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**Sustainable Recovery
in Post-Pandemic Era**

Green Economy Challenges

Organized by: Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical
Research, Ss. Cyril and Methodius - University in Skopje,
Republic of North Macedonia and Institute of Social Sciences
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PREFACE

Instigated by a desire to contribute to the societal endeavours to cope with the challenges of the pandemic and with hope for domestic and international sustainable recovery with regards to each relevant functional area, the two oldest social science institutes in North Macedonia and Serbia - the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research at Ss. Cyril at Methodius University in Skopje and the Institute of Social Sciences in Belgrade, in cooperation with the International Labour Organization organized the online international scientific conference *Sustainable Recovery in Post-pandemic Era: Green Economy Challenges* on 7 – 8 December 2021. This issue represents the Conference Proceedings following said Conference.

The Conference gained weight because of the significant attendance level of 119 authors from 20 countries, presenting 59 papers. As well, this scientific weight was due to the level of sophistication of the well-elaborated presentations on topics related to pressing contemporary issues regarding circular economy and development, geo-economics, labour market and green jobs, policy and governance, geo-politics, security, socio-demographics, education and public health.

Namely, the Conference aim to bring together scholars and researchers to discuss the issues of post-pandemic environmentally-sustainable economic recovery from the economic, social, public policy and legal standpoint was fully met. In the dawn of the pandemic crisis, the European Union launched the proposal of the Environmental European Law (2020) setting a legal framework to achieve the 2050 climate neutrality goal, only a year after the introduction of the European Green Deal (2019). The interconnection of climate action and environmental protection activities, dealing with social and political challenges and inclusive COVID-19 recovery was the central theme for critical consideration from both, theoretical and practical perspectives, creating the forum for holistic and integrative approaches' identification and development.

During the pandemic, governance and media practice have been changed as well.

The empowerment of the European Union industry and business, boosting the circular economy, particularly, the waste control and management as well as building the new Just Transition concept of workers and community adaptation to green jobs, alongside with introducing respective educational practices were the core focal issues of the Conference participants.

The public health crisis called for strong responses based on solidarity, co-operation and responsibility. That required the identification of current challenges find new paths to support key international and national actors in their efforts to “repair” and “transform” societies by tackling the inequities and, stimulating the growth.

The considerable research in these areas manifested in the particular works of the authors which were subsumed to vigilant double-blind peer review process, with assignment of two

field-related reviewers per paper, proceeded by detailed deliberation of separate Editors as well as by joint Editors' conferral. Each author accounted for the linguistic adequacy.

Finally, this issue of Conference Proceedings entails 15 papers, divided in two major sections: the first being titled *Politics and Society in Post-Pandemic Era* and the second is *Sustainable Recovery – Green Policy Levers*.

Both the Editors and the organizing entities are deeply grateful for the contribution to the Conference to all participants, to the authors for the quality of their papers and cooperation, to the committed reviewers, as well as to all assisting subjects in the process.

There are high hopes that the entirety of the ideas, through this issue, will be communicated to the policy makers, researchers and the broader public, thus contributing to the improvement of contemporary societal processes.

The Editors

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POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN POST-PANDEMIC ERA

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to substantial changes in the lives of citizens. There is almost no segment or branch left unaffected. Living in a pandemic (or, in other words, in the conditions of the “new normal”), caring for one’s own health and the health of loved ones, as well as caring for economic survival, affected people. The working process, the communication process, the functioning of the institutions and the process of decision-making have changed.

Having in mind the mentioned aspects, this paper will aim to show whether and to what extent the pandemic has influenced (and still affects) the participation of citizens in certain political processes. In addition to analyzing the turnout in the parliamentary elections in 2020, and the local elections in 2021, as well as the degree of impact of the pandemic, an online survey was conducted with citizens.

Keywords: elections, turnout, political participation, COVID-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

The term political participation refers to any of the many ways in which people can seek to influence the composition or policies of their government (Hague, Harrop, 2007). Voting in elections is a major process of political participation, although the latter is also recognized in less conventional forms such as signing petitions and participating in protests.

Parliamentary elections in 2020 in Macedonia were held just a few months after the start of the pandemic, at a time when there was still no vaccine and great fear among the citizens of the unknown was present. This is a period in which schools are closed, the work of state institutions is organized in rotations and many companies prefer to work from home. In these elections, the lowest turnout from 1990 until today was registered. Based on the mentioned circumstances, this paper raises the main research question “whether and to what extent the pandemic has influenced the participation of citizens in political processes”.

The paper focuses on the effects of the COVID-19 on citizens’ political participation and attempts to assess whether and to what extent the fear of being infected with the coronavirus influences their decision (not) to participate in elections or public protests. For the needs of the paper, an online survey was conducted that tries to measure how much the “pandemic” circumstances and the possibility of infection affected the participation of citizens in the electoral processes of the parliamentary (in 2020) and local (in 2021) elections. Part of the research is dedicated to the protests as a form of political participation, in which as a process there is also the possibility of spreading the infection.

Guided by the data on the turnout in Macedonia, in order to see if this is a trend, data from other countries in the region that have held parliamentary elections in the pandemic period will be analyzed too.

2. Electoral turnout

Turnout is one of the most important topics in the focus of political science. This is the way in which the citizens transfer their sovereignty to their future representatives, and in order for this process to be democratic, it assumes active involvement of citizens in it. The variability of electoral turnout from cycle to cycle, as well as from country to country, is in the research focus of many authors.

Franklin links the drop in turnout to the decline in the importance of elections, in terms of the turnout trend from the 1950s to the end of the last century. While in the post-World War II period, elections resolved major issues that posed a conflict in society, with the reduction of class conflict, later on, voters have less incentive to vote on election day (Hague, Harop, 2009). He also points out the change in the decision to vote, i.e. in contrast to group and party voting which is characteristic of the post-war period, changes in voting for issues, economy, competencies. According to Norris, the decline is due to reduced voter satisfaction with government achievements. Downs points out that turnout is higher in countries where

the voting effort is small (meaning the registration process) and the potential gains are large. (Hague, Harrop, 2007)

According to Franklin's analysis, the short period between elections and the predictability of the election result reduces voter turnout. In addition, Peter Mayer points out that the sooner the elections are held, the unpredictable the results are. According to Geys, voter turnout is higher in countries with historically higher turnout, in countries with smaller populations, in elections where results are expected to be "tight", where parties spend more money on campaigning, in proportional electoral systems, where registration to voters is easy and where elections take place at the same time (Bale, 2009).

According to Norris, the institutional context and cultural factors equally contribute to explaining voter turnout. In countries subject to its comparison, where all other things are equal in terms of political institutions, turnout is likely to be maximized in elections using the proportional representation model, with small constituencies, regular but relatively rare national competitions and competitive party systems. But even if the institutional context is controlled, there are significant inequalities in participation in elections related to human development, socio-economic resources and cultural attitudes. In any society, citizens who are more educated, richer and more motivated are more likely to participate in elections than others, and activism is higher in post-industrial nations (Norris, 2004).

The above aspects that have an impact on the turnout can be found in one place in the publication of a group of authors "Engaging the Electorate: Initiatives to Promote Voter Turnout from Around the World". They recognize two groups of factors: (1) contextual and systemic factors and (2) individual and social factors. In the first group of factors, such as the contextual ones, are mentioned: the perception of the effectiveness of the political contest (the degree to which citizens believe that different election outcomes affect governance); the competitiveness and importance of the election (if the election result is believed to be tight, voters may view election day as significant); the nature of the party system (the degree of fragmentation can provide a variety of options for voters although strong fragmentation can have the opposite effect, leaving voters confused about the effect their vote may have); higher spending on the election campaign (may raise the profile of elections and lead to wider distribution of political information); voting traditions in different communities (the emergence of "safe" places may reduce voter turnout or certain communities may be a particularly lucrative target for different interest groups or political parties); strategic voting (voters may be more willing to go out to prevent an adverse outcome); duration between elections (when elections are held frequently, voter turnout suffers); weather (extreme weather conditions can affect turnout); and the nature of the election event itself (turnout in referendums and voting for a civic initiative is usually lower than in national elections, but there are exceptions).

Systemic or institutional elements are generally more stable and often require significant legislative and administrative change efforts. Examples of systemic factors are: the electoral system (the more the electoral system reflects the citizens' choice, the higher the turnout is); voter registration as a state or individual responsibility; mandatory versus voluntary voting (turnout is higher when there is mandatory voting and there is a sanction); one vs. multiple

voting days; elections held on a working day or a day off (turnout is higher when voting takes place on holidays or weekends); the availability of alternative voting procedures (advance voting, proxy voting, postal voting, etc. allows voters who may not be able to vote on election day to vote in advance); physical access to polling stations; and the use of new technologies (electronic voting).

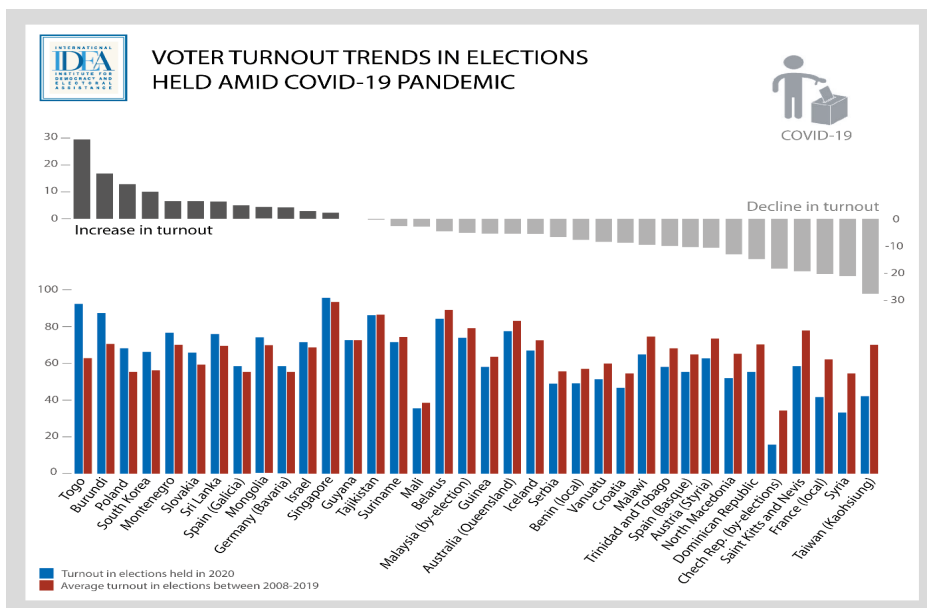
In the group of individual and social factors are mentioned: age (turnout is lowest among the youngest population), level of education (there is generally a positive correlation between education level and electoral turnout); gender; interest in politics; networking; socialization and others.

From the analysis of the International Institute IDEA for the elections in the World held in the conditions of COVID 19, a decrease in the turnout was observed in 77 countries, i.e. in 66% of the countries that organized elections in this period (Aslund, 2022).

Among the factors that are likely to affect the increase in voter turnout are: the implementation or scaled-up special voting arrangements, the political context and the timing of the elections. Special voting opportunities include: postal voting, proxy voting, mobile ballot, box voting, early voting, and they have proven particularly important in many countries. (Bicu, Wolf, 2020)

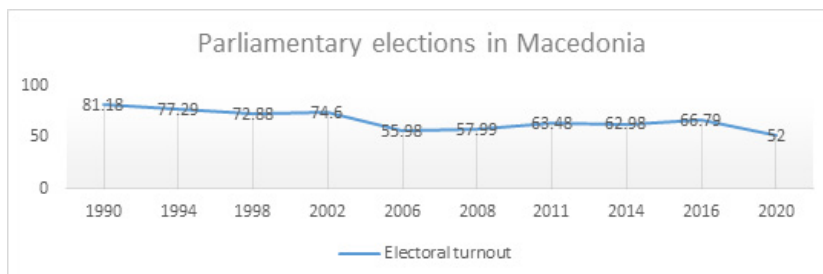
Examples of elections with a significant political context that influenced the turnout are the elections in Montenegro and Poland, where the elections are assessed as crucial by the population in both countries, but also as uncertain in terms of the election result.

The time of the elections refers more to the situation with some infected in the period of the elections, and this group of countries includes those who organized elections shortly after the start of the pandemic, in conditions when there were no infected in the country.

Figure 1: Electoral turnout during the Covid-19 pandemic

Source: International IDEA (<https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/going-against-trend-elections-increased-voter-turnout-during-covid-19-pandemic>)

As for the turnout in Macedonia, the data shows a significant decline. While in the first election cycles since independence the trend is over 70%, in the last 20 years it ranges from 56% to 67%, so that in the last parliamentary elections (which were the first to be held in pandemic conditions) it was 52% (Graph 1).

Graph 1: Electoral turnout – Parliamentary elections in Macedonia

Source: International IDEA

Regarding the countries in the region, significantly reduced turnout in elections organized in a period of pandemic is observed at the elections in Serbia, Bulgaria and Croatia. In Montenegro and Kosovo, turnout is higher in the election cycle organized during a pandemic than before, while in Albania turnout is almost at the same level.

From the presented data it can be seen that with the exception of Montenegro, the turnout in other countries in the region is around 50%. It can also be noted that the turnout trend in the last decade of the last century is much higher than the percentage of citizens who turned out on election day during the last 20 years.

North Macedonia has the largest decline in turnout during the pandemic compared to other countries in the region: 15% less voters went to the “pandemic” elections in 2020 compared to 2016. In other countries this decline is much smaller and is around 7% in Serbia, 6% in Croatia and 5% in Bulgaria. The comparative review allows us to conclude that not everywhere the pandemic has contributed to reduced voter turnout, the opposite exceptions are Montenegro and Kosovo, while Albania has maintained turnout as in the pre-pandemic period.

It can also be noticed that in the mentioned countries where we have a decrease in the turnout in the elections organized in conditions of a pandemic, the turnout is at the lowest level in the history of each country. Despite the mentioned difficult circumstances with the health systems of the countries in the region, still the social and political conditions as well as the changes of the political structures had their additional impact on the turnout, which is also seen from other researches.

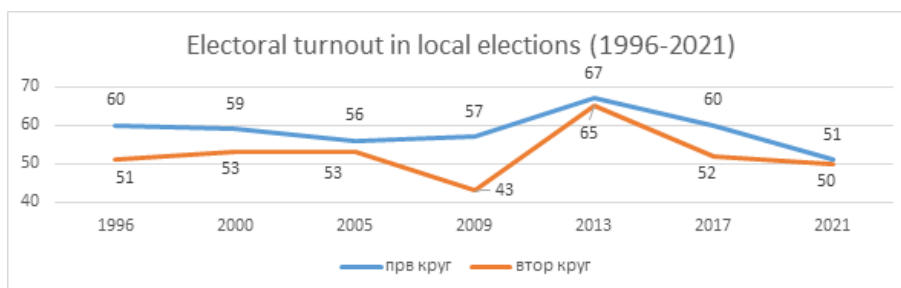
Table 1: Parliamentary elections turnout

Year of elections	Serbia	Bulgaria	Croatia	Albania	Montenegro	Kosovo	Macedonia
1990			84,54%				81,18%
1991		83,87%		98,2%			
1992			76,61%	91,5%			
1994		72,23%					77,29%
1995			68,79%				
1996				89,08%			
1997		58,87%		72,56%			
1998							72,88%
2000			76,55%				
2001		66,63%		54,95%			
2002							74,6%
2003			61,65%				

2004						49,52%	
2005		55,76%		48,73%			
2006					72,05%		55,98%
2007	60,57%		59,58%			43,23%	
2008	61,35%						57,99%
2009		60,64%		50,77%	66,19%		
2010						45,6%	
2011			54,17%		70,56%		63,48%
2012	57,77%						
2013		52,49%		53,31%			
2014	53,09%	51,05%				42,6%	62,98%
2015			60,82%				
2016	56,07%		52,59%		73,41%		55,79%
2017		53,85%		46,76%		41,3%	
2019						43,2%	
2020	48,93%		46,9%		76,65%		52%
2021		49,11%		46,32%		48,84%	

Source: International IDEA

The reason to believe that the pandemic had a significant effect on the electoral behavior of Macedonian voters is the fact that the local elections held in October 2021 were with the lowest registered turnout from the first conducted in 1996 till today (see Graph 2). Turnout in the local elections in 2021 was 10% lower than in the first round in 2017, as well as 16% lower than in 2013.

Graph 2: Electoral turnout – local elections in Macedonia (1996-2021)

Source: State Election Commission, Pankovski et al. (2021), pg. 33

As can be seen from the data presented worldwide, but also in relation to the region, the COVID-19 pandemic has its impact on the turnout, although general causes have been detected in countries where this is not the case. Such data gives us the right to further research this phenomenon, ie how much the reduced turnout in the parliamentary elections in 2020 and local elections in 2021, is a result of pandemic circumstances.

3. Empirical data

In order to answer the main research question “Whether and to what extent the pandemic has influenced the participation of citizens in political processes”, an online survey was conducted in which 379 respondents participated. The survey was opened in the period November-December 2021. Although it is not a representative sample, the findings from it show a certain tendency that could be further explored to greater depth.

According to the demographic characteristics, 38% men and 62% women participated in the survey, from which dominates the category with higher education (43%), and with a master’s and PhD degree (36%), followed by secondary (19%) and primary education (1%).

In terms of employment status, 78% are employed, 12% are unemployed, 5% are students and 4.5% are retired. There were 84% Macedonian, 10% Albanian and 6% respondents that are grouped in the category of others.

According to questions about COVID-19, 77% of survey participants are vaccinated, 36% said they had contracted the virus, and 34% answered that someone close to them had died.

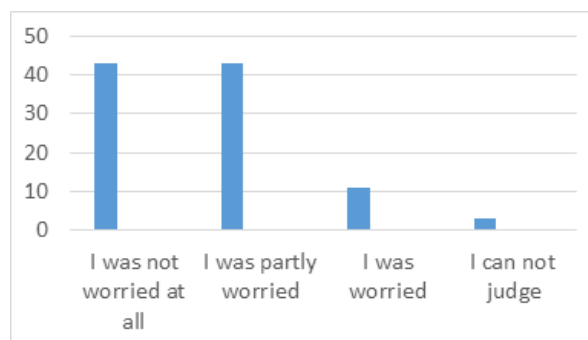
In terms of age structure, more than half of the respondents belong to the age group 30-45 (57%), and a quarter to the age group 40-60 (25%). A small number of respondents belong to the youngest (18-29) and the oldest (60+) age group, 12% and 6%.

3.1. Participation in elections

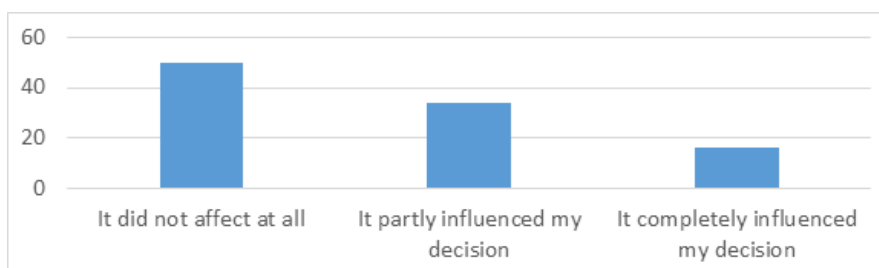
A high 82% of respondents confirmed that they had participated in the 2020 elections. The majority (53.5%) of those voting in 2020 (N = 312) were concerned that they would be infected with COVID-19 in the voting process (43% said they were partially concerned, and almost 11% that they were completely concerned), and 43% said they were not worried about getting infected.

Of those who did not vote in 2020 (N = 62), half did not participate in the elections because they were concerned that in the voting process there was a risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 (for 40% that influence was partly, and for 16% that influence was completely). Exactly half of all respondents who did not vote in 2020 chose to abstain regardless of the pandemic.

Graph 3: To what extent were you worried that you would become infected with COVID-19 in the voting process in the 2020 parliamentary elections?



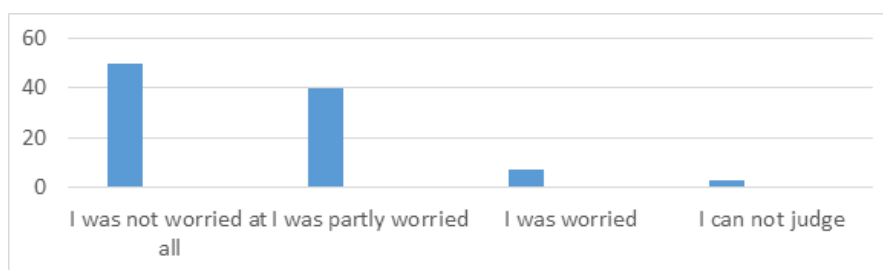
Graph 4: To what extent did the possibility of becoming infected with COVID-19 influence your decision not to vote in the 2020 parliamentary elections?



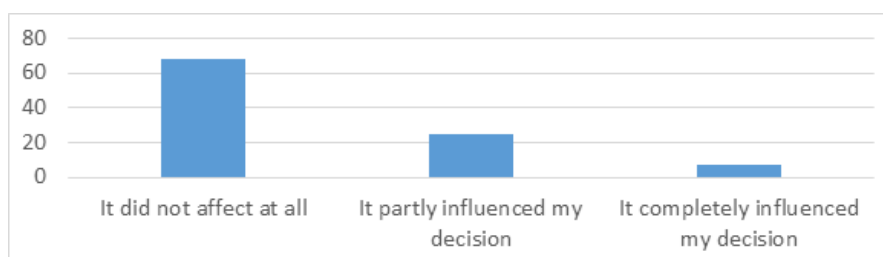
Regarding the local elections held in 2021, 85% of the respondents answered that they had participated in them. Concerns about the possibility of getting infected is declining, so in this election just over 50% of those voting (N = 321) said they were not worried at all, and 47% were worried (40% partially and 7% completely).

The impact of the pandemic as a reason for abstinence is declining in the 2021 elections, ie, a significant majority (68%) of those who did not vote in 2021 (N = 56) did so without the impact of the pandemic, and less than a third of respondents (32%) stated that the risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 had some effect on their decision not to participate in the elections.

Graph 4: To what extent were you worried that you would become infected with COVID-19 in the voting process in the 2021 local elections?



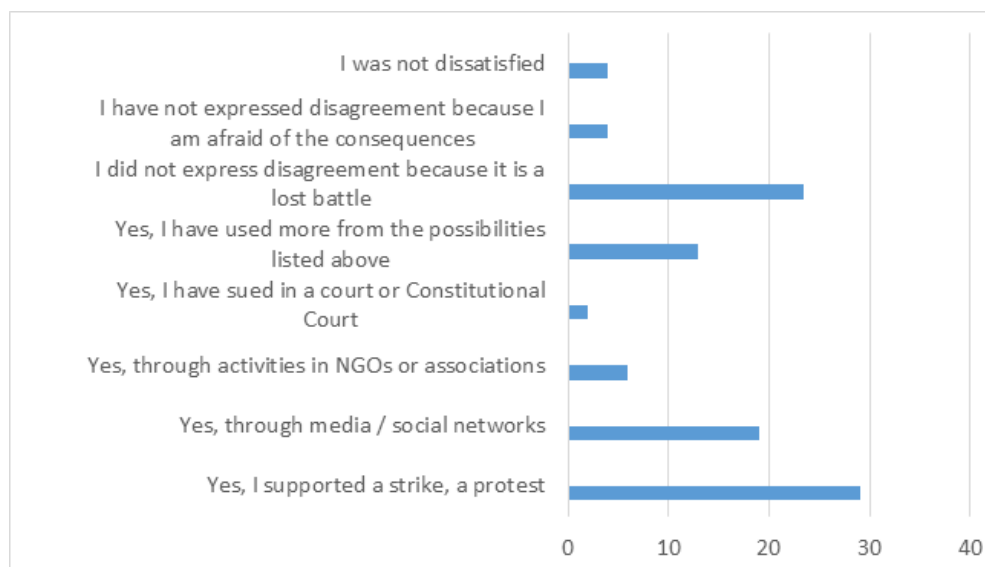
Graph 5: To what extent did the possibility of becoming infected with COVID 19 influence your decision not to vote in the 2021 local elections?



Taken together, these findings suggest that fear of contracting COVID-19 during the election process is declining, as more time has passed since the start of the pandemic (voter concerns are higher in 2020 than in 2021). The survey did not identify significant differences between demographic groups regarding concerns about COVID-19 infection as a reason for election abstinence, except among educational groups. Concerns about contagion after participating in the election process are highest among the most educated group and lowest among respondents with secondary education (majority of those with postgraduate and doctoral (56%) were partially concerned, and the majority of those with secondary education (53%) were not at all worried about getting infected).

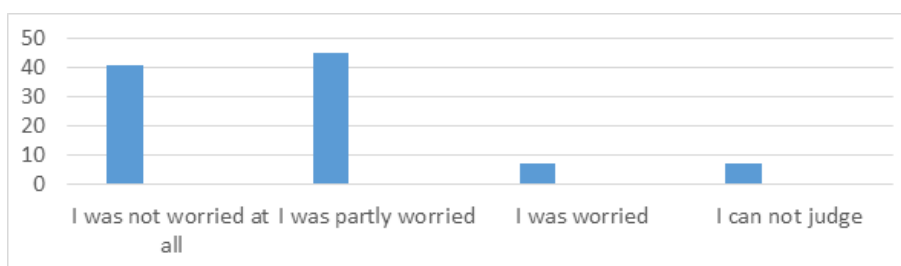
As part of the political participation, is also the expression of the attitude of the citizens through participation and support of protests. To the question “Have you ever expressed your dissatisfaction with a law, a decision of the Government, etc.?”, 67% of respondents answered that they expressed their position in some way (Graph 6). Regarding the activity of protests, in the last two years, ie in the period of COVID-19, a total of 32.5% of the respondents participated in one (11.9%) or more than one protest (20.6%).

Graph 6: Have you ever expressed your disagreement with law, a government decision, etc.?



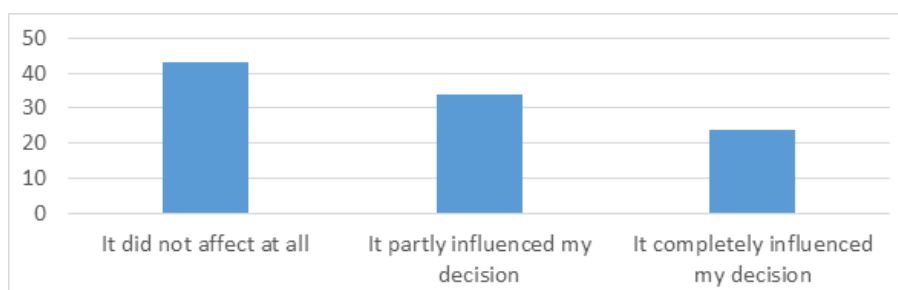
Regarding the degree of concern, of the respondents who participated in the protests, 44.7% answered that they were partially, and 6.5% completely worried that in this process they could become infected.

Graph 7: To what extent were you worried that by participating in the protest you would become infected with COVID-19? (%)



According to 57.4% of the respondents who did not participate in protests in the last two years, the possibility of becoming infected with COVID-19 partially or completely influenced their decision to participate in such processes.

Graph 8: To what extent does the possibility of becoming infected with COVID-19 affect your decision not to participate in the protests? (%)



Although this is a research with great limitations, based on the data presented, it can be concluded that COVID-19 has an impact on the political participation of citizens, but the level of concern is higher when it comes to protests..

4. Conclusions

From the data on the turnout in the world for the election cycles organized in a period of pandemics, we can see the trend of reduced turnout in 66% of the countries that organized elections. This trend is also observed in the presented data from the region. From the countries in the region, the largest decline in voter turnout is in the parliamentary elections in Macedonia.

Although this is a survey with great limitations, the data show that 54% of respondents who voted in the last parliamentary elections in 2020 were concerned that they would be infected with COVID-19 during the voting. The concern is reduced to 47% about the same process in relation to the local elections in 2021.

Regarding the participants in the survey who did not vote in the parliamentary elections, 50% of them answered that the possibility of becoming infected with COVID-19 influenced their decision not to vote. This percentage is significantly reduced when it comes to local elections, ie 32% of respondents who did not participate in the 2021 elections answered that the possibility of contracting COVID-19 influenced their decision not to vote.

There is a greater concern regarding the political participation of citizens in the part of protests, i.e. even 57% of the respondents who did not participate in protests, answered that the possibility of contracting COVID-19 influenced their decision.

Based on the presented data, it can be concluded that the possibility of infection from COVID-19 has a certain impact on the political participation of the citizens, and the level of concern is higher when it comes to protests. In order to be able to confirm this phenomenon with certainty, it is necessary to conduct some field research.

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MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES ON ROMA AND EGYPTIAN MINORITY YOUTH IN ALBANIA DURING COVID-19 PANDEMICS

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Abstract

The impact of COVID -19 pandemic in mental health symptoms in adolescents was considerable. This paper explores the associations between psychosomatic symptoms in relation to age or gender. Collected data were obtained from a sample of 201 adolescents in a range of 14-20 years old in Albania. Psychosomatic problems were measured using the Health Behavior in School –Age (HBSC) and a section of demographic data. Higher levels of psychosomatic symptoms such as irritability, bad temper, nervousness, difficulties in getting asleep, headache, stomach ache, and dizziness were revealed as concerning for adolescents. Based on the so far knowledge, this is the first study that researches the factor of mental health symptoms in school-aged youth from marginalized minorities in Albania. The study highlights the need of emergent intervention to help adolescents from these two minorities to cope with psychosomatic symptoms and also to find ways of promoting positive mental health.

Keywords: mental health, psychosomatic symptoms, youth, Roma minority,
Egyptian minority

1. Introduction

Mental health became a general concern during the pandemic time (Courtney, Watson & Battaglia et al., 2020; Moreno, Wykes & Galderisi et al., 2020). Albanian adolescents are worsening and their mental health symptoms grew during COVID-19 (Miconi, Dervishi & Wium at al., 2021).

According to APA dictionary of Psychology (APA Dictionary, 2022) “*mental health is a state of mind characterized by emotional well-being, a good behavioral adjustment, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms, and a capacity to establish constructive relationships and coping with the ordinary demands and stresses of life*”. Mental health of adolescents is related to the lack of psychological and somatic symptoms. Adolescents are experiencing psychosomatic symptoms as a form of reaction to a drastic decline in their mental health. Albania was one of the countries that has been forced to implement extreme measures such as social distancing, quarantines or total lockdown in some cases. All these had a significant impact on psychological aspects and to the general well-being of adolescents from Roma and Egyptian minority (Miconi, Dervishi & Wium at al., 2021). Adolescents from Roma and Egyptian minorities faced with major challenges as a consequence of the pandemic due to limited access to basic resources, which may hinder their psychosocial development. Roma and Egyptian communities represent the most deprived and stigmatized groups in Albania (Assembly of the Republic of Albania, 2017) and share a very similar and concerning situation (De Soto, Beddies, & Gedeshi, 2005; Home Office, 2017; Miconi at al., 2021). Their stressful situations have worsened during the first COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (Miconi at al., 2021).

Psychosomatic symptoms were at increased risk during this health emergency (Courtney, Watson & Battaglia et al., 2020; Moreno, Wykes & Galderisi et al., 2020; Murphy, Khan & Sun et al., 2021; Gadermann, Thomson & Richardson et al., 2021; Mohler-Kuo, Dzemaili & Foster et al., 2021; Manchia, Gathier & Yapici-Eser, et al., 2021). Recently, the European Union underlined the need for considering Roma youth participation and inclusion in research and interventions during the pandemic, in line with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child’s invitation to guarantee children’s rights to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and for those views to be considered (Milkova & Larkins, 2020, In Miconi et al., 2021). Reports denounces a concerning situation during this health emergency for young Roma and Egyptian community across Albania and nine European countries (Miconi et al., 2021). Often minorities lacked essential and basic health, income and education, and that due to systemic discrimination, Roma and Egyptian adolescents were often excluded from participation in research initiatives (Larkins, 2020). Some studies focused on Roma and other minority adolescents in the school context across multiple Eastern European countries prior to the pandemic (Dimitrova et al., 2018). Furthermore, little is known on how the situation has evolved during the pandemic in some minority groups whom might be at higher risk of experiencing psychosomatic symptoms that can affect normal development and increase the factor risk for mental health problems (Mohler-Kuo, Dzemaili & Foster et al., 2021; Kar, Oyeturji & Prakash et al., 2020; Oswald,

Rumbold & Kedzior et al., 2021; Manrique-Millones, Wiium & Pineda-Marín et al., 2021). The previous study (Miconi et al., 2021) on qualitative data (i.e., focus group discussions) highlighted strikingly high psychological symptoms among Roma and Egyptian adolescents and shed light on the important role of some protective factors for minority adolescents. The pandemic has affected beliefs about personal abilities, their relationships with people, family and community solidarity, increased sense of isolation and mental health concerns (Moreno, Wykes & Galderisi et al., 2020; Murphy, Khan & Sun et al., 2021) causing youth distress, lack of hope that affected their psychosocial resource and fragilizing coping in circumstances that were out of their control such as Covid-19 (Gadermann, Thomson & Richardson et al., 2021; Mohler-Kuo, Dzemaili & Foster et al., 2021).

According to the study (Kapetanovic, Rothenberg & Lansford et al., 2020; McGorry, Mei & Chanen, et al., 2022), there was an increase in psychological and somatic symptoms in adolescents, due to the pandemic situation. Studies also revealed a trend of increased crisis in mental health symptoms (Vermeulen, van der Heijden & Kocavska et al., 2021). The HBSC, a brief symptom checklist that explores the frequency of occurrence of symptoms such as nervousness, feeling low, difficulties in getting asleep, headache etc., suggest that if two of the symptoms are reported more than once a week, the condition is classified as a poor mental health (Erhart et al., 2009). Building on prior literature and on our qualitative research findings, the present study aims to investigate the impact of psychosomatic symptoms in a sample of Roma and Egyptian adolescents living in Albania during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. As in a community-based approach, our research explores:

- 1) Differences in prevalence of psychological and somatic problems on mental health of adolescents during and after the pandemic situation
- 2) Potential role of individual factors as age, gender, ethnicity and education on psychosomatic problems.
 - What is the level of psychosomatic problem in adolescents?
 - What is the role of demographic factors in psychosomatic problems?
 - How they correlate with psychological and somatic symptoms?

The report of our research was based on interviews with 201 adolescents in three cities of Albania. This article is part of a larger research project on adolescent perspectives on positive youth development and mental health. In the present paper our concern is on measuring self reported health issues by using eight symptoms and examine the role of these symptoms in adolescent daily life. Results will inform prevention and intervention programs to support and protect minority youth's positive development and mental health during and in after the current health emergency.

2. Methods

Procedure and participants

According to the data from Roma and Egyptian community in Albania (INSTAT, Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, United Nation Albania & UNPD., 2015) the most populated districts of Roma and Egyptian minorities are Tirana, Korça, Elbasan, Fier, Durrës, Shkodra and Berat. For the purpose of this study and the available budget, we focused on three District areas of Albania: Shkodra in Northern Albania, Elbasan in the center and Berat is the south part of Albania.

In order to recruit youth from Roma and Egyptian communities, we contacted 9 organizations from the seven most populated cities of Albania, from which only 3 organizations were selected to participate in the project. Out of 9 identified organizations, three of them agreed to let us approach the selected youth. However, several other organizations got interested in our research study, and asked if we could include them in our out-reach activities and findings. Some of the organizations were excluded because not be able to help in the recruiting process of the participants. We agreed and chose two groups in the three cities contained a mixed sociodemographic background.

Three cities in Albania were selected to join the study using a random cluster sampling procedure. Specifically, one city in the central district, one city in the south district, and one city in the north district were selected. Three organizations of Roma and Egyptian community were selected, one for each represented city. All youth in the lists of the selected organizations were invited to participate in the study. The data were collected in the outdoor organization setting with the presence of two well-trained research assistants from each minority (Roma and Egyptian, male/female) respecting the social distance and the safety of the participants. Data were collected between August, 1, 2020, and September 05, 2020 the when austerity measures against the Covid-19 pandemic were released. An incentive was given to all the participants.

The project received the ethical approval from the Ethics committee of the University of Bergen (Norway) (Reference number: 612969) which applies to all EU and allied countries. The research assistants from Roma and Egyptian minorities informed the parents and the youth about our research project. The youth received written information about the study and our interest in exploring their point of views on questions asked in the HBSC survey. They also received written information to bring to their parents. If the youth were interested in participating in the study, they were asked to sign the consent form. Those under the age of 16 were asked to acquire consent from their parents. We informed the participants about the possibility of withdrawing at any time, and 5 of them used this option. The present study focused on 201 youths, who took part in an interview schedule used to guide the research assistants for posing questions and answer options to respondents. The aim was not to exclude anyone who had no education, or those who had dropped-out of the school early and have difficulty in reading, also to pose every question-and-answer option in the very same way to every respondent. That was done in order to minimize interviewer effect,

or possible changes in the way the interviewee replied based on “how or when” questions were presented by the interviewer. The interview schedule lasted between 30-35 minutes, depending on how comprehensive the participants answers were. During the individual interviews, we sat side by side with the participants and allowed to check the questionnaire by looking thought of it.

Sample

The present study focused on 14 - 20 years old youth. A total of 201 youth, among whom 53.2% were boys and 46.8% were girls. From the total sample, N = 49.8% were youth from Roma minority and 50.2% from Egyptian minority; 88.6% were single and 11.4% married. About 81.6 % of youth lives with their parents, 6% with mothers, 2.5% with father. 8% of the youth live with other adults that are not their parents and 2% with their own family. From all participants, 95% belong to Muslim religion and 5% Catholic. About 3% of the youth reported to be without education, 32.8% attended school, about 13.9% finished the primary education, and 50.2% of them reported to have dropped-out school. Based on the highest level of education that they have 3% have no education, 74.6% have primary education, 20.9 have secondary education and 1.5% attend university. Regarding the perception about how participants rated their academic performance, they argued 0.5 as excellent, 4.1 as very good, 64.1% as fair and 9.7% confirm that they have poor academic performance.

Measure

Demographic data include relevant information on age, gender (i.e., Boy or Girl), marital status (Single, Married) ethnicity (Roma or Egyptian), living conditions, religions (Muslim, Catholic Orthodox or Other), course study (No education, Primary school, High school, Technical or vocational school and University education), school year (No education, At school, Finish school, Drop -out), academic performance (Excellent, Very good, Fair, Poor) and the highest educational level of their father and mother (i.e., No education, Primary school, High school, Technical or vocational school and University education). These variables were treated as control variables as they have been found to have some implication for the experience of developmental assets (Wiium et al., 2018).

Health Behavior in School-aged Children (HBSC) symptom checklist is a non-clinical measure of health complaints (Currie & Morgan, 2020). The HBSC Symptom Checklist (HBSC-SCL) includes eight symptoms. Participants are asked to rate the frequency of 8 physical and psychological symptoms experienced in the past 6 months according to a 5-category response scale (from rarely or never to almost daily), coded from 0 to 4. The total (HBSC-SCL) scale range is 0–32 points. We also developed two independent indexes: (1) somatic complaints (HBSC-SCL_S) including headache, abdominal pain, back pain, and dizziness, and (2) psychological complaints (HBSC-SCL_P) including depression, nervousness, irritability or bad mood, and difficulty sleeping.

Statistical analysis

The analysis was carried out in SPSS 20.0. Descriptive analyses as frequency and percent for demographic data were collected. Means were compared using t-test for gender, ANOVA for levels of education, age groups and HBSC. The correlations between the different levels and intensity of HBSC were tested through Pearson correlations coefficients. Linear Regression was used to explore the role of demographic data on psychosomatic symptoms.

3. Results

Results of descriptive statistic on mental health of adolescents (table 1.3) show a major impact of the pandemic Covid-19 on psychological symptoms like feeling low more than once a week $N=0.5\%$, Irritability or bad temper $n=7.5\%$ and feeling nervous $N=9\%$, compared to somatic factor like backache $N=0.5\%$ and dizziness $N=1.5\%$ of the total sample. Irritability or bad temper ($N=1.5\%$) and feeling nervous $N=05$ seems to experienced by youth about every day. It looks like these are the most typicall way of expressions of psychological symptoms. What came out is that adolescents from both minorities experience about every week somatic symptoms as headache, backache, stomach ache, dizziness and psichological symptomses as irritability, bad temper, nervousness, feeling low, difficulties in getting asleep.

The descriptive data not presented in table on the distribution of somatic and psychological symptoms in the healthy behavior of adolescents. As revealed, psychological symptoms have a higher mean prevalence among Roma subjects ($M = 1.813$; $SD = .621$) while somatic symptoms have a higher prevalence among Egyptian subjects ($M = 1.295$; $SD = .352$). The results not presented in table indices a distribution of somatic and psychological symptoms on mental health of adolescents in relation to ethnicity, gender, marital status, living conditions and education. Both factors have a normal distribution between them ($M = 1.439$; $SD = .428$). SD values in the range from 0.309 to 0.547 indicate a sufficient and discreet dispersion regarding the data collected.

Table 3.1 Percent of Health Behavior in School-aged Children (HBSC)

	Rarely or never	About every month	About every week	More than once a week	About every day
<i>The somatic factor</i>					
Headache	72.6	25.4	2.0	0	0
Stomachache	80.1	19.4	.5	0	0
Backache	71.1	22.9	5.5	.5	0
Dizziness	75.6	21.4	1.5	1.5	0

<i>The psychological factor</i>					
Feeling low	57.7	35.3	6.5	.5	0
Irritability or bad temper	49.8	30.8	10.4	7.5	1.5
Feeling nervous	43.8	35.3	11.4	9.0	.5
Difficulties in getting to sleep	81.1	17.4	1.5	0	0

Results revealed that there were significant differences between boys and girls according to the levels of health behavior in school age. From the table (tab 3.2) above, it can be revealed that there are statistically significant differences between the gender only for the somatic symptoms ($t = -2.153$, $p \leq .05$) as the value of p is less than .05. The result shows that girls ($M = 1.34$, $ds = .34$) experience more somatic symptoms compared to boys ($M = 1.24$, $ds = .28$).

Based on Pearson correlation analysis not presented in table, there were no significant correlation between total health behavior in school age and for the two dimensions psychological symptoms and somatic symptoms ($p > .01$).

To understand the impact of the variables of Ethnicity, Gender, Marital Status, Living Conditions, Age and Education on Mental health of adolescents we performed the Spearman correlation test. The data showed that Marital Status ($r = .737$; $p < .05$) and Education ($r = .369$; $p < .05$) have the highest impact on mental health of adolescents. On the other hand, Gender ($r = .024$; $p < .05$) and Age ($r = .021$; $p < .05$) have the lowest impact on general mental health of adolescents.

The Spearman test also indicates indices with clinical significance, of which the psychological symptoms have the specific weight and the highest importance as an influencer on mental health ($r = .901$; $p < .05$).

Regarding the influence of somatic and psychological symptoms on the variables of Ethnicity, Gender, Age, Marital Status, Living Conditions and Education, the psychological symptoms again have the highest significance ($r = .903$; $p < .001$).

Table 3.2 Differences of Health Behaviour in School age by gender

Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Health Behaviour in School	Male	107	1.43	0.35	-.727	.468
	Female	94	1.47	0.38		
psychological factor	Male	107	1.60	0.55	.134	.894
	Female	94	1.59	0.54		
somatic factor	Male	107	1.24	0.28	-2.153	.033
	Female	94	1.34	0.34		

From the t-test analysis for the total rate of Health Behavior in School age and for the two subscales Psychological and Somatic Symptoms with Ethnicity there are statistically significant differences for the total rate of Mental Health in School age ($t = 4.268$, $p \leq .05$) and Psychological Symptoms ($t = 6.147$, $p \leq .05$). Roma minority adolescents experience more psychological symptoms compared to Egyptian minority adolescents ($M = 1.38$, $ds = .35$).

Table 3.3 Differences of Health Behaviour in School age by Ethnic minority

	ethnic	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Health Behaviour in School	rome	100	1.56	0.38	4.268	.000
	egyptian	101	1.35	0.32		
psychological factor	rome	100	1.81	0.62	6.147	.000
	egyptian	101	1.38	0.35		
somatic factor	rome	100	1.28	0.26	-.448	.655
	egyptian	101	1.29	0.35		

To see if we have significant differences between education in terms of HBSC level we used the T test. From the data not presented in the table there are no statistically significant differences between the educational level as the value of p is greater than .05.

From data not presented in table the Linear Regression analysis for somatic and psychological symptoms shows a slight tendency of the influence of somatic symptoms ($M = 1.450$; $SD = .364$) on mental health $R = .306$ and the determining index $R^2 = .093$ is seen. This suggests that the influence of somatic symptoms in mental health of adolescents is very small, only 9.3%. To find out if there are significant differences in the influence of the somatic symptoms according to ethnicity, gender, marital status, living conditions and education, we used the significance test T. Indices showed that Egyptian Ethnicity ($t = .764 < .001$), Female ($t = 1.487 < .001$), Married ($t = 1.708 < .001$) and living with mother ($t = 2.120 < .001$) are the main characteristics of the profile of persons who show somatic manifestations in their behavior. Living with the father and other non-family adults and education do not seem to have an impact on these behaviors. This means that somatic manifestations, however mild in their impact on mental health, do not depend on the subject's lifestyle and degree of education.

Based on the data not shown in table, a higher tendency of distribution of the influence of psychological symptoms ($M = 1.285$; $SD = .309$) on mental health $R = .471$ and the determining index $R^2 = .222$ compared to somatic manifestations is seen. This means that the influence of the psychological symptoms on mental health is higher, than the somatic occurrence, at 22%. To find out if there are significant differences in the influence of the psychological symptoms according to the characteristics of ethnicity, gender, civil status, living conditions and education, we used the significance test T. Indices show that married subjects ($t = 2.327 < .001$) and those who have lived with their mother ($t = .622 < .001$) and

who live with their own family ($t = -.011 < .001$) are the main characteristics of the profile of persons who display psychological influences to adolescents' mental health. Ethnicity, gender and education, do not seem to have an impact on these manifestations. This suggests that psychological manifestations in mental health are not differentiated based on the subject's gender, ethnicity or education.

4. Discussion

The present study is the first to include cross-sectional data to investigate mental health of adolescent minority groups in Albania during and after the pandemic situation or how age, gender, ethnicity or education may causally contribute to psychological and somatic symptoms and to the overall mental health on adolescents. Exploration of adolescent perspectives in relation to psychological and somatic symptoms displayed every week, based on literature, shows that these are synonyms of poor mental health.

In general, adolescents reported concerning somatic symptoms as backache and dizziness with a frequency more than once a week. These are considered severe levels of poor mental health which might have a prolonged impact on the general well-being of the adolescents and also compromise their positive development. The Covid-19 pandemic seems to lead adolescents in experiencing somatic symptoms as backache or dizziness as a normal way of reaction to this unusually situation that affected all people.

According to Manchia and colleagues (Manchia, Gathier & Yapici-Eser et al., 2022) the COVID-19 pandemic increased the levels of distress, depressive, anxiety symptoms, and resilience in all, but with higher risk on children and adolescent population, affecting particularly their mental health. What is a concern for adolescent poor mental health is the presence of psychological symptoms present in adolescents almost every day? This finding revealed that the most typical reactions for adolescents are revealed through psychological symptoms. The most concerning symptoms are irritability or bad temper or feeling nervous. Based on the results, the Roma minority adolescents have higher level of psychological symptoms compared to Egyptian one. According to Wickström & Lindholm (2020) – *“adolescents living under difficult life situation may view themselves as the problem, as if being irritated and nervous and feeling low are health problems that they should rid of themselves”* but, considering the unusually situation related to Covid-19, these symptoms may affect the general well-being. It is necessary, also, to consider the fact that adolescent experiences of psychosomatic symptoms are complex and influenced by the difficulties of living conditions and marginalization of their community. Girls' somatic symptoms are higher than boys when the symptoms caused by different sort of problems are not merely related to poor mental health conditions but, come as a serious issue that is a risk of being overlooked. To argue in these findings, we need to take in consideration the role of Roma and Egyptian girls in school, family, neighborhood, community and the lack of opportunity to decide for their own future.

The novel stressors introduced by Covid -19 pandemic compromised the daily routine and lifestyle of adolescents (Chadi, Ryan & Geoffroyts et al., 2022). Rosen and colleagues (Rosen, Rodman & Kasperek et al., 2021) suggested some protective factors that can help adolescents to cope better with the pandemic. These protective factors are related to the role of the family to organize the routine of adolescents with a structured routine, less passive screen time, lower exposure to news media about the pandemic, and to a lesser extent more time in nature and getting adequate sleep help reducing somatic and psychological symptoms and promoting adolescents mental health (Dvorsky, Breaux & Cusick et al., 2022).

Another study revealed that (Brasso, Bellino & Blua et al., 2022) adolescents represent the most at-risk group for developing psychological symptoms or other forms of mental health problems as a result of COVID-19 outbreak and restrictions. The somatic and psychological symptoms in some predisposed adolescents to suffer from mental health problems can become more words as a result of poor family support and other social-economic problems. According to this finding adolescent from Roma and Egyptian minorities represent a higher risk for new mental disorders and symptoms, suicidality, and access to emergency psychiatric services.

All these factors had deeply affected the way that girls see themselves and their role in life. In line with other studies, we found an association between the psychological symptoms and lower mental health compared to somatic symptoms. The mutual association between psychological symptoms and poor mental health issues was supported by the role that symptoms as depression (feeling down) and anxiety (nervous and bad temper) have on the general mental health. Those revealed symptoms are in line with the study of Hjern et al (2013) which showed that adolescents from minority groups show higher degrees of psychological symptoms compared to those of majority group, because of the lack of integration and discrimination that they face.

Findings relating to the relation of demographic data as ethnicity, revealed that adolescents from Roma minority tend to be more affected by psychological symptoms because of their general living context. The examination of ethnicity in psychosomatic symptoms is particularly relevant considering the extensive problems with inclusion, work, living condition, education and literacy in Albania as in the past decade the segregation of these two minority groups who are even more vulnerable to social exclusion for their specific community settings.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the potential role of characteristics as ethnicity, gender, marital status, living conditions and education on psychosomatic symptoms of adolescents during and after pandemic situation of Covid-19. The results show that adolescents from minorities in Albania who were from Roma minority, reported higher psychological symptoms than

Egyptian minority adolescents. Adolescent girls who come from Egyptian minority, are married, and live with mother are more likely to show somatic manifestation in their behavior.

The findings suggest that efforts to cultivate a more inclusive social community climate may be able to mitigate these minorities and provide supporting services to help them flourish and manage better their daily life problems, and thus promote the general mental health with a specific focus on psychological well-being of adolescents of Roma and Egyptian minorities. Policy makers and community services should be aware to psychosomatic symptoms that may affect the general psychological well-being of adolescent minorities in Albania.

While the psychological well-being of adolescents is determined by characteristics as ethnicity, gender, marital status, several macro-level factors need to be addressed to be able to control mental health symptoms and to increase awareness of the importance of feeling accepted and helped, to feel protected against adverse mental health that includes either the construction of a social identity, less feelings of loneliness, more perceptions of belonging, support and positive development. Thus, community services should be provided with resources and tools to develop an inclusive professional and social climate where adolescents are less likely to be excluded or stigmatized based on their ethnic or socioeconomic background.

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JOURNALISM AND GLOBAL CRISIS: CHALLENGES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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Abstract

As a global crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic has also affected journalism and the media.

The subject of interest is journalism in conditions of a global crisis. The main research question of the research is: "What are the challenges that journalism and journalists in the Republic of Macedonia faced during the COVID-19 pandemic?"

The main goal of the research is to determine the challenges that journalism and the journalists in the Republic of Macedonia faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative methodological techniques were used for the realization of the research, i.e. semi-structured in-depth interviews.

A general conclusion can be drawn from the interviews that journalists had to tackle a difficult challenge which impacted their mental and physical health. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the surface a lot of gaps in regard to the government treatment, the public and journalists and emphasized the need for systematic changes.

Keywords: challenges, COVID-19 pandemic, journalism, media, Republic of Macedonia

1. Introduction

Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic first entered and entirely took over the global scene at the start of 2020, the journalists' task to collect and distribute accurate information became extremely challenging. Journalists have been reporting on the virus situation all the while fearing for their own health. Their working conditions, organizing their workloads, the manner in which they were sourcing information, the sources they used, and the way in which they talked to their interlocutors – all this changed. The drastic changes to daily life opened many new problems to journalists and resurfaced old issues that have been persisting for decades. Have journalists responded to their professional task professionally and with dignity at a time when their own lives have been brought into question?

Starting from the fact that journalists exist within the communication ecology in which their work influences and is influenced by the surrounding environment, it was interesting to research what was the communication ecology like when the pandemic (and everything it brought) occupied people's lives and existence. The facts say that "journalists discursively placed themselves in a responsible but vulnerable position within the communication ecology – not solely as a result of the pandemic but also from environmental conditions that long preceded it. Journalists found their reporting difficult during the pandemic and sought to mitigate the forces challenging their work as they sought to reverse the flow of misinformation" (Perreault & Perreault, 2021)

This qualitative research carried out by a research team from the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research had the goal of analysing the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had (and probably still has) on journalists in the Republic of Macedonia and their day-to-day activities. The main research question was what were the professional challenges and difficulties that journalists faced during a global health crisis while the country was making the greatest effort to manage the newly created crisis on a health, economic and political level and how this reflected on their personal lives.

2. The role of journalists during a health crisis

Major crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, highlight the basic need for reliable, verified and credible information. In this context, "the social role of journalism is more crucial than ever, but practising this profession is even more difficult" (The Vital Role of Journalism in Times of Crisis, 2020). Hence, what was the role of journalists? The answer to this question starts with defining the primary role of a journalist in this new health crisis: informing with "credible, unbiased and understandable information on all aspects of such a crisis, but also of countering the disinformation that is spreading faster than the virus". Journalists had to be the ones to provide "medical and health information about the virus and how to protect oneself from it". Furthermore, this crisis created a need for journalists to be in the role of someone "who understands the social, political and economic consequences of the pandemic. For journalists, this means being able to question the authorities about their choices and the

implementation of their decisions”. Journalists were also expected to strike “the right balance between emergency information, public service information, ‘constructive’ information and uncompromising investigations into the responses of the governments and administrations concerned” (The Vital Role of Journalism in Times of Crisis, 2020).

Moreover, it is a fact that at the beginning of the crisis, journalists were less concerned with investigative journalism or making stories more dramatic. They and their audience were more interested in knowing what happened and how to stay safe (The Media’s Role in a Crisis, Disaster, or Emergency, n.d.). All these characteristics to the role of journalists, in reality, became vital aspects, even if they have always stood for the journalism’s mission, and have become absolutely necessary in a time of crisis, especially a health crisis such as the one we have been living in for the last two years.

A research study that focused on the self-perception of journalists about what is their role during the pandemic showed that the role of journalists changes when they are reporting on health crises compared to situations when there is no crisis, especially not a potentially dangerous one. Hence, journalists say that the crisis changed their role and they have become “public mobilizers”, professionals in a “role responsible to classify risks” and that “they have changed from watchdogs into cooperatives”. Simply, they had to become less critical and more cooperative and empathetic towards all events because those events were life-threatening. Furthermore, the research findings showed that both professionalism and education are also important when it comes to how journalists understand and perform their roles. Namely, specialist reporters (appropriately trained) believed that they are better equipped to deal with the challenges of health crisis coverage, such as balancing and remaining critical with co-operation with authorities in their efforts to contain crises. Specialist reporters also believed that they are less likely to get swayed by the panic often accompanying health crises than general reporters are (Klemm, Das & Hartmann, 2019).

While we are still on the topic of the journalist’s role, especially in times of disaster and crisis, it should be emphasized that journalism also serves as a conduit for communications from public officials and experts to the broader public, which is known as the facilitative role of journalism and means that in times of crisis journalists conceive of and operate their role given what they perceive their audience needs. In the “facilitative” role, the journalist’s purpose is to monitor and carefully observe the environment for “relevant information about events, conditions, trends and threats” (Christians et al. in Perreault and Perreault, 2021) and is operated in a response to a perceived need for collaboration to try to answer the audience’s need for cooperation. In fact, the facilitative role draws on an understanding that the journalist is responsible to society and perhaps contributes to the public’s decision making in a crisis (Perreault and Perreault, 2021).

To sum up, the COVID-19 crisis across the world has posed a daunting challenge to journalism as a discipline, changing the journalist’s role and “the journalistic competencies necessary in such crisis times, with which journalists can strengthen their role in society by shifting its standards and norms under a transformative and interdisciplinary perspective, which for a long time has been hindered by the inertia of the industry and industry-centered journalism education” (Estella, 2020).

3. Mental health of reporters during the COVID-19 pandemic

One safety aspect that it is often overlooked, but has become especially relevant during the pandemic, is the risk related to mental health.

Work-related stress is not new for journalists, especially those that report from conflict zones. But nowadays stress is different, says reporter Hill: “As a journalist, you have to be consuming news all day long, which means being plugged into the Twitter firehose. It is kind of like sticking your face over the Chernobyl reactor and just staring into the radiation for like 10-12 hours a day because you’re sitting at home” (Podkovyroff Lewis, 2020).

During a webinar organized by Investigative Reporters and Editors, Al Tompkins from Poynter Institute said his biggest concern is that journalists don’t spend enough time decompressing outside of their work and reflected on the situation majority of journalists are in: “Most people check their phones right before they fall asleep, sometimes in the middle of the night and usually as soon as they wake up, which induces stress and burnout” (Podkovyroff Lewis, 2020).

Testimonies by most journalists indicate that reporting on the COVID-19 impacted their mental health (More work, less pay: COVID-19 worsens plight of stressed-out Balkan reporters, 2020). The findings from a relevant survey of 73 journalists from international news organizations showed that the majority of respondents (around 70%) “suffer from some level of psychological distress”, and that “26% have clinically significant anxiety compatible with the diagnosis of Generalized Anxiety Disorder which includes symptoms of worry, feeling on edge, insomnia, poor concentration, and fatigue”. A certain number of respondents (around 11%) reported “prominent symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which include recurrent intrusive thoughts and memories of a traumatic COVID-19-related event, a desire to avoid recollections of the event, and feelings of guilt, fear, anger, horror and shame” (Selva & Feinstein, 2020).

Again a high 70% of journalists (out of 1,406 journalists, editors and other media workers from 125 countries in the world) featured as respondents identified “the mental health impacts from covering the COVID-19 crisis as the most difficult challenge”, and 82% reported at least one negative emotional or psychological reaction as a result of the pandemic (Posetti, Bell & Brown, 2020).

Following this aspect of the journalists’ work, the testimonies and findings from various surveys only confirm the need for training and education on mental resilience and mental health protection in times of pandemics and other crises and high stress situations.

„I have learnt how to evaluate my mental resilience and prepare myself before going to sensitive conflict areas or interviewing people who suffer from trauma. This helps me to deal with stressful situations and to apply the knowledge I have gained from the training in my daily routines“, says Aung Aung Htoo, who worked as a journalist at Radio Free Asia’s Rakhine Programme for three years, and has faced many challenging situations in the field, from verbal assault to physical safety risks due to the highly conflictive situation in Rakhine State (Supporting journalism around the world in times of COVID-19, 2021).

4. Research methodology

This study on the challenges of journalism and journalists in the Republic of Macedonia during the COVID-19 pandemic is part of the research project “Political, juridical and cultural challenges in dealing with the pandemic”, conducted by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research – Skopje within the integrative functions of the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. This text has also come about from the authors’ involvement in the activities of the Global Risk Journalism Hub (GRJH), an international network of experts in communications, media and journalism. The research is led by the main research question: “What are the challenges that journalism and journalists in the Republic of Macedonia faced during the COVID-19 pandemic?”

In order to arrive at an answer to this question and identify the challenges of journalism in the Republic of Macedonia in conditions of a global crisis, the research was carried out in two phases. The first phase consisted of an online survey, whereas the second phase delivered an in-depth semi-structured interview aimed at producing more detailed information. The research was done from October until December 2021.

Here, the focus is on the second phase of the research, hence presenting and analysing received data and results from interviews with journalists. The instrument for carrying out the interview was prepared by the working group of Global Risk Journalism Hub. The questionnaire for the interview consisted of six parts:

- general information about the journalist,
- perception of the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as a global health crisis,
- the narrative of the COVID-19 pandemic as a global health crisis,
- sources of information used during the COVID-19 pandemic,
- presence of misinformation and fake news during the COVID-19 pandemic,
- risks reflected on individual level.

Given the scope of the questionnaire and the topics and aspects covered, the focus here is on just a few of them: **the general problems in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in the Republic of Macedonia from the journalists’ point of view; the general impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on journalism and journalists in the Republic of Macedonia; the individual risks and challenges for journalists arising from the COVID-19 pandemic; the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and the need for education on trauma and receiving appropriate support; the positive aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic from the journalists’ point of view.**

In regard to the sample, a strategy of selection via the principle of intentional sample was used. Thus, journalists were selected based on two criteria: those that have long years of work experience as media experts and are regarded with an esteem in their profession. The

sample consists of journalists employed by “Telma”, “Alfa”, “Kanal 5”, “Sitel”, TV 24, MTV, MIA, “Prizma”— six television stations, an information agency and an Internet portal in the Republic of Macedonia. Hence, all journalists included in the sample have over ten years of work experience in journalism, all of them have worked in different types of media during their professional career and at different positions, and some of the journalists in the sample are also part of academia.

Because of the specific living and working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore the specific position of journalists and their work engagements, the process of finding appropriate interlocutors and conducting interviews was more difficult and posed a big challenge. Consequently, although a large number of journalists in the Republic of Macedonia was contacted for the goals of the research, interviews were carried out with only ten journalists.

The results, that is to say the information from the interviews are to follow, organized thematically, adding specific examples via quotations from the answers by journalists, as key findings for the main research question and the entire research on the challenges about reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic. The names and surnames of those interviewed will not be revealed and instead codes are to be used referring to quotations from the answers in order to maintain anonymity.

5. Research findings and a narrative-descriptive analysis

The following part will present an analysis of received answers and illustrating them via quotations from the interviews with journalists.

5.1. General problems in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in the Republic of Macedonia from the journalists’ point of view

The final analysis of the answers by journalists paints a picture that shows that the country dealt (and still is) inappropriately with the pandemic. The answers brought to light a situation of an insufficient hospital capacity and inappropriately equipped health institutions. Health management was assessed as chaotic, inappropriate and motivated by political interests. Journalists reported that relevant experts were unavailable to the media and there was absence of debates and forums.

“As journalists, we can’t find expert epidemiologists that would explain to the public what type of disease this is, and we begged them for information. The forecasts on what would happen were often wrong, which gives me the right to conclude that we don’t have experts in that field. We didn’t have hospital capacity; decisions were often made overnight without any basis. Entire departments were closed off overnight and even clinics. Our healthcare was chaotic before, but since the pandemic started it’s been completely shattered. The

experts didn't have a unified stand and were confusing the public. Decisions were made politically" (#1).

Government measures for overcoming socioeconomic problems were assessed as "ad-hoc solutions, especially in the most vulnerable areas" (#10). The management of the economic crisis in which the citizens found themselves was assessed as benefitting employers and harming employees, with trade unions playing a minor role in the entire process:

"What, as a trade unionist, really bothered me in the Government attempts to cover the economic losses arisen from the crisis was that the main negotiators were almost always the chambers, the employers, whereas the employees and trade unions were a minority. In this context, the Government did everything it can to 'save' the big business owners and tycoons and almost nothing to maintain the living standard for the workers and small business owners" (#4).

All of the above can be summed up in the answer by one of the interviewed journalists, who lists all the key problems in dealing with the health crisis, from crisis management and socioeconomic shortages to the overall poor conditions of the health system, the response by relevant institutions and the selective abidance by posed measures:

"Primarily, problems with the management and organization of resources. Macedonia is a poor country with limited resources and a weak economy and as such had to 'fight for oxygen' alongside much more developed countries. In this sense, there were problems in being able to hospitalize the infected, lack of hospital beds, exhausted medical staff... Also, Macedonia started the process of immunization relatively late, therefore a large number of people, including myself, were forced to get vaccinated in neighbouring Serbia. The crisis de facto showed that there are double standards at play, because while the protective measures were in place the abidance to laws was selective to some people" (#2).

From all of the above, it can be concluded that general problems in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in the Republic of Macedonia from the journalists' point of view include: inappropriate crisis, health and socioeconomic management, lack of experts and of unified stand and making political decisions.

5.2. Overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the journalism and journalists in the Republic of Macedonia

The journalists and journalism as a whole faced a big challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic that led to a complete change in working conditions in this area and within all media. Journalists were at the frontlines and reported on the pandemic putting themselves in danger from many aspects. Above all, their physical health was under threat, but the pandemic also had a big impact on the mental health of journalists and their socioeconomic situation was under question. In addition, during a pandemic that brought a lot of uncertainty and many unknowns for people everywhere, journalists were caught in the middle between

the vast number of information, misinformation and fake and sensationalist news and the public which they were obliged to inform on time and in accurate fashion. They were also torn between the relevant institutions and the public, and this changed journalism as a profession. What is especially important is that the global health crisis shed light on all the “holes” in regard to the journalists’ training on reporting on global crises and the lack of professionalism and ethics in their reporting.

“Every crisis reveals the anomalies of a system, and such was the case with COVID-19 too. Across the entire world, including us, the coronavirus pointed to the “holes” in society, the areas we need to work on and improve. The lack of professional journalists was noticeable, the way of receiving and reporting such news was so important and creating public hysteria showed that the country needs trained experts in this area“ (#6).

In conditions of a global pandemic that includes rolling out unpopular measures, such as social isolation and quarantine, journalists were faced with three main challenges: access to relevant sources, reorganization of editorial staff including doing work online with fewer staff members and dealing with the financial crisis.

The main official source appears to be “the Minister in the role of a spokesperson that reads out information every day” (#1). Asking journalist questions becomes almost impossible because “all press conferences were online” (#1). And receiving information from the field, which is to say, from the hospitals, was neither allowed nor safe to do: “nobody dared to think of going there... we were very scared to enter the clinics“ (#1).

The change in living conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic brought about a change in the work of editorial staff, as well which meant “work in shifts with reduced number of staff aimed at protecting personal health“ (#9).

Event coverage becomes the main challenge for the editorial staff:

“It became clear that we couldn’t go to events and interview people directly, we couldn’t invite interlocutors to our studios... there were restrictions on movements, and the curfew entirely disabled our work. Suddenly, we could no longer do our job in the way we knew how up until then“ (#10).

Shifting events from the physical to the online space impacted the way that “media owners had to ‘learn’ that they can also create cheaper programs, so instead of the journalist going to the event, this is now done online which cuts down production costs“ (#2). The entire crisis caused by the pandemic reflected on the financial condition of journalists:

“Some of our colleagues had salary cuts, a few were even dismissed and started court procedures about their dismissals“ (#2);

„The situation with journalism in Macedonia is very difficult and the crisis only made it worse. A lot of media for a small population, an opportunity for many speculations and public manipulation, misinformation on account of certain interest groups“ (#3).

As for the overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the journalism and journalists in the Republic of Macedonia, a conclusion can be drawn that the main effects of the pandemic are seen in the change of the working conditions and the change in journalism as a profession, also in the endangerment of the psychophysical health of journalists and in finding relevant and credible sources of information.

5.3. Individual risks and challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic

Given the specific work of a journalist, work that generally brings all kinds of challenges and risks, it is especially important to put in context the risks and challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, the interviewed journalists emphasize that they faced big challenges when reporting during the pandemic which was a lot of pressure, and an additional obstacle was the lack of confidence by the public and even stigmatization and discrimination:

“The pandemic hit us all. I was affected by it professionally as a journalist, as well as personally. I work under a lot of pressure inflicted by the crisis, and on the other hand I face people who are showing resistance, who don’t believe that the virus exists or in the vaccines... To those people we are the main target, the journalists, and they accuse us that we are making it up, that we are creating tensions and disturb their peace. It is a challenge to still be up to the task and keep on reporting professionally, to hear about disease and death, to publish sad stories for almost two years, it’s exhausting“ (#7).

Apart from all the professional challenges, journalists were also challenged on a personal level during the COVID-19 pandemic in that they had to think of a way to protect themselves and their closest:

“I got COVID. This was a major stress factor, because of all the stories that you can die. I live alone and somehow, I got really scared. My colleagues kept checking on me, bringing me everything I needed, but I found the uncertainty really stressful” (#1);

“Fear from death, although I didn’t have time to think, I’m a single mother... if I’m gone my child won’t have parental care... you’re so terrified because you know more than the others“ (#5);

“Mental health, mental pressure, guilty conscious because via the many contacts from work I can bring the virus to my family, the inability to understand the seriousness of our profession by the public, bringing stigma and discrimination instead“ (#6).

Thus, the individual risks and challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic include: work under much bigger pressure, a lot of anxiety, but also discrimination from the public.

5.4. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and the need for training on trauma and appropriate support

One of the key aspects related to the COVID-19 pandemic was its impact on mental health. This is especially visible in a profession such as journalism, because journalists were in an exposed position reporting on the pandemic and witnessed almost all negative elements of this global health crisis. As one of the interlocutors says:

“This COVID situation is like the one my colleagues went through when reporting on the war in 2001... they were on their feet, reporting, but immediately afterwards they would say ‘my hair has gone white... I need to see a psychiatrist’, even though they were only reporting on the situation“ (#5).

What is paramount in terms of mental health protection is that the journalists in the Republic of Macedonia do not believe they are sufficiently prepared and trained to report on critical situations and they emphasize this gap in the education system, but also in the absence of any type of education and support by the organizations/institutions where they work:

“All working journalists, especially those covering healthcare, have to be trained on trauma – this is most necessary and urgent. We go into forensic pathology units, into homes of people with amputated legs, people who have cancer – we go through all of that. Not to mention those two huge accidents that happened in our country. In order to do a good story, we have to be empathetic, and if we are, we get shaken up and then we can’t sleep for days. We work with people who are ill, who have lost their closest to them, it’s terrible... Our television station hasn’t offered any specific help with mental health nor any other protection” (#1);

“Yes, ‘the new normal’ is entirely abnormal, and in that sense, I think that we all carry or will carry psychological problems from this situation. The journalist profession is stressful as is, therefore a systematic help with mental health should likely be considered, especially in this kind of situations” (#4);

“The crisis impacts mental health and that’s reflected and felt. I found it very stressful to be reporting, especially at the start of the pandemic. Twelve hours a day I was occupied with reporting on everything, in order not to miss on anything. All that causes stress which is hard to get rid of. None of the journalists have been offered help with their mental and physical health” (#7).

It can be concluded that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of the journalists was very big and noticeable and that additional education and support are needed so they can be more educated, prepared and trained for trauma reporting.

5.5. Positive aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic from the journalists' point of view

Apart from the inevitable negative aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic, this global health crisis also produced a few positive aspects, as referred to by some of the interviewed journalists. In general, these aspects go along the lines of how the specific living and working conditions during the pandemic have enabled “more time to go inwards, bigger focus on personal and collective health” (#2). Also, due to limited movement, social distancing, quarantines and the rest of the measures to prevent spreading the disease, one of the journalists says: “we focused more on our families, our close friends, because we weren’t allowed to have a large social circle” (#9), which is to say that during the pandemic people were spending most of their time within the circle of their families and socialising was limited to either their families or a small number of people. In regard to the positive aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the interviewed journalists pointed to the fact that a keen closeness was established during the pandemic, both with their family members and colleagues, and an important role in all this had the various means of communication available where they could be in contact and share information, images, supportive messages and such:

“We got closer, more connected, we were sending messages back and forth nonstop, shared more personal stuff. We organized meetings after working hours to socialise, celebrated birthdays, we recommended each other films, listened to music. Every positive news was shared, even during weekends. We were celebrating all our birthdays including our children’s birthdays at work” (#10).

When it comes to the positive aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic from the journalists’ point of view, the general conclusion is that in the time of the pandemic, the people had more time for themselves and their families, opportunity to build closer relationships with their colleagues in terms of sharing more personal problems and to reconsider some of their life choices and plans.

6. Conclusions

Given the primary role of journalism, which is sharing accurate, credible, unbiased and easy to understand information, a general conclusion can be drawn from the interviews that journalists had to tackle a difficult challenge which impacted their mental and physical health.

For the goals of the research that takes the challenges faced by journalism and journalists in the Republic of Macedonia during the COVID-19 pandemic as subject of interest, there are a few specific conclusions from the received and analysed data, which is to say, the following key challenges have been identified:

☞ changes to the way of work of journalists and media during the COVID-19 pandemic and reorganization of capacity;

- ☼ threatened mental and physical health of journalists;
- ☼ threatened socioeconomic situation of journalists;
- ☼ lack of relevant and credible sources of information;
- ☼ an influx of information, misinformation, half-truths and fake news;
- ☼ hate speech, stigmatization and discrimination;
- ☼ lack of transparency by relevant institutions and bodies
- ☼ lack of education and training of journalists on reporting during crisis.

Regarding the *general problems in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in the Republic of Macedonia from the journalists' point of view*, the following is important to be mentioned: inappropriate crisis and socioeconomic management, chaotic health management and insufficient hospital capacity, lack of experts and of unified stand and making political decisions from political interest. *The overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the journalism and journalists in the Republic of Macedonia* is seen in the change of the working conditions in journalism and in the media and the change in journalism as a profession, also in the endangerment of the psychophysical health of journalists and in dealing with the infodemic and misinformation and fake news, i.e. in finding relevant and credible sources of information. *The individual risks and challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic* include: work under much bigger pressure, a lot of stress, fear and anxiety, but also hate speech and discrimination from the public. It can be concluded that *the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of the journalists* was even more significant due to the specificity of their profession and that additional education and support by the organizations/institutions are needed so they can be more prepared and trained for working and reporting in such conditions, having the right knowledge, tools and mechanisms for that. From *the journalists' point of view*, there are also *positive aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic* and they refer to the fact that people had more time for themselves and their families, time to dedicate to themselves and their loved ones, but also to get closer to colleagues and share much more with them, and to reconsider some of their decisions and attitudes.

The goal of the research was to shed light and identify the challenges faced by journalists in the Republic of Macedonia during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the in-depth interviews with journalists contributed towards identifying all important aspects in as much detail as possible through the personal experiences of journalists faced with a global health crisis, but revealed many other aspects too, for example the positive aspects of the pandemic as well as problems, risks and challenges existing long before the global health crisis, but which have resurfaced with more force.

The journalists' personal experiences of their role during the pandemic showed that they have a strong sense of professional responsibility and duty to help the public by providing them with timely information that would serve to protect their health and their closest. In fact, their role in initiating, calling out and re-examining the responsibility of relevant state

institutions is notable, as is transmitting relevant sources (national and international) with opposing views.

Given the specific conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the specific nature of journalism as a profession, the interviews were carried out with a relatively small number of journalists, therefore the results are somewhat limited, but taking in mind the subject of interest and set goals of this research, the information received provide substantial data on the matter and lead to new insights and perspectives.

In this context, it is very important to point out that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the surface a lot of gaps in regard to the government treatment, the public and journalists and emphasized the need for systematic changes. Namely, the public's lack of confidence in the media and journalists was notable, the lack of education and training of journalists on reporting during crisis, the sensationalism and race for "clicks" by certain media, the absence of mechanisms by the authorities to deal with misinformation, fake news and hate speech, the non-transparency of relevant institutions and the lack of credible sources of information. All these aspects present very important topics for further research.

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THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND STATE INTERVENTIONISM IN THE FIELD OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Abstract

The field of public health by definition is a field of significant action and competencies of the state interventionism and state regulation. Public health systems, regardless of the ownership status of individual operators in the public health system, as a whole should and must be regulated and controlled by state institutions, bodies and organs. This competence and duty of the state regulatory bodies is sharpened to the extreme in conditions of epidemic and pandemic crisis. This is exactly the case with the current pandemic of COVID-19 disease, which is caused by the coronavirus SARS-COV-2. It is a virus that is spread through close interpersonal contacts, ie through aerosols. It is a virus that imposes a significant suspension on normal, established and vital interpersonal contacts. It is a virus that requires the suspension of elementary and essential social relations. The primary goal of this research, speaking more concretely and precisely, is to come to completely relevant and confirmed knowledge, experiences and data on the importance and necessity of the function of the state, ie state interventionism, in facing and overcoming epidemic and pandemic conditions. The aim is to point out, precisely on the concrete example of the epidemic and pandemic of the SARS-COV-2 virus and the disease COVID-19, the fact that the protection of public health is a classic state function, which, as such, can not be replaced by private or public-private initiative, an initiative that by definition has a commercial and profit meaning and purpose.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic; public health; state interventionism; collective immunity; mortality and lethality.

1. Introduction

The only real solution to overcome the epidemic and pandemic of the SARS-COV-2 virus and COVID-19 disease that can really be implemented at the current level of social and civilizational development is to achieve collective immunity. It can be achieved through natural and/or artificial immunity. State interventionism in the field of public health must achieve this practically “at any cost”. The usual and established way of social relations must be renewed. Including revitalization of economic life and its return, return of economic reproduction and economic development in circumstances and regime without serious anti-epidemic measures and without their negative impact on economic reproduction and economic development. This is the first task and duty that is considered in this text from the multitude of such separate tasks and duties of state interventionism in the field of public health in the existing epidemic and pandemic circumstances. The second such task and duty is to maintain the mortality rate, either in relation to the total number of infected or in relation to the number of inhabitants as a percentage of one million inhabitants, at the lowest possible social level and maximum control and balancing of all types of mortality factors and especially lethality. And as a third component of this text, of course to the extent permitted by this text, i.e. its purpose, the importance of the quality and functionality of military health in the overall national health system is considered, especially the example of the USA, i.e. the US military health (for example, the personal physicians of the presidents are, in principle and as a rule, military physicians), with a very brief addition through Serbian military health.¹

2. Establishment of collective immunity practically “at any cost”

The epidemic at the national level and the global SARS-COV-2 coronavirus pandemic (Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2) and the disease COVID-2 (Coronavirus disease 2019) are completely extraordinary situations in relation to the normal, civilized functioning of the whole of social relations. Because the virus is a respiratory virus that is transmitted through the most normal, civilized relations between people whose most diverse relationships make up the overall structure and network of social relations, ie the social community. That is the meaning of the insidiousness of overcoming the epidemic and pandemic caused by a respiratory virus: the shorter or longer suspension of the most normal social relations, those relations that represent the content and essence of today, of the current most diverse social life. Practically, this means that for a certain period of time a number of usual, everyday, established social relations that contain, represent and symbolize the meaning of existence and functioning of modern, civilized social relations, ie social communities should be interrupted. We are talking about the severance of direct, physical interpersonal relationships and their eventual, if it is technically and technologically feasible, replacement, replacement with virtual, indirect and non-physical platforms and media of communication. Something that would represent a virtual and provisional society and social

¹ This text was written in the first half of October 2021.

relations. Society and social relations that fundamentally degrade, deconstruct human nature, its spiritual, social and psychological ontology (Singh, 2020).

These findings in the most direct and essential way possible primarily refer to one of the two ideal typical ways of overcoming the epidemic, ie the pandemic. The ideally typical way that implies a practically complete moratorium, ie closure and deactivation of almost the entirety of modern, civilized social relations. And this is understood of a certain period of time which actually represents the period of two life cycles, two cycles of reproduction of the virus. For example, 14 plus 14 days for the Wuhan virus strain. This, among other things, at the level of substance, means that the citizens will generally not have contact with the respiratory virus, there will be no illnesses and deaths, because the virus will not be able to spread and multiply and will not be needed to establish collective immunity to the virus. But this projection is a purely ideal-type projection, it in reality can not be realized. It is not possible, in this particular case when it comes to the Wuhan strain, to be temporarily suspended or closed for 28 days practically the entire social life, to disable all social contacts outside the immediate families, bans on leaving homes, generally termination of work of the state and public administration, termination of the functioning of the entire economic life, with the exception of the functioning with a certain minimum required volume of the security bodies, of certain communal services, of the health system and the like (Rawson, 2020).

If this one of the two ideotypical ways to overcome the epidemic and the pandemic can not be realized real socially, civilizationally and economically, then it remains to implement the second ideotypical way to overcome the epidemic and pandemic crisis. This second way can practically be presented as a necessity for the state to enable the achievement of collective immunity of the population against the virus and thus to reduce the endemic and pandemic to endemic, if it is no longer really possible to completely eradicate the virus and the disease it causes. The achievement of collective immunity can indeed be projected, set up and implemented on and through multiple anti-epidemic pathways, but it must practically be implemented "at all costs". Because socially, civilizationally and economically some other real price can not be paid. In such situations, which are bordering on war or are practically already military circumstances, some necessary price must be paid (Kwok, 2020).

The process of achieving collective immunity in this particular epidemic and pandemic case can be divided into two parts or two stages. The part before the invention and use and the part after the invention and use of vaccines. And when specific drug and therapy do not exist. The part before the discovery and use of vaccines implies natural immunization for that part of the population for which it has been established with certainty that in principle and as a rule easily tolerates the virus, that the disease will not have a severe clinical picture and there will be no fatal cases. We emphasize: in principle and as a rule. These, specifically speaking, are young people, ie people with good immunity and without accompanying serious chronic diseases. For all other parts of the population, appropriate measures should be taken for a certain closure, ie for the suspension of specific segments and levels of established social life. Plus, measures should be taken, as preventive measures for the entire population. These are the "famous" masks, distance and a high level of personal and public hygiene. The part, or stage of the procedure for achieving collective immunity after the discovery and

use of vaccines has a qualitatively new dimension which directly refers to the conclusion that the achievement of collective immunity is imposed and implemented by state anti-epidemic and anti-pandemic interventionism practically as “at any cost”. Let us immediately “discover” that the price is the acquisition of the disease and the loss of human lives of those individuals and groups who will not accept the vaccination and/or will not respect the preventive measures. That is, those individuals and groups who will not accept to participate in achieving the necessary and inevitable collective immunity artificially. If they do not accept this, then they practically accept to participate in the achievement of collective immunity in a natural way (Castro Dopico, 2021). Because social life at a certain level of optimality must function, especially the life of economic production of goods and services must continue, the work of state and public administration must take place (Сагајковски/ Sasajkovski, 2020). As inhumane as this may be, it can be morbid, but it is a cost to pay if one does not want to participate in the efforts and processes to achieve collective immunity artificially. Because that collective immunity must be established practically “at any cost”. Its realization is the only social, civilizational and economic way and path to overcome the epidemic, ie pandemic, caused, it must be emphasized once again, by a respiratory virus that is transmitted by (close) interpersonal contacts, and which in itself is a factor to temporarily disrupt or even destroy the established civilizational relations of society. A virus that in real civilization can be defeated only by achieving collective immunity, majority or predominantly artificial and minority in a natural way. The essential difference is the price that will be paid: with more or less human lives.

3. The COVID-19, mortality, lethality and the possibilities of state interventionism

It is true that parity mortality from COVID-19 globally is relatively and comparatively small: only a few percent-about 2.1%. This is a percentage of the total number of confirmed positive cases of SARS-COV-2 virus. Of course, there are other important parity ways of calculating mortality. Just as it must be borne in mind that the finding that COVID-19 is low in mortality is a finding of the ratio of this mortality to the rate of mortality caused by SARS viruses, in 2002/03, and MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome), in 2012/13 (Lu, 2020). At the same time, when concluding the low mortality from COVID-19 disease, one most inevitably keep in mind the very difficult fact that elementary humanity requires not to forget that for the deceased and their loved ones that mortality rate is absolute-100%. That is why talking about low mortality as a certain global favorable circumstance is undoubtedly an expression of the brutal violation of humanity, of basic human morality. But calculating such higher or lower mortality rates is still inevitable in multidisciplinary health and disease research, including sociological/medical-sociological research on health and disease. This is about medical sociology or the sociology of medicine or the sociology of health and disease as one of the many special sociology in relation to general sociology. A special sociology that is quite neglected in the Macedonian sociological community, including in terms of the number of realized research projects, defended master theses and doctoral dissertations. It is necessary to emphasize here the fact that the definition of health and disease through biomedical definitions has long been predominantly abandoned. Biopsychosocial definitions

of the terms health and disease are dominant as two key terms in medical sociology. Such a definition is contained in the founding act of WHO (World Health Organization), back in 1946. (WHO, 1946)

The basic and elementary humanity in the thematic framework of this text strongly urges the state interventionism to be primarily and most essentially aimed at achieving the best results in the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 disease. Therefore, mortality data, especially mortality data more closely defined as hospital mortality, in the strongest, most appropriate and most direct way possible show the success of state interventionism in dealing with the most severe, vitally destructive consequences of the pandemic. Of course, the series of factors that as objective factors, regardless of the skill and success of state interventionism, in this context as a definite and relevant subjective factor, strongly determine the data on total mortality and lethality must not be neglected. This indication must be constantly taken into account when analyzing and comparing mortality and lethality data between individual countries and regions. In this context, it must be specified that when we talk about the skill and success of state interventionism as a concrete subjective factor, it must be analytically intersected with a series of objective factors that inevitably affect mortality and lethality and which primarily refer to the very real situation the current general health condition of the population and the current real condition with the development, quality and competence of the national health system, i.e. the public health care system (Pota, 2020).

The COVID-19 mortality data from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine will be used below. And it is a deliberate choice. On the one hand, not to use data that can be criticized as politically induced and (mis)used. So, data from state institutions and bodies will not be used. On the contrary, data that have indisputable academic, scientific and professional dignity and credibility and which are from, according to S. P. Huntington, Western civilization provenance, which is our, Macedonian reference side of civilization identity. In this context, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine is/still is the most respected academic, educational and research institution in the field of public health. Through these data at this place in this text we will focus specifically on emphasizing the Macedonian high mortality rate. It has previously been pointed out that globally, comparatively and relatively, the mortality rate from COVID-19 is low. Low when compared to mortality rates achieved with several similar diseases caused by coronaviruses. Thus, mortality in 2002/03 with the SARS coronavirus was 10% -11%, and with MERS in 2012/13 the mortality rate was almost 30%. Among other things, because of this high mortality, then the epidemic did not develop into a real pandemic. Namely, then the virus, killing its human reservoir, to which it passed, as its unnatural reservoir because the corona virus is a zoonosis, destroyed itself. This is one of the problems with this current corona virus. Namely, its small mortality allows it to stay for a long time in its humane, unnatural reservoir and to multiply there, while, quite normally, to mutate (Fani, 2020). Although SARS-COV-2 is a large virus, it has a large genome and therefore mutates slowly. Influenza viruses, for example, mutate four times faster. Or, the Variola vera virus that has not mutated at all. When talking about mortality rates in epidemic or pandemic conditions, just for the sake of comparison, let me mention that measles/Variola vera mortality theoretically ranges from 40% to 60%. There are cases, in some countries, that mortality has reached up to 80%. In March and April 1972

in the then Yugoslavia the mortality rate was stopped at 22%, but then, this fact must be infinitely emphasized, in just three weeks 18 million people were vaccinated. Mortality from vaccine side effects was 1% (Ristanovic 2016). In any case, one must know and in no case forget that vaccination has an effect and makes sense if it is massive and if it is fast. The virus must not be allowed to reproduce and change, becoming more contagious but, fortunately, not more pathogenic.

Following this specific and certainly necessary introduction, we come to the specific global data of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, on October 6, 2021, given that this data is updated almost every hour.(Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, 2021). According to these data, the mortality rate from COVID-19 disease in relation to the number of confirmed positive cases of SARS-COV-2 globally is around 2.04%, while the Macedonian mortality rate is 3.49%. Out of a total of 186 countries, territories and other specific entities, (only) twenty-five have higher mortality than Macedonia. Vanuatu has the highest mortality 25%, followed by MC Zaandam 22.22%, Yemen 19.02%, Peru 9.5% and so on. Of the countries around Macedonia, BiH has 4.53%, Montenegro 1.47%, Bulgaria 4.17%, Slovenia 1.54%, Croatia 2.12%, Kosovo 1.85%, Greece 2.24%, Serbia 0.87%, Albania 1.58%. Certain reservations may be made about the validity of this data, but the fact is that these data have gained a certain academic, professional and scientific legitimacy upon their acceptance by the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. These data should later be compared with the data on excess mortality, ie excessive mortality in those countries and in those data to look for certain cases of mortality from COVID-19 that are presented somehow differently.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to obtain data on hospital mortality, ie mortality in patients who are treated in hospital due to the severity of the clinical picture. This applies including to the Macedonian case and the Macedonian experience with this epidemic and pandemic. There are calculations made on separate, meaning incomplete official, state data that the mortality rate in Macedonia is 28%, meaning the mortality rate in all patients regardless of the severity of the clinical picture. The mortality of patients with moderate-severe and severe clinical images, more specifically the hospital mortality is calculated at 44%, and the mortality in COVID intensive care units is more than 90%.(Facebook, Trajkovski, 2021)

It is indisputable that for multidisciplinary, including medical-sociological, analyzes and studies of the statics and dynamics of the epidemic, ie the pandemic, it is more appropriate and clearer, in addition to announcing the number of deaths, not to publish primary daily data on the number of tested and positive, including due to the excessive sensitivity of PCR tests and due to the rather large number of infected who will not develop disease and will not show symptoms, but primarily to publish data on the number of patients, separately for patients with mild, with moderate-severe and with a severe clinical picture, including the number of patients in the intensive care unit, as well as data on the transition of patients with mild to moderate-severe clinical picture and the transition of patients with moderate-severe to severe clinical picture. The statics and dynamics of the sick, especially the hospitalized sick is the most essential data for multidisciplinary academic studies and acquisition of academic knowledge, including for academic medical-sociological research and conclusions.

Undoubtedly, when it comes to the high mortality in Macedonia, especially when the epidemic is overcome and when it goes down to the endemic, i.e. when the necessary collective immunity is achieved, the various necessary means and resources will have to be found for scientifically complete seriousness and theoretically and methodologically absolutely credible multidisciplinary research, as well as for preparation of master theses and doctoral dissertations. Including sociological, ie medical-sociological. Certainly, such a high mortality in Macedonia is influenced by a number of various factors. That high mortality, ie the piety towards the dead requires with complete scientific integrity and dignity to explore the individual packages of factors. It should not be forgotten so as not to be repeated. In the animal world there are a number of coronaviruses, a number of 1,400 coronaviruses are mentioned, zoonotic viruses waiting to be transferred to another species-the human species. The SARS-COV-2 is the fifth coronavirus to cross (Prince, 2021). It is one of the narrowest circle of primary and essential tasks of state interventionism in the field of public health in the context of the current epidemic and pandemic.

4. The COVID-19 Pandemic and aspects of the importance of military health in the USA (and in Serbia)

Perhaps at first glance this part of the text one can look at and understand as a separate part that has no place in this text. However, there is a strong opinion and conviction in this text that the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic, ie the US experience with it as a national epidemic COVID-19, and the individual palliative quite briefly elements of the US public health intervention complex, fully deserves to be highlighted as part of the content of this text. This is due, in part, to the fact that the USA still globally radiates and practices the highest levels of hard and soft power, including scientific and applied health power, as well as due to the fact that the US health system, especially at the tertiary level, is conceptually and in principle based on the free market of health care and services (Maxey, 2015). We must also keep in mind the fact that the now former President of the United States, Trump, was diagnosed with COVID-19, and was treated not by US civilian health but by US military health. At the same time, in the USA there is the institution Physician to the President, who is the director of the White House Medical Unit, and which Physician to the President is not in principle a prominent doctor professor from the ranks of civil health and the American civil medical academic community, but is in principle he is high medical officer-colonel or general, i.e. admiral (Jones, 2020). This is a part of the text that is thematically close to the field of political epidemiology.

But and the American system of public health is certainly and inevitably a state system of public health through which the lines of state interventionism extend. In this context speaking, The National Institutes of Health (NIH), there are 27 such institutes and additional centers, are the primary structure in charge of public health care. In these pandemic, ie epidemiological conditions in the USA, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) appeared in the first place of professional and general public interest from all these institutes in a completely normal and logical way. Together with its director

for many decades, since 1984, Anthony S. Fauci (today he is 82 years old). At the same time, by President Biden Fauci has been appointed Chief Medical Advisor to the President. This post was introduced by Trump and his choice for that post was, was his Physician to the President, Ronny Jackson, who in fact Trump inherited from President Obama, and who was then unsuccessfully nominated by Trump as United States secretary of veterans affairs. The Ronny Jackson's successor was Sean Conley, a very young medical colonel, born in 1980, but also a war veteran from Afghanistan. Conley has gained controversy over Trump's treatment over allegations that he did not give accurate or completely accurate and exhaustive information about the president's health at press conferences. President Biden has named Retired Medical Colonel Kevin O'Connor as his Physician to the President, who was his Physician to the Vice-President at the time Biden was Vice-President of the United States. This sequence of the text must be concluded by emphasizing that the personal physicians of US presidents are, in principle and as a rule, senior medical officers (Bryant, 2013).

In the USA public health system, two other leading institutions are The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which quite normally and logically play an extremely important role in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, it must be strongly emphasized that Trump, in addition to all these permanent and leading institutions of the USA public health system, has established the function of White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator, Deborah Birx. It is clear that Trump did this to isolate Fauci, with whose views, recommendations and proposals he did not agree. But incumbent President Biden has also appointed his own COVID-19 coordinator, Jeffrey Zients (who is not a physician but an economist, a fiscal policies specialist, and who was President Obama's fiscal policy adviser), means as a counterweight to Fauci, although Fauci was promoted to Chief Medical Advisor to the President.

Trump's short-lived, incredibly short-lived COVID-19 disease, a virtually four-day illness, in addition to capturing the attention of the general public, not just the medical and scientific community, for the treatment he received, but it made quite obvious the fact that U.S. presidents generally have military physicians as personal physicians, and also strongly drew the attention of the general public to the health facility to which Trump went, or was taken, to be treated. That health facility is actually one of the U.S. Army's most prominent military health facilities-the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, formerly the Walter Reed Naval Medical Center (Murray, 2010). Even the medical council that treated the president was not made up of the best physicians gathered from all the medical institutions in the USA, but was made up, except for one doctor from John Hopkins University Medical School-Brian Garibaldi, strictly of military physicians (including personal physician Sean Conley) by Walter Reed: CDR Sean Conley, MD Col Sean N. Dooley, MD Capt John Hodgson, MD CDR Wesley R. Campbell, MD LTC Jason M. Blaylock, MD Robert Browning, MD Brian Garibaldi, MD LT Juliana Lavopa, RN CDR Megan Nasworthy, RN (CNN, 2021).

This text will not lose anything of its thematic compactness if a very brief digression is made in this place, which refers to our closest neighborhood-Serbia. There, the most influential political and social figures were treated by military health, for example the then Patriarch Irinej (Gavrilovic), as well as, for example, General Zoran Stankovic, the leading Serbian

professor of forensic medicine and forensics and former Minister of health and defense. So, they were not treated in the central civilian medical institution specialized in the treatment of infectious diseases-the University Clinic for Infectious Diseases within the Clinical Center of Serbia. But the essence and point of this example lies in the fact that the authorities there have obviously made the strictest possible decision: the SARS-COV-2 virus and COVID-19 disease must not enter, through virus-positive patients, the central military medical facility, the Military Medical Academy (MMA). Thus, no patients positive for SARS-COV-2 or COVID-19 were treated at the MMA. Instead, one military health facility was soon revitalized and transformed into the COVID Military Hospital Karaburma, with commander medical colonel. The most influential COVID-19 patients, including the then patriarch, were treated there.

In any case, the importance of military health for national health systems, i.e. for public health systems, needs to be explored very thoroughly, including within medical sociology.

5. Conclusion

So, in this text, three fields, components or aspects of state interventionism in the field of public health in conditions of epidemic and pandemic with respiratory coronavirus are perceived:

1. The need to establish collective immunity at practically “at any cost”, because only in this way can the epidemic and pandemic situation be realistically overcome. Whereas state interventionism is put in a situation to consciously clash with a certain number of deaths, practically those who do not want to participate in the achievement of collective immunity artificially, which means that these people have practically chosen to participate in the achievement of collective immunity in a natural way.
2. The mortality from COVID-19 is much lower than mortality in similar epidemic, but not pandemic, conditions with SARS in 2003 and MERS in 2013. But there is a significant level of difference in mortality rates from country to country, as well as in relation to the average global mortality. The task of state interventionism, together with truly independent researchers, is on a very real and objective level to detect and identify the complex of various factors that led to a specific national high mortality rate, especially hospital mortality.
3. In this epidemic and pandemic situation, too, it has been shown that military health, more specifically in the USA, as well as in Serbia, has the treatment of a top health segment within the overall national health system in general. As an illustration of this conclusion, it can be pointed out that in principle and as a rule, the personal physicians of American presidents are military physicians, medical colonels or medical generals or admirals, and that then-President Trump was treated in a military medical center-Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

4. The experiences of this epidemic and pandemic unequivocally show and argue that in future such epidemics and pandemics the competencies and powers of state interventionism are crucial. Public health has always and everywhere been a function of the state and its interventionism. The private or private-state initiative can in no way be a substitute for the treatment of public health as an elementary and thorough state function. The protection of public health can in no way be left to any commercial or market law and interest. Simply because the protection of public health must not in any case and under any circumstances be dependent on the dictates of commercial and market interest.
5. This text, inter alia, primarily points to the need for further research into the emerging weaknesses of the functioning of existing global and national public health systems. Weaknesses that were primarily expressed as non-intervention of state bodies in charge of public health protection in the use of the epidemic and pandemic to satisfy private commercial interests and goals. Including by private, ie non-state operators of medical and health services. Both at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

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CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC REFLECTIONS ON THE INITIATIVES OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse and determine the potential of religious communities in Macedonia for achievement of particular sustainable development goals (SDGs), and what is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the activities of religious communities that correspond to the these goals. Given the commitment to inclusive partnerships at all levels (global, regional, national and local) as a necessary condition for obtaining these goals, it is not surprising that the support of religious leaders is emphasized in all global initiatives for successful realization of the SDGs. The foundation of these partnerships built upon common principles and values, is the initial basis for emphasizing common moral principles in religious teachings that are directly correlated with SDGs. Considering the scope of these goals, the focus of the analysis in this paper is directed towards the first two goals – no poverty and zero hunger. Thereby, these goals will be identified in the teachings of Christianity and Islam that is the forms of manifestation of these goals in the stated religious teachings, as well as their significance in these religions. In addition, initiatives of the religious communities regarding the stated goals after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic will be pointed out. To meet this objective, analysis was applied in both cases, with the first part analyzing the key aspects of the Holy Books of Christianity and Islam, where the importance of the

indicated goals in the teachings of both religions, was determined based on the views of prominent theologians, as well as their interpretations of the texts. While, the second part is a thematic analysis of the answers from the semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives of religious communities in Macedonia.

Keywords: sustainable development goals, religious communities, humanitarian initiatives, COVID 19

1. Introduction

From 25 to 27 September 2015 at United Nations Headquarters in New York, all Heads of State and Government and High Representatives unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda that consisted 17 Sustainable Development Goals, containing 169 global targets and 232 indicators to measure progress in implementation, and a set of follow-up and review principles and mechanisms. It was developed as a global action plan whose objective is to transform the world over the next 15 years. The 2030 Agenda was built on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to end extreme poverty, protect the planet and ensure peace and prosperity (UN, 2015). At the same time, the commitment of its creators was to provide a universal, transformative, ambitious, shared and common vision for all humankind, all religions and cultures, and all creatures on earth. And while the MDGs had been unilaterally set within the UN with little to no consultation with any stakeholders, SDGs were conceived as the largest participatory process, being developed through multi-stakeholder consultation (Tomalin, 2019).

In the consultation process, as well as in the implementation phase, the need and importance of support from religious communities was recognized. This recognition stemmed from the fact that over 80 per cent of people worldwide identify as members of a religious or spiritual community (UNEP, 2016), which in turn influence these people's views of the world around them. Religious practices, beliefs and values are deeply intertwined in the daily lives of believers, while leaders of churches, mosques, temples and other religious communities play an important role in shaping attitudes, opinions, behaviors and dealing with societal challenges. Thereby, a clear appeal was made to the religious leaders and organizations for their active involvement in the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the SDG in their communities, at their own rates and in mutual cooperation. But long before this call was made, religious leaders had launched various initiatives to protect the environment. It is important to note that religious leaders were among the early community organizers who initiated collective efforts on forest conservation, long before the role of forests in climate change mitigation was acknowledged. Hence, as expected, this appeal was immediately supported by religious leaders worldwide, whereby in September 2015 in Bristol, faith leaders, representing 24 belief traditions from around the world, including Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism and Shintoism, declared their support in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNEP, 2016). In addition, on 28 November 2015, at COP21 in Paris (few days before adoption of the Paris Agreement), religious leaders and representatives of faith-based organizations participated in an interfaith event for climate justice. At this event, declarations for climate justice were submitted, signed by more than 1.7 million people, demanding a fair and ambitious climate deal at the forthcoming United Nations climate summit (CIDSE, 2015).

This was followed by the initiative of 33 religious leaders, who in support of the 22nd Conference of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in November 2016 presented the "COP22 Interfaith Statement", in which faith communities call on their followers, individually and collectively, to "act on the reality of the climate crisis" (COP22, 2016).

2. No Poverty – Zero Hunger

Considering the scope of SDGs, the focus of the analysis in this paper is directed towards the first two goals:

- No poverty – to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. It envisions the eradication of extreme poverty, as well as the implementation of appropriate social protection systems and measures for all people, with special emphasis on the poorest and most vulnerable. In order to encourage active participation, this goal also envisages the provision of equal rights and access to economic resources, basic services, natural resources, as well as ownership and control over land and other forms of property, technology and financial services. In addition, it stands for supporting of communities exposed to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters. Finally, emphasizes the need to create sound political frameworks at national, regional and international levels, as well as mobilization of resources as crucial processes to support poverty eradication actions (UNDP, 2015).
- Zero hunger – to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition, and to ensure access, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food. Achieving this goal implies promotion of sustainable agriculture practices that increase productivity and production, as well as strengthen the capacity for adaptation to climate change and disasters. Thereby, it is necessary to increase investment in rural infrastructure, agricultural research, extension services and technology development. However, food security and improved nutrition will be unattainable if trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets are not corrected and prevented. It is therefore necessary for policy makers to ensure the proper functioning of food markets and to facilitate timely access to market information (UNDP, 2015).

The relevance and justification for setting these two goals for this study, arises from several findings regarding the current situation in Macedonia. The analysis of the State Statistics Office of the Republic of North Macedonia (STAT, 2019) from 2019, on the indicators for monitoring the level of achievement of SDGs, states that 41.6% of the population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Also, 22.2% of the population lives in income poverty, while 31.1% of the population is materially deprived. Furthermore, 14.3% of the population lives in poor dwelling conditions, and 24% of the population is unable to keep their home adequately warm.

According to the analysis of the World Population Review for 2020 (World Population Review, 2021), measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and complemented by Gross National Income (GNI) per capita (which gives a better indication of how that nation's individual citizens are faring), Macedonia ranks sixth in terms of poverty in Europe.

As for the connection between the activities of religious communities and achievement of these two goals, there are a number of findings throughout history. Regarding this connection, Emma Tomalin points out that: "religious traditions have always played a central role in supporting those experiencing poverty, through service delivery as well as the provision

of spiritual resources that provide mechanisms for resilience at both the individual and community level.” (Tomalin, 2018). In doing so, she clarifies that sometimes such activities involve those who are motivated by their religion to help other members of their religious community, but religious practitioners also often give their support to those of other religions. A brief overview of the history of religious communities’ involvement in humanitarian work is provided by Elizabeth Ferris, who states that:” long before international humanitarian law was formalized in treaty law, individuals and faith communities provided assistance to those afflicted by natural disaster, persecution, uprooting and war. The theme of justice for the poor, the marginalized and the alien is central to the Hebrew scriptures. The persecuted often sought sanctuary in temples and cities of refuge and, in the later medieval period, monasteries were often places of refuge and hospitality for strangers. Catholic orders were established to provide charity to the poor, medical care to the sick, education for children and hospitality to strangers. In the Orthodox and Protestant traditions, a special category of lay ministry, the diaconate was established to carry out Christian service (Greek word *diakonia*) which continues to be viewed as central to the mission of the church. This service to others was based not only on Christian values of charity and mercy but was also rooted in the belief in the absolute value of the human person” (Ferris, 2005).

As an adjunct in clarifying the nature of the relationship between religion and global efforts to achieve these goals, we enclose Tomalin’s analysis of the three phases of religion-development engagement (Tomalin, 2018). Explaining these phases, she states that they are not clear-cut phases, and there is overlap between them. But their significance is reflected in the identification of the shifting engagement between religions and global development institutions over time, as well as in depicting of the religious roots of the modern secular Western development project. In the first phase, which Tomalin calls the ‘pre-secular’ or the ‘integrated phase’, which is during the colonial era, religion and poverty reduction were intimately entwined. Thereby, faith actors had a more central and recognized role in social welfare and poverty reduction in contrast to the role they have played since the mid-20th century. According to Tomalin, contemporary global development project is a legacy of this, and therefore has a religious roots that are now obscured.

The post-World War II period was marked by the rise of secularism in the Global North and the diminishing influence that religious values and sources of authority have on individuals and the state. This situation, according to Tomalin, heralds the second phase, which she calls the ‘secular’ or the ‘fragmented’ phase. This phase refers to the era of the global development industry which is based on the normative secularist position that modernization will lead to secularization. In doing so, the role that different religious traditions continued to play in local development was marginalized. This phase is followed by the third phase, which is characterized by the ‘turn to religion’ from the early 2000s. According to Tomalin, the revitalization of religion has led to a greater voice for faith actors in public development debates and initiatives, and an ‘apparent turn to religion’ by global development actors. In doing so, she points out that since the early 2000s there has been a marked increase in interest from secular global development institutions, including development donors and NGOs, in funding and working with faith actors around poverty reduction (Tomalin, 2018).

Given the religious affiliation of the majority of the population in Macedonia, this paper covered the two largest religious communities, the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Religious Community.

3. Position and activities of religious communities in Macedonia after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic had a specific reflection on the religious life of faithful all over the world, and consequently on the religious life in Macedonia. In our previous papers on this topic (Blazhevski, 2021, Gjorgjevski, 2021), it was noticed that despite the introduction of numerous restrictive measures for prevention and protection against the spread of coronavirus, which in many cases, were contrary to the religious practices of religious communities, they clearly and unequivocally support the measures. Given the specific circumstances that the crisis arose in time just before and during the major Christian and Islamic holidays, the larger religious communities in Macedonia mainly adhered to the state decisions for dealing with the crisis. In doing so, most of the festive services were held only by the clergy, while the usual public holiday gatherings were hindered, as well as family and private holiday visits and gatherings. It was also noted that apart from the joint statement from the meeting of the heads of churches and religious communities in Macedonia, initiated by the director of the Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Groups just before New Year's Eve, neither before nor after this statement were there any other joint statements (Blazhevski, 2021).

In the aforementioned papers, we also analyzed the representation and position of the media regarding religious communities that is religious practices since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, special attention was given to the situation in social media, given that health epidemics typically generate bursts of attention on social media. In doing so, it was pointed out that: "that the religious element was heavily exploited in the media and the public, highlighting manifestations of anti-religious intolerance stemming from non-religious circles. This tendency was transmitted on social media, to which religious communities reacted with short statements, or there was no reaction at all. But these reactions, as well as the amended and corrected statements by religious communities, were not sufficiently represented in the media" (Gjorgjevski, 2021).

4. Empirical research

4.1. Methodological approach

In terms of research methods, this research is a qualitative study with thematic analysis of responses from semi-structured interviews. The justification and relevance of the chosen methodological approach to this topic is also emphasized by Bryman, who points out that:

“qualitative research tries to observe social life in terms of processes” (Bryman, 2012). The research design in this project is cross-sectional, whereby the collection of empirical records took place in a precisely determined time interval, from September 10 to November 15, 2021. In this study, we used an on-line individual interview as a method for collecting empirical data. The sample was purposefully stratified and the respondents from the religious collectivities were persons who have completed a higher theological education. Also, within the religious community to which the respondents belonged, they held a position from which they had insight into humanitarian activities and initiatives, or were directly involved in some of them. The prepared interview was sent by e-mail to approximately 25 representatives of religious collectivities. Only 15 respondents completed the interview and returned it to the research team. Accordingly, the research sample was composed of 15 respondents.

The basics of the interview was explained to the potential respondents in the e-mail which was sent to them, as well as in the interview. The interviewees were previously informed on the basic information about the project and the interview, and they were asked for informative consent for interviewing, which was obtained. All interviewed persons were guaranteed anonymity, as well as adequate protection of the information and views expressed in the answers, and of course their keeping, processing, and interpretation or presentation.

4.2. Data analysis

After the data collection, a thematic analysis of the interview responses was performed, which was aimed at generating data themes. The approach used in the data analysis was inductive, with categories and themes derived from the interviews. In doing so, the qualitative analysis of the selected questions focused on interpreting the responses of the interviewees. Thereby, from the thematic analysis of the data, the following themes have been defined: Orientation of humanitarian activities towards all citizens; Aggravated organization of humanitarian activities; Supporting greater engagement of religious communities in the implementation of SDGs; Posting on social media vs. turning to traditional media about the activities of religious communities; and Moral education of young people.

The analysis of the mentioned topics that arose from the indicated questions was in accordance with the established goals of this study for contextual consideration and understanding of the mentioned topics (Bryman, 2012). Additionally, the quotations of the respondents were used as: proof of their views, better understanding of the key concepts, illustration, and they are in function of the findings and conclusions of this paper. In certain categories, there is saturation or repetition to some extent, which was noticeable during the stratification of the answers. Also, despite the presentation of the themes as discrete, there is overlap between them.

5. Thematic analysis of empirical materials

5.1. Orientation of humanitarian activities towards all citizens

The formation of this topic was imposed by the answers of the respondents regarding the humanitarian activities of the religious communities to which they belong. Although none of the questions asked the respondents about the selectivity in humanitarian activities, that is whether the humanitarian activities of their religious communities were aimed exclusively at believers. The answers of the respondents immediately emphasize that the humanitarian activities are aimed at all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation: "The humanitarian activities initiated by our religious community refer to: help to poor families, people in need, orphans, regardless of their religious affiliation." (9); "The Islamic religious community organizes humanitarian activity for all citizens, regardless of their religious and ethnic affiliation" (4); "In accordance with the great desire and enthusiasm of our Metropolitan, everyone who turned to us or who we had heard needed help was helped" (12)

Also, this orientation of humanitarian activities was emphasized on the issues that referred to the period before, as well as to the period after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic: "We have a great tradition and strong desire to help the poor" (2); "The Macedonian Orthodox Church has always cared for its faithful children, but also for all those who have asked for help"(10).

The emphasis on this orientation of the humanitarian activities of the religious communities was noted in almost all respondents. Also, they maintained this orientation in the future, regardless of the course of the COVID-19 pandemic: "... daily financial assistance for the poor has been established, which is our permanent commitment" (7); "All temples throughout the diocese constantly respond to requests for help from: poor, sick, old and frail people, people with disabilities, but also people with addictions"(3).

5.2. Aggravated organization of humanitarian activities

The introduction of a number of restrictive measures to prevent and protect against the spread of coronavirus has necessitated the need for religious communities to adapt to these measures and protocols. This was followed by a period of adaptation to protocols and protection measures, as well as reorganization of the humanitarian activities of the religious communities: "We adapted to the circumstances and recommendations of the institutions and there was no delay in humanitarian activities" (1). In doing so, most of the respondents state that they faced difficulties after the introduction of the initial protocols and measures for protection: "There was a change, in terms of the way the humanitarian activity was organized, due to the observance of the anti-Covid 19 measures" (15). This has also led to a decrease in the intensity of humanitarian activities at the beginning of the pandemic: "The new conditions and measures led to a change in the dynamics of the implementation of activities." (10).

However, the respondents point out that this did not cause any delay in any of the previously initiated humanitarian activities. In addition, partial initiatives were launched for the provision of protection equipment.” The only change occurred in the part of our donation for the needs of the hospital, with the supply of medical material for protection from COVID-19. All other activities, as far as I know, were carried out, perhaps only with less intensity.” (6).

Most of the respondents state that the new situation with the coronavirus pandemic did not reduce the response of the believers to the humanitarian activities. Although, the restrictive measures and the ban on the movement of citizens during 2020, reduced the opportunities for their active participation.” All the believers who helped before the pandemic, continued to participate in all activities” (8); “The response was at the same level as before, but due to the measures, the engagement was reduced.” (11).

5.3. Supporting greater engagement of religious communities in the implementation of SDGs

In the analysis of the answers, the respondents were united by the position of support for greater engagement of religious communities in the implementation of SDGs:” They need to engage much more and initiate cooperation with all interested parties” (5); “They need to be more engaged, but we do not have the opportunities and sufficient knowledge for that.” (13). In addition, for some of the activities, the respondents listed their religious communities as bearers, while for some of the activities, they propose the inclusion of religious communities with appropriate assistance, while the bearers would be the state institutions:” ...assistance from state institutions is needed” (2); “Coordination and professional support by state institutions is needed” (12).

Some of the respondents, in addition to helping reduce hunger and poverty, point to other areas of SDGs in which they could provide adequate support. The most commonly mentioned areas are: nature protection, health protection, education, care for the well-being of people:” Religious communities as Divine institutions, in which the people have more confidence, should be more engaged in the processes of sustainable development. As influential institutions, religious communities should be engaged in other activities related to the SDGs (not only in reducing hunger and poverty), but especially in educational processes, in nature protection, in the preservation of health, in respecting and caring for people, because all these principles are already contained in the teachings of the faith as the highest principles, as a relation to God’s creation.” (14).

A small number of respondents, despite the clearly emphasized support, when asked about the key humanitarian activities in which their religious community could be involved, some of the respondents did not state a specific activity or area. However, they state that this stems from the insufficient knowledge and experience in all segments of this issue. Therefore, they point to the support from state institutions, that is cooperation with appropriate staff who have knowledge and years of experience in this issue:” Construction of housing for the

poor, construction of kitchens specifically for the poor as Objectives to be taken by state institutions, where religious communities would help with their contribution.” (3).

5.4. Posting on social media vs. turning to traditional media about the activities of religious communities

The need for analysis of reporting on humanitarian activities of religious communities arose from the findings of the analysis of the position and activities of religious communities after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic (Blazhevski, 2021). In these analyzes, the reflections on the public opinion regarding the position and activities of the religious communities were also considered. In addition, it was pointed out that the religious element was heavily exploited in the media and the public, highlighting manifestations of anti-religious intolerance stemming from non-religious circles. This tendency was transmitted on social media, although public interest in religious practices has drastically decreased over time. The access of the media has a great impact on the acceptance and support of humanitarian activities of religious communities by citizens. It would also affect the motivation of religious communities to continue and expand the spectrum of humanitarian initiatives.

During the analysis of the answers of the respondents, three groups of answers were formed, ie three different approaches of the religious communities regarding the reporting of their humanitarian activities.

Most of the respondents stated that they did not notify the traditional media, but posted on social media about the humanitarian activities of their religious communities. The most common were the posts on Facebook, while at the same time, the posts on their websites followed:” It was only posted on social media” (9); “As for all other activities, it was posted on social media, that is on our Facebook page” (7); “It was posted on our website and on the FB page of our diocese” (6).

A small number of religious communities, in addition to posting on social media and their websites, have reported on their humanitarian activities to some of the traditional media, especially to television stations. Most of them submitted notifications to the local media, for which they expressed interest. While the initiative towards the larger national media was generally absent, as well as the interest on their part:” We were covered by the media only by the local media: Radio and Television Kiss and the website Tetovo info” (11); “Notification was sent to all media that were interested in our activities” (4). Characteristic of all these respondents is the impression that the media reported correctly and impartially regarding their humanitarian activities:” They reported impartially and truthfully” (11); “I consider that the reporting was correct and professional” (15).

Very few respondents stated that they did not submit a notification on the humanitarian activities of their religious communities to any of the traditional media, nor did they post on social media about these activities. In doing so, none of the respondents gave a specific

reason for such an approach: “No, we did not inform the media” (1); “We did not submit any notification on the activities to the media, nor was it posted on any of the social media” (8).

5.5. Moral education of young people

Similar to the topic of the orientation of humanitarian actions, this topic arose from the space in the questionnaire provided for a question or topic that was not listed, but the respondents consider it relevant and would like to express their opinion. The position towards the need for moral education of young people prevails among most of the respondents, and some of them state these thoughts in the context of the answers to some of the questions. Thereby, this position prevails among the respondents who, in addition to reducing poverty and hunger, point out specific areas of SDGs in which they could provide adequate support.

In doing so, they build on this attitude, emphasizing the impact of education on raising environmental awareness. Here they emphasize the positive benefits of getting acquainted with religious teachings, pointing out that young people through them would be formed into personalities who will have respect for people and nature:” Islamic teaching commands and demands peace, mutual assistance and solidarity, hospitality, mercy and other high values.’(4); “The Church will never teach children to disrespect their neighbors, or nature” (14).

Also, the majority of respondents point out the neglect of moral dimension in education, emphasizing the essential connection between religion and morality, and recognition of fundamental beliefs and moral values in religion as a strong incentive in rising of environmental awareness:” The church can only give children a good moral foundation, the foundation of which will be love, and when children have a sound basis, it is much easier to build themselves into healthy and reasonable people, who will always act according to the moral Christian principles in relation to each of God’s creations.” (5); “I will concentrate my opinion on this issue at one point, which I think is of the utmost importance nowadays in complete moral erosion. That is the education. I think it is difficult to change older people, although it is not impossible, but it is still better to prevent than to treat (as the saying goes). If we all work together, of course the pedagogues, the ecclesiastical persons and the parents in general, then we can say with confidence that this region of ours will bear good fruits, which, in turn, will contribute to many things in all aspects of our lives, including the achievement of SDGs.” (13).

6. Conclusion

Today’s challenges facing humanity, such as poverty, climate change, clean energy and pollution will not be solved only through a reliance on technology and science, even if they were equitably available to all communities. Religion is important determinant of human behavior, behavioral change and moral responsibility. Agenda 2030 provides a

framework for broad cooperation with stakeholders in various social spheres. Furthermore, it is recommended more active involvement of religious leaders and organizations in the implementation of the Agenda 2030, that is the achievement of sustainable development goals. This perception is supported in a number of official strategies and documents, which recognize that religious principles also encourage caregiving and donation to the poor and the needy as an essential obligation of those who possess a minimum level of wealth. In doing so, these reports particularly emphasize that religious communities can significantly contribute to ending extreme poverty, leaving no one behind when addressing multi-dimensional poverty and related challenges such as youth and minorities, and access for all to basic services.

All religions recognize in one way or the other that poverty, exclusion and discrimination are social, humanitarian, and security issues. The primary message of Christianity and Islam is a call for improvement and integration of the poor into society and elimination of all obstacles and inequalities for full individual development. But, The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound effect on religion and believers. The interaction between religious traditions, religious freedom and responsibilities in public health is complex, intertwining the cultural and legal dimensions of social reality. The 'new normal' also affected humanitarian activities organized by religious communities.

The analysis of the answers, confirms that introduction of a number of restrictive measures to prevent and protect against the spread of coronavirus caused difficulties in organization of the humanitarian activities of the religious communities. This led to a decrease in the intensity of humanitarian activities at the beginning of the pandemic. However, this did not cause any delay in any of the previously initiated humanitarian activities, nor did it reduce the response of the believers to the humanitarian activities.

According to the presented answers it can be seen that humanitarian activities of the religious communities were not aimed exclusively at believers, that is almost all respondents emphasize that these activities were aimed at all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation. Also, this orientation of humanitarian activities was emphasized on the issues that referred to the period before, as well as to the period after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the answers processed it can be concluded that according to the majority of the respondents, religious communities support their greater engagement in the implementation of SDGs. Among the most commonly mentioned areas are: nature protection, health protection, education, and care for the well-being of people. This position is followed by the emphasis on the need for moral education of young people. Thereby, positive benefits of getting acquainted with religious teachings are highlighted, as a strong incentive to raise environmental awareness.

From the analysis of the empirical evidence it can also be concluded that the use of social media is becoming more prevalent in religious communities, despite the impression of the respondents that the traditional media reported correctly and impartially regarding their humanitarian activities.

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RISK MITIGATION, RISK MANAGEMENT ON FLOODS IN POLOG REGION, NORTH MACEDONIA

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Abstract

Floods are associated with extreme precipitation events and have a significant influence on society. Flood events are now reported more frequently than ever before due to the increasing spread of human settlement and development activities in urbanized areas. The changes in climate and hydrologic flood patterns in Europe and in the Western Balkans clearly indicate that there is a growing need to assess the impact of precipitation extremes on flood risk. The Republic of North Macedonia is no exception to these trends; consequently, the country is exposed to various types of natural hazards, including floods. Damages and losses caused by floods have been on the rise in the Upper Vardar River Basin (Polog Region) over the past few years. For this purpose, a baseline survey was prepared to identify people's and communities' perception of flood and other risks, their current willingness to accept certain risks, and their willingness-to-pay to mitigate risk to acceptable levels similar survey is planned for the end of the program to detect likely changes in perception following a period of intensive community awareness programs and campaigns.

Keywords: risk management, Polog Region, flood perception, Republic of North Macedonia, risk mitigation

1. Introduction

Floods are associated with extreme precipitation events and have a significant influence on society (Lenderink G, van Meijgaard E., 2008). Flood events are now reported more frequently than ever before due to the increasing spread of human settlement and development activities in urbanized areas. (Fernandez et.al., 2016: 1367) The changes in climate and hydrologic flood patterns in Europe and in the Western Balkans clearly indicate that there is a growing need to assess the impact of precipitation extremes on flood risk. The Republic of Macedonia is no exception to these trends. The country is exposed to various types of natural hazards, including floods. According to the World Bank, similarly to 28 European and Central Asian (ECA) countries, the country is exposed to climate change and its consequences. According to Climate Change in Eastern and Central Europe (2009), only three countries in the region have experienced more climate-related natural disasters between 1990 and 2008. The country was ranked twelfth among ECA countries in terms of overall disaster risks and their impact on the development and prosperity of the country and its citizens.

Floods have been one of the most prevalent natural hazards in Macedonia in the last decade, causing loss of life, displacement of people, and devastating economic impact. Risk is defined as the probability that a particular level of loss will be sustained by a given series of elements as a result of a given level of hazard impact (Alexander, 2000).

Risk=Hazard x Vulnerability

The concept of vulnerability is commonly used in disaster research. Multiple definitions and different conceptual frameworks of vulnerability exist because several groups have different views about vulnerability. Vulnerability captures the conditions of an object of observation that characterize disadvantages in the face of natural hazards (Fekete A. 2009). Furthermore, vulnerability is affected by physical, economic, environmental, and social factors (Westen & Kingma, 2009). In this manner, social vulnerability as a dimension of vulnerability refers to ‘the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist, or recover from the impact of a hazard’ (Cutter et al. 2003). The assessment of social vulnerability includes various factors or characteristics, such as age, gender, race, overcrowding, ethnicity, social class, unemployment rate, immigrant status, density and quality of the built environment, land use, housing tenancy, and the presence of informal support networks (Cutter et. al. 2000). The majority of studies provide a map representing the spatial variability of social vulnerability (Cutter et al. 2000). Thus, social vulnerability maps allow for the representation of anticipated community needs at differing levels of disaster response (Morrow BH. 1999). This study is no exception.

Some of the most commonly referenced vulnerability characteristics are summarized in the table below.

The study aims to map vulnerability groups and assess their vulnerability according to variables developed by Dunning and Durden in the upper Vardar river basin. The main goal of this research is to collect data for the needs of the expert team working on the

preparation of the “Flood Risk Management Plan in the Upper Basin of the Vardar River (Polog Region)”, in accordance with the concept and objectives of the Floods Directive of the European Union. This project will provide a level of detail that will be sufficient to select an optimized flood risk mitigation strategy in the future and will be one of the basic documents for planning future activities.

2. Literature overview - overview of national legislation

The core national legal document that regulates and covers floods is the Law on the Environment. The law incorporates the basic principles and procedures of environmental management. The chapter on sustainable development and global issues in the area of the environment, contains provisions for establishing a national system with the aim of stabilizing greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations in the atmosphere, preventing dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system, and mitigating the effects of climate change. Article 187 requires the preparation and adoption of a National Plan on Climate Change. The main elements of the plan, *inter alia*, include:

- vulnerability assessments in several sectors and measures of adaptation;
- mitigation analyses;
- information and cartographical presentation of monitoring, research, and systematic observation of climate change; action plan and measures for mitigation of climate change;
- economic analysis of the proposed measures for climate change prevention and mitigation;
- bodies, institutions, and other legal entities responsible for the implementation of the national plan, action plan, and measures for climate change prevention and mitigation;
- description of activities of public awareness-raising, education, and professional training of the scientific, technical, and management staff and result achieved.

The law also provides for the implementation of CC-related actions by the LSG units, including the implementation of the principles of sustainable development, adoption of a Local Environmental Action Plan, submission of monitoring data from the local monitoring network, as well as data required for the maintenance of the respective cadastres, submitting relevant data to the elaboration of the project environmental impact assessment study and access to environmental information possessed thereby, implementing Strategic Environmental Impact Assessments

3. Research

The survey of the Flood Risk Management Plan for the Upper Vardar River Basin was conducted from 24.03.2018 until 05.04.2018. For this purpose, a structured questionnaire was developed and distributed to the households based on previously established methodology. Details of the design of the sample are as follows:

The questionnaire model

Survey is a structured questionnaire composed of 48 questions, divided into 5 thematic areas. It is designed to include quantitative and qualitative data that will provide information on the demographic and socio-economic position of the respondent, which provides answers and represents his views and perceptions about floods.

The Questionnaire covers questions about floods encompassing the following thematic areas:

1. Demographic data of the respondents;
2. Questions regarding their knowledge and information on the floods;
3. Questions regarding their property prior to floods;
4. Questions regarding their concern about the floods and the level of knowledge/information about the floods;
5. Questions regarding how the respondents obtain information and prepare in case of floods;

The key findings from the research in these areas are given below, followed by an overview of general recommendations.

4. Survey results and key findings

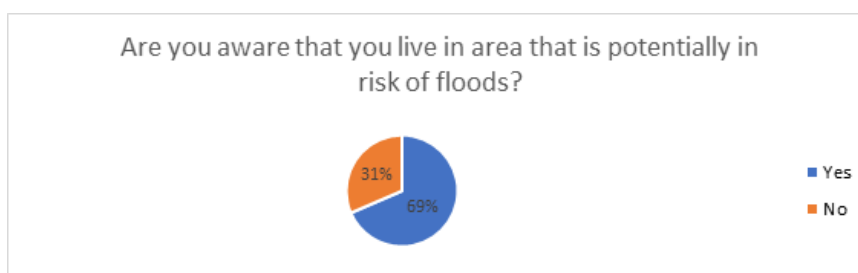
The survey was carried out in the localities where flooding has occurred in the past and in localities that are at particular risk according to the relevant stakeholders identified in the upper section of the report. A total number of 410 respondents participated in the Survey. Prior to the survey, the draft questionnaire was tested in a pilot study. Ten questionnaires were distributed among socially and demographically different test persons, mostly from the research locations, in order to check the comprehensibility and effectiveness of the questionnaire and its logic. Consequently, several questions were revised accordingly.

The geographical structure of the entire questionnaire sample is relatively balanced. 52% men and 46% women took part in the survey. It ought to be emphasized that 8 mainly older households (2%) filled in the questionnaire. The Survey was conducted in 9 municipalities in the Polog Region and the % of the respondents by the municipality and the sample is a reflection of the population in the municipalities. The highest percentage of the respondents

are from the municipality of Tetovo 27%, Gostivar 20%, and the lower representation had Jeguovce 5% and Saraj 3%. It is important to highlight that every single village and settlement in each municipality was covered in the survey according to the survey sample.

It is interesting to highlight that 31% of the respondents are not aware that they are living in an area that is at a potential of risk of floods. The majority of those who are aware of the risk of floods have witnessed themselves floods or they have been informed by the elderly, and only a non-significant percentage (10%) have been informed by the government or media. This exemplifies the need for a more proactive approach of the government for increasing and informing the local community about the flooding and the consequences of the flooding.

Figure 1: Awareness of living in an area that is potentially at risk of floods



(Source: survey "Flood Risk Management Plan for the Upper Vardar River Basin", 2018)

Respondents who responded with Yes to the previous question were asked how they obtained information regarding the flood risk; accordingly, 45,9 % of the respondents had witnessed a flood in their community, 9,5% are informed by elderly members of their family, 7,3% from neighbors, 4,1% from TV and Radio and 3,4% from the local government.

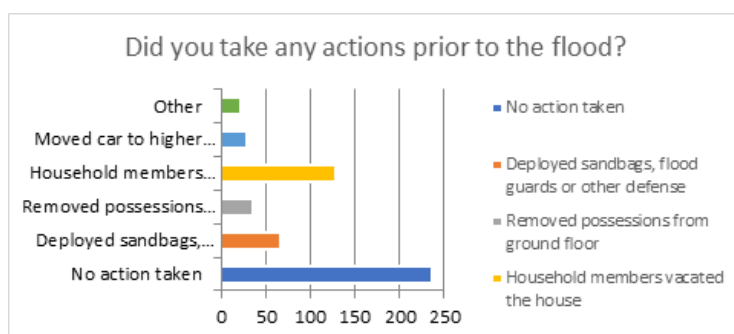
Figure 2: How the citizens obtain information on flood risk



(Source: survey "Flood Risk Management Plan for the Upper Vardar River Basin", 2018)

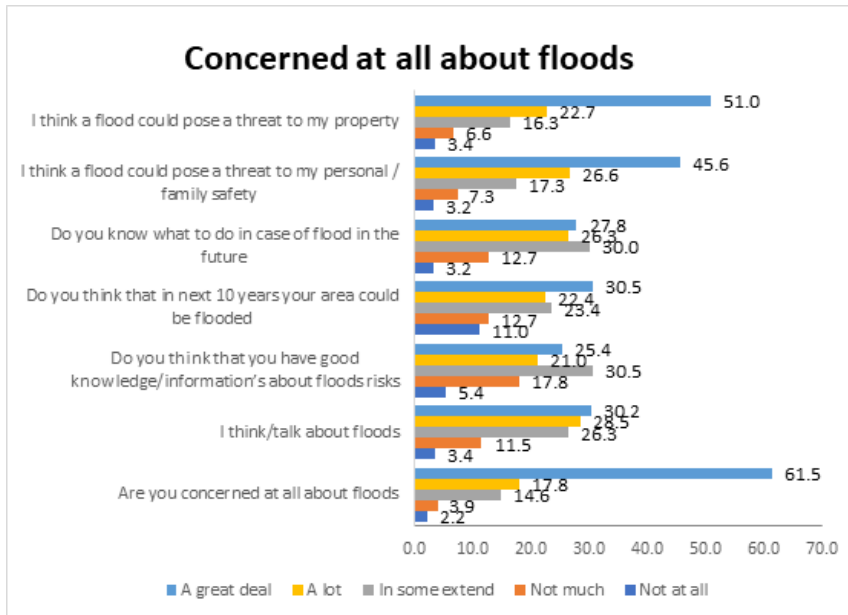
Respondents were asked if they have taken any actions prior to the flood. 46% of the respondents responded that they have not taken any action prior to the flood. 13% of the respondents deployed sandbags, flood guards, or other defense, 7% of respondents have removed possessions from the ground floor and 25% have vacated their family members from the house (Figure 12). The findings exemplify that around 50% of the respondents have not taken any action, and it is highly relevant to assess what is the reasoning for such an approach.

Figure 3: Action taken prior to the flood



(Source: survey “Flood Risk Management Plan for the Upper Vardar River Basin”, 2018)

The respondents were asked if they are concerned with floods. 61% have a great deal of concern about the floods, 18 % are concerned a lot, 15% to some extent, and 2% are not at all concerned with floods. Only 3,2 % are in the opinion that the floods are not posing a threat to them and their family, the overwhelming majority see some type of a threat from the floods. Nearly half of the respondents have to some extent or do not at all understand what to do when they face a flood. This again reiterates the need to build community awareness and capacity for flood protection. Again majority (83%) of the respondents are of the opinion that their settlement will be flooded in the next 10 years. More than half of the respondents, have to some extent, not much or not at all, knowledge, or information about the risks of floods. An overwhelming majority of the respondents 89% are a great deal or a lot concerned about the impact of the floods in their settlement.

Figure 4: Concern about flood

(Source: survey “Flood Risk Management Plan for the Upper Vardar River Basin”, 2018)

The respondents were asked if building in risk areas may be a reason for flooding. 59% of the respondents believe that deforestation is the main reason for flooding in their region, and only 4,6% don't believe that deforestation is the reason for flooding. The overwhelming majority of the respondents believe that building in risk areas a great deal, a lot, or to some extent can be done because of flooding. Around 74% of the respondents believe that lack of maintenance of the protective infrastructure against flooding can be a cause for flooding. 57% are of the opinion that proper waste management contributes a great deal to flooding in the region. Similar responses are noted with the lack of intervention in the riverbed and an improper sewer network. A closer look at the responses reveals that the respondents believe that floods are caused by a conjunction of the above-mentioned causes in the previous questions.

In the same light, participants in the focus group highlighted that the leading causes of flooding were uncontrolled deforestation and solid waste. One of the residents mentioned that the alarming illegal deforestation is supported by the institutions that are there to prevent it. The residents had been continuously complaining, both formally and informally, to the respected institutions about the alarming deforestation. They had protested before in front of the mayor's office by blocking the main road. However, they had not been taken seriously, even though they reported the individuals responsible for the illegal deforestation.

And the last question on the questionnaire was “What would be the most important problem in your community?”. More than half of the respondents said that unemployment is the main problem (60.7%), and as the second most important problem, they highlighted migration (17.1%), and only 2.2% of the respondents think that flooding is their main problem. This is due to major unemployment, especially among the young population in this area and their search for jobs outside the Republic of Macedonia.

5. Conclusions

Institutions within the Upper Vardar Basin region lack available tools and mechanisms for collaborative approaches to floodplain management. Citizens argue that there is a lack of intergovernmental and inter-institutional cooperation in times of flooding which increases vulnerability to floods.

Respondents had no awareness of mitigation options for their settlements, and the details related to, for example, emergency response plans. This is a result either of the poor participatory processes for flood management decision making or that this type of planning for the Upper Vardar Basin region is nonexistent. Accordingly, there has been no evidence of multiple hazards planning approach to planning in the Upper Vardar Basin region.

Findings put into the light the access to economic resources (low income) of the residents of the Upper Vardar Basin region which has a negative impact on resilience to any hazard as a result of the lack of access to economic and social resources. 2/3 of the respondents have a monthly income of less the 350 euros (Figure 4 Economic status). Differently put, 66% of the respondents (households) earn less than a medium salary in the Republic of Macedonia.

For the residents of the Upper Vardar Basin, informal social networks are the most important source of support during the flood which, in the perception of the people affected, they provide material, physical and mental support which often preceded the material compensations provided by public authorities.

Formal institutions (local authorities, central government, fire brigades) are not seen as a trustworthy partner for support in the immediate hazardous situation.

A rural/urban divide within the trust in the capacity of formal networks was obvious in the findings. It is interestingly to note that the trust in the formal institutions in rural municipalities is higher than in the urban municipalities.

Flood awareness and knowledge served as the focus of the investigation, due to the fact that awareness is a necessary precursor to preparedness, the lower one's 'awareness' about some kind of danger, the more one is vulnerable to it. The findings show that there is low awareness regarding flooding and flooding preparation. Related, the residents of the Upper Vardar Basin region not only are not aware of flood history and hazard context but also lack understanding on what is their role what are the role of the institutions and avenues and approaches for prevention and protection in case of hazards by floods.

Structural measures - Citizens have the opinion that not much has been done on structural measures such as dams, levees, and floodwalls in order to reduce the probability of flooding in the location of interest.

Property insurance - Is seen as a luxury that the majority of respondents can not afford. Moreover, there is a belief that the government is solely responsible for people's security and most essential needs, allowing them to abdicate individual responsibility.

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Review scientific paper

**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FROM A HUMAN RIGHTS
PERSPECTIVE:
»GREEN« CASES OF THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN
RIGHTS**

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Abstract

Although the European Convention on Human Rights does not guarantee a specific right to a healthy environment, it is increasingly being used by individuals to secure protection in terms of a wide range of environmental issues. The European Court of Human Rights has ruled on a number of environment-related cases, in which individuals argue that a breach of their rights guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights is a result of adverse environmental factors. There are already a number of environment-related issues identified in the Court's case-law, which could affect various Convention rights. Through an analysis of the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights related to the environment, the paper provides an overview of the different ways in which environmental factors affect various Convention rights. It aims to elaborate on the role and the approach of the European Court of Human Rights in environment-related cases and highlight its influence in terms of securing environmental protection.

Keywords: human rights, environment, environmental protection, European Court of Human Rights, European Convention on Human Rights

1. Introduction

The European Convention on Human Rights (“ECHR” or “Convention”) does not contain a specific right to a healthy environment, or any specific reference to the environment, although there were several attempts to adopt an additional protocol to the ECHR recognising the right to a healthy environment (Lambert, 2020: 10-12). Nevertheless, the European Court of Human Rights (“ECtHR” or “Court”) has already heard a number of cases concerning the environment and has developed an extensive case-law in this regard. This has been done through extending the scope of application of existing Convention rights, in order to be able to accommodate applications complaining of environmental abuse and afford effective environmental protection, taking into account that the Convention is a “living instrument which [...] must be interpreted in the light of present-day conditions” (*Tyrer v. the United Kingdom*, 25 April 1978, § 31, Series A no. 26).

There are several Convention rights that are most commonly invoked in cases relating to environmental matters and that have had the biggest impact. Namely, the Court has identified a number of environment-related issues in its case-law, which have the potential to affect Article 2 (right to life), Article 6 (right to a fair trial), Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) and Article 1 of Protocol No.1 (right to property), and there is already a solid body of case-law regarding alleged environmental human rights infringements that are tested against the previously mentioned rights (Council of Europe, 2012; European Court of Human Rights, 2022). There are also some other Convention rights that are occasionally invoked as well in the context of environment, such as Article 3 (prohibition of torture), Article 5 (right to liberty and security), Article 10 (freedom of expression), Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association) and Article 13 (right to an effective remedy), but the case-law concerning most of these rights is still rather scarce (Council of Europe, 2012; European Court of Human Rights, 2022).

The focus of this paper is placed on providing a review and assessment of the approach of the ECtHR in environment-related cases and the role of the Court in terms of securing environmental protection. Given the focus of the paper, the question of the treatment and development of environmental protection in the Court’s case-law and the manner in which environmental factors affect various Convention rights will be answered as well. This will be mainly done through analysis of the Court’s case-law concerning environmental matters.

In this regard, the paper will first give an overview of the Court’s case-law concerning environment-related cases, providing a comprehensive and summarized presentation on the treatment and development of environmental protection in the Court’s case law and the principles and standards that the Court has developed in this regard. In terms of providing more information on the context regarding environmental protection on European level, the paper will elaborate on the attempts within the Council of Europe to adopt an additional protocol to the ECHR recognising the right to a healthy environment and the developments in that regard. Afterwards, based on the overview of the case-law of the Court concerning environmental matters, an analysis will be conducted as regards the Court’s approach in these cases and the ways in which environmental factors affect various Convention rights.

Finally, the results of the analysis as regards the approach of the ECtHR in cases concerning environmental matters and its role in securing environmental protection will be summarized.

2. Literature and case-law overview

2.1. Overview of the case-law of the European court of human rights concerning environment-related cases

Taking in consideration that the ECHR does not guarantee any environmental rights, it is no surprise that the Court did not accept to declare admissible individual applications complaining of environmental abuse, by rejecting them as inadmissible *ratione materiae*, until the 1980s (Garcia San José, 2005: 7-8). Namely, the first environmental application was declared admissible by a Decision of 15 July 1980, concerning the case *Arrondelle v. the United Kingdom* ((dec.), no. 7889/77, 15 July 1980). In this case, the applicant, owner of a pavilion situated at the edge of the runway of an airport, nearby a highway, complained that the noise pollution was violating her right to a private life as well as her right of respecting her possessions, alleging that noise pollution decreased her house's market value. The Court declared the application admissible because it considered it justified under Article 8 of the Convention and Article 1 of Protocol No.1 to the Convention. Namely, these Convention rights provided the basis for a friendly settlement in this case later on.

After the decision brought in the case *Arrondelle v. the United Kingdom*, a number of admissibility decisions were rendered in other environment-related cases, which led to identifying various environment-related issues in the Court's case-law that could affect the exercise of certain Convention rights. Such decisions were adopted by the Court in *Zimmerman and Steiner v. Switzerland* ((dec.), no. 8737/79, 18 March 1981) (noise and air pollution); *Baggs v. the United Kingdom* ((dec.), no. 9310/81, 14 October 1985) (noise); *Powell and Rayner v. the United Kingdom* ((dec.), no. 9310/81, 16 July 1986) (noise); *Vearncombe and others v. the Federal Republic of Germany* ((dec.), no. 12816/87, 18 January 1989) (noise); *Zander v. Sweden* ((dec.), no. 12816/87, 18 January 1989) (water pollution).

In the case of *Zimmerman and Steiner v. Switzerland* (13 July 1983, Series A no. 66), the Court found Article 6 of the Convention applicable to a complaint about the length of proceedings concerning compensation for injury caused by noise and air pollution from a nearby airport. The Court held that there had been a violation of Article 6(1).

In the case of *Powell and Rayner v. the United Kingdom* (21 February 1990, Series A no. 172), the applicants, who lived near Heathrow Airport, complained that the authorised noise level there is unacceptable and the measures pursued by the government to minimise the noise are insufficient. The Court noted that the quality of the applicants' private life and the scope for enjoying the amenities of their home had been adversely affected by the noise generated by aircraft using Heathrow Airport. However, it also pointed out that the existence

of large international airports and the increasing use of jet aircraft had become necessary in the interests of a country's economic well-being. Furthermore, a number of measures had been introduced by the authorities to control, abate and compensate for aircraft noise at and around Heathrow Airport.

Therefore, the Court held that the authorities could not arguably be said to have exceeded the margin of appreciation afforded to them or upset the fair balance required to be struck under Article 8 of the Convention. It observed that "it is certainly not for [...] the Court to substitute for the assessment of the national authorities any other assessment of what might be the best policy in this difficult social and technical sphere" (*Powell and Rayner v. the United Kingdom*, 21 February 1990, § 44, Series A no. 172) as "this is an area where the Contracting States are to be recognised as enjoying a wide margin of appreciation" (*Powell and Rayner v. the United Kingdom*, 21 February 1990, § 44, Series A no. 172). Namely, relying on the margin of appreciation, as a standard tool used when aiming at striking a balance between the need for respect for a Convention right and an alleged breach, the Court found no violation of Article 8. Although the Court observed that the applicants' homes had been adversely affected by the noise, the authorities had struck a fair balance between the competing interests of the applicants and the community as a whole, in light of the importance of the airport to the United Kingdom economy and the measures already adopted by the government. It therefore held that there had been no violation of Article 13 of the Convention in respect of the claims of either applicant under Article 8 since no arguable claim of violation of Article 8 and no entitlement to a remedy under Article 13 had been made out in relation to either applicant.

In the case of *Zander v. Sweden* (25 November 1993, Series A no. 279-B), Article 6 of ECHR provided the basis for a complaint that the applicants were denied a remedy for threatened environmental harm. The Court based the applicability of Article 6 on its finding that the applicants could arguably maintain that they were entitled under Swedish law to protection against the water in their well-being polluted as a result of the polluting company activities on the dump. The applicants' claim was directly concerned with their ability to use the water in their well for drinking purposes. Such ability was one aspect of their right of property. Accordingly, the entitlement in issue was a 'civil right' and thus Article 6(1) was applicable. At the material time, it was not possible for the applicants to have the relevant decision reviewed by a court. Accordingly, the Court held that there had been a violation of Article 6(1).

Around the same time when the Court began to accept to declare admissible individual applications complaining of environmental abuse that affects the exercise of various Convention rights, the Court also began to accept individual complaints concerning restrictions in Convention rights that, in accordance with paragraph 2 of Articles 8 to 11 of the Convention and Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 to the Convention, pursued a legitimated aim, which consisted in safeguarding good environmental conditions as a general interest (Garcia San José, 2005: 8). Such decisions were adopted by the Court in *Hakansson and Sturesson v. Sweden* ((dec.), no. 11855/85, 15 July, 1987); *Fredin v. Sweden* ((dec.), no. 12033/86, 14 December, 1987); *Pine Valley Development Ltd and others v. Ireland* ((dec.), no. 12742/87, 3 May, 1989); *Allan Jacobsson v. Sweden* ((dec.), no. 16970/90, 15 October, 1995).

The case of *Fredin v. Sweden (no.1)* (18 February 1991, Series A no. 192) concerned the revocation of the applicants' licence to operate a gravel pit, situated on their land, on the basis of the Nature Conservation Act. The applicants in this case complained that the revocation of their exploitation licence had amounted to a deprivation of property. According to the Court, "in today's society the protection of the environment is an increasingly important consideration" (*Fredin v. Sweden (no.1)* (18 February 1991, § 48, Series A no. 192). Having regard to the potential of the gravel pit if its exploitation had been continued in accordance with the applicants' exploitation licence, the Court recognized that the applicants had suffered substantial losses. However, it further noted that when the applicants started making investments, they could have relied only on the authorities' obligation to take due account of their interests when adopting decisions relating to nature conservation, as prescribed in the Nature Conservation Act. According to the Court, this obligation could not have reasonably founded any legitimate expectations on their part to continue the exploitation for a long period of time. The Court also took in consideration that the authorities granted a three-year closing-down period to the applicants. In addition, the authorities subsequently extended this period by eleven months at the applicants' request. Consequently, the Court found that, having regard to the circumstances of the case and the legitimate aim pursued by the Nature Conservation Act, i.e. protection of the environment, it could not be held that the revocation of the licence had been inappropriate or disproportionate. Therefore, it found no violation of Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 to the Convention. The Court confirmed this approach in the case of *Pine Valley Development Ltd and others v. Ireland* (29 November 1991, Series A no. 222).

Since then, the Court's case-law concerning environmental matters has increased significantly. Namely, the Court has ruled on a number of environment-related cases, expanding the scope of environmental protection based on various Convention rights and developing various principles and standards in that regard (Council of Europe, 2012; European Court of Human Rights, 2022; European Court of Human Rights, 2022). In fact, under various Convention rights, it has addressed almost all thinkable forms of environmental issues (European Court of Human Rights, 2022), such as:

- a. Article 2 of the Convention (right to life)
Dangerous industrial activities: *Öneryıldız v. Turkey* (2004) (Grand Chamber); Exposure to nuclear radiation: *L.C.B. v. the United Kingdom* (1998); Industrial emissions and health: *Smaltini v. Italy* (2015) (decision on admissibility); Natural disasters: *Murillo Saldias and Others v. Spain* (2006) (decision on admissibility); *Budayeva and Others v. Romania* (2008); *Viviani and Others v. Italy* (2015) (decision on admissibility); *Özel and Others v. Turkey* (2015);
- b. Article 3 of the Convention (prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment)
Passive smoking in detention: *Florea v. Romania* (2010); *Elefteriadis v. Romania* (2011);
- c. Article 5 of the Convention (right to liberty and security)
Mangouras v. Spain (2010) (Grand Chamber)
- d. Article 6 of the Convention (right to a fair trial)
Access to court: *Athanassoglou and Others v. Switzerland* (2000) (Grand Chamber); *Gorraiz Lizarraga and Others v. Spain* (2004); *L'Erablière A.S.B.L. v. Belgium* (2009); *Howald Moor and Others v. Switzerland* (2014); *Karin Anderson and Others v. Sweden* (2014); *Stichting Landgoed Steenberg and Others v. the Netherlands*

- (2021); Failure to enforce final decisions: *Kyrtatos v. Greece* (2003); *Apanasewicz v. Poland* (2011); *Bursa Barosu Başkanlığı and Others v. Tukey* (2018);
- e. Article 8 of the Convention (right to respect for private and family life)
 Dam construction threatening archaeological site: *Ahunbay and Others v. Turkey*; 2019 (decision on admissibility); Environmental risks and access to information: *Guerra and Others v. Italy* (1998); *McGinley and Egan v. the United Kingdom* (1998); *Roche v. the United Kingdom* (2005) (Grand Chamber); *Vilnes and Others v. Norway* (2013); *Brincat and Others v. Malta* (2014); High-voltage power line: *Calancea and Others v. the Republic of Moldova* (2018) (decision on admissibility); Industrial pollution: *Lopez Ostra v. Spain* (1994); *Taşkın and Others v. Turkey* (2004); *Fadeyeva v. Russia* (2005); *Giacomelli v. Italy* (2006); *Tătar v. Romania* (2009); *Dubetska and Others v. Ukraine* (2011); *Apanasewicz v. Poland* (2011); *Cordella and Others v. Italy* (2019); Mobile phone antennas: *Luginbühl v. Switzerland* (2006) (decision on admissibility); Several types of noise pollution: Air traffic and aircraft noise: *Hatton and Others v. the United Kingdom* (2003) (Grand Chamber); *Flamenbaum and Others v. France* (2012); Neighbouring noise: *Moreno Gómez v. Spain* (2004); *Mileva and Others v. Bulgaria* (2010); *Zammit Maempel and Others v. Malta* (2011); *Chris v. Romania* (2014) (decision on admissibility); *Yevgeniy Dmitriyev v. Russia* (2020); Road traffic noise: *Deés v. Hungary* (2010); *Grimkovskaya v. Ukraine* (2011); Wind turbines and wind energy farms: *Fägerskjöld v. Sweden* (2008) (decision on admissibility); Industrial noise pollution: *Borysiewicz v. Poland* (2008); *Martinez Martinez and Maria Pino Manzano v. Spain* (2012); Rail traffic: *Bor v. Hungary* (2013); Emissions from diesel vehicles: *Greenpeace e.V. and Others v. Germany* (2009) (decision on admissibility); Urban development: *Kyrtatos v. Greece* (2003); Waste collection, management, treatment and disposal: *Brânduse v. Romania* (2009); *Di Sarno and Others v. Italy* (2012); Water supply contamination: *Dzemyuk v. Ukraine* (2014);
- f. Article 10 of the Convention (freedom of expression/freedom to receive and impart information)
Steel and Morris v. the United Kingdom (2005); *Vides Aizsardzibas Klubs v. Latvia* (2004); *Association Burestop 55 and Others v. France* (2021);
- g. Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association)
Costel Popa v. Romania (2016)
- h. Article 13 of the Convention (right to an effective remedy)
Hatton and Others v. the United Kingdom (2003) (Grand Chamber); *Kolyadenko and Others v. Russia* (2012);
- i. Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 to the Convention (protection of property)
Papastavrou and Others v. Greece (2003); *Öneryıldız v. Turkey* (2004) (Grand Chamber); *N.A. and Others v. Turkey* (2005); *Valico S.R.L. v. Italy* (2006) (decision on admissibility); *Hamer v. Belgium* (2007); *Turgut and Others v. Turkey* (2008); *Depalle v. France and Brosset-Triboulet and Others v. France* (2010) (Grand Chamber); *Kristiana Ltd. v. Lithuania* (2018); *O'Sullivan McCarthy Mussel Development Ltd. v. Ireland* (2018); *Dimiat Yordanov v. Bulgaria* (2018); *Pop and Others v. Romania* (2019) (decision on admissibility); *Yasar v. Romania* (2019); *National Movement Ekoglasnost v. Bulgaria* (2020);

Within this extensive case-law of the Court concerning environment, there are also a number of landmark cases that contributed to its evolution in the context of the Court's approach to these issues. For instance, landmark environment-related cases of the ECtHR include

the cases of *Lopez Ostra v. Spain* (9 December 1994, Series A no. 303-C) and *Guerra and Others v. Italy* (19 February 1998, Reports of Judgments and Decisions 1998-I).

In the case of *Lopez Ostra v. Spain* (9 December 1994, Series A no. 303-C), the applicant lived in a town where leather industries were concentrated. She complained of the municipal authorities' inactivity and passive attitude regarding the nuisance (smells, noise and polluting fumes) caused by a waste-treatment plant situated just a few metres away from her home. She also alleged that the degree of seriousness of these matters and the level of distress they had caused her had amounted to a degrading treatment. The Court in this case noted that "severe environmental pollution may affect individuals' well-being and prevent them from enjoying their homes in such a way as to affect their private and family life adversely, without, however, seriously endangering their health" (*López Ostra v. Spain*, 9 December 1994, § 51, Series A no. 303-C). It also noted that regard must be had to the fair balance that has to be struck between individual and community interests, and in any case the State enjoys a certain margin of appreciation." (*López Ostra v. Spain*, 9 December 1994, § 51, Series A no. 303-C).

The Court found that there had been a violation of Article 8 of the Convention. It held that the authorities had not succeeded in striking a fair balance between the competing interests: the interest of the town's economic well-being, i.e. having a waste-treatment plant, and the applicant's effective enjoyment of her right to respect for her home and her private and family life. The Court noted that the applicant and her family had to bear the nuisance and inconveniences for over three years before deciding to move from there as it became obvious that the situation could continue indefinitely. Also, the applicant's daughter's paediatrician recommended that they do so. Having regard to the circumstances, the municipality's offer could not afford complete redress for the nuisance and inconveniences to which they had been subjected. In terms of the complaints of degrading treatment, the Court held that there had been no violation of Article 3 of the Convention. Namely, it recognized that the conditions in which the applicant and her family had lived for a number of years were very difficult but did not amount to a degrading treatment.

In the case of *Guerra and Others v. Italy* (19 February 1998, Reports of Judgments and Decisions 1998-I), the applicants lived approximately one kilometre away from a chemical factory producing fertilisers. Accidents due to malfunctioning had already occurred in the past, the most serious one in 1976, after which one hundred and fifty people were admitted to hospital with acute arsenic poisoning. The applicants complained that the air had been polluted by emissions of unknown chemical composition and toxicity from the factory. They alleged that the lack of practical measures, in particular to reduce pollution levels and major-accident hazards arising out of the factory's operation, had violated their right to respect for their lives and physical integrity. They also alleged that the authorities' failure to inform the public about the hazards and the procedures to be followed in the event of a major accident had violated their right to freedom of information.

The Court held that Article 10 of the Convention is not applicable in this case. According to the Court, freedom to receive information basically prohibited a government from restricting a person from receiving information that others wished or might be willing to impart to him.

However, that freedom could not be construed as imposing on a State, in circumstances such as those of the present case, positive obligations to collect and disseminate information of its own motion. As regards Article 8 of the Convention, it found that the authorities had not fulfilled their obligation to secure the applicants' right to respect for their private and family life. The Court reiterated the principle established in *Lopez Ostra v. Spain* that "severe environmental pollution may affect individuals' well-being and prevent them from enjoying their homes in such a way as to affect their private and family life adversely" (*Guerra and Others v. Italy*, 19 February 1998, § 60, Reports of Judgments and Decisions 1998-I). In the present case, the applicants had waited, right up until the production of fertilisers ceased in 1994, for essential information that would have enabled them to assess the risks they and their families might run if they continued to live in a town particularly exposed to danger in the event of an accident at the factory. Therefore, the Court held that there had been a violation of Article 8 of the Convention. Having regard to this conclusion, it further found it unnecessary to also consider the case under Article 2 of the Convention.

Another landmark case is the Grand Chamber case of *Hatton and Others v. the United Kingdom* ([GC], no. 36022/97, ECHR 2003-VIII). The applicants in this case lived or had lived in the vicinity of Heathrow airport. They alleged that the government policy on night flights at Heathrow airport violated their rights under Article 8 of the Convention as their health suffered due to regular sleep interruptions caused by night time planes. In addition, they submitted that they had been denied an effective domestic remedy for this complaint. The Court observed that "there is no explicit right in the Convention to a clean and quiet environment" (*Hatton and Others v. the United Kingdom* [GC], no. 36022/97, § 96, ECHR 2003-VIII), due to which it was not considered appropriate for the Court to apply a special approach in respect to the matter at issue "by reference to a special status of environmental human rights" (*Hatton and Others v. the United Kingdom* [GC], no. 36022/97, § 122, ECHR 2003-VIII). It further noted that the State's responsibility in environmental cases may arise not only from situations where the pollution is directly caused by the State, but also from a failure to regulate private industry in terms of securing respect for the rights guaranteed in Article 8 (*Hatton and Others v. the United Kingdom* [GC], no. 36022/97, § 98, ECHR 2003-VIII).

The Court in this case observed that "where an individual is directly and seriously affected by noise or other pollution, an issue may arise under Article 8" (*Hatton and Others v. the United Kingdom* [GC], no. 36022/97, § 96, ECHR 2003-VIII). However, unlike the Chamber, the Grand Chamber found that there had been no violation of Article 8 of the Convention as the authorities had not overstepped their margin of appreciation by failing to strike a fair balance between the right of the individuals affected by the regulations to respect for their private life and home and the conflicting interests of others and of the community as a whole. The Court noted that an economic interest in maintaining a full service of night flights existed and that only a small percentage of people had suffered by the noise. It also noted that the housing prices had not dropped and that the applicants could move elsewhere without financial loss. However, it is important to note that the Court in this case also introduced a test to be followed during an inquiry in cases involving State decisions affecting environmental issues. It had foreseen two aspects to the inquiry which may be carried out by the Court: first, the

Court may assess the substantive merits of the government's decision, to ensure that it is compatible with Article 8; and second, the Court may scrutinise the decision-making process to ensure that due weight has been accorded to the interests of the individual (*Hatton and Others v. the United Kingdom* [GC], no. 36022/97, § 99, ECHR 2003-VIII). As regards the claim that the applicants had not had a remedy at national level to enforce their Convention rights, the Court found that there had been a violation of Article 13 of the Convention as the scope of review by the domestic courts in the present case was not sufficient to comply with Article 13.

The case of *Taşkın and Others v. Turkey* (no. 46117/99, ECHR 2004-X) concerned the granting of permits to operate a goldmine. The applicants alleged that both the granting by the national authorities of a permit to operate a goldmine using the cyanidation process and the related decision-making process had violated their rights under Article 8 of the Convention. In this case, the Court reiterated that "Article 8 applies to severe environmental pollution which may affect individuals' well-being and prevent them from enjoying their homes in such a way as to affect their private and family life adversely, without, however, seriously endangering their health." (*Taşkın and Others v. Turkey*, no. 46117/99, § 113, ECHR 2004-X). In addition, it pointed out that "the same is true where the dangerous effects of an activity to which the individuals concerned are likely to be exposed have been determined as part of an environmental impact assessment procedure in such a way as to establish a sufficiently close link with private and family life for the purposes of Article 8 of the Convention" (*Taşkın and Others v. Turkey*, no. 46117/99, § 113, ECHR 2004-X) and that "if this were not the case, the positive obligation on the State to take reasonable and appropriate measures to secure the applicant's rights under paragraph 1 of Article 8 would be set at naught." (*Taşkın and Others v. Turkey*, no. 46117/99, § 113, ECHR 2004-X).

The Court held that there had been a violation of Article 8 of the Convention, finding that the national authorities had failed to comply with a court decision annulling a permit to operate a gold mine using a particular technique, on the grounds of the adverse effect on the environment, subsequently granting a new permit. Namely, notwithstanding the procedural guarantees afforded by national legislation and the implementation of those guarantees by judicial decisions, the Council of Ministers, by a decision which was not made public, authorised the continuation of production at the gold mine. The Court found that, in so doing, the authorities had deprived the procedural guarantees available to the applicants of any useful effect. In the present case, the Court also held that there had been a violation of Article 6(1) of the Convention (right to a fair trial within a reasonable time).

In the case of *Fadeyeva v. Russia* (no. 55723/00, ECHR 2005-IV), the applicant lived in a major steel-producing centre. She complained that the operation of a steel plant close to her home endangered her health and well-being. Although the authorities had established a sanitary 'buffer zone' around the works, the applicant had been housed in a flat inside the zone, like many thousands of others. The applicant obtained a court order requiring to be rehoused outside the zone, but this was never executed. A subsequent attempt to enforce this order was rejected by the courts. The Court held that there had been a violation of Article 8 of the Convention as it found that the national authorities had failed to strike a fair balance

between the interests of the community and the applicant's effective enjoyment of her right to respect for her home and her private life. It noted that the State did not offer the applicant any effective solution to help her move from the dangerous area. Furthermore, although the polluting enterprise operated in breach of domestic environmental standards, there was no information that the State designed or applied effective measures which would take into account the interests of the local population, affected by the pollution, and which would be capable of reducing the industrial pollution to acceptable levels.

In this case, the Court pointed out that "the adverse effects of environmental pollution must attain a certain minimum level if they are to fall within the scope of Article 8" (*Fadeyeva v. Russia*, no. 55723/00, § 69, ECHR 2005-IV). In this regard, it further noted that "the assessment of that minimum is relative and depends on all the circumstances of the case, such as the intensity and duration of the nuisance, and its physical or mental effects" (*Fadeyeva v. Russia*, no. 55723/00, § 69, ECHR 2005-IV). In addition, it also noted that "the general context of the environment should also be taken into account" (*Fadeyeva v. Russia*, no. 55723/00, § 69, ECHR 2005-IV). The Court concluded that, "in order to fall within the scope of Article 8, complaints relating to environmental nuisances have to show, firstly, that there was an actual interference with the applicant's private sphere, and, secondly, that a level of severity was attained" (*Fadeyeva v. Russia*, no. 55723/00, § 70, ECHR 2005-IV). Nevertheless, it maintained that the assessment of the severity of the environmental conditions depended on the context and the circumstances of the case, concluding that although "the pollution did not cause any quantifiable harm to her health, it inevitably made the applicant more vulnerable to various illnesses" (*Fadeyeva v. Russia*, no. 55723/00, § 88, ECHR 2005-IV). Therefore, the Court accepted that "the actual detriment to the applicant's health and well-being reached a level sufficient to bring it within the scope of Article 8 of the Convention" (*Fadeyeva v. Russia*, no. 55723/00, § 88, ECHR 2005-IV). It is also worth to note the Courts' observation that "it remains open to the Court to conclude that there has been a manifest error of appreciation by the national authorities in striking a fair balance between the competing interests of different private actors in this sphere" (*Fadeyeva v. Russia*, no. 55723/00, § 105, ECHR 2005-IV), while at the same time emphasizing that "the complexity of the issues involved with regard to environmental protection renders the Court's role primarily a subsidiary one" (*Fadeyeva v. Russia*, no. 55723/00, § 105, ECHR 2005-IV). In that sense, "the Court must first examine whether the decision-making process was fair and such as to afford due respect to the interests safeguarded to the individual by Article 8 ... and only in exceptional circumstances may it go beyond this line and revise the material conclusions of the domestic authorities" (*Fadeyeva v. Russia*, no. 55723/00, § 105, ECHR 2005-IV).

In the case of *Tătar v. Romania* (no. 67021/01, 27 January 2009), the applicants were a father and a son, who complained that the technological process used by a company, whose gold mining activity was located close to their home, put their lives in danger. Due to an environmental accident that occurred at the site, about 100,000 m³ of cyanide-contaminated tailings water were released into the environment. They also complained of inaction on the part of the national authorities concerning the numerous complaints lodged by the first applicant about the threat to their lives, to the environment and to his asthmatic son's health.

The Court held that there had been a violation of Article 8 of the Convention. It found that, despite the absence of a causal probability in the present case, the existence of a serious and substantial risk to the health and well-being of the applicants imposed on the State a positive obligation to adopt reasonable and adequate measures capable of protecting the rights of the interested parties to respect for their private life and their home and, more generally, to the enjoyment of a healthy and safe environment (*Tătar v. Romania*, no. 67021/01, § 107, 27 January 2009). The Court also pointed out that authorities had to ensure public access to the conclusions of investigations and studies, reiterating that the State had a duty to guarantee the right of members of the public to participate in the decision-making process concerning environmental issues (*Tătar v. Romania*, no. 67021/01, § 88, 27 January 2009).

The case of *Di Sarno and Others v. Italy* (no. 30765/08, 10 January 2012) concerned the state of emergency regarding waste collection, treatment and disposal in the region where the applicants lived and/or worked. The applicants in the instant case alleged that the national authorities omitted to take the necessary measures to ensure the proper functioning of the public waste collection service and by implementing inappropriate legislative and administrative policies, which had caused serious damage to the environment in their region and endangered their lives and health. They also complained that the authorities had not informed those concerned of the risks entailed in living in a polluted area.

Having regard to the fact that the collection, treatment and disposal of waste are without a doubt dangerous activities, the Court observed that the authorities were under a positive obligation to take reasonable and adequate steps to protect the right of the people concerned to respect for their homes and their private life and, more generally, to live in a safe and healthy environment (*Di Sarno and Others v. Italy*, no. 30765/08, § 110, 10 January 2012). According to the Court, “even assuming, as the Government have affirmed, that the acute phase of the crisis lasted only five months ... and in spite of the margin of appreciation left to the respondent State, there is no denying that the protracted inability of the Italian authorities to ensure the proper functioning of the waste collection, treatment and disposal service adversely affected the applicants’ right to respect for their homes and their private life, in violation of Article 8 of the Convention in its substantive aspect (*Di Sarno and Others v. Italy*, no. 30765/08, § 112, 10 January 2012). It further held that there had been no violation of Article 8 of the Convention in its procedural aspect as the studies commissioned by the civil emergency planning department were made public, which means that the authorities discharged their duty to inform the people concerned, including the applicants, of the potential risks to which they exposed themselves by continuing to live in the region (*Di Sarno and Others v. Italy*, no. 30765/08, § 113, 10 January 2012). Lastly, it held that there had been a violation of Article 13 of the Convention concerning the complaint related to the absence of effective remedies in the Italian legal system by which to obtain redress for the damage sustained.

2.2. Attempts to adopt additional protocol to the European convention on human rights recognizing the right to a healthy environment

In the past decades, there were several unsuccessful attempts to adopt an additional protocol to the ECHR recognising the right to a healthy environment (Lambert, 2020: 10-12). These attempts, initiated in the 1970s and resumed by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on several occasions, have failed for a number of reasons (Lambert, 2020: 10-12).

Recommendation 1130 (1990) suggested to the Committee of Ministers to include the preparation of a European Charter and a European Convention on Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development in the Council of Europe's intergovernmental work programme (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 1990), while in Recommendation 1431 (1999), the Parliamentary Assembly asked the Committee of Ministers to: "instruct the appropriate bodies within the Council of Europe to examine the feasibility of: [...] drafting an amendment or an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the right of individuals to a healthy and viable environment" (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 1999). The Committee of Ministers responded that "the recognition of the individual and legally enforceable nature of the human right to a healthy and viable environment meets at present certain difficulties, legal and conceptual" (Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, 2000).

Later on, the Parliamentary Assembly made a new attempt by approving Recommendation 1614 (2003), in which it pointed out how pertinent it would be for the Committee of Ministers to "draw up an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the recognition of individual procedural rights intended to enhance environmental protection, as set out in the Aarhus Convention" (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2003). However, the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights expressed serious reservations in this regard, observing that "the European Convention on Human Rights and its Court would be given tasks beyond their competence and means" (Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2003). In addition, it emphasized that the focus should be on procedural rights and that states should be given time to recognise such rights under national laws.

Another attempt was made in 2009 with the Recommendation 1885 (2009), where the Parliamentary Assembly called for a right to a healthy environment to be added to the ECHR (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2009). In its reply, the Committee of Ministers recognized the importance of a healthy environment and its relevance to the protection of human rights, but it considered that the ECHR system already indirectly provides for environmental protection through the existing Convention rights and their interpretation within the evolving case-law of the Court, due to which it did not see it "advisable to draw up an additional protocol to the Convention in the environmental domain" (Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, 2010).

In this regard, it is worth to note some of the remarks and suggestions expressed in the Introductory Report on the High-Level Conference Environmental Protection and Human Rights, published in 2020 (Lambert, 2020). After explaining how the legal doctrine has

changed with regard to the interaction between human rights and the environment by moving towards an ecocentric approach, the report, among the other, refers also to the traits of the ECtHR's case-law concerning environment. Namely, it is stated that due to the failing of various initiatives for an additional protocol to the ECHR regarding the right to a healthy environment, the Court's environment-related judgments show a very cautious stance, restricted to environmental health protection, and reflect a now outmoded anthropocentric approach with too large margin of appreciation accorded to states for economic interests. It further proposes five priority areas for considering about the future environmental/ecological rights. In this sense, among the other, it suggests a recognition of an individualised right, both personal and collective, to a decent or ecologically viable environment, as a broader concept than that of the right to a healthy environment and one that includes an ecocentric view and an intergenerational approach. It further proposes for consideration other substantive rights, such as the right to environmental education and greater protection of environmental activists, as well as strengthening the right of access to environmental justice and developing a model for environmental proceedings at European level. Emphasizing that all these rights already exist within the legislation and legal systems at national, regional and UN level, it is suggested to urgently consider the advisability of adopting a binding European pact on environmental human rights, including these various rights, together with an appropriate monitoring mechanism.

3. Research

3.1. Approach of the European court of human rights in environment-related cases

It could be noted that there are two main scenarios when it comes to environment-related cases that are brought to the attention of the Court: cases concerning allegations that environmental harm is contrary to certain Convention rights and cases concerning allegations that a certain environmental protection measure of the national authorities infringes certain Convention rights (Verschuuren, 2005: 369). Basically, in simple words, it can be said that human rights can be invoked in environment-related cases both for and against the environment.

The case-law of the ECtHR concerning environment has evolved significantly since the first environmental application was declared admissible in 1980. Today, it covers a wide range of environmental issues, such as: noise (aircraft noise, neighbouring noise, road traffic noise, industrial noise pollution, etc.), dangerous industrial activities, air pollution, pollution of soils, emissions from waste disposal sites, dust pollution, oil pollution in coastal areas, deforestation, urban development, biodiversity conservation, passive smoking, etc. Its focus is mainly on procedural issues, and sometimes on substance. Moreover, the ECtHR has developed a number of principles and standards concerning environment-related cases through its evolutionary approach.

Given that environmental pollution has become a matter of growing public concern in recent decades, the States have adopted various measures in order to reduce the adverse effects of industrial activities. When assessing these measures from the standpoint of Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 to the Convention, the Court has accepted that the States have a wide margin of appreciation in the sphere of environmental protection. Thus, in the case of *Fredin v. Sweden (no. 1)* (18 February 1991, Series A no. 192), the Court recognised that “in today’s society the protection of the environment is an increasingly important consideration” (*Fredin v. Sweden (no. 1)*, 18 February 1991, § 48, Series A no. 192), and held that the interference with a private property right (revoking the applicant’s licence to extract gravel from his property on the ground of nature conservation) was not inappropriate or disproportionate in the context of Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 (*Fredin v. Sweden (no. 1)*, 18 February 1991, § 55, Series A no. 192). In this sense, in the earlier case of *Powell and Rayner v. the United Kingdom* (21 February 1990, Series A no. 172), the Court held that “it is certainly not for [...] the Court to substitute for the national authorities any other assessment of what might be best policy in this difficult technical and social sphere. This is an area where the Contracting Parties are to be recognised as enjoying a wide margin of appreciation” (*Powell and Rayner v. the United Kingdom*, 21 February 1990, § 44, Series A no. 172).

After referring to the protection of the environment as an “increasingly important consideration” (*Fredin v. Sweden (no. 1)*, 18 February 1991, § 48, Series A no. 192) in today’s society, the Court went a step further in the case of *López Ostra v. Spain* (9 December 1994, Series A no. 303-C), and famously noted that “severe environmental pollution may affect individuals’ well-being and prevent them from enjoying their homes in such a way as to affect their private and family life adversely, without, however, seriously endangering their health” (*López Ostra v. Spain*, 9 December 1994, § 51, Series A no. 303-C). It also noted that “fair balance that has to be struck between individual and community interests, and in any case the State enjoys a certain margin of appreciation” (*López Ostra v. Spain*, 9 December 1994, § 51, Series A no. 303-C).

In the case of *López Ostra v. Spain*, the ECtHR held for the first time that a failure by the state to control industrial pollution was a violation of Article 8 of the Convention, where there was a sufficiently serious interference with the applicants’ effective enjoyment of their right to respect for their home and their private and family life, while the interference did not have to threaten the applicants’ health. However, it noted that consideration has to be given to the fair balance between the competing interests of the individual and the community as a whole, i.e. balancing paragraph 1 and paragraph 2 of Article 8. Since then, in most cases concerning alleged breach of Article 8, the Court turns to examining whether, according to the second paragraph of Article 8, a fair balance has been struck between the applicant’s effective enjoyment of the right to respect for private and family life and the interests of the wider community (Cenevska, 2016). In this sense, it is also important to note that in some cases, the economic interest of the state, as an interest of the community as a whole, can override the interest of an individual (for instance, see *Powell and Rayner v. the United Kingdom*, where no violation of Article 8 was found). However, the case of *López Ostra v. Spain* confirms that it would be difficult to assert the state’s overriding economic interest in a situation where a polluting activity is violating a national law.

Later on, in the case of *Guerra and Others v. Italy* (19 February 1998, Reports of Judgments and Decisions 1998-I), the Court confirmed the principle established in *Lopez Ostra v. Spain* that “severe environmental pollution may affect individuals’ well-being and prevent them from enjoying their homes in such a way as to affect their private and family life adversely” (*Guerra and Others v. Italy*, 19 February 1998, § 60, Reports of Judgments and Decisions 1998-I). This principle became “the Court’s recurring proviso in the subsequent environmental protection cases” (Cenevska, 2016: 8). In this case, the Court started to attach procedural value to Article 8 of the Convention, the legal basis of which lies in the concept of state’s positive obligations. In fact, both *Lopez Ostra v. Spain* and *Guerra and Others v. Italy* point to the positive duty of a state to take measures, which would secure the enjoyment of the individual rights to private life and property. Namely, the essence of both cases is in a failure of governments to enforce already existing law or a failure to act.

In the Grand Chamber case of *Hatton and Others v. the United Kingdom* ([GC], no. 36022/97, ECHR 2003-VIII), the Court noted the lack of an explicit right in the Convention to a clean and quiet environment, due to which it did not consider it appropriate to apply a special approach concerning the matter at issue “by reference to a special status of environmental human rights” (*Hatton and Others v. the United Kingdom* [GC], no. 36022/97, § 122, ECHR 2003-VIII). In this case, the Court accorded a wide margin of appreciation to national authorities when striking a fair balance between the competing interests of the individual, i.e. violation of the right of the applicant, and of the community as a whole, i.e. economic interest of the state (*Hatton and Others v. the United Kingdom* [GC], no. 36022/97, § 98, ECHR 2003-VIII), while at the same time observing that “where an individual is directly and seriously affected by noise or other pollution, an issue may arise under Article 8” (*Hatton and Others v. the United Kingdom* [GC], no. 36022/97, § 96, ECHR 2003-VIII). However, the Court in this case also introduced a test to be followed during an inquiry in cases involving State decisions that concern environmental issues, which consists of two aspects: substantive and procedural (*Hatton and Others v. the United Kingdom* [GC], no. 36022/97, § 99, ECHR 2003-VIII). The procedural aspect of the Court’s inquiry was further strengthened in the case of *Taşkın and Others v. Turkey* (no. 46117/99, ECHR 2004-X), where it was pointed out that determining the dangerous effects of an activity to which the individuals concerned are likely to be exposed as part of an environmental impact is considered enough to establish a sufficiently close link with private and family life for the purposes of Article 8, thus triggering the positive obligation of the State to take reasonable and appropriate measures to secure the individuals’ rights under the first paragraph of Article 8 (*Taşkın and Others v. Turkey*, no. 46117/99, § 113, ECHR 2004-X).

In the case of *Fadeyeva v. Russia* (no. 55723/00, ECHR 2005-IV), the Court clarified that the adverse effects of environmental pollution must attain a certain minimum level in order to fall within the scope of Article 8, while the assessment of that minimum level depends on all the circumstances of the case (*Fadeyeva v. Russia*, no. 55723/00, § 69, ECHR 2005-IV). It was also noted that the Court’s scrutiny over whether the national authorities managed to struck a fair balance between the competing interests consisted of verifying whether there has been a manifest error of appreciation on their part in that process (*Fadeyeva v. Russia*, no. 55723/00, § 105, ECHR 2005-IV). Furthermore, the Court deferred again

to the broad margin of appreciation of the national authorities by pointing out that the complexity of the issues involved concerning environmental protection “renders the Court’s role primarily a subsidiary one” (*Fadeyeva v. Russia*, no. 55723/00, § 105, ECHR 2005-IV), although in this case it found that the authorities had failed to strike a fair balance between the interests of the applicant and the interest of the community as a whole.

The case of *Tătar v. Romania* (no. 67021/01, 27 January 2009) marks an important shift in the language of the Court as it started to increasingly refer to the concept of a right to a safe and healthy environment (Cenevska, 2016: 10). The Court explicitly referred to this concept when recognizing that in a situation of absence of a causal probability, the existence of a serious and substantial risk to the health and well-being of the applicants is considered sufficient to impose a positive obligation on the State to take steps to protect their rights to respect for their private life and their home and, more generally, their right to enjoy a healthy and safe environment (*Tătar v. Romania*, no. 67021/01, § 107, 27 January 2009). This is considered to be a landmark case, especially because the Court, for the first time, relied on the precautionary principle in order to reach the judgment (Verschuuren, 2005: 375). Namely, although the Court observed that the applicants had failed to prove the existence of a causal link between exposure to sodium cyanide and asthma (*Tătar v. Romania*, no. 67021/01, § 106, 27 January 2009), it found that the existence of a serious and material risk for the applicants’ health and well-being imposed a duty on the part of the national authorities to assess the risks, both at the time it granted the operating permit and subsequent to the accident, and to take appropriate steps to address the risks (*Tătar v. Romania*, no. 67021/01, § 107, 27 January 2009).

Later on, the Court referred again to the concept of a right to a safe and healthy environment in the case of *Di Sarno and Others v. Italy* (no. 30765/08, 10 January 2012), where it observed that the national authorities were under a positive obligation to take reasonable and adequate steps to protect the right of the people concerned to respect for their homes and their private life and, more generally, to live in a safe and healthy environment (*Di Sarno and Others v. Italy*, no. 30765/08, § 110, 10 January 2012). In addition, both *Tătar v. Romania* and *Di Sarno and Others v. Italy* emphasized that the authorities have to ensure public access to the conclusions of investigations and studies, reiterating that the State has a duty to guarantee the right of the public to participate in the decision-making process concerning environmental issues.

4. Discussion

Although the Convention is not designed to provide a general protection of the environment as such and do not expressly guarantee a right to a healthy environment, it could be noted that it indirectly offers a significant degree of protection regarding environmental matters, as demonstrated by the Court’s evolving case-law in this area. Namely, the Court has increasingly dealt with cases in which individuals have complained that a breach of one of their Convention rights has resulted from adverse environmental factors. Moreover, it could be noted that there is a development in the Court’s case-law towards a greater protection

of individuals. One of the indicators in this regard is the reducing of the burden of proof concerning the causal link between pollution and health effects.

The overview of the ECtHR's case-law concerning environment demonstrates that environmental factors affect Convention rights in various ways. Namely, these environmental factors may directly affect the Convention rights, or give rise to certain procedural rights for the individual concerned, while protection of the environment may serve as a legitimate aim for interference with Convention rights.

It could be noted that procedural rights have been widely recognized in the Court's case law concerning environment. Namely, the national authorities have a duty to ensure public access to information, such as impact studies and risk assessment, participation in environmental decision-making processes and access to court. It could also be noted that the Court relies largely on domestic environmental standards in its environment-related case-law. It seems that, in general, applicants are successful in cases where the national authorities omitted to adhere to existing environmental standards. Another significant trait of the Court's approach to environment-related cases is the wide margin of appreciation accorded to the national authorities in balancing the economic interests of the community as a whole with the human rights of individuals. In this sense, it seems that the Convention system mainly serves as a safety net for individuals and an incentive for States to implement existing environmental laws and standards. Namely, in order to protect their citizens, States are obligated to apply domestic environmental standards and to execute domestic court rulings.

Also, it is worth noting that before the case of *Tătar v. Romania*, the Court considered the substantive right to a healthy environment to be a matter of national law. However, by placing the concept of a right to a safe and healthy environment within the context of Article 8 of the Convention, the Court has made a step towards abandoning its purely procedural approach to its environmental jurisdiction and creating a potential that could lead to eventual recognition-to the extent possible- of a right to a healthy environment, which would have both a procedural and substantive aspect.

Given that the Court has a serious regard for its role as a "last resort" when States have failed to take measures or disregarded domestic law, as one of the most significant characteristics of its approach to cases concerning environment, it provides for correction of the shortcomings of domestic law and procedures when it is clear that States have little regard to national measures. Thus, it could be said that the Court is being effective in terms of securing the respect of the rights of individuals, while upholding basic legal principles. This seems to be the real potential of the Convention to positively affect environmental protection in Europe. Namely, in case when States fail in implementation of environmental laws and standards, the utilisation of the Convention rights can assist in providing implementation of these laws for European citizens, by offering a remedy for individuals considering themselves to suffer various consequences due to such non-implementation.

Nevertheless, it could be noted that the use of the Convention and human rights, in order to provide environmental protection, also has certain limitations. For instance, the limitations may arise in connection with the enforcement of the Court's environmental rulings. Namely,

the national authorities are obliged to execute the Court's final judgments (European Convention on Human Rights, 1950: Article 46(1)), thus including the Court's rulings in regard to environmental issues. However, the implementation of the Court's judgments by national authorities can often be problematic (Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2020). Still, despite the various obstacles to the implementation of the Court's judgments, it could be asserted that the enforcement of the judgments undoubtedly has a potential to produce general changes in the behaviour of the national authorities, which may result in positive changes in the context of environmental protection. Also, it could be claimed that it seems doubtful whether the utilisation of the Convention rights can always lead to extensive improvements in environmental conditions (Pederson, 2010). Namely, although it could be said that the Court started to increasingly refer to the concept of a right to a healthy and safe environment, the lack of a right to a healthy environment still affects the approach of the Court to environment-related cases in a manner of having a generally cautious stance with too wide margin of appreciation accorded to national authorities for economic interest.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of the ECtHR's environment-related cases shows that the Court has built up a substantial body of case-law as regards various environmental matters. Namely, despite the lack of a specific right to a healthy environment, or any specific reference to the environment, the Court has developed an extensive case-law in this field, by using a number of Convention rights as relevant to various adverse environmental issues complained of by applicants, thus succeeding to indirectly offer a significant protection in this regard. It could be noted that there is a development in the Court's case-law towards a greater protection of individuals.

As demonstrated by the Court's case law, the Court mainly deals with two basic types of environment-related cases brought to the attention of the Court: cases in which it is argued that environmental harm is contrary to certain Convention rights and cases in which it is argued that a certain environmental protection measure of the national authorities violates certain Convention rights. As to the manner in which environmental factors affect various Convention rights, it could be concluded that these factors may affect Convention rights in three different ways: Convention rights may be directly affected by adverse environmental factors; adverse environmental factors may give rise to certain procedural rights for the individual concerned; and environmental protection may serve as a legitimate aim justifying interference with certain Convention rights.

The Court has endorsed the value of procedural rights in an environmental context by their wide recognition in its case-law concerning environment. In general, it affords a wide margin of appreciation to States in balancing the economic interest and individuals' human rights and relies to a large extent on domestic environmental standards when adjudicating environment-related cases. It thus provides for correction when national authorities disregard domestic laws and procedures and secures respect for individuals' rights, which builds on its potential to positively affect environmental protection. However, it seems that the absence of a right

to a healthy environment affects the Court's approach to environment-related cases in a way that, in general, it manifests a cautious stance, followed by a wide margin of appreciation afforded to States for economic interest. In this regard, it is also worth noting that the Court has started to increasingly refer to the concept of a right to a safe and healthy environment in its case-law. Thus, it seems that the Court has paved a way which might prospectively lead to recognition of a right to a healthy environment. In any case, despite having certain limitations, there is no doubt that the Court plays an important role in strengthening the European citizens' environmental rights, as shown by its case-law.

As to the possibility for the Court to recognize a right to a healthy environment on its own, having regard to the increased referring of the Court to the concept of a right to a safe and healthy environment in its case-law, it seems worth exploring carefully whether such approach would be the most expedient solution in terms of providing better environmental protection under current circumstances. Namely, the latest developments, tendencies and suggestions made to the Council of Europe in the context of emphasizing the need to recognize an individualised right, both personal and collective, to a decent or ecologically viable environment, as a broader concept than that of the right to a healthy environment, together with other additional environment-related substantive and procedural rights, which would ultimately be adopted within a binding European pact on environmental human rights, trigger the question is it really up to the Court to recognize a right to a healthy environment on its own. Namely, having regard to the current state of affairs, it is worth considering whether it is time for the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers to readdress these issues, especially having in consideration the constitutional and legislative developments that have occurred in many member states of the Council of Europe and at EU level.

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Review scientific paper

**PANDEMIC AND POSTPANDEMIC CHALLENGES OF
HEALTHCARE LEADERS FOR SUSTAINABLE SAFETY
CULTURE**

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to elaborate the main (post)pandemic leader's goals, such as timely adopting new safety protocols, providing support for the staff's wellbeing and patient's safety in coordination with all relevant healthcare guidelines and institutions. After the systematic analysis of the academic literature the method of evaluation of expert observations was used in order to see how healthcare leadership efficiently responds in time of crises due to the pandemic, but also to see the future need of adaptation, reorganization and optimization. The results suggest readiness to decide/act fast, but also to create a sense of control over the situation, trust and stability. Additionally, an effort is made to emphasize the key elements of an effective crisis team and effective communication with employees and stakeholders as one of the key elements of successful crisis management in relation with leadership style that empowers employees to participate in decision making.

Keywords: healthcare leadership, crisis, control, safety culture, transformational change

1. Introduction

Crisis management is crucial and over the years its importance has increased because countries, due to different situations, often face a variety of crises. According to the author Hayes (2021), *crisis management refers to the identification of a threat to an organization and its stakeholders in order to mount an effective response to it*". The author Posey (2021) adds that, *crisis management is the application of strategies designed to help an organization deal with a sudden and significant negative event*". According to existing definitions, it is clear that crisis management in organizations has a very important function because failed crisis management can cause large financial and corporate losses. It also helps to redefine the existing organizational safety culture.

The world is currently facing an unprecedented health crisis (the Covid-19 pandemic), especially in health organizations and that is why they are the focus of this research. In order to successfully manage crises, the organization needs to have leaders who will be skilled enough to foster change. Definitely, according to Mohrman et al., (1998) leadership is an ability, i.e. power that mobilizes members of the group in the effective achievement of organizational goals. The author Bass (1990, p.19) adds that leadership is an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves the structure or restructuring of members' situations, perceptions or expectations. According to the authors Huczynski and Buchanan (2007), leadership is a process that achieves influence on activities by which an organized group is directed towards achieving goals.

Specific and different managerial skills are needed to overcome crises, like possession of intuition, knowledge, skills and abilities. All of the above mentioned, help to prevent crises and to successfully manage or mitigate the consequences of crises. This means that executive leaders should make decisions that are important for the future of the organization even in conditions of pressure, lack of information and complete disorganization.

Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize that the most important factor is the trust in the management because employees in crisis situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic rely on management decisions and expect that executive leaders will make the best decisions to successfully deal with the crisis. Moreover, the trust in the executive leaders and in their thriving decisions influences the employees to feel confident and to develop professional relationships with the patients for whom it is essential to feel safe. It is becoming clear that a sustainable culture of safety is a profound and crucial issue in pandemic crisis management.

2. Literature overview

2.1. Crisis pandemic management in healthcare organizations

According to Uhl-Bien et al. (2009), crisis management in healthcare is a complex and dynamic process that goes through several levels of crisis (pre-crisis, acute and post-crisis

levels). The *pre-crisis level* is a period when the health organization becomes aware that a serious problem has arisen and it is a time when preventive actions can be taken to avoid entering a phase of acute crisis. Crisis leaders need to recognize the situation and anticipate what it can develop into and then take the next steps because if the crisis goes into an acute phase then it will be necessary to activate the crisis management plan. According to the author Jankelova et al., (2021) it is necessary not to underestimate the crisis, not to make a wrong assessment, but to be aware of the growing crisis and not to ignore the warnings.

The *acute phase* often means damage was already done, regarding the reputation and the financial status of the organization, which is why it is necessary to take measures to control the damage, to optimize it and to prevent further spread. The *post-crisis phase* begins when the crisis is under control and then the organization directs all its efforts to compensate for the losses. During this period, the organization shows to the public that it takes care of the problems it has faced and at the same time activities are conducted to compensate the financial, material and personal losses. Next, the organization performance during the crisis is evaluated and changes that have been identified as essential in the acute phase are made (so that the organization can be more prepared in the future). Due to the complexity, the post-crisis phase is often long and requires specific skills to obtain the following answers:

1. How did the health organization deal with the bad publicity?
2. What could have been done better?
3. What communication did the health organization conduct during the crisis?
4. What losses has the organization faced?
5. Has the crisis prompted contract terminations and have any lawsuits been filled?
6. Can any opportunities be extracted from the crisis?

Regarding the Covid pandemic, numerous authors have raised the question of how prepared health organizations were to respond to the challenge and how many of them had successfully managed the crisis. The authors Faeste et al., (2020) explain that in the post-Covid phase it is important to analyze the changes that occurred during the pandemic and to decide which changes will continue and which will be modified. Therefore, it is especially important to look at the experiences of related organizations that have faced the same problem at the same time. Next, it is necessary to listen to the experiences of frontline leaders and health professionals who have directly encountered the pandemic through the treatment of patients and the constant exposure to the risk of infection. It is also important during the post-pandemic phase to set the right priorities and make the right investments. The author Pfeifer (2020) in his research explains that in the post-Covid phase it is crucial to evaluate the connection, collaboration and coordination between the stakeholders. Regarding the coordination, he claims that it is very important for the executive leaders to quickly receive the information from the government institutions and at the same time to place it to the public with empathy and understanding. When it comes to collaboration, it is important for the leaders to provide a link between people and resources focused on the goals they need to achieve. Regarding

coordination „the coronavirus requires coordination in several critical areas: 1) increasing testing for better situational awareness and planning, 2) promoting social distancing to reduce the spread of the virus, 3) surging the capacity of medical facilities and staff to care for patients, 4) increasing the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies, and 5) developing antivirals and vaccines” (p.2). The authors Jaason M. et al. (2021) in their publication in “Jama Network Open” add that in the post-Covid phase, leadership priorities should be aimed at balancing priorities, maintaining staff motivation, and restoring organizational strength after a long period in which all staff worked under stress and exposure at risk. At that phase, the executive leadership and the frontline leaders have a particularly important role to play.

3. Research

The purpose of this research was to give answer on the research question: “how leadership in the health care organizations cope with huge pressure caused by Covid-19 pandemic and what kind of rapid and creative solutions have been found out and implemented”. We are looking for an approach that is most important during the crisis and recovery stage of crisis. Having in mind that good crisis management has to provide coordination with employees and stakeholders to improve quality and safety without losing values, employees and organizational mission.

The approach of this research is qualitative, by making content analysis of relevant and existing research academic literature (research survey reports, research articles, strategies, policies) to find out the best practices that health care organizations implement in coping Covid-19 crisis.

After defining the list of data sources, the data were accessed and collected into an organized system according to the research question.

Because most of the data came into different formats the next step was to filter, order and combine information in order to combine and compare the results. The data that was relevant for this research was survey studies reports that has relevant information about their sample characteristics, measures, procedures, and protocols.

After the systematic analysis of the academic literature the method of evaluation of expert observations was used in order to see how healthcare leadership efficiently responds in time of crises due to the pandemic, but also to see the future need of adaptation, reorganization and optimization. The stress was on the role of organizational safety culture, communication and leadership.

4. Discussion

The analysis resulted in several research studies that can be singled out and their findings are summarized in the table below.

The most important finding is that it is essential to take care of the psychological safety of employees, or, as the authors Rangachari and Woods (2020) state, unpredictable conditions cause stress to the workers (because of extreme workloads, rapidly evolving practice environments and witnessing large volumes of medication errors, infections, and deaths) and therefore it is necessary for leaders to develop a strategy to eliminate emotional stress in the workplace among healthcare professionals. Conversely, a lack of senior leadership care will lead to reduced safety, reduced patient care, and increased pandemic and post-pandemic health care problems.

In fact, the healthcare organizations that have proven to have the most successful practice timely forecasting, crisis management and crisis recovery at the level of individual, team and organization and at the same time, in all forms and levels, most care is taken for safety in the organization and staff is constantly trained as to adapt to the circumstances and how to stay safe even in extreme crisis situations. This is also emphasized in the PsNET study (2021) according to which *„when employees trust they will be supported, they are likely to feel psychologically safe and empowered to communicate safety concerns to managers, which, in turn, enables patient safety to improve in everyday practice for all patients”* (p.4). All this helps to overcome the worker burnout syndrome which directly disrupts the sustainable safety culture in the healthcare organization because then the employees feel chronically tired and under constant stress at work. So, the key point is to create a work environment in which mutual trust will foster psychological security and thus employees will be reasonable, rested and ready to participate in the decision-making process together with the management. According to Rangachari and Woods (2020) *„worker trust, psychological safety, and empowerment are key elements of a positive work environment that enable safe, high-quality care to be delivered, despite challenges”* (p.8).

Table 1. Summary of data findings- cases of health care organizations in dealing with a pandemic and post-pandemic crisis

❖ The case of Stanford Medicine of California, USA for experience with stuff well being	A survey of a sample of 69 health professionals was conducted and the result was that eight sources of anxiety were identified during the crisis: (1) adequate access to PPE; (2) exposure to COVID-19 at work and taking the infection home to family, (3) inadequate access to COVID-19 testing if symptoms develop since the infection could be propagated at work, (4) uncertainty about whether their organization would support their needs if they develop infection, (5) access to childcare during school closures and increased work hours, (6) support for additional needs as work hours increase (food, lodging, transportation), (7) ability to provide competent care in a new area (e.g., non-ICU nurses deployed to serve as ICU nurses), and (8) inadequate communication and information. The solution to this situation lies in practicing the approaches to listen to the other, to prepare the other, to protect the other, to give support to the other, to show care for the other and to pay respect to the other. The research highlights the need for support and trust as key elements in overcoming the pandemic crisis. The main limitation of the study is the small sample.
❖ The case of Danish healthcare organizations for experience with stuff well being	A study was conducted that includes 89 leaders and which aims to show the differences in behavior during a crisis and the result was obtained that it is important for the managerial level to take responsibility and build strong beliefs, attitudes and values that will transmit to employees who need to feel safe. At the same time, it is essential to have a managerial education that will also be transferred to the lower hierarchical levels and that will help the employees to respond better and more professionally to the needs of the patients. It is also important to set up experienced leaders with years of experience who will know how to convey information without causing fear, emotional stress or panic in employees. The main limitation of the study is the small sample.
❖ The case of Metropolitan Hospital Group in Taiwan for an experience with stuff well being	The research included 337 respondents who participated in a study that examined the patient safety culture and personal well-being. The result is that dimensions of teamwork climate, safety climate, job satisfaction and stress recognition as patient safety culture predicted staff exhaustion. Also, here is the result that in the post-pandemic era, there seems to be an improvement on certain aspect of the patient safety culture among hospital staff, and the improvement is more prevalent for managers. Main limitation of the study is the study design because the study sample is not representative of the entire hospital group.

❖ The case of an acute hospital in Singapore for experience with communication	A study of a sample of 13 units involving 1154 participants was conducted and the greatest agreement refers to the fact that right and timely communication at all levels can save lives in public health emergencies, and identifying the enablers and barriers can affect lives of staff and serviceusers. The study has no visible limitations.
❖ The case of Pakistan's hospitals for experience with the safety culture	The study included 232 health workers who had direct contact with covidated patients in Pakistan during the pandemic. The results show that safety conscientiousness moderates the relationship between safety specific transformational leadership and COVID-19 perceived risk. The study has no visible limitations.
❖ The case of young leaders in different countries for experience with the safety culture	According to this study which contains experiences from hospitals in Spain, Austria, Kenya, Portugal, Dubai and Germany, experiences highlight the importance of inclusivity at every step and prepare rigorous protocols, policies and procedures, in order to standardize care and ensure safety of all (if you take care of your staff, your staff will take care of the rest). The main limitation of the study is the short period of analysis taken into account.
❖ The case of West Virginia University Hospitals and Health System for experience with specific management model	Interviews were conducted with 15 leaders who manage the crisis and the result was obtained that for a successful overcoming of the crisis the Kotler model was used for eight-phase overcoming of the crises in the organizations it covers the establishment of a sense of urgency, formation of a powerful guiding coalition, creation of a vision, communication of the vision, empowerment of others to act on the vision, plan for and creation of short-term wins, consolidation of improvements and production of more changes, and institutionalization of new approaches. In this way, health organizations have successfully faced the pandemic crisis and created opportunities for the post-crisis period. This study suggests creating an integrated organizational structure to provide timely decision-making and coordinate communication within and between healthcare facilities. Also, a fundamental role of this coalition was establishing HICS to facilitate rapid, 24-hour communication between the leadership team and all hospital and clinic personnel. Specific are the emerging infection disease teams, all new protocols, other transformed services and the implementation of the strategically plan. The study has no visible limitations.

Source: Adapted according to a number of studies, attached to the list of references

4.1. Key points from analyzed case studies

Prevention is crucial and leaders need to be focused on preventing a crisis in the organization. This should be their primary responsibility because ignoring allows small problems to remain unresolved and thus the obvious side effects of the crisis to emerge. The construction of a model for crisis management in healthcare must include recommendations, ways and solutions for successful crisis prevention (as is the case with the Covid 19 pandemic).

Different authors point out different ways in which a healthcare organization can be protected from a crisis such as a pandemic. There is an agreement among the authors that communication is crucial. Thereby, a health organization in which there is no communication between employees, in which employees do not feel satisfied with the work and do not identify with the work and organization, it is easily susceptible to crisis.

The main focus of leaders should be directed to the individuals i.e. to improve professional skills, develop employee's knowledge, expand employee's horizons that will allow them to successfully integrate into work activities and successfully identify with the goals and strategies of the healthcare organization. This process of socialization, adaptation and individualization of employees is important due to the fact that the organization in this way will be much easier to deal with any type of crisis that may strike. Effective communication, which leads to a higher level of readiness, requires effective channeling of positions, competencies, responsibilities and motivations.

It is also important to link employee priorities and their identification to the crisis management strategy. This leads to the second phase, which is effective communication between employees. In this phase, the internal and external communication systems are identified and the communication strategy is evaluated. Effective communication between employees leads to the third part, i.e. effective crisis communication. The focus should be on the following crisis communication dimensions: operations, victims, credibility, professional expectations, ethics and trust. With the successful implementation of the previous phases, we can finally reach an effective crisis management strategy.

Here the healthcare organization needs to focus on several steps. The first is establishing a crisis prevention program. The next is the identification of potential crisis situations. Concrete operational measures should be taken. Consequently, step by step with this we come to the last step which consists of liquidation of the crisis consequences. The success or failure to respond to the crisis depends on the level of communicative culture that is present in the organization: hierarchical or horizontal, open or closed, revealing or secretive. Organizational safety culture can also create bottlenecks, i.e. systematic rejection of information, based on the communication process that is set according to the rules and structure of its functioning.

Too often, organizational standard operating practices, its pragmatic and cultural perspectives, the use and distribution of information, and the implicit and explicit expectations of its employees are what shape the key perceptions and decisive events that cause a crisis. Merging these bottlenecks in times of crisis will disrupt the flow of information inside and out from

the organization. The flow of information will be most endangered in organizations with a strict hierarchical structure in which communication is highly formalized. As a result, the losses and disruptions caused by the crisis will have a stronger effect on these organizations than on an informal and dynamic organization in which information is exchanged through a flexible set of resources.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

Healthcare leadership plays a crucial role in continuous improvement of safety culture in the health organizations. Covid-19 pandemic is the recent greatest test for leading human resources through adaptation of global pandemic challenges (lack of employees, supplies and new protocols) while managing huge volume of patients from the new disease. COVID-19 pandemic has shown that quality and safety practice requires transformational change and healthcare leaders should embrace the lessons and see this as an opportunity to make a shift in organizational thinking.

The key recommendations certainly come from WHO (2020) according to which it is necessary to take steps to protect workers from violence, to improve their mental health; to protect them from physical and biological hazards, to advance national programs for health worker safety, and to connect health worker safety policies to existing patient safety policies. Also, there is a new Global Patient Safety Action Plan from 2021 in which are given the nine global lessons post Covid-19 pandemic (systems, strategy, learning, workforce, safety, co-production, integration, sustainability and equity).

According to the CDC recommendations, local leaders within the hospital would need support to better communicate and translate hospital updates in response to COVID-19 to actionable plans for their staff. Better communication in executing resource utilization plans, expressing more empathy and care for their staff, and enhancing communication channels, such as through the use of secure text messaging rather than emails would be important.

According to the study of Jama Network Open (2021) the main important recommendations are: People Focus: Acknowledge Staff and Celebrate Successes, Provide Support for Staff Well-being, Environmental Scan : Develop a Clear Understanding of the Current Local and Global Context, Along With Informed Projections, Learning and Preparation: Prepare for Future Emergencies (Personnel, Resources, Protocols, Contingency Plans, Coalitions, and Training, Recalibrating, Optimizing, and Organizing, Reassess Priorities Explicitly and Regularly and Provide Purpose, Meaning, and Direction, Maximize Team, Organizational, and System Performance and Discuss Enhancements, Manage the Backlog of Paused Services and Consider Improvements While Avoiding Burnout and Moral Distress, Envisioning, Sustain Learning, Innovations, and Collaborations, and Imagine Future Possibilities, Crisis Communication, Provide Regular Communication and Engender Trust In Consultation With Public Health and Fellow Leaders, Provide Safety Information and Recommendations to Government, Other Organizations, Staff, and the Community to Improve Equitable and Integrated Care and Emergency Preparedness System wide. According to Actionable Patient

Safety Solutions (APSS) it is necessary to have a leadership checklist, it requires strategy and takes several years to adopt, requiring strong leadership at all levels. It is recommended to include: person-centered culture of safety, holistic, continuous improvement and model for sustainment. According to APSS (2021) recommendations for *„organization's hat effectively create a person-centered culture of safety, a holistic, continuous improvement framework, and an effective model for sustainment will embody these characteristics of highly reliable organizations”* (p.7). Also, it is noted that education is the solution, there should be a standardized way of communicating patient information and finally, an effective leadership development program and incorporation of human factors training across the organization is an essential component of sustainment.

Given the above, in the crisis and post-crisis period it is essential to take care of how employees feel emotionally, that is, to put human resources in a privileged position because if the health organization manages burned staff who do not feel balance, trust and protection, good results can not be achieved in everyday clinical practice. It was concluded that it is necessary within the health management to create an environment in which mutual trust will be developed and in which stakeholders will be able to communicate about problems regardless of whether they are individual problems or team problems. Progressive reactions are needed to motivate the workers to do their best, to maintain a sustainable safety culture that determines patient trust and safety. Leaders are encouraged to create an environment of trust, psychological security, proving, and free communication. It is concluded and emphasized that it is necessary to adapt new safety protocols that will increase patient safety and all this is undoubtedly related to the formation of a crisis team of experts to control infectious diseases, and to provide guidance that will be implemented by the management. In addition, it is recommended that every health organization should aim to be an organization that effectively creates a person-centered culture of safety, a holistic, continuous improvement framework, and an effective model for sustainability.

The key message that emerges from this research is *“Keep health workers safe to keep patients safe”*.

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SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY – GREEN POLICY LEVERS

GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT AS POTENTIAL LEVER OF GREEN GROWTH¹

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Abstract

In the past two decades, public procurement changed significantly from compliance to a strategic function in a majority of highly developed countries becoming a strong lever that promotes green growth. EU legislation created favorable legal preconditions for the application of green public procurement (GPP) in member states (MS) in all phases of the procurement process. However, some recent research show that uptake of GPP was low and fragmented in MS with weak enforcement of the public procurement rules allowing environmental considerations. To promote GPP adoption of GPP in practice, governments have to work on closing implementation gaps. That includes, besides creating a favorable legal framework, establishing a centralized governmental body that would lead and coordinate reforms in this area as well as developing an evaluation methodology to detect the strengths and weaknesses of a public procurement system. Strategies and annual action plans for the development of public procurement system that includes GPP, as an integral part should be prepared accompanied by close monitoring of progress in their implementation.

Keywords: sustainable public procurement, green public procurement, green growth, implementation gap

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1. Introduction

In the majority of highly developed countries, public procurement became a strong lever for promoting green growth since governments around the world spend an estimated US\$11 trillion in public contracts every year, representing approximately 12 percent of global GDP (Bosio et al, 2020). Such significant purchasing power is used by governments as a tool for achieving economic, social, and environmental goals as well as for the creation of markets for green solutions, thereby stimulating the private sector to develop their expertise and services (C40 & ARUP, 2015).

Broad transformation of public procurement led to Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) which could be marked as “a process whereby public organizations meet their needs for goods, services, works, and utilities in a way that achieves value for money on a whole lifecycle basis in terms of generating benefits not only to the organization, but also to society and the economy, whilst minimizing damage to the environment” (UNEP 2011).

Public procurement is increasingly used by the OECD countries as “a smart governance tool to achieve non-procurement policy objectives of economy, efficiency, and environmental protection” (OECD, 2015a). In other words, SPP means that governments not just shift the focus of procurement from seeking the lowest price to achieving “Value for Money” (VfM), but use the procurement function strategically to achieve policy objectives linked to the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, environmental and social as well. The major goals of SPP are the promotion of green growth; environmental protection; reduction of social inequalities, development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); promotion of minority and women-owned businesses; support for innovations, and responsible business conduct.

On the other hand, GPP is a component of SPP that uses public sector purchasing to achieve the general environmental goal of “reducing environmental impact throughout the whole life cycle” (EC, 2008). Over the past decade, GPP has shifted from “do less harm” to a more proactive approach whereby public procurement is used to achieve specific environmental objectives (World Bank, 2021).

In spite of widely recognized role of GPP in promoting green growth, recent researches show that uptake of GPP was low and fragmented in the EU member states with weak enforcement of the public procurement rules allowing environmental considerations. Thus the challenge for policy makers is to detect factors of “implementation gap” and to find ways on how to overcome them.

2. Literature overview

2.1. EU regulatory framework for green public procurement

Since 2014, the new European Commission (EC) Directive 2014/24/EU (hereafter: Directive) deployed a “demand-side policy of public procurement” to achieve strategic economic, societal, and environmental goals in the EU (EC, 2010). However, elements of the Green Public Procurement concept could be traced back to 1986, when the Single European Act (SEA) was introduced to enable the reaching of the EU goals and targets including those related to environmental protection. The European Commission 2020 Strategy (EC, 2010) and Renewed Sustainable Development Strategy (EU, 2006) identified green public procurement as an essential market-based instrument for attaining the EU’s economic and environmental objectives (Pouikli, 2021).

European Commission defines green procurement as “a process whereby public authorities seek to procure goods, services and works with reduced environmental impact through their life cycle when compared to goods, services and works with the same primary function that would otherwise be procured” (EC, 2008). This definition brought “Life Cycle Cost” (LCC) into public procurement legislation and practice.

Green goods, services, and works can be distinguished by the low impact on the environment across the life cycle of the products used. The product life cycle costs encompasses six phases from “cradle to grave”: starting with raw material extraction; manufacture of the product; transportation to site; use of the product in production of other products to deliver a service or in construction; maintenance; and end-of life disposal. Approximately 80 percent of the environmental impacts are generated in raw material extraction and manufacturing (World Bank, 2021).

The Directive provides concrete mechanisms LCC to be embraced by saying “the most economically advantageous tender from the point of view of the contracting authority shall be identified on the basis of the price or cost, using a cost-effectiveness approach, such as life-cycle costing which covers parts or all of the costs over the life cycle of a product, service or works”.

It could be concluded that the Directive created legal preconditions for the application of GPP in all phases of the procurement process, starting with planning what procurement subject is going to be purchased till the selection of the most favorable bid that takes into account costs of environmental impact incurred during the life cycle period.

2.2. Implementation gap in green public procurement

European Commission pointed out that GPP “should play a bigger role for central and local governments to respond to societal, environmental and economic objectives, such as the

circular economy” (EC, 2017). The question is to what extent MS and contracting authorities at the national and local levels across the EU exploited the abovementioned opportunities in practice.

Valuable insight into GPP uptake by EU institutions and national and local governments was provided by Badell & Rosell (2021). The main finding of the research was that there was a significant difference in GPP use among different levels of public authorities. The local public sector is the front-runner in GPP adoption, with 8.41 percent of tenders adhering to green criteria. It is followed by national governments (5.31%), while EU institutions are lagging far behind with only 2.65%.

Such low and fragmented uptake together with the weak enforcement of the public procurement rules allowing environmental considerations demonstrate that the current framework failed to serve as an effective lever to promote the essential organizational and behavioral changes in the majority of MS. Hence, the GPP state of play reveals that “it still remains an underdeveloped (and unexplored) field in practice” (Pouikli, 2021).

With the cognition that advanced and favorable legislation is far from being enough for wider use of GPP, the question is what should be done to fulfill “green growth” objectives in practice. The difference between regulation and expected outcomes of their application in practice was defined as an implementation gap (SIGMA/OECD, 1998). In other words, it could be said that the implementation gap is the deficit between the set of legal norms and the capacity to implement and enforce them. In the next chapter, we will focus on major factors that create an implementation gap in public procurement.

3. Research

3.1. Factors of green public procurement uptake

Testa et al. (2012) confirmed the relevance of awareness for the adoption of GPP in practice. Moreover, Ahsan and Rahman (2017) investigated the challenges of GPP implementation in the Australian public healthcare sector and they identified a lack of senior management support as an important factor that may limit the uptake of GPP.

Research of influence of legislation on public procurement performance in Serbia, concretely on the effectiveness of procurement measured by the number of days to complete procedure, estimated that influence of legislation is only 23% while remaining depend on other factors, such are: 1) organization of public procurement function 2) corruption and “Echo corruption”, 3) administrative capacities of contracting authorities, and 4) motivation of employees engaged in public procurement (Cudanov et al, 2018). Although the last mentioned research is not dealing with green procurement directly, it could be useful to put light on factors with a significant impact on the effectiveness of policy measures and instruments in public procurement in general. Thus, the factors should be considered relevant for GPP as a specific form of public procurement.

3.1.1. Awareness

According to Testa et al. (2012) awareness of GPP initiatives and tools is a highly powerful instrument that influences choice in favor of GPP thus increasing the number of tenders that are adopted with the inclusion of environmental criteria. The more a public administration is informed and acquires competence and know-how in developing GPP practices, the more it is ready to introduce green criteria in the tenders. This relation between awareness and uptake of GPP is confirmed by numerous practical examples showing that information campaigns, sensitizations on GPP opportunities, and training courses for purchasers are actually increasing the capability of contracting authorities to adopt and effectively “use” environmental criteria in their purchasing strategies and decisions.

3.1.2. Organization

Research that included 100 randomly chosen contracting authorities in Serbia and interviewed public procurement officers (PPOs) proved that procurement officers in Serbia were interested primarily in form, feel detached, and demotivated (Jovanovic et al, 2022). In such a situation it is hard to expect them to opt for a more complex and thus more demanding GPP.

To develop GPP, it is important to clearly specify ‘who is accountable for what’ within the contracting authority. Moreover, PPOs’ tasks should be linked to the performance goals of procurement, including GPP. To increase the positive motivation of PPOs (i.e. their perception of benefits from the procurement process), it is necessary to introduce rewards for success either in the form of material stimulus or recognition (Jovanovic et al, 2022).

3.1.3. Motivation of employees

Besides competence, motivation is the second crucial factor that determines the contribution of public procurement officers to public procurement performance. If public procurement officers operate in an environment with a focus on formal compliance and with little or no recognition of performance indicators such as: purchasing goods and services of higher quality and lower impact on the environment, the economy of procurement (lower life-cycle costs), etc. than officers will have no incentive to make additional efforts to meet any of the objectives.

According to the research (Jovanovic, 2020), PPOs consider higher motivation as the most relevant factor that would stimulate them to upgrade procurement performance (86% of respondents claimed that). However, the research results confirmed that only 9% of the interviewed officers received some award for their successful work. Out of those awarded, 60% consider that the reward was inadequate. In other words, only 3.6% of the interviewed officers were satisfied with how they were rewarded for success.

In parallel with positive incentives, there are negative incentive instruments (sanctions). Research proved that sanctions were much more applied than positive incentives when PPOs are concerned. Namely, 34% of officers expected to be sanctioned in case they failed which is a much higher rate than that of their superiors (only 14%). When concern of not failing to meet formal requirements is dominant, there is hesitation on the PPOs side to embrace the new practice, including the one related to GPP due to the increasing risks that novelties bring.

To overcome mentioned limitations on motivation, it is necessary to change both organizational models as well as reward and incentive schemas. Regarding organization, more decentralization in decision-making is needed. Organizational goals of contracting authorities should be set to reflect the “green” aspect of procurement. Moreover, a transformation from negative incentives (sanctions) towards positive ones, such as recognition and rewards is required to establish more balanced and better-motivated motivation patterns for PPOs.

3.2. Development patterns of green public procurement

Adoption and development of GPP varied among countries during the past two decades. Highly developed countries in North America, Europe, and East Asia were early uptakers of GPP (World Bank, 2021). In these countries, the GPP reforms started with the creation of a legislative framework that enabled GPP implementation. Application of GPP was initially voluntary, left to the discretion of the procuring agencies, but governments gradually expanded the range of products for which GPP became mandatory. Stimulating regulation was accompanied by the setting up of a central procurement agency that is in charge to apply GPP practices across the government. This concept characterized by governments that “lead by example” in changing green consumption choices across society is marked as a “top-down” approach.

On the other side, in some countries such as the Latin American ones, local self-governments were the first that implemented GPP (World Bank, 2021). Cities and municipalities are close to the environmental impacts such as air and water pollution, waste management, flooding, and loss of green space that urged environmental action. Moreover, cities participate two-thirds of the total energy consumption and are responsible for three-quarters of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from global final energy use which indicates how important local authorities are for achieving global environmental goals (REN21, 2021). Moreover, many local self-governments incorporated “green” aspects in their local economy and procurement policies. The model with a leading role of local self-governments in applying GPP could be considered a “bottom-up” approach.

A significant advantage of the “bottom-up” approach is that it is more flexible in promoting innovative practices. On the other side, limited potential in scaling up GPP practices is its major weakness. When adoption of GPP practices is voluntary and thus limited to willing contracting authorities prepared to take the initiative in the absence of binding regulation room for dissemination is limited. Furthermore, the lack of obligatory national legislation

results in different practices at the local level thus complicating suppliers' engagement with the public sector limiting the further scale of GPP adoption.

Regardless of whether the initiative for GPP comes from the top or bottom level of government, it is important to have a central body (Public Procurement Agency – PPA) that will promote the adoption of green procurement across the government. In many countries, environmental agencies were the first to promote the GPP agenda as a means of achieving environmental goals. However, since environmental agencies have limited authority over procurement practices, a whole-of-government approach requires that PPAs take on a leadership role.

Arguments for PPAs leading role in promoting GPP are summarized in the World Bank study: “PPAs have the authority to develop the enabling framework and implementing tools needed to drive GPP adoption across the public sector. PPAs can mandate the application of GPP in specific product categories. They can put a structure in place for GPP systems to operate efficiently by reforming procurement laws and regulations, establishing GPP institutions, developing training opportunities, and creating supporting tools for implementation, such as environmental criteria, LCC tools, framework agreements, and marketplaces. PPAs are best placed to develop GPP tools that can be used by authorities across government and to promote procurement approaches that reduce the administrative burden on each contracting authority” (World Bank, 2021).

That was confirmed in the case of Serbia where the Public Procurement Office (PPO), as a central policy body, was the leading institution in promoting GPP. The PPO recommended provisions to the new Public Procurement Law that enabled wider use of ecological criteria in the process of selection of bids. Furthermore, the PPO prepared guidelines for contracting authorities on how to apply environmental criteria as well as models of tender documentation. Finally, workshops where the models were presented and explained to contracting authorities how to apply them in practice.

4. Discussion

4.1. Relevance of Life Cycle Costs and Most Economic Advantageous Tender for green public procurement uptake

GPP should be considered as a part of wider public procurement reforms that transform procurement from a compliance to a strategic function. Prerequisites for GPP are the adoption of an advanced “Value for Money” concept as well as a “Life Cycle Costs” approach that would include environmental impacts.

LCC enables procurement authorities to include into evaluation the impact of purchased subjects on the environment through costs they generate during the entire period of their exploitation when selecting the most favorable bid. That is a significantly different approach compared to the alternative one when bids are selected solely based on bidding prices.

In many cases purchasing goods and services have “hidden” indirect costs that originate from their influence on the environment generated during a period of exploitation, which could significantly exceed purchasing price. Thus it is important to internalize externalities, which LLC allows, unlike the “lowest price” model. Only by using LCC, procuring authority would be able to calculate all real costs of purchased goods, services, or works imposed on the society.

It is not possible or economically feasible to eliminate all environmental impacts across the product life cycle. However, GPP seeks to align procurement with environmental policy objectives by addressing the most significant environmental impacts and those that can be mitigated cost-effectively. In that way, GPP helps governments to achieve their environmental policy goals such as reduction of pollution, improving resource efficiency, promoting more sustainable production and consumption, stemming biodiversity loss, increasing resilience, and reducing the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs) that contribute to climate change.

GPP is a powerful lever that could be used in several ways. Firstly, purchasing authorities could implement environmental considerations when deciding on a purchase. Secondly, when preparing technical specifications, which define required goods or services characteristics, a contracting authority may formulate them in terms of performance or functional requirements that would include environmental aspects.

Moreover, under certain conditions defined in the Directive, purchasing authorities may require goods or services with specific environmental, social, or other characteristics regarding: a) the technical specifications, b) the award criteria, or c) the contract performance conditions (Pouikli, 2021). The Directive allows contracting authorities in the EU member states (MS) to block a tenderer when they find negative environmental (and/or social) impacts of their tender. However, an adequate selection of award criteria provides a significant opportunity for green public procurement (Martinez-Romera & Caranta, 2017).

GPP requires the use of the most economically advantageous tender (MEAT) criteria. To apply MEAT criteria in an objective, non-discriminatory way, it is important to calculate environmental costs accurately, expressed in monetary form thus making bids comparable. The Directive enables the use of MEAT criteria and links it to LCC by saying that the MEAT should be calculated based on the price or cost, using life-cycle costing that covers parts or all of the costs over the life cycle of a procurement subject.

However, one of the key challenges is the increased cost of GPP since the “greening” of goods and services that governments procure require significant private sector investments resulting in a rise in procurement costs. A recent study by World Economic Forum indicated that 40% of public procurement-related emissions could be abated for less than \$15 per tonne of CO₂ (WEF, 2022). Their approximation of the total costs of decarbonization at the global level is that the efforts of the world’s governments to reach net-zero emissions will increase procurement costs by between 3% and 6%.

To stimulate producers (suppliers) to adopt new business solutions requiring additional investments, governments may use “green premiums” thus providing them with funds for

technological innovation. This instrument may be considered as an alternative to a carbon tax, which would incentivize suppliers to make a green transformation of their goods and services to avoid the tax.

A significant challenge for green reforms is the lack of transparent data on the effects and costs of public sector activities' impacts on the environment. Complete and transparent datasets covering emissions resulting from public sector operations and procurement are generally lacking even in highly developed countries, making it difficult or impossible to set emissions baselines, define realistic, achievable targets, compare data across products and sectors as well as track progress. The situation is much worse in developing countries with the additional problem of discrepancies between different official sources of data.

Pandemic crises created additional constraints related to the costs of green growth. Increased government spending worldwide caused by pandemic means that the added costs of green public procurement would have to compete with other governmental priorities. This is especially true at the local level, where budgets are particularly restricted and where the great majority of public funding already goes to such critical priorities as health. It is therefore essential that procurement officials at every level of government engage in discussions about the fiscal trade-offs that may be necessary when increasing purchases of greener goods and services.

In the majority of countries, public procurement is decentralized, making it difficult to create coherent GPP strategies across all levels of government. On average, less than half of 2019 public procurement spending in OECD countries took place at the centralized level which indicates how important is to establish effective coordination among different levels of government as well as among procuring agencies operating at national and sub-national levels (WEF, 2022).

4.2. Strategies for green public procurement development (Strategies for promotion of green public procurement)

To be able to track progress in the implementation of LCC and MEAT criteria, as well as other aspects of GPP reforms, governments have to apply an adequate assessment tool. One of such tools is the OECD's Methodology for the Assessment of Procurement Systems (MAPS). The MAPS assesses procurement systems against four criteria: 1) Value for Money, 2) Transparency of procurement processes, 3) Fairness and non-discrimination and 4) Governance of procurement processes. The abovementioned criteria are applied across four pillars of the public procurement system: 1) Legal, regulatory, and policy framework; 2) Institutional framework and management capacity; 3) Procurement operations and market practices and 4) Public accountability, integrity, and transparency (OECD, 2022).

Based on assessment findings regarding achieved standards, weaknesses, and strengths of a public procurement system, governments prepare national public procurement strategies and annual action plans for the strategy implementation. An integral part of the strategy and

action plans should be the adoption and development of GPP. Strategies and action plans provide a framework for the implementation of reforms. They authorize procuring agencies to adopt GPP practices and hold those responsible for GPP accountable for progress in implementation.

Strategies and action plans for public procurement reforms that include GPP can be developed at the national, subnational, and contracting authorities' levels. National strategies are mandatory with the widest coverage and highest impact thus being most important. The preparation of national strategies and action plans starts with an assessment of the current status of the public procurement system as well as of constraints and opportunities for its improvement. GPP should be considered an integral part of that process. It is common practice that a "policy body" such as a PPO has a leading role and coordinates the preparation of the strategy and annual action plans for the strategy implementation.

In the early phase of GPP uptake voluntary approach with a gradual expansion of GPP is advised. Application of GPP practices typically starts at a central procurement body that procures selected subjects on behalf of contracting authorities at a national level. In the beginning, GPP procurement subjects are those that are less complex, highly standardized, and widely used by the public sector, such as office equipment, ICT equipment, vehicles, etc. Due to the high level of standardization and "buying at large" effect on purchasing prices benefits of GPP are visible serving as arguments for expanding the new, "green" procurement practice. Application of GPP practices can be mandatory for some product categories and voluntary for others. Once positive experiences in the implementation of GPP became recognized, the number of mandatory categories should be gradually increased over time.

GPP reforms usually start with simple environmental criteria, such as the application of eco-labels in specific product categories. In many EU countries, the EU Eco-label criteria are inserted directly into technical specifications and/or award criteria. A copy of the eco-label certificate is seen as full verification that the selection criteria are met. In later phases of GPP implementation, more complex environmental criteria can gradually be introduced.

The roadmap for GPP adoption could have several steps. The first step should be to determine a baseline. Further activities would be to set up targets as well as to adopt green procurement regulations. The next step is to design value chains/sourcing strategies for procurement categories with the highest impact on the environment. In the next step procurement standards would be defined. Close cooperation with suppliers in finding a cost-effective model for their green transformation is needed as well. Finally, tracking the performance of GPP and using feedback as inputs for a rethinking of implemented solutions and finding ways for improvement in the future should be part of the roadmap.

5. Conclusions

EU legislative framework provides favorable conditions for the implementation of GPP. However, recent researches show that uptake of GPP was low and fragmented in member states with weak enforcement of the public procurement rules allowing environmental considerations. There are several factors of the “implementation gap” understood as the difference between regulation and expected outcomes of their application in practice. They are: 1) organization of public procurement function 2) corruption and “Echo corruption”, 3) administrative capacities of contracting authorities, 4) managerial capacities, 5) motivation of employees engaged in public procurement, and 6) awareness of GPP benefits and available tools for its implementation.

Closing above mentioned implementation gaps and promotion of GPP usually starts with the adoption of required legislation and setting up of a central procurement body that would be in charge to apply GPP practices across the government. This approach is called “top-down” since it is led by the central government. In the alternative “bottom-up” model, local self-governments have a leading role in applying GPP through their economic and procurement policies. Local initiatives proved to have limited potential in scaling up GPP practices since the adoption of GPP practices is voluntary and thus limited to willing contracting authorities prepared to take the initiative in the absence of a national regulatory framework. In both cases (whether top-down or bottom-up scenario), a gradual (“step-by-step”) approach to promoting GPP is advised. GPP reforms should proceed incrementally, building on operational experience. They entail successive improvements in the enabling framework, operational tools, and approaches as the scope and scale of GPP operations expand.

To be able to track the progress of GPP reforms and changes in strengths and weaknesses in practice, governments have to apply an adequate assessment tool. Based on assessment findings regarding achieved standards, weaknesses, and strengths of a public procurement system, a government prepares a national public procurement strategy and annual action plan for the strategy implementation. An integral part of the strategy and action plans should be the adoption and development of GPP. Strategies and action plans provide a framework for the implementation of reforms. They authorize procuring agencies to adopt GPP practices and hold those responsible for GPP accountable for progress in implementation.

Recent reviews of procurement reforms highlight the importance of raising awareness early on and tackling biases that can hinder GPP adoption (Andhov et al, 2020 & Luyckx and Pál-Hegedus Ortega, 2020). This requires proactive change management over an extended period. Consistent messaging from political leadership and senior management is critical. So too is stakeholder engagement, providing stakeholders with the opportunity to voice their concerns and priorities, identify the most promising opportunities, avoid pitfalls, and build on private sector experience. Broad-based training should build the case for GPP, address stakeholder concerns, and help stakeholders identify opportunities.

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THE NEW CHALLENGES FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE PANDEMIC AND POST-PANDEMIC PERIOD

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Abstract

The paper focuses on several important challenges of human resource management (HRM). First, strategic human resource management approaches and responses to crisis caused by COVID-19 have been elaborated and recommendations have been made for creating a safe culture that should combine behavioral approaches and the use of technology. Second, as companies navigate this phase of recovery and recalibration in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, managers should take care to optimise and re-invent their retention potential. Therefore the most effective employees retention strategies have been analysed in the paper. Finally, the third important challenge for HRM in organizations is establishing an adaptive work organization, alternative work arrangements and hybrid model of working due to the increase in the number of employees working remotely. Various aspects of remote work have been examined and analyzed, as well as its advantages and disadvantages. The paper is based on a literature review/theoretical and conceptual framework development; secondary data analysis; international and organizational documentation content analysis; and group interview data analysis.

Keywords: strategic human resource management, employee retention strategies, remote work, COVID-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a huge shock to companies. The global health crisis found companies unprepared and forced managers to take urgent and swift action. In order to ensure survival and protect business continuity, they had to look for fast and innovative solutions for their business operations and work organization. In this regard, human resource management (HRM) plays a crucial role in enabling the organization to successfully manage the crisis while maintaining a positive overall company performance and at the same time, helping the workforce to adapt and adjust to new working conditions.

The aim of the paper is to explore the most important challenges that HRM faced in the pandemic period, to analyse future trends and to offer possible solutions and actions for HRM in response to the post-pandemic period. Bearing in mind that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way companies organize their work, three important domains can be singled out that HRM should take into consideration: strategic human resource management, employee retention strategies and remote work. The purpose of the first part of the paper is to identify Strategic Human Resource Management approaches and responses to crisis caused by COVID-19. The focus is on future workforce trends and how they affect human resource (HR) leaders in the way they contribute to the overall strategy of the organizations in the time of the pandemic and post pandemic. The second part discusses the predictions of increased employee fluctuations that companies face due to the new opportunities created by the pandemic and changed workers' preferences. Several effective retention strategies have been elaborated for the upcoming post-pandemic period. The third part explores the HRM challenges in establishing an adaptive work organization, alternative work arrangements and hybrid model of working due to the increase in the number of employees working remotely.

The research goal of this paper is to analyze primary and secondary data addressed to COVID-19 implications for HRM, and to learn how HR professionals are coping with the 'new reality' and in what way are they preparing for the post-pandemic business future.

The methodological approach is combined, i.e., mixed-methods research design is applied and it is based on a) literature review/theoretical and conceptual framework development, b) secondary data analysis c) international and organizational documentation content analysis d) group interview data analysis. For the first part of the data analysis (a, b, c) desk-research was conducted, where the key words/phrases for exploring and selection of analysed materials were: HR(M) and COVID-19 pandemic/post-pandemic. For the last part (d) an online webinar "HR challenges in the pandemic and post-pandemic period" organized in collaboration between Macedonian Human Resources Association and the Department for Organizational Sciences in the frames of the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research, was used as an opportunity to ask the present HR professionals at the event (N~60) about their opinion, in a form of a group interview in the discussion section. For this occasion, a fully structured interview guide was developed and shared by the authors, consisted of close-ended questions. The data was collected and analysed in the research period October 2021 – February 2022.

Finally, we make a series of recommendations for HRM policies and practices, supporting the new future of work organization in the post-pandemic period.

2. Literature overview

2.1. Strategic human resource management approaches and responses to crisis caused by COVID-19

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) focuses on the overall HR strategies adopted by business units and companies and tries to measure their impacts on performance (e.g. Dyer 1984; Delery and Doty 1996). The links with strategic management are well known, particularly through the two fields' mutual interest in the resource-based view of the firm and in processes of strategic decision-making (e.g. Boxall 1996; Wright et al. 2003). The links with industrial relations are also very important, currently shown in the shared interest in the notion of 'high-performance work systems,' while the connections with organizational behavior are evidenced in mutual interest in such notions as psychological contracting and social exchange (e.g. Wright and Boswell 2002; Purcell et al. 2003).

It seems that SHMR cover all important fields to develop high-performance work systems, but however some of the authors think that it not gives effective strategic answer toward COVID-19 emerging issues at the workplace. Most of the authors agree that traditional conceptualizations of Strategic Human Resources practices or high-performance work systems require modification in the context of COVID-19 (Collings, McMackina, Nybergb, Wright, 2021). The authors that agree with this statement address several notes to SHMR for future researches:

- SHMR is object of critiques that failure to include novel adaptive to COVID-19 circumstances in work environment (Harney and Collings, 2021).
- Strategic HRM research needs to move toward the new conceptualization and measurement of HR practices such as flexibility, job design etc. rather than capturing these under the category of 'other'. (Boon et al. 2019).
- "Indeed, academic research in strategic HRM is often premised on a homogenous view of the employee relationship and an assumption that HR practices used within firms are relatively homogenous (c.f. Huselid, 1995). However, employees differ in their experience and interpretation of HR practices depending on their role (Kehoe and Wright, 2013). Lepak and Snell (1999) were among the first to differentiate strategic HRM practices for different employee groups. COVID-19 highlights the importance of considering the differential impact of strategic HRM across different employees groups in terms of how and where they work". (Collings, McMackina, Nybergb, Wright, 2021:2).

Therefore according to Collings, McMackina, Nybergb, and Wright (2021) it is very important for future SHMR to understand firstly how work context influences employee behaviors and actions; secondly how to resolve tensions among stakeholders, highlighting the need to consider inter alia employees, customers and communities along with shareholders; Third, to resolve tensions between the strategic and operational roles of HR.

Undoubtedly everyone agrees that COVID-19 has drastically changed the way of work. In these circumstances the Human Resources Management role has been acknowledge and most of the leaders are relying on HR professionals to navigate these challenges. Therefore, the object of this review was to analyzed published data addressed COVID-19 implications for HRM on websites of human resources associations in order to learn how HR professionals are coping with the new reality.

2.2. Post-covid retention strategies

One of the major aims of organizations is to retain the best of their employees in order to benefit from their ability, skills and knowledge (Cortese, 2012). Employee retention is the inverse of employee turnover. So, if employee turnover rate is defined as the percentage of employees that leave the organization during a given time frame, then employee retention would be the percentage of employees that stay with organization during that time frame.

Retention strategies are defined as:

- A retention strategy is a plan that organizations create and use to reduce employee turnover, prevent attrition, increase retention and foster employee engagement. While some turnover is inevitable, building a retention strategy to prevent as much voluntary turnover as possible can save an organization a lot of time and money. After all, it's much easier and much less expensive to train and develop your current employees than it is to continually hire new people;
- Effective employee retention is a systematic effort by employers to create and foster an environment that encourages current employees to remain employed by having policies and practices in place that address their diverse needs. A strong retention strategy becomes a powerful recruitment tool. Retention of key employees is critical to the long-term health and success of any organization. Employees retention matters as organizational issues such as training time and investment; lost knowledge; insecure employees and a costly candidate search are involved. Hence, failing to retain a key employee is a costly proposition for an organization. Various estimates suggest that losing a middle manager in most organizations' costs up to five times of his salary;
- Retention strategies are policies and plans that organization follow to reduce employee turnover and attrition and ensure employees are engaged and productive long-term. The key challenge for businesses is ensuring a retention strategy aligns with business goals to ensure maximum return on investment. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a key

growth area of retention strategies – employees may be more likely to remain with an employer that shows a commitment to the local community or the environment. At the same time, CSR is increasingly aligning with the bottom line as consumers increasingly do business with companies that display strong social responsibility policies.

Why are the retention strategies especially important for the post-pandemic period?

One in four employees plans to leave their employer after the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, according to a new survey. That number is even higher for millennials and employees with children at home in remote learning situations (one in three planning to leave).

Burnout experienced by workers is one big reason for an expected spike in resignations. Some of the reasons for burnout include heavy workloads during the pandemic, balancing work and private life, worsened mental health and a lack of communication, feedback, and support from their employer.

But for sure, another and maybe key (although hidden) reason is the postponing of the decision of employees (who have the intention) to leave the workplace in time of global, health, financial crisis. This delayed decision for post-pandemic period minimizes the risk of losing the: health insurance, secure job, monthly incomes, traveling abroad options for work and/or going back to the native countries (because of the closed borders and varying traveling protocols).

ILO (2020, 2021) has predicted a mass exit of female workers as many women have struggled balancing both being primary caregivers of their households and working during the pandemic (most often on front lines in the Covid hospitals, as nurses, and in the service sector).

Though some employers have embraced benefits, resources and flexibility during the pandemic, many organizations were slow to act or did not make enough changes to help workers through the most challenging time of their lives. Retention strategies demonstrate the engagement by the management, and they can positively affect the employees' intention and decision to leave the company "that cares".

2.3. Remote work during the COVID-19 crisis

Although the general business environment is constantly changing and companies are forced to make adjustments to meet the uncertainties brought about by rapid social, economic and technological change, the COVID-19 pandemic dealt an unexpected blow to companies' operations. To protect the population from the rapid spread of the virus, in the first months of the pandemic, governments adopted lock-down and social distancing measures. Companies and workers were imposed very quickly, almost overnight, to significantly change work arrangements and introduce alternative ways of working mainly based on remote work. Remote working has become a work practice that has enabled companies to maintain operating capacity even in highly unpredictable circumstances. The 2021

OECD Employment Outlook (OECD, 2021) reports a significant increase across OECD countries from around 16% of the workforce before the pandemic to around 37% during the first wave (in April 2020) (in Criscuolo et al., 2021). Before the COVID-19, in the last few decades, remote work has been practiced, but in a very limited scale. The rapid development of information and communication technology (ICTs) has enabled remote work to become a more acceptable way of working. The phenomenon of remote work is not new. As a concept, it was first explained by Nilles (1988) known as »telecommuting« or »telework« (in Messenger, 2017). Eurofound and ILO (2017) defined remote work as the use of information and communications technologies, such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktop computers, for work that is performed outside the employer's premises. In other words, remote work implies alternative work arrangement where employee performs work tasks outside of the employer's locations, without personal contact with co-workers, and is able to communicate with others inside and outside the organization using ICTs. Synonyms for remote work are flexible workplace, telework, telecommuting, e-working, and work from home. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work usually refers to work from home.

Empirical findings on remote work in the past two pandemic years indicate that this way of working has advantages, but also disadvantages.

A significant number of workers and managers claim to have a positive experience from this way of working. Managers argue that a key benefit for the organization is the higher productivity of employees, while remote workers find that working from home allows them to concentrate better on work tasks, save time and travel expenses (OECD, 2021). Remote work also have a positive impact on work engagement and flexibility because allows workers to organize their work and personal life according to their needs, which in turn has a positive impact on overall job satisfaction and productivity. Greater work independence enables better adjustment to remote working. Survey results confirm that job autonomy and self-leadership were positively related to work productivity and work engagement (Galanti et al., 2021).

Some authors argue that teamwork will be affected because team coordination is more difficult when working from home (OECD, 2021), so it is assumed that the organization of work in smaller teams will be more suitable (Foss, 2020).

Important factors of effective work from home are providing employees with adequate physical and mental working conditions, which means adequate workspace (home office) and IT tools, as well as opportunity to work without distractions (Rudnicka et al., 2020; Carillo et al., 2021).

On the other hand, there are some negative effects of working remotely. Lack of physical contacts and supportive relationships with colleagues, as well as feedback from the manager has been found to be a significant obstacle to working remotely (van Zoonen, et al., 2021; Carillo et al., 2021; Rudnicka, et al., 2020). Workers claim to have felt isolated (OECD, 2021), as a result of very limited face-to-face interactions with colleagues (Rudnicka et al.,

2020). This can potentially have negative consequences not only for the well-being of the employees, but also for the overall innovative and productive capacities of the company.

In terms of productivity, the managers confirm that they have experienced negative effects on knowledge sharing, reduced knowledge flow and organizational learning, as well as reduced loyalty to the organization (OECD, 2021). Social isolation and family-work conflict were found to be negatively associated with productivity and work engagement, but positively associated with job stress. Lack of transition between work hours and personal time, or difficulties in separating paid work from private life are considered as serious obstacles for remote workers. Work-life balance may be compromised as a result of longer working hours and even more so, working in the evenings and on weekends (ILO, 2020; OECD, 2021).

3. Research

The research findings, presented in three subsections, address the new trends in the organization of work, suggesting future directions and recommendations for HRM in the upcoming post-pandemic period.

3.1. Strategic human resource management: trends and recommendation from professional HR associations

The method that has been used is a narrative review approach based on proposed strategies to coping and anticipate the COVID-19 impacts on human resources management professionals published on web sites from several human resources associations. The following associations have been analyzed: World Federation of People Management Associations (WFPMA); Chartered Professionals in Human Resources (CPHR Canada); The NAHRMA national member associations include the Chartered Professionals in Human Resources of British Columbia & Yukon (CPHR), the Mexican Human Resource Management Association (AMEDIRH), and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM); The professional body for HR and people development, UK (CIPD); Gartner; European Association for People Management, the body for European HR associations (EPAM), from October 2021 to November 2021.

Summary of findings results revealed several future of work trends:

- *Increasing remote work & flexible work arrangement.* A recent Gartner poll showed that 48% of employees will likely work remotely at least part of the time after COVID-19 versus 30% before the pandemic. In Europe around 5% were regularly working from home pre-pandemic; in some countries, this number more than quadrupled in the past 18 months. The European Commission estimates that nearly 40% of EU workers began to telework full-time due to the pandemic. Finland now has the highest share of remote workers in Europe, with 25.1% of workers regularly working from home. Luxembourg

and Ireland follow, both having home working shares of over 20%. Remote working rates are far lower in parts of Eastern Europe. The post-COVID-19 world establishes new models in which remote work and more flexible schedules are normal. That in turn leads to new requirements for the workplace and the workforce of the future. Several steps are critical in this regard:

- The work strategy has to incorporate remote, hybrid, and onsite working. This approach has to develop digitalized operational model and define how to use different spaces.
- Redefine employment options and workforce structure. Establish flexible options for some job roles to accommodate highly qualified talent that doesn't want to operate on the basis of a fixed contract anymore.
- Less frequent are reviews for the jobs that cannot be done from home. It should be borne in mind that the pandemic has particularly impacted jobs that cannot be done remotely. Dingel and Neiman (2020) developed a remote work score for different types of occupation (Figure 1). Occupations with a score close to zero cannot be done remotely, while most tasks in occupations with scores close to 1 can be done remotely without significant problems and in line with social-distancing restrictions.

Occupations such as cleaning and food preparation (which are classified as elementary), plant operation, assembly and craft-related trades cannot easily be done remotely and therefore have been severely impacted by the pandemic. In contrast, high-skilled managerial jobs are relatively easy to adjust to social-distancing restrictions.

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Table 1
Share of jobs that can be done at home, by occupation's major group.

Occupation	O'NET-derived baseline	Manual assignment
15 Computer and Mathematical Occupations	1.00	1.00
25 Education, Training, and Library Occupations	0.98	0.85
23 Legal Occupations	0.97	0.84
13 Business and Financial Operations Occupations	0.88	0.92
11 Management Occupations	0.87	0.84
27 Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations	0.76	0.57
43 Office and Administrative Support Occupations	0.65	0.51
17 Architecture and Engineering Occupations	0.61	0.88
19 Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations	0.54	0.36
21 Community and Social Service Occupations	0.37	0.50
41 Sales and Related Occupations	0.28	0.21
39 Personal Care and Service Occupations	0.26	0.00
33 Protective Service Occupations	0.06	0.00
29 Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	0.05	0.06
53 Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	0.03	0.00
31 Healthcare Support Occupations	0.02	0.00
45 Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	0.01	0.00
51 Production Occupations	0.01	0.00
49 Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	0.01	0.00
47 Construction and Extraction Occupations	0.00	0.00
35 Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	0.00	0.00
37 Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations	0.00	0.00

Notes: This table reports the share of jobs that can be done at home for each 2-digit SOC major group. We aggregate our 6-digit SOC classification using the employment counts in the BLS's 2018 Occupational Employment Statistics. The O'NET-derived classification in the first column is the basis for all subsequent results reported in this paper. The results using the manual assignment, reported in the second column, are available in our replication package.

- *Strengthening transparent culture.* Foster affiliation by sharpening the organization's purpose and culture to inspire employees. This is crucial in a remote or hybrid workplace with less physical proximity. As the decisive shapers of the organization's culture, top

management and frontline leaders must position themselves to drive a culture that builds on trust and appreciation.

- *Strengthening communication.* Identifying the most effective communication channels and listening to workers has proven to be very important. In the event of reducing personnel, employees should be provided with exit alternatives in alignment with the labor laws of each country.
- *Accelerate in digital.* HR must step up its capabilities in digital, IT, and analytics to future-proof the organization's workplace, improve employees experiences and play a more strategic role.
- *Set new paradigms for skills and employees.* To adjust to the new reality and win in the 2020s, organizations need to have the right people with the right skill sets—within HR and beyond. This entails adequate workforce planning, sophisticated upskilling and reskilling opportunities and a holistic talent management approach.
- *Build a learning organization.* Offer targeted reskilling and upskilling measures, and embed continuous learning and individual learning journeys that respond to the increased pace of change.
- *Enhance HR expertise.* Data scientists, user experience designers, and people with an analytical focus and business expertise will become crucial. HR functions need to hire people in these roles in order to understand the organization's future needs.
- *Business continuity planning.* Establishing the risk profile of a business & the level of vulnerability in terms of its impact on People, Processes, Profits & Partnerships will help ensure resilience.

3.2. Post-covid retention strategies suggestions

According to the literature review and online desk research, the recommended retention strategies for the post-pandemic period would be the following:

- *Introducing more flexible employment policies:* Looser and more varied policies such as work from home, flextime, reduced workdays, half-shift availability, scheduling consistency or paid leave flexibility can all help persuade employees to stay.
- *Creating a supportive work environment:* By encouraging “open door” communications exchanges and providing career counseling and mentorship opportunities.
- *Recognizing good employee work:* Management should show gratitude to the loyal and hard-working employees (via email announcements, during team meetings, or even with attractive incentives).
- *High potential employee's detection:* It can be huge assets to the organization. But they need further development and resources. Being able to identify these individuals is key to figuring out how to motivate and retain them.

- *Listening to the needs/concerns of every employee:* Knowing employee needs and concerns on both a broad scale and an individual basis (by surveys or one-to-one meetings), could be helpful in reducing the turnover risk.
- *Providing innovative fun activities for the employees:* E.g., use of creative employee engagement strategies such as interactive virtual team meetings (where employees are told to tour their home/introduce their family), celebrations such as birthdays, anniversaries, or personal talents (painting, music, sport...).
- *Virtual team-building activities:* The ability to work virtually like in an office setting is not for everyone. As a result, most remote employees feel isolated from their co-workers. These activities are carried out by management to improve group processes and interactions, increase employee engagement and morale. It also develops better working relationships between employees.
- *Upskilling and reskilling workers:* By providing adequate trainings which will help the employees to gain and/or develop the required skills for the post-COVID job demands.
- *Shaping their growth and development:* Helping employees achieve their short-term and long-term goals is one of the most crucial employee retention strategies. It shows that you are invested in their future just as they are. Most millennials and Gen-Z workers will choose a job with lower pay if they see development opportunities.
- *Employee well-being:* Especially after the COVID-19 outbreak, we understood that health is top priority for everyone. Both our physical and mental health had been tested. The organization can give its employees more than just sick leaves, or for example a mental week off to cope with burnout. Providing private health insurance is another excellent way to take care.
- *Offer incentives:* Another way to get employees to stick with your company during this time is to provide them with incentives to stay. Whether it's increased pay, benefits or bonuses, employees respond well to motivation.
- *Engaging in CSR programs:* A CSR initiative where the workers can contribute their participation is an excellent employee retention idea. It will go a long way in creating effective employee engagement. Millennials and Gen-Z workers are more inclined towards social responsibility.
- *Profit-sharing plan:* A profit-sharing plan is a type of plan used by employers to distribute a portion of a business's profits to employees.
- *Conducting exit interviews:* Sometimes letting go of an employee is inevitable. Hence, conducting exit interviews just before an employee is about to leave is very crucial.

The results from the online webinar/group interview have confirmed that:

- In 64% cases (with existing HR department/unit) the HR strategy was modified due to Covid-19 pandemic.

- 36% of the respondents expect increased employee's turnover after the pandemic, 36% do not know/aren't sure, 28% answered negatively.

- Only 33% of the cases answered confirmatively that there are retention strategies implemented in the organization, 22% do not know/aren't sure and 45% answered negatively.

3.3. Remote work in the post-pandemic period

The literature review and the analysis of relevant studies of international institutions, reveal some important features of remote work that need to be pointed out. In general, they can be summarized as positive and negative outcomes for companies and for employees.

Positive outcomes for the organizations: increase in employees' productivity; better organizational flexibility and agility; higher talent retention; improved gender diversity; and less absenteeism and turnover among workers.

Negative outcomes for the organizations: reduction of knowledge flows and organizational learning; risks for innovative capacity of the organization and productivity on the long run; difficulties in team working; and reduction in employees' loyalty to the organization.

Positive outcomes for the employees: higher job satisfaction; remote work positively affect employee's work engagement; increased motivation; more options for childcare concerns and schedule flexibility; reduced commuting time; better concentration at home and lower commuting expenses.

Negative outcomes for the employees: negative effects on employee's work-life balance; difficult to manage boundaries between working and non-working time; tendency to overwork; social isolation and the lack of supportive relationships with colleagues, as well as feedback from the manager.

The findings from the online webinar/group interview provide evidence of employee experience over the past two years, expectations for the future of remote work, and its impact on productivity and well-being. Results have revealed that:

- in the past two years, 30% of respondents worked very often from home, occasionally 25%, rarely 25%, while 20% did not work from home at all; no respondents reported working entirely from home;

- if there is an opportunity to choose, a significant number (58%) answered that they would like to work from home occasionally (2-3 times a week); 14% of respondents confirm that they completely want to work from home, but the same number do not want at all (14%); those who have stated that the nature of the work does not allow them to work from home are 14% also;

- in 53% of cases it is confirmed that the organization has established new or modified operating procedures in order to maintain high efficiency and effectiveness of work from home, in 35% partially and in 24% it is not confirmed;

- only 18% of respondents answered that the organizations has conducted training to improve the efficiency of remote workers, 29% said that it was partially implemented, while a high 53% answered negatively.

- a significant 62% answered that a new performance management system has not been introduced for employees working from home, 23% answered that it has been partially introduced, only 15% answered positively;

- only 6% think that the organization implements flexible work arrangement policies, 67% say that they are partially implemented, while 27% say that they do not apply at all;

- according to the respondents, the biggest advantage of remote work is the flexible work schedule (43%), and the biggest disadvantage is the reduced communication and cooperation between employees (36%).

Based on previous knowledge, several HR management policies and practices can be recommended in order to get the most out of working remotely:

- *New operating procedures* - customized operating procedures for both individuals and teams, in order to maintain high efficiency and effectiveness of remote work.
- *Upgraded communication practices* - which are necessary to enhance interaction and coordination of work tasks among remote workers.
- *Fast and reliable ICT infrastructure* - remote working requires a stable and secure IT connection that enables unhindered digital communication and digital transfer of documents and data that may be sensitive or protected by law.
- *Results-oriented performance management system* - it is a system that focuses on outcomes rather than processes. This is another useful way to motivate highly skilled remote workers due to their propensity for individual work routines.
- *Adapting a hybrid work model* - allowing employees to work part-time remotely (preferably 2-3 times a week) and work arrangements that are more autonomous, more flexible and better tailored to the individual preferences of employees.
- *Training programs for employees* - trainings that will address the needs of remote work and will improve the competencies and skills of remote workers (use of ICTs, work in virtual teams, building self-discipline and self-management).

4. Discussion

HRM plays an important role in creating responses for quick adaptation of employees by implementing new workplace policies and procedures. The aim of this paper was to examine the main HRM challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic that significantly affected working conditions, and at the same time to suggest possible actions in response to the new circumstances. HRM challenges were located in three domains: strategic human resource management, employee retention and remote work.

Regarding SHRM, the pandemic provided a new experience and change of work attitudes for a significant part of the employees, which caused the same strategic practices to have a completely different effect on different groups of employees. This has had an impact on the way companies strategically manage people and has highlighted the need to change current HR practices with new work practices that will emphasize more flexibility and job design in order to meet the needs of different groups with different job preferences. Best practices that all HR professionals can follow to better prepare their organizations for future unexpected crises include: the promotion of a transparent culture, sending clear messages to all workers, improve and fast adapt to new technology, remote work & flexible work arrangement and business continuity planning.

Given the new work experiences, the pandemic has opened up new opportunities for workers. Now, they are looking for jobs that will meet their new needs and preferences. In order to retain core and talented employees, HRM should respond to such changing workforce demands by creating new retention strategies. This means that the organization should establish mechanisms to improve the work environment in which employees will have the opportunity to acquire new competencies through training so that they can grow, develop and achieve their career goals. Retention strategies that introduce more flexible schedules will help employees maintain a positive work-life balance and higher job satisfaction.

Unlike the pre-pandemic period, it is already obvious that remote working will be the preferred form of work for many workers. In the paper, various aspects of remote work were examined and the advantages and disadvantages were detected. The analysis revealed that HRM should consider two critical aspects when introducing remote work: sustain employees' productivity and at the same time ensure them better work-life balance. With respect to future trends, companies need to rethink their HR policies. Hybrid forms of work will be more likely in the future, and efficiency gains may be highest when remote workers work from home or elsewhere two or three days a week, and some days are at workplace. The hybrid model prevents employees from feeling socially isolated, and provides an opportunity to maintain face-to-face communication with colleagues. Furthermore, job autonomy and self-management have been identified as potential enablers of remote work engagement. HRM should promote flexible work-related arrangements with focus on goal-based priorities and deadlines.

5. Conclusions

Given the current post-pandemic period, the paper highlights important areas of action that HRM should consider in order to maintain high organizational performance, to ensure favorable working conditions, but also to promote the well-being of its employees. The research findings suggest that the appropriate strategic positioning of HRM, employee retention policies and work organization that introduces remote work practices, can contribute to the company's success.

Post-pandemic work trends imply organizational adjustments primarily in the area of SHRM policies. Several important solutions for SHRM can be singled out, such as: rethinking the work strategy by introducing a digitalized operating model that enables remote work and change of work arrangements according to the preferences of the employees; building a culture of trust and respect; and HR planning with a focus on a talented workforce that has the competencies and skills needed to anticipate future organizational and business needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the imposed new working conditions for employees have resulted in a change in their work preferences. Now, more and more workers are ready to leave their jobs, and look for a new job that would offer better working conditions in line with their work and living needs. These emerging labor market trends have forced companies to respond quickly with adequate employee retention strategies. It can be concluded that the most effective retention strategies are those that will provide: supportive work environment which takes into account the needs and concerns of each employee; employee well-being (physical and mental health care); employee growth and development that includes adequate training for upskilling and reskilling; and finally, financial incentives and other non-monetary benefits and rewards.

In terms of remote work, the findings suggest that this model of work represents great potential and opportunity for companies in the future. However, most of the workers and employers do not have enviable experience in implementing such work practice. To achieve maximum effects from remote work, managers and HR specialists need to consider several important recommendations. In summary, these would be the following: adopting a hybrid work model, establishing new operating procedures and communication tools and practices to support remote workers; results-focused management system accompanied by more autonomous and flexible work arrangements; building competencies for performing remote work, with special emphasis on self-management; and fast and reliable IT infrastructure.

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MANAGING GREEN GROWTH IN SELECTED NON-EU BALKAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Over the last few decades, the economic growth is not the only way of expression of one country's development and progress. Recently, the term development beside the economic growth also incorporates the components of environmental protection and social equity and is known as sustainable development. One of the instruments that can be used to quantify it, is the Green Growth Index (GGI). This Index enables easy policy making in achieving sustainable development since it is based on four dimensions: efficient and sustainable resource use, natural capital protection, green economic opportunities, and social inclusion.

The goal of this paper is to present the results of the five non-EU Balkan countries in 2019 and 2020 concordant to the GGI through their scores in GGI dimensions. The methodological framework is based on the classical methods of scientific research - analysis, synthesis, selection, comparison and generalization.

The conducted desk research points to the conclusion that the considered countries have started their ways towards achieving green growth and sustainable development, but there are possibilities for further improvement in separate/particular dimensions. Hence, a recommendation for the countries of interest is to increase their efforts in those dimensions in which they have lower values to raise their overall ranking in the calculation of GGI.

The research is limited in the sense that it is based on two GGGI Reports (2019 and 2020). More comprehensive research can lead to more precise conclusions on this issue.

Keywords: management, Green Growth Index, sustainable development, improvement

1. Introduction

According to UN, sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The ultimate goal and at the same time, the purpose of appearance of this concept is to create such society where resources are and will be used to continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the environment. In the last few decades, sustainable development is increasingly used for measurement of the countries development achievements of, and it is based on three pillars: economic growth, social equity and environmental protection. Basically, sustainable development is “no longer quantitative but qualitative development, in other words a balanced striving for all human values, whether material or intangible, in harmony with nature. The old vision of the “affluent society” had resulted in an unjust and ardent “consumer society”. The new vision proposes a “sustainable society” as the attainable model of a just and prosperous world (Decleris, 2000). “Thus, it became anachronistic to talk about the development and protection of the environment as for two separate issues. Dualism is gone. There is only one “sustainable development” (Matlievska, 2010). “In dynamic systems such as the human society, sustainability is a matter of balance, held through time and space. It is actually, *quinta essentia* of sustainable development.” (Matlievska, 2013).

Key promoters of this concept are international organizations, especially the UN, which in 2015, has set 17 goals that each member state should strive to achieve. For quantified goal setting, global indicator framework includes 231 unique indicators¹. However, countries face difficulties to monitor its development and to create policies based on 231 indicators. Therefore, scientific and educational institutions offer different ways to aggregate and consolidate the indicators. One of the most recent methods to track the countries development is the Green Growth Index (GGI) calculation developed in 2019 by the Global Green Growth Institute². Green Growth Index is a composite index measuring a countries performance in achieving sustainability targets including Sustainable Development Goals³ (SDGs), the Paris Climate Change Agreement⁴, and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets⁵. The development of GGI is an important step toward developing a common understanding of green growth and indicators that can operationalize its concept. The Index aims to provide policymakers with a metric to measure green growth performance and on which to base their decisions.

¹ About SDG Indicators, read more at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>.

² GGGI was established as an international intergovernmental organization in 2012 at the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, dedicated to supporting and promoting strong, inclusive and sustainable economic growth in developing countries and emerging economies. Read more at: <https://gggi.org/>.

³ About Sustainable Development Goals, read more at the following link https://www.sightsavers.org/policy-and-advocacy/global-goals/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIp9qQ9fDr9QIVE7TVCh2p5QErEAAYASAAEgIgq_D_BwE.

⁴ The full name is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Read more at the following link <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>.

⁵ About Aichi Biodiversity Targets read more at the following link <https://www.cbd.int/doc/strategic-plan/targets/compilation-quick-guide-en.pdf>.

GGI rests on four dimensions: 1) efficient and sustainable resource use; 2) natural capital protection; 3) green economic opportunities; and 4) social inclusion. Each dimension is consisted of four separate categories⁶. The first dimension, Efficient and sustainable resource use entails: Efficient and sustainable energy Efficient and sustainable water use Sustainable land use Material use efficiency. The second dimension, Natural capital protection consists of: Environmental quality, Greenhouse gas emission reduction, Biodiversity and ecosystem protection and Cultural and social value. The third dimension, Green economic opportunities, consists of: Green investment, Green trade, Green employment and Green innovation. Finally, the fourth dimension, Social inclusion implies: Access to basic services, Gender balance, Social equity and Social protection.

For each of the four abovementioned dimensions, calculations and numerical expressions are possible because each dimension is based on selected indicators (the overall GGI framework represents 36 green growth indicators⁷). This way enables facilitated monitoring of the countries not only in terms of achievement of green growth, but also of sustainable development. Simultaneously, one can track the overall score of each country for the GGI, and it is also possible to monitor the progress achieved in each dimension individually. Thus, policy makers have a clear perspective regarding the dimension they should focus on, in order to improve the figure, and therefore the overall GGI value.

The methodology used for the calculation of the GGI and its four dimensions (efficient and sustainable resource use; natural capital protection; green economic opportunities; and social inclusion) is in details explained in the two reports that are subject of review in this Paper - GGGI Report 2019 and GGGI Report 2020. Moreover, the following research methods have been applied: analysis, synthesis, selection, comparison and generalization.

The goal of this paper is to explore the achievements of five non-EU member countries located in Europe - Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and North Macedonia, in terms of the GGI, and in terms of each dimension individually, in 2019 and 2020. In this regard, after the introduction, the second part explains research methodology used; the third one focuses on the constitutions of the selected countries in terms of incorporation of provisions related to environmental protection and natural resources. The fourth part provides an overview of the GGI. It is followed by the fifth part that gives: an overview of the achievements of Europe as a continent compared to other regions/continents, and an overview of the achievements of Southern Europe compared to the other European sub-regions. An overview of the achievements of the selected five countries is presented in the sixth part. As a research result, the conclusions and recommendations are conferred in the last part of the paper.

⁶ Explanation n about all categories can be found at <https://greengrowthindex.gggi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2020-Green-Growth-Index.pdf>, pg. 3.

⁷ GGGI Insight Brief No. 3 Assessment and Main Findings on the Green Growth Index December 2019, page 3. It can be found at https://www.greengrowthknowledge.org/sites/default/files/downloads/resource/GGGI-Insight-Brief-No.-3_Final.pdf.

2. Methodology

Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and North Macedonia were selected for the research. They all have at least three similarities: former socialist countries, same geographical region, and strategic commitment to EU accession.

For the purposes of the paper, a brief content analysis was conducted of the 1974 Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 1976 Constitution of Albania, the 2019 GGGI Report, and the 2020 GGGI Report. Further on, content analysis of other relevant sources was conducted. In addition to that, analysis was conducted of data related to the GGI dimensions and the overall GGI. More precisely data in original form was selected and extracted from both GGI reports.

The comparative method was used to contrast available data in the two reports, as follows:

- at the world level, i.e., for the five continents (Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas and Oceania), trend data for the period from 2005 to 2019, and the data for 2019;
- at the level of the European subregions (Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, Western Europe and Northern Europe), the data for 2019.
- at the country level (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia), the data for 2019 and 2020.

This determines the differences between the continents/regions, between the European subregions, and between the selected Balkan countries, and according to the four dimensions of GGI and the overall GGI.

After selection, analysis and comparison, certain conclusions and recommendations were summarized (synthesized).

Research limitations. The conducted comparison between the achievements in 2019 and 2020 has its limitations because in the calculation of the GGI, the methodological approach that was used for the preparation of the GGGI Report 2019 and the GGGI Report 2020 differed, which means that the comparison in the two years indicates an interpretive range of effects.⁸

3. Comparative analysis of the constitution of SFR Yugoslavia (1974) and the constitution of Albania (1976) in terms of environment protection provisions

When focusing on the four dimensions of the GGI calculation, it can be noticed that two of them refer to environment. Therefore, it would be appropriate to look into the originations of environmental protection in the constitutions of the five selected countries. Since four of

⁸ "Considering the significant updates on the 2020 Green Growth Index with the replacement of about 28% of the 36 indicators, the country's performances from last year's report on the Index cannot be compared to those from this year". GGGI TECHNICAL REPORT NO. 16, GREEN GROWTH INDEX 2020, Measuring performance in achieving SDG targets, December 2020, p.8. Available at: <https://greengrowthindex.gggi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2020-Green-Growth-Index.pdf>.

them (Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia) were republics within the country of SFR Yugoslavia, brief review of its Constitution of 1974⁹ follows, as well as of Albania's Constitution of 1976.¹⁰

Article 192¹¹ of the Yugoslavia's Constitution reads: "Man shall have the right to a healthy environment". Furthermore, 192 paragraph 2 reads: "Conditions for the realization of this right shall be ensured by the social community."

The SFR Yugoslavia Constitution of 1974 is the first constitution in the world to recognize the man's right to a healthy human environment. Although in literature¹² (Boyd, 2012) it is indicated that Portugal (in 1976) and Spain (1978) are the first countries whose constitutions have recognized and acknowledged this right, in fact the Yugoslavia's Constitution of 1974 for the first time in the world defines the man's right to a healthy environment, along with the other constitutionally guaranteed rights. It also determines the obligation of the community to provide conditions for the realization of this right of man and of the citizen.

In addition, it is beneficial to point out other articles of this constitution, which provide the basis for sustainable use of natural resources - the birth of the idea and the concept of sustainable development, and more specifically, the concept of green growth.

Article 193, paragraph 1 reads: "Anyone who utilizes land, water or other natural goods shall be bound to do so in a way which ensures conditions for man's work and life in a healthy environment."

Article 193, paragraph 2 reads: "Everyone shall be bound to preserve nature and its goods, natural landmarks and its rarities,..."

Article 86, paragraph 1 reads: "All land, forests, waters and watercourses, the sea and seashore, ores and other natural resources must be used in conformity with statutorily-defined general conditions which ensure their rational utilization and other general interests."

Even the slightest glance is sufficient to conclude that the SFRY Constitution of 1974 provides the basis for rational use of natural resources, the manner of their utilization which should enable life in a healthy environment, the obligation to preserve the nature and its goods, etc.

⁹ The Constitution of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1974) can be found at the following link <https://www.worldstatesmen.org/Yugoslavia-Constitution1974.pdf>.

¹⁰ The Constitution of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania (1976), can be found at the following link <https://data.globalcit.eu/NationalDB/docs/ALB%20The%20Constitution%20of%20the%20Peoples%20Socialist%20Republic%20of%20Albania%201976.pdf>.

¹¹ Chapter III: Freedoms, rights and duties of man and of the citizen.

¹² "The Effectiveness of Constitutional Environmental Rights", It can be found at: <https://environment.yale.edu/content/documents/00003438/Boyd-Effectiveness-of-Constitutional-Environmental-Rights.docx?1389969747>. This article summarizes and updates the research published in D.R. Boyd, The Environmental Rights Revolution: A Global Study of Constitutions, Human Rights, and the Environment (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2012).

To our research, there is no article in the Constitution of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania (dated December 28, 1976) that enshrines the right to a healthy environment. Yet, Article 20 reads: "Protection of the land, natural wealth, waters and the atmosphere from damage and pollution is a duty of the state, of the economic and social organizations, and of all citizens". This article defines the citizens' obligation, among other, to take care of environmental protection and protection of natural resources.

Both constitutions contain provisions that refer to the obligation to protect natural resources; however the SFRY Constitution also defines the human right to a healthy environment. Hence, it is evident that in the reviewed countries, environmental protection and protection of natural resources is a constitutionally guaranteed category and it provides the basis for policy making, actions and monitoring of the situation in that field.

4. Overview of the GGI

The obtained scores for the Green Growth Index and its dimensions are within the range from 1 to 100, whereby 1 indicates the lowest or very low performance and 100 indicates the highest or very high performance. A score of 100 in the index, dimensions, and indicator categories indicates that a nation has achieved a specific aim since the indicators are benchmarked against sustainability targets, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, other globally accepted targets, and top country performers. The scores are classified within an indicated range and can be interpreted as follows:

- 80–100 – this range implies very high scores, where the target was reached or almost reached.
- 60–80 – this range refers to high scores, suggesting a strategic position to fully reach the target.
- 40–60 – this range includes moderate scores, towards finding the right balance to progress and avoid moving away from the target.
- 20–40 – this range consists of low scores, finding the right policies to align development in order to achieve the target.
- 1–20 – this range contains very low scores, and therefore requires significant actions to improve the position relative to the target.

The non-EU Balkan countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, belong to the geographic region of Europe, and within this region, they are part of the subregion of South Europe simultaneously being Western Balkan countries. Hence, this paper will first compare the Green Growth Index rankings provided for five geographic regions - Africa, Europe, the Americas, Oceania and Asia. A comparison between four subregions of Europe will follow - Eastern, Northern, Southern, and Western Europe, as well as comparison between the five Balkan countries. An analysis of data is presented, with

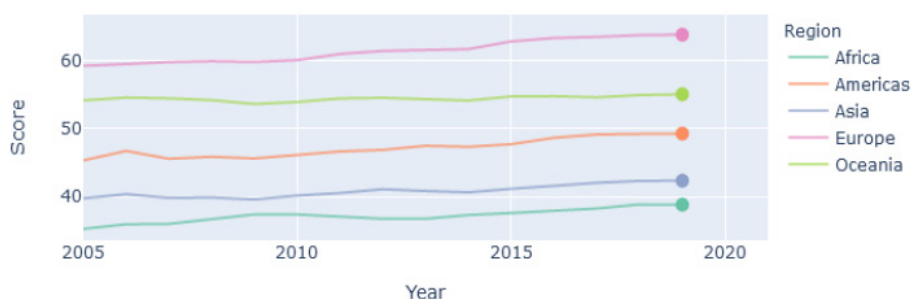
an analysis of the scores in the four GGI dimensions - efficient and sustainable resource use, natural capital protection, green economic opportunities, and social inclusion, and the scores in the overall GGI.

5. Overview, results and discussion of the GGI performance of the continents with a special emphasis on Europe

Let's look back in history and review the trends in the Green Growth Index by geographic region/continents from 2005 to 2019, as shown in Figure 1.

As of Figure 1, it can be noticed that Europe is the leader when it comes to the Green Growth Index performance across time. The scores of the Europe suggest that it is doing better compared to other continents in the period 2005-2019.¹³

Figure 1: Trends in GGI by region from 2005 to 2019



Source: GGI Report 2020.¹⁴

Europe's ranking in 2019, as a region, compared to the ranking of other regions, will be observed and will follow (Figure 2). To gain insight, the achievement in four dimensions of Europe are compared to the achieved in the dimensions of other regions.

¹³ The GGGI Report 2019 or the GGI Report 2020 present the trends of the four subregions of Europe in the period from 2005 to 2019.

¹⁴ The GGGI Report 2019 or the GGI Report 2020 present the trends of the four subregions of Europe in the period from 2005 to 2019.

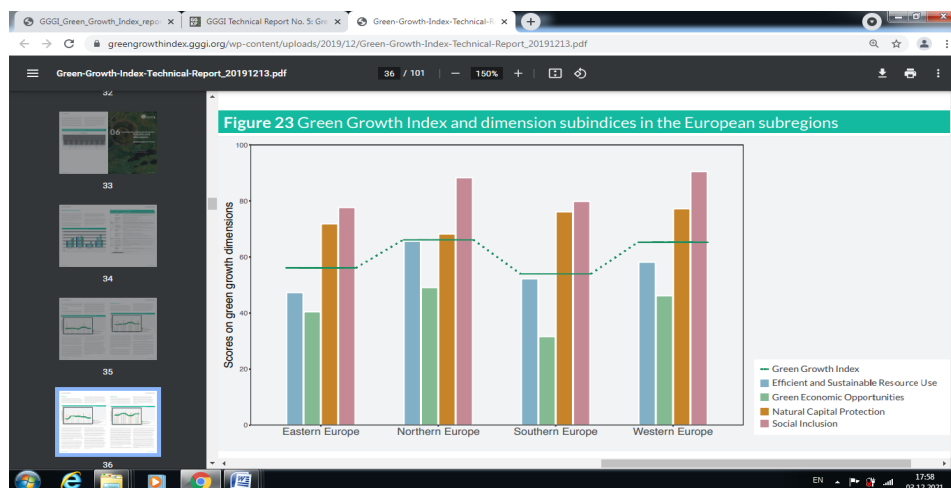
Figure 2. Performance in green growth dimensions by geographic region/continent in 2019



Source: GGI Report 2020.¹⁴

As can be detected in Figure 2, across all continents, achievements for green growth dimensions is generally the highest for natural capital protection and social inclusion, and the lowest for green economic opportunities. In 2019, compared to the other continents, the result in Europe is mostly high. In the dimension of social inclusion, Europe is followed by the Americas, and then Asia. Oceania is fourth-ranked, and Africa is last. In the dimension of natural capital protection, the first-ranked Europe is followed by Oceania, Africa, and Asia with the lowest result. In the dimension of green economic opportunities, Europe is a convincing leader with result almost double or twice as good as the other four regions that have quite close results. In this group, the Americas are ranked on the second place, Asia is third, followed by Oceania, which is in fourth place. Afrika has the lowest result in the group. The situation is different in the dimension of efficient and sustainable resource use, where Oceania is first-ranked, followed by Europe which is second-ranked. Next are Africa and the Americas; which are close to each other with similar results. Asia is the last one. Europe has the strongest performance in 2019, compared to the other regions.

Brief evaluation of Europe's subregions achievements is following, because it is important to look over the outcome of the Southern Europe subregion (to which the five selected countries belong) compared to outcomes of the other subregions in Europe. GGI and dimensions results in the European subregions in 2019 are presented in the Figure 3.

Figure 3. GGI and dimensions in the European subregions in 2019

Source: GGI Report 2019.¹⁴

According to Figure 3, in 2019, all Europe's subregions stand out in the dimensions of natural capital protection and social inclusion, having scores that are ranked from high to very high. They are doing well when it comes to efficient and sustainable resource use. Green economic opportunities is the dimension which requires an increased focus by all subregions, due to its lowest values.

In regard to efficient and sustainable resource use, Southern Europe is ranked third, while Northern Europe is first and Western Europe is second. Eastern Europe has the lowest scores. Southern Europe has low scores in green economic opportunities and it is on the fourth place. Northern Europe is first positioned, followed by Western Europe and Eastern Europe, as second and third respectively. The lowest scores of Southern Europe can be observed in natural capital protection as well; and the leader in this dimension is Northern Europe followed by Western Europe, with Eastern Europe being third-ranked. In social inclusion, Southern Europe is third, after Western Europe which is slightly better than Northern Europe. Eastern Europe is in the fourth place, with a similar score as the third-ranked Southern Europe.

6. Overview, results and discussion of the GGI performance of the Non-EU Balkan countries

As it was previously indicated, the five selected countries are similar according to three criteria (their past political system, their geographic location, and their strategic goal); thus, it is intriguing to see whether they are similar according to their achievements in the four

dimensions, and whether they are closely ranked. Their scores for 2019 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Green growth dimension sub-indices and Green Growth Index and ranks for the selected countries in 2019

European countries/ territories	Europe sub- Region	Dimensions				Green Growth Index		
		Efficient and sus- tainable resource use	Natural capital protec- tion	Green econom- ic oppor- tunities	Social inclu- sion	Scores	Level	Rank
Serbia	South- ern	40.26	74.02	33.89	74.83	52	mod- erate	30
Albania	South- ern	50.27	80.49	23.42	75.14	52	mod- erate	31
Monte- negro	South- ern	57.54	68.12	9.40	72.36	40	mod- erate	35
Bosnia and Her- zegovina	South- ern	40.15	62.24	9.27	64.66	35	low	37
North Macedo- nia	South- ern	45.09	78.15	-	73.97	-	-	-

Source: GGI Report 2019.¹⁴

According to Table 1, the overall 2019 Green Growth Index results for countries that received scores for all four green growth dimensions, for the non-EU Balkan countries, and their 2019 ranks (out of 43 European countries) are as follows: Serbia – 52,43 (rank 30), Albania – 51,66 (rank 31), Montenegro – 40,41 (rank 35) and Bosnia and Herzegovina – 34,98 (rank 37). North Macedonia has no score at GGI, nor is its rank measured because there are no scores for green economic opportunities.¹⁵

Reviewed by dimensions, from Table 1 it is evident that in the dimension of efficient and sustainable resource use in 2019, Montenegro has the highest score (57.54), followed by Albania (50.27). The score of North Macedonia is third (45.09), followed by Serbia (with a score of 40.26) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (40.15). The difference between the first-ranked Montenegro and the last-ranked Bosnia and Herzegovina is over 17 points.

Regarding natural capital protection, the leader in this group is Albania (almost 80.5), followed by North Macedonia (78.15). The following respective scores include Serbia (74.02), Montenegro (68.12), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (62.24), which means that these

¹⁵ The Index is not computed if the score for one dimension is missing.

countries have the lowest ranking in this dimension. The difference between the first-ranked Albania and the last-ranked Bosnia and Herzegovina is almost 18 points. The third segment, green economic opportunities, is perhaps the most interesting for analysis. It is observable that Serbia has the best achievement in the region (33.89), followed by Albania with a score of 23.42. There is a drastic difference in the following countries, Montenegro with a score of 9.40, and Bosnia and Herzegovina with a score of 9.27. North Macedonia is not ranked in this dimension at all, which is further an obstacle for the assessment of the overall GGI.

The difference between the first-ranked Serbia and the last-ranked Bosnia and Herzegovina, is 24.6 points. In the fourth dimension, social inclusion, all five countries have high performances. Namely, the leader in this area is Albania (75.14), followed by Serbia (74.83), North Macedonia (73.97), Montenegro (72.36), and last, Bosnia and Herzegovina with the lowest rank (64.66). The difference between the first-ranked Albania and the last-ranked Bosnia and Herzegovina is almost 10.5 points.

In 2019, in all four dimensions, Bosnia and Herzegovina is ranked last. Albania is the leader in the group in two dimensions (social inclusion and natural capital protection), Montenegro is the leader in efficient and sustainable resource use, while Serbia is the best in green economic opportunities. After the analysis of the scores for the non-EU Balkan countries for 2019, their scores for 2020 are following and presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Green growth dimension sub-indices and Green Growth Index and ranks for the selected countries in 2020

Europe-an countries/ territories	Europe – sub-region	Dimensions				Green Growth Index		
		Efficient and sustainable resource use	Natural capital protection	Green economic opportunities	Social inclusion	Scores	Level	Rank
Serbia	South-ern	57.31	69.51	40.91	76.70	59.46	Mod-erate	28
Albania	South-ern	65.05	82.62	9.44	80.69	44.98	Mod-erate	35
Monte-negro	South-ern	66.06	60.91	12.75	71.65	43.78	Mod-erate	36
Bosnia and Her-zegovina	South-ern	58.70	61.76	9.54	69.05	39.31	Low	37
North Macedo-nia	South-ern	59.70	74.72	-	72.71	-	-	-

Source: GGI Report 2020.¹⁴

Table 2 shows that the overall 2020 Green Growth Index results for countries that obtained scores for all four green growth dimensions, for the non-EU Balkan countries, and their 2020 ranks are as follows: Serbia – 59.46 (rank 28), Albania – 44.98 (rank 35), Montenegro – 43.78 (rank 36) and Bosnia and Herzegovina – 39.31 (rank 37). North Macedonia has no score at GGI, and its rank is not measured because there are no scores for green economic opportunities.

In 2020, in the dimension of efficient and sustainable resource use, the best ranked country is Montenegro (66.06), followed by Albania (65.05). They are followed by North Macedonia (59.70), Bosnia and Herzegovina (58.70) and Serbia (57.31), with fairly close and similar scores. The difference between the first-ranked Montenegro and the last-ranked Serbia is almost 9 points.

In terms of natural capital protection, the leader in the group is Albania with a score of 82.62, which is significantly higher than North Macedonia (74.72), Serbia (69.51), Bosnia and Herzegovina (61.76), and Montenegro (60.91). The difference between the first-ranked Albania and the last-ranked Bosnia and Herzegovina is almost 21 points.

The third dimension, green economic opportunities, again shows the greatest discrepancy in the ranking of the countries in the region. Serbia has the highest score (40.91), and significantly lower scores were obtained for Montenegro (12.75), Bosnia and Herzegovina (9.54), and Albania (9.44). In 2020, just like in 2019, North Macedonia is not ranked in this dimension. The difference between the first-ranked Serbia and the last-ranked Albania exceeds 31 points.

In terms of social inclusion, the countries achieved high results in 2020 as well: Albania (80.69), Serbia (76.70), North Macedonia (72.71), Montenegro (71.65), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (69.05). The five countries in the region, same as in 2019, are ranked highest in this dimension in 2020 too. The difference between the first-ranked Albania and the last-ranked Bosnia and Herzegovina is over 11 points.

In 2020, Albania is a leader in two dimensions (natural capital protection and social inclusion), Montenegro is a leader in efficient and sustainable resource use, while Serbia is the best in green economic opportunities. Bosnia and Herzegovina is positioned last in two dimensions (natural capital protection and social inclusion), Albania is last in green economic opportunities, and Serbia has the poorest achievement in efficient and sustainable resource use.

Despite the methodological limitation related to the comparison of the achievements of the countries from 2019 with those from 2020, still the sum of provided data in the reports by thematic units for the surveyed countries are highly indicative of the conditions and may be subject to analysis and discussion which is presented below.

In 2019, Serbia is ranked on the 30th place, and in 2020 it was 28th; in both years, Serbia has shown the best performances compared to the other countries and has moved up two positions in the GGI rankings. In terms of dimensions, Serbia showed better results in 2020 compared to 2019. Namely, in efficient and sustainable resource use in 2020, Serbia has

made progress by almost 17 points (from 40.26 in 2019 to 57.31 in 2020). In the dimension of natural capital protection in Serbia in 2020, there was a decrease compared to 2019 by about 4.5 points (from 74.02 in 2019 to 69.51 in 2020). Progress was achieved in green economic opportunities of almost 7 points (from 33.89 in 2019 to 40.91 in 2020), as well as in social inclusion, although that progress is not so evident and is less than 2 points (2019 - 74.83, 2020 - 76.70). Although one can notice a decline only in the dimension of natural capital protection, when comparing the two years in Serbia, it would be reasonable to recommend that Serbia should pay more attention to this dimension, still one should bear in mind that this is the dimension in which Serbia achieved the best result, compared to the other three dimensions.

Albania has dropped by 4 positions in 2020, and it is on the 35th place compared to 2019, when it is ranked on the 31st place. In terms of dimensions, in efficient and sustainable resource use, Albania has made progress of almost 15 points (in 2019 - 50.27, and in 2020 - 65.05). Although it is not as evident, Albania has made progress in natural capital protection by more than 2 points (2019 - 80.49 and 2020 - 82.62). In the dimension of green economic opportunities, there was a drastic decline in 2020 compared to 2019. Namely, in 2019 it has a result of 23.42, and in 2020 it has a result of 9.44. In social inclusion, Albania made progress by over 5 points in 2020 compared to 2019 (in 2019 - 75.14 and in 2020 - 80.69). According to the results of the two analyzed years, Albania should make an effort in the dimension of green economic opportunities, which is generally a weakness of all Balkan countries.

In terms of the overall ranking of GGI, in 2020, Montenegro dropped by one position (35th place in 2019, 36th place in 2020). In the dimension of sustainable resource use, in 2020 it made progress and reached 66.06 points, compared to 2019 when it had 57.54 points. In natural capital protection, Montenegro had a decline in 2020. Namely, from 68.12 points in 2019, in 2020 it has 60.91 points. In terms of green economic opportunities, Montenegro shows some progress in 2020 compared to 2019 (from 9.27 points in 2019 to 12.75 in 2020). A slight decline in 2020 compared to 2019 is observed in Social inclusion (2019 - 72.36 and 2020 - 71.65). Montenegro has achieved generally good results in all dimensions. It should be emphasized that in the third dimension, green economic opportunities, Montenegro shows a progress of 3 points, and should continue this growing trend.

Bosnia and Herzegovina retains the same ranking in both reviewed years - it is ranked 37th in both 2020 and 2019. By dimensions, Bosnia and Herzegovina has made significant progress in 2020 in efficient and sustainable resource use, by more than 18 points (from 40.15 in 2019 to 58.70 in 2020). Regarding the second dimension, natural capital protection, in 2020 there is a slight decline compared to 2019 (from 62.24 points in 2019 to 61.76 points in 2020). In the third dimension, green economic opportunities, Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2020 shows very little progress compared to 2019, from 9.27 in 2019 to 9.54 points in 2020. In social inclusion, in 2020 it made progress of approximately 4.5 points compared to 2019 (2020 - 69.05, 2019 - 64.66). Same as the other countries, it has the weakest effect in the dimension of green economic opportunities, however it has achieved progress in the first dimension. Being the last ranked country in both reviewed years, it is advisable for Bosnia and Herzegovina to improve its achievements in all four dimensions.

North Macedonia is not ranked at all when reviewing the overall GGI, because its calculation requires ratings of the country in all four dimensions. Namely, North Macedonia lacks an assessment in the dimension of green economic opportunities for both years. As for the other dimensions, the situation is as follows: in the dimension of efficient and sustainable resource use, in 2020 the country has made good progress of almost 15 points compared to 2019 (from 45.09 in 2019 to 59.70 in 2020). In 2020, there is a decline in natural capital protection by almost 3.5 points (from 78.15 points in 2019 to 74.72 points in 2020). Although with a low value, in 2020 there is an observable decline in the dimension of Social inclusion compared to 2019; the decline is slightly greater than 1 point (in 2019 - 73.97 and in 2020 - 72.71). The main weakness for North Macedonia is the lack of data on the dimension of green economic opportunities, and accordingly - the impossibility to calculate the overall GGI. Hence, the direction for Macedonia is to provide data related to the indicators in the dimension of green economic opportunities. This will allow the country to track its progress in that dimension, and subsequently, the progress regarding the GGI.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

The SFR Yugoslavia Constitution (1974) is the first constitution in the world where the right to a healthy environment is a constitutionally guaranteed category. Although the Constitution of Albania (1976) does not contain the right to a healthy environment, it imposes the citizens' duty to protect the land, natural wealth, waters and atmosphere from damage and pollution.

The trend from 2005 to 2019 in all five continents is upward, with Europe and the Americas having the highest growth.

According to the GGI, Europe is the best, compared to the other four continents/regions of the world in 2019.

In 2019, compared to the other three subregions, Southern Europe has a high score in the dimensions of natural capital protection and social inclusion, and shows the lowest rank in green economic opportunities. Regarding efficient and sustainable resource use, it is ranked third out of four European subregions.

In regard to the Balkan countries, the conclusion regarding the sequence in their ranking, both in 2019 and 2020, is interesting, it is the same. More precisely, in both 2019 and 2020, Serbia is ranked best compared to the other countries. It is followed by Albania, then Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina is last. In both years, there is a lack of data on North Macedonia regarding the dimension of green economic opportunities, therefore the score, the level and the rank are not calculated for this country.

According to the analysis of the data from 2019 and 2020, there are observable drastic differences between the countries in the dimension of green economic opportunities, which indicates that the countries should pay more attention to green investment, green trade, green employment, and green innovation.

All non-EU Balkan countries have to make additional improvements, as both GGGI Reports for 2019 and for 2020, show drastic differences in Europe in general. It can be noted that the countries in question are ranked at the lowest ranks.

Additional efforts have to be made in all non-EU Balkan countries in order to improve the general performance in regard to the GGI. The data presented for 2019 and for 2020, show the actual sectors in which improvements shall be made.

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TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD CONSUMPTION

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Abstract

This paper deals with one aspect of sustainable food consumption, i.e. consumption of locally grown and produced food. Review of literature indicates that locally produced food has positive impact on the environment and positive effects on local economy. The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic has caused logistics disruptions in global food supply chains, affecting food prices and availability in retail stores. In light of these obstacles, consumption of locally produced food has been recognized as a measure to combat eventual future disasters. Building upon the Theory of planned behavior (TPB) and systematic review of literature on consumers' motives to purchase sustainable food, published between 2000 and 2021, this study proposes a conceptual model of the determinants of consumer behavioral intentions towards locally grown and produced food. Implications of the study are discussed and limitations and future research directions are noted.

Keywords: sustainable food consumption, locally produced food, Theory of planned behaviour (TPB), food supply chains, Covid-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

In 2007 New Oxford English Dictionary added a word ‘locavore’, indicating a person who prefers local food and the popularity of local food has started to rise (Adams & Salois, 2010). Nowadays consumption of locally produced food is recognized as one of the fastest growing trends, particularly in developed economies (Skallerud & Wien, 2019; Kim & Huang, 2021; Kumar et al., 2021). Recent research has suggested greater importance of local food movement in comparison with other 21st century trends, such as consumption of organic and fair trade food (Memery et al., 2015). Buying locally produced food has become closely associated with sustainable consumption, due to environmental and ethical benefits of buying local food, such as reduced food miles, animal welfare, support for local producers and local communities (Megicks et al., 2012). Support for local economy and community has been recognized as an even more significant driver of buying locally produced food than quality of local food items (Memery et al., 2015).

There is no widely accepted definition of local food. However, locally produced food is generally described as food produced within a radius of 100 miles from the point of purchase, or within a state boundary (Adams & Salois, 2010; Printezis et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2021). At the outset of local food movement the popularity of locally produced food did not stem from a growing demand of consumers, but was led by governmental initiatives to support small-scale local farmers and national production, whereas later it was driven by consumer demand for transparency and information on product origin, due to a number of food related scandals (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015) and rising customer awareness of environmental and health-related consequences of food consumption (Bianchi & Mortimer, 2015; Giampietri et al., 2018). Many consumers were driven to local food as a response to globalized food production and distribution (Adams & Salois, 2010; Dukeshire et al., 2011; González-Azcárate et al., 2021; Verain et al., 2021). Together with organic and fair trade, locally produced food is considered sustainably produced food (Gracia et al., 2012).

Local food is closely associated with local food systems and shorter supply chains. Shorter food supply chains imply limited number of intermediaries and geographical proximity between producers and consumers (Vittersø et al., 2019). There are different dimensions of sustainability with regard to food supply chains and they may not necessarily be complementary. Economic sustainability implies lower price for consumers and at the same time value added for producers, environmental sustainability implies lower greenhouse gas emissions, usage of natural resources and generation of waste along supply chains, whereas social sustainability implies strengthening local identity, supporting local production of food, increasing knowledge and trust among supply chain actors. Studying short food supply chains (SFSCs) from six European countries (France, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland and the UK), from the perspective of consumers, producers and retailers, Vittersø et al.’s (2019) findings indicate the agreement among respondents in terms of the contribution of SFSCs to social sustainability, whereas the findings were inconclusive regarding the contribution of SFSCs to environmental and economic sustainability.

Whereas some authors support local (national) branding initiatives as a means of developing secure markets for local producers (Mugera et al., 2016) or argue for locally grown food and farmers markets as opportunities for enhancing food system sustainability (Conner et al., 2010), other perspectives should also be acknowledged. Whereas some authors associate SFSCs with sustainability, mainly due to their allegedly lower contribution to greenhouse gas emissions in comparison with global supply chains, SFSCs are not necessarily more sustainable than global food supply chains, but there are factors which contribute to greater sustainability of local food systems (Kiss et al., 2019). Edwards-Jones et al. (2008) and Stein and Santini (2021) claim that locally produced food, in terms of carbon footprint and environmental impact, does not necessarily imply more sustainable option in comparison with imported food items, as transportation is not the only source of greenhouse gas emissions. According to Stein and Santini (2021), even if one excludes environmental aspect of local food system's sustainability, these systems cannot ensure food security and resilience, although they provide new employment, contribute to community development and can enable local producers to charge a better price.

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic has raised the issue of sustainability of global food systems. The crisis has made weaknesses of just-in-time approach of global food systems to be more obvious (Hobbs, 2020; Blay-Palmer et al., 2021). Bottlenecks in transportation and international trade restrictions with the aim to ensure domestic supply, made food at some markets less available and more expensive. According to Nemes et al.'s (2021) comparative study including 13 countries (Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Norway, South Korea, Spain, and the UK) alternative and local food systems (ALFSs) reacted more readily to major social issues caused by the crisis, such as food security and food justice. The authors further argue that, even though severe food shortages did not occur and long food chains displayed ability to withstand the crisis, ALFSs showed higher level of resilience, flexibility, capability for innovation and rapid adaptation, which reinforced the interest of policy-makers into local food and its potential for sustainable food system transition. Taking into account China's response to ensure food supply at the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, Fei et al. (2020) argue for local food production and short food supply chains for building more resilient and sustainable food systems. In a similar vein, González-Azcárate et al. (2021) claim that "COVID-19 has stressed the importance of SFSCs, as these chains can be a dam for food security and nutrition during uncertain economic times"(p.911). According to Hobbs (2020), the emergence of Covid-19 crisis might have shaken customer confidence into global food system, and the author further emphasizes that "It seems likely that interest in the local food movement will grow, at least in the short to medium term post-COVID-19, and that food security and a desire to support local businesses may well become more important as motivations for patronizing local food supply chains" (p.5).

Although consumer behaviour related to locally produced food has been somewhat studied thus far, extant literature mainly pertains to the U.S. and western European economies, whereas studies stemming from developing economies are relatively sparse (Zhang et al., 2020). In particular, factors which shape customers' attitudes towards local food have received limited academic attention (Kumar et al., 2021). Although local food has frequently

been associated with sustainable food, majority of empirical studies related to sustainable food pertain to green, eco-friendly or organic food. Vast majority of them supported predictive validity of the Theory of planned behaviour in explaining consumer food-related behaviour (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008; Dowd & Burke, 2013; Paul et al., 2016; Singh & Verma, 2017; Qi & Ploeger, 2019; Elhoushy, 2020) and this approach has been used as a pillar of the present study, which aims to propose a conceptual model of the drivers of customer intentions to purchase locally produced food. The paper is organized as follows: The following section describes methodology. This is followed by the review of literature and the proposal of a conceptual framework. Results of the study, including its limitations and directions for future research are presented subsequently.

2. Methods

We performed a systematic review of scientific literature available in the following electronic databases: ScienceDirect, Emerald, ProQuest, Wiley Online Library and searched through the reference lists of selected papers. Our focus was on studies published in English language, between January 2000 and December 2021, using the following keywords: “local food”, “sustainable food”, “behavioral intentions”, “Theory of planned behavior”. We searched for the papers using the aforementioned keywords in titles or abstracts. One database only, ScienceDirect, yielded more than 1100 results. However, studies related to tourists’ and restaurant diners’ behavioural intentions, consumer behavior related to online delivery apps, consumption values, food wasting, market segmentation were excluded from further analysis, which resulted in less than 10% of initially pooled items which were further processed.

3. Review of literature and the proposal of conceptual framework

Theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) has been extensively applied in previous studies as a theoretical framework to explore the determinants of consumer behavioural intentions and behaviour. According to this theory, attitudes, social (subjective) norms and perceived behavioural control (PBC) influence consumer intentions. Attitudes refer to a degree of favourable or unfavourable evaluation of a behavior. Subjective norms refer to a perceived social pressure to perform certain behaviour, whereas PBC refers to customer perceptions of easiness of performing certain behaviour. Behavioural, normative and control beliefs affect attitudes, subjective norms and PBC. Behavioral intentions refer to consumers’ expectations or plans related to a future action. They are regarded as a proxy of future behavior (Paul et al., 2016).

TPB emerged as a useful framework in explaining consumer behavioural intentions towards locally grown and/or sustainably produced food (Robinson & Smith, 2002; Nurse et al., 2012; Kumar & Smith, 2017). Lim and An (2021) supported the applicability of TPB framework in explaining Korean consumers’ purchase intentions towards national well-

being food. According to their study's findings, attitudes, social norms and PBC emerged as significant determinants of consumers' purchase intentions.

In Vermeir and Verbeke's (2008) study, attitudes towards sustainable products emerged as the most significant determinant of consumer purchase intentions. A number of previous studies reported a positive influence of consumers' attitude towards sustainable food on their behavioural intentions (Robinson & Smith, 2002; Nurse et al., 2012; Bianchi & Mortimer, 2015; Paul et al., 2016; Kumar & Smith, 2017. Shin et al., 2017; Pham et al., 2018; Qi & Ploeger, 2019). Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Attitudes towards local food will positively influence consumer intentions towards purchasing local food.

In addition to attitudes, previous studies indicate significant impact of social influences on consumers' behavioral intentions. Social influences emerged as significant predictor of Spanish consumers' willingness to pay more for locally produced lamb meat (Gracia et al., 2012). According to Giampietri et al.'s (2018) findings from Italy, social influences determine customers' intentions to purchase food from SFSCs. Qi and Ploeger's (2019) study revealed significant impact of the opinion of relevant others on Chinese customers' intentions to purchase organic food. Recent research has also indicated significant impact of relevant others' opinion on customers' attitudes related to the purchase of green products (Paul et al., 2016) and actual buying behaviour related to green food (Singh & Verma, 2017). Based on previous studies, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Subjective norms will positively influence consumer purchase intentions related to local food.

H3: Subjective norms will positively influence consumer attitudes related to the purchase of local food.

According to Kneafsey et al. (2013), high consumer interest into locally produced food does not universally translate into purchase behaviour, as consumers may not know where to buy local food or have limited financial resources to perform the purchase. Availability of locally produced food, convenience, price, food labelling have been the most frequently highlighted contextual factors which can exert positive or negative influence on consumer behaviour (Penney & Prior, 2014; Bianchi & Mortimer, 2015; Feldmann & Hamm, 2015; Printezis & Grebitus, 2018). In the context of traditional well-being Korean food, Lim and An's (2021) study indicated consumers' perceptions of the ease of purchasing traditional food as the strongest predictor of their purchase intentions. In a similar vein, availability of local food during various seasons emerged as a significant predictor of Canadian customers' propensity

to buy locally produced food (Dukeshire et al., 2011). Perceived behavioural control also emerged as a significant determinant of customers' intentions to purchase food from SFSCs in Giampietri et al.'s (2018) research performed in Italy. Taking into consideration the aforementioned, the following hypotheses can be proposed:

H4: Perceived behavioral control will positively influence consumer intentions towards purchasing local food.

High level of customer trust in SFSCs and customer willingness to support local production have been revealed by recent research (Bianchi & Mortimer, 2015; Vittersø et al., 2019). SFSCs contribute to close interaction and the promotion of trust between consumers and producers (Kneafsey et al., 2013). According to Stein and Santini (2021), customers are willing to pay more for products distributed via SFSCs, as they trust them. The importance of trust in food providers as a driving force of customers' purchase intentions has been emphasized by Lim and An (2021). Giampietri et al.'s (2018) research findings from Italy indicate that customer trust in SFSCs leads to their intentions to purchase food from SFSCs. Trust in fair trade label significantly influences consumer willingness to buy and willingness to pay for fair trade food, according to research findings from Turkey (Konuk, 2019). Similarly, trust in private organic labels emerged as a significant predictor of customer intentions to purchase organic food (Konuk, 2018). Therefore, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H5: Trust in local food suppliers will positively affect consumer intentions towards purchasing local food.

In food consumption it has become evident that consumers purchase products not only expecting benefits for themselves, but also considering altruistic reasons (Ozonaka et al., 2010; Gracia et al., 2012; Memery et al., 2015; Birch et al., 2018; Byrd et al., 2018; Skallerud & Wien, 2019). According to Zhang et al. (2020) consumers can be motivated to consume locally produced food considering benefits for themselves, such as freshness, superior taste and quality, transparency related to the origin of products, and by considering benefits for environment, local community and local economy. This stance was also supported by Nurse et al.'s (2012) study, which indicated concern for environment, local economy and social fairness as significant predictors of consumers' willingness to pay more for locally grown products. Consumer concern for environment and local economy were also supported by Grebitus et al.'s (2013) experimental auctions which revealed that consumers' WTP was falling with the increase of food miles. Kumar and Smith's (2017) study supported the relevance of consumers' concern for environment and support to local economy as the determinants of their attitudes towards local food consumption. A large body of literature has indicated consumers' perceptions of locally produced food as environmentally friendly, better tasting, i.e. having natural taste, healthier, free from chemicals, preservatives and

fresher than imported products, with positive impact on local economy, fair returns to farmers and fair treatment of farm labour and as a means of preserving local heritage and tradition (Carpio & Isengildina-Massa, 2009; Adams & Salois, 2010; Ozonaka et al., 2010; Dukeshire et al., 2011; Penney & Prior, 2014; Bianchi & Mortimer, 2015; Feldmann & Hamm, 2015; Memery et al., 2015; Wägeli et al., 2016; Berg & Preston, 2017; Birch et al., 2018; Fan et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2021). According to the TPB theory, behavior is a function of attitudes towards the behaviour, which are shaped by behavioural beliefs (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). Consumers' beliefs in local origin of food have been shown to positively affect their attitudes towards food (Dentoni et al., 2009). According to Feldmann and Hamm (2015), consumer knowledge of local food influences their attitudes and further leads to purchase intentions related to local food. In Skallerud and Wien's (2019) study performed in Norway, emphatic and social concern for local producers emerged as significant determinants of consumers' attitudes towards the consumption of locally produced food. Empirical results from China and Denmark provided evidence of significant contribution of beliefs regarding superior taste of locally produced food and support for local economy towards consumers' positive attitudes related to the consumption of local food (Zhang et al., 2020). According to Kumar et al. (2021) customers' values and beliefs related to local food positively affect their attitude towards local food. In light of the above, we propose the following hypotheses:

H6a: Customer beliefs related to self-interest of consuming local food positively affect their attitudes towards local food;

H6b: Customer beliefs related to environmental benefits of consuming local food positively affect customer attitudes towards local food;

H6c: Customer beliefs related to the benefits for local economy and local community positively affect their attitudes towards local food.

Hypothesized relationships are graphically displayed in Figure 1.

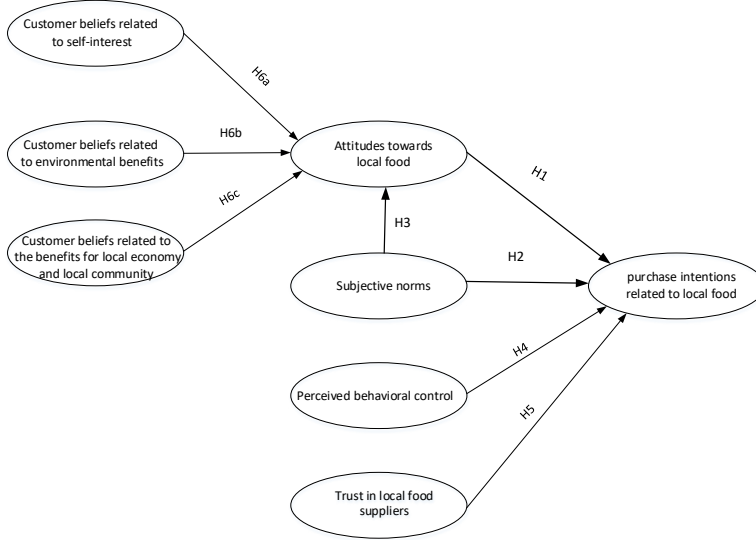


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

4. Discussion and conclusions

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, which has caused logistics disruptions in global food supply chains, has contributed to the rising interest in local food movement. Although some major disruptions in food supply have not been recorded, locally produced food has been recognized as a solution to ensure sustainable food systems, in case of eventual future market disruptions.

Building upon recent research on the driving factors of sustainable, and primarily organic, food movement, this study aimed to propose a conceptual framework of the determinants of customer purchase intentions related to locally grown and produced food. Extant research on sustainable consumption of final consumers and their behavioral intentions points out to the pertinence of Ajzen's Theory of planned behavior in explaining consumer future intentions. In addition to attitudes, subjective norms and PBC in explaining purchase intentions, recent studies have pointed out to the relevance of consumer trust in goods suppliers as a direct determinant of purchase intentions, whereas customer beliefs related to the benefits for themselves stemming from local food consumption, benefits for the environment and local community and economy have been proposed as indirect determinants of customer future intentions, which impact is mediated via customer attitudes related to the consumptions of local food.

Knowing the factors which motivate consumers to purchase locally sourced food is important for marketers and policy-makers who want to promote the consumption of

locally produced food, as it provides them with useful information for developing effective marketing strategies. To what extent attitudes towards consuming local food, social pressure from significant others, perceived ease or difficulty of buying local food and trust in local producers determine consumers' purchase intentions would be important information for policy-makers in their promotional campaigns oriented towards stimulating consumers' interest and positive behavior towards locally produced food. Previous research has shown that consumers ascribe different value to "locally produced" depending on a product category (Printezis et al., 2019) and that significance of the components of TPB theory in predicting consumer intentions varies between categories of locally produced/grown products (Nurse et al., 2012). Therefore, empirical examinations of proposed conceptual model in different product categories would be fruitful avenues for further research. According to Zhang et al. (2020), consumer behaviour related to locally produced food has been somewhat studied thus far, however, empirical studies stemming from developing economies are relatively sparse. Therefore, an examination of proposed model in a developing economy would close existing gap in the literature and equip policy-makers and marketers of local food with valuable knowledge for improving market position of local food. Recent research has also highlighted the mediating role of TPB variables in the relationship between environmental concern and purchase intentions related to green food products. Future examinations of the determinants of local food demand could be enhanced by the inclusion of this variable.

In spite of its positives, this study is not without limitations. The number of studies we included in the analysis is limited by our search criteria. Although we aimed to collect sufficient number and quality of literature sources, we took into consideration only journal articles published in English language, which excluded potentially valuable information and constructs which could have enhanced proposed conceptual framework. Also it would be beneficial for further research to extend the pool of keywords, including e.g. expressions such as "regional food", as review of literature has indicated frequent associations of local food with regional food items, due to the absence of exact definition of local food.

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Review scientific paper

**TACKLING REGIONAL DISPARITIES AND ADVANCING
SUSTAINABILITY IN THE EU AND NORTH MACEDONIA
DURING AND AFTER COVID-19**

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Abstract

The regional convergence in the EU is largely promoted by the EU Cohesion Policy (CP). This policy simultaneously has the focal role in advancing European strategies and sustainability goals which in great part overlap with the global ones; and is tightly linked to all EU “sustainable recovery” endeavours.

On the other hand, the policy of Balanced Regional Development (BRD) in the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM), an EU candidate country, is a minor policy not substantially intertwined with sustainability.

Through the prevailing qualitative content analysis, the paper aims to determine the permanent factors affecting the balanced regional development and sustainability in the EU and RNM, during and after COVID-19. As CP is financially and institutionally well-based, the various factors determining its effectiveness are dominantly linked to the national implementation of CP, while for the Macedonian policy of BRD, the systemic factors are prominent with emphasis on the overall inefficiency of the policy itself.

Keywords: cohesion policy, sustainability, pandemic, balanced regional development

1. Introduction

The EU's Cohesion Policy (CP) aimed at economic, territorial and social cohesion, today represents the greatest European investment instrument, thus playing a significant role in the overall EU functioning and is considered an equalizing and binding factor in favor of the European integration processes. CP incorporates complex economic, social, environmental, developmental and political issues. As well, it is a reflection of current inherently European axiological stand-points which in a great part overlap with the UN sustainability goals, hence, they have universal ideological prospects.

The policy of balanced regional development (BRD) in the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM) is affected by the CP in terms of setting aims, legal formulations and institutional adaptation due to the accession process of RNM to the EU¹. Although declaratively BRD entails greater goals similar to the ones of the CP, it is a minor policy not substantially intertwined with sustainability.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to postponing of some of the goals of the CP and represented a disruptive force in achieving the targets of this policy. However, the principles of the policy and the factors that impact its effectiveness remain continuously at play for the broader period, regardless of the COVID-induced crisis. Admittedly, some of the factors are more pronounced during crisis (such as the fiscal policies and good governance), however, all of them retain their significance, and therefore their determination and evaluation will represent the first focal point of the paper. Since the policies of EU and RNM are vastly different in their scope and effectiveness, the more relevant issue for the Macedonian BRD is to determine whether some functional fundamentals have been established to address the regional disparities, sustainability and the crisis which is the second focal point.

Ultimately, the goal of this paper would be to determine the factors affecting the balanced regional development, economic growth, social progress, health and environmental sustainability in EU and RNM in perpetuity.

The applied methodology in this paper is somewhat hybrid since it entails both the (dogmatic) legalistic method applied to several EU legal acts and all Macedonian adopted laws and decrees with the force of law in the period March 2020 – April 2021; and the content analysis applied to these legal acts, the Budgets, MFF, but also on studies, reports, surveys and other empirical research as secondary sources. The qualitative approach is dominant in the paper.²

¹ The Macedonian accession is largely based on the SAA signed in 2001 that entered into force in 2004.

² The acquiring of data was completed until the end of December 2021.

2. Global, European and Macedonian circumstances of the most vulnerable under COVID

Due to the COVID-19-induced crisis, on a global scale, until the 3rd quarter of 2020 the most jobs that were lost were in the most impacted sectors: tourism, accommodation and food services, arts and culture, retail and construction (ILO, 2021: 2). The losses have been relatively larger for the young workers, women, self-employed and workers with medium and low skills. All this leads to increasing the inequality within the countries and unequal recovery (*Ibid.*). The identical sectors were the most affected ones in the EU (EC, 2021: 1), and this situation is largely reflected in RNM as well, although certain differences are noted. According to the Macedonian State Statistical Office, considering losses in net salaries, the most affected are the accommodation and food services - 23,18 %; arts and recreation -19,53 %; expert, scientific and technical activities, -16,11 %; manufacture -10,52 % and transport and storage (Risteska, 2020: 54). Unlike global and EU picture, where construction was among the most impacted sectors, in RNM it was 10th (with caveat, because of the typical undeclared income and nonstandard contracts for construction workers).

In the Western Balkans countries, COVID-19 had great impact on poverty increase, although during 2021 many parameters began to slowly return to 2019 levels (Madzarevic-Sujster et al., 2021: 8).

In RNM, in the 2nd and 3rd quarter of 2020, around 26 000 jobs were lost cumulatively in comparison with the first quarter of 2020, mostly among the low-paid workers without any signed employment contracts, out of which significant part home paid workers (Brief 50). The agricultural workers were strongly hit as well – their working hours were diminished for 28%, and the salary income for 16% (Brief 46: 15-29).

COVID-19 had significant implications on women and gender inequality. On global level, according to the loss of jobs, the women were shown to be 1.8 times more vulnerable than men during the pandemic (WEF, 2020). Both genders experienced increase of the unpaid work, but the women's burden is significantly greater in terms of home and caring activities (UNWOMEN, 2020: 4-6). This increases poverty and exclusion of women. The same pandemic effects were noted regarding the women in the EU, as well as in RNM where women's labour is greater in services, caring, educational and health-care sectors. Moreover, in RNM, in the healthcare sector, so much as 74% of the employees are women, so the contagion risk is larger (Doninovska, Usinov, 2021). During the pandemic, especially during the movement restrictive measures, there was a significant increase of numbers of home violence, both globally and in the EU (EIGE 2021; BMJ 2020). In RNM, the Ministry of Internal Affairs marks increase of reported cases of 44.6% and 2 femicide cases (Risteska, 2020: 59-60).

Regarding the rural areas, the problem of accessibility of services arises in many EU countries. For RNM this is the most accentuated for the rural women in the pandemic, since the access regarding all social institutions and various services, including the health-care ones is limited (Tosheva, 2021; Risteska, 2020: 23-24).

These increased inequalities, more than ever require due policy attention in the EU and RNM. All these categories of people and sectors remain continuously within the scope of the EU Cohesion Policy, which was the reason to raise the attention of this policy in the direction of coping with the effects of the crisis. In many areas, beside the initial uncoordinated, inadequate and solidarity-deficient EU response, CP served as a rapid-reaction instrument. Initially, it covered two important European packages of measures: the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) and CRII+, further followed by the European Recovery Plan and other better-rounded European sets of measures and plans that are intricately linked to CP. However, a number of net payers and the Commission argue that CP responses should be exceptional and temporary to ensure that the long-term structural objectives and spending priorities of CP are not undermined (Bachtler *et al.*, 2020: 36-37).

By great contrast, given the modest scope and effectiveness of the Macedonian policy of BRD, neither of the mentioned affected categories, have been addressed through this policy but rather through the well-established central state institutions, instruments and policies.

3. Crises insignia – divergent paths for EU regions and countries

Crises tend to deepen regional divergence and various societal gaps. The pandemic had various effects on regions and the new patterns of regional development are not well-defined yet because of the novelty of the phenomenon. However, the prognosis is analogous with the previous economic crisis which is that prolonged economic divergence among the EU regions can be anticipated. The essential difference between this crisis and that of 2008 is that the current crisis is not structural (Fedajev *et al.*, 2021: 2). Anyhow, COVID -19 will significantly force further economic divergence within the EU (*Ibid.*: 23) with some long-term effects (Margini *et al.*, 2020: 16).

COVID-19 is undoubtedly a regional crisis, spatially uneven in its impacts (Bailey, 2021, 1955). While Bisciari *et al.* consider that the CEE member states show greater resilience to the COVID-19 crisis and divergence would be more prominent in EU-15 for the period 2019-2021 (Bisciari *et al.*, 2020: 7), others accentuate that regions in Southern Europe are likely to suffer larger and more long-lasting recessions than those in the north and east (Odendahl, Springford 2020, 1; Fedajev *et al.*, 2021: 24).

Despite the numerous methodological challenges of understanding and measuring the impact of CP, still, dominantly it is considered that there has been a CP-promoted process of convergence among EU regions and especially among countries, except for the period of the quoted previous crisis when it paused and mainly reverted.

Anyhow, the affected social areas and the divergent trends just accentuated the necessity of CP. For the purpose of future increase of the functionality of the regional policies of EU and RNM, as well as their context with the COVID-crisis, it is crucial to analyze the main factors influencing the effectiveness of these policies.

4. General factors influencing Cohesion Policy's effectiveness

Since the CP is an overarching policy, a much more generalized approach is in order, i.e. identification under which circumstances it produces greater results. The factors impacting the functionality of the Cohesion policy are intertwined; some represent syllogisms, some are either separate factors or sub-factors and some are both.

4.1. Targeting and allocation

There is a linear link between cohesion spending and growth (Crescenzi, *et al.* 2017: 6). The adequate targeting and allocation are important. They entail 2 elements: synchronization of optimally envisioned objectives and regional needs; and allocation of Structural Funds.

Namely, diligent identification and targeting of the main socio-economic weaknesses of the regions can increase the effectiveness of CP (Cataldo, Monastiriotis, 2018: 3-4). Formerly, as the CP priorities were broad, they raised the issue of *thematic concentration*. Concentrating expenditures in a small number of thematic areas creates advantages of scale and resource mobilization and thus has the potential to maximize the returns to investment (*Ibid.*: 6-7). CP should focus only on limited number of 'core priorities', compliant to the evidence that only some of the funds and goals have been significantly successful (Fiaschi *et al.*, 2018: 21). Some areas where the cohesive funding had been proven as more effective are environment and infrastructure, while for entrepreneurship, sectorial development and social cohesion spending is positive as well (ed. J. Bachtler *et al.*, 2017: 17). Hence, the concentration of funds and effective targeting are key for the achievements of CP. The adequacy between programme allocations and actual expenditures is important (Crescenzi *et al.*, 2017: 4-6).

Allocation of Cohesion funds per capita is strongly varied across European regions, and the constant dilemma regarding its *spatial concentration* is whether geographical prioritization of regions (regional concentration) or equal distribution of funds among them should be applied. The less developed regions need more moderate thematic concentration.

4.2. Absorption capacity

The absorption capacity is one of the salient factors for successful implementation of the Structural funds in the beneficiary regions and this impact is generally greater in more developed regions (ed. Piattoni, Polverari, 2016: 331).

The effective absorption of funds is a constant challenge for EU countries and total absorption is more the exception, less the rule. The absorption capacity is highly varied across regions due to differences in the labour market features, decentralization, investments, institutional framework and infrastructural development (Moreno, 2020: 27-38).

Long-term absorption is important. For effective absorption of Structural Funds, it is not only the volume of the financial means that is important but also the provision of assistance in absorbing EU funding in a sustained fashion (ed. J. Bachtler *et al.*, 2017: 152).

4.3. Macro-factors – national policies and relations

Despite the Barca Report which focuses on highly localized factors that condition CP's success, according to more recent research, member states with their policies most substantially affect this policy's functionality. National macro-institutional factors (conditions and models of intervention) play a greater role in shaping heterogeneous returns from Cohesion Policy, than the diversity in the local conditions (Crescenzi, Giua, 2019: 11).

The national level is particularly important because there are macro-factors on this level which are homogenous: the fiscal and monetary policy, as well as the legislature (ed. S. Piattoni, L. Polverari, 2016: 445).

Both the political situation within a country and a region, and the relations between various layers of governance influence the allocation process of CP funds (ed. J. Bachtler *et al.*, 2017: 27). Namely, the national governments with their (non)complementary policies and comportment influence the efficacy and effectiveness of the CP. Also, national governments influence the access of funds during the negotiation phase with EU, then, in the instance of intra-national distribution of resources and implementation among various regional authorities (Dotti, 2016: 6). In this contexts, the approach of the Government towards the use of funds is significant - if at any stage of implementation there is a pressure to use as much of the funds as possible in a relatively short time, then there is a threat to the quality of projects (ed. Musialkowska *et al.*, 2020: 140).

More concretely, domestic factors that define variations in CP governance processes and impacts are: formal and informal intragovernmental relations, the preexistence of territorial communities or networks for regional development, institutional and administrative capacity, learning capacity, policy entrepreneurship by local elites, clientelism and domestic policy paradigms (Bachtler, *et al.*, 2016: 22).

The type of polity and the level of decentralization are factors. Some of the NUTS regions coincide with their legislative and administrative competences while other are nonessential, artificial statistical regions, such as the case of Macedonia. The decentralized structures are better at realization of the implementation tasks of CP related to expenditure (Crescenzi, *et al.*, 2019) under the assumption that other state settings are satisfactory with high quality.

A factor for successful fostering of regional growth (by CP) is the capacity to create relevant strategies, i.e. openness to ideas, knowledge exchange and a willingness to adapt (ed. J. Bachtler *et al.*, 2017: 51) Less analyzed, but still very important factors are the networks and social capital.

Out of the named factors, special attention should be put on good governance, institutional quality and administrative capacity which although gain greater weight when the central state is analyzed, still, they can refer to all levels of governance.

4.3.1. Good governance

As a macro-factor, the good governance plays a great role, since the quality of governance is an important determinant for regional growth (EC, 2017: 135) and for better articulation of needs in the negotiation process in multilevel decision making (Crescenzi *et al.*, 2019). Regions with higher level of quality of governance get more as a result of economic development, unemployment rates etc. Regions with lesser corruption and better bureaucracies are more attractive for funds allocation, are better at implementation of the ESIF and to adherence to CP rules (ed. Piattoni, Polverari, 2016: 93).

Low quality of government hinders economic development and reduces the impact of public investment, including that co-financed by cohesion policy (EC, 2017: xxi), and can lead to funding losses as well. The inability to spend the funds available to the member states within the envisaged timeframe can lead to their loss according to the decommitment rule $n+2$ or they can spend them inefficiently in an attempt to spend them in time (EC, 2014: 175). Hence, losses directly correlate with the quality of governance.

Transparency and verifiability are also required of any public action with intended spatial effects because of the strong interdependencies between places (Barca, 2009: 23). In many regions across the EU, public procurement is open to the risk of corruption and a lack of competition for contracts as reflected in a number of instances where a contract was awarded when only one bid had been submitted (EC, 2017: 135). Again, the causality between corruption control (and other elements of good governance) and the effective usage of the Structural Funds is conspicuous.

4.3.2. Institutional quality

Institutional capacity affects the attainment of long-term policy objectives and the ability to implement structural reforms which have the potential to boost growth and employment (EC, 2017, 135). The institutional background, along with the national context, the process of implementation and impact of territorial units represent a combination of fundamental factors for eclectic realization of the CP goals (Pleshivchak, 2020: 53). In fact, the institutional quality impacts the implementation (ed. Piattoni, Polverari, 2016: 241).

As well, the institutional embedding affects local performances and development. A line of thinking accentuates that the persistence of institutional differences across regions, despite economic integration, is a key in maintaining regional disparities, since institutions shape the way the economy can use available resources or absorb new ones. Serious institutional

weaknesses keep a regional economy away from innovation, moving up on the technological frontier and thus growth (Musialkowska *et.al.*, 2020: 148).

4.3.3. Administrative capacity

Administrative capacities and efficient procedures may also have a bearing on whether the impacts of funds are maximized. This is especially important, since member states are responsible for managing programmes, including project selection, control and monitoring (to prevent, realize, and correct any irregularities) and project evaluation (ed. Musialkowska *et al.*, 2020: 120).

Hence, administrative capacity is a key feature of the successful management and implementation of EU funds. Good governance can play an important role i.e. it may be an underlying condition necessary for sustained economic and social development, as well as for a modern public administration (ed. Bachtler *et al.*, 2016: 169).

Surubaru (2016) dissolves the administrative capacity to various components: institutional capacity, bureaucratic capacity, human resources capacity, political stability, political support and political clientelism (Fratesi, Wishlade, 2017: 820)

Overall, institutional structure, relations and quality affect the impact of CP through connection of the main goals of the policy with the national and regional contexts, affect the economic growth and development, the increase of employment, the efficacy of the SF spending and the way of implementing of CP.

4.4. Local circumstances and factors

The local circumstances represent both object and subject of influence of Cohesion Policy.

As said, institutional and administrative settings reflects on local economic performances and development. Local circumstances and factors are represented through their spatial vicinity, distance and population patterns, economic and political links in national and international context, local assets (Bachtroegler *et al.*, 2020: 21-26) (only after accumulation over certain period of time), knowledge of territorial resources and competitiveness (including its constitutive elements, among which, the most prominent: human capital, firms, and innovations). The accumulation of human capital presupposes time and strong educational systems of primary and vocational education (ed. Bachtler *et al.*, 2016: 256). Important local success factors are also the previous socio-economic and political circumstances, some of the latter being: quality of local authorities, intensity of public spending (Crescenzi, Giua, 2019: 3) regional political coalition and their relation to the central ones and the stability of regions (Dotti, 2016: 4-5).

In this context, the place-based approach is very significant because it contributes to the development of results-oriented public administration and emphasizes the importance of qualitative information and knowledge about the territorial resources and the developmental potential necessary for decision-making. It accentuates the relation among territorial resources, institutional framework and regional development (ed. Bachtler *et al.*, 2016: 272)

4.5. Synergy with other policies

Policies tend to have inter-dependent effects and their impact cannot therefore be maximized if a fragmented approach is adopted and policy decisions are taken in isolation (ed. Bachtler *et al.*, 2016: 81). For instance, it can be maximized when Cohesion Policy expenditure is complemented by Rural Development and CAP funds which also have the nature of spatial targeting. National policies that simultaneously function on local level are additional relevant factor of influence (*Ibid.*: 26-27).

The relations of CP with other EU or national policies, regardless of whether they are spatially targeted or represent sectoral policies with spatial impacts are extremely relevant for the territorial cohesion.

All elaborated factors are “timeless” and will continue to play their role with great intensity in continuity even after the pandemic. Some factors surfaced as more relevant for the prompt EU economic response and the required implementation capacity of the aid transfers, and these were the national administrative capacities and the fiscal policies.

5. Main features of the policy of Balanced Regional Development in the Republic of North Macedonia

The policy of balanced regional development in the RNM is necessary mostly because of the great disparities between the socio-economic level of the Skopje Region and all other planning regions in the state (which are not units of local government, but exist only at NUTS 3 level). This policy represents solid normative systemic entity, with institutional and organizational fundaments, highly suitable to the European CP. Even the definition for BRD's goal itself is almost identical with the European narrative, and that goal is “balanced and sustainable development of the entire territory of Republic of Macedonia, featured by a high rate of economic growth, competitive planning regions with relatively small disparities and optimal usage of natural, human and energy resources, high economic and social cohesion and the population enjoying a good living standard.” (*Strategy for BRD of RM 2009-2019*, 2009). This is only on a declarative level and even though it seems that the goals of the Macedonian BRD are connected to the sustainable goals, the elaboration below will show why that is not the case.

Effectiveness-wise, this policy manifests significant non-functionality for a number of reasons. Traditionally, the small allocation for this policy, cannot elevate the level of regional competitiveness or reduce the regional disparities. The imperative norm envisages annual allocation of minimum 1% of GDP (*Law on BRD, 2007, Art.27*) while the actual spending for the period where precise data is available 2009-2011 is between 0,003 и 0,2% of BDP annually (Audit Office, 2013). For the next period there is a lack of quantitative data, but there are strong indications that in the following years the situation has not been changed.

BRD in Macedonia is characterized with centralization, because its most prominent players are the Government of RNM and the Council for Regional Development where some governmental ministers are members *ex officio*. The effects of the attempt to increase the regional power and other subnational actors are not significant (Cekic, 2018: 30-34).

Further on, there is inconsistency of the measures and partial use or application of IPA funds.

Besides the fact the Strategy for Balanced Regional Development 2021-2031 entails partial aspects of BRD, RNM does not have a general strategy for economic development which would be basis for properly planning the policy of BRD as a coherent whole.

Additionally, the institutional capacity, i.e. the level of expertise of the professional personnel and their personal motivation are relatively low (Zabijakin Chatleska, 2018). The institutional structure of RNM is too burdened, inefficient, unreformed, even partisan, contributing to Macedonia being ranked as 82nd out of 141 countries in 2019 according to the Index of Global Competitiveness of the World Economic Forum (Iseni, Zekiri, Jusufi, 2020: 12).

These aspects of ineffectiveness stem from the key factors impacting the policy of BRD in RNM, most of which are systemic (and somewhat different to the ones in the EU for a number of reasons). These factors are: economic and political developmental level of the state, the limited total financial capacity of RNM, of the underdeveloped economic sectors and even lower level of strategic planning and policy making, not based on data, the deficiencies in the educational and administrative policies and good governance.

Out of these, the financial insufficiency will be accentuated: besides the objective financial limits of a medium developed country, RNM faces further reduction of the funds that could be allocated to the purposes of BRD because of political or partisan goals, corruption, clientelism etc. Additionally, previously mentioned realized spending for BRD which amounts to several millions EUR annually accounts for all types of territorial units: the regions, the areas with specific needs and the rural areas. Given the needs in every area, social, health, educational, ecological, gender equality, etc. where billions are required, this small amount cannot make even minimal changes. Also, the disparities among regions cannot be overcome, because the differences in allocation of finances, for instance in two regions, amount to 100 000- 150 000 EUR in favour of the poorer region, while except the Skopje region, all other regions participate in the total national GDP with approximately 1 billion EUR. All of this makes this policy useless. As well, a negative feature is the concept of non-existing previously envisaged ratios and rules for distribution of finances according to populated places, area

or areas with specific needs which promotes arbitrary financial distribution (Micevski, 2017: 44), especially harming the rural places/municipalities (Jonoski, Dimkovski, 2017: 88). Financial incapacity negatively influences the ability to apply for IPA projects and the obligation of the municipalities (many of which, poor) to participate with 50% in financing of the costs for the centers for regional development, is a special burden for them which additionally creates resistance in complying to such obligation.

6. The BRD policy's and central state's response for coping with the COVID crisis

Per the elaboration above, it is more than evident that the Macedonian policy for BRD hasn't touched the categories of people and sectors affected by the COVID-crisis, nor has such capacities. Except declaratively, it is not an effective mean for dealing neither with the goals of the balanced regional development, even less with sustainability, and didn't play a palliative role regarding the COVID-crisis.

The central state institutions responded to the COVID-crisis, each with different level of proficiency, adequacy and devotion.

After the declared state of emergency in RNM on 18 March 2020 to the end of coping with spreading of the virus, the Government of RNM adopted around 250 decrees with the force of law (DFL) (Ministry of Justice, 2021: 4), as well as other legal acts pertaining the exceptional circumstances. DFL were adopted for the purpose of dealing with the pandemic with regard primarily to special economic measures, then, more general fiscal substantial and procedural issues, monetary, budgetary and other financial ones concerning the central, local authorities, banks and private persons. DFL were adopted pertaining to the functioning of the private sector, such as contract relations, firms, bankruptcy and liquidation. There were many DFL that regulated the issues of tourism, transport, construction, infrastructure, water supply, energy supply, agriculture, sport, culture and others. Some had positive gender effects.

With the activation of the Assembly, *inter alia*, the reprogrammed state Budget was adopted for 2020, according to which increase of 4,1% expenditure was planned compared to the initial Budget and all the expenditure items were changed compliant to the fourth set of governmental measures for dealing with the pandemic in the direction of diminishing the less productive spending. With this reprogramming all affected categories by the COVID are targeted (OGRNM 262/20)

In November 2020, the Assembly adopted a line of fiscal laws and laws for financial aid of certain categories of people in the economic sectors, especially of the employers with losses, retirees, persons under social protection, young, single parents, children with no parents and parental care, artists, other persons working in culture, film, music etc., purchase of grapes and wine industry and there was a similar stipulation in the Law on Tobacco..

At the end of December the Budget of RNM for 2021 was adopted. This is a very specific budget, accommodated to the pandemic, addressing all key challenges. Its goals are strengthening the funding of the health care system, protecting the health and lives of citizens, support of the economic stabilization and establishing the fundamentals for economic recovery and fast growth (*Budget of RNM 2020*).

According to the Budget 2021, the Strategy for economic recovery and fast growth includes four pillars: 1) economic recovery from COVID-19, entailing the priorities: protection of the citizens' health and social protection of the most vulnerable social categories and support for the private sector and keeping the jobs; 2) fast inclusive and sustainable economic growth; 3) strengthening the competitiveness of the private sector and 4) development of human resources and equal opportunities, through which macroeconomic stability and financial sustainability would be achieved, economic recovery and acceleration of the economic growth (*Ibid.*: 3).

Generally, the economic measures are perceived by the citizens as useful, but in limited sense, as well as abused by the private sector. On the other hand, the private sector, still faces difficulties (NDI, IPSOS, USAID, 2020: 34-36).

Summarily, the recovery in 2021 from the COVID-induced recession in 2020 mark greater rate than the expectations, with better performances in the 2nd quarter of 2021 due to a combination of domestic opening, enabling tourism and favourable preconditions for regional exports. The need for careful monitoring of the labour market is present. The employment support programmes as response to the impact of COVID-19, helped mitigate the hit, but the overall recovery will not be easy, especially for the women and youth. (Madzarevic-Sujster *et al.*, 2021: 4) Several analyses are in the same line that the institutional endeavor has led to mitigation of the economic impact of the crisis, especially regarding the labour market.

Beside the significant central state efforts, there is a great space to take advantage of the crisis to shift towards greater intervention in the laws concerning social policies, with accent of persons unable for self-care, for reducing the inequalities of living conditions, improving the conditions of the labour market and conditions, education, accessibility of services to various categories of population, for promoting the health capacities, both infrastructural and professional, introducing gender state budgeting and others.

7. Conclusions

The regional convergence and economic growth in the EU are largely promoted by CP but this policy simultaneously has the focal role in advancing European strategies and sustainability goals and is tightly linked to all EU “sustainable recovery” endeavours.

The fundamentals of CP are solid, i.e. the financing is sufficient and the institutional framework adequate. At the EU level there are difficulties during MFF negotiation with intergovernmental elements but so far this has been a constructive process. As well, for a relatively short time,

the initial EU problematic and non-solidary action for dealing with the COVID-crisis was overcome and this policy became a leading one in promoting the EU instruments for dealing with the pandemic. Most of the problematic points of the effectiveness of CP are detected at the national implementation of the policy.

The permanent factors influencing the effectiveness of CP during and after the pandemic can be various, some of which are most prominent. The adequate targeting and allocation of structural funds are primary. The absorption capacity is a special factor encompassing numerous interrelated elements which represent factors themselves such as the features of the labour market, decentralization, investments, institutions and infrastructural development, while the long-term absorption is important. Then, the macro factors are significant, such as adequate and timely legislature, fiscal and monetary policies, political situation and comportment (intragovernmental relation, political entrepreneurship, clientelism and corruption), national governments, capacity for strategic planning, the level of decentralization of the state, good governance, the synchronization with other intricate policies on several levels, institutional quality and administrative capacity. The strictly local and regional factors influencing CP effectiveness are the local assets, regional competitiveness, as well as the previous socio-economic and political circumstances of the regions.

For the future design of CP, it should be taken into consideration that the economic, political and juridical processes are emphasized at national level, which means that the place-based approach, although extremely important for usage of the place potentials, is still secondary compared to the national effects. The keeping of the current goals is key for the continuity of the policy, with their upgrade regarding new challenges such as digitalization, green recovery, changes in working paradigms, environmental protection, social and educational challenges, with greater direction of the funds towards productive environment than to infrastructure.

The Macedonian policy of BRD is legally and institutionally well founded, declaratively almost identically to the EU CP. However, it is highly ineffective due to the financial insufficiency, deficient rules for fair distribution of funds that would serve the purpose of policy, unsynchronized approach with other national policy endeavours, underused IPA funds, institutional incapacities etc. The salient factors affecting its inefficiency are: economic and political developmental level of the state, the limited total financial capacity of RNM, the underdeveloped economic sectors and even lower level of strategic planning and policy making, not based on data, the deficiencies in the education, administrative policies and good governance.

The total budgetary deficient state capacity objectively leads to smaller opportunities for optimal reducing of the damages for crisis and for the recovery of the economy, with consistent attention to all social subsystems, human rights, climate change etc. However these endeavours in RNM are mostly and rather effectively made by the central state institutions, while the BRD has proved to be useless in this sense.

Therefore, to the end of promoting the concept and realization of the Macedonian BRD, an improved economic basis is needed as well as solid strategic planning involving the entire

expert public dealing with BRD and sustainable development issues; then, schemes of fiscal equalization are needed with criteria and permanent financing of the poorer parts of the regions, above all, the rural areas and the ones with specific needs, which should be covered of state funds, with the exception of the City of Skopje. Still, the salient dealing with the problems of BRD are not by far exclusively in the scope of this policy, but relate to many other policies and the elevation of the entire national level of development, in which sense the financial and institutional influence of EU would possibly represent a positive factor.

The pandemic should be used as an accelerator for social and policy change.

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Review scientific paper

MAJOR ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

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Abstract

Climate change may spell disaster for humanity, while combating climate change will require a radical revision of our consumer habits and huge costs for the global economy. Namely, the ecological transition will increase public spending, and consequently fiscal deficits. As alternatives with strong tax increases seem difficult to implement as they would dramatically raise real interest rates (thereby cutting investments), it is realistic that expansionary monetary and fiscal policies will continue. Accordingly, what we see from the beginning of 2020s, associated with the pandemic, with the strong expansion of fiscal spending followed by ultra-loose monetary policy globally may become a new norm in the 2020s and the 2030s.

Keywords: climate change, global warming, economic costs, ecological transition, world GDP

1. Introduction

Climate change is certainly one of the largest menaces to economic progress and stability because heat waves make us often unable to work and decrease productivity; cyclones and typhoons are destroying millions of people; droughts are reducing harvests...

Regarding major economic consequences of climate change the first question arising is: Can the world reduce carbon dioxide emissions without significantly reducing the living standards? What we are currently looking is a ferocious experiment in the form of a COVID-19 pandemic that provoked the biggest drop in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions in history while generating the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression (the 1930s). Unfortunately, it looks like to be only a prediction of what is coming. Namely, in order to have a 50% chance of keeping global warming below 1.5°C (compared to the average before the Industrial revolution), the world should again have an annual decline in CO₂ emissions of 7% from 2020 every year until 2050, which seems to be unrealistic. Which is the worst, the coming years could be even worse if we do not abort the century-old link between GDP growth and carbon pollution as soon as possible. It seems clear that the costs of radical reforms, such as the road to a zero-carbon economy, could be too high, leading to a number of development problems.

2. Various Estimates of the impact of the ecological transition to “zero carbon emissions” on GDP

There are various projections of the impact of the ecological transition to “zero carbon emissions”. International Energy Agency (IEA, 2021) estimates fall of 4% by 2030 for the global economy, European Commission (EC, 2021) is projecting a roughly neutral impact for the EU, while Network for Greening the Financial System (NGFS, 2019) a marginal fall for the global economy. There is no doubt that these discrepancies indicate a lack of consensus among leading scholars on the macroeconomic effect of actions to mitigate negative climate change.

Accordingly, there are differences in necessary investment growth. The European Commission (EC, 2020) is predicting an increase in investment of 1.5%-1.8% of world GDP 2021-30 (compared to the period 2011-20). Similar projection was done by the IMF (2021), which concluded that annual additional investments should amount to 2% of the world GDP between 2030 and 2040. The International Energy Agency (IEA, 2021) is estimating that the global transition to zero carbon-dioxide emissions by 2050 would imply a rise in world energy investments by 2 p.p. by 2030. Yet, gross investment in transition would be significantly larger, as share of investment in fossil fuel extraction, transportation, and the transformation must be allocated to green energy investment.

What is clear is the trade-off between today and future spending. Namely, increasing the share of investment in GDP by two percentage points (p.p.) would create strong negative macroeconomic consequences (for example, increase of the real interest rate). Under

assumptions that investment growth translates into “greening” of capital (so that potential GDP is at the same level), the fall in annual consumption would be 3% in 2030, which is very high number in the context of slowing growth in advanced economies.

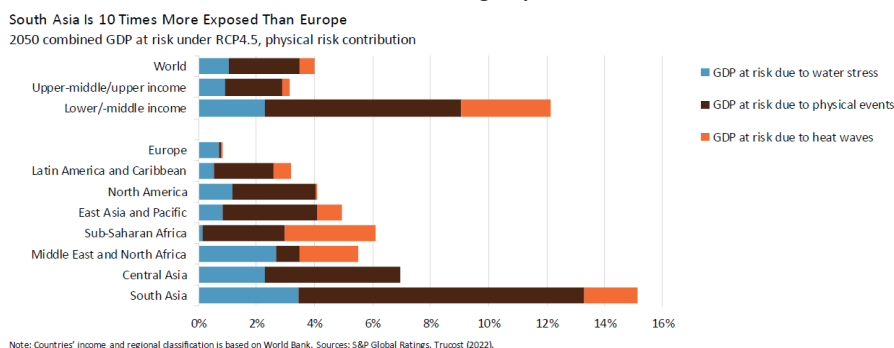
3. Different scenarios

An increasing number of studies and activities show that measures focused on coping with global climate change are a golden opportunity for ensuring sustainable development, which would allow continuing global growth.

The recent The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report (IPCC, 2022), approved by 270 authors and 195 governments, warned that if emissions are not cut quickly, heat and humidity will create conditions that human cannot tolerate, and that its economic impact could be devastating. For example, financial hub of India, Mumbai, could face floods due to increasing sea levels, while Ahmedabad was in danger of a severe heat wave. The report points out that more than 3.5 billion people, which is 45% of the global population, now is living in very vulnerable areas. Additionally, about 35 million people could face annual coastal floods by 2050, while 45-50 million are at risk of the same by 2100.

Ratings firm S&P Global published a report (covering 135 countries) claiming that climate change could induce 4% of global annual economic output lost by 2050 with poorer parts of the world disproportionately hard, especially South Asia (Weforum, 2022). To add, more than 60 economies could have their credit ratings cut by 2030 due to global warming. In this report, among others, is indicative calculation of the World Meteorological Organization. Namely, a weather, climate, or water-related disaster was occurring somewhere daily for the last 50 years, making 115 deaths on average and over \$202 million in losses both on a daily basis.

Table 1: Combined risk under climate change by 2050



Source: www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/04/climate-change-global-gdp-risk/

American economist William Nordhaus, who received the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2018 for integrating climate change into long-term macroeconomic analysis, has given one of solutions to climate change. He proposed to apply prices that will act as a deterrent to using fossil fuels, because the current price is artificially low and does not motivate the search for alternatives (as are renewable).

According to the Swiss Re Institute Report (2021), the global economy could lose one tenth of its total by 2050 due to climate change if temperature increases stay on the current trajectory (meaning Paris Agreement and net-zero emission targets are not being met). In the worst scenario, climate change could take up to 18% of the world GDP by 2050 (under assumption that global temperatures rise by 3.2°C). The hardest hit would be African and Asian economies (especially ASEAN countries), while China is at risk of losing almost one fourth of its GDP in this scenario. Advanced economies in the northern hemisphere (the US, the EU, especially Canada) were comparatively less vulnerable and also better resourced to cope with global warming.

Table 2: Climate Economics Index Stress - How global warming by 2050 will affect 48 states covering 90% of the world GDP?

	Temperature rise scenario, by mid-century			
	Well-below 2°C increase	2.0°C increase	2.6°C increase	3.2°C increase
	Paris target	The likely range of global temperature gains		Severe case
Simulating for economic loss impacts from rising temperatures in % GDP, relative to a world without climate change (0°C)				
World	-4.2%	-11.0%	-13.9%	-18.1%
OECD	-3.1%	-7.6%	-8.1%	-10.6%
North America	-3.1%	-6.9%	-7.4%	-9.5%
South America	-4.1%	-10.8%	-13.0%	-17.0%
Europe	-2.8%	-7.7%	-8.0%	-10.5%
Middle East & Africa	-4.7%	-14.0%	-21.5%	-27.6%
Asia	-5.5%	-14.9%	-20.4%	-26.5%
Advanced Asia	-3.3%	-9.5%	-11.7%	-15.4%
ASEAN	-4.2%	-17.0%	-29.0%	-37.4%
Oceania	-4.3%	-11.2%	-12.3%	-16.3%

Source: Swiss Re Institute (2021): The economics of climate change.

Note: The second and third scenario are based on assumptions that further mitigating actions are taken (2°C increase) and if some mitigating actions are taken (2.6°C increase)

A comparison with past experience indicates that these costs are likely to be high. Consequently, the transition to net zero emissions is likely to involve major changes in growth patterns. The effects will include a significant negative supply-side shock, as well as investment growth large enough to affect global equilibrium interest rate growth. In addition,

we can expect major negative effects on consumer income, redistributive changes and strong pressure on public debt. Having all this in mind, it will not be easy for analysts and political experts to persuade politicians and the public to intensify efforts towards decarbonisation (PIIE, 2021).

Even under the assumption that green technologies are cheaper than traditional ones, the costs of switching to them will be large. Namely, a significant part of the existing capital (buildings, machinery and vehicles) will have to be discarded and replaced before its service life expires (for example, due to stricter environmental regulations), meaning that more investment will be necessary to sustain the identical production's level. The sudden obsolescence of capital is known as a negative supply shock, and basic economic consequence of this is fall of potential production. The negative supply shock, among others, describes the dramatic increase in oil prices in the 1970s, and inevitable shock we are waiting will be about the same magnitude (3-4 percentage points of the global GDP). In addition, jobs will be lost in traditional carbon-intensive industries. In spite fact that other jobs will be created in industries that do not rely on fossil fuels, workers that worked in these sectors will probably become "losers of the transition."

According to Eichengreen (2021), cutting Europe's greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions by 55% by 2030 will cost 5.6 trillion dollars. Since reducing greenhouse gas emissions is a public good, companies left to their own devices will invest too little. Moreover, where infrastructure has network characteristics (such as in traffic) someone has to coordinate relevant investments. It follows that most of this spending will be made by governments. So where will governments of the EU find this huge money? Should they borrow it and should EU rules be revised to encourage them? In the past, various governments have adopted a "golden rule" that exempts public investment from self-imposed restrictions on deficit spending (3% deficit and 60% public debt, both as shares of GDP), and the rationale is that public investment pays for itself. If it is productive, the denominator of the debt-to-GDP ratio grows. If it is very productive, it generates tax revenue sufficient to service and repay additional debt. Looking in this way, investing in a green economy could qualify.

Hausmann (2021) is pointing out that a significant reduction in CO₂ emissions entails the electrification of everything that can be electrified. But this will require huge amounts of aluminum, cobalt, copper, lithium and rare earths, which can only come about through a major expansion of mining. Mass electrification may also require more hydropower and nuclear power plants. We are already seeing the consequences of this. While the recent increase in oil prices is helping decarbonization by making fossil fuel energy more expensive, the fact that aluminum and copper prices are close to historical highs means that the price of electricity alternatives is also rising, reducing the rate of green energy replacement. So while the losers from decarbonization are relatively obvious, the winners (e.g. OPEC members, some countries rich in metals) will be those who combine geographical happiness with smart action. It is clear that regions and countries that want to benefit from the relocation of energy-intensive industries will need to ensure secure access to green energy.

A report by Christian Aid (2021), presented at Cop26 conference in Glasgow, is projecting strong economic harm to the world's vulnerable countries. Namely, under climate policies

that are today active, the average GDP could be hit by almost one-fifth by 2050 and 64% by 2100. Even in the case that the world limits heating to 1.5C economies would cope with average GDP damage of -13.1% in 2050 and -33.1% in 2100 respectively, with Africa being particularly vulnerable. The basic policy recommendation for a COP26 is to provide new and needs-based finance and a system - via OUN especially - to deliver it to vulnerable developing countries.

To add, the Cop26 summit in Glasgow brought together more than 120 heads of state and government and representatives of nearly 200 countries to make up a plan with goal of sustaining global warming at 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels. The summit has made a significant progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but the national carbon targets set there are far below needed to stay within 1.5 C range. Accordingly, representatives agreed to consider their goals before the next annual climate “conference of parties”, which will be organized in next November 2022 (in Egypt). Namely, the 1.5C limit is the basic target. The Paris Agreement of 2015 required countries to keep global temperature rise “well below” 2C and to “continue efforts” to restrict rise to 1.5C. Without that, the world would almost certainly already be on the irreversible road to 2C heating - a level that would lead to far worse consequences, with widespread drought, water shortages for billions of people, thermal waves and sea level rise (The Guardian, 2021).

According to the World Commission on the Economy and Climate Report (2018), the adoption of ambitious climate measures could create 65 million new low-carbon jobs. To achieve this, we need to accelerate structural transformation in five key economic sectors: clean energy systems (decarbonisation of the energy system); smarter urban development; sustainable land use (switching to more sustainable agricultural methods combined with strict forest protection could generate an economic benefit of around \$ 2 billion per year); smart water management (in areas with water scarcity, GDP could fall by 6% by 2050, and this could be prevented by more efficient use of water through technological improvements and investment in public infrastructure); the circular industrial economy (95% of the value of plastic packaging materials - up to \$ 120 billion a year - is lost after first use; policies that encourage more circular and efficient use of materials could boost global economic activity and reduce waste and pollution).

The World Economic Forum’s Global Risks Report (2021) pointed out that the response to COVID-19 offers four governance options to strengthen the overall resilience of countries, enterprises and the international community. These are: formulating analytical frameworks that take a holistic and systematically based view of risk impacts; exploring new forms of public-private partnership on risk-taking; investing in high-profile “risk champions” to encourage national leadership and international cooperation; and improving risk communication and combating misinformation.

4. Without scientific consensus

There is no scientific consensus on what to do in the current socio-economic context. The International Energy Agency claims that anti-capitalist alternatives, as Naomi Klein (2014), *Jason Hickel* (ID4D, 2021) or Kate Raworth (Raworth, 2018), are unlikely to succeed, as a scenario with dramatically reduced economic growth would jeopardize investments in the environment. Namely, the huge sums needed to upgrade energy systems (alternatives with lower carbon dioxide emissions) will require economic growth to be financed (Fickling, 2020).

IMF's (2021) growth-friendly strategy consists of: a green investment plan and support to green research and development, carbon pricing, and measures to ensure the social fairness of the transition. This strategy integrating the today's capitalist system with needed environmental actions could be more successful if the measurement of economic performance, such as GDP per capita, is redefined and economic growth takes into account the costs of ecological protection. Namely, while the corporate sector is considering sustainable investment opportunities without taking into account externalities, governments need to impose at least part of these costs to them, apart from themselves taking lion share of ecological costs.

Associated with this, techno-optimists are convinced that green innovations can greatly help to solving problems. Skeptics of future economic growth describe the transition to net zero (carbon) emissions as a fundamental change that will end decades of consumer-led high economic growth, and that the world will inevitable enter the post-growth era (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2021).

Tax changes, such as a carbon tax, will do too little to help. What is necessary is fundamentally change social attitude to property, business and capital. In addition, fiscal policy must be directed in the direction of huge public programs associated with the environment, but also with the need to secure that possible systemic shocks do not make large part of the global population even poorer. The policy shaking up the established base of power although desirable is probably unrealistic. Accordingly, it is unrealistic to expect a magical, technological, bullet that will keep temperatures low, and that it costs us nothing (McDuff, 2019).

5. Conclusions

It is clear that the ecological transition will increase public spending, and consequently fiscal deficits and public debt. As alternatives with strong tax increases seem difficult to implement, as they would dramatically raise real interest rates (thereby cutting investments), it is realistic that expansionary monetary and fiscal policies will continue with all the expected consequences of income redistribution.

Having battle against climate change will imply a drastic change of our consumer habits. Smarter use of electronic and electrical devices, i.e. their longer life, greater modularity and better servicing, will certainly reduce the energy consumption of this kind of device (in this way reducing emissions). Technological advances are dramatically based on “fossil technologies”, so it is necessary to intensify government subsidies, regulations and management of fossil fuel prices to direct innovation towards cleaner technologies, making green growth more efficient. To be honest and more optimistic, this is already happening in part as renewable energy prices fall. Additionally, capitalism has begun to “green up”, with more and more companies investing in being part of a cleaner future (example of market capitalization of Tesla compared to General Motors is indicative).

As Pisani-Ferry (2021) claims, in order for new cleaner technologies to save the consumer society, people will have to change their way of life (for example, a deep transformation of the diet, which today has very intensive use of meat, will disrupt traditions of nutrition). What we see from the beginning of 2020s, associated with the pandemic, with the strong expansion of fiscal spending followed by ultra-loose monetary policy (printing money by the world’s leading central banks) may become a new norm in the 2020s and the 2030s.

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Review scientific paper

THE POTENTIAL FOR A SUSTAINABLE WASTE PICKER'S SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IN MACEDONIA

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Abstract

The paper offers an overview of the Macedonian waste management sector while showcasing the current environment for a waste picker social enterprise and recommendations to create an enabling environment. It describes the sector in terms of structure, actors and their position in the value chain. Based on the analysis, bottlenecks of the industry are identified in order to uncover opportunities and threats for further development.

Findings indicate that the industry in which the social enterprise would need to operate can be categorized as highly competitive. Additionally, informal pickers need support that would mitigate some of the characteristics of the “culture” of informal waste picking based on lack of structure, lack of respect for rules and sense of commitment and accountability. The current situation requires changes in the legal framework on local level and national level and waste picker's institutional recognition. Their role in society needs to be valued and their exploitation countervailed.

Keywords: waste, pickers, social, enterprise, recycling

1. Introduction

The Macedonian waste management system has been an immense environmental issue for decades. The situation is slowly improving in terms of citizens' health protection, cleaner environment and protection of natural resources. The seriousness of the problem and its slow improvement is constantly assessed negatively in the reports of multilateral and civil society organizations, which monitor the processes related to the environment and the protection of the health of citizens (UNECE, 2019). Research suggests that it does make economic sense to invest in sustainable waste solutions, because the other option is to let uncollected and disposed waste cause significant health and environmental impacts. The cost of these impacts is higher than the cost of developing and managing sustainable waste management systems (Wilson et al, 2013).

The fact that the national institutions, and the local self-governments, for years, violate the laws that they adopt and do not fulfill the obligations that they have set (Eunomia, 2017; EEA, 2021), speaks for how much this problem is being avoided. In that empty space left by the institutions of the state and the private sector, the so-called "Informal waste pickers" earn a living, by valorizing those types of waste.

Many organizations and researchers around the world have researched this phenomenon, which is not unique, but it is a hallmark for developing countries, for the way their waste management systems operate. Mainly, in the literature as a reason for this way of functioning that involves the informal recycling sector, is attributed to the lack of job opportunities, poverty and the lack of safety nets for the poverty-stricken. According to the World Bank's report (2018:109), waste management can be the single highest budget item for many local administrations that in low-income countries, it might comprise up to 20% of the municipal budgets, on average (Wilson et al, 2013).

In such conditions, with lower awareness and ability to pay for the service, states, and local governments, leave room for some of their citizens to valorize the valuable things from the value chains. Also, waste pickers are currently able to cover the part that the private entities fail to cover, because it is not profitable for them. The informal waste pickers are at the moment competitive, as they perform their tasks with a high degree of labor intensity, with almost minimal costs (fuel and depreciation of assets), functioning as market traders (Josifovski et al., 2017).

The World Bank's report (2018:109) is clearly stating that "when properly supported and organized, informal recycling can create employment, improve local industrial competitiveness, reduce poverty, and reduce municipal spending. But the reality for the informal waste pickers remains one with unhealthy conditions, a lack of social security or health insurance, and persisting social stigma."

Hence, my interest in examining the options to group and formalize Macedonian waste pickers and assess the potential for them to grow into another type of market player, especially one that would capture a market niche through increased volume and uniqueness. The improved valorization would improve their own and their family's quality of life.

Civil society organizations and activists have a long-standing desire to make changes in the way the waste management system in the country works. The goals are on the one hand, environmental protection through increased rates of selection and recycling of waste and on the other improved living conditions for thousands of socially marginalized citizens involved in the processes.

This is a serious challenge that has a well-intentioned goal, but for now remains unmet. Although different pilots and other activities have been done to help the process of formalization of the groups of marginalized citizens who operate in the informal part of waste management in our country (Go Green, 2021:5), economic and cultural reasons have stood in that way. The cultural values of the informal waste pickers do not correspond to the new ways of economic activity and management.

The objectives of this research were the following:

- Main objective
 - Identification of the feasibility of a Macedonian sustainable waste picker's social enterprise.
- Specific objectives
 - Identification of the bottlenecks and opportunities in the waste management sector for the social enterprise.
 - Outlining of recommendations to be implemented by national and local authorities in order to create a more enabling environment.

2. Literature overview

2.1. Informal waste picking and recycling

There is an early research that started to mention the people that are involved in the initial forms of waste recycling that has opened this complex matter to the attention of policy creators and researchers worldwide (Gutenschwager, 1957; Lipsett, 1974). But, according to the renowned waste pickers author Anne Scheinberg (2016), the informal waste sector started to be seriously researched just around 2006, mainly because of the work of different multilateral organizations like for instance the German International Cooperation (GIZ). Since then, it can be marked as the beginning of a growing research interest that aims to conceptualize waste picking (Scheinberg et al., 2016). In this regard authors like Downs and Medina (2000) have been pivotal. They meticulously try to understand waste picking as an activity that has been carried out throughout human history and showcase its nature that is ingrained with human development.

Although one can notice the growth in the research and literature generated on waste picking, still there is a lack of consolidated methodologies, terms and frameworks (Dias, 2016). This might be attributed to the topic's versatile nature in terms of waste pickers as political and social stakeholders, but also economic actors. If on top of this we add the cultural and geographical differences, the aim to create one comprehensive conceptualization is just futile.

That is why, we need to resist the notion of creating one universally good solution, regarding the local waste management systems and the improvements of the livelihood of waste pickers in different countries. As, more and more research conducted especially in the last 10 years, suggests that efficient and effective waste management models in developing countries are possible. But, they can be achieved only if they are tailored according to the local needs and conditions whereby an additional direct involvement from the different stakeholders in the value chains is strongly advised (Bartone, 1995; Wilson et al, 2013; UN.ESCAP 2017).

The evidence of a correlation between informal waste picker's integration and improved waste management can be seen in multiple research studies (Keita et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2012; Aparcana et al. 2013; Ramush & Lange, 2013). These papers emphasize that the waste management systems that formally include the waste pickers, achieve improved collection and recycling rates, better quality materials, keep the solid waste fees low and improve the livelihoods of waste pickers (Wilson et al., 2013; Navarrete-Hernandez and Navarrete-Hernandez, 2018; Medina, 2008).

In the Macedonian case, there is scarce research on this topic. Although the interviews I conducted in a few waste pickers settlements in Skopje (2017), showed that there is a long tradition of this practice in our country that dates from the previous political and economic system (the former socialistic Yugoslavia). The people we have interviewed back then, were a third generation involved with these types of waste activities.

The first data and research came from the efforts of the USAID funded project "Plastic Recycling", (MDC-Ti.net, 2011). These efforts developed the Macedonian recycling sector significantly and gave it a new dynamic. This project's efforts included: education, infrastructure and legislative support (USAID, 2022). There are few papers since then that explore this topic in the Macedonian context (Josifovski et al., 2017; Mojanchevska, 2017; Scheinberg, 2016). All of them confirm the positive benefits that the informal waste pickers are bringing to the society as a whole, both in terms of economics and clean environment. Generally, all of the above-mentioned authors are providing similar recommendations in terms of the needed policies and legislative changes in order to empower the waste pickers as a marginalized group of people and create an enabling environment within a modified waste management system in the country.

3. Research

The key research questions were:

- What are the different types of informal waste pickers?
- What are the earnings and costs of the informal waste pickers?
- What are the relationships between the different stakeholders in the Macedonian recycling industry?
- What kinds of changes are occurring in the Macedonian recycling industry and what are their effects on the profits and the possibilities for a sustainable growth?

The overall steps undertaken in order to fulfill the objectives and answer the key research questions were the following:

- Desk research and data analysis
- Designing a questionnaire
- Conduct semi-structured interviews with all the different stakeholders involved

This field work consisted of in-depth interviews and observation. In total 22 participants were interviewed and they can be broken down to 15 Roma informal waste pickers from Skopje (the communities in Vizbegovo & Shuto Orizari), 2 owners of recycling facilities in Skopje and Kumanovo and 5 small and medium-sized scrapyards.

- On-site visits of waste related companies throughout the country (recycling facilities, scrap yards etc.)
- Waste pickers costs & income analysis
- Porter's Five Forces Analysis

The usage of the five competitive forces helped this study to determine the long-run profitability of the Macedonian recycling industry and to help determine the possible role of the waste picker's social enterprise. The five forces govern the profit structure of an industry by determining how the economic value it creates is apportioned. That value may be drained away through rivalry among existing competitors, but it can also be bargained away through the power of suppliers or the power of customers or be constrained by the threat of new entrants and substitutes. Strategy can be viewed as building defenses against the competitive forces or as finding a position in an industry where the forces are weaker. Changes in the strength of the forces signal changes in the competitive landscape critical to ongoing strategy formulation (Porter, 2008).

Porter's Five Forces Analysis helped us to understand the following factors that are crucial for the long-term sustainability of the waste picker's social enterprise:

- Understand the Macedonian recycling industry;
- Identify the attractiveness of the markets;
- Identify opportunities and risks;
- How profits within the Macedonian recycling industry are distributed;

- Extrapolate Macedonian recycling industry trends & anticipate changing trends.

Informal Waste Pickers Market Positioning

The informal waste pickers are being perceived negatively by the public communal enterprises, despite the fact that their work is essential for the Macedonian recycling industry and is cutting their costs. The results from the interviews showed that Macedonian waste pickers sell their sorted waste mostly illegally to small and medium-sized scrap yards (formal and informal). After these entities receive the waste from the waste pickers, they continue with additional separation, packing (some have these capabilities), and sell recyclable material in larger quantities further down the chain. At a later stage, the large companies further process the materials and collaborate with domestic or foreign partners in order to export the waste or use it domestically for industrial purposes. There are medium-size companies that sell directly to domestic companies on local or regional level and thus attain the higher-end price for themselves like for an example the "Ekoproekt-ko company from Kochani sell their regionally collected papers and cardboard to the paper factory "Paper Mill" in Kochani for their industrial processes.

Also, according to the laws all actors engaged in this process should be able to determine the origin of the collected waste, yet, it is widely known by both the institutions and the private waste entities that the majority of that waste is collected informally through the hard work of the waste pickers. Most of the companies use the loopholes in the laws in order to legalize the waste that they have acquired unlawfully.

Table 1. *Pro-forma estimates of informal waste pickers costs:*

Collection equipment - capital/investment costs	Cost of acquiring a tricycle, bike with additional pulling equipment, motorcycle, etc.- Around 9000 den.
Collection equipment - maintenance costs	Amortization, parts, repairs, tires, motor oil etc.- Around 700 den./month
Collection equipment- operating costs	Fuel- Around 3000 den./month
Unpaid family labor	In almost all cases the collected/sorted waste is sold by the man in the family and he manages the funds received. This is not calculated.
Phone Expenses	A smaller number uses phones to communicate for work-related issues- Around 300-400 den./ month.
Taxes	• Directly or indirectly they pay 10% personal tax. • They pay the VAT when they purchase equipment, parts, fuel, etc.

From the interviews it was possible to classify the informal waste pickers into three categories according to the functions in the value chain that they were performing and the volumes that they operated with.

- Small scale

These are the waste pickers that normally collect and sort their waste through picking in the communal waste bins, the bins of some private entities and scavenge in the dumpsites. In this group there is a smaller subgroup that is waste picking as an additional income or a side job. This subgroup is motorized and mostly works with medium to large scale private businesses that have waste that has certain market value, but not high enough in order for them to establish a formal collection scheme.

- Medium scale

In the number of people we can consider this group smaller than the small scale waste pickers group, but waste volume wise they are more productive. This group operates with older motor vehicles and this is their daily job, but unlike the small scale subgroup of motorized waste pickers, this group collects and sorts waste as a primary economic activity. The waste that comes from this group is purer, because it is collected directly from the source. They pick up mostly packaging waste from supermarkets, factories and other manufacturing entities.

- Middleman

This is a very small group of people if we compare it to the previous two groups of waste pickers. Most of these people have been members of the previous two groups, but through the years they have been able to reach a position where they only operate a small or medium-sized informal scrap yard and don't do any physical work in terms of waste picking from the source. Most of them have motorized vehicles that they use to pick up sorted waste from the other waste pickers from their neighborhoods. Then they collect this waste in their informal improvised scrap yard and act as a vendor for the formal waste businesses.

Table 2. Estimate of the three levels of informal waste picker's net income (based of PET collection and sorting):

Type of Waste Pickers	Waste	Hours per day	Days per month	Kg per day	Kg per month	Denars per kg (Average)	Income per month (den.)
Small scale	PET	6	30	40	1200	11	13,200
Medium scale	PET	8	30	100	3000	11	33,000
Middleman buyers	PET	8	30	2000 (min.)	60,000	13	780,000 (profit at least 240,000)

Porter's Five Forces Analysis

(1) Bargaining Power of Buyers:

- Bargaining power of buyers: Reasonably high. At the beginning stage of the waste picker's social enterprise as there are multiple sellers of sorted packaging waste, some of them illegal, makes them more competitive in terms of lower costs. The clear alternative to the waste picker's social enterprise are the other informal waste pickers. Beyond a certain market share, the waste picker's social enterprise may have a better pricing position in the future.
- Switching barriers for the demand side: Low. It is easy for the buyers to change the suppliers of the sorted waste that they buy. They are interested in the price, quantity and the purity of the sorted waste. One of the potential switching barriers that the waste picker's social enterprise can create is to start their operations in a smaller city where the competition is much smaller, so that they can demand higher prices.
- Value proposition for customers: Almost non-existent. At the beginning the only differentiation between the waste picker's social enterprise and the other vendors of sorted waste will be the potential investment from an international donor or domestic public institution. The difference in value can be brought through the scheme of door-to-door model through which the social enterprise will be able to collect more waste per employee than the other formal and informal vendors and thus create advantage, but also with branding through storytelling and appeal to the social responsibility of citizens. The problem might occur as soon as the additional costs of operations for the door-to-door system are not covered by an external party, the advantage will turn into a disadvantage.
- Buyer information availability: High. The people involved in the waste companies show high levels of information knowledge about the suppliers and their processes, due to the size of the country and the number of the population, through personal contacts, the most important information travels very fast.
- Power of distribution channels: Low. In the case of this industry we cannot see any real power of distribution channels that anyone might have. But the social enterprise should be careful if they, at the beginning, want to sell their products on the Macedonian market. There are few larger companies that can buy their waste and one of them ("Pavor-Veles") has a history of spending big funds if needed to destroy any competition that is disturbing their waste distribution channels.

(2) Bargaining Power of Suppliers

- Bargaining power of supply side: Weak at this stage, as there are small quantities involved that the social enterprise can offer.
- Switching costs of the supply side: Are low. Suppliers of waste easily can be switched by the buyers without any additional costs. Additionally, the suppliers might endure new higher costs if they start selling to a rival company and then they want to go back

to the previous company that they were previously selling. According to the interviews, this type of cases prove bad for the suppliers because they receive worse selling conditions, mainly in terms of the price. Just because the buyers perceive this as a betrayal.

- Value proposition for supply side: Not compelling. Due to the indirect network effects and the low scale that the waste picker's social enterprise would have, they cannot offer anything distinctive that would create the case for them to be more valuable in the chain.
- Barriers to entry for the supply side: Low. Permits and investments in basic equipment are not strong enough of a barrier, but by buying more advanced equipment and building infrastructure in the future, certain barriers can be accomplished to a certain extent when potentially the social enterprise would move forward in the value chain and begin to treat, process and trade the waste instead of only collecting it and sorting it.

(3) Threat of new entrants

- Barriers to entry:
 - Without outside funding and institutional support, the low profitability and medium risk, would not attract similar or any entities to start something similar on their own.
 - The positive opinion, raised awareness and personal contacts in around 46 buildings (or 1700 households) that a social enterprise can use from the "Go Green" project is a barrier for other potential similar organizations to overcome.
 - The power of the incumbent that the social enterprise would exercise can be a threat as others do not know what to expect in terms of running operations with waste pickers (lessons learned from "Go Green").
- Economies of scale: The new social enterprise would not be able to exercise any economy of scale.
- Brand equity: If built properly it can be a very valuable asset.
- Expected retaliatory action: Low. However, if the social enterprise grows by large then it would face the threat of the waste pickers that would stay still outside of the system, fighting for their existence.

(4) Threat of substitutes

- Waste Incineration Facility: High
- Vending machines placed by municipalities & Pakomak: Low
- App collecting scheme: Low
- Informal waste pickers (outside the enterprise): Medium

- The threat of substitutes is low due to the very different value proposition of the substitutes, but the threat from the Incineration Facility can be significant.

(5) Rivalry among competitors

- Rivalry is high. There are multiple market players that fight any sign of competition by all legal means possible.
- A lot of locally focused entrants may dilute Pavor-Veles's strength (i.e. financial resources and infrastructure) enough to capture enough market share in those regions.
- The competition will have to be taken very seriously by the social enterprise if it wants to move forward in the value chain. "Pavor- Veles" and the other value chain actors keep a cap on prices and the pace of growth in the industry.
- The larger companies have expanded into several different waste streams, with that they have diversified their risks and the profits from one waste stream. They use this strength to compete in other waste streams.

4. Discussion

4.1. A Macedonian Waste Picker's Social Enterprise: Possibilities and problems

According to the interviews and the analysis it can be discussed that the industry in which a waste picker's social enterprise would need to operate can be categorized as highly competitive. This means potential issues and these are the supporting aspects:

- Many competitors of similar size in the industry

This is leading to prolonged competition with most innovations being harvested by the few larger companies, some of the buyers and consumers (especially the foreign ones). Because of the fierce rivalry among many small and medium companies, the few higher end companies are leading the market to a situation of oligopoly (in the case of "Pavor-Veles and few others of that size).

- Slow aggregate industry growth (on the demand side)

This leads to rivals striving for market share as the "only" way to grow, thereby instigating a nil-sum game where everybody tries to get market share from someone else. This is mainly a result of the new Chinese policy to stop the imports of recyclables. On the other hand, the current situation with the prices of raw materials, especially of metal, can incentivize

- High fixed costs

The idle capacities of some of the recyclers come at high cost leading to pressure to sell at

low margins to generate revenue contribution to the cost base. For example one can notice from the interview answers that one of the biggest waste recyclers, the company “Greentech-Skopje” needed to degrade their market position from a large recycling facility to a larger junkyard in Skopje, because the low profits “ate their company out”.

■ High exit barriers

The productive assets remain in the market due to their high remaining values. This led to intense rivalry in the industry, where the largest company “Pavor-Veles” is committed to lose profits for a longer period, just in order to harm their competition or their partner’s competition.

It can be discussed that if we want a financially sustainable waste picker’s social enterprise, the current situation in the recycling industry would require structural changes in the legal framework on local level and national level and a wide range of directly targeted policies. First and foremost, the informal waste pickers need to be recognized as partners to the institutions. Their role in society needs to be valued. Instead of blocking them, the public communal enterprises need to compensate them for the service, either through the waste fee currently paid by households or by a different fair division method.

Additionally, there is a need for implementation of the legal obligation for citizens to segregate waste at the sources. In that way the waste pickers would get access to larger quantities of waste that would make it more cost-effective for the door-to-door strategy to operate. The door-to-door strategy will increase the quantities of collected waste, provide cleaner resources and will reduce operational costs.

The role of municipalities is very important in supporting collection points where the waste will be sorted and prepared for further inclusion in the waste management system as well as in developing funding schemes that would allow access of these entities to capital and infrastructure facilities to enable further development. These entities should strive to move forward in the value chain and try to provide at least products like baled plastic or some other treated resources.

Support from international donors can be helpful in the establishment of this system while funds from the local and national authorities can in later stages fill in the gaps for the sustainable provision of the service.

Regardless of the form of legal operation of the informal pickers, it is important that informal pickers themselves have understood the need for such a form. The creation of trust between the informal waste pickers is recognized as a precondition for formalization, in particular in the building of a system that is based more or less on collaboration. The legal representation of informal pickers needs to include them in the management and operation so that disparities in power are not jeopardizing the system. Finally, they must be mentored in their daily operation and special attention should be focused on the personal development of the waste pickers.

5. Conclusions

If the waste picker's social enterprises are understood as a formalization option that would answer the demand of public institutions for the informal waste pickers to adapt to their rules and the whole process is directed only at the expense and call for action from the informal actors, then one can expect only a failed process. Many previous similar attempts in other countries have proved to be unsuccessful. And if we take the results of this research into consideration, then we must know that a serious approach is required if one wants to see a win-win situation for all the stakeholders. That kind of result is possible with a structural integrated approach towards enabling a wide array of policies and measures towards the potential waste picker's social enterprises, like the following:

- Organize waste collectors into legal entities;
- Subsidies such as “grace period” for social benefits for a period of at least one year with gradual decreasing of contribution from the state, if the picker remains in employment;
- Capacity building through mentoring for further professionalization of the informal waste pickers;
- Encouraging the primary selection of waste and door-to-door communication between informal pickers or their representative entity with households and companies;
- Develop and implement actions to create partnership with relevant institutions like the local self-governance, public utility companies, waste management entities;
- Further develop and adopt municipal waste management policies and practices to enable inclusive environment for the informal waste pickers;
- Enable ownership and institutional capital to the enterprise of informal waste pickers;
- Financial incentives for the new social enterprises that will employ informal pickers;
- Support for the families that need assistance in children care, in particular to those lacking access to kindergarten;
- Increased efforts in reorganizing the operation of the public communal enterprises;
- Redesigning the waste collection fee to promote fair share among stakeholders included in the communal waste collection.

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