ANALELE ŞTIINŢIFICE
ALE
UNIVERSITĂŢII „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" DIN IAŞI
(SERIE NOUĂ)

SCIENTIFIC ANNALS
OF
„ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" UNIVERSITY OF IAŞI
(NEW SERIES)

SOCIOLOGIE
ŞI ASISTENŢĂ SOCIALĂ

SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK

Tom XVII / Nr. 2, December, 2024

Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iaşi

ANALELE ŞTIINŢIFICE ALE UNIVERSITĂŢII „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" DIN IAȘI
(SERIE NOUĂ) SOCIOLOGIE ŞI ASISTENŢĂ SOCIALĂ
ISSN: 2065-3131 (print) / **ISSN:** 2066-8961 (online)

The journal is edited by the Department of Sociology and Social Work, Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences. It is published by the Publishing House of „Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi.

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România,700539
Phone: 00 40 0232 314947
Web adress: www.editura.uaic.ro
Email: editura@uaic.ro
Desktop publisher: Florentina Crucerescu

All submissions will undergo a double-blind peer-review process.
The journal is published bi-annually. Number of copies/issue**:** 200 copies.
Web page: http://anale.fssp.uaic.ro/index.php/asas

Aims: *Analele Ştiinţifice ale Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iaşi. (Seria nouă) Sociologie şi Asistenţă Socială* aims to promote the remarkable results of scientific and empiric research of professorates, researchers, students, and practitioners in the field of humanist sciences to stimulate the optimal functioning of academic and social fields. Analyses and theoretical-methodological sociological explanations as well as the exemplification of their values at the political and social work strategies and interventions level are welcome.

Abstracting and indexing services: Scientific Annals of the „Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University, Iasi (New Series) Sociology and Social Work Section are covered by several major indexing services including: **ERIH PLUS, EBSCO**, **PROQUEST CSA-Sociological Abstract**, **PROQUEST-Social Services Abstracts, PROQUEST-Worldwide Political Science Abstracts, CEEOL**, **Ulrich**, **IBSS**, **INDEX COPERNICUS, SCIPIO** and CNCSIS (2008-2011: **B+** category).

SUMMARY

SCIENTIFIC ANNALS OF „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" UNIVERSITY OF IAȘI
VOLUME XVII/2, SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK, 2024

DOI: 10.47743/asas-2024-2-766

ROMANIA'S PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 8 OF THE 2030 AGENDA. A STATISTICAL ASSESSMENT

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Robert-Vicențiu GABOR[3]

Abstract: Initially, sustainable development was regarded as a response to the ecological crisis caused by the intensive industrial exploitation of resources and ongoing environmental degradation, emphasizing preserving environmental quality. Over time, the concept has broadened to encompass the complex notion of quality of life, integrating social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions. At its core, sustainability recognizes the dependence of human activities on the environment and its resources. Key elements such as health, social security, and macroeconomic stability are vital for ensuring a high quality of life. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, titled *Transforming our World*, was adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 25, 2015, with the support of leaders from 193 countries. This framework updates the vision of sustainable development through 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 specific targets. Romania, as one of the signatories, has been implementing its National Sustainable Development Strategy (2018-2030) since 2018. This work adopts an exploratory perspective to examine the progress made in achieving SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth – on global, European, and national levels. To analyze Romania's progress toward SDG 8, we will employ descriptive statistical methods and principal components analysis. The data, spanning the years 2008-2023, are sourced from the National Institute of Statistics and Eurostat. The findings of this study aim to support the assessment and monitoring of Romania's achievements under SDG 8 and to inform strategies and public policies that promote decent work and economic growth.

Keywords: Agenda 2030, sustainable development, work, employment, unemployment, economic growth

Résumé : Initialement, le développement durable était considéré comme une réponse à la crise écologique causée par l'exploitation industrielle intensive des ressources et la

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dégradation continue de l'environnement, avec un accent particulier sur la préservation de la qualité environnementale. Au fil du temps, le concept s'est élargi pour inclure la notion complexe de qualité de vie, intégrant des dimensions sociales, culturelles, politiques et économiques. Au cœur de ce concept, la durabilité reconnaît la dépendance des activités humaines vis-à-vis de l'environnement et de ses ressources. Des éléments clés tels que la santé, la sécurité sociale et la stabilité macro-économique sont essentiels pour garantir une qualité de vie élevée. L'Agenda 2030 pour le Développement Durable, intitulé *Transformer notre monde*, a été adopté par l'Assemblée générale des Nations Unies le 25 septembre 2015, avec le soutien des dirigeants de 193 pays. Ce cadre actualise la vision du développement durable à travers 17 Objectifs de Développement Durable (ODD) et 169 cibles spécifiques. La Roumanie, en tant que signataire, met en œuvre depuis 2018 sa Stratégie nationale de développement durable (2018-2030). Ce travail adopte une approche exploratoire visant à examiner les progrès réalisés dans l'accomplissement de l'ODD 8 – Travail décent et croissance économique – aux niveaux mondial, européen et national. Pour analyser les progrès de la Roumanie vers l'atteinte de l'ODD 8, nous utiliserons des méthodes statistiques descriptives et une analyse en composantes principales. Les données, couvrant les années 2008-2023, proviennent de l'Institut national de la statistique et d'Eurostat. Les résultats de cette étude visent à soutenir l'évaluation et le suivi des progrès de la Roumanie dans le cadre de l'ODD 8 et à orienter les stratégies et politiques publiques visant à promouvoir un travail décent et une croissance économique.

Mots clés : Agenda 2030, développement durable, travail, emploi, chômage, croissance économique

Rezumat: Inițial, dezvoltarea durabilă a fost considerată o soluție la criza ecologică cauzată de exploatarea industrială intensivă a resurselor și de degradarea continuă a mediului, aducând în atenție necesitatea prezervării acestuia. În timp, conceptul de dezvoltare durabilă s-a extins, incluzând și noțiunea complexă de calitate a vieții, integrând dimensiuni sociale, culturale, politice și economice ale acesteia. În esență, dezvoltarea durabilă recunoaște impactul activităților umane asupra mediului înconjurător și resurselor acestuia. Elemente cheie precum sănătatea, securitatea socială și stabilitatea macroeconomică sunt esențiale pentru a asigura o calitate ridicată a vieții. Agenda 2030 pentru Dezvoltare Durabilă, intitulată *Transformarea lumii noastre*, a fost adoptată de Adunarea Generală a Națiunilor Unite pe 25 septembrie 2015, cu sprijinul liderilor din 193 de țări. Acest cadru actualizează viziunea asupra dezvoltării durabile prin 17 Obiective de Dezvoltare Durabilă (ODD) și 169 de ținte specifice. România, în calitate de semnatară, implementează din 2018 propria Strategie Națională pentru Dezvoltare Durabilă (2018-2030). Lucrarea de față propune o perspectivă exploratorie cu scopul de a evidenția progresul realizat în îndeplinirea ODD 8 – Muncă decentă și creștere economică – la nivel global, european și național. Pentru a analiza progresul României în atingerea ODD 8, vom folosi analiza statistică descriptivă și analiza componentelor principale. Datele, care acoperă perioada 2008-2023, provin de la Institutul Național de Statistică și Eurostat. Rezultatele acestui studiu au o contribuție la monitorizarea și evaluarea progreselor României în realizarea ODD 8 și la calibrarea strategiilor și politicilor publice care urmăresc ca obiective munca decentă și creșterea economică.

Cuvinte cheie: Agenda 2030, dezvoltare durabilă, muncă, ocupare, șomaj, creștere economică

1. Brief history of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The sustainable development paradigm implies a balanced approach to development based on economic growth, and social welfare, considering the need to protect the environment. Current interpretations of sustainable development raise issues of respect for human rights, poverty reduction in all its forms, population health, promotion of gender equality, social justice, inclusive policies, and international cooperation for the future of humanity and the planet (Iftimoaei & Gabor, 2021).

The adoption of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* was preceded by a series of international conferences and agreements that brought to the world's attention the consequences of human activity on the environment. The first such international conference, the Human Environment Conference, was organized by the United Nations in Stockholm in 1972. The proceedings of the conference were finalized with the adoption of a *Declaration* containing 26 principles for sound environmental management. These principles formed the basis for a political dialogue between policymaker from developing countries regarding the consequences of industrialization and economic growth on humans and natural environment. The preamble to the *Declaration* states that „The protection and improvement of the human environment is a major issue which affects the well-being of peoples and economic development throughout the world; it is the urgent desire of the peoples of the whole world and the duty of all Governments".

The Stockholm Conference was followed by an *Action Plan for the Human Environment* focused on the development of decent settlement in the regions with population growth and the need to increase health services. Decent habitats mean providing fresh water for everyone, ensuring fertile soil for agriculture, providing energy resources taking into account the necessity of ensuring a sustainable balance between human activities and natural environment protection. One of the significant outcomes of the Stockholm Conference was the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (United Nations, 2024).

The impact of industrialization on the environment was taken up again and deepened in 1987 when the United Nations set up the *World Commission on Environment and Development*, chaired by the Prime Minister of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland. The commission's work emphasizes that development is not just about economic growth and financial profit. What is important is that the results of economic activities benefit as many people as possible. Development does not mean the unrestricted exploitation of natural resources. However, it must also include concerns about protecting the human environment and measures to alleviate the negative consequences of economic activities. *The Brundtland Commission* is credited with offering the most widely recognized definition of sustainable development to date: „meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (United Nations Brundtland Commission, 1987).

The conclusions of the Stockholm Conference were revisited and strengthened during the *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, commonly referred to as the „Earth Summit," held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Rio Conference Report emphasizes that human beings are central to sustainable development, which fundamentally entails promoting economic growth for social well-being while maintaining the Earth's ecological balance. The Rio Conference also adopted Agenda 21, which provides local governments/public administrations with a framework for drawing up their sustainable development strategies, programs and measures. Agenda 21's main strands are the fight against poverty and social exclusion, the production of sustainable goods and services and the protection of the natural environment (Iftimoaei, 2021).

An important step in the history of sustainable development is marked by the *Millennium Declaration* adopted by the United Nations in September 2000. This document outlines the following global priorities: alleviating poverty, fighting hunger, providing education for all children, fostering gender equality, lowering child mortality rates, ensuring maternal access to healthcare worldwide, preventing and addressing HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, and building partnerships to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The *Millennium Declaration* also proposed a partnership based on solidarity whereby rich countries provided resources to fund sustainable development programs in poor and developing countries (United Nations, 2000).

A decade after the Rio Declaration, the *World Summit on Sustainable Development* (2002) adopted the *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation*. In September 2005, the World Summit in New York assessed progress in implementing the Millennium Declaration Goals. Subsequently, the Sustainable Development Goals Tracker, which replaced the Millennium Declaration Goals, was launched at the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (United Nations, 2002).

Agenda 2023 for Sustainable Development was launched at the 70th session of the UN General Assembly on September 25, 2015, when 193 heads of state and government unanimously adopted this strategic document, which proposes to increase the resilience of communities and cities in the context of climate change and the social, demographic, economic and political transformations that mark the world in the 21st century. The year 2015 was full of events on sustainable development: the *Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction*, which adopted the *Sendai Framework for Action for Disaster Risk Reduction* 2015-2030; the *Third International Conference on Financing for Development* followed by the adoption of the *Addis Ababa Action Agenda*; the 2015 *United Nations Climate Change Conference* which finalized the *Paris Climate Agreement* (United Nations, 2015).

Since January 1st, 2016, the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda have started to be implemented by the signatory countries, which have developed strategies and policies in line with the targets for each goal and indicators to measure progress. Since its adoption, the European Union has established itself as a global leader in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. As a member state of the UN and the EU, Romania has expressed its adherence to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda and has endorsed the EU Council Conclusions, adopted on June 20, 2017, „A sustainable future for Europe: the EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (Departamentul de Dezvoltare Durabilă/ Sustainable Development Department, 2018).

Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda is SDG 8 - Decent Work and Growth, which will be discussed in this paper. Essentially, SDG 8 aims to achieve economic growth through the creation of well-paid jobs, improved labour productivity, opportunities for employment, eradication of forced labour, eradication of in-work poverty, including for people in need, young people neither working nor learning, through education and training in line with a globalized labour market impacted by the development of digital technologies (Chigbu & Nekhwevha, 2023).

2. Literature review

Achieving the SDG 8 of ensuring productive employment and decent work for all men and women by 2030 requires recognizing the intrinsic value and associated costs of social reproduction processes (Rai *et al*, 2019). According the authors, SDG 8 draws heavily from the ILO's Decent Work agenda, which is centred around four fundamental standards: freedom from forced labour, the eradication of child labour, freedom from workplace discrimination, and the right to form unions and engage in collective bargaining. These standards have emerged from long-standing negotiations among diverse stakeholders, including corporate entities, states, trade unions, NGOs, women's organizations, and new labour movements representing the informal sector.

Kreinin & Aigner (2021) analyse SDG 8 from a critical approach, considering it as phenomena, institutions, and ideologies, and concludes that it fails to meet strong sustainability criteria. The authors propose a new framework for SDG 8, titled „Sustainable Work and Economic Degrowth" aligning it with strong sustainability principles and the latest scientific research. Their research adopted an integrated systems approach to advancing the SDGs' overarching aim of securing a sustainable future for present and future generations. The contributions of this work include innovative indicators to assess societal dependence on economic growth and measures to guarantee welfare based on growth economic models.

In a comparative research dedicated to SDG 8, Lapinskaitė & Vidžiūnaitė (2020) assess the state of SDG 8 in G20 countries between 2013-2018. The study consists in a comparative literature review, qualitative data analysis, content analysis, comparison, and grouping. The TOPSIS method is utilized to rank G20 countries based on key SDG 8 indicators. The analysis reveals that Japan achieved the best progress in environment protection and notable economic growth during the study period, followed by the United States and South Korea. Conversely, Argentina, Brazil, and South Africa ranked lowest among the G20 countries.

Carlsen, L. (2021) proposes a „partial ordering-based analysis" of key indicators related to SDG 8 compliance across the 27 European Union member countries. The analysis focuses on five main indicators: real GDP (GDP), the investment share of GDP by institutional sectors (INV), the percentage of young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET), the employment rate (EmpR), and the long-term unemployment rate (LtUR). The results provide clear insights into the general economic and employment conditions within the EU, as well as detailed comparisons of investment patterns and employment trends.

In exploratory research on the concept of SDG8 and its relevance to economic development in the EU, Skvarciany & Astike (2022) are using a Multiple Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) approach. In the same research the CRITIC method was used to assign weights to criteria, identifying the most critical indicators. The COPRAS method was then applied to rank countries based on their progress toward SDG8. The CRITIC analysis highlighted the annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person as the most significant indicator among SDG8 targets. The COPRAS results identified Germany (100 points) and France (91 points) as the most advanced countries in implementing SDG8. Conversely, Latvia (59 points) and Finland (56 points) were the least advanced in achieving the goal. These findings provide insights into the varying levels of progress across EU member states regarding SDG8 implementation.

Bieszk-Stolorz, B., & Dmytrów, K. (2023) provided research regarding a statistical and geographical comparison of SDG 8 implementation within the European Union (EU) from 2002 to 2021, with particular attention to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study evaluates the progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development objectives both collectively and individually. The analysis employs COPRAS, Dynamic Time Warping (DTW), and hierarchical clustering methods. This methodology allows the assessing of the SDG 8' implementation, and identifying clusters of countries based on progress trends. Nordic countries demonstrate the highest levels of SDG8 implementation, while Greece, Spain, Italy, Romania, and Slovakia show the lowest levels. Some less-developed countries (e.g., Czechia, Poland, and Malta) showed significant improvement, whereas some well-developed nations (e.g., France, Luxembourg, and Portugal) experienced minimal or no improvement. The analysis shows that no clear geographical diversity was observed in the changes over time in SDG8 implementation. The overall conclusion is that the COVID-19 pandemic led to a decline in SDG8 implementation across the EU.

3. Global and European progress on the implementation of SDG 8

The implementation of the targets associated with SDG 8 has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic consequences. Even in a world without pandemics or other crises, achieving the SDGs would have been difficult. What is important is the progress in achieving the SDGs-associated targets for each country signatory to the 2030 Agenda. Despite all the negative consequences, the COVID-19 pandemic has been an opportunity to accelerate scientific and technical discoveries (Blanco *et al.*, 2022).

World economies have not yet fully recovered from the global health crisis, further amplified by military conflicts in some parts of the world. The war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine in March 2022 and the reactivation of the conflict in the Middle East following the terrorist attacks by Hamas against the population of Israel in September 2023, with regional and global reverberations, jeopardize the implementation of the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals. Grain supply chains are crucial for achieving SDGs 1 and 2, which aim to reduce poverty in all its forms and combat hunger worldwide. Ukraine is a significant grain exporter to countries on the African continent. At one point, after the outbreak of Russian aggression, there was a UN fear of a global food crisis. Ukraine's exports from its Black Sea ports have decreased considerably since the beginning of the war. The Istanbul Agreement of July 2022 on the export of Ukrainian grain to the Black Sea was in operation for some time but was not extended by Russia when it expired. In the meantime, Ukraine benefits from other grain transportation routes, including through Romania.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023 states that global real GDP per capita growth will slow down. The precarious economic situation in many countries will lead to an increase in unemployment and informal work. Youth unemployment will continue to challenge public employment strategies and policies. At the same time, the pandemic has accelerated the development of the digital economy which provides well-paid jobs for those employees who have the digital skills to meet the growing demands of employers for an increasingly skilled workforce (Iftimoaei & Vevera, 2024).

In the year of adoption of Agenda 2030, globally, the incidence of informal work was 58.6%, and in the pre-pandemic year 2019, it was 57.8%. The health measures imposed by the management of the COVID-19 pandemic have reduced economic activity and, consequently, decreased employment concomitant with an increase in informal work. In 2022, global informal labour reached 58.0%. In absolute terms, this means there are about 2 billion informal jobs globally. People in informal work are socially and economically vulnerable because they do not benefit from social and health insurance contributions. According to *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023*, in 2022, globally, nearly 1 in 4 young people (23.5% or 289 million) were not in employment, education or training, compared to a 2015 baseline of 22.2%. The global unemployment rate fell significantly in 2022, dropping to 5.4% from 6.6% in 2020 as economies began to recover from the pandemic crisis. This rate was lower than the pre-pandemic level of 5.5% in 2019. Estimated global unemployment in 2022 affected 192 million people. Global unemployment is projected to fall further to 5.3% in 2023, equivalent to 191 million people (United Nations, 2024).

Since adopting the 2030 Agenda, the European Union has taken a global leadership role in implementing sustainable development goals. To achieve this, it has integrated the values, principles, and objectives of the 2030 Agenda into European strategies and policies, created tools to monitor and assess progress voluntarily reported by member countries, and adopted discussion papers for a comprehensive, unified, and consensual approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (European Commission, 2017).

The European Consensus is grounded on poverty eradication as the overarching development goal, integrating concerns related to economic growth, environmental protection, peace and security, and humanitarian aid (European Commission, 2017). Of the 156 countries reporting progress on the SDGs, seven EU-27 member countries rank among the top 10 countries in the Global SDG Index, while all EU-27 member countries are among the top 50 countries (European Commission, 2019).

Economic growth is a goal shared by all EU-27 member countries. The standard of living of European citizens depends mainly on the performance of national economies. However, it is not automatically reflected in the indicators that describe economic growth: gross domestic product per capita and the actual growth rate of gross domestic product per capita. In other words, gross domestic product is not a measure of social welfare. Some European countries have enjoyed a sustained rate of growth in Gross Domestic Product but continue to experience high levels of poverty, including in-work poverty, resulting in a high degree of social polarization and persistent economic inequality (European Commission, 2024).

Figure 1 depicts the dynamics of real GDP per capita from 2018-2020. According to Eurostat, Romania ranks among the top EU-27 Member States with an average increase in real GDP per capita over the period. During all this time, the relative poverty rate in Romania has not fallen below 22%. Romania is developing economically without social welfare. Economic growth between 2018-2023 needs to be more inclusive.

Economic growth in the EU-27 Member States must go hand in hand with increased employment by providing equal opportunities for women and men and socio-professional integration of people with disabilities, migrants, and other groups of people from disadvantaged groups in the labour market. Decent work means creating equal and fair opportunities for all people and access to well-paid jobs, education, and training facilities in the context of an increasingly digitalized economy.

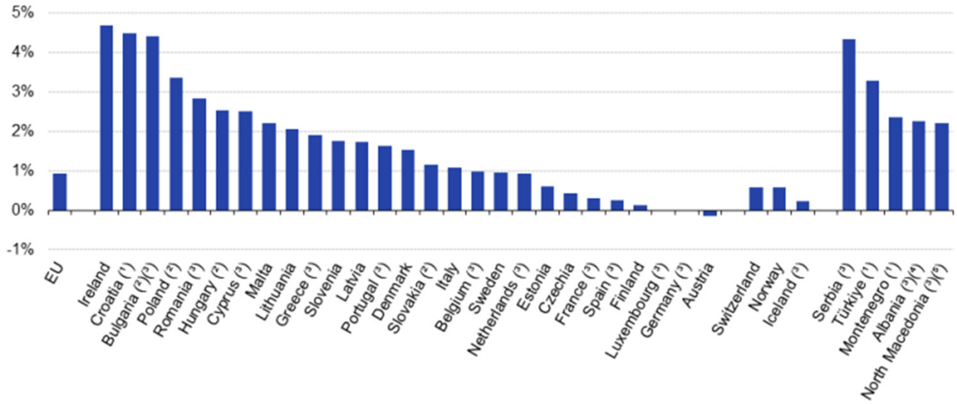

Figure 1. Change in real GDP per capita, by country, 2018-2023
(average annual growth rate in %)
Source: Eurostat, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat, 2024

Eurostat (figure 2) shows that Romania has surpassed countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary, and Greece regarding wage level (adjusted average annual wage). In 2023, the adjusted average annual wage in Romania was 17,739 Euro 2023, exceeding the values in Hungary (16895 Euro) and Greece (17013 Euro) and approaching the wage level in Poland (18,054 Euro). However, in 2023, working poverty in Romania was 15%, the highest level in the EU-27, which means a high degree of economic inequality among working people. According to data from the Romanian Ministry of Labour at the request of Economedia, 1.5 million employees in Romania were paid a minimum wage of 3,000 lei and almost 349,000 more with a minimum wage of 4,000 lei. At the beginning of 2023, Romania had more than 5.6 million active employees, which means that more than a third of employees are paid the minimum wage (Reştea, 2023).

High employment rates contribute to developing an inclusive society, which reduces poverty and economic inequalities between social groups, local communities and regions in the EU-27 Member States. Figure 3 shows that all EU-27 Member States improved their employment performance in 2023 when the EU employment rate reached a record high of 75.3%, an increase of 3.4 percentage points compared to 2018 when it was 71.9%.

All European countries are experiencing difficulties engaging young and disadvantaged people in the labour market. According to Eurostat, the EU's NEET rate for 15-29-year-olds has improved since 2013 and reached 11.2% in 2023, the lowest on record. If this positive trend continues, the EU is expected to reach the NEET rate target of 9% by 2030.

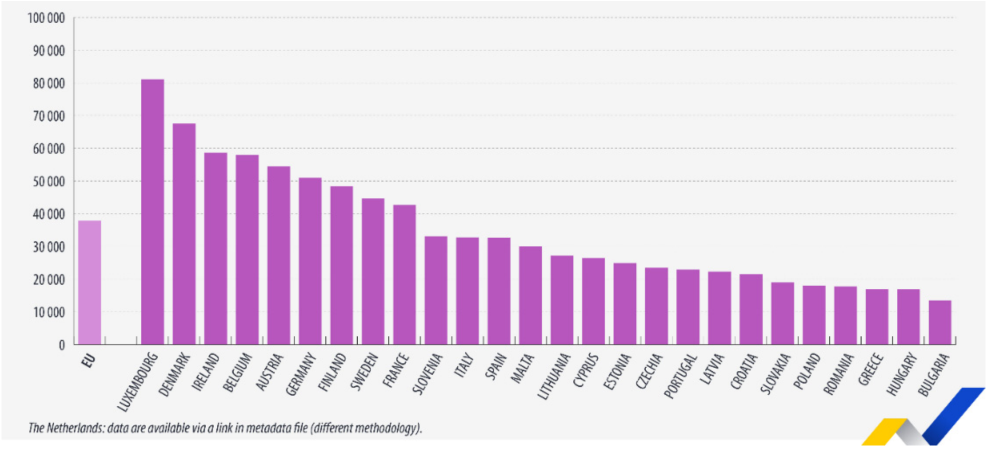

Figure 2. Average annual full-time salary per employee (in Euro), 2023
Source: Eurostat, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat, 2024

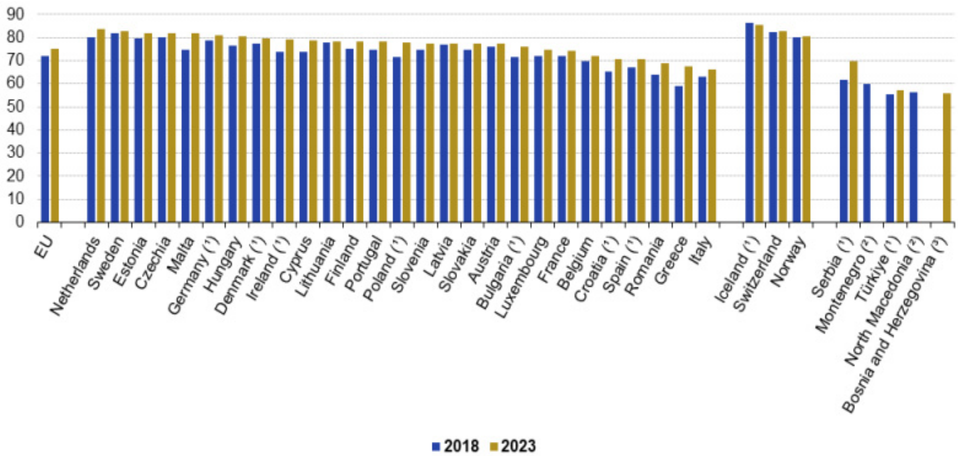

Figure 3. Employment rate, by country, 2018 and 2023
(% of population aged 20 to 64)
Source: Eurostat, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat, 2024

In all European countries, women do not benefit from facilities for balancing work and domestic activities, including raising and educating children. People with disabilities who want to work face a lack of assistive technologies and reasonable accommodation in the workplace. Although many EU Member States complain about labour shortages, there is insufficient concern about attracting people into the labour market who are not working but are available to work and/or looking for work.

4. Research methodology, data and results

The National Institute of Statistics has developed indicators to assess Romania's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The collabo ration between the Department for Sustainable Development and the National Institute of Statistics has materialized in the realization of a multi-disciplinary statistical data aggregator, which has the role of supporting the substantiation of public policies at the central and local levels, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the *National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania* (România Durabilă/ Sustainable Romania, 2024).

In this study, we used the following variables to analyze the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda, which we extracted from the National Institute of Statistics-*TEMPO Online* platform:

- *Real Gross Domestic Product* (*GDP*) per capita is an indicator used to assess the level of economic development and the standard of living. A percentage increase in GDP indicates an improvement in the average standard of living of the population. This indicator is significant from an economic perspective, as GDP reflects the monetary value of final goods and services produced in a country over a given period.
- *Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita* expresses the growth rate of this product relative to the population and is calculated as the percentage change from the previous year.
- *Employment rate of tertiary-educated persons* represents the share of the employed population with tertiary education in the total number of persons with tertiary education.
- *Youth employment rate* (*age group 15-24*) indicates the proportion of the employed population in a given age group (x) to the total population in the same age group.
- *In-work poverty rate* reflects the disposable income per adult-equivalent below the poverty line, which is 60% of the median disposable income per adult-equivalent after social transfers. According to National Institute of Statistics, the total disposable income of a household is calculated by summing the income of all household members with the income generated by the household as a whole: all earned income (employees' wages and salaries and self-employment income), private income from investments and property, inter-household transfers; all social transfers received in cash, including old-age pensions.
- *Growth rate of labour productivity per person employed* highlights the effectiveness of the labour expended in the production process. This indicator is calculated by gross value added over the total number of persons employed. The employed population includes all persons engaged in productive activities, as defined by national accounts, and includes employees and own-account workers. The indicator is the growth rate of

labour productivity per person employed, expressed as a percentage change over the previous year.

- *Nominal average net monthly average nominal earnings on research and development activity in enterprises* are calculated by deducting compulsory social security contributions and related tax from the average gross monthly wage earnings. The result is divided by the average number of employees and months in a year.

These variables are included in the *European Union's Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) set of indicators. They are used to monitor the progress of SDG 8 - Decent work and economic growth. This goal is part of the European Commission's priorities embedded in initiatives such as the *European Green Deal* and *An Economy that Works for People*. The processed data is taken from the National Institute of Statistics – *TEMPO Online* and Eurostat for 2008-2023.

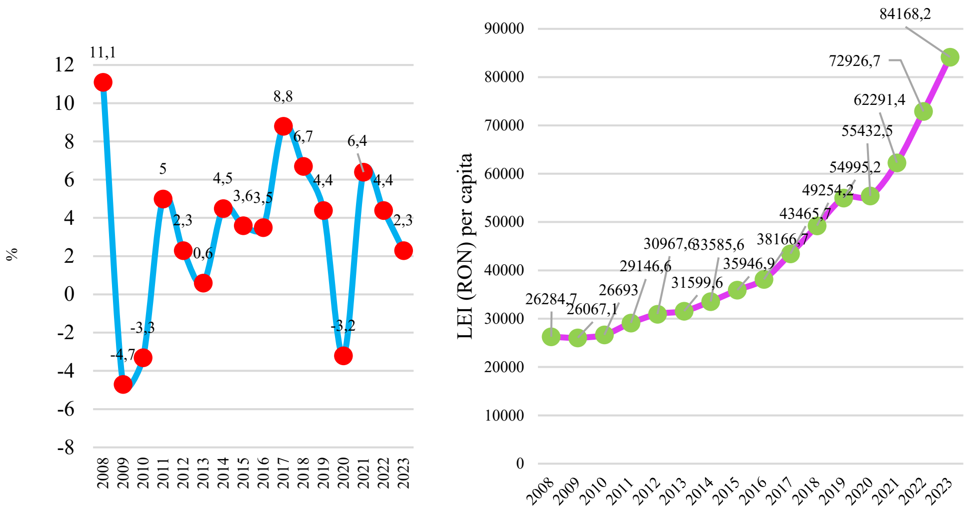

Figure 4. Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita (left) and the nominal value of GDP per capita over the period 2008-2023 (right) in Romania
Source: own processing based on INS – TEMPO Online database

As can be seen in figure 4, the annual growth rate of real GDP per capita had a negative evolution in 2009, 2010 (consequences of the global economic crisis), and 2020 (due to the coronavirus pandemic), while in the other years it had a positive trend, with a maximum increase of 11.1% in 2008 compared to the previous year (due to the accession to the European Union). The nominal value of GDP per capita in Romania also shows a steady increase since 2011 (after the economic crisis). In 2023, the value of real GDP per capita is 84168.2 lei.

Employment is essential for ensuring an adequate standard of living while providing a stable framework for the realization of individual goals and aspirations. It also contributes to economic development, quality of life, and social inclusion.

Increasing employment by bringing into the labour market people who are difficult to employ (people with disabilities, marginalized, socially excluded) is essential for an inclusive society oriented towards the well-being of as many people as possible. Sustainable development also requires a change in approach from increasing employment to the quality of employment (decent working conditions and incomes above the poverty line).

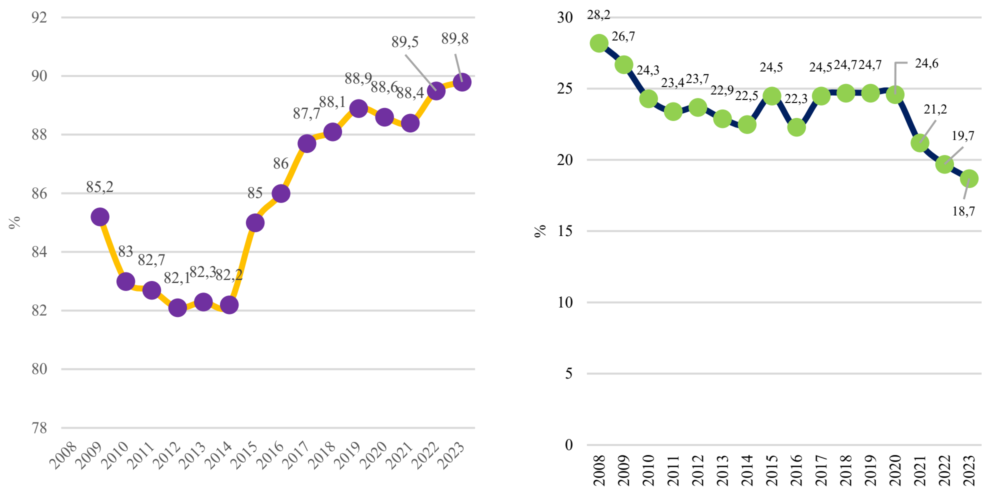

Figure 5. Employment rates of tertiary-educated (left) and of young people aged 15-24 in 2008-2023 (right) in Romania
Source: own processing based on INS – TEMPO Online database

As for the employment rate of people with higher education in Romania (figure 5), we note that it has recorded values of over 85% since 2015, with an increasing trend every year. In 2023, the employment rate of people with higher education (89.8%) in Romania is above the European Union average (87.3%).

The employment rate of young people in Romania's 15-24 age group shows a downward trend from 2019 (from 24.7% to 18.7% in 2023). Romania is in second last place in the European Union, just above Greece. The differences between Romania and other EU Member States can be explained by factors such as limited access to suitable jobs for young people, insufficient alignment between the skills acquired in education and labour market requirements, and limited opportunities for apprenticeships or internships. In contrast, Northern and Western European countries, with the highest employment rates in this category, offer better-structured policies for integrating young people into the labour market.

The European Union's ambitious target is to reach an employment rate of 78% for 20-64-year-olds by 2030. To support this goal, the Action Plan proposes halving the employment gap compared to 2019 and reducing the rate of NEETs (those not in employment, education, or training) aged 15-29 to 9% by 2030. These measures underline the EU's commitment to a more inclusive labour market and increasing job opportunities.

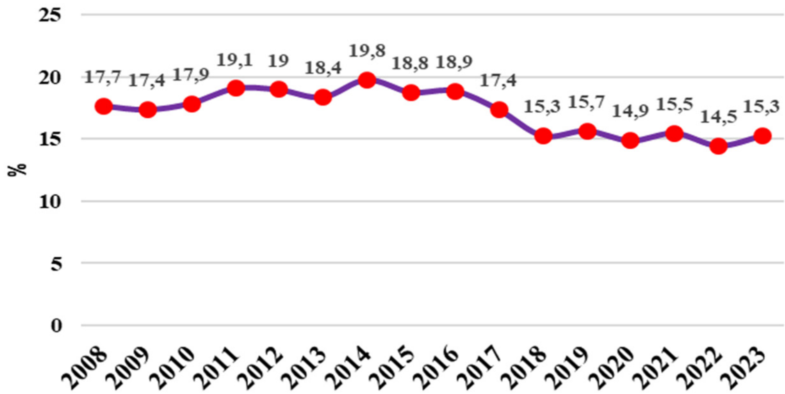

Figure 6. In-work poverty rate in Romania, 2008-2023
Source: own processing based on INS – TEMPO Online database

The in-work poverty rate (Figure 6) has been on a downward trend since 2016 in Romania. Thus, from 18.9% it reached 15.3% in 2023. However, compared to the EU average (8.12%), the gap is significant. Factors contributing to in-work poverty are the following: low wages; poor working conditions; high cost of living; lack of social protection; lack of adequate qualifications hindering access to well-paid jobs as well as regional inequalities (major disparities between regions). The impact of in-work poverty influences social instability, economic inequality, limits consumption and investment.

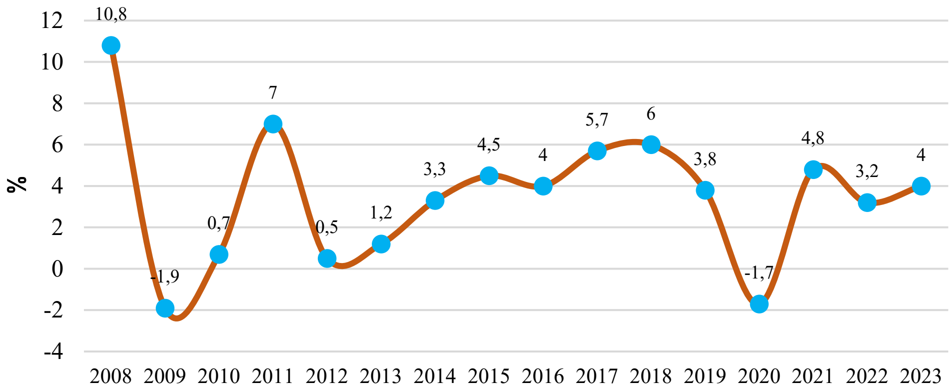

Figure 7. Growth rate of labour productivity per person employed in Romania 2008-2023
Source: own processing based on INS – TEMPO Online database

The growth rate of labour productivity per person employed in Romania (figure 7) had negative values in 2009 compared to 2008, and in 2020 compared to 2019, the reasons being the economic and health crises.

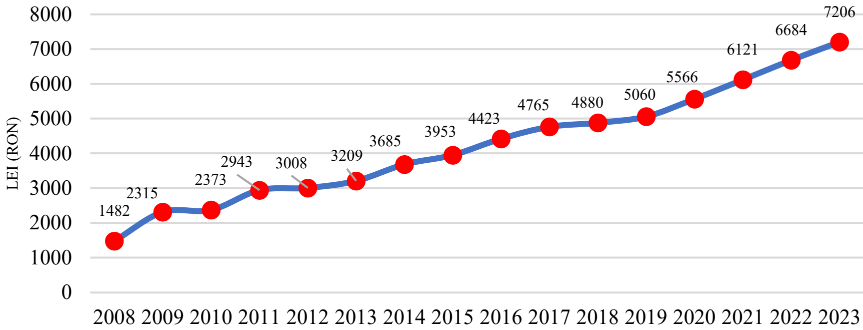

Figure 8. Average net monthly earnings in Research & Development activity in Romania for the period 2008-2023
Source: own processing based on INS – TEMPO Online database

The monthly average net wage in Research&Development activity in enterprises (figure 8) has had an upward trend in all these years, and in 2023 the value is 7206 lei.

To characterize the evolution of the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 8 of Agenda 2030 at the level of the countries of the European Union, we used the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) method. This is a descriptive method of multidimensional data analysis and is applied in the study of the relationship between quantitative variables (Culic, 2004; Pintilescu, 2022). Euclidean distance is used to calculate the distance between two points. The following objectives are pursued:

- highlighting statistical links between the variables;
- emphasizing similarities/differences between the statistical units analysed according to all the variables recorded;
- justification of similarities/differences between units in terms of the variables.

The PCA highlights a system of factorial axes that concentrate the information contained in the initial table. In the first step, we apply standardization of variables. After data processing, we obtained the following results on the statistical variables: correlation matrix, calculated value of chi-square and KMO statistics, variance of the variables, eigenvalues and variance explained by each factorial axis, coordinates of the variables on the factorial axes, graphical representations. We obtained next results:

Table 1. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.531
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	33.181
	df	10
	Sig.	.000

Source: own processing with SPSS

We obtain that the Correlational Matrix of the variables is significantly different from an Identity Matrix (χ 2 =33.181, p=.000). With a 95% probability, there are statistically significant relationships between the variables analysed. In the same time, we obtain KMO = .531>.500 value that indicate a reliable factor analysis. The eigenvalues corresponding to the five factorial axes and the inertia explained by each axis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Values and inertia explained by factorial axes (Total Variance Explained)

Component	**Initial Eigenvalues**			**Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings**		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	1.973	39.451	39.451	1.973	39.451	39.451
2	1.668	33.352	72.802	1.668	33.352	72.802
3	0.721	14.423	87.226			
4	0.394	7.873	95.099			
5	0.245	4.901	100			

Source: Principal Component Analysis – own processing with SPSS

The first two factor axes explain 72.8% of the total inertia. According to Benzecri's criterion, these two factorial axes are interpreted. The graphical representations allow us to visualize the position of the variables in the factorial axis system. Interpreting the obtained graphs makes it possible to identify the direction and intensity of the links between the variables.

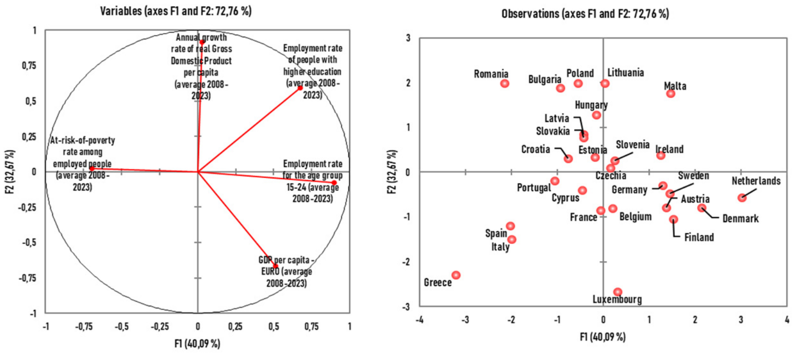

Figure 9. Position of variables and statistical units on the first two factorial axes
Source: Principal Component Analysis – own processing with XLSTAT

The first horizontal factor axis indicates a positive correlation between the annual growth rate of real GDP per capita, the employment rate of tertiary-educated persons, the employment rate of 15-24-year-olds, real GDP per capita and a negative correlation between these and the working poverty rate. The second factorial axis shows a positive correlation between the annual growth rate of real GDP per capita, the in-work poverty rate, the employment rate of those with tertiary education and a negative correlation between these variables and the employment rate of young people aged 15-24 and real GDP per capita.

Suppose we refer to the statistical units (European Union countries). In that case, the first factorial axis highlights countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, and Austria with a high average employment rate of young people aged 15-24 years, high average real GDP per capita for the period analysed, as well as the lowest values of the poverty rate of those in work. At the opposite pole is Greece, which has low average values for the variables analysed. Malta stands out with the highest value of the employment rate of people with tertiary education (87.7%).

The second factorial axis highlights Luxembourg with the highest average GDP per capita (€ 83632) in the European Union from 2008-2023. Romania, Poland, Lithuania and Bulgaria have the lowest values. In terms of the annual growth rate of real GDP per capita, these countries are characterized by higher average growth rates than more economically developed countries. This is explained by the fact that Romania, Poland, Lithuania, and Bulgaria are emerging economies, meaning they have a higher growth potential, as the level of economic development and real GDP per capita are still below the EU average.

5. Concluding remarks

Of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals included in the 2030 Agenda, SDG 8 – *Decent Work and Economic Growth* - occupies a central place and is the subject of this study. SDG 8 aims to promote economic growth by creating well-paid jobs, increasing labour productivity, expanding employment opportunities for diverse groups, eliminating forced labour, and reducing in-work poverty. It also aims to support people in need, young people who are neither employed nor involved in education, through vocational training initiatives adapted to a globalized labour market influenced by digital transformations.

In order to monitor the progress made by Romania, we used some of the indicators of Sustainable Development Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda: real GDP/capita; annual growth rate of real GDP/capita; employment rate of tertiary educated people; employment rate of young people (age group 15-24); working poverty rate; growth rate of labour productivity per person employed; average net monthly nominal average net wage growth per R&D activity in enterprises. The values of these indicators highlight the important progress made by Romania. However, significant challenges remain, such as reducing working poverty, increasing the participation of women and young people in the labour market and improving working conditions. Sustained strategies for education, digitization and sustainability are essential to achieve the targets set in the 2030 Agenda.

In this study, using principal component analysis, we have highlighted the statistical relationships between the variables analysed for 2008-2023. The first factorial axis shows a positive correlation between the annual growth rate of real GDP per capita, the employment rate of tertiary-educated persons, the employment rate of young people aged 15-24 years and real GDP per capita. There is also a negative correlation between these variables and the in-work poverty rate. The second factorial axis indicates a positive correlation between the annual growth rate of real GDP per capita, the in-work poverty rate and the employment rate of tertiary-educated persons. In contrast, the statistical link with the employment rate of young people (15-24 years old) and real GDP per capita is negative.

As far as the EU countries are concerned, the Netherlands, Denmark and Austria have the highest youth employment rates (15-24 years old), a high average real GDP per capita over the period and the lowest in-work poverty rates. Malta also stands out with the highest employment rate of people with tertiary education (87.7%). Luxembourg has the highest average GDP per capita in the European Union from 2008-2023 (€83,632), while Romania, Poland, Lithuania and Bulgaria have the lowest. However, regarding the annual growth rate of real GDP per capita, these countries have higher average values than more economically developed countries. This is explained by their status as emerging economies, which gives them a higher growth potential, given that their economic development and real GDP per capita are still below the EU average.

Our study has some research limitations in that not all indicators for monitoring and evaluating the targets associated with Sustainable Development Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda were included. Therefore, this may affect the accuracy and applicability of the findings.

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SCIENTIFIC ANNALS OF „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" UNIVERSITY OF IASI
VOLUME XVII/2, SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK, 2024

DOI: 10.47743/asas-2024-2-767

GREENWASHING PHENOMENON AND ITS IMPACT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING SDG-12 ON SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Alexandru-Cosmin APOSTOL[1]

Abstract: Through this article, I propose a synthetic analysis of the greenwashing phenomenon and its impact on sustainable development, with a focus on sustainable or green consumption and production. This analysis is valuable in the context of the approaching year 2030, when the extent to which the targets set by the United Nations (UN) in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be achieved will be debated. In the first part of the article, the trajectory of global concerns regarding sustainable development and sustainable consumption and production is described. The second part presents various scientific approaches to measuring responsible and sustainable consumption, highlighting the increasing tendency of people to adopt a lifestyle based on green consumption, thus becoming green consumers. The third part addresses the phenomenon of *greenwashing* and its implications for the SDGs. In short, *greenwashing* represents a misinformation strategy that hides (intentionally or unintentionally) certain information from consumers, which is used by various companies to create the image of organizations concerned about environmental issues and implementing sustainable production methods. This phenomenon can create major confusion among green consumers, who are oriented toward sustainable consumption practices. They may fail to recognize whether a product is truly sustainable, whether a company is genuinely committed to promoting green / sustainable consumption, or whether a transition is taking place from a linear to a circular economy. Furthermore, greenwashing can fuel increasing scepticism both among consumers, who lose trust in responsible consumption practices, and investors, who wish to support companies that implement environmentally friendly activities. Therefore, the greenwashing phenomenon proves to be a major challenge in achieving the targets set in the SDGs.

Keywords: greenwashing, sustainable development goals, SDG-12, sustainable consumption, green consumption

Résumé : À travers cet article, je propose une analyse synthétique du phénomène de greenwashing et de son impact sur le développement durable, en mettant l'accent sur la consommation et la production durables ou « vertes ». Cette analyse est précieuse dans le contexte de l'année 2030 qui approche, moment où l'on débattra de la mesure dans laquelle

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les objectifs fixés par les Nations Unies (ONU) dans le cadre des Objectifs de Développement Durable (ODD) auront été atteints. Dans la première partie de l'article, la trajectoire des préoccupations mondiales concernant le développement durable et la consommation et la production durables est décrite. La deuxième partie présente diverses approches scientifiques pour mesurer la consommation responsable et durable, mettant en lumière la tendance croissante des individus à adopter un mode de vie basé sur la consommation verte, devenant ainsi des consommateurs verts. La troisième partie aborde le phénomène de greenwashing et ses implications pour les ODD. En résumé, le greenwashing représente une stratégie de désinformation qui cache (intentionnellement ou non) certaines informations aux consommateurs, utilisée par diverses entreprises afin de créer l'image d'organisations préoccupées par les enjeux environnementaux et l'implémentation de méthodes de production durables. Ce phénomène peut créer une confusion majeure chez les consommateurs verts, orientés vers des pratiques de consommation durables. Ils peuvent ne pas parvenir à reconnaître si un produit est réellement durable, si une entreprise est réellement engagée dans la promotion de la consommation verte/durable, ou si une transition a effectivement lieu d'une économie linéaire vers une économie circulaire. De plus, le greenwashing peut alimenter un scepticisme croissant, tant chez les consommateurs qui perdent confiance dans les pratiques de consommation responsable que chez les investisseurs qui souhaitent soutenir des entreprises mettant en œuvre des activités respectueuses de l'environnement. Par conséquent, le phénomène de greenwashing s'avère être un défi majeur dans la réalisation des objectifs fixés dans les ODD.

Mots-clés : greenwashing, objectifs de développement durable, ODD-12, consommation durable, consommation verte

Rezumat: Prin intermediul acestui articol, propun o analiză sintetică asupra fenomenului de greenwashing și a modului în care acesta afectează dezvoltarea durabilă, cu accent pe consumul și producția verde. Această analiză este utilă în contextul apropierii anului 2030, când se va dezbate măsura în care țintele propuse de Națiunile Unite (UN) în Obiectivele de Dezvoltare Durabilă (SDGs) au fost atinse. În prima parte articolului este descrisă traiectoria preocupărilor globale referitoare la dezvoltarea durabilă și consumul și producția sustenabilă. În cea de-a doua parte sunt descrise câteva abordări științifice referitoare la modalitățile de măsurare a consumului responsabil și sustenabil, fiind evidențiat faptul că oamenii sunt tot mai mult tentați să adopte un stil de viață bazat pe consumul „verde”, ei devenind practic consumatori „verzi”. În a treia parte este tratat fenomenul de *greenwashing* și implicațiile pe care le are asupra SDGs. Pe scurt, *greenwashing* reprezintă o strategie de dezinformare, de ascundere a unor informații (voită sau nu) în rândul consumatorilor, la care apelează diverse companii în scopul de a crea imaginea unor entități organizaționale preocupate de grija față de mediu și implementarea unor mijloace de producție sustenabile. Acest fenomen poate crea confuzii majore în rândul consumatorilor verzi, orientați spre practici de consum sustenabil. Ei ajung să nu mai realizeze dacă un produs este sau nu este sustenabil, dacă o companie este sau nu este preocupată de promovarea consumului verde, dacă într-adevăr are loc o trecere de la o economie liniară la una circulară. Mai mult decât atât, *greenwashing* poate alimenta creșterea scepticismului pe de o parte în rândul consumatorilor care ajung să nu mai aibă încredere în practicile de consum responsabil, iar pe de altă parte în rândul investitorilor care doresc sa susțină companii care implementează activități prietenoase cu mediul. Prin urmare, fenomenul de *greenwashing* se dovedește o provocare majoră î n calea atingerii țintelor propuse prin SDGs.

Cuvinte cheie: greenwashing, obiective de dezvoltare durabilă, SDG-12, consum sustenabil, consum verde

1. Introduction. From sustainable development to sustainable consumption and production

As we approach the year 2030, discussions about achieving the targets outlined in the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are becoming increasingly intense and gaining broader visibility in the public sphere. One of the 17 objectives included in the SDGs focuses on sustainable consumption and production, categorized under Goal 12 of the United Nations Agenda: „Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns" (https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal12). Before detailing what achieving this goal entails, it is appropriate to briefly revisit how concerns regarding sustainable development have evolved, as well as the practices of sustainable consumption and production.

Sustainable development was defined as early as 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland, 1987) as „development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (p. 43).

Seven years later, in 1994, one of the first definitions of sustainable consumption and production was developed during the Oslo Symposium. Sustainable consumption and production are defined as „the use of services and related products, which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of further generations" (Baker, 1996).

Subsequently, the concept of sustainable consumption and production gained recognition as a major social priority within the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, adopted in 2002 during the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). In this context, sustainable consumption and production were identified as one of the three overarching objectives and essential requirements for ensuring sustainable development, alongside poverty eradication and the efficient management of natural resources to foster socio-economic development (Hens & Nath, 2003).

In summary, „sustainable consumption and production" is an umbrella concept that encompasses a range of key issues, including:

- Meeting the needs of consumers and producers;
- Improving people's quality of life;
- Increasing resource-use efficiency;
- Enhancing the use of renewable energy sources;
- Reducing waste.

Thus, the focus is on providing goods and services that meet basic needs while simultaneously reducing negative environmental impacts and health risks. Additionally, attention is directed toward delivering less harmful consumption patterns by promoting the use of more efficient and less polluting goods and services, without compromising the volumes of goods and services consumed (Oslo Roundtable, 1994).

In this context, the 12th goal included in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for „Sustainable Development" was formulated, which refers to „Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns." Thus, sustainable consumption is viewed as a sectoral component of sustainable development (Rumpala, 2011). This goal, along with the other 16 objectives, is considered a key area in supporting the well-being of both current and future generations. Specifically, the aforementioned Goal 12 was established in response to projections regarding the significant population growth, expected to reach 9.8 billion people by 2050, with implications for access to the natural resources needed to sustain current lifestyles and consumption patterns.

Against this background, the issue of changing consumption habits and sustainably reducing consumption levels arises. Concerns about ensuring sustainability are evident, as we witness a rise in the number of sustainability reports, indicating an increasing awareness that sustainability should be at the core of business practices. As such, the number of sustainability reports has tripled from 2016 to the present day. Additionally, between 2019 and 2022, a total of 485 policies supporting sustainable consumption were developed, according to the UN, across 62 countries from around the world and the member states of the European Union.

Food waste is a sign of overconsumption at the global level. Reducing food waste can be achieved through the implementation of appropriate policies and, more importantly, by allocating funds for investments in new technologies, infrastructure, education, and monitoring. According to United Nations data, 931 million tons of food are wasted annually - which is equivalent to 120 kilograms of food being discarded by each person every year, even though a large number of people face hunger.

Specifically, the UN Agenda 2030 highlights that government authorities can actively engage by developing and implementing policies and regulations that set precise targets for reducing waste generation or promoting the circular economy over the linear economy. The transition to a circular economy involves creating durable, repairable, and recyclable products. Additionally, it focuses on promoting practices such as reusing, refurbishing, and recycling to minimize waste quantities and prevent the depletion of resources. From the consumer's perspective, individuals can adopt sustainable lifestyles, which involve reducing consumption, selecting products with a low environmental impact, and reducing their carbon footprint in daily activities.

The business sector can also make a significant contribution through investments in innovation and by identifying solutions that inspire consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles, ultimately leading to an improvement in well-being.

At the same time, consumers can contribute to achieving Goal 12 of the UN Agenda by reducing the amount of waste generated, as well as by becoming aware that there are sustainable alternatives for the goods, products, and services they consume. Through simple actions such as using reusable bags, using containers made from recycled plastic, making informed purchases, and buying products from local and sustainable sources, even an ordinary person can make a difference, exerting pressure on the business sector to implement sustainable production practices.

2. Research on Responsible and Sustainable Consumption Behaviour. Transition to Green Consumerism in the Context of SDG-12

Scientific concerns regarding the analysis of responsible and sustainable consumption behaviours in the context of sustainable development have become increasingly evident, as a rapidly expanding body of literature has emerged in recent decades. Moreover, research and efforts to define concepts in this field have a history spanning more than half a century, arising in response to environmental degradation and the depletion of natural resources.

Two pioneers in the study of sustainable and responsible consumption behaviours were John H. Antil and Peter D. Bennet (1979), who, in the late 1970s, developed a definition of „socially responsible consumption" building on a similar definition proposed by Henion & Wilson (1976). Socially responsible consumption refers to consumption behaviours and purchasing decisions associated with environmental and resource-related issues, driven not only by the desire to meet personal needs but also by a concern for enhancing societal well-being at a broader level. Antil & Bennet (1979) also referred to other contributions in their work, indicating a growing interest in this field: *responsible consumption* (Fisk, 1973), *socially conscious consumer* (Anderson & Cunningham, 1972), and *ecologically concerned consumer* (Henion & Wilson, 1976).

More recently, Quoquab et al. (2019) proposed an operationalization of „sustainable consumption behaviour" divided into three dimensions focused on: quality of life, concern for environmental well-being, and care for future generations. According to the authors mentioned above, sustainable consumption behaviour refers to the ways individuals purchase, use, and dispose of goods and services, considering social and environmental aspects. By adopting such a model of consumption behaviour, which emphasizes the efficient use of goods and services, individuals demonstrate increased attention to improving quality of life, show concern for environmental issues, and address the personal needs of future generations.

In summary, Quoquab et al. (2019) emphasize that *quality of life* is associated with a wise and mindful consumption model that involves the efficient use of goods and services to increase resource efficiency while meeting the basic needs of individuals. This includes reducing overconsumption associated with excessive purchases. Concern for „*environmental well-being*" involves considering the effects of overconsumption on the environment by minimizing the use of toxic materials and reducing waste and pollutant emissions throughout a product's lifecycle. *Care for future generations* can be expressed by avoiding the excessive use of natural resources, ensuring that these generations retain the means to meet their personal needs.

Consumers' attention to sustainable products is increasingly evident in contemporary society. A large-scale global study conducted by Nielsen (2018) revealed that 81% of respondents place high importance on companies implementing activities and programs to support environmental protection. Additionally, 73% acknowledged that they could adopt responsible consumption behaviours to reduce their environmental impact (e.g., purchasing organic products, goods labelled „grass-fed" or „free-range," or clean-label products in the beauty sector). These shifts are also becoming increasingly visible in the advertising messages of major companies. For instance, the Nielsen Global Report (2023) shows that, between the beginning of 2022 and May 2023, over 18,000 sustainability-focused advertising campaigns were launched in Germany. These campaigns emphasized promoting sustainable technologies and innovations in production cycles, creating an emotional connection with consumers by addressing environmental concerns, and highlighting corporate efforts to genuinely support the circular economy. Practices such as reuse, recycling, and repairing purchased products were actively promoted among consumers.

Another report, titled Sustainable Market Share Index™ (Kronthal-Sacco & Whelan, 2024), highlights that products marketed as sustainable hold an 18.5% market share, a figure that has been steadily increasing since 2013. For instance, the growth recorded between 2015 and 2023 was 4.8%. The largest contribution to the rise in sales of sustainably marketed products comes from individuals with high incomes, higher education, urban backgrounds, and primarily from the millennial generation. However, a significant contribution is also observed among middle-income individuals from Generation X and Baby Boomers. This trend reflects the emergence of a niche of consumers referred to as „green consumers" who prefer products or services that minimize environmental harm and support social justice. These consumers are contrasted with „grey consumers" described as „consumers who generally do not have green values or lifestyles" (Young et al., 2010, p. 21).

In the context of debates surrounding the SDGs, increasing the number of individuals adopting sustainable consumption patterns, or green consumption, proves to be a challenging target, as the literature extensively addresses the *green gap* — the discrepancy between intention and action. Studies indicate that a favourable attitude toward sustainable products does not necessarily translate into corresponding purchasing behaviours (Gleim & Lawson, 2014; ElHaffar et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2016). Thus, while the share of people expressing positive attitudes toward consuming such goods and services is rising, this does not necessarily correlate with an increase in the volumes of sustainable products and services purchased. Decision-making in buying processes is complex, involving internal factors such as personal motivations, which complicate a deeper understanding of the specifics of this process. Moreover, researchers have found that ethical purchasing principles are often secondary, overshadowed by other factors that significantly influence purchasing decisions, such as prices, promotions, lifestyle, and perceptions of product quality. The green gap can also be explained by the fact that individuals tend to choose products based on their benefits, purchasing them to meet specific needs or for immediate personal interest.

In conclusion, such research and analyses contribute to the perception that society is genuinely and concretely concerned with achieving the targets set by the SDGs. However, this raises the question: are there specific challenges to meeting Goal 12 of the Agenda? The answer is undoubtedly yes. These challenges include obvious ones, such as the *green gap*, and more subtle ones, such as the phenomenon of greenwashing, which will be addressed in the next part of this article.

3. The Phenomenon of Greenwashing and Its Impact on SDG-12

As highlighted in the previous section of this paper, in recent years, consumers have become increasingly concerned about the environmental issues caused by excessive consumption, leading to the emergence of so-called *green consumerism*. This specific type of consumption is closely tied to the attention people pay to environmental problems, paving the way for *ecological marketing*, which focuses on whether products are genuinely environmentally friendly (Zhu & Sarkis, 2016). At the same time, organizations have taken note of consumers' needs, desires, and expectations, entering this market through various practices designed to attract this growing niche of environmentally conscious customers.

A significant challenge for green consumerism is posed by the phenomenon of *greenwashing*. As noted by de Freitas Netto et al. (2019), the term *greenwashing* is closely linked to the work of environmental activist Jay Westerveld, who observed in 1986 that the hotel industry promoted the practice of reusing towels under the pretext of environmental conservation. However, Westerveld pointed out that such policies stood in stark contrast to other practices in the hotel industry, which were far from environmentally friendly and were considered harmful. Moreover, the promotion of the „reuse" idea was actually driven by an attempt to reduce housekeeping costs rather than a genuine commitment to sustainability. Since then, the body of research and analysis surrounding *greenwashing* has grown significantly (Dahl, 2010), resulting in numerous and varied definitions related to this phenomenon.

Next, I will present the most commonly cited definitions related to *greenwashing*. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2023), *greenwashing* refers to „the creation or propagation of an unfounded or misleading environmentalist image." The Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) defines *greenwashing* as „a behaviour or activities that make people believe that a company is doing more to protect the environment than it is," while Merriam-Webster (n.d.) states that it is „behaviour or activities that make people believe that a company is doing more to protect the environment than it really is." Additionally, another frequently mentioned definition in the literature is that of TerraChoice (acquired by UL), which describes *greenwashing* as „the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service" (UL, n.d.). Also, according to another definition, „greenwashing is a co-creation of an external accusation toward an organization with regard to presenting a misleading green message." (Seele & Gatti, 2015).

Thus, we are talking about an emerging concept that has been increasingly addressed in the academic literature and has sparked interest even from the United Nations (n.d.), which highlights that the phenomenon presents numerous obstacles in achieving the SDGs and combating the crisis caused by climate change and environmental issues.

According to Jakubczak & Gotowska (2020), consumers are directly exposed in their daily lives to a variety of „greenwashing" practices, including:

- **Promoting marketing messages claiming that an organization implements environmentally friendly measures**, while other activities contradict the mission they claim to support. For example, a sector heavily exposed to greenwashing is the fashion industry. A recent report highlights that 60% of sustainable practices promoted by major European players in this market are actually „unsubstantiated" and „misleading" (Arthur, 2023), which can create confusion among consumers about what is truly sustainable and what is not.
- **Delivering information about environmentally friendly practices** that lack scientific support or are based on fabricated data to demonstrate their beneficial environmental effects to the public.
- **Using abstract concepts** that could be interpreted as being correlated with environmental care but lack substantial backing or clear explanation.
- **Using „invented" or untrustworthy labels** (e.g., the eco-friendly label) to present products or services as environmentally safe, without meeting actual environmental criteria.
- **Using graphic images, colours** (such as green), symbols, or photographs that mislead consumers into thinking they are opting for environmentally friendly products, goods, or services when they are actually not.

These tactics can significantly undermine genuine efforts toward sustainability by creating confusion, eroding consumer trust, and making it harder for individuals to make informed, responsible choices.

Some companies, in order to maximize profits, resort to various greenwashing strategies (selective disclosure, attention deflection, deceptive manipulation, dubious authorizations and labels, etc.) in order to maintain the appearance that their production practices are environmentally friendly (Yang et al., 2020).

All these aspects can cause major confusion among consumers who claim to adopt „green consumption" through their personal purchasing decisions. In such a context, attitudes and beliefs associated with green consumption may suffer as there is no deep understanding of what constitutes a green good, product, or service. Therefore, consumer choices may ultimately prove to be superficial, influenced more by a preference for a certain brand (Braga et al., 2019).

One of the SDGs targets most profoundly affected by the phenomenon of „greenwashing” is 12.6: „Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle” (UN, 2024). Thus, even though companies are encouraged to implement sustainable practices and report their true environmental impact, „greenwashing” leads to the promotion of distorted or falsified information that misleads consumers about how environmental policies are supported. Ultimately, individuals wishing to adopt green consumption find themselves unable to distinguish concretely between sustainable and unsustainable corporate practices.

4. Conclusions

The phenomenon of *greenwashing* is widespread and merely creates an illusion in the consumer's mind, who deceives themselves into believing they are responsible and oriented toward consuming green/sustainable goods, products, and services. Even though the consumer's actions may reflect a declared, genuine care for the environment, they can be trapped by the deceptive practices of large organizations that profit from the recent discussions surrounding sustainable consumption and production practices. Therefore, education focused on adopting sustainable consumption practices must be increasingly developed to combat greenwashing. Consumers need adequate information to identify the signs of greenwashing to form an accurate understanding of the production methods involved in various markets. For instance, a noteworthy initiative is the introduction of a *greenwashing index* (e.g. https://www.greenwashingindex.com), which aims to inform end consumers about which organizational practices are genuinely sustainable and which are hidden behind greenwashing tactics. In addition, there are guides addressed both to the public and to companies, designed to help understand and prevent greenwashing (Horiuchi et al., 2009).

Moreover, *greenwashing* practices lead to an increase in consumer reluctance toward sustainable consumption, fostering a critical attitude toward „green consumerism.” At the macro level, investor confidence, especially among those directing capital toward supporting sustainable consumption and production practices, can be significantly eroded due to greenwashing practices (Pizzetti et al., 2019). As a result, we may witness a deepening of the gap between environmental attitudes and actual consumer behaviours, which could negatively impact the achievement of the objectives outlined in the SDGs.

As future research directions, it is recommended to explore this topic through studies examining how people relate to the phenomenon of greenwashing: to what extent are they aware of it and how exposed do they feel to it? How much attention do they pay to the production practices of goods, products, and services provided by suppliers? What is the real distance between the intention to adopt green consumption behaviours and the actual action, given the existence of greenwashing? On the other hand, another target group for such studies could be companies that claim to use sustainable production methods. In this context, research could investigate the extent to which they truly adopt sustainable production methods that support green consumption and meet the needs of this consumer niche.

In conclusion, it remains to be seen through systematic analyses how the phenomenon of greenwashing has affected the achievement of the targets set in the SDGs.

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SCIENTIFIC ANNALS OF „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" UNIVERSITY OF IASI
VOLUME XVII/2, SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK, 2024

DOI: 10.47743/asas-2024-2-768

THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL ECONOMY IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

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Abstract: The article explores the impact of the social economy in Romania on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the *UN 2030 Agenda*, considering the specific contributions of different types of social economy organizations in achieving sustainable results. These organizations include: economically active NGOs (operating under Government Ordinance No. 26/2000, Law No. 246/2005), licensed social enterprises (operating under the Social Economy Law No. 219/201) and licensed protected units (operating under Law 448/2006 on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities). The paper aims to assess the contribution of these economic entities to sustainable development by identifying their specific activities that influence progress towards the achievement of the SDGs. Comparative analysis of different types of organizations helps to understand how each contributes to different aspects of sustainable development.

The study was based on updated data from the *Register of Associations and Foundations* (published on the website of the Ministry of Justice), the *National Register of Social Enterprises - RUES* (published on the website of ANOFM) and the *Register of Authorized Protected Units* (published on the website of the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity).

The results underline the direct contribution of social economy organizations to SDG 1 (Poverty Free), SDG 3 (Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Growth), SDG 10 (Reducing Inequalities) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). By reporting on the SDGs, organizations clarify their social impact, improve transparency and accountability, and at the same time increase their attractiveness to donors and partners. This approach facilitates the creation of strategic partnerships and fundraising, contributing to sustainable and effective solutions. The SDGs also provide a clear framework for monitoring progress, assessing long-term impact and supporting public policies that promote sustainable economic and social development.

In conclusion, social economy organizations play a key role in transforming society and in achieving a significant number of Sustainable Development Goals, having a

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positive impact on communities, the environment and local economic development and are thus fundamental pillars of global sustainable development.

Keywords: social economy, social economy organizations, social impact, sustainable development goals

Resumé : L'article explore l'impact de l'économie sociale en Roumanie sur la réalisation des Objectifs de Développement Durable (ODD) de *l'Agenda 2030 de l'ONU*, en considérant les contributions spécifiques des différents types d'organisations de l'économie sociale dans l'obtention de résultats durables. Ces organisations comprennent : des ONG économiquement actives (fonctionnant en vertu de l'ordonnance gouvernementale n° 26/2000, loi n° 246/2005), des entreprises sociales agréées (fonctionnant en vertu de la loi sur l'économie sociale n° 219/201) et des unités protégées agréées (fonctionnant en vertu de la loi 448/2006 sur la protection et la promotion des droits des personnes handicapées). L'objectif du document est d'évaluer la contribution de ces entités économiques au développement durable en identifiant leurs activités spécifiques qui influencent les progrès vers la réalisation des ODD. L'analyse comparative de différents types d'organisations permet de comprendre comment chacune contribue aux différents aspects du développement durable.

L'étude s'appuie sur les données actualisées du *Registre des Associations et Fondations* (publié sur le site Internet du Ministère de la Justice), du *Registre National des Entreprises Sociales - RUES* (publié sur le site Internet de l'ANOFM) et du *Registre des Unités Protégées Autorisées* (publié sur le site Internet de l'Instance nationale pour la protection des droits des personnes handicapées, ministère du Travail et de la Solidarité sociale).

Les résultats soulignent la contribution directe des organisations de l'économie sociale à l'ODD 1 (pas de pauvreté), à l'ODD 3 (Santé et bien-être), à l'ODD 4 (Éducation de qualité), à l'ODD 8 (Travail décent et croissance), à l'ODD 10 (Réduction des inégalités) et ODD 12 (Consommation et production responsables). En rendant compte des ODD, les organisations clarifient leur impact social, améliorent la transparence et la responsabilité, et en même temps augmentent leur attractivité auprès des donateurs et des partenaires. Cette approche facilite la création de partenariats stratégiques et la collecte de fonds, contribuant ainsi à des solutions durables et efficaces. Les ODD fournissent également un cadre clair pour suivre les progrès, évaluer l'impact à long terme et soutenir les politiques publiques qui promeuvent un développement économique et social durable.

En conclusion, les organisations de l'économie sociale jouent un rôle clé dans la transformation de la société et dans la réalisation d'un nombre important d'objectifs de développement durable, ayant un impact positif sur les communautés, l'environnement et le développement économique local, et constituent ainsi des piliers fondamentaux du développement durable mondial.

Mots-clés : économie sociale, organisations de l'économie sociale, impact social, objectifs de développement durable

Abstract: Articolul explorează impactul economiei sociale din România asupra realizării Obiectivelor de Dezvoltare Durabilă (ODD) ale *Agendei ONU 2030*, luând în considerare contribuțiile specifice ale diferitelor tipuri de organizații ale economiei sociale în obținerea de rezultate durabile. Printre aceste organizații se numără: ONG-uri active din punct de vedere economic (care funcționează conform Ordonanței Guvernului nr. 26/2000, Legea nr. 246/2005), întreprinderi sociale autorizate (care funcționează conform Legii economiei sociale nr. 219/201) și unități protejate autorizate (care funcționează conform Legii 448/2006 privind protecția și promovarea drepturilor persoanelor cu dizabilități). Scopul lucrării este de a evalua contribuția acestor entități economice la dezvoltarea durabilă prin identificarea activităților lor specifice care influențează progresul către realizarea ODD. Analiza comparativă a diferitelor tipuri de organizații ajută la înțelegerea modului în care fiecare contribuie la diferite aspecte ale dezvoltării durabile. Studiul s-a bazat pe date actualizate din *Registrul Asociațiilor și Fundațiilor* (publicat pe site-ul Ministerului Justiției), *Registrul Național al Întreprinderilor Sociale - RUES* (publicat pe site-ul ANOFM) și *Registrul Unităților Protejate Autorizate* (publicat pe site-ul Autorității Naționale pentru Protecția Drepturilor Persoanelor cu Dizabilități, Ministerul Muncii și Solidarității Sociale).

Rezultatele subliniază contribuția directă a organizațiilor economiei sociale la ODD 1 (Fără sărăcie), ODD 3 (Sănătate și bunăstare), ODD 4 (Educație de calitate), ODD 8 (Muncă decentă și creștere), ODD 10 (Reducerea inegalităților) și ODD 12 (Consum și producție responsabilă). Prin raportarea ODD-urilor, organizațiile își clarifică impactul social, îmbunătățesc transparența și responsabilitatea și, în același timp, își sporesc atractivitatea pentru donatori și parteneri. Această abordare facilitează crearea de parteneriate strategice și strângerea de fonduri, contribuția la soluții durabile și eficiente. ODD oferă, de asemenea, un cadru clar pentru monitorizarea progreselor, evaluarea impactului pe termen lung și sprijinirea politicilor publice care promovează dezvoltarea economică și socială durabilă.

În concluzie, organizațiile de economie socială joacă un rol cheie în transformarea societății și în atingerea unui număr semnificativ de Obiective de Dezvoltare Durabilă, având un impact pozitiv asupra comunităților, mediului și dezvoltării economice locale, fiind astfel piloni fundamentali ai dezvoltării durabile globale.

Cuvinte cheie: economie socială, organizații de economie socială, impact social, obiective de dezvoltare durabilă

1. Introduction

The social and solidarity economy (SSE) plays a key role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), contributing to a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable society. The adoption of the resolution „Promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development" by the United Nations General Assembly (A/77/L.60) in April 2023 and the Council Recommendation of 27 November 2023 on developing framework conditions for the social economy (C/2023/1344) highlight the global recognition of this sector as a catalyst for sustainable development.

At the European level, according to the Council Recommendation of 27 November 2023 on developing framework conditions for the social economy (C/2023/1344), in a general sense, social economy means „a set of autonomous private law entities providing goods and services to their members or society, encompassing forms of organization such as cooperatives, mutual societies, associations (including charities), foundations or social enterprises, and other legal forms, operating by the following principles and essential characteristics: (i) the prevalence of people as well as the social or environmental objective over profit; (ii) the reinvestment of all or the majority of profits and surpluses to further social or environmental goals and to carry out activities in the interest of members/users ('collective interest') or society at large ('general interest'); and (iii) democratic or participatory governance" (p. 8).

Social economy organizations are entities that combine entrepreneurial and social dimensions in the provision of services and products (European Commission 2016; European Commission 2019; European Commission 2020). This duality of purpose allows social economy organizations to operate in different national contexts and in different sectors, adapting their models to address a wide range of economic and social needs. The activities of social economy organizations have been focused on addressing social challenges: poor access to care or support services to overcome vulnerability (SEEs providing social services), limited access to health care (especially preventive and community-based) especially in underserved areas (e.g. rural areas) or for people from vulnerable groups (e.g. elderly people, people with disabilities) (health service provider HEOs), unemployment or poor labour market integration of certain groups of people (e.g. people with disabilities, migrants, single mothers, people with low skills) (HEOs integrating vulnerable people into the labour market) (Petrescu and Lambru, 2022; Gidron and Monnickendam-Givon 2016; Kerlin, 2017). These activities demonstrate the essential role of SEEs in complementing public social protection or employment systems, especially in contexts where state capacity is limited or where specific needs are not met.

The literature considers the role of SEOs in achieving social protection goals to be linked to the welfare state and market failures (Kibler et al. 2018; Nicholls and Teasdale 2017). Thus, SEEs are considered to be effective public policy tools in employing people from vulnerable groups by creating inclusive employment environments, increasing skills, providing support services for those from vulnerable groups (Aiken 2007; Teasdale 2012; Doherty, Haugh and Lyon 2014; Gidron and Monnickendam-Givon 2016), in mobilizing social capital by creating collaborative frameworks, stimulating participation in decision-making (Evans and Syrett 2007; Kay 2006) or in the provision of social or health services (Petrescu and Lambru, 2022; Gidron and Monnickendam-Givon 2016).

In recent years, at the European level, SEEs are increasingly oriented towards innovative activities that respond to contemporary societal challenges and are future-oriented. Key areas of innovation include (European Commission, 2024; European Commission, 2020):

- **Circular economy**: OES plays a key role in promoting sustainable practices such as recycling, upcycling and promoting zero waste initiatives. These create value by turning waste into resources, reducing environmental impact while promoting local economic development.
- **Collaborative economy**: OES adopts shared resource models, including community-owned cooperatives, peer-to-peer platforms, which promote inclusion and solidarity.
- **Migration and integration services**: Many SEOs address the challenges associated with migration by offering services such as language courses,

legal assistance, housing support and cultural integration programs for migrants and refugees.

- **Energy Solutions**: In the context of climate change, OES engages in renewable energy projects such as community solar or wind farms, energy cooperatives, and energy efficiency programs for low-income households.
- **Transport systems**: SE innovates in sustainable and inclusive transport solutions, such as shared mobility services, community-oriented transport initiatives and accessible public transport options for disadvantaged groups.

The evolution of SEEs from traditional social service providers to promoters of innovation and systemic change underlines their adaptability and relevance in a rapidly changing world. Their focus on both social and entrepreneurial objectives positions them as key actors in addressing the unmet needs of contemporary societies and promoting sustainable and inclusive development.

Social and solidarity economy organizations pursue long-term sustainability and transition to formal economy, operating in all economical domains. They promote values intrinsic to their operation, such as caring (for the people and for the planet, interdependence, equality, transparency, self-governance, accountability, decent work and sustainable livelihoods. Thus, the social economy, through its activities and values, cross-cut across many of the SDGs, becoming an essential pillar for achieving them:

1. **Solidarity and equity**: Combating inequalities and promoting social inclusion (SDG 1: Poverty Free - the social economy contributes to poverty reduction by creating jobs, supporting vulnerable people and implementing social initiatives; SDG 2 - Zero Hunger - social economy organizations involved in sustainable agriculture, agricultural cooperatives and food surplus redistribution initiatives contribute to food security and hunger reduction; SDG 3: Health and well-being - The provision of health and social services, including care for the elderly or vulnerable, contributes to the well-being of communities; SDG 10: Reduce inequalities - By supporting the social and economic inclusion of marginalized groups, the social economy contributes to reducing inequalities between individuals and communities. For example, associations providing support for the integration of refugees, people from ethnic minority groups or people with disabilities).
2. **Democratic participation**: The social economy promotes participatory governance, transparency and accountability, supporting social cohesion and citizen involvement (SDG 16 - Peace, justice and strong institutions).
3. **Sustainability**: Develop economic models that respect natural resources and protect the environment (SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities - the social economy supports social housing initiatives or urban revitalization projects; SDG 12 - Responsible consumption and production,

SDG 13 - Climate action, Organizations offering renewable energy solutions or reforestation initiatives).

4. **People first**: Unlike profit-focused organizations, the social economy puts people's needs and well-being first (SDG 4: Quality education - supporting access to education for disadvantaged groups, skills development and vocational training are core activities for many social economy organizations; SDG 5: Gender equality - the social economy promotes women's equal participation in economic and social life by creating jobs and supporting women-led initiatives. SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth - the social economy generates sustainable employment, promotes social entrepreneurship and ensures decent work conditions, especially for vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities).

The social economy's contribution to the implementation of SDGs is also mentioned in the European Commission's Social Economy Action Plan „as it is actively engaged worldwide in reducing poverty, driving the transition to sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production and sustainable financing. As such, collaborative and not-for-profit organizations are a key pillar of Europe's social and economic resilience" (see „Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy", a communication from European Parliament, p. 4)

To obtain a comprehensive picture of the role of the social economy in Romania in achieving SDGs, a two-step methodology was used, including 1) a literature review; 2) data analysis and processing of the economic activities of social economy organizations in Romania, obtained from the inventory of 3 distinct types of organizations, namely: non-governmental organizations with economic activity, authorized social enterprises and authorized protected units.

The aim is to assess the contribution of these social impact legal entities that generate income from economic activities to various sustainable development objectives, with a focus on social inclusion, reducing inequalities and promoting a sustainable economy.

2. Analysis of the social economy sector in Romania concerning the Sustainable Development Goals

The social economy is an important segment of sustainable development in Romania, with significant social, economic and environmental impacts. The work of social enterprises, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and approved protected units (APUs) contributes directly to improving the quality of life and achieving the SDGs. This analysis highlights the diversity of economic activities in the sector and how they support community development and reduce inequalities.

2.1. The size of the social economy sector

The social economy in Romania has its roots in the 19th century, initially represented by cooperatives, associations, foundations and mutual societies. Their development was severely hampered by the communist regime, but after 1990 the sector has seen a revival, especially in the field of NGOs and mutual societies. Romania's accession to the EU in 2007 boosted the institutionalization of the social economy, and in 2015 Law 219/2015 was adopted, which regulates the sector and defines social enterprises.

According to the law, the social economy represents a set of activities outside the public sector that aim to serve general or community interests through social inclusion and the provision of goods and services. The principles of the social economy stipulated by the law are the prioritization of social objectives over profit, solidarity and collective responsibility, democratic control by members, independence from public authorities and reinvestment of the majority of profits for social purposes. To qualify as a social enterprise (SE), an entity must be independent of the public sector, be governed by private law, adhere to the principles of the social economy and hold a social enterprise certificate.

The main entities that can qualify as an SE include cooperatives, mutual aid houses, associations and foundations, as well as limited liability companies (LLCs). These entities operate under specific framework laws and can obtain a „social enterprise label" by meeting the above criteria. (Petrescu, Iftimoaei, Vasiliu, Enache, Isac, 2024).

Table 1. Legal framework for main SE entities

Entities	Laws
Cooperative societies	Law no. 1/2005
Credit unions	Government Emergency Ordinance no. 99/2006, Law no. 227/2007
Associations and foundations	Government Ordinance no. 26/2000, Law no. 246/2005
Mutual aid houses for employees	Law no. 122/1996
Mutual aid houses for pensioners	Law no. 540/2002
Agricultural companies	Law no. 36/1991
Agricultural cooperatives	Law no. 566/2004
Limited liability companies	Law no. 31/ 1990

In 2021, "the social economy sector in Romania included 2,043 cooperatives, 127,053 NGOs (associations and foundations), 5,216 mutual societies and 2,331 limited liability companies. The number of newly certified social enterprises amounted to 2,622 in 2021, of which 113 were social insertion enterprises." (Petrescu, Iftimoaei, Vasiliu, Enache, Isac, 2024).

In our study, in order to highlight the social impact of social economy organizations in relation to sustainable development objectives, we analysed three distinct types of organizations, namely: non-governmental organizations with economic activity, licensed social enterprises and licensed protected units. While there are possible overlaps between the three types of organizations, the analysis attempts to capture a number of their characteristics and developments, as well as their areas of activity that influence the SDGs.

Non-governmental organizations with economic activity (operating under Government Ordinance no. 26/2000, Law no. 246/2005) - those that are in the ANAF database and that declare their balance sheets annually to the Ministry of Finance, as required by law. According to the Integral Study on the *Non-Governmental Sector. Profile, trends, challenges* (Voicu, 2024), there were a total of 81938 unique entities in Romania that filed at least one one-year balance sheet between 2013-2022. Out of these: 30% filed balance sheet year by year; 5% filed only in 2022; 4% filed year by year starting in 2016; 2% year by year until 2017 and 0.4% filed year by year between 2015 and 2020 and then stopped filing. According to the survey, there are about 125,000 unique registrations in the National NGO Register, almost 82,000 have filed at least once NGO balance sheet between 2013-2022 and almost 58,000 have filed an NGO balance sheet in 2022.

Table 2. Classification by field of economic activity of the NGOs that have submitted their balance sheet at the end of 2022 and correlation with the Sustainable Development Goals

Fields of activity	Total balance sheet submissions 2022
Culture/Art	3911
Sport / Hobby	9773
Animal protection	1280
Education	5467
Research	381
Health	2393
Social/charitable	5130
Disabilities	621
Elderly	563
Roma people	86
Women	1755
Family	282
Children	2435
Young people	1291
Environment/ecology	1214
Civic, advocacy	1813
Ethnic	551
Religious	2800
Business/professional	8016
Community development	1443
Agricultural	2928
Tourism	350
Commune/ Forestry	1638
Owners land/woodland	293

Source: Voicu, B. (ed.), 2024.

Authorized social enterprises, according to Law No. 219/2015 make a significant contribution to sustainable development by providing innovative solutions to social and economic problems. Through the diversity of their activities, the sector manages to support social inclusion, reduce inequalities and contribute to local economic development.

According to the National Register of Social Enterprises (RUES), updated on October 31, 2024, a total of 2931 were registered in Romania, of which only 1863 still had a valid certificate of operation and only 60 were social insertion enterprises.

Table 3. Classification by fields of economic activity of social enterprises with valid certificate, authorized according to the law

Field of activity	Total social enterprises
Manufacture and processing of products - textiles, furniture, bread and bakery products, meat, fruit and vegetable juices, plastics, medical and dental devices, appliances and instruments, concrete products for construction, carpentry products, etc.	424
Education, teaching and research	259
Construction work	186
Social services, social or personal welfare	129
Health, dental services	103
Business and management consultancy, accounting and financial auditing activities	75
Landscape maintenance activities	54
Retail sale of second-hand goods sold in stores, online	50
Activities of advertising agencies, web site management and related activities	48
Activities of nursing homes and homes for the elderly and homes for persons unable to care for themselves, other social work activities, residential and non-residential, activities of day care activities for children	45
Publishing and printing activities	44
Activities of tourist agencies, car rentals	29
Sporting activities	17
Packaging activities	17
Non-hazardous waste collection, recycling, reuse	14
Activities of Employment Placement Agencies	12
Other lending activities	5
Other activities	352

Source: *Single Register of Social Enterprises* (2024), ANOFM.

The social economy sector thus covers a wide range of economic activities, each linked to specific sustainable development objectives:

1. **Social and care activities** - The organization of homes for the elderly and day care centres for children are key areas. These activities contribute to reducing poverty (SDG 1) and ensuring the well-being of vulnerable people (SDG 3).
2. **Education and research** - Social enterprises involved in education and training support skills development and integration into the labour

market. Through these activities, they contribute to improving access to quality education (SDG 4).

3. **Industrial production** - The manufacture of products such as textiles, furniture, bakery products or medical instruments supports the local economy and promotes sustainable patterns of production and consumption (SDG 8 and SDG 12).
4. **Health** - Dental services and other health-related activities (including physiotherapy, speech therapy, psychological counselling, etc.) contribute to improving the quality of life and reducing inequalities in access to essential services (SDG 3 and SDG 10).
5. **Construction and infrastructure** - Social enterprises in this sector support the development of communities and create jobs for different population groups, thus contributing to sustainable economic growth (SDG 8).
6. **Consulting and professional services** - Business, accounting and management consulting activities help strengthen the economy and support other organizations in achieving their goals (SDG 8).

Authorized sheltered units. To highlight the social impact on work integration of people from vulnerable groups, in particular people with disabilities, we also included in our analysis the authorized sheltered units, regulated by Law 448/2006 „on the protection and promotion of the rights of people with disabilities", which have an important contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals targets. As of 19.11.2024, according to the Register of Protected Units published by ANPD ("National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity"), a total of 406 authorized protected units were registered (56 internal sections within associations and foundations; 287 SRLs; 40 authorized natural persons, 22 family businesses and 1 internal section within a public institution)

Table 4. Classification of Authorized Protected Units by fields of economic activity, according to the law

Fields of activity	Total Authorized Protected Units
Manufacture of made-up textile articles (except apparel and underwear); / Manufacture of workwear; / Manufacture of wearing apparel (except underwear)	93
Other human health activities	30
Printing activities	30
Bookbinding and related activities/Packaging activities/Library and archives activities	27
Other information technology/computer manufacturing service activities	26
Manufacture of stationery;	23

Fields of activity	Total Authorized Protected Units
Manufacture of corrugated paper and paperboard and of containers of paper and paperboard	
Other forms of learning	18
Activities of advertising agencies	16
Business and management consultancy activities	13
Cleaning activities	13
Manufacture of furniture	10
Collection of non-hazardous waste	4
Activities of sales and intermediaries	4
Other social work activities without accommodation	2
Other activities	97

Source: *The Register of Protected Units* (2024), on https://anpd.gov.ro/web/unitati-protejate/

2.2. Impact on the labour market

The social economy generates employment opportunities for various categories of the population. Jobs created in economically active NGOs as well as in licensed social enterprises and sheltered units contribute to reducing inequalities (SDG 10), in particular by integrating people from vulnerable groups (Petrescu and Lambru, 2021).

In 2022, a total of 143,805 people were employed in the sector of associations and foundations, part of the social economy sector (according to the *Barometer of the Social Economy in Romania*, 2023).

In 2023, 4,100 jobs were created in authorized social enterprises and another 2,657 in Authorized Protected Units, most of which were for people from disadvantaged categories. By the end of 2023, these organizations have generated more than 6,700 jobs, of which 2,081 are for people from vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities. This demonstrates the important role of the sector in ensuring decent work and supporting social inclusion (SDG 8).

3. Contribution of social economy organizations to the Sustainable Development Goals

The analysis of the data provided reveals the contribution of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social enterprises to the achievement of the SDGs, highlighting their impact in areas such as poverty reduction, education, health, decent work and social inclusion.

1. SDG 1: No poverty

- *Correlated activities:*
    - Nursing home activities for the elderly and disabled (45 entities), other social services without CAEN code (110 entities), and daycare activities for children.
    - NGOs play a key role in providing social services to vulnerable groups.

- *Contribution of the NGO sector and social enterprises:*
    - Reducing the risk of poverty by providing social services and support to vulnerable people.
    - Of the 4100 jobs created by social enterprises, 342 are for people from vulnerable groups, reducing social exclusion.

Romania's National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030 aims to reduce the number of people living below the poverty line, increase employment, and develop the social protection and social assistance system. In the Strategy, reference is made to the Social Economy Law which created the necessary framework for the development of social enterprises in order to contribute to the increase of employment of vulnerable people and social inclusion (Iftimoaei, C., 2021).

2. SDG 3: Health and well-being

- *Related activities:*
    - Dental health and services (95 entities).
    - Other human health activities (30 entities).
    - Nursing homes and services for the disabled.
- *Sector contribution:*
    - NGOs and social enterprises support access to health services and specialized care, especially for vulnerable groups.
    - Health employment creation contributes to quality service provision.

3. SDG 4: Quality education

- *Related activities:*
    - Education, teaching and research (102 entities).
    - Other forms of education (18 entities).
- *Sector contribution:*
    - NGOs and social enterprises provide access to education, training and professional development, improving inclusion and educational equity.
    - Supporting education contributes to increasing opportunities for economic and social inclusion.

4. SDG 5: Gender equality

- *Implicit contribution:*
    - Although the data do not explicitly indicate gender equality-oriented projects, activities in education, health and job creation favour the involvement of women and other disadvantaged groups in economic and social activities.

Data provided by the „European Commission", „Eurostat" and the „European Institute for Gender Equality" show that Romania with 54.5 points is at the average position in terms of the gender equality index (67.4 points) compared with the European level in 2021. From the reports of the aforementioned institutions, women in Romania are affected by domestic violence, face problems in terms of accommodating working time with housework, and there is a gap between the employment rate of women versus the employment rate of men in Romania (16.5%), compared to the European average (11.9%) (Iftimoaei, C., Gabor, V., 2021).

5. SDG 8: Decent work and growth

- *Related activities:*
  - Manufacturing (424 entities), construction activities (186 entities), business and management consultancy activities (75 entities).
  - A total of 143 805 jobs in the associations and foundations sector.
  - A total of 4100 jobs in social enterprises, of which 342 were for vulnerable groups.
  - Authorized Protected Units (UPA) created 2657 jobs, of which 1739 were for people with disabilities.
- *Sector contribution:*
  - Decent job creation, including for vulnerable and disabled people, contributes to labour market inclusion and economic growth.
  - Around 60% of economically active social enterprises make a profit, demonstrating their sustainability.

6. SDG 10: Reduce inequality

- *Related activities:*
  - Licensed protected units (UPAs) and licensed social enterprises prioritize the integration of people from vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities, elderly, disadvantaged families).
- *Sector contribution:*
  - Reducing inequalities by providing economic opportunities and social services to disadvantaged groups.
  - Local capacity building through community projects.

7. SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production

- *Related activities:*
  - Manufacture of textiles, plastics, construction concrete products and other goods (424 entities).
  - Retail of second-hand goods (50 entities).
- *Sector contribution:*
  - Promotion of sustainable production and circular economic practices.

8. SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

- *Linked activities:*
  - Collaboration between NGOs, social enterprises and public authorities to implement social and economic projects.
- *Sector contribution:*
  - Building a collaborative ecosystem that supports sustainable development.
  - Integration of NGOs and social enterprises in local and national strategies.

In Romania, the analysis of the NGO sector highlights several trends and challenges that outline both its potential and its limitations. The first relevant aspect is the activity rate of non-governmental organizations, which shows that only 66% of the 125,000 entities registered in the National NGO Register are active (Voicu et al., 2024). This significant discrepancy between the total number of organizations and those operating indicates possible difficulties in maintaining constant activity. Causes may include a lack of financial resources, internal organizational difficulties, or legislative barriers. This context suggests the need for better-defined and targeted public policies to support active organizations, either by simplifying administrative regulations or by providing incentives to facilitate their sustainability.

In terms of NGO revenues, the situation reveals a considerable dependence on external sources of funding. According to data, 82% of the sector's income comes from donations, sponsorships and grants (Voicu et al., 2024). This funding structure, although vital, exposes organizations to significant risks in case of economic fluctuations or legislative changes that affect the ability of donors and sponsors to financially support the sector. This highlights the importance of a concerted strategy to diversify financial resources. To this end, NGOs could explore the development of income-generating activities, the creation of partnerships with the private sector for joint projects, or access to structural and European funds.

Thus, although the NGO sector in Romania has a significant numerical presence, its relatively low rate of activity and its majority dependence on external funding highlight its vulnerabilities. Tackling these challenges requires not only initiatives from the sector itself but also a more favourable policy framework that fosters sustainability and reduces administrative obstacles. This could make the NGO sector a stronger and more stable actor in the development of civil society in Romania.

3. Conclusions

Reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is essential for assessing the social impact of a social economy organization for several reasons:

- ***Alignment with international commitments***: the SDGs (a set of 17 global goals adopted by all member states of the UN, aim to eradicate poverty, protect the planet and promote prosperity for all by 2030. By reporting against these goals, social economy organizations show that they align their activities with international commitments and contribute to the achievement of shared global goals. This alignment can increase the organization's legitimacy and attract international support, including funding and partnerships;
- ***Clarifying social impact***: A social impact assessment about the SDGs enables the organization to define and measure its contributions to sustainable development. By identifying relevant objectives (e.g. reducing inequality, quality education, decent work, environmental protection), the organization can concretely show how its activities generate social and economic benefits and thus contribute to solving global problems. This adds value to the report by demonstrating social responsibility and commitment to sustainability;

- ***Accountability and transparency***: An SDG-based approach helps organizations to be more transparent and accountable to their stakeholders. Whether local authorities, investors, NGOs or the general public, using the SDGs as a framework for assessment and communication provides a common, easy-to-understand language to measure progress. This helps to better understand the impact of the organization's actions and create a sense of trust and support from them;
- ***Building partnerships and attracting funding***: Organizations that align their activities with the SDGs are more attractive to funders and strategic partners, such as donors, investors and international organizations, who support initiatives that contribute to global development goals. The SDGs can also help to identify new sources of funding and strengthen existing partnerships, as many are interested in investing in projects with a positive and sustainable social impact;
- ***Effective monitoring and reporting***: the SDGs provide a clear framework for monitoring progress and assessing long-term impact. In this way, organizations can collect and analyse relevant data systematically, making reporting more effective and easier to compare with international standards. The SDGs can also guide organizations in setting measurable targets and tracking their achievement, contributing to continuous improvement of activities and results;
- ***Support public policies***: An SDG-based approach can positively influence public policies and contribute to the development of government strategies and initiatives that support sustainable social and economic development. Organizations that demonstrate their impact in this context can play an active role in dialogue with public authorities and in promoting the changes needed to achieve the SDGs.

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SCIENTIFIC ANNALS OF „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" UNIVERSITY OF IASI
VOLUME XVII/2, SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK, 2024

DOI: 10.47743/asas-2024-2-769

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF GIG WORK IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: A REVIEW OF THE PLATFORM WORK DIRECTIVE

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Abstract: The gig economy in the European Union (EU) has significantly transformed traditional labour markets, prompting critical discussions about worker rights and protections. This article presents a narrative review of the literature on gig work within the EU, focusing on the Platform Work Directive. It explores the challenges of employment status classification, rights and protections for gig workers, the role of algorithmic management, social security inclusion, the impact on platform companies, and policy implications. By synthesizing existing research, the article highlights the broader policy implications for labour protection across the EU and considers potential future developments in this rapidly evolving sector.

Keywords: Gig Economy; Platform Work; European Union; Employment Status Classification; Algorithmic Management; Labour Protections; Social Security; Directive on Platform Work

Résumé : L'économie des petits boulots dans l'Union européenne (UE) a profondément transformé les marchés du travail traditionnels, suscitant des débats essentiels sur les droits et protections des travailleurs. Cet article propose une revue narrative de la littérature sur le travail de plateforme au sein de l'UE, en se concentrant sur la Directive relative au travail sur plateforme. Il examine les défis liés à la classification du statut d'emploi, les droits et protections des travailleurs de plateforme, le rôle de la gestion algorithmique, l'inclusion dans les systèmes de sécurité sociale, l'impact sur les entreprises de plateformes, ainsi que les implications politiques. En synthétisant les recherches existantes, l'article met en lumière les implications politiques plus larges pour la protection du travail au sein de l'UE et envisage les développements futurs possibles dans ce secteur en évolution rapide.

Mots-clés : Économie des petits boulots ; Travail de plateforme ; Union européenne ; Classification du statut d'emploi; Gestion algorithmique ; Protections du travail ; Sécurité sociale ; Directive relative au travail sur plateforme

Rezumat: Economia platformelor din Uniunea Europeană (UE) a transformat semnificativ piețele tradiționale ale muncii, generând discuții esențiale despre drepturile și protecțiile lucrătorilor. Acest articol prezintă o revizuire narativă a literaturii de specialitate privind

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munca pe platformă în cadrul UE, cu un accent special pe Directiva privind munca pe platformă. Sunt analizate provocările legate de clasificarea statutului ocupațional, drepturile și protecțiile lucrătorilor pe platformă, rolul managementului algoritmic, integrarea în sistemele de securitate socială, impactul asupra companiilor de platforme și implicațiile politice. Prin sintetizarea cercetărilor existente, articolul evidențiază implicațiile politice mai largi pentru protecția muncii în UE și analizează posibilele evoluții viitoare din acest sector în continuă schimbare.

Cuvinte-cheie: Economia platformelor; Munca pe platformă; Uniunea Europeană; Clasificarea statutului ocupațional; Management algoritmic; Protecția muncii; Securitate socială; Directiva privind munca pe platformă

1. Introduction

The emergence of the gig economy has introduced a paradigm shift in the European labour market, characterized by short-term contracts and freelance work facilitated by digital platforms (De Stefano, 2016). Estimates suggest that there are around 28 million platform workers in the EU, a figure projected to increase by 52% by 2025 (Murphy & Dundon, 2023). This surge encompasses various forms of work facilitated by digital platforms, including crowd work and on-demand services (De Stefano, 2016).

While gig work offers flexibility and autonomy, it raises significant concerns regarding worker classification, labour protections, and the potential for exploitation (Kerikmäe & Kajander, 2022; Vyas, 2020). Issues such as algorithmic bias, gender inequality, and discrimination have emerged, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive regulations to protect gig workers (Tan et al., 2021). The transformation of employment models has also led to the rise of gig worker advocacy groups, such as the National Domestic Workers Alliance Gig Worker Advocates, which prioritize fair compensation for gig workers (Hernandez et al., 2024). These groups argue that gig workers should be treated as employees rather than independent contractors, and that platforms should provide more benefits and protections to workers (Henten & Windekilde, 2018).

In response to these challenges, the European Commission proposed the Directive on Platform Work, aiming to improve working conditions and clarify employment status (Silberman, 2023; Veale et al., 2023). The Directive seeks to address false self-employment, regulate algorithmic management practices, and enhance transparency and accountability of digital labour platforms. However, its implementation faces hurdles, including debates over definitions, cross-border issues, and the complexities of aligning with existing EU social acquis and national regulations (Aloisi, 2022; Cavallini & Avogaro, 2019).

This article employs a narrative literature review to synthesize existing research on gig work and the proposed EU Directive on Platform Work. By providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic, it aims to contribute to the ongoing discussions on labour protections in the gig economy.

2. Methodology

This study utilizes a narrative literature review approach, allowing for a qualitative analysis of diverse sources to provide an in-depth understanding of the gig economy and the proposed Directive on Platform Work (Green et al., 2006). Relevant literature was identified through systematic searches of academic journals, books, policy papers, and official EU documents published between 2015 and 2024.

Key search terms included „gig economy," „platform work," „EU Directive on Platform Work," „employment misclassification," „algorithmic management," „labour protections," „social security," and „collective bargaining." The selection focused on sources discussing the gig economy in the EU, employment status classification, rights and protections for gig workers, algorithmic management, the impact on platform companies, policy implications, and themes directly related to the provisions of the Directive.

The literature was reviewed thematically to identify common issues, debates, and gaps in understanding. The analysis involved summarizing key findings, critically evaluating perspectives, and integrating insights to provide an overarching narrative of the complexities surrounding gig work and the potential impact of the Directive.

3. Clarification of Definitions

A fundamental aspect of the Directive is the clarification of definitions concerning „digital labour platforms" and „platform workers" (Aloisi, 2022). The Directive defines a digital labour platform as any natural or legal person providing a commercial service that involves organizing work performed by individuals at the EU level (European Parliament, 2024). By establishing clear definitions, the Directive aims to encompass a wide range of platform-mediated work, ensuring that workers are not excluded from protections due to technicalities.

The scope includes both online and location-based platforms, recognizing the diverse nature of gig work (European Commission: Joint Research Centre et al., 2018). This broad approach seeks to prevent platforms from exploiting loopholes and emphasizes the EU's commitment to addressing the gig economy comprehensively.

4. Employment Status Classification

A central issue in the gig economy is the misclassification of gig workers as self-employed rather than employees, allowing platform companies to circumvent labour laws (Friedman, 2014; Todoli-Signes, 2017). This misclassification results in workers lacking minimum wage guarantees, health insurance, and other essential protections, shifting risks and costs onto the workers themselves (Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016).

The Directive introduces a legal presumption of employment for platform workers (Aloisi, 2022). Workers are presumed to be employees unless the platform can prove otherwise, effectively shifting the burden of proof onto the platforms. This measure aims to simplify the process of determining employment status and reduce legal uncertainties (Silberman, 2023).

Courts and regulators have historically struggled to apply traditional employment tests to gig work arrangements, leading to inconsistent rulings and legal uncertainty across different jurisdictions (Pinsof, 2016). The control test may not adequately capture the nuances of platform work, where control is often exerted indirectly through algorithms (De Stefano, 2015). By introducing the presumption of employment, the Directive seeks to overcome these challenges and provide a uniform approach across the EU (Aloisi, 2022).

5. Rights and Protections for Gig Workers

Gig workers often operate without the security of minimum wage guarantees, social protections, or adequate health and safety measures (Bajwa et al., 2018). The precarious nature of gig work means that income can be unpredictable, and workers may bear the costs of tools, equipment, and insurance (Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016). The lack of employer-provided benefits leads to economic insecurity (Yoel & Hasym, 2021).

The proposed Directive aims to extend fundamental labour rights to gig workers, trying to tackle the most critical issues related to fairness and protection. Fair remuneration, in this regard, includes minimum wage guarantees to protect the workers from exploitation and also keep their incomes stable. Rajkumar Chaudhary & Prajapati, 2024. In addition, it also guarantees access to social benefits including unemployment benefits, sick benefits, and medical aid, thus improving the social security coverage for gig workers (Katiyatiya & Lubisi, 2024). The Directive also takes up issues of health and safety where appropriate measures should be provided to protect workers against work risks (Bajwa et al., 2018). Furthermore, it strengthens the right to workers' representation by facilitating collective bargaining and enabling gig workers to join trade unions and engage in collective action without breaching competition laws (Stylogiannis, 2023). These provisions address the power imbalance between platforms and workers, promoting a more equitable and sustainable gig economy (Pilatti et al., 2024).

High-profile cases involving companies like Uber and Deliveroo have highlighted the challenges gig workers face regarding employment rights (Pietrogiovanni, 2019). While some court rulings have favoured workers, these victories are often limited in scope, emphasizing the need for comprehensive legislative solutions (Deon, 2020).

6. Algorithmic Management and Transparency

Algorithmic management uses computer algorithms to assign tasks, monitor performance, and make decisions traditionally handled by human managers (Jarrahi et al., 2021). In the gig economy, platforms employ algorithms to distribute work efficiently, but this often lacks transparency and can lead to worker dissatisfaction (Bucher et al., 2021).

Workers may not understand how decisions are made or have the ability to contest them, leading to a sense of alienation (Weber et al., 2023). The opaque nature of algorithms can perpetuate biases and discrimination, as decision-making processes may reflect underlying prejudices encoded in the software (Ananny & Crawford, 2018).

The Directive addresses worries related to algorithmic management, mainly by introducing transparency-enhancing and accountability measures: requiring platforms to be more transparent about how algorithms affecting working conditions-assignment, evaluation, etc.-actually work; and making significant decisions impacting workers (deactivation, disciplinary actions, etc.) subject to human review for oversight and appeal (Renzi, 2023; Ponce del Castillo & Naranjo, 2022). To prevent unfair treatment, the Directive enforces non-discrimination policies, addressing algorithmic biases related to gender, race, and other protected characteristics (Tan et al., 2021). Additionally, it prioritizes the protection of workers' personal data and privacy rights, aligning these requirements with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Ananny & Crawford, 2018). Collectively, these provisions aim to mitigate the adverse effects of algorithmic management and ensure fair treatment for gig workers.

Algorithmic transparency and non-discrimination are crucial in gig work as they affect the relationship between digital platforms and gig workers. Algorithmic transparency refers to the ability of gig workers to understand the decision-making processes of algorithms used by digital platforms (Sun & Li, 2024). Non-discrimination refers to the fairness and impartiality of algorithms in making decisions about gig workers (Sun & Li, 2024).

Studies have shown that algorithmic transparency can lead to increased trust and motivation among gig workers ((Sun & Li, 2024). When gig workers are aware of the decision-making process of algorithms, they are more likely to perceive the algorithm as fair and rational (Sun & Li, 2024). This perception can lead to increased motivation to engage in positive work behaviors (Sun & Li, 2024).

However, algorithmic complexity can negatively moderate the relationship between algorithmic transparency and transactional contract fulfilment (Sun & Li, 2024). When algorithms are too complex, gig workers may find it difficult to understand the decision-making process, leading to a decrease in their perception of algorithmic fairness and rationality (Sun & Li, 2024). This can ultimately lead to a reduction in employees' proactive service performance (Sun & Li, 2024).

Furthermore, algorithmic transparency can also lead to increased accountability and the right to know for gig workers (Sun & Li, 2024). This can empower gig workers to be accountable for the decisions made by algorithms and to challenge the fairness and rationality of decision-making processes (Sun & Li, 2024). However, „the establishment of a designated feedback avenue is essential for enabling employees to offer their perspectives and proposals regarding algorithmic governance at their convenience" (Liang et al., 2024).

In summary, algorithmic transparency and non-discrimination are essential in gig work as they affect the relationship between digital platforms and gig workers. By providing algorithmic transparency, digital platforms can increase trust and motivation among gig workers while also increasing accountability and the right to know. However, algorithmic complexity can negatively moderate the relationship between algorithmic transparency and transactional contract fulfilment, highlighting the need for digital platforms to provide clear and concise algorithmic policies and support for gig workers (Sun & Li, 2024).

7. Social Security Inclusion

Gig workers frequently fall outside traditional social security systems, limiting their access to unemployment benefits, healthcare, and pensions (Rajkumar Chaudhary & Prajapati, 2024). The classification of gig workers as self-employed means they are often responsible for their own social insurance contributions, which can be burdensome given their typically lower and irregular incomes (Montebovi et al., 2020).

The Directive aims to integrate gig workers into national social security schemes by requiring platforms to contribute to social security on their behalf (Wynn & Paz-Fuchs, 2019). It introduces measures to adjust eligibility criteria within social security systems, ensuring that non-standard workers, including gig workers, gain access to essential protections (Naik, 2023). In increasing flexibility, it also supports the principle of portability of benefits; workers will be able to keep their social security rights when switching between jobs or platforms. According to the Directive, employer contributions for social security funds will have to be paid by platforms to further make gig workers' benefits compatible with those of regular employees (Hsieh, Adisa, et al., 2023; Mangold, 2024).

By redefining employment relationships, the Directive may significantly impact gig workers' access to social security systems, reducing economic insecurity and reinforcing the social safety net (Aysan, 2020).

8. Impact on Platform Companies

The implementation of the Directive provides platform companies with a major challenge in terms of labour costs and the need to rebalance their business models (Mangold, 2024). In this respect, some platforms reclassify workers, accepting them as employees and rearranging the corresponding contractual arrangements and HR practices (Mangan et al., 2023). Others will adapt operational models in an effort to retain flexibility, to some extent, within the boundaries set by labour regulations, through redefinition of service offerings or focusing on less heavily regulated markets. Platform companies will also seek judicial contestation, which will involve questioning the provisions of the Directive through courts or lobbying for exemptions to delay or mitigate the effect of regulations (Kenney & Zysman, 2019; Aloisi, 2022).

While the Directive may level the playing field by ensuring all platforms adhere to the same labour standards, increased operational costs could impact prices for consumers or earnings for workers if platforms attempt to offset expenses (Hassel & Sieker, 2022). Platforms might explore hybrid models that combine elements of traditional employment and gig work or increase the use of automation to reduce reliance on human labour (Radović-Marković, 2021).

9. Cross-Border Issues

The transnational nature of platform work gives rise to thorny issues related to cross-border employment and the functioning of the EU single market (Aloisi et al., 2023). Workers and platforms usually operate in multiple jurisdictions, so enforcement becomes complicated, and questions arise about which laws should apply. The Directive henceforth seeks to harmonize these regulations to establish consistent labour protection across all member states and to lower regulatory arbitrage opportunities that employers seek (Purcell & Garcia, 2021). It also dictates cooperation between member states themselves through sharing information and by taking joint actions to ensure effective enforcement of its provisions (Aloisi, 2022). Moreover, the Directive has sought to protect the integrity of the single market and ensure that platforms do not leverage divergences in national regulation to the detriment of workers' rights (Drahokoupil & Fabo, 2016).

Cross-border platform work in the EU presents complex challenges for labour law, social security, and taxation, affecting approximately 4.3% of the working-age population who often face precarious conditions and unclear employment status (Kurianov, 2023). The platform economy challenges current labor regulations based on traditional employer-employee relationships established during the industrial age (Nilsen, Kongsvik, & Antonsen, 2022). Drawing on research and qualitative interviews, studies identify four regulatory gaps and introduce the concept of „regulatory escape," suggesting that addressing the power of platforms requires an expansive view of regulation encompassing all forms of socioeconomic influence (Nilsen, Kongsvik, & Antonsen, 2022).

The transformative power of technology reshapes markets and social interactions, necessitating meaningful discourse on governance systems to ensure decent and safe working conditions (Nilsen, Kongsvik, & Almklov, 2022). According to Grabher and van Tuijl (2020), platforms accelerate the shift from long-term employment to gig work, transforming professional careers into contractual portfolios shaped by online reputation capital (as cited in Makó et al., 2022). New global initiatives on „soft regulation," such as the World Economic Forum's Charter of Principles for Good Platform Work, promote the participation and advocacy needs of platform workers, equal working conditions, social security, decent earnings, learning opportunities, and data management (Makó et al., 2022).

Recent legal developments have led to worker reclassifications and new regulatory initiatives in some countries (Aloisi, 2022). The EU has introduced measures like the Directive on transparent and predictable working conditions to address these issues (Aloisi, 2020, 2022). However, challenges remain in adapting existing labor and social security paradigms to the platform economy (Aloisi, 2020).

Addressing cross-border issues is essential for the Directive's success and the integrity of the EU's single market.

10. Policy Implications and Future Developments

The Directive represents a significant policy development with implications beyond gig work (Aloisi, 2022). By setting new standards for labour protections in the digital age, it may influence regulations in other sectors undergoing technological transformation. The Directive could serve as a catalyst for broader reforms aimed at adapting labour laws to the realities of a changing economy (Garben, 2019).

The Directive is aimed at improving the working conditions of gig workers. This may be achieved through a broad array of policies and technological innovation, including measures to increase collective bargaining power, protection against discrimination and retribution, and the introduction of specific legislation addressing the unique needs of various types of gig workers (Hsieh, Adisa, et al., 2023; Hsieh, Karger, et al., 2023). Still, the effective implementation of these measures depends on the overcoming of various challenges.

First, policies have to keep up with the fast pace of technological evolution, including new developments in algorithmic management and the rise of new platform models (Ananny & Crawford, 2018). Second, the realization of the Directive's objectives will only be possible through active cooperation between platform companies, workers, policymakers, and other stakeholders, establishing a dialogue and possibly introducing new governance structures (Aloisi, 2022). Ultimately, individual member states are expected to face distinct national challenges in the execution of the Directive, thereby requiring customized strategies and assistance from the European Union (Cavallini & Avogaro, 2019). Tackling these obstacles will be essential for guaranteeing the successful enhancement of the rights and conditions of gig workers as intended by the Directive.

Comparatively, the EU's approach is more proactive and comprehensive than in regions like the United States and ASEAN countries (Gebert, 2023). In the U.S., regulatory efforts are fragmented, with state-level initiatives like California's AB5 facing legal challenges and pushback from the industry (Larkin, 2021). The UK's efforts, such as the Taylor Review, have been criticized for their limited impact on improving gig workers' rights (Deon, 2020).

The EU's Directive may serve as a model for other regions seeking to balance innovation with worker protections, highlighting the importance of regulatory frameworks that adapt to new forms of work while safeguarding fundamental rights (Gebert, 2023).

11. Conclusion

The gig economy presents complex challenges requiring nuanced policy responses. The EU's proposed Directive on Platform Work is a significant step toward addressing issues of employment classification, labour protections, algorithmic management, and social security inclusion. By providing clearer definitions and extending rights and protections to gig workers, the Directive seeks to promote fairness in the labour market.

Success will depend on effective implementation and cooperation among stakeholders, including platforms, workers, and EU institutions. Addressing potential unintended consequences, such as increased costs for consumers or reduced flexibility for workers, will be essential.

Future policy developments should continue to adapt to the evolving nature of work, ensuring technological advancements contribute to decent work and economic growth. Ongoing research, dialogue, and international cooperation will be crucial in shaping a fair and equitable gig economy that benefits all participants.

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SCIENTIFIC ANNALS OF „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" UNIVERSITY OF IASI
VOLUME XVII/2, SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK, 2024

DOI: 10.47743/asas-2024-2-770

THE IMAGE OF THE 'EURO' IN THE MEDIA. A CONTENT ANALYSIS

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Abstract: The study analyses the image of the euro in the press and public perceptions through a content analysis of media articles. The objective of this scholarly inquiry is to ascertain dominant narratives and themes in order to understand how economic and political events influence attitudes towards the euro and contribute to confidence in the euro. The methodology uses content analysis applied on Italian and European press articles, processed with R packages for sentiment analysis and visualization of the most frequent terms. The study focuses on articles addressing the opinions of the public in the euro area, with a focus on Italy, where euro scepticism is more pronounced. The results highlight both positive and negative sides about the euro, with variations in tone related to economic crises, political dynamics and confidence in fiscal policies. The implications of the research are relevant for policy makers and the media, providing recommendations for effective communication strategies to underpin public confidence in the euro. Understanding the power of media over community perception can facilitate the development of better informed monetary and communication policies that enhance euro stability and acceptance in the euro area.

Keywords: euro, public perception, content analysis, sentiment analysis, text mining

Résumé : L'étude entreprend un examen complet de la représentation de l'euro dans les médias ainsi que des perceptions du public, en utilisant une analyse méthodique concernant l'essence des articles de presse. L'objectif de la recherche est d'identifier les récits et les thèmes dominants afin de comprendre comment les événements économiques et politiques influencent les attitudes à l'égard de l'euro et contribuent à la confiance dans la monnaie. La méthodologie de recherche utilise un examen de contention qualitative orientée vers des publications journalistiques italiens et européens, en utilisant des packages R pour l'analyse des sentiments et la représentation graphique de la terminologie la plus courante. La recherche examine des articles universitaires qui portent sur les points de vue de la population de la zone euro, en mettant essentiellement l'accent sur l'Italie, où le scepticisme à l'égard de l'euro est particulièrement accru. Les résultats mettent en lumière les éléments avantageux et désavantageux associés à l'euro, les fluctuations du sentiment étant corrélées aux crises économiques, à la dynamique politique et aux niveaux de confiance dans les cadres budgétaires. Les conséquences de cette enquête sont importantes pour les décideurs politiques et les médias, car elles fournissent des recommandations pour des stratégies de communication efficaces visant à renforcer la loyauté du public comme l'euro. Comprendre

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l'influence des actualités sur la conception perceptuelle du public peut faciliter la formulation de politiques monétaires et de communication plus éclairées qui renforcent la stabilité et l'approbation de la monnaie européenne en Zone Euro.

Mots clés : euro, perception du public, analyse de contenu, analyse de sentiment, exploration de textes

Rezumat: Studiul analizează imaginea euro în presă și percepțiile publicului printr-o analiză de conținut a articolelor media. Scopul cercetării este de a identifica narațiunile dominante și temele pentru a înțelege modul în care evenimentele economice și politice influențează atitudinile față de euro și contribuie la încrederea în această monedă. Metodologia utilizează analiza de conținut aplicată pe articole din presa italiană și europeană, procesate cu pachete R pentru analiza sentimentelor și vizualizarea termenilor cei mai frecvenți. Studiul se concentrează pe articole care abordează opiniile publicului din zona euro, cu accent pe Italia, unde scepticismul față de euro este mai pronunțat. Rezultatele evidenția atât părți pozitive, cât și negative despre euro, cu variații de ton legate de crize economice, dinamica politică și încrederea în politicile fiscale. Implicațiile cercetării sunt relevante pentru decidenții politici și mediul de presă, oferind recomandări pentru strategii de comunicare eficiente care să susțină încrederea publicului în euro. Înțelegerea impactului mass-media asupra percepției publice poate sprijini dezvoltarea unor politici monetare și de comunicare mai bine informate, care să consolideze stabilitatea și acceptarea euro în zona euro.

Cuvinte cheie: euro, percepție publică, analiză de conținut, analiză a sentimentelor, text mining

1. Introduction

The euro area serves as a quintessential illustration of monetary integration, exerting considerable influence on both the European continent and the global arena. This singular monetary union, which encompasses 20 Member States of the European Union that have embraced the euro as their unified exchange, was formed to strengthen economic balance, progress and financial integration between Member States. The euro area aimed to eliminate monetary barriers and remove exchange rate uncertainties; facilitate trade and financial interactions; and contribute to the stability and prosperity of the region. The adoption of the euro has affected macroeconomic factors such as inflation, trade and economic convergence between Member States, which has contributed to shaping citizens' perceptions of the single currency.

The literature review underlines the importance of studying citizens' perceptions of the euro, as they reflect the different impacts of economic issues on different social strata. Moreover, understanding citizens' perceptions can improve the communication from official bodies and the effectiveness of monetary policy, thus increasing citizens' trust in the euro.

This paper aims to critically analyse attitudes, opinions and beliefs about the euro, taking into account dominant discourses in the press and the effects of economic and political events on public perceptions. It will also examine the factors that contribute to confidence in the euro, thus providing a comprehensive view of the dynamics between euro-area citizens and the single currency. A content analysis with the identification of recurring themes and relevant dominant narratives will thus make a valuable contribution to understanding the complexity of public perceptions of the euro and to developing effective monetary and communication policies.

2. Literature review

The euro area was established to promote economic balance, progress and financial integration by removing monetary barriers and exchange rate uncertainties in trade and financial relations between countries. Monetary integration commenced in 1951 with the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) to coordinate coal and steel production among six European nations. The Treaty of Rome followed this in 1957, which established the European Economic Community (EEC) and encouraged trade and market liberalization (European Commission, 2023b). The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 introduced the concept of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), facilitating the phased implementation of the euro currency. In 1999, the euro became the reference currency for electronic and financial transactions, and in 2002 euro, banknotes and coins were put into circulation. Although there have been significant difficulties, the euro area has remained robust and adaptable. The 2009 sovereign debt crisis was a major setback, highlighting the challenges of fiscal and crisis management in a monetary union. However, financial and fiscal surveillance mechanisms have been put in place to reinforce stability and coordinate policies. The enlargement process continues, with new countries poised to join the euro area (European Central Bank, 2021).

To adopt the euro, EU member countries must meet specific criteria and go through an assessment and preparation process. These criteria aim to ensure that the acceding countries are ready for the responsibilities of a monetary union. The Maastricht criteria include an inflation rate that needs to be less than 1.5 percent surpassing the mean of the three most proficient performers Member States, a budget deficit below 3 percent of GDP, public debt below 60 percent of GDP, and a long-term interest rate close to the average of the 3 best-performing Member States. In addition, the national currency must have been part of the Exchange Rate Mechanism II (ERM II) and should be maintained for a minimum duration of two years without significant tensions. These conditions ensure an efficient and stable transition to the euro and protect member countries from instabilities. The euro adoption process has influenced various macroeconomic aspects, such as inflation and trade, contributing to economic convergence among EU Member States (Gunnella et al., 2021). This economic development has also affected citizens' perception of the common currency and the next section will review the scholarly discourse about the implications of the euro implementation.

The literature emphasizes the importance of assessing how the euro is perceived by citizens for several reasons, highlighted as follows:

- Economic issues influence individuals differently based on age, occupation and socio-economic status. Analyzing citizens' perceptions provides an understanding of the varied impact of economic issues, giving a deeper insight into the situation. For example, inflation can be affected differently based on one's income and spending habits (Witt, 2016). The study of perceptions can facilitate the identification of distinct groups of citizens and the development of appropriate policies to address economic problems.
- Understanding citizens' perceptions of the euro is crucial for improving communication with them. It enables government officials and central bank representatives to communicate more effectively with the public (Banducci, Karp, and Loedel, 2003). When misconceptions exist about the functioning of the euro, responsible institutions can provide clear information to help EU citizens better understand the monetary system (Roth and Jonung, 2022). By examining citizens' perceptions, officials can uncover gaps in their communication strategies and implement corrective measures to ensure effective information dissemination.
- Understanding citizens' perceptions of monetary policy is crucial for increasing its effectiveness (Marcussen & Zølner, 2003). According to Verdun (2019), these analyses provide valuable insights into the influence of monetary policies on individuals" perceptions. Consequently, officials can take negative perceptions and their motives into account to protect the public and improve economic performance (Deroose, Hodson, and Kuhlmann, 2007). The better institutions understand citizens' perceptions, the better equipped they are to make informed decisions in designing and implementing monetary policy at the EU level.
- Trust is fundamental to the sustainability of a currency. Greater confidence in the euro can not only revive financial growth but also attract investment and ensure greater stability. To assess the factors that shape this trust, it is necessary to analyse citizens' opinions (Roth and Jonung, 2022). This type of analysis will be able to provide the means to strengthen confidence in the euro, including more communication with the public and the adoption of appropriate monetary strategies.

Without trust in a currency, it cannot work and cannot survive over time. People will use the currency to buy goods and services and to keep their savings safe. A currency loses its value to fulfil this obligation as a medium of exchange and store of value when confidence in it has been eroded (Skaggs, 1998). If confidence in a currency declines, people rush to get rid of the currency, reducing its value in all forms in which it is held (Bordo, Jonung, & Markiewicz, 2013). Finally, if a currency becomes scarce in terms of acceptance or use by people, it might as well become worthless.

People within a euro area member country may decide to exchange their savings for alternative currencies, in case of a negative view towards the euro, this could cause the euro to depreciate. Correspondingly, the reduction in the price of the euro may increase inflation, which is currently rising intensively and causing economic instability across the euro area. This link has been well established in several studies (Hobolt and Leblond, 2014; Roth, Jonung and Nowak-Lehmann. There is a high risk of a loss of confidence in the euro in the Euro Zone financial system and relations between Member States. For this reason, firms and individuals may be less willing to invest or do business in the euro area if they feel that they lack confidence in the currency (Gabel and Hix, 2005).

To build and maintain confidence in the euro, and to manage monetary and fiscal policies carefully to ensure the price and exchange rate stability of the euro, confidence in the euro and the euro area could only be improved if sound economic policies and conditions are maintained. It is also necessary to ensure that governments fulfil their financial responsibilities. The sustainability of a currency can only be the responsibility of the institution that oversees it. From the information presented above, it is clear that it is essential to analyse public perception of the euro. Therefore, this research paper tends to uncover the determinants of favourable versus unfavourable views towards the European single currency.

3. Research objectives

This research will seek to explore and understand in depth the attitudes, opinions and beliefs about the euro as reflected in the media and how these shape public perception, thus the research objectives are as follows:

1. To identify and analyse the prevailing discourses in the press on the euro.

This was designed to identify the major themes, narrative frames and how the euro is represented in the Italian press. This objective intends to understand the context and spectrum of opinions illustrated in journalistic materials, providing a basis for exploring citizens’ perceptions.

2. Assessing the impact of economic and political events on euro perceptions.

Against the background of the historical context and economic developments, the paper will explain how major events (e.g. the sovereign debt crisis) have influenced public opinion on the euro. This objective focuses on identifying relationships between economic events and changing attitudes towards the single currency.

3. Identifying factors contributing to confidence in the euro.

Information will be sought from the press to determine the factors that have contributed to building or eroding confidence in the euro. It will also assess the effectiveness of official communication and monetary strategies and the effect these strategies have had on public confidence.

These objectives are based on the need to appreciate the complexity of public perceptions of the euro as a unifying aspect towards sustainability and stability in the euro area. By examining how the press influences or reflects these perceptions, the study can reveal important relationships between media discourse and public attitudes. Moreover, recognizing that people have diverse opinions and experiences provides a basis for better and more inclusive monetary and communication policies. Finally, understanding the factors that generate trust in the euro is essential to ensure monetary and economic stability for Italy and Euro Zone as a whole in the extended temporal framework.

4. Methodology

The articles and their sources analysed in this paper are presented in *References* at *Articles used for content analysis* section. Texts from PDF files are extracted using the PDF tools and tm packages; then, punctuation and number cleaning tasks are performed along with stop words (stop words) before converting the text to lowercase to normalize (Ford, 2019).

The tm package with DocumentTermMatrix is used to convert a cleaned corpus into a matrix that captures the frequency of each term in the documents while using the TF-IDF weighting method to understand the importance of terms in the corpus.

Word cloud packages, such as dplyr and ggplot2, allow for performing word frequency analysis, removing all irrelevant words and assisting in visualizing the most frequent terms and associating them with different themes or sentiments (Rul, 2019). For example, Figure 2 is a bar chart showing the frequency of word usage in the articles under discussion. Each bar thus represents a different word; the length of each bar indicates how many times (denoted by "n") that particular word appeared in the texts examined.

Using *tidytext* and various sentiment lexicons (Bing), the emotional tone of the texts is assessed, identifying the words with the most positive and negative connotations. For example, Figure 4 is a word cloud, a visual representation of the frequency of words in a given set of texts. Words are displayed with different sizes; the frequency with which a term appears within the written discourse is directly proportional to its prominence within the visual representation of a word cloud.

The methodology involves a combination of text cleaning and processing, thematic and sentiment analysis, and visualization, allowing a detailed exploration of the content and sentiment in the documents analysed. The use of these packages in R facilitates efficient manipulation of texts and extraction of relevant insights from the data.

5. Results

Figure 1 is a cartogram illustrating the level of acceptance and perception of the euro in 2019 across the Euro Area, with different shades of colour corresponding to degrees of favourability. Four main groups can be distinguished according to this perception:

- Group I, where countries have the most favourable view of the euro, includes Ireland, Estonia, Finland and Luxembourg, with acceptance rates above 86 percent.

- Group II includes Austria, Slovenia, Slovakia, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal and Latvia, with acceptance rates between around 77 percent and 81 percent.

- Group III is made up of Greece, Spain, France and Belgium, with perceptions ranging from around 68 percent to 74 percent.

- Group IV, with the least favourable view of the euro, is made up of Cyprus, ***Italy*** and Lithuania, with acceptance rates between around 57 percent and 61 percent.

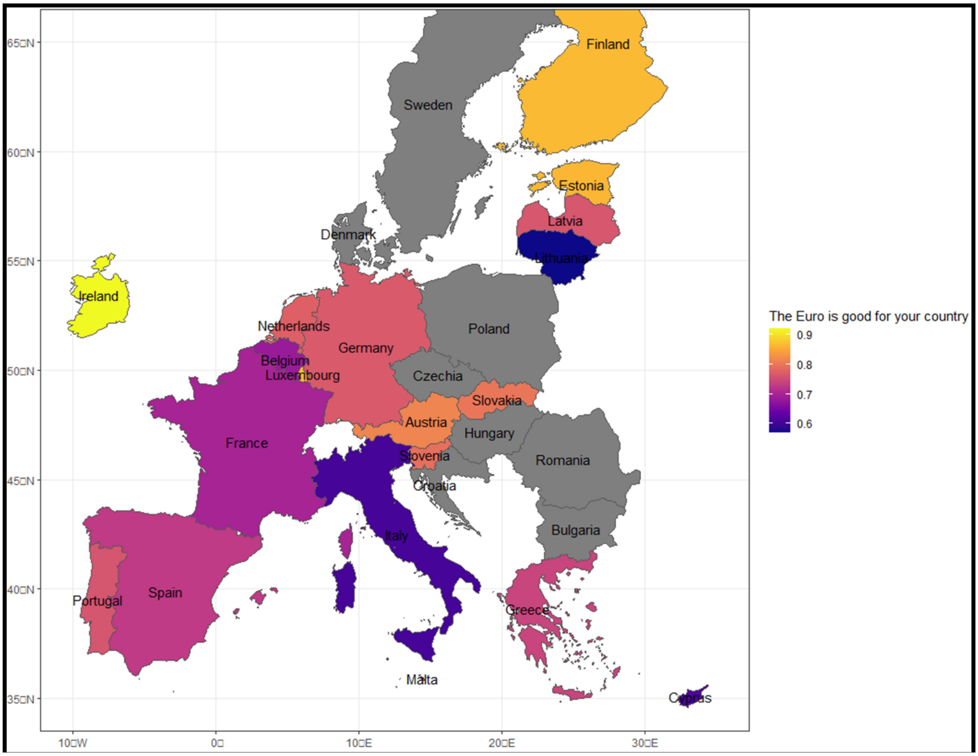

Figure 1. National perception of the euro
Source: personal processing in Rstudio, based on data from GESIS database

The data used to create the perceptual map are from Flash Eurobarometer 481, 2019 (European Commission, 2019). This year was chosen because the COVID-19 pandemic has had global effects, also affecting people's perceptions, thus it was desired to isolate the effects of the pandemic in illustrating citizens' perceptions.

The map gives a detailed picture of how the benefits of the euro are perceived differently across countries in the Euro Area.

Data analysis for Italy shows a less favourable perception of the euro. The article "Italy and the euro: myths and realities" by Tommaso Nannicini, Alessandro Saia and Paolo Manasse (2014) analyses the influence of the euro on the economic landscape of Italy. Using a „synthetic control" methodology, the authors conclude that the euro has had a beneficial impact on Italian trade, increasing bilateral trade with euro-area countries excluding the UK. However, in terms of interest rates on Italian government debt, the reduction attributed to the euro is considered relatively small, with the caveat that the data could be underestimated due to the European debt crisis and possible spillover effects. The article also criticizes the use of unsubstantiated or exaggerated arguments in the Italian political debate on the euro, suggesting that public opinion is negatively influenced by media narratives or anti-euro policies.

In light of the above findings, the present scholarly endeavour aims to disentangle the determinants of Italy's reluctant perception of the European single currency, the euro, through a rigorous content analysis of related press articles. A thorough examination of the relevant articles will be used to identify recurring themes and prevailing narratives that may unfavourably influence public opinion. By using a content analysis methodology, it is intended to extract and codify significant messages to understand the frames of reference and connotations associated with the euro. Significant consideration shall be directed towards the rationale presented in the public sphere, their veracity and alignment with economic realities confirmed by empirical studies.

According to Figure 2, the term "European" appears to be the most frequently used in the corpus of texts, closely followed by the abbreviation "I" and the word "euro". This suggests that discussions focus strongly on topics related to the European Union and the single currency.

Other words that appear with high frequency are "political", "government", and" economic", indicating an intense discussion around the political, governmental, and economic implications of the topic under analysis. Terms such as "public", "Europe", "growth", "decline", "debt", and "party" are also quite present, signalling that public issues, economic growth and decline, national debt, and political parties are relevant topics in these articles. The terms "policy", "crisis", "fiscal", and "economy" also appear in the graph, suggesting that fiscal policy, economic crises, and the general state of the economy are frequently discussed in the context of the euro and Italy. The words "country", "area", and "Italians" reflect a focus on Italy as a country, the euro area, and Italian citizens in the general discussion of the euro.

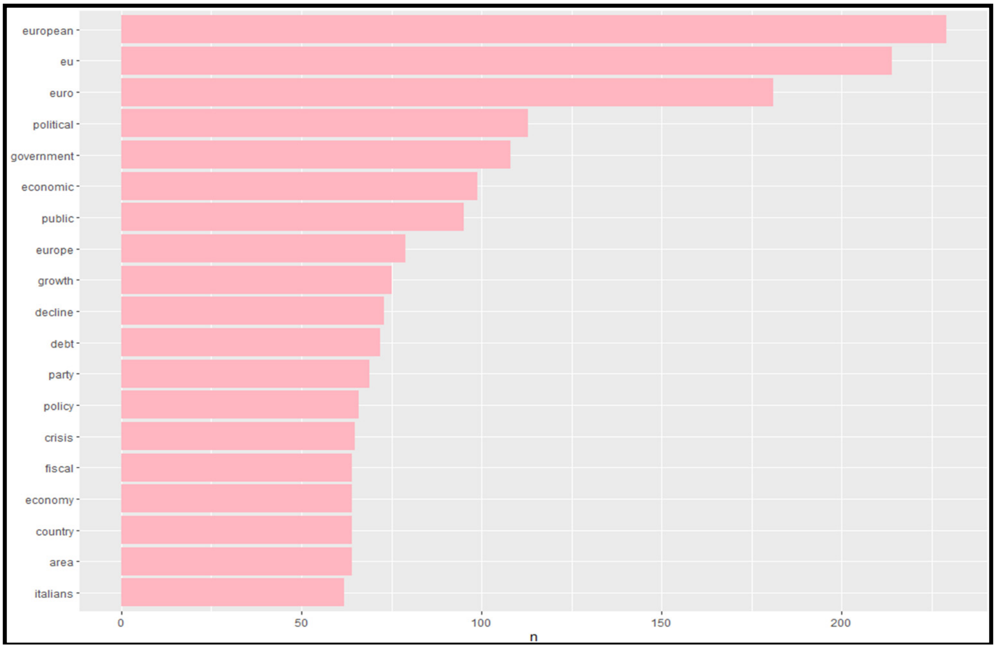

Figure 2. Most frequent words in the analysed articles
Source: personal processing in Rstudio, based on text from selected articles

Figure 3 is a diagram showing the associations of the word "euro" in the context of the analysed data. This diagram shows the links between „euro" and six different words, each with an association coefficient of 0.95. This high value of the coefficient suggests a strong correlation between "euro" and the respective terms in the corpus of texts analysed.

Figure 3. Word Associations Related to „Euro"
Source: personal processing in Rstudio based on data from selected articles

The six concepts are Capital, Banking, Declined, Growth, Investment, and Export. The associations indicated in the diagram suggest that the text analysed around the euro is closely related to economic themes such as capital, banking, investment and exports. They also show an association with economic growth and with declines or declines, indicating that the euro is discussed in the dynamic context of economic performance. The unit coefficient of association for all these terms suggests that each of these concepts has an almost equally strong association with the euro in the analysed texts. This may imply that the euro is perceived as a key factor or a major influencer of these economic issues in the respective articles.

In Figure 4 we can observe the central words, which are also the largest, are „euro", „European", „political", „government", „economic", and „public". This indicates that in the analysis, these topics are the most discussed about the euro. For example, „euro" and „European" suggest a focus on monetary issues and European integration, while „political" and „government" indicate that discussions are often in the political and governmental context. Other notable words are „crisis", „growth", „policy", „debt", „country", and „economy", which belong to the economic domain and are relevant to discussions about the euro. This suggests that the euro is frequently connected with various aspects of the state of the economy, including crises, economic growth, fiscal policies, national debt, and overall economic performance. The terms „market", „union", „eurozone", „labour", and „structural" also appear in the cloud, implying that discussions about the euro are often related to the market and structure of the European Union, the eurozone, the labour market, and structural reforms.

Figure 4. Word cloud
Source: personal processing in Rstudio based on data from selected articles

Figure 5 shows two bar charts reflecting sentiment analysis of a corpus of texts using the Bing Dictionary. This sentiment analysis method classifies words into positive or negative categories based on a predefined set of terms.

The graph on the left highlights words with a negative connotation. The words are ordered in descending order of their frequency of occurrence in the texts analysed. The most frequent negative terms are „decline", „debt", and „crisis", followed by „problems", „issues", „difficult", „lost", „risk", „failed", and „poor". The fact that these terms appear frequently indicates a predominantly negative perspective in the texts analysed. The graph on the right shows words with a positive connotation. Like the negative graph, they are presented in order of frequency. The most frequently occurring terms with a positive connotation are „support", „reforms", „like", „well", „important", „trust", „respect", „led", „innovation", „reform", and „competitive". This selection suggests that while there is a significant presence of negative sentiments, there is also a recognition of the positive aspects under discussion.

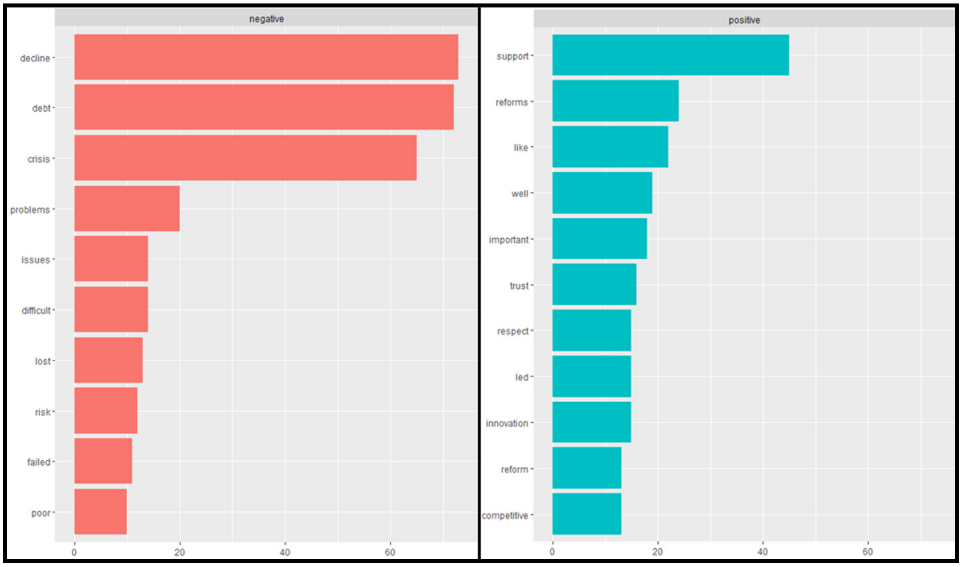

Figure 5. Sentiment analysis using Bing Dictionary
Source: personal processing in Rstudio based on data from selected articles

Figure 6 presents a sentiment analysis in the form of a word cloud, where larger terms indicate a higher frequency of sentiment in the texts. The cloud is divided between terms with positive and negative connotations, suggesting their impact on the perception of the euro.

Terms with negative impact, such as „crises", „debt", „instability", and „risks" are highlighted on the left side of the word cloud and have large dimensions, indicating a high frequency of occurrence in the texts. This suggests that topics such as economic or financial crises, debt levels, and the general feeling of economic uncertainty and instability are frequently discussed in the context of the euro. Such terms may reflect public concern about the vulnerability of the euro to economic fluctuations and unforeseen events, undermining confidence in the single currency.

On the other hand, on the right side of the cloud, the terms „strong", „supporting", „reforms", and „trust" indicate a positive impact. „Strong" may suggest a perception of stability and soundness of the euro, while „reforms" refers to structural changes or economic policies that are perceived as positive improvements in economic efficiency and stability. The term „supporting" indicates a general feeling of support for the euro, possibly from governments, financial institutions or the public. Finally, „trust" reflects the level of confidence placed in the euro, with the implication that a high perception of trust may promote a positive climate in the use and acceptance of the euro.

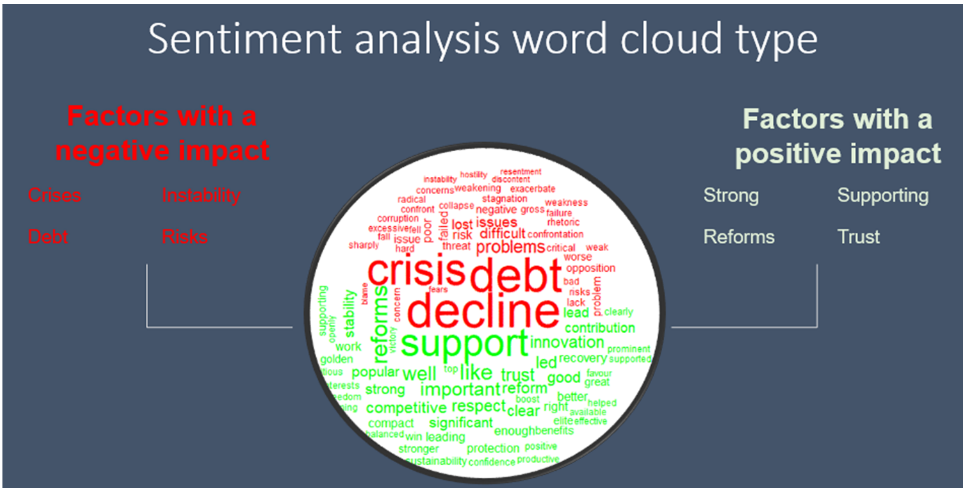

Figure 6. Sentiment analysis in the form of a word cloud
Source: personal processing in Rstudio based on data from selected articles

6. Discussion

The analysis presented above highlights the diversified perception of the euro within the Euro Area, with a particular focus on Italy, where sentiment is less favourable compared to other countries. By relating these results to the objectives set, the context can be better understood and relevant conclusions can be drawn for the discussion section of the study.

Link to Objective 1

Word frequency and sentiment analysis illustrate how the euro is perceived and discussed in the Italian press. The high frequency of terms such as „euro", „European", „political", „government", and „economic" in the analysed articles highlights a concentration on the monetary, political and economic characteristics of the euro. This indicates a diversity of discourses in the press, with a particular focus on the implications of the euro on national politics and economy.

The results align to map the spectrum of opinions and narratives in the press, providing a basis for understanding public perceptions.

Link to Objective 2

The sentiment analysis highlights the existence of a predominantly negative perspective in the texts analysed, with frequently used terms such as „decline", „debt", and „crisis". This reflects how economic and political events, such as the sovereign debt crisis, can influence public opinion about the euro. This relates directly to the objective of exploring the impact of major events on attitudes towards the single currency, suggesting that negative narratives can play a significant role in shaping public perceptions.

Link to Objective 3

The presence of terms with positive connotations in the sentiment analysis, such as „support", „reforms", and „trust", provides clues about the factors that may contribute to confidence in the euro. While the predominant discourse may be negative, the existence of positive narratives emphasizes the importance of structural reforms, political support, and public trust as key elements in building or maintaining confidence in a single currency. These findings are relevant for assessing how official communication and monetary strategies influence the perception of the euro, aligning to determine the factors underlying trust in the euro. Based on the analysis conducted and the results obtained, future research directions can further explore the issues identified, as well as new dimensions of euro perception and acceptance. Here are some specific suggestions:

- Extend the study to include a more detailed comparative analysis across different countries in the Eurozone in order to identify specific factors that contribute to different levels of acceptance and trust in the euro. This could help to understand the cultural, economic and political contexts that influence public perceptions.
- This research should concentrate on the influence of media narratives in melding public opinion regarding the euro, investigating how various narrative frameworks, tonal elements, and the frequency of coverage about euro-related subjects affect public perceptions. This investigation may encompass a content analysis of social media platforms, blogs, and online discussion forums to encompass a broader spectrum of discourses and viewpoints.
- Investigate in more detail how economic and political reforms at the national and European level affect confidence in the euro. Research could assess the effectiveness of monetary and fiscal policy measures in improving public perceptions and strengthening monetary union.
- Longitudinal studies that monitor the progression of public trust in the euro across temporal dimensions, particularly within the framework of global and European economic occurrences, including financial upheavals, significant policy transformations, and structural adjustments. Such

investigations could yield critical understandings regarding the robustness and flexibility of the monetary union.

- Exploring the relationship between the degree of financial comprehension and perceptions of the euro, to determine whether and how financial literacy influences understanding and acceptance of the single currency. Research could identify gaps in financial education and propose initiatives to improve it.

Through the exploration of these research trajectories, subsequent investigations may yield a more profound and intricate comprehension of the determinants that shape the perception and acceptance of the euro, thereby facilitating the formulation of more efficacious policies aimed at reinforcing the monetary union and enhancing the citizens' rapport with the singular currency.

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SCIENTIFIC ANNALS OF „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" UNIVERSITY OF IASI
VOLUME XVII/2, SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK, 2024

DOI: 10.47743/asas-2024-2-771

TRUST AS A PILLAR OF SOCIAL COHESION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: DYNAMICS AND INTERCONNECTIONS

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Abstract: This article addresses the complex interlink between the levels of social cohesiveness and trust in the Republic of Moldova, underlining that both aspects are significant in determining the country's democratic development. The research describes the trust dynamics by elaborating a profound review of the literature, using secondary data analysis and quantitative research provided by the Institute of Legal, Political, and Sociological Research. Based on sociodemographic information and comparative analysis from other countries, it assesses the degree of trust among people and institutions, especially in the context of pandemic problems. The paper discusses the controversial state-building initiatives of the Republic of Moldova, the oligarchs' strong position, pervasive corruption, and state capture in a position to deprive institutional trust. Unfair competition poses serious barriers to the electoral democratic framework. It does, nonetheless, point to areas of hope, which include media and political plurality, active civil society, and developments around specific reform areas. Equally important is the commitment of the Republic of Moldova to European values, with the European Union holding the key leverage in terms of democratic transformation. While trust is a crucial ingredient in elaborating social cohesion and resilience in the Republic of Moldova, the article argues that democratic improvements will require constant EU incentives.

Keywords: social trust, social cohesion, social capital, institutions, electoral democracy

Résumé : Cet article examine l'interconnexion complexe entre les niveaux de cohésion sociale et de confiance en République de Moldavie, en soulignant que ces deux aspects jouent un rôle déterminant dans le développement démocratique du pays. La recherche analyse les dynamiques de confiance en s'appuyant sur une analyse des données secondaires et un examen approfondi de la littérature, en référence à des recherches quantitatives fournies par l'Institut de Recherche Juridique, Politique et Sociologique. En se basant sur des informations sociodémographiques et une analyse comparative avec d'autres pays, l'étude évalue le degré de confiance entre les individus et envers les institutions, en particulier dans le contexte des problématiques liées à la pandémie. Une discussion est faite sur les initiatives controversées de building de l'État dans la République de Moldavie, la position dominante des oligarques, la corruption généralisée et la capture de l'État qui

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compromettent la confiance institutionnelle. La concurrence déloyale constitue également un sérieux obstacle au cadre démocratique électoral. However, the article does raise sources of hope-the pluralistic media and political landscape, an active civil society, and advances made in some areas of reform. It also insists on the commitment of the Republic of Moldova to European values, with the European Union holding one of the keys in the transformation towards a democratic regime. Enfin, bien que la confiance soit un ingrédient clé pour renforcer la cohésion sociale et la résilience en République de Moldavie, l'article soutient que les améliorations démocratiques nécessiteront des incitations constantes de la part de l'Union européenne.

Mots-clés : confiance sociale, cohésion sociale, capital social, institutions, démocratie électorale

Abstract: Acest articol abordează legătura complexă dintre nivelurile de coeziune socială și încredere în Republica Moldova, ambele aspecte fiind semnificative în determinarea dezvoltării democratice a țării. Cercetarea descrie dinamica încrederii prin revizuirea literaturii de specialitate, utilizarea analizei secundare a datelor, precum și a datelor cercetărilor cantitative furnizate de Institutul de Cercetări Juridice, Politice și Sociologice. Pe baza informațiilor sociodemografice și a analizei comparative din alte țări, studiul nostru evaluează gradul de încredere între oameni și instituții, mai ales în contextul problemelor pandemice. In articol punem în discuție inițiativele controversate de construire a statului în Republica Moldovenească, poziția dominanta a oligarhilor, a corupției generalizate și a capturării statului cu rezultatul compromiterii încrederii instituționale. Concurența neloială reprezintă bariere serioase în calea cadrului democratic electoral. Cu toate acestea, ea indică domenii de speranță, care includ mass-media și pluralitatea politică, societatea civilă activă și evoluțiile în jurul unor domenii specifice de reformă. La fel de important este angajamentul Republicii Moldova față de valorile europene, Uniunea Europeană deținând pârghia cheie în ceea ce privește transformarea democratică. În timp ce încrederea este un ingredient crucial în elaborarea coeziunii sociale și a rezistenței în Republica Moldova, articolul susține că îmbunătățirile democratice vor necesita stimulente constante din partea UE.

Cuvinte cheie: încredere socială, coeziune socială, capital social, instituții, democrație electorală

1. Introduction

The understanding of social cohesion is pivotal for the proper working of society. It refers to the level of unity, confidence or collaboration among its members, where social institutions are key to the development and protection of this quality. The Republic of Moldova, like any other society, is endowed with certain challenges and opportunities for social cohesion. To this effect, the level of confidence in social institutions is very important in the promotion of the stability and sustainable development of the nation. After the Declaration of Independence, the Republic of Moldova has been through a long and complex transition period which has severely impacted the people's confidence in the institutions. The ongoing processes of democratization, socio and economic reform and social change have created a more or less unstable climate for the population. As a result, aspects such as corruption, inefficiency, political interference, and low transparency have undermined trust in institutions, including the government, judiciary, political parties, and the media.

The social stability of the Republic of Moldova is highly dependent on the trust that its citizens have in its state institutions. In a society where the majority of citizens have confidence in its strategic institutions, there is a higher level of cooperation, unity, and order. The more people believe that institutions are just and fair, the more secure and endorsed they feel about these institutions. Therefore, confidence in institutions is a prerequisite for business development, social integration, and participation in civic life. Trust in social institutions in the Republic of Moldova has been falling in recent years, but there is a need to find reasons that affect such trust. Change in understanding and functioning of social institutions involves continuous efforts and well-conceived communication strategies. The concepts of accountability and transparency must be entrenched in the institutions to win back public trust and enhance cohesion.

The present article will investigate the dynamics of trust in the social institutions in the Republic of Moldova, the factors which account for the level of such trust and recommend measures that can be utilized in the promotion of social trust. After reviewing the literature and seeking relevant illustrative examples from different settings, we shall offer possible solutions and guidance on dealing with the current limits and encouraging trust in social institutions in the Republic of Moldova. Our goal is to highlight the role of social institutions in fostering social trust and cohesion in the context of the Republic of Moldova and to help shape a theoretical and practical framework that instils trust and encourages social engagement. In our case, we hope to assist in the course of building and consolidating trust towards a sound institution that undergirds the structural integrity of the Republic of Moldova in a transitioning era.

Individual and social levels of trust have always been appreciated by the society. Trust between people is basic for smoother togetherness, enhancing democracy, and the quicker development of state institutions. Trust in others permits participation in cooperation and increases the bond that exists in society. Given the significance set on social trust, an increasing number of studies try to determine its constituents and how it is formed. A significant dispute around this question does exist, but researchers mostly contend that this is how building trust operates – in most cases specific to location. Factors that may be available as crucial for the emergence of social trust in one country may not matter in the context of another country. The present study aims to investigate the defining factors of social trust in the unique political, economic, and social settings of the Republic of Moldova. The case of the Republic of Moldova stands out for several, no less important aspects. First, Moldova was the other in the group of post-Soviet economies and belonged to the Soviet Union for a long period where collectivism and egalitarianism were widely accepted. Such an experience usually results in congruency in social trust. Secondly, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the country embarked on the path of transitioning to democracy and a market economy. Since these processes gained intensity in the last two decades, the

Republic of Moldova provides a valuable case for studying how new political and economic governance approaches may influence social trust levels.

2. Theoretical framework

If we consider the concept of trust in social institutions, it is a vital part of social cohesion and stability in a society. It is a definition and theory that have been developed with time by many sociologists. According to Anthony Giddens, „trust viewed as increase in certainty within social relationships, based on past experiences and expectations regarding the future behavior of others" (Giddens, 1990). On the other hand, Niklas Luhmann conceptualizes trust as the creation and acceptance of risk through reducing communication complexity (Luhmann, 1979).

Sociological studies have pointed out several factors that influence trust in social institutions. Among the leading theories is the social capital theory of Robert Putnam, which stresses that it is social relationships and networks that form the basis for trusting social institutions. The theory argues that civic participation, social interaction, and a sense of community belonging are key ingredients for building institutional trust (Putnam, 2000). Karen S. Cook delves into trust within a broader social framework, exploring the underlying processes and mechanisms that sustain trust and examining its implications for cooperation and social interaction. Cook synthesizes various theoretical perspectives on trust, highlighting its importance in organizations, communities, and interpersonal relationships. Her work provides a comprehensive understanding of trust's multifaceted nature and the factors that influence it (Cook, 2005). Nan Lin researches social capital and its contribution to the development of trust and social relations. Lin develops a theory that stresses the importance of social networks and strong ties for developing trust and social cohesion. Through his research and examples, he manages to show how social capital enables cooperation, resource exchange, and mutual support, thus creating an environment that is friendly for trust and positive social interactions (Lin 2001).

Diego Gambetta explores the nature of trust and its construction or erosion within cooperative relationships. He examines the psychological and social mechanisms underpinning trust and social cooperation. Gambetta's theoretical analyses and case studies shed light on factors affecting trust development and its restoration or deterioration, discussing aspects like reciprocity, moral hazard, and relational structures (Gambetta, 1988). Bo Rothstein addresses the problems and dilemmas of trust and social cooperation in contemporary societies. The work investigates the impact of „social traps" on trust and social solidarity. According to Rothstein, defective social structures and coordination problems may undermine trust and create self-reinforcing vicious circles in damaging behavior. Efficient institutions and public policies will counteract these situations and nurture institutional trust (Rothstein, 2005). Pamela Paxton discusses the loss of social capital in the United States and its consequences regarding trust and social cohesion. With the analysis of different measures and empirical data, she reveals the sources of trust and civic engagement decline and ways for the restoration of social capital in the U.S. (Paxton, 1999).

Marc Hooghe and Dietlind Stolle present a comparative view of social capital and civil society. Their compilation brings together contributions on the role institutions and collective actions play in generating social capital across diverse social and cultural environments. They consider how institutions and civil society shape trust and social cooperation, hence offering useful insights into different practices and outcomes across countries (Hooghe et al., 2003). David L. Feldman and Karen Stenner examine the relationship between threat perception and political authoritarianism. The two authors discuss how specific social and political situations can enhance the desire of individuals for authoritarian regimes while undermining confidence in democratic organizations. Their study gives a psychological and political view of trust and stability within institutions (Feldman et al., 1997).

The evolution of trust in social institutions provides a multilayered and interesting topic, put into a comparative perspective in Western and Eastern European societies. Generally speaking, Western societies have a long tradition of institutional trust rooted in democratic values, the rule of law, and good governance. Traditionally, institutions like governments, systems of justice, police, and the media enjoyed high trust from the public. Still, recent decades have seen a decline attributed to economic crises, demographic shifts, political polarization, and problems with institutional transparency.

In Eastern Europe, in contrast, deep political and economic transitions swept across the region with the end of the Soviet Union. For this latter area of the world, trust in social institutions was influenced by experiences such as the dismantling of old structures, corruption, political instability, and economic adversities. With democratic consolidation and European integration, however, institutional trust started to improve in countries like Poland and the Czech Republic. In Moldova, the post-independence transition was also painful. Permeated with corruption and ineffective governance, it was plagued by political instability, while persistent economic problems neither came to nor went away. This has resulted in low levels of trust in institutions such as government, judiciary, and police. Ethnic and geopolitical factors contribute even more to societal polarization and erosion of interethnic trust. Comparing Western Europe with Eastern Europe and Moldova reveals differences in institutional trust conditioned by history, politics, and culture.

3. Research methodology

Secondary data analysis is performed in the given study by resorting to quantitative data of multiple waves of the POB, conducted by the Institute of Public Policy. Precisely, data for four waves were analysed: June 2021 (n1=1161), November 2022 (n2=1132), August 2023 (n3=1215), and October 2024 (n4=1100 respondents). The repeated cross-sectional design of the POB allows the examination of longitudinal trends and dynamics in public attitudes in the Republic of Moldova. The weights were applied to be representative of the adult population of the country and accounted for basic demographic variables: age, gender, type of residence, and geographic region. In analysing this trend, the theoretical framework is based on trust theories, which conceptualize social trust as being related to two different sources: cultural predispositions and contextual conditions. Dispositional factors stem from cultural norms and values and are thus relatively stable and less sensitive to short-term fluctuations. Conversely, contextual factors, shaped by the political, economic, and social environment, are more dynamic and may change rapidly. This dual-framework approach thus enables to capture of the structural and situational dimensions of the formation of social trust in Moldova.

We refine this analysis further by including primary data from a probability-based survey carried out by the Center for Sociology and Social Psychology within the Institute of Legal, Political, and Sociological Research. This survey was carried out from November 15 to December 20, 2021, and it involved multi-stage random sampling in 87 localities situated on the right bank of the Dniester River. The sample size of 1,698 respondents ensures statistical reliability, with a margin of error of ±2.8% at a 95% confidence level. Stratification variables included urban-rural residence, gender, age, educational attainment, and regional distribution to ensure a representative snapshot of the Moldovan adult population. Triangulation of these sources of data enables a far-reaching analysis of the interaction between macro-structural forcing factors, such as political and economic systems, and micro-level predispositions, such as individual attitudes and cultural values. The integration of secondary and primary data allows this study to present a comprehensive inquiry into the determinants of social trust in Moldova and bring to light the persistent impact of cultural dispositions hand in hand with the mouldability of trust under changing contextual conditions.

4. Study results

The dynamics of institutional trust in the Republic of Moldova between June 2021 and October 2024 are impressive, reflecting that period's socio-political and economic contexts. During this period, Moldova passed from a socialist government to a pro-European administration, passed through the post-COVID-19 pandemic period, faced war consequences in Ukraine, and had an energy crisis deepening. Each of these factors influenced public perceptions of institutional performance and legitimacy. Data from four waves of the Public Opinion Barometer reflects the cumulative trust levels („very much" and „somewhat trust") in key institutions and provides an insight into how the Republic of Moldova's society responds to structural and contextual pressures.

Table1. Evolution of the Republic of Moldova population's trust in institutions in 2021-2024

	Distribution of cumulative responses „A lot of trust" and „Some trust"			
Institution	June 2021	November 2022	August 2023	October 2024
Government	18,5%	28,0%	28,4%	23,7%
Parliament	15,1%	24,3%	26,7%	20,5%
President	47,0%	34,1%	35,8%	35,3%
Justice	18,5%	17,7%	22,5%	15,2%
Army	42,0%	26,9%	32,6%	30,1%
Church	72,6%	62,5%	58,0%	63,4%
City Hall	55,3%	55,6%	55,4%	55,1%
Political parties	18,5%	16,5%	17,3%	9,4%
Mass media	44,8%	43,3%	41,0%	30,9%

Source: Institute of Public Policies, Public Opinion Barometer, June 2021, November 2022, August 2023, October 2024; n1=1161 r, n2=1132 r, n3=1215 r. n4=1100

In June 2021, the socialist government remained in office, while the country was still dealing with the exceptional medical situation created by the pandemic. Trust in the government stood at a low level of 18.5%, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction with pandemic management and governance shortcomings. By November 2022, however, this had surged to 28.0% as the newly elected pro-European PAS government took strides toward dealing with the refugee crisis from the war in Ukraine. This dropped to 23.7% by October 2024, indicating that long-drawn crises energy shortage- and the failure of the government to meet governance expectations gradually eroded public optimism initially bestowed upon it.

Public trust in the Parliament follows a similar pattern. As early as June 2021, 15.1% of respondents trusted it because of dissatisfaction with the political establishment under the socialist regime. The pro-European government's pledges of reform consequently brought a gradual rise in the record of trust, culminating in the peak value of 26.7% in August 2023. However, by October 2024, it had fallen to 20.5%, reflecting overall public disappointment with legislative inactivity and the general polarization of the pre-election landscape. The decline underlines that structural reforms, usually slow and contentious, did not satisfy the expectations of the public in due time.

Trust in the President followed a different pattern. During the pandemic in June 2021, trust was at an unusually high 47%, reflecting trust in the presidency as an unifying figure during a time of national crisis. While governance challenges mounted, it decreased to 34.1% by November 2022 and stabilized at about 35% through 2023 and 2024. Thus, the modest levels of trust in this period are indicative that even though the presidency still retained symbolic authority, its capacity to influence public confidence was weakened amidst the persistence of systemic challenges.

The trust in the judiciary varied within the range of 15.2% to 22.5% in this period. In this context, these numbers underline the scepticism about how well judicial reforms have been carried out and to what extent the system is independent. The results improved somewhat in 2023, probably because of increased political rhetoric on anti-corruption measures, but decreased again to 15.2% in 2024.

Other institutions also presented some interesting dynamics of trust. For example, trust in the army, an institution traditionally enjoying a high level of trust, fell from 42% in June 2021 to 26.9% in November 2022, when public attention began to shift toward domestic emergencies like the arrival of Ukrainian refugees. Trust partially recovered to 30.1% by October 2024 but remained below pre-crisis levels, reflecting a general shift in public attention to domestic issues. Similarly, trust in the church went from 72.6% in 2021, down to a low of 58.0% in 2023, before recovering to 63.4% in 2024. Such fluctuation may be indicative both of secularization tendencies and of the variable role of the church in attempting to answer societal concerns in times of political and social instability.

In contrast, trust in mayoral offices stood at about 55% throughout the period, with very little variation. This is probably because of their direct connection with the day-to-day life of citizens and their perceived insulation from national political crises. Meanwhile, the level of trust in political parties and mass media went down, with political parties suffering a sharp decline from 18.5% back in June 2021 to just 9.4% in October 2024. This indicates increasing alienation of the public from party politics, which is fostered by perceptions of polarization and ineffectiveness. In a similar vein, the level of trust in the mass media decreased from 44.8% in 2021 to 30.9% in 2024, reflecting much scepticism after perceived biases and the role the media has played in polarizing society. In all, the dynamics of institutional trust during this period reflect a complex interplay between cultural predispositions and contextual factors. On one hand, trust in institutions such as the church and local authorities reflects relatively stable cultural expectations. On the other hand, trust in dynamic institutions of government, Parliament, and political parties varies based on immediate political and economic conditions. The public's response to various crises in Moldova underlines that responding not only to the immediate challenges but also to structural and systemic issues is fundamental for the long-term prospect of building trust. The dynamics of public opinion regarding the direction of Moldova's development between June 2021 and October 2024 reflect the significant socio-political and economic challenges the country faced during this period. The distribution of responses—whether the country was perceived as being on the right track, the wrong track, or respondents were uncertain—shows how shifting contexts influenced public sentiment.

Table 2. Evolution of respondents' opinions on the country's development direction

Period	The direction is correct	The direction is wrong	I don't know/ I don't answer
June 2021	29,6%	63,9%	6,5%
November 2022	24,3%	65,8%	9,9%
August 2023	32,0%	57,8%	10,3%
October 2024	39,2%	46,7%	14,1%

Source: Institute of Public Policies, Public Opinion Barometer, June 2021, November 2022, August 2023, October 2024; n1=1161 r, n2=1132 r, n3=1215 r. n4=1100

In June 2021, in the last months of the socialist government, 29.6% of the respondents believed the country was going in the right direction, while 63.9% considered the direction wrong. That period truly coincided with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that had then put severe tests on the government's management of healthcare and economic challenges. Generally, public dissatisfaction might have been heightened by limited vaccine rollouts, strained medical infrastructure, and economic stagnation. The high level of negative assessments speaks to a lack of trust in the ability of the socialist leadership to manage these crises effectively.

In November 2022, once the pro-European government of PAS had taken power, only 24.3% felt the country was going in the right direction, and 65.8% felt it was taking the wrong direction. This represents a drop and may indicate that the initial optimism of the public, following the elections in July 2021, dissipated. The COVID-19 pandemic by then was no longer a number one concern, while Moldova was heavily affected by the war in Ukraine. It had to provide significant aid to the Ukrainian refugees, secure the border, and manage the geopolitical tensions brought on by the conflict. While needed, these may have deflected attention away from domestic reforms and economic recovery, feeding the general public discontent. The emerging energy crisis was starting to bite household budgets, too, and dampen optimism even more.

In August 2023, the proportion of respondents who perceived the country as being in the right direction went up to 32.0%, while those who saw it as headed in the wrong direction went down to 57.8%. This uptick suggests that some of the work of the government, like addressing the energy crisis and ensuring macroeconomic stability, was finally beginning to strike a chord with the public. However, the remaining effects of inflation, high energy costs, and slow reform processes likely cooled popular euphoria. The rise in the number of respondents not voicing a clear opinion, to 10.3%, might suggest that people have grown more ambivalent or simply tired of political and economic developments.

By October 2024, in the eve of the presidential elections, public opinion happened to show a dramatic turn. The percentage of those who believed the country was taking the right direction reached its peak at 39.2%, while those who saw the direction as wrong significantly declined to 46.7%. There were a couple of reasons for this change. First, the PAS government might have been more intense with communication on governance and reform successes in the run-up to the elections. Second, the polarized electoral environment clear division between pro-Western and pro-Eastern camps could have motivated incumbent government supporters to become more confident in their country's direction. But the increase in uncertain responses to 14.1% reflects the deep fragmentation of the electorate and points to the undecided voters' role in shaping the election outcome.

Table 3, on the perception of global development over time, gives great insight into how global events shape public opinion. Therefore, it compares responses between June 2021 and October 2024, reflecting great pessimism about the global trajectory and growing scepticism regarding the world's development.

Table 3. The evolution of opinions on the direction of development in the world

Period	The direction is correct	The direction is wrong	I don't know/ I don't answer
June 2021	37,8%	50,6%	11,5%
November 2022	18,7%	63,6%	17,7%
August 2023	24,4%	60,4%	14,4%
October 2024	21,3%	66,5%	12,2%

Source: Institute of Public Policies, Public Opinion Barometer, June 2021, November 2022, August 2023, October 2024; n1=1161 r, n2=1132 r, n3=1215 r. n4=1100

In June 2021, 37.8% of the respondents said the world was heading in the right direction, and 50.6% believed it was on the wrong track. During this time, there were several critical international developments: the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines provided a sense of hope that things would return to some sort of normalcy, yet the virus mutations took some of that hope away. It was expected that the high percentage of negative responses would be conditioned by global democratic erosion and the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan. The relatively low percentage of respondents who were uncertain- 11.5%- implies a majority with quite firm opinions, possibly corresponding to increased awareness during the pandemic.

By November 2022, optimism had more than halved to 18.7%, while pessimism had increased fourfold to 63.6%. This faces the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which sent shockwaves not only into world security structures but also inflated economic and energy crises everywhere. Inflation reached alarming levels, thus eroding purchase power and building widespread economic uncertainty. The fading severity of the COVID-19 pandemic likely provided some relief, but it was overshadowed by ramping up tensions between major powers like the U.S. and China. These compounding crises explain the dramatic increase in negative perceptions, as well as the rise in uncertainty to 17.7%, reflecting the unpredictability of global developments during this period.

In August 2023, data revealed a slight recapture of optimism, as 24.4% perceive the global trajectory to be positive, while the majority-60.4%-are pessimistic. During this period, extreme weather events continue to unfold with record-breaking global temperatures, raising the present threat of climate change. Furthermore, the revived violence in the Israel-Hamas War and meagre advances in Ukraine's counteroffensive against Russia further strained international stability. However, the slight improvement in optimism may be attributed to the world's gradual adaptation to these challenges and the international community's efforts to address pressing issues, such as climate change and humanitarian crises.

By October 2024, optimism was back down to 21.3%, and pessimism rose to its peak at 66.5%. The armed conflicts in Ukraine and between Israel and Hamas continued through this period. Mistrust deepened between the United States and China, increasing global tensions. In addition, lingering economic instability further crushed people's confidence. Still, against all these challenges, the reduction to 12.2% of uncertain responses shows that the people had clearer views on global issues, perhaps compelled by the unending media exposure to what was happening around the world. In the final analysis, the data reveals a stable trend of increasing disappointment with global developments with temporary recoveries. The events of this period serve only to illustrate how closely linked global progress is with large-scale crises, be it a pandemic, war, or economic instability.

Data in Table 4 reveal the extent to which respondents trust various sources of potential help. It starkly juxtaposes horizontal, or personal networks, against the vertical, or institutional, trust. The results show a deep imbalance, where confidence in the personal network (relatives, friends, neighbours, and colleagues) is far stronger than in institutional structures, such as the state and local government.

Table 4. Respondents' trust in the help received from institutions/individuals

To what extent do you think you could count on help from the following institutions/people?						
		I don't trust at all	I trust to a small extent	I trust to a large extent	Very much trust	I don't know/find it difficult to answer
Institution/ person	State	49,3%	43,1%	5,0%	1,2%	1,4%
	City hall	44,5%	44,5%	7,9%	1,1%	2,1%
	Relatives	7,1%	29,0%	44,2%	18,8%	0,9%
	Friends	15,9%	40,7%	32,8%	8,1%	2,5%
	Neighbors	36,9%	38,8%	17,1%	4,1%	3,1%
	Colleagues	32,7%	36,9%	23,1%	3,9%	3,4%

Source: Table elaborated by authors.

Accordingly, horizontal relationships have the highest level of trust, with relatives coming out as the most reliable source: 63% of the respondents (putting „great trust” and „very great trust” together) believe that they would be able to rely on their relatives if they needed some kind of help. Friends earn more trust than vertical institutions: 41%, colleagues 33%, and even neighbours 21%. This pattern reflects a strong reliance on informal social networks during times of need, likely because of proximity, ease of access, and perceived dependability.

By contrast, vertical trust is very low. Only 6% of the respondents have a high confidence in the state and 9% in the local city hall. The difference supports the idea of a critical gap in institutional support effectiveness and reliability. More than 90% in the case of both the state and local government declared either a lack of or only limited, trust in those entities, which would indeed signal systemic failure to meet citizen expectations for support. In all probability, low institutional trust reflects irritation with bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, and deficient social services, compounded by broader socio-political and economic challenges.

Preference for horizontal support networks points to a cultural and social dynamic where it is believed that relationships with people are far more immediate and reliable. In contexts of economic uncertainty, political instability, or a history of institutional shortcomings, individuals naturally turn to those closest to them for support. This happens all the more in societies whose core ways of managing adversity depend on bonds of family and community. This tells of the great disequilibrium in trust. The data suggests that the inability of the state to establish a strong and trustworthy support system results in continuing reliance on informal networks, which may exacerbate inequality even further. For example, people without strong personal ties might be particularly vulnerable since they lack social capital to draw upon in times of need. Furthermore, the low institutional trust hints at a possible erosion of civic engagement since citizens may feel either disengaged from or disillusioned with formal governance structures.

5. Discussions and conclusions

Trust dynamics in Moldova run the gamut of attitudes: from credulity, whereby individuals are not very critical of the credibility of their interlocutors, to paranoia, characterized by generalized suspicion. During the pandemic crisis, this dynamic became more marked and underlined how critical events were able to determine an impact on trust relationships inside society. In this respect, it is turning to be a core resource for social stability, especially in times of uncertainty. It is necessary to stimulate a culture of trust based on cooperation and social responsibility, which would assist in the reduction of global and local risks, enhancement of quality of life, and development of a connected and resilient society.

Social cohesion is one of the main drivers of economic development and continues to reflect the interplay between trust and collaboration among societal actors. High levels of social trust lower transaction costs, enhance the regulatory environment and reinforce the reliability of economic interactions. Conversely, a lack of social cohesion can act to constrain investment and development. The general trend of low institutional trust in Moldova is mostly driven by rampant corruption, insufficient delivery of public services, and concerns about the electoral process being unduly influenced. These perceptions are deeply entrenched and intermingled with the close connections between economic and political elites, thus giving rise to oligarchic tendencies and undermining the popular belief in democratic institutions.

Against these challenges, Moldova does show positive signs of democratic development: political pluralism is present, the media scene is decidedly competitive, and political reforms have been significant, which evidences resiliency within the democratic framework. Although civil society remains underdeveloped, it is capable of shaping reform agendas and promoting democratic values. Moreover, Moldova's European orientation has become a very important driving force for democratization, with the European Union wielding strong influence to encourage reforms and offset autocratic tendencies.

Future research should look further into the contextual factors shaping social trust across different nations or regional groups. These comparative analyses could thus be used to tease out the more subtle ways in which political, economic, and social conditions may influence processes of trust-building. Perhaps more importantly, this study underlines a positive interplay between social and political trust, even in societies with low baseline trust levels. This finding suggests that Moldova can be taken out of the vicious circle of distrust and underdevelopment, provided that collective resilience and cooperation are harnessed effectively. These international crises - the COVID-19 pandemic, energy shortages, and a regional military conflict - have come to exemplify the Republic of Moldova population's capacity for collective action and resilience. If it further consolidates democratic institutions, fights corruption, and builds social trust, the Republic of Moldova will be able, despite everything, to achieve more stability and prosperity, and strengthen its European aspirations.

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SCIENTIFIC ANNALS OF „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" UNIVERSITY OF IASI
VOLUME XVII/2, SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK, 2024

DOI: 10.47743/asas-2024-2-772

LABOUR MARKET INSERTION OF SOCIAL WORK ALUMNI IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: The social work domain is part of a continually changing and challenging global world and new solutions and improvements are needed as should happen in any evolving domain. The main aim of the current exploratory study was to highlight the insertion of the labour market of seven years of promotion alumni on social work from one university founded in 1990, that organizes Bachelor's Degree studies in social work and is localized in the North-East area of Romania. We used a quantitative method (questionnaire on alumni in social work) with mixed questions (closed and open ones) that provided us the means to be able to conclude that the internships and the employment rate exist due to strong community partnerships between the university and local organizations that are active in the social work domain.

This exploratory study can represent the early foundation for a sustainable image of employment and a research contribution to the social work system in Romania. According to our exploratory study results from the 174 respondents, 121 were already in the labour market during their university studies and immediately after graduation. Of the 121 respondents, 42 work in the social work system with different executive or leading attributions in public or private entities from local and national levels.

The final results helped us present the three main categories of workforce among social work alumni: social workers, specialists in other domains (not related to the social work domain), and teaching staff. They also concluded that re-qualification is frequently encountered among the options of specialists who have chosen to become social work students over the years.

Keywords: students; social work; labour market; career; graduate; social capital; partnership; development; Romania

Résumé : Le domaine du travail social fait partie d'un monde mondial en constante évolution et difficile et de nouvelles solutions et améliorations sont nécessaires, comme cela devrait se produire dans tout domaine en évolution. L'objectif principal de la présente étude exploratoire était de mettre en évidence l'insertion sur le marché du travail actuel d'anciens élèves de sept années de promotion en travail social d'une université fondée en 1990, qui organise des études de licence en travail social et est localisée dans le Nord-Est. région de la Roumanie. Nous avons utilisé une méthode quantitative (questionnaire auprès des anciens élèves en travail social) avec des questions mixtes (fermées et ouvertes) qui nous

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ont donné les moyens de pouvoir conclure que les stages et le taux d'emploi existent grâce à de forts partenariats communautaires entre l'université et organisations locales actives dans le domaine du travail social.

Cette étude exploratoire peut représenter la première base d'une image durable de l'emploi et une contribution de la recherche au système de travail social de Roumanie. Selon les résultats de notre étude exploratoire auprès des 174 répondants, 121 sont déjà sur le marché du travail pendant leurs études universitaires et immédiatement après l'obtention de leur diplôme. Sur les 121 répondants, 42 travaillent dans le système du travail social avec différentes attributions de direction ou de direction, dans des entités publiques ou privées au niveau local et national.

Les résultats finaux nous ont permis de présenter les trois principales catégories de main-d'œuvre parmi les anciens élèves du travail social : travailleur social, spécialiste dans d'autres domaines (non liés au domaine du travail social) et personnel enseignant. Et aussi de conclure que la requalification est fréquente parmi les options des spécialistes qui ont choisi de devenir étudiants en travail social au fil des années.

Mots-clés : étudiants; travail social; marché du travail; carrière; diplômé; capital social; partenariat; développement; Roumanie

Rezumat: Domeniul asistenței sociale este parte din lumea globală aflată în continuă schimbare provocatoare, iar noi soluții și îmbunătățiri sunt necesare așa cum ar trebui să se întâmple în orice domeniu științific în evoluție. Scopul principal al prezentului studiu exploratoriu a fost acela de a evidenția inserția pe piața forței de muncă a șapte promoții de absolvenți în asistență socială dintr-o universitate înființată în 1990, care organizează studii de licență în domeniu și este localizată în zona de Nord-Est a României. Am folosit o metodă cantitativă (chestionar privind absolvenții în asistență socială) cu întrebări mixte (închise și deschise) care ne-a oferit mijloacele de a putea concluziona că există o corelație între stagiile de practică din timpul facultății și rata de angajare ridicată datorită parteneriatelor comunitare puternice între universități și organizațiile care sunt active în domeniul asistenței sociale.

Acest studiu exploratoriu poate reprezenta fundamentul timpuriu pentru o imagine durabilă a angajării absolvenților și contribuție la cercetare la sistemul de asistență socială din România. Conform rezultatelor studiului nostru exploratoriu din cei 174 de respondenți, 121 sunt deja pe piața muncii în timpul studiilor universitare și imediat după absolvire. Din cei 121 de respondenți, 42 lucrează în sistemul de asistență socială cu diferite atribuții executive sau de conducere, în entități publice sau private de la nivel local și național.

Rezultatele finale ne-au ajutat să prezentăm cele trei categorii principale de forță de muncă în rândul absolvenților de asistență socială: asistent social, specialist în alte domenii (care nu are legătură cu domeniul asistenței sociale) și personal didactic. Și, de asemenea, să concluzionăm că recalificarea se întâlnește frecvent printre opțiunile specialiștilor care au ales să devină studenți la asistență socială de-a lungul anilor.

Cuvinte cheie: student; asistență socială; piața muncii; carieră; absolvent; capital social; parteneriat; dezvoltare; România

1. Introduction

Social work in Romania dates from 300 years and it is mainly associated with the involvement of churches and monasteries in helping the persons in need.

The main beneficiaries, that the social work system from that period focused on, were mainly oriented on children, mothers, elderly persons, and disabled persons. Unfortunately, in Romania during the period of communism, social work did not exist at all, because the main doctrine of communism was that we are all equals and everybody gets what needs to be correlated for their daily necessities and there is no need for social work. As seen in different documentaries released after 1990 through television, at that period disabled children were kept in foster care centers in miserable conditions because the regime did not accept this as an issue that existed in the society. Social work at that time was absent and it has fallen into a latent stage.

Romania is 35 years after the fall of communism. Nowadays, social work in Romania has managed to evolve and each day tries to become more performant first by creating and updating the legal framework for preparing specialists in the social work domain (undergraduates) and, after that, for insertion into the labour market properly. For example, after the communist period, there were many local city halls where they hired social workers with middle studies and no qualification in the social work domain had to do the social work duties. Also, in the former legislation there was a mention that in this domain can be active „social workers, other specialized staff in social work, as well as staff with various professions, qualifications and skills" according to article 121, alin.1. (Law No. 292/2011 on social assistance). This small gap allowed executives from the social work domain and decision actors to also hire different specialists instead of qualified social workers with no Bachelor Degree in the domain. Until recently the mayors explained that they had no qualified social workers to fill in those positions so they hired other specialists. In the last ten years, because more alumni in social work emerged each year this need has found its solution, and qualified personnel exist and it is easier to be found and inserted into the labour market. This way, we can state that the human resources and its quality improved over time, at least from this point of view. Even though social work has (re)borne after the communist period, important steps were made at the national level to create and develop a suitable and sustainable local development for the actors involved in this system, namely: universities, public and private sector, stakeholders, students, local community etc.

Many national specialists studied the different stages of the evolution of social work in Romania (Szabó, 2020; Buzducea, 2008; Lazăr et al., 2019). All the papers present the different stages of the evolution of social work from Romania and the fact that they are trying to reach a higher level similar to the traditional system of social work from countries such as the United States of America, Poland, Spain, Italy, Norway, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Despite international analyses proposing reforms of social work systems that could be closely linked to social health (Andrews et al., 2019; Andrews et al., 2016), each country pursues its means of development according to its national specifics and available human resources.

The first steps for national regulations in Romania in the social work domain were made in 2004 when it was issued *Law No. 466 of 2004 on the status of the social worker*. This law regulates the rights and obligations of social workers who work in Romania, their activities, continuing lifelong specialization, incompatibilities, prohibitions, ethical principles, etc. (Law no. 466 of 2004 on the status of the social worker, 2004).

Also, in 2001 was issued *Law no. 705 of December 3, 2001, regarding the national social assistance system,* followed by Law *no. 47 of March 8, 2006, regarding the national social assistance system*, and *Law no. 292 social assistance from December 20, 2011,* that is continuously updated and exists in present days. This law provides the legal framework for: values and principles that govern the domain; definitions and terms used in the systems; types of beneficiaries; types of social services; types of social benefits; minimum conditions fulfilled to be granted; entities that can provide social services; sources of funding the entities from the system; ethics and conduct; and, human resources and their management (Law No. 292/2011 on social assistance).

And, in 2012 with *the Law no. 197 regarding quality assurance in the field of social services from November 1, 2012 (*updated*)* which stipulates conditions that must be fulfilled for national qualitative social services that can be provided for our social work beneficiaries (Law no. 197 regarding quality assurance in the field of social services from November 1, 2012 (*updated*), 2012). Many other special laws, for different categories of social beneficiaries are issued and updated according to the necessities of the social work system. For example, *Law no. 219 on social economy* and all its updates to fill the national regulations in this domain (Law no. 219, on the social economy, 2015).

Secondly, after national regulations, steps were made in the direction of establishing national universities for teaching social work specialists that will perform lately on the labour market in the domain and also will develop new regulations on different topics according to society's challenges. In Romania, according to the annual decisions for the modification of annexes no. 1-6 of the Government Decision regarding the approval of the Domain Nomenclature and specializations/programs of university studies and the structure of higher education institutions for each academic year and, also the *Law of Higher Education no. 199/2023* focusing the enrolment to social work studies in Romania are available for the universities that have authorized Bachelor Degrees programs in this domain (Law no. 199 The Higher Education, 2023). For example, for the academic year 2022-2023, was issued Decision 433 from 2022 23 universities were authorized to register students in the social work domain in the Bachelor's Degree program.

Following Article 32 of the Romanian Constitution university studies are free of charge (The Romanian Constitution, n.d.). As we can see in **Figure No. 1** below in Romania some universities prepare future social workers for the labour market field in the next counties: Timişoara, Arad, Bihor, Cluj-Napoca, Caraș-Severin, Dolj, Gorj, Argeş, Sibiu, Brașov, Constanța, Galați, Iași, Suceava, Bucharest. It can easily be noticed that there is more concentration in the North-

West, West-South, and Centre of the country with different types of universities which produce a larger number of alumni in the social work domain. In the North-East Area, there are only two counties: Suceava and Iași, with three universities that have alumni from the social work domain: University 'Alexandru Ioan Cuza' from Iași, University 'Petre Andrei' from Iași and University 'Stefan cel Mare' of Suceava.

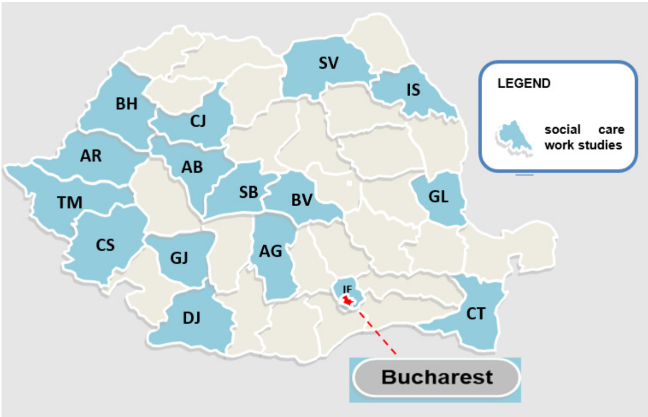


Figure 1. Distribution of universities in Romania where are enrolled students in social work studies
Source: created by the author

Universities have an important role in transmitting and developing new principles for an internal cultural habitus (Bourdieu, 1980) that exists after graduation and can contribute to local community development (Bagherianfar & Dolati, 2022) as future employers in their domain of study. For example, each alumnus of social work that is inserted into the labour market in city halls from different counties in Romania, where previously there was no hired social worker, has its specialist previous experience obtained during internship, volunteer period, or experience exchange as a student, and it brings his/her know-how. Also, adapts his/her expertise to current situations, finds proper solutions, engages the community members, and establishes pillars among local actors and stakeholders' involving all of them for the same common objective: community development all along with its advantages and possibilities.

2. Theoretical framework

Choosing a career path in the domain of social work may have its roots in the personal previous life experience and goals (Rogošić & Baranović, 2016), existing social capital, and the way you want to participate in the community development around you (Gubbins et al., 2018) and the way you are `shaping the service triangle and navigating stakeholder interests within this` (Vermeerbergen et al., 2021). The effects towards community development and intervention are influenced by the type of organization you are a part of `order-based or functional` (Pless et al., 2015), governmental or non-governmental one.

For example, governmental institutions such as the General Directorate of Social Work and Child Protection, Directorate of Social Assistance, and Probation Service implement the national regulation at the local level in each county where they are located and have a wider area of intervention for different social categories of beneficiaries in the same time frame. Another advantage is that the budget for the activities is provided by the designated ministry (finance or labour) or reimbursement funds through different approved projects. There is also the possibility to request a budget supplement if needed.

On the other hand, when you work as a social worker, volunteer, or internship in a non-governmental entity the budget is limited because it comes only from projects that you implement and are focusing only on different specific beneficiaries such as abused children and their families. There is no possibility of requesting a budget supplement, you have to adjust all in the initial project budget. A solution can be to submit another project with sustainable activities and to be a flow-up for the initial one.

But, to both types of organizations, governmental or non-governmental or order-based or functional, the efficiency of the intervention at the community level is related to public and private partnerships. They join in different projects implicating their specialists for the mutual objective defined mainly by community development in the area where they are located. As a final possible result, if they manage to collaborate better for an improved lifestyle for the people in the community also their activities would be easier to implement.

The Social Capital theory developed by James Samuel Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu, and Robert Putman combined with the Institutional Theory analysed by Pamela S. Tolbert and Lynne G. Zucker represents the base of our current exploratory study. We tried to identify and present the ways that local partnerships, social norms, current social networks, and previously existing community relationships and connections can contribute to engaging students and alumni in the labour market in the social work domain. Both theories, the social capital theory and the institutional theory contain different elements that are at the base of our exploratory study: people (e.g. students and alumni in social work, current specialists activating in the domain or convex one) and institutions existing in this domain (e.g. national, regional and local ones). The people and the institutions are permanently interconnected and the long-time created networks or new ones, partnerships, and connections from Suceava county and neighbourhood provide the places where information is shared and the interested actors take what they need for the mutual objective – community development (Miron, 2010), particularly in our case the insertion on the labour market of alumni from social work.

At the same time to be part of the local development of the society and to have a high percentage of employment among alumni. As Silvia Rogošić mentions that `social capital of the community can be used by individuals in an attempt to achieve personal goals` (Rogošić & Baranović, 2016) such as employment in the study domain.

We were able to identify the forms of formal and informal social capital (Putnam, 2001) and the way that the nods created provide reciprocity and contribute to community development and employment of alumni in the social work domain. For example, alumni of social work become current employees in local city halls, their original hometowns. Initially, there was a free position and no experts to apply and during their university studies they did their internships there and after graduation, they applied for the job and became a part of the organization. This way a mutual gain was obtained also for the community and the alumni. He/she was born in that community, knows its problems, and now can contribute with the expertise obtained during university courses and different other internship stages. Also, the way that Institutional Theory can contribute to engaging students and alumni to participate in local community development and employment.

The importance of higher education and employment is analysed in the scientific literature (Souto-Otero & Białowolski, 2021) where strong connections are revealed. Over time we were able to see that the institutional frames provided during university studies assures a rigorous base for future employers. Also, social norms and different actors' involvement from the community level are relevant to the organizational insights (Tolbert & Zucker, 2012) (Patriotta, 2020) that are carried out and implemented after employment.

In Romania, some regulations offer the opportunity for students to work during their university studies during holidays or with a reduced program and there are fiscal facilities for the employer (Law no. 72/2007 on stimulating the employment of pupils and students, 2007), or for internship stages (Law no. 335/2013 regarding the internship for higher education graduates, with subsequent changes, 2013), or apprenticeship at work (Law no. 279/2005 on apprenticeship at work, republished, with amendments and subsequent additions, 2005). All rights and duties regarding the unemployment insurance system and employment stimulation work are regulated by Law no. 76 from 2002 and all its updates (Law no. 76/2002 regarding the unemployment insurance system and employment stimulation work, with subsequent amendments and additions, 2002).

The option to work is decided by each person and this is conditioned by many factors, mainly mutual benefits, either for the alumni, for the beneficiary, or the institution. For example: `to enhance well-being and a positive employment relationship` (Guest, 2017), can represent an important element for an alumnus or a specialist, meaning that if you feel that your work is important and provides proper means for learning, performing, belonging and career evolution you are motivated to stay and build more in that team. Another mutual benefit may be to `improve the distribution of decent employment conditions` (Grimshaw et al., 2017) which can be interpreted as an opportunity for recent graduates on the labour market and more necessary for current generations to ensure their stability at their jobs. In strong correlation with the previous benefit, the `desire for work autonomy` (Pulignano et al., 2021) is very important for our alumni who start their internships or jobs immediately after graduation. The work autonomy is relevant for them and gives in time the feeling of independence and confidence in their forces. Another relevant element is the appropriate leadership style (Mcdermott et al., 2013) which is important for all specialists. The social work domain also has the particularity that there are different approaches for the same problem, but different beneficiaries due to their particularities. The leadership style can contribute to proper community development by engaging each actor who is willing to participate and to empower each initiative that comes from the people and specialists.

I asked each alumni generation `What is the main reason or gain that they obtained during their internship period`? The answer to this question is focusing on `finding motivation in practice, looking back to go forward` (Harney & Collings, 2021) and contributing to social development in the area where they work. Because this domain is in permanent development and exchange and needs to be updated constantly, the students and the alumni have the opportunity to work with many different categories of beneficiaries, from children (with disabilities, abandoned, in foster families, beggars, abused, trafficked persons, delinquent, etc.), to adults also with different comorbidities, to elderly persons or to elaborate social policies, community development, programs, and projects implementation and so on. This way they can like or dislike, and embrace a certain area of interest in this domain, and this way he/she find motivation in what they do and in what they feel they contribute to society. Finally, but not least, all these benefits `still meet major challenges` (Szabo, 2014) because we are a changing and challenging global world, and new solutions and improvements are needed as should happen in any evolving domain. In the following part of the paper, we will present the research methodology of the current study.

3. Materials and Methods

This article has focused on a quantitative method (questionnaire on alumni in social work) with mixed questions (closed and open ones). These methods helped us to create an image regarding the particularities of the social work system that is a part of the entire national social work system of Romania, mainly in the northeast area of the country. And, is also a good example of the employment of alumni in social work from one university founded in 1990, one of the many universities that organize Bachelor's Degree studies in social work and is localized in the North-East area of the country.

For the online questionnaire, we sent the link to the entire population of the seven years' cohort students who participated in the final exam and graduated from 2018 to 2024 at one university founded in 1990, one of the many universities that organize Bachelor's Degree studies in social work and is localized in the North-East area of Romania. There are 257 graduates (alumni) in the social work domain at this university that we choose. From the total number of populations, we received answers from 174 respondents, with a ± 3.98% margin of error, a population percentage of 67%, and a confidence level of 95% were used in our current exploratory study. From all the respondents we asked for their informed consent before answering the questions of the survey. Participation in this study was voluntary and the anonymity of the answers was assured. Also, no financial or material rewards were given or asked from the respondents. We mention that the present research was conducted fulfilling the stipulations of national and international regulations and we assured the anonymity of the respondents. The statistical analysis of the answers received at the questionnaires was made with the statistical soft JASP 0.17.2.1 version offered in open-source by the University of Amsterdam.

Among respondents to our questionnaire, we were able to identify that there were different types of employability, such as:

(1) alumni that work in the social work domain after the final exam, with an executive or coordinating tasks;
(2) a person who has a job in a different field of study, such as sales, teaching staff, nursing, shift leader, etc.;
(3) a person who, before enrolling the undergraduate studies in social work was working in the same domain as specialists with similar attributions, qualified with secondary education, and after graduation started to work in the domain;
(4) graduate, who before enrolling the undergraduate studies in social work was working in different domains as specialists, and after graduation kept working in their domain;
(5) alumni who do not work at all but choose to specialize themselves in the social work domain.

The main aim of the exploratory study was to present the situation of seven years' promotion alumni in the social work scientific domain from one university founded in 1990, organizes Bachelor's Degree studies in social work and is localized in the North-East area of Romania and their insertion on the actual labour market.

The research questions of the current exploratory study are:

(1) There is a uniform distribution among the genders of alumni from the social work domain?
(2) Which are the main categories for workforce distribution on domains of alumni from social work?
(3) There is a connection between internships during undergraduate studies and working in the social work domain after graduation?
(4) Is re-qualification the main idea encountered among the alumni in the social work domain?

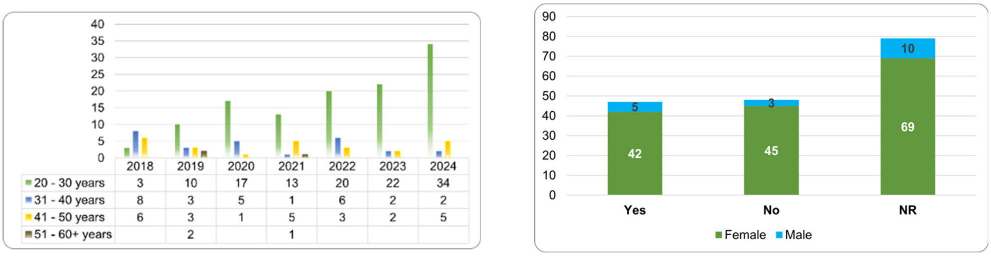
As an added value we must mention that scientific research for the seven years' analysis is relevant for a domain that is in its development stage in a country where the communist era left its marks.

4. Results of the exploratory study

Regarding the social worker profile, the available scientific literature mentions that is a `woman, around 35 years old, graduated from university studies in the field and usually works in a public entity of social work` (Lazăr, 2015). Among the social workers are also men but in a more reduced number than women.

From the total number of respondents in our survey (N=174), the age of each promotion and gender on their current job status is shown in **Figure 2 (a)** and **(b)** below. The average age of the respondents is 30 years old; the lowest age is 20 years old and the highest age is 54 years old. Instead of gender distribution, we can easily notice that the female percentage is larger than the male one; from the 174 respondents, we have only 18 males (10%).

This can be justified in the context that people consider this job more suitable for a woman than for a man, so for this reason, the majority of the alumni and respondents are female. We must mention that there are sectors of this domain where male social workers are more appropriate for this activity. For example, in the men's prisons sector where we have probation counsellors and an advantage is that the social worker should be a male. Or, in a hospital for the mentally ill beneficiaries with bouts of anger and violence also a male social worker would be more recommended for the job.



(a) (b)

Figure 2. Describes the age and gender of respondents: (a) Age of respondents on each promotion; (b) Gender of respondents on current job status.
Source: created by the author

From the above **Figure 2 (a)** we can see that each analysed promotion has on the first rank the 20 – 30 years group and we can see that only in 2019 and 2021 promotions we had respondents with the 50 – 30+ years group. Also, from **Figure 2 (b)** we can notice that 27% (N=47) are currently working in their domain field. And 55% (N=95) are active in the labour market, even though they work in their domain or a different one. Notable is the fact that we had a large number of `NR` – `No response` from 45% (N=79) respondents. We can only assume that they were not interested in answering this question that it was easier for them to check this box or that their answer is not relevant.

The distribution of the 174 respondents to the online questionnaire can be seen below, in **Figure 3.** A larger percentage (24%) of answers were received from the 2024 promotion of alumni, due to the fact that they were recently alumni and they were still close to the university. The 2018 and 2019 promotions have the smallest percentage (10%) in our research.

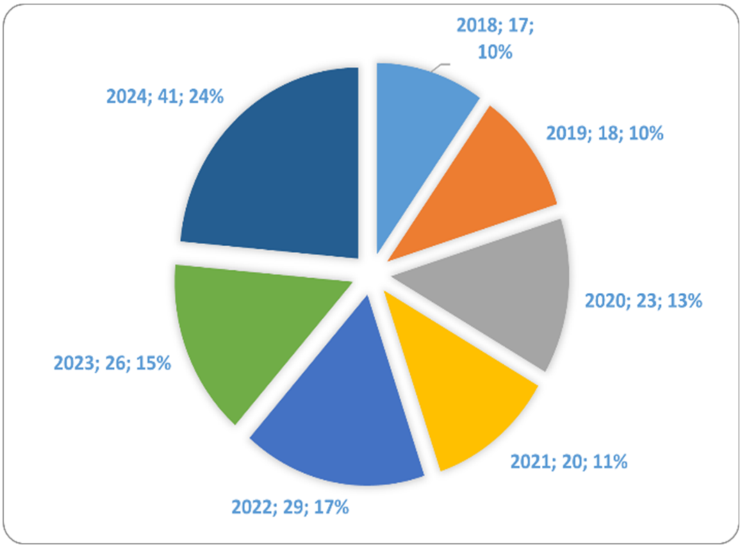
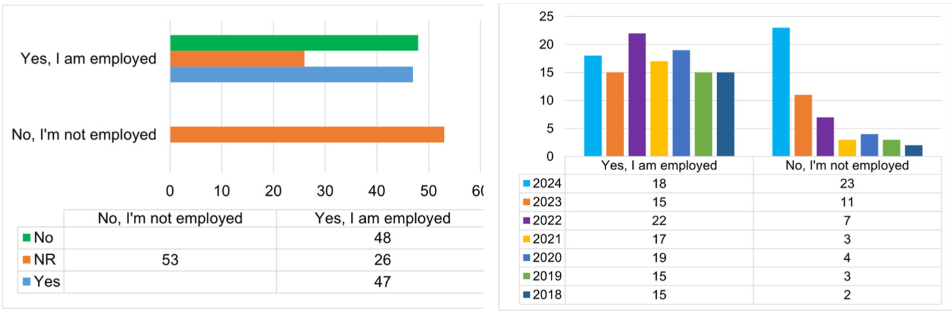


Figure 3. Distribution of each promotion of students/respondents
Source: created by the author

As previously seen, one of the main items that were of interest to us was the status of the labour market at present for the alumni of the seven cohorts during this research. From the results, we managed to see that more than half of them were employed at that moment 70% (N=121). From this percentage, 47 persons (27%) are working in the social work system with different job descriptions 48 persons (28%) are actively involved in other domains of activity, and other 26 respondents (15%) are active in the labour market without telling us on what type of domain, as seen in **Figure 4 (a).** From **Figure 4 (b)** below we can see that the current alumni promotion (2024) has the largest number of respondents who are not employed at this moment. The explanation can be because the majority of the alumni preferred to dedicate their time to study and after that to find a proper job. The respondents from the same promotion, 2024, that answered `Yes, I am employed` activate in different domains such as waitress/waiter, sales, temporary job, teaching staff, etc.

This percentage of 27% (N=47) is relevant to the fact that in the North-East Area of Romania and even in Suceava county there is a huge lack of specialists in the social work domain as can be seen in official statistics (*National Institute of Statistics*, n.d.) and also according to Ministry of labour from Romania (Min. of Labour, 2023) where there are presented the necessary social services for each county.



(a) (b)

Figure 4. Describes the job status on the labour market and distribution of respondents:
(a) Job status on the labour market (employed/unemployed) at the moment;
(b) Distribution on each promotion of job status on the labour market (employed/unemployed) at the moment
Source: created by the author

For the current job status of alumni from the social work domain, we can see in **Figure 5** below that 57 persons (33%) have between 1 - and 10 years' experience, and 11 persons (6%) have less than 1 year. If we have a look at the distribution of answers on each cohort, we can notice that promotion 2019, 2022, and 2024 have the largest number of respondents that are employed at this time, namely 9% (N=15), 9% (N=16) and 10% (N=18). It is visible that the 2024 cohort answered in a percentage of 13% (N=23) that they prefer actually to not answer (`NR`).

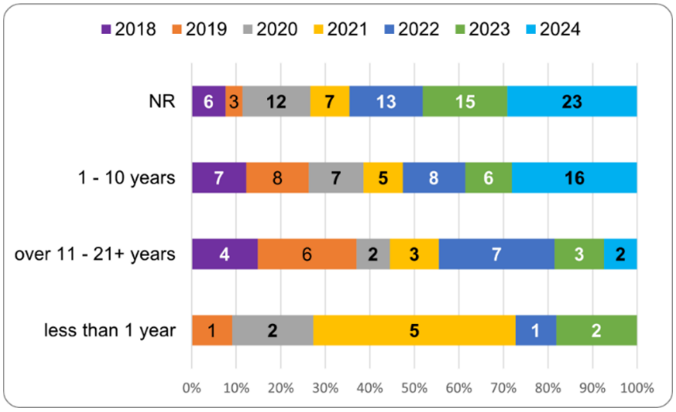


Figure 5. Experience in work field (how many years did they work until now)
Source: created by the author

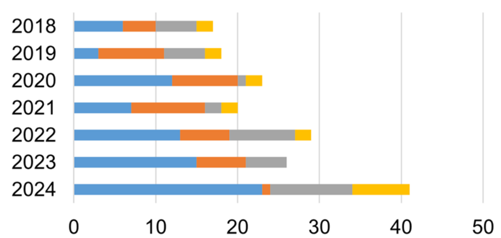
Among the reasons that they mentioned for choosing this career path are: *`helping people in need`, `finding a purpose for themselves`, `contributing to the community`, `having a social work case in their neighbourhood/family`, `they felt the need for a change`, `they come from children's centers and the social worker* *influenced they life and they want to be a model as well`, `to show other social workers how a qualitative job is made (as a challenge)`.*

The workforce distribution on the domain can be seen in **Figure 6** below where we were able to identify three main categories of workforce among alumni of social work, namely: social worker - 24% (N=42), specialist in other domains (not related to the social work domain) – 21% (N=26) and teaching staff - 10% (N=17). We need to mention that the three categories that we extracted from the respondent's answers gather more detailed job descriptions encountered at the national level.

For example, `social workers` includes jobs in the social work domain such as therapist, intern, therapist for children with autism syndrome, probation counsellor, day center coordinator for elderly people, and specialist inspector. In this category, we also included the specialists who carry out activities of social work but do not have a Bachelor's Degree such as workers from local city/county hall (named `referent` in Romanian), community medical assistant which has attribution of social work at local level accordingly to national regulation (Methodological rules of May 23, 2019 regarding the organization, operation, and financing of the community healthcare activity, 2019).

For the category `teaching staff` we included here occupations from the elementary and pre-university personnel that activate as: assistant for kindergarten teacher, kindergarten teacher, teacher of math and mechanics, elementary teacher.

For the category `specialist in another domain,` we included persons who are active such as transport coordinators, administrators, recruitment specialists, sales advisors, counselling assistants, trade workers, call center operators, acquisition specialists, police personnel, HR inspectors, data processing operator, translator, nurse, shift leader.

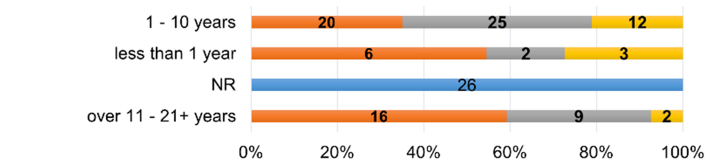


	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
NR	23	15	13	7	12	3	6
Social worker	1	6	6	9	8	8	4
Specialist in another domain	10	5	8	2	1	5	5
Teaching staff	7		2	2	2	2	2

Figure 6. Main categories of workforce among alumni of social work
Source: created by the author

Re-qualification is one of the main ideas that was encountered during our study. Both questions (closed and open answer ones) existing in the questionnaire and their answers, highlighted the fact that respondents who worked in different domains chose this specialization to change their career path. Many respondents from the questionnaire mentioned that they had already been hired for over 1 year and currently have a job in the social work national system, as can be seen in **Figure 7** below. The actual national education system offers the opportunity for re-qualification (Szabó et al., 2022) if the specialists have this need. From the figure below we can see that the total number of specialists from another domain with experience in the labour market represents 26% (N=36) from the total number of respondents (N=174); and, teaching staff represent 8% (N=17). This is very significant because we can conclude that the social work profession is a viable one for re-qualification for persons from other domains and they bring their know-how from their previous jobs this way proper innovative solutions from multidisciplinary points of view are brought into this domain's attention and community development.

Another argument received from these respondents was that one of the main reasons why they chose this specialization (re-qualification) is that `*during the last period of time I heard more about the opportunities given by this job and they want to re-qualify and change the career*` (Female, 35 years, working in another domain).



	over 11 - 21+ years	NR	less than 1 year	1 - 10 years
NR		26		
Social worker	16		6	20
Specialist in another domain	9		2	25
Teaching staff	2		3	12

Figure 7. Comparing experience in the work field
Source: created by the author

From the total number of respondents (N=174) we can state that for `social workers` that found a job in this domain, the internship period during their Bachelor's Degree studies was `very helpful` and `helpful`. In the five steps Likert scale that we used to measure that role we can conclude that 60% (N=73) of the total number of respondents that mentioned that they are employed (N=121) considered that the internship period during the Bachelor's Degree study was `very helpful`/`helpful`/`appropriate` for them and contributed to finding a job in this domain. It is easily notable from **Figure 8** below, that the social work alumni that are currently working after graduation in the social work domain had the advantage of the practice experience during their university studies. And only 14 (12%) respondents that are in the labour market selected the `not helpful` option.

This means that the way the actual university program is configured helps to better integrate its alumni in the market field at the local level. Improvements are always needed and foreseen as normal in such a fluid domain where we activate.

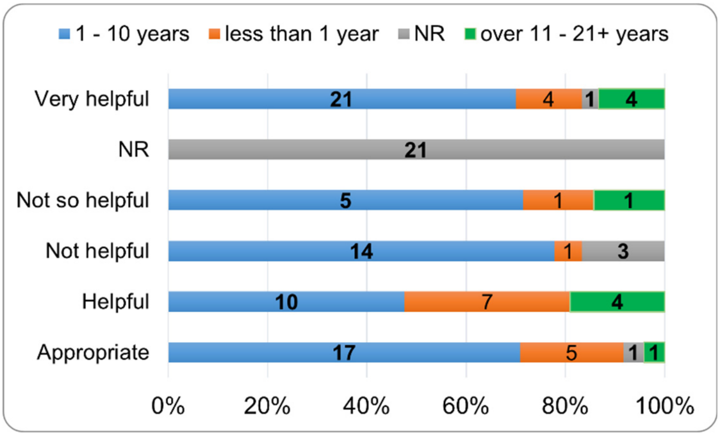


Figure 8. Comparing practice during Bachelor's Degree studies and finding a job in the work market
Source: created by the author

From the above results, we can highlight that until now the actual undergraduate studies in social work from the university founded in 1990, which organizes Bachelor Degree studies in social work and is localized in the North-East area of Romania contributed to preparing and intermediate properly the insertion on the labour market for its alumni. The main motivation factors mentioned by the respondents regarding the quick insertion into the labour market are related to the fact that: `*I feel prepared for challenges that they will come*` (Female, 24 years), `*the fact that I was involved in COVID-19 and Ukrainian refugees' crisis gave me more confidence*` (Male, 22 years), `*the local community support me*` (Female, 44 years).

During the three years of university studies the students enrolled in a social work undergraduate studies have the opportunity to participate in internships starting from the second year of study, because national standards require. For example, at University `Stefan cel Mare` of Suceava, Faculty of History, Geography and Social Studies, Department of Humanities and Socio-political Studies, for their enrolled students' Bachelor Degrees and Master of Arts in social work domain, has signed many partnership agreements with institutions, both public and private sector, which activate in social work domain in Suceava county and nearby counties, such as seen in **Table 1** below in this paper. We believe similar partnerships, at the local level, are also signed at the other 31 universities that have the opportunity to also enrol students in the social work domain. This way can ensure a direct connection with beneficiaries, and the labour market, and a smooth passage is made from theory to practice for all the involved actors in the teaching process.

Table 1. Indicative list of organizations where students can perform internships during undergraduate studies in social work

Type of organization	Name of the organization	Website
Public	General Directorate of Social Work and Child Protection Suceava *(rom. Direcția Generală de Asistență Socială și Protecția Copilului)**	https://dgaspcsv.ro/
	Directorate of Social Assistance *(rom. Direcția de Asistență Socială)*	https://shorturl.at/GIKUZ
	Agency for Payments and Social Inspection from Suceava County *(rom. Agenția Județeană pentru Plăți și Inspecție Socială Suceava)*	https://suceava.mmanpis.ro/
	Probation Service from Suceava *(rom. Serviciul de Probațiune Suceava)*	https://probatiune.just.ro/contacts/
	Botoşani Penitentiary *(rom. Penitenciarul Botoşani)*	https://anp.gov.ro/penitenciarul-botosani/
	National Agency Against Human Trafficking - Regional Center from Suceava *(rom. Agenţia Naţională Împotriva Traficului de Persoane – Centrul regional Suceava)*	https://anitp.mai.gov.ro/centre-regionale/
Private / Non-profit organization	Save the Children organization *(rom. Organizatia Salvati Copiii)*	https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/cine-suntem/unde-suntem-activi/suceava
	Association „Smooth Light" Suceava *(rom. Asociatia „Lumină Lină" Suceava)*	https://shorturl.at/qyPRZ
	Diecezan center Iasi, Caritas Association – Suceava Branch *(rom. Centrul Diecezan Iași, Asociația Caritas – filiala Suceava)*	www.caritas-iasi.ro
	Iochebed Foundation, Center Iochebed Suceava *(rom. Fundația Iochebed, Centrul Iochebed Suceava)*	https://shorturl.at/flnBL
	Association for Intervention in Autism Suceava *(rom. Asociația pentru Intervenție în Autism Suceava)*	https://shorturl.at/cgNV0
	FARA Foundation *(rom. Fundația FARA)*	https://faracharity.ro/
	Romanian Red Cross Suceava Branch *(rom. Crucea Roșie Română Filiala Suceava)*	https://crucearosiesuceava.ro/
	eLIBERARE Association - Suceava Branch *(rom. Asociația eLIBERARE - Filiala Suceava)*	https://www.eliberare.com/
	Association „Smell of heaven" Suceava *(rom. Asociația „Miros de cer", Suceava)*	https://www.mirosdecer.ro/

Type of organization	Name of the organization	Website
	Alcoholics Anonymous from Romania, Suceava Branch *(rom. Alcoolicii Anonimi din Romania, Filiala Suceava)*	https://alcooliciianonimi.ro/
	Association Kairos *(rom. Asociaţia Kairos)*	https://shorturl.at/acoDJ
	Association Fight for freedom *(rom. Asociația Fight for freedom)*	https://www.fightforfreedom.ro/
	Association Teona Ariana, Suceava *(rom. Asociația Teona Ariana, Suceava)*	https://www.teona-ariana.ro/
	Home for the elderly, Solca *(rom. Căminul pentru persoane vârstnice, Solca)*	http://solca.ro/index.php/caminul-pentru-persoane-varsnice-2/
	Association of the Institute for Social Partnership Bucovina *(rom. Asociația Institutul pentru Parteneriat Social Bucovina)*	https://bucovinainstitute.org/

*Here are also included all residential Centre's that are in its subordination

Source: created by the author

We need to mention that the undergraduates from social work at the university founded in 1990, which organizes Bachelor Degree studies in social work and is localized in the North-East area of Romania are very active as internships in public and/or private entities from Suceava county, Botoșani, Rădăuți, Vatra Dornei and all the neighbouring counties from Suceava, such as Piatra Neamț, Roman, Iași or local halls. Also, some students can do their internship period at their social work office in his/her home village. This way they interact and learn directly and actively from their local entities and contribute to the identification and solving of the needs identified for the social work beneficiaries and this way they contribute to local community development.

With the help of open questions used in our questionnaire, we tried to identify the modalities that the students and alumni have to access internships and job opportunities. We managed to identify that some of the students already had parents (*`my mother works at X shelter as healthcare and since I was I child I went there and I started to volunteer and I liked what I was doing`* - Male, 23 years), relatives or friends (*`my mother's friend works as a social worker and told me that is a nice job`* - Female, 24 years) that work in the social work domain. This type of social capital contributed for them to easily participate in internships and also find a suitable job in the social work domain.

Some of the respondents mentioned that they managed to get hired in the same place where they did their internship during undergraduate studies due to their earnestness and commitment (*`I was an internship during my second and third study year and after I graduated the mayor offered me the position of social worker because it was unoccupied and several times nobody presented at the exam`* - Female, 25 years).

From all the answers that we received to the open questions from the questionnaire, we can say that the internships and the employment rate exist due to strong community partnerships among university and local organizations from social work. And, also due to informal capital existing locally binds the people and provides them a security feeling and willingness to contribute to sustainable community development.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Even though the national social work system is in the same category as the medical system, there is the Sectoral Committee on Social Work and Medical Assistance, the first one has many steps to fulfil and become as structured and completely efficient as the medical one. As we can see important steps were made and we are in the growth trend and still developing. Regulations, institutional strategies, formal and informal capital, and current networks are the key elements that contributed to the social work domain update and its contribution to local development.

National regulations are now existing and are continuously updated to current needs. Also, since 2005 The National College of Social Workers which `represents the interests of the social worker profession` (*The National College of Social Workers*, 2004) was founded. It brings together social workers from Romania and promotes this profession. In the last ten years, it has extended its branches at the local community level and more information to the stakeholders and population was disseminated. The main goal is to create a stronger synergy among specialists from the social work domain, both locally and nationally.

The present exploratory study emphasizes the positive impact of one university founded in 1990, that organizes Bachelor's Degree studies in social work and is localized in the northeast area of Romania and the large percentage of the immediate absorption of social work alumni on the local labour market. The objective of the exploratory study is reached and we can state that we managed to identify that the seven years' alumni cohorts in the social work domain from the targeted university we choose are hired in the social work domain and into the actual labour market and brings its contribution to the community development.

The four main research questions of the exploratory study are answered, namely:

(1) The female in a larger number of respondents and alumni from the social work domain.

(2) There are three main categories for workforce distribution on domains of alumni from social work: `social workers`, `teaching staff`, and `specialist in another domain`. Each above category includes different types of specialists from the labour market, such as: `social workers` (therapists, interns, therapists for children with autism syndrome, probation counsellor, day center coordinator for elderly people, specialist inspector); `teaching staff` (assistants for kindergarten teacher, kindergarten teacher,

teacher of math and mechanics, elementary teacher) and `specialist in another domain` (transport coordinator, administrator, recruitment specialist, sales advisor, counselling assistant, trade worker, call center operator, acquisition specialist, police personnel, HR inspector, data processing operator, translator, nurse, shift leader).

(3) Exists a connection between internships during undergraduate studies and working in the social work domain after graduation because they managed to interact with organizations and specialists from the domain making the transition to the labour market easier this way. We may say that the informal social capital and social networks contributed to student and alumni employment. Also, the labour market assures the absorption of alumni from social work-study programs. And, finally, the current internships, as social capital, social norms, and institutional practice, during undergraduate studies properly meditate insertion on the labour market in social work.

(4) The re-qualification of alumni from the social work domain is the main idea encountered among the respondents from our survey.

This exploratory study can represent the early foundation for a sustainable image of employment and research contribution to the social work system in Romania. According to our exploratory study results from the 174 respondents, 121 are already in the labour market during their university studies and immediately after graduation. Of the 121 respondents, 42 work in the social work system with a different executive or leading attributions, in public or private entities from local and national levels.

We know that at the moment the current social work services are not covering the needs of the existing beneficiaries, a large number of social work entities need to be created in Romania during the next years, as a short-, medium- and long-term goal. Even though this is a minus, we noticed that the actual number of specialists from the social work domain are motivated enough to keep working in the system and contribute to the local community development.

All these being said we are at the stage where we can propose some viable solutions for increasing the engagement of students and several alumni in the social work system from Romania, in four directions:

(1) *National level*, such as increasing the number of social workers from the institutions chart correlated with the total number of existing beneficiaries from that area (this way you do not overcharge the social worker); increasing the budget for the social work system (social benefits and services); clear regulation on performance indicators and possibilities for career paths;

(2) *Institutional level*, such as permanent participation in lifelong learning programs so that she/he will be updated on current methods and solutions (for example: during COVID-19 and Ukrainian refugee crisis,

even when new legislations are issued and need to be implemented); involvement of more interns for social work activities;

(3) *Community level*, such as: creating a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary team for crisis situations and for daily ones; increasing the partnerships among stakeholders; participation at national information campaigns on different domains themes, etc.

(4) *Personal level*s, such as the correlation between the social worker and their specialization (for example: if a person specializes in probation service, he/she should be left in that service to perform and not be moved to another service); work motivation for activity improvement.

The fulfilment of these may help to increase employment in the social work sector workforce. There are no limits; the list is still open to other solutions that will appear during the activities that will be performed next by the specialists trying to solve the upcoming problems for their beneficiaries.

Limitations of our research

The present exploratory study has its limitations, namely:

- the lack of official statistics regarding the number of social workers working and specializing in different types of beneficiaries (e.g. children at risk, elderly persons, disabilities, chronic disease);
- the lack of comparative analyses at the national level for alumni of social work from all universities that organize Bachelor Degree studies in social work;
- the reduced number of persons that answered the open questions from the questionnaire;
- the reduced number of respondents: for the online questionnaire it is possible that the alumni received a junk message and they were not able to answer the questions;
- the respondents' lack of experience being in their first year of job and not having the whole image of the social work system.

Funding: No funds were received for this study.

Disclaimer: All opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the employer, or any government, agency, or organization.

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SCIENTIFIC ANNALS OF „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" UNIVERSITY OF IASI
VOLUME XVI/2, SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK, 2023

DOI: 10.47743/asas-2024-2-773

DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION IN SOCIAL WORK IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: PRACTICES AND DIFFICULTIES

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Abstract: Professional supervision in social work in the Republic of Moldova is a relatively new field, the first mechanism in the field being approved in 2008. This article presents the results of research carried out on the subject of professional supervision in the field of social work in the Republic of Moldova, which allowed highlighting the implementation practices, needs met by these meetings and some gaps. The supervision activity is carried out in the form of a cascade, especially applying internal supervision. Also, studies have established that group supervision sessions are most often held, which also serve a reporting function.

Keywords: beneficiary, social worker, supervisor, supervisees

Résumé : Supervision professionnel dans le domaine de l'assistance sociale en République de Moldavie est un domaine relativement nouveau, le premier mécanisme dans ce domaine ayant été approuvé en 2008. Cet article présente les résultats de recherches menées sur le thème du supervision professionnel dans le domaine de l'assistance sociale en République de Moldavie, ce qui a permis de mettre en évidence les pratiques de mise en œuvre, les besoins satisfaits par ces réunions et certaines lacunes. L'activité de supervision s'exerce sous forme de cascade, en appliquant notamment le supervision interne. En outre, des études ont établi que des séances de supervision de groupe sont le plus souvent organisées, qui remplissent également une fonction de reporting.

Mots-clés : bénéficiaire, travailleur social, superviseur, superviser

Rezumat: Supervizarea profesională în asistența socială din Republica Moldova este un domeniu relativ nou, primul mecanism în domeniu fiind aprobat în anul 2008. Acest articol prezintă rezultatele cercetărilor realizate la tematica supervizării profesionale în domeniul asistenței sociale din Republica Moldova, care au permis evidențierea practicilor de desfășurare, nevoile satisfăcute prin aceste ședințe și unele lacune. Activitatea de supervizare se realizează în formă de cascadă, în special aplicându-se supervizarea internă. De asemenea, studiile au stabilit că cel mai des sunt desfășurate ședințele de supervizare în grup, care servesc inclusiv funcție de raportare.

Cuvinte cheie: beneficiar, asistent social, supervizor, supervizați

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1. Introduction

The field of social work in the Republic of Moldova is subject to multiple challenges in the context of recent transformations and the connection to international standards. The professional activity of social workers and those involved in the provision of social services is directly determined by the level of knowledge and practical experience in the field. At the same time, the precarious situations of social work beneficiaries directly impact the professional activity and mood of social work professionals. In this context, professional supervision, as an important component in social work, is intended for all categories of staff directly or indirectly involved in the provision of social services. In the case of those directly involved, supervision is of particular importance by participating in supervision activities it is possible to avoid professional burnout and leaving the field of activity. In the Republic of Moldova, the concept of supervision entered the practice and theory of social work relatively late, through the institutionalization of the mechanism in the field of child and family services, and later also for other types of services. Through the consolidated effort of civil society (A.O. Partnership for Every Child) and the authorities, the „Supervision Mechanism in Social Work" was approved in 2008, being applied in the Community Social Work Service and the Home Social Care Service. In 2017, the supervision mechanism was revised, extending to other social services, and in the period 2021-2022 with the support of development partners (Global Initiative Changing the Way We Care) the process of analysis and adjustment to the needs of the system was started of the supervision mechanism. Currently, as a result of the reform in the field of social work, it was not possible to develop new procedures regarding professional supervision, the field being less addressed within social services, but it remains an evaluated component in the context of the accreditation of social services.

2. Research Methodology

The analysis of the research methodology applied in the studies carried out at the international level allowed the outline of the methodological research framework of the influence of professional supervision on the activity in the field of social work in the Republic of Moldova. The research design included a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods, as follows:

- The quantitative study „Opinions and practices of professional supervision in social work", based on a survey, on a sample of 105 supervisors (period 2021-2022),
- The quantitative study „Evaluation of supervisee satisfaction following supervision sessions", based on a survey, on a sample of 514 supervisees (period 2021-2022),
- The qualitative studies „Supervision in social work: difficulties and opportunities" 6 supervisors) and „Evaluation of the opinion of experts regarding professional supervision in social work" (8 experts) based on in-depth individual interviews (period 2023-2024).

In this article, some of the research data carried out are analysed, especially those that allowed the identification of practices and difficulties in carrying out professional supervision.

3. Results

The process of professional supervision in the Republic of Moldova involves several categories of professionals. According to national standards, these are the supervised employees, supervisors and managers within the territorial social assistance structures or social services within them, each having specific roles and responsibilities. At the same time, in the Republic of Moldova, professional supervision is carried out in the form of a „cascade", carried out on functional levels, as follows:

- The head of the territorial social assistance structure supervises the service managers within or subordinate to the structure, including the structure's specialists,
- Managers of the services within or subordinate to the structure carry out the supervision of the supervisors at the service level,
- Supervisors carry out the supervision of employees by occupational category (community social workers, members of the Social Service Mobile Team, etc.). This type of supervisory performance is more closely associated with administrative supervision.

Even if the normative framework currently applicable in the country establishes the way of conducting supervision in the form of a cascade, some experts believe that it is carried out formally, outside of a procedural approach. At the same time, supervision is more associated with control, in the context in which it is carried out by managers whose main goal is to ensure the functionality of the institution.

> *But let it be a continuous process, I think the supervision should cover all levels, but let's not talk only about the supervision of community social workers. Because they need supervision, even the heads of departments at the ministry. And why not... the minister should also be supervised from the outside, which I pray would contribute to improving the system.* (I_E_4)

> *So apparently, the mechanism is not very functional, because it is not very clear at the national level... But when they hear the word supervision, they think of control, verification and not the support, guidance component...* (I_E_5)

The implementation of the supervision activity is usually carried out through supervision meetings. These can be organized in different ways, including their combination: individual supervision, group supervision, dyadic supervision, reflection teams, remote supervision using electronic communication equipment. A typology of supervision is made (Cojocaru Ș., 2005, p. 135) starting from three reference systems: the relationship of the supervisor with the organization (1), the form of organization (2) and the perspective of approaching reality (3). Depending on the first reference system - the supervisor's relationship with the organization, it can be:

- *internal supervision* carried out by a designated person within the institution, specific to non-governmental organizations, especially international ones. This type of supervision would be expensive and would create certain problems if the designated person has a management position. However, among the positive aspects of this type are: the guarantee of the quality of the services provided, the achievement of the educational function in a short time, it is more accessible to the customers, permanent feedback, permanent monitoring of quality standards and performance objectives, etc. This type of supervision is also applied within the national social work system, the supervision function being assigned to a professional within the system.

> *Yes, on the inside, exactly, because I have to have access... For example, if a question came up and I don't know how to handle it, because we often have cases that are urgent and cannot be postponed...* (I_E_5)

> *On the part related to internal supervision, I would see it as useful, necessary, to appoint supervisors from the system anyway, because they know very well the specifics of the work.* (I_E_7)

- *external supervision,* provided by people outside the institution at its request, or is supervision that takes place between a practitioner and a supervisor who does not work for the same employer (Beddoe L., 2012, p. 199). This type of supervision is considered to contribute to an objective assessment of staff, reflective learning, critical and constructive confrontation, quality service delivery, etc.

> *Someone from the outside, who would guide them and help them see differently, because the supervisor must be impartial, he must not judge, he must not give solutions, if you go by the book. And I think that the outsider would be the most suitable, experienced and works only on this and knows how to do this very well.* (I_E_2)

However, among the limits of external supervision are: limited access to staff supervision, offering „templated" solutions within supervision, poor conflict prevention, etc.

Corresponding to the form of organization of supervision, two types can be identified: individual supervision and group supervision. According to the third frame of reference - the reality approach perspective, they can be identified:

- *classic, problem-centered supervision* that aims to establish the problems faced by social workers in solving the case, through diagnosis, analysis and identification of solutions. The supervisor focuses especially in working with supervisees on the causes that generated a problem. But in situations where the causes can no longer be identified, then the supervisor has the mission of supporting social workers to identify solutions to the current situation.

- *appreciative supervision,* focused on appreciation, which includes several stages that put in the foreground the positive vision, focusing on strengths and successes assumed and realized by professionals.

Regardless of the type of supervision adopted, this is an intervention whereby the less experienced social work professional is supported by the supervisor to develop professional skills and competencies in a more or less formalized setting. During the supervision sessions, their content will focus on the methods and techniques applied, the discussion of difficult cases and the identification of solutions, the exchange of experience, the emotional state of the supervisees and the strengthening of team spirit.

The mechanism of professional supervision in social work, applied in the Republic of Moldova, indicates two types of supervision, including individual and group supervision, which can be carried out in a planned way, both in a formalized and informal way, as needed or ad hoc. Within the mechanism, it is indicated on the need for social assistance structures to promote informal supervision, by creating collegial teams/pairs to offer support to young people employed in the system.

In the specialized literature on the approach to individual supervision (Milicenco S., 2023) it is mentioned that this represents an opportunity for the supervisee to benefit from systematic individual support, focused on individual professional needs. The central point in individual supervision is the analysis of the quality of the services provided by the specific employee. Cojocaru St. (2005, p. 137) considers individual supervision to be a case supervision, focused on casework analysis. The supervisor must ensure that the supervised employee applies standardized work methodologies: case management, specific assessment and intervention tools. In the view of some supervisors, this kind of supervision is carried out in work situations that present difficulty for professionals, which represents a broad and vague understanding of the activity of supervision.

> *Individual supervision, this is when the social worker reaches an impasse and he does not know what to do next.* (IA_supervisor_2)

Compared to individual supervision, group supervision offers the group of supervised professionals the opportunity to meet to review the work and find effective solutions together and to transfer knowledge and best practices in a common learning environment. In some bibliographic sources (Getzelman D., 2003, p. 19), group supervision is defined as „the regular meeting of a group of supervisees with a designated supervisor in order to improve their understanding of themselves as practitioners, of the beneficiaries with whom they work and/or about service delivery in general, who are aided in this endeavour by interacting with others in group processes' or 'a form of supervision in social work which is based on interactions within the group of social workers supervised" (Milicenco S., 2023). This type of supervision is applied in cases where the supervisees have sufficient experience of providing services, in the situation where the group is sufficiently consolidated and when the presence of the supervisor is accepted by the group members. Group supervision is a professional meeting, planned and organized, with the objective of evaluating specific situations that social workers encounter in practice, learning from their own experience and from the experience of others, resolving conflicts within the group. The group supervision process can only be applied if there are at least 3 people in the group, the first of whom is the supervisor (presenter), the second - observer and the last - supervised (consultant) (Muntean A., 2007, p. 217). Through these aspects, group supervision differs from dyadic supervision, which involves the activity of the supervisor with two supervisees at the same time.

Furthermore, group supervision can also be an activity to strengthen the employee team. In the case of territorial social assistance structures, which have employees in geographically distant localities, group supervision can offer more opportunities in this regard, compared to individual supervision. During group supervision sessions, more difficult cases can be discussed, best practices can be discussed, employees can be informed about new trends and work methodologies. Some supervisors participating in the qualitative study mentioned that both types of supervision are useful, highlighting the fact that group supervision presents advantages from the perspective of opportunities to exchange opinions between group members and examine cases.

> *Both types of supervision, individual and group, are useful, but in group sessions colleagues can express themselves, for example I have my opinion, but it may not always be correct and then colleagues can express themselves opinion and let us reach a common denominator. As far as individual supervision is concerned, I can tell them the ways to go in one case or another, where they have to file, who to turn to, how to visit the family. But cases are best examined in a team.* (IA_supervisor_1)

The choice of any professional supervision practice is a management option, bearing in mind the goals of the supervision, the necessary resources and the profile of the supervisees.

The quantitative study among supervisees reveals that group supervision sessions are carried out in a higher proportion (97.9%) compared to individual ones (85.6%). More than 14% of supervisees stated that individual supervision sessions are not carried out, especially community social workers and those from services (16.9%) and those from the South area mentioning this aspect (23.5%).

Every second supervisee (50.4%) believes that they received the type of supervision they wanted, and another 44% - generally yes. Less than 4% of the supervisees consider that they did not receive the supervision they wanted, these being among community social workers.

Studies conducted among supervisors and supervisees revealed a different periodicity of supervision sessions. The individual ones are organized to a greater extent when necessary (64.8% of supervisors and 53.9% of supervisees), while group supervision meetings are held more often every month (57.1% of supervisors and 57.2% of supervisees). The practice identified in the qualitative study refers to the organization of group supervision meetings towards the end of the month, the meeting also being used to report on the activity carried out.

> *I try to organize a group supervision session once a month. I am preparing a topic that we debate at these meetings. We organize the group once a month at least or twice, and the individual ones as necessary. 2 supervision sessions can also take place daily. I try to organize the group supervision meeting at the end of the month when we do the monthly tally. Each social worker presents his difficulties, which files he has under examination, at the end of which we set the date for the next supervision meeting.* (IA_supervisor_1)

> *The group meeting needs to be held once a month, but it doesn't always work out. Individual meetings can also take place at least once a month, but as a rule, they can also take place as needed.* (IA_supervisor_3)

A share of 4.5% of supervisees said that they had never attended supervision sessions, of which 3.5% attended individual sessions (3.9% of social workers, 4.9% of those with 1-5 years of work). A 2007 study of 675 social workers in Australia found that 84% of them had benefited from supervision, but not all (Manthorpe J., Moriarty J., Hussein S., Stevens M., Sharpe E., 2013, p.1-17), such differentiated involvement also being identified in other countries (for example, Great Britain).

The disaggregated analysis of the data reveals that individual supervision as needed is performed more often by supervisors with 4-6 years of supervisory experience (69%) and those with up to 5 supervisees (75%). Supervisors who supervise between 6-10 people, compared to other categories of supervisors, more often organize individual supervision meetings weekly (21.9%), and those with more than 11 supervisees in a larger proportion hold individual meetings monthly (14, 3%) or quarterly (19%). However, it cannot be said that work experience and the number of supervisees determine the frequency of individual supervision sessions.

Concerning group supervision, the study among supervisors highlights that the larger number of supervisees implies the organization of monthly group meetings in a larger proportion: 59.4% of supervisors who supervise 6-10 people and 57, 1% of those who supervise more than 11 people, compared to 50% of those who supervise fewer than 5 people. Instead, these supervisors to a greater extent organize these meetings quarterly.

> *They share their opinion; we take one more case for examination and try to find the solutions together.* (IA_supervisor_1)

This fact was also revealed in the study „Evaluation of the situation regarding the initial and continuous professional training of the person in the field of child and family protection in the Republic of Moldova" (year 2021), in which it is indicated that the professional supervision of specialists within social services has a fragmented character and the main focus is on providing methodological support. However, the periodic holding of supervision meetings, by outlining a systemic model, contributes to the promotion and creation of a supportive environment for professionals in the field of social work, allowing them to reflect on their professional activities.

The results of the research allowed the identification of the duration of the supervision sessions. Thus, based on the data presented by the supervisors, the average duration of an individual supervision session is 49.21 minutes, with a maximum time of 180 minutes and a minimum of 10 minutes. Data collected from supervisees indicates an average duration of 54 minutes, with a maximum duration of 240 minutes and a minimum of 1 minute. The minimum duration seems unrealistically small to successfully conduct the meeting according to the established protocol. In such cases, it can be considered that a consultation of the supervisee takes place for quick action.

The results of the study conducted with the participation of supervisors show that more than half of them conduct individual meetings lasting up to 30 minutes, mostly supervisors aged up to 45 years, with more than 4 years of supervisory experience and supervising 6-10 people. The data also reveal that the duration of individual sessions also differs depending on the frequency of this type of supervision: those who conduct weekly indicated a shorter duration (up to 30 minutes) of supervision sessions, and those who conduct quarterly – the duration increases up to 61-90 minutes. In the opinion of some supervisors, the short duration of the supervision sessions is determined by the multitude of tasks of the supervisor, which lead to the reduction of the duration of the supervision sessions.

> *Half an hour, I tell you we don't have time, doing supervision like this along with the basic function ... it's not right.* (IA_supervisor_2)

> *Depending on the length of the sessions, it can be one hour, three hours, but on average an hour and a half.* (IA_supervisor_4)

The qualitative study revealed that the duration of the supervision sessions could also be influenced by the issue being discussed by the supervised staff.

> *The duration of an individual and group session is different. An individual session can last about 30 minutes, depending on the situation and the problem the social worker is facing. A group session can last from one to two hours.* (IA_supervisor_3)

The frequency/amount of supervision received satisfies 39.1% of supervisees very satisfied and 55.4% are partially satisfied. The most satisfied are the professional personal assistants and parental assistants and those with 1-5 years of work experience and from the Center area. Slight or total dissatisfaction was expressed by a small number of supervisors - 3.3%, mainly social workers.

Comparing the two types of supervision, a good proportion of supervisors consider that individual supervision (35.2%) is more adapted to the needs of the supervisee than group supervision (21.9%). Individual supervision is also easier to achieve (33.3%) than group supervision (25.7%). Individual supervision is considered more effective in achieving the outcome (26.7%) than group supervision (20%).

In the opinion of the supervisees, 40.7% of the supervisees considered that the supervision sessions fully met their needs, with a higher share of those who indicated that individual supervision is offered in the institution and with up to 5 years of work activity.

Many of the needs of the supervisees were met for half of them (50.6%), with a higher proportion of social workers and other specialists, those with 6-10 years of work experience. Approximately 7% felt that some or none of their needs were not met by the supervision they received, these being mainly community social workers.

When asked to nominate the **needs met** during the supervision sessions, the supervised respondents encountered some difficulties in giving answers. Around 11% (11.5%) had the need for guidance and support and the need for knowledge of the application of case management covered. Around 8% indicated that they were informed about accessing social services (8%) and gained new knowledge (7.8%). 5% of the respondents' needs were covered by the need for knowledge of how to prepare case files (5.3%) and social assistance legislation (4.9%). The need to develop communication skills, planning of activities, working with data and others gained statistically insignificant weights (sub 3%).

The **unmet needs** in the supervision meetings are: quality provision of social services (5.1%), application of case management (1.6%) and discussion of social inspection results (1.4%). Other unmet needs have accumulated less than 1%: information on monetary support, file processing, working conditions and salaries, community social worker's duties, assistance to vulnerable persons, involvement of multidisciplinary team, etc.

In order to determine the level of satisfaction of the supervisees with the supervision they received, the author developed the **supervisor satisfaction scale**, consisting of 9 items from the Questionnaire for Supervisors, as follows: Appreciation of the quality of individual supervision, Appreciation of group supervision, Getting the desired supervision, Matching the supervision to the needs of the supervisee, Recommending the supervisor to another supervisee, Satisfaction with the supervision received, Satisfaction with the amount of supervision received, Influence of supervision on the professional activity of the supervisee, and Likelihood of choosing another supervisor. As a result of the score calculation, three levels of supervisor satisfaction were established: low (score less than 24), medium (score between 25-30) and high/high (score 31-36).

The highest level of satisfaction was recorded by half (50.8%) of the supervised, mainly those from the Chisinau municipality (61.1%), professional parental assistants (87%), with 1-5 years of work experience (54.1%) and with a weekly frequency of participation in individual (75.5%) and group (68.8%) supervision sessions.

The average level of satisfaction was identified among about 2/5 of the supervisees (39.1%). Their group is made up of supervisors from the North area

(45.7%), professionals (44.4%) and social workers (42%), with more than 15 years of experience (50%) and who attend group (66.7%) or individual supervision sessions annually (60%).

Every tenth supervisee (10.1%) showed ***a low level of satisfaction***, mostly supervisors from the South (17.6%), social workers (11.6%) and heads/managers of services (10.7%), with up to 1 year of work experience (17.2%) and those who attend supervision meetings, regardless of their type, organized annually (20% - individual meetings and 33.3% - group meetings).

These data confirm that the frequency of the organization of supervision meetings has an influence on the supervisors' satisfaction with the supervision activity.

4. Conclusions

The studies conducted in the Republic of Moldova show that the field of supervision is in the process of development, and interventions are needed in terms of regulation, organization and implementation. The replacement of the function of supervisor by a community social worker or the exercise of the given function by the manager does not allow to achieve the expected results, even though more than half of the supervisees declare themselves satisfied with the supervision received. At the same time, the development of the field implies the need for professionalization of those who will exercise this function, in order to increase the performance of the supervisees.

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SCIENTIFIC ANNALS OF „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" UNIVERSITY OF IASI
VOLUME XVII/2, SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK, 2024

DOI: 10.47743/asas-2024-2-774

A LITERATURE REVIEW ABOUT JUDGMENTS OF LEARNING, FEELING OF KNOWING, AND TIP OF TONGUE ON AGING EFFECT

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to review previous research findings of the effect on aging in the domain of source monitoring i.e.: Judgment of Learning (JOL), Feeling of Knowing (FOK), Tip of Tongue (TOT). In the first part of the article, the global concept of metamemory is described which has one or two main components of monitoring (e.g., JOL, FOK). Then metacognitive monitoring in older adults from several research findings in the literature is examined. In this study, the difference between younger and older adults on source monitoring which is the subject of the study is also addressed. The recent theoretical and empirical advances on the effect of aging in source monitoring are considered. Previous studies that identified the effects of aging on source monitoring are examined. These studies are compared and interesting points that stood out are discussed. After discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the studies, the questions of where and how these studies can be used are also discussed.

Keywords: Monitoring, Metamemory, Source of Memory, Feeling-of-Knowing, Judgment-of-Learning

Résumé : Le but de cette étude est de passer en revue les résultats de recherches antérieures sur l'effet sur le vieillissement dans le domaine de la surveillance des sources, à savoir : jugement d'apprentissage (JOL), sentiment de savoir (FOK), pointe de langue (TOT). Dans la première partie de l'article, le concept global de métamémoire est décrit qui comporte une ou deux composantes principales de surveillance (par exemple JOL, FOK). Ensuite, le suivi métacognitif chez les personnes âgées à partir de plusieurs résultats de recherche dans la littérature est examiné. Dans cette étude, la différence entre les adultes plus jeunes et plus âgés en matière de surveillance des sources qui font l'objet de l'étude est également abordée. Les récents progrès théoriques et empiriques sur l'effet du vieillissement dans la surveillance des sources sont pris en compte. Des études antérieures ayant identifié les effets du vieillissement sur la surveillance des sources sont examinées. Ces études sont comparées et les points intéressants qui se démarquent sont discutés. Après avoir discuté des forces et des faiblesses des études, les questions de savoir où et comment ces études peuvent être utilisées sont également abordées.

Mots-clés : Monitoring, Métamémoire, Source de Mémoire, Sentiment de Connaître, Jugement d'Apprentissage

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Abstract: Scopul acestui studiu este de a prezenta rezultatele cercetărilor anterioare ale efectului asupra îmbătrânirii în domeniul monitorizării sursei și anume: judecarea învățării (JOL), sentimentul de cunoaștere (FOK), vârful limbii (TOT). În prima parte a articolului, este descris conceptul global de metamemorie care are una sau două componente principale ale monitorizării (de exemplu, JOL, FOK). Apoi este examinată monitorizarea metacognitivă la adulții în vârstă din mai multe constatări ale cercetărilor din literatură. În acest studiu, este abordată și diferența dintre adulții mai tineri și cei mai în vârstă în ceea ce privește monitorizarea sursei care fac obiectul studiului. Sunt luate în considerare progresele teoretice și empirice recente privind efectul îmbătrânirii în monitorizarea sursei. Sunt examinate studiile anterioare care au identificat efectele îmbătrânirii asupra monitorizării sursei. Aceste studii sunt comparate și sunt discutate punctele interesante care s-au remarcat. După discutarea punctelor forte și a punctelor slabe ale studiilor, se discută despre a ști unde și cum pot fi utilizate aceste studii.

Cuvinte cheie: monitorizare, metamemorie, sursă de memorie, sentiment de cunoaștere, judecată de învățare

1. Introduction

Memory can be affected by aging. The goal of the present study is to investigate the subject of monitoring of metamemory and other terms (Judgments of Learning, Feeling of Knowing, Tip of Tongue) in relation with aging. Memory loses its efficiency with aging. There are many studies about how the memories of older adults are changing overtime in the frame of metamemory. Many cognitive variables are age- related, and almost all cognitive variables are moderately interrelated with each other (Carroll, 1993). Aging affects memory skills, and some of the metacognition components, such as FOK, JOL, etc. (e.g., Hertzog & Dixon, 1994; Love- lace, 1990). Verbal learning decreases as people age alongside with cognitive aging (Light, 1991). As an example, in the years of old age, failures in resource memory skills increase with age. And this failure results in the emergence of strange situations such as forgetting the first time and re-telling a joke. Although there is no cognitive or neurological damage in the elderly, they may forget over time. One research suggests that older adults are typically found to report lower memory ability, lower personal control over memory, and greater change in their memory ability during adulthood, compared with young adults or middle-aged adults (e.g., Dixon & Hultsch, 1983; Gilewski, Zelinski, & Schaie, 1990; Hultsch, Hertzog, & Dixon, 1987; Jopp & Hertzog, 2007; Lachman, Bandura, Weaver, & Elliott, 1995; Lineweaver & Hertzog, 1998). One of the significant risk factors is getting old. Especially during the phase change from adulthood to older adulthood, and with the decrease of memory ability, the issues related to forgetfulness increase. In addition, with time the person gets slow and their response time decreases (Schwartz, 2014).

Metamemory's global definition is thought to be about abilities, tasks and personal memory beliefs. Metamemory means knowing and being aware of our memory, the ability to make judgments and controlling them. That is why metamemory refers to the monitoring of process, performance, and contents of memory (Schwartz, 2014). For example, an elderly both has to pay his already late bills and take his dog for a walk the next day. However, he is aware of the fact that he needs to pay the bills first. We use metamemory for actions where we understand how much we are capable of doing each task, knowing when to do each, and whether we want to, or we must do.

According to Nelson and Nares (1990), metamemory frameworks have two main aspects: monitoring and control. Monitoring is the awareness of personal cognitive abilities, and thanks to monitoring, metacognitive judgment is successfully done (Flavell, 1979). For example, if a person is confident that he will remember some pieces of information, this confidence is related to metacognitive monitoring. Moreover, metacognitive control also refers to regulative encoding or retrieval processing based on our metacognitive monitoring. In other words, metacognitive control can be linked to a basic awareness of memory output (i.e., monitoring) (Nelson & Leonesio, 1988; Nelson & Narens, 1990). For example, older adults believe their memory impair, so they may not choose to try learning new information.

Monitoring is a significant term for metamemory. That is because, monitoring occurs when people judge whether they think something, or they remember something, and when they feel more confident or less confident about if they know something. In other words, they check themselves about how confident they are in terms of understanding something (Schwartz, 2014). For example, an elderly woman decides to visit her old neighbourhood after a very long time; if she checks whether she still remembers how to go there or not, or if she checks a map to see if she remembers correctly or not, this is called measuring one's mental state. Another example: a woman who is 65 years old goes grocery shopping without a shopping list. If she tries to remember what she needs to buy and what she does not need is a mental state measurement.

FOK and JOL are sub-groups of monitoring. The FOK is a part of metacognitive monitoring which plays a key role in regulating memory performance. One indication of metacognitive monitoring is the FOK. It refers to items we cannot currently remember, and the degree of the possibility of whether we can remember them later or not (Nelson & Narens, 1990). Therefore, FOK is a prospective memory judgment. Various deteriorations occur in memory functions as we age such as encoding, and retrieval. There are differences between younger adults and older adults on memory performance. As we will give details in effect on aging FOK resolutions in the main body part.

The judgments made about whether or not any subject has been learned in different areas of life is called JOL. In addition, number of studies have observed in JOL from many different aspects especially theoretical perspectives in which have used several procedures and have found that many different or similar results. Also, Hines, Hertzog, and Touron (2015) explained JOL as; one metric for assessing an individual's views of his or her current state of learning is the JOL. Alam and Shimul (2014) said, JOL is another important metamemory term which people make either in the course of learning or afterward about how well they have learned the specific target materials. People use JOL during a period of retrieval or learning.

For example, let's we think that the student encounters a previously learned subject. JOL refers to the name for remembering students' encoding information and not retrieval it. JOL; determinations made during the study of whether the item has been learned already like students. This research has been made in order to explore the effects of aging on monitoring. From this point onward, the aging effect is considered and addressed.

2. Judgments of Learning

In the literature, the term JOL uses to refer to the judgments people make about their own learning during or after learning. In this part, studies on the effect of this aging on JOL will be mentioned. For example, Tauber and Witherby's (2019) first aims of study the JOL, was to investigate whether it affects the learning of the older adults. Experimenters analysed the serious of related words paired on both older and younger adults. For both age groups, half of the participants made a JOL pair and half of them did not. After 3 minutes breaks, a cued- recall test was administered to participants by experimenters. According to results findings, in JOLs modify older adult's learning, there was no significant relation. Unlike young adults, JOL has been shown to not effect older adults in learning.

There are lots of significant studies about JOL accuracy. Some research appraises differences of age regarding how accurately individuals monitor coding processes and results. Age differences in the absolute accuracy of JOLs varied between experiments. In one experiment (Connor, Dunlosky, Hertzog, 1997), older adults showed significantly smaller differences between mean recall and mean JOLs. The findings were inconsistent with the claim that age differences in absolute accuracy reflect age-related deficiencies in metacognitive monitoring.

On the other hand, Dodson Krueger's study (2007) indicates that older adults made higher- confidence errors than younger adults when responding to questions, older adults need memory of specific details about recent events. Because older adults miscombine features from different events. During the study phase, participants (younger adults, younger-delay, older adults) heard sentences spoken by either a woman or a man. Every sentence heard was related to an image of the source. At in the test phase, individuals made an initial old-new judgment (i.e., „Did you encounter it before, or is it new?"), and for other subjects that received a judgment of old, all individuals made a source judgment about who showed the subject before (i.e., the woman or the man). The individuals rated the probable accuracy of each of these responses from 50 to 100 for their judgments (In the scale is equivalent to 50 estimates and 100 certain.). In this experiment of methods, participants randomly assigned 48 undergraduates University of Virginia (18-26 years). Half of the students (24) younger adults group, some of students (24) younger-delay group who, after study phase, return 24hr complete the test phase. Twenty- four older adults were appointed to older groups. Those three groups finished a not-related spatial relations task in 5 minutes. After that, both the younger and older groups started the testing phase of the source-monitoring task. The test consisted of 120 expressions, including 40 new expressions and 80 study expressions showed visually and randomly. In addition, four more expressions were used to explain the task to the participants at the beginning. As a result, older adults' monitoring the accuracy of item answers were worse than youngers' accuracy of item. Moreover, another study on age differences in JOL accuracy has proven minimal effects of aging on the accuracy of metacognitive monitoring (Dunlosky and Hertzog, 2000). Researchers use both interactive images and rote repetition in the process of two study test trial when comparing older and younger adults. Their purpose are to determine the difference of knowledge updating between trials. Also, they investigate that is any difference in depending on age deficiency in metacognitive monitoring. Researchers said, „Knowledge updating was not necessarily reflected in the absolute accuracy of metacognitive judgments, it was evident for both age groups." in result of the study. The researchers' argument was older adults are not sufficient to use strategy about to use metacognitive monitoring to update knowledge. However, the study did not support that.

The effectiveness of JOL judgments in many areas of life has led to studies in many areas. Tauber and colleagues (2016) studied the impact of aging on memory monitoring and emotions. The effect of healthy aging has been observed on humans. The primary purpose of the study was to find out if there is a difference between young adult participants and older adult participants when positive and neutral pictures are given. In addition, the experimenters' secondary aim was to investigate dimensions of emotion (valence and arousal) that may affect young adult and older adult participants' monitoring of learning. The study suggested that positive pictures of young adult participants and older adult participants would be more emotionally salience on memory than neutral ones. Experimenters used pictures for younger and older adult participants. These surprising results can be mentioned briefly and in general. The differences are striking when compared to the previous article in the review of the literature review. For every two groups, JOLs were higher for positive ones than neutrals, however, previous studies suggested JOL did not differ between positive and neutral words. On the other hand, aging did not impact on dimensions of emotion. In other words, all age groups (younger and older adults) recalled more highly arousing pictures than low arousing pictures. Moreover, compared with younger adults, older adult participants did not report any impairment in monitoring learning.

Tauber and Dunlosky's other study (2012) examined the resolution of younger and older adults' JOL using emotional materials. Researchers used 10 negative words (e.g., assault, bomb cancer), 10 positive words (e.g., bunny, circus, diamond) and 10 neutral words (e.g., cork, errand, fabric) in their experiment 1. Sixty-six younger adults and fifty-nine older adults recruited from received $20 each participating. Researchers divided participants into two groups based on words' emotional valence (negative group: negative-neutral words, positive group: positive-neutral words). As a result, there was no significant difference between younger and older adults' resolution of JOL. However, older adults' JOL was not different between positive and neutral words, in contrast with older adults, younger adults' JOL was different between positive and neutral words. Younger adults recalled positive words more than neutral words.

During the experiment, participants' biases may affect the results. Shi, Tang and Liu (2012) investigated the results of the studies affected or not. Making attribution to information is an important mental process. In different age groups (young adults-older adults), predicting source memory, in JOL judgements schematic effects were investigated by Shi, Tang and Liu (2012). Two statements were presented to subjects from a doctor and a lawyer. Researchers analyse between the relation before and after retrieving and schema-encoding condition. Subjects completed a task of source attributing which is presented by the researcher to them. JOLs provided by younger adults and older adults could predict source memory though without schematic help for encoding. The study results showed that; they use people for safe and effective forecasting strategies. Older adults are used to the schema when the task is related to the performance. When they did not want to show bad performance, they took this path.

To sum up, the previous studies demonstrated that not only older adults but also younger adults were influenced by several metacognitive cue manipulations during the experiment. And these cues are both similar and dissimilar from each other. There are differences between older adults and younger adults from evidence test performance in JOL. Also, there are many research findings as to the accuracy of JOLs. Finally, studies support that the age-related JOL resolution is insensitive. In this part of the study, studies related to JOL are compiled. In the next section, the comparison of the studies on FOK is included.

3. Feeling of Knowing

Several studies have been conducted in the FOK from many different aspects or theoretical perspectives in which have used several procedures and they have found many different or similar results. One of the goals of this review is to examine FOK studies on aging. So, in this part of the review the effect of aging on FOK was mentioned in detail. There are several heuristics for metacognitive judgements but two theoretical models based on FOK judgements: cue familiarity and accessibility model. Firstly, we explain cue- familiarity model. Cue- familiarity model have presented in several experimental studies. According to this model, If more familiar cues (word pairs) are in experiments, this cause to high FOK judgements. (If the subject is too familiar with the cue, an increase in the subject's FOK judgments is observed.) This model was suggested by Reder and Ritter (1992). This model implies that individual degree to which to cue, individual have level of familiarity on cue, individual judge they know the answer. (The more familiar the subject is with the clue to find the target word, the greater the sense of knowing (FOK)) In other words, participants judge to herself I can find target words with given cue words. (In other words, the subject makes the following judgment to himself: „I can find the target word with the given clue.") For example, Reder and Ritter's (1992) experiment 1, based on cue-familiarity model. They selected question-answer strategy in arithmetic problems. This experiment consisted of two sets: training problems and post-training problems. First set in experiment, subjects were shown a large series of arithmetic problems. (Subjects were shown various arithmetic problems) and were told solution to these problems by them (They were asked to solve these problems) Experimenter used a computer screen microphone. Then, solution of problems was spoken to a computer microphone by subjects. Each problem was presented on a computer screen a 500-ms delay. Then, participants press either the 'R' the button for retrieve to problem answers or the press 'C' button for calculate problem answers. In a result even though 23*27 and 24+28 had not been shown earlier, previous exposure 23-27 to the problem increase FOK judgements on participants. Participants FOK judgements increases with previous exposure to familiar problem.

Otherwise, another model on FOK judgments is the accessibility model. According to Koriat (2001), it argues that participants' FOK judgments focus on the volume and strength of partial information, while when participants fail to retrieve an answer, FOK judgments are based on the amount and intensity of partial information accessed during the search for the target-paraphrase sentence. For example, the first letter of the target item, how many syllables the items have, and so on. Furthermore, the theory implies that FOK judgments vary according to the accuracy of the information retrieved by the participants.

There are many studies related to FOK. One of the study areas is semantic FOK. We may be defined as knowledge of the world is semantic FOK. Semantic knowledge consists of an individual's general information about the environment and nature. For example, when someone asks you „When Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was born?", the recall of the answer „Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was born in 1881." is semantic knowledge. In one study, Souchay et al. (2014) assessed the effect of aging on semantic FOK judgement and episodic FOK judgement. In this study were used 80 French words and 80 equivalent English words. Twenty- nine younger adults and twenty-nine older adults have been selected for the research. The goal of this study was to evaluate participants' skills to estimate future identification for non-translated items depending on their contextual knowledge. In other words, if participants believe that they can recognize the target word, they say „yes" FOK judgement, but they believe that they cannot recognize target word, they say „no" FOK judgement. As a result, for semantic FOK judgement, no aging influences were found.

Likewise, in one study about episodic FOK (Thomas & Bulevich, Dubois, 2011) determined the situations under which FOK judgments in episodic memory affected the quality of partial or contextual information. Researchers compared two conditions in the article: which partial information was questioned pre-and-post of FOK judgments. They proposed that, if made before FOK judgments, the accuracy of such decisions would be positively affected. Additionally, following the well-established deficit in older adults, they concluded that, in the lack of a particular stimulus, older adults might be less likely to use partial information efficiently when processing of FOK judgments. Researchers conducted this article using 3 experiments. In the first experiment of the study, they investigated how partial information collected affected decisions on FOK in both older and younger adults. Using the method used by Koriat (1993), the researchers examined participants' work with goals paired with a neutral cue and then gave the participants a cued recall test. The words were chosen from the Affective Norms for English Words word list (Bradley & Lang, 1999) and the 36 cue words were chosen from the University of South Florida Free Association Norms (D. L. Nelson, McEvoy, & Schreiber, 2004). If the target could not be produced by the participants, they were asked to make a FOK judgment and then provide the valence of the word to be remembered. Then the participants were asked to complete the six-alternative forced-choice recognition test. In the second part of the experiment, researchers evaluated situations under which partial information was retrieved before and after FOK judgements were made. They predicted that when partial information was retrieved before making FOK judgments, older adults would display progress in prediction accuracy. In the last experiment, participants were required to make FOK judgments and partial replies to information within time limit constraints. The strategy was intended to force access to the associated partial information, rapidly and shallowly (unvalued). Researchers found that the quality of partial information affected predictive accuracy in FOK. It was confirmed in younger adults, irrespective of when partial information was retrieved, so in older adults only when partial information was retrieved prior to making FOK judgments. The results indicate that older adults could produce accurate predictions of episodic FOK. Yet, it was found that older adult’s ability to predict future retrievability depends on the time of partial contextual information, while younger adults have been found to have access to this information more easily.

Moreover, another domain of FOK is episodic FOK. In general, studies on FOK in the literature have focused on episodic FOK rather than semantic FOK. For instance, Souchay and Isingrini (2012) studied on age-related differences between JOL and FOK. All participants both younger adults and older adults were assessed on their JOL accuracy and were asked to predict later retrieval during the study phase (FOK accuracy). The results showed that even though there were no significant differences between younger and older adults on JOL accuracy, there were differences between groups on their episodic FOK accuracy. Furthermore, we need to address an alternative hypothesis in order to we explain rising episodic FOK come with on aging: the memory constraint hypothesis which also has been suggested that by some researchers (Hertzog et al., 2010; Souchay, et al., 2007). These researchers studied on resolution FOK, and they indicated a that decline in episodic memory capacity in the older adults because of reducing to accessibility and availability in FOK on older adults.

The differences between younger and older adults have been emphasized concerning the resolution FOKs. Some studies indicate that older adults have lower self-efficacy as to memory performance (i.e., recognition, can remember target items) than younger adults. In other words, older adults tend to lower level predict their future performance than actual memory performance (Hertzog & Touron, 2011; MacLaverty & Hertzog, 2009; Sacher, Isingrini, & Tacconat, 2013). For example, Isingrini and Taconnat (2013) investigated the effect of aging on episodic FOK accuracy under divided attention paradigm. This study's result showed the significant differences between younger and older adults on episodic FOK. In addition, although younger adults under divided attention are similar results with older adults when the full- attention task. Because older adults believe that their memory is not as well as that younger people's (Hertzog, Hultsch, & Dixon, 1989). Thus, some false beliefs were observed episodic FOKs judgments in older adults. Sacher, Landre, and Taconnat (2015) investigated the age- related differences in episodic FOK and is a similar result like previous studies about FOK effect on aging. The goal of this study investigated that, FOK accuracy change with aging. Participants consisted of 61 older adults and 59 younger adults. Firstly, sixty mild associated cue-target word pairs were shown to participants. (e.g., customs-CONTRABAND). Before participants were been seen each cue (10s per item) and asked to retrieve target word, is a 30- s interference task (processing speed test) cued- recall test was showed again, participants estimate on six- point scale (0,20,40,60,80,100 sure). Distractors, semantically similar to targets, add to list (e.g., FRAUD, TRAFFIC, EXCHANGE, CONTRA-BAND and COUNTERFEITING words that were semantically similar to the target words were added to the list). Then, participants were asked to which word had seen before (Participants were asked which word they had seen before)? As a result, younger participants made a more accurate judgment about recognize newly learned items than older participants. In other words, older adults had a lower FOK accuracy than younger adults. In we summarize that FOK studies have been made with different age groups as younger-older adults. Even though, is not a difference between younger and older adults on semantic FOKs, there is a difference between younger adults and older adults on episodic FOKs. As we emphasized above, older adults may have not confidence in their memory capability and cognitive skills. In the next part of the review, we will see to TOT phenomenon depending on age relatedness.

4. TOTs Phenomenon and Aging

From a metamemory perspective, „TOT is typically defined as a phenomenon that occurs when a word will be recalled even though it is not accessible immediately" (Schwartz, 2006). For instance, an older person may not remember the names of his children even though he knows their names. Most studies indicate that older adults experience TOTs more often than young adults (Brown & Nix, 1996; Burke, MacKay, Worthley, & Wade, 1991; Heine, Ober, & Shenaut, 1999). In this part of the review study, studies investigating the effect of aging on TOT phenomenon are discussed. The reason why older adults have more TOT experiences than younger adults are because they have a strong false belief for their decline of memory (Schwartz, 2016). In addition, older adults know more words than younger adults. This results in some retrieval problems (retrieval problems instead confusion) while trying to choose appropriate words in a conservation, which causes more TOT experiences in older adults (Mandell & Salthouse, 2013).

Important studies have been done examining the effect of age on TOT, one of which being laboratory studies. For example, Rastle and Burke (1996) investigated the TOT deficit in both young and older adults. The study examines various effects of TOT deficit on various parts of the brain. However, this article focuses on their age-related results. In Experiment 1, the hypothesis indicates that the current processing of target words decreases on TOT processing in both young and older adults. Another hypothesis suggests that phonological processing is essential for these experiments. Rastle and Burke aimed to evaluate to what degree previous works helped to obtain words semantically and phonologically. As a result, Experiment 1 showed that the current pronunciation of a word increases its recall in response to a question of general knowledge. In Experiments 2 and 3, it is shown that semantic processing enhanced correct answers for both young and older adults when asked general knowledge questions. However, they did not show any results for decreasing TOTs' being an advantage. Diary studies are another important example of TOT studies. For instance, the study of Burke et al. (1991) investigated the effect of aging on TOT phenomenon, benefitting from the structure diaries that the participants provided. These diaries consisted of eleven questions about each TOT experience. The questions were related to type of words (e.g., name of person, objects), and patterns of words (e.g., sound, number of syllables). Participants consisted of 50 younger adults, 30 middle-aged adults and 50 older adults. The study had two phases. During the first phase, participants filled out a retrospective questionnaire. They predicted how many times they experienced TOT of different kinds. In the next phase, during four weeks, the participants took notes about the random experiences of TOTs in their daily lives. Finally, the experimenters compared participants' expectations and the diary reports. As a result, middle- aged adults and older adults reported more TOTs than younger adults compared to all participants' diaries.

Furthermore, the effect of aging on TOT experience was investigated in a natural environment and laboratory by Heine, Ober, and Shenaut (1999). They studied three different age groups: 30 people in total, a group of young people aged between 18-24, a group of young people aged 60-74, and a group of old people aged between 80-92. The study was initially a laboratory experiment in which the TOT frequency and the resolution of the TOT experience were observed in all age groups. According to the researchers' hypothesis, in study 1, the TOT resolution and frequency were expected to increase with aging. In study 2, the TOT experience data is recorded from all participants by using structured diaries for a 28-day duration. Researchers' hypothesis for study 2 indicated that all age groups' TOT resolution time would increase. Findings showed that for study 1 and study 2, older adults needed a longer time to resolve TOT experience. In study 1, an age-related decrease in word retrieval is not seen in the first stage but is seen in the curing stage of the study. Also, the 80-92 age group was particularly disadvantaged about TOT than other age groups and participants. Study 2 (diary study) shows that, TOT experience is resolved in all ages, including the 80-92 age group, with adequate time. Both study 1 and study 2 demonstrate that participants would probably remember words that they have not forgotten yet if they are given the time to retrieve them. TOT frequency is also increased by aging. In another experimental study, Brown and Nix (1996) examined TOTs in older adults versus younger adults. Picture-word tasks were used in this study. TOT experiences were recorded with an electronic timer. They found that older adults (62-84 years old, M=73.6) have more TOT experiences than younger adults (18-21 years old, M=18.9).

In certain cases, researchers have conducted various research including participants with pathology to examine the effects of pathology on TOT. Sang-A and Ji-wan (2015) studied the effect of aging on the TOT phenomenon with a task involving the names of famous people. Participants with mild cognitive impairment (MCI) were included in the study. The study included 10 MCI adults (50 years old and older), 10 oldest adults (65 years old or older), 10 older adults (50-64), 10 mid-aged adults (30-49) and, 10 younger adults (20-29). Firstly, researchers compared the rate of TOT in face naming among MCI group and the normal oldest group. Then, the rate of TOT responses was assessed between normal participants. In this study, during the first phase the participants are shown the names of famous people and then they are expected to tell these names back. The participants cannot remember some names, but in the next phase they remember these names and they can say them. As a result, there were significant differences between the normal group and the MCI group based on the rate of TOT. These results suggested that, having a pathology has an impact on TOT states. Moreover, researchers compared these findings with normal participants. The rate of TOT increased in normal aging.

In sum, in the present literature review, was mentioned that there is no significant differences between pathological participants and non-pathological participants on the rate of TOT (Sang-A and Ji-wan, 2015). In addition, was mentioned about diary- and laboratory-based studies indicate that older adults have more failure retrieval items than younger adults. Diary studies suggest that older adults spend more time to resolution in TOTs than younger adults (Burke et al., 1991; Heine, Ober, & Shenaut, 1999). First, older adults have difficulties in accessing already encoded items. So, they may make more retrieval errors even for familiar words compared to younger adults.

Discussion and the Future Directions

When we investigated studies, we realized the strength features of research. Metamemory is not only a new but also a significant branch for cognitive psychology and start studies about this area is important for future research. Our primary goal is to observe degree to which aging impacts on monitoring processes. On the other hand, there are also negative aspects of source monitoring being a new field. There are not worthwhile studies on this topic. This area is a newly developing area. The number of studies in this area are not enough. Therefore, the studies should be increased in this field. Most of studies, based on western cultures, but the rest of the cultures should not be ignored. Alam and Shimul (2014) and also, Wright and Frederick (2009) underline cultural differences. Social context is different for every human being. Researchers should consider to culture factor in the future research of the field. The major purpose was to analyse and understand the monitoring process and also, understand two main domains of monitoring: the JOL and the FOK. In addition, we examine another phenomenon of monitoring TOT. We found studies about this phenomenon related to aging. And we explored JOL, FOK, and TOT in the investigation on the literature.

In the first part of the review article, we interest in this question „Does JOL results change related to age or does not change?". Then studies about JOL accuracy was analysed. In the studies, the effect of aging on JOL results was examined using emotion materials.

Additionally, it was examined whether participants' schemas affected the study results. Then we discuss evidence findings regarding to the FOK. Even though there is no significant difference based on the effect aging in semantic FOK. Unlike JOL, as we guessed there is an important difference in the FOK that come with the aging effect. In this old age period, some deficiencies are seen as expected, and therefore, TOT is a natural outcome of the developmental period. As we emphasized in the TOT part of this article; older adults have bigger semantic memories than youngers. That's why they fail in the retrieval process. This are also important findings and surprising consequences.

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SCIENTIFIC ANNALS OF „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" UNIVERSITY OF IASI
VOLUME XVII/2, SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK, 2024

DOI: 10.47743/asas-2024-2-776

DO LEADERS MATTER?
A CASE STUDY FOR THE LOCAL ELECTIONS IN ROMANIA, IASI COUNTY, FROM 2020-2024

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Abstract: This article aims to make a theoretical incursion on electoral behaviour through the prism of the relations that matter when voters choose, insisting on determinisms that can matter to them: the relationships between political leaders and the parties they belong to.

Starting from the theoretical analyses carried out, especially for the electoral rounds at the national/central level, the article aims to outline the formula of determinism between local leaders appointed for mayors in local elections to influence the results of the electoral elections about the vote obtained by the parties for the nomination of the elected representatives proposed for the Local Councils / the parties to which they belong.

The proposed analysis is quantitative, and exploratory, starting from the results obtained in Iasi County in the local elections of 2020 and 2024 for the appointment of Mayors (political leaders) and Local Councils (parties).

Keywords: electoral system, local elections, leader, political party, electoral behaviour

Résumé : Cet article se propose de faire une incursion théorique sur les comportements électoraux à travers le prisme des ressorts qui comptent lorsque les électeurs choisissent, en insistant sur les déterminismes qui peuvent avoir de l'importance pour eux: les relations entre les dirigeants politiques et les partis auxquels ils appartiennent. À partir des analyses théoriques réalisées notamment pour les tours électoraux au niveau national/central, l'article vise à esquisser la formule de déterminisme entre les élus locaux nommés pour les Maires lors des élections locales afin d'influencer les résultats des élections électorales en relation avec le vote obtenu par les partis pour la désignation des élus proposés aux Conseils Locaux/partis auxquels ils appartiennent.

L'analyse proposée est quantitative, exploratoire, à partir des résultats obtenus dans le comté de Iasi lors des élections locales de 2020 – 2024 pour la nomination des Maires (leader politique) et des Conseils Locaux (parti) dans le comté de Iasi.

Mots-clés : système électoral, élections locales, leader, parti politique, comportement électoral

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Abstract: Articolul de față își propune să realizeze o incursiune teoretică asupra comportamentului electoral prin prisma resorturilor care contează atunci când electorii aleg, insistând asupra determinismelor care pot conta pentru aceștia: raporturile dintre liderii politici și partidele din care aceștia fac parte.

Pornind de la analizele teoretice realizate mai ales pentru rundele electorale de nivel național /central, articolul își propune să contureze formula de determinism dintre liderii locali desemnați pentru funcția de primari la alegerile locale în sensul de a influența rezultatele alegerilor electorale în raport cu votul obținut de partide pentru desemnarea aleșilor propuși pentru Consiliile locale/ partidele din care aceștia fac parte.

Analiza propusă este una cantitativă, exploratorie, pornind de la rezultatele obținute în județul Iași la alegerile locale din anii 2020 – 2024 pentru desemnarea Primarilor (lider politic) și a Consiliilor locale (partid) din județul Iași.

Cuvinte cheie: sistem electoral, alegeri locale, lider, partid politic, comportament electoral

1. Introduction

Electoral behaviour refers to how the voter acts in front of the ballot paper, what he votes for, as well as the determinisms / the springs that make him choose one candidate or another / a political leader or another / a political party or another or a coalition of parties.

Regardless of the typology of the electoral system (majority, proportional or mixed), the electoral behaviour of the voter is influenced or can be influenced deliberately or accidentally, consciously or unconsciously, by various stimuli (leader, party, typology of electoral offer, type of society in which elections take place, type of content promoted in campaigns, types of policies, etc.), determining him to vote objectively or subjectively.

From this point of view, this analysis will present both theoretically and practically – based on a case study – what is the role of the political leader and of the party in determining the voting option, and – from a theoretical point of view – which other determinisms can influence the electoral option, in the sense of rounding off the discursive universe.

2. Determinisms of the electoral behaviour: leaders and/or parties

What is the relationship between the party leader and his party during the electoral period is a question that arouses interest both at the level of the profile research and at the level of political-electoral practices, as long as the goal of each political party is to reach government, regardless of which political-administrative level we take into account: from the national level (presidential elections, for Parliament, etc.) up to the local level (for City Halls, County Councils, etc.).

In terms of research, several lines have been distinguished over time:

a. researches claiming that the party leader is the one who determines the electoral preferences of voters, including for the party they come from;

b. researches that argues that voters' electoral preferences for the party or the party leader should not be equated, the voters effectively choose the party separately from the leader; research claiming that it is the party that influences voters' electoral preferences before the leader's preferences;

c. as well as research claiming that other factors determine the preferences of the electorate at the time of elections, beyond the party to which the leader belongs or his capacity as leader of the party.

a. This dimension supports the view that leaders determine the electors' preferences before any other kind of reasoning. Of course, the uninominal electoral systems primarily highlight the candidate/leader of the party in front of the proportional ones, but at the level of the present analysis, we take into account the fact that the elector can vote based on this consideration strictly related to the characteristics of the leader, even when he is put in front of a list, in the case of a proportional electoral system. In the literature, several points of view have been developed regarding the number and the typology of leadership qualities that determine voter preferences.

Bittner (2011), among others, argues that to understand leader effects, we should study leaders' character traits. Voters likely base their general judgment of party leaders on their judgments of these leaders' wide range of characteristics (Greene 2001; Ohr and Oscarsson, 2013). In addition, evaluations on character traits can be measured more reliably than general leader perceptions (e.g., Schwarz 1998). But which character traits do voters desire in their political leaders? The extensive literature review on leadership traits distinguishes between two traits (e.g. Bittner 2011; Johnston 2002), three traits (e.g., Funk 1999), four traits (e.g., Kinder 1986; Miller *et al.* 1986), six traits (e.g., Bass 1981), and up to fourteen character dimensions (Simonton 1986).

First, *political skills* include the skills needed to perform well in the political arena, such as general competence, political intelligence, and strategic behaviour. Second, strong and powerful leadership, (self-)confidence, and decisive behaviour by party leaders are called *vigorousness.* Third, *integrity* refers to leaders' honesty, (un) corruption, and whether the leader is focused on his or her own needs or on the needs of the electorate. Fourth, *communicative skills* refers to both inspiring or visionary leadership and the mediagenic skills of the leader, including whether the leader comes across as friendly, clear, empathic, and charming. Finally, the stability of leaders' visions and actions is labelled *consistency* and includes whether the leader behaves predictably (Aaldering *et al.* 2018, p. 75).

b. With this analytical dimension according to which voters' preferences are determined strictly by the party, we can mention here two dimensions: on one hand, the partisan vote (strictly subjective), on other hand, the calculated vote (determined by the calculation of the political party being able to become governmental or not). In terms of determining the preferences of voters according to the affinity for one party or another, the logic of electoral behaviour is clear: the elector will vote according to the affinity he has for the party, regardless of the competence of the candidates it presents, regardless of its real chances, regardless of the electoral platform. This type of emotional voting translated into a form of loyalty to a party can be the result of a long electoral tradition inherited from the family, or coming strictly from the notoriety of the party itself: its historical capacity to win several rounds of elections, to resist over time throughout the electoral rounds, etc.

The other objective dimension of party voting is determined by the calculation made by the elector in terms of the party's ability to effectively win the elections in which it participates. Whether it is a majority or proportional electoral system, there is an objective calculation of voters to vote for large parties that have a real chance of winning elections, seats in elective legislative institutions and guaranteeing stable governments/stable mandates (guaranteed by large parties with as many seats as possible in the assemblies for which they run). In other words, to vote for large parties to the detriment of small parties and to be less interested in the typology of the electoral system, the used techniques, the calculation methods, the ideology of the parties, on the nominal candidacies or the notoriety of the candidates.

Although electoral outcomes only reflect the most immediate consequences of electoral systems (they do not reflect the long-term consequences for redistribution, see for instance Iversen and Soskice 2006), the approach allows us to effectively capture citizens' views on the matter. It is more natural and intuitive for citizens to pass a judgment on concrete results rather than on abstract and technical rules. Furthermore, people are used to seeing electoral outcomes, and they update their political attitudes following the announcement of results (Anderson *et al.* 2005). The electoral outcomes that citizens find good for democracy do not neatly conform to the proportional or majoritarian vision of democracy, (...) but to the efficiency/legitimacy of the government (Blais, *et al.* 2021).

Minority governments are usually seen as less desirable than majority governments for two reasons. First, they are more likely to be dismantled before term limits given that the opposition parties enjoy a majority of parliamentary seats and can always dismiss the government. This creates instability whereas citizens often want governments that are strong and steady (Gallagher *et al.* 2011; Warwick 1994). Second, minority governments must negotiate with opposition parties to pass bills and adopt policies, and they are thus less likely to meet their electoral promises (Strom and Swindle, 2002).

c. Concerning those researches that distinguish between different factors that can influence the preferences of the electorate, concerning the literature, we can identify the following lines. The electorate's preferences are determined, beyond the party's leadership and the party's notoriety, by: the degree of media coverage of the leader, the correlation of national/local issues with the electoral agenda – that is, the public policies supported and considered important for that community/society, the type of society/community and the conspiracy theories, etc.

The media are likely to play an important role in the way political leaders influence society (Bittner 2011). Most voters never meet party leaders in real life, and therefore, they form their judgments about them mainly based on their representation in the media (e.g., Esser and Strömbäck 2014; Robinson 1976; Strömbäck 2008). Thus, media coverage of party leaders is a likely source of electoral leader effects. Our study focuses on the extent to which media coverage of party leaders affects support for their parties. We refer to the media coverage of party leaders in terms of their leadership traits as „mediated leadership images" (Aalderling *et al.* 2018, p.73). The behaviour of voters and, implicitly, the electoral preference are determined, according to these points of view, by the content and media frequency of news (on all channels) during the electoral period referring to the candidate political party and leader. Moreover, this news must have a positive character to determine voters' preferences and, also through the media, both the political leaders and the political parties must remain visible throughout the electoral campaign, to „remind" the voter whom to vote for. Van der Meer (2012) argues that keeping the voter's voting choice alive through the media works especially in smaller communities, where parties and their leaders need to make themselves seen through as many channels as possible to voters, with an electoral agenda that brings those communities' issues to the forefront.

The type of community determines the behaviour and the preferences of the electorate, beyond party formations or the qualities of the leader. This type of influence is observed in ethnically and culturally divided societies/communities, where several types of minorities live, etc., so they do not have a unitary character.

Scholars from Lijphart to Nordlinger or Reilly suggest that in divided places political elites need to identify connections between themselves and their voters. This link is already presumed by parties representing politically relevant groups, since, as Diamond and Gunther (Diamond and Gunther 2001, p. 23) suggest, „the electoral logic of the ethnic party is to harden and mobilize its ethnic base with exclusive, often polarizing appeals to ethnic group opportunity and threat". Even though reaching out across the divide is acknowledged to contribute more substantively to the stability of consociational places, mobilizing voter support for non-binary politics in a polity operating under consociational arrangements is considerably more difficult (Tonge 2020). The central challenge for cross-segmental parties in consociations is to develop strategies that yield electoral success and ensure their political relevance (Agarin & Jarett 2022, p. 723). In these societies, consociational democracies, what matters is that the political parties identify themselves through their programs with those minority groups either through political measures that respond to specific problems presented in their electoral agendas, or through the construction of a leader who is recognized by each minority as coming from their ranks/belonging to that minority (sexual, ethnic, religious, etc.), beyond notoriety, personal qualities, background, studies, etc. The overlap of the two dimensions: a leader belonging to the minority and/or party promoting minority needs as a priority, determines the electoral preferences of the voters in these types of communities/societies/consociational democracies.

Other authors argue that what counts when they vote are the public policies supported by the political party or by the party leader. It is not important for the organizational dimensions or institutionalization, but only **the public**

policies on the electoral agenda. Referring to the elections for the European Parliament, the specialized literature in the field highlighted the importance of public policies promoted in the electoral campaigns as determining the electoral choice. Based on previous research regarding the relation between policy issues and electoral participation, we argue that the link between the key policy issues and the individual's decision to turn out during European elections functions through two direct and one indirect channels. First, EU citizens should be more inclined to vote when they perceive a major transnational policy issue as highly important (Braun and Schäfer 2022, p. 125). Second, people should feel more incentivized to participate in an EP election when they hold an extreme opinion on a key policy issue. These two direct channels imply that both meta-attitudinal cognitions (such as issue importance) as well as more operative forms (such as attitude extremity) affect political behaviour (Bassili 1996). Third, the public relevance of certain policy issues should enhance the mobilization effect of personal issue importance among the citizens of this country.

Beyond the importance of the parties or of the leaders, in the specialized literature, some authors claim that the determination of voters' preference is also determined by what are called **the conspiracy theories**. The appeal made during the election campaigns to the conspiracy theories refers to the invocation of some evil political forces (parties, politicians, coalitions, other political-economic actors, etc.) that can destroy the state/community unit itself, can generate internal insecurity (fights between social classes produced against the background of various forms of abuse) or international (attraction of the community/state in regional or international conflicts, etc.), a fact that directs the electoral preferences of the voters as far as possible about them or lead to the actuation of a mental calculation of the lowest evil type.

It is expected that conspiratorial news heightens anxiety, which occurs when people appraise a situation as unpleasant, highly threatening and uncertain (Lerner and Keltner 2000), and when a situation seems out of control (Smith and Ellsworth 1985). An anxious reaction is how we detect threats and danger (Eysenck 1992). For instance, election interference might make citizens wonder about their government's legitimacy, or question how the election might be decided. While election interference would cause uncertainty, we also anticipated that conspiratorial news would heighten anger, which is distinct from anxiety. Anger is more likely when a threat or harm is characterized by certainty (Brader *et al.* 2011).

Thus, the preferences of the electorate will be directed towards that political formation or that political actor that will more skilfully use the conspiracy theories and will place itself in the desirable formula of removing any risk that could appear to the state, to the well-being, peace, prosperity of the state or the electoral community of which it is a part.

Beyond these determinisms that can influence the voter's preferences when they vote, this article aims to identify if there is a continuity in the voters' preference between the political leader of the party and the party to which he belongs, through the applicability of the working hypothesis to the local level, in the elections for the Local Councils / Mayor of Iaşi County, from the 2020 and 2024 local elections.

3. Methodology and sample

The present study aims to test whether there is continuity between the voter's preference in the localities of Iasi County for the political parties that ran for the local elections in 2020 and 2024 for the Local Councils and the political leaders of the respective political parties that ran for the position of Mayor. The proposed analysis is a quantitative, exploratory one, starting from the results obtained in Iaşi County in the 2020 and 2024 local elections for the appointment of Mayors and Local Councils in Iaşi County, using as statistical data the results recorded for each locality/communes in part of Iaşi County, taken from the specialized site https://rezultatevot.ro (see notes 34 and 35). This analysis records the results obtained for all 97 localities [in urban aria (5 cities)[2] and rural aria (92 de communes/localities)[3]] from Iasi county, elections for the Mayor (uninominal elections– which count the political leader of the party) and for the Local Councils (LC) of the localities (where the party counts, taking into account the percentage of the party that obtained the highest percentages for this structure/ generically named, dominant party).

4. Results

About the 97 localities in Iaşi county, at the level of the 2020 elections, in 97% of them, the party to which the elected Mayor belongs was the same as the party that holds the largest percentage (dominant party) in the Local Council (LC) of the locality, and in 3% of the county's localities, the party to which the elected Mayor belongs was different from the party that obtained the highest percentage in the Local Council (LC) and for 2024, in the local elections, the percentage of localities where there are different parties between the political colour of the mayor and the majority in the Local Council has increased to 5% (see **Fig. 1**).

[2] Data from: https://iasi.insse.ro/despre-noi/despre-judetul-iasi/geografie-si-statistici/, accessed on 21.01.2024.

[3] Data from: https://localitati.fandom.com/ro/wiki/List%C4% 83_de_comune_din_jude %C8%9Bul_Ia%C8%99i, accessed on 21.01.2024.

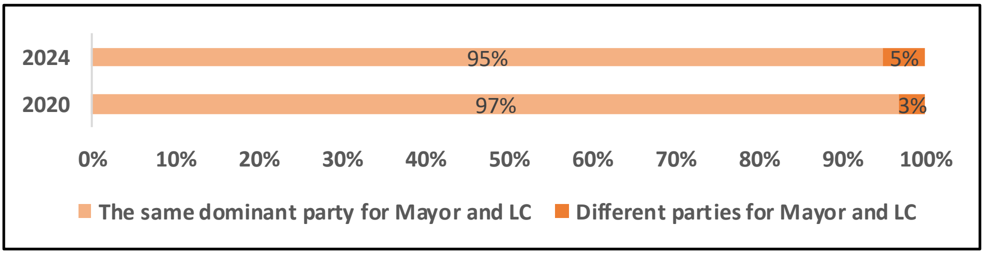

Figure. 1. Electoral situation in Iasi County in 2020 and 2024

Of the 97 localities in Iaşi county, in the 2020 elections, in 51% of them, PNL was the party that held the most votes in the Local Council (the dominant party) and that also obtained the position of Mayor; in 43% of the localities, PSD is the party that holds the most votes in the Local Council (the dominant party) and that also obtained the position of Mayor; in 2% of the localities, USR-PLUS is the party that holds the most votes in the Local Council (the dominant party) and that also obtained the position of Mayor; in 1% of the localities, PMP is the party that holds the most votes in the Local Council (the dominant party) and that also obtained the position of Mayor; and in 3% of the localities of the county, there are different parties about the variable dominant party in the Local Council and the party from which the political leader who obtained the position of Mayor comes (see Figure 2).

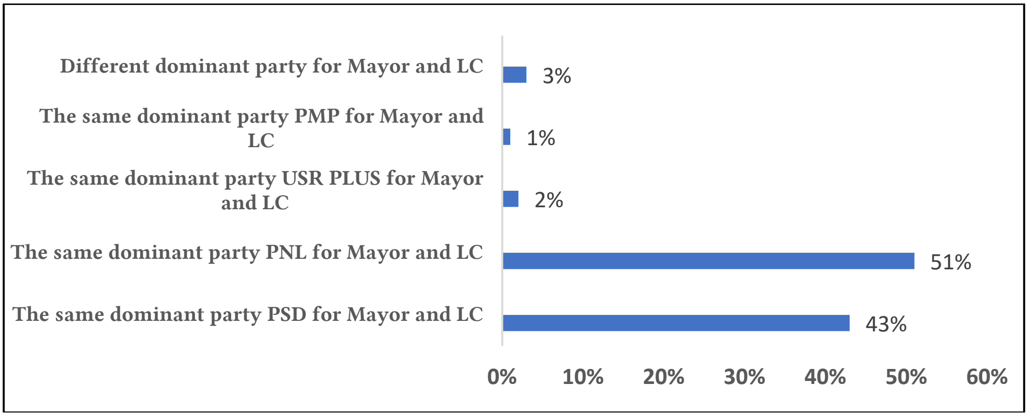

Figure 2. Electoral situation for total localities in 2020

In the 2024 elections, two parties have the same political coloration between the party from which the mayor comes and the majority in the Local Council. PNL obtains 52% of the localities, and PSD increases to 48% (see **Figure 3**).

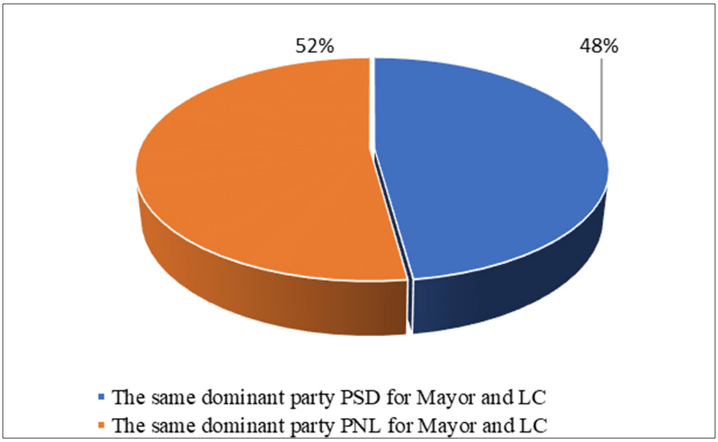

Figure 3. Electoral situation for total localities in 2024

Concerning the situation of the 3% percentages that do not overlap the percentages of the political leader with the percentages of the dominant party in the Local Council, the situation brings to the fore a formula of political cohabitation between PSD, PNL and USR-PLUS, and for the 5% of cases registered in the 2024 elections, the formula of cohabitation brings to the fore another political party – AUR – which did not participate in the 2020 elections, USR-PLUS disappearing from the political chessboard at the county level (see **Table no. 1** and **Table no. 2**).

It can be observed that there is no strict rule that can be separated concerning the three cases presented: in the sense that the dominant parties in the Local Councils can be both left (Social Democrat Party – PSD) and right (National Liberal Party – PNL), the case of obtaining the position of the Mayor - the same (they come from the entire political board of the county). The only rule that can be deduced is that, regardless of the type of the party, in all cases, the percentages obtained by the leader candidate for the position of Mayor are higher than those of the dominant parties in the Local Councils, which can lead us to conclude at this level of the analysis that the leader seems to matter more in determining the electoral choice in 2020, and in 2024.

Detailing the percentages obtained by the main parties at the county level in 2020 (PNL, PSD, USR-PLUS and PMP), we can see that there are two large parties that dominate the county PNL and PSD and two parties – Save Romania Union and PLUS: USR-PLUS and Popular Movement Party: PMP – that obtain 3% among the localities in the county (see **Table no. 3, Table no. 5** and **Table no. 7**).

In the 2024 elections, the percentages obtained by the main parties at the county level (PNL, PSD, AUR), we can see that there are two major parties that dominate the county, PNL and PSD (see **Table no. 4, Table no. 6**).

Concerning the data presented in **Table no. 3**, it can be seen that the highest percentage is obtained in 2020 by a PNL mayor - 87.33% in Scobinti commune, and for the Local Council - PNL obtained the highest score in Plugari commune - 82.15%. The lowest percentage for obtaining the position of mayor from

PNL is obtained in Dumești commune - 26.98%, and the Local Council, in the same commune - 28.14%. The average of the percentages obtained by PNL at the level of Iaşi County is 56.85%.

The percentage for obtaining the position of mayor from the PNL is obtained in the commune of Dumești - 26.98%, and in the Local Council, in the same commune - 28.14%. The average of the percentages obtained by the PNL at the level of Iasi is 56.85%.

About the data presented in **Table no. 4**, it can be seen that the highest percentage is obtained in the 2024 elections by a PNL mayor - 89.39% in Ciortești commune, and for the Local Council - PNL obtains the highest score also in Ciortești commune - 83.53%. The lowest percentage for obtaining the position of mayor from the PNL is obtained in the commune of Rediu - 28.92%, and in the Local Council, in the municipality of Iasi - 24.7%. The average of the percentages obtained by PNL at the level of Iasi is 61.29% for the Mayor and 54.56% - for CL.

In 2020, in 27 of the localities, the position of PNL Mayor is obtained with percentages above the average of the party's percentages at the county level, and in 19 of the localities, the party obtained LC higher percentages than the average of the party's percentages.

In 2024, in 21 of the localities, the position of PNL Mayor is obtained with percentages above the average of the party's percentages at the county level, and in 24 of the localities, the party obtains CL percentages higher than the average of the party's percentages.

About the data presented in **Table no. 5**, it can be seen that the highest percentage is obtained by a PSD mayor - 92.77% in Tătăruși commune, and for the Local Council - PSD obtains the highest score in the same commune - 87.57%. The lowest percentage for obtaining the position of mayor from the PSD is obtained in Prisăcani commune - 38.44%, and in the Local Council, in Hârlău - 31.81%. The average percentage obtained by PSD at the level of Iaşi is 56.2%.

In 2020, in 23 of the localities, the position of PSD Mayor was obtained with percentages above the average of the party's percentages at the county level, and in 15 of the localities, the party obtained higher percentages for LC than the average of the party's percentages.

Concerning the data presented in Table no. 6, it can be seen that in the 2024 elections, the highest percentage is obtained by a PSD mayor – 93.9% in Țuțora commune, and for the Local Council – PSD obtains the highest score in Brăești commune – 85.76%. The lowest percentage for obtaining the position of mayor from the PSD is obtained in the commune of Prisăcani - 38%, and in the Local Council, in the commune of Focuri - 36.28%. The average of the percentages obtained by the PSD at the level of Iasi is 64.43% for the mayor and 58.55% for the Local Council.

It can also be observed that in 2020, the number of communes obtained by the two parties at the county level is quite close, 49 localities - PNL, compared to 42 localities - PSD, and in the 2024 elections, the number of communes obtained by the two parties at the county level is quite close 48 localities – PNL, compared to

44 localities – PSD However, we cannot exclude the importance of the parties, their notoriety, their size, their tradition, which may be other variables that can determine the electoral choice, beyond the boundaries of the present analysis. The trend seems to be at the county level between 2020-2024 of orientation to the left on the political chessboard of voters.

Table no. 7 shows the same tendency to maintain determinism between the leader of the party appointed to the position of Mayor and the party he belongs to, which obtained the highest percentages in the Local Council (dominant party).

We note that in the case of the other two parties - USR-PLUS and PMP - which obtained the highest percentages at the level of Local Councils as well as the position of Mayor, the political leader of the same party, the only regularity that can be remembered is that the party leader, regardless of the party, obtains higher percentages than those obtained by the party from which it comes and which ranked first in the Local Council (dominant party). Being much smaller, newer parties, without a tradition at the county level, the number of localities for which they obtain both positions – of Mayor and they get more votes in the Local Council – is much lower – in 3% of the county's localities. At the level of 2024, this tendency of small parties to obtain a majority in CL and the position of Mayor disappears completely.

On the other hand, to emphasize the relationship between the position of Mayor - the political leader from the same party and the party that obtains the highest percentage (dominant party in the Local Council), the percentage values for the two local administrative level positions were compared. Thus, in 2020 election, for the PNL, in 94% of cases, the percentages of the PNL Mayor are higher than the percentages obtained by the same party for the Local Council - dominant party and in 2024, the percentage increases to 100%. Thus, for the 2020 elections, for the PSD, in 93% of cases, the PSD Mayor's percentages are higher than the percentages obtained by the same party for the Local Council - dominant party and in 2024, the percentage increases to 95%.

We can thus conclude that, regardless of the ideology of the party (right-PNL and left-PSD), it seems that the electoral option is determined by the political leader, and candidate for the position of Mayor, in only 6% of cases - the percentage obtained by the PNL for the Local Council is higher than the percentage obtained by the PNL candidate for the position of Mayor and only in 7% of the cases - the percentage obtained by the PSD for the Local Council is higher than the percentage obtained by the PSD candidate for mayor in the 2020 elections, and the trend for 2024 is to further outline the mayor's position as a locomotive about the party to which he belongs and which obtains the majority in the Local Council.

Also, in the two 2020-2024 electoral rounds, out of a total of 97 localities, in 2024 compared to 2020, in 73 of the municipalities the same political coloration line was maintained for both the position of mayor or the majority in CL, and in 24 of the cases the large parties – PNL and PSD – either took over either the majority in the Local Council or the position of mayor in front of the small parties (in 4 communes), or they reversed the roles between them (19 cases, of which in 10 cases PSD took over communes in which PNL had traditionally voted in 2020, and in 8 cases – vice versa) (see **Table no. 8**).

These cases and these percentages do not, however, allow us to exclude the case where the voter's electoral option is determined by the party and, later, by the political leader-candidate for the position of Mayor. At the level of the present analysis, however, we can say that, in terms of the percentages obtained, at the level of Iasi County, the voters' electoral option seems to be much more strongly influenced by the political leader, candidate for the position of Mayor, whether or not he is part of the same party as the party that obtains the most votes in the Local Council (dominant party). However, in terms of the percentages of over 90% in the 2020 elections / even 100% in the 2024 elections, in which the political leader who obtains the position of mayor and the party that obtains the most votes in the Local Council come from the same party, he emphasizes the determinism between the two variables and seems to orient the county more to the left in 2024 compared to the trend to the right recorded in the 2020 elections.

5. Conclusions

The electoral choice/option is a complex one and has many determinants behind it. Based on the present quantitative study, it appears that there is a determinism between the party leader and the party he belongs to. For the voter, both the leader and the party he belongs to matter when he votes. About the present research, it is difficult to determine the causal relationship, if the choice of the leader determines the choice of the party or vice versa, the party leader is chosen according to the party he belongs to at the local level. However, it can be seen that in the majority of cases, where there is an overlap between the political colour of the dominant party in the Local Council and the political colour of the political leader who obtained the position of Mayor, the percentages of the political leader are above the value of the percentages obtained by the party of which it is a part. This fact seems to determine that the political leader matters first in the voters' choices, as he acquires the function of locomotive for the party to which he belongs or, in other words, it seems that the electoral option of the voters is determined first by the characteristics of the political leader and then by the importance of the party itself, and the tendency to shape this approach is visible between the electoral rounds between 2020-2024, at the local elections. However, it is difficult to determine if there are no other reasonings that voters take into account when they vote at the local level, determinisms that combine with those of the political leader variable, such as those mentioned in this analysis, taken from the literature specialized.

However, we can conclude that, to the specialized literature and the purposes of the present research, electoral behaviour in terms of the expressed vote is determined both by the political leader of the party and by the party to which it belongs, that there is a determinism between the two variables, but it is difficult to establish the meaning of the causal relationship. It seems that the leader is the one who determines the electoral choice and, then, the choice of the party as an electoral option, but, based on the data used, we cannot exclude the importance of the other variants of determinism that can influence the electoral choice, and we cannot exclude whether there may be other variables that to concurrently determine the electoral choice. Moreover, the present study does not propose to establish this sense of the causal relationship, nor does it propose to eliminate the other determinisms of electoral behaviour presented at the theoretical level (state/community typology; conspiracy theories, etc.).

It is worth remembering that, implicitly at the level of local elections, the electoral behaviour of the voter is determined by the importance of the political leader who is running, by the importance of the political party from which he comes, and subsequent studies will observe whether at the local level implicitly the other determinisms presented at the present level of analysis may exist or coexist.

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Anexes

Table no. 1. Electoral situation in three localities in 2020

Localities	Mayor percentage	Party from which the Mayor belongs	LC percentage	Dominant party in LC
Pascani	40,11	PNL	36,52	PSD
Mircesti	47,32	USR-PLUS	40,81	PNL
Mogosesti Siret	36,54	PSD	35,96	PNL

Table no. 2. Electoral situations in other five localities in 2024

Localities	Mayor percentage	Party from which the Mayor belongs	LC percentage	Dominant party in LC
Harlau	38,31	PSD	33,31	PNL
Vladeni	45,76	PNL	44,1	PSD
Popesti	35,94	PNL	34,65	AUR
Dumesti	43,98	PSD	40,57	PNL
Tansa	52,54	PSD	46,95	PNL

Table no. 3. Electoral situation in the localities of Iasi County for PNL party (2020)

No	Localities	Mayor percentage - PNL	Dominant party in LC percentage -PNL
1	Lespezi	45,11	37,3
2	Deleni	86,05	71,7
3	Scobinti	87,33	71,22
4	Plugari	87,23	82,15
5	Coarnele Caprei	51,67	51,65
6	Cristesti	62,06	56,99
7	Valea Seaca	35,49	28,3
8	Todiresti	50,38	41,55
9	Gropnita	75,8	66,53
10	Trifesti	77,97	72,1
11	Probota	72,75	58,54
12	Romanesti	61,45	51,11
13	Harmanesti	61,29	58,24
14	Stolniceni-Prajescu	63,49	47,27
15	Alexandru Ioan Cuza	42,81	40,09
16	Halaucesti	67,77	62,35
17	Bals	51,67	50,24
18	Braesti	79,19	77,53
19	Podu Iloaiei	59,16	53,94
20	Popesti	52,16	48,93
21	Sinesti	73,76	65,21
22	Dumesti	26,98	28,14
23	Victoria	63,03	59,41
24	Popricani	53,02	47,03
25	Letcani	60,05	56,15
26	Horlesti	80,24	76,38
27	Miroslava	56,26	46,66
28	Iasi	42,01	32,24
29	Aroneanu	50,05	46,19
30	Golaesti	43,33	45,2

No	Localities	Mayor percentage - PNL	Dominant party in LC percentage -PNL
31	Ungheni	57,48	53,84
32	Holboca	53,76	49
33	Tomesti	77,49	60,13
34	Barnova	51,99	44,58
35	Mogosesti	50,99	46,61
36	Mironeasa	82,67	80,11
37	Dagata	61,35	57,18
38	Tansa	59,78	51,3
39	Tibanesti	59,49	51,73
40	Scanteia	50,06	47,36
41	Dobrovat	78,2	58,97
42	Schitu Duca	48,62	35,24
43	Comarna	54,53	51,24
44	Costuleni	68,72	60,77
45	Ciortesti	61,05	58,56
46	Mosna	82,75	64,23
47	Ceplenita	38,96	39,29
48	Valea Lupului	38,87	37,45
49	Rachiteni	49,67	48,14

Table no. 4. Electoral situation in the localities of Iasi County for PNL party (2024)

No	Localities	Mayor percentage - PNL	Dominant party in LC percentage - PNL
1	Deleni	78,57	70,76
2	Scobinti	77,19	65,19
3	Plugari	88,79	83,28
4	Coarnele Caprei	60,1	54,17
5	Cristesti	88,19	79,48
6	Todiresti	70,86	60,34
7	Trifesti	71,06	64,83
8	Probota	72,77	68,49
9	Erbiceni	48,13	46,17
10	Romanesti	62,48	59,01
11	Pascani	52,18	41,39
12	Harmanesti	47,23	44,07
13	Alexandru Ioan Cuza	63,54	55,78
14	Halaucesti	60,28	57,88
15	Rachiteni	56,28	52,63
16	Oteleni	47,47	42
17	Podu Iloaiei	76,84	64,64
18	Sinesti	85,39	74,96
19	Movileni	64,52	60,32
20	Rediu	28,92	28,32
21	Victoria	61,62	57,43
22	Popricani	60,01	52,6
23	Letcani	50,48	47,32
24	Horlesti	77,97	70,81
25	Miroslava	44,7	36
26	Iasi	32,24	24,7

No	Localities	Mayor percentage - PNL	Dominant party in LC percentage - PNL
27	Aroneanu	54,33	51,21
28	Golaesti	60,43	57,84
29	Ungheni	46,74	38,41
30	Holboca	67,5	54,39
31	Tomesti	75,24	52,81
32	Barnova	37,65	33,14
33	Mironeasa	76,09	73,55
34	Dagata	67,21	60,88
35	Tibanesti	52,96	46,04
36	Draguseni	50,68	44,93
37	Scanteia	45,84	38,09
38	Schitu Duca	59,96	56,56
39	Comarna	43	41,95
40	Costuleni	60,2	55,12
41	Ciortesti	89,39	83,53
42	Gorban	56,59	43,42
43	Mosna	82,04	61,93
44	Dolhesti	55,51	54,67
45	Cozmesti	42,67	38,55
46	Ceplenita	53,5	49,38
47	Mogosesti Siret	54,52	50,67
48	Valea Lupului	82,43	69,32

Table no. 5. Electoral situation in the localities of Iasi County for PSD party (2020)

No	Localities	Mayor percentage - PSD	Dominant party in LC percentage - PSD
1	Tatarusi	92,77	87,57
2	Siretel	54,86	51,15
3	Harlau	43,2	31,81
4	Sipote	55,77	54,41
5	Bivolari	61,78	53,89
6	Vanatori	58,55	50,19
7	Cotnari	47,35	45,54
8	Belcesti	45,14	44,75
9	Focuri	63,69	51,36
10	Vladeni	49,74	48,52
11	Roscani	57,8	57,26
12	Tiganasi	78,44	60,56
13	Erbiceni	69,07	62,02
14	Baltati	58,16	51,05
15	Ion Neculce	79,53	74,19
16	Strunga	62,57	59,62
17	Helesteni	48,03	44,89
18	Motca	72,42	60,96
19	Miroslovesti	45,72	46,18
20	Ciohorani	70,13	63,14
21	Butea	75,97	65,27
22	Ruginoasa	58,98	51,88
23	Cucuteni	58,4	58,8

No	Localities	Mayor percentage - PSD	Dominant party in LC percentage - PSD
24	Oteleni	61,03	44,85
25	Lungani	67,78	66,25
26	Madarjac	46,96	35,58
27	Tutora	68,52	62,74
28	Ciurea	58,55	46,78
29	Voinesti	56,37	45,23
30	Tibana	53,2	43,75
31	Ipatele	70,62	68,75
32	Scheia	50,81	42,59
33	Draguseni	50,44	52,95
34	Grajduri	55,25	47,8
35	Prisacani	38,44	38,43
36	Raducaneni	43,98	38,86
37	Grozesti	54,37	51,36
38	Gorban	49,27	44,02
39	Dolhesti	45,58	43,41
40	Cozmesti	52,96	48,21
41	Costesti	89,02	82,03
42	Fantanele	63,64	58,02

Table no. 6. Electoral situation in the localities of Iasi County for PSD party (2020)

No	Localities	Mayor percentage - PSD	Dominant party in LC percentage - PSD
1	Tatarusi	87,41	81,1
2	Lespezi	38,5	38,63
3	Siretel	77,77	72,06
4	Sipote	58,89	58,01
5	Andrieseni	50,92	50,37
6	Bivolari	55,81	51,04
7	Valea Seaca	52,29	49,54
8	Vanatori	73,41	66,31
9	Cotnari	48,06	44,87
10	Belcesti	64,57	60,85
11	Focuri	58,22	36,28
12	Gropnita	75,35	73,53
13	Roscani	48,19	47,29
14	Tiganasi	79,89	69,94
15	Baltati	54,04	51,45
16	Ion Neculce	73,89	67,9
17	Strunga	57,63	56,8
18	Helesteni	57,03	56,54
19	Motca	64,35	53,19
20	Miroslovesti	68,31	58,48
21	Ciohorani	55,75	49,84
22	Stolniceni-Prajescu	66,76	56,6
23	Mircesti	41,28	38,63
24	Butea	79,48	68,91
25	Ruginoasa	54,05	46,33
26	Cucuteni	66,14	66,61

No	Localities	Mayor percentage - PSD	Dominant party in LC percentage - PSD
27	Bals	84,93	80
28	Braesti	86,9	85,76
29	Lungani	87,25	84,96
30	Madarjac	66,71	55,36
31	Tutora	93,9	82,45
32	Ciurea	56,21	45,73
33	Mogosesti	49,28	43,97
34	Voinesti	49,37	46,58
35	Tibana	58,63	50,87
36	Ipatele	75,5	71,73
37	Scheia	61,67	51,53
38	Grajduri	58,87	47,48
39	Dobrovat	81,94	67,4
40	Prisacani	38	37,28
41	Raducaneni	58,15	47,63
42	Grozesti	75,03	71,18
43	Costesti	83,47	78,82
44	Fantanele	61,4	56,58

Table no. 7. Electoral situation in the localities of Iasi County for different parties (2020)

No	Locality from Iasi County	Mayor percentage	Party from which the Mayor belongs	Percentage LC	Dominant party in LC
1	Andrieseni	32,48	PMP	27,33	PMP
2	Movileni	36,5	USR-PLUS	33,55	USR-PLUS
3	Rediu	41,8	USR-PLUS	37,32	USR-PLUS

Table no. 8. Comparative analysis for the electoral situation between parties

No	Locality IASI	Mayor party 2024	Mayor party 2020	Dominant party in LC 2020	Dominant party in LC 2024
1	Lespezi	PSD	PNL	PNL	PSD
2	Andrieseni	PSD	PMP	PMP	PSD
3	Valea Seaca	PSD	PNL	PNL	PSD
4	Gropnita	PSD	PNL	PNL	PSD
5	Vladeni	PNL	PSD	PSD	PSD
6	Erbiceni	PNL	PSD	PSD	PNL
7	Stolniceni-Prajescu	PSD	PNL	PNL	PSD
8	Mircesti	PSD	USR-PLUS	PNL	PSD
9	Bals	PSD	PNL	PNL	PSD
10	Oteleni	PNL	PSD	PSD	PNL
11	Braesti	PSD	PNL	PNL	PSD
12	Popesti	PNL	PNL	PNL	AUR
13	Dumesti	PSD	PNL	PNL	PNL
14	Movileni	PNL	USR-PLUS	USR-PLUS	PNL
15	Rediu	PNL	USR-PLUS	USR-PLUS	PNL
16	Mogosesti	PSD	PNL	PNL	PSD
17	Tansa	PSD	PNL	PNL	PNL
18	Draguseni	PNL	PSD	PSD	PNL
19	Dobrovat	PSD	PNL	PNL	PSD

No	Locality IASI	Mayor party 2024	Mayor party 2020	Dominant party in LC 2020	Dominant party in LC 2024
20	Gorban	PNL	PSD	PSD	PNL
21	Dolhesti	PNL	PSD	PSD	PNL
22	Cozmesti	PNL	PSD	PSD	PNL
23	Mogosesti Siret	PNL	PSD	PNL	PNL

SCIENTIFIC ANNALS OF „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" UNIVERSITY OF IASI
VOLUME XVII/2, SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK, 2024

DOI:10.47743/asas-2024-2-777

THE STATUS OF SOCIO-HUMAN DISCIPLINES IN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION. CASE STUDY IN ROMAN, ROMANIA

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Abstract: In this article, we present the results of an empirical study through which we analyzed the perception of teachers and students towards socio-human disciplines (with a case study in the municipality of Roman, Romania). We were interested in the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the importance of socio-human disciplines specific to secondary and high school levels, by applying questionnaires to a sample of 110 teachers and 133 students. Comparatively, we wanted to know if there are significant differences between teachers' and students' opinions regarding the importance of socio-human subjects, to what extent there is the perception that the socio-human field is intended for students and less for students, as well as the differences in students' opinions according to their gender, class of studies, study path and environment of residence. This analysis were doubled by in-depth documentation on the school curricula, and the direct and indirect skills that students must acquire.

Keywords: socio-humanistic disciplines, pre-university education, civic culture, socio-human competences, development of young people

Resumé : Dans cet article, nous présentons les résultats d'une étude empirique à travers laquelle nous avons analysé la perception des enseignants et des étudiants à l'égard des disciplines socio-humaines (avec une étude de cas dans la municipalité de Roman, Roumanie). Nous nous sommes intéressés aux perceptions des enseignants et des élèves quant à l'importance des disciplines socio-humaines spécifiques au niveau secondaire et secondaire, en appliquant des questionnaires à un échantillon de 110 enseignants et 133 élèves. Comparativement, nous avons voulu savoir s'il existe des différences significatives entre les opinions des enseignants et des étudiants concernant l'importance des matières socio-humaines, dans quelle mesure existe la perception que le domaine socio-humain est destiné aux étudiants et moins aux étudiants, comme ainsi que les différences d'opinion des étudiants selon leur sexe, leur filière d'études, leur parcours d'études et leur milieu de résidence. Ces analyses ont été doublées d'une documentation approfondie sur les programmes scolaires, les compétences directes et indirectes que les étudiants doivent acquérir.

Mots-clés : disciplines socio-humanistes, enseignement pré-universitaire, culture civique, compétences socio-humaines, développement des jeunes

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Abstract: În acest articol prezentăm rezultatele unui studiu empiric prin care am analizat percepția profesorilor și elevilor față de disciplinele socio-umane (cu un studiu de caz în municipiul Roman, România). Ne-au interesat percepțiile profesorilor și elevilor cu privire la importanța disciplinelor socio-umane specifice nivelului gimnazial și liceal, prin aplicarea chestionarelor unui eșantion de 110 profesori și 133 de elevi. Comparativ, am dorit să știm dacă există diferențe semnificative între opiniile profesorilor și ale elevilor cu privire la importanța subiectelor socio-umane, în ce măsură există percepția că domeniul socio-uman este destinat elevelor și mai puțin elevilor, precum și diferențele de opinii ale studenților în funcție de sex, clasa de studii, filiera de studiu și mediul de rezidență. Aceste analize au fost dublate de documentarea aprofundată asupra programelor școlare, a competențelor directe și indirecte pe care trebuie să le dobândească elevii.

Cuvinte cheie: discipline socio-umaniste, învățământ preuniversitar, cultură civică, competențe socio-umane, dezvoltarea tinerilor

1. Introduction

The socio-human disciplines taught in school have an important role in transmitting values and principles that encourage young people to get actively involved in the life of the society they are part of. Young people are future voters and active citizens of the society in which they live. For the proper functioning of the company, they must know its functioning mechanisms. Classes in socio-human disciplines can make a decisive mark in the formation of young people in the spirit of democracy and participation. Each of these subjects contributes to the training of current and future generations, so it is important to give them due weight in the curriculum. Unfortunately, „the field of socio-human sciences has been and continues to be considered as having a secondary importance, although its study has multiple formative valences. Students must form truly human qualities that can only be born through the impact with culture and implicitly, with those disciplines that we call socio-human”. (Cucoş, 2014).

1.1. Socio-human disciplines - historical perspective

To begin with, we will detail a series of information regarding the socio-human disciplines as they were present in the school curricula before the Revolution. During the communist regime, socio-human disciplines had the „status of Cinderella” (Stoica, 2022, 9). Sociology was declared a bourgeois science in 1948 and banned. In the mid-1960s, against the background of an ideological relaxation, sociology programs were reintroduced in universities and sociological research centers affiliated with various institutions were established (Stoica, 2018, 80). At the end of the 1970s, the regime's policy changed, and psychology and sociology were again eliminated from universities. Sociology courses in various sub-fields continued to be taught in other faculties (technical, economics, philosophy, law) but the only institution that awarded diplomas and doctorates in sociology remained the Stefan Gheorghiu Academy, „which trained the staff of the Romanian Communist Party” (Stoica, 2022, 9). The evolution, in parallel, of sociological research has been sinuous through the strict control of the themes of research or of the scientific discourse considered subversive. The evolution of sociology and the sociologist profession was presented by S. Mitulescu (2021). According to this author, sociological university education was resumed in 1966, so the first class of sociologists graduated in 1970 – only 25 graduates). Subsequently, several 200 sociology and psycho-sociology graduates from Bucharest, Cluj and Iasi were reached. As a great sociologist – H.H. Stahl – observed, „the state bodies have asked themselves what are sociologists for? And to conclude that they are of no use. But they could not abolish sociology as it had been done in 1948, at least for fear of international opprobrium" (Stoica, apud Rostas, 2000, 169). After 1989 various authors (Chelcea, 2017; Zamfir, 2009) have published several volumes that highlight the temporal evolution of some disciplines in the socio-human category. The last author (Zamfir, 2009; p. 60) stated, for example, that „Romanian sociology has faced a drama. It exploded at the beginning of the liberalization of Romanian society and tried to consolidate itself in the phase of political closure of Ceausescu socialism. Sociology has been out of step with the dynamics of society. It tried to coagulate and reassert itself in Romania in the twilight of the period of liberalization and the chance for change of socialist society: a little too late and inevitably hesitant. Hopes for change had already begun to disappear in 1968." The same author recalled the revival of sociology after 1965. The most important factor was perhaps „the belief that sociology would have a very important role in the reform of Romanian society, due to the liberalization process of the '60s. Two prestigious figures trained in Gusti's school dominated: Henri Stahl and Traian Herseni. Many people interested in sociology found an opportunity under the political umbrella of Miron Constantinescu" (pp. 50-51). However, after the abolition of sociology in 1978, no new generations of sociologists were produced, only those trained before survived in universities, in research institutes and continued to publish and even conduct research. The community of sociologists has not grown, but it has remained active. Many sociology graduates were „distributed on non-sociological positions, but maintained their vocation as sociologists (p. 58).

C. Zamfir also makes us aware of the situation that philosophy and psychology were facing. He highlights the fact that „the Faculty of Philosophy was severely amputated by the union with the Faculty of History. The sociology and psychology departments were abolished. The profile of philosophy was united with that of history, and the number of philosophy students decreased severely" (p. 58). Also, after the abolition of the university education of sociology and the abolition of the positions of sociologists, „perhaps because of various pressures, it is possible that the Party realized that it had exaggerated. He promoted a certain tolerance towards sociological journalism. After 1978, many sociology books were published, which were important steps in its liberalization" (p. 69).

1.2. Teaching socio-human subjects in pre-university education

After a long personal teaching experience, I believe that the mission of the socio-human disciplines consists in developing the democratic spirit, in stimulating the initiative, and active and responsible participation of citizens in political life. Democracy is not a given or a gift, it is a conquest of citizens. It exists as long as the citizens claim it.

I believe that the purpose of socio-human disciplines is to form a certain type of citizen: the informed, active, responsible citizen, sensitive to the problems of the community. The citizen must protect himself against abuses and attacks on his rights from any source – public or private; this situation can be achieved only if citizens are informed, and understand the functioning of public institutions, democratic values and norms, social changes and alternatives. Essentially, the role of socio-human disciplines is to transmit these mechanisms and to contribute to the formation of a model citizen, involved in the life of society as a whole. In fact, from various sociological research, it has been found that Romanian society feels the absence of civic culture, of education of the feeling of collectivity, of respect for the law. This state associated with the indifference and non-involvement of citizens in political life constitutes a threat to Romania's fragile democracy. That is why the tasks that the socio-human disciplines assume are all the greater and all the more difficult.

The analysis of the roles that the teacher fulfils cannot be carried out outside the conceptual framework and the perspective of interpreting the school as a space for social interaction. The role-status dynamics specific to a school organization imply a redefinition of teachers' roles, „a multiplication and diversification of their functions in the conditions in which society is increasingly knowledge-oriented" (Diac, 2009, p. 652). E. Păun (1999, 79-87) considers that „the teacher is subject to several influences and pressures, often contradictory, in the fulfilment of his roles, exerted by organizational/institutional factors (inspectors, directors, heads of departments) and by partially institutionally regulated factors (parents, students, colleagues)".

As it results from the main school documents in Romania, the socio-human disciplines belong to the curricular area of *Man and Society*. They are found in the framework curriculum[2] starting with the third and fourth grades, through the discipline *Civic Education*; according to the framework curriculum in force, the study of socio-human disciplines continues in the fifth to eighth grade through the discipline Social Education and then, within each high school class. The Social Education discipline is distributed as follows: Critical Thinking and Children's Rights (5th grade), Intercultural Education (6th grade), Education for Democratic Citizenship (7th grade), Economic and Financial Education (8th grade). At the high school level, students study Logic, Argumentation and Communication (ninth grade), Psychology and Entrepreneurial Education (tenth grade), Economics and

[2] Available online at http://programe.ise.ro/Actuale.aspx, accessed 07.06.2022.

Sociology (eleventh grade), Philosophy and Social Studies (twelfth grade). According to *the General Framework for the Curricular Model for Socio-Human Disciplines*[3]*:* „through socio-human disciplines, valuing their interdisciplinary and integrative potential, students can form a comprehensive image of themselves, of others and society. Students can understand the action and institutional conditioning, the links between thinking and action in different fields. Students can prepare themselves as future informed citizens, capable of creatively integrating themselves into dialogue and social action and assuming responsibilities in personal and public life."

Also, according to the same document, „the purposes of studying socio-human disciplines derive from the purposes of pre-university education and from the educational ideal as formulated in the Education Law no. 84/2.07.1995 (republished, with subsequent amendments and completions), art. 3 (2): *the educational ideal of the Romanian school consists in the free, integral and harmonious development of human individuality, in the formation of the autonomous and creative personality*".

At the secondary and high school level, the study of socio-human disciplines highlights a series of purposes that are presented comparatively in the table below (Table 1.)

Table 1. Aims of the socio-human disciplines

At the secondary school level	At the high school level
„Participation in the life of the community according to the rights and responsibilities they have and belonging to different communities";	„Participation in economic and social life according to the rights and responsibilities they have as citizens and belonging to different communities":
„Developing the capacity for integration in different socio-cultural environments (family, group of friends, community, professional environment, organizations, etc.)";	„Training the ability to reflect on economic, social, cultural, political realities, based on the relationship of learning acquisitions";
„Developing critical thinking, acquiring intellectual work tools, problem-solving strategies, decision-making, teamwork";	„Developing the entrepreneurial spirit and a proactive attitude, to promote the new, to manifest the initiative in personal and professional life or in running a business";
„Encouraging the creative expression of ideas and feelings regarding manifestations of a social and cultural nature";	„Developing positive attitudes towards oneself and others based on tolerance, responsibility, rigor, etc., necessary in personal and public life"

[3] Available online at http://www.socio-umane.ro/e107_files/ downloads/Documente %20scolare/Model%20curricular%20socio-umane%20-%20cadru%20general.pdf, accessed 13.08.2022.

At the secondary school level	At the high school level
„Cultivating sensitivity, appreciation of values, availability for intercultural dialogue”	„Developing functional skills essential for success in personal, social and professional life, such as effective communication, critical thinking, negotiation, problem solving, decision-making”
	„Forming one's own value system, in order to achieve personal fulfilment and promote a quality life”

Source: General framework of the curricular model for socio-human disciplines, p. 2[4]

All of the above can also be found in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union „on key competencies from the perspective of lifelong learning” (2006/962/EC) outlines for graduates of compulsory education, a European training profile structured on eight key competence areas: communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competences and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship, social and civic competences, cultural awareness and expression”.

The contribution of socio-human disciplines to the formation and development of European key competencies „is nuanced and diversified, including both the direct contribution to the formation and development of certain key competencies, as well as the indirect contribution/awareness of other key competencies”. The table below lists the key European competencies targeted by the study of socio-human disciplines.

Table 2. Key European competencies targeted by the study of socio-human disciplines

Key competencies directly targeted through the study of socio-human disciplines	Key competencies indirectly targeted through the study of socio-human disciplines
▪ „Social and civic competencies” ▪ „Spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship” ▪ „Communication in the mother tongue” ▪ „Cultural awareness and expression”	▪ „Learning to learn” ▪ „Mathematical skills and basic skills in science and technology” ▪ „Digital competence”

2. Methods: participants, instruments

The starting question of our research was the following: *what is the role of socio-human disciplines in the formation of students?* And I considered that the

[4] Available online at http://www.socio-umane.ro/e107_files/downloads/Documente%20scolare/Model%20curricular%20socio-umane%20-%20cadru%20general.pdf.

perspective should be twofold: from the teachers, but also the students. Thus, the research was carried out on a sample of 110 teachers and 133 students from Neamt County, Romania. The characteristics of the samples were as follows. For teachers, we used the following independent variables:

- gender (18% male, 82% female)
- the age of the respondents between 25 and 65 years old
- seniority in education [1-5 years seniority (6.4%), 5-10 years (12.7%), 10-15 years (10%), 15-20 years (20.9%), 20-25 years (16.4%) and over 25 years (33.6%)]
- the status in education (86% tenured, 7% substitutes, 7% employed on the viability of the position)
- by the school's background: 58% of the subjects come from schools in urban areas, 42% from rural areas.
- by teaching degree: 4.5% of teachers with a doctorate, 65.5% with a teaching degree I, 13.6% of teachers with degree II, 14.5% with a definitive degree, 2% beginners
- by the main discipline taught: teachers of biology, chemistry, socio-humanities, physical education and sports, music education, physics, history, geography, computer science, ICT, food industry, foreign languages, mathematics, Romanian language, religion.

For students, we have identified the following categories according to the following independent variables:

- gender (19% male, 81% female)
- the age of the respondents between 16 and 19 years old
- class of studies: 41% of the eleventh grade, 59% of the twelfth grade
- by home environment: 56% of the subjects come from rural areas, and 44% of subjects from urban areas.
- by course of study: 73% of the theoretical track, 25% of the vocational track and 2% of the technological track (2.3%)
- specializations: social sciences, philology, natural sciences, pedagogy, theology, handball, mathematics-computer science, computer technology.
- according to the father's level of education, 56% of the fathers have a high school education, and 17% have university studies; according to the mother's level of education, 51% high school education, and 27% university.

2.1. Research objectives

1. Probing the perception of teachers and students regarding *the formative valences of socio-human disciplines*;
2. Identifying the perception of teachers and students on the number of hours allocated to socio-human disciplines;
3. Evaluation by teachers and students of the role of socio-human disciplines in the formation of students;
4. Evaluation of opinions on the integration of young people with socio-human studies into the labour market;

5. Identifying students' suggestions on increasing the efficiency/quality of socio-human disciplines.

2.2. Study hypotheses:

H1. There is a statistically significant difference between the teachers' and students' appraisals regarding the importance of the socio-human subjects studied during high school.

H2. The expansion of the number of social science hours is supported to a greater extent by students than by teachers.

H3. The importance given by students to socio-human disciplines is significantly different according to their gender, class of studies, course of study and environment of residence.

H4. The social sciences are perceived as being recommended to students rather than to students.

H5. The contribution of social sciences to the development of young people is significantly different perceived by teachers and students.

The research was carried out between July 21 and July 31, 2022, through questionnaires completed in Google Docs sent by email, WhatsApp and Messenger both individually and within groups of teachers/students. To establish new connections with any respondents, we resorted to the snowball technique. The questionnaire applied to teachers included questions on the state of education, on the assessment of the importance of socio-human subjects in the common core (gymnasium and high school), on the number of hours allocated to these subjects, from which subjects the hours should be reduced if the number of hours allocated to socio-human subjects would increase, how these subjects contribute to the training of young people and the advantages of training students through socio-human disciplines, what genre are these disciplines intended for. The questionnaire applied to students included questions regarding the state of education, the main subjects preferred by students, the assessment of the importance of socio-human subjects in the common core of high school, whether the number of hours allocated to these subjects should be increased, from which subjects the hours should be reduced if the number of hours allocated to socio-human subjects would increase, how these disciplines contribute to the training of young people/the advantages of training students through socio-human disciplines, which gender these disciplines are intended for. Also, the students were asked if in that school year they chose optional subjects in the socio-human field, if they would change anything in the way the socio-human classes are conducted, if they want to take the baccalaureate in a discipline in the socio-human field, with whom they advise about their future from an educational point of view and if they intend to study and work in another country.

2.3. Results

a. Teachers' opinions and representations

- formative valences of socio-human disciplines

For the teachers, the formative valences of the socio-human disciplines were expressed very suggestively and we will state some appreciations. Thus, these disciplines are characterized by:

- are of interest and topical;
- helps students to know themselves;
- training skills in reasoned communication;
- the development of critical thinking;
- anchoring students in the reality that surrounds them;
- the study of socio-human disciplines facilitates the use of tools for the social integration of individuals;
- students must know everything related to the organization of a democratic society, rights, duties, but also responsibilities;

- the number of hours in the school curricula

If these subjects are useful, then should the number of hours be higher? Those who answered that it is not necessary to increase the number of hours allocated to socio-human subjects justified it especially from the perspective of the students' schedule, which is already very busy. One respondent also pointed out *that* „in general, these subjects are taught only theoretically, unrelated to everyday life, and are just a way of forcing students to either regurgitate half-understood information or promote half-understood ideas taken wholesale from Western schools. Given that students have the freedom to choose optional subjects, in the final grades of high school, only then do I think these subjects are welcomed for students who have the passion and desire to deepen them*"*. Other respondents draw attention to the fact that the timetable of students in Romania is very busy and they study a very large number of subjects.

- the usefulness of socio-human studies

Through the study of socio-human disciplines - say the teachers - young people are formed as active citizens in society. According to respondents, socio-human disciplines contribute to the formation of young people by cultivating respect for human values, freedom, democracy (81.8%), development of critical thinking (74.5%), and respect for citizens' rights and obligations (66.4%). 30% consider that they have a role in orientation and active insertion in the social environment and only 10.9% consider that they have a role in the development of political culture. The most relevant advantage of studying socio-human disciplines lies in the fact that students can become informed, active, and responsible citizens (78.2%) but also the easier way to understand society as a whole (59.1%). Also, students can develop their democratic spirit (31.8%), understand the functioning of public institutions (30.9%) and acquire a civic culture (26.4%).

- integration into the labour market

Regarding finding a job, 51.8% of respondents believe that young people who want to specialize in social sciences and humanities will have no problems finding a job, while 53 respondents out of 110 (48.2%) believe that they will have problems finding a job.

b. Students' opinions and representations

- the importance of socio-human disciplines

Regarding the importance of socio-human disciplines in the training of young people, respondents said that Psychology (77 respondents), Entrepreneurial Education (59), Economics (52) and Sociology (44 respondents) are very important.

- the number of hours in the school curricula

40.6% of students answered that the number should be increased, while 28.6% answered that the number of hours should not be increased. Those who answered *yes* justified their choice by thinking about how these disciplines help young people to adapt to changes in society, to understand the society in which they live, to develop skills related to communication and establishing social relationships and the contribution made to personal development as follows:

- because students need to understand the perpetual changes in society;
- because it helps us develop and communicate;
- because socio-human disciplines are much more applicable in everyday life;
- the socio-human disciplines contribute to the formation of argumentation, empathy and understanding of emotional skills as well as to learning healthy ways of expressing them, to understanding one's self, forming one's personality, one's own opinions and choosing one's values, all these skills being essential for a better future. The other subjects, such as mathematics or physics, are also important, but no matter how much mathematics you know, if you are a corrupt man, you will still do more harm than a civic man with less knowledge in these areas;

- the usefulness of socio-human studies

The development of critical thinking was chosen by 85.7% as the most relevant when we talk about the training of young people through socio-human disciplines. This is followed by the cultivation of respect for human values, freedom and democracy (69.2%) and respect for citizens' rights and freedoms (53.4%). 40.6% of students appreciate orientation and active insertion in the social environment and the development of political culture (22.6%). The advantages resulting from the study of socio-human disciplines are the following: students can become informed, active, and responsible citizens (72.2%), they can better understand the society in which they live (66.2%) and comprehend the functioning of public institutions (42.1%).

- integration into the labour market

Young people who want to specialize in social sciences will have no problems finding a job, according to 50.4% of students, while 49.6% believe they will find it harder to find a job and 97% of respondents they are intended for both girls and boys equally

- suggestions for improving the quality of socio-human classes

If they had the opportunity to change the way the socio-human classes are conducted, some of the students would not want to make changes being satisfied with the way they are carried out, others would change the way of teaching, approach, nonchalance on the part of both students and teachers, more practical activities. This question corresponds to objective 4, namely „identifying students' suggestions on increasing the efficiency/quality of socio-human disciplines". Therefore, several students highlighted that they would like more practical activities, but also more attractive teaching accompanied by PowerPoint presentations, images, videos, filling out subject-specific questionnaires, etc. Other students said the following:

- the class should be more interactive, for example, students should present projects or case studies;
- I would change the way it is carried out, in addition to theory I would also introduce real-life examples or even experiments;
- lack of materials in English, lack of fluency in English (useful for search engines - there are many more academic materials in English; for the socio-human disciplines to reach the level of the real ones, it is necessary to use this language for each lesson as well as the opportunities it provides to the learners in terms of abundance of information);
- emphasizing informative videos on debates and topics presented in an interesting way in English, changing the emphasis on competition between groups to the detriment of those between individuals (in the case of 30 students, only one cannot express his opinion without disinterest or ridicule from all the others, a diminished effect in the case of debates between groups);
- socio-human classes could be improved by carrying out more practical activities such as visits to institutions or participating in various debates in which students can get involved in social life.

c. Testing statistical hypotheses

H1. There are statistically significant differences between teachers and students in assessing the usefulness of socio-human disciplines.

We proposed for testing this hypothesis a set of socio-human disciplines Logic, Argumentation and Communication, Entrepreneurial Education, Psychology, Economics, Sociology, Philosophy, and Social Studies. The results of statistical analysis is in next table:

Table 3. Nonparametric test for testing differences in independent samples (teachers and students)

	Logic, argumentation and communication	Entrepreneurial education	Psycology	Economy	Sociology	Philosophy	Social Studies
Mann-Whitney U	3981	6411	7172.5	6432	5921.5	3826	5591.5
Wilcoxon W	12892	15322	16083.5	15343	14832.5	12737	14502.5
Z	-6.459	-1.816	-0.298	-1.749	-2.746	-6.724	-3.383
Asymp. Mr. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.069	0.766	0.080	0.006	0.000	0.001

From the analysis of the table we can see that there are statistically significant differences in the case of the following disciplines: Logic, argumentation and communication (U=3981, Z=-6.459, p=0.000), sociology (U=5921.5, Z=-2.746, p=0.006), philosophy (U=3826, Z=-6.724, p=0.000), social studies (U=5591.5, Z=-3.383, p=0.001). From the frequency tables, we found that teachers consider Logic, argumentation and communication more useful than students indicate (mean ranks: 152.3>96.9), also sociology (mean ranks: 134.6>111.5) then philosophy (153.7>95.7) and finally social studies (mean ranks: 153.7>95.7). Otherwise, the opinions of students and teachers do not differ significantly. The research hypothesis is partially confirmed.

H2. The expansion of the number of social science hours is supported to a greater extent by students than by teachers.

The preferences of teachers and students for the time dedicated to socio-humanistic disciplines were distributed in the next table:

Table 4. Overtime requirement for socio-humanistic disciplines

	Teachers	Students
Fewer hours	22%	23%
Same number of hours	62%	53%
More hours	16%	24%

The relatively higher values for the students' preferences are observed. Statistical analysis revealed that there is no association between the two variables (Chi Square=2.49, df=2, p=0.287). In other words, there are no significant differences between teachers and students in terms of the demand for overtime in the socio-human field. The hypothesis is not confirmed.

H3. The importance given by students to socio-human disciplines is significantly different according to their gender, class of study and course of study.

a. Gender differences

The results of the statistical analysis are visible in the following table:

Table 5. Nonparametric test of differences in independent samples (according to the gender of respondents)

	Logic, argumentation and communication	Entrepreneurial education	Psycology	Economy	Sociology	Philosophy	Social Studies
Mann-Whitney U	1244	1346	1312.5	1304.5	1260	1165.5	1224.5
Wilcoxon W	7130	1671	1637.5	7190.5	1585	7051.5	1549.5
Z	-0.634	-0.025	-0.245	-0.28	-0.549	-1.12	-0.765
Asymp. Mr. (2-tailed)	0.526	0.98	0.806	0.779	0.583	0.263	0.444

We note that in all cases Asymp. Sig is above 0.05. We deduce that there is no statistically significant difference between boys and girls in terms of assessing the importance of socio-human records. The hypothesis is not confirmed.

b. Differences by class of study

And in this case all Asymp thresholds. Sig were above 0.05. The only exception was given by the discipline Philosophy (U=1618, Z=-2.539, p=0.011) in which the students of the eleventh grade showed a greater interest than the students of the twelfth grade (mean ranks: 76.5>60.2)! This result is all the more surprising as the subject is done in the final grade!

c. Differences by course of study

For this analysis, we have retained only students from the theoretical track and those from the vocational track. And in this case all Asymp thresholds. Sig were above 0.05. The only exception was given by the discipline Entrepreneurial Education (U=1082, Z=-2.995, p=0.003) in which students from the vocational track showed a greater interest than students from the theoretical track (mean ranks: 76.5>60.2)! The hypothesis is partially confirmed!

H4. The social sciences are perceived as being recommended to female students rather than to boy students.

Table 6. Destination of the socio-humanistic disciplines

	They are intended for everyone equally	They are rather meant for girls	They are rather intended for boys	Total
Teachers	106	4	0	110
Students	129	3	1	133
Total	235	7	1	243

It is observed that teachers or students consider in their vast majority that socio-human disciplines are intended for everyone equally. The two variables are not associated (Chi Square=1.22, df=2, p=0.541). There are no statistically significant differences between teachers' and students' choices. Most of them consider that these subjects are equally intended for boys and girls. The hypothesis is not confirmed.

H5. The contribution of social sciences to the development of young people is significantly different perceived by teachers and students.

In the questionnaire, the respondents received a list of training modalities provided by the socio-human sciences as follows:

- Development of critical thinking
- Active listening
- Cultivating respect for human values, freedom, democracy
- Orientation and active insertion in the social environment
- Political participation
- Political culture
- Respect for citizens' rights and obligations

Respondents were asked to choose only three answer options. If three variables were thus generated, we analyzed a single summative variable with multiple choices. The statistical analysis expanded to see specific differences by respondent types. The results were as follows:

Table 7. The contribution of social sciences to the development of young people

	Development of critical thinking	Active listening	Cultivatig respect for human values, freedom, democray	Orientation and insertion in the social environment	Political participation	Political culture	Respect for citizen rights/obligations
Teachers	74.5%	25.5%	81.8%	28.2%	12.7%	8.2%	62.7%
Students	85.7%	21.1%	69.2%	40.6%	9.8%	22.6%	48.1%

The two variables are associated (Chi Square = 29.6, df = 7, p = 0.000) in other words teachers and students evaluate differently the contribution of social sciences to the development of young people. We notice that students are more confident in this contribution when we talk about Critical Thinking Development, Orientation, and Active Insertion in the Social Environment or Political Culture. Teachers in turn insist more on Active Listening, Cultivating respect for human values, freedom, democracy Political participation and respect for citizens' rights and obligations. In conclusion, the hypothesis is confirmed.

3. Conclusions

Through this study, we pursued a series of objectives such as: probing the perception of teachers and students regarding *the formative valences of socio-human disciplines*, identifying the perception of teachers and students on the number of hours allocated to socio-human disciplines, evaluation by teachers and students of the role of socio-human disciplines in the formation of students, evaluation of opinions regarding the integration of young people with socio-human studies on the labor market, identification of students' suggestions regarding increasing the efficiency/quality of socio-human disciplines.

The empirical approach has totally or partially confirmed a series of hypotheses as follows:

H1. There is a statistically significant difference between teachers' and students' assessments regarding the importance of the socio-human subjects studied during high school – partially confirmed (teachers and students have different evaluations in the case of the following subjects: Logic, Argumentation and Communication, Sociology, Philosophy and Social Studies. These subjects are considered by teachers to be more important in education than students consider them)

H2. The extension of the number of hours of social sciences is supported to a greater extent by students than by teachers- not confirmed (there are no significant differences between teachers and students in terms of the demand for overtime in the socio-human field)

H3. The importance given by students to socio-human disciplines is significantly different according to their gender, class of studies, course of study and environment of residence. Partially confirmed (that there is no statistically significant difference between boys and girls in terms of assessing the importance of socio-human disciplines; students in the eleventh grade showed greater interest than the students in the twelfth grade in the discipline of Philosophy; entrepreneurial education, students in the vocational stream showed greater interest than students in the theoretical track in terms of Entrepreneurial Education)

H4. The social sciences are perceived as being recommended to female students rather than to boy students. Unconfirmed (respondents consider that socio-human subjects are intended for all students regardless of gender!)

H5. The contribution of social sciences to the development of young people is significantly different perceived by teachers and students. Confirmed.

The present research must be continued on large representative samples in several regions/counties. The theme is very topical because the social education of young people has strong reverberations throughout society. The fact that these social subjects can be taught and learned in creative ways is due to the willingness to take feedback from students.

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SCIENTIFIC ANNALS OF „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" UNIVERSITY OF IASI
VOLUME XVII/2, SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK, 2024

DOI:10.47743/asas-2024-2-778

INTEGRATED SOCIAL SERVICES FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN RISKY SITUATIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA THROUGH THE LENS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Abstract: The article presents integrated social services for children as an essential element in the protection and well-being of vulnerable children in the Republic of Moldova. Integrated social services take a coordinated approach, combining interventions from health, education, social protection and legal support. They address the complex needs of children at risk, including separated children, children affected by poverty and children with disabilities. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relevant for Moldova from the perspective of integrated social services are: eradicating poverty (SDG 1), ensuring health and well-being (SDG 3), ensuring quality education (SDG 4), reducing inequalities (SDG 10); promoting justice and inclusion (SDG 16) and strengthening partnerships (SDG 17). The SDGs form a comprehensive set that ensure sustainable development in Moldova and contribute to improving the quality of life including for people in vulnerable groups.

Keywords: integrated social services for children, vulnerable children, children in risky situations, sustainable development goals

Résumé : L'article présente les services sociaux intégrés pour les enfants comme un élément essentiel de la protection et du bien-être des enfants vulnérables en République de Moldavie. Les services sociaux intégrés adoptent une approche coordonnée, combinant des interventions dans les domaines de la santé, de l'éducation, de la protection sociale et du soutien juridique. Ils répondent aux besoins complexes des enfants à risque, y compris les enfants séparés, les enfants touchés par la pauvreté et les enfants handicapés. Les objectifs de développement durable (ODD) pertinents pour la Moldavie du point de vue des services sociaux intégrés sont les suivants : éradiquer la pauvreté (ODD 1), assurer la santé et le bien-être (ODD 3), assurer une éducation de qualité (ODD 4), réduire les inégalités (ODD 10), promouvoir la justice et l'inclusion (ODD 16) et renforcer les partenariats (ODD 17). Les ODD forment un ensemble complet qui garantit le développement durable en Moldavie et contribue à l'amélioration de la qualité de vie, y compris pour les personnes appartenant à des groupes vulnérables.

Mots-clés : services sociaux intégrés pour les enfants, enfants vulnérables, enfants en situation de risque, objectifs de développement durable

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Rezumat: Articolul prezintă serviciile sociale integrate pentru copii ca un element esențial în protecția și bunăstarea copiilor vulnerabili din Republica Moldova. Serviciile sociale integrate adoptă o abordare coordonată, combinând intervenții din domenii precum sănătatea, educația, protecția socială și suportul juridic. Ele vizează nevoile complexe ale copiilor aflați în situații de risc, inclusiv cei separați de părinți, cei afectați de sărăcie și copiii cu dizabilități. Obiectivele de Dezvoltare Durabilă (ODD) relevante pentru R. Moldova din perspectiva serviciilor sociale integrate sunt: eradicarea sărăciei (ODD1), asigurarea sănătații și bunăstării (ODD 3), garantarea educaţiei de calitate (ODD 4), reducerea inegalităţilor (ODD 10); promovarea justiției și incluziunii (ODD 16) și consolidarea parteneriatelor (ODD 17). ODD-urile formează un set complet ce asigură dezvoltarea durabilă în Moldova și contribuie la imbunatățirea calității vieții inclusiv pentru persoanele din grupuri vulnerabile.

Cuvinte cheie: serviciile sociale integrate pentru copii, copii vulnerabili, copiilor aflați în situații de risc, obiective de dezvoltare durabilă

1. Introduction

Integrated social services for children represent an essential pillar in the protection and assurance of the well-being of vulnerable children, offering a holistic and coordinated approach to meet the complex needs of children. Social services for families and children at risk in the Republic of Moldova combine interventions from various fields such as health, education, social protection, and legal support, to provide solutions adapted to children in vulnerable situations, such as those separated from their parents, affected by poverty, or with disabilities. The provision of integrated social services for children aims to prevent social exclusion and marginalization, ensuring a support environment that facilitates harmonious development and active participation in community life (Goodwin, 2021). A fundamental aspect of integrated social services is the intersectoral collaboration between public institutions and non-governmental organizations, ensuring that children and their families receive multidisciplinary and personalized support.

2. Theoretical Perspective

The European social network conceptualizes the first definitions of integrated social services, where integrated social services are a coordinated system of interventions aimed at vulnerable groups, seeking to offer an adapted response to the needs of beneficiaries through collaboration between various sectors, such as health, education, social assistance, and legal services. The purpose of integrated social services is to prevent social exclusion and to facilitate inclusion and well-being through a holistic approach to the issues faced by beneficiaries (European Social Network, 2016). Isabelle Natalina Fabbricotti highlights the importance of coordinated actions at various levels to ensure efficient and beneficiary-centered care (Fabbricotti, 2006). Children's needs can be addressed effectively through an integrated approach, which prevents institutionalization and offers alternatives for community-based care, promoting social inclusion and improving the quality of life for vulnerable children, through long-term development-oriented interventions and the realization of fundamental rights.

In the context of developing integrated social services for children, the Republic of Moldova has ratified a series of international normative acts concerning children's rights. These include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1993, and its optional protocols regarding children's involvement in armed conflicts, ratified in 2004, and the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography, ratified in 2007. Additionally, Moldova ratified the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding the communications procedure on May 5, 2022. This protocol allows children to file complaints with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child if they believe their rights have been violated and no solution has been found at the national level, either individually or through legal representatives. The protocol serves as a tool for investigating severe or systemic violations of children's rights (Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the procedure of communication, 2022). The 54 articles of the Convention cover essential issues, such as every child's need for a family and protection from discrimination, regardless of factors such as gender, age, or religion. The state has the responsibility to ensure the conditions and resources for the healthy growth and education of children, while the child services must comply with the norms established, particularly in the areas of safety and health. According to the Convention, both parents have shared responsibility for raising and developing the child, and the state must oversee the enforcement of this principle. The state is also obligated to protect children from violence, harm, and physical or psychological abuse, including within the family. The right to full health and access to health services are recognized as fundamental rights of the child, with an emphasis on primary and preventive care. The Ministry of Social Protection, Family, and Children plays a key role in ensuring the respect of children's rights and in implementing legislative tools for social progress and human rights within European democracies.

Through the ratification of the Association Agreement with the European Union, as provided by Law no. 112 of July 2, 2014, the legal basis for the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union was established. Upon signing this agreement, our country committed to ensuring a balanced and adjusted social policy according to the current conditions. Article 151 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) outlines the objectives of the EU's social policy: promoting employment, improving living and working conditions, equal treatment of workers, providing adequate social protection according to needs, fostering social dialogue, and developing human resources to enable high and sustainable levels of employment and combat exclusion (EUR-Lex. Social policy) Thus, public policies should aim to ensure an adequate level of welfare and social security for all members of society. Harmonizing the regulatory framework of the Republic of Moldova with the European system and raising the living standards of citizens in difficult situations represent the primary challenge for all institutions in the Republic of Moldova.

Most of the international commitments have been transposed into the national legislative and regulatory framework for the protection of children's rights. In this regard, we note:

The legislation in the Republic of Moldova in the field of child protection and social services reflects a constant concern for the welfare of children and vulnerable families, being periodically updated to respond to the current needs of society. These are outlined in:

- The Family Code no. 1316 of October 26, 2000, which establishes the legal foundations for family relations and child protection, emphasizing the importance of ensuring a safe and adequate environment for their development.
- Law no. 370 of November 30, 2023, on children's rights, which establishes the principles and procedures for the protection of children's rights, placement in foster families, and other protective measures.
- Law no. 547 of December 25, 2003, on social assistance and Law no. 123 of June 18, 2010, on social services, which complement the general framework for social assistance and services, highlighting the state's role in supporting vulnerable categories of the population.
- Law no. 121 of May 3, 2001, regarding the supplementary social protection of certain population categories and Law no. 315 of December 23, 2016, on social benefits for children, which clarify legal aspects related to allowances and indemnities granted to families and children in difficult situations.
- Other successive government decisions, such as Decision no. 1478 of November 15, 2002, on indemnities for families with children, and Decision no. 409 of April 9, 1998, regarding the approval of the Regulations of the National Council for the Protection of Children's Rights, regulate the provision of indemnities and support for children, consolidating a legal and procedural framework to ensure equitable access to necessary resources for their protection and development.

Currently, the National Program for Child Protection for the years 2022-2026, which gives special attention to a systemic approach, is being implemented to ensure the relevance of the policy document (National Child Protection Program for 2022-2026). The programme includes the development of change theory, participatory identification and selection of priority intervention areas, estimating the necessary resources for implementation, and developing a monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanism. The action plan for its implementation is aligned with the National Development Strategy „Moldova 2030," which is also focused on ensuring a solid and inclusive social protection system and a balance between work and family, addressing the challenges of the social assistance system and the conclusions drawn in the analysis of the „Mid-Term

Evaluation of the Implementation of the Child Protection Strategy for 2014-2020 and the Action Plan for 2016-2020." (The government of the Republic of Moldova on the approval of the draft law on the approval of National Development Strategy „Moldova 2030").

The three proposed general objectives provide a new approach to setting development priorities for the child protection system:

1. The child protection system responds promptly and efficiently to the needs of each child.
2. Adults and children manifest zero tolerance toward any form of violence against children.
3. Children grow up in a safe and protective family environment that ensures their well-being (National Development Strategy of Social Services for Children and Families 2022-2025, 2022).

The impact of the National Program is expected to improve all areas of children's welfare, including reference to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To effectively address the complex challenges faced by families and children in risk situations, an integrated and multisectoral approach is necessary. Therefore, cross-sector collaboration in education, health, justice, and social assistance is essential to provide coherent and coordinated support. While the Republic of Moldova has made significant progress in providing social services, major challenges still exist that hinder the full achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a strategic framework for developing sustainable and effective social policies aimed at supporting vulnerable families and children in Moldova. Key SDGs include:

- **SDG 1**: Eradicating poverty in all forms, with social services playing a key role in poverty reduction. Social services have a prioritar rol in reducing poverty by providing material, financial and psychological suport for families and children at-risk, contributing to the prevention and reduction of extreme poverty.
- **SDG 3**: Ensuring good health and well-being for all. Integrated social services promote access to medical care, psychological support, and the creation of a healthy environment for vulnerable children and families, contributing to the improvement of overall health and well-being.
- **SDG 4**: Guaranteeing quality education and lifelong learning. Social services facilitate access for vulnerable children to quality education, preventing school abandonment and supporting their academic development. Education is essential for preventing social exclusion and providing equal opportunities for all. Additionally, in the Republic of Moldova, parenting education programs have been developed and implemented in recent periods, facilitating lifelong learning.
- **SDG 10**: Reducing inequalities within and among countries. Serviciile sociale integrate sunt esențiale pentru reducerea inegalităților economice

și sociale, asigurând acces echitabil la resurse și oportunități pentru toate familiile și copiii, indiferent de mediul lor de proveniență.

- **SDG 16**: Promoting peaceful, inclusive societies and access to justice. In this context, the development of integrated social services is a major challenge for the Republic of Moldova. The fragmentation of social services and the lack of effective coordination between sectors (education, health, social protection) hinder the provision of integrated support for families and children. Another difficulty in developing integrated services is the development of professional capacity among service providers and improving collaboration between the institutions involved, as confirmed by the study „Needs of social service providers in relation to children separated from parents and children in risk situations" conducted in 2015 by Diana Cheianu-Andrei (Cheianu-Andrei, 2015).
- **SDG 17:** Partnerships for the Goals emphasize the need for international collaboration to mobilize additional resources. The approach supports the development of sustainable and equitable solutions for providing social services to vulnerable groups, contributing to broader social inclusion. Social services in Moldova face a severe lack of financial and human resources, limiting the ability to deliver uniform and quality services for all at-risk children nationwide. The study „Social services for people with intellectual and psycho-social disabilities and children from vulnerable groups" by Ludmila Ciocan highlights major challenges such as limited access to services, lack of specialized personnel, insufficient funding, and uneven territorial distribution of services (Ciocan, 2018).

A synthesis of the Sustainable Development Goals framework, which outlines strategic support for social policies for vulnerable families and children in Moldova, is represented graphically in the next figure:

Figure 1. Support for families and children at risk in Moldova through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
Source: The author in the documentation process

These goals emphasize addressing Moldova's challenges, including service fragmentation, inadequate resources, and the need for improved inter-sectoral coordination.

Although there are numerous challenges, the 2030 Agenda also provides important opportunities for improving social services for families and children at risk in Moldova:

- The development of new intervention models, including community-based services and digital platforms for counseling and support, could contribute to expanding access and the efficiency of social services.
- Partnerships with international organizations and external donors represent an important source of funding and expertise for developing and improving social services.
- Another essential aspect is the active involvement of local communities in the decision-making process and implementation of social programs. This ensures the sustainability and relevance of the services provided, directly contributing to their success.

To create and implement an integrated service model in the Republic of Moldova that includes social assistance, education, healthcare, and psychological counseling, evaluating effectiveness is crucial. Evaluation helps understand the impact of social services on vulnerable communities to ensure that the needs of families and children at risk are met sustainably. The expertise of those involved can help identify best practices and adjust services to effectively address the SDGs, particularly SDG 1 (poverty), SDG 3 (health), and SDG 4 (education). To this end, we consulted the opinions of five experts through a focus group research. The experts' opinions suggest that: *Evaluation should be based on clearly defined and measurable indicators, such as the accessibility of services for vulnerable families, their involvement in the intervention process, and the improvement of social and educational outcomes for children (FG_1). An essential tool would be the use of both quantitative methods, such as surveys, and qualitative methods, such as interviews and direct observations, to provide a comprehensive picture of service effectiveness (FG_3). Evaluation must also involve the opinions of direct beneficiaries, namely children, families, and the community, to obtain relevant feedback (FG_4). ... The impact evaluation should take into account the costs and benefits of the intervention (FG_2); ... using available resources to maximize impact on the community (FG_5). Continuous monitoring of progress is necessary to identify improvements or potential issues that may arise in service implementation and to ensure that they meet the specific needs of vulnerable families (FG_3). An adaptive approach, which responds in real time to contextual changes and community needs, will contribute to the sustainability of long-term interventions (FG_6).* The experts' opinions underline the necessity of an adaptive approach in evaluation, one that quickly responds to changes in the community and allows for adjusting interventions based on the local context's evolution.

3. The main conclusions reached in the analysis

Integrated social services for families and children at risk in the Republic of Moldova are essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, providing support to the most vulnerable members of society. A systemic and multisectoral approach is necessary to ensure effective interventions that address the complex needs of vulnerable individuals. Implementing these services in line with the SDGs can help reduce inequalities, promote social inclusion, and ensure sustainable development. Integrated social services are a priority for supporting the most vulnerable members of society, such as children facing poverty, discrimination, or lack of access to education and healthcare. A systemic and multisectoral approach is essential, as the needs of vulnerable people are often interconnected and require interventions from various fields. The development of integrated social services for children at risk in line with the SDGs not only contributes to reducing inequalities but also promotes social inclusion through a holistic approach, facilitating the integration of vulnerable children into society and ensuring equal chances for education and harmonious development according to the individual needs of children. The experts' opinions emphasize the need for an adaptive approach in evaluation that quickly responds to community changes and allows for adjusting interventions based on local context evolution.

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