

COST Action CA20112

**Evaluation on Rural and
Territorial Development,
Urban Development**

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PROFEED *book 3*



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CA20112 - Platform OF policy Evaluation community for improved EU policies and Better ACKnowledgement

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ABOUT PROFEEDBACK

The COST Action PROFEEDBACK - Platform OF policy Evaluation community for improved EU policies and Better ACKnowledgement (CA20112, MoU 052/21) 2021-2025 aims to foster the networking of the policy evaluation community at EU-level, raise awareness on the importance of evaluation policy research and improve its impact on policy-making. The Platform, following a bottom-up and open approach, will gather researchers and professionals from various scientific fields and sectors to present and evaluate theories, topics, tools and methods of policy evaluation. Results of the Europe-wide assessment of good practices will provide direct and high-quality inputs for national and EU bodies responsible for policy evaluation.

Policy evaluation is a key tool in understanding, developing and modernising EU policies, thus there is a growing demand for EU-wide and high quality evaluation services. The main challenge is that currently there is no bottom-up platform for European researchers and professionals working in policy evaluation. They have limited possibilities to discuss common problems, assess country specific practices and share their knowledge in a mutually beneficial and effective way.

The PROFEEDBACK Action has three key objectives to achieve during the Action period 18/10/2021 - 17/10/2025 and beyond.



Foster networking and knowledge-exchange of the policy evaluation community at European level



Raise awareness on the importance of policy evaluation research and improve its impact on policy-making



Reinforce state-of-the-art research in the policy evaluation field and contribute to evaluation standards

ABOUT PROFEEDbook3

In the framework of the PROFEEDBACK Action, one conference every half-year is implemented. After each conference thematic deliverables are issued, the so called PROFEEDbooks (D4.1-D4.8). They summarise the main presentations and results of the conferences.

PROFEEDbooks support multidisciplinary, the systematisation of different methodologies and the exact transfer of know-how for the policy evaluation community. These also serve the interests of European and national policy-makers in developing the frameworks of the next programming periods and of a common European evaluation culture.

In addition, the PROFEEDbooks enrich the literature of public policy, aiming to develop theory, knowledge, method and tool base of European evaluation policy as well as a common understanding of the current problems and challenges. PROFEEDbooks support the Action in reaching audience beyond the Action members.

The 3rd PROFEEDBACK Conference focuses on **Evaluation on Rural and Territorial Development, Urban Development**. During the conference, we discuss evaluation results on regional development policies to understand:

- the factors influencing the effectiveness of these policies at the national or regional level
- strengths and challenges of the methodologies applied to measure the success of regional development policies
- the challenges of policy evaluation in distinguishing between short-term versus long-term effects of social inclusion policies
- role and efficiency of social innovation in the regional development
- impact of the global megatrends on the issues related to fair regional development

The conference has taken place in **Bratislava, Slovakia** between **18-19 May 2023**.

The event has been organised by the **Centre for Social and Psychological Sciences of the Slovak Academy of Sciences**.



FRAMEWORK

Sema Yılmaz Genç

Yıldız Technical University, Turkey

A review of some important literature resources affecting the development of sustainability philosophy with its socioeconomic and environmental dimensions.

ABSTRACT

Sustainability is a socio-ecological process characterized by the environment, economy, and social spheres of influence in the pursuit of a common ideal. It is a commitment and initiative to leave a world where they can be self-sufficient in every field for future generations. Sustainability is the goal of achieving human ecosystem balance (homeostasis). This target also covers temporal processes with a holistic approach in the context of “sustainable development.” Since the first ages, humanity has always attempted to create permanent systems and structures in socioeconomic terms, which can be defined as sustainability. But at that time, people generally did this in order not to compromise their current order and welfare level. Today, we see that sustainability has a much newer and more modern definition. Today, a definition of sustainability centered on the future rather than the present was introduced in the Brundtland Report in 1987: “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Sustainability, which is used to refer to the biosphere and the ability of civilization to be permanent in the 21st century, aims to ensure a change in a balanced environment where the potential to meet human needs today and in the future is preserved. This study discusses some important literary sources that affect the development of the philosophy of sustainability with their socioeconomic and environmental dimensions. Selected sources in this context are: *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* (1949), *Silent Spring* (1962), *The Limits to Growth* (1972), *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As If People Mattered* (1973), *Our Common Future* (1987), *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2014), *The End of Nature* (1989), *Food Waste. Home Consumption, Material Culture and Everyday Life* (2014), *Wasted World: How Our Consumption Challenges the Planet* (2012), and *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming* (2019).

The realisation of the need to preserve the environment and promote socioeconomic development for future generations has led to the emergence of sustainability philosophy as an important field of study in the contemporary world. Sustainable development derives from the philosophy of sustainability, which seeks to integrate the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of human existence. This paper seeks to examine some influential literature sources that have influenced the recent development of sustainability philosophy.

A Sand County Almanack: And Sketches Here and There by Aldo Leopold is a pioneering sustainability book. Leopold's 1949 book emphasises preserving nature and balancing economic needs with environmental sustainability. Silent Spring by Rachel Carson, which started the modern environmental movement, is another influential sustainability book. Pesticides harm the environment, especially birds, according to this 1962 publication. Besides, chemicals in agriculture and other industries raised health concerns.

The Limits to Growth was published in 1972 and predicted the consequences of continued population and industrialization growth using computer models. The book demonstrated the importance of sustainable development, as continued economic growth would result in environmental degradation. E.F. Schumacher's 1973 book Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as If People Mattered argued for a focus on scaled-down, community-oriented, and sustainable economic models that prioritise the well-being of people, the environment, and the economy.

Our Common Future, published in 1987 by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development, defined sustainable development as meeting present needs without compromising future needs. It stressed global environmental cooperation. The 2014 book The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History by Elizabeth Kolbert argues that humans are causing the sixth mass extinction. Bill McKibben's 1989 book The End of Nature describes how humans are destroying nature.

Food Waste. Home Consumption, Material Culture and Everyday Life by David Evans, published in 2014, examines the issue of food waste and its environmental impact, as well as methods for reducing it. The 2012 book by Tim Jackson titled Wasted World: How Our Consumption Threatens the Planet examines the environmental effects of our consumer culture and calls for a new economic model that prioritises the well-being of people and the planet.

Finally, David Wallace-Wells' 2019 book The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming warns of climate change's dire consequences and stresses the need to act. These literary sources have greatly influenced sustainability philosophy, emphasising the need for sustainable development that prioritises people, the environment, and the economy and recognising the urgent need to address human-caused environmental degradation.

The titles listed in the paper all contributed in their own unique ways to the development of sustainability philosophy. A Sand County Almanack is a classic in the field of environmental ethics, emphasising the significance of natural resource conservation and stewardship. Silent Spring exposed the dangers of pesticides and their impact on the environment, which resulted in substantial changes to environmental policy. The Limits to Growth raised concerns about the finite resources of the planet and cautioned against the path of economic growth that is unsustainable. Small Is Beautiful contested the prevalent ideology of unrestricted economic growth and proposed an alternative vision of sustainable development.

Our Common Future introduced sustainable development and called for a global action plan to achieve it. The Sixth Extinction brought to light the dramatic loss of biodiversity and its effects on ecosystems and human welfare. The End of Nature was one of the earliest works to highlight the devastation of global climate change. Food Waste and Wasted World addressed the issue of excessive consumption and its environmental impact. The Uninhabitable Earth is a stark warning of the catastrophic consequences of climate change inaction.

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Sema Yılmaz Genç was born in Istanbul on 25/07/1980. She completed her undergraduate studies at Kocaeli University, Department of Economics, in 2002. In 2004, she obtained her master's degree from Kocaeli University, Department of Economic Policy, with a thesis titled "Capital Accumulation Problem in Turkey: Perspectives of Capital Accumulation Models." Continuing her academic journey, she earned her Ph.D. from Marmara University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Economic History in 2008. Her doctoral thesis focused on "An Assessment on the Contributions of Galbraith to Economic Thought."

In 2009, Sema Yılmaz Genç began her career as an assistant professor at Kocaeli University. She held the position of Head of the Department at Kocaeli University, Ali Rıza Veziröđlu Vocational School, Marketing and Advertising Department from 2010 to 2020. In 2018, she was granted the title of associate professor in the field of Economic Thought. Since 2021, she has been serving as an Associate Professor at Yıldız Technical University, known as the top university for Economics in Turkey. Her research interests span economic methodology, economic thought, economic sociology, institutional economics, and economic history. Notably, she has been recognized as the most published academician in her field at her university for the year 2022.



Vincent Caruana

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Flogging a dead horse or the nine lives of cats?

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Local Agenda 21 (LA21) was first mentioned in chapter 28 of Agenda 21, which was adopted at the 1992 Rio Conference. The ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability) adopted a working definition of the Local Agenda 21 process:

“Local Agenda 21 is a participatory, multi-sectoral process to achieve the goals of Agenda 21 at the local level through the preparation and implementation of a long-term, strategic action plan that addresses priority local sustainable development concerns.”

The main thrust of LA21 was that most environmental problems could be traced back to local communities and that local governments could play an important role in implementing sustainable development programmes and mobilising community support.

“As the level of governance closest to the people, [local authorities] play a vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote sustainable development.”

Chapter 28, Agenda 21 (1992).

Main argument of the paper

Is Agenda 21 a dead horse and are those who still believe in the transformational power of LA21 flogging a dead horse? Or is LA21 – and the principles it embodies such as participation - such an important response to current sustainability challenges that it will have nine lives, albeit under different names and packages?

Literature review/theoretical background

The commitments of Agenda 21 were reiterated during the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), with a focus on action, in fact many started using the phrase Local Action 21. Yet some 20 years down the idea of LA 21 started to lose fashion. Of course much was achieved during that period. This included decentralizing governance, adapting traditional operational practices, and becoming more open and more participatory with regards to decision making for sustainable development. Although there were many obstacles, such as limited financial support, lack of information, difficulties in assessing progress, and low priority from national governments, the loss of fashion of the movement had its roots elsewhere. Agenda 21 had become the victim of conspiracy theories and outlandish claims such as that it was aiming to impose a socialist or communist redistribution of wealth or that it was leading to some unknown age of misery and pain.

Methodology

The author draws in part on his Doctoral research where he demonstrated that with inspiring leadership and a real commitment to a mental mode that embraces citizen mobilisation and new spaces for conversations, both CSOs and local institutions can be a positive force towards sustainable solutions at a local level, as well as reflect on further developments and experiments that are taking place with respect to participation and local governance. The research methodology adopted was a case study approach—using four case studies across the Mediterranean geographic territory— by means of multiple sources of data gathering as appropriate to the different contexts of the case studies chosen and as permitted by practical considerations. The Doctoral research is further supported by a literature review of the “failure” of Agenda 21 to remain at the top of policy making, as well as an analysis of the various tenets of Agenda 21, and how they find themselves in policy making, albeit using a different language and framed differently.

Findings/Discussion/Policy implications

This paper argues that LA21 is even more necessary today than when it found its roots in Rio in 1992. The principles behind it are taking and might need to continue taking new forms and act under different names and experiments. Furthermore the digitalisation of society has produced new opportunities for participatory decision making for sustainable development and it is imperative that local governments are supported to make use of such developments to help provide positive solutions to current sustainability challenges. One can also argue that some of the tenets of Local Agenda 21 have been taken over through SDG 17, while Local Action 21 can be read through the translation of the SDGs to the local level. Yet the language of the SDGs - while seemingly more acceptable than the language developed through Agenda 21 - seems to be much more focused on a techno-managerial approach, and the measurements of the progress towards attaining such goals seems to be mainly quantitative and gives little to no importance to process, something that was central to the thinking behind Agenda 21. The various asks of different social movements for genuine participation in decision making for a better environment and better planet can be conceptualised as a reaction to this seemingly techno-managerial approach and as a cry for the reinstatement of the values, norms, and processes that originally inspired Agenda 21.

Conclusion

The study evidences the power of the case studies to reframe and critically challenge hegemonic core beliefs. This paper argues for an increased role of Education for Sustainable Development in building the capacity for a repackaged LA21.

Keywords

Agenda 21, Participation, Education for sustainable Development.

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Elisabetta Venezia

University of Bari Aldo Moro, Italy

Regional development policies: the transport sector role

ABSTRACT

Introduction

The paper focuses on the implementation of the Puglia Evaluation Plan 2014-2020 and discusses evaluation results of regional development policies. The developed evaluation activity offers significant elements of reflection on the activities carried out and on the main results achieved, also providing useful elements for possible strategic lines of the new 2021/2027 programming. The reference sector is that of the transport system and network infrastructures. The objective in this case is the completion and structural and technological modernization of the regional network for the transport of passengers and goods based on means that guarantee more efficient and more sustainable conditions of movement from an environmental point of view.

Theoretical background

The paper uses mixed methods to examine the socio-economic impacts coming from the construction and operations of transport systems and network infrastructures improvements. In doing so, the paper seeks to understand whether the under-explored in-process stage of large-scale infrastructure improvements provide regional economic development outcomes for lagging regions (Munday et al., 2023). With increased regional accessibility level along transport infrastructures, the advantages of each part of the region begin to switch, affecting people's residential choices and producers' site selection. The resulting "polarization" and "diffusion" can accelerate the flow of production factors, such as labor, capital, and technology (Wang et al., 2023). Anyway, based on different research fields and regions with different economic development levels, scholars have different research conclusions on regional development policies.

Methodologies

The main methodologies used for the various evaluations carried out are based on Theory based evaluation and as well as on combined qualitative-quantitative methodologies and on the use of counterfactual analysis. These adopted evaluation approaches highlight how central in the evaluation are the evaluation questions and the subjects in charge of the evaluation, as well as all those who are involved in the evaluation process and with whom there has been a long process of methodological dialogue. The necessary background and technical skills have therefore certainly been strengthened, above all within the Administrations, but also in connection with the institutional partnership and with the socio-economic partners, which have contributed to giving greater solidity, quality and utility to the evaluations and the results to which they arrive.

Findings

The interventions concern the railway network, the connections of the secondary and tertiary nodes of the "internal areas", the port, rear-port and interport infrastructures. The evaluations make it possible to gather useful indications on the effects generated by the strengthening of the infrastructural equipment and railway services with particular attention to accessibility and functionality deriving from the implementation of the interventions. Methodologically, the evaluations make it possible to outline a new approach in terms of connection between territories to encourage commercial exchanges by rail and satisfy the needs of people's mobility in a comfortable and effective way.

Discussion/Policy implication

The results of the analyzes indicate that Puglia identifies as indispensable the promotion of territorial cohesion also at an internal level, aimed at multiplying the success factors of relations between communities: for this reason it was also considered necessary to strengthen the accessibility system of the areas within the superstructured regional networks. The actions promoted aimed at reducing the access times to the main urban nodes from the internal areas and at improving the conditions of access of the resident populations to the most relevant services available in the urban centers (in the sectors of education, health care, fruition of widespread cultural heritage , artistic, naturalistic).

Conclusions

The evaluations make it possible to gather useful indications on the effects generated by the strengthening of the infrastructural equipment and railway services with particular attention to accessibility and functionality deriving from the implementation of the interventions. Methodologically, the assessments make it possible to outline a new approach in terms of connection between territories to encourage commercial exchanges by rail and satisfy the needs of people's mobility in a comfortable and effective way. The repercussions in terms of local economic development are extremely positive.

Keywords

Regional Development, Transport Sector, Strategic Planning, Evaluation Methodologies, Theory based Evaluation.

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**MUNICIPALITY/
GOVERNANCE**



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Assessing the financial sustainability of municipalities in Hungary

ABSTRACT

Keywords

financial, sustainability, municipalities, indicator

The municipal system in Hungary underwent significant changes during the 2010s. The reforms were necessary to consolidate the large debt accumulated by municipalities, to solve the financing problems of public service provider systems, and to reduce significant income and development disparities between local governments. Alongside the introduction of the new task financing system, serious efforts were made to digitize local governments. Thanks to the digitalization of budgeting, numerous databases are now available to the government, allowing for the monitoring of the financial situation of municipalities. The aim of the present study is to assess the financial risks and evaluate the level of financial sustainability of local governments in Hungary.

Since the introduction of the new financing system of municipalities the State Audit Office of Hungary has made several investigations to assess the risks of municipalities in Hungary. (State Audit Office of Hungary, 2019) Although these investigations unanimously conclude, that financial risks of local governments are low in Hungary, they fail to include the companies managed by municipalities in their analysis.

Using the available data, an analytical framework has been created using 19 financial indicators to evaluate the financing situation and risks of the total 3,178 domestic municipalities for the years 2015 and 2021. This framework allowed the examination of specific fields of financial risks such as the level of debt, solvency or liquidity, but also made it possible to compare the complex state of financial sustainability of municipalities. Through the use of GIS mapping tools, spatial patterns of municipal financial sustainability could also be investigated.

Looking at the aggregated budget data of local governments and companies under their control, it can be seen that almost 30% of Hungarian municipalities had to deal with an operating deficit in 2021, compared to only 20% in 2015. Another important finding of this study is that territorial inequalities of financing sources of municipalities are also growing in Hungary. A major driver of this change is the concentration of Local Business Tax revenues, which account for 80% of all self-collected revenues of municipalities. Overall financing risks of local governments were also assessed using a 19-item complex indicator, flagging mostly municipalities from disadvantaged areas as high-risk and settlements with measurable economic activity as lower risk.

While the introduction of the task financing system has helped stabilize municipal operations, we can draw the conclusion, that significant deficits, growing debts, and territorial inequalities still pose significant risks. Although the complex indicator used in this study consists of factors that are widely accepted for the measurement of municipal financial sustainability, it is important for future studies to explore the possibilities of introducing new factors that have a stronger explanatory power for municipal budget deficits and the need for debt. This future indicator could have the potential to measure the long-term effects of rural or urban development projects on municipal financial sustainability – an aspect too often overlooked by rural developers and planners all over Europe.

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How to 'clear impact' of combined authorities: the case of the UK

ABSTRACT

Introduction

The paper discusses impact evaluations of public projects and programmes in the UK combined authorities. Under 'clearing the impact', we mean impact evaluation of the interventions of combined authority – a legal body set up that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate and take /collective decisions across council boundaries. Measuring impact is a quite challenging task as combined authorities operate in a competitive environment together with 'traditional' local authorities.

Literature review/theoretical background

Decentralization, aimed to form efficient local governance leading to the creation and maintaining adequate living conditions for individuals, providing high-quality affordable public services, and coordinating the interests of the state and those of local communities, takes an important place in the policy agenda of many countries. According to the OECD, wealthier countries tend to be more decentralised while the UK stays one of the most centralised countries. White Paper 'Levelling Up the United Kingdom' sets out stages of the state programme aimed to level up the UK, including the role and importance of combined authorities.

Methodology

The paper analysis the experience of combined authorities in the UK from M&E perspective. Creation of combined authorities (mayoral and non-mayoral) aimed to bring more power to British regions as well as to level up existing disproportions in regional development. UK experience of creation and running combined authorities is an interesting example of so to say 'mixed' decentralization when power is being transferred to the local level, however, not to the lowest one, which could be considered as a certain breaking of the subsidiarity principle.

Findings

As of today, 10 combined authorities, including the North of Tyne Combined Authority, operate in the UK, distributing money through specially established Investment Funds within the allocated budgets. Each Investment Fund is subject to a five-yearly Gateway Review by the Government to ensure value for money and impact evaluation. The Gateway Review should establish the basis for making decisions on the subsequent investment for the next five-year funding period.

Regular conducting of Gateway Reviews is one of the methods of impact 'clearance' or in the other words understanding the impact of combined authorities' interventions. Evaluation of the North of Tyne Combined Authority interventions conducted in 2020-2022, evidenced its positive contribution to the development of the local economy and justified further devolution - joining another four local authorities that will take place in 2024.

In addition to Gateway Review combined authorities conduct programmes impact evaluations and envisage a combination of quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods, that allow understanding of the value of interventions at a higher level of detail.

Discussion/Policy implications

UK combined authorities have limited flexibility in selecting outputs and outcomes for measuring the progress of projects and programmes delivery as their list is mainly set up by the government. However, they have decent floor for manoeuvre when it comes to measuring and 'clearing' the impact. Wellbeing Framework for the North of Tyne can serve as a good example of defining impact indicators by the local authorities.

Conclusion

The overview allows us to conclude the importance of conducting impact evaluations by local authorities and justify the relevance of combined authorities' establishment for the levelling up regional development. Proper combination of evaluation methods to ensure impact evaluations in a long-term run is a challenging task to be addressed.

Keywords

Impact evaluations, combined authorities, Gateway Review, Levelling Up, decentralisation

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Mirela Tase

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Labour market in Albania and the effectiveness of local governance on facilitating school-to-work transitions

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyse the policies focused on facilitating school-to-work transition. Every year the labour market in Albania has to absorb large numbers of education graduates. Education plays an important role in determining early labour market outcomes. Those with only basic education are most likely to be engaged in unpaid household work, and if they do enter the labour market, they predominantly work in the informal sector. This is also true for those with initial vocational education and training (VET) and for those with general secondary education: both these groups of graduates mainly work in unregistered jobs and without contracts. The labour market is strongly segmented into a formal and an informal sector.

Keywords: policies, youth employment, vocational education, labour market

Introduction

According to INSTAT (2022), the population of Albania on 1 January 2022 was 2,793,592 inhabitants, experiencing a decrease of 1.3 % compared to 1 January 2021. The working-age population has decreased the most by 20.6%. In the last two years, the annual population growth rate has been negative, at about -1.3%. This situation is driven by a process, both natural and migratory, in which many Albanian citizens choose to emigrate in order to find a job. Albanian citizens emigrate individually, by signing an employment contract with the beneficiary or through private recruitment agencies or in an illegal way. Albania is not an economically attractive country for migrants. Mostly of them used as a transit place to arrive in EU countries. Higher remuneration in EU Member States has made it an attractive destination for the local labour such as Germany but these last years it seems that UK is one of the preferable countries for the youngest generation and especially with origin from the North part of Albania.

Findings

The labour market is strongly segmented into a formal and an informal sector. For their first job graduates are more likely to enter the informal sector than the formal sector. This requires targeted approaches for each education level, including improved public funding for schools, providing financial assistance to poor households and making second-chance opportunities available, especially for basic secondary school dropouts. There is still a significant skills shortage and skills gap in the Albanian labour market, primarily due to insufficient collaboration between the worlds of education and business.

Result and Discussion

As a result, different transition experiences have been caused by not only the level of educational attainment but also the quality of education and close links to the labour market. The labour market in Albania is in a process of continuous development that requires certain controls to ensure its proper functioning. Communication and publicising measures continue to be a problem. Recently introduced initiatives, including on-the-job training and professional internships, need to be more widely promoted among employers to attract greater interest. Programmes could also benefit from improved cross-governmental coordination in delivery and design. Cooperation between the employment and education sectors is limited, which contributes to problems, with curricula design not meeting labour market needs and employers' requirements, and untapped potential for educational institutions to contribute to furthering the success of VET activities.

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INNER/OUTER



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Why do regional disparities persist in Serbia?

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Regional disparities are an ongoing, systemic and multi-decade challenge in Serbia, despite the fact that regionalization and regional policy issues occupy an important place in national public policy. Yet another peak appears to have been reached after the global financial crisis and during the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper seeks an answer to the question of how to reverse the divergent movements on the regional map and the increasingly sharp division into developed and underdeveloped areas. Also, how realistic and certain will it happen in the medium term? In this regard, the sustainability of regional growth drivers and the necessary institutional framework changes will be analyzed to achieve sustainable and efficient regional growth and a greater degree of regional cohesion.

Literature review/theoretical background

Theoretically, regional economic development is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon. Consequently, a predominantly part of the literature was consulted that seeks to identify local conditions that allow an economic system to achieve and maintain high rates of development, and accepts the idea that exogenous factors, such as the presence of infrastructure and innovation, are at the basis of regional development.

Methodology

This paper presents the main insights into convergence patterns for 18 Serbia districts (NUTS 3 level) during 2012-2021 measured in terms of 'beta' and 'sigma' convergence (Barro and Sala-i-Martin, 2004). Using the RE model, these panel data were simultaneously utilized to examine the statistical significance of three alternative funding channels for regional productivity growth (gross fixed investments, net inflow of FDI, and total regional state incentives).

Findings

Regarding 'beta' convergence moderate convergence has been present since 2015 but, on average poorer districts haven't grown faster than richer districts in the period 2012-2021. Moreover, during the pandemic, the divergence was further deepened. 'Sigma' convergence reveals no convergence pattern until 2019, as well as divergence during the COVID crisis. During the period 2015-2021. unlike the positive inflow of net FDI and gross fixed capital investment, total regional development incentives by the central government had no statistical significance on the growth of GVA per employee in the observed districts.

Discussion/Policy implications

Encouraging investment is a key driver of regional growth. But the tendency to quickly bridge the development gap by attracting FDI benefits only certain districts in Serbia. At the same time, due to various structural problems, regional variations in investment efficiency persist. Exports have played the role of driving growth in those areas that are equipped with infrastructure and available labor and that, with the help of financial benefits, incentives, and competitive costs of doing business, have managed to attract renowned foreign companies. The new regional development agenda must therefore also promote alternative drivers of growth.

Conclusion

This paper brings a practical and integrated perspective of some development paradigms that should be taken into account when creating a new regional development agenda in Serbia. But existing regional disparities are a subtle phenomenon that integrates many factors. Hence, future research should encompass the collection of a wider and multidimensional set of regional data to bypass current research limitations in incorporating spatial planning and governance processes in a better understanding of regional development trends.

Keywords

regional disparities and cohesion, regional development, Serbia

JEL Classifications: R11; O18; P48;

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Functional links and development opportunities of inner and outer peripheries of Hungary

ABSTRACT

The challenges and development opportunities of peripheral regions have been studied for decades in Europe and in Hungary and their importance is becoming increasingly emphasised in European and in national regional policies. Spatial theory approaches the centre-periphery relationship in two ways: from a socio-economic and a geographical perspective. Peripheries can be divided into two main groups based on this: while the inner peripheries, despite their central geographic location, have a disadvantageous socio-economic situation, the outer peripheries are defined as areas that are peripheries both socio-economically and geographically. However, the definition and delimitation between inner and outer peripheries are not clear and raises a number of additional questions. In the case of the outer peripheries, the social and economic situation of the region on the either side of the border is usually unfavourable, but cross-border links and cooperations can help to alleviate the marginalisation of border regions. With the opening of borders – such as the accession to the Schengen Agreement – cross-border flows have been strengthened and have opened a new chapter for the peripheral areas.

In our presentation we will present a possible delimitation of the inner and outer peripheries of Hungary, taking into account socio-economic indicators, accessibility of centres and the border situation. This is followed by an analysis of three selected inner and outer peripheries (Marcal Region, County of Nógrád – County of Banská Bystrica, County of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén – County of Košice) with particular reference to socio-economic situation, labour market links, territorial cooperations and the role of borders.

Our research found that all the selected areas lack urban centres, and their disadvantaged situation is related to the separating role of administrative and/or national borders. As a result, access to jobs and services is a challenge, which may have contributed to the socio-economic peripheralisation of these areas. In many cases of peripheral border regions – especially in the case of County of Nógrád and County of Banská Bystrica – are faced in development traps due to the administrative boundaries. In many cases, cross-border linkages have reached an advanced stage over the decades (e.g. labour flows), but in some areas (e.g. social care systems, community transport networks) they still face obstacles until now.

In conclusion, in line with our preliminary expectations that different kind of borders often modify the spatial links and social-economic situation of peripheries and goes hand in hand with the emergence of social, economic and labour market shadow zones.

These areas are connected by functional links and territorial cooperations, so the successful break-out can be achieved through the stimulation of cross-border and trans-regional links, driven by social and economic community needs complex programmes – such as the coordination of transport infrastructure planning with labour flows, trade, tourism, the cross-border monitoring of labour potential in the case of industrial relocation, the establishment of trans-regional tourism destination management, etc. However, joint development and the (re)creation of cross-border functional areas are often hampered by legal frameworks and bureaucratic obstacles – this was particularly evident in the protectionist measures taken during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords

peripheries, cross-border regions, inner peripheries, functional areas, territorial cooperations

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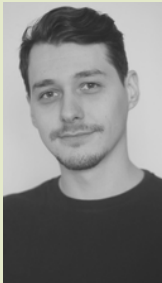
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Transformation of urban and rural areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina

ABSTRACT

Introduction

The modern rural area of Bosnia and Herzegovina is more or less characterized by a deep crisis of the economic, social and demographic development, which is reflected in a growingly emphasized atrophy of population, especially intensive in local community areas. The scope and depth of crisis characteristics of development processes are testified by the fact that, according to the current development index, 58.2% of local administration units (city and municipality administration) is positioned below the threshold of 75% average of development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where 10.5% is below the threshold of 50% of country's development. Considering that, – depending on the geographic position (especially distance from more developed local communities, as the center of areal development) and also the intensity of development processes – issues and development outcomes of certain local administration units are significantly different. These differences are clearly seen in the diversity of areal structure, that is, mosaic landscape of rural areas, and they are supported by current typology of rural and urban settlements of Bosnia and Herzegovina (R.Nurković, 2012).

In this paper, among other things, it has been emphasized that every rural area in Bosnia and Herzegovina represents a particular individuality and distinctiveness. Various research methods were used in this paper, from critical evaluation and compilation of previous research results, through interviews and research dialogue, to space-time analysis of indicators of rural development of local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the modern period. Through the interview method, three leading actors in rural development of local communities from recent past and current were included. As a foundational source of data, the Annual reports on cooperative entrepreneurship for 2015 (B&H Statistical Agency Sarajevo, 2017) were used, and their analytical data were considered in the space-time context. With those, other unpublished (official statistics) and/or published data were used as well. Negative development trends in rural areas are consequentially closest related to agricultural crisis, traditionally the most important economic field with the superior influence on development processes and stabilization of suburban areas. Since the beginning of the transitional period, agricultural development in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been burdened by a series of problems that have resulted in continuing decrease of the physical scope of manufacturing and an increasing negative intensity of the balance sheet of the agricultural – food sector. (Nurković, R.,2010)

Methods of work and data sources

Urbanization and rural development of urban settlements in Bosnia and Herzegovina with own specificities and moderately small areas requires using special methods. According to methodology of urban geography scientific methods have been used, such as methods of analysis and synthesis, mapping method, statistical method and descriptive method, method of field research as well as method of text analysis. (Bowler, I.R. ed. (1992)

Therefore, studying the general models and urban geography methodology in a combination with urban-geographic approach have been used. Agencies of the entity institutes for statistics, together with the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina have been conducting a Survey on Urban Population in accordance with methodological rules and principles of the International Labour Organisation and requirements of Eurostat for five years, by which international comparability of data in the area of statistics of urban settlements has been provided. (Vrišer, I. 1995) As a basic method of collecting primary data sources, an interview method has been used, ie. an in-depth interview, where the main instrument was a reminder for an interview. About 25 urban settlements in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been surveyed. Today, Bosnia and Herzegovina is, like many countries in the world, in the stage of more emphasized polarized development. The effects of such development are expressed in many spatial processes and structures. In this structure, agriculture, protection of environment, planning the land use and economic planning, are treated as equal, but with different development under responsibility of different governmental agencies that are in contact with different groups for economic development. Bosnia and Herzegovina is under the fundamental constitution reform that will, among other issues, solve the basic issue of its administrative-territorial organization. (Woods, M. i McDonagh, J. 2011)

Research results

In the area of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are no defined rural regions, nor a definition of a rural area. At the beginning of the twenty-second century, about 43% of total population of Bosnia and Herzegovina lived in a rural area. Through analyzing the number of rural population and rural characteristics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is necessary to also analyze the current situation within the broad historical context. Rural areas, ever since the middle of the nineteenth century, especially during the real-socialist economic system, until the middle of the fifties to the nineties, along with the transition in the past ten years, and also in the period from 1922 to 2017, were exposed to degradation processes that lead to the edge of village extinction – the main element of a rural area. (Lorber, L., 2010) Civilization and historic processes of deruralization, industrialization and urbanization, present in certain phases of development in all parts of local communities, had an extremely selective and negative influence on the development of a Bosnian and Herzegovinian village.

Real-socialist planned economy favored the industrial development, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a typical rural country, has undergone deruralization which became very distinct after 1955. Due to increased industrialization and decrease of interests for agriculture, a process of deruralization has occurred, that is, abandoning village as a place of residence. Deruralization was an accelerated process in the past fifty years or so. In 2017, over 70% of rural areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina had a characteristic of distinct regression in development, which represents a distinct negativity of all demographic, socio-cultural and area-planned indicators. These areas are deep in the process of extinction due to traffic isolation, high population age, and a great share of elderly and female population. We must act with concrete measures on further development of these areas, because, without those interventions, they are lagging behind on development, where 40% of rural areas are positioned within frames of balanced development, and about 30% are expanding. (R.Nurković, 2007:101)

Survey results from various non-government organizations, active in rural areas, show that most of youth thinks of their residence in rural areas as temporary, and doing agriculture and other activities is only a way to receive minimal income which they save in order to move to urban parts and getting employment there in other sectors. (Deichmann, J. I. 2012) The first step included differentiation of urban and non-urban settlements. For such purpose, a well-known model of extracting urban settlements was used, and it was critically considered and amended in this case, especially in the sense of using the degree of centrality as an important indicator of functional independence of a settlement, one of the foundational preconditions of understanding the concept of a city in a formal sense. (Woods, M. i McDonagh, J.2011)

Conclusion

Considering the recent development processes, there is a clear difference between the predominant rural areas and explicit rural areas, where rural areas are distinguished for unfavourable characteristics with most of the observed indicators. Unfavourable characteristics of demographic development of rural areas are expressed in higher and higher depopulation rate between 1991 and 2017, lower population density, negative migration balance, higher rate of natural fall, respectively total depopulation rate of old age of population. At the same time, explicit rural areas are separated with higher degree of economic utilization of population and a higher share of employed people in primary sector against the average of rural areas.

The presented, spatially-differentiated structural and dynamical problems of rural areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, are the resultant of cumulative influence of different factors, from geographic position (remoteness of the developed central settlement), through regional development, to war events during the first half of the 1990s. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the existing development problems are different in each single rural area, respectively the consequence of different combination of influences of the mentioned factors, which imposes the need for a differentiated approach to their solving. The both served to interests of the state and regional economy rather than to interests of rural population. With all these factors in circulation, improvement of socio-economic conditions is connected with socio-economic differentiation..

Key words: transformation of urban, rural areas, economic growth, population, Bosnia and Herzegovina

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NEW SKILLS



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Afraid of robots? Get trained!

ABSTRACT

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Keywords: training, active labour market policy, impact evaluation, automation

Introduction

Supporting individuals through labour market transitions presents one of the crucial pillars of the policy agenda addressing changes in the future of work. With the evermore-present impact of new technologies on the structure of occupations and demanded tasks, upskilling becomes one of the most tempting policy-making options. In this respect, training provided under the portfolio of active labour market policies (ALMPs) presents an ideal policy tool.

We evaluate a reform of the training supplied to registered unemployed in Slovakia in 2015. Specifically, we explore six training specializations: healthcare workers, welders, truck drivers, security guards, accountants and beauticians.

Literature review

Technological advancements alter the occupational structure of labour markets all around the world (Acemoglu and Loebbing, 2022), The pace of this change is expected to increase in the near future (European Commission, 2023). Reskilling becomes a necessary strategy for individuals and societies (Ernst et al., 2018).

Occupations with a higher average risk of being automated are associated with lower wages and a higher risk of unemployment (Nedelkoska and Quintini, 2018). Although declaring to be afraid of automation (Kozak et al., 2020), employees in occupations with a higher risk of automation appear to invest less in continuing non-formal training (Koster and Brunori, 2021). Publically supported training presents a promising policy tool (Tomini and Groot, 2016; Kruppe and Lang, 2018).

Methodology

We use administrative data to:

- describe the change in the portfolio of training specialization resulting in giving the choice of specialization to training participants;
- ii. explore the labour market outcomes of participants by estimating the average treatment effects of training participation under the unconfoundedness assumption.

We construct an exhaustive list of outcome indicators based on participants' income, employment or absence from the unemployment register during 36 months after participation. We trace labour market outcomes of six most numerous training specializations: healthcare assistants, welders, drivers, security guards, accountants and beauticians.

Findings

Jobseekers tend to pick out of the most popular training specialisations (70 percent of all trainings was concentrated in the 6 most numerous specializations). Jobseekers use training to reduce their risk of automation and increase income. In line with available empirical studies, we estimate a positive employment effect observable in the long run and a positive income effect in the short run. Additionally, our data allow us to observe outcome differences across training groups in respect of their automation risk. The training specializations with a lower risk of automation, healthcare assistants and welders, do not seem to benefit more from providing the training than specializations with higher automation risk such as security guards, drivers and accountants. This could be explained by exodus of retrained healthcare assistants and welders from Slovakia. Interestingly, a training specialization with the lowest automation risk - beauticians - does have a positive impact on the employment probability or income as expected. This finding can be explained by their movement to shadow economy and not reporting their true income.

Conclusion

Some training specializations (healthcare assistants and welders) are used as channels to find employment abroad. In contrast, other training specializations (security guards and drivers) present a pipeline for low-skilled jobseekers to find jobs in Slovakia in occupations with a lower risk of automation. Re-training into accounting increases employment chances and thus also the potential income, but at the same time, increases the risk of automation. In contrast, being trained as a beauty professional reduces the risk of automation but also opens a gate to informal employment.

Discussion/Policy implications

Due to the impact of new technologies on the occupational structure, career transitions with associated unemployment periods will become even more frequent. Publically funded training offered to the unemployed support individuals during their career transitions. Shifting the choice of training specialization to the participants may result into sub-optimal allocations of public funds. For example, by opening a channel to unemployed jobseekers to find employment in the informal sector or abroad (in a situation of a scarced domestic labour force).

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On the urgency of digital literacy policies

ABSTRACT

Keywords

Digital Literacies, EU policies, Young People, Platforms.

Introduction

Digital Literacy has continued to gain traction as an essential framework for engaging within platforms across digital life. Yet we still struggle with understanding the impacts and ramifications of the rapid turn to the platform society (van Dijck et al, 2018). “A platform ecosystem is an assemblage of networked platforms, governed by a particular set of mechanisms that shapes every practices” (van Dijck et al, 2018: 4). We are too often limited by a dependent use of big tech companies, such as the so-called GAFAM (Google, Amazon, Meta, Apple, Microsoft) that lack insights from digital human rights perspective (profit before public values). Thus, when impact and responses are discussed, they are often centered on the individual level over the collective one, even when platforms come to shape and shift the make-up and meaning of marginalized and vulnerable communities and groups- and thereby political, social, economic, and cultural aspects. For instance, Portugal has a population of more than 10 million people and scores an Internet Penetration of 78% rate, with 49% of the Portuguese reportedly using Facebook and 24% reportedly using WhatsApp to share news (Reuters, 2022). What, then, shall we formulate a pedagogical session to foster digital literacy among youth in the post-pandemic world? In what ways are Portuguese youth impacted by the growing use of social media platforms, and what are their responses?

Literature review

Digital Literacy can be broadly defined as the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to provide users with essential framework for effective lifelong engagement with media messages (Christian, 2020: 7). It is a combination of literacy (learning how to read and write) and digital (learning how to use and engage with platforms). Here, my focus relies on Digital Literacy Pedagogical Sessions (DLPS) as a testbed applied in formal and non-formal schools, as well as broader educational contexts in Portugal. It aims to promote the dissemination of knowledge and skills produced in the broader areas of social sciences, particularly through the sharing of digital literacy, as well as stimulate critical debates around the main challenges of contemporary democracies related to the digital life (Hertwig and Grune-Yanoff, 2017).

To contribute to the democratization of knowledge, the promotion of digital human rights and the participatory, iterative, and bottom-up formats of pedagogy role means to foster basic competences of digital literacy as an indispensable public value to nurture future generations. It also stimulates the construction of an ecology of knowledge towards an inclusive, fair, and democratic society oriented to understanding reality so as to transform it (Tygel and Kirsch, 2019: 109).

Methodology

To achieve its goal, DLPS creates a pedagogical toolkit applied to youth between 12 and 18 years old of elementary and high schools in Portugal. At the same time, it provided conditions for academic researchers to learn new techniques, gain access to information about digital literacy initiatives, instruments, and methods little explored at initial educational stages. A structural working plan was conducted in three phases: i) Desk research of digital literacy: discussing the methodology and learning new participatory (pedagogical) approaches. The development of a systematic and critical review to enable the tutor to identify the driving forces and outcomes of digital literacy practices and characteristics of potentially effective interventions that lead to foster community values; ii) I engaged in an action research experience: implementing an outreach project about pedagogical sessions to show how youth can absorb digital literacy from an earlier educational stage. DLPS aims to provide policy makers clues on how to do build digital literacy policies as an effective long-term strategy, as well as to safeguard democracy in the coming future; iii) Integration of results to suggest to key EU policymakers' to EU and Portuguese authorities the development of evidence-based recommendations.

Findings

DLPS sessions provided to Portuguese youth a direct contact with those who were carrying out initiatives related to interrogate and subvert the dominance of platforms. Thus, the digital literacy sessions promoted bottom-up discussions that were accompanied by “collective talks” lasting 10 to 20 minutes at the end of the session. There, youth are invited to reflect together on their own daily (digital) experiences within platforms and provide feedback to their peers. The pedagogical sessions took place in 2021-2022 (3 sessions) - Figueira da Foz, Peniche and Lisbon - and 2022-2023 (13 sessions) - Sao Joao do Estoril, Arcozelo (Vila Nova de Gaia), Oliveira do Hospital, Aveiro, Ponte da Barca, Braga, Carregal do Sal, Porto, Vila Real, Ponte da Barca, Leiria, Meda, Penacova - with the participation of the Portuguese schools involved with topics related to the agenda of digital literacy. DLPS were implemented in different Portuguese contexts by using bottom-up participatory pedagogies at schools. Most of the audience were young people between 12 and 18 years old.

Discussion/Policy implications

The educational activities aim to value the cultural, social, political, and economic aspects within the platforms, support bottom-up educational pedagogies through community learning and strengthen participatory models (Barbosa, 2020). DLPS provides practice experiences and knowledge exchange, such as: presentations from the students' perspective; breaking ice sessions; small talks of young people with expert on digital literacy field; critical insights about how platforms govern the digital society, historical processes related to the influence of big tech companies as private conglomerates interested in short-term profit; images; gaming dynamics on how to fight disinformation, mainly on chat apps (European Union, 2019). My goal is to activate meaningful engagement in collective teaching-practices, while developing a critical consciousness which would result from the agency intervention into the digital world in a post-session moment. Furthermore, young participants were presented to nominate their everyday routine on and with platforms, explaining their motivations by themselves. The idea is that DLPS present paths to the youth be challengers of their own sense of digital reality and able to be a spark of hope to create forms of intervention in practical terms (Freire, 1972).

Conclusion

Urgent policies should invest in creative ways to overcome barriers of disinformation, while enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital age from an early educational age. DLPS inaugurates a pedagogical format to adapt the teaching curricula through participatory pedagogy. It advocates a new format of presenting digital literacy at school level, beyond the need to rely only on technologic literacy as end-user. Here, digital literacy and participatory education combined may foster an engaged pedagogy to combat oppressive power structures such as digital colonization, algorithmic violence, gender violence, class divides and racism, among other forms of brutal violence (Calzati, 2021). To support cross-sector collaboration and new models for exchange on how to transgress the geopolitical power of the so-called GAMAM (Google, Amazon, Meta, Apple, Microsoft), DLPS still have a long way to reflect on how to interrogate the platform dominance played by the Global North. In the context of the European Year of Youth (2022), this policy paper suggests a two-pronged out-of-the-box approach. On the one hand, we should rethink and update 'known' ways of doing and producing digital literacy initiatives, undertaking at least three core urgent actions: i) to foster youth digital literacy initiatives to nurture future generations; ii) to empower also their autonomy as promoters of agency since an earlier educational level; iii) avoid reducing forms of knowledge to a selected group of experts, to privilege instead a recursive, iterative, transdisciplinary, intersectional and dialogic process able to engage youth in order to better inform them about their role regarding the current challenges of the platform society.

On the other hand, while thinking through creative ways of disseminating new sources of pedagogical formats while enhancing trust and accuracy, we ought to reinvent the forms of how governments and public authorities engage digital literacy within youth. Academic experts could post brief content also on social media platforms (creative videos, short messages) and guarantee new ways to assess accurate information in order to provide accessible and adapted language to target youth.


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Entrepreneurship education between theory and practice

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Nowadays, an economy based on knowledge is no longer just referring to the assimilation of knowledge but also skills development aimed at creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Adequate human capital represents a significant pillar for national or regional economic growth, which implies the existence of entrepreneurial education that must be carried out at all levels and in all its forms. The education system is thus facing a major challenge: ensuring the necessary skills for youth to meet the current and future society's demands.

Literature review

Entrepreneurial education started in the United States in the 1940s, after which it spread worldwide. Besides business initiation, entrepreneurial education encompasses a broader concept that aims to enable autonomy and personal development among youth. Since 2006 the European Commission (EC) has shifted its focus towards entrepreneurial education by defining the idea that the education and training system should be structured to foster entrepreneurship, seen as the individual ability to transform ideas into actions (Domilescu, 2019), and ensure future transversal skills to be open-minded towards the society opportunities (Casanova et al., 2022). In this regard, the European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework was introduced as a reference (European Commission, 2018). Supporting entrepreneurship is based on the presumption that "what is different is not always good, but what is better is always different" (Furdui et al., 2021). These lead universities to expand their missions from education and research to economic development through scientific innovation (Coşkun et al., 2022).

Methodology

Qualitative research was used as methodology, based on a specialized literature review to identify the topic approaches in theory, but also in practice by analysis of how several universities manage to respond to the need to have young people with entrepreneurial skills. Two work objectives were defined to argue the need for entrepreneurial education at the university level and identify some case studies to be analyzed. Also, the experience from UCB in Romania is presented.

Findings

The need for entrepreneurial education is argued at the university level in the literature, and concretely, several universities have adapted their education-research mission towards innovation, too. Starting from the definition of the competencies that allow the creation of an entrepreneurial mentality, either the university curriculum was reorganized, or the teaching-learning-evaluation strategies were modified so that students develop entrepreneurial competencies.

Discussion

The literature review revealed different ways of higher education approaches focusing on entrepreneur skills development, such as solid links establishing with the business environment, carrying out projects in student teams, entrepreneurship knowledge assimilation by students learning from experience by participating in business plan competitions, debates, events where successful businessmen are invited.

In the Romanian academic environment, entrepreneurship can be found in the curriculum; also, a Student Entrepreneurial Society was established. A case study at UCB is presented.

Conclusion

An excellent entrepreneurial environment that lives and develops can be ensured through a modern, adapted education system through research and innovation. Curriculum, teaching strategies, and professors play an essential role in developing students' entrepreneurial skills.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial skills, sustainable education

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INNOVATIONS

Zvi Weinstein

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Entrepreneurship, innovation and creative industry as a driver of regional development a case study of Caesarea industrial park in Israel

ABSTRACT

Introduction

The paper describes a case study of an ecosystem of Caesarea smart regional industrial park in Israel established on the base of a new concept of regionalism planning which integrates influential factors to achieve a successful development region. They include a vision, stakeholders, fourth industrial revolution, human-social-economic-cultural-natural capitals, close partnership between industrial park-central government and academy in addition to accessible geographical infrastructures, central transportation location and environmental conditions, science and medical centers as well as tourism. Summing up all these elements means an excellent basis to implement a creative and smarter eco-industrial park.

The 21st century world population is coping with challenges that change the known economic order. This issue is under a decisive impact on the labor market, the services and cultural consumption industries. Processes as accelerated urbanism, pollution and automation produce real need in establishing modern and green industrial regions that are suitable to changes to become.

The world becomes more sophisticated and smarter: smart cities, smart firms, smarter industry and smart buildings, nature and regeneration are the next generation. The reasons to the huge unprecedented technological developments are the significant realization of saving resources with efficient operation, fast and convenient, and deliver abilities that only few decades ago were considered as taken from science fiction movies. Smart Industrial Parks (SIP) and ECO-Industrial Parks (EIP) are an example of modern employment parks where exceptional services are the pillars that contribute to the empowerment of the businesses and to the employee welfare and wellbeing.

The paper's argument is that regional planning of Smart and Eco Industrial Parks must go along with interdisciplinary policy that updated itself all the time.

To evaluate the regional planning of Caesarea SIP, we used a set of questions that covers most possible issues and topics related to industrial parks. The evaluation is based on two main sources: the Expert Forum Committee recommendations led by the Ministry of Interior the State of Israel (2018) and the International Framework for Eco industrial parks suggested by the three organizations – UNIDO, GIZ, and World Bank (2021).

The paper's conclusion points out that Caesarea Smart Industrial Park became an excellent example for other similar regions due to the realization of its vision, its systematically work and multi-disciplinary stakeholders who are acting together to achieve the highest standards of smart and eco- industrial parks. This degree is similar to the indicators suggested by the UNIDO, GIZ and World Bank.

Literature review

There are ample of references dealing with regional planning and industrial parks. We have chosen mainly those who have relationships with what is planned in Israel.

Hatuka (2019) defines the differences between the traditional and the new and modern regionalism in Israel. The traditional regionalism during the years 1950-1970 supported harmonic relationships between cities and villages located in the same region while the ecological components kept together with the geographical spatial sprawl of the population and the urban growth. The priority was in the first place toward the periphery areas instead of the central areas where the leading metropolitans. The huge investments of the government policy in infrastructures, industrial and services development in the periphery in order to prevent out migration faced the neoliberal ideology and limited its investments and its active involvement.

On the other hand, the new regionalism looks at the region as an area with significant and important social units in contrast to the traditional regionalism producing powerful productive aimed at economic development, technological innovation and productive culture. This concept identifies the global acceleration contributes to strengthening the localism and establishing non-hierarchical and decentralized society. As part of that process, cities and regions in the periphery become the main target for investments and innovation along with new networks of sub-governance. Since the ends of the 1990's these regions were entitled to special attitude in developed countries and presented different status and autonomy in three levels: The first is the economic level, that is, an agreement on entrepreneurship managing their economic agenda in variety of domains such as industry and tourism. The second one is the social level, that is, an agreement on unique collectiveness identification. It means a regional awareness defined by individuals, groups and organizations that feel sense of belonging; and the third level deals with governance which means establishing a structure that support the public policy design and its implementation in the region toward the central government.

The Israel Experts Forum (2018) led by the Ministry of Interior who is in charge of the national and regional planning policy, and the Ministry of Economic and Industry has suggested several definitions and guidelines for regional planning;

1. Designing, organizing and managing tool of the total economic, social and cultural potential in relation to a group of compounds or common unites in order to exacting them in a specific space.
2. Using and managing local and regional resources to realizing common strategic aims and goals.
3. A process of future sustainable design, based on its whole unique properties and characteristics, inspiring to create a stream and balance of resources divided equally within creating connections to national and international tendencies in order to enlarge the cake (Razin, 2017).

According to the above definitions, regional planning relates to a geographical space that holds common components, narrative and functions performing among its parts, while a large divergence exists in this region (such as types of population and settlements that live together) that has to be considered. The challenge facing a regional planning is to analysis and defining it along with fixed tests. In other word, a regional planning is a process of synergy among different arrays according to a common vision and an operational plan represents and considers the needs of different groups and based on the region's properties (Frankel. 2017).

The fourth industrial revolution is the accelerator to regional development. It changes the production pattern, the print foot of industrial firms and the scope of the local municipality incomes from taxes, the relationships between dwellings and employment as well as the needs of the regions and local governments to re-invent themselves (Schwab, 2019;

The global tendencies in industry (Avraham, 2020; Sofer, 2018) as an incentive to strengthen the regional concept and their impacts on economy, planning, society, environment and their challenges are based on the research conducted by Hamo al. et. (2019). They are described and explained divided into four types - the fourth revolution, industry as ecosystem, urbanized industry and ecology industry. Each one of them holds five components: economy, planning, society, environment, and challenges.

The policy decision to use the regional area of Caesarea to become a smart industrial (SIP) was determined by the famous Baron Edmond de Rothschild Family (EDRF, 2022) vision long period before Israel became a state. The vision that leads the corporation directed through a firm belief in the power of individuals to bring about change and out of commitment to and sense of responsibility for the pioneering spirit of the state of Israel. Its expression is through the objective of impact entrepreneurship aimed at establishing a measureable business model and encouraging the flow of new economic capital to meet the social and environmental needs.

The evaluation analysis shows differentiation among countries. Wang, (2022) describes the intelligent construction among China industrial cities use as a platform for advanced information technology of its parks. Wang systematically introduces the solution design of SIP platform to prevent future problems of low operational efficiency. The common method to evaluate SIPs is the Analytical Hierarchical Process (AHP). It is defines as a process that use hierarchical decomposition to deal with criterion decision making, industrial symbiosis, resource improvement, environmental protection and information transparency.

Sofer (2018) describes the Italian APEA system that is the ecological equipped industrial areas deals mainly with heavy industry and technology in northern Italy the most developed region.

The latest development to analysis industrial SIPs and EIPs is the UNIDO, GIZ and World Bank (2021) to EIPs who investigates many indicators related to the completed industrial region ecosystems with steps ahead for more improvements regarding management, planning, materials, equity, gender and ethics. Many SIPs and EIPs regions moved toward using these indicators.

Methodology

A case study is developed focusing on the issue of how to evaluate smart industrial park which is not the usual way of analysis an industrial area with its fixed firms or companies and the products produced by them. The vision of Caesarea industrial park originated developed by a person with future insight long time before the area has changed and developed as we recognized it today. Therefore, it is quite a different cast.

Lack of specific researches and articles discussing in depth an evaluation to give us enough value for the Caesarea industrial park, we decided to assess and evaluate the SIP through the following steps:

- Learning about other industrial parks whether in Israel or from similar regions in other countries
- Reading relevant literature discussing Smart and Eco Industrial Parks (SIP / EIP)
- Analysis the policy document of Caesarea SIP
- Interviews conducted with experts including management staff in charge of the physical plans, the social-economic-environmental, the business community and the people at the strategic level.
- An in-person visit to the site
- An in-person interviews with Caesarea SIP management level
- Using the questionnaire tool based on the Expert Forum at the Israeli Ministry of Interior
- Using the UNIDO, GIZ, World Bank indicators to find out to what extend they are disseminated in our case study
- Conducting a qualitative evaluation

The methodology revealed us many difficulties to evaluate industrial areas:

- Different systems used
- Many indicators to measure
- Lack of evaluation uniformity
- New lexicon, words, terms, guidelines
- Definition of terms like sustainability, ecology, ecosystem, smart and more, are defined differently
- Different countries use different systems to evaluate SIP / EIP. China – AHP (focus on economic development, industrial symbiosis, resource improvement, environmental protection, information transparency); Italy APEA (Ecological Equipped Industrial Areas); UNIDO – EIP measurement (2021)

Findings

The research on Caesarea smart and ecological industrial park gave us a lesson about the advantages and local conditions that brought the park to an excellent degree. It became an example to many other Israeli industrial parks and foreign countries to come and visit learn about the impacted factors.

- Engagement & investment of many stakeholders
- Human, social, economic, natural and cultural capitals that operate together *
- Close connections with academy and hospital for research and technology
- Location in the middle way between Tel Aviv in the south, the economic metropolitan and Haifa in the north, the marine port for export and import (50 Km from each)
- The park serves as a central employment site for the settlements around - 52% out of 12,000
- An open declared natural area by the Ministry of Environmental Protection in Israel
- Archeological area: ancient Caesarea with its port, amphitheater and the aqueduc
- An international golf area
- Connectivity of easy public transportation: train, bus, bike paths
- “One stop shop” for planning, security, regulations, construction
- Using renewable energy, electric charging for cars, circular economy, reuse water
- A new park academy is built to upgrade employee skills and a research center for technological innovation together with Israeli universities
- A business community exists
- 260 leading businesses built their main branch in Caesarea smart and ecological park

Discussion, Evaluation and Conclusions

A smart industrial zone is a physical area designated for industrial activity that uses advanced technology and data analytics to improve efficiency, productivity, and sustainability. To measure the success and impact of a smart industrial zone, a variety of policy indicators may be used. These indicators can help evaluate the zone's performance in areas such as energy consumption, carbon emissions, economic performance, productivity, quality of life, innovation, talent attraction, transportation accessibility, number of high quality industries in the region, implementing Environmental Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The analysis of our topic brings us to the conclusion that Caesarea industrial park has built itself on multi indicators disciplines related first of all, to their vision accepted according to Rothschild Family Foundation (EDRF, 2021); Secondly is the global industrial revolution 4.0 with its sophisticated technology and at the third place the UN SDGs. In addition are the accumulated developments in global industry best practices that became part around the globe and amended to fit local conditions.

We can mention the language changes used in industry such as heavy and polluted industries that changed due to climate crisis to sustainable, smart, ecological industrial park (EIP), greening, clean air, decarbonized, performance requirements, employee rights, gender equality, nature regeneration, innovation, circular economy, and the SDGs term as an integration and comprehensive action aimed at improving worldwide populations.

The International Framework of the UNIDO (2021) describes the SDGs as the drivers for inclusive and sustainable industry. The 2030 SDGs include targets and action for industry, innovation and infrastructure as well as measures for decent work, economic growth, gender equality, and climate action. For example, SDG 9 aims at significantly raise industry's contribution to employment and gross domestic by 2030. The means to achieving this goal may include retrofitting Industries to make them sustainable, increasing resource-use efficiency, and increase adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial process. SDG 7 aims, among other things, to double the rate of energy efficiency improvement and significantly increase the share of renewable energy by 2030. SDG 8 targets sustained per capita economic growth at seven percent, and SDG 13 focuses on climate actions. SDG 12 to sustainability reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse in the public and private sectors by 2030. It will also require firms, especially large and multinational enterprises, to adopt sustainable practices to report sustainability performance accordingly. SDG 5 addresses issues of gender equality. These SDGs are applicable to EIPs and the so-called smart parks, and the development of an international framework for their use.

Caesarea's smart and eco-industrial park composes all points mentioned in the article explained the regional planning concept, the elements used for the methodology analysis, and the indicators of management, planning, operation, society, economy, environment, resource preservation, information transparency, international investments, renewable energy, quality of life, community services.

Our Conclusion

The analysis of the Caesarea Smart Industrial area brings us to the conclusion that it is an autonomous region disconnected from the urban settlements around it and function as independent area managed and operated by two entities – Caesarea Assets Corporation and Caesarea Development Corporation bounded to the Rothschild Family vision. The industrial park compound is located physically in a distance from the cities around it. The industrial areas supplies a regional employment solution to more than 50% of required labor and it bases on unique resources of diverse industries of each business located in the park.

Long years of development since 1993 until 2023 have succeeded to establish a unique industrial park that serves as an excellent example to local governance and international countries.

Keywords

Regional Planning Definitions and Characters; Smart and Eco-Industrial Park; Drivers for Development; Creative Industry; Regional inter- and intra- Relationships; Eco-Industrial Areas; sustainability; Qualitative evaluation; ESG; SDGs

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**Cross sectoral innovation as a driver of local development:
Case of crowdfunding in Turkey**

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Crowdfunding is considered as one of the main financial source for ascendant start-ups. Particularly in developing countries, crowdfunding attract more interest where there is a limited financial opportunities for start-ups (Samarah & Alkhatib, 2020).

However, many questions remain open on the proper design, implementation and feasibility of the crowdfunding platforms, and the extent to which public policies can contribute to success of crowdfunding platforms (Chervyakov & Rocholl, 2019).

A recent initiative led by Ankara Development Agency (A branch of Ministry of Industry and Technology of Turkey) revealed that a cross sectoral collaboration between crowdfunding platforms and public institutions may work successfully in supporting early-stage startups and improve the entrepreneurial ecosystem. In this study, we elaborate the underpinnings of public-private collaboration, contribution of this collaboration on the success of crowdfunding campaigns of startups.

Literature review and theoretical background

The crowdfunding platforms are key for various types of initiatives and entrepreneurial activities around the world both for the establishment and growth period (Smirnova et al., 2021).

Given the limited amount of money available for the start-ups, crowdfunding platform may play a crucial role in generating necessary seed funding (Bretschneider et al., 2014).

(Baumol & Strom, 2007) proposes four primary tenets underpinning an entrepreneurial economy:

- ease of starting and growing a business;
- generous rewards for productive entrepreneurial activity;
- incentives for unproductive activity, and
- incentives to keep the winners on their toes.

Governments' use of crowdfunding may be considered as a public sector innovation with normative and economic benefits (Hong & Ryu, 2019). In this context, the study involves discussion of all four tenets and their relevant policy tools.

Methodology

In this study, we investigate the impacts of a public-private collaboration in the mean of match-funding on success of crowdfunding campaign and improvement of entrepreneurship ecosystem. A mixed methods and multilevel approach was used to collect data including desk research, document analysis, investigation of 36 crowdfunding campaigns, as well as semi-structured expert interviews.

We argue that governments may use match-funding to collaborate with the crowdfunding platforms to attract citizens to invest in start-ups and improve the capacity of entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Findings

Overall, findings suggest that, with all else being equal, government involvement has significant positive impacts both on crowdfunding performance (as measured by success rate and funding amount.) and improvement of entrepreneurship ecosystem.

The study highlights there are multiple impacts of government involvement in equity based crowdfunding as follow;

Impacts of Entrepreneurship Ecosystem:

- Contribution to the deepening of the entrepreneurship ecosystem
- Contribution to the awareness and dissemination of crowdfunding platforms
- Transformation and catalyzing effect by changing the way public collaborates with private companies

Impacts on Entrepreneur:

- Financial contribution
- Improving trust in the company and campaign, motivating others to invest in the project
- Public Recognition Effect
- Capacity building impact with pre-campaign guidance

Discussion/Policy Implications

Public policies can foster the formation of a new ecosystem around equity based crowdfunding. In particular, the paper focuses on equity-based crowdfunding, a new player in entrepreneurial finance providing early stage, technology based innovative start-ups with the possibility to raise capital by providing endorsement by the local development agency, a public institution.

Accessing funding is considered one of crucial challenge for the early stage start ups around the world. Conventional public policies are focused on enhancing entrepreneurship ecosystem to overcome the problem of lack of accessing funding.

Incentivizing crowdfunding through public policies represents an illustrative case of an innovative approach to support entrepreneurship ecosystem. The study elaborates the leverage effect of limited funding provided by the local development agency, a public institution, on the successful crowdfunding campaigns.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which an innovative public policy with a limited budget can contribute to successful funding of early-stage entrepreneurs. Preliminary results of our study highlights direct intervention of public agencies as a mean of match-funding can create a synergy affect.

The nature and the success of this cross sectoral innovation can be inspiring for other countries in providing financial mean to early-stage start-ups by highlighting the role of public sector as accelerator, motivator, trust builder and funder, at the same time.

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Young people and new tech in addressing climate change in remote communities

ABSTRACT

Keywords

Young People; Climate Change; Disruptive Technologies; Remote Communities

Introduction

Sustainability education tends to take the view that young people need to be educated on issues around climate change and sustainable growth/development. What is missing from such an approach are 'beyond content' pedagogies that draw on young people's existing knowledge, concerns, and creative imaginations to envisage alternative futures that are desirable to them; and to help them move from knowledge to action. This work draws on young people as a resource to: (a) understand perspectives on disorder wrought by climate change; (b) create new frameworks for new orders that can help navigate uncertain futures; and (c) contribute to the development of policy and practice towards a type of education that is shaped by their concerns and contributions.

Literature Review

The role of young people and new technology in addressing climate change in remote communities is crucial. Remote communities often have limited access to resources and information, making them particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. However, new technologies and innovative solutions they enable can help bridge this gap and allow young people to take an active role in mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change.

Advanced Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other disruptive technologies such as Virtual Reality and Big Data Analytics can indeed play a significant role in tackling climate change. AI and machine learning can help to optimize energy use and reduce emissions. AI can also be used for climate modeling and prediction, allowing policymakers to make more informed decisions based on climate projections. Virtual Reality (VR) can be used to raise awareness about climate change and its impacts. VR simulations can be developed to educate the public on the causes and effects of climate change, and to demonstrate the potential solutions that are being proposed. This can help to engage the youth and promote support for climate action. Big Data Analytics can be used to identify patterns and trends in climate data, allowing researchers to better understand the impacts of climate change and develop effective strategies for mitigation and adaptation [1, 4].

What is more, technology can be used to address climate change in remote communities also through the use of remote monitoring and data analysis tools. These tools can provide real-time data on weather patterns, soil moisture levels, energy use and waste, resources and other key indicators that can help communities adapt to changing conditions. Young people can be trained to use these tools and analyse the data, providing valuable insights into how best to manage natural resources and protect the environment [2].

Finally, social media and other communication technologies can be used to raise awareness about climate change and mobilise support for local initiatives. Young people are often at the forefront of social media activism, and they can use these platforms to share information and build support for environmental initiatives in remote communities [3].

Methodology

The project will use a mosaic of speculative methods drawn from humanities and social sciences and culminate with a forum bringing together local perspectives that look towards global futures. The principal aims of the work is to: (a) To offer young people (13-14-year-olds) in the UK and Brazil, living in areas most vulnerable to climate change, the opportunity to explore the disorder climate change causes and imagine possibilities for different orders in the future; (b) to use these local perspectives in an international exchange forum to offer a framework for navigating uncertain futures; and (c) to contribute to the development of policy and practice towards sustainability education. The technologies described on the Literature review part will be the glue between the involved parties to start building the needed to tackle the climate change and build a bright(er) future.

The work will take place in two countries, the UK and Brazil. In each country, we will work with four groups of seven (7), Year-9 young people. In the UK we will work in two locations, one in inner Norwich and one on the Suffolk coast. In the former (Norwich), we will work with a group of students attending an inner-city school and have been supporting action against climate change. These students and their families face the prospect of involuntary displacement to avoid loss in life and property. In the latter location (Suffolk) participating students attend a school near the town of Lowestoft, East Suffolk, which is on one of the fastest eroding coastlines in the UK and at imminent risk of erosion. In Brazil we will work with young people attending two different schools in the North of Brazil. The young people we will work with, and their families have been violently expelled from their lands by large agribusiness and their health has been severely compromised due to their exposure to pesticides. In addition, increased temperatures associated with global warming are linked to more severe droughts. The local students and their families have been affected by climate change in different ways, including droughts, sea level rise and forced movement.

Conclusions

In summary, young people and new technology can play a vital role in addressing climate change in remote communities. By promoting the so-called disruptive technologies and others like, remote monitoring and data analysis tools, and leveraging social media to build support for local initiatives, young people can help create a more sustainable and resilient future for these communities. And on top of that all the above can also be used to properly tackle the socio-economic effects of the climate change and to propose innovative ways to overcome its effects.

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A white rectangular card with a slight perspective tilt is centered on a grey background. A thick green horizontal ribbon passes behind the card, and a thick dark blue horizontal ribbon passes behind it. The text is printed in a bold, green, sans-serif font.

EVALUATION OF EU FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Mihaela Iorgulescu - Aioanei

QURES Quality Research & Support, Romania

Comparative analysis of the EU competitive sector programmes in Turkey based on a set of intervention-level evaluations. Two key bottlenecks that failed to be adequately addressed, in both eastern and western parts of the country

ABSTRACT

The paper presents a comparative analysis of the results of three evaluation studies, assessing mainly effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the European Union's Instrument of Pre-Accession implemented in Türkiye, in the area of regional competitiveness and innovation. The analysis takes into consideration the findings and results of the Interim Evaluation and Export Evaluation of the Regional Competitiveness Operational Programme 2007-2013 of Türkiye - RCOP and the Interim Evaluation of the Competitiveness and Innovation Sector Operational Programme 2014 - 2020 of Türkiye - CISOP. The main purpose of both interventions was to support the establishment of common use facilities and innovation hubs, where SMEs in the industry sector can access services such as: prototyping, testing, production, consultancy, technical support in order to contribute to the competitiveness level of enterprises in Türkiye and decrease economic disparities among regions. While RCOP (funded under IPA I) was focused on the eastern part of Türkiye, covering 43 relatively less developed regions from Türkiye (provinces with less than 75% national income when compared to the average in Turkey), CISOP 2014 - 2020 (funded under IPA II) covered mainly the western part, thus more developed regions. In the case of RCOP, the funds were directed mainly to manufacturing and tourism sectors. For CISOP, a stronger component addressing the needs in the research and innovation area was designed, besides manufacturing industry and tourism, starting from the premises that this type of support can bring more added value for more developed regions where the research and innovation ecosystem is in a more advanced stage.

The conceptual framework on which the aforementioned evaluations were based on the EU regional development philosophy transposed into policy documents through EU treaties, regulations, relevant European Commission decisions, but also on the UN principles covered by the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The 3 evaluations have had similar designs, encompassing: desk-review, national and regional level interviews, programme beneficiaries and target groups surveys and case studies (for approximately 50% of project portfolio). The criteria applied in order to select the sample of projects for in-depth review were: representativeness at measure / action level, presence of more than one project in the region (in order to capture synergies and impact at regional level), regional context (the effects of Covid19 pandemic being among the analyzed context elements) and financial dimension of the financed projects.

The main conclusions highlighted through the comparative analysis of the progress made by the programmes against their planned results in terms of private sector development are:

a) due to the fact that the awareness level within the SME sector on the importance of digitalization, green transition and innovation in the industry sectors remained limited during the implementation of the programmes, the demand for the newly created services in the supported common use facilities or hubs was rather low for many financed projects, leading to sustainability related problems.

b) the efforts made by the operating structure (management body of the two programmes) to increase the capacity of funds beneficiaries to effectively implement the projects turned out to be less than needed in both cases, even if the 2014 - 2020 programme, covering the western part of the country, started from the premises that the beneficiary institutions already have the necessary human resources, technical expertise and financial capacity.

The evaluation showed that both programmes corresponded to the needs in the targeted regions, remaining relevant during the implementation periods. Nevertheless, in the case of RCOP implemented mainly in eastern part of Türkiye, external factors affected significantly its progress. In the context of a less developed area and a deteriorating economic situation, in many cases the negative context turned out to be way more influential than the benefits of the implemented projects and the beneficiaries would have needed more support for implementing mitigating actions. In the western part of the country, covered by CISOP, while context conditions were better and the selected beneficiaries were key actors in their field of activity, having the necessary expertise and financial capacity, in many cases not enough human resources or not the right technical expertise was deployed to the projects' implementation teams. Regarding the expected demand from the SMEs sector for the new created services, both programmes encountered difficulties in reaching their target groups, in order to generate the expected changes at regional level. Beneficiaries were in general more focused on conducting the planned activities, without putting efforts in activities meant to increase awareness and the level of information of the potential clients on the opportunities created for them through EU funds. Thus, ensuring self-sustainability of the projects after the termination of the financial support become a challenge in the context of both programmes.

Key words

regional development, regional competitiveness, Instrument of Pre-Accession, intervention-level evaluation

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Evaluation of under-accessed measures in the framework of the national rural development program (NRDP) in Romania

ABSTRACT

The paper presents the evaluation of the National Rural Development Program (NRDP) from 2014 to 2020, in Romania, conducted in 2019 and led by QURES Quality Research and Support, which was focused on under-accessed measures. The Evaluation aimed to enhance the precision of rural development assistance and to facilitate the implementation process, ensuring that all parties receive information that can add value to the implementation process.

The NRDR 2014–2020 is the programme providing funds from the European Union and the Government of Romania to support the economic and social growth of rural regions in Romania. The NRDP is financially supported by the EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) and aims to strategically develop rural regions by focusing on: restructuring and increasing farm viability, facilitating sustainable management of natural resources and improving rural areas by developing infrastructure and services, promoting economic diversification.

The literature utilized in the evaluation includes European and national legislation regulating rural financing and developments, horizontal documents, EU regulations, provisions of the National Rural Development Programme, the monitoring and evaluation framework for the Common Agricultural Policy for the period 2014-2020, Measure Sheets within NRDP, Evaluation and Selection Reports of the project calls. To carry out this evaluation, a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods was used, based on an evaluation matrix that was developed during the initial stage. This approach ensured the triangulation of data and evidence, and thereby enhanced the rigor of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations. One of the first instruments used was a document analysis conducted at a general level, regarding the National Rural Development Program and the funding procedures/mechanisms used, as well as at the level of (sub)measures/projects analyzed in depth. The document analysis was initiated in the initial phase of structuring and completed/finalized in the analysis and evaluation phases.

A second instrument applied was interviews conducted on a large scale, including the following stakeholders: the Management Authority NRDP, paying agencies, the beneficiaries, rejected applicants and consultants. A total of 72 interviews were conducted with stakeholders at the national, regional, and local levels.

The information collected through documentation and interviews was further consolidated and triangulated by with data obtained through three surveys, addressed to applicants and beneficiaries of NRDR (sub-measures: 1.1 "Support for vocational training and skills acquisition actions", 4.2a "Investments in processing/marketing of products in the fruit-growing sector " and Sub-measure 6.3 "Business start-up aid for development of small farms" - Integrated Territorial Investments Danube Delta), as well as consultants.

The information obtained through documentation and interviews was verified and supplemented by the data collected from the three surveys conducted with applicants and beneficiaries of the sub-measures 1.1, 4.2a, and 6.3 within the ITI (Integrated Territorial Initiative), as well as with the consultants involved in the projects. This approach ensured a high level of validity through the triangulation of data and evidence collected from multiple sources. The three focus groups organized with beneficiaries from the ITI area (considering that two of the under-accessed measures are implemented in this area), with representatives of the fruit sector (considering that two of the under-accessed measures are part of the strategy in this sector, sub-strategy of the NRDP) and with the consultants' representatives (starting from the hypothesis issued in the initial period that in many cases the consultants know technical details better than the beneficiaries themselves). A more in-depth analysis was conducted under the framework of 6 case studies covering submeasures 1.1, 4.2.a, 6.3 ITI, 6.5, and package 9 of Measure 10.

It is worth emphasizing that all of the measures analyzed are highly pertinent and align with the needs of potential beneficiaries. However, there are several causes that led to the lack of access to these measures, among them: most of the conditions for packages 5, 9, 10, 11 of Measure 10 have been difficult to meet, in particular maintaining the 5-year commitments, ensuring crop rotation, difficulty in meeting certain commitments from applicants by ensuring crop rotation. In the case of the "Integrated Territorial Initiative" measures, implementation was hindered by the late approval of the Integrated Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Danube Delta and, therefore, by the equally late launch of calls for dedicated projects. The main challenges are related to the incompatibilities in the intervention logic of some measures that negatively affected the feasibility of implementation, for example, in the case of submeasure 3.1, only farmers were eligible, as processors are more interested, and their activity fits better with joining the groups that proposed products in Romania recognized according to European quality schemes.

Following the evaluation, several transversal causes were identified that prevented access to the available funds, they being the following: delays in launching project applications, the delay in implementing the recent measures taken by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to offer potential beneficiaries access to loans on more favorable terms, insufficient capacity of the institutions involved, the need for higher expertise and the lack of a national and secure online Agricultural Register, which could facilitate efficient information management. These aspects affected the absorption of funds and created difficulties in effective implementation.

In summary, the information provided by the Managing Authority and paying agencies has helped to create a moderate-to-high level of awareness about the mechanisms and implementation process of the evaluated European funds/measures. Agency for Payments and Intervention in Agriculture (APIA) conducts an extensive information campaign each year for eligible farmers, including printed and electronic materials such as brochures, posters, leaflets, and guides, as well as on-site meetings at APIA centers and mayoralties of Territorial Administrative Units. For certain measures targeting groups with technical capacity, consultants, or specialized EU finance departments, the level of information is higher, with up to 86% understanding according to surveys conducted. However, small farmers with limited technical skills have lower levels of information and understanding. The information activities are mainly generic and focused on passive transmission via the internet, to the detriment of active information activities such as face-to-face meetings or help desk support.

The main recommendations resulting from the process of analyzing and evaluating the collected data and the issued findings include: better planning and timely preparation of project calls, more comprehensive consultations with involved actors for newly introduced measures, closer collaboration between different directorates, launching new calls for projects, developing a mechanism to attract smaller and older farmers, reconsidering the amount of compensatory payments available, implementing a system to recognize the quality of advisory services, monitoring and adjusting online systems, extending simplified cost options, and implementing customized information and communication actions.

Keywords: Under-Accessed Measures, National Rural Development Program, recommendations, applicants, beneficiaries.

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The effect of the interventions of the human capital operational programme in increasing the employment of neets in Romania?

ABSTRACT

Introduction

The research has the aim to identify the effects of the interventions included in the Human Capital Operational Programme from Romania on increasing the employability and occupation rate of NEETs. The research conducted feeds into the evaluation service conducted for the Ministry of Investments and European Projects, within Evaluation Theme 1 of the contract „Evaluation of employment interventions”. This evaluation theme focuses on POCU’s specific objectives targeting NEETs as defined by the programme until its review in 2020: young people aged between 16 and 24 years old (up to 25 years old) who are not enrolled in education, do not follow a training programme and do not work.

Literature review

Since 2014, two implementation plans for the "Youth Guarantee" initiative were developed in Romania. A first plan covered the period 2014-2015 and was implemented at least partially through interventions financed under the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013. The second plan covers the period 2017-2027 and a number of the measures provided for in this context are financed under the POCU 2014-2020. Romania included in the measures for the implementation of the "Youth Guarantee" reform elements of apprenticeship and internship programs, which would help young people prepare for the labour market and strengthen their relevant skills. The reforms aimed at two main aspects: increasing the attractiveness of apprenticeship and internship programs, both for employers and for young people, and strengthening the framework for the acquisition of skills by young people. The changes to the normative framework also included the introduction of facilities for employers of young NEETs.

Methodology

In the evaluation round from 2020, the researchers applied counterfactual impact evaluation, analysed the national statistics on employment and the data obtained through the survey, analysed documents, carried out interviews with relevant stakeholders and developed case studies at the level of the financed projects.

Findings

Overall, the study found the following:

- The INTESPO project, mainly, and the other POCU projects as a subsidiary, contribute to the enrolment in the SPO of approximately 12% of the young NEETs registered at the national level, but approximately 35% of those active (who eventually register with the SPO);

- POCU projects contribute to a small extent to the training of young NEETs, ensuring the training of only 2.42% of them and contributing only 1% to the participation rate in education and professional training of young people;
- No effect of POCU on the employment of young NEETs is observed. A small percentage of young people who received support went on to work and kept their jobs. The counterfactual analysis shows that the control group was able to increase its employment to a greater extent than the target group, despite the support received by the latter through the POCU;
- Young Roma received special attention in the program and this aspect generated positive effects for them, both in terms of acquiring skills and in terms of employment. These results are significantly better than for young people from other ethnicities.

Discussion/Policy implications

The absolute number of young NEETs has been on a steady downward trend over the period 2014-2019, but this situation is mainly due to demographic decline. It is serious that the percentage of young NEETs in the total youth population has decreased slightly in Romania, especially compared to the European dynamics. The paper made several recommendations that have policy implications. One recommendation was to include in the intervention youth mobilization activities, in order to develop transversal skills for life, work and to raise the motivation level of young people, being adapted to their needs, but especially to the interests of young people. Another recommendation was to implement a minimum duration of 18 months for projects, in order to have time to carry out outreach and mobilization activities of the target group, but also for support activities for young to find a job.

Conclusion

The contribution of POCU materialized in the registration of young people at the public employment service (SPO), to a small extent it contributed to the enrolment to vocational training of young people and effect was observed in terms of the employment of young NEETs, except at the level of projects that directly finance subsidies for employers and youth mobility.

Keywords

NEETs, ESF+, Employment, Education, Romania

Key references

Law no. 76/2002 on the unemployment insurance system and employment stimulation was amended in 2016, 2017 and 2018 to include provisions on support for the employment of young NEETs.

Law no. 176/2018 on Internships.

Law no. 279/2005 on apprenticeship at the workplace, its implementing rules and the four amendments between 2017-2019.

Law no. 335/2013 regarding the internship for higher education graduates and its amendments from 2017 and 2018, and in 2018,.

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**LABOUR MARKET
POLICIES**

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Labour migration of Roma from the perspective of the family

ABSTRACT

Key words: Labour migration. Roma. Family. Gender roles.

This paper studies the role of the Roma family in the process of decision-making about labour migration abroad. Slovakia has one of the highest percentages of the Roma minority in the European Union. The widening gap between the minority and the majority is an ongoing problem. This presupposes a push for migration as a strategy to secure a livelihood or to address discriminatory attitudes on the part of the majority. Labour migration of Roma is still relatively under-studied, especially from the perspective of the decision-making and family.

We propose, in line with other scholars, that much of what is considered individual migration should be appropriately conceptualized as family migration (Cooke, 2008), and the importance of the family increases across international borders (Vertovec, 2002). This is in line with the theory of the New Economy of Migration which argues migration does not originate from an individual but from a collective decision (Massey, et. al., 1993). Furthermore, the literature perceives a strictly defined role of a woman and a man within the Roma family (Žilová, Jankovičová, 2008; Liégeois, 1997). We investigate these roles through the lens of decision-making about migration among Roma families. We thus contribute to a thus far unexplored topic, in order to enlarge current understanding of various factors at the family level as well as beyond it, which result in the act of migration.

The field work focused on interviewing Roma families, both men and women, who have experience with labour migration abroad. Qualitative research design relied on semi-structured interview supplemented with vignettes which were conducted in two locations within Slovakia from August to November 2022. Overall, 18 interviews with men and women in Roma households took place.

We find that the Roma community in Slovakia faces several obstacles when entering the labour market. Persistent unemployment due to the lack of job opportunities, discrimination and low wages are incentivize migration of the Roma community for work abroad. The motivation of migrants to go abroad is a combination of different factors, closely connected with the desire for a better life. Migration takes place with the significant help of family members located abroad or as co-migration with relatives, which confirms the growing importance of the family across international borders (Vertovec, 2002).

This specificity of women's migration is typical for only one of the two areas and is less acceptable in the other. This signals a changing role of women within the Roma family, with a growing say in decision-making. Despite this finding, the majority of decision-making takes place after a joint agreement between the man and the woman (the closest family), without a significant influence from other family members.

The conclusions of our paper confirm that migration is a collective decision (Massey, et. al., 1993) of the closest family. Previous research pointed to a strict division and traditional gender roles of women and men in Roma households (Žilová, Jankovičová, 2008; Liégeois, 1997), which, according to our findings, is gradually starting to change. As the research results show, labour migration of Roma in Slovakia is very diversified and specific in its behaviour in different locations. Diversity offers scope for further research in other locations in Slovakia, which would once again enrich our knowledge of labour migration.

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CSPS - Slovak Academy of Sciences, Slovakia

Explaining the gaps between Roma and non-Roma job-seekers in the access to employment programmes in Slovakia

ABSTRACT

Introduction

The Roma belong to a largest ethnic minority in Central Europe, and in Slovakia, characterized by very poor living conditions, and poor employment outcomes (Kahanec 2014). While the Roma are a diverse ethnic community, especially marginalized Roma communities (MRC) are characterized by poor access to education reflected in low skills; bad housing conditions and spatial segregation; as well as worse health outcomes relative to the majority population (Škobla and Filčák, 2016; Hidas et al., 2022). Labour market exclusion has been one of the dominant dimensions of marginalisation. To date, the Roma in Slovakia have significantly higher unemployment rates than the majority population and often fall into inactivity. Unemployment among the Roma is up to 25% higher than among the non-Roma living in their vicinity (FRA, 2011). Although the Roma social inclusion is a multi-layered issue necessitating a complex intervention cutting across a range of areas, increasing the share of formal employment of the Roma can be a major vehicle of social integration.

Literature review

Active labour market policies are a key policy intervention tool for policy makers to bring disadvantaged groups closer to the labour market. While evaluation studies of ALMPs in Slovakia exist (Štefánik and Karasová, 2016; Štefánik, 2021; Karasová, Baláž, and Polačková, 2019), to date relatively little is known about the implementation of ALMPs with respect to Roma specifically. This paper aims to fill this gap by empirically measuring the job placement and participation in active labour market programmes (ALMPs) between the Roma and non-Roma job-seekers in Slovakia, and contextualizing the measured differences in the broader institutional framework of activation and social policies. We in particular investigate patterns in allocation of jobseekers living in high/low Roma density municipalities to different ALMP measures, and interpret it in a broader context of policy design, targeting and labour market placement under conditions of structurally weak labour markets.

Methodology

In our analysis, we merge the municipality-level information on MRC population from the Atlas of Roma Communities (Atlas of Roma Communities, 2019) with administrative data on registered job-seekers in Slovakia.

The article explores the differences in the probability of job placement and participation in active labour market programmes (ALMPs) based on job-seekers' residence in a municipality with a high share of the population living in marginalised Roma communities (MRC). We then explore administrative data on job-seekers registered in Slovakia during 2017 complemented by information on their participation in ALMPs, and follow their labour market activity paths until 2020. We focus on two labour market activity outcomes and estimate a series of logit models of the probability of a job-seeker: (i) exiting the register of unemployed due to a job placement/de-registration, and (ii) job-seekers' participation in various types of ALMPs, recognizing the different roles of various types of ALMPs including public works (PW), employment incentives (EI), counselling (CS), and training (TR).

Findings

Out of the 503 731 jobseekers registered during 2017, 231 823 had a permanent residence in settlements (municipalities) with the share of Roma population above 5 percent (46 percent). A look at the spatial distribution of MRC population and the unemployment rate reveals that regions with a higher share of MRC population are concentrated in areas with higher unemployment. At the municipality level, unemployment is correlated with the share of the population living in MRCs (correlation coefficient = 0.717). This correlation suggests that the districts with a higher share of MRC population are also in more urgent need of public employment services.

Our findings show that the probabilities of a job placements fall with a rising share of Roma population in the place of residence. In contrast, the probability to be de-registered (for non-cooperation) increases with the share of population living in MRC. We observe a declining chance of being placed and a growing chance of being de-registered in spite of the fact that, on average, ALMP participation is higher in regions with higher unemployment rate, which is also spatially highly correlated with the density of Roma communities. Moreover, the more “intensive” or expensive ALMP programmes are less accessible for clients living in MRCs and the less “intensive” support is more often taken up by clients residing in municipalities with a higher share of MRC. The observed portfolio of ALMP services provided in municipalities without MRC population differs from the portfolio provided in municipalities with a high share (above 50 percent) of population living in MRCs.

Conclusion/policy implications

In the interpretation of results we go beyond the well-established argument of economic and social discrimination of the Roma based on ethnicity (European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2022; Kureková, 2015; IFP, 2014).

Specifically, in the Slovak case, the plethora of policy tools available to public employment services (PES) staff does not include measures suitable for individuals distant from the labour market due to multiple disadvantages, which in addition to ethnicity include also low education, gender, poor health status or poverty. This, we argue, might lead to what appears a systematic institutional exclusion from PES employment support of the jobseekers living in high-MRC communities. We then argue that the design of current employment integration models seems to fail to address the multidimensional disadvantages that occur in the whole ecosystem in which the integration takes place (e.g., Kureková et al., 2022; Nevala et al., 2015; Shaw et al., 2022). As a result, employment programmes might be exclusionary towards vulnerable groups by not considering their specific disadvantages. From a policy perspective this implies that the plethora of tools available to employment services should be adjusted to enable effective labour market inclusion of those most distant to the labour market, in order to provide real activation options to counsellors as well as marginalized Roma.

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Adult learning policies within almps in Slovakia: accessibility and regional differences

ABSTRACT

This work has been financed by VEGA project no. VEGA 2/0079/21.

Introduction - Active Labour Market Policies in Slovakia (ALMPs) and Training Programmes within ALMPs in Slovakia

Adult learning policies are one of the key policy channels to deal with changing demand for skills and the need to create opportunities for learners to participate in upskilling and reskilling. Only then we can achieve a shift in the aggregate skills supply as a response to the changing skills demand. Expenditures on Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) in Slovakia are one of the lowest in the EU, with a marginal expenditure on the training component of the ALMPs (about 0,6% of total ALMP expenditures in 2020), these are expected to grow in the coming years, as Slovakia is particularly exposed to pressures from digital and green transitions. The goal of this paper is to produce specific evidence on the design and accessibility of selected training programmes within ALMPs in Slovakia. We find that this evidence is scarce in Slovakia and therefore important to be strengthened for the upcoming training programmes for job seekers or employed and adequate interpretation of the future impact assessments of such programmes.

Review of relevant literature

From the number of research papers reviewing the ALMPs in Slovakia or undertaking their impact assessment, only a few research works focus on the training programmes within ALMPs. From the most recent works, Stefanik (2018a) reviews ALMPs, including the training programmes and Stefanik (2018b) analyses the training programme REPAS, a training programme aimed at providing vocational training to registered unemployed. The scheme has a character of training vouchers for job seekers. Stefanik (2021) analyses the effect of change in the implementation of REPAS.

The methodological approach of the paper

The baseline of the programme assessment is set by the results of a counterfactual analysis of three ALMP programmes (Stefanik, 2014). The counterfactual evaluation is based on administrative data on registered unemployed jobseekers in Slovakia, inter-linkable with the database of participants in ALMP measures. Administrative data was provided by the COLSaF and covers the period between January 2014 and December 2020. The counterfactual evaluation uses propensity score matching.

The ultimate and explicit objective of the ALMP programs is to improve the employment chances of its beneficiaries. Four outcome indicators are constructed, based on the presence or absence from the register of JSs administrated by COLSAF. These are proxies of the employment status.

First, we discuss and compare the results of the counterfactual analysis against the backdrop of the success criteria applied for ALMPs by the COLSAF. Then we define a set of criteria in relation to the regional labour market and socio-economic characteristics and discuss the accessibility of the three programmes and the regional differences along these criteria. We discuss how they explain the programme assessments and what are the implications for the policy design.

Findings

Three programmes analysed in this paper show significant differences in the regional structure of the participants as well as the dispositional conditions of participants. The outcome of the CFE shows the positive effect of participation in the programme REPAS which provided access to vocational training. KOMPAS provides access to soft skills training and RESTART which offered career counselling courses have not achieved positive effects for the participants based on the CFE. However, REPAS had achieved a relatively even distribution of participants across the regions compared to RESTART and KOMPAS. Both KOMPAS and RESTART had a significantly higher share of participants in the regions, known also as “lagging” regions. REPAS also had a significantly higher share of participants whose initial field of study was in technical sciences. In the case of RESTART and KOMPAS the difference in the length of the unemployment spell, higher for the participants compared to eligible job seekers, was significantly bigger than in the case of the participants in REPAS.

Conclusions and suggestions for further research

We suggest that the inter-connectedness of training programmes should be considered for a more comprehensive discussion, assessment, and further development of the training programmes within ALMPs. It is important to reflect on the effectiveness of the training programmes in terms of access to these programmes for different groups of job seekers, considering their skills profiles. We also find that there is a gap in better understanding the effect of the regional differences and their effect on access to and assessment of the training programmes that needs to be further inspected. Counterfactual evaluations could be supported by additional assessment approaches, such as approaches based on a cost-benefit analysis. We also argue that the objectives of adult learning need to be revisited and discussed at the policy level referring to typologies of learning schemes and barriers and using evidence from the research on adult learning.

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Locking in or pushing out: The caseworker dilemma

ABSTRACT

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Keywords

active labour market policy, program evaluation, machine learning, youth unemployment

Introduction

Despite the indisputable, long-term focus of public employment policies, youth unemployment remains a pressing issue. Especially in times of economic downturns, such as during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, youth cohorts entering the labour market face a higher risk of unemployment. The negative effects of youth unemployment have motivated a substantial policy response, since 2014 concentrated under the European Union (EU)-wide Youth Guarantee (YG) initiative. Here, we describe one particular country-level implementation of the YG initiative through a portfolio of ALMP programs. By adopting a novel double-machine-learning (DML)-based, dynamic estimation technique (Bodory et al., 2022), we generate evidence on the impact of various types of ALMP programs potentially provided in two different periods of unemployment.

Literature review/theoretical background

Active labour market policies (ALMPs) are essential in tackling youth unemployment. Nevertheless, the evidence on the impact of such policies remains ambiguous (Caliendo and Schmidl (2016); Eichhorst and Rinne (2018); Kluge et al. (2019)).

Despite the temptation to produce program-design relevant information addressing the “What works” question, studies applying one homogeneous empirical strategy to identify the impact of various ALMP programs remain scarce (e.g., Caliendo and Schmidl (2016); Madoñ et al. (2021)). New alleys are being opened by employing machine learning (ML) in policy impact evaluation (Athey and Imbens (2017)). This study explores one such alley, joining a recent stream of studies, by documenting the advantages of machine learning in the impact evaluation of ALMP programs (e.g., Cockx and Van Belle (2019); Goller et al. (2021); Knaus et al. (2022)).

Methodology

We explore administrative data provided by the Slovak PES - Central Office for Labour Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (COLSAF). Our data includes the whole population of registered jobseekers with their unemployment and ALMP participation history. We quantify the impact of participation in various types of ALMP programmes on the long-run absence from the unemployment register. Under the unconfoundedness assumption, we quantify the potential gain of participation in various types of ALMP programs, taking place 0-6 or 6-12 months after the start of the unemployment, compared to two alternative counterfactual situations of:

- a less employable client remaining unemployed for more than 6 months
- a more employable client remaining unemployed for up to six months.

We aim to tailor our identification strategy to generate evidence supporting caseworkers in their everyday dilemmas when supporting individual job search decisions.

Findings

The ALMP programs provided under the YG in Slovakia during 2016 can be clustered to:

- Employment incentives (EI)
- Graduate practice (GP)
- Training (TR)
- Public works (PW)

Our results confirm some of the well-discussed conclusions of the recently popular ALMP impact evaluation meta-analyses. For example, we document that those ALMP interventions applied earlier yield a greater impact than do those applied later; that workplace experience collected in the private sector (EI and GP) improves the employment chances of unemployed youth, which is in contrast with PW-type programs; and that TR improves long-term employment chances, even more so if combined with other ALMPs.

Additionally, we document that the shortening of the unemployment period by itself, without ALMP participation, has a long-term impact on the absence of individuals from the unemployment register.

Conclusion and discussion

Reflecting on available meta-analyses on the impact of ALMPs and especially youth targeting ALMPs, we are able to confirm a number of their findings:

- The impact of ALMPs is higher if the intervention takes place earlier in the unemployment period (Martin and Grubb, 2005; Carling and Larsson, 2005).
- Workplace experience collected under "PW" types of programs has a negligible impact than workplace experience collected in the private sector or regular employment (Kluve et al., 2019; Card et al., 2018; Caliendo and Schmidl, 2016).
- Combinations of interventions appear to increase the impact of some program types (in line with the conclusions of (Kluve et al., 2019)).

In addition to the well-discussed findings of the meta-analyses, we also observe the following:

- The shortening of the unemployment period is associated with an impact on the long-term probability of an individual's absence from the unemployment register.
- The shortening of the unemployment period, by itself, without any ALMP participation, outperforms ALMP support provided later in the unemployment period.
- Sequences of at least two short-term TRs outperform the shortening of the unemployment period in terms of impact on the long-term probability of an individual being absent from the unemployment register (supporting the "train first" approach).

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**RURAL /
LAND USE**

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Agroforestry as an essential element for rural development in the Slovak Strategic Plan of common agricultural policy

ABSTRACT

Keywords: agroforestry, policy, rural development, Slovakia

Slovakia can be regarded as a rural agricultural landscape as recorded by the European Landscape Classification (Mücher et al., 2010) and by the predominance of agriculture in the republic's land usage (Izakovičová et al., 2022). Agricultural area represents over 48% of Slovakia with arable land dominating (SOSR, 2021), resulting in characteristic large-block fields with a low degree of ecological stability. A contrast to this agricultural desert, mostly in lowlands and basins, is the traditional agricultural landscape consisting of a mosaic of small arable fields and permanent crops with grasslands, vineyards, and high-stem orchards (Špulerová et al., 2017). This mosaic has survived especially in mountainous regions with harsh environmental conditions (Špulerová, 2008) and is closely linked to agroforestry.

Socio-economic change of the last century has significantly influenced agricultural trends and rural development (RD). Collectivisation of agriculture, increase of agricultural production, and Slovakia's 2004 EU entry all had a substantial impact on traditional farming in the country. The process of collectivisation led to a massive disappearance of mosaic landscape structures. Shrubs, hedgerows, and trees have disappeared and traditional land uses have almost vanished (Izakovičová et al., 2022). As many farmers were compelled to leave their ancestral lands and urbanization became more prevalent, RD was slowed down (Gajdoš, 2005).

The main overarching factor that has altered farming management in Slovakia is agricultural policy (Bezák and Mitchley, 2014). Since 2004, the priorities of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have broadened from a focus on production only, to the rational use of natural resources and the objectives of sustainable development of rural areas. However, implementation has also had negative effects, mainly in weak support for extensive farming, weak emphasis on biodiversity of agroecosystems, and support schemes for small farmers (Izakovičová et al., 2008; Csaki et al., 2013; Bezák and Mitchley 2014).

Current intervention 73.01 Establishment of an agroforestry system proposes to support it only on 1350 ha (CAP SP Slovakia 23-27), or 0.07% of the total land devoted to agriculture in Slovakia (SOSR, 2022). According to the best current findings based on LUCAS data, the estimated area of existing agroforestry systems (AFS) in Slovakia is 43 900 hectares (den Herder et al., 2017).

There are also more than 300 000 hectares of abandoned agricultural land that is reverting to shrubland (SOSR, 2021), which could be converted to profitable AFS supporting rural livelihoods. This poor support scheme is also conditional on nonsensical restrictions on design, tree species composition, and management choices. The latest government regulation governing subsidy conditions (GSR, 2022) even prohibits the harvesting of fruit from agroforestry trees. This denies the very essence of AFS, which is diversification of production and sustaining smallholder production for increased social economic, and environmental benefits.

Slovakia has established a variety of RD goals to promote rural communities' economic, social, and environmental sustainability (MoE, 2018). Overall, agroforestry can help Slovakia achieve several of the RD goals by promoting sustainable land use, enhancing biodiversity, and providing new economic opportunities for the rural population. These practices can help increase resilience and advance sustainable RD by combining trees with crops and/or livestock. Agroforestry is neither a cost to farmers nor a barrier to agricultural production. On the contrary, it is essential to increase productivity in the face of increasingly unfavourable climatic conditions (Paul et al., 2017; Lehmann et al., 2020; Staton et al., 2022). Slovakia must build supportive legislative processes that not only enable but directly favour agroforestry practices over the unsustainable plundering of natural resources by conventional large-scale farming.

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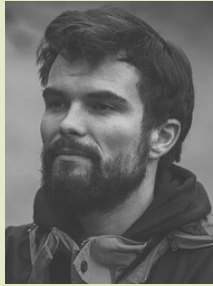
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Assessment of the possibilities and limitations of LAGs activities in Croatia

ABSTRACT

Local action groups or groups (LAGs) embody the LEADER approach for the development of rural areas that enable the integral implementation of economic and social cohesion. (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008). In the 2014-2020 programming period, the LEADER method was expanded under the broader term Community-Led Local Development (CLLD). CLLD is a broader method of integrated local development, used at the sub-regional level, and complements other forms of development support (Servillo, and De Bruijn, 2018).

LAG (local action group) is a partnership between representatives of the public, economic, and civil sectors in rural areas, LAGs are defined as carriers of CLLD. In Croatia the application of the LEADER approach in multi-sector planning of local development began in the late 2000s with the participation of civil society organizations. In the 2014-2020 programming period, 54 LAGs were selected, covering an area of about 51,000 km² of the land territory of Croatia, and slightly less than 2.5 million inhabitants. But LAGs and their activities are not sufficiently researched (Tolić and Markotić Krstinić, 2015.; Markotić Krstinić, 2021).

The objectives of the paper are to assess the possibilities and limitations of LAGs in Croatia, and the effects of their work on rural development in Croatia. The research is based on a triangulation of data from different qualitative and quantitative methods. Three different data collection methods were used in the research: a focus group with key stakeholders, a survey (on a sample of all registered LAGs in Croatia), and a case study of one LAG.

The results of the research reflect several key dimensions related to LAGs: human resources and financial capacities of LAGs, working methods and impact of LAGs, their networking and visibility, and the external environment of LAGs' work in Croatia.

The results showed that the human resources of LAGs are mostly satisfactory, with strongly emphasized needs for education and support. The need for additional education is emphasized. LAGs budgets are growing, but additional space and the need to diversify funding sources, and greater allocation of financial resources can be seen. More than half of LAGs have an adequate budget that enables the implementation of the planned goals/activities/programs. The extensive administrative requirements are an obstacle to the effective work and development of LAGs. Some needs, such as greater autonomy and flexibility, which would improve their community work and ways in which they support local development, are highlighted.

The results suggest that LAGs are not seen as a priority at the national policy level, but their potential as a stakeholder in rural and territorial development according to their own needs and priorities is highlighted. For now, LAGs are perceived as an "extended arm" of the implementing bodies and depend on their effectiveness. Also, the inclusion of the local population is a challenge. The bottom-up approach sometimes does not work completely due to the lack of capacity of residents of rural areas (Lukić and Obad, 2016). A comparison of Croatian LAGs with those in the European context (EU CAP Network, 2021) suggests that Croatian LAGs have smaller financing but the share of the rural population benefited from improved services/infrastructure is bigger than the EU average.

In conclusion, we may say that the concept of LAGs is still taking roots in Croatia. The concept is also seen as a process of Europeanization as it fosters the participation of local stakeholders and integrated development based on the expressed needs of local stakeholders. But the question is whether the key reasons why the CLLD approach is being used are realized: putting people who have needs or challenges in focus, providing the ability to respond to growing diversity and complexity, and being more flexible than other approaches (European Commission, 2018). As this is an under-researched field in Croatia, there is highlighted need for additional research.

Keywords

Local action group, LEADER, CLLD, rural development, sustainable development, territorial development

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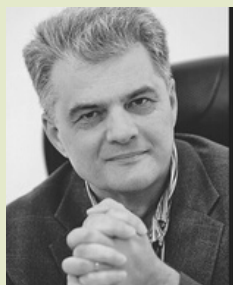
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**Revitalizing rural communities through sustainable tourism:
Encouraging village retention and bridging the gap between small
and large villages in Hungary**

ABSTRACT

Keywords: rural hollowing, government interventions, rural tourism, rural policy Hungary

Hungary's rural villages face a critical depopulation crisis due to migration, natural loss, and urbanization. Smaller villages are especially vulnerable, with aging populations contributing to rural hollowing and magnifying regional inequalities. Government efforts to curtail this trend include subsidies and housing support programs. Yet, there's a need for more localized and flexible strategies. This study explores the potential of rural tourism as a mechanism to address these demographic challenges. In light of increasing rural depopulation in Hungary, characterized by high migration rates, natural loss, and urbanization, there is an imperative to explore sustainable solutions. This issue has led to socio-spatial disparities and a crucial transformation in rural areas. Concurrently, the evolution of rural tourism, originating from the 'village paying guest service' in the 20th century, presents a potential mitigating factor. An in-depth investigation into the interplay between rural tourism and depopulation is therefore warranted.

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of rural tourism development in Hungary. Data sources include official statistics, surveys, and interviews with key stakeholders, such as local authorities, tourism operators, and residents. The data is analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to identify patterns, trends, and spatial distribution of rural tourism resources and activities.

The findings reveal that Hungary's rural tourism sector has significant potential for growth, driven by its diverse natural and cultural resources, such as national parks, traditional villages, and local gastronomy. However, challenges such as limited infrastructure, lack of marketing, and insufficient collaboration among stakeholders hinder its development. Successful case studies demonstrate the importance of community engagement, public-private partnerships, and targeted investments in enhancing the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations. The study highlights the need for a strategic approach to rural tourism development in Hungary, addressing the identified challenges and building on the existing strengths. Policy implications include the development of a national rural tourism strategy, investments in infrastructure and marketing, and the promotion of public-private partnerships.

Furthermore, fostering community engagement and sustainable practices can contribute to the long-term success of rural tourism initiatives, ensuring economic, social, and environmental benefits for all stakeholders.

The depopulation of Hungarian rural villages presents significant challenges, but our research suggests that rural tourism, coupled with greater local autonomy and collaborative efforts, can offer a sustainable solution. Future policies should prioritize these elements to effectively address the persistent demographic issues in Hungary's rural regions.

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Evaluating rural development through the lenses of gender equality projects: The case of rural Elbasan, Albania

ABSTRACT

Gender equality is crucial for sustainable rural development in the Western Balkans region, and non-governmental organizations play a vital role in promoting gender equality in Albania. However, gender inequalities in rural areas continue to persist, limiting the opportunities for women to participate in decision-making, to have access to resources and benefit from local development projects. These inequalities have been targeted by various gender equality projects in rural areas that aim at promoting women's empowerment and their participation in the decision-making processes. This paper examines the implementation of gender equality projects and analyzes their effect on rural development in the Elbasan region of Albania, with a particular emphasis on one EU-supported gender equality project targeting gender budgeting for women and girls in the rural areas of Elbasan, Albania. This evaluation examines the extent to which gender equality projects in the rural areas have impacted the lives of women and girls in terms of empowerment and participation.

Batliwala (2007) emphasizes community participation and capacity building as crucial elements in promoting the outcomes of sustainable development. While focusing on the complexities of promoting gender equality in development, Cornwall and Edward (2010) highlight the need for using a comprehensive approach that also examines the root causes of gender inequalities. Moreover, the United Nations (2015) consider gender mainstreaming crucial for achieving development programs and policies successfully. However, while gender mainstreaming has the potential to address gender inequalities, implementation faces several challenges, including limited community involvement, inadequate resources, and a lack of institutional support (Leach & Mitchell, 2006).

This study is based on fieldwork conducted in two rural areas where a gender equality project focused on gender budgeting was implemented. The research employs a gender-sensitive evaluation approach that combines qualitative and quantitative data collection methods and analysis. The main argument of this research is that gender equality projects are essential for sustainable rural development and women's empowerment, but it also emphasizes the fact that their impact needs to be evaluated through a participatory and gender-sensitive framework that takes into consideration the experiences and perspectives of both women and men. Also, the paper argues that gender inequality in rural areas in Albania is persistent and highlights the need for more gender equality projects on rural development.

The findings of this research suggest that projects targeting gender equality in rural areas have positive impacts on rural development, women's empowerment and women's participation in decision-making processes. However, it is crucial for these projects to be designed and implemented by taking into consideration the needs and priorities of rural women, thus promoting their agency and empowerment for achieving sustainable results. Moreover, this study identified several challenges that are faced while implementing a gender equality project in the rural area of Elbasan. These challenges include limited community involvement in the gender budgeting process due to lack of trust in the local government and inadequate resources in the local government in rural areas. The findings of this study also reinforce the idea that policymakers need to give priority to gender equality in general and involving all the members of rural communities as agents, including women and marginalized groups.

The findings of this research on rural development in Albania through gender equality projects may resonate with broader issues of other lagging-behind regions and rural areas, since gender inequality is a global issue that affects many women and men worldwide. This paper provides insights for different researchers working in diverse regions in the field of rural development, gender inequality and participatory evaluation.

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RESILIENCE



Anna Csizovszky

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Community resilience - The case of Hungarian districts

ABSTRACT

Currently, resilience studies are at the forefront of urban and regional research. Moreover, resilience attracts significant attention in the EU policy debate. In light of the numerous crises that Europe is currently confronting, resilience has become more incorporated into local strategies. However, sectoral and territorial structural changes require an appropriate professional foundation to ensure the growth in absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities. Community resilience, defined as the ability of different regional levels to adjust their socioeconomic systems to cope with adverse effects of external factors and to be able to provide adaptive responses, plays a crucial role in sustainable regional development patterns. So far, specific resilience studies, such as economic and climate resilience, have received more attention in scientific analysis, making it difficult for decision-makers to prioritize areas for development and identify fundamental gaps that define different areas. Along this line, this research assesses community resilience in the Hungarian districts. The applied indicator system is an adaptation of the Baseline Resilience Indicators for Communities (BRIC) framework, introduced by Cutter et al. (2014), and successfully applied in several countries (Javadpoor et al., 2021; Scherzer et al., 2019). In the Hungarian context, the district level (former LAU 1 level) providing an extensive set of territorial units allows the use of context-specific indicators. For determining the reliability of the results, the resilience score of the districts selected from the top, middle and bottom of the ranking were compared to the Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (Fenntartható városfejlesztési stratégia - SUDS) created for districts or the seat of districts. The resilience score was compared with the findings of the situation analysis, the risks identified and the areas for action identified.

The results indicated higher values in the Western and lower values in the Eastern part of the country. The territorial analyses revealed high heterogeneity concerning the evaluated resilience category. Districts that rank above average in the social and economic dimensions perform below average in the environmental and community subdomains. Besides, rapid suburbanization processes around cities contributed to the decrease in overall community resilience. In particular, the deficiencies emerged through the infrastructural, community and environmental dimensions. The findings were contrasted with regional development plans in order to judge how closely they reflected reality. The structure of the strategies follows resilience dimensions very similar to the applied dimensions of the indicator framework. In addition, the documents sought to determine the towns' (and its regions') broader risks, exposures, and resilience capacities. Based on the analyzed SUDSs there was no significant difference between the problems identified locally and the results of the community resilience assessment.

This is partly the result of the overlap between the variables incorporated in the resilience indicator and those used to underpin the strategies. In the case of problems related to an ageing population, the indicator system, unfortunately, masks the issue in some places due to the normalization of the data. However, apart from the problems, which are pressing country-wide, the indicator system was able to reveal the most pressing shortcomings and reflect local conditions. For this reason, I think the findings from the BRIC adaptation provide a good starting point for local consideration, facilitating prioritization by decision-makers.

Key words

community resilience, territorial strategy, BRIC, Hungary

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Urban vulnerabilities and the climate crisis: The challenges of slums in the global south

ABSTRACT

Keywords: climate crisis; public policies; urban development, slums; global south.

Introduction

Climate change is one of the most pressing global challenges of our time, with significant impacts on communities and cities around the world. In this discussion, it is necessary to bring to the center of the debate how the urban context, markedly altered in the mid-20th century, brought new contexts to the countries of the Global South and, above all, new challenges for residing in the city, especially due to the growth of informal settlements with precarious infrastructure and limited enjoyment of rights, such as favelas.

Literature Review

Climate colonialism refers to the unequal distribution of climate change impacts and historical emissions responsibilities between countries in the North and the Global South (Roberts & Parks, 2006). Communities in the Global South face numerous challenges in adapting to climate change and building resilience. These challenges include a lack of economic resources (Leichenko & Silva, 2014), weak public institutions, and limited technical and scientific capacity (Biesbroek, G. R. et al., 2013), which hinder the implementation of adaptation and mitigation policies and actions.

Methodology

The vulnerabilities of slums in the global south require analyzing through the lens of policies to promote access to decent and affordable housing in slums and favelas. For that, strengthening regulation and control in urban planning prevents informal settlements from expanding in risk areas and reduces communities' exposure to climate change impacts (Revi et al., 2014). It also implies developing resilient infrastructures and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation measures specific to these settlements, thus ensuring more excellent protection and well-being for their inhabitants in a changing climate (Hallegatte et al., 2016; IPCC, 2021).

Findings and Policy Implications

The most vulnerable populations are the urban poor, with over 1 billion people living in slums and informal settlements (UN-Habitat, 2020). Despite these risks, many cities have not adequately addressed climate change due to a lack of policies, resources and public awareness.

Finally, more than 10,000 cities have joined the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, forming the largest global network of cities committed to climate action (Global Covenant of Mayors, 2021).

Active participation and empowerment of local communities are fundamental to addressing the climate crisis in neighborhoods and favelas in the Global South (Wamsler et al., 2020). Including the population in decision-making and implementing adaptation and mitigation policies and projects is crucial to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions.

Conclusion

Given the structural causes that increase the vulnerability of communities in neighborhoods and favelas, overcoming these obstacles requires multidimensional management of public policies, such as improving urban planning and investment in resilient infrastructure, promoting citizen participation in decision-making, and strengthening emergency prevention, response and recovery systems to reduce socio-environmental risks and increase the resilience of these communities in the face of the challenges posed by climate change.

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A just green transition but for whom? Local evaluation of effects of small hydropower plants in Serbia

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Loosely and vaguely conceptualized green transition in Serbia encompassed EU banks' loans, state subventions, private capital, and central authority monitoring to provide and secure green, clean, sustainable, renewable alternative to coal by installing small hydropower plants (SHPP), among other policies. Even though the former Minister of Mining and Energy emphasized the importance of a just and people-centered green transition, the process worked in favour of private investors at the expense of local communities, environments, and biodiversity.

Literature review/theoretical background

By design, the green transition is a top-down process from the supranational to the national and local levels (EC, 2020). But if its components lack bottom-up support and legitimacy, should they be evaluated as meaningful and sustainable? This paper argues that the success of a well-implemented development project can be traced to its acceptance by the local population. If the local population is not invested in the project (for example in the installation of SHPP) in such a way that they essentially "own the issue" and participate in its solution, then programs aimed at building capacity or reducing vulnerability can easily backfire (Nightingale, 2017).

Methodology

The author will use a qualitative process-tracing method with small sample sizes (Anguko, 2019) to assess the impact of several small hydropower plant installations in achieving a just green transition in Serbia. A particular emphasis will be placed on the protests on Stara Planina, which became a regional symbol of popular discontent toward SHPP and encouraged further organizing against this type of electricity generation (BIRN, 2018). By triangulating data from different sources (analysis of documents, official statements of relevant actors, reports of non-governmental organizations, and opinions of local residents), the author aims to trace the process and determine the reasons for public resentment towards SHPP in Serbia.

Findings

First, the European decision-making level (or any international one for that matter) when addressing a strategic agenda must be embedded in the local historical, cultural, and environmental context in order to be sustainable and meaningful in the long run.

Second, the national monitoring and evaluation approach should consider the effects on local communities and biodiversity before evaluating whether European-set targets are met. Third, a sustainability assessment must not only recognize how much new coal-free electricity is generated, but also the state of biodiversity, water, and land (against the backdrop of deforestation done to build the project and often putting rivers in the tube), as well as whether it affects the water supply of the local population and their arable land.

Discussion/Policy implications

During the last ten years, the general public in Serbia became familiar with the technical specifications and requirements of derivative SHPPs mainly because of the immeasurable damage caused by their construction. There are dozens of protests by local populations against SHPP throughout Serbia in this period (BGEN, 2018; Lakić 2019) and having in mind a national plan to build over an additional 700, widespread civic unrest won't halt soon. Based on locally organized environmental protests, it can be discussed that no one asked the population for their opinion nor constructively informed them about the process (Popović and Rajić, 2019; Kušljugić et al, 2022).

Conclusion

The opinions of local population provide the first feedback on whether a national approach, often guided by the European framework and funds, is on the right, or at least minimally harmful, path. Therefore, when evaluating the effectiveness and sustainability of public development policies with a strong foothold in local communities, the evaluator must first consider whether the project has received approval or repudiation from the local population. Perhaps expert ministries and decision-makers did not have complete information about the harmfulness of derivative water intakes, which is also hidden by the strong EU sponsorship. However, the same argumentation for installing new SHPPs does not hold water after years of protests and complaints by impacted local populations.

Keywords

evaluation, green transition, development, protests, Serbia.

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Using the impact Web GIS Platform to assess regional cohesion policy in promoting environmental sustainability in the CENTRE NUTS 2 of Portugal

ABSTRACT

Introduction: This paper analyses the main impacts of the Operational Programme for Sustainability and Use of Resources (POSEUR 2014–2020), which is the most powerful EU Cohesion Policy mechanism implemented in Portugal concerning sustainable environmental development. The POSEUR interventions in Portugal aim at promoting sustainable development (Keeble, 1988) based on three axes: 1. The support of a transition to a model of the low-carbon economy; 2. The promotion of climate change adaptation strategies, risk prevention and management; 3. Protecting the environment and promoting the efficient use of resources.

Literature review/theoretical background: EU Cohesion Policy is the main mechanism to promote the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals (Firoiu et al., 2022) for the different EU regions (Nekvasil & Moldan, 2018). The awareness of climate change and adopting greener behaviours in European areas depends greatly on the efficacy of implementing the projects funded by the EU Cohesion Policy (Pirvu et al., 2019). The Centre NUT II is an eloquent example of a region with strong potential for transitioning towards a more environmentally friendly circular economy with several mid-sized cities in the national context. These cities can work as hubs to bring people into new sectors of activity and raise the area's attractiveness (Henriques et al., 2022). Nonetheless, the growth of economic activities in the Portuguese centre NUT II must be balanced by ecosystem preservation, as the literature points out.

Methodology: With a mixed methodological approach, impact scores were produced for five environmental sustainability dimensions: i) low-emissions economy, ii) adaptation to climate change, iii) risk prevention and management, iv) environmental protection, and v) resource efficiency. Based on the collected data, both quantitative (project database + statistical indicators) and qualitative (interviews + literature review), applied to a TIA (TARGET_TIA) methodology (Medeiros, 2014).

Findings: The POSEUR had a low positive overall impact on the sustainable development process of the Portuguese Centre Region (NUTS II). The results of this study follow a growing literature trend and lead to the conclusion that there are high levels of ineffective and inefficient implementation of EU Cohesion Policy-related funding, which is especially visible in the southern peripheries of Europe (Polverari, 2016).

There is a standard narrative legitimated by the outcomes achieved in this work that points to misallocation of EU funds (Medve-Bálint, 2018), which leads to a low impact in the less developed areas of the peripheral Member States. This study corroborates the idea that more should be done to achieve high regional impact scores when implementing EU Cohesion Policy-related investment.

Conclusion: With POSEUR, EU Cohesion Policy established the sustainable foundations for the interventions of future environmental sustainability investments in the Centre Region of Portugal, which is largely a rural EU region. Overall, POSEUR had a low positive impact. Consequently, future programmes need a more efficient and effective implementation, and a broader adaptation to the regional environmental sustainability needs and challenges (the regional sensibility factor). In the case of the Portuguese Centre NUTS II, the preponderant role of the universities and the importance of urban sustainability management models that can tame uncontrolled peri-urban expansion need further attention. Only by doing that can the mid-size cities in the central Portuguese region improve their levels of regional development, by addressing their needs without producing environmental damage to the surrounding rural areas. Additionally, future programmes require better monitoring and evaluation mechanisms which can effectively assess the main changes and impact resulting from the implementation of environmental, sustainability-related public investment. All things considered, EU Cohesion Policy still has a vital role in fomenting environmental sustainability processes in all EU regions. To this end, however, it needs to strengthen its financial capacity in this domain in order to increase its positive impacts, in particular in the low-emissions economy domain, towards the desired EU green and digital transition.

Keywords:

EU Cohesion Policy; POSEUR; TARGET_TIA; Sustainable Development; Centre of Portugal

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**SOLIDARITY/
COOPERATION**

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Non-profit organizations and territorial cohesion:

The case of cross-border collaboration

ABSTRACT

Keywords: Cross-border, Regional cohesion, social capital, non-profit organizations

Introduction

After years of harmonic and stable relationships, the EU's international relations with the neighboring countries are deteriorating (Brexit, Switzerland, Russia). While international relations are worsening, people are still living in cross-border regions. Does it mean that relationships at the local level and territorial cohesion deteriorate? The attitudes of national governments influence the situation and the permeability of borders for civil society cooperation, but the border regions are far from the centers.

According to the market and government failures theories, when the markets and public sector fail, non-profit organizations act. Civil society organizations are essential stakeholders promoting bottom-up solutions where top-down approaches work with difficulties. Is it valid also in cases of cross-border regions?

Literature review

Creating social capital helps to develop cross-border regions. The issue is that they must cope with various barriers that are more evident than in inland regions. Borders diminish homogeneity, coherence, and connections among stakeholders (Lundén, 2018, p. 99).

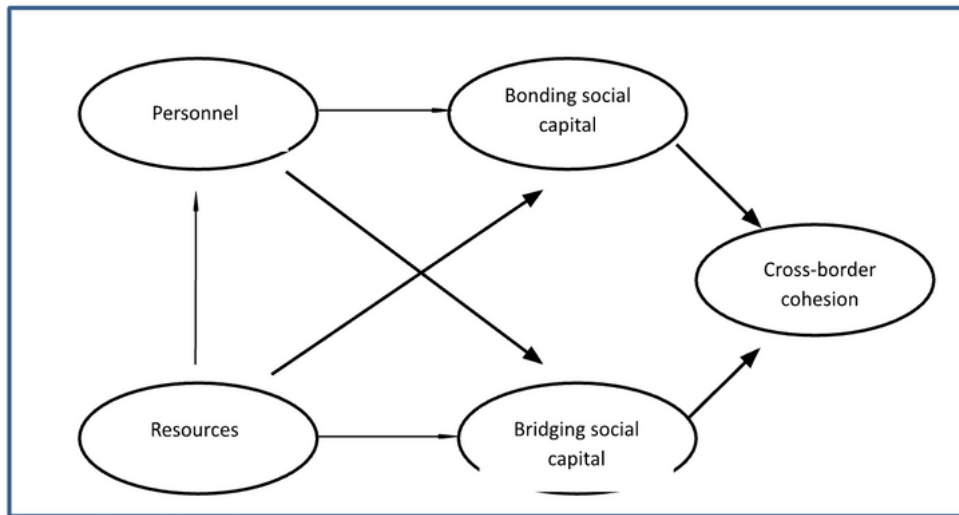
Bonding social capital (relationship to local and national stakeholders), and bridging social capital (links to stakeholders from other groups abroad) are the two types of social capital that decide about cohesiveness of regions. These two types of social capital are very close, but they distinguish relationships with other people, especially in cross-border regions.

The various studies aiming at cross-border relationships study usually countries and regions with different culture. Particularly, Central and Eastern Europe provided a good example during the transition period, when bridging social capital was missing there. Our study concentrates on the Upper-Rhine region in France, Germany, and Switzerland, where such a situation did not appear since the end of the WWII and, thus, we can assume that the region is cohesive.

Methodology

We analyze data from a survey among NPOs in the Upper - Rhine region collected in February to April 2022. We applied PLS-SEM approach using plssem package in STATA 17 SE (Venturini & Mehmetoglu, 2019) to test the relationships among personnel resources, resources in general, bonding and bridging social capital, and perceived cross-border cohesion.

Figure 1: Tested model



Source: Own elaboration

Findings

The results of the tested model point out the importance of bridging social capital in cross-border cohesion. Effect of bridging social capital on cross-border cohesion is positive and statistically significant (0.916, p-value 0.000), while for bonding social capital it is small and insignificant (0.046, p-value 0.116). The indirect effect of resources on cohesion is positive (0.364), while personnel resources negative (-0.031).

Conclusions

Our estimates show a positive role of resources in creating social capital. The results also confirmed that bridging social capital has a positive impact on cross-border territorial cohesion. As in other NPOs, resources in cross-border NPOs are important for social capital formation. In case of human resources, the estimates do not provide such a clear picture. Majority of the NPOs in our sample concentrate on clients from the same country of origin. It means that bonding social capital plays a more important role than bridging social capital.

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Causes of failure among women's cooperatives: A qualitative case study from an attributional perspective in Turkey

ABSTRACT

Keywords: Women's Cooperatives, Public Policy, Empowerment of Women, Social Development, Social Enterprise

Introduction

Cooperatives are social enterprises that play an important role in regional development with the aim of contributing to different aspects of economic and social life. According to World Cooperative Monitor Report, at least 12% of people on earth is a member of any of the 3 million cooperatives in the world. The three hundred largest cooperatives and mutual generated an overall total of 2,170.99 billion USD in turnover for the year 2020(WMR, 2022). Cooperatives provide both work opportunities to their members or services and infrastructure for society's needs. Today, there are more than 80 thousand cooperatives of 26 different types, with approximately 8 million members in Turkey. Additionally, over 1000 women's cooperatives operate in several fields(Gümrük & Bakanlığı, 2012).

The objective of this study is to investigate the internal and external failure factors of women's cooperatives from an attributional perspective. In order to achieve this, in-depth personal interviews with failed women's cooperatives from different regions of Turkey will be conducted, via purposive and snowball sampling. Finally, we draw conclusion and suggestion for policy makers, cooperative members, consultants and researchers.

Literature review and theoretical background

Existing studies mostly emphasize successful cases, however, limited research focuses on the failure factors of cooperatives. We are in the believe that considering the internal and external reason of failed examples will positively affect the potential success of cooperatives that may contribute sustainable development of countries.

The attribution theory is concerned with how people interpret and explain the causes of events, including their own behaviour and the behaviour of others. This notion in social psychology was primarily developed by Heider (1958), Kelley (1973), and Weiner (1976). Internal causes include ability and effort or motivation, external causes comprise task difficulty and luck, which correspond to entity or situation attributions(Davis & Gardner, 2004; Heider, 1982; Kelley, 1973). In this study, we will focus on external and internal failure factors of women cooperatives based on Weiner' locus of control dimension. The analysis for this study, some other attributions were also added based on theoretical and empirical search.

Attribution theory offers a valuable lens for exploring and comprehending the factors that contribute to the failure of cooperatives. However, studying failed cooperatives and obtaining information about them poses significant challenges, thus necessitating the utilization of qualitative research methods.

Methodology

As a methodology, a qualitative-based case study design approach used in this research. This approach is particularly useful when studying complex social phenomena or exploring topics that have not been extensively researched (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Neuman, 2012; Yıldırım, 1999). In other words, case study is useful method for understanding and interpretations of the failure factors which women's cooperatives face.

The research design consists of several stages. Firstly, a literature review was conducted to establish a theoretical framework. Secondly, this theory was utilized to collect relevant data/information. Finally, the data collected through field research was analyzed to identify internal and external factors that results to the failure of women's cooperatives. In the scope of the research, interviews were conducted with managers and members of women's cooperatives that were inactive, in the process of dissolution, or closed down, established by women and for the empowerment of women. This study mostly focused on cooperatives established by and for women, rather than cooperatives that employ women, managed by few women and/or have a few women on the board of directors.

Preliminary findings

The list of factors derived from theoretical framework and subdivided into external and internal factors. Based on initial observations, it appears that the interviews tended to cite external factors more frequently than internal ones. The failure factors cited by the cooperatives member or/and manger are illustrated below:

External factors

- Changes in government policies and regulations (inability to be aware of certain changing regulations by cooperatives)
- Poor market conditions (difficulties in accessing alternative markets due to technical, technological, or institutional capacity deficiencies)
- Financial and legal obligations such as taxes, rent, mandatory expenses, operational costs, and fees
- Lack of self-sufficient capacity of cooperatives due to set up or management by governmental bodies and unions (limit them to expand and grow)

Internal Factors

- Lack of good governance; poor management strategy leads to loose motivation of members
- Lack of open communication and trust among members
- Internal conflict between managers and members of cooperatives
- Lack of awareness of cooperatives' objectives by managers and members

Discussion/Policy implications

It is crucial to develop holistic policies to increase women's employment and include them in the formal sector. Women's co-operatives fail due to both internal and external problems. The field research also illustrates that integrating women's cooperatives into the existing cooperative system is more difficult than other large-scale cooperatives. Thus, redesigning existing policies and strategies may contribute to the development of social cooperatives, especially women's cooperatives survive. These are mainly listed below;

- Designing a pre-cooperative partnership/form with simple legislation for small-scale social and women's cooperatives
- Setting up a regional-wide cross sectoral expert team to mentor them until become self-sufficient and sustainable, also peer to peer mentorship provided by experienced members of successful cooperatives
- Supporting to build of knowledge-sharing networks/platforms/applications to be set by cooperative unions, and among themselves concerning innovative product development processes, entering new markets, adapting new technologies
- Developing alternative market opportunities where cooperatives can sell their products and services to eliminate financial tribulations, and making existing instruments more inclusive and active

Conclusion and further research

Public institutions are keen to provide support to cooperatives with different policies, tools and strategies. Exploring the underpinnings of effective policies towards women's cooperative will be instrumental to develop the appropriate strategies and future perspectives. This study aimed at identifying key failure factors of women's cooperatives in Turkey and determine the real causes behind the unsuccessful cooperatives. Additionally, we also highlight the extent to which financial and non-financial supports are effective in the development, expansion and sustainability of cooperatives.

The study shows that women's cooperatives make a positive contribution to local development when suitable policy designs. However, all support offered to the cooperatives must strengthen their capacity in a sustainable manner. The interviews revealed that state support should be more holistic and comprehensive, particularly for small-scale social and women's cooperatives.

Besides financial support, it is critical to creating educational and mentoring supports horizontally rather than vertically, simplifying the legislation and working on pre-cooperative partnerships, thus reducing the bureaucratic burden in favour of women. It is also necessary to develop new support mechanisms/tools and models to ensure that they reach the institutional capacity where they can continue their operations independently. On the other hand, in terms of future research, there is a need to carry out further academic studies that deal with failure factors of cooperatives from different perspectives.

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**Supporting programs for the development of cooperatives in the
republic of Serbia**

ABSTRACT

Introduction

According to the OECD nomenclature, the Republic of Serbia belongs to the group of predominantly rural countries, while the rural space is inhabited by almost 55% of overall population (Radović, Radović Marković, 2016). Rural business ambient is characterized by low diversification of economic activities, exposing the agriculture as dominant activity (Bogdanov, Vasiljevic, 2011). Its also limited by low economic power of farms, unsatisfactory access to contents of physical and social infrastructure, presence of intensive rural-urban migratory processes and mainly negative natural increase (Šantić et al., 2017). Moreover, currently unfortunately over the 25% of total number of rural settlements is in the process of disappearing (Subić, Jeločnik, 2021). Serbia is one of the few countries that the focus on solving the actual issues within the rural space initially articulates throughout the work of two ministries, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (MAFWM) and the newly established Ministry of Rural Welfare (MRW), while there is no overlapping in competences of the previously mentioned public institutions.

Literature review

Cooperation, or collective action of individuals is in the core of cooperatives. International cooperative Alliance defines them as “people-centered enterprises owned, controlled and run by and for their members to realize their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations. They could be formed around many human activities and needs. Globally, the most of cooperatives belongs to the group turned to agriculture (Valentinov, 2007). Besides, there are strong beliefs that cooperatives and cooperation could be a successful tool in improving livelihood in rural areas (Kumar et al., 2015), as they have positive impact on boosting the overall life and business conditions (Wanyama et al., 2009). Public support to forming and strengthening the business activities of cooperatives is not the very new policy tool (Iliopoulos, 2013). The most often throughout this support certain governments have been strived to stop the negative economic and social trends in agriculture, or rural areas, even to revive them (Yanbykh et al., 2019). In line to mentioned, it has to be noted that Serbia has long and very rich tradition of cooperatives in the sector of agriculture (Krasavac, Petković, 2015).

Methodology

Realization of the research primarily involved the use of "desk research" method, as well as methods of analysis and synthesis, which enabled an adequate assessment of specific measures and programs implemented by the competent Ministry focused to the strengthening of competitiveness and position of the Serbian village and rural areas. The research was carried out based on available secondary data of MRW, together with the consultation of relevant literary sources.

The main goal of research is to present one of the MRW activities, i.e. supporting measure for the development of cooperatives at national level, realized towards the prevention of further dying out of rural communities in Serbia. Additionally, paper tries to define certain recommendations, useful both for public policy makers and grant's end users.

Main Findings

Main intentions of MRW are to improve the living and working conditions in rural areas, which would slow down pronounced processes of demographic migration and lead to the revival of Serbian villages. In accordance with that, every year at the entire territory of Serbia, MRW implements several programs (grants distribution based on public competition), such are: Supporting program for the development of cooperatives; Supporting program for the purchase of rural households (houses with garden) by the young couples; Supporting program for the purchase of minibuses for the needs of certain local rural communities; Supporting program for the organization of specific rural events, etc.

In line to the available budget of MRW, in recent years, supporting programs have led to several positive trends, which as a result initiate the growth of economic activity and advancement of the quality of life in rural areas, i.e. greater interest of the population for the living in rural space.

Related to cooperative issues, not so far, based on initiative of the National team for the revival of the Serbian villages and in that time actual Minister in charge for balanced regional development, in 2017 has been started the implementation of the project "500 cooperatives in 500 villages". From 2021 the project was transformed into a permanent measure of the newly established MRW. Through the project, or further program of the Ministry, to existing and newly established agricultural cooperatives were awarded grants (up to the level of previously determined amount) throughout the competitive public tenders (based on the proposed business idea) in order to support the development of cooperative activity, to strengthen capacities and provide alternative sources of income in the agriculture sector, but also to support other rural activities (rural tourism, craftwork, social programs, etc.), to create new jobs in rural areas, or to provide survival and staying, or to attract the people to come and have quality life in rural communities.

During the period 2017-2021, the mentioned project, and later the public measure, have been reallocated over 2.13 billion RSD (around 18.13 million EUR) of budgetary assets to agricultural cooperatives of different profiles. The selection criteria of grant calls are determined to favor the excellence of the business ideas, as well as overall benefits for the certain local rural community. The success of the measure realization in observed period could be seen in fact that grant was received by 207 cooperatives (where 60% of them are classified as newly established), or about 20% of the total number of cooperatives applied for the grants. The process of public grants distribution is followed by well-balanced regional dispersion of available assets, what clearly presents that survival and development of villages in every part of Serbia is of great national interest. Program realization has been resulted in great interest in establishment of cooperatives. So, while up to 2017 were shut down around 100 agricultural cooperatives annually, from the moment of program starting up till today over 1,100 new agricultural cooperatives have been started to operate in Serbia.

Policy implications and Conclusions

The social role and assigned responsibility of the newly established MRW in preserving and improving the position of village and rural population in Serbia is indisputable. It is highly affirmative that by the implemented measures and activities, MRW in previous period successfully dealt with the most of issues that follow the progress of living and working conditions in rural areas.

Proposed recommendations are directed both to public policy makers and end users of the assigned budgetary assets (i.e. agricultural cooperatives).

In upcoming period, public policy makers should:

- to affect the more intense involvement of scientific, educational and professional institutions and organizations within the mechanism of established measures' creation and implementation, in line to general benefit that derives from the transfer of available knowledge, practices and skills (they would be in function of deeper analysis and additional fine-tuning of applied measures, as well as in finding new supporting alternatives);
- to create a model for the distribution of incentives that would slightly favors the cooperatives gathered around production lines with higher economic potential and social benefits, or specific ideas that preserve the culture and tradition of a certain rural environment;
- to make stronger media pressure in order to popularize available measures;
- to try in conditions of re-escalation of global economic crisis, to fight for higher share of these measures during the distribution of national budget, as well as to allocate the larger individual grants to end users; etc.

In upcoming period, grant users (agricultural cooperatives) should:

- to believe in their business ideas, as to be more persistent in their attempts to approach available public grants;

- to better articulate their business ideas and potential contribution to the local rural community, as to better justify the necessity of using the available incentives;
- to rely more strongly on the existing knowledge base, as to do not run away from the joint preparation of business ventures with reputable representatives of science and profession; etc.

As more than five years have been passed since the initiation of the grants distribution to the appropriate representatives within the cooperative sector of Serbia, further research steps should be turned to deeper analysis of real economic, ecological and social impacts, as to general benefits achieved not only by the grant beneficiaries, but the rural communities in which they are located.

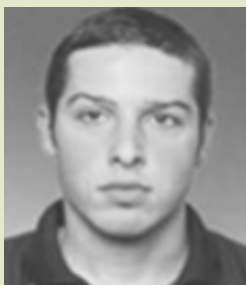
Key words

Serbia, cooperatives, public support, rural space, sustainability.

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**LABOUR MARKET
ABSORPTION**



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Activation programmes and the hiring decision-making process

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Employers' labour market strategies have received little attention in the Czech Republic to date, and in fact this is a fairly accurate reflection of the overall orientation of labour market policy. The focus has been mainly on the supply side of the labour market and the demand side has only been marginally addressed. Employers' strategies remain largely obscured. The aim of this paper is to look at employers' recruitment strategies and decision-making, at least in the context of the selected active labour market policy (ALMP) programmes.

Theoretical background

To compensate for the lack of relevant information about job applicants, employers, like other decision-makers, use a wide range of stereotypes and heuristics in their decision-making. This method of decision-making makes the recruitment process vulnerable to various forms of discrimination (Bills et al. 2017; Birkelund et al. 2020), including statistical discrimination (Bonoli & Hinrichs 2012; Tilcsik 2021), where group characteristics (signals) are used as proxies for other, more difficult-to-measure qualities such as intelligence or work ethic. Participation in ALMPs may be a signal that is interpreted by employers along with other available characteristics in decision-making (Fossati et al. 2020; Liechti et al. 2017).

Methodology

Since the intention is to describe how a set of characteristics (signals) influences the decision-making process of employers, the paper is based on a factorial survey experiment (FSE). According to Auspurg and Hinz (2015), FSE allows to identify causal relationships and also minimises the assumed social desirability bias. The study examined the impact of a number of characteristics on the decision-making process of employers for three different types of positions (unskilled workers, skilled workers and administrative workers). In addition to potential participation in an activation programme, other characteristics that are tested include age, gender, presence of children in the household, education, health status, experience of short- and long-term unemployment and over-indebtedness.

Findings

The findings from the factorial survey experiment suggest that the perceived impact of having completed one of the activation schemes varies according to the position for which the applicant was hired.

While for the unskilled position, completing any of the tested programmes (training, subsidised jobs and public works) has a positive impact, for the skilled position only training and subsidised jobs have a positive impact, and for the administrative position only training has a positive impact. For all the jobs tested, long-term unemployment experience and over-indebtedness have a significant negative impact on applicants' prospects.

Discussion

In particular, we confirm the differential impact of participation in activation programmes found by Liechti et al. (2017). Both according to the programme and according to the position. However, in contrast to the findings of the cited study, our study found that participating in a training programme had a positive effect on the likelihood of getting employed, and this was found to hold true for all three positions considered. Employers' attitudes towards the over-indebted and the long-term unemployed are alarming from a policy-maker's perspective. Both issues need to be addressed urgently.

Conclusion

This study is one of the first to explore employers' attitudes towards activation programme participation in the Czech Republic. It has been shown that participation in these programmes can increase the chances of finding a job for some of the candidates. However, the study also shows that certain characteristics substantially reduce the opportunities for everyone in the labour market.

Keywords

FSE, activation programmes, employers, recruitment, decision-making

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The impact of COVID 19 pandemic on the 25+ NEETs population across Europe: An exploratory analysis

ABSTRACT

Introduction

According to the ILO Monitor (2021), the global effect of the COVID-19 pandemic can be detected in the increase of the inactive population rather than in the increase of unemployment (ILO, 2021:2). Furthermore, according to the same document, the increase in unemployment between 2019 and 2020 affected primarily the youth rather than the older workers (ILO, 2021:2). Consequently, we have analyzed the evolution of the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) population, along with youth employment, in the EU and EEA countries to detect the changes, and their causes during the pandemic.

Theoretical background

After years of recovery for European youth employment from the 2007–2012 economic crisis, they were one of the hardest hits by the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (Eurofound, 2021). This exposure of the youth affects not only their economic situation but also their living conditions and mental well-being (Eurofound, 2021). But even in the longer term, the "official" end of the pandemic does not affect all European countries equally, as some countries succeed in recovering the pre-pandemic employment rate of the youth while others are struggling to reach that level (EUROSTAT, 2022). So, if the country-level interventions can be measured, the impact of these interventions should also be measured on the reduction of the NEETs rate in the analyzed countries.

Methodology

The units of our analysis are the EU-27 (from 2020) and the EFTA countries (except for Lichtenstein because of the lack of data). Initially, we tested the associations between the different indicators (youth unemployment, youth activity rate, and NEETs rate), and then by computing the differences between the start and end periods, we tried to identify the effect of the different social policies on the evolution of these rates.

Findings

Our initial finding was that there is a significant correlation between the youth employment rate, the youth long-term unemployment rate, and the 15-29-year-old NEET rate in the analyzed countries during the pandemic period (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).

On the other hand, when we calculated the differences between the levels from 2022 and 2019 to find out if the analyzed country could successfully cope with the challenges provoked by the pandemic, this significant relation disappeared, meaning that the European countries dealt differently with this new challenge.

Discussion/Policy implications

Our research proves that the generalized ILO (2021) results are valid in the case of the European youth, as in each analyzed year the correlation between the NEETs rate and the youth employment was stronger than between the NEET rate and the youth long term unemployment. Analyzing the social benefits (e.g., housing, unemployment, family care, etc.) effect in the analyzed countries, the amount of social protection and the health care benefits seem to significantly influence the youth employment rate, but none of them significantly influences the NEETs rate. These results underline previous research regarding the strong connections between health and long-term unemployment (e.g., Herbig, Dragano, & Angerer, 2013) or the need for a higher priority to social protection versus the high priority of work incentives (e.g., Andersen, 2002).

Keywords: NEETs, COVID-19 pandemic, youth employment, EU-27, and EFTA countries

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Employment Policies to overcome Demographic Changes in the Balkans: The case of aging population in Albania

ABSTRACT

Keywords: demographic change, older workers, ageism, employment policies, Albania, Balkans

Introduction

Since the fall of Communism in 1991, Albania has seen a significant change in its population and employment policies. Economic growth and sustainability as well as the labor force and national employment laws have been significantly impacted by these changes. Aging populations, declining birth rates, and high youth unemployment rate in the labor market call for effective employment policies. The aging population means a smaller pool of people as an active working force will be available to fill open positions. This might cause a lack of skilled workers, making it more challenging for businesses to find and keep talent.

The data facts project a shrinking and aging labor force. As such, Albania will need to plan for developing policies to support pension and healthcare systems and adapting the labor market to changing demographics. Investing in keeping work attractive for this group is a good response to the labor shortage. By offering enough and sufficient training and ensuring the right social circumstances, it can be attractive for the older generation to stay active longer. In addition, attracting more women into the labor force is another solution.

The goal of this study is to investigate the intersection of Albania's present demographic changes and employment policies to overcome the effect of the aging population.

The study concludes that organizations in Albania should implement effective employment policies to improve employee retention, engagement and overcome labor market challenges. Moreover, the government should concentrate on developing active ageing policies, such as training and upskilling initiatives, flexible work schedules, social protection programs, and anti-discrimination laws. In order to ensure sustainable economic growth and social stability, the study also stress the significance of developing and implementing active ageing policies at the national and regional levels.

Literature review/theoretical background

The labor market in Albania has seen possibilities as well as difficulties as it makes the transition to a market economy, after the fall of communism regime, while recent regional and national demographic developments show implications for the labor market in the Balkans.

According to statistical projections for Albania, the total population is expected to decline which may eventually lead to a shortage of skilled workers, and statistics indicate a shrinking working force. According to the World Bank (2021), the proportion of the population aged 65 years and over in Albania is expected to increase from 10.9% in 2020 to 23.2% in 2050, while the proportion of the working-age population (15-64 years) is expected to decline from 67.3% to 56.7% over the same period.

The gender gap in the Albanian labor market with women comprising only 42.2% of the labor force (World Bank, 2021), indicates women are underrepresented and those who do participate face significant barriers to career advancement, which can lead to high turnover rates among women. Shtembari, et al. (2022) and Bregasi, E., & Shima, R. (2019), pointed out that women are more interested in policies such as flexible work arrangements, mentoring programs, and gender-sensitive training programs.

While the youth unemployment rate of 29.7% (World Bank, 2021; European Commission, 2020), indicates that many young Albanians seek opportunities in other countries, making it even harder for organizations to attract and retain talent. The “Youth Guarantee” scheme, which attempts to give young people education, training, and work experience, is one of many initiatives the government has put into place to alleviate youth unemployment.

Studies show that age is an important factor for human resource planning strategies and policies regarding older employees, their training participation, opportunities to find a job, and retirement behavior. This fact is becoming more important given that the labor markets in Europe are facing a demographic revolution issue since the share of 50+ workers (Babyboomers or earlier) is larger than ever. The 50+ group will retire later than previous ones because of increasing pension ages in many countries (OECD, 2021). According to Demi et al. (2020), creating a harmonized and well-articulated wage system for the public and private system would bring a much consolidated pension scheme, public and private as well which is current and very functional in developed countries.

Albania's aging index in 2020 was 23.8, which was similar to neighboring countries such as Greece (23.6), but lower than countries such as Italy (34.8) and Croatia (27.4), according to the World Bank. This suggests that Albania's population is aging, but not as rapidly as some other countries in the region. As a consequence, it will face similar demographic challenges in the coming years. As such, Albania will need to plan for an aging population, including developing policies to support pension and healthcare systems, and adapting the labor market to changing demographics.

Despite efforts from the government to improve labor market conditions and overcome difficulties created by demographic changes, according to Ramhorst, A. (2021) there are gaps in staff training, in preparing, and in adopting and monitoring the progress of individual employment plans. Moreover, there are no specific policies for older workers. Hence, this study tries to shed light and fill in this gap.

The author suggests that policymakers should focus on expanding active ageing policies, including training and upskilling programs, flexible working arrangements, and anti-discrimination policies. Moreover, the study addresses the above labor market problems, by suggesting that organizations should tailor their employment policies to the specific needs and expectations of different demographic groups as discussed also by Berberi, E., & Imeri, A. (2019; 2021). Furthermore, employees are more likely to stay with an organization if they feel that they are fairly compensated and receive benefits such as healthcare and paid time off (Shtembari, et al., 2022 and Lleshi, G., & Mino, E., 2018).

Methodology

This study is built on a scoping review. "Scoping reviews can be particularly useful for bringing together literature in disciplines with emerging evidence, as they are suited to addressing questions beyond those related to the effectiveness or experience of an intervention" A scoping review is used for 'reconnaissance' of a topic to clarify definitions and conceptual boundaries of a topic or area (Peters et al., 2015).

Moreover, analyses and results are provided from descriptive analyses of secondary data from National Statistics Institute (INSTAT) and other international organizations.

Inclusion criteria used for the scoping review are: English articles, peer reviewed, publication date (2013-2023).

Findings

The analyses of the secondary data provided from national institute of statistics and international statics indicate a pessimistic scenario for the future of the labor market in the country.

Albania is undergoing through a socio-economic transformation due to demographic changes. The population has started to decline since 2001, from 3,06 mln to 2,86 mln in 2019 and projected to 2.42 mln by 2050 (United Nations, 2020; INSTAT 2019), with an increase of the median age from 38 years in 2021 to 42 by 2031 (INSTAT, 2019).

The youth unemployment rate is 29.7% (World Bank, 2021; European Commission, 2020). Moreover, Ramhorst, A. (2021) points that 1% drop in the overall employment rate is associated with an almost 6 % drop in the youth employment rate, indicating the Albanian labor market the second most sensitive in the region, with an elasticity of 5.8

There is a gender gap, with women comprising only 42.2% of the labor force (World Bank, 2021).

The most important change is the aging population, since Albania has been among the countries with a young median age. The share of 65 + in the total population will increase from 14% in 2019 to 21.8% by 2031, while the active working force (15-64 years) is expected to shrink from 68.7% to 62.4%.(INSTAT 2019. Consequently, the aging dependency ration (table 1) will progressively increase from 21.6% in 2019 to 32.7% by 2031 (INSTAT, 2019) and 76.1% by 2070 (UN, 2020).

	INSTAT (2019)			UN (2020)	
	2001	2019	2031	2050	2070
Total Population (in mln)	3,06	2,86	2,74	2,42	1,94
65+ (in %)	7,50	14,00	21,80		
0- 14 years old	30	17	16		
Dependency ratio	11,30	21,60	32,70	40,70	76,10

Table 1. Aging-dependency ratio

As the population in Albania is aging, it will have a significant negative impact on the economy in the future. Moreover, ageing may inhibit innovation and entrepreneurship. Further, there is a risk that population aging may reduce fiscal savings since age sensitive expenses like health care, retirement plans, and long-term care would rise as tax income declines, reducing the fiscal savings required for public investments that boost productivity.

Among the most important factors leading to aging workforce are:

- lower birthrate: the fertility rate has been declining steadily from 2.6 children/ woman to 1.5 (1990 -2020)
- Estimated over 3.000 deaths more than the total births (INSTAT, 2021)
- Emigration of reproductive age population and families with young children
- Youth emigration: Albania has experienced high levels of emigration in recent years, particularly among young people. According to the United Nations, the country's net migration rate was -1.9 migrants per 1,000 population in 2020, which is one of the highest rates in the region.

Discussion/Policy implications

Health care, education, and labor market regulations are just a few of the sectors where these demographic trends have significant policy ramifications.

To address its employment issues, Albania has implemented a number of policies and methods. The National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS), which was developed in 2014, is one of the important employment plans. The NESS seeks to raise labor market participation, raise the standard of jobs, and raise the caliber of education and training. The goal of the strategy is to foster an environment that will support inclusive and sustainable growth. Additionally, the government has taken action to strengthen the employment-related laws. For instance, the Labor Code was updated in 2015 to conform to EU norms. The updated Labor Code strengthens worker protections and promotes flexible work arrangements.

One of Albania's most important demographic shifts is the aging of the population. By 2031, the projected share of people aged 65 and older than is 22% , up from 16% in 2021. This demographic shift has significant implications for healthcare policies, as the demand for healthcare services is likely to increase. The Albanian government has put policies in place to deal with this issue, such as raising healthcare financing and making investments in medical education and training.

To summarize, the aging population will require changes in the labor market, educational system, and health care system. To keep an older workforce productive in an era of rapid technological development, effective employment policies are necessary, such as more flexible work arrangements would need to be encouraged and workplaces would need to be modified to meet their demands. The education system would also need to increase investment in lifelong learning. To ensure that older people stay healthy, the health sector would need to become more effective.

Conclusion

In conclusion, population shifts have a big impact on Albania's employment policies and laws. Employment trends and the need for labor have been impacted by population aging and emigration. The Albanian government has put measures into place to deal with the issues brought on by these demographic trends, such as raising healthcare budget and making investments in education and training. It has introduced reforms to the pension system to address the aging of the population, and also implemented programs to support entrepreneurship and small businesses to create new employment opportunities. Furthermore, employee retention policies that are tailored to the specific needs and expectations of different demographic groups can be effective in addressing the demographic challenges facing the Albanian labor market. These policies can help organizations retain their employees, reduce turnover, and ensure a stable and productive workforce.

However, ongoing efforts are required to address the labor shortages in important sectors and to make sure that employment policies are in line with demographic changes.

Reforms to encourage older workers to work longer and maintain marketable skills throughout their extended working lives could include raising the retirement age further, investing in lifelong learning, and making changes to the healthcare system.

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