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Exploring stakeholder perspectives on eco-tourism and eco-hotels in Albania

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Abstract

This study investigates the perspectives of various stakeholders on the development and functionality of eco-tourism and eco-hotels in Albania. Utilizing a semi-structured questionnaire, the research gathered insights from hotel managers, owners, employees, suppliers, farmers, recycling and waste disposal companies, tourism experts, and government representatives. The study aims to understand the challenges, opportunities, and necessary steps for advancing eco-friendly practices within the Albanian hospitality sector. The findings reveal several critical challenges, including high costs, lack of awareness, and insufficient government support, which hinder the widespread adoption of sustainable practices. Despite these obstacles, stakeholders are optimistic about the future growth potential of eco-tourism, driven by increasing consumer demand for sustainable tourism experiences. Key opportunities identified include market differentiation, international collaboration, and the development of education and training programs to enhance sustainability awareness and expertise. The study also emphasizes the importance of stakeholder collaboration in promoting eco-tourism and the adoption of innovative eco-friendly practices, such as renewable energy sources, zero waste programs, and sustainable transportation. Recommendations for policymakers include providing robust support and incentives, improving eco-tourism infrastructure, and developing clear policies to encourage sustainable practices. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies and comparative analyses to further understand the dynamics of eco-tourism development.

Keywords: Eco-tourism, sustainable practices, stakeholder perspectives, hospitality industry, Albania, environmental sustainability.

1. Introduction

The increasing awareness of environmental issues and the impact of the hospitality industry on ecosystems has spurred a significant shift towards sustainable practices worldwide (Lew et al., 2020). Ecological hotels, also known as green hotels, embody this shift by integrating principles of sustainability into their operations to minimize their ecological footprint (The International Ecotourism Society, 2015). In Albania, a country renowned for its natural beauty and burgeoning tourism sector, the role of ecological hotels is becoming increasingly critical. This paper investigates the approach of interest groups towards the concept and functionality of ecological hotels in Albania, aiming to understand the implementation of environmental best practices within the hotel industry.

The concept of ecological hotels is rooted in the broader movement of sustainable development, which seeks to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017; Moise et al., 2018). Ecological hotels are distinguished by their commitment to environmental stewardship, which includes energy efficiency, water conservation, waste reduction, and the use of sustainable materials and resources (Bohdanowicz & Zientara, 2008; Kasim, 2007). Moreover, these establishments often engage in practices that contribute to the local community's socioeconomic development, thereby embodying the triple bottom line approach of economic viability, environmental protection, and social equity (Salman et al., 2020).

In Albania, the hotel industry plays a vital role in the national economy, with tourism contributing significantly to GDP and employment (Pojani & Grabova, 2022; Seidl, 2014). However, the rapid growth of this sector has raised concerns regarding its environmental impact, particularly in terms of resource consumption and waste generation (Republic of Albania. Council of Ministers, 2022; The World Bank, 2021). As such, there is a pressing need to explore the adoption of green practices within Albanian hotels to ensure the sustainable development of the tourism industry (Bego & Malltezi, 2011; Dibra, 2023; Pojani & Grabova, 2022).

Interest groups, including hotel managers, owners, employees, suppliers, farmers, recycling and waste disposal companies, tourism experts, and government representatives, are key stakeholders in the promotion and implementation of sustainable practices in the hotel industry (Fallah & Soori, 2023; Juneja & Banerjee, 2023). Their perspectives and strategies are crucial for understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with ecological hotels in Albania. By examining the views of these interest groups through a semi-structured questionnaire, this study seeks to uncover the relationship between environmental responsibility and the adoption of green practices in the Albanian hotel industry.

2. Literature Review

The increasing emphasis on sustainable development across various sectors has significantly influenced the hospitality and tourism industry (Romagosa, 2020). Eco-tourism, defined as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education (Butler, 1999; Derks et al., 2020; The International Ecotourism Society, 2015), has emerged as a critical component of sustainable tourism.

2.1 Eco-tourism and sustainable practices: Eco-tourism integrates environmental conservation with socio-economic benefits for local communities. It is characterized by minimal impact on the environment, conservation of biodiversity, and enhancement of the cultural integrity of local people (Seraphin et al., 2018). The concept of eco-tourism goes beyond mere tourism; it embodies an ethos of respect for nature and local cultures, fostering a sustainable relationship between tourism and the environment (Gössling et al., 2020).

Sustainable practices in the hospitality industry include a broad range of initiatives designed to reduce the ecological footprint of tourism operations. These practices encompass energy efficiency measures such as the use of renewable energy sources, implementation of energy-saving devices, and optimization of energy use through smart technologies (Hsieh, 2012; Jones et al., 2014). Waste management practices involve reducing waste generation, promoting recycling, and managing waste disposal in an environmentally friendly manner (Bohdanowicz & Zientara, 2008). Water conservation efforts include the use of low-flow fixtures, rainwater harvesting, and wastewater treatment and reuse.

The use of eco-friendly products, such as biodegradable cleaning agents and sustainable building materials, further supports the sustainability of hospitality operations. These practices not only contribute to environmental preservation but also enhance the marketability of tourism businesses by attracting eco-conscious consumers.

2.2 Stakeholder collaboration: Effective eco-tourism development requires the collaboration of various stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector (Romagosa, 2020).

Each stakeholder group brings unique perspectives, resources, and expertise that are critical to the successful implementation of sustainable tourism practices.

Government agencies play a pivotal role in formulating policies, providing regulatory frameworks, and offering financial incentives to encourage sustainable practices (Sigala, 2020). Local communities are essential for the on-ground implementation of eco-tourism initiatives and for ensuring that tourism benefits are equitably distributed. Their involvement is crucial for preserving local cultures and fostering community support for eco-tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Lapointe, 2020).

NGOs contribute by advocating for environmental conservation, providing technical expertise, and facilitating community engagement. The private sector, including tourism businesses and investors, is responsible for implementing eco-friendly practices and innovations that drive the industry's sustainability (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Lapointe, 2020). Studies have highlighted the importance of stakeholder engagement in fostering a shared vision for sustainable tourism and ensuring the successful implementation of eco-friendly initiatives (Romagosa, 2020). Collaborative approaches help align the interests of different stakeholders, promote transparency, and build trust, all of which are vital for the long-term success of eco-tourism projects.

2.3 Challenges and barriers: Despite the benefits, the adoption of eco-friendly practices in the hospitality industry faces several challenges. High implementation costs are a significant barrier, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that may lack the financial resources to invest in sustainable technologies and practices (Zenker & Kock, 2020). The initial capital outlay for energy-efficient systems, waste management infrastructure, and eco-friendly products can be prohibitive (Hall, 2011).

Lack of awareness about the benefits of eco-tourism and sustainable practices is another major challenge. Both industry stakeholders and potential tourists may not fully understand the environmental, social, and economic advantages of sustainable tourism. This gap in knowledge can hinder the adoption of eco-friendly practices and reduce consumer demand for sustainable tourism experiences.

Insufficient government support in the form of policies, incentives, and infrastructure development further complicates the situation. Without a conducive regulatory environment and financial incentives, businesses may lack the motivation to pursue eco-friendly initiatives.

Cultural resistance to change and the perceived complexity of implementing sustainable practices also pose challenges. In many cases, traditional business practices and attitudes may conflict with the principles of sustainability, making it difficult to achieve widespread adoption of eco-friendly initiatives (Zaida Taylor, 2008).

2.4 Eco-tourism in Albania: Albania, with its diverse natural landscapes and rich cultural heritage, holds significant potential for eco-tourism. The country's mountainous terrain, pristine beaches, and historical sites provide a unique backdrop for sustainable tourism experiences. However, the development of eco-tourism in Albania faces unique challenges that need to be addressed to fully realize its potential (Icka et al., 2021).

The lack of government incentives and support is a major obstacle to the growth of eco-tourism in Albania. Without financial incentives, tax breaks, and supportive policies, businesses may find it challenging to invest in sustainable practices. Furthermore, limited awareness and expertise among industry professionals and the public can hinder the adoption of eco-friendly initiatives (Bego & Malltezi, 2011; Icka et al., 2021; Pojani & Grabova, 2022).

To overcome these challenges, it is crucial to raise awareness about the benefits of eco-tourism and provide training programs that equip industry professionals with the necessary skills and knowledge. Enhancing infrastructure, such as transportation and waste management systems, is also essential to support the growth of eco-tourism in the country.

The growing consumer demand for sustainable tourism experiences is a driving force behind the adoption of eco-friendly practices in the hospitality industry. Research indicates that tourists are increasingly seeking eco-friendly accommodations and activities that minimize their environmental impact (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2008). This shift in consumer preferences presents both opportunities and challenges for the tourism industry.

On the one hand, the rising demand for sustainable tourism experiences creates a market for eco-friendly products and services. Businesses that adopt sustainable practices can differentiate themselves from competitors and attract eco-conscious tourists. This market differentiation can lead to increased customer loyalty, higher occupancy rates, and potentially higher revenues.

On the other hand, meeting the expectations of eco-conscious tourists requires significant investments in sustainable infrastructure, training, and marketing. Businesses must continuously innovate and adapt to changing consumer preferences to remain competitive (Ait-Yahia Ghidouche & Ghidouche, 2019; Halleux, 2017; Lapointe, 2020). This requires a commitment to sustainability at all levels of the organization and a willingness to invest in long-term solutions.

Developing a robust policy and strategic framework is essential for promoting eco-tourism. Governments play a pivotal role in providing financial incentives, establishing regulatory standards, and facilitating stakeholder collaboration (Hall, 2011).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design: The methodology of this study is designed to explore the perspectives and strategies of interest groups towards ecological hotels in Albania, focusing on the integration of environmental best practices within the hotel industry. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research approach was adopted, utilizing semi-structured questionnaires as the primary data collection tool.

The semi-structured questionnaires were carefully designed to elicit detailed responses from participants regarding their views on ecological hotels and the implementation of green practices within the hotel industry in Albania. The questionnaire comprised both open-ended and closed-ended questions, allowing for both quantitative analysis of certain responses and qualitative insights into the perspectives of the respondents. Key themes covered in the questionnaire included awareness and understanding of ecological hotels, perceived benefits and challenges of implementing green practices, and the role of various stakeholders in promoting environmental sustainability in the hotel industry.

The selection of participants aims to represent a broad spectrum of interest groups within the hotel industry, including both internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders consisted of hotel managers, owners, and employees, while external stakeholders included suppliers, farmers, recycling and waste disposal companies, experts from the tourism sector, and representatives from local and national government. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that participants had relevant experience or involvement in the hotel industry and were thus able to provide informed perspectives on the subject matter.

Data collection took place over a two-month period from December 2023 to January 2024. The final sample consisted of 51 respondents, reflecting a diverse range of viewpoints from various interest groups. Participants were contacted via email and social media platforms, with an invitation to participate in the study and a link to the online questionnaire. To encourage participation and ensure a high response rate, follow-up reminders were sent, and the importance of the study for promoting sustainable practices within the Albanian hotel industry was emphasized.

The questionnaires were completed anonymously to ensure confidentiality and to encourage candid responses. Participants were informed that the data collected would be used solely for the purposes of the research and would be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Upon completion of the data collection period, responses were compiled and analyzed to identify common themes, trends, and insights related to the approach of interest groups towards ecological hotels and the implementation of green practices in Albania.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study’s objectives and their rights as participants, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study. Additionally, measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants’ responses, in line with ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects.

The methodology adopted in this study provides a comprehensive framework for investigating the perspectives and strategies of interest groups towards ecological hotels in Albania. By utilizing semi-structured questionnaires to gather qualitative data from a diverse sample of participants, this research aims to contribute valuable insights into the promotion and implementation of environmental best practices within the Albanian hotel industry.

3.2 Descriptive analysis: Table 1 shows some descriptive statistics and insights related to the semi-structured questionnaire responses. Basing on the affiliation, the respondents include a diverse group of stakeholders, such as farmers, experts from the tourism sector, and local government representatives, indicating a broad perspective on the topic. According to the years of experience, Table 1 shows a wide range of experience among the respondents, with a maximum of 30 years and a minimum of 0 years, indicating a diverse set of perspectives. The mean years of experience is 7.31, which suggests that, on average, respondents have a moderate level of experience in the tourism industry.

The familiarity with eco-tourism and eco-hotels indicates that a significant number of respondents have a fair familiarity (21) with eco-tourism and eco-hotels, closely followed by those who are very familiar (19) with the concept. A smaller group of respondents (11) reported not being familiar at all with eco-tourism and eco-hotels. This variation in familiarity levels suggests differing levels of engagement and understanding of eco-tourism concepts among the stakeholders involved in the Albanian hotel industry.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Years of Experience in the Tourism Industry	**Value**
Count	51
Mean	7.31
Std	5.24
Min	0
25%	4
50%	7
75%	10
Max	30
Affiliation	**Frequency**
Farmer	4
Hotel owner	8
Manger	5
Experts from the tourism sector	4
Local government representatives	19
Hotel employee	11
Familiarity with eco-tourism and eco-hotels	**Frequency**
Fair	21
Very familiar	19
Not at all	11

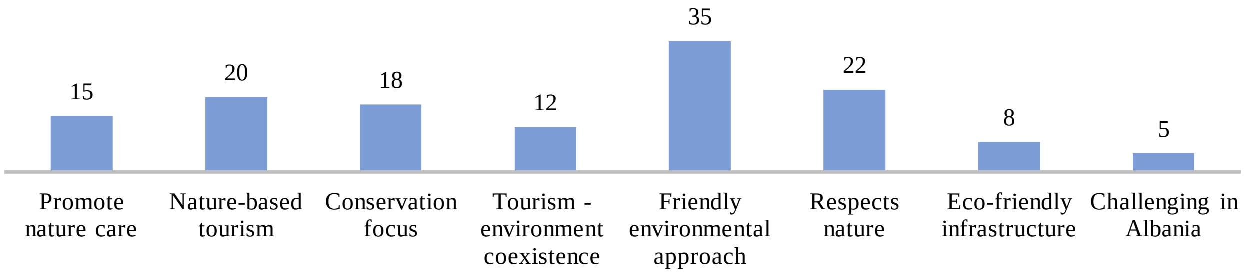
4. Results

Graph 1 shows the meaning of eco-tourism in the context of Albanian tourism, with each bar represents the number of respondents mentioning each topic. Respondents, underscored the importance of eco-tourism as a mechanism to promote the care and preservation of nature (15). This perspective suggests that eco-tourism in Albania is seen as an avenue for raising awareness and fostering a culture of environmental stewardship. Stakeholders identified eco-tourism with tourism activities that are based on, and integrated with, natural environments (20). This highlights the intrinsic value placed on Albania’s natural landscapes as the foundation for eco-tourism experiences.

A recurring theme in the responses was the focus on conservation efforts (18). This signifies an understanding that eco-tourism is not just about enjoying natural beauty, but also about actively contributing to the conservation of these environments for future generations. The idea of coexistence between tourism activities and the environment (12) reflects a balanced approach to eco-tourism, where economic activities are conducted in harmony with ecological preservation. This concept is pivotal for ensuring sustainable tourism development in Albania.

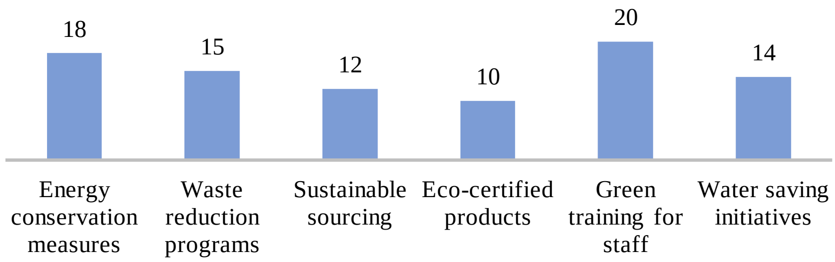
Stakeholders emphasized the need for eco-tourism practices to be environmentally friendly (35), minimizing negative impacts on the environment. This reflects a commitment to sustainable practices that protect the environment while facilitating tourism. Respect for nature (22) emerged also a fundamental principle of eco-tourism in Albania. This suggests that eco-tourism is deeply rooted in a respect for the natural world, guiding the way in which tourism activities are planned and executed.

The mention of eco-friendly infrastructure (8) indicates a recognition of the importance of sustainable infrastructure in supporting eco-tourism. This includes the development of facilities and services that adhere to environmental standards and practices. Acknowledging the challenges of implementing eco-tourism in Albania (5), this reveals the recognition of obstacles such as economic, regulatory, and awareness-related issues that need to be addressed to fully realize the potential of eco-tourism in the country.



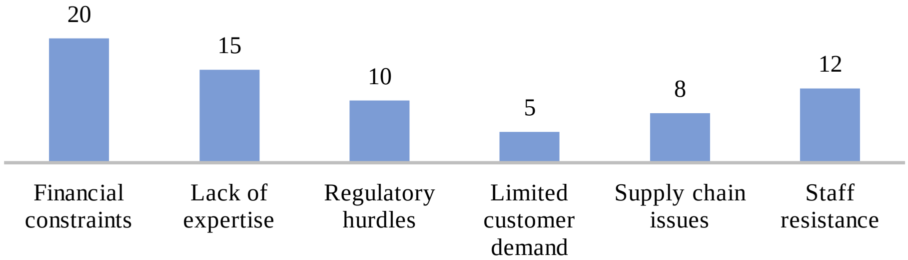
Graph 1. The meaning of eco-tourism in the context of Albanian tourism

In Graph 2 are presented the results for any existing eco-friendly practices in organization/hotel. It reveals a variety of sustainability initiatives currently in place within the Albanian hospitality sector. In particular, energy conservation measures include (18) the use of energy-efficient appliances, lighting, and renewable energy sources aimed at reducing overall energy consumption. Waste reduction programs (15) focus on minimizing waste through recycling, composting, and reducing single-use plastics. Sustainable sourcing (12) involves procuring goods and services from environmentally responsible suppliers, such as locally sourced food and eco-friendly products. Eco-certified products (10) are certified for their low environmental impact, ensuring that hotels use sustainable materials and supplies. Green training for staff (20) emphasizes educating employees about sustainable practices and their role in implementing these practices within the organization. Water saving initiatives (14) include the use of low-flow fixtures, rainwater harvesting, and wastewater treatment systems to conserve water.



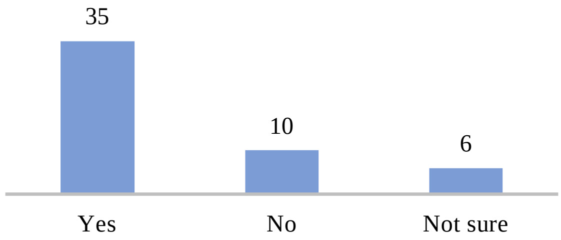
Graph 2. Existing eco-friendly practices the organization/hotel

Graph 3 presents the challenges stakeholders face in implementing eco-friendly initiatives such as financial constraints (20), lack of expertise (15), staff resistance (12), and regulatory hurdles (10). Such insights can be critical in developing strategies to overcome these barriers and promote the adoption of sustainable practices within the hospitality sector.



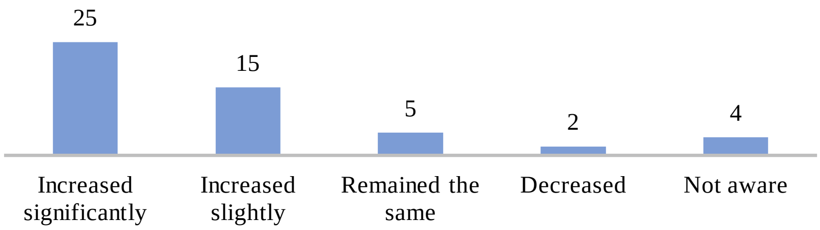
Graph 3. Challenges in implementing eco-friendly initiative

Results about whether there has been an increasing demand for eco-friendly tourism experiences in recent years are presented in Graph 4. A significant majority of the respondents have noticed an increase in demand for eco-friendly tourism (35), indicating a positive trend towards more sustainable tourism practices. A smaller segment of respondents either have not noticed such a demand (10) or are unsure about it (6). There is a growing awareness and preference for eco-friendly tourism experiences among consumers, which could be a driving factor for the industry to adopt more sustainable practices.



Graph 4. Increasing demand for eco-friendly tourism experiences in recent years

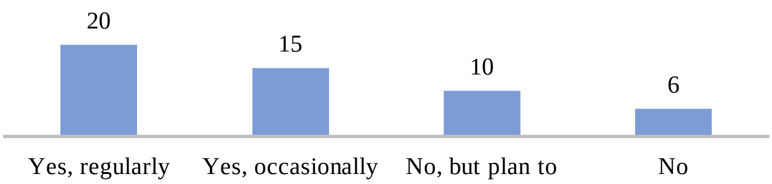
Graph 5 shows the results about the evolution of tourist preferences regarding eco-friendly accommodation. A significant number of respondents believe that there has been a significant increase in the preference for eco-friendly accommodation among tourists (25), while others have noticed a slight increase (15). A smaller number of respondents believe that preferences have remained the same (5) or decreased (2), and a few are not aware of any changes (4). There is a general perception among the surveyed stakeholders that tourist preferences are shifting towards more eco-friendly accommodation options, which can have implications for how the hospitality industry in Albania adapts to these changing demands.



Graph 5. Evolution of tourist preferences for eco-friendly accommodation

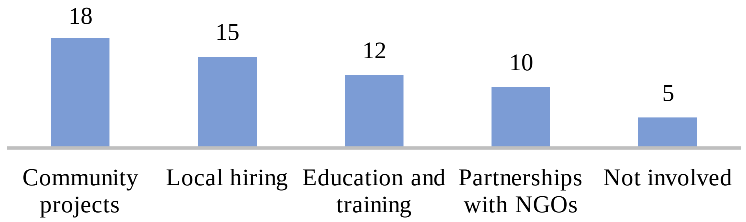
Results regarding collaboration with organizations to promote eco-tourism, are presented in Graph 6. The graph shows a positive trend towards collaboration within the Albanian hospitality sector, with the majority of respondents engaging in some form of partnership with local environmental organizations or government bodies. Regular (20) and occasional collaborations (15) are quite prevalent, suggesting that many organizations recognize the value of these partnerships in promoting eco-tourism.

The fact that some organizations plan to collaborate in the future (10) indicates a growing awareness and commitment to sustainability. The relatively small number of organizations not collaborating at all (6) suggests that there is potential for increasing engagement through targeted awareness and support programs. Overall, the graph underscores the importance of collaborative efforts in advancing eco-tourism, highlighting the role of regular and occasional partnerships in fostering sustainable practices within the hospitality industry.



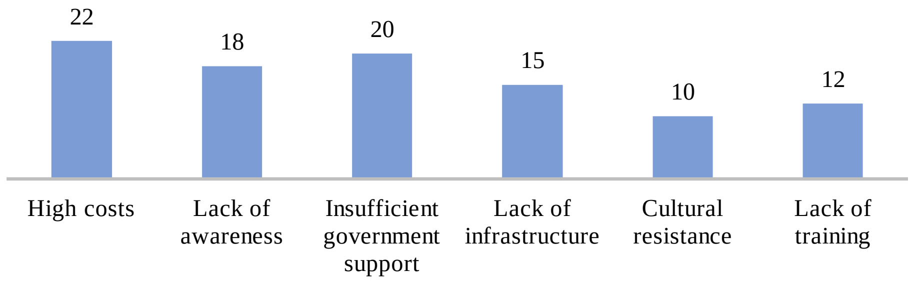
Graph 6. Collaboration with organizations to promote eco-tourism

Main results about ways organizations involve the local community in their eco-friendly initiatives, are presented in Graph 7. It shows that there is an emphasis on community projects (18) and local hiring (15) as primary methods of involving the local community in eco-friendly initiatives. Education (12) and partnerships (10) are also noted as significant, while a smaller number of respondents indicate no involvement of the local community in such initiatives (5). These results highlight the importance of engaging the local community in sustainable practices, which can lead to more successful and inclusive eco-friendly tourism development.



Graph 7. Involvement of local community in eco-friendly initiatives

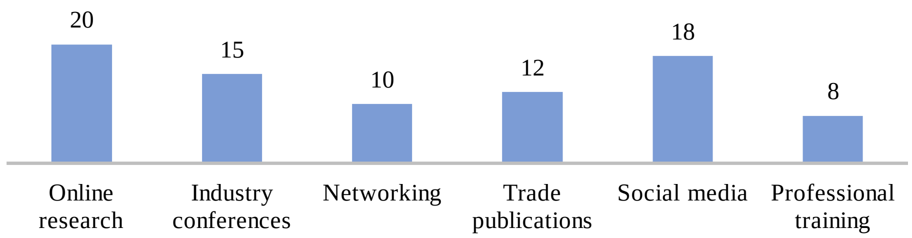
The Graph 8 illustrates the barriers to the adoption of eco-friendly practices in the Albanian hospitality sector. High costs (22), lack of awareness (18), and insufficient government support (20) are perceived as the most significant barriers. These are closely followed by a lack of infrastructure (15) and a lack of training (12), with cultural resistance also playing a role (10). Understanding these barriers is crucial for developing targeted strategies to overcome them and advance sustainable tourism in the region.



Graph 8. Barriers to eco-friendly practices in hospitality

Results regarding methods used by stakeholders in the Albanian hospitality sector to stay informed about global trends in green tourism and hospitality, are presented in Graph 9. Online research (20) and social media (18) are the most common ways stakeholders keep abreast of green trends, followed by industry conferences (15) and trade publications (12). Networking (10) and professional training (8) are also noted as means of staying updated, though they are less frequently mentioned compared to the other methods.

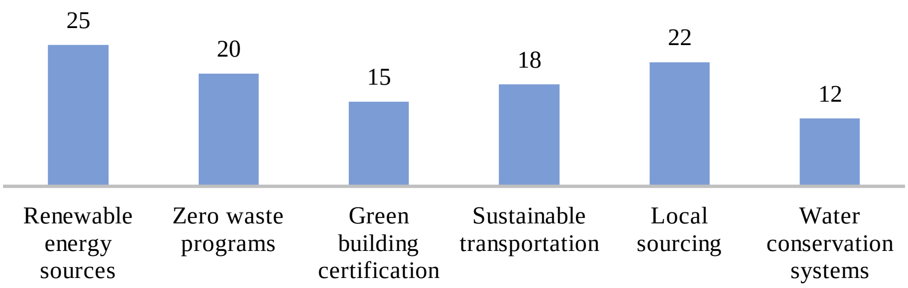
These results show that digital and social platforms play a significant role in disseminating information about sustainable practices in tourism, reflecting the importance of these channels for continuous learning and adaptation within the industry.



Graph 9. Staying updated on global green tourism trends

Graph 10 illustrates preferences for innovative eco-friendly practices that stakeholders in the Albanian hospitality sector would like to see implemented. Renewable energy sources (25) and local sourcing (22) emerge as the most desired eco-friendly practices, followed by sustainable transportation (18) and zero waste programs (20). Green building certification (15) and water conservation systems (12) are also highlighted as important, though to a slightly lesser extent.

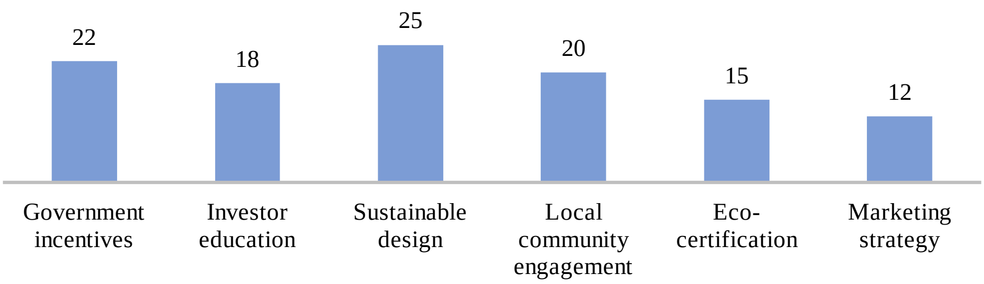
Moreover, these findings show a strong interest among stakeholders in advancing various sustainable initiatives within Albania's hospitality and tourism sector. The emphasis on renewable energy and local sourcing, in particular, reflects a broader trend towards sustainability and environmental responsibility in the industry.



Graph 10. Desired innovative eco-friendly practices in Albania

Results regarding the necessary steps for the development of a successful eco-hotel model in Albania, based on stakeholders' perspectives are presented in Graph 11. Sustainable design (25) is considered the most critical step for developing a successful eco-hotel model, followed by government incentives (22) and local community engagement (20). The importance of investor education (18), eco-certification (15), and a solid marketing strategy (12) are also acknowledged, though they are seen as slightly less urgent.

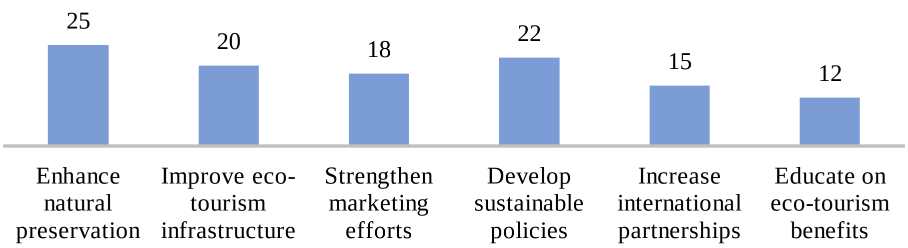
These findings underscore the multifaceted approach needed to establish eco-friendly hotels in Albania, highlighting the roles of design, financial incentives, community involvement, and education in achieving sustainability goals within the hospitality sector.



Graph 11. Necessary steps for a successful eco-hotel model in Albania

Graph 12 shows strategies stakeholders believe Albania could employ to position itself as a competitive destination for eco-tourism. Enhancing natural preservation (25) and developing sustainable policies (22) are viewed as the most critical actions for Albania to strengthen its eco-tourism competitiveness. This is closely followed by improving eco-tourism infrastructure (20) and strengthening marketing efforts (18) to better promote Albania's eco-tourism offerings. Increasing international partnerships (15) and educating on the benefits of eco-tourism (12) are also considered important, albeit to a slightly lesser extent.

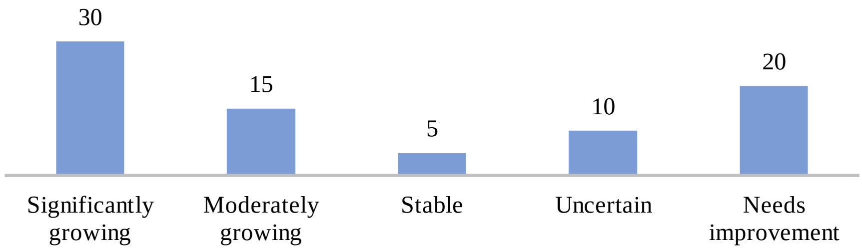
These findings show a comprehensive approach to eco-tourism development in Albania, emphasizing the importance of both preserving natural resources and actively promoting sustainable tourism practices. Such strategies aim to not only attract eco-conscious tourists but also ensure the long-term sustainability of Albania's tourism sector.



Graph 12. Positioning Albania as a competitive eco-tourism destination

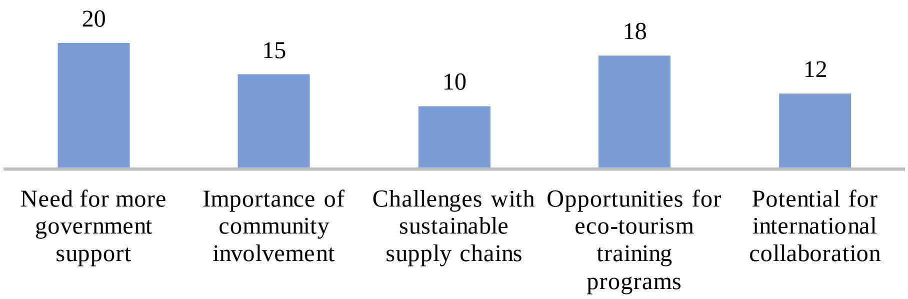
Findings on the future of eco-tourism and eco-hotels in Albania are presented in Graph 13. A significant portion of respondents are optimistic, envisioning a significant growth in the eco-tourism sector and the development of eco-hotels in Albania (30). A moderate number believe in a more modest growth (15), while a smaller group sees the future as stable (5) or uncertain (10). There's also a noteworthy segment that feels the sector "needs improvement" to achieve its full potential (20).

These findings reflect a generally positive outlook on the future of eco-tourism and eco-hotels in Albania, with a strong belief in the sector's growth potential. However, it also acknowledges the challenges and areas needing attention to realize this potential fully.



Graph 13. Future of eco-tourism and eco-hotels in Albania

Graph 14 presents additional comments or insights shared by respondents regarding eco-tourism in Albania. A significant number of respondents highlighted the "need for more government support" (20) as a crucial factor for advancing eco-tourism. The "importance of community involvement" (15) and "opportunities for eco-tourism training programs" (18) were also frequently mentioned, indicating a belief in the need for collaborative efforts and education to foster sustainable tourism development. Challenges with "sustainable supply chains" (10) and the potential for "international collaboration" (12) were recognized as well, though to a lesser extent. These findings underscore the multifaceted approach needed to enhance eco-tourism in Albania, pointing out areas for improvement and opportunities for growth identified by the stakeholders.



Graph 14. Additional comments or insights on eco-tourism

5. Discussion

The study's findings provide a comprehensive overview of the current state and future prospects of eco-tourism and eco-hotels in Albania, as perceived by various stakeholders in the hospitality and tourism sector. Through an analysis of responses to a series of questions, this study offers important insights into the challenges, opportunities, and necessary steps for advancing sustainable tourism practices in Albania. The identification of significant barriers to the widespread adoption of eco-friendly practices underscores the complexity of transitioning towards more sustainable tourism models. High costs, lack of awareness, and insufficient government support were highlighted as major challenges, suggesting that financial and informational resources are critical to overcoming these hurdles. Additionally, the mention of cultural resistance and lack of training points to the need for educational initiatives aimed at both the industry and the broader public to foster a more eco-conscious mindset.

The importance of collaboration between hotels, local environmental organizations, government bodies, and the local community emerged as a recurring theme. Such partnerships are deemed essential for promoting eco-tourism and implementing eco-friendly initiatives effectively. This highlights the interconnected nature of sustainable tourism development, where success depends on the active involvement and cooperation of all stakeholders.

Responses indicate a perceived increase in demand for eco-friendly tourism experiences, suggesting that consumer preferences are evolving towards greater environmental consciousness. This shift presents both an opportunity and a challenge for the Albanian hospitality sector, as it necessitates the adoption of sustainable practices to meet changing customer expectations while also offering a pathway to differentiate Albania as a unique eco-tourism destination.

Stakeholders are generally optimistic about the future of eco-tourism and eco-hotels in Albania, envisioning significant growth and development in this area. However, the realization of this potential is contingent upon addressing the identified challenges, particularly through the development of sustainable policies, enhancement of natural preservation efforts, and improvement of eco-tourism infrastructure. The emphasis on sustainable design and the desire for innovative eco-friendly practices further reflect the sector’s commitment to environmental sustainability.

This study underscores the need for a multi-faceted approach to fostering eco-tourism in Albania, encompassing government incentives, investor education, and community engagement. Stakeholders also call for more robust marketing strategies and international partnerships to elevate Albania’s profile as a competitive eco-tourism destination. Additionally, this study reveals a consensus on the value of continuous learning and adaptation to stay abreast of global green tourism trends.

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the complexity of advancing eco-tourism and eco-hotels in Albania. While challenges exist, there is a clear path forward characterized by stakeholder collaboration, policy development, and an alignment with evolving tourist preferences. By addressing the barriers and leveraging the opportunities identified by stakeholders, Albania can position itself as a leading eco-tourism destination, contributing to both environmental sustainability and economic growth.

6. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the perspectives of stakeholders within the Albanian hospitality and tourism industry regarding the current state, challenges, and prospects of eco-tourism and eco-hotels. Stakeholders identify several key challenges to the adoption of eco-friendly practices, including financial constraints, lack of awareness, and insufficient governmental support. Despite these challenges, there is a strong sense of optimism about the future growth potential of eco-tourism in Albania, driven by an increasing demand for sustainable tourism experiences and evolving tourist preferences.

Moreover, this study offers some implications. Hospitality managers should focus on integrating eco-friendly practices into their operations, recognizing the growing consumer demand for sustainable tourism experiences. Investing in staff training on sustainability issues and adopting innovative eco-friendly practices can enhance their competitive advantage. Managers should also seek partnerships with local communities and environmental organizations to bolster their eco-tourism initiatives.

The findings highlight the need for policy makers to provide more robust support for the eco-tourism sector, including financial incentives for eco-friendly initiatives and investments in eco-tourism infrastructure. Developing clear policies and frameworks that encourage sustainable practices in the hospitality industry can help overcome identified barriers. Policy makers should also prioritize educational campaigns to raise awareness about the benefits of eco-tourism.

This study underscores the importance of continuous research into sustainable tourism practices and their implementation challenges. Academics can contribute by conducting studies that explore the effectiveness of different eco-friendly practices and by developing training programs for industry professionals.

Additionally, this study provides some limitations. The study’s findings are based on a sample of stakeholders within the Albanian hospitality and tourism sector, which may not fully represent the views of all industry participants. Additionally, the analysis of responses relied on hypothetical codes and frequencies for some questions, limiting the specificity and depth of the insights obtained. The qualitative nature of some responses also presents challenges in quantitatively measuring the extent of certain phenomena.

Future research should aim to address the limitations of this study by employing a larger and more diverse sample of stakeholders. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into the evolving nature of eco-tourism and the impact of implemented eco-friendly practices over time. Comparative studies between Albania and other countries with established eco-tourism sectors could offer valuable benchmarks and lessons. Finally, research into the economic impacts of eco-tourism, including cost-benefit analyses of eco-friendly practices, could provide critical information for decision-makers in the industry.

In conclusion, while Albania faces challenges in fully realizing its eco-tourism potential, the opportunities for growth and development in this sector are significant. By addressing the identified barriers and leveraging the strengths and opportunities highlighted by stakeholders, Albania can enhance its position as a desirable eco-tourism destination. This progress requires the concerted efforts of managers, policy makers, and the broader community, guided by informed research and best practices in sustainable tourism.

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DIFFICULT RETURN TO NORMALITY Post COVID 19 Experience of Obstetrics-Gynecology University Hospital (OGUH) "Queen Geraldine" Tirana, Albania

"There are three kinds of truth: facts, evidence, and statistics."– Benjamin Disraeli

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Abstract
The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted health care services and imposed restrictions on social life. One of the most serious consequences caused by the harsh measures of restrictions of the social and economic life of the country was the reduction of activity and deformation of the structure of maternity hospitals. The experience of these two post COVID - 19 years (2022, 2023) shows that the pace of hospital activity returning to normality (at pre-pandemic levels) is too slow.
The main purpose of our study is to analyze the rate of return of performance indicators to the normal state, as before the COVID 19 Pandemic. This is done by calculating the general performance indicators of our hospital in the periods before, during and after the COVID 19 Pandemic.
In a retrospective manner, we calculated the averages of the hospital's general performance indicators, such as the Number of Inpatients, the Inpatients Days, the Average Length of Stay (ALOS), Bed Circulation and Bed Occupancy from 2018 to 2023. This six years time was divided in three periods: Period A, (2018 and 2019) two years **before** the COVID 19 pandemic, Period B (2020 and 2021), two years **during** of the COVID 19 pandemic and Period C (2022 and 2023) two years **after** the COVID 19.
Our study shows that the general hospital performance indicators during the pandemic period (years 2020 and 2021) suffered a significant decline. The number of hospitalized patients in the period before the COVID 19 Pandemic compared to during the COVID 19 pandemic decreased by 7.93%. The decrease in the number of hospitalized patients continued in the period after the COVID 19 pandemic, but the rate of decrease was more moderate at 1.46%. Likewise, the rate of the Average Length of Stay (ALOS), by decreased by 13.91%. Bed Turnover and Bed Occupancy decreased respectively 3.36% and 19.69% in the period during the COVID 19 Pandemic compared to the period before this pandemic, but increased respectively by 7.57% and 4.79% in the period after the COVID 19 pandemic compared to the values during this pandemic.
In the post COVID 19 period, the rate of decline has decreased a lot, but it is still far from the level of the pre-pandemic levels. This **slow return to the normality** has its own causes, which must be carefully analyzed to draw lessons in more successful coping with similar situations in the future. The causes of such a slow normalization are the fear/panic of the population towards the COVID 19 pandemic as well strengthening and easing the restrictive policies applied during the period of the COVID 19 Pandemic in elective services offered in Gynecology, Abortion, Outpatient, etc.

Keywords: COVID 19, obstetrics & gynecology university hospital, performance, pre-pandemic levels.

A. INTRODUCTION

Officially, the first case of COVID 19 in Albania was confirmed on March 8, 2020. It should be noted that suspected cases of patients with COVID 19 symptoms had previously been detected but not confirmed. The reaction of the Albanian Government was the application of numerous physical and social distancing measures. The first reaction was extreme; a total blockade of the country for around a month. This total closure of the country was eased gradually and in stages, but still implementing physical distancing measures, mandatory wearing of masks and promoting hygiene-related measures were implemented in terms of partial lockdown, remote work, closure of schools and universities and the development of online learning, etc. It should be noted that these measures are considered among the harshest applied in the countries affected by COVID 19 and have very serious impacts on the social and economic life of the country, thus also on the health system. The health policies aimed mainly at the measures that would avoid the overloading of health institutions (ambulatory service but above all the hospital one) and would create free capacities to treat patients with COVID 19. This goal was intended to be realized through several ways of which the most important were the conversion of some national hospitals into special hospitals to treat patients with COVID 19, the limitation of planned (elective) surgical operations that would create spaces in intensive care units (reanimation), etc. This policy, combined with other psycho-social restrictions, also brought about a change in the structure of hospital activity. The post COVID 19 period is considered the year 2022 and beyond. This period was characterized by the gradual return to the normalization of the social and economic life of the country. Normalization is a process and as such requires its time. Our aim in this study is to analyze the rhythms of the normalization of the performance of OGUH "Queen Geraldine", always confronting it with the impact of the restrictions imposed on the COVID 19 pandemic.

C. BODY OF MANUSCRIPT

We retrospectively analyzed the hospital activity in OGUH "Queen Geraldine" in 6 years that include the period from 2018 to 2023. This selection was made in order to study the hospital activity during three periods of two years each and specifically; the first period (A) before the COVID 19 pandemic (2018 and 2019), the second period (B) during the COVID 19 pandemic (2020 and 2021) and the third period (C) after the COVID 19 pandemic (2022 and 2023). In this way, we are able to analyze and compare the results of hospital performance in these three periods before, during and after the COVID 19 pandemic to evaluate its impact on the hospital's altitude as well as the rate of return to the normal state (initial). More specifically, we have calculated the averages of the hospital's general performance indicators, such as the Number of Admitted Patients, the Inpatients Days, the Average Length of Stay (ALOS), Bed Circulation and Bed Occupancy in the three periods, before, during and after the COVID 19 pandemic. Furthermore, we have calculated the difference (in %) of these indicators to evaluate the pace of their decrease/increase according to the respective periods (See tab. 2).

Selection of cases and statistical analysis:
The data were selected retrospectively from the hospital information system and we calculated and evaluated the performance indicators as a hospital.
We statistically processed the data with Excel and IBM SPSS (v.22) for descriptive statistics, which enabled us to present them in tables and graphs, as well as to calculate average indicators, SD, SE, Median, etc. The evaluation is mainly based on descriptive statistical methods. To be more detailed, we have calculated the two-year averages of the three periods mentioned above, for all the main hospital performance indicators for the hospital as a whole. Analytical statistics were performed with SPSS, making the appropriate comparisons by means of the relevant tests. The calculation of the t-test values and the p-value allow us to evaluate the statistical significance of the comparisons of the indicators in the three periods that we have analyzed. (See special tables, tab. 3/1, 3/2 and 3/3). Statistical significance is estimated if $p < 0.05$ in 2-tailed P values.
The results of our study are summarized in several combined tables and graphics to better describe and facilitate their understanding. First, we will present the results of the main performance indicators of OGUH "Queen Geraldine" (tab. 1) which will help us to create a general picture of the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on the hospital's activity.

Tab. 1 General Performance indicators years 2018 - 2023

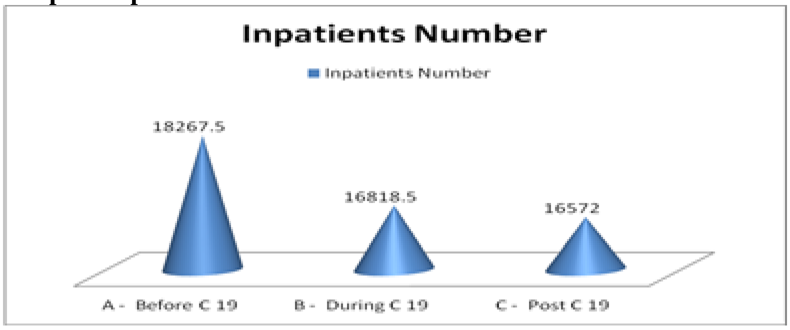
Year	Inpatients number	Inpatients Days	ALOS	Bed Circulation	Bed Occupancy (%)
V. 2023	16616	42987	2.60	80.70	59.60
v. 2022	16528	39650	2.40	80.20	54.99
v. 2021	16903	40927	2.40	82.10	56.80
v. 2020	16734	45628	2.73	67.48	52.57
v. 2019	17861	54746	3.07	75.68	66.28
v. 2018	18674	57761	3.10	79.10	69.90
Average	**17219**	**46950**	**2.72**	**77.54**	**60.02**

For a more accurate analysis, we have built a tab. 2 in which we calculated the averages of the periods before (A), during (B) and after (C) the COVID 19 pandemic, and the differences (in %) of the above 3 periods.

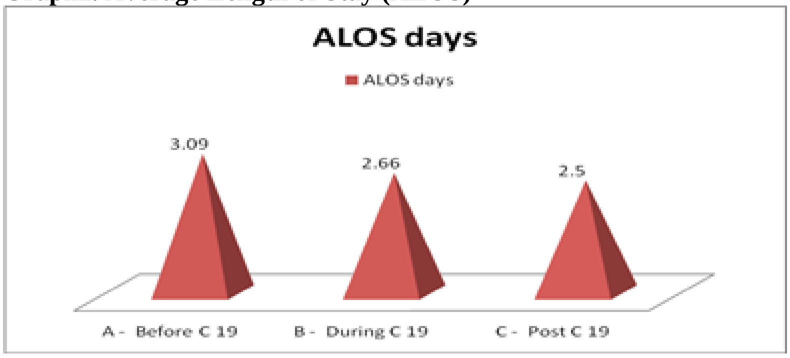
Tab2. Performance Indicators Before, During and After COVID 19 Pandemic

Period to COVID 19	Average Value			
	Inpatients Number	ALOS days	Bed Circulation	Bed Occupancy (%)
A - Before C 19	18267.5	3.09	77.39	68.09
B - During C 19	16818.5	2.66	74.79	54.68
C - Post C 19	16572	2.50	80.45	57.30
Diff. B - A (%)	- 7.93%	- 13.91	- 3.36	- 19.69
Diff. C - B (%)	- 1.46%	- 6.01	+ 7.57	+ 4.79
Diff. C - A (%)	- 9.28	- 19.09	+ 3.95	- 15.85

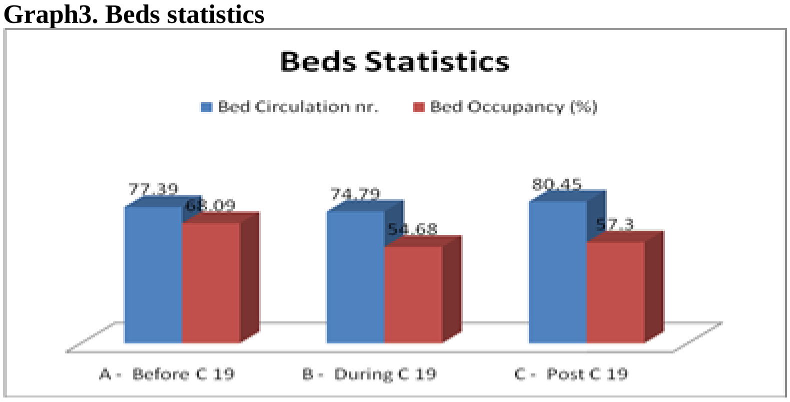
Graph1. Inpatients number



Graph2. Average Length of Stay (ALOS)



Graph3. Beds statistics



To reflect the values of the test t and the value of p which enable us to evaluate the statistical significance of the comparisons of the indicators in the three periods we have analyzed, we have built 3 special tables, tab. 3/1, 3/2 and 3/3.

Tab. 3/1 Period before and Period during COVID 19

Indicator	Before	During	One Sample t Test		
			t value	p value	Significance
Inpatients	18267.5	16818.5	N/I	> 0.05	No
ALOS	3.09	2.656	28.60	0.022	Yes
Bed Circulation	77.39	74.79	N/I	> 0.05	No
Bed Occupancy (%)	68.09	54.685	N/I	> 0.05	No

Tab. 3/2 Period during and Period after COVID 19

Indicator	During	After	One Sample t Test		
			t value	p value	Significance
Inpatients	16818.5	16572	N/I	> 0.05	No
ALOS	2.656	2.50	N/I	> 0.05	No
Bed Circulation	74.79	80.45	N/I	> 0.05	No
Bed Occupancy (%)	54.685	57.30	N/I	> 0.05	No

Tab. 3/3 Period before and Period after COVID 19

Indicator	Before	After	One Sample t Test		
			t value	p value	Significance
Inpatients	18267.5	16572	N/I	> 0.05	No
ALOS	3.09	2.50	39.00	0.016	Yes
Bed Circulation	77.39	80.45	N/I	> 0.05	No
Bed Occupancy (%)	68.09	57.30	N/I	> 0.05	No

Obstetrics and Gynecology University Hospital (OGUH) "Queen Geraldine", Tirana, Albania is one of the two tertiary university hospitals specialized in Obstetrics and Gynecology in Albania. This hospital serves the region of the capital Tirana (about 750,000 inhabitants), but it is also a national reference center, so serves to diagnose and treat difficult cases from all over the country. During the 6-year period that we are studying, the main performance indicators show that in OGUH "Queen Geraldine", 103,326 patients were admitted and 281,699 bed days were realized. The analysis of the general performance indicators results as follows:

1. During the period of COVID 19 Pandemic (years 2020 and 2021), a significant decrease in the number of hospitalized patients was found by about minus 7.93% compared to the period before the COVID 19 pandemic, i.e. the years 2019 and 2020. This is also the case in the Average Length of Stay (ALOS) decreased 14.04%, bed circulation minus 3.36% and bed occupancy minus 19.96%.

2. The comparison of the main performance indicators for the period during the pandemic (years 2020 and 2021) with those of the post-pandemic period (years 2022 and 2023) gives us the following results: The number of hospitalized patients continued to decrease, but at a lower rate, 1.46%, ALOS decreased by 5.87%, while bed turnover showed a significant increase by 7.57% and bed utilization increased by 4.78%.

We have summarized the results from the statistical analysis with SPSS of the comparison of the averages with the One-Sample test in tables 3/1, 3/2 and 3/3. For illustration, we present only one of these tests:

ALOS Before and During COVID 19

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 2.656					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
ALOS	28.600	1	.022	.42900	.2384	.6196

The results presented in tables 3/1, 3/2 and 3/3 show that:

1. In the period before the COVID 19 pandemic, compared to the period during the pandemic, we have a decrease in almost all hospital indicators, but more pronounced in:

    a. Average hospital stay (ALOS) - $t = 28.60$ $p = 0.022$, statistically significant difference.

2. In the period during the COVID 19 pandemic, compared to the period after the pandemic, we have a moderate decrease/increase in some hospital indicators, but a decrease to emphasize in: There are significant differences in the general performance indicators, but when compared, the changes are not statistically significant ($P > 0.05$)

3. In the period before the COVID 19 pandemic, compared to the period after the pandemic, we have a decrease in almost all hospital indicators, but more pronounced in:

    a. Average hospital stay (ALOS) - $t = 39.00$ $p = 0.016$, statistically significant difference.

In the post COVID 19 period, the years 2022 and 2023, hospital performance indicators began to return to normalization, but at a very slow pace. What are the causes of this slow normalization? In our assessment, the causes of such a slow normalization are the same ones that caused the significant decline in the performance and clinical indicators of OGUH "Queen Geraldine" during the COVID 19 Pandemic:

1. Fear/panic of the population towards the COVID 19 pandemic as well

2. Strengthening and easing the restrictive policies applied during the period of the COVID 19 Pandemic in elective services offered in Gynecology, Abortion, Outpatient, etc.

In other words, the COVID 19 pandemic, which with its severity, caused millions of deaths and hundreds of millions of sick all over the world, imposed a new model in the provision of health services by citizens in the institutions of the health system. This new model of relations citizen - health institutions (hospitals) conditioned for a period of more than two years significant reluctance and limitations of health care in non-acute health services. Due to inertia, this model continued even after the end of the COVID 19 Pandemic, this two-way inertia, i.e. both from the citizens and from the health institutions.

D. CONCLUSIONS

In the post COVID 19 period, the years 2022 and 2023, hospital performance indicators began to return to normalization, but at a very slow pace. What are the causes of this slow normalization?
In our assessment, the causes of such a slow normalization are the same ones that caused the significant decline in the performance and clinical indicators of OGUH "Queen Geraldine" during the COVID 19 Pandemic:

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The most frequent statistical methods used in medical researches
The findings of a random study sample of published articles in Albanian medical journals

"There are two kinds of statistics, the kind you look up and the kind you make up."
– Rex Stout

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Abstract
The statistical analysis is a very important part of any medical research study. The results and inferences are not accurately possible without proper validation with various statistical tools and test. The inappropriate use of statistics methods can lead to incorrect conclusions.

The main purpose of our study is to make researchers aware of the various aspects of statistics methods used in medical research and so as to adopt better statistical practices.

This is a review article aimed to study the most frequent statistical methods based on an internal observation of published studies in some of the recognized Albanian medical journals (available free online) during the last five years. The results are coming from a final sample of 35 articles. The evaluation process was focused on the statistical method used in these studies. The top three most common statistical methods we found were: Descriptive Statistics was the most used method out in 100% of the studies, Inferential Statistics carried out in 44% of studies, and Combination (Descriptive and Inferential Statistics) was found in 44% of the studies. The top three less common statistical methods we found were: Regression (14%), ANOVA One way (9%) and Survival Analyses (6%).
The use of appropriate statistical methods in medical research supports the process of making correct statistical analyses, draw the right conclusions and avoid various errors. In this perspective, improvement of the teaching programs to learn the basics of medical statistics for health system professionals and active involvement of biostatisticians in the publishing boards of medical journals and scientific research remain the most effective ways to improve the situation.

Keywords: medical research, study design, statistical methods, statistical errors.

A. INTRODUCTION
There is more than a century that the statistical analysis is considered to be a very important part of any medical research study. Knowledge of the appropriate statistical test to apply in any given situation is important. The inappropriate use of statistics analysis can lead to incorrect conclusions.
Unfortunately, there are still medical researchers who understand statistics as a "makeup" of their studies. Consequently, they value, know and use little statistical methods in their studies.
Health care professionals need to have a solid knowledge of medical statistics. The researchers have a big responsibility to understand research methods, conduct the best research they can and publish the real results from their studies.
The biostatisticians are the experts of medical statistics and an integral part of every serious research study.

B. BODY OF MANUSCRIPT
This is a review study. We have randomly selected a total of 35 research articles published in some of the most recognized medical journals in Albania over the last five years (2018 - 2023). The cases were selected retrospectively from articles published in most recognized medical journals of Albania. The selection was at random from the journals free online archives. The data were treated according to the code of ethics, preserving the anonymity of the authors and journals.
This sample of 35 articles was analyzed to assess the statistical method used in all these studies as defined in the medical research literature. All the key findings are presented in Tab. 1
We evaluated the frequency and the accuracy of the statistical methods used in these publications. Our results (see table 1) showed that according to their usage, the statistical methods can be divided in three groups:

- **Group I,** the most used methods including Descriptive Statistics (100% of the studies), Inferential Statistics carried out in only 60% of studies, while the Combination (Descriptive and Inferential Statistics) was found in 60% of the studies.

- **Group II,** the moderated usage methods like t-tests (40%), Chi-square Test (29%), Confidence interval (29%), Correlation coefficient (23%).
- **Group III,** includes the less used statistical methods like Regression (14%), ANOVA One way (9%) and Survival Analyses (6%).

Table 1: Types and frequencies of statistical methods usage

Nr.	Groups	Types of Statistical Methods	Frequency nr 35	
			Number	%
1	I	Descriptive statistics only	35	100
2		Inferential statistics only	21	60
3		Combination (Inferential and descriptive statistics)	21	60
4	II	Students t-tests	14	40
5		Chi-square Test	10	29
6		Confidence interval	10	29
7		Correlation coefficient	8	23
8	III	Regression	5	14
9		ANOVA One way	3	9
10		Survival Analysis	2	6

In this review, we focus on the most common statistical methods found in the articles published online in various Albanian medical journals:

1. **Descriptive statistics** - Summary statistics used to organize and describe the data

When we first collect data for some project, it will usually be in a 'raw' form. That is, not organized in any way, making it difficult to see what's going on.
Descriptive statistics is a series of procedures designed to illuminate the data, so that its principal characteristics and main features are revealed. This may mean sorting the data by size; perhaps putting it into a table, maybe presenting it in an appropriate chart, or summarizing it numerically; and so on.
Descriptive statistics

- ✓ Summary statistics to use to organize and describe the data.
- ✓ Proportion, mean, median, SD, percentiles
- ✓ Descriptive statistics do not generalize beyond the available data

Descriptive statistics is the simplest part of the statistical analysis. Building tables and graphs, calculating the means, mode, median, standard deviations, etc., it is the most favorite part of those researchers who consider the statistical analysis as a "makeup" process. That's why it is done in 100 % of the studies.

2. **Inferential statistics -** Making decisions in the face of uncertainty.

When we want to discover things that interest us about a population, we take a sample. We then hope to generalize our sample findings, first to the study population and ultimately to the target population. Statisticians call this process, of generalizing from a sample to a population, statistical inference or inferential statistics.
Actually, estimation is not the only way of making inferences about population parameter values. An alternative approach is to raise the hypothesis that a population parameter has a particular value, and then see if the value of the corresponding sample statistic is compatible with your hypothesis. This approach is called hypothesis testing.
Inferential statistics

- ✓ Generalize from the sample.
- ✓ Hypothesis testing, confidence intervals – Student's t-test, Fisher's Exact, ANOVA, survival analysis – Bayesian approaches
- ✓ Making decisions in the face of uncertainty

Inferential statistics is of a high degree of difficulty. This is also the reason that researchers know and use it a little. In our study, only 60% of researchers use one or more tests of this method.

3. **Combination (Inferential and descriptive statistics)**

The combination of descriptive and inferential statistics requires a good knowledge of statistics. Only 60% of the publications included in our study used both methods.

4. Student t-tests

Two hypothesis tests are prominent in general clinical research. One is the two-sample t test, which is used with metric data to test the equality of two independent population means.

Two-sample t test - used to test whether or not the difference between two independent population means is zero (i.e. the two means are equal). The null assumption is that it is. Both variables must be metric and normally distributed.

Matched-pairs t test - used to test whether or not the difference between two paired population means is zero. The null assumption is that it is, i.e. the two means are equal. Both variables must be metric, and the differences between the two must be normally distributed.

The t test (Student) is a very used test as it serves us to evaluate the difference between two means. On the other hand, its calculation requires good knowledge of statistics. This is the reason that in our study it was found applied in only 40% of the publications.

5. Chi-square Test

Chi-squared test (χ^2) is applied to frequency data in the form of a contingency table (i.e. a table of cross-tabulations), with the rows representing categories of one variable and the columns categories of a second variable. The null hypothesis is that the two variables are unrelated. The chi-squared test has two common applications: first as a test of whether two categorical variables are independent or not; second, as a test of whether two proportions are equal or not.

Chi-squared test (χ2) is a very useful test but not “a piece of cake” (also complicated to calculate). In our study, we found it used only in 29% of cases.

6. Confidence interval

In research studies it is common to wish to draw general conclusions from a relatively small amount of data. This is usually because it is impractical or impossible to study the whole population. If we are answering specific questions or hypotheses then the answers will tell us something about the whole population.

Suppose we selected many samples, then the sample means would follow a distribution known as the sampling distribution of the mean. We could calculate the mean of these sample means, and the standard deviation. The standard deviation of the sample means is known as the standard error of the mean and provides an estimate of the precision of the sample mean.

A confidence interval estimator is a numeric expression that quantifies the likely size of the sampling error. But to get a confidence interval we need first to introduce an important concept in statistical inference – the standard error. The standard error is a measure of the spread in all (same-size) sample means from a population. We can very easily estimate the standard error with the equation: **SE** (mean) = $\frac{SD}{\sqrt{n}}$ where **SD** is the standard deviation for the data and **n** is the sample size. Notice that as the sample size n increases, the standard error decreases. In other words, the bigger the sample, the smaller is the error in our estimate of population mean.

The calculation of the confidence interval in our study was used only in 29% of cases.

7. Correlation coefficient

Correlation and regression are used to investigate the relationship between two continuous variables.

Pearson’s correlation investigates the strength of a linear relationship between two continuous variables. It is used when neither variable can be assumed to predict the other. It gives an estimate, the correlation coefficient, and a P value. A confidence interval can also be calculated.

Pearson’s correlation coefficient, denoted **ρ** (Greek rho), in the population, and **r** in the sample, measures the strength of the linear association between two variables. Loosely speaking, the correlation coefficient is a measure of the average distance of all of the points from an imaginary straight line drawn through the scatter of points.

The value of Pearson’s correlation coefficient can vary as follows:

- –1, indicating a perfect negative association (all the points lie exactly on a straight line);
- 0, indicating no association;
- +1, indicating perfect positive association (all points exactly on a line).

In practice, with real sample data, you will never see values of –1, 0 or +1.

The use of Pearson's correlation coefficient will depend on the degree of knowledge of the calculation technique and the need to use it in the specific case. In our study, we found it used only in 23% of cases.

8. Regression

Regression investigates the nature of the linear relationship between two continuous variables. It is used when investigating how one variable (the predictor variable) affects the other (the outcome variable). It gives the equation of the best fitting

straight line through the data in the form of the intercept and slope of the line, with confidence intervals. It allows the estimated slope to be tested against a null value of 0. It enables predictions to be made with confidence intervals.
The fact that an association between two variables does not mean that there is a **cause-and-effect relationship** between them. The idea of a causal relationship between variables, such that changes in the value of one variable bring about or cause changes in the value of another variable. In the clinical world demonstrating a cause–effect relationship is difficult, and requires a number of conditions to be satisfied; the relationship should be plausible, repeatable, predictable, with a proved mechanism, and so on.
The calculation of the regression coefficient is considered a technique of a high degree of difficulty. In our study, this technique was used only in 14% of cases.

9. ANOVA One way

ANOVA One way is an extension of the t test and compares means from three or more independent samples. It gives one overall P value comparing all groups based on a test statistic which follows an F distribution. The samples for each group come from populations with the same mean values. One-way analysis of variance is based on the variability ('variance') between the group means: if group means are far enough apart, this suggests that the groups are from different populations It works by partitioning the overall variability into two components of variability: The variability between the group means: '**between group variance'** The remaining variability not due to differences between the groups: '**residual variance'** If the groups are truly different, the between-group variance will be much greater than the residual variance This is tested using the ratio of the two variances: the F ratio. If the variability between groups is no more than we would expect due to randomness alone then the two estimates will be similar and the F ratio will be close to 1.0. If the F ratio is much greater than 1.0, the two estimates must be very different, providing evidence that the group means are different.
One way ANOVA calculation is considered a technique of a very high degree of difficulty. In our study, this technique was used only in 9% of cases.

10. Survival Analysis

Survival methods are used to calculate survival (time-to-event) probabilities. For example, in studies of survival after breast cancer diagnosis, survival methods are used to calculate the probability that women will survive for 5 or 10 years. Such techniques are used to compare treatments and to provide information to patients about their likely prognosis.
The basis of this method, a procedure known as survival analysis, is the measurement of the time from some intervention or procedure to some event of interest. For example, if you were studying survival after mastectomy for breast cancer, you would want to know how long each woman survived following surgery.
Survival probabilities can be depicted graphically in a **Kaplan–Meier curve**. The x-axis depicts the length of survival time and the y-axis depicts the cumulative survival probability.

Survival time calculation is considered a technique of a very high level of difficulty. In our study, this technique was used only in 6% of cases.

C. CONCLUSIONS

a. It has been accepted for more than e century that the statistical analysis is a very important part of any medical research study. The results and inferences are not accurately possible without proper validation with various statistical methods. The use of appropriate statistical methods in medical research supports the process of making correct statistical analysis, draw the right conclusions and avoid various errors.
b. Unfortunately, there are still researchers who understand the role of statistics as a **"makeup"** and not as an integral part of the research process. This is the reason why they value little, know little and use little the statistical methods.
c. Making the researchers **aware** of the various aspects of statistics methods used in medical research and so as to adopt better statistical practices is a very important target.
d. In this perspective, improvement of the **teaching programs** to learn the basics of medical statistics for health care professionals and active involvement of **biostatisticians** in the publishing boards of medical journals and scientific research remain the most effective ways to improve the situation.

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The Influence of Social Norms on HRM Practices in Albania: Unravelling the Impact of Cultural and Institutional Contexts in a Post-Socialist Market

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Abstract

This research explores the impact of social norms on Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in Albania, a post-socialist market characterized by unique cultural and institutional landscapes. Building upon theoretical frameworks such as social exchange theory, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, and institutional theory, this study investigates how traditional cultural values and evolving institutional frameworks influence HRM strategies and operations in Albania. Through in-depth interviews with HR managers from both public and private sectors, the research uncovers how cultural norms like collectivism, respect for hierarchy, and the importance of personal relationships continue to shape HR practices such as recruitment, performance management, and employee relations. Additionally, this study examines the challenges faced by organizations in balancing global HRM standards with local cultural expectations amidst Albania's ongoing transition towards a market-oriented economy. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in HRM within emerging markets, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive and contextually adapted HR strategies. This paper provides practical insights for local and international organizations operating in Albania, emphasizing the importance of aligning HRM practices with the unique socio-cultural and institutional dynamics of post-socialist societies.

Keywords: Four to six keywords are to be provided for indexing purposes.

1. Introduction

Human Resources Management (HRM) is increasingly recognized as a crucial element in achieving organizational success in emerging markets. According to Darwish et al. (2024), HRM practices significantly affect both perceived and actual organizational performance in emerging markets. In such settings, effective HRM practices are essential for managing the workforce's adaptability, motivation, and alignment with organizational goals. HRM functions like recruitment, training, performance management, and employee relations become critical in ensuring that organizations can attract, develop, and retain talent that is capable of thriving in these less affluent contexts (Horwitz & Budhwar, 2015). Al Jawali et al. (2022) illustrate how talent management practices in Dubai's public sector have been adapted to meet the specific needs of the local context, highlighting the importance of contextually relevant HR strategies. This underscores the idea that HRM in emerging markets must be responsive to the unique conditions present in these regions, which can differ significantly from those in more developed economies.

Cultural norms such as collectivism, respect for hierarchy, and the importance of personal relationships often influence how HRM practices are implemented in post-socialist markets (Morley et al., 2021; Webster & Wood, 2005). In many post-socialist economies, informal networks, social capital, and political patronage are significant, meaning that HR practices such as recruitment and promotion may heavily rely on these informal channels rather than formalized procedures (Drishti et al., 2022; Efendic & Ledeneva, 2020). Cultural norms are a significant factor influencing HRM practices in emerging markets. The work of Al Ariss & Sidani (2016) suggests that cultural considerations must be at the forefront of international HRM strategies, particularly in regions where cultural norms differ markedly from those in the West. In the Middle East, for example, traditional values and social hierarchies heavily influence HRM practices, necessitating a careful balance between global HRM standards and local cultural expectations (Haak-Saheem & Darwish, 2021). This need for cultural sensitivity is echoed in the broader literature, where scholars such as Farndale et al. (2023) and Farndale & Sanders (2017) argue that positioning context front and centre is crucial for effective HRM in diverse environments.

Similarly, the legal and institutional frameworks in emerging markets are often less developed and more fluid than those in established economies, which can create both challenges and opportunities for HRM. Webster & Wood (2005) discuss how institutional constraints, such as weak legal enforcement and regulatory inconsistencies, can limit the effectiveness of HRM practices. This is particularly relevant in post-communist and developing economies, where the transition to market-oriented legal systems is still ongoing. Darwish et al. (2024) further highlight the importance of understanding and adapting

to these legal variances when implementing HRM practices across different emerging markets, noting the significant differences that can exist even within the same region.
This study aims to explore how these social norms, alongside the broader institutional context, influence HRM practices in Albania. Through in-depth interviews with HR managers in public and private sectors and across various industries, this research seeks to uncover the specific ways in which cultural values and societal expectations shape HRM strategies and operations. By examining the intersection of social norms and HRM practices, this study contributes to the broader understanding of HRM in emerging markets and offers practical insights for organizations operating in Albania.
Albania's rich historical background, coupled with its recent economic and political transformations, creates a distinct environment where traditional social norms coexist with modern business practices, resulting in hybrid HRM approaches (Drishti & Carmichael, 2022). Social norms such as respect for hierarchy, the importance of trust in interpersonal relationships, and the influence of collectivism are significant factors that influence HRM practices. In particular, areas such as the ways organizations manage their human resources, from the recruitment process, which rely heavily on personal networks, to performance appraisals are heavily influenced by seniority and loyalty rather than purely meritocratic criteria (Vaughan-Whitehead & Vazquez-Alvarez, 2019). Understanding the impact of these norms is essential for both local and international organizations operating in Albania, as they navigate the challenges of balancing global HRM strategies with local cultural expectations.
Moreover, the legal and institutional frameworks in Albania, while increasingly aligned with European standards, are still in flux, adding another layer of complexity to HRM practices in the country (García-Cabrera et al., 2018).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Perspectives on Social Norms and HRM in Post-Socialist Markets

A conventional way to plan a manuscript is to construct an outline. An outline has two interacting purposes. One is to shape the technical information in logical order and other is to help in organizing and thinking about paper. It should be flexible. The main text should be divided into several sections and subsection. There should be continuity in the presentation. The style of sections and subsection are generally given in the guidelines of the journal. If nothing is available, it is preferable to see the previous issue of the journal concerned. The complex mathematical derivation should be placed in the appendix of the paper, which is placed at end of the paper.

The communist legacy in post-communist markets significantly influences contemporary HRM practices. Under communist regimes, employment was characterized by state control, job security, and a strong emphasis on collectivism. HRM practices during this period were largely bureaucratic, with little focus on efficiency or individual performance. This historical context continues to shape the HRM landscape in post-communist countries, where many organizations are still in the process of transitioning to market-based HRM practices (Webster & Wood, 2005). One of the most persistent themes in the literature is the influence of cultural norms on HRM practices in post-communist markets. In many of these countries, the legacy of communism has left a strong imprint on organizational cultures, where hierarchical structures and centralized decision-making were the norms. This has led to a continuation of top-down management practices in many organizations, even as they attempt to modernize their HRM approaches (Kiriazov et al., 2000).

Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions, such as power distance, collectivism vs. individualism, and uncertainty avoidance, provide a framework for understanding how social norms influence HRM in emerging markets. The HRM practices in Albania are profoundly influenced by cultural dimensions as outlined by Hofstede. For example, the high power distance in Albanian culture justifies the preference for hierarchical structures and respect for authority in HR practices.

Similarly, Albania's collectivist culture emphasizes the importance of relationships, loyalty, and social networks, which naturally leads HR managers to adopt practices that prioritize group harmony over individual achievement. The integration of Hofstede's dimensions into the understanding of HRM practices in Albania also highlights the challenges that expatriate managers might face if they are not attuned to these cultural specifics. The collectivist orientation that characterized communist regimes also continues to influence HRM practices.

Another cultural factor affecting HRM in post-communist markets is the resistance to change. Given the rapid and often chaotic transition from communism, employees in these markets may be sceptical of new management practices or wary of initiatives that seem to disrupt established norms (Ralston et al., 2008). This resistance can be a significant barrier to the implementation of modern HRM practices, such as performance-based pay or participative management styles.

In post-communist markets, HRM practices often reflect a blend of old and new cultural norms, where hierarchical structures and collective decision-making coexist with more modern practices such as performance-based pay and individual accountability. This cultural hybridity can create challenges for organizations, particularly for multinational enterprises (MNEs) that must balance global HRM standards with local cultural expectations.

In post-communist markets, there is often a strong emphasis on group cohesion and loyalty, which can manifest in HR practices such as recruitment and promotion. For example, hiring decisions may still be influenced by personal relationships and social networks rather than solely by merit (Mellahi et al., 2011). This can create challenges for multinational companies operating in these markets, as they must navigate the tension between local cultural norms and the need for standardized HR practices across global operations.

Social exchange theory (Homans, 1974) suggests that HRM practices in emerging markets are deeply influenced by the reciprocal relationships between employers and employees, shaped by cultural norms. In societies where relationships and trust are paramount, HRM practices such as recruitment, promotion, and performance management may rely heavily on personal networks and social capital, rather than purely formalized processes.

Contextual HRM theory (Ferris et al., 1998) emphasizes the importance of understanding the specific social, economic, and cultural contexts in which HR practices are implemented. In emerging markets, this approach is crucial as it recognizes that HRM practices must be adapted to fit the local social norms and institutional frameworks, rather than applying Western HR models without modification.

Also institutional theory (Lewis et al., 2019) and the varieties of capitalism theory (Hall & Soskice, 2003) suggest that HRM practices in emerging markets are significantly shaped by the formal and informal institutions within a society, including laws, regulations, and social norms. We review these frameworks in the following section.

In conclusion, the integration of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, along with social exchange theory, contextual HRM theory, and institutional frameworks, underscores the complexity of HRM practices in less affluent markets like Albania. These theoretical perspectives highlight the need for HR managers to be highly aware of the local cultural and institutional contexts when implementing HR strategies. The success of HRM practices in such environments depends on their ability to balance traditional values with the demands of modernization, ensuring that global HR models are adapted to fit the unique characteristics of the local workforce and societal norms.

2.2. Theoretical Perspectives on Institutional Framework and HRM in Post-Socialist Markets

Comparative and institutional frameworks often inform the theoretical underpinning of HRM in emerging markets. Institutional theory offers an influential lens for understanding HRM practices in emerging markets by emphasizing the role of formal and informal institutions—such as laws, regulations, norms, and cultural practices—in shaping organizational behaviour. According to institutional theory, organizations in emerging markets must navigate a complex array of institutional pressures, which can lead to the adoption of certain HRM practices that align with the prevailing institutional context. Oliver (1991) provides a foundational perspective on how organizations strategically respond to institutional pressures, which is particularly relevant in emerging markets where institutions are often in flux. Organizations may adopt, modify, or resist HRM practices based on their alignment with local institutional norms and the need to gain legitimacy within their operating environment. Fainshmidt et al. (2018) further elaborate on the diversity of institutional systems across emerging markets, providing a contextual taxonomy that identifies different types of institutional configurations. This taxonomy helps to explain why HRM practices might vary significantly across emerging markets, even when they share similar levels of economic development.

Hall & Soskice (2003) "Varieties of Capitalism" (VoC) framework provides another useful tool for understanding how different institutional configurations can lead to diverse HRM practices. In the VoC model, economies are typically categorized as either liberal market economies (LMEs) or coordinated market economies (CMEs), each with its own characteristic HRM approaches. This perspective is further developed by Lane & Wood (2009), who explore how variations within capitalist systems influence organizational behaviour, including HRM. Whitley's (1999) work on divergent capitalisms also contributes to this discourse by examining how the social structuring of business systems impacts HRM. This approach is particularly relevant in emerging markets, where the interplay between traditional practices and modern management techniques can create unique challenges for HRM practitioners.

Comparative capitalism theories offer another perspective for understanding HRM in emerging markets. These theories emphasize the diversity of capitalist systems and how this diversity affects organizational practices, including HRM. Webster & Wood (2005) explore how institutional constraints shape HRM practices, particularly in contexts where formal institutions may be underdeveloped or inconsistent. This is a common challenge in many emerging markets, where HRM practices must often be adapted to fit local conditions that may not align with global standards. Darwish et al. (2024) contribute to this discussion by assessing the measurement invariance of HRM parameters across different emerging markets. Their cross-country analysis highlights the importance of understanding the local context when applying global HRM models, as the effectiveness of these models can vary significantly depending on the specific institutional and cultural environment. This perspective aligns with the broader comparative capitalism literature, which argues that while globalization encourages the spread of certain HRM practices, their implementation and success are heavily influenced by local factors.

Farndale et al. (2023) argue for the centrality of context in international HRM research, suggesting that any analysis of HRM practices in emerging markets must prioritize the local context. This approach is supported by Whetten (2009), who examines the interface between context and theory, particularly in non-Western settings like China. Whetten's work underscores the importance of developing context-sensitive theories that can account for the unique characteristics of emerging markets, rather than simply applying Western-centric models. Haak-Saheem & Darwish (2021) provide an example of this contextual approach by examining HRM practices in the Middle East. They argue that HRM in this region is deeply influenced by local cultural and institutional factors, which must be considered when designing and implementing

HRM practices. This perspective is particularly relevant for multinational enterprises (MNEs) operating in emerging markets, where understanding and integrating into the local context can be critical for success.

In conclusion theoretical perspectives on HRM in emerging markets are diverse and multifaceted, reflecting the complexity of these environments. Institutional theory, varieties of capitalism, comparative capitalism, and contextual approaches all offer valuable insights into how HRM practices are shaped by the unique characteristics of emerging markets. These perspectives highlight the importance of understanding local contexts—whether cultural, institutional, or economic—when analysing HRM practices in these regions. As emerging markets continue to evolve, further theoretical development will be essential to capture the dynamic interplay between global HRM trends and local realities.

HRM in post-communist markets presents unique challenges and opportunities, shaped by the region's transition from centrally planned economies to market-oriented systems. The legacy of communism, coupled with the ongoing economic, institutional, and cultural transformations, has a profound impact on HRM practices in these countries.

2.3. HRM Practices in Albania

In the Albanian context, HRM practices often reflect a blend of traditional and modern approaches.

Recruitment processes, for instance, are frequently influenced by informal networks and personal relationships, a common feature in many emerging markets. This reliance on personal connections can sometimes supersede meritocratic principles, reflecting the importance of social capital.

Additionally, performance management practices may still exhibit a degree of reverence to seniority and loyalty, rather than being purely outcome-based, which is a remainder of the country's historical legacy.

Training and development have gained importance in recent years, especially as organizations seek to align with European Union standards and improve competitiveness. However, the effectiveness of these practices is often limited by the availability of skilled trainers and the resources dedicated to HR functions.

Compensation practices, while improving, still face challenges related to wage disparities and the influence of the informal economy, which can undermine formal HR policies.

Social norms in Albania, deeply rooted in the country’s history and cultural traditions, play a crucial role in shaping HRM practices. One of the most influential social norms is the strong respect for hierarchy and authority, which often affects organizational culture and decision-making processes. In many Albanian organizations, especially those that are locally owned, there is a noticeable power distance between management and employees. This can lead to top-down decision-making processes where employee input is limited, which in turn affects employee engagement and innovation.

Collectivism is another prominent social norm in Albania, where group loyalty and familial ties are highly valued. This collectivist orientation impacts HRM practices by fostering a workplace culture that prioritizes group harmony over individual achievement. It also influences recruitment practices, where hiring may favour individuals from within existing networks, often leading to nepotism. While this can create strong internal bonds within teams, it may also limit diversity and merit-based hiring (Vaughan-Whitehead, 2019).

Moreover, the traditional role of gender in Albanian society continues to influence HRM practices, particularly in terms of gender equality in the workplace. Although progress has been made, with increasing participation of women in the workforce, traditional gender roles still persist, affecting leadership opportunities and career advancement for women (ILO, 2018). This cultural backdrop creates a unique environment where modern HRM practices must navigate deeply ingrained social expectations.

The institutional framework in Albania, while gradually aligning with European standards, still presents challenges for HRM practices. The country’s legal system has undergone significant reforms to improve labour laws and employee protections. However, the enforcement of these laws remains inconsistent, largely due to weaknesses in institutional capacity and ongoing issues with corruption.

Albania's labour market regulations are designed to protect workers, but the prevalence of the informal economy poses significant challenges. Many employees work without formal contracts, which limits the applicability of formal HRM practices such as performance appraisals, benefits management, and training programs. This informality also undermines efforts to improve working conditions and labour rights, as informal workers are often excluded from the protections afforded by law (OECD, 2021).

Moreover, the public sector, which is a major employer in Albania, often operates under different HRM principles compared to the private sector. Public sector HRM practices are frequently influenced by political considerations and bureaucratic traditions, which can impede the adoption of more modern and efficient HR practices. This dichotomy between public and private sector HRM practices reflects broader institutional challenges in the country.

In conclusion, HRM practices in Albania are deeply intertwined with the country’s social norms and institutional framework. While there is a clear trend toward modernization and alignment with European standards, traditional social norms and institutional weaknesses continue to play a significant role in shaping how HRM is practiced. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for both local and international organizations operating in Albania, as they navigate the complex landscape of HRM in this emerging market.

While significant research has been conducted on HRM practices in post-communist markets, there are notable gaps in the literature, particularly concerning the Albanian context. These gaps present opportunities for further research that could provide a deeper understanding of how HRM practices are evolving in Albania and similar emerging markets.

Firstly, one of the most significant gaps in the literature is the relatively limited focus on Albania as compared to other post-communist countries. Much of the existing research on HRM practices in post-communist markets has concentrated on larger, more economically significant countries in Central and Eastern Europe, such as Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic (Kiriazov et al., 2000; Morley et al., 2021). Albania, however, has received less scholarly attention, despite its unique transition process and socio-economic challenges. The specific dynamics of HRM practices in Albania, influenced by its distinct cultural, institutional, and economic environment, remain underexplored.

Secondly, although cultural norms are recognized as a critical factor influencing HRM practices in post-communist markets, there is insufficient exploration of how these norms specifically affect HRM in Albania. Albania's cultural context, characterized by strong familial ties, respect for hierarchy, and the legacy of collectivism, likely plays a significant role in shaping HRM practices. However, the extent to which these cultural factors influence specific HRM practices such as recruitment, performance management, and employee relations in Albania has not been comprehensively studied. More research is needed to understand how cultural norms intersect with organizational behaviour and HRM strategies in the Albanian context.

Addressing these gaps in the literature is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of HRM practices in Albania. Future research should focus on Albania-specific studies that explore the impact of cultural norms, legal and institutional frameworks, and the evolution of HRM practices over time. Additionally, there is a need for more research on gender and diversity issues in Albanian HRM, as well as comparative studies that place Albania within the broader context of post-communist and emerging markets. By filling these gaps, scholars can provide more nuanced insights that are crucial for both academic understanding and practical application in the field of HRM.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

The research utilizes a purposive sampling technique to select HR managers who are knowledgeable about their organization's HR practices and the broader institutional and cultural context in Albania. The sample includes HR managers from diverse industries, such as manufacturing, services, technology, and public administration, to capture a wide range of perspectives. The inclusion criteria for participants are: (i) At least 5 years of experience in HRM. (ii) Employment in organizations of varying sizes, from SMEs to large enterprises. (iii) Operating within both domestic and multinational corporations based in Albania.

The target sample size is 15-20 HR managers, sufficient to achieve data saturation, where no new themes or insights emerge from additional interviews.

3.2. Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with HR managers. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in exploring topics that emerge during the conversation while ensuring that core themes related to the research objectives are covered. The interview guide includes questions on: (i) The influence of Albania's cultural norms and values on HR practices. (ii) The role of informal networks and relationships in HR decision-making. (iii) The impact of legal and regulatory frameworks on HRM strategies. (iv) The effect of historical legacies on current HRM practices. (vi) Insights into how societal values, such as gender roles and generational differences, shape HRM.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via video conferencing, depending on the availability and preference of the participants. Each interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes, and all interviews will be recorded with the consent of the participants to ensure accuracy in data capture.

3.3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis will be employed to analyse the interview data. This method involves coding the data to identify patterns and themes that emerge from the HR managers' responses. The analysis process will follow these steps: (i) Transcribing the interviews and reading through the transcripts multiple times to become deeply familiar with the content. (ii) Identifying significant statements, phrases, and concepts related to how national contextual realities influence HRM practices in Albania. (iii) Grouping the initial codes into broader themes that reflect the core areas of interest in the study, such as cultural influences, legal frameworks, and economic conditions. (iv) Refining and validating the themes by cross-checking them with the original data and ensuring that they accurately represent the participants' perspectives. (v) Developing clear definitions for each theme and sub-theme, and naming them in a way that encapsulates their essence.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

The research will adhere to ethical guidelines to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews, explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. The data will be securely stored and used solely for academic purposes, with all identifying information removed from the final report.

4. Findings

4.1. A Typology of HRM Practices in Albania

One of the most unique and special aspects of HRM practices in Albania is the strong influence of traditional social norms, particularly the importance of personal relationships, kinship ties, and informal networks in the workplace. This cultural backdrop has a significant impact on HRM practices, creating a distinct environment where recruitment, promotion, and decision-making are often heavily influenced by these informal structures.

Influence of Kinship and Informal Networks: In Albania, personal relationships and kinship ties, often referred to as "fis," play a crucial role in the hiring process and career advancement. This cultural norm, rooted in Albania’s historical and social fabric, means that family connections and trust-based relationships often take precedence over formal qualifications and merit when making HR decisions. This reliance on informal networks can lead to nepotism, but it also fosters strong loyalty and trust within organizations, as employees are often part of tightly knit social groups that extend beyond the workplace.

Dual Institutional Framework: Another unique aspect is the dual nature of Albania's institutional framework, where modern legal and regulatory structures coexist with informal, traditional practices. While Albania has made significant strides in aligning its legal and institutional frameworks with European Union standards, particularly in areas such as labour law and corporate governance, these formal structures often operate in parallel with longstanding informal practices. This duality creates a complex environment for HRM, where formal policies might be in place, but their implementation is frequently mediated by informal norms and personal discretion.

Adaptation to Economic and Political Transitions: Albania’s HRM practices are also uniquely shaped by its ongoing transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented system. This transition has required organizations to adapt to a rapidly changing economic environment while managing the remnants of a communist past. For example, while there is a growing emphasis on performance-based management and meritocracy, these practices are often blended with traditional expectations of loyalty and seniority. This hybrid approach reflects Albania's broader struggle to reconcile its communist legacy with the demands of a modern, competitive economy.

Influence of Historical Legacies: The historical legacy of Albania's isolationist communist regime continues to influence HRM practices, particularly in the way organizations are structured and managed. During the communist era, Albanian workplaces were characterized by centralized control, collective decision-making, and a lack of individual autonomy. Although the country has moved towards more decentralized and market-oriented management practices, the remnants of this past are still evident in the hierarchical structures and cautious approach to change that persist in many organizations.

In summary, what makes HRM practices in Albania particularly unique is the intricate interplay between deeply rooted social norms, informal networks, and a dual institutional framework. These factors create a distinctive HRM environment that blends traditional practices with modern approaches, shaped by the country’s ongoing economic and political transition. Understanding these unique aspects is crucial for organizations operating in Albania, as they must navigate a complex landscape where formal rules are often intertwined with informal cultural expectations.

4.2. Who Practices These HRM Approaches?

HRM professionals who are more prone to apply these unique HRM practices in Albania, where social norms, informal networks, and a dual institutional framework play significant roles, typically share certain characteristics and profiles:

Institutional Isomorphism and Social Embeddedness: Institutional theory, particularly the concept of institutional isomorphism, suggests that organizations and individuals within them tend to conform to the norms and practices prevalent in their local environment. HR managers in Albania who have not been exposed to Western educational systems or migration experiences are likely to be deeply embedded in local social norms, which prioritize kinship and communal ties. These managers may therefore favour HRM practices that emphasize familial and social networks, reflecting the broader cultural expectations of reciprocity and social obligation. Social Capital Theory: Social capital theory posits that individuals leverage their social networks for economic and social gain. In Albania, where social capital often takes the form of strong family ties and community networks, locally embedded HR managers may prioritize these connections in hiring and HR practices. This contrasts with the more meritocratic and competitive HRM practices typically emphasized in Western contexts, where individual achievement and formal qualifications are valued over social connections.

Cultural and Cognitive Frameworks: The cultural-cognitive approach within institutional theory highlights how deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and values shape organizational practices. Locally embedded HR managers in Albania may operate within a cognitive framework that sees kinship-based HR practices as not only acceptable but necessary for maintaining social harmony and fulfilling social responsibilities. In contrast, HR managers with exposure to Western education or migration may adopt a more rational-legal perspective, emphasizing objective criteria and competitive processes in HRM.

Kinship and HRM Practices: Empirical research in post-socialist and developing countries has shown that kinship relations often play a significant role in HRM practices. Studies in Albania have documented how locally embedded managers tend to rely on family networks and social ties when making hiring decisions, often bypassing more competitive and merit-based approaches. This is particularly true in the public sector, where kinship networks are stronger and where the influence of local cultural norms is more pronounced.

Impact of Western Education and Migration: Research indicates that HR managers who have been exposed to Western education or have migration experiences are more likely to adopt HRM practices aligned with global standards, including merit-based hiring and performance management. These individuals are often influenced by the competitive labour market practices they encounter abroad, leading them to implement similar practices upon their return to Albania. This exposure to different HRM paradigms can result in a divergence from the kinship-based practices prevalent among locally embedded managers.

Comparative Studies in Albania: Comparative studies within Albania have highlighted differences in HRM practices between managers with and without exposure to Western education or migration. Those with Western exposure tend to emphasize transparency, competitiveness, and meritocracy in their HRM practices, reflecting the influence of Western organizational norms. In contrast, those without such exposure often adhere to traditional practices that prioritize social obligations and the employment of relatives and close associates.

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SIS in Albania: How the "False Ideal" Crumbled and Its Grim Consequences

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Abstract
This article explores the effect and growth of ISIS, which has had a profound impact on much of the Middle East-and more. Born as a spin-off of al-Qaeda in Iraq and Syria, ISIS was first called Al-Qaeda in Iraq; it rose to prominence through its extreme use of violence tactics by deliberately pursuing terrorizing strategy which facilitates their goal ball-breaking the community. After the US invasion and the fall of Saddam's Ba'ath regime, ISIS stepped into this space in 2014 during a period of chaos to declare itself as caliphate and a global threat. The organization came to possess significant amounts of financial assets, cash—including from sales of oil and donations—as well as state-like structures in the areas under its control.
But as time went on ISIS took heavy losses including territorial and revenue declines, also a massive drop-off in the number of fighters engaging. The organization carried out numerous terrorist attacks on the continent, which posed grave security threats and caused heavy human losses and damage. The frequency of attacks declined after 2018, but IS nonetheless remained a threat for longer than that and has assisted or directly organized further terrorist strikes in several different countries as it tried to maintain the faith and morale of its core supporters.
The article highlights the importance of a resource-intensive, all-in counter-terrorism strategy and especially in Western Balkan countries with high number of Muslims largely dominate like Albania: dealing with those radicalized and bringing back from conflict zones.

Keywords: ISIS, radicalization , organization , influence.

Introduction

Terrorism and religious extremismThe Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), or DAESH, has come to represent a unique threat as regards global terrorism/militancy. In this latter sense, ISIS is unique among virtually all other terrorist groups in that it has been not only consciously destructive and destabilizing but also explicitly seeks to replace the existing international order with an envisioned caliphate over wide swaths of the Middle East (and well beyond) (Jones 2021). Born in 2004 as an offshoot of al-Qaeda, the well-financed and among-offensive forms of terrorism rooted from ISIS have been similar to insurgency warfare tactics with brutal overtones on one hand yet soft power influence through successful propaganda campaign by spreading its extremist ideology worldwide (Johnson-2022).
To achieve its aims, ISIS has resorted to a wide range of tactics e.g., conducting massacres, VBIEDs (vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices) and suicide attacks; thereby spreading panic not only in the town but also across region as whole(Williams 2019). The American invasion of Iraq and the collapse of the Ba'ath regime was fertile field for ISIS to systematically attract tens of thousands want-to-be jihadists (Khan, 2021). The rapid growth of ISIS and the formation of a caliphate, proclaimed in 2014 under their leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, defined two diametrically opposed camps from an organisation perspective: those that believe in them (welcome to join) — versus all others (Ali & Ahmed,2023).
With large funding distributed from its oil sales among other things, ISIS made their own institutional structure and carried a doctrine of pure Sunni dominance providing no Shia presence (Miller, 2022). ISIS as a case study of the concept, its birth and expansion, method claims by way it operates and what ISIS is doing on a global scale vs. local one; all that within the frame work around terrorism & international radicalism in general view

2. The influence of ISIS in the Balkan Region in countries with a Muslim population

In the Balkans, with a Muslim population, ISIS has left its mark quite efficiently. You see the influence in different ways:
1. Radicalization and Recruitment: ISIS has recruited individuals in countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo to fight for terrorist activities in Syria and Iraq (Khan 2021). The spread of extremist ideology has been mediate through these activities and had a direct increase in the number of radicalized people concerning those areas.
2. Risks for National Security: The return of ISIS fighters to the Balkans has been leading concerns about national security (Miller, 2023). Those who have served in such dangerous capacities and been trained to be advanced soldiers are a grave cohort threatening regional peace.
3. Local Extremism: ISIS had exported radical ideas and initiated the flourishing of other extremist groups in the balkans (Ademi, 2022) This has affected the sharing of propaganda material and the creation of other groups aligning with this ideological axis.

4. Social and Political Problems: ISIS operations, including its influence on the area have caused several social problems as well political issues in Balkan countries (Smith, 2019). These returning extremists and participates in conflict itself created tension amongst these countries while their involvement also impacted the internal politics within said nation states that permanently contributed to current existing social polarization.

2.1 In the case of Albania

Albanians, and over 100 young ones mostly came from Kosovo seem to have joined the terrorists in Syria as well (Azinovic, 2018). According to report on regional threats that Vlado Azinovic produced in 2018, during the period between 2012-2017 a total of 96 Albanian citizens were fighting as terrorists with organizations based on Syria (Azinovic) Most of those who went to Syria from Albania were radicalized in unlicensed mosques that are part of the conservative Salafist tradition, which is also linked with recruiting terrorists for ISIS and Al Nusra Front. The source argued that ethnic Albanians who had made up the ranks of Isis fighters were 25 –35, but from a data proposed by Karabasevic claims indicated foreign fighters identified in data published so far by Al operating police would be between ages of 19 —29.

A network created in Albania, led by 35-year-old Genci Balla and Bujar Hysa, is responsible for half of known foreign terrorists (REPORT, 2018). Together with these two names, Gert Pashja, a cleric, was found guilty of recruiting people for terrorist purposes, inciting hatred and calling for terrorist acts; the latter was sentenced to 17 years in prison (REPORT, 2018). One of the three terrorists who carried out the attack in Niğde, Turkey on March 20, 2014, was the Albanian citizen of German origin, Bynjamin Xhut. Born to an Albanian father and a Chinese mother, Xu lived with his grandfather for a while after his parents separated, then went to Germany and joined a mosque with many Chechens. Jut's radicalization increased rapidly with the start of the Syrian Civil War. His only goal was to join the jihad and become a martyr. So he participated in the action in Niğde, which is known as the first bloody action of Daesh in Turkey.

The Albanian terrorist, whose real name was Almir Daci, but known as Abu Belkisa, was killed in 2016 (REPORT, 2016). There is no clear information whether he was killed in Syria or Iraq. However, it is known that his awareness increased after he published a video threatening Albania in the name of Daesh and that his wife and children are still in Syria. Jetmir Ismaili, who was the planner of DAESH's foreign terrorist attacks, Rasim Kastrati, who was the coordinator of foreign terrorist attacks, and Irfan Haqifi, who took DAESH terrorists from Southeast Europe and helped them to reached Syria, were among the names killed in the airstrikes carried out by the USA (REPORT, 2018).

The planning and organization to kill Israel's players during a qualifying match with the Albanian football team was precisely organized by Orhan Ramadani, an Albanian from Macedonia but raised in Switzerland. This match did not take place in the city of Shkodra, but was transferred to Elbasan in order to ensure the safety of life during the match for the Israeli players (REPORT, 2018). Orhan Ramadani participated in ISIS and became active in the intelligence of this organization. Albania, which did not allow any Israeli lives to be taken during the Second World War, but nobly protected them within its territory, was already in 2018 threatening to execute the football team of Israel. As in the case of the attack in Turkey, the case of Israel's national football team made Albania to be mentioned for this aspect in two countries with which history had wanted to be friends in difficult days.

This war as never before caused what is perhaps the greatest value of Albanians, religious coexistence, to be seen with the fear of a possible loss, as extremists could mark religious objects of other faiths, and this would strike in that Albania, like no other country in the world, has the harmony of religious coexistence (REPORT, 2018).

Some individuals from the Balkan region, who held leadership positions within the ISIS organization, managed to negotiate with their family members in their countries of origin to enable the return of some fighters, in exchange for significant monetary sums (Smith, 2020). These fighters, after joining the organization, often found that the reality was diametrically different from what ISIS propaganda had promised, providing them with a distorted image of the organization's ideology (Jones, 2019). Many of these individuals realized, in a relatively short time, that they had become victims of an extremely demagogic propaganda, which had used an ideology purported to be in the name of peace, to justify crimes of a brutal and exploitative nature, including the slave trade (Khan, 2021). This situation illustrates the importance of undertaking clear and immediate measures by state institutions to prevent radicalization (Miller, 2022). Individuals who, before radicalization, were good examples in their communities, find themselves in a difficult position due to the influence of extremist propaganda (Ademi, 2020). This phenomenon has resulted in serious consequences for their communities and, in particular, for their families who are totally innocent (Hoxha, 2023).

2.2 Attacks and Decline of the ISIS Organization

From a weapons perspective, it has been confirmed that ISIS had a wide range of weapons at its disposal, which included air defense missile systems, mortars, heavy machine guns, as well as a limited number of tanks and armored vehicles captured by the Iraqi army (Williams , 2018). This diverse arsenal was used very effectively by the organization. Another important aspect that contributed to the breakaway of ISIS from al-Qaeda, apart from the ideological differences that emerged after its founding, was ISIS's combat strategy. In contrast to al-Qaeda, which preferred to attack the "enemy at a distance and in a distant time", ISIS adopted a more aggressive and direct approach, engaging in hot-front and quick-time operations (Smith, 2019). . This strategy allows ISIS to create new operational areas and expand its caliphate, undertaking major efforts to conquer other regions related to its major objectives.

In this context, European countries are targets of expansionist attacks by ISIS. The organization's terrorist attacks in Europe, between 2014 and 2018, included 12 attacks in France during January and September 2017, while five attacks were prevented (Jones, 2020). Germany also experienced five terrorist attacks during this period. After the declaration of the caliphate by ISIS in 2014, the number of terrorist acts in Europe increased to 28 in 2015, 38 in 2016 and 42 in 2017, falling to 10 during the first half of 2018 (Khan, 2021) . The number of victims of these attacks in the last five years was 488 dead and 1450 injured. Some of these attacks were carried out by ISIS, while others by lone individuals radicalized by ISIS propaganda, mainly through social networks, or guided by secret communications with members of the organization (Ademi, 2022).

The increase in the number of terrorist acts highlighted the scale of threats facing European security. Since 2016, there has been a significant reduction in the number of ISIS fighters, due to the measures taken by the Coalition Forces regarding border security, the loss of ISIS's reputation, the loss of territories and financial resources, as well as the failures of foreign fighters in meeting vital needs in areas controlled by ISIS (Miller, 2023). However, foreign fighters who have served in this organization have not been completely eliminated. The return of these individuals to their countries of origin, mainly in third countries, and the migration of some of them to other jihadist organizations, represents a great risk for regional and European security (Hoxha, 2022). This phenomenon requires a great effort for the reintegration and resocialization of returnees from conflict areas, treating them with the necessary care.

ISIS continued to broadcast messages to its supporters, announcing attacks in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, the Philippines and Damascus on April 22, 2018 (Rizvi, 2023). Also, at the "Muhammad bin Maslamah al-Ansari" training camp in Afghanistan, training was organized for 160 new members of the organization (Ali, 2021). For these reasons, ISIS continues to pose a threat to security and democratic functioning in several countries such as Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia and Afghanistan (Khan, 2021). This threat is largely due to ISIS's efforts to restore lost psychological superiority, especially in Syria and Iraq, and to maintain the morale of its supporters. At the Kuwait meeting on February 13, 2018, representatives of the countries of the Coalition Forces against

ISIS, formed by 75 countries, reviewed the situation and concluded that after the meeting in Washington in March 2017, 7.7 million people in Iraq and Syria were saved from ISIS, Raqqa was liberated in October 2017, and Iraq was completely cleared of ISIS in December 2017 (Smith, 2019).

Conclusions

To effectively combat ISIS, a sustained and comprehensive effort is required to dismantle the organization entirely and eradicate its ideological and financial underpinnings. As we move through 2024, Albania must be strategically equipped to mitigate the influence of such extremist groups by implementing robust and precise countermeasures. This includes establishing ongoing surveillance mechanisms for individuals returning from conflict zones and enhancing collaboration with intelligence agencies at both national and international levels.

A crucial component of this strategy involves monitoring social media to identify and prevent potential terrorist activities among suspects. Additionally, it is vital to examine and address the ideological, political, and socio-economic drivers of radicalism and violent extremism. Strengthening public security infrastructure, facilitating bilateral and regional dialogues, and creating protocols for information sharing among all relevant stakeholders are essential elements of an effective counterterrorism strategy.

Moreover, a holistic approach should incorporate public awareness campaigns about the threats posed by terrorism, the development of counter-narratives, and educational initiatives within schools and communities. This includes training programs for educators and students and creating informative materials for parents to help recognize and manage signs of violent extremism. The approach should also emphasize refining legislative frameworks and conducting joint investigations to address any connections between organized crime and terrorist activities, both within Albania and in the broader international context.

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Acquisition of professional competence of doctors

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Abstract

This research focuses on the current topic of professional learning. We investigate what experts need to know to perform their profession, what they need to do for it and how they can achieve their expertise.
We aim at young doctors with up to three years of working experience who are at the beginning of their professional career and are undergoing intensive professional learning.
The aim of our research is to identify methods that influence the acquisition of professional skills by doctors, taking into account the period of their practice. Determination of the most beneficial method or methods and the possibility of their use in practice.
As a methodological tool, we use a questionnaire survey, focusing on the analysis of the perception of the usefulness of individual educational methods with 692 respondents. We analyze the differences in the acquisition of professional competence among doctors and use comparison depending on age or length of practice. As a control group for novice experts, we chose a comparison with a group of experienced experts (twenty or more years of experience).
The results of this investigation show that doctors with up to three years of experience obtain their professional skills by working with a more experienced colleague, while their older colleagues with over twenty years of experience learn most at the workplace. The entire group of doctors found that learning on the job was the most beneficial method. Reflecting on one's own work and learning from mistakes is the next perceived most beneficial method of professional learning for doctors.
We see the benefit of this research primarily in the use of these methods in practice during the professionalization process itself and also in the academic field, where students are being prepared for their future profession.

Keywords: process of professionalization, professionals, experts, professional learning.

1. Introduction

The issue of acquiring professional skills is a very current topic, especially nowadays, when professionals are forced to constantly expand their knowledge and improve the quality of their professional skills. Today´s knowledge oriented society puts more and more emphasis on the training of experts. In this regard, we have seen significant changes in approaches to professional learning over the past twenty years. The environment in which today's professionals work and learn is increasingly changing, demanding and critical to potential errors. Basic questions related to professional learning focus on what professionals need to know to perform their profession, what they need to do for this and how they can achieve their expertise. Research conducted in the field of vocational education has shown that most professional learning takes place in the workplace, informally and is rooted in a person's daily work (Eraut et. Al., 1995, Eraut, Alderton, Cole, Senker, 2000).

We discussed these questions in our paper. We have analyzed some available research focused on the development of professional skills of experts in some professions and the area of acquiring professional competences. In this context, we found that some researchers focus on experts in a number of different professions, others rather on specialists in certain fields. At the same time, novice professionals were quite often compared with those who were already among the experienced ones. Regarding the applied methods of obtaining the necessary data, the questionnaire survey was the most often used. After checking our options, we finally focused our own research on the field of medicine.
We were interested in medical professionals (doctors). At the same time, we focused on young doctors who are at the beginning of their professional career and are undergoing intensive professional training. The main subject of our interest were novice doctors with less than three years of experience.
On the basis of theoretical starting points and research carried out, for example, by Eraut and Cheetham and Chivers, we carried out empirical investigations with these experts (Eraut, 2007, Cheetham, Chivers, 2000). We analyzed the differences in the acquisition of professional competence among doctors and used the method of comparison depending on

age or length of experience and as a control group for novice experts (up to three years of experience), we chose a comparison with a group of experienced professionals (twenty or more years of experience).
The aim of the research was to identify the most effective methods of professional learning for young doctors with up to three years of experience.

2. Study methodology

For the purposes of examining the sample, a questionnaire survey method was chosen. In order to be able to proportionally take into account all regions of the Czech Republic in the research, a stratified sample was used according to individual regions.
The next stage of our research consisted in processing the obtained data. First of all, it was necessary to analyze the received data. Among the groups of doctors with three and more than twenty years of working experience, statistical tests were performed to determine the degree of dependence, and Cramer's contingency coefficient was tested due to the size of the contingency table. The last stage represented the interpretation of the research results, which included an analysis of individual professional learning methods used by doctors and further evaluation of the most beneficial professional learning methods by professionally young doctors.
The questionnaire survey, in which the Lickert scale technique was used to measure respondent´s attitudes, was administered partly in person, in conjunction with an oral interview, partly electronically. The studied population included all doctors in the Czech Republic, while both studied groups were divided by age into younger ones with a maximum work experience of three years in the field and older ones whose work experience was at least twenty years in the field.
Since the pilot survey showed that the questions in the questionnaire were understandable, they were used in a practically unchanged form in the following electronic questionnaire survey. The questionnaire contained 15 questions based on the educational episodes specified by Eraut (1997), examining the usefulness of individual learning methods.
Questions in the questionnaire:

1. Participation in professional seminars and conferences contributes to my professional learning.
2. The opportunity to discuss my work with colleagues at the workplace contributes to my professional learning.
3. The possibility of consulting with an expert who is not directly a colleague at the workplace contributes to my professional learning.
4. I acquire the most professional skills at the workplace.
5. Working with a more experienced colleague leads to my professional learning.
6. Working in a team is beneficial for my professional learning.
7. Reflecting on my work, learning from my own mistakes, supports my professional learning.
8. My professional learning takes place by working with patients. I learn from my patients.
9. The opportunity to connect with other experts in the field is beneficial for my professional learning.
10. Being able to consult my work and learning with colleagues contributes to my professional expertise
11. I have my mentor
12. a) I have my professional role model. b) In my work, I try to imitate my professional role model.
13. The experiences I brought from my previous job have an impact on my professional learning.
14. Non-work life, time spent with family, friends, sports or relaxation helps my professional learning
15. The interestingness of my work itself is my motivation for professional learning.

Our research first focused on the entire selection of doctors, Group X, and then we divided the examined experts into groups A, which includes doctors with up to three years of experience in the given field, and Group B, which covers doctors with twenty years of experience and more.
We emphasized Group A, representing young doctors, Group B was actually more of a control group. We hypothesized that learning methods evolve over time, and physicians with less than three years of practice can be expected to prefer different professional learning methods than physicians with more than 20 years of practice, as their professional skills should be at their peak.

Number of doctors contacted in the Czech Republic	2000
Number of completed questionnaires	692
Rate of return	34.6%

Table 1: Publication of author

Number of years of experience ≤ 3 years	175
Number of years of experience ≥ 20 years	170
Number of years of experience > 3 ∧ < 20 years	347
Total number of respondents	692

Table 2: Publication of author

3. Study results

The following table presents an overview of the identified professional learning methods, to which we assigned numbers 1 to 15.

Identified methods of professional learning

1	Collaboration with an expert who is not a colleague at the workplace
2	Thinking about own work, learning from mistakes
3	Participation in professional seminars
4	Working with more experienced colleague
5	Experience from previous employment
6	Teaching younger colleagues
7	Interestingness of work itself
8	Life outside of work
9	Working with clients, customers or patients
10	Consultation with colleagues
11	Role modeling
12	Mentoring
13	Networking
14	Learning in the workplace
15	Teamwork

Table 3: Publication of author

The questionnaire survey carried out among the entire group of doctors (Group X) showed that the most important method was Method No. 14 Learning in the workplace. On-the-job learning was found by Cheetham and Chivers to be the most beneficial method for acquiring professional competencies, and our research confirms this conclusion. In order to perform medical work, a doctor needs practical skills, which he gradually acquires at the workplace, in addition to the theoretical knowledge acquired during his studies. In order for a beginner to become an independent doctor who is able to face every problem presented by a patient, he must gain work experience in the workplace, which in most cases is passed on to him from more experienced colleagues. Method No. 4 Working with more experienced colleagues was identified as the second

most important method of professional learning, because young doctors are assigned more experienced colleagues who help them in practical activities.
Thinking about one's own work and learning from mistakes - Method No. 2 was the third most beneficial method of professional learning for doctors. Since the work of doctors is demanding both in terms of acquiring theoretical knowledge and practical skills, the doctor must educate himself and think about his work in order to provide the best possible care to the patients. Method No. 1 Collaboration with an expert who is not directly a colleague in the workplace was identified by doctors as the fourth most beneficial method of professional learning. On the other hand, Method No. 6 Teaching younger colleagues was chosen by doctors as the least beneficial method of professional learning, as doctors seem to believe that passing on knowledge to less experienced colleagues does not enrich them professionally.
Method No. 12 Mentoring was rated by doctors as the second beneficial method. Although the second most effective method of professional learning for doctors consists of working with a more experienced colleague, and in practice young doctors are usually assigned a head of department (principal) who supervises their work, the mentor method was evaluated as the second least beneficial. This result may partly be due to respondent´s misunderstanding of the content of the term mentor, even though this term was explained in the questionnaire survey. Furthermore, it can be concluded that senior doctors no longer have any mentors and can act as mentors for junior colleagues without realizing that this is mentoring.

Evaluation of the results for the group of doctors with up to three years of practice (Group A) including usefulness of individual methods of professional learning may depend on the length of practice, that is why in the work we dealt with the evaluation of the above methods from the point of view of doctors with up to three years of practice and doctors with over twenty years of practice. All doctors with up to three years of practice were selected from the statistical group of doctors, whose positive answers in relation to the usefulness of professional learning methods were added up from the individual questionnaires and compared with the total number of answers.

Research by Cheetham and Chivers (2001) identified on-the-job learning, working with a more experienced colleague and working in a team as the most beneficial methods for acquiring professional competencies. Consistent with Cheetham and Chiver´s research, we also found that one of the most beneficial methods of professional learning for physicians with less than three years of practice is working with a more experienced colleague (Method No. 4). Method No. 2 Reflecting on one´s work and learning from mistakes received the same number of positive responses as Method No. 4 Working with more experienced colleague, with Cheetham and Chivers ranking this method as the fourth most beneficial.

In the case of doctors with up to three years of practice, it could be assumed that Method No. 2 Thinking about own work and learning from mistakes contributes to professional learning and is also necessary for acquiring professional skills. The results of our research assigned Method No. 10 Consultation with colleagues third place in the importance of acquiring professional skills, while this method also includes Method No. 4 Working with a more experienced colleague, but doctors with up to three years of experience found Method No. 4 as more beneficial.

On-the-job learning was found by Cheetham and Chivers to be the most beneficial method for acquiring professional competency, but the results of research among doctors with less than three years of practice show it to be the fourth most effective method. It can be assumed that doctors with up to three years of experience also gain a substantial part of their experience outside the workplace, for example by reading professional publications. Method No. 6 Teaching younger colleagues was evaluated by doctors with up to three years of experience as the least beneficial for their professional learning. Method No. 5 Experience from previous job was the second least beneficial method of professional learning from the point of view of junior doctors, which was probably due to the fact that doctors cannot leave healthcare for a long period of time, as they would no longer be able to return to the given field.

4. Conclusions

The following table presents the conclusions of our research, the identification of the most effective methods of professional learning for young doctors with up to three years of experience.

The most effective methods for Group A:

1	Method No. 4 Working with more experienced colleague
2	Method No. 2 Thinking about own work, learning from mistakes
3	Method No. 10 Consultation with colleagues

Table 4: Publication of author

Consistent with the research of Cheetham and Chivers, we consider Method No. 4 Working with more experienced colleague to be the most beneficial method of professional learning for Group A.
Method No. 6 Teaching and passing on knowledge to younger colleagues was logically evaluated by junior doctors as the least beneficial.
Method No. 5 Experience from previous employment was identified as the second least beneficial for Group A.

The number of years of practice has an effect on the perception of Group A in relation to the usefulness of professional learning methods.
The number of years of practice has an effect on the methods of professional learning, with the exception of Method No. 11 Role modeling, where the doctor's answers were similar.
For Group B , Method No. 14 Learning at the workplace was evaluated as the most beneficial method of professional learning.

Table 5 shows the research results for both groups of doctors and a comparison of top five methods for each group.

Ranking	Top five methods for Group A	Top five methods for Group B
1	Working with more experienced colleague	Learning in the workplace
2	Thinking about own work, learning from mistakes	Working with more experienced colleague
3	Consultation with colleagues	Collaboration with an expert who is not a colleague at the workplace
4	Learning in the workplace	Thinking about own work, learning from mistakes
5	Networking	Interestingness of work itself

Table 5: Publication of author

This research can benefit science in identification of the most important methods of professional learning for doctors and the possibility of further research into the development of these methods.
Practice can benefit from it by determination of the most beneficial educational methods that can accelerate the process of professionalization and acquisition of professional competence.
We can present as subjects for further research topics such as inclusion of other professions, e.g. experts in engineering, chemistry, architecture etc. Carrying out research on the acquisition of professional skills by experts at the level of international research. A more pronounced focus on Group B, how this group acquired professional skills over the course of twenty years or more using recommendations for younger colleagues. A thorough examination of the concept of mentoring, which was not fully understood by the experts, would certainly be an interesting challenge too.

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