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ORIGINAL PAPER

The Hidden Cost of AI: Carbon Footprint and Mitigation Strategies

Narcis Eduard Mitu[1], George Teodor Mitu[2]

Abstract:
The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into modern economies holds transformative potential, but its environmental impact, particularly its carbon footprint, is a growing concern. This paper explores the hidden costs associated with AI, focusing on its substantial greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Training large-scale AI models, particularly those based on deep learning, is highly energy demanding, resulting in substantial GHG emissions. Operationally, the continued use of AI systems further exacerbates the environmental toll, especially in data centres powered by non-renewable energy sources.

This paper highlights mitigation strategies, including the transition to renewable energy sources for powering AI infrastructures and the development of more energy-efficient algorithms. Techniques such as model pruning, quantisation, and knowledge distillation are identified as crucial in reducing energy consumption during the training and operational phases of AI models. Additionally, the role of AI in sustainability efforts is examined, suggesting that AI could facilitate resource efficiency in industries such as agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing, thereby contributing to the global transition towards a low-carbon economy. While AI promises significant advancements across multiple sectors, it is essential to address its environmental costs through sustainable practices. Failure to do so may result in AI accelerating climate change, overshadowing its potential benefits.

Keywords: AI, carbon footprint, climate change, cost, green AI
JEL Classifications: Q 54, Q55, Q56, O33, F64

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Introduction

There is currently an overwhelming enthusiasm surrounding the potential benefits that Artificial Intelligence (AI) could bring to humanity. However, are we truly prepared for such a profound shift, the full scope of which is only just becoming apparent? A lion cub may seem like an innocent kitten, something we eagerly wish to play with, but when it matures, it can devour us.

Numerous aspects of AI deserve discussion. Artificial intelligence is a technology with immense potential, but also significant risks (European Parliament, 2020; Olimid & Olimid, 2022). AI has the capacity to radically alter our lives, for better or worse. At present, both the enormous advantages and disadvantages of this technology are becoming apparent (Kumar, 2019; Duggal, 2024; IBM, 2024). To utilise AI responsibly and ethically, we require international institutional collaboration and appropriate regulation, which should ensure its benefits while mitigating its drawbacks. Additionally, we need ongoing awareness and education to help us understand and adapt to the impact AI will have on our lives and society. AI is reshaping the future of humanity (Rawas, 2024). However, all of these endeavours must be underpinned by a fundamental objective: cutting-edge technology must not harm the planet, and by extension, people. From this perspective, there are certain issues that are insufficiently discussed, one of which is AI's carbon footprint.

AI's Carbon Footprint

The carbon footprint represents the total amount of greenhouse gases (GHGs) generated by human actions and activities (Mitu & Stanciu, 2024). Consequently, the carbon footprint is determined by the quantity of GHG emissions, expressed as carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_2e), associated with the activities of an individual or other entities (e.g., buildings, corporations, countries, etc.). This concept includes both direct emissions, such as those from fossil fuel combustion for production, heating, and transportation, as well as the emissions associated with generating the electricity used to produce the goods and services consumed (Selin, 2024, Stanciu & Mitu, 2024).

Depending on the activity under analysis, distinct types of carbon footprints can be identified, based on the typical GHG emissions of the activities involved (Repsol, 2024):

Individual carbon footprint: This is based on a person's consumption habits and takes into account GHG emissions associated with their transportation, energy consumption for heating and cooling homes, dietary habits, goods consumption, recycling practices, etc.

Product footprint: This includes the GHG emissions across various stages such as raw material extraction, the production process, energy generation, product transformation for other firms, the customer's use of the product, waste treatment, and transportation between stages.

Corporate footprint: This encompasses the GHG emissions inventory related to a company's or organisation's operations. It serves as the primary basis for identifying energy efficiency measures within the organisation, as well as collaborative action with other firms in the sector.

An increasing number of studies highlight that AI consumes large amounts of energy and generates substantial GHG emissions, thereby leaving a significant carbon footprint (Luccioni et al., 2020; Cowls et al., 2021; Cho, 2023, etc.).

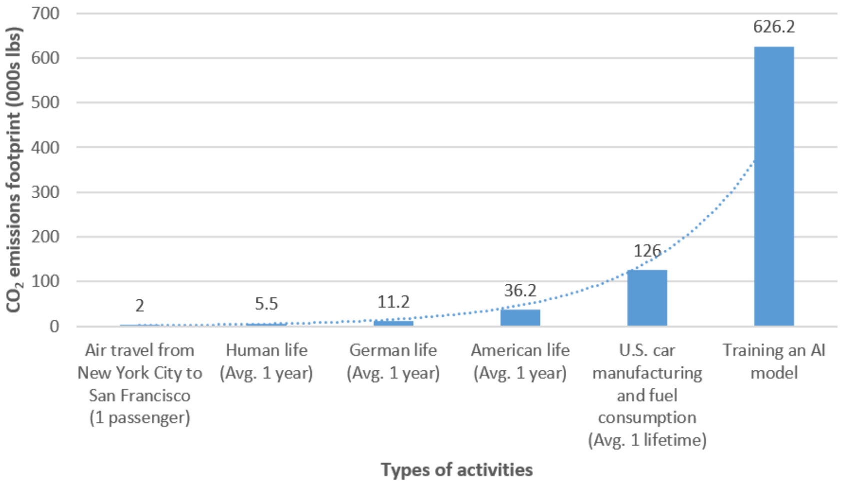
According to Williamson (2023), the carbon footprint of AI is a composite indicator, which equals the total GHG emissions, or carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_2e), produced during the manufacture of computing technology (e.g., chips, semiconductors, etc.), combined with the emissions from training AI models and the CO_2e emitted during the operational lifetime of AI systems.

Carbon Footprint of AI = Carbon Footprint of Computing Technology Production + Carbon Footprint of Training AI + Carbon Footprint of Operating AI (Usage)

Most analyses of AI's carbon footprint focus on the latter two categories, as they are unique to AI (Williamson, 2023). However, each of these components significantly contributes to AI's overall environmental impact, necessitating a detailed analysis to understand their implications and potential mitigation strategies.

1. Carbon Footprint of Computing Technology Production - The production of computing technology is a critical factor in determining the carbon footprint of AI systems. The manufacturing processes for hardware, such as graphics processing units (GPUs) and data centres, are energy-intensive and often reliant on fossil fuels. The industrial sector, including the production of computing hardware, is a major source of global carbon emissions, accounting for nearly 36% of total emissions (Chen et al., 2022). This is further exacerbated by the increasing demand for advanced computing technologies, which require energy-intensive processes. The amount of GHGs generated by electricity production varies significantly across regions, with some areas producing energy with a far larger carbon footprint than others. In regions where coal and gas dominate the energy mix, the carbon emissions associated with computing technology production can be substantial, contributing to AI's overall carbon footprint (Lannelongue et al., 2021). The relationship between economic activity and environmental degradation is well-documented; as energy consumption increases with economic growth, so too do CO_2e emissions (Ojaghlou et al., 2023). Moreover, the extraction of raw materials for hardware production, or the use of plastics, also adds to the environmental burden, as the mining and processing of these materials often lead to significant GHG emissions (Panagiotopoulou et al., 2021; Mascarenhas, 2023).

Figure 1 – CO_2 emission benchmarks



Source: Authors' processed, based on Nord (2020)

2. Carbon Footprint of Training AI – The training of AI models, particularly large-scale deep learning models, is a highly energy-intensive process that significantly contributes to the carbon footprint of AI. Training state-of-the-art models requires extensive computing resources, leading to high electricity consumption (Xiao, 2023). There is a wide range of emissions depending on the model, with some sources indicating that training a large language model can result in 200 to 600 metric tonnes of CO_2e (Williamson, 2023). For instance, training models such as OpenAI's GPT-3 has been estimated to produce approximately 552 metric tonnes of CO_2e emissions (Cooper, 2023; Tomlinson, 2024). This one-time cost is often amortised over the many queries processed by the model, but the initial energy demand remains a critical concern. The environmental impact of AI model training is exacerbated by the increasing complexity and size of these models, which require even more computational power and consequently more energy (Liu et al., 2023). The inefficiency of current hardware and algorithms further aggravates energy consumption during training, creating a situation where the growth rate of AI computational power outpaces improvements in energy efficiency (Liu et al., 2023). As such, the GHG emissions from AI training represent a growing concern, necessitating a shift towards more feasible practices in AI development (Xiao, 2023).

3. Carbon Footprint of Operating AI (Usage) – Once AI models are trained, their operational phase also contributes to the carbon footprint. Emissions per query during the usage of AI systems can vary depending on several factors, including the efficiency of the underlying hardware and the energy source powering the data centres. Continuous use of AI applications, especially those requiring real-time data processing and decision-making, leads to sustained energy consumption. The GHG emissions associated with electricity used for AI operations can vary significantly depending on the energy sources utilised (e.g., fossil fuels versus renewable energy). AI systems deployed in data centres using renewable energy sources may have a substantially lower operational carbon footprint compared to those powered by fossil fuels (Panagiotopoulou et al., 2021). However, the rapid expansion of data centres, which are projected to contribute up to 2% of global CO_2 emissions, highlights the urgent need for sustainable practices in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector (Avgerinou et al., 2017).

Mitigation Strategies and AI Sustainability

The carbon footprint of AI is an increasing concern, necessitating the implementation of effective mitigation strategies and the promotion of Green AI initiatives. These strategies aim to reduce the environmental impact of AI technologies while leveraging their potential to contribute positively to sustainability efforts.

Several strategies have been identified to reduce the carbon footprint associated with AI. A prominent approach is the transition to renewable energy sources for powering data centres and AI infrastructure. By using solar, wind, or hydroelectric energy, organisations can significantly reduce the carbon emissions associated with their AI operations (Mustafa et al., 2022). Additionally, the adoption of energy-efficient hardware and algorithms can further minimise energy consumption during both the training and operational phases of AI systems (Cowls et al., 2021).

Another effective strategy involves optimising AI algorithms to enhance energy efficiency. Research indicates that developing more efficient machine learning models can lead to substantial reductions in energy consumption and, consequently, carbon emissions. Techniques such as model pruning, quantisation, and knowledge distillation can reduce the computational resources needed for training and inference, thereby decreasing the overall carbon footprint (Cowls et al., 2021).

The integration of AI into key sectors such as agriculture, commerce, hospitality, industrial manufacturing, etc., can facilitate resource efficiency, leading to lower emissions in these industries (Bhagat et al., 2022; Ahuja, 2024; Ding, 2024; Qi, 2024). Furthermore, AI can enable the transition to a low-carbon economy by enhancing climate monitoring and predictive analytics, which can inform policy and operational decisions (Huang, 2024; Liu, 2024). Of course, these strategies are not exhaustive, their number being limited only by our ability to overcome the barriers of knowledge.

The Role of Green AI Initiatives

The concept of Green AI emphasises the ethical responsibility of AI researchers and practitioners to consider the environmental impact of their work. This includes not only the carbon emissions generated by AI models but also the broader implications of AI technology deployment. The AI community increasingly recognises the need for accountability in the design and implementation of AI systems, leading to the emergence of research focused on environmental sustainability in AI, termed "Green AI" (Verdecchia et al., 2023). Green AI initiatives advocate for transparency in reporting the carbon emissions associated with AI research and applications. This transparency can help stakeholders make informed decisions about the environmental impact of AI technologies and encourage the adoption of sustainable practices. Furthermore, the development of policies promoting sustainable AI practices, such as incentivising the use of renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies, is crucial for fostering a culture of sustainability within the AI community (Cowls et al., 2021). The importance of integrating sustainability into the design and deployment of AI technologies is increasingly recognised, helping to mitigate their environmental impact while harnessing their potential for positive change. Additionally, AI can facilitate the transition to a circular economy by improving waste management and resource efficiency (Yang et al., 2022).

Conclusions

Artificial Intelligence represents one of the most revolutionary technologies of the modern era, with vast potential to radically transform entire sectors of the economy and daily life. From optimising industrial processes to AI-assisted medical diagnosis and the creation of systems capable of offering decision-making support in complex scenarios, AI opens new horizons for innovation and progress.

However, alongside the widespread use of AI, a critical and increasingly concerning aspect is emerging: the enormous energy consumption associated with training and using these models.

The carbon footprint of AI is a complex interaction of various components, including the production of computing technology, AI model training, and operational emissions during usage. Large neural networks, especially deep learning models, require significant computational power, leading to a considerable increase in electricity consumption. The data centres supporting these technologies consume energy equivalent to that of small cities. If this growth is not carefully managed, there is a risk that the benefits brought by AI could be offset by its negative environmental impact, accelerating climate change and diminishing the technological advantages.

Although these factors significantly contribute to the overall environmental impact, AI also offers opportunities to play a crucial role in promoting sustainability. By adopting Green AI practices and optimising energy consumption across all sectors, the AI community can work towards minimising the carbon footprint while maximising AI's potential to address climate change challenges.

Energy consumption is not the only major challenge. AI also raises ethical and governance concerns. As systems become increasingly complex and autonomous, there is a risk that they may escape human control. For instance, decisions made by an AI system in a specific context, without human intervention, could lead to unforeseen or undesirable consequences. Moreover, concerns about transparency and explainability of models are growing, as they become more opaque with increasing complexity. If stringent oversight and accountability measures are not implemented, humanity risks losing control over the technology it has created, which could have disastrous effects.

In conclusion, while AI offers extraordinary opportunities, humanity must remain extremely vigilant regarding the associated challenges. Managing energy consumption and ensuring that AI remains under human control and benefits all people are essential for this technology to reach its potential without causing significant collateral damage.

Thus, the operational carbon footprint of AI is not solely a function of the technology itself but also of the broader energy infrastructure that supports it. In short, AI's carbon footprint is a multi-faceted issue encompassing the production of computing technologies, the energy-intensive training of AI models, and the continuous operational requirements of AI applications. Addressing these components is crucial for mitigating AI's environmental impact and transitioning towards more sustainable technological practices.

Authors' Contributions:

The authors contributed equally to this work.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Romanian Student Perceptions of Entrepreneurship

Radu Florin Ogarcă[1)]

Abstract: This study examines Romanian students on various aspects of entrepreneurship, including the specificities of entrepreneurial activity, entrepreneurial lifestyle, entrepreneurial role models, the desirability of starting a business, the feasibility of starting and sustaining a business, and barriers to entrepreneurship.
The empirical data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to students from the faculties of the University of Craiova. The analysis of these data provided important insights into understanding young people's perceptions and expectations regarding entrepreneurship.
The findings of this investigation may have implications for the development and implementation of entrepreneurship education programs within Romanian higher education institutions. Understanding students' perceptions and expectations can help to design more effective and relevant programs that will lead them to perceive entrepreneurship as a possible career opportunity.

Keywords: *entrepreneurship; Romania; entrepreneurship perceptions; entrepreneurial career intentions*

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1. Introduction

The entrepreneurship literature commonly addresses factors that determine entrepreneurial intentions and entrepreneurial behavior. However, this literature scarcely investigated how the image of entrepreneurs, their lifestyle, and their activities, at the social and individual levels, influence the intentions and actions of individuals to start their businesses.

In the Romanian context, no recent studies have addressed this topic in the academic field. Given this research gap, this study aims to explore Romanian students' perceptions of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs.

The objectives of this research are to assess students' entrepreneurial intentions, to identify the factors that facilitate and hinder the initiation of entrepreneurial ventures, and to explore students' perceptions (positive or negative) of entrepreneurs and their role in community development. From these objectives, the research questions are: RQ1: Is an entrepreneurial career desirable for Romanian students?; RQ2. What are the factors that influence students' perception of entrepreneurship?; RQ3. Is there a correlation between students' perception of entrepreneurship and their entrepreneurial intentions?

2. Literature review

Most of the studies from different scientific fields have related the positive impact of entrepreneurship on economic, technological, social, and political development and environmental welfare (Carree & Thurik, 2005; Neumann, 2021).

Entrepreneurship has an important role in economic growth and development (Carree & Thurik, 2005), and makes economies more competitive and innovative (EC, 2013). Startups and young firms are important in creating new jobs (Bednarzik, 2000) and increasing productivity (Nickell, 1996; Decker et al., 2014). Entrepreneurship can help a country's economy grow balanced and rapidly (Yusuf & Albanawi, 2016) and aid in regional development (Neumann, 2021).

In transition countries entrepreneurs can act as reformers, playing an important role in designing new business models (McMillan & Woodruff, 2003). Entrepreneurs can bring additional welfare to transition societies by creating new jobs, providing consumer goods, limiting the market power of state firms, and stimulating reforms.

In comparison, the dysfunctional aspects induced in society by entrepreneurship are little addressed in the literature. Zahra & Wright (2016) identified potential dysfunctionalities for entrepreneurship: resistance to technological change (some entrepreneurs sabotage new technologies to maintain a competitive position or to preserve a status quo in their industry); political influence control and abuse of power (some entrepreneurs may engage in influencing the political agenda of the country in which they operate, may support politicians to block countries' access to international markets, they may engage in corruption); waste of natural resources (concerned to procure raw materials efficiently, entrepreneurs may disrupt the natural balance of some ecosystems through their activities); hazardous working environments in some small firms (in some entrepreneurial companies the working environment may become toxic due to the actions or personality of the entrepreneur, excessive competition between employees, staff turnover).

Baumol (1996) has underlined that the institutional framework related to entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in determining the impact of entrepreneurship in an economy, both positive and negative. Sánchez-Escobedo et al. (2011) found that entrepreneurial activity can be influenced by formal factors (supporting bodies and regulations on entrepreneurship, costs and procedures of starting a business) and informal factors (entrepreneurial role models, entrepreneurship, and attitudes towards entrepreneurs' activities). Through investigating extensive literature in the field, Neumann (2021) identified several factors that determine the nature of the impact of entrepreneurship in society, positive or negative: industry affiliation; regional population density (in urban areas the effect is more pronounced and more positive compared to rural areas); regional entrepreneurship density (the impact of entrepreneurship decreases in regions with high entrepreneurship rates); institutions and culture (social norms and cultures have stronger and more positive effects on the relationship between entrepreneurship and economic growth); local development; innovativeness; firm survival; firm size; degree of internalization; motivation (opportunity-driven entrepreneurial activity have a greater impact than necessity-driven entrepreneurial activity); growth ambitions; qualification (firms founded by people with academic degrees seem to have a more positive direct effect on employment); gender and age.

The consequences of entrepreneurship, observed objectively (using social-economic indicators) and the subjective social and individual perceptions of these effects, influence the orientation of individuals towards entrepreneurship, but also the shaping of the image of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs in the respective community.

Studies on entrepreneurial intentions, perceptions towards entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurship on nationally representative samples are very few in Romania.

An earlier study (Mediafax, 2013), conducted on a sample of 5887 urban respondents, revealed that Romanians have a negative perception of employers, with 68.9% of respondents considering that they are not role models in the spirit of responsibility towards work.

The Romanian Startup Barometer (EY, 2019), conducted on a sample of 374 entrepreneurs, revealed that 74% of the respondents considered that entrepreneurship is not sustained by Romanian mentalities and values (compared to 60% in a similar survey in 2017 and 60% in 2016). The survey also shows that 73% of respondents consider that business failure is perceived negatively in Romanian society and is penalized. The entrepreneurs considered as role models for the respondents were: Elon Musk (7%), Jeff Bezos (6%), and Steve Jobs (5%). 75% of the respondents consider that Romanian schools do not prepare young people to become entrepreneurs. For 41% of respondents, mentoring and discussions with other entrepreneurs are the main source of learning. The main barriers for entrepreneurs in starting and developing a business are mentality and fear of failure (20%); poor education (12%); and fiscal unpredictability (12%).

The Amway Global Entrepreneurship Report (Amway, 2020) reveals that 75% of respondents want to start their own business (57% global average). The same study shows that 63% of respondents considered that they possess the necessary skills for starting a business, only 30% of respondents consider that they have adequate resources for starting a business, 50% suppose that family and friends would not dissuade them from starting a business and 71% would leverage their social network if starting a business). According to the same report, 68% of Romanian respondents mention that the most desirable benefit of starting their own business is the opportunity to work at something they are passionate about, and 68% of Romanian respondents also mention that the most desirable benefit is the possibility to be their boss. The main barrier Romanian respondents see in starting their own business is raising needed capital (45% of respondents).

A 2022 survey (RBL, 2022), conducted on a sample of 1109 people from all counties in Romania, revealed the following perceptions of entrepreneurs: 65% of the respondents consider Romania a country where honest people can succeed in business; only 41.9% could point to a Romanian businessman they consider a role model; 63.4% consider Romanian entrepreneurs to be rather honest (up 40.4% from 2011 when a similar survey was conducted); 65.5% think that businessmen should intervene when the state does not solve problems in society (35.3% consider that intervention should be through funding).

A recent survey (Enescu, 2024), conducted on a sample of 1071 people, representative of the population aged 18-65 in urban areas, reveals that the image of entrepreneurs in Romania has significantly improved between 2012 and 2024. According to a previous survey in 2012, 65% of respondents believed that "Entrepreneurs get rich at the expense of their employees" and 56% of respondents considered that "In Romania, only those who steal make money". A similar survey in 2024 reveals that 23% of the respondents state that the model of professional success they would choose is that of a businessman/entrepreneur. Enescu (2024) considers that this evolution can be explained by the power of models: external models (the mediatization of famous foreign entrepreneurs in Romania), and internal models (direct or indirect contact with honest, hard-working, self-realized Romanian entrepreneurs).

According to international research based on an online questionnaire, conducted by the multinational company Ipsos (2023), 26% of Romanians trust business leaders, compared to the global average of 25%. A higher level of trust in business leaders was recorded in Indonesia (47% of respondents), India (40%), and Thailand (37%).

The situation is not significantly different for the younger generation in Romania. According to a 2022 market survey (Apostol et al., 2022), conducted on a sample of 1212 young people (16-24 years old), 36% of the respondents stated that they intended to start their own business, but not in the next year, while 8% expressed intention to initiate their business within the next year. The main barriers to starting their own business were: lack of financial resources (mentioned by 78% of respondents); lack of knowledge about starting a business (66%); and lack of mentors to guide them in entrepreneurship (64%). The main motivations for starting their own business were: the desire to contribute to society (30% of respondents); the possibility to do what they want/like (20%); and the opportunity to earn more than one salary (19%).

The perception of entrepreneurs is a subjective construct based on individual norms, beliefs, rules, and procedures (Arroyo-Barrigüete et al., 2023). Volkmann & Tokarski (2009), citing several studies, considered that a distinction should be made between the image of an entrepreneur at a distance and close up. The distance image is a stereotypical image resulting from mass psychology, while the close-up image is the result of individual experience.

Although in the literature there is a predominance of approaches that reflect the positive role of entrepreneurship at the economic-social level, in practice, at the level of individuals in certain communities or generalized to communities at some point in time, entrepreneurs may have a negative image (as previously mentioned in the studies on Romania). Thus, entrepreneurs may be perceived as exploiters of employees' labor, greedy, concerned only with profit and enrichment, ruthless, and egoistic. This image is augmented by the media, which mainly report economic illegalities or associate businessmen with problems such as unemployment, and poverty (Volkmann & Tokarski, 2009).

The perception of entrepreneurs is an important element in the development of entrepreneurship. When entrepreneurship is socially legitimized and a significant proportion of the members of a community associate entrepreneurship with positive values, new business start-ups are stimulated in that community (Guzmán Cuevas & Cáceres Carrasco, 2001). In a European Union (EC, 2013) paper, containing a strategy for reigniting entrepreneurship in Europe, one of the three crucial pillars of this strategy is the emphasis on entrepreneurial role models. The entrepreneurial culture at the European level can be transformed by changing the perception towards entrepreneurs through positive communication on entrepreneurial success stories, on the value created by entrepreneurs in society, and on the benefits of a career in entrepreneurship. Public and private institutions should engage in this endeavor.

Recent research on the perceptions of entrepreneurship among young people in Romania is scarce. Volkmann & Tokarski (2009) investigated the image of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship among students in Germany, Romania, Latvia, Italy, and Austria. Romanian students attributed high ethical standards to entrepreneurs (in contrast to students in other countries). Romanian students were also the most inclined to see themselves as entrepreneurs.

Gasse & Tremblay (2011) conducted a similar study on a sample of students from Canada, Tunisia, France, Romania, Great Britain, Colombia, and Germany. According to the results of this study, Romania has a high rate of students who intend to start a business. Romanian students associate entrepreneurship with project development and business development, similar to Canadian, French, and Tunisian students, in contrast to British, Colombian, and German students who associate entrepreneurship with business creation elements. Romanian students also consider in a lower proportion, compared to students from other countries, that entrepreneurship can be developed in large firms, in the public sector, or in non-profit organizations.

Badulescu & Badulescu (2013) conducted a study on a sample of 88 Romanian PhD students from several fields (Science, Engineering, Economics, Medicine, etc.). The study revealed that a significant proportion of the respondents have a formal and declarative interest in business (also determined by the tendency to conform to a "trend ", especially in Central and Eastern Europe, and Asia, respectively a positive and constantly improving image of the entrepreneur), but also a superficial knowledge of the realities and requirements for an entrepreneurial career.

Perceptions towards entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs, the image of the entrepreneur in a community, change over time as a result of economic, social, political, and cultural changes in that community. Because we have not identified any recent study on this topic contextualized to young educated Romanians, we consider that our research approach, structured on the research questions inserted above, is an opportune one, of national and European relevance.

3. Methodology and results

The sample was selected from students of several faculties of the University of Craiova. We sent an e-mail invitation to 800 students briefly explaining the objectives of the study. Of the 800 invitations sent, 500 were sent to students from the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration and 300 to students from other faculties. Students were invited to complete an online questionnaire (Google Forms). The invitations to students and the collection of responses were sent out between July and September 2024.

We received 178 questionnaires, of which we eliminated 9 partially completed questionnaires (more than 30% of the data were missing).

The final questionnaire had 28 questions. Several studies addressing similar topics were consulted to develop the questionnaire (Martz et al., 2007; Izedonmi & Okafor, 2010; Goliath et al., 2014; Lee-Ross, 2017; Rahim & Mukhtar, 2021; Skorupa & Stępień, 2024). This questionnaire was obtained after two stages of testing with groups of 15 students. These iterations aimed to ensure that any confounds were avoided.

The structure of the sample by faculty, gender, age, and cycle degree can be observed in Table 1.

Table 1. The structure of the analyzed sample

		Frequency	Percent
Faculty	Faculty of Economics and Business Administration	108	63.9
	Faculty of Sciences	15	8.9
	Faculty of Horticulture	10	5.9
	Faculty of Mechanics	8	4.7
	Faculty of Automation, Computers and Electronics	6	3.6
	Faculty of Law	6	3.6
	Faculty of Electrical Engineering	6	3.6
	Faculty of Physical Education and Sport	3	1.8
	Faculty of Social Sciences	3	1.8
	Faculty of Letters	2	1.2
	Faculty of Theology	1	.6
	Faculty of Agronomy	1	.6
Gender	Female	101	59.8
	Male	68	40.2
Age	18-25 years	107	63.3
	25-30 years	12	7.1
	30 + years	50	29.6
Type of study programme	Bachelor	118	69.8
	Master	49	29.0
	PhD	2	1.2

From the 169 respondents, 38.5% had taken an entrepreneurship course in college. Moreover, 36.09% of the respondents have a very close family member (parents, brother/sister, grandparents) who has or has had their own business. 7.7% of respondents already have their own business.

The seventh question of the online questionnaire assessed students' perceptions of successful career options in Romanian society. Students could choose a maximum of three alternatives. The responses indicated that a career as a businessman/entrepreneur is perceived as most frequently associated with professional success by 53.4% of respondents. The subsequent career paths are associated with professional achievement in Romania: doctor (51.1%); lawyer/lawyer/judge (33.7%); IT-ist (28.7%); mayor/minister/parliamentarian (26.4%).

About a third of the respondents point to a Romanian entrepreneur they appreciate and who inspires them. There are very many entrepreneurs mentioned. The most frequently mentioned are Ion Țiriac and Paul Nicolau (nicknamed Pescobar), the owner of several fish restaurants, active on social media. Also, about a third of the respondents indicated a foreign entrepreneur who inspires them. The most frequently mentioned is Elon Musk.

A five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used for questions on entrepreneurial intentions, self-assessment of entrepreneurial career skills and competencies, perceptions towards starting own business, and perceptions towards entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship (questions 11-28).

Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis of questions 11-14 regarding entrepreneurial intentions. Analyzing the data in this table, it can be seen that students have a relatively strong aspiration to become entrepreneurs, with moderate optimism about the perspective of starting their own business within a time horizon of 10 years or less. Students are aware of the risks involved in starting their own business. Students' confidence that they can be able to cope with entrepreneurial activities is moderate, very close to neutral.

Table 2

	Mean	**Std. Deviation**
Q11. In a horizon of a maximum of 10 years, I will own my business.	3.4970	q1.33240
Q12. I want to be an entrepreneur.	3.7811	1.35598
Q13. I expect it will be easy for me to become an entrepreneur if I choose to become one.	3.0237	1.21964
Q14. There are many risks when opening and running your own business.	4.2012	.99750

Using an independent samples t-test, we analyzed whether there are differences between students from the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration (FEBA) and students from other faculties of the University of Craiova in terms of the level of aspiration to start their own business and confidence in their abilities in case of engaging in entrepreneurial activity. We considered such an analysis necessary because students in economics are supposed to be more familiar with the peculiarities and challenges of entrepreneurship.

Analyzing the data in Table 3, it can be observed that the significance value for Levene's test is greater than .05 for both variables studied. Thus, we can observe a higher intensity of aspirations of business students to start their businesses and a higher confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities, but the differences are not statistically significant.

Table 3

	Faculties	Mean	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances (Sig.)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Q12. I want to be an entrepreneur.	FEBA	3.8426	.072	.434 (E.v.a)
	Others	3.6721		
Q13. I expect it will be easy for me to become an entrepreneur if I choose to become one.	FEBA	3.0741	.324	.476 (E.v.a)
	Others	2.9344		

(E.v.a = Equal variances assumed; E.v.n = Equal variances not assumed)

Questions 15-20 aimed to analyze students' perceptions of the conditions that ensure success in entrepreneurship. The results of the descriptive analysis are presented in Table 4. Based on these data, it can be concluded that students in the study sample consider perseverance as an essential factor in entrepreneurial success. Students also perceive entrepreneurs as innovators. Factors of moderate importance in entrepreneurial success are specific entrepreneurship education and certain native qualities. Also, being financially resourced to start a business does not guarantee the success of that business, just as luck is considered marginal to entrepreneurial success.

Table 4

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q15. It takes a lot of perseverance to succeed as an entrepreneur.	4.5680	.82904
Q16. I believe that a successful entrepreneur is always an innovator.	4.0296	1.08795
Q17. Being a successful entrepreneur requires specific education.	3.6686	1.24748
Q18. To succeed in entrepreneurship, all you need is chance.	2.0769	1.04654
Q19. To succeed in entrepreneurship requires certain native traits.	3.3018	1.17415
Q20. Anyone can become a successful entrepreneur if they have enough money to start a business.	2.4970	1.21069

Through questions 21-28, we aimed to identify some coordinates of the image of entrepreneurs among students at the University of Craiova. The descriptive analysis is presented in Table 5.

Students tend to consider that entrepreneurs have a higher standard of living than the average citizen. This suggests that respondents associate entrepreneurship with high social status and material well-being.

The perception that retired entrepreneurs have a higher standard of living than the average citizen is less clear among students (very close to neutral). The difference between the answers to questions 21 and 22 can be explained by the fact that respondents assume that entrepreneurs may experience some financial/material difficulties in retirement if their businesses are not stable enough, i.e. entrepreneurs do not have long-term financial plans.

Respondents have a strong belief that entrepreneurs have a positive impact on society. This reflects an understanding among students of the role of entrepreneurship as a driver of development and innovation in society.

The average of the answers to question 24 shows that students consider, despite a stereotype, that entrepreneurs are not completely independent. Although entrepreneurs have certain degrees of freedom, their activity is under the influence of constraints generated by external factors (business partners, financial institutions, public authorities, and the labor market).

Also, the negative image of entrepreneurs as 'exploiters' of employees is not dominant, but it is a perception present among students, as their answers to question 26 reveal.

The average of responses to question 27, close to neutral, reveals a mixed perception of entrepreneurs. An important part of the student respondents considers Romanian entrepreneurs to be focused on short-term profit without creating long-term value.

The answers to question 28 show that students do not generally perceive that success requires transgressing ethics or law, but there is a significant minority (20%) who believe these behaviors are occasionally necessary.

Table 5

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q21. Entrepreneurs have a higher standard of living than the average citizen.	3.4438	.95030
Q22. Entrepreneurs have a high standard of living in retirement.	3.2189	1.04909
Q23. Entrepreneurs have a positive impact on a region/country.	3.8166	.99197
Q24. Entrepreneurs are totally independent.	2.8817	1.08461
Q25. Entrepreneurs do not have a personal life.	2.3077	1.21008
Q26. Entrepreneurs get rich by "exploiting" the labor of their employees.	2.6036	1.22581
Q27. In Romania, most entrepreneurs are just scalpers.	2.8402	1.24089
Q28. One cannot succeed in business without ethical/legal transgressions.	2.4556	1.31366

Using an independent samples t-test, we further analyzed whether there are differences in Romanian students' perceptions of the image of entrepreneurs depending on the faculty they attend (we focused on the differences between students in economics and those who attend a faculty in another field). We retained questions 23, 26, 27, and 28 for analysis. The summarized data are presented in Table 6.

It can be observed that there are no statistically significant differences between the students of different faculties regarding the image of entrepreneurs (positive and negative sides). A larger but not statistically significant difference is observed in the question related to the positive role of entrepreneurship in the economic and social development of a region/country. Thus, economics students believe, to a greater extent than students from other fields, that entrepreneurs have a positive impact on society.

By analyzing the data in Table 6 it can be highlighted for Q26-Q28 it can be seen that students of economics are less in agreement with the negative statements regarding entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship.

Table 6

	Faculties	Mean	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances (Sig.)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Q23. Entrepreneurs have a positive impact on a region/country.	FEBA	3.8519	.679	.540 (E.v.a)
	Others	3.7541		
Q26. Entrepreneurs get rich by "exploiting" the labor of their employees.	FEBA	2.5278	.023	.293 (E.v.n)
	Others	2.7377		
Q27. In Romania, most entrepreneurs are just scalpers.	FEBA	2.7963	1.529	.542 (E.v.a)
	Others	2.9180		
Q28. One cannot succeed in business without ethical/legal transgressions.	FEBA	2.3981	.384	.451 (E.v.a)
	Others	2.5574		

(E.v.a = Equal variances assumed; E.v.n = Equal variances not assumed)

In Table 7, we have summarized the ANOVA analysis carried out to test whether age is a factor influencing students' perceptions regarding entrepreneurs. It can be seen that there are no statistically significant differences between the perceptions of students in the three age groups towards entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. However, it can be said that the perception of the positive role of entrepreneurs in society increases with increasing age, but at the same time, the skepticism towards business ethics and legality also increases.

Table 7

		Mean	Sig.
Q23. Entrepreneurs have a positive impact on a region/country.	18-25 years	3.7944	.927
	25-30 years	3.8333	
	30 + years	3.8600	
Q26. Entrepreneurs get rich by "exploiting" the labor of their employees.	18-25 years	2.6636	.617
	25-30 years	2.3333	
	30 + years	2.5400	
Q27. In Romania, most entrepreneurs are just scalpers.	18-25 years	2.9346	.415
	25-30 years	2.5833	
	30 + years	2.7000	
Q28. One cannot succeed in business without ethical/legal transgressions.	18-25 years	2.3645	
	25-30 years	2.5000	.472
	30 + years	2.6400	

In Table 8 we have summarized the results of the independent samples t-test analyzing the differences in perceptions of entrepreneurship depending on the existence of an entrepreneur among the respondents' very close relatives (parents, brothers/sisters, grandparents). There are no statistically significant differences in the answers to the analyzed questions between the two categories of respondents. Surprisingly, respondents with a close relative who is an entrepreneur are slightly more inclined to associate business success with ethical compromises.

Table 8

	Close relatives are entrepreneurs.	Mean	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances (Sig.)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Q23. Entrepreneurs have a positive impact on a region/country.	Yes	3.7705	.040	.671 (E.v.n)
	No	3.8426		
Q26. Entrepreneurs get rich by "exploiting" the labor of their employees.	Yes	2.4754	.056	.309 (E.v.a)
	No	2.6759		
Q27. In Romania, most entrepreneurs are just scalpers.	Yes	2.6557	.122	.147 (E.v.a)
	No	2.9444		
Q28. One cannot succeed in business without ethical/legal transgressions.	Yes	2.6066	.187	.263 (E.v.a)
	No	2.3704		

(E.v.a = Equal variances assumed; E.v.n = Equal variances not assumed)

In Table 9, we have summarized the results of the independent samples t-test analyzing the differences in perceptions of entrepreneurs according to the existence of an entrepreneurial model declared by the respondents. We find that respondents who have an entrepreneurial home-grown model have a more favorable view of entrepreneurs as opposed to those who do not have such a model (the difference is statistically significant in Q27 and significant in Q28).

Table 8

	Respondents constantly follow/admire a Romanian entrepreneur.	Mean	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances (Sig.)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Q23. Entrepreneurs have a positive impact on a region/country.	Yes	4.0000	.070	. 104 (E.v.a)
	No	3.7328		
Q26. Entrepreneurs get rich by "exploiting" the labor of their employees.	Yes	2.5472	.190	.687 (E.v.a)
	No	2.6293		
Q27. In Romania, most entrepreneurs are just scalpers.	Yes	2.4717	.528	.009 (E.v.a)
	No	3.0086		
Q28. One cannot succeed in business without ethical/legal transgressions.	Yes	2.1698	.073	.056 (E.v.a)
	No	2.5862		

(E.v.a = Equal variances assumed; E.v.n = Equal variances not assumed)

Finally, we analyzed the correlation between respondents' willingness to become an entrepreneur (Q12) and their perceptions towards entrepreneurs (Q21-Q28). Table 10 presents the results of this analysis. It is found that, in general, the correlations between the willingness to become an entrepreneur and perceptions of entrepreneurship are weak and statistically insignificant. A statistically significant correlation is only observed between the perceived high standard of living of entrepreneurs after retirement and the willingness to become an entrepreneur.

Table 10

		Q12. I want to be an entrepreneur.
Q21. Entrepreneurs have a higher standard of living than the average citizen.	Pearson Correlation	.150
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.052
Q22. Entrepreneurs have a high standard of living in retirement.	Pearson Correlation	.260
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
Q23. Entrepreneurs have a positive impact on a region/country.	Pearson Correlation	.103
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.184
Q24. Entrepreneurs are totally independent.	Pearson Correlation	.027
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.729
Q25. Entrepreneurs do not have a personal life.	Pearson Correlation	.023
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.765
Q26. Entrepreneurs get rich by "exploiting" the labor of their employees.	Pearson Correlation	.109
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.160
Q27. In Romania, most entrepreneurs are just scalpers.	Pearson Correlation	.053
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.491
Q28. One cannot succeed in business without ethical/legal transgressions.	Pearson Correlation	.090
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.246

Discussion and conclusions

The first conclusion of our study, starting from the first research question, is that a career in entrepreneurship is perceived by students as socially desirable, i.e., most of the respondents (53.4%) consider that in Romanian society professional success is associated mainly with the status of businessman/entrepreneur (the next professions indicated are medicine - 51.1%; lawyer/prosecutor/judge - 33.7%). The majority of respondents (60.2%) want to become entrepreneurs ("agree" and "strongly agree"). In addition, 52.1% of the respondents believe that in 10 years or less, they will start their own business.

Although numerous studies identify socio-cultural factors as predictors for entrepreneurial intentions, there are, however, few studies that distinctly identify and analyze the social desirability of an entrepreneurial career or the social status of entrepreneurs (Ozaralli & Rivenburgh, 2016; Mehtap et al., 2017; Badghish et al., 2023).

The social status of the entrepreneur and the social desirability of an entrepreneurial career do not necessarily influence the entrepreneurial intentions of individuals in a community. Soomro & Honglin (2018) conducted a comparative study on the entrepreneurial intentions of adults in China and Pakistan. According to this study, entrepreneurship is considered a socially desirable career in China, and this cultural element is a positive and highly significant predictor of entrepreneurial intentions. In Pakistan, although entrepreneurs have a high level of status and respect in society, this does not induce the respondents to move towards entrepreneurship, preferring a stable job.

Not in all communities the social status of entrepreneurs is high, i.e. entrepreneurial careers are not very socially desirable. Thus, a survey of a sample of students from Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia (Petković et al., 2018) revealed that respondents believe that an entrepreneurial career is not sufficiently valued in society (the score is higher in Serbia and lower in Croatia).

In this context, it is worth noting that the University of Craiova's student respondents perceive entrepreneurship as a socially valued career. Romania, as well as the previously mentioned communities in the former Yugoslav area, experienced for 45 years a communist regime in which private initiatives were suppressed, mostly forbidden, and demonized through propaganda. In addition, an important part of the entrepreneurial class that emerged in the early transition period, on the background of inexperience and immaturity of the Romanian society, through their activity, exploiting certain pre-1990 established informal networks or certain legislative weaknesses, affected the image of the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship (Văduva, 2016). Although young respondents were not contemporaries of these periods, the collective mindset may have exerted influence on them. Therefore, we appreciate the fact that 53.4% of the respondents consider that in the current Romanian society professional success is associated with the status of entrepreneur/businessman.

Investigations carried out to answer the second research question revealed that respondents generally have a rather positive view of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, but are not very far neutral. Between respondents' perceptions of entrepreneurs, there are no statistically significant differences determined by the faculty they are attending, age, or the existence of a close relative who owns a business. More important, but not statistically significant, differences are observed between the responses of students who have an entrepreneurial model and those who do not. Our study revealed that about two thirds of the respondents do not have a Romanian or foreign entrepreneur role model. It was also found that the majority of Romanian and foreign entrepreneurs mentioned as role models are male, while female entrepreneurial role models are missing.

Studies in the field have reported similar findings, i.e. entrepreneurial role models can have a positive impact on individuals' attitudes toward entrepreneurship (Boldureanu et al., 2020; Abbasianchavari & Moritz, 2021).

In light of these considerations, a practical implication of our study could be to identify at the University of Craiova multiple solutions to facilitate student interactions with entrepreneurs and exposure to successful entrepreneurial narratives. These solutions could be: inviting successful entrepreneurs to share their experiences at conferences and workshops; including real case studies of successful local entrepreneurs in university entrepreneurship courses; organizing mentoring programs in partnership with local entrepreneurs; and developing podcasts with successful entrepreneurs accessible to students for free on internal educational platforms.

The final finding of our study was that there is generally no difference between students' perceptions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship and their willingness to start their businesses. The exception is the perception of a high standard of living for entrepreneurs in retirement. This result is somewhat surprising from two points of view: financial security in retirement is more desirable for young respondents than independence or immediate financial success; entrepreneurship is perceived as offering a high standard of living in retirement, although entrepreneurship does carry the risk of entrepreneurs' income and thus the risk of irregular pension contributions. Along these lines, Alpeza (2021) shows that despite some preconceptions about the financial security of entrepreneurs, some entrepreneurs may face the challenge of securing the necessary sources of funding in retirement. Mastrogiacomo & Dillingh (2015) highlight a high level of uncertainty about the future financial wealth of entrepreneurs (compared to older generations) and refer to the debate on the desirability of compulsory social insurance for entrepreneurs. A career in entrepreneurship, even a successful one, does not inherently ensure financial security in retirement. Entrepreneurs need, as any other citizen, financial education, preparation and planning for retirement from the perspective of financial resources, and consistent responsible financial behavior.

Finally, we highlight some limitations of the research. First, our research is exploratory and should be extended (e.g. it should be carried out on a sample including students from other universities located in socio-culturally different regions). In addition, it is necessary to review the variables that may influence students' perceptions towards entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, as most of the variables analyzed in this study do not generally lead to statistically significant differences. Second, a fairly high percentage of the student respondents lack knowledge about the economic and social environment and business (they have not studied entrepreneurship as a compulsory course, do not have family members involved in business, and do not consistently follow business information). Third, the responses were collected electronically and the sample does not have the characteristics of a random sample.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Social networks and civic participation: analysis of 23 institutional Facebook pages from Romania's North–East region

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Abstract: In this article we analyze the digital interaction between 23 local public authorities from Romania's North–East region and citizens through the Facebook social network, focusing on two clusters grouped more by the administrative and economic importance of the cities rather than strictly by population size. The study measures the engagement level using specific indicators (*Posts*, *Reactions*, *Comments*, *Shares*) for the May–June 2024 period, strategically coinciding with an interval estimated to have intense civic activity. The results indicate substantial variability in digital communication strategies, with clear patterns of inactivity on certain days and significant differences in performance regarding social media use in institutional communication. The data analysis provides empirical bases for optimizing communication strategies and more territorially balanced digitalization policies.

Keywords: *social networks, Facebook, civic participation, interaction, patterns.*

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Social networks and civic participation: analysis of 23 institutional Facebook pages from Romania's North–East region

Fundamental premises

As genuine communication channels, social networks provide sets of predictors regarding citizens' participation in civic actions (discussions and debates, voting participation, etc.). Social network users are constantly exposed to various information and debates that have the potential to influence their civic behavior. Through analyzing data from social pages, certain behavioral patterns can be observed, such as posting frequency, interaction level with civic action-related content, and the nature of friend networks that can predict the likelihood of a user actively participating based on their involvement in debates. The existence of citizens who participate in various discussions on social media platforms can have a "contagious" social effect, increasing the probability of higher user involvement around events of interest. For example, electoral-stakes events are the context in which news about political candidates or those already in office who participate in discussion groups promoting their public policies are frequently commented on and shared, predisposing towards active involvement both before and during the electoral campaign.

In this article, we examine the Facebook network not just as a social interaction tool but also as an essential mobilizing factor for civic engagement, having the capacity to convert passive users into active and dedicated members of society.

We list some of the fundamental premises that determined our decision regarding the data collection period:

Electoral behavior cyclicity: the pre-electoral period naturally generates an increase in public interest, users become more active and involved in discussions on social media platforms, and the need for information about candidates and programs increases.

Intensification of political communication: parties and candidates intensify their online presence, the frequency of posts and diversity of content on social media platforms increases, and implicitly more resources are invested in promoting online content.

Increase in organic engagement: more interactions (posts, likes, comments, shares), more heated discussions in comments, formation of active pro or contra groups.

Central arguments

The analysis of Facebook data from Socialinsider reports around local elections is not arbitrary; it is based on the following considerations:

Maximum representativeness: Data collection was conducted during a period when we estimated an intense information flow and when there was a probability of capturing both the diversity of opinions and positions (including political ones), as well as the main topics of local interest.

Statistical relevance: Real data provides us with a concrete basis for analyzing *engagement* that will allow the identification of relevant patterns, and through the diversity of interactions, we estimate a representative sample.

Predictive value: The analysis of online behavior for a time interval around local elections that theoretically interests both local public authorities and citizens can indicate electoral trends and support in identifying priority themes for citizens, which allows measuring the effectiveness of local public authorities' messages to them.

Time interval implications: We relied on collecting a set of real data for statistical analysis through which we could observe the dynamics of communication between local public authority and citizens.

Starting from the consideration that citizens' use of electronic means to interact through traditional channels with public authorities is likely an extension of civic and political involvement, we analyze the level of engagement through the Facebook social network in 23 county cities and county seat municipalities from Romania's North-East region. We propose a series of hypotheses regarding the interaction of local public authorities with citizens through the Facebook social network, and to test them, we analyze Socialinsider data, evaluating the parties' involvement through analysis of *Posts, Reactions, Comments, Engagement, and Shares*. Through these measurements, we intend to bring a better understanding and management of online communication on social networks and social networks themselves, with an added benefit being the possibility of adaptation according to our research interests.

Practical implications – Practical measurement of online interaction of certain local public authorities.

Originality/Value – This paper is the first to propose measurements to evaluate parties' involvement on the institutional Facebook page of public authorities in the N–E region and which aims to provide methodological foundation to correlate in future research with a tool for measuring web pages, engagement patterns that can guide communication strategies in the local public authority-citizens relationship. This can be used both in academic circles and public administration, for a better understanding of institutional online *engagement* through the Facebook platform.

In the ”conclusions” section, we present the potential benefit of the results for interested public authorities and for future research.

Citizens' participation in civic and political actions: the foundation of civic engagement

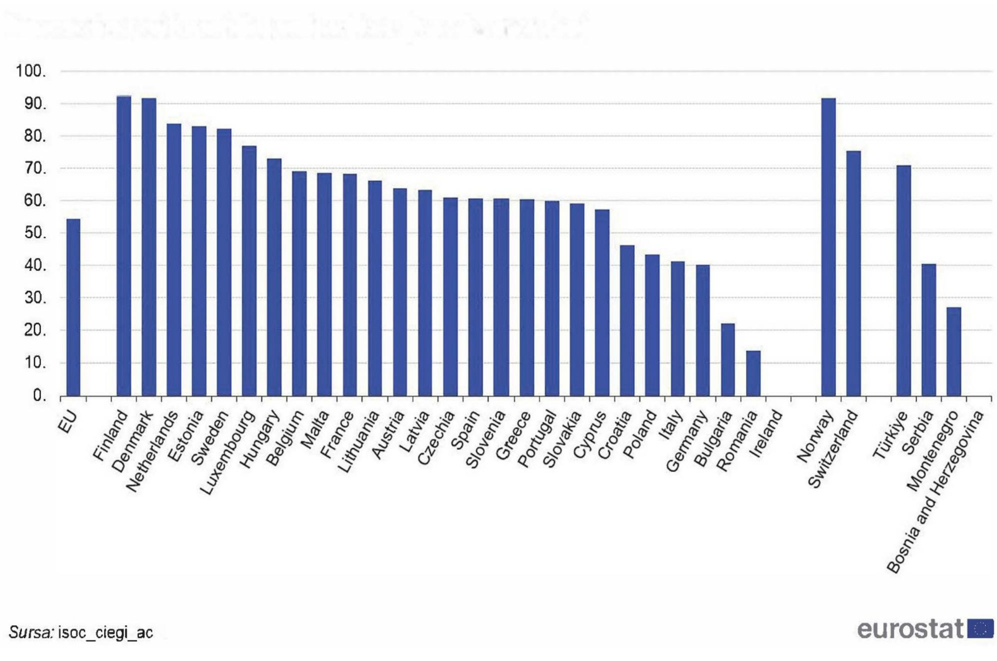
Citizens' participation in civic actions and political activities represents the core of civic engagement (Steven & Levy, 1999). At an individual level, civic engagement is represented by social contact (personal and social interactions: conversations, discussions, collaboration or common actions, participation in social events or gatherings, etc.), which citizens have among themselves in their community or in the social groups with which they interact and through which they contribute to the diffusion process (Bandiera & Rasul, 2004), (Lin, 2003), (Lynch, Kent & Srinivasan, 2001), (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). The diffusion and extended dissemination of local authorities' posts on the Facebook social network page through shares combined with other predictors can indicate the level of interaction.

Largely depending on the proportion of internet users, the use of social networks in public and governmental organizations is considered a powerful and useful tool in opening and increasing the degree of citizen participation (Nica, Popescu, Nicolăescu & Constantin, 2014). Although the electoral campaign itself is not our major interest, in terms of online activity intensity, we expect a more pronounced participation from both public authorities and citizens equally.

*What role do social networks play in citizen mobilization and involvement (in electoral campaigns)?*Any content posted on social networks can capture citizens' attention influencing their involvement if the topics addressed are significant and of interest to them (Bonsón, Royo & Ratkai, 2016). Social networks are the tool through which politicians can reach voters as internet users increasingly depend on digital platforms to obtain news and information of interest. However, this fact does not guarantee that all social network users are politically active online. Yet citizen involvement is considered important not only for the visibility and election of the candidate as a political action but also for the debate of public policies with citizens (Missingham, 2011).

The role of social networks in contemporary communication and forms of online participation on Facebook, together or separately, are frequently researched themes in the field of electronic governance, but quite few investigate the role of options that Facebook social network page buttons and their characteristics (*Posts*, *Comments*, *Shares* and *Interactions*) offer. Each of these options can be a ”voice” and a potential amplifier. The better the information operations are executed, the more potential they have to gain influence.

*To what extent is the potential of social networks exploited in the North-East region?*Although statistically social networks are among the most powerful instruments with implications for social order, in Romania (Graph 1) we observe that the level of citizen interaction with public authorities has the lowest share. According to statistics, only 14% of internet users interacted with public authorities over 12 calendar months. Such a percentage can support the statement that the potential of social networks is not sufficiently exploited in the public authority-citizens relationship.



Figures 1: Interaction with Public Authorities 2023 (last 12 months);

Preliminary data analysis

We explore social network participation to see the extent to which local public authorities interact with citizens. We measure the interaction level of local public authorities from the North-East region through the Facebook social network by analyzing the frequency of posts for information/communication or other specific actions. To test the hypotheses, we measure the posting frequency and number of interactions on the institutional Facebook pages of 23 county cities and county seat municipalities from the North-East region, during the period of May 26–June 24, 2024. The comparative analysis of this data is relevant for determining whether there are significant differences in terms of increasing or decreasing interaction during the electoral campaign, confirming or invalidating our expectations.

Statements

The level of interaction (*engagement*) is influenced by a set of factors (number of *posts*, *reactions*, *comments*, *shares*, day) that act simultaneously. On a secondary level, we state that:

1. The number of daily posts positively influences the level of *engagement*, controlling for other variables.
2. The number of reactions has a positive impact on the level of *engagement*, independent of the effects of other variables.
3. The number of comments contributes positively to the level of *engagement*, taking into account the effects of other variables.
4. The number of shares has a positive influence on the level of engagement, controlling for other variables.
5. The day of the week moderates the relationship between other independent variables and the level of *engagement*.

In the pre-testing phase of the Socialinsider instrument, we created a database comprising *Posts, Reactions, Comments, Shares, Engagement,* for the institutional Facebook social pages of 23 local public authorities from the N–E region, for the interval May 23–June 24, 2024.

To obtain the overall picture of large-scale trends and patterns before focusing on specific aspects, the same data was analyzed to validate/invalidate data that verifies the initial statements and supports the intention of identifying possible anomalies. Through this analysis, we intended not only to test the instrument but also to obtain benchmarks for an in-depth analysis which, depending on its complexity, we could carry out partially or entirely in future more extensive and thorough research.

Posting frequency: With an average of 0.81 and a median of 0.74 posts per day, a moderate posting activity is observed, below one post per day. The relatively small standard deviation (0.44) indicates reasonable consistency in posting frequency.

Engagement: Reactions are the dominant form of engagement, with an average of 56.34 per day, significantly higher than comments (7.24) and shares (8.70). The notable difference between the mean (72.90) and median (42.57) of total engagement suggests the presence of days with exceptionally high engagement, which influences the average.

Variability: High standard deviations, especially for reactions (47.98) and total engagement (61.97), indicate considerable fluctuation from day to day. This variability suggests that certain posts or days generate significantly more interest than others.

Asymmetric distribution: For all measured variables, except posts, the mean is significantly higher than the median, indicating a positive asymmetric distribution. This suggests the presence of occasional engagement "peaks" that pull the average upward.

Posting efficiency: The high ratio between engagement (mean 72.90) and number of posts (mean 0.81) shows that on average, each post generates a significant level of interaction.

Engagement patterns: Reactions appear to be the audience's preferred form of engagement, being significantly more numerous than comments or shares. Shares (mean 8.70) are slightly more frequent than comments (mean 7.24), highlighting content as being considered valuable enough to be shared. We can say that viewed as a whole, the data points toward a moderate but effective posting strategy, with fluctuating but generally good engagement. The presence of days with exceptionally high engagement suggests opportunities to identify and replicate factors that contribute to the expected success of these posts. Thus, the data distribution explains social media activity characterized by occasional "peaks" of interest and involvement, rather than a uniform distribution of interactions.

The collected data represent the 30 days from the period May 26-June 24, where we can visualize day-to-day trends, including periods of engagement increase and decrease. *Confirmed peaks*: days with exceptional engagement (May 30 and June 5) are evident, but we can also see other days with high performance. *Daily fluctuations*: the graph better highlights the daily volatility of engagement, especially for reactions and total engagement. *Period of inactivity*: June 9, which appears with zero values for all variables, is now more evident in the context of surrounding days. *Posting Trends*: we can more clearly observe the posting pattern, which seems to have a slight decrease toward the end of the analyzed period.

Preliminary results

For the descriptive interpretation of data from a theoretical perspective, we analyzed trends and relationships between different performance indicators for social media posts, focusing on key concepts from digital communication theory and social media marketing. Thus:

Posting frequency (Posts), with an average of 0.81 posts per day indicates a moderate posting strategy. Theory suggests that optimal posting frequency varies depending on platform and audience, but generally, content quality is more important than quantity (Batovski, 2013). The standard deviation of 0.44 shows moderate variability in posting frequency.

Interactions: Average engagement of 72.90 per post consists of reactions (mean 56.34), comments (mean 7.24), and shares (mean 8.70). This distribution aligns with the social media "engagement pyramid," where reactions (minimum effort actions) are most frequent, followed by shares and comments which require more effort (Charlene & Bernoff, 2008).

Content virality: The average number of shares (8.70) indicates a moderate level of virality. In the theory of innovation diffusion applied to social media, shares are essential for content spread beyond the immediate audience.

Content quality and audience resonance: Days with high Engagement (e.g., June 5 with 229.52) suggest content that strongly resonated with the audience. The "Uses and gratifications" theory would suggest that this content satisfied specific user needs (information, entertainment, social connection, etc.). (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973), (Chatman, 1991).

Consistency and fluctuations: The high standard deviation for Engagement (61.97) indicates significant fluctuations that can be interpreted through agenda-setting theory, suggesting that certain topics or content types have a greater impact on the audience. Agenda-setting theory is an important concept in communication and mass media. This theory maintains that mass media has a significant influence on topics that the public considers important. Proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972 in the article "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media" in Public Opinion Quarterly, following a study of the 1968 US presidential campaign, the theory's basic principle is that mass media doesn't necessarily tell us what to think but influences what to think about. In other words, it determines which topics are considered relevant by the public. The operating mechanism is triggered by emphasizing certain themes and ignoring others through which mass media sets the public "agenda." The first level of agenda-setting theory is establishing topic importance, and the second level is influencing how the public thinks about these topics. The frequency of a topic's appearance, positioning, and space/time allocated in media being the influencing factors. This theory has significant implications for understanding public opinion formation and mass media's influence on society. (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Interactivity: An average of 7.24 comments per post indicates a moderate level of interactivity. The theory of two-way communication in social media emphasizes the importance of these interactions for building relationships with the audience.

Seasonality and content cycles: Significant fluctuations are observed from day to day, with engagement peaks (e.g., May 30, June 5). These patterns can be analyzed in the context of theories about rhythm and temporality in digital communication.

Relative posting efficiency: The ratio between engagement and number of posts varies considerably. Days with high engagement and a low number of posts (e.g., June 5: 1 post, 229.52 engagement) demonstrate the principle of quality over quantity in content strategy.

Absence of activity: June 9 with zero activity on all measurements may indicate an intentional pause or technical issue. In our data, June 9 is the election day subject to legislative restrictions. Theories about constant social media presence would suggest that such breaks can negatively affect long-term engagement.

At this point in the analysis, the data reflects a social media strategy with significant fluctuations in Engagement and a focus on content quality rather than posting frequency. For a more in-depth analysis, it would be useful to correlate these data with the type of content posted, time of day when the message is posted, and external events relevant to the audience. Referring to the relevance of statistical data, these focus on social media activity of public entities (local authorities from Romania's North–East region), over a 30-day period (May 26 – June 24). With an average Posts frequency of 0.81 posts per day, moderate social media activity is suggested. The average of 72.90 Engagement per Posts indicates a decent level of citizen interactions. There is also variability: high standard deviation for most measurements suggests inconsistency in post performance.

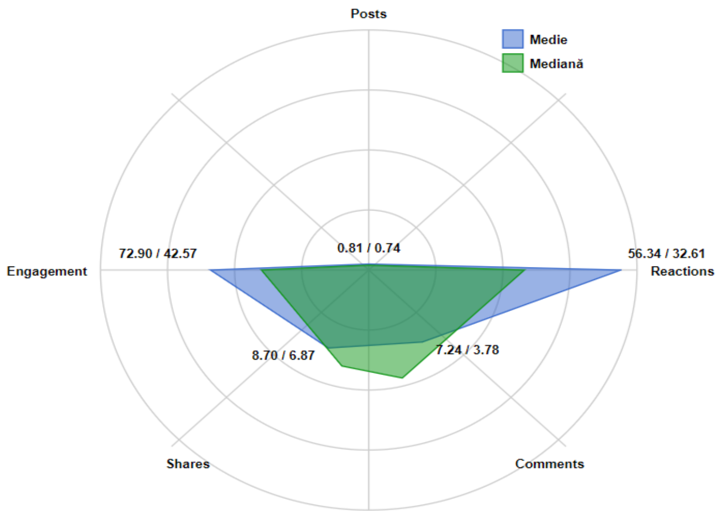
Comparative analysis of collected data

1. *Comparative analysis of means and medians*

To obtain insights about the distribution and central tendencies of the data for each social media indicator, we conducted a comparative analysis of the mean and median, with the same data subsequently represented through radar charts. A significant difference between mean and median will indicate an asymmetric (skewed) distribution.

The analysis by indicators shows that for *Posts* (Mean: 0.81; Median: 0.74), the points are very close, indicating a relatively symmetric distribution of posts. For *Reactions* (Mean: 56.34; Median: 32.61), a significant difference is observed, suggesting the presence of days with an exceptional number of reactions. *Comments* (Mean: 7.24; Median: 3.78) appear with a notable difference, indicating an asymmetry in the distribution of comments. *Shares* (Mean: 8.70; Median: 6.87) show a smaller difference compared to reactions and comments, but still indicate a slight asymmetry. *Engagement* (Mean: 72.90; Median: 42.57) presents the largest discrepancy in the mean and median comparison, suggesting the presence of days with exceptional engagement.

We thus observe *positive asymmetry*: for all indicators, the mean is greater than the median, indicating a positive asymmetry in the data distribution; *Reactions* and *Engagement* show the highest *variability*, visible through the large difference between mean and median, and *consistency*: *Posts* have the smallest difference between mean and median, suggesting a more uniform distribution of posts.

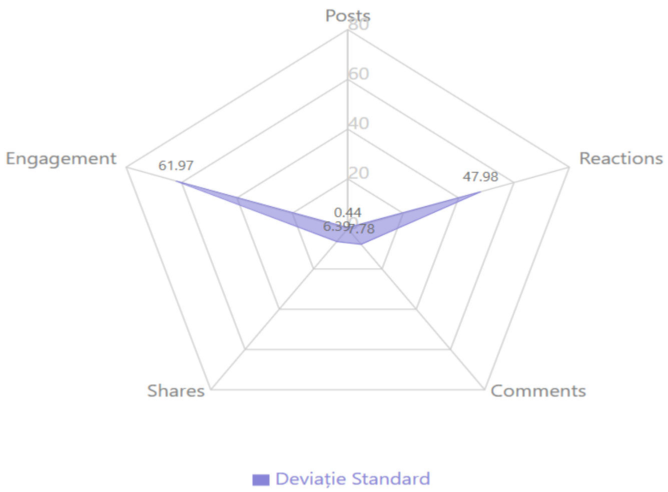


Figures 2: *Mean Vs Median comparison*

We observe that for all measured indicators, the mean is higher than the median, suggesting a positive asymmetry in the data distribution for each category. The largest difference between mean and median is observed in Engagement and Reactions, indicating greater variability and the presence of extreme values in these categories. Posts have the smallest difference between mean and median, suggesting a more uniform distribution of posts throughout the analyzed period.

2. Comparative analysis of standard deviation

Engagement has the highest standard deviation (61.97), creating that pronounced "peak" observable in the graphical representation (Figures 3). *Reactions* have the second-highest standard deviation (47.98), forming another extended point on the graph. *Comments* and *Shares* have moderate and similar standard deviations (7.78 and 6.39 respectively). *Posts* have the lowest standard deviation (0.44), being closest to the center of the graph.



Figures 3: *Standard deviation comparison*

The greatest variability is observed in *Engagement*, suggesting the existence of significant differences in the level of involvement between different posts or periods. *Reactions* also show high variability, indicating that the number of reactions fluctuates considerably. *Comments* and *Shares* have moderate variability, indicating a more uniform distribution but still with some fluctuations. *Posts* has the lowest variability, which may indicate consistency in posting frequency.

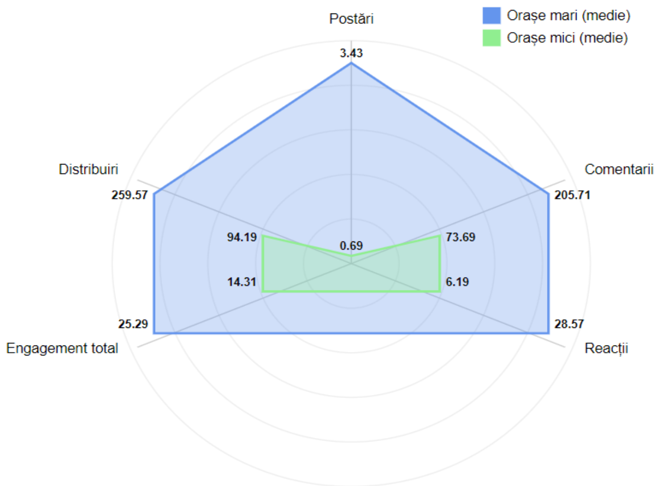
3. *Comparative analysis of cluster 1 Vs. cluster 2*

To compare the mean and median for the 23 cities in the sample for which data is analyzed, we classified them into cluster 1 and cluster 2 (Table 1). The grouping criterion is based more on the administrative and economic importance of the cities rather than strictly on population. All cities in the first group are county seats or cities with significant economic and historical importance in their region (for example, Bârlad). The cities in the second group, although some have over 10,000 inhabitants, are considered "small" in terms of their administrative or economic importance compared to those in the first group.

Table 1: *Cluster classification*

Cluster	Descriptive values	*Posts*	*Reactions*	*Comments*	*Shares*	*Engagement*
cluster 1 Iași, Botoșani, Piatra Neamț, Suceava, Bacău,Vaslui Bârlad	*Mean*	3.43	205.71	28.57	25.29	259.57
	Median	3	133	14	9	156
	Standard Deviation	2.18	319.89	51.76	42.18	408.76
cluster 2 Hârlău, Târgu Frumos, Dorohoi, Flămânzi, Darabani, Roman, Târgu Neamț, Bicaz, Fălticeni, Rădăuți, Câmpulung Moldovenesc, Onești, Moinești, Comănești, Huși, Negrești	*Mean*	0.69	73.69	6.19	14.31	94.19
	Median	0	0	0	0	0
	Standard deviation	1.14	216.01	22.76	43.76	279.45

4. Statistical comparison of Mean and Median, cluster 1 Vs. cluster 2



Figures 4: *Mean/Median comparison cluster 1/cluster 2*

In figures representation 4, we observe the data distribution and asymmetries for cluster 1 (large cities): *Posts* (Mean: 3.43, Median: 3), the median is close to the mean, suggesting a relatively symmetric distribution. For *Reactions* (Mean: 205.71, Median: 133), the mean is significantly higher than the median, indicating a positive skewed distribution (skewed right). There are several cities with a large number of reactions pulling the mean upward. For *Comments* (Mean: 28.57, Median: 14), again, the mean is higher than the median, suggesting positive asymmetry. For *Shares* (Mean: 25.29, Median: 9), the significant difference indicates strong positive asymmetry. Some cities have a much higher number of shares than others. For total *Engagement* (Mean: 259.57, Median: 156), we see a positive asymmetry, reflecting trends observed in the individual components. In cluster 2, for all measured categories (*Posts*, *Reactions*, *Comments*, *Shares*, total *Engagement*), the median is zero, while the mean has positive values, indicating extreme asymmetry in distribution. In cluster 2, most cities have very reduced or nonexistent activity, and only a few cities have more intense activity, pulling the mean upward.

Conclusions

Asymmetry: For both cluster 1 and cluster 2, there is a positive asymmetry in data distribution. This suggests that there are a few "high-performing" cities that have much more intense online activity than the rest.

Variability: Cluster 1 shows greater variability in online activity, with significant differences between mean and median.

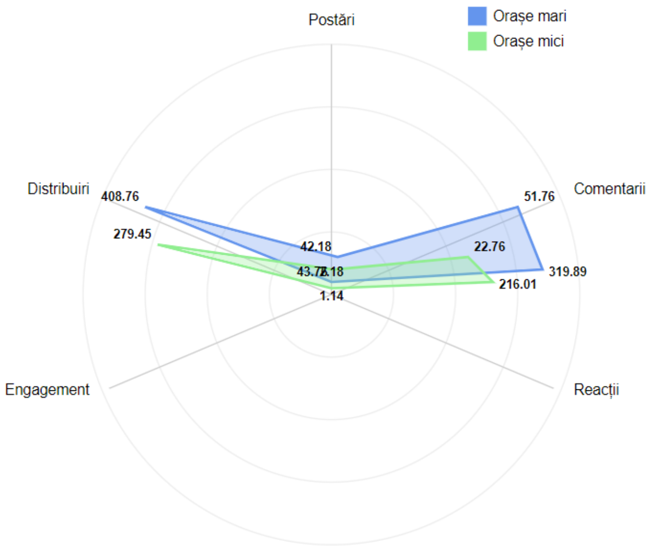
Inactivity in small cities: Zero median for all measured variables in cluster 2 suggests that at least half of the component cities have minimal or nonexistent online presence.

Unexploited potential: The large difference between mean and median for small cities shows that there is growth potential if more cities would adopt more active social media strategies.

Concentration vs. Dispersion: Online activity appears to be concentrated in a few cities, especially in the small cities category, while for large cities there is greater dispersion, although still asymmetric.

5. Statistical comparison of standard deviation cluster 1 Vs. cluster 2

Figures 5 visually shows a larger standard deviation for cluster 1, indicating greater variability in the number of posts (*Posts*: cluster 1: 2.18; cluster 2: 1.14); Significant difference, suggesting that regarding cluster 1, there is much greater variability in the number of reactions received (*Reactions*: cluster 1: 319.89; cluster 2: 216.01); *Comments*: cluster 1 again shows greater variability in the number of comments (cluster 1: 51.76; cluster 2: 22.76); Interestingly, here small cities have a slightly higher standard deviation, indicating similar or even greater variability in shares (*Shares*: cluster 1: 42.18; cluster 2: 43.76); Total *Engagement* shows greater variability for cluster 1 (*Engagement*: cluster 1: 408.76; cluster 2: 279.45).



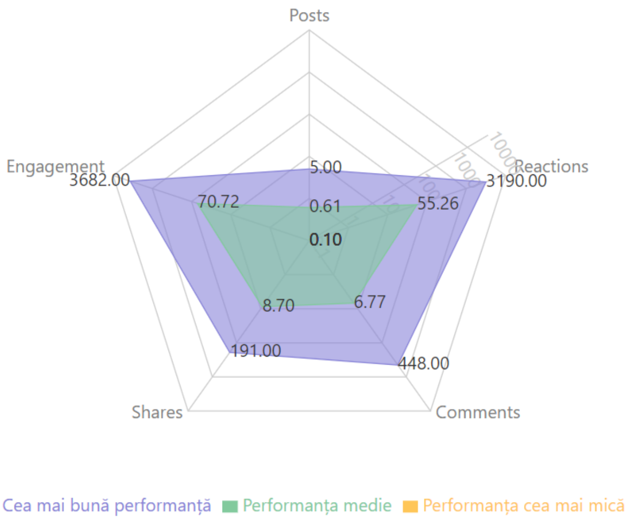
Figures 5: *Standard deviation comparison cluster 1 Vs. cluster 2*

In general, cluster 1 shows greater variability in social media activity, with the exception of shares. The largest difference in variability is observed in *Reactions* and total *Engagement*. Shares appear to be the score with the smallest difference in variability between cluster 1 and cluster 2. This greater variability for cluster 1 may suggest a more pronounced difference between top performers and the rest, while cluster 2 seems to have more uniform activity (although possibly lower in general).

6. *Comparative analysis: best performance, average performance, and lowest performance*

To compare the best performance with average performance and lowest performance, we used the maximum, minimum, and mean values for each measured category (Posts, Reactions, Comments, Shares, and Engagement) during the period May 26 - June 24. A comparative descriptive analysis of the data shows that for *Posts*: There is a significant difference between the best performance (5) and average performance (0.61), indicating that days with intense posting activity are rare. The lowest performance (0) suggests there are days without any posts. *Reactions*: An extreme variation is observed, with the best performance (3190) being substantially higher than the average (55.26). This indicates the presence of exceptionally popular posts that attract a large number of reactions. *Comments*: Similar to reactions, comments show a large discrepancy between best performance (448) and average (6.77), suggesting that certain posts generate intense discussions. *Shares*: The best performance (191) is significantly higher than the average (8.70), indicating that some content is particularly "shareable". *Engagement*: Being a cumulative measure, it shows the greatest variation.

The best performance (3682) is substantially higher than the average (70.72), reflecting days with exceptional social media activity. The data shows large variability in performance for all scores, with occasional peaks of intense activity that significantly exceed average performance. The lowest performance being 0 for all categories suggests there are days with minimal or nonexistent social media activity. A comparative picture for best performance, average performance, and lowest performance for the 5 measured categories: Posts, Reactions, Comments, Shares, and Engagement, can be observed below (Figures 6):



Figures 6. *Comparative performance analysis: high, average, low*

Due to large differences between values for different categories (for example, Posts having a maximum value of 5, while *Engagement* has a maximum value of 3682), the graph may appear disproportionate. Small values are difficult to distinguish. The lowest performance being 0 for all measured categories appears as a point in the center of the graph. The larger the surface area, the better the performance. For better data interpretation, we could use separate graphs for each measured variable, which would allow a more suitable scale for each dataset; excluding the lowest performances (being 0 for all categories) and focusing only on the best performance and average performance.

7. Comparative analysis of mean and median engagement by counties

The data analysis to compare means - medians and standard deviations between counties is based on engagement data, as it is a relevant indicator of post performance.

Table 2: *Total engagement by counties*

COUNTIES	*DESCRIPTIVE VALUE*	*ENGAGEMENT*
IAȘI	*Medie*	164.48
	Mediana	117.00
	Dev. Std.	106.91
BOTOȘANI	*Medie*	132.76
	Mediana	40.00
	Dev. Std.	175.30
NEAMȚ	*Medie*	92.38
	Mediana	16.00
	Dev. Std.	183.261
SUCEAVA	*Medie*	100.68
	Mediana	41.00
	Dev. Std.	155.71
BACĂU	*Medie*	344.02
	Mediana	128.00
	Dev. Std.	573.49
VASLUI	*Medie*	60.98
	Mediana	23.00
	Dev. Std.	90.95

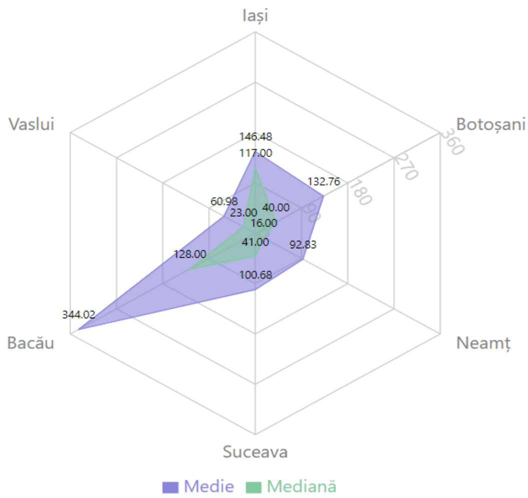
We observe that Bacău county has the highest values for all three descriptive values, indicating a high level of engagement, but also high variability. Vaslui county has the lowest mean and standard deviation, suggesting a lower but more consistent level of engagement. Neamț county has the lowest median, which may indicate that most posts have low engagement, with possible extreme values raising the mean. Iași and Suceava counties have moderate values for all statistics, placing them in the middle of the ranking. Botoșani county has a high standard deviation compared to its mean, indicating large variability in engagement.

The comparative descriptive analysis of mean and median for the engagement variable indicates Bacău county as having the highest level of engagement, with a significantly higher mean than the other five counties. However, the high standard deviation suggests there is large variability between posts, with some having very high engagement, while others possibly much lower. Vaslui county, on the other hand, has the lowest average level of engagement, but also the smallest standard deviation. This indicates a more consistent but generally lower level of engagement. Neamț county presents an interesting situation, having the lowest median, but moderate mean and standard deviation. This suggests that most posts have low engagement, but there are some posts with very high engagement that raise the mean. Iași and Suceava counties have similar performance, with moderate values for all statistical data. These seem to have a stable online presence, without extreme fluctuations. Botoșani county has an engagement average close to that of Iași and Suceava, but a much higher standard deviation.

This indicates greater inconsistency in post performance, with some likely having much greater success than others.

In conclusion, each county seems to have a different social media strategy or different audience. Bacău county manages to obtain the highest engagement, but with high variability. Vaslui county has a more modest but more consistent presence. The other counties fall between these extremes, each with its own particularities regarding online engagement.

A graphical representation of mean, median, and standard deviation of Engagement for the six counties (Iaşi, Botoșani, Neamț, Suceava, Bacău, and Vaslui), clearly highlights Bacău county as having the largest "footprint" in the graph, especially for mean and standard deviation. Vaslui county has the smallest "footprint", indicating lower values for all three measurements. The other counties have more balanced shapes, but with notable differences between them.

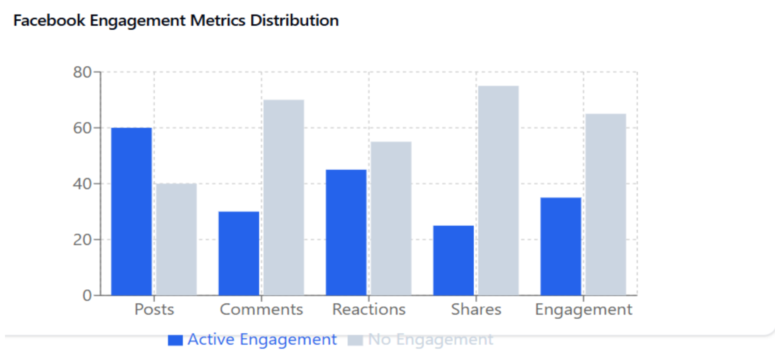


Figures 7: *Mean/Median engagement comparison by counties*

In figures 7, it is evident that Bacău has the largest difference between mean and median, which indicates a possible asymmetric distribution of data. Vaslui county has the lowest values for both mean and median. For most counties, the mean is significantly higher than the median, suggesting the presence of extreme values (outliers) that pull the mean upward.

Interpretation of engagement level

Represented as percentages (Figures 8), we observe that *Posts* have the highest level of active engagement, approximately 60%, indicating that users are active in content creation; *Comments*: Active engagement is lower, around 30%, with a significant difference between active and total engagement; For *Reactions*: Active engagement is approximately 40%, representing a popular form of interaction; *Shares*: have the lowest level of active engagement, around 20%, suggesting that users are more reluctant to share content; *Engagement* (total): Active engagement is approximately 35%, representing an average of all interaction patterns.

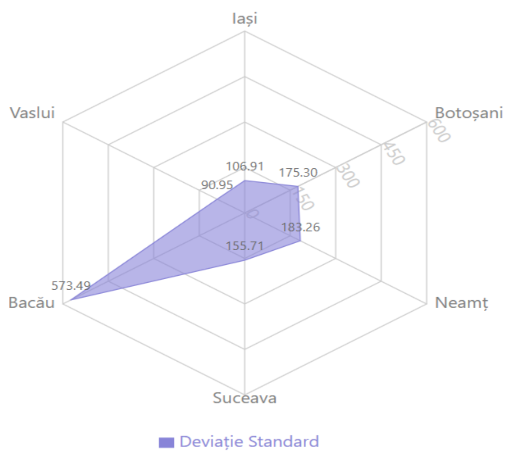


Figures 8. *Interpretation of engagement level*

We conclude that *Posts* generate the highest *active Engagement*, suggesting that original content creation should be encouraged to stimulate shares and comments. The difference between active and total engagement indicates potential for increasing the level of active user involvement.

1. *Comparative analysis of standard deviation by counties*

Bacău county clearly stands out with the highest standard deviation, creating a pronounced "peak" in the graph. Vaslui county has the lowest standard deviation, being closest to the center of the graph. Neamț and Botoșani counties have similar values, forming close points on the graph. Iași and Suceava have intermediate values, but significantly lower than Bacău county.



Figures 8: *Standard deviation comparison by counties*

Main identified patterns

Total absence of activity on certain days: June 9 shows zero scores for all measurements (*Posts, Reactions, Comments, Shares, Engagement*); We explain this pattern as being caused by legislative restrictions on local election day.

Patterns in small cities cluster: Zero median for all variables measured in cluster 2 (small cities) shows that at least half of small cities have minimal or nonexistent online presence.

Inactivity patterns on weekends: Lower or zero scores are frequently observed on weekends, suggesting reduced administrative activity outside normal working hours.

Significance of zero scores

Administrative significance: Indicates lack of consistent digital communication strategy; Suggests possible human and technical resource limitations, especially in small cities; May reflect absence of standardized procedures for online communication.

Significance on public authority-citizen relationship: Zero scores indicate interruptions in dialogue with citizens; May signal periods when citizen feedback is not collected or processed; Suggests potential lost opportunities for community interaction.

Statistical significance: Creates asymmetric data distribution; Significantly influences medians, especially for small cities cluster; Affects calculation of central tendency and dispersion measures.

Implications for E-Government development: Indicates need for administrative capacity development in digital environment; Suggests need for clearer policies regarding online presence; Highlights disparities between large and small cities in digital tool adoption.

Perspectives and research directions

Significant potential for engagement growth in small cities; Need for standardization of digital communication practices; Possibility of developing customized strategies based on patterns identified through this and similar analyses; Analysis of factors influencing *Reactions, Comments, and Shares* separately, instead of combining into a single *Engagement* score. Investigation of other variables that could influence *Engagement*: type of content posted, posting time, or audience demographic characteristics. A longitudinal analysis could provide more valuable information about how *Engagement* evolves over time and what factors influence it. Using more advanced regression techniques, such as ridge or lasso regression, could be useful for managing the multicollinearity problem.

Discussions

The analysis of the collected data reveals several significant aspects regarding the digital communication of local public authorities with citizens through institutional Facebook pages:

Digital communication disparities at local level: We observed important differences between large and small cities regarding the frequency and efficiency of digital communication. The zero median for all variables in the small cities cluster indicates a structural problem in digital communication adoption. The high variability in engagement (standard deviation 573.49 for Bacau vs. 90.95 for Vaslui) suggests a lack of consistent communication strategies.

Engagement patterns: Reactions represent the dominant form of interaction (mean 56.34), followed by shares (mean 8.70) and comments (mean 7.24). A positive skewness is observed in the engagement distribution for all measured categories. Weekdays show significantly higher engagement compared to weekends.

E-governance implications: The large differences between clusters suggest the need for more territorially balanced digitalization policies. Frequent zero scores indicate the need for a more consistent online presence, while the high variability in engagement suggests opportunities for optimizing communication strategies.

Limitations and challenges

The analyzed period (30 days) may not be representative of long-term trends. Legislative restrictions (e.g., election day) influence communication patterns. The lack of data about human and technical resources of the institutions limits the understanding of the causes behind the observed disparities.

Conclusions

The analysis of engagement patterns in digital communication of local public authorities from the North-East region reveals the following concrete results:

Significant disparities between clusters: large cities record an average engagement of 259.57, almost three times higher than that of small cities (94.19). The high standard deviation (408.76 for cluster 1 vs. 279.45 for cluster 2) indicates high variability in communication efficiency.

Different performance across counties: Bacau County leads with the highest average engagement (344.02), Vaslui County records the lowest level (60.98). The variability between counties suggests different adoption of digital communication strategies.

Specific patterns identified: Systematic inactivity during weekends, higher engagement on weekdays, more concentrated activity in county capital cities.

Performance Indicators: Reactions dominate the forms of Engagement (mean 56.34), Shares and Comments have lower but more stable values, while Posts show the lowest variability (standard deviation 0.44).

Practical implications: The need for a standardized digital communication strategy, the opportunity for administrative capacity development in the digital environment, significant growth potential in small cities.

Recommendations: Implementation of consistent digital communication policies; Development of resources dedicated to online presence; Continuous monitoring and optimization of engagement strategies.

The results of our analysis provide an empirical basis for developing more efficient digital communication strategies in local public administration, highlighting both current challenges and opportunities for improvement.

Authors' Contributions:

The authors contributed equally to this work.

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Social networks and civic participation: analysis of 23 institutional Facebook pages from Romania's North–East region

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Predictive Analysis of Volatility for BSE S&P GREENEX index using GARCH Family Models: A case study for Indian stock market

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Abstract:
The research paper aims to examine the BSE GREENEX index, which was developed to monitor and assess the performance of environmentally conscious companies based on carbon emissions. This index, created in collaboration with IIM Ahmedabad, is a valuable tool for companies aiming to enhance their carbon performance. It facilitates the creation of eco-friendly financial products like mutual funds, exchange-traded funds (ETFs), and structured funds. The study spans 2014 to 2024, utilizing quantitative data and various econometric tools to analyze price movements. With a dataset comprising 2485 observations of S&P BSE-GREENEX spanning from February 28, 2014, to March 15, 2024, the research explores the application of different GARCH models, including GARCH, EGARCH, IGARCH, TARCH, APARCH, and PARCH, across various distributions. By evaluating criteria such as AIC, SC, and Log Likelihood values, the APARCH (1,1) model with a t-distribution emerges as the optimal choice. The study's findings reveal the presence of volatility clustering, leverage effects, and log memory volatility within the BSE S&P GREENEX index. Furthermore, the analysis suggests that macroeconomic fluctuations have led to intermittent declines in volatility. Employing econometric and statistical methodologies, the paper endeavors to comprehensively elucidate these phenomena and their implications.
Keywords: *BSE, CARBONEX, GREENEX, Sustainability, GARCH, APARCH, Volatility, Green Finance*
JEL Code: C1, C32, C51, G13, Q5

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Predictive Analysis of Volatility for BSE S&P GREENEX index using GARCH Family Models: A case study for Indian stock market

Introduction

Green companies, also referred to as environmentally friendly or sustainable businesses, are entities that operate in a manner that reduces their negative impact on the environment."Sustainability" and "sustainable development" frequently lack clear and consistent definitions despite their widespread usage(Azevedo et al., 2017). Sustainability managers spearhead initiatives to make their companies' products and services more environmentally friendly (Kurland & Zell, 2011). Despite the challenges posed by the vague and widespread nature of sustainability risks, corporations are compelled by growing regulatory and societal demands to integrate social and environmental responsibility into their strategies and management systems(Giovannoni & Fabietti, 2013).Green finance aims to boost financial support for eco-friendly projects, advancing sustainable development goals(Kitakogelu & Ozili, n.d.).Going eco-friendly for businesses is complex, and there are many ways to become more sustainable. The key for environmentally conscious companies is to adopt at least one "4 Rs": reduce, reuse, recycle, and recover. (Čekanavičius et al., 2014).In order to achieve the GDP target projected for 2030, an annual growth rate of 8.58% is deemed necessary. To effectively realize this goal within the stipulated timeframe, it is imperative to attain growth rates of 10.67% and 3.55% in distinct periods(I. Ali et al., 2021).Sustainable investing, evolving from the 1980s, is now termed ESG investing, prioritizing Environmental, Social, and Governance factors and integrating societal impact into the financial decision-making frameworks (Meher, Hawaldar, Mohapatra, Spulbar, et al., 2020).

BSE launched two indices, BSE-GREENEX and BSE-CARBONEX, on February 22nd and November 30th, respectively, 2012(Seth & Singh, n.d.).India has four sustainability indices: S&P BSE GREENEX, S&P BSE CARBONEX, S&P BSE 100ESG, and Nifty 100 ESG.GREENEX is an index tracking environmentally sustainable companies' performance, aiding investors in aligning portfolios with sustainability goals. It offers a benchmark for evaluating financial performance, managing risk, and identifying investment opportunities in green sectors. By monitoring GREENEX, investors gauge market trends, assess returns, and make informed decisions about portfolio allocations. GREENEX is crucial in integrating environmental considerations into investment strategies while considering financial performance and risk management.The S&P BSE GREENEX is a real-time index that evaluates the performance of the leading 25 companies within the S&P BSE 100 index, focusing on their carbon efficiency.Quantitative environmental data disclosed voluntarily under the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) are drawn from companies listed in the BSE 100 index(Maji & Mondal, n.d.) It considers factors such as greenhouse gas emissions, market capitalization, and liquidity to gauge their environmental impact and financial strength**.**The BSE-GREENEX marks a significant initial stride towards establishing an inclusive market mechanism to foster energy-efficient practices among major corporate players in India.

BSE developed the GREENEX index, which focuses on tracking and evaluating the performance of companies based on carbon emissions that are environmentally conscious, in collaboration with IIM Ahmedabad to assist companies in improving their carbon performance. Index can utilized to create eco-friendly financial products such as mutual funds, exchange-traded funds (ETFs), and structured funds.The index is specifically created for investors who are socially conscious and gracious for society, ethical, and environmental factors while making investment decisionsInvestors are inclined to pay a premium for green companies to get better returns. The performance can observed by the focus on the potential benefits of ESGs. (Sharma, 2022).

Previously, investment decisions were only for monetary benefits, but in modern investment, companies take the society along with the profit (*Grnex*, n.d.). Technology continually shapes finance, driving efficiency, accessibility, and innovation in financial services and operations(Meher et al., 2024). Need for empirical analysis is necessary to conduct a data-driven study to observe the effectiveness of sustainable index in the Indian capital market. (Gurung & Sarkar, 2023).Assessing the volatility of GREENEX enables investors to make informed decisions and manage risk effectively in their sustainable investment portfolios.

Literature Review

In the present era, stock markets have become an integral part of a country's economy, playing a vital role in its growth and development. Observing the performance of a financial market requires considering its volatility. A market with low volatility is generally considered safer than a highly volatile market.

Much progress has been made in studying the volatility of stock indices.For the sake of convenience, the literature review has been divided into four different categories.The first category responds to the studies related to GREENEX companies. The second category responds to volatility. The next category responds to the GARCH family. And the last category responds to the APARCH

GREENEX companies and their objectives

BSE-GREENEX is the indicator used to predict carbon emissions by companies listed by BSE and suggests that investors should invest in companies that are a lesser threat to the environment.(Chowdhury et al., 2023). BSE-GREENEX is the initial stage for establishing mechanisms to encourage energy-efficient practices (Bhattacharya et al., 2013).GREENEX's launch signals growing environmental consciousness in the Indian investing community, fostering eco-friendly investment choices(V. Tripathi & Bhandari, 2014).Significant investment in these funds propels the market's progression of green and sustainable stocks (Babu et al., 2022). This increases the funds available in the US surged by nearly 400% (Babu et al., 2022). As GREENEX has low volatility, conscious investors are slightly more focused on it(Chowdhury et al., 2023)**.**Research has been conducted and found that BSE-CARBONEX has a positive relation with BSE-Energy and BSE-GREENEX has a positive relation with industrial production ("SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT, MANIFESTATION AND AUGMENTATION," 2023).BSE GREENEX gives equal importance to both energy efficiency and profitability (Maji & Mondal, n.d.).GREENEX and CARBONEX are described as emerging indices despite this, they are in the early stages of development(Chowdhury et al., 2023).

Volatility

Volatility refers to rapid and unpredictable changes in value, often used in finance to describe investment price fluctuations(Babu et al., 2022).Recentadvancements in financial econometrics enable more accurate volatility predictions,this has caught the eye of investors and decision-makers(Kumar, Meher, Birau, et al., n.d.).One can predict market directions by studying volatility, providing insights into economic expectations, and facilitating informed decisions about future economic trends(Meher, Hawaldar, Mohapatra, & Sarea, 2020). Comprehending volatility patterns and determinants is crucial for investors, policymakers, and financial analysts in making informed decisions(Kumar, Anand, et al., n.d.).Analyzing and predicting the stock prices and their return volatility of companies listed in sustainable indices is essential.Time series analysis predicts trends by analyzing past data, uncovering patterns to forecast future developments accurately, and effectively informing decision-making(Meher et al., 2021). Since December 2019, the COVID-19 epidemic has caused turbulence in global financial markets. It has been found that all major US stock market indexes are significantly impacted by conditional volatility due to COVID-19 (Babu et al., 2022). There are no asymmetric volatility transfers between the Green Bond and Equity Markets(A. Tripathi, 2022).It is important to consider the distribution of innovations when modelingand forecasting volatility, as it cannot be assumed to be normal(Erkekoglu et al., 2020).

GARCH family model

The GARCH model is an addition of ARCH. GARCH is the statistical model that assesses volatility and predicts future volatility. GARCH models are not just for forex markets but are also useful for stock markets (Erkekoglu et al., 2020).GARCH models are commonly utilized in volatility prediction because they possess a knack for encapsulating the evolving dynamics of volatility over time (Kumar, Meher, et al., n.d.)In 1982 Robert F. Engle broke the ARCH model (Autoregressive Conditional Heteroskedasticity). However, this model has major limitations, which were identified by Bollerslev in 1986 and introduced a generalized form of ARCH known as GARCH(Generalized ARCH) that provides resilience to the lag structure (Erkekoglu et al., 2020).GARCH-based models are more appropriate when considering the skewness and asymmetry in time series data. GARCH volatility focuses on the conditional variance of returns over a while (Bangur & Bangur, 2023). The maximum likelihood method typically estimates GARCH-type model parameters, including GARCH and IGARCH, using standard statistical software for normal or t-distributed errors(So & Yu, 2006).Many researchers worldwide have used the GARCH model to analyze the stock market volatility pattern. Volatility focuses on how the conditional variance on returns over a while.

APARCH Model

APARCH (Asymmetric PARCH) extends the ARCH and GARCH models. APARCH models enable the different effects of both positive and negative shocks on volatility within financial time series data. The APARCH model has two parameters based on the GARCH model. The leverage effect is measured by one of the parameters (DING, 2011).The APARCH model is flexible as it measures skewness and leverage effect.Ding, Granger, and Engle's APARCH model (1993) consolidates diverse univariate parameterizations, enriching volatility analysis in financial time series(Bollerslev, n.d.).

PARCH (Power ARCH) model is a statistical model to assess the volatility of foreign exchange markets as well as the volatility of financial assets. It is widely used to categorize volatility patterns witnessed in financial time series data.Building on the GARCH model, PARCH integrates an additional term to capture how volatility reacts. Volatility leads to more price drops compared to price increases. (alam & Rahman, 2012).PARCH is a GARCH-like model that allows for positive and negative parameters.The APARCH model stands as a broad category encompassing ARCH and

GARCH models, thus providing a comprehensive framework for volatility analysis in financial modeling(G. Ali, 2013).

Research Gap

In financial modeling, especially in the context of BSE-GREENEX, a significant research gap knuckles down when applying GARCH models. While accessible in the literature, it explored various methodologies for volatility, but it remains incompetent to be understood. This research attempts to understand BSE-GREENEX volatility using GARCH models; the study aims to provide a more specific volatility forecast.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the volatility of BSE GREENEX from 2014 to 2024.
2. To find and study volatility using appropriate GARCH models.

Research Methodology

Data used in this research are quantitative, andGARCH Family models are used to determine price movements. There are 2485 data points of S&P BSE-GREENEX ranging from 28/02/2014 to 15/03/2024. The study was done to know the volatility using GARCH models with Gaussian normal distribution, student's t distribution, generalized error distribution (GED), t distribution, and GED distribution with parameters. Logarithm returns are calculated to make data stationary and it was observed that data shows clustering in it for this ARCH LM test was applied to test heteroskedasticity in residual series of return. Various models from the GARCH model are used (GARCH, IGARCH, TGARCH, EGARCH, PARCH, and APARCH) across various distributions for volatility analysis. The software package used was EViews 10.

Significance of study

As climate change becomes increasingly urgent, exploring sustainability's impact across different sectors is crucial. Rising awareness has sparked a surge in investment in green projects, reflecting a collective effort to address environmental degradation and promote a sustainable future. This research offers significant benefits to understanding the financial market dynamics. Much work has not been done at the individual level, and as everyone wants to make sustainable investments, a knowledge gap exists. For this, it is important to know the volatility by taking a sustainable index in the market and academic field. This study tries to understand BSE-GREENEX volatility.

Limitations of study

Despite conducting a thorough time series analysis with a substantial dataset, the results remain incomplete due to a lack of regression analysis on the indicator. While APARCH is a sophisticated and adaptable model within the GARCH family, it may not fully capture all volatility-influencing variables. Limited institutional support and resources hinder in-depth exploration.

Analysis, estimation and results

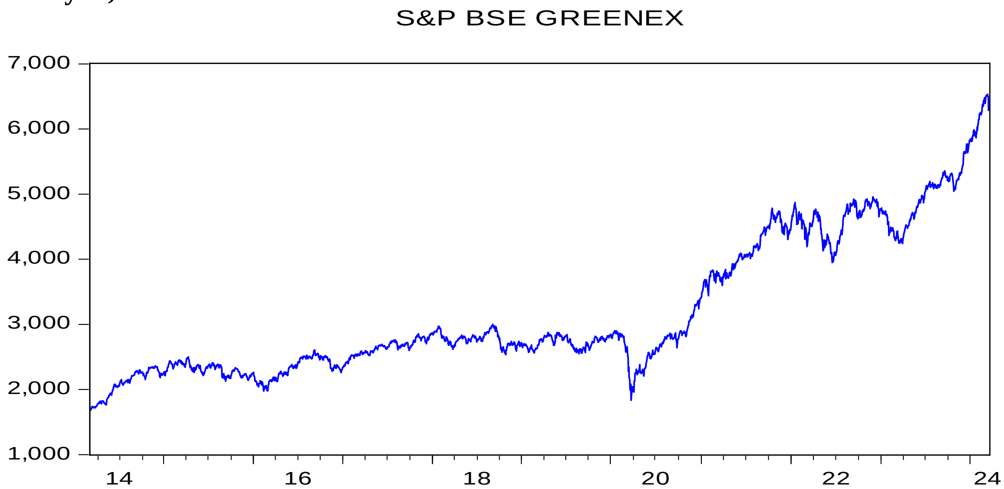

Figure 1 The trend of daily closing price of the index
Source: Author's computation using EViews 10.

The above graphical representation is of S&P BSE GREENEX. It shows that the market was not very volatile between 2014 and 2018, but after 2019, there was high volatility due to factors like COVID-19 and other financial problems. Between 2022 and 2024, the graph does not show volatility.

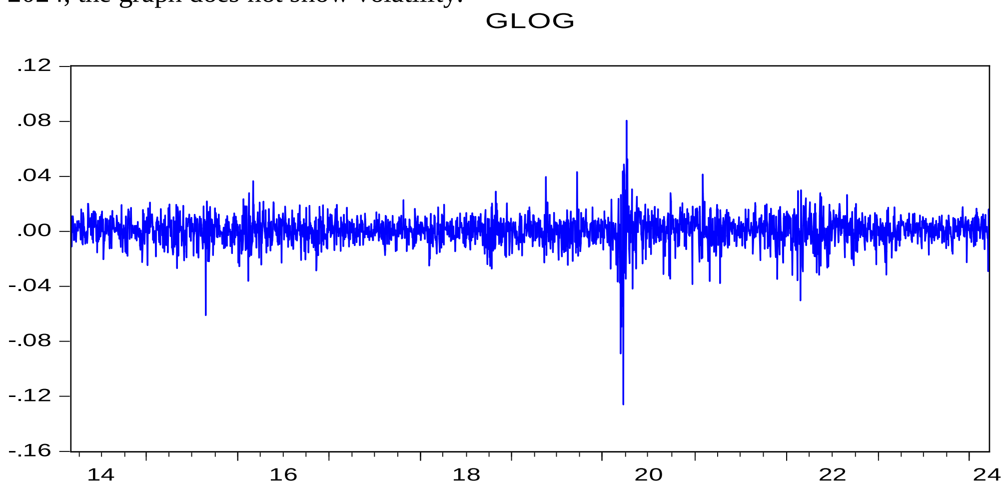

Figure 2 Log Return Graph
Source: Author's computation using EViews 10

Log return is calculated to make returns stationary. The above graphical representation is the log return of S&P BSE GREENEX. As discussed above, because of COVID-19 and other financial problems, the graph shows a sharp dip in 2019. Due to the heteroscedastic nature of data, it is important to analyze the stationarity test.

Null Hypothesis: GREENEXLOG has a unit root
Exogenous: Constant
Lag Length: 0 (Automatic - based on SIC, maxlag=26)

		t-Statistic	Prob.*
Augmented Dickey-Fuller test statistic		-49.19577	0.0001
Test critical values:	1% level	-3.432790	
	5% level	-2.862504	
	10% level	-2.567328	

*MacKinnon (1996) one-sided p-values.

Table 1 Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) TEST
Source: Author's computation using EViews 10

Test of stationarity

The test above is the Augmented Dickey-fuller (ADF) test. As it can be observed, the probability value is less than 0.05, here we reject the Null Hypotheses test, and the data has no unit root and the data is stationary.

Descriptive Statistics

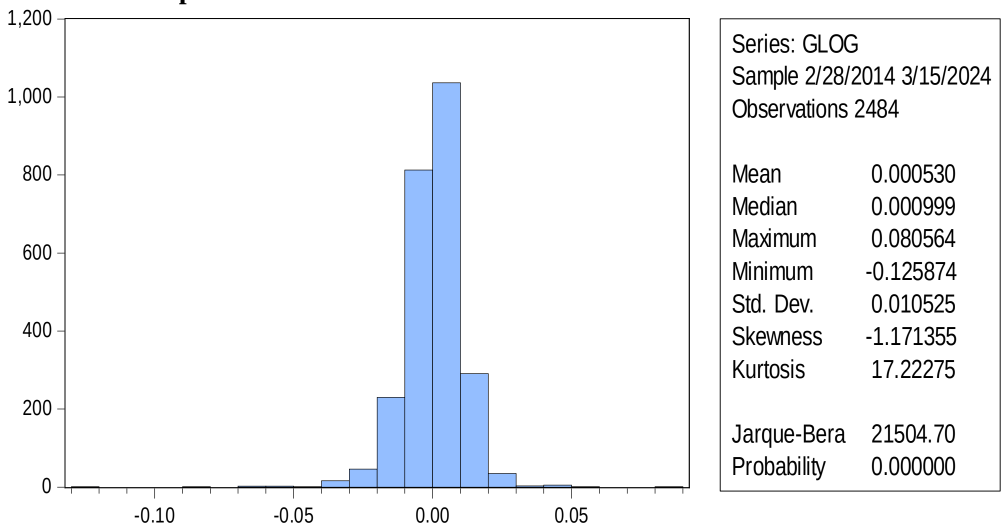

Figure 3 Test Distribution Analysis
Source: Author's computation using EViews 10

For analysis of the log return, we have the above test statistics. The Standard deviation is very low, which signifies that most of the dataset is around the mean value and less deviation. The skewness suggests that data is left-tailedand meaning data is clustered towards the higher values. The data is leptokurtic, suggesting higher peaks, volatility, and maybe asymmetry. To analyze further we need to check the ARCH effect on the data through the ARCH LM Test.

Heteroskedasticity Test

Heteroskedasticity Test: ARCH

F-statistic	34.60165	Prob. F(1,2480)	0.0000
Obs*R-squared	34.15304	Prob. Chi-Square(1)	0.0000

Table 2 ARCH effect test

Source: Author's computation using EViews 10

From the test results above it is very evident that the P-values are below 0.05, we conclude there exists an ARCH effect on the data. We will be using the GARCH model against ARCH due to its limitations of weights.

		GARCH	IGARCH	TARCH	EGARCH	PARCH	APARCH
Normal Distribution	Akaike info criterion	-6.508132	-6.482558	-6.538223	-6.534819	-6.507343	-6.539838
	Schwarz criterion	-6.496418	-6.475529	-6.524166	-6.520763	-6.493286	-6.523438
	Log Likelihood	8084.846	8051.096	8123.204	8118.978	8084.866	8126.209
	ARCH significant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Autocorrelation	No	No	No	No	No	No
	ARCH LM-Test	No	No	No	No	No	No
	GARCH significant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	significant coefficient	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student's T	*Akaike info criterion*	-6.554916	-6.536444	-6.578931	-6.576542	-6.554255	-6.57999
	Schwarz criterion	-6.540859	-6.527073	-6.562532	-6.560142	-6.537855	-6.561247
	Log Likelihood	8143.928	8118.995	8174.743	8171.777	8144.107	8177.057
	ARCH significant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Autocorrelation	No	No	No	No	No	No
	ARCH LM-Test	No	No	No	No	No	No
	GARCH significant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

	significant coefficient	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Akaike info criterion	-6.547456	-6.529809	-6.570602	-6.5677	-6.54668	-6.571438
	Schwarz criterion	-6.533399	-6.520438	-6.554202	-6.551301	-6.53028	-6.552695
	Log Likelihood	8134.667	8110.758	8164.403	8160.8	8134.703	8166.44
	ARCH significant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Autocorrelation	No	No	No	No	No	No
	ARCH LM-Test	No	No	No	No	No	No
	GARCH significant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Generalized Error	*significant coefficient*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Akaike info criterion	-6.546573	-6.536444	-6.577877	-6.575258	-6.552013	-6.579021
	Schwarz criterion	-6.534858	-6.527073	-6.56382	-6.561201	-6.537956	-6.562621
	Log likelihood	8132.57	8118.995	8172.434	8169.183	8140.325	8174.855
	ARCH significant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Autocorrelation	No	No	No	No	No	No
	ARCH LM-Test	No	No	No	No	No	No
	GARCH significant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
T distribution (Parameter)	*significant coefficient*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Akaike info criterion	-6.552716	-6.529809	-6.57078	-6.567778	-6.545784	-6.571702
	Schwarz criterion	-6.541002	-6.520438	-6.556723	-6.553721	-6.531727	-6.555303
	Log Likelihood	8140.197	8110.758	8163.624	8159.896	8132.59	8165.769
	ARCH significant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Autocorrelation	No	No	No	No	No	No
Generalised Error (Parameter)	*ARCH LM-Test*	No	No	No	No	No	No

	GARCH significant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	significant coefficient	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 3 Decision Table
Source: Authors's tabulation using MS Office

After implementing GARCH, IGARCH,TARCH, EGARCH, APARCH, and PARCH among Gaussian Normal Distribution, Student's t distribution, Generalized Error distribution(GED), t distribution, and GED with fixed parameter, from the table it can be concluded that APARCH student's t distribution is most suitable model due to lowest Akaike info criterion(-6.57999), lowest Schwarz criterion(-6.561247) and highestlog-likelihood(8177.057)

Dependent Variable: GLOG
Method: ML ARCH - Student's t distribution (BFGS / Marquardt steps)
Sample (adjusted): 3/04/2014 3/15/2024
Included observations: 2483 after adjustments
Convergence not achieved after 500 iterations
Coefficient covariance computed using outer product of gradients
Presample variance: backcast (parameter = 0.7)
@SQRT(GARCH)^C(7) = C(3) + C(4)*(ABS(RESID(-1)) - C(5)*RESID(
-1))^C(7) + C(6)*@SQRT(GARCH(-1))^C(7)

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	z-Statistic	Prob.
C	0.000671	0.000169	3.977092	0.0001
GLOG(-1)	0.078816	0.020517	3.841434	0.0001
	Variance Equation			
C(3)	8.90E-05	8.09E-05	1.100449	0.2711
C(4)	0.065836	0.009977	6.598898	0.0000
C(5)	0.999853	1.5E-103	6.8E+102	0.0000
C(6)	0.867900	0.017764	48.85790	0.0000
C(7)	1.395735	0.198703	7.024226	0.0000

T-DIST. DOF	7.338239	0.931924	7.874285	0.0000

R-squared	-0.004519	Mean dependent var	0.000534
Adjusted R-squared	-0.004924	S.D. dependent var	0.010525
S.E. of regression	0.010551	Akaike info criterion	-6.579990
Sum squared resid	0.276180	Schwarz criterion	-6.561247
Log likelihood	8177.057	Hannan-Quinn criter.	-6.573183
Durbin-Watson stat	2.132139		

Table 4 APARCH(1,1) student's t distribution
Source: Author's computation using EViews 10.

From the analysis, it can be concluded that there is no baseline effect on the current volatility. The C(4) value suggests that the data is slightly impacted by the previous variances of the past. C(5) value close to 1 suggests that the current volatility is replicated or affected by previous volatility in absolute terms regarding scaling. From the C(6) value, it is also evident that there is a high chance of previous conditional variances and deviations for the current level of volatility. C(7) suggests asymmetry, which provides results that are opposite to the situation. There is a high chance of volatility clustering, long memory volatility, and leverage effect.

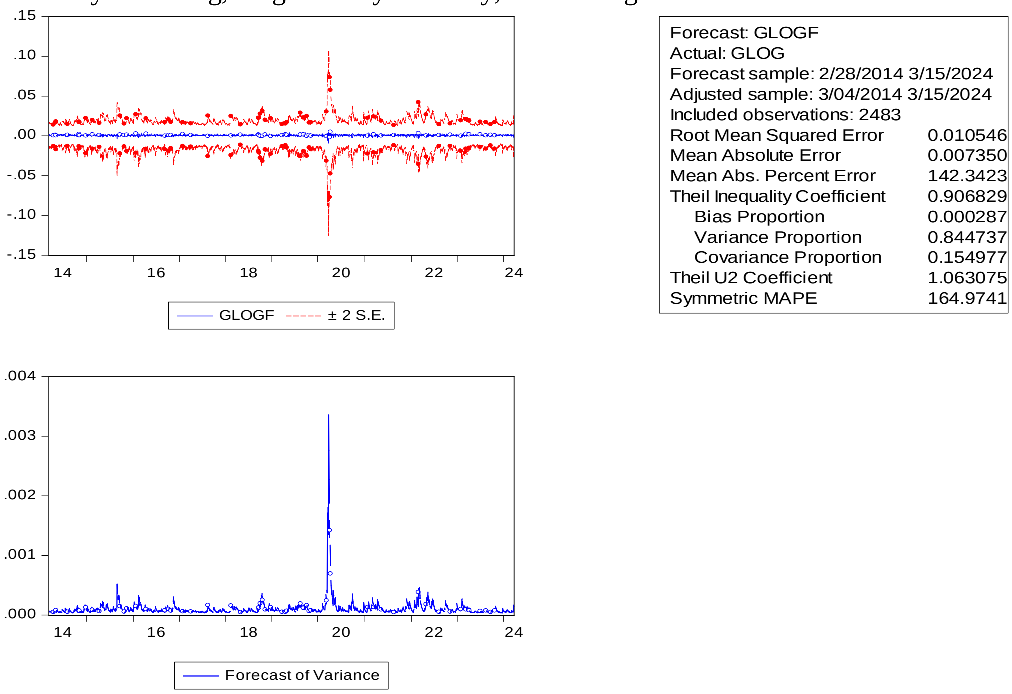

Figure 4 Graphical presentation of volatility

Source: Author's computation using EViews 10

From the above graphical presentation, it can be observed that it explains the nature the nature of volatility. It can also observed that the residual graph corresponds to the actual volatility.

Conclusions and Recommendations

APARCH(1,1) seems the fittest model to study the volatility of S&P BSE-GREENEX, as it observed that there is asymmetry, volatile clustering, leverage effect, and volatility observed around 2019-20 due to COVID-19, and allied variables such as money supply, inflation, and macroeconomic factors. Although APARCH is a fine model, but it fails to incorporate finer details caused by invisible variables, resulting in the generalization of calculated results. It becomes essential for the academic community to do in-depth research on the finer details of the sustainability indices toinform investors and society. For this, various models are used, such as AI, ML, COPULA, and VAR, which are multivariate in nature and showa larger picture of volatility, and accessingmore information benefits society and investors, promoting transparency, sustainability, and value creation.

Authors' Contributions:

The authors contributed equally to this work.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Exploring GARCH Family Models for Volatility Prediction of BSE S&P BSE CARBONEX index of Indian stock market

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Abstract:
The research paper delves into an in-depth analysis of the S&P BSE CARBONEX index, which serves as a benchmark for top companies, evaluating and benchmarking their climate change mitigation practices. The study focuses on volatility analysis of BSE CARBONEX, employing various GARCH models such as GARCH, TARCH, EGARCH, IGARCH, PARCH, and APARCH across five distributions. Through meticulous evaluation based on criteria including AIC, SC, and Log Likelihood values, the APARCH (1,1) model is selected, revealing the presence of asymmetry and volatility clustering within the index. This quantitative, applied, exploratory, and explanatory study conducts volatility analysis of S&P BSE CARBONEX over a period of 2485 daily observations from February 28, 2014, to March 15, 2024. To ensure data stationarity, log returns are calculated based on the previous day's price, and the nature of the data is explored using statistical measures such as mean, median, mode, skewness, kurtosis, and standard deviation. Furthermore, the study conducts heteroscedasticity tests through the ARCH LM test, uncovering signs of a leverage effect, albeit with statistically non-significant coefficients. The analysis also scrutinizes periods of dip and volatility, concluding that the year 2020 saw heightened volatility likely attributed to events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and associated variables, followed by a swift recovery. Additionally, the study observes small memory-based volatilities within the index. Through its comprehensive analysis, this research offers valuable insights into the dynamics of volatility within the BSE S&P CARBONEX index, contributing to a deeper understanding of market behaviour and potential implications for investors and policymakers alike.

Keywords: *S&P BSE CARBONEX index, BSE, Sustainability, ESG, Volatility, APARCH, GARCH, Green Investment, Sustainability Index*
JEL Codes: C32, C51, G13, G14, G17, G31, G44, Q56, Q57

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Exploring GARCH Family Models for Volatility Prediction of BSE S&P BSE CARBONEX index of Indian stock market

Introduction

The S&P BSE CARBONEX has been a benchmark of top companies measuring and benchmarking them on the basis of their climate change mitigation practices. However, in recent times India has showcased itself as a champion of climate-related issues and it becomes equally important to incorporate similar practices in every way possible so is sustainable investing.

In the case of the Indian Stock market, four indices are representative of sustainability i.e. BSE Carbonex, BSE Greenex, BSE ESG and NIFTY 100 ESG (G. et al., 2024) CARBONEX is affected by Index of Industrial production, M3, Crude oil prices, REER but not WPI(P. Sharma et al., 2021)

There is a need for sustainable investing and study shows there is very little evidence that investment decision is influenced by the green practices of the corporation.(Maji & Mondal, 2015) Healthy CSR positively affects a company's performance not only in the current year but also in the following years.(Garg, 2016)COVID-19 and related events and variables had significant impact on the index and it made the index highly volatile, different from its long memory volatility for a short span of time. Mapping of volatility and reasons and associated variables becomes essential for rational investment and decision making.(Santosh et al., 2023)Post-digital financial inclusion, investment frequency have increased significantly so is digital financial services usage.(Meher et al., 2024)

Literature Review

Volatility of carbonex is similar to that of the market, interesting fact is that during COVID-19, investors of sustainable indices got more returns than non-sustainable investments. Sustainability indices mimics Sensex patterns and GARCH(1,1) analysis concludes there exists a calendar effect (Monday and Tuesday effect).(Kalimuthu & Shaik, 2024) Overall, sustainable indices have more returns than less sustainable corporations.(Debnath & Dinda, 2023a)Both China and India are considering low-carbon policies and practices and carbon neutrality has been in the forefront.(Kedia, 2016) Randomness in the data has little or low impact on the variability of the data.(Lahmiri et al., 2018) Not very significant amount of CSR spending has been spent on environmental activities and there is also discrepancies in the disclosure.(J. Sharma & Verma, 2023) Retail investors' motives to invest in the socially responsible index is motivated by attitude, morality, and subjective financial literacy. (Joshi & Dangi, 2023)Study shows ESG factors have less impact on firm’s performance but individual factors of environment, Social and Govenance have significant impact on performance and individual risk indices have negative impact on operations and finances. (Shobhwani& Lodha, 2023) People are considering green investments especially during the COVID timeline, the study tries to evaluate pre and post-lockdown analysis of investment BSE CARBONEX and inverstor-related variables.(Chowdhury et al., 2023) Number of independent directors, non Chairman-CEO duality has a positive impact on environmental disclosure.(Vig, 2023) Companies of BSE carbonex were comparatively stable in black swan events in comparision to non ESG corporations.(Deshmukh et al., 2022a) A large degree of volatility was seen ain COVID 19 in BSE CARBONEX and rise of 145.8% conditional variance. Analysis was done using GARCH (1,1) model.(Bangur, 2022) COVID-19 brought an opportunity to form awareness about CARBONEX (R., 2021)Oil related corporations in CARBONEX were most affected due to crude oil, volatility.(Ashiq & Shanmugasundaram, 2020) DEA-TOPSIS criteria has been used to rank companies on sustainability.(Mehta et al., 2019)Strong correlation has been witnessed between SENSEX and green indices irrespective of any events such as black swan events.(Deshmukh et al., 2022b)Study finds that GARCH models are better in predicting and modelling volatility in comparison to EWMA model.(Kumar, Kumar Meher, et al., n.d.)There is possibility of presence of asymmetric volatility in crude and allied sectors due to COVID-19.(Kumar Meher et al., 2023) Innovative assets like gold, oil, currency etc were effected by financial spillovers due to outbreak of global pandemic.(Meher et al., 2023) Unpredicted volatility has been witnessed in the crude oil sectors and there are chances for higher fluctuations, henceforth cautious investment decision is suggested.(Meher et al., 2020) More diversified studies of stock indices across the top economies are required for the enhancement in the field of research of volatility fraternity concerning important stocks.(Kumar Meher et al., 2024)To understand GARCH in current context, it becomes very important to focus on G-20 economies.(Kumar, Meher, et al., n.d.) For very precise GARCH estimation, we should also focus on advanced models like DCC-GARCH, M-GARCH and similar models.(Kumar, Anand, et al., n.d.) In case of green indices like CARBONEX and GREENEX there is consistency in returns and post COVID returns are better than pre-COVID returns.(S. Sharma, 2022) Funds like CARBONEX, GREENEX, BSE ESG has caught investors attention and it has been found that they outperformed all the market indices overall irrespective of similar volatility across the market.(Debnath & Dinda, 2023b) There is a need now to think and invest in green.(Chakrabarti & Sen, 2015)

Research Gap

Not many studies have touched on the sustainability index, and even if studies concerning sustainability indices have been done it has not been done on the volatility and associated factors, most studies are exploratory and find linkages with other variables in nature but studies that exclusively study volatility are missing. Not much has been done in the academic field that would be wholesome in the area of sustainability indices. Especially there has been a deficit of studies concerning BSE CARBONEX. In the absence of studies, there is a lack of awareness among investors and the public in general about the index in general and its nature in particular making it not a very much preferred criterion for investment and decision making.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the volatility of BSE CARBONEX from 2014 to 2024
- To formulate an appropriate GARCH model that can capture the asymmetric nature of the index due to significant events in the chosen timeline

Research Methodology

The study conducted is quantitative, applied, exploratory, and explanatory conducting volatility analysis of S&P BSE CARBONEX for 2485 daily observations from 28/02/2014 to 15/03/2024. To make the data stationary Log returns are calculated based on the previous day's price. The nature of data has been explored using mean, median, mode, skewness, kurtosis, and standard deviation. The heteroscedasticity test is done through the ARCH LM test. Various GARCH family models including GARCH, TARCH, EGARCH, IGARCH, PARCH, and APARCH have been tested along Normal

Distribution, Student's t-distribution, Generalized Error distribution, t-distribution (fixed df), Generalized Error Distribution (fixed parameter). Based on AIC, SC, and Log Likelihood appropriate model is chosen for analysis and the coefficients of variance equation is analysed for studying the nature of volatility. The data has been sourced from the BSE historical database and the software used is Eviews10.

Significance of the study

In the times India championing the climate and sustainable causes, it becomes equally important to study the sustainability impact from all and across the sectors. Investors are also now aware of sustainable investing and are actively diversifying their portfolios into green-based investments. It becomes very crucial to do the muti-faceted analysis of the various financial parameters including volatility for informed and rational investment. Not very much study has been done in this regard and no study so far has been performed on individual analysis of BSE CARBONEX in one and half decades. This study is highly significant not only for investors for balanced investment but equally important to companies and corporations to understand the dynamics of the index due to the effect of the internal and external environment.

Limitations of the Study

Although, the analysis is of a time series nature and a significant number of data has been used to analyse with the statistically chosen most appropriate model but the results are not indicative of the entire picture as the indicator was independently analysed without any other regressors. Due lack of knowledge of the minute level of statistics and econometrics, interpretation may be of generalized nature at some instances. Although, APARCH is one of the most advanced yet flexible model of the GARCH family but it fails to map all the regressors and invisible variables that may be affecting the volatility. The intricate nature of volatility is also very difficult to measure in univariable analysis and may require a multivariate analysis. One of the reasons for not being able to go into the desired depth is lack of resources and institutional support, this constrains the deep-level study or maybe a more detailed level study.

Analysis, Results, and Discussion

First of all, it becomes very essential to look at the price graph to visually understand the volatility of the BSE CARBONEX over almost 10 years.

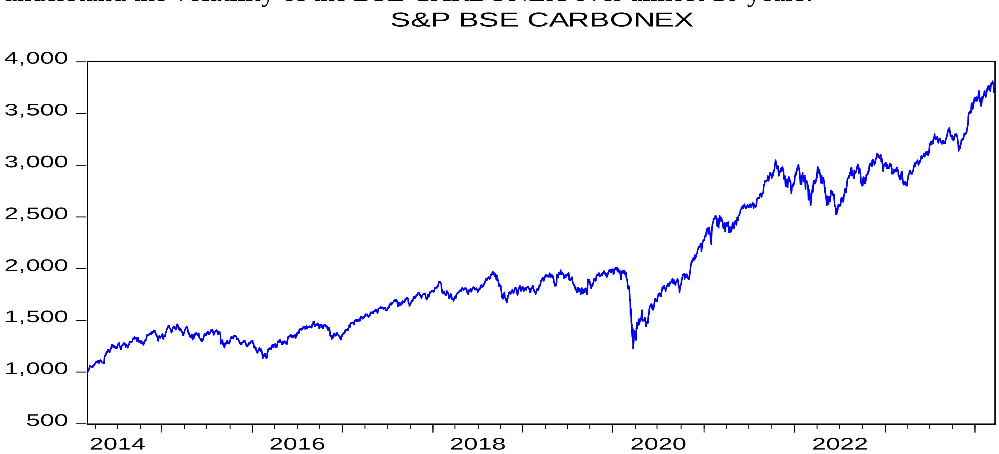


Figure 1 : Volatility curve of daily Prices

Source: Author's Computation using Eviews 10

From the above graph, it is very evident that the index has been very volatile since the start of the period, and a pattern in the volatility is also somewhat evident. To make data stationary and for further analysis, it becomes essential to convert the price into its logarithmic returns. Below is the graphical representation of logarithmic returns.

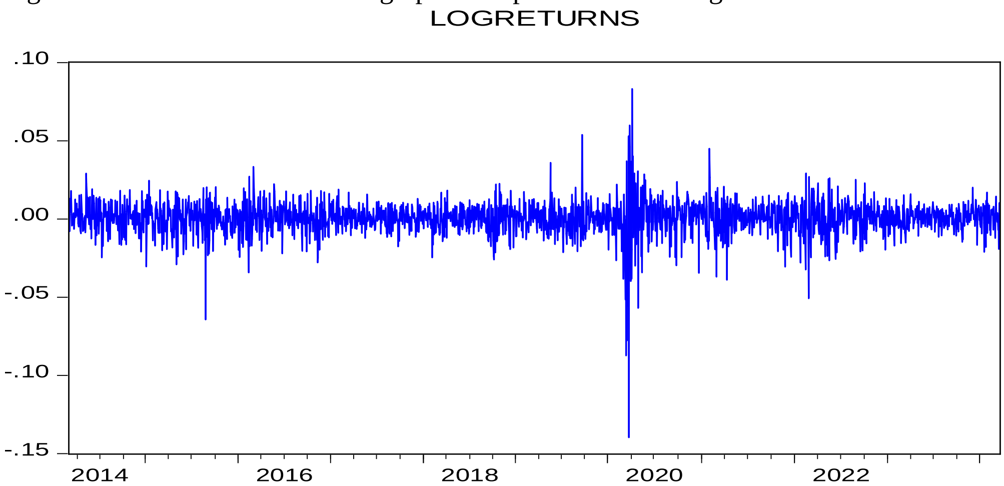


Figure 2: Log returns graph
Source: Author’s Computation using Eviews 10

From the logarithmic data clustering of shocks and somewhat patterns in data is evident, to further the analysis, it becomes essential to test the stationarity of the data.

Stationarity Test

Null Hypothesis: LOGRETURNS has a unit root			
Exogenous: Constant			
Lag Length: 6 (Automatic - based on SIC, maxlag=26)			
		t-Statistic	Prob.*
Augmented Dickey-Fuller test statistic		-17.82941	0.0000
Test critical values:	1% level	-3.432796	
	5% level	-2.862506	
	10% level	-2.567330	

Table 1: Heteroscedasticity Test
Source: Author’s Computation using Eviews 10

Augmented Dickey-Fuller Test was employed to test the stationarity of data and as the P-value is less than 0.05 and t-statistics is less than 5% significant level the data has having unit root and is stationary. To understand the nature of data let's look at some statistical parameters.

Descriptive Statistics

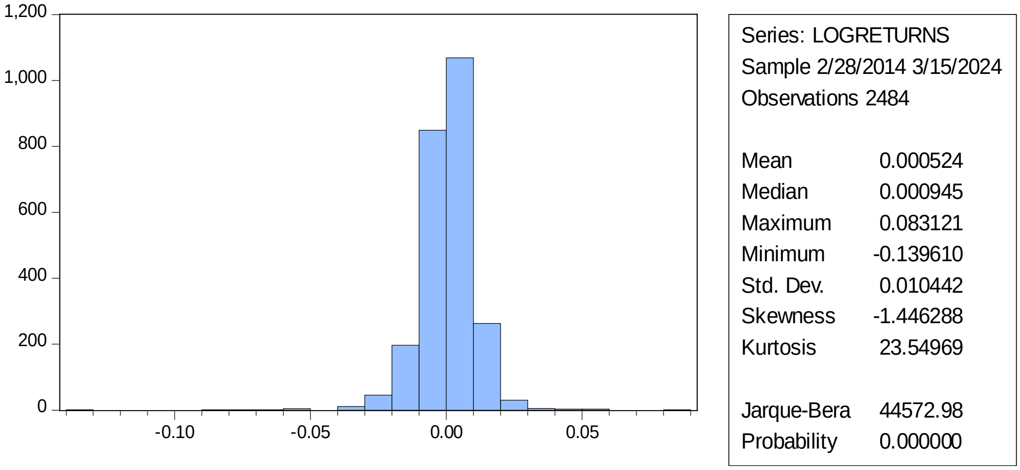


Figure 3: Test Statistics
Source: Author's Computation using Eviews 10

The mean and median are not very similar, the data is slightly negatively skewed meaning longer tails at the negative side and the data is also leptokurtic signifying a very high peak, meaning sharper peak and fatter tails and the standard deviation signifies a moderate level of volatility. The presence of a fatter tail resembles t t-type distribution.

To proceed with the volatility analysis, it becomes essential to test the heteroscedasticity of the data, which is done to ARCH LM test of the residuals.

Heteroscedasticity Test

Heteroskedasticity Test: ARCH			
F-statistic	67.75694	Prob. F(1,2480)	0.0000
Obs*R-squared	66.00816	Prob. Chi-Square(1)	0.0000

Table 2 :ARCH LM Test
Source: Author's Computation using Eviews 10

From the analysis, it is very evident that the ARCH effect is present and we should follow with autocorrelation tests. GARCH is chosen over ARCH due to its limitations in considering weights and it has been established by many studies that GARCH is fit to estimate conditional variance of parsimonious models. Now to find the appropriate GARCH model, GARCH, EGARCH, TARCH, IGARCH, PARCH, and APARCH were estimated across five distributions.

Distribution	Criteria	GARCH	IGARCH	TARCH	EGARCH	PARCH	APARCH
Normal Distribution	*Akaike info criterion*	-6.6111	-6.3469	-6.6499	-6.6494	-6.6107	-6.6553
	Schwarz criterion	-6.5994	-6.3399	-6.6358	-6.6354	-6.5967	-6.6389
	Log Likelihood	8212.6440	7882.7310	8261.8000	8261.2790	8213.2040	8269.5610
	ARCH significant	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
	Autocorrelation	No	No	No	No	No	No
	ARCH LM-Test	No	No	No	No	No	No
	GARCH significant	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
	significant coefficient	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Student's T	*Akaike info criterion*	-6.6643	-6.6465	-6.6923	-6.6942	-6.6636	-6.6973
	Schwarz criterion	-6.6503	-6.6371	-6.6759	-6.6778	-6.6472	-6.6786
	Log Likelihood	8279.774	8255.6000	8315.5510	8317.8460	8279.8990	8322.7100
	ARCH significant	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
	Autocorrelation	No	No	No	No	No	No
	ARCH LM-Test	No	No	No	No	No	No
	GARCH significant	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
	significant coefficient	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Generalized Error	*Akaike info criterion*	-6.6570	-6.6411	-6.6848	-6.6851	-6.6564	-6.6888
	Schwarz criterion	-6.6430	-6.6318	-6.6684	-6.6687	-6.6400	-6.6701
	Log Likelihood	8270.7030	8248.9810	8306.1830	8306.5830	8270.9160	8312.1540
	ARCH significant	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
	Autocorrelation	No	No	No	No	No	No
	ARCH LM-Test	No	No	No	No	No	No

	GARCH significant	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
	significant coefficient	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
T distribution (Parameter)	*Akaike info criterion*	-6.6610	-6.5017	-6.6910	-6.6926	-6.6603	-6.6962
	Schwarz criterion	-6.6493	-6.4946	-6.6769	-6.6786	-6.6463	-6.6798
	Log likelihood	8274.594	8074.8030	8312.8590	8314.9020	8274.8090	8320.2730
	ARCH significant	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
	Autocorrelation	No	No	No	No	No	No
	ARCH LM-Test	No	No	No	No	No	No
	GARCH significant	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
	significant coefficient	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Generalised Error (Parameter)	*Akaike info criterion*	-6.6547	-6.6386	-6.6846	-6.6848	-6.6542	-6.6888
	Schwarz criterion	-6.6430	-6.6316	-6.6705	-6.6708	-6.6401	-6.6724
	Log Likelihood	8266.8640	8244.8780	8304.9160	8305.1920	8267.1460	8311.1510
	ARCH significant	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
	Autocorrelation	No	No	No	No	No	No
	ARCH LM-Test	No	No	No	No	No	No
	GARCH significant	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
	significant coefficient	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Table 3: Decision table for GARCH Selection
Source: Author’s formulation using MS Office

From the table above it could be concluded that APARCH (1,1) at student’s t-distribution has the lowest AIC value, comparatively lowest SC value and highest Log Likelihood value, making it a suitable model for the analysis. Let’s proceed with APARCH test.

APARCH (1,1)

Dependent Variable: LOGRETURNS
Method: ML ARCH - Student's t distribution
Sample (adjusted): 3/04/2014 3/15/2024
Included observations: 2483 after adjustments
Convergence achieved after 22 iterations
WARNING: Singular covariance - coefficients are not unique
Presample variance: backcast (parameter = 0.7)
@SQRT(GARCH)^C(7) = C(3) + C(4)*(ABS(RESID(-1)) - C(5)*RESID(-1))^C(7) + C(6)*@SQRT(GARCH(-1))^C(7)

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	z-Statistic	Prob.
C	0.000630	0.000156	4.039760	0.0001
LOGRETURNS(-1)	0.105472	0.020547	5.133175	0.0000
		Variance Equation		
C(3)	0.000187	0.000151	1.237197	0.2160
C(4)	0.075412	0.169146	0.445837	0.6557
C(5)	1.000000	3.721383	0.268717	0.7881
C(6)	0.886855	0.015611	56.81026	0.0000
C(7)	1.167592	0.172457	6.770342	0.0000
T-DIST. DOF	7.253487	0.902071	8.040929	0.0000

R-squared	-0.011304	Mean dependent var	0.000527
Adjusted R-squared	-0.011711	S.D. dependent var	0.010442
S.E. of regression	0.010503	Akaike info criterion	-6.697310
Sum squared resid	0.273704	Schwarz criterion	-6.678567
Log-likelihood	8322.710	Hannan-Quinn criter.	-6.690503
Durbin-Watson stat	2.208005		

Table 4: APARCH (1,1)
Source: Author’s formulation using MS Office

The variance equation is as follows:

$$\sigma_t^\delta = \omega + \sum_{j=1}^{q} \alpha_j \left(|\varepsilon_{t-j}| - \gamma_j \varepsilon_{t-j}\right)^\delta + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \beta_i (\sigma_{t-i})^\delta$$

Notation	Meaning
ω C (3)	A constant term representing the baseline of volatility
α C (4)	Persistence of Volatility/Absolute Past Residual
γ C (5)	Scaling Factor
β C (6)	Persistence of Volatility/Lagged Conditional Standard Deviation
δ C (7)	Decay Rate/Power Term/Asymmetry Term

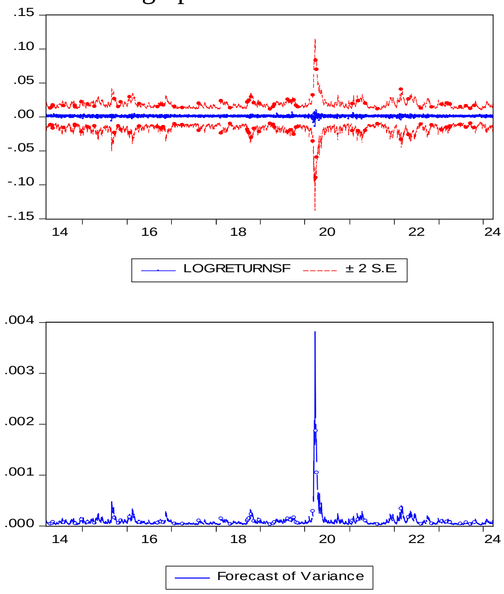
Table 5: Notation Table
Source: Author's formulation using MS office

From the above APARCH(1,1) analysis it is very clear that there is very little impact of baseline and positive shock persistence due to their very low coefficient value along with the fact they are statistically non-significant as their P-value is far more than 0.05. However, it is also evident that the scaling factor becomes very important to be noticed as its value is absolutely 1 which signifies high persistence of past volatility and its effect is in absolute terms. (although P-value >1)

However, when we move to the persistence of volatility due to negative events we see the value is close to .9, which means continued persistence of either high or low volatility, and along with that, we see there is a possibility (highly) of asymmetric effect as the coefficient is greater than 1 i.e. volatility acting opposite to the nature of the overall shock.

The analysis also suggests the presence of volatility clustering as the persistence value of C (4) is non-significant we cannot exactly conclude presence of leverage effect. Some of the reason of the volatility might be due to COVID-19 pandemic and associated macro-economic variable events.

To understand the volatility better and check the fitness of model, let's look at the forecast graph



Forecast: LOGRETURNSF	
Actual: LOGRETURNS	
Forecast sample: 2/28/2014 3/15/2024	
Adjusted sample: 3/04/2014 3/15/2024	
Included observations: 2483	
Root Mean Squared Error	0.010499
Mean Absolute Error	0.007050
Mean Abs. Percent Error	NA
Theil Inequality Coefficient	0.893506
Bias Proportion	0.000226
Variance Proportion	0.791227
Covariance Proportion	0.208546
Theil U2 Coefficient	NA
Symmetric MAPE	162.3447

Figure 4: Forecast Graph
Source: Author's Computation using Eviews 10

From the forecast graph it is very clear that there was huge volatility in 2020 may be due to COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on variable such as interest rate, inflation, crude oil volatility, geopolitical shocks etc. but what is very important to understand is overall there is low volatility and pattern is seen usually in the form of small shocks persistent throughout which makes 2020 dip a temporary dip. However, it was also observed that sustainable investments paid more in comparison to less sustainable investments. We can see that the forecast matches our analysis, which makes us conclude that APARCH (1,1) is a fit model to estimate the volatility of S&P BSE CARBONEX.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Through APARCH analysis we have been able to know the reasons and associated variables that are responsible for the unique volatility of the BSE CARBONEX Index. There is presence of asymmetry to a larger extent and evidence are also there of volatility clustering and long memory volatility. However, there was volatility in 2020 that was different from the usual nature maybe due to COVID-19 and associated variables such as inflation, lack of disclosure, money supply imbalance, crude oil, demand-supply asymmetry and macroeconomic variables. However, soon the volatility was replaced by small shocks that are typical to the nature of CARBONEX.

But what is very crucial to be noted that that the analysis is not all inclusive of factors of volatility due to limitations of APARCH model and univariate analysis. It is highly suggested to have a more deep analysis with company/ sector wise volatility mapping in order to avoid generalization which has been a case in this analysis to a certain extent. It is also suggested to incorporate more complex models and software and AI and ML for a larger picture of the volatility and access to more minute information in the larger interest of investors and society and industry at large.

Authors' Contributions:
The authors contributed equally to this work.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Digitization of the Algerian public sector: how is it evolving?

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Abstract:
Electronic government, or e-government, is becoming an essential tool in the management of public administration throughout the world. Both the World Bank and the United Nations insist that every state must make use of e-government to strengthen democracy and good governance. It is therefore interesting to study the evolution of its installation in the Algerian context, marked by a highly bureaucratic administration. To support this, we have used the UN's key indicators for evaluating the development of e-government, and official data, particularly those of an informational and statistical nature, collected from Algerian authorities and other international sites. Our conclusion is that the installation and evolution of e-government and, consequently, the provision of online services in Algeria suffer from various deficiencies, particularly political ones due to the instability of the executive power.

Keywords: *Digitalization, public sector, evolution, Algeria.*

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Digitization of the Algerian public sector: how is it evolving?

Introduction.

The use of the Internet and information and communication technologies (ICTs) by governments is spreading throughout the world. The Internet has become an essential tool in day-to-day government administration. This practice, as a model for modernizing public administration, has given rise to electronic government or e-government (United Nations - DPEPA, 2002). The use of the Internet helps to make public policy more efficient and transparent, and consequently to improve the delivery of public services. The synthetic definition of e-gouvernement is "the delivery of [government] information and services online via the Internet or other digital means, e-government or digital government has the potential to improve connections with citizens, businesses, and other governments'' (Tolbert, Mossberger, McNeal, 2008). So e-gouvernement policy, the use of IT tools and equipment, aims to reduce bureaucratic procedures and give citizens the opportunity to participate and interact in public decision-making (Norris, D.F. 2010). In this sense, its objective is twofold: to govern better in order to serve the citizen better, with a view to good governance. Technologically, e-gouvernement is the multiplication of its supports, i.e. electronic government platforms and official websites. And theoretically, more the flow and speed of the Internet are higher, on the one hand, more information and communication technologies and electronic media (Stoica,V., Loghin Dumitriu,N. 2024) become sophisticated, on the other hand, therefore more e-gouvernement is growing more the relationship between citizens and government changes for the better. But neither the initiation nor the development of e-gouvernement is automatic or self-evident. Firstly, it's a question of the context of application, where failure to take account of its characteristics can lead to errors and inefficiency: "many governmental institutions copy the best features of other institutions websites without considering their particular objectives and values" (Gavriluță, Stoica, Fârte, 2022). Another inefficiency factor - of a behavioral nature - may arise in relation to reluctance and resistance to change, particularly that which challenges the authority of those in charge in a context where informality (procedure) is common practice. As a result, the supply of e-services suffers in terms of quantity, quality and delivery times. We therefore ask what is the significance of this last statement in the context of the installation of e-government in Algeria.

The purpose of this article is therefore to examine how e-gouvernement is initiated in a developing country importing all its technology from abroad, and where informality and bureaucracy are systemic practices. And starting from the premise that public policy is what the gouvernement decides and does, we ask: how does the Algerian State decide on the installation of e-government or, more generally, on the digitization of public administration? How has the advent of e-gouvernement evolved so far? What is the state of the e-services offering, and what improvements have been made to the government-citizen relationship as a result?

To answer this question, we take a brief look at e-gouvernement from the existing literature, then focus on the Algerian context, using official data to support our analysis: mainly those provided by United Nations e-gouvernement survey reports, while the rare Algerian data are those provided by the national press or a few ministerial reports and statements: Algerian websites provide no statistical data on the number of e-services applicants, nor on e-grievances or e-claims, and evenless on satisfied or pending requests,..

We are therefore only interested in the evaluation of the development of e-government and the resulting general indicators for the provision of dematerialized services. Our analysis will be based on an evolutionary perspective, i.e. we will examine the degree of progress of public sector digitization over time, using the appropriate indicators. To achieve this, the preferred analytical tool is the one developed by experts from the United Nations, namely the e-gouvernement development indicator and its main component, the e-services sub-indicator. Based on those performance indicators, we will compare the ante and post covid19 periods, i.e. 2010/2018, during which the gouvernement paid particular attention to the implementation of e-government, and 2022/2024, during which the normal resumption of activities is confirmed, benefiting from the experience of working and communicating remotely acquired during the covid-19 pandemic period. In fact, the intense use of information and communication technology (ICT), to which the world's States, including Algeria, have resorted, theoretically makes governments more accountable to their citizens (Gavriluță, Stoica, Fârte, 2022). At the same time, we examine the performance of the Algerian State in relation to the global and regional levels in terms of leader or sub-region.

We will therefore have to examine : a) the evolution of e-government and its explanatory factors in Algeria since 2009, when the e-Algeria strategy was launched, and b) the state of the resulting e-services.

1. E-government as discontinuous model.

E-government can be built according to theoretical models describing its evolution (Coursey, Norris, 2008). A model describes the stages in the construction of e-government. These models come in several variants. In fact, the stages they determine generally range from one to five or six (Wescott, 2001; Ronaghan, 2001). And each stage, from the first to the last, has a specific construction, with the possibility of moving from one stage to another without a transitional stage, either two (2) to five (5) or two (2) to six (6) (Hillerand Belanger, 2001; Baum and Di Maio, 2000; Layne and Lee, 2001). So are determined the different stages –from their basic element the governmental world wide web to their full development, i.e. the inter- and intra-activity phase between stakeholders such as government, citizens, business and civil society. In reality, however, all the models are similar in many aspects, since they, at the same time, highlight the progressive evolution, inist and explain the stages considered as those of significant progress, and the stages in which gouvernement acts in series on each stage (Coursey, Norris, 2008). It is important to remember that the final phase is either transactional or citizen participation, and the first is information and emergency. The intermediate phases are those that can be described as progressive and tending towards maturation (Dener, C. and al., 2022), such as interactivity, pronounced use or transaction. From this different progressions are determined the quantities and qualities of electronic services.

The Algerian e-government model will experience a number of setbacks and discontinuity in its implementation process. Indeed, the political and administrative context in which it was set up was marked by the instability of the executive power: a multiplication of successive governments, while the presidency enjoyed relative stability. From 1999 to 2024, Algeria was governed by two presidents elected by universal suffrage (12/1999 to 04/2019 - four terms of five years each - and 12/2019 to 09/2024), an interim president (04/2019 to 01/2020), and a period of socio-political unrest marked by a “peaceful” popular uprising (02/2019/ to 12/2019). During this period, these presidents appointed 27 heads of government, who were either reappointed or dismissed. Gouvernement reshuffles followed, appointing or recalling ministers (for example 25 for Post and ICT, six for digitization), which necessarily had an impact firstly on administrative organization and management, through the waltz of appointed officials and central managers with increasingly short terms of office, then on e-gouvernement policy through its perpetual recommencement and redefinition, and finally on the e-services offering.

1.1 Initialization and re-initialization.

Faced with the bureaucratic problems (Ahn, M.J. and Bretschneider, S., 2011) identified by gouvernement officials and deplored by citizens, the public authorities decided in 2009 to launch a strategy to digitize the public sector, called e-Algérie 2013. In other words, a period of five years is planned to establish a convincing e-government. Indeed, the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, an organization in charge of developing information and communication technologies, announced that "the e-Algérie 2013 strategy aims to roll out an action program to organize Algeria's transformation towards the information society and digital economy over the next five years" (algerie-dz.com, 2/10/2009). The project is ambitious, covering sensitive areas of citizens' daily lives, and consists of a policy of digitizing services in the fields of “e-administration, with the digitization of civil status, e-education and e-health”.

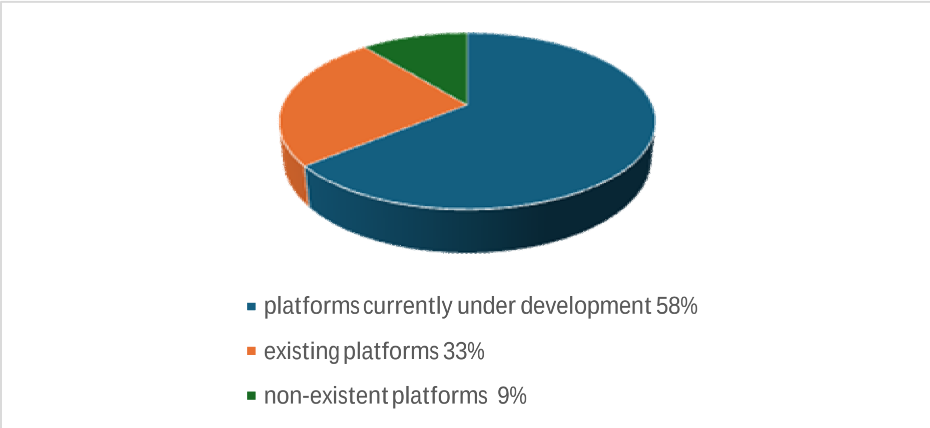
This policy of modernizing Algerian public administration by integrating the Internet is in line with UN recommendations, which state that e-gouvernement strategy is defined like “the employment of the Internet and the world-wide-web for delivering government information and services to the citizens” and can include “virtually all information and communication technology (ICT) platforms and applications in use by the public sector. (United Nations - DPEPA/ASPA, 2002). The means of its realization reside in an appropriate internet infrastructure because, according to the minister “without a good telecommunications infrastructure in Algeria, it's not possible to talk about projects. There are plans to upgrade the infrastructure: we need to reach six (6) million high-speed Internet accesses in Algeria within the next five years; we've already reached only 400,000” (algerie-dz.com, 02/10/2009), despite the fact that Algeria has a population of 35 million, over 80% of whom are literate. For Algerian officials, therefore, the essential thing about e-gouvernement is that it enables the democratization of high-speed Internet access, thereby side stepping the proposition that e-government public policy, as a societal practice, is situated in a democratic perspective (Giraud, Warin, 2008a; Giraud, Warin, 2008b): in other words, it’s meaning the management of public affairs by citizens. Between 2009 and September 2013, however, this project remained largely unrealized, for a number of reasons. The fundamental cause, it seems to us, is the changes of gouvernement between 2009 and 2013 : three governments succeeded one another, and three ministers in charge of the “post and information and communication technologies” portfolio passed on instructions to one another. Beyond the deadline (September 2013), e-Algérie2013 will be jeopardized by governmental instability. Indeed, a new government - September 2013/May 2014 - led by the same Prime Minister, was formed with a new Minister in charge of the Post Office and ICTs, and with the innovation of a Ministry attached to the Prime Minister in charge of public service reform. These appointments gave rise to the General Directorate of Civil Service and Administrative Reform, organized into seven (7) central departments, including the IT department. This comprises four subdirectorates: 1.the subdirectorate of computer networks, 2.the subdirectorate of software and applications, 3.the subdirectorate of computer equipment maintenance, 4. the subdirectorate of documentation and archives (Journal Officiel de la République Algérienne-JORA- N° 41 du 06 /07/ 2014/décret exécutif n° 14-194 du 3 juillet 2014). In this we can understand that a governmental desire to lay the foundations for a policy of anchoring IT and the Internet in the public sector. Administrative staff will specialize by directorate and sub-directorate in computerizing public administration. This is a prerequisite for the advent of e-government. As a result, e-gouvernement is still in its infancy. According to the United Nations e-gouvernement survey 2014, Algeria as an Upper Middle Income country achieves a low e-gouvernement development index (EGDI) score of 0.3106, ranking 136th worldwide and 16th in the Top 20 countries in Africa (U.N. e-gouvernement survey 2014/ Department of Economic and Social Affairs DESA). Far behind the world leader -Republic of Korea- which achieves 0.9462 and the African leader -Tunisia an Upper Middle- with 0.5390 in the rank 75th in the world, and less the world Average wich is equal 0.4712, but just a little above of the Regional Average africa with 0.2661. Whereas the scores achieved prior to this date reveal indicators in 2012 at a level of 0.3608 for a rank of 132, and in 2010 they were at a level of 0.3181 for a rank of 131. In other words, progress in this 2010/2014 period is relatively nil, and EGDI remains virtually stable, with a score of around 0.31... But how will e-gouvernement evolve beyond this period?

1.2. E-government and the instability of executive and administrative power.

Faced with this slow implementation of e-government, in 2016 the President of the Republic decreed the creation of the National Public Service Observatory (JORA n° 02 of 13/01/2016). The observatory has 25 members, 72% of whom are gouvernement representatives; civil society is represented only by local elected representatives (04), two representatives of national associations and one media representative, i.e. 28%. However, the observatory is just a consultative body (article 2 in decree JORA n° 02 of 13/01/2016) charged with proposing and "evaluating and supervising actions to implement national policy in the field of promoting and developing public service and administration" (article 3).Its recommendations and reports do not have the force of law, and therefore neither impose themselves nor have an effective impact on sectoral e-gouvernement policies. In June 2020, the new president, elected at the end of 2019, set up a Ministry of Digitalization and Statistics, which will be wound up in September 2023, while continuing to keep its website open. Structured into five general directorates: the General Directorate of Digitization; the General Directorate of Statistics; the Directorate of Information Systems and Communication; the Directorate of Cooperation, Legal Affairs and Archives; and the Directorate of General Administration, the whole comprises 29 subdivisions and sub-directorates. Its remit, as for all the reforming administrative bodies that preceded it, is to draw up and implement “the national policy for the promotion and development of digitization and the digital transformation of public administrations and businesses... with a view to improving the quality of public service” (JORA no. 74 of December 08, 2020).

The Ministry, as a transmission belt, offers services that boil down to redirecting citizens, administrative agents or economic operators to address their requests or grievances to the portals and websites of ministries or central departments of ministries or national agencies. These are non-performing sites, waiting to be upgraded or in the process of “migrating to a more efficient site” (https://sidjilcom.cnrc.dz/ date 28/06/2024). In 2022, the Ministry presents a mixed assessment (https://mns.gov.dz/static/document/bilan_num.pdf/), noting that “the qualifications of the staff in charge of the structures are highly diversified and unsuited to the missions and functions performed,... a wide disparity in terms of IT infrastructures,... dysfunctions in terms of maintenance services". As a result, the objectives need to be redefined, and would involve "making qualitative adjustments to digitization initiatives" and ensuring "the transition from a sector-based, compartmentalized and costly approach to a cross-functional, collective and mutualized one". According to the Ministry's own digital survey (diagram 1), there are 298 digital platforms dedicated to socio-economic activities subject to authorization, of which only 98 have digital platforms.

Fig n°1. **Distribution of socio-economic platforms/ 33% active; 58% to be built; 9% not active.**



Source: Report of the main activities of the Ministry of Digitalization and Statistics: https://mns.gov.dz/static/document/bilan_num.pdf (consulted on 28/06/2024)

And yet another new institution, the High Commission for Digitization (HCN), will be created (September 2023) as an executive body responsible for administrative reform, with the distinctive feature of having a steering committee to deliberate on the national digitization strategy (article 8) and a scientific and technical committee appointed to give advice and issue recommendations on the national digitization strategy (article 17) (JO RA n° 59 du 10 septembre 2023 /Décret présidentiel n° 23-314 du 6 septembre 2023). The High Commission, which still (07/2024) does not have an operational website, is tasked with "designing the national digitization strategy, in consultation with the sectors concerned, institutions, the economic sector and civil society" (article 4 in JO RA n° 59 of September 10, 2023). This is a *de facto* recognition that the previous policy of digitizing public administration, initiated in 2009, acted by default and lacked a political strategy. The High Commissioner for Digitization is therefore initiating a new strategy by establishing the Algerian National Center for Digital Services in collaboration with Huawei, a Chinese technology producer (dailyelmoudjahed online, 06/23/2024).

1.3. Various other obstacles to the digitization of the public sector.

It seems to us that the second main factor in the failure to achieve the objectives of digitizing public administration is a range of other obstacles. These include resistance to organizational, innovative and managerial change (Crozier M. 1963) through inertia, reluctance and non-adherence, sabotage and other negative reactions. It is acknowledged that change modifies habits and the environment, and removes certain advantages and privileges, such as those linked to the position and responsibility of civil servants. Electronic service (absence of human presence) by passes the administrator by dematerializing services. So, according to the Board of Directors of the Groupe algérien des acteurs du numérique -GAAN- Algeria is still facing the challenge of digitization: “Launched in 2009 and relaunched in 2018, the ‘e-Algérie’ project is struggling to achieve all its objectives,” because it is still encountering obstacles and blockages to its implementation and use, and “what has been done so far is really not the best approach for setting up e-government” (in the daily El watan-dz 23/04/2023).

Indeed, the digitization of sectors is at a low level, and what's more, the level of use of digital platforms, which are not unified or interconnected, is not known. Seven months after the creation of the High Commission for Digitalization to replace the ministry of the same name, the expert report (https://www.algerieinvest.dz/ of 08/04/2024) found that the Internet infrastructure exists, but is fragmented into isolated sites, while paper-based administration continues to exist. Hence the need for a strategy of interconnections between the various administrations to achieve completely paperless administrative procedures (Kahlane A. 2023). There are, however, small pockets of interconnection, such as the one between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of the Post Office for student enrolment, or the one between the Ministry of Startups, Finance, the fund of Non-Salaried Workers (known as CASNOS) and the Post Office for obtaining the self-employed entrepreneur's card, where the Ministry of Higher Education is not integrated, eventhough it is home to the houses and sites of entrepreneurship and startups.

This is due to a lack of coordination between government institutions, and the absence of a cross-functional vision enabling the development of a digital feasibility strategy. The example of the unused biometric card is edifying in this respect (https://www.algerieinvest.dz/ of 08/04/2024). The card contains all identification data and personal information, but cannot be used, without authorization, by all administrations, on pain of (theoretical) penal sanctions. Under these conditions, the e-gouvernement strategy consists of creating the legal framework for the exploitation of digitized data and promoting cloud computing (Callejas J.T Flores and Dumitriu P. 2019), thus enabling the interconnectivity of government administrative entities.

So the e-Algeria strategy is stagnating in phase two of its evolution. Will the national services center boost this development? The center was set up with a view to achieving “national digital autonomy and sovereignty”. But we can deduce from this e-Algeria approach that the bureaucratic lightening that e-gouvernement aims to achieve is counterbalanced by the administrative heaviness - in the form of a multiplication - of bureaucratic staffs with no real responsibilities, who are supposed to promote or impact the implementation and management of e-government. This administrative procedure - appointing and setting up delegated ministries, committees, observatories, commissions, commissariats, etc. within the presidency, ministries or government - is the main political mode of the government's desire to resolve the problems of the public administration-citizen relationship in the age of digitization. Each ministry “electronizes” its administration at its own level, according to its own skills, resources and perhaps political aims. Incoherence and lack of inter-sectoral coordination thus mark the evolution of e-government. More than fifteen years later, the problem of the advent of e-gouvernement arises in the same terms, and the same strategy is envisaged to solve it! Thus, e-gouvernement is not a universal prerogative, but depends on contextual parameters, in particular the political one – its implementation - and the pressure of demand (from the population). These determinants are just as much linked to the e-gouvernement development index as to the installation of local websites (Attour, Chaupain-Guillot, 2020).

2. E-governmentdevelopment.

To grasp this slowness we refer to the e-gouvernement development index or EGDI defined by UN experts as the “weighted average of standardized scores on the three most important dimensions of e-government, namely: (i) the scope and quality of online services quantified by the Online Services Index (OSI); (ii) the state of development of telecommunications infrastructure or the Telecommunications Infrastructure Index (TII); and (iii) inherent human capital or the Human Capital Index (HCI). Each of these indices is a composite measure that can be extracted and analyzed independently" and, mathematically, its equation is as follows: EGDI = 1/3 (OSI+ TII + HCI). In the case of Algeria, the EGDI attempts to determine levels relative to the significant contribution of human capital ..., as everywhere in the world whose indicator remains high (UN survey 2014). One criticism can be levelled at the set-up of the EGDI equation: Why is it that while the components are so equivalent in terms of contribution, given that HCI is high all over the world, and that HCI and TII both contribute to the supply of services on the one hand, and to extent that education and teaching are constants in people's lives, while the quest to improve living conditions - health, water supply and conveyance, housing or the use of technology - is the result of the sacrifices and investment capacities of states. In Algeria, the HCI is consistent with a socializing social policy: the population benefits from compulsory public education and free vocational training for the under-18s, unrestricted access to public health care, and water and electricity connections for almost 85% of the population. The essential gap lies in access to the Internet - at low speed - and the availability of IT tools or cell phones, which are still very expensive. According to Global Digital Reports (https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-algeria) the state of digital in Algeria in 2024, withits 45 million people, in early 2024 is: There were 33.49 million internet users in Algeria at the start of 2024, when internet penetration stood at 72.9 percent ; Algeria was home to 24.85 million social media users in January 2024, equating to 54.1 percent of the total population and a total of 50.65 million cellular mobile connections were active in Algeria in early 2024, with this figure equivalent to 110.2 percent of the total population. But report reveals that 12.46 million people in Algeria did not use the internet at the start of 2024, suggesting that 27.1 percent of the population remained offline at the beginning of the year. And the median speed of mobile internet connections is 21mbps while the median speed of fixed internet connections atteint 12.0 mbps. On 2022 global digital report lists the following data: 17.70 million people in Algeria did not use the internet at the start of 2022, meaning that 39.4 percent of the population remained offline at the beginning of the year. While Data published by Ookla (an Ericsson's associate in expanding the data-driven ecosystem to include mobile measurements and crowdsourcing data) indicate that internet users in Algeria could have expected the following internet connection speeds at the start of 2022: Median mobile internet connection speed via cellular networks: 11.44 Mbps for 29.06 world; and Median fixed internet connection speed: 9.78 Mbps very low regarding to connection speed 59.00 in the world (https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-algeria).

2.1 Divergent results.

Compared to African and world levels, Algeria's EGDI appears low. It should be noted that the EGDI level – driven upwards essentially by a very high HCI (0.67 on average) – is higher than the OSI level. There is therefore a discrepancy between a high EGDI and a low OSI, as shown in table number one (1).

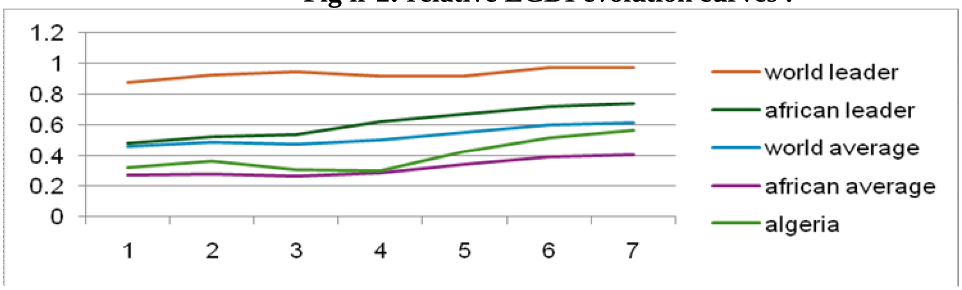
Table n° 1. Algeria E-Gouvernement Development Index.

Year	Algeria rank	Index value					Online Service Compo-nent	Telecom Infra-structure component	Human Capital Compo-nent
		leader		average					
		World	Africa	World	Africa	Algeria			
2010	131	0.879	0.483	0.461	0.273	0.318	0.098	0.125	0.738
2012	132	0.924	0.519	0.488	0.278	0.361	0.255	0.181	0.646
2014	136	0.946	0.539	0.471	0.266	0.311	0.079	0.199	0.654
2016	150	0.919	0.623	0.499	0.288	0.300	0.065	0.193	0.641
2018	130	0.915	0668	0.55	0.342	0.422	0.215	0.389	0.664
2020	120	0971	0.720	0.60	0.391	0.517	0.277	0.579	0.697
2022	112	0.972	0.736	0.610	0.405	0.561	0.374	0.613	0.696
2024	116	0.985	0.862	0.638	0.425	0.596	0.332	0.813	0.642

Source : United Nations e-governementsurvey

The diagram (number 1) of these magnitudes clearly shows thatAlgeria's position, over the period 2010/2022, has evolved irregularly. However, it is just above the African average and below the world leaders and average. The gap with the world leader is narrowing very slightly, from 0.56 to 0.41 (a tiny 27% improvement), while the gap with the African leader tends to increase, from 0.16 to 0.17. Compared with data from 2024 (UN E-Gouvernement survey 2024), even though there is a slight improvement in the score - up to 0.5956 - Algeria falls back to 116th place worldwide, meaning that other countries are making faster progress in digitizing the public sector.

Fig n°2: relative EGDI evolution curves :



Legend: horizontal axis represents years; vertical axis= EGDI values [0 , 1].

During the covid-19 period, when the use of e-services is theoretically high, EGDI increases thanks to the contribution of the telecoms infrastructure, without any significant progress being made in the e-services component. In 2022, Algeria, considered as an upper middle-income country, will achieve an EGDI score of 0.5611, placing it among the lower middle-income countries, as shown in table 2 below.

Table n°2. Average EGDI and subindex values, by income group, 2022

Country grouping by income	EGDI average	OSI average	TII average	HCI average
Low income	0.2963	0.3024	0.2139	0.3726
lower-middle income	0.5032	0.4562	0.4441	0.6092
Upper-middle income	0.6470	0.5725	0.6040	0.7645
High income	0.8241	0.7542	0.8420	0.8762
Average for all income groups	0.6102	0.5554	0.5751	0.7001

Source: 2022 United Nations E-Government Survey.

This trend has been driven by a divergence between the rise in the EGDI indicator and the weakness in the supply of electronic services.

2.2 Online services or OSI.

The digitization policy implemented to date (2024) culminates in the government's formalization, in December 2022, of a digital government portal for public services and government information (www.bawabatic.dz, translated this means "your portal" (https://bawabatic.dz/?&lang=fr, consulted 01/05/2023). This Government Portal of Public Services, as it is called by the government, provides “unified access to digitized services to spare users the constraints of electronic searches on multiple existing portals” (in www.bawabatic.dz). It is available in three consultation languages (Arabic, French, English). Four (04) search areas are available to access services: home, citizens, businesses and associations; home opens onto public services and government information (electronic and non-electronic) for citizens, individuals and professionals.

These services are provided by theme –twenty two (22)- (religious affairs, transport, education,...management, industry...) and by sector or ministry –twenty six (26) a number which can vary from one government to another, (justice, communication, agriculture and rural development...). Over two hundred (200) services are offered, and citizens are invited to formulate proposals in the form of opinions and suggestions via a contact form at pgov@mns.gov.dz. The services offered are divided into services and procedures. A service is the on-line monitoring of the progress of an application; while a procedure is the filling in and sending, via the Internet, of a forma vailable on the site: the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, for example, has seventeen (17) services and only three procedures. Considering the departments by sector, we obtain their “primary” distribution as follows (table n°3):

Table 3 Services by sector :

Ministry	Number of services
Ministry of the Interior, Local Authorities and Regional Planning	12
Ministry of Justice	15
Ministry of Finance	18
Ministry of Education	13
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research	18
Ministry of Vocational Training and Education	03
Ministry of Energy and Mines	10
Ministry of Culture and Arts	06
Ministry of Youth and Sports	08
Ministry of Digitization and Statistics	02
Ministry of Post and Telecommunications	19
Ministry of National Solidarity, Family and Women'sAffairs	13
Ministry of Industry and Pharmaceutical Production	24
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	50
Ministry of Housing, Urban Planning and Urban Affairs	20
Ministry of Trade and Export Promotion	11
Ministry of Communication	25
Ministry of Public Works and Basic Infrastructures	04
Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts	20
Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security	86
Ministry of the Environment and Renewable Energies	11
Ministry of Fisheries and Fish Production	10
Ministry of Knowledge Economy, Start-Ups and Micro-Enterprises	17
Ministry of Moudjahidine and RightfulClaimants	02
Ministry of ReligiousAffairs and Wakfs	16
Total e-services	435

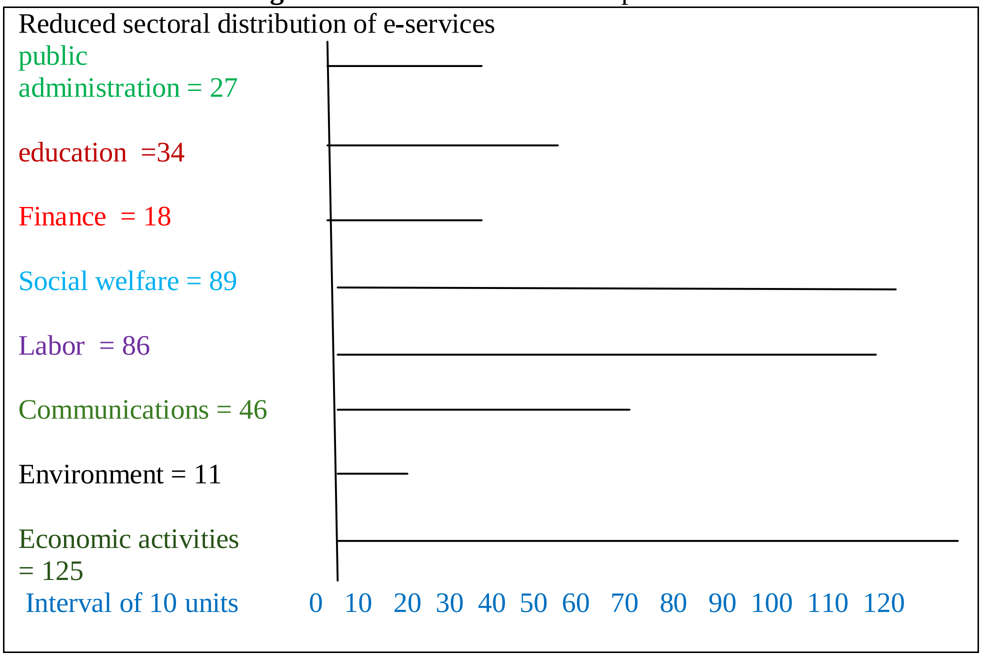
Source:government portal for public services (https://bawabatic.dz/ consulted on 28/06/2024).

This distribution can be aggregated (as a secondary distribution), with reference to the sectoral classification of e-services carried out by UN experts (e-gouvernement survey, 2014), and whose "consistency of online service can be a key factor in building trust in the institutions of the government" (chapter2, United Nations E-Government Survey 2012). A distribution of services according to the contribution of the various ministries to the achievement of fundamental public policy objectives - promotion of individual and social well-being - can therefore be drawn up as shown in diagram3:

1. modernization of public administration, data archiving, which includes the Ministries of the Interior and Justice,
2. Education: which includes the ministries of the various levels of education,
3. Finance:includes the Treasury and Customs,
4. Social welfare includes all ministries that contribute to the support and development of individuals or the community, and includes the ministries of culture and the arts, youth and sports, moudjahiddines and beneficiaries, housing, urban planning, national solidarity and the family,
5. Labor and employment,
6. Communications, post, digitization,
7. Environment and renewable energies,
8. Economic and commercial activities.

Three sectors dominate, in terms of size, the e-services types:economic activities, social welfare and labour.

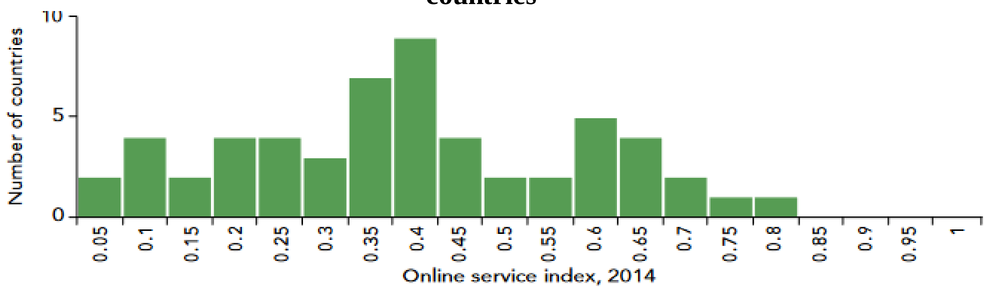
Fig n°3 sectoral redistribution of public services



Source:based on data from the government's public services portal (https://bawabatic.dz/ consulted on 28/06/2024).

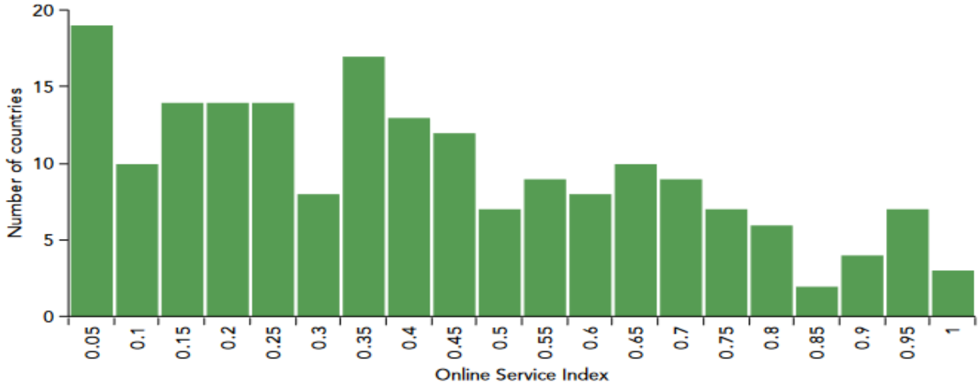
The evaluation of the quality and characteristics of online services constitutes ’one of the more straight forward aspects of e-government performance measurement… In practice, evaluation of online services is never that simple….. Through a typical country model, experts identify four stages of development of online services based on country experiences witch: "typically begin with Stage 1 Emerging information services Gouvernement, an emerging online presence with simple websites, progress to Stage 2 Enhanced information services, an enhanced state with deployment of multimedia content, and stage 3 Transactional services two-way interaction, advance to a transactional level with many services provided online and gouvernement soliciting citizen input on matters of public policy, and finally to Stage 4 Connected services a connected web of integrated functions, widespread data sharing, and routine consultation with citizen susing social networking and related tools" (UN egovernment survey, 2010). The online services (OSI) as a component of the E-Government Development Index (EGDI) is a composite indicator measuring the use of ICT by governments to deliver public services at national level. It is a standardized index values. (*U.N. E-Government survey 2014)*. The value of the OSI indicator varies in an interval between 0-low level-and 1-its high level. Its distinct thematic areas form five sub-indices: Institutional Framework (IF), Service Provision (SP), Content Provision (CP), Technology (TEC) and e-participation (EPI) and whose weights are respectively: 10% for I F, 45% for SP, 5% for CP, 5% for TEC, 35% for EPI, (UN.egvt survey 2022). Therefore, SP and EPI form 80% of the OSI index: meaning that if the latter is low, it is participation and service provision that are low or insignificant. As with the EGDI, the online services indicator focuses here on 2014. This date can be seen as a turning point in the policy of modernising public administration in Algeria, insofar as a new policy of administrative reform was launched by the government in place. This involved the overhaul of procedures started in 2014 ‘’for civil status in order to make a successful transition to e-government‘’ (Houda, 2022). 2014 performances show a Low online service performance to income: Algeria with an online service index 0. 0787 – under than 0.10- just ahead of four countries with a score of less than 0.05 regarding high online service performance relative to income like Morocco 0.6929 (Lower Middle) or Rwanda 0.5118 (Low income). Relatively, therefore, Algeria's online service indicator is low compared to countries with the same level of income, hereUpper middle income, whose distribution is as follows and which places Algeria in the second interval (0.05; 1) which includes fewer than five countries (fig.3) and fewer than ten countries compared to the distribution considered at world level (fig.4):

Fig n°4 Distribution of Online Service Index values: Upper middle income countries



Source : p.55-chapter2, *United Nations E-Government Survey 2014.*

Fig n°5. Distribution of Online Service Index values integrated all countries is like this :



Source : p.46 -chapter2, United Nations E-government survey 2014.

As citizens become more familiar with and confident of reliable online services, confidence in government increases (Piatak,J.and Jensen, C., 2024). The United Nations e-Government Survey uses a three-level model of e-participation that moves from more ‘passive’ to ‘active’ engagement with people. The model includes: 1) e-information that enables participation by providing citizens with public information and access to information upon demand, 2) e-consultation by engaging people in deeper contributions to and deliberation on public policies and services and 3) e-decision-making by empowering people through co-design of policy options and co-production of service components and delivery modalities‘’ (United Nations e-govrnment survey 2014). However, the level of online services achieved up until 2012 could only give an e-participation score of 4 or virtually zero compared with higher levels such as South Africa 13 or the Netherlands 81; this result is obtained by zero e-information (=0), zero e-decision-making (0) and five e-consultation (=5). Previously, the score achieved by Algeria in online services was around : Index Value 0.2549 of which StageI =75%; stageII= 248%; stageIII= 8%; satgeIV=9%; stageV= 22% (United Nations E-Government Survey 2012).

Has the experience been sufficient to improve this state of affairs? In 2022, with regard to the interaction phase and therefore citizen participation as measured by the e-participation index, Algeria, although having a high EGDI level, achieved a low EPI, which indicates that ‘the government's efforts to actively involve citizens in collaborative governance are limited’ (U.N. e-government survey 2022). Although the measurement of e-participation has been able to take account of the availability of open public data, particularly in the key sectors in which Algeria invests, such as education, health, employment, justice and social protection, in order to gain a better understanding of ‘the engagement between the government and the population in the consultation and decision-making processes’, the situation has not changed for all that. Indeed, the digitisation of the public sector is a necessary condition for modernising government organisations, but it is not sufficient without government-citizen interaction, which plays ‘a key role in strengthening the delivery of public services and opportunities for community engagement’ (UN e-government survey 2022). The e-decision making factor has always been zero, with e-participation averaging less than 0.10 over the period. This e-participation indicator deteriorates in 2024 to a low of 0.055.

In this respect, according to the income distribution by country, Algeria is in the middle half of OSI countries with high or very high TII values and high or very high HCI values; the relatively advanced development of human capital and infrastructure can provide a solid basis for efforts to improve the provision of online services in these countries.

Table n° 4 index value online services OSI Algeria Evolution.

Year	Algeria index value	Index value							Observations notedfrom e-government reports
		leader		average		e-participation index			
		World	Africa	World	africa	Algeria	World leader	African leader	
2010	0.098	1.000	0.530	0.274	0.144	0.014	1.000	0.300	Only a few countries -32%- are able to offermanytransac-tional services online at this time
2012	0.255	1.000	0.601	0.433	0.257	0.053	1.000	0.343	websitesaim at centralizing the entry point of service delivery to a single portal wherecitizens can access all gouver-nementsupplied services,
2014	0.079	1.000	0.693	0.392	0.201	0.078	1.000	0.804	Open Gouvernement Data introduces a new approach to publishinggovernment data and helps bridge the gap betweengovernment and citizens
2016	0.065	1.000	0.717	0.462	0.257	0.119	1.000	0.831	The issue thatmanygovern-ments are tacklingtodayis not whether to open up their data, but how to do so.
2018	0.215	0.979	0.806	0.569	0.363	0.202	0.983	0.788	Many people in Africa are unable to benefitfromICTsbecause of poorconnectivity, high cost of access and lack of necessaryskills
2020	0.277	0.994	0.700	0.562	0.370	0.155	0.988	0.75	Sinceearly 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic has reinvigorated the role of e-government. The utilization of conventional digital government services isbecoming more widespread
2022	0.374	0.983	0.749	0.555	0.367	0.227	1.000	0.546	Leaving no one behind in the hybrid digital society
2024	0.332	1.000	0.887	0.565	0.386	0.055	1.000	0.84	In their interactions with e-government platforms, people generally prefer to have easy access to digital information and services and to complete all transactions fully online through a single, integrated system of services delivery

Source/UN e-gouvernement survey/ 20210….2024.

In what follows, we distinguish between LOSIs and OSIs. LOSIs, introduced in 2020 as a more refined measure of e-gouvernement development, are e-services provided on a local scale and generally relate to large cities, particularly country capitals or those that have become leaders by achieving high scores (Table 5), as provided in particular in the e-gouvernement survey. In what follows, we compare Algiers with other leading global, regional and sub-regional cities.

Table n°5 : Local Online Services Index : LOSI (Algiers on comparaison).

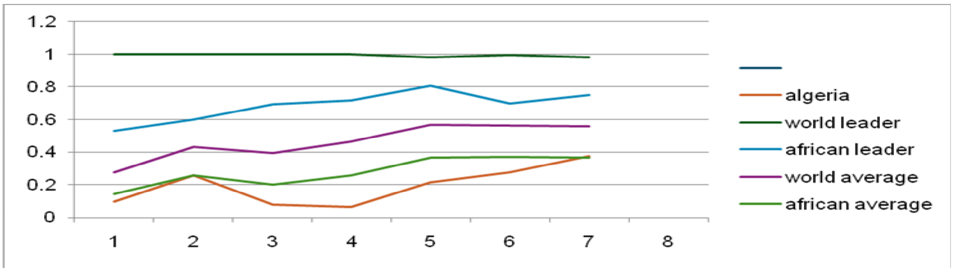
Year		Algeria	Town leader World	Town leader Africa	Tunisia	Morroco
2020	.	Algiers	Madrid	Johannesburg	Tunis	Casablanca
	I.V	0.2875	0.9625	0.55	0.4125	0.3
	riw	56	1	26	40	54
2022	.	Algiers	Berlin	Johannesburg	Tunis	casablanca
	I.V	0.2209	0.9767	0.6163	0.4651	0.4535
	riw	125	1	57	80	82
2024		Algiers	Tallinn & Madrid	Kigali	Tunis	Casablanca
	I.V.	0.1354	0.9271	0.625	0.4167	0.4261
	riw	144	1	55	89	86

Source/UN e-gouvernement survey/ 2020 ;2022, 2024. I.V. = Index value ; riw= rank in the world

In terms of online service provision, Algiers has fall sharply since 2020 and ranks 144th in the world in 2024, far behind cities in countries with fairly significant poverty thresholds, such as Mogadishu 126°, Freetown 116° or Nairobi 56°! At the Maghreb level, Casablanca and Tunis perform better, with higher and more competitive LOSI indicators than Algiers.

The following diagram illustrates Algeria's position in the world and in Africa in terms of leadership and average.

Fig n°6 Algeria Evolution of index value of online services OSI.

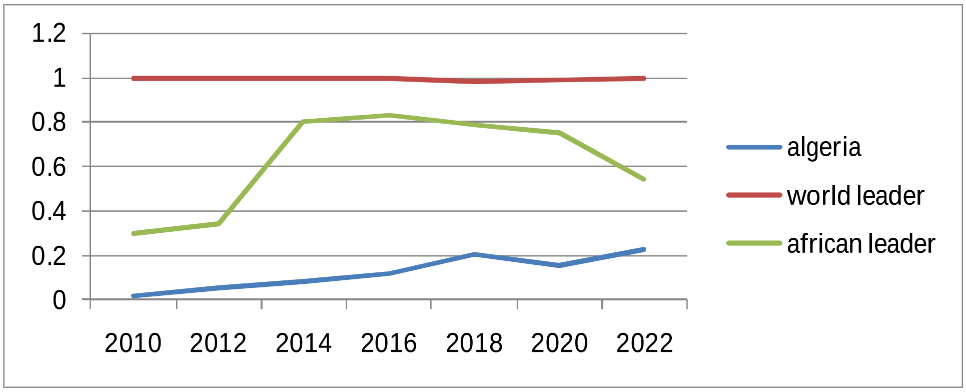


Source: UN e-gouvernement survey/ 20210....2024; years are on the x-axis.

Even as it rises, the OSI Algeria curve remains below the rest of the world, demonstrating the very significant gap with world averages:in 2022, Algeria will be positioned just at the level reached by the world average before 2012. The same remark can be applied to the LOSI indicator, according to which Algiers achieves values that are too low, placing it respectively in 2022 and 2024 at 125th and 144th place in the world.

While the evolution of the e-participation indicator (described as follows in diagram no. 7) shows a clear decline in Algeria's position in 2024, with an indicator of 0.05 virtually nil, it seems far removed from that of the rest of the world, which is evolving steadily at a high level for the developed world represented by the leading country, and at an accelerating manner for Africa represented by its leader.

Fig n°7 : e-participation index evolution



Source: UN e-governmentsurvey/ 20210....2022.

Thus, at EGDI, OSI and LOSI levels, Algeria is called upon to adopt a policy based on greater effort and efficient investment, and to determine an e-gouvernement strategy in which the e-participation index must be improved.

Conclusion

An analysis of the data we have used, gathered from official bodies and ministerial declarations or taken from the websites of global organizations, indicates that Algeria is experiencing many difficulties in setting up and implementing its e-government. It's not so much the technological infrastructure and human capital that are lacking, but rather their management and implementation strategies, which remain ineffective.From its initialization as an e-Algeria strategy and the institution of administrative reform, through to the decision to digitize the entire public sector, using a variety of instruments at different times to launch the project, such as the IT department, the national observatory and the digitization commission, e-government has been slow in coming to fruition and that is out of all proportion to the means implemented. Its performance remains dependent on the political will of the various ministers and officials who have succeeded one another in the position of responsibility, and on many obstacles and constraints linked to the instability of executive power, and therefore to the high-frequency internal mobility of administrators. The impact of these factors is a situation of digital backwardness in the public sector, revealed by the discrepancies between the levels achieved by the EGDI indicators – pulled upwards by the TII and the HCI - and the OSI and LOSI indicators, which remain low as a result of very low or almost non-existent e-participation. Such a position, for an upper middle-income country, limits both the supply of dematerialized public services and citizens' confidence in government and public policy. As a result, the digitization strategy remains at short-term challenge for political leaders.

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Digitization of the Algerian public sector: how is it evolving?

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Treasure as an essential element of public diplomacy. A preliminary case study on the example of Romanian actions

Andrzej Dubicki[1], Marek Olędzki[2]

Abstract:
Treasures of the past play an important role in the broader process of learning about one's own past, but they have also played and continue to play an important role in the international arena. In this capacity, they are an important element of a country's public diplomacy - this theme has been evident in international politics since at least the 19th century, when, with the development of archaeology and history, more and more such finds, often very spectacular, began to be exhibited in numerous museums as an element of national pride, but also as a good cultural ambassador for one's own country. In such a capacity, the Romanian state had already been using one of its greatest treasures - the one excavated in Pietroasa in 1837 - since the 1860s. In the capacity of a kind of cultural ambassador, the treasure was used at world exhibitions in Paris and Vienna, while also being the subject of much political discussion.
The object of the article will be to analyse the exhibition policies of Romania - that is, to identify the places where it was decided to exhibit the greatest national treasures; in addition, to indicate both the motives and the political benefits of such action between the 19th and 21st centuries. Due to limitations, only a preliminary analysis will be made of the currently vital issue of restitution of cultural property, also an important element of public diplomacy.
Keywords: *Romania, treasures, public diplomacy, museums, treasures recovery.*

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Treasure as an essential element of public diplomacy. A preliminary case study on the example of Romanian actions

With the advent of the modern era, interest in past eras began to grow. The Renaissance awakened interest in the past. At first, individuals who gradually began to build their own collections of antiquities were interested in collecting traces of the past, whereas from the beginning of the 18th century individual states began to invest more and more boldly in building their own collections of antiquities. While initially there was a proverbial boom in the acquisition of antiquities from the area of the Mediterranean Sea, a little later the construction of own collections based also on the evidence of one's own past began. It was on this wave that the foundations of, for example, the British Museum, and later its equivalents in other parts of Europe, were laid. Thus, one might be tempted to say that the Age of Enlightenment put the issue of acquiring monuments of antiquity on the proverbial agenda; every state, to a greater or lesser extent, began making efforts to acquire important testimonies of the past, treating it almost as an element of national honour.

Undoubtedly the catalyst for further interest and the element that brought antiquities into the orbit of broader diplomacy was the peace treaty ending Napoleon Bonaparte's unsuccessful expedition to Egypt - the peace of 4 July 1801 provided for the surrender to the British of much of the artefacts acquired by the French during the Egyptian expedition. The desire to acquire more artefacts at a fairly easy cost, evident in the treaty concluding the Egyptian expedition, was also due to a change in attitudes towards science more broadly in Britain - it was at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the British government decided to introduce a policy aimed at making science and art more accessible (Hoock 2017, 55). As a result of the expanded demand for the acquisition of knowledge, it also became noticeable that there was an increased interest from the part of interested parties to acquire more artefacts in order to satisfy the public's expectations as well. Due to the favourable circumstances, the British sought to acquire as many artefacts as possible from the French, which they ultimately succeeded in doing so. Among the most important acquisitions in this case was the Rosetta Stone. With the development of archaeology, demands for the surrender of artefacts began to rise with an increasing frequency when final peace agreements were concluded.

A second element of a political and diplomatic nature was the use of artefacts already acquired or found to popularise one's own country. One of the first such uses was the display of an Irish artefact (the Brooch of Tara) at the 1851 EXPO by the Irish jeweller Waterhouse in a wave of interest in Celtic art (McEvansoneya 2011, 80). While the 1851 exhibition can be seen as a kind of 'internal' British affair, the object's subsequent display at the next general exhibition in Paris can already be seen as part of a broad public diplomacy aimed at presenting an artefact from the British Isles to the French public. Understandably, the original motivation was probably a desire to attract more clients, but the fact itself should nevertheless be noted as being trend-setting in this field. The participation of the brooches from Tara was justified here insofar as an integral part of the Paris exhibition was a section (organised as a separate exhibition) of fine arts - within which the artefacts were also presented at subsequent exhibitions.

Romania decided to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the presentation of the new country's achievements on the international stage, deciding to participate in the World Exhibition of 1867, which was organised in Paris. The decision to participate was taken in 1865, with the receipt of an invitation from the French government. For the Romanians, it was important that they were able to take part in the event on its own as a separate exhibitor and not as part of the Ottoman Empire, as was the case, for example, with their participation in the London Exhibition of 1851. Given the requirements of public diplomacy, this was a *de facto* recognition of at least the formal suzeranity of the Romanian state. The Romanians quite readily agreed to participate in the exhibition by quickly appointing their chief commissioner, who became Alexandru Odobescu, already a well-known historian and archaeologist at the time (Odobescu 1976, 42). Subsequent expositions of the treasure outside Romania took place in the United Kingdom (1867/1868), where it was exhibited at the South Kensington Museum [now the Victoria and Albert Museum], and in Paris on the occasion of the World Exhibition in 1900. This was for a long time the last intentional exhibition of the treasure outside Romania. During the Great War, the treasure was sent to Russia for safekeeping, there seized by the Bolsheviks, and for a long time the possibility of presenting it internationally disappeared.

After the recovery of the Pietroasa treasure and other important Romanian artefacts (1956), they were temporarily displayed in Romania during the temporary exhibitions. The provisional solution was due to the fact that the National Museum of Romanian History was to be commissioned as the final home for most of Romania's treasures - the decision to set it up was still taken in 1969, but work progressed slowly, as befits a socialist economy, and the museum only opened its doors in 1971. Thus, it can be considered to some extent a return to the solutions used back in the 19th century, until EXPO 1900 in Paris, when the treasure from Petroasa was sent abroad for the last time for these purposes.

Romanian treasures in all were shown abroad, except of course for those temporarily confiscated by the Bolsheviks, again from at least 1925 (Romanian Art Treasures 1965-1966, 4). The first such exhibition was organised in Geneva and Paris, an exhibition presenting medieval Romanian art. It was prepared by the greatest Romanian historians, Nicolae Iorga, Vasile Pârvan and Gheorghe Balș, whose experience guaranteed the quality and reception of the exhibition among the public.

The first such exhibition outside Romania is known to have taken place in 1965/1966, but its composition/content was not very extensive. In the UK, the venue was the Royal Scottish Museum. Stefan Buzas, on the Romanian side, and Alan Irvine, on the British side, were responsible for preparing the exhibition. The institution selecting the artefacts and coordinating their shipment to the UK was: Romanian State Committee for Culture and Arts, which also played a decisive role in the preparation of the next exhibition (Rumanian Art Treasures 1965-1966).

The Romanian authorities decided to send their most important artefacts on another *tour* in 1970 and 1971. The exhibition first visited Paris. This took place between 25 May and 1 September 1970. the exhibition was held at the *Petit Palais*, where, as the Romanians recalled, it was received with full pomp and attentiveness. It was a summation of the hitherto good relations between the two countries, which had been foreshadowed by the visit paid to Bucharest by French President Charles de Gaulle in 1968. An additional aspect strengthening the reception of the exhibition in France, was the patronage of both the French President Georges Pompidou and the then President of the Romanian Council of State, Nicolae Ceaușescu; in addition, the Romanian dictator paid a visit to Paris during the exhibition (15 VI -17 VI) (România Libera, 16 VI 1971, 4). A visit to the exhibition was not on the agenda of the visit of Nicolae Ceaușescu himself, but as a cultural event, a visit to the *Petit Palais* was on the schedule of the Romanian leader's wife Elena on 16 June 1971. The Romanian press duly noted the satisfaction of her companion at the success of the exhibition of

Romanian monuments in Paris. This success was further emphasised by the statement of the French Minister of culture, Edmond Michelet, expressing his satisfaction at the possibility of hosting such an important exhibition in France (România Liberă, 17 VI 1971, 3). The exposition of Romanian monuments in France was also part of the French cultural programme, which also included other monuments of material culture, from Tutanachamon's tomb to pre-Columbian art, on display in the "Petit Palais". According to French journalists, the exhibition was conceived as a presentation of the different material cultures and their heritage, including spiritual heritage; inhabiting Romania throughout history. On the Romanian side, the selection of the artefacts for the exhibition was to be made by the archaeologist Radu Florescu. (Dunca 1970, 26). It is worth noting that this was a premiere in terms of exhibiting elements of the Apahida treasure, discovered only the previous year. Also in this connection, the French press even described the Romanian exposition as the event of spring 1970 in Paris. The correspondent of the daily *Le Monde* emphasised the excellent selection of the artefacts on display, reflecting well the complexity of the ancient cultures present in Romania, which in turn was well received by the Parisian public, providing a good showcase for Romanian culture (Contemporanul, 29 V 1970, 10). The exhibition finally lasted until the beginning of September 1970, receiving excellent reviews from the local press, which in turn was scathingly reported in Romania itself, e.g. in the correspondence of Ioan Grigorescu [n.b. later Romanian ambassador to Poland] (Scânteia 4 IX 1970, 6).

The next stop was Stockholm (on which occasion the patera research mentioned elsewhere reported by M. von Heland (1973) took place. A Romanian publication of April 1970 indicated that the last stop of the touring exhibition would be Copenhagen, but the final visit to the Danish capital was not realised. It was eventually decided that the last Western capital (presumably in exchange for Copenhagen) where the exhibition would be shown would be London. The British were interested in the possibility of hosting/taking over the exhibition in June 1970, and it was decided that it would be held at the British Museum, as the institution most predestined to do so. The exhibition was due to open on 29 January 1971 (NA, FCO 34/107;2). Invited to open it was, from the Romanian side, M. Macovei, chairman of the Romanian State Comittee for Culture and Arts. On the British side, the exhibition was originally intended to be opened by Lord Lothian the then Under-Secretary of State at the UK Foreign Office (Peter Kerr, 12th Marquis of Lothian).

The organisation of the exhibition in London was made possible by the British-Romanian cultural exchange programme concluded in 1968. On the London side, the supervision of the event was entrusted to the British Council, as the organisation responsible for coordinating cultural exchange, and the British Museum as the host institution for the exhibition. According to the assurances of the Romanian ambassador to the UK, the exhibition was to show the British public the best that Romania had to offer. Moreover, in discussions with the British, it was emphasised that the exhibition was prioritised in both Paris and Stockholm, from which delicate resentments towards the British arose, especially in the context of the rather limited space for the deployment of the exhibition.

It was finally decided on 13 January 1971 that the exhibition from the British side would be opened by Anthony Royle, then Under-Secretary of State in the British Foreign Office, the participation of a member of the British Cabinet was to reassure the Romanian side of the importance that was attached to the exhibition and to ensure the participation of members of the Romanian government in the opening of the exhibition (NA, 34/107; 3).

From the analysis of the documents, it appears that procedural issues were a relatively big problem, because as the Romanian side felt somewhat undervalued by the limited exhibition space, they wanted to compensate for this through a more elaborate event setting. This in turn did not very much correlate with the vision of the exhibition presented by the British Museum. The Romanians asked for representatives of the royal family to be present at the event. However, in this case, the tight schedule of *the Royals*, and the very late date of the event, was an obstacle.

The exhibition was accompanied by the publication of a corresponding catalogue, for which articles on individual monuments were written by the greatest Romanian specialists in specific fields (historical eras). The final version of the catalogue contains texts also published in France and Sweden, nevertheless with additional articles and an appropriate introduction, signed by Trevelyan. On the Romanian side, Dumitru Stănescu was responsible for the exhibition, while the curator on the British Museum side was Hugh Tait. The exhibition catalogue includes 489 material culture artefacts from a chronological range from the Middle Neolithic to 1711. The exhibition catalogue begins with the famous 'thinker' figurine excavated near Constanta, still widely used today in the souvenir industry, at least in Romania. The exhibition prepared was indeed a cross-section through the most important monuments of the aforementioned eras providing an excellent showcase for Romania.

Among the most important artefacts are the figurines of the aforementioned 'thinker' and his wife, constituting a whole, there were also the famous Geto-Dacian helmets from, among others, Cotofenești, further the rhyton from Poroina, the treasure from Agighiol, the Celtic helmet from Ciumești and the greatest treasures from the Migration of Peoples Age, the treasure from Pietroasa and part of the no less rich treasure from Apahida. (Treasures 1971). Most of these artefacts are now on display in the treasury of the National Historical Museum in Bucharest.

The British press emphasised, as did the French press previously, the great value of the exhibition, which represented a unique opportunity for the local public to admire such a quantity of important historical artefacts. It was also stressed that the transportation to Britain of such a quantity of important archaeological artefacts was done in secret for security reasons. (Contemporanul, 12 I 1971). In Britain, the exhibition lasted until 25 March 1971.

The early 1971 exhibition was not the only cultural event organised by the British Museum that year. In general, it can be noted that the Romanian-British rapprochement clearly visible in the late 1960s and early 1970s served many aspects of the development of mutual relations. Suffice it to mention, for example, the settlement of issues related to the establishment of aviation relations between the countries concerned at that time (see previous conference), a kind of extension of the aforementioned settlement was also the acquisition by the Romanians of the opportunity to purchase British BAC 1-11 aircraft and their subsequent licence production. Also, as can be seen, the agreement on cultural cooperation, at least at the turn of the mentioned decades, can be regarded as a success; especially as already in November 1971 the respectable doors of the British Museum hosted Romanian art again, this time in a slightly later edition. This time the exhibition was hosted by the ethnographic department of the London institution, and the theme was Romanian folk art. Unlike the previous exhibition presenting historical treasures, which, due to its importance, lasted a relatively short time; this time the exhibition was to last much longer - six months. (Scînteia, 23 November 1971, 6). The exhibition opened on 19(?) November 1971 and presented to the British public, among other things, traditional Romanian clothing, patterned textiles and other broad aspects of folk art. The correspondent of the party newspaper Scînteia stressed the great interest on the part of Londoners in the new exhibition. The opening on the British side was attended by John Wolfenden, then director of the British Museum, who also gave the opening speech; Sir William Harpham, director of the cultural centre "Great Britain - Eastern Europe, and Allan Olivier, director of "Europe Publication ltd." was also present. In common with other exhibitions of a similar nature, especially in the pre-internet era, the exhibition attracted widespread interest from most students at London art schools, as the exhibits provided excellent models for credit theses. Another aspect of cultural diplomacy, was to lead, also in November 1971, to the publication by the prestigious Oxford University Press of the collection Romanian Short Stories, containing a selection of the most interesting fiction texts of a cross-section of Romanian authors. (Scînteia, 23 XI 1971, 6).

In the years that followed, Romanian artefacts were presented several times outside the country, nevertheless sometimes it can be doubted whether the originals were really presented during these exhibitions . It can be said with a high degree of probability that the exhibition of the early 1990s that took place in Germany presented copies of the treasure from Pietroasa, made in Paul Telge's workshop in 1884.

In the context of successive major exhibitions promoting Romania, mention should also be made of the event held in 2010 in Rome, under the title: *Ori antichi della Romania. Prima e dopo Traiano/Ancient Gold Jewelry from Romania. Before and after Trajan*. It was presented between 17 December 2010 and 3 April 2011 in the Trajan Forum in Rome. As in other cases, the exhibition material came from the treasury of the National Museum in Bucharest, while the criterion for selection was to demonstrate the links between Romania and Italy. It should be noted that the size of the exhibition was rather modest, especially when compared to the others analysed in this study - 140 artefacts produced between the 17th century BC and the 6th century AD were on display. It is difficult to identify the most important of the exhibits on display. From modern point of view, and also taking into account the non-artistic circumstances associated with Romanian national treasures, the Dacian gold royal bracelets, which already have their own history in which there was a criminal element and a diplomatic struggle for their recovery, should be considered important artefacts (The History of Romania in One Object: The Dacian Gold Bracelets). The official opening of the conference took place on 16 December 2011, at a special press conference attended by Romanian Minister of Culture Hunor Kelemen, Undersecretary of State at the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Bogdan Aurescu and Italian officials, albeit of a slightly lower rank than the Romanian delegation. The official opening to the public took place the following day. Incidentally, the exhibition was accompanied by additional events - on the occasion of the closing of the exhibition on 3 April 2011, a meeting took place with teams of re-enactors, who presented units from the time of Septimius Severus that were rarely recreated by re-enactment teams. As an additional attraction aimed directly at the Romanian diaspora, additional guided tours in Romanian were organised from 26 March to 3 April, i.e. at the end of the exhibition; this was an important way of meeting the needs of the local Romanian community.

The next such prestigious exhibition was not directed abroad until more than half a century later, when an event commemorating the 140th anniversary of the establishment of Spanish-Romanian relations was organised in Madrid. The exhibition was open from 1 October 2021 to 27 February 2022 on the grounds of the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid. (https://www.archeotravelers.com/en/2022/02/20/exhibition-the-archaeological-treasures-of-romania-the-dacian-and-roman-roots/)

More than 800 historical objects were presented in the Spanish capital, coming mainly from the holdings of Romanian museums, especially the National Historical Museum, but also from Spanish museums, providing valuable material of a comparative nature. The main intention of this exhibition was to show the many relations between east and west Europe, against the background of the heritage of common history such as the Celtic and Germanic peoples and the Roman Empire. Thus, it can be seen that the main idea of the exhibition remained the same, without changing over 160 years - to show to the Western public the close ties between Romania and the West, as a testimony to the Western aspirations of the Romanian political and intellectual elite. The exhibition was curated on the Romanian side by Ernest Oberländer-Târnoveanu and on the Spanish side by Andres Carretero Perez. Comparing this exhibition with the one previously discussed and organised half a century earlier, it should be noted that it was a little more cross-sectional, presented more monuments than before, but what can be considered as its relative weakness, of course only in relation to its predecessor, was the lack of presentation of all the relevant treasures. Thus, the treasure from Pietroasa or Apahida was only partially presented, but nevertheless those parts of the treasure which referred to the Gothic heritage were selected for display.

It must be stressed that, in this case, the exhibition was given due prominence, as is perfectly evident when analysing the exhibition catalogue, which this time opens with messages from King Felipe VI of Spain and President Klaus Iohannis of Romania, emphasising the historical community of the two countries concerned. The selection of artefacts on display, also presented a shared history, with an emphasis on elements potentially linking Spain and Romania. This time, the focus was on a slightly greater internationalisation of the event, which was also evident in the preparation of the materials promoting the exhibition - the event catalogue is available in both Spanish and English versions.

In summary, it should be noted that archaeological treasures occupy a prominent place in public diplomacy for several reasons. First of all, it is always an element that attracts the attention of the public, which is the target of such diplomatic efforts. Such activities could be seen, for example, in the 19th century, when the largest Romanian treasures were willingly sent to familiarise the societies of the great powers with the newly established state and its political and cultural ambitions. It is an opportunity to familiarise the public with the most important cultural objects, and one can promote one's own interpretation of historical phenomena and, of course, of artefacts, setting them in a specific archaeological context. Examples of such activities were the exhibitions in Madrid and Rome, which attracted the attention of the highest state agents, including, for example, the King of Spain. The occasion was the anniversaries of the establishment of diplomatic/cultural contacts between the countries concerned - it was also an excellent opportunity to address a slightly different addressee, namely their own diaspora - in this respect, this phenomenon can also be interpreted as an element of maintaining ties with the home country. Another element that should be mentioned and was present in Romanian public diplomacy was the desire to maintain good cultural relations with the countries where relevant exhibitions were organised, while carrying out activities in other fields of activity. This was the case, for example, in the United Kingdom, where, almost contemporaneous with the exhibition activities presented, discussions were held with a view to, for example, obtaining a licence for the BAC 1-11 aircraft.

As can be seen, the use of monuments in public diplomacy is very wide-ranging and certainly deserves a wider examination of the issue.

Authors' Contributions:
The authors contributed equally to this work.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Religion, Politics, and Trust: A Review of Romania's Social Fabric Across 20 Years

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Abstract:
This study investigates the evolution of Romania's social fabric over 20 years, utilizing aggregate data from the World Values Survey (WVS). The research examines changes in social norms, attitudes, and values across political, religious, and national identities, and their impact on subjective well-being. Findings reveal a persistence of collectivist values centered on family and community, alongside an increase in national pride but not necessarily a willingness for collective action. Religiosity shows a rise in personal belief but a decline in organized participation. Political engagement and trust in institutions, however, declined significantly. Despite these trends, subjective well-being improved, suggesting that evolving social attitudes and values positively influence life satisfaction. The study concludes with a discussion of the interplay between tradition and modernity in shaping Romania's evolving social landscape and highlights future potential directions for research.

Keywords: *social fabric, religiosity, well-being, Romania, World Values Survey*

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Introduction

Since the collapse of the Communist regime in 1989, Romania has faced the ongoing challenge of developing its economy and social capital, and of reshaping a participative civil society. One of the main goals of European social policy is to promote social cohesion and support people’s well-being. However, few studies show whether there is a relationship between these goals in Romania, and even fewer are focused on the measurement of these variables across time. This project uses aggregate data from the World Values Survey (WVS) to measure the changing nature of Romania's sociocultural values across an analytical timeframe of 20 years. Social fabric is defined as the normative orientations that underlie a community's beliefs and way of life. This encompasses the cultural values, attitudes, and norms that make up a social system. Subjective well-being refers to an individual’s own assessment of their health and quality of life (Das, K.V., Jones-Harrell, C., Fan, Y., 2020). The end of this research, on a micro-level, is to locate Romania in the larger landscape of the process of globalization and assess the resulting sociocultural changes on the population. Specifically, the three research questions to be answered are:

1. How much continuity or change has there been in Romania's social norms, attitudes, and beliefs?
2. What are the most salient and persistent characteristics in political, religious, and national identity?
3. What is the effect of social attitudes and values on subjective well-being?

On a macro-level, this project aims to use Romania as a case study of social change. From its position in the midst of a socio-political transition, Romania can provide insight into the implications of societal traumas and on implementing institutional change after a mass social crisis, which is a pressing need in the face of the cascading collective traumas marking this decade.

Literature Review

Research using the World Values Survey (WVS) provides insights into cultural, social, and political values across different societies. The survey's longitudinal nature enables researchers to track changes in values over time within societies, identifying societal trends and shifts in attitudes towards various issues such as democracy, gender roles, and environmental concerns. Specifically, WVS research can provide insight in two domains. First, by examining values related to trust, tolerance, and social capital, WVS research can shed light on factors contributing to social cohesion and integration within societies. Secondly, WVS data can provide insights into the effects of globalization on cultural values, including changes in attitudes toward traditional norms, individualism, and cosmopolitanism. Both of these areas can provide valuable contextual contributions to policymakers.

Research based on the World Values Survey (WVS) and other such data sources have probed the cultural shifts in Romania since its Communist Revolution in 1989, although much of this literature is dated. Several studies have observed that Romania has remained a traditional society in terms of religious authority, risk avoidance, focus on discipline, and conservatism (Friedlmeier & Graveliuc, 2013). One study observing transgenerational patterns in three generational cohorts found that young Romanians implicitly assume the same values and attitudes as the older generation, reinforcing collective narratives and social strata (Gavreliuc, 2012). A comparative analysis of historical regions of Romania found that individualistic values characteristic of competition and independence are still sparse, and that negative attitudes towards institutions which result in lack of social trust and involvement are still prevalent (Iacobuta, Baciu, & Asandului, 2009). The economic recession has been cited as a possible obstacle to a postmodern value orientation (Friedlmeier & Graveliuc, 2013). Another study analyzing why political participation is weaker in Romania than in the West found that economic resources and human capital (e.g. education, urban residence, employment, and socioeconomic status) impacted civic participation (Dragoman, 2009).

Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index report on Romania notes that the public's satisfaction with democracy has declined markedly in the last two years and that levels of trust in society are low (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024). Blatant cases of corruption are less frequent, but the political system has been slow to respond to direct societal pressure. Interestingly, as a long-term trend, the Orthodox Church is the leading institution in terms of public trust (67%), scoring above national political institutions like the government or parliament. Overall, Romania's internal challenges are related to the enduring consequences of ineffective governance and include limited administrative capacity, delayed reforms in key sectors, clientelism, and a declining commitment to continue the anti-corruption fight.

Methodology

The WVS is a representative comparative time series of the sociocultural, political, economic, and religious positions of people from 120 countries. Conducted every five years by global research teams and used to analyze economic development, democratization, and social capital, its data has proved the instrumental role of a country's social fabric in the stability of its political institutions, the flourishing of its civil society, and the effectiveness of its policy. This study uses all available data on Romania [waves 3 (1998), waves 5 (2005), waves 6 (2012) and 7 (2017)] from the WVS. To maximize the reliability of the longitudinal analysis, the set of questions selected was consistent in wording and response categories across the waves.

This study identifies seven measures of the social fabric on three indicators of well-being, together with a number of sociodemographic controls:

Based on the theoretical outline presented above and the contextual landscape of previous findings, three predictions were made:

Hypothesis 1: Across all cohorts, it is expected that the scores of religiosity will decrease and the scores of political participation will increase across time.

Hypothesis 2: Political identity will be characterized by restored trust and engagement in political institutions; religious identity will be characterized by an emphasis on personal belief over organized participation; and national identity will be characterized by collective action.

Hypothesis 3: Self-reported well-being will increase across the waves as Romania shows a shift towards more modern and European social values.

Measures

Social fabric was operationalized by seven normative orientations: family values, community values, national values, social trust, institutional trust, religious values, and political values. *Family values* and *community values* are calculated using the questions on the importance of family and the importance of friends (collapsed and recoded as: 1 = important, 2 = not important) respectively. To measure *national values*, I used two survey items--one asking about willingness to fight for country (collapsed and recoded as: 1 = yes, 2 = no) and the other about national pride (collapsed and recoded as: 1 = proud, 2 = not proud)--to create a three-point scale of national fidelity. *Social trust* was measured using the survey item asking whether most people can be trusted (1 = yes, 2 = no). *Institutional trust* was measured as *confidence in government* and *confidence in political parties*

The variables *political values* and *religious values* were coded into additive scales made of survey items that captured the degree of importance and of participation in politics or religion. The variables were operationalized using questions that measured either attitudes or participation. *Political attitude* was assessed by the questions on importance of politics in life and interest in politics. *Political participation* was assessed through questions on party membership, frequency of discussing political matters with friends, and various political actions such as signing a petition. These variables were combined to encapsulate *political values. Religious attitude* was assessed by questions on belief in God, the importance of God in one's life, and the importance of religion in one's life. *Religious participation* was assessed by identification as a religious person, membership of a church or religious organization, and frequency of attending religious services. These variables were combined to encapsulate *religious values.* Each respective scale has a minimum value of zero (not religious/political at all) and a maximum value of three (religiously/politically active).

To measure *subjective well-being*, I used three survey items: feeling of happiness (collapsed and recoded as: 1 = happy, 2 = not happy), satisfaction with life (collapses and recoded as: 1 = satisfied, 2 = ambivalent, 3 = not satisfied), and subjective state of health (collapsed and recoded as: 1 = good, 2 = fair, 3 = not good).

Six single-item covariate control variables are used in these analyses to account for variation due to demographics. These are *gender* (0 = male, 1 = female), *age* (coded as 1 = <29, 2 = 30-49, 3 = >50), *size of town* (collapsed and recoded as: 1 = <2000, 2= 5-20,000, 3 = >20,000), *education* (eight ordinal categories from 1 = "inadequately completed elementary education" to 8 = "university with degree/higher education—upper-level tertiary certificate"), *employment status* (collapsed and recoded as: 1 = not employed, 2 = part-time, 3 = full-time or self-employed), and *social class* (a subjective self-rating, recoded as: 1 = "lower class," 2 = "working class," 3 = "lower middle class," 4 = "upper middle class," 5 = "upper class").

Results

Demographics. The final sample consists of 7,391 respondents across 20 years. The descriptive statistics include age, gender, education level, and size of settlement size. The mean percentage of the female population across the four time periods is 52.275%. The mean age of the participants is 45.35 years with a standard deviation of 1.92 years.

Family Values. The measure for the importance of family was stable and high (89-91%) across the chronology of the waves, indicating collectivistic attitudes and the primacy of familial ties. This trend suggests that in Romanian culture family is still considered is a core value and among the most important aspects of life.

Community Values. The measure for the importance of friends increased across the chronology of the waves (percentage of participants responding ‘very important’ increased from 21% to 38%), affirming that Romania can still be considered a collectivistic society that values commitment to the member ‘group’ above the individual.

National Values. The national values measure consisted of two variables: (1) willingness to fight for country, and (2) pride in nationality. These offer a broad overview of changes in public sentiment regarding collective identity and the propensity towards collective action over time. Firstly, there was a decrease in the proportion of participants willing to fight for their country between the first wave (1994-1998) and the final wave (2017-2022), indicating a potential decrease in nationalistic sentiment or increase in pacifism or passivity. Secondly, a consistent majority of respondents report being 'Very proud' or 'Quite proud' of their Romanian nationality, with a notable increase in those 'Very proud' from 1994-1998 to 2017-2022. While national pride seems to be increasing, with more individuals identifying strongly with their nationality, the willingness to fight for one's country is not increasing. This suggests that while Romanians are confident in their nationality, it does not necessarily translate into a willingness to engage in collective action such as combat.

Religious Values. Religiosity consisted of two sets of measures: (1) religious attitude, which was assessed by questions on belief in God, the importance of God in one's life, and the importance of religion in one's life; and (2) religious participation, which was assessed by identification as a religious person, membership of a church or religious organization, and frequency of attending religious services. In the variables that make up the religious attitude measure, there was an upward trend in self-reported belief in God, importance of religion, and importance of God increased over time, which indicates an increase in religiosity in Romania since 1998. In the variables that make up the religious participation measure, there was a decrease in self-reported religious membership and religious attendance, which indicates a decrease in religious activity. Specifically, there was a decrease in more frequent attendance (more than once a week and once a week) and an increase in attendance on special holidays. Given that a large portion of the WVS sample reported not being members of a church, this suggests that religiosity is less associated with or attached to an organized institution and more to individual belief. These trends collectively suggest a complex religious landscape mediated by political attitudes.

Political Values. Political values consisted of two sets of measures: (1) political attitude, which was assessed by the questions on the importance of politics in life and interest in politics; and (2) political participation, which was assessed through questions on party membership, frequency of discussing political matters with friends, and various political actions such as signing a petition. In the variables that make up the political attitude measure, there was a decline in self-reported importance and interest in politics, suggesting a trend toward disengagement over the years. In the variables that make up the political participation measure, there was a decrease in political actions such as signing a petition and attending a demonstration, and in party membership. These measures indicate an overall trend of low confidence, dissatisfaction, or mistrust in political parties and in the government.

Social Trust. Social trust was measured using the survey item asking whether participants agree that "most people can be trusted." Overall, there was a downturn in participants who agreed with this statement, implying a perceived decrease in trustworthiness among people.

Institutional Trust. Institutional trust was measured using two variables: (1) confidence in government and (2) confidence in political parties. The number of participants signalling 'No confidence at all' increased from 27% to 43% and from 37% to 50% respectively. This trend indicates a notable increase in skepticism towards government and political parties, with more Romanians expressing very low or no confidence in these institutions.

Subjective Well-being. The subjective well-being measure consisted of the following variables: self-reported feelings of happiness, satisfaction with life, and subjective state of health. There was a positive trend across all aspects of well-being measured, indicating perceived improvement in quality of life and well-being in the population across 20 years.

Discussion

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The first research question guiding the study concerned how much continuity or change has there been in Romania's social norms, attitudes, and beliefs across the waves of data. It is clear that Romania has experienced both continuity and change in its social norms, as family values remain strong and collectivism persists despite a gradual shift towards individualism and increasing reliance on personal autonomy and self-expression. Contrary to the hypothesis that religiosity scores would decrease and political participation scores would increase across all cohorts over time, the findings revealed a notable increase in religiosity, while political participation consistently declined.

The second question sought to identify the persistent characteristics in Romania's political, religious, and national identity. In political identity, there was a notable decline in engagement and trust in political institutions; in religious identity, an increase in personal belief and the importance of religion persisted despite decreased church attendance; and in national identity, a sense of pride was not accompanied by a corresponding willingness to engage in national defense or collective action. As such, the initial hypothesis was incorrect.

The third question concerned the effect of social attitudes and values on subjective well-being. Positive trends in subjective well-being, as indicated by self-reported happiness and life satisfaction, suggest that the evolving social attitudes and values—such as increased family loyalty and spiritual commitment—contribute to an improved perception of quality of life in Romanian society. The third hypothesis was correct in anticipating increased well-being. The finding suggest that social attitudes and values prioritizing family loyalty, personal religiosity, increased recognition of diversity, evolving attitudes towards individual autonomy positively influence subjective well-being, leading to higher levels of reported happiness and life satisfaction among individuals. However, this shift is accompanied by challenges such as declining social trust and political engagement, indicating a complex interplay between tradition and modernity.

Analysis

Overall, the WVS data presents a multifaceted view of native Romanian society in transition from 1998 to 2017, reflecting a tension between individualism and collective identity. While the increased recognition of diversity could indicate a shift toward a more multicultural society, the lack of a corresponding increase in social trust poses challenges to social cohesion. The analysis of the data reveals a significant downward trend in social trust among the native Romanian population from 1998 to 2017, as evidenced by a marked decline in the belief that "most people can be trusted." These transitions suggest a broader societal trend characterized by eroding faith in political structures and a retreat from communal engagement, possibly reflecting a larger global movement toward individualism and skepticism of political entities and collective initiatives.

The interplay between societal engagement and trust illustrates a concerning trend: as political involvement declines and social trust erodes, an increasing number of individuals express caution in their interactions with others. Examining neighborly relationships, there is an interesting juxtaposition within this timeframe. Historically, mentions of immigrants and foreign workers as neighbors saw a substantial drop between 2005 and 2009, followed by a noticeable resurgence from 2010 to 2014. This pattern may indicate an increased visibility or awareness of these communities. Additionally, the data shows an upward trend in the acknowledgment of neighbors of different races and religions from 1994 to 2017, signaling potential growth in community diversity and possibly increased tolerance. However, the initial decline in the mention of neighbors from different religious backgrounds—followed by a resurgence in the later years—hints at evolving societal perspectives on religious diversity. Despite signs of increasing diversity in certain respects, a concurrent decline in generalized social trust suggests that while native Romanian communities may be diversifying in terms of race, religion, and immigrant status, it has not yet engendered a corresponding increase in social cohesion or trust. Factors such as socio-economic disparities, changing political landscapes, and growing individualism may contribute to this complex relationship (Bălţătescu, 2004).

It was expected that participants would give more importance to political participation and national identity in response to Europeanization and democratization. While there remains a robust sense of national pride among Romanians, the correlation between this pride and the readiness to defend the country has weakened over time. This disparity raises critical questions about national identity and collective purpose in the contemporary context. Interest in political matters shows a clear trend of disengagement among native Romanians from 1998 to 2017, evidenced by a declining interest in politics and the perceived importance of political involvement. Conversely, the data indicates a resilient commitment to religious identities, with a noted rise in the percentage of individuals who consider religion vital in their lives. This shift suggests a reorientation toward more spiritual values amid political and social uncertainty, indicating that many individuals may seek solace and community through their faith.

Family, too, remains a central mechanism for the transmission of values. Although there has been a gradual shift towards greater individualism in Romanian society, as evidenced by changing attitudes towards personal autonomy and self-expression, collectivist values such as family loyalty and solidarity continue to hold significance. Previous research has affirmed the role of cohesion (Voinea, 2005) and solidarity, defined as “mutual trust and support, mutual respect and understanding, fidelity” (Popescu, 2009. p. 58, p. 73) in familial norms. The societal concept of family was influenced by the social and demographic policies enacted during the Communist era, which considered the family to be “the vital cell of the society” (Fodor et. al., 2002; Potârcă, G., Mills, M., & Lesnard, L., 2013). Most recently, Matei and Bobârnat (2022) observed how familial solidarity affected and was affected by transnational migration. Previous research however has suggested that value transmission between Romanian parents and offspring was weak and limited to collectivist values (Friedlmeier, 2006).

Research on subjective well-being in Romania has been varied. A cross-sectional study investigated analyzing of happiness and life satisfaction across 59 countries using the WVS survey conducted from 2010 to 2014 placed Romania in the bottom 10 countries in terms of happiness (Ngamaba, 2017). This study found that the significant factors driving happiness and life satisfaction included freedom of choice, trust, national pride, importance of friends and family, and weekly religious attendance. A study on the relationship between social capital and well-being in Romania found that a unit increase in social capital, which was measured by generalized social trust and membership of in voluntary organizations, would increase well-being of individuals by 4.9% (Kumar, 2017). The International Survey on Child Well-Being (ISCWeB) project found that Romanian children reported higher levels of subjective well-being than their counterparts in other countries (Bălțătescu & Bacter, 2016, 2020). Despite the number of such studies, research on the predictors of well-being Romania remains vague and imprecise (Serban-Oprescu, Dedu, & Serban-Oprescu, 2019).

While the World Values Survey (WVS) data provides valuable insights into the changing social and cultural dynamics in Romania, several limitations must be acknowledged in interpreting the findings. First, the reliance on self-reported survey data introduces potential biases such as social desirability bias and measurement error. Second, although the WVS data is longitudinal, there are variations in sample sizes and survey methodologies across different waves. Lastly, because it cannot encompass all relevant variables, the survey only intuits broad societal trends and may overlook nuanced or localized experiences within specific Romanian communities. Future research can use these trends to develop insight into their implications: How are changing cultural values and social norms shaping identity formation and social cohesion in Romanian communities? What are the social and cultural implications of increasing diversity and migration flow in Romania, and how can policies promote social integration and intercultural dialogue?

Conclusion

Overall, WVS data offers valuable insights into the values and cultural shifts occurring in Romania since the Communist era. These trends highlight the complex interplay between historical legacies, socio-economic changes, and cultural shifts in shaping the values of the native Romanian population. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for policymakers, community leaders, and researchers as they seek to navigate

Romania's evolving social fabric and inform policies and interventions aimed at promoting social cohesion, democratic governance, and economic development.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Diverging Paths of Justice: A Comparative Insight into Legal Traditions and Court Systems in Romania, the UK, and the US

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Abstract :
In examining the legal systems of Romania, the United Kingdom, and the United States, one is immediately struck by the divergent paths through which justice is administered and law is interpreted within these jurisdictions. This paper delves into the foundational differences in legal traditions and systems, specifically, the civil law system of Romania contrasted with the common law traditions of the UK and the US, exploring how these differences impact the interpretation of laws, the roles of judges, and the overall legal processes. For legal practitioners, scholars, and students, understanding these comparative dynamics is crucial for navigating the increasingly interconnected global legal landscape, offering insights into how different societies organize their judiciary to uphold the rule of law.

Keywords: *legal traditions, court structures, judicial policies, teaching legal English.*

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Diverging Paths of Justice: A Comparative Insight into Legal Traditions and Court Systems in Romania, the UK, and the US

Introduction

In a world where legal principles increasingly transcend national boundaries, a comparative analysis of different legal traditions offers valuable insights into how societies understand, interpret, and apply the concept of justice. Romania, with its civil law tradition rooted in Roman and Napoleonic influences, contrasts markedly with the common law systems of the United Kingdom and the United States. These legal traditions not only inform the foundational principles of each system but also shape judicial structures, procedural rules, and approaches to legal interpretation. This paper will explore the implications of these differences by examining three areas: the historical and philosophical foundations of each system, the structural organization of courts, and the role of judges within the judicial process. By doing so, it aims to illuminate how legal traditions influence the operation of justice and the protection of rights across distinct jurisdictions.

The importance of this comparative analysis extends beyond academic interest, as globalization and transnational legal practice require an appreciation of diverse legal frameworks. Legal rules, as Pierre Legrand (1997) argues, "are always embedded in a specific cultural matrix, meaning that attempts to transfer them across jurisdictions ignore the depth of local legal traditions" (p. 117). This idea suggests that understanding the nuances of each system is essential, as legal principles are not simply interchangeable across borders; they are deeply interwoven with the unique historical and social contexts in which they developed. For instance, while Romania's civil law system emphasizes codification and systematic regulation, the common law systems of the UK and the US rely heavily on precedent and judicial discretion. This fundamental distinction affects not only substantive law but also procedural dynamics, evidentiary standards, and the role of legal professionals within each system.

As legal traditions increasingly interact in a globalized world, it becomes crucial to recognize the resilience of each system's foundational principles. Kelemen (2011) notes that "as legal traditions come into contact through globalization, the resilience of foundational principles in each system highlights the importance of comparative legal studies" (p. 45). Comparative analysis enables legal practitioners, scholars, and policymakers to understand the distinct philosophies and structural choices that underpin each tradition, fostering cross-border legal strategies that respect and accommodate these differences. By gaining insight into how legal systems like those in Romania, the UK, and the US interpret and administer justice, we can enhance judicial cooperation and promote a deeper respect for the plurality of legal traditions worldwide.

Historical Background and Evolution of Legal Systems

Romania: Roman Law Foundations, Napoleonic Code Influence, Post Communist Legal Reforms

Romania's legal tradition has deep roots in Roman law, a foundational influence on much of Europe's legal landscape. As Stein (1999) notes, "Roman law has left an indelible mark on European legal traditions, including Romania's" (p. 47). This influence dates back to the Roman conquest of Dacia in 106 AD, after which Roman customs, laws, and language permeated the region. Roman legal principles, particularly those governing property rights and contractual obligations, laid a foundation for Romania's legal system, which persisted even after the Roman Empire's fall (Westrup, 1950).

In the 19th century, as Romania sought to modernize its legal system, it turned to the Napoleonic Code as a model. The Romanian Civil Code of 1865 was closely modeled after the French civil code, reflecting the wider European trend towards codification. According to Merryman and Pérez-Perdomo (2007), "the civil law tradition values codified statutes, reducing the interpretive role of judges" (p. 112), which was in line with Romania's goal of creating a systematic and predictable legal framework. This civil law orientation emphasized codified rules and principles, underscoring a legal structure where judges applied written law consistently rather than relying on judicial discretion.

Following the collapse of communism in 1989, Romania underwent significant legal reforms to align with European standards, especially as it prepared to join the European Union in 2007. Abraham (2016) explains that "the transition from a communist to a democratic state required Romania to overhaul its legal system, embedding principles of human rights and judicial independence in the 1991 Constitution." This post-communist period saw extensive reforms to various codes, including the Civil and Penal Codes, aimed at harmonizing Romanian law with the EU's legal framework and integrating principles of human rights and judicial independence.

United Kingdom: Development of Common Law, Historical Precedents, Influence of Statutory Law

The United Kingdom's legal system is one of the oldest and most influential common law systems globally, characterized by its reliance on judicial precedents and the principle of stare decisis (Holdsworth, 1922). The development of English common law began during the reign of Henry II in the 12th century, when royal courts were established to create a unified system of justice across the kingdom. Holmes (1881) observes that "the common law, by its very nature, evolves through a continuous process of judicial interpretation," and this evolution has allowed English law to adapt over centuries while maintaining a stable framework.

Statutory law also became increasingly important in shaping UK law, particularly during the 19th-century legal reforms. The Judicature Acts of 1873–1875 were landmark statutes that merged common law and equity courts, thereby streamlining judicial processes. According to Slapper and Kelly (2014), "the Judicature Acts marked a critical point in English legal history, integrating previously separate courts and reinforcing the significance of statutory law" (p. 89). Although the role of legislation grew, case law and judicial precedents continue to serve as the bedrock of the UK legal system.

A unique aspect of the UK system is the balance between parliamentary sovereignty and judicial interpretation. Unlike Romania's system, which prioritizes codified statutes, the UK allows judges more latitude to interpret laws dynamically. For instance, in the landmark case Donoghue v. Stevenson (1932), the House of Lords established the foundational tort principle of "duty of care." Lunney and Oliphant (2017) explain that this case illustrates how "the common law is shaped by judicial reasoning and interpretation, adapting to changing societal values" (p. 125), highlighting the judiciary's role in shaping legal principles within the UK's common law framework.

United States: Adaptation of English Common Law with Distinct Federalism and Constitutional Focus

The United States inherited the English common law tradition through its colonial ties to Britain. However, following independence in 1776 and the subsequent ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1787, the American legal system began to diverge, embedding unique principles of federalism and constitutionalism. According to Friedman (2005), "while early American courts initially followed British precedents, the creation of the U.S. Constitution introduced a distinct legal framework that emphasized checks and balances" (p. 103). This divergence led to the development of a dual court system, where federal and state courts operate independently, each with the power to interpret the Constitution and statutory laws within their jurisdiction.

One of the most significant developments in American law is the principle of judicial review, established in the landmark case Marbury v. Madison (1803). McCloskey (2016) describes this decision as "a cornerstone of American constitutional law, empowering the judiciary to invalidate laws that conflict with the Constitution" (p. 76). Judicial review enshrined a system of checks and balances unique to the American judiciary, giving courts a crucial role in protecting constitutional rights and ensuring that all laws align with constitutional principles.

Federalism also plays a critical role in shaping the U.S. legal system. Unlike the centralized judiciary of the UK, the U.S. has distinct legal jurisdictions within each state, allowing for significant variation in state laws. Elazar (1987) explains that "federalism enables states to develop their own legal norms and practices, fostering diversity within a unified legal framework" (p. 54). This decentralized approach allows for state-specific laws on issues like criminal penalties, civil procedures, and contract law, adding complexity to the U.S. legal landscape. For example, Maddex (2005) notes that "state constitutions often reflect regional priorities and values, leading to variations in case law across the United States"(p. 38), which further distinguishes the American system from other common law traditions.

Court Structures and Jurisdiction

The structural organization of courts in Romania, the United Kingdom, and the United States reflects each country's unique approach to legal administration, judicial hierarchy, and legal tradition. These systems demonstrate how historical and legal philosophies shape court structures, judicial responsibilities, and the overall delivery of justice.

Romania: A Hierarchical Civil Law System

Romania's court system is rooted in the civil law tradition, reflecting its history of codification and Roman legal foundations. The court structure is hierarchical, consisting of four main levels: lower courts (judecătorii), tribunals (tribunale), courts of appeal (curți de apel), and the High Court of Cassation and Justice (Înalta Curte de Casație și Justiție), which serves as the highest appellate authority. The High Court is tasked with ensuring uniform interpretation and application of the law across the country (Merryman & Pérez-Perdomo, 2007).

Romania also has a Constitutional Court (Curtea Constituțională), a separate body from the general judiciary, which exclusively handles constitutional matters. The Constitutional Court reviews the constitutionality of laws, governmental acts, and treaties, ensuring that Romania's legal framework aligns with its 1991 Constitution and

European Union standards. Unlike courts in common law systems, Romanian judges focus on applying codified statutes with limited interpretive discretion, reflecting a top-down approach to legal consistency (Stein, 1999).

The systematic structure of Romanian courts promotes cohesion and predictability in judicial decision-making. Each level of the hierarchy plays a defined role, with lower courts addressing routine legal disputes and higher courts resolving complex appeals or legal questions. The emphasis on codification and binding statutory interpretation ensures uniformity in the application of laws across the nation (Abraham, 2016).

United Kingdom: A Multi-Jurisdictional Common Law System

The United Kingdom's court system is more complex than Romania's due to its common law heritage and the presence of distinct legal jurisdictions for England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Each jurisdiction has its own court structure and legal traditions, though they share a common highest appellate court: the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom. Established in 2009, the Supreme Court replaced the House of Lords as the ultimate authority on legal appeals within the UK (Slapper & Kelly, 2021). However, unlike Romania's High Court of Cassation and Justice, the UK Supreme Court does not have the power to invalidate parliamentary legislation, as the UK lacks a single codified constitution (Dicey, 1885). Instead, courts interpret and apply statutes passed by Parliament, which retains ultimate legal sovereignty.

The UK legal system relies heavily on judicial precedent (stare decisis), a hallmark of the common law tradition. Appellate courts, including the Supreme Court, set binding precedents that lower courts must follow, ensuring consistency while allowing flexibility to adapt legal principles over time (Holdsworth, 1922). This allows the UK judiciary to balance legal stability with the capacity to respond to societal changes, as seen in landmark cases like Donoghue v. Stevenson(1932), which established modern tort principles (Lunney & Oliphant, 2017).

The separate jurisdictions within the UK highlight the system's regional diversity. For example, Scotland retains distinct rules for civil and criminal law, while Northern Ireland's legal system has its own courts and procedures. Despite this complexity, the unified appellate structure ensures a degree of consistency across the UK, albeit within a flexible, precedent-based framework.

United States: A Federal Dual-Court System

The United States operates a dual-court system, reflecting the country's federalist structure. There are two parallel systems of courts: the federal courts and the state courts, each with its own hierarchy. At the apex of the federal judiciary is the Supreme Court of the United States, which has ultimate authority to interpret the U.S. Constitution and resolve disputes between federal and state jurisdictions. Established by Article III of the U.S. Constitution, the Supreme Court also holds the power of judicial review, enabling it to strike down laws deemed unconstitutional, as established in Marbury v. Madison (1803) (Friedman, 2005).

Below the Supreme Court are the U.S. Courts of Appeals (13 circuits) and the U.S. District Courts, which serve as trial courts for federal cases. Federal courts handle cases involving constitutional questions, federal laws, or disputes between states. Each state, meanwhile, has its own court system, typically including trial courts, appellate courts, and a state supreme court. State courts primarily address issues under state law, such as criminal cases, family law, and property disputes, leading to significant variation in legal standards and procedures across states (Elazar, 1987).

This decentralized structure allows states to retain autonomy in their legal systems while operating under the framework of federal law. For example, states differ on matters such as sentencing guidelines for criminal offenses or contract law requirements. Maddex (2005) notes that "state constitutions often reflect regional priorities and values, leading to a diversity of laws and practices across the country" (p. 38). While this fosters innovation and regional responsiveness, it also requires coordination between federal and state courts to resolve jurisdictional conflicts.

Role and Responsibilities of Judges

The role of judges within each legal system is fundamentally shaped by the underlying legal tradition, which influences how they interpret laws, administer justice, and interact with other branches of government. These differences are particularly evident in the civil law tradition of Romania compared to the common law traditions of the United Kingdom and the United States. The divergence in judicial roles reflects each system's philosophical approach to law, affecting judicial training, decision-making authority, and the relationship between the judiciary and the legislature.

Romania: Judges as Enforcers of Codified Law

In Romania's civil law system, judges are primarily seen as interpreters and enforcers of codified law. The civil law tradition, which has roots in Roman law and was later influenced by the Napoleonic Code, emphasizes legislative supremacy—the idea that the law is complete and self-contained, requiring judges to apply it as written. As noted by Merryman and Pérez-Perdomo (2007), "the civil law tradition assumes that legal codes contain all necessary rules, and judges are bound to these statutes rather than to precedent" (p. 34). Consequently, Romanian judges are expected to strictly adhere to statutory codes, with limited scope for creative interpretation or judicial innovation.

Judicial training in Romania focuses on ensuring that judges understand and apply the codes systematically and consistently. According to Fletcher (2002), "the civil law system relies on judges who act as administrators of the law, ensuring that it is applied uniformly across cases" (p. 82). This training reflects the role of judges in civil law systems as technical appliers of the law rather than as interpreters who shape its development. Unlike in common law systems, judicial decisions in Romania do not create binding precedents. Instead, decisions are generally case-specific, and while higher court rulings are respected, they do not carry the binding force typical of common law systems.

This approach reflects a civil law philosophy that values legal certainty, consistency, and predictability over judicial discretion (Zweigert & Kötz, 1998). Romanian judges are primarily administrators of legislative will, applying laws uniformly without overstepping legislative intent. This systematic approach aligns with the civil law tradition's emphasis on a structured and hierarchical legal system, where judges play a secondary role to the legislature in shaping legal norms.

United Kingdom: Judges as Interpreters and Developers of Common Law

In the United Kingdom, judges play a more dynamic role, largely due to the common law tradition's reliance on judicial precedent. The principle of stare decisis, or adherence to precedent, requires judges to consider past judicial decisions when making their rulings, ensuring that similar cases yield similar outcomes. However, UK judges are not merely passive followers of precedent; they also have the authority to interpret and adapt legal principles to meet new circumstances. According to Slapper and Kelly (2021), “the flexibility of common law allows judges to interpret statutes within a broader social context, often applying purposive or contextual methods” (p. 142).

British judges use a variety of interpretive approaches, such as the purposive approach, which looks at the intent behind legislation, and the contextual approach, which considers broader social implications. This judicial discretion allows for legal continuity, while also enabling the judiciary to adapt the law to evolving social norms. Donoghue v. Stevenson (1932), a seminal case in tort law, illustrates this flexibility, as it established the modern principle of “duty of care,” which has since been foundational in UK law (Lunney & Oliphant, 2017).

The role of UK judges as interpreters and developers of the law reflects the common law system’s emphasis on adaptability. While they respect legislative authority, judges in the UK actively participate in shaping legal doctrines through their rulings, often responding to complex societal issues. This dual role—following precedent and exercising interpretive discretion—allows UK judges to influence the gradual evolution of legal principles.

United States: Judges as Custodians of Constitutional Principles

Judges in the United States share many similarities with their British counterparts in their reliance on precedent and judicial discretion. However, American judges, especially those in the federal judiciary, hold an additional power that profoundly shapes their role: judicial review. Established by the landmark case Marbury v. Madison (1803), judicial review allows American judges to interpret the U.S. Constitution and to invalidate laws or executive actions deemed unconstitutional. This authority positions the judiciary as a co-equal branch of government alongside the legislative and executive branches, granting American judges significant influence over public policy and the protection of individual rights (Friedman, 2005).

In the U.S., the Supreme Court has the power to set binding precedents on constitutional matters, shaping the legal landscape on issues ranging from civil liberties and federalism to economic regulation. According to McCloskey (2016), “the power of judicial review has made the U.S. Supreme Court one of the most powerful judicial bodies in the world, capable of influencing both national policy and individual rights” (p. 48). This role is particularly prominent in cases related to civil rights, such as Brown v. Board of Education (1954), where the Supreme Court's ruling against racial segregation in schools transformed American society.

The combination of statutory interpretation, common law development, and constitutional adjudication makes the role of U.S. judges particularly powerful and distinct. U.S. judges are not only interpreters of statutory law but also protectors of constitutional principles, with the ability to shape national policies through landmark rulings.

Comparative Analysis: Judicial Roles in Civil Law vs. Common Law Systems

The different roles of judges in each system reflect broader legal philosophies about the nature of law and the function of the judiciary. In Romania, the judge’s role as a strict interpreter of codified law aligns with the civil law tradition’s emphasis on legislative supremacy and systematic legal order. Romanian judges are primarily administrators of legislative will, ensuring that laws are applied uniformly and consistently without overstepping the boundaries set by the legislature. This approach reinforces a view of the judiciary as a technical body focused on precise application rather than interpretation or policy-making (Merryman & Pérez-Perdomo, 2007).

In contrast, the roles of judges in the UK and the US embody the common law values of adaptability and judicial discretion. In the UK, judges actively participate in shaping the law through their interpretations and rulings, contributing to the evolution of legal principles over time (Dicey, 1885). British judges are respected for their ability to interpret statutes within the broader context of common law principles, adapting to new social realities while maintaining continuity with established doctrine. In the US, judicial discretion is even more pronounced, with the power of judicial review granting American judges a central role in constitutional interpretation and public policy.

This comparison highlights how legal traditions influence the scope of judicial authority and the relationship between courts and legislatures in each jurisdiction. In civil law systems like Romania, where the legislature is the primary source of law, the judiciary's role is more constrained. Judges are expected to apply the law as written, with minimal room for interpretation or innovation. In common law systems like those of the UK and the US, however, judges have the freedom—and sometimes the obligation—to interpret, adapt, and even develop the law to address changing societal needs and values. This flexibility allows the judiciary in these systems to respond dynamically to complex legal issues, fostering a legal environment that balances continuity with adaptability.

The roles and responsibilities of judges in Romania, the UK, and the US demonstrate the impact of legal traditions on judicial function. While Romanian judges are seen primarily as enforcers of codified law, judges in the UK and the US actively shape the law through interpretation, precedent, and constitutional review. This divergence illustrates the broader philosophical distinctions between civil law and common law systems: the former values certainty and legislative supremacy, while the latter embraces judicial creativity and adaptability. Understanding these roles is essential for grasping the unique ways each system approaches justice and the rule of law.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the divergent paths taken by Romania, the United Kingdom, and the United States in developing their respective legal systems. The analysis reveals that while Romania adheres to a civil law tradition, emphasizing codified statutes and limiting judicial discretion, the UK and US are guided by common law principles, where judicial precedent and interpretive flexibility play pivotal roles. These distinctions reflect not only differences in legal philosophy but also varying historical, cultural, and political influences that have shaped each country's approach to justice. In Romania, the legal system emphasizes predictability and consistency, with judges strictly applying legislative codes. Conversely, the UK and US legal systems prioritize adaptability, allowing judges to interpret and develop the law to respond to evolving societal needs.

Understanding these differences is increasingly important in today's globalized legal landscape. For international legal practitioners, knowledge of both civil and common law systems is essential as cross-border transactions, multinational litigation, and international treaties become more prevalent. Legal professionals who understand these comparative nuances can navigate foreign jurisdictions more effectively, bridging gaps between civil and common law traditions to provide more comprehensive advice and representation. For instance, a lawyer advising a multinational company must be aware of how judicial discretion might affect the interpretation of contract law in a common law country versus a civil law jurisdiction.

Looking to the future, globalization and the rise of transnational legal issues are likely to encourage some degree of convergence in legal practices. The growth of international organizations, like the European Union and the United Nations, has already fostered a degree of harmonization in areas such as human rights, commercial law, and environmental law, where international treaties and conventions create a shared legal framework. While the foundational principles of civil and common law are unlikely to merge fully, there is potential for procedural and substantive elements to align more closely. For instance, international arbitration has developed rules that blend civil and common law traditions, offering a flexible approach that can accommodate diverse legal backgrounds. Such convergence may serve as a model for other areas of law, especially in fields heavily influenced by global commerce and technology, where uniformity can reduce legal uncertainty and enhance cross-border cooperation.

In summary, examining the legal systems of Romania, the UK, and the US underscores the value of a comparative perspective. As legal practices evolve alongside global interconnectivity, a comprehensive understanding of diverse legal systems is vital, offering practitioners the tools to navigate an increasingly interconnected world with nuanced, adaptable, and informed strategies. This evolving global legal environment may not fully unify civil and common law traditions, but it certainly points towards a future where legal professionals and systems are better equipped to address the complexities of an interconnected global society.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Multiculturalism and Globalisation in Teaching Romanian as a Second Language (RL2)

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Abstract :
The landscape of language education is continually reshaped by the forces of multiculturalism and globalisation, particularly in the context of teaching Romanian as a Second Language (RL2). Multiculturalism, with its emphasis on recognizing and valuing the diversity of cultures within the language learning environment, introduces a rich layer of complexity and opportunity to the RL2 classroom. On the other hand, globalisation has dramatically expanded the horizons of RL2 education by facilitating access to a wealth of resources and connections that were previously unimaginable. This study deals with the nuanced interplay between these forces, exploring their impact on pedagogical strategies, curriculum development, and the overall learning experience in RL2. By examining specific facets of multiculturalism and globalisation, we can uncover effective approaches to language teaching that not only enhance linguistic proficiency but also foster global awareness and intercultural competence among learners.

Keywords: *multiculturalism, globalisation, pedagogical strategies, intercultural communication, RL2.*

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Multiculturalism and Globalisation in Teaching Romanian as a Second Language (RL2)

Introduction

In recent decades, the rise of multiculturalism and globalisation has been one of the defining features of global society, influencing various facets of human life, including education. The teaching of Romanian as a Second Language (RL2) is no exception, as these forces intersect to transform methodologies, curricula, and the overall approach to language instruction. Multiculturalism introduces the need to acknowledge and incorporate the cultural backgrounds of learners, thereby enriching the language learning experience with diverse perspectives and worldviews. In parallel, globalisation accelerates the exchange of ideas, methods, and educational resources, enabling language educators and learners alike to benefit from an interconnected, resource-rich environment. Understanding how these forces shape RL2 education is essential for creating learning environments that support linguistic, cultural, and social competence in a globalized world.

In the age of global interconnectedness, teaching Romanian transcends traditional boundaries, transforming into a tool for bridging cultures and fostering mutual understanding. The teaching of Romanian as a foreign language has become increasingly significant in the context of globalization and multiculturalism, necessitating approaches that address diverse learner backgrounds and global interconnectedness (Argaseala, 2023). This sentiment encapsulates the profound shift in RL2 education: Romanian is not only a language of national identity but has also evolved into a vehicle for cross-cultural dialogue, reaching audiences that span continents and cultures.

The teaching of Romanian as a second language (RL2) occupies a unique position in the European educational landscape. Romania, as an EU member state with an increasingly multicultural demographic, is witnessing an influx of individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This, combined with the country's evolving socio-political context, demands a language education approach that is inclusive, globally relevant, and adaptable to students from varying cultural milieus. This paper examines how multiculturalism and globalisation intersect in RL2 education, exploring their implications for language acquisition, teaching methodologies, curriculum design, and the cultivation of intercultural competence among students.

The Concept of Multiculturalism in Language Education

Multiculturalism in language education refers to the integration and appreciation of diverse cultural backgrounds within the learning process. Fundamentally, multiculturalism is the recognition of cultural diversity as a valuable asset, emphasizing that cultural differences are not obstacles to learning but rather sources of enrichment (Banks, 2009). In the RL2 classroom, where students may come from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, multiculturalism offers a framework that not only acknowledges these differences but also leverages them to enhance the learning experience. This approach supports the development of cultural literacy, defined as the ability to understand and respect the cultural contexts that shape communication and social behavior (Nieto, 2004:28). Through multicultural education, RL2 learners gain linguistic competence and cultural awareness, preparing them to navigate Romanian within its own cultural setting as well as in diverse global contexts.

For RL2 instructors, multiculturalism involves a deliberate approach to teaching that extends beyond mere acknowledgment of students' backgrounds; it requires integrating culturally relevant content, examples, and teaching methods that reflect the diversity of the classroom. Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasizes that culturally relevant pedagogy “empowers students intellectually, socially, and emotionally by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1995:469). In the RL2 context, this could mean using examples or idioms that resonate with students' unique backgrounds, thus making Romanian more accessible and meaningful. By doing so, RL2 educators create a space where students are not simply learning a language but are also cultivating a greater appreciation for multiple cultural perspectives.

Multiculturalism shapes the RL2 classroom by fostering an inclusive environment where students feel respected and represented. This inclusive atmosphere encourages active participation, as students are more likely to engage when their identities and experiences are valued within the curriculum. Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of social constructivism supports this approach, suggesting that learning occurs most effectively in a social context where students construct meaning through interaction with their peers and teachers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 84). By drawing connections between their own cultures and the target language, students gain motivation and engagement, viewing Romanian not only as a subject but as a means of intercultural connection.

Moreover, viewing Romanian through multiple cultural lenses enables students to develop a more nuanced understanding of the language and its applications across social and cultural contexts. Multiculturalism in the RL2 classroom therefore extends beyond language proficiency to include cultural competence—a crucial skill in our increasingly globalized world (Bennett, 2009). As students learn to interpret Romanian within various cultural frameworks, they build a foundational understanding that prepares them for meaningful intercultural interactions, enriching their overall language learning experience and enhancing their cultural literacy.

The Impact of Globalisation on RL2 Education

Globalisation, defined as the process by which nations become increasingly interconnected through trade, communication, and cultural exchange, has significantly reshaped the landscape of language education (Held & McGrew, 2007). This global interconnectedness has heightened the accessibility of educational resources, fostered cross-border collaborations, and spurred demand for languages like Romanian in international job markets. For Romanian as a Second Language (RL2) education, globalisation has expanded the reach of the Romanian language, increasing its relevance in international contexts and necessitating teaching approaches that prepare learners for global communication. As such, globalisation has broadened the range of pedagogical materials available, from digital resources to authentic language media, enabling RL2 instructors to design curricula that are both culturally diverse and relevant for global audiences.

In this context, learning Romanian as an RL2 becomes more than a simple acquisition of vocabulary and grammar—it transforms into an experience of adaptation and personal growth. Lăpădat (2022) describes the process as "a transition, a metamorphosis of the struggle to communicate ideas” (Lăpădat, 2022:14), capturing the transformative nature of RL2 learning in a globalized setting. For many students, engaging with Romanian means not only navigating the language but also adjusting to new cultural frameworks, societal norms, and forms of self-expression. This “metamorphosis” reflects the broader goals of global language education, where learners undergo a shift in identity and worldview as they acquire the language skills to articulate their thoughts within Romanian cultural contexts.

The impact of globalization on RL2 is also evident in the increased availability of digital resources that provide learners with authentic exposure to Romanian. Scholars argue that these resources are crucial for developing students' linguistic competence in a real-world context, as they allow learners to engage with language as it is used in various social and professional settings (Leung, Harris & Rampton, 2004). For instance, digital tools like online news platforms, language-learning apps, and multimedia resources expose students to current cultural trends and everyday language use in Romania. This access not only enriches students' language skills but also encourages the development of cultural literacy, which is essential for navigating Romanian language and culture in an increasingly interconnected world (Byram, 1997).

The global demand for Romanian speakers has been propelled by factors such as Romania's integration into the European Union, the globalization of businesses, and increased international tourism. Consequently, there is a growing need for RL2 instruction that prepares learners for real-world contexts, such as international business, academic exchanges, and cultural tourism. As Graddol (2006) notes, language education in the globalized era must be responsive to the "transnational mobility of people and information," requiring curricula that emphasize practical language skills and cultural competence (Graddol, 2006:114). In RL2, this means that students must be equipped with language skills that allow them to function effectively across diverse cultural settings, whether in business negotiations, academic conferences, or intercultural dialogues.

Globalisation also necessitates that the RL2 curriculum prioritizes practical language use, critical thinking, and intercultural competence. As Risager (2006) suggests, language learning in a global context must transcend traditional methods by integrating global perspectives and emphasizing skills that enable learners to interpret and communicate across cultures (Risager, 2006:28). This approach aligns with the demands of a globalized job market, where multilingualism and cultural adaptability are increasingly valued. For RL2 students, this means a curriculum designed not only to build linguistic proficiency but also to cultivate the cognitive flexibility and cultural sensitivity needed for meaningful interactions within local and international spheres.

Pedagogical Strategies in an RL2 Context

Culturally Responsive Teaching

One of the core pedagogical strategies in an RL2 classroom informed by multiculturalism is culturally responsive teaching. This approach entails adapting teaching methods to reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of the students, a practice that has been shown to enhance both engagement and retention in language learning. As noted by Hammond (2015), culturally responsive teaching "creates a bridge between students' home cultures and the new culture they are navigating in the classroom," fostering a learning environment that feels inclusive and relevant (Hammond, 2015:22).
Studies demonstrate that incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into language instruction not only enhances engagement but also facilitates a deeper understanding of the target language and culture. For example, Gay (2018) emphasizes that culturally responsive teaching requires "acknowledging the legitimacy of cultural heritage as legacies that affect students' attitudes and approaches to learning" (Gay, 2018:32). In the RL2 classroom, this might involve using culturally familiar examples, idioms, or historical references that resonate with students' own backgrounds, making Romanian both more accessible and more relatable. This approach aligns with findings by Paris

(2012), who advocates for “culturally sustaining pedagogy” as a means to maintain and celebrate diverse linguistic and cultural identities in the classroom (Paris, 2012:95).

Additionally, culturally responsive teaching involves more than simply integrating cultural content; it also requires creating a classroom environment that encourages students to share their own cultural perspectives. This approach promotes a collaborative and inclusive learning space that values cultural exchange, an environment supported by Vygotsky’s (1978) social development theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978:86). Encouraging students to bring in their cultural perspectives transforms the RL2 classroom into a space where cultural knowledge flows bidirectionally, enriching both language learning and cultural understanding.

Research also suggests that culturally responsive teaching can improve academic outcomes for diverse learners by making the content more meaningful and engaging (Banks, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995). When students see their identities and backgrounds reflected in the curriculum, they are more likely to feel connected to the learning process, which can lead to greater academic investment and persistence. In the context of RL2, culturally responsive teaching not only improves language acquisition but also supports students in developing intercultural competencies, equipping them with the skills needed to interact effectively in a multicultural world (Nieto, 2010; Sleeter, 2011).

Incorporating culturally responsive teaching in RL2 education recognizes that language learning is deeply interconnected with cultural understanding, as learners bring their unique perspectives into the classroom. Thus, educators are encouraged to design lessons that bridge Romanian cultural elements with students’ own cultural backgrounds, using this diversity as a valuable resource for enriched, contextually relevant learning.

Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL)

Task-based language learning is another effective strategy in the RL2 context, particularly given the influence of globalisation on language education. Task-based approaches that simulate real-life situations can effectively develop communicative competence in RL2 learners. TBLL is designed to help students use language in a way that mirrors authentic, practical situations they might encounter outside the classroom, such as ordering food, asking for directions, or discussing current events. This focus on practical tasks builds learners’ confidence and equips them with the skills necessary to handle real-world interactions in Romanian, emphasizing the development of functional language skills.

Research supports the efficacy of TBLL in language learning, highlighting its impact on learners’ ability to communicate effectively in diverse contexts (Ellis, 2003). According to Ellis, task-based learning allows students to focus on meaning rather than form, fostering a more natural and engaging language-learning experience (Ellis, 2003:42). Long (2015) also emphasizes that “tasks should be relevant to learners’ personal, academic, or career goals” to make the learning process meaningful and ensure that students are motivated to participate actively in their language development (Long, 2015:98). By simulating real-life situations, TBLL encourages learners to think critically and adapt their language use to suit various social and cultural interactions, making it particularly valuable in the multicultural and globalized RL2 classroom.

The alignment of TBLL with a multicultural classroom environment is further supported by Nunan (2004), who found that task-based methods foster a "learner-centered environment," allowing students from diverse backgrounds to connect with the language in a way that feels personally relevant (Nunan, 2004:67). TBLL enables RL2 students to bring their cultural and linguistic experiences into the learning process, making it more inclusive and supportive of diverse perspectives. When students engage in tasks that simulate real-life interactions, they not only develop their linguistic skills but also cultivate intercultural competence, a crucial skill in our increasingly globalized society (Willis & Willis, 2007).

Additionally, research by Skehan (1996) indicates that task-based approaches are especially beneficial for developing communicative competence, as they encourage students to produce language spontaneously, rather than relying on rehearsed responses (Skehan, 1996:23). In the RL2 context, this spontaneity and adaptability are key to navigating various social situations where language use is less predictable. Thus, TBLL aligns well with a globalized RL2 classroom, as it prepares students to apply their linguistic skills in diverse and multicultural settings, enhancing their readiness for meaningful interactions beyond the classroom.

Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL)

The globalisation of technology has significantly transformed language classrooms, offering new opportunities for language acquisition through digital tools that promote active learning and engagement. In RL2 education, Utilizing digital tools and online resources can enrich the RL2 learning experience, providing access to authentic materials and facilitating interactive learning. TEL encompasses a range of resources, from language learning apps to virtual exchanges, that allow learners to engage with Romanian in ways that mirror real-world interactions, thereby enhancing both linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence.

A core aspect of TEL in language education is the integration of mobile technology, which facilitates a learning environment conducive to continuous and interactive language practice. As Lăpădat (2023) notes, "The integration of mobile technology in language education has facilitated an environment conducive to continuous and engaging vocabulary learning, significantly enhancing learners' interaction with the target language" (Lăpădat, 2023:267). Through mobile apps and digital tools, RL2 students can engage in vocabulary practice outside the traditional classroom setting, allowing for greater exposure and retention. This continuous interaction with Romanian vocabulary not only improves language acquisition but also sustains learner motivation, as students feel more connected to the language throughout their daily routines.

Research supports the effectiveness of TEL in language education, indicating that digital tools can increase student motivation and engagement (Stockwell, 2007; Wang & Vásquez, 2012). Stockwell (2007) notes that technology provides language learners with "flexibility in both the pace and the mode of learning," which is essential in accommodating diverse learning preferences and making language acquisition accessible to a wider audience (Stockwell, 2007:106). In the RL2 context, TEL enables students to access Romanian language resources that reflect authentic speech and contemporary cultural references, allowing learners to experience the language as it is used in daily life.

TEL strategies, such as virtual exchange programs, have proven particularly valuable in fostering intercultural competence. These exchanges allow RL2 students to participate in real-time conversations with Romanian-speaking peers, providing them with invaluable conversational practice. O'Dowd (2007) argues that virtual exchanges serve as "digital bridges" that connect students across cultural and linguistic boundaries, promoting both language skills and cultural awareness (O'Dowd, 2007:132). In the case of RL2, such exchanges allow learners to immerse themselves in authentic Romanian conversations, enhancing their ability to navigate cultural subtleties and social norms within Romanian-speaking contexts.

Additionally, TEL allows RL2 instructors to incorporate multimedia resources—such as videos, podcasts, and online articles—that reflect current events and cultural trends in Romania. This approach aligns with Chapelle's (2003) findings that interactive multimedia materials help contextualize language learning, making it more meaningful and relevant to learners (Chapelle, 2003:76). The use of contemporary resources connects students with Romania's evolving culture, offering insights that enrich both language comprehension and cultural knowledge. Furthermore, studies by Reinders and White (2016) emphasize the role of TEL in providing immediate feedback and enabling adaptive learning paths, which are critical for learners to progress at their own pace and address individual needs in language acquisition (Reinders & White, 2016:12).

In summary, TEL in RL2 education leverages the advantages of digital tools to create a dynamic and responsive learning environment. By incorporating TEL, educators offer students a more immersive experience of Romanian, grounded in real-life cultural and social contexts. This approach not only advances linguistic skills but also prepares learners to engage effectively within Romania's multicultural landscape, cultivating both language proficiency and cultural competence.

Intercultural Communication Training

Intercultural communication training is critical in RL2 education, as it equips students with the skills to navigate cultural differences effectively. Developing intercultural communicative competence is essential for RL2 learners to navigate cultural nuances and engage effectively in diverse contexts. This competence, defined as the ability to interact appropriately and respectfully with people from other cultures, is a key goal in preparing RL2 students to communicate within Romanian-speaking communities and beyond.

Intercultural communicative competence has been widely studied, with scholars emphasizing its role in fostering global citizenship and empathy (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Byram's (1997) influential model of intercultural competence highlights the need for language learners to not only master linguistic skills but also acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to interact effectively across cultures (Byram, 1997:31). In the RL2 context, this approach means that students are learning Romanian not only as a linguistic system but as a gateway to understanding Romanian cultural norms, values, and social practices. Deardorff (2006) adds that developing intercultural competence involves a "transformative process" where learners develop greater self-awareness and adaptability - qualities essential for thriving in a multicultural world (Deardorff, 2006:246).

Intercultural communication training in RL2 might involve activities that explore Romanian social etiquette, cultural values, and historical context, allowing students to gain a nuanced appreciation for Romania's cultural diversity. Fantini (2009) suggests that such training should include practical experiences that encourage learners to reflect on their own cultural assumptions and biases, a process that helps them relate more empathetically to Romanian customs and traditions (Fantini, 2009:458). Role-playing exercises, discussions about Romanian social norms, and interactions with Romanian speakers can create a learning environment where students practice respectful and culturally appropriate communication.

As globalisation increases intercultural contact, RL2 students are likely to encounter individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Intercultural communication training therefore prepares students for interactions not only with Romanians but also within multicultural settings, supporting the development of well-rounded, globally aware language learners (Bennett, 1993). According to Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, students move from an ethnocentric perspective to a more ethnorelative understanding through exposure and engagement with different cultural practices, a progression that intercultural training in RL2 seeks to facilitate (Bennett, 1993:44). For RL2 learners, this means acquiring both language proficiency and the ability to interpret and adapt to the subtleties of Romanian social contexts.

Intercultural communication training in RL2 education is therefore necessary for fostering language learners who are capable of meaningful, respectful, and effective interaction within Romania and the wider world. By integrating intercultural competencies into the RL2 curriculum, educators provide students with the tools to bridge cultural gaps, navigate complex social landscapes, and cultivate a sense of shared understanding across cultures.

The Role of Teachers in a Multicultural and Globalised RL2 Classroom

Teachers in the RL2 classroom play a pivotal role in implementing multicultural and globalised approaches to language education. They act as facilitators, cultural mediators, and advocates for inclusivity, ensuring that all students feel represented and valued within the learning environment.

Promoting Cultural Sensitivity and Empathy

RL2 teachers must model cultural sensitivity and empathy, as these qualities are essential for creating an inclusive classroom atmosphere that supports diverse learners. Research emphasizes the importance of cultural sensitivity in fostering an environment where students feel seen and valued, which can enhance both motivation and academic success (Gay, 2002). Gay (2002) describes culturally responsive teaching as the "ability to recognize and celebrate cultural differences in ways that positively impact student engagement and learning outcomes" (Gay, 2002:107). By demonstrating respect for each student's cultural background, teachers not only build rapport but also challenge stereotypes and encourage open-mindedness.

Teachers' own actions in modelling empathy can significantly impact students' willingness to engage with Romanian in meaningful ways. Studies by Ladson-Billings (1995) have shown that when teachers actively embrace and model cultural awareness, students are more likely to feel connected to the learning material and confident in participating in discussions (Ladson-Billings, 1995:469). In the RL2 classroom, this may include teachers sharing aspects of their personal experiences with the Romanian language or culture, creating a mutual exchange that builds trust. When teachers demonstrate an openness to cultural diversity, they set a standard that encourages students to also express their unique cultural identities and perspectives, promoting intercultural dialogue and empathy.

Modeling cultural sensitivity also involves recognizing and addressing biases. Nieto (2010) asserts that culturally responsive educators must reflect on their own cultural assumptions and actively work against biases that may unconsciously influence classroom dynamics (Nieto, 2010:58). In the RL2 context, this could mean using a range of culturally relevant examples in teaching and discussing various aspects of Romanian society in ways that respect both mainstream and minority perspectives. By doing so, teachers establish an atmosphere where diversity is not merely acknowledged but integrated into the learning process in a way that enriches all students' understanding of Romanian.

Research also highlights the role of empathy as a pedagogical tool that enhances students' ability to engage in language learning more deeply (Zembylas, 2013). Zembylas (2013) argues that empathy allows educators to connect with students on an emotional level, fostering a supportive environment where learners feel comfortable exploring complex linguistic and cultural concepts (Zembylas, 2013:176). In the RL2 classroom, this may involve teachers demonstrating patience, offering encouragement, and acknowledging the emotional challenges that can accompany learning a new language within a foreign cultural framework. By promoting empathy, RL2 teachers help students approach Romanian with curiosity and openness, which is especially valuable in a multicultural learning environment.

Adaptability and Flexibility

In a multicultural and globalized RL2 classroom, teachers must demonstrate adaptability and flexibility to effectively address the unique learning needs of a diverse student body. Given the variety of linguistic backgrounds, learning styles, and cultural experiences among students, an adaptable teaching approach is essential to fostering an inclusive learning environment. As Tomlinson (2001) notes, effective differentiation requires "attentiveness to students' varying readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles" (Tomlinson, 2001:45), making it particularly valuable in a setting where learners may require different types of support.

Flexibility in teaching may involve modifying instructional materials and methods based on students' varying levels of familiarity with Romanian culture and language. For instance, while some learners may need additional practice with foundational grammatical structures, others may be ready to engage in advanced conversational practice that builds on their existing language skills. Richards and Rodgers (2001) emphasize that adapting teaching methods to individual needs allows educators to create a responsive classroom environment where all students can progress at their own pace and develop confidence in their language abilities (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:157).

Adaptability also requires teachers to be attentive to cultural nuances that might affect students' learning experiences. By remaining open to adjusting their approaches based on student feedback and engagement, RL2 teachers can respond effectively to the evolving dynamics of a multicultural classroom, creating a supportive environment where each student feels valued and understood.

Encouraging Active Engagement and Participation

Active engagement is essential in an RL2 classroom shaped by multiculturalism and globalisation, as it promotes meaningful learning through student participation and intercultural exchange. When students are encouraged to share their cultural perspectives and language learning experiences, they gain the opportunity to learn from one another, deepening their understanding of both Romanian and each other's backgrounds. According to Dörnyei (2001), student engagement in collaborative activities "enhances motivation and investment in the learning process," particularly in language classrooms where interpersonal interaction is fundamental (Dörnyei, 2001:63).

Teachers play a pivotal role in facilitating these discussions, creating a space where students feel comfortable expressing their identities in relation to Romanian culture. By encouraging students to reflect on their own cultural identities, teachers foster an environment that not only enhances linguistic competence but also cultivates empathy and openness among students. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism supports this approach, suggesting that learning is most effective when it involves collaborative interactions that challenge students to build new understandings through dialogue and shared experiences (Vygotsky, 1978:84).

Encouraging active participation also allows RL2 students to take ownership of their learning, making the classroom experience more relevant and engaging. Engaging students in critical discourse analysis can enhance their linguistic and rhetorical skills, offering them tools to examine and understand Romanian language and culture in depth (Lăpădat, 2024:307). Through this approach, students gain insight into the ways language shapes social contexts and identities, thereby strengthening their ability to communicate effectively in diverse settings. In this way, teachers create a collaborative and inclusive learning environment that is enriched by the cultural diversity of the classroom, ultimately preparing students to use Romanian in multicultural contexts beyond the classroom.

Conclusion

The forces of multiculturalism and globalisation have had a profound impact on the teaching of Romanian as a Second Language, transforming the RL2 classroom into a space that reflects the diversity and interconnectedness of the modern world. By embracing multiculturalism, RL2 educators can create inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments that honor the diverse backgrounds of their students. Meanwhile, globalisation has enriched RL2 education with unprecedented access to resources, enabling educators to design curricula that are globally relevant and culturally diverse.

As Lăpădat and Lăpădat (2020) assert, "the information we provide cannot and must not be restricted to traditional structures of grammar, vocabulary and so on. We need to stay connected to an entire apparatus of updated cultural and informational references" (Lăpădat & Lăpădat, 2020:139). This perspective underscores the necessity for RL2 educators to move beyond conventional language teaching approaches and incorporate contemporary cultural, social, and informational elements. In a globalized educational landscape, students require more than linguistic tools; they need cultural literacy and awareness of the current social and informational landscapes of Romanian-speaking communities. Such a broad scope in teaching prepares students not only to communicate effectively but to understand and engage meaningfully with Romanian culture in today's fast-changing world.

To effectively teach Romanian in this context, educators must adopt pedagogical strategies that emphasize cultural competence, real-world application, and inclusivity. They must also develop curricula that address global themes and integrate authentic language resources, preparing students to use Romanian in multicultural and international settings. While the challenges posed by multiculturalism and globalisation are real, they offer educators the opportunity to cultivate a new generation of RL2 learners who are not only linguistically proficient but also globally aware and culturally sensitive. As RL2 education continues to evolve within this complex landscape, the commitment to multiculturalism and globalisation will remain essential for fostering meaningful and transformative language learning experiences.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Teaching practices with an interdisciplinary approach

Daniela Scorțan[1)]

Abstract:
Interdisciplinarity facilitates the learning process through which the learner experiences the connections between his reality and that of the world, through concrete learning activities requiring an act of personal and social engagement. The integration of interdisciplinary educational activities stimulates students to find concrete meaning in learning. The students learn to make connections between concepts and skills in related subjects and, subsequently, with everyday life. We must build a bridge between the disciplines based on the similarities established between them in terms of learning content, concepts and technical and cognitive skills. The integration of subjects allows teachers to go beyond textbooks in order to make learning more meaningful and satisfying for the learner. Interdisciplinary projects also offer a more enriched knowledge of the subject under study, an openness to what other disciplines can offer and a better perception of the role of disciplines. A learner preparing an interdisciplinary project focuses as much on "how he learns", that is to say, on the development of his personal data collection method and problem solving as well as the establishment of links between the subjects and the concepts learned for each isolated subject. Interdisciplinarity contributes to the development of better social and cultural interaction and the ability to solve everyday problems. Interdisciplinarity also promotes the development of higher cognitive skills such as critical thinking, the spirit of synthesis and integration, reflective skills, the understanding of difficult concepts and conceptual memory. Interdisciplinarity seems to result in better learning of better attitudes among students and a better relationship between teachers and students. In addition to contributing to the construction of learning, interdisciplinarity promotes the integration and updating of the person.
Keywords: *interdisciplinary, learner, project, skills, knowledge, relationships.*

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Introduction

Interdisciplinarity allows us to approach a subject or concept from various perspectives. It relies on the interaction between different disciplines to exploit complementarity and offer a complete panorama of the concept discussed. Students can thus benefit from a global and contextualized understanding, and teachers find themselves confronted with a new way of mobilizing their skills.

It is appropriate here to distinguish interdisciplinarity from multidisciplinarity. The first involves active cooperation between the different subjects, where each contributes to a common vision of the theme studied. Multidisciplinarity, for its part, consists rather of parallel teaching of different fields without real interaction between them.

For the majority of authors, including (Choi & Pak, 2006), we can define, basically three types of interdisciplinarity: multidisciplinarity which is a juxtaposition of different disciplines without knowledge integration, interdisciplinarity which is the synthesis of at least two disciplines and which induces the establishment of a new level integration and discussion of knowledge and transdisciplinarity where disciplines no longer appear and where we study dynamics of entire systems.

The nuance between multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity is however more tenuous and Klein (2010) provides additional light by affirming that a project becomes interdisciplinary when the integration and interaction of different disciplines become proactive, in other words when the members are always attached to their discipline while working together to resolve a common problem.

In their work Chiriţescu & Păunescu present (2020: 249): „an interdisciplinary landscape of the complex topic of legal translation, successfully combining linguistics (both diachronic and synchronic), sociolinguistics, pragmalinguistics, intercultural communication and, last but not least, translation studies."

It is important to specify that the implementation of an interdisciplinary project does not necessarily reconsider the notion of discipline, on the contrary. The complementarity between disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity is essential in the creation of an interdisciplinary project (understanding the parts in order to understand the whole and understanding the whole in order to understand the parts). There cannot be an interdisciplinary school project without disciplinary learning of the notions of base. If we want to understand a global phenomenon in its entirety and go into an in-depth understanding, gaps in disciplinary knowledge would be a major problem.

After a few years of practice or even at the start of their professional career, teachers are often searching for new methods or approaches to implement in order to manage a classroom problem, to develop their teaching or simply to break the routine. Interdisciplinarity has the quality of offering rich and differentiated systems linked to the environment when organizing educational activities. These activities can be particularly motivating for the teacher and provide a challenge that meets his expectations. By its nature, interdisciplinarity also requires great collaboration within the teaching staff and these sharing opportunities are essential to stimulate reflection, encourage the exchange of knowledge and experiences, and alleviate the feeling of loneliness, especially during difficult or weak moments.

Interdisciplinarity can be an advantage in the organization of an institution. In the long term, it allows tending towards a curriculum unit and thus deal with more complex subjects or themes such as ecology, health, economic growth. By its nature of wanting to connect the school knowledge and that of everyday life, interdisciplinarity is an approach that takes into account socio-economic needs and cultural aspects of the society. Finally, for institutions, it is an economic approach of knowledge appropriation. Indeed, faced with the exponential explosion of knowledge, having a holistic approach helps avoid repetition of subjects and thus promotes a mutual support system between academic disciplines.

The principles of an interdisciplinary approach

We have chosen to define four principles on which the construction of an interdisciplinary practice is based. These four parameters, prior to action, are not chronological stages. Like a system, they constantly interfere with each other, and feed off each other. Isolating each parameter must be simply understood as a way of analysing the construction processes of these actions and identifying methodological principles more clearly.

The four parameters are: the creation of a team culture (relationships between teachers), the articulation of the disciplines (the concepts taught), the choice of a working theme (the learning situation) and the organization (the necessary conditions for functioning).

The educational implementation will occur as the result of these four parameters, the moment when reflection is transformed into action. Team culture is a necessary condition for an interdisciplinary project: creating links between disciplines requires that teachers work together, communicate and construct educational approaches. But it is also a consequence. Indeed, interdisciplinary action contributes to creating a culture specific to an educational team. Every member of the team is enriched by the reflection of the other, by his conception of things. The desire to give meaning to action, to training, the concern for efficiency contributes to the progressive development of a common team culture.

The psycho-affective dimension in building a team is not negligible. Of course, it is easier to work with people „that we like”, but the question that arises is rather to know how to work together while going beyond emotional divisions. It is important to design the work in team as a skill to be acquired and not as an eventuality subject to affinities. Also, the investment is not the same for all teachers, depending on the objectives of each discipline. Before any educational project, teachers should discuss what motivates their participation in the action, agree on training objectives and identify common educational goals. Debating, discussing, and arguing leads to better understanding, to accepting the diversity of points of view in order to take them into account in action. The richness of the teaching teams comes from the diversity of approaches and methods. On the other hand, wanting to „standardize” them, make them uniform could contribute to an impoverishment of learning.

All this capacity for teamwork requires developing a certain number of skills, which are acquired, and do not simply depend on the personality of the teacher: listening to others, respecting what it is said, argumentation, conflict management, meeting management, animation techniques. Working as a team helps everyone evolve in his representation of teaching: the teaching profession becomes a profession of exchanges, adaptation, solidarity practices negotiated in a logic of cooperation.

Concerted and articulated work in interdisciplinarity does not mean that all teachers systematically find themselves together in the class to share the animation time. Some sequences may be common, others not. It is during the preparation for the project implementation that these modalities are decided. This new dynamic, resulting from collective work, is similar to teacher training. The permanent exchange enriches the reflections and stimulates the work of the teacher. It is both a source of motivation and an entry into a research/action process that is built collectively, through the permanent search for new learning solutions.

This team culture is perceived as an additional asset by the students: it demonstrates the cohesion of the teachers, the coherence of learning and gives meaning to the training. One of the challenges of interdisciplinarity is the ability to construct in students a global vision of a complex situation, and to make connections between knowledge from different disciplines.

The concept of interdisciplinarity is based on a constructivist hypothesis of learning. According to Kaufman & Brooks (1996: 234-235): „Constructivist teachers look for and value the students' points of view. Understanding the students' points of view helps the teacher determine where and how instruction can facilitate learning. Teachers adapt curriculum to challenge students' suppositions. The opportunity to reflect on one's present assumptions, premises, beliefs, or conceptualizations facilitates cognitive growth. When teachers design lessons that provoke students to confront their initial suppositions, teachers maximize the likelihood of student learning. Finally, constructivist teachers assess student learning authentically and within the context of teaching. They set up systems and settings in which students can exhibit work and share ideas with classmates, and they use nonjudgmental responses when responding to students' work."

Knowledge construction

There is learning only in response to a question. It is the student who builds his knowledge by gradually overcoming obstacles to understanding the problem. Knowledge construction by the student requires the implementation of practices where the student acts, questions, clearly poses to himself the problems he wants to solve, responds and expresses himself freely, takes initiatives, makes contributions, becomes a real interlocutor for the teacher in reciprocal exchanges where he produces knowledge. We observe, in a way, a reversal of the meaning of knowledge: it is no longer the teacher, the bearer of knowledge, who disseminates it to the student, but it is the student who, in an active approach, appropriates the necessary knowledge for action. The teacher is then the mediator between the student and knowledge.

For the student to construct complex knowledge, this presupposes that the teachers themselves have carried out a joint analysis of the links that exist between the disciplines, with regard to a real situation. The disciplines are then positioned as tools for understanding a situation. How to move from isolated encyclopaedic knowledge to knowledge that facilitates action is the objective that teachers set for themselves through interdisciplinary practices.

The student's appropriation of the problem is reinforced when he can compare his own vision with other students.

In group work, beyond the interest of the collective challenge, the student finds himself in a permanent negotiation, in this need to argue and have his proposed responses validated, in the face of other divergent proposals. This situation of conflicting points of view is particularly formative because it helps the student in the transformation of these initial representations. On the other hand, we also see that motivation increases when a collaborative relationship is established between students; new behaviours can thus be developed (listening, mutual aid, solidarity).

According to Jacobs, H. H. (1989: 2): „Effective interdisciplinary programs must meet two criteria. They must have carefully conceived design features: a scope and sequence, a cognitive taxonomy to encourage thinking skills, behavioral indicators of attitudinal change, and a solid evaluation scheme. They must use both discipline-field-based and interdisciplinary experiences for students in the curriculum."

According to MacLeod (2018: 709): „Opacity problems generate mismatched communication and uncertainty in interactions between collaborators which make it very difficult to coordinate practices in productive ways. In other cases, the problems might be less directly due to a lack of technical insight into one another's practices and more due to the fact that the conceptual and methodological distance between the cognitive domains is very large. As mentioned, philosophers often identify such divides, and sometimes propose ways, in theory at least, to bridge them. However sometimes there might be no straightforward way to translate or link models or concepts from the different domains, without solving very complex problems neither domain is well-adapted to solve with its current sets of practices. Importantly it may require significantly restructuring practices in those domains in ways which conflict with the way practices in those domains have been designed and optimized. In such cases domain specificity becomes a particularly intransigent obstacle."

The advantages of interdisciplinary approaches

Interdisciplinary approaches have many benefits for students and teachers. These practices establish an optimal learning climate, stimulate the motivation and critical thinking of learners, and promote teamwork and skills management. The interdisciplinary approach allows students to discover different aspects of a concept or subject.

According to Lăpădat & Lăpădat (2020: 144): „it is very important to organize activities, intercultural, interdisciplinary and extracurricular experiences that would have the role of putting into practice the concept of language learning through discovery and through their own experiences. The intercultural perspective, used in the process of teaching and learning a foreign language, has the role of preserving its own identity by becoming aware of the mother tongue and culture, on the one hand, contributing, at the same time, to the development of intercultural communication skills."

By comparing their knowledge with that of other fields, they are able to form a more complete and coherent idea of the object of study. This method also helps them see connections between disciplines and contextualize their learning. By combining several perspectives in the analysis of a problem, students are encouraged to think differently and take a critical look at the information they receive.

Interdisciplinary approaches also encourage creativity since they invite students to explore new ways of thinking and to innovate in solving complex problems. As students are projected in a real and complex context, their motivation increases and they seek to understand the world around them. They become actors in their own learning, and consequently, develop greater autonomy in their work.

Interdisciplinary projects encourage teamwork between teachers and students. Everyone must coordinate their actions with those of other members, share their skills and invest effectively to carry out the team task. In this way, cooperative learning is stimulated and everyone acquires relational skills essential to any actor in our contemporary society.

According to Kuh, G.D., Kinzie, J.L., Buckley, J.A., Bridges, B.K. and Hayek, J.C. (2006: 66): „Widespread use of effective pedagogical practices must be at the core of any agenda to promote student success. (...) This restructuring movement is characterized by a shift in emphasis from faculty teaching to student learning (Barr and Tagg). This shift promises to have profound implications for setting higher expectations for students, for raising academic standards, for asking students to take more responsibility for their learning, for demonstrating competency through assessment, and for emphasizing and validating alternative ways of knowing, interdisciplinary methods, and problem-focused learning."

Interdisciplinarity, according to Wood (1997), facilitates the process of learning through which the learner experiences the links between his reality and that of the world, through concrete learning activities requiring an act of personal and social commitment. The students learn to make connections between concepts and skills that make reference to related subjects and, subsequently, to everyday life.

We must build a bridge between disciplines based on the similarities established between them in terms of learning content, concepts and technical and cognitive skills. It is important to note that any interdisciplinary approach is learner-centred rather than subject-centred. The ultimate goal of teaching is the integration of knowledge that the learner does, and not the accumulation of notions and of isolated skills. Thus, according to Pigdon and Woolly (1993), more emphasis is placed on the „learning process" than on the „content of the material".

How to implement interdisciplinary approaches?

Define a common objective: it is essential to establish a unifying project or theme around which the disciplines will come together. This objective must be sufficiently complex and interesting to require the contribution of several subjects.

Create a multidisciplinary teaching team: teachers must work together to develop their common teaching sequences and scenarios. Good communication and involvement of each member are necessary.

Organize time and space: a precise and flexible plan must be established in order to manage meetings between teachers and students, as well as to optimize the use of learning spaces dedicated to this approach.

Promote creativity and innovation: teachers must encourage students to explore original paths and go beyond traditional disciplinary frameworks.

Establish a pragmatic evaluation: the evaluation must be done on the basis of the learning achieved and the active participation of students in their interdisciplinary project. The evaluation criteria must be adapted to take this dimension into account.

Students' social and personal capabilities can also be developed thanks to the complexity of the tasks. Indeed, the social interactions between students or between the student and the teacher are very well-developed, because an interdisciplinary approach promotes humility, listening and tolerance and thus helps to limit individualism for the benefit of the group spirit and collaboration. In addition, they leave the possibility for the teacher to grant more freedom to the student and thus to develop his autonomy and sense of responsibility.

Case study in an interdisciplinary project

An example of an interdisciplinary project could bring together two teachers, an English teacher and his colleague, a history-geography teacher who intend to offer their students the possibility of better understanding the historical and social realities of the Anglo-Saxon world, and to establish extensions, comparisons and parallels between certain periods and key movements of British and American civilization.

Some important topics to cover could be: industrial England in the 19th century, slavery and the struggle for civil rights in the United States as well as the impact of American popular culture. This type of activity should be encouraged and developed in order to better weave the coordinated cultural benchmarks of the students, and also to fight against cultural stereotypes, which are still too often present.

The progression of the interdisciplinary sequence is mainly thematic. The interdisciplinary prerequisites assume that learners have the general knowledge and basic skills to question a graphic document, a diagram or a table, to analyse it and make an oral comment on it.

According to Bărbuceanu (2020: 39): „One cannot deny the variety of learning styles existent in a seminar room, such as visual learners - who can profit mostly from the visual aids, kinaesthetic learners and touch learners - who appreciate working with physical objects, tablets, phones or flashcards. The sense of easiness and positivism that lowers anxiety for the students in the seminar room resided in this methodology helps them perform sound, and feel self-assured."

Interdisciplinary learning allows students to build disciplinary knowledge while consolidating transversal skills. From the teachers' point of view, this action gave meaning to the team which is no longer defined solely by affinities but by a common project and a common culture based on objectives, on a concrete situation and on educational approaches. It also made possible to achieve the educational objectives initially planned.

The final assessment identified areas of improvement such as a more organized preparation for the implementation of other interdisciplinary projects for subsequent generations. From the students' point of view, in addition to the interest in discovering a new world and interesting people, this action gave meaning to a certain number of approaches seen in progress: „we see what it really is to conduct a survey".

It is also an opportunity for them to be independent, to live in a group by taking charge of daily material tasks, to establish different relationships between themselves and with teachers. For students, this type of work is of great interest: they prepare for their future professional life, they are given the opportunity to be useful, they develop a spirit of analysis and synthesis, they learn how to communicate, to be autonomous and know that we trust them and that we count on them.

Students most often request this type of teaching because it offers them an integrated approach to a given subject of study. And in fact, in practice, the vast majority of them are won over by these interdisciplinary courses. The integration of different ways of understanding the same object, and of several methods for studying this object, allows them to grasp the complexity of reality, while acquiring disciplinary reasoning and methods.

The interdisciplinary approach that they experience during group work (whether practical work, guided work, or field projects) is an opportunity for them to establish links or interactions between disciplines usually treated separately. In addition, they appreciate the diversity of the teachers who supervise them, both from a disciplinary and human point of view.

Different ways to integrate curriculum

It is necessary to highlight certain essential conditions for the development of the interdisciplinary curriculum to be considered by teachers. First, we must emphasize the importance of training teachers in the foundations and practical applications of different models of curriculum integration before embarking on the development of interdisciplinary units. Second, the participation of teachers in the development and teaching of interdisciplinary units and the time necessary for the work team meeting are essential to the success of the interdisciplinary experience.

These conditions will encourage the sharing of educational strategies and material resources auspicious for the development of the theme or concept under study. Teachers should use student-centred methods that promote dialogue, discovery, role-playing, grouping of ideas, the ability to state and solve problems. Large group learning and small group work in an interdisciplinary project create a sense of peer group belonging that is essential for work focused on a particular theme or concept. Teamwork, which particularly highlights the collaborative pedagogy and the pedagogy of belonging, contributes to the interactive socialization process fundamental to updated pedagogy.

Fogarty (1991) recognizes that the integrated curriculum is a means used to facilitate the construction of links between subjects on the one hand and with everyday life on the other hand. According to her, the integrated curriculum is an organized and wanted regrouping of a variety of learning experiences from different disciplines.

According to Fogarty (1991: 61-65): there are ten ways to integrate curriculum: the fragmented model, the connected model, the nested model, the sequenced model, the shared model, the webbed model, the threaded model, the integrated model, the immersed model and the networked model. In the fragmented model, the focus is on a single discipline. Relationships between subject areas are only implicitly indicated. In the connected model, the focus is on making explicit connections within each subject area – connecting one topic, one skill, one concept to the next; connecting one day's work, or even one semester's ideas, to the next. In the nested model, the curriculum is seen through three-dimensional glasses, targeting multiple dimensions of a lesson. In the sequenced model, although topics or units are taught separately, they are rearranged and sequenced to provide a broad framework for related concepts. In the shared model, the curriculum is seen through binoculars, bringing two distinct disciplines together into a single focused image. In the webbed model, the curriculum is seen through a telescope, capturing an entire constellation of disciplines at once. In the threaded model, the curriculum is seen through a magnifying glass: the big ideas are enlarged throughout all content with a metacurricular approach. In the integrated model, the curriculum is seen through a kaleidoscope: interdisciplinary topics are rearranged around overlapping concepts and emergent patterns and designs. In the immersed model, the curriculum is seen through a microscope that filters all content through the lens of interest and expertise. In the networked model, the curriculum is seen through a prism, creating multiple dimensions and directions of focus.

Teachers have to put in place the conditions necessary for this learning, to „stage" interdisciplinarity. They have to choose and construct educational situations, while maintaining their disciplinary expertise, an essential factor of interdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinarity involves having at least two reference disciplines and a reciprocal action between them. This is an important element in the eyes of teachers whose professional identity is defined by the discipline they teach.

Confronted with concrete situations, with professionals, with other learning situations, the student will be able to gradually become autonomous, speak up, gain self-confidence and reinforce or rebuild self-esteem, an essential factor in motivation. The validation of student's productions by third parties (other teachers, professionals, local experts) largely contributes to this self-confidence. So the disciplines, the hours of lessons get a meaning, serve a purpose. The student realizes that he has the tools that he can use in various situations.

Conclusions

Interdisciplinary work can take various forms throughout the training, depending on program requirements, institutional possibilities or teacher's choices. For the successful implementation of interdisciplinary teaching, it is necessary that teachers be prepared to stake on the openness and creativity essential to overcoming the well-established boundaries of disciplinary knowledge and identity.

But this implementation must also be based on genuine institutional will. Finally, we must offer teachers the opportunity to train in these new forms of teaching and learning and give them the means to achieve them.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Comics as Effective Teaching Tools in the English Language Classroom

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Abstract:
Based on the combination of two code systems, the linguistic and the imagery, comics have served various cultural and political purposes, thus acquiring the range and depth to be regarded as something more than just a form of popular literature for children. During the communist regime in Romania, for instance, comics were used as an instrument of ideological propaganda, aiming at rewriting the national history and familiarising the young with the "great" achievements of socialism. Since comics are culturally contextualised, they represent a valuable tool in the process of teaching/learning a foreign language. The aim of this article is to present the pedagogical potential of this genre, and thus to argue for its inclusion in the school curriculum. The theoretical investigation is backed by a set of activities for students, meant to exemplify the possible uses of this type of literature in the English language classroom. The conclusion is that comics offer more than just text and visuals; they provide a rich and appealing source for the development of learners' language skills and intercultural competence.

Keywords: *comics, cultural diversity, language skills, reading, superheroes.*

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Introduction

Comic books were for long regarded as a form of "low" culture, unworthy of any serious reading, let alone research, or academic interest. Scott McCloud points out that the authors of comics, although obviously gifted artists, shared the infamous status of their work: "For much of this [the 20th] century, the word *comics*, has had such negative connotations, that many of comics' most devoted practitioners have preferred to be known as *illustrators, commercial artists,* or, at best, cartoonists." (McCloud, 1993: 18) It took time for this type of art to be considered a form of literature which is worth reading and studying. One of the reasons behind this change of status is the special attention that postmodernism has given to popular culture, to all the artistic expressions that had formerly been rejected as non-art. The value of comics has gradually been acknowledged, and thus, they are no longer seen as "those bright, colourful magazines filled with bad art, stupid stories and guys in tights" (McCloud,1993: 2), but rather as an art with hidden powers.

One of these powers consists of creating superheroes. Our collective imagination has been enriched by popular characters such as Superman, which emerged in 1938, at a time when America was struggling with the depression caused by the Wall Street crash, and Europe was witnessing the assent of the ambitious Chancellor Adolf Hitler (Morrison, 2011: 4). The fruit of the imagination of two adolescents, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, Superman emerged as an imaginative response to a dehumanised, industrialised world. In his research on the creation of this first superhero, Morrison points out that, unlike the heroic archetypes of Hercules, Agamemnon or Perseus, who were "full-time" heroes, Superman was the brave, strong, determined side of the shy, bespectacled newspaperman Clark Kent, often denied respect and largely misunderstood. Many people can therefore identify with him – "there is something of Clark in all of us" (Morrison, 2011: 9) – and, at the same time, feel the inner energy of a Superman, hence the public appeal of the superhero.

The hidden power of comic books was used by the communist regime in Romania as an instrument of ideological propaganda (Spătaru-Pralea, 2019: 20). The comics in popular magazines, such as *Cutezătorii* (1967-1989), *Arici Pogonici* (1957-1977) or *Şoimii Patriei* (1980-1989), intended to familiarise the children with the "great" achievements of socialism, and to rewrite the history of the Romanians as to suit the principles of the communist ideology of the time. It was mainly children's literature, a fact which comes to confirm the instructive/pedagogical potential of comics. Since 1989, the publication of comic books has flourished in Romania; yet, it has remained a genre mostly dedicated to, and enjoyed by children and teenagers.

Starting from the fact that youngsters like reading comics, it has been argued that this resource can successfully be used in the English classroom in order to enhance language learning (Graham, 2011:92; Clydesdale, 2006: 2). The article seeks to bring arguments in favour of including multimodal texts in the process of teaching, analysing the specific discourse of these texts, and presenting the linguistic, pragmatic and cultural advantages of this type of material in the English classroom.

The language of comics

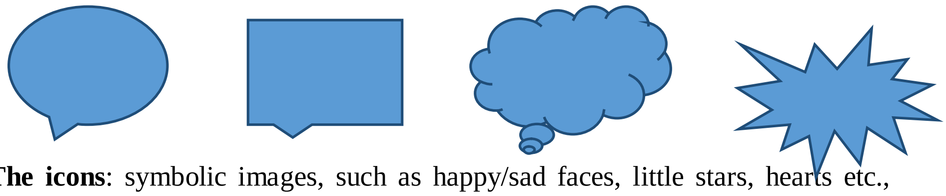
According to the majority of critics and theoreticians of the genre, comics rely on the interaction of image and text, thus representing a hybrid art whose very heterogeneous nature defies clear cut definitions or classifications. They are broadly perceived as a story told via a sequence of images; hence, its definition as *sequential art*, proposed by Will Eisner, the father of the graphic novel (Eisner, 1985: 7). Scott McCloud admits that "in most cases, this is the only definition we're likely to need" (McCloud, 1993: 9); yet, he expands it, considering that this form of art requires a more detailed explanation: "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the reader" (McCloud, 1993: 9).

Discussing the possibilities of defining this genre, Stephen Cary explains that the term "comics" refers to several types of material: cartoons, comic strips, comic books, graphic novels, that use cartooning to tell the stories, but with a different format. They also vary in size, stretching from single panels in the case of cartoons, to full-length books (Cary, 2004: 10-11). In the late 1990s, comics have found their way on the Internet, and "webcomics", as they are known in the online medium, have gathered a whole community of creators, eager to self-publish their work (Smith, 2006: 4-5). In this article, we shall use the generic "comics" to refer to them all, focusing on the narrative as comprehensible input in the English language classroom.

In order to choose the most appropriate teaching material for classroom use, the teacher has to pay attention to the different elements of the comic strips, because they all play a major role in the unfolding of the story as they carry specific meaning that needs decoding for a thorough understanding of the text. Here are some of the main elements:

- **The panel**: the space, usually rectangular, that contains a single image. This graphic convention functions as a metaphoric window that the reader opens to the fictional space. It shows "a single moment in time" (McCloud, 1993: 94), and the sequence of panels sets the action on a temporal line that moves from left to right.
- **The gutter**: the space between panels, that works as a break, or as a gap in time. The reader can use his/her imagination in order to fill these gaps with what may have happened. The panels and the gutters are the readers' guide through time and space.
- **The caption**: a speech box, placed at the top or bottom of a panel, that provides information about the scene, the characters and so on. It is the author's narration that is used to set the scene of the action in the panel, and it must not be confused with the speech bubbles pertaining to the characters.
- **The speech balloons**: contain words spoken by the characters. Apart from indicating who is speaking and what he/she is saying, the versatile balloons codify messages in new ways, their shapes being used to convey paralinguistic information. Thus, a rounded or rectangular shape indicates a common utterance in a normal tone; a cloud-like bubble contains the thoughts of a character, while a star-shaped balloon shows the anger a character is feeling, or an "explosive" situation. McCloud points out that "variations in balloon shape are many and new ones are being invented every day" (McCloud, 1993:134), in the author's attempt to render sounds, motion, thoughts, feelings, emotions in visual images.

Figure 1: Comic balloons



- **The icons**: symbolic images, such as happy/sad faces, little stars, hearts etc., that are used to represent people, things, places, ideas. The iconic pictures speak for themselves; they carry an encoded, easily recognised meaning, that needs no explanation in words. It is an instance of what McCloud calls “amplification through simplification”: “By stripping down an image to its essential *meaning*, an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can’t.” (McCloud, 1993: 30) It is perhaps this very simplified reality of comics that makes them so popular, yet, so deep.
- **The sound effects**: images and words that make the reader “hear” various sounds. An explosion, a thunderstorm, a falling object, or a fight can be rendered by drawings alone, but once accompanied by words such as *boom*, *bang, splash, ouch*, their sound effect is clearly enhanced. The interjections and onomatopoeic words are therefore widely used in comics, their sonority greatly contributing to the comprehension of the text.

The brief analysis of the constitutive elements of the comics shows not only how complex this art is, as a creative mixture of different codes, but also how useful it can be in any foreign language classroom, as a rich, authentic, appealing, versatile teaching material.

Why bring comics into the English language classroom?

We believe that, out of so many types of instructional materials, there are good reasons, stemming from the main principles of language acquisition, why teachers should take comics into consideration. Carry Stephen points out that: “Despite substantial research showing the benefits of learning comics, despite teachers’ frequent calls for relevant, high-interest materials, […] getting teachers to use comics is still a tough sell.” (Cary, 2004: 4) We shall therefore present the reasons for integrating comics into curricula, and how they can facilitate second language development.

The appeal of comics for English language learners

The strength of students’ motivation influences their learning, being an important factor that determines “how seriously they approach the work, how much time they set aside for it, how hard they push themselves” (Scrivener, 63). In other words, the curriculum needs to attract and engage students. From this perspective, more and more scholars have acknowledged the importance of bringing popular culture into the classroom (Buckingham, 1998; Lewis, 1998; Alvermann, Moon & Hagood, 1999). As Norton and Vanderheyden point out, if teachers do not take into consideration “the social and cultural texts that are authorised by youth – which may simultaneously empower and disempower them – they run the risk of neglecting and silencing their students” (Norton & Vanderheyden, 2003: 204-205).

Having been educated at a time when learning meant memorising words and grammar rules, overcorrecting and reading long literary texts, many teachers tend to disregard popular culture, and do not take comics seriously as a source of language input. Yet, a class is about the students, and for the students; therefore, (pre)adolescents should be engaged in a curriculum that is relevant to them, to their age and their interests. It goes without saying that various forms of popular culture will interest and attract them more than traditional texts. As Sylvester (1995) pointed out, attention leads to learning; that is, appealing content directly impacts motivation. Rememorizing the early stages of his school days, Stephen Cary confesses that: "Superman made me a reader. Dick and Jane tried their best, but they couldn't give me what The Man of Steel offered: a good reason to read. Like most American school kids […] I could decode and comprehend like a champ, but I had little to no interest in what teachers were asking me to read." (Cary, 2004: 1) It all resulted in the child hating reading and becoming "the classic nonreading reader" (Cary, 2004: 1). Nowadays, in the age of the Internet, when children are more hooked than ever before on social media content, YouTube shorts, video games and computer graphics, it has become a must to make room for their superheroes in the English language classroom, and to encourage them to bring in the knowledge that they have acquired outside the classroom (Norton & Vanderheyden, 2003: 204-205). Teachers should eventually admit that popular culture is the target language culture their students are interested in and, therefore, it must be incorporated into the curriculum.

Apart from attractive subjects, the appeal of comics for learners resides in the addition of visuals to a story. McCloud points out that: "When you look at a photo or a realistic drawing of a face – you see it as the face of another. But when you enter the world of the cartoon – you see yourself […]. We don't just observe the cartoon, we become it." (McCloud, 1993: 36) In Stephen Cary's confession, "I never once wanted to be any of the people I read about in school. But I would have changed places with Superman or Batman or Turok, Son of Stone, in an instance." (Cary, 2004: 2) Therefore, instead of feeling alienated from the characters while struggling to grasp the meaning of a text, comics offer learners the space to identify with the characters, since part of the story is conveyed by images. Visuals acquire several functions in reading: they help learners understand the text better by offering additional information; they enhance the coherence of the text; they make the information vivid and memorable; their aesthetics catch the eye and spark interest in the text.

Comprehensible input and the affective filter

Starting from the theoretical considerations in second language education that emphasise the prominence of the meaning over the form of a message, Stephen Krashen has developed a theory of language acquisition based on a series of hypotheses. Thus, in order to acquire a second language, learners need comprehensible input and an affective environment: "comprehensible input and the strength of the filter are the true causes of second language acquisition" (Krashen, 1982: 33).

The input hypothesis says that learners go first for meaning, and after that they acquire structure. The acquisition is done by understanding language which is "beyond our current level of competence", and this is possible with the help of "context and extra-linguistic information" (Krashen, 1982: 21). In this light, comics provide a valuable input because the visuals, as mentioned above, help the students decode the text, by providing "clues that shed light on the meaning of an unfamiliar word or structure" (Krashen, 204: 123), and at the same time bring in much extra-linguistic information. Cary emphasises this idea, saying that: "In second language education, teachers and students know the truth of the old saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. In fact, […] the right picture at the right time may be worth several times that many words." (Cary, 2004: 23). When a text is paired with images, there are high chances that students will understand the material better and faster, and they will remember it for a long time. As Irina Boncea points out: "Without understanding input appropriately, learning simply cannot get any improvement" (Boncea, 2021: 124).

Another aspect of the input that educators emphasise is its authenticity. Comics provide real world and authentic language of an informal register that is commonly used with friends and acquaintances. As a result, readers of all ages can enjoy the casual, every day talk, while, at the same time, being exposed to the richness of native speech.

The affective filter hypothesis proposed by Krashen brings forth the role of self-confidence and low anxiety levels in the process of second language acquisition (Krashen, 1982: 31). A relaxed learning environment, in which students feel confident to express themselves, is essential for the input to be efficiently acquired. The need to create a friendly atmosphere for language learning has been emphasised by numerous educators: "In order to take risks, you need a learning environment in which you do not feel threatened or intimidated. In order to speak, you need to feel you will be heard and that what you're saying is worth hearing. […] In order to succeed, you need an atmosphere in which anxiety levels are low and comfort levels are high." (Kristmanson, 2000: 1)

When reading comics, learners have the possibility to go back and forth in the text, and read at their own pace. As Kress explains, "The sequentiality and linearity of former textual structures is replaced by a web, which can be entered at any point of my choosing and explored with neither a pre-given point of entry nor a pre-given point of departure." (Kress, 1997: 161) This freedom to move through the text enhances the comprehensibility of the input, as students can re-read the parts they do not understand. It is much like browsing on the Internet, a skill that all students have. In this context, anxiety levels are much reduced, since students do not feel the stress of getting stuck or losing track of the information.

A study conducted by Bonny Norton and Karen Vanderheyden on the topic of the appeal of Archie comics for English language learners revealed that eleven out of thirteen preadolescents "cited humour as central to the appeal of these texts, using the adjectives *fun, funny,* and *humorous*" to characterise the comics (Norton & Vanderheyden, 2003: 208). Humour in the classroom helps creating the affective environment discussed above by reducing stress, enhancing interaction, increasing students' joyful participation in activities, encouraging less confident students to speak, and ultimately, creating a warm, friendly relationship between students and teachers. Apart from its pedagogical value, humour is a valuable source of language input. The puns and twists often imply sophisticated vocabulary and an effort on the part of the reader to decode the message. As Meek argues, "a joke is often the best reading test" (Meek, 1988: 19); in other words, if students do not laugh, they most probably have not understood the joke.

The development of learners' skills

The use of comics in the English classroom helps the development of all language skills. We have discussed the advantages of reading comics in terms of comprehensible and appealing input, but the benefits can stretch in time, in the sense that they create a conduit of reading, a taste for reading, and a desire to read more and more. Therefore, comics reading does not exclude book reading; on the contrary, it builds students' skills and nurture future readings of other types of literature.

Regarding the difficulty of comic books for English language learners, research has shown that, on average, there are 2000 words per issue, and the degree of difficulty can vary considerably (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988; Krashen, 2004). Comics can serve to teach vocabulary (idiomatic speech, colloquial register) and grammar in context, while providing a form of reference for the observation of narrative structure (Ranker, 2007). Students can thus develop their print literacy, learning punctuation, sequencing, the role of different fonts and so on. As reading implies decoding the connection between visuals and text, learners make use of higher-level thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Moreover, the multiple forms of representation that accompany the text – drawings, speech balloons, captions, icons – make the reader assume two identities at the same time: "the identity of the teller and that of the told" (Norton & Vanderheyden, 2003: 211). The reading process becomes more complex, as the learner has to make two interpretations simultaneously - from the perspective of the narrator and that of the narrate -, and thus develop skills which are otherwise difficult to teach. All these aspects make comics suitable for instructional purposes for various ages and language abilities.

The multimodal text is an excellent source of input for creative outcome. It is well known that the shift from a linguistic perspective (Chomsky, 1965) to a communicative one (Hymes, 1972) in language teaching has shaped current teaching approaches which focus on developing learners' communicative competence. In terms of practice, Communicative Language Teaching stresses the necessity of introducing classroom activities that engage learners in communication (Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 76). Here are a few examples of activities that can be done in pairs or groups:

- **Fill in the blanks**: the teacher removes the words or sentences from one panel and asks the students to fill the gaps with the missing information.
- **Finish the story**: the last picture of a comic strip is removed and the students have to continue the story and come up with an ending. They may even make a drawing of this last frame.
- **Jigsaw**: a comic strip is cut into pieces which must be put in order. The teacher can ask the students to justify their ordering. Alternatively, the teacher removes the speech bubbles from a comic strip, cuts them, and asks the students to pair each bubble with the right picture. As a variation for more advanced students, each group gets a picture of a comic and has to describe it to the other groups, without showing it. Based on the descriptions, the students must agree on the sequence.
- **Role-play**: students are presented with a comic strip, without words. In groups, they have to make up the story and act it out in class.
- **Debates**: based on the action of a comic strip, the characters, the moral or cultural issues prevailing in the story, the teacher can involve students in group debates on various topics, depending on their age and language level.

The communicative activities can easily be extended into writing tasks. For instance, a possible assignment would be to write an essay on:" What kind of comic book character would I be?", or to create a narrative story based on graphic illustrations.

Students may also be encouraged to draw and write their own comics inspired, for example, by a childhood memory.

Intercultural competence

A language is the "mirror of a particular culture" (Wei, 2005: 56); therefore, being a good communicator in a foreign language means understanding the culture of that language. The language teaching profession has acknowledged the connection between language and culture, and has therefore advocated for the necessity of developing learners' intercultural competence which "involves developing with learners an understanding of their own language(s) and culture (s) in relation to an additional language and culture. It is a dialogue that allows for reaching a common ground for negotiating to take place, and where variable points of view are recognized, mediated, and accepted." (Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino, & Kohler, 2003: 46) Nowadays, in the context of our globalised world in which communication makes borders irrelevant, and migration is an on-going phenomenon, focusing on the intercultural dimension should be the ultimate goal of language teaching.

Research has shown that comics facilitate not only second language acquisition, but also contact with the target-language culture (Norton & Vanderheyden, 2003: 209). Stephen Cary remembers that Spanish cartoons "made learning Spanish vocabulary and structures easier. I was also picking up colloquialisms and pop culture knowledge I could immediately put to use in my Mexican travels." (Cary, 2004: 3) In his analysis of the time/space construction in comics, McCloud reinforces the idea that these forms of art are a product of their culture. Western cartoons put forth "the goal-oriented" nature of that world, whereas Japanese productions reflect "a rich tradition of cyclical and labyrinthine works of art" (McCloud, 1993: 81). From this perspective, the rich cultural references encountered in English language comics give students the possibility to get in touch with Western values, compare them with their own system of values, and thus acknowledge and respect diversity. In this way, students will be well prepared for future interaction with people of different cultures.

Conclusion

Comics are fun: fun to read, fun to teach, and fun to learn from. The humorous connotation of "fun" should not let the genre fall into triviality; on the contrary, it should reinforce reluctant teachers to take popular culture into consideration, because the funny side of teaching materials is very appealing to learners and greatly contributes to enhancing their motivation. It creates the perfect learning environment for the acquisition of language skills that will serve the students long after the class has finished. It also provides a gateway to other cultures, promoting the empathy and tolerance that we all need in order to become true intercultural speakers.

Apart from all these benefits, perhaps the most important aspect related to the use of comics in the classroom refers to its capacity of promoting reading for the pleasure of reading. At a time when both parents and educators complain about the children's lack of interest in books, the superheroes have the superpowers to keep alive the printed text, and to create role models for a generation so eager to find idols with whom to identify.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Women victims of intimate partner violence perceptions, causes and types

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Abstract:
Violence against women is considered one of the biggest problems in today's society, being a widespread social phenomenon at international and national levels. According to the World Health Organization, 1 in 3 women worldwide has experienced, at least once in their lives, physical and/or sexual violence in an intimate relationship. Therefore, the first part of the article follows to understand the theoretical aspects of violence, as well as the evolution of the phenomenon of intimate partner violence in Romania. The second part of the article presents a sociological study that aims to present the perceptions of women victims of violence and the impact on the couple's relationship. It also tries to identify the forms, factors and consequences of violence, as well as the reactions of victims.

Keywords: *couple violence, women, perceptions, causes, forms, Romania.*

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Introduction

Violence against women is a social problem faced by all countries in the world, and current research is trying to identify the specific aspects (types and forms of manifestation), the conditions that favor violent behavior, including the social, economic, cultural and legal context that determines the spread of this phenomenon. In today's society, violence is constantly changing and evolving, with new forms of violence being identified that have led to profound changes in people's values, mentalities and attitudes.

Therefore, there is a need to raise awareness of the issues involved in violence and the impact on the physical, mental and spiritual health of women victims, but also on their families, the community and society in general.

Conceptual framework of violence

The term violence is widely discussed in the literature and has different connotations depending on its use or the terms associated with it. According to the Dictionary of Sociology, the term violence means: „the use of force and coercion by an individual, group or social class for the purpose of imposing violence on others"(Zamfir & Vlășceanu, 1998: 658–659).

The term implies a violation of social laws and norms, based on an abusive relationship between two parties in which power is unequally distributed. Thus, according to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian language, violence is "the production of an act with violence, which is produced and acted with force, with intensity, which is done with force, lack of restraint in words or deeds, the fact of using brutal force, violation of the legal order"(Dexonline, n.d.).

In its understanding of the term violence, the United Nations emphasizes both the types and consequences of violence against women, describing it as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life"(United Nations, 1993).

In the Istanbul Convention, domestic violence is defined as a particular aspect of family violence, representing "all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, regardless of whether the perpetrator shares or has shared the same domicile with the victim" (art. 3, b) (Council of Europe, 2011).

The World Health Organization (2024) uses the term "intimate partner violence" which refers to "behavior by an intimate partner or former partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical assault, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors".

In Romania, Law 212/22 May 2003 on preventing and combating domestic violence defines violence as "any intentional action or inaction, except in self-defense or defense, manifested physically or verbally, committed by a family member against another member of the same family, which may cause mental, sexual, emotional or psychological harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, arbitrary deprivation of liberty or coercion".

Therefore, in approaching and understanding the phenomenon of violence against women, several specific elements are used which are interconnected:

- ✓ use of physical force or any other kind of coercion to intimidate the victim;

- ✓ the perpetrator's purpose is to harm or cause suffering to the victim;
- ✓ the victim is feeling the abuse;
- ✓ a legal authority recognizing the acts committed as abusive.

Theoretical framework for understanding violence against women

The study of violence against women has three interrelated components: direct, structural and cultural violence (Turliuc, Turliuc, & Huțuleac, 2009: 12). Direct violence is visible through its results, e.g. beatings, injuries, deprivation of livelihoods (food, clothing) or denial of financial support to the family. Structural violence is found in the socio-economic and political norms of a society, rooted in gender inequalities that support and maintain the superior role of men over women, particularly within the family. Cultural violence, on the other hand, is the specific aspects that legitimize violence in a society, normalized through beliefs.

Violence in couples takes many forms, some visible, some harder to identify, but each having a major impact on their quality of life and mental health: physical violence (hurting or attempting to hurt a person); verbal violence (involves provoking fear through intimidation, threats, coercion); psychological violence (doing emotional harm to a person through coercion or threats); sexual violence (any sexual behavior committed against a person's will); social violence (isolating a person from family, friends, society); economic violence (enforcing financial dependence); spiritual violence (using a person's religious beliefs to intimidate or manipulate).

The UN General Assembly states that violence against women "includes, but is not limited to, physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the family, including battering, sexual abuse of children within the marital home, violence related to the violation of women's property rights, genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, violence perpetrated by other family members, and violence related to exploitation" (United Nations, 1993b).

Consequently, the factors that may influence the onset of conflict or acts of domestic violence, according to Strauss are (Straus, 1989):

- ✓ intra-family conflicts generated by the diversity of activities and interests of family members; gender and age differences; common identity of family members and intensity of involvement; involuntary membership; confidentiality of family behaviors; high level of conflict increases the risk of violence;
- ✓ gender inequality;
- ✓ rules that allow domestic violence;
- ✓ family socialization in violence;
- ✓ the level of violence in society;

Depending on the intensity and frequency of the violent behavior, violence is divided into: the mild and tolerant form, which is common in couple relationships, and the extreme form, where there is abuse with a strong impact on physical, emotional and mental health (Straus, 1989: 33).

Characteristics and profile of the woman victim of violence and the perpetrator

There are two categories of victims of traumatic events[1]: primary victims, who suffer directly from the event, and secondary victims, who witness traumatic events, whether they are family members, friends, persons or even strangers.

In most cases of domestic violence, the woman is a primary victim, the portrait of the victim is made up of several characteristics, most of which are common to women who experience violence in the couple relationship (Bonea, 2012: 144):

- ✓ low self-esteem because they seek validation from their partner, putting their own needs ahead of their partner's needs, and taking responsibility for their abusive behavior;
- ✓ a constant and strong feeling of guilt, which amplifies vulnerability, makes her repress feelings of helplessness, anger, sadness and upset and can lead to self-harm;
- ✓ emotional dependency for self-validation and to compensate for lack of affection and security;
- ✓ previous experience of violence or neglect of both the perpetrator and the victim, which can lead to the perpetuation of violent behavior;
- ✓ strong attachment to the abuser due to lack of self-love;
- ✓ loss of a sense of self-worth through a distorted perception of oneself, others and the world around them;
- ✓ poor general health: pain, insomnia and violent nightmares, including frequent visits to the doctor;
- ✓ engaging in deviant behaviors (abuse of alcohol, drugs and other substances) as a form of escape from the reality of abuse and as a release of stress and fear;
- ✓ negative emotional states such as constant nervousness, anxiety, agitation;
- ✓ Psychological overload manifested by lack of concentration and reduced ability to solve tasks; difficulty processing information or making decisions.
- ✓ perpetuation of abuse as an effect of internalizing aggressive behaviors and reproducing them later (e.g. mother using abuse as a disciplinary method)

There are three typologies that portray the family abuser, according to Donald Dutton (Bonea, 2012: 33).

- ✓ Violent or antisocial (type 1): includes individuals with violent and manipulative behavior who are prone to use alcohol and other substances;
- ✓ Borderline personalities (type 2): includes individuals who have difficulty forming attachments, are impulsive, antisocial, and who quickly go from one state to another;
- ✓ Emotionally unstable (type 3): includes emotionally aggressive people.

Depending on the risks to which the victim may be exposed, perpetrators can also be divided into the following categories (Bonea, 2012: 33).

- ✓ Low-risk abuser is the one who is at the first manifestation of violence in the relationship, has not had abusive and dysfunctional behaviors, self-control during the period of separation;
- ✓ A medium-risk abuser is one who exhibits several risk factors, including: violent behavior towards children, difficulty maintaining intimate relationships, inability to form stable attachments due to multiple relationships, lack of friends, history and complaints from previous victims, and a history of offending;

✓ A high-risk abuser is an abuser who exhibits at least one of the following risk factors: violent behavior before and after separation, medical problems, arrests for intimate partner violence, admission of violent behavior during arrest, suicidal behavior or attempted homicide, no history of substance abuse, and refusal to admit to violence.

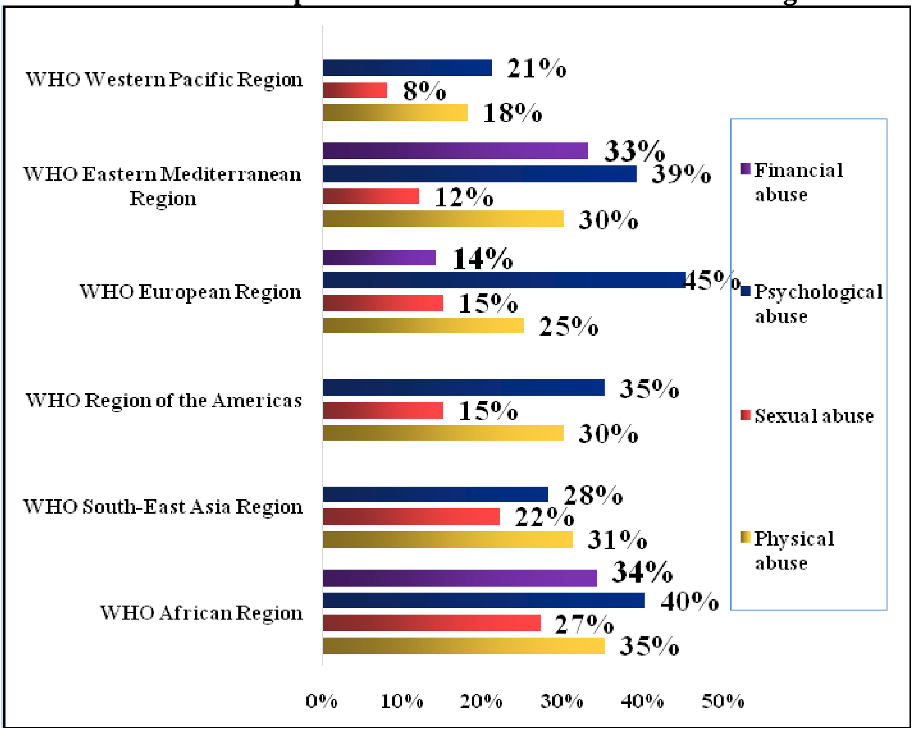
Domestic violence statistics at international and national levels

According to global estimates by the World Health Organization, in 2018, 1 in 3 women were physically and/or sexually abused at least once since the age of 15, meaning between 736 million and 852 million women aged 15 and over.

Regarding intimate partner violence, it is estimated that approximately 26% of women worldwide have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former partner at least once in their lives. Intimate partner violence begins at an early age, with 1 in 4 girls aged 15–19 being assaulted by their partner at least once in their lives (WHO, 2021).

Analysing the median prevalence of types of intimate partner violence, it is observed that the WHO African Region is the most affected area, as this area has the highest values for physical, sexual and financial abuse. Psychological abuse is most common in the WHO European Region, as can be seen in the graph below:

Chart 1.Median prevalence of domestic violence-WHO regions



Source: According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2022)

At European level, data provided by the European Union (EU) highlights that one in three women has been a victim of physical or sexual violence at least once in their lives and approximately two women are killed every week by a partner or another family member (European Commission, 2023).

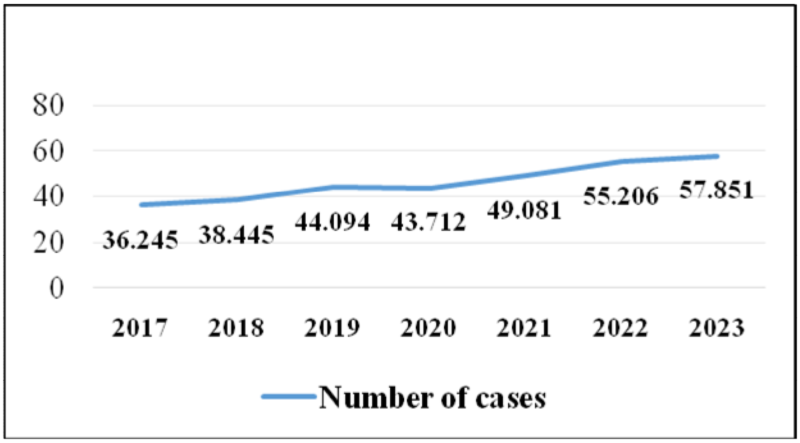
In Europe, an online opinion poll was conducted between 21 December 2018 and 4 January 2019, with 8,500 respondents aged 16-64. According to Statista (2024), the ranking of countries that reported domestic violence as the main problem women are facing is: Serbia (41%), Hungary (30%), France (29%), Poland (24%), Italy (23%), Belgium (21%), Russia (21%), United Kingdom (20%), Sweden (17%), Spain (12%), Netherlands (10%), Germany (10%)

The study "Violence against women: an EU-wide survey" conducted by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2014, which is based on over 42,000 interviews conducted in the 28 member states of the European Union (EU), presents the following statistical data on domestic violence:

- ✓ 22% of women who are or have been in a relationship with a man have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence;
- ✓ 31% of women claim to have suffered six or more incidents of rape by their current or former partner;
- ✓ 43% of women or two in five women say they have suffered some form of psychological violence from their current or former partner.

In Romania, according to data provided by the Romanian Police, between 2017 and 2022, the number of domestic violence crimes increased by 37.3%, a situation presented in the graph below:

Chart 2. Number of cases of domestic violence



In 2023, according to Romanian Police data, 108,831 domestic violence situations were intervened in, 47.5% of the cases being in urban areas and 52.5% in rural areas. Over 62% of the registered criminal acts (i.e. 35,897) were beatings or other forms of violence. It is noted that, since the beginning of 2024, 99,837 cases of domestic violence have been registered, an increase of 5%, compared to the same period in 2023.

The rising number of registered crimes regarding domestic violence reflects both the scale of the phenomenon and a change in the attitude of victims who are aware of their rights and demand the application of legal measures, as well as increased trust in the justice system.

Sociological research on domestic violence in Romania

Sociological research on domestic violence in Romania had as objectives the identification of the perception of domestic violence, the knowledge of the types and forms of domestic violence, as well as the identification of the causes and effects of domestic violence. The questionnaire-based opinion poll technique was used and had a sample of 311 people, of whom 203 women and 108 men, in a relationship (married/cohabiting/single), living together with the partner, in the same household, for at least 12 months. The period of application, download and processing of the results was October-December 2023.

From the research results, there is an awareness of domestic violence as a major social problem, with over 92.8% of respondents emphasizing the negative impact of this phenomenon and the need for intervention to reduce cases of domestic violence and protect victims and other affected people.

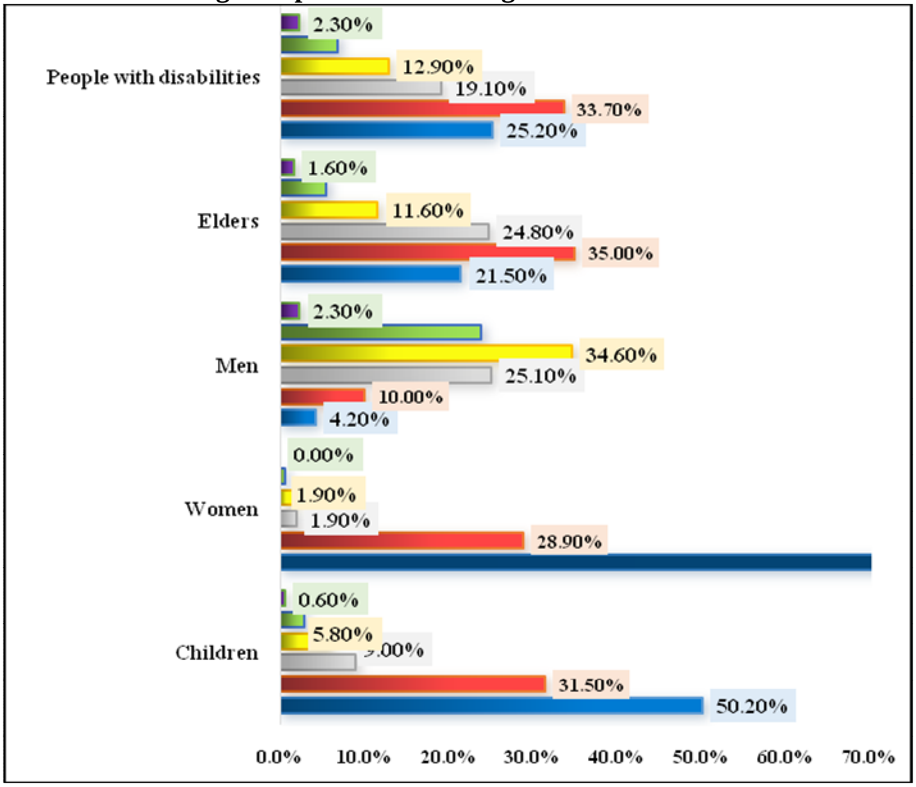
Table. 1 To what extent do you consider domestic violence to be a problem in Romania?

Response variants	***Percentage***
Very large measure	**53.8%**
Large measure	**37.6%**
Small measure	**4.8%**
Very small measure	**2.6%**
Not at all	**0.6%**
I don't know/I don't answer	**0.6%**
Total	**100%**

The respondents' perception of the categories prone to becoming victims of domestic violence indicates that of the five categories included in the analysis, women are perceived as the most vulnerable group, 95.5% of those surveyed consider themselves most exposed to domestic violence.

Due to the lack of financial resources, wage inequalities and limited access to professional opportunities, the lack of access to basic services (health, education and social assistance), as well as family obligations create a state of vulnerability among women. For 81.6% of respondents, children are seen as potential victims of violence, followed by people with disabilities and the elderly, according to 58.9% and 56.5% of those surveyed, respectively. Men, on the other hand, are slightly or not at all prone to becoming victims for approximately 59% of respondents.

Chart 3. Categories prone to becoming victims of domestic violence



The main cause of domestic violence, identified by 26% of respondents, concerns alcohol/drug use, which highlights how abusive behaviours are triggered by the use of various substances that amplify the risk of domestic violence by affecting self-control and decreasing the ability to make balanced decisions.

In addition, consumption can be a refuge or a coping mechanism, as a consequence of abusive behaviour that already exists in the couple. Poverty (12%) and low education level (10.3%) are mentioned as secondary causes, as both amplify the state of helplessness and limit the individual's ability to manage tense situations and, implicitly, violent behaviours in the family.

Jealousy or infidelity are factors mentioned by 9.9% of respondents, and childhood experiences of violence by 9.6%. Normalization of violent behaviours can occur within the entourage (8.6% of respondents mentioning this cause), and lack of communication between partners by 7.7% of respondents. Also, abusive behaviours are legitimized by:

- ✓ social environment tolerant of violence (*collective mentality regarding domestic violence*) for 6.2% of respondents;
- ✓ gender inequalities (2.9%) which are based on discrimination and male superiority; power relations are often tilted in favour of the aggressor, who considers himself superior;
- ✓ antisocial behaviour and delinquency outside the couple (2.3%), because people who are delinquent or antisocial have a higher chance of exhibiting violent behaviours in the couple relationship;

- ✓ imitating violent behaviours through exposure to violence through audio-visual media (2.3%);
- ✓ stress (2.3%) which affects physical and mental health and the ability to self-regulate emotions.

Table 2. Causes of domestic violence

Response variants	*Percentage*
Alcohol/drug use	**26.0%**
Poverty	**12.0%**
Low level of education	**10.3%**
Jealousy/infidelity	**9.9%**
Childhood experiences of violence	**9.6%**
Entourage	**8.6%**
Lack of communication	**7.7%**
Social environment tolerant of violence (collective mentality	**6.2%**
Inequalities between women and men in different fields	**2.9%**
Antisocial behaviour and delinquency outside the couple	**2.3%**
Stress	**2.3%**
Violence in the audio-visual field (TV, internet)	**2.1%**
Don't know/ /Don't answer	**0.1%**
Total	**100%**

A complex understanding of domestic violence is highlighted, including both physical (38.8%), verbal (23.9%), psychological (16.8%), sexual (10.9%), social (4.3%), economic (2.1%) and religious (1.8%) abuse. According to the data in the following table, perceptions of domestic violence vary; 80% of the responses highlight physical, verbal and psychological forms of abuse.

Physical violence (beating, hitting, pushing, etc.) is mentioned as the main form of violence by approximately 39%. Verbal violence (insults, threats, degrading words) is reported by 24% of respondents, while psychological violence, which includes terrorizing, threatening, intimidation and emotional blackmail, deprivation of essential personal needs, is specified by 16.8%. Sexual violence as a form of domestic abuse (degrading comments, marital rape, etc.) is identified by 10.9%, social violence (prohibition of contact with family or friends) and economic violence (prohibition of access to a job, confiscation of finances) are mentioned by 4.3% and 2.1% respectively, indicating the abuse of power and control over personal freedom.

Table 3. Basically, what do you understand by domestic violence?

Response variants	*Percentage*
Hitting, kicking, pushing, slapping, hair pulling, smacking, banging against walls and furniture	**38.8%**
Insults, threats, intimidation, using degrading words	**23.9%**
Offences, terrorization, threats, intimidation and emotional blackmail, deprivation of meeting essential personal needs	**16.8%**
Degrading comments, unpleasant touching, various insults during or in connection with sexual intercourse, marital rape	**10.9%**
Prohibition of relationships/contact with family, friends, work colleagues	**4.3%**
Prohibition of the partner from obtaining a job, confiscation of finances	**2.1%**
Prohibition or ridiculing the victim's religious, cultural, and ethnic norms	**1.8%**
Don't know/Don't answer	**1.2%**
Another answer	**0.2%**
Total	**100%**

When asked why victims of domestic violence do not seek help, out of the 311 respondents, they mentioned as their main answers:

- ✓ fear of the aggressor: for 36.6% of respondents, it is the main reason because it is generated by the aggressor's reactions which are often based on injuring, threatening, intimidating, manipulating, isolating and blackmailing the victim, putting her in a vulnerable situation and making her feel dependent and unsupported;
- ✓ lack of financial resources - 14% of those surveyed recognize how the lack of money creates an economic dependence of the victim on the aggressor and discourages them from leaving the abusive relationship because they are afraid that they cannot afford the costs of daily life;
- ✓ low support from family/friends (10.9%);
- ✓ weak involvement of state institutions (10.9%).

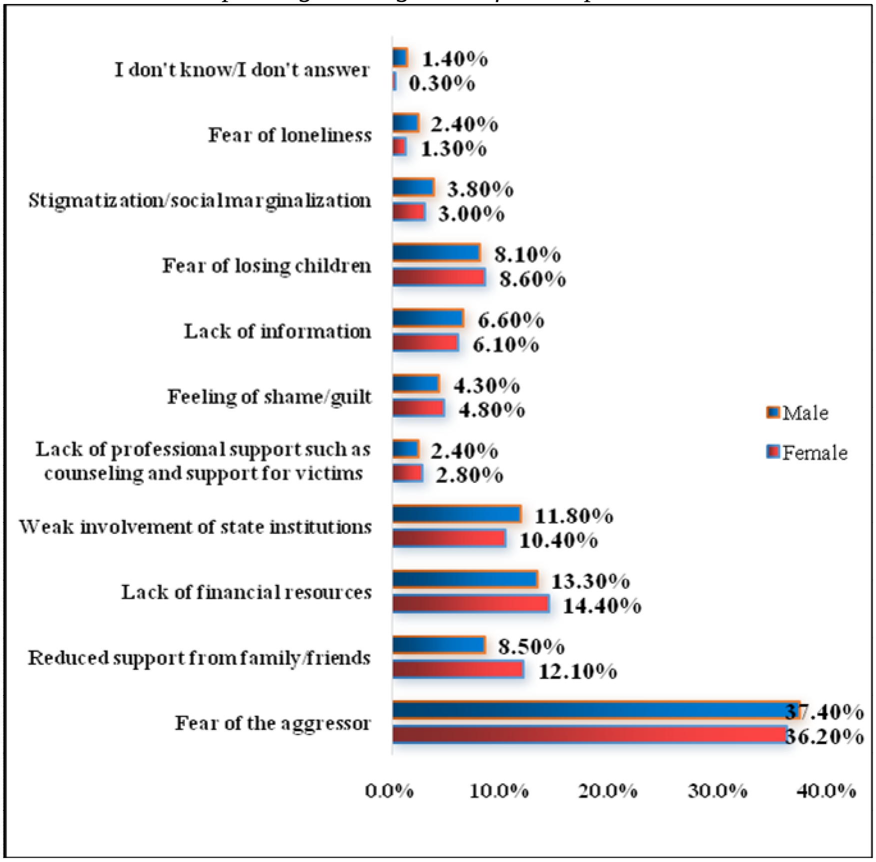
Table 4. Why don't victims of domestic violence seek help?
- female and male respondents' answers -

Response variants	*Percentage*
Fear of the aggressor	**36.6%**
Lack of financial resources	**14.0%**
Low support from family/friends	**10.9%**
Weak involvement of state institutions	**10.9%**
Fear of losing children	**8.4%**
Lack of information	**6.3%**
Feelings of shame/guilt	**4.6%**
Stigmatization/social marginalization	**3.3%**
Lack of professional support such as counselling and victim support	**2.6%**

Fear of loneliness	**1.7%**
Don't know/No answer	**0.7%**

The distribution of reasons why victims do not seek help in cases of domestic violence may vary by gender, as both men and women face specific barriers. The top two answers mentioned by both female and male respondents are: “fear of the aggressor” and “lack of financial resources”.

Chart 4. Distribution of the main reasons why the victim does not seek help
- depending on the gender of the respondents-



From the correlation of the questions “why do victims of domestic violence not seek help?” and “is there domestic violence in your current relationship with your partner?”, it is found that women who identify as victims of domestic violence in their current relationship mention fear of the aggressor and “low support from family/friends” as the main reasons why they do not leave the abusive relationship. The importance of the support network, such as family/friends, for the female victim of domestic violence is revealed, as it provides the necessary support to overcome the trauma and access resources to help her get out of the abusive situation.

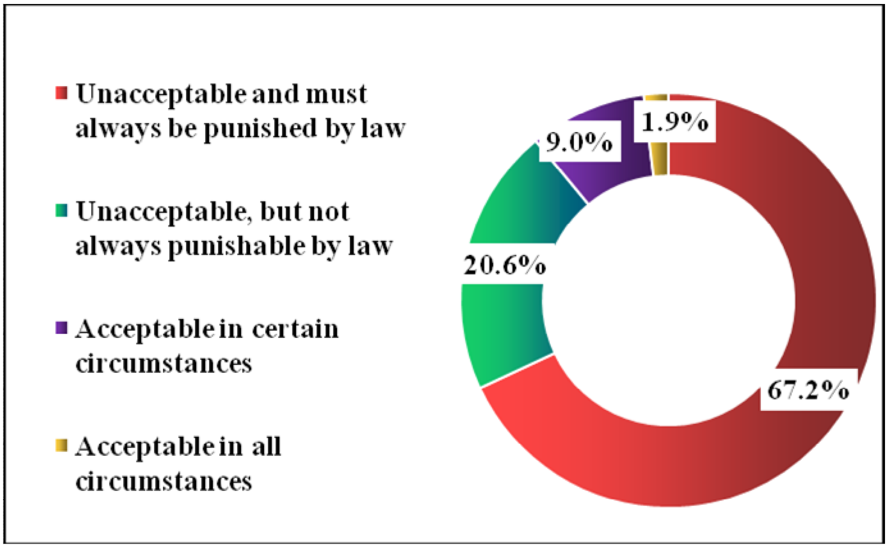
Low support from family and friends can amplify feelings of isolation, helplessness, and uncertainty, which prevent the victim from seeking professional help and leaving the abusive relationship.

This situation is amplified in the case of women with children, as research shows, because the abuser often intimidates his victims with threats against the children, and if he controls the family's income (whether by being the sole financial provider or by confiscating all of the victim's earnings) he ensures that the partner does not have stability and sufficient resources to leave.

There is a majority consensus in favour of legal interventions and sanctioning domestic violence; 66.3% of respondents consider domestic violence unacceptable and that it should always be punished by law, and 20.6% consider it unacceptable, but does not always require legal sanctions.

The fact that approximately 11% consider domestic violence acceptable in some or all circumstances suggests a high degree of tolerance that the population has regarding domestic violence and underlines both the need for educational measures to change the perception regarding the acceptability of intimate partner violence, as well as the need for clear public policies to raise awareness of the negative effects of violence and to support victims. These data confirm statistical data at European level, which confirm that Romanians' tolerance towards domestic violence is above the EU average.

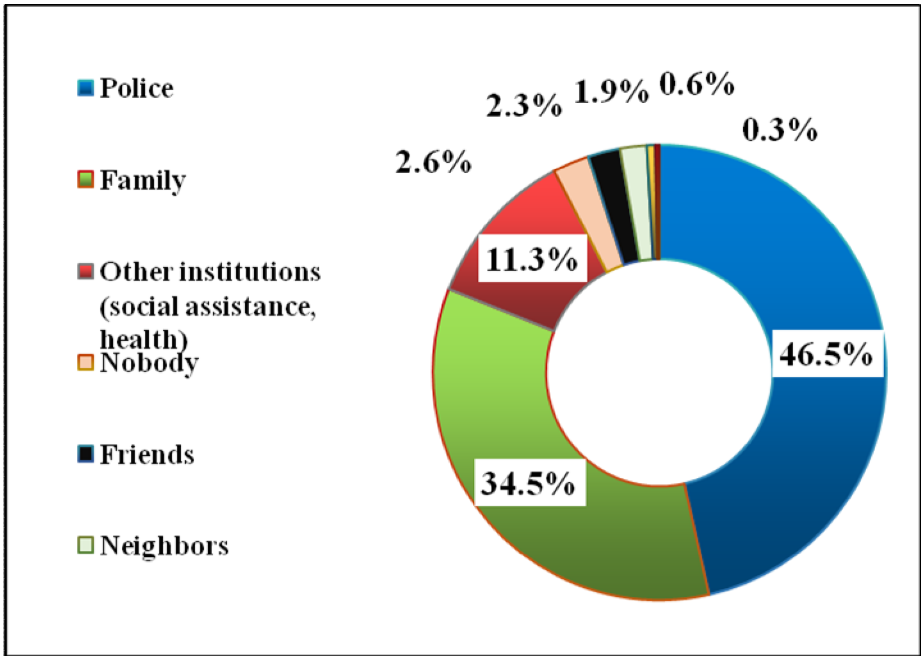
Chart 5. Number of social services for domestic violence in 2020



Regarding the risk of intimate partner violence, to the question "Who do you think should intervene in cases of domestic violence?", 46.5% consider the intervention of the authorities, especially the police, as the main response measure in cases of domestic violence, and the family (34.5%) is described as the second factor of intervention and support. These data correlate with data provided by UN Women, which states that only 1 in 10 women victims of domestic violence would seek help from the police and that they often do not seek help from outside, preferring the help of their family (UN Women, 2021).

In the intervention process, 11.3% identify other institutions, such as social assistance and health care, with lower values being identified for friends (2.3%), neighbours (1.9%) or other people (0.6%).

Chart 6. Intervention in cases of domestic violence



Regarding the level of information on prevention and protection against domestic violence, there is partial awareness of the legal and support resources available to victims:

Table 5. Legal and support resources available to victims

Response variants	*Yes*	*No*	*Don't know/No answer*
a law(s) relating to domestic violence between partners	**51.5%**	**45.0%**	**3.5%**
the existence of a free single number telephone line for victims of domestic violence	**55.8%**	**42.3%**	**1.9%**
institution(s) assisting victims of domestic violence	**61.7%**	**35.4%**	**2.9%**
what is the protection order	**65.5%**	**31.6%**	**2.9%**

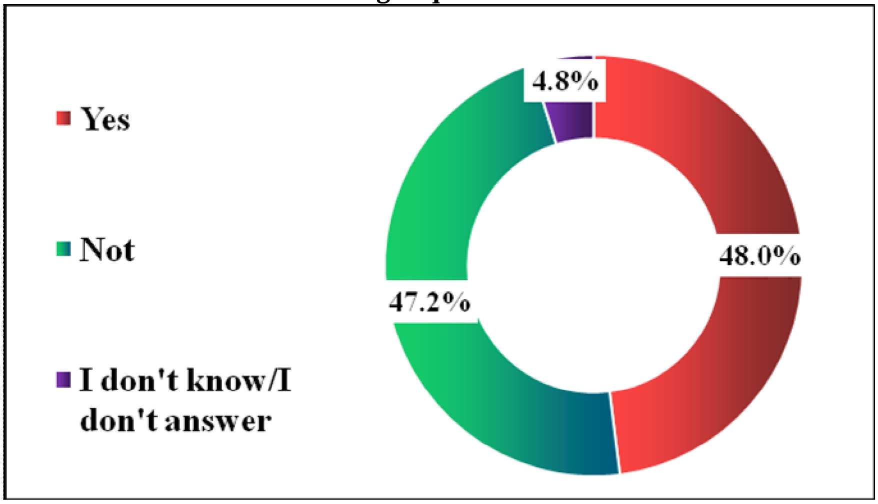
Among women who declare themselves victims of domestic violence, there is poor information regarding the means of legal protection and available support resources:

- ✓ 58.2% are not informed about laws regarding domestic violence between intimate partners;
- ✓ 50.9% are unaware of the existence of a free telephone line for victims of domestic violence;
- ✓ 41.8% are not aware of the existence of institutions that support victims of domestic violence;
- ✓ 38.2% do not know what a protection order entails.

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the vulnerability of certain social groups, such as women, and increased the risk of domestic violence and abusive behaviour. Family tensions have been intensified by factors such as the health crisis, home isolation, working from home, financial instability, social isolation, and limited recreational opportunities.

According to the research data, the majority of respondents (48%) mention that, in the last year, they have heard of cases of domestic violence among acquaintances, which suggests that this phenomenon is on the rise.

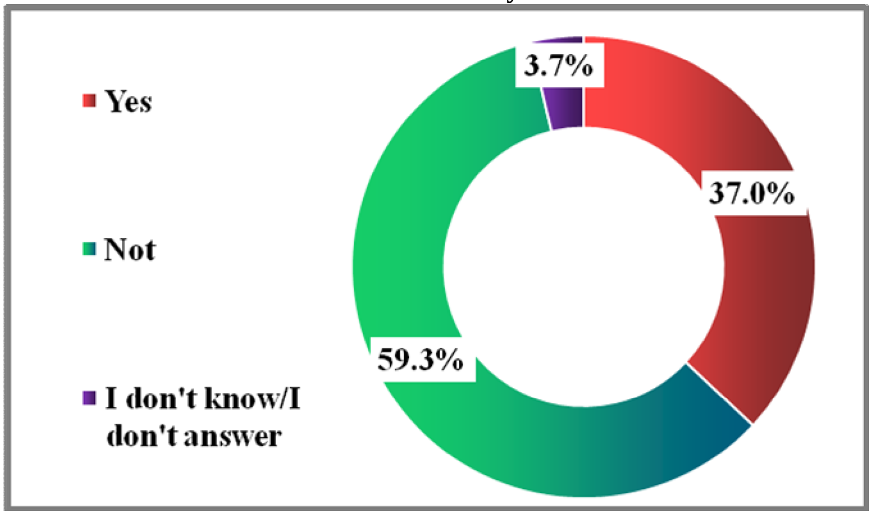
Chart 7. Number of cases of domestic violence among acquaintances



Of the women in the survey who declare that they are victims of violence by their life partner, over a third (37.0%) state that, in the last 12 months, the abuse has increased in intensity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a vulnerable climate and intensified women's experiences of violence by creating conditions conducive to the intensification of abusive behaviours: home isolation and limited contacts, financial insecurity through decreased income and job loss, emotional tensions due to stress and anxiety generated by constant concerns about one's own health and that of those close to them, as well as low access to support services.

Chart 8. The increase in intensity of abuse in the last 12 months



About 40% of participants indicate occasional conflicts, stating that they argue at least once a month, up to 2-3 times a month. Over 6% mention daily tensions and arguments, while 9% say they never argue.

Table 6. How often do you argue with your partner?

Response variants	*Percentage*
Less often	**40.8%**
2-3 times a month	**13.2%**
Once a month	**10.6%**
Once a week	**10.0%**
2-3 times a week	**9.0%**
Never	**9.0%**
Daily	**6.1%**
Don't know/No answer	**1.3%**

In terms of the last incident with their partner, the majority of respondents, i.e. 60%, mentioned that they had been at least victims of violence in the last month, about 28% of respondents mentioned an incident 2-12 months ago, and 10.5% said that it had been more than a year since the last incident of partner abuse.

Table 7. Thinking about your current partner, when was the last incident?

Response variants	*Percentage*
Last month	**26.3%**
Last week	**24.4%**
2-4 months ago	**15.8%**

More than 1 year	**10.5%**
In the last two weeks	**8.8%**
6-8 months ago	**5.3%**
10-12 months ago	**3.5%**
4-6 months ago	**1.8%**
8-10 months ago	**1.8%**
Don't know/No answer	**1.8**

The most common types of injuries resulting from the incident are bruises and scratches (39.2%), followed by wounds, sprains and burns (19.2%). Internal injuries and fractures, including broken bones or teeth, are less common (5.8% and 0.8% respectively). A significant 20% of those surveyed say that they were not left with any injuries following the incident, indicating that the incidents were without physical consequences or were not very visible.

Table 8. If so, did the incident result?

Response variants	*Percentage*
Bruises, scratches	**39.2%**
None of the above	**20.0%**
Injuries, sprains, burns	**19.2%**
Other	**10.0%**
Internal injuries	**5.8%**
Fractures, broken bones, broken teeth	**0.8%**
Miscarriage	**0.8%**
Don't know/No answer	**4.2%**

More than 59% of respondents denied that abuse increased in intensity in 2022, while 37.0% said that it did, which may be a consequence of socio-economic and cultural changes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 9. In the last 12 months, has the intensity of abuse increased?

Response variants	*Percentage*
No	**59.3%**
Yes	**37.0%**
Don't know/No answer	**3.7%**

In terms of possible separation or break-up attempts in the last 12 months, 57.4% of respondents say that they have not broken up or tried to do so, while 42.6% have tried to or have actually broken up with their partner in the last 12 months.

Tabel 10. Have you broken up or tried to break up with your partner in the last year?

Response variants	*Percentage*
No	**57.4%**
Yes	**42.6%**

Conclusions

Domestic violence is the most common form of violence faced by women globally, being one of the most widespread human rights violations that affects relationships between family members and has a significant impact on their health (physical, psychological, sexual and reproductive) and on the society as a whole.

Domestic violence is a problem that needs to be criminalised and regulated by improving victim protection and preventing future acts of violence, such as protection orders, counselling services, and emergency shelters, as well as through public information campaigns and legislative changes that have increased protection against domestic violence. Easier access to legal aid and psychological support allows victims to see more clearly that resources are available and that reporting can lead to improvements in their situation.

In recent years, the scale of the phenomenon of domestic violence at national and international levels requires attention from social policies in this area. The increased visibility of this phenomenon contributes to raising awareness at the community level and to support and prevention actions for victims.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Principles of Individualism in John Stuart Mill: The Role of Emotions and Feelings in Human Action

Ionuț Răduica[1)]

Abstract:
In this study, I intend to show that, for John Stuart Mill, emotions and feelings are not only important for each individual but also play a major role in shaping human action. This significant role is used either constructively or negatively, both by individuals and by society as a whole. Understanding and 'guiding' emotions and feelings is of particular importance in his works, especially *On Liberty*, as it supports the political principle of individualism and contributes to happiness and well-being. The method regards the conceptual analysis of John Stuart Mill's works, with a focus on *On Liberty*, to explore how Mill perceives emotions and feelings as fundamental to both individual autonomy and social dynamics.

Keywords: *John Stuart Mill, feelings, emotions, individual liberty, society*.

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Introduction

In 1859, John Stuart Mill published *On Liberty*, an essay that would become the foundation of classical liberalism and the primary (re)source for discussions regarding the status of the individual in a society that had become more complex, diverse, dynamic, yet also more threatening to the individual.

One of the main directions of Mill's philosophy addresses the relationship between society – whether seen as an abstract entity, encompassing collections of impersonal norms, or as beliefs and values passed on to the majority by nominal groups – and the flesh-and-blood individual, with his fluid limits, means, and purposes. Historically, the individual and society have almost always been in conflict. However, particularly interesting is the interface through which this discord is expressed, namely through feelings and emotions, although not exclusively so: “The practical principle which guides them to their opinions on the regulation of human conduct, is the feeling in each person’s mind that everybody should be required to act as he, and those with whom he sympathizes, would like them to act” (Mill, 2003: 77). At the same time, “desires and impulses are as much a part of a perfect human being, as beliefs and restraints” (Mill, 2003: 125). As a result, the understanding and appropriate use of feelings and emotions can tip the balance in favor of the individual.

Mill’s central idea asserts the preeminence of the individual over the masses, with the English philosopher criticizing the excessive power of the “tyranny of the majority” over the individual. It is, in fact, the collective action of the crowd that inflicts terrible damage on freedom. Thus, the individual must be free regardless of the direction and effects of his freedom, as long as he does not infringe upon the private sphere of others (Mill, 2003: 122). Moreover, the axiom of individualism is nuanced by numerous empirical observations, which show that individual freedom has beneficial effects on society, even when, at first glance, it may seem to run counter to it. In other words, by respecting the freedom of the individual, everyone benefits, although in ways that are not without challenges: “The pressure to cope with the liberties of others will tend to bring it about that you appreciate their motivations, and sometimes in a way that can motivate you” (Millgram, 2019: 130).

To convince readers of the importance of individual freedom, Mill is compelled to critique collective representations regarding the exercise of society's power over the individual, as well as common metaphysical prejudices. Thus he argues that the psychological laws, the motives behind action, do not have an a priori nature, as Kant believed, but are acquired through experience: “If there really is this preponderance – which there must be, unless human affairs are, and have always been, in an almost desperate state – it is owing to a quality of the human mind, the source of everything respectable in man either as an intellectual or as a moral being, namely, that his errors are corrigible. He is capable of rectifying his mistakes, by discussion and experience. Not by experience alone.” (Mill, 2003: 90) Consequently, most individuals will naturally pursue reason, utility, happiness, self-expression, or creativity, learning from mistakes as well as from cooperation with others to achieve their goals. Mill is encouraged in this empirical direction by the scientific future of social science, whose foundations were laid by Comte (Hamburger, 1999: 123). However, not all critics agree with this point of view, as there are areas of action (economics, for example) that are interpreted speculatively, without practical experience (Mazlish, 1988: 99).

Just as with intellectual laws, social laws do not have a metaphysical origin; instead, they are the result of interpersonal experiences or are often generalizations of particular, impactful experiences. These stem from meritorious individuals who transmit not only “examples of more enlightened conduct” but also “better taste and sense in human life” (Mill, 2003: 129). Yet, even these are merely general patterns whose versatility should ideally foster social evolution after first enhancing individuality. However, it must be clarified that society is only a collection of individuals. Where we observe “personalized” qualities within the profile of abstract society, such as strong feelings of aversion and envy, we must understand that they originate from various situations involving specific individuals, even if collective memory does not retain their names.

In his famous essay, Mill highlights the important historical role of emotions and feelings, observable in individual people, explicit groups, and even within the nation as a whole. Thus, certain strong emotions and sentiments-whether positive or negative, real or merely desirable to specific individuals or groups, beneficial to the majority-have contributed to the “establishment of moralities”. Mill notes: “The likings and dislikings of society, or of some powerful portion of it, are thus the main thing which has practically determined the rules laid down for general observance, under the penalties of law or opinion” (Mill, 2003: 78).

Truth and Error in Emotional Subjectivity

Under the pretext of forming social, moral, or political rules, society has come to stifle individualism even before it can manifest. This has led to (self-)censorship functioning primarily as a brake on potential actions, impacting both freedom of expression and, by implication, freedom of thought. Although society accepts the notion that each individual should have a personal contribution within their existential context, it simultaneously upholds the clause of tradition and established behavioral norms that were suitable to certain individuals in specific past circumstances. The influence of society on the individual has become so pervasive that, as Mill asserts, no one has focused on eliminating this political and moral harm but has instead aimed only for isolated changes. Although major historical ideological conflicts (such as universal church vs. confessions, faith vs. atheism) have allowed for the acknowledgment of some political rights for the individual and certain unsanctioned ideas and feelings, the threat of intrusion into the private sphere-whether by society or by government-has been met only with feelings of resistance, whose effectiveness is questionable. It’s important to note that the idea of a state as a protective intervention is an illusion; the government also makes subjective decisions on various types of abuse that are “improperly invoked and improperly condemned” (Mill, 2003: 80).

To stop the assault on individuality, especially as a political principle, we must understand that prejudices and errors in thinking have enabled this situation. Generally, people are accustomed to their own “opinion, of which they feel very certain” (Mill, 2003: 88). These lead them to avoid examining the foundation of their beliefs. Mill argues, “That mankind are not infallible; that their truths, for the most part, are only half-truths; that unity of opinion, unless resulting from the fullest and freest comparison of opposite opinions, is not desirable, and diversity not an evil, but a good, until mankind are much more capable than at present of recognising all sides of the truth, are principles applicable to men’s modes of action, not less than to their opinions.” (Mill, 2003: 88). Despite this, many people remain trapped in a vicious circle of error, from which they find it difficult to escape, whether this originates from their own minds or from others' beliefs upon which they rely unjustifiably. Furthermore, truth is more challenging to obtain than error, as individuals are not naturally and a priori capable of holding truths, and as a result, "for in proportion to a man's want of confidence in his own solitary judgment, does he usually repose, with implicit trust, on the infallibility of ''the world'' in general" (Mill, 2003: 88).

Thus, individuals' resistance to the pressure of dominant or representative opinion (church, political party, reference groups) is minimal. Authentic opinion is often surrendered to authority of any kind, without the individual being troubled by the fact "that mere accident has decided which of these numerous worlds is the object of his reliance, and that the same causes which make him a Churchman in London, would have made him a Buddhist or a Confucian in Pekin" (Mill, 2003: 88).

The Natural Barrier of the Intellect

The natural limitations of the intellect also stem from the confusion between the ideas to which individuals adhere by chance (family, friends, etc.) and the diversity of opinions in the entire world-a diversity that includes both the past and abstract ideas entirely different from one's own. In other words, people fall victim to a subjective network of knowledge, often shaped by emotions and feelings unrelated to objective reality.

In this vicious circle of knowledge, immoral strategies of ideological domination have proliferated through inflexible, absolute ideas constructed precisely to be irrefutable. In contrast, the opinions advocated by the English philosopher should be grounded in experience-experience that has not yet been practically disproven. This category of truth, valid *hic et nunc,* is based on trial, error, validation, and invalidation. Mill's method is closely tied to engaging all intellectual faculties: "The human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice. He who does anything because it is the custom, makes no choice. He gains no practice either in discerning or in desiring what is best. The mental and moral, like the muscular powers, are improved only by being used" (Mill, 2003: 123-124).

The incomplete person, one who does not possess their own goals and means, becomes an instrument through which authority can absolute itself, thanks to unconditional submission. Mill argues that some doctrines falsely claim that "all the good of which humanity is capable, is comprised in Obedience" (Mill, 2003: 126), mistakenly deducing that subordination to anything human should follow from worshiping God, even though "the true virtue of human beings is fitness to live together as equals" (Mill, 2008: 79). For such a doctrine, eradicating unyielding instincts seems natural. In reality, an authentic religion aligns God's goodness as a creative being with the fullness of "all human faculties that they might be cultivated and unfolded, not rooted out and consumed, and that he takes delight in every nearer approach made by his creatures to the ideal conception embodied in them, every increase in any of their capabilities of comprehension, of action, or of enjoyment" (Mill, 2003: 127). Beyond this, methodologically sustainable opinions are those open to debate and testing against opposing hypotheses. Mill emphasizes that the truth has to be accepted only after someone „tests it, gives it a scientific or practical form, and fits it into its place among the existing truths of philosophy or science" (Mill, 2008: 125).

Intellectual errors are common because error is much more likely than truth. Beyond self-evident matters, people cannot fully grasp reality, which explains why many geniuses of the past supported erroneous beliefs. However, anyone can turn to verification and experience, to critiques and opposing viewpoints, but this pursuit is always the prerogative of the individual, not society. The entirety of history's rational strength is simply an accumulation of individual experiences that have proven useful and trustworthy. Furthermore, wisdom is the result of human cooperation, born from each person's instructive interaction with others. As Mill asserts that: „The only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject, is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion, and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind. No wise man ever acquired his wisdom in any mode but this; nor is it in the nature of human intellect to become wise in any other manner" (Mill, 2003: 90).

Once knowledge is achieved, it can be emulated by other minds, facilitated by emotions and feelings that ease its transfer: „The honour and glory of the average man is that he is capable of following that initiative; that he can respond internally to wise and noble things, and be led to them with his eyes open" (Mill, 2003: 131). This is why people of genius should be naturally and spontaneously imitated by the masses.

Despite the collective errors, negative feelings, and emotions that typically undermine individual liberty, as previously discussed, the fallacy of collectivist thinking can be defeated. The arguments supporting individual freedom are numerous. The benefit of sincere expression and free thought far surpasses merely repeating "good" standards, which are upheld by minds incapable of critical thinking and reason. Freedom of thought has the unique virtue of allowing ordinary human beings the ability to reach the mental development they are capable of. When most of society embraces this freedom as essential ideas and topics large enough, then the "yoke of authority was broken" (Mill, 2003: 103).

Emotions and feelings provide a special lens through which to interpret Mill's ideas and his solid belief in political liberty. Looking at the individual, we see that "desires and impulses are part of a complete human being, just as much as beliefs and restraints; and strong impulses are dangerous only when they are not held in proper balance, when one group of goals and inclinations develops strongly while others that should coexist with them remain weak and inactive: "Yet desires and impulses are as much a part of a perfect human being, as beliefs and restraints: and strong impulses are only perilous when not properly balanced; when one set of aims and inclinations is developed into strength, while others, which ought to co-exist with them, remain weak and inactive" (Mill, 2003: 125).

However, seemingly irrational impulses arising from feelings can, in fact, serve rational actions: "Energy may be turned to bad uses; but more good may always be made of an energetic nature, than of an indolent and impassive one. Those who have most natural feeling, are always those whose cultivated feelings may be made the strongest" (Mill, 2003: 125). "Good" feelings are a vital component when they align with the opinions one holds: "If the grounds of an opinion are not conclusive to the person's own reason, his reason cannot be strengthened, but is likely to be weakened by his adopting it: and if the inducements to an act are not such as are consentaneous to his own feelings and character (where affection, or the rights of others, are not concerned) it is so much done towards rendering his feelings and character inert and torpid, instead of active and energetic" (Mill, 2003: 124).

Mill's philosophy thus underlines the importance of balancing personal convictions with emotions that genuinely reflect one's nature and moral reasoning. This balance empowers both individual freedom and the society that benefits from diverse, critically formed perspectives. Viewing society as a whole, feelings and emotions are both indicators of its current state and markers of significant change. Although the English philosopher often speaks of their negative role, there are situations in which these emotions drive political reforms or motivate a mindset adapted to innovation, beneficial to all.

As previously stated, society is not a living organism; any resemblance to people is a mere metaphor, as it lacks a body, will, and, most importantly, purpose. Rather, it represents a collection of general information about the groups of individuals who make it up. This social modus vivendi often operates through public sentiments and emotions. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary for society not to be politically oriented, first and foremost, against the individual. The historical exceptions to this rule, according to Mill, include the political and spiritual fervor after the Renaissance and the latter half of the 18th century, the era of Fichte and Goethe in Germany.

Conclusions

While Mill does not entirely exclude the idea of authority intervening in individuals' private lives, particularly on broad and general grounds, he finds such intrusion usually inappropriate: "with respect to his own feelings and circumstances, the most ordinary man or woman has means of knowledge immeasurably surpassing those that can be possessed by any one else" (Mill, 2003: 140). Furthermore, negative feelings toward individuals cannot justify "correction" through social intervention. Even the flaws of "depravation of taste" cannot be eliminated by force from their possessors; instead, such flaws could even be adopted by those incited to despise them (Mill, 2003: 141).

Public sentiments toward specific individuals should be assessed based on how the private sphere of those individuals' actions affects others, with the type of harm caused being crucial. If these sentiments negatively affect others, only non-intrusive or non-coercive actions, such as isolating the behavior and distancing from the agent, should be considered. If the effects on others are severe, punishment can be more drastic (imprisonment, fines, etc.); however, if the behavior affects only the individual, no one has the right to intervene by force, except as a moral duty that functions only if first accepted by the troubled person. In addition to the moral disagreements over group intervention in an individual's life, Mill lists other dysfunctions frequently arising from such corrections. Among these, notably, is the lack of adaptation in the response, because "the odds are that it interferes wrongly, and in the wrong place" (Mill, 2003: 147). Furthermore, the boundaries of group intervention relate to those of deontology, a series of imposed precepts and moral laws never fully internalized by ordinary people, though often applied by them with fanaticism.

The tyranny of feelings also emerges along the lines of political power's intrusion into people's private lives. The main issue here lies in the popular support for this injustice and the complex and often obscure mechanisms that enable it. Because Mill's analysis of such issues (state education, slavery, etc.) mainly focuses on the limits of governance, we reiterate that the individual is complete, endowed with reason and emotions, experiences and judgment, good and bad qualities, only when genuinely free, regardless of their chosen actions and goals. No one has the moral right to censor an individual's actions, judgment, or feelings if they do not negatively impact others.

In conclusion, Mill examines the relationship between the individual, with their subjective and objective limitations, and the powerful society in which they live, often unconstrained in relation to the individual. The English philosopher shows that this relationship is frequently mediated through emotions and feelings. Unfortunately, merely describing the effects does not change the cause, as long as individuals persist in foundational errors in their ideas without resorting to experience, openness to diverse perspectives, or a critical stance. Mill's solution is to understand this mechanism and to use it positively-emotions and feelings should become the basis for the individual's evolution and, by extension, that of society. Emotions and feelings play a vital role in a complete being, who should embody enthusiasm, impulses, empathy, sincere belief in one's own opinions, and other "vivid" emotions that provide motivation and energy for action, change, adaptation, or growth.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Domestic Violence in Romania in the period 2020-2023

Veronica Gheorghiță[1)]

Abstract:
Regardless of the political, economic, and cultural organization of societies, domestic violence is found in every country, in a lot of forms and manifestations. The effectiveness of intervention measures is being established on the basis of culture, economic development, and the organization of the social assistance and justice systems. The first part of the paper aims to outline a current picture of domestic violence in Romania, highlighting the causes, effects and extent of domestic violence at the national level. The second part of the paper is based on sociological research that analyses Romanians' perceptions of domestic violence, as well as to identify the risk of intimate partner violence. It also analyses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the forms of manifestation and the degree of severity of domestic violence at the national level.

Keywords: *domestic violence, perceptions, causes, research, Romania.*

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Introduction

Domestic violence is considered one of the biggest problems of today's society, being a widespread social phenomenon at international and national levels. Regardless of the political, economic and cultural organization of contemporary societies, domestic violence is found in every country, in a multitude of forms and manifestations, the effectiveness of intervention measures being established based on culture, perceptions and organization of the social assistance and justice system.

The study of domestic violence gains importance in terms of risk factors (poverty, mentality and social stereotypes regarding the superior role of the man in the family, low level of education of the victims, alcohol consumption, lack of social and legal support for victims, low political interest, violent behaviour promoted through the media, etc.), but also of the short and long-term effects, at the individual and social level (poor physical and mental health, emotional, behavioural and developmental disorders, social isolation, impact on the psychological and emotional well-being of children and society as a whole).

Domestic violence occurs between people in an intimate relationship and is perpetrated by both men and women. However, the violence is most often directed at women, with the vast majority of victims being females.

The conceptual framework of domestic violence

Although there is no consensus in the specialized literature regarding the definition of the term domestic violence, the purpose of the definitions is to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon by incorporating common elements: the coercion or act of aggression used by the aggressor, the abuse felt by the person being assaulted, the aggressor's intention to commit aggression, the recognition and/or sanctioning of acts of violence by the competent authorities.

Domestic violence is often used interchangeably with the terms "domestic abuse" or "intimate partner violence" and describes any pattern of behaviour that is used to gain or maintain power and control over a partner. The difference between the terms domestic violence and family violence is emphasized, with the concept of domestic violence being included within the concept of family violence.

Thus, according to the Save the Children Organization (2013: 11) domestic violence includes violence between partners, whether spouses or concubines, while family violence includes any act of violence directed against any member of the family (children, women, elderly people and other family members).

The Council of Europe argues that domestic violence includes "all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim" (Council of Europe, 2011: Article 3).

In terms of the national context, domestic violence was legally framed as a social problem, in the amendments made to the Criminal Code at the end of 2000. Subsequently, through Law no. 217/2003, with subsequent amendments and additions (art. 2), domestic violence refers to "any crime or intentional act of physical, sexual, psychological, economic, social, spiritual or cyber violence, which occurs in the family or domestic environment or between spouses or former spouses, as well as between current or former partners, regardless of whether the aggressor lives or has lived with the victim" (Parliament of Romania, 2020).

Types, forms of manifestation of domestic violence

In general, in the specialized literature, the following forms of domestic violence are encountered according to Shreeves and Prpic (2020): physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence, harassment, as well as female genital mutilation, forced marriage, forced abortion and sterilization, harassment and "honour" crimes.

In Romania, Law 217/22 May 2003 on the prevention and combating of domestic violence, art. 4 and 5, distinguishes the following types of domestic violence:

● verbal violence which includes abusive or offensive language that uses words, expressions or phrases intended to hurt, intimidate or degrade a person or group of people, such as: threats, humiliating words and insulting expressions.

● psychological violence refers to intimidation and manipulation behaviours that intend to impose constraints through blackmail, verbal threats, demonstrative violence, invasion of privacy through surveillance, jealousy, control, neglect, isolation.

● physical violence includes bodily harm to health through direct methods (hitting, slamming, pushing, burning, strangling, etc.) and indirect methods (poisoning, intoxication or other actions with a similar effect), in any form and of any intensity, including hidden ones.

● sexual violence which includes forced actions to degrade through the imposition of sexual assault, sexual intimidation, forced sexual relations.

● economic violence involves the prohibition of professional activity, deprivation of economic resources such as medicine, food, intentional theft of goods and control over them, refusal to support the family, imposition of heavy and harmful activities for health.

● social violence aims at prohibiting or restricting contact with family, friends, community, prohibiting access to education, restricting access to certain areas of the shared home, withholding identity documents, restricted access to information (such as telephone, internet or other means of information).

● spiritual violence refers to limiting, prohibiting access to religious, cultural, linguistic and ethnic values, penalizing the use of the mother tongue, imposing the adoption of spiritual-religious practices that contradict a person's values and beliefs.

● cyber violence refers to the use of technology to intimidate and control, such as online harassment and stalking, sending threatening or violent messages, non-consensual publication of intimate materials or information that violates a person's privacy, unauthorized access to private communications and data, and abusive use of social networks and telecommunications.

Causes and effects of domestic violence

Domestic violence acts can occur at any time and in any circumstance, being influenced by various factors, which differ depending on the situation and circumstances in which the violent acts occur. Domestic violence can also have negative and long-lasting effects for both victims and perpetrators.

In the specialized literature, the following are listed among the causes of domestic violence:

- ✓ poverty or lack of financial resources that amplify tensions between partners, violent behaviour being a form of releasing tension and a reaction to the feeling of insecurity and lost control over one's own life;
- ✓ internal causes such as the presence of character or personality disorders, including brain dysfunctions;
- ✓ social stereotypes that emphasize the position of authority of men and the inferiority of women in society and in the private sphere, as well as gender roles that configure the role of protector and leader of men and the role of caregiver and supporter of women. Norms that establish the dominance of men over women legitimize various forms of violence (Băluță & Tufiș, 2022: 19-20);
- ✓ insufficient legal procedures or laws that limit the protection of victims, but also the low trust of victims in the legal system, which discourages them from seeking help;
- ✓ social permissiveness towards intimate partner violence, which illustrates indifference or even approval of violent behaviour in the couple relationship;
- ✓ the lack of training of specialists in public institutions – social workers, prosecutors, psychologists – is another factor that hinders the activity of preventing and combating the phenomenon;
- ✓ low support mechanisms, such as: insufficient services for victims (emergency shelters, medical, legal assistance, counselling and therapy) and human resources to help protect victims;
- ✓ major barriers for legal and social interventions;
- ✓ low level of education and lack of access to information for women;
- ✓ low access of women to paid jobs;
- ✓ violent behaviours in the family of origin;
- ✓ presence of harmful behaviours *(alcohol, gambling, drug use)*.

The effects of violence on victims are described as traumatic events. The concept of trauma is defined as "the event in the subject's life that is defined by its intensity, the subject's inability to respond adequately, the disturbance and the lasting pathogenic effects it causes in the psychic organization" (Bonea, 2012, p. 144).

The characteristics of traumatic events are described by Dubrow as "traumatic events that are unexpected in onset and unpredictable in intensity, with a frightening character for most of those affected" (Bonea, 2012: 144).

The consequences of domestic abuse are traumatic because they involve the mental, emotional, physical, social and financial impact on the individual survivor, their family and children, as well as the wider societal costs, including the costs of police response, health and other social services. In general, violent behaviours in the family can have as results or consequences (World Health Organization, 2024):

- ✓ injury to the victim: 42% of people who experience intimate partner violence are injured as a result of this situation; homicide or suicide of the people involved;
- ✓ increase in risk behaviours (smoking, substance and alcohol consumption);
- ✓ gynaecological problems, such as sexually transmitted infections or HIV, unplanned pregnancies and induced abortions;
- ✓ infant mortality and morbidity;
- ✓ poor general health: reduced mobility, gastrointestinal disorders, headaches, pain such as back pain, abdominal pain, chronic pelvic pain;
- ✓ behavioural and emotional disorders of the victims: committing violent acts for men and being a victim of violence for women.

Women, victims of domestic violence, may face various problems such as: isolation, inability to work, limited ability to take care of themselves and their children, disorders (sleep, concentration, sexuality); memory loss or blockages; anxiety, crying spells, phobias; self-mutilating or obsessive-compulsive behaviour; low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence; emotional disorders, feelings of sadness, guilt.

Even the aggressor faces negative effects, such as being banned by the authorities from visiting certain places or being deprived of liberty due to serious acts committed with violence.

In addition, it places an economic burden on society in the form of healthcare, legal, social and productivity costs. According to an EPRS study, the total annual cost of violence against women in the EU amounted to over €228 billion in 2011 (Dimitrova-Stull, Prpic, & Shreeves, 2015).

National and international statistics on violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic

According to statistical data provided by UN Women, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the following data has been found for domestic violence (UN Women, 2021, p. 5):

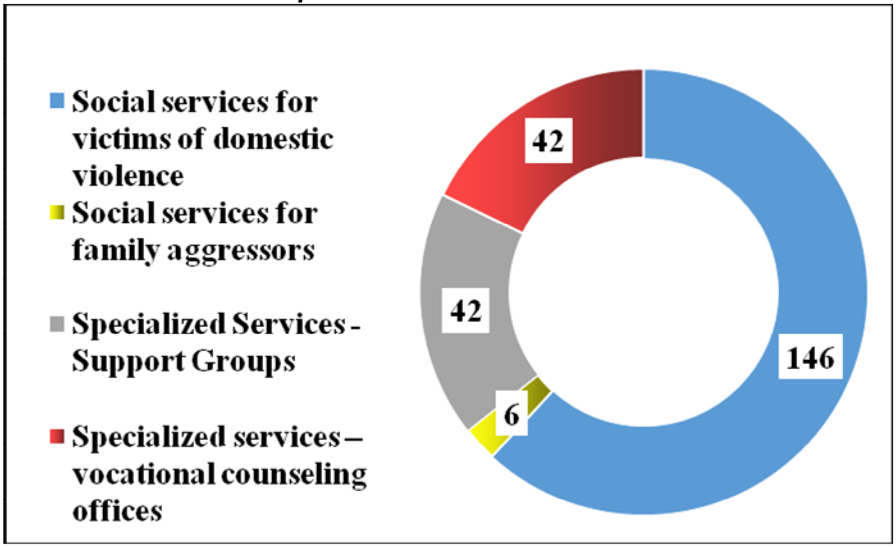
- ✓ 1 in 2 women mention having experienced violence, directly or indirectly, since the beginning of the pandemic;
- ✓ the most frequently encountered form of abuse is verbal, mentioned by 50% of women, followed by sexual harassment (40%), physical abuse (36%), denial of basic needs (35%) and denial of means of communication (30%);
- ✓ 7 in 10 women believe that the phenomenon of domestic violence increased during the pandemic;
- ✓ 1 in 4 women (23%) feel less safe at home since the beginning of the pandemic due to household conflicts that have become more frequent;
- ✓ 52% of unemployed women and 43% of employed women mentioned episodes of domestic violence.

At national level, according to data provided by the Romanian Police, between 2020 and 2021, the number of domestic violence crimes increased by 11%, representing 5369 cases (from 43.712 cases in 2020 to 49.081 cases in 2021). In the period 2020-2023 there was an increase in cases of domestic violence, that is, from 49081 cases to 57851.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic violence expanded, impacting the entire family. Statistical data from the period 01.01.2020 – 30.04.2020 show that 955 calls were registered, of which 436 calls were during the beginning and maintenance of the state of emergency (16 March 2020 – 30 April 2020). An increase of 59% was noted compared to the same period in 2019 (National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men, 2020).

Thus, in response to the spread of the phenomenon of domestic violence as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men – ANES increased, in 2020, the number of services intended for victims of domestic violence: 42 sheltered housing, 42 support groups, 42 vocational counselling offices, reaching a total of 236 services intended for victims of domestic violence.

Chart 1. Distribution of services for victims of domestic violence in 2020



Sociological research on domestic violence in Romania

Quantitative sociological research aimed to identify the perceptions of women victims of domestic violence on the causes, effects and impact of violence. It also aimed to identify the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mode of manifestation of violence, the effects on the woman victim and her family. The technique used is the opinion survey, questionnaire instrument, on a target group of 158 persons, of which 111 are female and 57 are male, in a relationship (married/ cohabiting/ unmarried), living with their partner in the same household for at least 12 months. The application, download and processing period was October-December 2022.

Socio-demographic profile of respondents

Regarding the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, a number of data reflecting gender, marital status, education and ethnicity were taken into account, which are represented in the tables and graphs below. Respondents are 66.1% female and 33.9% male, and in terms of place of residence, 60.1% are urban and 39.9% rural.

Table 1. Sex

Response variants	***Percentage***
Female	**66.1%**
Male	**33.9%**

The age of the respondents was mostly in the 25-55 age range, with 34.5% of the respondents aged between 35-45 years, 23.8% aged between 46-55 years, 22.0% of the respondents aged 25-34 years, 14.3% aged between 18-25 years, 4.2% aged between 56-65 years, and 1.2% aged over 65 years.

Table 2. Age

Response variants	*Percentage*
35-45	**34.5%**
46-55	**23.8%**
25-34	**22.0%**
18-25	**14.3%**
56-65	**4.2%**
Over 65	**1.2%**

The analysis of the marital status of respondents indicates that the majority of respondents are married (58.9%), 19.0% are unmarried (19.0%), while 17.3% live in informal, cohabiting relationships, 7.8% of respondents said that they are not in a relationship, while 4.6% of respondents chose as their response option. Low percentages were recorded for the response options "divorced" (4.2%) and "widowed" (0.6%).

Table 3. Marital status

Response variants	*Percentage*
Married	**58.9%**
Single	**19.0%**
Cohabitation	**17.3%**
Divorced	**4.2%**
Widow	**0.6%**

In terms of the educational profile of the respondents included in the research sample, about 41% have undergraduate and postgraduate education and 51% have secondary and post-secondary education.

Table 4. Educational level

Response variants	*Percentage*
High school education	**26.8%**
Post-secondary	**23.8%**
University	**22.6%**
Postgraduate	**17.9%**
Primary education	**7.7%**
Not the case	**1.2%**

The majority of the respondents (66.1%) consider that the COVID-19 pandemic has not caused any changes in the family. For 24.4% of the respondents, the pandemic made the situation worse, while for about 8.9% it changed the situation for the better. There are gender differences in perceptions of the effects of the pandemic on families.

Women are more likely to think that the pandemic has made things worse (70.7%) or stayed the same (65%), the explanation being that they may have had to manage more additional responsibilities, such as, for example, working at home, caring for children or other family members or children's online schooling.

These data also confirm European data, where around 7 in 10 women believe that domestic violence increased during the pandemic. In contrast, for 35.0% of male respondents, the family situation "stayed the same", indicating that they were less affected by the pandemic in managing their daily activities and responsibilities. Over 80% of respondents said they felt safe in their home in the 2020-2022 period, while 13.7% felt insecure.

Table 5. In the last 2.5 years, have you felt safe in your home?

Response variants	***Percentage***
Yes	**81.0%**
No	**13.7%**
Don't know/No answer	**5.4%**

Women were more likely to feel insecure than men, with around 74% of those who said 'no' being female. Women's perceptions of the feeling of safety in their own home may be influenced by factors that relate to both the infrastructural conditions of the home and socio-cultural factors such as domestic violence, lack of economic resources, social isolation or social insecurity. Domestic violence, in all its forms (physical, psychological, emotional abuse), is the phenomenon that creates the greatest vulnerability, as the environment in which they should feel safest becomes the one that creates the greatest sense of fear and instability. In addition, the social isolation and economic instability during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to heightened feelings of fear and anxiety, as they have less capacity to ask for help, receive support or take protective measures.

Table 6. In the last 2.5 years, have you felt safe in your home?
(responses by gender)

Gender	***Yes***	***No***	***Don't know/ No answer***
Feminine	**64.7%**	**73.9%**	**66.7%**
Masculine	**35.3%**	**26.1%**	**33.3%**

Feelings of insecurity are triggered by causes such as violence: about 37% of respondents mention verbal and physical abuse, 16% claim substance abuse, e.g. alcohol or drugs in the household, and about 8% mention physical insecurity of the home, assessed by the lack of locks, padlocks and other systems to provide protection.

The fact that 36.8% of respondents did not answer the question suggests either a high level of sensitivity to the topic or a low level of awareness of why they feel unsafe in their own home.

Table 7. Mainly, why do you feel unsafe in your home?

Response variants	*Percentage*
There is verbal abuse in my house	**23.7%**
There is substance abuse (e.g. alcohol or drugs) in the	**15.8%**
There is physical violence in my house	**13.2%**
My home is insecure (e.g. no locks)	**7.9%**
I live with people I don't trust	**2.6%**
Don't know/ No answer	**36.8%**

The correlation with gender shows that women feel unsafe due to substance abuse in the household (mentioned by 15.8% of women), but also verbal (13.2%) and physical (13.2%) abuse. On the other hand, the main insecurity factors for men are verbal abuse (10.5%) and living in a house that does not satisfy them as a safety infrastructure (5.3%).

The majority of respondents who are in a relationship, more than 45%, say that the frequency of quarrels is low, a few times a year, which indicates a low share of conflicts in the family. About 1 in 5 people (14.4%) quarrel once a month, with some quarrels being more frequent, weekly (16.8%) and daily (4.8%), but a significant 12.3% say they never quarrel.

Table 8. How often have you argued with your partner in the last 2.5 years?

Response variants	*Percentage*
Less often (two to three times a year)	**45.4%**
Weekly	**16.8%**
Once a month	**14.4%**
Never	**13.2%**
Don't know/No answer	**5.4%**
Daily	**4.8%**

Women report more frequent quarrels in the categories "daily" (75%) and "weekly" (78%), while men report a lower frequency of quarrels; the categories "less frequently" (32.9%) and "never" (45.5%) register the highest values out of all the answers.

For 57.2% of the respondents, the COVID-19 pandemic did not change the dynamics of quarrels with their partner; the frequency of quarrels remained the same as before the outbreak of the pandemic. For about 12%, quarrels became more frequent; the health, social and economic instability caused by the pandemic created tension in the couple relationship.

Table 9. Compared to the period before the outbreak of the COVID19 pandemic, the quarrels with the partner were:

Response variants	***Percentage***
Same	**57.2%**
This is not the case	**16.7%**
More	**11.9%**
Fewer	**7.7%**
Don't know/No answer	**6.5%**

Compared to before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, around 57% of respondents report that the frequency of quarrels with their partner has remained the same and only 12% report more quarrels. Out of the total responses, according to the gender distribution, approximately 9% of women reported more quarrels in the post-pandemic period than men (3.0%). 17% of the respondents mention that they have a harmonious relationship because they do not quarrel with their partner. Women seem to have experienced more changes in the frequency of quarrels than men, with higher percentages than men in all response categories.

The first incident with a partner occurred for about 30% of the respondents more than 18 months ago, and for 15% of the respondents between 12 and 18 months. Referring the responses to the sex variable, 33.3% of women said that the first incident occurred more than 18 months ago, while there is a significant proportion of people (8.5%) reporting that the first incident occurred recently: 1 month ago (8.5%); between 2-6 months (8.5%); between 6-10 months (8.5%), between 10-14 months (14.9%) and between 14-18 months (12.8%).

Table 10. Thinking about your current partner, when was the first incident?

Response variants	***Percentage***
More than 18 months ago	**29.8%**
12-14 months ago	**10.6%**
In the last month	**8.5%**
16-18 months ago	**8.5%**
2-4 months ago	**6.4%**
8-10 months ago	**6.4%**
10-12 months ago	**4.3%**
14-16 months ago	**4.3%**
4-6 months ago	**2.1%**
6-8 months ago	**2.1%**
Don't know/No answer	**17.0%**

In terms of recent incidents, response injuries are distributed between the last week and more than 2 months. It is found that the majority of the incidents occurred in a relatively recent time interval: 45.7% in the last month, while 8.7% in the last 7 days. It is observed that about 20%, which may indicate a possibility of denial of the abusive situation or intention to avoid the subject.

Table 11. Thinking about your current partner, when was the last incident?

Response variants	*Percentage*
more than 2 months	**21.7%**
3 weeks	**17.4%**
1 month	**17.4%**
2 weeks	**10.9%**
in the last 7 days	**8.7%**
2 months	**4.3%**
Don't know/No answer	**19.6%**

Violence has a significant impact on the psychological wellbeing of victims, with frequently mentioned consequences being: loss of self-confidence (19.7%), depression (15.5%), difficulty sleeping (15.5%), panic attacks (9.9%) and vulnerability (8.5%). In general, women reported a variety of effects of abuse that target psychological distress, such as depression, loss of self-confidence and difficulty concentrating. For men, where some form of abuse was reported, loss of self-confidence and difficulties in relationships were mentioned as the main consequences.

Table 12. The worst incident with your current partner that happened in the last 2.5 years. Did it result in any of the following:

Response variants	*Percentage*
Loss of self-confidence	**19.7%**
Depression	**15.5%**
Difficulty sleeping	**15.5%**
Panic attacks	**9.9%**
Vulnerability	**8.5%**
Difficulty concentrating	**7.0%**
Anxiety	**5.6%**
Relationship difficulties	**5.6%**
None of the above	**2.8%**
Don't know/No answer	**9.9%**

In terms of physical consequences of abuse, 53.3% of the respondents mentioned bruises and scratches as the most common types of injuries. The lack of wounds for 21.2% suggests that, although they did not suffer major physical injuries, the possibility of psychological or emotional abuse exists. Injuries such as fractures or sprains were less common; only 6.4% of participants mentioned them.

From an analysis of the types of injuries reported by gender, women largely reported bruises and scratches (69%), followed by wounds, sprains, burns (16%) and fractures (6.4%) as consequences of the incident. In addition, 18.8% of women reported no injuries following the incident.

Table 13. Thinking of the worst incident you have suffered from any of the following

Response variants	*Percentage*
Bruises, scratches	**53.3%**
No injuries	**21.2%**
Injuries, sprains, burns	**10.6%**
Fractures, broken bones, broken teeth	**6.4%**
Other	**2.1%**
Don't know/No answer	**6.4%**

In terms of reacting to abusive behavior, as the most vulnerable group in cases of family violence or domestic violence, women state that:

- ✓ 93.8% did not seek police assistance because of the current partner's behavior
- ✓ 83.8% have never called the hotline to report domestic violence
- ✓ 84.7% have never asked for a protection order in connection with a domestic violence problem

The main reasons given by women for not calling the police following a violent incident are:

- ✓ fear of losing children (16%)
- ✓ fear of partner and retaliation (14.8%)
- ✓ keeping social appearances, not letting outsiders know what is going on (12.3%)
- ✓ shame, embarrassment (9.9%)
- ✓ family involvement or victim management (9.9%)
- ✓ lack of confidence that she can handle the situation on her own (8.6%)

Table 14. Main reasons why women did not call the police after a violent incident

Response variants	*Percentage*
I'm afraid I'll lose the children	**16.0%**
Fear of partner, fear of reprisals	**14.8%**
I didn't want anyone to know	**12.3%**

I took care of it myself/involved family	**9.9%**
Shame, embarrassment	**9.9%**
I didn't think they could do anything	**8.6%**
Unimportant incident/not serious/never crossed my mind	**6.2%**
I was too emotionally affected to contact the police	**6.2%**
My partner or someone else stopped or discouraged me	**4.9%**
I thought it was my fault	**3.7%**
Don't know/ No answer	**2.5%**
He didn't want his partner to get arrested or get in trouble with the police	**2.5%**
I didn't want the relationship to end	**2.5%**

Conclusions

Dating violence takes many forms, some hard to identify, such as psychological abuse, and others visible, such as physical violence.

Since the beginning of the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in the number of cases of violence against women, although the number of official reports does not reflect the reality, because due to the constraints imposed by the pandemic, stigma, fear and shame surrounding the subject, many victims did not report their aggressor.

Violence against women tends to increase during social imbalances or social anomalies, such as the COVID-19 epidemic. These changes have affected women more, with more conflict in their relationship with their partner. On the other hand, research shows that men's married life is more stable, with less experience of quarrels with their partners.

Although most incidents of intimate partner violence first occurred at least 18 months ago, depending on how the relationship evolved, the actual time between incidents has shortened, with the majority of respondents mentioning a period of less than 2 months for this.

The effects of violence against women cause detrimental effects on women's lives, affecting aspects of women's physical, emotional and psychological well-being and may be associated with committing or experiencing violence later in life. Factors such as low self-esteem, shame or guilt, fear of retaliation and fear of losing children are factors that prevent reporting abuse to the police or leaving a violent partner.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Focusing on Fluency: Boosting Speaking Skills in Foreign Language Acquisition

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Abstract :
The acquisition of a foreign language opens up a myriad of opportunities and experiences, ranging from enhanced career prospects to deeper cultural understanding. Among the four primary language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking fluently is often considered the most challenging to master. This paper addresses the significance of focusing on fluency in speaking skills within the context of foreign language acquisition. It examines strategies and methodologies that can aid learners in overcoming barriers to fluency, thereby enhancing their overall language learning experience. Ultimately, the journey to fluency is a rewarding experience that opens doors to a world of opportunities.

Keywords: *speaking, skills, fluency, foreign language, learning/teaching.*

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Introduction

Fluency in speaking is often considered the ultimate goal in foreign language acquisition. Language learners frequently aspire to speak effortlessly, without hesitation, and with the ability to navigate complex social and professional interactions in the target language. While reading, writing, and listening comprehension are important components of language proficiency, speaking fluently is the skill that allows learners to actively engage with others and participate meaningfully in communicative exchanges. Achieving speaking fluency, however, is not a simple matter of acquiring vocabulary or memorizing grammatical structures. It involves the ability to use language spontaneously, manage conversational flow, and overcome communication challenges in real time. As such, it requires not just knowledge of the language, but also the development of cognitive and psychological strategies to facilitate smooth communication.

Nation and Newton (2009) emphasize that "fluency is often regarded as a key indicator of language proficiency, representing the speaker's ability to produce language spontaneously, quickly, and without significant hesitation" (p. 152), which shows why speaking fluently is a primary goal for many language learners, especially since it allows them to participate meaningfully in communicative exchanges. Furthermore, "the entire concept of synchronicity, the ability to connect to a contemporary platform of teaching, has fostered significant necessities for adaptation" (Lăpădat, 2020:139), which pinpoints the need for educators to balance traditional methods with modern, adaptable teaching techniques to meet the demands of fluency in today’s communicative contexts.

In this paper, we will explore the key factors that contribute to speaking fluency in foreign language acquisition. Specifically, we will look at the relationship between fluency and accuracy, the role of interaction in language learning, the importance of input, and the psychological factors, such as anxiety, that can influence speaking ability. Finally, we will discuss effective strategies for enhancing speaking fluency and offer practical recommendations for learners and educators alike.

Defining Fluency in Language Acquisition

Fluency in language learning is often understood as the ability to produce spoken language smoothly and effortlessly, with minimal hesitation. Fluency is not synonymous with grammatical accuracy or the correct use of syntax; rather, it refers to the ability to communicate ideas clearly and fluidly, even if minor mistakes occur along the way. In this sense, Skehan (1996) describes fluency as the "ability to communicate ideas in an uninterrupted, smooth, and efficient manner, without the cognitive load of focusing on form" (p. 46). This definition highlights that, unlike accuracy, fluency involves a speaker’s capacity to articulate thoughts seamlessly and adaptively, fostering meaningful conversation and interaction.

Developing fluency also requires an awareness of the structural differences between native and target languages. One needs to recognise the differences between native and target languages in order to enhance fluency: "learning a foreign language can be challenging due to the fact that in the first stage, the learner will automatically try to connect the syntax of the new language to the set of grammar rules that exist in his mother-tongue" (Stoian, 2021:149). This observation turns the attention to the necessity for learners to identify and adapt to these structural differences to achieve greater speaking fluency.

Additionally, fluency involves speaking with natural rhythm and pace, without overly pausing to search for words or grammar rules. For learners, the primary challenge in developing fluency is overcoming the initial hesitation and anxiety that comes with speaking a foreign language. Fluency allows for quicker processing and quicker production of language, facilitating the natural exchange of ideas and fostering deeper, more meaningful conversations.

Fluency is often considered the ultimate measure of success in second language acquisition (SLA). In communicative contexts, the ability to express oneself with ease, adapt to new situations, and maintain conversations in real-time is a valuable skill. It is important to recognize, however, that fluency is not a static state. It is a developmental process that occurs over time and depends on a variety of factors including practice, exposure, and psychological readiness. Fluency is shaped by both external factors such as the availability of language input and interaction opportunities, as well as internal factors like the learner's cognitive strategies and emotional disposition.

Fluency vs. Accuracy: Finding a Balance

One of the most significant challenges in language acquisition is balancing fluency with accuracy. While fluency emphasizes the natural and fluid use of language, accuracy involves the correct application of grammatical rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Early language learning models emphasized the importance of accuracy, with teachers focusing on correcting mistakes and providing explicit instruction on grammar and vocabulary. Ellis (2005) notes that "while fluency and accuracy are often seen as competing aspects of language performance, a balanced approach can foster a more complete language competence, allowing learners to communicate both effectively and accurately" (p. 159), suggesting a balanced approach in which learners benefit most when fluency practice is paired with corrective feedback, allowing them to speak freely while refining their accuracy over time. However, this focus on accuracy alone can inadvertently lead to slower speech, as learners may become overly cautious and hesitant when speaking.

In contrast, an overemphasis on fluency—encouraging students to speak freely without concern for mistakes—can lead to the development of fossilized errors. Fossilization occurs when errors become ingrained and difficult to correct over time. The challenge, therefore, is to strike a balance between fluency and accuracy. Language learners should be encouraged to speak freely and express their thoughts without fear of making mistakes, but they also need opportunities to refine their accuracy through feedback and correction. In this regard, we can say that developing fluency in a foreign language requires prioritizing effective communication over strict grammatical accuracy, viewing grammar as a step within the broader goal of achieving smooth, successful exchanges of ideas (Burtea-Cioroianu, 2020:146). This approach suggests that while grammar contributes to language learning, true fluency arises from the ability to communicate confidently in real-life situations.

Research has shown that learners who focus solely on accuracy tend to produce slower, more fragmented speech, as they are preoccupied with the mechanics of the language. This often results in a process of thinking in the native language, translating into the target language, and then trying to produce a perfect sentence. In contrast, learners who focus on fluency may initially make more errors, but their speech tends to be smoother, and they are more likely to communicate effectively overall.

The ideal approach is to integrate both fluency and accuracy, recognizing that the two elements complement each other. Fluency practice, through conversation, storytelling, and other interactive tasks—helps learners develop confidence and automaticity in language production. At the same time, learners should receive corrective feedback on their errors, ensuring that they are aware of and can address mistakes when they occur. Over time, with repeated exposure to the target language and consistent practice, learners can improve both their fluency and accuracy, integrating these elements into their overall communicative competence.

The Role of Interaction in Developing Fluency

Interaction is essential in the development of speaking fluency. In the process of language acquisition, interaction provides learners with the opportunity to use language in authentic communicative situations, which is far more beneficial for fluency development than isolated drills or passive listening activities. Long (1983) underscores the value of interaction, arguing that it "provides learners with opportunities to use language in meaningful exchanges, thereby enhancing both their fluency and their confidence in using the target language" (p. 134). Through interactions, learners gain the chance to practice language in context, helping them to adjust their speech based on feedback and develop a more natural conversational flow. Therefore, speaking in real-time, with the need to respond quickly and appropriately to another person, provides the kind of dynamic environment where learners can practice and refine their language skills.

Language is learned most effectively through social interaction. Theories of second language acquisition, particularly the interaction hypothesis, argue that learners benefit from negotiating meaning during conversations, which enables them to adjust their language use based on feedback from their interlocutors. This negotiation of meaning—where learners clarify, rephrase, and ask for confirmation—provides crucial feedback that helps them adjust their language use and develop fluency. Furthermore, the pressure of real-world communication forces learners to become more adaptive and creative in their use of language, encouraging the development of both spoken fluency and pragmatic competence.

Interactive activities—such as role-plays, group discussions, and problem-solving tasks—can help learners practice real-life language use in a controlled, low-stakes setting. These activities allow learners to rehearse language that is relevant to their needs, whether it is ordering food at a restaurant, negotiating in a business meeting, or making small talk at a social gathering. Through repeated practice in these interactive contexts, learners become more confident in their ability to express themselves in the target language.

Moreover, peer interaction offers the added benefit of mutual support. Learners can help each other, offer feedback, and collaborate on solving communication problems. In a supportive group setting, learners feel more comfortable taking risks and experimenting with the language, which accelerates the development of fluency.

Input and Fluency Development

Input is another necessary component of developing speaking fluency. In the context of language learning, input refers to language that learners are exposed to through listening or reading. Comprehensible input—the type of language that is slightly above a learner’s current level but still understandable—is critical for acquiring new vocabulary and grammatical structures. When learners are exposed to rich, varied, and contextualized input, they are better able to internalize language patterns and incorporate them into their speaking repertoire. Krashen (1985) highlights that "comprehensible input is essential in language acquisition, as it provides learners with the language structures and vocabulary needed to facilitate spontaneous, fluent speech" (p. 62). When learners encounter rich and varied input, they internalize language patterns and structures that ultimately support fluent, unhesitating speech in real-world settings.

For speaking fluency, input helps learners develop automaticity, which refers to the ability to produce language without conscious thought. The more exposure learners have to authentic language, the more they internalize the structures, vocabulary, and speech patterns used by native speakers. For example, watching movies, listening to podcasts, or engaging with other forms of media in the target language provides learners with valuable input that they can use in conversations. This input helps learners familiarize themselves with common expressions, idioms, and conversational strategies, all of which contribute to fluency.

It is important to note that input should be both extensive and varied. Learners who are exposed to a wide range of linguistic contexts—such as different accents, registers, and topics—are better able to handle the diversity of language use they will encounter in real-world interactions. Regular and varied input provides learners with the tools they need to adapt to different communicative situations, whether they are engaging in formal discussions or casual, everyday conversations.

While input alone is not sufficient to develop speaking fluency, it provides the raw material that learners need to produce language spontaneously. Without sufficient exposure to language input, learners may struggle to produce accurate and fluent speech, as they simply do not have enough linguistic material to draw upon.

Psychological Factors: Anxiety and Confidence

One of the biggest obstacles to speaking fluently in a foreign language is anxiety. Many language learners experience significant anxiety when asked to speak in the target language, especially in a public or high-stakes setting. This anxiety can stem from fear of making mistakes, being judged by others, or feeling that one’s language proficiency is inadequate. This fear can lead to avoidance behaviour, such as not participating in class discussions or refusing to engage in conversations with native speakers. Anxiety can also result in physical symptoms—such as a dry mouth or shaking hands—that further exacerbate the problem. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) observe that "anxiety can negatively impact language performance by creating a cognitive burden that hinders learners’ ability to focus on language processing and fluent production" (p. 127). Overcoming this challenge requires supportive learning environments where mistakes are seen as part of the growth process, helping learners to build confidence and reduce anxiety over time.

Anxiety directly affects fluency because it increases hesitation and impairs cognitive processing. When learners are anxious, they are more likely to focus on their mistakes or fear of failure, rather than on the content of the conversation. This mental distraction interferes with the natural flow of speech and makes it more difficult for learners to speak confidently and fluidly.

To mitigate the effects of anxiety, learners should be encouraged to create a positive, supportive environment where mistakes are viewed as a natural and necessary part of the learning process. Teachers and peers can help alleviate anxiety by offering constructive feedback, focusing on the progress learners have made, and fostering a growth mindset. Encouraging risk-taking and celebrating mistakes as learning opportunities can help reduce anxiety and improve fluency over time.

Confidence also plays a central role in fluency development. Learners who believe in their ability to communicate in the target language are more likely to engage in speaking practice and seek out opportunities to interact. Building confidence can be achieved through consistent practice, positive reinforcement, and gradual exposure to more challenging language tasks. As learners gain experience and see improvements in their ability to communicate, their confidence grows, and they become more comfortable speaking fluently.

Recognizing individual learning styles is essential for understanding and supporting language acquisition, as they "are a valuable contribution to the psychoeducational diagnosis" (Scorțan, 2021:150), providing insights into each learner's cognitive preferences. Tailoring instructional methods to align with these preferences creates a more personalized approach that can alleviate anxiety and build confidence—two critical psychological factors in developing fluency. When learners feel understood and see their unique needs addressed, they are more likely to engage openly in speaking exercises, taking risks without fear of judgment (Lăpădat and Lăpădat, 2023). This personalized approach not only boosts motivation but also enhances speaking fluency, as learners develop the confidence to navigate real-life communication situations. Emphasizing learning styles as part of fluency-building acknowledges the psychological underpinnings of language acquisition, underscoring the need for adaptive teaching methods to create a supportive, anxiety-reducing environment.

Strategies for Enhancing Speaking Fluency

To develop speaking fluency in a foreign language, learners can adopt a range of effective strategies that target different aspects of spoken communication, including pronunciation, vocabulary, listening comprehension, and real-world interaction. These practices are designed not only to improve fluency but also to build confidence and adaptability in various communicative contexts.

Shadowing: Shadowing involves repeating what a native speaker says in real-time, often directly following along with audio recordings, podcasts, or videos. This technique helps learners refine their pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation by closely mimicking native speakers' speech patterns. By practicing the natural flow of spoken language, learners become more comfortable with the cadence and inflection used by native speakers, which enhances their ability to sound more authentic. Shadowing also promotes faster processing speeds and improves learners' ability to speak without lengthy pauses, both of which are crucial for fluency.

Role-playing and Simulations: Role-playing is a powerful tool for practicing specific speaking scenarios. Whether it is simulating a job interview, participating in a debate, or pretending to navigate a social situation, role-playing allows learners to practice speaking in a variety of contexts and use language that is relevant to their needs. Thornbury (2005) advocates for role-playing, noting that it "provides opportunities for learners to practice communicative tasks in a supportive environment, building confidence and fluency in speaking" (p. 97). By engaging in these simulated scenarios and repeated practice, learners become more comfortable with spontaneous speaking, which is key to enhancing their fluency and adaptability.

Extensive Listening and Speaking Practice: Engaging regularly with authentic materials, such as movies, TV shows, podcasts, and real conversations with native speakers, exposes learners to the language as it is naturally used. Listening to authentic content familiarizes learners with common phrases, idioms, and informal expressions, which are essential for fluid communication. Additionally, practicing conversation with native speakers enables learners to internalize language patterns, making it easier to respond naturally and quickly. This consistent exposure fosters automaticity—the ability to produce language without conscious thought—which is fundamental to speaking fluency.

Using Technology: Language exchange apps, online conversation platforms, and speech recognition software can provide learners with opportunities to practice speaking and receive immediate feedback. These technological tools make it easier to find conversation partners and practice speaking regularly, regardless of geographic location. As "the symbiosis between computer technology and education can no longer be denied or overlooked" (Bărbuceanu, 2022:241), e-learning has reshaped the educational landscape, making it easier for learners to access diverse conversation partners and practice speaking regularly, regardless of geographic location. By leveraging these digital resources, students can enhance their fluency through consistent practice and interaction, supported by the immediacy and accessibility that technology now offers.

Regular Conversation Practice: Frequent conversation with native speakers, language exchange partners, or fellow learners is one of the most effective ways to improve speaking fluency. Regular conversation practice reinforces vocabulary, grammatical structures, and cultural expressions learned through input while helping learners build confidence in their speaking abilities. Engaging in real conversations provides essential opportunities to navigate the unpredictability of spoken language, make on-the-spot adjustments, and respond appropriately in different contexts. As learners practice frequently, they become more comfortable speaking spontaneously and maintaining the natural flow of language, which are critical for achieving conversational fluency.

Conclusion

Fluency development should be viewed as an integrated process that requires consistent practice, varied input, and confidence-building strategies. Richards (2008) argues that "fluency development should be considered as a multi-faceted process, incorporating practice, exposure, and confidence-building in order to foster real-world communication competence" (p. 19). This holistic approach prepares language learners for meaningful communication across diverse cultural and professional contexts, highlighting the critical role fluency plays in effective interaction. Achieving speaking fluency requires a comprehensive approach that integrates interactive practice, exposure to authentic input, and the development of cognitive and emotional strategies to manage communication. By balancing fluency and accuracy, engaging in interactive learning environments, and embracing opportunities for real-world communication, learners can gradually build the confidence and competence necessary to speak fluently in their target language. As language learners continue to engage with the global community, the importance of fluency cannot be overstated, as it enables meaningful, effective communication across cultures and contexts.

Authors' Contributions:

The authors contributed equally to this work.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

The role and purpose of English prepositions

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Abstract:
English language has a structured grammar in which parts of speech like *the noun, the verb, the adjective and the adverb* help us express our ideas. *English prepositions* have the role of offering clarity, direction and sense in a sentence. Even if most of the English prepositions are the shortest words from this language, their role is essential for the syntax of every sentence or phrase. Most grammar books speak about English prepositions as linkers or bridges between other parts of speech. It is important to add that, in English we can encounter two or three prepositions one after another, having a similar communicative effect and functioning as a single unit/ preposition (e.g. *in front of, up to, out of, along with, from behind*, etc). These types of combinations in which 2 or 3 prepositions are used together, lead to prepositional phrases. Moreover, English, as a flexible and fluid language, gives us the chance to use the same preposition in different contexts but with distinctive meanings:
e.g. The bread is *in* the box. (The preposition *in* shows the place of the object)
He is *in trouble*. (In this case we have a collocation in which the preposition is fixed and cannot be translated separately. The sense of *in trouble* = to have problems)
Please, *come in*! (This is a phrasal verb where the preposition is mandatory. The sense of *come in* = enter)
English prepositions can be classified in *simple* and *complex or compound*. *Simple prepositions* are represented by one word: ***in, on, at, for, to, by, about,*** etc. *Complex or compound prepositions* are formed by a group of words: ***as for, aside from, such as, in spite of, in favour of, from under, in addition to***, etc. Of course, *English prepositions* can also be classified depending on the purpose of their use. This means that in English, prepositions can help us express: **time**, **action**, **location**, **direction**, **space orientation or they can help us introduce an object**. In general, English prepositions are placed before nouns or pronouns in order to establish a relationship with the other words from the sentence. Besides this general use, we also find English prepositions in other situations that represent exceptions to this rule.
This article is meant to detail one important connector in English communication: *the preposition*.
Keywords: *English grammar, English prepositions, connectors, foreign language, communication.*

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The role and purpose of English preposition

Introduction

English grammar can be challenging for foreign learners. Even if they learn the main parts of speech (the noun, the verb, the adjective and the adverb) with all their exceptions; English learners should also know how to connect these parts of speech, how to give as many details as possible, in other words – to speak and write English fluently. In every stage of learning English, English prepositions have a vital role in establishing a correct connection between nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc. As I mentioned in my abstract, prepositions are seen as connectors or bridges between words. An English sentence, in order to have a meaning and to express our ideas correctly, has to contain the right preposition/s.

Although it may be true that for English learners, this language, as any other foreign language, can have a lot of pitfalls, learning the appropriate connecters can help them achieve a satisfying level of English. In order to reach an advanced level of communication in English, one must practice this language for a long period of time. English grammar with all its components, rules and exceptions is fundamental for English learners. To learn English as a standard language means that learners should be aware of:"… the total ensemble of lexical, semantic and grammatical tools affiliated to the members of a linguistic group or community with the purpose of proliferating basic communication…"(Chirițescu, Păunescu. 2021: 95).

English prepositions give meaning to our communication and they help us link the words from our sentences/ phrases. Even if, in the beginning, it may be difficult, to choose the correct preposition, in time, the English learner will stop trying: "…to connect the syntax of the new language to the set of grammar rules that exist in his mother-tongue. This process will undoubtedly lead to syntax and grammar mistakes."(Stoian, 2021: 150)

Each language has its own difficulties and finesses that the learner should learn to master in time. In English we have three main types of prepositions: *simple, complex and phrasal prepositions*. The first category of English prepositions – <u>the simple ones</u> is represented by *monosyllabic or polysyllabic* words like: *in, at, of, to, from, since, to, etc and under, without, until, within, between, behind, against, despite, etc.* In the second category – <u>*complex prepositions*</u> – we can include combinations like: *throughout, alongside, as for, as to, up to, etc.* As for the *phrasal prepositions* we can include the ones used with verbs or other parts of speech: e.g. *in reference to, as long as, on account of, look up, turn off, come out, etc.* Nevertheless, the English prepositions that are used with verbs, form another important category in the English grammar – that of *phrasal verbs*. For Romanians who learn English, these special verbs are quite difficult because: "… in Romanian grammar we can't find direct equivalents." (Stoian, 2021:153)

Each English phrasal verb has a different meaning and one verb can take different prepositions. For example – the verb <u>*to break*</u> can be followed by the following prepositions: <u>*in, out, into, up:*</u>

The burglar <u>*broke in*</u> the museum. (The verb means to force the entry). / The dog <u>*broke out*</u> from his cage because the owner forgot the door open. (To escape) / The police had to <u>*break into*</u> the house in order to stop the violence. (Enter somewhere by force)/ The couple <u>*broke up*</u> after a terrible fight. (The relationship ended)

All these different meanings and different prepositions that can be added to a single verb can be learned, not necessarily by trying to memorize each of them (this would be impossible), but through practice.

General traits for English prepositions

In English, prepositions have a wide range of meanings. As I mentioned in the abstract of this article, one preposition can express different things – depending on the context, e.g.:

I'm preparing a presentation *for* the meeting. (The preposition expresses the reason of my activity)

We have visited them *for* Easter. (The preposition expresses the time and the duration of our visit)

Other examples could include the preposition *of.* Its meaning is different but, at the same time, it could be confusing. In some English sentences there is a tendency of avoiding the preposition *of* – by changing the word order, e.g.:

I bought a book *of* grammar – I bought a grammar book. / They used glasses *of* good quality – They used good quality glasses. But:

Today, the lunch at the canteen *consists of* soup, chicken salad and fried potatoes. (Here, we have a phrasal verb and the preposition of is mandatory)

He is *thinking of* phoning you. (Again, in this case, the preposition is mandatory)

Jane told him those things *out-of* sympathy. (Here we have a combination of two prepositions and we cannot omit any of them)

Let's meet *in front of* the cinema. (Here we have 3 prepositions and each of them has different meanings separately, but, together – *in front of* – shows direction and a certain point, location or place)

Such examples of prepositions can continue because almost every English preposition has a wide range of meanings and uses. English prepositions are used to show: *direction, transportation, location and time. The prepositions of direction* are: *along, through, across, around, to, over, above, from,* etc. Here are some examples of such prepositions:

Mary will travel *to* Greece. / The cinema is *across* the park. / The map shows that we should go *through* this tunnel. / Take the bus *from* the next station.

English prepositions of transportation include: *on, in, by*. Some grammar books tell us to use the preposition *on* for big vehicles such as: bus, train, airplane, metro or anything else that can transport many people at the same time. The preposition *in* should be used for smaller vehicles:

E.g.: The employees were *on* the bus when they saw the accident. / He is planning to go *on* a cruise ship next holiday. / I was *in* my car when the storm began. / I can put your luggage *in* the taxi.

The preposition *by* is used to show how someone travels to different destinations: He travels *by* bus. / They go to Spain *by* plane. / I'm going in this business trip *by* train.

The prepositions that show the location are: *in, on, at, under, between, inside, outside,* etc.

e.g.: The present is *in* the black box. / You can find interesting dishes *on* this menu. / The statue is *between* two old trees. / The gallery is *inside* this building.

When we talk about time, we use certain prepositions like: *at, on, in*.

e.g.: We will meet *at* 4 o'clock. / The theatre play starts *in* 15 minutes. / The project will be presented *on* Friday *at* 10 o'clock *in* the morning.

All these examples show that English prepositions play an essential role in our communication. They not only link parts of speech, but they also help us express our ideas clearly. To learn every aspect of a foreign language, with all its particularities is a demanding task for the learner. He/ she should be motivated by:"… various factors, including personal goals, attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and identity, also placing importance on social and cultural factors, such as the influence of family, peers, and the wider community, in shaping learners 'motivation and language learning outcomes." (Lăpădat, Lăpădat. 2023:142)

Therefore, the learners of a foreign language should be sufficiently motivated in order to surpass all the difficulties that may arise in the learning process. Coming back to my topic, English prepositions and their meanings can be learnt through examples, through writing, reading, listening and speaking tasks. The learner identifies the context in which the preposition is used and he/ she can reproduce a similar context only through practice. It is true that the learning process also means:"… to dedicate a certain amount from your personal time in understanding and learning the grammar of that language, practicing your vocabulary and grammar knowledge , developing your skills in using the foreign language in free speech and exercising the foreign language in written texts." (Stoian. 2023:93)

Today, with all the technology that has developed in such a way that it is present in all the domains, as well as in education, students/ learners have access to information very quickly. Some even consider that they can extract all the necessary information in the right way so that:"…the attitude to learn autonomously and adaptively is paramount, it goes beyond the achievement of knowledge, it is aimed at fostering critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving skills crucial for accomplishment in a rapidly progressing world." (Bărbuceanu, 2023:63)

Therefore, students/ learners feel the need to be independent, to try to learn on their own. This new tendency should take into account that foreign languages need special filters for the abundance of online information. To learn, for example, English grammar is a process that requires a teacher who is able to find the right sources and to guide the learner in a correct direction. When it comes to English prepositions, the learners of English need to study examples, contexts and afterwards create their own sentences/ phrases. Due to the fact that prepositions play a key role in the whole structure of a sentence, it is important to learn and to assimilate, as much as possible, all the meanings and uses of every English preposition.

Phrasal verbs – use of prepositions

Throughout the evolution of English language, several language specialists wrote about these special verbs that have appeared in English. According to Owen G. Mordaunt and Matthew McGuire, the definition of a phrasal verb is:"…an ordinary verb combined with a preposition or an adverbial particle that has at least one meaning which is unpredictable and different than what would be denoted by taking the literal meanings of the individual words separately and placing them together." (Mordaunt, McGuire, 2020:1)

As mentioned before, English has a special type of verb – the *phrasal verb.* In English there are available many lists of phrasal verbs with examples and explanations. Phrasal verbs are formed from a simple verb to which we add prepositions or adverbs. Their complexity comes from the fact that, as they join a preposition or an adverb they also acquire different meaning. The English learner has to be very careful when using these verbs. If he mistakes the preposition or the adverb that goes after the verb, his entire communication will be a failure. Here are some examples of phrasal verbs which are formed by adding a preposition:

The manager *put off* the meeting. / The child *switched off* the computer. / The success of that project *turned out* to be the reason for his promotion.

“The meaning of a phrasal verb cannot be easily inferred from the basic meanings of its components. However, its meaning is not simply idiosyncratic. In very many instances it relates not to basic meanings but to extended meanings of the words making it up.”(Dixon, 2021:9)

English prepositions are also used with other verbs beside the phrasal verbs. These verbs are called *prepositional verbs*. The special trait of *prepositional verbs* is that the object is always placed after the preposition. This is the trait that differentiates them from the phrasal verbs. In the case of the phrasal verbs, the place of the object can be different. Examples of *prepositional verbs*: *count on, approve of, long for, apply for, result in, listen to, deal with, excuse for, search for, etc.* Anyway, some of these prepositional verbs can function as both: phrasal and prepositional depending on the context. It is true that the delimitation between the phrasal verbs and prepositional ones is often very subtle and it can be established if we take into consideration the stress placed on words and the intonation that we use. Besides their use with verbs, English prepositions are also found near adjectives:

e.g.: Greece is *famous for* its hospitality. / He was very *proud of* his achievements. (These examples illustrate how adjectives and prepositions go together. The list is bigger and it includes other combinations like: *thankful for, enthusiastic about, certain of, suitable for, bored with, familiar with*, etc. For these combinations there is no set of rules, so it is advisable that once the student learns the adjective to learn the preposition suitable for it.)

Can English sentences begin with prepositions?

The answer for this question is yes, English sentences can begin with prepositions. It is advisable to use prepositions as the word that starts a sentence when you want to show:

e.g.: (a beginning) – *In* the beginning his works were not appreciated by the audience. / *At* the beginning of the meeting we will have a small presentation from the Chinese team.

(An end) – *In* the end, the characters from the movie survived the earthquake.

(Other contexts in which we can start our communications with prepositions) – *By* the time he arrived home, the quests had left. / *From* Craiova to Bucharest there is a distance of approximately 250km. / *After* you finish your homework, you can go out and play./ *Over* the next few years, he got involved in different activities. / *Since* you have left, the manager tried to deal with your tasks.

Nevertheless, although there is no specific rule that forbids us to start our sentences with prepositions like: *but/ and*, it is advisably to look for synonyms that can replace them.

Conclusions

English prepositions play an important role in the syntax of a sentence/ phrase. In English, prepositions are the ones that link words and help us express: time, location, direction or to introduce a topic/ an object. English prepositions have their role in developing English proficiency for students. Despite the fact that English prepositions are one of the smallest words in English, they represent a difficult category when it comes to the part in which the teacher has to explain and show the different meanings and uses that one preposition can have. Even if, they are small words, English prepositions offer clarity and sense when they are used. In general, English grammar offers learners certain knowledge that can be used in:"…free speech and exercising the foreign language in written texts. When it comes to English, its learners have to be familiarized with the main parts of speech, with English grammar rules and they have to enrich their English vocabulary whenever it is possible."(Stoian. 2023:93)

English grammar offers the learner the possibility to express himself in a correct manner. Whether or not the English learner decides to combine online resources with the materials that he receives from his teacher, there are several things that he has to consider: "… English grammar's aim is to turn skilful pupils into skilful users of English language. Learning English grammar means to achieve the skill of building personal correct structures in English."(Stoian. 2022:47).

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ORIGINAL PAPER

The Development of Learning Strategies during Technical English Classes

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Abstract:
The current paper proposes a student-oriented strategy for the development of learning skills during ESP classes. The need for the current research stems from the observations gathered during ESP classes according to which few students are aware of their current learning strategies. Moreover, students seldom realise how their active and passive learning differ from their peers' learning and that they can gradually and actively improve their learning strategies. The aim of this paper is to identify the specificity of technical English study and to forward a set of practical solutions to the challenges of ESP instruction that have the potential to upgrade students' learning outcome.

Keywords: *Active learning, learning strategy, passive learning, student-oriented approach, Technical English classes.*

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1. Introduction

In post-communist education there has been a remarkable shift in understanding the development of learning in the sense that educational success is no longer perceived as ‘a construct of ability’ and is now being viewed as resulting from ’appropriately guided effort’ (Dweck, 1999: 15). There is evidence indicating that effective learning occurs when students explicitly develop awareness of learning strategies and techniques, specifically when these are aimed at the metacognitive level (Hoyle & Davisson, 2011; Yeager & Walton, 2011). The increment of learning capabilities is, as a result, closely associated with *learning to learn,* the increase of student autonomy, the development of *independent learning skills* together with the *transfer of learning* across contexts. As teaching methodologies are shifting focus from teacher-centered to student-centered, learning results are ultimately being broken down to the role played by individuals in optimising their learning performance and outcome. And since teaching is not prescriptive and is unable to deliver the same results for all learner typologies, students are becoming increasingly involved in outperforming themselves. Technical English students as well can largely benefit from an increase in the awareness of which learning strategies seem to be working for them. During ESP classes, students are focused on improving their overall performance of general English and technical vocabulary in contexts and situations that pertain to the object of the ESP class: technical, medical, business etc. They may also be keen on developing learning strategies that help them produce better outcomes, bear relevance to their future professional lives and help them become independent learners.

The concept of ***learning skills*** is often used to depict the variety of techniques employed to acquire knowledge and develop new skills, in an environment that is characterized by formal learning, be it a school or university. Rychen & Salganik (2003: 44) make reference to the internal structures of a competence as the manifestations of ‘Knowledge, Cognitive skills, Practical skills, Attitudes, Emotions, Values and ethics and Motivation’. Apart from academic contexts, learning often occurs in non-formal surroundings that are either generated by the student or circumstantial in nature. For instance, technical students often watch video tutorials that help them do their school assignments or simply out of technical curiosity, watch or read technical reviews before purchasing technology, attend technology fairs etc. All these can represent an important source of learning as most of these contexts are available only in English.

The education specialists attending the Council of Europe (1997) symposium furthered the proposal that competencies that stand at the foundation of skill development be regarded ’as the general capability based on knowledge, experience, values, dispositions which a person has developed through engagement with educational practices (1997: 26). Rychen & Salganik futher dwell into the definion of competence (2003: 43) ‘as the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context through the mobilisation of psycho-social prerequisites (including cognitive and non-cognitive aspects)’. Competences are viewed as the ‘internal mental structures in the sense of abilities, dispositions or resources embedded in the individual’ and are triggered by a ‘specific real world task or demand’. Consequently, if improved learning is desired, one must work at possessing competence and helping it surface by exposing themselves to situations in which competence can manifest itself relevantly.

Moreover, the ultimate goal of developing learning skills or acquisition capabilities is to produce enhanced and optimized subsequent learning, i.e. to produce skills that students find relevance for and make good use of in expanding knowledge further. In other words, students must be helped to become autonomous learners by seeking relevance and extension of the learnt content, by taking active charge of their subsequent learning and by not relying exclusively on what has been taught during a lesson and further feed their curiosity through research, extra practice etc. There are two main ways in which learning skills can be further developed by **improving the effectiveness of study** and **learning routines** which will yield palpable learning results and by **improving specific competence** – such as literacy, comprehension, inference or critical thinking – which will constitute a sound foundation or act as the prerequisites for deeper learning and skills transfer across subjects.

2. Transitioning knowledge into skill

There has been heated debate regarding the limitations of terminology in capturing the essence of students' learning evolution how *education* and *training* develop and change an individual's ability to benefit from what they have learned in their subsequent professional lives. As pointed out by Bălănescu (2021) ESP students will seek and find appropriate integration into communities of thought when and if their needs analysis includes information about language practice environments, in other words if trained to communicate in environments that bear resemblance to what they will encounter in their professional lives: '(…) learners' ability to communicate is the main condition of their participation in future communities of practice. As a result, classroom activities are meant to derive from the information offered by needs' analysis, and are designed as the actual or approximate versions of real activities' (2021:95)

The term **skill** itself has been under scrutiny for its limiting perspective on learning and performance (Higgins & Baumfield, 2004) and regarding what constitutes transferable skills and how they can be transitioned to meet the needs of students as professionals in their chosen domain (Bridges, 1993). The key issue and one of major concern is that students who perform well academically are not necessarily equipped to pursue their goals on a practical level and. There is often great discrepancy between acquired knowledge and professional success when knowledge is not paired with practical applications, the search for relevance and an independence of thought. This matter poses great relevance for technical students who are in dire need of exposure to experimental contexts in which knowledge is applied practically to render a sense of its relevance and later on become transferable to related or unrelated situations in the workplace. Moreover, from the earliest stages of development technical students need to become independent learners, harness their curiosity about their field of choice, fill in knowledge gaps on their own and build critical thinking.

Bridges (1993) notes that transferable skills are, in fact, the most fundamental to success after thoroughly analysing the underlying notions of cross-curricular, generic, core skills. Knowledge and skill are relevant as long as individuals possess the ability to perceive their applicability and adapt, modify and transfer them to a number of other social or cognitive domains in their lives and use them in a wide range of situations. When working with technical students, these findings are of utmost interest in the sense that students gradually become aware of the fact that all the technical knowledge and skills they acquire during their academic years will never be used exactly as they were taught and learnt but rather they represent bricks to be made use of in building customised structures of thought and action. In this regard, it is only by constantly practising awareness, adapting and altering structures of thought, skill and knowledge can these be made relevant to any given context at any given time. Similarly, Stephenson (1992: 1) emphasises that the concept of '***capability*** depends much more on our confidence that we can effectively use and develop our skills in complex and changing circumstances than on our mere possession of those skills'.

When skills and knowledge are referred to and perceived as a commodity which can be accumulated, much of the applicability of knowledge is lost. What students do often fail to understand is the fact that teachers are present in class not only to deliver knowledge, but also to stimulate curiosity that students need to perceive as an opportunity and help in the development of skills that are to be refined by students who put them to good use. Instead of being fed information, students need activation to engage in learning as a form of participation to discussions, groups, communities, domains etc. Thus, knowledge delivery cannot replace the importance of learners as actively engaged individuals. For it is only when students are engaged that knowledge pairs with experience and acquires relevance and transfer capability.

Any given human is the sum of their experiences internalized in a way that is specific to the cognitive and personality traits and translated into behavior in an equally unique manner. According to Sfard (1998) the engagement of the students can be equated to a 'linguistic turn' which 'suggests that the learner should be viewed as a person interested in participation in certain kinds of activities rather than in accumulating private possessions' (1998: 6). In the same author's view, learning is associated to becoming a member of a community of knowledge, speaking the language of that community and joining in the activities according to the condoned social and cultural norms with significant social, cultural and situational specificity. Both acquisition and participation possess great value and, 'when combined together, run a good chance of gratifying all our needs without perpetuating the drawbacks of each one of them'. Differently put, when knowledge is put to work in socially driven learning contexts, no knowledge is wasted and a community of thought emerges from people who exchange ideas, find solutions to challenges, react and interact.

Stephenson (2000:2) carries on this line of analysis by discussing how autonomy and independence are achievable. He defines ***capability*** as '...an all round human quality, an *integration* of knowledge, skills, personal qualities and understanding *used appropriately and effectively* – not just in familiar and highly focused specialist contexts but in response to new and changing circumstances'. (author's italics). The affective as well as the cognitive dimension play a significant role in providing appropriate responses to ever-changing situations. The author further suggests that ***capable*** people have confidence in their ability to 'take effective and appropriate action within unfamiliar and changing circumstances'. Consequently, students need to develop the ability to expect the unexpected, in other words, to be mentally, cognitively and emotionally prepared to react to challenges using the knowledge they possess and the skills they have developed through their learning activities.

Thinking is believed to represent an invisible process instantiated in the mind. Nonetheless, when this process is highlighted in some visible way, it increases students' awareness of the thinking process itself, allowing them to become more independent as they start making make conscious decisions about the thinking they are now able to investigate. Moreover, when thinking is made visible, students inherently understand that it is a key part of the learning process (Tishman & Palmer, 2005). A possible solution for making thinking visible is by means of thinking routines in the form of tools, structures, and patterns of behavior that model the thinking process (Ritchhart, Church & Morrison, 2011).

When developing critical thinking skills, students need to be encouraged to be diplay reasoning capacity and to be reflective. This can be done by providing opportunities to compile new knowledge with previously existing knowledge, by creating logical sequencing of data, expansion patterns and decision making. Also, it is essential that tasks be purpose-driven in the sense that students must see an application to the outcome. Additionally, multiple points of view should be presented on the topics covered, so students can analyse and decide what to believe in.

3. Active and Passive learning

Most of the world is conceptualized inside the human brain as a result of passive and active learning combined. While passive learning derives from being exposed to realities, phenomena, behaviours or mere knowledge, it is active learning that clarifies, expands and deepens our understanding of the afore mentioned realities. One question arises: should teachers allow students to explore concepts and subsequently offer instruction, or should the teaching occur first and then let students actively explore? The following chart offers a crystalised view of the question with its associated challenges:

Passive learning first	**Active learning first**
Knowledge, cognitive input provided	Teacher provides prompts, schematics for experiments
Tasks- completed by students	Students explore solutions, test them, refine experiment, ask questions, investigate
Evaluation + feedback	Students conceptualise, formulate thesis-abstractisation of experimental data
Students do not take active charge to research concepts further	Students research further to validate/ falsify assumptions, disseminate results, ask more questions, engage in peer discussions and debates, promote the experience
	Students seek to replicate the experience in the future

While it might seem obvious that all instructors desire to have students who are keen on active learning, i.e. students who ask questions, challenge norms and investigate further, research indicates that active learning may not be made possible or is rendered irrelevant in the absence of passive learning (Grabinger & Dunlap: 1995; Markant & Gureckis: 2014). The assumption made by students who have not been provided with input is that they will either freeze and not know how to approach the task since they have not been provided with background knowledge. Markant & Gureckis (2014) demonstrate how active exploration was particularly ineffective when there are discrepancies between the target concept and previously existing hypotheses. In other words, students become active learners when the passive input is sufficient to convey deep understanding of the concept and/ or task to a level that triggers students to take autonomous charge of exploring further. In fact, work carried out by Thai (2015) argues in favour of receiving passive instruction prior to performing active classifications as this has the potential to uplift perceptual classification learning and abstractisation. To the technical English teacher, the challenge remains how to select appropriately calibrated input in a way that will provide sufficient baseline knowledge to act as foundation for perceptual classification while steering away from the temptation of providing too much cognitive input that would paralyse students' initiative to research further and thus trigger active learning. Addionally, when relevant cognitive input is offered first, we believe it would allow technical students to optimize the selection of appropriate proof, examples, and questions during active learning and increase their overall learning performance.

When active learning precedes passive learning it gradually expands understanding from the level of experiment to the level of hypothesis, from the concrete to the abstract, which is a valuable tool in technical language instruction. This, in turn, creates the challenge of generating the right examples to falsify the learner's current hypothesis in a way that encourages them to try multiple solutions and test them until a thesis can be extracted from the experimental content. When active learning occurs first, it has been noticed to encourage students in generating improved attention span and memorisation strategies, which can then be put to good use during passive learning activities.

In defense of the approach in which active learning precedes passive instruction, researchers such as Westermann & Rummel (2012) dwell on the concept of *productive failure* and demonstrate that creating particular learning situations in which students are forced to struggle with a task (problem solving, critical thinking) can yield better outcomes for subsequent instruction. In problem-solving situations, failure to produce a solution immediately behaves as an activator of creativity, self-reliance and motivation booster. In a way, this approach is similar to throwing children at the deep end to force them to learn how to swim. Barbaric as it may seem, it is in the presence of adversity that the human brain and body perform at their best. Instinctive resources start to surface, the adrenaline creates a multitude of alternatives in the process of solution seeking and the validation provided by succes generates the desire to replicate the situation in the future.

4. Raising awareness of students' own learning strategies

Though language classes are presumed to be focused on the development of information and communication skills, there is a fair degree of reasoning, self-management and interpersonal skills that are developed as well. During technical English classes, it is even more prevalent to use deduction, problem-solving and reasoning to expand knowledge and improve performance especially as most of the topics approached are hyper-specialised and they are used as core data for increasingly complex structures of knowledge. Since the ability to use existing information to solve problems and make decisions is highly valued in the results-oriented world of today (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011) there is stringent need for a shift towards emphasizing critical thinking in education.

Critical thinking is often applied to real world language use in students' personal lives and in whatever discipline they choose to follow (Brookhart, 2010). In actual fact, a large proportion of employers claim that, in recent years, among the most valuable skills they have been looking for in potential employees is the capacity to think critically and independently (Taylor, 2010). As we are preparing technical students to join the labour market, language classes should be aimed at developing more than mere linguistic competence and performance. Through carefully selected activities language students can learn to develop mechanisms of questioning and expanding knowledge, finding relevance and transfer opportunities, pairing cognitive with the metacognitive.

In raising awareness of one's learning strategies, students are oblivious of how they should reflect on their working/learning strategies. In helping technical students become more knowledgeable about which factors can increase their productivity and learning outcomes as well as what are the ways in which they can transition from passive to active learning, we have devised a self-observation chart that aims at clarifying which aspects of learning students are currently experiencing and which aspects they can improve if their goal is to learn more efficiently.

The self-observation chart below derived from closely analysing the most common manifestations of students' learning tribulations and the factors that might hinder the acquisition of knowledge and the performance of skill. It has also drawn inspiration from Report Cards that are used in some Canadian schools and in most British schools for all levels of education to provide teacher-student or teacher-parent feedback on the academic performance of students in class. In transforming a report card into a self-observation chart for university students the aim was to make students aware of what criteria are used for evaluating learning performance and use these criteria for building improved learning styles that may render optimized learning outcomes. In other words, the purpose of the chart is to optimise metacognition and give way to further development of learning skills. Additionally, considering that technical English students rank as adults in terms of age and will soon seek employment in technical communities, the categories to reflect upon also overlap with what employers are looking for in potential employees. Thus, while improving their learning styles, students also get a glimpse into what their working styles are and learn how to improve them as well.

When filling in the self-observation chart, students are advised to consider their ESP class specific behavior rather than their overall performance in the role of students in other related or unrelated classes. Additionally, students are encouraged to analyse their own performance from an outside stance, thus providing an objective perspective on the way in which they operate in class. The categories of interest in this observation chart build gradually from passive learning into active learning, encouraging students to actively reflect on their personal learning styles and on the quality of the learning outcome, while receiving suggestions of what ideally makes them better learners. The suggested categories involve **task completion/work habits**, **use of information, class participation, cooperation with others, goal setting, initiative, independent work, problem solving**. Each category has been approached from the angle of Passive and Active learning, thus allowing students to reflect on the importance of each type of learning, particularly since passive learning strategies set the background for active participation and learning autonomy. Moreover, in the case of dominantly inactive students, it may raise awareness of what they should do next with the information they receive passively as outlined in the chart.

The self-observation chart has been devised for use as follows: each student reads through the categories and ticks the aspects they consider are true for them, after which they reflect on the ones they have not ticked. The next step is to think of why they have not undertaken those actions in the past and how undertaking those in the future might benefit their learning. Students should also be encouraged to reflect on how they might incorporate the sections they have not ticked into future performance in class.

Self-observation chart

An analysis of learning and working styles during Technical English Classes
Instructions: a) Think of yourself in the role of a student. b) Tick the bullets containing information that you consider to be true for you as a student at present. c) Reflect on the categories you have not ticked. Why do they not represent your style of work at present? How could they benefit you if they were true? In what ways can they be made true for you?
Example I have not ticked °*is attentive to details*. It is because I often rush to get things done. If I paid attention to details, my work would be more qualitative. Also, I would spend less time correcting mistakes resulting from rushed work. I should probably tone down my tempo and work more thoroughly.

1. Task completion /work habits

Passive learning	Active learning
o attends regularly and displays punctuality o is attentive to details o understands directions, task instructions o organizes materials and equipment for effective use o chooses and uses materials, technology and equipment correctly, safely o organizes and uses time efficiently (uses planners, schedules, breaks work into manageable sequences)	o completes assignments based on instructions with punctuality and care o begins work promptly (without procrastination) o perseveres with complex projects that require sustained effort o is flexible and adaptable during class o is interested and enthusiastic about homework assignments o manifests creativity in task resolution

2. Use of information

Passive learning	Active learning
o understands, summarises information o gathers information effectively, using a variety of techniques and resources o understands visuals (diagram, schemata, tables, charts) o is interested in the accuracy of the information provided o organizes information logically and manages it effectively o selects appropriate research procedures and uses them effectively o recognizes when assignments and projects	o interprets information and identifies relevance (in what other ways it can be used) o invests consistent effort in interpreting visual material, tries to make sense of it and formulate relevance o analyses all information and alternatives in reaching a conclusion o asks questions to clarify meaning and ensure understanding

would benefit from additional information and identifies the type of information needed o uses information-retrieval technology effectively	o assesses information and ideas and draws relevant conclusions o integrates learning from various other subjects / areas of learning o uses data creatively, recycles concepts, knowledge and applies it to other tasks

3. Class participation

Passive learning	Active learning
o actively listens to ideas mentioned during class, group activities o accepts various roles within the class and group, including leadership and menial roles o takes on work to be done to complete class and group activities or projects o accepts the goals of the class and group, rather than one's individual goals o manifests respect for the ideas of others in the class and group o recognizes contributions of group members through encouragement, support, or praise o accepts responsibility for personal behavior/reactions	o Actively participates in class and group activities o manifests interest in working with new groups o actively contributes to cooperative problem solving o tries to motivate others and encourages others to participate o communicates well with class and group members o contributes information and ideas to the class and group o questions the ideas of the group to seek clarification or agreement o supports ideas and observations of the group with facts and details o paraphrases points of view to help understanding o seeks consensus before making decisions o works to resolve difficulties encountered during an activity o carries out decisions.

4. Cooperation with peers

Passive learning	Active learning
o follows classroom procedures o listens to, acknowledges differing opinions o respects the rights, property, and opinions of others o shares resources, materials, and equipment with others o responds to and is sensitive to the needs and welfare of others	o willingly engages in working with others o assumes responsibilities in groups, the classroom, and the school o helps others, takes turns, volunteers o takes into consideration the immediate and long-term effects of their actions on others o engages in cooperative work and social interaction with others o establishes positive relationships with peers

	o takes into consideration differing opinions

5. Goal setting

Passive learning	Active learning
o Identifies personal and group goals o sets appropriate criteria for assessing work o identifies specific steps or actions needed to reach goals or to improve o identifies strengths and areas for improvement in own work o revises goals or steps and strategies when necessary o accepts comments on performance from others and carefully weighs them	o uses identified criteria to assess work o assesses one's own work o evaluates own success in reaching goals o perseveres to achieve goals o identifies and pursues goals independently o uses peer review to improve work and monitor learning

6. Initiative

Passive learning	Active learning
o accepts new tasks o wants to learn more o manifests curiosity about phenomena, objects and events o identifies problems to solve o approaches new learning situations with confidence	o seeks new opportunities for learning o generates questions to deepen understanding o takes on challenges, responds to challenges and takes risks o observes, questions, and explores o initiates search of new information in additional resources, investigates and obtains information independently o is not afraid to conduct experiments o develops original ideas and innovative procedures o seeks assistance when necessary o attends co-curricular activities

7. Independent work

Passive learning	Active learning
o accepts and understands working protocols/ routines o uses planners to organize time effectively	o works efficiently without supervision o persists with challenging tasks o deploys working protocols/ routines without supervision o identifies and pursues learning goals and tasks independently o selects learning materials, resources, and activities independently o explores, selects, and uses a variety of learning strategies

8. Problem solving

Passive learning	Active learning
o approaches problems using logic o chooses appropriate materials and equipment to solve problems o analyses previous solutions to similar problems o makes associations between various domains of knowledge in solving problems	o uses analysis to clarify problems o devises a plan to solve the problem and carries out the plan o records the process and the results o checks the solutions / results o evaluates the plan, solution, or result o solves problems independently o devises alternative solutions or ways of solving a problem o applies successful strategies to new problems o develops original ideas and creative approaches to solve problems

5. Conclusion

At the very core of professional success in the current society stands the ability to learn. With increasingly rapid changes in the work place dynamics, parly due to the rapid growth of technology and as a result of changing societal needs in a new and globalised world, students are faced with the need learn how to learn so that they are able to enter and maintain their participation on the employment stage and in civil society. The need for becoming competitive in the work environment starts with becoming self-competitive and develop one's professional persona during academic years. Post-communist education has been moving in the direction of building structures for self-development that students can rely on in their subsequent professional lives. In other words, educators are becoming aware and are raising awareness in their students of the necessity for continual development that is able to aid any individual in transcending from academia to the labour market. The limited perpective of an educator faced with the challenge of activating students during Technical english classes has been captured in the form of the current study, relying on the reflection of daily challenges posed by students who prefer to remain passive and hope that the knowledge acquired will suffice them in becoming active workers one day. Therefore, the goal of the current paper has been to identify the components of learning and how they can be converted into skill, along with raising the awareness of what students are actually engaging in during learning and how they could further develop active participation. During techical English classes, students often find themselves intimidated by the apparent difficulty of the subject. The self-observation chart constructed above is aimed at increasing students' metacognition and providing them with aid as to how they can further their understanding of technical terminology and concepts with the tools of curiosity, further research, problem-solving, initiative and group collaboration.

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Involving Young People in Democratic Decisions: Consultation Mechanisms and Opportunities

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Abstract:
The paper explores how young people can be involved in decision-making and democratic life. Through consultation mechanisms, young people can contribute to policy formulation and community development.
The paper addresses the context and importance of consulting young people in decision-making, the concept of consultation and types of consultation. It explores the tools and methods used to consult young people and highlights the role of institutions and organizations in consulting young people. The paper identifies obstacles in the consultation process and proposes solutions to remove or reduce these barriers.
Involving young people in democratic life is essential for building a fair and progressive society. It is important that public authorities, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions work together to ensure accessibility and transparency in consultation processes. Young people must be informed and encouraged to exercise their democratic rights.

Keywords: *decision-making process, democratic life, transparency, consultation mechanisms*

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Introduction:

The active participation of young people in decision-making and implementation of actions at local and regional level is crucial for building more tolerant and prosperous democratic societies. Involvement in the democratic life of a community means much more than simply exercising the right to vote. Active citizenship and participation implies the provision of mechanisms for action by decision-makers as well as their use by citizens: the support needed to influence decisions and engage in actions that contribute to the development of a better society must be provided by the state, the exercise of rights, the effective use of means, space and ethical access to opportunities for participation are the responsibility of young citizens and beyond.

Local and regional authorities, being closest to young people, have a key role to play in promoting their participation. They can ensure that young people not only hear or learn about democracy and citizenship, but also have the opportunity to practise it effectively. It is essential that young people are able to influence and shape decisions and actions from a young age, not just later in life, to ensure meaningful and continuous participation.

Young people account for 15.80% of Romania's population, the EU average being 16.20%, and the country with the most young people being Cyprus with 19.80% (https://www.zf.ro/special/tinerii-reprezinta-mai-putin-de-16-din-populatia-romaniei-in-22374765). This percentage proves the high representation of young people in Romania's population, citizens with unique perspectives and specific needs, and reinforces the belief that the participation of young people in democratic decision-making is essential. Their involvement ensures the diversity of society.

In addition, young people bring new ideas and innovative solutions to current problems. They are often more open to change and have a vision shaped by the adoption of new technologies. The benefits of participation lie in their personal development by developing leadership skills, critical thinking and civic responsibility. Young people involved today will become tomorrow's leaders who ensure the continuity and sustainability of participatory democracy.

The importance of youth participation is complemented by the conclusion that policies that take young people's voices into account are better tailored to meet the needs of all citizens, contributing to more effective and equitable governance.

Research methodology:

In order to realize this material we started with a research of national legislation in the field of youth participation.

The primary legislation, the basis of the regulations for participation in general, is the Law no. 52/2003 on the transparency of decision-making in public administration and the Methodological Norms for the application of Law no. 52/2003 on the transparency of decision-making in public administration, of 27.06.2022.

The purpose of Law 52/2003 is regulated in Article 1, paragraph 2, letter b) and refers to the involvement of active participation of citizens in the process of administrative decision-making and in the process of drafting normative acts. Other regulations contained in the aforementioned law refer to the procedure of public consultations. Thus, the drafting of a draft normative act is preceded by the publication by the issuer, at least 30 working days before the submission of the draft for approval, of a notice of the intention to draft the normative act and a period of at least 10 calendar days to receive in writing proposals, suggestions or opinions on the draft normative act

(Law 53/2003). This procedure is known as public debate, which ensures the right to free expression of any interested citizen.

Article 2, letter a) of the above mentioned law stipulates a principle on the basis of which the law is implemented and which regulates that the information of persons must be provided in advance, ex officio, on issues of public interest to be debated by the central and local public administration authorities, as well as on draft normative acts. This principle represents the point of analysis of the regulations contained in another law, namely Law 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest (Romanian Parliament), as well as in the Methodological Norms for the application of Law 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest of 07.02.2002 (Romanian Government. Art. 3 of Law 544/2001 regulates the obligation of public authorities and institutions to provide access to information of public interest ex officio or upon request, through the public relations department or the person designated for this purpose.

Youth Law 350/2006 (Romanian Parliament) defines young people as citizens between 14 and 35 years of age to whom a number of principles of participation are respected and applicable, as reflected in the provisions of ert.4): ensuring the participation of young people in the decisions that concern them, including in the drafting, promotion and implementation of youth policies, in particular through non-governmental youth and youth structures; increasing the participation of young people in public life and encouraging them to assume individual or group responsibilities; supporting and guiding young people to participate actively in the economic, educational and cultural life of the country

Thus, since 2001 there has been a legal framework for citizens to be legally informed and, on the basis of this information, to participate actively in the democratic life of society, and since 2006 there has been a youth law that establishes the principle of participation as the basis for the exercise of certain rights.

Compliance with the legal provisions of the above-mentioned normative acts is ensured by the General Secretariat of the Government, which annually draws up a Report on compliance with these legislations.

As a research method we also used data analysis of these reports.

Data for a completed calendar year is collected in the middle of the next year. Thus for the year 2023, data has just been collected and there is not yet a report, and data for the year 2022 is contained in a report available at https://sgg.gov.ro/1/transparenta-decizionala-monitorizare/.

According to him, the data contained in Annex 7 of the Methodological Norms for the implementation of Law no. 52/2003 on the transparency of decision-making in public administration were collected from 93 authorities and institutions of central and local public administration, respectively:

Year	**INSTITUTIONS**	**No.**
2022	Ministry	10
	County Councils	31
	Municipalities	52

- Appraisals of own work in the field of transparency in decision-making;
- Available resources on transparency in decision-making,
- Working with specialized directorates
- Partnership with citizens and their legally constituted associations

- Data on the process of drafting normative acts
- How to announce draft legislative acts
- Relations with civil society
- Status of recommendations received and public debate meetings
- Data on decision-making

The report highlights that central authorities, i.e. ministries, have a very good partnership with citizens and their associations, in contrast to local authorities, which rate the partnership as good.

As regards the consultation process, in 2022, 11,912 normative acts were adopted and 9,583 of them were subject to public consultation on the institutions' own websites or at the issuer's premises.

143 people working in public administration have specific public information and communication tasks, and they are responsible for 1,567 of the 127,000 associations and foundations registered in 2022. A mathematical calculation means 10 associations per 1 person and a percentage of 0.01 of the established associations participating in democratic life.

Following the implementation of the public consultation process and citizens' participation with proposals, 2022 saw

Recommendations	3.472
Recommendations introduced in draft legislation	24,34%
Organized public meetings	2.653
Number of civil society participants	11.288
Number of media participants	1.473

These data prove that the percentage of civil society participation in Romania is extremely low.

A study published by Eurobarometer 2007-2022 (European Parliament) shows that in Romania, the socio-demographic trend for citizens to have their voice heard is increasing 15 years after becoming EU citizens by 16% to 36% (2022) from 20% (2007), compared to the EU average increase of 13% from 30% (2007) to 43% (2022)

Romania's average is also higher than the EU average in terms of satisfaction with democracy in the EU, with 16% of Romanian citizens being satisfied with democracy compared to 11% of the EU.

In order to report the degree of implementation of the legislative provisions of Law 544/2001, the General Secretariat of the Government monitored the compliance of public authorities with the standards for displaying public information and the set of information/documents that institutions must publish for the information of citizens included in the National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2016 - 2020 (Romanian Government) and found an improvement of the general situation by increasing the volume of public information displayed in a standardized manner and the frequency of their updating. The initial standards were maintained and included in the National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2021 - 2025 (Government of Romania), and the General Secretariat of the Government *monitored and evaluated the application by public authorities and institutions of the legal provisions on free access to information of public interest in public administration,* according to the regulations set out in Art 3. Paragraph 1 point 5 letter e of the Government Decision no. 137/2020 on the organization, functioning and attributions of the General Secretariat of the Government (Government of Romania).

During 2023, 582 websites of public institutions were monitored nationwide:

Ministry	21
institutions, authorities and agencies of the central public administration subordinated to or coordinated by ministries	126
autonomous central authorities and institutions	27
prefect's institutions	42
county councils	41
Mayors of municipalities and cities at national level	325

The monitoring involved verifying the compliance of institutional websites with a number of 25 legal indicators included in the National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2021 - 2025, of which we list those that are relevant to the subject of the study: Name of the person responsible for receiving requests based on Law no. 544/2001, contact details, models of request and complaint forms; Decision-making transparency, including Annual Report Law no. 52/2003 (previous year); Institutional integrity.

The results of the monitoring revealed the existence of deficiencies with regard to the following data relevant to the present study: annual report Law no. 544/2001; annual report Law no. 52/2003; Institutional Integrity section.

The analysis of the 2 reports (General Secretariat of the Government) on the implementation of the legislation in the field of participation has outlined a series of recommendations based on the points to be improved.

Thus, starting from the difficulties reported in the public consultation process: absenteeism, disinterest, dissatisfaction and lack of initiative, lack of understanding of the role of public debates on draft legislation, low degree of involvement of civil society and citizens, the reporting public institutions have proposed a series of measures to improve the aspects considered important to increase the efficiency of public consultations:

- Direct and more effective means of communication and consultation;
- Simplifying consultation procedures by using modern means of communication;
- Improved inter-institutional communication;
- Continuous training of public administration staff in the application of Law 52/2003;

Legal ways for young people to participate in democratic decisions

Citizens' participation in solving local problems of particular interest implies their involvement in the management of decisions and service provision (Public Participation Resource Center, 2006:10).

Participatory democracy aims to bring decisions as close as possible to the beneficiaries, who are informed and consulted on how to manage public authority and resources.Following the dialog between authorities and citizens, to the extent possible, the suggestions of the latter are integrated into government interventions, thus aiming to meet the needs of local communities (Voican: 2008:8).

The terminology used in the sphere of encouraging citizens' participation in solving local problems of particular interest is wide-ranging and includes various formulations such as: The principle of citizen consultation; The right to obtain information of public interest; Consultation with beneficiaries; Collective consultation; Consultation of interest holders/stakeholders/beneficiaries; Consultation of direct/immediate/key beneficiaries; Citizens' access to information of public interest; Dialogue with citizens;i Civil dialogue; Citizens' participation in decision-making; Public participation in decision-making; Transparency of decision-making; Public debates; Negotiations with employers and professional/industry trade unions....; Referendum; Plebiscite; Participatory democracy, etc.

All these names are also ways of involving citizens in the democratic decision-making process. This process involves three stages leading to effective participation:

Stage 1. Informing the citizen. This stage has a legal basis in a series of normative acts: the Constitution, art.31, which recognizes the individual's right to information; Law no. 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest which defines the right to information as access to any information of public interest and outlines a series of rights and obligations for public administration authorities. Thus public authorities are obliged to ensure that citizens are correctly informed about the following two elements: public affairs and matters of personal interest. And the only restriction on the exercise of the right to information is that it must not jeopardize national security and measures to protect young people. The right to information is thus considered a fundamental right of the individual which is regarded as essential to life, liberty and dignity, being indispensable for the free development of the human personality. The exercise of the right of free access to information implies the obligation of the authorities to provide information to citizens. Thus, according to Law no. 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest, free and unrestricted access of individuals to information of public interest is outlined as a fundamental principle of relations between individuals and public authorities (Parliament of Romania, 2001:544). Access to information of public interest (Gîrleșteanu, 2011) will be realized by the competent public authorities or institutions in two ways: ex officio or at the request of individuals (Romanian Parliament, 2001:544).

In compliance with these provisions, the citizen has access to ex officio information (including the institution's Activity Report) and information on request.

Stage 2. Citizens are *consulted* on both national and local issues through:

Hearings: Local elected officials (local/county councilors, mayor, deputy mayor, county council president and vice president) are required by law to hold hearings and present information to the City/County Council on issues raised by citizens. A hearing is a meeting, an interview given to a requesting citizen by a person holding a responsible position, such as a local elected official. The hearing meeting is held in a restricted setting, usually at the public official's office at the public institution

Quarterly meetings: citizen meetings are one of the ways elected officials can identify the needs of citizens in the community. That is why local elected officials are required to organize regular, at least quarterly, citizen meetings. The citizens' meeting is an informal meeting to discuss specific citizens' problems or ongoing or planned projects in the locality or neighborhood.

Public debates on draft administrative acts: Consultation through public debates is a mandatory step in the process of adopting administrative acts as instruments for public policy making and administrative decisions. The purpose of consultations is to create the framework for dialog in which citizens provide feedback on public policy options at various stages of the decision-making process. The procedure for carrying out consultations on draft legislative acts is described in Article 6 of Law No 52/2003 and refers to the obligation to publicize and organize procedures for consulting citizens in the process of drafting legislative acts, with the relevant deadlines.

Citizens' participation in local council meetings: as a form of achieving participatory democracy, the publicity of the meetings of the legislative bodies, the two chambers of the Parliament and the local and county councils, respectively, aims, on the one hand, to make the decision-making and legislative process more transparent and, on the other hand, to enable citizens to become co-participants in solving the problems of the nation, respectively of the local communities. If the rule is the publicity of the meetings, by exception to this rule, the law limits citizens' access to the meetings in which national security and safety policy issues or other data expressly provided for by Law no. 52/2003 are debated.

Referendum: Referendum is the consultation process by which citizens are asked to vote "YES" or "NO" on the issue subject to referendum, deciding by a majority of valid votes cast. The legal act governing the referendum is Law 3/2000 on the organization and conduct of referendums.

Stage 3. Active participation materializes through:

Advocacy: The root of the word advocacy comes from the word advocate and means to plead, and the advocate is the ambassador and supporter of a cause. Advocacy campaigns aim to solve the problem facing members of the community. The target of the advocacy campaign is the authorities who have the power to solve that problem. In order to achieve their objectives, citizen organizations need to go through several steps in an advocacy campaign:• Clearly formulating the purpose and objectives of the campaign;• Communicating externally through clear, keyworded messages;• Identifying stakeholders/ stakeholders and building alliances;• Establishing the techniques and steps to be followed.

Legislative initiative at national and local level: the legislative initiative is that form of realization of participatory democracy that allows citizens to participate in the decision-making process by formulating proposals for draft laws and resolutions of local or county councils. The exercise of the local legislative initiative is regulated by the Administrative Code O.U.G. no. 57/2019. which allows citizens to provoke the triggering of the decision-making procedure and to propose normative acts themselves.

Partnership: As one of the most recent trends in promoting participatory democracy, the establishment of partnership aims to bring together in a common framework the diverse conflicting interests of local, regional or national stakeholders to find solutions to local needs and priorities (UNDP, 2002). Partnership is defined as a group of actors/organizations that have come together to address issues of common concern, where all partners, using their skills, experience and resources, can contribute to development (Andersson, 2006:16-17).

Although there are these legally regulated ways that offer young people the possibility to get involved in democratic life, statistics show that, on the participation component, Romania is among the group of EU Member States with the lowest level of participation of young people in activities organized by different groups and clubs. Nearly one third, 32% of young people stated that they participate in at least one activity, such as: sports clubs; youth, leisure or any kind of youth organization; cultural organization; local organization active in the local community; political organization or political party; human rights or global development organization; environmental or climate change organization; any other non-governmental organization (European Commission, 2023)

Compared to the EU average, Romania has lower levels of youth participation in all types of activities. The biggest differences were found in the activities of sports clubs, with a share of 62% - 26th place, cultural organizations, with a share of 47% - 20th place, and local organizations active in the community, with a share of 46% - 23rd place.

Civic activism, as measured by membership in non-governmental organizations - foundations, associations, remains modest. According to BOPT data, it amounted to 8% in 2018, almost double the level in 2016, and 13% in 2020.

When it comes to participation in decision-making, young people's assessments remain predominantly negative: 39% believe that they cannot influence decisions at local level and 45% believe that they cannot influence decisions at central level, compared to 25% who believe that they can influence decisions at local level and 27% at national level (Ministry of Youth and Sport, 2021)

According to another study conducted in 2024 on young people in Romania and around the world, young Romanians also engage in other forms of civic and political participation: signing an online petition (29% have participated in such an activity), participating in demonstrations (20%), volunteering in NGOs (32%), joining a political party or political group (10%), boycotting products for political or environmental reasons (21%) or participating in online political activities (17%) (Freidrich Ebert Stiftung, 2024).

Young voters: In addition to these methods known and analyzed in the legislation and specialized doctrine, young people are recognized the right to vote, which they exercise from the age of 18. Article 36 of the Constitution provides for the right to vote, but not the corresponding obligation. This is why the turnout of young people at different types of elections varies. Thus, compared to the 2020 elections, in the 2024 parliamentary elections, the turnout of young people was a third higher, but 7% below the national average. The reasons for the below country average were:

- 51% do not consider themselves civically engaged
- 76% have little or no confidence in democracy,
- 95% say they have little or no trust in political parties.

Conclusion

By corroborating all the studies, questionnaires, legislative provisions and reports monitoring compliance with laws in the field of participatory democracy, we conclude that, in a democratic society, tools for young people to be legally involved in decision-making exist, but they are used with reluctance and distrust.

Understanding what motivates or hinders young people to participate in civic activities, as well as their attitudes towards society and politics, is key to designing initiatives to promote more active citizenship and an essential aspect of developing youth-friendly policies.

The Romanian Government's National Youth Strategy 2024-2027 proposes a series of activities and measures that foresee the following outcomes in terms of youth participation:

- The legislative and institutional framework in the field of youth policies adjusted and harmonized. The outcome aims at improving the regulatory framework for youth policies, youth foundations and clarifying the situation of youth assets. In addition, the result aims to strengthen the administrative capacity to manage youth policies, develop the IT infrastructure, increase the quality of services and diversify services. Financial support mechanisms, support for the participation of youth organizations in accessing funding and information campaigns on projects and funding opportunities are also envisaged in order to achieve the outcome.

- Increased level of social and individual responsibility. Within this outcome, the focus is on promoting health and health education, preventing and combating violence of all kinds, trafficking in human beings and risk behaviors, and empowering young people to act as agents of change for sustainable and environmentally friendly development.

- Increased degree of participation of youth organizations in accessing and implementing national and European programmes. Within this outcome, the focus is on developing volunteering, increasing opportunities and forms of participation in decision-making, representation and increasing the capacity to get involved in youth projects.

- Increased level of active involvement of young people in public life. Improved digital competences. The outcome emphasizes measures that contribute to supporting and encouraging young people's participation in public life as well as those that contribute to the development of digital skills needed for digital transformation and cybersecurity. (Government of Romania, 2024). National Youth Strategy 2024-2027)

Considering that young people are the future, and that in Romania they represent 15.8% of the country's population, their participation not only enriches the democratic process, but also contributes to the development of a more inclusive and dynamic society.

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The resistance of totalitarian mentalities and some difficulties of the rule of law construction in the Romanian cultural and political space

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Abstract:
After the fall of the communist regimes, Romania and the Republic of Moldova adopted constitutional frameworks inspired by the Western post-war constitutional model, a model that had been built as a reaction against Nazism, i.e. to normatively counteract the objective social hierarchies, conceived as natural frameworks of legitimate domination. As a result, Western constitutional systems focused on equality, even if they remain pluralistic at the level of constitutive principles. However, their imitation by the post-communist systems, which broke away from regimes that exacerbated equality, created a major problem for the new European democracies: objective law itself generates institutional reactions directed against individual freedom, social elites and their pluralistic structure, private property and economic freedom, which apparently cannot be understood as a guarantee of political freedom. They also lead to major dysfunctions in the political structure of society in terms of the relationship between state law and the self-regulation of the market economy. The basic structural conditions of liberal societies and legal systems are thus called into question. Starting from this general framework of analysis of post-communist constitutional systems, this study will show how the fundamental norms of our states or the interpretation given to them should be refocused in order to stimulate pluralism, the effective protection of private property and economic freedom.

Keywords: *pluralism, liberal democracies, social state, rule of law, welfare state, economic freedom, presumption of lawful acquisition of wealth.*

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The resistance of totalitarian mentalities and some difficulties of the rule of law construction in the Romanian cultural and political space

A. The pluralism of constitutive principles in liberal democracies and its constitutional transposition

Twentieth-century totalitarianisms theorized and practiced ideological monism. Their legal systems turned a doctrine considered as the only true one into norms and eliminated all others from the basic structure of society, that is, in their capacity as the foundation of the political and, consequently, of the state and its law. This monism was built against modern liberal political theories, which advocated the need for ideological pluralism – moral and comprehensive – and a fundamental pluralistic structure of society. Liberal society and its political organization must be pluralistic, which means that pluralism "is not a mere historical condition that must quickly disappear; on the contrary, it is [...] a permanent feature of the public culture of modern democracies" (Rawls, 1993: 251). Consensus cannot therefore have as its object, in modern liberal democracy, the ideological basis of society. Democracy is based precisely on the questioning of this basis. Consensus, when it has such an object, can only lead to totalitarianism. What John Rawls proposed then seems logical: consensus can only result on the basis of ideas that are common to comprehensive doctrines. It results in an intersectional consensus, which "exists in a society when the political view of justice that governs its basic institutions is accepted by each of the comprehensive, moral, philosophical and religious doctrines that have been lasting in that society over generations" (Rawls, 1993: 245-283). This consensus is primarily procedural. Everyone agrees that we can disagree, as long as we agree to settle our conflicts peacefully. And this regardless of the form that violence might take. The fair procedure of balancing the pluralistic society is called democracy. It is not a doctrine, which eliminates other doctrines, but a dialectical balancing of all doctrines.

The constitutional law of liberal democracies ensures the peaceful coexistence of social structures which promote various conceptions of the good society. It is equidistant to parties, to religious cults, to economic structures, to employers, unions, etc. For the liberal state, pluralism is a condition and a guarantee of the freedom that it is obliged to guarantee to its subjects. At the constitutional level, the priority of the just over the good means that the procedures for judging the fair balancing of the conceptions of the good are, from the point of view of the constitution of the legal order, logically prior to the judgment of the substance of the rules which transpose one or another view of the good society.

Such a political society is pluralistic at all its levels, including the one of the constitutive principles. The constitutional system of liberal democracies is necessarily founded on several principles, themselves in a dialectical balance, which weigh each other (Dworkin, 1985) according to the circumstances that particularize the basic structure of the given society, without being able to eliminate each other. As a rule, the principles used to find a modern liberal democracy are freedom, equality and solidarity. A society based excessively on individual freedom will create ever greater inequalities, therefore, in order to achieve social justice, equality must be revalued through some form of redistribution of goods and social benefits. If equality is exacerbated, in order to achieve a just society, individual freedom must be revalued, by building mechanisms of differentiation, by understanding equality as a right to difference, etc. In the just society, "all other principles operating at the level of society must be subordinated to this ideal of justice. Only in this way can justice play the role of binder of all other principles and, at the same time, of their regulatory principle, by limitation. It therefore has a positive role, because it ensures social cohesion, and a negative one, because it ensures that none of the other principles will become predominant." (Dogaru, Dănişor & Dănişor 1999: 78)

When the peoples of the former popular 'democracies' revolutionized the political and, consequently, constitutional system, they tended to return, in opposition to egalitarian totalitarianism, to the liberal pluralistic regime sketched above. But, for this return to be effective, they had to balance the excessive equality imposed by this form of totalitarianism and the solidarity that no longer allowed difference, by establishing a constitutional framework based - not exclusively, but predominantly - on individual freedom. This oppositional privileging of freedom as a constitutive principle over equality and solidarity was not transposed into post-communist constitutions. The first cause is the misunderstanding of the fact that moral and comprehensive pluralism is a condition for the existence of a just society. The monist mentality had a much greater degree of resistance than in the societies that opposed Nazi totalitarianism. Most people in post-communist societies still fail to understand a society which, having several foundations, seems to have none any longer. They have the nostalgia of unity. The second cause is mimetism. If, about the socialist statist systems, it could be justly said that they were not located to the left, but to the East, about the post-totalitarian ones it can be said that they are not oriented to the right, but to the West. As a result, the new post-communist democracies were tempted to copy the constitutions of Western states and focus, like them, on equality and solidarity.

The constitutional framework of post-revolutionary Romania and independent Moldova was no exception. The constitutions in the Romanian cultural space are, consequently, today centred around unity, equality and solidarity. Liberty is hardly detectable as a constitutional principle in these constitutions. Thus, in the Constitution of Romania, art. 4, which imposes the foundation of the state, mentions the unity of the people, instead of the indivisibility of the legal order in relation to the subjects, imposes the solidarity of citizens as the foundation of the state and establishes as a founding principle equality as non-differentiation in relation to the criteria of affiliation to the primary identification groups, but it does not include any rule that imposes difference or freedom as the foundation of the state. Apart from a reference to the free development of human personality, within art. 1(3), which imposes, also in continuation of a philosophy built against liberalism, supreme values, instead of principles (Dănişor, 2022: 33-49), no provision in the title on the general principles of the Romanian Constitution refers to freedom. The systemic problem that the Constitution had to remedy in 1991 was the identity imposed by communism and the equality that prevented freedom from existing, which would have imposed a principled valorization of freedom, meant to ensure the differentiation of people based on merit and the (re)creation of social elites, which can ensure the pluralistic structuring of the new society. Thus, acting at the constitutional level, Romania slowed down, if not missed, the process of establishing pluralism, which should be, as the Constitution itself states, a condition and a guarantee of constitutional democracy.

The difficulties of structuring the party system in the Romanian cultural space are also due to the normative exacerbation of equality in a system that wants to get rid of too much equality, even if some additional causes (Dănişor, 2009a: 9-17) are brought to this paradoxical structuring of the principle base of society. The Romanian political parties mimic the pluralistic structuring on the cleavages typical of the West, which our society cannot make functional, and are centred, at most, around some conjunctural alternative government programmes, but not around different ideologies. They are all, like the constitution, egalitarian, unitarist, therefore centralist and located to the west, never to the right. As a result, democracy is conceived as a doctrine, not as a procedure of fair arbitration between doctrines, and its dialectical mechanisms are perceived as generators of disorder, not as guarantees of freedom. The state is necessarily unitary, this form that excludes pluralism from the legal order being non-revisable (Dănişor, 2018a: 17-43), and the separation of powers is understood rather as a dysfunction, which prevents the state from being effective, than as a guarantee of freedom (Dănişor, 2009a: 9-17).

The state governed by the rule of law, i.e. what should be the system of fair means of guaranteeing human rights, even against democratic political power, is perceived as an adversary of the power of the people, which affects its sovereignty, and when it is required by international treaties, usually of the Council of Europe and the European Union, it is perceived as a system of external domination, as a new kind of imperialism, which affects the independence of the state (Dănişor, 2017a: 9-28). The distortion of the understanding and normative function of the rule of law is accentuated by its transformation into a “social” state governed by the rule of law, which presupposes a dominance of substance over form, of the unity built by merging people into a society based on a substantial doctrine against the fair dialectic of procedural arbitration between doctrines. This type of rule of law focuses on the idea of derogating from *formal* equality to ensure real equality, an idea that had been central to Marxism and consequently to communist regimes. The outcome is the temptation to slide, more or less subtly, from the social state governed by the rule of law to the socialist state and from ensuring real equality of opportunities to imposing material equality. Hence the resistance of the institutional reluctance to private property, still perceived as necessarily constituted by the theft of values that naturally belong to the people, in order to satisfy the selfish needs of some, and the perception of those who have made wealth as presumed thieves, who must prove that they are innocent and that their private property is not theft. The economy, regulated as “market” economy by the Romanian Constitution, is in tension between the self-regulation of the markets and the need for state intervention to ensure real equality, through a redistribution that, under the conditions described above, can only be disproportionate. Economic freedom is so undermined by this substantification of democracy and socialization of the state, which no longer seems to be able to be political (the exact character that was denied to it by Marxist theory, which would have wanted a social state, in which the political and legal superstructure was to disappear), so that even more than 30 years after the Revolution, we still have more employees in the public sector than in the market economy, and the state distorts the self-regulation of the markets on a daily basis.

To correct these tendencies, imprinted on the system by a problem-centred constitutional framework, we should interpret the constitutional provisions in a liberal way. Sometimes it happened, as in the case of the interpretation of equality made by the Constitutional Court of Romania, which became “right to difference” (Decision no. 70/1993). But it did not happen very often, and when it did, not as sharply and substantially.

We will address, in the following, from a constructive point of view, three fundamental problems of this constitutional framework and the trends it imprinted on the political and legal system in the space of post-communist Romanian culture: the social state governed by the rule of law, the relations between the generalized welfare state, also called the welfare state, and the market economy and the presumption of lawful acquisition of wealth.

B. The social state governed by the rule of law

In 1991, the Romanian constitution opted for the substantial form of the rule of law - the social state governed by the rule of law, without expressly providing for the liberal character of the state and established through art. 16 of the Constitution equality as a sovereign principle in terms of rights and freedoms, not freedom, a structuring principle that would have enabled the hierarchy of society according to skills and merit, impossible in the previous totalitarian regime.

The option for the social state governed by the rule of law is not, *per se*, risky for the protection of rights and freedoms imposed in the state governed by the rule of law as the goal of law. On the contrary, it involves the correction of the liberal formalist vision on equality, by ensuring not only justice as a formal balance, but social justice, which involves a redistribution of social benefits and a material conception of equality (Dănişor, 2009b: 48), favouring the access of vulnerable subjects to the benefits of public space, even though social assistance and protection measures. In the social state governed by the rule of law, equality "authorizes derogatory discriminations from formal equality, if they ensure equal opportunities for those who are in unequal situations and equal access to some social benefits for those who suffer because of a relevant difference" (Dănişor, 2018b: 666). Differential treatments are imposed, not in an egalitarian way, but so that factual, natural or social inequalities do not impinge on rights, the preservation of the particularities that differentiate the beneficiaries of equality having to be respected (Nica, 2012: 19-28).

What kind of solidarity, how much of it, in favour of whom and for what purpose can the state impose and, correlatively, how far can it push the correction of inequalities, through the establishment of differentiated legal regimes, in order to fulfil its social mission? The answer required by the rule of law is: a solidarity compatible with the modern idea of organic solidarity between different subjects, which cooperate and "contribute, by playing a social role different from that of the others, to the satisfaction of the needs of all" (Dănişor, 2020), without the differences being erased, and not a mechanical solidarity between uniformed subjects, instrumentalized by the group and fully integrated into the community, typical of totalitarianism (Dănişor, 2020); a punctual solidarity, a means, not an end, only if and only to the extent that it is absolutely necessary, as the only solution to ensure the rights of the vulnerable ones who are in a relevantly different situation or made vulnerable by social inequities or injustices, and not to tend to economic equality; (Ionescu & Dumitrescu, 2017: 22); a solidarity that does not result from calculations of social utility (Dănişor, 2018b: 484) and that is not placed at the service of the totality, of the generic public interest, of a good version of society, but of the vulnerable ones, so that equality remains that of opportunities, as equal start and access, excluding restrictive consequences on the rights of the other subjects and which would equalize evenly. The limit of remedying inequalities, through relevantly different legal treatments, is to support the manifestation of freedom. Redistributions due to solidarity cannot create material equality, justice must be activated to balance the excesses of solidarity (Dănişor, 2018b: 302). This type of response is imposed by the demands of equality, including as a right to difference and by art. 53 of the Constitution on the restriction of the exercise of rights and freedoms

(Dănișor, 2008: 3-22) in the state governed by the rule of law: only freedom can limit freedom.

On several occasions, the legislature's answers to the above question, validated by the Constitutional Court (hereinafter, the CCR), did not activate punctual solidarity, to correct excesses of freedom and inequalities that affected access to the benefits of public space and freedom of equal participation in its construction. The social mission of the state was activated with the jeopardy of rights, showing egalitarian tendencies: through the establishment of some obligations of solidarity, we moved towards real equality. For example, the CCR considered, constitutionally, an identical treatment applied to subjects in different situations, which extended the tax norm to non-taxable subjects, in the name of the idea that those who benefit together from an income must be united in terms of tax burdens, regardless of who is the formal holder of the income (Decision no. 49/1994), (Dănișor, 2018b: 300, (Nica, 2013: 71-72). Also, the CCR validated the taxation of pensions for the part that exceeded a certain amount, citing the social state and the fact that such taxation is "a social measure by which the national public budget is increased", which "creates the budgetary possibilities for the corresponding increase in pensions, as well as for ensuring a minimum decent standard of living for all citizens of the country', validating the restriction of the right to a pension in order to ensure the right to a pension and a decent standard of living, without taking into account that the state is legally social and the needs of the national public budget cannot justify the restriction of an earned right (Dănișor, 2009b: 168) (Nica, 2013: 193-194).

The explicit establishment, through the constitutional revision of 2003, of generic legal solidarity between citizens as the foundation of the Romanian state, in art. 4(1) of the Constitution (Dănișor, 2009b: 167), aggravated the risk of sliding from the liberalism of the rule of law to totalitarian manifestations, in which "the transformation of equal opportunities and access due to a balanced redistribution into a material equality" would take place, from "the solidarity that creates a right to those in a situation of vulnerability due to a relevant difference in situation, to a solidarity as obligation", as long as "in the name of legal solidarity between citizens, some will contribute more and others will benefit more. But this inequality is an exception, not a rule. The problem is that in our Constitution it is transformed not only into a rule, but into the foundation of the state" (Dănișor, 2009b: 167).

The problem manifested itself especially in the context and trace of the economic crisis. The spectrum of real equality became visible through the imposition of solidarity; its siren song ("let some contribute more so that others may benefit more") has become audible, echoing the achievement of material equality through solidarity that excuses unjustified discrimination objectively and reasonably. Thus, a legislative proposal of 2010, supported by the Government and rejected in Parliament only in 2012, provided for the restriction of property rights, through taxation, in order to create a solidarity fund for the benefit of "the most disadvantaged categories of the population, primarily pensioners", without respecting the constitutional requirements of the restriction of the exercise of rights (Nica, 2013: 70-71), the rights for which the proposed measure was required not being individualized (Dănișor, 2018b: 285). The totalitarian reflex inclined towards the creation of a good society, in which economic equality prevails over rights.

The siren song was also heard on the occasion of the CCR's invocation of social solidarity [and not the solidarity established by art. 4(1) of the Constitution], in order to validate the reduction of judges' salaries, on the occasion of validating the reduction of salaries of state employees, for the defence of economic security which claimed the restoration of the budget balance and in the context of considering the amount of contributory pensions as impossible to reduce, the Court refusing to analyse it from the perspective of art. 53 of the Constitution. Incorrectly interpreting these provisions, the CCR validated relevant differences in treatment between pensioners and state employees, as well as between state and private employees, whose constitutional character it did not justify from the perspective of the equality requirements established in its own case law (Nica, 2013: 140-149) (Decision no. 872/2010). Economic calculation prevailed. The state transferred the task of finding the most appropriate solution to satisfy the rescue of the economic being of the state onto some subjects on whom it imposed solidarity, restricting their freedom. Solidarity in favour of the instrument – the state, which should have served the purpose – the protection of rights, without relevant unjustified different treatment. The state also evaded the obligation to justify the fairness of the arbitration procedure between the multiple possibly good options for protecting national security, which made the measure unnecessary in a democratic society, as required by art. 53 of the Constitution, whose purpose is freedom (Dănişor, 2017a). Typically totalitarian, priority was given to the good, not the just, to the totality, not to individual rights. In the name of "the future well-being of society, representing, in the last resort, each of the individuals that make it up (...)" (Decision no. 872/2010), the state transformed the subjects whose rights were affected into the saviours of the general interest, invoking solidarity to relieve itself of the role of the right and just saviour.

So that equal opportunities will be achieved through solidarity, and the relevant character of the differences in situation will not impose a different relevant treatment with a uniformization effect, but only with an effect of correction of disproportionate imbalances, it should be analysed in relation to a unitary criterion, which it is not present in the case law of the CCR, including that regarding social protection measures (Dănișor, 2018b: 302) (Nica, 2013: 238-244). In the context of the same economic crisis, the CCR considered, again, that the taxation of the part of the pensions that exceeded a certain amount, exempt from tax, respected equality and the fair settlement of fiscal burdens. Solidarity was activated in favour of the right to health protection, through unequal treatment, against rights also depending on an effort of solidarity (Nica, 2013: 180, 193-197), tending towards equalization.

The misunderstanding of interventionism in the social state was translated into the principle terms of the CCR as follows: "the degree of intensity of these interventionist measures may differ depending on the political vision and the economic conditions of the state at a given moment", the purpose of the social state being "to ensure both the economic and social well-being of citizens, as well as social cohesion, without denying the right of the public authorities to establish the concrete conditions for the achievement of this desideratum" (Decision no. 1594/2011), (Decision no. 785/2019), (Muraru & Tănăsescu). Public authorities do not have rights, but powers; their exercise, regardless of desiderata, is subject, in the state governed by the rule of law, to the protection of rights, not to arbitrariness, nor to the egalitarian spirit, nor to the primacy of the economic over the legal. Social cohesion excludes the imposition of solidarity that fails in real equality: to impose equality, insofar as it is not natural, would be to institute discrimination (Decision no. 107/1995).

To interpret the social state governed by the rule of law and solidarity as allowing restrictions of rights outside the liberal constitutional framework and economic equalization to be reached through arbitrary, insufficiently justified differences in treatment or based on differences in situation whose relevance is not clear attests, if not that the spectrum of real equality still haunts the Romanian state, at least the insufficient assimilation of liberalism and the mechanisms of the rule of law meant to safeguard freedom. Not excessive, but freedom. It remains one of the ideals of the 1989 Revolution, in the spirit of which, following the 2003 revision, art. 1(3) of the Constitution makes it mandatory to interpret the supreme values guaranteed in the democratic and social state governed by rule of law. To balance the excesses of equality and prevent their slide into totalitarian identity, freedom must remain the goal of the system: to freedom through equality, not the other way around.

C. The (interventionist) welfare state against the (self-regulated) market economy and economic freedom

The Welfare State (Dănișor, 2017b) (Rosanvallon, 1981), which appeared in Europe at the end of the 19th century aimed at regulating the consequences of the industrialization process: accelerated urbanization, poverty, health and public security problems. Practically, the 'social problem' becomes the catalyst and engine for transforming the role of the state, into an active role of promoting a minimum of economic well-being, reducing social tensions and promoting social citizenship, a role highlighted through an accelerated regulation process.

The Welfare State becomes a type of state that tends to regulate all spheres of society, due to the new role of the state to protect the social and natural environment, the consequence in terms of rights and freedoms consisting in an amplification of state intervention at the level of the behaviours of individuals and groups of individuals. Thus, the essential role of the state, to protect individual freedom and to apply sanctions in the case of injuries to freedom, to create an institutional framework for the exercise of individual freedom, is refocused on the promotion and protection of some social values, with the consequence of amplifying state interventionism within the social scope, through regulation.

"The type of state that, through a more or less well-chosen term, we call the Welfare State - pointed out Tim Koopmans - is mainly due to the activity of the legislature. The first draft was made in the field of social policy, with the laws within labour, health, social security law; but, gradually, state interventions extended to the sphere of the economy (with laws on competition, transport and agriculture); and, finally, we have reached the present situation, with the expansion of the public sector, the exercise of a generalized state control over the economy, the responsibility assumed by the state in the matter of employment, the development of social assistance plans, the financing of activities that do not have a profitable purpose, regarding for example arts, or public works and the renewal of unhealthy urban centres" (Koopmans, 1978: 313-314).

In its capacity as a fundamental right, economic freedom represents a right of an economic nature, which includes several valences, all of which represent manifestations of the person's will to engage in economic relations (production, exchange, marketing, distribution, provision of services etc.) in order to obtain a certain benefit, valences resulting from concrete forms such as freedom of association, right to work, freedom of trade and industry, freedom of enterprise, freedom of competition or contractual freedom. These valences compete to build an autonomous concept, that of economic freedom. As a fundamental right, economic freedom must be understood as autonomy-freedom, which involves the relationship of the individual with the public power, so that the latter has a series of specific positive and negative obligations in this relationship, namely non-interference, establishing the general framework for the exercise of freedom, promoting, guaranteeing and protecting it through the levers of law.

The concept of economic freedom of the individual implies and grounds another concept, that of ‘freedom of the economy’, which translates into the need for a free organization of the economic system as a whole, its minimal dependence on the intervention of power and its development only as a result of the manifestation of the free economic individual’s will. Thus, the state has a positive obligation to intervene in the economic sphere through legislative acts, in order to ensure a certain type of organization of the economic space - the market economy - and a certain level of economic development, by which to encourage, first of all, the possibility for the ‘private’ to participate in the performance and development of economic activities through the free play of demand and supply on the market.

The Romanian constitutions have never expressly provided for this concept, the express enshrinement occurring with the revision of the 1991 Romanian Constitution, revision approved by national referendum in 2003. The new constitutional text provides in art. 45 entitled “Economic freedom”: “Free access of persons to an economic activity, free enterprise, and their exercise under the law shall be guaranteed”. In addition, art. 135 of the Constitution, entitled “Economy”, provides: “(1) Romania’s economy is a free market economy, based on free enterprise and competition. (2) The State must secure: a) a free trade, protection of fair competition, provision of a favourable framework in order to stimulate and capitalize every factor of production; (...)”

The normative coordinates of economic freedom (Muraru & Tănăsescu, 2023: 396-403) (Gîrleșteanu, 2008: 38-59), as it results from the content of art. 45 of the Romanian Constitution, reveal two fundamental elements: the person’s free access to an economic activity and free enterprise. The first pillar of economic freedom as a fundamental right is the free access of the person to an economic activity. The analysis of this concept must first concern the clarification of the notions of “free access” and “economic activity”, and secondly the implications of the exercise of the concept itself of “free access to an economic activity”, both aspects in the debate revolving around the holder, “the person”. “Free access” involves the possibility of entering a pre-existing framework, following the exercise of a voluntary and conscious choice, which belongs to the essence of the very notion of freedom. The “economic activity” represents a human activity which seeks to satisfy the consumption needs of the individual, by acquiring necessary material goods and services, including both commercial and industrial activities (Art. 2 letter a) of the Emergency Ordinance no. 44/2008) (”economic activity” - “profit-making activity, consisting in the production, administration or alienation of goods or in the provision of services”). Exercising the “free access to an economic activity” implies the abstract faculty of the person (natural or legal) to become a participant in economic life. The holder of this prerogative is not only the individual (Art. 2, Law no. 133/1999) (“entrepreneur” - “an authorized natural person or a legal person”), as a natural person, but also the legal person, as an association of individuals. The exercise of free access to an economic activity implies a legal realization of the person’s option to participate in economic activities provided by the positive law, because this exercise can only be done “under the law”, as specified in the final part of art. 45 of the Constitution. Thus, any person will become an active economic participant in the legal forms and will be able to carry out those types of activities provided by law.

The wording of art. 45, in which the individual’s freedom to engage in economic activity and free enterprise are distinctly guaranteed, must be interpreted in the sense of delimiting the scope of these notions and the existing relations between these two aspects of economic freedom. In this sense, free enterprise is an extension of the free access to an economic activity, complementing it and being conditioned by it.

The concept of free enterprise appears, in a broad sense, as a fundamental and freely expressed choice at the level of option, attitude and individual action of members of society or as an attitude, behaviour, predisposition towards creativity, responsibility, autonomy and self-confidence. However, considering the marginal name of the article - economic freedom - the direct consequence consists in the need to analyse the concept of free enterprise by referring to its manifestation in the strictly economic space; a general analysis, given the broad and fluid meaning of the concept, is unacceptable due to the inaccuracies it could give rise to.

Such a legal approach can be substantiated starting from the concept of freedom of enterprise, which thus presents itself as a fundamental right of an economic nature explicitly guaranteed in various acts of a constitutional nature or enshrined jurisprudentially by the courts of constitutional litigation. The concept of freedom of enterprise is the fruit of French constitutional case law. The French Constitutional Council recognizes it and assigns it constitutional value starting with Dec. no. 81-132 of 16 January 1982 as arising from art. 4 of the 1789 Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen; the concept is further developed by the Hexagon legal doctrine (Cabrillac, Frison-Roche & Revet, 2001: 668-669) (Favoreu, 2000: 235-240) (Drago & Lombard, 2003: 9-47). It should be mentioned that the first references to the freedom of enterprise can be found in art. 1 of the Royer Law of 27 December 1793 – “freedom and the will of enterprise are the foundation of commercial and artisanal activities (...)” specifying that the Le Chapelier Law of 14-17 June 1791, although it suppressed professional groups that behaved like real castes, liberalized not only individual access, but also equality of exercise

The legal doctrine (Lajoye, 2002: 123) (Cabrillac, Frison-Roche & Revet, 2001: 671) (Drago, 2003: 33-38) (Grisel, 2006: 158-159) has appreciated that the freedom of enterprise implies the possibility for any individual to freely choose an economic activity allowing to obtain the means of subsistence, to establish by creating or acquiring an enterprise, and to thus exercise sovereignly the chosen economic activity. The freedom of enterprise first manifests itself as the freedom to create an enterprise, and later as the freedom of exploitation, consisting in the faculty to direct and manage the enterprise at will (i.e. the right to choose its economic policy or strategy, partners, suppliers, customers, etc.), its corollary being represented by the freedom of competition that comes to protect it.

The French case law and doctrine, which, as we stated previously, introduce the concept of *“liberté d’entreprendre”*, is not sufficient in terms of clarifying the concept of “free enterprise”, but it has the merit of constituting a starting point in the proposed approach. There is no doubt that the Romanian free enterprise has as its correspondent the French *freedom of enterprise*, but the enshrinement of the first concept in the

Romanian fundamental act itself implies the need to use and analyse it from the point of view of the normative consequences it creates in Romanian society.

Thus, a first step must be to find an adequate definition for "free enterprise" from the perspective of its concrete and imposed manifestation framework, namely the economic one. We can say that the free enterprise consists of the freedom of any person not to be hindered in the will to interact economically with another in order to realize and carry out projects of an economic nature to achieve a close goal, the increase of the patrimony. These economic projects, which are means of achieving the proposed goal, are the result of the creative act of *homo economicus*, are creative activities, forms of human manifestation in economic terms. Free enterprise also implies the possibility for any person to become an active participant in economic life in the way considered to be the most appropriate (either as a natural person or as a legal structure), using the legal means available for the implementation of a certain policy.

The constitutional regulation of economic freedom has an impact on the market economy. Exercising the right of free access to an economic activity and free enterprise, the normative components of economic freedom in accordance with art. 45 of the Constitution, includes two aspects: on the one hand, that the natural or legal person holding the right has the desire and the possibility of autonomous and free manifestation of the will to become an actor of economic life, and, on the other hand, the necessity of the pre-existence of a regulatory framework of the economic activity. These two aspects acquire, in the light of the components of economic freedom, a normative character and translate into two types of general obligations incumbent on the public power: a general positive obligation to do and a general negative obligation to abstain.

Economic freedom implies a positive obligation for the state, one that requires it to play an active role. It is about the obligations specified in art. 135(2), letter a): "The State must secure a free trade, protection of fair competition, provision of a favourable framework in order to stimulate and capitalize every factor of production." (Muraru & Tănăsescu, 2023: 1190-1201). The state must regulate the conditions of access to and exercise of economic activities in a minimal manner, by virtue of its character as a social state governed by the rule of law, tributary to the interests of civil society. This minimal manner is transposed into two basic conditions imposed on the public power: this access should not be materially expensive for those who wish to exercise it, and the procedure by which the legal subject becomes an effective participant in economic life should not be too slow, too bureaucratic, be characterized by speed, so that the interested party has to meet certain minimum material conditions in a short period of time in order to be able to carry out the proposed activity, an activity which, being of an economic nature, is subject to a certain risk depending mostly on the time factor. However, it must be emphasized that sometimes the nature and importance of certain types of economic activities for the economic system as a whole require that the procedure by which the legal subject becomes an economic participant should be more cumbersome precisely because of the risks that the exercise of such economic activities might have.

Economic freedom creates, secondly, a right of subjects guaranteed against the state. The state has the *negative* obligation to respect the diversity of trade and industry acts, their independent character from the public space and their creation based on the free play of will emanating from the private space, with the consequence of the impossibility of determining a priori the categories of activities that can be carried out on the state territory and the legal forms of economic manifestation (which would in fact constitute a manifestation of economic management). This general negative obligation can be summarized as follows: the public must allow private economic enterprise on which it *cannot impose* forms of manifestation, but it can only *propose* them.

Contemporary developments within economic regulation attest to the diversity of relations maintained in this field between the public (state intervention) and the private (economic freedom/freedom of the economy). It is thus necessary to outline the size of this relation, which influences any regulatory attempt of the economic space. However, legal dogmatism does not seem to give credibility to the alternative coexistence of public and private, more or less pacifist, in the regulation of the economy, proposing another formulation: the public *or* the private (Bureau, 1997: 317-353).

The public makes direct reference to state intervention in the economic field, such interventions being placed under the sign of diversity: to prohibit, authorize, order, supervise, exploit, etc. Interventionism attests to an interference of persons in affairs that do not belong to them, suggesting an interference of public institutions in a sphere that does not normally pertain to them. Others, however, doubt about such a qualification of this phenomenon of interference, expressing the idea that interventionism consists in the exercise by the state of its general functions, resulting therefore, that the state's competence in the economy must be recognized to the same extent as in other fields (Bureau, 1997: 320).

The private is defined by contrast: "private from what?". One possible answer could be deprived of public intervention. If the role of the public is defined by reference to interventionism, the private finds its place in the notion of (economic) liberalism, the result of a doctrine based on the prohibition of violating or preventing the exercise of economic freedom and the free access of private enterprise. Thus, the classics and neoclassics condemn as a matter of principle any state intervention. Adam Smith, with his theory of the "invisible hand" (Smith, 1965), states that the pursuit of each individual's own interest leads to the realization of the general interest so that "the harmony of these two types of interests is natural", so any state intervention must necessarily be limited.

Thus, an intermediate conclusion is required: economic and philosophical thinking give nuanced answers, starting from the natural competence that the state has in the economic field and ending with the affirmation of its total incompetence. The nuances result from the difficulties of admitting a limited competence of the state and fixing the limits of this limited competence (Sève, 1992: 63). So, the whole public-private debate turns into the competence of the state to intervene in the economic field, from the perspective of the necessity, legitimacy or effectiveness of a certain intervention.

Positive law in the economic field must therefore consist of a permanent attempt to find solutions to reconcile the general interest with the private interest (of the enterprise), to ensure the balance between intervention and autonomy.

Currently, there is a crossing of the borders between public and private under different modalities in the economic field. This phenomenon occurs in the sense that borders seem to be abandoned, because they no longer correspond to reality: the traditional opposition between public and private thus becomes relative. In the economic field, we often have the impression that these borders are blurred, resulting in hybrid forms, whether it is the qualification of the interveners in economic life (the emergence of independent administrative authorities, public-private associative forms, etc.), or whether the nature of the interventions of public power (contractual economy) is considered (Bureau, 1997: 334). At the same time, a private influence on state action can also be conceived, the elaboration of regulations becoming tributary to the demands of the market. Thus, the state creates rules that tend, “most of the time, to manage the situation, which are only accompanying measures, translating or formulating the demands of the market itself” (Henry, 1991: 645).

D. Attempts to review the presumption of lawful acquisition of wealth and the control of their constitutionality

Once freed from the old totalitarian regime, property should reconfigure its position among the guarantees of a liberal system. It is a complex process, which both Romania and the Republic of Moldova have followed and continue to strengthen, that of recognizing the function of property to allow people to participate in the construction of the public space and that of opposing state authority. “The liberal state is therefore a state that guarantees property, not because it is a state of owners, but a state of freedom, because property is a means of freedom” (Dănişor, 2007: 60). But this process of building a system of fundamental norms to stimulate the effective protection of private property proves to be equally important and difficult. Thus, although the Romanian Constitution states, in art. 44(1), the fact that the property is guaranteed and, in art. 44(8), the fact that “legally acquired assets shall not be confiscated”, a prohibition derived from the “legality of acquirement” of wealth, which is “presumed”, the old mentalities, that became common during the Marxist-inspired communist regime, continue to plague Romanian society.

The presumption of the lawful character of the acquisition of wealth, enshrined in the constitution, has been targeted by revision attempts three times. The three draft laws to revise the Constitution were initiated either by members of Parliament or by the President of Romania, which denotes the mentality of the people’s representatives regarding property. It is about the survival of the totalitarian conception, according to which private property is theft (Proudhon, 2009), in an attenuated form in the new post-totalitarian society, that all persons who have accumulated a certain wealth must have acquired it by illicit means. In fact, it is about the institutional reactions directed against property, generated by the idea according to which the objective, general law, constructed in opposition to the particular, subjective and therefore selfish rights, would be superior to the latter. The institutional reaction of the people’s representatives, the Parliament and the President of Romania, gives voice to the above-mentioned conviction, through constant attacks on one of the constitutional guarantees of the right to property. The institutional reaction can be easily explained by the politicians’ need to obtain political capital, but this finding implies the existence of a totalitarian reflex at the level of the people’s mentality.

The analysis of the constant attacks on the presumption of the lawful acquisition of wealth cannot be carried out outside the national and European context of the fight against crime, through the confiscation of goods related to the commission of crimes. And this from the perspective of the incompatibility that could exist between the constitutionally enshrined presumption and the state competence to confiscate certain goods.

Another institutional reaction, this time to protect the constitutional guarantees of the right to property, is that of the Constitutional Court of Romania, which has already developed a consistent and coherent case law in the field.

The first of the attacks on this presumption was represented by the initiative to revise the provisions of art. 41(7), the current art. 44(8) of the Romanian Constitution, which proposed to replace the presumption of lawful acquisition of wealth with the following text: “The wealth whose lawful acquisition cannot be proven shall be confiscated” (it is about the legislative proposal to revise the provisions of art. 41(7) of the Constitution, initiated by 39 senators, dated 28 August 1996). The initiative was the subject of the constitutionality control, and the Court laid the foundations of a case law designed to contribute to the change of mentalities and to the rebalancing of the relationship between equality and freedom, by the conjunctural balancing of each of them, in order to create a society that has the subject freed from objective law in the foreground.

From the analysis of the text proposed by the initiators, one can find the intention to suppress one of the constitutional guarantees of the right to property, that of the lawful acquisition of wealth, with the consequence of overturning the burden of proof. Thus, the holder of the property right would be exposed to the obligation to prove the lawful character of the acquired property, although, as the Constitutional Court also states, “this presumption is also based on the general principle that any legal act or fact is lawful until proof to the contrary, requiring, with regard to a person's wealth, that its unlawful acquisition should be proven” (Decision no. 85/1996). Consequently, the burden of proof must be on the person making the accusation and alleging the unlawful nature of the wealth. By removing this guarantee, the initiators sought to establish another presumption, that of the unlawful character of the wealth whose acquisition cannot be proven by its owner, with the consequence of the confiscation of this wealth. As a result of such a constitutional review, a state of legal insecurity would be created regarding the right of ownership that persons have over the goods that make up their wealth. Consequently, the Court decided the unconstitutionality of the initiative to review art. 41(7) of the Constitution on the grounds that it removes a guarantee of the right to property, thus violating the limits of revision: “Since the revision proposal results in the suppression of the constitutional guarantee of the right to property represented by the presumption of lawful acquisition of wealth, it is unconstitutional, violating the revision limits provided by art. 148(2) of the Constitution”

In its decision, the Constitutional Court also rules on the claim that this presumption would represent an obstacle for state bodies in the action to confiscate goods intended for, used or resulting from a crime or minor offence, in the following terms: “par. (8) of art. 41 of the Constitution provides that the goods intended for, used or resulting from crimes or minor offences can be confiscated only in accordance with the law. Otherwise, the presumption established by art. 41(7) of the Constitution does not prevent the investigation of the illicit character of the acquisition of wealth” (Decision no. 85/1996). Nothing prevents state agents from administering evidence for the purpose of proving the illicit nature of the goods held by a particular person, if there are suspicions of this. Moreover, the express constitutional provision in par. (8) of art. 41 (current paragraph (9) of art. 44) removes any uncertainty from this point of view. Under the law, goods resulting from crimes or minor offences can be confiscated, but the legislature must create the rules that allow this confiscation with strict observance of the presumption of lawful acquisition of wealth, in other words, without being able to impose on the holder of the right of ownership a disproportionate obligation, by reversing the burden of proof.

Despite the clear, concise and coherent arguments expressed by the Court in the mentioned Decision, there is a resistance of totalitarian mentalities in Romanian society, following the exacerbation of equality as a constitutive principle, which in the communist regime had succeeded in shattering the structure of civil society and uniformizing individuals to the erasure of any traits of their individuality, to such an extent that people became extremely willing to sacrifice their own rights and liberties for the sake of a so-called objective law.

The presumption of the lawful acquisition of wealth was the target of two more initiatives to revise the Constitution, on the same arguments aimed at the efficiency of the process of confiscation of goods acquired from the commission of crimes. It is about the legislative proposal initiated by a number of 233 deputies and 94 senators in 2003 and the revision project initiated by the President of Romania, at the proposal of the Government, in 2011. These initiatives denote a suspicion strongly rooted in the collective mind, which convinced the initiators to take the approach further, relying on popular support. According to the legislative proposal of 2003, the text of art. 41 had to be completed with a new paragraph with the text: "The presumption provided for in paragraph (7) shall not be applicable for the goods acquired as a result of the capitalization of the proceeds from crimes". The CCR decided that "the aim is to overturn the burden of proof regarding the lawful nature of the wealth, providing for the unlawful nature of the wealth acquired through the capitalization of the proceeds from crimes" (Decision no. 148/2003), a fact that is equivalent to the suppression of a constitutional guarantee of the right to property, violating the limits of revising the Constitution.

The 2011 revision project was simply aimed at eliminating the presumption of lawful acquisition of wealth, and the Constitutional Court reiterated its arguments that led it to decide the unconstitutionality of the other two previous attempts to suppress this constitutional guarantee, arguing that: "In the absence of such a presumption, the possessor of an asset would be subject to continuous insecurity, since whenever the unlawful acquisition of the said asset was invoked, the burden of proof would not be on the person making the claim, but on the possessor of the asset. (Decision no. 799/2011)

The recurrent argument of the initiators of these revisions seems to concern the efficiency of the approach to the confiscation of goods acquired from illegal acts. The presumption of the lawful acquisition of wealth being relative, it can be countered by evidence to the contrary. Therefore, the legislature's intervention in the matter of confiscation will not represent an unallowed interference in the right to property "if the evidentiary system is properly regulated, so as to allow countering the presumption of lawful acquisition of wealth and if the law establishes sufficient procedural guarantees for the possessor of the goods" (Safta, 2012: 121).

In our criminal procedural system, the issue of respecting the presumption of lawful acquisition of wealth is raised in the matter of the institution of extended confiscation (Art. 112^1 Criminal Code), which creates a particular mode of evidence, which calls into question this presumption, as well as the presumption of innocence and the presumption of the origin of goods from criminal activities for which no judgment of conviction was pronounced (Lefterache, 2016: 280).

Extended confiscation is a security measure that widens the scope of goods that can be confiscated through special confiscation, under certain conditions that convince the court that the goods in question come from criminal activities. Thus, it is about the goods of a person who was convicted for an act likely to procure a material benefit and for which the law provides a prison sentence of 4 years or more, goods that were acquired by the convicted person in a period of 5 years before and, if necessary, after the time of the crime, until the date of issuing the act of referral to the court (Art. 112^1 Criminal Code). Because confiscation concerns goods that are unrelated to a crime for which the person has been convicted, but is ordered as a result of the court being satisfied that their acquisition was unlawful, extended confiscation may raise issues regarding compliance with the presumption of lawful acquisition of wealth. In fact, it is exactly this conviction of the court that calls into question the presumption analysed. It is about two presumptions, the one provided by the Constitution as protection of the right to property, and the one established by the Criminal Code, based on the conviction of the court. The problem is knowing which prevails. However, considering the fact that the presumption of the lawful acquisition of wealth is relative, contrary evidence is allowed to overturn it. “The conviction of the court that the goods come from criminal activities other than those that are the subject of the conviction is a judicial presumption. A presumption, even if it is difficult to overturn, remains within acceptable lines as long as it is proportionate to the legitimate aim pursued, there is a possibility of proving the contrary and the right to defence is ensured” (Lefterache, 2016: 285). Thus, considering the fact that the court forms its view based on evidence, that it must comply with the requirements of art. 53 of the Constitution, the extended confiscation representing a restriction of the right to property, that both the person aimed at by the measure of confiscation and the interested third parties benefit from the right to a fair trial, having the possibility of judicially challenging the confiscation decision, the violation of the presumption of lawful acquisition of the goods cannot be taken for the security measure of extended confiscation.

In conclusion, the right to property must, when constitutionally regulated, become freedom of private appropriation and constitute a limit to the regulation of the matter of property, so that it can fulfil the function of guaranteeing freedom, understood both as autonomy and as participation. In the Romanian post-communist cultural space, the resistance of totalitarian mentalities, both in the case of the majority of citizens and in the case of most public institutions, calls into question the effectiveness of the political function that property must play. The Constitutional Court strives to give a liberal meaning to the constitutional regulations, but without a change in mentality, through appropriate education it is difficult to estimate whether the case law of the special court will have the intended effect.

E. Conclusions

A reporter from Radio România Actualități was asking the listeners, not long ago, who they thought was the most important invention in human history. Most of them answered “electric current”. None found that any invention in the social sciences was of any importance, and no revolutionary way of social organization was mentioned. Everyone seems to think that the progress of knowledge in the field of exact and natural sciences, translated into technical inventions, is important, but no one seems to understand that it does not help us live better together, or in a more just society, but that sometimes, too often, it facilitates violence and despotism, that “totalitarianism is despotism plus electricity” (Polin, 1982: 17).

This mentality of devaluation of social sciences and inventions located at the level of the organization of society and the legal structure that frames it is not new and it inevitably leads us towards totalitarianism. The lack of a solid education of people in social sciences, which causes them to fear their own freedom, which they are unable to understand as a structural condition of society, seeing it rather as a source of disorder, is the one that makes them want a society which totally embraces them. In order to avoid totalitarianism, we should therefore reorient knowledge and education, repositioning the social sciences where they belong, realizing that "if scholars were bent on discovering the laws of political and social evolution [...] before seeking the laws of physics and chemistry, states would now all be governed by scientists, instead of being, more often than not, governed by the ignorant, the impulsive, the stupid, or the raging lunatics" (Fourastié, 1957: 211-212). We should build a new mentality in people, which will set them free.

Legal rules are part of this education, for they create ideal-types of relationships between us and limits to the authority that society can have over us. Within the legal system, the most important normative ideal-types are constitutive principles, for they are the normative ideas that we base our social existence on, in order to constrain society to be what we are able to bear it to be.

However, the Romanian Constitution is confusing when it regulates these principles. It thus causes chaotic institutional reactions and amplifies the anxious tendencies of the masses, which leads us, inevitably, to the totalitarianism which we wanted so ardently to get rid of, through the revolution. We should restore the constitutional framework in order to build a system of balancing the constitutive principles. In the absence of this revolution, which, from a legal point of view, must take the form of a revision of the Constitution, the constructive interpretation of the relations between freedom, equality and solidarity can patch up the system, to make it work as much as possible, but nothing guarantees that it will take us where we want, i.e. in a just society that respects the rights and freedoms of all of us.

Authors' Contributions:

Dan Claudiu DĂNIȘOR: *A. The pluralism of constitutive principles in liberal democracies and its constitutional transposition; E. Conclusions*

George Liviu GÎRLEȘTEANU: *C. The (interventionist) welfare state against the (self-regulated) market economy and economic freedom*

Elena Mădălina NICA: *B. The social state governed by the rule of law*

Mădălina Cristina DĂNIȘOR: *D. Attempts to review the presumption of lawful acquisition of wealth and the control of their constitutionality*

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Romanian Constitutional Court, Decision no. 49/1994 (Off. Gazette no. 125 of 21 May 1994)

Romanian Constitutional Court, Decision no. 872/2010 (Off. Gazette no. 433 of 28 June 2010): "(...) judges act in solidarity with the inhabitants of a country" and that solidarity demands a proportional responsibility, for which it did not provide arguments. The CCR validated the arbitrary reduction in the salaries of the state employees, considering that it was imposed by national security, which also involved "aspects of the life of the state - such as economic, financial, social - that could affect the very being of the state due to the scale and gravity of the phenomena", without demonstrating that the threat to economic security was real and could only be eliminated by reducing the salaries of state employees, and not by another, more appropriate measure, without affecting a fundamental right in violation of art. 53 of the Constitution and of equality with subjects who are not part of the state employees, not included within the scope of the law, in which case it should have demonstrated why this difference in treatment was not only objectively and reasonably justified by a relevant difference in situation, but also proportional to the goal pursued.

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http://sfx.bibl.ulaval.ca:9003/sfx_local?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&url_ctx_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&ctx_enc=info:ofi/enc:UTF-8&ctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&rfr_id=info:sid/sfxit.com:azlist&sfx.ignore_date_threshold=1&rft.object_id=1000000000726583&rft.object_portfolio_id=&svc.fulltext=yes

Universität Passau
https://infoguide.ub.uni-passau.de/InfoGuideClient.upasis/start.do?Query=10%3d%22BV035261002%22

BSB Bayerische StaatBibliothek
https://opacplus.bsb-muenchen.de/metaopac/search?View=default&oclcno=502495838

Deutsches Museum
https://opac.deutsches-museum.de/TouchPoint/start.do?Query=1035%3d%22BV035261002%22IN%5b2%5d&View=dmm&Language=de
Technische Hochschule Ingolstadt
https://opac.ku.de/TouchPoint/start.do?Branch=3&Language=de&View=thi&Query=35

=%22502495838%22+IN+[2]

Hochschule Augsburg, Bibliothek
https://infoguide.hs-augsburg.de/InfoGuideClient.fhasis/start.do?Query=10%3d%22BV035261002%22

Hochschule Weihenstephan-Triesdorf, Zentralbibliothek
Freising, Germany
https://ffwtp20.bib-bvb.de/TouchPoint/start.do?Query=1035%3d%22BV035261002%22IN%5b2%5d&View=ffw&Language=de

OTH- Ostbayerische Technische Hochschule Regensburg, Hochschulbibliothek
OTHBR, Regensburg, Germany
https://www.regensburger-katalog.de/TouchPoint/start.do?Query=1035%3d%22BV035261002%22IN%5b2%5d&View=ubr&Language=de

Staatliche Bibliothek Neuburg/Donau , SBND,
Neuburg/Donau, Germany
https://opac.sbnd.de/InfoGuideClient.sndsis/start.do?Query=10%3d%22BV035261002%22

Universitätsbibliothek Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Eichstätt, Germany
https://opac.ku.de/TouchPoint/start.do?Branch=0&Language=de&View=uei&Query=35=%22502495838%22+IN+[2]

Bibliothek der Humboldt-Universität Berlin, Universitätsbibliothek der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Berlin, Germany
https://hu-berlin.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/search?institution=HUB_UB&vid=hub_ub&search_scope=default_scope&tab=default_tab&query=issn,exact,1584-224X

Hochschulbibliothek Ansbach, Ansbach, Germany
https://fanoz3.bib-bvb.de/InfoGuideClient.fansis/start.do?Query=10%3d%22BV035261002%22

Bibliothek der Europa-Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder)
Frankfurt/Oder, Germany
https://opac.europa-uni.de/InfoGuideClient.euvsis/start.do?Query=10%3d%22BV035261002%22

University of California Library Catalog
https://catalog.library.ucla.edu/vwebv/search?searchCode1=GKEY&searchType=2&searchArg1=ucoclc469823489

For more details about the past issues and international abstracting and indexing, please

visit the journal website at the following address:
http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/revistadestiintepolitice/acces.php.

CONFERENCE INTERNATIONAL INDEXING OF THE PAST EDITIONS (2014-2024)

CEPOS Conference 2024

The **Fourteenth International Conference** After Communism. East and West under Scrutiny (Craiova, House of the University, 15-16 March 2024) was evaluated and accepted for indexing in 11 international databases, catalogues and NGO's databases:

Indexation links:

CEEOL https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1195305

ProQuest, Part of Clarivate

https://www.proquest.com/docview/2863220849/CC02F21AE4DB44F1PQ/1?accountid=50247&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals

Oxford Academic (Oxford University Press)

https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/csad066

Oxford Journal of Church and State-Oxford Academic (Oxford University Press) (Vol. 65, nr 4/2023) în secțiunea Calendar of Events JCS (publicare 28 Noiembrie 2023)

Conference Alerts

https://conferencealerts.com/show-event?id=254313

Science DZ

https://www.sciencedz.net/.../100575-14th-international...

10 Times

https://10times.com/after-communism-east-and-west-under...

The Free Library

https://www.thefreelibrary.com/CEPOS+NEW+CALL+FOR+PAPERS...

Conference 365

https://conferences365.com/.../14th-international...

World University Directory

https://worlduniversitydirectory.com/edu/event/...

Conferences daily

https://conferencesdaily.com/eventdetails.php?id=1625192

Gale Cengage Learning USA https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA766112846...

CEPOS Conference 2023

The **Thirteenth International Conference** After Communism. East and West under Scrutiny (Craiova, 17-18 March 2023) was evaluated and accepted for indexing in 5 international databases, catalogues and NGO's databases:

Oxford Church & State Journal:
https://academic.oup.com/jcs/articleabstract/65/1/168/7044222?redirectedFrom=fulltext

10 Times: https://10times.com/after-communism-east-andwest-under-scrutiny

Conferencesite.eu:
https://index.conferencesites.eu/conference/57510/13th-international-conference-after-communism-eastand-west-under-scrutiny;

Schoolandcollegelistings
:https://www.schoolandcollegelistings.com/RO/Craiova/485957361454074/Center-of-Post-Communist-Political-Studies-CEPOS

Conferencealerts : https://conferencealerts.com/showevent?id=247851

CEPOS Conference 2022

The **Twelfth International Conference** After Communism. East and West under Scrutiny (Craiova, 18-19 March 2022) was evaluated and accepted for indexing in 6 international databases, catalogues and NGO's databases:

https://www.conferenceflare.com/events/category/social-sciences-and-humanities/art-history/

Vinculation International Diciembre 2021 newsletter n 99
https://issuu.com/fundacionargeninta5/docs/diciembre_2021_fundaci_n_argeninta-ai_ok?fr=sZjg2NjE5NTg3OTY

https://www.schoolandcollegelistings.com/RO/Craiova/485957361454074/Center-of-Post-Communist-Political-Studies-CEPOS

https://10times.com/company/cepos
https://10times.com/after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny

https://conferencealerts.com/show-event?id=238529

https://www.sciencedz.net/conference/82995-cepos-international-conference-2022-after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny

CEPOS Conference 2021

The Eleventh International Conference After Communism. East and West under Scrutiny (Craiova, House of the University, 19-20 March 2021) was evaluated and accepted for indexing in 5 international databases, catalogues and NGO's databases:

https://academic.oup.com/jcs/advance-articleabstract/doi/10.1093/jcs/csaa064/5941887?redirectedFrom=fulltext

https://conferencealerts.com/show-event?id=229654

https://www.sciencedz.net/en/conference/72628-1thinternational-conference-after-communism-east-and-west-underscrutiny

https://10times.com/after-communism-east-and-west-underscrutiny

https://worlduniversitydirectory.com/edu/event/?slib=1thinternational-conference-after-communism-east-and-west-underscrutiny-2

CEPOS Conference 2020

The Tenth International Conference After Communism. East and West under Scrutiny (27-28 March 2020) was evaluated and accepted for indexing in 7 international databases, catalogues and NGO's databases:

Scichemistry
http://scichemistry.org/ConferenceInfosByConferenceTopicId?conferenceTopicId=57

Oxford Journals
https://academic.oup.com/jcs/advance-articlepdf/doi/10.1093/jcs/csz078/30096829/csz078.pdf

Conference alerts
https://conferencealerts.com/show-event?id=215370
https://www.sciencedz.net/en/conference/57625-10thinternational-conference-after-communism-east-and-west-underscrutiny

Intraders
https://www-intradersorg.cdn.ampproject.org/v/s/www.intraders.org/news/romania/10th-international-conference-after-communism-east-and-westunderscrutiny/amp/?amp_js_v=a2&_gsa=1&usqp=mq331AQCKAE%3D#aoh=15737604302246&referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com&_tf=De%20pe%20%251%24s&share=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.intraders.org%2Fnews%2Fromania%2F10th-internationalconference-after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny%2F

10 times
https://10times.com/after-communism-east-and-west-underscrutiny

The conference alerts
https://theconferencealerts.com/event/46428/10th-internationalconference-

after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny

Scirea
https://www.scirea.org/ConferenceInfosByConferenceCountryId?conferenceCountryId=75

CEPOS Conference 2019

The Ninth International Conference After Communism. East and West under Scrutiny (Craiova, House of the University, 29-30 March 2019) was evaluated and accepted for indexing in 6 international databases, catalogues and NGO's databases:

Oxford Academic Journal of Church & State https://academic.oup.com/jcs/article-abstract/60/4/784/5106417?redirectedFrom=PDF

10 Times
https://10times.com/after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny

Conference Alerts
https://conferencealerts.com/show-event?id=205682

Researchgate
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327905733_CEPOS_9TH_INTERNATIONAL_CONFERENCE_AFTER_COMMUNISM_EAST_AND_WEST_UNDER_SCRUTINY_2019?_iepl%5BviewId%5D=sjcOJrVCO8PTLapcfVciZQsb&_iepl%5Bcontexts%5D%5B0%5D=publicationCreationEOT&_iepl%5BtargetEntityId%5D=PB%3A327905733&_iepl%5BinteractionType%5D=publicationCTA

The Free Library
https://www.thefreelibrary.com/9th+INTERNATIONAL+CONFERENCE+AFTER+COMMUNISM.+EAST+AND+WEST+UNDER...-a0542803701
Science Dz.net
https://www.sciencedz.net/conference/42812-9th-international-conference-after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny

CEPOS Conference 2018

The Eighth International Conference After Communism. East and West under Scrutiny (Craiova, House of the University, 23-24 March 2018) was evaluated and accepted for indexing in 15 international databases, catalogues and NGO's databases:

Conference Alerts, https://conferencealerts.com/show-event?id=186626
Sciencesdz, http://www.sciencedz.net/conference/29484-8th-international-conference-after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny

ManuscriptLink,
https://manuscriptlink.com/cfp/detail?cfpId=AYAXKVAR46277063&type=event

Maspolitiques,http://www.maspolitiques.com/ar/index.php/en/1154-8th-international-conference-after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny

Aconf, https://www.aconf.org/conf_112399.html

Call4paper,https://call4paper.com/listByCity?type=event&city=3025&count=count
Eventegg, https://eventegg.com/cepos/

10 times, https://10times.com/after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny
Biblioteca de Sociologie, http://bibliotecadesociologie.ro/cfp-cepos-after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny-craiova-2018/

Science Research Association http://www.scirea.org/topiclisting?conferenceTopicId=5
ResearcherBook http://researcherbook.com/country/Romania

Conference Search Net, http://conferencesearch.net/en/29484-8th-international-conference-after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny

SchoolandCollegeListings,
https://www.schoolandcollegelistings.com/RO/Craiova/485957361454074/Center-of-Post-Communist-Political-Studies-CEPOS

Vepub conference, http://www.vepub.com/conferences-view/8th-International-Conference-After-Communism.-East-and-West-under-Scrutiny/bC9aUE5rcHN0ZmpkYU9nTHJzUkRmdz09/

Geopolitika Hungary, http://www.geopolitika.hu/event/8th-international-conference-after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny/

CEPOS Conference 2017

The Seventh International Conference After Communism. East and West under Scrutiny (Craiova, House of the University, 24-25March 2017) was evaluated and accepted for indexing in 10 international databases, catalogues and NGO's databases:

Ethic & International Affairs (Carnegie Council), Cambridge University Press-https://www.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/2016/upcoming-conferences-interest-2016-2017/

ELSEVIER GLOBAL EVENTS LIST http://www.globaleventslist.elsevier.com/events/2017/03/7th-international-conference-after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny

CONFERENCE ALERTS-http://www.conferencealerts.com/show-event?id=171792

10TIMES.COM-http://10times.com/after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny

Hiway Conference Discovery System-http://www.hicds.cn/meeting/detail/45826124

Geopolitika (Hungary)-http://www.geopolitika.hu/event/7th-international-conference-after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny/

Academic.net-http://www.academic.net/show-24-4103-1.html

World University Directory-http://www.worlduniversitydirectory.com/conferencedetail.php?AgentID=2001769

Science Research Association-http://www.scirea.org/conferenceinfo?conferenceId=35290

Science Social Community-https://www.science-community.org/ru/node/174892

CEPOS Conference 2016

The Sixth International Conference After Communism. East and West under Scrutiny (Craiova, House of the University, 8-9 April 2016) was evaluated and accepted for indexing in the following international databases, catalogues and NGO's databases:

ELSEVIER GLOBAL EVENTS-http://www.globaleventslist.elsevier.com/events/2016/04/6th-international-conference-after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny/

Oxford Journals – Oxford Journal of Church & State-http://jcs.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2016/02/06/jcs.csv121.extract

Conference Alerts-http://www.conferencealerts.com/country-listing?country=Romania

Conferences-In - http://conferences-in.com/conference/romania/2016/economics/6th-international-conference-after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny/

Socmag.net - http://www.socmag.net/?p=1562

African Journal of Political Sciences-http://www.maspolitiques.com/mas/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=450:-securiteee-&catid=2:2010-12-09-22-47-00&Itemid=4#.VjUI5PnhCUk

Researchgate-https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283151988_Call_for_Papers_6TH_International_Conference_After_Communism._East_and_West_under_Scrutiny_8-9_April_2016_Craiova_Romania

World Conference Alerts-http://www.worldconferencealerts.com/ConferenceDetail.php?EVENT=WLD1442

Edu events-http://eduevents.eu/listings/6th-international-conference-after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny/

Esocsci.org-http://www.esocsci.org.nz/events/list/

Sciencedz.net-http://www.sciencedz.net/index.php?topic=events&page=53

Science-community.org-http://www.science-community.org/ru/node/164404/?did=070216

CEPOS Conference 2015

The Fifth International Conference After Communism. East and West under Scrutiny (Craiova, House of the University, 24-25 April 2015) was evaluated and accepted for indexing in 15 international databases, catalogues and NGO's databases:

THE ATLANTIC COUNCIL OF CANADA, CANADA-http://natocouncil.ca/events/international-conferences/

ELSEVIER GLOBAL EVENTS LIST-http://www.globaleventslist.elsevier.com/events/2015/04/fifth-international-conf

GCONFERENCE.NET-http://www.gconference.net/eng/conference_view.html?no=47485&catalog=1&cata=018&co_kind=&co_type=&pageno=1&conf_cata=01

CONFERENCE BIOXBIO-http://conference.bioxbio.com/location/Romania

10 TIMES-http://10times.com/Romania

CONFERENCE ALERTS-http://www.conferencealerts.com/country-listing?country=Romania

http://www.iem.ro/orizont2020/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/lista-3-conferinte-internationale.pdf
http://sdil.ac.ir/index.aspx?pid=99&articleid=62893

NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM-http://www.nationalsymposium.com/communism.php
SCIENCE DZ-http://www.sciencedz.net/conference/6443-fifth-international-conference-after-communism-east-and-west-under-scrutiny

ARCHIVE COM-http://archive-com.com/com/c/conferencealerts.com/2014-12-01_5014609_70/Rome_15th_International_Academic_Conference_The_IISES/

CONFERENCE WORLD-http://conferencesworld.com/higher-education/
KNOW A CONFERENCE KNOW A CONFERENCE-http://knowaconference.com/social-work/

International Journal on New Trends in Education and Their Implications (IJONTE) Turkey http://www.ijonte.org/?pnum=15&

Journal of Research in Education and Teaching Turkey-http://www.jret.org/?pnum=13&pt=Kongre+ve+Sempozyum
CEPOS CONFERENCE 2015 is part of a "consolidated list of all international and Canadian conferences taking place pertaining to international relations, politics, trade,

energy and sustainable development". For more details see http://natocouncil.ca/events/international-conferences/

CEPOS Conference 2014

The Fourth International Conference After Communism. East and West under Scrutiny, Craiova, 4-5 April 2014 was very well received by the national media and successfully indexed in more than 9 international databases, catalogues and NGO's databases such as: American Political Science Association, USA-http://www.apsanet.org/conferences.cfm

Journal of Church and State, Oxford-http://jcs.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2014/01/23/jcs.cst141.full.pdf+html;
NATO Council of Canada (section events/ international conferences), Canada, http://atlantic-council.ca/events/international-conferences/

International Society of Political Psychology, Columbus, USA-http://www.ispp.org/uploads/attachments/April_2014.pdf

Academic Biographical Sketch, http://academicprofile.org/SeminarConference.aspx; Conference alerts, http://www.conferencealerts.com/show-event?id=121380 Gesis Sowiport, Koln, Germany, http://sowiport.gesis.org/; Osteuropa-Netzwerk, Universität Kassel, Germany, http://its-vm508.its.uni-kassel.de/mediawiki/index.php/After_communism_:_East_and_West_under_scrutiny_:_Fourth_International_Conference

Ilustre Colegio Nacional de Doctores y Licenciados en Ciencias Politicas y Sociologia, futuro Consejo Nacional de Colegios Profesionales, Madrid, http://colpolsocmadrid.org/agenda/.

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E.g.: Anca Parmena Olimid*, Cătălina Maria Georgescu**, Cosmin Lucian Gherghe***

* Associate Professor, PhD, University of Craiova, Faculty of Social Sciences, Phone: 00407******, Email: parmena2002@yahoo.com. (Use Times New Roman 9, Justified)
** Lecturer, PhD, University of Craiova, Faculty of Social Sciences, Phone: 00407******, Email: cata.georgescu@yahoo.com. (Use Times New Roman 9, Justified)
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Abstract
The abstract must provide the aims, objectives, methodology, results and main conclusions of the paper (please submit the papers by providing all these information in the abstract). It must be submitted in English and the length must not exceed 300 words. Use Times New Roman 10,5, Justify.

Keywords
Submit 5-6 keywords representative to the thematic approached in the paper. Use Times New Roman 10,5, Italic. After the keywords introduce three blank lines, before passing to the Article text.

Text Font: Times New Roman: 10,5

Reference citations within the text
Please cite within the text. Use authors' last names, with the year of publication.

E.g.: (Olimid, 2009: 14; Olimid and Georgescu, 2012: 14-15; Olimid, Georgescu and Gherghe, 2013: 20-23).

On first citation of references with more than three authors, give all names in full. On the next citation of references with more than three authors give the name of the first author followed by "et al.".

To cite one Article by the same author(s) in the same year use the letters a, b, c, etc., after the year. E.g.: (Olimid, 2009a:14) (Olimid, 2009b: 25-26).

References:
The references cited in the Article are listed at the end of the paper in alphabetical order of authors' names.
References of the same author are listed chronologically.

For books
Olimid, A. P. (2009a). *Viaţa politică şi spirituală în România modernă. Un model românesc al relaţiilor dintre Stat şi Biserică*, Craiova: Aius Publishing.
Olimid, A. P. (2009b). *Politica românească după 1989,* Craiova: Aius Publishing.
For chapters in edited books
Goodin, R. E. (2011). The State of the Discipline, the Discipline of the State. In Goodin, R. E. (editor), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 19-39.

For journal Articles
Georgescu, C. M. (2013a). Qualitative Analysis on the Institutionalisation of the Ethics and Integrity Standard within the Romanian Public Administration. *Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques*, 37, 320-326.

Georgescu, C. M. (2013b). Patterns of Local Self-Government and Governance: A Comparative Analysis Regarding the Democratic Organization of Thirteen Central and Eastern European Administrations (I). *Revista de Ştiințe Politice. Revue des Ştiințe Politice*, 39, 49-58.

Tables and Figures
Tables and figures are introduced in the text. The title appears above each table.
E.g.: Table 1. The results of the parliamentary elections (May 2014)

Proposed papers: Text of the Article should be between 3000-5000 words, single spaced, Font: Times New Roman 10,5, written in English, submitted as a single file that includes all tables and figures in Word2003 or Word2007 for Windows.
All submissions will be double-blind reviewed by at least two reviewers.