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MPOX in the Balkan countries: Current situation and state of knowledge

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Abstract

In the last two decades, the landscape of monkeypox disease (MPOX) has changed, from sporadic outbreaks in endemic countries restricted to Central and Western African countries to non-endemic countries worldwide with increased human-to-human transmission including the Balkan countries. The World Health Organization (WHO) in response to the 2022 MPOX global outbreak coupled with the ongoing outbreaks in Central Africa has recently classified MPOX as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. The twenty-two MPOX confirmed cases in Greece at the end of 2024 and the first case recorded in Kosovo raised our concerns about a potential outbreak of MPOX infection in the Balkans. This study aims to describe the confirmed cases in terms of epidemiology, clinical symptoms, diagnostic methods and surveillance programs implemented in the Balkan countries. Our results reveal that among the cases identified in the Balkan countries between May 2022 and December 2024 most were young and middle-age men. The highest incidence of MPOX registered cases was from Greece followed by Slovenia and Serbia. In more than half of the cases persons reported sex with other men and the disease was characterized by rashes in anogenital areas. This suggests that informative guidance in different settings, promoting safe sexual practices, and vaccination of high-risk groups of the population are essential pillars to control MPOX outbreaks.

Keywords: Monkeypox, MPOX; Balkan countries; zoonosis; outbreak; epidemiology; surveillance system

Recent Developments in the Albanian Real Estate Market and Investors' Behavior

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Abstract

The real estate industry is changing to become more dynamic and useful, prioritizing accessibility and outcomes over ownership. There won't be a positive return on investment if investors don't develop creative and reasonably priced ways to gain operational experience. Contrary to many economic and financial theories, which assume that people make investment decisions based on their rationality and considering all available facts, there is evidence that suggests human beings make decisions and choices based on irrationality, inconsistency, and incompetence when faced with uncertainty. With an emphasis on how people choose which real estate investments to make, this essay aims to provide a broad overview of behavioral finance. In general, Albanians are prone to irrational decision-making, particularly when they experience losses and overvalue their possessions based on generalizations that aren't necessarily relevant to the asset. They are also susceptible to herd instinct and make investment decisions based on the models of the people they associate with. A growing tourism industry, more foreign investment, and economic improvements have all contributed to Albania's real estate market's notable expansion in recent decades.

Keywords: real estate, decision, investment, behavior, economic theory

Gender Dilemmas in Artistic Swimming

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Abstract

This research explores developments in synchronized swimming since 2015, when men were first allowed to compete officially. These rule changes opened new opportunities but also raised dilemmas around gender inclusion. They reflect broader societal efforts toward gender equality and prompt a reevaluation of the sport's aesthetic, performance, and regulatory frameworks. The inclusion of transgender athletes introduces further complexity.

The study is based on secondary research, primarily document analysis and media review. Key sources include FINA/World Aquatics rule changes, International Olympic Committee statements, and national federation guidelines. The media research examined sports journalism articles, athlete interviews, and social media discussions. Document analysis traced institutional positions, while media analysis revealed how various societal actors respond to these changes.

Findings show growing acceptance of male athletes in the sport, though gender stereotypes still shape aesthetic expectations. No consistent regulation exists for transgender athletes. The media often presents male and transgender athletes as novelties—boosting visibility but risking marginalization. Concerns over performance equity are frequently rooted in outdated or unscientific views. The sport is becoming more inclusive, but culturally it takes time to adapt.

In conclusion, male and transgender participation brings creative and athletic enrichment to artistic swimming. However, fair and inclusive regulations must be grounded in scientific consensus. It is essential to update aesthetic standards, provide education for judges and coaches, and raise public awareness about gender diversity. Ongoing research and monitoring are crucial to understanding the impact of these changes on performance and audience perceptions.

Keywords: gender dilemmas, artistic swimming, rules, gender equality, inclusion

Modeling and lightning overvoltage analysis of transmission lines

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Abstract

The mathematical modeling and simulation of electromagnetic transient processes is very important for the overvoltage analysis of power transmission systems. The aim of study is modeling of overhead transmission lines as a very important part of power systems. Based on insulation coordination guides and standards, the study is focused on the modeling accuracy impact for evaluating the voltage levels during transient process of lightning. This phenomenon plays an important role in study of electrical stability of overhead transmission lines, which are the most exposed to this transient process. The mathematical modeling and simulation are performed on ATP environment, as one of the most widely used software for the study of transient processes in transmission lines, especially for the analysis of very fast transient processes. Based on really data for all the necessary modeling elements, there are treated the lightning voltages for a 400kV transmission line of Albanian power system. The simulations are performed for some different representations of line on modeling (partial and fully on line elements, like conductors, towers, grounding system). By comparing the overvoltage levels for each case, the study shows some recommendations and conclusions about the impact of modeling of transmission lines on their performance analysis during lightning study.

Keywords: transmission line, modeling, simulation, overvoltage

Is the transgender issue also a doping question?

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Abstract

The intersection of gender identity and anti-doping regulations has emerged as one of the most complex dilemmas in contemporary sport. As more transgender athletes seek inclusion in competitive events, the role of hormonal treatments — particularly testosterone suppression or supplementation — raises critical questions about fairness, eligibility, and what constitutes "doping." It has been a long road from Caster Semenya's World Athletics Championship gold medal, weightlifter Laurel Hubbard's Olympic entry to Stephanie Turner's failure to compete against Redmond Sullivan in an American fencing competition. For a long time, it has been a question in scientific circles whether Asian and Caucasian-type people break down testosterone differently or not.

Traditionally, doping has been defined as the use of substances or methods intended to enhance athletic performance (World Anti-Doping Agency [WADA], 2021). However, in the case of transgender athletes undergoing medically necessary hormone therapy, the intention is not performance enhancement but alignment with gender identity (Harper, 2015). This distinction challenges the current anti-doping frameworks, which were not designed with gender transition in mind. On the one hand, testosterone-altering drugs have a global effect on the body, and we don't know the long-term effects in adults, especially if they are used before puberty. Testosterone levels are currently actually used as a gender limiter. Jacobsson et al. published in 2006 about the UGT2B17 gene whose presence or non-existence results in a significant difference in testosterone glucuronide secretion, which is responsible for converting testosterone into a water-soluble compound so that it can be detected in urine. (Ránky et al., 2009)

Regulatory bodies like the IOC have introduced new frameworks emphasizing fairness, inclusion, and non-discrimination (International Olympic Committee, 2021). Yet the debate persists: does hormone therapy confer an unfair advantage? Emerging research suggests that after a period of hormone therapy, physical advantages such as muscle mass and strength may diminish significantly, though not uniformly across all individuals or sports (Roberts et al., 2021). While other researchers suggest that transgender female athletes have significantly greater absolute handholding power than cis women (Hamilton, 2024)

Simultaneously, broader gender issues continue to challenge the binary structures of sports competition (Béki & Tamás-Szora, 2024). Non-binary athletes, for example, do not fit into traditional male/female categories, raising further questions about eligibility, event classification, and fairness (Travers, 2018). Moreover, media portrayals often fuel public misunderstanding, either framing transgender and non-binary athletes as threats to fairness or as political symbols (Trolan, 2013).

This paper, based on secondary research using document analysis and media studies, argues that current doping definitions and gender regulations need significant reform. Sports organizations must differentiate between therapeutic hormone use for gender transition and illicit doping practices. Fairness must be redefined not only through biological markers but also through ethical and social principles of inclusion and equity.

Keywords: doping, gender, non-binary athletes, testosterone.

Transforming Albania's Economic Structure: The Strategic Role of Manufacturing Sector

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Abstract

Economic diversification, particularly through the expansion of the industrial sector, is crucial in enhancing long-term economic resilience and sustainability. This paper examined how shifting away from Albania's historical reliance on a limited number of sectors, such as agriculture, tourism, and remittances, can help reduce vulnerability to external shocks, economic volatility, and seasonal instability. By broadening the economic base, particularly through the growth of industries, Albania could strengthen its economic structure, stimulate innovation, and improve productivity. The study argued that a more diversified economy, with a robust industrial sector, not only mitigates risks but also can create new job opportunities and reduce regional disparities. Investments in industrial development and human capital, along with targeted support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), were seen as essential for achieving sustainable and long-term growth. The findings highlighted the need for strategic government policies to promote diversification, showing that Albania's economic stability and prosperity depend on embracing industrial diversification as a central component of its development strategy.

Keywords: Economic diversification, Industrial sector, Human capital, Policy strategies

Bridging Rationality and Reality: The Impact of Financial Literacy on Behavioral Biases in Albania's Economy

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between financial literacy and behavioral biases in individual financial decision-making, with a focus on Albania—a country marked by low financial education, institutional distrust, and the enduring psychological effects of past financial crises. Drawing on behavioral finance theory, the research explores whether financial literacy serves as a protective factor against cognitive biases such as loss aversion, herd behavior, anchoring, overconfidence, and status quo bias. A structured questionnaire, combining standardized financial literacy questions and scenario-based bias assessments, was administered to a diverse sample of 110 respondents. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis using SPSS reveal a significant inverse relationship between financial literacy levels and the number of biases exhibited. Notably, herd behavior and loss aversion were most prevalent, especially among individuals with lower financial knowledge. The findings suggest that while greater financial literacy can mitigate irrational behavior, it is not sufficient on its own to eliminate bias. The study concludes with policy recommendations emphasizing the need for targeted, culturally relevant financial education that also addresses the emotional and cognitive dimensions of financial behavior in post-transition societies.

Keywords: Financial literacy, behavioral biases, Albania, loss aversion, herd behavior, financial education.

New insights into MPOX vaccines and prospect strategies

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Abstract

The human population seems to be more susceptible to monkeypox infection, given the successful eradication of the smallpox worldwide and the cessation of smallpox vaccination campaign in 1980. In particular, a high incidence of monkeypox virus (MPXV) disease (MPOX) in both Central and Western Africa was reported in the past 50 years. MPXV compared to variola virus (VARV), the etiological agent of smallpox, is less lethal, but it represents a threat to public health. The World Health Organization (WHO) recently classified MPXV disease as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern due to the global events of MPOX in May 2022, coupled to ongoing outbreaks in Central and Western Africa in August 2024. Also, the WHO's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) suggests the use of smallpox vaccines, which include ACAM2000, MVA-BN, and LC16m18. Although these were deployed to prevent the spread of disease among the highest-risk groups, they did not deliver complete immunization and presented manufacturing issues. Given the potential of the MPOX virus (MPXV) to evolve and the wide animal reservoir, there is an urgent need to develop a new vaccine platform that specifically targets MPXV. The review describes new insights into the MPOX specific vaccine development and prospects strategies such as *prime-boost* vaccinations to control and prevent future outbreaks.

Keywords: MPOX, smallpox vaccines, new vaccine platforms, prime-boost regimens, non-human primates (NHPs), fowlpox virus (FWPV)
