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CONTENTS

PEDAGOGICAL VALUE AND RELEVANCE OF THE PLAY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PARENTS OF STUDENTS OF YOUNGER SCHOOL AGE AND TEACHERS

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Abstract: The subject of the research is the pedagogical value and relevance of the play from the perspective of parents of students of younger school age and teachers. The aim of this research is to examine the opinions of parents and teachers about the importance of play in children's development. A descriptive method and surveying technique were applied. The sample consisted of 200 parents of students of younger school age and 145 teachers from the Republic of Serbia. The research results show that parents and teachers recognize the importance of play in children's development, while there are certain statistically significant differences between sociodemographic variables and the opinions of parents of students of younger school age and teachers regarding the importance of play in children's development. Interesting findings of the research show that unlike parents who self-assess that they know how to recognize the play that the child needs, teachers' agreement with this item is lower, while teachers do not fully agree that parents know how to recognize the play that the child needs. In accordance with these results, further research can direct attention to ways of promoting the play among modern parents. Also, further research can focus on the partnership between family and school in the context of children's play, whereby teachers as professionals and reflective practitioners should point out to parents the pedagogical value and relevance of play in children's development.

Keywords: play, parents, teachers, primary school, competent parenting.

Field: Social Sciences and Humanities

1. INTRODUCTION

Child's play by researchers and authors (Vygotsky, 1978; Stagnitti, 2004; Krnjaja, 2010; Eret, 2013; Roopnarine & Davidson, 2015; Klarin, 2017; Lai et al., 2018; Milošević, 2018; Andersen et al., 2023; Dodd et al., 2023; Kovačević & Gluvak, 2023; Sirojev, 2024) approach from different perspectives looking at this serious, crucial and all-time topic. The benefits of the play are multifaceted, ,,in addition to enriching imagination, developing thinking, broadening language expression, preparing for work, play includes the child in socialization processes, teaches him behavior" (Vilotijević, 2002: 146). As primary and crucial persons, ,,parents constantly provide their children with knowledge about the world in which they grow up" (Gordon, 2003: 248), where numerous authors point out that the play from the earliest days should occupy a special place within the family environment and family education. ,,The results indicated that parents' play when they were children was of better quality than their children's play today and that their children's play is more solitary" (Gardašević, 2021: 38-39). Certainly, the obtained empirical results are worrying when looking at the dimension of the quality of children's play in modern conditions and circumstances when children have a range of games and toys. Looking at the time preschoolers and parents spend playing, ,,the results of the research show that only 22.6% of parents of preschool children have time to play together with their children every day" (Nenadić-Bilan, 2014: 112). Certainly, in the context of striving for competent parenting, it needs to be given more attention and time in the family environment, because its benefits are exceptional. The play also has a pedagogical value and relevance for children of younger school age (Kopas-Vukašinović, 2006; Stojanović, 2017). In addition to parents, the role of educators and teachers in the play is extremely valuable and important (Klarin, 2017). A modern teacher ,,a reflective practitioner explores and examines his own beliefs regarding his possibilities of action and tries to change his beliefs and representations in order to expand his own sphere of action" (Andevski et al., 2015: 101). Starting from the fact that the modern system of upbringing and education needs a pedagogical worker as a reflective practitioner, through the prism of our topic, a reflective practitioner teacher should understand the pedagogical value and relevance of play, nurture and apply it in their own professional actions, evaluate its effects, involve parents and points them to the benefits of children's play. With our research, we want to make a contribution to this topic and examine, observe and analyze the opinions of parents and teachers according to the pedagogical value and relevance of play in children's development.

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2. METHODOLOGY

The subject of the research is the pedagogical value and relevance of the play from the perspective of parents of students of younger school age and teachers. The aim of this research is to examine the opinions of parents and teachers about the importance of play in children's development. The descriptive method and scaling technique were used in the research. An assessment scale containing ten items was used as an instrument and was taken from the author Eret (Eret, 2013: 197). Respondents responded on a five-point Likert-type rating scale in modalities 1 - I strongly disagree; 2 – I mostly disagree; 3 - I neither agree nor disagree; 4 - I mostly agree; 5 - I completely agree.After the introductory part, the respondents gave answers to general questions. General questions for parents concerned gender of parents, age of parents, level of education, place of residence, gender of child and school performance of the child at school. The results were processed in the SPSS program. The sample consisted of 200 parents of students of younger school age and 145 teachers from the Republic of Serbia. The structure of the parents' sample is shown in Table 1, while the structure of the teachers' sample is shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Structure of the sample – parents

Variables	Frequencies	Percentages
Parent's gender		
Male	42	21
Female	158	79
Age		
up to 33 years old	27	13.5
From 34 to 38 years old	126	63
More than 38 years	47	23.5
Level of education		
High school	81	40.5
Faculty	88	44
Master	31	15.5
Place of residence		
City	164	82
Suburb	15	7.5
Village	21	10.5
Gender of the child		
Male	79	39.5
Female	121	60.5
School success		
Excellent	181	90.5
Very good	17	8.5
Good	2	1

Source: Milanović

Table 2 shows the structure of the sample of teachers. The general data of the teachers are presented – gender and years of service.

Table 2. Structure of the sample - teachers

Variables	Frequencies	Percentages
The gender of the teacher		
Male	23	15.9
Female	122	84.1
Years of service		
up to 7 years	48	33.1
From 8 to 15 years	68	46.9
From 8 to 15 years	20	13.8
More than 23 years	9	6.2

Source: Milanović

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Parents' opinions about the pedagogical value and relevance of the play
We start from the first research task, which was to examine parents' opinions regarding the importance of play in children's development.

Table 3. Parents' responses according to the importance of play in children's development

	N	M	SD
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	200	4.65	0.548
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	200	4.44	0.787
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	200	1.82	0.802
Children play too little.	200	3.41	0.908
If the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else.	200	2.46	0.756
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	200	4.42	0.675
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	200	4.51	0.709
Children should have more obligations than plays.	200	1.48	0.649
The play makes the child immature.	200	1.37	0.579
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	200	1.40	0.602

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

The obtained results in Table 3 indicate that the highest mean value was calculated for the item that children's play is an important part of growing up, that play should be part of a child's daily life, that a parent knows how to choose a play that a child needs and that the child will benefit from the play in the future life. Parents' opinions are divided when it comes to the issue of children playing too little. Parents' low agreement is present with the following items: if the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else, that the play prevents the child from making good judgments, that children should have more obligations than play, that it is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible and that play makes the child immature. ,,The parents stated that the majority consider that play is an important part of growing up" (Eret, 2013: 197), also, the research results show. With the second research task, we wanted to determine whether there are statistically significant differences between sociodemographic variables and parents' opinions regarding the importance of play in children's development.

Table 4. Statistically significant differences between parents' opinion on the importance of play and gender of parents

	t	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	-7.564	198	0.000
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	-9.696	198	0.000
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	6.918	198	0.000
Children play too little.	-6.014	198	0.000
If the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else.	-2.831	198	0.005
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	-7.816	198	0.000
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	-12.026	198	0.000
Children should have more obligations than plays.	6.835	198	0.000
The play makes the child immature.	10.125	198	0.000
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	6.386	198	0.000

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. Based on the results shown in Table 4, we can see that there are statistically significant differences between the gender of parents and their opinion on the importance of children's play. Unlike fathers, mothers more often believe that play is an important part of growing up, that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs, that the children play too little, if the play is pointless, the children should be focused on something else, the child will benefit from the play in the future life, that play should be part of children's everyday life, while fathers more often state that play prevents the child from making judgments, that children should have more obligations than play, that play makes the child immature and that it is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.

Table 5. Statistically significant differences between parents' opinion on the importance of play and parents' age

	χ2	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	50.493	4	0.000
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	43.120	6	0.000
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	61.703	8	0.000
Children play too little.	32.484	6	0.000
If the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else.	19.245	6	0.004
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	53.822	6	0.000
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	31.336	4	0.000
Children should have more obligations than plays.	43.730	4	0.000
The play makes the child immature.	31.965	4	0.000
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	61.295	6	0.000

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. The obtained results show that the parents who in our research belong to the second group, from 34 to 38 years old, more often consider that children's play is an important part of growing up, that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs, they do not agree at all that the play prevents the child from doing well reason, they neither agree nor disagree that children play too little and that if the play is pointless, the children should be focused on something else, they fully agree that the child will benefit from the play later in life, that the play should be a part of the child's everyday life, they do not agree at all that children should have more obligations than plays, that play makes the child immature and they do not agree at all that it is important for the child to adopt the behavior of adults as soon as possible.

Table 6. Statistically significant differences between parents' opinions about the importance of play and parents' level of education

	χ2	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	68.126	4	0.000
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	87.647	6	0.000
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	97.195	8	0.000
Children play too little.	34.559	6	0.000
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	102.620	6	0.000
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	65.448	4	0.000
Children should have more obligations than plays.	43.513	4	0.000
The play makes the child immature.	48.496	4	0.000
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	69.600	6	0.000

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. Based on the results obtained and shown in Table 6, we observe that parents with the faculty more often answer that they completely agree that children's play is an important part of growing up, that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs, that the child will benefit from the play later in life, that play should be part of children's everyday life. Parents and faculty usually do not agree at all that the play prevents the child from making good judgments, that children's obligations should be more than plays, that the play makes the child immature, that it is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible. Unlike parents with a master's degree, the majority of parents with high school and university degrees neither agree nor disagree with the item that if the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else. The majority of parents with a high school diploma neither agree nor disagree that their children play too little. There are no statistically significant differences between the level of education of the parents and their opinion with the item if the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else. Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated.

Table 7. Statistically significant differences between parents' opinion on the importance of play and parents' place of residence

	χ2	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	87.621	4	0.000
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	112.392	6	0.000
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	102.804	8	0.000
Children play too little.	33.166	6	0.000
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	92.746	6	0.000
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	120.236	4	0.000
Children should have more obligations than plays.	83.115	4	0.000
The play makes the child immature.	96.577	4	0.000
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	82.189	6	0.000

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. Based on the results in Table 7, we can see that parents who live in the city more often respond that they fully agree that children's play is an important part of growing up, that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs, that the child will benefit from the play later in life, that the play should be a part of children's everyday life. The majority of parents who live in the city choose the answer modalities neither agree nor disagree and mostly agree with the item children play too little. Also, the majority of parents who live in the city do not agree that playing prevents the child from making good judgments, that children should have more obligations than playing, that playing makes the child immature and that it is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible. There are no statistically significant differences between the parents' place of residence and their opinion with the item if the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else. Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated.

Table 8. Statistically significant differences between parents' opinions about the importance of play and the gender of the child

	χ2	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	8.537	2	0.014
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	10.522	3	0.015
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	15.217	4	0.004
Children play too little.	9.575	3	0.023
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	10.224	3	0.017
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	7.186	2	0.028

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. Based on the results shown in Table 8, we can see that parents of female children more often respond that they fully agree that children's play is an important part of growing up, that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs, that the child will benefit from the play in later life and that the play should be a part of children's everyday life. Parents of female children do not agree at all that the play hinders the child's good judgment. The largest number of parents of female children neither agree nor disagree that children play too little, while there are no statistically significant differences between the other items used to examine parents' opinions about the importance of play and gender of children.

Table 9. Statistically significant differences between parents' opinions about the importance of play and children's school success

	χ2	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	80.460	4	0.000
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	74.288	6	0.000
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	66.507	8	0.000
Children play too little.	23.600	6	0.001
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	63.633	6	0.000
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	62.970	4	0.000
Children should have more obligations than plays.	51.827	4	0.000
The play makes the child immature.	57.240	4	0.000
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	68.027	6	0.000

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. The obtained results show that the parents of children with excellent school results more often completely agree that children's play

is an important part of growing up, that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs, that the child will benefit from the play in the future, that the play should be a part children's everyday life. The majority of parents of children with excellent results do not agree at all that play prevents the child from making good judgments, that children should have more obligations than plays, that play makes the child immature and that it is important for the child to adopt the behavior of adults as soon as possible, while they neither agree nor disagree and mostly agree that children play too little. There are no statistically significant differences between children's school success and parents' opinions with the item if the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else.

Teachers' opinions about the pedagogical value and relevance of the play
With the next task, we tried to examine the opinions of teachers according to the importance of play in children's development.

Table 10. Teachers' answers according to the importance of play in children's development

	N	M	SD
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	145	4.84	0.367
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	145	3.89	0.843
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	145	1.45	0.513
Children play too little.	145	2.37	0.634
If the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else.	145	2.61	0.490
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	145	4.78	0.416
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	145	4.91	0.287
Children should have more obligations than plays.	145	1.30	0.458
The play makes the child immature.	145	1.28	0.448
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	145	1.27	0.445

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Based on the results shown in Table 10, we can see that teachers recognize the pedagogical value and relevance of children's play. When we look at the mean value, the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs, a lower mean value was calculated for the teacher than for the parent, where we observe that the teachers do not fully agree that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs. The next research task was to determine whether there are statistically significant differences between sociodemographic variables and teachers' opinions regarding the importance of play in children's development.

Table 11. Statistically significant differences between teachers' opinions on the importance of play and teacher gender

	t	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	-4.155	143	0.000
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	-3.189	143	0.002
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	5.140	143	0.000
Children play too little.	-2.017	143	0.046
The play makes the child immature.	4.697	143	0.000

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. Based on the results shown in Table 11, we observe that female teachers more often respond that they fully agree with the items that children's play is an important part of growing up, that a parent knows how to choose a play that a child needs. Female teachers more often answer that the play prevents the child from making good judgments and that the children play too little. Male teachers are more likely to think that play makes a child immature. There are no statistically significant differences between the other items used to examine teachers' opinions about the importance of play and the gender of teachers.

Table 12. Statistically significant differences between teachers' opinions on the importance of play and years of service

	χ^2	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	15.995	3	0.001
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	33.744	12	0.001
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	11.291	3	0.010
The play makes the child immature.	42.689	3	0.000
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	17.948	3	0.000

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. Based on the results in Table 12, we can see that teachers who belong to the category of work experience up to 7 years and from 8 to 15 years completely agree with the item that children's play is an important part of growing up, teachers who belong to the category of work experience of 8 to 15 years neither agree they neither agree nor disagree and generally agree that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs. Also, unlike teachers of other categories of work experience, teachers with 8 to 15 years of work experience fully agree that the child will benefit from the play later in life. Teachers who belong to the category of working experience up to 7 years and from 8 to 15 years do not agree at all that the play makes the child immature and they do not agree at all with the item that it is important for the child to adopt the behavior of adults as soon as possible. There are no statistically significant differences between the other items used to examine teachers' opinions about the importance of play and the years of service of teachers.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The obtained results of the research show that the parents of students of younger school age recognize the benefits, values and relevance of children's play. Certain statistically significant differences were observed. Unlike fathers, mothers more often recognize the pedagogical value and relevance of play in children's development. Parents aged 34 to 38, parents with college degrees, parents who live in the city, parents of female children, and parents of children with excellent school results are more likely to recognize the value and relevance of play. Teachers also recognize the pedagogical value and relevance of the play. Certain statistically significant differences were calculated between teachers' opinions about the importance of play in children's development and the teacher's gender and years of service. Unlike parents who self-assess that they know how to recognize the game that their child needs, teachers' agreement with this item is lower. Further research can focus on examining teachers' desire for training to promote play in curricular and extracurricular activities, promoting play among students' parents, and implementing volunteer activities with thematic play activities for parents and students.

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BREAKING STEREOTYPES: WOMEN'S JOURNEY IN MALAYSIA'S LOGISTICS AND TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

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Abstract: This study investigates the involvement of women in Malaysia's logistics and transport sector, which plays a crucial role in the nation's economic development. It aims to pinpoint obstacles to women's career advancement, evaluate the potential for increased female participation, and offer recommendations to foster gender equality, thus contributing to a more inclusive workforce in this pivotal industry. The study used a mixed-methods approach, combining a survey of 200 female employees, in-depth interviews with 20 female professionals, and case studies of two female leaders. Quantitative data were analysed statistically, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis to provide insights into challenges, opportunities, and strategies for success in the industry.

The study identified key barriers for women in the sector, including workplace discrimination, work-life balance challenges, and limited mentorship. However, opportunities are emerging in e-commerce and digital logistics, which offer greater flexibility. Effective policies and support systems can enhance women's participation in the industry.

The study also recommends gender-sensitive HR policies and emphasizes promoting women to leadership roles, establishing mentorship programs, and strengthening professional networks to create a more inclusive work environment. This study offers a comprehensive analysis of gender dynamics in Malaysia's logistics and transport sector, combining global and local perspectives. Through surveys, interviews, and case studies, it explores challenges and opportunities for women, with recommendations to promote gender equality and increase female participation in male-dominated industries.

Keywords: play, parents, teachers, primary school, competent parenting.
Field: Social Sciences and Humanities

1. INTRODUCTION

The logistics and transport industry is an integral pillar of Malaysia's economic infrastructure, under-pinning the facilitation of trade and significantly contributing to the nation's GDP. Malaysia's strategic geographical location in Southeast Asia establishes it as a pivotal trade hub, linking the Asia-Pacific region with the global market (Zulkifli, 2018). This strategic positioning has been instrumental in Malaysia's development as a key player in international trade. The sector encompasses a broad spectrum of activities, including freight forwarding, warehousing, transportation, and comprehensive supply chain management. The industry's growth trajectory is closely tied to the country's economic development, with advancements in infrastructure and logistics technology enhancing its capacity and efficiency.

Historically, Malaysia's logistics sector has undergone significant transformation, driven by both global trade dynamics and domestic economic policies. The development of major port facilities, such as Port Klang and the Port of Tanjung Pelepas, has positioned Malaysia as a critical node in regional and international supply chains (Tan & Lim, 2021). These infrastructural advancements have not only bolstered Malaysia's role in global trade but have also created substantial employment opportunities within the sector. Major projects such as the Malaysia-Singapore High-Speed Rail and the expansion of Port Klang reflect the government's commitment to enhancing logistics capabilities. However, despite these advancements, the sector's growth has been accompanied by persistent gender disparities that affect women's participation and progression in the industry (Zainuddin & Ali, 2021).

1.1. OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE INDUSTRY

Historically, the logistics and transport sector in Malaysia has been predominantly male-dominated, particularly in technical and leadership roles, resulting in a significant gender imbalance. Women's participation in this sector has been constrained by various systemic barriers. Despite a gradual increase in female participation, representation remains disproportionately low (Tan & Lim, 2021). Women in the industry encounter systemic barriers that impede their advancement, such as entrenched gender

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biases and inadequate support mechanisms. The sector's culture and traditional norms have historically marginalised women, limiting their access to opportunities and professional growth. Recent initiatives aimed at promoting gender diversity have started to yield positive effects, though substantial progress is still needed to achieve genuine equality (Williams & Hale, 2021).

The barriers faced by women in Malaysia's logistics and transport industry include gender biases that affect hiring and promotion practices. Women often encounter prejudice during recruitment and advancement, which can hinder their career progression. Structural challenges related to work-life balance and professional development opportunities further restrict women's advancement. For instance, logistical roles are frequently associated with long hours and demanding schedules, which can disproportionately affect women who may also bear the responsibility for family caregiving. Despite efforts to address these issues through policies and initiatives, achieving gender parity remains a considerable challenge. Understanding these challenges and the opportunities for advancement is essential for developing strategies to promote greater female participation and leadership in the sector.

The logistics and transport industry has historically been dominated by men, with women predominantly occupying support roles such as administration and customer service. This gender imbalance is rooted in deeply ingrained stereotypes and institutional practices that have long favoured male employees for technical and leadership positions (Roberts & Kitchin, 2019). Historically, societal perceptions have deemed logistics and transport roles as physically demanding and requiring technical expertise, which has been stereotypically associated with men. Women, on the other hand, have been relegated to roles perceived as less challenging or less critical, which has contributed to their underrepresentation in higher-level and technical positions.

Despite progress in recent years, women continue to face significant barriers to advancing within the industry. Gender biases and stereotypes perpetuate the perception that logistics and transport roles are unsuitable for women, thereby limiting their access to career advancement opportunities. According to a study by Connell (2009), these stereotypes often lead to occupational segregation, where women are concentrated in lower-paying, less prestigious roles while men dominate more technical and leadership positions.

Recent global trends reflect a gradual increase in female participation within the logistics and transport sector, largely driven by diversity and inclusion initiatives. Organisations such as the International Transport Forum (ITF) have been instrumental in advocating for gender parity in the industry. The ITF's programs focus on increasing women's representation and supporting their career advancement by addressing systemic barriers and promoting a more inclusive industry environment (ITF, 2021).

Initiatives such as the Women in Logistics and Transport (WiLAT) network have also played a crucial role in addressing gender disparities. WiLAT provides networking opportunities, mentorship, and advocacy for women in logistics, aiming to challenge systemic barriers and promote a more inclusive industry. The network's efforts are aligned with broader global movements toward gender diversity and inclusion, which seek to dismantle entrenched biases and create pathways for women's advancement.

The underrepresentation of women in logistics and transport is further compounded by various systemic barriers. Gender stereotyping often leads to occupational segregation, where women are funneled into roles deemed more suitable for their gender, while men dominate technical and leadership positions (Connell, 2009). Women's exclusion from critical decision-making roles and limited access to influential networks exacerbate these disparities. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that includes policy changes, organisational commitment to diversity, and targeted support for women's career development.

Key studies have examined these barriers in detail. For instance, research by Ahmad et al. (2020) highlights the difficulties women face in balancing work and family responsibilities, which can restrict their career progression. The demanding nature of many logistics roles, including long hours and travel requirements, can disproportionately impact women who may have additional caregiving responsibilities. Addressing work-life balance issues is essential for supporting women's career advancement in the industry (Wood & Budhwar, 2019).

Emerging opportunities in digital logistics and supply chain management are reshaping the landscape of the industry. The rise of digital technologies has created roles in data analysis, IT management, and other areas that are less physically demanding and more flexible. These new roles offer potential pathways for career advancement and are less constrained by traditional gender biases (Chong & Yew, 2022). As the industry evolves, these opportunities may help attract more women and support their progression within the sector.

A significant body of research suggests that gender diversity can enhance organisational performance. Increased female representation often leads to improved innovation, decision-making, and

overall business outcomes (Roberts & Kitchin, 2019). Gender-diverse teams bring different perspectives and approaches to problem-solving, resulting in more effective and creative solutions. Various diversity initiatives, including mentorship programs, flexible work arrangements, and diversity training, have been shown to improve women's participation and advancement in male-dominated industries (Jones et al., 2022).

Barriers to women's participation in male-dominated industries are multifaceted, deeply rooted in societal norms, and continue to impede gender equality in the workforce (Wallace & Johnson, 2022). Among the most significant challenges are entrenched gender stereotypes, a lack of supportive policies, and limited access to professional networks and mentorship opportunities (Roberts & Kitchin, 2019). These gender stereotypes often manifest in occupational segregation, where women are funneled into roles perceived as more appropriate for their gender, such as administrative or support positions, while men overwhelmingly dominate technical and leadership roles. This segregation is not just a reflection of individual biases but is often reinforced by organisational cultures that subtly or overtly favour men in high-impact, decision-making positions (White & Williams, 2020).

Moreover, these stereotypes contribute to the creation of environments where certain roles are seen as inherently unsuitable for women, such as those that require physical strength, long hours, or extensive travel, which are often key to advancement in sectors like logistics and transport. As a result, women are frequently overlooked for promotions, leading to a glass ceiling that restricts their upward mobility. The absence of policies that actively promote gender diversity, such as flexible working hours, parental leave, and initiatives to address unconscious bias, further exacerbates these issues. Additionally, the limited access women have to professional networks and mentorship means they miss out on crucial support systems that can provide guidance, advocacy, and opportunities for career growth. This lack of support not only hinders individual advancement but also perpetuates a cycle where women are underrepresented in positions of influence (Syed & Kramar, 2017) thereby reinforcing the status quo and slowing progress toward gender parity in male-dominated industries.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach to investigate the experiences of women in Malaysia's logistics and transport industry, a sector where gender disparities are significant. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the research aims to provide a comprehensive view of the challenges and opportunities faced by women in this traditionally male-dominated field. The quantitative component includes surveys that capture broad trends, such as job role representation, career advancement opportunities, and instances of gender-based discrimination, while the qualitative aspect involves in-depth interviews to explore personal experiences and the nuanced barriers and facilitators influencing women's careers.

The sampling for the study was conducted using stratified random sampling to ensure a diverse and representative selection of female employees across different job levels, departments, and years of experience within the industry. This method was employed to capture a wide range of perspectives and to minimize bias in the data. By including participants from various roles and career stages, the study aims to offer insights into how different factors impact women's experiences and career progression, ultimately providing a balanced view of their challenges and opportunities.

Data collection involved distributing a structured questionnaire to 200 female employees and conducting semi-structured interviews with 20 professionals at various organizational levels. The survey assessed job satisfaction, career aspirations, perceived barriers, and support mechanisms, using both descriptive and inferential statistics for analysis. Complementing this, thematic analysis of interview data offered deeper insights into personal experiences, systemic issues, and success stories. This mixed-methods approach ensures a thorough exploration of the barriers and opportunities for women in logistics and transport, facilitating more targeted strategies for promoting gender equality and career advancement in the sector.

3. RESULTS

The job satisfaction of female employees in Malaysia's logistics and transport sector presents a mixed picture. While 62% of women reported being somewhat satisfied with their roles, reflecting a general sense of contentment, there remains significant room for improvement. The sector's demanding nature and traditionally male-dominated environment contribute to challenges in job satisfaction, with 15% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction due to issues related to the work environment and job security.

The survey data indicates that while 56% of women find their work environment supportive, 44% face significant challenges due to the sector's physical demands and long hours. This dichotomy highlights the need for improvements in working conditions and better recognition of employee contributions. Approximately 48% of female employees feel adequately acknowledged, but 52% believe their efforts are overlooked, suggesting that more comprehensive recognition programs are necessary to enhance job satisfaction and retention.

Career aspirations among female employees are high, with 78% aiming for advancement within the sector. However, only 45% feel they have access to necessary training and mentorship resources, while 55% report insufficient support. This gap underscores the need for enhanced support mechanisms and more robust career development resources. Additionally, 60% feel encouraged to pursue career advancement, but 40% lack sufficient encouragement or opportunities, indicating a need for targeted initiatives to support women's career growth.

Gender bias remains a significant barrier, with 70% of women reporting its impact on their career advancement and job satisfaction. This finding emphasizes the need for effective policies and training to address gender bias. Furthermore, 65% of respondents feel restricted in accessing professional networking opportunities, which hinders their career growth. The lack of flexible work arrangements affects 55% of women, exacerbating work-life balance issues, while safety concerns impact 30% of respondents, highlighting the need for improved safety measures.

The qualitative insights from interviews and case studies reveal the complexity of navigating a career in a male-dominated field. Successful female leaders in the logistics sector have navigated challenges by leveraging mentorship, professional networks, and inclusive practices. The case studies emphasize the importance of adopting innovative practices and fostering supportive environments. Overall, the findings suggest that targeted interventions to address gender biases, enhance support mechanisms, and promote career advancement opportunities are crucial for creating a more equitable and supportive work environment for women in the logistics and transport sector.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The Malaysian logistics and transport industry, driven by the expansion of e-commerce and global trade, presents numerous career opportunities. However, women face significant challenges in this traditionally male-dominated sector. This discussion highlights key issues such as workplace discrimination, work-life balance, mentorship gaps, safety concerns, and available opportunities. Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering a more equitable and inclusive work environment.

Workplace discrimination remains a major issue for women in the sector, manifesting through biases that undermine their professional capabilities and limit their advancement opportunities. Gender stereotypes influence hiring practices and promotions, often resulting in women being overlooked for leadership roles and experiencing unequal pay. Such discrimination is exacerbated in an industry known for its demanding and male-centric culture, making it essential for organizations to actively challenge these biases through equitable policies and training programs.

The demanding nature of logistics and transport jobs, including long hours and inflexible schedules, poses additional obstacles for women, particularly those with family responsibilities. The lack of flexible working arrangements significantly hinders women's ability to balance their professional and personal lives, impacting their job satisfaction and career progression. Implementing policies that support work-life balance, such as flexible scheduling, parental leave, and childcare support, is vital for improving retention and career advancement for women in the industry.

Despite these challenges, the growth of the industry offers significant opportunities for women, particularly in emerging fields like digital logistics and supply chain management. Government initiatives and policies aimed at promoting gender equality and supporting women's career advancement, such as training programs and financial incentives for diversity, are also crucial. By creating supportive work environments that address discrimination, provide mentorship, and ensure safety, organizations can help women overcome barriers and contribute to a more inclusive and successful logistics and transport sector.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study offers a comprehensive examination of the experiences of women in Malaysia's logistics and transport industry, shedding light on both the challenges and opportunities they encounter. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the research provides valuable insights into the barriers that impact women's participation and career advancement, while also highlighting the factors that contribute

to their success and progression within the sector.

One of the primary challenges identified is workplace discrimination, which manifests in various forms including gender biases that affect hiring practices, promotions, and pay equity. Addressing these issues is crucial for creating a more equitable work environment. Additionally, work-life balance remains a significant concern, especially given the demanding nature of logistics and transport roles. Women often struggle with balancing professional responsibilities with personal and family commitments, highlighting the need for more flexible work arrangements and supportive policies.

The study also underscores the critical need for mentorship and professional development opportunities. Many women lack access to networks and mentors who can provide guidance and support, which is essential for navigating career paths and advancing to leadership roles. Implementing targeted mentorship programs and offering professional development resources can help bridge this gap and empower women to achieve their career goals.

Safety concerns and harassment are also significant issues that impact women's job satisfaction and career progression. Creating a safe and supportive work environment is imperative for fostering a culture where women feel valued and secure. This includes establishing clear anti-harassment policies, providing adequate safety measures, and ensuring that support systems are in place for addressing any issues that arise.

The findings of this study have important implications for industry stakeholders, policymakers, and organisations committed to promoting gender diversity and inclusivity. By addressing the identified challenges and leveraging opportunities for women, there is potential to create a more equitable and supportive environment within the logistics and transport sector. This involves not only implementing effective policies and practices but also fostering a culture of inclusivity that values and supports female professionals.

Organisations can play a pivotal role in driving change by adopting best practices for gender equality, such as offering flexible working conditions, supporting career development through training programs, and actively working to eliminate discrimination and harassment. Policymakers can support these efforts by enacting and enforcing regulations that promote gender diversity and by providing incentives for organisations that demonstrate a commitment to creating inclusive workplaces.

Furthermore, the research highlights the need for ongoing evaluation and adjustment of policies and practices to ensure they effectively address the evolving needs of women in the industry. By continually assessing the impact of these measures and engaging with female employees to gather feedback, organisations can make informed decisions and drive meaningful improvements.

In conclusion, this study provides a detailed exploration of the experiences of women in Malaysia's logistics and transport industry, emphasizing the importance of addressing challenges and capitalising on opportunities to foster gender equality. By implementing supportive policies, offering education and training programs, and cultivating inclusive work environments, stakeholders can contribute to a more equitable and successful sector. The insights gained from this research are essential for guiding future efforts to promote gender diversity and advance women's careers in the logistics and transport industry.

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THE NECESSITY OF IMPLEMENTATION OF TEACHER'S COMPETENCES FOR PEDAGOGICAL WORK WITH CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS
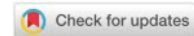
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Abstract: In modern society, the need for competences is becoming increasingly apparent, both for teachers, pedagogues and for other professions. Teacher competencies are a current topic of pedagogy, because they are trying to research, analyze and reach the most complete, high-quality profile of the teacher, in order to maximally improve his role in the upbringing and education of children and young people. It is necessary to design and modify competencies that would be most suitable for the teacher's work with children with special educational needs. In addition to the theoretical part of the paper, in which we analyzed in more detail the meaning of the concept of teacher competence, the paper also contains an empirical part. In fact, only an extract from a more extensive research is given, which explicitly refers to the pedagogical phenomenon - The necessity of professional development of the competence of teachers for working with children with special needs. The research was conducted on a sample of 170 primary school teachers in the area of Kosovska Mitrovica using the descriptive method and the method of pedagogical theory analysis. From the research techniques, we opted for the survey technique, and from the instruments - a questionnaire for teachers. Based on the conducted research, we can state that the obtained results can be used to draw a series of conclusions about the need to implement the competence of teachers for pedagogical work with children with special educational needs.

Keywords: competencies, teacher, implementation, children, special educational needs.
Field: Social sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher competencies represent a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivation and personal characteristics that enable an individual to act actively and effectively in a certain (specific) situation (Hrvatić, Piršl, (2007) according to: Đurić, 2017: 31). In a similar vein, Leburić and Zec (2008:45) point out that "competencies represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, knowledge and understanding, interpersonal and intellectual skills, as well as ethical values" (2008:45). Some authors define competence in a narrower and broader sense. Competencies in the narrower sense, according to the author Despotović, represent the ability to perform a certain activity within a given job or profession according to a certain standard, while in a broader sense "competencies represent a composite of specific knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable the performance of a certain activity" (Despotović, 2010:261).

It is evidently an acceptable position that "competence" means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities in the work environment and in different life situations. Competencies include more than knowledge and understanding and take into account the ability to demonstrate and apply what has been learned when performing a task (skills), as well as how - with what attitude and way of thinking - the student approaches the task) (Radenković & Vujović 2023:128). The author Roc reduces the essence of competence to "the learned ability to adequately perform a task, duty or role" (Ros, 2002:195).

Every child has his own, unique potential that needs to be developed and directed towards a specific goal. Children with disabilities are, like other children, the future of the world. Through upbringing and education, they acquire competences for carrying out work and involvement in all forms of everyday life. The terms: child with special needs and child with developmental disabilities do not mean the same thing, because children with learning disabilities are only one group of children with special needs. This term is not appropriate even from the aspect of psychological understanding of needs, because all people basically have the same needs, but the ways of satisfying them can be difficult and different. If the term

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special needs is used, it is much more practical and acceptable to use the term - special educational needs. In this way, this term would describe all those children who have difficulties in learning, which may be the result of a disability or some other unfavorable circumstances, due to which they need support and help during education. Author Suzić believes that children "feel these criteria with their sixth sense and value them very highly" (Stanković-Đorđević, 2013). The most important thing is to develop competencies to support the development of the student's personality, which especially applies to working with children who have learning disabilities. Consequently, the teacher should know well the individual characteristics of all students, their capabilities, limitations, interests, etc., and organize and prepare lessons in special subjects according to them. Also, the role of the teacher in the organization, i.e. preparation, planning and implementation of lessons is permeated by the constant presence of other teaching areas, i.e. motivational and areas of communication and interaction with students (Vučinić, D. & Antonijević, R. 2020:739).

We are aware that changes in society also result in certain innovations in teaching. In fact, as one of the special novelties, the so-called "home learning" stands out for those students with developmental disabilities who, due to specific difficulties and needs, can in this way create an educational environment by themselves using the advantages and services of educational technologies. Therefore, communication electronic networks provide a wide opportunity for an inclusive education program (Parlić Božović, 2020 pp.65). Accordingly, different competencies should be designed for different teachers, from beginners to experienced teachers; it is necessary to thoroughly investigate and practically confirm which competencies should define which levels (Teodorović, J., Milin, V., & Stanković, D. 2019, pp.625). The transition to a competence-oriented approach in education, training and learning represents a change of the traditional paradigm (passive learning, lecture-demonstration teaching) towards a new paradigm of education and teaching that assumes active learning (Branković, 2021).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The empirical part of the work contains one extract from a more extensive research that explicitly refers to the task: the necessity of implementing the competence of teachers for pedagogical work with children with special educational needs. We must emphasize that due to the scope of the work, not all details about the structure of the population and the research sample are shown. The sample included 170 teachers from two elementary schools in the area of Kosovska Mitrovica: "Sveti Sava" and "Branko Radičević" elementary schools. We questioned the teachers in order to test the hypothesis: the professional development of the competence of teachers for working with children with special needs varies in relation to gender, professional qualification and years of service of teachers.

Indispensable elements of the research are the following variables: teacher's gender (male, female), teacher's educational background (teacher's school, pedagogical academy, teacher's faculty), and teacher's work experience (in three categories: up to 10 years, from 11-25 years and from 26 -50 years).

In this research, we used a descriptive method and a pedagogical theory analysis method. From the research techniques, we opted for the survey technique, and from the instruments, a questionnaire for teachers. The data obtained from the research were processed using tables, percentages and the X2 test to check the significance of differences in teachers' opinions depending on the mentioned variables.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

Teachers' opinions on the professional development of teachers' competence for working with children with special needs were divided into three answer categories: agree, partly agree and disagree. The research was based on the hypothesis that all the mentioned variables determine statistically significant differences in the teacher's opinion on the mentioned task.

Table 1. Teachers' opinions on professional development of teachers' competence for working with children with special needs, depending on gender

Pol	I agree		I partly agree		I don't agree		H
	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Men	17	34%	28	56%	5	10%	50
Women	69	57,50%	42	35%	9	7,50%	120
Total	86		70		14		170

X^2 :7.90; дф 2; 0,05-5,99 о,о1-9,21
The author of the research results in Table 1. is Sanja Marković.

The results shown in the table were obtained on the basis of the research carried out by the school in 2023/24   year in Kosovska Mitrovica, authored by Sanja Marković. Based on the results shown in table no.1. we note that the calculated X^2 is 7.90 and thus exceeds the threshold value for significance at the о,о5 level with df 2 (5.99). Therefore, our hypothesis was confirmed - in our survey, the opinions of teachers differ depending on gender, that is, a higher percentage of female teachers stated that it is necessary to improve the competence of teachers in working with children with special needs.

Table 2. Teachers' opinions on the professional development of teachers' competence for working with children with special needs, depending on school education

School education	I agree		I partly agree		I don't agree		H
	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Teachers' school	51	54,26%	12	27,91%	0	0%	43
Pedagogical Academy	31	72,09%	40	42,55%	3	3,19%	94
Faculty of Teachers	24	72,73%	9	27,27%	0	0%	33
Total	106		61		3		170

X^2 :7,24; дф 4; 0,0-9,49; 0,01-13,28
The author of the research results in Table 2. is Sanja Marković.

Teachers, depending on their professional qualification (teacher school, pedagogic academy, teacher's faculty) opted, in the largest percentage, for the first category of answers - I agree. The calculated X2 is 7.24, which is lower than the threshold value for significance at the level of 0.05 with df 4 (9.49), so we can conclude that the opinions of teachers with different professional qualifications do not differ statistically significantly, i.e. that their views are similar on issues of improving the competence of teachers in working with children with special needs.

Table 3. Teachers' opinions on the professional development of teachers' competence for working with children with special needs, depending on work experience

Work experience	I agree		I partly agree		I don't agree		H
	f	%	f	%	f	%	
up to 10 years	25	58,14%	14	32,56%	4	9,30%	43
11-25 years	22	66,67%	49	52,13%	6	6,38%	94
26-50 years	39	41,49%	7	21,21%	4	12,12%	33
Total	86		70		14		170

X^2 :11,47; дф 4; 0,05-9,49; 0,01-13,28
The author of the research results in Table 3. is Sanja Marković.

Teachers, depending on their work experience (up to 10 years, from 11-25 and 26-50 years), expressed themselves differently about the necessary professional development of teacher competence. Based on the data in table no. 3 we can see that the highest percentage of 66.67% has the second category of respondents (from 11-25 years of work experience) who agree, that is, they agree about the need to improve the competence of teachers. The calculated X2 is 11.47 and indicates that it is above the threshold for significance at the 0.05 level with df 4 (9.49), thus confirming our hypothesis about the

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statistically significant influence of teachers' work experience on their opinion about the need to improve competence teacher.

4. DISCUSSIONS

It is unnecessary to talk about how important the teacher's competence is in the successful realization of the educational process of students with special educational needs. It is certainly important that teachers possess competencies that the authors classify in three categories: key, basic and special competencies, but emotional competence is also indispensable. In fact, the teacher must possess those human, humane qualities, tolerance, philanthropy, willingness to give every child the maximum in education.

According to the obtained research results, we can conclude about the necessity of improving the competence of teachers in working with children with special needs. The mitigating circumstance is that the teachers are ready for cooperation, for innovations in working with children with special needs, as well as for cooperation with the pedagogical assistant in order to achieve better results. Of course, this question opens up other topics and needs, but we are aware that teaching must be innovated and include pedagogical assistants, as well as personal companions for children with special needs, in order to achieve effective educational work.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Teachers have a dominant role in educational work. It is necessary for them to improve themselves permanently. Our hypothesis, which is as follows: The necessity of professional improvement of the competence of teachers for working with children with special needs is confirmed in this work. Therefore, teachers must improve professionally and work on expanding the spectrum competencies that are necessary in the implementation of educational work with children.

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IMPACT ASSESSMENT ON NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

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„The experience of the twentieth century made highly problematic the claims of progress on the basis of science and technology. For the ability of technology to better human life is critically dependent on a parallel moral progress in man. Without the latter, the power of technology will simply be turned to evil purposes, and mankind will be worse off than it was previously."
Francis Fukuyama

Abstract: The risk of a lack of consensus on the development and use of artificial intelligence in the defense domain may have significant negative implications in the future. Such incoherence in the relationship can cause the strategic vulnerability of the largest global military and technological powers precisely through the negative manifestations of use in an undefined environment. The importance of achieving consensus within the joint activities of the United Nations, the European Union, the United States of America, the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation provides artificial intelligence with a strong basis for ethical acceptance and establishing norms and rules of global use. Assessing the impact of artificial intelligence on the development of the national security strategy is an important factor in shaping the future defense system. Just as terrorism, the proliferation of nuclear and biological weapons and unconventional threats have become an integral part of the consideration of a wide number of national security strategies of sovereign states, so it is necessary that artificial intelligence be a part of consideration and a formal part of shaping the security system, at all levels from global to local. This work should, through a short strategic assessment, bring artificial intelligence closer to the professional public and contribute to its actualization and implementation in normative and legal strategic documents of states and global security and defense organizations.
Keywords: global security and defense, artificial intelligence, strategic assessment, security dilemma.
Field: National security

1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic assessment is the first step in strategic planning. It represents a structured way of researching forces, trends, opportunities and threats in the environment. The strategy or "grand strategy" has the task of establishing the principles and plans that orient the foreign policy vectors for a longer period of time. The strategy, the adoption of which is usually subject to assessment, shows how the state develops and uses its instruments of power in achieving national goals. Branislav Miljković stated that the preparation of the assessment should include all key areas that reflect on national security, but also on the realization of national goals and interests. The integral elements of the assessment are the development of events in the international environment and the actions of its various subjects and the consequences for national security. Adequate and timely assessment of key strategic processes creates conditions for strategic deterrence, selection of national policies and foreign policy instruments in order to prevent and prevent surprises, i.e. mitigating the consequences of inevitable negative processes (Милосављевић, 2019). Artificial intelligence is precisely one of the important entities that can influence the national security strategy.

The modern global environment is basically today based on advanced technologies, among them artificial intelligence, which implies its influence on strengthening and preserving national security. The main goal of this work is to show the impact of artificial intelligence on the ability to improve and protect the vital national interests of the state. The analytical capabilities of artificial intelligence, which are basically the result of machine learning, are widely recognized. The ability to process large amounts of data and generate information is essential for the functioning of the intelligence and security sector. Modern sensor networks that collect data, systems for mass collection and processing of data from public sources, monitoring communications of terrorist groups and malicious non-state actors, require modern and technologically advanced systems for data collection, decryption and processing. The processing of

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such a large amount of data in order to detect, locate and ultimately neutralize threats requires precisely the capabilities possessed by artificial intelligence. Stephen Lomlen stated that as nations continue to invest in artificial intelligence capabilities, understanding the implications and challenges associated with these technological advances becomes paramount to ensuring a nation's secure future (Lomlen, 2024).

Strategic assessment basically includes assessment of strategic needs, assessment of strategic capabilities, risk assessment and overall strategic effects (In Their Own Words: China's National Defense in the New Era, 2019, 96). It is certain that artificial intelligence at this stage of development can be evaluated in all four previously mentioned categories, i.e. from strategic needs to effects. This paper will present various aspects that will try to assess the real impact of artificial intelligence on the national security strategy from a theoretical point of view. The ultimate goal is to ensure a full understanding of the potential of artificial intelligence and its impact on key elements of effective governance. Conceptual challenges related to the manifestation of power and the eventual security dilemma of artificial intelligence are considered, through considerations from the aspect of philosophy and the modern technological environment. Before adopting a new national security strategy, each country is obliged to assess the strategic environment, define key challenges, risks and threats and define the ways of achieving the national interests it has set.

2. GLOBAL POWER AND SECURITY DILEMMA OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

As stated in the quote by Francis Fukuyama in the book "The End of History and the Last Man" at the beginning of this paper, it is clear that the moral and technological progress of humanity must be synchronized (Fukuyama, 2012). It is unquestionable that artificial intelligence is transforming the world in various ways. From the way we are educated, to the way the economy works, there is almost no area where experts do not see the application and possibilities of using artificial intelligence. Among them is national security (Karlin, 2018). The complete actualization of artificial intelligence in all spheres of life and the daily promotion of new inventions and methods of application no longer call into question the possibilities and tendencies of development. However, despite all technological aspects and applicability, in order for artificial intelligence to be a fully rounded system, it must be considered from a strategic level. This was perhaps best explained by the authors of the Defense artificial intelligence strategy from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In the aforementioned Strategy, they stated that the ultimate goal is for Great Britain to become a "scientific and technological superpower" by 2030. A national AI strategy should play a role in fully transforming and improving the entire industry (Defense artificial intelligence strategy, 2022). If we put the previous tendency in the context that artificial intelligence is still on the so-called "narrow", i.e. the first level of development and that only a small number of segments are moving towards the second, i.e. general stage of development (Glenn, 2023), it is clear that it is no longer questionable that this will happen, but it is only a question of who will be the first to master these technologies and ensure advantage over the competition. Great Britain's strategists have clearly formulated their strategic decisions regarding artificial intelligence and, in accordance with the goal, they have formulated appropriate means and ways to implement the strategy.

Essentially, artificial intelligence will cause a security dilemma by increasing its global influence. However, the characteristics of its manifestation will not be within the framework of Cold War bloc divisions, but will be part of a wider global aspect that will include several actors. One of the greatest advantages of artificial intelligence is that it does not necessarily require that a great world power stands behind its development, so that the final effect of its manifestation would be of a global character. In this way, small countries that do not have a large territory and natural resources will be able to compete equally at the global level.

Back in 2018, Michael C. Horowitz, in his article "Artificial Intelligence, International Competition, and the Balance of Power," argued that national security decision-makers must grapple with the essential dilemma of when, where, why, how and under what circumstances to use national power. If "artificial intelligence is actually the ultimate driver," then its impact on the development of national security strategy can be twofold. In one case, it can be proactive, that is, improve it, but on the other hand, it can have some negative effects on development, certainly this requires serious examination and study. In the end, it raises more questions than it answers (Horowitz, 2018). Perhaps one of the key questions from this domain is whether artificial intelligence will in fact be an instrument of national power of a sovereign state in the future? On the other hand, will the rapid proliferation and availability of such technology help non-state actors to achieve their goals more easily? The last, and perhaps the most difficult question, will artificial intelligence at the highest level of development, that is, superintelligence, be an active factor in the creation of national security strategies? We currently cannot answer these questions, but it certainly obliges us

that in addition to the technological development and practical application of artificial intelligence, we must consider and study the ethical principles of application, the cultural premise, philosophical viewpoints and finally clearly define the strategic frameworks of application and development.

At the end of this brief overview of the global impact, it is important to state that in terms of war and military use, to date, most discussions about the impact of artificial intelligence on national security strategy have mainly focused on the operational level of war. This is primarily conditioned by the level of development of the same, however, it does not exclude the need to consider the development of future military capabilities, ethics of application and influence on decision makers. Steven Davis stated that the national defense strategy emphasizes the importance of artificial intelligence in military operations in order for the United States of America to maintain an advantage over its competitors. Which is a similar approach to the UK case mentioned above. In order to fully realize this advantage, it will be necessary to integrate artificial intelligence not only at the tactical level but also at the operational level of war (Davis, 2022).

3. FORMULATION OF NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

National security strategy is of essential importance for every country. The time we live in is full of daily security problems that threaten to spread from the local level to the region, and perhaps beyond. Every country has an imperative to adapt its national security strategy in a timely manner to contemporary challenges, risks and threats found in the global and immediate environment. Most countries today are actively considering the place and role of artificial intelligence in their strategy. The approaches are different, but it is clear that most countries, due to the unknowns of how and in what way to include artificial intelligence in the national security strategy, resort to a solution in which they develop a special strategy. A few countries, such as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, have developed specific artificial intelligence strategies in the defense domain.

Professor Ljubomir Stajić gave an account of the impact of modern security challenges, risks and threats on the development of the national security strategy and concluded that the new security systems with their organization, efficiency and effectiveness, along with the application of sophisticated means and measures of the new generation, have yet to respond to them. He concluded that a new understanding of security must be an integral part of the new strategy (Ljubomir, 2009). It is the previous consideration that provides a framework for thinking about the implementation of artificial intelligence within the framework of the national security strategy. The previously expressed security dilemma and the impact on the global power of artificial intelligence, as well as its ubiquity in all spheres of life, gives us the full right to consider its place and role at a strategic level.

The formulation of national security strategy is widely accepted through the principle of General Maxwell D. Taylor. He stated that strategy consists of goals, ways and means. This concept can also be represented as an equation. Strategy is equal to goals (goals towards which one strives), plus ways (courses of action), plus means (instruments by means of which a goal can be achieved). This general concept can be used as a basis for formulating any kind of strategy, military, political, economic, or any other, depending on the element of national power being used (Taylor, 1990). Formulating a national security strategy has three primary goals: problem formulation, decision making, and evaluation. Problem formulation focuses on understanding the strategic framework and considering the direction in which they might manifest in the future. This directly requires a clear knowledge of global and regional trends. Decision-making requires answers to the main strategic questions of the use of national power in support of national interests and values. Finally, the evaluation includes a periodic review of previous problems and decisions in order to determine how and in what way the projected strategic framework has changed.

One perhaps important parameter related to security is understanding the difference between a state's "grand strategy" and military strategy (Lykke, 1989). Military strategy should not be confused with national (grand) strategy, which can be defined as: "The art and science of developing and using the political, economic and psychological powers of a nation, together with its armed forces, during peace and war, to ensure the national goals" (Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Publication 1,, 2016). Right here, it should be clearly demarcated that artificial intelligence with its capacities can be used in all factors of national power and as such can be considered in different strategies. Which is a great potential that needs to be adequately used and optimally used in the national security strategy on the umbrella act of a state.

4. STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

As a rule, strategic assessment always precedes the creation of a national security strategy. In

order to consider the possible impacts of artificial intelligence on strategic decisions, it is necessary to make an appropriate assessment beforehand. The assessment should suggest the potential and answer the relevance in the field of national security. It is known that it provides various opportunities, but also challenges for decision makers. What is characteristic of artificial intelligence is incomplete knowledge of development tendencies, and therefore of possibilities. Development tendencies, opportunities, risks and final effects should be an integral part of future strategic assessments. The assessment cannot predict the future, but it can certainly help the country develop different scenarios in order to respond to crises, which is one of the functions of the strategy. In the context of the aforementioned statement, Thomas Reid said that "Futurists, of course, did not always get the future wrong, but they almost always got speed, scale and shape wrong." They still do. (Rid, 2016)"

One significant factor that will affect the assessment of the impact of artificial intelligence on the national security strategy is the academic circles that will participate in that process. The central question here is: Should the development of a strategic assessment, and then the strategy, be left to a narrow circle of the academic community, or should the wider professional community present its position and proposals? If this work were to be delegated to a narrow academic community, it is questionable how fully the potential and risks brought by such a technology would be understood. Considering the enormous influence of artificial intelligence in the framework of national security, it is expected that the aforementioned attitude will become a problem very soon. The problem will be directly reflected in the narrow understanding of the perspective that artificial intelligence should provide to the entire society (Gloria Phillips-Wren, Jain Lakhmi, 2006). Bearing in mind the wide spread of artificial intelligence in various sectors of the economy, economy, private sector within various services from the domain of the digital agenda. The aforementioned sectors not only use artificial intelligence products, but also develop them to the greatest extent, which implies that without their attitude and opinion, the full potential cannot be realized.

Artificial intelligence should not be considered only as an object of decision, it will also be an element that will help the decision maker with its capacities (Joe McKendrick, Andy Thurai, 2022). The stated claim is precisely one of the important characteristics that make it considered in a different context in relation to other influential factors when developing a strategy. As an example, we can state that the migrant crisis can affect the security of the state and is evaluated and considered as such. However, it cannot participate in the creation of a strategy because it does not possess the capabilities of artificial intelligence, which can be a threat, but also propose a way to defend against the threat. This "measures-countermeasures" approach stems from the aforementioned fact and requires an approach we call "sequential robustness". This approach is rooted in the paradoxical existence of uncertainty, influenced by factors such as rapid technological development and geopolitical changes. Unlike traditional policy approaches, sequential robustness acknowledges and accepts the transitory nature of current circumstances (Christopher A. Mouton, Caleb Lucas, 2023). In the end, it is important to state that despite all the potential of artificial intelligence, decision-making will always be immanent to humans.

Strategic assessment is basically a thought process that consists of several stages, which were previously mentioned. Within these phases, it is necessary to carry out an assessment of strategic needs, assessment of strategic capabilities, assessment of risks and overall strategic effects.

Assessment of strategic needs

The national interest of every country is to follow modern trends, especially in those that are important for the achievement of the most important national goals. These trends are directly reflected in the possibilities of instruments of national power, which constitute the basic resource for realizing national interests. Artificial intelligence is precisely the technology that affects all aspects of the state, including national security. The previous statement suggests to us that there is an extraordinary need for every country to develop artificial intelligence in all fields, especially in the field of defense and security. The distribution of global power, which was mentioned earlier, will be partially conditioned by the development of artificial intelligence. As in centuries before, this distribution cannot be expected to be even, but the potential for development will be available to all who wish to compete. In this way, artificial intelligence will become a strategic need for a country to secure a global position in the future distribution of power and influence.

Strategic needs related to artificial intelligence represent objective conditions for its development and implementation. They include the need for necessary power capacities, various means and equipment, as well as appropriate organization. In addition to the above, it is necessary to have appropriate support and meet the prerequisites in the strategic environment. Therefore, the assessment of strategic needs is mainly conditioned by the nature of strategic goals or tasks and under certain conditions, the forces, ways and means needed to achieve strategic goals or the execution of tasks are analyzed and evaluated.

Different strategic goals or objectives have different strategic needs, and different strategic conditions will require different strategic needs. The same principle applies to artificial intelligence. In the assessment of strategic needs, it is necessary to assess the feasibility and reliability of deploying the necessary strategic assets and forces according to the specific conditions of the strategic environment and define specific strategic needs. It is necessary to make a comprehensive plan of the content of strategic needs, ways of its realization and development in order to create objective conditions for effective strategic management (In Their Own Words: China's National Defense in the New Era, 2019).

Benjamin Jensen argued that the central intelligence question we face today is "How does artificial intelligence affect national security? (Jensen, 2023)" According to him, the center of gravity rests not only on lines of code, but also on people, bureaucracy and infrastructure, i.e. the database that turns any technology into a strategic advantage (Benjamin Jensen, Scott Cuomo, Christopher Whyte, 2022). From the above, we can conclude that the basic strategic need is the achievement of dialogue and cohesion at the national level, both among professionals and the general public regarding further development and use.

Strategic needs for artificial intelligence within national security can be reflected through the following factors:

• Assessment of the needs that organizations need to consider in order to ensure a successful and sustainable digital transformation based on artificial intelligence (Aldoseri et al, 2024);

• It is necessary to define and adopt legal and ethical norms for the use of artificial intelligence. The basic need is the acceptance of the ethical norm of use by the broad social framework;

• Policy initiatives for managing artificial intelligence need to be strengthened. Politics has supremacy in relation to all other activities of society and it must first of all follow the guidelines from the strategy with its actions;

• It is necessary to define how and who manages artificial intelligence resources. This resource must be controlled by the state, but it must also be properly accessible and useful to all segments of society;

• It is necessary to invest more to improve education, research and implementation of socially useful projects;

• The last need is also an opportunity, it offers an opportunity for cooperation between countries and organizations. In this way, artificial intelligence could be a point of rapprochement and improvement of bilateral and multilateral relations between countries (Jiajun Cao, Yuefen Wang, 2020).

The previously stated strategic needs in defining the place and role of artificial intelligence in the assessment speak in favor of the importance and importance of monitoring the movement of such an important global trend. Ensuring technological progress in terms of artificial intelligence will enable the synchronized development of different segments of the country and international connectivity. Any absence or slowdown will exponentially distance the country from those who are progressing. Considering the speed of development of artificial intelligence, any slowdown in the development and implementation of new trends and solutions will cause the state to stagnate in all areas. This is a consequence of the representation of artificial intelligence in all domains, that is, instruments of national power.

Assessment of strategic abilities

Strategic Capability Assessment usually refers to the process of evaluating and analyzing a country's ability to develop and implement strategies that will help it achieve its long-term goals. When talking about the strategic capabilities of artificial intelligence in the future, it is common to think that it can be applied in several stages of strategy development. The lowest is the so-called "descriptive stage" that uses artificial intelligence to analyze the environment and evaluate performance. The second phase is "diagnostic" where artificial intelligence identifies the sources of performance. In the third stage "forecasting", which allows strategists to predict scenarios and make decisions based on trends (Gomede, 2023). This assessment involves the analysis of multiple aspects, including resources, competitive environment, capacity for innovation, risk management, and the like.

The basis of the strategic capability of artificial intelligence in the future should be the provision of advantages in relation to the environment through the synchronized development of all instruments of power. It should be a source of competitive advantage, among other things, in the domain of defense and security. Strategic capability development refers to the renewal of organizational capabilities that are sources of competitive advantage (Alireza Javanmardi Kashan, Kavoos Mohannak, 2014). This kind of state advantage in a strategic environment is the first significant strategic capability of artificial intelligence.

Another segment that will certainly have a significant impact on strategic capabilities is the speed of development of artificial intelligence and the transition from the "narrow" to the "general" level. Analytical abilities that are the backbone of use today will certainly move towards the development

of cognitive abilities, which will result in a drastic change in the way of use, which are two different levels of ability. "Narrow" artificial intelligence is applied in specific tasks within defined domains, while "general" aims to replicate human-level intelligence in a variety of tasks and domains. Achieving "general" artificial intelligence remains a challenge, requiring technological advances and ethical considerations. Understanding the differences between these AI paradigms is vital to shaping a responsible and useful future for AI (Memon, 2024).

In the aforementioned context, it is important to assess the strategic capabilities of artificial intelligence in relation to the changes it will cause in the formulation of the next national security strategies. Charles Cohen stated that the potential of artificial intelligence in defense is enormous. It can streamline operations, improve decision-making, and increase the accuracy and efficiency of military operations. Today's highly automated and future autonomous military systems will perform tasks that are extremely dangerous or virtually impossible for humans. AI-based analytics can provide strategic advantages by predicting and identifying threats (Cohen, 2023).

Analyzing, researching and evaluating the strategic capabilities of artificial intelligence is a process that cannot end, it is continuous and synchronized with development. Predicting a future ability is extremely difficult and practically impossible even in this situation when the topic allows us almost everything we can imagine. The assessment that artificial intelligence will provide a competitive advantage, the development of cognitive abilities and the prediction and identification of threats are certainly part of the capabilities that are of a strategic nature and that we should take into account when defining the next national security strategy. The aforementioned capabilities are only part of the wide range of artificial intelligence influences that could affect the development of instruments of national power through the following activities: data collection and analysis, risk and security assessment, scenario creation, process optimization, automation and other activities.

Assessment of strategic risks

Over the past two decades, many Western nations have adopted risk assessment as a central part of their national security decision-making and prioritization process (Rick Nunes-Vaz, Steven Lord, Daniel Bilusich, 2014). While artificial intelligence offers tremendous security benefits, it can also be a source of risk. The gradual integration of artificial intelligence-based systems into the practice of national security requires a careful assessment of risks and possible future both positive and negative implications. As the digital age continues to reshape the world, the field of national security is at a crossroads (Artificial Intelligence (AI) Challenges and Advantages in National Security, 2023).

Artificial intelligence can be a source of risk, but it can also reduce risk. In the first case, that is, as a source of risk, it can be interpreted as a lack of national will in the direction of development and monitoring of usage trends. Another case related to the fact that artificial intelligence can reduce risk is related to the state and security apparatus relying on its analytical capacities when making decisions. It is relatively easy for a person to get used to a high degree of automation in various areas, even in the domain of national security. The more we move away from humans as executors in the processes of processing data and turning it into information, the more we will depend on the capacity of artificial intelligence. It should not be forgotten that it is only a technology that works in a limited space defined by a finite number of variables in an algorithm. The objectivity of artificial intelligence is one of the main risks that we will face in the process of making decisions at a strategic level.

Securing a strategic competitive advantage through the use of artificial intelligence is only possible if states and decision makers recognize that artificial intelligence can be used maliciously and produce unintended consequences. States are developing artificial intelligence with the aim of improving national security and ensuring overall prosperity. However, it is important to understand at the highest level the limitations of artificial intelligence and the risks associated with its use.

At the end of 2023, the administration of the United States of America passed the "Executive order on the safe, secure and reliable development and use of artificial intelligence" (Executive Order on the Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Development and Use of Artificial Intelligence, 2023). According to the aforementioned Order, artificial intelligence represents a threat to national security. Among other things, it is ordered that a significant part of the national artificial intelligence industry must check what are the vulnerabilities of national security and potential abuse, that is, what are the risks of use. The main goal of such actions is to reduce the level of risk to a minimum.

Strategic risk assessment must achieve three goals: one is to avoid the decision to allow absolute risk and to suppress high-level risks as much as possible; the second is comparing and analyzing the risks of various decisions and making reasonable strategic choices; the third is to make accurate and precise views and decisions. Some risk factors related to the overall situation necessarily need to be strategically prepared for facing the risks (In Their Own Words: China's National Defense in the New Era, 2019).

The European Commission presented a recommendation to carry out a risk assessment in four critical areas of technology: advanced semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum, biotechnology. The recommendation specifies that the first source of risk is the transformational nature of technology, the risk of civil and military fusion, and finally the risk that technology could be used in the context of human rights violations. The focus of the risk assessment should be on the possibility of accessing high-risk technology, technological risk and the so-called "leakage" of technology. The assessment that the wide availability of technology such as artificial intelligence can also be a risk because it can provide various malicious instances with the power that the state security apparatus has. Part of the states that do not have full sovereignty over all instruments of power, which are still in the process of rounding off statehood, may be threatened by the technological superiority of anti-state actors. The last element that is important to assess in terms of risk is the proliferation and illegal transfer of technology to non-state actors or hostile states. The most important achievements of artificial intelligence, especially from the domain of the defense industry, should be protected with the highest protection measures.

In the end, perhaps the biggest risk is that the necessary technological progress in the development and implementation of current trends is not achieved. This will directly affect the development and positioning of the country on the international stage. Any country that does not control, direct and monitor the development of artificial intelligence in its environment risks being inferior to the environment.

Evaluation of the effect

The strategic effects of the use of artificial intelligence in the framework of national security are difficult to assess without trends that are the product of indicators of direct use. In the conditions of modern hybrid threats whose effects are sometimes visible long after the activities have been carried out, it implies that the importance of assessing the strategic effect, which has become an indispensable part of strategic planning and direction, is growing. It is an important basis for assessing whether the strategic purpose has been achieved and ensuring the sustainable development of the implementation of the strategy (In Their Own Words: China's National Defense in the New Era, 2019). The effects of artificial intelligence on international organizations and most of the developed countries are already visible, as most have developed some kind of development and use strategy. While some of the most developed ones dared to take a step to develop a strategy in the domain of national security.

The effect of the use of artificial intelligence will affect national security by driving changes in three areas: military, information and economic superiority (Greg Allen, Taniel Chan, 2017). The accompanying effects of artificial intelligence are reflected in the technological domain and will significantly influence the optimization and improvement of the production process. It is known that any technology that ensures superiority in the field of defense and security, as a rule, later exerts a significant influence on the rest of the economy. This will not only affect economic growth, but also the optimization of resource consumption, as well as ecology.

When talking about the assessment of possible strategic effects, we can consider artificial intelligence as a future element of deterrence of sovereign states. Today, the strongest deterrent is still unequivocally nuclear weapons. Part of the countries achieve deterrence effects with conventional military forces. However, militarily neutral countries, such as the Republic of Serbia, have an exceptional opportunity to use the effects of the development, implementation and use of artificial intelligence in the field of defense and security as a key element of deterrence in the future. The availability of high technologies that bring superiority on the battlefield, in the cyber environment and in the information sphere, give strength to other instruments of national power to defend the interests of the state and to move in the direction of achieving national goals.

5. CONCLUSION

The development of artificial intelligence will cause a change in the domain of challenges, risks and threats that countries will face in the future. Its accelerated development will cause faster changes in the strategic environment, which will imply more frequent changes in the national security strategy. Hybrid warfare, i.e. the proliferation of unconventional warfare, is directly related to the development of artificial intelligence. Superiority in the development and implementation of artificial intelligence will ensure a new distribution of global power between countries that will achieve a step ahead of the competition. The formation of power between the states that are on the opposing sides will cause a security dilemma of even greater and more intense proportions compared to those we have known so far. We can find an argument for such a claim in the extremely fast development of artificial intelligence, which is largely ahead of the predicted dynamics.

The technological superiority of artificial intelligence, despite its specificities, cannot go beyond the

limits of philosophy. Philosophy, with its supremacy over science and technology, is a safe place where man is guaranteed primacy. Artificial intelligence, regardless of its level of development, will not be able to understand Plato's Thymos and replace man. It is difficult to predict whether one day the "decisive battles" of Clausewitz will be conducted by artificial intelligence on behalf of humans, but it is certain that it will influence the transformation of war. This will be directly reflected in the formulation of the national security strategy in each subsequent change.

Assessing the impact of artificial intelligence on the formulation of a national security strategy is extremely important for any country that proactively acts in the direction of realizing its national interests. A comprehensive assessment of strategic needs must assume the existence of national cohesion and unity in the use of artificial intelligence, because only in this way can it provide a strategic advantage over the competition. Long-term assessment of strategic capabilities is possible through monitoring the development from the level of "narrow" to "general" artificial intelligence. The most important capabilities in the field of defense and security are certainly the ability to predict and identify threats. The above-mentioned positions regarding strategic needs and capabilities directly imply that the biggest risk for the state is stagnation in the development of artificial intelligence. The question is no longer whether it is necessary, but what is the level of development and application of artificial intelligence in state instruments of national power. The assessment is that the final effects of the successful adoption and wide application of artificial intelligence, which are aligned with the ethical and legal postulates of society, represent the basis of the strategic deterrence of every country, especially small countries such as the Republic of Serbia. Such an assumption may be the answer to the question of how to preserve sovereignty and territorial integrity in the conditions of modern challenges, risks and threats.

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APPLICATION OF PARAMETER STATISTICAL TESTS AND DATA ENVELOPMENT ANALYSIS METHODS IN MODERN BUSINESS

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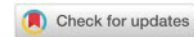
Abstract: In the absence of a sufficient amount of information for quality business decision-making, i.e. successful performance of activities without unnecessary losses in the consumption of inputs, recently the non-parametric DEA method (Data Envelopment Analysis) is most often used through the linear programming technique. In the event that company managers have enough information to make business decisions, parametric statistical tests are used that compare the company's current performance with optimal performance, i.e. those that are on the edge of efficiency. However, this situation is very rare, so before making business decisions, non-parametric and then parametric statistical tests are carried out in detail. The subject of research of this paper is primarily focused on the simultaneous application of parametric and non-parametric statistical tests in the assessment of the economic efficiency of an economic entity.

After the conducted research and analysis of the obtained results, it was determined that the null hypothesis, which claims that the relative efficiency of the warehouse obtained by parametric statistical tests and the DEA method is identical and that the trends have the same direction, could not be fully accepted. Namely, it was found out that the results of one and the same economic situation using the mentioned two types of analysis differ to the extent that they are not adequate for economic decision-making, however identical results were obtained in the assessment of the trend. It can be concluded that the simultaneous application of both methods, as well as its implementation in several iterations, can provide enough quality information for effective decision-making. Stochastic processes that occur during the implementation of business decisions using the DEA technique can be minimized through the simultaneous application of statistical parametric methods and tests for evaluating the expected efficiency of DEA. The effectiveness of this method in any case depends on the size of the sample implemented in the aforementioned statistical analysis. The aforementioned statistical tests enable the measurement and detection of those input parameters that will most effectively contribute to the efficiency of business systems.

Keywords: DEA, parametric statistical tests, linear programming, sample, business processes, information.
Field: Economy

1. INTRODUCTION

The stochastic processes that occur during the implementation of business decisions using DEA methods can be minimized through the simultaneous application of statistical parametric methods and tests to assess the expected effectiveness of DEA. The effectiveness of this method in any case depends on the size of the sample that is implemented in the aforementioned statistical analysis. The larger this sample, the more reliable the result of statistical parametric tests (Anđelković, 2022).

On the other hand, the inclusion of a larger sample in the statistical analysis increases the costs of its implementation and also requires a longer time for its implementation. Choosing the required sample size for statistical analysis requires a careful and multidisciplinary approach.

In any case, the simultaneous use of non-parametric and parametric statistical tests is the most effective tool for making quality business decisions. Parametric statistical tests, which evaluate the set hypotheses in DEA analysis, contribute a lot to the reliability of management functions.

The aim of the simultaneous application of non-parametric and parametric methods contributes to a large extent to quality management of business processes, efficiency and profitability of business systems (Deakin, 2001).

The necessity of using parametric statistical tests in the evaluation of the applied DEA methods is necessary in situations where there is an insufficient amount of relevant information available that can lead to incorrect conclusions when making business decisions and thus the deviation of the business system from the optimal business trajectory with incalculable negative consequences for that business system.

The same is the case in situations where business decision-makers have too much information

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about an economic phenomenon, so the selection of the right and adequate information requires the combination of parametric statistical tests and DEA methods (Glišović, 2017).

2. PARAMETER STATISTICAL TESTS

When applying parametric statistical tests in practice, one must take into account the fact that the parameter represents the size of the overall observed set, while statistical analysis usually operates with the concept of a sample of a statistical set, which may or may not represent the objective result of the entire observed phenomenon.

These tests assume that the random variable will have a normal probability distribution.

Unlike parametric statistical tests, non-parametric tests operate exclusively on the values of the entire observed set (Jiyoung, 2019).

A nonparametric statistical test is a test that allows two sets of conditions or treatments to be compared without assuming that the values are normally distributed. Thus, for example, one can compare the speed with which two different groups of people can run 100 meters, where one group trained for two months and the other did not.

Requirements typically relate to the following:
• Two random, independent samples;
• Data are continuous - in other words, in principle it must be possible to distinguish values at the nth decimal place;
• The measurement scale should be ordinal, interval or proportional;
• For maximum accuracy, there should be no ties, although this test - like others - has a way to resolve ties.

Null hypothesis. The null hypothesis claims that the median of the results obtained by the parametric statistical tests and the DEA method is identical.

The basic equation can be written as,

$$U = NM + \frac{N(N+1)}{2} - \sum_{x_i} Rank(x_i)$$

To solve some of the problems, appropriate parametric equations are introduced, where instead of directly defining the function from the variable f(x), both the function and the variable are defined in terms of a third variable called a parameter, e.g. like,

$$x=f(t)g=g(t)x=f(t)g=g(t)$$

Each value of (t) defines a point,

$$(x,g)=> (f(t),g(t))(x,g)=(f(t),g(t)).$$

Plotting a parametric curve is not always straightforward. There are often parameter restrictions and this affects the form of parametric equations or functions (Međurečan, 2019).

3. STATISTICAL TESTS USING DEA METHODS

DEA analysis has been proven to be an excellent data-driven efficiency analysis method for comparing multiple-input, multiple-output decision-making units (DMUs). In the classic DEA concept, it is assumed that the status of each measure is clearly displayed (hence known) as an input or an output. However, in some situations, a performance measure (the efficiency of one DMUi) may play an input role for some DMUj and an output role for other DMUk (Pjanić, 2016).

The classification of inputs and outputs is done at the level of variables that are labeled as flexible measures.

The example of higher education institutions in the UK demonstrates the applicability of the DEA-based approach mentioned here. In this case, DEA analysis is used to examine the technical efficiency (TE) of 45 British higher education institutions (universities) in the period 1980/81–1992/93. This period saw major changes in public funding and the extent of student and staff participation.

In order to shed light on the causes of efficiency variations, TE is decomposed into purely technical efficiency (BCC), congestion efficiency and volume efficiency. The analysis showed that there was a significant increase in the weighted geometric mean of TE scores during this period under investigation, although this increase was most visible between 1987/1988 and 1990/1991.

The rising results of TE are mainly attributed to good results in pure technical efficiency and congestion efficiency, with volume efficiency playing a minor role.

A Malmquist approach is then used to distinguish changes between TEs and intertemporal shifts in the efficiency frontier.

The results reveal that total factor productivity increased by 51.5% between 1980/1981 and 1992/1993, and that most of this increase was due to a significant shift beyond the efficiency frontier during that period.

DEA analysis of the efficiency of higher education institutions was also applied on the example of Selcuk University. In this study, an attempt was made to determine how effectively and efficiently the institutions work with the used input and output parameters (total costs, number of graduates, average academic grades). All this was accomplished by the faculty affiliated with Selcuk University (Radosavljević, 2022).

It is important to inform management and create insight into the decisions that need to be made in accordance with changing factors for the future. In the subject study, the annual report of the administration of Selcuk University for 2018 and data on the results of the academic incentive for 2018 were used. DEA, as a non-parametric technique, used the principles of linear programming in the analysis of relative efficiency in order to enable the mutual comparison of institutions or DMUs.

As a result of the study, an analysis of the relative efficiency of the units was performed and evaluations were made regarding the ways in which the inputs and outputs were not efficient, and the identification of ways to make them effective. If it is effective, the capacity would be kept at the level of existing activities, and if it is not, then for such unused capacity, estimates of the unused capacity were made (with proposed measures for their more successful operation) (Radosavljević, 2022).

At the level of the aforementioned cases, DEA models were developed to calculate the technical efficiency of DMUs with flexible measures. For these types of systems, the conventional DEA model is modified to include flexible measures.

The proposed approach is potentially useful in many applications, including the evaluation of production efficiency, health care systems, educational institutions where a general variable in a flexible DEA structure can be considered an input or an output.

The analysis began with an axiomatic study of the proposed model. Finally, an application in higher education was used to demonstrate the usefulness of the subject model. Further research is mainly focused on the transformation of other DEA-based models, e.g. the bottleneck-based model, where a similar concept is used (Shahidul, 2020).

The flexibility model based on DEA can be applied in a wider and different range of companies, basically at the level of various processes in the organization, but not at the level of the entire organization (also models: ABC, Brownow model, DtM, KBEMS).

In processes, operations, quality and excellence, different quality trends are present. Some of the concepts that have experienced intensive application are highlighted here, such as: TQM (introduced in the early 1990s), Six Sigma, ISO 9000 and other HSE standards, TPM in production, BPR, TOC, excellence frameworks such as EFQM, Lean, Lean Six Sigma integration (Santosh Govind Bhosale, 2015).

The theory of constraints (TOC - Theory of constraints) is a management paradigm that considers every controllable system as limited in achieving a number of its goals (although with a very small number of constraints).

This means that TOC always implies that there is at least one constraint in the firm. TOC uses a focusing process to identify a constraint and restructure the rest of the organization around it. TOC also adopts the common thesis that "a chain is no stronger than its weakest link". This means that organizations and processes are vulnerable because the weakest DMU or part can always damage, threaten or force them into bankruptcy and liquidation, or at least adversely affect the business outcome (Simonović, 2019).

In some works, when applying DEA, an alternative model is proposed in which each flexible measure is treated as an input or output variable.

The main interest of the DEA method is to make the business system as efficient as possible and to evaluate the technical efficiency as well as possible.

An illustration of the proposed model with application in higher education institutions in the UK provides a real example of the proposed model with a flexible structure. The data used by (Simonović, 2019) are applied. Two factors were selected as inputs: general expenditure ($k1$) and equipment costs ($k2$), and three factors as outputs: undergraduate students ($i1$), postgraduate research ($i2$) and postgraduate teaching ($i3$). The flexible measure here was research income ($z1$). The research income status for each university was determined by the same DEA model, while the data set consists of 50 universities.

Model results indicate that research income was considered an input or output variable in the estimation model. It was observed that 25 universities (out of 50 analyzed) treat research income as an output

measure, and 25 universities treat it as an input measure.

Researched efficiency of higher education institutions in two cases, using DEA-CCR model, one with research income as input and another model with research income as output, shows that research income should be included in the output.

4. STATISTICAL FOUNDATION FOR DEA

DMUs, in these considerations, contain an output vector and an input vector, where $i \in I$ and $k \in Ks$ are convex subsets of RR and RI, respectively. The input quantities and the variable proportions of the output mixture are random variables (Šegrt, 2022).

The DEA estimator is defined in accordance with the basic definition (such as: an estimator - who makes an estimate; or - in statistics: a rule, method or criterion for achieving an estimate of a parameter's value). Of course, in other cases it can also represent a person who assesses the value, price, number, quantity or volume of something.

DEA methods effectively determine the efficiency of the business system independently of the input parameters. By using these methods, a greater number of system solutions can be reached, which can be efficiently implemented with the effective use of DEA and null hypothesis tests.

These methods and tests can easily and transparently determine whether the set parameters in the null hypothesis are underestimated or overestimated. Just by knowing whether the initial parameters of the hypothesis are greater or less than the results of this analysis, it is possible to correct the value of the null hypothesis and then re-evaluate it.

We note here that the experience of the person making the assessment plays a big role in setting the value of the null hypothesis. And finally, the use of information technologies plays an important role in the preparation and processing of data, which as a result will have valid parameters for establishing the null hypothesis.

5. HYPOTHESIS TESTS FOR SITUATIONS CHARACTERIZING SHIFTS AT THE BORDER

In situations where the necessary data are available in the research of changes in the profitability of market participants in a certain time interval, all the necessary hypothesis test procedures must be foreseen beforehand in order to apply them in the most efficient way (Springer, 2016).

In the specific case, we can consider all variations, around the estimated values of the set hypotheses in situations characterized by shifts at the border, as non-deterministic or random quantities.

The subject tests are rarely applied in situations where we do not have a large enough sample and in these situations they should be used with great caution. Additional simulation studies are always warranted to provide valid evidence of small sample performance (Marjanović, 2018).

The use of information technologies as well as the modernization of statistical tests in DEA in any case contribute to greater accuracy of their results and facilitate decision-making by the competent management. The development and expansion of methods and appropriate tests in this analysis is a constant and continuous process (Marjanović, 2018).

Type references should also be taken into account, as a certain complementarity can be observed as in the case of the analysis of problems with flexible flow stores analyzed using DEA (Springer, 2016).

6. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

On a simple example, we will analyze the application of the DEA technique and the application of parametric statistical tests to assess the efficiency of a business system in the specific case of a store, depending on the invested capital and realized net profit. Furthermore, our goal is to compare the obtained results of both approaches and determine their possible deviations.

Null hypothesis. The null hypothesis states that the relative efficiency of the store obtained by parametric statistical tests and the DEA method is identical and that the trends have the same direction.

In the following example, the relative efficiency of the store and the trend depending on capital and net profit was calculated using parametric statistical tests (Table 1) as well as using DEA methods (Table 2).

Table 1: Efficiency and trend obtained using parametric statistical tests

Capital	Net gain	% profitability	Eff	Trend
3,636	0,2667	7,3	0,883	↗
1,832	**0,3333**	**18,19**	**0,981**	↘
1,743	0,1667	9,56	0,709	↗
1,654	0,1543	9,33	0,941	↘
1,598	0,1442	9,00	0,842	↘

Source: The authors

Table 2: Efficiency and trend obtained using DEA methods

Capital	Net gain	% profitability	Eff	Trend
3,636	0,2667	7,3	0,502	↗
1,832	**0,3333**	**18,19**	**0,943**	↘
1,743	0,1667	9,56	0,472	↗
1,654	0,1543	9,33	0,536	↘
1,598	0,1442	9,00	0,502	↘

Source: The authors

It can be observed that the trends clearly have the same direction, and the maximum efficiency level is also similar with minimal deviations. The estimated maximum efficiency for the capital level of 1,832 stores using parametric statistical tests is 3.8% higher than the same estimate made using the DEA method. It can also be seen that in addition to the maximum effectiveness estimates, with this level of capital, the highest percentage of profitability was achieved.

Table 3: Comparative overview of effectiveness assessment by statistical and DEA method

Capital	Eff estimated by statistical method	Eff estimated DEA method	Difference	% difference
3,636	0,883	0,502	+ 0,381	56,85
1,832	**0,981**	**0,943**	**+ 0,038**	**3,8**
1,743	0,709	0,472	+ 0,237	66,57
1,654	0,941	0,536	+ 0,405	56,96
1,598	0,842	0,502	+ 0,34	59,62

Source: The authors

Table 3 shows a large difference in the assessment of store efficiency for other levels of capital and profit determined by these two methods. This difference is smaller in all observed cases when it was performed using the DEA method (E(ff.DEA)<E(ff.PST)). The differences are huge.

The causes of the mentioned differences can be primarily attributed to the stricter criterion for the calculation of efficiency in DEA methods, the application of an insufficient number of parameters, as well as the size of the observation sample.

The null hypothesis put forward when approaching this analysis is partially rejected because the results of the relative efficiency of the store estimated by the mentioned methods are too different to reach a valid conclusion. The second part of the hypothesis is accepted because the trends in both methods match.

7. CONCLUSION

In the absence of a sufficient amount of information for quality business decision-making, i.e. suc-

cessful performance of activities without unnecessary losses in the consumption of inputs, recently the non-parametric DEA method (English Data Envelopment Analysis) is most often used, which is carried out through the linear programming technique.

In the event that the managers of the companies have enough information to make business decisions, parametric statistical tests are used, which compare the current performance of the company with the optimal performance, i.e. those that are at the efficiency limit.

Statistical tests make it possible to measure and detect those input parameters that will most effectively contribute to the efficiency of business systems.

Stochastic processes that occur during the implementation of business decisions using the DEA technique can be minimized through the simultaneous application of statistical parametric methods and tests to assess the expected effectiveness of DEA. The effectiveness of this method in any case depends on the size of the sample that is implemented in the aforementioned statistical analysis. The larger this sample, the more reliable the result of statistical parametric tests.

In any case, the simultaneous use of non-parametric and parametric statistical tests is the most effective tool for making quality business decisions. Parametric statistical tests, which evaluate the set hypotheses in the DEA analysis, greatly contribute to the reliability of management functions.

The aim of the simultaneous application of non-parametric and parametric methods contributes to a large extent to quality management of business processes, efficiency and profitability of business systems.

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THE WAR IN UKRAINE IS DISRUPTING THE GEOPOLITICAL ORDER BETWEEN RUSSIA AND NATO

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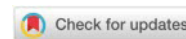
Abstract: About twenty years ago, Robert Kagan, Victoria Nuland's husband, published the book "Europeans act like they're from Venus, while Americans act like they're from Mars." The personification is more than clear. Venus is the symbol of love and peace, Mars is the god of war. The European dimension of NATO had a historical handicap, due to the "doctrine of agreement" according to which the Europeans "did not need to worry about interventions within the borders of the Alliance because the Americans have always been there". They designed and financed the defense of Europe. Europe successfully sheltered behind the shadow of Uncle Sam". Gradually geopolitics evolved especially after the NATO air campaign against FR Yugoslavia in 1999. Two decades later with the war in Ukraine, the world returned to the student war with serious threats of nuclear conflict. And Putin's Russia showed that it is from Mars. This encouraged NATO and EU allies to strengthen their ranks. The war in Ukraine cured NATO of apoplexy as diagnosed by Macron. The alliance also became attractive to its most indifferent allies Sweden and Finland. On the map of Europe, a big turn happened due to the NATO membership of the two neutral Scandinavian countries, Finland and Sweden. From a geopolitical point of view, Russia opposed the membership of Finland and Sweden in the Alliance, because the border with NATO was extended by two hundred kilometers. It can also be considered the biggest upheaval in Europe since 1989. On the other hand, Russia, with its invasion of Ukraine, violated the provisions of both international law and political declarations that protected the immutability of borders. "The whole project of the EU, European association and cooperation relies on such norms. The war happened and changed the perspectives of all countries, both those that are in NATO and those that have not been. The entire Western world stood on the side of the victims, on the side of the defense of the order that had maintained the stability of Europe since 1945." The war in Ukraine has disrupted the world geopolitical order. Globalization has been put in danger by the establishment of the largest sanctions against Russia. The alliance has consolidated and is looking for new allies and partners. On the other hand, Russia is also reorienting itself towards new allies, primarily China, N. Korea, Iran, the BRICS countries

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, Putin, NATO, Globalization, Deglobalization
Field: Social Sciences and Humanities

1. INTRODUCTION

Russian aggression against Ukraine marks the end of the post-Cold War era and the dream of lasting peace on the Old Continent. After the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, we are witnessing that the bloc division has once again returned to Europe. However, unlike the former East-West ideological divide, the dividing line has moved about 2,000 kilometers east of the one diagnosed by Winston Churchill on March 5, 1946, during a famous speech at the University of Fulton, Missouri. Then Churchill pointed out "From Stettin, on the Baltic, to Trieste, on the Adriatic, an iron curtain descended over Europe", pointed out the "Old Lion" who left power eight months earlier, states Mark Semo (Semo, 2022, p.7). Churchill warned of the new danger that threatened a Europe that had just triumphed over Nazism. It was the beginning of the East-West confrontation, which was at once military, political and ideological, structuring all international relations during the next forty years. The ideological war lasted until 1991 and ended with the victory of the Western bloc after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The situation created by the open conflict between the West and a Russia largely supported by China, even if the two countries are not bound by a formal military alliance, is in many ways reminiscent of the East-West confrontation of the second half of the 20th century. Just like a few decades ago, the conflict concerns the opposition between authoritarian regimes and democracies.(Black, 2023) It is in this sense that the competitive international entity "composed of state units that maintain regular relations with each other and all of which are likely to be involved in a general war" is elaborated by Raymond Aaron through the definition of the international system in his capital work "War and Peace Between Nations - of international relations ("Paix et la guerre entre les nations- des relations internationales") whose work is best explained by the renowned analyst Duroselle (Aron, 1962, 963). It is evident that the world is facing a new "cold war" otherwise the expression, which is something of an oxymoron, first appeared from the pen of George Orwell, in a very thoughtful article in the left-wing British weekly "Tribune" of October 19, 1945. In this article the author predicts that

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after the Americans, the Soviets will in turn create the A-bomb and a balance of terror will be created in a "permanent state of cold war" (Mitchel, 2023). Fear of mutual annihilation guaranteed the status quo in Europe, but wars in Asia and Africa left millions dead in Third World countries. In the case of Ukraine, for the first time since 1945, the epicenter is in Europe. "With the return of high-intensity war, the European continent is losing one of its comparative advantages in globalization, which is Europe's strategic stability as a region at peace," notes Thomas Gomart, director of the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI). He emphasizes that "in terms of global issues, this war seems anachronistic for those who rhyme globalization and demilitarization since 1991, i.e. fundamentally the Europeans, but it is not so for those who see the world through the balance of military power, i.e. the Russians, the Chinese and the Americans. This return to the colonial war of conquest in the shadow of nuclear power represents a major change in the geopolitical game.

2. IS THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER CREATED BY THE USA IN DANGER?

Today's international context is extremely fluid. The liberal order established and led by the United States is in danger of disruption without an alternative system emerging. At least that's what Chinese, Russian and other leading intellectuals of BRICS tinks (Shigong, 2019/2023). Even if Western-dominated globalization is under attack from all sides, it remains the main economic paradigm. We are witnessing the gradual "de-universalization" of Western norms and values, but these have not been replaced by a "Chinese model" or some other normative set. Multipolarity (or "polycentrism") is often invoked, but there is no consensus on the implications of this concept. One thing is certain, and that is that since the end of World War II, the "system" of the international order has never been so divided and disorganized. Unlike China, which thrived within the liberal world order, Russia generally saw itself as a victim of this system, feeling cruelly exploited by the West. Not surprisingly, the Putin regime has been pleased with the various turmoils the US and Europe have experienced over the past decade. While the West was punished for its supposed arrogance, Moscow became aware of the concrete benefits of weakening the West. Despite the erosion and shortcomings of the American order, Russia realized that the United States still remains the most powerful world power, both economically and geopolitically, technologically, militarily-strategically and scientifically-innovatively. Moscow's ideal was in such a context to establish a "concert of great powers" of the 21st century, where the United States, China, Russia and a few other big players would rule the whole world. According to the interpretations of S. Karaganov, "Victory of Russia, represents a new "concert of nations", and Russia engages in global issues, in order to realize its vision in the joint management of international affairs. However, the implementation of such a vision at a time when strength and power have become much more diffuse, where international standards of liberal democracy have experienced occasional crises and the rise of China, India, and Brazil rests on global ambitions, revives Russia's ambition to create the most favorable geopolitical climate that will create more favorable positions for her. In recent years, we have witnessed a rise in strategic tensions between the great powers: USA/China, China/Japan, India/Pakistan, Iran/Saudi Arabia, Iran/Israel, Azerbaijan/Armenia based on geopolitical and nationalist animosity, radical alter-globalism to terrorist Islamism, xenophobic nationalism. At the same time, new forms of confrontation were asserting themselves, such as cyber-attacks and hybrid warfare. It is evident that no one respects security agreements, especially in the field of strategic arms control. "Hot spots" have multiplied and the situation in the world is more and more difficult: the Korean Peninsula, the Middle East, the South China Sea, Ukraine, etc. Therefore, the possibility of a military conflict between two great powers (or more) no longer seems as unthinkable as once thought a few years ago. The realist tradition invoked by the Kremlin is based on the idea of a classical international system inspired by the Westphalian concept of co-governance of the world by the great powers. However, the world of the 21st century transcends multiple national borders and challenges the influence of great powers. The globalization of trade, the abundance and ubiquity of information, the rapid development of high technologies, the acceleration of climate change, uncontrolled migration, the increasing pressure due to the lack of food, water and other resources, the "de-universalization" of norms and values, have made the world increasingly difficult for management. (Tisou, 2023, p.3)

3. UKRAINE AS A GEOPOLITICAL AND GEOECONOMIC STAKE

What is a current issue from a geopolitical point of view today are those 2,500 kilometers of the eastern Ukrainian front as the future lines of separation between the European Union and Russia. Russia dreams of establishing the borders, as before 1989, that is, the "thick border", according to Sabine's expression. Dullin, author, in particular, of the book of the same name (Depretto, 2014, 360) "Russian

leaders, from czars to Vladimir Putin, have consistently wanted to expand their borders westward, for fear of coming into direct contact with what they see as an adversary." This role was played by popular democracies in Central and Eastern Europe between 1944 and 1989. Today, this is one of the main reasons why the Kremlin wants to regain control over Ukraine, or at least take over part of its territory that stretches from the east and southeast of this country. Observed from a historical perspective, Ukraine has always played a key economic, political and military role for Russia in its struggle with "Western empires" both during the Tsarist Empire and during the "Cold War". The events in Ukraine go beyond the borders of this country and affect its neighbors, especially the most powerful: Russia and the EU, but also the United States. Historically, Ukraine has played a key economic, political and military role for Russia in its struggle with "Western empires" to divide spheres of influence. And that as in the time of the imperial empire, as well as during the "Cold War" and the period after the Cold War. Indeed, from an economic point of view, Ukraine has great potential for agri-food and mining production. Ukraine has two very important ports on the Black Sea: Odessa and Sevastopol. In addition, through Ukrainian territory, most of the Russian gas passed through European countries. From a military point of view, Ukraine was just as fundamental to Russian defense and security. The Russian capital is located only 480 kilometers from the Ukrainian border, which, according to the Kremlin, makes it very vulnerable to possible attacks from NATO, although neither the United States nor any other NATO member has declared that it would attack Russia. This argument is just an excuse for Moscow to keep Ukraine under its influence, as a kind of "buffer zone" with the Western countries. (Morin, 2022, p.24)

4. CULTURE AND RELIGION AS STAKES

The unity of Ukrainian historical regions is debatable, uneven and obvious. Especially since their geographical location has made it for five centuries a stake between two messianisms inspired by two Christian churches, those of Warsaw and Moscow, to say nothing of the occasional influences of Berlin, Vienna and Bucharest. Therefore, in 1991, the new state of Ukraine was in search of elements of a common identity, but from that moment, the old divisions reappeared. It is evident that there is a lack of unity factors. On the religious level, in the 1990s the country was the theater of a "war of the churches" between believers of three denominations of the same Orthodox Church, for control of places of worship. Since the Christianization in 988, the Russian Orthodox metropolitan resided in Kiev, but for security reasons, in 13 the metropolitan was moved to the north-eastern part of Russia, in the region of Vladimir. In 1326, the Russian sovereign offered property near Moscow and thus it became the center of the Orthodox Church "of all Russians". Historically, the Patriarch of Moscow is the legitimate successor of the Metropolitan of Kyiv. During the episode of 1918-1919, the Ukrainian nationalist government created the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church, recognized by Constantinople. With the victory of the Bolsheviks, this church emigrated to Canada. In 1991, the new Ukrainian government constituted the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, which Constantinople did not recognize. In the same period, the exiled Church from Canada returned to Ukraine. Thus, Orthodoxy in Ukriana was divided according to three beliefs, namely the Orthodoxy of the Moscow Patriarchate and two autocephalous churches.

In 2007, 11,233 Ukrainian parishes depended on the Moscow Patriarchate, 3,963 on the Kyiv Patriarchate, 1,178 on the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church since 1918. Parallel to these church institutions, there is also a Uniate Church, or Greek Catholic, which recognizes the supremacy of the Roman Pope. It was created by the Poles in the 17th century to "gather heretics to the Holy Cross", and is active only in western Ukraine (Natalka, Rousselet, 2004/5, p.39-50). Some of the analysts believe that one of the most significant stakes of the war in Ukraine are exactly the religious issues and the politicization and animosity between the church communities (Lutaud-Le Figaro, 2022).

5. THE MEANING OF LANGUAGE CONFLICT

In terms of language, according to the 2001 Census, 77.8% declared themselves as members of the Ukrainian nation, while 17.3% declared themselves as the Russian nation and 4.9% others. Regarding the use of the mother tongue, 68.5% of the Ukrainian population considers the Ukrainian language to be their mother tongue, while 29.6% declared that their mother tongue is Russian. The population declares its mother tongue, as a result of the long life symbiosis between Russia and Ukraine. 29.6%. A significant number of people who declare themselves to be Ukrainians consider Russian as their mother tongue (according to the population census, from 2001). The Ukrainian language was more widespread in the villages, with various dialectal forms. In 2001, almost the entire population understood Russian and switched from one language to another depending on the interlocutor, but the majority actually spoke

"surjik", a kind of mixture of Ukrainian and Russian. All toponyms were in Russian, including the capital city of Kiev, which is now called Kyiv. https://www.lemonde. fr/international/ article/2021/02/16/en-ukraine-la-bataille-des-langues_6070135_3210.html The situation is similar with publications. Books written in Russian cover 90% of the market, and publications in Ukrainian have only a limited market. Before 2014, the Russian press was present everywhere. Three areas in the center and in the south represent a situation of relative balance between Russian and Ukrainian language vocations. In three lower Dnieper districts, the majority speak Russian, while in three upper Dnieper districts, between 9.5 and 10.3% speak Russian and the majority speak Ukrainian (89-90%). Sumy region, 16% speak Russian against 84% who speak Ukrainian. Three central districts practice Russian 6-7% and Ukrainian 92-93%. In the nine western districts, the share of Ukrainian speakers exceeds 93%, that of the Russian language is marginal (3 to 5%). In Transcarpathia, 12.7% of the population is declared to be of Hungarian nationality, while in Chernivtsi, 17.5% is declared to be of Romanian or Moldovan nationality. After rusian invasion at a video conference of NATO members, February 25, 2022. NATO thus followed the path of Sir Halford Mackinder's archaic geopolitics. Mackinder in his work Democratic Ideas and Reality, written as a manual for the British participants in the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919, formulated the principles of the necessity of separating the Germans and the Slavs in Europe. The geopolitical goal was for the British Empire to remain intact and spared from endangering the potentially powerful economic-demographic union. Toward that image, he gave Central Europe a meaning it neither has nor can have. "He who rules central Europe rules the world," Mackinder states. "The world" - yes, but only as long as Europe is "the world". The same principle was applied at the end of World War II. By dividing Germany, the Soviet Union was prevented from being its master, again with the same idea: a unified Germany under the Soviets meant that the Soviets ruled the world.

6. WHAT IS NATO TO THE EUROPEAN UNION?

The end of the Cold War marked the definitive end of the Versailles system, which was built at the expense of three countries: Germany, Russia and China. Therefore efforts were made to find the only remaining way to emerge their truncated remains and that was the "open door policy of NATO" through the expansion of the Alliance. It was NATO that was supposed to prevent German-Slavic unification, as prescribed by Mackinder. Hence, Central Europe was perceived as a "sanitary cordon" and a rampart through which Russia must not pass to the West under any circumstances. Some aspects of Russia's positions towards the US and NATO became more transparent at the NATO Security Conference in Munich. In the presence of, among others, the Secretary of Defense of the United States, Robert Gates, Russian President Vladimir Putin gave a strong speech on the foreign relations of The Security Conference in Munich, Germany (2007). He used the occasion to denounce the interventionism of the United States outside its territory, to denounce the fact that it is at the heart of a "unipolar" world and to express his concern about what he sees as the expansionism of the Alliance. The tone was so heavy-handed that some observers see the speech as threatening a return to the Cold War between the United States and Russia. In 2008 at the Bucharest Summit, the George W. Bush administration failed in its attempt to convince the rest of the European allies to accept Ukraine's membership in NATO in order to gain candidate status with the Membership Action Plan. After the invasion of Crimea (2014), relations between NATO and Russia cooled. The alliance's and Ukraine's ambitions to institutionalize relations have met with fierce resistance in Russia's political elites. In 2014, Russia occupied the strategic peninsula of Crimea, considering that President Khrushchev made a big mistake when he decided to hand it over to Ukraine in 1955. Putin heard the worrying news, which strengthened his intention to do what he announced, at the last Munich Security Conference. Putin believed that: - Since 2014, Russia has been an enemy of the West; - the expansion of NATO in the future is directed against Russia; - Russian demands for security guarantees will not be accepted (although German Chancellor Scholz was ready to negotiate); - in the event of a war in Ukraine, Russia will be cut off from economic ties with the West, which should destroy the Russian economy; - The West will seriously limit the purchase of gas from Russia; - Ukraine will be immediately admitted to the European Union; - The European Union will expand to the countries of the Western Balkans (but not as urgently as Ukraine and without any time perspective); - NATO will not weaken, but will strengthen the military presence on the borders with Russia; - the world order should continue to be built on universal liberal values; - The West should use the current crisis to close its ranks. From here, even before the Russian intervention in Ukraine began, it follows that there was no way to resolve the Russia-NATO conflict. It is unlikely that any event will change Putin's mood and decision to commit to the language of force as "the only one that the West takes seriously and understands," as Medvedev reiterated.

7. UKRAINE IN NATO

Putin asked for nothing but what Zbigniew Brzezinski proposed in 2015. "Russia must be given assurances that a free, democratic Ukraine will not aspire to NATO membership," Brzezinski said in Poland. Already in 2014, he proposed a "constructive compromise" according to which Ukraine will become a country whose internal and foreign policy resembles Finland, Sweden or Austria. During 2021, Putin was completely burdened with Ukraine. After Ukraine adopted a new security doctrine in March 2021 in which it was clear that Russia was its main enemy, it became clear that there was no word on the fulfillment of the "Minsk 2" agreement. In July 2021, Putin published an extensive article about the unity of Russians and Ukrainians, from which it was clear that Russia would never allow Ukraine to become a member of NATO from where they could launch missiles that could reach Moscow in four minutes. Kiev's political elite read Putin's message as a signal that the Kremlin was on its way to scrapping the 1994 Budapest accord that guaranteed Ukraine's territorial integrity in exchange for giving up its nuclear weapons. The first step in the direction of the new policy was announced by Putin on November 18, 2021 at the session of the expanded collegium of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "NATO destroyed all dialogue mechanisms on its own initiative. Of course, we will respond to the military activity of NATO members along all Russian borders," Putin said at the time. Constructive destruction Putin's decision to take military action against Ukraine has come at a high price. No one, not even the author of this text, justifies the invasion of Russia, which caused over 500,000 casualties of civilians and soldiers on both sides. According to international law, Russia has violated the principles of the UN Charter. For now, it seems that Russia is willing to pay that price, and even higher than what is now being demanded. It is undeniable that after the war in Ukraine, if it ends according to Moscow's plans, almost all relations between Russia and the West will be impossible. Not even Stalin had such a radical break in relations with the West. Stalin had no relations with the West, but he loved them. Future Russia will not have them and will not want them. This is announced by the strategic affairs of Russian experts closely connected with the Kremlin. They state that in 2021 Russia started a new phase in its foreign policy. They call that phase the "constructive destruction" of the previous model of relations with the West. Elements of this line have been accumulating for a decade and a half - tentatively since Vladimir Putin's famous speech in Munich in 2007. But the prevailing trends in policy and rhetoric were residual attempts at integration into the Western system against a backdrop of defensive sentiment. At the end of 2021, with Russia's ultimatum to the US and NATO to stop building military infrastructure near Russia's borders, the bloc's eastward expansion marked the beginning of that "constructive destruction." The task is not only to stop the diminishing and, nevertheless, extremely dangerous inertia of the Western geostrategic offensive, but also to seriously approach laying the foundations for changing the relations that developed between Russia and the conditional West in the 1990s. "Fortress Russia" should come out of this process. The alliance between China and Russia aims at the destruction of globalism and the US dollar, the expulsion of America from Europe, the strengthening of multilateralism against US unilateralism. Although they have little faith in these ambitions, the BRICS states and those from Africa and Asia who have similar desires to remove Western dominance and superiority should not be underestimated: For Russia, which managed to realize economic progress despite the sanctions, the most natural and promising direction is development and the strengthening of relations with China. It will greatly improve the capabilities of both countries. If the West continues to be bitterly hostile, Russia will enter into the first provisional defense alliance with China, delayed by five years. This Russia deviates from every historical pattern by deciding that it "must help Peking in every possible way, to prevent it from being even temporarily defeated in the war launched against it, because that defeat will weaken Russia as well." It is clear that Eastern policy should not be directed at China. In world politics, economics and culture, the East and the South are rising, including "thanks to our undermining the military superiority of the West, on which its hegemony has been based for the last five centuries". When it comes to building a new European security system to replace the dangerously outdated old one, it must be built within a large Eurasian project.

8. CONCLUSION: THE LOGIC OF THE WINNERS OF THE COLD WAR

The current crisis is connected with the continued refusal of Western capitals to integrate Russia into a single system of collective security in Europe. At the end of the Cold War, it seemed that the time had come to realize the concept of the "Great West" that would unite the transatlantic alliance of America and Europe, better known as the "Western Hemisphere" and the giant Eurasian continental plate. , "Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok" Russia was supposed to be that "new West" that would become an almost universal covering of the globe. Instead, something completely different happened. No one

particularly hides the motives for such stubbornness in the West. The West does not allow anyone to doubt the "victory in the Cold War" Henry Kissinger's chief adviser at his company "Kissinger Associates" Thomas Graham wrote that the whole thing is that Moscow "does not recognize its defeat in the Cold War", because of which "victory " in the West cannot be complete.(T.Graham,1992) "Russia wants to be considered a world power instead of admitting defeat," writes the American newspaper. The Berlin Wall, November 11, 1989. The father of "perestroika" Alexander Yakovlev claimed that Gorbachev's coming to power marked the end of the Cold War, because he decided to end it, and dissolved the Warsaw Pact. (A.Yakovlev, 2020)   Following the triumphalist logic of the self-proclaimed "world of the victor", the United States, one might say, followed the then safe path of military logic: you withdraw - we occupy. In other words, the Soviet army withdrew and the American army arrived in its place. Thus, a regional security system centered on NATO was born. He divided European countries into those covered by the collective defense guarantees of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty and those forced to fend for themselves and survive as best they could. This is especially true for Russia. Hence the current crisis. The preservation of the old institutions that embodied the policy of containment inevitably led to the preservation of the same policy in new conditions. This policy was also opposed by her official father, George Kennan, who, as soon as the discussion on NATO expansion began, warned that it would be a "fatal mistake".

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ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CONTENT MARKETING IN B2B SECTOR IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Abstract: Content marketing has garnered significant attention with the evolution of digital marketing. Widely prevalent, it is now most prominent on digital channels such as social media, blogs, podcasts, e-books, webinars, case studies, and various other forms. Both B2C (Business-to-Consumer) and B2B (Business-to-Business) markets are expanding, with competition intensifying for market share, striving for continuous dominance. With the development of digital channels, the significance of content marketing is increasingly recognized. The aim of this study is to highlight the importance of content marketing in B2B marketing and provide guidelines on the most effective content in marketing, shedding light on whether specific types of content are particularly significant for certain industries. Empirical research has been conducted, offering insights into the significance of content marketing in the Republic of Serbia within the B2B realm through data collection via surveys and their analysis using independence tests in the SPSS software package. The research results indicate that content marketing is not adequately utilized in the Republic of Serbia's B2B market, leaving room for improvement.
Keywords: content marketing, B2B, B2B marketing, content personalization
Field: Marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

In the present era, where accessing all information is possible with just a few clicks, consumers have become more discerning, as alternatives abound for every choice. However, in all markets, the number of competitors is steadily increasing, each striving to establish its dominance. In such markets, characterized by a multitude of substitutes, companies aim to distinguish themselves by creating unique value for customers, building a brand, and enhancing corporate reputation (Yaghtin et al., 2020). In this context, content marketing plays a significant role and is gaining increasing importance. Through interactive content and valuable information, companies connect with customers and foster interaction (Figueroa, 2020).

The purpose of content marketing is to build relationships with consumers based on relevant, creative, and innovative content, providing them with high-quality material to gain their trust. Various forms of content marketing exist, including blogs, videos, infographics, e-books, podcasts, webinars, and many others (Figueroa, 2020; Filipović, 2021). Depending on the target audience, different types of content marketing carry varying degrees of significance. The ultimate goal of content marketing is to establish long-term relationships with consumers by directing the distribution and promotion of products and services towards building consumer loyalty, a common objective for all companies. In addition to sales-focused initiatives, content marketing creates value for consumers by fostering long-term relationships through entertainment, problem-solving, or specific education efforts.

For B2C companies, all marketing activities directly impact consumers, with the goal of placing products and/or services in markets for individual consumers. Marketing strategies are directed towards mass communication channels to reach as many people as possible and achieve the most effective outcome after a campaign.

In contrast to B2C, B2B marketing aims to direct marketing activities towards other companies to stimulate the sale of products and/or services that other companies will use. Purchase decisions in the B2B segment are almost rational and based on numerous long-term goals, economic benefits, and efficiency (Hebben, 2021; Simon, 2020).

In B2B markets, a thorough understanding of the needs and problems of customers is necessary to tailor content to the specific needs of a given company. This approach also achieves a long-term effect on customers and encourages loyalty. In the B2B world, decisions to purchase new products and/or services are much more complex and lengthy because the decision involves various sectors of the company, where content marketing can help create value for each sector individually.

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Content marketing in the B2B world aims to provide specific value to the target audience through useful and relevant content, which is a crucial factor in achieving a competitive advantage in the market.

The content marketing created by companies and brands is not the same for everyone. It is extremely important to create content that will help B2B buyers solve business-related problems and that is tailored to their business and issues, i.e., personalized (Kosuniak, 2021; Pandey et al., 2020). Researching content marketing, researchers have found that creative content is highly valued by B2B customers, and email as a channel for disseminating creative content in the B2B world is particularly significant (Nguyen & Tran, 2022; Mgbame & Iyadi, 2022; Kyung, 2021).

In line with the presented research, the hypotheses to be tested in this study are as follows:

H1: Companies with longer operational histories attribute greater significance to content when making purchasing decisions.

H2: The industry in which B2B buyers operate influences the type of content that is relevant to them.

H3: Content personalization is crucial for customers in the B2B sector.

H4: Content delivered through email holds significant importance for B2B buyers in the Republic of Serbia.

H5: Creative content is particularly valued by B2B buyers.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

As previously mentioned, the objective of this study is to assess the effectiveness of content marketing in the B2B sector and identify the most effective forms of content for B2B buyers. To achieve this, a survey was designed and administered to B2B buyers. The online survey was conducted within the territory of the Republic of Serbia across various industries. The survey period spanned from July 20, 2023, to August 20, 2023.

The survey consisted of three personal questions (name and company name of the respondents, email, and contact phone number) and 13 questions whose answers would serve as evidence for testing the hypotheses.

A total of 51 relevant responses were obtained through data processing. Respondents were contacted after completing the survey to verify the authenticity of the provided data. Given the significance of content marketing and its usage in Serbia's B2B markets, a challenge in conducting this research was finding professionals who had encountered content marketing and whose responses were suitable for further investigation.

For the technical processing of the collected data, the statistical program IBM SPSS was utilized. In addition to descriptive statistics to characterize the sample and graphical analyses, the chi-square test of independence was employed. The chi-square test, suitable for qualitative data or when the distribution significantly deviates from normal, was used to determine whether there is a relationship between two variables. Based on a review of available literature, the application of this test was found to be justified for the specific research at hand.

3. RESULTS

After the data were collected and entered into the SPSS software package, it was determined that the obtained responses could be categorized into eight different industries. The largest number of respondents operate in the IT sector (18 respondents, or 35% of the total sample), while the smallest number of respondents come from the automotive industry, wood industry, marketing agencies, and edible oil production (3 respondents each, or 6% of the total sample).

In order to conduct appropriate tests, it was necessary to establish the length of respondents' business operations in a specific industry. The majority of respondents have been operating for more than 10 years in their respective industries (24 respondents, 47% of the total sample), while the smallest number of respondents have been in business for 3 to 6 years.

Table 1. Chi-square test for the variables length of operation and content effectiveness

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	49,853a	9	,000
Likelihood Ratio	33,969	9	,000
N of Valid Cases	51		

Source: Authors

By applying the Chi-square test of independence for the variables length of operation in a given industry and the opinion on the effectiveness of attracting clients or customers through content marketing, a Pearson statistic value of 49.853 was obtained, with an extended level of significance of 0.000. Considering that this value is significantly below the significance level of 0.05, it is evident that this statistic is significant. Figure 1 illustrates the Chi-square test for the variables Industry of Operation and the type of content influencing purchasing.

Figure 1. Industry of Operation and the type of content influencing purchasing
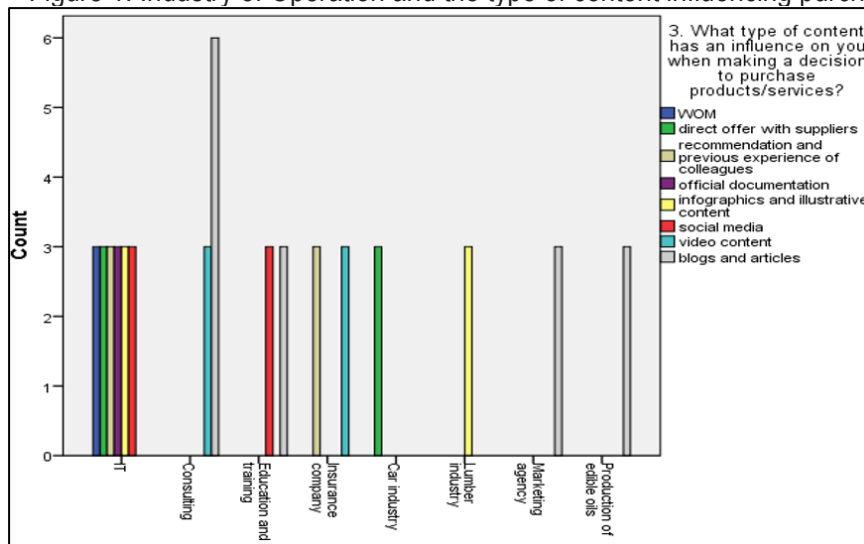
Source: Authors

Based on Figure 1, it can be observed that in the IT industry, various types of content can be used in the form of content marketing, while for other industries, the following insights are apparent:
• In the automotive industry, direct offers from suppliers have the most significant impact.
• In the wood industry, infographics and illustrative content have the greatest influence.
• In marketing agencies and edible oil production, blogs and articles have the most significant impact.
This indicates that the type of industry has a substantial impact on choosing the content to approach and meet the demands of B2B buyers.

Table 2. Chi-square test for the variables Industry of Operation and Assessment of Content Personalization Effectiveness

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	55,250a	21	,000
Likelihood Ratio	52,710	21	,000
N of Valid Cases	51		

Source: Authors

By applying the Chi-square test of independence for the variables Industry of Operation and the Assessment of Content Personalization Effectiveness, a Pearson statistic value of 55.250 was obtained,

with an extended level of significance of 0.000. Considering that this value is significantly below the significance level of 0.05, it is evident that this statistic is significant.

Table 3. Chi-square test for the variables Industry of Operation and Possibility of Improving the Quality of B2B Content Marketing

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23,476a	7	,001
Likelihood Ratio	24,617	7	,001
N of Valid Cases	51		

Source: Authors

By applying the Chi-square test of independence for the variables Industry of Operation and the Possibility of Improving the Quality of B2B Content Marketing, a Pearson statistic value of 23.476 was obtained, with an extended level of significance of 0.001. Considering that this value is significantly below the significance level of 0.05, it is evident that this statistic is significant.

Table 4. Chi-square test for the variables Industry of Operation and Type of Content for Obtaining Information

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	83,725a	21	,000
Likelihood Ratio	71,210	21	,000
N of Valid Cases	51		

Source: Authors

By applying the Chi-square test of independence for the variables Industry of Operation and Type of Content for Obtaining Information, a Pearson statistic value of 83.725 was obtained, with an extended level of significance of 0.00. Considering that this value is significantly below the significance level of 0.05, it is evident that this statistic is significant.

Table 5. Chi-square test for the variables Length of Operation and Possibility of Improving Content Marketing in B2B Marketing

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12,295a	3	,006
Likelihood Ratio	12,811	3	,005
N of Valid Cases	51		

Source: Authors

By applying the Chi-square test of independence for the variables length of operation and possibility of improving content marketing in B2B marketing, a Pearson statistic value of 12.295 was obtained, with an extended level of significance of 0.006. Considering that this value is significantly below the significance level of 0.05, it is evident that this statistic is significant.

Table 6. Presentation of Respondents' Answers

Question	Distribution of survey responses
Do you find the content created for you effective in capturing your attention?	Three respondents consider the content to be extremely effective and three find it insufficiently effective. The majority of responses, a significant 58.8%, or 30 respondents, perceive the content as partially effective, while 29.4% of respondents, totaling 15 individuals, believe that the presented content is effective. It is evident that there is room for improvement in the content to more effectively capture the attention of B2B customers.
Do you believe that high-quality B2B content can enhance the relationship between you as a buyer and your suppliers?	In the conducted research, a significant 82.4%, or 42 respondents, believe that it is possible to enhance the relationship between buyers and suppliers in the B2B world through the use of content. 17.6%, or 9 respondents, think that there is a possibility, but to a limited extent.
Is there sufficient emphasis on content marketing by B2B companies in the Republic of Serbia?	In the conducted research, a notable 88.2%, or 45 respondents, believe that companies in the Republic of Serbia do not give sufficient importance to content marketing. Only 11.8%, or 6 respondents, believe that enough importance is given.
How do you evaluate the creativity of B2B content marketing from domestic companies you have encountered?	The majority of respondents, 58.8% or 30 individuals, believe that B2B content marketing is "somewhat creative," while 41.2%, or 21 respondents, find it creative. In the survey, the options "very creative" and "not creative" were provided, with no responses falling into those categories.
Has B2B content ever helped you solve a business problem?	"Partially helped" is the most common response among surveyed B2B buyers, with 27 respondents. 21 respondents believe that the content has "significantly helped," while 3 respondents think it has not helped.
How do you rate the personalization of B2B content you have encountered so far?	The majority of responses indicate that the B2B content is "partially personalized," with 39 responses. Six respondents each believe that the content is "very personalized" and "not personalized at all."

Source: Authors

Table 6 displays the questions that were posed to B2B buyers through the survey and the distribution of their responses.

4. DISCUSSION

The research conducted indicates that content marketing in the Republic of Serbia, specifically in B2B markets, is not being utilized adequately. There is potential for improvement in all areas, starting with additional user personalization and the use of multiple forms of content marketing within a single strategy. The study identifies several issues observed in the use of content marketing in B2B markets in the Republic of Serbia. Some markets lack high competition, leading companies to not pay sufficient attention to marketing content. Another observed problem is the low level of personalization.

The choice of content marketing format largely depends on the market in which a company operates. The conducted research draws the following conclusions:
- Companies in the IT market predominantly use case studies, infographics, and illustrations.
- Consulting firms commonly use case studies and webinars.
- Companies in the education sector most frequently utilize e-books, webinars, and case studies.
- Insurance companies often use webinars and infographics.
- Companies in the automotive industry typically rely on video materials and webinars.
- Companies in the wood industry sector most commonly use case studies and e-books.
- Marketing agencies often utilize webinars, e-books, and infographics, while companies in the edible oil production sector typically rely on webinars and case studies.

Based on the conducted research, 58.8% of respondents (30) consider the content presented to them partially effective, indicating room for improvement in terms of information relevance and author expertise. Additionally, 82.4% of respondents (42) have subscribed to content at some point during their business operations, suggesting that companies with authority among their audience should consider creating subscription-based content.

Furthermore, 94.1% of respondents (48) believe that B2B content marketing has significantly or partially helped them solve business problems, highlighting its potential. Data shows that 76.5% of respondents (42) perceive B2B content marketing as partially personalized, indicating room for further personalization.

Over 82% of respondents (42) believe that B2B content marketing directly influences the relationship between buyers and suppliers, emphasizing the need to invest in content marketing in Serbia.

Based on the empirical research, several recommendations for improving B2B content marketing in the Republic of Serbia can be made, including: 1. Personalize content marketing for each company

individually to approach potential customers and build long-term relationships; 2. Base personalized content marketing on the industry and goals of a specific company; 3. Enhance the quality and expertise of all types of content marketing.

Conclusions drawn from the empirical research regarding defined hypotheses include: H1: "Companies with longer business operations give more importance to content when making purchasing decisions." The hypothesis is partially accepted, suggesting that it holds true for certain B2B industries.

H2: "The industry in which B2B buyers operate influences the type of content that is relevant to them." The hypothesis is fully accepted, indicating that different industries find different types of content significant.

Hypothesis H3: "Content personalization is important for B2B buyers" - based on the conducted research, the hypothesis is fully accepted. More personalized content is highly valued by buyers, regardless of the industry to which the B2B buyer belongs. This aligns with the findings of Kosuniak (2021) and Pandey et al. (2020).

Hypothesis H4: "Content delivered via email is significant for B2B buyers in Serbia" - based on the conducted research, the hypothesis is rejected. It has been demonstrated that content delivered through other digital channels in Serbia is more significant. These results contradict the findings of Nguyen & Tran (2022), Mgbame & Iyadi (2022), and Kyung (2021). However, by confirming Hypothesis H5, which states, "Creative content is offered to B2B buyers in Serbia," their results are validated. In the conducted research, B2B buyers indicated that the content presented to them is not sufficiently creative. Therefore, there is a need to increase the level of content creativity in the future.

5. CONCLUSION

Content marketing has become exceptionally significant with the development of digital marketing. To establish a connection with customers for a brand, whether in the B2C or B2B market, it is necessary to deliver creative and valuable content through digital channels. However, it is crucial to choose channels that are suitable for content distribution, i.e., channels through which one can reach customers or users.

Research conducted has shown that companies in the Republic of Serbia must put in significant effort to enhance the quality of the content they deliver to their B2B customers. These conclusions were drawn based on a survey where respondents were B2B market customers. In addition to content quality, it is necessary to improve the level of content personalization, as this is a segment highly appreciated by B2B customers, as demonstrated by previous research and the survey conducted.

Regardless of the channel through which it is delivered, the content must be useful, high-quality, and personalized. The channels used for content distribution vary from industry to industry, and companies must take this into account when defining their strategies.

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LEADERSHIP APPROACHES IN MANAGING AI-DRIVEN PROCESS AUTOMATION FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES

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Abstract: The analysis conducted in this paper aims to enhance the understanding of leadership roles in managing human resource automation changes in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). A prerequisite for this analysis was the development of descriptive statistical parameters to organize collected data based on common sample characteristics, particularly in the context of automation and its impact on human resource management. Various statistical learning methods were applied throughout the paper to analyze and interpret the variables required for this level of research. The analysis followed successful data collection through surveys conducted within SMEs, along with data cleaning and validation. The data were gathered to explore the changes brought about by automation, specifically the impact these changes have on leadership roles in human resource management. Special attention was given to analyzing employee skills and knowledge, as well as how leadership can facilitate the transition to automated systems. The process involved identifying and analyzing variables based on survey responses, with the goal of confirming the research hypotheses. Finally, statistical tests were employed to determine data patterns and assess the effects of leadership on the success of automation initiatives in SMEs. This research provides valuable insights into how effective leadership can smooth the transition to automated processes in human resource management within the SME sector.
Keywords: Process automation, AI, data, SME, leadership
Field: Technical and technological sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of automation technologies has created significant changes in how organizations operate, particularly in the realm of human resource management (HRM). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), often characterized by limited resources and more agile operations compared to large corporations, are now increasingly integrating automation into their HR processes. This shift is driven by the potential of automation to streamline workflows, enhance productivity, and reduce operational costs. However, while the technological benefits are evident, the transition to automated systems presents a unique set of challenges, particularly in the domain of leadership and change management (Avolio, 2013).

Leadership plays a pivotal role in the successful implementation of automation in HRM. The complexities associated with introducing new technologies into established business processes necessitate strong leadership to guide teams through the transition. Leaders must not only facilitate the adoption of automation tools but also ensure that employees remain engaged, motivated, and adequately prepared for the new working environment. In SMEs, where the workforce is often smaller and more closely knit, leadership's influence on organizational change becomes even more pronounced. Leaders in these enterprises are directly responsible for managing resistance to change, addressing skill gaps, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation.

This paper focuses on the role of leadership in managing human resource automation in SMEs. Although there is a wealth of literature on leadership and change management in larger organizations, there is a notable gap when it comes to understanding how these dynamics play out in smaller enterprises, where resources and personnel are often limited. By examining the specific challenges that leaders in SMEs face during automation transitions, this research seeks to shed light on effective leadership strategies that can support successful change management in this context.

One of the key challenges in the automation of HR processes is the potential disruption to traditional roles and responsibilities. Automation can fundamentally alter how tasks are completed, shifting the focus from manual, repetitive tasks to more strategic, value-added activities. For employees, this often means a significant change in their job functions, requiring new skills and a shift in mindset. Leaders, therefore, must be equipped to manage these transformations, ensuring that the workforce is prepared to embrace

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the changes rather than resist them. This involves clear communication, training, and a supportive work environment that encourages adaptability and innovation.

The success of automation in HRM is also closely tied to the ability of leaders to manage the emotional and psychological aspects of change. Fear of job loss, uncertainty about new technologies, and concerns about the relevance of one's skills can all contribute to resistance among employees. In SMEs, where individual contributions can have a more direct impact on overall business outcomes, the stakes are even higher. Effective leaders in these settings must demonstrate empathy, provide reassurance, and actively involve employees in the change process to minimize resistance and foster a sense of ownership (Bass, 1990).

This paper presents an analysis of leadership's role in managing automation transitions in SMEs, with a focus on HRM processes. Using data collected through surveys in SMEs, the study explores the impact of automation on HR functions and the corresponding leadership strategies required for successful implementation. Through the application of statistical methods, this research identifies key variables that influence the success of automation initiatives and examines how different leadership styles can facilitate or hinder these efforts.

In conclusion, as SMEs continue to adopt automation technologies, the role of leadership in guiding these changes becomes increasingly critical. This research aims to provide insights into the specific leadership approaches that are most effective in ensuring a smooth transition to automated HR systems, contributing to the broader understanding of change management in the context of technological innovation in SMEs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Automation in human resource management (HRM) presents a unique set of challenges for leaders in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As technological changes disrupt traditional processes, leaders must navigate not only operational transformations but also the emotional, psychological, and skill-based shifts that employees experience. Leadership becomes the linchpin of successful automation, and the approaches leaders take directly affect how smoothly the transition occurs and how well employees adapt to new systems. This section explores several key leadership strategies that can optimize the automation process: emotional intelligence, strategic planning, transparent communication, and comprehensive employee training and support.

2.1 Emotional Intelligence and Employee Well-being During Automation

Leaders with high emotional intelligence (EI) are critical in guiding employees through the emotional turbulence that often accompanies automation. The introduction of new technologies can evoke a range of responses from employees, including anxiety, fear of job loss, and resistance to change. Leaders with strong EI are better equipped to understand and address these emotions, helping to reduce stress and facilitate smoother transitions (Becker, 2009).

A key aspect of emotional intelligence is empathy—the ability to put oneself in others' shoes and understand their feelings. During the automation process, employees may feel overwhelmed by the changes and uncertain about their future roles. Leaders who demonstrate empathy can better respond to these concerns, offering reassurance and fostering a sense of security. This, in turn, reduces resistance to change as employees feel understood and supported by their leaders.

Furthermore, effective communication, which is another facet of emotional intelligence, plays a crucial role in building trust between leaders and employees. When leaders communicate openly and frequently, addressing employees' concerns and providing clarity about the automation process, they help reduce uncertainty. This trust-building contributes to greater acceptance of new technologies, as employees are more likely to embrace change when they feel that leadership has their best interests at heart (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014).

The ability of emotionally intelligent leaders to manage workplace stress also impacts the overall organizational culture. By fostering a supportive and positive work environment, they encourage employees to view automation as an opportunity for growth rather than a threat. This shift in mindset is essential for ensuring long-term success in adopting new technologies within HRM processes.

2.2 Strategic Planning for Effective Automation Implementation

In addition to emotional intelligence, strategic leadership is another crucial factor in the success of HR automation. Leaders who adopt a strategic approach to planning and implementation can more effectively manage the complexities of transitioning from manual to automated systems. A well-thought-out strategy involves setting clear goals, analyzing available resources, and anticipating potential challenges that may arise during the automation process (Caruso and Salovey, 2004).

Strategic leaders begin by defining the objectives of automation in alignment with the overall business goals. Whether the goal is to improve efficiency, reduce costs, or enhance decision-making capabilities within HR, having a clear vision allows leaders to guide the organization in the right direction. This clarity also helps employees understand the purpose behind the changes, which can reduce resistance and improve buy-in.

Resource allocation is another key component of strategic leadership in automation. Leaders must assess both human and technological resources to ensure the organization is equipped to handle the transition. This includes not only selecting the right automation tools but also ensuring that employees have the necessary skills and support to use these tools effectively. Strategic leaders will often conduct a gap analysis to determine where additional resources or training may be needed, thereby minimizing disruptions during the transition.

Strategic planning is essential for the successful implementation of automation technologies in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). A well-defined strategy provides a roadmap that aligns automation efforts with the organization's overall goals, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively and that the anticipated benefits are realized. Leaders must begin by conducting a thorough assessment of current processes, identifying areas where automation can yield the greatest impact, such as reducing manual tasks, improving efficiency, or enhancing data accuracy (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2020).

Setting clear objectives is a critical component of strategic planning. These objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART), allowing organizations to monitor progress and make necessary adjustments along the way. Additionally, leaders must consider the potential challenges associated with automation, such as resistance to change, skill gaps, and integration issues with existing systems. By anticipating these challenges and developing mitigation strategies, organizations can enhance the likelihood of successful implementation.

Moreover, engaging stakeholders throughout the planning process is crucial. Involving employees in discussions about automation can foster buy-in and generate valuable insights. By adopting a strategic approach to planning and implementation, organizations can ensure that automation initiatives are executed smoothly, ultimately leading to improved operational efficiency and competitive advantage (Davenport and Ronanki, 2018).

Anticipating challenges is an integral part of strategic planning. Leaders who consider potential obstacles, such as employee resistance, technological glitches, or budget constraints, can develop contingency plans to address these issues before they become major roadblocks. By preparing for these challenges, strategic leaders ensure a smoother and more efficient transition to automation, ultimately leading to better outcomes for both employees and the organization (Day and Antonakis, 2012).

2.3 Transparent Communication and Employee Involvement

Transparency in communication is another critical factor in managing the human side of automation in SMEs. Leaders who provide clear, open, and honest communication throughout the automation process help build trust and reduce uncertainty among employees. By keeping employees informed about the reasons for automation, the expected changes, and how these changes will affect their roles, leaders can alleviate many of the fears and anxieties associated with technological transformation.

One of the most effective ways to foster transparency is by involving employees in the decision-making process. When employees feel that they have a voice in shaping how automation will be implemented, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the success of the new systems. This increased engagement can lead to greater motivation and a more positive attitude toward change. Employees who understand the benefits of automation and have had input in the transition process are more willing to adopt new working methods and technologies (Goleman, 2020).

In SMEs, where leaders often have closer relationships with employees, this transparency and involvement are particularly important. Leaders who actively seek employee feedback and involve them in planning discussions not only increase engagement but also gain valuable insights into potential issues or areas for improvement that may not be visible from a top-down perspective (Goleman, 2000).

Transparent communication plays a vital role in the successful implementation of AI-driven automation within organizations, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Leaders who maintain open, clear, and consistent communication throughout the automation process foster trust and reduce employee anxiety. Transparency ensures that employees understand the reasons behind adopting AI technologies, the anticipated changes in workflows, and how these changes will impact their roles. This clarity helps dispel fears and misconceptions, enabling employees to focus on adapting to new technologies rather than worrying about potential threats, such as job displacement.

Involving employees in the automation decision-making process further enhances transparency and fosters a sense of ownership. When employees are included in discussions about the selection and

implementation of AI tools, they feel valued and more engaged with the process. Their involvement can also provide valuable insights, as employees who work directly with processes targeted for automation often have a deep understanding of operational challenges and potential areas for improvement. By seeking employee feedback and incorporating their suggestions, leaders can increase motivation and acceptance of new systems.

This collaborative approach creates a sense of shared responsibility, where employees are not merely passive recipients of change but active participants in shaping the future of the organization, leading to smoother transitions and improved outcomes.

Moreover, transparent communication helps to prevent misunderstandings and misinformation, which can easily derail the automation process. By providing regular updates and being available to answer questions, leaders ensure that employees are fully aware of what is happening and why, fostering a collaborative environment where everyone works together toward the common goal of successful automation (Huang, 2018).

3. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

Finally, a key aspect of leadership during the automation process is ensuring that employees receive adequate training and support to adapt to new technologies. Automation often requires employees to develop new skills or adopt different ways of working, and without proper training, this can lead to frustration, decreased productivity, and errors.

Leaders who prioritize training as part of the automation process help employees transition more smoothly to the new systems. By offering continuous education and making resources readily available, leaders enable employees to increase their proficiency with automated tools, thereby enhancing productivity and minimizing mistakes. This not only benefits individual employees but also leads to better overall business outcomes, as the organization can fully leverage the advantages of automation (Kotter, 1996).

Support goes beyond technical training; it also includes emotional and psychological support. Leaders should recognize that learning new systems can be stressful, particularly for employees who may not feel confident in their technical abilities. By creating a supportive environment where employees feel comfortable asking questions and seeking help, leaders can reduce anxiety and build a culture of continuous learning.

Training employees to effectively use AI-driven process automation is critical to ensuring the success of such initiatives, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As AI continues to transform traditional business processes, employees need to acquire new skills to adapt to the changing landscape. A well-structured training program not only enhances employees' technical proficiency but also fosters a sense of confidence and security in their ability to work with AI technologies (Lewis and Heckman, 2006).

Training programs should focus on both the practical and theoretical aspects of AI-driven automation. On the practical side, employees must learn how to use specific AI tools and software integrated into their daily tasks. This involves hands-on training sessions, guided by experts, where employees can practice using the technology in real-world scenarios. Theoretical training, on the other hand, should address the broader implications of AI, helping employees understand how automation improves workflows, enhances decision-making, and supports overall business goals.

Beyond technical skills, training should also include soft skills such as problem-solving, adaptability, and continuous learning. As AI technologies evolve, employees must be prepared to adapt and upskill regularly. By providing ongoing training and resources, leaders ensure that employees remain agile and fully equipped to leverage AI for improved productivity and innovation in the workplace (Manuti and De Palma, 2014, McKinsey, 2020).

Additionally, leaders can establish mentoring programs or create teams of early adopters to assist their colleagues in adapting to the new technology. These peer support structures can accelerate the learning process and help create a positive attitude toward the changes (Nadkarni and Prugl, 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

The success of automation in human resource management, particularly in SMEs, is heavily dependent on effective leadership. Leaders with high emotional intelligence can address the emotional needs of employees during the transition, while strategic leaders ensure that the automation process is carefully planned and executed. Transparent communication and active employee involvement foster a

sense of trust and ownership, reducing resistance to change. Finally, providing comprehensive training and support enables employees to adapt more easily to new technologies, leading to better business outcomes. By combining these leadership strategies, SMEs can not only implement automation more smoothly but also create a work environment that is prepared for future technological advancements. This has also been confirmed by Northouse (2019) and Westerman (2014) in their respective research.

In the evolving landscape of human resource management, especially within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), automation presents both significant opportunities and challenges. The role of leadership is central to navigating this transformation successfully. Leaders with high emotional intelligence can address the emotional and psychological needs of employees, reducing stress and resistance during the automation process. By demonstrating empathy, clear communication, and support, these leaders foster a work environment where employees feel valued and secure amid change (PwC, 2019).

Strategic leadership is equally critical in ensuring the successful implementation of automation. Leaders who plan carefully, anticipate challenges, and align automation goals with broader organizational objectives create a smoother transition and optimize the benefits of new technologies. Transparent communication and active employee involvement further enhance engagement, creating a sense of ownership and reducing resistance.

Finally, providing ongoing training and support ensures that employees have the skills and confidence to adapt to new systems, enhancing productivity and minimizing errors. Through a combination of emotional intelligence, strategic planning, transparency, and continuous support, leaders in SMEs can drive the successful adoption of automation, ultimately leading to improved efficiency, employee satisfaction, and business outcomes (Senge, 2006). Effective leadership is the key to turning the challenges of automation into opportunities for long-term growth and innovation.

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THE BORDER ISSUE AND IRELAN- NORTHERN IRELAND RELATIONS

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Abstract: When Ireland was partitioned in 1920, it was a long time before geography and geopolitics took an interest in it. It was only with the peace process in the 1990s that a real scholarly debate emerged on the politico-territorial aspects of the Northern Ireland problem. However, the partition that was supposed to solve the Irish question actually created an even more complex Northern Irish problem, perhaps. Among the multiple dimensions of this problem (social, economic, religious, cultural), the territorial dimension has a central place. Since the 1920s, border antagonisms have played a major role in political tensions in Northern Ireland, but also between Dublin and Belfast, and between Dublin and London. Borders and divisions were also important factors in the forced displacement of Northern Ireland from 1969. However, this border issue should not be reduced to a simple binary opposition between nationalism, anti-partisanship, on the one hand, and unionism, partisanship, on the other. If the border question was so serious and complex in Ireland, it is because, identity is fatefully connected and determined in relation to the territory. Hence the importance of questioning the scope of the political compromise reached in 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement. Although this agreement appeased Northern Ireland, many doubted that a definitive final solution had actually been found. Some analysts call this period the post-national effect? With BREXIT, this process risked being jeopardized, but as time passes, no more dramatic changes are visible, except for infection. It seems that the EU, the United Kingdom and Ireland have managed to find an effective multilateral agreement on the future of Northern Ireland.

Keywords: Border, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Troubles, Peace Process,

Field: Social Sciences and Humanities

1. INTRODUCTION:THE BORDER ISSUES

Relations between the two Ireland, the border issue and the failure of partition (1920-1985) Since the partition, the border issue has poisoned the political and socio-economic relations between the two Irish administrations, as well as the relations between London and Dublin. The Irish Government Act of 1920, passed by the British Parliament, created two self-governing administrations. The Irish Free State, in twenty-six southern counties, had to satisfy the nationalist-Republican community represented by Sinn Fein. Northern Ireland, meanwhile, covered the remaining six counties and had to satisfy the Ulster union community, even if it covered only part of that province. If the rest of the Irish unionist community withdrew from this division, much of the irredentist nationalist community would never accept it. Under the 1921 Treaty of London, which amended the terms of the 1920 Act, the Dublin government was able to take over, and the Border Commission was tasked with reviewing the border road. But the project failed in 1925, especially under pressure from Belfast, and the three governments finally agreed to retain the original route. The 1925 agreement also repealed the Council of Ireland, which, in a 1920 law, was supposed to allow socio-economic cooperation between the two entities and could also allow for a possible unification process. The Treaty of London of 1921 deeply divided Sinn Fein, part of which, a minority but important, refused to participate in the institutions that emerged from it. (I.Smithson, 2018, 34p.)This was the cause of a civil war that lasted almost two years ... But the failure of the Border Commission in 1925 and its discrediting of the current government in Dublin allowed the parties to the treaties to integrate these institutions as they fought them. In April 1926, Eamonn de Valera, head of Sinn Fein, created Fiana Fiel. The aims of this new parliamentary party: to reunite Ireland and make it a fully independent state from London, both economically and politically. The coming to power of Fiana Phil in 1932 was to mark a major milestone in the development of the border issue and relations between the three governments of the British Isles. (T. Bowman, J. McBride, I. Montgomery 2021, 34-56,p.) With Amon De Valera, Dublin's Northern Ireland strategy has been reduced to two basic, inseparable and intangible principles: first, the Belfast government has no legitimacy and is therefore not an interlocutor. Unification will be achieved in London, not Belfast. Second, while unification is a priority, it should not prevent the Irish state from fully exercising sovereignty over its territory. Dublin's full exercise of its sovereignty over its legal territory is in no way a recognition of the division. 8 In 1937, he adopted a new constitution that gave Dublin quasi-independence. Articles 2 and 3 of this new Constitution reinforced their own conceptions of the Northern Ireland issue by giving value to the basic law (L. Rodríguez-Davis, 2023,4 p,) "Article 2: The national territory consists of the whole… In fact, in essence, these articles have changed nothing.

Northern Ireland's status has not changed and there has been no progress towards reunification. But that was not without consequences. The claim to the land they contained exacerbated the already unfavorable relationship with the majority unionists in Northern Ireland. In addition, by declaring any other Northern Ireland policy unconstitutional for Dublin governments, they have banned any initiative for negotiations.

2. A BORDER CAMPAIGNE OF IRA IN 1956

With Amon de Valera, Dublin's Northern Ireland strategy has been reduced to two basic, inseparable and intangible principles: first, the Belfast government has no legitimacy and is therefore not an interlocutor. Unification will be achieved in London, not Belfast. Second, while unification is a priority, it should not prevent the Irish state from fully exercising sovereignty over its territory. Dublin's full exercise of its sovereignty over its legal territory is in no way a recognition of the division. In 1937, he adopted a new constitution that gave Dublin quasi-independence. Articles 2 and 3 of this new Constitution reinforced their own conceptions of the Northern Ireland issue by giving value to the basic law (L. Rodríguez-Davis, (2023,4 p,)"Article 2: The national territory consists of the whole… In fact, in essence, these articles have changed nothing. Northern Ireland's status has not changed and there has been no progress towards reunification. But that was not without consequences. The claim to the land they contained exacerbated the already unfavorable relationship with the majority unionists in Northern Ireland. In addition, by declaring any other Northern Ireland policy unconstitutional for Dublin governments, they have banned any negotiation initiative between Dublin and Belfast. Together with this frontal irredentist anti-partisanship, Dublin made an equally radical choice between economic protectionism and nationalism. For all its political and symbolic specificity, the Northern Ireland border was one of the instruments for implementing this program. While claiming the unity of Irish island territory, Dublin increasingly closed the Northern Ireland border for economic exchanges. Also, the rejection and constitutional impossibility of recognizing Belfast put an end to almost all forms of cross-border cooperation, even the most local and informal ones. There was also no question of cooperation with the enemy on the part of the Northern Irish authorities. Until the late 1950s, nothing warmed relations between governments. Even London's promise to act for post-war unification in exchange for Dublin military cooperation did not persuade Eamonn Valera to give up neutrality. The war period also widened the gap between the two economies, which also became increasingly impermeable to each other. Then, when, in 1948, Fiana Phil lost her parliamentary majority, the ruling coalition could not change anything. On the contrary. With the official proclamation of the Republic of Ireland, they increased tensions. Under pressure from Belfast, London passed the Irish Law of 1949, which, although recognizing the Republic of Ireland, reasserted Northern Ireland absolute ownership of the Crown. The action on the violent edges of nationalism did not help. In 1956, the IRA launched a border campaign: the aim was to attack, from the Republic of Ireland, the sovereign symbols of the British state (border checkpoints, police stations, customs, etc.) located in Northern Ireland along the border. The whole socio-economic relationship between the two Irish territories suffers from these tensions, especially in the areas adjacent to the border. (M. Solly, 2021) In general, co-operation between the two Irelands has remained ... organized by Sinn Fein from 1920 to 1922 has already weakened the economic exchange between the two spaces (Bw.Redaction, 2023,13-19). From the time Fiana Phil came to power in 1932 to 1938, the customs war between London and Dublin also had profound effects. The value of cross-border trade fell from милиони 17 million in 1924 to 5 million in 1937 [Barrington, 1958, p. 20]. A town like Derry, located on the border, was seen being brutally cut off from almost all of its catchment area located across the border. The development of traffic on cross-border railways has revealed the seriousness of the situation. In addition, they closed one by one after the result. The evolution of cross-border migration also reveals. In 1926, 63,919 Irish-born people lived in Northern Ireland. In 1971, they were only 35,604.(. P. Buckland, (1981,18,p.) Census in Ireland, Dublin, Office Supplies Office. But in the face of this influx, Belfast introduced several legal and administrative measures to curb immigration that were considered a political threat, as it strengthened the nationalist vote in Northern Ireland (Ibid. P. Buckland, 1981, p. 61). The economy of the Northern Ireland border regions, where most of the nationalist minority was concentrated, was also deliberately neglected by Belfast.

3. THE IRA'S DEFEAT IN ITS BOREDR CAMAPIGNE

The late 1950s marked a turning point, especially within nationalism. The IRA's defeat in its border campaign has prompted nationalist and Republican movements to seek new avenues for action. A new generation of nationalists arrived, fed by new values, especially in the north. Benefiting from the establishment of the welfare state after the war, a growing part of the Catholic community was now also

interested in its social and economic status, its civil rights under the Northern Ireland regime, and no longer just the issue of reunification. 12 In the South, the end of Imon De Valera's career allowed other personalities to emerge and, above all, to take a step back from what had been done before, whether economic or political. Influenced by historians, cultural critics, and various politicians, the whole nationalist and republican ideology began to be the subject of a wide-ranging revisionist movement.In 1957, a Whitaker report condemning protectionism called for a brutal shift in economic policy. When, a few months later, Sean Lemas took over the leadership of the majority Fiana Phil and became head of government, he immediately implemented the recommendations of Whitaker and Barrington. Dublin abandoned protectionism and opted for free trade. In 1965, in anticipation of future EEC membership, Dublin and London even created a free trade area. That same year, he met with Terence O'Neill, Prime Minister of the Government of Northern Ireland. It was the first time since the split that the heads of government of the two Irish administrations have talked directly to each other and considered possible cross-border economic, social and cultural co-operation. In 1966, Sean Lemas set up a parliamentary committee to work on constitutional reform, including a reformulation of Article 3. It was not a question of abandoning unification, but of finding other means to achieve this, especially by allowing negotiations with Belfast. The border between Ireland and Northern Ireland is finally opening. Relations between governments have calmed down. The numerous reforms undertaken by the Lemas government have had a profound and rapid impact in twenty-six counties, especially at the economic level. A huge process of modernization had begun, which visibly transformed the social and economic reality of the country. But between Belfast and Dublin, despite efforts for economic co-operation, things really did not have time to change in depth, as the political upheavals that intervened destabilized the union majority in Northern Ireland, the most radical and compromising part. 14 Despite all the precautions O'Neill took, his rapprochement with the Dublin government and the very small concessions he agreed to make to the nationalist community in Northern Ireland were considered treason. Within its majority, hardline unionism (also known as loyalty), representing mainly the urban constituencies in eastern Northern Ireland around Belfast, opposed any sharing of power and wealth with Catholics.(S.Paseta, 2006, 23,p.)

4. FAILURE OF THE BORDER CAMPAIG

In 1968, the first violence broke out in Northern Ireland, between, on the one hand, the civil rights movement, animated mainly by Catholics seeking greater civil and socio-economic equality, and, on the other, the unionists. Protestants, who rejected any idea of political or socio-economic reform in favor of the Catholic minority. The local police, mostly Protestants, were out of control. In 1969, as the violence escalated, London accepted Belfast's request and sent troops to Northern Ireland to restore law and order. sent troops to Northern Ireland to restore law and order. Violence and an Impossible Political Solution to the Border Issue (1969-1985) Even if the border issue has only a second place in the explosion of violence. (C. McNaughton, 2023) The civil rights movement as a whole called for ..., it was very fast aggravating factor and pronounced political instability. After the failure of the border campaign, the IRA abandoned the armed struggle to commit itself to the socio-political action.In Northern Ireland, the Sunningdale Declaration was greeted with outrage among Unionists.(S. Knispel 2021) In vain. The most radical, who formed a new association (Ulster Workers' Council), launched a general strike, which lasted fourteen days despite the intervention of the British army. The new Northern Ireland government fell on January 28, 1974, ending the Sunningdale compromise de facto. At the same time in the Republic, the Sunningdale Declaration was sued for unconstitutionality. The verdict, passed in January 1974, did not retain its unconstitutionality, but only procedural reasons: Sunningdale, since it is only a statement of intent, it cannot be unconstitutional. Implicitly, this meant that it could not become law because it would be incompatible with Articles 2 and 3. Suningdale's failure marks the inability to find a political and institutional solution to the border issue, which leaves much room for violence: 1976 was the deadliest with 314 deaths, almost a tenth of the 3,601 deaths registered between 1969 and 1998. 20 Years later, the same reasons gave the same effects. The British government hoped to find a purely internal solution to the Northern Ireland crisis, but it was very clear that it could not do without the Irish dimension, ie a political solution to the issue of the outcome. Popular support for violent republican language grew in the early 1980s. (Ibid. S. Knispel 2021, 2.p) It was imperative to revitalize. This is why the Dublin ruling coalition formed the New Ireland Forum: the aim was to debate to reformulate the nationalist ideal in the interests of the unionists. In 1985, with Fianna Fáil in opposition, the Dublin government signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty with London (Johnsson, 1981), more or less reiterated the Sunningdale Terms and Conditions and proposals made by the New Ireland Forum. Yet, although it was infinitely less violent, much of Northern Ireland's unionism rejected the treaty for the same reasons as in 1974 (Ulster says no!). In fact, in the elections that followed, the unionist

electorate overwhelmingly supported the opponents of the agreement. In Dublin, Fiana Phil refused to vote for ratification of the treaty, arguing that it was contrary to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution and signaled a waiver of unification. As with Suningdale, and although the Anglo-Irish Treaty was ratified by the parliaments of London and Dublin, negotiations were stalled on the border issue. Partition remained the main obstacle to the establishment of stable political institutions in Northern Ireland. Whether it was partisanship and anti-partisanship, or even in the two more divided camps, no political consensus was possible. No institutional architecture has harmonized the different political-territorial aspirations. Faced with this political incompetence, armed action remained the only option for many. • 1985-1998: Towards a post-national solution to the border issue?

If we compare the situation that arose from 1985 with that which arose from the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, it is clear that these thirteen years represent a significant development. If this global agreement, signed by all actors in the conflict, political and paramilitary, was ratified by referendum in the north and south. [16] [16] In Northern Ireland, 71.12% of the vote on the agreement. In F, bringing new political solutions to the border issue also raises questions about Ireland's future: should this be seen as the arrival of a post-national Ireland? New context 23 The novelty of the context is primarily socio-economic. Since joining the Common Market in 1973, the Republic of Ireland has definitely moved to free trade. Through various aspects of its regional policy (Interreg, ERDF, etc.), Europe has also imposed economic cooperation on Dublin and Belfast, particularly on the issue of border regions: in 1983, it published a study specifically on the issue of border regions. . The economy of these regions has clearly revealed their developmental backwardness compared to the rest of the island [ESCEC, 1983]. Therefore, the positions defended by De Valera necessarily became obsolete and the whole of the old nationalist conceptions of Northern Ireland fell apart. The unexpected financial money represented by Europe also benefited the entire economy of the Republic, which experienced a real economic revolution ("Celtic tiger") during the 1990s. This changed roles: while the South was long economically overtaken by the North Ireland.

5. GOOD FRIDAEY AGREEMENT

The issue of the border in the peace process and the 1998 Easter Agreement 27 In 1993, Dublin and London signed the Downing Street Declaration, formalizing their common desire to find a comprehensive solution, the Dublin government, yet Fiana Phil, even and publicly accepted the hypothesis of reform of Articles 2 and 3 of its Constitution. At the same time, the Clinton administration is inviting Gary Adams to persuade him to agree to a permanent truce before the talks. Although this ceasefire was subsequently terminated, the process was ongoing. Framework documents drafted by London and Dublin in 1995 served as the basis for negotiations by all actors, violent and nonviolent, to which US officials were added. The final negotiations ended on April 10, 1998, with all parties signing the Good Friday Agreement. (Ibid. Johnsson 1981) to be ratified in a second step by referendum in the North and South. This agreement, which repeals the 1920 law, addresses all issues of the conflict which it groups into three branches (three directions): the internal dimension of Northern Ireland (institutionalizing the division of power between the unionist majority and the nationalist minority), the east-west dimension (the relationship between the Irish governments and London) and the Irish dimension (the question of the border and relations between Ireland and Northern Ireland). The solution to the border issue lies in three interconnected points. First, reunification is no longer subject to the principle of consent, but to the principle of parallel consent. This means that it will be possible only if a favorable majority is expressed in both the North and the South, through two simultaneous and identical referendums. Under these conditions, London and Dublin will have to continue reunification. Second, cross-border cooperation is institutionalized through the creation of a North / South Council of Ministers, with executive powers in five main areas: agriculture, tourism, education, health, environment and transport. Implementing bodies specialize in these areas to implement the recommendations and decisions of the North / South Council of Ministers. The third, most delicate point in the negotiations is the reformulation of Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution of the Republic. Their new version is significantly different from that of 1937: Article 2 It is the right and firstborn right of every person born on the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the Irish nation. It is also the right of all persons otherwise qualified under the law to be citizens of Ireland. Furthermore, the Irish nation cherishes its special affinity with people of Irish descent living abroad who share its cultural identity and heritage. Article 3 The strong will of the Irish nation, in harmony and friendship, is to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland, in all the diversity of their identities and traditions, recognizing that a united Ireland will be created only by peaceful means with the consent of the majority of people, democratically speaking, in both jurisdictions of the island. Until then, the laws adopted by the Assembly determined by this Constitution will have a similar area and degree of application as the

laws adopted by the Assembly that existed immediately before the entry into force of this Constitution. Institutions with executive powers and functions divided between those jurisdictions may be established by their respective competent authorities for those purposes and may perform powers and functions in respect of all or any part of the island.((J. Hakly 2020) On Isle of Ireland is no longer defined as the territory of the Irish nation, but as the territory shar by the communities living there. Dublin also acknowledges that other institutions of its own may be legitimately sovereign in Northern Ireland, including cross-border institutions for Charles Henry Hackley longer the only constitutional solution • constitutional. Interpretation 1998: a post-national solution or a simple border standardization? Within the scientific community, many in this political solution on the Irish border questioned the realization of the dream of Jürgen Habermas or Jay Rugby, the emergence of a new, post-national Ireland, where national identities would be separated from the notions of territory, self-determination, sovereignty (D.,G. Habermas 2024)). But what is it really? Twelve years after ratification, it is undeniable that the Easter Agreement has undoubtedly changed the game. For the first time after the partition in 1920, the institutional architecture set up on the island is no longer in dispute. And while it was necessary to temporarily suspend institutions in Northern Ireland, it was not because of the border issue. The vast majority of the population and political actors now accept the political framework established by this agreement. Given this, the emergence of a post-national Ireland is questionable, not only theoretically, but also because, in the case of Ireland, it tends to minimize or ignore the risks of a recurrence of the border issue. Theoretically, postnationalism is based on problematic assumptions. For example, many thinkers and researchers argue that, contrary to the post-national thesis, globalization and especially European integration can not be understood as a simple process of destruction of the nation-state . Huckley made it clear, for example, that the process of European integration meant more the strengthening of territorial identities than their interrogation. (J.Hackley,2019), On In other words, the evolutions that are taking place at the global and European level do not mean the disappearance, but the reconfiguration of national territorial identities. However, these reconfigurations are inherent in the national phenomenon that constantly builds, deconstructs and reconstructs its relation to the territory. The idea of post-national deterritorialization therefore deserves critical consideration. In addition, in Ireland, several elements confirm these theoretical questions. As we have seen, Ireland's economic boom facilitated rapprochement between Belfast and Dublin during the 1990s. Development in socio-economic conditions will not be without impact. If it lasts, the current financial crisis would therefore severely punish both Irish economies, which could further exacerbate tensions. The risk would also be the risk of a protectionist reflex, especially in Dublin, which would weaken cross-border economic coordination, which is still at the heart of the new Belfast-Dublin relationship. Therefore, the state and its territorial sovereignty remain central factors in the institutional and political balance of the island. Moreover, in Northern Ireland, even if political violence has almost disappeared, there can be no real reconciliation. Tensions between the two main communities are still palpable. Among the many reasons for this tension, there is the territorial issue.

6. CONCLUSION

Rejecting violence does not necessarily mean adhering to a post-national identity. An insignificant part of nationalism, as well as an insignificant part of the unionist community, still nurtures relations with the territory and space that remain irreconcilable. For this reason, despite the deterritorializing effects of globalization and European integration, it can be said that the island of Ireland as a whole has not yet entered the post-national era. In addition, with a parallel consent system that complicates any eventual reunification process, there is a threat of a recurrence of the problem. Because, on both sides of the political spectrum, today the heirs of the hard territorial line share power. Moreover, if Sinn Fein has won an election since 1998, it is because of his opposition to the SDPS 'post-nationalist rhetoric. The Post, June 6, 2001. On In addition, the DUP faces competition from a very traditional non-extinct edge, represented for example by TUV (Traditional Trade Union Voice). In this context, the electoral weakening, consistently since 1998, of Northern Ireland's most moderate unionist and nationalist parties is a cause for concern In 2003, the SDPL lost its majority nationalist seats in what happened, all this indicates that the agreement, obviously, allowed a big step to be taken towards the normalization of the border. Conclusion 36 Thus, the border issue played a central role in the failure of the Northern Ireland institutions created in 1920, but this border issue could not be reduced to a bipolar conflict between nationalist anti-partisanship on the one hand and unionist partisanship in the United States. else. Influenced by a number of antagonisms, he certainly opposed nationalism against unionism, from Dublin to Belfast, but he also divided nationalism and unionism and continues to do so. In this context, the 1998 agreement is not such a major break with the past. It is clear that even if divisions are no longer expressed in the same way and

no longer interfere with institutional functioning, they are still very much present.

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ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN THE FUNCTION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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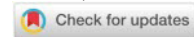
Abstract: The main goal of this paper is to determine the level of development of entrepreneurial education in the Republic of Serbia, bearing in mind the fact that entrepreneurial education plays a significant role in encouraging entrepreneurial spirit and entrepreneurship. Acquiring and developing entrepreneurial competences in the territory of the Republic of Serbia for persons older than 15 years is also achieved through the implementation of the functional basic education program for adults. In the design and realization of entrepreneurial activities, the connection of the economy and educational institutions plays a significant role, as well as the introduction and implementation of the dual education system, began to be implemented within certain secondary vocational schools, mainly in the field of technical-technological scientific disciplines. Various extracurricular activities, projects and programs implemented in educational institutions, often with the support of national and/or international institutions, organizations, business entities, etc., make a significant contribution to the acquisition and development of entrepreneurial competences.

Entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and abilities can be improved by studying entrepreneurship at universities and colleges, through independent exams and/or modules, at basic, professional, specialist, master's and doctoral studies, with a multidisciplinary approach, mainly within organizational sciences, business economics and management, engineering management and industrial engineering.

Entrepreneurship is also successfully studied in the sphere of informal education, through the implementation of various training and development programs created for different age categories of the population, with different levels of entrepreneurial (prior) knowledge.

Based on research, it has been established that in the Republic of Serbia, a certain progress has been made in the implementation of entrepreneurial education, which is represented in a formal sense at all levels of education, especially in secondary vocational education. On the other hand, it was established that it is necessary to work on improving the general entrepreneurial climate and entrepreneurial environment, which would stimulate all categories of the population to be additionally educated, activated and realize their entrepreneurial potential. In this, entrepreneurial education plays an extremely important role, which should be continuously improved. It is especially necessary to work on improving the implementation of entrepreneurial education in the youth population. The need to create a program to encourage and improve female entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship of the socio-economically vulnerable population was also identified.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial education, entrepreneurial education of young people, Republic of Serbia
Field: Economics

1. INTRODUCTION

In scientific and professional circles, the prevailing opinion is that the level of entrepreneurial education of young people is crucial for the development of the sector of small and medium enterprises and entrepreneurship, i.e. the economy as a whole (Jović-Bogdanović et al., 2022), which is especially important when taking into account that in the Republic of Serbia, more than half of employees (65% of employees) are in the sector of small and medium enterprises (Arsić et al., 2020). The sector of small and medium-sized enterprises in developing economies contributes significantly to gross added value, affects financial stability, and in crisis situations is a stabilizer, often a driver of economic development, therefore it is not surprising that potential entrepreneurs increasingly recognize the importance of lifelong learning for business success (Jović-Bogdanović et al., 2022). Small and medium-sized enterprises in the Republic of Serbia, similarly to other developing countries, today face numerous challenges and difficulties, such as: 1. unstable business ecosystem, 2. difficulties in charging for own works and services, 3. high level of parafiscal fees and 4. difficult and expensive access to finance (Arsić et al., 2020). The ultimate goal is to

strengthen the sector of small and medium enterprises through the process of entrepreneurial literacy of (potential) entrepreneurs, adequately connecting business experience gained in practice and theoretical knowledge. Risk is an integral part of entrepreneurship, therefore having an adequate entrepreneurial education is important, as it can contribute to reducing the negative impact of potentially risky events (Jović-Bogdanović et al., 2022).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of entrepreneurial education in Serbia. It examines key trends, challenges, and opportunities within the sector. Utilizing a range of data sources, the study evaluates the growth of entrepreneurial programs, levels of student engagement, and the effectiveness of various educational models. The objective is to illuminate the development of entrepreneurial education in Serbia and its broader implications for economic growth and job creation.

Employing both theoretical and empirical research methodologies, the authors systematically explore fundamental concepts while offering a comparative analysis of the role of entrepreneurial education in stimulating innovation and economic advancement, with a particular focus on its significance in the Serbian context. The empirical component is underpinned by current literature and case studies, particularly addressing the impacts of entrepreneurship education on economic development.

The research methodology involved an application of diverse methodological procedures, primarily desk research and the systematic collection of both primary and secondary data. Alongside scientific methods such as analytical-synthetic, inductive-deductive and comparison-classification techniques, the study effectively communicate summarized data pertinent to the analysis.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

"Systematic and continuous implementation of learning and education processes are becoming one of the most important forms of human resource development in the modern socio-economic environment. Permanent needs for highly qualified, independent and trained workers, as well as increasingly necessary retraining and retraining, broaden the field of action and application of knowledge and education. Numerous companies and institutions invest more and more in the knowledge and education of their employees, offering them numerous programs for the acquisition and improvement of various knowledge and skills. Recognizing the importance of knowledge and permanent learning for successful business, leading world companies have started to establish their own schools and even universities as a special center for learning, training and development of their existing and potential employees. (Premović J. and Premović T., 2011). Education basically represents a set of activities aimed at collecting and acquiring different forms of knowledge through the realization of the learning process and the training of individuals for the application of acquired knowledge in everyday life (Garabinović, 2017).

In Europe, entrepreneurial education is also considered a decisive factor in the successful realization of entrepreneurial activities, especially when taking into account the fact that entrepreneurs are not born, but are created by modeling entrepreneurial potential, in which the role of entrepreneurial education is extremely important (Subotić, 2017). In the most developed countries, young people devote more time to entrepreneurship education, which positively reflects on the development of entrepreneurship in those countries, while in countries with the lowest incomes, young generations manifest their entrepreneurial potential earlier, among other things, because they spend less time in the school system (Schoof, 2006).

In the process of creating a successful entrepreneur, educational workers can help potential entrepreneurs to better spot and use potential business opportunities for entrepreneurship (Subotić, 2017). Entrepreneurial education increases entrepreneurial activities and directly affects a higher level of self-confidence, a lower risk perception and the improvement of human capital, as a valuable resource in any entrepreneurial venture (Jiménez et al., 2015). At the institutional level, within the framework of legal regulations, various strategies, programs, analyses, etc., entrepreneurial education was introduced as a lifelong learning concept with a special focus on children and young people (Čekić-Marković, 2015; Subotić, 2017; Jović-Bogdanović et al. ., 2022).

Different entrepreneurship education programs can influence the intentions of entrepreneurs in the process of starting a business (Peterman and Kennedy, 2003). Entrepreneurial education in the narrower sense refers to the acquisition of economic and business knowledge and skills, familiarization with the world of work, designing and planning a career and implementing activities that contribute to the acquisition and development of the so-called "soft skills". By studying entrepreneurial content through formal and informal education, awareness of employment opportunities is acquired and developed, as

well as opportunities for starting one's own business venture as a source of income and livelihood, i.e. for successful inclusion in the world of work (https://prosveta.gov .rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/16_ Preduzetnistvo.pdf). Global Entrepreneurship Monitora Special Report on Entrepreneurship Education & Training (Martínez et al., 2010) also indicate to the importance of education. They point out that education is key to the development of entrepreneurial activity and that people with less education are less likely to engage in entrepreneurial activities. The lack of entrepreneurial education results in a low level of entrepreneurial potential (Franke and Lüthje, 2004). The results of the research conducted on a sample of 37,285 respondents also show the existence of a significant relationship between entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial potential (Bae et al., 2014).

The perception of the role of education in developing a sense of initiative and in developing an entrepreneurial spirit differs from country to country. The OECD- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, report Entrepreneurship at a Glance 2013 (Entrepreneurship at a Glance 2013) showed that in Brazil, Norway and Portugal, for example, more than 75% of adults consider formal education important, while this the share in Japan is less than 20% (OECD, 2013). The importance and multiple positive effects of the application of entrepreneurship education, which is implemented both in formal and informal education, are also shown by the results of extensive research conducted in European countries. Namely, in 2015, the European Commission presented the results of entrepreneurship education in 23 European countries in a report, after 91 studies on entrepreneurship education were carried out. Conducted research has established that entrepreneurial learning gives good results, "that it works" (European Commission, 2015). The results of these extensive research indicate that students who had entrepreneurship education during their schooling, compared to students of the same age who did not have entrepreneurship education:

• acquire and develop more intense relationships with peers and with the school
• exhibit a higher level of self-confidence, a higher level of motivation for learning and have more professional and business ambitions
• they are less likely to be unemployed, more of them are stably employed
• work in better and better-paid jobs
• have greater opportunities to establish their own business
• companies owned by them tend to be more innovative and successful compared to companies whose owners did not acquire knowledge and experience in the field of entrepreneurship during their education.

In the Republic of Serbia, following the example of the developed countries of the European Union, the importance of entrepreneurial education on the development of entrepreneurship and on the general socio-economic development is increasingly recognized. The Government of the Republic of Serbia ranks entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial education as key priorities in the development of human resources. The Serbian Government declared 2016 the year of entrepreneurship, while the next 10 years were declared the decade of entrepreneurship, which shows that the need for the development of entrepreneurship is huge, that the development of entrepreneurial potential and entrepreneurship is necessary in order to accelerate economic development, start the labor market, reduced unemployment (Subotić et al., 2017; Jović-Bogdanović et al., 2022). Due to all of the above, a survey of the current implementation of entrepreneurship education in Serbia was conducted. In addition to the analysis of the existing situation, the possibility of improvement and development of entrepreneurial education as a prerequisite for the development of entrepreneurship in the Republic of Serbia was also pointed out, the results of which are presented in this scientific paper.

4. RESULTS

In the Republic of Serbia, entrepreneurship in formal education as an independent subject is represented within primary and secondary vocational education with the largest scope and content of entrepreneurship being studied within secondary vocational schools, most often agricultural-food, chemical-technological, technical, and especially economic, which is not the case in gymnasiums and art schools, in which the entire implementation of educational activities affects the development of (defined) competencies, among which competencies for entrepreneurship are included.

"Entrepreneurship" can be studied in elementary schools in the Republic of Serbia in recent years in the 7th or 8th grade (in the weekly fund of 1 hour, i.e. in the annual fund of 34 or 36 hours) as one of the offered electives "Free Teaching activities", which are a mandatory part of the teaching and learning plan that the school plans with the program and the Annual Work Plan. The Institute for the Improvement of Education and Training has created a Program for the implementation of teaching content

in "Entrepreneurship", which includes four interrelated topics (protection of consumer rights, the world of work, start yourself and others, student companies), which are most correlated with the curriculum of the compulsory education subject "Technique and technology". During the study of the teaching content from "Entrepreneurship", the importance of valuing and basing the teaching process on the knowledge and skills that the students have acquired from extracurricular activities and from the world of work and business is apostrophized.

"Entrepreneurship" is studied in elementary schools in the Republic of Serbia to contribute to the "development of innovation and entrepreneurship in students, the ability to turn ideas into action, the ability to work in a team and use various sources of knowledge for a better understanding of social processes and phenomena and takeover responsible roles in modern society. The purpose of the free teaching activity "Entrepreneurship" is the development of entrepreneurial competencies, support for the professional development of students, as well as preparation for navigating the modern world of work, which is changing due to technological development".(https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/viewdoc?uuid=5d9b256c-edfa-4f7e-9398-50e74cce091&actid=979123&doctype=og).

In addition to the acquisition and improvement of students' competence for "Entrepreneurship and orientation towards entrepreneurship", during the implementation of the content of topics from "Entrepreneurship" other general cross-curricular competences of students are developed (communication, work with data and information, digital competence, problem solving, cooperation, responsible participation in a democratic society, responsible attitude towards health, responsible attitude towards the environment, aesthetic competence)" (https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/viewdoc?uuid=1c6fd9b3-b030-4bf1-8fb9 f51db533ea8&actid=979124&doctype=og).

The introduction of entrepreneurship as an independent teaching subject in vocational secondary schools began in 2002, when the Republic of Serbia implemented the Reform and Modernization of Secondary Vocational Education. In the period from 2003 to 2005, and as part of the first phase of this Reform, "Entrepreneurship" was implemented as a separate compulsory subject in five areas of work in fifty pilot schools, i.e. in total in twenty sample educational profiles. This was preceded by the correction of existing and the creation of new curricula. In the period from 2005 to 2008, as part of the second phase of this Reform, "Entrepreneurship", also as a separate compulsory subject, was introduced in twenty-two selected pilot schools, i.e. in eight selected sample educational profiles. As part of the second phase of the introduction of "Entrepreneurship" as a special subject in secondary vocational schools, the education of teachers who taught "Entrepreneurship" was carried out. Until 2013, in secondary vocational schools, teaching in "Entrepreneurship" was successfully implemented in seventy selected educational profiles in the four-year and three-year duration of student education. Considering the importance of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education, the implementation of "Entrepreneurship" as an independent compulsory vocational subject, which is still current, especially in secondary vocational education, has been continued and improved. (Čekić-Marković, 2015; Premović, 2024).

In the development of students' entrepreneurial competences, the possibility of applying acquired knowledge and skills in practice is extremely important, in which the Dual Education model plays a special role, which has been successfully implemented in recent years through the cooperation of companies and secondary vocational schools, mainly in the field of technical and technological disciplines. Through various extracurricular activities, projects and programs in primary and secondary education, entrepreneurship is promoted and popularized, all with the support of the European Union, as well as various national and/or international institutions, organizations, business entities, etc. (Premović, 2024).

One of such projects which is implemented with the support of the European Union and which represents a novelty in the education system of Serbia, is the Project "Second Chance - Development of a System of Functional Primary Education for Adults", which is implemented in primary schools and in schools for primary education of adults. This program involves a three-year education (divided into 3 cycles, each cycle lasting one year) of participants who are older than 15 years, and who need to acquire basic education and to be trained for certain jobs and professions. As part of the implementation of this project, entrepreneurship lessons are also implemented, the aim of which is for students to acquire and improve entrepreneurial competences, to train them for "enterprising implementation of activities from the context of the family, macro and micro social environment and the development of competencies necessary for successful inclusion in the world of work and acquiring economic and business literacy" (https://prosveta.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/16_Preduzetnistvo.pdf).

In higher education, entrepreneurship is studied at colleges and universities in the Republic of Serbia through independent exams and/or modules, at basic, vocational, specialist, master's and doctoral studies, with a multidisciplinary approach, predominantly in the field of social-humanistic and technical-technological scientific disciplines within organizational sciences, business economics and

management, engineering management and industrial engineering. There are also different types of training and improvement programs, which are organized and implemented in the sphere of informal education, by state or private, domestic and/or international institutions, organizations, educational centers, professional-scientific societies, etc. for different age categories of the population, with different levels of entrepreneurial (pre)knowledge.

The prevailing opinion among the professional and scientific public is that in order to improve the youth employment process and harmonize educational policies with the requirements of the labor market, and all with the ultimate goal of improving the economic and general development of developing countries, such as the Republic of Serbia, it would be necessary to revise school and university curricula in the direction of encouraging the development of entrepreneurial potential in children and young people, through compulsory and optional subjects at all levels of education, during all phases of schooling, as well as through the organization of various seminars, forums, educational and motivational workshops with programs of empowerment and providing professional support and help (Subotić, 2017). In addition to the introduction of entrepreneurship education into the regular education system at all levels of education within different educational profiles (Subotic, 2017; Jović-Bogdanović et al., 2022), it is important to fulfill the basic prerequisite for the successful implementation of entrepreneurship education, the creation of a stimulating environment that supports and nurtures the development of entrepreneurial competencies (Subotić et al., 2017; Stanisavljev et al., 2019; Premović, 2024).

It is also important that educational workers apply adequate, modern interactive methods and work techniques, that the classic passive teaching system be replaced by a new and more efficient one for the adoption of teaching content from entrepreneurship. Some of the modern teaching methods that could be successfully implemented in the teaching of entrepreneurship are, for example, the scientific method and the PLTL method. The PLTL method is a method of research group workshop learning, which is led by a peer mentor, and it has been very successfully implemented in the study of teaching content in the field of chemical technology and related scientific disciplines in both high school and university education (it is very successfully represented in developed university networks). (Premović, 2013; Premović et al., 2017). In the territory of the Republic of Serbia, there is a clear need to implement various programs and projects with the aim of encouraging entrepreneurship, especially female entrepreneurship and encouraging entrepreneurship in socially sensitive categories of the population, which includes people of lower socio-economic status (Subotić, 2017).

5. CONCLUSION

In the Republic of Serbia, progress has been made in the past period in the implementation and development of entrepreneurial education (especially in the sphere of secondary vocational education, and to some extent also in the sphere of basic education, basic adult education and higher education), as one of the most important prerequisites for the development of entrepreneurship. However, in grammar schools and art schools in the Republic of Serbia, entrepreneurship still does not exist as a compulsory subject, and almost nothing significant has been undertaken to achieve this goal. In the sphere of informal education, there are various activities (programs, projects, trainings, workshops...) which educate and encourage the population to realize their entrepreneurial ideas.

On the way to introducing entrepreneurship into the education system, the Republic of Serbia relied on examples of good practice, as well as on the support and financial assistance of the member states of the European Union and various domestic and foreign partners. It would be necessary to continuously work on improving existing projects, on increasing their scope and content, as well as on expanding and deepening existing collaborative relationships, on finding new European and other partners, but also on the successful application of examples of good practice from socio-economically developed countries. so that the implementation of (formal and informal) entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurship in the Republic of Serbia, especially in the youth population, would be successful. In this way, through high-quality entrepreneurial education, young people will be adequately prepared „to real life" hrough sustainable successful business of individuals, and thus society as a whole, which is of extreme importance for the Republic of Serbia, as one of the developing countries.

Based on the research conducted, it was established that it is necessary to keep working on improving the general entrepreneurial climate and entrepreneurial environment, which would stimulate all categories of the population to be additionally educated, activated and to realize their entrepreneurial potential. In this, entrepreneurial education plays an extremely important role, which should be continuously improved. In particular, it is necessary to work on improving the implementation of entrepreneurial education in the youth population, who are considered key implementers of entrepreneurial activities, and thus of the economic

and overall socio-economic growth and development of every society and state, especially developing countries, including the Republic of Serbia. In addition to the need to improve youth entrepreneurship, the need to create a program to encourage and improve female entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurship of the socio-economically vulnerable population has also been identified. The Republic of Serbia, on its way to improve entrepreneurship, which is achieved through the improvement of formal and informal entrepreneurship education, should follow the application of good practices of the developed countries of the European Union, whose support and help in the implementation of entrepreneurship education is significant and shows a tendency to grow.

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THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE WITHIN CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS

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Abstract: The public prosecutor's office is an independent state body tasked with protecting constitutionality and legality. It this regard, the prosecutor's office is responsible for prosecuting perpetrators of criminal offenses ex officio. The majority of criminal offences in the Republic of Serbia fall into this category, meaning that a significantly smaller number of offences are prosecuted by private complaint, which depends solely on the will of the injured party. The author first of all examines the historical development of the public prosecutor's office, which has its roots in France. In the early XIX century, French Code d'instruction criminelle formalized the role of prosecutors as essential participants in the court proceedings, a practice that proved highly effective. The French model was later adopted by other European countries. The paper aims to define the public prosecutor's office in the context of its organization, focusing on the principles that underpin this state body. These principles exist to ensure the office operates as efficiently as possible. They include the principles of indivisibility, unity, hierarchical structure and monocratic decision-making. The author provides a detailed analysis of each of these principles, thereby offering deeper insight into the organization of the public prosecutor's office. Particular emphasis is placed on the position of the public prosecutor in the criminal proceedings, as one of the main criminal procedure actors, alongside the criminal court and the defendant. The prosecutor's role is most easily defined through the analysis of the rights and duties assigned by law. Therefore, the author outlines the role of the public prosecutors not only during the main trial, but also during the investigation, emphasizing their authority to represent the prosecution in the public interest. The public prosecutor is obliged to present the court with relevant evidence showing that the accused has indeed committed the offence in question, which will result in a conviction and the satisfaction of justice. In this regard, the author highlights the role of the police, other state bodies, and all natural and legal persons who are obliged to provide the requested information to the prosecutor if so required. The public prosecutor may propose that the criminal court examine a person as a witness, believing that the individual possesses useful information about the perpetrator and the circumstances under which the crime was committed (location, motive, potential accomplices, etc.). The author's intention is for the research results to underscore the necessity of good organization and regulation of the position of the public prosecutor's office, as this is the only way to ensure the effective protection of social goods. These goods primarily relate to a wide range of fundamental human rights guaranteed by both domestic and international legal acts. In conclusion, the author stresses the importance of legal regulation of criminal proceedings because convictions can deprive individuals of their right to freedom for an extended period. For this reason, the author clearly points out the need for fairness in the proceedings, which also applies to the conduct of the public prosecutor, who is obliged to present both inculpatory and exculpatory evidences before the court. Finally, author addresses the anomalies faced by certain states regarding the independence of the public prosecutor's office, providing recommendations to eliminate, primarily, political influence on the work of public prosecutors.

Keywords: Public prosecutor, criminal proceedings, organization, justice
Field: Social sciences (Law)

1. INTRODUCTION

The prescription of criminal offenses and criminal sanctions would be entirely ineffective if there was no procedure to determine whether a certain person actually committed the offense, in what manner, and with what motives. Some parties are indispensable participants in criminal proceedings, with the criminal court being a prime example, as it is a state authority responsible for ensuring that the criminal process is conducted legally. The court has the obligation to consider the rights and duties of other parties and to undertake all necessary actions to ensure the efficiency of the judicial system. The prosecution of perpetrators of criminal offenses is most often in the hands of the prosecutor's office. As an independent state authority, the public prosecutor's office is responsible for prosecuting criminal offenses that are not subject to private charges. The role of the prosecutor is usually carried out by the public prosecutor as a state authority (Totić, 2024, 140). These are criminal offenses that primarily harm the public interest, regardless of which specific legal good is violated in the particular case. The scope of the public prosecutor's office is defined by the Constitution and laws, with its autonomy guaranteed by the principle that no one has the right to influence its work, whether judicial, legislative, or executive bodies. The main task of the public

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prosecutor's office is to protect the fundamental values and achievements of civilization, as proclaimed in numerous international and domestic legal acts. Therefore, public prosecutors are obliged to perform their assigned functions impartially and in accordance with the law.

Protecting the public interest is imperative, thus the prosecutor's office is authorized to inform the public about ongoing criminal proceedings in a manner that does not obstruct the efficiency of the criminal procedure. Before the criminal court, the public prosecutor's office is authorized to file indictments against perpetrators of criminal offenses and to contribute to establishing the facts in the criminal process through its actions. The prosecutor's office is tasked with collecting evidence that will be presented directly before the court during the main trial, implying that the court's decision will be based on this evidence, as well as that presented by the defense, and occasionally by the court itself. The subject of proof includes facts relevant to making a judicial decision, which have direct procedural significance or pertain to determining the criminal offense and sanction (Škulić, 2014). The significance of proving in criminal proceedings is exceptional because if a procedural party fails to prove a fact, it must be considered as non-existent (Brkić, 2012, 318). The position of the public prosecutor is specific when compared to the role of the opposing party in the proceedings, i.e., the defense. The public prosecutor not only has the duty to represent the indictment but also to treat evidence impartially, whether it favors or goes against the accused. This duty arises from the prosecutor's status as a state authority, which mandates unequivocal compliance with the principle of legality.

2. ORIGIN AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

The public prosecutor is a party in criminal proceedings and, at the same time, an independent state authority with the right and duty to prosecute perpetrators of criminal offenses (Stevanović & Đurđić, 1998). However, until a criminal proceeding begins, involving the opposing party and ideally taking place before an independent and impartial court, the public prosecutor does not essentially fulfill the function of a party (Roxin, 1998). Historically, the origin and development of the public prosecutor's office are closely linked to the change in the concept of the prosecutorial function. In earlier times, the function of prosecuting accused persons was entrusted to the police and the courts. In the literature on criminal procedure, there is a consensus that the roots of the public prosecutor's office lie in France, emerging during the era of the absolutist monarchy as a form of state governance. The reasons for the establishment of this institution can be traced to the desire of the French kings at that time to secure a favorable position and outcome in proceedings that did not have an exclusively criminal-procedural character. The strengthening of their power eventually led to public prosecutors becoming mandatory participants in proceedings, further solidified by the decision to prohibit courts from operating without their presence. Over time, the role of protecting the ruler's interests was surpassed, and the public prosecutor's office took on the exclusive function of criminal prosecution. With the transition from the inquisitorial (investigative) to the modern type of criminal procedure, public prosecutors became legally authorized entities to whom citizens submit criminal complaints as acts initiating criminal proceedings. The adoption of Napoleon's Code d'instruction criminelle in 1808 fully aligned the public prosecutor's office with the modern type of criminal procedure. Given the significance and role of the well-organized French model for the functioning of the legal system, it is not surprising that the public prosecutor's office was established in other European countries as well. Good legislative solutions were adopted by other European states, such as Italy, Germany, and Austria. For example, in Germany, the public prosecutor's office was established in the mid-19th century by separating the investigative and judicial functions previously held by the investigating judge (Langbein, 1974, 440). In the Republic of Serbia the public prosecutor's office was established in 1929 with the enactment of the Judicial Criminal Procedure Code. Today, the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia from 2006 envisages the public prosecutor's office as an independent state authority, while its establishment, organization, jurisdiction, and other characteristics are detailed in the Law on the Public Prosecutor's Office, as well as the Law on the Seats and Jurisdictions of Courts and Public Prosecutor's Offices and the Criminal Procedure Code. By analyzing the constitutional and then legal provisions, it is established that the public prosecutor's office has the right and duty to prosecute perpetrators of criminal offenses, which implies the possibility of submitting legal remedies for this purpose. Any other way would hinder the effective functioning of the public prosecutor since it is precisely through the submission of the prescribed legal acts in criminal proceedings that the prosecutor fulfills its constitutionally and legally defined role as a party in criminal procedure.

The specificity of the public prosecutor's position in the proceedings lies in its ambivalence—it is both a party in the criminal procedure and a state authority prosecuting perpetrators of criminal offenses (Grubač, 2004). Thus, its legal nature is dual, as the prosecutor's office holds the status of a state authority

and simultaneously one of the main parties in the proceedings. Therefore, impartiality and objectivity in the work of the public prosecutor are imperative, just as they are for the criminal court. A more detailed examination of the legal nature of the public prosecutor's office reveals that it is not a judicial body. Namely, the public prosecutor's office does not have judicial functions within its jurisdiction, but its work indicates that it is not entirely independent of the court. The most accurate definition would be to consider the public prosecutor's office as a quasi-judicial body that collaborates with the court in protecting society from crime, thus acknowledging its judicial role. This cooperation is characterized by the submission of legal instruments to the court based on statutory authorization. In respecting the principle of fairness in criminal proceedings, the legislator also provides other criminal procedure subjects with the opportunity to challenge the prosecutor's decisions if they are dissatisfied with them for certain reasons. For instance, a victim may submit a request to the court to take over the prosecution if the public prosecutor has withdrawn from or decided not to initiate the proceedings at all. Although it acts as a party in the criminal procedure, represents the indictment, and undertakes activities with the criminal court to reach a lawful judicial decision, the public prosecutor's office does not have the authority to participate in rendering that decision. The prosecutor can only influence the court's decision regarding the existence or non-existence of the accused's guilt by presenting relevant evidence. Evidence is provided by the public prosecutor and the police forces, whose main task is to gather useful information from citizens and individuals who possess scientific and professional knowledge in specific fields (Totić, 2024, 106).

3. PRINCIPLES OF THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE OPERATION

Regarding its legal nature, an interesting viewpoint is that the public prosecutor's office is an independent body of the National Assembly functionally connected with the executive branch through the Government, which holds executive power (Ilić, 2018, 6). The work of the criminal court is always subject to criticism since the public is interested in respecting legality, fairness, and justice. Like the criminal court, which operates based on certain principles, principles also characterize the work and activities of the public prosecutor's office in criminal proceedings. Principles serve as the backbone of internal organization and relationships within the prosecutor's office (Bošković & Kesić, 2020). The first principle is hierarchy, which should be considered in two ways. It refers to the organization of the public prosecutor's office as a whole and each individual prosecutor's office. The public prosecutor's office is based on the principle of subordination and superordination, meaning a lower-ranking prosecutor is subordinate to a higher-ranking prosecutor, and vice versa. As a result, lower-ranking prosecutors often receive criticisms from higher authorities to correct irregularities in their work. In this regard, lower-ranking prosecutors may receive instructions aimed at improving their performance for more efficient prosecution. Such instructions are usually issued in writing but can also be given orally in exceptional circumstances when urgency is required. In practice, urgency typically implies the inability to perform a specific action in the future or the inefficiency of that action. However, the legislator stipulates that oral instructions must be formalized in writing within three days. The principle of unity and indivisibility of the public prosecutor's office means that it is a unified state body across the Republic of Serbia's territory. Furthermore, this unity and indivisibility are present in each prosecutor's office, suggesting a connection from the lowest to the highest level, creating a unified entity. There is also unity among prosecutor offices of different ranks, and all prosecutor's office members, without exception, act uniformly toward third parties. Therefore, any action taken by a prosecutor represents an obligation for the entire prosecutor's office.

The principle of devolution allows a higher-ranking prosecutor to perform actions authorized to a lower-ranking prosecutor, thus controlling the work of the prosecutor's office and correcting the lower prosecutor's actions if needed. The principle of substitution (delegation) enables a higher prosecutor to delegate actions to another lower prosecutor when the originally authorized prosecutor cannot perform the tasks. In such cases, the higher prosecutor must issue a decision explaining the reasons for this delegation. The principle of monocratic (unipersonal) organization of the public prosecutor's office indicates that the function is carried out exclusively by one person, the public prosecutor. Monocracy is a key feature, as it is not possible to perform tasks or decide on any matter collectively. In communication with external parties, one person from the public prosecutor's office is always responsible. Undoubtedly, the principles underlying the public prosecutor's office are primarily established in the public interest. The public interest, which guides criminal proceedings, demands a complete and undisputed truth about the facts forming the basis of the accused's criminal responsibility since only the accused, whose criminal liability has been fully and indisputably established, may be punished. This foundation establishes the state's right to punish, known as ius puniendi (Sijerčić-Čolić, 2012, 77). The establishment of principles aims to enhance the functionality of the public prosecutor's office, ensuring it serves citizens more efficiently.

4. THE POSITION OF THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

The primary task of the public prosecutor, as an authorized prosecutor and organ of criminal procedure, is to objectively, comprehensively, and lawfully clarify and resolve a particular criminal matter, thereby achieving criminal law protection of society from crime (Milošević & Tošić Sremac, 2023). There are theories suggesting that upholding legality is the main function of the public prosecutor, implying that the prosecutor is primarily a protector of the law (Ilić, 2007). The public prosecutor's position in criminal proceedings is unique, resulting from a wide range of rights and duties defined by law. The public prosecutor is a party to the criminal process who represents the indictment and is responsible for initiating and maintaining the proceedings. Before initiating criminal proceedings, the prosecutor plays an active role in the investigation phase, focusing on gathering evidence to support the claim that the accused committed the alleged crime, leading to the indictment. It is the prosecutor's duty to prosecute offenders for crimes that are prosecuted ex officio. If there is sufficient evidence creating the necessary level of suspicion that a crime has indeed been committed, the prosecutor is obliged to initiate criminal proceedings. Through procedural actions by both the prosecutor and other participants in the criminal process, the final goal—resolution of the criminal matter—is achieved. Although the public prosecutor is primarily responsible for the function of prosecution, it should not be overlooked that various actors assist in this role. For instance, while gathering evidence of the crime, the prosecutor may encounter individuals who can provide relevant information about the perpetrator or other important circumstances. In such cases, these individuals will be designated as witnesses by the prosecutor's office and summoned to testify in court about what they know. A similar situation occurs with experts who, at the prosecutor's request, offer specialized assistance in non-legal fields to clarify the factual situation further. The prosecutor can publicly invite anyone with relevant information for a particular case to provide it to the prosecutor's office. The Criminal Procedure Code stipulates that criminal reports for offenses prosecuted ex officio should be submitted to the competent public prosecutor in writing, orally, or through other means.

However, in practice, criminal reports are often first submitted to the police (Kiurski & Stepanov, 2022). The most important cooperation exists between the prosecutor's office and the police, involving numerous measures to gather crucial information. Police officers assist the prosecutor's office during crime scene inspections, reconstructions, and other evidentiary actions, significantly aiding the acquisition of essential information for the proceedings. Police officers are legally required to cooperate with the prosecutor's office, but this duty extends to other state bodies and all legal entities. Specifically, if a police officer refuses to cooperate with the prosecutor, the prosecutor can inform his/her superior. In such situations, the prosecutor can also notify the relevant ministry, the Government, or a parliamentary committee. The police and other state bodies must act upon the prosecutor's request within 24 hours after receiving the notification, otherwise, the prosecutor can request the initiation of disciplinary proceedings against the individual who failed to act. While the police, as a state body responsible for ensuring security and peace, generally act independently, the prosecutor's office may assume the execution of certain actions during the pre-investigation phase. However, this raises questions about the prosecutor's expertise, and in practice, prosecutors seldom resort to this authority. Instead, the police are obliged to report to the prosecutor immediately after performing any evidentiary actions. The law empowers the police to detain individuals found at the crime scene for up to 6 hours, pending the arrival of the prosecutor. These are individuals who possess crucial information for the criminal process, and questioning them later may be impossible or inefficient. Courts are also required to cooperate with the prosecutor's office, usually by providing case files and other information necessary for the prosecutor's further actions. Failure of the court or any other state body to comply with the prosecutor's request results in monetary penalties.

5. DISCUSSION

Punishing offenders is a fundamental characteristic and conditio sine qua non for the functioning of the rule of law. Only through a lawfully conducted criminal procedure the state has the opportunity to prosecute and sanction individuals who have committed offenses against protected interests. Overall, the efficiency of the public prosecutor's office depends on numerous factors, with expertise and technical resources standing out. However, practice shows that the most crucial element for the prosecutor's office's efficiency is ensuring its independence in performing its duties. Only through autonomy can the prosecutor's office adequately respond to the challenges it faces and continually contribute to the stability of the legal order. Therefore, eliminating any external influences that could undermine the autonomy of the prosecutor's office is imperative. In countries where there is governmental influence over the prosecutor's office, organized crime finds fertile ground, leading to a decline in public trust in state institutions and an

increase in corruption. This results in unwanted outcomes, as a small portion of the population remains unaccountable for their illegal activities, creating a group of "untouchables." In such cases, the prosecutor's responsibility is particularly significant, as these often involve criminal offenses that must be prosecuted. It is not uncommon for the police to gather the necessary evidence against an individual, only for the prosecutor's office to decide not to prosecute. This is where the influence of politics on the prosecutor's office becomes most evident, undoubtedly leading to a widening gap among people. Legislative solutions are therefore needed not only to regulate the work of the prosecutor's office but also of all state bodies, with the primary goal being to ensure conditions for their unimpeded operation and proper functioning. Only in this way can the prosecutor's office, in cooperation with other state bodies, effectively work on prosecuting those who disregard accepted social norms.

Unfortunately, anomalies in the work of judicial bodies are pervasive in the countries that emerged from the former Yugoslavia. As a result, the most severe consequences are felt by citizens, who justifiably believe that fairness and justice are not the guiding principles of those in judicial positions. For decades, the ruling structures in these countries have tightly held all the levers of power, which significantly impacts the perception of the entire region in the eyes of other European and global nations. Ruling parties often view the prosecutor's office as a form of private property intended to serve their political goals, which are primarily lucrative. Such a state of affairs is incompatible with the original function of the prosecutor's office, justifying the claim that this state body largely does not serve the interests of all citizens but rather those of specific interest groups. As a result of the inefficient exercise of prosecutorial functions, individuals responsible for various criminal acts remain unpunished and undeservedly gain an advantage over the general population, whose interests the prosecutor's office should be protecting. There are numerous examples from European countries that also struggle with the link between political and criminal structures but have achieved significant results in combating their influence. Italy is a prime example of a country that has faced a decades-long issue with organized crime, but it also has strong judicial institutions and trained individuals ready to free Italian society from the grip of the mafia.

6. CONCLUSION

Given that criminal proceedings can result in long-term imprisonment sentences that restrict the right to freedom, it is not surprising that such proceedings are rigorously regulated by legal provisions. These provisions determine who the subjects of criminal procedure are, as well as their roles and positions in establishing a person's guilt. This meticulous regulation is necessary because criminal acts threaten and harm fundamental human values, which are the achievements of civilization. Any assault on a person's life, body, or property disrupts the stability of the system. The most important aspect is having a well-organized system where victims can receive adequate protection before competent authorities, and perpetrators receive appropriate sanctions. Any other outcome is incompatible with the modern concept of establishing criminal liability. To ensure that criminal proceedings are conducted lawfully, the institution of the public prosecutor's office was introduced as a state authority responsible for prosecuting offenses that violate the public interest. The development of the public prosecutor's office is a direct consequence of the progress of human civilization, expressing the desire to provide adequate protection for essential human values. This, in turn, safeguards the existing social order, as any other power dynamic would lead to lawlessness and the negation of fundamental human rights and freedoms. The primary task of the public prosecutor's office is to uphold constitutionality and legality, underscoring the importance of this institution in modern states. In the Republic of Serbia, its operation is governed by the Constitution and legal provisions that thoroughly regulate the organization, jurisdiction, functioning, and role of the prosecutor's office. One of the main characteristics of the prosecutor's office is its independence in carrying out assigned tasks, along with the ability to collaborate with various entities in collecting relevant information, which will later serve as the basis for a court's decision after the completion of criminal proceedings.

The prosecutor's office has the right to seek assistance from the police primarily in gathering information deemed important for the successful conduct of criminal proceedings, as well as from all individuals and legal entities capable of contributing to the clarification and resolution of a criminal matter. Thus, the public prosecutor can request that a particular person be questioned as a witness or that an expert examination be carried out on an item believed to have been used in the commission of a criminal offense. The public prosecutor's office is one of the main participants in criminal proceedings, alongside the criminal court and the defendant. Throughout the process, the prosecutor's task is to convince the court that a particular individual committed the offense by presenting valid evidence. It is the prosecutor's duty to prosecute offenders in the public interest and contribute to a conviction through activities. However, during the collection of evidence, the prosecutor may also encounter facts that favor the defense. In such

cases, the public prosecutor is obliged to present these to the court, adhering to the principle of fairness. The possibility of reviewing the legality of the public prosecutor's work also stems from the hierarchical structure of this institution, where higher prosecutors can review the work of lower ones, providing advice and comments. Additionally, victims who believe that the public prosecutor is not acting in line with their expectations can address higher authorities to point out shortcomings in the prosecutor's actions. Finally, it is worth noting that the legislative framework governing the position and role of the public prosecutor's office in the Republic of Serbia is robust. However, it is evident that significant negative influences from political and criminal factors hinder the effective fulfillment of its assigned responsibilities.

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POWERS OF ADMINISTRATIVE INSPECTION BODIES IN SANCTIONING ECONOMIC MISDEMEANORS IN SERBIAN LAW

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Abstract: In the paper, the author analyzes the connection between administrative inspection bodies ("inspekcije") and sanctioning economic misdemeanors in Serbian law. The purpose of the paper is to answer several questions. Why do administrative inspection bodies have specific powers in sanctioning economic misdemeanors and what gives them an opportunity to detect economic misdemeanors? What are the powers given to the administrative inspection bodies after detecting an economic misdemeanor and what is the legal nature of these powers? Classical legal methods are being used: dogmatic and normative. In answering to these questions, the author shows the general connection between administrative inspection ("inspekcijski nadzor") and detection of misdemeanors, using economic misdemeanors as a paradigm. After that, the author explains what powers administrative inspection bodies have after detection of economic misdemeanors, in imposing misdemeanor sanctions. Finally, the author analyzes the legal nature of these powers – whether they are only procedural or meritorious as well. The results show that administrative inspection bodies have two basic powers, depending on the specific economic misdemeanor: to initiate a misdemeanor court procedure by submitting the formal request or to issue a misdemeanor fine order ("prekršajni nalog"). The power to initiate a misdemeanor court procedure has a clear, procedural nature. Legal nature of the inspector's power to issue a misdemeanor fine order, however, is not clear, because it depends on the legal nature of the misdemeanor fine order itself, which is also ambiguous. A misdemeanor fine order has been regulated in an unclear and illogical manner. It has been qualified both as a decision to impose a misdemeanor sanction and a request to initiate a misdemeanor court procedure at the same time. It has been given an ambivalent character, which a legal institution could not normally have. After a detailed analysis of the legal nature of a misdemeanor fine order, the author concludes, proving the main hypothesis, that it is a decision made to impose a misdemeanor sanction. This means that the powers of inspectors, when issuing a misdemeanor fine order, are the powers of essentially meritorious nature. The author recommends that the court's adjudication should be actually understood as a judicial protection which has been given to the offender. This is the way the legislation should also change, so that the various legislative contradictions could be removed and so that the powers of administrative inspection bodies could have a clear legislative grounds.

Keywords: administrative inspection, administrative inspection bodies, economic misdemeanors, request to initiate a misdemeanor procedure, misdemeanor fine order.

Field: Social sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

In Serbian law, until recently, administrative bodies were authorized to decide on misdemeanor cases. However, after the latest misdemeanor regulations, they have lost this authority. Misdemeanor cases are only trialed by the misdemeanor courts, which means that the role of administrative bodies, including those competent for administrative inspection (used as a general Serbian term "inspekcijski nadzor", and not as a literal translation of the term "upravna inspekcija"), particularly important in this context, has also changed.

The administrative inspection bodies ("inspekcije") have also lost their essential meritorious powers in fighting misdemeanor offenses by losing their former jurisdiction in a misdemeanor procedure. Today, they are mostly left with procedural powers: their main role is prosecuting the offender before the court. Nevertheless, it seems that the meritorious powers of administrative inspection bodies are not completely lost. They can still be found in the form of a misdemeanor fine order ("prekršajni nalog"), although in a quite specific and unusual way.

Specific powers in fighting misdemeanor offenses are generally given to all inspection bodies, but their true value can be primarily seen in the field of economy. It should be clear, therefore, that economic misdemeanors (misdemeanors connected by the same object they should protect – the economy) have not been selected by accident. They are used as a paradigm to show that inspection bodies have an essential role in this field, solving some of the main problems of economic misdemeanors, as crimes hard to detect and known for their dark figure. Administrative inspection creates an opportunity to get first

indications of the committed economic misdemeanor offense and collect the evidence, which is usually hidden in the reviewed documents.

The research should explain this relationship between administrative inspection bodies and fighting economic misdemeanors. The aim is to answer several questions. First, why do administrative inspection bodies have any powers in fighting economic misdemeanors? Second, what powers do they exactly have after detecting an economic misdemeanor? Finally, what is the legal nature of these powers and are they truly only procedural, or meritorious as well?

By answering these questions, we will try to prove the main hypothesis of the paper. When they prosecute the offender for an economic misdemeanor before the court and initiate a misdemeanor court procedure, administrative inspection bodies have clear powers of procedural nature. When issuing a misdemeanor fine order, however, their powers are ambiguous due to the contradictory legal nature of the misdemeanor fine order itself. If we want to discover the true legal nature of these powers, first we have to examine the true legal nature of the misdemeanor fine order. This examination should show us that, despite legislative contradictions, a misdemeanor fine order is a decision on imposing a misdemeanor sanction. Therefore, the powers of administrative inspection bodies, when issuing a misdemeanor fine order for an economic misdemeanor, essentially still have a meritorious nature.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Achieving the aforementioned goals requires the use of the classical legal methods – dogmatic and normative. The dogmatic method, or the method of legal interpretation, is used to determine the exact or true meaning of the specific legal rules regulating the powers of administrative inspection bodies in fighting economic misdemeanors. The normative method and observing these regulations as a whole, as a system, should give us a closer explanation of these powers and their legal nature.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Administrative bodies and fighting misdemeanors have been traditionally connected. A long time ago, during the police state period, misdemeanors were also described as police offenses, i.e., offenses punishable by the police. Since the authority that applied misdemeanor sanctions was administrative, misdemeanor offenses were also conceived as a part of administrative law (Milkov, 2020). This relationship between administrative and misdemeanor law was solid in German countries (historically speaking), and in Austrian law, it remains so even today (Milkov, 1986; Wieser, 2009).

Traditional connections between administrative bodies and misdemeanors can also be found in Serbian law. For a long time, administrative bodies were authorized to impose sanctions in misdemeanor proceedings. However, this connection has been weakened with the establishment of misdemeanor courts, as courts of competent jurisdiction. After the establishment of misdemeanor courts, administrative bodies were actually still empowered to carry out the misdemeanor procedure, but only at the beginning and only in the first instance (ZoUS, Art. 27; ZP2005, Art. 91). Very soon, after the enacting of the latest Misdemeanor Act, they completely lost this competence. Today, therefore, under the Misdemeanor Act, only misdemeanor courts have jurisdiction in cases of this kind (ZP, Art. 100).

Transforming the misdemeanor procedure into a court procedure has definitely changed and weakened the role of administrative bodies in dealing with misdemeanor offenders, but their powers are not completely gone. By taking administrative actions, they still have the opportunity to detect misdemeanors. This, of course, applies not solely to the police but also to various administrative inspection bodies.

The primary function of the inspection bodies is the administrative inspection. To carry out an inspection means determining whether the economic and other activities of natural and legal persons comply with the applicable laws and regulations. It implies direct insight into these operations, followed by imposing prescribed measures depending on the results (ZDU, Art. 18, Para. 1). These measures are of an administrative nature, which means that the main purpose of the inspection is not to detect misdemeanors and apply misdemeanor sanctions. Detecting misdemeanors can only be a side effect of the administrative action – a side but a rather logical effect. Although detecting misdemeanors is not a primary role of inspection bodies, it is a logical result of their administrative powers. These powers, including observation, taking statements, reviewing documents and records, sampling, photographing, etc., give the inspection bodies an opportunity to discover committed misdemeanors and collect the evidence (Milovanović & Vasiljević, 2014; Rapajić, 2019; Martinović, 2018).

The relationship between administrative inspection and the detection of misdemeanors is essential in the field of economy. It is important not only because of the frequency of administrative inspection in

this field and the fact that it is carried out by numerous bodies but also because of the specific features of economic misdemeanors. To mention only the tax administration and its role in fighting shadow economy (Rapajić et al., 2021; Milić, 2023). Economic crimes, in general, are hard to detect and are characterized by their dark figure (Škulić, 2015). The issue of economic crimes, including economic misdemeanors, refers primarily to their detection and evidence collection. At the source of the problem, therefore, the role of the administrative inspection bodies seems to be the most significant. Qualified and competent officers and their administrative powers are the crucial prerequisites for detecting economic misdemeanors, the traces of which are usually hidden in the business documents.

Using economic activities as a paradigm, it should be clear that the relationship between administrative inspection and misdemeanors is necessary and rather natural. Just because they no longer have the power to carry out a misdemeanor procedure does not mean that administrative bodies have nothing to do with detected misdemeanors. On the contrary, they still have an essential role to play in applying misdemeanor sanctions.

After discovering that an economic misdemeanor offense has been committed, inspectors of administrative inspection bodies have the authority to take two actions: first, they are authorized to initiate a misdemeanor court procedure by submitting the formal request; second, they are authorized to issue a misdemeanor fine order (ZIN, Art. 42, Para. 1). Cases in which these powers can be used are expressly regulated and do not depend upon the inspector's discretion.

A misdemeanor fine order shall be issued for economic misdemeanors punishable only by a fine, determined by law in a fixed amount. In other cases, inspectors shall address the court and initiate the misdemeanor procedure, i.e., request the misdemeanor court procedure to be instituted (ZP, Art. 168, Para. 1-2). After the start of the misdemeanor process, the inspector that made the request shall have the position of a party. Its function is to prosecute the offender while the court is authorized to adjudicate the case. On the other hand, by issuing a misdemeanor fine order, the inspector imposes the punishment as an exception to the rule according to which misdemeanor sanctions shall be imposed only by the misdemeanor courts (ZP, Art. 87).

These powers, however, shall not be used every time. There are some exceptions to these duties – to prosecute the offender or issue a misdemeanor fine order. First, it shall not happen when the violation is not only an economic misdemeanor offense but also an administrative law violation at the same time, and the offender has acted in compliance with the imposed administrative measures. Additionally, it is important that the fine does not exceed the specific amount, that no misdemeanor law measures are prescribed, and that no damage or harm is inflicted – if so, then it should be compensated. Secondly, the offender shall not be prosecuted or punished if he reports the violation himself before the commencement of the inspection procedure or before the notification of the upcoming inspection. Again, inflicted damage or harm should be compensated, i.e., all available means should be used to compensate for the inflicted damage or harm (ZIN, Art. 42, Para. 3).

One of the main principles of a misdemeanor procedure is the accusatory principle. According to this principle, a misdemeanor procedure shall be carried out on the grounds of request, submitted to the court by a competent authority (ZP, Art. 88). The legal theory describes this request as an indictment (Ristivojević & Milić, 2023). Its legal nature seems to be quite clear. Therefore, administrative inspection bodies' role as authorities competent to submit the request seems equally clear. By submitting the request, an inspector charges the offender with a misdemeanor offense. In other words, the inspector's function is to prosecute the offender before the court. As a prosecutor in the misdemeanor procedure, the inspector has the position of a party, which means the inspector has a wide range of procedural rights and duties. In short, all the powers of inspectors in performing this prosecuting function are the powers of a procedural nature.

Unlike with the above request, the legal nature of a misdemeanor fine order is not so clear. Quite the opposite: it is very ambiguous. Therefore, the powers of inspectors when issuing this order are of a similar nature: vague and disputable. To begin with, it could be said that these powers have a mixed and combined character – procedural and meritorious at the same time.

A misdemeanor fine order is said to actually have a double legal nature. It is considered a decision and an indictment at the same time. As a decision, it is made to impose a misdemeanor sanction. As an indictment, it leads to charges against the misdemeanor offender. To be precise, it is a decision made to impose a fine on the offender, but also a latent indictment, similar to the already explained request to initiate and institute a misdemeanor court procedure (Jeličić, 2018). Unlike the request, this "indictment" is submitted to the court by the offender himself (Milić, 2022).

The complex legal nature of a misdemeanor fine order derives from legal regulations. It should be remembered that a fixed fine is being imposed on the offender by issuing a misdemeanor fine order.

Actually, it could be said that a fine is being applied, but only conditionally, because it depends on whether the offender accepts the misdemeanor liability.

The misdemeanor liability can be accepted by paying half the fine within eight days of receiving the order. This way, the offender is released from the duty of paying the other half. If the fine is not paid, it will mean that the offender accepts the liability due to omission if he does not address the court to decide the case within the same time limit. It shall mean that the misdemeanor fine order has become final and enforceable (ZP, Art. 173, Para. 1-2).

If the offender does not accept the liability, he shall bring the case before the court by submitting the misdemeanor fine order and turning it into a request for a court decision. From that moment on, the offender becomes the accused or the defendant, although the misdemeanor procedure has not yet actually commenced. It will formally commence only if the court decides so (ZP, Art. 174, Para. 1-2, Art. 177, Para. 1). After the court has decided that the misdemeanor procedure has formally commenced, the offender is no longer fined, i.e. it is legally presumed that the fine has not been imposed (ZP, Art. 174, Para. 6). If that is the case, the body that issued the misdemeanor fine order once again has to use its procedural powers to prosecute the defendant.

These unusual legal rules regarding a misdemeanor fine order are difficult to explain logically as they combine something that should not be combined. Only the consequences, which have led to numerous contradictions, seem logical. A misdemeanor fine order should be used to impose a misdemeanor sanction and, at the same time, initiate a misdemeanor procedure in which the sanction should be imposed! In a given legal framework such as this one, many things could be argued: e.g., the legal nature of the procedure in which a misdemeanor fine order should be issued, the legal position of the offender, and particularly the fact that a misdemeanor fine order, as a decision made to impose a fine, becomes capable of transforming into a request submitted to the court to decide on the case.

The procedure for issuing a misdemeanor fine order is not regulated as a misdemeanor procedure. A misdemeanor procedure is only regulated as a court procedure and formally commences only when the court decides so. Before that, the misdemeanor procedure does not exist, regardless of the fact that a misdemeanor fine order has been issued. In fact, if the offender does not address the court, there will be no misdemeanor procedure at all. But if this procedure is not a misdemeanor procedure, what kind of procedure is it? What is its legal nature? In what proceedings should misdemeanor sanctions be applied if not in a misdemeanor one? Even though a misdemeanor fine order is issued by an administrative body, the procedure itself is not administrative.

The person to whom a misdemeanor fine order has been issued becomes the defendant only when the request for a court decision is made. And that request is made by the defendant himself, as already explained. But what is the position of the offender before that moment? Legal theory tells us that before the commencement of the court procedure, the offender is actually only a suspect (Ristivojević & Milić, 2023). This "suspect," however, has also been fined because a misdemeanor fine order has been issued! How is it possible for the same person to be punished for a misdemeanor offense and suspected of committing it at the same time? Following the legislative logic, we come to the conclusion that the offender has been punished first, only to be accused later!

The legislative "logic" is actually the following: the person to whom a misdemeanor fine order has been issued has been punished and has not been punished at the same time! At the same time, a misdemeanor sanction has been imposed and has not been imposed! It has not been imposed as it depends on the offender and whether he accepts the liability or not. If the offender does not address the court, he will remain punished. However, if he addresses the court, he will become the defendant. If the court commences the misdemeanor procedure, it will mean that there was no fine at all, that the fine was only apparent.

Legal rules give the impression that the request for a court decision is not a separate submission. The request is the misdemeanor fine order itself, submitted to the court. Hence, the previous observation that a misdemeanor fine order mysteriously changes its legal nature and transforms itself from a decision made to impose a fine into a request for a court decision. Of course, this unusual transformation could not be made logically and consistently. A misdemeanor fine order has suddenly become a submission, but it is not entirely clear which one.

As a request for the court to decide on the case, the offender presents a misdemeanor fine order. This way, however, the offender becomes the defendant, which does not seem logical because it implies he has accused himself. If the offender addressed the court by submitting the "indictment," something very unusual would happen: the offender would prosecute himself.

As a submission of the offender, the request will not be further considered by the court if it is unsigned or presented after the given time limit. If that is the case, the misdemeanor fine order shall become final

and enforceable. Suddenly, however, in the same context of meeting the formal requirements for further proceedings, the request seems to be submitted by the inspector that issued the misdemeanor fine order. At the same time, again. If the misdemeanor fine order does not meet all the formal requirements for further proceedings, especially if the violation has not been precisely and clearly described and determined, the court shall ask the inspector to correct it. Otherwise, the misdemeanor fine order shall be dismissed on formal grounds (ZP, Art. 174, 182). At the climax of these legislative exhibitions, we can see that an illegal decision can turn into an incomplete submission and be dismissed. But what it really means and what is actually being dismissed is not specified! If there is only one and the same submission to the court, then the legal consequences should also be the same, although absurd: the misdemeanor fine order becomes the request for a court decision submitted by the offender, which is being dismissed for not being corrected by the inspector, becoming at the same time final and enforceable!

All these contradictions result from misunderstanding the true legal nature of a misdemeanor fine order. The legislator has misunderstood the fact that a legal institution cannot have a double legal nature and cannot cover two legal institutions of different legal natures at the same time, nor can it change its legal nature, becoming something else. If a misdemeanor fine order imposes a fine, becoming final and enforceable, then it has to be a legal act – a decision – and not a mere submission to the court!

If a misdemeanor fine order were truly an indictment, it could not be a decision made to impose a misdemeanor sanction. If a misdemeanor fine order is a decision, it will not become an indictment as it cannot change its legal nature. Submitting the order to the court cannot be explained as indicting, especially keeping in mind the fact that it shall be submitted by the offender. The request made to the court could be logically explained only as the request for judicial review of the misdemeanor fine order. Adjudicating the case means giving the offender judicial protection against a misdemeanor fine order as the previous decision on the misdemeanor sanction. The entire misdemeanor procedure, as a judicial proceeding, resembles a "legal remedy" against a misdemeanor fine order – to use the analogy with the judicial review of administrative actions.

The legal nature of a misdemeanor fine order cannot be influenced by whether the offender accepts the liability. For the legal concept of a misdemeanor fine order, it changes nothing. Otherwise, the essence of every decision could be influenced by whether the party accepts it or not. If accepting the decision, the party will implement it – if not, the party will challenge it. It sounds very logical. Why should a misdemeanor fine order be any different in that respect? Perhaps because the legislator is determined to show that administrative bodies have no jurisdiction in these cases, only courts do. Administrative bodies are not authorized to decide on a misdemeanor procedure case but to apply a misdemeanor sanction?! Once again, we have to ask ourselves the same question: in what procedure should a misdemeanor fine order be issued? In what procedure should a misdemeanor sanction be applied? In a misdemeanor procedure, of course, no matter who makes the decision and how summary the procedure really is!

The constitutional right to a fair trial could be a potential reason for this legislative approach. If so, it must be noted that the reason is not justified. In the spirit of the right to a fair trial, administrative bodies could also decide on misdemeanor cases in a misdemeanor procedure. Their decision, however, would have to be subject to judicial review of full scope and jurisdiction. The right to judicial protection against the decision, and not exclusive judicial decision-making, would be quite sufficient for the right to a fair trial. Concealing the true nature of a misdemeanor fine order has only led to problems and legislative contradictions. Regardless of the legislative intentions and this legislative Gordian knot, the powers of administrative inspection bodies, when issuing a misdemeanor fine order for an economic misdemeanor, essentially remain powers of a meritorious nature.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The main role of the administrative inspection bodies is not to detect misdemeanor offenses. As the name suggests, the main function of an administrative inspection body is to perform an administrative inspection using administrative powers. Detecting misdemeanor offenses is only a side effect of performing an administrative inspection, though a very logical one, because of the way an administrative search is carried out. That is why administrative powers are logically followed by the powers delegated to these bodies by the misdemeanor law.

Inspector's powers granted by the misdemeanor law are not explicitly designed to fight economic misdemeanors but can show their full value and importance regarding this type of offense. Economic misdemeanors, the same as economic crimes in general, are mostly hidden and hard to detect. Powers immanent in administrative inspection and qualified officers as experts in the specific field of economy seem to be of crucial importance for detecting economic misdemeanors and collecting the evidence.

Inspectors are given two central powers upon detecting an economic misdemeanor. Depending on the offense and the prescribed sanctions, they are authorized to request a misdemeanor court procedure or issue a misdemeanor fine order.

The inspector actually prosecutes the offender by initiating a misdemeanor procedure before the court. As the initiator of the misdemeanor procedure, the inspector has the position of a party, i.e., has numerous procedural rights and duties. In other words, the inspector's function is purely procedural, without any meritorious powers to decide on the case.

On the other hand, by issuing a misdemeanor fine order, the inspectors themselves impose a misdemeanor sanction. It should mean that the inspector's powers are meritorious and that the inspectors themselves have decided on the case. It is true, but only if the offender accepts the liability. If not, the offender shall address the court, and the misdemeanor fine order shall become a request for the court to decide on the case. This way, the procedural powers of the inspectors in prosecuting the offender are reactivated.

It appears that a misdemeanor fine order has been given an ambivalent legal nature. It is a decision on the misdemeanor sanction and a request submitted to the court to initiate the misdemeanor procedure. When this legislation was made, the legislator seems to have forgotten that a legal institution cannot represent two legal institutions at the same time, nor can it mysteriously change its legal nature and become something essentially different. If the misdemeanor fine order is a decision made to impose a misdemeanor sanction, it cannot simultaneously be a request for a decision, nor can it become one! If the misdemeanor fine order were a request, an indictment, or a mere submission, it could not be a decision at the same time, nor could it ever have been!

Legislation combining something that should not be combined has led to numerous contradictions. Apparently, the procedure of issuing a misdemeanor fine order is not a misdemeanor procedure! Apparently, the offender who has been fined has not even been accused yet! Apparently, a misdemeanor fine order can become final and enforceable, but it can also be dismissed as an incomplete submission because the inspector has not corrected it, although it has not been submitted to the court by the inspector! To take the legislative absurdity to the limits, a misdemeanor fine order, as an "indictment," shall be submitted to the court by the offender so that he could accuse and prosecute himself!

All these legislative contradictions seem to result from misunderstanding the true legal nature of a misdemeanor fine order. If it serves to impose a fine, it has to be a decision and a legal act. By issuing a misdemeanor fine order, misdemeanor liability is decided on, and misdemeanor sanction is applied. That is why a misdemeanor fine order can become final and enforceable. The offender's standpoint could not change that, nor could it transform an order into a mere submission to the court.

Submitting a misdemeanor fine order to the court could only be logically explained as requesting judicial protection. Before the court, the offender requests a judicial review and challenges the misdemeanor fine order. A misdemeanor fine order and a request for a court decision should not be seen as one and the same thing, regardless of the form in which the request is submitted. As a decision without some essential formal elements, a misdemeanor fine order should not be dismissed as an incomplete submission. It is illegal, and it should be annulled. In the end, understanding the true legal nature of a misdemeanor fine order suggests that the powers of administrative inspection bodies, when issuing this order for an economic misdemeanor, are essentially meritorious. The inspector decides on the case and imposes a fine in a procedure that could not be unknown and unspecified – it could only be a misdemeanor procedure!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LEGAL ASPECTS OF INVESTOR PROTECTION IN SERBIA

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Abstract: Investor protection is a key element in creating a favorable business environment and attracting foreign and domestic investments. This scientific paper analyzes the legal aspects of investor protection in the Republic of Serbia, with special reference to the legislative framework, institutional mechanisms and international agreements that regulate this area. This paper deals with identifying the legal challenges that investors face, as well as the existing mechanisms that ensure their protection. Through the analysis of domestic and international legal frameworks, the goal is to point out the importance of further improvement of legal solutions and strengthening of institutional support for investor protection. The paper further discusses the role of international arbitration in the settlement of investment disputes. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the legal aspects of investor protection in the Republic of Serbia, with a focus on the compliance of domestic legislation with international standards and practices. In this paper we use a legal-analytical methodology, which includes a review of relevant laws, an analysis of institutional mechanisms for investor protection, as well as case studies from court practice and arbitration proceedings. The research results show that, although there is a solid legislative framework, certain legal risks still remain, especially in terms of law enforcement and the protection of investors' rights in practice. Recommendations include further strengthening of institutional support and improvement of transparency in the settlement of investment disputes. The conclusion of the paper emphasizes the need for continuous adjustment of the legal system in order to further improve the protection of investors and ensure a more favorable investment environment in Serbia.

Keywords: investor protection, investments, legal framework, Serbia, arbitration, international standards, institutional mechanisms.

Field: Business law

1. INTRODUCTION

Investor protection is a key aspect of the economic development of any country, especially in the context of globalization and the increasingly intensive movement of capital across borders. Investors, whether domestic or foreign, play a vital role in promoting economic growth, creating new jobs and fostering technological progress. However, in order for investments to be sustainable and attractive, it is necessary to ensure legal certainty and protection of investors from various risks, including unfair regulations, uncertainty in law enforcement, as well as abuses by state or private entities.

In the Republic of Serbia, investors' protection occupies an increasingly important place in the legal framework, especially after the process of harmonization of legislation with European legal standards, which are necessary for the further development of the market economy and the attraction of foreign direct investments (FDI). Through a series of reforms, Serbia has improved its laws on investor protection, as well as the institutional framework that enables quick and efficient protection of investors' rights. However, despite the existence of a relatively stable legislative framework, many investors face challenges in practice, which include bureaucratic obstacles, insufficiently transparent processes and lengthy court proceedings.

This paper investigates the legal aspects of investor protection in Serbia through the analysis of existing laws, their implementation in practice, as well as through comparison with international standards and best practices. Special emphasis is placed on the institutional mechanisms available to investors in case of violation of their rights, including the possibility of settling disputes through international arbitration.

The work methodology is based on legal analysis, which includes a review of relevant laws and regulations, court practice, as well as secondary sources related to investor protection. Through the analysis of domestic legislation and comparison with international legal standards, this paper will identify key challenges and weaknesses in the existing system of investors' protection, while giving recommendations for its improvement.

The aim of this paper is to provide a contribution to a better understanding of the current state of investor protection in Serbia, as well as to indicate possible directions for improvement in order to create a stable and predictable business environment. Consideration of legal aspects of investor protection is essential for achieving economic development and attracting new investments, which is one of Serbia's

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main priorities in the process of economic reforms and approximation to the European Union.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this research focused on the legal aspects of investors' protection in the Republic of Serbia, various materials and methods were used in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the existing legal framework and its effects in practice. The analysis began with the study of key legal and regulatory documents that define the rights and obligations of investors. Among them, the most important are the Law on Foreign Investments, the Law on the Capital Market and the Law on Protection of Competition. These laws represent the basis of the legal system that protects investors and regulates various aspects of their business in Serbia.

For a detailed understanding of the legal framework, a legal analysis was conducted, which included a review of the texts of laws, legal norms and regulations, as well as an analysis of their implementation mechanisms. Through this analysis, comprehensiveness and clarity of legal provisions, as well as compliance with international investors' protection standards were investigated. The comparative analysis made it possible to identify the differences between Serbian legislation and international norms, which is crucial for assessing the level of compliance and identifying areas that require additional harmonization.

Case studies are another important research method. Specific examples from practice, including judgments of domestic and international arbitration bodies, have been analyzed. These examples provide insight into the actual application of the law and the challenges investors face in practice. Case studies provide a better understanding of the problems, as well as a better understanding of successful and unsuccessful practices in investors' protection.

Qualitative research, including interviews with lawyers and representatives of relevant institutions and investors, complements document analyzes and case studies. This research provides direct insight into the experiences and attitudes of participants in the investment process, revealing real challenges and recommendations for improvement. Through applied surveys we have collected data that reflect investors' perceptions and experiences regarding legal protection and institutional mechanisms.

The secondary literature review included a review of previous research, academic papers and reports from relevant organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This analysis enabled additional understanding of the current state and trends in investors' protection, as well as insight into international standards and recommendations for improvement.

3. RESULTS

The research results provide a detailed overview of the current situation and challenges related to the legal protection of investors in the Republic of Serbia. The analysis showed that, although there is a developed legislative framework that includes key aspects of investment protection, there are significant problems in its implementation and effectiveness.

The legal framework in Serbia, including the Law on Foreign Investments and the Law on Capital Markets, provides a solid basis for investor protection. These laws include key aspects such as the right to a fair trial, the right to compensation and protection from unfair regulation. However, the research revealed certain legal loopholes that may affect the safety of investments. For example, specific provisions on expropriation and changes in regulations are not sufficiently precise, which can lead to legal uncertainty for investors.

In addition, the analysis showed that although Serbia has made efforts to harmonize its legislation with international standards, there are several key areas that still require additional harmonization. For example, the regulations related to the protection of minority shareholders and mechanisms for resolving disputes are not fully aligned with the norms of the European Union. These discrepancies can create barriers to foreign investment and reduce the level of investor confidence.

Institutional mechanisms for the protection of investors, such as the Securities Commission and the Agency for Business Registers, operate within the framework of established laws, but their effectiveness may vary. The analysis revealed that there is a need to improve the capacity of these institutions, especially in connection with faster processing of requests and greater transparency in operations. For example, some investors expressed frustration with the slow resolution of administrative procedures and the lack of clear guidelines regarding the implementation of the law.

Dispute settlement mechanisms, especially international arbitration, have proven to be key tools for investor protection. Investors often choose arbitration because of its fast and efficient dispute resolution, as opposed to the slower domestic judicial system. The research has shown that while arbitration provides

an effective solution, there is a need to improve local dispute resolution mechanisms to reduce the need for international arbitration proceedings.

The case studies provided concrete examples of the challenges investors face. For example, in several cases problems with bureaucratic obstacles, lack of coordination between different regulatory bodies and slow judicial procedures were noted. These examples highlight the need for reforms that would improve legal certainty and efficiency of investors' protection.

Qualitative research through interviews and surveys with lawyers and with representatives of institutions and investors contributes to an additional understanding of the problem and recommendations for improvement. Investors pointed out the need for clearer guidelines, greater transparency and faster resolution of disputes. Recommendations include strengthening the capacity of relevant institutions, improving communication between institutions and investors, as well as reforming existing laws to ensure better investment protection.

In conclusion, the research results point to the need for continuous improvement of the legal system in Serbia in order to create a more stable and attractive investment environment. Law reform and improvement of the work of institutions and more efficient dispute resolution prove to be crucial for strengthening investor protection and stimulating economic growth through increasing confidence and security in investments.

4. DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we analyze the results of research into the legal aspects of investor protection in the Republic of Serbia, considering how these results correlate with the existing theoretical framework and practice, as well as identified challenges and recommendations for improvement. The discussion focuses on key research findings, including legal gaps, compliance with international standards, effectiveness of institutional mechanisms, and recommendations for future reforms.

The analysis of the legal framework for the protection of investors in Serbia reveals significant legal loopholes that can affect the safety of investments. Although there are basic legal provisions governing the rights of investors, such as the Law on Foreign Investment and the Law on Capital Markets, there is a lack of specific regulations that would deal with issues such as expropriation and changes in regulations that directly affect investors. These gaps can lead to legal uncertainty and increase risk for investors, which can negatively affect their attitude towards investing in Serbia.

The theoretical framework of investors' protection suggests that clearly defined laws and regulations should provide full protection and minimize legal uncertainty. However, our finding that there are legal gaps indicates the need for additional legal norms that would regulate specific situations in more detail. This is especially important in the context of attracting foreign investment, as investors often look for a stable and predictable legal framework.

The research has shown that although Serbia is making efforts to harmonize its legislation with international standards, there are still areas that require additional harmonization. For example, regulations related to the protection of minority shareholders and mechanisms for resolving disputes are not fully aligned with the norms of the European Union. These discrepancies can reduce the level of investor confidence and make it difficult to enter the market.

According to the theory of international law, the harmonization of national legislation with international standards is crucial for the protection of investors and the attraction of foreign investments. Our analysis points to the need for additional efforts in this area, especially in relation to the protection of minority shareholders and the improvement of local dispute resolution mechanisms. Increasing compliance with international norms can contribute to improving the investment climate and attracting more investors.

The analysis of institutional mechanisms for investors' protection shows that although institutions such as the Securities Commission and the Agency for Business Registers play a key role, there is a need for their improvement. Problems with the speed of processing requests and lack of transparency have been identified, which may affect the effectiveness of investors' protection.

The theoretical framework on institutional effectiveness suggests that transparency and speed are keys to effective law enforcement and investor protection. Our findings point to the need to improve the capacity of these institutions, including improving the process of processing requests and increasing transparency of operations. Strengthening institutional capacities can contribute to better protection of investors and increase their confidence in the regulatory system.

Based on the research results, several key reforms are recommended to improve investors' protection in Serbia. First, legal gaps need to be filled through additional regulations that would regulate specific situations such as expropriation and changes in regulations in more detail. This could reduce

legal uncertainty and increase investment security.

Second, there is a need for further alignment with international standards, particularly in relation to the protection of minority shareholders and dispute resolution mechanisms. Increasing compliance with international norms can improve the investment climate and attract more foreign investment.

Third, institutional mechanisms should be improved through strengthening the capacities of relevant institutions and increasing transparency in their work. These include improving the speed of application processing and clearer guidelines for investors. These changes can contribute to better investors' protection and strengthening confidence in the regulatory system.

Finally, continuous monitoring and evaluation of the legal framework and institutional mechanisms is recommended in order to timely identify and solve new challenges and problems. Continuous improvement of the legislative and institutional framework is crucial for ensuring a stable and favorable investment environment in Serbia.

5. CONCLUSION

Research of the legal aspects of investors' protection in the Republic of Serbia provided significant insights into the current legal framework and identified key challenges and opportunities for improvement. This conclusion summarizes the main findings of the research, provides recommendations for future reforms, and discusses their importance for improving the investment climate in Serbia.

Based on the conducted analysis, it can be concluded that the existing legal framework for the protection of investors in Serbia offers basic protection, but additional improvement is needed to ensure complete security and attractiveness for investors. Laws such as the Law on Foreign Investments, the Law on Capital Markets and the Law on Protection of Competition lay a solid foundation, but several key legal gaps have been identified that may affect the legal certainty and stability of investments.

One of the main findings of the research is that there are gaps in regulations related to specific situations such as expropriation and changes in regulations. These loopholes contribute to legal uncertainty and can discourage potential investors. In addition, although Serbia has made efforts to harmonize its legislation with international standards, there are still areas that require additional harmonization, particularly in relation to the protection of minority shareholders and dispute resolution mechanisms.

Institutional mechanisms, including the Securities Commission and the Agency for Business Registers, play a key role in protecting investors. However, the analysis showed that there is a need to improve the capacity of these institutions, especially in relation to the speed of processing requests and increasing transparency. Furthermore, dispute resolution mechanisms, especially international arbitration, have proven to be an effective tool, but there is a need to reform local judicial procedures in order to reduce the need for international arbitration.

Based on the results of the research, several key reforms are recommended that could significantly improve investors' protection and improve the investment climate in Serbia. First, legal gaps need to be filled through the adoption of additional regulations that would cover specific situations in more detail, such as expropriation and changes in regulations. This could reduce legal uncertainty and increase investment security.

Second, there is a need for further harmonization of national legislation with international standards. It is especially important to improve the regulations related to the protection of minority shareholders and to improve mechanisms for resolving disputes. Increasing compliance with international norms can improve the investment climate and attract more foreign investment.

Third, institutional mechanisms should be improved through strengthening the capacities of relevant institutions and increasing transparency of their work. These include improving the speed of application processing, introducing clearer guidelines for investors and improving communication between institutions and investors. Strengthening the capacity of institutions can contribute to better protection of investors and increase their confidence in the regulatory system.

Finally, continuous monitoring and evaluation of the legal framework and institutional mechanisms is recommended in order to timely identify and solve new challenges and problems. Continuous improvement of the legislative and institutional framework is crucial for ensuring a stable and favorable investment environment in Serbia.

This research has a significant role in understanding the legal aspects of investor protection and provides a basis for future reforms. Understanding the key challenges and gaps in the legal framework enables decision makers, legislators and regulatory bodies to take the necessary steps to improve the legal system and improve the investment climate. Also, the research provides investors with useful information about the current state of legal protection in Serbia, which can help in making investment

decisions and risk minimization strategies.

Through the identification of problems and recommendations, this research contributes to the creation of a more favorable environment for investments, which can have long-term positive effects on the economic development of Serbia. Ultimately, improving the legal protection of investors contributes to strengthening the stability and security of investments, which is crucial for the economic growth and prosperity of the country.

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A CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF POPULATION FROM THE EAST (HELLENIC-SPEAKING COUNTRIES) IN THE MUNICIPIUM ULPIANA IN THE SOUTH OF THE PROVINCE OF UPPER MOESIA

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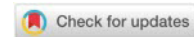
Abstract: The paper presents the data regarding the inhabitants from the east (Hellenic speaking countries) in the municipium Ulpiana in the south of the province of Upper Moesia (Kosovo and Metohija). The occupation of Dardania and the establishment of the Roman province of Upper Moesia led not only to territorial but also to ethnic changes in this area, about which we are insufficiently informed. By conquering the territory of Dardania and establishing their authority over it, the Romans left a certain autonomy to its inhabitants, followed by urbanization and Romanization from the 1st to the 4th century. After occupying Dardania, there was a period of introduction of the local population into the Roman state-political order, as well as the organized settlement of colonists of oriental origin (Hellenic-speaking countries). The Roman administration introduced the local population in Moesia with a new period which brought new achievements to the conquered areas. Urbanization was carried out gradually, through the settlement of Roman citizens, the oriental population (Hellenic-speaking countries), and the served legionnaires, in colonies, followed by the promotion of native settlements to the rank of cities under Roman law, municipium. This process led to the integration of a significant part of the native population from the south of Upper Moesia (Kosovo and Metohija). A significant number of foreigners, settlers from the east (Hellenic-speaking countries) lived and worked in the south of Upper Moesia, primarily in urban areas. It should be noted that the majority of epigraphic monuments from the area of Kosovo and Metohija belong to Roman citizens who immigrated from the Romanized areas of the Empire. They mainly originate from the two largest city centers, Ulpiana near Gračanica and the Roman settlement near Sočanica, in the Ibar valley. Diverse archeological finds and epigraphic monuments shed some light on these processes in the municipium of Ulpiana.
Keywords: Settlers from the east, Dardania, municipium Ulpiana, Upper Moesia, Kosovo and Metohija.
Field: Social sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

With the occupation of Dardania in 28 BC, the Roman state devoted itself more intensively to consolidating and strengthening its authority in this area and its inclusion in the political and economic currents of the Empire (Žippel, 1877, pgs. 157–162; Filow, 1906, pg. 89; Alföldy, 1964, pg. 115; Webster, 1969, pg. 75; Папазоглу, 1988, pg. 143, 163–164; Ferri, 2001, pg. 55; Mirdita, 2015, pg. 145; Hajdari / Goddard / Kabashi, 2021, pg. 632–662). Until today, the date of the establishment of Moesia could not have been precisely determined. We believe that the administrative annexation of Dardania to the Roman state took its final form with the establishment of the province of Moesia in AD 12 at the earliest, and AD 15 at the latest, because narrative sources already call Moesia a province at that point (Tac. Ann. I 80; VI 39. See: Ferjančić, 2018, pg. 317; Самарџић, 2020, pg. 12–13).

In the territory of modern Kosovo and Metohija during the Roman period, as shown by the epigraphic monuments, in addition to peregrini from the ranks of the local population, there were also Roman citizens (cives Romani), either settlers or locals who acquired Roman civil rights under the emperors of the 2nd century and the first half of the 3rd century. A significant number of foreigners, settlers from the east (Hellenic-speaking countries) lived and worked in the south of Upper Moesia (Kosovo and Metohija), primarily in urban areas. It should be noted that the majority of epigraphic monuments from the area of Kosovo and Metohija belong to Roman citizens who immigrated from the Romanized areas of the Empire. They mainly originate from the two largest city centers, Ulpiana near Gračanica and the Roman settlement near Sočanica, in the Ibar valley (Papazoglu, 1969, pgs. 168–172; Čerškov, 1969, pgs. 61–63; Фидановски, 1998, pgs. 300–303; Hajdari / Goddard / Kabashi, 2021, pg. 632–662; Goddard, / Dabas, / Hajdari, / Berisha, / Mukai, / Bernollin, / Jedrusiak, / Laenger, 2022, pgs. 153–16 2).

In the historical literature, the problem of the localization of Ulpiana has attracted considerable attention. Cartographic sources do not mention it, although it was located at an important crossroads. Most researchers today believe that its name is hidden, in a corrupted form, in the name of the road station

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Vicianum, presented by Tabula Peutingeriana or Peutinger Table (Tab. Peut. 557. Уп. Вулић, 1938, pg. 10; Поповић / Чершков, 1956, pgs. 324–327; Чершков, 1957, pg. 69; Паровић-Пешикан, 1982, pgs. 57–74; Фидановски, 1998, pgs. 258–349; Петровић, 2007, pgs. 94–95; Самарџић, 2021, pg. 127–137; Самарџић, 2021, pg. 211–223; Hajdari / Goddard / Kabashi, 2021, pg. 632–662; Самарџић, 2022, pg. 325–332; Goddard, / Dabas, / Hajdari, / Berisha, / Mukai, / Bernollin, / Jedrusiak, / Laenger, 2022, pgs. 153–16 2; Самарџић, 2023, pg. 185–207). The remains of Ulpiana were found about 1.5 km west of the Gračanica monastery and 7.5 km southeast of Priština, near Ugljar and Čaglavica. The settlement is located on a plain, which is bounded in the north by the Gračanka small river, and in the south by the slopes of Drenovac. Its remains – fortification walls (400 x 400 m) and other structures – were first noticed, visited, sketched, and described by Đ. Bošković. The remains of the ancient walls at the site of Gradine or Stare gradine are twice the size of the fortifications. In addition, in several places, Bošković observed walls at the height of the vaults, and in the fields a large number of bricks of the Roman format (0.31 x 0.41 x 0.4 m), as well as several fragments of architectural plastic decorated with relief ornaments (part of a wreath, a large number of decorative marble slabs 1.8 cm thick, a large capital, two stair bases, one stela) (Бошковић, 1928, pgs. 269–272). A significant number of Roman spolia from the ancient Ulpiana in the foundations and walls of the Gračanica monastery was also mentioned by Vulić (Вулић, 1931, pgs. 192–193, nos. 515–518) and Parović Pešikan. A Roman tombstone with a badly damaged inscription was built into the plinth on the southern side: NE[- - -] / AD[- - -]/ME[- - -] / vix(it) [an(nis) ? - - -] / PA[- - -]/PE[- - -]. (Паровић-Пешикан, 1982, pg. 57. Уп. Бошковић, 1926/1927, pgs. 269–272). Parović Pešikan found the remains of Roman tombstones in the altar and a part of a marble pillar (length 0.64 m and diameter 0.25 m) in the narthex. In the facade wall, a large marble block decorated with cyma (1.67 x 0.58 x 0.27 m) was observed, while she noted a stone sarcophagus in the gate of the Gračanica monastery, in front of the church (2.17 x 0.68 x 0.86 m) (Паровић-Пешикан, 1982, pgs. 60–61).

2. ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM OF EPIGRAPHIC MATERIALS

As previously stated, a significant number of foreigners, settlers from the east (Hellenic-speaking region) lived and worked in the area of municipium Ulpiana, in the south of Upper Moesia (Kosovo and Metohija), as evidenced by epigraphic monuments (Душанић, 1971, pgs. 254; Душанић, 1975, pg. 136; Паровић-Пешикан, 1982, pgs. 60–61). Priests of the Syrian cult of Jupiter Dolichenus are mentioned on the damaged votive altar (0.70 x 1.50 x 0.20 m) found in the vicinity of Gračanica, not far from Ulpiana. The text reads: I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) D(olicheno) / pro salute d[[d(ominorum) nn(ostrorum)]] / Imp(eratoris) Aug(usti) / Victor Demetri et De/metrius Ambibi sace[r]/dotes eiusdem dei s(olverunt) v(otum) [- - -] / [- - - (ILJug 1416. Уп. Вулић, 1931, pg. 192 no. 510; Марић, 2003, pg. 110, 154; Čerškov, 1969, pg. 67; Mirdita, 2007, pg. 71). Erasing a part of the imperial title in the second line (damnatio memoriae) indicates the rule of the Severus dynasty, primarily Caracalla, when the name of his brother Geta was erased from the monument (Hörig/ Schwertheimer, 1987, pg. 86 no. 115; Mirdita, 1981, pg. 248, no. 219 (18)). The name Demetrius appears for both priests (LGPN vol. I, IA). It appears in inscriptions throughout the Empire (Italy, Spain, Gallia Belgica, Gallia Narbonensis, Dalmatia, Pannonia, Noricum, Dacia, Britain, Gallia Lugdunensis, Upper Moesia, Lower Moesia, Rhaetia). In the case of the first dedicator, Victor, it is his father's name, while in the case of the second dedicator, it is his name. It indicates that the two priests could be from one of the Hellenic-speaking provinces of the Roman Empire. Neither of the two dedicants has a nomen gentile, which testifies that they were Roman citizens (Matijašić, 2002, pg. 59). The name of the father of the second dedicant is particularly interesting. Namely, Ambibius (OPEL I 91) is quite rare and appears on a small number of inscriptions found throughout the Roman Empire (AE 1977, 0125; AE 1991, 1376; IMS VI 85).

Settlers from the east are witnessed on one altar from the Church of St. Nicholas near Prizren. The text reads: I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) / Melano / Martinus [Se]ptimius / [Cae]sonius / [Gall]icanus / [exvoto(?)] pos(uerunt) (ILJug 531a=AE 1972, 501). Based on the inscriptions, we see that Jupiter appears in Kosovo and Metohija with the epithet Melanus. Mirdita dated the inscription to the second half of the 2nd century or the first half of the 3rd century (Mirdita, 1981, pg. 262 no. 303 (8)), while Grbić stated that Jupiter Melanus could be equal to Zeus who bears the epithet Melenus, attested on Trajan's coin from the Phrygian city of Dorylaeum (Asia Minor), and that the settlers, who came to trade or make crafts as they did in their homeland, brought with themselves the reverence of this deity to Moesia (Grbić, 2015, pg. 129–130). This coincides with Dušanić's assumption that the dedicators of this monument were settlers, the Bithynians, from Asia Minor, who dedicated the altar to Zeus of Mela, the patron of this place in Bithynia, whose epithet Melanus is a Bithynian dorism for Melenus, which appears on Trajan's coins of the Phrygian city Dorylaeum. This author explained that the presence of these four dedicants in these

non mining regions is the result of the spread of Bithynian cults from the area in Dardania where their presence was related to the production of mines, or they passed through these regions and left behind this dedication (Душанић, 1971, pgs. 256–257). According to the names of the dedicants, we cannot conclude that they came from the Hellenic-speaking regions, but since the absence of nomina gentilicia is evident, we can assume that they were peregrines, slaves, or freedmen who lived and worked in ore-bearing areas (Душанић, 1971, pg. 257) or were Romanized (Grbić, 2015, pg. 130).

In the same way, settlers from the east were mentioned on a votive altar that was found in Laplje Selo. The reconstructed text reads: I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) / Melcid / Ael(ius) Octa/vianus ve(teranus) cum / suis v(otum) p(osuit) (Mirdita, 1981, pg. 251 no. 236 (35); Mirdita, 2007, pg. 39). Mirdita noted that Jupiter appears with the epithet Melcid in the inscription. Based on Jupiter's epithet, he assumed that he was an immigrant from Asia Minor, and based on the imperial nomen gentilicum of the dedicator (he received civil rights from Caracalla in AD 212) and the palaeographic characteristics of the inscription, he roughly dated the monument to the 3rd century (Mirdita, 1980, pg. 187; Ferjančić, 2002, pg. 291). Parović Pešikan and Peja read the inscription as follows: I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) / Mel(ano) Cid(iesso) / Ael(ius) Octa/vianus / v(ir) e(gregius) cum / suis v(otum) p(osuit) (Parović-Pešikan, pg. 1982, 70; Peja, 1984, pg. 60). Parović Pešikan read the abbreviation Mel( ) as Mel(ano), referring to the above-mentioned monument from Prizren, while he did not provide a solution for the second epithet, unlike Peja who read this abbreviation as Cid(iesso) (after the name of a small place in the western part of Phrygia – Kidyessos). Parović Pešikan and Peja believe that these epithets of Jupiter are related to the cities in Asia Minor, so they believe that these settlers were from Asia Minor in Dardania, whose presence is most likely related to mining production (Parović-Pešikan, 1982, pgs. 70–71; Peja, 1984, pgs. 60–61).

This origin of the deities to whom the previously mentioned inscriptions were devoted leads us to look for the source of some other cults recorded on the Dardanian monuments of the Roman period in Asia Minor (Душанић, 1971, pgs. 257–258). It is assumed that the cult of Zeus Aezanensis/Aezaniticu should also be connected to the northern regions of Asia Minor, attested on a votive altar from Ulpiana that was found in 1958 on the so-called western necropolis. The text reads: Ἀπολλώνιος Ὑ Μενελάου Ὑ ἀνέστησε Ὑ τὸν βῦωμὸν θεῷ Διὶ Ὑ Ἐζζαῖῳ ς (ILJug 524. Up. Душанић, 1971, pg. 258 image 3; Mirdita, 1981, pg. 247 no. 209 (8)). Dušanić dated the inscription to the 1st or the 2nd century. His attention was particularly drawn to Zeus's attribute Ἐζζαῖος, for which there is no analogy. In his opinion, it could be connected with the famous Zeus's sanctuary of the city of A(i)zanoi, on the border of Phrygia and Bithynia (Душанић, 1971, pgs. 258–259). Dušanić assumed that the dedicator of the monument, Apollonius, was an immigrant or a descendant of immigrants from Phrygia, who maintained a connection with his birthplace by revering this deity. It is also assumed that he came to Dardania for mining (Душанић, 1971, pgs. 258–259).

A tombstone (1.65 x 0.76 x 0.30 m) made of white marble was found in Peća. The text reads: D(is) M(anibus) / Ulp(io) Attico / et Ulp(iae) Ianu/ariae et Ulp(io) / Thalaso / Pasades uxor / marito et filiae / et nepoti bene / meritis posuit (ILJug 64. Up. Evans, 1885, pg. 68 fig. 27; Vulić, 1931, pg. 53 no. 117; Papazoglu, 1964, pg. 61 no. 44a; Papazoglu, 1969, pg. 179 no. 52a). The inscription can be dated to the 2nd century (Mirdita, 1981, pg. 259 no. 283 (24)). Papazoglu stated that there are no analogies for Pasades and it is probably a local name (Papazoglu, 1969, pg. 179 no. 54). Loma assumed that the name Pasades is an abbreviated form, without the case suffix, which is common in Latin epigraphy when the name is accompanied by a congruent word written as a whole, uxor in this case. She believes that it is an ethnonym derived from one of the most common Latin suffixes -ensis. The name would read Pasadensis (Pasadian woman), after a city in Caria in Asia Minor, attested as Pasada, Pasanda, Passanda, while the ethnonym would read Pasandeus. Loma stated that names of geographical origin often appear in the nomenclature of slaves and freedmen, which also applies to the name Thalas(s)us in this inscription (Kajanto, 1965, pgs. 47, 51; Loma, 2010, pgs. 28–29). It is assumed that this inscription refers to Trajan's colonists, i.e., settlers from Asia Minor to western Dardania (Душанић, 1971, pgs. 258, 261; Loma, 2010, pgs. 28–29).

The eastern population remained faithful to the gods of their homeland. The Orientals who were settled in Upper Moesia did not renounce their identity, also confirmed in religion. Those in Kosovo and Metohija also accepted Roman official gods but assimilated with oriental deities. The cult of Mithras, the Iranian god of the sun, joined the oriental cults in Dardania. In modern historiography, it is believed that the cult of the god Mithras came to the Roman provinces of the central Balkans via the Danube limes and Aquileia (Zotović, 1966, pg. 6; Zotović, 1968, pgs. 69–70; Zotović, 1971, pg. 83; Zotović, 1973, pg. 133; Imamović, 1977, pgs. 277–283; Gavrilović-Vitas, 2017, pgs. 193–194; Gavrilović-Vitas, 2018, pgs. 185–188). The cult of Mithras was present in the 2nd and 3rd centuries in Dardania (Mirdita, 2007, pgs. 75–79; Самарџић, 2020, 215–217). This cult is attested in the epigraphy within the customs stations in Dardania (Petrović, 1975, pg. 130 no. 9, 10; pg. 132 no. 15) where the dedicant was a slave (of oriental origin)

(Zotović, 1966, pg. 30; Zotović, 1973, pg. 109; Mirdita, 2007, pg. 80). He was contrascriptor Apollonidus who was relocated from Lamud near Kumanovo to Visianum near the town of Čaglavica not far from Gračanica. His monument, dedicated to Mithras, is dated to AD 211 (Petrović, 1975, pg. 130 no. 9, 10; 132 no. 15 = Mirdita, 1981, pg. 241 no. 171).

3. CONCLUSION

Epigraphic monuments from the area of the municipium of Ulpiana, mentioning persons of Greek or oriental origin (Hellenic-speaking countries), are dated to the reigns of Antoninus (AD 98–192) and Severus (AD 193–235). It is assumed that these were freedmen and slaves who were relocated from Asia Minor by means of imperial decrees from large imperial estates and overpopulated cities to mining areas and settlements in the south of Upper Moesia (Ulpiana). In Kosovo and Metohija, the peregrini were mentioned on the votive altar from Ulpiana, dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus by his priests Victor, son of Demetrius, and Demetrius, son of Ambibus. The veneration of this cult is connected to the presence of foreigners who came to economically developed areas such as the area of Kosovo and Metohija. The settlement of foreigners to work in mines and the presence of Bithynians as excellent workers in quarries and mines was corroborated throughout Kosovo and Metohija. These claims are supported by the epigraphic evidence found during the excavation of the Church of St. Nicholas near Prizren in 1962, mentioning Iuppiter Melanus, to whom this altar is dedicated. Jupiter could be the same as Zeus who has the epithet Melenus, attested on Trajan's coin of the Phrygian city of Dorylaeum (Asia Minor). The presence of inhabitants from Asia Minor in Dardania is most likely related to mining production. It is assumed that one peregrine is corroborated on the votive altar from Ulpiana, discovered in 1958 on the so called western necropolis. It is believed to be a Phrygian cult, and that the dedicant Apollonius was an immigrant from Phrygia. In Ulpiana, in 1959, at the site of the western necropolis, a votive altar was discovered on which Jupiter's epithet was recorded as Melcid. His dedicant, Aelius Octavius, could be a descendant of settlers from Asia Minor. One peregrine was also confirmed on the altar that was found in Prizren. The altar is dedicated to Asclepius, Telesphorus, Hygia, the genius of Dolichenus, and the genius of the cohort. The dedicant Surus, son of Heraclitus, could be from Syria. This is primarily indicated by the dedication to the Genius of Dolichen, who was named paternus deus. The epithet paternus indicates that it is a deity of the homeland.

It is assumed that the settlers of Greek or Oriental origin (Hellenic-speaking countries) in the areas of Kosovo and Metohija were part of the population – freedmen and slaves – who were relocated by imperial decrees from Asia Minor, large imperial estates, and overpopulated cities to areas rich in ore and settlements in the Balkan provinces. It is believed that this organized migration policy aimed to contribute to intense mineral exploitation and the improvement of the economy in those areas.

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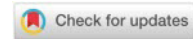
IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS ON PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN MODERN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract: Communications and the communication process have a significant impact on organizational development and modern management. This impact is decisive and requires an analysis of the internal and external factors that can affect the success of the organization.

The purpose of the development is to emphasize the possibilities for personal improvement through the effects of the communication process and the construction of basic and specific communication skills among workers in modern organizations.

The main tasks that are logically related to the set goal and follow from it are: to highlight the essence of personal development through communication in organizations; to emphasize the importance of general factors related to personality development; to identify the basic communication skills favoring personal development in modern organizations.

Through effective communication, leaders can convey their visions and strategies to employees, inspiring and motivating them. Also, through open dialogue and exchange of ideas, a better understanding of strategic goals and methods is created.

The basic methods used in the development are qualitative, namely - philosophical analysis, synthesis of new theory and analysis of concepts and definitions. From the quantitative methods, the literature review was used.

The main results, based on the analyzes already made, show that personal development, strategic thinking and communication in organizations are essential for managing change and adapting to a changing environment.

A basic conclusion can be drawn that clear and open communication helps employees to adapt more quickly to new strategies and actively participate in overall organizational development.

The main recommendation is the need to take into account the influence of strategic thinking and organizational communications on modern and increasingly dynamically developing organizations. These influences are undoubtedly positive as they contribute to better management, achievement of strategic goals, growth and fruitful cooperation.

The additional data that can be indicated in connection with the issues already considered are aimed at the positive identification and presentation of the personality, by means of improving various useful skills such as the formation of digital literacy and culture.

Keywords: management, organization, communication, personal development
Field: Social sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

The article examines the possibilities for personal improvement through the effects of the communication process and the construction of basic and specific communication skills among workers in modern organizations. Personal development is impossible without communication and communication, even more so in the twenty-first century - the century of over-communication, dynamics, technology and artificial intelligence. The variety of factors that support and constitute personal development are also subject to consideration in the development. It is also emphasized the need to improve the general and develop communication skills specific to the organizational environment, in order to adequately meet the requirements of the time in which we live.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The basic methods used in the development are qualitative, namely - philosophical analysis, synthesis of new theory and analysis of concepts and definitions. From the quantitative methods, the literature review was used.

2.1. ESSENCE OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH COMMUNICATION
In the scientific literature, the issues related to the etymology and use of the term "communication" remain controversial. The concept has been used since ancient times, from the moment when people began to channel their efforts for the purpose of joint activity. Even the ancient Greek thinker and

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philosopher Socrates created dialogue as one of the earliest forms of communication.

Communication is inextricably linked to the human personality and is a basic physiological function favoring our survival, development and future. Any conscious human activity is impossible without communication (Vasilev, Stefanova & Angelova, 2017). From birth (including in the prenatal period), people have to learn communication skills. In the modern world of over-communication, this dependence is even more vivid and urgent, as the demands on individuals in personal and professional terms are even higher and numerous. All this is conditioned by the continuous and certain changes in the external environment, as well as the internal environment for different organizations. In this sense, the following relationship can be highlighted, namely – personalities change, therefore communication also changes, as well as opportunities and conditions for development.

It can be said that as many personalities exist, as many definitions and attempts to define the concept of "personal development" are possible in the literature on the problem. What the definitions have in common is that it is about improving individuals in the whole palette of multifacetedness that accompanies them. For some individuals, the phrase "personal development" is associated with obtaining prestige, power, money, high social status. For others, it represents organizational self-assertion, career growth and professionalism. In the third case, personality development is associated with spiritual growth and character improvement. In the fourth situation, it is a matter of purely physical self-cultivation. In the fifth situation, one can talk about a complex consideration of the already mentioned components (Vasilev & Belyovska, 2018). The list of possibilities is long enough to draw up the following definition, which does not make explicit claims to complete clarity and comprehensiveness. Personal development represents improvement and self-motivation of individuals in physical, psychological, social, spiritual, financial and emotional aspects and the resulting consequences for society and for the individual.

3. RESULTS

The factors that influence the development of personality are most diverse in description. Heredity, family, friends, environment (political, economic, social, international), education, self-motivation, maintenance of purposeful behavior and others can be mentioned as such.

3.1. FACTORS RELATED TO PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
Heredity as a factor in personal development - at the beginning of the new millennium, scientists successfully mapped the human genome. Unraveling the so-called "alphabet of life", however, leads to even more questions and ambiguities, both of a moral-ethical and scientific nature. Today, the clichéd maxim attributed to Socrates, and according to some scholars to Democritus, "I know that I know nothing" applies in full force. According to the British scientist, zoologist and journalist Matt Ridley, the human genome is an autobiography or a kind of record of genetic language that includes the various achievements and turning points that characterize the historical development of the human species and its predecessor species, from the beginning of life to the present day (Ridli, 2019, p. 8). Heredity is a key factor for subsequent personal development, but biological characteristics alone are not a sufficient condition for the prosperity of an individual.

The family as a factor for personal development - since ancient times, human beings live, join forces and develop in a society. According to the American neurobiologist David Eagleman, people constantly observe the formation and dissolution of family bonds, different types of relationships, even obsessions through their presence in various social networks and continuous participation in alliances. All these social influences are built by special circuits in the human brain, which spread widely like networks, and in turn track other people, in terms of communication, feel their pains, assess their intentions and make a "read" of their emotional condition. Human social skills have their enduring roots manifested through neural circuitry, thus reliance on these circuitry is based on the relatively young field of science called "neuroscience" (Igalman, 2017). The family, whatever that term means these days, still has a major role in the development of the personality, but other social factors should also be taken into account.

Friends as a factor for personal development - the people we meet at different stages of our life path have a significant impact on our development. Often times, the people we choose as friends influence us more than our own family, especially during the teenage years. This fact is largely determined by the shortening of the distance in our communication with friends and in communication itself.

According to the Canadian psychologist Steven Pinker, friendship, like various forms of altruism, "is vulnerable to frauds", which is why people have invented a specific saying - "A friend in need is known". Apparent friends take advantage of their association with a specific helpful person and mimic appreciation in an attempt to show that they are valued themselves. But at the first more serious difficulty,

such pseudo-friends easily give up and retreat. People have emotional responses that aim to eliminate insincere friends. When we are "pressed against the wall", a sincere friendly support touches us. Acts like this make us emotional, remember the noble deed, and at the same time feel the need to reassure our friend that he will not be forgotten. Adversity is the most validated test of which people we should call true friends. This is where the meaning of friendship is rooted, since, evolutionarily speaking, a friend is someone who is willing to support you when no one else would bother to do so (Pinkar, 2011, p. 438).

The environment as a factor (political, economic, social, international) – the external environment, including economic, political, social and international aspects, can have a significant impact on the personal development of the individual. This influence can manifest itself in different aspects and at different stages of a person's life. Here are some ways in which the external environment can influence personal development:

• First, in terms of economic environment - the high or low economic stability of a country can affect the degree of financial security of an individual. Low income and economic instability can create stress and limitations on opportunities for education, health and personal development. Opportunities for employment and career development also depend on the economic environment. High unemployment and limited economic opportunities can lead to problems with developing professional skills and careers.

• Second, regarding the political environment - political events and the regime in a given country can have an impact on an individual's civil rights and liberties. The lack of democracy and legal certainty can limit the possibility of personal development and self-expression. Wars and conflicts can lead to physical and emotional trauma and make it difficult to build a stable personality.

• Third, the social environment, which includes societal values, cultural context, and social norms, can influence personality development, shaping individual beliefs and values. The education system and opportunities to access education can determine individual success and professional development.

• Fourth, regarding the international environment - global trends and international relations can influence personal development by forming global awareness and intercultural skills. Migration and international interactions can enrich individual experience and contribute to the development of tolerance and mutual understanding (Kalinov, 2022).

It is important to note that despite the influence of the external environment, individuals have the ability to form their own decisions and adapt to different conditions. Personal development is the product of the interaction between the inner potential of the individual and the external influences that surround him.

Education as a factor - education plays a key role in the personal development of an individual in several aspects. In terms of cognitive development, education provides knowledge, skills and intellectual stimuli that help an individual develop their cognitive potential. This includes the mastery of core academic subjects, critical thinking, analytical skills and problem-solving abilities.

• Emotional and social development - education is not limited to learning materials; it also includes educational aspects. The school provides opportunities for social interaction, cooperation and the development of interpersonal skills. Teachers and schools often play an important role in shaping students' value and moral beliefs.

• Professional development - education has an important influence on the professional development of the individual. Provides the necessary knowledge and skills to prepare for a specific occupation or career. Higher education and specialized courses contribute to the discovery of better employment opportunities and increased income.

• Personal growth - education can help an individual develop personal characteristics such as perseverance, discipline, responsibility, ambition and self-discipline. Experiencing successes and failures in school and student life can lead to stronger self-esteem and confidence in one's abilities.

• Civic responsibility - education can promote civic responsibility and participation in society. Educated individuals are more likely to understand the importance of voting, participation in public initiatives, and participation in the development of society (Borisova, 2017).

However, it should also be noted that education is not only limited to formal schooling. Continuous learning and self-education are also important for lifelong personal development.

Self-motivation as a factor – this is the internal drive or motivation that comes from the individual himself. It represents man's desire and passion to achieve goals and develop in various aspects of his life. Self-motivation can have a significant impact on personal development in the following ways: constant learning and self-improvement, achieving goals, self-discipline and persistence, increased self-confidence, coping with challenges, greater courage and independence, better interpersonal relationships. Self-motivation, therefore, can be a powerful stimulus for personal development and achieving success in various aspects of life. It encourages the individual to take an active role in their own development and to

pursue their passions and goals with enthusiasm and persistence.

Maintaining purposeful behavior as a factor has a significant impact on personal development. When an individual has clear goals and directs his efforts towards them, this can contribute to several important aspects of personal development: motivation and persistence, focus and concentration, self-regulation, continuous learning and development, self-confidence and a sense of achievement, creating meaning and significance, leadership (Nikolaeva, 2020).

4. DISCUSSIONS

Conditionally, communication skills can be divided into two groups: general skills - active listening, parameters of speech and language culture, asking questions, behavioral characteristics; specific skills – organizational culture parameters, specific professional language, foreign language culture, presentation skills, positive self-presentation skills, improvement of non-verbal communication, digital literacy, etc.

4.1. KEY COMMUNICATION SKILLS ENHANCING PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS

General communication skills affect not only the individual development of employees, but also the organizational culture and effectiveness.

• Active listening improves communication by encouraging openness between colleagues and between different levels of management. This leads to better understanding and cooperation. The skill of active listening helps in conflict resolution by allowing all parties to express their points of view and find common ground. Through active listening, employees learn to perceive and appreciate different perspectives, which is key to developing critical thinking and empathy (Serafimova, 2024).

• The parameters of speech and language culture form a professional identity. The use of appropriate language and communication style within the organization helps to build a professional identity and culture that is aligned with the organization's mission and values. Understanding and applying the rules of effective communication and language culture in the organization helps employees build important social skills (Ivanova, 2024).

• Asking questions supports learning and innovation. In this way, critical thinking and the search for new knowledge is stimulated, which is fundamental for personal development and innovation in the organization. This increases engagement, with the opportunity to ask questions and receive feedback helping to increase engagement and a sense of belonging among employees.

• Behavioral characteristics influence relationships and help develop leadership skills. Characteristics such as empathy, adaptability and responsibility have a direct impact on the quality of relationships in the organization and help create a positive work environment. Other behavioral characteristics such as initiative and the ability to lead are key to developing leadership skills and preparing employees to occupy higher positions in the organizational hierarchy.

General communication skills interact to create an environment that promotes personal and professional development of employees, while simultaneously contributing to the achievement of organizational goals and maintaining a strong organizational culture.

Specific communication skills play a key role in personal development in organizations, while also positively influencing the overall effectiveness and culture of the workplace. Each of the aspects listed above has its own unique value. Understanding and the internal acceptance of the parameters of the organizational culture help personal development by encouraging the sharing of common values and norms. This leads to a stronger sense of belonging and commitment to the organization.

• Specific professional language is a sign of expertise and professionalism. Mastery of specific professional language and terminology increases understanding of a given field, which is the basis for professional development and recognition.

• Knowledge of foreign languages and cultures broadens perspectives, increases adaptability and improves the ability to work in a multicultural environment, which is valuable in the globalized work environment.

• Presentation skills help in expressing ideas effectively. The ability to present diverse ideas clearly and persuasively is important for personal development as it improves opportunities for influence, persuasion and leadership (Stefanova-Ivanova, 2024).

• Positive self-presentation skills build confidence and professional identity. Positive performance and self-presentation help build confidence and develop a strong professional identity, leading to greater career success.

• By improving non-verbal communication, conditions are created for better interaction. The ability

to understand and use nonverbal cues improves interpersonal communication and interaction, which is critical for effective teamwork.

• Digital literacy is directly related to adaptability to innovation. In today's work environment, digital literacy is key to the effective use of technology, enabling faster adaptation to innovations and process improvement (Kostov, 2024).

Each of these aspects contributes to complex personal and professional development in organizations. Not only do they help increase individual effectiveness and job satisfaction, but they also improve communication, collaboration, and the overall culture of the organization. Thus, communication skills become a fundamental element for the success and development of each employee, as well as the organization itself as a whole (Kaneva, 2024).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Communication skills play a critical role in the context of personal development in modern organizations. They not only facilitate effective communication and collaboration between employees, but also help build professional identity, develop leadership qualities, and improve interpersonal relationships. The specific aspects of communication skills, such as understanding and applying organizational culture parameters, mastering a specific professional language and foreign language culture, presentation skills, positive self-presentation skills, improving non-verbal communication and digital literacy, all interact to enrich the individual development of employees.

These skills contribute to the creation of a healthy and supportive work environment where each individual can develop their potential to the maximum. Additionally, they foster a culture of continuous learning and adaptability that is essential in the rapidly changing environment of the twenty-first century. Communication skills not only facilitate overcoming challenges and effective problem solving, but also facilitate innovation and creativity within an organization.

In conclusion, the development and improvement of communication skills are crucial for the personal and professional development of employees in modern organizations. They form the basis for creating sustainable and effective working relationships that contribute to the successful development of individuals and organizations in today's global and dynamic world of organizations.

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RESHAPING DIGITAL LANDSCAPES: ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF AI IN DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES ON LOCAL SMES

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Abstract: This study investigates how artificial intelligence (A.I.) influences digital marketing strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in local markets. Study investigates the effect of artificial intelligence (AI) tools on enhancing sales process efficiency in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Statistical analyses, including ANOVA and regression, reveal a strong positive relationship between AI adoption and improved sales efficiency. The findings offer valuable insights for SMEs aiming to gain a competitive edge through AI, with a recommendation for further research into specific AI applications that optimize efficiency and drive business growth. Through a literature review, we examine the integration of AI technologies into SMEs' digital marketing efforts and assess the opportunities and challenges associated with AI adoption in this sector. Our findings reveal the evolving landscape of digital marketing strategies among local SMEs, highlighting trends, techniques, and implications of A.I. implementation. We explore A.I.'s role in transforming digital marketing practices, including personalized content delivery, predictive analytics, and automated customer service. Moreover, our analysis sheds light on SMEs' unique challenges when adopting A.I. technologies, such as resource limitations, skill gaps, and data privacy issues. Despite these hurdles, SMEs acknowledge A.I.'s importance in enhancing their digital presence and driving business growth in today's competitive digital marketplace. Our research aims to inform strategic decision-making and empower SMEs to capitalize on the opportunities A.I. presents in the digital age. Ultimately, we hope to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how A.I. can be a game-changer for SMEs striving to thrive in an increasingly digital world.
Keywords: A.I., digital marketing, SMEs, local markets, sale efficiency, personalized content
Field: Social Sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital landscape, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in local markets face increasing pressure to adapt and innovate to remain competitive. According to (Theodoridis and Gkikas, 2019), SMEs can utilize A.I. to access faster and more cost-effective digital marketing solutions, allowing them to compete more effectively with larger companies. By employing machine learning, smaller firms can overcome resource limitations and gain valuable insights through accurate data analysis. Amid the various technological advancements fueling this shift, artificial intelligence (A.I.) stands out as a key driver in transforming digital marketing strategies for SMEs. According to (Olazo, 2022), successfully incorporating Internet marketing into a firm's operation requires proficiency in online marketing, a solid I.T. infrastructure, and a thorough understanding of how these components work together. Despite these challenges, SMEs acknowledge A.I.'s transformative potential to improve their digital presence and drive business growth in a fiercely competitive digital landscape. Moreover, our analysis indicates that SMEs need help adopting A.I. technologies, including constrained resources, skill deficiencies, and data privacy concerns. As per (Stone et al., 2020), leveraging A.I. for data analytics can set SMEs apart from larger businesses. By identifying consumer trends and creating tailored marketing campaigns, SMEs can effectively target the right audience at the right moment. According to (Alqurashi et al., 2023), our findings strongly indicate that A.I. goes beyond mere technological tools; it acts as a driving force for innovation in marketing. Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) has rapidly emerged as a transformative element in digital marketing, reshaping how companies analyze, engage, and influence their target markets. Empirical studies in A.I. and digital marketing have identified several consistent themes in scholarly research. A.I. is recognized as a versatile tool across various business applications, with experts seeing it as essential to future societal advancements (Verma et al., 2021). The introduction of A.I. to digital marketing has ushered in an era defined by data-driven insights, tailored user experiences, and automated processes (Pan et al., 2023). In marketing, A.I. is beneficial for tracking and predicting customer purchasing trends, enhancing the overall consumer experience across the buying journey (Alqurashi et al., 2023). Through AI-driven personalization, digital marketing can deliver customized content and recommendations that align closely

with each user's preferences. Likewise, customer service and frontline interactions benefit from rational A.I. applications, such as social robots for greeting and conversational A.I. for efficient support (Huang & Roland, 2020). A primary A.I. application in digital marketing is personalized content delivery. By employing sophisticated algorithms that assess vast user datasets, marketers can offer highly customized content to match user preferences, behaviors, and demographics. This tailored approach increases user engagement, boosts conversion rates, and builds stronger brand loyalty. AI-driven tools also allow firms to adapt websites, emails, social media, videos, and other materials to meet consumer needs better. A.I.'s capabilities, like machine learning and pattern recognition, allow it to emulate human cognitive processes, making it indispensable for responsive, data-informed personalization (Theodoridis & Gkikas, 2019). AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants are now central to customer engagement and support strategies in digital spaces. These intelligent tools handle routine inquiries, provide tailored recommendations, and assist users through the sales funnel, creating a seamless experience. Additionally, chatbots serve as effective data collection tools, reducing the need for extensive personnel and removing many customer service barriers. To remain competitive, businesses also use AI-powered dynamic pricing modules to optimize pricing strategies for their products and services. These A.I. systems enable precise, real-time pricing adjustments, even over short periods, making dynamic pricing one of the most profitable A.I. applications in marketing (J.W., 2020; Zhao et al., 2022; Rabby et al., 2021). A.I. plays an essential role in content creation, where algorithms can now produce articles, blog posts, and product descriptions from set guidelines and input data. Although human oversight remains crucial for ensuring quality and relevance, AI-powered content generation significantly accelerates creation and offers strategic insights. Content generation using A.I. has become a growing research focus. Scholars such as (Kasneci et al., 2023; Jackson et al., 2022) have explored language models like GPT-3 in automated writing and creative generation, finding that while these models achieve remarkable fluency, challenges like maintaining coherence and avoiding biases persist, pointing to areas for further improvement (Cao et al., 2023). Academic literature on A.I. in marketing can generally be categorized into four primary areas: (1) technical A.I. algorithms addressing specific marketing challenges (e.g., Chung et al., 2009, 2016; Dzyabura & Hauser, 2011, 2019), (2) consumer psychological responses to A.I. (e.g., Luo et al., 2019; Mende et al., 2019), (3) A.I.'s impact on jobs and society (e.g., Frey & Osborne, 2017; Huang & Rust, 2018), and (4) managerial and strategic considerations regarding A.I. use (e.g., Fountaine et al., 2019; Huang & Rust, 2020).

2. A.I.'S INFLUENCE ON ONLINE BUSINESS FOR LOCAL SMES

Artificial intelligence (A.I.) has emerged as a powerful agent of digital transformation, driving significant changes in various industries, particularly within marketing. Modern marketing approaches embrace A.I. to enhance operational efficiency and competitive advantage (Chintalapati & Pandey, 2022). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the digital commerce are increasingly leveraging A.I. to strengthen their market position and customer engagement. By incorporating AI-driven marketing strategies, SMEs can achieve more precise targeting and better customer retention, allowing them to compete with larger firms cost-effectively despite resource limitations (Hansen & Bøgh, 2021). A.I. enables SMEs to utilize automated insights and tailor their marketing strategies, making operations more efficient and adaptable to market demands. This adaptability provides SMEs with an edge in the fast-paced digital market. The value of A.I. in marketing is expected to grow as technology advances, reinforcing its importance in future business strategies (Weber et al., 2021).

A.I. is transforming the digital business landscape for SMEs by enabling more targeted marketing strategies. Through machine learning and data insights, SMEs can craft personalized campaigns that maximize engagement and improve ROI (Grewal et al., 2020). In customer support, AI-driven tools like chatbots and virtual assistants provide real-time, customized interactions, boosting customer satisfaction (Diederich et al., 2022; Maedche et al., 2016; McTear et al., 2016). A.I. also enhances operational efficiency by automating essential processes, such as inventory management, which minimizes manual work and allows SMEs to concentrate on core business tasks (Gavrila et al., 2021).

3. CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY AI IN LOCAL SMEs' ONLINE BUSINESS

AI integration in SMEs offers promising benefits but presents numerous challenges. While A.I. enhances marketing, customer service, and efficiency, SMEs encounter technical barriers, budget constraints, and ethical considerations around workforce impacts and data privacy (Berente et al., 2021). Adapting current systems often requires custom solutions, collaboration with third parties, and significant

employee training. Clear leadership and communication are crucial for effective management changes as A.I. reshapes business roles and processes. A.I.'s potential to turn challenges into growth opportunities enhances SMEs' resilience in the market (Lu et al., 2022). However, a lack of conceptual frameworks for A.I. application in marketing remains a significant obstacle (Adeleye et al., 2024). Collaboration with digital partners offers internal expertise that SMEs may lack, accelerating A.I. adoption (Sahoo et al., 2023). For SMEs in digital marketing, the ability to analyze vast amounts of data provides a competitive edge. A.I. enables SMEs to predict trends, automate tasks, and personalize customer interactions effectively (Adeleye et al., 2024). This capability transforms digital marketing analytics, making A.I. essential for strategy and decision-making (Thilagavathy & Kumar, 2021; Zairis & Zairis, 2022). Although A.I. project implementation is generally well-regarded among SMEs, challenges in project planning and execution still exist. The shortage of skilled A.I. professionals also pushes SMEs to invest in talent retention or form external partnerships to attract A.I. expertise (Teerasoponpong & Sopadang, 2021).

4. THE ROLE OF AI TOOLS IN SALES FOR SMES: MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research model consists of the independent variable, Application of AI tools in SMEs, and the dependent variable, Improving the efficiency of sales processes, as shown in (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Research model

Source: Author's research
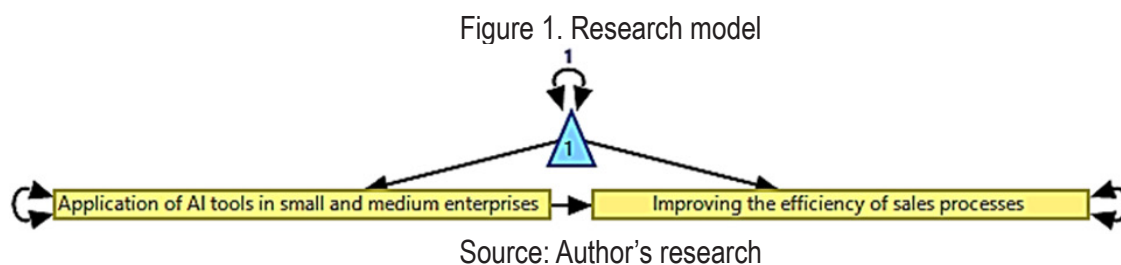
The research aims to determine whether the application of AI tools in SMEs improves their efficiency in sales processes.

Null Hypotheses H0: The application of AI tools in small and medium-sized enterprises does not affect the improvement of efficiency in their sales processes.

Alternative Hypotheses Ha: The application of AI tools in small and medium-sized enterprises affects the improvement of efficiency in their sales processes.

5. RESULTS

The study utilized an online questionnaire completed by respondents via the Internet, consisting of six statements for each variable in the model (Table 1). Respondents answered using a 5-point Likert scale (1 - strongly disagree, 2 - somewhat disagree, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 - somewhat agree, 5 - strongly agree). The research sample included 275 respondents. The statements were derived from the authors' personal experiences and sources referenced in the theoretical research. Correlation and regression analyses were used in the study to assess the impact of the independent variable.

Table 1. Claims in research

Claim - Improving the efficiency of sales processes	1	2	3	4	5
In our company, we regularly use AI tools to analyze market data.	2	9	26	78	160
AI tools help us significantly in segmenting our customers.	2	5	28	82	158
We use AI tools to automate communication with customers.	2	5	28	83	157
The introduction of AI tools has improved the prediction of sales trends in our company.	8	27	55	97	88
AI tools have increased the speed of order processing in our team.	9	4	22	93	147
Employees are adequately trained to use AI tools in their daily work.	6	13	30	64	162
Claim -Application of AI tools in small and medium enterprises					
The efficiency of my sales team increased after implementing AI tools.	4	8	31	95	137
The processing speed of sales processes has improved significantly thanks to AI tools.	8	11	36	79	141
The satisfaction of our customers increased after the implementation of AI solutions in sales.	9	45	55	69	97
Our ability to respond quickly to customer needs has improved thanks to AI tools.	9	15	30	94	127
We have increased the number of closed sales transactions thanks to the use of AI tools.	4	6	36	82	147
Communication within my sales team has become more efficient after the introduction of AI technology.	4	13	38	88	132

Source: Author's research

(Table 2) presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, focusing on activity, gender, education, chronological age, and years of work experience. The data indicate that the respondents are predominantly male, highly educated, older, and have varying levels of work experience. The predominance of the service sector over manufacturing may reflect specific labor market trends or the nature of the respondents' businesses.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of respondents

User activity	N	Column %
service	162	58.91
production	113	41.09
Gender of user	**N**	**Column %**
men	191	69.45
women	84	30.55
School preparation of respondents	**N**	**Column %**
primary or secondary school	103	37.45
college or university	172	62.55
Chronological age of the user	**N**	**Column %**
(18-30)	26	9.45
(31-45)	84	30.55
(46-58)	104	37.82
(>58)	61	22.18
Years of service of the user	**N**	**Column %**
(<=10)	63	22.91
(11-20)	99	36.00
(21-30)	83	30.18
(>30)	30	10.91

Source: Author's research

The statistical data in (Table 3) Summary of Fit provide insight into the model's performance used for data analysis. The coefficient of determination, 0.768984, indicates that approximately 76.9% of the variance in the dependent variable, Improving the efficiency of sales processes, can be explained by the independent variable, Application of AI tools in SMEs, in the model. The high R^2 value suggests that the model explains the data well. The results indicate that the model is highly effective in explaining the variance in the dependent variable, Improving the efficiency of sales processes, and making accurate predictions with relatively low error. The average values reflect the respondents' positive attitudes toward the research question.

Table 3. Summary of Fit

RSquare	0.768984
RSquare Adj	0.768138
Root Mean Square Error	0.373247
Mean of Response	4.148485
Observations (or Sum Wgts)	275

Source: Author's research

The results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) used to test the statistical significance of the model are presented in (Table 4). The ANOVA results indicate that the model significantly explains the variance in the dependent variable, Improving the efficiency of sales processes, given the very high F ratio and an extremely low probability for F, implying that the model is effective in prediction and that the results are statistically significant [$F_{(1,273)}$ = 908.7353, p < 0.0001]. This supports the hypothesis Ha: The application of AI tools in small and medium-sized enterprises affects the improvement of efficiency in their sales processes.

Table 4. Analysis of Variance

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio
Model	1	126.59881	126.599	908.7353
Error	273	38.03250	0.139	Prob > F
C. Total	274	164.63131		<0.0001

Source: Author's research

The regression analysis results (Table 5) include the coefficients for the predictors and their statistical characteristics. The regression analysis results indicate that the Application of AI tools in SMEs has a significant and positive relationship with the dependent variable, Improving the efficiency of sales processes. The high t-ratio and very low Prob>|t| suggest reliable results. The standardized beta coefficient also suggests that the Application of AI tools in SMEs is a key factor in explaining the variance in the dependent variable, Improving the efficiency of sales processes.

Table 5. Parameter Estimates

Term	Estimate	Std Error	t Ratio	Prob>|t|	Std Beta	VIF
Intercept	0.34716	0.128093	2.71	0.0071	0	.
Application of AI tools in small and medium enterprises	0.887155	0.029429	30.15	<0.0001	0.876917	1

Source: Author's research

Based on the data from (Table 5) Parameter Estimates, a multiple linear regression equation was formed, as shown in (Formula 1):

Each unit increase in the application of AI tools in small and medium enterprises results in an increase in Improving the efficiency of sales processes by approximately 0.887.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the significant impact of AI tools in improving the efficiency of sales processes within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). With a high coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.768984$), the results indicate that nearly 76.9% of the variance in sales process efficiency can be explained by the use of AI tools, underscoring their critical role in enhancing productivity and performance. Findings from the ANOVA and regression analyses reveal a statistically significant, positive association between AI tool usage and increased sales efficiency, evidenced by a substantial F ratio and an exceptionally low p-value ($p < 0.0001$), which supports the alternative hypothesis (Ha). The study suggests that the adoption of AI tools is both beneficial and essential for SMEs aiming to enhance their sales processes. The robustness of the results across different analyses reinforces the model's reliability and predictive accuracy, with each unit increase in AI tool application correlating to an approximate 0.887 increase in sales efficiency. Furthermore, respondents' positive perspectives on AI's role underline its practical value and growing acceptance within the sector. In summary, this research confirms the importance of AI in transforming sales processes and offers valuable insights for SMEs seeking competitive advantage through technology. Future research could examine specific AI applications that drive the most significant efficiency gains, providing a deeper understanding of how AI can support business growth.

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THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN THE PROMOTION AND PRESERVATION OF GORANI CULTURAL IDENTITY IN KOSOVO AND METOHIJA

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Abstract: This paper examines the impact of teaching staff on promoting and preserving Gorani identity in Gorani schools in Kosovo within the Serbian educational system. The researchers employ a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and semi-structured interviews. Seventh and eighth-grade students from five primary schools and third and fourth-year high school students were surveyed. Interviews were conducted with the principals of each school and one teacher per school, except for one school where communication could not be established. The structured survey includes 16 questions (one open-ended), based on a 5-point scale, aiming to assess the effectiveness of teachers in promoting Gorani culture, students' knowledge of the culture, students' participation in cultural activities, and students' interest in preserving Gorani heritage. Our findings indicate that schools play a significant role in cultural preservation and promotion. However, the full potential of the school system in this regard has yet to be realized, as cultural knowledge transfer largely depends on the enthusiasm and self-initiative of the teaching staff. The main challenges are not solely curricular, as teachers often use certain lessons to promote Gorani culture but are also influenced by Kosovo's complex political and social landscape. While financial support from Belgrade is available, there is a lack of initiative from both authorities and schools. This study also suggests two key areas for future research: first, a comparative study including Albanian- and Bosnian-language schools could enhance understanding of parallel educational systems in post-conflict settings. Second, an exploration of the Gorani community's position within the broader political landscape of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and the Brussels process could provide further insight.

Keywords: Gorani, Gorani community, Gorani identity, Serbia, Serbian educational system in Kosovo*, post-conflict education,

Field: Social sciences, sociology

1. INTRODUCTION: LITERATURE REVIEW AND GOAL OF RESEARCH

The Gorani community has been the subject of academic research since Russian ethnographer Ivan Yastrebov (2018) visited Gora—the region located in today's Albania, Macedonia, and Serbia— in the nineteenth century. In 1955, Milisav Lutovac, a member of the Serbian Academy of Science, visited the region and made the same remarks as Yastrebov: Gorani are Serbs who speak the Serbian language. Earlier that century, Yordan Ivanov (1905), a member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, presented a thesis that Gorani are Bogomils and, as such, are part of the Bulgarian diaspora. This thesis produced two interesting variations. First, Nazif Dokle (2011), a Gorani and Albanian author, reiterates that Gorani are Bogomils but concludes that the thesis speaks in support of their Macedonian identity. The second variation of the "Gorani as Bogomils" thesis flows as follows: if the members of the Bosnian Church were Bogomils, and if the Gorani were Bogomils and the Bosnian Church was located on the territory of today's Bosnia, then the Gorani are Bosniaks. It hardly needs to be mentioned that there is no evidence that the Bosnian Church was Bogomil, let alone that it has anything to do with today's Bosniaks; the only medieval source referring to Bogomils in Bosnia is almost certainly a forgery (Malcolm, 1996, p. 31).

Although it is difficult to dispute the Islamization of the Orthodox population in Gora (e.g. Катић, 2021), the origin and history of the Gorani still remain a subject of debate in contemporary literature. It also finds its place in pseudo-scientific works; see Fikret Hafizofić, a retired mathematics teacher, and also the ideas of Sulejman Aličković. Further, linguistic circles are partially repeating divisions from the debate on the origins of the Gorani. Thus, Božidar Vidoevski considers Gorani speech to be a Macedonian dialect from the Western Macedonian region (Steinke, 2017), while Bulgarian linguists view it as part of the Bulgarian-Macedonian dialect continuum (Koleva, 2012), and Radivoje Mladenović (2001) argues Gorani is a mixture of Serbian and Macedonian. Unlike history and language, which are politically and academically challenging issues, Gorani culture is well documented and consists of complementary works. Thus, the central elements of Gorani culture are folk costumes (Đorđević Crnobrnja, 2015), folk music (Ranković, 2016), the celebration of Đurđevdan (Pavlović, 2021), weddings and marriage practices

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(Ђорђевић Црнобрња, 2018), migrations (Markov, 2020), and mythology (Petreska, 2008).

Education is about the Gorani community remains an under-researched area. Apart from Milenović (Миленовић, 2010), who gives us an account of the education of the Gorani community from 1918 to 2008, the authors did not find any other research. The main reason is quite simple: the vast majority of Gorani in Kosovo and Metohija perceive Serbia as their homeland since they are educated within the Serbian system in the Serbian language. However, the opening of Gorani schools in Albanian and Bosniak, the penetration of ideas of pseudo-historians among young Goranians, as well as the general challenges faced by the Serbian education system in Kosovo, make the scientific study of Gorani education essential. We decided to address this very political topic in an apolitical way with the question: What is the role of teachers in majority Gorani schools in the promotion and preservation of Gorani culture?

2. RESEACH FRAMEWORK

We employed a mixed methods approach that allows us to use both quantitative and qualitative methods—in our case, a structured survey and semi-structured interviews. The results were collected simultaneously between March and May 2024 and then analyzed at the same time. The schools that participated in the process are as follows: elementary schools "22. December" in Restelica (12 students, all eighth grade), "5. October" in Kruševo (16 students, seventh and eighth grade), "Nebojša Jerković" in Ljubovište/Dragaš (10 students, all 8th grade), "25. maj" in Vranište (2 students in seventh and eighth grade), and "Zenuni" in Brod (10 students, all eighth grade), as well as the economics and trade high school (8 students)—with a total of 56 participants in the survey. Additionally, the principal and one teacher from each school were interviewed. It should be noted that of the elementary schools that teach in the Serbian language, we were only failed to establish communication with the school "9. May" in Rapca. It is worth noting that, in certain schools, lessons are taught in Bosnian ("December 22," "October 5," "Zenuni") and Albanian ("December 22"). Not including schools in other languages should not be seen as a limitation of this work, but as a hint of future research that, in addition to building on our results, could provide insights into the parallel educational systems in post-conflict societies.

The structured survey contained a total of 16 questions (with the fourth question being open-ended) on a 5-point scale to investigate not only the effectiveness of teachers in promoting Gorani culture and experience in class but also students' knowledge of Gorani culture, students' participation in activities linked to the promotion of the Gorani culture, and students' interest in preserving Gorani cultural heritage. Surveys were sent to school principals beforehand to inform parents about the content and obtain their consent. Finally, on the scheduled day, the students filled out surveys in the presence of their teachers. Although we had the option to extend the survey to all grades because it would not be expensive and time-consuming (the classic challenges of a census survey), we decided to include only eighth graders and in certain schools seventh graders. Including all grades would increase the burden on schools (Bethlehem, 2009).

The interviews are semi-structured and, as previously mentioned, include school principals and one teacher per school. In the initial phase, the principals were contacted with information about the research with guarantees that the questions would be exclusively related to the role of teachers in preserving Gorani culture. Given the complexity of the political situation, including the place of Serbian education in Kosovo and Metohija, we have found that the a priori exclusion of political topics can encourage people to participate in research. After a positive reaction, we sent surveys and interview topics. Therefore, the respondents were familiar with the nature of the research. Prior to the interviews, participants filled out the consent form in which they noted whether the interview could be recorded or the researcher would take notes, gained an understanding of with rights and obligations of each party, and said whether we could use their names and affiliations. Out of ten interviewees, only three requested to remain anonymous. Although only three respondents requested anonymity, we opted to anonymize all interviewees. The interviews were conducted by the co-author, a member of the Gorani community, which enabled us to have easier access to the interviewees and bypass the potential issue of community member-outsider interaction impacting the interview (Banks, 1998); though there are authors who challenge this dichotomy (see Berger, 2013). Other potential challenges appear when an individual researches their own community, such as emotions (Laliberté & Schurr, 2016) or solidarity (Augustin, 2020); however, these have been overcome by the constant contact of all co-authors during the research and joint result interpretation. Also, in the case of surveys and interviews, all documents are stored according to valid regulations.

Before presenting the results, three more points need to be acknowledged; these are reflected in the discussion section of the paper. First, although we decided to address this topic through apolitical research questions, the influence of politics on the education system is undeniable and we must not neglect the

influence of education in building political cohesion, political socialization, and a culture of political action (Bazić, 2012). Then, we accept that formal education is important, but it is also only one of the elements in preserving the culture of a community in addition to other aspects such as language, (UNESCO, 2003), traditional wisdom and practice (Sillitoe, 2009), and holidays and cultural manifestations (Getz, 2010). Finally, it is important to keep in mind that the destruction of material monuments and institutions, which play a role in transmitting the culture, history, and collective memory of a community, in Kosovo has removed bearers of cultural and historical messages; this interrupts the messages' intergenerational transmission and leads to the erasure of the collective memory of that community (Vučković, 2022).

3. RESULTS

Surveys
The questions were divided into four themes: 1. Knowledge and participation; 2. Importance and interest; 3. Activities and engagement; and 4. Teacher effectiveness and future initiatives. There are no significant differences in the answers between elementary school and high school students, which is why the results are not separated. The fourth question is open-ended and concerns participation in activities as well as lessons in class that focus on Gorani culture. The most common response regarding activities was "Đurđevdan", followed by mentions of "wedding", and "wearing national costume". In terms of lessons on Goran culture, typical student responses included: "we don't have such lectures, but teachers sometimes connect the class with Goran culture", and "some teachers, if something from the lesson associates them with a tradition, then they explain it to us". Additionally, some students associated Goran culture with their music classes, stating: "in music culture, we have classes where we learn more about our Goran costume and culture" and "we listen to Goran music in the music culture class".

Regarding the answers on the 5-point scale: students believe that they are well acquainted with Gorani culture and tradition (average score 4.07), while they rated the frequency of participation in activities related to Gorani culture as 3.39. Their experiences in the classes show that there is room for improvement (3.11) but also that there is interest in learning about Gorani culture as well as a desire for more cultural events. However, students believe that teachers are relatively successful in involving students with a score of 3.70. Additionally, our respondents believe that learning from culture can be useful with a score of 3.88, and they perceive the preservation of Gorani cultural heritage as very important with a score of 4.39. However, they rate their involvement, the likelihood of recommending ideas, and their interest in participating in future initiatives only at just above the average grades between 3.3 and 3.7; they said that learning about Gorani culture has a moderately positive impact on understanding cultural diversity with 3.68. Finally, students strongly support the introduction of a special subject that would focus on Gorani culture with a score of 4.13.

Interviews
The interview was designed around five topics: 1. General queries; 2. Gorani culture and education system; 3. The integration and promotion of Gorani culture; 4. Support of the school administration, local and educational authorities, and 5. suggestions for improvement.

The first group of questions enabled the researchers to get to know the interviewees and the schools. School "25. maj" started operating in 1922 and today classes are held in two shifts in the Serbian language; "Nebojša Jerković" has been working continuously since 1948 and has four departments outside its main building; "5. oktobar" was founded in 1963 in Kruševo, but, since 2006, classes have been held in Glubočica; "Zenuni" in Brod existed since 1930 and it has branches in the villages of Bačka and Dikance. The School of Economics and Trade was founded in 1969 it was operating in the home school in Dragaš, but since 2006 moved to the nearby village of Mlike. It is worth stressing that most of our interviewees have a decade or more of experience in education.

All interviewees believe that they are familiar with Gorani culture. Further, besides two principals who do not see the need to learn about Gorani culture in the school because "there are more than twenty or so national minorities" and it is not "of key importance," the others find that preservation is more than desirable because, as one teacher reminds us, "it is easy to forget culture and tradition if it is not nurtured." One of the principals emphasizes that the elements of Gorani culture should be "available to others so that they can get to know our tradition, culture and all the elements that adorn our community." When it comes to answers linked to the integration and promotion of Gorani culture, they mostly corresponded to the replies received from the students on the fourth question. Thus, art and music classes, where folk songs, costumes, and customs are covered, remain the most common answers. In addition, the interviewees note that certain events usually accompany important dates and anniversaries: "the conditions are difficult, and

we are not able to do anything special, but when it comes to some events such as the 50th anniversary of the school, it's okay whether [...] we organize folklore, recitations, or music, we are simply not able," "through various cultural and artistic events, we celebrate school day, through art exhibitions, etc. One of the ways is that for the third time for every jubilee from the 60s onwards, we issue a newsletter in which we select pages in which we promote our culture and tradition." Some of the interviewees also note the positive reactions of the students to this type of activity: "the children are happy," "they are satisfied," "every student when we come to his field knows something, we give him the freedom to express himself freely, to behave well, to present himself well, and to be completely satisfied."

When asked about the support of the school administration and the authorities responsible for education, teachers' answers vary from "currently we do not receive any support" through "primarily in the part of supporting our demands [...] although for now it is at a minimal level" to "the support is present in every view." One interviewee explains that "the administration, in accordance with its capabilities, and above all due to the specific position of our community in these turbulent times, does not have much space or means to support any cultural content in any way, except for the one for the school day." On the other hand, the director's answers are somewhat different, focusing on the specific help provided by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and the Office for Kosovo, primarily in celebrating school days but also in printing magazines. However, one of the directors adds that, during the external evaluation, they insisted "that we emphasize regular classes as well as where possible, that we promote our culture, language and customs." It seems that the general perception of our interviewees is that there is support but no initiative from the authorities. In other words, the authorities are willing to support school initiatives: "I don't think they are to blame [the authorities], I think it is more our fault because we are not asking for something."

The last part of the conversation was reserved for proposals on how the government can help in the promotion of Gorani culture. Interestingly, although (as expected) they mention the financial aspect in the form of equipment and expansion of the school space, our interviewees more often lead the conversation in several other directions. The first recurring theme was increased autonomy for teacher: "encourage teachers to move beyond templates [...] to have more freedom." Another proposal was broader outreach: " we would be grateful for invitations to showcase our culture outside Gora […] such as the activities we had in the cultural center in Gračanica and the city school in Klokot to present our culture, language, and customs". Establishing a cultural center or society was also suggested: "A cultural-artistic society with financial backing and workshops for making Goran folk costumes would be a small step forward with a great epoch-making effect in preserving the Goran being. The guarantor of our cultural and historical duration". Finally, one interviewee reminds us of the establishment of the National Council of Goranians and expresses the hope that the Council "through its representatives, among whom I am the chairman of the management board for culture, to find a module in contact with the relevant ministry, so that in the near future Gorani culture studies according to the curriculum of the Republic of Serbia."

4. DISCUSSION

Our quantitative findings demonstrate that young people believe that they know Gorani culture well and that they moderately active in cultural activities at school and above all in the community. Their experience is only satisfactory when it comes to Gorani culture within lessons themselves, and they express interest in learning more about their own culture as well as participating in school activities that promote Gorani culture. This is also confirmed by our interviewees; conversations and lessons about Gorani culture are sometimes included at the initiative of the subject teacher and only when there is an objective opportunity. On the other hand, teachers and directors confirm while students are happy to participate in cultural events, there are relatively few events.

The disparity between students having a strong understanding of their culture despite having few cultural events and classes in school is due to the fact that, as shown by previous research, people's perception and knowledge of tradition, speech, and holidays is nurtured primarily within the family or wider community (Đorđević Crnobrnja, 2014; 2015; 2018). Coming from family environments where local culture is celebrated, the desire to increase cultural events in schools is not surprising. Interestingly, while there is interest in more cultural content at school, students show less enthusiasm for participating in future initiatives and projects. One of the possible explanations for this difference is that participation requires more effort than passive consumption of cultural content.

In addition to the large number of cultural events, students clearly believe that it is important to include lessons about Gorani culture in the curriculum itself. Both their principals and teachers express a desire to include such lessons as well as more extracurricular activities. This is the (obvious) point at

which politics enters the field of education. Although there is very strong general support from Serbia and often specific support for school initiatives, neither side currently sees the promotion of Gorani culture as a priority or their responsibility. For the authorities in Belgrade, it is the preservation of the Serbian education system in Kosovo, while for the Gorani community, the primary goal is survival in Gora. It should be noted that staff in schools, as well as students and their parents, through participation in Serbian institutions, link their future with the Serbian population of Kosovo and Metohija. In this context, it would be interesting in subsequent research to analyze the potential role and place of the Gorani community in the Brussels process.

Furthermore, the students rated their involvement as well as their teacher's effectiveness as above average, which matches the answers from the interview and reveals that teachers are making individual efforts. It is also interesting that they believe that learning about Gorani culture has positive effects on the perspective and understanding of cultural diversity. Their observation, or perhaps just intuition, is certainly confirmed in the scientific literature, where understanding one's own culture represents a significant step towards appreciation and respect for cultural diversity—first of all, through the development of self-awareness, empathy, and critical thinking (Baker, 2015).

Finally, students, principals, and teachers all reacted positively to the introduction of a special subject that would focus on Gorani culture. Although there are indeed over twenty national minorities in Serbia, not only would the creation of such a curriculum be almost impossible, but it would also be counterproductive for the cohesion of society. However, considering the political and social circumstances in Kosovo and the active efforts to destroy the material carriers of cultural messages—as well as the educational system of Serbia being one of the few remaining potential carriers of these messages—this idea should not be rejected per se. The introduction of a special subject on Gorani culture, in an ideological sense, signals that the Gorani are part of the Serbian national body with full respect for local cultures. A less ambitious but still impactful idea is the state government creating a platform for exchanging experiences and knowledge between schools in Kosovo and Metohija, as well as schools across the rest of Serbia.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Schools play an important but not essential role in the promotion and preservation of Gorani identity. However, that role is limited by the curriculum, as well as by the political and social situation in Kosovo. The involvement of teachers in the promotion of Gorani culture is mostly self-initiated and takes place in music and art classes. Additionally, schools almost exclusively organize cultural events for the purpose of celebrating important dates. In addition to insufficient time within the curriculum for cultural content, teachers face challenges such as the lack of equipment, limited school space, and sometimes, lack of communication with school administrators. The directors note that there is financial support from the state authorities but no official initiatives that would promote Goran's cultural heritage. Furthermore, our interviewees emphasize that while it is important for them that the voice of the Gora community is heard outside the territory of Gora, there are few initiatives coming from the schools themselves.

During this study, two interesting topics for future research emerged. First, comparative research that encompasses bilingual and multilingual schools can contribute to the general understanding of parallel education systems in post-conflict societies. Second, there is no literature that indicates, in the case of full implementation of the Brussels documents and the Ohrid Proposal, the place and role that the Gorani community occupies. For example, would schools with a Goran majority remain in the Serbian system or would majority Goran schools in Kosovo became part of the Community of Serbian Municipalities?

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INTERNATIONAL FRANCHISING AS A METHOD OF IMPLEMENTATION AND MARKET POSITIONING OF EXISTING FRANCHISING FORMS

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Abstract: The need for capital for further fertilization, i.e. conquering new markets through minimal investments, can be realized through franchising as a specific investment method of contractual business. The use of a successful business method, reduced investment risks and independence in business are the determining reasons for joining the franchising network by a potential franchisee. Franchising provides the franchisor with the opportunity to expand its business to the target market with minimal investments and minimal investment risks, until the franchisee, by joining the franchising network, uses all the benefits and advantages in practice of a successfully developed business system that is recognized by potential consumers as business that is characterized by a built image and brand. One of the methods that the franchisor uses to conquer a new market with minimal investments and minimal investment risks, and with the expected profit, is international franchising. International franchising is a distribution technique that contractually integrates a distribution system instead of a chain of ownership managed from a single center. International franchising does not represent a special form of franchising business, but rather a method through which the franchisor realizes the expansion of franchising business on the international market. Regardless of the form in which franchising appears (goods, services, production, etc.) on the international market, it can be realized through various methods that enable and provide international franchising, all in accordance with the needs, specifics and requirements of the target market. Modalities of realization of international franchising are achieved through: 1) master franchising; 2) direct franchising; 3) area development agreements and 4) joint venture.

Keywords: international franchising, franchisor, franchisee, franchise, franchising contract, master franchising, direct franchising; area development agreements; joint venture

Field: Law

1. INTRODUCTION

The need for capital to conquer new markets through minimal investment can be achieved through a franchising agreement (franchise). As a specific investment method of contractual business operations, i.e. as a concept of contractual expansion of business operations in a target market, franchising is becoming ever more aggressively significant in the contemporary market circumstances (Miljković & Simić, 2021). Franchising, as a method of contractual investment business, develops and experiences expansion in the common law system (the American legal system) (Blair & Lafontaine, 2010, p.7). Franchising can most simply be characterized as a method of selling goods (Mendelsohn, 2004, p.1); i.e. franchising is a business tool in which a business owner, called the franchisor, allows another person, the franchisee, to trade in their goods or services in conformity with the franchisor's business plan and using their trademark (Elsaman, 2023, p.45). According to another group of authors, franchising is a system of distribution of goods and/or services and/or technology, based on close and continuous cooperation between legally and financially separate and independent entities, the franchisor and franchisee, by which the franchisor gives the individual franchisee the right and imposes an obligation to operate in line with his business concept (Јовановић & Радовић & Радовић, 2020, p.417). In a franchising agreement, one contractual party, the franchisor, grants for a specific time and in a specific territory the right to use the franchise as a franchise package with the obligation of providing training, administrative, and marketing services to the other contractual party, the franchisee, who commits to using the granted franchise in the franchising unit's operations and to pay a franchise fee for it.

Franchising offers the franchisor the opportunity to expand their business into target markets with minimal investment outlays and minimal investment risks. By joining a franchising network, the franchisee gains all the benefits and advantages of a business system that has been successfully developed and is recognized by potential consumers as having a well-established image, brand, and goodwill (Miljković, 2022). Goodwill consists of two elements: a) the reputation of the existing business and b) the expectation that such a reputation will continue to attract clients (Kavarić, 2020, p.2). It can be concluded that franchising represents nothing more than a distribution technique that integrates a distribution system by

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contract instead of a chain of ownership managed from a single center (Emerson, 1990, p.1508). One of the modalities of implementation of existing forms of franchising used by the franchisor is international franchising, which enables them to conquer new target markets with minimal investment outlays, minimal investment risks, and expected profits.

2. WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL FRANCHISING?

International franchising is not a separate form of franchising business, but a mode/method through which the franchisor achieves expansion of franchising business into international markets. It should be emphasized that regardless of the form franchising takes (retail, service, production, etc.), it can be implemented in the international market using various methods that enable and provide international franchising, all in accordance with the needs, specificities, and requirements of the target market. The reasons that influence the expansion of international franchising business are: a) the need for growth of successful business operations and b) the ability to achieve such growth by connecting with others who possess capital and workforce (Mendelsohn, 2004, p.1). The international franchising system creates favorable conditions for companies to enter the markets of other countries, stimulating rapid development of entrepreneurial activities (Stetsiuk & Miroshnychenko & Dudko, 2019, p.332). The essence of international franchising is that the franchisor grants the franchisee the right to represent the brand in the international market using trademarks, know-how, technology, and business model (Stetsiuk & Miroshnychenko & Dudko, 2019, p.333).

International franchising is characterized by a number of significant advantages: 1) exploitation of local management when overcoming problems related to foreign language and culture; 2) due to the impossibility or high value of appropriate remote control, business supervision is entrusted to a local expert; 3) legal procedures conducted by local lawyers which allows for the lawful sale of goods in the target country without any liability to its legislation; 4) potential to bypass laws of certain countries that prohibit or control income from foreign direct investments; 5) the ability of overcoming political difficulties, for example, the potential expropriation of foreign direct investments. The franchisee, typically a resident of the target country, significantly reduces the risk of such problems. In any case, even if assets are expropriated, the franchisee, not the franchisor, will suffer the losses; 6) one of the greatest advantages of international franchising is the possibility of avoiding customs duties, which, despite a large number of international agreements, still hinder the development of global trade (Pengilley, 1985, p.190)

3. MODALITIES OF IMPLEMENTING INTERNATIONAL FRANCHISING

Depending on the way the trading network is organized (Stetsiuk & Miroshnychenko & Dudko, 2019, p.335), the modalities of implementing international franchising are implemented through: 1) master franchising; 2) direct (single-unit) franchising; 3) area development and joint ventures (Mendelsohn, 1992, pp.31-32).

3.1. Master franchising
Under a master franchising agreement, the franchisor grants the master franchisee the right to recruit new franchisees (sub-franchisees) within a specified time and territory, with the obligation to provide on-site support services (Hershman & Caffy, 2004, p.55). A master franchising agreement is concluded by the master franchisor when: 1) they do not have sufficient financial resources; 2) lack the necessary experience to successfully develop the franchising business system in the target market; 3) the administrative costs of establishing a standalone business in the target market are large and burdensome; 4) there is a perceived dispersion of business risks between themselves and the master franchisee; and 5) minimal capital investment is necessary with greater involvement from the potential master franchisee through resources (financial, personnel, and experience) they possess. The advantages of master franchising for the master franchisor are that they are significantly relieved from addressing ongoing problems that may arise when entering the target market, as the entire burden falls on the master franchisee (who understands the legal regulations, business customs, culture, and language of the market, and often originates from the target market territory).

By concluding a contract, two independent legal relationships are created between: a) the master franchisor and the master franchisee, and b) the master franchisee and the franchisee (sub-franchisee). A contract is concluded with only one master franchisee in the target market, who has the exclusive right within the territory assigned by the contract (country – region) to open and manage their own franchise unit (franchise outlet), on one hand, and grant sub-franchises on the other hand. By transferring exclusive

rights to develop franchise operations and stepping into the role of the master franchisor, the master franchisee has rights and obligations toward the sub-franchisee. The exoneration clauses within the master franchising agreement stipulate that the master franchisor is released from liability towards the sub-franchisee. A legal relationship is established between the master franchisee and the sub-franchisee, in which the master franchisee acts as the franchisor to the sub-franchisee (Mendelsohn, 2005, p.263).

When the success of master franchising depends on the business capabilities of the potential master franchisee, certain business challenges are posed to the master franchisor. These challenges must be considered in the execution of the master franchise. Potential issues to which the franchisor should pay increased attention include: 1) difficulties in identifying and selecting the right person or company for the sub-franchisor – the master franchisee; 2) the need for a strong and profitable base and business operations that will meet the requirements set by the franchisor; and 3) the diversion of workforce and financial resources in relation to domestic operations. To maximize the chances of success, the franchisor must allocate resources primarily to international operations, always requiring more people and costs than expected; and 4) the time factor, which always lasts longer than expected (Mendelsohn, 2004, p.87).

One of the more significant questions that arise is what criteria can determine whether success or growth in franchising has been achieved in a specific market? The answer should be sought in that the master franchisor always sets minimum growth criteria that the master franchisee must achieve within a specified timeframe. Although the master franchisor can determine the criteria for minimum growth and the period in which it must be achieved, the question arises of what happens if the minimum growth cannot be met, especially in a market that is new and where it is difficult to achieve the projected minimum growth. In such circumstances, the master franchisor often resorts to suspending certain rights, such as the exclusive right to growth if the master franchisee does not achieve the highest projected threshold. By suspending the anticipated right, the master franchisor does not have the right to unilaterally terminate the agreement, except in circumstances where the master franchisee fails to achieve a slightly lower growth threshold (Riesterer, 2001, p.49). In addition to relinquishing the exclusive right to growth, in order to stimulate the master franchisee to achieve a higher level of growth of the franchised business in the target market, lower royalty rates are envisioned (Miljković, 2016, p.224).

In environments where market competition is fierce, the master franchisor requires the master franchisee to quickly develop business in the target market. However, it is necessary initially to allow the master franchisee to operate independently, i.e., they are required to maintain a certain number of systematic units before sub-franchising, for the purpose of becoming familiar with the functioning and operation of franchising. It cannot be expected from a master franchisee who has not demonstrated the ability to independently and successfully manage a minimum number of systematic franchise units to successfully lead sub-franchised operations where it is necessary to continuously and efficiently maintain a connection with the sub-franchisee(s). To avoid such situations, it is necessary for the master franchising agreement to include provisions obligating the master franchisee to independently manage a certain minimum number of systematic franchise units for a specified period, and only after becoming acquainted with the business and functioning of the granted franchising, can they proceed to sub-franchising.

The master franchisor must ensure that the potential master franchisee has the resources necessary for the full development of franchising business. The franchisor always opts for a potential master franchisee who has: a) specific experience; b) the capability to develop a sub-franchising system; c) successfully establishes, maintains, and develops relationships with sub-franchisees; d) can successfully resolve potential disputes between sub-franchisees; e) successfully applies and implements systematic standards; and f) successfully implements the latest management systems. Besides these characteristics, it can be concluded that the master franchisee must primarily behave more like a business manager and less like a business operator to fall into the category. (Riesterer, 2001, p.51).

In modern economic and market contexts, which require faster access to a specific market upon which the survival of a certain brand simultaneously depends, master franchising represents the most suitable and effective method of capital investment. The master franchisee assumes the majority of financial risks and hence the responsibility for the successful management of the granted system, and consequently has a right to a larger percentage of royalties and income inflows from the sub-franchisee holders. The higher revenues of the master franchisee (the master franchisee generally earns more than usual, which occurs in direct franchising or regional development agreements) undeniably imply that the master franchisor achieves lower revenues, in order to position the brand in the target market. However, despite the lower income that the franchisor achieves, it should be noted that one of the major drawbacks of master franchising for the franchisor is 'ceding systematic control over the market.' Ceding systematic control is manifested in that the master franchisee independently (a) chooses the sub-franchisees; (b) provides training; (c) develops the distribution network and (d) controls promotions and advertising in

the target market. The master franchisee is the one who controls how the sub-franchisees meet the systematic requirements implemented in the master franchise agreement, which are also stipulated in the sub-franchising agreement. Through the direct responsibility that the master franchisee has towards the master franchisor, indirect control is achieved in enforcing the prescribed systematic standards by the sub-franchisees.

One of the more significant issues is also the question of training, both (a) for the master franchisee and (b) for the sub-franchisees. The master franchisor is obliged to provide training to the master franchisee and their staff (if they have any). Training for the master franchisee is most often conducted at the headquarters of the master franchisor (with ongoing training provided in the market of the master franchisee). It is necessary to ask whether the master franchisor is obliged to provide training to the sub-franchisees, even though there is no direct contractual relationship with them, or whether it is the obligation of the master franchisee. In circumstances where the master franchisee is developing the franchising business system in the target market and is at the beginning of the business (lacks experience in providing training), the master franchisor provides the necessary training to the sub-franchisees. The obligation to provide training to the sub-franchisees by the master franchisor lasts until the moment the master franchisee becomes experienced enough to provide training.

3.1.1. Distribution

Given that it contributes its capital and bears most financial risks, the master franchisee independently establishes a distribution network. The master franchisee develops a distribution network primarily to distribute to the sub-franchisees: 1) inventory and equipment, and 2) to maintain control over the distribution network and accompanying revenues. (Riesterer, 2001, p.53). If the master franchisor wishes to retain control over the distribution network and the ongoing inflow of revenues from inventory and equipment, they independently develop a distribution system. The development of the distribution network, both by the master franchisor and the master franchisee, initiates potential conflicts regarding the jurisdiction of goods distribution. Avoiding conflict is in the compromise anticipated in the master franchising agreement, which stipulates that the franchisor is responsible for the distribution of proprietary goods (for which the agreement is concluded), and the master franchisee is responsible for the distribution of local products.

For the success of master franchising, it is essential that the master franchisor requires from the master franchisee a higher degree of management, i.e., managerial capabilities. Finally, it should be emphasized, based on everything presented about master franchising, that it represents the most applicable, most popular, and most successful form of international franchising.

3.2. Direct franchising

Direct franchising is a form of franchise business that allows the franchisor to enter into a separate agreement with each franchisee (Mendelsohn, 2004, p.86) along with the obligation to provide basic and ongoing support throughout the term of the agreement. A direct franchising agreement ensures the independence of the franchisee in terms of managing the franchise unit (Riesterer, 2001, p.41). The advantages of direct franchising for the franchisor include: a) the ability to maintain a franchise agreement for each franchise unit, even when the same franchisee operates several units and b) serves as an experimental model (pilot project) in the target market, i.e., an instrument for in-depth scanning of the target market, in order to justify or refute the feasibility of independent operations or entering into a more complex form of franchising agreement.

In the process of concluding agreements, the significance of direct franchising as a modality for implementing one of the forms of franchising agreements lies in its application, aimed at avoiding certain potential problems (market conditions), which nullifies the differences that may exist in the target market that can significantly impact the success of the franchising system's operations. Such differences include: a) language barriers; b) local laws that may influence franchising, franchise operations, and contracts, regardless of the increased standardization of specialized industrial laws; c) cultural differences and differences in daily life; d) variations in taste and habits of the population in individual countries; e) unchangeable national characteristics; and f) the need to adapt the franchising system – network to local conditions. (Mendelsohn, 2005, pp.261–262). The franchisor must directly or through outsourcing verify whether: a) the potential franchisee operates in accordance with the positive legislation and b) the business they wish to conduct is in compliance with the positive legislative acts of the target market. As the franchisee, there appears to be a small business owner who lacks sufficient own capital to start a business independently and often lacks the necessary knowledge and experience in the domain of business and advertising. The question arises as to how such a franchisee can operate in the target market and achieve the expected results. Under such circumstances, a greater participation of the franchisor is inevitable, specifically: a) with increased financial resources; b) with increased participation in the direct training of

franchisees; and c) in establishing a distribution network. In addition to greater involvement in the initial steps of developing franchise business, there is also a need for greater participation of the franchisor in the domain of advertising. The franchisor allocates a significant portion of its financial resources to advertising (Miljković, 2016), particularly when it is necessary to promote the franchising business that is emerging, with the aim of conquering the target market. At the moment when the franchising business becomes recognizable in the market, the entire burden of advertising and promotion falls on the franchisee, with the franchisor able to continue with advertising and promotion, if it assesses that the franchisee is not business-ready to take them on. The obligation to provide training has its advantages and disadvantages for the franchisor. The advantage of direct training for the franchisor is that it allows a significant level of control over the franchisee when entering the business system, on the one hand, while on the other hand, it entails the need for significant financial resources. Given the amount of financial resources needed, the franchisor needs to consider whether: a) the training is conducted at its headquarters or at the headquarters of the franchisee; and b) whether existing training programs can train a new franchisee or whether a new training program needs to be developed and designed.

One of the important segments of direct franchising is establishing a distribution network in the target market. By establishing a distribution network, the franchisee is enabled to procure the goods necessary for operations at more economical (privileged) prices from the franchisor than market prices. However, when developing the distribution network, the franchisor must consider the circumstances of whether: a) inventory and equipment can be purchased on the local market or must be imported; b) volume discounts are available if negotiating with suppliers of the entire system; and c) the system includes proprietary goods that must be imported from the franchisor's home country (Riesterer, 2001, p.43).

Finally, in circumstances when the target market is close to the headquarters of the franchisor (which is located in a neighboring country) and when distribution costs are minimized, direct franchising is applicable, i.e., profitable. However, even in circumstances where there is a significant distance from the business headquarters, the business of direct franchising is profitable if the franchisor: a) does not need to conduct comprehensive and complex training and control of the franchisee (the business system that is transferred by contract is not complex), and b) due to tax or business regulations of the target market, is unable to independently develop the franchising business in the target market.

3.3. Area development agreements

Through area development agreements, the franchisor grants the franchisee (the development executor) rights to open and operate a specified number of franchise units within a predetermined time frame (expansion period) and defined area (territory - zone) (Mendelsohn, 2004, p.66). Area development agreements are conceptually similar to direct franchising. The franchisee, acting in the role of 'development executor,' is required to develop 'multiple franchise units' within clearly defined territorial boundaries in a specific market, within a precisely determined timeframe (Riesterer, 2001, p.44).

Essential for area development agreements is the territory – the region in which the franchisee is granted exclusive rights to establish franchise units. The franchisor precisely specifies by agreement the size of the territory on which the franchisee must execute the granted exclusive rights. An area development agreement is applicable in the domestic market only in large countries that cover a vast area with a significant concentration of population (Mendelsohn, 2005, p.269). When determining the size of the territory, instead of allocating the entire target market to one franchisee, the franchisor can designate a larger number of areas within the target market to be assigned to a greater number of franchisees, aiming to encourage competitiveness among them. The competitiveness among franchisees is closely linked to the achievement of business plans determined by the franchisor, which relate to growth, profitability, or performance of the franchised business (Riesterer, 2001, p.44)..The franchisor often, for reasons such as a) lack of market knowledge or b) absence of an adequate and serious franchisee, chooses not to grant the franchise to a single large franchisee because the failure of development based on the contractually stipulated conditions can affect the business of the entire franchising network. In such circumstances, the franchisor, often within the target market, designates a 'larger number of smaller areas' where the franchisee is determined within each of these areas.

By concluding and implementing area development agreements, two contractual relationships are formed. The first arises between the franchisor and the franchisee, based on which the franchisee has exclusive rights to the assigned territory and is obliged to develop and manage the franchising business within that territory. With the implementation of the assigned rights and obligations, the franchisee (franchising area developer) enters into an individual contract with each individual franchisee in the designated area. The area developer, at the request of the franchisor, is obliged to conclude an individual contract with each potential franchisee. The reason why the developer must do this is to ensure that the franchisor can unilaterally terminate the contract for the regional development of individual units without

abolishing the franchisee's right to manage all its units within the assigned territory. The franchisor can combine the contract for regional development with contracts of individual units because this ensures an exclusive right to remove a problematic franchise – the area developer from the franchising business system.

When concluding area development agreements and later implementing them in the target market, the franchisee assumes the obligation and responsibility for the growth and development of the system in the target market by agreement. Given that area development agreements are concluded with one or more developers, it is of utmost importance that the franchisor retains the right to limit transfer – contractual conveyance. The franchisor, by contractual provisions, limits or prohibits the franchisee from freely selling individual units to third parties. For the franchisee to be able to sell, i.e., to carry out a transfer, written consent – approval from the franchisor is necessary.

For franchisors, it is also important to whom they grant the exclusive right of development in a specific area. Although area development agreements can produce widely divergent systems depending on the size of the exclusive territory granted, it is worth noting that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' profile of a franchisee. When development is assigned to multiple developers, small exclusive areas are allocated within a single target market, and the franchisees are similar to direct franchisees (they often lack easy access to capital and require substantial business assistance from the franchisor). In the allocation of larger areas involving only one area development agreement, the franchisee is typically a company that has developed and established a system of successful business operations, therefore: a) the investments for capital expenses by the franchisor are lower; b) development costs are shared between the franchisor and the franchisee; and c) training costs for the franchisee are significantly lower. In situations where the franchisor enters into area development agreements with a 'single franchisee,' there is a: 1) reduction in administrative costs; 2) minimization of training and monitoring requirements; and 3) less need for direct contact with the franchisee compared to a direct franchising system.

In circumstances where the franchisee is a developed business entity, and therefore there is a smaller number of franchisees, the training costs for franchisees are considerably lower, and the franchisor's expenditures are significantly lower than during the training of direct franchisees. However, if area development agreements are concluded with a larger number of small franchisees, it is inevitable that they require an enhanced system and level of business training.

Unlike direct franchising where the franchisor often finds themselves faced with the challenge of independently solving ongoing issues that may arise during the system development phase, this is not the case with area development agreements. In area development agreements, the franchisor utilizes resources developed by the franchisee, thereby making their position much more comfortable, especially when the contract is concluded with a franchisee who already has an established business system. The franchisee is the one who will bridge the language and cultural barriers, while the franchisor has the opportunity to better understand the legal regulations of the target market. However, when a larger number of area development agreements for 'smaller areas' are concluded, the position of the franchisor is not the same as in the previous case because it involves franchisees who are very similar to those in direct franchising. In such circumstances, the franchisor, with the help of the franchisee-developer, needs to solve all those problems they would have faced during direct franchising.

As with direct franchising, the question of developing a 'distribution' system is one of the crucial issues, and its resolution can influence the success or failure of franchising development. When it comes to contracts for 'developing smaller areas with a larger number of developers,' the franchisor assumes the same or similar obligations as in direct franchising, i.e., they themselves develop the distribution system (distribution network) and thereby participate in the development of the system. However, if area development agreements are concluded with 'one or a smaller number of' franchisees (developed and successful), it is assumed that they are capable of independently meeting the ongoing distributive needs or can satisfy the distributive needs of the system even outside the market in which the franchisee operates (Riesterer, 2001, pp.47-48).

Area development agreements are often resorted to by the franchisor when: a) they wish to maintain direct control over the granted system and to have a continuous flow of royalties; b) they do not want to invest or develop relationships with a larger number of franchisees, but only with one or a few who have an established business system; and c) tax laws, legal regulations, or other circumstances prevent them from independently and directly developing in the target market, and they do not want to relinquish control over the granted system and to have a continuous flow of income - royalty.

3.4. Joint ventures

A joint venture represents another in a series of modalities that serves the franchisor as a method for developing a franchising network in a target market. The need to: a) participate from the very beginning

in developing the business system; b) retain capital in the joint venture company; c) minimize exposure to financial risks; d) utilize the knowledge and experience of a local partner; and e) if there are tax incentives or business advantages that facilitate easier collection of local capital, present the determining reasons why an entity enters with a local partner into a joint venture company agreement (Sanga, 2018). A joint venture company appears in the role of: a) franchisee or b) franchisor. Operating via a joint venture does not significantly change the development of franchising operations; the target market develops through the recipients of the master franchise or area developers, albeit the master franchisee or area developer is to some extent owned by the franchisor as one of the founders of the joint venture company (Riesterer, 2001, p.57).

Depending on the specific needs of the franchisor for developing franchising in the target market, a different degree of ownership - share held by the local partner over the company can be determined. When the franchisor needs a local partner to leverage 'its knowledge and experience' of the market, then minor ownership rights are assigned to the newly established company. In cases where the franchisor needs 'capital for development' of the franchising business system, using the capital and resources of the local partner, then greater ownership rights are granted. For a joint venture company to operate in the target market, it must conclude an appropriate 'development agreement' or a master franchising agreement with the franchisor (Mendelsohn, 2005, p.266). All business rules applicable to other companies also apply to the joint venture company, regardless of it being partly owned by the franchisor.

Considering the needs and in accordance with the goals it has and wishes to achieve in the target market, the franchisor thus selects a potential partner. If national legislation stipulates that one of the partners must be from the target market or if the contract aims to gather local capital, a 'sophisticated business entity' emerges as a partner, which possesses significant capital and is capable of aligning business operations with: a) companies in the target market, and b) financial laws and regulations of the target market. In cases where the franchisor uses a local partner to gather knowledge about the local market, then the local partner plays a more significant role in the daily legal-business operations of the joint venture company.

The incentive for a franchisor to participate with a significant capital investment is contained in the existence of ownership rights and securing initial success of the joint venture company in the target market, while the local partner contributes experience and knowledge of the target market. Given the circumstances that involve a substantial part of the capital, it is inevitable that the franchisor also has a higher degree of control over the business operations of the joint venture company. The level of control over the business is significantly higher compared to the control the franchisor has in master franchise agreements. The franchisor must ensure that the implemented control is consistent with the planned control, for the reason that other franchisees should not feel discriminated against in relation to the joint venture company that might appear in the role of a franchisee.

The franchisor, who is interested in the success of the joint venture company, actively participates (take upon themselves the responsibility) in training the company's staff. However, the question arises whether the franchisor, regardless of the level of control and how much financial involvement there is, is obligated to train the staff? The answer to this question is linked to two primary factors: a) the amount of financial involvement and b) the degree of control. If the franchisor's financial involvement is proportional to or less than that of the local partner, and the degree of control is lower, the franchisor is not obligated to provide complete and immediate training that would be provided under different circumstances.

Finally, no less significant and even crucial to success is the franchisor's interest in ensuring that joint ventures succeed in the target market, which is linked with the distribution system, i.e., how developed the distribution network is. The franchisor undertakes the obligation to develop the distribution system at their own expense regardless of whether the distribution remains within the realm of the franchisor or is established at the level of the joint venture (Riesterer, 2001, p.57). Despite the franchisor being the one who develops the distribution network, the development of the distribution network is always an obligation of the joint venture company when it acts in the role of: a) the franchisor (direct franchising) or b) concluding contracts for regional development (development of small territories).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on what was presented in the paper, we can draw the conclusion that franchising as a special form of contractual investment to the franchisor through the assignment of the franchising package of rights, image, goodwill, brand and business methods gives him the opportunity to expand his business in the target market with minimal investment and minimal investment risks. Expanding its business on the target market, the franchisor uses various existing forms of franchising. The advantage

for the franchisee is that by accessing the developed franchising network, he uses all the benefits and advantages in practice of a successfully developed business system that is recognized by potential consumers as a business characterized by a built image, brand and goodwill. However, it should be pointed out that one of the modalities through which the franchisor achieves the expansion of franchising business on the international market is international franchising. In order to avoid potential confusion, and as we emphasized in the paper, international franchising does not represent a special form of franchising business. In our work, we tried to provide a better insight into the advantages of international franchising, which is achieved on the international market, depending on the way the trade network is organized, through: 1) master franchising; 2) direct franchising; 3) area development agreements and 4) joint venture. In the paper, the author has discussed each of the forms of realization of international franchising, leaving the reader of this paper to better familiarize himself with each of them separately, acquainting him with their advantages and disadvantages.

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ADVANTAGES OF USING LITERARY TEXTS IN INTEGRATION

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Abstract: In integrative teaching, which is based on the holistic principles of integration as the connection of knowledge from different areas of human life, the starting points that enable such connection play an important role. Literary texts, due to the inexhaustible richness and complexity of their subject matter, can play the role of important integrative starting points in teaching. This way of working has numerous advantages because it contributes to the acquisition of practical, applicable knowledge, and in the paper are determined the benefits provided by literary texts as a starting point in integration when it comes to encouraging students: 1) activities in class; 2) desire to read; 3) desire for independent research and 4) developing imagination and creativity. The mentioned advantages were examined from the perspective of classroom teachers, who are the most called upon to implement integration in practice and are a segment of a wider research that included 225 practitioners in the Republic of Serbia during 2021 and 2022. The results show that the largest number of teachers have very positive attitudes about all the previously mentioned advantages of using literary texts, as over 80% of respondents fully or partially agree with them. Practitioners most positively value the contribution that the use of literary texts in integration has when it comes to developing students' imagination and creativity and increasing their activity in class (88,0%), then the contribution to encouraging students' desire to read (83,5%) and in the end, although highly valued, the contribution reflected in the encouragement of students' desire for independent research (80,9%). The results are an indication that the theoretical and methodological efforts that promote integration and the role that literary texts play in it are recognized in practice and raise the issue of further implementation of this way of working in teaching.
Keywords: integration, Serbian language teaching, Serbian language teaching methodology.
Field: Social sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

The methodological approach advocating for the introduction of integration into the teaching process is based on the need for students to acquire functional knowledge. These are the kinds of knowledge that are necessary when solving problems, the causes of which may originate from different sources. Addressing these requires combining knowledge from different fields, which essentially represents the core of integrative learning (Stakić, 2021; 2023a, 2023b). However, in order for such learning to be successful, it is important to encourage "personal motivation, awakening of the spirit of inquiry, desire for knowledge, and curiosity" in students (Stakić, 2023a, p. 187). This methodological stance also contains some of the positive effects of applying literary texts in integration. Incorporating literature into teaching enables the development of students' intellectual potential, as well as their imagination and creativity. Literary texts serve a psychological-pedagogical function and have an "emotional aspect" (Irina, 2021, p. 187). Jelena Bobkina and Svetlana Stefanova emphasize that incorporating the analysis of literary works "in the process of foreign language acquisition offers a unique opportunity for students to explore, interpret, and understand the world around them," and advocate for the need for "critical reading," where readers engage in the "active evaluation not only of linguistic items, but also of a variety of meanings and viewpoints" (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016, p. 677). In this way, students are encouraged to engage in research and critical thinking, which are essential not only for language learning but also for navigating the modern world, where the sheer volume of information has grown to the point that it can sometimes be difficult to separate what is important from what is presented as such. Furthermore, by reading literary texts, students become familiar with history, philosophy, customs, culture, religion, ethics, and social norms. This list is far from exhaustive, as it is almost impossible to list all the areas of knowledge, sciences, and scientific disciplines that can be explored through literary texts, whose potential themes are complex and rich, since they can encompass everything that makes up human life (Stakić, 2021; 2023b). For this reason, we wanted to examine how practitioners assess the advantages that literary texts provide as starting points in integrative teaching.

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2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The subject of the research is the advantages that literary texts provide as starting points for integration. The goal was to determine the views of practitioners regarding the potential benefits of using literary texts as a basis for integration, specifically in terms of encouraging students to: 1) engage actively in class; 2) develop a desire to read; 3) cultivate a desire for independent research; and 4) stimulate imagination and creativity. The examined segments are part of a larger study that involved 225 elementary school teachers in the Republic of Serbia during 2021 and 2022. The independent variables in the study were the teachers' years of service and the grade level in which they teach (Table 1).

Table 1. Teacher's professional experience (years of service) and the grade level of primary school in which they teach

Teachers' professional experience								Grade level of primary school in which they teach							
0–5 years		5–10 years		10–20 years		over 20 years		1st grade		2nd grade		3rd grade		4th grade	
f	p	f	p	f	p	f	p	f	p	f	p	f	p	f	p
27	12,0	39	17,3	71	31,6	88	39,1	60	26,7	59	26,2	50	22,2	56	24,9
TOTAL NUMBER OF TEACHERS	f							225							
	p							100							

Source: Research authors Stakić & Milovanović (Stakić, 2023b; Stakić & Milovanović, in press)

In examining the potential advantages of literary texts as starting points for integration, a descriptive method and scaling technique were applied, with a questionnaire constructed as the instrument. The chi-square test (χ^2) was used to assess the impact of variables, and the criterion for statistical significance was set at $p < 0,01$. Data analysis also included frequencies (f) and percentages (%), and the IBM SPSS Statistics 25 software was used for data processing.

3. RESULTS AND DISKUSIONS

Literary material is a tool that allows students to "be active participants, whose curiosity, imagination, and emotions, combined with the intuition and inventiveness of the teacher, create a fertile ground for the development of creativity and an appropriate attitude toward themselves and others as subjects" (Milovanović, 2020, p. 351). Texts motivate students to engage, and motivation is one of the key factors in encouraging students to acquire knowledge (Motevalli, Perveen & Michael, 2020, p. 64). Our research into the contribution of literary texts as starting points for integration in increasing student activity in the classroom has shown that teachers positively assessed this contribution (see Table 2) and that there was no statistically significant impact of the independent variables, such as teaching experience (see Table 3) and the grade level in which they teach (see Table 4), on their attitudes.

Table 2. The impact of literary texts in integration on increasing student activity in the classroom

Students are more active when a literary text is used as a starting point for integration in the classroom.

Attitudes	f	%
Strongly agree	114	50,7
Mostly agree	84	37,3
Undecided	20	8,9
Mostly disagree	5	2,2
Strongly disagree	2	0,9
Total	225	100

Source: Research authors Stakić & Milovanović

Table 3. The impact of literary texts in integration on increasing student activity in the classroom with regard to the variable years of teaching experience

Students are more active when a literary text is used as a starting point for integration in the classroom.

| Years of experience | Attitudes | | | | | | | | | | Total | |
| | Strongly agree | | Mostly agree | | Undecided | | Mostly disagree | | Strongly disagree | | | |
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Up to 5 years	16	59,3	9	33,3	2	7,4	0	0	0	0	27	12,0
5–10 years	20	51,3	14	35,9	2	5,1	1	2,6	2	5,1	39	17,3
10–20 years	34	47,9	29	40,8	8	11,3	0	0	0	0	71	31,6
Over 20 years	44	50,0	32	36,4	8	9,1	4	4,5	0	0	88	39,1
Total	114	50,7	84	37,3	20	8,9	5	2,2	2	0,9	225	100

$\chi2 = 15,924$ df = 12   p = 0,195

Source: Research authors Stakić & Milovanović

Table 4. The impact of literary texts in integration on increasing student activity in the classroom with regard to the variable grade level

Students are more active when a literary text is used as a starting point for integration in the classroom.

| Grade level | Attitudes | | | | | | | | | | Total | |
| | Strongly agree | | Mostly agree | | Undecided | | Mostly disagree | | Strongly disagree | | | |
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1st grade	31	51,7	21	35,0	7	11,7	1	1,7	0	0	60	26,7
2nd grade	29	49,2	22	37,3	6	10,2	2	3,4	0	0	59	26,2
3rd grade	24	48,0	20	40,0	5	10,0	1	2,0	0	0	50	22,2
4th grade	30	53,6	21	37,5	2	3,6	1	1,8	2	3,6	56	24,9
Total	114	50,7	84	37,3	20	8,9	5	2,2	2	0,9	225	100

$\chi2 = 9,406$ df = 12   p = 0,668

Source: Research authors Stakić & Milovanović

The data presented in Table 2 show that 88% of teachers agree (50,7% strongly agree and 37,3% mostly agree) with the statement that the use of literary texts as an integration starting point positively influences increased student activity in the classroom. 8,9% of respondents were undecided, and only 3,1% expressed disagreement (2,2% mostly disagree and 0,9% strongly disagree). Regarding the influence of independent variables, although there were no statistically significant differences, the results show that the largest number of teachers (4,5%) who expressed that they mostly disagree with the contribution of literary texts to increasing student activity have more than 20 years of teaching experience. This could be explained by the innovation of teaching models compared to the ones they learned about during their studies. Interestingly, in the group of respondents with up to 5 years of experience, no one expressed disagreement with the contribution of literary texts to increasing student activity.

However, since personal factors can also play a role in the application of texts in integration (Maričić & Stakić, 2024), drawing any conclusions of this kind should be preceded by further examination of the reasons for disagreement. It is particularly important to consider that only in the group of respondents with 5–10 years of experience, 25,6% of practitioners strongly disagreed with the statement that using literary texts in integration positively influences student activity in the classroom.

Encouraging students to read "must be inspired by a need for literature and internal motivation" (Dragić & Ilić, 2020, p. 283), and our study on the contribution of literary texts in integration to stimulating students' desire to read shows that the respondents had positive attitudes toward this contribution (see Table 5).

Table 5. The impact of literary texts in integration on stimulating students' desire to read

Literary texts as a starting point for integration stimulate students' desire to read.

Attitudes	f	%
Strongly agree	102	45,3
Mostly agree	86	38,2
Undecided	31	13,8
Mostly disagree	4	1,8
Strongly disagree	2	0,9
Total	225	100

Source: Research authors Stakić & Milovanović

The data presented in Table 5 show that the majority of teachers (83,5%) agree with the statement that using literary texts as a starting point for integration stimulates students' desire to read. Specifically, 45,3% strongly agree, and 38,2% mostly agree with this view. Recognizing this potential within integrated learning is highly significant. As Fuad, Suryanto & Muhammad (2021, p. 41) state, "Reading is an important learning," and, in addition, reading literary texts "extensively exposes learners to a variety of cultural viewpoints, situations, and experiences" (Rahman & Muhamad, 2023, p. 2596). In relation to this contribution, 13,8% of respondents were undecided, 1,8% mostly disagreed, and only 0,9% strongly disagreed with the benefit of literary texts in integration.

The study on the impact of independent variables such as years of teaching experience and the grade level in which the respondents teach showed that no statistically significant differences were found in the attitudes of respondents regarding the impact of the variable grade level in which they teach (see Table 7), but that significant differences were observed when considering the variable years of teaching experience (see Table 6).

Table 6. The impact of literary texts in integration on stimulating students' desire to read, with regard to the variable years of teaching experience

Literary texts as a starting point for integration stimulate students' desire to read.

Years of experience	Attitudes										Total	
	Strongly agree		Mostly agree		Undecided		Mostly disagree		Strongly disagree			
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Up to 5 years	12	44,4	13	48,1	2	7,4	0	0	0	0	27	12,0
5–10 years	22	56,4	10	25,6	4	10,3	1	2,6	2	5,1	39	17,3
10–20 years	30	42,3	27	38,0	14	19,7	0	0	0	0	71	31,6
Over 20	38	43,2	36	40,9	11	12,5	3	3,4	0	0	88	39,1
Total	102	45,3	86	38,2	31	13,8	4	1,8	2	0.9	225	100

$\chi2 = 19{,}579$ $df = 12$ $p = 0{,}075$

Source: Research authors Stakić & Milovanović

Table 7. The impact of literary texts in integration on stimulating students' desire to read, with regard to the variable grade level

Literary texts as a starting point for integration stimulate students' desire to read.

Grade level	Attitudes										Total	
	Strongly agree		Mostly agree		Undecided		Mostly disagree		Strongly disagree			
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1st grade	28	46,7	22	36,7	9	15,0	1	1,7	0	0	60	26,7
2nd grade	24	40,7	25	42,4	10	16,9	0	0	0	0	59	26,2
3rd grade	21	42,0	18	36,0	8	16,0	3	6,0	0	0	50	22,2
4th grade	29	51,8	21	37,5	4	7,1	0	0	2	3,6	56	24,9
Total	102	45,3	86	38,2	31	13,8	4	1,8	2	0,9	225	100

$\chi2 = 16{,}881$ $df = 12$ $p = 0{,}154$

Source: Research authors Stakić & Milovanović

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The examination of the impact of years of professional experience on the respondents' attitudes revealed that the greatest differences exist in the category of respondents with 5–10 years of experience. In this category, the highest number of respondents completely agree with the statement that literary texts increase students' motivation for reading (56,4%), but the lowest number mostly agree with this claim (25,6%). Additionally, this is the only category of respondents where there is a noticeable complete disagreement with the stated advantage (5,1%). This polarization could be a result of the respondents' personal preferences for using literary texts in integration, as evidenced by the previously mentioned result that this is the only category in which 5,1% of practitioners expressed complete disagreement with the idea that using literary texts in integration increases student activity in the classroom.

Regarding the impact of the variable grade level in which respondents teach, although there is no significant difference, it is noted that respondents who disagreed with the idea that using literary texts as a starting point for integration increases students' desire to read teach in the third and fourth grades of primary school. Whether their answers reflect personal experience with a decline in students' reading curiosity in these grades, or whether they are due to other factors, requires further research.

In the third research task, we aimed to determine how practitioners assess the impact of literary texts as integrative starting points on increasing students' desire for independent research. The results showed that the respondents have positive attitudes towards this advantage (see Table 8) and that there is no statistically significant impact of the variables work experience (see Table 9) and the grade level in which they teach (see Table 10) on their attitudes.

Table 8. The impact of literary texts in integration on stimulating students' desire to read

The use of literary texts as a starting point for integration encourages students' desire to engage in independent research.

Attitudes	f	%
Strongly agree	95	42,2
Mostly agree	87	38,7
Undecided	36	16,0
Mostly disagree	4	1,8
Strongly disagree	3	1,3
Total	225	100

Source: Research authors Stakić & Milovanović

Table 9. The impact of literary texts in integration on encouraging students' desire for research with regard to the variable years of experience

The use of literary texts as a starting point for integration encourages students' desire to engage in independent research.

Years of experience	Strongly agree		Mostly agree		Undecided		Mostly disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Up to 5 years	12	44,4	10	37,0	4	14,8	0	0	1	3,7	27	12,0
5–10 years	17	43,6	15	38,5	4	10,3	1	2,6	2	5,1	39	17,3
10–20 years	26	36,6	29	40,8	14	19,7	2	2,8	0	0	71	31,6
Over 20 years	40	45,5	33	37,5	14	15,9	1	1,1	0	0	88	39,1
Total	95	42,2	87	38,7	36	16,0	4	1,8	3	1,3	225	100

$\chi2 = 11,094$ $df = 12$ $p = 0,521$

Source: Research authors Stakić & Milovanović

Table 10. The impact of literary texts in integration on encouraging students' desire for research in relation to the variable grade level

The use of literary texts as a starting point for integration encourages students' desire to engage in independent research.

Grade level	Attitudes											
	Strongly agree		Mostly agree		Undecided		Mostly disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1st grade	26	43,3	23	38,3	7	11,7	3	5,0	1	1,7	60	26,7
2nd grade	21	35,6	28	47,5	10	16,9	0	0	0	0	59	26,2
3rd grade	24	48,0	15	30,0	10	20,0	1	2,0	0	0	50	22,2
4th grade	24	42,9	21	37,5	9	16,1	0	0	2	3,6	56	24,9
Total	95	42,2	87	38,7	36	16,0	4	1,8	3	1,3	225	100

$\chi2 = 13,011$ $df = 12$ $p = 0,326$

Source: Research authors Stakić & Milovanović

The data presented in Table 8 show that 80.9% of respondents agree (42,2% strongly agree, and 38,7% mostly agree) that the use of literary texts in integration encourages students' desire for research. This result indicates that practitioners have experientially confirmed the claims made by experts in the 1990s, suggesting that students' interaction with literary texts can support research processes such as "making connections to life experiences, finding focused questions to research, searching for facts and ideas related to inquiry questions, engaging in in-depth discussions, introducing new perspectives and connections, and sharing ideas with others" (Short & Armstrong, 1993, p. 97).

The pedagogical literature promotes the view that reading and analyzing literary works encourages children's development. "Discussions about literary texts encourage children's reasoning, development of research skills, establishing cause and effect, critical analysis and evaluation, imagining literary characters and the chronotopes in which they are situated" (Vučković, 2017, p. 34). This perspective highlights not only cognitive development but also the importance of reading and analyzing literary texts in stimulating children's imagination. "Imagination is a powerful factor to be stimulated and developed in teaching literature. It offers many ways of understanding and analyzing works of art" (Marwa, 2014, p. 1656). Imagination and creativity lie at the core of one's creative relationship with the world and the discovery of the new. In teaching, it is important to strive toward this, and literary texts encourage students to dream and imagine, to put themselves in the role of heroes, and to continue enjoying their imagined adventures long after they have finished reading the literary work. This potential that literature possesses is significant in integration, and the results of our research have shown that it is recognized by practitioners as well (see Table 11).

Table 11. The impact of literary texts in integration on the development of imagination and creativity

The use of literary texts as a starting point for an integrative approach contributes to the development of students' imagination and creativity.

Attitudes	f	%
Strongly agree	136	60,4
Mostly agree	52	27,6
Undecided	23	10,2
Mostly disagree	2	0,9
Strongly disagree	2	0,9
Total	225	100

Source: Research authors Stakić & Milovanović

The data presented in Table 11 show that the majority of respondents (88,0%) agree with the statement that using literary texts as a starting point for an integrative approach in teaching contributes to the development of students' imagination and creativity (60,4% strongly agree, and 27,6% mostly agree). At the same time, this is the statement with the least disagreement (0,9% mostly disagree and 0,9% partially disagree), while 10,2% were undecided. The results indicate that there is no statistically

significant impact of the variables work experience (see Table 12) and the grade level in which they teach (see Table 13) on their attitudes.

Table 12. The impact of literary texts in integration on the development of imagination and creativity in relation to the variable years of experience

The use of literary texts as a starting point for an integrative approach contributes to the development of students' imagination and creativity.

Years of experience	Attitudes											
	Strongly agree		Mostly agree		Undecided		Mostly disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Up to 5 years	15	55,6	10	37,0	2	7,4	0	0	0	0	27	12,0
5–10 years	22	56,4	11	28,2	4	10,3	0	0	2	5,1	39	17,3
10–20 years	46	64,8	17	23,9	8	11,3	0	0	0	0	71	31,6
Over 20 years	53	60,2	24	27,3	9	10,2	2	2,3	0	0	88	39,1
Total	136	60,4	62	27,6	23	10,2	2	0,9	2	0,9	225	100

$\chi 2 = 14,597$ $df = 12$ $p = 0,264$

Source: Research authors Stakić & Milovanović

Table 13. The impact of literary texts in integration on the development of imagination and creativity in relation to the variable grade level

The use of literary texts as a starting point for an integrative approach contributes to the development of students' imagination and creativity.

Grade level	Attitudes											
	Strongly agree		Mostly agree		Undecided		Mostly disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1st grade	38	63,3	15	25,0	6	10,0	1	1,7	0	0	60	26,7
2nd grade	31	52,5	20	33,9	8	13,6	0	0	0	0	59	26,2
3rd grade	31	62,0	12	24,0	6	12,0	1	2,0	0	0	50	22,2
4th grade	36	64,3	15	26,8	3	5,4	0	0	2	0,9	56	24,9
Total	136	60,4	62	27,6	23	10,2	2	0,9	2	0,9	225	100

$\chi 2 = 12,352$ $df = 12$ $p = 0,418$

Source: Research authors Stakić & Milovanović

Although there is no significant impact of the variables, the data presented in Table 12 show that respondents who mostly disagree with the statement that the use of literary texts in integration contributes to the development of imagination and creativity have more than 20 years of work experience, while those who completely disagree with this contribution have 5–10 years of professional experience. When it comes to the grade level, only one respondent teaching in the first grade and one respondent teaching in the third grade mostly disagree with the contribution to the development of imagination and creativity, while two respondents teaching in the fourth grade completely disagree. However, the largest percentage of respondents who fully agree with this contribution teach in the fourth grade (64,3%). A similar situation was observed when examining the impact of this variable on stimulating students' desire for reading, which may be explained by the personal preferences and professional expertise of teachers in applying this approach. The results of previous research also imply a "need for different forms of professional development for teachers in this area" (Stakić, 2023b, p. 44). However, considering that the percentage of disagreement is negligible (0,9% mostly disagree and 0,9% completely disagree), the results of our research confirm the pedagogical view that literary texts represent "one of the main means of improving the creativity of students", and attention is given to analysis that contributes to its development (Mamyrova & Kurbanalieva, 2023, p. 447).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The results of our research showed that a high percentage of practitioners believe that using

literary texts as a starting point for integrative connections contributes to the development of students' imagination and creativity (88%), positively impacts their activity (88%), and also has other benefits, such as stimulating the desire to read (83,5%) and motivating students to engage in independent research (80,9%). It is noteworthy that the research potential of literary texts in integration is rated lower than their ability to stimulate activity, the desire for reading, and the development of imagination and creativity. However, it cannot be concluded that practitioners do not recognize this potential. For literary texts to achieve their full potential, they should not be viewed merely as content that covers a specific topic and facilitates better understanding of it, but also as content that supports exploration and the construction of new meanings. Additionally, "cross-curricular reading instruction lets students contemplate problems and situations that reflect the world as they know it" (Aslan, 2016, p. 1800), which also serves as an encouragement for research that can be sparked by literary texts. The lower rating of this statement compared to all others may indicate the need for further education of the segment of the teaching staff who do not recognize the research potential of literary materials.

The results of our research confirm the findings that "literature can have a powerful effect on children's understandings of content area themes" (Short & Armstrong, 1993, p. 97). One of the central pedagogical implications of this study is that such an approach should be promoted in teaching, i.e., literary texts should be used in integration, especially considering that contemporary research results (Stakić, 2021; 2023b; Stakić & Milovanović, in press) also support the earlier views of researchers that "the potential offered by literature often has not been realized" (Short & Armstrong, 1993, p. 97).

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A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF MOTIF SEMIOTICS IN IRANIAN QASHQAI AND SERBIAN PIROT KILIMS

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Abstract: Kilims, while primarily functional as floor coverings, hold deep cultural, artistic, and aesthetic significance. The design, patterns, and motifs on these traditional woven floor coverings, in addition to their beauty and artistic features, reflect beliefs, myths, and cultural heritage, preserving the community's identity across generations. This paper aims to review the rich tradition of kilim weaving and study the motifs, symbols, and patterns found within the kilims of Qashqai nomads in Iran and those of the Pirot region in Serbia. This research employs a cultural semiotics framework, based on "The Theory of Semiotics," to analyze and compare placements, types and connotative meanings of motifs within these two regions. The research adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology, involving developing a corpus (database) of motifs from sample kilims. To set up the corpus, a random sample of 80 kilim photos was gathered, mainly from catalogs and books, consisting of 40 images of Qashqai kilims and 40 images of Pirot kilims. Each kilim was reviewed to detect motifs using an annotation model. A tagset of motifs was then developed to classify and annotate each motif based on its region, placement, type, connotative meanings, and thematic categories. The corpus reports support various forms of analysis, including statistical, descriptive, and comparative assessments. The findings indicate that while Qashqai and Pirot kilims feature some common motifs, the symbolic and semiotic meanings linked to these motifs differ significantly, reflecting unique ways of understanding within each cultural context. The comparative analysis of motifs also indicates cultural similarities and differences rooted in each region's unique beliefs, customs, and myths. The research is divided into four sections: the first provides an introduction to the tradition of kilim weaving, focusing on practices among the Qashqai tribes of Iran and the Pirot region of Serbia; the second outlines the theoretical framework and research methodology; the third discusses the motif classification, annotation schema, and development of the tagset; and the final section presents a comparative analysis of motifs and their representations in kilims from each region. By identifying, classifying and analyzing kilim motifs as a visual language that reflects cultural identity, historical continuity, and regional distinctions, this study aims to contribute to the broader field of cultural studies in general and cultural semiotics in particular.

Keywords: kilim motifs, semiotics, cultural studies, Iranian Qashqai kilims, Serbian Pirot kilims.
Field: Humanities

1. INTRODUCTION

The kilim simply defined as "a flat woven rug or rug without a knotted pile" (Hull & Bernard, 1997, p. 5), is considered one of the oldest human handwoven cultural resources. Finding the exact origin of weaving kilims is not clear, however, since the oldest floor weaving the Pazyryk Rug, dated around the 4th-3rd centuries B.C., has been found in a valley with this name in Siberia (Muccillo De Medeiros & De Medeiros, 2021, p. 160), it can be assumed that kilims as a specific type of floor weaving for purposes of protection from the cold winters and for decorations in tents, were likely developed by nomadic peoples in the East, possibly on the plains of Central Asia, several thousand years ago (Yavari, 2014, p, 12). However, due to their thinner and weaker texture compared to carpets, and their lower durability, there are no known surviving examples of preserved kilims. Despite their simple texture, the patterns and motifs on kilims add artistic, aesthetic, and symbolic value. In general, the patterns and motifs of kilims are determined by the weaver's creativity and memory. Historically, particularly among nomadic and rural communities, kilims were woven without a predetermined design plan, relying instead on the weaver's recollection and improvisation. Kilim motifs and patterns are typically composed of geometric designs that represent specific shapes and symbols, which often remain consistent over time, preserving the traditional cultural identity of the ethnic groups that create them. This paper investigates the rich tradition of kilim weaving in two regions: the Qashqai nomads of Iran's Fars province and the Serbian city of Pirot. It aims to compare the motifs, patterns, and symbols of kilims from these regions using semiotic anthropology to interpret cultural beliefs, customs, and traditions embedded in these designs. By applying semiotics and analyzing the connotative meanings of motifs, this study examines how different cultures conceptualize and express ideas through kilim motifs, highlighting both cultural connections and distinctions between Persian and Serbian traditions in the use of motifs on kilims.

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1.1. THE ART OF KILIM WEAVING IN IRAN AND SERBIA

In Iran, kilims are woven extensively due to the nomadic lifestyles of various ethnic groups, whereas in Serbia, the city of Pirot serves as a significant center for kilim production, mainly due to settled communities. Like Persian carpet weaving, which is considered one of the unique arts of Iranians with a history going back over two thousand years, kilim weaving also has a deep-rooted tradition in Iran. Kilims in Iran are woven in every corner of the country, including Khorasan, Baluchistan, Fars, Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, and other provinces, Each region has its own unique style, method of weaving, and way of depicting patterns and motifs. Also, among the most famous nomadic regions (or tribes) in Iran, known for their unique woven kilims and artistic designs, patterns, and motifs, are the Qashqai, Bakhtiari, Shahsavan, Lori, Harsin, Kermanshah, Sene, Baluch, and Khamse. The Qashqai is one of the largest tribes in Iran, primarily residing in the Fars province in the southwest of the country, and they predominantly speak Turkish. According to Yavari (2014, p. 96), the origin of this tribe can be traced back to the 16th century, when they were part of the Turkish-speaking armies that invaded northern Iran, and as a result, some Qashqai kilim designs can be related to kilims of the Caucasus. Qashqai kilims are one of the most famous kilims in Iran. The main characteristics of Qashqai kilims that make them highly famous in Iran and worldwide, are their handwoven craftsmanship, the use of natural dyes, exceptional durability, and beautifully designed patterns and motifs. According to Davar and Momenian (2006, p. 50) "the Qashqai are well-known for their exceptional artistry and expertise in wool dyeing, their mastery of producing vibrant and diverse colors, and their remarkable skill in various kilim weaving techniques."

In Serbia, the term "kilim" (in Serbian, "Ćilim") has been used since the 16th century, reflecting its introduction following the arrival of the Turks in the Balkans and the subsequent influence of the oriental lifestyle in the region. The most worldwide well-known kilims of Serbia are from "Pirot", a city in the south-east of Serbia, and in some other parts of the country especially in Vojvodina the art of kilim weaving has its own tradition. The origin of Pirot kilim weaving is not entirely clear, making it difficult to determine its exact beginnings. According to Velkova (2020, p. 29), "kilim-making came to Pirot from east and Pirot Turks first started making kilims after designs they had brought from their homeland, Asia Minor". Ćirić (1954, p. 115) also indicates the unknown origin of Pirot kilim and suggests that the origin and early development of Pirot's kilim production were likely determined by the Turkish period. Existing research confirms that the late 18th and 19th century was undoubtedly a period of significant development for this craft (Cvetković, 2015, p. 66; Petković & Vlatković, 1996, pp. 17, 22). Frfulanović-Šomođi et al. (2020, p. 45) indicated that the Pirot kilim, as a brand, was recognized by the Serbian state during the second half of the 19th century as an authentic product of folk craftsmanship. It was presented at numerous fairs across European capitals starting in the early 20th century, introducing a new perspective on the culture and artistic creations of previously unknown women.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND METHODOLOGY

While kilims are primarily used as floor coverings, their designs, patterns, and motifs can reflect the beliefs and myths of the weavers, serving as a means to preserve and transfer these cultural expressions to future generations. Ateş (2004, p. 44-45) indicates that, for centuries, kilims were woven with specific symbolic patterns to ward off natural calamities like storms, floods, extreme heat or cold, death, or wild animals, which were believed to be sent by the gods. Prior to this tradition, such symbols were inscribed on rocks or could even be found on other handicrafts, such as plates and jars. Research on kilims in the late 19th century reveals that, for centuries, women have used kilims as mediums to express their emotions, including love, death, and fear, through the patterns and motifs they wove. This practice emerged because women were the primary weavers while men were engaged in hunting or warfare. Therefore, it is evident that a kilim carries its own unique "sub-text," offering a wealth of intellectual, artistic, emotional, and sensory messages. Anquetil (1994, p. 27). As such, kilims serve as cultural and psychological chronicles of society, providing insights into the culture and family structures of past eras. To study and analyze the symbols, patterns, and particularly the motifs depicted on Qashqai and Pirot kilims, this research adopts "The Theory of Semiotics" as its theoretical framework. According to Niu, M. (2020, p. 4), "Semiotics is the study of signs and their processes, including the relationships between the sign, its object, and the interpretant. It explores the conceptual connections between semiotics and semiosis, aiming to clarify the roles and connotations of signs in meaning-making." This study also employs the theoretical framework of "Semiotic Anthropology" to conduct a comparative analysis of the motifs on Qashqai kilims of Iran and Pirot kilims of Serbia. Semiotic Anthropology as an approach deals with symbolic and conventional meanings through analyzing a broader contextual framework, which can be called "a society". Therefore,

semiotic anthropology studies how signs and symbols are used in societies, focusing on their cultural and historical backgrounds. In this regard, based on Mertz (2007, p. 340), Semiotic Anthropology employs language, culture and society to analyze how language and other systems of human communication contribute to the reproduction, transmission, and transformation of culture. Motifs on kilims, as symbolic signs, could represent the cultural views, customs and traditions, beliefs and attitudes towards the life, world and the society of the weavers in particular and a tribe or an ethnic group in general. Therefore, this study adopts two theoretical frameworks: semiotics to identify and define the connotative meanings of motifs, and social semiotics to conduct a comparative analysis of the motifs from the Qashqai and Pirot regions. The aim is to explore the cultural interactions, similarities, and differences between these two regions, situating the research within the field of "Cultural Studies." The methodology comprises three main phases: (1) Constructing a comprehensive database of motifs, (2) Developing an annotation model to classify and analyze motifs, and (3) Conducting statistical, descriptive, and comparative analyses of the motifs found on Qashqai and Pirot kilims. In the first phase, the focus was on constructing a kilim motif corpus (database) through three stages. First, motifs were collected by reviewing catalogs of Iranian and Serbian kilims, with 80 kilim pictures randomly selected, 40 from each region. Second, standards for motif annotation were established to ensure consistency in identifying the diverse forms that motifs can take. Third, a Microsoft Excel database was created to store and manage the collected data after finalizing the standards and patterns. In the second phase, a model for motif annotation was proposed in two stages, as follows: First, a classification scheme was developed to categorize the most common motifs on kilims based on motif regions (originality of motifs), motif placements (where motifs are located on the kilims, whether in the borders or the center), motif types, and their symbolic meanings. Second, based on this scheme, a tagset was created, named the Kilim Motif Tagset (KMT), classifying motifs by region, placement, type, connotative, and thematic meanings. Finally, in the third phase, data analysis was performed using statistical, descriptive, and comparative methods. Quantitative analysis interpreted findings through statistical methods applied to the tagset results. Qualitative analysis explored the similarities and differences between Iranian and Serbian kilim motifs, guided by Semiotic Theory. This resulted in a comparative analysis, based on Semiotic Anthropology, which provided a detailed examination of motifs from both cultures, highlighting shared themes and unique elements in Iranian Qashqai and Serbian Pirot kilims.

2.1. DEVELOPING A MODEL FOR MOTIF ANNOTATION

After setting up the corpus and collecting the sample kilims pictures, in the second phase, the annotation model was established. The primary criterion for determining the annotation model is the establishment of a theoretical framework of semiotics that allows for the interpretation and meaning of motifs. For this purpose, the Barthes' semiotic theory was chosen as the scheme for motif annotation. This theory, as outlined by Jadou and Ghabra (2021, p. 472), focuses on three levels: denotation, which refers to the literal meaning; connotation, which relates to cultural and mental concepts; and mythology, which reflects historical and cultural ideologies embedded in signs. Based on this theoretical framework, after identifying the kilim motifs and adding them to the corpus, they are classified in two stages: first, by their formal-structural shape (denotation), referred to as the type of motifs; and second, by their symbolic meanings, referred to as the connotative meaning. Therefore, in terms of shape and structural forms, the motifs are categorized and annotated into four types, similar to some previous studies, including Suri (2018, p. 65), which are as follows: (1) Human-Representative Motifs: This type of motif includes human figures and specific body parts like hands, feet, or faces. (2) Animal-Representative Motifs: This group features motifs representing various animals, real or mythical, such as turtles, scorpions, or birds (3) Plant-Representative Motifs: This group includes motifs depicting botanical elements such as flowers, leaves, vines, or trees. (4) Geometric and Abstract Motifs: These motifs, which are the most common and frequent, are characterized by geometric shapes, abstract forms or repetitive arrangements, such as stars and zigzags.

In terms of symbolic or connotative meaning, motifs were classified based on Barthes' theory, referred to as "the second-order semiotic system". This system uses the first-order signification as its foundation, and while the first-order signification, annotated here as "Motif", provides a sign with denotation, or a literal meaning, the second-order signification, annotated as Connotative Meaning, adds connotative or symbolic meaning, which includes cultural and ideological concepts.

For instance, in Qashqai kilims, the "Ram's Horn" motif is classified as an Animal-Representative motif, symbolizes fertility (connotative meaning) or in Pirot kilims, the "Devil's Knee" (Vraško kolena) identified as a Geometric motif (denotative) which, according to Živadinović (2022, p. 79) it is one of the oldest symbols in pre-Christian Slavic mythology and is believed to provide strength, fearlessness and

bravery and luck in battle. It also serves as defense against any evil, signifies protection (connotative meaning). It is also worth noting that the origins of many motifs and symbols are rooted in ancient myths, either specific to a particular culture or borrowed and exchanged between cultures. These motifs appear not only on woven artifacts such as carpets and kilims but also, in other handicrafts like vessels, goblets, and talismans. Therefore, understanding their mythological significance is also essential for analyzing the meaning of motifs.

Considering the diverse connotative meanings of motifs and the need for consistent analysis, developing a thematic classification outline became essential. This outline organized motifs with shared connotative meanings, providing a basis for comparative analysis within the framework of Semiotic Anthropology. Therefore, five primary thematic domains were defined to categorize motifs: 1) Spirituality and the Divine, 2) Protection and Power, 3) Life and Nature, 4) Cultural Identity and Social Values, and 5) Fertility and Renewal. This outline facilitates a more organized and meaningful analysis of motifs, emphasizing symbolic connections within each category. Based on the motif annotation scheme and classification, a Kilim Motif Tagset (KMT) has been created. Based on the motif annotation scheme and classification, a Kilim Motif Tagset (KMT) has been developed. This tagset categorizes motif regions, motif placements, motif types, and their connotations. Furthermore, each motif is assigned a unique ID code to ensure precise identification. The tagset helps structure the research and ensures consistency, making it easier to analyze the data both quantitatively and qualitatively. Table 1 presents the classification of motifs and their descriptions, which form the foundation for developing the tagset.

Table 1. Classification of Motifs and Their Descriptions

Classification	Total	Description
Motif Regions	2	Iran (Qashqai), Serbia (Pirot)
Motif Placements	2	Borders, Center
Motif Types	4	Human, Animal, Plants, Geometric
Motifs	66	*Qashqai motifs and patterns:* Alma Gol (Apple Flower), Alaqord (Two-Colored Wolf), Broken Lines, Chahār Khāl (Four Spots), Checkered, Comb, Crab, Cross (Mithraic Swastika), Deer, Double Cross, Finger, Hook (S), Interconnected Triangles, It-al (Dog's Paw), Kheshti (Brick), Khorāsāni Motif (Positive and Negative Chicken-head), Langaj, Modākhel (Sky Gateway), Mohramāt (Striped Patterns), Peacock, Qashqai Border (Domino Beads), Qezel Qeychi (Eight-Pointed Star), Ram's Horn, Scissors, Semi-Mo'aqali, Sorme-dān (Diamond Star), Stepped Border, Wild Goat, Woman. *Pirot motifs and patterns:* Apron, Birdie (Tiče), Bombs (Bombe), Chair (Stolica), Comb, Cross, Crown Prince, Čurlinjak, Devil's Knee (Vraško koleno), Dove (Gugutka), Dragon, Eye (Očilo), Fetter (Bibice), Flame, French Candies (Francuske bombone), Fruit, German Box, Hook (Čenđeli), Kuveri (Smirna Pattern), Lion Paws, Little Devils (Đavolčići), Lizard (Gušter), Mara Convent, Mihrab, Mirror, Octopus (Atapot), Opanak Shoes, Perched Doves, Queen's Sleeve, Rašić's Pattern, Roses (Đulovi), Sofra (Sovra), Soldier, Soveljka (Shuttle), Tree of Life, Tulip, Turtle (Kornjača/Željka).
Motif Connotative Meanings	46	Abundance, Adaptability, Affection, Authority, Bad luck, Beauty, Birth of Mehr, Blessing, Connection, Cycle, Devotion, Duality, Elegance, Eternity, Faithfulness, Femininity, Fertility, Freedom, Happiness, Honor, Immortality, Marriage, Masculinity, Messenger, Monarchy, Mountain, Nobility, Passion (love), Peace, Power, Protection, Rain, Rebirth, Running water, Sacred Space, Sky entrances, Spirituality, Strength, Sun, Support, Tolerance, Tradition, Truth, Unity, Water, Wealth.
Motif Thematic Categories	5	Spirituality and Divine, Protection and Power, Life and Nature, Cultural Identity and Social Values, Fertility and Renewal

Source: Authors

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The selected motifs from Qashqai and Pirot kilims were carefully categorized and tagged using a structured framework. Therefore, a total of 40 kilims were analyzed from each region (80 kilims in total), with 150 tags assigned to each, and a tagset of 300 motifs was developed based on the annotation model of the research. The motif classification was organized into three main categories: Motif Placement, Motif Types, and Thematic Categories. The detailed distribution of motif tags is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Motif Tags in the Corpus

Classifications	Motif Tags	Qashqai Kilims	Pirot Kilims
Motif Placement	Motif in Border	30 (20%)	28 (19%)
	Motif in Center	120 (80%)	122 (81%)
Total tags	**2 Groups**	**150** (100%)	**150** (100%)
Motif Types	Geometric and Abstract Motifs	68 (45%)	82 (54%)
	Animal Motifs	45 (30%)	37 (25%)
	Plant Motifs	31 (21%)	24 (16%)
	Human Motifs	6 (4%)	7 (5%)
Total tags	**4 Groups**	**150** (100%)	**150** (100%)
Motif Thematic Categories	Spirituality and Divine	41 (27%)	24 (16%)
	Fertility and Renewal	16 (11%)	21 (14%)
	Life and Nature	44 (29%)	8 (5%)
	Protection and Power	28 (19%)	42 (28%)
	Cultural Identity and Social Values	21 (14%)	55 (37%)
Total tags	**5 Groups**	**150** (100%)	**150** (100%)

Source: Authors

Based on the quantitative data above and the examination of motifs in Qashqai and Pirot kilims, a descriptive analysis can be made in three sections:

A) Placement of Motifs: The composition and arrangement of motifs on each kilim are significant as they determine the structure of the artwork. Both regions predominantly focus on central motifs, which serve as the focal point in kilim design. In Qashqai kilims, 80% of motifs are positioned centrally, and similarly, in Pirot kilims, this figure is 81%. Border motifs are slightly more prevalent in Qashqai kilims (20% compared to 19%), reflecting greater attention by Qashqai weavers to framing the overall design. Border motifs are often arranged as patterns, with the most prominent ones in this research corpus in Qashqai kilims include the Madākhal border (Marvel of Peru, also known as Laleh Abbasi flowers in Persian, which appear as positive and negative shapes in ancient Iranian arts, with the connotative meaning of the entrance to the sky, and Langaj, with the connotative meaning of the throne gateway (enlightenment or spiritual perfection). On the other hand, in Pirot kilims, the most prominent border motif identified in the research corpus was Kornjača/Željka (turtle), a widely recognized pattern in Pirot kilims. It conveys the connotative meaning of durability and longevity while also representing fertility, a healthy life, and protection from danger. Another notable motif, Čenđeli, depicts a grappling hook mounted on a wooden pole, traditionally used for hanging items, connoting support and connection.

B) Type of Motifs: The corpus reports indicate that the most common types of motifs are geometric and abstract. In arts and handicrafts, especially in tribal and rural weavings, abstraction and stylization are the dominant forms of representation. The use of geometric shapes is more frequent due to their simplicity and symmetry, resulting in a final design with clear geometric order. Although these motifs are the most frequent in both Qashqai and Pirot kilims, they are more prominent in Pirot kilims (55%), reflecting a focus on symmetry and weaving precision, Which are distinctive features of Pirot kilims and the Balkan region. On the other hand, animal and plant motifs are more abundant in Qashqai kilims, highlighting their deep connection with nature, likely due to the nomadic lifestyle of these communities and their harmony with the natural environment. In both regions, human-related motifs are the least common, likely due to the complexity of designing and weaving such motifs and a preference for symbolism over figurative representations.

C) Thematic Categorization of Motifs: A crucial part of this analysis relates to the connotative meanings and thematic categories of the motifs. The statistical data reveal distinct thematic differences between the motifs in the two regions. In Qashqai kilims, motifs related to the category of Spirituality and Divine (27%) and Life and Nature (29%) are the most frequent. Conversely, in Pirot kilims, the highest numbers of motifs are seen in the themes of Cultural Identity and Social Values (37%) and Protection and Power (28%). This highlights the focus of Qashqai kilims on spiritual themes, reflecting the beliefs and values of the Qashqai tribes, as well as motifs linked to nature, emphasizing their attention to such elements. On the other hand, Pirot kilims, with motifs emphasizing power, protection, and collective identity, hold a special place in the culture and history of Serbia and serve as symbols of home and family

in the daily lives of its people.

Overall, it can be concluded that cultural, social, and geographical factors, along with historical, mythological influences and intercultural exchanges, significantly influence the development and frequency of kilim motifs in these two different regions. This indicates a strong connection between the motifs used in kilims and the social and cultural traditions of the communities that produce them. The most frequent Qashqai kilim motifs within the research corpus include It-al (Dog's paw), Khorāsāni, (Birds' head), with their connotative meaning linked to the concept of "rain/seeking rain" (Parham, 1991, p. 42). These motifs fall under the thematic category of Life and Nature. Additionally, Madākhel (Marvel of Peru) and Sorme-dān (Diamond Star), with their connotative meaning of "eternity" belong to the thematic category of Spirituality and Divine. In Serbian Pirot kilims, the most common motifs found in the corpus are the Turtle (Kornjača/Željka), with the connotative meaning of longevity and fertility (Živadinović (2022, p. 85), falling under the thematic category of Fertility and Renewal. Moreover, the Hook (Čenđeli) and Devil's Knee (Vraško koleno) convey the connotative meaning of "support and protection" under the thematic category of Protection and Power, while the Sofra reflects the connotative meaning of "unity" under the thematic category of Cultural Identity and Social Values.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This comparative study, grounded in the theoretical frameworks of semiotics and semiotic anthropology, uses both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to identify, categorize, and analyze the similarities and differences in the motifs of kilims from Qashqai, Iran, and Pirot, Serbia. Kilim weaving has a much longer history in Central Asia, Iran, the Caucasus, and Anatolia than in Pirot, suggesting that the motifs of Pirot kilims were influenced by neighboring regions, particularly Anatolia and the Caucasus. On the other hand, the migratory lifestyle of Qashqai nomads across northern and central Iran, combined with their interactions with the Caucasus, has resulted in shared features between Qashqai and Pirot kilims. Despite these similarities, the motifs, designs, and patterns in each region reflect distinct cultural contexts. Both Qashqai and Pirot kilims focus on central motifs and geometric designs, but their themes differ significantly. Qashqai kilims emphasize nature, animals, and spirituality, rooted in the nomads' mystical and migratory heritage. In contrast, Pirot kilims focus on geometric abstraction, cultural identity, and protective symbols, deeply tied to Serbian local traditions. These differences highlight the diverse cultural expressions shown through kilim weaving in the two regions. Further research into kilims from other regions, such as Central Asia, Anatolia, and the Caucasus, could provide a more complete understanding of shared and unique motifs, helping to explain how ancient trade routes, like the Silk Road, influenced their development. The collection and documentation of these motifs, along with identifying their connotative, symbolic, and mythological meanings, are essential for preserving the cultural and artistic heritage of each region. Conducting more extensive and comparative studies will improve the understanding of different cultures and uncover the shared values that connect them.

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DEVELOPING FUTURE LEADERS: THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN FOSTERING INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP

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Abstract: The development of future leaders is a critical issue for modern organizations facing increasing challenges and rapid changes in the business environment. Leadership skills are multifaceted, as leaders are a blend of numerous professional activities and competencies that, through innovation, open the door to the future. Therefore, the foundations of leadership are directly linked to the tools and skills managers must possess to navigate the dynamics of global business practices. For organizations aspiring to remain competitive in a dynamic environment, the development of future leaders is crucial. Human Resources (HR) play a significant role in identifying, developing, and empowering innovative leaders who not only keep pace with change but also shape it. The essence of developing HR towards the future lies primarily in creativity based on knowledge, the development of human capital, and a corporate culture with a multidimensional aspect. HR is a multidisciplinary organizational function that draws on theories and ideas from various fields such as management, psychology, sociology, and economics. There is no single best way to manage human resources, nor has any manager formulated an effective approach to HR management, as people are complex beings with complex needs. Effective HR management largely depends on the causes and conditions provided by the organizational environment. Therefore, this research addresses how HR can promote leadership development through strategies that support innovation in leadership, leadership team diversity and skills, transparency, principles of decentralized leadership, and emotional intelligence. Special emphasis is placed on innovative approaches that enable leaders to develop critical thinking, agility, and the ability to solve complex problems in changing situations. The paper also analyzes the methods organizations can use to cultivate a culture of innovative leadership and the challenges faced by HR teams in these processes. A key objective of this research is to analyze contemporary practices and provide insights into the critical elements necessary for building innovative leadership within organizations to meet future challenges.
Keywords: Human Resources, Innovation, Human Capital and Corporate Culture
Field: Management

1. INTRODUCTION

A global characteristic of contemporary business is the constant change in business practices, the environment in which business is conducted, and the imposition of increasingly strict standards. The race for a position in the global, as well as the national, market is becoming more exhausting and difficult. Competition among organizations and companies whose core activities are the same or similar is becoming more rigorous and advanced. In order for a business to survive, competing companies must constantly improve their operations and working methods. In addition, companies and smaller firms, in order to achieve their maximum competitiveness, must specifically focus on the quality of the services and products they offer, as well as the development of leaders and leadership that can meet future challenges. Therefore, direct competitiveness in quality also implies the quality of business, which is manifested through management and the identification of the right leaders.

In order to examine in greater detail the aspects of human resource management through the development of future leaders, which is the focus of this paper, it is necessary to first review the concepts we will be addressing throughout the paper. These concepts serve as the foundation for building upon the more complex forms that emerge. By analyzing various theories and definitions related to this issue, we arrive at a common conclusion: that human resources, in their essence, constitute the workforce, and that this type of resource may be the most crucial for the efficient functioning and coordination of the economy and the social order as we know it. Therefore, human resources are vital for economic development, as they drive progress and serve as a means for coordinating other resources to achieve the goals necessary for the functioning and advancement of society.

The term "human resources," in its most basic sense, refers to the individual—humankind—and, as a concept, encompasses more than just employees or personnel within an organization. The concept of "human resources" does not solely include workers, but also their values, skills, capabilities, results, potential, and competencies. In other words, this term encompasses the overall potential of the individual

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as an employee, or as a key contributor to an organization.

In addition to possessing significant capital for the development of a company or enterprise, a key aspect of competition among organizations lies in the pursuit of skilled, creative, and educated professionals. These individuals can take on leadership roles, using their innovative capabilities to drive progress and shape the future. The primary factor of competitiveness and market advantage is people—their development, capabilities, motivation, and job satisfaction. In a word, "human resources" can serve as the core resource for improving the productivity of any organization.

This paper focuses on the strategic development of leadership innovation through specific methods, principles, and techniques aimed at fostering critical thinking, a multidimensional approach to management, and emotional intelligence. The methodological analysis examines the approaches organizations can employ to cultivate a culture of innovative leadership, while also addressing the challenges faced by human resource teams during these processes.

2. METHODS AND MODELS FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The explicit development of a methodological concept for human resource management is outlined by the Michigan School, which emphasizes that the human resource management system and organizational structure should align with the organization's strategy. This alignment involves the development of specific models and methods (Widyatmoko, Pabbajah, Widyanti, 2020). The same authors suggest that there is a human resource cycle for developing future leaders, comprising four generic processes or functions that are carried out in all organizations. These include selection, evaluation, rewarding, and development, with selection being the initial and foundational step.

The direct focus on achieving this methodological approach and generic process for business values can also be developed through the concept of human resource management. This approach includes direct support for leadership development, largely driven by innovation and rooted in the philosophy of management and business operations. In this way, the representation of organizational interests is encouraged, with particular emphasis on strategic integration and a strong corporate culture. This culture stems from the vision of top management leadership, which requires individuals who are dedicated to the strategy, adaptable to change, and aligned with the organization's culture (Tessema et al., 2022).

Implicitly, it can be argued that the development of future leaders is too critical to leave solely to HR managers—it is a necessity rather than a rhetorical question (Tutar & Sarkhanov, 2020). Authors such as Aust, Matthews, and Muller-Camen (2020) have observed that human resource management policies are a shared asset tailored to drive business value and adapt to new paradigms. This ensures that human resources remain sustainable amidst shifting business objectives.

At the same time, the promotion of innovative leadership is developed through human resources, with direct support for individuals capable of learning, adapting, innovating, and generating creative energy. When properly motivated, this creative force can, on one hand, ensure the long-term survival of the organization and, on the other, cultivate future leaders (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019). This approach creates a unique human capital resource, which can be considered an asset within an organization or enterprise. To maximize this resource, additional efforts and human resource management strategies are required to attract, retain, and nurture qualified, dedicated, and motivated leadership.

The process of Human Capital Management (HCM) is closely related to human resource management. To this end, steps must be taken to assess and meet future leadership needs that can achieve organizational goals. This depends on the incentivizing and innovative actions of human resources, as well as the development of inherent capacities through measurable contributions, learning potential, and continuous development.

This also involves talent management—a process of acquiring and nurturing talent through a set of interdependent human resource management policies and practices in areas such as resource allocation, learning and development, performance management, and succession planning (Gerhart & Feng, 2021). However, the focus of HCM lies primarily in the use of metrics (measuring HR and workforce performance) as a tool to guide strategies and practices in people management, particularly through leadership roles.

Authors Sohel-Uz-Zaman, Anjalin, and Khan (2019) highlight Watson Wyatt's research in identifying four categories of human resource practices linked to human capital management practices and market value. These practices emphasize the pivotal role of a distinguished leader

in increasing capital value by boosting shareholder returns by 30%. A similar model of organizational performance is outlined by Nalbantian and colleagues, based on organizational performance frameworks developed by Mercer HR Consulting. This model is grounded in elements such as people, work processes, management structure, information and knowledge, decision-making, and rewards. Each of

these elements operates differently within an organizational context, creating a unique "DNA" for the organization (Al-Dalahmeh, 2020).

When these elements are developed independently, as often occurs, the potential for cultivating leaders within human resources becomes misaligned. This misalignment prevents the optimization of human capital, significantly limiting the prospects for positive future growth—for both leaders and the organization.

Identifying these opportunities requires disciplined measurement of an organization's human capital assets and the management practices that influence their performance. Mercer (2021) employs a statistical tool called Internal Labour Market Analysis, which relies on ongoing employee and labor market data to analyze the actual experiences of employees, rather than merely considering the stated HR programs and policies. This approach helps to identify business goals and comparatively assess human capital potential, particularly how leadership can support these objectives.

Direct measurement of human capital value is achieved through assessments of individuals' capabilities, growth potential, and alignment with organizational values. These individuals, identified as potential leaders, can contribute to achieving both current and future organizational goals. Methods and metrics used to determine the efficiency of human capital capable of producing standout leaders are often reflected in the "value added per person," where the most critical indicator of human capital value is the level of expertise within the organization (Pasamar, Diaz-Fernandez, de La Rosa-Navarro, 2019). Their suggestion is to first analyze this identification through the organization's core competencies and then evaluate it through employee satisfaction surveys.

3. STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

A key characteristic of the human resource management system is its strategic orientation, grounded in its multifaceted nature. This characteristic is embodied in the concept of Strategic HRM—an integrated approach to developing HR strategies that enable an organization to achieve its goals while simultaneously fostering the development of future-oriented leaders.

The initial phase of this strategic orientation towards leadership development and positioning involves a long-term direction cultivated by the organization. This entails aligning resources with the dynamic environment, markets, clients, and customers to identify stakeholders who may become future leaders (Obuba, 2022). Through this targeted strategy focused on leadership development, the organization defines the direction it intends to take in relation to its environment. This is a process of articulating intentions and allocating or aligning resources with opportunities and needs, based on a resource-based strategy.

The strategic vision for developing future leaders also encompasses implementation, which involves change management and planning—key aspects of the strategy aimed at achieving strategic alignment. The human resources approach to identifying leaders begins with a plan that defines the course of action, followed by consistency in behavior, which reflects the vision and perspective of both the organization and its leaders (Collins, 2022).

The strategic approach to human resource management focuses on meeting the organization's human capital needs and developing new leaders. As Penrose suggests, strategic human resource management can be viewed as "administrative organization and a set of productive resources," which, in the context of globalization, gains significant importance as such resources are considered unique and irreplaceable (According to: Lau & Michie, 2024). This perspective is further developed by Hamel and Prahalad, who argue that competitive advantage in globalization is achieved through a model in which a company can acquire and develop human resources that enable it to learn faster and more effectively apply its learning compared to its rivals (According to: Danook & Al. Obaidy, 2024).

The need for a strategic approach to developing leaders who can achieve future goals must be a perspective supported at all levels of the organization, primarily by the human resources teams. These teams should simultaneously develop plans and methods for classifying potential future leaders. This also entails numerous innovative activities, including models of desirable strategic thinking, responsibility for assuming leadership roles, and the broader impact that future leaders must have (Samimi et al., 2022). Openness to criticism and self-improvement, along with a commitment to lifelong learning, are further components of human resources' approach to leadership development for the future. What human resources must recognize is that, at every level of the company, there are potential leaders to be "discovered" within employees who frequently demonstrate an innate tendency to take responsibility, find solutions to problems, and motivate others (Akdere & Egan, 2020). Early identification of these new leaders allows for a focus on developmental initiatives, such as leadership training, challenging assignments, and

training programs, as well as motivation development. All of these can create a foundation for accepting the leadership role in the future. The literature highlights several significant activities that human resources should incorporate into the preparation of new leaders, with an emphasis on investing in foundational training programs that provide potential leaders with the skills and knowledge they need. Additionally, workshops focused on team building, change management, strategic thinking, effective communication, and ethical decision-making in leadership development are essential (Kremer, Villamor, Aguinis, 2019).

Acquiring new knowledge can also be achieved through knowledge transfer, where new leaders can adopt organizational-level insights from experienced leaders who should provide support. Through the synergy of personal engagement, a strong foundation for leadership development is established, helping to highlight both the strengths and weaknesses they possess. The system of practices emerges as a crucial element in applying learned skills, where potential leaders can observe experienced leaders, thus entering the complex system of leadership operations while also achieving their personal development.

4. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN LEADERSHIP

Human resources focused on developing new leaders have a special obligation to take a qualitative approach in ensuring and developing all available resources so that they are beneficial to the organization. This ensures a broader focus on the quantitative and business-strategic aspects of human resource management, which is driven "rationally" (Hajiali et al., 2022). In line with these claims, earlier, the author Guest (1991) commented that the human resource approach must be driven by external threats in order to compete with rivals, where investment in human resources is a priority that can maintain a high level of quality for future leaders as well as corporate culture.

Considering these views, we can emphasize the direct interests of management, which should be integrated with the business strategy through human resource development processes and the development of new leaders who can manage both performance and the needs of a strong corporate culture with its mission and values. Achieving this goal is only possible through enhanced communication, training, and motivation for leadership.

In the domain of organizational and corporate culture, it should be understood that, as a result of the interactions and communications between employees within an organization, there emerge shared values, beliefs, and behavioral norms among its members. In this context, the leader occupies a special position, acting as a sort of bridge, embodying behaviors that human resources should recognize and prepare for in the development of new leadership roles (Banmairuroy, Kritjaroen, Homsombat, 2022). If organizational culture is defined as a set of beliefs, behavioral norms, values, and assumptions adopted and developed by the members of an organization through shared experience, which then directs their behavior and thinking, the leader, as a distinct bearer of power, must be grounded in these specific values.

The core values of a leader and their power in the global society are tied to employees within the organizational culture, which enhances communication among employees, fosters a climate that encourages innovation and creativity, links all rewards to good performance, and creates and maintains a sense of satisfaction and success from high-quality work. Furthermore, it ensures conditions in which every idea can be presented. Organizational culture itself is an extremely important factor in the strategic decision-making process, as it encompasses the beliefs and assumptions held by decision-makers in the organization, which influence final decisions. The domain of leadership, as a manifestation of power, can be considered a significant premise in the social changes that may follow. The assumptions imposed by organizational culture during this period determine whether strategic decisions are correct or not, confronting every future leader with potential obstacles and preparing them for their future roles. As the culture strengthens, which is simultaneously homogeneous, its influence on strategic decisions also grows.

Organizational culture acts as a determinant and reflects the overall capability of the company, establishing itself as a significant segment that demonstrates how the culture, the leader, and the employees adapt to changes in their environment. A culture that emphasizes openness and flexibility towards global events often creates the assumption that the company is successful. The value system and beliefs of successful companies prioritize the need for continuous adaptation to environmental changes, which every future leader must monitor (Moldoveanu, Narayandas, 2019). However, organizational culture can also have a very negative impact on the company's ability to adapt to changes, in the sense that it can block change or even prevent top management from recognizing the need for change.

Numerous changes, both in society and in the way organizations operate, are implemented through organizational culture, which makes a significant contribution, not only from already developed but also from future leaders, in reducing conflicts within the organization. The most common cause of conflicts in

an organization is the existence of different and incompatible reference frameworks that are used to better understand the environment (Meng, Berger, 2019). Conflict is inevitable when two or more individuals, who have different assumptions, values, and beliefs about the environment, find themselves in a situation where they need to work together or make decisions. A strong culture prevents such a possibility.

The development of a unique organizational culture, which human resources implement through leadership development, also serves as a strong motivator, fostering a sense of identification with the organization among its members. This allows individuals to satisfy their need for belonging, which can only be achieved if they identify with their organization. Employees' identification with the organization will be possible only if it possesses a strong culture.

One of the most significant sources of organizational culture is the personality of the dominant leader, who is developed from the existing human resources and plays a crucial role in crisis situations (Bhaduri, 2019). This source of organizational culture represents a process in which the leader imposes their own assumptions, values, and beliefs onto the employees within the company, thereby embedding them into the content of the organizational culture. Leaders of an organization undoubtedly hold the greatest power and, as such, have the ability to control all resources. If they choose, they can direct this power not only to ensure the acceptance of their orders by subordinates but also to have their opinions adopted as their own. The leader participates in all communications, especially during times of change, as they are the central figure in these processes. For this reason, they are in a position to impose their beliefs and attitudes on others.

Historically, the majority of great leaders have emerged during times of major conflicts, when society as a whole also underwent periods of crisis and adaptation. All of these leaders went through a period of learning and development, which was deeply rooted in human capital, or human resources.

5. CONCLUSION

One of the biggest challenges faced by companies striving for sustainable success in the global market is the training of the next generation of leaders. Since they serve as strategic partners in identifying, developing, and empowering talent capable of responding to future challenges, human resources play an indispensable role in this process. Fostering innovative leadership that combines visionary thinking, flexibility, and the ability to motivate and direct teams towards common goals is crucial.

Human resources must create an environment that encourages learning, creativity, and adaptability in order to produce leaders of the future. The competencies required of today's leaders are developed through initiatives such as talent management, mentoring, and tailored training programs. In addition to developing technical leadership skills, human resources must also focus on the development of emotional intelligence in future leaders, as this skill impacts interpersonal relationships, corporate culture, and teamwork. Therefore, the future leader must be a bearer of change and a driver of innovation, thereby gaining the trust and shared values of the organization. Essentially, the role of human resources in creating new leaders should not be viewed solely as operational but also as transformational, as it influences the continuous shaping of the organization, where the needs of society and the market are recognized.

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SERVICE ORIENTATION AS A DRIVER OF ENGAGEMENT AND JOB SATISFACTION: INSIGHTS FROM SERBIAN HOTEL EMPLOYEES

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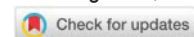
Abstract: The study investigates the relationships between service orientation, job engagement, and job satisfaction among hotel employees in Serbia. The research surveyed 244 employees across hotels of varying categorization levels, employing quantitative methods using AMOS software. Results reveal a significant positive influence of service orientation on job engagement, which in turn positively impacts job satisfaction. The study also explores the direct effect of service orientation on satisfaction and its indirect influence mediated by engagement. Findings highlight partial mediation, underscoring engagement's critical role in linking service orientation to satisfaction. Furthermore, significant differences were observed between employees with tourism-related education and those from other backgrounds in terms of these three variables. The research underscores the importance of fostering service-oriented practices to enhance employee satisfaction and engagement, which are essential for delivering high-quality services. The study concludes with recommendations for future research and practical implications for human resource strategies in the hospitality sector. By addressing the interplay of these variables, this study contributes to understanding how employee-centric practices can drive organizational success in competitive tourism markets. Limitations and prospects for comparative studies across different economic contexts are also discussed.
Keywords: service orientation, job engagement, job satisfaction, hotel employees, analysis.
Field: Social sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry has always been at the forefront of prioritizing customer satisfaction, largely relying on its human resources to create memorable experiences for guests. In this context, service orientation emerges as a pivotal concept, embodying the attitudes and behaviors of employees focused on fulfilling customer needs effectively. For countries like Serbia, where tourism is gaining increasing importance, the hospitality sector must ensure not only high service standards but also robust strategies to maintain employee satisfaction and engagement. This becomes particularly significant in a competitive global market, where the quality of customer service can determine the success or failure of a business (Shams et al., 2021). Despite its critical role, limited research has been conducted on the interrelationships among service orientation, job engagement, and job satisfaction, especially in developing tourism markets. Understanding these relationships can provide actionable insights for managers aiming to foster a motivated and satisfied workforce capable of delivering superior service quality (Rabiul et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the dynamic and interpersonal nature of hospitality work creates unique challenges and opportunities for employee engagement. Employees in customer-facing roles often encounter high levels of stress and emotional demands, making engagement a key factor in their job satisfaction and overall performance. Previous studies have demonstrated that service-oriented practices enhance employees' psychological connection to their work, promoting higher levels of engagement and satisfaction (Kloutsiniotis & Mihail, 2020). However, the interplay between these factors remains underexplored in Serbia's hospitality industry, where workforce dynamics and cultural nuances may influence these outcomes. By addressing these gaps, this paper aims to not only expand the theoretical understanding of these relationships but also provide practical implications for enhancing human resource strategies in the Serbian hotel sector. Such insights are essential for achieving sustainable growth in the tourism industry

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and elevating Serbia's position in the global market (Demirović Bajrami et al., 2022).

The fundamental strength of a company in a competitive business environment lies in its human resources. Employees who are service-oriented prioritize the interests of clients above all, followed by other stakeholders (managers, owners), to develop profitable businesses and ensure long-term success. As a positive outcome of service orientation, some authors highlight job satisfaction (Park et al., 2020), which is a prerequisite for client satisfaction, loyalty, and positive recommendations. Research has shown that service orientation can positively influence employee engagement. For example, Zablah et al. (2012) state in their research that companies that focus more on employee service orientation can, in return, expect higher job engagement and greater job commitment. In his study, Wang (2011) notes that an increase in employee engagement leads to an increase in job satisfaction. For instance, when an employee experiences success in their work as a result of their engagement, they feel a sense of achievement, which in turn leads to job satisfaction. The more satisfied the employees are the better-quality services they provide. The current level of the overall hotel offering in Serbia is still at a medium level, further challenged by increasing competition in the tourism market. This raises the question of whether, in addition to an underdeveloped accommodation offer, other factors—such as employee engagement and service orientation, which significantly impact retaining existing clients and attracting new ones, are contributing to operational challenges.

The aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between service orientation and job engagement among hotel employees in Serbia, as well as the connection between engagement and job satisfaction. Additionally, the study analyzes the interrelationship between service orientation and job satisfaction, with a particular focus on the mediating role of job engagement in this relationship. The results provide a better understanding of these relationships, which play a crucial role in improving business performance.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Relationship Between Service Orientation and Job Engagement
According to Zablah et al. (2012), service orientation, as a business resource, is linked to employee motivation, such as job engagement. Through the motivational process, business resources encourage and motivate employees to pursue personal development and achieve goals, which can lead to higher engagement and improved job performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Employees with a strong service orientation exhibit greater effort and willingness to meet client needs, demonstrating the individual's dedication to their job. Recent research emphasizes that service orientation acts as a motivational force, improving employees' job engagement by fostering a sense of purpose and belonging (Guan et al., 2021). Employees with high service orientation are often driven by intrinsic motivation, which aligns with the findings of Wang and Tsai (2021), who noted that service-oriented employees tend to exhibit stronger engagement due to their alignment with organizational goals. This connection has been reinforced in studies highlighting the role of supportive work environments in amplifying service orientation's effect on engagement (Rabiul et al., 2021). Recent research emphasizes that service orientation acts as a motivational force, improving employees' job engagement by fostering a sense of purpose and belonging (Peng et al., 2024). Employees with high service orientation are often driven by intrinsic motivation, which aligns with the findings of Wang and Tsai (2021), who noted that service-oriented employees tend to exhibit stronger engagement due to their alignment with organizational goals. This connection has been reinforced in studies highlighting the role of supportive work environments in amplifying service orientation's effect on engagement (Eldor, 2020). Based on these findings, it can be suggested that individuals with a strong inclination toward serving clients are more likely to be motivated and, consequently, more committed and engaged at work. Considering these assumptions, the following hypothesis is defined:

H1: *Employee service orientation positively influences their job engagement.*
Relationship Between Job Engagement and Job Satisfaction
Positive experiences and emotions can lead to positive work outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Saks, 2006). A satisfied worker is likely to be more active within the organization, as they develop a sense of belonging to the organization. It can be concluded that highly engaged employees possess energy, determination, dedication, and a connection with the organization, which in turn fosters satisfaction and increases productivity. Furthermore, research by Saks (2006) and Alarcon & Edwards (2011) has shown that job engagement is one of the primary drivers of job satisfaction. The relationship between engagement and satisfaction has been further validated by longitudinal studies that underscore engagement as a precursor to job satisfaction (Ozturk et al., 2021). Employees who are engaged report higher levels of energy and focus, which directly contribute to job satisfaction by enhancing their work experience and

reducing emotional exhaustion. Based on these findings, it is hypothesized:

H2: *Employee engagement positively influences job satisfaction.*
Relationship Between Service Orientation and Job Satisfaction
According to research conducted by Eren et al. (2013), there is a significant relationship between service orientation and job satisfaction, which impacts not only greater financial performance but, more importantly, customer satisfaction. Additionally, some studies argue that service orientation will have a greater impact on satisfaction when employees have more frequent contact with clients (Donavan et al., 2004). Based on the literature, it is assumed that a positive relationship exists between service orientation and job satisfaction. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: *There is a positive relationship between service orientation and job satisfaction.*
The Mediating Role of Job Engagement
Given that service orientation is linked to employee motivation (Zablah et al., 2012) and that employees with higher levels of service orientation are likely to be more motivated, it can be expected that they will be more dedicated to their work and become more engaged. On the other hand, job engagement is expected to predict job satisfaction. An engaged employee exhibits higher energy levels while working and feels happier due to their involvement in the job (Karatepe, 2012). Based on this, it is assumed that job engagement can mediate the relationship between employee service orientation and their job satisfaction. The following hypothesis is therefore proposed:

H4: *Job engagement mediates the relationship between service orientation and job satisfaction.*

The conceptual model, encompassing the hypothesized relationships between job satisfaction, job engagement, and service orientation, is graphically presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual model
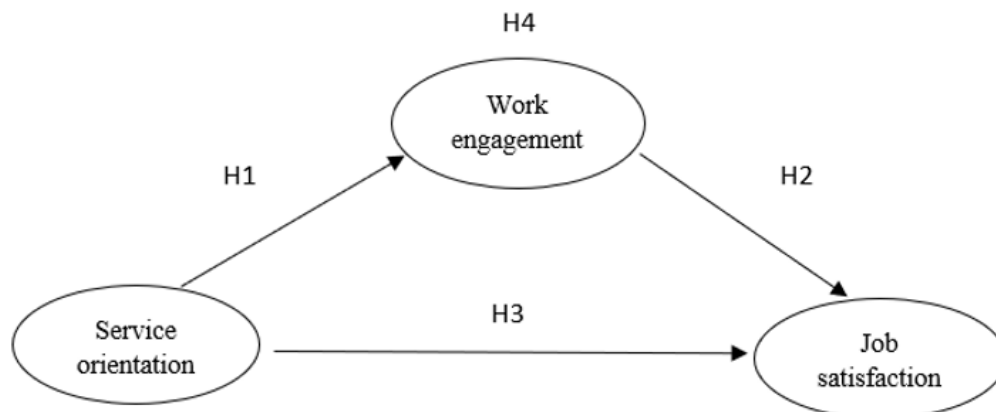
Source: Authors

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data for this study were collected from employees working in hotels of all categorization levels in Serbia. A list of 312 hotels was compiled, and they were contacted via email. Employees were selected from seven segments of the organizational structure (accounting/finance, front desk, food and beverage, housekeeping, administration, sales and marketing, human resources). A total of 244 questionnaires were returned, all of which were completed anonymously and deemed valid for the study.
The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section included variables related to socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, education level, job position, etc.). The second section measured service orientation using four variables adapted from Licata et al. (2003). The third section assessed job engagement using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006), which includes three dimensions (vigor, dedication, and absorption) composed of 17 variables. The fourth section focused on job satisfaction, measured through eight variables based on Karatepe et al. (2007).

4. RESULTS

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents
The survey results indicate that a significantly higher proportion of respondents were women (69.3%) compared to men (30.7%). More than half of the employees were aged between 26 and 35. Approximately one-fifth of the respondents were in their early 20s, while those in their 30s and 40s were less represented. Regarding education level, 29.9% of respondents had completed a higher vocational school, followed by those with master's degrees (29.5%). Nearly 66% of employees had educational backgrounds related to tourism and hospitality.

In terms of work experience, 23.4% of respondents had been working in their respective hotels for less than one year, while the majority (68.4%) had between 1 and 10 years of experience. Only a small number of respondents had over 20 years of experience in their current hotels. Regarding job positions, half of the respondents worked at the front desk, 17.2% were in sales and marketing, followed by food and beverage (9.8%), human resources (6.6%), housekeeping (6.6%), accounting and finance (5.7%), and administration (3.3%).

Hypothesis Testing
The proposed relationships between the variables were tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the AMOS software. The analysis results indicated that the model was well-fitted (GFI=,941; TLI=,920; CFI=,973; NFI=,972; RMR=,007). The standardized path coefficient was applied in the analysis of the first two hypotheses (H1 and H2). As shown in Table 1, there is a statistically significant positive relationship between service orientation and job engagement, thus confirming Hypothesis 1 (β=0,862). Similarly, the relationship between job engagement and job satisfaction is also statistically significant, confirming Hypothesis 2 (β=0,939).

Table 1. The impact estimates after introducing the mediator into the model

	β	p	result	R2
Service orientation → satisfaction	-0,209	0,000	significant	0,892
Service orientation → engagement	0,862	0,000	significant	0,744
engagement → satisfaction	0,939	0,000	significant	0,881

Source: Authors

Before testing the mediation effects, the relationship between the independent variable (service orientation) and the dependent variable (job satisfaction) was examined. The effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable represents the direct effect. On the other hand, the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediator (engagement) is the indirect effect (Figure 1). These effects are primarily represented through loading factors, implicit and explicit variables, which measure the intensity of the linear correlation between them. In this study, satisfactory reliability was achieved as the factor values range between 0.74 and 0.94. The first step in analyzing the mediation variable is to determine whether the direct effect between the independent and dependent variables is statistically significant.

Table 2. Estimates before the mediator (engagement) is included in the model

	β	p	result	R2
Service orientation → satisfaction	0,756	0,000	significant	,571

Source: Authors

The results in Table 2 show that there is a statistically significant impact of service orientation on job satisfaction, with p (0.000) at the level (sig ≤ 0.05). This effect is quite strong, considering that the R2 value is 0.57, meaning that service orientation explains 57% of job satisfaction in hotels in Serbia. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is accepted (β=0.756).
It is assumed that service orientation influences job satisfaction through work engagement. After the model was confirmed to be appropriate, the results of the impact of service orientation on job satisfaction after introducing the mediator are presented in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, the beta coefficient indicates that service orientation has a significant impact on engagement (β=0.86). On the other hand, engagement also has a significant impact on job satisfaction (β=0.94).

After introducing the mediating variable (engagement), the beta coefficient for service orientation changed from $\beta=0.756$ to $\beta=-0.209$. It can be concluded that this represents partial mediation, as the direct effect of service orientation on job satisfaction is still statistically significant ($p=0.000$) and there remains a direct relationship between these two variables after the mediator was introduced, even though the β value changed. Therefore, job engagement partially mediates the relationship between service orientation and job satisfaction, and Hypothesis 4 is partially accepted.

5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary goal of this study was to formulate and empirically test an integrated model of the interrelationships and impacts between service orientation, engagement, and job satisfaction, which was achieved through an analysis of relevant literature and statistical data processing. The results showed that service orientation positively affects engagement (H1). This confirms that the author's assumption was consistent with the research by Babakus et al. (2009), which emphasizes that employees who are service-oriented toward clients demonstrate more characteristics of engaged individuals. Therefore, service orientation is a significant business resource within the framework of employee work engagement. Encouraging and nurturing service orientation is crucial for achieving a competitive advantage in the business world.

Furthermore, the study results showed that engagement positively affects job satisfaction (H2), which aligns with previous research (Saks, 2006). Employee engagement greatly depends on the energy they have, their focus, as well as their involvement and dedication to work (Schaufeli et al., 2006). This means that the high level of energy present in engaged workers contributes to more positive work outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Saks, 2006). Similarly, when an individual is engaged in their work, it creates a positive feeling, an affective connection to the work, and they are likely to be more satisfied with their job. Based on Hypothesis (H3), it was found that there is a positive relationship between service orientation and job satisfaction. This relationship was achieved not only directly but also partially through the mediating role of engagement, which is, however, much weaker than the direct effect (H4).

The interplay of service orientation, engagement, and job satisfaction observed in this study also highlights the importance of contextual and cultural factors within the Serbian hospitality sector. As Serbia continues to position itself as an emerging tourism destination, the development of a service-oriented workforce becomes integral to sustaining competitive advantage. This study's findings suggest that a nuanced understanding of workforce dynamics, particularly in developing economies, is essential for optimizing human resource strategies. The significant variation in outcomes based on educational backgrounds points to an opportunity for tailored interventions, such as vocational training or targeted employee development programs, to bridge skill gaps and reinforce service-oriented behaviors. Moreover, the partial mediation effect of engagement emphasizes the need to address intrinsic motivational factors within the workplace, such as providing employees with meaningful work, recognition, and growth opportunities. These elements not only enhance engagement but also solidify the link between service orientation and job satisfaction, contributing to a cohesive organizational culture that prioritizes both employee well-being and customer satisfaction. This underscores the dual necessity of aligning employee satisfaction strategies with organizational performance goals in the rapidly evolving hospitality landscape.

What is ultimately crucial for business success is having satisfied clients, and this is greatly contributed to by service-oriented and satisfied employees, as they are the prerequisite for long-term satisfied clients. For this reason, it is very important to establish appropriate standards with the goal of controlling employees and improving the quality of services (Popesku, 2013). Service quality results in greater respect for hotel services as a product, which, in turn, creates quality relationships within the organization. The findings of this study align with the current discourse on service orientation and its impact on workforce dynamics. Recent studies highlight the mediating role of engagement in various service industries, where fostering intrinsic motivation significantly enhances job satisfaction (Peng et al., 2024; Ozturk et al., 2021). This study extends these insights to the Serbian hospitality sector, highlighting the importance of tailoring human resource strategies to cultural and contextual nuances. Additionally, the study aligns with recent evidence showing that a supportive organizational culture, where employees feel valued and recognized, amplifies the effects of service orientation on both engagement and satisfaction (Eldor, 2020). For managers, this implies a need to invest in employee development programs and engagement initiatives that reinforce service-oriented values while addressing individual motivational drivers. Future research could explore how technological advancements in the hospitality industry—such as AI-driven customer relationship management systems—intersect with service orientation and engagement to further enhance job satisfaction. This approach could reveal how modern tools complement

traditional human resource strategies in shaping workforce dynamics in emerging tourism markets.

The results of this study may be somewhat significant for managers in the hotel industry in Serbia, as, based on insights into the behavior and attitudes of employees, they can improve service standards. However, the situation in the hotel industry regarding human resources is not as weakened, and there are certainly opportunities for improving future prospects. One assumption is that employee engagement, job satisfaction, and service orientation may also depend on their relationship with their superiors. Therefore, to create a pleasant work atmosphere within the organization, it is very important for superiors to establish a quality relationship with employees, one that is pleasant, full of trust, and through which employees will develop a sense of belonging to the organization they are employed in. This will reduce any potential obstacles that may disrupt any of these three elements. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on human resource practices in the hospitality sector by empirically validating the relationships between service orientation, job engagement, and job satisfaction. The findings underscore the critical role of service orientation as both a direct and indirect driver of job satisfaction, mediated by engagement. These results have practical implications for hotel managers aiming to foster a motivated and satisfied workforce capable of delivering superior service quality. Strategies to promote service orientation, such as training programs and recognition initiatives, could be pivotal in achieving higher engagement and satisfaction levels. Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of creating a supportive work environment where employees feel valued and connected to organizational goals. By leveraging these insights, the Serbian hospitality sector can enhance employee performance and customer satisfaction, ultimately contributing to the industry's sustainable growth. Future research could extend these findings by exploring cross-cultural comparisons and examining the role of leadership styles in moderating these relationships, thereby providing a broader understanding of best practices in employee management.

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INTEGRATED FINANCIAL REPORTING – STEP FORWARD IN SATISFYING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF STAKEHOLDERS?!

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Abstract: The turbulent beginning of the 21st century, characterized by, among other things, financial scandals related to the operations of several well-known corporations, as well as the world economic crisis imposed the need for companies to provide stakeholders (external and/or internal), and especially current and potential investors, with additional information related to broader social and environmental aspects of their business. For this purpose, the concept of corporate social responsibility and integrated reporting has been developing for the last thirty years, as a tool that should meet the growing needs for financial and non-financial information. The most important accounting authorities (Financial Accounting Standards Board – FASB and International Accounting Standards Board – IASB), as well as the corresponding bodies within the European Union, are trying to regulate this matter with documents (codes, initiatives, directives, recommendations, etc.) with the aim of defining rules that will help the management of corporations to meet the growing information needs of stakeholders. Through a critical analysis of the positive and negative sides of the mentioned documents, comparing them with the existing regulations in the Republic of Serbia, we determined that the proponents of the concept of integrated reporting face challenges similar to those that characterize the process of standardization, harmonization and convergence of international accounting regulative (IAS/IFRS). Namely, there is an evident need for integrated reporting to be part of the annual financial report, but the structure and information that should be contained in those reports differ, which reduces their usability. Even Directive 2014/95/EU, which represent the only document on which the expert public agreed, failed to overcome the mentioned problems, so the need to revise this document is a confirmation that additional efforts are needed to increase the comparability, reliability and relevance of these reports. On the other hand, the adoption of IAS/IFRS that would deal exclusively with integrated reporting could contribute to the further development of this concept, because the inclusion of environmental accounting in the provisions of several current IAS/IFRS represents a solid basis for the creation of quality information on business sustainability, but their further shaping and publication depends on the degree of corporate awareness in that field, specific regulatory requirements of individual countries, as well as the level of accounting culture, which in our conditions is not at an enviable level. There is also a fear that too long harmonization, similar to IAS/IFRS, will create a kind of "vicious circle" in which the possibility or need to revise one of the related documents or possibly an accounting standard will be practically impossible due to their interdependence and intertwining with the provisions of other regulations.

Keywords: integrated reporting, corporate social responsibility, directive 2014/95/EU, accounting.
Field: Social sciences.

1. INTRODUCTION

The turbulent beginning of the 21 century, characterized by financial scandals, the world economic crisis, war conflicts (Iraq, Libya, Syria, Ukraine, the Gaza Strip,...), the COVID-19 pandemic, announcements of new conflicts and pandemics, impose the need for company managers to include in financial reports the part related to "information about the company's social responsibility, about its sustainable development, about the company's corporate management and about the company's impact on environmental protection and society" (Vićentijević, 2016, 62). While in the countries of the European Union, such an obligation prescribed by Directive 2014/95/EU can be performed either by including a non-financial report in the annual business report or by compiling a separate report, Article 37 paragraph 3 of the current Law on Accounting in the Republic of Serbia stipulates that the non-financial report includes in the annual business report. The essence of the aforementioned regulations aims to develop a report that would contain "comprehensive and understandable information about overall performance, prospective and retrospective, in order to satisfy the information needs of stakeholders," (Knežević, Pavlović, 2019), i.e. information related to the company's mission, its strategy and future corporate goals (Gogić, 2022, 93).

The starting assumptions of our research are as follows:

H1 - current and potential investors, as the most important stakeholders of corporate companies, are not satisfied only with the information presented in financial reports, but also seek information about the social and environmental aspects of business;

H2 - the relevant international accounting regulative (current IAS/IFRS) allow the inclusion of non-financial information in financial statements and

H3 - integrated reporting should be formally regulated in a way that will prevent subjectivity and manipulations and enable the transition of corporate companies to a "safe, climate-neutral and circular economy" (Damnjanović, 2021, 119).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research is based on a critical analysis and comparison of the most important regulations that, in the form of directives, initiatives, recommendations, codes and/or legal regulations, attempt to regulate the matter of integrated reporting, starting with King's codes on corporate governance from 1994 and 2002 (Knežević, Pavlović, 2019), through the Recommendation on recognition, measurement and disclosure of environmental impact in financial statements of companies (2001/453EC) published by the European Commission in May 2001, the Global Reporting Initiative, up to Directive 2014/95/ EU from 2014 for the countries of the European Union, i.e. the current Accounting Law from 2019 in our conditions. The comparison method is the basic method used in this article.

3. RESULTS

The relatively long period of time in which the focus was placed on the adoption of regulations that would make integral financial reporting uniform and comparable indicates the seriousness of the approach to solving the problem of the lack of complete information with which their users can evaluate not only retrospective, but also prospective performance of the observed corporate enterprise. Significant results were achieved in the harmonization of various documents, while Directive 2014/95/EU, which were adopted on 22 October 2014, considered "the only European codified minimum of non-financial disclosure on which the professional public has agreed" (Dolamić, 2016, 16). Of course, there is a fear that a relatively long period of time for the harmonization of regulations may affect the fact that, analogously to the problems related to the standardization, harmonization and convergence of IAS/IFRS, problems also appear with the regulations that regulate the matter of integrated reporting. Finally, the reports should be transparent, without the intention to manipulate the perception of stakeholders, i.e. not to implement a strategy of blurring failures and/or a strategy of exaggerating successes (improving the image) (Martinez-Ferrero et al., 2019. 477). For this reason, the best solution is to adopt a harmonized standard that would require a multidisciplinary approach, so that problems related to comparability, reliability and comparability of information from integrated reports could be eliminated or, at least, reduced to an acceptable level.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF INTEGRATED REPORTING REGULATIVE

Integrated reporting emerged as a "response" to the growing demands of users of information from financial statements to disclose information about financial performance, corporate governance and sustainable development of the corporation. First, in the Republic of South Africa, in 1994, the Code on Corporate Governance was published, authored by Supreme Court Judge Mervin King (King I), while integrated reporting as a concept was contained in the revised King II Code, which was based on the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), founded in 1997 in the USA, (Boston, Massachusetts) (Knežević, Pavlović, 2019). Recommendations on recognition, measurement and disclosure of environmental impact in financial reports of companies (2001/453EC) published by the European Commission in May 2001 formed the basis for the non-binding reports on corporate social responsibility. The aim of these recommendations was to encourage European companies to improve "the quality, transparency and comparability of information on the effects of negative environmental impacts and efforts to mitigate and eliminate them, in order to enable investors and other stakeholders to easily and clearly see the impact of the aforementioned factors on corporate performance" (Sekerez, 2016. 64-5), but "the lack of harmonized guidelines resulted in the impossibility of comparing or adequately assessing environmental risks that affect financial position of the company." (Elliott & Elliott, 2003, 829).

The aforementioned shortcomings of the recommendations are being corrected by adopting three key regulations within the European Union (Damnjanović, 2021, 22-9):
- Non-financial Reporting Directive – NFRD, Directive 2014/95/EU;

- Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation – SFDR, Regulation (EU/2019/2088) i
- EU Taxonomy, ((EU) 2020/852).

The European Union directive on non-financial reporting from 2014 obliges large companies (balance sheet of more than 20 million Euros or net turnover of more than 40 million Euros; an average of more than 500 employees during the observed period and entities of public interest) to have in their non-financial reports information about the environment, impact on society and employees, respect for human rights and prevention of corruption and bribery. Non-financial reports can be included in the company's annual report or can be a separate publication with the business report (Damnjanović, 2021, 23). Its goals are: to strengthen transparency and accountability of companies, whereby non-financial information is vital for managing changes towards a sustainable global economy combining long-term profitability with social justice and environmental protection; identify sustainability risks and increase investor and consumer confidence in the EU single market and raise to a uniform, high level the transparency of social and environmental information of companies in all sectors in all EU member states (Dolamić, 2016, 5). In June 2020, the need for revision of the Directive was confirmed, in order to, first of all, ensure an increase in the quality of published information in terms of its comparability, reliability and relevance (Damnjanović, 2021, 26).

The regulation on reporting on sustainable financing entered into force in March 2021 and its focus is on all actors in the financial market. It aims to support investments in a sustainable economy. The regulation automatically became valid in the member states of the Union and does not require transposition into national legislation in order to become binding (Damnjanović, 2021, 27).

Finally, the EU Taxonomy, which came into effect in July 2020, defines a list of economic activities that are sustainable in the context of environmental protection, although it is planned to expand Regulation to include "activities that do not have a significant impact on sustainability, economic activities that significantly damage to sustainability, as well as the inclusion of social goals in the taxonomy" (Damnjanović, 2021, 29).

The increase in interest in integrated reporting and the beginning of procedures for the adoption of accounting standards almost coincide, but the above-mentioned accounting authorities have not paid adequate attention to this problem, nor have they developed standard(s) (IAS/IFRS) that would focus on CSR reporting. The fact that some fifteen standards also deal with environmental accounting issues for many, nevertheless, represents "a significant starting point for the creation of quality information on business sustainability, the further shaping and publication, which depends on the degree of corporate awareness in that field and the specific regulatory requirements of individual countries" (Sekerez, 2016, 62).

When it comes to the Republic of Serbia, the previously mentioned obligation to prepare non-financial reports (Article 37) as well as consolidated non-financial reports (Article 38) according to the Accounting Law should raise awareness among us about the need to harmonize the activities of business companies with the requirements to preserves and protects the environment, respects human rights, and works to prevent corruption and bribery.

Finally, the position that is increasingly advocated in academic circles is also important for accounting, and it contains the opinion that wider recognition of risks, costs and obligations related to the sustainability of business would imply the introduction of a completely new binding report within the annual calculation or at least the prescription of a minimum set of necessary information about business sustainability within the existing framework of financial reporting, which would be a more correct solution in the short term (Sekerez, 2016, 66).

5. CONVENTIONAL ACCOUNTING AND INTEGRATED REPORTING

Accounting is one of the most important information systems in a business, so it is logical that it is almost impossible to compile a business report of any kind without the greater or lesser involvement of an accountant. It is generally known that the basic purpose of organizing the accounting function is to monitor the relationship between the company and the environment that took place in the previous accounting period. On the other hand, the reports that companies should prepare, which pertain socially responsible operations, refer, to the greatest extent, to future accounting periods, so the question arises as to whether and to what extent conventional accounting can be useful in compiling the so-called reports on non-financial business or sustainable development, that is, when assessing the risks and benefits that such business entails?

Corporate social responsibility assumes influence and satisfaction of needs and requires numerous and more heterogeneous groups of (financial and non-financial) stakeholders, both within and outside

the company. When compiling financial statements, conventional accounting is focused on meeting the informational needs of investors (current and/or potential) as the most important stakeholders. An additional problem is represented by accounting principles (materiality, causality, prudence, truthfulness, completeness, etc.) that create a closed system that is not capable of flexibly reacting to increasing environmental challenges. The recipe for improving the quality of integrated reporting should be "the inclusion of non-financial performance information in the field of business sustainability and its integration with traditional financial information" (Sekerez, 2016, 61).

Providing non-financial information on corporate social responsibility cannot be the sole task of the accounting function. Namely, we have already noted that accounting is organized in a way that allows it to monitor the effects of business transactions from previous accounting periods on the financial position and earning capacity of the company, and therefore it is almost impossible to monitor the effects that the company's activities have on the living and social environment. However, most reports contain financial and non-financial information that is primarily a product of management accounting, such as total environmental protection costs, total amount of generated waste, total amount of recycled waste, total electricity consumption, etc.

The quality of information from integrated reports should be influenced by the further approximation of the concepts of traditional financial reporting and reporting on socially responsible business, the symbiosis of which should improve the quality of information from conventional accounting and offer ways to integrate information (financial and non-financial) about future business within the annual accounting . In this regard, it is necessary at the global level, with the participation of the aforementioned accounting authorities (IASB and FASB), to define global guidelines for identifying, measuring and publishing information in integrated reports, in order to prevent excessive detailing leading to the publication of information that has no impact to raise the quality level of reporting on retrospective and prospective performance of corporate enterprises.

In the Republic of Serbia, compiling reports on sustainable development is a relatively new practice. The first report on corporate social responsibility was published in 2007 by the company Holcim, which produces cement (Marinović, 2019). For example, NIS company started reporting on environmental protection in 2010, and serious investments that were supposed to reduce environmental pollution began in 2011 (Škarić-Jovanović, 2013, 102). This company's report on sustainable development for 2014, which was made in accordance with the GRI guidelines, was verified by an independent auditor. It is indicative that an increasing number of companies in the financial services sector are compiling a report on corporate social responsibility, which includes a segment related to environmental protection, even though their operations do not directly have many common grounds with the impact on the environment, but that impact can be observed indirectly in cases of financing investment projects of other companies, the implementation of which may negatively affect it.

Finally, some ambiguities in the mentioned documents result in many companies publishing only affirmative information in integrated reports as a means of propaganda and corporate image building, before they really want to take responsibility for the consequences of business activity (Gray, 2006, 798).

6. CONCLUSION

The need to publish information related to socially responsible business is a reality in modern business conditions. For this reason, the obligation of non-financial reporting for the entire European Union starting from 2017 has been prescribed. In this way, the hypothesis that information from official financial reports represents only part of the information needed by current and future investors, as well as other stakeholders in the decision-making process, was confirmed. For this reason, steps are being taken to formalize the practice and standardize the procedures for compiling reports on non-financial operations. In the last ten years, the European Union has adopted a set of directives and regulations that stipulate the obligation to compile the aforementioned reports for entities of public interest. Reporting on sustainable development is also included in the provisions of several IAS/IFRS. We believe that adopting a standard that would exclusively deal with socially responsible business would be a step forward in the unification of rules and procedures that would raise the quality of these reports to a higher level and prevent subjectivity and manipulation of stakeholder perceptions, thus confirming the remaining two starting hypotheses of our research.

In the process of compiling reports on non-financial operations, the role of the accounting function is also important. However, accounting is an inflexible system whose role in compiling the aforementioned report can be significant, but not decisive. The paper mentions some of the limitations of conventional accounting that prevent this, probably the most important information system of a company, from taking

full responsibility for the content of this report. We believe that prescribing a minimum set of necessary information on sustainable business within the existing framework of financial reporting would contribute to meeting the informational needs not only of investors, but also of other financial and non-financial stakeholders, both external and internal.

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MORAL PANIC IN THE NARRATIVES OF ONLINE MEDIA IN SERBIA

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Abstract: Moral panic is a social phenomenon in which a particular event, group, or issue is perceived as a serious threat, provoking exaggerated reactions from the media, authorities, and the general public. The media play a significant role in the production and spread of moral panic, often exaggerating events to achieve personal, economic, or political goals, rather than focusing on the need for institutional changes. The concept of moral panic was popularized in sociology by Stanley Cohen in 1972 in his work Folk devils and moral panics, in which he defined the key elements of moral panic, including the role of the media. This paper examines whether elements of moral panic appear in the headlines of online media in Serbia regarding the environmental protest against lithium mining in western Serbia, titled "There will be no mining," held on August 10, 2024, in Belgrade. The analysis uses Cohen's criteria— exaggeration and distortion, prediction and symbolization. The unit of analysis consists of headlines from online media outlets Politika, Danas, and N1 (quality media/serious), Informer and Alo (tabloids), and Blic (semi-tabloid) covering the mentioned protest. A total of 160 headlines from the mentioned media outlets were analyzed. The method of quantitative-qualitative content analysis shows that all the analyzed media use all elements of creating moral panic in their headlines related to the protest, according to Cohen's model. This means that they use sensationalistic, dramatic, and often exaggerated headlines. Additionally, certain elements of the protest are presented in a way that suggests they will recur with even more severe consequences, and the protest itself, the participants, as well as lithium mining, are often depicted through symbols. Although elements of moral panic are evident in all media, tabloids dominate its creation. This research contributes to the theoretical and empirical understanding of the moral panic phenomenon, with a particular focus on the role of the media in its production. The application of Cohen's moral panic model to the specific case of the environmental protest in Serbia offers a new perspective on how different types of media (quality media, tabloids, and semi-tabloids) shape public opinion, and the perception of social issues. Through the analysis of headlines in online media, the research provides insight into how, and to what extent the media use elements of moral panic, such as exaggeration and distortion, prediction, and symbolization. These elements are used to shape the narrative about the protests, which can have long-term social, political, and ecological consequences.

Keywords: moral panic, online media, Serbia, media headlines, protest.
Field: Social sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

In modern societies, moral panic is an essential element, identifying certain phenomena, individuals, or events as threats that must be defended against to preserve the social order and community. This often involves problematic behavior by specific people, which is seen as a danger to the very survival of society and requires punishment (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009). The author Bennett believes that society is constantly exposed to moral panic (Bennett, 2018). Although various parties contribute to the creation of moral panic, this paper will focus on the media as the key creators of this phenomenon. Some scholars argue that the media play a crucial role in the production of moral panic (Alexander, 1990; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009; Krznar, 2014; Prodović, 2012). As creators of moral panic, the media influence the public's perception of events or phenomena. Moral panic is both a sociological and socio-psychological phenomenon. The concept of "moral panic" was first introduced in sociology by British sociologist Jock Young in 1971. His work focused on the significant rise in drug use, which caused widespread public concern (Thompson, 1998). The formal integration of this concept into sociology is attributed to Stanley Cohen. He states that a person or event is defined as a threat to values, which is stereotypically portrayed by the mass media, while experts offer solutions, but the situation either disappears or worsens (Cohen, 2011). Based on this, Cohen identified five key elements of moral panic. The first element is the labeling of someone or something as a threat to societal interests and values. The second element involves the media, which present this threat in a recognizable way, leading to a rapid increase in public concern. The fourth element is the reaction from authorities, relevant bodies, or those who shape public opinion. The final element is the eventual decrease of the panic and societal changes. Regarding the media, Cohen highlights three criteria used in the creation of moral panic. The first is exaggeration and distortion, where the media amplify the severity of an event, such as protests, using sensationalist headlines and melodramatic language. The second element is prediction, which involves media forecasting that the event will recur with even more serious consequences. The third element is symbolization, a process

where the media assign negative meanings to certain symbols. This happens when a term is used to represent a specific status, which may be delinquent or deviant, when style becomes a visual marker of that term, and when objects themselves become symbols of status (Cohen, 2011). Media also often engage in the demonization of particular social groups, which is presented sensationally and accepted by the public (Grulović, 2024). Moral panic is also discussed by Yvonne Jewkes in her book Media and Crime. She argues that moral panic arises when the media present an ordinary event as extraordinary. She believes that the subjects of these events are often young people, as their behavior is seen as a test of societal health (Jewkes, 2004). She explains the process of creating moral panic by saying, "the media set in motion a 'deviancy amplification spiral' in which a moral discourse is established by journalists and various other authorities, opinion leaders and moral entrepreneurs, who collectively demonize the perceived wrong-doers as a source of moral decline and social disintegration" (Jewkes, 2004, p. 68). A similar view is shared by Aleksandra Ilić, who believes that the media play a crucial, even decisive role in the creation of moral panic. Through their reporting, they help achieve the goals of the elite, especially in closed societies where the media are neither independent nor objective (Ilić, 2020). Media reporting in such circumstances is not always based on truth but is often rooted in propaganda (Stojanović, 2023). Media theorist David McQueen has discussed situations that are prone to the emergence of moral panic. Similar to Jewkes, he argues that moral panic occurs when society faces significant changes it struggles to adapt to. He uses the Industrial Revolution and the widespread modernization of the 1960s as examples (McQueen, 1998). Professor Charles Acland believes that crises or events that present a threat are a natural part of many societies. He argues that without such situations, there would be less need for regulatory bodies like the police, military, judiciary, and religious orders. In this way, moral panic, as a concentrated concern, prompts organized responses from social institutions (Acland, 2018). A feature of moral panic is the critical language used to examine various phenomena that share notable similarities (Falkof, 2020). Sociologist Milana Ljubičić asserts that several parties contribute to the creation of moral panic, including the media, the public, politicians, lawmakers, representatives of formal social control, and social activists (Ljubičić, 2021). When society is in crisis, there is a higher likelihood that certain events will be viewed as significant threats, sparking moral panic. The response to these threats often includes calls for increased and stricter social control or regulation (Thompson, 1998). This study examines how Serbian online media covered the protest against lithium mining in the Jadar Valley and the company Rio Tinto, held on August 10, 2024, in Belgrade, and whether Cohen's elements of moral panic appear in the headlines of those media. The event was chosen because lithium mining is a key social issue in Serbia, leading to strong societal polarization—while most believe the project would harm nature and public health, others emphasize its economic benefits.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research focuses on how Serbian online media covered the protest against lithium mining in the Jadar Valley and the company "Rio Tinto", which took place on August 10, 2024, in Belgrade. The primary goal is to assess whether elements of moral panic appear in the headlines of online media outlets N1, Informer, Alo, Blic, Politika, and Danas regarding this protest. The online media outlets N1, Informer, Alo, Blic, Politika, and Danas were selected due to their different editorial policies and reporting styles. This selection allows for an analysis of how various media approach the same event and how they use elements of moral panic in their headlines. The research will primarily identify and analyze moral panic elements in these headlines, based on the criteria established by sociologist Cohen, including exaggeration and distortion, prediction, and symbolization (Cohen, 2011). Headlines were chosen because they often represent the first interaction readers have with media content and significantly shape their initial perception of events. The central research question is how and to what extent elements of moral panic are reflected in the headlines of Serbian online media, according to Stanley Cohen's theory. The analysis focuses on headlines published on August 10, 2024, the day of the protest in Belgrade, enabling an examination of media coverage within the context of a specific and timely event. The study analyzes 160 headlines from the selected online media outlets using a quantitative-qualitative content analysis approach. The number of 160 titles was obtained by reviewing the online archives of the six analyzed media outlets.

3. RESULTS

By analyzing 160 headlines from six Serbian online media outlets (N1, Informer, Alo, Blic, Politika, and Danas) from August 10, 2024, related to the protest against lithium mining in the Jadar Valley, we

determined that all the media use key elements of moral panic according to Stanley Cohen's theory. The elements of moral panic appear 169 times. The total number of headlines containing elements of moral panic in some media exceeds the number of published articles, as some headlines included more than one element of moral panic. Elements of moral panic are most pronounced in tabloids (Informer and Alo), which also published the most articles during the protest itself. The most commonly used elements were exaggeration and distortion (a total of 106 headlines), where protests were portrayed as a serious threat to social peace and stability, using dramatic and sensationalistic language, whether referring to direct or paraphrased statements of the actors, or when the headlines lacked specific sources. To a lesser extent (a total of 47 headlines), there is also symbolization, with protests often being described as an attempted coup and protesters as aggressors, which contributes to creating an image of the protest as something that threatens the fundamental values of society. The elements of prediction about possible outcomes of the protests were the least present (a total of 16 headlines), which indicates that the media speculated less about the future consequences of the events. The table below provides a detailed overview of the frequency of each of these elements in the analyzed online media (Table 1).

Table 1: Elements of moral panic in the headlines of Serbian online media about the "There will be no mining" protest.

Online media	Total number of analyzed headlines	The number of headlines with exaggeration and distortion	The number of headlines with prediction	The number of headlines with symbolization	The total number of headlines with elements of moral panic
N1	20	6	5	4	15
Informer	51	50	4	19	73
Alo	37	33	3	16	52
Blic	8	4	1	1	6
Politika	22	11	2	4	17
Danas	22	2	1	3	6
Total	160	106	16	47	169

4. DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of headlines from six Serbian online media outlets during the "There will be no mining" protest against lithium extraction in the Jadar Valley reveals a clear pattern of employing elements of moral panic, as outlined by Stanley Cohen, in all the examined media. These elements, such as exaggeration and distortion, prediction, and symbolization, appear in various forms and with differing intensities, depending on the type of media and its editorial policy. Exaggeration and distortion are the most prominent elements of moral panic, appearing in a total of 106 headlines, and are most prevalent in the tabloids Informer (50 headlines) and Alo (33 headlines). Headlines in these media often feature dramatic and sensational phrases such as "terror," "coup," "fascists," and "violence," among others. An example of this element of moral panic can be found in an article from Informer with the headline "Extraordinary primitivism of fake ecologists! They want to secure pocket money from the West through a coup!" (Informer, 2024), as well as an article from Alo with the headline "Everything Vučić has built and opened, they block - Trains stopped at Prokop, TERROR against the citizens of Serbia!" (Alo, 2024).

These headlines not only depict the protests as a significant threat to public order but also frequently associate them with radical and violent actors, including the opposition, foreign nations and citizens, and even extremist groups. This distortion of reality helps foster the perception that the protests undermine the very stability of the state, with protesters portrayed as potential sources of violence and instability. N1 and Danas are less inclined to feature elements of moral panic. These media outlets concentrated more on the negative impacts of the Rio Tinto project rather than focusing on the protests themselves, as seen in the tabloids. The headlines in N1 and Danas often emphasized the environmental, political, and societal consequences of the project. While these media outlets did report on the protests, their coverage was less sensational, and the protesters were not as strongly portrayed as dangerous groups. Nonetheless, some

headlines in these outlets still contained elements of exaggeration and distortion, primarily attributed to statements from specific individuals. For instance, N1 published "The Prime Minister referred to the protest participants as a rotten gang" (N1, 2024), and Danas reported "Miloš Vučević reacted to the protest: A rotten gang is blocking, they don't even know what they want" (Danas, 2024). Blic published the fewest articles on the protest, and consequently, there were fewer elements of moral panic present (just 6 headlines in total). An example of exaggeration and distortion in this media is the headline (VIDEO) Fight on Gazela during the protest: "Audi" blocked another vehicle, then KICKED THE DRIVER and attacked a young man who tried to intervene (Blic, 2024). Interestingly, Politika, as a serious media outlet, published more headlines with a dramatic tone (11 headlines), such as the headline Croatian media are calling for civil war in Serbia (Politika, 2024). The second most common element of moral panic in the headlines is symbolization, which appears in 47 headlines. It is most prevalent in the headlines of tabloid media Informer (19) and Alo (16). In these, the protests are framed as part of a broader alleged plan to destabilize the country, with protesters labeled as "fascists" or "separatists," and the protests linked to a potential "coup." For example, the headline in Informer reads Tycoon media are calling for civil war! Foreign services have prepared a coup plan and assassination of Vučić! (VIDEO) (Informer, 2024), while the online media Alo published EXTREMISTS ANNOUNCE ECONOMIC TERRORISM: Kokanović: We will strike at the Serbian economy, block the whole country! (Alo, 2024); Petković: It is clear that there are direct ties between separatists in Priština and the organizers of the alleged environmental protests in Belgrade (Alo, 2024). These headlines, instead of focusing on the protests themselves, use negative symbols, further amplifying the sense of danger and threat. N1 and Danas reported on the "There will be no mining" protest with four headlines that featured elements of symbolization. In these media outlets, this element mainly relates to mining and the Rio Tinto project. For example, N1 published Message from students before the protest: The government has committed many wrongdoings, and Rio Tinto is only part of it (N1, 2024), while Danas featured Svetlana Bojković at the protest against lithium: Our gathering is purely environmental, the government accuses us of a coup (Danas, 2024). In some headlines, more than one element of moral panic was present, and symbolization was observed in titles we previously mentioned as examples of exaggeration and distortion, such as when Prime Minister Miloš Vučević called protest participants a "rotten gang." Blic noted one headline with symbolization in the form of a direct quote: Vesić: "The blockade of railway stations is illegal and represents harassment of citizens" (Blic, 2024). Symbolization also appeared in headlines from Politika (4), a media outlet traditionally seen as reputable. In the headline Destabilization of Serbia under the guise of environment (Ćurčić, 2024), a narrative is created about the danger behind environmental initiatives. This is particularly noteworthy because the article was published in one of the more serious and reputable media outlets, which could lead to a negative public perception of environmental issues. The prediction element was the least represented in the analyzed media, appearing in only 16 headlines. N1 had the most prediction-related titles, but they mainly focused on forecasting the damage from lithium mining. The media also published headlines predicting protests, such as Lutovac: Fearmongering continues - the goal is to bring fewer people to the protest in Belgrade (Beta, 2024). In contrast to N1, Informer and Alo made more rigid forecasts about the outcome of the protests. One headline from Informer was Extreme groups will try to radicalize the protests! No one knows what they might resort to! (VIDEO) (Informer, 2024). Alo featured the headline OPPOSITION CONTINUES THE BLOCKADE, DISCLOSE NEXT HELLISH MOVE: Vučić calls an urgent meeting, awaiting an important decision (PHOTO/VIDEO) (Alo, 2024). Meanwhile, Politika ran the headline Spasić: The state will do everything to prevent the disturbance of public order and peace tonight (Politika, 2024). These headlines suggest that the protests could escalate into something more dangerous, adding to a sense of panic in the public. Regarding the aftermath of the protests, nearly all of the analyzed media outlets referenced statements from the Minister of the Interior Ivica Dačić. Danas published Dačić on the protest in Belgrade: Public order and peace were disturbed, criminal charges will be filed (Danas, 2024), and Blic featured Dačić on the protest against lithium mining: "After the rally, there was a serious disturbance of public order and peace, criminal and misdemeanor charges will be filed" (Blic, 2024). Although these predictions were not always accurate, the implications raised by the headlines stirred fear and uncertainty, reinforcing the narrative of the protest as a dangerous social phenomenon. This analysis confirms that all elements of moral panic, as defined by Stanley Cohen, were present in the media coverage of the protests against lithium mining in the Jadar Valley. In line with Cohen's understanding of how the media can shape public perception of social issues as threats, our data shows that tabloids, such as Informer and Alo, used exaggeration and distortion to portray the protests, creating an atmosphere of panic. These elements also appeared in the headlines of N1, Danas, Blic, and Politika, but in a more subdued form. The analyzed media also incorporated elements of symbolization and prediction, further contributing to the narrative of the protest as a destabilizing force. These findings align with Cohen's

theory that the media, especially tabloids, use sensationalism to create negative narratives about certain social issues. This study highlights the differences in reporting styles among various types of media. In N1 and Danas, all elements of moral panic appeared in the coverage of the protest, but their headlines mostly focused on creating a negative narrative about the company Rio Tinto project itself. The use of elements like exaggeration and distortion, prediction, and symbolization was particularly evident in tabloids like Informer and Alo, while more serious outlets and semi-tabloids such as N1, Danas, Politika, and Blic had milder but still present elements of moral panic. These results contribute to existing literature on moral panic by showing that modern media, particularly tabloids, employ strategies that align with Cohen's model, especially in the context of current social issues. The research also underscores the difference in reporting approaches across media types, helping to understand how editorial policies influence narratives on various topics. Moreover, the study suggests that the media can shape public attitudes toward environmental protests, particularly in politically and socially polarized societies.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This analysis of media headlines regarding the "There will be no mining" protest clearly demonstrates how and to what extent various types of media incorporate elements of moral panic in accordance with Cohen's theory. Tabloids like Informer and Alo predominantly use exaggeration and distortion (sensational headlines, melodramatic language, and misleading titles) to portray the protests as a significant threat to social stability. These media outlets often depict protesters as radical groups associated with violence and political destabilization, incorporating elements of symbolism and prediction. In contrast, serious media such as N1 and Danas mostly focus on the environmental, political, and economic implications of the Rio Tinto project. However, even in their coverage, milder forms of moral panic are present, as seen with the semi-tabloid Blic. An interesting case is Politika, a respected media outlet, which frequently used narratives suggesting the dangers of environmental protests, illustrating that even well-established media can contribute to the narrative of social destabilization. The findings from this study indicate that elements of moral panic are present in the headlines about the protests across all the analyzed media, but they appear in different forms and to varying degrees. A key takeaway from this analysis is that, despite the differing approaches among the media outlets, all of them employed elements of moral panic in shaping the narrative around the protests, placing the event within a context of crisis and potential destabilization. This framing could have long-term social consequences, including increased polarization and heightened tensions in society.

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DIGITAL TRANSFORMATIONS SHAPING SME INTERNATIONALIZATION - SERBIAN CASE

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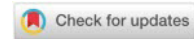
Abstract: The challenges of achieving sustainable development for SMEs in the digital era highlight the need to address both technological and strategic aspects of growth. Recognizing this, the authors reviewed literature and policies, focusing on how firm digitalization and internationalization within Serbia's digital ecosystem can drive innovation in operations, products, and market communication to support SME internationalization. Given that SMEs constitute 99% of Serbia's enterprises, their sustainable development is crucial. To investigate this, data were gathered from 417 small and medium-sized enterprise executives online between March and June 2024, supported by the Association of Employers of Serbia. The study analyzed 18 predefined statements using a quintile rating scale and utilized correlation methods to evaluate the impact of digitalization, the digital ecosystem, and internationalization. Key findings reveal that SME digitization ($R^2 = 0.6658$) and digital ecosystem factors ($R^2 = 0.2292$) exert considerable influence on internationalization. However, the effectiveness of national regulations is constrained by issues in implementation and enforcement. These insights emphasize the importance of embedding digital technologies into SMEs' innovation policies and international strategies to enhance their competitiveness in global markets. This work enriches the academic field by drawing attention to areas for improvement, such as niche marketing, global-born strategies, and digital framework policies, which are essential for strengthening SME export performance. It also advances theoretical discussions on corporate activism, social narratives, and disruptive technologies while addressing gaps in SME internationalization strategies.
Keywords: SME Internationalization, Digitalization, Digital Ecosystem, Innovation Strategies, Serbia
Field: Social Sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

Key contributors to sustainable economic growth in various nations are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). (Ahn., Khandelwal., & Wei, 2011). In recent years, they have increasingly become active players in the international market, fueled by technological progress, which has reduced the risks and expenses of entering foreign markets. (Altuzarra., Bustillo., & Rodriguez, 2016; Angelsberger, 2017). The emergence of digital technologies plays a pivotal role in these advancements. Prior studies have emphasized the intricate connections between internationalization, digitalization, and sustainability within the SME context. (Biesebroeck., Konings., & Martincus, 2016; Bilgin., Lau., & Demir, 2012). However, as noted by Bilkey & Tesar (1977), this field is rapidly evolving, but substantial gaps persist in our understanding of the impact of digitalization on SME internationalization. This study seeks to examine how digital technologies, combined with the national digital ecosystem, influence the SME internationalization process. Internationalization has been understood and defined through multiple perspectives, reflecting its complex and multifaceted nature. Worldwide engagement is often described as a gradual process in which a company broadens its involvement in global markets, establishes connections with international business partners, and conducts transactions across borders. Foundational perspectives emphasize incremental growth and the importance of relationship-building as key components of this process. These definitions are complemented by theoretical approaches that provide deeper insights into how firms internationalize. Among these approaches is the behaviorist perspective. In contrast, the resources and skills approach, rooted in Penrose's (1959) and Teece et al.'s (1997) works, underscores the importance of company-specific capabilities as drivers of business success. The relational (netwotk) perspective emphasizes the significance of relationships and interactions. In promoting internationalization, the born global perspective examines newly established firms that create and exchange knowledge through global networks, as noted by Mercier-Suissa and Bouveret-Rivat (2010). Research on SME internationalization has also identified various factors influencing this process, exploring how information internalization, network development, and other determinants shape SME internationalization. Meyer and Skak (2002) proposed a gradual evolution toward internationalization as SMEs build networks and capabilities. Leonidou (1995) categorized export stimuli into internal drivers, such as human resources.

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Further, the importance of data, expertise, and collaboration in internationalization decisions highlights how these factors collectively influence SMEs' ability to navigate global market A transformative trend in SME internationalization is the rapid adoption of digitalization. Digital practices are reshaping business landscapes by enabling SMEs to enhance their competitive advantage and extend their reach through virtual channels. The integration of technology is driving the emergence of smart companies, enabling SMEs to optimize their operations and, in turn, enhancing their ability to meet the demands of an expanding market and digital consumer base with greater efficiency. These advancements are not merely tools for operational improvement but are reshaping the fundamental ways in which SMEs engage with global markets. The dynamic interplay between digitalization and internationalization raises important questions about how SMEs can harness these technologies to attract and retain digital customers while building sustainable competitive advantages. The literature suggests that strategies embracing new digital technologies and leveraging insights from digital consumption trends will be crucial for SMEs navigating an increasingly interconnected global economy. Future research should further explore how digital transformation influences SME operations, customer engagement, and market positioning, offering actionable recommendations to support their internationalization journeys. The chosen digital factors to be explored in this research are crucial because they have to provide enterprises with the tools, support, and secure environment they need to digitalize effectively and compete globally.

At first, a well-rounded national digital ecosystem that allows enterprises to transition smoothly into digital operations, address international opportunities, and expand in a highly interconnected global marketplace, Building Trust and Security in Digital Operations, Enhancing Competitiveness Through Innovation, Providing Access to Global Financial Tools, Empowering a Skilled, Ensuring Regulatory Alignment and Market Access (e-commerce, digital contracts and payments, simplified online services, cybersecurity, data protection aligned with international standards, and export promotion programs make it easier for enterprises to enter foreign markets), Supporting Data-Driven Global Strategy, Facilitating Cross-Border Partnerships, Promoting Digital Inclusion and Equality Regulatory Framework for Digital Operations and Market Entry, and SMEs digitalization, as the next defined factor to be researched in the study, importance is in supporting enterprise exports, making global operations more efficient, accessible, and responsive to international market demands (Jevtić et al., 2013; Miškić et al., 2024). Cloud technology enables SMEs to store and manage data remotely. Digital tools for customer engagement, such as social media, chatbots, and email marketing, allow SMEs to interact with customers efficiently and personalize communication. Digitalization provides SMEs with access to data analytics tools, helping them make informed decisions based on customer insights and market trends. Adopting e-commerce platforms and other digital sales channels opens new markets and revenue streams for SMEs, helping them reach customers beyond their local area and even internationally. Automation of repetitive tasks reduces errors and increases operational efficiency, allowing SMEs to focus resources on growth and innovation. With increased digitalization, cybersecurity measures have become vital for securing sensitive data and upholding customer confidence. SMEs need to adopt secure practices to safeguard against cyber threats studied in Špiler et al.'s (2023), Srebro et al.'s (2023), and Jevtić et al.'s (2024) works. Many SMEs cater to mobile-centric customers, making mobile-friendly security measures, financial technology (Fintech) solutions and more flexible SME operations are factors characterizing the digital transformation of SMEs, offering them greater operational efficiency, new market opportunities, and the agility needed to thrive in a digital-first world (Jevtić, Vučeković & Tasić, 2024).

The following literature and selected factors of influence on SMEs internationalization are defined by further research model (Figure 1). The model consists of 2 independent variables: SME digitization (1), national digital ecosystem (2), and dependent internationalization of SMEs (3).

Figure 1. Defined study model
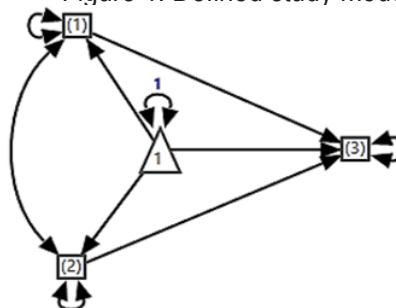
Source: Authors' research

2. METHODOLOGY

Based on existing theoretical sources, relevant literature, and the author's previous studies on digitalization, SME development, entrepreneurship, and innovation, an empirical investigation was conducted to explore the views of 417 SME representatives in Serbia. The study focused on two main factors: the national digital ecosystem and the digitalization of SMEs, and how they influence SME internationalization. The study was conducted using an online questionnaire from March to June 2024, across the entire country, with support from the Association of Employers of Serbia. Respondents provided their views on the significance of the research variables for the dependent variable using a quintile rating scale (1–5, with 5 being the highest rating) across 18 predefined statements. To assess the influence of these variables, regression analysis was used, as presented in Table 1. The average measurements of the SMEs' internationalization (3) as a dependent variable were analyzed with respect to the SMEs' digitization (1) and digital ecosystem (2) - different independent variables, using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The research hypotheses are defined as follows:

H0: *A prominent association is not evident among SMEs' digitization (1), digital ecosystem (2), and SMEs' internationalization (3).*
Ha: *A prominent association can be seen among SMEs' digitization (1), digital ecosystem (2), and SMEs' internationalization (3).*

3. RESULTS

Table 1 presents an analysis that identifies the statements for all variables in the model, highlighting those evaluated most positively and those with the greatest consistency or disagreement among respondents. The highest average scores were for statements "2.1" (4.8369) and "2.2" (4.7649), indicating that respondents rated these items most positively. In contrast, the lowest average scores were for statements "3.1" (3.9544) and "2.6" (4.0839), suggesting a lower level of agreement or less positive responses. The smallest standard deviation was for the statement "2.1" (0.3699), indicating strong agreement among respondents. The highest standard deviation was for the statement "3.6" (0.8219), showing greater variability in responses for that statement.

Table 1. Mean and variability measures for the statements

Claim		
Claims for SMEs' Digitization	**Mean**	**Std Dev**
1.1 Digitalization of internal and external business functions streamlines and optimizes processes, which is crucial for SMEs engaged in exporting	4.4988009592	0.5680800164
1.2 Automation tools streamline the creation and management of export documentation and compliance, reducing human error and enhancing efficiency in customs procedures.	4.1055155875	0.5951674662
1.3 Cloud platforms enable centralized, remote access to information, helping manage export operations and coordinate with global partners from anywhere.	4.3932853717	0.6677696787
1.4 Real-time tracking and automated inventory systems improve stock management, reducing delays and ensuring timely fulfillment of international orders.	4.6858513189	0.6314028238
1.5 Integrated digital supply chain solutions facilitate efficient shipping and tracking, allowing SMEs to monitor shipments and address logistical issues proactively.	4.4844124700	0.5192188128
1.6 Digital financial tools with multi-currency and international transaction capabilities simplify invoicing, payments, and currency conversions for exporters	4.1846522782	0.4970629472
Claims for Significance of Digital Ecosystem	**Mean**	**Std Dev**
2.1 A strong digital infrastructure, including high-speed internet, 5G, and reliable cloud services, allows businesses to seamlessly interact with international markets and customers.	4.8369304556	0.3698728699
2.2 Simplified eCommerce processes and streamlined cross-border logistics empower enterprises to access international customers with ease and efficiency	4.7649880096	0.4465918615
2.3 Adopting international cybersecurity standards ensures data protection and builds confidence among global customers and partners	4.4436450839	0.5346765276
2.4 Availability of cross-border financial services and payment solutions allows enterprises to efficiently manage international transactions and investments	4.4628297362	0.5496368139
2.5 Government export initiatives provide essential resources and guidance for enterprises, making it easier to enter and succeed in foreign markets	4.4700239808	0.5672879555
2.6 Digital platforms that foster international collaboration provide enterprises with opportunities for partnerships, joint ventures, and market expansion	4.0839328537	0.657907431
Claims for SMEs' Internationalization	**Mean**	**Std Dev**
3.1 Online resources, social media insights, and specialized market research platforms help SMEs identify high-potential regions, understand customer preferences, and evaluate competitors.	3.9544364508	0.5373865993
3.2 Access to global market intelligence and data enables enterprises to make informed decisions and tailor strategies to international consumer demands	4.1678657074	0.5552403336
3.3 SMEs then develop a digital strategy that includes selecting appropriate online sales channels, global e-commerce marketplaces or localized e-commerce sites	4.3477218225	0.5687797662
3.4 With insights from data analytics, SMEs can adjust marketing strategies, pricing, and even product features to improve alignment with market demands and maximize growth potential.	4.4052757794	0.5059938651
3.5 Digital tools like chatbots, multilingual support, and CRM (Customer Relationship Management) platforms enable SMEs to provide responsive customer service across time zones.	4.6330935252	0.6333353965
3.6 Localization is critical for engaging international audiences, whew. SMEs adapt their products, website, and marketing materials to fit the cultural, linguistic, and regulatory requirements of each target market	4.2541966427	0.8219570278

Source: Authors' research

Pearson correlation coefficients for all three variables (1), (2), and (3) demonstrate the positive relationships between each pair, with relatively high correlation coefficients. This suggests a significant interdependence among the variables, which can be explored further in analyzing their relationships. Specifically, the correlation between (1) and (2) is 0.7126, suggesting a significant positive relationship, where variable (1) explains 50.77% of the variance in variable (2). Similarly, the correlation between variables (1) and (3) is 0.8293, meaning that variable (1) accounts for 68.77% of the variance in variable (3), also reflecting a strong positive relationship. The correlation between variables (2) and (3) is 0.7038, suggesting a similarly strong connection, with variable (2) explaining 49.53% of the variance in variable (3). To assess the significance of these relationships, reveal that the theoretical model significantly explains the variation observed in the data. This affirms the statistical relevance of the model and justifies the acceptance of the hypothesis (Ha). - A prominent association can be seen between SMEs' digitization (1), digital ecosystem (2), and SMEs' internationalization (3). Further, the regression analysis presented in Table 3 reveals that the independent variables (1) and (2) exhibit a strong influence on the dependent variable (3). This reveals that adjustments in variables (1) and (2) can markedly affect the result of the variable (3). Significantly, all independent variables have p-values under 0.05, highlighting their strong statistical relevance. Among them, variable (1) exerts a stronger influence on the outcome variable, as evidenced by the higher standardized beta coefficient (0.665881 vs. 0.229279).

Table 2. Estimated Parameters

Term	Estimate	Std Error	t Ratio	Prob>|t|	Std Beta	VIF
Intercept	-0.799159	0.202279	-3.95	<0.0001	0	
(1)	0.7602055	0.042802	17.76	<0.0001	0.665881	2.0314508
(2)	0.3888877	0.063591	6.12	<0.0001	0.229279	2.0314508

Source: Authors

A linear regression equation was derived from the data presented in (Table 2), shown in (Formula 1):

$$(3)=-0{,}799159+0{,}7602055\cdot(1)+0{,}3888877\cdot(2) \qquad (1)$$

Figure 2, providing the non-standardized contribution, and Figure 3, providing the standardized contribution to the research model, are included as attachments in the study.

CONCLUSION

This research focused on analyzing the impact of digitalization and the digital ecosystem on the internationalization journey, with Serbian SMEs serving as the primary case study.

The findings highlight the need for SMEs to prioritize these factors to enhance their competitiveness in the global market. Additionally, national policies and regulations should enhance the digitalization framework and support further technological and knowledge integration within SMEs. In this context, the government plays an instrumental role in facilitating SME entry into global markets through supportive trade policies, regulations, and incentives. Since internationalization is fundamentally a capability-building process, it requires SMEs to actively gather information, establish networks, and cultivate innovative and sustainable competencies to remain competitive on the international stage.

This study's outcomes aim to advance the academic discourse surrounding SMEs by highlighting their growth through internationalization and the innovative digital ecosystem within the digital economy in Serbia. Additionally, the findings can inform management practices, particularly efforts to strengthen the digital ecosystem for SMEs through dynamic capabilities, including readiness for change and agile leadership.

However, the study has limitations, particularly in establishing causal relationships as outlined in the hypothesis. The results could be more aligned with theoretical reasoning if the research had focused on specific technology sectors, services, or manufacturing industries rather than SMEs from all industrial sectors.

Future research could adopt a more focused approach to fully explore each process involved in realizing a digital ecosystem and implementing digital technologies within SMEs. Key areas for exploration could include cloud technology, digital customer engagement, digital sales channels, automated

business processes, remote work and collaboration tools, cybersecurity and data protection, mobile-first approaches, financial technology (fintech) solutions, and scalability and flexibility.
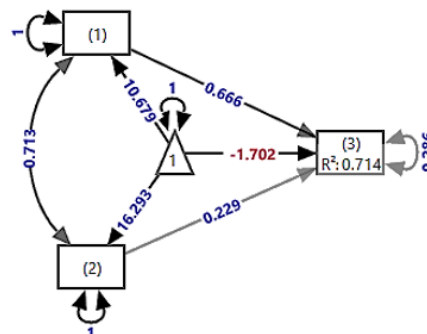
ADDITIONAL DATA
Figure 2. The Defined research framework Non-standard contribution sizes
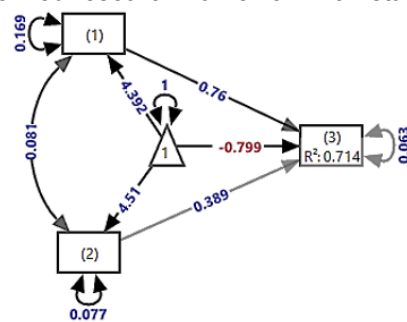
Source: Authors' research

Figure 3. The Defined research framework Standard contribution sizes

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DIGITALIZATION OPPORTUNITIES AND NECESSARY DIGITAL SKILLS IN SOCIAL LOGISTICS (SPECIFICALLY LOGISTICS IN SERVICING THE UNEMPLOYED, DISABLED AND DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE)

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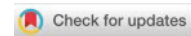
Abstract: The new realities associated with the entry of digitalization into all spheres of life require its active application in the provision of social services. Digitalization in the provision of social services is extremely important from the point of view of the specifics of the people using such services. It is related to their needs, the need for facilitation, shortening the time for their service, expanding access to services and providing greater opportunities for inclusion of people who need and use these services. In the provision of social services, the organization and management of logistics are extremely important, both from the point of view of the delivery of the necessary products and services to the individuals in need, and on the basis of the logistics toolkit, which provides opportunities to optimize logistics costs, which is fundamental in the conditions of resource deficit.

Social logistics (in the public sector) is a multifaceted concept that includes the application of the logistics concept, based on the integration and optimization of material and human flows and their accompanying information flows, through logistics tools, to the provision of public spheres and activities that directly or indirectly are related to people's health, their quality of life and their security and safety (Banabakova, 2023, p. 145, author's definition). The logistics of serving the unemployed, disabled and disadvantaged, which ensures the provision of social services to these users, is one of the main elements of social logistics. Digitalization and the development of digital skills in the provision of social services is directly related to the digitalization of logistics in serving the unemployed, disabled and disadvantaged. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the important role of logistics in all areas of life, including the provision of social services and healthcare. In the conditions of the pandemic, the role of logistics was life-saving.

The purpose of the present study is to highlight the specifics of social services and, on this basis, to identify the need, benefits and opportunities for digitization and the development of digital skills in the provision of social services and the logistics for their implementation in order to ensure better service and respectively – a higher quality of life for people with specific needs. In the development of this article, scientific methods were used, such as critical analysis, comparative analysis, an overview of the leading authors in the researched fields, methods of collecting secondary information and methods of collecting primary information - survey methods (survey and semi-structured in-depth interview with focal groups of experts in the researched fields) and method of observation, analysis of secondary and primary information and others. The main results of the research are in the following directions: identification of the specifics and problem areas in the provision of social services in Bulgaria; substantiating the need, benefits and opportunities for digitization and the development of digital skills in the provision of social services; bringing out the main possible tools for digitalization and development of digital skills in logistics in serving the unemployed, disabled and disadvantaged people in order to improve the quality of social services provided.

Keywords: digitalization, digital skills, social services, logistics in serving the unemployed, disabled and disadvantaged
Field: Social sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

Digitization is "a process of conversion (transformation) of information on an analog medium (text, sound and video signals, telephone pulses) in digital form using electronic devices according the scanning method, which includes the processes of converting analog information into digital. This allows information to be processed, stored and transmitted in a digital environment, via computer networks, satellite, Internet and social networks to the user, regardless of his location." (Pernishka, Blagoeva, Kolkovska, 2021, p. 34). "Digitalization is considered not only as a process of digitizing traditional information flows, but also as an environment integrating digital resources, services and specialists with the necessary knowledge and skills at the level of technologies of this environment, related to the creation, storage, access, use, the dissemination, security and protection of information" (Pernishka, Blagoeva, Kolkovska, 2021, p. 35).

The new realities associated with the entry of digitalization into all spheres of life require its active application in the provision of social services. Digitalization in the provision of social services is extremely important from the point of view of the specifics of the people using such services. It is related to their

needs, the need for facilitation, shortening the time for their service and others. The aim is to guarantee an effective connection between people using social services and the institutions that provide them, in order to achieve an adequate match between the demand and supply of social services. "The main idea of digitization and digital transformation is connected with the assimilation of new projects and activities through the active use of digital technologies. The aim is to master new processes, generate new user value and increase the level of user satisfaction." (Chipriaynova, 2021, p. 51).

The purpose of the present study is to highlight the specifics and problems of social services and, on this basis, to identify the need, benefits and opportunities for digitization and the development of digital skills in the provision of social services and the logistics for their implementation in order to ensure a better service and, respectively, a higher quality of life for people with specific needs.

2. DIGITALIZATION AND DIGITAL SKILLS IN THE PROVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND SOCIAL LOGISTICS AS A PREREQUISITE FOR IMPROVING THEIR QUALITY

According to Zlateva, "human beings have social instincts that are genetically determined. Therefore, man is originally social. The instincts for group identity, coherence, cooperation, justice and others determine his sociality and turn him into a structural element of "external" communities" (Zlateva, 2016, p. 243). The sociality of the individual and of society as a whole lies at the basis of the development of social policy (Banabakova, 2023, p. 124-136).

The main direction of social policy is the provision of social services.

Social services are activities to assist individuals and families who have difficulty or are unable to meet their basic life needs. These services are provided by the state and municipalities, by individuals and legal entities after licensing (Banabakova, 2023, pp. 136-142). Personal social services are designed to meet the social care needs of certain groups of society – children in need, elderly people, people with mental problems, people with mental retardation and disabled people. Services are offered by local authorities, charities and private organisations. State intervention in this area is carried out by local social service agencies. Social care is implemented in the form of: home care (the client is visited at home); day care (the client visits an institution for a certain part of the day or for the whole day); and residential type of care (the client leaves home, lives in an institution and receives care there). "Social services are provided in or outside the usual home environment." (Hristova, Hristov, 1999, p. 211-213)

Social logistics is important for the provision of social services in many directions.

Social logistics (in the public sector) is a multifaceted concept that includes the application of the logistics concept, based on the integration and optimization of material and human flows and their accompanying information flows, through logistics tools, to the provision of public spheres and activities that directly or indirectly are related to people's health, their quality of life and their security and safety (Banabakova, 2023, p. 145, author's definition). The implementation of social logistics in the public sphere requires active state intervention and the construction of the necessary logistics structures at the national, regional and municipal level, the appointment of logistics specialists and the use of the accumulated experience in the field of business and military logistics. However, the most important condition for the development of social logistics is the awareness of its focus on the needs of society. The exact fulfillment of the seven main tasks of logistics, namely – delivery of the right product, at the right time, at the right place, in the right quantity and quality, at the right price (from the point of view of consumers) and to the right consumers, is mandatory, but in social logistics, the needs of society and increasing its quality of life are fundamental (Banabakova, 2023, p. 174-176). In the provision of social services, the organization and management of logistics are extremely important, both from the point of view of the delivery of the necessary products and services to the people in need, and on the basis of the logistics toolkit, which provides opportunities to optimize logistics costs, which is fundamental in the conditions of resource deficit.

The logistics of serving the unemployed, disabled and disadvantaged, which ensures the provision of social services to these users, is one of the main elements of social logistics. This logistics is extremely important mainly because of the specific needs of this segment of the population. The goal is to serve more people in a shorter amount of time, while at the same time making the process less expensive and keeping people satisfied. Logistics related to disabled and disadvantaged people requires not only perfect organization in terms of time, place and costs related to supplies, transport and personnel, but also adaptation of logistics activities to the specific problems of this segment (Banabakova, 2023 , p. 174-176). According to Ilcheva, "**logistics functions in the provision of social services can** be systematized in the following way (Ilcheva, 2021, p. 453-454): resource provision of the material base; providing healthy nutrition; access and provision of health care; information function and organization of

educational services; coordination of activities for the organization of free time and personal contacts of users and others."

In the provision, access and use of social services in Bulgaria, there are a number of problems that can be overcome if these activities are considered in close connection with social logistics and modern logistics principles and tools are applied to them.

According to Ilcheva (Ilcheva, 2023, p. 143-145), the following **problems** related to the system of social services are outlined (Table 1).

Table 1. The main problems of the social services system

Problems	Essence of the problem
Underdeveloped infrastructure and limited access to social services	Despite the significant increase in the number of social services offered in the community, their total volume is not able to cover the existing needs.
Predominance of public service providers, low participation of the private/non-governmental sector and low use of the legally existing public-private partnership option	In the Bulgarian sector of social services, public providers prevail, in contrast to the imposed global practices.
Lack of efficiency and quality of social services in the process of deinstitutionalization	Despite the deinstitutionalization of social services, what has been achieved in terms of the real social integration of persons in need of support is insufficient.
Inadequacy of the model of social services, which is determined by the place of their provision	This model, to a lesser extent, corresponds to the dynamics of modern social relations, changes in the demographic structure and the observance of the rights of users of social services.

Source: Table 1. is adapted from Ilcheva, M. (2023) *Social security – evolution in the conditions of crises and transformations*, Publ. House Institute for Knowledge, Science and Innovation, V. Tarnovo, p. 143-145

Optimizing the process of providing social services in Bulgaria and solving a large part of the problems in this direction is related to digitization and the development of digital skills - the application of modern information and communication technologies that allow integration, improved communication, easier access, monitoring and coordination at each stage of the process of providing social services. The digital transformation of the economy and society is the main factor for the digital development of Bulgaria as part of the European Union. Digital technologies are changing people's lives and opening up new opportunities for the development of all sectors and society as a whole. "A leading priority for the European Union is to build a society that is supported by digital technologies, in the context of common values and with the aim of making people's lives easier" (Ilcheva, 2023, p. 149-156). Digitalization is also extremely important for the social services sector, because it helps to expand access to services and provides greater opportunities for inclusion of people who need and use these services.

"Digitalization in the provision of social services is related to the general process of digitization and development of digital competences in Europe and follows the main **trends** in this direction, such as (Ilcheva, 2023, p. 151): turbulent and comprehensive digital transformation of the economy of Europe; uneven distribution – only 20% of small and medium-sized enterprises in Europe are highly digitized; different degree of introduction of electronic government - from 75% of electronic public services in some European countries to less than 30% in other countries (European Commission, 2019); increasing digital exclusion and inequality". These trends show that the digitization process in some of the European countries, including Bulgaria, is still at an initial stage of development. "Bulgaria permanently occupies the last 28th place in the EU. The trend for one of the lowest levels of digital skills in the EU is deepening, with the percentage of the population with basic digital skills in Bulgaria being 29% against an average of 58% for the EU" (DESI Index Data, 2020).

Digitization and digital transformation in the provision of social services is necessarily related **to increasing the professional qualifications and skills of employees for working with innovative information and communication technologies and respectively based platforms**. The new realities require the integration of the efforts, experience and knowledge of institutions dealing with the provision of social services and IT specialists in order to obtain a synergistic effect in terms of the quality of social services provided.

The effective and efficient application of digitization in the provision of social services in Bulgaria faces a number of challenges such as (Ilcheva, 2020, p. 241-250): Bulgaria's lagging behind in terms of insufficient investments in information infrastructure and development of the necessary digital skills, which

are interconnected and mutually conditioned; digitization and globalization lead to a growing demand for new skills, both by employers and by social workers, with the combination of technical and social skills gaining particular importance, making the transformation of human resources the most valuable capital for the development of social services; technical skills must be complemented by "soft skills", which requires large investments for training and development of the necessary skills and competencies; insufficient connection between the social sphere and the digital sector, which also explains the weak application of information and communication technologies in social services and others.

In Europe, including Bulgaria, a major social problem is the aging population. Therefore, the main applications of information technologies are aimed at their wider use for prevention, diagnosis and rehabilitation. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the process of the wider use of artificial intelligence **in the form of**: artificial intelligence thermometer, smart health data support applications, social distancing software and applications, smart cameras, chatbot systems in the role of smart applications with virtual assistant, blockchain technologies and others (European Commission, 2020). Robots (telepresence and as portable devices) can also be used to provide social care. Their application reduces the risk of infection and ensures continuity of care in conditions of isolation, restrictions on freedom of movement and social distancing.

The use of the possibilities of digitalization and respectively artificial intelligence in the system of social services leads to **the optimization and respectively to the improvement** of a number of processes, such as: planning the distribution of resources; shortening the time for processing applications for benefits, submission and processing of applications for the use of various social services; forecasting the needs of users of social services at an individual level; assisting public employment services in matching possible jobs with candidates in a more efficient way and others. Digitization in the provision of social services is also necessary in social services from a distance, for which purpose the construction of digital on-line centers is necessary. The main applications of digital technologies in social services are: electronic applications; artificial intelligence; digital platforms; and digital assistant. In the social services system, digital platforms are widely used, providing more opportunities to connect social service users and providers of these services for home care and childcare. The use of this type of technology as an intermediary between users and providers of social services tends to increase in the future because these platforms create an open market for the use of this type of service (Digital labor platforms in Europe, 2019).

"The issue related to the security of service users in the mass digitization of the social services sector is also important. Eurofound studies show that digital technologies increase the sense of security of social service users" (Eurofound, 2019). This is especially true for the elderly, who having an easy-to-use digital device to monitor their individual risks can increase their sense of security.

3. DIGITALIZATION OPPORTUNITIES AND NECESSARY DIGITAL SKILLS IN LOGISTICS IN SERVING THE UNEMPLOYED, DISABLED AND DISADVANTAGED

The digitalization and development of digital competencies in the provision of social services is directly related to the digitalization of **logistics of serving the unemployed, disabled and disadvantaged**, which ensures the provision of social services to these users.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the important role of logistics in all spheres of life, including the provision of social services and healthcare. In the conditions of the pandemic, the role of logistics was life-saving. According to Zlateva, "COVID-19 has further accelerated and compressed the course of digitalization of the economy, social processes and, respectively, of logistics, and has actually confirmed the correctness and necessity of the adopted direction of social development. Dealing with the pandemic was assisted by digital infrastructure – online business, online education, online services and digitalization of public services. All this has categorically shown that the future of public life and in particular the economy and logistics is digitalization." (Zlateva, 2021, p. 743). Modern realities require active application and development of digitalization and digital skills in business and military logistics (Banabakova, 2022, p. 12-14). The experience gained in these two types of logistics can also be successfully applied in the logistics of serving the unemployed, disabled and disadvantaged. "As a result of the advent of digitalization, logistics and transport are taking on a new face and the supply chain is undergoing a complete change. With logistics becoming the foundation of every field, new development strategies are already being developed, aimed at the constantly emerging innovations in logistics, such as robotics, artificial intelligence and algorithms for smart machines. The latest technological innovations aim, on the one hand, to reduce the total costs of logistics, and on the other hand, through logistics to improve customer satisfaction and achieve a higher quality of service" (Nahata, 2018).

According to Rakovska and other researchers in the field, the applied "information systems in logistics, also called logistics software, are very diverse" (Rakovska, Dragomirov, Lukanov, 2018, p. 283). They are constantly developing and improving with the idea of better meeting the needs of logistics and consumers. Digitalization in the field of logistics is manifested in a number of **directions** (Banabakova, 2023, p. 109). The opportunities for digitalization in the logistics sector are also fully applicable in logistics when serving the unemployed, people with disabilities and people in disadvantaged situations.

The main place is occupied by **Enterprise resource management (ERP) software systems**, which are imposed as a standard for software supporting logistics management (Rakovska, Dragomirov, Lukanov, 2018, p. 289). "The application of ERP systems is required and established due to the complexity of organizational processes and the separation of a large number of heterogeneous organizational units. As a result, the need arises for an effective way to exchange information, a unified database for its storage, as well as a tool to sift data, analyze it and present it in a form that corresponds to and supports the making of correct decisions by every employee throughout the organization, regardless of their functions" (Hlebarov, 2021, p. 182).

The transport is very important for logistics related to the provision of social services. Digitalization in transport companies is already widely used and has proven benefits. The experience gained can also be used in the digitalization of transport, necessary for the provision of social services. The main types of software used in transport are distinguished by the criteria of software with an installation nature and functionality (Banabakova, 2022, pp. 12-20). In transport management, a suitable choice for operational and business software **are Transport management systems – TMS**, which are software developments that are part of supply chain management systems. TMS has many forms, and can be a standalone information system or a component of wider process management software. The functions of a TMS system vary depending on its developer and needs, but in terms of transport, **the optimal functions are: deliveries** - monitors important events and manages contacts with shippers; **planning and optimization** - selects the most effective options and routes and finds options for optimizing processes; **task execution** - manages daily processes, loading and unloading, transport documents, information exchange and process monitoring; **audit** - manages all financial processes of the transport operation; **report and analysis** - analyzes the performance of individual units, as well as the entire organization.

For logistics related to the provision of social services, the storage of inventories is also important. Therefore, **Information systems for managing warehouse activities in logistics** are also applicable. Such are **Warehouse Management Systems (WMS)** (Rakovska, Dragomirov, Lukanov, 2018, p. 286). Their purpose is to support warehouse processes related to: tracking material flows and document flow; optimization of a number of warehouse activities; and management of automated warehouse systems.

If necessary, in logistics of serving the unemployed, disabled and disadvantaged, **the information technologies for automatic identification of units in logistics** can also be applied (Rakovska, Dragomirov, Lukanov, 2018, p. 290-298). Automatic identification is an automated identification of units through computer systems. For the application of automatic identification in logistics when providing social services, **barcode technology and radio frequency identification (RFID) technology** can be used.

In addition to the use of appropriate software products, digitalization in logistics is also developing in a number of innovative directions (Nahata, 2018), which are also applicable in logistics of serving the unemployed, disabled and disadvantaged in order to increase the efficiency and improve the quality of social services, such as: flexible logistics; blockchain (a system for tracking computer records); drones; sustainable logistics and others.

Information management systems used in logistics can be adapted to the needs of any organization. But for this purpose, IT companies that implement, configure and make training are extremely important, because if the procedure is not carried out well, the results may not be positive. The main **reasons** for this are that the procedure is long, expensive and often there is a lack of good communication between the organization that needs logistics software and the IT company. "To identify the main problems and forms of communication between IT service client organizations and IT companies, a study was conducted using the following **methods**: desk research, in-depth interviews, focus group interviews and a questionnaire survey" (Serafimova, D., Andreeva, A., Banabakova, V., 2022, p. 347-348). The studies were conducted among representatives of organizations performing logistics (managers, experts and employees) during the period 2021 - 2023.

One of the main problems faced by all participants in the survey is the need for the provided IT service to be modified and improved soon after. Of the respondents, 67% indicated that this is often necessary, and 33% indicated that this has been necessary at most once. **Another important problem** for organizations performing logistics (34% often, and the remaining 66% - at least once) is related to the fact that when assigning the task, the client organizations have explained in detail what services are expected

from the IT companies, but have received a service that does not fully meet their initial requirements. **A significant problem** is related to communication, with the results of the survey showing that 34% of the interviewed logistics experts indicated that they had great difficulties in communicating with IT specialists, due to the specific computer terminology that the latter use. Of the remaining respondents, 33% indicated that they had such difficulties, but they were not serious, and the remaining 33% showed that they had no such problems. – Figure 1.

Figure 1. Problems communicating with IT specialists due to the specific computer terminology they use
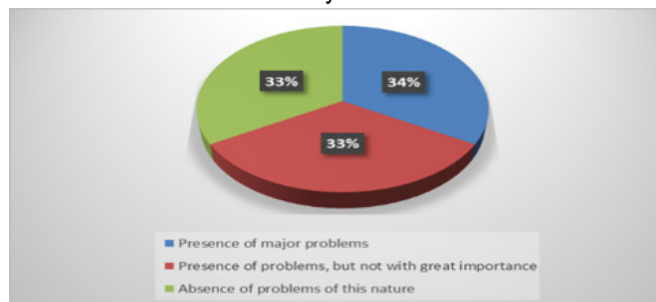
Source: Figure 1. is adapted from Serafimova, D., Andreeva, A., Banabakova, V. (2022). Digitalization of Business and Public Organizations - Communication Problems with IT Companies and Possible Solutions. In: Ciurea, C., Boja, C., Pocatilu, P., Doinea, M. (eds) Education, Research and Business Technologies. Smart Innovation, Systems and Technologies, Vol 276, p. 348, Springer, Singapore

The results of the study show that effective communication and interaction between the client and the IT service provider are very important, because of they are the main prerequisite for providing an information product adequate to the needs, which guarantees the provision of a quality logistics service.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Digitalization and the improvement of digital skills in the provision of social services, including in the logistics of serving the unemployed, disabled and disadvantaged are an element of the overall strategy for implementing a sustainable transformation of social services. "The strategy for sustainable transformation is inextricably linked to promoting social innovations (which also include digitalization and the development of digital competencies in the provision of social services) and improving social safety nets" (Ilcheva, 2023, p. 163-165).

The benefits of applying digitalization in transport related to the provision of social services are expressed in: a significant reduction in overall logistics costs; strict fulfillment of requests; transportation of the necessary goods within the agreed deadlines; ensuring high quality of logistics services, and others.

The benefits of implementing information systems for managing transport and warehouse activities in logistics related to the provision of social services are: reducing the level and accelerating the turnover of inventories; increasing the number of users served; reducing the time for providing social services; improving the quality of social services; opening up opportunities to reduce the cost, respectively - the costs of social services; opportunities for more flexible response to changes in the demand for social services, and others.

The benefits of applying automatic identification technologies in logistics in the provision of social services - barcode technology and radio frequency identification (RFID) technology are: they are flexible, easy and convenient to use; automatic operation; human intervention to correct information is excluded; user service costs are reduced; they work in real time and in different environments; the traceability of material assets is facilitated and accurate; high data security is achieved, and others.

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POSSIBILITIES OF APPLICATION OF MODERN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING ART SUBJECTS

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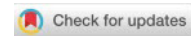
Abstract: The paper discusses the possibilities of application of modern educational technology in teaching art subjects, specifically music and art culture, in primary school. Modern educational technology, including digital platforms, multimedia tools and interactive applications, offer significant potential for enriching the teaching process, making it more dynamic, interactive and adapted to the needs of students. Using these resources, teachers can combine traditional teaching methods with modern technologies, which allows students to learn in a way that is more adapted to their interests and needs, with a richer visual and audio experience. In this regard, the aim of this paper is to explore the advantages and challenges of integrating these technologies into teaching art subjects. Special attention is paid to the impact of technology on student creativity, motivation and engagement, as well as the role of teachers in integrating these resources into teaching. The paper emphasizes the importance of developing teachers' digital competencies, which are key to the successful implementation of modern teaching of art subjects. The role of the teacher in such teaching is multifaceted and requires responsibility, patience and flexibility. The teacher acts as a guide and mentor who helps students safely explore and use all the opportunities that technology offers them, while at the same time encouraging them to creative expression and independent learning. With proper guidance and support, the teacher helps students develop not only artistic, but also digital skills that will be valuable to them in the future. The paper presents examples of good practices and recommendations for improving teaching through the innovative use of modern educational technology.
Keywords: modern educational technology, teaching of music and art culture, primary school
Field: Humanities

1. INTRODUCTION

The presence of modern technologies in all areas of life in the 21st century has influenced the need for their application in education as well. The justification of this need is based on the general social importance, on the future professional relevance of modern technologies, on the pedagogical effects in improving learning and learning results, and on the potential of changes that could occur in institutions such as schools (Nadrljanski et al., 2016, pp. 16-17). As technical and technological development takes place at a high speed, "the teaching itself must understandably follow everything that is happening in the outside world and to a greater or lesser extent follow that development, enriching it through new goals, contents, methods and forms of work, teaching aids, technical devices..." (Popović, 2007, pp. 59). Modern educational technology should not be understood only as "the application of computers (which is inevitable today due to their many possibilities of use) but as the application of various forms, ways and methods of work in the educational process made possible by technical devices such as various forms of television, video, satellites, telecommunications, educational networks and services, optical technology and etc. Although computer technology has taken over the numerous possibilities of using earlier teaching aids and resources, the role of educational technology has not diminished, but on the contrary, it has increased its role and importance because it has gained new possibilities of use with a better quality of presenting the existing reality and influence on students" (Даниловић, 2009, pp. 959). Accustomed to a multitude of diverse information that comes to them at high speed thanks to modern technologies, students expect constant attention in various creative ways. In this regard, teachers are expected to learn quickly, be dexterous and adapt to the situation, so the application of modern educational technologies should include all solutions applicable to the teaching process, such as the use of digital platforms, multimedia tools and interactive applications that offer significant potential for enrichment teaching process, making it more efficient, comprehensive and adapted to the needs of students. With a multimedia approach to the teaching process, "not only the style and way of work changes, but also the quality of knowledge to a large extent. This creates conditions for the acquisition of more diverse, dynamic and complex knowledge" (Stanković, 2012, pp. 159). The use of modern technologies opens up numerous opportunities and

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perspectives in education. They offer a wide range of new opportunities for learning, teaching and access to knowledge at all levels of education and within all subjects.

Technology enables quick and easy access to a wealth of information from various sources. Students can use the Internet, online databases, digital books, and other resources to expand their knowledge and explore topics of interest. Technological tools enable the personalization of the educational experience, adapting the teaching process to the individual needs and way of learning of each student because they have "such possibilities that it can simulate the natural flow of the teaching process to the greatest extent possible, individual and independent ways, forms and methods of learning, and can create such an intellectual environment, or learning environment, in which each student can progress to the extent that his intellectual abilities, motivation and prior knowledge allow him" (Bilandžija, 2010, pp. 238). Adaptive software, interactive tutorials and personalized courses are some examples of technological solutions that support personalized learning. Technology can improve students' engagement through interactive activities, games, simulations and other multimedia content, through which they can have a better experience in learning and acquiring knowledge. These tools often encourage greater interest, motivation and active participation of students in class. Digital learning platforms enable collaboration and communication between students and teachers regardless of geographical distances. Students can collaborate on projects, share ideas, provide feedback, and learn from each other through online discussions, forums, group work, and other tools, which fosters the development of social connections among students and enhances their collaboration. Modern technology enables the collection, analysis and interpretation of data on student progress. Teachers can use this information to adjust their teaching methods, identify areas that require additional support, and provide individualized support to each student. By accessing different tools and technologies, teachers can improve the quality of teaching and facilitate learning. In addition, information technology can be "useful to them in all phases of the teaching process, both in the preparation phase and in the implementation phase. In the phase of teacher preparation, it is particularly important due to the possibility of collecting data, analyzing information and preparing content that include different types of media, the availability of information, content and different sources that can to use in teaching, as well as for communication and exchange of information with colleagues. In addition, its application simplifies and makes the assessment and testing of students' knowledge less subjective" (Maričić & Purić, 2011, pp. 815). Observed from these aspects, technology becomes a necessary and integral part of modern educational practice, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and providing students with the opportunity to develop the necessary skills for the 21st century, including working with information, communication, creativity and critical thinking, as well as the ability to connect their knowledge with the real world through practical applications of the learned material.

With the aim of pointing out the necessity of developing teachers' competencies related to the use of modern technologies in teaching, UNESCO published a project called the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers. This document defines a common platform and frameworks of digital competences that should be possessed by a teacher within the framework of modern or future educational practice. Among other things, teachers should be: aware of the educational policy that indicates the importance, role and obligation of applying modern educational techniques and technology in teaching; able to integrate ICT into their curricula; get to know where, when, how much, why and how to use ICT in classroom activities; get familiar with basic hardware components and software operations; able to use technology with the whole class, small groups, but also in individual student activity; get in touch with various tools and educational software that are directly related to their subject and with applications that can be of didactic use when mastering teaching topics and content (UNESCO ICT, 2011). Furthermore, this document supports initiatives related to the integration of ICT in teacher education, equality in education, quality of learning and teaching, professional development of teachers, more efficient management of education, as well as more efficient management of administration.

Dealing with the issue of modern university education, Stanković (2012) states that unfortunately, in our region, the development and application of modern technologies in education is proceeding at a much slower pace (than the needs dictate) compared to the developed countries of the world and their educational systems. This author concludes that, among other things, it is necessary to "involve and connect with the main faculties, because after obtaining the diploma, teachers are almost left to their own devices, not to mention the large presence of earlier personnel who did not even have the opportunity to study educational technology during their education. It is necessary to intensify and accredit as many courses as possible, organize symposiums and seminars, especially research projects in this field, in order to raise the awareness of educators even more and adequately popularize the most modern pedagogical achievements" (Stanković, 2012, pp. 163). Other authors also point to the fact that the integration of modern technologies into the educational process requires appropriate training and digital

competences of teachers, because technology as an instrument is not enough by itself. In their opinion, it is crucially important that "teachers are ready to function in a more open, flexible environment. It is for this reason that it is important for teachers to be familiar with trends and tools in education, in order to see the advantages of using new tools and adapt and use them in the best way in teaching" (Bošković, et al., 2020, pp. 29). Considering that a very unfavorable situation prevails in our educational and teaching practice when it comes to the introduction of innovations in the teaching process, especially when it comes to the application of modern educational technology, the authors Arsić and Zaporožac (2021) raise the question of the possibility of overcoming the current situation. According to their opinion, it is necessary, first of all, to create awareness of the need to introduce innovations into the teaching process and adopt a clear strategy that should enable: 1) the introduction of the subject of modern educational technology (as mandatory) in the study programs of teaching faculties; 2) organizing quality training by introducing a "special group" of elective subjects in the domain of pedagogical-psychological and didactic-methodical character as well as educational technology for those teachers who have completed or are completing "non-teaching" faculties, and are employed or will be employed in teaching; 3) bridging "misunderstandings" between experts in technical and social sciences, especially pedagogical sciences, and developing awareness among both "that they can understand each other"; 4) creating a favorable pedagogical climate for the introduction of innovations in teaching through the motivation of teachers, but also of all those who are involved in any way in the organization and implementation of the teaching process (Арсић & Запорожац, 2021, pp. 362).

Immensely valuable research results are the one provided by the authors who dealt with the issue of remote learning during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Vasojević, et al., 2021; Jovanović & Dimitrijević, 2023; Wang & Zheng, 2021). Chinese authors Wang and Zheng conclude that after the full opening of schools, we should pay attention to the positive experiences and successful pedagogical practices during the previous period and try to make it part of the new normality. These authors indicate that it is particularly important to understand the benefits of using ICT as part of the curriculum and the improved competence of teachers that will enable them to integrate technologies into pedagogical activities. They also point out that, in the post-COVID-19 period, technology can be integrated into education in a number of ways by teachers knowing how to use national platforms, conducting synchronous online lessons, organizing video-based flipped learning and using TV and radio programs for learning. Such acquired knowledge enables teachers to face challenges in new ways and to integrate all successful practices into school teaching in the period after COVID-19 (Wang & Zheng, 2021). Jovanović and Dimitrijević (2023) were engaged in research aimed at examining the barriers that students encountered during the implementation of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research was conducted on a sample of 424 high school students using a specially designed instrument that included 40 potential barriers that were grouped into nine dominant factors: socio-emotional, substantive, communication and support, technical skills, assessment, technical conditions, administrative, organizational and cheating on tests. A ranking of the selected factors "showed that in our sample, cheating on tests and assessments was the most common obstacle, while technical skills were the least obstacle. The obtained results indicate significant pedagogical implications in the field of didactic-methodical education and professional development of teachers, but also the need to empower them for cooperative and team work" (Jovanović & Dimitrijević, 2023, pp. 102). Some of the mentioned problems, but also the advantages that teachers faced during remote learning before and after the time of the coronavirus pandemic, represent extremely valuable experiences that change the way we learn and teach today.

The introduction of modern educational technologies in the teaching of art subjects, specifically music and fine arts, in elementary school, opens up new opportunities for teaching and learning, enriching traditional methods with interactive, dynamic and personalized approaches. Thus, students can learn "to critically interpret media messages, to convey their ideas through multimedia art forms in a collaborative environment, show creativity and innovative ideas, possess information and media literacy, use ICT, be flexible and adaptable, productive and responsible with interdisciplinary and multicultural education" (Ilić, 2019, pp. 3). In addition, the application of modern technologies in art subjects facilitates the learning process, allows students to explore new media and develop creative skills through interactive digital tools. This topic becomes especially important in today's society, where children already have contact with digital technologies from an early age and "come to school with rich experience, their interest in information and communication technologies and experience in their use is a good prerequisite and motivation for further developing that knowledge at school" (Ilić, 2015, pp. 5). Using the available resources of modern technology, combined with traditional teaching methods, students are enabled to learn and create in a way that is more adapted to their interests and needs, with a richer visual and audio experience.

Based on everything that has been said so far, it is clear that in the teaching of art subjects - art and

musical culture in elementary school, the educational process today implies the indispensable application of modern educational technology. Digital technology thus becomes an integrative element that combines the creative aspects of art with technological possibilities, making the teaching of these art subjects more accessible, interactive and current for students. By finding common concepts that connect these two fields, technology and art, the foundations are created that allow them to complement each other and create new opportunities for creative expression and learning.

2. DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN THE TEACHING OF ART SUBJECTS - ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES

The subjects of music and art culture are an integral part of the primary school educational system. These teaching disciplines, through various artistic activities and creative processes, contribute to the development of students' creative abilities, aesthetic experience, and artistic expression. Music culture is a subject that deals with the development of students' musical abilities and skills, learning about the development of musical art through its historical development, as well as learning about the musical traditions of their own and other nations. Activities such as singing, playing, mastering the basics of musical literacy, listening to music and creating music contribute to the development of students' musical taste, creativity and ability to express themselves musically. Art culture is a subject focused on visual arts and allows students to express themselves through drawing, painting, sculpting and other forms of artistic creativity. Students learn different techniques of artistic expression, become familiar with artistic styles and culture, and develop aesthetic sensitivity. Both subjects play an important role in developing a love for music and visual arts, as well as the emotional and creative development of students, helping them to understand and value artistic expressions both in their work and in art and culture in general.

In the conditions of general digitization and computerization, the use of digital platforms, multimedia tools and interactive applications in the teaching of music and art culture is becoming more common, enabling students to access contents and resources that would otherwise not be available in a traditional school environment. Such tools provide students with the freedom and opportunity to create and produce, while learning about digital technology and multimedia forms of expression. However, with an emphasis on the specifics of these artistic disciplines, which are traditionally based on practical work and interaction with sound, shapes, colors and materials, it is necessary to point out that modern technologies do not replace traditional artistic media, but rather they only expand them to the possibilities of artistic expression, communication and perceptions. Contemporary media are not used in isolation from classical artistic media or in an isolated cultural context. Modern and traditional media should be used together, they should be used by taking the best of both media" (Ilić, 2019, pp. 110), because although it brings numerous advantages, digitalization of teaching also poses certain challenges for students and teachers.

The integration of modern technologies can significantly improve interactivity, student motivation and creativity in teaching. By using certain resources, teachers can combine traditional teaching methods with digital technologies, which allows students to learn in a way that is more adapted to their interests and needs, with a richer visual and audio experience. The application of digital platforms and tools must be adapted to the age of the students, so that they can use these resources independently or with minimal help from the teacher in the most effective way. Some of the platforms and tools that are suitable for primary school students are: Google Classroom is a platform useful for organizing tasks and materials, and in teaching art subjects it allows teachers to post audio and video materials, images of works of art or links to digital content. This platform is easy to use, even for younger students, with minimal training; YouTube contains a large number of videos in the field of music and visual arts that are adapted to the age of students. YouTube Kids is an even safer option, aimed at younger users, with content filtered and adapted to their needs; Kahoot! and Quizizz are tools suitable for creating quizzes and interactive games that allow students to test their knowledge in a fun way. Both tools are suitable for elementary school students because they are visually appealing, intuitive and fun, and can also be used to practice art concepts; The Google Arts & Culture platform enables virtual tours of museums and galleries, which is an ideal way to introduce students to works of art and cultural landmarks from around the world. Upper elementary students can discover art with quality images and easily accessible information. Soundtrap for Education is an online music recording and editing platform that offers a simple interface suitable for elementary school students. It allows students to experiment with sound and create their own music, which can be very stimulating for their creativity in teaching music culture; Canva for Education is a useful tool for creating digital posters, presentations and other visual creations. Her educational program is free and easy to use, with a variety of templates that students can use to create their own artwork; Platform ClassDojo provides support for communication and partial integration of teaching content. It

is mainly used for communication between teachers, students and parents, but it also has the option to post short educational videos and photos, which can be useful in teaching art subjects; Procreate Pocket is a tool available for mobile devices that allows the creation of digital art. Procreate is suitable for upper elementary students who are interested in digital painting, as it provides numerous options for drawing and image processing; Chrome Music Lab is a free online tool that allows students to learn basic music concepts through interactive activities. The laboratory is easy to use and adapted to younger students, who can explore basic musical elements (rhythm, melody, harmony...) in a fun way; Scratch is a visual programming language that enables the creation of animations and games, but it can also be used in art classes to create interactive stories and visual projects. The platform is youth-friendly, making programming and art accessible and fun. When choosing and applying these platforms, in addition to the age of the students, it is important that the teacher also takes into account the level of their digital skills. For younger students, simpler tools and those with a visually appealing interface are recommended, while older students can work on more advanced projects and use more complex platforms.

The role of the teacher in explaining and guiding students through digital activities in the teaching of art subjects is of crucial importance for the successful and purposeful use of technology. The teacher acts as a guide and mentor to help students safely explore and take advantage of the opportunities that technology provides. With proper guidance and support, the teacher helps students develop not only artistic, but also digital skills that will be valuable to them in the future. In this regard, a teacher who uses digital tools and platforms in teaching should possess key digital competencies, namely: use a computer, tablet or smartphone at a basic level, including the ability to work in operating systems (Windows, macOS or Android), navigate in internet browsers and using basic programs such as word and spreadsheet processors; is familiar with educational platforms that facilitate the organization and implementation of classes (Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams or Moodle), and knows multimedia tools adapted to the teaching of art subjects; knows how to create and manage various digital contents (presentations, videos and visual materials); knows how to use digital tools to encourage interaction and collaboration among students (Google Docs, Padlet or Nearpod); knows how to integrate technology into the curriculum so that it supports and enhances learning, rather than technology being just a supplement without an educational purpose; is able to check the quality, relevance and reliability of digital content, as well as to evaluate student achievements in digital tasks; is familiar with the basic principles of online security and privacy, in order to ensure the protection of student data and his safety while using the Internet; understanding the ethical and legal aspects of using digital content (respect for copyright, proper citation of sources and ethical behavior on the Internet); support for students' digital literacy and continuous learning and adaptation to new technologies.

Although digitization of teaching brings numerous advantages, it also poses certain challenges for students and teachers. Potential risks include over-reliance on technology instead of traditional techniques and methods essential to the development of artistic abilities; lack of personal expression and intuitiveness, which leads to a decrease in the originality of artistic creation and works of art; distracting students from the actual artistic creation and consideration of details in their works due to the simultaneous use of multiple tools, applications and platforms; lack of personal touch and creativity in works of art due to excessive commercialization and use of templates; the loss of fine motor skills as an important aspect of artistic work in traditional media, as well as the danger of inadequate protection of privacy and data security. In this context, it is important that technology is used as a tool to improve teaching, not as its replacement, and that teachers carefully choose which digital tools and platforms to include in teaching in order to encourage the development of students' artistic skills and creativity in the best way.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Modern educational technology, including digital platforms, multimedia tools and interactive applications, is becoming more and more prevalent in the teaching of music and art in primary school, allowing students to explore different artistic media, combine sound, image, text and animation in their works, which significantly expands the range of their creative expressions. This availability of tools and resources gives students the freedom to experiment and develop their ideas in ways that were not possible in traditional classroom settings. By applying digital technologies, teachers have the opportunity to improve their pedagogical work, providing students with a more comprehensive and interactive education. In this context, teachers play a key role as facilitators, who not only impart knowledge, but also guide students through the process of digital creation, encouraging them to explore and express their own ideas. Through digital platforms and tools, teachers can create different teaching patterns that stimulate active and collaborative classroom dynamics. With the digitization of teaching comes new forms of interaction

among students, who have the opportunity to collaborate on projects in real time, exchange ideas and create together. These tools not only encourage creativity, but also develop critical thinking, problem solving and collaboration skills. Teachers who know how to integrate such tools into their teaching can provide students with a deeper and more meaningful educational experience based on personal research, innovation and teamwork. Although they offer numerous advantages, digital technologies also bring certain challenges. Over-reliance on technology can lead to the neglect of traditional artistic techniques, which are still important for the development of artistic expression and technical skills. Therefore, it is necessary to find a balance in the application of technology and the maintenance of traditional artistic methods, so that students develop skills that include both digital and conventional creation. In addition, teachers must be aware of the ethical and security aspects of technology use, as well as the responsible use of resources and the protection of student data. Finally, digital technologies are not only a tool that makes teaching more efficient and interesting, but also a catalyst for changes in the education system. Those who know how to use them in the right way can significantly improve art education and create future generations of students who will be ready to use technology as a tool for creation, innovation and expression. In this sense, teachers have an important role in training students to understand and use technology in a responsible and creative way, which is the key to developing artistic expression in the digital age. Digital technologies are a necessary and inevitable part of modern education. Their integration into the teaching of art subjects has the potential to significantly improve students' creative development, encourage innovation and enable new ways of expression. However, in order to fully utilize this potential, it is necessary for teachers to constantly improve their digital competences, as well as to find a balance between traditional and digital teaching methods, so that students get the best of both teaching models.

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EUROPEAN UNION'S PRACTICE TURN IN "GREEN" POLICIES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS

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Abstract: The European Union's (EU) diplomatic practice stands out as a unique and distinct approach, setting it apart from other diplomatic practices. Putting the European Green Deal at the center of the whole-of-government approach and steering the EU into accelerating the implementation of Agenda 2030 makes this distinction even more realistic. This paper aims to delve into its core aspect, particularly its role in elevating "green" policies to the forefront of the accession negotiations with the Western Balkans (WB). This research, utilizing the theory of practice approach, describes the recent "turn" in EU policies and investigates if the EU is a true and innovative leader on this topic in the Western Balkans (WB). In this context, the first concern is whether the WB truly acknowledges the EU as a crucial leader to follow in transforming green policies. The second concern is whether the EU is guiding and directing the WB through the accession negotiations to become sustainable and greener, intending to achieve a shared goal. Based on the research evidence, the paper situates the EU strategically in the regional landscape by scrutinizing the tangible aspects of its leadership through the lens of the modes of leadership theory. As a result, this paper elucidates how and why the EU is diplomatically leading the green transformation through WB accession negotiations, and it considers the potential success of the 2050 climate-neutral European continent. Establishing regional and international practices in green policies significantly contributes to the EU's position in the global order, and recognizing the EU as a leader underscores its unique diplomatic nature.

Keywords: EU diplomacy, Treaty of Lisbon, European Green Deal, Western Balkans, theory of practice, leadership theory.
Field: Social sciences.

1. INTRODUCTION

The primary investigative objective is to evaluate whether the European Union (EU) plays a crucial role as a diplomatic leader in achieving Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. The EU and its member states not only carry out activities in the international arena but also extend their reach beyond its borders, employing various foreign policy tools. The Treaty of Lisbon came into force in 2009, marking the core year for the "turn" in practice. In 2019, the European Commission (EC) adopted the European Green Deal (EGD) as a transformative growth strategy, leading the EU to achieve climate neutrality. This marks the second pivotal year for the shift in practice. The Treaty of Lisbon is a cornerstone for the diplomatic legitimacy of the EU, considering the new diplomatic structure and its true innovative nature compared to other international actors. At the same time, the Lisbon Treaty delegated significant formal leadership functions to the EU for its performance in the "wider world," according to Article 2. The EU utilizes the EGD as one of its tools to build a modern, resource-efficient, clean, circular, and competitive economy in order to achieve Agenda 2030.

Additionally, the accession negotiations with the Western Balkans are considered one of the leading foreign policy tools for reaching Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). This unique diplomacy that the EU is performing toward external partners could be defined as green diplomacy. The EU negotiates to achieve sustainable development goals and establish itself as the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. This consists of adopting specific policies and strategies and obligatory targets for successful implementation, firstly within the EU (so-called Principle of Integration) and afterward through diplomatic channels and instruments to spread the influence over the EU border (Cardiff Process). It means that countries that intend to become part of the EU need to align with EU policies in all specificities. The EU includes sustainable development as a core principle through the Treaty on the European Union and as a priority objective for the Union's internal and external policies, mirrored in the European Green Deal.

Furthermore, the EU's role in shaping the global 2030 Agenda, which has become the world's blueprint for sustainable development, was instrumental. Moreover, the European Commission, appointed for the five-year period in 2019, adopted "a whole-of-government approach," or a comprehensive approach, as a holistic and cross-sector policy approach that needs to be pursued in partnership with

all stakeholders at all levels. This approach ensures political oversight and coordination efforts across government and at all levels, from global to local, for the implementation of the SDGs while taking into account the interlinkages between them. To ensure such policy coherence, it is essential to integrate the economic, social, environmental, and governance dimensions of sustainable development at all stages of domestic and international policymaking. The quality of public administration plays a crucial role in these efforts (A Comprehensive Approach, 2020). In addition, all commissioners need to consider sustainable development once they create and adopt decisions regarding their competencies. Having said that, the EU fully commits to implementing Agenda 2030 and actively supports development assistance to achieve these goals beyond its borders. The substance of this intention of reaching goals beyond EU borders puts it in the position of the potential leader. The subsequent explanation will delve into the nature of this leadership and its recognition within the WB.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research section focuses on scrutinizing specific materials to analyze the EU's accession negotiations policy. Firstly, the theory of practice, as a practice and an instrument of influence towards the Western Balkan region, can be widely applied to the activities of the EU. Secondly, the leadership theory evaluates the EU's recognition as a true leader in the green transition and its role in guiding and directing the Western Balkans (WB) through accession negotiations towards a shared goal of climate neutrality. In the practice theory, Adler and Pouilot defined several elements that a particular action needs to fulfill to become a practice. First, practice is a performance, a process of doing something. Second, this performance is patterned, generally exhibiting certain regularities over time and space. These patterns are part of a socially organized context, giving them meaning and structuring interaction. Third, practice is more or less competent in a socially meaningful and recognized way. Thus, social recognition is a fundamental aspect of practice; its (in)competence is not inherent but attributed to and through social relations. The notion of performance implies that the public, or an audience, can appraise the practice. Fourth, practice rests on background knowledge, which it embodies, enacts, and reifies all at once. Finally, practice weaves together the discursive and material worlds. Without language, communication, and discourse, people could not tell the difference between behavior and practice (Adler&Pouliot, 2011, pp.7-8).

By putting the EU's actions throughout this pattern and all these elements of the theory of practice, we confirm that activities the EU is taking beyond its borders regarding sustainable development are eventually becoming international practices. One of the foreign instruments on this path is the accession negotiation policy. By application of these elements of the practice, it could be concluded that this policy with certainty became a practice in the last few decades (Đurčević Cucić, 2023). The accession negotiation process is a performance, and it is not static. It has also been repetitive and patterned since the first enlargement in 1973. It is also competent and socially recognizable in the candidate countries and potential candidates, as is the eagerness to become a part of this European family. Finally, it manifests through the organizational chart of the regular negotiation process, including established negotiation frameworks, Stabilization and Association Committees and Sub-committees, peer review missions, and annual reporting from the European Commission and European Parliament.

On the other hand, leadership theory elucidates the modes and specificities that an individual aspiring to a leadership position must master. Starting with the definition, Avery states that leadership is a process in which an actor purposely seeks to influence and guide activities in a group toward collective goals, decisions, and desired outcomes (Avery, 2004, p.22). Nye defines leadership as "the power to orient and mobilize others for a purpose" (Nye, 2008, p.19). Consequently, people perceive a leader as an actor who guides or is in charge of others (Nye, 2008, p.18). In this way, people perceive the EU as a leader who can inspire others towards a specific goal, such as implementing Agenda 2030 and SDG and achieving climate neutrality in Europe by 2050. In addition to this argument, the EU occasionally named itself a "global leader" in climate change and sustainable development policies when it represented its priorities in the United Nations. However, to claim the title of "leader," one must receive acceptance and recognition. Parker and Karlsson define several types of leadership that could be applied to this research. The first mode is structural leadership, which relies on the capacity to take action or deploy power resources that create incentives, costs, and benefits that may sway other actors to change their behavior. The second mode is idea-based leadership, characterized by problem naming and framing, agenda-setting efforts, and discovering and proposing joint solutions to collective problems. The third mode is directional leadership, which means leading by example and demonstrating specific policy prescriptions' feasibility, value, and supremacy. The fourth and final mode is instrumental leadership, which refers to

an actor's ability to promote the formation of coalitions, solve negotiation problems, and build bridges necessary to broker deals (Parker, Karlsson, & Hjerpe, 2017, p.242; Parker & Karlsson, 2014). The text below elaborates on this leadership framework by describing the EU's position in the WB region regarding implementing the EGD.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Arguing that the EU is the leader in implementing the Agenda 2030 comes from the valuable available resources. The assumption that accession negotiations serve as a tool to achieve the goal of becoming a global leader also receives confirmation. To determine the EU's leadership role, we need to provide answers to two primary questions. The first question is whether the EU is guiding and directing the WB through accession negotiations to become sustainable and greener in pursuit of a common goal: climate neutrality. The second is whether the WB recognizes the EU as a green transition and transformation leader.

Regarding the first question, the European Union prioritizes the European Green Deal, a growth strategy aimed at achieving climate neutrality and economic prosperity. The EU adopted the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans as a core instrument for delivering EGD regionally (An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, 2020). Additionally, the European Commission presented the working document with specific guidelines for implementing the Green Agenda for the WB (Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, 2020). It is based on the pre-accession funds and foresees the inclusion of environmental goals from the Green Deal in all activities for economic recovery. At the Western Balkan Summit in Sofia in 2020, as part of the Berlin Process, the heads of state and governments from the Western Balkans adopted this plan as a unique declaration (Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, 2020). The EU and each of the Western Balkans partners should view the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans as a blueprint for potential measures based on the existing political and technical cooperation frameworks, particularly the Stabilization and Association Agreements, the Negotiation Frameworks, and Economic Reform Programs. The Agenda should enable the Western Balkans and the EU to create stronger links between climate and environmental actions, policy reforms, and EU approximations. It should also guide the definition of financial and technical assistance strategies at both the bilateral and regional levels. Furthermore, the EU has been leading the way in the transition toward a climate-neutral economy and has much to offer in terms of experience with decoupling economic growth from resource use. The EU's experience, know-how, and resources can support the Western Balkans in their efforts to enhance resilience and adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change while also achieving synergies with the clean air objectives (one-atmosphere approach). In line with the European Climate Law, climate neutrality will be reflected in the EU's bilateral relations and accession negotiations with the Western Balkans, who should already now start transforming their societies accordingly (Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, 2020, 2-3). By creating, adopting, and delivering this specific framework of envisaged activities for the WB, the EU intended to structurally influence the process of adaptation and implementation of policies within the WB region. Additionally, the EU intends to replicate the EGD in the region and, in alignment with EU policies, push forward the reformation and transition of societies toward a greener and cleaner environment. Therefore, the answer to the first question is that the EU naturally guides its actions towards fulfilling defined priorities. It uses the Green Agenda for the WB as a specific tool of influence to bring about regional transformation and a positive impact in achieving Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. The instrument of accession negotiations is perceived as crucial in simultaneously making an impact both regionally and globally.

Regarding the second question, it is challenging to assess the true nature of EU leadership since no such evidence could confirm that citizens of the WB accepted this EU role. Adoption and confirmation are the primary conditions for being a leader. However, specific results arose from the decisions made and implemented by WB as part of the negotiation process. Indeed, the WB intended to become a part of the EU once they started negotiations, which ultimately led to the conclusion that the EU is recognized as a leader. If this were not the case, the negotiation process would not be valuable, realistic, or appropriate. Therefore, the process of accession negotiations closely links the EU's leadership in the WBs. Since the obligations from the accession negotiations Framework and Stabilization and Association Agreements and Economic Reform Programs are essential and cannot be overlooked, candidate countries are aware of the efforts that should be pursued to become "greener." Adopting specific politics, decisions, and strategies is part of the Green Agenda for the WBs and arises from this framework and the negotiation chapters

dedicated to sustainable development. The implementation process as part of the negotiations with the EU does not consist of voluntary steps by the governments of the WB. It is part of mandatory settlements prescribed in the negotiation framework. Therefore, whether or not the leadership of the EU is sincerely accepted, it is prescribed. This questionable stance of the leader could also be estimated by looking at the results of the latest polls regarding support for EU accession. According to the latest polls, the support in the WB towards accession to the EU is variable. In North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, 68% of the population would vote for EU accession in a referendum, 79% would do so in Montenegro, while the percentages in Kosovo*(This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence). and Albania are 89% and 92% of the population, respectively. Serbia is an exception since only a plurality of 40% of the population would support joining the EU, while 34% would vote against it. However, the question regarding citizens' attitudes toward the reality of the EU membership perspective provides a different picture. In Serbia, 54% of citizens believe that the EU is not serious in its intention to offer membership in the European Union. In North Macedonia, that percentage is 47%, compared to 34% of people who believe that the EU is serious about enlargement. The public in Bosnia and Herzegovina is divided (44% believe that the EU is serious compared to 42% who believe it is not), while in Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo, the majority of the population - between 54% and 62% - believes that the EU is serious about offering membership to the Western Balkan countries (Western Balkan Regional Poll, 2024). From this perspective, the leadership of the EU is subject to change across the region due to significant variations in support for accession. It is also a matter of the countries' conditions regarding human rights and the rule of law, the state of democracy, and living conditions that are currently not high in quality. For instance, the citizens' opinion in Serbia on EU accession and the seriousness of the EU in terms of enlargement are closely connected to the citizens' satisfaction with the government, employment, and social policy; opinion toward the Russia-Ukraine conflict; and traditionally strong bond with Russia. Considering only the EU policy on Russia, it is clear why the percentages are low or high depending on the questions. There is no evidence to support the EU's leadership position in the transition to green policies. However, as previously mentioned, the primary outcome of the accession negotiations is the execution of these crucial policies, potentially signifying the implicit acknowledgment of leadership.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Returning to the paper's beginning, it is highlighted that there were two practice "turns" in the EU regarding the green policies and transition to climate-neutral Europe. The Treaty of Lisbon was, with certainty, one of the significant game-changers in regional integration on the global scene. With a new institutional framework consisting of a High Representative, the European External Action Service, and the Delegation of the EU, groundbreaking changes were made. With the explicit declaration of who will represent the EU in which branches and in what capacity, the legitimacy and representation of the EU became unquestionable. Therefore, the practicality of EU diplomacy shifted towards expanding its influence beyond the EU borders. Secondly, adopting the EGD and the composition of the European Commission, appointed in 2019, led to another practice turn, especially in terms of green policies. By using this practice approach and engaging in negotiations with other parties and third countries, the EU aimed to increase its influence and establish itself as a leader in the field. By structurally influencing the WB's political, economic, and social system, the EU achieved a specific position of structural leadership. The second part of this paper's definition of different types of leadership recognizes the EU as a structural leader, as it instrumentalizes the accession negotiations to influence WB societies. Despite the lack of concrete data on the acceptance of this leadership role from WB entities, it is clear that the EU's ongoing accession negotiations, compliance with EU legislation, and commitment to implementing the Green Agenda for the WB, along with the specific funds received through the Instrument for Pre-accession, validate this leadership position.

As for the EU, it could also be stated that in order to exert its influence on the WB, it utilizes structural diplomacy. Keukeleire and colleagues define structural diplomacy as the process of dialogue and negotiation by which actors in a system seek to influence or shape structures in the various relevant sectors (political, legal, social, economic, security, and other) and on the various relevant levels (individual, societal, state, regional, global) (Keukeleire, Thiers & Justaert, 2009). In this context, we can deduce that the EU functions as a structural agent, striving to persuade the Western Balkans (WBs) to implement structural modifications in their political, social, and economic systems. As defined previously, structural leadership relies on the capacity to act or deploy power resources that create incentives, costs, and benefits that may sway other actors to change their behavior. The EU acknowledges all these points

as part of its efforts to assist and support the WB. The EU provided the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance as a special incentive and benefit to change WB behavior and increase the implementation success rate of the 2030 Agenda and dedicated SDGs. Furthermore, the term "structurally" in structural diplomacy has three key aspects of performance and goals that are recognized through the activities of the established diplomatic structure by the Lisbon Treaty and implemented over WB. These elements are the objective to influence or shape structures, the objective to have structural or sustainable effects, and the enduring character of the objectives and diplomatic efforts (Arnout&Keukeleire, 2010, p.3). The EU delivers these elements both within the WB and globally. EU diplomacy's specificity and unique nature have been a matter of debate for years, and in reaching a global leadership position, there must be different ways of "doing things." Smith has repeatedly emphasized that the EU aims to lead its diplomacy differently to establish itself as a global actor in the international arena (Smith, 2017, p.126; Smith, 2016, p.313). This intention of the EU to settle as a leader and perform a global impact in terms of green transition is also visible in other instruments used toward other partners. This is evident in the EU's development policy, which serves as an instrument of its foreign policy. The European Consensus on Development, updated in 2017, serves as the primary development tool for supporting and assisting countries in need, particularly developing countries (European Consensus on Development, 2017). Also, the EU Global Strategy adopted in 2016 put sustainable development at the heart of the EU's external action (Mackie, Gavas, Koch, Hackenesch & Maxwell, 2016; EU Global Strategy, 2016). One of the essential instruments used by the EU is also the inclusion of the EU citizens into discussions about the EU's sustainable future, known as the dialogue on the Future of Europe, which is one of the indicators of its specific nature and way of creating policies and consequently external actions (Stefanović-Štambuk, 2023). The EU has already established itself as a global leader in climate change policy, owing to its pivotal role in the negotiations of the 2015 Paris Agreement (Ugur, Kadir Cener & Aksoy, 2016; Bevziuc, 2020; Bremberg & Michalski, 2024). Brandi (2018) estimates that the EU's leadership in this matter is directional.

Having said that, the accession negotiations and the political responsibilities arising from the negotiation framework assert the EU's leadership position in the WBs concerning green policies. If one country intends to be part of the EU community, fulfilling all preconditions is an obligation. The European Green Deal is just one small segment in a broad spectrum of EU policies. However, even a concrete examination of the citizens' attitude toward EU leadership regarding green transition is missing due to different factors and the complexity of the task; it could be concluded that besides the structural leadership that the EU is pursuing toward the WB region and beyond the mentioned typology of leadership, a specific "reformative" leadership (author's emphasis) exists. This means that progress and development in WB are impossible without EU influence due to the probable lack of political will and the current state of play in the region regarding the crucial aspects of quality of life. The WB region is constantly under reformation, revision, or assessment through the EU actions and examinations. It is not necessary to achieve the overall transformation of WB societies. However, reforming these societies remains necessary as a specific driving force. Reformative leadership entails the implementation of change based on the incentives provided by the proclaimed leader, fostering progress, and ensuring the continuity of reformation within the political and economic framework. Although not explicitly stated in any policy or guidelines, reformative leadership is an ongoing process essential for future cooperation and collaboration between the EU and WB. Therefore, through its unique diplomatic role, the EU gains recognition as a leader when we reach a consensus on the pace of implementing each policy, which it transfers to third countries, and their precise alignment during the negotiation process. The nature of the EU leadership in the WB could be assessed as idea-based and instrumental if the specific policies are observed. For instance, this is the case in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. However, we cannot agree on the success and effectiveness of this process, nor can we conclude that citizens genuinely believe in this leadership. However, the leadership that the EU intends to obtain collides with the nature of the definitions of these types of leadership. Finally, the practices implemented within the EU in 2009 and 2019 primarily helped the EU position itself as a structural leader in the WB regarding the green transition, as well as a leader in other parts of the world by providing development assistance and support. The accession negotiations are just one of the instruments used by the EU to explore the role of the global leader in sustainable development, as in the so-called green policies in reaching the goal of climate neutrality by 2050. This paper examines the various specificities that the EU possesses and performs in the international scene, highlighting the unique nature of its diplomacy. By declaring higher standards and ambitions than other international actors, such as reaching climate neutrality by 2050, the EU uses its diplomatic nature to put itself in the position of a global leader that others need to look up to. Given the instruments used and their global effectiveness, the EU's potential success in reaching this goal is realistic.

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REFLECTIONS ON THE PROBLEMS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

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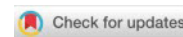
Abstract: In the last almost 25 years, a frequently discussed topic in the public space is the quality of higher education, not only by experts in this field, but also by people far from the educational process. It is easy to suggest the opinion about the poor quality of the educational product of Bulgarian higher education institutions and the need for almost continuous reforms in the educational system of our country, justifying itself with the place of Bulgarian higher education institutions in the European space of higher education. And if some of the changes have a positive effect, then a significant part of them are not only ineffective, but also bring a large dose of negativity to Bulgarian higher education. Especially in the last few years, when a number of defects have been noticed in the legislative framework of higher education and the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, leading to a number of untenable decisions and self-dealing at the university level by some rectors' managements. Undoubtedly, actions of this kind undermine the authority of both the academic staff and the students and the entire system of higher education, which feeds the opinion of the apologists who support the idea of poor-quality higher education in Bulgarian higher education institutions. Yes, to a certain extent, some deviations in the quality of education are noticeable in some higher education institutions, especially in the years of transition from a centralized market economy and a democratic society. Yes, with the introduction of the law on the development of the academic com Higher education institutions in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation, which replaced the Law on Scientific Degrees and Scientific Titles, in the first years there was a boom in the number of elected professors and associate professors in universities, after which actions were taken to regulate this process with changes in the legislation, in order to introduce Mini Higher education institution National Requirements for the Academic Staff and Academic Positions and registration with the National Academy of Sciences and Humanities. In parallel, a Criteria System of the NEAA for Evaluation and Accreditation was introduced in accordance with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Moreover, the parallel evaluation of professional fields according to the schedule of the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation is already a fact for the purpose of comparability and measurability of training in specialties in a given professional field in different universities in the interest of improving the quality of the educational process. Against the background of the above processes, the scientific reflections of the author, who has 38 years of experience as a university lecturer, are provoked by the observations and established problem areas in higher education. This is the purpose of this publication to examine the problematic areas in state higher education institutions, provoked both by some legislative defects and by the unilateral decisions of some rectors' managements.
Keywords: higher education, higher education management, higher education issues
Field: Social sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

The dynamic changes in the socio-political, economic and social environment in the Republic of Bulgaria are causing significant metamorphoses in the development of the higher education system in the country. The reasons for this are both objective and subjective. Higher education is facing increasingly high demands against the backdrop of the development of IT and the digitalization of the educational process. The expectations of the digital generation are sometimes not justified due to insufficient resources for the activities of state higher education institutions to renew HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs material base and scientific infrastructure. And although since 2014, with the participation of higher education institutions in projects financed under the Operational Program Science, Education and Smart Growth (OPSESG), National Roadmap for Scientific Infrastructure (NRSI), significant changes have occurred in its renewal, centers of excellence and centers of competence are being built, the overlay of negative public attitudes and the discrepancy between the expectations of society with the receipt of the educational product from higher education continues. The proclamation of the suggestion that higher education in our country is not at a sufficient level and of high quality continues. There are many defenders of the idea that it is time to close some state universities, due to HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs large number, unfortunately among them are some politicians who, with HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs actions, contribute to the negative attitudes of society towards higher education. Of course, such a suggestion is exaggerated and unjustifiably unfounded. But the fact that there are some problem areas in the higher

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education system is a fact that should not be underestimated. And then, when we allow ourselves to talk openly about them, then adequate decisions can be made in the interest of protecting Bulgarian higher education. This is the reason why the author of this publication allows himself to share some of his thoughts on the problems of higher education from the standpoint of his professional experience and a participant in the accreditation process on both sides of it in response to a number of questions from society, which increase negativity towards Bulgarian higher education institutions. This also determines the goal of our scientific research, with an emphasis on the objective and subjective factors influencing the activities of public higher education institutions and the reasons, primarily subjective, giving rise to certain problem areas.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

More than one or two publications have been written on the problems in the higher education system. Even the author of this publication himself has several previous ones. And if attention has been focused primarily on the quality of education and the criteria for assessing the scientific quality of the academic staff, some problems related to the management of the higher education system have remained and remain out of reach. Observing the processes in various state higher education institutions, it is striking that in some state higher education institutions the management of HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs governing bodies, intoxicated by the power granted to them by the legislative framework and academic autonomy, lack sufficient managerial skills or rather they misunderstand the principles of management, mixing them with egocentrism. Thus, a number of decisions have been made from the positions of authority, not respecting the academic rights and freedoms of the human factor. This is the reason why, in studying the issues in this publication, in addition to the research, comparative approach, the managerial approach in its comprehensiveness is also used, which is the basis of strategic decisions for the quality of training and the educational process in the interest of the place of the HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION in the European Higher Education Area. Moreover, the expediency of managerial decisions requires the applicability of both the analytical and logical approaches, taking into account the environmental factors - internal and external.

3. RESULTS

The system of higher education in Bulgaria in its historical development has undergone its changes in positive and negative aspects. And if in the mid-90s of the last century, when our country had already embarked on the path of transition to building a market economy and a democratic society, the legislative framework of higher education and the development of the academic staff contributed to the positive effects in its development and the well-intentioned public attitudes, then in the last 10 years or so the negative public attitude prevails. The reasons are Higher education institution-layered with an objective and subjective nature. One part is caused by the lack of certain regulatory framework, another part by the previous inability of the Council of Rectors to have legislative powers, a third part by demographic problems in the country, a fourth group of reasons is caused by the systematic financial shortage of state HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs and the wrong system for HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION financing according to the number of students, which reflects on the quality of education, a fifth group of reasons is reduced to the allowed politicization of the educational system, which is reflected in the legislative and regulatory provisions, which also reflects on the choice of the governing bodies of HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs, a sixth group of reasons is related to the openness of the educational market and the preferences of young people to acquire higher education and qualifications in foreign universities, the not always good basis of previous education in the secondary course of study, which hinders the process of upgrading knowledge and skills, and last but not least - the insufficient management experience or misunderstanding of the management of the educational process in some state HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs, which reflects on the insolvency and subjectivity of management decisions, bordering on disrespect for academicism and professionalism of the human factor, respectively, and the quality of education. Of course, the above groups of reasons are not the only ones, many more can be listed, but some of them, arising from the lack of continuity and consistency in the upgrading of the educational and management process, give rise to reflections on the problems and the search for ways to overcome them.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The starting point of our scientific research is the regulatory framework of higher education and

the development of the academic staff, the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2021 - 2030 and other strategic documents - national and EU, the national program "Popularization of Bulgarian Higher Education and Facilitation of Access for Applications of Persons of Bulgarian Ethnicity Living Abroad for Study in Bulgarian Higher Education Institutions", publications on the researched issues, opinions of the Institute for Market Economics, interviews with the Chairman of the Council of Rectors, opinions of business representatives and other sources engaged in the problems of higher education and, last but not least, the observations and professional experience of the author. On this basis, the discussions are based on the retrospection of the environment and the state of the higher education system.

Undoubtedly, the dynamic changes in the higher education environment also determine the challenges and trials before it. Here, we should also take into account the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the higher education system in our country, indicated in retrospect and clearly outlined in the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2021 - 2030 (SG, 2021). On this basis, in the effort to bring the legislative framework of higher education and the development of the academic staff in line with European strategic documents and national programs, in the period 2015 - 2020, significant amendments and additions were made to the Higher Education Act, the Academic Staff Development Act and the accompanying by-laws. And all this in the interest of expanding access and increasing the share of graduates in our country. On the one hand, a number of improvements have been made to the regulation of the higher education system and the development of the academic staff, but at the same time, some aspects remain outside the regulation, which subsequently give rise to some problem areas. Leading among them are:

- still not sufficiently implemented connection education - labor market, regardless of the legislative changes and actions taken in this direction through the protected and priority specialties. The reasons on the one hand are lack of interest or lack of sufficient knowledge about these specialties, or preferences for training abroad in these specialties without subsequent realization in the country. On the other hand, the business does not always show interest in graduating students and providing an opportunity for realization or realization against unsatisfactory pay. As a result of this, the resulting deficit of specialists in certain socio-economic areas. The solution is to create a mechanism to motivate the admission of students in these specialties with the necessary calculations together with the business on a contractual basis and an obligation to ensure realization by the business;

- politicization of higher education, manifested in individual legislative norms and the search for political dividends from untenable proposals, a recent example of which is the exemption from tuition fees, without coordination with the Council of Rectors and HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs, dooming them to deprivation of financial resources and bankruptcy. Often, a number of legislative norms are adopted without taking into account the requests and opinions of HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs and the academic Higher education institution. Others are adopted populist without providing the necessary financial resources for Higher education institution implementation, such as the example of the Higher education institution payment for assistant professors, without providing the resources for this and other academic positions, which gave rise to the corresponding protest actions; And despite the additional financial assistance provided to certain HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs with a significant shortage of financial resources, it is again insufficient and does not guarantee the implementation of legislative norms. No less a problem in this regard is the opposition of individual HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs regarding the Higher education institution of academic staff and regarding the additional payment for the educational and scientific degree "doctor" and the scientific degree "doctor of sciences". The solution to overcome this problem is depoliticization of the education system, compliance with and financial security of legislative norms, non-admission of different Higher education institutions for the same academic position and transfer of responsibilities to the relevant higher education institution, as well as the confrontation between higher education institutions.;

- lack of an appropriate mechanism for financing higher education institutions, where for years the subsidy was granted for the number of students without taking into account the demographic crisis. Moreover, the practice of announcing admissions by state order exceeding the number of secondary school graduates continues. The currently applicable methodology for determining the coefficient of higher education institutions by professional field is also seriously criticized, the risk of which is inequality between universities and increased admissions to certain fields with a higher coefficient, without taking into account the opportunities for realization after graduation. Decisions in this direction should be made jointly with the Council of Rectors and specialists from the Ministry of Education through the development of scenarios and the selection of a suitable one that satisfies state higher education institutions. Moreover, funding should be tied as a priority to the quality of education;

- insufficient applicability of modern and effective forms of training, without taking into account the needs of the modern digitalized generation;

- lack of understanding or reluctance to develop joint educational programs with foreign higher education institutions, even where such programs are implemented to some extent, there are "advisors" who hinder Higher education institution development and expansion;

- an insufficiently developed system for motivating and financially supporting research and publication activity, which forces the academic staff to allocate personal resources for this from Higher education institution already modest budget. This is also the reason why young researchers leave universities. The solution is for each higher education institution to have a developed and applicable methodology for objective payment of research and publication activity supporting academic development and the pursuit of development in science. It is advisable to create a Fund for financing participation in scientific events and for publishing scientific works at the national level and distributing it according to the results of scientific research.

- insufficiently demonstrated connection between scientific research and the educational process, as well as detachment of scientific research from the practical challenges of society, the overcoming of which problem is through linking the taught educational material with the scientific achievements of the academic staff in the relevant field.

- insufficient practical training of students, as in many HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs the aim is to theorize the taught course material through lecture courses at the expense of practical classes and the acquisition of practical skills. The reasons are both in the insufficient practical training of part of the academic staff, and in the insufficient attraction of specialists from practice for the purposes of the educational process, although the legislation has regulated this process. Last but not least, practical classes require greater flexibility, diverse forms and preliminary preparation. This is also the reason for the discrepancy between the expectations of business from the education of the specialists they need. The solution is to distribute the hours in a given discipline 50:50% lectures-practical training and closer cooperation with specialists from business.

- lack of regulations to fill the shortage of candidate students and announced admission of foreign students and attraction of students from the Bulgarian diaspora, and in this regard, at the last meeting of the Council of Rectors in October this year, specific decisions and actions were identified. A national program for attracting foreign students to Bulgaria is to be developed, accompanied by an annual indicative budget, with the aim of using the potential of higher education institutions for training students who cannot be provided by the domestic market of educational services due to the demographic crisis in the country.;

- lack of involvement of academic staff (primarily associate professors and professors, in some cases also assistants) in some HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs with the training process and at the same time receiving additional remuneration for project activity, which is listed in Higher education institution job descriptions. In parallel, the practice is being strengthened in some HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs for assistants to give lectures as a priority, regardless of legislative norms and the requirement that lecture courses, especially in mandatory disciplines, 70% of Higher education institution teaching hours be conducted by habilitated academic staff. Moreover, these HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs attract assistants on a fee basis, who are also assigned lecture courses, in addition to practical classes.

- subjective and complicated indicators and subjective assessment of the NEAA, which are confirmed by the constantly changing criteria and the inclusion of academic staff without experience in accreditation procedures in the expert groups. This problem is also supported by lobbying in the conduct of accreditation procedures for certain HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs, non-compliance with some requirements of the legislative framework for ownership of property, etc. etc. To this we should add lobbying for the approval of members of standing committees and the accreditation council upon the proposal of the Council of Ministers. The above circumstances in themselves imply and implement a subjective assessment of some HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs.

- loss of academic staff with proven professionalism and age discrimination, as in recent years there has been a massive outflow of academic staff both at a young age with scientific potential and a discriminatory attitude towards academic staff over 65 years of age. As a result, the practice of dismissing this academic staff with proven professional experience, scientific potential, established scientists at the will of the rector-employer or his deputies is being established without clear criteria, without prior discussions based on subjective opinion, regardless of Higher education institution academic employment on the principle of "inconvenient". Observations show that the result of these actions is a reduction of departments, faculties, professional areas to the critical minimum and often a lack of quorum for holding the relevant meetings. Moreover, in some higher education institutions, as a result of such subjective

actions of Higher education institution rector's leadership during accreditation procedures, it is observed that the lack of professors in certain professional areas and often one habilitation with the academic title "associate professor" in a field is observed. The solution is to change the legislation and return to universities authoritative and proven with Higher education institution professionalism learned professors and associate professors in the universities and auls in the interest of the quality of education and raising the prestige of the higher education institution.;

- lack of academic responsibility and a model of management in the interest of the public interest, supported by the frequent practices in some HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs of ignoring the basic principles in the higher education system, including continuity, innovation and creativity, observance of academic autonomy, academic rights and freedoms, academic ethics, responsibility, transparency and accountability, objectivity and impartiality in decision-making. The practice of ignoring continuity when the rector's leadership takes office and considering that the chronology of the HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION is only just beginning, of lightly canceling lawful orders of predecessors, of confusing management with command and egocentrism, of holding cheap PR events, of ignoring the dignity and honor of proven professionals is increasingly being established. A confirmed practice in some HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs is that management decisions are made on the principle of "convenient" / "inconvenient", "someone said", etc. etc., having nothing to do with the principles of the managerial approach, without thinking about the consequences for the HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION and its future;

- lack of sufficient legislative norms for control and allowing retroactivity in the legislation, taking into account in this case the insufficient regulation of control regarding violated procedures for academic growth, plagiarism and the responsibilities of the governing bodies of the HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION for unlawful actions. Moreover, the legislation allowed retroactivity regarding plagiarism for past procedures at a time when anti-plagiarism checks were not required. Yes, the author maintains an opinion on not allowing plagiarism as a norm, but at the same time anti-plagiarism actions should have a more preventive effect before a given procedure for academic development, thereby creating a culture of correct citation and use of other people's works. The other thing that is happening is more like "settlement of scores".

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, without the author's claims for exhaustiveness of the researched issues, the reflections on the mentioned problems cannot be referred to a common denominator for all state HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs. They are a product of the personal observations and professionalism of the author, whose cause is quality training and educational process, which will establish the higher education system of the Republic of Bulgaria in the European Higher Education Area, whose place there is indisputable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SOME ASPECTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING IN STUDENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between certain socio-demographic characteristics (gender, year of study), loneliness, personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism, openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness) and certain aspects of students' psychological functioning (depression, anxiety, stress, life satisfaction) during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the study aimed to identify differences in certain aspects of mental health between male and female students and between students in lower and higher years of study. The study comprised 712 participants, including 563 female and 149 male students. The proportion of first-year students was 27.6%, the proportion of second-year students was 17.8%, the proportion of third-year students was 19.3%, the proportion of fourth-year students was 13% and the proportion of fifth-year students was 19.7%. The survey was conducted in June 2021 using an online questionnaire. The results show that female students have higher levels of anxiety and stress, while male students report higher levels of loneliness. In addition, students in lower years of study reported higher levels of depression, anxiety, stress and loneliness, while students in higher years of study reported higher levels of life satisfaction. A statistically significant positive correlation was found between neuroticism and loneliness with measures of mental health (depression, anxiety and stress), while a negative correlation was observed with life satisfaction. Extraversion and conscientiousness showed a significant negative correlation with measures of mental health and a positive correlation with life satisfaction. In addition, openness was negatively correlated with stress and agreeableness was negatively correlated with depression. As the study found significant differences in the determinants of mental health between lower and upper year students, it is important to ensure the availability of professional support for all students, especially lower year students who are still adjusting to the new living conditions. These findings suggest that strategic priorities need to be set across universities to protect and actively promote students' mental health.

Keywords: COVID-19, personality traits, loneliness, mental health
Field: Social sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

Students are particularly vulnerable to mental health problems (Blanco et al., 2008; Eisenberg et al., 2016) and the COVID-19 pandemic has further worsened their mental health (Cao et al.,2020). Social distancing measures reduced social interaction, while many students lost their jobs or experienced financial difficulties (Doolan et al., 2021). In addition, the transition to online education reduced direct contact with peers, which had a negative impact on academic performance and overall satisfaction. Research during the pandemic shows high levels of anxiety, depression and stress among students (Cao et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). French studies show that many students suffered from significant stress and mental health problems (Wathelet et al., 2020). In Croatia, although most students did not have severe problems, a significant percentage reported moderate mental health problems (Vulić-Prtorić et al., 2020). In addition, 7.9% of students had difficulties with online learning (Doolan et al., 2021). Research also show that first-year students experienced the most emotional difficulties during the pandemic, including depression and anxiety due to adapting to study conditions and new circumstances (Doolan et al., 2021; Živčić-Bećirević et al., 2007). Loneliness resulting from social isolation has a negative impact on self-esteem and overall life satisfaction and can lead to serious physical and mental health problems (Brajković, 2010). Research shows greater loneliness in students leaving home and increased loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hwang et al., 2020; Santini et al., 2020). Loneliness is also associated with depression, anxiety and low self-esteem (Mushtaq et al., 2014) and has a negative impact on academic performance. Since entering university represents a significant life change for first-year students, involving an adjustment to new social and emotional challenges, differences in psychological functioning are expected between students in lower and higher years of study. It is hypothesised that lower year students will have higher levels of depression, anxiety, stress and loneliness and lower levels of life satisfaction, while female students will have higher levels of depression, anxiety, stress and loneliness and lower levels of life satisfaction compared to male students. In addition, personality traits such as extraversion,

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conscientiousness, openness and agreeableness are expected to be positively associated with higher life satisfaction and negatively associated with depression, anxiety, stress and loneliness in students of all years of study. In addition, neuroticism and loneliness are expected to be positively correlated with higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress and negatively correlated with life satisfaction.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The final sample consisted of 712 participants, of whom 563 were female students and 149 were male students. 27.6% were first-year students, 17.8% were second-year students, 19.3% were third-year students, 13% were fourth-year students, and 19.7% were fifth-year students. More than half of the students (54.6%) had moved for their studies, the majority were single (53.8%), while 38.6% were in a relationship. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 64.4% reported good health and 63.5% reported an average financial situation. The majority had no fear of infection (69.7%) or death from the coronavirus (69.9%). Peers were moderately or strongly missed by 63.1%, and 79.9% were mostly or completely satisfied with family support. Similarly, 72.3% were satisfied with the support they received from friends. The virtual environment during the pandemic was moderately stressful for the majority (33.9%), while 32.4% categorised the adjustment of academic tasks as moderately stressful. Worrying about family was moderately stressful for most participants (39%). The following measurement instruments were used. Life Satisfaction Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985): this scale consists of 5 items that participants answered on a 7-point scale. Higher scores indicate greater life satisfaction. Goldberg's Big Five Personality Inventory (IPIP) (Mlačić & Goldberg, 2007): this scale measures 5 personality traits: extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness and intellect, with 10 items per dimension. Participants responded on a 5-point scale. Higher scores indicate a stronger personality trait. Short version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Lacković-Grgin et al., 2002): this scale measures the level of loneliness with 7 items, and participants responded on a 5-point scale, with higher scores indicating more loneliness. Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS) (Reić Ercegovac & Penezić, 2012): the DASS measures depression, anxiety and stress with 42 items (14 per subscale). Participants answered the questions on a 4-point scale, with higher scores indicating a higher symptom level. The study was conducted in June 2021 via an online questionnaire on social media. Approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy in Mostar. Participants were informed about the anonymity and scientific purpose of the data and could withdraw at any time. The instructions were clear and adapted for each scale.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive parameters, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, skewness and kurtosis indices and reliability coefficients for the Extraversion, Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, Intellect and Conscientiousness scales, the Depression, Anxiety and Stress scale, the Loneliness scale and the Life Satisfaction scale (N=712) ($p < .05$*; $p < .01$**).

	M	SD	Min	Max	Kolmogorov-Smirnov test	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach α
Extraversion	31.416	8.242	11	50	0.048*	-0.096	-0.524	0.88
Neuroticism	28.252	7.732	11	40	0.041*	-0.019	-0.578	0.85
Agreeableeness	41.583	6.134	10	50	0.095*	-0.951	1.316	0.83
Openness	38.133	4.831	21	50	0.062*	-0.275	-0.114	0.70
Conscientiousness	37.456	6.929	14	50	0.073*	-0.461	-0.173	0.83
Depressiveness	10.445	10.867	0	42	0.168*	1.114	0.240	0.95
Anxiety	11.537	9453	0	42	0.128*	0.921	0.151	0.91
Stress	16.341	11.208	0	42	0.098*	0.466	-0.803	0.94
Loneliness	16.523	6.206	7	35	0.088*	0.468	-0.452	0.81
Life Satisfaction	17.345	4.520	5	25	0.076*	-0.430	-0.393	0.84

Source: Author's research

The agreeableness and life satisfaction scales showed negative skewness, with results skewed towards higher scores, while the depression, anxiety and stress scales showed positive skewness, with results clustered around lower scores. A statistically significant difference was found in anxiety, stress, and loneliness by gender (Table 2); female students had higher levels of anxiety (M_m=10.18, M_f=11.89, $p<0.05$) and stress (M_m=14.14, M_f=16.92, $p<0.01$), while male students had higher levels of loneliness (M_m=17.48, M_f=16.27, $p<0.05$). There were significant differences in depression (M_1 = 12.64, M_2 = 8.52,

$p<0.01$) anxiety ($M_1 = 13.54$, $M_2 = 9.58$, $p<0.01$, stress ($M_1 = 18.13$, $M_2 = 14.80$, $p<0.01$), loneliness ($M_1 = 17.73$, M2 = 15.58, $p<0.01$), and life satisfaction ($M_1 = 16.65$, $M_2 = 17.95$, $p<0.01$) depended on the year; first-year students reported higher of depression, stress, and loneliness, while students in higher years were more satisfied with their lives (codes 1 and 2 refer to the years of study, where 1 represents lower years of study and 2 represents higher years of study). A statistically significant interaction between gender and academic year was found in depression and anxiety. Depression and anxiety scores were significantly lower in male students in higher years compared to female students in higher years, with depression ($M_f=9.1$, $M_m=6.28$, $p<0.05$) and anxiety ($M_f=10.65$, $M_m=6.45$, $p<0.05$).

Table 2: Significant differences in depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness and life satisfaction between male and female students and between students of different years of study using two-way analysis of variance ($p < .05$*; $p < .01$**)

Source of variability		df	F	p
Gender	Depresiveness	1	0.020	0.888
	Anxiety	1	3.681	0.055*
	Stress	1	7.254	0.007**
	Loneliness	1	4.701	0.030*
	Life Satisfaction	1	2.800	0.095
Year of study	Depresiveness	1	33.516	0.000**
	Anxiety	1	38.483	0.000**
	Stress	1	19.324	0.000**
	Loneliness	1	21.251	0.000**
	Life Satisfaction	1	16.519	0.000**
Interaction	Depresiveness	1	7.496	0.006**
	Anxiety	1	9.164	0.003**
	Stress	1	3.573	0.059
	Loneliness	1	1.208	0.272
	Life Satisfaction	1	2.632	0.105

Source: Author's research

The results showed that neuroticism and loneliness were significantly positively correlated with depression, anxiety and stress and negatively correlated with life satisfaction. Extraversion and conscientiousness showed a significant negative correlation with depression, anxiety and stress and a positive correlation with life satisfaction. Students with higher levels of these traits were more emotionally stable and more satisfied with their lives. Agreeableness was negatively correlated with depression and positively correlated with life satisfaction, while openness was negatively correlated with stress and positively correlated with life satisfaction, but not with depression and anxiety. Female students were more anxious and stressed, but no significant relationship was found between gender and depression or life satisfaction. Higher year students had lower levels of depression, anxiety and stress and higher levels of life satisfaction. In Table 3 the coding system is as follows (Gender 1 = female students, 2 = male students; Year of study 1 = lower years of study, 2 = higher years of study).

Table 3: Correlations between personality traits (neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness) and loneliness with measures of depression, anxiety, stress and overall life satisfaction using Pearson's correlation coefficient ($p < .05$*; $p < .01$**).

	Depressiveness	Anxiety	Stress	Life Satisfaction
Neuroticism	.56**	.59**	.78**	-.34**
Extraversion	-.37**	-.25**	-.28**	.35**
Agreeableness	-.20**	-.05	-.07	.25**
Conscientiousness	-.35**	-.26**	-.22**	.32**
Openness	-.20	-.07	-.10**	.20**
Loneliness	.60**	.43**	.48**	-.40**
Gender (1,2)	-.01	-.74*	-.10**	-.06
Year of study (1,2)	-.19*	-.19**	-.15**	.14**

Source: Author's researh

4. DISCUSSIONS

Statistically significant differences in anxiety, stress, and loneliness were found between male and female students. Female students have higher levels of anxiety and stress, while male students are lonelier. No differences were found in depression and life satisfaction. Additionally, first-year students show higher levels of depression, anxiety, stress, and loneliness, while upper-year students have higher levels of life satisfaction. A statistically significant interaction between gender and year of study is present in depression and anxiety, with upper-year male students exhibiting lower levels of these symptoms compared to female students. Numerous studies confirm the association with higher levels of anxiety in women (Costantini & Mazzotti, 2020). Li and Graham (2017) suggest that differences in sex hormones may play a role in women's greater sensitivity to anxiety and stress. Gender differences in loneliness may be caused by the quality of social relationships, with women having better-developed social networks (Gierveld et al., 2009). Although no differences in depression were found, research show that both male and female students often minimize the symptoms of depression, which can make them harder to identify (Michael et al., 2006). For the pandemic period, this could mean that symptoms of depression might have been interpreted by students as indicators of a COVID-19 infection, given the overlap in certain symptoms (e.g., loss of appetite, fatigue, lack of concentration, etc.). First-year students face greater stress and uncertainties related to transitioning to university (Lacković-Grgin & Sorić, 1995), which was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Doolan et al., 2021). Moreover, higher stress levels in first-year students may be linked to challenges in adapting to academic life and social isolation. Furthermore, a positive correlation was found between neuroticism and loneliness with depression, anxiety, and stress, and a negative correlation with life satisfaction. Extraversion was negatively correlated with depression, anxiety, and stress, and positively correlated with life satisfaction. These correlations confirm previous research which suggest that neuroticism increases sensitivity to stress. There is a positive association between conscientiousness and extraversion and increased life satisfaction, while these traits are negatively associated with depression, anxiety, and stress. On the other hand, agreeableness and openness were not significant correlates of anxiety but were positively correlated with life satisfaction, as confirmed by other studies. People with high openness use coping strategies that reduce stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 2004).

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study provides valuable insights into the psychological functioning of students during the COVID-19 pandemic by examining key dimensions of mental health with a focus on individual differences based on gender and personality traits. The study found associations between personality traits and various aspects of mental health, emphasising the importance of individual characteristics in coping with stress and adaptation. The study shows statistically significant differences between male and female students in terms of anxiety, stress and loneliness, confirming and complementing previous findings on gender differences in vulnerability to mental health difficulties. The results show that lower year students, including first year students, have higher levels of depression, anxiety, stress and loneliness, while upper year students report higher levels of life satisfaction. These findings point to the particular challenges of the transition to higher education and the importance of supporting first-year students. This study is one of the few to examine the mental health of students from Bosnia and Herzegovina in the context of the pandemic. Based on the findings, the study highlights the need to strengthen student counselling services, promote mental health within the academic community and develop programmes that reduce loneliness and improve student adjustment.

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