

BOOK OF ABSTRACT

**Social Sciences in a Changing World;
Building Equity. Empowering Children and
Youth, and Advancing Human Development**

BOOK OF ABSTRACT

This Book of Abstract includes the contributions presented at the International Scientific Conference “Social Sciences in a Changing World: Building Equity, Empowering Children and Youth, and Advancing Human Development”, held on 13–14 May 2026 and organized by the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana. The volume brings together interdisciplinary research and professional perspectives addressing contemporary social challenges, human development, social inclusion, education, migration, child and youth well-being, and social policy. It aims to promote academic dialogue, international collaboration, and evidence-based approaches within the social sciences.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SESSION 1A: Child Protection and Justice Systems 15

The Impact of Criminal Activities on the Daily Lives of Young People in the Dobraç Community

***Julida Peraj & Julia Hoxha* 16**

Online Child Sexual Exploitation in Albania: Survivors' Perspectives and Implications for Child Protection Systems

***Mirgit Vataj* 17**

Crisis centers as a source of support for families going through a divorce or separation

***Lenka Žižka Motlová* 18**

Barriers to Child-Centred Risk Assessment in Pre-Divorce Families: Evidence from Czech Child Protection Social Workers

***Petra Vašínová & Jitka Vacková* 19**

High skilled workers' integration – focused on HEIs in Czechia

***Eva Fichtnerová* 20**

Consciousness of School-Age Children and Its Application in Social Work: The Czech Context

***Mrg. Pavlína Kvěchová & Jitka Vacková* 21**

SESSION 1B: Social Policy, Systems and EU Integration 22

Investing in Youth as a Driver of Social Cohesion: Lessons Learned from the Pilot Implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Albania and Implications for the Western Balkans

***Arjela Merkuri & Fiona Todhri* 23**

Bridging EU Accession and Youth Inclusion: A Qualitative Exploration of Digital Innovation for Implementing the European Child and Youth Guarantees in Albania and the Western Balkans

***Anisa Hysesani* 24**

The role of the Social Fund mechanism in the development of social

protection services for children and families in Albania

Izela Tahsini & Anduela Valle

25

Merit-Based Recruitment In The Albanian Civil Service: Challenges And Opportunities

Romina Liçaj & Artur Rada

26

The European Child Guarantee as a Driver of Systemic Reform in Albania with a Focus on Workforce Development and Decentralization

Denada Seferi

27

Beyond Institutional Closure: An Ecosystemic Reading of Institutionalisation as the Default Emergency Response in Albania's Child Protection System

Izela Tahsini & Julinda Vokopola

28

SESSION 1C: Youth Well-being, Development and Social Dynamics

29

Early piloting of Building Lifelong Opportunities for Mental health (BLOOM) in Albania: A non-specialist psychological intervention to Address Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties in Children Aged 5–10

Ilva Vjero, Felicity Brown & Sarah Skeen

30

Social Media Use and Mental Health in Adolescents: A Cross-Sectional Study of Body Image and Self-Esteem in Albania

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Edvin Lame & Dr. Fatjona Hysi

31

Promoting Social-Emotional Competencies in Early Childhood: A School-Based SEL Intervention in Albanian Kindergartens

Lediona Braho & Prof. Dr. Arjana Muçaj

32

Overparenting unpacked: A scoping review of definitions, practices, and consequences

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Brunilda Zenelaga & Alda Demneri

34

Gender Socialization through Proverbs and Their Impact on Social Roles

PhD (C) Orjola Xhaholli

35

Rigidity of The Masculinity Construct As A Predictor Of The Use Of
Feminizing Labels Among Young Males

PhD. Arjet Pervizi & Msc.(c). Saida Vulaj **36**

ONLINE SESSION 1: Investing In Children And Youth For Human Development And Social Equity **37**

Family as a Socializing and Preventive Factor of Violent Behavior in
Young People

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Blerina Hamzallari & PhD. (C) Doralda Tanellari **38**

Interdisciplinary Approaches for Young People In Contact With the
Law

***Dr. Brunilda Laboviti, MSc. Greta Katreli, MSc. Bejlinda Mustafa &
MSc. Elina Veizi*** **40**

Women in Leadership in North Macedonia: Barriers, Challenges, and
Opportunities

PhD. Arta Xhelili **42**

Empowering minors to avoid the risk of involvement in crime at an
early age

PhD (C). Esjurda Tallushi & Prof. Assoc. Dr. Marinela Sota **44**

Child Protection and the Prevention of Abuse in Kosovo

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Besnik Murati **45**

Empowering Youth: The Vital Role of Social Workers in Advocating
for the Rights of Vulnerable Groups in Kosovo

Prof. Asst. Dr. Avdyli Gashi **46**

SESSION 2A: Social Policy, Inclusion and Integrated Support Systems **47**

Participation of People Experiencing Homelessness in Social Work
Interventions: Insights from the Czech Republic

Mgr. Michaela Šrenková & doc. PhDr & Bc. Alena Hricová, Ph.D. **48**

Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Practice: Disability Policy
Implementation and Social Inclusion in Albania

Dr. Blerta Drenofci **49**

Fostering Resilience and Inclusion: Holistic Support for Adults with
Disabilities without Parental Care

Interdisciplinary approach to youth in contact with the law: secondary victimization, institutional experience and the need for integrated support

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ardita Prendi

51

Implementation of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS): A Theoretical Perspective from Europe to Albania

PhD. Lejda Abazi

52

SESSION 2B: Mental Health, Well-being and Social Dynamics

53

Resilience in Marriage: Exploring Its Occurrence In Albanian Couples

PhD. Drilona Llangos

54

Future Shock Anxiety: The Psychological Impact of Rapid Societal Change on Albanian Youth

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Artemisi Shehu/Dono , Elda Vladi & Prof. Dr. Arjana Muçaj

55

Psychotherapeutic intervention and his impact on Quality of Life among women diagnosed with breast cancer in Albania: A clinical and psychosocial case analysis

PhD (C) Alketa Çoku & Prof. Assoc. Dr. Artemisi Shehu

57

The Invisible Burden of Care giving in Palliative Care: A Critical Review of Contemporary Literature

PhD (C) Marinela Pane & Assoc. Prof. Dr. Erika Bejko

59

Does Meaning in Life Explain the Link Between Personality and Anxiety? A Mediation Study in Emerging Adults

Gerald Brahimaj & Elda Vladi

60

From pain to diagnosis: Somatic presentations of anxiety and depression among adult patients in Albania

M.Sc. Evita Karanxha, M.Sc Artemida Ceca, M.Sc Marinela Tanushi, M.Sc Arba Karaj, M.Sc Altea Rroshi, M.Sc Artina Çoka, M.Sc Nerxhivane Mehmeti, M.Sc Matilda Topollaj, M.Sc Elsida Hysen

61

SESSION 2C: Psychosocial Challenges and Institutional Responsibilities in a Changing Society

62

Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education: Rethinking Students' Knowledge, Lifelong Learning, and Cognitive Competency <i>Dr. Stela Dhima & Prof. Assoc. Dr. Migena Buka</i>	63
Organizational Commitment as a Protective Factor Against Burnout: Empirical Evidence from Public Administration <i>Prof. Assoc. Dr. Migena Buka & M.Sc. Aleksandra Meta</i>	64
Beyond Silence and Sacrifice: Rethinking Mental Health Systems for Carers <i>Meriglena Rusta & Prof. Assoc. Dr. Juliana Ajdini</i>	65
The Silent Acceptance of Workplace Bullying: A Qualitative Study of Employee Perceptions and Leadership Influence <i>Prof. Assoc. Dr. Emanuela Ismaili & Prof. Dr. Edmond Dragoti</i>	66
An Assessment of Media Literacy Characteristics And Informational Vulnerability Among Students <i>Prof. Assoc. Dr. Blerina Hamzallari, Orneta Lleshi & Semiha Koçi</i>	67
Rural Ageing and Social Exclusion in the Context of Migration <i>Prof. Assoc. Dr. Juliana Ajdini</i>	68
Unaccompanied Foreign Minors in Albania: A Comprehensive Analysis of Challenges and Opportunities <i>Assoc. Prof. Dr. Anisa Subashi, PhD (C) Anisa Ruseti & Msc. Jonita Kabashi</i>	69

SESSION 2D: Psychosocial Vulnerability, Rights, And Institutional Response 70

The Role and Quality of Individual Assessment Reports in Juvenile Justice in Albania <i>PhD (C) Julia Hoxha & Prof. Assoc. Dr. Rudina Rama</i>	71
Politics behind closed doors: Documenting women's mass resignations from local councils <i>Prof. Assoc. Dr. Marsela Dauti & PhD (C) Geldona Metaj</i>	72
Health Behaviors among Teens in the City Of Tirana <i>Jonida Haxhiu</i>	73
Living with Lupus in Albania: A Psychosocial Perspective <i>Prof. Assoc. Dr. Juliana Ajdini & Dr. Aida Ndreja</i>	74

ONLINE SESSION 2: Advancing Integrated, Holistic Models of Human Well-being	75
Comprehensive Assessment of Training Needs and Well-being Among Parents and Teachers Supporting Special Educational Needs Children	
<i>PhD. Mihaela Grasu & PhD. Silvia Popovici</i>	76
University Experiences and Support Needs of Students with Disabilities: Evidence from Kosovo	
<i>Prof. Assoc. Dr. Njomza Llullaku</i>	77
Strengthening Aftercare in Juvenile Justice: Lessons from International Models for the Kosovo Context	
<i>Dr. Asst. Rita Selimi</i>	78
Empowering Students through Teachers: Linking Job Satisfaction to Human Capital Development	
<i>Dr. Elmedina Nikoçeviq-Kurti</i>	79
Trauma and Psychosocial Needs of Children in Foster Care: Challenges Faced by Foster Families in Albania	
<i>PhD (C) Megi Xhumari & . Prof.Assoc. Dr. Juliana Ajdini</i>	80
The Role of Women in Albania In Strengthening Democracy, Citizenship, and Collective Action	
<i>Msc. Eurona Leka</i>	81
Child Protection and the Prevention of Abuse in Kosovo	
<i>Prof. Assoc. Dr. Besnik Murati</i>	82

ONLINE SESSION 3: Education, Social Inclusion, and Policy Pathways for Sustainable Human Development	83
---	-----------

Empowering Children through Inclusive Education	
<i>Msc. Marsela Kalaja</i>	84
Literary Translation As Cultural Mediation and A Catalyst For Youth Education and Human Development: Translational Equivalence In The Albanian Version Of Vanity Fair By William Makepeace Thackeray	
<i>PhD (C) Eralda Bushati & Assoc. Prof. Dr. Darina Kaçollja</i>	85
Education and knowledge in a sustainable environment, through	



digital literacy for transformation

PhD (C) Edlira Demiri

86

Professionalization of University Librarians in the Digital and Artificial Intelligence Transition

Silvia Popovici

87

Social Work Interventions in Domestic Violence Prevention: An Empirical Study from Albania

PhD. Ramiola Kalemi

89

Promoting Social Inclusion and Human Development among Older Adults in Transitional Societies: Evidence from Albania

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Eris Dhamo & Prof. Assoc. Dr. Fiona Todhri

90

Transnational Parenthood and the Reconfiguration of Filiation: A Private International Law Inquiry into Surrogacy

M.Sc. Marinel Prenga & M.Sc. Ornella Nikolli

91

SESSION 3A: Social Policy, Protection and Institutional Response

92

Family Policy And Child Protection In “Small Welfare States”: The Case Of North Macedonia

PhD. Elisabeta Bajrami Ollogu, PhD. Hava Rexhep & PhD. Daniel Pavlovski

93

Proactive Social Works in Child Protection Policy – Case of Albania

Prof. Assoc. Dr Marinela Sota

94

Assessment and Behavioral Change in Male Perpetrators: Evidence from Counselling Programmes in Northern Albania

PhD. Fatjon Taipi

95

From Potential to Employment: An Integrated Psychosocial and Labour-Market-Oriented Approach to the Professional Integration of Persons with Disabilities

Suela Ndoja & Nersada Mandija

96

From Training to Practice: Building Stronger Professional Capacities in Coordinated Responses to Gender-Based Violence

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Eliona Kulluri Bimbashi &

PhD (C). Marsela Allmuça

97

Psychological and Cultural Adaptation as a Key Factor in the

SESSION 3B: Education Systems, Practice and Social Contexts

99

Students' Perceptions and Experiences of Physical Education: From Academic Obligation to Integration as a Lifestyle

Msc. Vitiola Pelari & PhD. Gerda Sula

100

Learning through play: using tabletop games to enhance teaching and learning in teacher education

PhD. Gerda Sula

101

Interdisciplinary Curricula for Socially Relevant and Globally Competent Education

Ma. Besmira Ibraimi

102

Out of Sight: Private Digital Communication and Institutional Blind Spots in Sexual Exploitation in Albania

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Blerta Bodinaku, Prof. Assoc. Dr. Anila Sulstarova, Prof. Assoc. Dr. Skerdi Zahaj, PhD. Greta Hysi, PhD. Gerda Sula

103

Exploring The Role of School Principals In Encouraging Teachers' Participation In Professional Development Programs: Evidence From Albania – A Literature Review

PhD (C). Iris Mançi

104

Experiences and Challenges Of Psycho-Social Service Specialists In Handling Cases Of Violence in Schools

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Artur Rada

105

Motivation and Cooperation in Socially Excluded Localities

Mgr. Bc. Daniela Vobůrková & Alena Hricová

106

SESSION 3C: Research, Innovation and Knowledge Transformation

107

The Transformation of Knowledge Production in Artistic Education through Generative Artificial Intelligence

Ened Kuka

108

The Transformation of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Albania (2015–2025)

PhD (C) Dorisjana Hasani & Prof. Dr. Merita Xhumari

109



The Role of Libraries in Information Management and the Education of Youth in the Digital Era

M.Sc. Beneta Dhima

111

Grade 11 Students' Perceptions of School Curriculum Load in Some High Schools in Tirana

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Leticja Gusho & Prof. Dr. Arjana Muçaj

112

Bridging Theory and Practice: Perceptions of Child Empowerment among Social Work Students and Professionals

Dr. Galsvinda Biba, Dr. Elona Hasmuaj & Prof. Assoc. Dr. Fatbardha Osmanaga

113

SESSION 3D: Social Protection, Equity, and Sustainable Development

115

Perception And Satisfaction Of Older Adults With Services In A Community Center: An Analysis Within The Framework Of Community-Based Social Work Using A Proactive Community Approach

PhD. Migena Kokeri & Prof. Assoc. Dr. Irida Agolli

116

Ageing, Inequality, and Local Service Gaps: A Social Needs Assessment of Older Persons in Lushnje Municipality, Albania

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Irida Agolli Nasufi & PhD. Alketa Zazo

117

Reconceptualizing Juvenile Criminal Justice As A Social Protection Policy: A Comparative Analysis

Arba Ollomani

118

Corporate Social Responsibility dimensions in the Albanian banking system

PhD. Visar Dizdari

119

Psychosocial Services in Vocational Education and Training in Albania: Institutional Challenges and the Path Toward Inclusion

Dr. Migena Kapllanaj & Prof. Assoc. Dr. Anisa Subashi

120

Problems of Institutional Intervention for the Protection of Children in Street Situations

Dr. Florion Bejleri

121

SESSION 4A: Migration, Displacement and Social Change

122

Gender Vulnerability In Migration: Challenges And Difficulties
Faced By Girls And Women In Host Countries

Msc. Ledja Lala

123

Migration, family and the reconfiguration of social solidarity in
Albania

Dr. Miranda Spahiu, Prof. Assoc. Eris Dhamo &

MSc. Gentiana Iseberi

124

Changing Youth Perceptions: The Role of Exposure to Deviant
Behavior on Social Media

Dr. Zyhra Gripshi

125

Artificial Intelligence Among Social Work Students

Bujanë Topalli & Arjeta Pelinku

126

A Philosophical-Analytical Examination of Heteronomy and Free Will

Dr. Jetmira Fekolli

127

SESSION 4B: Democracy, Governance and Political Dynamics

128

The 2018 Student Movement in Albania: Opportunity Structures,
Collective Action Frames, and Limitations to Value Changes

PhD. Sokol Lleshi

129

From Capacity Building to Influence: Civil Society Advocacy and
Entry Points for Gender-Responsive Climate Finance in the Western
Balkans

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Elona Dhëmbo

130

The Nation as an Oasis in State – Citizen Relations: A Philosophical
Perspective

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Ferit Baça

131

Corruption and Political Development in Albania (1912–1991): State
Building, Capitalist Relations, and a Historical Political Economy
Alternative to Institutional, Cultural, and Public Choice Paradigms

Dr. Sofokli Meksi

132

Conspiracy theories in Albania: weapons of the weak or instruments
of ideological reproduction?

PhD. Arlind Qori

133



SESSION 4C: Digital Transformation, Innovation and Ethics in Social Development **134**

- Patterns of Presence and Behaviour of “Senior Influencers” on TikTok and Instagram: A Content Analysis
Gaia Olea, Iara Sebastián, David Alonso, Andrés Arias **135**
- Digital Transformation, Responsibility, And Human Development: Rethinking Time And Space In The Technological Age
PhD (C). Blerina Karagozji **136**
- Hate Speech on Internet and Social Media: A Gender Perspective
Prof. Assoc. Dr. Daniela Kalaja & Msc. Elisabeta Nano **137**
- V-Social Work: Redefining the boundaries of Social Services in virtual environments
Pablo Álvarez Pérez & Fernando Relinque Medina **139**

ONLINE SESSION 4: Digital Transformation, Innovation and Ethics in Social Development **140**

- Teachers’ Self-Perceived Digital Competence as a Predictor of Student Academic Achievement: Evidence from an Upper Secondary School
Msc. Manjola Sallaku **141**
- Digital Transformation Among Older Adults
Prof. Assoc. PhD . Neus Caparrós **142**
- Design and planning of a digital inclusion proposal with older adults through peer learning: an experience in Alicante (Spain)
Elena M. Cortés-Florín, Yolanda Domenech-López, Fernando de Lucas-Murillo de la Cueva, Mercedes Molina-Montoya, Emiliano Ramírez-García, Iara Sebastián-Esandi **143**
- How Gen Z creates new words: Productivity of word-formation processes in the digital age English
MSc. Azra Thaqi Gashi **144**
- Creative Productions in Public Spaces “Learning by Playing”
MSc. Iris Canaj **145**
- Juvenile Substance Use and Violence in Albania: An Analysis of Institutional Fragmentation in the Child Protection System
Dr. Monika Taçi **146**

Youth Shaping Safer Digital Spaces in Kenya, Albania, and Canada

Kathleen Manion, Ilva Vjero & Laura Wright

147

ONLINE SESSION 4: Digital Transformation, Innovation and Ethics in Social Development

148

Democracy in times of Cholera: The Role of Academia in shaping Generation Z in line with the European values

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Klodiana Beshku

149

The Role of Children as Legitimated Subjects in Environmental Justice (Standards and Future Scenarios in the Albanian Context)

PhD Elsa Toska

150

From Policy to Practice: Operationalising Gender-Equal Cities in European Municipal Practice

Luminița Iosif

151

Systematic Review of Technology Adoption among Older Adults through an Intersectional Approach

Iara Sebastián-Esandi

152

From Scrolling to Self-Confidence: How Consuming Psychological Content On Social Media Shapes Perceptions Of Competence

Xhoela Curri & Admir Dahati

153

Connected at 65+: How Group dynamics helps Technology Acquisition

Linda Ducca Cisneros, David Alonso González &

Andres Arias Astray

154

The page features decorative geometric shapes in the corners. The top-left corner has a blue and red shape, while the bottom-left corner has a green and yellow shape. Both shapes have a black, textured triangular area at their base.

SESSION 1A

Child Protection and Justice Systems

The Impact of Criminal Activities on the Daily Lives of Young People in the Dobraq Community

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ABSTRACT

Fear of crime and feelings of insecurity within the community have a profound and multifaceted impact on individuals' everyday lives, influencing the way they interact, move, and build relationships within the social environment. This study aims to explore the impact that criminal activities and elements of insecurity, including the presence of criminal gangs, have on the daily lives of young people in the Dobraq area of Shkodër. The research adopts a qualitative approach, grounded in phenomenology as a research strategy. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 residents aged 20–29. Data analysis revealed that: (i) perceptions of insecurity significantly affect residents' lifestyles and freedom of movement; and (ii) criminal activities and the presence of criminal gangs contribute to increased interpersonal isolation. These findings highlight the need for community-based policies and interventions aimed at creating a safer environment and strengthening social ties within the community.

Keywords: *youth, criminal activities, fear, insecurity, Dobraq*



Online Child Sexual Exploitation in Albania: Survivors' Perspectives and Implications for Child Protection Systems

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ABSTRACT

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) has become an increasingly significant challenge for child protection systems worldwide. The rapid expansion of internet access and digital technologies has created unprecedented opportunities for children to communicate, learn and participate in online environments. However, these technological developments have also generated new forms of risk related to sexual exploitation and abuse. This study examines the experiences of survivors of online child sexual exploitation in Albania and explores the perspectives of professionals working in child protection and social services. The research is guided by ecological systems theory and trauma-informed approaches, recognising the complex social, psychological and institutional dynamics associated with exploitation. A qualitative participatory research design was employed, combining conversations with seven survivors of online sexual exploitation and a survey of fifty frontline professionals working in social and child protection services. The findings reveal several systemic challenges, including stigma and barriers to disclosure, limited trust in institutional responses, unequal access to specialised support services and gaps between existing legal frameworks and their practical implementation. Survivors emphasised the importance of psychological support, responsive reporting mechanisms and coordinated institutional interventions in supporting recovery. By foregrounding survivor perspectives, the study contributes to the limited body of research on online sexual exploitation in the Western Balkans and identifies structural factors influencing protection outcomes. The findings provide important implications for policy development, professional training and the strengthening of integrated child protection systems in the digital environment.

Keywords: *online child sexual exploitation, child protection, digital safety, survivors' perspectives, Albania, social services*

Crisis centers as a source of support for families going through a divorce or separation

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the author focuses on providing support and assistance to children and parents going through a family breakdown, within the context of social work and multidisciplinary collaboration at crisis centers. Crisis centers in the Czech Republic provide crisis assistance in accordance with Section § 60 of Act No. 108/2006 on Social Services, as amended. Children should be an integral part of decision-making processes during family breakdown. In the event of family breakdown, the focus is on protecting children, improving the quality of the care system and multidisciplinary cooperation, ascertaining children's views and protecting their opinions, and involving children in decision-making processes. This involves creating a safe space, proactive engagement, responding to conflict situations, acknowledging their feelings, expressing their needs, and providing feedback. In crisis centers, not only minors but also their parents receive support. The goal of this collaboration is to identify children's needs and ascertain their views, including their opinions on how to resolve the situation. During separation and divorce, parents are often in significant conflict, and crisis centers offer them support and assistance through individual and joint family consultations, as well as in parent support groups. The presentation will also focus on methods and techniques that help assess the family situation and, above all, the needs and wishes of minor children whose parents are divorcing or separating.

Keywords: *Crisis centers, social work, children's needs, parental separation and divorce, decision-making needs*



Barriers to Child-Centred Risk Assessment in Pre-Divorce Families: Evidence from Czech Child Protection Social Workers

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ABSTRACT

Conflictual divorce is associated with increased risk and can have significant negative impacts on a child's wellbeing. In these situations, formal evidence of potential harm is often incomplete or difficult to obtain, and decisions must be made within very limited time frames. In the Czech Republic, social and legal child protection workers (OSPOD) play a key role in assessing family situations and providing evidence for court proceedings, but the barriers to quality assessment in the pre-divorce phase have so far been described only marginally. This contribution is based on a focus group focused on the process of assessing conflictual divorces in OSPOD practice. From the broader discussion, two questions were selected for the purposes of the presentation, concerning what most complicates the work of assessment workers. The data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The results point to the risk of diversity in practice depending on the availability of information and cooperation with both parents and the professionals involved. Strengthening transparent procedures, coordination with professionals, and organizational conditions that support consistent and child-centered decision-making appear to be key.

Keywords: *conflictual divorce, social and legal protection of children, barriers, assessment*



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ABSTRACT

The research aimed to find out selected aspects of the integration of foreign scientific-research and academic workers at HEIs in the Czech Republic. It applies the theory of person-in-environment (PIE) understanding a person as part of a dynamic system (Bronfenbrenner) with the purpose to find out obstacles harming respondents' quality of life and prevent them from engaging in the work process and a new social environment. The research tool was a questionnaire, all public universities in the Czech Republic were approached. Feedback was obtained from 221 respondents. Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS programme, and supplemented with qualitative research by coding answers to open questions in the Atlas.ti programme. The analyses revealed problematic areas; respondents identified complicated administration, the Czech language as the only official language, and problems with providing basic life needs (accommodation, school facilities, health care), as well as socio-cultural differences and deficiencies in the services provided by institutions. This is the first and very unique feedback with examples that should lead to further research in this area and the incorporation of evidence-based practice within high-skilled workers' integration strategies.

Keywords: *high-skilled, immigration, integration, HEI, Czech Republic*



Consciousness of School-Age Children and Its Application in Social Work: The Czech Context

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to provide a comprehensive insight into the Czech research discourse and the current state of knowledge regarding the legal consciousness of school-age children and its application in social work. The research is framed within theories of youth empowerment and risk prevention, positing that developing legal awareness is a vital prerequisite for fostering responsibility and enabling children's active engagement in social processes. To map the current academic landscape, a qualitative analysis of existing literature was conducted. The approach involves reviewing and analysing pivotal domestic studies that have shaped the field of legal consciousness in the Czech Republic over the past quarter-century. The findings are expected to reveal significant shifts in how school-age children comprehend basic legal concepts, alongside their evolving capacity to distinguish between formal legal rights and general moral norms. This review contributes to the ongoing development of social work methodologies by emphasizing that integrating legal consciousness into standard practice is essential for effective risk prevention and the overall protection of vulnerable youth.

Keywords: *legal consciousness of school-age children; social work; legal consciousness in the Czech Republic; risk prevention; literature review*

SESSION 1B

**Social Policy, Systems
and EU Integration**



Investing in Youth as a Driver of Social Cohesion: Lessons Learned from the Pilot Implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Albania and Implications for the Western Balkans

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the pilot implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Albania during 2023–2025 period, drawing lessons for its national roll-out and potential regional adaptation in the Western Balkans. Anchored in the Social Investment Approach and activation policy theory, the study frames the Youth Guarantee as a strategic instrument for enhancing human development, reducing youth vulnerability, and strengthening social cohesion by improving school-to-work transitions. The paper relies on published documents from the Albanian pilot phase, administrative monitoring data from 2023–2025 period, and a comparative review of policy developments in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Findings highlight high rates of positive and timely exits, strengthened digital service delivery systems, and improved gender balance in employment outcomes. However, limited outreach to inactive NEET youth, growing reliance on subsidized employment measures, and sustainability concerns at the 12-month follow-up stage remain significant challenges. Regionally, uneven institutional capacities and fiscal constraints produce differentiated implementation trajectories. The study argues that lasting impact depends on strengthened inter-institutional coordination, sustainable domestic financing, and targeted outreach mechanisms, reinforcing the role of youth investment policies in promoting inclusive growth and social cohesion.

Keywords: *Youth Guarantee; NEET; social investment; Western Balkans; youth employment, social cohesion.*

Bridging EU Accession and Youth Inclusion: A Qualitative Exploration of Digital Innovation for Implementing the European Child and Youth Guarantees in Albania and the Western Balkans

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the intersection of Albania's European Union accession process and the implementation of the European Child and Youth Guarantees, focusing on how digital transformation and ethical artificial intelligence governance can strengthen inclusive social protection systems for vulnerable young populations. Employing a qualitative research design, the study conducts a thematic document analysis of national policy frameworks, EU accession progress reports, and strategic documents related to child and youth protection in Albania and the Western Balkans. The research is grounded in the European Pillar of Social Rights framework and draws upon comparative policy analysis to contextualize Albania's reform trajectory within regional dynamics. Findings reveal that while digital tools hold significant promise for enhancing cross-sectoral coordination and evidence-based service delivery, their effectiveness depends on addressing professional capacity gaps, ethical governance frameworks, and the meaningful participation of young people in digital policy design. The study contributes qualitative insights and policy recommendations for aligning national youth inclusion strategies with EU standards, fostering human-centered, shock-responsive systems that empower children and young people—including those with disabilities—as agents of sustainable development across the region.

Keywords: *European Child Guarantee, EU accession, qualitative research, digital transformation, youth empowerment, Western Balkans*



The role of the Social Fund mechanism in the development of social protection services for children and families in Albania

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ABSTRACT

In Albania, social protection services for children and families are faced with considerable challenges in regard to institutional coordination, development of community services and sustainability of interventions. The Social Fund has functioned as a key mechanism for inciting the development of these services, offering financial resources and structural support for local institutions. This paper aims to explore the influence of the Social Fund in the development of social protection services for children and families and their integration social services at the local level. The methodology is based on secondary data, through desk review of relevant national legal and policy frameworks, studies and reports. The study is guided by a conceptual framework that draws on international best practices in social service development, with a focus on service integration, institutional coordination and sustainability. The main findings show that the Social Fund has contributed to strengthening institutional capacities and integration of services in the community, although these gains are limited by ongoing challenges related to financial dependency and local capacities. This implies the need for policies that strengthen coordination mechanisms and ensure sustainability of social protection services for children and families in Albania.

Keywords: *Social Fund, social policy, social protection services, children, families, Albania*

Merit-Based Recruitment In The Albanian Civil Service: Challenges And Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Merit-based recruitment and equal opportunities are fundamental principles for ensuring professionalism and effectiveness in public administration. Albania has undertaken significant reforms to strengthen the civil service system and align recruitment practices with European standards. Although the legal framework has remained stable since 2015, recent assessments indicate that important challenges persist in ensuring the full and effective implementation of these principles in practice. This paper analyzes the transparency, professionalism, and effectiveness of recruitment procedures in the Albanian civil service, with a focus on mechanisms coordinated by the Department of Public Administration (DAP). The study aims to assess the extent to which the current system supports merit-based selection and attracts qualified candidates for positions in the public sector. The research relies on a qualitative approach, based on the analysis of secondary data, including legislation, strategic documents, reports, and administrative data. Findings show that, although recruitment procedures are formally competitive and non-discriminatory, structural limitations remain evident, including weaknesses in strategic human resource planning, limited use of competency-based selection instruments, and declining levels of candidate participation in recruitment processes. The study highlights the need to strengthen human resource planning capacities and modernize recruitment instruments, with the aim of enhancing the quality, transparency, and credibility of recruitment processes in the Albanian civil service.

Keywords: *Merit-based recruitment, civil service, state administration, Albania*



The European Child Guarantee as a Driver of Systemic Reform in Albania with a Focus on Workforce Development and Decentralization

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implications of the European Child Guarantee (ECG) for systemic reform in Albania, with a particular focus on workforce development and decentralization in child-related services, in the context of the recent adoption of the National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee 2026–2030. The study is guided by a multidimensional child well-being framework, emphasizing social inclusion, equity, and institutional capacity within welfare systems. A narrative reflection approach is adopted, drawing on policy analysis, national reports, and international assessments to explore the dynamics of social protection and child welfare reform in Albania. The findings highlight persistent gaps in workforce capacity, coordination challenges, and regional disparities that affect service delivery, as well as key measures that need to be planned for the effective implementation of the Child Guarantee in Albania. The study contributes to informing policy alignment, capacity-building efforts, and reforms toward more effective decentralized governance in Albania.

Keywords: *European Child Guarantee, child poverty, Albania, workforce development, decentralization, social policy.*

Beyond Institutional Closure: An Ecosystemic Reading of Institutionalisation as the Default Emergency Response in Albania's Child Protection System

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines child institutionalisation in Albania beyond the closure or transformation of residential institutions, focusing on why institutional placement continues to function as the most readily available emergency response, and in some cases the only immediately available protection mechanism, within the child protection system. Guided by an ecosystemic perspective, the study analyses institutionalisation as the outcome of interactions across policy, service, institutional, family, and community levels. Methodologically, the paper draws on documentary and administrative evidence from the emergency child protection service of NISMA ARSIS for the period 2021 - 2025, including service records, case documentation, and database data on accommodated children. It examines children's pathways following emergency placement, with particular attention to return to family or/and placement in residential care services. The paper contributes to debates on deinstitutionalisation in Albania by exploring why, despite reform efforts, institutionalisation remains the default or most immediately available response in many emergency cases. It highlights implications for prevention, family support, alternative care, intersectoral coordination, and the strengthening of community-based child protection responses.

Keywords: *deinstitutionalisation; child protection; institutionalisation; emergency response; ecosystemic perspective; Albania*



SESSION 1C

Youth Well-being, Development and Social Dynamics



Early piloting of Building Lifelong Opportunities for Mental health (BLOOM) in Albania: A non-specialist psychological intervention to Address Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties in Children Aged 5–10

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the early pilot of the UNICEF and WHO BLOOM intervention in Albania, examining feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary outcomes for children aged 5–10 with emotional and behavioural difficulties and their caregivers. BLOOM is based on a trans diagnostic, evidence-based approach, integrating cognitive-behavioural strategies and caregiver-mediated techniques. It is informed by ecological and family systems perspectives, emphasizing the role of caregivers and family context in child wellbeing. A multi-phase approach was used. First, a contextual adaptation process included desk review, stakeholder consultations, and participatory workshops with children, caregivers, and providers. Second, a mixed-methods case series pilot with 20 families was conducted. The intervention was delivered by four trained non-specialist providers. Pre-and post-intervention measures assessed child and caregiver outcomes, alongside qualitative interviews. Piloting in Albania indicated that the intervention was feasible to be delivered by non-specialist providers with adequate training and support and was perceived to lead to improvements for children and families. Findings highlighted the crucial role of caregivers and extended family in child-focused psychological interventions and the need to ensure their engagement alongside their child. The study supports scalable, culturally adapted, non-specialist interventions to effectively address child mental health needs in resource-constrained settings.

Keywords: *Child mental health; psychological intervention; non-specialist delivery; caregiver engagement; cultural adaptation*



Social Media Use and Mental Health in Adolescents: A Cross-Sectional Study of Body Image and Self-Esteem in Albania

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ABSTRACT

This study explores problematic social media use and its association with adolescents' mental health in Albania, with particular emphasis on cultural and contextual influences insufficiently addressed in the international literature. It aims to examine the relationships between social media use, depressive symptoms, and social anxiety, while assessing the mediating roles of body image and self-esteem. A cross-sectional, descriptive–correlational design was employed with a sample of 315 adolescents aged 13–19 years. Data were collected at a single time point to evaluate associations among the study variables. Findings indicated moderate levels of social media use, with TikTok, YouTube, and WhatsApp as the most frequently used platforms, alongside relatively low levels of depression and anxiety. A strong positive correlation emerged between social support and resilience ($r = .710$), while body image was negatively associated with social media use ($r = -.446$). No statistically significant relationship was found between time spent on social media and depressive symptoms ($r = .007$). The findings emphasize the importance of cultural context in shaping the relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes. Social support appears to function as a significant protective factor, whereas body image serves as a central mediating variable through which social media exerts its effects. Overall, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of adolescent mental health in relation to social media use.

Keywords: *social media, adolescents, body image, self-esteem, depression, anxiety*

Promoting Social-Emotional Competencies in Early Childhood: A School-Based SEL Intervention in Albanian Kindergartens

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood is a critical developmental period during which social-emotional competencies begin to shape children's well-being, relationships, and future learning trajectories. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has gained increasing international attention as a framework that supports children's emotional understanding, self-regulation, empathy, and positive social interaction. These competencies are particularly important in contemporary societies characterized by rapid social change, where educational systems are increasingly expected to support children's holistic development and promote equity in learning opportunities. Despite the growing international evidence supporting SEL interventions in early education, structured programs remain limited in many educational contexts, including Albania. This study presents the design and implementation model of a school-based SEL intervention developed for children aged 5–6 years attending public kindergartens in Tirana. The program aims to strengthen children's social-emotional competencies through structured classroom activities that focus on emotional recognition, empathy development, cooperative interaction, and conflict resolution. The intervention is implemented in collaboration with preschool teachers supported by psychosocial professionals working within early childhood institutions. The study adopts a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design involving 192 children, with 96 assigned to the experimental group and 96 to the control group, across 32 kindergartens in Tirana. The research seeks to examine how structured SEL activities integrated into everyday classroom practices can contribute to children's social-emotional development and promote more supportive learning environments in preschool education. By presenting the conceptual framework and intervention model, this study contributes to broader discussions within the social sciences on empowering young children, promoting equity in early education, and advancing human development through evidence-informed educational practices.



Keywords: *Social-emotional learning; SEL intervention; child development; social-emotional development; early childhood education; educational equity.*

Overparenting unpacked: A scoping review of definitions, practices, and consequences

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ABSTRACT

Overparenting has gained increasing attention as a distinct parenting pattern characterized by excessive involvement, control, and protection in children's lives. As contemporary family dynamics evolve, concerns have emerged regarding the potential developmental implications of this phenomenon. This scoping review aims to systematically map the existing literature on overparenting, focusing on its definitions, core practices, and associated consequences for children and adolescents. A comprehensive search of peer-reviewed studies and relevant literature was conducted across major academic databases (Web of Science and Scopus). The selected studies were analyzed to identify common conceptualizations of overparenting, as well as patterns in parental behaviors and contextual influences shaping these practices. Particular attention was given to the outcomes associated with overparenting across emotional, social, and cognitive domains. The findings reveal considerable variation in how overparenting is defined and measured, highlighting the absence of a unified conceptual framework. Despite these inconsistencies, the literature consistently links overparenting to reduced autonomy, lower self-efficacy, difficulties in emotional regulation, and increased vulnerability to anxiety and stress among children and adolescents. At the same time, the review underscores the role of broader sociocultural factors, including heightened parental expectations, safety concerns, and shifting norms around intensive parenting. As a conclusion, this review emphasizes the need for greater conceptual clarity and methodological consistency in future research. It also calls for more longitudinal and cross-cultural studies to better understand the long-term and contextual effects of overparenting. By synthesizing current evidence, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the balance between parental support and autonomy in child development.

Keywords: overparenting, scoping review, definitions, practices, consequences



Gender Socialization through Proverbs and Their Impact on Social Roles

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of proverbs as cultural agents in shaping gender socialization and influencing social roles. Drawing on gender socialization theory, the study analyzes how culturally transmitted sayings encode and reproduce norms associated with femininity and masculinity. A qualitative research design underpins this study, integrating literature review, observation, and the free association technique. The sample consisted of first-year undergraduate students from the Faculty of Social Sciences, who were invited to interpret selected local and foreign proverbs alongside visual materials. Data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns in participants' responses. The findings indicate consistent associations of women with beauty and modesty, and men with strength and courage, reflecting the persistence of internalized gender stereotypes. Proverbs emerged as influential cultural mechanisms that subtly reinforce and perpetuate gendered expectations. The study underscores the role of everyday cultural expressions in shaping identity and social behavior, particularly among younger generations. It contributes to scholarly discussions on gender and culture and offers practical implications for education, social policy, and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality.

Keywords: *gender socialization, proverbs, gender roles, stereotypes, cultural norms, identity construction*

Rigidity of The Masculinity Construct As A Predictor Of The Use Of Feminizing Labels Among Young Males

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine whether the rigidity of the masculinity construct serves as a predictor of the use of feminizing labels among young males in the Albanian context. Drawing on the conceptualization of masculinity as a “social construct” (Connell, 2005), “the gender role strain paradigm” (Pleck, 1995), and the “precarious manhood model” (Vandello & Bosson, 2013), the study conceptualizes masculinity as a construct that requires continuous social validation and is sensitive to symbolic threats. A quantitative correlational design was employed with a sample of 100 male adolescents aged 11–18 years. The instruments include a scale developed to measure the use of feminizing labels (FLUS) and a scale assessing attitudes toward traditional masculinity norms (MAMS). The results are expected to show a positive and significant relationship between the rigidity of the masculinity construct and the use of feminizing labels, suggesting that these function as regulatory mechanisms for maintaining the boundaries of this construct. By providing empirical data from the Albanian context, this study contributes to addressing a theoretical gap and to understanding the processes through which the masculinity construct is formed, while highlighting the need for interventions aimed at revising gender norms and reducing interpersonal stigma.

Keywords: *masculinity construct; feminizing labels; construct rigidity; adolescence; precarious manhood.*



ONLINE SESSION 1

Investing In Children And Youth For Human Development And Social Equity



Family as a Socializing and Preventive Factor of Violent Behavior in Young People

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ABSTRACT

Exposure of young people to violent behaviors has become an increasingly relevant social concern, particularly in societies experiencing social and economic transition. Violence encountered during adolescence whether directly experienced, observed within family or school environments, or mediated through digital spaces, can significantly influence young people's emotional well-being, social relationships, educational engagement, and future participation in society. Understanding the social contexts that shape these experiences is essential for promoting equity and sustainable human development. This study explores the role of family as central socialization institution in shaping young people's exposure to violent behaviors and in supporting preventive processes. The purpose of this paper is to explore how family dynamics and family support perform as protective factors or as conditions that may increase vulnerability to violence. Special attention is paid to the ways in which family environment, family relationships, communication patterns, emotional and practical support contribute to the formation of young people's social behaviors. The methodology is based on a qualitative analytical approach, combining theoretical analysis and document review. The study draws on academic literature, international reports, and policy frameworks related to youth, violence prevention, education, and social development. The analysis is guided by socialization theory and the ecological model of human development. This paper aims to contribute to the critical reflection of the role of the family as an environment with dual importance in the lives of young people, both as a socializer of violent behaviors and as a preventer of them. It seeks to inform future research, family-centered community training and intervention, social policies focused on prevention, youth empowerment, and the advancement of human development in contexts marked by inequality and social change.



Keywords: *youth violence, family, socialization, prevention, social equity, human development*



Interdisciplinary Approaches for Young People In Contact With the Law

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ABSTRACT

Young people who come into contact with the law represent a vulnerable group that faces numerous social, psychological, and legal challenges. In many cases, their involvement in the justice system is associated with various factors such as family problems, economic difficulties, lack of social support, the influence of the social environment, and limited educational opportunities. For this reason, addressing these cases requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond a narrow legal perspective. Interdisciplinary approaches provide an effective model for addressing the complex needs of young people who are in contact with the law. The interdisciplinary approach is based on the collaboration and coordination of professionals from different fields, such as justice, psychology, social work, education, and healthcare. This collaboration aims to ensure a comprehensive assessment of the situation of young people and to provide interventions tailored to their individual needs. Through this model, institutions and professionals can work together to develop rehabilitation and reintegration strategies that promote the well-being of young people and prevent the recurrence of problematic behaviors. An important aspect of the interdisciplinary approach is the emphasis on protecting the rights of young people and promoting restorative justice. Rather than focusing solely on punishment, this approach seeks to understand the causes that have led young people to become involved in conflict with the law and to create opportunities for personal development, education, and integration into the community. Furthermore, interinstitutional cooperation helps in the development of more effective policies and programs aimed at supporting young people. In conclusion, interdisciplinary approaches represent an important and necessary method for addressing the situation of young people in contact with the law. By integrating knowledge and practices from different professional fields, these approaches contribute to the protection of young people's rights, their rehabilitation, and the development of a more just and inclusive society.



Keywords: *Interdisciplinary approach; juvenile justice; young people in conflict with the law; restorative justice; rehabilitation; social support.*

Women in Leadership in North Macedonia: Barriers, Challenges, and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the barriers and challenges faced by women leaders, as well as the factors contributing to their underrepresentation in leadership positions. From a practical perspective, the research seeks to present findings that can contribute to improving women's advancement to higher-level positions. The study was designed to capture respondents' perceptions regarding barriers, challenges, and potential pathways for enhancing women's position in leadership. The study included a total of 243 respondents from both private and public organizations in the Republic of North Macedonia. The findings confirm earlier insights from the literature, indicating that women in leadership positions encounter multiple structural, cultural, and personal barriers. Key challenges identified include gender discrimination, socially constructed role expectations, work-life imbalance, patriarchal norms, traditional mindsets, and reluctance among organizations to appoint women to senior roles. In addition to external barriers, the study reveals the presence of internal obstacles, particularly a lack of self-confidence. However, this is not associated with a lack of skills or education, as women demonstrate strong professional competencies; rather, it appears to be influenced by broader societal factors. The findings also highlight the impact of the dual role of women as both professionals and primary caregivers, with married women more frequently affected by this challenge. Statistical analysis shows a relationship between age and perceptions of skill-related barriers, with younger women expressing greater confidence and readiness for leadership roles. No significant correlation was found between education level and perception of barriers, suggesting that women face similar challenges regardless of their educational background. The study emphasizes the importance of societal and cultural change, improved legal frameworks, and greater media representation of women leaders, as well as the role of education in fostering self-confidence and supporting women's advancement into leadership positions.



Keywords: *Women's leadership; Gender barriers; Work–life balance; Patriarchal norms; Gender discrimination; Leadership challenges; North Macedonia*

Empowering minors to avoid the risk of involvement in crime at an early age

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ABSTRACT

In Albania, social policies are more focused on the intervention for the reintegration of children into Albania and their treatment after they have already become part of the criminality and penitentiary and probation systems, while the possibilities regarding preventive programs are fewer or even non-existent in terms of extension throughout Albania. The purpose of this study is to identify some of the concrete forms of child empowerment through systemic commitment to reduce the risk of involvement in deviant behavior. The methodology of this study is based on the qualitative research method through interviews with 10 parents, 10 minors under 14 years of age who have committed antisocial behavior and have been accompanied at least once to the police station (in the presence and with the permission of their parents), 5 school social workers and 5 employees of the Child Protection Unit for the period April-June 2025 in the City of Tirana. Some of the main findings of the paper are related to the fact that when talking about the empowerment of minors, we do not specifically evaluate family support from a material point of view but focus on strategy. Schools have lost the opportunity through curricula to promote responsible behavior because disciplinary educational policies are lacking. Referring also to the international practice of developed countries, we see the family and the school as two separate environments, where the community intervention approach and support in a multidisciplinary team do not work or no cost coverage is foreseen for this in the budgets of central or local government in the current context of interventions at the macro, mezzo or micro level. The importance of this study lies in its approach to analyze the preventive factors and concrete measures that are missing as potential to minimize the involvement of minors in crime at an early age.

Keywords: *minor, empowerment, prevention, criminality, potential.*



Child Protection and the Prevention of Abuse in Kosovo

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ABSTRACT

The protection of children’s rights constitutes a fundamental priority in democratic societies, as children represent a particularly vulnerable group exposed to various risks and forms of abuse. Responsibility for ensuring a safe and protective environment is shared among the family, society, and state institutions. Child protection policies encompass a range of mechanisms and procedures aimed at the prevention, identification, and effective response to abuse, including physical and emotional violence as well as neglect. The Republic of Kosovo has integrated international standards into its legal system, particularly through the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the harmonization of domestic legislation. However, despite notable normative progress, challenges in the practical implementation of policies and in the effective prevention of abuse persist. This paper analyzes the legal and institutional framework in Kosovo, identifying key challenges and highlighting the need to strengthen child protection mechanisms.

Keywords: *child protection, abuse, public policy, legislation, Kosovo.*

Empowering Youth: The Vital Role of Social Workers in Advocating for the Rights of Vulnerable Groups in Kosovo

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is specifically to examine how social work plays a crucial role in protecting vulnerable youth's human rights in Kosovo's complex sociopolitical context. Among the challenges young people face, it focuses on those with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and victims of violence. The study is grounded in a human rights-based approach and uses qualitative methodology with thematic analysis of literature and professional practice. Specifically, it explores the impact of social work advocacy on human rights (RQ1) concerning young individuals and the methodologies employed to identify and address vulnerabilities within this demographic (RQ2). While discussing the contributions of organizations in safeguarding marginalized youth (RQ3), it acknowledges the dearth of data on challenges encountered by social workers in implementing human rights initiatives specifically targeted at young people (RQ4). Emphasizing the importance of collaboration among various stakeholders, including governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations, the study underscores the transformative potential of social work in advancing human rights agendas for youth. It concludes by advocating for further research and concerted action to promote equality and justice among young people in Kosovo, thereby contributing to our understanding of the critical role of advocacy in social work concerning youth issues.

Keywords: *Social work; Human rights; vulnerable youth; Advocacy; Kosovo; Social justice*



SESSION 2A

Social Policy, Inclusion and Integrated Support Systems



Participation of People Experiencing Homelessness in Social Work Interventions: Insights from the Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

This contribution focuses on the participation of people with experience of homelessness in social interventions in the Czech Republic, particularly on the extent of their involvement in decision-making regarding the social services provided and their own life situations. The starting point is the concept of participatory social work based on partnership, empowerment, and recovery. In the Czech context, this concept is implemented to a rather limited extent and primarily within the framework of innovative projects by nonprofit organizations and social housing initiatives. This contribution presents the situation in the Czech Republic based on an analysis of specialized and strategic literature, which suggests that in everyday practice, the prevailing model is still one in which social workers are responsible for managing interventions, while clients participation is limited to individual planning and consultations. Based on data from social workers, the paper illustrates, specific forms of participation in the field, perceived barriers, and examples of successful practices, including elements of greater participation of users in Housing First-type projects and peer roles. The aim of opening up this topic to a wider audience is to provide a basis for more systematic integration of participation into Czech social work with people experiencing homelessness.

Keywords: *client empowerment; Czech Republic; homelessness; Housing First; participation;; social work interventions;*



Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Practice: Disability Policy Implementation and Social Inclusion in Albania

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ABSTRACT

Although Albania has developed a comprehensive legal framework to promote the rights of persons with disabilities, significant challenges remain in translating these commitments into equitable outcomes. The paper aims to explore consumer's with disabilities perceptions and identify key barriers to effective implementation. A qualitative approach was employed, using five focus group discussions with representatives of disability organizations, persons with disabilities, and family members across four cities of Albania: Tirana, Shkodra, Korça, and Vlora. Data were analyzed thematically across key domains, including accessibility, employment, education, social protection, healthcare, and participation in public and political life. Findings indicate persistent implementation gaps despite legislative progress. Major barriers include limited physical and digital accessibility, unstable VET and employment opportunities, challenges in inclusive education, and insufficient services for independent living. Weak institutional coordination and limited participation of persons with disabilities further hinder effective policy outcomes. The study underscores the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms, improved coordination, and meaningful involvement of persons with disabilities in policymaking. These measures are essential for advancing social inclusion and equity in Albania.

Keywords: *disability policy, policy implementation, social inclusion, accessibility, equity, Albania*

Fostering Resilience and Inclusion: Holistic Support for Adults with Disabilities without Parental Care

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ABSTRACT

This study examines holistic support strategies aimed at fostering resilience and inclusion among adults with disabilities who lack parental care and reside in family-style residential care, which combines long-term accommodation with coordinated psychosocial support. This study provides new insights into the well-being of adults with disabilities living in family-style residential care without parental support, a population that remains understudied. Guided by the biopsychosocial approach and the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (Kim et al., 2025), the research investigates how person-centered, integrated support frameworks enhance overall well-being. Using a mixed-methods design, data were collected from 35 adults living in family-style residential programs. Quantitative findings revealed that 72% of participants reported moderate to high life satisfaction, 79% experienced increased social engagement, and functional independence scores improved by 24% on average (Cohen's $d = 0.7$), indicating a moderate-to-large effect of holistic interventions. Semi-structured interviews highlighted perceived improvements in emotional well-being, autonomy, and meaningful social roles. Findings underscore the value of integrated, coordinated care approaches that bridge clinical, social, and environmental domains. Implications include the development of structured family-style residential programs that incorporate mental health services, life skills training, and community integration initiatives, contributing to evidence-based policies and practice that strengthen resilience, inclusion, and quality of life for this vulnerable population.

Keywords: *holistic care, supported residential care, biopsychosocial model, adults without parental care, resilience, person-centered care*



Interdisciplinary approach to youth in contact with the law: secondary victimization, institutional experience and the need for integrated support

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ABSTRACT

Young people in contact with the law represent a particularly vulnerable category, as interaction with the justice system generates consequences that extend beyond the formal legal dimension into psychological and social domains. In this context, secondary victimization emerges as a significant phenomenon, linked to institutional practices, procedural communication and the lack of coordinated support, which may intensify stress, stigmatization and emotional insecurity. This article examines the role of interdisciplinary approaches in addressing the needs of young people in contact with the law by integrating legal, psychological and social perspectives in the analysis of institutional experience. The study draws on empirical data from young people aged 18–21 within the Albanian penal system, where social isolation, anxiety, perceptions of institutional treatment and the need for psychological support appear as central features of their experience during criminal proceedings and detention. Findings indicate that institutional fragmentation and insufficient coordination between services increase exposure to secondary victimization, weaken rehabilitation outcomes and limit social reintegration. The article argues for more development-sensitive institutional models in which justice, psychology and social services operate through coordinated intervention to strengthen protection, rehabilitation and long-term inclusion.

Keywords: *youth in contact with the law, secondary victimization, institutional experience, psychological support, interdisciplinary intervention*

Implementation of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS): A Theoretical Perspective from Europe to Albania

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ABSTRACT

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) encompasses a range of interventions aimed at promoting psychological well-being, preventing mental health disorders, and supporting individuals and communities facing psychosocial stressors. The concept integrates two complementary dimensions: mental health support, which includes clinical and psychological services such as psychotherapy, counseling, and psychiatric treatment, and psychosocial support, which focuses on social, emotional, and community-based interventions that strengthen resilience, coping mechanisms, and social functioning. The theoretical framework of MHPSS is grounded in an interdisciplinary and multi-sectoral approach widely applied in public health, education systems, social services, and humanitarian contexts. Across Europe, MHPSS programs are implemented through integrated policies and services involving schools, community health systems, and social protection structures. In Albania, the development of MHPSS initiatives has been increasingly supported through partnerships between governmental institutions and international organizations, including the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and Terre des hommes. The aim of this study is to examine the main MHPSS models and to provide a theoretical comparison between their implementation in Europe and Albania. The study employs a qualitative research approach based on the analysis of scientific literature, policy documents, and institutional reports related to mental health and psychosocial support interventions. The study underscores the importance of training and strengthening mental health professionals, particularly in Albania, to improve national mental health systems and service delivery.

Keywords: *MHPSS; Europe; Albania; life course.*



SESSION 2B

Mental Health, Well-being and Social Dynamics



Resilience in Marriage: Exploring Its Occurrence In Albanian Couples

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ABSTRACT

Marriage, in the family code, is defined as legal cohabitation, based on moral and legal equality of spouses, the feeling of love, respect and mutual understanding, as the basis of unity in the family. An important element for satisfaction in marriage is the resilience factor between the two partners. Known as the ability to work on personal differences, to strengthen the emotional bond and mutual commitment. The aim of paper is exploring the role of resilience in overcoming challenges in marriage. We will attempt to provide answers to research questions on the following issues: What do we mean by resilience in a couple relationship? How to cope with different stressors in marriage through resilience? How should partners work on their relationship to prolong marriage? This study will be qualitative and descriptive, among the first research studies, on resilience in marriage, in Albanian society. Based on literature research and the use of a checklist as instrument in a sample of 50 married adults, in the city of Elbasan. Studies show that resilience in a couple's relationship affects the longevity of a marriage. High levels of stress and lack of resilience over the years transform partners and lead them towards divorce without seeking the help of couple therapist.

Keywords: *marriage, resilience, couple, therapy, psychologist*



Future Shock Anxiety: The Psychological Impact of Rapid Societal Change on Albanian Youth

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ABSTRACT

Rapid societal transformations have been associated with heightened uncertainty among young populations, often conceptualized as “future shock” (Toffier, 1970). Empirical evidence examining this phenomenon within transitional contexts such as Albania has remained limited. This study aimed to examine the predictive relationship between perceived societal instability and future-oriented anxiety, to assess the impact of anxiety on adaptive decision-making, and to investigate the moderating role of resilience among Albanian youth. A cross-sectional quantitative design was employed with a sample of young adults aged 18–29 years in Albania ($N = 350$; 57.1% female, 42.9% male). Data were collected using standardized and psychometrically validated instruments. Perceived societal instability was assessed using an adapted measure grounded in the Intolerance of Uncertainty framework (IUS-12). Future-oriented anxiety was measured using the Dark Future Scale (DFS). Adaptive decision-making was evaluated through the Adult Decision-Making Competence scale (A-DMC), while resilience was measured using the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-10). Correlational analyses and hierarchical regression models were conducted to test direct and moderating effects. The findings indicated that perceived societal instability significantly predicted higher levels of future-oriented anxiety ($\beta > 0$, $p < .05$), supporting H1. Future-oriented anxiety was negatively associated with adaptive decision-making ($\beta < 0$, $p < .05$), confirming H2. Furthermore, resilience significantly moderated the relationship between perceived societal instability and anxiety, such that higher levels of resilience attenuated this association (interaction term $p < .05$), supporting H3. The study highlighted the psychological impact of rapid societal change on Albanian youth and demonstrated the protective role of resilience in mitigating future-oriented anxiety and supporting adaptive decision-making. These findings underscored the importance of developing targeted psychological interventions aimed at strengthening resilience and enhancing individuals’ capacity to cope with uncertainty in rapidly changing environments.

Keywords: *future shock; future-oriented anxiety; resilience; decision-making competence; intolerance of uncertainty; youth; Albania*



Psychotherapeutic intervention and his impact on Quality of Life among women diagnosed with breast cancer in Albania: A clinical and psychosocial case analysis

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ABSTRACT

Breast cancer remains one of the most prevalent oncological conditions affecting women worldwide, posing not only significant physical challenges but also profound psychological and social consequences. Women diagnosed with breast cancer frequently experience emotional distress, including anxiety, depression, fear of recurrence, and disruptions in personal, familial, and social functioning. These psychological burdens can substantially impair overall quality of life, underscoring the importance of integrating psychosocial care into comprehensive ontological treatment. Psychotherapeutic interventions have increasingly been recognized as essential components of cancer care, aiming to strengthen resilience, enhance coping strategies, and improve emotional well-being. This study aims to examine the impact of psychotherapeutic intervention on quality of life among women diagnosed with breast cancer in Albania. It specifically explores the relationship between psychological support and key dimensions of well-being. Data are collected using standardized psychological assessment instruments and structured procedures to evaluate levels of distress, coping mechanisms, and perceived quality of life. The clinical component focuses on a 34-year-old female patient diagnosed with breast cancer following a right-sided mastectomy, who presented with clinically significant anxiety symptoms previously managed by psychiatric care. The patient engaged in long-term psychotherapy with a psychoanalytic orientation. Initially, her functioning was largely confined to caregiving roles, with limited social engagement. The therapy consisted of weekly sessions over a two-year period, with consistent adherence, including remote sessions when necessary. Over time, the patient demonstrated significant psychological and functional improvements, including increased autonomy, restructuring of daily routines, and initiation of professional activity aligned with her personal interests. This case highlights the potential effectiveness of long-term psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy in facilitating emotional processing, improving adaptive functioning, and



supporting patients in confronting internal fears. These findings are consistent with prior research in psycho-oncology demonstrating the benefits of sustained psychotherapeutic interventions in reducing distress and enhancing quality of life.

Keywords: *Breast Cancer; Psychotherapy; Quality of Life; Psychosocial Support; Women's Health; Albania*



The Invisible Burden of Care giving in Palliative Care: A Critical Review of Contemporary Literature

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ABSTRACT

In the context of palliative care, family caregivers represent an essential yet often invisible pillar of health and social care systems. Despite their central role, caregiving burden remains under-recognized, while its impact is profound and multidimensional. This paper presents a critical review of contemporary scientific literature on caregiving burden in palliative care, focusing on its emotional, physical, social, and financial dimensions. Drawing on established theoretical frameworks, including stress and coping theory and the caregiver stress process model, caregiving burden is conceptualized as the result of prolonged exposure to chronic stressors linked to the complexity of care and the progressive deterioration of the patient's condition. Empirical evidence consistently shows that caregivers experience high levels of burden, significantly affecting their psychological well-being, social functioning, and physical health. Literature frames caregiving burden as a dynamic and interrelated process, where emotional distress, physical exhaustion, social isolation, and financial strain reinforce one another. In palliative care, this burden is intensified by exposure to suffering, anticipatory grief, and end-of-life decision-making. Despite growing research, significant gaps remain, particularly in underrepresented socio-cultural contexts. This review highlights the need for integrated, context-sensitive approaches and emphasizes recognizing caregivers as key actors in palliative care policy and practice.

Keywords: *care giving burden, palliative care, family caregivers, stress, well-being, multidimensional burden*

Does Meaning in Life Explain the Link Between Personality and Anxiety? A Mediation Study in Emerging Adults

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ABSTRACT

Anxiety is highly prevalent during emerging adulthood, a developmental period characterized by emotional instability and identity exploration. Personality traits, particularly Neuroticism, have been consistently identified as strong predictors of anxiety; however, less is known about the psychological mechanisms underlying this relationship. Drawing on integrative models of personality and well-being, the present study examined whether meaning in life mediates the relationship between Neuroticism and anxiety among emerging adults. A cross-sectional sample of 407 emerging adults (aged 18–29 years) completed measures of Neuroticism, meaning in life (Presence and Search), and anxiety symptoms. Pearson correlations and regression-based mediation analyses were conducted. Results indicated that Neuroticism was positively associated with anxiety and negatively associated with Presence of Meaning. Presence of Meaning was negatively correlated with anxiety at the bivariate level; however, it did not significantly mediate the relationship between Neuroticism and anxiety when included in regression models. Neuroticism remained a strong and significant predictor of anxiety after controlling for meaning in life. These findings suggest that although meaning in life is associated with both personality and anxiety, it does not function as a primary explanatory mechanism linking Neuroticism to anxiety in emerging adulthood. The results highlight the dominant role of dispositional emotional vulnerability in anxiety and suggest that meaning in life may operate as a parallel protective factor rather than a mediating process.

Keywords: *Emerging adulthood; Neuroticism; Meaning in life; Presence of meaning; Anxiety; Personality; Mediation*



From pain to diagnosis: Somatic presentations of anxiety and depression among adult patients in Albania

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M.Sc Marinela Tanushi

M.Sc Arba Karaj

M.Sc Altea Rroshi

M.Sc Artina Çoka

M.Sc Nerxhivane Mehmeti

M.Sc Matilda Topollaj

M.Sc Elsida Hysen

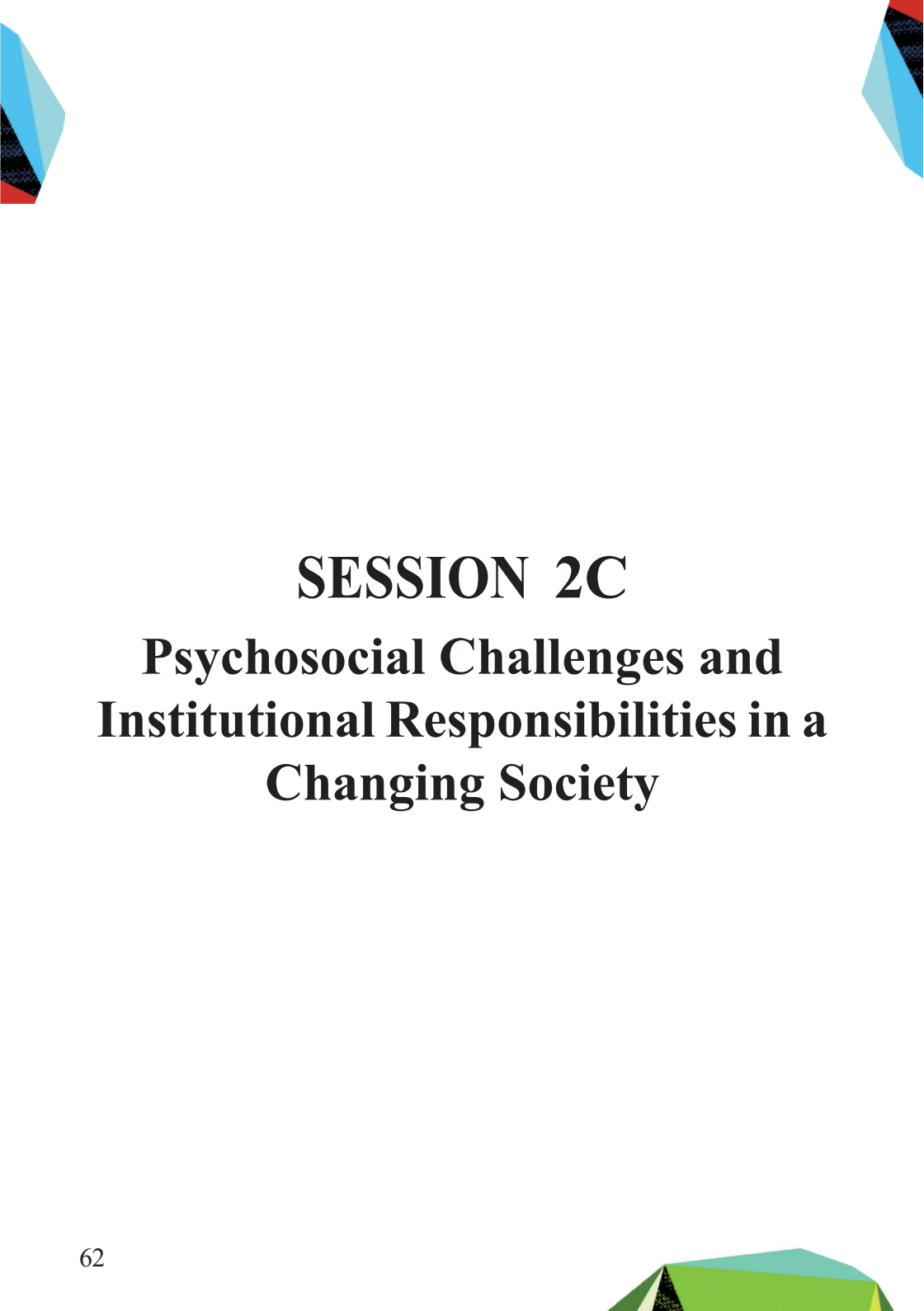
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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how anxiety and depression are expressed through somatic symptoms in primary care settings in Albania. It addresses the problem of under-identification of mental health disorders, as patients often present psychological distress through physical complaints. The study is grounded in the framework of the biopsychosocial model, which posits that the body and mind are interlinked. It considers the role of cultural factors and stigma in shaping how individuals communicate and interpret their distress. The study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional approach, drawing on data collected from primary care patients (n=181) in Albania. The analysis examines patterns of somatic expression (PHQ-15), anxiety (GAD-7) and depression (PHQ-9). Findings indicate significant associations between somatization, depression and anxiety. This often leads to delays in accurate diagnosis and inappropriate treatment. Additionally, findings suggest that patients find it easier to confide in informal sources such as friends and family for their emotional problems. The study contributes to increasing awareness of the need to integrate mental health into primary care. It emphasizes the importance of training healthcare professionals to recognize somatic manifestations of psychological distress and to adopt culturally sensitive approaches in clinical practice.

Keywords: *somatization; anxiety; depression; primary care; Albania*

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SESSION 2C

Psychosocial Challenges and Institutional Responsibilities in a Changing Society

Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education: Rethinking Students' Knowledge, Lifelong Learning, and Cognitive Competency

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ABSTRACT

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools is transforming learning and knowledge practices in higher education. This study explores its impact on learning, focusing on students' cognitive competency and lifelong learning patterns. It addresses the concern about the risk that widely used AI may promote passive learning rather than reflective engagement, thereby reshaping how knowledge is built and internalized. The author investigates students' use of AI and their behavioral and learning patterns. Using a combined method of desk review and observation, analyzing data from students' reports of AI tools used for their master's theses, and collecting observations from in-class group tasks and presentations. Results show that while AI is widely used, there is a misalignment between its potential and actual use. Students use AI, amongst other purposes, to generate or enhance text, instead of using it to co-create and critically brainstorm ideas with it. As a result, passive use of AI reduces critical engagement, while structured co-creative practices may enhance knowledge autonomy, critical thinking, and permanent skills. This study contributes a novel pedagogical framework for understanding AI use from students, and the need for guided support in the more efficient use of AI tools in enhancing learning and quality work production.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence in Education; Knowledge; Student Cognitive Competency; Digital Literacy; Co-Creation; Higher Education*



Organizational Commitment as a Protective Factor Against Burnout: Empirical Evidence from Public Administration

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ABSTRACT

In the context of increasing organizational complexity, the interaction between organizational commitment and burnout represents a key factor for well-being and effectiveness in public administration. This study examines the direction and strength of this relationship, as well as the role of relevant demographic factors. The study was designed as a correlational study with a quantitative approach, conducted on a sample of 95 public administration employees. The results indicate a statistically significant negative relationship between organizational commitment and burnout ($r = -0.303$, $p = 0.043$), which, according to Cohen's classification, can be interpreted as a moderate effect. The effect is more pronounced in the psychological dimension ($r = -0.408$, $p = 0.005$), representing a moderately strong relationship, while the physical dimension does not reach statistical significance. The analyses show that gender does not play a significant role, whereas age and job tenure have a noticeable influence on this relationship. The study contributes to the field of organizational psychology by providing empirical evidence from public administration and highlights the importance of institutional interventions aimed at strengthening employee commitment, as a means of reducing burnout. From a theoretical perspective, the findings support the idea that organizational commitment functions as an important psychological resource that enhances individuals' resilience to stress and professional exhaustion, particularly in transitional contexts.

Keywords: *organizational commitment, burnout, public administration, workplace well-being*

Beyond Silence and Sacrifice: Rethinking Mental Health Systems for Carers

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the limitations of current mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) systems, focusing on the insufficient provision of structured services for family members caring for individuals with chronic mental health conditions. While most MHPSS interventions primarily target patients, the needs of carers are often overlooked, resulting in increased psychological burden, stress, and reduced well-being. This gap highlights a critical weakness in current mental health systems. The study is guided by an integrated framework based on holistic well-being and ecological systems theory, emphasizing the interdependence between individuals and their family environments across the life course. A qualitative methodology is employed, including semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with carers, alongside consultations with social and health service representatives. Data are analyzed using thematic analysis. The research is based on three main assumptions: carers experience significant psychological burden, have limited access to information, and face barriers in accessing MHPSS services. This study contributes to the limited literature focusing on carers within MHPSS systems and advocates for the integration of targeted psychosocial support services, including counseling, psychoeducation, and structured support programs. The findings are expected to inform more inclusive and integrated care systems, highlighting the urgent need for policy and practice reforms that recognize carers as central actors in mental health support.

Keywords: *mental health, psychosocial support, caregivers, family support, integrated care.*



The Silent Acceptance of Workplace Bullying: A Qualitative Study of Employee Perceptions and Leadership Influence

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ABSTRACT

Workplace bullying is an increasingly recognized organizational issue that negatively affects employees' well-being, job satisfaction, and interpersonal relationships in professional settings. This study explores the nature and causes of workplace bullying, employees' perceptions of this phenomenon, and the role of leadership in preventing bullying behaviours. A qualitative methodology was employed, involving semi-structured interviews with 30 employees from different organizations in Tirana, Albania. The findings revealed that workplace bullying is present across various organizational settings and is frequently normalized or silently tolerated by employees. Key contributing factors included hierarchical power differences, poor communication, envy, unfair competition, and negative organizational climates. The study further found that authoritarian leadership styles and weak organizational support systems increase the likelihood of bullying behaviours in the workplace. The findings highlight the importance of effective leadership, clear organizational policies, and supportive workplace cultures in preventing workplace bullying and promoting employee well-being. The study contributes to the limited research on workplace bullying in the Albanian context and offers practical implications for organizations seeking to create safer and healthier working environments.

Keywords: *workplace bullying; employee perceptions; leadership; organizational climate; qualitative research*

An Assessment of Media Literacy Characteristics And Informational Vulnerability Among Students

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ABSTRACT

The developments in information technology and the digitalization of communication have revolutionized communication systems creating challenges for their users. Higher education institutions have a key role in training young people in the smart and critical use of technological and informational innovations. Students' cognitive and critical skills are increasingly challenged, and in this context, universities must respond to the immediate demand for media and digital literacy study programs. This article aims to assess several key characteristics related to understanding and use of media among students, with the purpose of identifying the features that make students a vulnerable group during media exposure. Data collection was carried out through quantitative methods using a structured questionnaire. This study is purposeful and designed as a case study with students of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana. The sampling technique is random sampling, and the distribution of the questionnaire was carried out through Google Forms platform. The findings indicate that the main directions of intervention should focus on educating students about the safe use of digital communications/interactions, the importance of protecting personal data, the verification of information sources and increasing awareness and skills against disinformation, fake news and media bias literacy.

Keywords: *Media literacy, bias, students, digitalization, vulnerability, study programs*



Rural Ageing and Social Exclusion in the Context of Migration

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ABSTRACT

Population ageing in rural Albania is deeply intertwined with large-scale migration of younger generations, leaving older adults behind in socially fragmented communities. This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of 17 elderly individuals (70+), residing alone in two rural municipalities — Kukës in the North and Devoll in the South-East. Through a phenomenological approach and thematic analysis, the study identifies four core dimensions of exclusion: social invisibility, absence of care, emotional abandonment, and erosion of dignity. The findings reveal a profound sense of loneliness and disconnectedness shaped by both demographic shifts and insufficient community-based support systems. The article argues for the urgent development of community-driven care models, intergenerational solidarity initiatives, and inclusive social policies that protect dignity and agency in later life.

Keywords: *social exclusion; ageing; migration; rural ageing; care; older adults; Albania*

Unaccompanied Foreign Minors in Albania: A Comprehensive Analysis of Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the situation of unaccompanied foreign minors in Albania, examining both the institutional challenges and the opportunities for system improvement. Based on a mixed-methods approach that combines demographic data with in-depth interviews conducted with child protection professionals, NGO workers, and public officials, the study offers an in-depth overview of current practices and systemic gaps. Findings show that most unaccompanied minors are boys aged 15–17, primarily from Egypt and Syria, and are often identified at border entry points. Despite the existence of legal provisions, practical challenges remain significant, including the lack of interpreters at borders, the absence of long-term care structures, limited legal guardianship mechanisms, and difficulties in accessing services due to the lack of documentation. The study highlights the fragmentation of the current protection system and the need to reform the legal and institutional framework in line with international standards. It calls for the establishment of long-term residential services accessible to foreign minors, improved inter-institutional coordination, and capacity building for child protection professionals. The findings aim to inform future policy and provide a foundation for targeted interventions that ensure the rights, safety, and integration of unaccompanied foreign minors in Albania.

Keywords: *unaccompanied minors, child protection, migration, legal framework, Albania, long-term care, integration*



SESSION 2D

Psychosocial Vulnerability, Rights, And Institutional Response



The Role and Quality of Individual Assessment Reports in Juvenile Justice in Albania

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ABSTRACT

Individual Assessment Reports (IARs) constitute a central instrument in the rehabilitation and reintegration processes of juveniles in conflict with the law, as they enable individualized, evidence-informed decision-making grounded in the specific needs and circumstances of each case. While international literature underscores their critical role in promoting tailored interventions, alternative measures, and the reduction of recidivism, their application and effectiveness within the Albanian context remain insufficiently explored. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to examine the role and significance of Individual Assessment Reports prepared by Probation Service specialists in Albania, with particular attention to their quality and the challenges associated with their preparation. The study adopts a narrative literature review approach, drawing on international and national sources to analyse the function, standards, and practical implications of IARs within juvenile justice systems. Findings indicate that the quality of Individual Assessment Reports is a decisive factor in shaping judicial and rehabilitative outcomes. When systematically prepared, evidence-based, and context-sensitive, these reports contribute to more effective case management and support the application of individualized and non-custodial measures. However, the literature also highlights persistent challenges, including limited institutional resources, time constraints, and capacity gaps among practitioners, which may undermine both the quality and the practical impact of these reports. The study concludes that strengthening the quality and consistency of Individual Assessment Reports is essential for enhancing their effectiveness within the juvenile justice system in Albania. It further suggests that future research should incorporate empirical evidence from Probation Service specialists to better capture practice-based perspectives and inform targeted policy and capacity-building interventions.

Keywords: *Individual Assessment Reports, juvenile justice, Probation Service, quality, challenges, Albania*



Politics behind closed doors: Documenting women's mass resignations from local councils

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ABSTRACT

One of the challenges in social science research is the study of political decision-making that unfolds behind closed doors. Informal meetings after working hours, conversations in cafés, and the circulation of information within small, trusted networks often shape political outcomes, yet they rarely leave documentary traces. As a result, such processes are difficult to capture through standard research methods such as surveys and focus groups. This paper discusses the methodological and ethical challenges of examining the mass resignations of women candidates from local councils following the 2023 local elections. The process, from women's inclusion on party lists to their subsequent replacement by men, occurred largely out of public view. Initial data collection efforts yielded limited results: official data were partial or incomplete, and the open call for study participation produced no responses. We discuss how, through collaboration with a women's rights organization, the mobilization of a local research team, and the use of complementary data collection methods, we were able not only to document patterns of resignation but also to uncover some of the political strategies underpinning them. The paper contributes to methodological discussions on studying opaque political practices and on how evidence can be used to challenge them.

Keywords: *women's political representation, local councils, mass resignations, data collection, local elections*

Health Behaviors among Teens in the City Of Tirana

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ABSTRACT

This aims to see studies of new studies of Tirana, in a person in the city of Tirana. The main issue is related to the certainty of the prevalence of non-internal habits, including sedentarism and unbalanced stress of psychology, pose a risk to the reports. The study is based on the Biopsychosocial Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior, which have an analytical framework to establish the interaction between two biological, psychological and environmental. These place the importance of social norms, personal attitudes and self-efficacy in the adoption of other changes. The research follows a mixed-methods design, including 350 teens aged 13–18 years from public and private schools in Tirana. The data are standardized by questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The analysis provides descriptive statistics. The results of the results of family support, school climate and disease education programs are similar in promoting positive activities. With this, the negative impact of excessive use of technology, non-physical nutrition and activities of activities is evidenced. The findings contribute to the design of intersectoral strategies for promoting youth health, public policies and educational practices at local and national levels.

Keywords: *adolescence, public health, education, education, well-being, Tirana*



Living with Lupus in Albania: A Psychosocial Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Systemic lupus erythematosus is a chronic autoimmune disease with unpredictable symptoms that deeply impact the psychological and social lives of patients. In Albania, where public awareness and institutional support for chronic illness is limited, individuals living with lupus face additional challenges of stigma, social isolation, and lack of access to psychosocial care. This qualitative study aimed to explore the lived experiences of lupus patients, focusing on emotional wellbeing, social relationships, and interactions with the healthcare system. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 patients (13 women and 2 men, aged 22–58) and 4 professionals (2 rheumatologists and 2 social workers). Participants were recruited using snowball sampling. Thematic analysis revealed four major themes: the invisibility of symptoms such as chronic fatigue; multidimensional stigma and disbelief; limited communication and support within the healthcare system; and patients’ self-developed coping mechanisms, often relying on informal support networks. The study highlights the need for more integrated and sensitive approaches to care that go beyond clinical treatment. Findings suggest that it is important that patients’ voices are heard in health policy, and that healthcare and social professionals receive training that reflects an understanding of the psychosocial challenges of chronic illness. These results provide a foundation for developing inclusive support systems and community-based interventions tailored to the Albanian context.

Keywords: *Systemic lupus erythematosus, social exclusion, chronic illness, psychosocial wellbeing, healthcare access.*

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ONLINE SESSION 2

Advancing Integrated, Holistic Models of Human Well-being



Comprehensive Assessment of Training Needs and Well-being Among Parents and Teachers Supporting Special Educational Needs Children

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the critical relationship between professional skills and well-being of parents and educators supporting children with special educational needs (SEN). The objective is to identify how the lack of financial resources, social isolation and occupational stress affect the mental health of these groups, proposing a training needs assessment focused on resilience. The research is based on the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), analysing how social support and self-education can act as protective factors against emotional exhaustion and decreased well-being. A quantitative methodology was used by applying surveys to a transnational sample of 312 participants (special educators and parents) from five European countries. The results indicate an alarming level of anxiety, depression and burnout, factors that undermine well-being and the effectiveness of interventions. The study demonstrates that training needs are not only technical, but also emotional, highlighting the importance of mutual support and self-care strategies to maintain psychological balance. The paper advocates a paradigm shift in educational policies: moving from strictly pedagogical training to holistic programs that prioritize the well-being of the adult. Strengthening this pillar is essential for the sustainability of inclusive education and for improving the quality of life of families of SEN children.

Keywords: *Well-being, special educational needs (SEN), burnout, Job Demands-Resources theory, mental health, transnational training.*

University Experiences and Support Needs of Students with Disabilities: Evidence from Kosovo

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences and support needs of university students with disabilities in Kosovo, focusing on the barriers they face in higher education and the support that contributes to their wellbeing, participation, and academic success. The research used a qualitative design consisting of one focus group (n=5) and semi-structured interviews (n=6) with students with disabilities from different academic fields at the University of Prishtina. Participants shared their perspectives on educational experiences, challenges encountered during their studies, and the support mechanisms that enabled or limited their engagement in university life. The findings show that students face multiple and interconnected barriers affecting their access to and participation in higher education. These include challenges related to family and home environments, urban infrastructure, transportation, and accessibility within university buildings and classrooms. While professors and peers were generally perceived as supportive, students emphasized that support often depends on individual goodwill rather than structured institutional systems. They highlighted the need for more coordinated services, accessible infrastructure, trained staff and person-centred support. The study also highlights the establishment of the Center for Students with Special Needs at the University of Prishtina as an important step toward improving accessibility and strengthening institutional support. Overall, the findings point to the need for stronger institutional commitment, better data, and clearer policy measures to advance disability inclusion in higher education.

Keywords: *inclusive education, students with disabilities, higher education, student support, inclusion.*



Strengthening Aftercare in Juvenile Justice: Lessons from International Models for the Kosovo Context

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ABSTRACT

The development of effective aftercare services is increasingly recognized as a crucial component of juvenile justice systems aiming to support rehabilitation and reduce recidivism among young offenders. While many countries have invested in structured post-release support programs, the organization and scope of aftercare services remain uneven across different national contexts. This study examines the existing framework of probation services and post-release support for juveniles in Kosovo. Drawing on findings from a meta-analysis, the study focuses on identifying key characteristics of effective post-release support that could be relevant within the Kosovo context. In particular, the analysis highlights the importance of continuity of support, relationship-based engagement and coordinated community involvement as factors associated with positive reintegration outcomes and reduced recidivism among young offenders. By situating the Kosovo context within broader international discussions on rehabilitation and reintegration, the study provides recommendations for strengthening aftercare structures and improving coordination between correctional institutions, probation services and community-based support mechanisms. Effective aftercare systems are essential for supporting successful reintegration and preventing reoffending among youth in conflict with the law.

Keywords: *Juvenile justice, Aftercare services, Youth reintegration, Recidivism, Probation services, Kosovo.*

Empowering Students through Teachers: Linking Job Satisfaction to Human Capital Development

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ABSTRACT

In a rapidly changing world, education plays a key role in advancing human capital and empowering children and youth. This study examines the factors influencing teachers' job satisfaction and their role in creating inclusive and supportive learning environments for students. The study is based on data from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2024, conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, focusing on a sample of 3,281 teachers from Kosovo. The main variables include professional collaboration and teachers' comfort with the social and emotional aspects of teaching, while student behavior stress is examined as a mediating factor. Job satisfaction is considered an important indicator of teacher well-being and a key element for the sustainable development of human capital. Data were analyzed using SPSS (version 21), applying descriptive, correlational, and regression analyses. The findings indicate that higher levels of stress related to student behavior are associated with lower levels of job satisfaction. In contrast, professional collaboration and stronger social and emotional competencies are linked to higher satisfaction levels. The results highlight that improving teachers' working conditions and professional support contributes not only to their well-being but also to the creation of more equitable, inclusive, and empowering learning environments for students. In this way, strengthening teachers' capacities serves as a key mechanism for advancing human capital and addressing the challenges of a changing society.

Keywords: *teacher professional development; job satisfaction; equity in education; student empowerment; human capital; TALIS 2024*



Trauma and Psychosocial Needs of Children in Foster Care: Challenges Faced by Foster Families in Albania

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the trauma experiences and psychosocial needs of children in foster care in Albania, alongside the challenges encountered by foster families within a developing alternative care system. It situates these issues within the broader process of deinstitutionalization and the ongoing transition toward family-based child protection services. The research adopts a qualitative, exploratory design based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 9 foster families and 21 professionals working in central and local government institutions, residential care settings, and non-governmental organizations providing social services. Participants were drawn from four key regions in Albania: Tirana, Shkodra, Korça, and Vlora. Using reflexive thematic analysis, the study identifies recurring patterns related to children's psychosocial needs and the systemic conditions shaping foster care practice. The findings indicate that many children enter foster care with experiences of trauma, disrupted attachment, and unmet developmental needs, requiring consistent and specialized psychosocial support. At the same time, foster families face multiple structural challenges, including limited financial assistance, insufficient professional and institutional support, and complexities within legal and administrative procedures. Insights from professionals further highlight gaps in coordination, service provision, and policy implementation. These factors collectively affect placement stability and the quality of care provided to children. By integrating the perspectives of both foster families and professionals across multiple regions, this study provides a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of foster care in Albania. It contributes to limited evidence base and offers practical, system-level insights to inform the strengthening of foster care as a stable, rights-based alternative within the national child protection system.

Keywords: *foster care; trauma; psychosocial needs; foster families; child protection system; deinstitutionalization; Albania*

The Role of Women in Albania In Strengthening Democracy, Citizenship, and Collective Action

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of women in Albania in advancing democracy, active citizenship, and collective action in the context of post-transition democratic consolidation. It analyzes women's participation in decision-making processes, their engagement in civil society, and their contribution to collective mobilization on social, political, and economic issues. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the study explores structural and cultural factors that shape women's empowerment and marginalization in the public sphere. Particular attention is given to women's organizations and feminist initiatives as key drivers in promoting gender equality and challenging entrenched social norms. The paper also assesses the role of public policies and legal frameworks in enhancing women's political representation. Findings suggest that, despite measurable progress, persistent barriers—such as gender stereotypes, unequal access to resources, and limited representation—continue to constrain women's full participation. However, the growing presence of women in civic activism and collective networks highlights their critical role in fostering inclusive democratic practices. The paper contributes to broader debates on democracy, citizenship, and collective action by providing empirical and analytical insights from the Albanian context.

Keywords: *women in Albania; democracy; active citizenship; collective action; gender equality; political representation; civil society; women's empowerment*



Child Protection and the Prevention of Abuse in Kosovo

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ABSTRACT

The protection of children's rights constitutes a fundamental priority in democratic societies, as children represent a particularly vulnerable group exposed to various risks and forms of abuse. Responsibility for ensuring a safe and protective environment is shared among the family, society, and state institutions. Child protection policies encompass a range of mechanisms and procedures aimed at the prevention, identification, and effective response to abuse, including physical and emotional violence as well as neglect. The Republic of Kosovo has integrated international standards into its legal system, particularly through the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the harmonization of domestic legislation. However, despite notable normative progress, challenges in the practical implementation of policies and in the effective prevention of abuse persist. This paper analyzes the legal and institutional framework in Kosovo, identifying key challenges and highlighting the need to strengthen child protection mechanisms.

Keywords: *child protection, abuse, public policy, legislation, Kosovo.*

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ONLINE SESSION 3

Education, Social Inclusion, and Policy Pathways for Sustainable Human Development



Empowering Children through Inclusive Education

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education constitutes a fundamental pillar for ensuring equity and the holistic development of every child. It fosters a learning environment in which all students feel accepted, valued, and supported, thereby directly contributing to their empowerment through enhanced self-confidence, active participation, and the realization of their individual potential. By providing equal opportunities for learning, collaboration, and self-expression, inclusive practices promote students’ social and emotional development. Furthermore, they strengthen interpersonal relationships and contribute to the establishment of a positive classroom climate, effectively preparing learners for participation in a diverse and inclusive society. The purpose of this study is to examine the implementation of inclusive education within the Albanian education system, with particular emphasis on the role of the competency-based curriculum. This curriculum reflects sustained efforts to embed inclusive principles by placing the learner at the center of the educational process and fostering the development of key life skills, critical thinking, and effective collaboration. Within this framework, the National Education Strategy 2021–2026 aims to advance inclusive education by ensuring equitable access and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. It envisions the development of supportive educational environments that respect diversity and promote the active engagement of all students. In conclusion, inclusive education remains a key driver in the development of a fair, high-quality, and inclusive education system.

Keywords: *inclusive education, school, curriculum, children’s empowerment.*

Literary Translation As Cultural Mediation and A Catalyst For Youth Education and Human Development: Translational Equivalence In The Albanian Version Of Vanity Fair By William Makepeace Thackeray

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ABSTRACT

In a globally interconnected and culturally diverse world, literary translation is not only a linguistic process, but also a powerful vehicle for cultural mediation and knowledge dissemination. This study investigates translational and cultural equivalence in the Albanian version of *Vanity Fair* by William Makepeace Thackeray, a novel critically reflecting the social hierarchies and class dynamics of the nineteenth-century English society. Through a comparative textual analysis between the source text and the Albanian translation, the study identifies strategies employed to convey semantic meaning, stylistic nuance, and culturally embedded references. Findings reveal that literary translation plays a pivotal role in expanding cultural horizons, fostering critical thinking, and enhancing youth education. By making classical world literature accessible, translation acts as a catalyst for intercultural dialogue, knowledge creation, and the promotion of human development. This research underscores the broader societal significance of literary translation as an educational tool and highlights its potential to contribute to the advancement of human knowledge, cultural literacy, and empowerment of young learners in contemporary society.

Keywords: *literary translation translational equivalence cultural mediation youth education human development*



Education and knowledge in a sustainable environment, through digital literacy for transformation

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ABSTRACT

Education is the process of transmitting knowledge, skills, and character traits through structured learning within institutions or no formal and informal means of socialization. There are 4 principles of education according to Dewey: utility, interest, experience, and integration. Considered a fundamental human right a key driver of sustainable environmental development, education as part of social policy significantly reduces poverty, improves health, and provides individuals with the stability to achieve their potential. Knowledge is an awareness of facts, a familiarity with individuals and situations, or a practical skill. Knowledge of facts, also called propositional knowledge, is often characterized as true belief that is distinct from opinion or guesswork by virtue of justification. There are 7 types of knowledge: Explicit Knowledge, Implicit Knowledge, Tacit Knowledge, Declarative Knowledge, Procedural Knowledge, Conditional Knowledge, and Conceptual Knowledge. There are 9 types of intelligence to use through education, and the IA is at the top of them nowadays. In my opinion, emotional and interpersonal intelligence are very important too to create potential. Educated individuals with the right potential skills, empathy, and principle-based ethics, such as respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. Our challenge is to develop 17th sustainable environmental objectives for our future country as part of BE in 2030, far away from the MSA of 2003. In Albania, there is a wide range of sources. As Bacon says " Knowledge is power, "which means education and understanding provide the capacity to make better decisions and achieve goals. Our educated students will use this power to reach development and transform our society as an EU part in 2030.

Keywords: *Education, individual, knowledge, IA technology, development*

Professionalization of University Librarians in the Digital and Artificial Intelligence Transition

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the professionalization process of university librarians in the context of the transformative pressures of Open Science, the proliferation of scientific databases, and the digitalization process. It examines how the emergence of Artificial Intelligence necessitates a shift in professional identity and skill sets. The objective is to evaluate the impact of targeted professional training on the competencies and attitudes of library staff at "Mihai Eminescu" Central University Library, Iași, Romania. The research is grounded in Pierre Bourdieu's Social Capital theory (1986), analyzing the transformation of the librarian's habitus from a "guardian of heritage" to a "data architect." It will also integrate the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) to assess psychological readiness for AI, and Actor-Network theory (Latour, 2005) to frame the librarian's evolving relationship with non-human actants such as scientific databases and algorithmic tools. The study employs a quantitative case study design centered on the Mihai Eminescu Central University Library. Data was collected via a structured survey from 48 respondents. A descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to measure the correlation between professional training and the acquisition of institutionalized cultural capital, focusing on both technical proficiency and professional self-efficacy. Results indicate a generally positive perception of training outcomes, suggesting that staff view continuous professional education as vital for navigating the Open Science landscape. However, the data reveals significant variability across specific competencies; while basic digital literacy is high, advanced skills related to AI integration and complex scientific data management show broader gaps. "Application intentions"—the bridge between learning a skill and implementing it in daily workflows—are influenced by the tension between perceived usefulness and the existing institutional infrastructure. The study contributes to the sociology of professions by demonstrating how Romanian university librarians convert training into symbolic capital to maintain relevance in a globalized research ecosystem. It provides a strategic framework for library management, suggesting



that professionalization must move beyond technical “upskilling” to address the socio-cultural capabilities of staff. The findings offer a scalable model for heritage libraries transitioning into AI-integrated hubs of Open Science.

Keywords: *Professionalization, Open Science, university libraries, social capital theory, digitalization, artificial intelligence.*

Social Work Interventions in Domestic Violence Prevention: An Empirical Study from Albania

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence is a significant and persistent social issue affecting individual well-being, family stability, and social cohesion. In Albania, it has gained increasing attention due to the rise in reported cases and its serious consequences. This study examines the role of social workers in raising awareness and preventing domestic violence within the Albanian context. Grounded in empowerment theory, this study adopts a quantitative approach based on data collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 30 women in the city of Durrës. The findings indicate that social workers play a crucial role in directing victims to protection services, increasing awareness of their rights and facilitating communication with relevant institutions. However, the study also identifies key challenges, including cultural norms, social stigma, and limited institutional coordination. The study offers practical recommendations for improving social policies and strengthening support services for victims of domestic violence, while also contributing to the existing literature on social work interventions in transitional societies. Furthermore, it highlights the need for more integrated and sustainable intervention strategies at both local and national levels.

Keywords: *Domestic violence, social work, empowerment, social policy, awareness raising, Albania.*



Promoting Social Inclusion and Human Development among Older Adults in Transitional Societies: Evidence from Albania

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ABSTRACT

Population ageing presents significant challenges and opportunities for social equity and human development, particularly in transitional societies. Older adults often experience multidimensional exclusion related not only to income insecurity, but more often to limited access to services, and social isolation. This paper examines the social inclusion, well-being, and human development outcomes of older adults in Albania, using an empirical mixed-methods approach. Qualitative data were collected through 16 in-depth interviews with elderly and 2 focus group discussions (1) with older adults and (2) social service professionals. Findings reveal substantial inequalities in access to social protection and healthcare services, with pronounced gender and rural–urban disparities. At the same time, community-based support networks and informal care mechanisms play a critical role in mitigating social exclusion. The study highlights the need for friendly age-responsive social policies and integrated community interventions that promote dignity, participation, and equity across the life course. The findings contribute to the broader debate on inclusive human development in a changing social landscape.

Keywords: *ageing, social inclusion, human development, equity, social protection.*



Transnational Parenthood and the Reconfiguration of Filiation: A Private International Law Inquiry into Surrogacy

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ABSTRACT

This study examines surrogacy as a paradigmatic challenge to Private International Law (PIL), arguing that cross-border assisted reproduction destabilizes classical connecting factors nationality, domicile, and *lex loci actus* while exposing tensions between state sovereignty and the child's fundamental rights. Drawing on the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights, particularly *Mennesson v. France* and the Advisory Opinion *Opinion P16-2018-001*, the paper highlights the Court's child-centered proportionality analysis under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Comparative reference to the Court of Justice of the European Union in *Coman v. Romania* underscores the principle of mutual recognition of personal status within the EU legal order. The analysis advances a structured conflict-of-laws methodology jurisdiction, applicable law, and recognition of foreign civil status while advocating an attenuated *ordre public* doctrine to prevent legal liminality for children born through international surrogacy. The paper concludes that PIL must evolve toward a rights-oriented, coherence-based model ensuring continuity of personal status and safeguarding the best interests of the child.

Keywords: *Private international law, surrogacy, filiation, ordre public, best interests of the child.*



SESSION 3A

Social Policy, Protection and Institutional Response

Family Policy And Child Protection In “Small Welfare States”: The Case Of North Macedonia

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, welfare states in post-socialist societies have undergone significant transformations driven by economic transition, demographic change, and emerging social risks. Within this context, family policy and child protection have become key domains of social policy, reflecting the state's responsibility to support families and promote child wellbeing. In small welfare states such as North Macedonia, these policies face particular challenges related to limited resources, institutional fragmentation, and increasing social vulnerabilities. This research examines the relationship between family policy, child protection, and social protection mechanisms in North Macedonia, exploring how these policy domains interact within the broader framework of the welfare state. The study aims to identify key policy instruments, institutional arrangements, and current challenges affecting the wellbeing and protection of children and families. Methodologically, the paper adopts a qualitative case study approach based on policy analysis of relevant legislation, strategic documents, and institutional frameworks related to family policy, child protection, and social protection. The analysis is complemented by statistical indicators and reports from national institutions and international organizations in order to contextualize recent policy developments. The research contributes to ongoing debates on welfare state transformation and the role of social policy in promoting child wellbeing in post-transition societies.

Keywords: *welfare state; family policy; child protection; child wellbeing; social protection; North Macedonia*



Proactive Social Works in Child Protection Policy – Case of Albania

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ABSTRACT

Albania, since 2010, has adopted a policy for the protection of children and their rights. On 2017, it was approved the new law “On Child Protection and their Rights” responding to the need for a more effective protection and specialised working force, mainly social workers, in the field. Several meetings were organised during the consultation phase as a draft law. It was assessed the process of the consultation with civil society organisations, professionals and academics in the field of social work. It was used a mixed methods approach to assess the effectiveness of the consultation process. The data collected included routine data from Ministry of Health and Social Welfare as well as one consultation meeting with professionals and one consultation meeting with academics at FSS, with a total of 89 stakeholders. Results show that the consultation process in terms of quantitative and qualitative indicators was an effective process. During the process, 22 amendments of the draft law were developed. Additionally, study shows that as long as professionals in the field and researchers are involved in the policy making process, the effectiveness of the policy in the specific context has greater chances to be positive.

Keywords: *policy, consultations, effectiveness.*

Assessment and Behavioral Change in Male Perpetrators: Evidence from Counselling Programmes in Northern Albania

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess behavioural change among male perpetrators participating in structured counselling programmes implemented by ZDB (Office for Men and Boys) in Northern Albania during 2025. The research is guided by an ecological and perpetrator-focused intervention framework aligned with Work with Perpetrators European Network (WWP EN) standards. The study is based on data from 78 male perpetrators engaged in counselling programmes across several municipalities. Standardised instruments from the WWP EN Impact Monitoring Toolkit were used, with data collected at multiple time points (T0–T3) from both perpetrators and their partners or ex-partners. A descriptive longitudinal approach was applied to analyse changes in behavioural indicators over time. Findings indicate that approximately 70–75% of participants demonstrated improvements in emotional regulation, accountability, and non-violent communication. Partner-reported data suggest reduced or ceased violent behaviour and increased perceived safety. Emotional violence was the most prevalent form at baseline, while participation declined in later stages, indicating retention challenges. The study highlights the effectiveness of structured counselling programmes in promoting behavioural change, while emphasising the need to strengthen referral systems, inter-institutional coordination, and implementation of legal provisions to ensure sustainability and long-term impact.

Keywords: *gender-based violence, perpetrators, psychological assessment, behavioural change, counselling*



From Potential to Employment: An Integrated Psychosocial and Labour-Market-Oriented Approach to the Professional Integration of Persons with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

Employment represents a fundamental dimension of social inclusion and economic participation for persons with disabilities (PWD), situated at the intersection of social justice, psychological well-being, and sustainable development. Despite significant progress in legal frameworks and inclusion policies, persons with disabilities continue to face structural and social barriers that limit their access to the labour market (OECD, 2010; World Health Organization, 2011). This paper presents the results of a comprehensive assessment conducted with 17 job seekers with disabilities in the city of Shkodra, Albania, within the framework of the project “Inclusive Opportunities towards Employment”, funded by the Council of Europe and implemented by the Women’s Center “Hapa të Lehtë”. The study adopts a methodological triangulation approach integrating three sources of evidence: (1) the professional experience of experts in clinical psychology and employment services, (2) empirical data derived from the technical report of the project activities, and (3) theoretical and empirical evidence from international scientific literature on inclusive employment. The findings indicate that participants possess a wide range of practical, social, and creative skills that constitute a significant potential for labour market integration. However, the analysis also identifies several structural barriers, including limited workplace mentoring, insufficient accessibility, and contractual insecurity, which affect the sustainability of employment. The study proposes an integrated psychosocial and labour-market-oriented approach in which psychological well-being, skills development, and institutional support function as complementary dimensions in promoting sustainable employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Keywords: *Inclusive employment; persons with disabilities; psychosocial approach; labour market integration; methodological triangulation; empowerment*

From Training to Practice: Building Stronger Professional Capacities in Coordinated Responses to Gender-Based Violence

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, coordinated and multi-sectoral responses to gender-based violence (GBV) have become essential for providing effective and integrated support for survivors. However, in many contexts, a gap remains between how these systems are designed and how they function in everyday practice. An important yet often overlooked factor influencing this gap is the capacity of the professionals responsible for carrying out coordination on the ground. This paper explores how training and professional development influence the effectiveness of coordinated GBV responses, based on survey data from 365 professionals involved in local coordination mechanisms across Albania. The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining a survey with interviews to explore both training experiences and how coordination works in practice. Using SPSS, the analysis employs both descriptive and inferential methods to identify patterns in training exposure, sources of training, and their relationship to knowledge levels and perceptions of system effectiveness. The findings reveal a mixed picture. Although most professionals report receiving training on coordinated approaches (71.8%) and domestic violence services (76.2%), access to this training varies depending on the context and is often influenced by externally funded projects rather than established institutional systems. A significant gap remains in perpetrator rehabilitation training, with more than half of respondents reporting no prior training in this area. The analysis also shows that training is associated with greater legal knowledge and more positive views of coordinated mechanisms, though these benefits are not consistent across sectors and professional roles. Overall, the paper emphasizes that strengthening coordinated responses to GBV requires moving away from fragmented, project-based training toward more consistent, practice-oriented, and system-supported approaches that enable professionals to translate policy into meaningful, effective support.

Keywords: *Gender-Based Violence, Coordinated Mechanisms, Professional Capacity, Training and Capacity Building*



Psychological and Cultural Adaptation as a Key Factor in the Integration of Afghan Refugees in Albania

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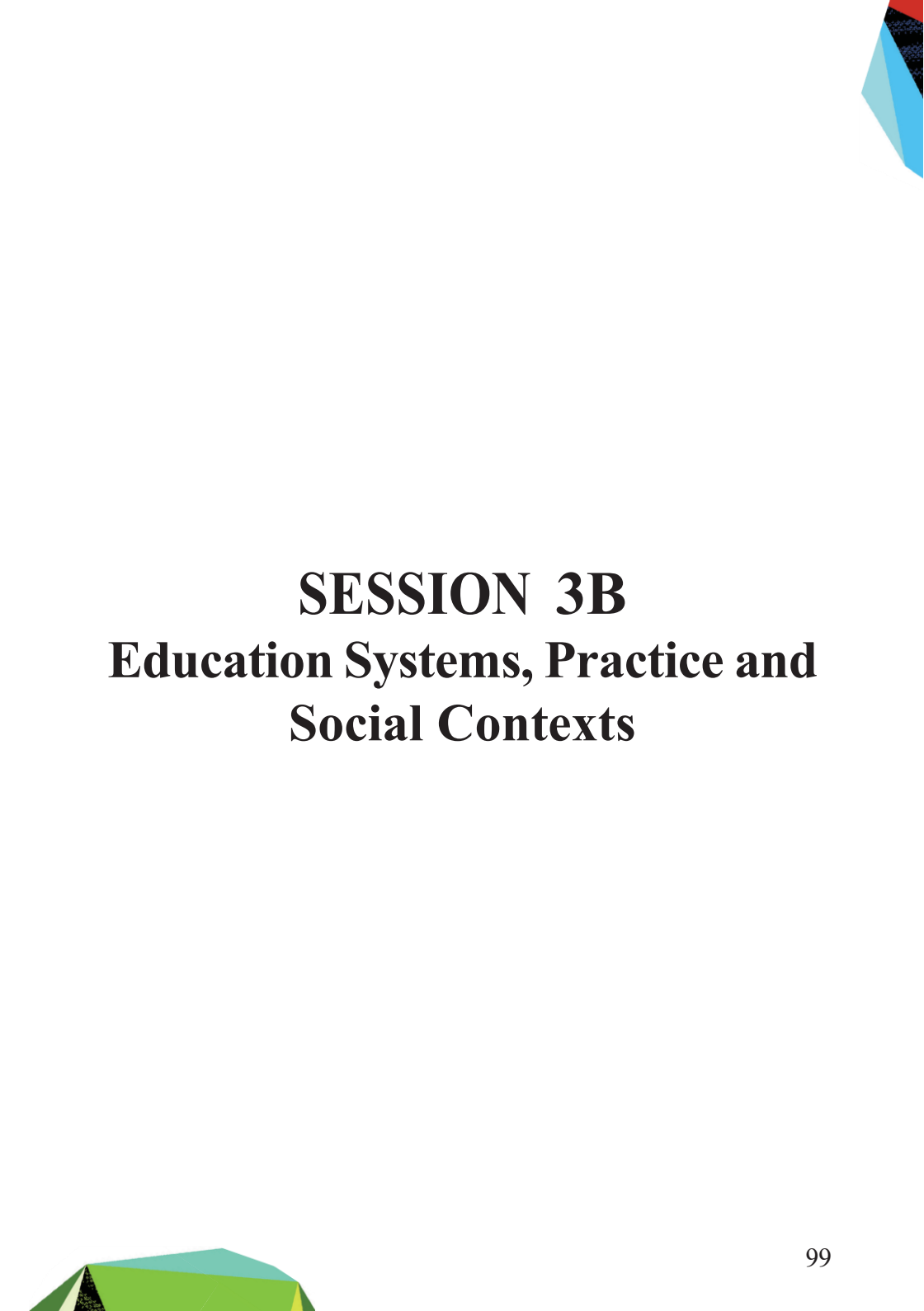
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ABSTRACT

Afghanistan's conflict, instability, and displacement have produced psychological vulnerability among Afghan populations, with high distress reported across refugee groups (Alemi, James, Cruz, Zepeda, & Racadio, 2014). Following the Taliban takeover in 2021, several thousand Afghans were temporarily hosted in Albania, where arrival was experienced as safety and as entry into an unfamiliar cultural, linguistic, and social environment (IOM, 2023). This study examined psychological and cultural adaptation as a key factor in the integration of Afghan refugee families in Albania. It was hypothesized that families reporting higher cultural adaptation would show lower symptoms of anxiety, depressive mood, isolation, and post-traumatic stress, despite previous exposure to war. A mixed-method descriptive design was used with a sample of 50 Afghan refugee families residing in temporary accommodation settings in Albania. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, family observation notes, and an adaptation checklist measuring perceived safety, language adjustment, social interaction, parenting stress, help-seeking behavior, and emotional well-being. Results indicated that war exposure had deeply influenced participants' perception of life, especially through persistent insecurity, fear of loss, distrust, and difficulty planning for the future. During the first months in Albania, common behaviors included withdrawal, hypervigilance, sleep disturbance, irritability, somatic complaints, and emotional dependence on family networks. Over time, families who developed basic Albanian communication skills, social routines, and contact with local services reported greater stability and hope. However, 58% continued to report anxiety symptoms, 46% depressive mood, and 40% trauma-related memories. Findings suggest that integration is not only a legal or social process, but also a psychological reconstruction of safety, identity, and belonging.

Keywords: *Afghan refugees; cultural adaptation; mental health*



SESSION 3B

Education Systems, Practice and Social Contexts



Students' Perceptions and Experiences of Physical Education: From Academic Obligation to Integration as a Lifestyle

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how students perceive and experience physical education, with a particular focus on its transition from an academic obligation to an integral part of their lifestyle. At a time when sedentary lifestyles are becoming increasingly prevalent and the physical and mental well-being of young people faces numerous challenges, the role of physical education in higher education gains particular importance. The study is based on a quantitative approach and relies on data collected through a structured questionnaire completed by 174 students at the University of Tirana. The questionnaire includes Likert-scale items measuring perceptions, motivation, experiences, and levels of engagement in physical activity, as well as the impact of physical education on students' daily lives. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify relationships among different variables. The findings suggest that although physical education is often initially perceived as an obligation, a considerable proportion of students come to experience it positively and incorporate physical activity into their lifestyle. The study also highlights several key factors influencing this shift, such as personal motivation, classroom experiences, and the influence of the university's social environment. Overall, this study provides a valuable contribution to understanding the role of physical education in promoting a more active lifestyle among students, while also offering practical recommendations for improving approaches and policies in higher education.

Keywords: *physical education, university students, perceptions, lifestyle, physical activity, quantitative methodology*

Learning through play: using tabletop games to enhance teaching and learning in teacher education

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on an action research project exploring how tabletop games can serve as catalysts for improving teaching and learning within teacher education. Conducted with master's students Teacher of Social Sciences in Upper Middle Schools in the subject of Educational Technology, in which future teachers learn to integrate technology and active learning in schools, the project followed iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Participants engaged with both traditional and modern tabletop games, analysing their mechanics, educational potential, and adaptability to specific school subjects. Through guided design sessions, they modified selected games to align with curriculum goals, implemented them in peer microteaching sessions, and reflected on student engagement, collaboration, and conceptual understanding. Findings suggest that tabletop games, when purposefully integrated into pedagogical design, promote motivation, strategic thinking, and deep learning. They provide authentic contexts for cooperation, assessment for learning, and inclusive classroom participation. Moreover, the process of adapting games supports metacognitive awareness and professional growth, helping future teachers move from theoretical understanding to creative classroom application. The paper concludes that play is not merely a pedagogical technique but a reflective practice that reshapes how teachers understand teaching itself—connecting cultural heritage, collaboration, and critical thinking in meaningful ways.

Keywords: *Game-based learning, Teacher education, Tabletop games, Action research, Learning theories, Educational innovation*



Interdisciplinary Curricula for Socially Relevant and Globally Competent Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of interdisciplinary curricula in promoting socially relevant learning and preparing globally competent graduates in contemporary education systems. It responds to the limitations of traditional subject-based curricula in addressing complex and interconnected global challenges. The paper is guided by James A. Beane's interdisciplinary curriculum theory, which emphasizes the integration of knowledge around meaningful, real-world issues, alongside the OECD Global Competence Framework, which outlines the key competencies required to engage effectively with global issues. Adopting a qualitative, conceptual approach, the study draws on a critical analysis of literature in curriculum studies and global education. It explores the potential of interdisciplinary curricula to connect learning with real-world contexts and to support the development of critical thinking, intercultural understanding, and socially responsible action. Findings provide actionable guidance for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers seeking to transform education programs into engines of social impact and global readiness. The research contributes to knowledge on curriculum innovation, pedagogy, and transformative learning in education. It contributes to ongoing debates on curriculum reform and highlights the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in shaping education that is both socially relevant and globally responsive.

Keywords: *interdisciplinary curriculum, global competence, social relevance, curriculum reform, global education*

Out of Sight: Private Digital Communication and Institutional Blind Spots in Sexual Exploitation in Albania

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ABSTRACT

Research on sexual exploitation increasingly references “online recruitment” and digital risks, yet prevention and safeguarding systems remain largely organised around what can be seen: locations, visible indicators, and discrete events. This paper argues that a key shift is not simply that recruitment happens online, but that private digital communication is reshaping the conditions under which exploitation becomes recognisable. Drawing on qualitative interviews with survivors and practitioners, alongside analysis of institutional case files from a national study in Albania, we examine how exploitation trajectories often develop through relationships that initially appear ordinary—romantic, supportive, or protective—while the decisive relational work unfolds in sustained, private, device-mediated contact. Across accounts, constant messaging, late-night communication, and accelerated intimacy enabled emotional dependency to consolidate largely out of view, with families and institutions frequently interpreting emerging changes through mundane frames (adolescent conflict, “disobedience,” household routines) rather than harm. The findings highlight a recurring policy problem: safeguarding systems calibrated to detect visible harm intervene late when coercion is already relationally embedded. Rather than treating technology as a direct cause, we conceptualise private digital communication as an “ecology of invisibility” that produces predictable patterns of misrecognition and institutional delay. We conclude by outlining implications for GBV-oriented policy and practice, including revisions to risk assessment frameworks, capacity-building on relational coercion in mediated contexts, and prevention models that address recognition—how harm is named, interpreted, and acted upon—before exploitation becomes externally legible.

Keywords: *Sexual exploitation; digital communication; coercive control; recognition; gender-based violence*



Exploring The Role of School Principals In Encouraging Teachers' Participation In Professional Development Programs: Evidence From Albania – A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the role of school leadership in shaping teachers' professional development (PD) is critical for enhancing educational quality in Albania. This literature review explores how school principals influence teachers' participation in PD programs and identifies leadership practices that foster engagement and continuous learning. The analysis is guided by transformational and instructional leadership theories, emphasizing how principals' behaviors, resource allocation, and support strategies create effective professional learning opportunities for teachers in Albanian schools. Peer-reviewed articles, reports, and policy documents from national and international sources published over the last 10 years were systematically reviewed. A thematic synthesis was applied to identify patterns, leadership strategies, and context-specific factors affecting teachers' participation in PD. Principals who provide clear guidance, recognize teachers' achievements, encourage collaboration, and demonstrate personal commitment to professional learning positively influence teacher engagement in PD programs. However, gaps remain regarding context-specific implementation practices in Albanian schools and the alignment of policy frameworks with leadership strategies in practice. The findings offer valuable insights for school leaders aiming to strengthen professional development initiatives and cultivate a professional learning culture, contributing to improved educational outcomes in Albania.

Keywords: *school leadership, teacher professional development, transformational leadership, literature review, Albania, educational management*

Experiences and Challenges Of Psycho-Social Service Specialists In Handling Cases Of Violence in Schools

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences and challenges faced by psycho-social service specialists in handling cases of violence by students in the school environment. The school environment is one of the main environments where violence against children occurs. The focus was on addressing this issue when the perpetrators of violence are students among them. The scientific method used for this study was qualitative. The purposive sample consisted of 14 psycho-social service specialists in 9-year schools in the city of Tirana. The main problems and challenges of specialists in dealing with cases of violence were: the low level of reporting of cases by teachers; a tolerant mentality mainly towards psychological and verbal violence; the lack of information and expertise of teachers to identify forms of violence; the high number of students in relation to the number of specialists; cases of violent students are often associated with a history of domestic violence which makes cooperation with parents difficult; limited cooperation of students with specialists due to a prejudiced approach.

Keywords: *student, violence, psycho-social service*



Motivation and Cooperation in Socially Excluded Localities

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores motivation for change and willingness to engage in social work interventions among residents of socially excluded localities, with a focus on the role of social work in shaping these processes. The study draws on theories of social exclusion, empowerment, self-determination, and stages of change to conceptualise “unmotivated” clients and the relational nature of motivation in social work practice. A qualitative research design using grounded theory is proposed, combining semi-structured interviews with residents of socially excluded localities and focus groups with social workers to generate a practice based theoretical model. The study is expected to clarify how structural and institutional barriers, professional approaches and client–worker relationships interact with individual and community motives for change across different phases of intervention. The paper contributes a conceptual framework for designing interventions that work with fluctuating motivation, challenges simplistic labels of “motivated”/“unmotivated” clients and informs training and supervision in social work with socially excluded populations.

Keywords: *social work; social exclusion; motivation for change; client participation; socially excluded localities; qualitative research*

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SESSION 3C

Research, Innovation and Knowledge Transformation



The Transformation of Knowledge Production in Artistic Education through Generative Artificial Intelligence

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ABSTRACT

The increasing integration of generative artificial intelligence into artistic education is reshaping how artistic knowledge is produced, transmitted, and evaluated. While these technologies are rapidly adopted within creative and educational contexts, their epistemological and pedagogical implications remain insufficiently theorized. This paper addresses the problem of how generative artificial intelligence transforms established models of knowledge production in artistic education, raising critical questions about authorship, creative agency, and the role of the educator. The study is guided by the central research question: how does generative artificial intelligence reconfigure the production and transmission of knowledge within contemporary artistic education? Methodologically, the paper adopts a qualitative and critical research approach, combining conceptual analysis with the examination of selected educational and artistic practices in which generative AI is actively employed. The analysis demonstrates that generative artificial intelligence functions not merely as a technical tool but as a mediating system that restructures learning processes, pedagogical authority, and creative decision-making. The paper argues that artistic knowledge increasingly emerges through hybrid human–algorithmic processes, requiring a reconsideration of educational frameworks and research paradigms. This contribution is situated within current debates on education and knowledge transformation, aligning directly with discussions on research and pedagogical change.

Keywords: *generative artificial intelligence, artistic education, knowledge production, pedagogy, educational transformation.*

The Transformation of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Albania (2015–2025)

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ABSTRACT

The period 2015–2025 represents a decade of structural transformation in the Albanian higher education and scientific research system within the broader context of Europeanization processes and institutional reforms. This study critically analyzes the foundational reform cycle initiated with Law No. 80/2015 “On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania,” and consolidated through the National Education Strategy 2021–2026 and its implementation action plan (Council of Ministers Decision No. 621/2021), which reconfigured university governance, quality assurance and funding mechanisms. It also examines the subsequent phase of institutional consolidation characterized by the National Strategy for Scientific Research, Technology and Innovation 2023–2030 (Council of Ministers Decision No. 542/2023), Law No. 109/2024 “On Science and Scientific Research in the Republic of Albania,” and most recently the Higher Education Policy Document 2030 (Ministry of Education, 2025). The analysis draws on the literature on the Europeanization of public education policies, which argues that normative alignment with European Union standards does not automatically ensure sustainable institutional transformation (Radaelli, 2003), as well as on the implementation gap approach, which highlights the divergence between policy design and actual outcomes (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). The Albanian reform reflects elements of a performance and accountability oriented public management model (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017), increasing formal autonomy while simultaneously strengthening standardized control mechanisms. The methodology is based on qualitative analysis of legal and strategic documents, combined with official statistical data from INSTAT on public funding for Research and Development (GBARD). The findings indicate a consolidation of the regulatory architecture and a more structured strategic programming of research, aligned with the orientations of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. However, the study also identifies persistent constraints in institutional capacities, research infrastructure, and the design of



financial incentive mechanisms.

Keywords: *higher education, scientific research, institutional reform, quality assurance, funding.*

The Role of Libraries in Information Management and the Education of Youth in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

In the digital age, society is confronted with an overwhelming flow of information that challenges individuals' ability to absorb and use it critically and effectively. The dominance of electronic and online sources, driven by ease of access and the vast quantity of data, often fails to ensure quality, accuracy, and reliability. In this context, young people are among the most exposed to disorientation and loss of focus in the learning process. Libraries emerge as key institutions in guiding users toward verified information and structured research. Through organized resources and professional services, they contribute to the development of critical thinking and research skills. However, the role of libraries cannot be separated from the education system. Close collaboration between these two structures is essential for promoting lifelong learning and sustainable education. The integration of libraries into the educational process supports the formation of an informed, responsible society capable of addressing contemporary challenges.

Keywords: *education system, libraries, youth, digital information, sustainable education, lifelong learning*



Grade 11 Students' Perceptions of School Curriculum Load in Some High Schools in Tirana

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of Grade 11 students at some public high schools in the city of Tirana regarding school curriculum load. The study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the association between curriculum load, personal time, and academic achievement. The sample consisted of 394 students selected through a multistage probability sampling procedure. Data were collected through a questionnaire based on a Likert scale, and the instrument demonstrated acceptable reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .74. The findings showed that students perceive the school curriculum as overloaded, characterized by a large amount of theoretical content and few practical activities. In addition, a negative association was found between perceived curriculum load and both academic achievement and personal time. The implications of the study highlight the need for a more balanced and functional curriculum with a stronger focus on practical activities.

Keywords: *curriculum load, personal time, academic achievement, student perceptions, public high schools.*

Bridging Theory and Practice: Perceptions of Child Empowerment among Social Work Students and Professionals

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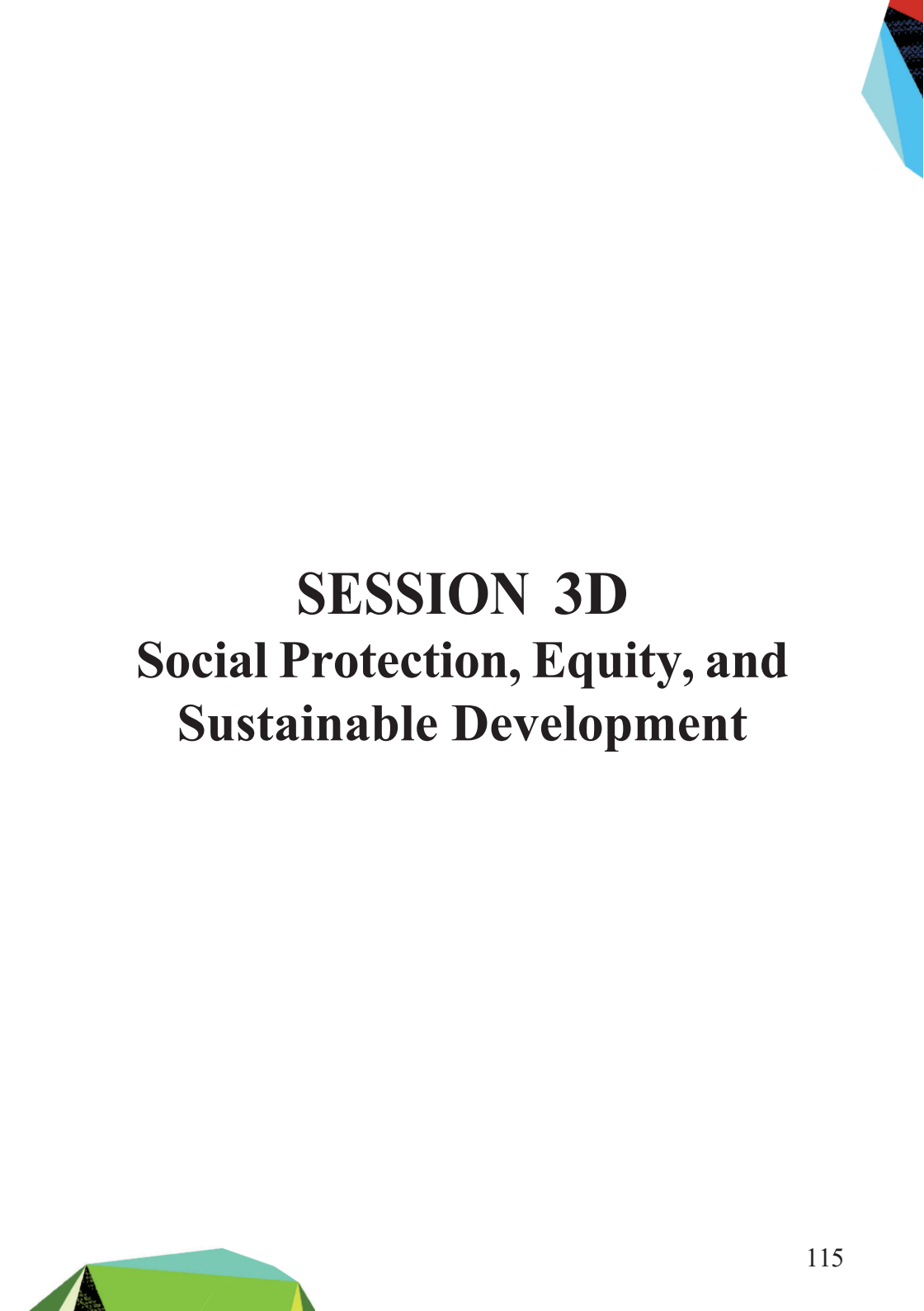
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ABSTRACT

Child empowerment, encompassing age-appropriate participation, voice, protection, and adult support, is central to social work practice and child-centered approaches. Although policy frameworks emphasize child-centered care, research on how social work students and professionals perceive and operationalize child empowerment remains limited, particularly regarding alignment between theoretical understanding and practical application. This exploratory study examined perceptions of child empowerment among 130 social work students and 25 practicing professionals in schools, community centers, childcare institutions, etc. in Shkodër, Albania. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with Likert-scale items covering key dimensions of empowerment—participation, voice, protection, and adult support—and open-ended questions capturing nuanced experiences. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively and comparatively across groups, and qualitative responses underwent thematic analysis to identify patterns and insights. Both students and professionals identified participation and protection as core aspects of child empowerment. Professionals emphasized practical constraints, including limited resources, institutional barriers, and cultural norms, which often reduce the scope of meaningful empowerment. Students displayed a more idealized understanding, prioritizing autonomy and decision-making involvement, sometimes without awareness of practical limitations. Common themes highlighted the importance of adult guidance, advocacy, and creating safe spaces for children’s voices to be heard. Findings reveal gaps between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation of child empowerment, emphasizing the need for enhanced professional training, reflective practice, and institutional support. The study contributes to strengthening social work education, informing policy, and promoting evidence-based strategies to enhance children’s rights and well-being.



Keywords: *child empowerment, social work, perception, participation, protection, Albania*

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SESSION 3D

Social Protection, Equity, and Sustainable Development



Perception And Satisfaction Of Older Adults With Services In A Community Center: An Analysis Within The Framework Of Community-Based Social Work Using A Proactive Community Approach

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ABSTRACT

Community services for the elderly play a crucial role in promoting psycho-emotional well-being, reducing social isolation, and increasing participation in community life. In the context of population aging and the challenges related to the weakening of support networks, assessing the perceptions and experiences of older adults regarding these services is essential for improving the quality and relevance of local-level interventions. This study aims to explore elderly individuals' perceptions of the services provided at a Community Center and their impact on well-being and social inclusion. The study was based on a quantitative empirical approach and was conducted through a structured questionnaire that included demographic data, types of services received (informational, educational, psychological, therapeutic, social, recreational, food services, referral, and institutional mediation), as well as an evaluation of service quality and staff performance using a five-point Likert scale. The sample consists of 67 interviews with older adults over the age of 60. The findings indicate a high level of satisfaction and a positive perception of the professional relationship established with the psychosocial staff, particularly in terms of empathetic communication, professional ethics, and dedication to service provision. Social, educational, and recreational services were among the most frequently attended and highly rated, reflecting the need for active social interaction and community participation. At the same time, the need to improve infrastructure and expand the range of services was identified in order to better address the evolving needs of this age group. The study reaffirms the role of the Community Center as a key mechanism for promoting active aging, empowerment, and social integration of the elderly. The findings highlight the importance of planning needs-oriented and community-based interventions, aiming to provide integrated and sustainable services that respect the dignity, autonomy, and well-being of individuals.

Keywords: *community services; elderly well-being; community-based so*

Ageing, Inequality, and Local Service Gaps: A Social Needs Assessment of Older Persons in Lushnje Municipality, Albania

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess the social needs of older persons and evaluate the availability, accessibility, and adequacy of social care services at the local level in Albania, using the Municipality of Lushnje as a case study. It addresses the growing challenges associated with population ageing and the increasing demand for long-term care services. The study is guided by a social protection and care economy framework, integrating concepts of long-term care, social inclusion, and ageing in place. It draws on policy perspectives related to integrated care systems and the role of local governance in delivering community-based social services. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach combining desk review of national legislation and policy frameworks, secondary data analysis (Census 2023, administrative data), and local-level service mapping. It includes analysis of demographic trends, service provision structures, and institutional roles, alongside qualitative insights from local stakeholders and service providers. Findings indicate a rapid ageing trend, with older persons representing approximately one-quarter of the population in Lushnje. Despite improvements in service coverage, significant gaps remain in long-term care provision, particularly in rural areas. The study highlights limited access to home-based and community services, heavy reliance on informal family care (predominantly provided by women), and growing risks of social isolation and poverty among older persons. Institutional fragmentation and uneven territorial distribution of services further exacerbate inequalities. The study contributes to ongoing policy debates on ageing and social protection in Albania by providing localized evidence on service gaps and emerging needs. It offers practical recommendations for strengthening integrated care systems, expanding community-based services, and improving coordination between social and health sectors. The findings are relevant for policymakers, local governments, and development partners working on social care reform and ageing policies.

Keywords: *Ageing; Long-term care; Social services; Older persons; Social protection; Lushnje*



Reconceptualizing Juvenile Criminal Justice As A Social Protection Policy: A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In the context of growing social inequalities and institutional transformations, juvenile criminal justice is increasingly being reconsidered not only as a mechanism of penal control but also as part of broader social protection policies. Academic literature and policy debates highlight the potential of juvenile justice systems to promote social inclusion, community cohesion, and the reduction of structural inequalities influencing youth offending. This perspective aligns with the principles of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which emphasizes inclusive institutions and the reduction of inequalities as key dimensions of sustainable development. This paper critically examines criminal policies directed toward juveniles, focusing on their capacity to foster social reintegration and address structural inequalities related to youth delinquency. The study is grounded in the concept of restorative justice developed by Howard Zehr, who views crime as a social phenomenon that harms relationships and weakens community cohesion rather than merely violating legal norms. From this perspective, juvenile justice can operate as a form of social protection addressing drivers of deviance such as poverty and social exclusion. The research uses a qualitative approach based on the analysis of academic literature and policy frameworks. It includes a comparative examination of criminal and social policy approaches in United Kingdom and Italy in addressing juveniles in conflict with the law, focusing on alternatives to detention and community-based interventions consistent with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: *Juvenile justice; social protection policy; restorative justice; social reintegration; structural inequalities; community-based interventions; criminal policy; social inclusion.*

Corporate Social Responsibility dimensions in the Albanian banking system

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within the Albanian banking system, focusing on its alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The research aims to analyze the distribution weight and temporal trends of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions in banking sector contributions from 2016 to 2024. The conceptual framework bridges historical CSR models with the three-dimensional structure of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Adopting a quantitative methodology, the study conducts secondary data analysis using annual reports from the Albanian Association of Banks. Key findings indicate that the social dimension holds the primary weight of contributions, significantly surpassing economic and environmental categories. Environmental objectives were found to be the least supported. Although contributions fluctuated, no consistent long-term growth or decline was observed across dimensions. The study enriches the understanding of CSR in Albania, highlighting a continued focus on short-term social interventions over sustained environmental commitments.

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility, 2030 Agenda, Sustainable Development Goals, Banking System, Albania.*



Psychosocial Services in Vocational Education and Training in Albania: Institutional Challenges and the Path Toward Inclusion

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the organization and functioning of psychosocial services within vocational education and training (VET) providers in Albania. While such services are relatively institutionalized in general pre-university education, they remain fragmented and architecturally incoherent in the VET sector. Employing a qualitative exploratory design, data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews (n=6) with central and local institutional actors and an online focus group (n=9) with psychologists and social workers employed in vocational schools. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022) through inductive coding. Four key themes emerged: (1) institutional fragmentation and governance gaps; (2) insufficient human resources and reactive service models; (3) a disconnect between inclusion discourse and actual institutional capacity; and (4) absence of professional supervision and standardization. Findings indicate that without clear regulatory frameworks, professional capacity building, and strategic policy integration, VET risks failing its social mission toward vulnerable student populations.

Keywords: *psychosocial services; vocational education and training; inclusion; vulnerable students.*

Problems of Institutional Intervention for the Protection of Children in Street Situations

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ABSTRACT

The exploitation of children under the age of 14 through forced begging or labor for financial gain remains one of the most challenging issues for child social protection institutions in Albania. Institutions such as the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the State Agency for Child Rights and Protection, municipalities, Child Protection Units, and the State Police are legally responsible for protecting children and preventing them from begging or working in dangerous public environments. However, despite institutional responsibilities and legal mechanisms, this phenomenon continues to persist. This article aims to identify the main challenges that hinder child protection institutions and law enforcement authorities from effectively protecting children from exploitation and hazardous street situations. A qualitative methodology was employed, consisting of 12 in-depth interviews conducted with key actors involved in child protection at both central and local levels, as well as police representatives. The findings indicate that the lack of institutional infrastructure and limited human capacities are among the main barriers to effective intervention. A particularly concerning finding is the inconsistent institutional response to removing children from dangerous environments, as child exploitation is often perceived as a cultural issue rather than a criminal offense. The study recommends that the Ministry of Interior instruct State Police officers to remove children from dangerous situations in all cases, together with their parents or guardians, and to initiate criminal investigations in repeated cases of exploitation. Furthermore, social protection institutions should prioritize the removal of children from high-risk environments and, in repeated cases, initiate procedures for the removal of parental responsibility and the placement of children in alternative care institutions.

Keywords: *children; dangerous environments; parental responsibility; social protection institutions; police; child exploitation*



SESSION 4A

Migration, Displacement and Social Change

Gender Vulnerability In Migration: Challenges And Difficulties Faced By Girls And Women In Host Countries

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ABSTRACT

Migration, as a social process involving the movement of people from the country of origin to host countries, has been an enduring social phenomenon and continues to occur even today with increasingly high rates. The aim of this study is to highlight and analyze the challenges and difficulties of girls and women in host countries. The methodology of the study is based on the qualitative method, focusing on a sociological theoretical framework in order to provide an overview of how gender can influence the creation of inequalities, not only in the country of origin but also in the host country. According to researchers and the review of the literature at a micro and macro-sociology level, girls and women face prejudice and insecurity in host countries. This begins with the general assumption that migrant women often perform jobs that do not hold high social status. Thus, unlike men, the employment of girls and women does not bring much economic benefit in the host country where they are displaced. This study contributes to the field of the sociology of migration by giving particular importance to the concept of migration from a gender perspective.

Keywords: *Gendered migration, Migrant women, Host countries, Insecurity.*



Migration, family and the reconfiguration of social solidarity in Albania

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ABSTRACT

Migration has been one of the most determining processes for social transformations in Albania during the last decades, influencing not only the economic structure, but also family relations, forms of solidarity and mechanisms of care. In the conditions of a fragmented welfare state, the Albanian family has historically functioned as a key actor of social protection, a role which has been significantly configured by the migratory experience and transnational ties. This paper aims to analyze the way in which migration has transformed the forms of family and social solidarity, as well as the implications that these changes have for social policies in Albania. Through a theoretical and analytical approach, the study examines migration not only as an economic phenomenon, but as a social process that transforms intergenerational relations, the division of responsibilities and forms of care. The study is based on a qualitative methodology and combines data from in-depth interviews with families that experience migration and a focus group with field professionals, enabling an integrated analysis of individual experiences and implications for social policies. The analysis suggests that migration creates a social paradox: on one hand it strengthens family solidarity through remittances and transnational support, while on the other hand it deepens inequalities and social fragmentation. The existing literature on Albanian migration emphasizes the role of family networks and informal social protection in coping with institutional gaps. This study contributes by exploring the limits of these mechanisms, focusing on care gaps, gender burden and social fragmentation, as well as their implications for social policies in Albania.

Keywords: *migration, social solidarity, family, social policies, Albania*

Changing Youth Perceptions: The Role of Exposure to Deviant Behavior on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the impact of exposure to deviant behavior on social media on youth perceptions and the acceptance of such behaviors. In contemporary digital societies, social media platforms play a central role in shaping attitudes, values, and behavioral norms, particularly among young people. The study is grounded in social learning theory and labeling theory, which explain how continuous exposure and social interaction influence the formation of attitudes and contribute to the reshaping of social norms over time. A quantitative cross-sectional research design was employed. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 180 participants aged 18–29. The main variables include the frequency of exposure to deviant content, perceived normality, and the level of acceptance of such behaviors. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and linear regression, while also examining the mediating role of normalization in the relationship between exposure and acceptance. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between exposure and the acceptance of deviant behavior. Increased exposure is associated with a higher likelihood of perceiving such behaviors as normal, with normalization acting as a key mediating factor. The study highlights the influence of digital environments in transforming social norms and emphasizes the importance of promoting media literacy and critical thinking among youth. These findings provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers concerned with the social implications of digital media

Keywords: *social media, deviance, normalization, youth, social perceptions, social acceptance*



Artificial Intelligence Among Social Work Students

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ABSTRACT

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into higher education has raised significant questions about its implications for professional training in social work. This qualitative study examines the patterns of AI use, perceptions, and professional expectations of social work students enrolled in the third year of the Bachelor’s program and the Master’s program at the University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi”, Albania. The research is guided by two central questions: (1) What is the level and nature of AI tool usage among social work students for academic purposes, and which specific platforms do they employ? (2) How do students perceive the role and impact of AI in their learning process, and what professional role do they envision for AI in their future social work practice? Drawing on a qualitative methodology, data were collected through a structured interview instrument administered digitally via online platforms, enabling accessible participation. The study explores dimensions including frequency of AI use, types of used tools, perceived academic benefits, ethical concerns, and students’ outlook on AI’s future role in social work. Findings are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of AI literacy needs within Albanian social work education and to inform curriculum development.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, social work education, student perceptions, AI literacy, professional identity, digital technology*

A Philosophical-Analytical Examination of Heteronomy and Free Will

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ABSTRACT

From a philosophical perspective, free will constitutes a fundamental condition of morality. This paper aims to examine this position, according to which morality serves as evidence of human freedom. A will guided by the moral law is capable of acting in accordance with it. The purpose of this study is to support the recognition of free will from a practical standpoint, arguing that acting in conformity with moral principles provides an indication of human freedom. The paper addresses several central issues, including the argument for free will, the concept of the good as good will, and free will as a postulate of practical reason. The methodology primarily consists of a philosophical-analytical examination of the notion of free will within the contemporary tradition of philosophical thought. This study seeks to develop a theoretical-practical framework through which reflections are articulated in order to emphasize the central role of the will in morality.

Keywords: *free will, good will, practical reason, categorical imperative, duty, dignity*



SESSION 4B

Democracy, Governance and Political Dynamics





The 2018 Student Movement in Albania: Opportunity Structures, Collective Action Frames, and Limitations to Value Changes

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ABSTRACT

In December 2018, university students across higher educational institutions organized a wave of protest events, and a sustained collective action against the educational reforms. This particular collective action by the young generation constituted the second largest mobilization of students in post-communist Albania since the 1990 student movement. What remains puzzling concerning the 2018 student movement is the ambiguity of the collective action frames which, on the one hand, emphasized a claim for value changes in the Albanian society, contesting the existing political system, and on the other hand, emphasizing changes of the public policies on higher education. Henceforth, the paper asks why the collective action of the students falls short of a social movement embodying value change? The key theoretical framework explaining the limitations of the 2018 student movement relies on the explanatory arguments of opportunity structures. Besides this theoretical framework, the paper addresses the presence of wider social coalitions in support of the social movement. The research design relies on a qualitative methodology, combining process-tracing, case-study research, and text analysis. One of the expected results is that of highlighting institutional and structural factors of social movement's effects. This research aims to contribute to social movements literature and democratization.

Keywords: *social movement, collective action, students, post-communist Albania, value changes*



From Capacity Building to Influence: Civil Society Advocacy and Entry Points for Gender-Responsive Climate Finance in the Western Balkans

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ABSTRACT

Commitments to gender-responsive climate finance have enhanced, but civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Western Balkans remain constrained in shaping policy and funding priorities. This paper discusses how targeted capacity-building and mentoring can enhance CSO influence in advocating for gender equality within climate finance frameworks. It draws on empirically-grounded, practice-based evidence generated through pre-training needs assessments, structured mentoring sessions with five CSOs in Albania and Kosovo, and a WB regional workshop on entry points for influence. Using a reflexive and thematic analytical approach, the paper identifies key barriers and enabling factors shaping advocacy effectiveness. Findings reveal that CSO influence is hindered from limited technical understanding of climate finance instruments, fragmented engagement, and restricted access to policy- and decision-making processes. At the same time, coalition-building, strategic framing of gender equality within broader development agendas, and engagement with multi-level governance structures emerge as critical entry points for impact. The paper bridges experiential knowledge with policy analysis and contributes to ongoing debates on inclusive governance and social policy innovation. It offers actionable insights for strengthening civil society's role in advancing equitable and sustainable climate finance, with relevance for broader sustainable human development and democratic participation agendas.

Keywords: *Gender equality, Climate finance, civil society advocacy, Western Balkans, Inclusive governance*

The Nation as an Oasis in State – Citizen Relations: A Philosophical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The nation is not just a community of individuals bound by history or a common language, but a living structure that nourishes and maintains the cohesive relationship between the state and its citizens. Like the lymph in the human body, which connects, cleanses, and regenerates, the nation is the vital element through which trust, legitimacy, and mutual responsibility are built. The existence of the nation is closely linked to the ability to self-govern and its shaping as a sovereign entity, while political independence and international recognition constitute essential elements of its consolidation in the international order. Some of these priority elements, as well as diplomatic recognitions by other states and the exchange of diplomatic representations also constitute the legitimate form of state sovereignty. The Republic of Kosovo represents a contemporary example of this process, where recognition by a considerable number of states contributes ever more to the affirmation of its international subjectivity. Through the metaphor of the nation as the lymph of state-citizen relations, it is intended to emphasize that the citizen is not connected to the state only through law but also through belonging, identity, and moral responsibility. In the absence of this connection, the relations between them risk becoming mechanical and fragile, leading to a lack of genuine engagement and mutual support that is essential for a healthy democratic society. This paper aims to examine the role of the nation not only as a cultural identity but also as a philosophical foundation of the political relationship between the individual and the state. The study also aims to clarify the theoretical meaning of the relations between the nation, the state, and the freedom of the citizen in contemporary societies.

Keywords: *morality, sovereignty, nation, state, individual, and society.*



Corruption and Political Development in Albania (1912–1991): State Building, Capitalist Relations, and a Historical Political Economy Alternative to Institutional, Cultural, and Public Choice Paradigms

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between corruption and political development in Albania from 1912 to 1991, a period marked by state building, the emergence of capitalist relations in the interwar era, and the subsequent consolidation of a Stalinist regime. Drawing on archival records, parliamentary proceedings, and secondary economic histories, the analysis critiques the dominant institutional, cultural, and public choice paradigms for their ahistorical and depoliticized treatment of corruption. Instead, the paper proposes a historical political economic paradigm rooted in class analysis, accumulation regimes, and state–society relations. Key findings indicate that corruption was not a cultural residue or principal-agent failure but a constitutive mechanism of elite formation, primitive accumulation, and political control across monarchical, fascist-occupied, and communist periods. The study contributes to post-socialist transition theory and comparative political economy by reframing corruption as integral to contested state-building projects rather than as a deviation from liberal norms.

Keywords: *Corruption, political development, Albania, state building, social political economy, primitive accumulation*

Conspiracy theories in Albania: weapons of the weak or instruments of ideological reproduction?

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ABSTRACT

Following global trends, even in Albania conspiracy theories are flooding the discursive field. In recent years conspiracy theories have emerged out of the margins of social discourse and become part of what can be considered as the legitimate field of political discourses. Intellectuals and prominent politicians are using them in order to gain popularity and gain in terms of internal and external legitimacy. Despite their epistemological evaluation, it is important to understand conspiracy theories function in the current social formation in Albania. Do they represent a challenge to the hegemonic political discourse that for more than three decades has intersected liberal and technocratic (pro-EU integration) discourses, and in this way functioning as “weapons of the weak”? Or do they represent an ideological misrepresentation of the structural contradictions and social wrongs that permeate the neoliberal social formation in Albania, therefore leading to forms of pseudo-criticism and pseudo-resistance? Our work will start from the basic definitions of conspiracy theories discursive logics. Then by using the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis as an important field in the critique of ideology approach, we will try to analyse critically not only conspiracy theories, but also their intertextual relations with adjacent and antagonistic political discourses and, most importantly, their relations with the socio-political developments of contemporary Albania, especially in terms of the country’s EU integration process.

Keywords: *Conspiracy theories; discourse, critique of ideology, social formation, neoliberalism, EU integration.*

SESSION 4C
**Digital Transformation,
Innovation and Ethics in Social
Development**

Patterns of Presence and Behaviour of “Senior Influencers” on TikTok and Instagram: A Content Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, an increasing number of older adults have begun to actively produce content on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as Senior Influencers, reflects evolving forms of digital participation among ageing populations. This study presents the results of an analysis of behavioural and posting patterns identified in the profiles of Senior Influencers active on these platforms.

The research forms part of the ADOPTIC65+ project (PID2023-150587OB-I00), Technology Adoption, Informal Experts, and Digital Education in Older Adults, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities. The methodology adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses of posts selected through purposive sampling. A set of specifically designed variables was applied, with Instagram and TikTok serving as the primary corpus. The findings identify the most recurrent patterns in content creation among older adults and examine their active participation within contemporary digital ecosystems. Ultimately, the study proposes a representative figure that may serve as a reference framework for understanding and promoting digital inclusion.

Keywords: *Senior Influencers; Content; TikTok; Instagram; Older Adults; Intergenerational; Digital*



Digital Transformation, Responsibility, And Human Development: Rethinking Time And Space In The Technological Age

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation is often described in terms of innovation and efficiency, yet its deeper significance lies in how it reshapes human action across time and space. This paper explores how contemporary technological systems extend the reach of human power and asks what kind of ethical responsibility this expansion requires. Twentieth-century philosophy has shown that technology transforms the structure of experience, turning time into a measurable resource and compressing spatial distance through networks of simultaneity. In the digital age, these shifts intensify: data persistence extends actions into the future, algorithmic systems influence life opportunities, and global connectivity reshapes our sense of proximity and belonging. The study is guided by a responsibility-oriented ethical framework, drawing on the work of Hans Jonas and ecological approaches to human flourishing. Methodologically, it adopts a conceptual and interpretive analysis, engaging philosophical texts in dialogue with current developments in digital society. The paper argues that as technological power expands across generations and territories, ethical reflection must expand accordingly. It proposes a framework grounded in intergenerational justice, digital equity, and the preservation of conditions for meaningful human development, contributing to ongoing discussions on sustainability and the well-being of present and future generations.

Keywords: *Digital Transformation, Responsibility Human, Flourishing, Intergenerational, Justice, Sustainability*

Hate Speech on Internet and Social Media: A Gender Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Hate speech on internet and social media has become an increasingly prominent phenomenon, attracting the attention of international scholars, particularly due to its disproportionate impact on women and girls. Its rapid spread has been facilitated by anonymity, global reach, and the lack of effective moderation mechanisms. One of the key contemporary challenges concerns how individuals cope with offensive content and the consequences these experiences have on their emotional and psychological well-being. Victims often experience uncertainty about how to respond, struggle to define their emotional boundaries, and face difficulties in protecting their self-esteem from the negative effects of online verbal attacks. Research indicates that women and girls are especially exposed to various forms of digital abuse, including direct insults, sexist harassment, and the reinforcement of gender stereotypes, all of which directly affect self-perception, self-confidence, and participation in virtual spaces. Beyond the individual level, these experiences also influence interpersonal relationships and the ability to engage safely and confidently in online public discourse. This study examines the phenomenon of hate speech on the internet and social media within the Albanian context, focusing on the experiences of women and girls. Using a qualitative approach and in-depth interviews, the research identifies the main forms of hate speech, including direct insults, sexist harassment, and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, as well as the most problematic platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. The findings reveal significant emotional and psychological consequences, including anxiety, stress, and decreased self-confidence. Participants reported adopting various coping strategies, such as ignoring abusive content, reporting it, and seeking social support; however, these strategies often prove insufficient due to the lack of effective institutional mechanisms and platform moderation. The study highlights the need for stricter content moderation policies, digital literacy education, psychological support services, and legal interventions to ensure a safer and more equitable online environment. The findings align with



international literature demonstrating the global nature of this phenomenon and its significance within contemporary discussions on women's rights and digital safety.

Keywords: *hate speech, internet, social media, gender perspective, Albania, emotional impact, coping strategies, digital safety.*

V-Social Work: Redefining the boundaries of Social Services in virtual environments

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ABSTRACT

This communication introduces v-Social Work, a pioneering project initiated in 2024. Currently in its field research phase, it establishes the groundwork for a Virtual Social Services Center through systematic participant observation. The methodology involves three researchers conducting 30 hours of fieldwork across Decentraland and VRChat. Each researcher performs five one-hour sessions per platform at varied times (morning, midday, and night), following a structured observation guide. The selection of Decentraland (text-based chat) and VRChat (voice-based communication) allows for a comparative analysis of how interaction modes influence social dynamics, conflicts, and professional intervention. Unlike e-Social Work, which uses technology to address physical-world issues, v-Social Work intervenes directly within virtual social environments. The presentation discusses preliminary findings regarding anonymity, structural inequalities, and cyberbullying in these spaces. We propose that v-Social Work be recognized as an emerging field of professional practice, essential for promoting social justice and human rights in the digital environments where a significant portion of contemporary social life now unfolds.

Keywords: *Metaverse; V-Social Work; Digital Social Justice; Social Intervention; Decentraland; VRChat.*

ONLINE SESSION 4
**Digital Transformation,
Innovation, and Ethics in Social
Development**

Teachers' Self-Perceived Digital Competence as a Predictor of Student Academic Achievement: Evidence from an Upper Secondary School

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ABSTRACT

This study examines teachers' self-perceived digital competence as a predictor of student learning outcomes in public Albanian upper secondary schools located in Durrës and Kavajë. Data from 32 teachers and 286 students (grades 10–12) revealed moderate-to-high teacher digital competence ($M=4.12/5$) and positive student perceptions of technology use ($M=3.85/5$). Bivariate correlations showed significant relationships between teacher self-perceived competence, student-reported teacher competence ($r=.42, p<.05$), and student learning improvements ($r=.38, p<.05$). Regression analysis confirmed that teachers' digital competence significantly predicted student-reported learning gains ($\beta=.35, p<.05$) after controlling for experience and grade level, explaining 19% of variance. Students estimated 76% of teachers effectively used digital tools. Findings support the hypothesis that confident teachers enhance students' understanding through better integration of digital resources. Albanian schools should prioritize DigCompEdu-based training focusing on self-efficacy to maximize existing technology investments. Cross-sectional self-reports and data from a limited number of schools in two cities limit generalizability; future longitudinal studies across a larger, more diverse set of schools with objective grade measures are recommended.

Keywords: *teacher digital competence, self-perceived competence, student achievement, Dig-CompEdu, upper secondary education, educational technology*



Digital Transformation Among Older Adults

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ABSTRACT

The digitalisation of society is advancing relentlessly, affecting and involving the entire population. However, the use, mastery and control of digital technologies vary significantly depending on age. Older people are one of the groups most vulnerable to these changes; therefore, understanding their digital reality is essential for identifying potential shortcomings and designing strategies to address them. It is within this context that the ADOPTIC project has been developed, with the aim of analysing the digital situation of older people and setting up digital workshops designed to provide them with the knowledge and tools to acquire and improve their digital skills. In the specific case of La Rioja, the project is currently in the diagnostic phase. To this end, informal discussion groups are being held with older people, in which information is gathered on their characteristics, their level of knowledge about mobile devices, their usual uses, their current and future needs, as well as the sources of support available to them for resolving queries. The initial findings point to the need to know more about the devices in order to manage aspects of daily life without having to ask for help.

Keywords: *digitalisation, older adults, devices, skills*



Design and planning of a digital inclusion proposal with older adults through peer learning: an experience in Alicante (Spain)

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ABSTRACT

At present, the digital divide continues to be a factor that limits older people's access to and use of digital environments and applications. This communication presents the design and planning of a digital inclusion proposal aimed at older adults in the province of Alicante (Spain). This study is part of the objectives of the ADOPTIC65+ project (PID2023-150587OB-I00), Technology Adoption, Warm Experts and Digital Education in older Adults, funded by the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities. The methodology combines a qualitative research design and a co-construction approach based on peer learning facilitated by warm experts. The proposal is currently at its initial phase and includes the design and planning of the following phases: I) Dissemination of the project among potential informal experts and their selection; II) Development of a focus group with older adults, identifying learning needs, digital competencies and expectations; III) Thematic analysis of the results and planning of the workshops; IV) Implementation of the workshops; and V) Evaluation of the results and feedback to the participants. The expected outcomes include learning about the participants' experiences, perceptions, attitudes and competencies in relation to technology, in order to contribute to enriching knowledge and practice in the field of digital inclusion.

Keywords: *digital education, digital inclusion, warm experts, older adults, co-construction*





How Gen Z creates new words: Productivity of word-formation processes in the digital age English

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ABSTRACT

The rapid shift of Generation Z to the digital and transformative age of AI reflects the ongoing lexical innovation in contemporary English. This continuous development requires the innovation of new lexical items from a generation whose vocabulary is highly influenced by digital platforms and online communities. This study investigates new words used by Generation Z, specifically the word-formation processes used to form these new words and the productivity of these processes involved. A corpus containing up to 30 words will be used as a data analysis instrument, data which will be collected through the most used social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, X (Twitter), as well as other online slang databases. The study adopts a qualitative morphological analysis supported by quantitative frequency counts. From that, each word will be categorized morphologically into its respective word-formation process, such as blending, clipping, back-formation, acronyms, initialisms, conversion, affixation, compounding and semantic shift. The findings are expected to reveal that innovative and economy-driven processes, particularly blending and clipping, are considered the most productive word-formation processes in Generation Z lexical creativity. Furthermore, this research aims to contribute to the major fields of English linguistics such as morphology, applied linguistics, and sociolinguistics, through providing insights into current patterns of lexical innovation, thus highlighting the influence of digital communication on language change.

Keywords: *Gen Z, word-formation processes, new words, morphology, linguistics, etc.*

Creative Productions in Public Spaces “Learning by Playing”

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of creative productions in public spaces and their impact on social interaction and informal learning, particularly among children. It aims to examine how artistic interventions in urban environments contribute to community engagement and civic awareness. The research is grounded in the conceptual framework of public space as a social construct, drawing on Jan Gehl's theory of “life between buildings,” which emphasizes the relationship between spatial quality and human activity. A qualitative, reflective methodology is employed, combining theoretical analysis with practical examples from creative projects and cultural events in Tirana. The findings indicate that well-designed public spaces encourage diverse forms of participation and interaction, while creative productions enhance their social and educational value. Special attention is given to children as a key audience, highlighting the importance of appropriate content, sensory elements, and inclusive programming. The concept of “learning by playing” is identified as a powerful tool for fostering creativity, social skills, and civic responsibility. The study contributes to discussions on art in public spaces by emphasizing its potential to support community development and experiential learning.

Keywords: *creative productions; public space; children; learning by playing; social interaction*



Juvenile Substance Use and Violence in Albania: An Analysis of Institutional Fragmentation in the Child Protection System

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the growing prevalence of substance use and violent behavior among minors in Albania, analyzing these phenomena as outcomes of institutional fragmentation within the child protection system. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the research explores child development through five interconnected systemic levels (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem), employing the concept of "systemic entropy" to explain the disorganization of protective subsystems. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating in-depth interviews with minors undergoing rehabilitation and qualitative testimonies from professionals (toxicologists at the University Hospital Center "Mother Teresa" -QSUT, psychologists from "Aksion Plus", social workers from the Child Protection Units in Tirana, and representatives of "Teen Challenge") with quantitative analysis of data from the Albanian State Police and QSUT for the period 2020-2024. The findings reveal an alarming decrease in the age of substance initiation among minors (10-11 years old) and identify a direct correlation between addiction and the rise of juvenile criminality. A critical "rehabilitation gap" is identified within the exosystem, highlighting that Albania currently possesses only one national addiction service, which lacks specialized staff and infrastructure for minors, forcing their treatment within adult rehabilitation structures. The study argues that addressing this issue requires a shift from reactive security measures toward an integrated and holistic prevention model that strengthens the synergistic interaction between the education, health and justice sectors in safeguarding child well-being.

Keywords: *Ecological Systems Theory, Child Protection, Substance Use, Juvenile Delinquency, Systemic Entropy, Albania.*

Youth Shaping Safer Digital Spaces in Kenya, Albania, and Canada

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ABSTRACT

Youth have rich digital lives that demand we foster safe, equitable and empowering experiences. This paper outlines how youth involved in Albania, Canada and Kenya experience online spaces and how they envision a multilayered transdisciplinary approach to creating safety in that space. Recognizing young people as active rights-holders and drivers of social change, this study centers equity, youth empowerment, and human development as foundational principles. It positions PAR as a rights-based methodology that enables youth to move from passive subjects to agents of inquiry, with the capacity to reshape their own digital environments. This project examined peer-to-peer sexual violence online across Kenya, Albania, and Canada, engaging 48 youth (ages 13–18) through participatory workshops and 93 survey respondents, fostering intergenerational dialogue, mapping digital risks, sharing safety strategies, and reimagining inclusive online spaces. Findings highlighted the emotional toll of digital harassment and the urgent need for cross-sector collaboration. Youth outlined a comprehensive plan to build safety that called on parents, educators, NGOs, tech companies, and governments to advance digital literacy, strengthen platform accountability, and support youth-led safety initiatives. By amplifying young people's voices and lived experiences, this research affirms their capacity as drivers of social change, while also providing recommendations for policy, platform design, and community practice to build equitable, safer digital spaces for youth.

Keywords: *youth participatory action research; online sexual violence; digital safety; youth voice*

ONLINE SESSION 5
Democracy, Technology, and
Inclusion in Contemporary
Europe

Democracy in times of Cholera: The Role of Academia in shaping Generation Z in line with the European values

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ABSTRACT

Albania has rapidly opened all the negotiating chapters on the way to the EU between 2024 and 2025. While the European integration process is formally advancing, it is hard to tell if the European values are also being absorbed. The core question we must ask throughout this process is: Are we collaborating enough to address the change simultaneously, preserve democracy, and shape our country's future in line with European integration? Every time we analyse a new situation, we keep in mind the macro, meso, micro, system, state, group, and individual levels. It is believed that the country is doing well in building the architecture needed to become part of the EU (EU integration bodies, adaptation to EU legislation, opening of chapters, etc.). Still, it seems as if failing to build the individual level and to teach Generation Z how to face current challenges. It is the duty of academia and education to address the individual. The fundamental values of the European Union, enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, such as the respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, and equality, are the core values that define the European model of society, promoting pluralism, tolerance, justice, and solidarity. How is academia in Albania dealing with the promotion of these values? This work will be based on analysing the EU's Common Position regarding Chapter 25: Science and Research, and Chapter 26, which covers research and innovation, Education and Culture, both part of the "Competitiveness and inclusive growth" cluster (Cluster 3) and comparing them to the National Agenda of Albania and different National Strategies.

Keywords: *European Values, EU advancement, absorption of values, formal compliance, negotiation chapters, adaptation, education, academia, national strategy.*



The Role of Children as Legitimated Subjects in Environmental Justice (Standards and Future Scenarios in the Albanian Context)

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ABSTRACT

Environmental justice has increasingly evolved to recognize children not merely as passive beneficiaries of environmental protection but as legitimate rights-holders and participants in environmental governance. This paper examines the role of children as legitimized subjects in environmental justice, with particular focus on international standards and their implications for the Albanian context. Recent developments in international human rights law, especially the recognition of the child's right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, have strengthened the normative framework linking children's rights and environmental protection. These standards emphasize children's rights to health, development, participation, and access to information and justice in environmental matters. In Albania, environmental challenges such as air pollution, waste management deficiencies, water contamination, and climate-related risks disproportionately affect children's well-being and development. Although the Albanian legal framework recognizes the right to a healthy environment and has adopted legislation on child protection, the role of children as active participants in environmental decision-making remains limited. This paper explores existing legal and institutional standards, focusing on limited mechanisms for children's participation, and restricted access to environmental justice.

Keywords: *Children, Constitution, Convention, environmental rights, subjects.*

From Policy to Practice: Operationalising Gender-Equal Cities in European Municipal Practice

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ABSTRACT

The URBACT Knowledge Hub: Gender Equal Cities report from 2022 synthesizes how municipalities can mainstream gender across governance, economy, public services, planning, and inclusion to improve equity and urban performance in a post-pandemic context shaped by pandemic, war-related displacement, and new EU strategies. The report integrates verified city instances and resources (URBACT, CEMR, EIGE) into seven thematic chapters aligned with municipal portfolios. We consolidate these elements into a practitioner framework encompassing gender budgeting, gender-responsive public procurement, disaggregated data and monitoring, and intersectional involvement. Multi city examples—Vienna (gender budgeting), Umeå (mobility & safety via gendered data), Barcelona (closing the digital gender divide), La Rochelle (STEM pathways), and Râmnicu Sărat (inclusive sports spaces)—show integrated “hard” (infrastructure) and “soft” (programmatic) interventions shift outcomes when co created with residents and guided by gender sensitive evidence. Gender mainstreaming is a comprehensive catalyst for enhanced services, secure environments, economic resilience, and expedited climate advancement (e.g., recalibrating mobility investments for trip-chaining and safety; incorporating equality clauses in procurement; governance linked with the Sustainable Development Goals). We propose a municipal action agenda: (1) develop comprehensive, local gender-disaggregated datasets; (2) institutionalize interdepartmental practices; (3) collaborate with civil society and gender specialists; (4) convey progress to maintain political commitment.

Keywords: *public participation; urban governance; mobility; gendered data; inclusion.*



Systematic Review of Technology Adoption among Older Adults through an Intersectional Approach

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a systematic review of published research on technology adoption among older adults from an intersectional perspective. The aim is to identify how different axes of difference and inequality interact and influence the use, adoption, and appropriation of digital technologies. This objective is framed within the ADOPTIC65+ project (PID2023-150587OB-I00), “Technology Adoption, Informal Experts and Digital Education in Older Adults,” funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities. The search is conducted through a selection of bibliographic databases (WoS, Scopus, and Dialnet), and the results of various scientific articles published in recent years (2019–2026) were subsequently synthesized. Throughout the process, the standardized 27-item checklist and flow diagram of the PRISMA method (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) are followed. The selected and analyzed articles incorporate quantitative methodologies, although qualitative studies that integrate an intersectional framework are prioritized. The results are expected to demonstrate how factors such as gender, diversity in abilities, socioeconomic status, territory, and age shape barriers and opportunities in the adoption and appropriation of technology. The findings allow us to conclude by emphasizing the need to incorporate an intersectional approach into technology adoption processes developed within the project and in emerging initiatives.

Keywords: *Older Adults, Adoption, Technology, Intersectionality, Systematic Review.*

From Scrolling to Self-Confidence: How Consuming Psychological Content On Social Media Shapes Perceptions Of Competence

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ABSTRACT

In social media environments, the proliferation of psychological content has changed the way individuals interpret their experiences. Continuous exposure to this information influences the deformation of perceptions about themselves, creating a sense of competence that does not always match the appropriate and appropriate expertise on the specific situation. The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between the consumption of psychological content on social media and the perception of competence in individuals. The study follows a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected sample, composed of young people active in using social media. The interviews focus on the subjective experiences of the participants, the way they interpret psychological content and how this affects the sense of personal competence. The data will be analyzed through thematic analysis following the steps of initial coding, identification of main themes and their interpretation in relation to the theoretical framework of the study. To increase reliability, techniques such as data triangulation and code review will be used. Ethical standards will also be respected, ensuring anonymity and informed consent of participants. The results aim to provide a clearer picture of how exposure to psychological content in digital space affects the perception of the competence of psychologically based knowledge identified both in the individual's relationship with himself as well as in his relationship with a social environment. The study is expected to contribute to the literature on psychology and the impact of social media on the construction of individual experience and social interaction.

Keywords: *social media, social psychology, competence, scrolling, youth*



Connected at 65+: How Group dynamics helps Technology Acquisition

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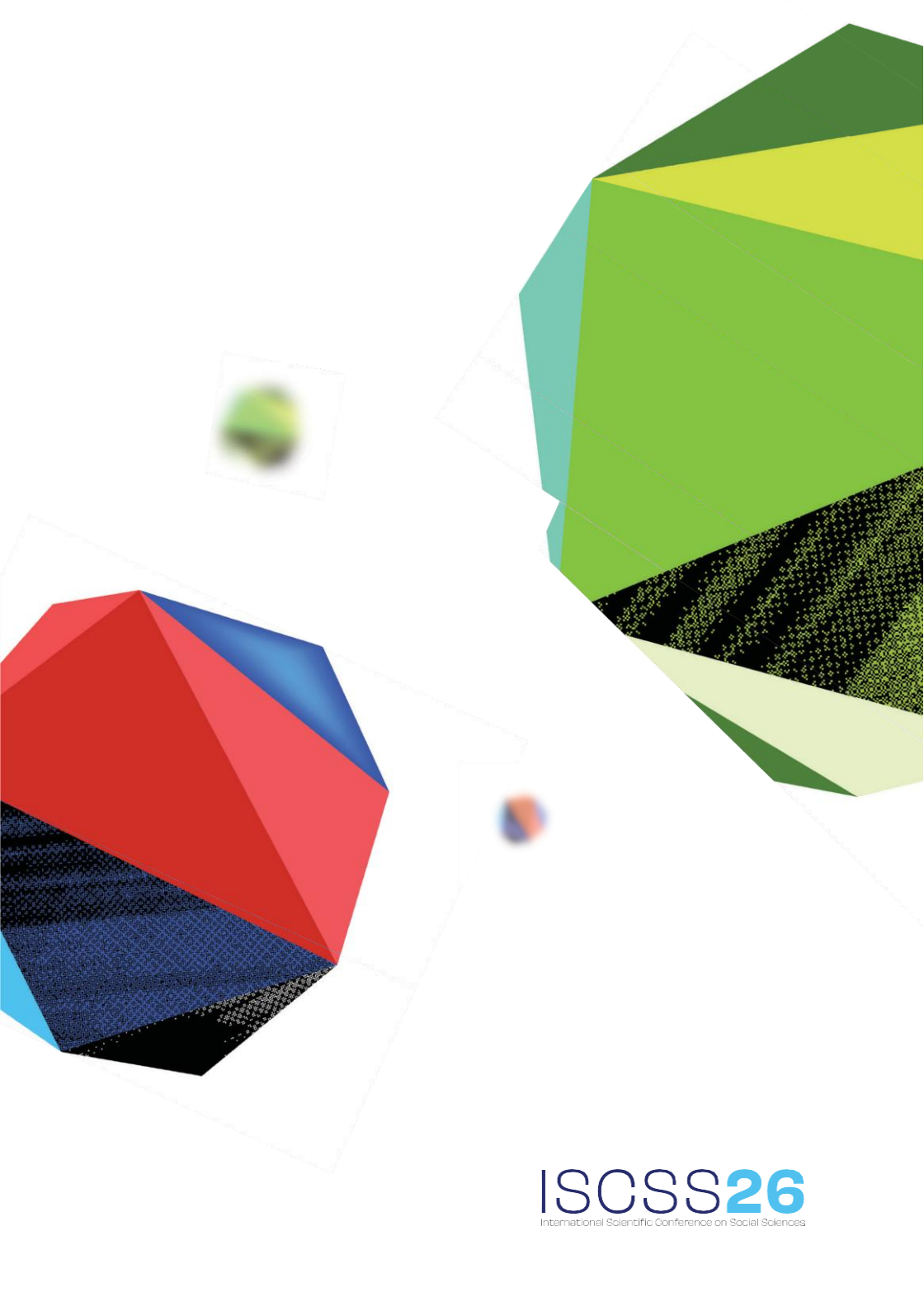
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the pivotal role of group components in technology adoption among people over 65, within the framework of the ADOPTIC65+ project. While traditional models of technology acquisition focus on individual performance and facilitating conditions, this study integrates groupwork dynamics to highlight how collective environments foster digital appropriation. Central to this approach is the figure of the “warm expert”—informal supporters who facilitate learning through emotional bonding and mutual aid. By implementing Labs65+, the project creates spaces for co-design and intergenerational solidarity, aligning with IASWG principles of empowerment and social justice. These group settings transform technology from an isolating barrier into a tool for collective agency, addressing variables such as gender, rurality, and educational background. The methodology is qualitative. The techniques are observation of recordings groups (Labs), focus groups. The analysis is thematic. Preliminary insights suggest that the success of digital inclusion depends less on technical instruction and more on the quality of the group experience. By fostering a “culture of support,” these groups mitigate technophobia and promote a sense of belonging. Ultimately, this research argues that integrating group-work standards into digital literacy programs is essential for bridging the generational divide and ensuring the right to digital participation in later life.

Keywords: *technology, older adults, warm experts, group work*



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