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RESEARCH SUMMARIES



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Djego Abedinaj

Optimizing Digitalization in Higher Education System

As the digitalization process goes across the education system, the impact has been quite diverse in different countries not only because some countries have allocated more financial resources compared to others. Integrating digital technologies in higher education institutions is highly dependent on context and the existing interaction within the institutions. The cultural and historical activities embedded in institutions positively impact flexibility towards organizational change.

Bearing that in mind, this research is focused mainly on the public universities in Albania and Serbia, and it is implemented in order to understand the dynamics that restrict or enable digitalization in the higher education system. To do so, two focus groups with students from both countries and stakeholder consultations from universities, civil society, and government have been conducted to have a realistic perspective of the current stage of digitalization and its systematic shortcomings.

The conclusion is that effective implementation of digitalization in higher education and change of the non-functional patterns require time, awareness, and massive capacity building to make the actors, administrative staff, teachers, and students embrace and use effective digital tools and lead them towards quality.

Marime Gjoka

Youth Willingness in Visiting and Promoting Cultural Heritage Sites Dating from Antiquity to Medieval

This policy paper provides a comparative view of Albanian and Serbian youth's willingness to visit and promote cultural sites dating from antiquity to the medieval age through digital means. Drawing from data collected by Questionnaire and through Expert Interviews and Focus Group, this policy paper provides concrete recommendations for institutions responsible for cultural heritage and other stakeholders.

Official data both in Albania and in Serbia show that there is a low level of visits of young people to various cultural sites. The collected data through this research confirms this trend with 29.3% of youngsters in Albania and Serbia visiting cultural heritage sites only once a year and 3.6% of them state that they have never visited one.

When it comes to youth initiatives, there is a growing tendency for youth engagement in cultural heritage promotion of sites mostly through social media. Globally, the people age group from 18 to 24 represent most users of social media to promote cultural heritage sites. Some examples of youth engagement in cultural heritage promotion through social media in Albania are Student Initiative for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, Revitalization of Local Museums, Albanian Archeology, and Amphora Blog. In the case of Serbia, some examples of promotion on Instagram are Archaeological Collection and All about Archeology as well as Neozoic Foundation's Archaeological Journal.

Considering that young men and women use social media at a significant level to obtain and share information, it is crucial to use these platforms for cultural heritage promotion to reach more young audiences and visitors. In the same line, 90.6% of the young people that completed the questionnaire said that there was a need for more digitalization of cultural heritage sites.

Currently, both governments are working on improving the digital presence of cultural heritage sites including attempts for 3D virtual tours. However, both Albania and Serbia must consolidate their efforts in improving the digital presence and the promotion of cultural heritage sites and engage young people in the process. It is also recommended to strengthen and expand web pages, social media presence and promotion, 3D virtual tours and other creative ways of using multimedia. Finally, it is paramount to work on the ICOM and UNESCO regulations about ticket categorization related to Museums that have pavilions dating from antiquity to the medieval age. There is a need for further action-oriented research in this area and better engagement of young people in the promotion of cultural heritage sites.

Ljiljana Kolarski

Digital Education: Challenges and Perspectives of Digitalization at the Universities of Tirana and Belgrade

Due to rapid technological advancement, the integration of digitalization into education has been considered one of the priorities in Albania and Serbia in the last few years. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic irreversibly changed the educational systems, accelerating the discussion and adoption of digital technology in higher education. Nonetheless, despite numerous initiatives, strategies, and policies, progress in integrating digitalization into higher education remains modest.

Students, in addition to professors, as the primary users of digital technologies in learning are notably affected by digitalization. Bearing that in mind, the survey was created and shared among students of five public faculties at the Universities of Tirana and the Universities of Belgrade with the aim to examine the students' perception of digitalization and the current state of digitalization in selected higher education institutions. To implement the research, a combination of methods was applied, including surveys and expert interviews, as well as desk research.

The results of the research indicated that more than half of students that participated in the survey barely know what digitalization represents, think their faculties should improve digital infrastructure for dealing with administrative issues and learning and that faculties' employees need to attend training events on how to improve digital skills and use digital tools. In light of the aforementioned considerations, one of the main conclusions is that ministries in charge of education and universities should collaborate in the promotion and implementation of digital technologies in higher education in order to improve its quality.

Andrijana Lazarević

Implementation of dual education system in higher education in Serbia and Albania – challenges and perspectives

Introduction and implementation of dual education in higher education in Albania and Serbia have been parts of the reform processes for the years. Albanian universities introduce dual education in higher education in 2011, while this model is recognized in Serbian higher education by the adoption of the Law on the dual model of study in higher education in 2019. Currently, only one Albanian university offers three dual education study programs, while in Serbia there are 32 accredited study programs.

Therefore, this paper presents the results of the analysis of the progress made so far in implementing dual education in Serbia's and Albania's higher education and suggests recommendations for further improvement and development.

The methodology used for this study included desk research, focus groups and interviews with experts and representatives of the relevant institutions and organizations from both Albania and Serbia.

The research results indicated that the needs for dual education studies exist, but the business sector should address its needs to academia more clearly for the sake of further development of appropriate dual education studies and further building the dual education system. Additionally, one of the findings is that further adjustment of the existing study programs to the business sector needs should take place. Furthermore, both companies and higher education institutions should invest more in the improvement of the competencies of all the involved actors, to provide high-quality study programs. Well-educated youth, with highly developed skills necessary for the labor market, is the goal of the dual education system and an indicator of its success.

Xhensila Mirashi

Perceptions of Albanian and Serbian Youth on the Open Balkans Initiative: Youth Perspective on Regional Cooperation

The 'Open Balkan' is a regional initiative initiated in 2019 and officially recognized as such in 2021. It was led by the Prime Minister of Albania, the President of the Republic of Serbia, and the Prime Minister of North Macedonia who signed various agreements related to labor market access, the interconnection of electronic identification schemes, and cooperation on veterinary medicines and food safety. This initiative has been the subject of considerable debate. On one hand, it is regarded as a transformative force on the political and economic landscape towards EU Accession; and on the other as fragmentation of regional politics, a parallel and unrelated initiative to the Berlin process. In this context, the opinions of young people and youth experts are important to guide the work of policymakers in WB countries.

Therefore, through this research perceptions of different dimensions of the 'Open Balkan' initiative among young people from Albania and Serbia are collected. A quantitative research methodology was employed, using an online survey for young people aged 18 to 29 residing in Albania and young people aged 18 to 30 residing in Serbia. 67 participants from Albania and 25 from Serbia participated in the survey. In addition, the qualitative research methodology was used, thus seven experts in the field of youth issues (4 residing in Albania and 3 in Serbia) were interviewed.

The results have shown that young people in Albania and Serbia, respectively, 73.9% and 48%, are interested in becoming involved in projects under this initiative. Also, 58.5% and 48% of them are interested in knowing more about the opportunities the other country has to offer. Meanwhile, the experts in both countries support the further development of regional cooperation but think that the 'Open Balkan' cannot be fully open if the other Western Balkan countries are not part of it. Finally, results show that governments and other stakeholders in both countries are recommended to increase their commitment to support joint projects in the form of youth exchanges and research mobility, but more efforts are needed to the promotion of intercultural dialogue and break the stereotypes and prejudices of the past.



Youth representation in politics in parliamentary elections (2021–2022)

Young people are barely represented in the current composition of the parliaments in Albania and Serbia. In both countries, young people face more challenges in competing to become members of parliament due to a lack of resources, limited experience in politics and reduced visibility in the mainstream media. Some young candidates utilize digital media better to engage with young voters, but the final result depends on the electoral rules and voting behavior of citizens.

Therefore, this research is dedicated to an analysis of the level of youth participation in politics in Albania and Serbia with a specific focus on parliamentary elections. More concretely, the policy document examines the parliamentary elections in April 2021 in Albania and the ones in April 2022 in Serbia through the lenses of young members of parliaments. Data collection methods were desk research, questionnaire, and interviews with representatives from faculties of political science and law and with young candidates for parliament from Albania and Serbia.

Young people who answered the questionnaire pointed out that they prefer young members of parliaments because they are perceived as more independent, that have adequate political knowledge and skills, not being corrupt and they can relate better to the young generation compared to older politicians and members of parliaments. Also, young people decide to vote for a candidate based on their affiliation with a political party. 81% of the young people responding to the survey are in favor of having quotas for young people's participation in parliament.

All interviewees highlight that young people's participation in parliament is needed as they bring new ideas and creative perspectives, thus contributing to change. If they already participate in parliament, it is important not to discriminate against them, but to trust them.

As for the recommendations, political parties need to involve more young people in a meaningful way in their political structures and strengthen youth political forums to prepare young candidates to become members of parliament. It is also important for civil society organizations to work with youth to encourage them to participate in politics. In addition, the establishment of a youth parliament is an option to be considered. Finally, awareness-raising campaigns and the promotion of young political leaders as role models are needed.



NGO led Youth initiatives in the Western Balkan Countries

Considering the complexity of the EU integration process and the lack of adequate information that reaches young people, projects that strengthen knowledge of the integration process are deemed a necessity. Additionally, recent studies show that even though the majority of this region demographically consists of young people, the occurrence of "brain drain" where skilled individuals leave their home countries to achieve a higher standard of living abroad is a huge threat to the development of the region (Taylor, 2021). Initiatives which spark hope and provide roadmaps for improvement in areas that directly affect the daily lives of young people shall be given priority by the civil society sector and state institutions. Bearing that in mind, this research explores the prospects of youth as a target group that fosters democratic values and standards in the Western Balkan countries.

The research comprehends a review of the existing literature regarding youth as a catalyst agent for change, interviews with representatives of NGOs and experts as well as a collection of best-case practices from European Movements in Albania, Serbia and North Macedonia.

Results of the research suggest that the main challenges are associated with a low willingness of young people to become involved, lack of funds and limited engagement of stakeholders.

It was estimated that the methods used to promote youth-related projects and engage young individuals were diverse. Furthermore, the level of cooperation with state structures could increase as often their suggestions and policy documents to improve the situation for young people in their respective countries are not taken into consideration.

Brief recommendations to support NGOs and the European Movement network to become a liable mechanism that delivers quality programs and measurable results to improve the status quo of young people in the Western Balkan countries were drafted.

Mila Vuković

High school Youth and Digital Violence During Covid-19

Based on the hypothesis that increased use of digital tools by students during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic might increase digital violence, this research was focused on the assessment if digital violence is happening among high school students in Serbia and Albania and if it is happening in which form is most common.

In order to address the aforementioned, quantitative and qualitative methods were applied, i.e., online questionnaires and focus groups, and different forms of digital violence were assessed (e.g., threats, harassment, blackmail, misuse of personal information, online sexual abuse etc.).

Based on the analysis of the collected data conclusions are that students usually spend an average of 4 hours online in both countries; 77.2% of pupils in Serbia did not experience any form of digital violence, but 13,9% experienced it, while in Albania 38,4% were in some of the digital violence situations, and 41,4% not. As for the different forms of digital violence, the most common among students in Serbia is the one related to misuse of personal information while the pupils in Albania, as most common, pointed out their experiences with spam emails with extortion content. According to the results, the main conclusion is that digital violence is present in schools in both countries, but it is not experienced by the majority of students in Serbia and Albania.

Project "Regional Youth Leadership Mobility Program" is jointly implemented by the Centre for Education Policy from Belgrade (Serbia) and the Center for Science, Innovation and Development (SCiDEV) from Tirana (Albania), with the support of the Open Society Foundation from Serbia and Albania. Project aims to improve regional and intercultural cooperation between young people from Serbia and Albania, strengthen leadership competencies, competencies for active participation, engagement and advocacy for change in society, improve their research competencies, critical thinking, advocacy skills, etc. Eight young researchers were selected through an open call for research projects published in Serbia and Albania and gained the opportunity to get to know another country better during the project, participate in a research and leadership capacity building program and conduct research on selected topics with mentoring support (under the two priority areas, Digital Transformation in Education and Youth Participation). During the project, young researchers had the opportunity to do comparative research, attended joint cultural activities and helped each other in the research process during their stay in Albania and Serbia.

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