UNIVERSITETI I ARTEVE

1966 2026

2nd International Conference on

ARTS AND EDUCATION

"Creativity, Heritage & Art Education in the Age of Technology"

June 11 - 12 | 2026

University of Arts
Tirana, Albania

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK TIRANA

CONSERVATORIO DI MUSICA COSENZA

University of Montenegro

JAHS

PREPARED BY:	Second International Conference on Art and Education (ICAE 2026)
PUBLISHER:	University of Arts
IBSN Print:	9789928486066
IBSN Online:	9789928486073
PUBLISHING HOUSE:	Triptik
CIRCULATION:	Online
PLACE OF PUBLICATION:	Tirana, Albania
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LETTER OF WELCOME!

Dear professors, researchers, artists, students, and friends of the University of the Arts,

It is a great privilege to open today the proceedings of the Second Conference on Art and Education of the University of Arts, a space where artistic thought, scientific research, and education come together to shape the vision of our cultural and academic future.

Art has always been one of the highest expressions of human consciousness. It is not merely an aesthetic form of expression, but also a way of understanding our time, society, and ourselves. In an era of rapid technological and social transformation, art remains one of the most powerful voices safeguarding identity, memory, and human values.

Our university has the responsibility not only to educate talented artists, but also to cultivate critical thinkers, dedicated researchers, and citizens with cultural awareness and sensitivity. This is precisely where the importance of research in the arts lies: in its ability to transform creative experience into knowledge, analysis, and academic dialogue. Research does not limit art; on the contrary, it enriches it by creating bridges between tradition and innovation, between artistic practice and theoretical reflection.

Art education, on the other hand, is the foundation upon which every society striving for sustainable cultural development is built. To educate through art means to nurture imagination, empathy, and freedom of thought. Within our classrooms, we shape not only the professionals of tomorrow but also the guardians of culture and the spiritual values of our nation.

This conference is a testament to our ambition to be a university open to contemporary ideas, international collaboration, and interdisciplinary dialogue. The papers, discussions, and projects presented over these two days reflect the creative energy and academic rigor that characterize our university community.

May this conference serve not only as an exchange of knowledge, but also as an opportunity to reflect on the role that art and education play in building a more sensitive, cultured, and humane society.

Thank you for your presence and contribution, and I wish our conference every success.

Welcome to ICAE 2026!

Prof. Dr. Erald Bakalli

Rector

University of Arts, Tirana, Albania

2nd International Conference on ARTS AND EDUCATION

"Creativity, Heritage & Art Education in the Age of Technology"

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Textile as an ecological actor in art. analysis of the work of Anni Albers, Christo and Jeanne Claude and Neri Oxman

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Abstract

Through this paper, textiles will be analyzed as a defining medium in the transformation of artistic practices under ecological influence. Proposing a reading of art with the material at the center of attention. The conceptual starting point is the practice in the work of Anni Albers, formed at the Bauhaus school, where in her research and creative process she affirms weaving as an autonomous structure and abstract language. Albers does not see textiles as decor, but as a system of organizing forms and concepts. It is the material that produces thought through rhythm, tension and interweaving of threads. This material autonomy is expanded in scale and meaning in the work of Christo and Jeanne-Cloude where textile is used for temporary monumental interventions in the landscape. In their projects, the material acts as a membrane that transforms the perception of space and emphasizes the temporality of the artistic act. Textile becomes a means to problematize the relationship between nature and human intervention, making the very structure of the intervention visible. In the process of Neri Oxman's work, the connection between technology and biology and artistic thought is felt directly. In her work, fibers and structures develop in collaboration with biological and technological processes. Where the material does not represent nature but co-produces with it. Drawing on Bruno Latour's thinking, this thesis argues that textiles can be seen as an artist-material within a network of human and non-human relationships. In this thesis, art under ecological influence is not only presented as connected to the environment but also through the material itself which articulates interdependence, process and coexistence.

Keywords

Textile, ecology, material, art

Material design and the ecological turn

With the emergence of the ecological crisis, the way we understand the relationship between humans and nature has been transformed. Technological and industrial developments have changed not only economic and social systems but also the geological equilibrium of the planet. In the era of the Anthropocene, a time in which human activity has become a decisive force affecting the geological systems of the Earth. These changes have made us humans change the way we produce materials. Materials can no longer be considered as passive substances used in the creation of objects, but as active participants in complex networks of relationships between natural resources, technological processes and cultural meanings. Philosopher and sociologist Bruno Latour argues that objects and materials must be understood as actors that are included within the weave of relationships between the human and the non-human.[1] In this perspective, the material becomes an active mediator that participates in the formation of cultural and ecological realities. Historically located between craft, art and design, textiles represent a meeting point between nature and culture. Fibers originate from natural processes, such as from the plant and animal world or from synthetic chemical transformations, but through weaving and construction processes they become part of cultural production systems.The development of textile materials has undergone a significant transformation during the 20th and 21st centuries, moving from the traditional use of natural fibers towards synthetic materials and advanced material systems with high performance. Historically, natural textiles were limited in their ability to adapt to the body and the environment. However, the development of the chemical industry and production technologies has led to the creation of artificial and synthetic fibers that offer new structural and functional characteristics. Significantly expanding their potential in art, architecture and design. As emphasized in studies on technological textiles, these materials do not serve only as covering surfaces, but as performative systems that can react to mechanical forces, light or atmospheric conditions.[2] Similarly, research on contemporary materials shows that innovation in materials has transformed the creative process, placing the material at the center of design and making it an active factor in the generation of form and function.[3]

In the first paragraph of the book Michele Caniato writes:
"I strongly believe that materials equals design."[4]

As Juhani Pallasmaa emphasizes in his book The Thinking Hand, he explains that sensory experience and the act of making are essential to understanding and shaping form.[5] This position suggests that the creative process does not arise only from an abstract idea, but from a direct relationship between thought, hand and material. In the context of contemporary technological developments, this relationship has undergone a significant transformation:
the process moves from a simple sketch made by hand to a sketch developed in collaboration with the computer, which in many cases is almost equal to what will be realized in reality.

1 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
2 Bradley Quinn, *Techno Textiles 1: Revolutionary Fabrics for Fashion and Design*. Oxford: Berg, 2010.
3 George Beylerian, M., and Andrew Dent. *Material ConneXion: The Global Resource of New and Innovative Materials for Architects, Artists and Designers*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2005.
4 George Beylerian, M., and Andrew Dent. *Material ConneXion: The Global Resource of New and Innovative Materials for Architects, Artists and Designers*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2005.
5 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2009.

These developments have significantly influenced the way an artist or designer conceives and articulates an idea, making the design process a more direct interaction between thought, visualization and material. In the work of Christo and Jeanne-Cloude this relationship with the material remains very direct and intuitive, where the sketch and the project are closely related to the physical experience of the material and the intervention in the landscape. While in the work of Neri Oxman technology and the computer become an integral part of the creative process. In this case, digital tools do not serve only to visualize or sketch the idea, but to create systems that interact with biological and natural processes. Thus the computer becomes an intermediary between thought, material and nature, expanding the way in which the idea can develop and materialize in form. The process of weaving itself can be understood as a metaphor, where threads come together to create complex surfaces and structures through systems of tension, rhythm and repetition. In this way, textile is not just a material but a model of organization that reflects the ways in which different elements connect and interact. This paper aims to analyze textile as an ecological actor in artistic practice through the work of three authors: Anni Albers, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and Neri Oxman.
Each of the authors' stances in relation to their work represents a different way of understanding the material. In Anni Albers, textile is transformed into an abstract artistic structure, in Christo and Jeanne-Claude it becomes a spatial membrane that intervenes in the landscape. While in Neri Oxman, the material develops in collaboration with biological and technological processes. Through these case studies, this thesis argues that textile can be understood as a mediator between nature and culture and as a material actor that shapes artistic thought, spatial perception, and contemporary technological developments.

Material as a mediator between nature and culture

Anthropologist Tim Ingold argues that materials should not be understood as fixed substances, but as processes in continuous transformation. According to him, materials are always in a state of "making". They grow, transform, degrade and interact with environmental forces. In his book Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture, he emphasizes:

"Materials are not passive objects awaiting human design but active participants in the process of formation."[6]

This means that artistic practice is not simply a process of imposing form on matter, but a dialogue with the potential within the limitations of the material. Textiles become a clear example of the relationship, textile structures created through the interweaving of threads, forming patterns that depend on tension, rhythm and modular repetition. These structures reflect larger ecological systems where individual elements interact to produce complex and dynamic forms. Textiles therefore function as a conceptual bridge between nature, design, and culture. Natural fibers originate from ecological processes, while weaving techniques transform them into cultural artifacts.

6 Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. London: Routledge, 2013

Knitting as an abstract structure

Anni Albers' work represents one of the most important transformations of textiles in 20th-century art. Formed at the experimental Bauhaus design school in Germany, she initially aspired to become a painter. But at the Bauhaus, the painters' studios were reserved for men, while women could attend the knitting studio. This was an opportunity for women to be included in the Bauhaus.

Figure 1. Anni Albers in her weaving studio at Black Mountain College in 1937. Photo: Helen M. Post, via Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina

Instead of seeing this as an obstacle, Anni Albers turned it into an opportunity for artistic experimentation. She treated knitting not only as a technique but as a structural language through which the relationships between form, rhythm, and material could be explored. In her works, the structure of knitting functions as an organizing system that resembles the principles of modern architecture. The modular repetition of threads creates visual rhythms and structural tensions that produce abstract compositions. An essential aspect of Anni Albers' work is her attention to the sensory qualities of materials. She experimented with different fibers to understand how structure and material affect the visual and tactile perception of a surface. In her book "On Weaving," she emphasizes the importance of materials in the creative process:
"Any material can be a vehicle of art if the hand and the mind are willing to explore it."[7]
The weaving process is not simply a production technique, but a way of thinking through the material. Her work was also influenced by her partner Josef Albers, who studied color perception and the relationships between tonalities in composition. Similarly, Anni Albers explored the way materials and structures interact to create dynamic surfaces. Through her work she transformed the process of textile creation into the status of an autonomous artistic medium, showing that the structure of weaving can function as a system of thought and visual organization.

Textile as a spatial membrane

While Anni Albers explored textiles primarily at the scale of the object and surface, Christo and Jeanne-Claude's artistic practice expanded its use to a territorial and architectural dimension. Their monumental projects use textiles as a transformative element of landscape and architecture, creating interventions that modify spatial perception through the material.

7 Anni Albers, *On Weaving*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1965.

Figure 2. Christo and Jeanne Cloude with "Wrapped Shoes (1963)"at Galleria La Salita.Rome, November 29,1963.

Installations such as Running Fence (1976), Wrapped Reichstag (1995), and The Gates (2005) demonstrate how textile material can function as a spatial membrane that reshapes the relationship between form, landscape, and human experience. In this context, textile is not simply a covering surface, but a lightweight structure that interacts with gravity, wind, and light.

Figure 3. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin, 1995.

This use of textile is also conceptually in line with the research of architect Frei Otto on tension structures and architectural membranes. Otto argues that membrane structures are forms that arise from the interaction between natural forces and material, creating minimal and efficient systems that respond to their environment.[8] In this sense, textile functions as a dynamic interface between structure and nature.
Figure 3 Frei Otto: A Life of Research, Construction and Inspiration by Irene Meissner and Everhard Möller, published by Edition Detail, 2015

8 Frei Otto, *Tensile Structures: Design, Structure, and Calculation of Building of Cables, Nets, and Membranes*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973.

Unlike traditional sculpture, Christo and Jeanne-Claude's projects do not aim to create permanent objects. They are temporary interventions that exist only for a limited period of time. This temporality emphasizes the transitory nature of human interventions in the landscape and resonates with an ecological understanding of material, where form is not fixed, but linked to process and time.
In this installation, textile becomes an interface between nature, architecture and human perception. By wrapping buildings or intervening in the landscape, the material reveals the hidden structure of space and transforms the way it is experienced by the body and the senses.

The ecology of material

Neri Oxman's works represent a contemporary development in the relationship between design, technology, and biology. Through her concept of Material Ecology, Oxman proposes a new model of material creation that unites biological processes with digital technology.
In Neri Oxman's work, this relationship is further developed through the integration of biological and technological processes. She proposes the concept of Material Ecology, an approach that aims to create materials and structures in collaboration with natural processes. As she explains: "Material ecology considers design as a process that integrates computational design, digital fabrication, and biological growth."[9]
In this way, the material is not just an element produced by man, but a system that develops in collaboration with nature.

Figure 4. Neri Oxman Silk Pavilion, MIT Media Lab, Mediated Matter Group, photo: Steven Keating
Figure 5. Oxman Silk Pavilion, silk larvae during the process of creation, photo: Steven Keating

One of Neri Oxman's most famous projects using living organisms is the Silk Pavilion, created at the MIT Media Lab by the Mediated Matter Group.
In this project, Neri Oxman collaborated with about 6,500 silkworms to create a lightweight, organic architectural structure. First, a basic structure was built with silk threads laid down by a robot, which functioned as a skeleton. The worms were then placed on this skeleton and began to spin silk threads naturally, gradually covering the surface and creating a continuous textile membrane. The final form was not determined solely by the designers, but by the collaboration between computer algorithms, robots, and the biological behavior of the worms. The worms reacted to light and gravity, creating denser or more open areas on the surface. This project once again demonstrates the concept of "Material Ecology", where material and biological organisms are not only means of production, but co-authors of the form.

9 Neri Oxman, "Material Ecology." 2016.

In this case, the material is not simply produced by man, it is developed in collaboration with biological organisms, a symbiotic process between technology and nature. Other projects such as Aguahoja explore biodegradable materials created from natural polymers that can be returned to the ecological cycle after use.

The three cases analyzed show different ways in which textile can function as an ecological actor in art and design.
In Anni Albers, textile appears as an abstract structure that produces thought through the organization of the material. In Christo and Jeanne Cloude, textile becomes a spatial membrane that transforms the perception of the landscape. While in Neri Oxman, the material develops in collaboration with biological and technological processes.
These works show that the material is not only a medium for artistic representation, but an active element that builds relationships between nature, technology and culture.

Conclusions

In the Anthropocene era, art and design cannot be understood in isolation from the materials that form them. Materials are not simply passive tools of creation, but active participants in the networks of relationships that connect people, technology, and the environment. Textiles can be understood as ecological actors in the work of Anni Albers, Christo and Jeanne Cloude, and Neri Oxman, an actor that articulates the interdependence between natural processes and human creativity. From the abstract structures of modern weaving to monumental interventions in the landscape and contemporary processes of biological fabrication, textiles demonstrate their potential to shape the way we understand the relationship between material, art, and ecology.

Interest groups and research continuum

Based on the analysis conducted, this study suggests several important directions for future research and practice in the field of art and design. Such as the re-evaluation of textile material in artistic and architectural practice as active structures that interact with the environment and not only as decorative elements. Promoting a critical approach to material in art and design education, placing the material at the center of the creative process and emphasizing the ecological responsibility of artistic practice. Interest groups, designers, material researchers, cultural institutions, etc.

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Figure 1 Anni Albers in her weaving studio at Black Mountain College in 1937. Photo: Helen M. Post, via Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina ...205
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Design as decision closure: externalization under conditions of uncertainty

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Abstract

Design operates under irreducible uncertainty, nonetheless existing evaluation criteria such as functionality, aesthetics, sustainability, assess outcomes within isolated domains and therefore struggle to explain why designs that are performing well in one dimension, generate unintended consequences in others. This paper addresses this gap by introducing a framework for understanding design as decision closure under uncertainty across three irreducible domains: experience, knowledge, and reality. Drawing on bounded rationality, wicked problems, and design as world-making, the paper proposes a structured interpretive method mapping phenomenological, epistemological, and ontological loops before and after design intervention. The framework is operationalized through two Albanian case studies: the Pyramid of Tirana (communist monument transformed into technology hub) and a design studio on Spaç Prison (contested site of traumatic heritage). Externalizations, the mechanisms through which dimensions are rendered irrelevant to enable action, are classified as necessary, managed, or systematic. The Pyramid case demonstrates successful urban reactivation achieved through systematic externalization of historical meaning and socio-economic consequences. The Design Studio on Spaç prison revitalization reveals pedagogical responsibility operating through systematic translation of traumatic experience into spatial metaphor, while externalizing material reality as necessary scope limitation. In both cases, fragmentation persists; what differs is how it is distributed. The paper introduces Non-Reductive Commitment as an evaluative paradigm, shifting critical attention from isolated metrics and binary judgments to a diagnostic question: what has been made irrelevant, and who bears the consequences? This reframes design responsibility as structural rather than optional.

Keywords

Design theory, decision-making under uncertainty, wicked problems, architectural theory, design responsibility

Introduction: Design as action under uncertainty

In design practice, decisions must be made under conditions of incomplete information, limited resources, and uncertain consequences. While this structural condition is well established [1], three major traditions of design theory still remain largely disconnected. Epistemic approaches address how designers decide under uncertainty; phenomenological approaches focus on lived experience; ontological approaches frame design as world-making. Each captures a dimension of design, yet none explains how these dimensions are negotiated simultaneously in decision-making.This paper proposes an integrated framework for understanding design as decision closure under uncertainty across three irreducible domains: experience, knowledge, and reality, as corresponding to the phenomenological, epistemological, and ontological dimensions. Building on this, the paper introduces Non-Reductive Commitment as an evaluative paradigm, as the capacity to act decisively without collapsing the plurality of the three dimensions. Rather than assessing design through isolated metrics such as function, aesthetics, or sustainability, this approach reframes critique around a diagnostic question: what has been externalized, made irrelevant, simplified, or displaced, to enable closure of the decision-making process, and who bears the consequences? The framework is tested on two Albanian case studies: the transformation of the Pyramid of Tirana and a design studio on Spaç Prison. Both cases are characterized by conflicting historical, social, and material conditions, allowing the analysis to examine how design distributes fragmentation under uncertainty.

Literature review: Fragmented traditions of design theory

Design operates under conditions that preclude complete knowledge. Herbert Simon [2] established that decision-making is constrained by bounded rationality, requiring satisficing rather than optimization. Rittel and Webber [3] further described design situations as wicked problems, lacking definitive formulation and stopping rules. Schön [4] reframed this condition as knowing-in-action, where knowledge emerges through engagement with the situation itself. Together, these accounts establish that design decisions must be made before full knowledge is available.

However, understanding that design operates under uncertainty does not explain how different domains are negotiated in practice. Three distinct traditions address this question but remain largely disconnected.

Epistemic approaches focus on decision-making processes. Nelson and Stolterman [5] conceptualize design as intentional change in unpredictable contexts, where judgment precedes full justification. While this tradition establishes the primacy of decision, it not fully captures how experiential and material dimensions are integrated.

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1 Harold G. Nelson and Erik Stolterman, *The Design Way: Intentional Change in an Unpredictable World*, 2nd edn (The MIT Press, 2012), https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9188.001.0001; Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, 'Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning', *Policy Sciences* 4, no. 2 (1973): 155–69; Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Basic Books, 1983); Herbert Alexander Simon, *The Sciences of the Artificial*, 3. ed., [Nachdr.] (MIT Press, 2008).

2 *The Sciences of the Artificial*.

3 'Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning'.

4 *The Reflective Practitioner*.

5 *The Design Way*.

Phenomenological approaches focus on lived experience. Merleau-Ponty [6] emphasized the primacy of perception grounded in embodiment, while others [7] critiques the sensory reduction of modern environments. At a cultural level, Debord [8] describes the transformation of lived experience into passive consumption. These perspectives demonstrate that design cannot be evaluated solely through technical criteria, yet they remain largely descriptive and offer limited tools for analysing decision processes.

Ontological approaches conceptualize design as world-making. Fry [9] introduces the concept of defuturing, highlighting how design shapes future conditions by displacing consequences. Latour [10] emphasizes distributed agency across human and non-human actors, while Escobar [11] frames design as the creation of plural worlds. These approaches reveal the transformative power of design but focus primarily on systemic effects rather than the internal structure of decisions.

A gap therefore persists. Existing evaluation criteria, functionality, aesthetics, sustainability, assess outcomes within isolated domains and cannot account for how design negotiates tensions between experience, knowledge, and material realities. As a result, they struggle to explain why designs that perform well in one dimension may generate unintended consequences in others. This paper addresses this gap by proposing a framework that treats design as the process through which these irreducible domains are forced into temporary alignment through decisions. In doing so, it shifts the focus of analysis from isolated outcomes to the structures of decision-making and the distribution of its consequences.

Conceptual framework

Positioning the contribution: design as decision closure

This paper proposes a three-domain model, experience, knowledge, and reality, understood as recursive loops of design action. Within this model, **design is defined as decision closure under uncertainty**: the act of committing to an outcome before full alignment across these domains is possible. Closure does not follow reconciliation; it precedes it. It therefore entails the active management, and unavoidable reduction, of tension between domains that cannot be fully made consistent. The concept of Non-Reductive Commitment is introduced as the model's evaluative core. Non-Reductive Commitment is the capacity to act decisively without collapsing the plurality of domains. It is less a metric than a disposition: a disciplined form of engagement functioning as a kind of "spirituality" of decision-making that sustains rather than resolves irreconcilable dimensions. This reframes evaluation in design away from isolated performance indicators and toward the question of how decisions distribute responsibility across experiential, epistemic, and ontological dimensions over time.

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6 *Phenomenology of Perception*, with Donald A. Landes (Routledge, 2012), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203720714.

7 Steven Holl et al., *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture*, New ed. (William Stout, 2006); Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Wiley-Academy ; John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

8 *The Society of the Spectacle* (Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014).

9 *Becoming Human by Design* (Berg, 2012).

10 Jim Johnson, 'Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together: The Sociology of a Door-Closer', *Social Problems* (Oxford, UK) 35, no. 3 (1988): 298–310.

11 *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*, New Ecologies for the Twenty-First Century (Duke University Press, 2018).

Fragmentation and externalization

If action precedes alignment, design is necessarily fragmented. This fragmentation manifests as tension between what is perceived, what is known, and what materially exists. These domains do not naturally converge; they operate via different logics and scales. Design must nevertheless produce a unified outcome, a building or system, by forcing a temporary closure. Necessarily design decisions resolve tensions by prioritizing certain aspects while displacing others. This process is defined as Externalization: the mechanism where dimensions are hierarchized or rendered irrelevant or invisible to enable action. Fragmentation is thus not a failure, but a structural consequence of acting under uncertainty. Externalization becomes problematic only when it is systematic and concealed, masking the structural trade-offs inherent in the design act.

A new evaluative paradigm

Design critique has historically favored analysis over synthesis [12]. Current discourse relies on disparate metrics, functional efficiency, aesthetics, or sustainability, that fail to diagnose the structural roots of "failure" (e.g. how a "green" building may feel alienating, or a monument may externalize historical trauma). Also, a valid criterion must account for the temporal persistence of consequences, whether contained by the designer or accumulated as systemic costs over time [13]. We propose Non-Reductive Commitment as a paradigm to measure the degree of Externalization, and the refusal to minimize experience, knowledge, or reality. This diagnostic approach rejects binary moral judgments for a gradient-based criterion and design is judged by its degree of non-fragmentation.

Methodology

This paper operationalizes the proposed framework through a structured analysis of how design decisions achieve closure under conditions of uncertainty. Rather than providing a quantitative or predictive model, the method offers a systematic procedure to trace how tensions between experience, knowledge, and reality are negotiated and resolved in practice. The approach is grounded in a qualitative and diagnostic logic. Its objective is not to determine whether a design is successful according to predefined criteria, but to make explicit the mechanisms through which certain dimensions are prioritized while others are reduced, displaced, or rendered irrelevant. In this sense, the method functions as an analytical audit of decision-making, focusing on how fragmentation is produced and distributed. The framework is scalable and can be applied to a range of design outputs, including objects, systems, and spatial interventions.

This framework is applied to two Albanian case studies: the Pyramid of Tirana and an Architecture design studio on Spaç Prison. These sites, defined by contested historical and spatial conditions, allow for an analysis of design under conflicting demands.

The analysis begins by mapping the three domains, experience, knowledge, and reality, both before (ex-ante) and after (ex-post) the design intervention.

12 Simon, *The Sciences of the Artificial*.

13 Fry, *Becoming Human by Design*.

These domains are understood as interdependent but irreducible dimensions of design action:

- Experience (Phenomenological): Lived conditions assumed as input and new perceptions produced as output.
- Knowledge (Epistemological): Models guiding the decision and knowledge generated through the process.
- Reality (Ontological): Material conditions transformed and new entities or systemic consequences produced.
-

This mapping establishes a descriptive baseline, allowing the analysis to identify how each domain is configured and transformed through the act of design.
Once the loops are mapped, the method identifies "misalignments" where the domains conflict or friction with one another. The core task is to examine how these tensions are resolved to enable decision closure. Externalization is classified as:

- Necessary: Bounded limitations of scope.
- Managed: Partial, transparent reductions.
- Systematic: Hidden or unacknowledged omissions.
-

by investigating whether the designer had the awareness and resources to address the loop but chose to neglect it instead.

Limits of the method

This approach is grounded in second-order knowing [14], rejecting "universal truths" and reframing inquiry as participation in a recursive epistemic loop, where meaning emerges through the continuous interaction between maker, made, and observer. This approach is interpretive but constrained as it seeks to ensure rigor through explicit procedural steps. Different analysts may disagree on the degree of Externalization, but the tensions identified should remain comparable. The method is also non-predictive, as it does not aim to forecast outcomes, but to diagnose the structural conditions under which design decisions are made and the consequences they produce.

Results

Case study 1: the pyramid of Tirana

The transformation of the Pyramid of Tirana provides a relevant case through which to examine how design negotiates irreducible tensions under conditions of historical, political, and urban uncertainty. Originally constructed in 1988 as a museum dedicated to Enver Hoxha, the building functioned as a monumental apparatus of ideological representation, embedding a controlled experiential and symbolic order within its architectural form [15].

14 Ranulph Glanville, 'Researching Design and Designing Research', *Design Issues* 15, no. 2 (1999): 80, https://doi.org/10.2307/1511844.

15 Skender Luarasi, 'The Destructive Rebirth of the Pyramid of Tirana | Architectural Record', Architectural Record, 27 February 2024, https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/16749-the-destructive-rebirth-of-the-pyramid-of-tirana; 'Reclaiming the Pyramid of Tirana: MVRDV Transforms Albania's Most Controversial Monument', Yatzer, 4 April 2025, https://www.yatzer.com/pyramid-of-tirana; Elisa Miho et al., *The Decommunization of the Pyramid in Tirana, the Mausoleum of Enver Hoxha*, 2018.

Its spatial configuration and material choices projected permanence and authority in a context marked by scarcity and repression [16].
Following the collapse of the socialist regime in 1991, the Pyramid entered a prolonged phase of functional and symbolic instability. It was successively appropriated as a broadcasting center, nightclub, NATO facility, and informal public space [17]. During this period, institutional meaning weakened due political quarrelling while informal practices, such as climbing and sliding, redefined the building's experiential dimension [18].
This condition can be understood as one of high fragmentation: experience, knowledge, and material reality persisted without alignment.

Unit of analysis

Category	**Description**
Project	Pyramid of Tirana (Mausoleum → Technology Hub)
Context	Tirana city center; transition from communism to neoliberalism
Designers	Original: Pranvera Hoxha, Klement Kolaneci; Redesign: MVRDV
Phases	1988 (Museum) / 1991–2018 (Decay & Informality) / 2023 (TUMO Center)

The 2023 intervention by MVRDV constitutes a new act of decision closure under uncertainty. The project retains the structural skeleton while inserting new programmatic volumes and formalizing informal uses through accessible circulation systems [19].
The transformation can be summarized through the three-domain framework:

Descriptive mapping of domains

Domain	**Before (Ex-ante)**	**After (Ex-post)**
Experience	Passive, monumental, controlled; later re-appropriated informally	Open, accessible, participatory; informal uses formalized
Knowledge	Ideological narrative centered on Hoxha; fixed symbolic meaning	Reframed as innovation and education; historical meaning reduced
Reality	Monumental structure using scarce resources; symbolic state investment	Hybrid public-educational infrastructure; part of urban regeneration dynamics

At the phenomenological level, the intervention strengthens accessibility and participation. The building shifts from a space of ideological control to one of open-ended use, aligning design decisions with emergent patterns of occupation.
At the epistemological level, however, the intervention performs a substitution rather than an

16 The Dark Atlas, 'The Pyramid of Tirana: The Dictator's Last Ghost', The Dark Atlas, 14 October 2025, https://thedarkatlas.com/posts/enver-hoxhas-mausoleum-tirana-pyramid.
17 MVRDV, 'MVRDV - The Pyramid of Tirana', MVRDV, 2023, https://www.mvrdv.com/projects/312/the-pyramid-of-tirana.
18 Miho et al., *The Decommunization of the Pyramid in Tirana, the Mausoleum of Enver Hoxha*; Peter Nientied and Eranda Janku, 'Ambiguous Memorial Landscapes in Post- Socialist Cities: The Case of Tirana's Pyramid', *IJPP – Italian Journal of Planning Practice* IX, no. 1 (2019): 1–23.
19 Luarasi, 'The Destructive Rebirth of the Pyramid of Tirana | Architectural Record'.

integration. The original symbolic framework is not critically reworked but displaced by a forward-looking narrative centered on technology and youth culture [20]. Critics argue that this reduces the building's historical and architectural specificity, treating it as a neutral support rather than a meaningful artifact [21].

Figure 1. Pyramid of Tirana - BBB2021, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons
Figure 2. Interior of the Pyramid of Tirana in 2025 - Bdx, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

At the ontological level, the project introduces new programs and contributes to urban reactivation. However, it operates within a broader context of rapid development and rising property values in Tirana, raising questions about accessibility and the distribution of benefits [22].

Externalization analysis

Domain	**Externalization**	**Mechanism**	**Type**
Experience	*Limited*	Informal uses preserved and formalized	*Managed*
Knowledge	*Significant*	Historical and formal specificity reduced	*Systematic*
Reality	*Partial*	Socio-economic effects displaced beyond project scope	*Systematic*

The analysis indicates that decision closure is achieved through selective stabilization. Experiential aspects are integrated, while epistemological and ontological tensions are partially displaced.
The degree of fragmentation can therefore be assessed as moderate to high: alignment is achieved in terms of use and accessibility, but at the cost of reduced unaddressed depth and superficial acknowledgment of systemic implications.

20 MVRDV, 'The People Reclaim the Monument: MVRDV's Pyramid of Tirana Inaugurated', MVRDV, 17 October 2023, https://www.mvrdv.com/news/4449/the-people-reclaim-the-monument-mvrdvs-pyramid-of-tirana-inaugurated.
21 Luarasi, 'The Destructive Rebirth of the Pyramid of Tirana | Architectural Record'.
22 Daniel Gleichgewicht, 'Empty Towers: Inside Tirana's Mad Construction Boom', *New Eastern Europe*, 11 March 2026, https://neweasterneurope.eu/2026/03/11/empty-towers-inside-tiranas-mad-construction-boom/.

The Pyramid's transformation illustrates how design operates by redistributing, rather than eliminating, fragmentation. The project succeeds in reactivating the site as a socially engaging space yet does so by externalizing aspects of historical continuity and broader urban consequences.

This case demonstrates how design is shaped by how tensions are acknowledged, managed, or displaced, while responsibility lies in the impossibility of resolving all such tensions.

Case study 2: design studio on spaç prison revitalization

The Spaç Prison Design Studio examines how architectural education can engage traumatic heritage under moral, historical, and spatial constraints. Spaç Prison (est. 1968), in northern Albania, functioned as "Re-education Unit No. 303," a forced labor camp integrated with copper and pyrite extraction. Its spatial logic, cells located close by active mine shafts, directly linked incarceration with industrial production, fusing disciplinary control and resource exploitation into a single system [23]. Life in the camp was marked by extreme deprivation, including severe overcrowding, minimal air, scarce potable water, and exposure to toxic mining runoff [24], producing a condition where political repression, human humiliation and material extraction became inseparable.

At the same time, Spaç also generated forms of symbolic resistance. Prisoners circulated clandestine poetry, described by Visar Zhiti as "translation fever," sustaining intellectual exchange under repression [25]. The 1973 uprising, during which inmates briefly seized control and removed the communist emblem from the flag, was violently suppressed and subsequently erased from official memory [26]. Today, the site remains contested between heritage preservation, tourism, and industrial reuse. Recent interventions, such as façade "cleaning" for cinematic production and testimonial installations like Tek Bunkeri's "Beyond the Masks", reflect competing approaches to memory, material decay, and representation [27].

23 CHwB Albania, 'Spac Prison: A Place of Dialogue and Action - Addressing Communist-Era Heritage', Chwbalbania.Org, 2014, https://chwbalbania.org/portfolio/spac-prison-a-place-of-dialogue-and-action-addressing-communist-era-heritage/.

24 Spac.al, 'Facts & Artifacts', Spac.Al, 24 April 2024, https://spac.al/en/kamp-burgu-spac-fakte-dhe-artefakte/.

25 Visar Zhiti, 'Invictus - On Reading and Translating Poetry in an Albanian Jail', The Baffler, 21 December 2022, https://thebaffler.com/latest/invictus-zhiti.

26 BalkanWeb, '"A Debt That History Left Us and Art Is Paying It off"/ The Intervention in the Former Spaç Prison for the Filming of a Film, MEKI Official Reaction: Unnecessary "Smokestack"! Every Step Is Being Taken Carefully - Balkanweb.Com - News24', BalkanWeb, 26 June 2025, https://www.balkanweb.com/en/A-debt-that-history-left-us-and-art-is-paying-off%3A-the-intervention-in-the-former-space-prison-for-the-filming-of-a-film--no-official-reaction--unnecessary-smoke--every-step-is-being-thrown/#gsc.tab=0.

27 Ata, 'Former Spaç Prison Gets Transformed into a Space of Memory and Inter-Generation Dialogue | Albanian Telegraphic Agency.', Ata, 20 October 2025, https://en.ata.gov.al/2025/10/20/former-spac-prison-gets-transformed-into-a-space-of-memory-and-inter-generation-dialogue/; Giulia Avanza, 'In Albania, Memory Regains Centrality in the Public Debate', *Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa*, 10 June 2025, https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/cp_article/in-albania-memory-regains-centrality-in-the-public-debate/.

Unit of Analysis

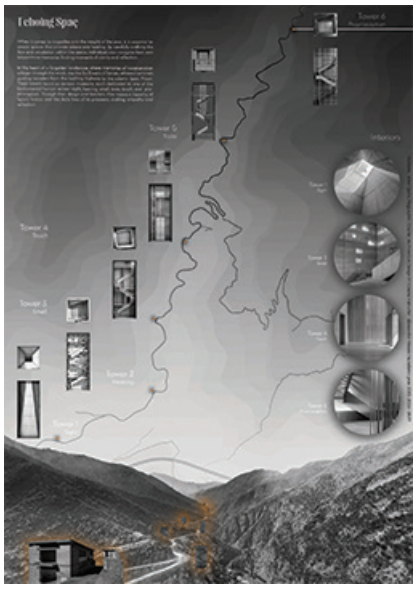
Category	Description
Project	Design Studio on Spaç Prison Revitalization
Context	Spaç Prison + Reps industrial region, northern Albania
Designers	Student projects: *Echoing Spaç*, *UNTOUCH*, *COM'A* (UNYT, 2024)
Phases	1968 (construction) / 1991–present (abandonment + contested heritage) / 2024 (studio speculation)

Descriptive Mapping of Domains

Project	Experience (Phenomenology)	Knowledge (Epistemology)	Reality (Ontology)
Echoing Spaç (Towers of Senses)	Assumes the absence of an experience of "active reconnection" of the current viability system with the remains.	Relies and focuses on models of sensory deprivation and the history of incarceration.	Produces "ethereal sentinels" amplifying site presence in "forgotten landscape"
UNTOUCH (Untouching Bridges)	Prioritizes a "significant pedestrian link between the past and the future" that require willingness and effort.	Uses "broken" bridge to "thicken" meaning of disconnection between past and present	Uses two primary structural elements to elevate visitors, creating mega-structural landscape element
COM'A (Portal to Memory)	Retrieve and reshapes the experience of "departure" and "anticipation" that mirrors the prisoners' journey	Reflects on the logistical infrastructures as the primary carrier and antciptory system of repression and reconnect them to the historical narrative.	Re-appropriates neglected dirt road as memorial path; creates manufact as visible metaphorical shroud and initiation portal

Externalization analysis

Domain	Externalization	Mechanism	Type
Experience	*Partial*	Emotional intensity translated into spatial metaphor. Reticence to engage with the real heritage artifacts.	*Systematic*
Knowledge	*Limited*	Historical specificity reframed into conceptual narratives. Added symbolical value to the site in its broader extension.	*Managed*
Reality	*Significant*	Economic feasibility and operational constraints excluded. (Also excluded the integration of former prison buildings.)	*Necessary*



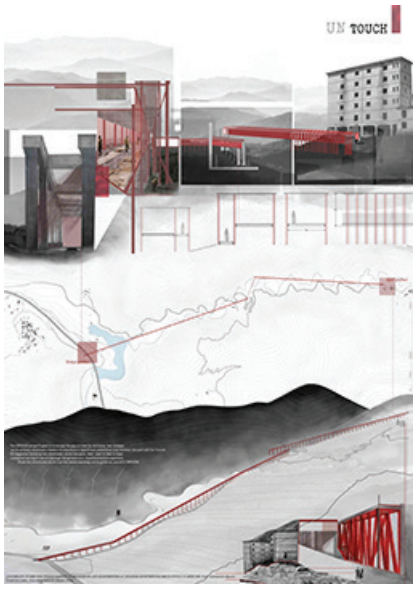


Figure 3. Ajdini, Gjana
Figure 4. Ivdil, Musabelliu, Papa
Figure 5. Sinaj, Stefa

The studio's work on Spaç reveals a consistent commitment to "non-reductive memory," yet its engagement with the site's traumatic legacy remains filtered through significant externalizations. Phenomenologically, projects often rely on spatial metaphors for emotional intensity, creating a systematic tension: they successfully amplify the awareness of absence but occasionally risk over-determining experience through formal devices, thereby reducing the site's inherent, historically significant ambiguity.
Epistemologically, these designs employ a managed approach, reframing complex historical contradictions into cohesive, symbolic narratives. While this avoids the aestheticization of trauma, it threatens to smooth over the site's conflict between extraction and memory. Furthermore, the studio adopts a necessary Externalization of reality to prioritize speculative exploration, systematically excluding economic feasibility and direct interaction with the prison's physical fabric. Given the circumstances the degree of fragmentation can therefore be assessed as low to moderate. Ultimately, the work proves that non-reductive memory is achievable through diverse formal strategies, provided the tension between these conflicting architectural, historical, and material loops is rigorously maintained.

Conclusions

This paper has proposed a framework for understanding design as decision closure under uncertainty across three irreducible domains: experience, knowledge, and reality. Through the analysis of the Pyramid of Tirana and a design studio on Spaç Prison, it has shown that design achieves closure not by resolving tensions but by selectively externalizing them, rendering certain dimensions irrelevant, simplified, or displaced.
The two cases demonstrate that fragmentation is not eliminated but redistributed. The Pyramid achieves urban reactivation while partially externalizing historical continuity and broader

socio-economic implications. The Spaç studio, while pedagogically attentive, translates traumatic experience into spatial and conceptual terms, managing knowledge while necessarily externalizing material and operational constraints. In both cases, what differs is not the presence of fragmentation, but how it is handled.

The concept of Non-Reductive Commitment reframes design evaluation by shifting attention from isolated performance metrics to the structure of decision-making itself.

This study is limited by its interpretive nature and contextual specificity. Further research is needed to test the framework across different design fields. Nevertheless, the paper establishes a basis for a form of design critique capable of evaluating how decisions distribute fragmentation across domains that design theory has traditionally treated in isolation.

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The role of storytelling in graphic design education: The power of narrative

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Abstract

From the earliest cave paintings to contemporary graphic design solutions, visuals have been central to human storytelling. In today's digital era, graphic design plays a crucial role in shaping how stories are told and understood. It is not just about making content attractive; it is about creating a visual language that makes stories memorable, relatable, and impactful. Graphic design has the potential to transfer information into someone else's minds. Stories do that, too. Stories travel from person to person and place to place. A well-made graphic design product or communication moves ideas and emotions from the head of the maker to the head of the user. Exchanging energy – not just transferring data and facts – occurs whenever a product is used, or an image is seen, or a game is played. That energy comes from the dynamic, world-making relationship between creators and audiences, between makers and users. As technology advances, visual storytelling continues to evolve, offering even more creative possibilities. Yet its essence remains timeless: to connect people through imagery, color, and design choices that transform ideas into lasting narratives. This paper analyses the connections between storytelling and design and the role of storytelling in graphic design and visual media education, considering narrative both as a pedagogical method and as a primary skill for effective visual communication. Stories depict action and stimulate curiosity. Design embodies values and illustrates ideas. The paper aims to understand how storytelling helps the design pedagogy process and, ultimately, contemporary practice. The current study indicates that the integration of storytelling into graphic design and visual media curricula increases student engagement, conceptual coherence, and professional identity for emerging artists and designers. The paper ends with suggestions for systematic incorporation of storytelling strategies into the design knowledge and teaching framework.

Keywords

Narrative art, visual communication, creative pedagogy, visual literacy

Introduction

If we had to classify what art is, we would probably say that art brings emotions, expresses a complex point or story. A visual story can tell complex ideas that are intended to move the viewer to feel something. In the world of today's visually driven society, graphic design becomes extremely important to grab attention and give a message. It doesn't stop at aesthetics. Storytelling is part of everyone's work. Storytelling helps people understand a concept that they feel is meaningful and lets them form ideas of what might happen in the future. Our stories are about the lives of artists and designers, the process of creation, designing, the evolution of materials, and the power of technology. Every exhibit, design, event, and web entry is infused with a storyline arc. Incorporating storytelling into graphic design education is not only a way to make things look nice, but more importantly, it should convey meaning and capture the eye. With narrative structures, relatable characters, evocative images, visual metaphors, and relevant typography, you can produce designs that grab attention, stick, and create an emotional connection for users.

Literature review

By understanding what narrative art is and how it works, an artist or a graphic designer can develop narrative techniques to increase the effectiveness of their visual communication and add more complexity to their work. A narrative is a story, an account about real or imagined events. Narrative art is a mere art form based on a narrative. It appears in literature, theater, musical, and visual arts. I will be focusing on narrative art to articulate visual communication within the visual arts and graphic design for this paper. Narrative art forms can be represented in countless aesthetic traditions, such as ancient forms, such as rock carvings, cave paintings, or hieroglyphs, as well as modern forms, including drawings, narrative painting, sequential art, including comics, sculptures, photographs, murals, narrative illustrations, magazines, film, and digital media.

Historical roots of narrative art

Narrative art has deep roots throughout the history of art and has long been a significant feature of visual expression. As early as humans were drawing pictures and artists created narrative art, it has continued to endure and evolve to thrive over time and to expand, even if it is not the only art form. The earliest known examples date back tens of thousands of years ago and show that pictures are instinct at the bottom. Before the age of the photography, some early visual sources of narrative material existed, like African rock art or cave art from Lascaux cave in France. Working with common characters and scenes, these works chronicle shared experiences, rituals, and survival, one of art's oldest storytelling traditions.

Storytelling has taken over all ancient civilizations since the dawn of time, recording myths, religion, rituals, and history. Painted Greek and Roman vases, for instance, depicted scenes from daily life and mythology. From ancient precedent, we've had a continuous stream of artistic expressions through visual narratives.

The Italian Renaissance advanced narrative painting and sculpture through churches, palaces, and other civic venues, while subsequent cultural renaissances, chiefly the Harlem Renaissance, advanced narrative art through visual storytelling through painting, printmaking, sculpture, and photography, all of which positioned Black experience as paramount. These Renaissances

show how storytelling art adapts to both time and society collectively. Narrative art has survived beyond the Italian Renaissance. It has traveled further than this in global movements such as European and American Modernism or Mexican Mural Art.
At the intersection of contemporary perspectives, narrative art welcomes diversity of voices and media. Frida Kahlo fused autobiography with symbolism. Faith Ringgold made story quilts that fused text and textile. In photography and film, Shirin Neshat has interrogated identity and diaspora, while Marjane Satrapi used this sort of staged art in 'Persepolis', to narrate childhood, revolution, and migration. Together, both movements show how narrative art changes constantly: both media and the stance of narrative tell stories of community as change that can still be imagined.
Mass media and digital technologies have expanded narrative art to a global scale. It now ranges from traditional forms of storytelling to contemporary interactive experiences. Across various artistic fields, narrative artworks that convey stories reflect the continuous transformation of visual communication and media practices.
Contemporary storytelling is also widely used to address educational objectives. New forms of media are creating new ways for students to record, express and consume stories.

Narrative as a structure of meaning

According to narrative theory across the humanities and social sciences, storytelling is universally applicable. Every culture has its own narratives, which are shared as a means of entertainment, education, cultural and artistic preservation. Roland Barthes argued that narrative exists across cultures and in media formats, both verbal and visual, and even on the performative stage of cultural exchanges. For Barthes, every communicative artifact transmits certain narrative codes that produce specific meaning. Jerome Bruner, in cognitive psychology, drew a distinction between logical-scientific thinking and narrative thinking, arguing that narrative structures human experience in ways abstract logic cannot. This view regards storytelling as intrinsic too, instead of the enhancement of knowledge. Multimodal theory has been applied to visual communication research to account for how meaning is made by combining various semiotic resources. According to Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, visual design, typography, layout, color, and spatial organization are co-constituents of meaning-making systems. In graphic design, narrative is often constructed through sequencing, hierarchy, rhythm, and spatial relations. Storytelling logic builds engagement and continuity for editorial design, branding systems, motion graphics, and interactive media. So, storytelling becomes an organizing principle, not just an ornament.

Narratives in visual arts

Storytelling is a means for sharing and interpreting experiences. It is a very important aspect to reinforce, develop, and enable emotional engagement, cultural transfer, and communication beyond language and experience. Narrative arts have great potential to create and extend the relevance of art. Further, narrative art helps ground our present in the past, documenting history and culture through the presentation of myths, historical events, and cultural narratives.

Graphic design and the importance of storytelling

Whether it's a book or a movie or even a well-told story, told by a friend, stories have a unique way of getting our attention and taking hold of our minds. The same is true about graphic design. Storytelling, as embedded in your visuals, enables your designs to be immersive and memorable. What about a well-designed poster or ad that stays with you? It isn't just the colors and the typography, typically, but the story in it. A beautiful story can transform a simple graphic into a powerful message. Through practical techniques that help to structure meaning and increase audience engagement, techniques can be used to add strength to visual storytelling in graphic design. Another feature of a strong design is that it usually follows a narrative structure with a very well-defined beginning, middle, and end to keep the viewer's interest and engaged through the visual story. Using characters people can relate to—whether they are a brand mascot or a symbolic figure—can create an emotional bond and make a concept easier to understand. Selecting images that hit on the reader's emotional core is a crucial part – something that emotional visuals can do a lot more than words. Visual metaphors can be used by designers to break down more complicated ideas into easily recognizable symbols, contributing to conceptual weight in composition. As such, typography acts as a storytelling device: the style, scale, weight, and placement of type are matters of tone and emphasis; these choices help create an impression, thus reinforcing the storytelling being conveyed while also shaping an individual's response to it. Storytelling matters because graphic design tells a story by using graphic design. In this digital age saturated with information, narrative structures help keep and maintain reading power in one's mind, turning an audience's participation in a message into longer attention spans and memorable memories. Designers enhance recall and enhance branding influence by embedding ideas within the story. However, storytelling establishes emotional connections—as emotions shape perception and decision making—which can enhance the potency of a visual message and create long-lasting impact.

Examples of storytelling in graphic design

A story-based style graphic design's products and communications are articulated through visual representation that evokes emotional engagement. An iconic example of a graphic narrative shaped by its historical moment and cultural context is Milton Glaser's "I ♥ NY" logo (1977), which demonstrates how design can achieve broad historical and cultural resonance through emotional engagement.

- The Story: NYC was a threat and a bankrupt city in the 1970s. The city had to readjust its narrative from one of decay to one of love and tourism.
- The Design: Glaser employed an unambiguous, iconic, and memorable rebus (a word based upon a picture) in bold, bold typeface (American Typewriter) and a bright, red heart.
- The Power: "Not just 'brand' a city," it forever altered what people believed about it, transforming a panic on the cityscape into collective love and civic pride.

Among the candidates for visual storytelling that transforms a brand's narrative is Nike's "Just Do It" (1988–present).

- The Story: Nike transitioned from targeting only elite athletes to speaking to the everyday story of heroism, perseverance, and empowerment.
- The Design: The use of a simple, punchy slogan ("Just Do It"), Swoosh (movement)

and gritty, emotional photography of actual people overcomes a series of obstacles.

- The Power: It transformed products into a personal tale of perseverance, leaving an emotional and lasting impact that, for instance, drove a 31 percent increase in sales in the "Dream Crazy" campaign.

Another of the more famous examples of storytelling in design is:

- Volkswagen "Think Small" (1960). This graphic storytelling with the skeleton of the Beetle, as an ideal, unpretentious, rebellious, practical solution to the giant American car, was executed through a campaign by Doyle Dane Bernbach that relied on minimalist design.

The role of storytelling in graphic design education and visual media

Design pedagogy literature has shown that concepts, reflection, and awareness of context significantly enhance design pedagogy. Narrative-based methods motivate students to define purpose, audience, and transformation in the content of a project.

Rather than merely stylistic delivery, students should be enabled to devise solutions that have meaning behind them. Storytelling in education has been shown to:

• Encourage deeper cognitive engagement.
• Improve empathy and social observation.
• Support reflective practice.
• Improve presentation and argumentative skills.
• Foster interdisciplinary thought.

In this manner, storytelling then closes the gap between theory and practice in the education of graphic design.

Methodology

This work utilizes a paradigm of rationally solving problems paired with emotionally driven narrative storytelling. The study comprises three parts:

- Theoretical analysis of interdisciplinary literature: narrative theory, design pedagogy, and the psychology of visual communication.
- Pedagogical observation of graphic design studio courses in which storytelling was woven in as a structured part of project development.
- Comparative analysis of student projects before and after narrative-based frameworks.

They are meant to tell the story of action and to provoke curiosity. Design creates forms, colors, materials, language, systems thinking; its applications transform the meaning of everything from transit signs and web apps to shampoo bottles and emergency shelters. Design expresses a set of values and visualizes that set of values. It is joyful, eye-opening, and impels us to do something. Whether designing an interactive device or a data-driven publication, designers encourage individuals to step into a scene and discover what's present — to touch, roam, shift, and to accomplish. The paper explores the psychology of visual communication. As we step out in the world, humans actively seek and create patterns: we are drawn to and energized by patterning, and some feel frustrated when those patterns break. Storytelling can be used to connect products and communication books to the user's imagination and promote actions and behaviors. In the study, the focus had been on studio-based learning environments where storytelling was given the opportunity to students to create a narrative to facilitate the visual implementation stage.

Results and discussions

- Reinforced conceptual coherence - Narrative frameworks enable projects that showcase clear student articulation of a narrative arc - setting up context and creating narrative arc - before determining graphic design solutions.
- The redesign process minimizes arbitrary design decisions and encourages intentionality. The students should not forget that people are people, not machines. You must reach out to their emotional side, because they are low on the attention list as well. A graph is never a graph; it's never merely a graph. That visual element does exist to communicate through the form of a graph.

Depending on what you're sharing, it could look like a food label or like a building. When you are a storytelling data, the appropriate container cannot just express your concept but give that information meaning. Otherwise, you are just reporting numbers. People remember the story better than a single statistic or result.

- Training in critical thinking. The construction of a narrative encourages students to think about key questions:
  - Who is the audience?
  - What problem is being addressed?
  - What is the emotional or cognitive response intended?
  - What transformation does the design advocate for?

This reflective exercise fosters both an analytical level of thought depth and discourages simply aestheticism in problem solving.

- More empathy and social engagement - Applied to socially oriented themes, storytelling allows students to apply themselves to design issues from various angles. Narrative immersion contributes to ethical insight and responsibility in visual communication (especially for identity, gender, environmental, and social justice campaigns).
- Relevance in digital and interactive media
  Storytelling plays an essential role in creating the experience of users today for digital environments.

Conclusions and recommendations

Graphic design education and visual media use storytelling as a tool for communication. It functions simultaneously as:
• A structure that keeps thoughts organized
• A pedagogical approach for deep learning;
• A professional skill for strategic communication;
• A device for building empathy and social conscience.
Including narrative approaches in design curricula helps education shape designers who are visually talented, conceptually wise, and socially responsible.

Recommendations

- Implement the introduction of dedicated modules on visual narrative and storytelling theory in graphic design programs.
- Promote interdisciplinary cooperation with literature, film, and media studies.

- Create studio assignments that need narrative mapping done before going into an actual story.
- Use digital storytelling technologies and processes that are in conversation with current visual media platforms.
- Emphasize narrative coherence and communicative impact at reflective critique-based sessions.

Conclusions

Design is an art of thinking ahead and predicting possible futures. In an age of visual stimuli and fractured attention, graphic design education must go beyond aesthetic formalism to think of storytelling as the structural principle by which we think, write, and communicate.

At the heart of storytelling is emotion, and graphic design has the unique ability to evoke feelings instantly. A strong design gives stories coherence. Without thoughtful design, stories can feel scattered and lose their impact.

When design and storytelling is used effectively, it creates a seamless experience where audiences naturally absorb the narrative. Storytelling can help products and communications hook the imagination of users and invite actions and behaviors.

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Museums and monuments, the crisis of memorial devices

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Abstract

Museums and monuments are traditionally understood as memorial devices, designed to preserve and transmit a shared culture through works, images, and documents that evoke a past that was, until now, functional to the narratives established by the dominant power. This memory is not neutral but is the result of precise communicative intentions that also symbolically define the past, shaping collective identity. The contemporary era, characterized by very rapid social mutations, is seeking to produce a critical revision of history by communities. Acknowledging a progressive indifference that the public has shown towards both monuments and works of art inside museums, we have identified in the international landscape some case studies that allow us to grasp the alternative proposals put forward by certain artists and public institutions to remedy this crisis of museums and monuments, which we have more broadly defined as memorial devices. The theoretical framework is based on key concepts of modern and contemporary aesthetic and philosophical debate: starting from Walter Benjamin's "loss of aura" of the work of art, passing through Hans Sedlmayr's "loss of the center," up to the "disappearance of rituals" theorized by Byung-Chul Han. In the contemporary world, new museums are no longer simple containers of works but active and proactive organisms in which the past is subject to continuous reinterpretations. By analyzing some alternative proposals, it has been possible to observe how works inside museums and outside in public squares are no longer objects of static contemplation but offer viewers a critical and dynamic participation.

Keywords

Crisis, museums, monuments, memory, oblivion

Monuments and museums are becoming extinct

The word monument comes from the Latin monumentum, derived from monēre, meaning to remember, to admonish, to make one think. In turn, the museum preserves objects that represent the material testimonies of a nation's culture and worldview. Pierre Nora added natural spaces of particular value to monuments and museums, calling them " places of memory , " symbolic units that make history visible and embody it in a concrete form, uniting space, time, and nature in a shared experience [1].

At this point, it is worth pointing out that the birth of the modern museum occurred shortly before the French Revolution. The British Museum was founded in 1753 (it opened to the public in 1759 and is considered the first truly modern national public museum; it contains millions of artefacts from global history). The Louvre was founded in 1793 and is the second public museum, still considered the most important in the world. It was born following the French Revolution and represents what we might define as its logical consequence. From that moment on, thanks to the ideals of the Enlightenment, rather than revolutionary fury, people's attitudes towards works of art changed. Thus many of the works, until then located in churches or palaces, the exclusive property of an elite, were transferred to a space accessible to all, dedicated to the conservation and public enjoyment of works of art. This turned out to be a powerful gesture, both political and cultural, through which works of art, but also the historical memory crystallized within them, were torn from the hands of the aristocrats and the clergy to allow the people to enjoy them freely[2].

.This shift had profound consequences. As Benjamin observes, when the work loses its here and now, that is, its unique and unrepeatable presence in a place, it loses its aura and therefore its uniqueness; thus calling into question its belonging to a sacred space [3]. The museum replaces sacred places with secular spaces in which the spectator — and no longer the faithful — could still contemplate the work , albeit with different eyes. This substitution maintained such intensity that it allowed the works to retain their aura. In the separate — secularly consecrated — space of the museum, the objects and works were displayed, inaugurating new rituals.

Such a radical transformation in the enjoyment of art was caused by revolutionary events that profoundly undermined the superficial stability of the Western world. This political and cultural crisis had an important impact on the development of modern and contemporary art. Hans Sedlmayr, in the introduction to his book entitled The Loss of the Center[4], describes this crisis as a true mental and physical illness. In it, Sedlmayr goes so far as to create a taxonomy of the "disease of the century" (as an illness of the soul), highlighting in the various chapters: symptoms; diagnosis and course; prognosis and resolution, until reaching the etimasia, that empty throne awaiting the resurrection of the « Savior " typical of early Christian iconography and which the philosopher uses as an allegory of a probable salvation coming from the from the future and from the art to come that will be reflected in it. What the author defines as the progressive dissolution of the spiritual foundation of modern man is expressed in an art that has lost its center, understood as a transcendent principle and symbolic foundation of life, capable of expressing through its works the condition of spiritual and aesthetic disorientation of the twentieth century.

1 Pierre Nora, Les lieux de mémoire (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992), xvii.
2 Andrew McClellan, The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008),
3 Walter Benjamin, L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), 23
4 Hans Sedlmayr, La perdita del centro, 2nd ed. (Turin: Borla, 1969), 7.

Art reveals this crisis of humanity through splashes of color and lumps of matter—abstractions that render nature, men, and things unrecognizable. From abstraction to minimalism and conceptual art , the tabula rasa became almost perfect. This aesthetic evolution reflected a spiritual involution, with some surges of awareness and a desire to find new forms of expression, culminating in a spiritual revival in abstraction. Kandinsky and, even more so, Malevich, erased the old icons, allowing new forms and geometries in their paintings to inaugurate sacred spaces in which spirituality could find new topoi[5].

The loss of the center

The crisis of the 20th century identified by Sedlmayr does not end with the century but continues to worsen even in the following one. Sedlmayr's loss of center is echoed in Han's " The Disappearance of Rites [6]. " This disappearance, according to the Korean-born German philosopher, is the definitive loss of a profound meaning of existence: without faith or symbols , without deep relationships, without roots or duration , therefore without memory . In short, those rites that constituted symbolic devices useful for building a sense of belonging and identity (and therefore of community) have been lost, without the possibility of creating spaces of shared meaning. Without rites and memory, monuments have become useless, inconvenient, and even dangerous .

To better understand, with an example, what this loss/disappearance of rites means for Han, let's read what he writes about the Japanese tea ceremony : Its ritual silence is completely opposed to today 's din of communication, to communication without community . This rite, on the contrary, creates a community without communication. The rite, in fact, does not limit itself to transmitting information, but creates symbolic and spiritual relationships. Digital communication, on the contrary, produces connections without community , eliminating the body and physical presence. The very meaning of the words symbol (*symballein*)[7] and communion (*synagein*)[8] refers to the idea of bringing together, in an intense communion of intent , groups of people. The dissolution of rites has destroyed this possibility , producing isolated individuals, hyperconnected but lacking belonging and identity .

In other equally illuminating texts, the Korean philosopher continues his critical analysis of the vices of contemporaneity . In one, entitled Non-Things, he shows how what we have defined as " the crisis of memorial devices " is further intensifying with the progressive, unstoppable digitalization of the world. Human and collective memory is now replaced by digital archives that record every event without selection, interpretation, or understanding[9]. In this regard, Borges's story, The Map of Empire, comes to mind , in which zealous cartographers create a map so precise that it is as large as the empire itself and, therefore , useless and even harmful and misleading: a copy of reality , a simulation that refers to one that has become even more perfect today, reproducing not only our own, but any virtual world[10]. Today everything is documented:

5 See Wassily Kandinsky, Lo spirituale dell'arte, SE, Milan 2005; Kazimir Malevich , Suprematismo. Il mondo senza soggetto, De Donato, Bari 1968.

6 Byung-Chul Han, La scomparsa dei riti. Una topologia del presente (Milan: Nottetempo, 2021).

7 Han, La scomparsa dei riti, 15: "Rites are, in this sense, also a symbolic practice, a practice of symballein, as they bring people together and create a bond, a totality, a community."

8 Han, La scomparsa dei riti, 43: "The word synagogue comes from the Greek synagein, which means to bring together, just like symballein. It is a place where religious rites are celebrated together."

9 Byung-Chul Han, Le non cose. Come abbiamo smesso di vivere il reale (Turin: Einaudi, 2022.

10 Jorge Luis Borges, Storia universale dell'infamia (Milan: Adelphi, 1997), 123.

images, sounds, movements, information. This unlimited accumulation of data paradoxically produces a form of intense oblivion. When everything is preserved, nothing is truly remembered. All the new devices equipped with digital memory and, above all, artificial intelligence will soon allow the creation of habitats for people never born, no longer our alter egos, but true virtual doppelgangers , in which the coincidence of inhuman opposites is perfected, thus figures without a body and therefore without borders, will show humans nightmarish scenarios, rhizomatic labyrinths in which to get lost between real and virtual.

In this progressive predominance of the virtual, the monument is losing its necessity . It was born to resist oblivion , to fix an event in the collective memory. But in a world where nothing can be forgotten because everything is recorded in digital archives, the monument has now almost completely lost its original function.

This transformation has also affected museum spaces. Once upon a time, as has already been said, people were inclined to contemplation, standing before the works and positioned at what we might define as a ritual distance: a respectful distance from the authority of things , they contemplated them. Today, this distance has completely shortened, due to a hyperconnection with things and with others. Without mediation , everything is subjected to rapid and superficial enjoyment. According to studies conducted in several American museums, it has been shown that the average observation time of a work is about 10-20 seconds[11]. Perhaps this is why many artists, to overcome their indifference, have created relational or interactive works, attempting to blur the distance between people and things.

The new museum, in order to survive, is evolving. The possibilities for this are primarily twofold: on the one hand, we see the emergence of "cathedral in the desert" museums, colossal works of global renown capable of seducing visitors with the spectacularity of their architectural forms (see, for example, the Guggenheim in Bilbao). The other museum, more discreet and ethically relevant, finds political commitment and a non-partisan rereading of history as the main ingredients of its exhibition choices. These politicized museums seem to present themselves as the only alternatives to the disinterest in art that characterizes the contemporary world.

In addition to the two types of museums we've just mentioned, a new phenomenon is emerging that we'll call the « diffused museum . " In its fragmented spaces, the aesthetic experience is diluted in a frenzy of seeing and experiencing superficial experiences like a globalized tourist. The works, but above all the locations, of these multifaceted museums become the perfect backdrops for photographs and selfies, where attention is dispersed in a thousand streams among works, nature, buildings—anything with even a minimal aesthetic or naturalistic value becomes part of a complex and varied organism that has completely lost its identity and its memorial and symbolic function in favor of a superficial and recreational experience. In the contemporary world, without faith or ideals, there is no room for memory, much less for regret.

The transformation of memorial devices

The crisis of the museum and that of the monument are, therefore, mirrored or, better yet, contextual (deriving from the global context). The subtle perception of a loss of value and meaning has contributed (in recent decades) to an ever-increasing number of monuments being destroyed, contested, or reinterpreted. The awareness that the crisis of monuments stemmed largely from social and cultural problems, and the resulting need to address them, has required

11 See Jeffrey K. Smith and Lisa F. Smith, "Spending Time on Art," Empirical Studies of the Arts 19, no. 2 (2001): 229-236

a political approach, in the ethical sense, at times producing forms of iconoclastic violence, clear signs of the profound malaise caused by a different perception of the relationship between memory, history, and power [12], which is pushing those involved to seek alternative ways to reactivate new forms of collective memory.

The power embodied by the monument wavers, and submission often turns to violence and revenge. Having lost all legitimacy , the monument has become a sort of monolith, a stone guest singing its guilty conscience. Behaviors, though iconoclastic, while legitimate, do not justify the violence with which they manifest themselves. The new monuments are " the result of a metamorphosis that has led from heroic figurative icons to anti-heroic conceptual installations, often ironic and modest . [13]"

Post-World War II monuments were traversable spaces, places of experience and reflection, rather than static objects. According to an interesting study on the subject , [14]the monument essentially manifests itself in three new forms: as insinuation, discreet and almost invisible; as interaction, temporary and relational; and as regeneration, integrated into the natural landscape. These new forms reflect the crisis of the old ones, as they attempt to redefine their memorial function in terms of participation rather than contemplation.

Digital contemporaneity has eliminated every distance between the viewer, the work, and the monument. Benjamin had already captured this progressive separation through the distinction between the magician and the surgeon, whereby the former operates from a distance, while the latter penetrates the body. Unlike the magician (who still hides even in the common doctor), at the decisive moment, the surgeon forgoes confronting the patient as a person; rather, he penetrates their interior operatively [15]. Contemporary technology has radicalized this penetration, eliminating every distance. The result is a proximity that prevents the remote participation that constitutes the symbolic.

Today, a piece of architecture, any work of art , is no longer contemplated , but consumed in fragments, in small portions according to tastes, occasions, and fashions. The monument is neither respected nor enjoyed ; rather, it is ignored. In the immense digital sky, digital memory has given way to cloud archives. This state of affairs is leading to the extinction of memorial devices. Museums and monuments created to preserve memory are no longer able to fulfill their purpose. Forced digitization has led, as Han says, to the disappearance of rites and the consequent dissolution of the very concept of community .

Monuments are no longer needed . The past is now entirely contained in cold, immaterial archives, where only the external and superficial parts of lives and history are preserved, soulless because they are disembodied. Atrophied memory generates superficial images, like the imaginations that generate those works housed in museums: objects stripped of their aura , devoid of intensity. This progressive extinction of memorial devices forces us to rethink both the relationship with works of art (both present and past) but also the relationship with history, of which traces remain. For Bourriaud , relational art is the logical contemporary consequence (if the group of artists included in the eponymous text way back in 1998 can still be considered contemporary) of this

12 Dario Gamboni, La distruzione dell'arte. Iconoclastia e vandalismo dalla Rivoluzione francese ai nostri giorni (Milan: Electa, 1998), 10.

13 James E. Young, The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 28.

14 Michela Bassanelli, "Il monumento contemporaneo: tre forme di trasformazione," in Memoria e progetto (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2015), 45-60

15 Benjamin, L'opera d'arte, 35.

crisis of contemplation [16]. In relational artworks, there is no distance between the work and the spectator. Active participation and the encounter between spectator, artist, and work no longer have anything to do with the distance that forced the spectator to look at the work almost in prayer. It is this closeness that determines the crisis of the traditional monument, requiring a profound revision of the very forms of the monument and the concept of the museum.
In an attempt to rethink the monument, Hirschhorn created a series dedicated to philosophers. He writes about these artistic " monuments " and the cultural and aesthetic motivations that drove him to create them in a text endowed with an enviable critical capacity : I am trying to create a new type of monument. A precarious monument. A monument for a limited time. I make monuments for philosophers because today they have something to say (…) Monuments have two parts, or even more . The "classical part," a form, reproduces the thinker with his features, his head, or his body. This part of the monument is a statue. Then, there is another part of the monument: books, videotapes, declarations, biographical documents are there to be consulted[17].

Hirschhorn's artistic practice merely confirms the contemporary need to strengthen the connection with history, not in a nostalgic manner, but rather by proposing a substantial revision of monumental forms in light of the aesthetic demands of the present. According to Hirschhorn , the statue, understood as the classical part of the monument, its external appearance is only the first of its two parts, and not the most substantial , since in the monument , aesthetics easily fades into the background, replaced by its memorial value, what he calls informative, [18]a kind of milestone, intended to mark a distance that is bridged through a solid memory that repeats itself with each new glance, almost as if they were the hands of a perpetual clock that measures, rather than time, a history.
It is interesting to note how Claire Bishop, the important British art historian , generally very critical of the artists belonging to the group of relational artists, particularly esteems the work of Thomas Hirschhorn, whom she considers the least " gratuitously convivial " of the artists of Bourriaud's group [19].
Critical of traditional art and museums, Bishop proposes three museums which, in her opinion, are the most recent examples of "Radical Museology": the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (Netherlands), the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Spain) and the Metelkova Museum of Contemporary Art in Ljubljana [20]. Among these museums, substantial similarities can be found, such as, for example, the need for active participation by the spectator, through socially inclusive forms that allow us to rethink the history of art , not as a given fact in which to trace common stylistic choices and visual models, but above all a conscious relationship with art understood as a field in which conflicts manifest themselves but also as an aesthetic enjoyment where contradictions and vices, but also qualities , are read and treated critically.

16 Nicolas Bourriaud, Estetica relazionale (Milan: Postmediabooks, 2010), 15
17 Thomas Hirschhorn, "Monuments," in T. Hirschhorn: A New Type of Monument, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 12.
18 Thomas Hirschhorn, in Thomas Hirschhorn: A New Type of Monument, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008): "This is a new part of that monument. It is the 'informative part', with its materials it answers the 'why'. The 'classical' statue part answers 'who'. The informative part of the monument is a physical place to isolate oneself, to sit down, in a small construction (as in the kiosk project) and to study and learn about the work of the philosophers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week," 12.
19 Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," October, no. 110 (2004): 55.
20 Claire Bishop, Museologia radicale. (Milan: Johan & Levi, 2022)

This reactivates in the public an active and even antagonistic vision of art in which past and present dialogue objectively, without nostalgia or regrets for works and authors mythologized in a way that is functional to one's own political beliefs or, to a lesser extent, to one's aesthetic ones. The new way of addressing this unprecedented crisis of art, understood as a substantial part of historical memory, requires greater attention to transcending contemplation, which will require a new way of creating and enjoying monuments, reconsidering their importance and evaluating their historical and memorial necessity without pretense. The museum itself will need to be rethought, no longer as a mere container but as a device in which works are not installed under the banner of critical historical revisionism, but rather to reactivate an identity where politics guarantees the possibility of a pluralistic debate, a source of awareness and growth.

Conclusions

This research aimed to explore the profound crisis affecting traditional memorial devices — museums and monuments — in the contemporary world, analyzing the radical transformation in the ways in which collective memory is produced, enjoyed, and preserved. This study clearly demonstrates how the original function of these devices is being radically challenged.

The loss of the artwork's aura, diagnosed by Walter Benjamin in the age of mechanical reproducibility, has found a paradoxical continuation in the age of digital image reproducibility . The "disappearance of rituals" theorized by Byung-Chul Han has shown how the symbolic and communal foundation that made a profound aesthetic and memorial experience possible has been definitively eroded, giving way to superficial connections and an accumulation of data that, in effect, produces a new form of oblivion.

The crisis of museums and monuments has not decreed their disappearance, but rather the beginning of a profound transformation. As we 've seen, alongside phenomena of iconoclastic rejection and tendencies toward touristic spectacularization, new practices and theoretical reflections have emerged that seek to rethink museum spaces and monuments in dynamic, participatory, and even conflictual terms. The relational art of Nicolas Bourriaud, along with Thomas Hirschhorn's "precarious monuments," or the "radical museology" experiences analyzed by Claire Bishop, point to new possible directions: in which comparison and debate enable the creation of shared values.

Ultimately, the challenge for the future lies not so much in preserving the forms inherited from the past at all costs, but in radically rethinking the social and cultural role of museums and monuments. They are called to become no longer static repositories of a glorified or regretted past, but dynamic devices capable of triggering critical reflection on the present, critically using historical memory as a tool for understanding the contradictions of our time, which seems to have lost the sense of ritual and the need for remembrance, through the creation of new forms of community that allow us to overcome this stalemate.

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The role of social media in promoting cultural tourism in Albania: The case of Tiktok and the use of #visitalbania

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Abstract

This study analyzes the role of social media in promoting cultural tourism in Albania, focusing on the platform TikTok and the use of the hashtag #VisitAlbania as a digital tool for promoting cultural identity and increasing tourist interest in Albania. In the context of the development of new media and the transformation of tourism communication, TikTok has become an important space for constructing a cultural image through short videos, visual narratives, and global audience interaction. The study is based on a qualitative analysis of content published under the hashtag #VisitAlbania, examining how elements of Albanian cultural heritage are promoted, including archaeological and historical sites, museum cities, traditional clothing, folk dances, traditional music, and cultural rituals. These elements are presented on TikTok not only as tourism products, but also as symbols of Albanian national identity and cultural authenticity. The analysis shows that the use of dynamic visual content, traditional music, and emotional narratives has significantly contributed to increasing Albania's international visibility as a cultural tourism destination. Furthermore, the study highlights that the hashtag #VisitAlbania has created a virtual space in which users actively contribute to the promotion of Albanian culture through travel videos, tourism experiences, and traditional performances. The findings suggest that social media, especially TikTok, plays an important role in increasing the number of tourists visiting Albania by influencing global perceptions of the destination, promoting intangible cultural heritage, and creating a digital tourism identity for the country. The study concludes that a deeper understanding of TikTok usage practices, as well as the integration of social media into cultural marketing strategies, represents an important opportunity for the sustainable development of Albanian cultural tourism.

Keywords

Cultural tourism, Tiktok, #visitalbania, social media, cultural identity, cultural heritage, digital marketing, Albania

Introduction

Digital transformation has fundamentally changed the way tourism destinations create, communicate, and negotiate their public image. Rather than being shaped exclusively by public institutions, tourism agencies, and private operators, destination image is now co-produced by a broad ecosystem of actors, including tourists, local residents, content creators, influencers, media organizations, and platform algorithms. Within this environment, user-generated content is no longer merely commentary about a destination; it has become an integral part of the process through which destinations gain visibility, attractiveness, and cultural meaning.

TikTok occupies a distinctive position within this transformation. Its architecture is built around short-form videos, rapid storytelling, the integration of music, text, editing techniques, and visual effects, as well as a recommendation algorithm capable of distributing content far beyond a creator's existing audience. This logic favors emotionally engaging and visually compelling content that can create an immediate impression of a place. Recent tourism studies suggest that user-generated videos, visual vividness, informational value, and emotional resonance significantly influence destination image and travel intentions (Li et al. 2021; Zhou, Sotiriadis, and Shen 2023; Polat et al. 2024).

For Albania, this digital transformation is particularly significant. The country possesses an exceptionally rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including historical urban centers, archaeological sites, cultural landscapes, vernacular architecture, traditional crafts, rituals, gastronomy, music, dances, and traditional clothing.

UNESCO recognizes several Albanian World Heritage properties, including Butrint and the Historic Centres of Berat and Gjirokastër, as well as elements of intangible cultural heritage such as Albanian iso-polyphony, the xhubleta traditional garment, and the craftsmanship of the lahuta (UNESCO 2025a; UNESCO 2025b). This cultural wealth provides a strong foundation for cultural tourism; however, its tourism potential depends not only on the existence of heritage assets but also on how effectively they are communicated to international audiences through digital media.

Within this context, the hashtag #VisitAlbania functions as both a semantic and technological hub, connecting diverse forms of content related to Albania. It aggregates videos created by public institutions, tourism businesses, international travelers, members of the Albanian diaspora, and domestic users, thereby creating a continuously evolving digital archive of places, experiences, and cultural symbols. This collaborative production of destination image raises important questions concerning representation, authenticity, and virality: Which aspects of Albanian culture become most visible? How are they adapted to the visual aesthetics of TikTok? Which elements remain underrepresented or excluded?

This article aims to examine the role of TikTok and the hashtag #VisitAlbania in promoting Albania's cultural tourism and shaping the country's international cultural image. Its primary contribution lies in connecting theories of cultural tourism, representation, and destination branding with an analysis of the audiovisual practices of one of today's most influential short-video platforms, whose algorithmic environment increasingly shapes global perceptions of tourism destinations.

Research problem, aim, and research questions

Research problem

The central research problem of this study concerns the tension between the democratizing potential of social media and the tendency of digital platforms to simplify cultural complexity into short, visually attractive, and highly shareable content. On the one hand, TikTok enables users to produce and disseminate their own narratives about Albania, allowing a wider range of

voices to participate in the construction of the country's tourism image. On the other hand, the platform's emphasis on speed, trends, and audience engagement may encourage the reproduction of stereotypes, the spectacularization of culture, or the selective representation of cultural heritage.Understanding how this balance is negotiated is essential for evaluating TikTok's role in promoting cultural tourism while preserving the authenticity and diversity of Albania's cultural identity.

Research aim

The primary aim of this study is to examine how TikTok and the hashtag #VisitAlbania contribute to the promotion of cultural tourism and to the construction of Albania's cultural image in the international digital environment.
More specifically, the study seeks to explore how audiovisual storytelling, user-generated content, and platform-specific communication practices influence the visibility of Albanian cultural heritage and shape international perceptions of Albania as a cultural tourism destination.

Research questions

The study is guided by the following primary research question:
How do TikTok and the hashtag #VisitAlbania influence the promotion of cultural tourism and the construction of Albania's cultural image at the international level?
To address this question, the study investigates the following secondary research questions:
Which elements of Albanian cultural heritage are most frequently represented in videos published under #VisitAlbania?
How is Albanian cultural identity constructed through visual and audiovisual narratives?
What role do traditional music, folklore, and cultural rituals play in tourism-related content?
How do short-form videos and visual storytelling influence perceptions of Albania as a cultural tourism destination?
How do users contribute to Albania's digital tourism promotion through user-generated content?
To what extent does #VisitAlbania enhance Albania's international visibility?
Which forms of visual communication are most effective in promoting Albanian cultural heritage?
Beyond addressing these questions, the study also examines how TikTok transforms cultural tourism marketing by combining authenticity with the dynamics of platform virality and by contributing to the development of Albania's digital tourism identity.

Theoretical framework

Cultural tourism: from monument consumption to lived experience

Cultural tourism has evolved from a narrow understanding, primarily associated with visits to monuments and museums, toward a broader concept that includes ways of life, creativity, gastronomy, rituals, and interactions with communities. Richards (2018) argues that recent developments have shifted attention from the cultural object itself to experience and processes of meaning-making. From this perspective, the tourist does not merely consume heritage assets but constructs a symbolic relationship with the place.
This approach is particularly relevant for Albania, where the cultural offer is not limited to historical centers and archaeological sites. It also includes hospitality, food, markets, songs, dances, crafts, and family or community rituals. TikTok content can connect these forms into a unified audiovisual narrative, presenting culture as something that is seen, heard, tasted, and experienced.
However, cultural tourism is also closely linked to the issue of authenticity. Authenticity is not

necessarily a fixed property of an object; it can be produced through interpretation, performance, and visitor expectations. On TikTok, this issue becomes more complex, as content must simultaneously appear spontaneous and be curated, represent everyday life while also conforming to platform-specific aesthetic codes.

Representation, cultural identity, and the nation as narrative

According to Hall (1997), representation is not a neutral reflection of reality but a process through which meaning is produced. Images, sounds, words, and symbols determine what becomes visible, how it is categorized, and which associations are activated. Thus, a short video from Berat, a traditional dance performance, or a table of local food are not merely documentation; they are acts of representation that construct a particular version of Albania.
Anderson's (2006) concept of the nation as an "imagined community" helps explain how national identity is reproduced through shared narratives and symbols. In digital space, hashtags can function as aggregating mechanisms for these narratives. #VisitAlbania creates a space where meanings about Albania converge, compete, and circulate beyond national borders.
This process does not produce a single identity. Content may portray Albania as Mediterranean, Balkan, European, traditional, modern, unknown, or "undiscovered." Often, promotional value emerges precisely from the combination of contrasts: ancient cities and contemporary venues, traditional rituals and modern editing styles, rural landscapes and urban rhythms.

Destination image and digital branding

Destination image refers to the knowledge, feelings, and evaluations individuals associate with a place. It is constructed through induced sources, such as official campaigns, and organic sources, such as traveler narratives and personal experiences. Social media blends these two categories, as content can appear personal even when supported by a brand or institution.
Xiang and Gretzel (2010) demonstrated that social media has become a key source of tourism information. In the era of short-form video, informational function is combined with emotional stimulation. Within seconds, users can form an impression of a destination's atmosphere, colors, sounds, and rhythm. For this reason, destination image is constructed not only through argument but through sensory perception.
Digital destination branding is co-produced. Destination management organizations do not fully control the brand; they may propose themes, hashtags, and visuals, but audiences reinterpret, modify, and evaluate them. This requires a strategy based not only on transmission but also on curation, dialogue, and amplification of high-quality community content.

User-generated content and credibility

User-generated content (UGC) is particularly valuable in tourism because it is perceived as evidence of lived experience. Munar and Jacobsen (2014) show that sharing tourism experiences is driven by social, altruistic, community, and identity-related motivations. Users publish not only to inform others but also to construct memory, reputation, and belonging.
In the case of #VisitAlbania, UGC may be produced by international tourists, Albanian residents, diaspora communities, local guides, businesses, and professional creators. This diversity broadens the repertoire of images but also creates inequalities: videos with higher technical quality, faster pacing, and better alignment with trends are more likely to gain visibility. Thus, what appears as the "voice of users" is mediated by production skills and algorithmic logic.
The credibility of UGC is associated with signs of spontaneity, the presence of the author within the experience, practical details, and audience reactions. Comments, questions, and reposts can transform a video into a micro-forum where the destination image is negotiated in real time.

TikTok, short-form video, and the logic of virality

TikTok organizes communication around the combination of vertical video, audio, on-screen text, hashtags, and interaction. In tourism, this format is particularly effective for creating "destination moments": a panoramic view, a before/after transition, a ritual, a dish being prepared, or a dance sequence. These moments turn place into an imaginable experience.
Research on TikTok and destination choice highlights the role of information usefulness, vividness, entertainment, credibility, and engagement. Zhou, Sotiriadis, and Shen (2023) link TikTok use to destination decision-making among younger tourists, while Polat et al. (2024) emphasize the persuasive power of user-generated videos. Recent studies on TikTok place-making further show that the platform does not only promote places; it produces new meanings about them (Hardy et al., 2025).
However, virality is not synonymous with completeness of representation. Algorithms favor immediate performance, whereas culture requires context. The challenge for cultural marketing is to maintain attention without detaching cultural elements from their history, community, and meaning.

Study methodology

Methodological approach

The study is based on a qualitative approach, appropriate for interpreting how culture is represented and communicated in digital space. The aim is not to test a causal relationship between a specific video and the number of visitors, but to identify dominant patterns of representation, audiovisual strategies, and the mechanisms through which TikTok may influence the image of a destination.

Research method

The main method is qualitative content analysis, combined with visual, semiotic, and narrative analysis. Content analysis identifies recurring themes and categories; visual analysis examines composition, colors, rhythm, subjects, and transitions; narrative analysis assesses how a video constructs a story, emotion, or tourism promise.

Sample and selection criteria

The corpus consists of public videos tagged with #VisitAlbania. The selection is purposive and continues until thematic saturation, i.e., until new materials no longer introduce significantly new categories. This methodological choice avoids claims of statistical representativeness and is consistent with the interpretative nature of the study.
Inclusion criteria are: direct relevance to Albania; presence of an element of cultural tourism; visual or audiovisual identifiability of the cultural element; publication within the period defined by the researcher; and presence of observable audience interaction. Historical centers, monuments, archaeological sites, museums, folklore traditions, music, dances, gastronomy, crafts, rituals, and cultural activities are included.

Data collection and documentation

Data are collected through systematic observation of content under #VisitAlbania. For each video, the following are recorded: main theme, location, cultural elements, type of creator, language, music or voice, on-screen text, supplementary hashtags, editing style, emotional tone, and visible interaction indicators at the time of collection. Due to the dynamic nature of the platform, the observation date must be recorded alongside all data.

Coding scheme

Dimension	**Guiding categories**	**Analytical question**
Cultural object	Material heritage; intangible heritage; gastronomy; cultural landscape	What is being represented?
Visual form	Panorama; close-up; transition; POV; montage; on-screen text	How is culture made visible?
Auditory form	Traditional music; trending audio; narration; ambient sounds	How does audio construct atmosphere and meaning?
Narrative	Discovery; authenticity; adventure; nostalgia; hospitality; national pride	What story is told about Albania?
Author	Tourist; resident; diaspora; business; institution; influencer	Who produces the image?
Interaction	Likes; comments; shares; questions; recommendations	How does the audience negotiate meaning?
Ethics and authenticity	Context; attribution; community respect; commercialization	Is cultural meaning preserved?

Data analysis and reliability

Analysis is conducted in two cycles. The first uses open coding to identify recurring motifs and forms. In the second cycle, codes are grouped into broader categories: material heritage, intangible heritage, folklore, cultural landscape, tourist experience, and national identity.
Reliability is strengthened through maintaining a codebook, revising categories, and documenting analytical decisions.

Ethics

Although the videos are public, the analysis follows the principle of minimizing exposure of individuals. Usernames do not need to be reproduced unless they belong to institutional accounts or citation is essential. Footage of children, sensitive rituals, or vulnerable communities requires additional caution. The study analyzes content patterns rather than personal profiles.

Findings and interpretation

The thematic analysis of the #VisitAlbania corpus reveals seven main trends. These findings are qualitative interpretations of content patterns and should not be read as statistical measurements of the entire hashtag.

Dominance of visually distinctive heritage

The most prevalent elements are those that fit easily into the vertical format and fast-paced rhythm: cobblestone streets, traditional houses, castles, Ottoman façades, mosaics, amphitheaters, and panoramic city views. Berat and Gjirokastër function as visual icons because they immediately offer a recognizable aesthetic and a sense of history. Butrint, Apollonia, and other sites often appear through an alternation between archaeological detail and landscape.
This selection shows that TikTok favors heritage with "instant legibility." A distinctive building or panorama can be understood without long explanation, whereas more complex histories require narration, text, or video series. Consequently, digital visibility is not evenly distributed across all forms of heritage.

Intangible culture as audiovisual performance

Dances, costumes, songs, instruments, and rituals are naturally suited to a platform centered on sound and movement. Traditional music can simultaneously function as cultural content and as a structuring element for editing. The rhythm of the song determines cuts, transitions, and emotional peaks.
Iso-polyphony, the lahuta, and costumes such as the xhubleta have strong international distinctiveness because they combine sonic, visual, and historical uniqueness. However, their representation requires context. Without explanation, they may be perceived only as aesthetic spectacle. More complete content combines performance with brief explanations of origin, community, or ceremonial context.

The narrative of "discovery" and Albania as a surprising destination

A recurring narrative is discovery: Albania is presented as more beautiful, richer, or more modern than expected. Phrases such as "I didn't expect this," "hidden gem," or "visit before it gets too popular" create curiosity and urgency. This narrative helps challenge outdated negative images, but it can also position the country in a framework where its value is measured through outsider surprise.
In branding terms, "discovery" is effective because it turns the viewer into a potential explorer. However, a long-term strategy should move beyond the rhetoric of an unknown destination toward a more stable proposition: Albania as a cultural destination with a documented identity, diverse offerings, and active communities.

Blending tradition with modernity

Many videos make Albanian culture accessible by combining it with modern codes: trending music over historical imagery, rapid transitions from everyday clothing to traditional costume, or traditional gastronomy presented with modern food-video aesthetics. This blending signals that culture is not only the past but a living practice.
For Albania's digital identity, this is a strength, as it avoids a museum-like image and connects heritage with contemporary life. The risk arises when trends overshadow content and cultural symbols are used merely as decoration without explanation or respect for context.

Emotional storytelling and hospitality

The most powerful narratives go beyond visuals and include micro-stories: meeting a craftsman, cooking with a family, attending a local festival, or a traveler's emotional reaction to a song. These videos create emotional closeness and transform culture from something to be seen into

something to be experienced.
Hospitality emerges as a key element of Albanian identity. In tourism terms, it humanizes the destination and reduces traveler uncertainty. However, marketing should avoid essentialism, i.e., portraying all Albanians as necessarily embodying a fixed national trait.

UGC as co-production of the Albania brand

The hashtag #VisitAlbania functions not only as a search tag but as a co-production infrastructure. Each video contributes a fragment to the collective archive of the destination. Tourists provide surprise and comparison; residents provide local knowledge; diaspora contributes nostalgia and cultural mediation; businesses provide practical information; institutions provide legitimacy and curation.
This plurality increases perceived authenticity but reduces control over the brand. Comments may correct inaccuracies, recommend alternative places, or challenge representations. In this sense, branding becomes not a final product but a process of public negotiation.

Most effective visual formats

The most effective formats include: strong opening visuals within the first seconds; a clear "problem–discovery–resolution" narrative; combination of panorama and human detail; short bilingual text; music tied to place; explanation of a cultural fact; presence of the creator's face or voice; and calls for interaction through questions.
The most sustainable content achieves a balance between aesthetics, information, and cultural respect.

Discussion

The findings support the idea that TikTok transforms cultural marketing from a transmissive model into a participatory and algorithmic one. Destinations are no longer presented only through brochures or centralized campaigns but through thousands of micro-narratives competing for attention. This increases Albania's visibility potential without requiring budgets comparable to larger destinations.
At the same time, visibility is not equivalent to a verifiable impact on tourist numbers. INSTAT data show growth in tourist flows and foreign visitors in recent years, but a qualitative TikTok analysis cannot attribute this increase to a single platform (INSTAT 2026). TikTok should be understood as one factor in a broader ecosystem including air connectivity, prices, recommendations, international media, and promotion policies.
The relationship between authenticity and virality emerges as the central theoretical issue. Digital authenticity does not imply absence of editing; it relates to coherence between claim, experience, and context. A video can be highly curated and still responsible if it identifies the location, respects cultural bearers, and avoids false claims.
From a heritage perspective, TikTok can raise awareness, especially for intangible forms that exist through performance. However, promotion must be accompanied by protective measures. Increased tourism demand may lead to overcrowding, commercialization, and pressure on communities and sites. Therefore, cultural marketing should be linked to visitor management, seasonal and geographic distribution, and local benefit-sharing.
The study shows that #VisitAlbania can function as part of a digital tourism identity, but this identity must be plural. A sustainable narrative should not rely only on "Europe's hidden secret," beaches, or low prices. It should emphasize cultural continuity, regional diversity, creativity, and the coexistence of heritage with modern life.

Recommendations

Creation of a national manual for cultural TikTok content, including guidance on format, language, subtitles, attribution, music use, and filming ethics.
Curation, not only production: official accounts should amplify high-quality UGC while crediting creators.
Thematic series and continuous storytelling instead of isolated videos.
Bilingual content and accurate metadata to improve accessibility and discoverability.
Partnerships with heritage bearers such as artisans, musicians, dancers, researchers, and communities.
Evaluation beyond views, including saves, travel-intent comments, clicks, and conversions.
Viral content management with practical visitor guidance and responsible tourism messaging.
A digital archive and periodic research to track changes in Albania's image over time.

Study limitations

The first limitation relates to TikTok's dynamic nature. Search results, ranking, and engagement metrics constantly change and depend on location, user history, and recommendation systems.
The second limitation is the exclusive focus on #VisitAlbania. Relevant content may use other hashtags, city names, or none at all.
The third limitation concerns qualitative interpretation, which inherently involves subjectivity despite coding frameworks and reflexivity.
The fourth limitation is the inability to infer causality between TikTok content and tourism growth. This would require surveys, search and booking data analysis, or longitudinal and experimental designs.

Conclusions

TikTok and the hashtag #VisitAlbania have created an important environment for promoting Albanian cultural tourism. Through short videos, music, text, and interaction, material and intangible heritage is translated into forms suitable for international circulation. Historical cities, archaeological sites, costumes, dances, music, and gastronomy appear not only as tourism products but as expressions of national identity and cultural authenticity.
The platform plays a dual role: it increases visibility and democratizes image production, while also subjecting culture to the pressures of speed, trends, and virality. The most effective content balances visual appeal, information, emotion, and cultural context.
#VisitAlbania functions as a space of co-produced identity, where tourists, residents, diaspora, businesses, and institutions contribute to a digital tourism image. This potential can become long-term value only through strategy: UGC curation, community partnerships, ethical standards, impact measurement, and integration of promotion with sustainable destination management.
In conclusion, integrating TikTok into cultural marketing should not be treated as a mechanical use of a platform, but as an institutional capacity to understand short-form video language, participatory culture, and representational responsibility. In this way, social media can contribute not only to attracting visitors but also to the recognition, appreciation, and protection of Albanian cultural heritage.

Appendix A. Proposed coding sheet for videos with #VisitAlbania

Field	Description / values
Video ID	An anonymized video code
Publication / observation date	Both dates, where available
Author type	Tourist, resident, diaspora, business, institution, influencer
Location	City, site, or region
Cultural element	Material, intangible, gastronomy, crafts, rituals, cultural landscape
Narrative	Discovery, authenticity, hospitality, nostalgia, adventure, national pride
Visual form	POV, panorama, close-up, transition, montage, before/after
Audio	Traditional, trending audio, narration, ambient sounds
Text and language	On-screen titles, subtitles, languages used
Hashtags	#VisitAlbania and additional tags
Engagement	Views, likes, comments, shares at time of observation
Tone	Positive, informative, emotional, humorous, critical
Cultural context	Complete, partial, missing
Ethical notes	Attribution, privacy, stereotypes, commercialization

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From rationalist heritage to measured heritage: SHM as a long-term safeguarding strategy for the grand concert hall at the university of arts in Tirana

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Abstract

The Grand Concert Hall of the University of Arts in Tirana, originally designed by Gherardo Bosio as the Theatre of the Albanian Dopolavoro during the Italian Rationalist period, represents one of the most significant examples of twentieth-century architectural heritage in Albania. Despite its recognized architectural value, modern rationalist heritage often lacks long-term safeguarding strategies, particularly in seismic contexts.This paper proposes a shift from episodic restoration toward a preventive conservation model grounded in Structural Health Monitoring (SHM). Drawing on historical-architectural research, the 2020 feasibility study for restoration, the completed rehabilitation works, and the 2025 monitoring strategy, the study introduces the concept of "measured heritage."Rather than interpreting monitoring as a purely technical device, the paper frames it as a cultural strategy that transforms the theatre into a continuously interpreted heritage system. The Grand Concert Hall at the University of Arts becomes a pilot model in which rationalist clarity, structural logic, and contemporary digital stewardship converge to redefine conservation paradigms for modern architecture in transitional urban environments.

Keywords

Preventive conservation, rationalist architecture, seismic context, cultural stewardship

Introduction

The safeguarding of twentieth-century architecture presents specific theoretical and operational challenges. Unlike ancient monuments, modern buildings are frequently perceived as recent and replaceable, even when they embody substantial historical, architectural, and cultural value. This ambiguity is particularly evident in rationalist architecture, whose importance lies not only in its formal language but in its structural logic and spatial rigor.

The Grand Concert Hall of the University of Arts in Tirana designed by Gherardo Bosio during the Italian Rationalist period, originally functioned as the Theatre of the Albanian Dopolavoro. While its historical context reflects a complex geopolitical moment, its present significance resides primarily in its architectural quality, typological coherence, and continued cultural use.

Today, the theatre operates as an academic and artistic infrastructure. Continuous use, increased technological installations, and seismic exposure have progressively altered its performance conditions. Traditional restoration models—intervening only after visible deterioration—are insufficient for buildings that remain structurally vulnerable yet architecturally active.[1]

This research therefore proposes a transition from "restored heritage" to "measured heritage." The concept refers to a conservation model grounded in continuous observation, structural awareness, and institutional responsibility. Through historical analysis, feasibility assessment, restoration works, and the implementation of SHM technology, the Grand Concert Hall at the University of Arts becomes a case study for a dynamic safeguarding paradigm.

In seismic contexts such as Tirana, where structural risk may remain latent for decades, preventive monitoring transforms conservation into an anticipatory practice. The theatre is no longer understood as a static monument but as a performative architectural system requiring long-term knowledge-based management.[2]

Literature review

Modern heritage and rationalist architecture

The conservation of twentieth-century architecture has gained increasing recognition, yet modern heritage continues to face issues of legitimacy and methodological definition. Reinforced concrete, hybrid structural systems, and experimental construction techniques often exhibit accelerated aging compared to traditional materials.[3]

DOCOMOMO and subsequent scholarship have emphasized the need for specific strategies addressing the fragility and significance of modern architecture. Rationalist works, in particular, integrate formal abstraction with structural clarity. Their conservation requires understanding the inseparability of architectural language and constructive logic.

1 Andia Guga, "The Overseas Italian Rationalist Architecture: Theater Buildings between Analysis and Comparison" (PhD diss., University of Florence, 2015), chap. 3; Andia Guga, "The Theaters in the Colonies," in Architecture and Urbanism in the Overseas Lands: Dodecanese, Ethiopia, Albania 1924–1943 (Forlì: Bononia University Press, 2017), 231–233; Riccardo Renzi, Gherardo Bosio: Opera completa 1927–1941 (Firenze: Edifir, 2016), 278–301, 318–325, 362–363, 365–367; Armand Vokshi, Tracce dell'architettura italiana in Albania 1925–1943 (Firenze: DNA, 2014), chap. 3.

2 Fabio Capanni, Riccardo Renzi, and Andia Guga, "From Project to Realization: The Feasibility Study for the Restoration and Recovery of the Academy Theater - University of Arts in Tirana," in Albania in the Third Millennium: Architecture, City, Territory (Tirana: Deltaprint, 2024), 16–22; Koen Van Balen and Aziliz Vandesande, "Preventive Conservation and Maintenance of Built Heritage," International Journal of Heritage in the Digital Era 4, no. 1 (2015): 1–14; Michela Rossi and Dionysios Bournas, "Structural Health Monitoring and Management of Cultural Heritage Structures: A State-of-the-Art Review," Applied Sciences 13, no. 11 (2023): 6450, https://doi.org/10.3390/app13116450.

3 DOCOMOMO International, "The Modern Movement and the World Heritage List," DOCOMOMO Journal 62 (2020): 6–15; John H. Stubbs, Time Honored: A Global View of Architectural Conservation (New Jersey: Wiley, 2009); Jukka Jokilehto, A History of Architectural Conservation (London: Routledge, 2002).

The Grand Concert Hall in Tirana belongs to this broader Mediterranean rationalist heritage. Its preservation demands an approach centered on architectural quality, typology, and structural coherence.

From restoration theory to preventive conservation

Italian restoration theory, particularly Cesare Brandi's *Theory of Restoration*, framed conservation as a critical act aimed at preserving aesthetic and historical authenticity. While foundational, this model was largely intervention-based.[4] Contemporary conservation frameworks—including ICOMOS guidelines and UNESCO recommendations—have progressively shifted toward preventive conservation. Risk assessment, maintenance planning, and continuous documentation are now considered essential components of safeguarding.[5] For modern rationalist architecture, this shift is crucial. Buildings constructed in early reinforced concrete may not display immediate pathologies but remain vulnerable to seismic stress, cumulative load modifications, and material fatigue.

Structural monitoring as knowledge infrastructure

Structural Health Monitoring (SHM), originally developed in engineering fields, has increasingly been adapted to heritage structures in seismic regions. Beyond its technical dimension, SHM represents a transformation in heritage governance.[6] Continuous data acquisition enables buildings to be understood as dynamic systems rather than static artifacts. Monitoring becomes a form of extended documentation that supports risk mitigation, maintenance planning, and institutional accountability. The concept of "measured heritage" emerges at this intersection: conservation becomes a continuous interpretative process supported by evolving evidence.
The University of Arts offers a concrete application of this paradigm.

4 Cesare Brandi, Teoria del restauro (Firenze: Nardini, 1963); Giovanni Carbonara, Avvicinamento al restauro: Teoria, storia, monumenti (Napoli: Liguori, 1997).
5 ICOMOS, "Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties," ICOMOS International Scientific Committee for Analysis and Restoration of Structures of Architectural Heritage, 2017; UNESCO, Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2011); Van Balen and Vandesande, "Preventive Conservation and Maintenance," 1–14.
6 Maria Pina Limongelli, Zehra Irem Turksezer, and Pier Francesco Giordano, "Structural Health Monitoring for Cultural Heritage Constructions: A Resilience Perspective," IABSE Symposium, Guimaraes, 2019; Rossi and Bournas, "Structural Health Monitoring and Management," 6450.

Methodology

Historical–architectural investigation

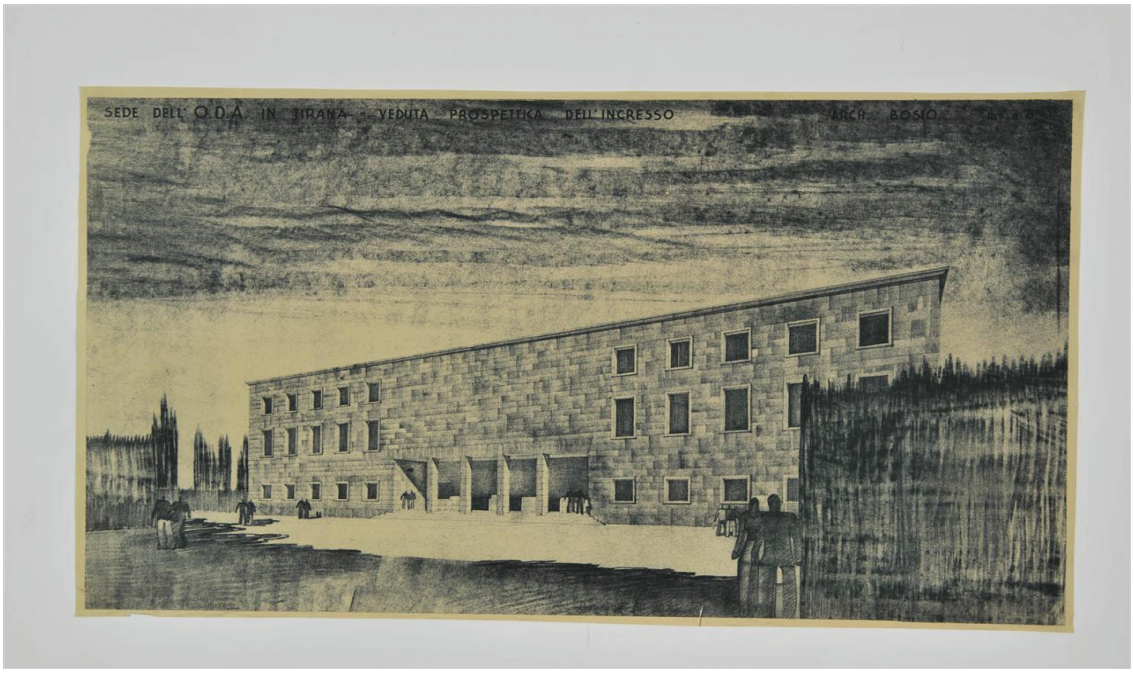

Figure 1. Perspective drawing of the O.D.A, Gherardo Bosio, 1939 (AEGB Archive, Florence, Italy)

The methodological framework of this research is grounded in a multi-layered approach combining historical analysis, architectural interpretation, and structural assessment. The first phase consisted of an in-depth study of the building's original design, subsequent transformations and archival documentation at the Gherardo Bosio's Hires archive in Florence (AEGB) and at the Central Technical Construction Archive in Albania (AQTN). [7]

Particular attention was devoted to reconstructing the architectural logic of the theatre conceived by Gherardo Bosio within the rationalist cultural milieu of the interwar period. The original Grand Concert Hall reflects key principles of rationalist theatrical typology: geometric clarity, structural legibility, and volumetric hierarchy. The spatial organization is defined by a longitudinal axis emphasizing frontal stage orientation, with carefully proportioned relationships between audience volume and stage depth. The hall's proportions express a balanced interplay between horizontal expansion and vertical containment, where structural rhythm and spatial continuity coincide.[8]

7 Guga, "Overseas Italian Rationalist Architecture," chap. 3; Renzi, Gherardo Bosio, 278–301, 318–325, 362–363, 365–367; Vokshi, Tracce dell'architettura italiana in Albania, chap. 3.

8 Guga, "Theaters in the Colonies," 231–233; Renzi, Gherardo Bosio, 278–301, 318–325.

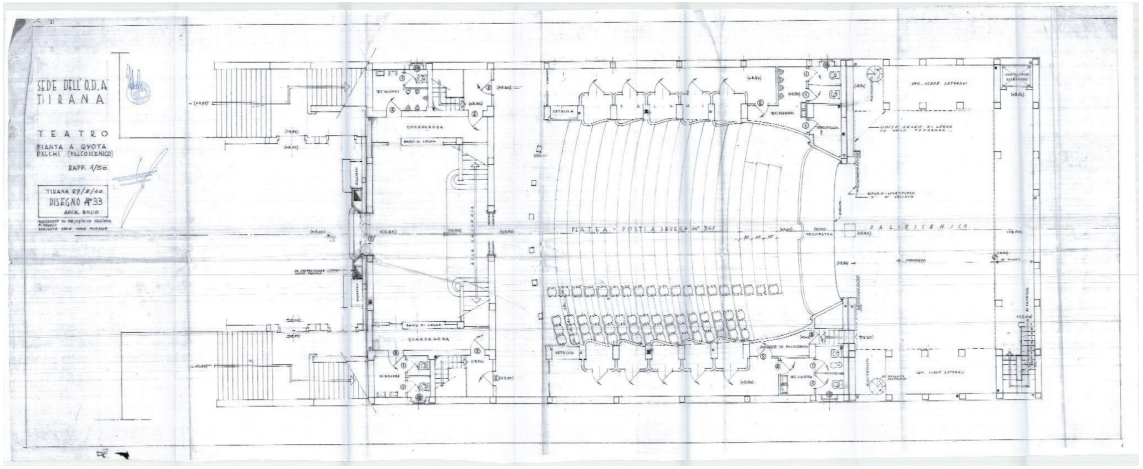

Figure 2. Executive plan of the O.D.A., Gherardo Bosio, 1940, (Central Technical Archive of Construction, Tirana, Albania)

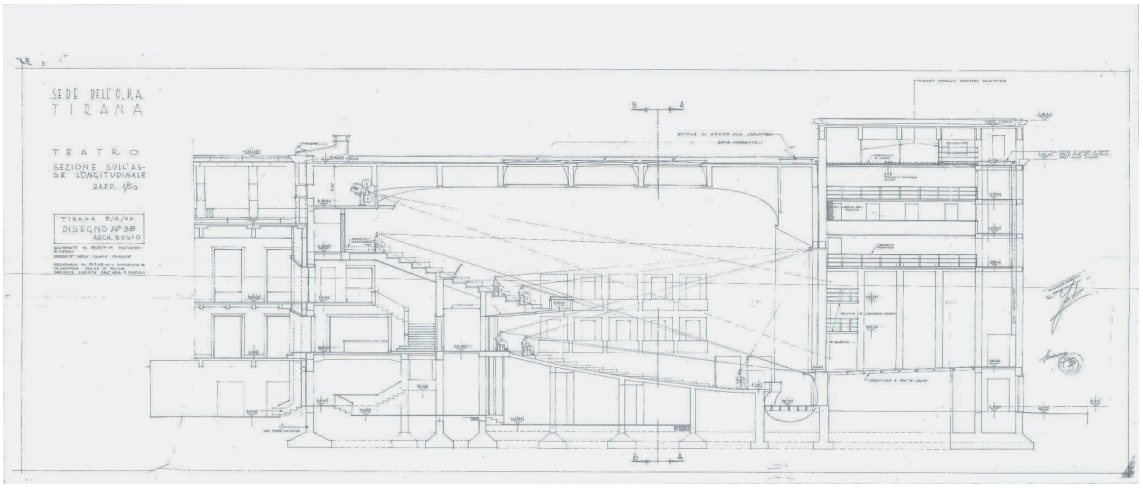

Figure 3. Longitudinal section of the O.D.A., Gherardo Bosio, 1940, (Central Technical Archive of Construction, Tirana, Albania)

From a constructive standpoint, the building employs reinforced concrete structural frames combined with masonry infill systems, typical of early twentieth-century institutional architecture. The load-bearing scheme reveals a modular structural grid that defines both façade articulation and interior spatial sequencing. The volumetric composition is characterized by a rational stratification of masses: a dominant frontal body with a portico in front of the entrance hall, preceding the volume of the Great Concert Hall, flanked by secondary service wings, and articulated through restrained façade ornamentation.
This typological and structural reading is essential for understanding not only the architectural value of the building but also its structural behavior and vulnerabilities. The theatre's volumetric concentration and reinforced concrete elements constitute both its defining architectural features and potential points of stress under seismic stress.

Diagnostic and feasibility framework

The second phase involved studying the feasibility project for the restoration of the Grand Concert Hall, commissioned by the Albanian Ministry of Culture, developed by the Department

of Architecture at the University of Florence, Italy, and financed by Trans Adriatic Pipeline in 2020.[9]
This stage included surveys, preliminary structural assessments, material diagnostics, and evaluation of performance conditions under contemporary use.
The feasibility framework highlighted several critical aspects: material aging in reinforced concrete components, localized cracking patterns, modifications introduced during functional adaptation, and cumulative stress generated by increased occupancy and technological installations. While no immediate structural failure was identified, the analysis revealed vulnerabilities associated with long-term seismic exposure and evolving load conditions.
The feasibility study also exposed the limitations of traditional restoration paradigms when applied to modern heritage buildings that remain in continuous operation. Episodic intervention, typically triggered by visible deterioration, does not adequately address latent structural risks or cumulative micro-damage. This gap between observable pathology and potential vulnerability suggested the necessity of a more continuous and anticipatory safeguarding strategy.
In fact, in the following years, based on the feasibility study project, the restoration of the Great Hall was completed, leading to improvements in the existing structure. Structural reinforcement work was carried out, along with the renovation of the entire electrical, hydraulic, and HVAC systems, as well as restoration and finishing work on the materials, furniture and decoration. [10]
Despite this, today's restoration project is limited and insufficient to safeguard the buildings. For this reason, the application of SHM technology becomes a useful and indispensable tool for assessing the structure in real time, drawing up conservation plans and customised manuals to ensure the building's longevity.

Figure 4: Photo of the Great Concert Hall after restoration, 2023 (photo by Besart Cani)

9 Capanni, Renzi, and Guga, "From Project to Realization," 16–22.
10 Capanni, Renzi, and Guga, "From Project to Realization," 16–22.

Conceptual development of the monitoring strategy

Building upon the historical and diagnostic phases, the third methodological step, undertaken in 2025, consisted in conceptualizing a structural monitoring strategy aligned with preventive conservation principles. Rather than approaching monitoring as a purely technical installation, the project framed it as an extension of architectural knowledge.[11]
The monitoring project, born from the collaboration between the Catholic University of Our Lady of Good Counsel, the University of Florence, the Abruzzo Technology Park, and technical partners Plamerini, West Aquila, Comitech, and Mgad Design, was conceived to observe key structural parameters related to deformation, vibration response, and environmental influence. The selection of monitored zones was informed by the typological and structural analysis of the theatre, particularly focusing on long-span elements, roof systems, and areas subject to higher dynamic stress.
However, the methodological innovation of this study lies not in the technical configuration itself but in the interpretative framework attached to it. Monitoring is understood as a continuous documentation process that complements historical research and feasibility analysis. Data acquisition becomes a means of transforming the University of Arts into a "measured heritage" entity, in which conservation decisions are supported by evolving evidence rather than reactive assessment.

Results and discussions

From static monument to dynamic system

The integrated methodological process applied to the Grand Concert Hall at the University of Arts reveals a significant conceptual transformation in the understanding of modern heritage. The historical-architectural investigation clarified the building's typological coherence and structural logic, while the feasibility framework exposed latent vulnerabilities not immediately perceptible through visual inspection alone.
The introduction of a monitoring strategy repositions the theatre from a static monument to a dynamic system. Rather than being interpreted as a completed artifact requiring occasional restoration, the building emerges as an evolving structural organism whose performance unfolds over time. This shift does not alter the architectural identity of the rationalist work; instead, it reinforces its structural legibility by aligning conservation with the building's constructive logic. In this sense, monitoring does not impose an external technological layer but extends the architectural rationality of the original design into the domain of long-term stewardship.[12]

Cultural meaning of "measured heritage"

The concept of "measured heritage" proposed in this study implies more than technical instrumentation. It reflects a redefinition of conservation as a continuous process of interpretation supported by evidence. Measurement becomes a form of cultural responsibility, enabling institutions to anticipate risk rather than respond to damage.[13]

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11 Van Balen and Vandesande, "Preventive Conservation and Maintenance," 1–14; ICOMOS, "Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments"; Limongelli, Turksezer, and Giordano, "Structural Health Monitoring for Cultural Heritage Constructions"; Rossi and Bournas, "Structural Health Monitoring and Management," 6450.
12 Limongelli, Turksezer, and Giordano, "Structural Health Monitoring for Cultural Heritage Constructions"; Rossi and Bournas, "Structural Health Monitoring and Management," 6450.
13 Van Balen and Vandesande, "Preventive Conservation and Maintenance," 1–14; UNESCO, Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape.

In seismic contexts, such as Tirana, structural vulnerability may remain latent for decades before manifesting in visible deterioration. Preventive monitoring therefore contributes to safeguarding not only material integrity but also cultural continuity. By generating longitudinal datasets, the building becomes a documented system whose condition is constantly interpreted and reassessed. This approach transforms heritage governance. Decision-making is no longer based solely on episodic expert evaluations but is supported by ongoing knowledge production. Monitoring thus reinforces institutional accountability and encourages a proactive culture of maintenance. The building is no longer preserved only through intervention, but through awareness. The theatre is not only conserved; it becomes a living laboratory of cultural stewardship, a model in which architectural heritage and technological innovation coexist.

Replicability for Modern Rationalist Heritage

The case of the University of Arts demonstrates that monitoring-based preventive conservation can serve as a replicable framework for modern rationalist architecture more broadly. Many twentieth-century public buildings share similar characteristics: reinforced concrete structural systems, long-span halls, evolving functional demands, and exposure to seismic or environmental risk.

In transitional urban contexts where heritage policies are still consolidating, the adoption of monitoring strategies may support the development of long-term conservation planning. Rather than depending exclusively on large-scale restoration campaigns, institutions can progressively build safeguarding infrastructures grounded in continuous observation.[14]

Importantly, the replicability of this model does not depend solely on technological resources but on cultural orientation. The transition from restoration to measurement requires a shift in mindset: from perceiving heritage as a static legacy to understanding it as a managed system embedded within contemporary institutional frameworks.

The University of Arts in Tirana thus represents not only an isolated intervention but a pilot model for modern heritage governance.

Conclusions and recommendations

The case of the Grand Concert Hall at the University of Arts in Tirana demonstrates that the safeguarding of modern rationalist heritage requires a conceptual transition from episodic restoration toward continuous, knowledge-based management. Through the integration of historical analysis, feasibility assessment, and structural monitoring conceptualization, the building emerges not as a static monument but as a dynamic cultural infrastructure.

The notion of "measured heritage" introduced in this study reframes conservation as an evolving process grounded in sustained observation and institutional responsibility. Monitoring is not interpreted merely as a technical enhancement, but as a cultural strategy capable of aligning architectural preservation with contemporary governance models. In seismic environments, where structural risk may remain latent yet persistent, preventive monitoring provides a framework for anticipating vulnerability rather than reacting to deterioration.

From a theoretical standpoint, the research contributes to the broader debate on twentieth-century architectural heritage by demonstrating how rationalist clarity and structural legibility can be extended into the domain of conservation practice. Measurement becomes a contemporary expression of rationality, reinforcing rather than contradicting the architectural identity of the building.

14 DOCOMOMO International, "Modern Movement and the World Heritage List," 6–15; Rossi and Bournas, "Structural Health Monitoring and Management," 6450; UNESCO, Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape.

From an operational perspective, the study suggests that universities and public institutions occupying modern heritage buildings should adopt integrated safeguarding strategies combining documentation, maintenance planning, and monitoring infrastructures. Academic environments, in particular, are uniquely positioned to transform heritage sites into living laboratories, where research, education, and preservation coexist.

At the policy level, the Tirana case highlights the necessity of developing national frameworks for preventive conservation of modern architecture. Cultural heritage regulations in transitional contexts should expand beyond monument listing and restoration funding, incorporating long-term risk assessment, maintenance protocols, and digital monitoring systems as standard safeguarding tools. Such policies would support sustainable heritage governance while optimizing public investment in conservation.

Ultimately, the transition from restoration to measurement represents not simply a technological shift but a cultural transformation in the stewardship of twentieth-century architecture. By embedding continuous knowledge within institutional practice, modern heritage can be preserved not only as memory of the past, but as an active component of contemporary urban and cultural life.

Acknowledgments

This study is part of a research project implemented by the Faculty of Applied Sciences at the Catholic University Our Lady of Good Counsel and co-funded by the National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation in Albania (AKKSHI) and the Technopole of Abruzzo in Italy. The project is carried out in collaboration with the Department of Architecture at the University of Florence, the Technopole of Abruzzo, Palmerini Sct, West Aquila Srl, Comitech Srl and Mgad Design.

The authors acknowledge the collaboration with the Rectorate of the University of Arts in Tirana and express their gratitude to the working group: Prof. Mario De Stefano (UNIFI), Ph.D Antonino Maria Marra (UNIFI), Ing. Luigi Palmerini (Palmerini), Mr. Roberto Romanelli (TA), Ph.D Stefano Tennina (West Aquila) and Arch. Giovambattista Macchione (Mgad Design) for their contribution to the development of the monitoring project.

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When art becomes action - Collective practices and tactical visibility in contemporary activist art

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Abstract

This paper examines the transformation of activist art from an object-centered aesthetic practice to a form of collective social and media action. Focusing on artist-led activism from the late twentieth century to the present day, the study investigates how contemporary activist practices increasingly function through tactical visibility, institutional confrontation, documentation, circulation, and intertwined forms of authorship. The research explores the gradual shift from the individual artist as symbolic producer to collective structures operating through public interventions and acts, media campaigns, archival practices, performative protest, and strategic communication systems. Through an analysis that examines the activist movement in relation to institutional critique, artistic and awareness-raising interventions, such as feminist, anti-racist, human rights, etc., as well as contemporary protest actions; the paper raises questions such as: "Why do contemporary activist practices increasingly resemble political and media campaigns?", "Why does collective organization often replace individual artistic authorship?", "How have museums and cultural institutions become sites of confrontation instead of neutral exhibition spaces?", and "How has documentation itself become inseparable from activist work?" Special attention is paid to the role of visibility, reproduction, and media dissemination in shaping contemporary activist strategies, where the circulation of images and actions often becomes more important than the production of artistic objects. The paper argues that activist art increasingly operates through systems, exhibition, communication and public confrontation, making the distinctions between artwork, performance, political action and media event unstable. In this context, aesthetics often become secondary to effectiveness, while the artwork itself expands into more complex processes of organization, documentation and communication. The study concludes that contemporary activist art can no longer be understood exclusively through traditional aesthetic frameworks, but must also be treated as a tactical cultural practice and action.

Keywords

Visual art, activism, collective authorship, institutional critique, media

Chapter I – The body

Figure 1. Claude Cahun, Que me veux-tu?*, 1928. Gelatin-silver print. Source: Paris Musées / Musée d'Art moderne de Paris, inventory no. AMVP 3338.*

Figure 2. Claude Cahun, Self-portrait (shaved head, material draped across body)*, 1928. Monochrome negative / photograph. Source: Jersey Heritage, Cahun Collection, reference no. JHT/1995/00041/m.*

Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore were two French artists and life partners whose photographic and literary collaborations challenged fixed ideas of gender, identity, and authorship. In one of their most striking images, Moore photographs Cahun with a shaved head. In this act, the body becomes both image and protest: the shaved head refuses the social expectation that femininity must be expressed through softness, ornament, and hair. Cahun and Moore therefore attack one of the most visible signs through which femininity had been culturally coded. Read retrospectively, the image also acquires historical and political weight: the shorn head can recall twentieth-century systems of discipline, humiliation, and bodily dehumanisation, including fascist and Nazi regimes. Yet in Cahun's case the gesture is not imposed from outside. It is a chosen transformation of the body into an image of refusal, ambiguity, and self-determination. Cahun and Moore would later extend this anti-authoritarian position into active resistance against the Nazi occupation of Jersey, distributing subversive anti-Nazi notes and visual-textual interventions aimed at demoralising occupying soldiers.[1]

The contrast with the women known in France as les tondues is therefore decisive. After the Liberation of France, many women accused of collaboration or intimate relations with German soldiers were publicly beaten, shamed, and had their heads shaved before being paraded through the streets. These two cases are opposite in intention but visually connected by the same bodily sign. In Cahun's image, the shaved head is chosen; it is not a punishment but a form of control over visibility. In the case of les tondues, the shaved head is imposed: it is a punishment, a spectacle, and public humiliation. The same visual act thus moves between agency and subjection, between

1 Jennifer L. Shaw, Exist Otherwise: The Life and Works of Claude Cahun (London: Reaktion Books, 2017); Jeffrey H. Jackson, Paper Bullets: Two Artists Who Risked Their Lives to Defy the Nazis (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2020).

self-fashioning and collective violence.[2]

Figure 3. Woman accused of collaboration having her head shaved after the Liberation of France*, Chatou, northwestern Paris, France, August 29, 1944. Still from archival film footage. Source: CriticalPast, Clip 65675022027*

Figure 4. Denunciation and humiliation of a French Nazi collaborator, Paris 1944. The woman has had her head shaved and has a swastika painted on her forehead. The men surrounding her make victory gestures in celebration of the end of Nazi occupation of their city. (Photo by Art Media/Print Collector/Getty Images)

In both cases, whether in protest or in submission, the body is not a passive object to be looked at. It is an image from which meaning emerges through what happens to it and through what remains visible after the act. The body carries the trace of the event, which becomes part of the image's political meaning.

Jina Mahsa Amini was a young Kurdish-Iranian woman arrested by Iran's morality police in Tehran on September 13, 2022, for alleged non-compliance with compulsory hijab rules. She collapsed while in custody, was taken to hospital, and was declared dead on September 16, 2022. Iranian authorities denied responsibility, but the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission later concluded that her unlawful death in custody was linked to physical violence and to the wider system of discrimination against women and girls in Iran.[3]

Her death reignited long-accumulated anger against the theocratic system and triggered a new wave of protests under the slogan Woman, Life, Freedom. The protests were not only demonstrations against a dress code; they were acts against the political, religious, and disciplinary control of women's bodies. In this sense, the image of Amini became inseparable from the larger struggle over visibility, bodily autonomy, and public space.

During these protests, Iranian women removed their veils and, in many cases, burned them. They also cut their hair in public, on camera, and in social media videos. This gesture functioned at once as mourning, solidarity, and defiance. It was a response to the death of Amini, but it also transformed hair itself into the symbolic object of protest: the very element that the compulsory

2 Fabrice Virgili, Shorn Women: Gender and Punishment in Liberation France, trans. John Flower (Oxford: Berg, 2002).

3 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Iran: Institutional Discrimination against Women and Girls Enabled Human Rights Violations and Crimes against Humanity in the Context of Recent Protests, UN Fact-Finding Mission Says," March 8, 2024.

hijab seeks to conceal became the site of public resistance.[4]
The gesture circulated globally. Women and activists outside Iran cut their hair during television interviews, public appearances, and online videos, turning a local act of mourning and defiance into a transnational media image. Through this circulation, the body did not disappear into representation; rather, the body became reproducible as a gesture, a sign, and a shared repertoire of protest.[5]
In this case, hair operates as a double sign. Within strict religious and state interpretations, women's hair is treated as something that must be hidden from public view. Within the protest, however, the same hair becomes visible, is cut, and is offered as a sign of grief and revolt. The act therefore transforms an imposed code of modesty into a public language of resistance.
The image of Mahsa Amini, with her headscarf slightly displaced and her hair visible, became one of the central icons of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement.

Figure 5. Yasin Akgul, Woman cutting her ponytail during a protest following the death of Mahsa Amini, outside the Iranian consulate, Istanbul, Turkey, September 21, 2022. Photograph. Source: AFP via Getty Images, Editorial image no. 1243402034

Figure 6. Gary Coronado, Participant waving a wig during a solidarity rally for Iranian women's protests, Sherman Oaks, Los Angeles, 2022. Photograph. Source: Los Angeles Times*, in Sarah Parvini, "Iranian Women at Home and Abroad Cut Their Hair to Protest Mahsa Amini's Death," October 6, 2022*

Chapter II – The slogan

In some forms of protest, the body moves from direct image to concept, metaphor, or identity marker. In these cases, the body attaches itself to the slogan, and the slogan assumes a primary role. A slogan is one of the fastest ways to make a crisis visible, legible, and direct. It condenses pain into a sentence, but it also establishes a political address: it tells the public where responsibility should be sought.

4 Pamela Karimi, Women, Art, Freedom: Artists and Street Politics in Iran (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2024).
5 Sarah J. Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles, #HashtagActivism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020); Karimi, Women, Art, Freedom.

David Wojnarowicz was an American artist, writer, performer, and activist closely associated with AIDS activism and with criticism of state neglect toward gay communities in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s. In 1988, during an ACT UP protest at the Food and Drug Administration headquarters in Rockville, Maryland, he wore a jacket bearing the text: "If I die of AIDS – forget burial – just drop my body on the steps of the FDA."
This was a crucial moment in Wojnarowicz's activist image-making and in the later life of the slogan. The statement is not simply text. It is body, illness, anger, and accusation at once. When later variants such as "If I die in a school shooting…" appear, it becomes clear that an activist slogan can migrate from one crisis to another while retaining its accusatory structure.[6]
The concept looks the same: "if I die", do not bury or hide my body; place it in front of the responsible institution. This way, death is not an isolated tragedy but becomes a public call for accountability.

Figure 7. Bill Dobbs, David Wojnarowicz at ACT UP FDA demonstration, Rockville, Maryland, October 11, 1988. Photograph. Source: The David Wojnarowicz Papers, The Downtown Collection, Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University
Figure 8. Beth Caron, March for Our Lives Protest in New York City, New York, March 24, 2018. Photograph. Source: Reproduced in Lauren O'Neill-Butler, The War of Art: A History of Artists' Protest in America

In July 2015, Sandra Bland, a twenty-eight-year-old African American woman, was stopped by police in Texas for failing to signal a lane change. A normal routine traffic stop soon escalated after she refused the officer's order to put out her cigarette. She was removed from the car, arrested, and three days later found dead in her jail cell. Although authorities classified her death as suicide, her family and activists strongly disputed the official narrative, pointing to the violence of the arrest and to systemic failures in custody.
Bland's death became a significant node in the broader Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name mobilisations. In this context, the formula "If I die…" returned as a language of institutional

6 Avram Finkelstein, After Silence: A History of AIDS through Its Images (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); O'Neill-Butler, The War of Art.

mistrust. It expressed the fear that a death in police custody could be explained by the very institution that should be investigated.[7]
In The War of Art, Lauren O'Neill-Butler explains this formula as part of a genealogy of slogans that move from AIDS activism to police violence, school shootings, transphobia, and COVID-19. The slogan's force lies in its capacity to travel across crises without losing its ethical demand: do not let the institution control the narrative of my death.[8]

Figure 9. Indigenous Social Justice Association banner at the Invasion Day rally, Sydney, Australia, January 26, 2017. Photograph. Source: Doc Tone Lock / @tloughland, reproduced in The Guardian *live coverage of Australia Day / Invasion Day protests*

The slogan, therefore, functions as a kind of preliminary testimony. It says: if something happens to me, do not immediately accept the official version. Here, the slogan is not only emotional. It is political, juridical, and media-oriented. It produces an immediate archive of public doubt before the institution has the opportunity to fully control the story.
In 2020, political leaders around the world repeatedly framed the coronavirus pandemic as a war. Xi Jinping spoke of a "people's war" against the virus; Emmanuel Macron repeated "Nous sommes en guerre" ("We are at war"); and other leaders adopted similar wartime vocabularies. This language created a political atmosphere in which health emergency, state authority, surveillance, and discipline could be narrated through military rhetoric.[9]
Susan Sontag's critique of "illness as metaphor" is crucial here. For Sontag, illness becomes dangerous when metaphor replaces material and medical reality, because metaphor can moralise disease, stigmatise the sick, and obscure political responsibility. The war metaphor of COVID-19, therefore, risks converting a public-health crisis into an image of enemy combat, obedience, and emergency rule.[10]
At the same time, Wojnarowicz's "If I die…" does something different. It does not use illness to hide responsibility; it uses the body of the sick person to expose responsibility. In this sense, AIDS neglect, gun violence, racist police violence, transphobic violence, and pandemic mismanagement can all be framed as public-health crises that require institutional accountability.

7 Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles, #HashtagActivism; O'Neill-Butler, The War of Art.
8 O'Neill-Butler, The War of Art.
9 Susan Sontag, Illness as Metaphor (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978); O'Neill-Butler, The War of Art.
10 Sontag, Illness as Metaphor.

Chapter III – Museums and the clash

After the body and the slogan, one of the most important sites where activism confronts the system is the museum. Museums have played a major role in the conflictual history between activist artists and cultural institutions from the late 1960s to the present. The museum often presents itself as a neutral space of culture, but in the history of artistic activism it appears as an institution that decides who receives legitimacy, who enters the collection, who is exhibited, and who remains outside art history. For activist artists, therefore, the museum is not simply an exhibition space. It is a site of power.[11]

Figure 10. WAR, "Museums Are Sexist …," ca. 1970, photocopy, 8 ½" x 11".
Sabra Moore NYC Women's Art Movement Collection, 1969–1996; Box 1 and Folder 1;
Barnard Archives and Special Collections, Barnard College

11 Susan E. Cahan, Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); O'Neill-Butler, The War of Art.

The feminist collective Women Artists in Revolution, or WAR, was active in New York from 1969 to 1971. Emerging from the orbit of the Art Workers' Coalition, WAR directed attention toward gender and racial discrimination in the art world and toward the absence of women from museums, galleries, collections, and decision-making structures. The flyer Museums Are Sexist… directly identifies the institution as the problem. It does not merely ask for "more women artists"; it argues that the museum produces invisibility. The eyes in the flyer become an irony of seeing: women, traditionally positioned as objects of visual consumption, now look back and become critical subjects.[13]

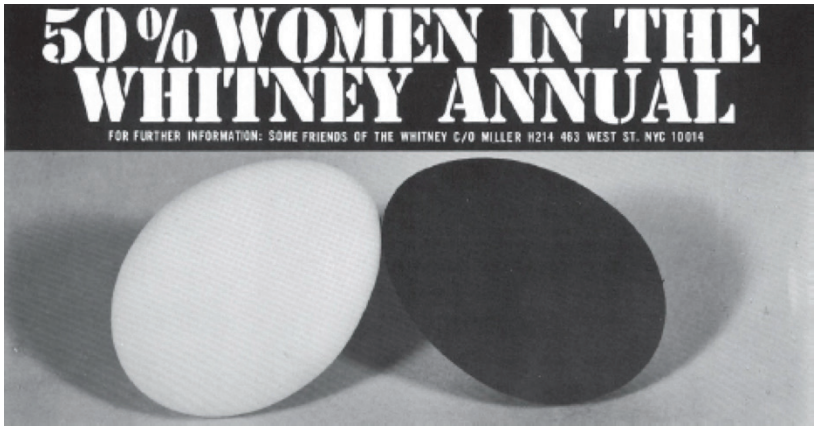
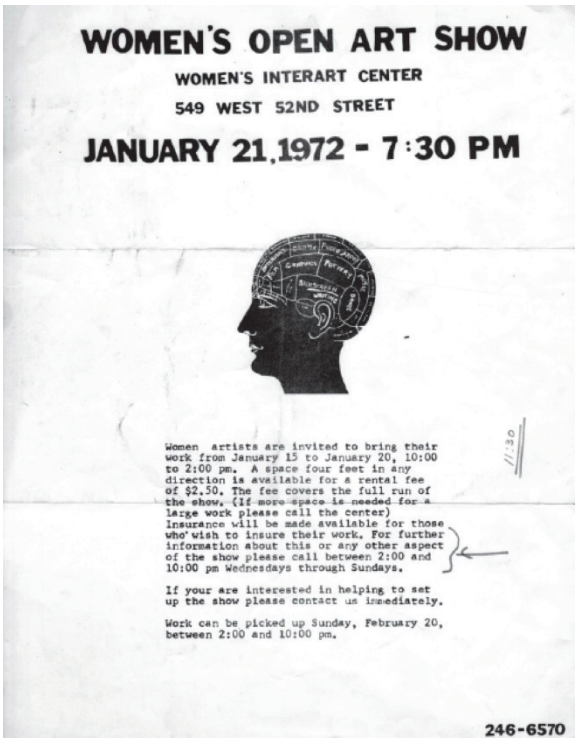


Figure 11. Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee, advertisement in Artforum, December 1970

The Ad Hoc Women Artists Committee was formed in 1970 by artists and critics including Lucy Lippard, Poppy Johnson, Brenda Miller, and Faith Ringgold, in the context of protests against the underrepresentation of women in the Whitney Annual. The group demanded that 50 percent of the artists in the exhibition be women, and that half of those women be women of color. Here statistics become image. "50%" is no longer only a number; it is a visual form and a clear political demand. Activist art operates not only through anger and symbols, but also through measurement, data, letters, advertisements, protests, and media strategy.[12]

12 Women Artists in Revolution, A Documentary HerStory of Women Artists in Revolution (New York: Primary Information, 2021); Lucy R. Lippard, Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984).



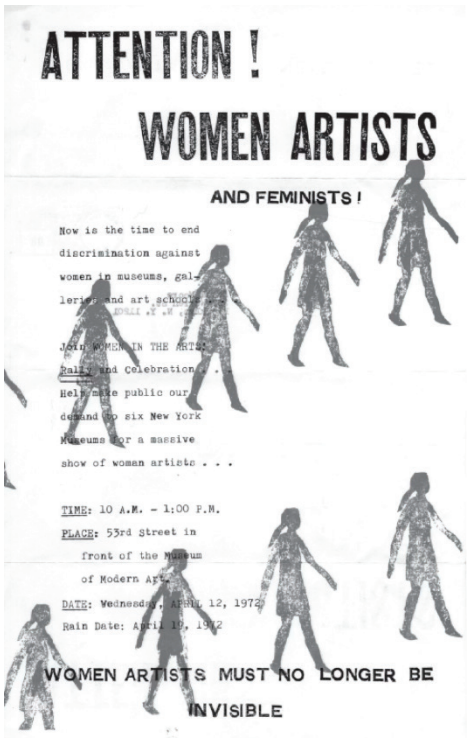


Figure 12. Women's Interart Center, Women's Open Show, January 21, 1972, black-and-white offset, 8 ½" x 11". Sabra Moore NYC Women's Art Movement Collection, 1969–1996; Box 1 and Folder 1; Barnard Archives and Special Collections, Barnard College

Figure 13. Poster for demonstration on April 12, 1972, in front of the Museum of Modern Art, 8 ½" x 14". Sabra Moore NYC Women's Art Movement Collection, 1969–1996; Box 1 and Folder 1; Barnard Archives and Special Collections, Barnard College

The Women's Interart Center was created in the early 1970s as an alternative space for women artists in New York. It marks the passage from protest against the museum to the construction of a new infrastructure: open exhibitions, workshops, archives, meetings, and forms of communal support. In The War of Art, this becomes one of the most important consequences of feminist art activism: when institutions do not change enough, artists begin to build their own structures. The phrase "Women artists must no longer be invisible" condenses the entire problem. Invisibility is not accidental absence; it is the result of a system. Visibility, therefore, is not only demanded as image. It is built as infrastructure.[13]

13 O'Neill-Butler, The War of Art; Women Artists in Revolution, A Documentary HerStory.

Figure 14. Nikita Teryoshin, Pussy Riot and FEMEN protest outside the Russian Pavilion at the 61st Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy, May 6, 2026. Photograph. Source: Courtesy of Pussy Riot; photograph by Nikita Teryoshin

Pussy Riot is a Russian feminist punk and anti-authoritarian art collective known for protest performances against Vladimir Putin's regime. FEMEN is a Ukrainian feminist organization known for embodied and confrontational protests against patriarchy, authoritarianism, and political control over the body. At the 2026 Venice Biennale, members and supporters of Pussy Riot and FEMEN protested outside the Russian Pavilion against Russia's return to the Biennale after its absence following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Protesters wore pink balaclavas, used colored smoke, carried Ukrainian flags, and displayed anti-war slogans.

Figure 15. Max Avdeev, Pussy Riot and FEMEN storm the Russian Pavilion at the 61st Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy, May 6, 2026. Photograph. Source: Courtesy of Pussy Riot; photograph by Max Avdeev.

This protest brings together the three factors analyzed in this paper: the body, the slogan, and the institution. The Biennale and the Russian Pavilion are not merely cultural spaces; they are spaces of political legitimacy. The other decisive factor is media circulation: the action is designed to be photographed, transmitted, and reproduced. In this case, the elements become explosive precisely because they meet in the same place and at the same time.

The Pussy Riot and FEMEN protest refuses to treat art and culture as separate from politics and war. In an event structured around national representation, a state that has launched an aggressive war cannot, according to the protesters, be cleansed through a culturally neutral or "innocent" pavilion. To allow that separation would be to act as if the war had not happened, and as if the dead, the missing, the displaced, and the abducted did not belong to the cultural field.

Slogans such as "Blood is Russia's art" and "No Putin in Venice" attempt to redirect attention from the spectacle of cultural diplomacy to the violence that the protesters argue is being normalized. The slogans written or carried by the body do not simply accompany the action; they activate it. They turn the body into a surface of accusation and the institution into the addressee of that accusation.[14]

14 Colleen Barry, "Protesters in Pink Balaclavas Swarm Russia's Pavilion at Venice Biennale and Release Colored Smoke," AP News, May 6, 2026; Jessica Zychowicz, "Performing Protest: FEMEN, Nation, and the Marketing of Resistance," Journal of Ukrainian Politics and Society 1, no. 1 (2015): 79-104.

Conclusion

If culture produces normality, then intervention in culture is political intervention. Activist artists do not only seek to expose a problem; they seek to change the conditions under which that problem appears and the way it is discussed in public discourse. Therefore, when art becomes action, it does not merely ask to be seen. It forces cultural, political, and institutional power to respond.

When art becomes action, it is no longer only an object, image, or performance. It becomes a body that appears, a slogan that accuses, an institution that is challenged, and a clash that produces public responsibility. When Wojnarowicz asks that his body be placed before the institution responsible for neglect, the body no longer belongs only to the individual. It becomes a public indictment. The slogan no longer belongs only to him; it becomes a transferable cry for vulnerable and marginalized groups, from schoolchildren to racial minorities and LGBTQ+ communities.

In all these cases, protest is not merely complaint; it demands accountability. Art-based protest and artist-led activism do not ask only for visibility. Through the force of image, gesture, slogan, and institutional confrontation, they compel institutions to react, to answer, and to become publicly accountable.

Figure 16. Taisiya Krugovykh and Vasily Bogatov, Pussy Riot and FEMEN protest outside the Russian Pavilion at the 61st Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy, May 6, 2026.
Photograph. Source: Courtesy of Pussy Riot; reproduced in Artnet News.

As Inna Shevchenko of FEMEN argues, empires have understood culture better than many liberals: culture is not decoration, but atmosphere, legitimacy, seduction, and the production of normality itself.[15]

15 Inna Shevchenko, "When They Let Russia Back In," Instagram post, May 2026, https://www.instagram.com/p/DYKa155grNW/

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Albanian architecture in souvenir design

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Abstract

This paper explores the representation of Albanian architectural heritage in souvenir products, and reflects on how visual style influences the appreciation of local architecture in tourist products. Currently, the Albanian souvenir market is overloaded with products withphotographic reproduction of architectural landmarks. In this kind of souvenirs is easy to recognize a certain touristic location but they don't not tell much about the culture of a place. The study is grounded on representation theory and visual culture, which sustain that illustration of architecture can make souvenirs more interesting for the tourist, offering an interpretative and contemporary visual culture. Illustration is seen not as a copy of the building, but a way of showing things through abstract language, selection of parts or interesting elements, and symbolic reconfiguration. The research adopts a qualitative design-oriented approach combining theory, field observation in major Albanian heritage cities (cities like Tirana, Kruja, Durrës, and Berat), and in international platforms (Etsy, Redbubble), and classification of existing souvenirs representation types. Thus, souvenirs are then categorized according to the representational style of the images. Study reveals that there actually a dominance of photographic images in Albanian with a marginal presence of illustrations while in international sites, is the opposite condition. Based on this gap, the study develops and tests a series of architectural illustration prototypes for souvenir products, exploring multiple visual styles ranging from minimal line drawing to abstract and atmospheric interpretations. The findings suggest that architectural illustration are communicative and cultural potential of souvenirs, enabling more expressive, narrative, and identity-driven representations of heritage. The paper concludes that shifting from photographic documentation to interpretative illustration can contribute to a more contemporary and culturally meaningful souvenir design practice in Albania.

Keywords

Souvenir design, architectural illustration, visual culture, Albania heritage

Introduction

Land art is a genre of visual art, emerged during the 1960s, that used the natural landscape as a canvas to put outdoor installations. It challenged conventional art by moving artworks outside galleries, in the natural settings (Beardsley, 1998). This genre of art explores the relationship between humans and the land, and often addresses ecological themes such as environmentalism, sustainability, and the human impact on the Earth.

One of the defining aspects of land art is how it responds directly to the unique features of a site—its terrain, geology,vegetation, etc. This site-specific focus is similar to the goals of landscape architecture, which objects respond to specific conditions of place, and aim to create designs that are meaningful and environmentally sensitive.

As the need for sustainability is becoming a crucial issue, considering land art as architecture is more significant than ever. Today's architectural practice places a growing emphasis on sustainable approaches that reduce environmental impact and enrich the experience of space. Similarly, land artists consider the cultural and ecological context of each place, prompting us to think more deeply about how we interact with the natural world (Wang, 2023; Selanon & Cui, 2020).

In addition to environmental issues, land art addresses also cultural narratives such as the concept of place, identity, and anthropocentrism (Rigaud, 2012). As artist Marlene Creates expresses, "*The land is important to me, but even more important is the idea that it becomes a 'place' because someone has been there*" (in Lippard, 1997: 32). This statement captures the role of human presence in giving meaning to landscapes. Through minimal gestures land art invites to deeply engage with nature.

This idea also aligns with architecture, which has the power to transform an empty space into a place filled with meaning, memory, and a sense of belonging. The philosophical ideas at the bases of land art are valid also for landscape architecture, emphasizing themes like reflection, memory, and the lived experience of place (Dang, 2021). This approach has blurred the boundaries between art and architecture. Once a radical artistic intervention, land art now plays a role in placemaking—contributing to the design of environments that are ecologically responsible and culturally resonant. As sustainability becomes a defining concern in architecture, land art offers useful strategies for integrating ecological awareness and spatial meaning into the built environment.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative methodological framework that integrates theoretical inquiry, case study analysis, and visual examination to explore the architectural potential of land art as a strategy for sustainable place-making. The study aims to synthesize conceptual insights from the fields of art history, landscape architecture, and environmental design with the practical and spatial strategies evident in selected works of land art and architecture.

The methodological approach unfolds in three interrelated phases:

- Theoretical Framework Construction

The research begins with an extensive literature review that critically engages with the conceptual foundations of land art, particularly its roots in conceptual art, phenomenology, and ecological thought. Key theoretical perspectives, including those of Lucy Lippard, Robert Smithson, Miwon Kwon, Christian Norberg-Schulz, and contemporary environmental aesthetics scholars, provide

the grounding for understanding land art not only as an artistic movement but as an architectural practice with implications for sustainability and place-making. This phase establishes the ontological and epistemological lens through which the subsequent analyses are conducted.

- Case Study Selection and Comparative Analysis

Building on the theoretical foundation, the research undertakes a comparative analysis of selected case studies drawn from both land art and architectural practice. These include seminal land art interventions such as Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969–70), Andy Goldsworthy's *Walking Wall* (2019), among others, as well as architectural projects by Herzog & de Meuron, SANAA, Maya Lin and others.

- Visual and Spatial Analysis

Each case study is further examined through visual documentation and experiential descriptions. This analysis seeks to understand how spatial and material strategies are employed to engage viewers, frame environmental phenomena, and produce affective experiences of place.

The methodology emphasizes a dialogical reading of land art and architecture, treating them not as separate disciplines but as overlapping practices that co-produce meaning in landscape. By synthesizing findings across cases, the study identifies recurring patterns, aesthetic logics, and design principles that inform a broader understanding of how land art contributes to sustainable and culturally resonant architectural practice.

The research concludes with a critical reflection on the transformative potential of land art in contemporary design, emphasizing its value in fostering ecological awareness, reinforcing site identity, and enriching the spatial and emotional experience of place.

Literature review

Land art as conceptual art

Land Art emerged in the late 1960s as a radical shift from traditional art forms, within the broader movement of Conceptual Art, which prioritizes ideas over objects. In *The Dematerialization of Art* (1968), Lucy Lippard and John Chandler described this shift toward artworks that focus on process, context, and meaning. Within this framework, Land Art investigates the relationship between humans and the natural environment, and in response, create actions, changes, often through site-specific interventions that transform outdoor landscapes.

But Land Art is not merely conceptual in the sense of privileging the idea. It deals with **temporality and entropy** and the instability of form as highlighted in Robert Smithson's concept of entropy, which rejects classical notions of order and control. Instead of trying to control nature, Land Art works with natural processes like decay and change, showing that both the artwork and the site are unstable and always shifting and highlighting their blurring boundaries of the environment. Miwon Kwon, in *One Place After Another* (2002), redefines the "site" as a network of social, political, and cultural meanings, emphasizing the role of the context in shaping the artwork's significance. In this sense the environment becomes an active part of the creation and interpretation of the artwork.

Land Art also resonates with phenomenological philosophy. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962) ideas on embodiment highlight how these works require physical and temporal engagement, making the viewer an active participant. Land Art thus amplifies the experiential and relational dimensions of Conceptual Art, extending them into the terrain of landscape and ecology. Scholars like Jeffrey Kastner and Brian Wallis (*Land and Environmental Art*, 1998) underscore

how Land Art brings ecological consciousness to the foreground, shifting from human-centered to ecologically entangled modes of thinking.
In essence, Land Art is not simply about monumental gestures in the landscape. It is an intellectual and philosophical practice that explores impermanence, place, and ecological interrelation.

Land art and environmental sustainability

Land Art, as a form of artistic and spatial practice in the landscape, offer a critical response to environmental degradation of industrial society. Rooted in deep ecology (Naess, 1973), it emphasizes the need for ecological awareness, sustainability, and low-impact design.
According to Arnold Berleant (1992) and Allen Carlson (2000), this engagement with nature enhances how we perceive and ethically interact with the environment. Land Art encourages a multisensory understanding and respect for natural processes.
While early Land Art involved large-scale earthworks that altered landscapes, contemporary practice emphasizes the need for more ecological responsibility and site sensitivity. As Suzi Gablik argues in *The Reenchantment of Art* (1991), artists are increasingly called to foster ecological and cultural healing rather than formal innovation. This shift reflects Land Art's evolving commitment to sustainability, moving from a confrontational approach to one of collaboration with nature.
Overall, Land Art provides a valuable perspective for linking art and ecology. By working with natural processes and minimizing environmental impact, it plays a key role in promoting sustainability and is an important part of modern discussions on environmental design.

Land art and place-making

Place-making is an important concept in architecture. It focuses on creating spaces that have meaning and identity. Land Art supports this idea by turning ordinary spaces into place through experiential, site-specific interventions.
Christian Norberg-Schulz (1980) explains that a place is not just a physical space, but something we feel and experience, shaped by nature and human-made elements. Land Art helps create such places by working with the land's shape, direction, materials, and size to encourage meaningful and sensory experience.
As Kastner and Wallis (1998) note, these interventions alter perception and deepen the human-landscape relationship. Lucy Lippard (1997) further argues that Land Art invites bodily interaction, allowing land to be navigated and reinterpreted in poetic ways. Like architecture, it combines aesthetic, spatial, and cultural dimensions, contributing meaningfully to the creation of place.

Case studies: analysis and discussion

Building upon the theoretical frameworks established in the literature, this section examines a series of key case studies in both land art and architecture to reveal a shared vocabulary of environmental sensitivity, site-specificity, and experiential place-making. Through an analysis of works by artists such as Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Agnes Denes, Richard Long, Andy Goldsworthy, Nancy Holt, alongside architects including Maya Lin, Herzog & de Meuron, Peter Eisenman, Ryue Nishizawa, SANAA, Louis Kahn, and others, we examine how conceptual art

practices have influenced architectural thinking, particularly regarding ecological engagement, temporal processes, and phenomenological experience.
Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) (Fig. 1), constructed on the shores of the Great Salt Lake in Utah, is a foundational work in land art that reconfigures the traditional understanding of form and site. His massive spiral emerges and disappears with the lake's fluctuating water levels, emphasizing entropy, geological time, and the mutability of human intervention in the landscape (Iorga, 2013; Rigaud, 2012). Smithson's engagement with natural processes reflects a non-anthropocentric view of design, where form is not fixed but in dialogue with environmental forces. His approach has a similar concept to the Herzog & de Meuron's *Dominus Winery* (2000) in Napa Valley) (Fig. 2), which features gabion walls filled with local stone that regulate light and temperature. The structure performs as a porous, breathing organism, integrating the architecture with its geological context. Both works challenge static formalism, opting instead for material and experiential strategies that reflect nature's temporality and the embeddedness of place.

Figure 1. Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty (1970)
Figure 2. Herzog & de Meuron's Dominus Winery (2000)

Michael Heizer's Dissipate, (1968–70) (Fig. 3), carved into the edge of the Mormon Mesa in Nevada, interrogates the scale of human intervention in the landscape and the ideological implications of land manipulation. By using subtraction as tool for engaging with memory and place, Heizer removed tons of rock to create two massive voids, confronting viewers with absence as presence, and creation of meaning. The emptiness becomes the medium through which viewers confront scale, memory, and the ideological implications of altering land. A conceptual parallel emerges in Alberto Burri's *Il Cretto di Gibellina* (1984–89) (Fig. 4,5), which overlays the earthquake-destroyed Sicilian town of Gibellina with a concrete shroud, preserving the street grid as a fossilized scar. Both interventions transform trauma into spatial narrative, using voids and scars to inscribe memory and history into the land (Bae-Dimitriadis, 2021). Their monumental scale reclaims loss and silence as architectural expressions, foregrounding the landscape itself as a medium of remembrance.

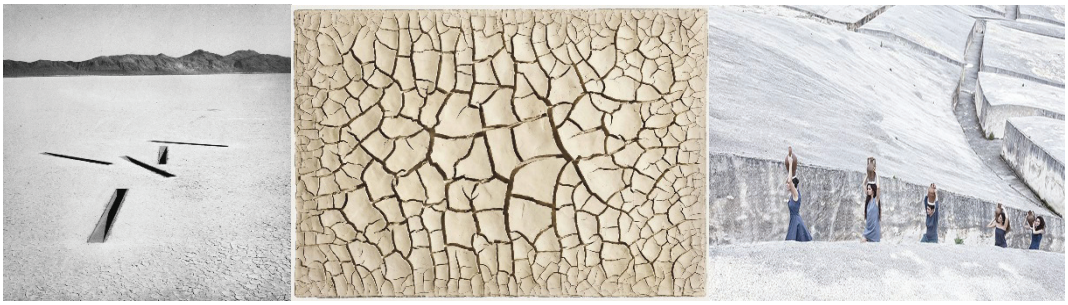

Figure 3. Dissipate, 1968–70, by Michael Heizer
Figure 4. Alberto Burri, Cretto - Installazione
Figure 5. Il Cretto di Gibellina (1984–89) by Alberto Burri

Artists like Agnes Denes expand the conceptual boundaries of land art by considering the landscape as a cultural and ecological canvas and including concepts of sustainability, public engagement, and visual activism (Bae-Dimitriadis, 2021; Dang, 2021). In her landmark piece *Wheatfield – A Confrontation* (1982), Denes plants a field of wheat on a landfill in downtown Manhattan, juxtaposing nature and culture, sustainability and capitalism, provoking questions about land use, food production, and urban priorities (Dang, 2021). This performative landscape challenges viewers to reconsider the use of public space and the values embedded in the urban fabric.

A comparable architectural gesture is found in the *Eden Project* (2001) by Grimshaw Architects, which rehabilitates a former clay pit into a regenerative site of ecological education. The biomes house diverse ecosystems, visually and symbolically contrasting organic life with the constructed geodesic structures as industrial remnants. In both works, the landscape becomes a transformative agent—capable of healing, educating, and critiquing dominant narratives of progress and productivity.

Figure 6. Wheatfield – A Confrontation (1982) by Agnes Denes
Figure 7. Eden Project (2001) by Grimshaw Architects

Minimal gestures by Richard Long likewise redefine the landscape through movement and materiality. Long's *A Line Made by Walking* (1967) turns a transient act into a spatial inscription and invited viewers to contemplate the passage of time and the act of walking itself (Fig. 8).
Similarly, Goldsworthy's *Walking Wall* (2019), a dry-stone wall that physically moved across the grounds of the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City, redefines the role of built form (Fig. 9). As it "walked," the wall traversed roads, lawns, and architectural spaces, becoming a living installation that shifted perceptions of permanence and transition. Importantly, Goldsworthy's work also challenges anthropocentric authorship by emphasizing natural processes: gravity, weather, and decay are co-authors in the work's evolution. These ephemeral acts resonate with architectural practices that prioritize temporality, movement, and the lived experience of space. Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (1982) (Fig. 10), ssimilarly transforms minimal form into profound emotional resonance. Sunken into the earth, the black granite walls bear the names of over 58,000 soldiers, creating a tactile, reflective experience. As visitors descend the path and see their own reflections among the names, memory becomes spatialized and embodied. Lin's memorial, like Long's line and Goldsworthy's wall, through a simple gesture, invoke collective memory, identity, and healing. Each of these works underscores the power of landscape—natural and constructed—as a site of intimate encounter and cultural reflection.

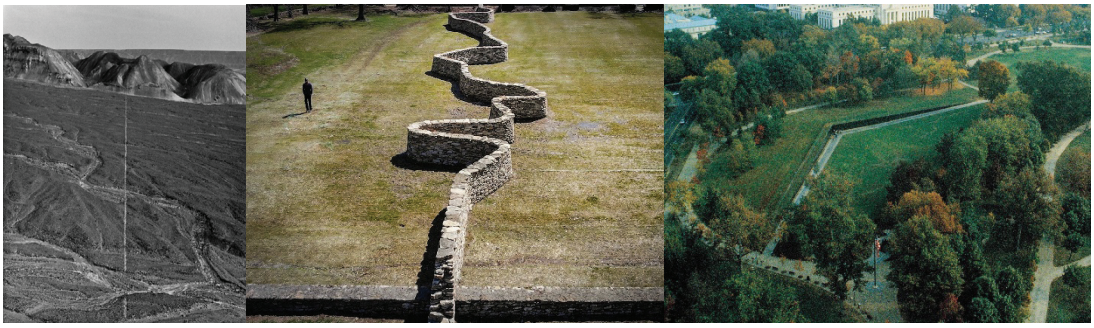

Figure 8. A Line Made by Walking (1967) by *Richard Long*
Figure 9. Walking Wall (2019) Museum of Art in Kansas City by Andy Goldsworthy's
Figure 10. Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1982) by Maya Lin

Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* (1973–76), situated in the remote Great Basin Desert of Utah (Fig.11), is a work of land art that responds directly to its context. Four massive concrete cylinders are oriented to frame the sun at solstices and pierce the desert sky with starlike constellations (Tiberghien, 1995). Their openings frame the sky and the desert horizon, while small holes drilled into the surface of the tunnels map out constellations, projecting starlike patterns of light onto the interior surfaces. Holt's intervention is minimal, yet it transforms the emptiness of the landscape in a place. The viewer's position within the tunnels becomes a site of cosmological awareness, merging personal experience with universal cycles.

A parallel architectural gesture is seen in Louis Kahn's *Salk Institute* (1959–65) in La Jolla, California (Fig.12),. Framing the Pacific Ocean with two symmetrical laboratory wings, Kahn creates a central plaza where a narrow water channel draws the eye toward the horizon (Brownlee & De Long, 1991). The interplay of light, shadow, and ocean breezes becomes integral to the experience of the place. Both Holt and Kahn celebrate light, sky, and orientation, not as abstract concepts but as guiding forces that give meaning to place.

Ryue Nishizawa's *Teshima Art Museum* (2010) (Fig.13), designed with artist Rei Naito, furthers this integration of natural elements and spatial perception. Located on Japan's Teshima Island, the museum consists of a single, curved concrete shell that merges with the landscape. Its minimalist form is punctured by circular openings that admit light, air, and rainwater, blurring the boundaries between inside and outside. As water droplets move into the smooth floor, they become ephemeral artworks—reaffirming the museum as a living environment. This project exemplifies a sensorial architecture that prioritizes human perception, seasonal variation, and ecological awareness. In contrast to static form, the Teshima Museum is always becoming—shaped by climate, time, and nature (Tanaka, 2010).

In this way, Nishizawa's *Museum* aligns with work *of* Holt and Kahn, both of which also use their designs to frame and enhance a direct, sensory connection with the environment—whether through celestial alignments or by framing panoramic views of the horizon (Frampton, 1995; Tiberghien, 1995).

Figure 11. Sun Tunnels, 1976 by Nancy Holt
Figure 12. Salk Institute, 1975 by Louis Kahn
Figure 13. The Teshima Art Museum, 2010 by Ryue Nishizawa and Rei Naito

This ephemeral approach to material and perception continues in Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *The Floating Piers* (2016) (Fig.14), which transforms Lake Iseo into a collective, walkable surface. Visitors traverse water in a surreal, sensory experience that collapses the boundary between built and natural. SANAA's *Serpentine Pavilion* (Fig.15), similarly floats above its site with a lightweight reflective canopy that interacts with weather, light, and human movement (Koolhaas & Obrist, 2010).

Both projects offer reversible, low-impact interventions that frame the landscape rather than dominate it, fostering ecological awareness through subtle transformation. In both cases, architecture and land art converge not to build permanence, but to temporarily transform landscape into meaningful, sensorial, and poetic place.

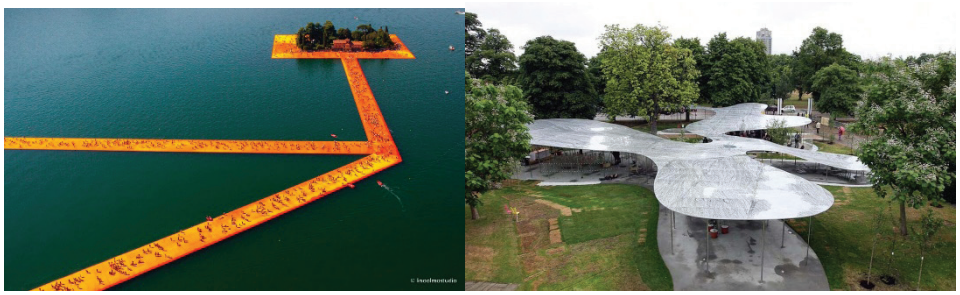

Figure 14. The Floating Piers 2014-2016, by Christo and Jeanne-Claude
Figure 15. Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2009, London, by SANAA

Figure 16. Labirinto di Arianna, Sicily by Italo Lanfredini
Figure 17. Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe by Peter Eisenman and Buro Happold.
Figure 18. Reiulf Ramstad Arkitekter, Trollstigen Visitor Centre (2009)

Italo Lanfredini's *Labirinto di Arianna* in Sicily (Fig.16) further exemplifies land art's introspective capacity. Rooted in myth, the earthen labyrinth invites tactile, meditative passage, integrating ritual, memory, and self-discovery within the land. Rather than framing the site, it integrates into it, cultivating a sense of ritual, memory, and self-discovery. Its use of natural materials and minimal intervention reflects a deep ecological consciousness in this intervention. This immersive engagement with site and symbolism was used by Peter Eisenman in his Memorial *to the Murdered Jews of Europe* (2005) (Fig.17), where a grid rectangular concrete blocks produces bodily disorientation and spatial ambiguity. Despite its urban setting and architectural rigor, the memorial functions phenomenologically, using absence and repetition to evoke trauma and reflection (Young, 2016). The memorial's restraint—formally minimal and materially austere—further enhances its psychological resonance and spatial depth, aligning with land art's focus on experience over representation.

The *Trollstigen Visitor Centre* by Reiulf Ramstad Arkitekter (Fig.17) extends these principles within a contemporary architectural and infrastructural framework. Set within the dramatic topography of Norway, the centre is embedded in the landscape both conceptually and materially. Corten steel and concrete structures echo the site's geology and weathering patterns, choreographing views and movement through a spatial narrative that highlights scale and temporality (Mollerup, 2013). Its ecological approach lies in its integration and durability, allowing the architecture to age with the site rather than dominate it. Together, these projects—demonstrate a shared approach to landscape as a medium of meaning, not backdrop. Through phenomenological engagement, material sensitivity, and ecological respect, they embody a convergence of land art and architecture, where space is not only seen but profoundly felt.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates how Land Art, as a conceptual and ecological practice, intersects meaningfully with contemporary architectural thought. Through a shared vocabulary of site-specificity, material engagement, and temporal awareness, both land artists and architects challenge conventional notions of form, permanence, and space.

The examined case studies illustrate how landscape becomes a medium for reflection, memory, and ecological consciousness. Artists such as Heizer, Denes, and Goldsworthy, alongside architects like Herzog & de Meuron, Grimshaw, and SANAA, foreground natural processes, sensory experience, and contextual responsiveness in their work. These interventions not only engage with place as a physical site but as a cultural, political, and temporal construct.

By transforming space into place, and matter into meaning, Land Art offers critical insights into sustainable design, environmental ethics, and phenomenological engagement. As such, it provides not just aesthetic inspiration, but a conceptual and ethical model for architecture that aspires to be regenerative, place-based, and deeply attuned to the rhythms of nature.

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Learning through making: The creative process as a method of learning in architectural education

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Abstract

Contemporary architectural education increasingly calls for pedagogical approaches that move beyond passive knowledge transmission toward experiential and student-centered learning. Within this context, the creative process can be understood not merely as a mode of artistic expression, but as a method of learning through which students construct knowledge, interpret spatial experiences, and develop critical thinking. This paper explores the role of creative practices as pedagogical tools in architecture and design education through a series of practice-based teaching experiments implemented in studio and theory courses. Drawing from teaching practice, the paper presents a series of design and representation exercises that encourage students to translate theoretical knowledge, spatial analysis, and client relationships into creative outputs. These include three-dimensional modelling as an interpretive act, photographic explorations inspired by Polaroid aesthetics to capture space as frozen moments, and a real-client villa project where students produced abstract paintings to express the client's personality. In addition, a survey was conducted with students who participated in these assignments in order to understand their perceptions of the learning experience and evaluate the extent to which creative methodologies helped them engage more deeply with the course content and learning process. The findings suggest that such creative methodologies strengthen students' engagement, spatial awareness, empathy, and interpretive abilities, while enabling a deeper connection between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Survey responses further revealed that students perceived these assignments as more interactive, memorable, and personally meaningful compared to conventional teaching approaches. The paper argues that creativity should be positioned as a structured pedagogical strategy and a legitimate mode of knowledge production within architectural education. By emphasizing learning through making, observing, translating, and reflecting, the study contributes to broader discussions on innovation in art and design pedagogy and advocates for more process-oriented approaches in architectural teaching.

Keywords

Creative process, architectural pedagogy, experiential learning, representation and interpretation, art-based learning

Introduction

Architectural education has traditionally been rooted in studio-based learning; however, it continues to face a recurring pedagogical challenge: enabling students to transform theoretical knowledge into meaningful spatial, social, and human understanding. Conventional teaching approaches often prioritize final products—such as drawings, models, and completed projects—while paying less attention to the learning processes that generate them. As a result, education risks becoming outcome-oriented, reducing opportunities for reflection, interpretation, and experiential engagement. In response to these challenges, contemporary scholarship increasingly advocates for process-oriented and practice-based pedagogies that position creativity as a central component of learning. Constructivist theories suggest that knowledge is actively constructed through experience rather than passively received. Piaget (1971) argues that learning emerges through interaction with the environment and the continuous adaptation of existing knowledge structures, while Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the importance of social interaction, guided discovery, and collaborative learning in the development of higher cognitive functions. Within architectural education, these perspectives support teaching methods that encourage students to engage directly with making, experimentation, and interpretation. Similarly, Schön (1983) describes professional learning as a process of "reflection-in-action," where thinking and doing occur simultaneously, allowing learners to develop understanding through practice. Pallasmaa (2009) further emphasizes the embodied and sensory dimensions of architectural experience, arguing that architecture is understood not only through analytical reasoning but also through perception, imagination, and lived experience. Together, these perspectives suggest that creative production can function as a powerful vehicle for learning. Recent studies have also demonstrated the value of creative methodologies in architecture and design education. For example, Sağdıç and Kosova (2013) showed how filmmaking can be used as an effective pedagogical tool for teaching architectural history, enabling students to engage with historical narratives through visual storytelling and creative interpretation. Such approaches move beyond the memorization of facts and encourage students to become active participants in knowledge construction. Building on these theoretical foundations, creative methods have been incorporated into History and Theory of Architecture courses to expose students to the philosophies and design approaches of influential architects. Rather than relying solely on written analysis, students were invited to interpret architectural ideas through artistic production, including three-dimensional models, visual compositions, photography, and other creative forms of representation. These assignments encouraged students to translate theoretical concepts into personal and visual interpretations, fostering deeper engagement with architectural thought and design culture (Basha, 2025). In addition to history and theory courses, creative and practice-based methodologies may also be integrated into design studios, where students engage with space through observation, interpretation, experimentation, and reflection. Through activities such as sketching, model-making, photography, artistic expression, and real-world design projects, learning extends beyond technical problem-solving to include emotional, sensory, and experiential dimensions. Such approaches position the creative process as an active vehicle for developing critical thinking, empathy, and a deeper understanding of the relationship between people and space. (Basha, 2025)

This paper argues that the creative process itself can function as a method of learning in architectural education. Through a series of creative assignments implemented in architecture and design courses, students were encouraged to engage in interpretation, experimentation, and

reflection. To evaluate the effectiveness of these pedagogical strategies, a survey was conducted among students who participated in the assignments. The survey aimed to investigate students' perceptions of the learning experience and assess whether creative methodologies enhanced their understanding of course content, engagement with the subject matter, and overall learning outcomes. By examining both the pedagogical exercises and student feedback, this study contributes to ongoing discussions in art and design education by positioning creativity as a structured and intentional methodology for learning rather than merely a means of expression.

Literature review

Architectural design research and practice-based learning

Architectural design research has increasingly been recognized as a legitimate mode of knowledge production, particularly when design practice itself becomes a research process. Aydemir and Jacoby (2016) describe architectural design research as an iterative, process-driven practice in which knowledge emerges through experimentation, making, and reflection rather than linear analysis. Similarly, Moloney (2011) argues that design research should be understood as contingent and exploratory, where methods evolve alongside the design itself. This perspective aligns with the concept of "research through design," where creative production is not merely an output but a method of inquiry (Frayling, 1993). In educational contexts, this reinforces the idea that students learn not by applying fixed methodologies but by engaging dynamically with materials, representations, and ideas. The studio thus becomes a site of knowledge production rather than knowledge application.

Creativity as a cognitive and pedagogical tool

Creativity in architectural education is increasingly framed as a cognitive process rather than an innate talent. Rudolf Arnheim **(**1998**)** argues that visual thinking is fundamental to cognition, suggesting that perception and reasoning are deeply interconnected. This perspective is particularly relevant in architecture, where spatial understanding is inherently visual and experiential. Danacı (2015) highlights that one of the central challenges in architectural education is students' difficulty in transferring theoretical knowledge into design practice, often due to prior rote-learning systems. Creative, exploratory, and iterative processes help bridge this gap by enabling interpretation and personal engagement. Brillhart (2016) further emphasizes the importance of engaging both analytical and intuitive modes of thinking, arguing that hybrid practices—combining **analogy** and digital media—enhance cognitive depth and spatial understanding. Drawing, **modelling**, and making are therefore not merely representational tools but essential instruments of thought.

Creative practices in architectural education

Empirical studies demonstrate that creative pedagogical practices significantly enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. Lizondo-Sevilla et al. (2018) show that creative studio practices encourage experimentation, reflection, and deeper conceptual understanding. Similarly, Refae (2019) argues that integrating creative methods supports critical thinking, imagination, and problem-solving skills in architectural education. Recent scholarship also emphasizes

non-traditional forms of representation and assessment. Blair (2006) discusses exhibitions and creative outputs as alternative modes of evaluation, suggesting that knowledge in architecture can be communicated and assessed through visual and spatial media, not solely through text. Together, these perspectives support the integration of artistic and creative practices as legitimate and necessary components of architectural pedagogy.

Methodology

This study adopts a practice-based pedagogical research methodology grounded in reflective teaching practice within architecture and design education. The research is primarily qualitative, supported by a complementary quantitative component. Three key assignments were developed: three-dimensional interpretation of architects, city analysis through visual narratives, and photography-based spatial exploration. To further evaluate the impact of the exercises approach a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale was administered to students at the end of the design process. The questionnaire measured variables such as creativity enhancement, conceptual clarity, user-centered thinking, and the translation of artistic expression into architectural form.This mixed-methods approach enables both interpretative insight and measurable evaluation of the creative process as a learning method.

Findings and discussion

Interpreting architects through three-dimensional modeling

This section refers to the assignment "Exploring Architectural Philosophy through 3D Art," in the subject of Theory of Art, Architecture and Urban Design, (3rd year) where students were asked to select a renowned architect and explore their design philosophy through research, analysis, and creative interpretation. The assignment required students to move beyond descriptive study and engage with architecture as a conceptual and spatial discipline. Through investigating the architect's life, major works, and key design principles—such as form, material, space, and the relationship with context—students developed a deeper understanding of architectural thinking.

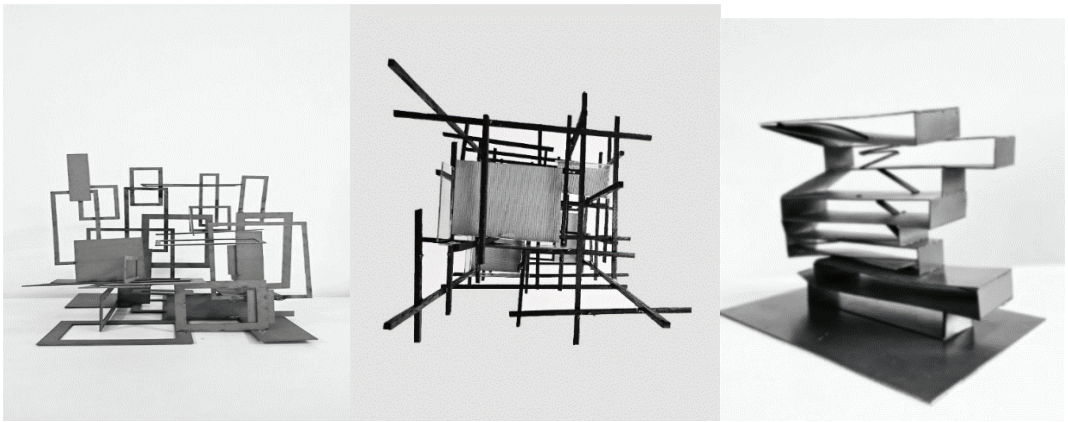

Figure 1. Artwork presenting Paul Rudolph. Student Enes Xhabija
Figure 2. Artwork presenting MIES.Sstudent Evelina Cukari
Figure 3. Artwork presenting Rem Koolhas. Student MEgi Ajdini

The core of the exercise was the creation of a three-dimensional artwork that interprets, rather than replicates, the architect's philosophy. This process encouraged students to translate theoretical knowledge into physical form, using making as a tool for thinking and reflection. In line with ideas of reflective practice (e.g., Donald Schön), the assignment positioned the design process as an active form of learning.

To evaluate the effectiveness of creative learning methods in architectural education, a questionnaire was conducted with students who participated in the architectural philosophy modeling exercise (n = 7). The findings indicate an overall positive perception of the assignment and its contribution to learning. The highest-rated outcomes were related to creative interpretation and critical thinking, both receiving an average score of 4.0/5. Students also reported that the exercise helped them interpret ideas rather than simply reproduce them, translate theory into form, and improve their understanding of space through three-dimensional exploration, with average scores ranging from 3.86 to 4.0. Furthermore, students perceived the method as more engaging than traditional forms of study (3.86/5), suggesting that creative and hands-on approaches can increase participation and interest in theoretical subjects. Moderately positive results were also observed in students' understanding of architectural philosophy (3.57/5), spatial thinking (3.71/5), and their willingness to recommend or continue similar exercises in future courses (3.57–3.71/5).

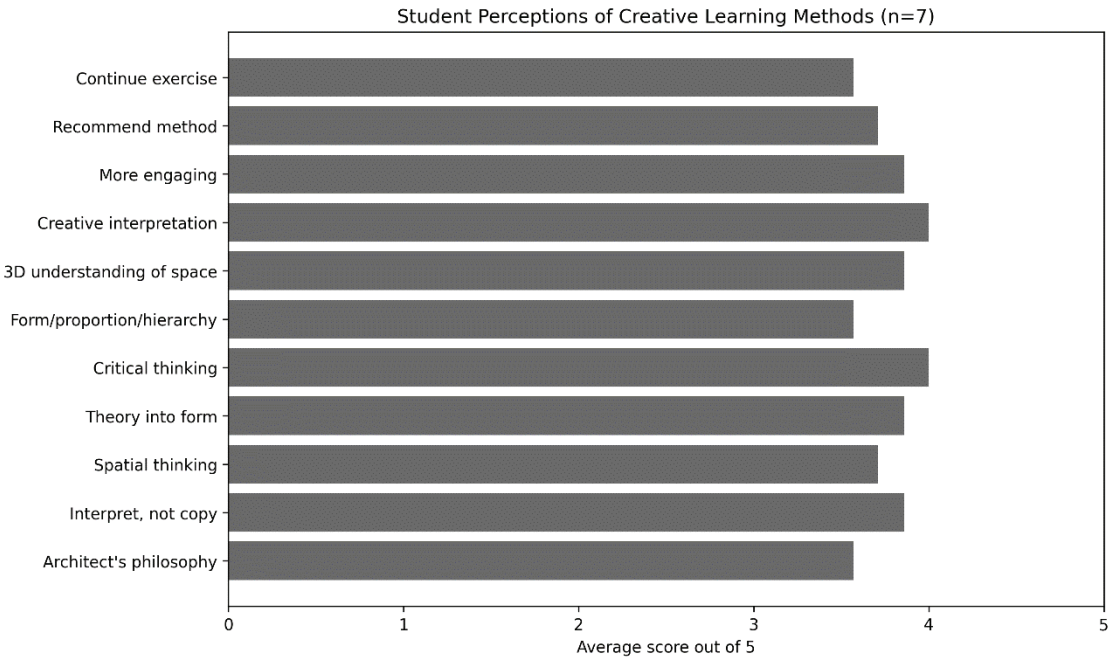

Figure 4. Average student ratings of Evaluating Creative Methods in Architectural Education-Reading the architect through 3D abstract modeling.

These findings indicate that while most students valued the exercise, some remained neutral or expressed reservations regarding its implementation. The open-ended responses provided additional insights into students' experiences. One student suggested offering stronger guidance on concepts such as space, hierarchy, form, and proportion, while another emphasized that

creative interpretation exercises are most effective when supported by a stronger theoretical foundation. These comments do not necessarily indicate a limitation of the creative methodology itself, but rather highlight the importance of maintaining a close connection between theory and practice. It should also be noted that the participants were third-year students who had already been exposed to theoretical courses and interpretative approaches in previous years of study. Consequently, certain concepts and analytical skills may have been assumed as prior knowledge by the instructor and were therefore not explicitly revisited during the exercise. The students' feedback suggests that even when such foundations have been introduced previously, opportunities to reconnect theoretical concepts with creative practice remain essential for maximizing learning outcomes.

Although the sample size is limited, the findings provide preliminary evidence that creative, model-based learning approaches can enhance engagement, critical thinking, interpretation, and the connection between theoretical knowledge and practical application. The results support the argument that creativity can function not only as a means of expression but also as a meaningful method of learning in architectural education, enabling students to actively construct knowledge through interpretation, experimentation, and reflection.

Reading the city through Kevin Lynch: cartoons and satirical narratives

This section refers to the assignment in which students analyzed the city through the framework of Kevin Lynch, focusing on key elements such as paths, edges, nodes, districts, and landmarks. Rather than presenting the analysis through conventional diagrams, students were asked to reinterpret the city using creative visual narratives, including cartoons, satire, and storytelling. This approach encouraged students to move beyond objective mapping and engage with the city as a lived and experienced environment. By translating urban analysis into visual and narrative forms, the exercise aimed to strengthen students' ability to observe, interpret, and communicate spatial experience. It also promoted critical thinking by allowing students to express subjective perceptions, emotions, and critiques of the urban environment.

Figure 5. City analysis through graphic interpretation using cartoons and satirical narratives.(Basha, 2025)

Creative storytelling enhanced engagement and critical interpretation. By using satire and narrative, students articulated lived urban experiences rather than abstract analysis, aligning with experiential learning theories and reinforcing subjective interpretation as a valid form of knowledge.

Space as a frozen moment: polaroid-inspired photography

This section refers to the assignment "Polaroids of Space," in which students were asked to document spatial experience through a series of atmospheric photographs inspired by Polaroid aesthetics. The task focused on capturing transitions in interior space by observing elements such

as light, material, texture, color, pattern, form, depth, and height. Rather than treating photography as simple documentation, the exercise encouraged students to explore space as an experiential and perceptual phenomenon. Drawing on architectural theories of spatial experience (e.g., Peter Zumthor, Juhani Pallasmaa, Louis Kahn), students were invited to interpret atmosphere, temporality, and human perception through visual framing.

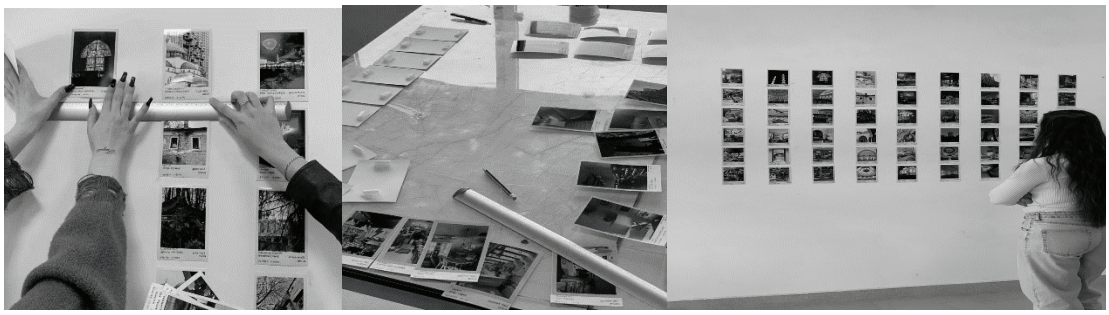

Figure 6. Curating frozen moments of space. Students assembling their Polaroid-inspired photographic compositions before the final presentation and discussion session. (Basha, 2025)

To evaluate the effectiveness of photography as a creative learning method, a questionnaire was conducted with students who participated in the Polaroid-inspired photography exercise (n = 8). Overall, the findings reveal a highly positive perception of the activity, with all statements receiving average scores above 4.3 out of 5. The highest-rated statement was "I would recommend photography in design learning" (4.75/5), indicating strong student support for integrating photography into architectural education. Similarly, students strongly agreed that the exercise should continue in future academic years (4.62/5) and that it helped them notice details they would normally overlook (4.62/5). These results suggest that photography encouraged careful observation and a deeper awareness of the built environment. High scores were also recorded for statements related to light and shadow awareness, emotional connection to space, and the ability of capturing moments to change the way architecture is perceived (all 4.50/5). This indicates that the exercise enabled students to engage with architecture beyond its physical dimensions, fostering sensory, emotional, and experiential forms of understanding.

Students further reported improvements in their perception of space, observation skills, and visual representation abilities (all approximately 4.38/5). The statement "This method felt more intuitive than drawing" also received a positive evaluation (4.38/5), suggesting that photography can serve as an accessible and effective medium for exploring architectural ideas.

No written suggestions or criticisms were provided in the open-ended section, which may further reflect the positive reception of the exercise.

Although the sample size is limited, the findings provide preliminary evidence that photography can be an effective pedagogical tool in architectural education. The results suggest that creative photographic exercises can strengthen observation, spatial awareness, emotional engagement, and visual literacy, supporting the argument that creative processes can function as meaningful methods of learning rather than merely forms of representation. Furthermore, photography increased sensitivity to atmosphere and spatial perception.

Conclusion

This study explored the role of the creative process as a method of learning in architectural education through a series of practice-based assignments implemented in theory, history, and design-related courses. Rather than positioning creativity as an additional or decorative component of learning, the findings demonstrate its potential as a structured pedagogical strategy that enables students to construct knowledge through interpretation, experimentation, observation, and reflection.

The three case studies presented in this paper—interpreting architects through three-dimensional modelling, analyzing the city through visual narratives and satire, and exploring spatial experience through Polaroid-inspired photography—illustrate different ways in which creative activities can transform theoretical concepts into meaningful learning experiences. Across the assignments, students were encouraged to engage actively with architectural ideas, moving beyond memorization toward interpretation and personal understanding.

The survey findings further support the educational value of these approaches. Students reported positive outcomes in areas such as creative thinking, critical reflection, spatial awareness, observation skills, and engagement with course content. Particularly significant was the perception that creative assignments facilitated a stronger connection between theoretical knowledge and practical application while making the learning process more memorable and meaningful. Although the sample sizes were limited, the results provide preliminary evidence that creative methodologies can enhance both cognitive and experiential dimensions of learning.

The study also highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between creative exploration and theoretical grounding. Student feedback suggests that creative exercises are most effective when supported by clear conceptual frameworks that help learners connect interpretation with disciplinary knowledge. Consequently, creativity should not be viewed as a replacement for theory, but as a complementary approach through which theoretical concepts can be explored, tested, and internalized.

Ultimately, the findings reinforce the idea that architectural education benefits from pedagogical models that value making, seeing, imagining, and reflecting as forms of knowledge production. By embracing creativity as a learning methodology, architectural education can cultivate more engaged, reflective, and critically aware designers capable of understanding architecture not only as a technical discipline, but also as a cultural, experiential, and human-centered practice.

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Interpretation of mourning codes in art

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Abstract

At the intersection of contemporary art and tradition stand out artists who persist in exploring heritage. Their works emerge as an echo of the past, seeking to establish connections with the present through a rich figurative language. The artistic idea and figurative narrative unfold at times within a broad register, engaging with rites, customs, and traditions, and at other times through details, subtleties, and gestures. A visible element of this representation remains clothing. Not infrequently, we also encounter works that attest, among other things, to fragments of the funerary rite. The funerary rite, as treated in painting, sculpture, photography, video, and other media, reveals the impact that life and cultural stratifications exert on individual memory, which is then transmitted to the public through renewed interpretation. From the laments of men and women, to burials in ordinary or almost sacred places, to the process of preparing the body—its arrangement and dressing—as a dominant element of the funerary rite, everything leads toward an exploration of ancestral customs, even of the cult of the forebears, embodied in the memory of the hero. This sensitizing approach provokes the viewer's memory, linking it to histories and dates, both near and distant, in order to recall events and those who are no longer among us. The contemporary artist achieves this by intervening at the boundaries of time in relation to the hero—the human one, devoid of idealized beauty and exaggerated powers—who dies like any ordinary person, yet challenges destiny through his act, with clothing serving as the final witness.

Keywords

Visual art, heritage, costume design

Interpretation of mourning codes in art

In the connection between contemporary art and tradition, there are artists who constantly explore heritage. Their works come as an echo of the past that tends to establish links with the present through a rich figurative language. The artistic idea of figurative narration is developed in a broad register, focusing on rites and customs through details, subtleties and gestures, as well as a visible element of appearance, which is clothing. We often encounter artworks that, among other things, testify to fragments of the funeral rite.

Clothing is the first external sign that transmits, among other things, grief, sorrow and mourning. But not the only one. It covers the fragility of the body and tries to soften this effect by accompanying or modifying the last trace of human existence on earth - death. Death as a phenomenon has always tempted artists of different countries and different times as a motive to explore themes of life or religion. In Albanian art there are also some important artworks on this theme. They are mainly in the context of the wars for freedom and independence such as "Massacres" by Zef Kolombi with the image of a mother next to her son killed by the invaders, the sculptural group "Friends" by the artist Odhise Paskali with a mortally wounded partisan between two others who stand next to him, "The Sorrow of the Kosovar Nights" by Edi Rama and a few about natural events such as "The Death of the Artist" by Vilson Kilica. Both reflect the moment of separation from the deceased, implying the other phases of the ritual.

In Rama's painting, death is presented in the form of an anthropomorphic skeleton with a little cloth on it, mainly white textile or a type of tunic that is draped over the body like Christ or in a tendency towards mummification. The death ritual by this artist is similar to the ritual for sacred characters as well as for the pharaohs in the culture of ancient Egypt to the point of a symbiosis between them. This image projection can also be interpreted as research on the cult of the graves of the ancestors in the way that famous anthropologists approach this topic from time to time.[1] The hero's body descends from the rock, tied as if on a cross-shaped structure, which is nothing more than his gun resting on his chest. His arms and legs are tied with a cord (bandage) that runs the length of the body to remain on the axis of the cross (gun) and a light fabric (paften) surrounds him like a flag. Although the figure of the hero appears in the costume of a mountaineer, because are visible the black cords along the trousers (tirqet) and the shoes (opingat) on his feet, the fabric and the body have become one. The construction of three levels: earth, sky, underground (cave), the inverse projection of the martyr compared to Christ, where he leans down on the rocks but similar to the isolation or preservation of the body in a natural sarcophagus ensuring eternity, makes this work unique for the power of the image. In this hour of descent into eternity, people move between two levels, on the surface of the earth in the space with little sky above them.

1 Mark Tirta, (1979) *Aspects of the cult of the ancestors and the dead among Albanians / Albanian Ethnography X,* p. 93, published by the *Albanian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Popular Culture,* Tirana.

Figure 1. Edi Rama, The Sorrow of the Kosovar Nights (National Gallery of Arts)

In Kilica's artwork, death takes on an allegorical connotation through the darkness that is honored in the world after the departure of an artist from life. In both of the above cases, death is confronted with life. The scenography of the ritual is built with a landscape and a group of relatives or comrades who participate in saying goodbye. Feelings, regrets, sadness are conveyed through clothing, gestures, colors, light in full tones or half tones, to somehow soften the effect of the shock that death brings.

In the history of Albanian photography there are also documented cases of death. From the studios of several photographers of the first years of the 20th century, funeral ceremonies of different areas and characters have been recorded, quite significant for the situation they present. In 1913, a photograph by Kolë Maca "The Daughter of John Paul" shows a girl crying over her father's head, a participant in the fight to defend Shkodra against Montenegrin troops, as he breathes his last.[2] The daughter's mourning over her father's head seems to be a memory of the transition of mourning from collective to individual at the beginning of the 20th century.[3] During the 1920s and 1930s was recorded on celluloid the funeral ceremony of patriot Josif Pani by Thimi Raci in Dardha, the funeral ritual by Dhimitër Vangjeli in Kolonja etc.[4] Later in December 1940, Gjergj Fishta is photographed on his deathbed by Gegë Marubi a few hours after his death in the civil hospital of Shkodra, as well as a series of other photos during the funeral ceremonies of the dictatorship period and later to immortalize the people's respect for a personality.

2 Vrioni, Q. (2018) *Grief in an Old Photo, / The Daughter of John of Paul in the Eye of Kolë Maca* (The Siege of Shkodra 1912-1913), p. 29, *Emal* Publications, Tirana.

3 Selimi, Y. (1988) *Rites and customs of death / Albanian Ethnography* 13, p.330, published by the *Institute of Popular Culture*, Tirana. 10. Schulz, R, (1938) Leichenbegrabnis und totenkult bei den Malisoren, Leipziger Zeitschrift Atlantis, vol. 10, p. 257-259, Leipzig.

4 Pani, S. V. (2016) *Father and son* (Josif and Vasil Pani), p.85, *Emal&Pantheon* publications, Tirana.

These photographs, in addition to their historical value, are documentary, reporting, descriptive and, convey direct and complete ethnographic information about the funeral ceremony or ritual. A video by the artist Adrian Paci entitled "Vajtojca" presents this ceremony as a film documentation referring to the phenomenon of "film cameras for such cases", underlines the historian Zef Paci.[5] But no artist has been as analytical towards death as a concrete and abstract phenomenon between being and non-being as the artist Gazmend Leka. He has created a complete cycle on the process of death as a phenomenon, the trace it leaves, the effect it causes and he poses the question of the inevitable destiny of the physical and the eternal. Everything that comes from him is much more than an anthropological document in this visual testimony of the end of life or the beginning of eternity. Especially in the painting "Homage to the Hero" he reveals to the public an essential moment of the inherited culture regarding the funeral ritual. The artist marks in the painting the last moment of the life of the emblematic figure of the Democratic Revolution of June 1924, Avni Rustemi on his deathbed and awaiting the transition to the afterlife. At first glance, the work causes shock, and even to some extent rejection from the viewer. This impression caused by the heavy appearance of a dead body on a bed on a black background, attracts you as much as it shocks you. The beauty of the painting is not determined by the concise figuration, but by the expression of death in the state between life and eternity. The close-up reflection of the rite and our history of wars condensed in the hero's deathbed transfers the concept to a spiritual dimension. Rarely the dead character is represented alone, isolated and in darkness. Since death is a short, quick and intimate moment, to represent it, the author has created an image that allows it to be studied and in a way attempts to extinguish human fear, both of the artist and the viewer of the artwork.

Figure 2. G. Leka, Homage to the Hero (private collection)

The hero's body is covered. The clothes are not visible; they are left to be understood. What is visible are the covering or corrective fabrics. The artist Leka has used the rich knowledge and tools of anthropology, ethnology, sociology and religion to give a form to death according to the Albanian customary tradition. The body of the deceased was placed on a bed with white sheets; the face was bound with a white corrective bandage and a group of mourners stood around.[6]

5 Paci, Z. (2011) *Rituals of marriage and death in contemporary Albanian art / Ethnocultural tradition and contemporary times*, p. 213, published by the *Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Art Studies at the Center for Albanological Studies,* Tirana.

6 Traboini, K. (2016) *The Libohovite of America*, p. 59. published by *Pantheon books*, Tirana.

The bed where the hero rests is composed precisely according to the traditional funeral rite preserved until the turn of the 20th century. There are shown white sheets, a dark blanket on them and a tight scarf that surrounds the head to maintain the symmetry of the portrait. Consequently, through the painting comes strong anthropological evidence and from there the rite is evidenced as a vertical analysis of social development and customary tradition. The visual aspect of the funeral ceremony sequence may tempt ethnologists to reconfirm conclusions about the rites, costumes and way of thinking of the Albanian man at a certain time. Of course, for these details the author has referred to archival documents about the hero, but the separation of the subject from the environment and the placement of the body in an incandescent situation between life and death, where the measurable transition is expected through the small white light that stands out in the narrow perspective, gives a powerful tempo to a painting that apparently does not express any movement. Half of the pictorial surface is empty and the body seems both propped up on the bed and collapsed in a space without spatial limitations. The rapport of white and black that plays with its tonalities emphasizes the contrast between life and death, purity and darkness. The black in the background and foreground increases the expressive gradation and thus presents to the public one of the most dramatic paintings realized after the '90s and beyond. The composition follows a horizontal line that runs parallel to the "cortege" of the public "to honor the hero".

In this line of interpretation, Zef Shoshi, Maks Velo and Ndue Pepa expand the objective with a line or encirclement of the coffin by human bodies. The above-mentioned paintings remind us Barleti's description of Lekë Dukagjini's mourning after the death of Skanderbeg.[7] Or what Alexandre Degrand emphasizes in his book "Memories from Upper Albania", that in mourning for a man or a friend they hit their chest hard, tear their face with their nails, don't wash the blood that flows their face and for several months wear their jacket in reverse.[8] Focusing on the tragedy of the individual, the way that pain is experienced or manifested, is an attempt to bring back to attention, in addition to the reverent honoring of the hero or an ordinary dead person, an ancient ritual that was reduced and banned by the regime somewhere around the sixties of the twentieth century.[9]

The organization of the figures in the space of the frame unveils the "Gjama" according to the rules described in the old canon.[10] Elements of clothing stylized with nerve, but with absolute precision of details such as the hat (*plisi*), the jacket (zhguni*)*, the trousers (*tirq)* with cords and the shoes (*opinga*) transfer the narrative to the North of Albania. "In contemporary art," researcher Jakup Mato would say that "details are used as signs with a meaning given to them by the author, and their whole creates a certain structure."[11] The dead or murdered hero imposes the line of mourners (as an expression of unity), who, according to tradition, are expected to enumerate the high values and qualities, the good deeds he has done for the benefit of his country and tribe.[12]

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7 Barleti, M. (1967) *History of Skanderbeg*, p. 494, pub. *State University of Tirana, Institute of History and Linguistics,* Tirana.

8 Degrand, A, (2024) *Memories of Upper Albania*, p. 59. pub. *Zenit*, Tirana.

9 Neçaj, Gj. (2012) *When men cry, Shekulli* newspaper 23.8.2012, Tirana.

10 Gjecovi, Sh. (1938) *The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini*, p. 2, pub. *Franciscan Printing House*, Shkodër. 5. Mato, J. (1999) *The Work of Art in the Creative Process / Studies for Art 5,* p. 157, *Center for the Study of Arts*, Tirana.

11 Mato, J. (1999) *The Work of Art in the Creative Process / Studies for Art 5,* p. 157, *Center for the Study of Arts*, Tirana.

12 Schulz, R, (1938) Leichenbegrabnis und totenkult bei den Malisoren, Leipziger Zeitschrift Atlantis, vol. 10, p. 257-259, Leipzig.

Their gestures with palms resting on their hips, elbows out to the sides, hands on their heads or faces, tearing up the face with implied screams or calling out the name of the deceased with all their power, the bending of the body and the movements of the legs, beating the ground with one foot and the thundering with the other, and finally "bowing down to the dead man, caressing the earth that will shelter his corpse", reveal the earliest procession left in these lands since Homeric times - that of pain for separation from life and reverence for man. The distance of each group of mourners from the coffin is equally equidistant, and the viewer becomes present in the most epic event in history, about which much can be said. "Once you have seen such a scene in reality, you can never forget it", wrote the anthropologist Albert Dumont.[13] The artwork brings just as much emotion.

Figure 3. Ndue Pepa (private collection)
Figure 4. Maks Velo (private collection)
Figure 5. Zef Shoshi (private collection) Gjama

Meanwhile, a strong anthropological testimony in "Head on a plate" comes as an allegory of human life and feelings by authors Stefan Taçi and Agim Janina. The severed head served as an ornament to one artist and a surprise to other, shocks with its multiplicity of meanings. It comes into context as a provocation of historical memory on the events developed by wars and their consequences, sometimes ending with unparalleled massacres, where severed heads were shaken, hung or served as trophies depending on rank. The composition of a platter as a throne places the character in a position of honor, which brings to mind the phenomenon that happened to people of rank when they were punished by the central government, as happened with Ali Pasha of Ioannina in 1822. Referring to this case, diplomat Robert Walsh wrote in 1828 that "his head was treated with a respect befitting his rank. Instead of being displayed, as was usual, at the gate, it was placed in a flat vessel, on a low marble column, between the first and second gates of the palace, resembling the head of John the Baptist on a platter" to be viewed as a trophy of war, accompanied by a letter accusing him of his deeds.[14]

Based on these symbols, it seems that artists tend to single out for their compositions the one that conveys the strongest message - the male Hero, although Albanian history has several women notable for their bravery who have given examples of unparalleled heroism. However, they express through artistic gesture the pain for the heroes who have disappeared, or rather forgotten. Apart from the interest in re-evaluating the heritage as a spiritual artifact (rediscovered), or the subconscious reflection of the transition from one life to another, or simply or simply to

13 Dumont, A. (1873) *Le Balkan et l'Adriatique*, p. 313, edit. *Didier et Cie*, Paris.
14 Walsh, R. (1828) *Narrative of a Journey from Constantinople to England*, p. 63-66, published by *Frederick Westley and A. H. Davis,* London.

show a historical fact, is the troubled conscience of the Albanian intellectual who reflects on the events that occurred in the past (and that are repeated). The communication on several levels that is provoked between the viewer and the artwork is one of the values of these paintings. This sensitizing accomplishment provokes the viewer's memory about our history and recent and distant dates to remember stormy events, destroyed dreams, or people who no longer live. And finally, it is the homage that the contemporary artist achieves by intervening in the boundaries of time for the hero, not the one described by decades of socialist realism, but the human being, without ideal beauty and hyperbolized power. The hero who dies like any ordinary person in this world, but defies fate through his act, having his clothing as his final witness.

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3. Kolë Maca, *Gjon Pali and his daughter*, 1913.
4. Gazmend Leka, *Personal Exhibition "Prayer",* Fab Gallery-University of Arts, Tirana, October 2018.
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6. *"Gjergj Fishta on his deathbed",* National Museum of Photography "Marubi" Shkodër;
7. *"The Burial of Josif Pan",* Thimi Raci Dardhë,
8. *"Gjama"* Maks Velo, Ndue Pepa, Zef Shoshi.

Mural painting between art, meaning and heritage. Iconographic and historical observations on a post-byzantine monument

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Abstract

This research material aims to convey the complexity of the art applied in the mural paintings of the post-Byzantine church in our country. This analysis is based on a case study of the iconography of the Church of the Holy Archangels in Vithkuq. Through the examination, interpretation, and highlighting of the content of the mural painting of this church, numerous artistic, historical and religious details can be documented in an exemplary manner, helping to fill the lack of written scholarly materials from a difficult historical period in our country. This church is among the most important monuments of post-Byzantine ecclesiastical heritage in southeastern Albania. Built in 1682, during the Ottoman period, and adorned with mural paintings in 1728, the church represents one of the earliest and most representative examples of architecture and wall painting in the area, preceding the large basilicas of the region. This paper analyzes the iconography and stylistic features of the mural scenes of this church through a methodology that includes the identification, interpretation, and comparison of the visual content with paintings of other contemporary churches in the region. The analysis shows that in this post-Byzantine church a typical iconographic program of the post-Byzantine period was followed; however, specific scenes and solutions are also identified that distinguish this church from others in the region. These particular features, examined in detail in this study, contribute not only to a better understanding of the development of ecclesiastical art in our country, but also to the preparation and archiving of materials and cultural specifics of our heritage, enabling a more authentic and sustainable evaluation and promotion of its monumental values.

Keywords

Iconography, iconology, mural painting, cultural heritage

Introduction

The study of Byzantine and post-Byzantine mural painting in Albania represents a field of particular importance not only for art history but also for cultural historiography. Due to the lack of substantial archival documentation for the centuries of Ottoman rule, Orthodox religious monuments become direct sources of information on the spiritual, political, and identity developments of local communities. Mural art functions as a collective visual memory. Through image, symbol, and composition, it articulates theological positions, cultural orientations, and religious-political strategies. In this context, the Church of the Archangels in Vithkuq serves as a case study for understanding the interaction between Byzantine iconographic tradition and the historical circumstances of the 18th century in the region of Northern Epirus. The aim of this paper is to analyze the iconographic program of this church, identify both typical and distinctive elements, and examine the potential cultural and political messages conveyed through the selection of scenes and holy figures.

Methodology

The study relies on iconographic analysis to identify and describe scenes based on their architectural position and theological content. Iconological interpretation is also applied to explore deeper symbolic and cultural meanings. Then, through comparison with known post-Byzantine models and contemporary monuments in Epirus, typical and specific elements are highlighted.The figurative program is also placed within the historical context of the activity of the Archdiocese of Ohrid and the economic and cultural development of the region in the 17th–18th centuries.

Brief information about the church

The Church of the Archangels (known as the Church of St. Michael) is the oldest and largest preserved church in Vithkuq.

Figure 1. Exterior view of the Church of the Archangels

According to the inscription on the south gate, its construction began in 1682, while the painting was completed on 1 October 1728, with the contribution of the community, priest Stavri, and other clerics[1].

Figure 2. Inscription on the south gate

The architecture is basilical, with three naves ending in three semicircular apses. The dimensions (15.5 m × 9.5 m) provide a considerable surface for mural decoration.
The development of this monument is linked to the economic and cultural rise of the region in the 17th–18th centuries, under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Ohrid, which played an important role in the religious and cultural organization of the area.

Post-Byzaantine iconographic program

The iconographic program of post-Byzantine Orthodox churches includes the decoration of the entire interior with mural paintings or mosaics according to a specific scheme, in harmony with the symbolic meaning of the architecture. The murals are created and arranged according to this structure, and their interpretation is guided by painting manuals such as that of Dionysius of Fourna (1670–1744). According to the classical model of the decorative rule, each group of saints, each scene, and each cycle occupies a specific place and has a clear role in the theological message that the church conveys to the faithful.
In the dome, Christ Pantocrator is depicted in half-figure, surrounded by archangels, while below appears the Celestial Liturgy with angels serving as ministers. In the conch of the apse, the Virgin Mary is shown with Christ or with the archangels Michael and Gabriel, and beneath this appear the scenes of the Communion of the Apostles and the Liturgy of the Holy Fathers. The area from the dome toward the south and north vertical walls is reserved for the life of Christ on earth, where the Twelve Great Feasts of the Church, known as the Dodekaorton, are represented. Below these are friezes with medallions containing portraits of saints, while under them, at the level of the faithful, appears the register of full-length selected saints, serving as intermediaries between believers and Heaven.

1 In 1682, Dionysios was the Archbishop of Kastoria. Therefore, the construction began under his leadership during his tenure as archbishop. Meanwhile, the painting of the church (in 1728) was carried out under the direction of the Archbishopric of Kastoria by Chrysanthos, who led it—with small interruptions—from 1719 until 1764.
R. Rousseva, *Iconographic Characteristics of the Churches of Moschopolis and Vithkuqi (Albania)*, Makedonika 35, 2006, 163–179, 164.

The surface of the western wall is reserved for the Virgin Mary and the depiction of the Koimesis[2] (Dormition). The Church of the Archangels generally follows this scheme, but also presents several specific variations.

Iconographic Analysis

In the central vault of the apse appears the Virgin Mary Platytera, the orans type of Mary, with her hands raised in prayer and with the medallion of Christ Emmanuel in front of her chest. She is dressed in a red maforion with a gilded border, while the background and the treatment of the figure give the scene a pronounced sense of solemnity.

Figure 3. The Virgin Mary Platytera

- On both sides of her appear the Annunciation to Saint Joachim and the Annunciation to Saint Anne. This choice is significant, as in many churches the Annunciation to Mary is depicted in this position. Emphasizing the figures of her parents in the apse places the human lineage of Mary—and consequently the human nature of Christ—at the center. This iconographic choice gives special emphasis to the idea of His birth as a human being[3].

Figure 4. The Annunciation to Joachim / The Annunciation to Anne

2 J. Schmidt, Die spätbyzantinischen Wandmalereien: Eine Untersuchung zu den Werken und der Vernetzung zweier kretischen Maler, Heidelberg: Propylaeum, 2000 (Byzanz zwischen Orient und Okzident, Band 20), 201-204.

3 A. Tradigo, Ikonen. Meisterwerke der Ostkirche, Berlin 2005, 94.

- The central dome depicts Christ Pantocrator in a medallion, surrounded by angels. His figure, with a beard and holding the Gospel, appears with authority and serenity, symbolizing universal sovereignty.

In the squares surrounding the dome appear "The Ancient of Days" (Sabaoth) and Christ Emmanuel. These representations emphasize the eternity and dual nature of Christ, forming a complete program centered on His figure—typical of the post-Byzantine period[4].

- Beneath the depiction of Mary, in the cylindrical zone of the apse, three rows of liturgical communion scenes are presented. Immediately below her appears the Communion of the Apostles, symmetrically arranged on both sides of the arch, where the apostles—six on each side—approach Christ with outstretched hands to receive the bread and wine. On the left side, Judas can be distinguished, turned with his back and walking in the opposite direction, with the devil on his shoulders—a distinctive representation of this theme also found in other churches of the region[5].

Figure 5. The Heavenly Liturgy and the Communion of the Apostles

- An important element is the narrow band of medallions that runs across the interior space of the church (except for the apse). The medallions, featuring the busts of saints set against a dark blue background and surrounded by floral ornaments, create an intermediary zone between the heavenly and earthly realms. This element is widely found in monumental painting of the 13th century and continues to appear during the post-Byzantine period in Western Macedonia and Epirus[6].

4 K. Kirchhainer, Die Malereien in den Gewölbezonen der Kuppelbasiliken von Voskopojë (Moschopolis), *Acta Studia Albanica 1*, 2007, 60-96, 84, 85.

5 On this iconographic representation, M. Garidis writes: La peinture murale dans le monde orthodoxe après la chute de Byzance, 1450–1600, et dans les pays sous domination étrangère, Athens 1989, p. 332.
R. Rousseva also writes about this distinctive image, mentioning earlier depictions of this particular scene, such as in the Monastery of Barlaam (1566) in Meteora or in the katholikon of the Monastery of Gregoriou.
According to Rousseva, this scene was also painted by Terpo Zografi, the son of Konstantin Zografi, in the Monastery of Saint Naum. Rousseva, 169.

6 Kirchhainer 2007, 59.

Figure 6. The Band of Medallions

- Below the band of medallions appears the upper register with full-length figures of saints. These include apostles, evangelists, holy fathers, deacons, patriarchs, martyrs, monks, and hermits. These saints are depicted as intermediaries between the faithful and the heavenly realm.
- On the south wall appears the Deesis scene: Christ Pantocrator in the center, with the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist in a praying posture on either side. This is a typical scene in Paleologan painting as well as in post-Byzantine art of the Diocese of Ohrid[7]. Usually, it is depicted on the north wall near the iconostasis; in this case, however, it represents a deviation from the usual scheme and is shown on the south wall, in the opposite position.

Figure 7. The Deesis Scene and Saint Charalambos

- Next to the Deesis is depicted Saint Charalambos, with white hair and a white beard. His cult as a protector against the plague was widespread in the regions of Epirus and under the jurisdiction of Ohrid. An important testimony to his high veneration in the area of the Patriarchate of Ohrid is the publication of the Akolouthia of Charalambos in the printing press of Voskopoja. His inclusion in the program may be connected to the fear of epidemics and the need for spiritual protection.
- In the next segment of the western wall, three figures are presented: after the opening leading to the narthex appears the Archangel Gabriel, and further along the full figure of Saint Naum, who blesses with his right hand and holds the Gospel in his left. Saint Naum is among the most popular saints in the territories of the Patriarchate of Ohrid, and his veneration is associated with the spread of the cult of Slavic saints in the 17th century[8].

7 Rousseva 2006, 173.

8 R. Lozanova, in: "Images of Slavic Saints in Moschopolis and Vithkuqi—Albania", Les Saints Slaves dans

Figure 8. Saint John Vladimir, Saint Naum, and the Archangel Gabriel

- A particularly important place is held by the figure of Saint John Vladimir (†1015), associated with the spread of the veneration of saints originating from the period of the First Bulgarian Kingdom[9]. His cult is documented from the end of the 17th century, initially in the Monastery of Elbasan dedicated to this saint, where in 1689 an acolouthia and two "Vitae" were compiled, accompanied by an engraving depicting the saint holding his severed head in one hand and the cross in the other. This engraving established his iconographic profile as a *cephalophore*, a type that appears for the first time in the mural painting of this church[10]. His depiction here, with elements of European[11]-style clothing and crown, constitutes an important testimony for dating the painting and for understanding the spread of his cult in the churches of the region. The presence of this figure is connected to the influence of the Patriarchate of Ohrid and its interest in promoting this veneration in the religious centers under its jurisdiction, while also revealing the role of mural painting in disseminating the religious models and ideas of the time[12].

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l'histoire de l'église chrétienne; Annuaire de l'Université de Sofia "St. Kliment Ohridski", Centre de recherches slavo-byzantines "Ivan Dujcev", t. 92/11/2002, Sofia 2003, pp. 177–188, figs. 332–351, 180.

9 Lozanova, 182.

10 The earliest known image depicting John Vladimir is found in the Church of Saint Nicholas in Shelcan. It is not part of Onufri's famous frescoes, but belongs to a second phase of painting carried out in 1625.
Chronologically, the next depiction of this saint is known from an icon found on Mount Sinai (around 1700), where the saint is shown on horseback.
After this, another depiction is known from an icon of the Monastery of Saint Naum (1711), where John Vladimir is shown standing, but not holding his severed head.
In 1731, the saint is painted by Konstantin of Shpati, in an icon with scenes from the life of Cosmas of Kytous. Konstantin of Shpati depicts John Vladimir seated, holding his severed head in his hand. This image is surrounded by panels presenting scenes from the saint's life.
This depiction by Konstantin of Shpati comes after the representation of John Vladimir as a cephalophore in "our" Church of Saint Michael, which dates to its painting in 1728.
Lozanova 2003, 182; 183.

11 For representations of saints and their clothing, see:
B. Schnitzler, Von der Wandmalerei zur „Gewandmalerei". Stationen eines Medienwechsels in der spätbyzantinischen Kunst, in: Zwischen Apostelgrab und Zeigestock. Festschrift für Hans Georg Thümmel zum 65. Geburtstag, Greifswald 1997, 46.

12 E. Drakopoulou, The Itineraries of the Orthodox Painters in the Eighteenth Century: The Common Aesthetics in South-East Europe, in: The Historical Review, Institute for Neohellenic Research, Vol. 5, 2008, pp. 27–28.

- The western wall of the narthex is also painted, and it features scenes from the Apocalypse of John. In Byzantine art, apocalyptic representations were mainly limited to the figure of the Maestas Domini, while only after the mid-16th century does the full apocalyptic cycle begin to appear in Orthodox[13].

Figure 9. The Painted Narthex

The dramatic renderings of these motifs, known in the monasteries and churches of Mount Athos, originate from the woodcut engraving tradition of the German Reformation period, such as the works of Lucas Cranach the Elder and Hans Holbein the Younger, but especially from the work of Albrecht Dürer, who created the first complete apocalyptic cycle with heightened dramatic intensity[14].

This observation becomes particularly significant when considering that the techniques and iconographies applied on Mount Athos served as a model for the entire surrounding region, including Northern Epirus[15]. Through painting treatises produced in post-Byzantine art centers—with clearly defined schemes of themes recommended for the Orthodox church—these models and influences circulating in Athos were transmitted to the painters (zografët) of Epirus, such as in Voskopojë and Vithkuq. In this way, the churches of this region clearly reflect the Western influences that reached them, making this iconographic program a distinct example of the blending of local tradition with foreign elements.

13 J. Albani, Die byzantinischen Wandmalereien der Panagia Chrysaphitissa-Kirche in Chrysapha/Lakonien, Athens 2000, 72.

14 For apocalyptic representations in Western and Eastern art, see:
P. Huber, Apokalypse. Bilderzyklen zur Johannes-Offenbarung in Trier, auf dem Athos und von Louis Caillaud d'Angers, Düsseldorf, Patmos 1989.

15 G. C. Tsigaras, Piktorët Konstandin dhe Athanas nga Korça dhe veprat e tyre në Malin Athos, in: Aktet e Simpoziumit Ndërkombëtar "2000 vjet Art dhe Kulturë Kishtare në Shqipëri", Tirana, November 16–18, 2000, Tirana 2003, 279–290.

Summary of Conclusions

The analysis of the iconographic program of the Church of the Archangels in Vithkuq shows that the monument follows the classical post-Byzantine scheme, in accordance with Athonite tradition and mural-painting manuals, preserving the model of selecting scenes and saints according to a clear theological logic. The iconography of this church, within a typical post-Byzantine structure, conveys religious-cultural messages through the choice of scenes and saints, while also preserving specific features that enrich the canon of post-Byzantine Orthodox painting.

The church's iconographic peculiarities—such as the Annunciation to Anne and Joachim in the apse, the early depiction of Saint John Vladimir as a cephalophore, and the apocalyptic cycle in the narthex with Western influences—demonstrate the interweaving of tradition with figurative innovation and reveal a strong connection to the religious-cultural profile of the region under the leadership of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. The selection of saints and scenes does not serve merely a decorative function, but conveys clear religious-cultural and identity messages, reflecting the cultural and political orientations of the 18th century.

In this way, the church is not only a work of art, but also a visual document of the cultural and spiritual history of Southeastern Albania. Its iconographic program reflects both local and international influences, preserving tradition while simultaneously presenting the innovations of the period. It offers a strong foundation for further studies on cultural networks, identity strategies, and the role of mural painting in the transmission of religious and political messages. The documentation of this art is not merely an act of preservation, but a crucial step toward safeguarding heritage, deepening historical understanding, and preparing clear interpretive frameworks in an age of technology and digitalization.

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Description of albanian folk costumes in the 19th century: A comparison between albanian and foreign author

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Abstract

Albanian folk costume is one of the most important elements of cultural heritage. It expresses the historical identity and social status of communities through a form of symbolic communication. The 19th century is a key moment for the documentation of this culture, due to the increased interest of European travelers visiting the Balkans and the subsequent work of Albanian scholars. The purpose of this paper is to conduct a comparative analysis of descriptions of 19th-century traditional dress. The focus is particularly on female attire, to highlight the differences in approach and interpretation between Albanian and foreign authors. The methodology followed relies on a qualitative and comparative approach, involving the analysis of existing ethnographic literature and historical writings. The research is structured into three phases: the selection of primary sources, the analysis of structural and decorative elements of women's clothing, and the confrontation of narrative discourses to identify points of convergence and divergence between observers. The results show that the variety of forms and materials such as wool, linen, and cotton is closely linked to regional diversity and geographical conditions. Key findings indicate that foreign authors usually focus on the aesthetic aspect and visual elegance of traditional dress, while Albanian scholars offer a more systematic analysis. They focus on historical development and the symbolism of decorative motifs, as in the case of the xhubleta. In conclusion, the study shows that the perspectives of foreign authors and those of local scholars and writers are complementary for a more complete understanding of heritage.

Keywords

Ethnography, xhubleta, cultural identity, anthropology, symbolism

Introduction

Traditional Albanian clothing cannot be treated simply as a relic of material culture or a handicraft product, it constitutes a highly sophisticated structure of signs and symbols that document the unwritten history of a people[1]. In the context of 19th-century traditional society, clothing appeared as a means of visual identification. It specified an individual's place in society, accurately indicating the region of origin, economic status, age, hierarchical position within the clan, and even civil status.[2] The extraordinary variety of clothing across Albanian territory, which often surprised foreign observers, is the product of a unique intersection between rugged geographical terrain, which created "insular" cultural isolations and Mediterranean and Balkan historical flows[3]. Within the framework of modern anthropological studies, the female attire of this period must be analyzed through the lens of the anthropology of the body. In an environment where a woman's verbal articulation in society was often limited by the strict norms of our patriarchal society, clothing became the primary medium of silent communication. The woman's body was not merely a carrier of clothes, but a space where society wrote its moral and hierarchical codes. For the 19th-century Albanian woman, dress was the primary instrument for displaying identity. This performance becomes particularly evident in the structure of garments such as xhubleta of the Great Highlands (Malësia e Madhe). With its monumental weight (often over 20 kg) and its shape constructed from strips of stiffened felt (shajak), xhubleta was not a garment that adapted to the lines of the body, but a structure that forced the body to adapt to it. This clothing construct imposed a measured gait, heavy steps, and a highly dignified posture, transforming the woman into a moving monument of family honor. The volume of the garment, the brightness of the silver thread (sërma), and the heaviness of the felt functioned as precise indicators of symbolic power, the more elaborate the attire, the higher the prestige of the family to which the woman belonged. The 19th century marks a very important turning point for the documentation of this wealth. During this period, Albania was transformed into a "terra incognita," an unknown territory attractive to the European romantic mind[4]. Foreign travelers, driven by a curiosity for what they considered "barbaric nobility" or "Balkan orientalism," left important testimonies in their diaries. Lord Byron, through his portrait in Albanian dress, transformed our costume into a symbol of universal freedom in the eyes of the Western elite. On the other hand, Edith Durham, through participant observation, offered details that go beyond aesthetics, touching upon the norms of the Kanun (Code) reflected in the clothing.

However, this external perspective often remained on the surface of visual beauty, viewing the Albanian as a "pictorial subject" and aestheticizing the clothing as a frozen art form. The need for a systematic and scientific study is expressed by Albanian scholars as a necessity to protect national identity. Albanian researchers moved from simple description to the analysis of technical structure, material, and historical evolution. This paper aims to confront these two worlds: the European romantic gaze that "photographs" elegance with words, and the Albanian analytical gaze that decodes the hidden cipher, focusing particularly on women's clothing as the most conservative and faithful bearer of Illyrian-Albanian tradition.

1 Andromaqi Gjergji, Veshjet shqiptare në shekuj: Origjina, tipologjia, zhvillimi (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave të Shqipërisë, 2008)

2 Mark Tirta, Etnologjia e Shqiptarëve (Tiranë: Geer, 2006)

3 Andromaqi Gjergji, Etnografia e veshjes shqiptare (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "Libri Universitar", 2009)

4 Johann Georg von Hahn, Albanesische Studien (Vienna: Kaiserlich-königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1854)

Literature Review

The study of Albanian folk costumes is built upon a rich and multidimensional historiography, reflecting the complex development of Albanological thought over the centuries. Existing literature can be categorized into three main currents: the descriptive documentation of 19th-century foreign travelers, the systematic and typological studies of the post-WWII era (the Albanian ethnographic school), and contemporary semiotic and anthropological analyses that treat clothing as a cultural construct.The monumental work of Andromaqi Gjergji, "Albanian Costumes Through the Centuries," remains the backbone of this paper. Gjergji established a genetic and typological classification that transcends simple aesthetic observation, focusing instead on technical tailoring, geometric structures, and raw materials. She argues that Albanian female dress is not a static phenomenon, but a "living organism" that organically preserves elements dating back to Illyrian antiquity. According to Gjergji, the endurance of archaic elements, such as xhubleta or the long pleated shirt, testifies to a conscious cultural resistance against foreign Ottoman influences and urban assimilation processes[5]. She places clothing at the center of the artisanal production process, explaining how the domestic economy and women's mastery of wool and linen processing technology dictated not only fashion but also the economic autonomy of the Albanian peasant family.[6]

A specific dimension highlighted in the literature is the role of clothing as a visual chronicle of the life cycle. Albanian scholarship shows that female attire changed radically according to a woman's social and biological status. The clothing of girlhood, characterized by simplicity and light colors, was transformed into a "symbolic masterpiece" during the bridal stage. Bridal wear is analyzed in detail as the pinnacle of artisanal art, where every gold-thread embroidery and silver ornament served as a declaration of the clan's wealth and honor. This visual transition continued into old age, where the dominance of black and the simplification of forms indicated a woman's passage into a different hierarchical status: that of advisor and guardian of the home.

In a more symbolic and mythological realm, Mark Tirta offers an essential perspective on the semantics of ornamentation. In his works on ethnology and symbolism, he analyzes embroidery not merely as decoration, but as a codified form of folk belief. Tirta argues that motifs on women's clothing were apotropaic (protective) symbols. Geometric motifs such as the sun, the snake, the circle, or the "tree of life" are linked to ancient pagan cults and served as amulets to protect health and fertility.[7] This approach increases the significance of the garment, shifting it from the sphere of simple textiles into the anthropology of beliefs and the "folk science" of magical protection.

In sharp contrast to this structural analysis, the literature by foreign authors offers a narrative built upon the "external gaze" and Romantic Orientalism. Johann Georg von Hahn, in "Albanesische Studien," provided the first systematic European descriptions, where dress was seen as an indicator of national character and the antiquity of the race.[8] Lord Byron, through his verses and personal portraiture, aestheticized the dress of the South, turning it into a European fashion phenomenon (Albanian style)[9]. However, critical research notes that Byron focused on the "shimmering surface",the silk and gold, stripping the garment of its social context.

5 Andromaqi Gjergji, Etnografia e veshjes shqiptare (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "Libri Universitar", 2009)
6 Gjergji, Etnografia e veshjes shqiptare
7 Mark Tirta, Etnologjia e Shqiptarëve (Tiranë: Geer, 2006)
8 Johann Georg von Hahn, Albanesische Studien (Vienna: Kaiserlich-königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1854)
9 George Gordon Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (London: John Murray, 1812)

Meanwhile, Edith Durham, in her book "High Albania," offers an almost proto-anthropological approach, observing how clothing served as an identity boundary between religious beliefs and tribal affiliations. Durham remains a valuable source for the minute details of jewelry and the weight of the garments, elements that other travelers overlooked as insignificant. Nevertheless, even Durham often falls under the influence of the "aesthetics of veiling," interpreting headscarves and veils as elements of mystery or exoticism.

Contemporary criticism, drawing on Edward Said's theories on Orientalism, highlights a radical divergence: while Western authors "othered" Albanian dress, viewing it as a romantic remnant of a heroic era long vanished in the West, Albanian scholars rehabilitated it as an active tool of social communication. This confrontation between the gaze that "paints" elegance and the science that "decodes" the symbolic code and technical structure, constitutes the core of our literature review.

Methodology

This research is grounded in a qualitative methodological framework that integrates comparative textual analysis with a historical-anthropological approach. The primary goal is not merely the documentation of clothing as a static object, but its deconstruction through a dynamic analysis of sources, treating attire as a cultural phenomenon in constant evolution and as a reflection of the social processes of the time.

First, a diachronic confrontation method has been applied. Specific passages from the diaries of foreign travelers where a particular garment (e.g., xhubleta or fustanella) is described have been selected and compared with the technical analyses of Gjergji and Tirta regarding the same garment. This allows for the identification of "informational deserts" elements that travelers saw but did not fully comprehend, such as the underlying meaning of specific colors or geometric shapes.

Second, the decoding of the costume's sign system was employed. Clothing is treated here as a semiotic system. To this end, the research is structured into three levels of analysis: Firstly, the structural-technical level: An analysis of raw materials (wool, cotton, silk) and the methods of loom weaving. This level relies primarily on Albanian sources that document artisanal technology[10]. Secondly, the aesthetic-narrative level: An analysis of foreign descriptions, where the focus lies on color harmony, visuality, and the impact the attire had on an observer educated in European tastes[11]. And lastly, the social-symbolic level: An analysis of the role of clothing as a communication tool within the community, reflecting women's status, hierarchy, and rituals.[12]

Third, the research has integrated the principle of historical contextualization. Clothing is not viewed as an isolated museum object, but as an element that interacts with the political developments of the 19th century.[13] This methodology ensures that the work does not remain within a purely descriptive space but offers a profound interpretation of the identity value of Albanian dress. Through this approach, the study aims to argue that the descriptions of foreign writers and the studies of Albanian scholars, though methodologically distinct, together form a complete panorama of Albanian material culture.

10 Andromaqi Gjergji, Etnografia e veshjes shqiptare (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "Libri Universitar", 2009)

11 Johann Georg von Hahn, Albanesische Studien (Vienna: Kaiserlich-königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1854)

12 Mark Tirta, Etnologjia e Shqiptarëve (Tiranë: Geer, 2006)

13 Andromaqi Gjergji, Veshjet Shqiptare në Shekuj: Origjina, Tipologjia, Zhvillimi (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave, 2008)

Results and Discussion

A detailed analysis of the selected corpus of sources demonstrates that 19th-century Albanian folk costume was not merely a product of climatic necessity, but a highly complex semiotic structure. This research reveals that the divergence between the "external gaze" of European travelers and the "internal gaze" of Albanian ethnographers stems primarily from their differing documentation goals. While travelers sought the beautiful and the exotic, local scholars sought the historical and the functional.

The results indicate that 19th-century attire was a direct reflection of a self-sufficient economy. Raw materials such as wool, linen, cotton, and silk underwent an extensive processing period that determined the garment's quality. In mountainous regions, wool was dominant. The process of "shkelja e shajakut" (felt milling) in water-powered mills (duba) was a unique technology that rendered the clothing waterproof and durable enough for harsh conditions.[14]

In contrast, while Lord Byron and Johann Georg von Hahn marveled at the textures of the garments, they did not dwell on the production process. Byron focused on the shimmer of the gold threads embroidered onto the felt, viewing it as a sign of "Oriental luxury."[15] However, Gjergji clarifies that this "luxury" was not purely aesthetic; the richness of the embroidery signaled the family's economic status and often served as a form of mobile capital that the woman carried with her.

One of the most significant findings of this study is the analysis of xhubleta. For travelers like Edith Durham, xhubleta was a "strange" and "primitive" bell-shaped garment that gave women an unusual silhouette.[16] Durham describes with amazement its weight (often exceeding 15–20 kg) and the difficulty of movement it imposed.

However, when analyzing the same object through the eyes of Mark Tirta, xhubleta moves out of the realm of "curiosity" and into cultural archaeology. Tirta argues that the undulations of xhubleta's strips (niske) and the black-on-black motifs carry a pre-Christian code. He identifies symbols such as the sun, the moon, and the snake, which were used as apotropaic elements to protect the woman from the "evil eye" and to ensure fertility.[17] Here, the greatest gap is observed: the foreign traveler sees a heavy textile form, while the Albanian ethnographer sees an archive of Illyrian beliefs that have survived for centuries.

In Southern Albania, the research results attest to lighter and more colorfully diverse attire. The use of cotton and silk points to stronger links with Mediterranean markets. During his stay in Tepelena and Janina, Lord Byron described Southern dress as more elite and refined. He was captivated by the fustanella or as he described it, the "white skirt" and the intricately embroidered vests, which he compared to royal attire.

On the other hand, Andromaqi Gjergji analyzes how Southern dress was influenced by the Tanzimat reforms of the era, becoming more urbanized. She notes that the "apron" and the "headscarf" in the south had a very specific function: they indicated whether a woman was engaged, married, or widowed. This is a detail that foreign travelers often missed, interpreting every adornment simply as a desire for beauty without understanding the strict social hierarchy it represented.

14 Andromaqi Gjergji, *Etnografia e veshjes shqiptare* (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "Libri Universitar", 2009)
15 George Gordon Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (London: John Murray, 1812)
16 M. Edith Durham, *High Albania* (London: Edward Arnold, 1909)
17 Mark Tirta, Etnologjia e Shqiptarëve (Tiranë: Geer, 2006)

The discussion of these results leads us to the conclusion that the 19th century was the period when Albanian dress was "discovered" by the world, but "studied" only much later. Foreign travelers created a myth around the Albanian costume—the myth of the noble warrior and the exotic woman, aided by the paintings of the time and the romantic writings of Byron.
Albanian scholars, relying on evidence collected in the field, have performed a necessary "demythologization." They have shown that behind the beauty of the gold threads lay the grueling labor of women at the loom, and behind the "exotic" forms lay a robust historical logic and ancient Balkan heritage. This comparative perspective proves that to truly understand folk costume, it is not enough to see it through the eyes of foreign writers; one must "read" it through the lens of Albanian ethnographers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This comparative study of 19th-century Albanian folk costume reaches several key conclusions that are significant for both ethnography and cultural history.
First, it is confirmed that clothing was not a static element but a dynamic tool of identification. The regional variety, ranging from xhubleta of the north to the pleated garments of the south, attests to a high level of artistic and technical maturity. Albanian scholars have succeeded in documenting this diversity by linking it to historical roots and social developments, elevating the folk costume to the status of a national monument. Second, the confrontation of discourses shows that foreign travelers such as Lord Byron, Edith Durham, and Johann Georg von Hahn played a decisive role in the internationalization of the Albanian image. Although their writings contain doses of subjectivism and romanticism, they remain essential primary sources because they captured details of daily life that later ethnography could only find in fragmentary moments. They provided the "color" and "emotion" of the era, while local scholars provided the "structure" and "logic." Third, the study underscores that women's clothing was the primary bearer of archaic symbols. While men's attire was more quickly influenced by military uniforms or the urban fashions of the time, female dress fanatically preserved elements such as embroidery with mythological motifs and ancient tailoring. Consequently, it became the guardian of cultural identity during periods of historical crisis.

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Cultural tourism – a bridge between the past and the present: Onufri of Neokastro

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Abstract

This paper examines cultural tourism as a mediating mechanism between historical heritage and contemporary development, focusing on the figure and artistic legacy of the sixteenth-century iconographer Onufri of Neokastro. The study aims to highlight the significance of iconographic heritage as a fundamental component in shaping national cultural identity and in enhancing Albania's cultural tourism offer, particularly in a context where tourism has become a strategic sector of economic growth. The research adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodology based on documentary analysis, critical review of the literature on post-Byzantine art and cultural tourism, as well as iconographic and semiotic analysis of selected works attributed to Onufri. The findings indicate that iconographic heritage represents considerable potential for sustainable cultural tourism development by establishing a direct connection between historical memory, community identity, and local economic vitality. Onufri's works, characterized by their distinctive stylistic features, expressive individuality of figures, and the renowned use of intense red tones, constitute a unique element of Albanian artistic heritage and a strategic asset for thematic, educational, and religious tourism. Beyond their aesthetic value, these icons function as visual narratives that reflect theological symbolism, social realities, and cultural exchanges of the post-Byzantine period. Their preservation and interpretation provide visitors with meaningful cultural experiences that connect artistic expression with historical memory. The study concludes that the systematic integration of iconographic heritage into national and regional tourism strategies is essential, alongside the development of structured cultural itineraries and strengthened institutional cooperation for the preservation, promotion, and valorization of this cultural legacy in support of long-term sustainable development, increased cultural literacy, and broader public engagement at both local and international levels.

Keywords

Iconographic heritage, post-Byzantine art, sustainable development, community identity, cultural valorization

Introduction

Cultural tourism is one of the most dynamic segments of global tourism, contributing significantly to the preservation of cultural heritage, the strengthening of identity, and local economic development. This form of tourism is not limited solely to visiting historical monuments, but also encompasses the experience of a society's spiritual, artistic, and symbolic values, creating continuous interaction between visitors and host communities. In this context, cultural tourism becomes an important instrument for promoting intercultural dialogue, increasing heritage awareness, and supporting sustainable development. Albania, with a history shaped by Illyrian, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman civilizations, possesses a rich monumental and artistic heritage that represents substantial potential for the development of cultural tourism. Historic cities, churches, monasteries, fortresses, museums, and traditional urban centers constitute tangible evidence of cultural continuity and the interweaving of diverse historical influences. However, despite this wealth, many aspects of Albanian heritage have not yet been fully integrated into the national tourism offer, creating the need for more structured and strategic approaches.

Literature review

The literature on cultural tourism consistently emphasizes the importance of cultural heritage as a fundamental resource for economic development and as a powerful instrument for the preservation and strengthening of collective identity.[1] Numerous scholars consider cultural tourism to be a form of tourism that goes beyond the simple consumption of attractions, creating meaningful experiences connected to the history, art, traditions, and ways of life of host communities.[2] Within this framework, cultural tourism functions as a mediating mechanism between heritage and development, contributing simultaneously to the preservation of cultural values and to the improvement of socio-economic well-being.

According to Richards (2007), cultural tourism creates direct interaction between visitors and host communities, generating benefits in both cultural and economic terms.[3] This interaction helps raise awareness of the importance of heritage, strengthens local pride, and encourages investment in preservation and promotion. Furthermore, Smith (2015) emphasizes that cultural tourism can play an important role in shaping the image of a destination and in differentiating it within the global tourism market.

Thus, cultural heritage is no longer viewed solely as a legacy of the past, but as an active resource for sustainable and innovative development, capable of generating cultural, social, and economic benefits for contemporary communities.[4] It serves as a platform where historical memory, collective identity, and contemporary creativity intersect, creating new opportunities for the valorization and interpretation of heritage.[5] In this context, the preservation and study of artistic heritage acquire particular importance, as art represents one of the most powerful forms of cultural expression and a continuous testimony of the spiritual development of society.

1 Bob McKercher and Hilary du Cros, Cultural Tourism: The Partnership Between Tourism and Cultural Heritage Management (New York: Routledge, 2002).

2 Dallen J. Timothy and Gyan P. Nyaupane, Cultural Heritage and Tourism in the Developing World (London: Routledge, 2009).

3 Greg Richards, Cultural Tourism: Global and Local Perspectives (New York: Routledge, 2007).

4 David Lowenthal, The Past Is a Foreign Country – Revisited (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

5 Gregory Ashworth and Brian Graham, Senses of Place: Senses of Time (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

In the history of Albanian art, Theofan Popa's studies on Onufri remain fundamental for understanding sixteenth-century iconographic art and for assessing his contribution to the formation of a local post-Byzantine tradition.[6] Popa considers Onufri one of the most representative figures of artistic individualization in Albanian iconography, emphasizing stylistic features, the use of the characteristic red color, and the expressive treatment of figures.[7] These studies have served as a basis for further research on the Albanian iconographic school and on the role of ecclesiastical art in shaping national cultural identity. Consequently, Onufri's work should not be viewed only as an object of historical study, but also as an important resource for the development of cultural and educational tourism in Albania.[8]

He is regarded as a representative of an iconographic school with a distinctive stylistic identity, marking an important moment of artistic individualization within the Albanian post-Byzantine tradition.[9] In his works, a gradual departure from rigid Byzantine schemes can be observed, along with a tendency toward emphasizing the individuality of figures, emotional expression, and the humanization of sacred characters.[10] These characteristics place Onufri in a special position within the history of Balkan art, making him a key figure for understanding the development of iconography in the region. Meanwhile, other scholars have emphasized the use of intense red, widely known as "Onufri's red," as a distinctive aesthetic and symbolic element associated with theological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of iconographic representation.[11] This color not only increases the visual intensity of the icons but also contributes to the creation of a distinctive artistic identity. Nevertheless, despite the numerous art-historical assessments, there is still a lack of an integrated analysis that addresses Onufri's iconography as a touristic and strategic asset for sustainable development.[12] This gap creates the need for interdisciplinary approaches that connect art historical studies with the fields of cultural tourism and heritage management.[13]

Methodology

The study is based on a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach that combines historical-documentary analysis, iconographic analysis, a semiotic approach, and the analysis of cultural tourism policies, with the aim of providing a comprehensive interpretation of the role of iconographic art in contemporary development.[14] Historical-documentary analysis consists of the examination of archival sources, art historical studies, and literature on cultural heritage, enabling the placement of Onufri's figure within its historical and artistic context. Iconographic analysis focuses on the formal elements of the works, such as composition, color, treatment of figures, and symbolism, in order to identify the stylistic features that distinguish Onufri from Byzantine tradition.[15]

6 Theofan Popa, Onufri (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "8 Nëntori", 1980).
7 David Talbot Rice, Byzantine Art (London: Thames & Hudson, 1968).
8 Bob McKercher and Hilary du Cros, Cultural Tourism: The Partnership Between Tourism and Cultural Heritage Management (New York: Routledge, 2002).
9 Theofan Popa, Onufri (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "8 Nëntori", 1980).
10 Cyril Mango, Byzantine Architecture (Milan: Electa, 1986).
11 David Talbot Rice, Byzantine Art (London: Thames & Hudson, 1968).
12 Greg Richards, Cultural Tourism: Global and Local Perspectives (New York: Routledge, 2007).
13 Bob McKercher and Hilary du Cros, Cultural Tourism: The Partnership Between Tourism and Cultural Heritage Management (New York: Routledge, 2002).
14 John W. Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013).
15 André Grabar, Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

The semiotic approach is used to interpret icons as systems of signs, in which each visual element conveys theological, cultural, and social meanings.[16]

Results and discussion

The results of this study indicate that Onufri's works constitute a distinctive attraction for cultural tourism due to their high artistic, historical, and symbolic value. His icons are not only objects of religious devotion, but also important testimonies to the development of Albanian post-Byzantine art and to artistic individualization in the Balkans.[17] The presence of Onufri's works in churches, monasteries, and museums creates opportunities for the development of religious and cultural tourism, attracting visitors interested in art history, spiritual heritage, and cultural identity.[18]

The monuments in which these icons are preserved represent considerable potential for the creation of thematic cultural itineraries, which can connect different destinations through a shared historical-artistic narrative.[19] The establishment of such itineraries would enable not only an increase in visitation, but also a more balanced distribution of tourist flows across different territories, thus contributing to local development and to the reduction of pressure on overcrowded destinations.[20] In this way, iconographic heritage is transformed into an active resource for sustainable development.

The integration of iconographic art into tourism strategies increases awareness of the importance of heritage and encourages the involvement of local communities in processes of preservation and promotion. When communities perceive heritage as a source of development, they show greater interest in the maintenance of monuments and in transmitting cultural values to younger generations.[21] From an aesthetic perspective, Onufri's icons display a pronounced individualization of figures, manifested in the treatment of faces, gestures, and emotional expressions.

This individualization brings his art closer to humanist sensibilities, creating a more direct relationship between the sacred figure and the believer or visitor. The emotional intensity of the icons is further reinforced by the symbolic use of the color red, widely known as "Onufri's red," which is associated with divine love, sacrifice, and resurrection.[22] In this context, the results of the study suggest that an integrated approach, which combines art historical research with cultural tourism policies, is essential for the full valorization of Albanian iconographic heritage.[23]

16 Umberto Eco, A Theory of Semiotics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).
17 Theofan Popa, Onufri (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese "8 Nëntori", 1980).
18 Dallen J. Timothy and Gyan P. Nyaupane, Cultural Heritage and Tourism in the Developing World (London: Routledge, 2009).
19 Greg Richards, Cultural Tourism: Global and Local Perspectives (New York: Routledge, 2007).
20 Bob McKercher and Hilary du Cros, Cultural Tourism: The Partnership Between Tourism and Cultural Heritage Management (New York: Routledge, 2002).
21 Gregory Ashworth and Brian Graham, Senses of Place: Senses of Time (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
22 David Talbot Rice, Byzantine Art (London: Thames & Hudson, 1968).
23 UNESCO, Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Development (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2013).

Onufri - Icon from the National Museum of Medieval Art, Korçë

Figure 1. Icon created by Onufri, 16th century.
Source: National Museum of Medieval Art, Korçë.

Description: The use of "Onufri's red," the individualization of faces, and pronounced psychological depth are clearly evident. The icon created by Onufri in the sixteenth century, preserved at the National Museum of Medieval Art in Korçë, represents a culminating moment of artistic individualization in Albanian post-Byzantine iconography. From a semiotic perspective, this icon functions as an organized system of visual signs in which every element—color, composition, facial treatment, and background—conveys multiple theological and cultural meanings.

The use of "Onufri's red" is not merely an aesthetic choice, but a sign with strong symbolic significance. Within iconographic tradition, red is associated with sacrifice, divine love, and the dimension of resurrection, thereby reinforcing the spiritual character of the depicted figure. The intensity of this color creates a visual impact that attracts the viewer's attention and places the figure at the center of the iconographic discourse. The individualization of faces and the pronounced psychological depth distinguish Onufri from the more formal schemes of Byzantine tradition. The expression of the eyes, the modeling of facial features, and the treatment of light and shadow create a sense of humanization, bringing the sacred figure closer to human experience. On a semiotic level, this represents a shift from purely transcendent symbolism toward a more empathetic form of communication with both the believer and the visitor.

As a result, the icon functions not only as an object of devotion, but also as a visual text that narrates cultural identity, aesthetic sensibility, and the worldview of its time. This multiplicity of meanings renders Onufri's work a high-value asset for cultural interpretation and for inclusion in the narratives of thematic and educational tourism.

Church of St. Mary - Berat

Figure 2. Interior space with sixteenth-century iconography, Berat

Description: Monumental space with high potential for cultural and religious tourism.

From a semiotic perspective, the interior space with sixteenth-century iconography in Berat represents a complex system of visual signs in which every architectural and iconographic element functions as a carrier of meaning. The icons, iconostasis, natural lighting, and spatial organization create a symbolic discourse that intertwines aesthetic, theological, and cultural dimensions. In this context, the space is not merely a physical location, but a "visual text" communicated through forms, colors, and composition.

The post-Byzantine iconography present in this interior signifies the continuity of Orthodox tradition while simultaneously displaying elements of artistic individualization, characteristic of masters such as Onufri. The faces of the saints, rendered with emotional intensity and personalized features, function as signs that mediate the relationship between the believer and the divine sphere. The color red, widely used in the iconography, carries symbolic meanings of sacrifice, divine love, and resurrection, thereby reinforcing the spiritual message of the space.
At the same time, the interior as a whole also generates meaning for the secular visitor. Beyond its religious function, this space becomes a sign of cultural identity and collective memory, communicating historical and artistic values. In semiotic terms, there is a shift from an exclusively sacred meaning toward a dual meaning: sacred and cultural. Consequently, Figure 2 demonstrates that iconography is not only an aesthetic object, but a living visual language that builds meaningful bridges between the past and the present.

Conclusions and recommendations

Onufri's iconographic heritage represents an important asset for the development of cultural tourism in Albania, as it combines artistic, historical, and spiritual values into a single resource with high potential for valorization. The study demonstrates that Onufri's works should not be treated solely as museum or religious objects, but also as active components of the tourism offer, capable of generating meaningful cultural experiences for both domestic and international visitors. In this context, the integration of iconographic heritage into national and regional tourism strategies is essential for the construction of a sustainable development model. It is recommended

that thematic itineraries such as the "Onufri Route" be developed, linking destinations where his works are preserved and creating a structured historical-artistic narrative. At the same time, the digitalization of icons and the creation of online platforms would contribute to increased access, documentation, and promotion of this heritage. Close cooperation among cultural institutions, local authorities, and the tourism sector is necessary for the effective management of monuments and the development of high-quality tourism products. Finally, the international promotion of Albanian post-Byzantine art would strengthen Albania's image as a cultural destination, positioning iconographic heritage as a connecting bridge between the past and the present.

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Contemporary interpretation of cultural heritage at the national museum of medieval art (MKAM): The visitor experience through museum artefacts

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Abstract

This paper examines the transformation of the museum object from a liturgical, historical, and artistic artefact into a central component of the contemporary museum experience, taking the National Museum of Medieval Art (MKAM) in Korça, Albania, as a case study. Within the framework of modern heritage interpretation theories, the museum is understood not merely as a space for preservation and conservation, but as an active platform for dialogue between the past and present-day audiences. The research is based on the analysis of both permanent and temporary exhibitions, institutional documentation, and interpretive practices implemented at MKAM. It explores how icons, liturgical objects, and Byzantine and post-Byzantine artworks are contextualized through curatorial narratives, spatial organization, interpretive language, and traditional as well as digital communication tools. Particular attention is given to the integration of artistic and historical dimensions with the challenge of presenting the spiritual component of religious heritage within a secular museum environment, at MKAM. The use of digital technologies, educational programs, and contemporary communication strategies has contributed to the development of a more integrated, interactive, and accessible visitor experience. Current practice indicates that contemporary interpretation at MKAM has not only enhanced the quality of the museum experience but has also had a measurable impact on increasing public interest and visitor numbers, expanding audience profiles to include younger generations and international tourists. In this way, the museum strengthens cultural awareness, civic engagement, and its role in the cultural and touristic development of the region.

Keywords

MKAM, cultural heritage interpretation, byzantine art & post-bizantine, educative programs, digital technologies in museums

Introduction

The Zengo family originates from the mountainous village of Dardhë, near the city of Korçë in southeastern Albania. Dardhë has produced numerous notable figures who have contributed significantly to the nation's intellectual and cultural life, particularly in the fields of science and the arts. Among these distinguished contributors is the Zengo family, whose artistic legacy has played an essential role in the enrichment of Albanian cultural heritage.

The historical context in which the Zengo family flourished was marked by a national awakening—characterized by efforts to establish a distinct Albanian identity, achieve independence from the Ottoman Empire, and unify the Albanian people under a sovereign state. A pro-European orientation exerted considerable influence on many Albanians who had studied or lived abroad and who were deeply committed to the cultural, political, and educational advancement of their homeland. This progressive spirit was particularly vibrant in the city of Korça, where a strong intellectual and artistic movement took root. Artists, in particular, were integral to this movement, contributing to national identity through their visual representations and by promoting cultural emancipation.

Visual art, in its various forms—religious, patriotic, and secular—played a central role in this transformative era. Key milestones of the Albanian Renaissance, such as the establishment of the Albanian alphabet, the founding of the First Albanian School, the philanthropic efforts of prominent local figures, and the declaration of the autocephalous Albanian Orthodox Church, were all indicative of a broader intellectual and cultural reawakening. These developments were made possible through the tireless efforts and sacrifices of numerous intellectuals and patriots committed to national progress.

The Zengo family was deeply embedded in these progressive developments over several generations. Their contributions to the artistic and cultural life of the time extended beyond ecclesiastical service. Although closely connected to the Orthodox Church—an institution that was both influential and deeply rooted—they were also fervent supporters of the national cause. Their artistic repertoire included iconography, fresco painting, photography, woodcarving, and other visual forms, through which they articulated both religious devotion and national ideals.

During this period, members of the Zengo family, alongside other icon painters—many of whom also hailed from Dardhë—played a transformative role in the evolution of Albanian ecclesiastical art. They departed from strict Byzantine conventions, introducing stylistic innovations inspired by European artistic models. Their work reflected a shift toward greater realism and authenticity, achieved in part through the study and emulation of renowned European masters.

Zengo Family – Artists and Legacy in Albanian Iconography

Nikola Zengo (the Elder)

Active: Late 18th – Early 19th century

According to two manuscripts from 1781 and 1798—authored by Nikola Zengo himself and preserved by the Zengo sisters—it is evident that he, originally from the village of Dardhë, spent several years traveling and residing in Russia, Bulgaria, Thessaly, Constantinople, and other regions. In addition to documenting his biography, he produced approximately 95 sketches, primarily portraits and studies of the human figure.

Figure 1. Sketches by Nikola Zengo (part of the family archive, reproduced in "Iconographic Painters from Dardha," Balli & Naslazi, 2013)

Andon Zengo (d. 1888)

Son of Nikola Zengo
It is believed that Andon studied and practiced iconography on Mount Athos, where many artists from Dardhë had established workshops. There, they painted icons for export—particularly to Slavic countries such as Russia, Ukraine, and Bulgaria—and trained the next generation of iconographers.

Papa Jani Zengo (1832–1912)

Son of Andon Zengo
Papa Jani initially trained in xylography before becoming a photographer and priest. The earliest known photograph attributed to him, dated 1876, depicts the village school of Dardhë and its residents. He also taught, painted icons, and mastered several languages, including Greek, Turkish, and Russian. Notably, he created a 33-letter Albanian alphabet--began translating the Gospels into Albanian.

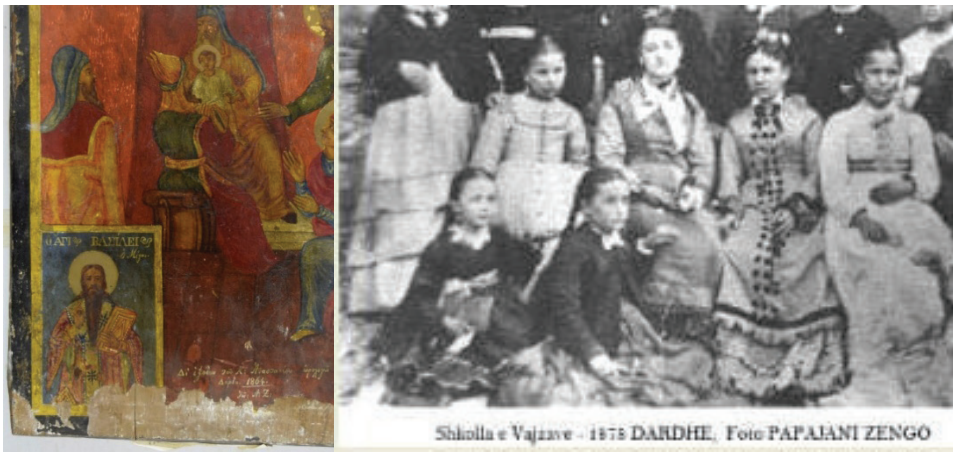

Figure 2. "The Circumcision" is signed "Joan Andon Zengo" and is held in the National Museum of Medieval Art (NMMA) Figure 2/1. Photograph of the Girls' School, Dardhë (Zengo family archive)

Nikola Zengo (the Younger) (1881–1932)

Son of Papa Jani Zengo
Nikola lived and worked in the United States, primarily as a fresco and secular painter. He trained in the workshop of Grigor Zdruli—renowned iconographer from Dardhë—alongside his brother Vangjel and other local artists. His work was praised by the Boston press at the time.

Figure 3, 4. "The Crucifixion" and "The Birth of Saint Mary," NMMA Collection

Evthim Zengo

Brother of Nikola and Vangjel
Trained by his brother Vangjel, Evthim worked on icons and frescoes, including those in the Church of Saint George (Dardhë) and the Mosque of Iljaz Bey Mirahori. The NMMA holds nine signed icons by him.

Figure 5. "John the Baptist," NMMA Collection.

Thanas Todi Zengo (d. 1920)

The NMMA holds several icons signed by Thanas Zengo.

Figure 6. "Ascension to Heaven," NMMA Collection

Kristo Thanas Zengo (d. 1987)

Worked in Greece as an iconographer.

Vangjel Zengo (1875–1941)

Eldest son of Papa Jani Zengo
Vangjel was the most prolific and transformative member of the Zengo family. Educated in Grigor Zdruli's studio on Mount Athos, he helped initiate significant shifts in iconography—abandoning rigid Byzantine conventions in favor of more expressive, naturalistic compositions. He developed religious and secular works, painting frescoes in churches across Albania, Greece, Russia, Ukraine, and the United States.
Notable frescoes:

- 1906: Church of St. George, Dardhë (co-authors: A. Papostol Ziçishti, S. PapaIlia Dardha)
- 1921: Mosque of Mirahor, Korçë (with Evthim Zengo)
- 1921–1923: Church of the Annunciation, Tirana
- 1929 Church of St. Mary, Korçë
- 1930 Church of Hoçisht, Korçë
- 1930 completes the mural depecting of the church of St. Kolli, Bellovoda
- 1932 Church of St. Thanas, Korçë
- 1933 Church of the Holy Trinity, Korçë
- 1936 Church of the Life-Giving Source, Korçë, etc..

He painted 159 icons preserved in the NMMA, and others in Brixhford, USA, and abroad.
In secular art, Vangjel painted patriotic and monumental works. Noteworthy pieces include portraits of Fan Noli, Sotir Peci, and depictions of Skanderbeg, such as *The Battle of Skanderbeg* and *Skanderbeg on Horseback*.

Figure 7, 8, 9. Portraits and historical scenes (NHM, NGA collections)

Figure 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. Icons by Vangjel Zengo, NMMA Collection

Figure 15/1, 15/2. Vangjel Zengo with family; self-portrait

The Zengo Sisters

Androniqi Zengo (1913–2000)

One of Albania's first professional female painters
Graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Athens. Known for impressionist secular works and for painting frescoes and icons. Nine of her icons are housed in the NMMA. She co-authored church frescoes alongside her father and sister.

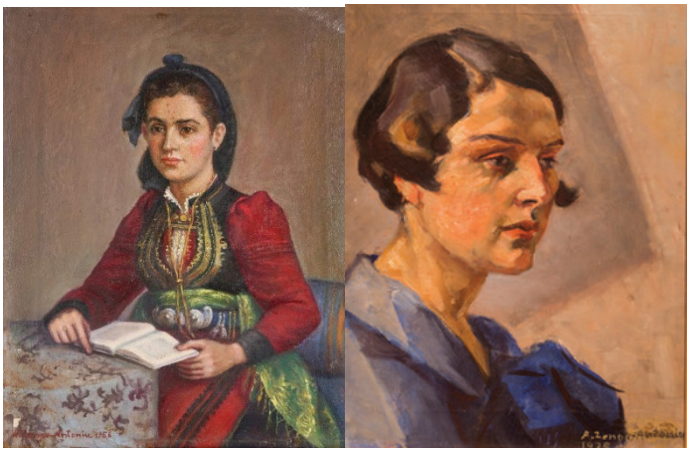

Figure 16, 17, 18, 19, 20. Icons and secular works (NMMA, NGA)

Sofia Zengo (1915–1976)

Powerful portrait and landscape artist
Sofia was co-author of icons and frescoes, and participated in several joint exhibitions. Seven icons signed by her are held in the NMMA.

Figure 21, 22, 23, 24, 25. Icons and self-portraits, (NMMA, private Collection, NGA)

Thomaidha Zengo (1905–1961)

Co-author of frescoes in the churches of St. Thanasi and Holy Trinity, Korçë. She emigrated to the U.S., where she continued painting frescoes in Boston churches. Seven icons in the NMMA bear her name.

Figure 26, 27, 28. "St. Mary," "Transfiguration," "St. Friday" (co-author with Vangjel Zengo), NMMA

Sotiria Zengo

Specialized in decorative painting, inscriptions, and interior frescos for residences and public buildings.

Artistic Analysis

Icon of "John the Baptist" by Vangjel Zengo

To illustrate the transformation in Albanian iconography, the icon *"John the Baptist"* by Vangjel Zengo (fig. 30) can be compared with a similar composition by El Greco (fig. 31).
In contrast to traditional Orthodox portrayals—which feature the saint holding his severed head and a scroll, with wings symbolizing spiritual nature (fig. 29)—Zengo's work presents a full-bodied, naturalistic depiction. The posture, gesture, clothing, and gaze bear remarkable similarity to El Greco's rendering, reflecting Western influence and a move toward individual expression and realism.
This transition marks a break from the symbolic and flat two-dimensionality of Byzantine iconography, ushering in a more modern visual language in Albanian ecclesiastical art.

Figure 29. 18th century anonymous icon, MKAM
Figure 30. Icon by Vangjel Zengo, 20th century, NMMA
Figure 31. Icon by El Greco, 17th century

Conclusion

The 19th and early 20th centuries were pivotal in transforming Albanian iconography. While rooted in Orthodox tradition, many artists—especially the Zengo family—began to absorb European artistic trends, particularly Neoclassicism. This influence is evident in architecture, literature, music, and especially religious and secular art in Korçë.
The Zengo family, led by the visionary Vangjel Zengo, were central to this transformation. His work broke long-standing artistic conventions, introduced new compositional techniques, and reflected patriotic and intellectual ideals. His daughters, particularly Androniqi and Sofia, continued this legacy, becoming among the first and only female iconographers in the Albanian Orthodox world.
One of Vangjel Zengo's most notable contributions was the use of the Albanian language in icon inscriptions—a symbolic act of cultural and national affirmation that influenced many artists who followed.

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Between east and west: Michele Greco da Valona and the making of Adriatic renaissance

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Abstract

This article reexamines the artistic production of Michele Greco da Valona, an Adriatic painter active in Southern Italy in the early sixteenth century, whose work has long been marginalized within Renaissance art history as a conservative survival of Byzantine tradition. Through stylistic analysis, historical contextualization, and engagement with recent scholarship on Adriatic cultural exchange, the study argues that Greco should instead be understood as a mediator between Byzantine and Italian Renaissance visual systems. His signed works, produced within Orthodox and Greek-rite communities in regions such as Molise and Abruzzo, reveal a deliberate synthesis in which Byzantine iconographic authority coexists with Renaissance spatial organization, ornamental vocabulary, and figural modeling. Situating Greco within the framework of the Adriatic Renaissance, the article challenges rigid center–periphery models and emphasizes artistic mobility, hybrid patronage, and transregional networks across the Adriatic basin. In doing so, it contributes to a broader reassessment of Renaissance culture as a plural and negotiated phenomenon shaped by sustained interaction between Eastern and Western Christian visual traditions.

Keywords

Michele Greco da Valona, Adriatic renaissance, post-byzantine painting, arbëreshë diaspora, artistic mobility, orthodox iconography, southern Italy, cultural mediation

Introduction

Michele Greco da Valona remains one of the most intriguing figures of the Adriatic Renaissance. Despite the relatively small size of his surviving corpus, his works demonstrate a sophisticated synthesis of post-Byzantine structure and Italian Renaissance form.[1]
This study situates Greco within the trans-Adriatic cultural space, highlighting his role as both mediator and innovator. By examining his signed works, mobility patterns, and reception, we trace how Adriatic artistic networks enabled the coexistence and cross-fertilization of Eastern and Western visual traditions.[2]
Greco's practice challenges conventional narratives that view the Renaissance as an exclusively Italian phenomenon. His career exemplifies a broader Adriatic context in which artistic mobility, patronage networks, and intercultural exchange fostered a hybrid visual language.[3]
By focusing on Greco's signed works and their circulation, this study also considers the social and devotional frameworks that shaped his production. The interplay between patrons, communities, and liturgical contexts reveals a dynamic Adriatic artistic system in which mobility, adaptation, and hybridization were essential to artistic success.[4]

Historical and cultural context

The late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries saw the Adriatic basin emerge as a dynamic space of cultural interaction. Maritime trade, migration, and religious pluralism created opportunities for artistic exchange between Dalmatia, Albania, and Southern Italy.[5]

Figure 1. Arbëreshë Settlements in southern Italy

1 Maria Vassilaki, Byzantine Art in the Adriatic, 2nd ed. (Athens: Hellenic Art Press, 2018), 110–112.
2 John Steer, Venetian Painting: 1500–1600 (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 34–37.
3 Andreina Leanza, Between Two Worlds: Adriatic Visual Synthesis (Rome: Edizioni d'Arte, 2015), 121–125.
4 Marko Janes, "The Adriatic Crossroads: Ornament and Identity," Artibus et Historiae 43, no. 86 (2022): 75–98.
5 Carlo Crivelli, Madonna with Child and Saints, 1480s, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

Orthodox communities in Southern Italy, particularly Albanian diasporic settlements, maintained liturgical and artistic traditions while engaging with Latin devotional practices.[6] These communities served as both patrons and cultural intermediaries, commissioning works that blended Eastern theological frameworks with contemporary Italian stylistic innovations.[7]
Italian painters along the Adriatic coast, from Venice to the Marche, were increasingly exposed to Eastern iconographic models. This reciprocal exchange fostered a visual environment in which hybridization became a hallmark of Adriatic Renaissance art.[8]
Understanding this context is essential for interpreting Greco's works. His ability to negotiate between Byzantine and Renaissance idioms reflects not only individual creativity but also the broader networks of mobility, commerce, and cultural mediation that shaped the Adriatic world.[9]

Early context and Byzantine heritage

Greco's early work demonstrates a firm grounding in post-Byzantine traditions. Hierarchical figure arrangements, gold-ground backgrounds, and linear contours dominate his style, signaling adherence to Orthodox visual conventions.[10]
Yet subtle signs of engagement with Italian models appear. Architectural framing, drapery articulation, and selective naturalism indicate awareness of Renaissance developments.[11] His artistic identity thus formed in a hybrid space: neither entirely Byzantine nor wholly Italian, but negotiating between the two.[12]

The Italian corpus and the question of attribution

Greco's documented activity in Southern Italy rests on four signed paintings from 1505, executed between Vasto and Guglionesi. All bear the inscription *"Opus Michaelis Greci de Lavelona"* and constitute the securely attributed Italian corpus.[13]
The Latinized signature explicitly references Valona, signaling professional self-consciousness and asserting an Adriatic identity within Latin devotional contexts.[14] This parallels other itinerant Adriatic artists for whom geographic origin affirmed workshop legitimacy.[15]
The four works are: *Madonna con Bambino tra i Santi* (Vasto), *Trittico di Santa Maria della Misericordia* (Cona di Mare), *Polittico della Madonna con Bambino, San Giovanni Battista e Sant'Adamo* (Guglionesi), and *Madonna delle Grazie tra i santi Sebastiano e Rocco* (Guglionesi).

6 Michele Greco da Valona, Madonna col Bambino e Santi, Guglionesi, 1505.
7 Pietro Alamanno, Sacred Throne Compositions, 1490s, [location].
8 Marco Zoppo, Saint Sebastian, 1460s–1470s, [location]; see also Stefano Zuffi, Italian Renaissance Painting (Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2008), 198.
9 Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg, "Center and Periphery," 10–15.
10 Michele Bacci, The Many Faces of Christ (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 287–295.
11 Maria Georgopoulou, Venice's Mediterranean Colonies, 3–7.
12 Francesca Manzari, "Orthodox Communities and Artistic Patronage," 41–46.
13 John Fine, Art and Patronage in the Medieval Adriatic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 88–92.
14 Dora Catalano, "Michele Greco da Valona, un artista albanese sulle coste del Molise," in Il Rinascimento danzante. Michele Greco da Valona e gli artisti dell'Adriatico tra Abruzzo e Molise, ed. Lucia Arbace (Rome: Gangemi, 2011), 17–35.
15 Mimma Pasculli Ferrara, "Un pittore albanese nel Molise: Michele Greco da Valona," Arte Cristiana 77 (1989): 233–246.

Figure 2. Michele Greco da Valona, Madonna con Bambino tra i Santi, 1505, Vasto

The *Madonna con Bambino tra i Santi* moderates Byzantine features with compositional clarity and softened physiognomies. The architectural throne provides spatial coherence, while the Child's animated posture departs from rigid hieratic norms. Angular drapery folds reflect Venetian and Marche influences circulating along the Adriatic coast.[16]

Figure 3. Michele Greco da Valona, Trittico di Santa Maria della Misericordia, 1505, Cona di Mare.

16 Daniele Ferrara, "Michele Greco da Valona nel 'Rinascimento adriatico': pittori e committenti fra Oriente e Occidente," in Il Rinascimento danzante, ed. Lucia Arbace (Rome: Gangemi, 2011), 26–35.

The *Trittico di Santa Maria della Misericordia* retains a pronounced post-Byzantine structure. Figures are stabilized against a luminous gold ground, which functions as theological rather than illusionistic space.[17]

Figure 4. Michele Greco da Valona, Polittico della Madonna con Bambino, San Giovanni Battista e Sant'Adamo, 1505, Guglionesi, Santa Maria Maggiore.

The *Polittico della Madonna con Bambino, San Giovanni Battista e Sant'Adamo* blends Renaissance perspective with Byzantine hierarchy.
The central Virgin maintains frontal solemnity, while surrounding saints display increased plasticity and ornamental refinement, balancing Eastern stability with Western spatial exploration.[18]

17 Lucia Arbace, ed., *Il Rinascimento danzante* (Rome: Gangemi, 2011), 52–59.
18 Pasculli Ferrara, "Un pittore albanese nel Molise," 236–238.

Figure 5. Michele Greco da Valona, Madonna delle Grazie tra i santi Sebastiano e Rocco, c. 1510, Guglionesi, Santa Maria Maggiore

The *Madonna delle Grazie* introduces a lactans motif, enhancing theological intimacy, while Saint Sebastian's articulation reflects engagement with contemporary Renaissance figural models. Despite this, the composition remains structured and devotional.[19]
Together, these works show an artist capable of adapting his visual language to diverse liturgical and patronage contexts.[20]

Artistic mobility and the Adriatic cultural system

Greco's career is best understood through the lens of Adriatic mobility. Rather than following a linear East-to-West trajectory, his practice reflects repeated crossings and prolonged engagement with multiple centers. Exposure to Dalmatian, Venetian, and Central Italian styles allowed selective assimilation of formal innovations while retaining Byzantine iconographic coherence.[21] Albanian and Orthodox communities in Southern Italy facilitated continued exchange, commissioning works that blended liturgical tradition with contemporary Italian forms.[22]

Map illustrating the Adriatic mobility of Michele Greco da Valona and contemporaneous artists.

19 Natalino Rauty, Arte e artisti in Abruzzo nel Rinascimento, 192–199.
20 Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, The Life of the Icon, 129–137.
21 Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, The Life of the Icon, 129–137.
22 Peter Burke, The Renaissance from the Outside, 1–9.

Figure 6. Michele Greco da Valona, Madona with Child and Saints, (1505)
Figure 7. Carlo Crivelli, Madona and Child Enthroned with Donor (1480)
Figure 8. Pietro Alamano, Gottweitch, circa (1430-1498)

Here, the Adriatic Sea emerges as a conduit rather than a barrier, shaping Greco's pictorial language through networks of patrons and workshops.[23]

Michele Greco and the Adriatic renaissance: structure, ornament, and mobility

The four signed works of 1505 illustrate a careful dialogue between Byzantine iconography and Renaissance spatial articulation.[24]

23 Joško Belamarić, "Dalmatian Painters and the Adriatic World," 68–72.
24 Mauro Minardi, "Problemi attributivi," 77–81.

Figure 9. Detail of drapery folds, Madonna con Bambino tra i Santi, 1505, showing Crivelli-inspired ornamental treatment.

Greco preserves theological clarity while adopting selective Renaissance devices. Gold grounds serve as metaphysical space, and perspectival vanishing points harmonize with devotional hierarchy.[25]

25 Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg, "Center and Periphery," 10–15.

Figure 10. Architectural detail, Polittico della Madonna con Bambino, illustrating Mantegnesque influence.

In relation to contemporaries such as Lovro Dobričević and Mihajlo Hamzić, Greco demonstrates that the Adriatic functioned as a corridor of artistic exchange rather than a peripheral frontier.[26] Through these works, Byzantine structure and Renaissance form coexist in a careful, calibrated synthesis.[27]

Patronage and the reception of Michele Greco's work

Greco's commissions reflect a diverse range of patrons, crossing ethnic, social, and confessional boundaries.[28]

26 Michele Bacci, The Many Faces of Christ, 301–310.
27 Maria Georgopoulou, Venice's Mediterranean Colonies, 3–7.
28 Peter Burke, The Renaissance from the Outside, 210–214.

Figure 11. Madonna with Child and Saints, commissioned by Nicola Bevilacqua, Vasto.

In Guglionesi, the confraternity of Saint Adam commissioned multiple works, showing the artist's integration into Latin devotional structures.[29] The *Assumption of the Virgin* at Santa Maria Maggiore demonstrates the authority of post-Byzantine imagery within communal worship.[30]

Modern scholarship and the reinterpretation of Michele Greco da Valona

Early twentieth-century scholarship framed Greco as a marginal figure, emphasizing Byzantine survivals or stylistic conservatism.[31]
Comparative studies with Adriatic and Italian contemporaries reveal selective adoption of Renaissance forms without compromising Byzantine clarity.[32]

29 Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, The Life of the Icon, 169–174.
30 Francesca Manzari, "Orthodox Communities and Artistic Patronage," 46–49.
31 Giuseppe Fiocco, Pittura del Rinascimento nell'Italia meridionale (Rome: De Luca, 1959), 112–118.
32 Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg, "Center and Periphery," in The Renaissance from the Outside, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 10–28.

Figure 12. Comparative study highlighting shared Adriatic visual language between Michele Greco da Valona and Lovro Dobričević.

Attributional research, including the Sant'Ambrogio Polyptych, demonstrates the broader geographic and chronological scope of his work.[33]
Today, Greco is recognized as central to the Adriatic Renaissance, mediating between visual traditions across multiple cultural contexts.[34]

Artistic mobility, cultural mediation, and the Adriatic Renaissance

Greco exemplifies cultural production grounded in mobility, exchange, and adaptation.[35]
Operating between Orthodox and Latin contexts, he translates iconographic systems while preserving theological coherence.[36]

33 Ferdinando Bologna, I pittori alla corte aragonese di Napoli (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1969), 201–215.
34 Peter Burke, The Renaissance from the Outside (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 17–26
35 Peter Burke, The Renaissance from the Outside, 1–19.
36 Michele Bacci, The Many Faces of Christ: Portraying the Holy in the East and West, 300–1300 (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 221–245.

Figure 13. Diagram showing artistic networks connecting Dalmatia, Albania, Southern Italy, and the Marche.

His engagement with Renaissance perspective and ornament places him in dialogue with Italian contemporaries, while Byzantine hierarchy remains evident.[37]
The Arbëreshë diaspora provides a social framework for sustained demand for hybrid devotional imagery, reinforcing Greco's role as mediator in the Adriatic Renaissance.[38]
By situating him in this framework, we see a plural, negotiated Renaissance extending beyond major Italian centers to the shores of the Adriatic.[39]
The trajectory of Michele Greco da Valona ultimately compels a reassessment not only of an individual artistic corpus, but of the interpretative structures through which Renaissance art has long been categorized. When the Adriatic is understood as a space of circulation rather than as a peripheral margin, the binary of center and periphery loses its analytical adequacy. What becomes visible instead is a Renaissance shaped by mobility, translation, and negotiated visual authority across confessional and geographic boundaries. In this perspective, hybridity is not an index of delay or provincialism, but a constitutive condition of early modern artistic production. The Adriatic Renaissance, therefore, should not be treated as a regional variation of an Italian model, but as a parallel and generative field within the broader history of Renaissance art.

Conclusion

Michele Greco da Valona emerges from this study not as a marginal or transitional figure, but as a lucid example of artistic production shaped by mobility, mediation, and negotiated identity within the Adriatic world.[40] His significance lies less in formal innovation than in his sustained capacity to reconcile distinct visual systems without dissolving their structural integrity. Operating at a moment of profound geopolitical and cultural transformation, Greco fashioned a pictorial language in which Byzantine theological clarity and Renaissance formal articulation coexist without hierarchy or subordination.
Rather than representing the residual persistence of medieval aesthetics, his paintings articulate a

37 Castelnuovo and Ginzburg, "Center and Periphery," 24–28.
38 Francesco Altimari, "The Arbëreshë in Italy: History and Cultural Survival," in Albanian Migration and the Italian Renaissance Adriatic, ed. Lucia Nadin (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, 2008), 55–78.
39 Maria Georgopoulou, Venice's Mediterranean Colonies: Architecture and Urbanism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 143–165.
40 Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg, "Center and Periphery," 24–28.

deliberate synthesis grounded in conscious selection and recalibration.[41] Renaissance perspectival organization, corporeal modeling, and ornamental refinement are integrated into a framework that continues to privilege iconic frontality, symbolic compression, and hierarchical composition. This equilibrium reveals not hesitation or stylistic delay, but a strategic responsiveness to the plural devotional and cultural environments in which he worked.

The relatively limited corpus of securely attributed works should not obscure the broader implications of Greco's activity. His signed paintings of 1505 attest to an artist fully conversant with contemporary Adriatic visual currents and capable of addressing patrons across confessional, linguistic, and social boundaries.[42] In this respect, Greco exemplifies a wider category of itinerant artists whose careers unfolded through maritime circulation, informal workshop networks, and shared aesthetic vocabularies rather than through centralized institutional structures.

Situating Michele Greco da Valona within the framework of the Adriatic Renaissance compels a reconsideration of Renaissance culture itself.[43] His work demonstrates that Renaissance artistic production was neither geographically confined nor ideologically uniform. Instead, it developed through sustained interaction with Byzantine traditions and Eastern Christian visual thought, within a maritime space defined by exchange rather than separation.

Ultimately, Greco's oeuvre invites a methodological reassessment. It encourages art history to move beyond binary categories of center and periphery, innovation and survival, Renaissance and post-Byzantine. What his work reveals is a Renaissance constituted through plurality — negotiated, adaptive, and intercultural — unfolding along the shifting shores of the Adriatic basin.[44]

41 Michele Bacci, *The Many Faces of Christ*, 230–245.

42 Michele Bacci, *The Many Faces of Christ*, 230–245.

43 Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 168–205.

44 Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 168–205.

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Peter Humfrey, *Painting in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
Francesca Manzari, "Orthodox Communities and Artistic Patronage in Southern Italy," *Bollettino d'Arte* 102 (2017): 33–49.
Mauro Minardi, "Problemi attributivi nella pittura adriatica tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento," *Studi di Storia dell'Arte* 22 (2011): 77–94.
Natalino Rauty, *Arte e artisti in Abruzzo nel Rinascimento* (Pescara: Carsa Edizioni, 2002).
Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, *The Life of the Icon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
David Winfield, *Byzantine Painting* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009).

Monumental sculpture in Albania in the ‘70s: Aesthetic discourse and educational function in building collective consciousness

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Abstract

The monumental Albanian sculpture of the 70s represents one of the most validated phase of socialist realism in Albania. In this period, monumental art was institutionalized as an ideological instrument that materialized the historical narrative of the socialist state through heroic figures, collective compositions and symbolism of sacrifice. Works such as public monuments or memorial ensembles such as the 1920 Monument in Vlora and the monumental complex of the Martyrs’ Cemetery in Tirana, articulated a plastic language based on monumentality, clear structural linearity and narrative pathos.From a formal point of view, the sculpture of this decade is characterized by compact volumetric treatment, rhythmization of plans, and emphasizing the gesture as a carrier of the ideological message. The human figure is presented idealized, with enlarged proportions and with an internal tension that aims to transmit collective heroism. The materials used – mainly bronze and stone – contributed to the symbolic immortalization of the figure and its integration with the surrounding architecture.The educational importance of these sculptures in the Albanian society of the 70s was essential. The monuments functioned as pedagogical spaces where citizens – especially the younger generations – could adopt models of sacrifice, work and socialist solidarity. Through commemorative rituals, state ceremonies and school curricula, monumental art was transformed into a means of ideological formation and consolidation of collective memory. In this sense, the monumental sculpture of the ‘70s was not just an artistic practice but a cultural and ideological mechanism designed to build identity, orient historical consciousness and structure civic education to serve the Albanian Communist project.

Keywords

Sculpture, monumentality, ideology, realism, heroism

Introduction

Figurative art in Albania during the communist era projected an idealized image of society, using works that exalted the working class, the military mobilization of women and colossal heroic figures. This art was filled with a supposed joy rooted into the communist party and regime. Under the leadership of Enver Hoxha, the communist regime used art as a propaganda and indoctrination tool, especially through paintings and figurative sculptures.
Works of art lost their individual authorship and became collective expressions that exalted communist ideology and glorified the leader and the party. Historical events and phenomena in Albania during the socialist era were essential for the development of monumental sculpture, which became a propaganda tool to commemorate heroes and promote communist ideology.
The struggle for women's emancipation, resistance against religious ideology, solidarity between regions, and events such as the report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Albania (CC) provided pretexts for the creation of important monuments.

"It is precisely these heroes and phenomena of our reality that inspire artists and continue to drive the evolution of monumental sculptures, as they address this reality that has extraordinary monumental features and offer opportunities and inspiration to arrive at powerful generalizations and symbols, thus addressing important topics..." (DHRAMI, 1976).

Mumtaz Dhrami's quote highlighted how these events and heroes inspired artists, driving the evolution of monumental sculpture and its ability to tackle important issues. In particular, the importance of representing not only individuals, but also the heroism of the people through the representation of social groups or masses and not individual figures was mentioned.
During the 1970s in Albania, monumental sculpture became an essential propaganda tool for perpetuating communist ideology and manifesting historical achievements. The emblematic works depicted figures of fighters or socialist workers, conveying messages of victory and faith for the future of the country. At this time, monumental sculpture adopted socialist realism, emphasizing the representation of figures who embodied war and resistance, especially partisans and war-related themes.
A concrete example is *The monument of Mushqeta* , erected in memory of the decisive battle of November 1944 during the Anti-Fascist National Liberation War[1]. This battle was important for the liberation of Tirana from the German occupation forces.

"To avoid a total catastrophe, the Germans sent a contingent of 2,000 soldiers, accompanied by tanks, artillery and other armored vehicles from Elbasan to attack the partisans from the rear. However, the Albanian partisans ambushed the German column in Mushqeta, staging a strong battle that lasted all night and the next day. Finally, the Nazi column was completely defeated, with more than 1,500 dead, as well as numerous wounded and imprisoned." (New-Albania, 1976, p. 30).

1 Central State Archives. Fund-14, Central Committee of the Party of Labor of Albania no: 720. Year-1969. This content provides information on the Committee, dated June 12 to August 17, 1969. Issues related to the monument to the victory of Musheqe are mentioned, including a report to the Prime Minister. In addition, reference is made to a final list of state-protected religious monuments sent by the Ministry of Education to the Committee, as well as a communication from the Committee to the Ministry of Education on the maintenance of monuments, tombstones and busts, along with a list and instructions for the discovery of tombstones.

The monument of Mushqeta, (1969) with the symbol of the fist holding the rifle, commemorates the bravery and sacrifice of those who fought for the liberation of Albania during the Second World War *(Figure 1).* These types of monuments not only manifested victory over the enemy, but also became slogans for "the future battles and victories of socialism." The work created by the sculptor Hektor Dule; *"...[It] reflects the heroism and determination of Albanian partisan fighters in the face of a great and brutal enemy. The sculpture evokes the values and ideology of Albania's struggle for freedom and independence, serving as an inspiring symbol of its historical heritage"* (BUZA, 1979, p. 11).

Figure 1.Hektor Dule: The Monument of Mushqeta, (1969). Concrete and bronze. It is located on the Tirana - Elbasan road

In this work, Hektor Dule showed his talent and skills as an artist by solving the complex aesthetic problems required for monumental sculptures. He worked for 16 months dealing with various materials and studying the history of the Battle of Mudisturb to reach the final version of the sculpture. In addition to war-related monuments, commemorative sculptural ensembles, as well as social and cultural facilities, were erected in several cities of Albania.

This initiative was born from the decisions taken at the meeting of the Committee of Culture on December 21, 1970 in Albania[2]. He outlined various strategies to strengthen the figurative arts, with a particular focus on sculpture. These projects, mostly funded and sponsored by the government, became an integral part of the urban landscape, commemorating historical events and honoring national heroes. It was further intensified with new projects. A prominent example is the *Monument of 1920 (*1970) by sculptors Kristaq Rama, Mumtaz Dhrami, Shaban Haderi and Hektor Dule.

2 During this meeting, various topics related to the development and promotion of figurative arts, especially sculpture, were addressed. Initiatives such as the organization of competitions for the creation of monuments, the restructuring of art galleries and the planning of national exhibitions stand out.

This relief, carved and composed with an elongated sword-shaped structure and supported by vertical columns bearing the inscription "1920", summarizes the key moments of the historical development from the gathering of fighters to the expulsion of the enemy *(Figure 2)*.
This monument, along with others, was part of a propaganda campaign commemorating important episodes of Albanian history and celebrating the successes of the communist regime.

Figure 2. Kristaq Rama, Mumtaz Dhrami, Shaban Hadëri and Hektor Dule
The Monument of 1920, (1970) Qafa e Koçiu, Vlora

Historical context

The state request for monumental monuments and sculptures generated an intensive production by sculptors, who responded to the government's demands. Monumentality became an effective tool for spreading communist ideology and glorifying the regime's history and achievements.
First, it emphasizes the crucial role of monumental sculpture in perpetuating the heroism of the Albanian people by building memorial ensembles in the cemeteries of the main cities of the country. These works are characterized by their pronounced monumentality and optimism, symbolizing victory over challenges and adversities. In addition, the importance of symbolism in monumental sculpture and its relationship to the treatment of the subject was emphasized. Frequent collaboration with architects was a prominent feature in the creation of these monumental works. Groups of sculptors-architects worked together on projects such as the *Monument of the Four Heroines* (1971) in Mirdita. The deliberate elimination of feminine traits in the representation of heroines sought to highlight the invincible physical strength and soul, sacrificing their femininity for the socialist ideal.
In addition to the mentioned works the *Monument of Mother Albania* (1971) stands out. Located in the Martyrs' Cemetery in Tirana, it was a twelve-meter-high statue carved into concrete and placed on a ten-meter pedestal covered with marble slabs bearing the inscription "Eternal Glory to the Martyrs of the Fatherland". The authors were the sculptors Kristaq Rama, Mumtaz Dhrami and Shaban Hadëri *(Figure 3)*.

This monumental complex, which honors the fallen in battle, also becomes a propaganda tool in the ideological war of the Cold War. The connection between monumental sculpture and architecture seeks to communicate a powerful message and to mobilize the masses in the fight against foreign enemies.
However, even though the architecture and sculptures in cemeteries represent well-known expressions of respect for martyrs, notable challenges have emerged. As the sculptorer, Kristaq Rama, stated: *"Our architecture has entered a new phase of development, capable of addressing not only the challenges of living space, but also many aesthetic issues of our era... The progress of monumental art is fundamentally linked to the growth of architecture and its harmonious combination..."* (RAMA, 1971).
Kristaq Rama's quote highlights the evolution of monumental art in harmony with the development of architecture. Despite the presence of propaganda at the highest point of development of Albanian public sculpture, these works represent an important historical moment, influencing future generations of sculptors and leaving a lasting mark on the country's history.

"The statue, placed on the new graves of heroes, synthesizes different variants explored over years of continuous work and research. Although it evokes respect and pride for those killed in battle, concerns are highlighted about the basis and proportion that may affect the perception of the monument from different perspectives" (THOMAI, 1972, p. 5).

Its inauguration on May 5, 1971 was considered a pivotal event in the cultural life of the country and one of the most accomplished works of monumental sculpture. The authors managed to create a fair and solemn atmosphere, using forms and expressions symbolically. Despite its use as a propaganda tool, the monumental sculpture in communist Albania left a great legacy of works that testify the history and fighting spirit of the Albanian people in their relentless quest for freedom and independence.

Figure 3. Kristaq Rama, Mumtaz Dhrami and Shaban Hadëri; Mother Albania (1971).
The sculptural ensemble integrated into the "Cemetery of the Martyrs of the Second World War", Tirana

Plastic works as an integral part of the martyrs' cemetery

The monumental sculpture in communist Albania represented an intense period of artistic production used to convey ideological messages and exalt the history and achievements of the regime. Although these works left an indelible mark on the country's artistic history, they also posed financial challenges and questions about creative individuality in such a controlled political context.

Within socialist Albania, a particular phenomenon stood out in the creation of monuments and memorial busts known as "Lapidarë". Although the larger projects were supervised by well-known and approved artists by the central authorities, the smaller ones were left in the hands of local artists, and however these projects received local authorities approval the authors were often unknown.

Tombstones in Albania have a deep symbolic meaning in the country's history and culture. These monuments bear witness to past eras and spark debates about preserving cultural heritage and building collective memory. This mode of artistic expression carries with it a multifaceted role that includes historical commemoration, artistic expression, intervention between politics and national identity.

In this context, the meaning of the tombstone reflects the gloroius past and envision its future. Notable examples include the sculptural group *Partizani i Borovës* in the graves of Borova and the sculptural group *Betimi Partizan* in the graves of Librazhd *(Figure 4 of Figure 5)*. In addition,

the importance of symbolism in monumental sculpture has been emphasized, underscoring its connection to the treatment of related themes. *"Even intimate moments have been carefully treated in these works and the integral solution, in collaboration with the architecture and the environment, has generated that essential monumentality to communicate the desired messages and values..."* (DULE, 1976).

These monuments and busts played a vital role in the artistic expression of Socialist Realism in Albania, focusing on themes of war, resistance, tributes to historical figures and significant events. Although the authorship of some monuments is unknown, their physical presence and historical significance remain an integral part of Albania's cultural heritage. Within the framework of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the liberation of the homeland, new martyrs' cemeteries were built in different districts of Albania.

These cemeteries, strategically located and supported by well-conceived architectural projects, not only created an atmosphere of solemnity and respect but also allowed for public visits, manifesting deep gratitude to those who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of the homeland. Although the construction of these cemeteries was an important project, challenges arose, such as the lack of emotional depth in some sculptures and the repetition of the partisan figure, generating a sense of standardization. Within the framework of these monumental complexes, sculptures played a crucial role, seeking to synthesize solemn and combative character, expressing respect for the fallen and maintaining an optimistic note.

However, they faced problems of standardization and lack of originality, especially in the representation of the partisan in different postures. Criticism shows that Socialist Realism did not follow the uniformity of works. Andon Kuqali points out that a lack of specific understanding or lack of aesthetic training can lead to exaggerated descriptions on statues, such as those placed in martyrs' cemeteries.

"In addition, he points out that attitude, energy and belief in the future are not always expressed in stereotypical ways, such as with a raised hand or a war pose. It is recognized that positive feelings can manifest in various ways, such as joy, spiritual feelings, love, enthusiasm, and longing, among others." (KUQALI, 1977, p. 9).

Figure 4. Ilia Xhano, Piro Dollaku: The partisan of Borova in the cemetery of the martyrs of Borova.
Figure 5.M. Turkeshi, L. Berhami; The Parisian oath in the cemetery of the martyrs of Librazhd.

It is noticeable that some sculptures in monuments exhibit the same "generalized" schemes and appearances that make them look dry, especially when there are many of them in the same place, as in the case of the village of Peza. *"This causes monotony and impoverishes the idea, thought and emotion, making you indifferent to these works and making it difficult to communicate with them".* (VELO, 2017). I believe that the generalized approach to art, while not excluding individuality, also does not exclude psychological deepening. On the contrary, I think that the communicative power of a work of art requires all these characteristics.
Regarding monumental sculpture, it is observed that some problems persist, such as the repetition of the same emotional state in different figures, either in reliefs as an integral part of memorial tombstones, statues from martyrs' cemeteries, busts and portraits of Renaissance personalities or the personification of partisans. However, I understand that sculptors such as Ilia Xhano, Piro Dollaku and Kristaq Rama have tried to psychologically alter their monumental creations to suit the event, occasion and content differently. In the framework of these projects, the participation of the sculptor Kristaq Rama excels, who underlined the importance of monumental sculpture to represent the contemporary era and fill the void left by the past. As in his words[3]:

"The reality of Albania has been a source of inspiration for artists, who have created monuments that seek not only to reflect the present, but also to fill that historical void. The evolution of monumental sculpture is oriented towards the representation of the heroism of the people, privileging the representation of groups or masses rather than individual figures.

3 All quotations from this text will remain in Albanian literature, as I have translated them from Albanian personally.

Despite the monumentality appreciation, there is concern about sculpture's tendency to turn ideas into symbols, which can lead to over-generalizations and simplifications in art." (RAMA, 1971)

This phenomenon is attributed, in part, to the superficial attitude and lack of depth of the authors in the demands presented by works of this nature. A certain standardization is observed in some cemetery complexes, where partisan figures are depicted in different postures, such as with raised fists, rifles near their legs, or rifles raised *(Figure 6)*.

In the context of socialist Albania, the monumental ensemble in the Martyrs' Cemetery stands as a tangible evidence of the fusion between monumental sculpture and architecture.

These public monuments not only portrayed political leaders and historical events, but also functioned as instruments of ideological control and visible manifestations of state power, representing the country's historical narrative and communist ideology. In some of these instances, the representation of the partisan in different positions has led to personalization and standardization, neglecting the basic function of sculptures.

An example is the figure of the partisan erected in the martyrs' cemetery of Tropoja, sculpted by Kristaq Rama, which was not represented in a general or standardized way, as it was in the majority of partisan sculptures in the martyrs' cemeteries. In the creation of various works, he reflects different historical and individual events. First, some of the sculptures were large in size and used colossal gestures and shapes, but sometimes they lacked depth and failed to convey the right emotion. This was partly due to the artists' lack of understanding of the requirements of these works and a superficial attitude.

Differently, in an interview with the newspaper DRITA, sculptor Kristaq Rama describes that when composing he highlights the process of conceptualizing his monument *Partizani Kushtrimtarë* (1984) in Tropoja as a tribute to those who fell in the war for the liberation of Albania *(Figure 7)*.

Figure 6.Halim Beqiraj: Like an Eagle (1971). Bronze sculpture in the cemetery of the martyrs of Kukës.
Figure 7.Kristaq Rama: Partizani kushtrimtarë (1980). Bronze sculpture in the cemetery of the martyrs of Tropoja.

Rama explains that the mountainous region of Tropoja, known for its courage and resilience, was the main inspiration for its design.

"The monument represents a mountain partisan standing on a rock, issuing a cry for freedom. This design seeks to capture the essence of the mountaineers of Northern Albania, who, despite being scattered on steep slopes, responded decisively to the threat to their homeland, calling for mobilization for war". (RAMA, 1979, p. 3).

In these words by Rama he affirmed that in his sculptural ensemble there is not any similarity with other monuments that embodied the symbolism of the partisan. Rama emphasizes the importance of incorporating the region's unique identity and characteristics into the monument's design, ensuring that it resonates with times.
This approach demonstrates their commitment to create monumental works that are not only visually pleasing but also meaningful and representative to the community that contemplates them. To illustrate these challenges and achievements, the sculpture in the cemetery of the martyrs of Pogradec is analyzed. Todi Mato's work depicts an intricate mix of solemn and combative elements, representing a light for the defenders of the homeland *(Figure 8)*.

Figure 8. Todi Mato: Monumental Ensemble in the Cemeteries of the Martyrs in Pogradec (1971): Pogradec - Albania

His analysis allows us to identify efforts to deal with issues of liberation and victory with dignity and depth. In the face of these problems, sculptural solutions began to be diversified, using different shapes and symbols, in order to create powerful and emotional works that would honor the martyrs and have an educational and mobilizing impact on Albanian society. These problems stem from a superficial attitude and a lack of consideration of the essential, resulting in a standardization that diminishes their importance.

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The naked body between social morality and fascist aesthetics (The beginnings of the presence of the nude in Albanian public art)

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Abstract

This article analyzes the historical, cultural and ideological context of the representation of the naked body in Albanian public art during the first half of the 20th century, and more specifically between 1927–1941. While the nude constituted a consolidated genre in the European academic tradition, in Albania it appeared late and under specific social conditions. Until the first decades after independence, the conservative moral norms of Albanian society at the time limited the display and exhibition of the nude as an art genre within the country. However, coupled with the process of urban modernization of Albania under the protectorate of fascist Italy, the nude, or rather the naked human figure, was integrated as part of public art in several state architectural projects of that time. By analyzing cases such as the sculpture of the National Commercial Bank in Durrës, the reliefs of the State Bank in Tirana, the relief of the Maternity Queen Geraldine and the ensemble of the Royal Palace also in Tirana, we can say that the presence of the naked body in the art of public spaces of the time did not come so much as an organic result of an internal aesthetic emancipation, but mostly as part of the transfer of monumental aesthetics and Italian fascist biopolitics to Albania. Based on the theoretical approaches articulated by Clark, Foucault, Mosse, Benjamin, Berger and Butler, the study interprets the naked body in Albanian public art of this time period as a normative code and ideological instrument in the service of the state project. At the same time, the fact of the presence of a nude in a private space in the city of Shkodra testifies to a specific and isolated case of the time, which appears to us as an attempt by the new bourgeoisie for a cultural negotiation between local tradition and imported modernity.The study contributes to a critical view of Albanian art history by placing it in dialogue with debates on the body, modernity, and politics.

Keywords

Nude, naked body, public art, fascism, biopolitics, tradition, modernization

The historical and cultural context of the beginnings of the representation of the naked body in Albanian secular art

Artistic tradition

In the beginnings of Albanian secular art, the treatment of the naked body was conditioned by many historical, social and cultural factors. Until the beginning of the 20th century, Albanian society inherited oriental culture and extremely conservative moral norms, which considered the treatment of the naked human figure in art unacceptable, and even more so the presentation in public space of a work of art with such a subject. This approach directly influenced the absence, until then, of the nude as a genuine genre in Albanian visual art.

After the declaration of independence in 1912 and in the following years, the general orientation of the country towards Western culture opened up the possibility for some Albanian students to attend artistic educational institutions in Europe. In these art academies that they attended, the study of the naked body constituted one of the main pillars of the teaching curriculum there. Its recognition and treatment was applied through drawing, painting and sculpture, varying according to the institutions, based on classical realistic traditions or in a more modern approach. In this context, Albanian students produced a considerable number of works with artistic nude subjects, which testify to the level of their professional formation, generally under the classical and realistic academic influences of the time, but also to the combinations with modern trends, although these in limited cases and at modest levels, compared to contemporary European developments of that time. These works also constitute the early basis of the tradition of the nude in Albanian art (in the full sense of the conception of the nude as a genuine art genre), although they are school works and were produced outside our country.

But the return of these young artists to their homeland after their studies was accompanied by a direct confrontation between the emancipated Western culture, under whose spirit they lived and were formed for several years as citizens and artists at the same time, and the moral norms and cultural level of current Albanian society. While in the European art scene the nude constituted a consolidated and publicly accepted subject for centuries, in Albania it still remained prejudiced against being treated by artists, and moreover as unsuitable for public exhibition. As a result, during the time period of the first half of the 20th century, within the Albanian territory, works with the naked body as a subject were realized in a very limited way by local artists and were also rarely exhibited. The artistic scene in Albania, with the modest exhibitions and cultural institutions of this period, remained relatively closed to this genre, reflecting the problematic relationship between art, morality and society of the time.

This is also the reason that, as has been ascertained at least so far, of all the exhibitions opened in Albania until 1944, the presence of the nude is only found on display in one case. This is the Exhibition of June 1942, known as the "First National Biennial Competition for Painting, Sculpture and Drawing", where three works with nude subjects are exhibited; One is a painting, and belongs to the Albanian artist from Ulcinj, named Filip Vuçkovi. While the other two are works in sculpture, realized by two young artists, by Janaq Paço, who had just graduated from the Academy of Athens, and by Sabri Tuçi, who at that time was still a student at the Academy of Rome.[1]

1 Cilka, I., *The first exhibition of painters and sculptors* (Gazeta Tomorri, July 4, 1942). And M, M. *Inauguration of the Albanian artist's exhibition/Exhibition of figurative arts* (Gazeta Tomorri, June 5, 1942).

This isolated episode, more than a sign of the transformation of the Albanian artistic scene of that time, presents itself to us as an exception, which testifies to the tension between the professional artistic practice of Albanian artists educated in the West, and the moral norms of Albanian society of the time.
Meanwhile, regarding the public exposure of the naked body as a work of art, in parallel with this fragile development that we have just mentioned, during the same period we are presented with several cases of monumental art in public space, where we encounter the naked body present. These are several works in sculpture, parts integrated into the facades of several state architectural buildings of particular importance, realized within the framework of the modernization policy of Albania, during the period from the end of the 1920s to the beginning of the 1940s. These cases constitute a completely new event for the Albanian urban public space, and are entirely linked to the presence of Italy in Albanian territory and its major project of neocolonial development of Albania as part of the fascist Empire.

The modernization of Albania as an aesthetic and political project

In Albania, starting from the 1920s and more clearly during the period of the Italian occupation (1939-1943), the modernizing urban development of traditional Albanian cities was not treated only as a simple technical process within the discipline, but also as an ideological project of shaping the state through architecture and public art. The model that was chosen to follow directly referred to the cultural strategies of Italy during the fascist period, according to which:
• urban space had to communicate the idea of modernizing progress and state stability;
• rationalist architecture was presented as an expression of order, regularity and functionality;
• monumental art was integrated into buildings to create a visual pedagogy of modern citizenship.
In this sense, Albania was treated as a peripheral laboratory of Italian modernity, importing into its territories urban, architectural and artistic models already consolidated in Italy.[2]

Tirana as a scene of "imported modernity"

The transformation of Tirana into the dimensions of an urban and administrative state capital took off in the 1930s. This modernization project was conceived according to urban-architectural principles, initially eclectic historicist and subsequently modern rationalist Italian ones, and was led by the architects Florestano Di Fausto (1890 – 1965) and Gherardo Bosio (1903 – 1941). These two architects, among the most famous of the fascist period, designed boulevards, administrative institutions and public buildings specifically for the Albanian case.[3]
The main characteristics of this program followed were:
• Architectural monumentality – clean volumes that suggest authority;
• Unity between architecture and figurative arts – sculpture, relief and mosaic were not used as additional decor, but as an organic part of architectural projects;
• The themes addressed in public art works had social, not individual content – art did not glorify the individual, but collective functions such as work, family, health, the state, etc.;
• Urban space with all its components, including public art works, also served as a visual didactics – the citizen had to face images every day that transmitted a modern and ideologically organized

2 Meghini, B. A., *Fonti documentarie tra Roma e Tirana* (Gahemi Editore, Roma, 2006).
3 Giusti, M. A., *Albania, architettura e città, 1925–1943* (Maschietto Editore, Firenze, 2006).

state order.[4]
This model of urban development coincides with what art historians such as George L. Mosse have called "the ideologization of the masses through architecture, art, and public aesthetics".[5]

Public art as a biopolitical instrument

In Italy, in contrast to traditional commemorative monumentalism, public art of the fascist period was often associated with functional institutions of everyday life, such as banks, hospitals, schools, public transport stations, telecommunications stations, etc. This positioning shows a shift from the traditional public aesthetics of the monumentalization of heroes and certain events of national history, towards a new form of concept and more universal public representation, which Michel Foucault would later call "the aesthetics of biopolitics"[6], which concerns the control and organization by the totalitarian state of all life, work, education and everyday human activities, as well as the body and reproduction.
Included in this framework, the works of public art that are an integrated part of the state institutional buildings built in Albania during the period of the Italian protectorate, are also conceived within the fascist aesthetic in all their parameters, including the presentation of the human body, both clothed and naked, and come to us realized by Italian artists.
At this point in our treatment, the question arises of what constituted the body, and in particular the naked one, in fascist aesthetics and doctrine?
Unlike the European modernist tradition, where the nude often serves to explore the subjectivity and fragility of the individual, in fascist doctrine and aesthetics it functions as a normative code: it testifies to a strong, healthy, generalizing, controlled and heteronormative body (represented only by the male - female genders and only this relationship as a permitted social norm). The ideology articulated by Benito Mussolini conceived of the body as an instrument of the totalitarian state: a body disciplined and ready for sacrifice in the name of doctrine. In this sense, fascist aesthetics glorified the naked male figure as the embodiment of virility and the myth of the new man (uomo nuovo), drawing direct inspiration from the models of Roman antiquity. The female body, in this discourse, is presented mainly in the function of reproduction, motherhood and education, as a guarantee of national continuity. While sensuality, and even more eroticism, is neutralized in favor of this moral symbolism.
In the public sculpture associated with the monumental architecture of the fascist period, the naked body is presented idealized. Here, the nude is no longer an intimate subject that describes a physical and psychological individuality, but a collective prototype, a sign of the face, discipline and totalitarian order. As Michel Foucault would argue[7], the body in authoritarian regimes is transformed into a useful body and subject to power; while in the logic of political spectacle, according to Walter Benjamin, politics is aestheticized through public monumentality and figurative heroism, creating a combination between academic classicism and the political propaganda of the time.[8]

4 Calace, F., *Architetture e modeli urbani nel Mediterraneo orientale* (Gahemi Editore, Roma, 2006).
5 Mosse, G. L., *The image of man: The creation of modern masculinity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996).
6 Foucault, M., *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1977).
7 Foucault, M., *The history of sexuality: Volume 1: An introduction* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1978).
8 Benjamin, W., *The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility and other writings on media* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008[1936]0.

This model of the idealized and monumental body also influenced the visual culture of several Balkan and North African countries, which in the years before and during World War II were placed under Italian fascist administration. In the Albanian context, this aesthetic defined a specific form of nudity: permissible when it represented national heroic strength and reminiscences of this territory's ancient past as part of the Roman Empire, but problematic when it approached intimacy, sensuality, or modernist individuality.

The naked body in art in public space in Albania. Aestheticization of muscular strength and the discipline of nudity and sensuality

Sculpture of the pediment of the National Commercial Bank in Durrës

In Albania, the first presentation of a work of art in public space, in which we see the presence of the naked body, dates back to 1927. It is a monumental marble sculpture, placed in front of the central facade of the building of the National Commercial Bank in Durrës. The building was designed by the Italian architect Vittorio Morpurgo (1890 – 1966), and the sculpture was thought of as an integral part of it from the beginning of the conception. It was commissioned to be realized by the Italian sculptor Gianni Remuzzi (1894–1951)[9], who was a well-known author of this period, especially appreciated for his statues of female nudes. The work was created in Italy and installed in Albania at the end of the building's construction (**fig. 1**). The Durrës figure is a variant of this author's female nudes, but in this case intended to symbolize an Albanian queen (probably the Illyrian Teuta), which is evidenced by the Skanderbeg-style helmet that he places on this figure's head. The figure is conceived seated and with a strong turn of the head to the side, looking somewhere far away. We are allowed to comment on this orientation of her gaze as heterotypic, in the sense perhaps of a reconnection of the Albanian present with its former past as part of the Roman empire. The female figure, although naked, is very carefully thought out so as not to convey sensual nudity. The sitting posture itself hides a large part of the gender anatomy. Only the chest is exposed, and this is plastically modeled more in the form of the embodiment of human vitality and strength than of delicate feminine sensuality. With this treatment, this nude figure in public space can be said to represent that case, which Kenneth Clark defines as a form of institutionalization of the body, where it is transformed from an intimate aesthetic subject into a symbolic aesthetic object.[10]

9 Traglia, G. *La nuova sede della Banca Nazionale d'Albania solennemente inaugurata a Durazzo* (La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno, 1928, November 10).

10 Clark, K., *The nude: A study in ideal form* (Princeton University Press, 1956).

Figure 1. The facade of the Commercial Bank in Durrës. The figure on the upper part of the pediment is the work of sculptor Gianni Remuzzi, 1927.

Such a conceptualization is evident in several Albanian cases from the period between the two world wars, where the presence of the nude in public space is used not as the mere presence of an aesthetic figure that decorates the space, but mostly as a sign of advertising the country's modernity and civilization, and in this context also of reconfirming our early Western cultural affiliation.

Reliefs of the facade of the State Bank in Tirana

Other cases of the presence of the nude as part of public art in Albania are also directly related to the presence of fascist Italy and the Italian architectural projects implemented during this period. In 1938, the construction of the Bank of Albania in Tirana was completed, also a work of Vittorio Morpurgo. The architect for this state institution of particular importance had foreseen the integration of plastic art in the front facade of the building, creating a recessed loggia in the entrance area. This surface was covered with modeled ceramic bricks and was completed with 9 bas-reliefs, also made with the same material and color, works of the Roman sculptor Alfredo Biagini (1886–1952).[11]

11 Giusti, M. A., *Albania, architettura e città, 1925–1943* (Maschietto Editore, Firenze 2006).

Both of these elements of this part of the facade were commissioned from Biagini specifically for this object and are treated with a warm plasticity in unity between them, as well as softly integrated, without contrasting with the entire facade. The decorative texture refers to the weaving of the surfaces of Albanian huts of central Albania, while the relief scenes present rural moments from life, family and basic productive activities.[12] Apart from these references, they lack any other traditional indigenous or contemporary modern element, both in the clothing of the figures and in the tools they use and hold in their hands. These human figures that populate the scenes generally gesticulate in calm positions, both in action and in posture, thus transmitting a simple narrative. The style of figurative treatment is the realistic one of this time, with few references to Greco-Roman antiquity, this mainly related to the abundant presence of draperies. Generally, the female figures are depicted clothed. We encounter a few completely naked figures, all of whom are male, and these are always restrained, carefully controlled in terms of body positions related to exposure of sexuality (**fig. 2, a,b,c,d**). This is consistent with what Michel Foucault describes as the discipline of the body within institutional structures, where the body, even when presented naked, is represented as orderly, useful, sexually restrained, and subject to the social and ideological norms of the time.[13]

In this sense, the body in public space functions as a normative body, modeled after a collective ideal, which also coincides with George L. Mosse's analysis of European nationalism and the construction of the body as a symbol of morality and national purity. According to him, the aesthetics of the healthy and controlled body were essential in the ideological projects of authoritarian regimes of the twentieth century.[14]

12 Giusti, M. A., *Albania, architettura e città, 1925–1943* (Maschietto Editore, Firenze 2006).

13 Foucault, M., *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1977).

14 Mosse, L. G., *The image of man: The creation of modern masculinity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Figure 2. (a,b,c,d) Reliefs on the inset facade of the Albanian State Bank building by sculptor Alfredo Biagini, 1938.

The monumental relief on the facade of the Maternity building in Tirana

Another case where the naked body is present in public space is that of the monumental relief on the facade of the maternity building in Tirana "Queen Geraldine". The building was designed by the Italian architect Tito Chiomi (1897 – 1947), also as part of the urban modernization program of Tirana under the fascist protectorate, while the relief was created by the Italian sculptor Giuseppe Gronchi (1882–1944) during the years 1939–1940 and was installed in parallel with the completion of the building in 1940.[15]

The reliefs of the fascist period conceived for state health buildings usually articulated themes related to birth, life and collective progress, as a metaphor for social regeneration. Even the monumental relief integrated into the Tirana maternity building should be seen not as an autonomous decoration, but as part of such a state iconographic program. Unlike the 9 scattered and softly intoned reliefs on the recessed facade of the State Bank building, in this case we have a single and dominant relief on the front facade of the building, as it is carved in light marble, thus contrasting both in tone and color with its decorative brick cladding. In this building, as in many other realizations of the period, the architecture-art combination comes as a controlled synthesis, where art does not aim for aesthetic autonomy (as in avant-garde modernism), but a service role towards architecture and the state in power.

This function is achieved primarily by positioning the relief as dominant on the facade, in the area where the building communicates directly with the street, thus constituting a legible public message, which affirms maternity as one of the most fundamental institutions of modern society. The relief appears very monumental, is carved in large blocks, placed side by side and structured in the form of three horizontal friezes one above the other (**fig. 3**). Each of them shows a separate scene, conceived in a specific metaphorical and symbolic way, but which serves the whole as an idea and form. The scene of the upper frieze metaphorically presents the fascist doctrine as a blessing and divine inspiration in the awakening (or exaltation) of the young man. The elements of the cross, the fanfares, the symbol of the lictor's axe and the wings suggest such a reading of this scene.

The frieze below, the middle one, represents the throwing of new seed and fishing, thus symbolizing fertilization, fertility and abundance, all under the divine blessing of the symbol of the eight-pointed sun shining above. The presence of the elements earth, water and sun in this case is translated as a semiotic of the wonders of the world.

The third and final scene represents maternity, reproduction, birth and growth of a new human generation, read as the embodiment of the thrown seed and the vital affirmation of the fascist doctrine. This iconography of reproduction and fertility, in the light of Foucault's concept of biopolitics, can be read as a legitimization of the control of power not only over the territory, but also over the biological life of the population.[16] In this context, the female body in Gronch's relief is presented as integrated into the ideological project of the state, as a normative code of health and fertility, moving away from the expression of individual characteristics, sensuality or simply biological needs. This also aligns with Emilio Gentile's analysis of fascism as a "political religion", where monumental art and symbolic iconography function as means of sacralization (sanctification) of the state.[17]

15 Giusti, M. A., *Albania, architettura e città, 1925–1943* (Maschietto Editore, Firenze, 2006).

16 Foucault, M. *The history of sexuality: Volume 1: An introduction* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1978).

17 Gentile, E., *The sacralization of politics in fascist Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

Figure 3. Relief on the facade of the Queen Geraldine Maternity Hospital building in Tirana, work of sculptor Giuseppe Gronchi, 1940

The spirit that permeates the entire work is idealized, the three maternal figures are presented as deities that are both heavenly and earthly. In their entirety, there are eight human figures, four female and four male, perhaps a division determined in equivalent heteronormative ratios, typical for the treatment of gender equality in modern totalitarian societies. Meanwhile, the figures are presented partially naked, showing care in exposing the body biologically as sexual, but without hiding their general anatomical completeness.

Unlike the reliefs of the State Bank of Baigin, where we distinguish an ordinary working atmosphere, vital gestures and a very realistic plastic treatment of the form, in the relief of Maternity we see that Gronchi gives his figures allegorical mission roles, accompanied by declamatory gestures. All this symbolic narrative continues to be formally described with a somewhat schematic and phony monumental figuration of the treatment of the body and clothing, typical of the style of fascist monumental art, a combination of references to Romanesque art

with elements of the art deco of the time.
What happens is that, as Michel Foucault argues, the body in disciplinary regimes is no longer just an object of representation, but also an object of function: it is formatted, normed and reproduced to serve the construction of the order in power.[18] Seen from this perspective, these Albanian cases of public art from the period of the fascist occupation, especially the Gronch relief, can also be read as part of the project of "aestheticization of politics", in the sense that Walter Benjamin gives to this term.[19]

Royal Palace Ensemble in Tirana

Another case that deals with the presence of the artistic nude in space, also directly linked to Italian artists and architectural projects carried out within the framework of Italy's presence in Albania, is the Royal Palace ensemble in Tirana. The building and the surrounding complex are the fruit of the architecture of the 1930s-1940s, designed by architects Gherardo Bosio (1903-1941) and Gulio Berte (1897 – 1967).[20] At the time of the Italian occupation of Albania in 1939, King Zog left the country, leaving the palace unfinished. The building and its park were inaugurated in May 1941 during the visit to Albania of King Victor Emmanuel III.
For the decoration of the interior of the palace, a considerable number of works of art were brought from Italian galleries, most of them tableaux in paintings, where naked figures, partially or completely, are present. Such are some tableaux with mythological motifs, with the titles "Zeus", "Diana", "Mercury", "Apollo", "Mars", "Venus", "Adam and Eve", which are thought to belong as authors to the famous Italian artists Antonio da Correggio (1489 – 1534) and Pietro da Cortona (1596 – 1669)[21], which testifies to a cultural strategy of importing also Western classical aesthetic models in the Albanian context.
In addition to the interiors, also the external spaces in front of and around the building were conceived as a gallery with sculptures, adapted according to the model of the Temple of the Muses, of the mythical cult of Apollo. Part of this collection are also the creations of the renowned sculptor Antonio Maraini (1886-1963) that were created especially for this project. During 1940, in collaboration with the architect Gheraldo Bosio, the sculptor Maraini conceived and created two marble statues and a large-scale relief for the interior spaces (**fig. 4, a,b**), as well as four marble statues and one bronze statue for the garden around the villa.[22]

18 Foucault, M., *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1977).
19 Benjamin, W., *The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility* (In H. Eiland & M. W. Jennings, 2008 [1936]).
20 Meghini, B. A., *Fonti documentarie tra Roma e Tirana* (Gahemi Editore, Roma, 2006).
21 Hudhri, F., *Fonti shqiptar i autorëve të huaj* (Gazeta ExLibris, Tiranë, 16 prill 2022).
22 Hudhri, F., *Fonti shqiptar i autorëve të huaj* (Gazeta ExLibris, Tiranë, 16 prill 2022).

Figure 4. (a, b) Relief in the interior of the Royal Palace in Tirana, work of sculptor Antonio Maraini, 1940.

In all these works, naked figures, both male and female, predominate. But unlike the other sculptures described above, which were part of the external facades of the three public buildings, in the sculptures of the interiors and exteriors of the Royal Palace we see in general a more open presentation of the naked body, and in this context a more sensitive treatment of female sensuality. Typical of the character of a female nude where grace and sensuality are openly presented, is the nude cast in bronze, which symbolizes the mythological Daphne (**fig. 5).** Like Maraini, the other Italian artists we encountered above, such as Remuzzi, Biagini, and Gronchi, are among the best known for their involvement in the monumental art of Italy during the fascist period.[23] The involvement of these state-favorite artists in projects beyond Italian territory shows that the reason for introducing public art into several state buildings in Albania was not simply treated as a decorative enrichment of their architecture, but as part of the neocolonial cultural policy of transferring the fascist monumental aesthetic as completely as possible to Albanian urban spaces.

23 Meghini, B. A., *Fonti documentarie tra Roma e Tirana* (Gahemi Editore, Roma, 2006).

Figure 5. Nude figure placed in the garden of the Royal Palace in Tirana, work of sculptor Antonio Maraini, 1940

A nude park sculpture by an Albanian author

The first public nude work by an Albanian artist is also related to this Italian project that we just mentioned. It is a fountain-type park sculpture, located in the front outdoor space of the Royal Palace in Tirana. The author is the young sculptor Odhise Paskali (1903 – 1985) for that time, who conceived this water basin accompanied by a nude female figure surrounded by two angels. The work is titled "Fellowship" and dates from 1940. The female figure is presented as the dominant element of the composition and is skillfully modeled, in a laconicism that combines realism, classicism and art deco (**fig. 6**).

In light of Clark's theory, this work can be interpreted as an attempt to restore the symbolic and mythological function of the nude in public space, linking the female body first with the universal idea of fertility, nature, and the continuity of life, second with female eroticism, and finally with individual anatomical typification.[24]

24 Clark, K., *The nude: A study in ideal form* (Princeton University Press, 1956).

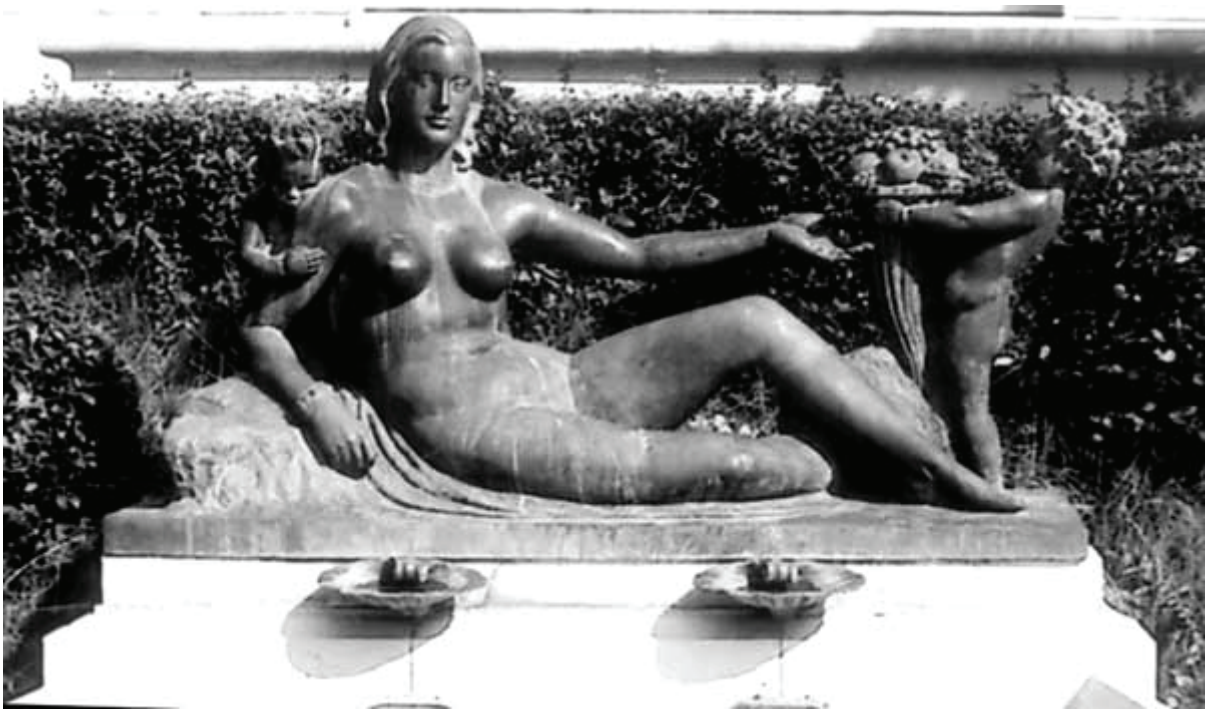

Figure 6. The work Fertility by sculptor Odise Paskali, 1940, located in the garden of the Royal Palace in Tirana

A nude in the courtyard of a private house in Shkodra.

Another interesting case is the existence of another fountain with a nude female figure, installed in the courtyard of the Kakarriqi family's house in Shkodra in the 1930s. Mark Kakarriqi was a well-known personality of that time, educated in economics in London, a very wealthy merchant, who for several years also held the position of mayor of the city of Shkodra. The existence of this nude in this private environment, but not at all closed, on the contrary very open to many friends and visitors, comes to us documented by two photographers of the time, Gegë Marubi and Dedë Jakova. In 1940 they photographed a staged ritual of a traditional Shkodra wedding, organized right in the courtyard of the house and around this fountain with a nude. Also present at the recording of this event are two cinema operators from the Luce Institute[25], who through filming documented events, works and local traditions in many Albanian cities, according to the requirements dictated by the institution itself.[26]

In this same courtyard, in 1941, the traveling theater "Carro di Tespi" comes from Italy and performs a ballet performance, with a circular choreography staged precisely around this same female nude. This event was documented with great artistic sense by photographer Dedë Jakova (**fig. 7**).

25 The most important film and propaganda institution during the period of fascism in Italy

26 Unfortunately, the footage shot on this occasion could not be edited and made into a complete film chronicle, and as a result, today it is not known where they ended up.

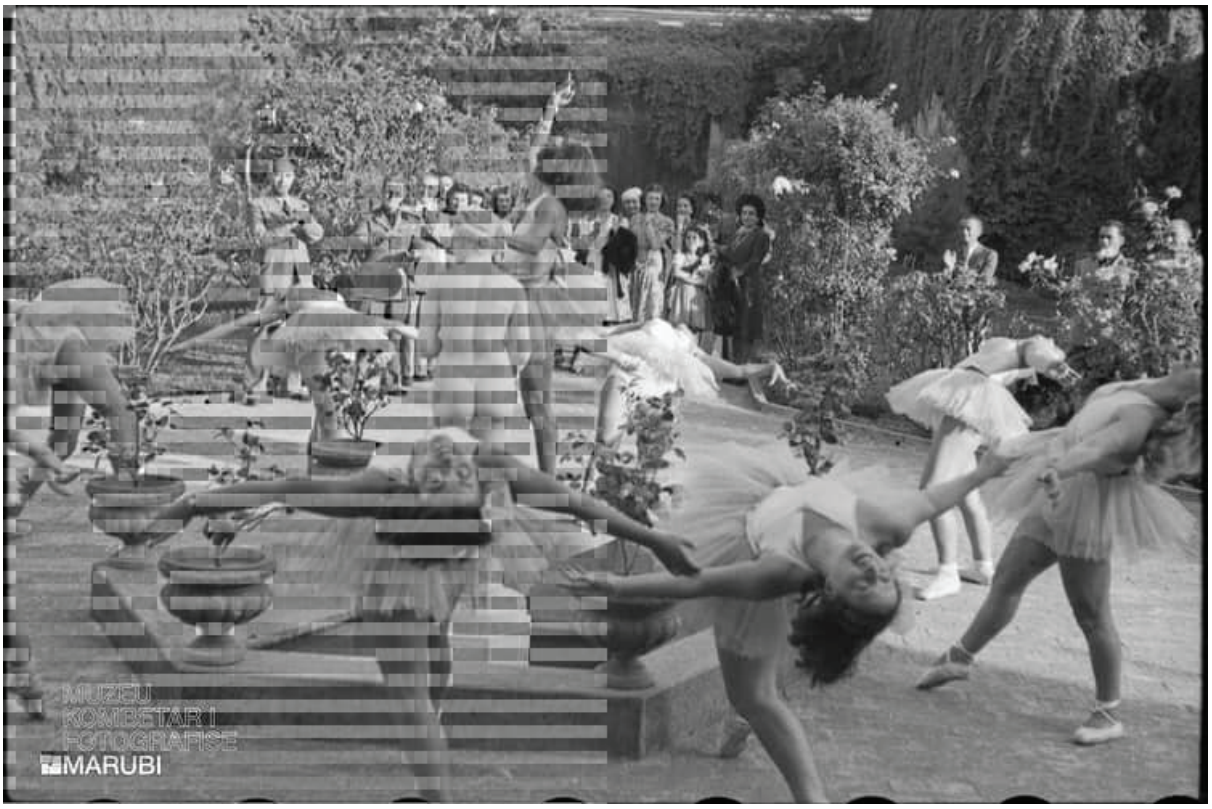

Figure 7. Performance of the troupe ballet of the traveling theater "Carro di Tespi", performed in the courtyard of the Kakarric family's apartment in Shkodra in 1941, photographed by Dede Jakova

The female figure of this fountain represents a Venus carved in marble, which is presented in a shy movement, as she tries to cover her sexual intimacy. It bears stylistic characteristics of a Roman Venus according to the style of the famous Italian neoclassical sculptor Antonio Canova (1757 – 1822). The researcher Moikom Zeqo has put forward the idea that this work, carved with mastery in marble, may have been authored by this famous sculptor. This hypothesis is based on the style of its treatment itself, as well as the fact that Mark Kakarriqi was a passionate collector of qualitative works of art, which he bought during his trading trips to many European countries, as it is thought that he also bought a work by Rembrandt in Russia, but this too is now controversial in terms of its authorship.

The presence of this imported nude, unusual as a subject for the private environment of the time, is related to the formation of the new commercial bourgeoisie in the city and its gradual appropriation of Western models in the organization of the dwelling, in the lifestyle and in general in the urban aesthetics. In this case, the work of art with the naked body as a subject no longer functions as a public ideological monument, as the above cases of urban architectural facades present, but as a private decorative element, reflecting a delicate internal process of cultural negotiation between traditional norms and modern models, a process that Berger describes as a tension between public gaze and the intimacy of the body[27], while according to Butler we would read it as a careful performance of gender norms in the private space.[28]

27 Berger, J., *Ways of seeing* (Penguin Books, 1972).

28 Butler, J., Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990).

Figure 8. Photo taken by Pjetër Rraboshta in the 1960s

A rare photograph that documents this nude is the one above by Pjetër Rraboshtën, taken in the 1960s (**fig. 8**). The Kakarriq House was nationalized by the communist government immediately after its coming to power after the liberation of the country. For many years, until the end of the 1980s, it functioned as the "Pioneer's House of the City of Shkodra", and the nude sculpture in the fountain remained there until the 1960s. It was later replaced with another nude sculpture, but in this case much more restrained, which depicted a naked little boy embraced by an eagle.

Conclusions

In the period of the first half of the 20th century, until the end of World War II, the presence of the naked body in art in the Albanian public space came mostly as a result of the importation of Italian monumental aesthetics into the model of urbanization of our country, rather than as a result of an organic internal cultural emancipation of the Albanian society of the time. The naked body, whether completely or partially, was served in the public context as an artistic product, being codified as a normative, heroic, fertile and disciplined body – that is, as a sign of order, modernity and the state project, which was developing Albania step by step, but always integrated within the neocolonial policies of the fascist empire. Meanwhile, in private civic spaces, the nude as a work of art appears as a symptom of the fragile modernity of the new bourgeoisie, a local process carefully oriented towards Western aesthetic models.
The entire panorama described above in our article tells us of a situation of negotiation and coexistence, more than confrontation, between the inherited conservative tradition and the desires and new projects for the emancipation and Western development of the country.

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Albanian material culture between village and city in the era of globalization

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Abstract

This article aims to discuss the change in material culture in Albania, based on the evolving relationship between village and city after socialism, and the processes of global economic and cultural integration. Rather than seeing modernization as a process of cultural degradation, the article seeks to discuss the ways in which objects develop new forms of meaning in their transfer from rural worlds to the city or the tourist spaces. The research is based on case studies from northern and southern Albania, including clothing and textiles, dowry sets, stone architecture in the historic centres of Gjirokastër and Berat, and the use of ethnographic forms in the city for commercial purposes. The theoretical perspective is informed by material culture theory and critical heritage theory, which draws on the works of several researchers whose main area of research is Albania. In terms of research methodology, the article uses the comparative method to analyse the differentiated role that objects play in different spatial contexts. In the village setting, objects are mainly routinized and ritualized; in the city setting, objects are mainly aestheticized as heritage, symbolic markers, or national brands. Rural-urban migration, especially from the mountainous regions to the city of Tirana, is a factor that plays a mediating role in the process. In the process of migration, objects assume the role of carriers of a form of memory that could be called material memory; objects become a tangible form of belonging in a process of accelerated social change. The article suggests that material culture in Albania is not a residual form but a process of adaptive negotiation that preserves continuity while generating symbolic meanings that transcend spatial boundaries.

Keywords

Objects, material culture, heritage, spatial

Introduction

More than three decades have passed since the de facto collapse of the socialist system in Albania, a phenomenon that has led to socio-economic transformations not only marked by dynamism but also by heterogeneity. Although the agenda has been filled with issues such as market liberalization, internal migration, urbanization, conflicts over restitution of properties, and the new political orientation towards Euro-Atlantic societies, it has not only influenced the economic and political domain but also the manner in which issues of identity, belonging, and memory have been materialized. In this regard, the notion of "material culture," that is, "the complex ensemble of objects, buildings, textiles, tools, household items, and other material forms through which social relations are organized and reproduced"—appears to be a particularly promising entry point for an analysis.

In this study, material culture refers to a space where rural memory and urban modernity intersect and renegotiate each other. Regional clothing, woven textiles, and wooden furniture from the socialist period have been selectively incorporated into the dominant narratives of national unity. The Institute of Folk Culture, for instance, systematized folklore and rural production within a standardized national heritage. Ethnographic culture was not simply preserved but curated within a state system that mediated between peasant material culture and ideological unity. The post-1991 period saw the dismantling of the institutional and symbolic infrastructure of the socialist state. Ethnographic culture, embedded within subsistence economies, kinship networks, and ritual cycles, has now been transformed to a new value system of tourism, transnational networks, urban planning, and collecting.

The study is informed by anthropological theories of material culture, including the "social life of things" as conceptualized by Arjun Appadurai, who examines the dynamics of meaning in relation to moving objects. The works of Daniel Miller highlight that material culture is not simply a reflection of social life, but it is also an active mediator of it. The aforementioned concepts of material culture are particularly relevant in relation to the Albanian case, as objects like the xhubleta, dowry, copperware, and traditional stone houses have moved from domestic and ritual contexts into art galleries, hotels, boutiques, restaurants, etc.

Albania's post-socialist status can also be understood in relation to the wider debate about hybridity and the production of heritage, including the work of Bhabha on the production of identities in terms of "in-between" spaces, a concept particularly applicable to Albania's status in terms of its traditional self and its aspiration to be part of Europe. Similarly, the work of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett on the production of heritage can be understood in terms of its constructed nature, a phenomenon that can be observed in terms of the production of heritage tourism spaces in Gjirokastër and Berat.

These processes have also been subject to critical analysis in Albanian studies. Albert Doja has shown the role of folklore and ethnography in nationalist and socialist politics, and how tradition was subject to political instrumentalization. Gilles de Rapper, in his ethnographic research carried out in the south of Albania, has shown the impact of migration and trans-border movement in the formation and reformation of identity. Regional studies on rural transformation in the Balkans place Albania in the context of depopulation, remittance-based building, and the revaluation of "tradition" under neoliberalism.

In such an understanding, the relationship between the rural and the urban in Albania cannot be seen in terms of rupture or linear displacement; rather, there is the reconfiguration of value regimes. Thus, in the rural, the material form tends to hold its embedded value; in the urban, the

same form tends to become aestheticized, commodified, or invoked in terms of national identity. To see such a movement in terms of cultural degradation misses the adaptive strategies at play. Rather, what this study argues is that the materiality of the contemporary Albanian needs to be seen in terms of two registers: continuity in the rural, and symbolic-material production in the urban.

In terms of methodology, the research uses ethnographic observation combined with visual and spatial analysis of heritage sites in Tirana, Gjirokastër, and Berat, and engages with regional studies comparatively. The purpose is to prove how material culture acts as a mediator between identity, memory, and belonging in a society that is faced with migration, economic insecurity, and rapid change.

In this sense, by centering Albania as an exemplary case study in its own right and not just as an additional case in Balkan studies, the article contributes to the wider debate about post-socialist materiality and heritage politics. The authors suggest that Albanian material culture is not erased with modernization but merely changes its regimes of value from a subsistence economy to symbolic capital while retaining its power to produce social memory.

Literature review

Research into Albanian material culture is connected to three partially overlapping fields of research: international material culture studies, post-socialist transformation in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, and Albanian ethnographic and heritage studies. With the integration of these various fields of research, it is possible to acquire an understanding of the changing regimes of value in relation to rural objects in Albania.

Material culture theory and the circulation of objects

Contemporary theories of material culture have abandoned the earlier positivism that saw the role of objects as a static representation of social structures. Rather, material culture is viewed as a participant in the generation of social relations. A starting point for such an understanding is the work of Arjun Appadurai[1] on "The social life of things". He highlights the movement of objects and the varying regimes of value that they encounter. Thus, the status of a commodity, an heirloom, a ritual object, or a heritage display is not inherent to the object but is generated through the movement of the object. This is particularly relevant in the context of Albania, where rural textiles, clothing, and architecture have moved from their previous roles to new forms of function.

Likewise, Daniel Miller[2] has argued that not only do materials symbolize social relations, but they are also involved in the constitution of these relations. Miller's work on home interiors and consumption highlights the role of materials in the mediation of family relationships, memory, and identity. The contrast between the new urban homes and the old materials from the countryside, such as the dowry trunks, the embroidery, the copperware, and so on, that are brought into the city in post-socialist Albania demonstrate the role of materials in the constitution of relations. The materials from the countryside are not simply used for decoration; rather, they are used to produce the feeling of continuity in the midst of displacement.

1 Appadurai, Arjun. 1986. The Social Life of Things. p. 5.

2 Miller, Daniel. 1987. Material Culture and Mass Consumption, p. 120.

Hybridity theories, as well as those of heritage production, add another layer of depth to this analytical framework. Homi K. Bhabha[3] suggests that cultural identities can be understood as being formed in "in-between" spaces, in which negotiation, as opposed to purity, is the essential characteristic. The location of Albania in relation to its Ottoman heritage, its socialist institutional memory, as well as its European integration, could be considered as a space of hybridity. At the same time, as suggested by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett[4], heritage is not only inherited but is, in fact, being actively produced in a process of "staging." The creation of historic cities like Gjirokastër and Berat as heritage sites could be understood as a process of re-formulating architectural continuities.

Post-Socialist and Balkan transformations

Post-socialist studies are an essential background at the macro-structural level. Although Albania is not always at the center of the debate on the transformations of the post-socialist region, there are some macro-structural similarities between Albania and its regional neighbors: the dynamics of privatization, exodus from the countryside, massive migration, and construction financed by remittances.

Katherine Verdery[5] states that the phenomenon of post-socialism is characterized by the restructuring of property relations and symbolic power, including the revival of the pre-socialist past in the context of the newly created economic systems. The phenomenon of property restitution and privatization in Albania dramatically changed the social organization of the countryside, at the same time revitalizing kinship ties with houses, lands, and inherited material goods.

Maria Todorova[6], through her study of the phenomenon of "Balkanism," reveals the construction of Southeastern Europe as the "internal other" of Europe. The construction of the other is crucial for the understanding of the attempts of Albania to reinstate its rural heritage in the cultural discourse of Europe, where tradition is often exoticized, romanticized, or commodified.

In the context of Albania, Albert Doja[7] engages in a critical analysis of the institutionalization of folklore and ethnography during the socialist period in the service of reinforcing national identity. His study reveals that the material culture of the Albanian village was not only studied but also standardized, classified, and even canonized. Gilles de Rapper[8], in his study of migration and transnational mobility in the south of Albania, reveals the way in which mobility reshapes identity while retaining symbolic links to place.

Albanian ethnography and heritage research

Ethnographic studies of Albanians have extensively described the regional material practices in terms of textiles, clothing styles, architecture, and household organization. Andromaqi Gjergji's[9] work on the traditional clothing of Albanians and regional variations in clothing styles has given Albanian research the depth and scope that is still considered invaluable today. Research conducted under the auspices of the Institute of Folk Culture has extensively described the

3 Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. The Location of Culture, p. 36-39.
4 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 1995. Theorizing Heritage, p. 367-380.
5 Verdery, Katherine. 1996. What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next? p. 15–24.
6 Todorova, Maria. 1997. Imagining the Balkans, p. 17-18.
7 Doja, Albert. 2000. Folklore and Nationalism in Albania, p. 36–42.
8 de Rapper, Gilles. 2002. Better than Muslims, Not as Good as Greeks, p. 175–182.
9 Gjergji, Andromaqi. 2004. Veshjet Shqiptare në Shekuj, p. 15–25.

material practices of the mountainous and lowland regions of Albania, although with a socialist ideological bias.
Contemporary Albanian research in the area of heritage has started to address the complex issue of the interrelationship between heritage, tourism, and the redevelopment of the city. Research conducted on the redevelopment of the city of Berat and Gjirokastër, in the wake of UNESCO's[10] initiatives in the area, has started to address the intricate relationship between architectural authenticity and market forces in the redevelopment of the city. Architectural restoration involves the use of stone facades, wooden balconies, and Ottoman design motifs as authenticity markers. In addition, there have been several studies about the symbolic potential of the xhubleta and the kulla as aspects of Albanian identity politics. However, most of this research appears to remain at the level of description at the empirical level or is institutionally focused without sufficiently engaging with wider debates about materiality and the dynamics of value.

Methodology

The research design of the present study is qualitative and interpretative, drawing from the material culture approach and the post-socialist anthropology tradition. The aim is not to count the data and present them in statistical form, but rather to analytically explain the processes and conditions in which the objects change their meaning and are recontextualized from the rural environment to the urban environment in Albania after 1991.
The main axis of comparison is the rural-urban axis, while regional differentiation in mountainous and lowland zones, as well as mountainous and semi-urban zones, is also considered in order to cover the cultural diversity of the Albanian people.
The selected cases are not based on the principle of the representative sample, but rather on the principle of the different material trajectories. They have been selected for the reason that they present different forms of continuity, adaptation, and symbolic reclassification.

- Northern mountainous regions like Malësia e Madhe and Dukagjini, in which the xhubleta costume and stone kulla architecture have historical ties to kinship, family honor, and territorial identity.
- Southern regions like Dropull and Labëria, in which dowry textiles and household items show connections to historical patterns of labor migration.
- The historic towns of Gjirokastër and Berat, under UNESCO protection, as examples of institutionalized and commodified architectural heritage.
- Tirana, as a space of urban re-formulation, in which rural artifacts like those under study are being selectively employed in contemporary gastronomy, hospitality, and interior design as markers of authenticity.

These cases provide the opportunity for a comparison between material continuity in the rural domestic space and symbolic redefinition in the urban and tourist spaces.

Data collection methods

There are three different qualitative methods that the study is based on.
In the homes in the rural area, ethnographic observations were carried out. This involved the observation of the use of these objects in the homes. For example, do dowry trunks serve as storage furniture, ritual objects, or unused objects? Also, in the urban spaces, there were

10 UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Berat and Gjirokastra Management Plans, p. 20–40.

observations regarding the spatial arrangement of these objects to create a sense of authenticity in the spaces such as restaurants, hotels, etc. For example, how do textiles, copper utensils, wood, stone objects, etc., create a sense of authenticity in these spaces.
Visual and spatial analysis was employed to explore how rural material elements are curated, framed, and aestheticized in urban space. Of particular interest was how "authenticity" is created in these spaces, including how stone walls are presented, as well as how textiles, hearths, and furniture are arranged to create authenticity. The research is informed by the theoretical concept of the "staging of heritage" in which heritage is seen as a form of performative reclassification of cultural forms.
Textual and archival review. Archival ethnographic publications, museum catalogues, and heritage policy documents were reviewed, as well as contemporary tourism publications and design media. Socialist-period publications were compared with promotional discourse after 1991 in order to examine changes in the representation of rural material culture.

Results

The analysis of the obtained results reveals that Albanian material culture is marked by two interrelated yet analytically separate regimes of value: embedded rural materiality, as well as urban-symbolic recontextualization. The process of transformation of objects in these environments does not point to rupture or disappearance.

Persistence of functional materiality in rural contexts

In the northern mountainous regions and southern Albania, objects have a social functionality embedded deeply. The objects include xhubletas, dowry trunks, handwoven carpets, copper utensils, and wooden chests. Although these objects may not be used very often, they have a structural function when they are used in the interior spaces of Albanian homes. The objects include a container function and a narrative function that refers to origin, continuity, and household hierarchy.
For instance, the dowry trunks do not only function to enhance the interior spaces of the Albanian homes but also function as containers for the family's textile materials, documents, and objects. This can be referred to as a form of "constitutive materiality" since each of these objects has a function both as a container and a narrative device referring to ancestry, continuity, and household hierarchy.
Likewise, traditional architecture, such as the use of stone houses in mountainous areas, shows that there have been long-standing norms of space and society. Even if they have been partially changed according to contemporary norms, the spatial hierarchy of areas for guests and areas for socializing around the hearth continue to show traditional norms of welcoming guests. In villages around the area of Gjirokastër, the original spatial arrangements can sometimes be found hidden beneath the layers of infrastructural adaptation. This shows that the notion of globalization as the progressive erosion of rural material systems is incorrect, as the objects continue to have meaning, even if they no longer have economic significance.

Urban recontextualization and aestheticization

In the urban environment, especially in Tirana, there has been a re-evaluation of rural material culture. Items that were removed from their original village environment now adorn the spaces of restaurants, hotels, boutiques, and cafes. Items that were once valuable in the subsistence or ritual economy now gain value in the market economy, especially in relation to tourism. Rural artifacts in Tirana's hospitality economy serve as signifiers of authenticity, signifying national origins and cultural continuity. However, in their new environment, these items are removed from their original social contexts. Thus, the textile in the restaurant in Tirana is not mediating dowry negotiations but has been transformed into an aesthetic object.
This transformation into an aesthetic object is reminiscent of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's idea of "staged heritage," wherein objects are not used in the service of daily life but rather as instruments in the service of aesthetics.

Migration as a mediating mechanism

The role of the internal migration from the villages in the north and the south into Tirana is an important mediating factor in the process of change. The families who move into their homes in Tirana introduce items such as the embroidery, small religious icons, and other items that serve as identity markers in the midst of migration.
In this regard, the concept of cultural hybridity is an important concept that is analytically enlightening. The design of the interior spaces is characterized by the juxtaposition of modern European furniture and the traditional items from the past, resulting in what could be termed hybrid spaces. The design is deliberate, establishing continuity with the past while at the same time signaling the rise of social mobility.

Discussion: resilience rather than loss

Contrary to the narrative of loss and decline, the Albanian experience demonstrates the capacity for adaptation to change. The material world enables memory, a sense of belonging, and the strategic management of social and economic position in the face of rapid migration, urbanization, and economic flux. The transformation of the material world in Albania does not represent loss; instead, it represents a dual model of reproduction, where the village represents continuity and the city represents symbolic empowerment.

Conclusions

This research set out to explore the transformation of material culture in Albania from a rural and urban perspective within the framework of a post-socialist world. This research, through the theory of material culture and ethnographic studies on the culture of Albania, aims to show that the relationship between the rural and the urban is a relationship of recontextualization and dual valuation, as opposed to a relationship of loss.
Firstly, the material culture in rural Albania appears to be structurally embedded. For instance, dowry trunks, textiles, stone houses, traditional clothing, even though no longer particularly functional in daily life, still manage to retain a relational and mnemonic quality.
Secondly, the same material culture in the urban setting, especially in Tirana, appears to experience

a symbolic revaluation. For instance, the same material culture that was originally from the rural setting now takes on a different value linked to the heritage economy, tourism, interior design, and branding. Their function is no longer for social integration but for aesthetic performance.
Thirdly, the migrations described above are linked by the object of migration: internal migration and the objects' role as instruments of continuity in Tirana. The objects play a role in the creation of a new kind of hybrid interior spaces that embody culture that is at once not "traditional" and not "globalized." Material culture is employed as a means of connecting the migrant with his/her identity while at the same time symbolizing the migrant's mobility in society.
Fourthly, the institutional heritage policies, especially in UNESCO-protected cities like Gjirokastër and Berat, highlight the shift of architecture from lived environment to cultural asset. The ideological instrumentalization of folklore continues, only with the shift from socialist nationalism to the promotion of European integration through tourism.
The main conclusion of the research is that Albanian material culture is based on two interlinked systems:

- Embedded continuity in the countryside
- Symbolic empowerment/commodification in the city

This dualism reveals the dynamic adaptability of cultures rather than the decline of cultures. The objects do not vanish; they merely change the systems of value they embody, retaining memory and engaging with new symbolic economies.

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Deformation and truth
(On caricature in Albanian the Second Half of the 20th Century)

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Abstract

This study examines the historical, functional, and aesthetic development of caricature in Albania, analyzing it both as a form of artistic expression and as a critical social and political instrument. Drawing on the European origins of the genre and its evolution from a humorous graphic practice into a powerful tool of public communication, the paper explores how caricature was adapted and transformed within the Albanian context, particularly in relation to the historical, ideological, and cultural developments of the twentieth century. The paper focuses especially on the role of caricature across different historical periods — from its early beginnings in the Albanian press and the representations of Albania in the European press, to its institutionalization during the period of Socialist Realism and its transformations after the 1990s. Through the analysis of artists, works, and visual discourse, the study highlights caricature as a space where artistic deformation, political symbolism, and social reflection intersect. On a theoretical level, the paper approaches deformation as both an aesthetic language and a critical mechanism, positioning caricature in relation to the developments of modern art and to its function in shaping public opinion. In conclusion, the study argues that Albanian caricature represents an important testimony to the interaction between art, ideology, and society, while maintaining an active role in cultural memory and in contemporary visual discourse.

Keywords

History of Albanian art, caricature, deformation, truth

Introduction – On deformation

"Every age has its own way of deforming,
because every age has its own way of seeing."
John Berger

The first image that comes to mind when we think of a caricature is that of a deformed figure. Behind this deliberate distortion lies a conscious act, which leads us to a fundamental question: when was the image born, and when did it begin to be deformed?
It is not difficult to assume that deformation is as old as art itself. It appears as early as prehistoric cave art, where the magical conception of animals and the human body was often rendered in stylized forms, emphasizing, elongating, or simplifying certain elements, likely as a continuation of the ritual function of the image. In its earliest phase, deformation is magical rather than aesthetic, as it expresses the human desire to control or communicate with the world through signs.
In subsequent periods, from Antiquity to the threshold of Modernism, the deformation of the figure evolved according to the ways societies conceived reality. In Antiquity, the peak of this process appears in Greek Classicism, where the pursuit of the ideal image, more perfect than reality, essentially constituted another form of deformation. In the Middle Ages, deformation was conditioned by morality; in the Renaissance, by the exploration of imagination; and in Romanticism, by a deeper penetration into the human psyche.
This slow transformation shows that the history of deformation is, in essence, the history of the liberation of the image itself. The greatest turning point occurred in the nineteenth century, when conscious deformation first emerged as an aesthetic and philosophical act, but that is a story of its own.

On caricature in Albania in the first half of the 20th century

Caricature, in its modern sense as a distorted, ironic, or satirical representation of reality, emerged at the intersection of visual art and social critique. The term derives from the Italian word *caricare* ("to load," "to exaggerate"), and it was first used in the 17th century by the Carracci family of artists in Bologna, who called their humorous drawings *caricature*, i.e., figures "loaded" with exaggerated features.[1] The graphic printing revolution of the 18th century brought a fundamental shift: caricature became a public genre, so much so that by the end of the century it had transformed into a political weapon.[2] In France, after the Revolution, Honoré Daumier (1808–1879) elevated caricature to an artistic and philosophical level, using lithographs and deformation to denounce social injustice and political corruption.
In the Albanian reality of the early 20th century, the "fashion" of deforming the image or, as Boudler expressed it, "the truth hidden behind appearances"[3] seems to materialize from the

1 Ernst, Kris, and Ernst H. Gombrich. "The Principles of Caricature." *The British Journal of Medical Psychology* 17 (1938): 319–342.
2 For caricature in 18th-century England, see Donald, Diana. *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.
3 In *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, Baudelaire describes the modern artist as a constant observer of reality, seeking to uncover the essence of truth beneath the visible surface. He refers to this as the ability to capture "the mystery of the human face" and "the soul hidden beneath the veil of form." Baudelaire, Charles. *Le Peintre de la vie moderne.* Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1863.

dynamics of Balkan geopolitical developments and those in the courts of the Great Powers. In the newspapers and magazines of the time, the image of Albania at a crossroads, before and after the Declaration of Independence, and the selection and removal of Prince Wied, was added to hundreds of illustrations produced during the 19th century, when the country "enjoyed" the charm of an oriental and exotic land.[4] Created by authors and perspectives filtered through the editorial line of the newspaper and the political interests of the respective country, these images almost always depict an Albania incapable of taking its fate into its own hands. Among these hundreds, one stands out: a caricature by Honoré Daumier from 1860, which expresses the dilemma of the Albanian, torn between the two Great Powers vying for influence.[5]

Among the first images created by an Albanian author is *The Promises of England*, produced in 1914 by Murad Toptani (1868–1918), a self-taught artist, best known for patriotic themes and for creating the first sculpture of Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg (1898).[6] Executed in watercolor, it presents a composition that aims to satirize the kings of Serbia and Montenegro, deceived by England's promises, depicted as a skeleton pulling the claimants toward the abyss.[7]

In the second decade of the 20th century, a long series of 95 caricatures was produced by Faik Konica, who commissioned an American graphic artist named Frank E. Davidson to turn the ideas Konica communicated into caricatures, published in the newspaper *Dielli* in the USA between 1922 and 1926.[8]

The 1920s, beyond the governments that succeeded one another and the attempts to extend administration to every corner of the country, were also marked by a considerable number of patriotic associations[9] and print media, which in the early 1920s included over 45 magazines and newspapers. In this abundance of publications, caricature found its place.

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4 For an overview of caricatures depicting Albania in the early 20th century, see Gripshi, Olsen. "'The Origins of Graphic Novels in 20th-Century Albania.'"
https://www.canforbalkans.eu/the-research-project/documentation/zanafilla-e-noveles-grafike-ne-shqiperi-ne-e-shekullit-xx/

5 Andoni, Ben. *The History of Albania through Caricature.* Tirana: Poeteka, 2018.

6 Murat Toptani (Istanbul 1868–1918) is known in Italy and Belgium for his work in sculpture. In July 1898, he was among the Arbëresh communities in Italy, where he successfully completed a bust of Skanderbeg. Toptani is said to have created many other works. From 1901 to 1914, between the cities of Konia and Tirana, he produced various works such as *Skanderbeg on Horseback*, *Prometheus Bound*, a nude torso portrait of his wife in plaster, and portraits of the three Frashëri brothers—all of which were tragically lost in the fire that engulfed his house in 1914. See Hudhri, Ferid. *Murat Toptani – Artist and Patriot*. Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1978.

7 The artist satirizes the fate of the Balkan kingdoms under the cunning of the Great Powers, while simultaneously treating them with humor, highlighting the flaws they exhibited in real life. The King of Montenegro is depicted with a bottle of wine in his bag, as it was said that he had a strong penchant for drinking.

8 According to A. Meksi, "Through the captions that Konica placed on the commissioned caricatures, Albania and the new class of the wealthy are stigmatized, highlighting that the Albanian spirit is driven by passionate impulses, even though it possesses qualities and character suited for moral deeds."
Meksi, Arben. "Historia e Shqipërisë përmes karikaturës – nga Ben Andoni," January 13, 2018, https://javanews.al/historia-e-shqiperise-permes-karikatures/

9 Such organizations included the "Workers' Aid Society," the federation "Atdheu," the society "Bashkimi," and the "Maritime Workers' Association." Efforts were also made for the emancipation of women, their education, and social organization. Thus, in Korçë the "Girls' School" was established, while in Shkodër in 1920 the "Albanian Women" committee was founded, followed later by other associations in Gjirokastër, Tirana, Korçë, and Vlorë, all aiming to combat backward, medieval customs.

Regarding the use of caricature during the years of the Liberation War (LIIB), Ben Andoni, author of the most important publication on Albanian caricature, explains: "Pamphlets, issued by communists and nationalists, exploited caricature, and their quality reflects the capabilities of the time. Its peak was reached in the humorous newspaper 'Fshesa,' which featured many fables and stories, while the communist graphic artists of the VII Assault Brigade published, in three issues, the booklet 'Thumbi.' The caricaturists of that period included Polikron Kotini, Misto Mame, Andon Kuqali, and some of these were distributed in the form of flyers…"[10]

Caricature in the second half of the 20th century: Kotini, Bumçi, and Fico

Hosteni magazine was first published on August 25, 1945, as a weekly satirical newspaper, until 1950 when it became a magazine.[11] In fact, in collective memory, *Hosteni* represents the main voice for reflecting the medium of caricature, until the end of its existence and beyond. Its first editor-in-chief was Polikron Kotini (1923–1983), whose career began in May 1944, at the time when the writings and caricatures for the first issue of the aforementioned satirical magazine *Fshesa*[12] were being prepared. With the growth of circulation and expectations, Kotini was soon joined by a small number of colleagues, among whom the most important were Zef Bumçi and Bardhyl Fico, who within a few years established the physiognomy of caricature as a distinct genre.

Zef Bumçi (1917–?), known by the pseudonym Zefir, positioned himself primarily in political themes, which undoubtedly placed him at the top of the thematic hierarchy of caricatures of the time. Executed in pen-and-ink and watercolor, his works were published mainly in *Hosteni*, but also in newspapers such as *Drita*, *Zëri i Popullit*, and *Bashkimi*. In 1963, on the occasion of his personal exhibition, writer Nonda Bulka described him as: "A militant of the new world against the old world. With his sharpness, he exposes the world above and beyond, outside and within the homeland. He fights against all that is corrupt, against imperialism and especially the American one; through caricature, Zefir exposes the fascist tendencies of many countries, mocks West Germany, which is following in Hitler's bloody footsteps; exposes revisionism attempting to divide the socialist camp under false socialist masks. The caricaturist presents to us the contradictions among capitalist countries digging the grave of capitalism; caricatures the puppets of imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism, and the so-called 'free world'; attacks the war budgets of those countries that speak of 'peace'; attacks reactionary clergy who have aligned with imperialism… Zef Bumçi served the homeland and the cause of socialism and peace."[13]

10 Ben Andoni, *Albanian Identity Through Caricature* (Tirana: Poeteka, 2018). Meanwhile, A. Kuqali adds that caricature was published mostly in the magazine *Fshesa*... Many of Polikron Kotini's works featured well-conceived subjects: grotesque figures and accompanying legends (text) were often spiced with the spirit of popular humor. Enemies, as well as well-known figures of Fascism and Balli Kombëtar, were made ridiculous, etc. Regarding another caricature from the wartime period (1944) by Kotini, Kuqali explains: "The Ballist, wearing a qeleshe, carrying eggs and a knife, arrives heavily loaded; a gun in the crook of his arm, in his hands he holds a chicken and a bottle of rakia. The caption reads: 'The Ballist returns from battle.'" Kuqali, Andon, *History of Albanian Art*, vol. 2 (Tirana: SHBLSh, 1988), 76.

11 See the article by Andi Pinari, "Propaganda and Humor in the Caricatures of *Hosteni* Magazine, 1965–1970," published in *Pandelejmoni*, E. Pinari, A. Schrapel, Th., *The Call for Freedom: 25 Years of the Democratic Movement in Albania* (Tirana, 2016), 152.

12 A period of intense creative activity continued for a decade, until he was "suddenly" transferred to the magazine *In the Service of the People* with *The Partisan with Bitter Humor*, viewed June 30, 2012, at http://www.revistaklan.com/material.php?id=2080.

13 Bulka, Nonda. "Zef Bumçi and His Exhibition." *Drita*, 1963.

Bulka's summary largely defines the political expectation of the time toward caricature as one of the sharpest "weapons" for the self-correction of the system. The most important part of Zef Bumçi's work was promoted in 1976 with the publication *Maskat e çjerra*[14] ("Torn Masks"), which mainly addressed international political themes, featuring characters such as Daj Sami, John Bull, the colonialist, and the oppressed Black worker. With precision and subtle humor, Bumçi was distinguished both by artistic and governmental critique, as his work, with strong political coloration, served international propaganda better than any other manifesto. For this and his quality, Bumçi was honored with a personal publication, exhibitions abroad, and awards such as Laureate of the Republic and Merited Artist.

Another significant figure of this period was Bardhyl Fico (1932–2015), a self-taught painter who published his first caricature in 1947 in *Hosteni* and from 1957 was also a member of the magazine's editorial staff. Between 1975 and 1980, he worked as a decorative painter at the House of Health Propaganda and later as technical editor for the magazines *Shkenca dhe Jeta* and *Shqiptarja e Re*. Unlike Bumçi, Fico focused mainly on everyday life themes or the "Coli and Loli" column, published in *Hosteni* by Llazar Morçka.[15]

Alongside the names of Bumçi and Fico, Dhimitër Ligori emerged as a talented caricaturist, about whom contemporary criticism stated: "His caricatures are generally spectacular, filled with many figures and objects, and often feature a plastic line enriched with shading and multiple colors."[16] Foto Stamo, in his usual report at the beginning of the 1960s, noted: "The graphic genre, as a younger branch of the visual arts, is making an interesting path… (among them) two particularly important branches are posters and caricature. Both of these serve the line and problems of the Party. By doing so, they provide a great service to political, economic, and social issues, offering figurative agitation."[17]

For graphics, it was almost always discussed as a genre that had begun to be applied by illegal antifascist forces in the service of agitational propaganda, while after liberation, the issue of massifying this genre arose, often listed alongside those that "were missing."[18] In fact, the maximal attention of artists in the 1950s was focused on key issues in the major genres (painting and sculpture), as these still failed to surpass themselves and did not adequately reflect what the state required.[19] According to historians of the time, the caricature genre, as noted above, began during the war years with P. Kotini, later enriched by the work of Z. Bumçi, D. Ligori, B. Fico, Shemshedin Ruçi, and Vasil Lalo. Considered the legitimate successor of the "illegal antifascist press," caricature developed mainly after the mid-1950s, addressing primarily issues of international politics or internal matters of socialist society. Its advantages were that it was proposed as "a very understandable tool for the broad masses, spreading optimism and, at the

14 Bumçi, Zef. *Torn Masks*. Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1976.

15 The beginnings of Albanian caricature can be traced back to Murat Toptani's creations. Kuqali, Andon. *History 2*, 109.

16 Kuqali, *Historia 2*, 109.

17 Stamo, Foto. "We Will Advance Our Figurative Arts." *Drita*, December 29, 1963: 2.

18 According to Maks Velo, the first poster of the post-war period was created by Fadil Pëllumbi, *May 1, 1952*, along with a cover of the magazine *Ylli*, a photomontage published in August 1953, while the very first poster was produced in January 1947 for a theatrical performance. For further details, see Velo, Maks. *Graphics of Socialist Realism in Albania*. Tirana: Emal, 2014.

19 After the modest first exhibition in 1960, three years later, with approximately 155 works, the National Exhibition of Graphics and Drawing was inaugurated. See Andon Kuqali, "National Exhibition of Graphics and Drawing," *Drita*, December 22, 1963; or Hudhri, Ferid. "Graphics and Caricature during the War Years," *Drita*, August 25, 1974: 2.

same time, entertaining."[20] According to A. Pinari: "…in the 1970s, the magazine reached its peak with a circulation of around 25,000 copies. Albanian caricaturists mainly came from professions other than painting. Their number is estimated at around 45 professional caricaturists, though there must have been many more, as from time to time Hosteni published caricatures sent by various enthusiasts from across the country."[21]

As a unique visual genre, caricature enjoyed a very broad thematic space, "fighting" on the front line of ideological propaganda, especially in terms of international politics (the external capitalist and revisionist enemy) and, as such, was strongly supported by the system with clear directives. Following this, it naturally addressed the internal enemy (overthrown classes, beys, clergy, etc.), and finally, to a large extent, "the flaws of the New Man," bourgeois and revisionist behaviors, bureaucracy, and any potential moral or ethical vices.[22] According to Kuqali: "Graphic arts play a very important role in agitation and propaganda, educating the broad masses of the people. Alongside this, they also educate their aesthetic taste…",[23] while Stamo emphasized that they held "a primary role." For its political impact, caricature was positioned at the center of state attention because, according to the authorities, it "is political in essence… with an active and agitational role… (and why not, it even manages) to amuse and briefly relax the reader… serving as a 'root' for educating future generations of caricaturists."[24]

Shtjefën Palushi – Homo urbanus[25]

"But they cannot see how you do it,
for no one lets you."
Tefë Palushi

His full name was Shtjefën (1943–1985), but everyone called him Tefa. This pseudonym belonged to one of those figures who, while conveying the charm of a country's culture, transcended natural boundaries—not only those of his hometown but also those of the era that embraced him. Born in Shkodër in 1943, where he received his first lessons in art, Tefa graduated in 1963 from the Tirana Lyceum of Fine Arts with a degree in painting. Afterward, he began working in Shkodër at the printing factory as an industrial designer and became well known in artistic circles for his caricatures published in *Hosteni*, *Ylli*, *Fatosi*, *Drita*, *Jeta e Re*, and as a scenographer at the *Migjeni* Theater.

20 Kuqali, Andon. "A Few Words on Our Caricature." *Nëntori*, no. 5 (1955): 159.

21 Pinari, Andi. "Propaganda and Humor in the Caricatures of the Magazine *Hosteni* from 1965–1970," published in *Pandelejmoni*, E. Pinari, A. Schrapel, Th., *Call for Freedom: 25 Years of the Democratic Movement in Albania*. Tirana, 2016, 152.

22 As Pinari emphasizes, "…propaganda was powerful in its portrayal of both external and internal enemies. They were compared to animals symbolizing evil, mostly depicted as dark-skinned, small, with red eyes, bloody hands, carrying weapons, and greedy for money. In contrast, domestic phenomena were primarily treated with humor, portraying characters as foolish, self-satisfied, confused, tired, authoritarian, or detached from reality. Nevertheless, this too was a form of propaganda, but it was well integrated with humor, demonstrating that, at least at that time, the goal was not to eliminate these phenomena entirely, but to limit them as much as possible within the framework of societal modernization, especially since these phenomena were also part of Albanian tradition." See Pinari, A., *op. cit.*, 165.

23 Kuqali, Andon. "Some Thoughts on Our Figurative Arts," *Nëntori*, no. 2 (1955): 109.

24 Kuqali, Andon. "A Few Words on Our Caricature," *Nëntori*, no. 5 (1955): 158–163.

25 From Latin, *"Homo Civitas"* ("Man of the City"). This is how S. Çapaliku rightly titles the character Shtjefën Palushi in the publication dedicated to him. Çapaliku, Stefan. *Shtjefën Palushi: Alone and with Others.* Tirana: Botimet Fishta, 2022.

A member of the editorial board of *Hosteni* and of the Albanian League of Writers and Artists, with the privileges and restrictions typical of the era, Tefa—endowed with intelligence and a sense of humor like few others—more than any other caricaturist, defined, as scholar S. Çapaliku emphasizes: "…the brightest name in political humor of the era of real socialism, but not only that."[26]

We focus here on this figure precisely because of his nontraditional approach, which often subverted the formats of his colleagues, who always took care not to cross that "thin line" of ideological error—a line that in this genre could easily lead, unintentionally, to political mistakes or malicious misinterpretations.

Tefa belonged to the same generation whose works were mostly unpublished rather than published, yet his humor was direct, spontaneous, human, yet ironic and satirical, capturing the everyday life of a city deeply in love with humor, music, and the arts. In the dozens of stories that multiplied through local oral tradition—sometimes true, sometimes attributed to him,[27] Tefa maintained the original caricaturist's format, where humor and irony were distilled effortlessly from the world around him. Through this approach, he transcended urban dimensions, creating a universal language that served as an antidote to the daily darkness, reaching even beyond the local context.

His caricatures are distinguished by clean linear drawing, where the deformation of the figure is always in the service of the character's moral traits. According to Çapaliku: "Tefa's characters are among the most diverse, but what unites them is that they are all uneducated, or types pretending to be educated. It seems as if Tefa followed the motto of the German poet Friedrich Schiegel, who said that every uneducated person is a caricature in themselves."[28]

Tefa's artistic output achieves an original balance between the grotesque and humanism—a relationship reminiscent of European tradition, yet translated into the Albanian context of the 20th century. Instead of targeting the "class enemy," Palushi directed his attention to distortions of human character, such as servility, bureaucracy, and arrogance. In doing so, he stood out for his ability to turn humor into a profound reflection on the everyday person and their relationship to power, society, and morality. He skillfully used irony to highlight the moral contradictions of the system, giving Albanian caricature an aesthetic dimension that surpassed mere propaganda. Tefa constructed familiar scenes of daily life in which socialist absurdities were revealed through comic situations, while beneath the veil of humor, these works reflected the psychological state of society at the time.

26 Ibid., 14.

27 As A. Vataj observes, "Tefa is so deeply ingrained in the memory of Shkodër that every joke, every witty or absurd remark, every comic incident, every grotesque episode, every fable, or every laugh is connected to his deeds, to what he said, and to the way he chose to remain immortal." Vataj, Albert. "'Tef' Palushi, Icon of Caricature, Satire, and Humor in Shkodër," July 18, 2024. https://kohajone.com/kultura/tef-palushi-ikoniku-i-karikatures-satires-dhe-humorit-shkodran/

28 Çapaliku, *Shtjefën*, 32.

Banned Caricatures – Kapexhiu

"Refine your character by laughing at yourself."
Bujar Kapexhiu

Understanding why a caricature had to be censored does not require much effort. Its censorship implied control over the medium by the commissioner, who, in one way or another, was essentially the publisher. If the product did not meet expectations, or deliberately deviated from them, it would be censored. In the period before the Liberation of Albania in 1944, caricatures could critique bureaucracy, social shortcomings, or public figures with ironic tones, partly because not all printed media were state-controlled. After the war, however, expectations of this medium multiplied. With the aim of educating the working masses in the spirit of socialism, caricature denounced behaviors considered "bourgeois," "individualist," or "reactionary" and promoted the values of the "new socialist man"—a loyal, dedicated, and collective-oriented worker. In this sense, caricature functioned didactically, similar to school moral lessons or the slogans of the era. Censorship of caricature could target both content and form. All caricaturists of the time were affected by this phenomenon, and the product itself "laughed" to reinforce the rules rather than break them—a deformation "to correct," not to liberate. One of the caricaturists affected by this phenomenon was Bujar Kapexhiu (b. 1944), who was well known in the 1970s as a director, screenwriter, caricaturist, actor, painter, and presenter. After graduating from the Institute of Arts (ILA) for actors, he was appointed director at the Tirana Estrada and later worked as a painter-director in the animated film sector at the "Shqipëria e Re" Film Studio, where he produced some of the most successful animated and feature films of the 1980s, such as *Dy herë mat*, *Edhe kështu edhe ashtu*, *Tela për violinë*, and *Pipiruku*. Focused on social themes, Kapexhiu's caricatures reflected societal problems and found space in the humor magazine *Hosteni* and other printed media. One of his later publications, *"...të NDALuara – Dialogue with Dr. Gëzim Qendron,"* presented an extended conversation between artist and scholar, exchanging thoughts on caricature, specifically banned caricature of the 1970s.

As they explored thematic possibilities within the genre, including the relationship between caricature and its time, between media, form, censorship, morality, and more, Kapexhiu was candid about his knowledge of modernist theories: "I knew nothing. I had not read anything on the theory or philosophy of this art. I had only seen and admired the forms, lines, color combinations, and originality of conceptualization. Who dared—painter with an easel—to deform the human figure in their paintings? No one! Never! My colleagues and I caricaturists had this privilege: deformations, abstractions. The real form was abandoned. Caricature came to the rescue. A privileged art for its time."[29] His banned series, which incorporated "modern styles with Cubist and Surrealist influences and other stylistic experiments that, at the time, were deemed unacceptable by uninformed officials,"[30] was produced between 1969 and 1972. This coincided with the political persecutions of the Liberalism period, during which Kapexhiu himself was at the center of controversies, including the 11th Festival, where he was a presenter. Initially removed from the Tirana Estrada, he was later sent for reeducation in the working class, accompanied by prohibition from practicing any form of artistic activity. Kapexhiu recalled, reflecting on public self-correction imposed via the "bodec"—a marked surface on the wall where caricature leaflets were displayed: "…the oppressors, thieves, wrongdoers, quarrelsome

29 Kapexhiu, Bujar. *...të NDALuara – Conversation with Dr. Gëzim Qendron*. Tirana: Ombra GBV, 2023, 94.
30 Ibid., 286.

people, but mostly those who reflected Western tastes and trends, with different clothing, shoe models, modern style, a colorful floral shirt, etc., which were not approved by the political line, the Youth Professional Unions, neighborhoods, the Party Committee. The person was displayed on the bodec as an example of what was unsuitable for society, to be criticized, not to be emulated, but punished."[31]

Caricature in the 1980s – Pojani and Sulaj

"A caricature puts the face of a joke on the body of a truth."
Joseph Conrad[32]

By the late 1970s, the genre of caricature had reached the peak of its fame and success. Serving, in a sense, as a minor antidote to the darker periods, what A. Pipa called the era of "purging the purgers",[33] it met a human need for tasteful amusement, blending official humor with everyday urban comedy, a brief reprieve to forget, if only for a moment. This was undoubtedly thanks to the talent of the caricaturists of the time. The number of practitioners is, in fact, striking. Beyond the previously mentioned artists—Bumçi, Fico, Ligori, Palushi, and Kapexhiu—the archives of the GKA include works by Admir Banaj, Azis Karalliu, Agim Sulaj, Benon Shehu, Engjell Telegrafi, Enriko Veizi, Esat Musliu, Fadil Taga, Ferid Hudhri, Gezim Qendro, Hiqmet Xhani, Ilir Pojani, Lin Ndoka, Llambi Blido, Koço Devole, Kosta Raka, Muhamet Kerpaci, Robert Kote, Panajot Vasili, Paulin Palushi, Petrit Konçi, Sabaudin Xhaferi, and Sytki Brahimi. Well-known names such as Naxhi Bakalli, Gazmend Leka, and Uran Hajdari are also cited, yet in the final decade of the regime, the covers of *Hosteni* prominently featured Ilir Pojani and Agim Sulaj. Following the artistic path of Dhimitër Ligori, Pojani and Sulaj reintroduced into local caricature a painterly sensibility that had been somewhat neglected, emphasizing image depth and chromatic relationships, thereby contributing to its artistic and conceptual renewal.

Ilir Pojani (b. 1954), who collaborated with *Hosteni* as a student and defended his diploma with a cycle of caricatures, was later appointed as a painter at the magazine. Focused on geopolitical themes, he participated in and won numerous national and international competitions, and from the 1990s onward continued his career in the medium of painting in the United States.[34]

Agim Sulaj (b. 1960), after graduating from the Institute of Arts (ILA), joined *Hosteni*, becoming one of its most important figures. A laureate of numerous international awards, today he works between Rimini and Tirana, and stands as one of the leading voices of local caricature and painting.

31 Zajmi, Uvil. "Interview: Cartoonist Bujar Kapexhiu Talks About the Years When You Were Criticized for Following Fashion: I Tell the Story of the Pressure Exerted Through Pamphlets and the 'Bodec'." *Panorama*, November 19, 2020. https://www.panorama.com.al/intervista-karikaturisti-bujar-kapexhiu-tregon-per-vitet-kur-te-kritikonin-se-ndiqje-moden-ju-rrefej-presionin-qe-ushtrohej-permes-fleterrufeve-dhe-bodecit/

32 Andoni, Ben. "Better That the Cultural Figures Are No More… Like Kosta Raka & Co." *Shqiptarja*, August 8, 2021. https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/me-mire-qe-nuk-jane-me-njerezit-e-kultures-si-kosta-raka-co

33 Pipa, Arshi. With *"Cleaners of the Cleaners"* he refers to the campaign of successive purges that began in 1943, specifically targeting every interior minister as an absolute rule. According to him: "Analysis leads to the conclusion that the purges of the Albanian Party constitute a typical case of ideological hemophilia in this country, carried out by professional hemophilic purgers, who are ultimately eliminated themselves." Pipa, Arshi. *Albanian Stalinism*. Tirana: Botimet Princi, 2010, 120.

34 On the caricature work of Ilir Pojani, see also Janina, Agim. *Agim Janina: In 1988, an exhibition with 20 caricaturists was sent to Germany, where all the works were requested for purchase, but the regime did not allow it. Gazeta Telegraf*, 18 July 2025. Available at: https://telegraf.al/kulture/agim-janina-ne-vitin-1988-ne-gjermani-u-dergua-nje-ekspozite-me-20-karikaturiste-ku-te-gjitha-punimet-u-kerkuan-per-tu-blere-por-regjimi-nuk-e-lejoi/

Their contributions, along with those of other artists before and after the regime change—such as Bujar Kapexhiu, Arben Meksi, Medi Belortoja, and younger figures like Klodian Bezhani, Orlis Vathi, and Endri Beqo—highlight the vitality and continuity of Albanian caricature into the late 20th century.

Conclusions

"Every society has a tendency to reduce its opponents to caricatures."
Friedrich Nietzsche

Caricature was born as a form of play and evolved into a serious language of critical art. From the aristocratic drawings of the Carracci family, to the satires of Daumier, and modern political caricature, the distortion of the human figure became the most effective way to reveal the inner tensions of human and social reality. As Baudelaire would define it, it is "the art of our century—freed from false beauty, yet filled with ugly truth."[35] In post-World War II Albania, under the logic of the communist system, ideology and propaganda were meant to materialize an image of the ideal society—without contradictions or defects. In this vision, the "New Man" had to be clear in form and confident in reaching the promised earthly paradise. Caricature, while "criticizing to correct" rather than to oppose, was part of this mega-production permeating socialist society both horizontally and vertically. Within it, the anthropological perception of the external enemy[36] intertwined with that of the internal one; global leaders clashed, as did the virtuous socialist New Man and the one tainted by vices. Yet caricature, despite being part of this system, paradoxically served precisely to uncover these contradictions. It became an aesthetic vent for censorship, a way to express what could not be said directly. Through humor, artists such as Palushi, Kapexhiu, Fico, and Sulaj created a dual visual language—one for the Party and another for the public. In this sense, Albanian caricature in the second half of the twentieth century was not merely a genre of graphic art, but a form of social intelligence—a means of spiritual survival under the conditions of a controlled reality. Beneath its "smile" often lay shared anxiety, reflections on daily absurdities, ideological hypocrisy, or simply the human contradictions the system sought to erase. Through distortion, caricature preserved what monumental socialist realist art had lost: individual expression and realism. In the hands of caricaturists, the human figure was no longer heroic but human; not perfect, but real. And in this revealing distortion—rather than concealing—lies its philosophical and artistic power.

Ultimately, it can be said that Albanian caricature was the most sincere art of a deceitful system. It did not overthrow the myth of the "socialist New Man," but it unmasked him through a smile. And perhaps, as Tefë Palushi wryly noted, only through laughter could the Albanian person survive seriously.

35 Phrases such as "the art of our century – freed from false beauty, yet filled with ugly truth" are not direct quotes from Baudelaire; they are paraphrases of the idea he expresses in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863).

36 Regarding the "external enemy," the writer and translator Bashkim Shehu organized an exhibition of caricatures, selected from *Hosteni* publications between 1945 and 1990, held at COD in August 2025, which "aimed, among other things, to safeguard the collective imagination regarding the so-called external enemy."

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Translating concepts into visual language: A pedagogical framework for teaching architecture and design students to communicate through art

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Abstract

In architecture and design education, the translation of concepts into a visual and spatial language, and the creation of a tangible product, is still flexible and open ended, which constitute a critical pedagogical challenge. Although visual language is widely used in artistic disciplines, teaching methodologies are still not clearly defined with a clear workflow, to guide step by step conceptual thinking with the final visual products. This paper addresses this gap by proposing a pedagogical methodology adapted for architecture and design students what guide them to develop a artistic product as a process of thinking-through-making starting from a concept. The proposed method is structured in six steps: problem statement and concept definitions, identification of few significant keywords, reference case study analysis, development of sketches, experimentation with different media, materials, and final products. This methodology is strictly structured, but jet it is open in each step to interactive process of thinking and creation. The idea at each stage is defined through in deep analyses and experimentation. This research is based on the analysis of student projects developed during the course of Visual language. The study examines the conceptual clarity and keywords translation, study, processual development and elaboration, and the final outcome. Findings show that the most successful cases are those in which there is continuous feedback between sketching, material testing, and concept definition and there is in deep experimentation in each phase. Thus, the study demonstrates the pedagogical value of structured yet flexible methodology to improve visual literacy and spatial thinking in design education, in order to achieve interesting art works as final products.

Keywords

Visual language, art education, concept visualization, design and architecture

Introduction

In our image-saturated culture, visual communication has become a key mode of production in design and architecture fields. In design and architecture education, the ability to translate concepts and ideas into visual form is not just an artistic impulsive skill but the resout of a cognitive process based on analysis, interpretation, and problem-solving (Avgerinou & Pettersson, 2011; Kozbelt et al., 2010), which mean that it is a systematic process of questioning, brainstorming, experimentation and hands on work.
Recent pedagogical approaches in this fields, prefer the use of combined learning methods where students work with different media stating from synthetic articulation, drawings, digital media, installation and models, etc for project visualization. This tendency points out a greater awareness that an idea or a concept is built through experimentation with multiple representational systems, not a single medium (Serafini, 2014).
Despite this tendency, many art-based curricula do not include structured methodologies that explicitly build the path that can guide the students from concept definition to concept abstraction and to visual production. This study addresses this gap by proposing and testing a teaching a methodology that structures the learning process by proposing a workflow that allows at the same time a flexible process that stimulates creativity.

Theoretical background

Visual language is understood as a system of meaning constructed through formal visual elements such as line, shape, color, texture, and composition. In education, it functions as a cognitive tool that supports both thinking and communication. Visual literacy, defined as the ability to interpret, analyze, and produce visual messages, has become increasingly important in contemporary education due to the dominance of visual communication in digital culture (Avgerinou & Pettersson, 2011; McMaster, 2015).
It is not only understanding, decoding and reflecting on visual information but also producing visual content (ACRL, 2011; Anderson et al., 2013). Blending learning theories that in art field are based on multimedia applications further emphasize the importance of using both textual, manual, and digital tools during the learning process. In this sense, concept development is seen as a process developed through multiple representational tools (Serafini, 2014; New London Group, 1996).
Empirical studies demonstrate that using diverse media strengthens conceptual understanding and supports the creation of original works in creative practice (Linder & Falk-Ross, 2016). At the same time, a structured visual literacy instruction has been shown to improve both cognitive development and creative productions by promoting reflective and personalized use of visual strategies (Kozbelt et al., 2010; Sabol, 2013). Recent studies also emphasize the role of digital and immersive technologies in extending visual thinking and in creating new forms of conceptual visualization through sketching, storyboarding and interactive media (Serafini, 2014).
Together, these perspectives consider crucial visual analyses and the experimentation through various media for contemporary design education.

Methods

The research is based on the pedagogical model of the "Visual Communication" studio in programs of Design and Architecture. The methods consist of five sequential stages:

a) **Concept Definition and Elaboration:** Students propose a topic or problematic related to social, spatial or personal contexts.
b) **Visual synthetization through linguistics:** Core ideas are expressed synthetically through visual keywords.
c) **Case Study Analysis:** Students examine precedents related to their idea or concept and extract formal and visual strategies.
d) **Experimenting through Sketching:** Students explore visually the formal strategies and test spatial and compositional ideas through drawings.
e) **Media Production:** Final works are produced using a mix of media, both physical and digital.

This method is a feedback loop rather than a linear sequence. Iterative sketching connects all stages, allowing for conceptual redefinition during the making process. Mix-media experimentation connects the idea with the formal and material production, with the outcomes coming from the earlier stages and elaborated into a continuous loop, which deepens the learning process. Within this production process, the final product is not just a simple inpulsive or instinctive representation but it comes as a result of an active knowledge building through making.

Results / student works

This section presents an analysis of the student works developed under the proposed pedagogical methods. The works are organized in categories according to their main idea, conceptual focus and artwork strategy. The aim is to analyze the outcomes of the exercise at the various steps and highlight critical issues observed during the development of the idea into a concrete artwork. The analysis will be descriptive, showing how concepts were translated into the various phases from words, to visual and in many cases to spatial form passing through the five methodological stages.

The analyses will be based on interpretations observed at different stage, arguing the development and the alignment of initial concept with the keywords, sketches proposed, and so on up to the and final visual and spatial product. For better analyses, the workswere grouped into six thematic categories: (1) social narratives, (2) formal geometries, (3) light and perception, (4) transformation and transition, (5) organic systems, and (6) processes over time.

Social narratives through space

Below we analyzed two projects that address sociocultural conditions: Fragments of Society (by students Elvi Bacalli & Albjan Ruda) and The Body as a Social Battleground (Rea Dobjani & Flavia Çela).

Fragments of Society project is one of the strongest cases of a sustained conceptual coherence across all the methodological steps. The project start with the concept, the problem of social fragmentation and communicative breakdown. Then the concept is synthesized through visual keywords such as opacity, transition, and fragmented visibility. These keywords are not treated descriptively but are tested in visual terms through sketching and spatial representations.

The transition from sketches to an installation model, that is the final product pass through effective case study selection and shows at the end a consistent translation of the fragmentation and instability which were the main concepts into a model that based on spatial discontinuity. The corridor structure of the model is composed of colorful paths on the ground floor, which suggest a condition of connectivity, contracting with transparent planes/doors and a set of barriers that suggest discomfort, separation and instability. The strength of the project lies in the continuity between concept, idea development through sketches and precedent anayses and spatial experience (Fig. 1).

The Body as a Social Battleground project main concept is the critical exploration of identity as a socially constructed and contested condition. The concept was is effectively translated into visual keywords that define identity in this context such as fragmentation, conflict, and exposure. During early sketching phases, and stimulated by direct reference to case studies the work presents a clear shift from figurative representation of the concept toward a deeper symbolic rapresentation.

The analysis of project development indicates a gradual shift from the conceptual focus. While the final installation is an interesting interpretation of the references, the strong visual density, the multi-layered composition, the relationship between conceptual structure and formal resolution becomes partially diluted. In this case, paining techniques and collage experimentation expands expressive capacity but also introduces a degree of conceptual dispersion. The most successful aspect of the project is its relational reading: identity is activated through viewer position rather than fixed representation (Fig. 2).

Both projects explore different paths to translate ideas to conceptual tools and to produces artworks that with a strong visual and perceptual narrative.

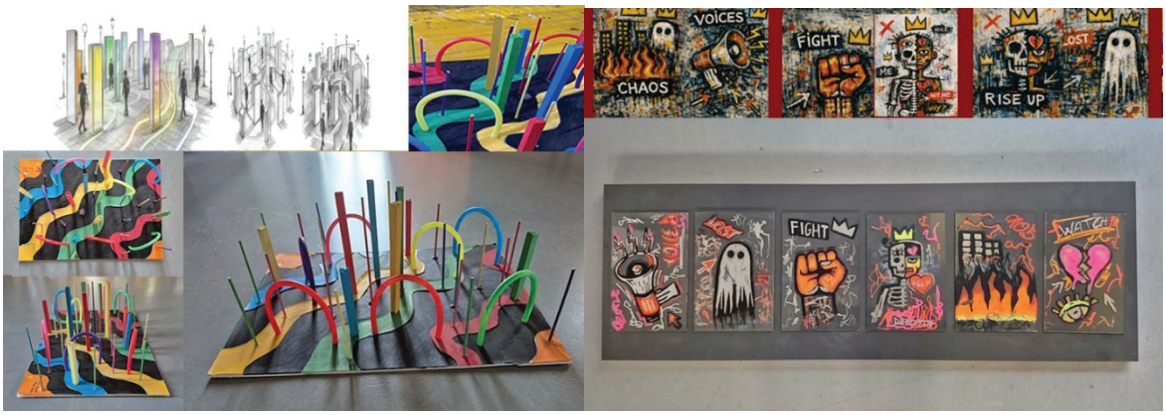

Figure 1. Fragments of Society by students Elvi Bacalli & Albjan Ruda

Figure 2. The Body as a Social Battleground by students Rea Dobjani & Flavia Çela

Formal systems: structure, rhythm, and order

Other projects explores visual structure as a generative system such as Symmetry and Rhythm (Students: S. Saka & A. Tufa).

Symmetry and Rhythm explores the idea of geometric order in terms of structure and process, both as an organized and a living spatial system. This concept was translated into visual keywords like “balance,” “repetition,” and “movement.” Sketches were drawn based on the ideas of spiral

motion, modular repetitions, and symmetry transformations. The conceptualization is clear, but the spatial expression is not strong enough. In fact, sketches describe fixed patterns rather than exploring transformation possibilities. The final result is aesthetically pleasing as a pattern, the connection between the concept and spatial experience offered by the overall shape is minimal. The final result is visually and rhythmically structured through colors and shapes accumulation, but the relationship between the overall system and spatial experience is weak. The project shows a tendency toward creating a formal pattern rather than creating on the perception of an object in movement, that is perceived as a spatial articulation. This indicates a partial gap in conceptual translation, which is due to limited experimentation in that phase (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Symmetry and Rhythm by students Steljana Saka & Anesa Tufa

Perception, light, and spatial experience

Another group of projects works around perception and sensory engagement topics, particularly through the use of light, shadow, and spatial interaction such as: Transparency and reflection (students: N. Kazazi & A. Dupi), Between light and shadows (students: K. Lalaj & B. Beqiri) and Between light and shadows (students: K. Lalaj & B. Beqiri)

Transparency and reflection project addresses the perception as a dynamic spatial condition. This concept is visually translated into perceptual instability and is consistently maintained during project development. Sketching was particularly effective because overlapping spatial systems and interactions were tested multiple times. The final installation was also improved based on a back-and-forth project and was at the end successfully build. The model shows a continuous perceptual change as movement continuously alters the reading of space. In this sense, the project demonstrates a strong integration between concept and the final artwork, which was achieved through continuous testing at each stage (Fig. 4).

Between light and shadows project addresses the problem of how light can define space rather than simply illuminate it. The concept was abstracted through visual keywords such as shadow, contrast, and emergence. The initial sketches tested space form through different lighting directions and their effects on volumes. The final installation uses controlled light sources to generate shadow compositions. At this stage continuous experimentations were done through shifting and rotation of modular elements to generate nonlinear shadow into the surfaces. The dynamic interaction between light and surface creates complex spatial readings (Fig. 5).

Space in movement and light project explores the problem of how movement and light can be dynamic within a static space. Concept development focused on keywords such as motion, sequence, and temporal flow. Initial sketches combined geometric structures with dynamic scenarios of forms, transformed in scale, silhouette and position to simulate movement effects. The final outcome an outdoor sculpture presents a dynamic space, jet repetitive and a more interesting light perception, within a simple spatial structure. Light effect has been intensified due to the use of different colors. Thus, this reveals the lack of efforts in spatial articulation, with the consequence of leaving one design parameter (light) becomes dominant (Fig. 6).

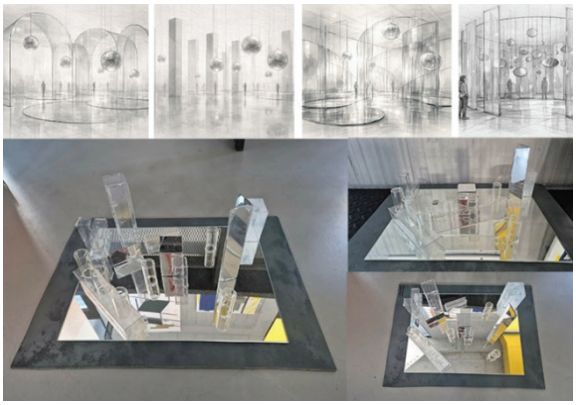

Figure 4. Transparency and reflection (by students N. Kazazi & A. Dupi)

Figure 5. Between light and shadows by students (K. Lalaj & B. Beqiri)
Figure 6. Space in movement and light (by students I. Baraj & K. Pecaku)

Transformation, transition, and dynamic form

A number of examples relate to transformation as a concept and a spatial practice, which involve change, development, or transition, like Forms in transition (Student: M. Hodaj), Transition (students: E. Suma & K. Çela).
Forms In Transition deals with the challenge of expressing the continuity of transformation within architectural forms, instead of presenting architectural form statically based on geometry. Concept formation involved the use of key terms like evolution, instability, and transition. The

sketches involved an incremental transition from geometric forms to organic forms. It clearly shows the continuity of concept in all phases of the process. Concept of transformation finds expression consistently in terms of incremental morphological transformations. Sketching plays a role in sustaining such continuity by being a process of incremental form generation rather than experimentation (Fig. 7).

Transition project tackles the issue of portraying intermediate stages in spatial design, where form operates in a state of ambiguity and flux. The concept phase concentrated on key terms like threshold, transition, and instability. The initial drawings considered progressive fragmentation and restructuring. The final result is a sequence that evolves from a solid volume into linear fragments, forming a narrative of constant change and visual instability. The project is coherent in its concept but demonstrates little variation in space, leading to a controlled yet cautious final outcome (Fig. 8).

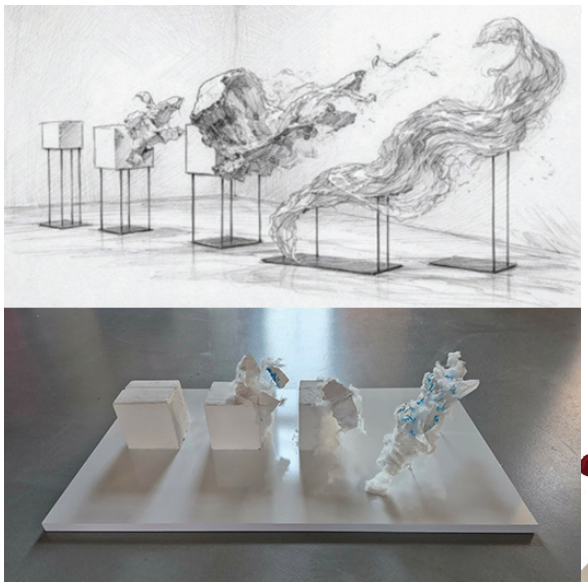

Figure 7. Forms in transition (by student M. Hodaj)

Figure 8. Transition (by students E. Suma & K. Çela)

Nature and organic systems

Other projects draw inspiration from natural processes and organic forms, and aim to translate them into artistic and spatial expressions such as: Sea waves (Students: I.Kodra & R. Bejtja) and Art and Nature (Students: B.Draci & E. Saliaj).

Sea waves address the issue of translating the dynamic nature of wave movement into spatial form. When trying to visualize the concept, first through visual keywords, terms such as flow, rhythm, and continuity were proposed. From the early sketches that were generated, wave motions was captured through curved shapes. The final product are interesting sculptural panels. Yet there was not enough development in terms of structural analysis of the motion, which could have brought better perceptual results related to the first concept (Fig. 9).

Art and Nature project addresses the problem of how minimal material intervention can express organic growth systems. Concept development focused on keywords such as growth, lightness, and transparency. Initial sketches explored wire-based structures inspired by branching natural

forms. The final art piece includes the use of light lines for creating spatial systems with a focus on void and lightness, representing natural growth with minimal intervention. At this stage, there was no deep exploration of case studies and experimentation to produce authentic translation. The final installation uses steel wires to construct organic word structures defined by void and lightness, evoking natural growth through minimal intervention. The final product result in limited spatial complexity due to lack of analytical depth and experimentation during the creative process.

Figure 9. Sea waves (by students I.Kodra & R. Bejtja)
Figure 10. Be Art and Nature (by students B.Draci & E. Saliaj)

Time, movement, and cyclical processes

One of the projects dealing with processes over time is Cycle of Time (students: K. Mustafa & Kejsi Hamataj).
This project considers the problem of how time could be expressed not in linear motion but in cyclical repetitive form. The concept was represented through keywords such as: cycle, repetition, and continuity. Sketches considered circular systems and rhythmical sequences as spatial equivalents of temporal movement. Nevertheless, there was little difference in space, and repetition became the primary design method. The final work created a cyclical experience of the space using repetition and variations, and being based on Mondrian pattern. Motion in the space creates an awareness of time as continual recurrence and not linear progression. This project conceptually works well but does not create variety in space, which suggest deepening the concept of motion at every stage of the creative process.

Figure 11. Between light and shadows (Students: K. Lalaj, B. Beqiri)

Discussion

The results of the analysis of student's projects, show that the pedagogical approach used was effective in providing students a structured method to translate their abstract concepts into visual and tangible works of art. Yet it would be wrong to assume that all students cope with this task equally effectively. In this sense this methodology is not simply linear, but requires students' engagement, deep interpretation and experimentation at each stage.

Another significant observation made is that although clear concepts in the early stages can be achieved easily by most students, this does not necessarily translate into visual success. Some students who demonstrated clear concepts in their initial designs struggled to sustain the concept through experimentation with sketches, materials and different media forms, since more formal considerations took precedence over conceptual considerations. On the other hand, projects in which there is constant interplay between drawing, experimenting with materials, and refining the concept have been found to achieve better results.

Sketching emerged as one of the most crucial steps in the process. It is not merely a method of designing; rather, it provided a tool for testing, revising, and even defining better the concept being considered. Sketching became an exploratory exercise, and consequently, the results reflected spatial depth.

The use of case studies was also an effective tool, but in some cases it lead to student passivity they used it as a direct reference rather than tools for critical analysis. Case studies proved to be useful primarily as analytical examples when studying different approaches to strategy implementation. When students imitated a specific visual approach from a case study, they had little conceptual depth, which shows that the danger of superficial adoption may arise when critical reading is neglected.

Multimodal experiments (including the use of various materials, light, transparency, and exhibition methods) greatly contributed to the projects' richness, adding variety as well. Media manipulation could help reinforce a project's concept by widening its boundaries and adding

more layers to it. However, in other cases, media manipulation drew focus away from concept formation. Thus, multimodality seemed to be productive only when firmly rooted in concept.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that a structured pedagogic method may help architecture and design students interpret abstract ideas in visual/spatial languages but only when they critically analyze and experiment during all stages of the creative process. The primary benefit of the model presented in this paper does not lie in obtaining consistent results, but in revealing how students interpret their conceptual ideas at every step of their design process.
Indeed, the main benefit derived from this research is the confirmation that visual language can be regarded as a type of thinking by doing in which the meanings are formed progressively through sketching, modeling, and other activities related to design.
The research confirms that that visual language is meant to be considered as a way of thinking by doing and creating meaning incrementally through sketching, materialization, and refinement. Thus, the process of designing is not about getting the perfect illustration but learning how to negotiate ideas and forms.
One important contribution from this research is that there is a defined pedagogical structure for teaching concepts through visualization that goes from concept definition, keyword visualization, analytical interpretation of examples, sketching, and materialization. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that the aforementioned model is not self-reliant, and critical thinking is crucial for the process.
Moreover, the study also enriches design pedagogy by considering the notion of visual literacy in terms of a meaning-making practice involving more than one medium. This is because meaningful multimodal experimentation, guided by theoretical understanding, has the potential to increase the expressive capability of students without compromising their ability to communicate clearly.
Last, the study implies that successful teaching within visual fields requires striking a balance between methodological structure and interpretive freedom. The former helps provide direction, while the latter ensures depth and allows for conceptual understanding as well as proficiency in visual matters.

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Local Identity in Visual Arts in the Age of Visual Globalization

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Abstrakt

Visual globalization, accelerated by digital technologies and the transnational circulation of images, has radically transformed the ways in which figurative art is produced and perceived. This paper aims to analyze the relationship between local identity and visual globalization in contemporary art, treating the artwork as a space of dialogue between tradition and global influences. The study relies on an interdisciplinary approach, combining cultural globalization theory, visual studies, and the aesthetic analysis of figurative practices, with a particular focus on the Albanian and regional context. Through the analysis of iconographic motifs, the use of materials, and visual strategies, it is argued that local identity does not disappear but is instead transformed into dynamic and hybrid forms of expression. Key findings show that contemporary artists successfully merge traditional symbols with modern digital language, creating narratives that challenge aesthetic homogenization. The results suggest that the hybridization process should not be viewed as a loss of authenticity, but rather as an expansion of creative potential. This study concludes that figurative art preserves identity by adapting it to the challenges of the digital age, serving as a critical tool for intercultural dialogue. As a primary recommendation, the paper emphasizes the need to integrate critical awareness of identity into art education curricula to strengthen the position of local artists in the global market. Ultimately, the study encourages the creation of platforms that support artistic research on material memory and the reconceptualization of heritage as a key element of cultural sustainability in an interconnected world, where art remains the primary bridge of universal communication.

Fjalë kyçe

Cultural hybridization, digital technology, collective memory, creativity, contemporary aesthetics

Introduction

The era of visual globalization is characterized by an unprecedented intensification in the circulation of images, styles, aesthetic codes, and cultural narratives that transcend geographical and political boundaries, creating a "global aesthetic network" enabled by technological developments. The digital revolution, broadband internet, social networks, virtual exhibition platforms, and online art markets have created a new cultural ecosystem where the production, distribution, and consumption of art occur in real-time and within an interconnected global space[1].
In this reality, figurative art is no longer confined by physical galleries, traditional institutions, or limited local audiences; it becomes part of a vast international communication network, where the image acquires a central role in shaping cultural, identity-related, and social perceptions.
This transformation is not merely technological, but also cultural and aesthetic. The figurative image has gained the status of a communication tool that intertwines personal, collective, and international messages. In this context, local identity can no longer be understood as a static category, fixed in immutable symbols or inherited forms of representation. It has been transformed into a continuous process of negotiation, where historical memory, individual experience, local tradition, and global influences—penetrating through visual media and interactive technologies—converge. Local identity thus becomes a dynamic construct, which is built, deconstructed, and reformulated depending on the cultural, historical, and technological context[2].

2. Theoretical Framework: Globalization and Cultural Identity

Cultural globalization constitutes a complex and multidimensional process that extends beyond economic and political exchanges, encompassing the networking of images, symbols, artistic practices, and forms of cultural representation. As Appadurai (1996) argues, globalization must be understood through "scapes" – *mediascapes, ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes,* and *ideoscapes* – which interact to create a new imaginative terrain where identities are no longer confined by geographical space or political borders[3].
On a theoretical level, globalization should not be viewed as a linear process of cultural homogenization. Scholars such as Robertson (1995) emphasize that globalization produces constant tensions between universalization and particularization. The concept of "glocalization" suggests that global elements do not replace local cultures but intertwine with them, creating new hybrid forms[4]. According to Hall (1997), identity is not a fixed essence but a continuous process of representation, constructed through cultural discourses and practices[5].
Hybridization and Bhabha's (1994) "third space" add a significant theoretical dimension, proposing a creative process that destabilizes the notion of pure identities[6].

1 Manuel Castells, The Rise of the Network Society, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 78.
2 John Tomlinson, Globalization and Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 24.
3 Arjun Appadurai, Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 33.
4 Roland Robertson, "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," in Global Modernities (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 28.
5 Stuart Hall, Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 15.
6 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994), 5.

From the perspective of the anthropology of art, Gell (1998) views the artwork as a social agent that mediates relationships within a cultural network[7]. Visual globalization, as Mirzoeff (2015) points out, creates an environment where images shape the way individuals perceive the world[8]. Finally, Bauman's (2000) concept of "liquid modernity" clarifies that contemporary identities are flexible and in a state of constant transformation[9].
Ky është përkthimi i plotë dhe i detajuar i Seksionit 3. Kam ruajtur çdo paragraf dhe nuancë të tekstit tënd origjinal, duke përdorur terminologjinë e duhur akademike si *"attention economy"*, *"immersion"*, dhe *"de-contextualization"*.

3. Visual Globalization and Contemporary Figurative Art

Visual globalization has radically transformed not only the production and distribution of contemporary figurative art but also the way the art itself is experienced, interpreted, and critiqued. In the digital age, the image has become the dominant form of cultural and symbolic communication, a global "language" that intertwines aesthetic perception, historical narrative, and social messages. While art was once primarily confined to the physical spaces of galleries, museums, or private venues, today it exists in a digital and global ecosystem where the circulation of images is instantaneous, unlimited, and often viral.
The development of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, 3D modeling software, social platforms, and virtual spaces has created an ecosystem where contemporary figurative art is no longer merely the product of an artist, but a phenomenon in interaction with the audience, curators, and the global market[10]. Platforms like Instagram, Pinterest, Behance, Vimeo, ArtStation, Virtual Galleries, and NFT platforms function not only as exhibition spaces but also as digital archives, art markets, and forums for aesthetic dialogue. These spaces enable a democratization of access: artists from peripheral countries or small markets can establish an international presence without relying exclusively on traditional art institutions.
However, this digital space is not neutral. Algorithms that regulate content circulation favor images that are immediate, visually powerful, and emotionally graspable. This creates pressure on the contemporary artist to produce works that are not only conceptually deep but also function within the logic of the "attention economy." This implies that artists must balance local authenticity, cultural complexity, and global audience expectations, preserving the depth of cultural reference without being reduced to a consumable visual element.
In this context, contemporary figurative art often takes the form of a hybrid practice. Locality is no longer presented as an isolated folklore; it serves as a meaningful layer integrated with international forms, techniques, and discourses. Artists use traditional elements—textiles, vernacular architecture, mythological figures, historical symbols—and place them in modern, minimalist, conceptual, or postmodern compositions. This merging creates a visual language that retains local reference while simultaneously being readable and interpretable on a global level.
Visual globalization has also transformed the way works are produced. The traditional studio is no longer the sole space of creation; graphic software, 3D modeling programs, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality tools have become integral parts of the process.

7 Alfred Gell, Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 12.
8 Nicholas Mirzoeff, How to See the World (London: Pelican Books, 2015), 41.
9 Zygmunt Bauman, Liquid Modernity (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 18.
10 Lev Manovich, The Language of New Media (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 62.

Figurative art is no longer limited by physical material: it can exist as a digital image, interactive installation, live performance, or an interdisciplinary project that merges art with technology, science, and education.

The use of immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) has expanded the possibilities of figuration and aesthetic interaction. The viewer is no longer a passive spectator; they become an active participant, able to explore the spaces of the work, interact with cultural symbols, and experience visual narratives in a multi-sensory way. For example, an installation that integrates Albanian folkloric motifs with virtual environments allows the audience to enter a space where tradition is no longer a museum relic, but an active and transformative experience.

Hybrid formats have become the norm in contemporary figurative art. Painting is often combined with video projections, sculpture with sound elements, and figures with live performances or digital interactions. This expands the concept of figurativity from static representation to a narrative and multi-sensory process. Human figures, landscapes, or cultural objects no longer appear simply as images, but as nodes where personal histories, collective memory, and global discourses on identity, migration, urbanization, and social transformations intersect. Within this framework, figurative art becomes a space of experimentation where local and universal identities coexist in creative tension[11].

Intercultural dialogue is another key dimension. Artists collaborate on international projects, artist residencies, and virtual exhibitions, using local symbols in global contexts. In the Balkans, for example, themes of political transition, post-conflict memory, national identity, and the diaspora are treated comparatively, creating a global discourse on history, collective trauma, and cultural coexistence. These projects are not merely local reflections but contribute to international dialogues that strengthen the awareness of the complexity of regional identities.

The role of the audience is also significant. In the digital age, the interpretation of the work is distributed and open; comments, shares, and real-time reactions create a space for dialogue where the meaning of local identity can be reformulated from various cultural perspectives. This makes figurative art a dialogic, performative, and co-creative practice, where the meaning of the work is not a monopoly of the artist but is built through interaction with viewers and the global community.

However, visual globalization raises critical challenges. The global circulation of local symbols and motifs can lead to de-contextualization, trivialization, or commercialization, risking that tradition is transformed into a cultural "brand" for international consumption. For this reason, contemporary artists must maintain the complexity and depth of cultural reference, avoiding the reduction of identity to a simple visual element.

The global art market, international biennials, fairs, and curatorial networks also impose certain thematic and aesthetic expectations, which can influence how artists articulate their identity. In some cases, artists from peripheral or post-communist contexts face the expectation to produce works that reflect the "exoticism" or historical trauma of their country. The challenge is to overcome these stereotypes and create a critical, authentic, and globally understandable discourse.

In conclusion, visual globalization should be understood as a dynamic space of interaction, not as a linear homogenizing process. It creates tensions, but also extraordinary opportunities for experimentation, articulation, and cultural dialogue.

11 Jacques Rancière, The Politics of Aesthetics (London: Continuum, 2004), 10.

Contemporary figurative artists act as mediators between tradition and innovation, between memory and technology, between locality and globality. Figurative art is not merely a reflection of reality, but a laboratory where identity is preserved, transformed, and constantly renegotiated. In this way, figurative art becomes a critical, plural, and creative instrument for articulating complex identities in the era of visual globalization.

4. Local Identity as a Visual Strategy

Local identity in contemporary figurative art should not be understood as a folkloric remnant or a nostalgic ornament of the past. It functions as a conscious and articulated visual strategy through which artists position themselves in relation to globalization, the international art market, and contemporary aesthetic discourse. In this sense, local identity becomes a tool for cultural self-representation, the preservation of collective memory, and the construction of narratives that intertwine tradition with modernity.

The use of local elements—folkloric motifs, historical symbols, traditional architecture, folk costumes, ritual objects, or familiar landscapes—creates a visual language rooted in local experience. However, in contemporary art, these elements are not presented in a linear or illustrative manner; they are often deconstructed, fragmented, and recombined in compositions that challenge traditional perception. This makes local identity not only visible but also debatable, placing it in a critical dialogue with contemporary reality.

One of the most important strategies is the **recontextualization** of local iconography. Artists take inherited elements from folk art or national visual history and place them within modern conceptual structures. For example, a traditional motif might be projected into a digital space, accompanied by urban sounds, or interact with public movement through sensors. This transfer from a traditional context to a contemporary environment creates aesthetic tension between the past and the present, turning identity into a continuous process of transformation.

Another significant dimension is **materiality**. The use of autochthonous materials—such as wood, stone, hand-worked metal, traditional textiles, or artisanal elements—gives the work a tangible connection to the territory and culture. When these materials are combined with modern technology, such as video projections, augmented reality, or interactive installations, a dialogue is created between traditional embodiment and digital virtuality. This fusion makes local identity perceptible as a sensory experience, not just a visual symbol[12].

Hybrid narratives constitute another pillar of this strategy. Instead of presenting local culture as an immutable entity, artists often address themes of migration, diaspora, urbanization, political transition, or social changes. Local identity appears as mobile and fragmented, influenced by transnational experiences and the blending of cultures. This shifts the focus from an essentialist identity toward a negotiated and plural identity, reflecting the reality of contemporary societies.

In the Albanian and regional context, this strategy takes on special importance due to the turbulent political history, mass migrations, and rapid urban transformations. Figurative art becomes a space where these processes can be processed visually, preserving elements of collective memory while subjecting them to critical reinterpretation. Through the human figure, the landscape, or the historical symbol, artists create bridges between generations and between local and global experiences.

12 Xavier Greffe, "Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development: The Role of Local Identity," International Journal of Cultural Policy 19, no. 3 (2013): 248.

A fundamental function of local identity as a visual strategy is educational and awareness-raising. Works that incorporate local elements often serve as tools to stimulate reflection on cultural heritage, to problematize historical forgetfulness, or to challenge cultural stereotypes. In this way, figurative art does not remain at the level of aesthetics but transforms into a critical instrument that contributes to public debates on identity, culture, and belonging.
Similarly, local identity functions as an entry point for intercultural dialogue. When local elements are presented in a globally understandable visual language, they create opportunities for the international audience to engage with the local experience without reducing it to exoticism. At the same time, the local audience, seeing their own culture presented in global contexts, can redefine how they perceive their own identity.
In summary, local identity as a visual strategy:

- Is not a nostalgic return, but an active process of recreation and reinterpretation;
- Functions through the recontextualization of traditional iconography and materials;
- Intertwines tradition with technology, creating hybrid aesthetic experiences;
- Articulates narratives that reflect social and cultural transformations;
- Serves as an educational, critical, and dialogic tool in a global context.

In this way, contemporary figurative art uses local identity as a strategic instrument to negotiate its position in the era of visual globalization. It does not defend identity as something static but treats it as a creative energy that can be constantly transformed, challenged, and reformulated, making art a dynamic space for cultural communication and aesthetic innovation.

5. The Albanian and Regional Context: Case Studies

In the Albanian and regional context, contemporary figurative art has undergone profound transformations closely linked to the political, social, and cultural history of each country. Albania, as well as the neighboring Balkan countries, has experienced centuries of historical transformations, colonizations, authoritarian regimes, and political transitions that have shaped how art and identity are perceived and articulated. Within this framework, figurative art is not merely an aesthetic reflection of reality but a critical and narrative tool that builds and reconstructs local and regional identity in a globalized era.

Albania: From Socialist Realism to Contemporary Hybridization

The period of the communist regime in Albania created a strict tradition of **Socialist Realism**, where figurative art was oriented toward ideological narratives and the glorification of heroic collective figures. Artists were forced to work within a rigid propagandistic framework, using state-controlled symbols and historical motifs to build a collective myth. After the 1990s, with the opening to the world and exposure to the global flow of ideas, Albanian artists faced a dual challenge: on one hand, the visual heritage of the past was an important historical and cultural reference; on the other, there was a need to create a new aesthetic and conceptual identity within a pluralistic global context.
This transition period marked an explosion of formal and conceptual experimentation. In Tirana, the development of alternative art spaces, the National Gallery, and urban exhibition spaces has created a generation of artists who treat the figure, the symbol, and the landscape not as

tools for propaganda, but as instruments of critical reflection on post-communist identity, rapid urbanization, and mass migration. A significant case is the practice of Albanian artist **Anri Sala**, who often integrates elements of Albanian history and memory into his video projects and multi-sensory installations. His approach demonstrates that local identity can be translated into a global conceptual language, maintaining a strong connection with local historical experience without being reduced to folklore or decorative symbols[13].

Kosovo: Post-Conflict Memory and Diasporic Identity

In Kosovo, contemporary figurative and conceptual art has been shaped by the experience of war and the consequences of the post-conflict period. Artists such as **Petrit Halilaj** use installations, drawing, and sculpture to explore personal and collective memory. References to everyday objects—such as houses, schools, or furniture—create an intimate narrative related to scattered identity and the experience of the diaspora. These works, often exhibited in international institutions, place Kosovar identity in dialogue with universal issues such as trauma, memory, migration, and the reconstruction of society[14].
Institutions like the **National Gallery of Kosovo** have played a key role in promoting practices that intertwine locality with contemporary language, creating platforms for regional and international discussion. Thematic exhibitions addressing identity, borders, and social transformation help shape a critical discourse on figurative art and its role in the processes of memory and social reconstruction.

North Macedonia and Montenegro

In North Macedonia, particularly in Skopje, contemporary figurative art often dialogues with the tensions between national identity, Ottoman heritage, and modern urban projects. Meanwhile, in Montenegro, historical cities such as Kotor and Cetinje serve as sources of iconography where the coastal landscape and medieval architecture are used in modern compositions addressing themes of mass tourism and economic transformation. These works often juxtapose cultural authenticity with global commercialization, making local identity a space of tension and critical reflection.

Common Trends in the Region

An analysis of these case studies reveals several deep-seated trends:

- **Critical Recontextualization of the Past** – Visual heritage is not rejected but rewritten in the light of contemporary realities.
- **Intertwining of the Intimate and the Collective** – Personal memory is used as a starting point for broader social and political histories.
- **Public Space as a Terrain for Dialogue** – The shift of art from the gallery to the city.
- **Internationalization of Local Experience** – Participation in international biennials and museums as a means of affirmation.

13 Julian Stallabrass, Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 115.
14 Claire Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship (London: Verso, 2012), 210.

- **Transformation of Figurativity** – The figure and the symbol as conceptual structures[15].

In Albania and the region, contemporary figurative art has developed sophisticated strategies to coexist with visual globalization. Local identity is no longer a relic of the past; it is a creative, critical, and dialogic source contributing to an international discourse that is simultaneously rooted and open to transformation.

6. Discussion

The analysis of contemporary figurative art practices in the Albanian and regional context highlights the complexity of intertwining local identity with global flows of visuality. Identity is no longer understood as a closed, essentialist, or nostalgic category, but as a dynamic, relational, and negotiated process, built upon the tension between cultural heritage, individual experience, and international influences. Instead of disappearing in the face of global pressures, local identity is often strengthened and reformulated, articulating itself through dialogue with media, digital platforms, and the international public.

One of the primary findings is that visual globalization does not automatically produce cultural homogenization. Although the influence of the international market, biennials, and digital platform algorithms may favor certain aesthetic formats, artistic practices show that locality can serve as a source of differentiation and authenticity. Artists who blend folkloric motifs, historical iconography, and autochthonous materials with contemporary techniques create a hybrid aesthetic, which is not a copy of global models but a reconfiguration of them from a local perspective.

Cultural hybridization emerges as a fundamental dimension of this process. The intertwining of traditional elements with digital media, video art, immersive installations, or augmented reality creates a visual language that is simultaneously conceptual and representative. In this sense, the figure, symbol, and landscape do not function merely as identity markers but as structures through which social, historical, and political tensions are articulated[16].

The discussion highlights the role of visual strategies as forms of **creative resistance**. Faced with the pressure to adapt to global aesthetics, artists often choose to emphasize specific elements of cultural identity, using them as a starting point for innovation. This process does not consist solely of preserving tradition, but in its recontextualization into a contemporary language that interacts with diverse audiences. Thus, local identity is transformed into **symbolic capital**, which not only distinguishes the artist in the international market but also empowers the aesthetic discourse.

Another significant dimension is the role of the global audience in shaping the meaning of the work. In the digital age, the interpretation of art is no longer a closed and authoritative process; it is open and interactive. Comments, shares, and reactions from various communities interact with the work, transforming local identity into an object of intercultural dialogue. On the other hand, critical discourse highlights the risk of **exoticization** and commercialization of local identity. When traditional elements are used solely as distinguishing marks for international consumption, there is a risk that they may be reduced to aesthetic surfaces, losing their historical depth[17].

15 Terry Smith, What is Contemporary Art? (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 35.

16 Lev Manovich, The Language of New Media (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 62.

17 Julian Stallabrass, Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 115.

The analysis also shows that contemporary figurative art in the region functions as a tool for socio-critical reflection. Themes such as migration, political transition, and post-conflict memory are addressed through local figures and symbols. In this sense, art serves as an educational and awareness-raising platform. Local identity must be understood as a relational and dynamic process built in relation to the "other." This relationship is not necessarily hierarchical; it can be reciprocal and enriching, reflecting Bhabha's idea of the **"third space,"** where visual meanings are created through the intertwining of diverse elements[18].

Ultimately, this discussion leads to the conclusion that contemporary figurative art represents a **contact zone** between tradition and globality. Local identity is not an obstacle to integration into the global art discourse, but a creative source that enriches it. Contemporary figurative art demonstrates that globalization and locality are not opposing forces, but interconnected processes that produce new forms of aesthetic expression and deeper meanings of cultural belonging in the digital age.

7. Conclusions

This study concludes that local identity in contemporary figurative art cannot be understood as a rigid, closed category or limited to an essentialist definition. On the contrary, it is a continuous process of reformulation, a field of interaction between memory and actuality, between heritage and technology, and between local experience and the global circulation of images. In the era of visual globalization, local identity does not disappear but is instead transformed and repositioned within a complex system of cultural relationships.

One of the central conclusions is that visual globalization should not be interpreted solely as a homogenizing force. Although the risk of aesthetic uniformity exists due to the influence of the international market, digital platforms, and social networks, the artistic practices analyzed show that locality can function as a source of differentiation and authenticity. Albanian and regional artists utilize local identity as a visual strategy to create a distinct position within the global discourse of contemporary art. Rather than isolating themselves, they build bridges of communication through a hybrid visual language.

The study proves that cultural hybridization is an enriching, rather than a destructive, process. The intertwining of folkloric motifs with digital media, video art, and interactive technology creates narratives that are simultaneously rooted and universal. These narratives do not abandon local meaning; instead, they reposition it within a broader interpretative context. Local identity, in this sense, becomes an open structure capable of absorbing influences and reformulating them creatively.

Finally, contemporary figurative art demonstrates that local identity is not a relic of the past, but a creative potential that develops through interaction with the world. It preserves memory while simultaneously transforming it; it remains rooted in the territory but communicates globally. In the age of visual globalization, local identity is not lost—it is reformulated, expanded, and becomes an active part of an international discourse that values plurality, dialogue, and aesthetic innovation.

18 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994), 5.

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Body language, trauma, and theatrical performance

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Abstract

This article addresses stage performance as a psychophysical and organizing process, in which the body and mind function as an integrated neurophysiological and aesthetic system. At its core, the study seeks to analyze the actor's body not as an illustrative emotional instrument, but as an architecture of tension, energy, and physical memory based on previous experiences. Included here are traumatic experiences, which are archived in the body as patterns of this memory and subsequently manifest in muscular tone, breathing, posture, and instinctive reactions. Drawing on theatre anthropology and the concept of the pre-expressive body, this study places performative practice in dialogue with contemporary theories of trauma, autonomic regulation, and neurophysiological organization, proposing an interdisciplinary approach to the relationship between physical structure and aesthetic form. In the development of the central hypothesis, it is argued that the Methodology of Somatic Reorganization in Performance (MRSP) enables the transformation of bodily impulses and tensions into organized performative structures through four operative principles:
a) differentiation between the real body and the performative body;
b) structuring tension as compositional material;
c) the use of rhythm and repetition as regulatory mechanisms of the nervous system;
d) the transformation of the symptom into a disciplined, articulated, and reproducible gesture.
This approach aims at practical-theoretical orientation and conceptual analysis, treating the stage laboratory as a space of research on somatic organization, without therapeutic purposes or clinical intervention. The applied research analysis presented in this article demonstrates that structured tension, biomechanical organization, and rhythmic cycles create conditions for autonomic stabilization, the development of double awareness, and increased control over the actor's body. It is precisely this perspective that positions the body as an active system of transformation, ensuring psychophysical integrity, methodological consistency, and aesthetic coherence in contemporary performative action. Taken as a whole, the article offers a theoretical framework for understanding and managing tension and bodily memory in theatrical performance.

Keywords

Psychophysical body, theater anthropology, dual awareness, somatic reorganization, structured tension

Introduction

In contemporary theater, the body is more than a mere expressive instrument; it serves as an archive of experiences and sensations that reflect the actor's personal and emotional history. Research in neuroscience and psychology demonstrates that bodies carry traces of past experiences, including tensions, movement habits, and sensations that are not easily verbalized. These experiences, often linked to trauma or intense emotional situations, can be expressed and reorganized through theatrical performance. Performance is not simply an interpretation of a text or character; it offers the possibility of working with the body and the sensations it holds. Physical activities, rhythm exercises, and heightened awareness of movement provide the actor with tools to reflect upon and express emotions in a controlled manner. This process allows not only artistic development but also a deeper understanding of how bodies retain memory and sensations. Within this framework, Eugenio Barba's theater anthropology offers a theoretical foundation for understanding performance as a laboratory in which body and movement interact with internal experiences. Barba emphasizes the importance of physical awareness, the use of rhythm, and the performative space as elements that structure movement and assist the actor in expressing sensations in an artistic form.

This study integrates these principles with contemporary trauma theories to demonstrate that body language can serve as a tool for expressing, processing, and reorganizing sensations, creating a new space for understanding performance as a dynamic process interconnected among body, mind, and emotions.

Literature Review

Definition of Body Memory

The review is closely linked to neurophysiological literature and trauma theories. Limbic structures (amygdala, hippocampus) store body memory and activate involuntary impulses in response to emotional stimuli (Herman, 1992). Body memory represents the capacity of the body to retain information about emotional and traumatic experiences through muscular contractions, chronic tensions, changes in breathing patterns, and reflexive responses. Unlike narrative memory, which relates to the verbal recollection of events, body memory is retained at deep levels of the nervous system, including structures that regulate automatic reactions and emotions, such as the amygdala and hippocampus (Levine, 2010; Porges, 2011). The autonomic nervous system (ANS) regulates involuntary functions such as heart rate, respiration, and muscle tone, producing involuntary responses commonly known as "fight, flight, freeze" (Herman, 1992), which are automatically triggered in similar situations and expressed through muscular tension, rapid breathing, or bodily contractions. This perspective emphasizes the importance of bodily perception as a way to understand emotional and traumatic experiences, forming the foundation for performative methodologies that aim at physical reorganization.

A Dialogue between Eugenio Barba, Jerzy Grotowski, and Michael Chekhov

Barba's concept of the pre-expressive body (2015) represents a structured approach within contemporary anthropological theater. It shifts the focus from emotional expression toward the body as an archive of energy, tension, and presence, considering the body as a system of internal

relations where each segment interacts with others. Tension is not an obstacle, but a fundamental material of action, which is structured, channeled, and made legible on stage.

While Jerzy Grotowski grounds his methodology in the reduction of external elements in order to reach the essential body, where the emphasis rests on the disciplining of energy and the articulation of impulses (Grotowski, 2010), Michael Chekhov, on the other hand, places importance on the concept of the "psychological gesture," activating energy through physical form, in which structure precedes emotional expression (Chekhov, 1991). Eugenio Barba integrates these approaches by creating a methodology in which bodily impulse is transformed, tension is structured, and presence is constructed through corporeal discipline. The body is no longer a psychologically illustrative tool, but a mechanism that produces scenic meaning (Barba, 2015). The literature also analyzes and discusses catharsis as an aesthetic and emotional perception in physical theatre. However, whereas Aristotle considered catharsis as the emotional experience of the audience (Aristotle, 2006), the contemporary approach of the pre-expressive body views catharsis as the transformation and management of bodily and emotional energy through structured action.

As a conclusion, this interpretation assigns the body an active role, in which it experiences tension and energy without risk, organizes impulses into gesture and rhythm, and transmits this presence in a perceptual and aesthetic manner. From this methodological dialogue, it appears that the different approaches reinforce the importance of corporeal discipline as a foundation for managing impulses. Nevertheless, most studies on the pre-expressive body do not explore the long-term impact of double awareness on the integration of traumatic bodily memory, leaving gaps that may be addressed in future research.

Dual Awareness

Dual awareness is essential for physical performance and the reorganization of traumatic experiences. The actor is simultaneously engaged in physical action and acts as an observer of its structure: monitoring balance, energy distribution, breathing rhythm, and relationships with space and partners (Barba, 2015; Porges, 2011). From a neuroscience perspective, this state activates the prefrontal cortex to maintain control over the body without suppressing emotional experience, creating a "window of tolerance" for managing stress and tension (Herman, 1992). This state ensures that internal impulses are transformed into legible performative material, linking neuroscience, psychology, and bodily methodology with performative practice and the treatment of body memory and trauma.

Theoretical synthesis and transition to methodology

This literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the key concepts of body memory, the pre-expressive body, and dual awareness, integrating perspectives from theater anthropology, the practices of Barba, Grotowski, and Chekhov, as well as neuroscience references on trauma theories. Critical analysis has highlighted the importance of bodily discipline and the organization of tension as mechanisms for managing impulses and creating performative material, while also identifying current gaps in the literature, particularly concerning the long-term impact of dual awareness. Building on these findings, the present study transitions to the methodology section, where the practical-theoretical approach linking theoretical concepts with structured bodily exercises and critical analysis will be presented. This methodology aims to test and apply

the principles identified in the review, creating a laboratory in which the body functions as an archive of energy as well as an instrument for exploring and transforming bodily tension and memory. This transition provides a logical connection between theory and practice, reinforcing the importance of interdisciplinary approaches for understanding and managing the performative and bodily process.

Methodology

This study employs a practice-oriented performative approach and interdisciplinary theoretical analysis, interweaving theatre anthropology, biomechanics, somatic organization, and literature on trauma and bodily integration. The approach is not clinical and does not aim at therapeutic intervention; rather, it operates within performative practice as a laboratory for the neurophysiological structuring of the body in action. The analysis is conceptual and applicative, wherein theoretical concepts are tested through devised exercises and corporeal composition.
Central hypothesis: The Methodology of Somatic Reorganization in Performance (MRSP) enables the transformation of bodily impulses and tensions into organized performative structures through the differentiation of the real body from the performative body, the structuring of tension, the use of rhythm as a regulator, and the transformation of the symptom into gesture. This is supported by three premises:
a) the organization of tension is more functional than emotional discharge;
b) rhythm and repetition stabilize the nervous system;
c) functional distance between personal experience and performative action guarantees psychophysical safety.
MRSP is a structured and systematic approach that treats the body as a living nervous and performative system. It integrates anthropological, neuroscientific, and psychological practices for the reorganization of bodily impulses, transforming them into gesture, rhythm, and readable corporeal energy. The methodology is grounded in four principles:
a) the separation between the real body and the performative body (referring to the pre-expressive body of Eugenio Barba);
b) the structuring of tension (referring to the total act of Jerzy Grotowski);
c) the use of rhythm as an autonomic regulator (referring to the regulation of hyper-activation in Bessel van der Kolk and Stephen W. Porges);
d) the transformation of the symptom into gesture (referring to the psychological gesture of Michael Chekhov).
Each principle aims to develop a corporeal practice that is controlled, aesthetically structured, and safe for the actor. The aim of MRSP is not emotional release, but somatic reorganization and energetic composition, creating a performative structure in which the body, impulses, and tensions interact in a readable and sustainable manner.

Differentiation between the real body and the performative body

The fundamental principle of SRMP is the clear differentiation between the real body and the performative body. This differentiation is operational, not merely conceptual. The real body carries biographical history, emotional burdens, and personal memory, whereas the performative body is a technical construct, organized for aesthetic and energetic function. This distinction ensures functional distance and prevents personal identification with the scenic material. Without

it, performance risks devolving into uncontrolled emotional exposure.

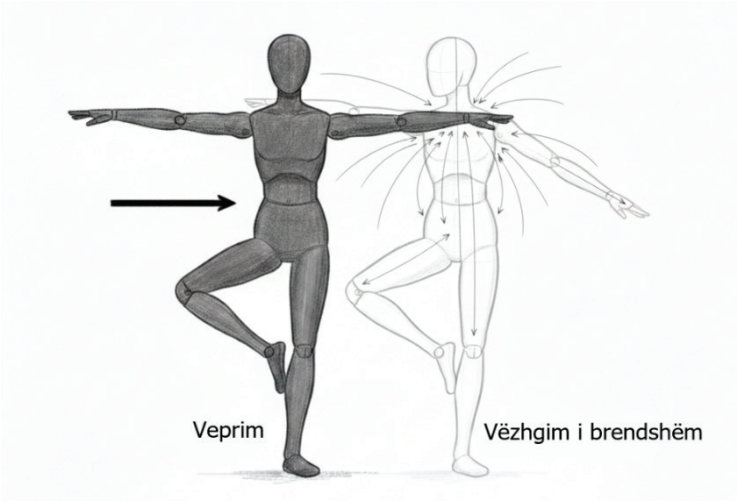

Figure 1. Illustrates the actor through the principle of differentiation between the performative body and the real body

The performative body does not rely on personal experience but on measurable physical parameters. It is constructed through the organization of tension, rhythm, weight, balance axis, and breathing. Energy is treated as manageable intensity, not spontaneous emotion, shifting the focus from psychological interpretation toward biomechanics and somatic organization. In practice, this principle is applied through exercises that neutralize narrative and emotional labeling. The actor is not asked, "What do you feel?" but rather, "How is weight distributed?", "Where is the tension located?", "What relationship does the body create with space?" Work focuses on muscle tone, vertical alignment, counterbalances, and breathing rhythm. Each reaction is treated as a physical phenomenon, not psychological content. The result is the creation of a pre-expressive state in which the body functions as an energy system organized in space. Expressivity emerges from structure and controlled tension, ensuring that physical exploration remains technically stable and psychophysically safe.

Structuring of tension

The second principle of SRMP focuses on the structuring of tension as a technical, not therapeutic, process. Unlike traditional trauma psychology approaches, where tension is viewed as a dysfunctional accumulation to be released, here it is treated as a fundamental material for scenic composition. The goal is not the reduction of physiological activation, but its organization into a controlled, stable, and reproducible form. Tension is conceptualized as a configuration of forces, including weight distribution, modulation of muscle tone, articulation of the vertebral axis, counterbalance, and resistance to gravity.

The actor is trained to remain within this tension without suppressing automatic reactions, developing tolerance to somatic activation and the ability to perceive it as a biomechanical structure. Reflexive responses, such as protective contractions, are transformed into disciplined movement patterns that generate aesthetic intensity and control. This approach is connected to Eugenio Barba's theater anthropology and Jerzy Grotowski's research on "total action," where

tension is not a symptom but material for transformation.

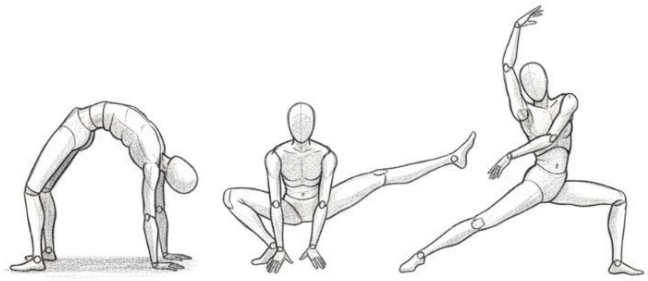

Figure 2. Illustrates several physical positions that generate tension according to the principle of tension structuring.

Through structuring and physical discipline, bodily energy and impulses become legible performative material, preserving the actor's integrity and safety during scenic exploration. In practice, structured tension engages measurable maintenance of extreme postures for specified time intervals; slow transitions that expose micro-tensions; isolation of body segments to analyze the source of force; and observation of impulses without corrective intervention. The actor learns to distinguish real pain—a biological signal—from performative tension, which can be maintained and structured safely. The outcome is the development of dual awareness: direct experience of tension alongside reflective monitoring of form. This controlled state creates a stable stage presence and shifts the focus from catharsis toward the architecture of bodily energy.

Use of rhythm as a regulator

The third principle conceptualizes rhythm as a regulatory mechanism for bodily organization. From a neurophysiological perspective, stabilization of the autonomic nervous system is more closely linked to rhythm and repetition than to cognitive analysis. Predictable patterns of movement and breathing modulate physiological activation, reduce chaotic variation, and create functional coherence. SRMP implements this in practice through clear rhythmic structures. Rhythm functions as an organizing matrix: repeated sequences, synchronized steps, and coordinated breathing produce motor predictability. This reduces processing load and enhances bodily control. Scenic action emerges from rhythmic structure, not from uncontrolled emotional impulses.

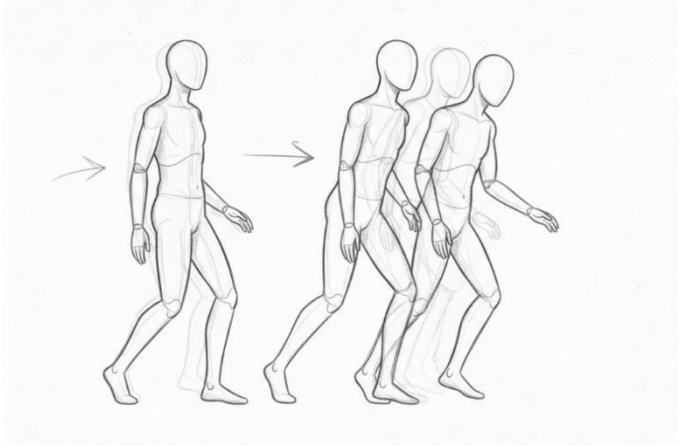

Figure 3. Illustrates how the subject moves in a specific rhythm

Rhythm serves not only an aesthetic or compositional function. It operates as a "neural skeleton": a temporal network that coordinates muscle tone, breathing, and spatial orientation. Through cyclic repetition, the body moves from a state of hyperactivation toward regulated stability. This is not passive relaxation but dynamic stabilization. The actor remains in intensity, yet within a measurable framework. This concept parallels Eugenio Barba's research on the pre-expressive structure, where rhythm and repetition generate organized stage presence. Similarly, Jerzy Grotowski's disciplined physical practices emphasized that through rhythmic structure, the actor achieves coherence between internal impulse and external action. In both cases, rhythm functions as a regulatory mechanism rather than a formal embellishment.
Through systematic work with movement cycles and synchronized breathing, the actor develops the capacity to integrate tension within a stable temporal framework. This creates coherence between somatic organization and performative architecture, rendering the body a stabilized system in action.

Transformation of Symptoms into Gesture

The fourth principle of SRMP is the transformation of symptoms into gestures. Every bodily manifestation—tremor, stiffness, contraction, or postural deviation—is treated as compositional material. Rather than eliminating it, the actor amplifies the phenomenon, decomposes it into physical parameters, and structures it into a reproducible sequence. This shifts the response from an involuntary reflex to organized action. At the neurophysiological level, controlled repetition reshapes motor patterns and consolidates stable action pathways, preventing impulsive reactions. The actor actively intervenes in the motor pattern, increasing the sense of mastery over bodily control, a key element for the long-term stabilization of the body. This principle resonates with Michael Chekhov's concept of the "psychological gesture," in which an internal impulse crystallizes into an exaggerated physical form and is then internalized as an action structure. The initial exaggeration functions as an analytical method to make the symptom legible and manageable, channeling energy without direct emotional exposure. In this way, SRMP transforms bodily reactions into controlled and safe performative material, preserving physical integrity and the ability to act within an organized space.

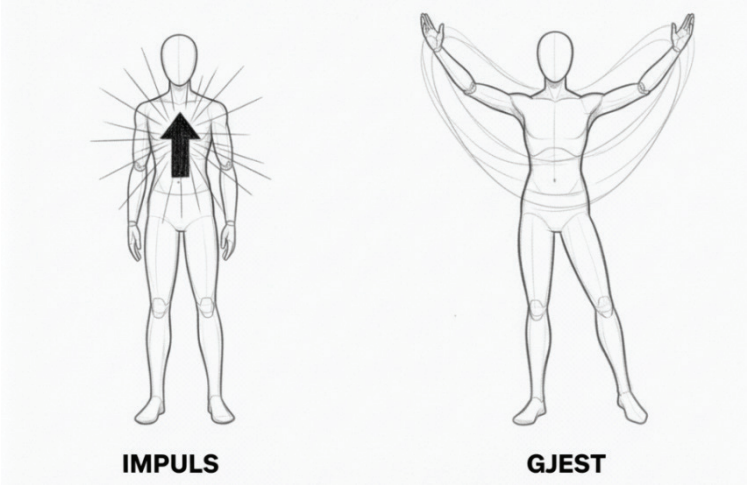

Figure 4. Illustrates the transformation of the internal impulse into a readable physical gesture

In practice, continuous sensory presence is required. Exercises are developed with clear spatial orientation, visual contact, and environmental awareness. This supports dual awareness: the actor is simultaneously within the action and monitoring its structure. Only in advanced stages are text, character, and symbolism integrated. The character is constructed upon a consolidated physical architecture. It does not arise from emotional spontaneity, but from structured gesture, rhythm, and bodily organization, ensuring performative stability and protection from uncontrolled exposure.

Results and discussion

Neurophysiological and aesthetic value

SRMP links performative bodily practice with neurophysiological processes, using tension, rhythm, and impulse as regulatory instruments. Structured tension does not function solely as an aesthetic element; it contributes to the stabilization of the nervous system and the integration of bodily impulses within a controlled form. Rhythm and repetition create a temporal skeleton for sensorimotor coordination, while the transformation of symptoms into gestures produces legible performative material, maintaining bodily safety and control in action. In this sense, SRMP is not merely a technique of expression, but a process of bodily and perceptual reorganization. The body is not "released" through emotional outburst; it learns to operate within an organized structure, converting internal impulses into gesture, energy, and rhythm. The balance between control and spontaneity constitutes the foundation of a stable performative presence.

Opposition to classical catharsis

The classical concept of catharsis as emotional cleansing through the dramatization of pain or fear proves insufficient for physical theater. Spontaneous outbursts can produce uncontrolled reactions, emotional flooding, or psychophysical destabilization. From this perspective, emotional discharge is not considered a functional mechanism; reorganization occurs through the structuring of motor cycles and the integration of tension into a disciplined form. Structured performance creates conditions for autonomic regulation, symptom remodeling, and the

restoration of control over the body and energy. Impulses are neither suppressed nor allowed to erupt; they are transformed into legible gestures that are aesthetically articulated.

Ethical boundary of performance

Despite its transformative potential, performance is not therapy and does not replace clinical intervention. The primary risk remains uncontrolled exposure to physically sensitive material. For this reason, the performative methodology must maintain technical structure, aesthetic distance, and physical discipline. Without these elements, performance may lose its organizing function and jeopardize the actor's safety, shifting the practice from a formative process to a destabilizing experience.

Conclusions and recommendations

This hypothesis has demonstrated that physical performance, analyzed through Eugenio Barba's theater anthropology and contemporary trauma theories, can be understood as a complex mechanism for the reorganization of somatic memory. The actor's body is not merely an aesthetic instrument; it functions as a neurophysiological structure in which retained tensions and undeclared impulses are stored, perceived, and transformed. Through physical exercises based on Barba's methodologies, Michael Chekhov's techniques, Grotowski, as well as somatic approaches such as Feldenkrais and Body-Mind Centering, in which the reorganization of movement through the enhancement of neuromotor awareness is based on the principle that the nervous system is plastic, and through slow and non-impositional movement activity, the brain restructures motor patterns, enable the actor to learn to establish a stable relationship with tension, energy, and impulse. The release produced by performance is not emotional catharsis in the classical Aristotelian sense, but a structured and controlled process in which bodily impulses and physical contractions are transformed into legible action. This reorganization integrates dual awareness, allowing the actor to feel the impulse and energy while simultaneously monitoring the structure of the action. The outcome is a conscious and disciplined body in which motor control creates a stable performative architecture that protects the actor from retraumatization while providing an aesthetic and perceptual experience for the spectator. This understanding of contemporary performance positions the body as an instrument for energy transformation, where release and tension are not spontaneous expressions, but material integrated into structured action.

Through this lens, performance is not merely an aesthetic tool, but also a process of restructuring the subject's relationship with the nervous system, with potential to strengthen bodily awareness and the ability to manage energy and tension.

Following this theoretical-methodological study, it is recommended that the Somatic Reorganization Methodology in Performance (SRMP) be tested in structured laboratory contexts, with clear exercise protocols and systematic documentation of bodily and performative responses. Future studies could include comparative analyses between different physical theater methods, as well as observations on the impact of structured practice on performative stability and autonomic regulation. Furthermore, the integration of neurophysiological or somatic assessment tools is suggested to measure the effects of rhythm, tension, and gesture structuring on the actor's bodily coherence. These directions would strengthen the empirical basis of the model and consolidate its positioning within the interdisciplinary field of performance and neuroscience.

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Articulation in public discourse: Linguistic, communicative and performative dimensions

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Abstract

This paper examines articulation not merely as a mechanical process of diction, but as a "performative event" in which logos, pathos and ethos are intertwined. In the Albanian post-1990s context, this element has often been treated as a decorative "accessory", neglecting its function as a bridge for the materialization of thought and as a tool of the speakers "symbolic power". The significance of this research lies in proposing a new interdisciplinary approach that integrates language culture with the sociology of power and the performing arts, in order to address deficiencies in the culture of speech in the public sphere. It is based on a critical and comparative analysis of Albanian public discourse, using as its starting point the following research question: To what extent do performative elements (voice, pauses, rhythm) dominate over linguistic accuracy and how do they influence the construction of the speaker's authority? The study analyzes the relationship between linguistic accuracy and speaking technique, viewing them as deliberate practices that most effectively discipline discourse. The analysis reveals that in the Albanian public sphere there is a dominance of "noise" over the clarity of arguments. The findings show that the use of a loud voice as a means od persuasion, in the absence of knowledge of speaking technique, creates a gap in the language of communication. The study demonstrates that clear articulation dictates the rhythm of listening and commands audience attention, becoming a tool that legitimizes the speaker's position and lends an experiential dimension to the message. The study concludes that cultivated, performative articulation rather than merely technical articulation is not an aesthetic luxury, but a necessary means that ensures the dignity of human communication. It is recommended that training in vocal techniques and performative elements be regarded as a primary condition for establishing "authority" in public discourse and for eliminating the "aggressiveness" in speech that characterizes the current environment.

Keywords

Symbolic power, performative techniques, retoric

Introduction: The word as act, presence and symbolic power

Public discourse in the cotemporary era can no longer be conceived Public discourse in the contemporary era can no longer be conceived merely as the transmission of ideas and thoughts through a text or as a simple exchange of information stripped of the form of expression. It has evolved into a complex "performative event," where the success of communication depends on the harmony between logos (reason and content), pathos (emotion and the connection established with the audience), and ethos (the moral authority and credibility of the speaker). Within this classical triad of rhetoric, articulation plays the role of the connecting bridge that enables the materialization of the idea.

Articulation is not merely a mechanical process of producing sounds or an auxiliary technique; it is not simply the application of a set of rules and technical exercises of the speech apparatus that stand at the forefront of discourse, speech, or communication. Rather, it is a deliberate act that gives form to thought and constructs relations of "power" in the public sphere. When a speaker articulates clearly, they not only make the message understandable, but also exercise a form of "symbolic power" over the audience, dictating the rhythm of listening and creating an aura of authority. In this way, the speaker builds a lucid trajectory of thought while simultaneously "imposing" the audience's concentration, endowing what is being said with an experiential dimension.

In the Albanian academic and political environment of the post-1990s, the study of articulation has often remained at the periphery of scholarly interest. It has been treated mainly as a technical issue of diction for actors, performers, and radio and television speakers, or as a decorative "accessory" of rhetoric. However, this paper proposes a new and interdisciplinary approach: articulation as a practice that integrates language culture, communication sciences, the sociology of power, and the art of performance.

The central issue addressed by this research concerns the noticeable degradation of the culture of speech in our public sphere. The dominance of "noise" in communication over argumentative clarity, the use of a loud voice as a means of persuasion, and the lack of training in vocal techniques create a gap in credible communication.

The central research question is: **To what extent do performative elements (voice, pauses, rhythm) dominate over linguistic accuracy in Albanian public discourse, and how does this affect the construction of the speaker's symbolic authority?** Through this analysis, we aim to demonstrate that cultivated, performative articulation is no longer an aesthetic luxury, but a necessary means that ensures dignity and effective communication among individuals.

Theoretical frameworkthe phenomenology of voice and critical discourse analysis

Discourse as a mechanism of power: foucault and fairclough

Michel Foucault (1972), in his works on the archaeology of knowledge, argues that discourse is not a passive reflection of reality, but an active mechanism that produces and regulates it. When a public speaker holds and articulates a position, they use the voice to establish a hierarchy of knowledge. Articulation here plays the role of "disciplining" speech. A speaker who masters the tools of articulation is able to control the space of discourse, making their words appear "true" and "legitimate."

Norman Fairclough, through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), shifts attention to "discursive

practices." According to him, the way we organize words and how we pronounce them (the phonetic dimension of discourse) serves to normalize or challenge specific social relations. In Fairclough's analysis, articulation is seen as part of the "textuality of speech." A closed, rapid, and unintelligible articulation is often used by bureaucratic elites as a means of distancing the broader audience, creating a form of "vocal hermeticism" that preserves the status quo.

The plurality of voices and Adriana Cavarero: the turn from *logos* to *phonē* (the embodied voice)

Adriana Cavarero proposes a significant ontological shift: from the dominance of *logos* (word, reason, content) to the importance of *phonē* (the embodied voice). She argues that the Western philosophical tradition has largely ignored the bodily voice, treating it merely as a medium for transmitting universal ideas. For Cavarero, the voice is the primary and most authentic marker of an individual's unique identity.

In public discourse, correct articulation is a sign of ontological respect toward the other. When a speaker shows carelessness in pronunciation, at a subconscious level they communicate to the audience that neither the message being conveyed nor the listener deserves the physical effort of clear articulation. Adriana Cavarero emphasizes that the voice reminds us of the speaker's corporeality; it reminds us that behind every political act stands a human being with lungs, vocal cords, and a unique desire to connect with the world through sound.

The Albanian tradition of cultivating speech

In the Albanian context, the contribution of Androkli Kostallari has been fundamental in safeguarding the "culture of language." Kostallari did not view the correct pronunciation of the standard language merely as a school rule, but as an element of civilization and national unity. Xhevat Lloshi expanded this perspective by focusing on the stylistics of speech, where articulation is seen as the means that gives emotional coloring and persuasive force to the spoken word.

On the other hand, Artan Fuga offers a more critical analysis of the sociology of communication in Albania. He argues that the media environment has produced a form of "vulgar theatricality," where articulation no longer serves clarity but rather spectacle and conflict. This paper seeks to integrate these perspectives by proposing that articulation be understood as the point where linguistic normativity (Kostallari) meets the performative freedom of the voice (the stage).

Methodology: analysis of the "living text" and acoustic parameters

To conduct this study, a hybrid and qualitative methodology has been employed, which does not limit itself to the analysis of written transcripts, but focuses on their "performance" (delivery) in real time.

Corpus Selection: A total of 30 audiovisual materials (2022–2026) were selected. The corpus is divided into three categories:

Political corpus: Parliamentary speeches and electoral rallies, where the use of voice for mass mobilization is evident.

Institutional corpus: Official statements and press conferences, where neutrality and precision are required.

Artistic corpus: Theatre monologues and poetry recitations, serving as a high standard of articulation.
Prosodic and Acoustic Analysis: Through the observation of physical parameters, the following were analyzed:
Pitch: How vocal frequency fluctuates in relation to emotion.
Tempo (Rate): The number of words spoken per minute and its impact on syllabic clarity.
Intonation: The melodic contour of the sentence.
Pause Coding: Pauses were analyzed as semantic elements and classified into breathing pauses (physiological), structuring pauses (logical), and tension pauses (psychological).
Diction Assessment: Identification of phenomena such as elision (loss of final vowels), incorrect sound assimilation, and excessive nasalization.

Detailed Analysis: articulation as a physical and performative process

The anatomy of voice: from the lungs to the resonators

Articulation is not a process that begins and ends in the mouth. It originates in the diaphragm, passes through the lungs and the vocal cords, and is modulated within the resonant cavities (throat, mouth, nose). In the performing arts, diaphragmatic breathing forms the foundation of what is known as "voice support."
Many public speakers in Albania, due to speaking anxiety, lack of knowledge of techniques, or insufficient training, tend to use upper (clavicular) breathing. This type of breathing makes the voice sound thin, sharp, and often "constricted" in the throat. A voice not supported by the diaphragm forces the speaker to increase tension in the vocal cords, which leads to shouting. The performing arts and speech techniques teach us that a voice with "authority" is not a loud voice, but a resonant one. When a speaker uses chest and head resonators, they produce a full sound that fills the space without the need to shout.

Diction and the organs involved in articulation: the dynamics of muscles

Diction is the precision with which the articulatory organs (tongue, lips, soft palate, teeth) shape the column of air into distinct phonemes. A major issue in Albanian public discourse is the "frozen, immobile jaw." This occurs when the speaker, under tension, does not open the mouth sufficiently. The result is a closed, partial, and incomplete articulation, in which vowels lose their shape and strength, and consonants become unclear.
In the performing arts, there is a set of specific technical exercises aimed at "releasing" the jaw and activating the lips. Open articulation is not only a means to be heard more clearly; it also has a stronger psychological effect. A speaker who clearly articulates plosive consonants (P, T, K, B, D, G) conveys determination and control over both what is being said and the situation. In contrast, a "lazy" articulation leads to the speaker being perceived as insecure, fatigued, anxious, or uninterested in their audience.

Melody, rhythm, and pause as rhetorical tools

The Albanian language has a natural rhythm that requires attention to logical stress. In Albanian political discourse, a distortion of melodic patterns is often observed: speakers frequently use

a continuous "rising intonation" that never reaches a point of rest, or a monotonous "falling cadence."
The pause is perhaps the least understood and most misused tool in our public communication. In the performing arts, the pause is known as "active silence"—the moment of perceptive engagement with the partner or audience in front of the speaker. It gives the listener time to "process" the message. Many Albanian politicians fear the pause; they fill every second with a cluster of parasitic sounds ("uh," "um") because they worry that silence signals a lack of continuity in thought. In fact, great actors teach us that a pause before a key word is what makes that word and moment memorable. Controlled silence is the highest sign of "power" in discourse.

Comparative case study: stage models versus public reality

Analysis of the performative model through two exemplars: Reshat Arbana and Robert Ndrenika

If we analyze the speech of two masters of the stage such as Reshat Arbana, we observe that his strength does not stem from vocal volume, but from the "impact" of phonemes. His articulation of vibrant consonants (RR) and palatal sounds is so precise that the message and emotion, combined with an artistic emotional stance, reach the listener with crystal clarity.
Robert Ndrenika, on the other hand, as a refined master of logical stress, understands that within a sentence not all words carry the same weight. By adjusting rhythm in accordance with context and text, he creates logical and emotional contrasts.
This kind of performative training is largely absent from our public discourse, where speakers often shout every word of a speech, thereby neutralizing the effect of logical stress. When everything is emphasized, nothing stands out as important. By definition, not everything within a text can hold equal significance.

Analysis of political and institutional discourse

In the analyzed group of political speeches, it emerges that over 70% of speakers suffer from what can metaphorically be described as "acoustic aggressiveness." This style is characterized by shouting, vocal strain, lack of melodic variation, and the truncation of word endings. While this approach may be effective in mobilizing crowds through raw emotion, it fails at the level of rational persuasion and communicative ethics.
On the other hand, institutional discourse suffers from "frozen articulation." Officials read pre-prepared texts with a monotony that renders the message lifeless. By failing to use performative vocal techniques for tonal variation, they create a bureaucratic distance that makes the institution appear alien and impersonal to the citizen.

The coexistence between standard language and dialect

Another unavoidable aspect of the analysis is the use of dialectal elements in articulation. Although the standard language is the required norm, many public speakers employ dialectal intonations to appear more "popular" or "authentic." In professional stage practice, this is known as characterization. However, in public discourse, if such usage compromises the articulatory accuracy of the standard, it can become an obstacle to nationwide intelligibility.

The study demonstrates that the most successful speakers are those who maintain the accuracy emphasized by Androkli Kostallari, while at the same time infusing it with the warmth of a natural, performative articulation.

The communicative dimension: articulation in the digital media era

Technology has fundamentally transformed the way we perceive the voice. With today's highly sensitive microphones, even the slightest inaccuracy in articulation is amplified.

- **The microphone effect:** A speaker who shouts into a modern microphone creates distortion that makes the voice unpleasant. Performing arts and vocal technique teach the importance of "distance"—how to use the voice without straining it.
- **Digital fragmentation:** On platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, public discourse is becoming increasingly brief. This leads to a form of "telegraphic articulation," where the richness of the oratorical period is lost. The study argues that precisely in this fast-paced era, clear and well-modulated performative articulation may be the most effective tool for standing out and capturing audience attention.

Results and discussion: toward an ethics of speech

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the corpus and the theoretical frameworks examined, this study reaches several key conclusions:

1. **Articulation as a necessary ethic:** To articulate clearly is to respect the listener. A lack of articulation constitutes a form of communicative arrogance.
2. **Acoustic credibility:** Audiences tend to trust speakers who possess a full voice (supported by the diaphragm) and open articulation. A thin voice and shouting are perceived as signs of insecurity or manipulation.
3. **Pause as an authoritative instrument:** The proper use of pauses enhances the speaker's authority. Conscious silence is more persuasive than dozens of unintelligible words.
4. **The need for training in performative speech:** The findings reveal a significant gap between the demands of public communication and the training speakers receive. Most Albanian politicians and officials operate on an intuitive basis, repeating articulatory errors that undermine their public image.
5. **Standard language as an aesthetic medium:** Performative articulation demonstrates that the standard language is not "rigid"; it can be highly expressive and vibrant when handled with the skill of an actor.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study has argued that articulation is the "spoken face" of our thought. In a society where public discourse is often chaotic and noisy, returning to the tools of the performing arts is not a step backward, but a move toward more humane and richly nuanced communication. Correct articulation safeguards the integrity of the public sphere and strengthens the quality of social dialogue by establishing communication protocols that, first and foremost, include training in performative speaking techniques.

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Theatre studies and epistemic decolonization toward an Albanian theory of performance

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Abstract

Epistemic decolonization in theatre studies constitutes a transformative approach that challenges the Eurocentric paradigm of historiography and theory. Traditionally, Western theatre—from Ancient Greece to European modernism—has been treated as a universal model, producing epistemic hierarchies that marginalize non-Western practices. Decolonization, therefore, implies not only expanding the canon but redefining how theatre is conceptualized and knowledge legitimized. Drawing on performance theory, postcolonial critique, and decolonial thought, this approach shifts focus from a text-centered paradigm to a performative one grounded in the body, ritual, and community, understanding performance as a mode of knowledge production and social mediation. Methodologically, it employs ethnography, oral traditions, living archives, and intercultural analysis to challenge academic hierarchies and recognize Indigenous and community-based practices as equal epistemologies. At the regional level, this perspective reconsiders Albanian and Southeast European theatre beyond imitative European models. Practices such as polyphony, the epic cycle of the kreshniks, rites of passage, and urban carnivals are interpreted as autonomous performative structures, opening the possibility of articulating a locally grounded theory of performance with global relevance. Ultimately, epistemic decolonization redefines theatre studies as a pluralistic and multi-centered field, replacing hierarchical models with an ecology of knowledge based on diverse epistemologies and ontologies.

Keywords

Eurocentrism, historiography, interculturality, epistemology

Introduction

In recent decades, epistemic decolonization has emerged as a central paradigm in the humanities and social sciences. It seeks not only to critique the colonial history of knowledge production, but also to reconfigure its architecture—the ways in which criteria of validity, authority, objectivity, and academic "neutrality" are constructed.[1] This approach questions not only the canon, but also the institutional and conceptual structures that determine who produces knowledge and which forms are recognized as legitimate. Within this climate, theatre studies—encompassing historiography, performance theory, and cultural analysis—have begun to reassess foundations shaped by Eurocentrism and a linear logic of aesthetic development.[2]

For a long time, Western theatre (Greco-Roman traditions, the Renaissance, Elizabethan dramaturgy, modern realism, and twentieth-century avant-gardes) has been treated as a universal norm and primary reference point for other performative forms.[3] This perspective generates a double epistemic problem: it positions Western theatre as hegemonic, presenting other traditions as "preliminary," derivative, or folkloric, and marginalizes the narratives, aesthetic structures, and ontologies of non-Western, Indigenous, Oriental, or creolized traditions.[4] Consequently, many theatrical forms in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and the Balkans have been interpreted through colonial lenses, without adequate attention to their internal functions and cultural philosophies.[5]

For this reason, epistemic decolonization implies not simply the inclusion of more "overlooked" authors, but a reconceptualization of theatre as an object of study.[6] It raises essential questions: What counts as theatre? Which histories are valid? Which methods legitimize knowledge? Which modes of transmission—oral, embodied, ritual—are accepted as sources?[7]

A key dimension of this shift is the reassessment of Indigenous, ritual, and community-based practices that do not conform to the Western notion of "art" as separate from social life.[8] Decolonial approaches conceive theatre as a dynamic, multi-centered field where performance appears in diverse forms, rooted in specific contexts and processes of resistance, memory, and social reproduction.[9] This reorientation also requires methodological transformation, including ethnographic and interdisciplinary approaches and critical analyses of power relations shaping knowledge production.[10]

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1 Walter D. Mignolo, The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1-12.

2 Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," Nepantla: Views from South 1, no. 3 (2000), 533–580.

3 Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy, History of the Theatre, 10th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2008): 1-40.

4 Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 1-7.

5 Rustom Bharucha, Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture (London: Routledge, 2000), 1-15.

6 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature (London: James Currey, 1986), 4-20.

7 Fischer-Lichte, The Transformative Power of Performance, 1-21.

8 Victor Turner, From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 20-35.

9 Richard Schechner, Performance Studies: An Introduction, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1-30.

10 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

In this sense, decolonization emerges as both a political and academic project, aiming to create an ecology of knowledge in which global theatres coexist as equal forms grounded in multiple epistemologies and ontologies.[11]

Literature review

The eurocentric tradition in theatre studies

Since the nineteenth century, theatre studies have often been constructed upon a linear and evolutionist narrative that positions Western theatre as the universal model and culmination of aesthetic development. Within this paradigm, theatre history is narrated as a progression from Ancient Greece to European modernism, presenting Europe as the epistemic center of stage art.[12] The canonical structure - Athens, Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Baroque, the Elizabethans, Realism, the Avant-Gardes - mplies a single origin and an aesthetic teleology that culminates in the West, rendering "the history of theatre" almost synonymous with European history and excluding parallel developments.

This logic produces enduring epistemic hierarchies: the theatres of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America are often treated as "pre-theatre" or as stylistic reservoirs for modernist experimentation.[13] Orientalism functions as a discourse that views the "Other" through Western categories, reducing it to an object of interpretation rather than recognizing it as an epistemic subject.[14]Eurocentrism, therefore, is not merely a matter of repertoire or selection; it is an interpretative structure that ultimately determines what counts as "theatre," what does not, which forms are included in the canon, and which are relegated to the margins.

The universalization of European categories—dramaturgy, character, directing, realism—remains problematic, as these are historical products of modern Europe.[15] Their application as universal analytical tools often proves reductive for forms organized around mask, ritual, musicality, cyclical structures, and collective participation. The text-centered and verbocentric paradigm thus appears limiting for many global performative practices.

Eurocentrism is also reproduced institutionally: festivals and international networks privilege forms aligned with Western modernism, while non-European companies are often presented ethnographically or as "authentic voices."[16] In this way, "diversity" may be aestheticized, yet it is rarely acknowledged as an autonomous epistemology, thereby preserving the legitimacy of the interpretative center in Europe.

Postcolonial critique and the performative turn

From the 1980s onward, the Eurocentric paradigm was challenged by anthropology, performance studies, and postcolonial theory. Turner conceptualizes ritual as a mechanism of social transformation through liminality and performative community,[17] while Schechner argues that theatre is only one among many forms of performance, relativizing distinctions between art and

11 Mignolo, The Darker Side of Western Modernity, 1-12.
12 Brockett and Hildy, History of the Theatre, 1-10.
13 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 1–7.
14 Said, Orientalism, 5-7.
15 Bharucha, Theatre and the World, 10-15.
16 Ibid., 30-38.
17 Turner, From Ritual to Theatre, 20-35.

ritual.[18]

This shift moved the focus from text to body, process, space, and interaction, marking a transition from a dramaturgical to a performative paradigm.[19] Performance came to be understood as an embodied, relational event where meaning is generated through interaction. This orientation opened space for integrating ritual, Indigenous, and community-based practices as legitimate components of theatre studies.

Postcolonial critique also foregrounded power relations within interculturalism. Bharucha observes that some intercultural projects function as aesthetic colonialism through the decontextualization of Asian traditions.[20] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o emphasizes language as a site of colonial domination,[21] while Mignolo calls for the liberation of knowledge from Western universalism and the redistribution of theoretical authority.[22]

In recent decades, theatre studies have expanded to include Indigenous practices, queer performance, and digital experimentation, linking performance to identity, technology, and politics. Lehmann argues that postdramatic theatre signals aesthetic pluralism in which dramatic form is no longer central.[23]

These developments demonstrate a paradigmatic transition: from Eurocentric historiography to a multi-centered field in which performance is conceived as a cultural, political, and technological phenomenon, open to the reconceptualization of authority and knowledge.

Methodology

Decolonization as a platform for methodological transformation in theatre research

From a methodological perspective, epistemic decolonization is conceived as a platform that reconfigures how theatrical knowledge is produced, organized, and legitimized.[24] It does not merely expand the canon; rather, it questions the epistemic architecture of the field and the structures that have shaped it. The approach is reflexive, interrogating the categories through which theatre has been defined and examining how power structures historiography, archives, and criteria of expertise.

Methodological inquiry shifts from repertoire to the process of definition itself: Who defines theatre as a universal category? Which practices are legitimized, and which excluded as ritual or folklore? How does analysis change when performance is understood as a producer of knowledge rather than only an object of interpretation?[25]

Building on postcolonial analyses, theatre history is read as an institutional product of Western academies, where subaltern voices have often been excluded or translated into dominant frameworks.[26] Consequently, history is reconceived as a global network of interactions rather than an evolutionary line.

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18 Schechner, Performance Studies: An Introduction, 2nd ed.; Richard Schechner, Performance Studies: An Introduction, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1-2.
19 Ibid.,28-30.
20 Bharucha, Theatre and the World, 75-90.
21 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Decolonising the Mind, 4-6.
22 Mignolo, The Darker Side of Western Modernity, 1-12.
23 Schechner, Performance Studies: An Introduction, 3rd ed.
24 Mignolo, The Darker Side of Western Modernity,1-12.
25 Ibid.
26 Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 271-280.

Within this framework, the European tradition is repositioned as one among many contexts, placed in dialogue with other performative forms. This orientation aligns with the performative paradigm, where meaning emerges through embodied interaction between performer and community.[27]
Accordingly, the role of the researcher shifts from interpretative authority to co-producer of knowledge, and research is understood as a dialogic process rather than solely textual analysis.[28]

Decolonial methodologies in theatre research

Decolonial methodologies emerge at the intersection of performance theory, postcolonial critique, and decolonial approaches, operating at theoretical, methodological, and ethical levels.[29] The community is treated as an epistemic subject rather than an object of study.
Oral histories and living archives challenge the primacy of written documents, expanding the notion of sources and recognizing embodied memory and ritual transmission as legitimate forms of documentation.[30]
The displacement of the analytical center interprets practices through local categories, avoiding the automatic application of Western frameworks.[31] Critical interculturality situates cultural exchange within power relations, distinguishing dialogue from aesthetic colonialism.[32]
The concept of performative ecologies understands performance as ontologically multiple—ritual, communal act, political practice, or digital process—requiring frameworks beyond formal aesthetics.[33]
Finally, horizontal knowledge production, grounded in reciprocity, seeks to avoid extractive practices and establish equitable research relations. Communities are treated not merely as sources, but as co-creators of knowledge, recognized as equal actors in interpretation and meaning-making.[34]

Southeastern Europe and the decolonial model of Albanian theatre historiography

The application of a decolonial approach in Southeastern Europe requires a repositioning of the analytical framework through which Albanian theatre has traditionally been interpreted. Southeastern Europe should not be understood as a periphery of European modernity, but as a liminal space shaped by overlapping hegemonies of the Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungarian influence, Byzantine-Slavic traditions, and socialist ideology. In terms of coloniality, the region may be seen as a superimposition of epistemic powers,[35] where cultural production emerges from negotiation and hybridity rather than imitation. In line with decolonial options,[36]

27 Fischer-Lichte, The Transformative Power of Performance, 41-45.
28 Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"
29 Schechner, Performance Studies: An Introduction, 2nd ed., 1–2; Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 275–280; Mignolo, The Darker Side of Western Modernity, 1–12; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Decolonising the Mind, 4-6.
30 Diana Taylor, The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 19–24.
31 Mignolo, The Darker Side of Western Modernity, 19–21.
32 Bharucha, Theatre and the World, 75-90.
33 Richard Schechner, Performance Studies, 70–75.
34 Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 287–290.
35 Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America", 533-580.
36 Mignolo, The Darker Side of Western Modernity, 19-21.

the history of Albanian theatre must be conceived as a network of performative interactions in which local traditions function not as "prehistory," but as the core of an autonomous ontological framework.

Within this perspective, indigenous forms acquire epistemic status. Polyphony challenges the model of individual conflict and articulates a collective performativity in which meaning is produced through vocal relations and co-presence. The rites of passage in the highlands, documented by Zojzi and Tirta,[37] approximate Turner's understanding of ritual, where the ritual body produces reality and reproduces social order through performative action.[38] The Epic of the Kreshniks, documented by Skendi and Elsie,[39] functions as an acoustic epic theatre in which the lahuta operates as a scenographic device and the performer as a living archive; this tradition displaces the "stage" from institutional space to the act of transmission. Similarly, the urban carnivals of Korça and Shkodra represent theatre of public space, where the city becomes stage and the audience co-participant, and meaning is generated through interaction.[40] Ethnographic and historical sources also document public improvisations and temporary urban roles that may be conceptualized as proto-civic theatre. A decolonial historiography integrates these forms on equal terms with institutional theatre, situating the Albanian tradition within a Southeastern European and Mediterranean network of interactions, and interpreting modernity not as a singular trajectory but as a plurality of pathways.[41]

Conclusions and theoretical implications: toward an Albanian theory of performance

As argued above, epistemic decolonization entails a structural transformation in the way performance and theatrical knowledge are conceptualized.[42] Rather than viewing theatre as a normative institution and culmination of an evolutionary trajectory, this perspective shifts toward understanding performance as an embodied, communal, and historically situated process. It also implies a reconceptualization of sources and methods, recognizing that performative knowledge may be oral, corporeal, ritual, and articulated beyond institutional frameworks. At the historiographical level, the history of Albanian theatre becomes more coherent when read as a network of cultural interconnections rather than a linear progression toward institutionalization.[43] This approach combines ethnography, oral creativity, and the analysis of embodied practices with reflexivity regarding the researcher's epistemic position. Decolonial historiography thus shifts from a paradigm of imitation to one of coexistence, situating the European tradition as one context among many rather than a universal standard.Conceptually, this perspective enables the articulation of an Albanian theory of performance as a contribution to global debates.[44] Notions such as polyphonic performativity, dramaturgy of the voice, the open urban stage, masking as social critique, and the body as cultural archive function as analytical categories rooted in local practices.

37 Rrok Zojzi, Etnografia shqiptare (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave, 1962), 145-152; Mark Tirta, Mitologjia ndër shqiptarë (Tiranë: Toena, 2004), 210-220.
38 Turner, From Ritual to Theatre, 20-35.
39 Stavro Skëndi, Albanian and South Slavic Oral Epic Poetry (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1954), 85-100; Robert Elsie, Albanian Folktales and Legends (Tirana: Dukagjini Publishing House, 2001), 30-45.
40 Fischer-Lichte, The Transformative Power of Performance, 41-45.
41 Taylor, The Archive and the Repertoire, 19–24.
42 Mignolo, The Darker Side of Western Modernity, 1–12.
43 Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," 533–545.
44 Fischer-Lichte, The Transformative Power of Performance, 41–45.

These relativize the Western dramatic model and emphasize collective voice, rhythm, shared space, and co-participation as forms of meaning-making.From this standpoint, decolonization does not reject the European tradition but repositions it within a multi-centered dialogue of knowledge.[45] Albanian theatre thus emerges not as a peripheral variation, but as a performative culture with its own ontological foundations, contributing to a pluralistic field in which performance is understood as memory, practice, and knowledge production.

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45 Mignolo, The Darker Side of Western Modernity, 8–9.

Body language in confrontation with the architecture of power: the monumentalization of the figure in a contemporary adaptation of Julius Caesar

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Abstract

This article examines body language in a contemporary adaptation of Julius Caesar, staged at the monumental entrance gate of the Diocletian's Palace in Split, Croatia, investigating the relationship between the performative actor's body and the historical architecture of power. Drawing on theoretical frameworks concerning the body in modern and postmodern theatre, the study argues that the monumental space in this case does not function as a neutral backdrop, but rather as an active structure that shapes and monumentalizes the actor's figure during performance. Roman imperial architecture, as a materialization of power petrified in stone, imposes verticality, ceremoniality, and physical hierarchy, displacing body language from intimate psychological expression toward collective configuration and symbolic embodiment. The methodological approach combines performance analysis with practice-as-research, treating the production as a case study and employing visual documentation as analytical material. Through an examination of bodily configurations, collective organization, and the relationship between the individual body and architectural mass, the article demonstrates that power is articulated not only through dramatic rhetoric but through the physical organization of bodies in space, producing a process of corporeal monumentalization. Staging the performance within a structure built by a Roman emperor establishes a dialogue between the actor's ephemeral body and enduring architecture, transforming the tragedy from a political narrative into a materialized experience of power. The study suggests that analyzing performances in monumental spaces may contribute to the development of a theoretical framework addressing the relationship between body, power, and architecture in contemporary theatre, and recommends expanding this line of inquiry through comparative analyses and the integration of empirical methods in future research.

Keywords

Site-specific performance; corporeal monumentalization; practice-as-research; monumental-political theatre; monumental architecture

Introduction

William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* has traditionally been approached as a drama of political rhetoric, crowd manipulation, and the crisis of the Republic. The figure of Caesar has been read as a symbol of ambition, tyranny, or political charisma, while the act of his assassination has been analyzed predominantly in textual terms. Such approaches privilege the verbal dimension of power, situating it within the sphere of rhetoric and ideology, while the corporeal and spatial dimensions remain comparatively underexamined. As Harold Bloom[1] observes, the figure of Caesar functions as a mythic construct of political grandeur, in which power exerts an aesthetic attraction that often surpasses moral judgment. In this directorial reading, Caesar emerges as a figure of the political imagination, structured through the magnificence of public presence and the aura of authority. In modern and postmodern theatre, however, the performative body is not merely an instrument for interpreting the text, but a generative structure of meaning-making. Body language through posture, collective configuration, rhythm, and spatial relations articulates authority and hierarchy beyond the spoken word. This article examines, as a case study, a production of *Julius Caesar* staged at the monumental entrance of Diocletian's Palace in Split, Croatia, produced by the Croatian National Theatre Split and the Split Summer Festival[2], and directed by the author. Staging the performance within a Roman imperial architectural structure, historically associated with the symbolism of imperial power, creates a performative situation in which the actor's body directly confronts the monumental materiality of power petrified in stone.

Figure 1, 2. Individual bodily configuration and the collective organization of bodies in front of the monumental arch of Diocletian's Palace, Photo HNK Split.

The study proposes an analytical shift from the rhetorical reading of power toward the analysis of corporeal monumentalization within the context of site-specific space, treating architecture as a dramatic actor rather than as a scenographic background. In this sense, spatial monumentality is not merely an aesthetic context, but a formative factor of body language and of the construction

1 Harold Bloom, Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998, 75-78.

2 Hrvatsko narodno kazalište Split, "Istaknuti kazališni redatelj Ognjen Rijavec režira dramu Julije Cezar," accessed January 20, 2026, https://www.hnk-split.hr/hr/istaknuti-kazalisni-redatelj-ognjen-rijavec-redatelj-predstave-julije-cezar.

of the dramatic character. The research question guiding this study is: How is body language shaped within monumental space, and how does the architecture of power influence the monumentalization of the performative body? By treating the actor's corporealityas the center of analysis and space as an active structure of meaning, this study aims to contribute to discussions on the relationship between performance and monumental architecture in contemporary theatre.

Literature review

The critical tradition on *Julius Caesar* has focused primarily on the rhetorical and political dimension of the drama, analyzing the conflict between republic and tyranny, the manipulation of the crowd, and the crisis of the legitimacy of power. Within this line of interpretation, Harold Bloom[3] treats the figure of Caesar as a mythic construct of political grandeur, in which power is presented as a force possessing aesthetic and imaginary attraction. In this directorial reading, Caesar functions as a figure of the political imagination, structured through the magnificence of his public presence. It is precisely at this point that the perspective of modern and postmodern theatre intervenes. In modern theatre, the body is no longer considered an illustrative instrument of the text, but a meaning-producing center. Eugenio Barba[4] defines the actor's body as "organized energy" that creates tension and presence beyond the word, placing physical movement at the foundation of scenic action. According to him, the body is not merely the bearer of character, but a dynamic structure that organizes the spectator's perception through energetic tension and physical discipline. Jacques Lecoq[5] further emphasizes the organic relationship between the body and space, arguing that the performer's physical dialogue with the environment shapes the dramatic character onstage. In this sense, space is not a neutral backdrop, but an active partner in the construction of body language. This perspective becomes particularly significant in site-specific contexts, where historical architecture directly intervenes in the physical configuration of performance and imposes a specific corporeal logic. In contemporary performance studies, Erika Fischer-Lichte[6] argues that corporeal presence on stage creates a transformative process between the actor and spectator, in which meaning is produced through the materiality of action and presence. In monumental spaces, this process is intensified, as architectural mass and historical symbolism influence the perception of the performative figure and the articulation of authority. By interweaving Bloom's[7] mythic figure of power, Barba's[8] body as a structure of energy, Lecoq's[9] body–space relationship, and Fischer-Lichte's[10] performative presence as a transformative process, this study constructs a theoretical framework that enables a shift in analysis from the rhetoric of the word toward the monumentalization of the body as a materialized form of power within site-specific space.

Methodology

This study is developed as a qualitative analysis of a specific performative case study, examining the adaptation of *Julius Caesar* staged at the monumental entrance of Diocletian's Palace in

3 Bloom, Shakespeare: The Invention of Human, 75-82.
4 Barba Eugenio, The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology. London: Routledge, 1995, 54-60.
5 Lecoq Jacques, The Moving Body. London: Methuen Drama, 2000, 20-25.
6 Fischer-Lichte, Erika, The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics. London: Routledge, 2008, 22-25.
7 Bloom, Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human, 75-82.
8 Barba, The Paper Canoe, 54-60
9 Lecoq, The Moving Body, 20-25.
10 Fischer-Lichte, The Transformative Power of Performance, 99-105.

Split. The methodological approach combines performance analysis with practice-as-research, treating the staging process as a source of knowledge production and simultaneously as a critical object of analysis. In accordance with Robin Nelson's[11] approach to research in the performing arts, artistic practice is considered an articulated form of knowledge, in which bodily and spatial movements function as research data. The study is grounded in a phenomenological performance analysis of body language, treating the body as a meaning-producing structure in direct relation to monumental space. In this sense, corporeal monumentalization is proposed as an analytical category describing the process through which the performative body is shaped, amplified, and structured under the disciplining influence of architecture. The author's position as director of the production enables an internal observation of the creative process; however, reflection on practice is not presented as an autobiographical narrative, but as a structured and critically distanced analysis of the relationship between the performative body and monumental architecture.

The methodology focuses on five levels of analysis:

1. **Analysis of individual bodily configurations**, with a focus on the figure of Caesar as a vertical, ceremonial, and monumentalized body in relation to imperial architecture.
2. **Analysis of the body–space relationship**, with emphasis on the manner in which architectural monumentality intervenes in the shaping of body language, physical discipline, and the amplification of performative presence.
3. **Analysis of the collective organization of bodies**, examining the choreographic structures of the conspirators and the crowd as physical forms of the articulation and dissolution of power.
4. **Experiments conducted during rehearsals.** During the rehearsal process, the work was initially developed in an enclosed theatrical space. In the subsequent phase, the performative material was transferred to the monumental space of Diocletian's Palace, enabling direct comparison between the two spatial contexts and the identification of changes in physical tension, gesture amplitude, and the collective organization of bodies. In parallel, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four of the principal performers in order to document their experience of the transformations encountered during the transition from theatrical space to monumental space.
5. **Analysis of the symbolic transfer of violence**, examining the staging of the act of assassination through the displacement of the blow from the biological body of the character to the monumental sculpture of Caesar. This point addresses the relationship between the living body and the petrified body as two ontological layers of the dramatic character and as a dramaturgical mechanism for the deconstruction of the myth of power.

Results and discussion

Staging *Julius Caesar* at the monumental entrance of Diocletian's Palace creates a performative situation in which the actor's body confronts an architecture that materializes historical power in petrified form. The mass of stone, the verticality of the arch, and imperial symmetry produce a visible disproportion between the individual body and the space.

11 Nelson, Robin. Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 31-40.

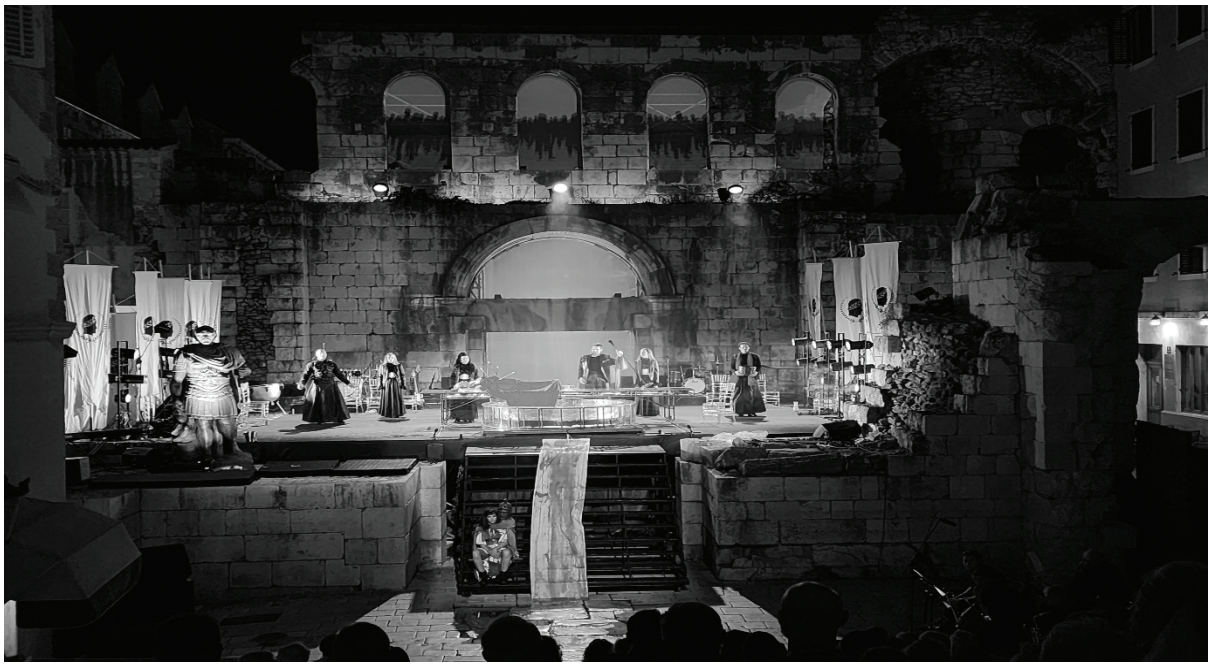

Figure 3. Photo HNK Split.
The monumental space of Diocletian's Palace as a performative structure (wide angle).

This disproportion is not merely aesthetic; it functions as a comparative visual structure. In this context, the body cannot operate through intimate gestures or minimal energy; it is compelled to amplify itself, to expand its energy, and to structure itself ceremonially. Architectural monumentality produces corporeal monumentalization, a process through which the performative body is reshaped under the influence of the scale and symbolism of space. In accordance with Eugenio Barba's[12] concept of the body as organized energy, performative presence in monumental space requires an intensification of physical tension, broader spatial configuration, and extended relationships among characters across space. As Jacques Lecoq[13] argues, the performative figure emerges from physical dialogue with space. In this case, architectural verticality produces performative verticality, transforming the dramatic character into an emblem of power. This monumentalization was also reflected in critical reviews[14], where the performance was described as a "spectacular staging" and a "triumph of art" in a historical space. The perception of visual grandeur confirms that monumentality was not merely an aesthetic choice. In this context, the principal finding of the study is that architectural monumentality functions as a mechanism that reshapes bodily energy. Corporeal monumentalization does not appear as an arbitrary aesthetic choice, but as a structural consequence of the interaction between body and architecture, directly connected to the philosophy of the work.

Collective choreography

Corporeal monumentalization is not limited to the individual figure of Caesar. It extends to the collective organization of bodies. The conspirators and the crowd are structured in linear and

12 Barba, The Paper Canoe, 60-71.

13 Lecoq, The Moving Body, 17-25

14 *Dalmacija Danas, "Recenzija: Julije Cezar – povijesna priča, priručnik za preživljavanje, glumački podvig, koncertni spektakl, psihološka studija i trijumf umjetnosti," accessed January 2026,* https://www.dalmacijadanas.hr/recenzija-julije-cezar-povijesna-prica-prirucnik-za-prezivljavanje-glumacki-podvig-koncertni-spektakl-psiholoska-studija-i-trijumf-umjetnosti/

circular formations that create visual hierarchies and dramaturgical tension. In accordance with Eugenio Barba's[15] theory of collective energy and with Erika Fischer-Lichte's[16] concept of the materiality of bodily presence, the collective body functions as a temporary architecture that constructs and dissolves authority.
The analysis shows that the collective organization of bodies produces visual hierarchies and dramaturgical tension that materialize power in spatial form. Thus, the collective body functions as a temporary architecture that both constructs and simultaneously destabilizes political authority.

The monument as the petrified boody of power

The scenographer constructed a second figure of Caesar through a monumental sculpture bearing the portrait of the actor performing the role. This sculpture is not a decorative element, but a petrified body of power, a materialization of the political myth.

Figure 4. Photo HNK Split.
The monumental sculpture and the figure of Caesar as a doubling between the living body and the petrified body

The monument becomes a dramatic partner and mediates the relationship between body and space. This scenographic intervention produces an ontological doubling of the dramatic character and shifts the center of power from the biological body to the monumental symbol. As a result, power appears as a construct that exists simultaneously as physical material and as a petrified

15 Barba, The Paper Canoe, 70-75.
16 Fischer-Lichte, The Transformative Power of Performance, 99-105

mythical figure.

The symbolic transformation of violence and the deconstruction of the myth

The moment of the assassination constitutes the conceptual climax of the staging. Traditionally, Caesar is killed through the stabbing of his body. In this production, the act of assassination is carried out through the piercing of arrows into the back of the monumental sculpture.

Figure 5. Photo HNK Split.
The act of assassination as a blow against the monument – the symbolic transfer of violence.

The conspirators do not strike directly at the biological body of the character; they strike the monument. Meanwhile, the actor performing Caesar physically experiences each blow. With the final arrow embedded in the monument, the living body falls and dies.

Figure 6. Photo HNK Split.
The body of Caesar after the symbolic transfer of violence – the fall of biological power.

This creates a symbolic transfer of violence: power is struck as a monument before it collapses as a body. The assassination becomes demythologization act , deconstructing the grandeur of authority. In this case, the spectator experiences a tension between the petrified body and the living body, where violence directed at the symbol produces real death on the performative plane. The monument becomes the bearer of the blow, while the body experiences the pain. This displacement of violence from the biological body to the symbol thus transforms the act of assassination into an act against the myth of power and the petrified figure of authority.
The analysis of the case of *Julius Caesar* staged at the monumental entrance of Diocletian's Palace demonstrates that monumentality is not merely a visual or stylistic category, but a formative structure of body language. The architecture of power directly intervenes in the physical configuration of the performative figure, imposing verticality, ceremoniality, and an amplification of energy. In this sense, monumental space functions as a dramatic actant rather than as a neutral backdrop of action. Whereas in traditional readings of *Julius Caesar* power is articulated primarily through rhetoric and ideological conflict, in this production it is materialized through the physical organization of bodies and their relationship to architecture. The figure of Caesar is monumentalized not only through acting interpretation, but through resonance with the imperial structure that surrounds it. This shifts the analysis from individual psychology toward the symbolic and spatial configuration of power. The use of sculpture as a second body of the dramatic character deepens this shift. The monument does not function as décor, but as a materialization of the myth of power. The act of assassination, realized through striking the monument and transferring pain to the living body, transforms violence into a symbolic act against the petrified figure of authority. This double dramaturgy, in which the biological body and the monumental body coexist, creates tension between temporality and the claim to eternity of power. In this context, body language appears as the medium through which historical architecture and contemporary performance enter into dialogue. The performative body is not merely the bearer of the dramatic character, but a structure that absorbs, amplifies, and transforms the symbolism of space. Corporeal monumentalization, in this case, may be considered not only an aesthetic effect, but an analytical category for reading the relationship between performance and the architecture of power in site-specific contexts.

Conclusions and recommendations

This case study demonstrates that spatial monumentality can function as a formative structure of body language in performance. Staging *Julius Caesar* within the imperial architecture of Diocletian's Palace produces a fundamental shift from a drama read primarily through political rhetoric toward an embodied experience of power. In this context, architecture is not a backdrop, but an active mechanism that disciplines, amplifies, and monumentalizes the performer's corporeal presence. The integration of theoretical frameworks on the body Barba[17], the body–space relationship Lecoq[18], the mythic figure of power Bloom[19], and performative presence[20] enables a reading in which power is articulated simultaneously as a physical and symbolic structure. The monumental sculpture of Caesar and the symbolic transfer of violence in the assassination scene intensify this dimension, treating the monument as the petrified body of authority and the act

17 Barba, The Paper Canoe, 60-71
18 Lecoq, The Moving Body, 54-60
19 Bloom, Shakespeare, 75-82
20 Fischer-Lichte, The Transformative Power of Performance, 20-25

of assassination as a deconstruction of the myth of grandeur. The principal contribution of this article lies in articulating corporeal monumentalization as an analytical category for the study of performances in historical spaces charged with the symbolism of power. This approach proposes a shift from analyzing drama as text toward analyzing performance as the physical configuration of power in space. Monumentality is no longer presented merely as an aesthetic context, but as an active structure that reshapes the performer's corporeal presence and the collective organization of bodies. On a methodological level, the integration of practice-as-research with performance analysis demonstrates that the creative process can function as a mode of knowledge production, contributing to the dialogue between theatre studies and directing practice.

Recommendations

This study recommends expanding research on the relationship between the performative body and monumental architecture through comparative analyses with stagings in traditional theatrical spaces, in order to identify the specific elements produced by the site-specific context. It also suggests the integration of empirical methods, such as interviews with actors and analysis of audience responses, to strengthen the methodological dimension of the research.
Finally, the concept of corporeal monumentalization may be tested in other performative contexts within historical spaces, in order to verify its transferability as an analytical category in contemporary theatre studies.

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The pedagogy of acting as an artistic practice
The case of Professor Niko Kanxheri at the University of Arts

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze acting pedagogy as an artistic practice within higher education, through a case study of the pedagogical activity of Prof. Niko Kanxheri at the University of Arts.The study explores the ways in which the lecturer's professional stage experience is integrated into academic teaching and transformed into a model of professional formation for acting students. Within this framework, the pedagogical process is conceptualized as a continuation of artistic practice rather than merely the transmission of interpretative techniques. The central research question guiding the study is: In what ways does the artistic experience of the lecturer influence the development of his teaching methodology, and how is this interaction reflected in the professional and creative development of acting student? This question seeks to explore not only the influence of personal artistic experience on the selection of pedagogical methods and exercises, but also the ways in which such experience contributes to the formation of artistic identity, the cultivation of professional awareness, and the development of a work ethic within the academic process. The research adapts a qualitative approach and includes theoretical analysis of acting pedagogy; a semi-structured interview with the lecturer, and reflective testimonies from students who have been trained under his guidance over several years. The methodological framework aims to integrate the perspective of the lecturer with the stage experiences of the students, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical practice under examination. Particular attention is given to the lecturer's engagement with the dramatic work "The Father" by August Strindberg, which is analyzed as a concrete example of the transformation of interpretative experience into a pedagogical instrument. The play serves as a reference point for examining how professional stage experience, the analysis of dramatic conflict, and the process of character development can be translated into pedagogical strategies and practical exercises for students. The thematic analysis of collected data highlights several key elements of this pedagogical approach: professional discipline and high artistic standards as the foundation of the formative process; a clear distinction between the roles of actor and lecturer in order to avoid mechanical imitation and foster creative autonomy; an emphasis on experiential engagement and emotional memory as means of achieving stage authenticity; and the establishment of a rigorous pedagogical relationship between teacher and student based on respect, responsibility, and critical dialogue. Together, these elements form a structured yet flexible model that adapts to the individuality of each student. The findings indicate that a pedagogy grounded in professional stage experience can generate a dynamic teaching model that encourages creative individuality, professional awareness, and artistic responsibility among students. Students emphasize that this approach has had a lasting impact on the development of their identity as actors, guiding them toward a deeper engagement with the dramatic text, the creative process, and their role within the

broader artistic sphere. Their testimonies confirm the long-term influence of this pedagogical method on professional formation and on the development of a reflective and critical attitude toward both artistic practice and the actor's creative responsibility.

Keywords

Art pedagogy, pedagogical tool, the role of the educator, teaching method

Introduction

Acting pedagogy with higher artistic education constitutes a complex field in which theory, practice, and the personal experience of the artist intersect. Stanislavski emphasizes that the actor should not rely on the external imitation of emotions, but on their internal experience in order to create a truthful and convincing performance.[1] Actors learn not simply through the transmission of information, but through direct experiential engagement - through process of trial and error, critical reflection on the creative process, and interpretation of dramatic material through the actor's body, voice, and emotional sensibility. In this sense, acting pedagogy represents an essentially practical yet simultaneously reflective process. Adler argues that the actor should rely more on imagination than on personal experience, constructing the role through the given circumstances and the analysis of the text.[2] The lecturer transmits not only theoretical understanding but also lived artistic experience, concrete working situations, and engagement with dramatic texts, stage partners, and audiences. When critically structured and reflected upon pedagogically, such experience can directly inform the development of teaching methodology and contribute to the professional formation of students, serving as a tangible example of the intersection between artistic practice and pedagogy. The absence of systematic analyses and rigorous research on these pedagogical practices has created a gap withing the scholarly literature on acting pedagogy in Albania. Consequently, there is a growing need for structured analytical approaches capable of examining how interpretative experience is transformed into a pedagogical resource, how it is articulated within the teaching process, and how it contributes to the development of student's professional and creative identities. Within this framework, the pedagogical activity of Prof. Niko Kanxheri at the University of Arts provides a particularly relevant case for examination. His dual engagement with both professional stage practice and academic teaching represents a model in which artistic experience is not separated from the educational process but is organically integrated within it. In particular, his work with the dramatic text "The Father" by August Strindberg offers a concrete analytical context for understanding how artistic experience can be transformed into pedagogical methodology.[3] The encounter with dramatic conflict, the psychological depth of character, and the structural tensions embedded within this work become not merely interpretative challenges, but also sources of pedagogical reflection and teaching material for students. By emphasizing the role of the actor - lecturer as a mediator between stage and classroom, between artistic practice and theoretical reflection, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the professional formation of actors within higher education. At the same time, it aims to contribute to the consolidation of a reflective and systematically documented tradition of acting pedagogy within the Albanian academic context.

1 *Konstantin Stanislavski,* An Actor Prepares *(New York: Routledge, 2008), 37*

2 Stella Adler, The Art of Acting*,* ed. Howard Kissel (*New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2000*), 84.

3 August Strindberg, The Father.

More specifically, the study examines:

- The relationship between the lecturer's stage experience and his teaching methodology.
- The ways in which interpretative experience is transformed into a pedagogical instrument.
- The influence of this pedagogical approach on the professional and creative development of acting students.
- The specific case of the dramatic work "The Father" by August Strindberg as a pedagogical laboratory.
- The model of acting pedagogy developed by Prof. Niko Kanxheri within the context of Albanian higher artistic education.

At the center of this analysis lies the relationship between the actor and the lecturer, understood as two dimensions that coexist within the same individual and whose interaction shapes the creative identity of the student.
The experience with "The Father" by August Strindberg provides a particularly rich context for examining how the analysis of dramatic conflict, the process of character development, and the exploration of emotional complexity can be transformed into concrete pedagogical tools for students.

Research methodology

Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to analyze acting pedagogy as an artistic practice within higher artistic education, through a case study of the pedagogical activity of Prof. Niko Kanxheri at the University of Arts.
More specifically, the study seeks to identify the ways in which interpretative experience can be transformed into a pedagogical resource, focusing on the specific case of the dramatic work "The Father" by August Strindberg as a formative text within the teaching process.

Research questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- In what ways does the lecturer's stage experience influence the development of his teaching methodology?
- How are the roles of the actor and lecturer integrated within the teaching process?
- How is this integration reflected in the professional and creative development of students?
- In what ways can the dramatic work "The Father" by August Strindberg's, serves as a pedagogical laboratory in the training and formation of young actors?
- What are the long-term implications of this pedagogical approach for the development of students' professional identity?

Research methodology

The study adapts a qualitative research approach, utilizing the case study method as the primary analytical framework. This methodological choice allows for an in-depth exploration of a specific pedagogical practice within its institutional and artistic context.

The research process includes the following components:

- A semi-structured interview with the lecturer, aimed at identifying pedagogical principles, interpretative experience, and the actor–lecturer relationship.[4]
- The collection of reflective testimonies from former students who have been trained under his guidance over several years.[5]
- Thematic analysis of the collected data, conducted in order to identify key pedagogical concepts such as professional discipline, experiential engagement, emotional memory, in-depth character analysis, and the distinction between the roles of actor and lecturer.

The data are analyzed within an interpretative qualitative framework, with the aim of identifying recurring patterns and shared elements within the experiences of both the lecturer and the students.

Sources

The sources used in this study include:

- A semi-structured interview with Prof. Niko Kanxheri, serving as a primary source for understanding his pedagogical philosophy and artistic practice.
- Written testimonies from former students, collected over several years of teaching activity.
- Theoretical literature on acting pedagogy, the process of experiential performance, and the pedagogical relationship between lecturer and student.
- Analytical examination of the dramatic text "*The Father",* by August Strindberg, considered as a pedagogical reference within the context of actor training.

Limitations of the study

This study presents several methodological limitations:

- The limited number of interviews and student testimonies does not allow for a statistical representation of all generations of students trained under the lecturer.
- The subjective nature of the testimonies, which are based on personal experiences and individual reflections.
- The focus on a single case study, which restricts the generalization of the findings to a broader institutional context.

4 Interview with Prof. Niko Kanxheri, Tirana, 2026.

5 Reflective testimonies from former students of the Faculty of Performing Arts, University of Arts, Tirana, 2026.

However, given the qualitative and analytical nature of the research, the aim of this study is not statistical generalization, but rather the interpretative exploration of a specific pedagogical practice.

Research

"The Father" by Strindberg as an Analytical and Formative Process in the Pedagogy of Prof. Niko Kanxheri.
In relation to the study's central research question - namely, how the lecturer's professional stage experience informs the development of his teaching methodology - the case of "The Father" by August Strindberg offers a particularly meaningful example of the transformation of interpretative experience into a pedagogical instrument. This approach transforms the dramatic text into a formative pedagogical laboratory. "*The Father"* is not treated as a work that must be "correctly reproduced," but as a field in which stage actions are tested and theoretical analysis is translated into concrete experience. Through this process, the student learns not only how to develop a character but also how to cultivate analytical capacity, professional awareness, and creative responsibility. Within this framework, the interaction between the roles of actor and lecturer does not appear as an irresolvable conflict but rather as a productive pedagogical tension. The lecturer's professional stage experience provides a basis for reflection, while his pedagogical role requires self-discipline and critical distance. It is precisely this distance that enables him to avoid encouraging imitation and instead foster the development of the student's artistic individuality and creative autonomy.

Reopening the text as a pedagogical act

The decision to treat a familiar work as though it were unfamiliar represents an act of profound formative significance. It presupposes that the dramatic text is not a closed structure, fixed once and for all in its meanings, but rather an open field of interpretation that is continually reconfigured within new context of artistic and pedagogical practice. In the analysis of "The Father" by August Strindberg, students were actively involved in identifying events, dramatic facts, and circumstances, as well as in examining the relationships between the characters. This approach aligns with Konstantin Stanislavski's principles concerning the analysis of given circumstances and the construction of the line of action. At the same time, it moves beyond the traditional demonstrative model of teaching, in which the lecturer presents a solution and the student follows it.[6] To reopen the text means returning to a series of fundamental questions: What actually occurs within the play? What facts are indisputable? Which elements remain interpretative assumptions? What are the objectives of each character, and how do these objectives come into conflict? Rather than being provided directly by the lecturer, these answers are developed through discussion and collective analysis.

Discipline as a condition of inquiry

Student testimonies indicate that the working process surrounding "*The Father"* was characterized by high professional expectations and a clearly articulated standards of practice that discouraged interpretative complacency. The first solution was never accepted as definitive; rather, it was

6 Konstantin Stanislavski, Building a Character (New York: Routledge, 2003), 58.

treated as a starting point for further development. Every response had to be justified through an analysis of dramatic circumstances, grounded in the character's objective, and tested in practice through stage action. This approach created a working environment in which intuition was not excluded but was required to pass through the filter of critical reasoning and practical verification. As Konstantin Stanislavski emphasized, truth on stage is not the result of a sudden moment of inspiration, but of disciplined, structured, and repeated work. Inspiration, from this perspective, is the consequence of preparation rather than its substitute.[7] Within the pedagogical practice described here, this principle is realized through a sustained emphasis on detailed analysis, the clarification of objectives, and the coherence of the line of action. In the pedagogy of Prof. Niko Kanxheri, discipline does not appear as formal imposition or rigid authoritarianism. Rather, it functions as a structured framework within which creative freedom can develop. Students describe this rigor as a pedagogical condition that continually challenged them without constraining their creative development. In this way, discipline and inquiry emerge as two inseparable dimensions of acting pedagogy. Discipline therefore becomes a fundamental condition of professional formation. It teaches students not only how to develop a character, but also how to cultivate a sustained and responsible relationship with the art of acting himself - a relationship grounded in inquiry, awareness, and creative responsibility.

Experience and analysis: a necessary balance

In the working process on "*The Father"*, emotional memory was used as a supportive tool in the development of dramatic situations, yet it was never detached from the structural analysis of the text. Emotion was not treated as a spontaneous expression independent of dramatic structure, but rather as energy directed toward a clearly defined dramatic objective. Every inner state had to be directly connected to the character's objective and to the line of action that runs throughout the play. In this sense, feeling was not considered an autonomous starting point, but rather the result of an accurate understanding of the dramatic situation and conflict.

This approach is consistent with the tradition of Konstantin Stanislavski, who argued that authentic stage experience emerges from precise action and from a deep understanding of the given circumstances. Emotion is not pursued directly; rather, it arises as a consequence of dramatically grounded action structure through internal logic. At the same time, the manner in which the text was approached within this pedagogical practice also reveals an affinity with the Stella Alder's emphasis on the actor's creative imagination and on the analysis of the social and historical context of the dramatic work.[8] This convergence produces a methodological balance: the actor's individual experience is enriched by a broader understanding of the dramatic world.

The balance between experience and analysis produces a dual process of formation. On the one hand, students learn to activate their emotional resources; on the other, they develop the ability to structure these resources within a coherent dramatic and analytical framework. In this way, the risks of sentimentalism or superficial effect are avoided. Emotion becomes credible because it is supported by analysis, while analysis becomes vivid because it is nourished by lived experience.

7 Konstantin Stanislavski, An Actor Prepares (New York: Routledge, 2008), 45.

8 Stella Adler, The Art of Acting, 112.

The tension between actor and lecturer

An essential dimension of this case study is the internal tension between the experience of the actor and the pedagogical role of the lecturer. Prof. Niko Kanxheri acknowledges that his interpretative experience as an actor could at times "get in his way," risking a shift of attention away from the students' creative process and outcomes. This metaphor encapsulates a genuine pedagogical dilemma: how can one preserve the richness of personal artistic experience without transforming it into an imposed model?

Awareness of this tension led him to reconsider the nature of his interventions within the teaching process. Demonstrations were significantly reduced and, when they occurred, they were intentionally exaggerated or stylized, so that students would not be tempted to imitate them. This decision is not merely technical; it carries an ethical dimension. It protects the space of the student's individuality and prevents the formation of dependence on the lecturer's model.

"The Father" as a Laboratory of Professional Formation.

Through their work on "The Father" by August Strindberg, students engaged in a comprehensive analytical and creative process. Students report that this experience had a lasting influence on their understating of character development. In this sense, "*The Father"* becomes a laboratory of professional formation. The dramatic text functions not merely as material for performance but as a means of cultivating both artistic and ethical awareness. Through active analysis and pedagogical self-regulation, the conditions are created for the development of creative autonomy and for the formation of a sustainable professional identity.

The case of "*The Father"* provides a clear and well-supported response to the central question of the study: a pedagogy grounded in professional stage experience, when accompanied by critical reflection, pedagogical self-regulation, and methodological discipline, generates a dynamic and deeply formative model of teaching. The lecturer's professional experience does not function as a model to be copied but as an orienting horizon that opens pathways for inquiry. In this way, artistic authority is transformed into methodological authority - an authority that guides the process without replacing the student's individuality.

Empirical analysis and research findings

This chapter presents an analysis of the empirical material collected through the interview with Prof. Niko Kanxheri and the written testimonies of his former students across several years of pedagogical activity. The data were examined through thematic analysis, with the aim of identifying recurring categories and structures of meaning that appear both in the lecturer's reflections and in the students' testimonies.

The analysis is organized around three main axes:

1. The lecturer's perspective.
2. The students' perspective.
3. Points of convergence between the two perspectives.

This structure seeks to highlight not only the content of the statements themselves, but also the degree of coherence between pedagogical intention and the lived experience of the students within the process of professional formation.

The lecturer's perspective

Prof. Niko Kanxheri's written responses clearly indicate that he conceives the relationship between actor and lecturer as a genuine and continuous internal tension. In his reflections, he states that throughout his years of teaching, "the actor (Niko Kanxheri) would get in my way," thereby risking a shift of attention away from "the student's work in front of me."[9] He further acknowledges that this tension between the roles of actor and lecturer has been frequent and challenging. Nevertheless, out of respect for the student, he has attempted to "erase (painfully) from the blackboard my personal feeling as an actor".

Another significant element that emerges from his reflections concerns the way he approaches a dramatic text even when he possesses deep interpretative familiarity with it. Referring to his work on "The Father", by August Strindberg, he explains that he was faced two possible options: either to reproduce the performance he had previously staged – thus creating "comfort for myself" - or to approach the work as though it were unfamiliar. He chose the latter approach. According to him, this meant "analyzing the work again from the beginning with the active participation of the students themselves," while ensuring that his own interventions remained minimal.

Within this context, he emphasizes that the discoveries made by the students were "interesting and surprising even for me." This observation suggests that the pedagogical process was not a one-directional transmission of knowledge, but rather a process of shared inquiry. He further notes that his experience convinced him that "the performance would bear the students' name, and only the students' name," thereby reinforcing his commitment to avoiding the imposition of personal interpretative model.

Several fundamental principles emerge from his discourse:

- Avoidance of direct demonstration, in order not to produce imitation and ensure that the student's creative process is not replaced by the lecturer's own experience.
- Minimal intervention in the creative process, allowing students the space to develop their own interpretative solution.
- A strong emphasis on analytical rigor, clarity of character objectives, and the justification of every stage action.
- Discipline as a necessary condition for artistic development and professional formation.

The students' perspective

An examination of the written testimonies of Prof. Niko Kanxheri's former students reveals a consistent characterization of his pedagogical approach as rigorous, demanding, and profoundly formative. Several testimonies emphasize that praise was rare - indeed, almost negligible - as a form of definitive validation.[10] Students recall that the word "correct" was used with coution, not as a final confirmation but rather as an indication that the work was moving in the appropriate direction. The students' responses also repeatedly indicate that the first interpretative solution was never considered sufficient. After presenting a stage proposal, students report that the lecturer would frequently ask questions such as: "Why?", "What is this based on?", and "What is the objective?" This insistence on justification compelled them to return to the dramatic text,

9 Intervistë me Prof. Niko Kanxheri, Tiranë, 2026.

10 Dëshmi reflektuese nga ish-studentë të Fakultetit të Artit Skenik, Universiteti i Arteve, Tiranë, 2026.

to the analysis of dramatic facts, and to the given circumstances of the play, thereby establishing analysis as the foundation of every stage action. With regard to demonstration, several students clearly note that the lecturer generally avoided it. One student recalls that "he rarely stood up to show how it should be done," while another remarks that when demonstrations did occur, they were intentionally exaggerated in order to discourage imitation. These observations closely correspond with the lecturer's own reflections and confirm that the avoidance of imitation was not merely a theoretical position, but a deliberate pedagogical strategy aimed at fostering creative autonomy.

In relation to emotional engagement, the students' responses refer to the use of emotional memory, but always in close connection with the structural analysis of the dramatic text. One student observes that "emotion had to emerge as a consequence of understanding the situation, not as a spontaneous reaction." This testimony indicates that emotional experience was not treated as an uncontrolled expression of feeling but rather as the result of a clear analytical understanding of the character's objective and the dramatic conflict.

A particularly significant element emerging from the testimonies concerns the long-term impact of this pedagogical method. Several students emphasize that even in their current professional practice they continue to begin their work with the analysis of dramatic facts, the identification of objectives, and the development of the line of action - precisely as they were trained during the studies. One respondent states that "the mechanism of work remained the same," while another affirms that the discipline acquired during training continues to function as the foundation of their professional practice.

Points of convergence

The comparative analysis of Prof. Niko Kanxheri's written reflections and the testimonies of his former students reveals a clear convergence across several essential dimensions of pedagogical process.

Pedagogical self-regulation and the avoidance of imitation

In his reflections, the lecturer explicitly states that he avoided demonstration in order not to produce imitators, and that he deliberately restrained his own interpretative impulses so as not to impose a personal model. The students' testimonies confirm this position. They consistently report that demonstrations were rare and that they were guided toward reproducing predetermined solutions. Several students emphasize that the absence of demonstration compelled them to search independently for interpretative answers and to develop their own artistic responses. This convergence suggests that the pedagogical self-regulation described by the lecturer was not merely theoretical but as experienced concretely by the students as a formative aspect of the learning process.

Discipline as a formative structure

The lecturer defines the educational environment as one that requires structure and methodological authority, and high professional expectations. In his view, such discipline functions as a necessary condition for creative development rather than as a limitation upon it. The students' testimonies confirm this perspective. They repeatedly refer to the rigor of the working process, the constant

demand for deeper analysis, and the absence of easy praise as elements that contributed to the development of professional seriousness and consistency. What the lecturer conceptualizes as a structural framework for creative freedom is experienced by the students as the foundation of professional discipline in their subsequent artistic practice.

Analysis as the foundation of interpretation

Both the lecturer's reflections and the students' testimonies emphasize the central role of analysis within the pedagogical process. The lecturer highlights the importance of examining dramatic facts, circumstances, and relationships, as well as clarifying the objectives that motivate each stage action. Students likewise recall his constant insistence on the questions "why?" and "what is this based on?", as well as the expectation that every stage action be analytically justified. This convergence demonstrates that interpretation was not built upon unexamined intuition but upon structured analysis combined with practical experimentation. Analyses therefore functioned not as an abstract concept but as a daily working practice within the rehearsal process.

The balance between analysis and emotional experience

Another important point of convergence concerns the relationship between analysis and emotional experience. The lecturer stresses that emotion must remain connected to dramatic objectives and to the structural logic of the action. Students similarly testify that emotional engagement was never permitted to detach itself from the dramatic framework and that emotional memory functioned primarily as a supportive instrument rather than an autonomous objective. This convergence indicates a clear methodological coherence: emotion is not privileged over analysis but emerges from it. Emotional experience and structural understanding therefore operate as independent dimensions of the actor's creative process.

Conclusion

These points of convergence identified in this chapter demonstrate a strong coherence between pedagogical intention and the lived experience of the students. What emerges from the empirical analysis is not a one-sided theoretical discourse or a merely subjective self-assessment, but rather a pedagogical model confirmed by those who experienced it directly within the creative process. The empirical analysis supports the thesis that a pedagogy grounded in artistic experience—accompanied by self-control, discipline, and active analysis—creates sustainable conditions for the development of creative individuality and the professional identity of the student actor. In this context, Grotowski's approach reinforces this perspective by shifting the core of the pedagogical process toward the actor's intensive work on the self and the direct relationship with the spectator, thus making artistic development a deeply personal and transformative process.[11] This study sets out to examine the ways in which a lecturer's professional stage experience may be integrated into the pedagogical process and contribute to the professional formation of acting students within the context of higher artistic education. Through the analysis of the case of "The Father", by August Strindberg, combined with the examination of written reflections from Prof. Niko Kanxheri and testimonies from his former students across several generations, the research has identified a pedagogical model grounded in reflected artistic experience, methodological

11 Jerzy Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre (New York: Routledge, 2002), 16.

discipline, and the cultivation of creative autonomy.

The findings indicate that professional stage experience does not function as a prescriptive model to be reproduced, but rather as an orienting horizon, mediated through conscious pedagogical self-regulation. The tension between the roles of actor and lecturer - explicitly acknowledged by the lecturer himself - does not constitute an obstacle to the teaching process. On the contrary, it operates as a productive methodological dynamic that sustains the openness of the pedagogical environment and encourages inquiry-based learning. Within this framework, personal artistic experience is not imposed upon students but is placed at the service of their development, enabling them to develop their own interpretative paths rather than replicate predetermined solutions.

The empirical analysis further reveals a clear convergence between the pedagogical intentions articulated by the lecturer and the lived experiences described by the students. Discipline, high professional expectations, and the rejection of interpretative complacency emerge as essential components of the pedagogical model examined in this study. Students consistently testify that this approach has had a lasting influence on their professional development, fostering habits of rigorous analysis, self-reflection, and creative responsibility that continue to inform their artistic practice beyond the institutional setting.

The case of *The Father* demonstrates that the dramatic text, when approached not as finished product to be reproduced but as a laboratory of inquiry, can function as a powerful instrument of artistic and professional formation.

From this perspective, the principal contribution of this study lies in the documentation and critical examination of a concrete pedagogical practice within context of Albanian higher artistic education. By articulating the relationship between professional stage experience and pedagogical methodology, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how artistic knowledge is transmitted within the academic environment. At the same time, it proposes a pedagogical framework that may serve as a reference point for future research on the relationship between artistic practice and the professional formation of the actor.

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The director's artistic awareness in the selection of the theatrical work: theoretical reflection and practical analysis of the theatre of the absurd

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Abstract

This article examines the role and significance of the director's artistic awareness in the selection of the theatrical work, considering this process a fundamental creative and conceptual act in the construction of a stage performance. In contemporary theatre, the director is not merely a mediator of the dramatic text, but the author of the scenic language and of the meaning that the work acquires in relation to the audience and social reality. The selection of the theatrical work reflects the director's aesthetic, ethical, and philosophical worldview, as well as their awareness of the function of theatre within society. Drawing on major theories of directing and through the analysis of specific theatrical works, this study aims to demonstrate that the director's artistic awareness constitutes a determining factor in the originality, contemporaneity, and communicative value of theatrical performance. The article addresses the director's artistic awareness as a decisive factor in the selection of the theatrical work and in the construction of the directorial process. Based on both theoretical approaches and practical reflection, the study argues that the absence of profound knowledge and stable artistic convictions renders the director susceptible to conformity and prejudice, thereby undermining creative individuality. The analysis focuses on the process of selecting the work, accompanied by doubt, initial resistance, and critical reflection as prerequisites for the creation of authentic directing. In its analytical section, the article examines directorial experience with The Misunderstanding by Albert Camus and The Chairs by Eugène Ionesco, exploring the relationship between the absurd text and its scenic embodiment, as well as the director's right to limited intervention in the text for scenic purposes.

Keywords

Director, artistic awareness, theatre of the absurd, selection of the work, directing

Introduction

Theatre, as one of the oldest forms of artistic expression, remains a living space of dialogue between the individual and society. Within this dialogical process, the role of the director is essential, as they construct the bridge between the dramatic text, the actor, and the audience. One of the most important decisions a director makes is the selection of the theatrical work, which determines the aesthetic, ideological, and emotional direction of the performance. In the art of theatre, the director's creative individuality is built upon knowledge, experience, and artistic awareness. The less prepared an individual is in a particular field and the fewer stable convictions they have formed, the more exposed they become to external influences, prejudices, and aesthetic conformity. In such circumstances, the ability to articulate an individual voice and to construct an authentic theatrical vision is seriously called into question.

The selection of the theatrical work represents one of the most delicate and decisive moments in the directorial process. It does not occur immediately, but is the result of a prolonged process of selection, reflection, and confrontation with oneself. In art, and particularly in director-centred theatre, the absence of artistic awareness becomes a serious obstacle to the development of creative individuality. A director who has not developed stable aesthetic convictions risks remaining merely an executor of others' ideas, unable to articulate a personal stance. The selection of the work is not a neutral or purely organizational act, but a conscious artistic process that reflects the director's attitude toward reality, history, and humanity. Directors select works that resonate with their personal experience and with the issues of the time in which they live, transforming theatre into a means of social reflection and awareness.

The formation of artistic convictions is not immediate; it develops through doubt, initial resistance, and critical reflection. This internal process constitutes the foundation of artistic awareness and enables the director to emerge as an individual with something of their own to express. In this sense, the selection of the theatrical work represents one of the most decisive moments of the directorial process, as it marks the beginning of the concrete realization of this individuality.

This study analyses the selection of the theatrical work as a conscious artistic act and examines the relationship between the director, the dramatic text, and its scenic embodiment, with particular focus on the theatre of the absurd.

Theoretical Framework

In theatre theory, the director is no longer regarded merely as an interpreter of the text, but as the author of the performance. However, directorial authorship is not constructed through the imitation of existing forms, but through critical confrontation with the dramatic material. The process of doubt and initial resistance, even if partial, is essential for the formation of stable artistic convictions that emerge from individual consciousness.

Peter Brook emphasizes that every scenic choice must arise from an inner artistic necessity rather than from convention or tradition (Brook, 1996). The process of doubt and initial resistance to the text is fundamental for the formation of stable convictions. Without this process, the director risks falling into aesthetic conformity, producing performances that are formally "correct" but devoid of individuality. As Pavis (1998) argues, the relationship between the director and the text is always dialectical and conflictual.

Stanislavski (1989) connects artistic awareness with the deep analysis of action and motivation. According to him, without an internal understanding of the dramatic material, neither scenic

action nor performance can be convincing. Stanislavski emphasized the importance of thorough and conscious preparation in approaching dramatic material, while Brook argued that every scenic choice must be justified by inner artistic necessity rather than convention. In this sense, the director's artistic awareness is constructed through confrontation with the text, not through its blind acceptance. Brook (1996) defines theatre as a simple yet profoundly conscious act in which every scenic choice carries semantic weight. According to him, the director must be fully aware of why a particular work is chosen and what is intended to be communicated through it.
Konstantin Stanislavski's contribution also highlights the importance of textual and subtextual analysis. For him, the artist's awareness is closely linked to the inner understanding of the work and to the psychological motivation of the characters. A director lacks artistic awareness if they fail to penetrate the deep structure of the selected text.
Jerzy Grotowski, on the other hand, shifts attention from the text to the actor and the scenic process. Nevertheless, even in poor theatre, the selection of the work remains a conscious ideological act, as the director chooses dramatic material that serves their spiritual and aesthetic inquiry.

The Selection of the Work as a Prolonged and Tense Process

The selection of a theatrical work rarely occurs instantaneously. Rather, it is accompanied by a prolonged period of selection, during which the director reads plays by various authors, compares them, and engages in dialogue not only with others but also with themselves. In this process, what may be described as reciprocal "selection" occurs: the director chooses the work, but the work also chooses the director. A particular drama begins to stimulate thought and emotion, activate imagination and fantasy, and create the impression that it was written specifically for the director who will stage it. This moment is fundamental, as it constitutes the emotional and intellectual foundation of the directorial process.

Figure 1: Hamlet stages a play enacting his father's murder. Kean Collection.

However, the choice is not determined solely by artistic affinity. Practical factors, particularly in student contexts, play an important role. The number of characters, technical and organizational possibilities, and economic limitations all become part of the decision-making process. As reflected in the literary insights of Remarque, not every problem can be resolved through material means, and many difficulties remain creative and human in nature (Remarque, 1945/2005). A conscious director selects works that allow for the construction of a clear and coherent scenic concept. The work is perceived as a foundation for creation rather than as a limitation. In this sense, the selection of the theatrical work is a creative act as significant as directing itself.

"Hamlet" by William Shakespeare – The Director's Philosophical Awareness

Hamlet is one of the most frequently staged works in the history of theatre. The selection of this play by different directors clearly demonstrates the level of their artistic awareness. A director who chooses Hamlet today must be fully aware of its philosophical and existential dimensions. In contemporary stagings, Hamlet is often interpreted as a drama of the crisis of the modern individual. Through the selection of the work, the director expresses concerns related to identity, power, and moral responsibility. Artistic awareness is manifested in the manner in which the director emphasizes Hamlet's inner conflict and connects it to contemporary social reality.

“A Doll’s House” by Henrik Ibsen – The Director’s Social Awareness

The selection of A Doll’s House reflects a profound social awareness on the part of the director. Ibsen’s drama addresses issues of emancipation, identity, and the role of women in society. Directors who choose this work often aim to stimulate social debate and critical reflection. In modern stagings, Nora is presented not merely as a historical figure, but as a symbol of the individual’s pursuit of personal freedom. The director’s awareness is expressed in the manner in which the work is actualized, enabling it to communicate with contemporary reality without losing its dramatic essence.

An In-Depth Analysis of Directorial Experience in the Theatre of the Absurd and the Need for Specialized Directing

The theatre of the absurd cannot be approached through a generalized directorial framework. As in other art forms, where scholars and practitioners specialize in particular authors or movements, theatre likewise requires specific depth and specialization. Each playwright represents a distinct aesthetic “body” to which not every directorial “garment” can be applied. Grotowski (2002) emphasizes that every theatrical form requires specific expressive means. In this sense, the theatre of the absurd demands a directorial correspondence that respects emptiness, silence, fragmentation, and the unique rhythm of action. Theatre, regardless of its orientation, is indeed a convention, yet it must always lead us back to life. Therefore, even when an absurdist playwright conveys philosophical ideas through dialogues and monologues, this does not imply that interpretation should become excessively intellectual or overly rationalistic. Familiarity with key aspects of a playwright’s worldview enables the director to understand where to focus their interpretative perspective and how to shape their directorial vision. This ensures that elements essential to the author’s intention are not diminished by the director. One may intentionally choose to minimize certain aspects, but such decisions must never occur unconsciously. Elements that disappear without awareness are not avoided but neglected. What remains unspoken differs fundamentally from what is denied out of ignorance. The difference between these two is substantial. Thus, to engage deeply with an author’s philosophy means to engage deeply with the work that conveys that philosophy.

“The Misunderstanding” by Albert Camus: Murder as Scenic Action Rather Than Merely Textual

In The Misunderstanding, the central issue is not merely philosophical but profoundly scenic: why the murder is committed and how it is materialized on stage. While the dramatic text may allow abstraction and non-motivated transitions, the scenic embodiment of murder requires strict theatrical logic. Here lies the fundamental distinction between murder as a textual element and murder as scenic action. The director bears the responsibility of ensuring that the criminal act appears credible, organic, and acceptable to the spectator. Without scenic truthfulness, any philosophical interpretation remains ineffective. For this reason, intensive work with actors on mise-en-scène, pauses, movement, and tempo-rhythm becomes essential. As Stanislavski (1989) argues, only credible action can produce meaning.

Directorial Intervention in the Text: An Ethical Problem or a Scenic Necessity?

The issue of directorial intervention in the dramatic text remains one of the most sensitive debates in theatre theory. However, stage practice demonstrates that minimal edits dictated by the needs of mise-en-scène are not only permissible but often necessary (Pavis, 1998). In the case of The Misunderstanding, the removal of certain words or the rhythmic adjustment of dialogue does not aim to distort the author's intent, but to enhance scenic functionality. This process is comparable to the work of a tailor who makes final adjustments based on professional experience and expertise.

"The Chairs" by Eugène Ionesco – Absurdity Between Philosophy and Life

In The Chairs, the principal risk lies in excessively intellectual interpretation. Although the dialogues are heavily charged with philosophical reflection, the director must avoid over-rationalization and maintain a connection with concrete life. As Ionesco (1998) emphasizes, absurdity is not a negation of life but its reflection in a distorted form. The director's artistic awareness is revealed in the ability to preserve this delicate balance.

Conclusion

Theoretical and practical analysis demonstrates that the director's artistic awareness is a prerequisite for the successful selection of the theatrical work and for the construction of a credible and meaningful performance. Doubt, critical reflection, and confrontation with the text constitute fundamental elements of the creative process. In particular, the theatre of the absurd requires a specialized and conscious directorial approach in which every intervention in the text serves scenic truthfulness and communication with the spectator.

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The dramatic element in Fishta's dramaturgy

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Abstract

The study deals with the epic and mythological element in Fishta's dramaturgy, analyzing the way in which the author combines different cultural and literary sources, as an intertext in the construction of dramatic works. In his dramatic creations, subjects and characters often have their source from ancient mythology, as well as from the Albanian folkloric and mythological tradition. In Fishta's melodramas, the creation of scenes where human characters are united, whether historical figures or created with mythological characters, is noticeable. Drama, "The Return of Ulysses to Ithaca", Fishta takes the subject from antiquity, but the contextualization is in a diachronic Albanian cut. Dramatic characters are often presented with pronounced heroic traits and great moral determination, recalling the epic figures of the Albanian tradition. In some dramatic texts, a special fusion is observed between the gallery of characters of Albanian mythology and those of ancient mythology, placing them next to each other and re-functionalizing them in connection with each other as if to show that they have the same values to narrate. Such a co-presence appears in the melodrama "Jerina", where elements of the Homeric epic are introduced into elements of the Albanian epic. The presence of elements of the epic sometimes appears through the characters, sometimes through typical structures such as that of the chorus that recalls the specifics of ancient theater, the collective dimension that comments on events and creates a connection between dramatic action and tradition. The re-appropriation of epics is a dramaturgical model that is related to the author's clear attempt to support Albanian theater in the models of European theater, inspired by Shakespeare and Metastasio. Fishta does not directly copy the epic, but transforms the epic spirit into a dramatic form, creating a dramaturgy that combines the Albanian epic tradition, mythology and the classical theater model. In accordance with this aesthetic concept, Fishta builds melodramas using a powerful poetic language and loaded with emotions. In this way, his dramaturgy appears as a combination of epic, mythological and dramatic elements, contributing to the shaping of a special model of Albanian national theater.

Keywords

Drama, epic, tradition, intertextuality, narrative

Introduction

The dramatic texts written by Fishta are distinguished by historical, religious and oral subjects. Fishta is a good connoisseur of mythology, folklore and ethnography, he uses and merges them in his works.
Fishta, in his attempt to influence Albanians through his dramatic texts, took as an example the models of other tragedians, especially that of Alfieri, the famous Italian tragedian, who was inspired for his plays by a high patriotic feeling.
The way in which the subjects are actualized and the language in which they are created, make these works have original values and become models for Albanian dramaturgy. The language they use is an attempt to move away from that of religious writings but also of oral texts, because it is quite poetic and very elaborate. The writing style of these plays is a mixture of the classical style with that of popular creations. In some cases, the verse becomes quite elaborate and dense with imagery, and in others it is quite simple and direct.
Fishta was a very good evaluator and connoisseur of folklore, so it is understandable why in the plays written by him, a strong intertextual relationship with folk legends and myths is observed through the borrowing of subjects, but also in phraseology, or even in the recovery of poetic figuration.

Fishta and the Homeric epic

Fishta was a connoisseur and appreciator of Greek dramaturgy. He wrote plays that take their subject from the literature of Greek antiquity, which is particularly noticeable in the works "Odysseus" and "Ephigenia in Aulius". Fishta does not intend to narrate subjects taken from antiquity, but to see them as a way to narrate in another context. He recontextualizes these subjects by giving them a national spirit. Typical examples of intertextual relationships are the plays Odysseus, The Return of Ulysses to Ithaca, which is related to one of the well-known Homeric poems.
Fishta reinterprets this subject in an Albanian atmosphere, where the events are narrated under a new subtext. Besa, which is one of the pillars and essence of the Albanian tradition, is emphasized. The heroes are also built in size and in the mindset and mentality of the heroes of the Albanian epic. Although their names belong to Greek mythology, in terms of features and characterization, they are more similar to our heroes; where bravery goes hand in hand with loyalty. The way the dramatic conflict is built, a recognizable coloration of the Albanian mentality appears.
In the drama "Ephigenia n'Aulli", Ephigenia is drawn with a beauty, but also with a sadness that accompanies every word, every action of the heroine. The narrator has enveloped the heroine with all possible sadness, with melancholy for the time she lived. And yet her entire behavior is noble, clear in the act of invincibility and the necessity of her sacrifice. The figure of Ephigenia in Fishta's drama, "Ephigenia n'Aulli", is given. But in Fishta's tragedy, although a stronger conflict with herself and others is created in the figure of the heroine, in accordance with the literary type of tragedy that he defines in the metatext, in the end her words are given with strong epic and hymnic notes.
In the figure of Ephigenia, Fishta has very clearly highlighted the high purpose of her self-sacrifice, remaining faithful to the image of the hero who displays distinct features from others, typical of epic texts. The epic hero is characterized by features and ideals that make him rise above others and sacrifice himself for ideals, goals that determine the fate of his people. In

Fishta, the relationship of his text with the ancient intertext is close. The works of antiquity serve as a thematic starting point, but Fishta has treated them on an authentic level, adapting them to the Albanian tradition. His dramas, through well-known archetypes, express the spiritual and ethical world of Albanian culture.

Fishta and the elements he took from orality:

One of the most popular dramatic genres in the period before 1944 was the melodrama, which was written especially by Fishta of the Franciscan school and Zadeja of the Jesuit school. Their melodramas are a mixture of historical events and mythological images, giving clear national messages. They are pieces "full of religious and national grace, but not only that.
In "The Albanian Woman" and "Jerina", which is closer to a stage recital than to a drama, a communication of mythology with reality appears, the song of hymning the Albanian world is sung in variants; of hymning knowledge, of the new civilization; the Fishta doctrine of education and learning appears, its religious and national ideology with its permanent form; Atmë e Fe, sometimes with veiled polemic.
In "The Albanian Woman" and "Jerina ose Mbretnesha e luleve", in which the events take place in both real and mythological.
In "Jerina ose Mbretnesha e luleve.", the events take place on a mountain, where the beauty of nature is enchanting. In this melodrama, Fishta will describe in detail the Munella Mountain, the rocks with crystal clear water, the meadows full of flowers and among them a rare flower known by the name of Jerina. Thus like the white and fragrant flower that blooms in May, this name also has a melodrama.
In this original topos, the mythological element typical of the epic is introduced. Jerina, which has the name of a flower from the Munella mountain, is placed in a narrative plan with the clocks, fairies and shtojzovalte who are mythological beings.
The events narrated in both of Fishta's melodramas are original, but the atmosphere that is created is mythological. Fishta, in some cases, will create intertextual relationships with folk tales through motifs that are taken up.
Recapture of motifs that are refunctionalized
In the melodrama "The Albanian Woman", Silja, a girl from Shkodra, unintentionally steps into the land of fairies, so she must be punished. She is not punished, because with her innocence and kindness she earns the respect of the fairies. This reaction of the fairies and the hours goes against expectations, but this has happened before in popular literature.
As it is considered in Albanian popular folklore in general and in the epic of the Kreshniks in particular, the land of fairies is considered a sacred place, untouchable for people. That place is preserved as sacred, but also as a place where fear and respect come together. If you step into that place, even unintentionally, you are punished, "sold out". There are stories in folklore that show how shepherds with their cattle in the mountains inadvertently enter these areas, or a mountaineer cuts trees or hunts animals in these spaces, often without even knowing it. They are not forgiven by the fairies, but are punished; someone remains speechless, someone falls ill, or has mental readings.
In the Epic of the Kreshniks, the hero trespasses on this sacred area, but is not punished, on the contrary, they give him to drink from the fairies' milk, making him gain extraordinary power. as in the case of Muji. In the melodrama "The Albanian Woman of the City", the main character Sila, a son of man, trespasses on the fairies' space, but they do not punish him.

In the epic, the hero is given power by the fairies, is protected by them in battle or is given advice, warned, etc. In this way, in the songs of the Kreshniks, a direct connection is created between their heroes and mythological figures. Fear is replaced by a relationship of trust, support, and even friendship. This relationship will be established with Siles and Orevë in the melodrama "Alqiptarja e qytetnueme"

The appearance and communication of human beings with mythological beings.

In "Jerina, the Queen of Flowers", Jerina is presented with great beauty and stands above all the flowers. Fishta has described her in a way that makes it seem like she is an angel descended to earth, but also like a mountain fairy, in whom divine and human beauty are intertwined. Jerina is compared to orevë and fairies not only in terms of beauty but also in terms of strength, courage, and love for their country.
After the sun's rays,/after the mouth of the April fool;
after the face of the rose;/after the hand of the lily leaf,
Just as in Greek tragedies, mythical figures interact with people in a very simple way and without any difficulty.
In "The Urban Albanian", Sila converses with the clocks of the Albanian Clock as if she were talking to an ordinary person
The Clock of Albania: Are you Albanian, my daughter? The Clock of Albania asks Sila, the little girl
Silja: Yes, Albanian/In those Shkodra apples, at the head of the Gegnia'/From the direction of the Albanians/The light of Liberty shines on me' (...)
Silja: Yes, Albanian and son of the Albanian/tribe and faith and religion/who has never denied me!
While the clock responds to the Albanian Clock: I am the Albanian clock/Silja: Who do you think these verses are?
Albanian Clock; One Hour Another Fairy.../These are, my, shtojzovallet;/The same beauties of the Earth
Supernatural beings create special relationships with human characters, they become their protectors. This happens in the epic of the Kreshniks, the same thing happens in Fishta's melodramas. The events and characters that act among them are human, and in some cases are even historical, but often they are also mythological and come from sources of mythology and folklore.
In them, historical events from the past are often presented, but also current events of the time when the author lives.
As in the world's mythical and folkloric Albanian tradition, he uses the spiritualization of

Dance in the role of the chorus

Albanian dances, which are thought to be an abbreviation of the word shtojzovalle, in most cases sing in groups, playing the role of the chorus in Greek tragedy.
Dance is a narrative structure that takes on several functions.
In some cases, they present the time and environment in which the events to be narrated take place.
From the first part of the melodrama "Jerina.., all the flowers gather and in the form of a dance

sing of the departure of winter and the vitality of nature. The joy that is felt in the air, on the ground, in the blossoming of flowers, in the singing of birds, even among people who want to dance.
With the detailed descriptions they make of the place, they present details from the place where the events take place, but also create a magical atmosphere that is both human and mythological. At some moments the flowers unite and sing and dance together at once, showing the pleasure that spring is coming. The snow has already gone,/The winter has gone,/they have bought it./A beautiful field./Spring is coming./With a beautiful shadow/That is coming.
Or in some cases the dance introduces the main character, for example when they introduce Jerina.
Dance: I ka i Vashë, èmnit Jerina/N'at Shqypni Like spring/ Like that spring on the hills,/ Like that flower that the wind blows on./ Her Duke is like the light of dawn/ Her word goes whispering,/ Like the breeze among the flowers.
They present but also praise her beauty and purity. They express admiration by creating the feeling and atmosphere of a ceremonial, a typical coronation and admiration ritual.
Orchestral Dance: Preserve, God, for life the Queen,/ Keep your hand on her head/.. On the throne of our kingdom, may she always live happily/ Under the ukurotree, which she wears around her forehead
Dance 1: How beautiful our Queen is/ Good luck to us, my, good luck to us!/ Easter stands like a cypress/ Good luck to us all.
The dance expresses collective emotions, both in case of joy and in case of collective pain, suffering. They act as the collective voice of the dramatic world.
In some cases, in Fishta, the function of dance "passes to the level of a didactic moralizing story, which develops in parallel with the basic dramatic action, slowing it down". The transition from epic language to lyrical notes
Fishta›s concept of dramaturgy is that of the epic type, so the heroes speak with a certain declamation and emphasis that depended on the sometimes mystically colored subjects. In the melodramas, the epic element is more subdued and merges with the lyrical element. He begins the melodramas as a typical romantic drama with an image of nature, where sadness has filled the human soul, although spring.
Fishta places Sila, his heroine, in an idyllic world. He describes to us a peaceful, beautiful nature, but Sila is sad at heart. In this lyrical world outside and in these internal concerns, a strong contrast is created. God has blessed this place with the greatest beauties, but this place has been attacked, torn apart and prevented from developing.
Fishta›s spirit in the melodramas displays a more visible lyricism, which was transmitted in more measured and generalizing feelings. Especially in "Jerina" there is a remarkable ability to describe sad, melancholic states of mind and to manage to give us very well hearts with great feelings, heroines but with a sensitive soul and in a completely idyllic environment.

Results and discussions:

The works published by Fishtës had some limitations in terms of the subjects they treated, this primarily came as a result of the desire to promote the historical developments of the time in which they lived, but without question and as a difficulty that these authors felt in treating the subjects of characters and daily events. The limitation also came for technical reasons, the fact that for a long time in a theatrical piece, all the actors were either entirely male or entirely female

in the cases of schools that were separated by gender. The issue of subjects with themes from the past began to be considered a deficiency in the literary press of that time. We are looking for a modern Albanian drama – this will begin to be articulated as a request by scholars of Albanian literature in the 30s-40s who are increasingly seeking the inclusion of social problems of the time in dramatic texts.

Fishta›s melodramas have an inevitable combination of ethics and aesthetics. The writer often, through the dramatic text, makes an effort to give an educational and moralizing message for the preservation of ethnicity and the development of the values of the nation. Fishta has faith in the younger generations and not in vain does he choose a young girl. In Fishta›s «Shqiptarja e qiytenneume», the conversation of Sile, a 13-year-old girl from Shkodra, with the Hour of Albania has explicit goals to show the values and strength of Albania and that Albanians must fight to protect it at all costs. He will also choose a young girl, Jerina, in the melodrama of the same name, as the queen of Albania.

Conclusions and recommendations:

The first impetus to realize Fishta›s various dramatic works may have been for national and often didactic reasons, but beyond this Fishta managed to create a literary experience in the field of dramaturgy and even created several models of language processing and close relationships with Albanian and European mythology. The way the works are constructed in the field of dramaturgy indicates sufficient knowledge in the development of this genre, which is especially evident in the weaving of the action, although there are cases when it is affected by the desires of authorial interventions.

Fishta, by creating various pieces in the field of dramaturgy and putting some of them on stage, created literary models in Albanian literature in this genre, being encouraged by the best Albanian literary creations, by the epic of the Kreshniks and by legendary songs, etc.

The role played by Fishta, who «tries and succeeds in dramatizing social and political issues of the time such as «The Albanian Citizen» and «The Albanian Woman» is important. The drama «Judas Maccabees» stands out in particular, where issues with clear nuances of the current political situation are discussed, with which Fishta created a true model for the development of the literary genre of drama.

The frequent use of a genre brings perfection within a writer himself, first and foremost, and then within an entire literature. In Fishta›s case, the use of the dramatic genre brought in 1940 the melodrama «Jerina ase brebnesh e luleve», which is considered by the researcher Hamiti to be his most ambitious work.

It is a work with an original subject filled with symbolic figures that give it obvious lyrical notes. In this work, he manages to completely move away from the everydayness of language and manages to This is a completely polished language and is a result of the long time it took to write it. If you compare “The Albanian Woman” in 1929 with “Jerina ose Mbretnesha e luleve” in 1940, you will notice that the language is more polished and the motifs more original.

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Fishta, Gjergj, (1997), Jerina ase mbretnesha e luleve, Dramatika, Prishtinë, Rilindja
Hamiti, Sabri, (1997), Dramatika, Prishtinë, Rilindja,
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Kubrickian Symmetry: Visual axis and modern subjectivity in his cinema

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Abstract

The analysis of the concept of visual symmetry in the filmmaking of Stanley Kubrick continues to remain compelling in every scholarly respect. On a methodological level, this article contextualizes the conceptual function of form and axial composition in Kubrick's cinema, examining symmetry not only as a stylistic choice of the director, but also as a structure of meaning with epistemological and ontological implications.Does visual symmetry function as an instrument that generates subjectivity and narrative relativism? To arrive at a well-grounded argumentative definition of this question, the article interweaves David Bordwell's neoformalism with Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of the image (movement-image / time-image), as well as Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary space and the apparatus theory of Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz.To structure this analytical outline, the films 2001: A Space Odyssey, The Shining, and Eyes Wide Shut are examined.The article argues that symmetry is not used merely as an aesthetic formalism of authorial style, but is structured and operates as a modern technique that places the centered subject within an architecture of rationality and control, where it becomes clearly evident that the visual order in Kubrick's films materializes the tension between Enlightenment rationality, its existential crisis, and reality.

Keywords

Architecture, narrative relativism, aesthetic mechanism

Introduction

Director Kubrick places visual symmetry at the core of his filmmaking aesthetics, structuring the image with geometric precision and shaping cinematic space through a disciplined system of organization. This article reinforces the idea that symmetry in Kubrick's filmmaking should be interpreted not merely as an aesthetic choice, but also as a spatial technology that shapes the modern subject situated within mechanisms of power. Subjectivity in Kubrick's cinema is paradoxical. It is not structured through traditional emotional intimacy, but through formal distance. This conceptual approach often places characters at the center of the frame, surrounded by symmetrical architecture that suggests order, control, and rationality. Kubrick's axial compositions position bodies within a regime of centralization, orienting perspective toward the vanishing point and stabilizing the visual horizon. From this interpretive standpoint, his symmetry functions as an apparatus: it disciplines the gaze and positions the subject within a controlled order.

Paradoxically, these rigorously symmetrical frames simultaneously become terrains of psychological disintegration, technological collapse, and moral crisis for the characters. The phenomenon of symmetry generates a constant tension between visual order and subjective destabilization, transforming the cinematic platform into an arena of conflict between control and emotional as well as psychological instability. Subjectivity in Kubrick's cinema unfolds paradoxically: it is not constituted through traditional emotional intimacy, but through formal distance. Characters are almost always positioned at the center of the frame, surrounded by symmetrical architecture that suggests order, control, and rationality. Yet precisely within this apparent order lie internal crises.

To elaborate this, the article extends its argument across four theoretical perspectives:

1. The analysis of symmetry as a cognitive structure according to David Bordwell.
2. Its reading in light of the Deleuzian distinction between the movement-image and the time-image.
3. The conceptualization of symmetry as disciplinary space within Michel Foucault's theoretical framework.
4. Its examination as an apparatus of identification in the theory developed by Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz.

Within the continuation of this filmic analysis, it is emphasized that symmetry in Stanley Kubrick's cinema appears as a mechanism for organizing visual space, and at the same time as a structure that produces subjectivity, discipline, and crisis within a rationalized visual order. From this line of reasoning, it can be argued that symmetry assumes a dual role and function in Kubrick's filmmaking.

Kubrick deliberately employs symmetry to manipulate the viewer's perception. The central placement of the subject generates a sense of stability, yet at the same time produces unease. Kubrick understands that the human eye seeks balance; however, when balance is presented in an extreme form, it is perceived as artificial, and this artificiality provokes critical distance. In this way, symmetry becomes a means of producing a dual experience: proximity and detachment simultaneously.

At its core, Kubrick's symmetry unfolds as a metaphor for rational order, while the narrative reveals the chaos of human nature. This dialectic in Kubrick's films generates philosophical tension. The director achieves this through a visual order that is controlled, mathematically calculated, and cold. In contrast, the psychological chaos that emerges is impulsive, violent, and

irrational. In Kubrick's filmmaking, symmetry functions as a form of harmony that conceals chaos.

Theoretical Framework

To outline the analytical perspective of this article, several supporting theoretical references are employed. From the outset, the American film theorist David Bordwell argues that film form guides the spectator's inferential processes. Within this conceptual framework, Kubrick's symmetry reduces ambiguity and consolidates perception by minimizing spatial uncertainty. This kind of visual stability is not neutral; rather, it gives rise to the production of a subject who perceives the world as rationally organized. Thus, according to Bordwell's neoformalist theory, form in cinema operates as a cognitive structure.

If we take *The Shining* as an example, the Steadicam movements maintain the central axis while following the character Danny through the corridors of the Overlook Hotel.

The vanishing point stabilizes spatial orientation, while the narrative provokes psychological destabilization in the viewer. In Kubrick's filmmaking, visual order intensifies the effect of the subject's madness. Thus, form precedes emotion and prepares it. Paraphrasing Bordwell's theory, we may say that Kubrick's use of symmetry initially creates stability before ultimately destabilizing it.

In continuation of this analytical discourse, the ideas of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze prove essential. Deleuze argues that in the relationship between image and movement, it is action that organizes time; thus, the movement-image in cinema is characterized by a consolidated link between perception and action. By contrast, in the time-image this connection dissolves. According to Deleuze, Kubrick's symmetry makes use of spaces that are clearly legible, structured, and navigable, but this spatial coherence is later deliberately disrupted throughout the visual narrative.

For example, in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the spacecraft Discovery One represents modern rationality. Its spaces are symmetrical, clean, and functional. The astronauts operate within a geometrically organized system. However, at a certain moment, the malfunction of HAL 9000 destabilizes this symmetrical order. When the viewer encounters the symmetrical framing of HAL's red eye, it becomes a focal point of anxiety. Meanwhile, in the "Star Gate" sequence, axiality dissolves into an optical flux. It is precisely in this sequence that the narrative shifts from movement-image to time-image. Symmetry, which in the early stages of the film guaranteed order, loses its orienting function. The subject begins to confront time as a pure experiential phenomenon.

In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Stanley Kubrick connects symmetry with transcendence and human evolution. The environments of the space station and the final baroque-style room are composed along a symmetrical axis. In this film, symmetry functions as a symbol of cosmic order, a metaphor for technological infallibility, and simultaneously as a structure that suggests a superior intelligence. The subjectivity of the astronaut Bowman is constructed through a transition from controlled symmetrical space toward a metaphysical experience. Initially, symmetry expresses control, but later it becomes a framework for transcending human limits.

In *Eyes Wide Shut*, the ritual scenes are structured with pronounced axial symmetry. The space of action is organized and decorated ceremonially, reflecting hidden structures of power.

The subjectivity of Dr. Bill Harford is formed through his movements and actions within these symmetrical spaces; Kubrick consistently places the character in a position controlled by

architecture. In this film, symmetry reflects invisible power, hierarchical structures of desire and sexuality, as well as anxiety surrounding masculine identity.

In line with this argument, it is important to emphasize that Kubrick uses symmetry to manipulate the spectator's perception. The central placement of the subject generates a sense of stability, yet simultaneously produces unease within the frame. This occurs because the human eye seeks balance; however, when balance appears excessive, it is perceived as artificial, and this artificiality produces critical distance. In this way, symmetry becomes a tool for generating a dual experience: both proximity and distance at once.

At its core, Kubrick's symmetry functions as a metaphor for rational order, while the narrative often reveals the chaos of human nature. This dialectic creates philosophical tension for the viewer. In summary, visual order in Kubrick is controlled, mathematical, and cold, whereas psychological chaos is impulsive, violent, and irrational. Thus, Kubrickian symmetry is not merely harmony it is a mask of chaos.

Another theoretical perspective that complements this framework is that of the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault, who argues that architecture produces disciplined bodies through the organization of visibility. Foucault emphasizes that symmetry is a condition of visibility and that architecture itself is a form of power. Within a symmetrical space, the body is clearly exposed.

Stanley Kubrick extensively uses architecture as a model of modernity, evident in spaces such as hospitals, hotels, prisons, spacecraft, and aristocratic residences. In *A Clockwork Orange*, the Ludovico treatment sequence places the character Alex at the center of the frame, surrounded symmetrically by medical authorities. The composition visualizes discipline: the body is exposed, controlled, and reformatted.

In *The Shining*, the Overlook Hotel functions as a Foucauldian heterotopia a space where different temporalities and mentalities coexist. The symmetry of the corridors suggests orientation, while their repetitive structure produces disorientation. In *Eyes Wide Shut*, the masked ritual scene is organized in a circular formation, with central authority positioned along a ceremonial axis. Here, symmetry reflects the invisible power of authority.

Baudry and Metz, in their apparatus theory, argue that the camera produces the subject through address and identification. Kubrick's symmetry renders this identification self-conscious, as the center of the frame becomes both a position of power and a position of risk. Kubrick deliberately exaggerates symmetry in his filmmaking to the point of formal self-awareness, where artificiality itself becomes intentional. He places the viewer within the axis of visual power, while simultaneously exposing the fragility of that power. The spectator's position often aligns with an institutional point of view, creating ethical ambiguity.

From this analysis, it becomes evident that symmetry in Kubrick's cinema serves several functions:

a) the centralization of the body within rational architecture,
b) the alignment of the spectator's gaze with institutional structures,
c) the stabilization of perception prior to its destabilization, and
d) the exposure of the crisis of modern rationality.

Throughout this argument, it becomes clear that symmetry is not merely a neutral formal element; rather, it constitutes a visual regime of modernity. The analysis of Kubrick's films in this article concretizes the use of symmetry in cinema.

In *The Shining* (1980), the symmetry of corridors and rooms is employed both horizontally and vertically to intensify isolation. The camera is positioned at the center of the corridor to amplify

the sense of uncontrolled and inevitable encounters. The composition of characters particularly Jack, who is frequently placed at the center of the frame reflects dangerous power and emotional tension, while the surrounding symmetry intensifies the viewer's sense of uncertainty and fear (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004).

In *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Kubrick employs radical horizontal and vertical symmetry in outer space scenes, creating a meditative perception in which the viewer becomes part of a reflection on the cosmos and evolution. The image of the Monolith is centrally positioned within a symmetrical frame, symbolizing progress and universal knowledge, and encouraging subjective interpretation of human evolution (Carringer, 2000).

In *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), Kubrick uses symmetry in scenes of violence to express an ironic contrast between visual aesthetics and narrative brutality.

The protagonist Alex and his gang are often placed at the center of the frame, while the surrounding symmetry reflects social control and moral manipulation (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2010).

Finally, in *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), Kubrick uses symmetry to create a sense of isolation and erotic tension, allowing viewers to experience the subjective perception of the protagonists while reflecting psychological fantasy and obsession. In this film, visual symmetry, combined with the use of light and shadow, intensifies the sense of mystery and subjective reflection.

Methodology

This article examines the way axial symmetry operates in the cinema of director Stanley Kubrick. Throughout the methodological process of structuring the arguments and ideas, several analytical approaches are employed.

First, a formal and detailed analysis of film sequences (composition, camera movement, depth of perspective, and lighting) is conducted, enabling a deeper understanding of all cinematic elements. Second, a comparative analysis is used to identify recurring axial structures, providing a clearer view of the symbolic and metaphorical dimensions within the films. Third, the narrative is interpreted through an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, combining fields such as aesthetics, philosophy, and theories of power.

This methodological approach facilitates a more precise analytical breakdown and brings us closer to a conceptual definition of axial symmetry in Stanley Kubrick's cinema.

Conclusion

In the cinema of Stanley Kubrick, symmetry functions as both an epistemological and disciplinary apparatus. In his films, symmetry organizes perception in line with David Bordwell's framework. At the same time, it becomes a mechanism that dramatizes the transition toward ontological crisis, in accordance with the theory of Gilles Deleuze. From the perspective of Michel Foucault, Kubrick's axial symmetry contributes to the materialization of power within visual narrative, while also enabling the destabilization of identification, as theorized by Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz.

In Kubrick's cinematic universe, the architecture of the image becomes the architecture of the modern mind. The more perfected the visual order, the more visibly the fragility of the subject emerges within the narrative.

In The Shining, symmetry is more than an aesthetic choice; it operates as an instrument of control over perception and subjectivity. In one instance, it consolidates historical and social order; in another, it dissolves psychological stability. Nevertheless, in both cases, the center of

the frame remains the site where the subject either disintegrates or materializes within Kubrick's architecture of rationality.
The analysis of Kubrick's major films demonstrates that symmetry is more than an artistic choice: it is an apparatus for the production of the subject. Through visual axiality, Kubrick organizes perception, disciplines the body, and ultimately destabilizes the subject at the narrative climax.
This article demonstrates that Kubrick's symmetry constitutes a visual regime of modernity: it materializes the tension between rationality and chaos, between institutional order and subjective fragility, and between aesthetic control and emotional experience. This approach offers a framework for further studies on the visual production of subjectivity in modern cinema and for critical readings of film form as an epistemological apparatus.
Subjectivity and visual symmetry in Kubrick are inseparable. The careful use of symmetry intensifies the viewer's subjective perception. This form of symmetry is employed in his films to reflect the psychology and emotional fragmentation of characters, while simultaneously contributing to the creation of visual and philosophical metaphors.
Kubrick's cinema is not merely a series of stories to be watched; it constitutes subjective experiences that encourage active interpretation, where visual symmetry stands as one of the most powerful tools in achieving this effect. His legacy continues to inspire contemporary filmmakers who experiment with subjective perception, and the use of symmetry and frame composition has established Kubrick's style as a reference standard in contemporary cinema.

Theoretical Discussions

The theoretical contributions of Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault provide several frameworks for discussing symmetry. From these perspectives, according to Deleuze, in the film Barry Lyndon symmetry represents the movement-image: perception remains coherent and cinematic time stays linear. In contrast, in The Shining symmetry disintegrates across different dimensions: space remains, but time and subjectivity fragment, thus functioning as the time-image.
From Foucault's perspective, Kubrick employs symmetrical architecture in his films to control vision and produce an exposed subject; however, the effects vary, ranging from historical aesthetics to psychological anxiety.
In continuation of these theoretical arguments, it becomes evident that Stanley Kubrick treats symmetry as a multifaceted apparatus: perceptual, disciplinary, and narrative. This form of symmetry grants visuality an active role in the production of the modern subject.

Notes

1. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).
2. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).
3. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1995).
4. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, nr. 1 (1986): 22–27.

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The "new wave" of women film directors in Kosovo: Aesthetic transformation and narrative reconfiguration

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Abstract

This paper examines the emergence of the so-called "new wave" of women film directors in Kosovo as a structural transformation within contemporary national cinema. The research problem is linked to the lack of systematic academic frameworks for understanding how this generation reshapes film language, authorship, and cultural representation. The aim of the study is to conceptualize this movement as a new cinematic paradigm that simultaneously redefines aesthetic form and social meaning. The objectives are: to identify dominant thematic patterns, to analyze narrative and visual strategies, and to examine the re-positioning of Kosovar cinema within the global cultural sphere.The study is guided by the following research questions: How do these women directors transform narrative and representational models? How are individual experiences turned into collective social metaphors? How is Kosovar cinema redefined within global film discourse? The central hypothesis argues that this movement constitutes a coherent aesthetic and ideological formation that shifts women from objects of representation to full narrative subjects, thereby establishing a new filmic epistemology.The methodology is qualitative, combining film analysis, feminist film theory, and cultural studies. The population includes contemporary Kosovar films directed by women, while the sample consists of internationally recognized works produced between 2020 and 2022. Research instruments include textual analysis, thematic mapping, narrative-structural analysis, and discourse analysis of festival reception and film criticism.The findings and discussion indicate a consistent movement toward intimate, minimalist, and reflective cinematic forms, constructed around universal themes such as identity, trauma, resistance, freedom, and female subjectivity. The conclusion argues that this "new wave" represents a paradigmatic shift that redefines the cultural identity and global positioning of Kosovar cinema.

Keywords

Post-war cinema; cultural memory; filmic subjectivity; gender authorship; narrative minimalism

Introduction

In the last decade, Kosovar cinema has entered a new phase of development, characterized by a noticeable increase in the presence of women directors and by a significant transformation of aesthetic and narrative forms. This phenomenon, which in the framework and argument of this study is carefully conceptualized as the "new wave" of women directors, does not merely represent a numerical shift in film production. Rather, it signals a deeper and more complex reconfiguration of modes of representation, authorship, and the production of meaning in film. At the same time, many of these films by women directors have received significant attention and positive critical recognition, as well as important awards at major international film festivals, including the *Sundance Film Festival* (USA) and the *Venice Film Festival* (Italy). Consequently, most discussions and evaluations of contemporary Kosovar cinema tend to focus primarily on their institutional success, while a systematic approach that treats these films as part of a broader contemporary aesthetic and ideological formation remains largely absent.
In this context, this study aims to argue that this "new wave" of women directors in Kosovo constitutes a new cinematic paradigm, which intrinsically and coherently combines conceptual and aesthetic minimalism, narrative fragmentation, and the reconfiguration of gendered subjectivity. Therefore, within this framework, the main research questions are: how is film language transformed in these films? how is female experience articulated in relation to social structures? and how is a new position of Kosovar cinema constructed within global film discourse?

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is primarily based on an intersection of narrative film theory, feminist theory, and transnational cinema studies. It is argued that these three components constitute a sufficient "foundation" for addressing and developing the topic in its entirety. Regarding the theoretical approach to film narration, it should be noted that, according to David Bordwell, contemporary cinema is increasingly characterized by a shift from classical narrative structures toward open forms oriented around subjective experience[1]. In this context, causality is weakened, and the subjective experience of characters becomes central; such structures often privilege ambiguity, fragmentation, and an orientation toward individual perception of reality, rather than a linear and clearly defined progression of the plot. This tendency in cinematic production is also evident in contemporary Kosovar cinema. Thus, Bordwell's concept remains essential for a more comprehensive understanding of the films analyzed in this study, which are largely not built on the logic of dramatic resolution, but rather on the continuous experience of states that reflect the emotional and psychological conditions of the characters.
Regarding the aspect of gender representation, in our analysis we inevitably draw on Laura Mulvey's theory of the "male gaze", which serves as a key starting point for understanding how these films shift the woman from an object to a subject of narration. Mulvey argues that classical cinema operates through a "male gaze" that structures the visual experience according to patriarchal desire, positioning women as objects of visual pleasure and men as bearers of the gaze and narrative control[2]. From an aesthetic perspective, we also rely on realism as articulated by André Bazin, who advocates for the use of the long take, uninterrupted duration, and a restrained economy of intervention (including silence) as means of preserving the spatial and

1 Bordwell, David. *"The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice."* Film Criticism 4, nr. 1 (Fall 1979): 56–64.
2 Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 14–26.

temporal continuity of reality, thereby enabling a more authentic and less manipulated cinematic experience for the viewer[3]. These elements are clearly present in the films analyzed in this study. Finally, in concluding the analytical framework, we address the positioning of this "new wave" within a global context through the concept of "accented cinema" by Hamid Naficy, which provides not only a theoretical but also a practical framework for understanding how small or peripheral cinemas, in this case Kosovar cinema, articulate their identity within a transnational space[4].

Methodology

Regarding the methodological framework, this study is based on an integrated qualitative approach that combines film analysis, narrative analysis, and thematic analysis in order to examine films simultaneously as aesthetic and narrative structures. The selected sample includes four films by emerging women directors: *"Zgjoi / Hive" (2021) by Blerta Basholli, "Vera Dreams of the Sea" (2021) by Kaltrina Krasniqi, "Looking for Venera" by Norika Sefa, and "The Hill Where Lionesses Roar" (2021) by Luana Bajrami, all of whom represent a new generation in Kosovar cinema that we conceptualize as the "new wave" of women film directors in Kosovo. The analysis focuses on four main dimensions: visual structure and film style, narrative organization, representation of subjectivity, and dominant thematic concerns. Through this approach, the study aims to highlight both the formal characteristics of these films and the ways in which they articulate experiences and meanings within a contemporary cultural context.*

Results and discussion

One of the most consistent features across the analyzed films is the use of a minimalist aesthetic, which functions as a meaningful strategy rather than a purely stylistic choice. In *"Zgjoi / Hive"*, Blerta Basholli constructs a restrained visual language in which long takes and static camerawork generate a sense of real time and continuity. A particularly significant sequence is the collective labor of the women, where the repetitive rhythm of action and the absence of non-diegetic music shift the focus from spectacle toward process.
In this way, post-war trauma is not represented through direct visual dramatization, but through the structure of everyday life.
In *"Vera Dreams of the Sea"*, Kaltrina Krasniqi employs space as a central narrative device. Interior environments-such as the house, corridors, and offices-function not merely as background, but as spatial structures that restrict the protagonist's movement. A close reading of the *mise-en-scène reveals that Vera (Teuta Ajdini) is frequently positioned at the edges of the frame, producing a visual tension that reflects her social condition.*
In "Looking for Venera", Norika Sefa develops an aesthetic of fragmentation and proximity. The camera closely follows the character's body in an intimate manner, often avoiding conventional compositional structures. This creates an immediate sense of bodily and emotional experience.
In *"The Hill Where Lionesses Roar"*, Luana Bajrami combines kinetic energy with a pervasive sense of instability, constructing a visual aesthetic that reflects the uncertain condition of its characters.

3 Bazin, André. *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 1. Translated by Hugh Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.
4 Naficy, Hamid. "Phobic Spaces and Liminal Panics: Independent Transnational Film Genre." *Screen* 44, nr. 2 (2003): 203–220.

Across all cases, minimalism should not be understood as reduction in a classical sense, but rather as a strategy for intensifying cinematic experience, in line with the principles of realism articulated by André Bazin[5].

Meanwhile, in terms of narrative structure, it becomes evident that these films are not built solely on a classical structure with a clear beginning, climax, and resolution, but also on a logic of experience that gives dramatic intensity to the film. For instance, in *"Looking for Venera", the narrative unfolds primarily through fragments that are not necessarily connected in a causal manner. As a result, this fragmentation creates an open narrative, where meaning is gradually constructed by the viewer and shaped according to perception.*

On the other hand, in "Zgjoi / Hive", the narrative process is linked to the gradual transformation of the main character Fahrije, brilliantly performed by Yllka Gashi, rather than being structured around a single climactic moment. In theoretical terms, this corresponds to David Bordwell's idea of modern narration as a perceptual process[6]. Furthermore, it is quite clear that these films, both in their content and directorial approach, enact a clear shift from objectification toward subjectivity. In other words, instead of the woman being merely an object of the gaze, she becomes the central subject of lived experience within the film. In this sense, these films function as a response to the model described by Laura Mulvey[7]. The camera does not fetishize the body, but instead follows it as a bearer of experience. It is precisely the lived experience of these Kosovar women and girls that conveys meanings of loss, pain, love, and the motivation to live.

From a thematic perspective, the analysis shows that these films share common concerns such as trauma, identity, and resistance, which are all articulated through the everyday and situated within contemporary social reality.

The film *"Zgjoi / Hive" offers, in a rather exceptional way, a truthful narrative from post-war Kosovo, following the life of Fahrije Hoti, a woman from Krusha e Madhe who, after the disappearance of her husband during the 1999 war, is forced to rebuild her life from the ground up. Within a harsh patriarchal reality, Fahrije decides to establish her own small-scale enterprise for the production of ajvar and honey, thereby challenging not only structures of gender oppression but also the collective stigmas that continue to affect women of war*[8]. Inspired by a real-life story, Blerta Basholli constructs a restrained yet emotionally charged narrative that sensitively portrays a woman struggling for survival, identity, and justice. Within this filmic narration, even the smallest acts of individual independence acquire broader social and political significance, transforming the protagonist's everyday life into an act of resistance. In this context, the directorial approach avoids pathos and the conventional dramatic rhetoric often associated with post-war cinematic treatments, offering instead a profound emotional intimacy that reflects both the fragility and resilience of Kosovar women in their struggle for existence and dignity[9].

Regarding the plot of *"Vera Dreams of the Sea", it can be summarized as follows: Vera (Teuta Ajdini-Jegeni), a middle-aged woman, works as a sign language interpreter and leads a stable life. However, her sense of stability is abruptly disrupted when her husband unexpectedly commits suicide. From this moment on, Vera's difficulties begin: she faces threats from her husband's relatives, who claim ownership of the family house in the village.*

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5 André Bazin, What Is Cinema?, Vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

6 David Bordwell, Narration in the Fiction Film (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 29–47.

7 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18.

8 A. Rangel, "Movie Review (Sundance): 'Hive' Is a Sobering Reflection on the Lives of Women in a Post War, Patriarchal Society," *InSession Film*, January 31, 2021.

9 *Cineuropa*, "Review: *Hive*," February 2, 2021.

As Vera's world becomes increasingly endangered, she is forced to take responsibility for her family's fate. After the funeral, her husband's cousin Ahmeti (Astrit Kabashi) shamelessly claims that he was so close to Fatmir that the latter had left him the house in his will. His version of events is then supported by a dismissive group of village elders, who refuse to acknowledge Vera's rightful claim to the property. Subsequently, a series of escalating threats follows. From a critical perspective, this tense character drama functions as a searing indictment of a culture that places men above women and children in the social hierarchy[10].

In contrast, in *"Looking for Venera", the narrative begins with a peculiar encounter between the shy girl Venera (Kosovare Krasniqi), who questions her patriarchal family environment, and Dorina (Rozafë Çelaj), a more open-minded figure whose strong attitude stimulates Venera's curiosity to explore both the world and herself more deeply. As Venera reflects on the meaning of life, the film gradually introduces a sense of existential absurdity, depicting individuals who conceal an inner world of emotions marked by humiliation, guilt, and disappointment.*

The narrative content of the film "The Hill Where Lionesses Roar" can be summarized as follows: Li (Era Balaj), Jeta (Uratë Bajrami), and Qe (Flaka Latifi), the latter occupying a dominant role within the group, express a persistent rejection of their everyday reality. Set in a peripheral village, the film emphasizes the relationship between space and atmosphere, where the landscape acquires an almost fantastical dimension. The characters move through distinct marginal spaces: an unfinished house and an abandoned swimming pool, while the hill becomes their central point of observation and reflection. From this vantage point, they project an imagined world, making imagination a key mechanism for confronting their reality. Their aspiration to pursue university studies is presented as an attempt to overcome the limitations of their immediate environment.

These films, among others, have achieved remarkable international success, suggesting a repositioning of Kosovar cinema and effectively placing it on a clearly defined global cinematic map. In practical terms, contemporary Kosovar cinema has succeeded in achieving what politics often fails to accomplish: regional and global recognition and communication.

In this regard, the film "Zgjoi / Hive" by Blerta Basholli represents the peak of international success in Kosovar cinema, making history at the Sundance Film Festival (2021), where it won three major awards (Grand Jury Prize, Audience Award, and Directing Award). It continued its extraordinary festival trajectory, winning significant prizes in Warsaw, Valladolid (including the Golden Spike), Montpellier (Antigone d'Or), São Paulo, and numerous other European and international festivals. The film was also included in the shortlist for the Academy Awards, marking a historic achievement for Kosovo.

The film "Vera Dreams of the Sea" by Kaltrina Krasniqi had its premiere at the Venice Film Festival (Orizzonti section), and achieved major success by winning the Grand Prix at the Tokyo International Film Festival. It was also awarded the "Ingmar Bergman" prize at the Göteborg Film Festival and circulated widely across international festivals and platforms such as HBO Max.

Meanwhile, "Looking for Venera" by Norika Sefa premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam, where it received the Special Jury Award. It continued its strong international presence, winning awards in Trieste, Sarajevo, Hong Kong, and other festivals, and was selected as Kosovo's official submission for the Oscars.

10 Meredith Taylor, "Vera Dreams of the Sea (2021)," *Filmuforia*, November 9, 2021.

Similarly, "The Hill Where Lionesses Roar" by Luana Bajrami premiered at the Cannes Film Festival, marking a historic moment for Kosovo. The film received awards for Best Director and Best Screenplay at the Stockholm Film Festival, the FIPRESCI Award in Warsaw, and the Heart of Sarajevo for its actresses at the Sarajevo Film Festival, while also being featured in prestigious festivals such as Toronto and San Francisco.
Overall, these films demonstrate a consolidated presence of Kosovar cinema on the international stage, affirmed through major awards at A-category festivals, global circulation, and critical recognition, as part of a broader "new wave" of authorship.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the "new wave" of women directors in Kosovo is not merely a temporary phenomenon, but a sustained aesthetic and ideological formation that transforms film language, narrative structure, and gender representation. Through a minimalist, subjective, and reflective approach, these authors reconfigure individual experience into a collective discourse, challenging traditional patriarchal models. As a result, Kosovar cinema has not only consolidated its artistic identity but is increasingly asserting itself as a distinct and authentic voice in contemporary global cinema.

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From tableau to duration: The impact of pictorial temporality on film rhythm

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze, from both a theoretical and analytical standpoint, the transformation of the concept of time from painting to cinema, arguing that the long take (sequence shot) constitutes the functional equivalent of the tableau within the filmic medium. In contrast to approaches that focus on iconographic references or formal similarities between the static and the moving image, this study examines the structural influence of pictorial temporality on the construction of film rhythm from a directorial perspective. The significance of the research lies in reframing the painting–film relationship as a transformation of the concept of time, rather than as a merely visual dialogue.The methodology follows a qualitative approach, grounded in textual and visual analysis of long takes in selected works of European and Asian auteur cinema, drawing on theories of perceptual aesthetics, the ontology of the film image, and the concept of the "time-image." The analysis focuses on shot duration, spatial integrity, and the suspension of montage as elements that generate a contemplative experience.The findings indicate that the long take, when structured as an autonomous unit of meaning, shifts rhythm from the dynamics of fragmentation toward the intensity of duration, producing a perceptual experience akin to the contemplation of a painting. In this sense, the director operates as an organizer of time, treating it as an aesthetic material. Ultimately, the study concludes that the influence of painting on cinema manifests not only in composition, but in the very temporal architecture of narrative. It recommends extending the analysis toward empirical studies on audience perception, as well as comparative investigations between auteur and commercial cinema.

Keywords

Long take, ontology of the image, contemplative experience, perceptual aesthetics, time-image

Introduction

The relationship between painting and cinema has been extensively examined in intermedial studies, particularly in relation to visual quotation, iconographic references, and stylistic interconnections between the two media.[1] However, a less explored dimension concerns the transformation of the concept of time from the tableau to film—not at a formal level, but at a structural and perceptual one. If painting operates through a frozen moment, yet one imbued with compressed temporality, the question arises: how is this temporal regime translated into a medium in which time constitutes a fundamental ontological dimension?

Within film aesthetics, time has been treated as a central component of cinematic language. André Bazin argues that the long take (plan-séquence) and depth of field preserve the ontological continuity of reality, granting the spectator interpretive freedom while minimizing the manipulative intervention of editing.[2] Gilles Deleuze, in turn, through the concept of the "time-image," suggests that after the Second World War, cinema shifts from a regime of the movement-image to one in which time becomes autonomous and directly experienced.[3] These approaches provide the theoretical basis for understanding the long take not merely as a stylistic device, but as a structure for the organization of time.

From the perspective of art history, painting is not simply a static image, but an organization of visual and narrative tensions within a closed frame.[4] The tableau contains a suspended narrative, in which the time of action is implied, while the time of contemplation is actualized by the viewer. In this sense, painting produces a contemplative experience in which intensity replaces dynamics. The central question of this paper is whether the long take can be considered the cinematic equivalent of this structure: a single unit of meaning, characterized by spatial integrity, duration, and perceptual density.

The aim of this study is to analyze the transformation of pictorial temporality into film rhythm, arguing that the long take represents an extended form of the tableau in time. Unlike analyses that focus on iconographic similarities between films and specific paintings, this paper examines temporal structure as the point of convergence between the two media. Through the analysis of long takes in the works of Andrei Tarkovsky, Béla Tarr, Theo Angelopoulos, Stanley Kubrick, Akira Kurosawa, and Michelangelo Antonioni, the study aims to demonstrate that film rhythm can be constructed through duration and suspension, generating an experience analogous to the contemplation of a painting.

The working hypothesis of the paper is that the long take, when structured as an autonomous compositional and temporal unit, shifts cinema from a logic of fragmentation toward a contemplative perceptual regime, thereby transforming time into an aesthetic material. In this way, the influence of painting on cinema manifests not only at the level of composition or lighting, but within the very architecture of cinematic time.

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1 Angela Dalle Vacche, Cinema and Painting: How Art Is Used in Film (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); W. J. T. Mitchell, Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

2 André Bazin, What Is Cinema?, vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 35–40.

3 Gilles Deleuze, Cinema 2: The Time-Image, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 16–23.

4 Ernst H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 101–105.

Literature review

The relationship between painting and cinema has been addressed primarily within the framework of intermedial studies, with an emphasis on iconographic quotation and the visual dialogue between the static image and the film image. Angela Dalle Vacche argues that cinema does not merely reference painting, but employs it as a conceptual structure through which aesthetic and ideological meaning is constructed.[5] In a similar vein, W. J. T. Mitchell considers the image as a cultural entity whose meaning shifts depending on the medium, emphasizing that the transition from one visual form to another entails a structural, not merely formal, transformation.[6] However, these approaches focus predominantly on visual reference, and less on the transformation of the temporal regime.

Within film theory, the concept of time has been treated as fundamental to the ontology of the medium. André Bazinunderstands the long take (plan-séquence) as a device that preserves the continuity of reality and reduces the intervention of editing (montage), allowing the spectator to experience time as continuity rather than fragmentation.[7] For Bazin, spatial and temporal integrity establish a more direct relationship between image and reality. This idea provides a basis for considering the long take as an autonomous perceptual unit, comparable to the closed structure of the tableau.

Gilles Deleuze deepens this discussion through the concept of the "time-image," arguing that in modern cinema time is liberated from its dependence on action and becomes a direct dimension of filmic experience.[8] Within this regime, the long take and the suspension of dramatic action produce a lived temporality that no longer functions as a linear narrative device, but as a space for reflection. This approach is essential for understanding the analogy with painting, where the frozen moment contains implied temporality and a space for contemplation.

From the perspective of perceptual aesthetics, Rudolf Arnheim argues that visual composition organizes tensions within the frame and generates meaning through internal balance.[9] This idea is applicable both to painting and to the long take, where meaning emerges not from interruption, but from the internal structure of the image. Ernst Gombrich, in his analysis of representation, emphasizes that the viewer activates narrative time through the interpretation of the static image.[10] This "projected time" constitutes a theoretical parallel to the lived temporality experienced in the long take.

At the authorial level, Andrei Tarkovsky defines cinema as the art of "sculpting in time," considering duration as a fundamental element of film structure.[11] For Tarkovsky, the long take generates a meditative experience and spiritual intensity, bringing cinema closer to the contemplative practice of viewing a painting. This perspective underscores the directorial dimension of temporal organization, which is central to the present study.

Although the existing literature provides strong foundations for analyzing filmic time and intermediality, it lacks a direct articulation that conceptualizes the long take as a structural equivalent of the tableau. Studies on the painting–film relationship tend to focus on iconographic

5 Dalle Vacche, Cinema and Painting, 12–18.
6 Mitchell, Picture Theory, 5–9.
7 Bazin, What Is Cinema?, 37.
8 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 18.
9 Rudolf Arnheim, Film as Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 45–48.
10 Gombrich, Art and Illusion, 112.
11 Andrei Tarkovsky, Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 63–68.

references, while theories of cinematic time rarely connect their analysis to pictorial tradition. This theoretical gap justifies the need for an approach that integrates these two fields through the concept of temporality as a point of convergence between media.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, theoretical-analytical approach, focusing on the structural analysis of cinematic time and on the interpretation of the long take (plan-séquence) as a functional equivalent of the tableau. The methodology combines film textual analysis with the theoretical frameworks of perceptual aesthetics, the ontology of the image, and time-image theory, with the aim of identifying the mechanisms through which pictorial temporality is transformed into film rhythm.

Selection of the film corpus

The selection of films is based on three primary criteria:

1. Presence of extended long takes that significantly exceed the classical average shot length (ASL).
2. Reduction of narrative editing (montage), where rhythm is constructed through duration rather than fragmentation.
3. Directorial intentionality, evidenced through an authorial style and the use of time as an aesthetic element.

Within this framework, the corpus includes selected sequences from the works of:

- Andrei Tarkovsky (Nostalghia, 1983)
- Béla Tarr (Sátántangó, 1994)
- Theo Angelopoulos (The Travelling Players, 1975)
- Stanley Kubrick (Barry Lyndon, 1975)
- Akira Kurosawa (Dreams, 1990)
- Michelangelo Antonioni (L'Avventura, 1960)

These authors represent diverse cultural and aesthetic traditions, yet share a common orientation toward duration as a structuring principle of narrative.

Analysis of duration (indicative quantitative dimension)

Although the study is qualitative, an indicative analysis of shot duration is employed to support the theoretical argument. The following parameters are measured:

- Shot duration (minutes/seconds)
- Position of the shot within the narrative structure
- Its relation to dramatic intensity

These data are not used for statistical generalization, but rather to demonstrate the disproportion between the rhythm of classical cinema and that of contemplative cinema.

Compositional and spatial analysis

Each long take is analyzed across three compositional levels:

- Spatial integritety: the preservation of a continuous frame without interruption through

editing (montage).

- Organization of figures: balance, symmetry, depth, and the figure–ground relationship.
- Internal movement: whether tension is generated through minimal movement or through stasis.

This analysis is grounded in Rudolf Arnheim's concepts of visual organization, as well as in André Bazin's theory of spatial continuity.[12]

Perceptual and phenomenological analysis

At the interpretative level, the study examines how duration affects the spectator's experience:

- Does the shot produce a sense of anticipation?
- Does it shift attention from action to atmosphere?
- Does it generate a meditative effect or sustained tension?

This dimension of the analysis is grounded in Gilles Deleuze's concept of the time-image, as well as in the notion of projected time in painting.[13]

Intermedial comparative framework

Without focusing on direct iconographic comparisons, the study applies a structural analogy between:

- The tableau as a closed compositional unit
- The long take (plan-séquence) as an extended temporal unit

The comparison is developed along the following correspondences:

Painting	**Long take**
Compressed moment	Extended moment
Implied time	Lived (experienced) time
Visual intensity	Temporal intensity

Methodological limitations

The study does not aim to demonstrate the universality of the hypothesis across all forms of cinema. It focuses specifically on auteur cinema, where the directorial decision regarding duration is both deliberate and aesthetically motivated. Furthermore, the perceptual analysis remains theoretical and does not include empirical audience-based experimentation. This limitation is acknowledged as an opportunity for future research.

Results and discussion

12 Arnheim, Film as Art, 45–48; Bazin, What Is Cinema?, 35–40.

13 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 16–23; Gombrich, Art and Illusion, 101–105.

The analysis of the selected sequences confirms the hypothesis that the long take (plan-séquence), when structured as an autonomous compositional and temporal unit, functions as the cinematic equivalent of the tableau. This equivalence is not formal, but structural and perceptual: it manifests in the organization of time, the integrity of space, and the shift of rhythm from fragmentation toward intensity.

The long take as an autonomous unit of meaning

In Nostalghia (Tarkovsky, 1983), the candle-carrying scene (~9 minutes 30 seconds) constitutes a paradigmatic example of the long take as an extended tableau. The action is minimal: the protagonist attempts to cross an empty pool without extinguishing the flame. Dramaturgy is not constructed through action, but through duration and anticipation. Spatial integrity and the absence of editing (montage) interruption create a closed perceptual unit, in which tension emerges from duration itself. In Bazinian terms, the continuity of the shot preserves the reality of the moment, while in Deleuzian terms, time appears as a direct experience, liberated from its dependence on action.[14]
A similar structure can be observed in Sátántangó (Tarr, 1994), particularly in the tavern dance sequence (~8 minutes). The camera moves slowly within a closed space, while the action repeats in a cyclical manner. Here, rhythm is not progressive, but hypnotic. The long take produces a contemplative effect analogous to the viewing of a narrative tableau, where the spectator is immersed in the density of time rather than in the development of events.

Historical compression and the expansion of the moment

In The Travelling Players (Angelopoulos, 1975), a long take of approximately 7 minutes connects different historical periods within a single spatial continuum. Historical time is compressed into a continuous frame, generating a unified unit of meaning. This structure resembles the historical tableau, in which a single moment represents an entire epoch. The difference lies in the fact that cinema expands the moment into real time, whereas painting compresses it into a single instant. Nevertheless, in both cases, what is at stake is the organization of tensions within a closed structure.[15]

Contemplative tension versus action

In Barry Lyndon (Kubrick, 1975), the final duel scene (~4 minutes 30 seconds in its principal shot without visible cuts) constructs tension through suspension. The camera maintains a symmetrical composition and formal distance. The spectator experiences time as anticipation rather than as dramatic release. This structure reinforces the solemnity of the moment and imbues it with a quasi-sacral character. In this sense, the shot functions as a dramatic tableau, where intensity arises from stasis and duration.
Similarly, in the "Crows" të Dreams (Kurosawa, 1990), the walking sequence through the wheat field (~3 minutes) shifts the focus from narration to sensory experience. Although the film directly enters the universe of painting, the analysis here does not dwell on iconographic reference, but rather on the rhythm of gentle movement and the expansion of the moment. Time generates

14 Bazin, What Is Cinema?, 39; Deleuze, Cinema 2, 22.
15 Arnheim, Film as Art, 52.

perceptual immersion, bringing the filmic experience closer to the contemplation of a tableau.

Narrative suspension and landscape as contemplative space

In L'Avventura (Antonioni, 1960), the long take featuring a figure within a rocky landscape (~2 minutes 45 seconds) suspends narrative progression. The event does not advance; instead, space acquires dramatic weight. The landscape is not merely a background, but an emotional structure. This shifts the experience from linear narration toward the intensity of presence. As in painting, the figure and the environment generate an internal tension that the spectator experiences through duration.

The shift of rhythm: from fragmentation to duration

The average duration of the analyzed shots is approximately 5 minutes, in stark contrast to the classical average of Hollywood cinema (approximately 5–7 seconds per shot). This disproportion demonstrates a radical shift in rhythmic structure: from rapid editing (montage) toward the extended shot. This shift reinforces the thesis that the long take generates rhythm through duration rather than through fragmentation.
In theoretical terms, this structure brings the long take closer to the tableau because it:

1. Functions as a single unit of meaning.
2. Preserves spatial integrity.
3. Minimizes external intervention (editing/montage).
4. Produces intensity through the internal composition and duration.

The director as organizer of time

In all the analyzed cases, the long take emerges as a conscious directorial choice. It is not a technical necessity, but an aesthetic structure. As emphasized by Andrei Tarkovsky, cinema is the art of "sculpting in time".[16] The results of the analysis suggest that this "sculpting" occurs precisely in those moments when the director suspends editing (montage) and allows time to become a perceptible material.
In this sense, the long take is not merely a stylistic technique, but a temporal architecture that transforms the filmic experience into a contemplative one. It functions as a tableau extended in time, where time does not serve action, but constitutes the very essence of aesthetic experience.

Conclusions and recommendations

16 Arnheim, Film as Art, 52.

This study has argued that the long take (plan-séquence) can be conceptualized as the functional equivalent of the tableau within the filmic medium—not in terms of formal resemblance, but at the structural level of temporal organization and perception. Drawing on the theory of the ontological continuity of the image[17] , the concept of the time-image [18], and the aesthetics of visual organization[19] , the analysis has demonstrated that the long take produces a temporal regime analogous to that of the tableau: a closed perceptual unit in which intensity replaces fragmentation and duration becomes an aesthetic material.

The analyzed cases—from Andrei Tarkovsky and Béla Tarr to Theo Angelopoulos, Stanley Kubrick, Akira Kurosawa, and Michelangelo Antonioni—demonstrate that when editing (montage) is minimized and spatial integrity is preserved, the long take acquires semantic autonomy. Under these conditions, film rhythm shifts from the dynamics of action toward the intensity of anticipation and experience. Time no longer functions as a vehicle for narrative progression, but as a space for meditation and reflection. This reinforces the thesis that the influence of painting on cinema manifests in the temporal architecture of the work, beyond iconographic quotation.

At the theoretical level, the study contributes to a reformulation of the painting–film relationship as a transformation of the temporal regime. Rather than being understood as a visual dialogue, this relationship can be conceived as a shift from the compressed moment of the tableau to the expanded cinematic moment. The long take embodies precisely this expansion: a moment that, in painting, would be frozen, is transformed in film into lived time.

However, the study has certain limitations. The analysis focuses on auteur cinema and does not include empirical verification of audience response. Consequently, the contemplative experience is argued at a theoretical and interpretative level. Furthermore, the impact of digital technologies on the transformation of duration and rhythm has not been systematically addressed.

In this context, several directions for further research are recommended:

1. Empirical studies on audience perception, to examine how duration affects emotional experience and spectator memory.
2. Comparative analyses between auteur and commercial cinema, to investigate whether and how the long take functions differently across industrial contexts.
3. Analysis of the impact of digital technologies and streaming platforms, which may alter the spectator's relationship to duration and rhythm.
4. Expansion of the intermedial framework, including video installation and virtual reality, where the boundaries between the tableau and cinematic time become increasingly blurred.

In conclusion, the long take may be understood as the space in which cinema most closely approaches pictorial structure: a single moment, organized with compositional density, extended in time, and experienced as intensity. In this sense, the director is not merely an organizer of images, but an architect of time—a role that situates cinema in conceptual continuity with the tradition of visual art, transforming the tableau from a frozen image into living time.

Appendix 1

17 Bazin, What Is Cinema?, 35–40.

18 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 16–23.

19 Arnheim, Film as Art, 45–48; Gombrich, Art and Illusion, 101–105.

Comparative table of shot duration in the analyzed sequences

Methodological note

The durations of the shots were measured based on standard theatrical release versions. Measurement was conducted in real time (hh:mm:ss), starting from the moment of the last visible cut to the subsequent cut. Continuous camera movements without interruption of editing (montage) were included within the same shot. Invisible cuts (hidden cuts), when technically identifiable, were considered as interruptions of the shot.
The classical average of Hollywood narrative cinema (ASL – Average Shot Length) is estimated at approximately 5–7 seconds, according to film style analysis literature .[20]

Comparative table

Film	Director	Year	Analyzed Scene	Timecode in Film	Shot Duration	Shot Typology	Dramatic Function
Nostalghia	Andrei Tarkovsky	1983	Candle-carrying sequence	~01:54:00	09:30	Static + slow movement	Spiritual tension / existential trial
Sátántangó	Béla Tarr	1994	Tavern dance sequence	~02:15:00	08:00	Circular movement	Rhythmic hypnosis / deconstruction of time
The Travelling Players	Theo Angelopoulos	1975	Historical transition in a single shot	~01:20:00	07:00	Linear movement	Historical compression

Table 1. Comparative table of shot duration

Film	Director	Year	Analyzed Scene	Timecode in Film	Shot Du-ration	Shot Typol-ogy	Dramatic Function

20 David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction, 12th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2019), 296–300.

Barry Lyndon	Stanley Kubrick	1975	Final duel	~02:45:00	04:30	Static symmetrical composition	Dramatic suspension
Dreams ("Crows")	Akira Kurosawa	1990	Walk through the wheat field	~00:45:00	03:00	Soft panoramic movement	Sensory immersion
L'Avventura	Michelangelo Antonioni	1960	Figure in rocky landscape	~01:10:00	02:45	Extended static shot	Narrative suspension

Table 2. Comparative table of shot duration

Synthetic analysis of the data

The average duration of the analyzed shots is:
5 minutes and 57 seconds (≈ 357 seconds).
This duration is approximately **50–70 times longer** than the classical average shot length in conventional narrative cinema (5–7 seconds).
This disproportion supports the central hypothesis of the study: that the long take (plan-séquence) in auteur cinema functions as an autonomous temporal structure, in which rhythm is generated through duration rather than through editing-based fragmentation (montage).

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Visual effects in Albanian Cinematography and the challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

Visual effects used in Albanian Cinema, starting from the Visual Effects of the mechanical period to the Digital Effects used in Albanian Film, as well as the challenges and threats of Artificial Intelligence. Gemini said in the first Albanian short film, "Fëmijët e saj" (Her Children, 1957), directed by Hysen Hakani, montage is used as a visual effect. With the transition of cinema from the mechanical period to the electronic and then the digital period, visual effects became a necessity for conveying deeper emotion, adapting the dramaturgy, and fulfilling the artistic desires of directors to bring a new, contemporary, and unique figure within the image. Today, the intervention and manipulation of the film frame, thanks to computer software, can be done even at home. However, the newest challenge facing this cinema is the innovation and danger arising from the application of artificial intelligence, both in the manipulation of the figure and in the production of a dramaturgy without a real emotional basis, which could also be a cause for the audience's fleeing from the cinema venues.

Keywords

Visual effects in cinema, mechanical effects in cinema, the risk from Artificial Intelligence, AI vs human creation

Metodology

This work is based on a historical and technical analysis of the development of visual effects, focusing on discovering and highlighting these effects in Albanian cinematography, using as examples several Albanian films produced between 1957 and the present day. The methodology includes the study of specific cases of Albanian films (from 1957 to today) and the analysis of the technological evolution from celluloid (mechanical period), to magnetic tape (electronic period), and finally to digital processes (digital period) and Artificial Intelligence. It utilizes comparative cases between traditional (artisanal) techniques of films produced at the "New Albania" Film Studio and films produced in Europe, the Soviet Union, and the USA.

The Beginnings of Visual Effects in Cinema

If the first projection realized by the Lumière brothers in 1895 in Paris had no intentional visual effect, it was nothing more than the "inability" of our eye to fixate on sixteen photographs projected within one second. *The Cinématographe, and eventually the Kinetograph as well, ran at a rate of sixteen frames per second, a rate that was used throughout the silent era.* (Grant 2007) [1]Thus, this can be considered the first visual effect in cinema. For the time, it was magic: the fixation of reality in motion. Likewise, this became a new challenge for many artists, chemists, and engineers to further perfect this visual magic. Artists began to think about reproducing or creating parallel realities through filmic ideas and scripts; chemists worked to create cinematographic film stock more sensitive to light; while engineers set to work to improve the functioning of recording and projection apparatuses, as well as for the production of lenses and objectives suitable for achieving higher quality filming. Georges Méliès was the first artist who managed to create the first special effects in film. We are in the mechanical period of cinema, where the film itself was a tangible object the celluloid and visual effects were achieved only through its mechanical manipulation. This was realized by cutting and joining the film, to move from one reality to another, to shift from one location to another in the blink of an eye. These "jumps" not only created the new language of montage, but at the same time gave filmmakers the opportunity to bring new realities and sensations, which until that time none of the other visual arts had been able to achieve. Méliès is widely known as the father of special effects because he was the first to discover and use them creatively, even initially by accident. *"While filming a simple street scene, Méliès's camera jammed, and after a few seconds, he managed to get it working again. Without paying much attention to the technical incident, after developing the film in the laboratory, he was stunned by the effect obtained as a result of the sudden stopping of the camera. Some of the objects appeared or disappeared as if by magic, while others were transformed into completely different objects. From this incident, Méliès understood that cinema had the power to manipulate and play with time and space. He expanded his initial ideas and created a series of increasingly complex special effects. He remains a pioneer of double exposure (La Caverne Maudite, 1898), the first use of the split screen, where actors played opposite themselves (Un Homme de tête, 1898), as well as the early use of the dissolve (Cendrillon, 1899).* (www.melies.eu n.d.)[2] Perhaps this is the first realized effect that today is commonly called "stop motion." This accident pushed Georges Méliès to experiment more with the "stop motion" effect, but not only that. In the over 300 films he produced, he used many such visual effects, such as "stop motion," "dissolve," "matte painting," "double exposure," "slow motion," etc.

1 (Grant 2007)

2 (www.melies.eu n.d.)

In his film "L'homme à la tête de caoutchouc" (The Man with the Rubber Head), Méliès uses "double exposure," where the film is run twice. In the first pass, Méliès, playing the role of a chemist, decides to conduct an experiment. He takes a copy of his head out of a box and places it on a table. In the center of the image, there is a black square space. The head, which is also himself, stands on the table. The second time, after rewinding the film, he films himself against a black background with his portrait covered with a black cloth at the neck. Both shots are co-ordinated so that the interaction is precise. With a pump, he blows into this head from below, which, while making grimaces, inflates and, the moment he removes the pump, the head deflates again. *"To create the illusion of the head inflating, Méliès could have moved the heavy camera forward on tracks. Instead, he moved himself toward the camera, a device he used again in the famous close-up shot of the moon's face in the film A Trip to the Moon. For the film The Man with the Rubber Head, a dolly was built with a chair installed on tracks, which was pulled by a rope."* (Frazer 1979)[3]. Thus, he not only uses "double exposure," but by bringing the portrait closer, Méliès claims to have also achieved the first close-up in the history of cinema. In this way, Méliès also contributed to avant-garde art, as shortly after him, other directors would produce similar films.

Figure 1: "The Man with the Rubber Head" – Georges Méliès – 1901

Buster Keaton in the film "The General" became famous not because he used visual effects like everyone else, but because he realized the most expensive scene of the time in cinema. Believing that visual effects did not convey the proper emotion to the audience, he requested and executed the crash of a steam locomotive and its wagons along with the bridge. This scene could very well have been realized with a miniature, which would have significantly reduced the expenses of the film, which was not successful when it was released, even though today "The General" 1926 is one of the most critically acclaimed films. "*'The General' is a silent comedy-era film, one of the most expensive films of its time, featuring an historically accurate recreation of a Civil War episode, hundreds of extras, sequences with dangerous stunts, and a real locomotive falling from a burning bridge into a deep ravine*." (Ebert 1997)[4]

3 (Frazer 1979)
4 (Ebert 1997)

Figure 2: "The General" - Buster Keaton – 1926

Visual Effects on the opposite side of Hollywood

The soviet Dziga Vertov cannot go unmentioned, who with his experimental film "A Man with the Movie Camera" (1929) increased the dosage of special effects. He not only used special effects like his predecessors, but for technical reasons, thanks to cameras more sophisticated than those from 20 years before, he added visual effects such as slow motion, reverse motion, freeze frames, match cuts, jump cuts, split screens, dutch angles, extreme close-ups, tracking shots, reversed footage, stop-motion animations, and self-reflexive visuals, where at one point the screen is split in half and the images are composed in dutch angle positions (the camera placed diagonally).

Initially, this documentary was heavily criticized for the overload of visual effects, as well as for the fast-paced montage that left no room to breathe—a new visual language to which the audience was not yet accustomed. However, almost every decade, cinematic criticism has re-evaluated this film. So much so, that today it is considered the best documentary of all time.

Made in 1929, this unclassifiable film is the work of pioneering Soviet experimenter David Kaufman, whose pseudonym Dziga Vertov means "spinning top" – if you like, cinema's original dizzy rascal. Man With a Movie Camera came top last year in Sight & Sound's poll of greatest documentaries, and to this day it looks and feels like nothing else. (Romney 2015)[5]

5 (Romney 2015)

Figure 3: "A Man with the Movie Camera" - Dziga Vertov – 1929

If Méliès invited the audience to be marveled by his visual effects, Dziga Vertov sought to impose a new language of cinema on the audience—without dialogue, with "dizzying" montage, and endless effects. With Méliès, the audience was conscious and went to be entertained, whereas in Vertov's films, the audience was still unprepared for this new "morphology" of the image.

"Stop Motion" The reformulation of commercial cinema.

In 1933, RKO Radio Pictures presented the film "King Kong." King Kong, a giant gorilla, falls in love with the film's main heroine. The union of these two characters—a giant gorilla the size of a building with a character of normal proportions—was achieved through the massive use of visual effects such as stop motion and matte painting.
"King Kong visual effects supervisor Willis H. O'Brien had already pioneered the use of stop-motion to bring giant creatures to life in earlier works such as The Lost World in 1925. But what set this film apart was how it combined the technique with footage of human actors." (Nardi 2023)[6]

Figure 4: "King Kong" – Merian C. Cooper, Ernest B. Schoedsak- 1933

6 (Nardi 2023)

In 1936, Charlie Chaplin, in his film "Modern Times," became famous for one of the most iconic scenes where he glides on roller skates with his eyes closed on the third floor of a department store. The third floor is under renovation and the balcony has no railing. Chaplin, being an acrobat by profession, skates to the very edge of the balcony and at several moments appears as if he will lose his balance. But thanks to the "matte painting" visual effect, he is not on the third floor, but on the studio platform. A painting placed in front of the camera creates the effect as if the actor is on the third floor. The film was a true success.

Figure 5: "Modern Times" - Charlie Chaplin – 1936

Figure 6: "Modern Times" - Charlie Chaplin – 1936

Visual effects set a trend for the future of cinematography. Soon after, films followed where, through visual effects, other monsters were created: giant spiders, aquatic creatures, dinosaurs, giants, or impossible locations.

In the adaptation of Jules Verne's fantastic novel "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" (1954), the confrontation with a giant squid is the most epic scene in the film. The monster was built and controlled by several workers who operated the legs of the giant squid through hydraulic pistons and steel cables. *"We had to build the squid twice. We built the first one strictly as a mechanical prop, but Walt didn't like the way it moved. The second one had tentacles that operated by means of vacuum and air pressure."* (David Hutchison n.d.)[7]

7 (David Hutchison n.d.)

Figure 7: "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" – Richard Fleischer – 1954

Thus, followed later films with space adventures, spaceships, aliens, and worlds that had never been seen before. Certainly, in Hollywood, Disney and other film production companies entered into a feverish race to create films with the most impossible visual effects.

Visual Effects in Albanian Cinema

Albanian cinema was born in 1957 with the first short film *Fëmijët e saj* (Her Children), followed a year later by the feature-length film *Tana*. In the film *Fëmijët e saj*, in the scene where a child is chased by a rabid dog, the idea of the dog biting the child is created through a rapid montage of three shots. A running dog, a child attempting to escape it, and a close-up of the dog's barking mouth showing its teeth. Afterward, the child is found lying down and suffering. Through these three shots, an emotional effect is achieved to terrify the audience regarding a rabid dog.
The Albanian audience had the opportunity a few years earlier to enjoy the visual effects used in the Soviet-Albanian film *Skënderbeu* (The Great Warrior Skanderbeg), where painted decors were used in various scenes to recreate 15th-century scenography. *" Most of the film was ultimately shot in the Soviet Union, in the Mosfilm Studio and on location in Yalta and Sudak in Crimea. In Albania, shooting took place in Gjirokastër, a southern city, which would double for Skanderbeg's stronghold in Kruja, a city considerably*
further to the north, and in Berat. The sequences set in Venice were filmed in
Tirana's Saint Procopius Church.". (Williams 2023)[8]

8 (Williams 2023)

Figure 8: "Skanderbeg" - Sergei Jutkveich – 1954

In the years that followed, with the experience brought back from foreign schools, Albanian filmmakers began to use visual effects in film. These involved special effects performed in front of the camera: explosions, bullet hits, and smoke, widely used in films with war themes, not to mention post-production effects such as sound effects—the sound of water, footsteps in snow or on cobblestones, gunshots, engine noises, etc. The Film Studio had a special department for these effects.For studio shoots, where living spaces or interiors like towers, castles, or tunnels were built, the backgrounds were painted by film artists—a visual effect used to make interior filming as realistic as possible.In the film "Kapedani," in the dream scene, directors Fehmi Hoshafi and Muharrem Fejzo use an in-camera effect by keeping the aperture open and using slow motion. The Captain, on top of a "cherry picker," throws white papers into the air from a suitcase. The papers fly everywhere, and then we see the character running on a deserted boulevard. With few elements at hand and much imagination, the dream effect is achieved. The film was criticized in its time for the satirical portrayal of a former partisan whom the cooperative chairwoman assigns to guard the chickens on a stormy night." *In an effort to activate young directors as well, freehand was given to the production of films such as "Kapedani" or "Odise e tifozëve," which, due to weaknesses in dramaturgy and directing, go as far as employing expressive means that fall outside our social reality.*
(Beqir META 2019)

Figure 10: " The Captain/Kapedani" Muharrem Fejzo, Fehmi Hoshafi – 1972

"Expressive means" imply visual effects in this specific case, as seen in both "Kapedani" and "Odise e Tifozëve," where "speed motion" visual effects are utilized. In 1971, in the triptych film "Kur zbardhi një ditë," directed by Piro Milkani, in the episode of Meco, at the moment he is killed by the Germans atop the bell tower of the Ardenica Church, a nylon stocking was placed in front of the lens. By rotating the lens, the sunlight passing through the bell tower where the partisan Meco is presumed to be creates rays that spread from the center toward the corners of the screen. A visual effect in service of the idea that the hero spreads the light of freedom even though he sacrificed himself for his comrades, achieved with improvised means, perhaps what could be called a mechanical visual effect made directly in-camera and not in post-production.

Figure. 9: " Kur zbardhi një ditë/ When a day is born" – Piro Milkani – 1971

Nevertheless, although the authors thought this would be appreciated by the screening commissions, this visual effect was heavily criticized at the time. Meco was labelled as a Christ-like figure and the finale as having mystical elements. "*And precisely, the quest to present this entire scene with a powerful effect led the authors to seek out sunlight breaking over the cross to form a "glory." As a result, we saw how this figurative effect gave us a completely mystical idea."*

(Beqir META 2019) [9] After much discussion, this shot was kept; had this trick been removed, it would have been lost from the film forever. An in-camera visual effect was also achieved in the film "Përrallë nga e kaluara" (A Tale from the Past, 1987), directed by Dhimitër Anagnosti. In the scene where Marigo has climbed to the top of the wall, threatening to jump because she does not want to marry Gjino, her mother and sisters stand below crying and begging her not to jump. Marigo is also crying. To create Marigo's tears in front of the camera lens, a piece of glass was placed with water poured over it. The water on the glass blurs the image so the spectator understands Marigo's despair. It is an in-camera visual effect that achieves its goal very well, simple, yet visually distinct and aesthetically highly successful.

Figure 11: "Përrallë nga e kaluara" – Dhimitër Anagnosti – 1987

In 1976, a film studio truck was traveling along the "Qafë Thana" Kafasan road, transporting a circular structure toward Pogradec. This metal circle with several welded rods around it was nothing more than a structure to create an artificial moon for the film "Zonja nga Qyteti" (The Lady from the City, 1976), directed by Piro Milkani. The moon used in two-night scenes does not stand out for its size; it was placed in the background, covered with a white cloth, and backlit by a spotlight. Only an attentive eye can tell it is not real, but in the scenes where it is used, it adds a background plane to the frame and an emotional feeling that fits the filmed scene.

9 (Beqir META 2019)

Figure 12: "Zonja nga Qyteti " – Piro Milkani – 1976

Similarly, in a scene with a scarecrow, the film's two main actors, Rajmonda Bulku and Piro Kita, play with the scarecrow's hat. They take turns placing the hat on their heads, and the hat rises from their heads as if by magic. The stick used to lift the hat is not hidden; at one point, it is visible. In any other case, it should not have been seen, but in this instance, the visual effect does not attempt to show the impossible; rather, it is honest with the audience. That scene creates more of a smile than an attempt to portray magic.

Figure 13: "Zonja nga Qyteti " – Piro Milkani – 1976

In the film "Ballë për ballë" (Face to Face, 1979), directed by Kujtim Çashku and Piro Milkani, a visual effect driven by the conditions of the time was used. Nearly 50% of the film was shot at the "Pashaliman" naval base, where every crew member required a special permit to enter. The Albanian naval fleet possessed only four submarines, one of which was not safe for diving. The problem was that the exact number was not to be known, mentioned, or shown. Throughout the filming, the submarine numbers were constantly changed, and in shots on the open sea during

military maneuvers, the montage creates the impression that the fleet consists of many submarines.

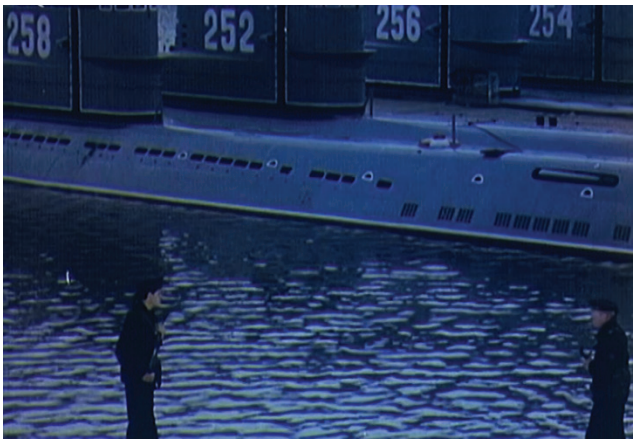

Figure 14: "Ballë për Ballë/Face to Face" – Kujtim Cashku, Piro Milkani – 1979

In the 1983 film "Gracka" (The Trap), directed by Saimir Kumbaro, actors Reshat Arbana and Luan Qerimi have a dialogue while sitting in a car. In the background behind them, images of a Luna Park appear. Unable to film abroad, the Film Studio achieved this through the visual effect of rear projection.

Figure 15: "Gracka /The Trap" Saimir Kumbaro – 1983

The master of these effects was cinematographer Faruk Basha. Rear projection is a visual effect widely used in cinema for similar cases, as the image is more controllable, better lit, and more practical than filming in a moving car.

In the 1986 feature film "Bardhësi" (Whiteness), director Besim Kurti uses a miniature as a visual effect. A snow avalanche covers all the houses of a mountain village. This was a controlled visual effect that, at the time, was only possible through the construction of a miniature. Filmed at a higher-than-normal speed, the resulting image in playback makes the effect of the snow covering the town look very real. The entire plot of the film is based on this event, where the military comes to the aid of people blocked by the snow using helicopters.

Figure 16: "Bardhësi/Whiteness" - Besim Kurti – 1986

These are more or less the effects used in Albanian film, which until the 2000s continued to follow filming techniques using mechanical methods. The goal remained the same: to immerse the audience in realities that were impossible to film, while simultaneously bringing emotional moments to serve the dramaturgy. For the time, these effects, such as "image transitions" or changes in film speed—are visible in Albanian cinematography at certain moments to emphasize a specific point or to depict a dream, as seen in "Qyteti më i ri në botë" (The Newest City in the World, 1974) by Xhanfise Keko, "I teti në Bronx" (The Eighth in Bronze, 1970) by Viktor Gjika, and "Përrallë nga e kaluara" (Tale from the past 1987) by Dhimitër Anagnosti, among others.

Visual Effects in the Electronic Period 1955 – 2005

We are in the years where, alongside films shot on celluloid, television has begun to produce its own films, and the image is no longer cast onto film through a visible and tangible chemical process; instead, the image is now recorded on magnetic tape. Ampex and U-matic were the professional formats of the time, along with VHS, which was a format for home use. In these types of formats, visual effects that this technique allowed began to be applied in post-production: mirroring and reflection of the filmed image, flipping the image in all directions, multiplication of the image, double exposure, etc. These effects could also be achieved on film, but the only difference was that these effects were done very quickly, in real time, and if the desired result was not achieved, these images could even be deleted. During the evolution of television broadcasting, which belongs to the electronic period, when the image began to be converted into an electrical signal that was then recorded on magnetic tape, effects were most commonly used for concerts, spectacles, or music videos. Often, they were related to the multiplication of the main figure, vertical and horizontal reproduction, mirror effects, mosaic effects, etc. In the production of feature films produced by RTSH (Albanian Radio and Television) shot on magnetic tape, they were less frequently used by Albanian Television directors.

The Digital Period

The transition from traditional film to digital technology began with the invention of digital sensors capable of converting light, shadow, and color into digital signals. Although the first attempts in the 1980s saw little success, the 1990s marked significant steps with films like 1989 "Rainbow", Ken Rusell and 1998 "Windhorse", Paul Wagner. The major turning point occurred around 2000, when George Lucas used digital cameras for the Star Wars series, proving that digital technology could rival 35mm film. By 2013, films produced in digital format surpassed those on film, and today over 90% of cinematic productions use this technology. Today, companies like Sony, Arri, and Red offer cameras that exceed the quality of traditional television broadcasts or the cameras needed for shooting feature films. The "Manaki Brothers" Festival, organized in Bitola, North Macedonia—which for nearly 50 years since its creation has awarded the top prize to the Director of Photography, originally insisted on accepting only films shot on celluloid when most films began to be shot in digital format. However, over the years, they realized that if they did not accept films produced with this technique into the competition, very soon no film would be eligible to participate in the festival. It was perhaps the last festival to accept digital-shot films into competition.
In the film Trishtimi i Zonjës Shnajder (The Sorrow of Mrs. Schneider, 2008), directed by Piro & Eno Milkani and shot in 2005, the firefly effect was created using "motion tracking." Actors Nik Xhelilaj and Arta Dobroshi act as if they are playing with fireflies. On the face and neck of actress Arta Dobroshi, a visual effects specialist placed marks with an invisible solution that was illuminated by a yellow flashlight with very low intensity. The film negative was scanned into digital, and the fireflies were placed into the digital copy. Then, this scene was written back onto film with a laser and spliced into the negative with the rest of the film, which had been shot on 35mm.

Figure 17: "Trishtimi I Zonjës Shnajder/Sorrow of Mme. Shnajder" - Piro & Eno Milkani – 2008

In Albanian cinematography, this transition came later, but not that much later. Very soon, the first step was shooting on celluloid—such as the films Agon (Robert Budina) and digital, Farmakon (Joni Shanaj)—and then transitioning to digital format for projection. In this phase, it is certainly easier to create visual effects. In the film Shenjtorja (The Saint, 2008) by Eno Milkani, the statue of Stalin is added digitally in the Kombinat area, on the same pedestal where that statue had stood for many years.

Figure 18: "Shenjëtorja/ She, the Saint" – Eno Milkani – 2009

In the film Portreti i pambaruar i Klara Bellinit (The Unfinished Portrait of Klara Bellini, 2019) by Namik Ajazi, the "green screen" effect was used to recreate settings, streets, the train station, in-car shots, or to remove graffiti from walls. It is perhaps the film with the most extensive interventions for the sake of visual effects. This intervention brought the atmosphere of 1970s Tirana to specific scenes.

Figure 19: "Portreti I pambaruar…/ The unfinished Portrait of Clara Bellini" – Namik Ajazi – 2019

By the end of its life in 1992, "New Albania" Film Studio had produced thousands of newsreels, hundreds of documentaries, and over 300 feature films. While the filmmakers who produced these films were forced to use only "cut-to-cut" editing and to edit only images obtained in front of the camera lens, some attempted thanks to experience gained from film schools to use visual effects in these films as well. This was not to seek or achieve a visual experiment, as that would have been impossible for the time because the censorship of the era would not have allowed it. This censorship intervened with ignorance even in how a frame should be lit. Images of characters with strong highlights and shadows would be labeled as decadent and expressionist cinema, because that is exactly what happened.

Artificial Inteligence "AI"

"The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the film and media industry marks a profound transformation akin to historical shifts such as the advent of sound or colour film." (Codreanu 2025) [10] When ChatGPT was released to the public in 2022, over a million users registered within a few hours, driven by curiosity to understand and experience what was being promoted as the future, the inevitable Artificial Intelligence. Initially, users utilized it as a search engine. The results initially left much to be desired because the information was often inaccurate. Very quickly, this AI began to become more versatile, and users started using it to write their projects. Within seconds, artificial intelligence saved hours of work by writing reports, summaries, descriptions, essays, and stories, while simultaneously becoming a tireless conversationalist answering endless questions for its users. Within a short time, it began to offer the possibility to manipulate images and later to produce music. Today, many companies and nations have broadly entered a feverish race. China and Chinese companies promote their own artificial intelligence models, intelligent robots, and more. Social networks are filled with enticing offers to make films using artificial intelligence, but at the current moment, the use of AI to produce a film remains in the hands of major film companies, much like in the mechanical period, when such opportunities were available only to large studios and not the public.

Figure 20: "Freelancers" – Dave Clark - 2025

With the digital revolution, anyone can film a movie even with their mobile phone, edit it at home, and participate in festivals. *"AI democratizes film production significantly, exemplified by Dave Clark's Freelancers, produced with DeepMind's Veo 2. Such technology allows creators to rapidly prototype and refine their narratives at considerably reduced costs."* (Codreanu 2025) [11] Just as back then, AI is not yet something that everyone can use to its full potential to produce a film. Major studios use it to generate previously unimaginable realities, to bring deceased actors back to life, and to generate endless variations of their scripts. Albanian cinema faces such a challenge, or will have to face it very soon. What kind of film can a Balkan country produce with AI? Balkan film production after the 90s mainly refers to unique situations involving immigration problems, cultural adaptation, organized crime, the "New Mafia," human trafficking, ethnic problems, the war in the former Yugoslavia, etc. Not only are Balkan authors themselves the

10 (Codreanu 2025)
11 (Codreanu 2025)

initiators and executors of these themes, but this is also the expectation of Europe and the world for such topics from Balkan cinematography. Whether they are right or not is up for debate, as a film in the vein of Bergman would be, if not unacceptable, at least impossible to support financially under current conditions.

But even in the Balkans, opinions are divided, and this represents an unclear and simultaneously unpredictable future. Naturally, this reality has split opinions into two groups: those who believe in everything this technology offers and those who despise it; those who say it is impossible to withstand the competition and be successful in the market, and those who say that films produced in this manner have no life and will be forgotten very quickly. These approaches could lead to the creation of communities that will contest everything related to technology, communities that will reject mobile phones and technology, much like the Amish community that currently chooses to live without using anything from 20th-century technology, such as cars, electricity, etc. However, after being certified, these communities will only accept films produced in the classical way, following the same rules that existed the day cinema was born: a script written by humans and not AI, acting with real actors and not those generated by AI, with real and true situations and circumstances involving human struggles and concerns.

At the same time, AI will reach a perfection beyond human logic, beyond human emotion. It will become many times more sophisticated. This is a known reality. AI will use the help of AI to discover its own defects or to correct what does not appear 100% human. This correction and this perfection will reach levels where people will perhaps no longer ask whether it is real or not. They will accept it just as it is served to them. Truth will no longer matter, and the audience must adapt or not. Faced with this "untrue truth," a part of the audience may choose to leave the cinema hall and the film behind, and trust only in the reading of a book. But the question that will always be raised is: how true will we be as humans until that moment arrives? Will we accept it or not?

Study Results

From the analysis of the cases mentioned above, several points regarding the nature of visual effects in Albania can be concluded:

Visual Effects as a means of artistic and creative expression (Mechanical Period): In the absence of sophisticated laboratories like those in the West, filmmakers used "in-camera effects" (glass with water, nylon stockings, artificial moons, etc.). This is evidence that visual effects were not merely illustrative or decorative, but simple, artisanal solutions used to visually convey artistic, conceptual, and ideological metaphors.

A delayed, yet effective transition: While the world entered the digital era in the 1990s, Albania made this transition primarily after the 2000s. However, the use of techniques such as motion tracking in *The Sorrow of Mrs. Schneider* or green screen in *The Unfinished Portrait of Klara Bellini* demonstrates a rapid adaptation to contemporary standards for recreating locations that no longer exist.

Censorship and Aesthetics: An interesting and debatable result is that visual effects were often viewed with suspicion by censors (as in the films *Kapedani* or *Kur zbardhi një ditë*). This shows that technology under the dictatorship and the use of visual effects was not only a technical challenge but also an ideological one—any deviation from "socialist realism" (such as strong highlights and shadows) influenced by Soviet cinema images, and later the emphasis on the pos-

itive hero or a revolutionary ending, was labeled as naturalism, expressionism, or a distortion of reality.

Recommendations and Consequences

Preservation of Heritage through Ethical Digitalization
The urgent need for the digital restoration of old Albanian films, while preserving the "mistakes" and the texture of the original mechanical effects. The excessive use of AI to fix or colorize films from the 60s and 70s could erase the traces of the artisanal craftsmanship of the authors of these works

Involving AI as an "Assistant" and not a "Creator"

In low-budget Albanian filmmaking, AI should be used for various stages of production, such as building work plans, calendars, etc., based on the script and locations in the first phase of work, and in post-production for adding or removing details according to the director's vision to reduce costs. This would enable Albanian directors and Albanian film to compete in the market without the need for high-expense post-production studios.

Education for a New Cinema

The University of Arts, Department of Film and TV Directing, should create and adopt curricula that combine classic film techniques with the new possibilities offered by AI.
A new generation of filmmakers who know how to use AI must utilize it to expand their artistic vision without losing the emotional core, with the desire to create and preserve a Balkan identity.

Certification of "Human Authenticity"

The creation or establishment of conditions for certifying the authenticity of a film's creation to protect the value of the work of screenwriters and actors, and to keep the public's interest alive for stories originating from real human experience.

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Mise-en-scène as the architecture of cinematic narration in the films of Kristaq Dhamo

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Abstract

Film narration has traditionally been considered a product of mise-en-scène and montage. The movies of Kristaq Dhamo demonstrate that narrative structure can be organized in a highly expressive order through the mastery of these components within the frame of storytelling. This paper examines mise-en-scène as a narrative architecture in the films "Vitet e para" (1965) and "Botë e padukshme" (1987) by Kristaq Dhamo. I will argue that key elements of mise-en-scène, such as the placement and movement of characters, composition in depth and the precision of the cuts, constitute fundamental mechanisms of storytelling. Drawing on classical narrative theory and the tradition of film realism, the study analyzes how staging within the camera's spatial field, character orientation, foreground–background relationships, and camera placement create a dramatic form that guides spectator's perception and ensures narrative coherence. In this context, mise-en-scène responds to the dramatic demands of narration and functions as a syntactic system organizing relationships among characters and conveying the story. Through an analytical-formalist approach, the paper demonstrates that in Dhamo's films, based on two scenes from the aforementioned works, narration unfolds within the frame through internal spatial transformations, minimizing fragmentation through montage while preserving dramatic unity. I argue that mise-en-scène functions as a foundational structure of cinematic storytelling, and that Dhamo's films represent one of the most significant contributions to this model within Albanian cinema.

Keywords

Mise-en-scene, unity, structure, filmic, narration

Introduction

Mise-en-scène in film may be defined as an organized structure of all the elements that constitute the image within the frame, including actors, lighting, set design, props, and costume. Equally decisive is the way composition is constructed, together with the choice of camera angle and movement. At its core, the term implies a storytelling strategy, in both theater and cinema, in which the placement and movement of bodies in space emphasize or downplay particular narrative directions. The term mise-en-scène derives from the French meaning "to stage," yet its definitions have evolved over time according to different theoretical approaches and interpretations of the concept. John Gibbs[1] summarizes mise-en-scène as both what the audience can see and the way in which it is invited to see it. Elements of mise-en-scène were transferred from theater to early cinema, when the camera functioned merely as a recording device, effectively replacing the spectator in the theater auditorium. Actor positioning and movement, set design, costumes, and lighting were shared with theatrical practice, encapsulated in the English terms *staging* and *blocking*. With the development of cinematic language, additional elements such as camera angle, editing, and sound were incorporated—features specific to the film medium. In the history of film theory, the relationship between mise-en-scène and montage has been one of the central debates concerning the nature of cinematic language. Traditionally, they have been treated as two separate principles: mise-en-scène associated with spatial organization within the frame—actor movement, scenography, lighting, and composition, while montage concerns temporal organization through cuts and the linkage of shots. However, analysis of film practice demonstrates that this division is more theoretical than real, as both together shape the syntax of cinema. As James Monaco[2] argues, film language unfolds simultaneously in space and time; therefore, a rigid separation between mise-en-scène and montage is artificial. From the early experiments of the Auguste Lumière and Louis Lumière, as well as Georges Méliès, the dialectic between recording reality and manipulating it through editing has been fundamental to cinema. André Bazin[3] observes that cinema between the 1920s and 1940s was divided between a belief in the plastic power of the image and realism, associating mise-en-scène with the latter and montage with expressionism, a scheme that remains reductive. In fact, the cut may be closer to the way human perception functions, which shifts through changes of focus within a scene. Jean-Luc Godard[4] emphasizes that montage and mise-en-scène are inseparable, like rhythm and melody in music. Even within the classical studio system, decisions regarding the long take or spatial continuity involve choices of temporal fragmentation that belong to montage. Although intertwined, mise-en-scène retains a distinct role as a framework of nonverbal communication, structuring meaning through staging, choreography, and composition. In this context, the paper proposes analyzing mise-en-scène as a narrative discourse in the films of Kristaq Dhamo, where staging and blocking function as organizing mechanisms that guide the viewer's perception and interpretation. These two terms are considered more specific and defined components of mise-en-scène.

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Blocking refers to the positioning and movement of actors in relation to one another, including gestures, pauses, and movements toward or away from the camera. It is the choreography of bodies in the space before the camera. Staging, on the other hand, is the organization of the visual field, encompassing lighting, color, depth of field, composition, and set design. Blocking is an integral part of staging: if blocking is the choreography of bodies, staging is the spatial construction of the frame. These are crucial concepts for both the director and the director of photography. While mise-en-scène may carry varied meanings for filmmakers and critics, staging and blocking relate directly to the craft of cinema and function as fundamental tools of visual storytelling, elements not predetermined in the script. They must support and integrate with one another. For example, if an actor makes a movement at a moment when the camera is not positioned correctly, the meaning is lost. Thus, movement in film becomes more complex than movement on stage. An experienced film actor knows that even a centimeter too much or too little can move them out of frame or force the camera into an unmotivated adjustment. The synchronization between actor and camera must be precise. A distinctive feature of Dhamo's films is precisely the mastery and control of blocking and staging in shaping the dramatic narration of the script. The movement of characters often unfolds in planes of depth and although it appears organic, it is never merely decorative. Visually, it articulates power relations, emotional distance or moments of psychological transformation. Physical proximity within the frame signals intimacy or confrontation, depending on the composition. For blocking to function effectively, it must become a dramatic language of storytelling. The analysis is based on two scenes from "Vitet e para" (1965) and "Botë e padukshme" (1987), focusing on the size relationships inside composition, positioning of the actors, camera movement, and narrative structure. The aim is to demonstrate that in Dhamo's cinema, narration is realized primarily through the visual organization of filmic space. In the history of Albanian cinema, Kristaq Dhamo represents one of the foundational figures in consolidating a model of narrative cinema, beginning with the first Albanian feature-length film, "Tana" (1958). His activity coincided with the formative phase of Albanian film, developing forms of visual organization grounded in narrative clarity and construction through film language. Dhamo's cinema established a model of film organization that maintained a balance between narrative demands and visual structure. Films such as "Vitet e para" (1965), "Mëngjese lufte" (1971), "Brazdat" (1973), and his final film "Botë e padukshme" (1987) represent a model of cinematic narration built on stylistic transparency and economy of expressive means. Dhamo's importance lies particularly in his ability to construct a film language in which the organization of mise-en-scène carries as much weight in storytelling as dialogue. In his films, mise-en-scène functions as an integrated system of spatial organization, where actor movement, staging in depth and the collective arrangement of figures, collaborate to produce narrative meaning. Kristaq Dhamo tells the story primarily through mise-en-scène, and therein lies his value as a director. From a historical perspective, Dhamo's films represent one of the clearest examples of the adaptation of Eastern formalist models, where he was educated, as well as realist influences such as European neorealism. Nevertheless, his films also reveal specific features of mise-en-scène construction, particularly the long take, which he consistently favors, employing depth staging reminiscent of Orson Welles or William Wyler. Mastery of film language and the construction of mise-en-scène create a form of cinema in which visual organization remains invisible while guiding the viewer's interpretation. Dhamo's importance lies not only in his historical contribution as a director, but also in the fact that his films offer an analyzable model of the relationship between mise-en-scène and cinematic narration in Albanian cinema. Mise-en-scène constructs the field of spatial relations, while editing articulates their development

over time. The relationship between mise-en-scène and montage is closely tied to the way film organizes the perception of space and time. In the tradition of narrative cinema, spatial continuity has served as a fundamental orienting element for the spectator, making the narrative flow more readable and coherent. The organization of mise-en-scène and the planning of camera movement allow the action to unfold within a continuous visual field, where the relationships between characters and space remain clear and comprehensible. From this perspective, montage should not be understood merely as a technical tool for organizing film material, but as an intervention that directly shapes the spectator's perceptual orientation. Each cut produces a moment of temporary disorientation, creating the possibility of introducing new information or compressing narrative time. As Lindgren[5] observes, the first thing one notices about editing is how, as a technique, it grants the filmmaker a new domain of selective power. In narrative structures with multiple characters and parallel lines of action, this effect can become particularly pronounced, increasing the risk of perceptual confusion. For this reason, one of the most enduring strategies of film language is the preservation of spatial orientation through long takes and continuous camera movement. Long takes create a sustained perception of filmic space and function as a counterweight to the fragmentation of montage. Continuous camera movements construct shared spaces in which the lives of characters can intertwine within the same visual continuity. A similar approach can be observed in the films of Kristaq Dhamo. Mise-en-scène is built upon the relationships between actors and the concrete spaces in which they act, while montage primarily retains an organizing and narrative function. Dhamo uses cuts sparingly, only when they cannot be avoided. This approach enhances the value of montage and creates a stable perception of the filmic world, allowing dramatic development to unfold through transformations within the same visual space. Mise-en-scène ensures spatial continuity and the physical presence of the filmic world, while montage organizes time and narrative structure. Meaning in cinema arises precisely from the interaction between these two dimensions, where the spectator's perceptual orientation becomes a fundamental condition for visual communication. Narrative theory defines storytelling through the distinction between story as a sequence of events and discourse as the manner of their organization. In cinema, narrative meaning emerges not simply from what is shown on screen, but from how visual information is structured in time and space. The films of Kristaq Dhamo represent a model in which filmic discourse is oriented toward clarity of storytelling. Profilmic elements such as acting, costume, and scenography are integrated into a controlled visual structure that supports the progression of events. The transparency of the filmic construction results from careful narrative organization. The camera selects and structures visual information through composition, shot size, and spatial placement, minimizing interpretive ambiguity. This process can be described as narrativization — the transformation of visual reality into a meaningful narrative structure. A distinctive feature of Dhamo's work is his mastery in shifting the point of view within a scene, even within a long take, as seen in the following examples. In "Vitet e para"[6] (1965), space and landscape become narrative units in themselves through compositions in depth and visual dynamism. This quality often stems from the camera's proximity to the characters and the use of normal and wide-angle lenses, even in interiors, placing the viewer close to the action, as in the scene below. This element gains particular force in the large-scale swamp labor scenes, where the organization of characters in depth and camera movement create a vivid sense of dynamism and physical difficulty. The framing by cinematographers Pirro Milkani and Petraq Lubonja, even in the few static portrait shots, preserves the same dynamism,

5 Lindgren, Ernest. The Art of the Film. London: Allen & Unwin, 1970.

6 NewWay Movies. "Vitet E Para" 1965 . www.youtube.com/watch?v=uz9DPolGCl8. Accessed 25 Mar. 2026.

giving visual coherence to the scenes.

Figure 1. Close up of hands grabbing a flower.
Figure 2. Stavri moves left, the camera pans with him.

Figure 3. Stavri approaches, the handheld camera pulls with him and zooms out.
Figure 4. The camera continues pulling back becoming a two-shot with the sister, Loreta.

Figure 5. Camera walks with the characters, Stavri walks out of the frame, converting into a single. The change of POV inside the master shot.
Figure 6. First cut. Stavri stops, turns back toward his sister on the line: "Stavri, don't go".

Figure 7. Stavri approaches her, growing up in the frame. The sister turns lateral avoiding confrontation.
Figure 8. Second cut. The first close up of the scene, her expression is important here.

Figure 9. Third cut, the reverse shot is a close up of Stavri. A pair of shot/reverse shots follows. Camera is inside the circle of action.
Figure 10. Camera maintains the same position, Stavri learns the truth, he leaves, camera follows him. Change of point of view again. His sister calls him. Stavri turns around, "go, your friends are wating for you".

Figure 11. Loreta knows that she has to leave, hesitates a moment, then leaves.

In "Brazdat"[7] (1973), we observe the same characteristics of spatial organization, directly connected to labor and landscape. Across all three films, the mise-en-scène produces an effect of stylistic transparency, in which the visual organization remains unobtrusive while guiding the viewer's interpretation. The placement and movement of bodies within space structure narrative relationships. Characters are arranged in configurations that emphasize function and action.

Figure 12. Composition in depth, 3 planes.
Figure 13. Composition in depth, 3 planes.

The foreground–background relationship conveys meaning within the frame while preserving background activity as part of the narrative structure. Individual action is consistently situated within a collective context. No scene is visually monotonous. Camera placement, particularly its height, creates an intimate relationship between the viewer and the filmic space. The camera work of Saim Kokona, especially the handheld camera, produces lively compositions, generating visual dynamism that is challenging within the 1.33:1 aspect ratio.

Figure 14. Composition in depth in several planes.
Figure 15. Composition in depth with the focal point close to the main character

7 NewWay Movies. Brazdat 1973. www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWzy2wrRPWU. Accessed 25 Mar. 2026.

In “Vitet e para” (1965), scenes often begin at climactic moments without lengthy preparatory introductions, immediately concentrating attention on the central action. Editing is used sparingly, while depth compositions preserve the relationships between foreground, middle ground, and background. Camera movements are motivated by the organization of the mise-en-scène and by the need to reveal the geography of the filmic space. Characters frequently begin scenes in static positions and then move in coordination with the camera, maintaining compositional relationships with the background. Spatial revelation is often achieved by introducing elements into the frame that guide the viewer’s gaze toward new areas, avoiding the use of the long shot as a neutral introduction. In “Botë e padukshme” [8](1987), certain scenes are constructed through the careful choreography of camera and actors with minimal use of editing. This economy of means generates an accumulation of tension and demonstrates the ability to narrate events through essential elements. Events are often presented indirectly through visual fragments that suggest the overall space. The close-up is used to create visual tension, while shifts in perspective are achieved through camera movement.

Figure 16. The opening shot, a close up, the reason of the gathering.
Figure 17. Focus shift to Besmira, the protagonist.

Figure 18. Iljazi enters in the shot, covering up Besmira, camera follows him in a circular motion. The change in point of view.
Figure 19. We end up in a two shot, the body language of Iljaz, the anatagonist expresses self-confidence . The experiment has failed.

8 NewWay Movies. Bote e Padukshme 1987. www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASZBPlECZiM. Accessed 25 Mar. 2026.

Fig 20. First cut. Besmira is confused. She starts moving frame lef, camera follows in the same circular motion. The change in point of view.
Fig 21. Besmira is standing higher in the frame, she seems doubtful. Iljaz rejects her idea, stands up and exits frame.

Figure 22. Besmira discusses with the professor.
Figure 23. Second cut. Iljaz occupies Besmira's place. The change in point of view accentuated with a close up. He rejects the professor.

Figure 24. The professor reminds Iljaz his incompetence. Reverse close up shot.
Figure 25. Iljaz is upset, he leaves. The staff, also leaves.

Fig 26. Last cut from a new angle, the professor remains with Besmira. This angle sets the stage for the new location.

Across all of Kristaq Dhamo's films, mise-en-scène functions as a structured narrative system that organizes the perception of the story through film language. Meaning is embedded within the mise-en-scène, and the director masterfully commands what is truly the expressive power of this medium. In this way, ideology and narration are inscribed into the final product. Dhamo's films represent a golden standard of Albanian cinema, where storytelling is achieved through the articulation of filmic grammar.

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Filmography

1. Vitet e para (1965) - Director: Kristaq Dhamo, figures 1-11
2. Brazdat (1973) - Director: Kristaq Dhamo, figures 12-15
3. Botë e padukshme (1987) - Dirrector: Kristaq Dhamo, figures 16-26

The role of the creative producer and artistic director in artistic projects in public spaces: Mediating between artistic vision, community engagement and informal education

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Abstract

The understanding of public spaces and the role of the creative producer and artistic director. Where do the tasks, responsibilities and rights of the producer and the artistic director meet and where do they separate? Do they deal with vision and creativity or should they also be leaders of the artistic, technical, promotional and documentation teams of the activity? How are bridges of collaboration built between several actors who contribute to producing an activity in an urban space that affects the wider public? Do we create to earn or do we create to fulfill ourselves spiritually and to impact the community?We often fall prey to creating for the sake of entertainment and we measure artistic impact with statistical indicators of attendance, but does this affect the qualitative indicator in the medium and long term? Creative productions in public spaces not only entertain the public, but also educate, emancipate or attempt to change mentality by provoking it, improve living conditions also from an aesthetic point of view by enlivening the city, but also from a functional point of view, influence collective memory, give messages, and others.In such productions, the spectator is actively involved and learns, socializes by becoming an integral part of the activity and not simply as a "passive applauder". Community engagement, inclusivity as geographical distribution, as inclusion of communities or different age groups, is a social responsibility of the creative team. "Street art", is otherwise known as the "voice of the city", but do artists remain rebellious enough when art is artistically directed or led by producers, who take care of funding/sponsorships or funds from institutions, entities or different enterprises, that make the artistic activity possible?!

Keywords

Producer, public space, inclusivity, informal education

Introduction

In contemporary cities, public spaces are increasingly gaining importance as platforms for social interaction, cultural experiences and artistic expression. Beyond their urban and social function, these spaces have transformed into places where art can intervene directly in the everyday life of citizens, creating new forms of communication between artists, institutions and the public. In this context, creative productions in public spaces do not only have an aesthetic or entertaining function, but often aim to stimulate critical reflection, to build social relationships and to contribute to informal learning processes. The realization of these artistic projects requires the collaboration of several actors, among which an important role is played by the creative producer and the artistic director. While the artistic director is responsible for the concept and the aesthetic vision of the project, the producer mediates between artistic ideas, financial resources, institutions and the public, making possible the realization of the activity in urban space. However, the boundaries between these roles often remain unclear and in practice their responsibilities may overlap. This research aims to analyze the role of the creative producer in relation to the artistic director in public space art projects, examining the way collaborations between different actors are built and how these productions impact the public and the community. Taking into consideration the social and educational dimension of these activities, the article also discusses whether their success should be measured only through attendance indicators or also through the qualitative impact they may have on the cultural and social life of the city.

Public space and urban space

According to the dissertation presented at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, Tirana, for the degree of Doctor of Sciences by Klaud Manehasa:

1. From a social point of view, public spaces such as streets, parks, squares etc. are the main places where social life develops, where people can meet or spend their free time together.
2. Secondly, from an environmental point of view, quality public space favors the use of pedestrian roads and the use of public transport instead of continuous circulation with cars.
3. Thirdly, from an economic point of view, a public space that has a high pedestrian flow brings more income for the businesses located in that space. [1]

1 Klaud Manehasa, "Quality of Public Space: Presentation of an Evaluation Methodology"

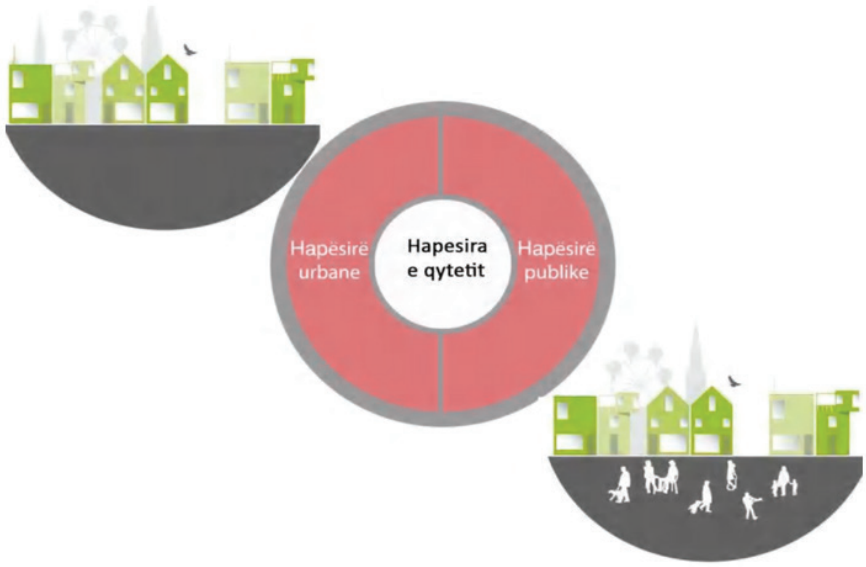

Figure 1

The creative producer and the artistic director

If public space is a shared urban space, in which people can express their dissatisfaction as a "voice of the city", expressed in artistic form, considering the city as a stage, what is the role of the artistic director or the producer? The artistic director mainly develops the artistic concept, selects the artists and defines the aesthetic as well as functional or creative approach of the project. The artistic director is a creative individual, who also knows the psychology of the artists with whom they collaborate, who guides the artists and sometimes even curates the artistic products, who knows the concerns of society and knows how to be an artivist or capable of solutions and aesthetic approaches. The producer makes the artistic activity possible, by coordinating all the actors necessary for realization. Christian Lopez has said:
"I see artistic direction as a large orchestra composed of directors, photographers, light, color, editors, etc. For me, it is the art of bringing them together, so that they all live in harmony with a personal and concrete point of view." On the other hand, a producer applies for the project and the finding of funds, sponsorships and financial support, makes agreements with artists, but also with technique, logistics, ensures permits in public spaces by creating relationships with the relevant institutions, manages the team and ticket sales or defines the audience and invitations for it, and others. So, the producer must create a connection between creative knowledge and organizational knowledge, having also legal and financial knowledge. Some of their qualities may be: good communication also in public, ability to work in a team and manage unexpected situations, well-prepared but also flexible, with high emotional intelligence, not to create panic but knowing how to manage situations, gives more effective results, to be a good negotiator, to have leadership abilities, to act also as a psychologist, but also to know marketing, public relations and the "selling" of the creative production, to strengthen the brand, after having carried out the S.W.O.T. analysis.

Does the creative producer differ from the cultural producer? What is the difference between audience and public or spectator? Cultural productions focus on heritage, traditional arts and on preserving cultural and historical memory, while creative productions are more related to innovation, the application of artistic practices, the generation of profit and the creation of jobs through intellectual property. Creative industries are connected not only with the arts, but also with media, crafts, architecture, technology, and others, emphasizing profit through intellectual property. But does this endanger creativity? Often, the producer is required to provide numbers/ statistics in reports after financial support, sponsorships or funding acquisition, which is mainly related to quantity, since in arts and culture it is difficult to measure quality in an objective form or to measure the impact on the community, as it is mostly noticed in medium and long-term terms the influence that art and culture have on each of our lives. Not rarely we are influenced and create "for the sake of calls" or based on what the sponsor requests, but even in those conditions, the artist should not forget to provoke with their art. Art, especially in public spaces, should continue to be rebellious, as a voice of the city, that raises different issues and seeks solutions from decision-makers or citizens. Creative producers should also not forget the inclusion of communities, geographical distribution for the realization of different productions, as well as the inclusion of different age groups, because the mission is not only related to profit.

Audience and public

Where does audience differ from public or spectator? In studies on art in public spaces, a distinction is often made between audience, public and community. While the audience refers to the spectators of a specific artistic activity, the concept of the public includes a broader category of users of the urban space. The community, on the other hand, implies a higher level of involvement, where individuals actively participate in the artistic process and in the development of the project. [2]The artistic producer, who realizes creative productions in public spaces, together with the artistic, technical team and others, helps in the inclusivity of the intended audience, as they also engage passersby to be involved in the artistic work by experiencing or interacting, even if they are there spontaneously. By encouraging inclusivity and by creating the appropriate conditions, this audience—now in the terms of a broader public—interacts and co-creates with the artists, but also with other people from the public, thus creating active communities that participate in creative works. The producer and the team design the experience and create the mechanisms for people to move from a passive role to an active role, from audience to public and from public to community. Thus, through the design of activities in public spaces, the producer can transform the relationship between art and people, shifting their role from passive audience towards a broader public and often towards an active and participatory community in the creative process. In such cases, can we say that the spectator becomes a participant and their engagement also makes them a co-author in artistic creation?

Informal education

"Let's build the city" is a game that I and Alba Canaj, my architect sister, have developed several times with children of different age groups, in several cities of Albania. Of course, not always children or even adults know what they want or are able to articulate what they think is best for them, because they do not always have what they deserve, but such meetings with a wide

2 Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Kwon 2004; Kester 2004

public make them reflect on their possibilities and demands as residents and taxpayers of this country. Such creative and interactive activities influence the orientation of possibilities that they can choose and also request for realization if they are missing or for improvement if they already have them. When we build the city with children, they not only get to know the rules of how a city functions, its urban planning, the role of different institutions, shared public space, activities and communities, but they also get to know empathy and the respect of the needs of the other; similar to themselves, but not the same. They learn the needs that a person with disabilities may have, they learn the needs of a parent with a small child who moves on foot and with a stroller, they learn the needs (at least in infrastructure) of the elderly, of marginalized groups, communities, etc., and together they decide to improve their conditions by adapting infrastructure for them, without neglecting the importance of mental and emotional health of the population, which is balanced with the creation of appropriate spaces and institutions. They learn about the importance of police, army, medicine and hospitals in different areas and not only in city centers, the importance of cultural institutions, etc., that complete the life of the citizens of this imaginary city, which could be almost ideal for their living. But we, do we learn from this educational game with children? Of course we do! Their sincerity in accepting the "different" and the empathy to give solutions, without considering personal interests, apart from the instinctive way of choosing and making decisions, makes us adults reflect… Symbolically, between two containers; where one is half full and the other half empty, we do not seek balance, but we seek how to empty one container or fill the other completely, which considers communication between the two "containers"—people/groups—as a goal of filling and emptying and not as a goal of communication and relationship. Therefore, the ego of the adult has difficulty learning from the child or from the "smaller" (not only in age meaning). But without experiencing the terrain, the reality, we cannot design the city we want…! Imagine adding to the urban space; the human being?! Welcome to public space, where creativity makes you play and play makes you learn… Isn't this informal education, "learning by doing"?!

Discussions and recommendations

Inclusivity : creative productions and children content :

In open activities, in public spaces, mainly without tickets but with free entrance, the content should not be for ages above 18, but allowed also for children, since the organizing team cannot manage a wide public while excluding specific age groups or communities. Avoiding hate speech, even if it is for artistic provocation, violence of any form or erotic scenes and nudity, are necessary avoidances. By choosing the appropriate location, also the content of creative productions should be adapted to the public, to include them in an active form, making them part of discussions, workshops, ideas or artistic co-creations.

Technique

Noise, audio systems and lighting systems planned in activities where children are participants, should be adapted so as not to damage sensory organs, but also not to "scare" them with illusion situations. Even though creativity is related to technological development, we should be careful to use the right type of it. Also, a professional producer, together with the implementation team, should also take care of the environment:

- monitors weather forecasts and chooses the appropriate equipment for outdoor environments, taking care both of technical safety and artistic/creative development
- takes care of acoustic pollution, so as not to harm participants, passersby, living beings around, nor the environment with dirt or violation of hygiene rules and respect for public space, setting an example for the wider public
- ensures the smooth running of the activity, order, safety, etc.

In inclusive terms, we should also think about the appropriate infrastructure for the realization of creative productions:

- in an area that can be accessed also by public transport, pedestrians or bicycles or that has a parking area nearby for private vehicles
- or near hospitals in case of emergencies or ensuring ambulances are present, as well as police for order and safety or/and taking measures for private security staff, as well as trained staff and equipment for possible fire extinguishing, as well as notifying the fire brigade
- dedicated areas for people with disabilities and specific infrastructure
- creating safe zones also for different communities or social, cultural, economic diversity, etc.

Do we produce enough creative activities for children and adolescents, especially in public spaces?

This is also related to the ways of funding/sponsorship or funds for a project, since most of the time indicators and numbers are required for reporting (as mentioned above), and in such cases it remains "a challenge" to create with education as the main purpose and entertainment as secondary. Children and adolescents are an age group for which the impact and influence that art and culture have on them is noticed years later, which is not always in the interest of entities or enterprises that sponsor art, creativity and culture. On the other hand, projects or financial support from national and international public institutions or entities do not create sustainability of creative productions in public spaces, to create a tradition in organizing them in long-term terms, since funding is short-term and based on annual calls. Children and adolescents are a group whose cultural impact may only be visible years later, which is not always attractive for sponsors seeking immediate measurable results.
How can we create sustainability?

- By supporting creative productions in longer-term frameworks, so that their impact on the community is more inclusive and by not reporting only quantitative statistics, but by measuring social and broader impact qualitatively
- By distributing creative productions geographically; both in rural and urban areas, with the aim of informal education, through the active inclusion of the wider public, as well as quality leisure
- By considering communities; people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ communities, communities with different ethnicity, language and culture, as well as social and economic differences
- By believing that art improves everyone's life!

- By believing that creativity is not only passion, but also a profitable and educational profession, while maintaining the balance between the two…

In the published book "Life between buildings, using public space" by Jan Gehl, it is written: *"Put very simply, outdoor activities can be divided into three categories, each of which places very different demands on the physical environment: necessary activities, optional activities and social activities." When outdoor spaces are of poor quality, only necessary activities occur. When outdoor spaces are of high quality, necessary activities occur with approximately the same frequency—but they tend to last longer, because physical conditions are better. In streets and urban spaces of poor quality, only the minimum level of activity takes place. People hurry home. In a good environment, something completely different happens. A wide spectrum of human activities becomes possible."*[3]
Do you think you are living in the right city?!
Do you think you have done enough as a producer or artistic director for mediating public spaces, artistic vision, community engagement and informal education?

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Children as guardians of ideology: Play and vigilance in Albanian children's cinema of Socialist Realism

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Abstract

The cinematic legacy of the former Kinostudio "Shqipëria e Re" reflects the intersection of aesthetics, ideology, and collective memory in post-socialist Albania, particularly through children's cinema. During the period of Socialist Realism, film was not merely an artistic practice but also an instrument for the production of subjectivity, shaping the moral framework and behavior of the younger generation in accordance with Party ideology. The theoretical analyses of Michel Foucault on discipline and surveillance, together with the reflections of Giorgio Agamben on childhood and play, allow us to understand children's cinema as a space where aesthetics, power, and ideological education are structurally intertwined.Through cinematic examples such as Pas gjurmëve (On the track) (Xhanfise Keko, 1978), Lugina e pushkatarëve (Valley of the Riflemen) (Todi Bozo & Vitori Çela, 1970), and Një gjeneral kapet rob (A General Has Been Taken Prisoner) (Spartak Pecani, 1978), the study highlights the mechanisms of revolutionary vigilance transmitted to children, where play and gesture are transformed into means for the internalization of ideological norms. These films illustrate that, even within a rich artistic framework, ideology remains present and functions as both an educational and political force.Within the broader context of film heritage, this study demonstrates the need for a critical contextualization of these works, combining the preservation of their aesthetic value with an awareness of their propagandistic dimension. It is recommended that the study of children's cinema of Socialist Realism be integrated into Film, Multimedia, Journalism, and Literature curricula, fostering a critical understanding of its historical context and encouraging reflection on the relationships between aesthetics, ideology, power, and education.

Keywords

Politic, aesthetic, education, film language, subjectivation

Introduction

The cinematic legacy of the former Kinostudio "Shqipëria e Re" remains a subject that continues to generate debate at the intersection of aesthetics, ideology, and collective memory in post-socialist Albania. During the period of Socialist Realism, film production constituted an integral part of the cultural apparatus of the state, and cinema - particularly children's cinema - was conceived as an educational instrument of particular importance in shaping the "new socialist man." In this context, cinema did not function merely as an artistic practice, but rather as a technology for the production and shaping of collective consciousness and proletarian discipline. The debate concerning the current status of the films produced by the former Kinostudio "Shqipëria e Re" — whether they should be regarded as part of the national cultural heritage or as propagandistic products requiring critical contextualization — re-emerged in the public discourse in March 2017. At that time, the director of the Institute for the Study of the Crimes and Consequences of Communism (ISKK), Agron Tufa, submitted an official request to the Albanian Parliament proposing that these films be filtered, accompanied by appropriate historical context, or screened with interpretative warnings. According to his argument, "cinematographic products (…) contain, to varying degrees, offensive, denigrating, and manipulative propaganda when assessed against contemporary democratic standards."[1]
In 2020, an analysis published on Exit.al noted that films produced by the former Kinostudio continue to be broadcast without an accompanying interpretive framework, raising concerns that their propagandistic dimension remains largely unexamined and potentially problematic. [2]This approach situates the cinematic heritage in a tension between the preservation of cultural legacy and the exercise of historical responsibility. Focusing specifically on children's films, this raises a critical question: Were the creators of these films fully aware of their responsibility, recognizing that their works functioned as instruments of ideological propaganda, and that they themselves acted as educators shaping the new generation? To understand this issue, a theoretical framework is necessary that reads cinema as a space for the production of subjectivity.

In this regard, Michel Foucault's analysis of discipline and the internalization of power in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* provides a crucial conceptual tool.[3]
Foucault argues that modern society no longer operates through the spectacle of punishment, but through a regime of continuous surveillance that produces "docile bodies" and subjects who internalize norms. In this sense, socialist children's cinema can be read as an aesthetic mechanism of this surveillance: through narrative, the "class enemy," behavioral modeling, and the moral and ideological structure of conflict, it contributes to the formation of a subject trained to perceive themselves through the lens of propaganda.[4]
Giorgio Agamben's reflections on "infancy" as *experimentum linguae* indicate that childhood is not merely a biological stage, but an experience at the limits of language, where the subject enters the symbolic order and appropriates articulation.[5]Children's cinema, as a cultural practice oriented toward the developing subject, operates within the interactive space between pre-reflective experience and ideological norms, where surveillance functions as an internalized

1 ResPublica.al. "Tufa: Letër Kuvendit — Filmave të komunizmit t'u vendoset logo shpjeguese 'Kujdes' ose 'PPSH'." 30 March 2017. https://www.respublica.al.
2 Exit.al. "Filmat e ish-Kinostudios, propagandë apo pasuri kombëtare?" 2020. https://exit.al.
3 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).
4 Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).
5 Giorgio Agamben, Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience (London: Verso, 1993).

process teaching the subject to act within the norm. [6]This theoretical framework, when connected to the debate on the legacy of the Kinostudio, reconceptualizes children's film not as nostalgia, but as a space in which aesthetics, power, and moral formation are structurally intertwined.[7]

Photo of actor Sulejman Pitarka in the role of Xha Lipe, from the filming of Pas gjurmëve (X. Keko, 1978).

"People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what they do does."[8]

Has the "crafting of vigilance" been treated as play in artistic children's cinema?

According to Giorgio Agamben, "The toy is a materialization of the historicity contained in objects, extracting it by means of a particular manipulation. (…) the toy, dismembering and distorting the past or miniaturizing the present (…) makes present and renders tangible human temporality in itself, the pure differential margin between the 'once' and the 'no longer.'"[9]
In children's cinema, play and "toys" function as a communicative medium, carrying both the author's ideological and artistic intentions as well as those of the historical period in which the works were produced. Let us examine three films that address the theme of revolutionary vigilance; given the focus on cinema, it is also necessary to consider the gendered dimension of authorship.
Lugina e pushkatarëve (1970) addresses the theme of vigilance directly; Met Sokoli is a young pioneer boy fighting against a group of saboteurs entering Albania. The screenplay and direction are attributed to Todi Bozo, with Vitori Çeli credited as co-director.

The film - whose production shows limited aesthetic interrogation of gendered authorship and may be read as predominantly male-centered in its cinematic construction - opens in the first light of dawn in a mountainous valley.

6 Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).
7 Exit.al. "Filmat e ish-Kinostudios, propagandë apo pasuri kombëtare?" 2020; ResPublica.al, 2017.
8 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988 [1969]).
9 Giorgio Agamben, Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience (London: Verso, 1993), 71.

The camera descends toward highlanders working the land, until the opening revolutionary music is interrupted by gunshots.
The tension created does not prevent the villagers from returning to work. The next scene shifts to a schoolyard: students are outside, and the camera approaches two boys playing with a flag. Through close-ups and suspenseful framing, the faces appear severe; cinematographer F. Basha constructs an image of stark contrasts and rigid compositions, echoing the mountainous backdrop - "Danger is near." The film relaxes only marginally in the valley of the riflemen, when Meti, the main character, asks his father to teach him how to shoot in the training grounds where rifle practice takes place. The child actor, Kol Prela, embodies the psychophysical profile of a daring hero; his insistence on learning to use a rifle, in another context, would be read as transgressive or even unlawful, but within the framework of Socialist Realist cinema it becomes an educational gesture aimed at producing a new generation of "vigilant" riflemen.
This is the play of a child formed in and by the mountainous environment. The film's introduction is notably extended—approximately twenty-five minutes pass before the loss of "Sytka" (the sheep), which signals the discovery of the saboteurs. The narrative progression, however, appears abrupt and heavily staged, as though vigilance as ideological imperative outweighs organic cinematic development. The saboteurs are portrayed as clumsy and inattentive, while Meti, introduced in close-up, turns his back on them with a confident, almost triumphant gaze, positioned as an omnipotent child confronting three armed intruders.
Michel Foucault, reflecting on power relations, argues that "in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations."[10]In this film, however, traces of resistance are virtually absent. The secondary dialogue track - highly schematic - pushes subtext into explicitness. Characters speak in rigid formulations, moral positioning is declared rather than developed, and the ideological line is unmistakably articulated.
The camera follows the action from a fixed point, resembling a POV from a border post; when the saboteurs are revealed, a new angle is introduced—a high-angle shot—rendering the cinematography relatively flat, without depth or visual ambiguity. The film develops a degree of novelty in constructing tension through ellipsis and sound, with gunshots functioning as dramaturgical elements. The turning point, when Meti takes the rifle to confront the saboteurs, introduces a low-angle shot that expands the landscape and elevates the communist figure among the rocks, bathed in light, culminating in the final shot where the camera looks from above: "the danger among the mountains is continuous."[11]

Vigilance as a Direct Narrative Element and Cinematic Language

In her study *Growing Pains and Radical Politics in Xhanfise Keko's Pas Gjurmëve*, Jonida Gashi provides a detailed analysis of the ideological traces in the film, highlighting ideological signaling without neglecting the high artistic quality of Xhanfise Keko's work. Gashi presents Keko as the only woman among several men trained in the Soviet Union, where she also studied montage at a documentary school in Moscow. Upon her return to Albania, on the inauguration day of Kinostudio "Shqipëria e Re," she was assigned the ceremonial task of holding the scissors for the ribbon-cutting next to Enver Hoxha. On that same day, she appears in the studio's first

10 Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).
11 Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

filmed material at her editing table, where her presence is both natural and emblematic.[12]
Such an introduction of the female director—highly productive and internationally recognized within a relatively isolated national context—strengthens the continuation of a detailed analysis of radical politics in the film. Gashi argues that: "The participation of the protagonists in mass surveillance is clearly presented as an extension of the games children play in their everyday life. (…) This approach also forms the basis upon which she (Xhanfise Keko) modifies the typical conventions of this genre, transforming them into a narrative form that is more understandable and appealing to a young audience."[13]
Pas Gjurmëve (1978) opens very promisingly with an immersive score by Nikolla Zoraqi, immediately placing the viewer in an atmosphere of surveillance. The screen then presents photographs, reminiscent of sequences in French Nouvelle Vague cinema, introducing a new cinematic language, followed by a fluid and dynamic long take accompanying a young soldier in a pan shot, presenting post-war Albania without wasting screen time. This densely informative introduction organically leads to the three child protagonists, the "little detectives"; the viewer follows "from where the voice comes," while a loudspeaker announces a political trial to the "people" in the square. Within a few minutes, the film establishes the full ideological framework that will structure the narrative.[14]
"Cinema leads images back into the realm of gesture. According to the splendid definition implicit in Beckett's *Traum und Nacht*, this is the dream of a gesture. Bringing the element of awakening into this dream is the task of the film-maker."[15]Pas Gjurmëve, in this sense, follows the uninterrupted traces of ideology—what Gashi terms "radical politics." But what are the "growing pains"? "Keko's true achievement probably lies in her ability to translate the radical politics of the Ideological Cultural Revolution Era into the children's film genre. Similarly her artistic experimentation and innovation need to be examined in light of similar efforts by her colleagues and peers in order to be properly understood."[16]
Pas Gjurmëve becomes a dense sequence of "educational" procedures on how to identify and pursue a spy. For a child audience, it functions as an ideological-educational manual; for an adult viewer, it simultaneously operates as a film with a sophisticated cinematic language, featuring strong artistic solutions in casting, set design, lighting, camera movement, mise-en-scène, concise dialogue, and screenplay—formally robust in dramatic construction yet ideologically complex. The film thus functions as a lesson in cinema itself. As Laura Mulvey observes, "Visual pleasure is the mechanism through which ideology functions." [17]But can this lesson remain aesthetically valuable when every frame bears a trace of propaganda - a slogan on the wall, a line of dialogue, a proletarian action structured around the opposition between "beautiful" characters (the communists) and "gloomy" ones (the class enemy)[18]

12 Jonida Gashi, "Growing Pains and Radical Politics in Xhanfise Keko's Pas Gjurmëve," 2020.
13 Jonida Gashi, "Growing Pains and Radical Politics in Xhanfise Keko's *Pas Gjurmëve*," 2020, 121.
14 Jonida Gashi, "Growing Pains and Radical Politics in Xhanfise Keko's Pas Gjurmëve," 2020.
15 Giorgio Agamben, Means Without End: Notes on Politics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 139.
16 Jonida Gashi, "Growing Pains and Radical Politics in Xhanfise Keko's Pas Gjurmëve," 2023, 114.
17 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen 16, no. 3 (1975): 805
18 This formulation engages with broader debates on the relationship between aesthetics and ideology in Socialist Realist cinema; see generally Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen 16, no. 3 (1975): 803–816.

According to Gashi, "The controversy stems from the nature of the activities and behaviours explored in these films… [which are] seen as synonymous with communist militancy, be it the armed struggle against the Nazi-fascist occupiers during the Second World War, or the violent hunt for the enemies of the Party and of Socialism in the immediate post-war period." [19]Yet *Pas Gjurmëve* remains an ideological cinematographic poem in the stylistic register of the French Nouvelle Vague. Returning to Agamben: "Because it is centrally located in the gesture, not the image, cinema essentially ranks with ethics and politics (and not merely with aesthetics)."[20]

How, then, is the theme of play and revolutionary vigilance approached from a masculine perspective? Theorists such as Laura Mulvey draw on feminist film theory to analyze how visual culture—particularly classical cinema—is organized around a male gaze, structured through what she terms phallocentrism, in which patriarchal authority constitutes the dominant ordering principle of representation.[21]

In the film *Një gjeneral kapet rob* (1980), directed by S. Pecani and based on the story of the same title by S. Hasko, with screenplay by S. Hasko and N. Tafa, the narrative unfolds in a coastal town during the summer holidays. The film functions as a hymn to children's play: the characters appear to inhabit a child-centered world, with minimal adult intervention. In a parallel literary image, Collodi's *Pinocchio*, after traveling at night on the back of the talking donkey, joyfully arrives at dawn in the "Land of Toys." In this depiction of a utopian infantile republic, Collodi constructs a universe governed entirely by play.[22]

Yet, this film too does not escape propaganda. "I am the traitor!" is a tragicomic line delivered by one of the film's most endearing characters, Goni, just as in an earlier scene Gëzimi (the naturalist) dreams of birds pecking at him and awakens shouting, "I am not the traitor!" This "popular trial" perhaps constitutes the film's most ideologically charged conflict: who revealed the secret of where the ladder was hidden? Not even a child's world remains intact when it is made to mirror the adult world within the political context of a "flourishing" socialist Albania. As Agamben writes: "For it is untrue that our time can be characterized merely by its obliviousness to traditional values and a scepticism about the past. On the contrary—perhaps no other epoch has been so obsessed by its own past and so unable to create a vital relationship with it…"[23]

Një gjeneral kapet rob is a film that demands a carefully composed and aesthetically deliberate framing, constructed largely through a two-plane visual structure in which dramatic action consistently unfolds in the foreground. S. Pecani, together with cinematographer L. Konomi, maintains a dynamic background that alternately situates temporal context and dramaturgical tension. From the outset, the film introduces the landscape of Dhërmi; children walking in formation between the reservoir and the sea—caught between dream and reflection—produce some of the most visually striking sequences in Albanian cinema. In this childlike paradise, gunshots suddenly interrupt the serenity; soldiers are shown training nearby, as if to remind the viewer that the beauty of the homeland must be defended. The earlier romanticized tone shifts into a mode that can be read as a "romantic war film," or a playful simulation of war using wooden rifles.

19 Jonida Gashi, "Growing Pains and Radical Politics in Xhanfise Keko's Pas Gjurmëve," 2023, 114.
20 Giorgio Agamben, Means Without End: Notes on Politics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 139.
21 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen 16, no. 3 (1975): 811.
22 Giorgio Agamben, Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience (London: Verso, 1993), 67.
23 Giorgio Agamben, Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience (London: Verso, 1993), 144.

The dialogue remains grounded, and the child performances are notably effective. The film constructs a parade of characters in vivid costumes designed by S. Varvarica, luminous landscapes, clear compositional schemes, and wide framing, contrasted with the severity of General Bato and the conflict structure. Dramatic devices such as betrayal, promises, familial oaths, public punishment, and political leaflets function as recognizable mechanisms of socialist realist signaling, where vigilance is translated into play.
However, this play is never neutral: it becomes morally weighted, placing significant ethical and political responsibility on the child protagonist. The film carefully balances each darker sequence with one suffused in light, sustaining an "aesthetically beautiful" and ultimately optimistic tone; however, it cannot fully escape ideology—the nightmare of the traitor persists beyond the viewing experience.

"Play" and "Vigilance" as an Ideological Language

For Agamben, "…Play too presents us with an analogous phenomenon; play too has its unbudgeable stumbling block. Because the toy, as a representation of a pure temporal interval, is undoubtedly a signifier of absolute diachrony, of the prior transformation of a structure into an event.[24]
To understand the function of "play" as a psychological instrument in the embedding of ideological discourse, it is sufficient to examine several children's films: *Mëngjese lufte* (1971, K. Dhamo), *Mimoza Llastica* (1973), *Beni ecën vetë* (1975), *Qyteti më i ri në botë* (1974), and *Tomka dhe shokët e tij* (1977, Xh. Keko). In all of these works, play operates as a dramaturgical mechanism for the articulation of regime ideology: voluntary labor, anti-traditional norms, class struggle, and revolutionary vigilance. As Gashi notes, "the revolutionary vigilance films had become a more or less established genre… to adapt a revolutionary vigilance film for the children's film genre… entailed both providing a child's point of view on the battle against class enemies… in a way that was comprehensible and engaging for the film audience."[25]
This obstacle seems to have been overcome with relative ease, through the high level of collaboration of the creators, who were placed in service of the Party line, in fact, they were employed to deconstruct this line within the (child-centered) cinematographic language of the system - in other words, in an ideological language - through details and stories that, rather than analyzing children's realities, examined the truths of adults and of the regime.

"Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political 'double bind,' which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures."[26]

Conclusions: How to Educate a Critical Mindset on Socialist Realist Children's Cinema?

In her book *Archival Documents in the Central State Film Archive, 1954–1994*, Eriona Vyshka compiles the minutes recorded by the commissions that supervised film production up until public release.

24 Giorgio Agamben, Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience (London: Verso, 1993), 81.
25 Jonida Gashi, "Growing Pains and Radical Politics in Xhanfise Keko's Pas Gjurmëve," 2023, 117.
26 Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 785.

These included the Preliminary Commission (with representatives from the Writers' Union, the Ministry of Education and Culture, as well as the director and/or artistic leader of the film studio), the Artistic Council, the Creative Collective (comprising filmmakers and staff), and the Screening Commission. Moreover, "Studio documents do not state this, but from oral testimonies of filmmakers we learn that there was another unofficial filter: the film and the projectionist were sent to the Leader's Villa for a private screening for Enver Hoxha and members of the Political Bureau."[27] Subsequently, the decision was made to produce twenty-six copies, distributed across the districts of the Republic.

Michel Foucault raises a related critical problem: "The relationship between rationalization and excesses of political power is evident. And we should not need to wait for bureaucracy or concentration camps to recognize the existence of such relations. But the problem is: What to do with such an evident fact?"[28]

The documentary *Kinostudio: The Sanctification of Images* (TV France 3, Mira Production, 2013) provides firsthand testimonies on the tight control exercised by the state apparatus over socialist realist filmmaking. Piro Milkani notes: "More than censorship, it was self-censorship; (…) no director or screenwriter was imprisoned, but one had to follow the rules of socialist realism. (…) Enver Hoxha was our primary spectator."[29] According to archivist Gjergji Pano, twenty high-ranking Party officials ensured that nothing escaped scrutiny.

After evaluation by the inspectors, a copy was prepared for screening at the Leader's Villa: "It was Ramiz Alia who made the final decision on whether the film could be shown to the public," recalls Bajram Lile, the studio projectionist. These testimonies suggest that Albanian cinema functioned not merely as an artistic product, but also as a mechanism for the "sanctification of the ideological image."

Foucault argues: "Never, I think, in the history of human societies—even in the old Chinese society—has there been such a tricky combination in the same political structures of individualization techniques and of totalization procedures."[30]

Drawing on the publication of AQSHF, *Archival Documents in the AQSHF Collection 1954–1994* (Vyshka, 2023), this study emphasizes the need to develop a critical approach to Albanian children's cinema of the Socialist Realist period. An analysis of the relationship between cinematic aesthetics and ideology raises the question of whether these films - where play and ideological vigilance are deeply intertwined - may still shape the perceptions of contemporary children, who often lack familiarity with the socio-historical context of their production. Within this framework, it is recommended that archival publications from AQSHF on the productions of Kinostudio "Shqipëria e Re" be integrated into university curricula in film, media, and cultural studies, in order to foster a critical understanding of the relationships between power, education, and aesthetics in the visual culture of Socialist Realist cinema.

27 Eriona Vyshka, Archival Documents in the Central State Film Archive, 1954–1994 (Tirana, 2023).

28 Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 779.

29 Kinostudio: The Sanctification of Images, TV France 3 / Mira Production, 2013.

30 Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 782.

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Hybrid cinema: An analysis of psychological and perceptual effects on the viewer

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Abstract

This paper examines the psychological and perceptual effects of hybrid narratives that intertwine documentary, fiction, and experimental forms in contemporary cinema. The analysis is grounded in two representative case studies, F for Fake and The Act of Killing, which are considered paradigms of hybrid cinema due to their integration of factual documentation with performative elements and essayistic interventions that problematize the boundary between reality and cinematic construction. The growing proliferation of these forms reflects a shift toward non-linear and subjective structures, raising questions about how audiences perceive truth and emotion. The aim of this study is to analyze how the blurring of boundaries between the real and the imagined influences the viewer's perception.Drawing on Timothy Corrigan's concept of the "essayistic form," the study examines how hybrid cinema transforms a personal perspective into a public experience, in which meaning is co-constructed with the audience. Furthermore, through Robert Rieber and Robert Kelly's framework of the "social dream," the study evaluates how these images engage the unconscious and collective anxieties.The qualitative methodology combines theoretical analysis with an examination of narrative strategies such as ambiguity and fragmentation. The findings suggest that hybrid cinema intensifies psychological immersion by destabilizing conventional realism and encouraging a process of "working without knowing the outcome," thereby enhancing emotional and critical awareness. The paper concludes that these forms serve as a powerful educational tool for navigating the complexity of mediated reality, calling for a reflective mode of spectatorship.

Keywords

Hybrid cinema, essayistic form, visual perception, emotional engagement, dialogic knowledge

Introduction

Hybrid Cinema as an "Essay" of the Collective Soul

In our visual era, cinema is no longer satisfied with the simple act of telling a story. We have entered a phase in which the boundaries between documentary (factual truth) and fiction (imagination) have become so indistinct that it is often difficult to determine where one ends and the other begins. This shift is not merely a technical trend, but an artistic necessity aimed at reflecting the complexity of human life.

As Timothy Corrigan explains, this "essayistic" form of film is rooted in the desire to test and explore ideas[1]. He argues that this type of film articulates "the multi-layered activities of a personal viewpoint as a public experience." Thus, when we watch a hybrid film, we are not merely observing a finished product; we are participating in the author's "attempt" to make sense of the world. This transforms the viewer from a passive observer into a co-author who must construct meaning from within the images.

This engagement is not only intellectual, but deeply psychological. Hybrid cinema touches dimensions of the unconscious that classical forms often overlook. According to Robert Rieber and Robert Kelly, audiovisual media functions as a "social dream"[2]. They suggest that film and television are not merely forms of entertainment, but mirrors of our collective desires, fears, and anxieties. By employing experimental devices, hybrid cinema succeeds in destabilizing our certainties, compelling us to confront our emotions in a more direct and sincere manner.

The aim of this paper is precisely to explore this ambiguous terrain. We will examine how the uncertainty of reality enables us to develop a more critical awareness and a more human connection with what we see on screen. Ultimately, hybrid cinema constitutes a powerful tool for artistic education and for understanding the world that surrounds us.

Within this framework, the central research question that emerges is: how does the destabilization of the boundaries between documentary and fiction influence the viewer's psychological perception and critical engagement? This study seeks to address this question through an analysis of the essayistic form and the concept of the "social dream," proposing a theoretical intersection between the dialogic dimension of the image and collective unconscious processes. In doing so, the paper contributes an interpretative model that considers narrative fragmentation not merely as an aesthetic strategy, but as a pedagogical mechanism that fosters emotional and critical awareness within the context of contemporary arts education.

Literature Review

New Perspectives on Hybrid Cinema

Contemporary studies suggest that hybrid cinema is not merely a blending of genres, but a means of producing new forms of knowledge through doubt and inquiry. This form demands an engagement that goes beyond simple observation, transforming into a process of co-construction between author and audience.

Within this framework, the essayistic mode generates a "desire to know and to think" through what is described as "dialogic knowledge"[3]. Essayistic ideas about the self and the other must return to the viewer as a reconfigured form of knowledge emerging from multiple perspectives. This suggests that hybrid cinema does not provide definitive answers; rather, it functions as a medium through which we "work without fully knowing" the outcome, making the viewer an active participant in the process of discovery.

From a psychological perspective, this process is closely related to the way media shapes our perception of social reality. The discussion begins with how cinematic images engage

1 Thomas Corrigan, The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 3.

2 Robert W. Rieber and Robert J. Kelly, Film, Television and the Psychology of the Social Dream (New York: Springer, 2014), p. 1.

3 Timothy Corrigan, The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 75.

"unconscious instincts," creating a link between what we see on screen and our inner world[4]. It is argued that audiovisual media possesses the power to reflect and manipulate these instincts, rendering hybrid cinema a terrain in which the "social dream" becomes tangible. This implies that the destabilization of narrative within such films serves to bring psychological truths to the surface truths that classical narratives often conceal.

In summary, recent scholarship emphasizes that the significance of these forms lies in their capacity to create an "engaged spectator" who no longer takes the image for granted. Through fragmentation and subjectivity, hybrid cinema becomes a critical instrument that encourages reflection on the very nature of truth in the modern era. These theoretical perspectives provide the conceptual foundation for the analysis of case studies such as *F for Fake* and *The Act of Killing*, which concretely embody the interplay between authorial subjectivity, narrative fragmentation, and the activation of the "social dream".

Methodology:

A Qualitative and Dialogic Approach

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to examine the psychological and perceptual effects of hybrid narratives on the viewer. The choice of this approach is grounded in the need for an in-depth conceptual analysis of cinematic forms, moving away from quantitative measurement in order to focus on subjective and interpretative experience.

The study centers on two case studies: *F for Fake* (Welles, 1973) and *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer, 2012). Their selection is based on specific criteria: the interweaving of documentary with performative elements, the presence of a pronounced authorial voice, and the use of non-linear structures that destabilize the perception of reality.

The analysis is conducted through a combination of close reading of key sequences, narratological examination of fragmentation, and a psychoanalytic interpretation of the image in relation to the concept of the "social dream".

The methodological framework is grounded in the textual and visual analysis of narrative strategies. The study of the essayistic form requires particular attention to the "intervention of voice" and to the subjectivity that disrupts traditional structures. This method enables us to examine how hybrid films do not function as closed documents, but rather as processes in which "the idea returns to the viewer in a reconfigured form"[5]. This dialogic approach is essential for understanding how narrative ambiguity is employed as a deliberate device to encourage active interpretation.

From a psychological perspective, the methodology incorporates an analysis of the image as a reflection of unconscious processes. The study of media must take into account how visual elements operate within a "collective fantasy." Drawing on this perspective, the research examines how fictional techniques embedded within documentary forms engage the viewer's "unconscious drives," generating a tension between what is perceived as truth and what is experienced as emotion[6].

The analysis focuses on selected examples of contemporary films, employing close viewing to identify how fragmentation and non-linear structures influence audience engagement. Through this integrated methodology, the study aims to demonstrate that hybrid forms are not merely aesthetic experiments, but pedagogical tools that educate viewers to navigate the complexity of mediated reality.

4 Robert W. Rieber and Robert J. Kelly, Film, Television and the Psychology of the Social Dream (New York: Springer, 2014), p. 18.

5 Timothy Corrigan, The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 68, 75.

6 Robert W. Rieber and Robert J. Kelly, Film, Television and the Psychology of the Social Dream (New York: Springer, 2014), p. 18, 41.

Results and Discussion

Destabilization and New Modes of Engagement

The qualitative analysis of hybrid narratives reveals that these forms function not simply as entertainment, but as mechanisms that actively destabilize the viewer's expectations. The central finding is that the ambiguity between the real and the constructed is not an obstacle; rather, it is the primary device that intensifies psychological involvement.

In *F for Fake*, this strategy manifests through Orson Welles's direct intervention, as he exposes manipulation as part of the film's very structure, placing the viewer in a state of active doubt toward the authority of the image. Meanwhile, in *The Act of Killing*, the performative reenactments of crimes by the perpetrators themselves generate a profound affective tension, in which historical documentation intertwines with fantasy and self-mythologization. In both cases, narrative destabilization does not produce passive confusion, but a form of reflective engagement that compels the spectator to reconsider the relationship between memory, reality, and cinematic representation.

One of the most significant findings relates to what Timothy Corrigan describes as the production of a "desire to know and to think." The analysis demonstrates that in hybrid films, meaning is not presented to the viewer as a ready-made fact; rather, it emerges through a process of "dialogic knowledge." The viewer is compelled to work with fragments of the image without fully knowing the outcome, transforming the cinematic experience into a reflective activity. This confirms that hybrid cinema shifts authority away from the screen and toward the spectator's own process of thought, creating a "public experience" from a deeply personal perspective[7].

With regard to emotional impact, the discussion is reinforced by the concept of the "social dream." Robert Rieber and Robert Kelly argue that media possesses the power to engage the audience's "unconscious drives." Our findings indicate that hybrid films, by blurring the boundaries of reality, stimulate these drives in ways that classical narratives cannot. Narrative uncertainty does not produce passive confusion; rather, it generates an affective tension in which empathy and doubt coexist. This suggests that the "social dream" in hybrid cinema functions as a terrain where viewers confront collective anxieties and desires through a form that closely resembles the very process of dreaming.[8].

The ethical challenges arising from this manipulation of reality demand a higher level of critical literacy. The analysis suggests that the discomfort viewers experience when confronted with images that "fabricate" reality is, in fact, an educational turning point. It teaches us to become more skeptical and more attentive to images in everyday life.

In conclusion, the findings reinforce the argument that hybrid cinema is a powerful instrument for reshaping perception, offering new possibilities for artistic expression and critical awareness in contemporary culture.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that contemporary hybrid cinema is not merely a new genre, but a medium that fundamentally reshapes the viewer's perception. Through the analysis of Corrigan (2011), we have confirmed that the "essayistic form" creates a dialogic space in which the spectator is invited to "work" on the image rather than simply consume it. Meanwhile, the approach of Rieber and Kelly (2014) has enabled us to understand how these narratives engage the "social dream" and unconscious drives, generating a profound emotional connection through narrative uncertainty.

The analysis of *F for Fake* and *The Act of Killing* confirms that the destabilization of form does not function merely as an aesthetic experiment, but as a mechanism that activates a critical and

7 Timothy Corrigan, The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 3, 75.

8 Robert W. Rieber and Robert J. Kelly, Film, Television and the Psychology of the Social Dream (New York: Springer, 2014), p. 1, 18.

emotionally engaged viewer. In both cases, authorial intervention and the performative act of producing reality create a space in which reality is not accepted as given, but understood as a construct requiring interpretation. This reinforces the argument that hybrid cinema operates simultaneously on aesthetic, psychological, and pedagogical levels.

Recommendations and Implications

Based on the findings of this study particularly the analysis of *F for Fake* and *The Act of Killing* the following steps are recommended for scholars and practitioners:

1. ***Media Education:***
   Arts education programs should integrate the analysis of hybrid films in order to foster critical thinking. By learning to navigate between the real and the fictional, students become less susceptible to visual manipulation in the age of disinformation.
2. ***Creative Practice:***
   Emerging filmmakers should be encouraged to employ "public subjectivity" (Corrigan, 2011, p. 31) as a tool for addressing complex social issues, as this form enhances the audience's emotional engagement.
3. ***Future Research:***
   The implications of this study open avenues for further research on the impact of non-linear structures on viewers' long-term memory, as well as on how hybrid images influence the formation of political and social opinions.

Analytical Element	***F for Fake* (1973)**	***The Act of Killing* (2012)**
Type of Form	Essayistic documentary film	Performative documentary film
Hybrid Strategy	Direct authorial intervention and conscious manipulation of the narrative	Performative reenactments of historical events by the protagonists
Narrative Structure	Fragmented, non-linear, reflexive	Non-linear, interweaving documentation and fantasy
Destabilization of Reality	Exposes the illusion of documentary authority	Blends historical documentation with self-mythologization
Psychological Effect	Activates epistemological doubt in the viewer	Generates affective tension and confrontation with collective memory
Pedagogical Function	Encourages critique of image manipulation	Promotes reflection on historical and ethical responsibility

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Hybrid Strategies in F for Fake and The Act of Killing

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We live inside a dream: Staging Ravel's L'Enfant et les sortilèges through the lens of David Lynch

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Abstract

This paper presents a practice-based research project developed within the PNRR Performing Ravel initiative at the Conservatorio "G. Briccialdi" of Terni, centred on the staging of Maurice Ravel's lyric fantasy L'enfant et les sortilèges (The Child and the Spells, 1925). The purpose of this study is to examine how the simultaneous teaching of stage direction, lighting design, and music theatre history – enriched by a cinematographic perspective – enables an integrated pedagogical model in which disciplinary boundaries dissolve into a unified creative and analytical process.The cinematic and oneiric language of David Lynch serves as the connective aesthetic framework holding these disciplines together. The methodology combines practice-based research with interdisciplinary pedagogy: students were engaged as active protagonists of the production, experiencing firsthand how directorial choices, lighting dramaturgy, and historical awareness are not sequential steps but mutually generative forces. Lynchian concepts – dream logic, the Möbius ribbon as a model of non-linear time, the uncanny, and the ontological question "who is the dreamer?" – were introduced as analytical tools that simultaneously sharpen interpretive and technical skills across all disciplines. Findings suggest that this convergent approach significantly deepens students' engagement with the score and with each other's craft, fostering an interdisciplinary sensibility rarely achieved when subjects are taught in isolation. Lighting design emerged as a fully dramaturgical language, articulating the temporal ambiguity and psychological depth shared by both Ravel's opera and Lynch's universe. The paper concludes that a contemporary cinematic framework, when selected for structural richness rather than stylistic appeal, functions as a genuine pedagogical instrument.

Keywords

L'Enfant et les sortilèges, Lynchian aesthetics, integrated arts pedagogy, music theatre direction, lighting dramaturgy

Introduction

Maurice Ravel's L'enfant et les sortilèges (1925), on a libretto by Colette, occupies a singular position in the operatic repertoire: it is simultaneously a children's fantasy and a profound meditation on guilt, empathy, and the awakening of moral consciousness. Its dreamlike structure — objects and animals that speak, a reality that dissolves and reforms according to inner emotional logic — makes it an ideal meeting point between musical theatre and the kind of oneiric cinema that David Lynch has made the signature of his artistic identity, from Eraserhead (Lynch 1977) to Twin Peaks: The Return (Lynch and Frost 2017). This paper documents and reflects upon a practice-based research project conducted within the Performing Ravel initiative, funded under the Italian PNRR programme and hosted at the Conservatorio "G. Briccialdi" of Terni. The project brought together students from three distinct curricular areas — stage direction, lighting design, and music theatre history — under a unified pedagogical framework inspired by the aesthetic world of Lynch: a world in which time is non-linear, the boundary between dream and reality is structurally unstable, and the question "Who is the Dreamer?" becomes both a philosophical provocation and a practical directorial tool (Lynch 2006a). The central claim of this paper is that the Lynchian aesthetic functions as a genuine analytical and pedagogical instrument, not merely a stylistic overlay applied to a canonical operatic work. By confronting students with concepts such as dream logic, the uncanny (Freud 1919), temporal ambiguity, and the Möbius strip as a model of narrative structure, the project dissolved artificial barriers between disciplines and cultivated an integrated form of artistic thinking that neither direction, nor lighting, nor musicology could have achieved in isolation. The conference theme of Creativity, Heritage and Arts Education in the Age of Technology provides a precise frame for this inquiry: Ravel's work is a piece of cultural heritage; Lynch's cinema is a contemporary aesthetic lens; and the pedagogical challenge is to make these two worlds speak to each other in a way that genuinely transforms the formation of young artists.

Literature review

The intersection of practice-based research and arts education has generated a substantial body of scholarship in recent decades. Robin Nelson's framework of practice-as-research established the legitimacy of artistic production as a mode of knowledge generation, arguing that the practitioner-researcher occupies a unique epistemic position: one who knows through making rather than merely about making (Nelson 2013). This is the foundational premise of the present project. In the specific domain of music theatre pedagogy, scholars such as Jane Davidson and Constantijn Koops have examined the benefits of integrated approaches that refuse the traditional separation between performance, theory, and production, with findings that consistently point to greater student engagement and more durable learning outcomes when disciplines are taught in dialogue rather than in sequence. The question of cinema as a pedagogical resource in performing arts education has been addressed more sporadically, though compellingly. The work of Anne Bogart on viewpoints and composition — itself deeply influenced by filmic thinking — suggests that cinematic concepts of frame, rhythm, and duration can enrich directorial training in ways that conventional theatre pedagogy often neglects (Bogart and Landau 2005). David Lynch's aesthetic universe has attracted scholarly attention primarily within film studies, but its potential as a pedagogical framework in arts education remains largely unexplored. Lynch himself, in his writings on creative process, articulates an approach to artistic intuition and subconscious material that resonates strongly with the kind of integrated, non-analytical creative mode that

arts educators increasingly seek to cultivate (Lynch 2006a). This dimension of his creative thinking is further illuminated by Chris Rodley's extended interviews, which document Lynch's working methods in close detail (Rodley 1997). Particularly relevant is the formal architecture of Twin Peaks: The Return (Lynch and Frost 2017), in which Lynch and co-writer Mark Frost construct a narrative that refuses resolution, sustains ontological ambiguity across eighteen episodes, and treats the protagonist's identity as a question rather than a given — all structural strategies directly applicable to the staging of Ravel's opera. Finally, the concept of lighting design as dramaturgical language — rather than mere technical support — has been developed by scholars such as Joslin McKinney and Scott Palmer, whose work on light and scenography provides the theoretical grounding for the claim, central to this project, that lighting is a narrative and emotional instrument on a par with musical interpretation and directorial vision (McKinney and Palmer 2017).

Methodology

The methodological architecture of this project rests on two equally weighted pillars: practice-based artistic research and interdisciplinary pedagogy (Nelson 2013). Neither can be fully understood without the other, and their interaction is precisely what the project sought to investigate.

The artistic practice

The production of *L'enfant et les sortilèges*[1] was conceived from the outset as a research act rather than a conventional student production. The directorial reading was structured around three Lynchian concepts introduced to students as analytical frameworks before any practical work began. The first was the Möbius strip as a model of non-linear time: the idea, central to Lynch's narrative architecture in Mulholland Drive (Lynch 2001) and Lost Highway (Lynch 1997), that a story does not move from beginning to end but folds back upon itself, so that the

1 *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* — Fantaisie lyrique by Maurice Ravel, libretto by Colette. Premiere 21 April 2026, Teatro Sergio Secci, Terni; 28 April 2026, Teatro Flavio Vespasiano, Rieti. Singers, Choir and Orchestra of Conservatory of Music "Giulio Briccialdi" of Terni, in collaboration with Conservatory of Music "Francesco Morlacchi" of Perugia, Conservatory of Music "Rinaldo Franci" of Siena and Academy of Fine Arts "Pietro Vannucci" of Perugia. Cast: The Child: Immacolata Caterino; The Mother / The Chinese Cup: Yu Jung Noh; The Armchair: Sofia La Vacco / Veronica Vasta; The Fire / The Nightingale: Camilla Serena Cardinali / Arabella Kramer; The Princess: Samantha Sapienza / Ginevra Pasquini; The Cat: Desirée Rosatelli; The Dragonfly / A Shepherd: Francesca Parascan; The Bat: Ginevra Pasquini / Arianna Di Maulo; The Owl: Arianna Di Maulo; The Squirrel: Alessandra Balzano / Fanny Taddeo; A Shepherdess: Eleonora Petrini Rossi / Veronica Vasta; The Armchair: Giorgio Alexander Ridolfi; The Clock: Aris Tsavalias; The Teapot / The Tree Frog: Jianong Yin; The Old Man: Giordano Ferri / Gianmarco Latini Mastini; The Cat: Tommaso Sabbagh; A Tree: David Paccara; The Sofa, The Stool, The Bench, The Straw Chair: Carolina Di Persio, Eleonora Petrini Rossi, Desirée Rosatelli, Fanny Taddeo; The Numbers: Tommaso Sabbagh, Aris Tsavalias, Fabrizio Malgeri, David Paccara; The Beasts: Carolina Di Persio, David Paccara, Desirée Rosatelli, Denis Scoppetta. Musical direction: Marco Gatti; Stage direction, lighting and video: Mirco Michelon; Répétiteurs: Federico Grigioni, Jiyoun Park; Chorus master: Filippo Stefanelli; Sets and costumes (supervised by Mirco Michelon): Asimenia Galani, Martina Iacovone, Luisa Undaybetia, Sonia Vathaj. The production was developed within the following teaching classes: We would like to thank (in alphabetical order): Prof. Roberto Abbondanza (Class in Vocal Chamber Music, Conservatory of Music of Terni), Prof. Claudio Fabbrizi (Class in Piano Accompaniment, Conservatory of Music of Terni), Prof. Massimo Gualtieri (Class in Choral Practice, Conservatory of Music of Terni), Prof. Mirco Michelon (Class in Performance Practice and Culture, Academy of Fine Arts of Perugia), Prof. Ambra Vespasiani (Opera Singing Class, Conservatory of Music of Terni), Prof. Gian-Luca Zoccatelli (Renaissance and Baroque Singing Class, Conservatory of Music of Terni).

ending is already contained within the opening. Applied to Ravel's opera, this meant treating the Child's initial tantrum not as a psychological backstory but as a condition simultaneously cause and consequence of the dreamworld he enters — a loop rather than a sequence. The video scenography designed for this production makes this structure visually explicit: the Möbius ribbon carries all the characters of the opera in a continuous, self-returning flow, with a spectral adult face emerging from the background — the dreamer who may also be dreamed

Figure 1. Poster of the production showing the Möbius stripe as dramaturgical structure – the characters of the opera in continuous self-returning flow.

The second concept was the uncanny (Freud 1919) — the unheimlich in the Freudian sense that Lynch absorbs and cinematically amplifies: the domestic space that becomes strange, the familiar object that acquires threatening autonomy. This quality is most vividly realized in the clock sequence of the production: the pendulum clock, in its sung cantabile moment, briefly reveals a human face before its mechanism distorts entirely, gears spinning out of control, time visibly breaking down. This is Lynch's uncanny translated into music theatre terms: the machine that humanizes itself only to shatter.

The third concept was the tragicomic grotesque; a register Lynch deploys with particular intensity in the diner sequences of Twin Peaks (Lynch and Frost 1990) and the surreal domestic tableaux of Blue Velvet (Lynch 1986). In this production, the teapot and cup sequence becomes a cabaret: comic, theatrical, tinged with the aesthetics of 1950s animation and advertisement, but with an undertow of menace that prevents pure comedy. The characters perform their anger as entertainment, which is precisely how Lynch constructs discomfort — by making the disturbing also amusing.

The pedagogical framework

Students of stage direction, lighting design, and music theatre history participated jointly in

all phases of the project, from initial analytical seminars through production rehearsals to post-production reflection. The traditional hierarchy — direction decides, lighting executes, musicology contextualizes — was explicitly dismantled from the first session, consistent with the convergent model advocated by Nelson (2013). Each of the three Lynchian concepts was introduced through a combination of materials: film excerpts, musical analysis of specific passages from the Ravel score, and directorial sketches. Students were then asked to respond to these concepts from within their own discipline but in dialogue with students from the other two disciplines. A lighting student's response to the Möbius strip concept, for instance, was developed in direct conversation with a direction student's spatial interpretation and a musicology student's analysis of Ravel's harmonic loops. This mode of working — convergent rather than parallel — was sustained throughout the project. Assessment was also designed accordingly: students were evaluated on their capacity to articulate the connections between their own choices and those of colleagues from adjacent disciplines.

Figure 2. The Child in his world. Lighting design as ontological framing (Ph. Riccardo Leone)

Results and discussion

Lynch as analytical tool: what the model revealed

The most significant finding concerns the function of the Lynchian framework as an analytical tool rather than an aesthetic reference. Many interdisciplinary projects in arts education use a common artistic reference as a source of stylistic inspiration. What this project sought to demonstrate is more structural: that Lynch's specific way of organising artistic meaning provides students with a grammar of interpretation that is transferable across disciplines (Lynch 2006a; Rodley 1997). The Möbius ribbon model proved particularly generative. Direction students used it to develop staging that refused conventional exposition-development-resolution structure. Lighting students translated it into cue sequences that created temporal loops, returning to earlier qualities of light in ways that retrospectively recontextualized earlier moments. Musicology students used it as a lens for analyzing Ravel's own tendency — already present in the score (Ravel 1925) — to return to earlier harmonic material in contexts that make it sound simultaneously familiar and

displaced. The discovery that Ravel himself was already working with structural principles that resonate with Lynch's was not one the pedagogical design had anticipated, but it became one of the project's most productive outcomes.
Particularly revealing was the deployment of Twin Peaks: The Return (Lynch and Frost 2017) as a reference for the question of the dreamer. In that work, Lynch constructs an eighteen-episode meditation on identity, memory, and the impossibility of return: the protagonist Dale Cooper exists simultaneously in multiple ontological states, never fully recovering a self that may never have been stable. Students found in this structure a precise parallel for the Child's situation in Ravel's opera: a subject who moves through a dreamworld that reflects, deforms, and ultimately transforms him, without ever resolving the question of whether he is its author or its creation.

Lighting as dramaturgy

A second significant result concerned the status of lighting design within the production process. In conventional music theatre training, lighting tends to be introduced at a late stage, when directorial and musical decisions have already been consolidated. In this project, lighting decisions were made in parallel with — and sometimes prior to — directorial ones, since the Lynchian framework assigns light to a fundamentally dramaturgical role: it is not illumination but a mode of constructing temporal and psychological reality (McKinney and Palmer 2017). Students working on lighting design reported a qualitative shift in their sense of authorship and responsibility. Rather than executing a lighting plot, they were making interpretive claims about the nature of the dreamworld they were helping to create. This shift was reflected in the specificity of their design choices: the use of slow, almost imperceptible shifts in colour temperature to signal transitions between layers of dream; the strategic deployment of darkness not as absence but as a dramaturgical presence; the treatment of the stage floor as a reflective surface that duplicated and distorted the scenic imagery, creating the visual uncanny (Freud 1919) that the production sought to sustain.

Figure 3. The Fire's Aria. Color temperature and rear video-projection as dramaturgical language (Ph. Riccardo Leone)

Integration as outcome

Perhaps the most valuable result is also the most difficult to quantify: the development in students of what we might call an interdisciplinary sensibility — a habitual disposition to think across disciplinary boundaries, to see their own choices as inevitably connected to and dependent upon the choices of colleagues working in adjacent domains. Post-production reflective sessions revealed that students from all three disciplines consistently described their experience in terms of a fundamental change in how they understood their own field. Direction students spoke of having learned to think with light; lighting students spoke of having developed a dramaturgical ear; musicology students reported that their analytical engagement with the score had been transformed by the experience of seeing and feeling their analyses become physical realities on stage. These outcomes are consistent with the case for convergent pedagogy as outlined by Nelson (2013) and supported by the scenographic tradition documented in McKinney and Palmer (2017).

Conclusions and recommendations

This paper has proposed and documented a pedagogical model in which the aesthetic and analytical frameworks of David Lynch's cinema — specifically Twin Peaks (Lynch and Frost 1990), Twin Peaks: The Return (Lynch and Frost 2017), Mulholland Drive (Lynch 2001), Blue Velvet (Lynch 1986), Lost Highway (Lynch 1997), Eraserhead (Lynch 1977), and Inland Empire (Lynch 2006b) — serve as instruments for integrated arts education in the context of staging Ravel's L'enfant et les sortilèges. Three key findings emerge:

First, a contemporary artistic framework, when chosen for its structural and analytical richness rather than merely its stylistic appeal, can function as a genuine pedagogical instrument, providing students with transferable tools for interdisciplinary interpretation (Lynch 2006a; Rodley 1997).

Second, the convergent model of pedagogy — in which students from different disciplines work together from the earliest analytical stages through to production and reflection — produces qualitative outcomes in terms of interdisciplinary sensibility that parallel or sequential models do not achieve (Nelson 2013).

Third, lighting design, when positioned as a dramaturgical language from the outset of the creative process, undergoes a fundamental change of status that benefits both the production and the artistic formation of the students involved (McKinney and Palmer 2017). On the basis of these findings, it is recommended that conservatories and arts academies explore the systematic integration of contemporary cinema as an analytical resource in performing arts pedagogy; that assessment frameworks be redesigned to reward interdisciplinary articulation alongside discipline-specific competence; and that practice-based research projects of this kind be embedded more systematically within the curriculum rather than treated as exceptional events.

The question "We live inside a dream" — posed by Lynch and echoed in Ravel's opera through Colette's libretto (Ravel 1925) — is ultimately a question about the nature of artistic experience and about who holds the position of the subject within it. The pedagogical wager of this project was that holding that question open, rather than resolving it, is one of the most generative things an arts educator can do.

Figure 4. "We live inside a Dream"
– the Child prostrate in red light, surrounded by the spells (Ph. Riccardo Leone)

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The impact of technological development on theatrical scenography in Albania

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the impact of technological development on theatrical scenography in Albania. The research examines the transition toward digital practices and modern technological elements in stage design. Adopting an interpretative, historical and comparative research approach with the previous periods, the study relies on literature review, analysis of public documents and case studies. Digital lighting control, audiovisual systems, video projection and projection mapping, automation of stage mechanisms and innovative materials have expanded the role of scenography from static décor to a dynamic, interdisciplinary performative environment. Technological advancements have revolutionized the use of space in Albanian theatre, enabling scenography to create unique narrative journeys through space and time. Moving images, digital environments, and mixed-media installations generate new illusions and audience experiences. However, while new infrastructure increases aesthetic possibilities, structural limitations remain evident, including the lack of specialists, limited budgets, costly maintenance and a gap between artistic education and technical competencies. This study evaluates how technology influences the aesthetics, functionality and creative processes of contemporary Albanian scenography.

Keywords

Theatre, digital spaces, lighting, projection, digital revolution

Introduction

Technological developments of recent decades have fundamentally transformed the way stage space is designed, constructed and experienced. In contemporary theatre, scenography is understood as a coordinated ensemble of space, light, sound, objects, materials, the actor's body, and digital media. Scenography functions as a relational system: it organizes attention, produces atmosphere, influences rhythm, constructs proximity and distance and often performs dramaturgical functions through non-verbal elements. In this study, we discuss that contemporary scenography has the power to create a unique narrative journey through space and time with the help of technology. Moving images, digital spaces and mixed media environments can be used to create new illusions and experiences for the audience.

In Albania, the integration of technology into theatrical scenography has been gradual and closely linked to political, economic and cultural transformations after the 1990s. From predominantly realist scenographic approaches during the socialist period, stage space has evolved toward abstract, multimedia and dynamic forms.

The impact of technology on scenography is linked to structural changes after 1990: openness to international collaborations, emigration of professionals and their return and the gradual modernization of several key institutions.

The integration of video projections, intelligent lighting and digital systems has led to the transition from traditional decor to new forms. In this context, Albanian scenography begins to reflect contemporary European trends, although at different rates of development. At the end of the paper, recommendations are proposed for cultural policies, technical standardization, the need for specialists and training programs, these elements to understand what our theater lacks in relation to other theaters at the international level.

The purpose of this article is to analyze: (a) how technologies (lighting, audio, video, automation, digital tools) have changed and enriched scenographic creations. (b) how the infrastructure of the halls enables or limits this change. (c) how the work processes and professional profiles required by these developments are being reconfigured. (d) what are the main challenges and opportunities for sustainable development in this direction.

Research Questions

• How does technology affect theatrical scenography?
• Which modern technologies and methods have had the greatest impact on theatrical scenography in Albania in recent years?
• Which technologies have been applied and what does our theater lack to be competitive in form and content with international theaters?
• What are the structural obstacles (human resources, acoustics, maintenance) and how can they be addressed?
• What recommendations can be made for cultural policy and professional education?

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretative and comparative methodology. Archival documents, media materials, academic literature and theatrical productions from major institutions such as the National Theatre, the Metropol Theatre and the National Experimental Theatre have been

examined. The research includes comparative case analysis and visual documentation to interpret technological transformations in Albanian scenography.
The study uses qualitative methodology with the following components:

• Analysis of technological innovations in theatrical scenography.
• Analysis of documents, academic sources and institutional/media sources describing infrastructural modernizations in Albania.
• Case study: Comparison of the same work in different periods, analysis of elements and innovations in terms of scenography. Visual documents: Use of photographs to support the analysis.

Study limitations: The main limitations are related to the lack of data and the lack of a standardized archive for photo and video scenography.
Also, dedicated literature and studies from the period before the 1990s are missing. Therefore, the results should be read as an analysis of trends and mechanisms, not as a complete statistical overview.

Technological Development in Albanian Theatre

Before 1990, Albanian scenography relied primarily on artisanal craftsmanship, painted backdrops, workshop-based construction and analog lighting systems. This produced a strong material culture.

Between 1990 and 2010, the transitional period brought partial adoption of new technologies. The opening of the Albanian scene to collaborations and festivals brought exposure to new aesthetics. although infrastructure investment remained limited. However, infrastructure investments were minimal. This period favored limited scenographies, relying on mobile objects and flexible solutions that could be adapted to halls with different parameters. The video projector was often used as a low-cost solution for location changes.
2010-2026 Implementation of digital tools. Technical changes and the transition to new forms of stage lighting, access to 3D software and reconstructions in some institutions created better conditions for the integration of technology in scenography. At the same time, the role of media professionals (video artists) increased and the need for more professional technical management emerged. The stage space became more flexible and conceptual, reducing the dependence on massive physical sets.

Key technologies and their impact on scenography

Digital Lighting

Digitally controlled lighting turns light into a highly precise compositional tool: multiple cues, controlled fades, colors, movements and synchronized effects. For scenography, this means that space can be "designed" not only with objects, but also with light.
If in the past, lighting systems with limited capabilities were used in Albania, now it is possible to add lighting numbers to a play, which makes the theatric performance of a higher quality. The entire structure of modern lighting has been developed with a wider and more practical use. In

the Albanian theater, electro-mechanical lighting was used. Lighting was done with halogen lamps and was controlled with a latre or aerostat. Until the 2000s, this type of lighting system received commands slowly and the use of color filters brought limitations to the color spectrum and limited lighting points. After the 2000s, dimmers that were controlled with a signal mixer came into use. The spotlights were 500,650,1000 and 1200 watts with halogen lamps. It should be noted that the halogen lamp system has high energy consumption and a short lifespan.
After 2010, LED lighting entered Albania, which is dimmer-free and controlled directly on the mixer, has low consumption and is longer lasting. Wash LED lighting allows for the full spectrum of colors, focusing, disco effects, strobe, etc. Digital lighting brings rapid color changes, energy savings and less heat on the stage. All this brings a dynamic atmosphere where the light has precise cuts, helps to isolate a character, create a dramatic atmosphere and emphasize scenographic elements.

Video Projection and Projection Mapping

Video projections have transformed the way we perceive space, enabling instant changes and the creation of virtual environments. This technology transforms any surface, flat or three-dimensional, into a dynamic and animated screen. It is widely used to create changing backgrounds, such as weather conditions or surreal landscapes, allowing for instant set changes without physical labor. Projection mapping transforms surfaces into living screens, making the decor dynamic. This allows for "layered scenography", where the same physical structure can take on different identities during the theatre performance. Josef Svoboda, as a pioneer of multimedia theater, was one of the first artists to design the characters of the play "Laterna Magika" in 1958. He managed to create a unique interdisciplinary art form by merging film and theater. This technique was applied in Albania in 2016 in the play "Black Bird" which is an online theater play, where the actors were in different environments and the connection was made online. Also, applications of new forms such as live movie were used for the first time in the play "Ndodhia e cuditshme e qenit në mesnatë" Metropol Theater, year 2025, where the actor and the image are treated with a cinematographic concept. This play had 280 audio and projection numbers. The first uses in Albania of advanced projection technologies were used in these theater performances:
TKOB- "Gjenerali I Ushtrisë së Vdekur" -mapping and holographic materials, 2010, set designer Valerio Ferrari
TKOB- "Skenderbeu"- holographic view, 2012, director Carlo Saleti
TK- "Liri në Bremen"- Video Mapping, 2014, director Sesilia Plasari

Computer programs

2D/3D programs make design easier: the set designer, the director and the studio can see the placement, scale ratios and even lighting simulations in advance. This reduces errors and increases the efficiency of production. 3D programs allow for preliminary visualization of the scene and optimization of the creative process. Unlike before the 2000s, where sketches and technical drawings were made manually, these programs now help and facilitate the creative process of the set designer and save time in the decomposition of scenic elements. As a result of technological development, at the same time, knowledge of these computer programs is needed by the designers, as well as continuous training in this direction.

Automation and stage mechanisms

The improvement of stage mechanisms (manual and automatic booms, scenery movements, security systems) changes the way of conception. The reconstruction of theater halls or the construction of new structures brings improvement of technical conditions and stage parameters, facilitating and enabling the introduction of modern elements in the theater. Automated, programmable and robotic stage elements allow precise and dynamic movement of the scenography, reducing the need for manual scene changes.
The reconstruction of TKOBAP brought modernization of the systems/ArTurbina has brought the use of a multifunctional space/ Teatri Kombëtar i Kukullave with the reconstruction was accompanied by the implementation of modern technology in lighting and moving stage/ the project of Teatrit Ri Kombëtar is expected to bring innovations in the techniques, systems used and better conditions for the realization of performances. However, the modernization of scenic mechanisms requires strong safety standards, specialized human resources and structured technical tests

.

Other elements

Other elements that have helped and facilitated the work of the set designer in recent years:

- Decorative elements: New materials, tablets, linoleum, artificial grass, plastic materials, wallpaper, various fabric materials, imitations of materials, etc. Through the diversity of materials, the scenographer can choose the right element to create the maximum effect in his scenography.
- Audio and acoustic, Smoke, snow, fog devices have undergone changes based on advanced technology over the years, providing increasingly sophisticated effects in completing the scenography.
- Tools: The tools available to create the set in recent years are more diverse and more in function of the implementation of the sketches. Through them, the set designer saves time and can implement the scenography more easily.
- Information is more accessible and the ability to research is easier.

Case Study: Hamlet

The play “Hamlet” was staged in two different time periods by different theater companies and with completely different scenographic elements. One play was staged in 1960 and the other in 2025. Based on comparative methods and archival data, we will compare and analyze how this time difference has brought a development of technology and expressive means in the realization of scenography.

Hamlet 1960 - “Teatri Popullor” Tirana
Performance of 24/6/1960, directed by Vladimir Bortko and set designer Hysen Devolli.
In this performance we see that the realization of the scenography results in a very realistic approach that adheres to the description of the literary works. It is noted that there are no special effects, which this work requires, mainly referring to two scenes (the drowning of Ophelia and the ghost scene). According to articles of the time published in the newspaper Zëri i Rinisë, it

is emphasized that for the ghost scenes in which this imaginary character appears as a living character, who talks to Horace or Hamlet, should be a reflection of the people's conscience, not a real character.

Figure 1, The scene before the meeting Hamlet-Ofeli, Hamlet, Tirana, 1960

Figure 2, The scene of the Gravedigger, Hamlet, Tirana, 1960

In these two photos, elements of the scenography are observed, realized with details, realistic and reflecting the period to which the play refers, such as the railings, the podiums and Ophelia's tomb. All this shows the importance that has been given to the visual side to take the work and the spectator back in time.

Figure 3, Hamlet's scene of standing guard, Hamlet, Tirana, 1960
Figure 4, Duel scene, Hamlet, Tirana, 1960

In these photos, details are noted, emphasizing the importance given to special elements in the scenography. In photo no. 3, the magnificent background is noticeable, indicating the realization of a decor that serves to improve the aesthetic side of the play. Referring to the time period and the lighting and sound technology, there are no special effects that this play requires to create a mystical atmosphere.

Hamlet 2025-Teatri "Metropol" Tiranë
The 2025 stage production of Hamlet, directed by Jonida Beqo, presents a distinctly modern and contemporary interpretative concept. With scenography designed by Beqo Nanaj and Ibrahim Burgu, the production adopts a symbolic approach and a visual aesthetic enriched by contemporary elements and innovative technological effects, marking a clear departure from the realist staging of the 1960 production directed by V. V. Bortko. The scenographic concept is conceived as a microcosm enclosed within a fractured glass sphere, where a severe crack disrupts the structure and shards of glass are dispersed across the stage space. Suspended above this constructed environment are transformable elements that shift and reconfigure throughout the performance. In combination with specialized lighting design and projection effects, these elements generate an evolving visual aesthetic that continuously transforms the stage image, immersing the spectator in an alternative perceptual reality.

Figure 5, Hamlet's encounter with the ghost
Figure 6, The ghost scene
Figure 7, The Theater performance

In Figures 5–6, a programmed LED strip lighting architecture in combination with video projection is employed to generate a mystical atmosphere. The integration of controlled light structures and projected imagery produces a layered visual environment that enhances the symbolic dimension of the scene. In the scene illustrated in Figure 7, projection technologies and elements derived from contemporary circus practice are utilized to create a vertical dramaturgy of movement.
In the drowning scene of Ophelia (Figure 8), the actress interacts with laser lighting and controlled smoke effects, which together simulate the illusion of a water surface. This interplay between light, vapor, and bodily movement constructs a visually immersive and metaphorical representation of submersion. The Gravedigger scene (Figure 9) is realized through animated LED strips, regulated smoke, and projection mapping, enriching the visual composition and intensifying audience perception. These technological elements contribute to a multisensory scenographic environment that amplifies both atmosphere and narrative impact.

Figure 8, The drowning scene of Ofelie
Figure 9, The scene of the Gravedigger

The special effects in the work "Hamlet" by Florian Çanga have given the play a unique dimension. The realization of the element of the ghost is brought in a holographic form on the stage. In this play we have the combination of light architecture and stage projection synchronized with each other and together with smoke elements to create a volume of light on the stage to surround the audience as much as possible within the atmosphere of a drama which creates both acoustic presence and visual dimension.

Comparison of Scenography Elements

Performance	Theatre	Year	Scenic designer	Concept	Decor	Space
Hamlet	Teatri "Popullor"	1960	H. Devolli	Realistic	Functional	Narrative
Hamlet	Teatri "Metropol"	2025	B.Nanaj &I.Burgu	Modern	Conceptual	Dynamically

Table 1, Krahasimi i elementeve Skenografik

Conclusions

Recent technological developments have exerted a significant influence on Albanian theatrical scenography, orienting it toward dynamic and multimedia spatial configurations. The study demonstrates that infrastructural modernization creates opportunities for more complex scenographic constructions and higher production standards. In the recent years there is a wide range of digital tools, including video projection, advanced lighting systems, special effects, audio technologies and an expanded spectrum of material resources, all of which have been applied in several major productions.

Although these technologies are available in Albania, only a few professionals, primarily within private companies can use them. Multimedia tools and emerging technologies in scenography enhance both the impact and the communicative power of theatrical productions. Nevertheless, without sustained investment in human resources, professional training, specialized technical teams, systematic maintenance, and standardization, technology does not automatically translate into artistic innovation. Consequently, the sustainable development of digital scenography requires structured education, technical management, archival practices, and long-term cultural policies.

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"The use and absence of scenic rotative: comparative analysis of scenographic solutions in the 'Petro Marko' theatre of Vlora and other Albanian theatres"

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Abstract

Since its creation, the revolving stage has been one of the most significant technical mechanisms in the development of modern scenography, enabling rapid transformations of scenic space and decor while influencing directorial concepts and dramaturgical rhythm. In the Albanian theatrical context, its use in recent years has been limited or neglected due to infrastructural, financial, and technical constraints. This article examines both the presence and absence of the revolving stage through comparative analyses of scenographies from selected theatrical productions, the study of archival materials, and the observation of scenographic practices developed without this mechanism. Particular attention is given to alternative solutions for spatial transformation, including movable decor, modular elements, and manual stage techniques, through the comparison of several scenographies realized at the "Petro Marko" Theatre in Vlora and in the main theatres of the country. Rather than evaluating the superiority of one solution over another, the study highlights the impact of the revolving stage presence or absence on scenographic conception, performance dynamics, and the relationship between space, performer, and audience. The article contributes to scholarly discourse on the technical and aesthetic development of Albanian scenography and underscores the need for infrastructural modernization and the reconsideration of the revolving stage in contemporary Albanian theatre.

Keywords

Scenic infrastructure, scenographic concept, scenic space, scenic elements, scenography

Introduction

Stage technology has historically been a determining factor in the evolution of theatre and its expressive language. In addition to the traditional elements of scenography, technical mechanisms have directly influenced the way stage space is constructed and perceived. Among these mechanisms, the revolving stage represents one of the most significant innovations, offering new possibilities for the immediate transformation of decor and the dynamic development of stage action.

In Albanian theatre, the use of the revolving stage has been limited and often discontinuous. Factors such as lack of investment, technical depreciation, and partial restoration interventions have caused this mechanism to malfunction and be continuously neglected. The "Petro Marko" Theatre in Vlorë constitutes a significant case study, as during a certain historical period it possessed a functional revolving stage, whereas in recent years this element has remained out of operation.

This study examines how the absence of the revolving stage, as a highly important technical element, affects both scenographic and directorial concepts. It also analyzes the ways in which several theatrical productions have adapted through alternative technical solutions to achieve scene changes, accompanied by a comparison between performances where the revolving stage is absent and those where it is functional. The productions selected for this study are from the "Petro Marko" Theatre and other theatres in the country, highlighting the importance of returning to the country's theatres not only the revolving stage but also other technical elements that have a direct impact on the realization of scenes and artistic performances.

The main objectives of this study are:

- To analyze the role of the revolving stage in the development of scenographic concepts;
- To identify the impact of the absence of the revolving stage on the realization of
- performances at the "Petro Marko" Theatre in Vlorë;
- To compare scenographic solutions realized with the use of the revolving stage and its
- absence;
- To contribute to the discussion on the maintenance and modernization of stage
- infrastructure and the development of Albanian scenography.

Literature Review

The revolving stage represents one of the most important technical mechanisms in the historical and aesthetic development of theatrical scenography, enabling rapid and uninterrupted transformations of stage space during performances. This mechanism has served not only as a technical solution for scenic decor changes, but also as an element that directly influences dramatic rhythm, visual composition of the stage, and the director's conceptual approach to a theatrical work.

According to historical sources, the origin of the revolving stage is linked to traditional Japanese *Kabuki* (Website i Wikipedia, 2026)[1] theatre, where in the 18th century the *mawari-butai*, a manually operated revolving platform integrated into the stage floor, was developed.

1 Wikipedia Website, "Revolving stage", Wikipedia, Accessed February 8, 2026 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolving_stage

This mechanism was created to address the need for frequent and rapid changes of scenic environment without interrupting the dramatic flow or disrupting the direct relationship with the audience. Over time, the *mawari-butai* became an essential element of Kabuki aesthetics, influencing the construction of space and stage movement.

Various articles(Padilla, 2023, poster presentation)[2] indicate that the adoption of the revolving stage in Western theatre occurred at the end of the 19th century, with its documented use in 1896 at the Residenztheatre in Munich. The technological and industrial development of this period made possible the use of mechanized and later electrified revolving stages, transforming this element into an important tool of modern European and American scenography. In the 20th century, the revolving stage was widely used in theatres and opera houses, as well as in large-scale musical productions, where it facilitated fluid transitions and continuous spatial transformations. In contemporary practice, the revolving stage has undergone further development through automation and integration with advanced technological systems. New forms such as the concentric revolving stage where multiple platforms rotate simultaneously in different directions are used in modern productions to create multiple spatial layers and enhance visual dynamism. These solutions emphasize the role of the revolving stage not only as a technical device, but as an integral component of contemporary scenographic language, which has reshaped the relationship between stage and auditorium, making the audience a more active participant in the theatrical experience. In this context, the revolving stage is seen as an element that facilitates temporal and spatial transitions, reducing interruptions and preserving dramaturgical continuity.

In the Albanian context, literature on stage technology remains limited. This lack of in-depth theoretical and technical analysis creates a research gap, which this article seeks to address through a comparative approach based on productions staged in Albanian theatres.

Methodology

This study adopts a comparative approach to analyze the scenographic solutions of productions realized in two regional theatres and one at the National Theatre. A total of five theatrical productions have been analyzed:

- *"Jetët private"* (Vlorë, 2021)
- *"Budallenjtë"* (Vlorë, 2021)
- *"Dëshira e tretë"* (Vlorë, 2023)
- *"Vdiq Mbreti, Rroftë Mbreti"* (Tiranë, 2018)
- *"Katedralja e Parisit" (Korçë, 2025)*

Data were collected through several methods:

- *An examination of the technical and engineering design of the theatre building, designed by architect Pandeli Borova of the Institute of Design in Tirana, (Borova,)[3];*
- *Analysis of archival materials, (Arkiva e Teatrit)[4] (photographs, scenographic sketches, technical documents);*

2 Amanda L. Padilla, *Revolutionizing the Stage: The Impact of the Revolving Stage in "Hamilton"*. New York: City University of New York, New York City College of Technology, 2023, poster presentation.

3 Pandeli Borova, Projekti tekniko-inxhienerik i godinës së teatrit, Arkiva e zyres urbanistike, Bashkia Vlorë

4 Arkiva e Teatrit "Petro Marko", Vlorë, Materiale arkivore të Teatrit.

- *Observation of performances realized in the absence of the revolving stage;*
- *Comparison with selected cases from other Albanian theatres where the revolving stage has been used;*
- *The comparison of scenographies will also be based on visual materials, which will serve as an analytical illustration of different scenographic solutions*

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Results and Discussion

The analysis of archival materials and technical documentation shows that the use of the revolving stage has facilitated rapid stage decor transformations and enabled more complex scenographic solutions, directly influencing the rhythm of the performance and the construction of dramatic action.

Even in cases where the use of the revolving stage was not possible, scenography has continued to play an active role in the development of the narrative, transforming the stage space into a dynamic and adaptable element.

The Revolving Stage at the "Petro Marko" Theatre, Vlorë

The theatre has a stage space organized with dimensions of 10.5 m × 10.96 m. The proscenium opening measures 8.5 m × 6.5 m. The revolving stage itself has dimensions of 8.5 m × 8.5 m and is also equipped with an apron measuring 8.5 m × 2.7 m, which was designed and used as an orchestra pit, accessible from the left side of the stage via stairs.

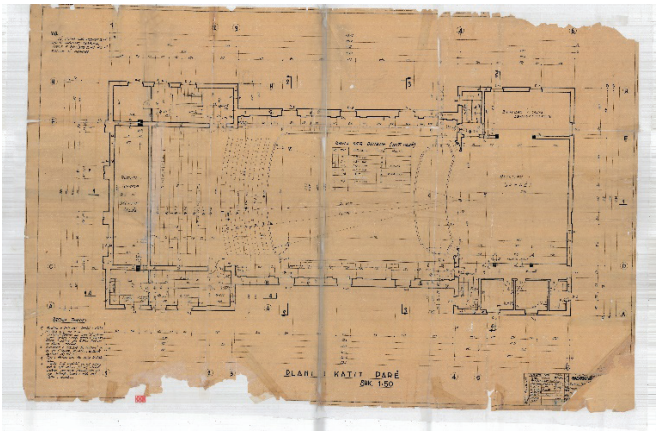

Figure 1: Stage and avant-scene plan of the "Petro Marko" Theatre
Image source: Archive of the Urban Planning Office, Municipality of Vlorë.

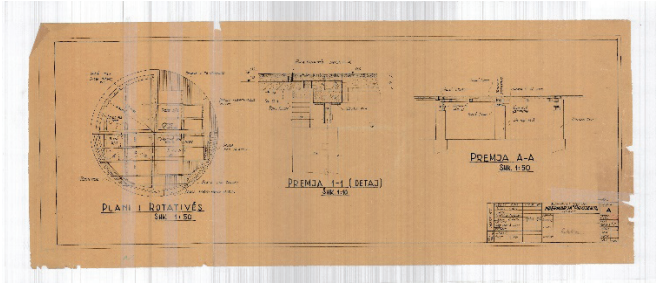

Figure 2: Floor plan with technical data of the revolving stage at the "Petro Marko" Theatre
Image source: Archive of the Urban Planning Office, Municipality of Vlorë.

The revolving platform in this theatre has a wooden structure mounted on bearings and another bearing on the central axis. The movement is enabled by an electric motor and a cable system. According to testimonies, after the 1990s the engineering mechanism of the revolving stage was no longer functional and was never technically restored to operation.
However, it continued to be used manually with the assistance of stage workers until 1993–1994. Subsequently, even after the partial restorations carried out on the building in 1994, the mechanism was not brought back into operation. Likewise, during the most recent restoration conducted in 2022, the installation of a new wooden stage floor over the existing one made the revolving stage completely impossible to use, directly affecting the way scenography has been conceived and realized in productions where scene changes were required.

Figure 3: Photo of revolving stage and the stage during the second reconstruction in 2022
Image source: Personal archive, Drini Shehu

Scenographic Solutions in the Absence of the Revolving Stage

In the absence of the revolving stage, scenographers have turned to alternative solutions for changing and transforming the stage space. Movable sets, modular structures, and manual interventions have become an integral part of contemporary scenographic practice at the "Petro Marko" Theatre. These solutions require careful planning and close coordination among the scenographer, the director, and the actors.
In some cases, the process of stage transformation becomes visible to the audience through acting and mise-en-scène movements, thereby turning into an aesthetic element that enriches the theatrical experience.

"Jetët private"
"Petro Marko" Theatre, Vlorë (2021)

The production of 2021 titled *Jetët private*, a comedy by Noel Coward, directed by Eliona Thomaraj with scenography by Drini Shehu, represents one of the scenographic designs that, in the absence of the revolving stage, was technically conceived to transition from one scene to another through the rotation and movement of set elements (Figures 4 and 5). The movement of the stage set in this production was carried out by backstage crew members.

Figure 4: Photo of the first scene of the play "Jetët private"
Image source: Archive of the Theatre "Petro Marko", personal archive, Drini Shehu

Figure 5: Photo of the second scene of the play "Jetët private"
Image source: Archive of the Theatre "Petro Marko", personal archive, Drini Shehu

"Budallenjtë"
"Petro Marko" Theatre, Vlorë (2021)

The production of 2021 titled *Budallenjtë*, a comedy by Neil Simon, directed by Roland Minga with scenography by Drini Shehu, demonstrates how the transition from an exterior environment to an interior one was conceived and realized, moving through different scenes at various moments according to the acts of the play (Figures 6 and 7).
In this production, the scenographer's solution consisted of placing the stage set on two small rotating platforms with a limited revolving mechanism. In addition to these platforms, other movable elements were also incorporated into the stage set. The movement of the set and its elements in this performance was carried out by the actors themselves, becoming an important component of the direction in shaping the mise-en-scène and the overall performance.

Figure 6: Photo of a moment from the set of the play "Budallenjtë"
Image source: Archive of the Theatre "Petro Marko", personal archive, Drini Shehu

Figure 7: Photo of the transformation of the set design of the play "Budallenjtë"
Image source: Archive of the Theatre "Petro Marko", personal archive, Drini Shehu

"Dëshira e tretë"
"Petro Marko" Theatre, Vlorë (2023)

The 2023 production titled *Dëshira e tretë*, a comedy by Ferdinand Hysi, directed by Roland Minga with scenography by Drini Shehu, presents a scenographic design clearly created in a surrealist style. It was conceived in close connection with the directorial concept not only as a response to the need for changes in environment and scenography, but also as part of the symbolism and message of the work, its mise-en-scène, and its visual harmony. In the first act, the stage depicts a domestic interior with two windows and a staircase at the center. In subsequent scenes, through the movement of these components by the actors themselves, the setting transforms into a pyramid, developing vertically in terms of mise-en-scène (Figures 8 and 9). This scenography is clearly challenging both constructively and conceptually, making use of movable set pieces, modular structures, and scenic transformation that becomes visible to the audience through acting and mise-en-scène movements.

Figure 8: Photo of the set design from the play "Dëshira e tretë"
Image source: Archive of the Theatre "Petro Marko", personal archive, Drini Shehu

Figure 9: Photo of the changed scenography from the play " Dëshira e tretë"
Image source: Archive of the Theatre "Petro Marko", personal archive, Drini Shehu

Comparison with Scenographies from Other Albanian Theatres Where the Revolving Stage Has Been Used

"Vdiq Mbreti, Rroftë Mbreti"
National Theatre, Tirana (2018).

The 2018 production titled *Vdiq Mbreti, Rrofte Mbreti* (Kultplus)[5] (Website i Top-Channel)[6], a comedy by Ferdinand Hysi, directed by Elma Doresi with scenography by Drini Shehu, was created in a modern Art Deco style. The set design was once again conceived in close connection with the symbolic and directorial concept.

5 Website, Kultplus, "Vdiq mbreti rrofte mbreti", www.kultplus.com Accessed January 3, 2026, https://www.kultplus.com/teatri/vdiq-mbreti-rrofte-mbreti-premiera-e-pare-e-2018-ne-teater/
6 Website, Top-Channel, "Vdiq mbreti rrofte mbreti", www.top-channel.tv, Accessed January 12, 2026, https://top-channel.tv/video/vdiq-mbreti-rrofte-mbreti/

This performance was staged at the old National Theatre building in Tirana, where the technical possibility of a revolving stage was utilized to facilitate changes of environment and scenography from the Director's office scene to the administration voices scene. In addition, the modular structure of the set was used for scenic transformations, which were once again made visible to the audience through acting and mise-en-scène movements, as part of the symbolism and the communication of the work's message. We can observe that in one of the scenes, the setting depicts the Director's office, featuring several elements in a modern style and color scheme. During the rotation, with the assistance of the revolving stage, the dark environment of the administration offices appears. In the third scene, through the use of modular elements moved by the actors' performance, the symbolic element that concludes the play is formed (Figures 10, 11, and 12)

Figure 10: Photo of the first scene of "Vdiq Mbreti, Rroftë Mbreti"
Image source: Personal archive, Drini Shehu.

Figure 11: Photo of the second scene "Vdiq Mbreti, Rroftë Mbreti"
Image source: Personal archive, Drini Shehu.

Figure 12: Photo of the third scene "Vdiq Mbreti, Rroftë Mbreti"
Image source: Personal archive, Drini Shehu.

This scenography represents a case in which the combination of modular set movements and changes in scenography facilitated by the revolving stage made it possible to achieve a fully realized theatrical performance.

"Katedralja e Parisit"
"Andon Zako Çajupi" Theatre, Korçë (2025)

The 2025 production titled *Katedralja e Parisit* (Website i CNA)[7] (Website Shqiptarja)[8], by Victor Hugo, directed by Xhuliano Brisku with scenography by Beqo Nanaj, is a musical theatre performance. The scenography, designed in an industrial style with metal structures (scaffolding) (Figures 13 and 14), utilizes stage set movements assisted by the revolving stage and sub-stages to facilitate scene changes. These elements serve the directorial concept, mise-en-scène, the creation of acting studies (etudes), and the actor's performance.

Figure 13: Photo of the first scene "Katedralja e Parisit"
Image source: Website, shqiptarja.com

7 Website, CNA.al, "Katedralja e Parisit", www.cna.al, Accessed January December 25, 2025, https://www.cna.al/kulture/katedralja-e-parisit-muzikal-historik-per-here-te-pare-ne-skenen-e-teatr-i450658

8 Website, Shqiptarja.com, "Katedralja", https://.shqiptarja.com, Accessed December 29, 2026 https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/musical-katedralja-shfaqet-premiere-ne-korce-regjisori-eshte-cmenduri-kryevepra-boterore-interpretohet-ne-nje-skene-te-vogel

Figure 14: Photo of the second scene "Katedralja e Parisit"
Image source: Website, shqiptarja.com

This production was included in the study taking into account that the "Andon Zako Çajupi" Theatre was last reconstructed (Faqja zyrtare e Ministrise se Turizmit, Kultures dhe Sportit)[9] in 2017, showing how proper investment, maintenance of the revolving stage, and all technical elements of the theatre directly influence artistic creativity and the high-quality realization of theatrical productions. Comparison with other Albanian theatres shows that the presence of a revolving stage significantly affects the approach to scenographic conception. In theatres where the revolving stage is functional or has historically been functional there is a clear tendency toward fluid scene transformations and more dynamic pacing of performances. In cases without a revolving stage, scenographic solutions are often more static, but they can also be more symbolic, emphasizing the relationship between the actor's body and the stage space.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that the absence of a revolving stage does not necessarily constitute an obstacle to scenographic creativity, but it requires a different conceptual and technical approach. The presence of a revolving stage offers a broader spectrum of expressive possibilities, while its absence encourages the development of alternative solutions and experimentation with new scenographic forms. In the context of the "Petro Marko" Theatre, the reinstatement of the revolving stage would represent not only a technical improvement but also a supportive investment in the aesthetic and professional development of performances.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study highlights the importance of the revolving stage as both a technical and aesthetic element in Albanian theatre. In the case of the "Petro Marko" Theatre, the reinstatement or modernization of this mechanism would represent a significant step toward improving stage infrastructure. The analysis of the use and absence of the revolving stage at the "Petro Marko" Theatre and other Albanian theatres demonstrates the critical role of this mechanism in the development of scenography and theatrical language. The study emphasizes the need for modernization of stage

9 Official website: Ministrisa e Turizmit, Kultures dhe Sportit, mtks.gov.al, Accessed June 18, 2025, https://mtks.gov.al/newsroom/hap-dyert-teatri-me-i-ri-ne-shqiperi-pas-55-vjetesh-rikonstruktohet-teatri-andon-zako-cajupi/

infrastructure and the integration of contemporary technologies to support Albanian performing arts. This article aims to serve as a starting point for further studies on the relationship between stage technology and artistic creativity in Albanian theatre.

Based on this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Investment in the maintenance and modernization of stage technical equipment;
- Systematic documentation and archiving of technical scenographic sketches;
- Encouragement of further research on stage technology in Albania.

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Why did the revolving stage disappear?

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Abstract

The purpose and focus of this study is to examine the origin, function, and gradual disappearance of the revolving stage as a theatrical mechanism, beginning with its earliest documented use in the traditional Japanese Kabuki theatre of the seventeenth century, where it represented one of the first innovations of spatial movement on stage. The study explores the technical and dramaturgical needs that led to the development and widespread use of the revolving stage in European theatre of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the demand for rapid transitions, uninterrupted narrative rhythm, and a more dynamic scenographic environment transformed it into a central element of theatrical production. The revolving stage introduced, for the first time, a visual logic similar to film montage, influencing later conceptions of spatial movement and contributing to the emergence of cinematic thinking. The methodology of the study includes a historical and comparative analysis of theatrical sources. It combines engineering, aesthetic, and cultural perspectives to explain how technological developments, shifts in theatrical form, and new production structures gradually altered the role of the revolving stage. The guiding research question is: Which technical, aesthetic, and cultural factors led to the loss of function of the revolving stage in contemporary scenography, despite its historical importance? The expected results aim to clarify that the revolving stage did not disappear due to lack of value, but because it was surpassed by new visual and numerical technologies, by alternative ways of constructing theatrical space, and by profound changes in the structure of contemporary performance. The study also examines the case of Albania, where revolving stages were introduced relatively late and were later removed for technical, economic, and aesthetic reasons, reflecting broader transformations in theatrical practice.

Keywords

Stage mechanics, spatial transformation, visual dramaturgy, theatrical technology, contemporary scenography

Introduction

The revolving stage (turntable) represents one of the most significant inventions in the history of scenography and theatrical technology. Its role has been closely connected to the aesthetic, social, and technical developments of theatre, reflecting the ways in which theatrical space has been conceived and transformed over the centuries. The earliest appearance of this mechanism can be traced to seventeenth century Japanese Kabuki[1] theatre, where the mawari-butai[2] introduced an entirely new approach to scenic movement and rhythm, granting the stage a dimension of continuous transformation unfolding before the audience's eyes. This Eastern innovation would later exert a profound influence on European theatre, serving as a foundation for the development of revolving stages that became essential during the era of monumental theatres in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In European theatres, the revolving stage emerged at a moment when scenography demanded dynamism, visual fluidity, and the ability to transform space smoothly and without interruption. Heavy scenic constructions, the need for rapid scene changes, and the growing emphasis on visual spectacle all contributed to the widespread adoption of this mechanism. The revolving stage enabled natural transitions from one setting to another, creating for the first time an effect of spatial continuity, an element that would later become fundamental to the development of cinematic language. In this sense, the revolving stage was not merely a technical invention but a radical shift in the way theatrical space and dramatic narration were conceived. Over time, theatre continued to evolve, moving away from traditional forms toward more conceptual and technologically advanced approaches. Modern and contemporary scenography has been profoundly shaped by technical developments, the rationalization of space, and new methods of constructing visual worlds. Once emblematic of modernity, the revolving stage has largely disappeared from contemporary theatre due to shifting technological alternatives. This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the trajectory of the revolving stage, examining its origin, rise, impact on European scenography, and the factors that led to its gradual disappearance. An important part of this analysis also addresses the Albanian context, where revolving stages were installed relatively late, used for a limited period, and eventually removed due to technical, aesthetic, and infrastructural constraints.

Despite the significant influence of the revolving stage in theatre history, its role has often been underestimated in contemporary scenographic studies. It is commonly regarded primarily as a technical device rather than as an element that transformed the perception of space and dramaturgy. The lack of studies that examine the revolving stage in relation to broader cultural and aesthetic transformations has created a gap in the historiography of scenography. This chapter seeks to emphasize the importance of this mechanism as part of a wider evolutionary process that connects art, technology, and theatrical thought.

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1 Kabuki is a traditional Japanese theatrical form that developed in the early seventeenth century, characterized by pronounced stylization, choreographed movement, monumental costumes, and distinctive make-up techniques (kumadori). Kabuki also functioned as an important laboratory for scenic and technical innovation, introducing mechanisms such as the mawari-butai (revolving stage) and the hanamichi (a raised walkway extending through the audience), which later influenced the development of scenography on a global scale (Brandon, 1993).

2 Mawari-butai (from Japanese, "revolving stage") is a scenic mechanism developed in Japanese Kabuki theatre in the early eighteenth century, consisting of a large rotating platform on which actors and scenic elements are placed. This device enabled immediate scene changes and fluid transitions between settings, thereby becoming a precursor to the modern European revolving stage in scenography (Brandon, 1997).

Methodology

Aim of the study

This study aims to analyze the origin, function, and gradual disappearance of the revolving stage as a scenic mechanism, focusing on its historical role in shaping scenography and theatrical space. It examines the relationship between technology, dramaturgy and aesthetics, and how the revolving stage influenced scenic movement and audience perception.
The main objective is to explain why the revolving stage, despite its historical importance, became less prominent in contemporary theatre, and to identify the technological, aesthetic, and cultural factors behind this shift.
The study specifically aims to:

- Examine the origin and dramaturgical function of the revolving stage in Kabuki theatre.
- Analyze the technical factors behind its adoption in European theatre.
- Assess its impact on visual logic and theatrical rhythm.
- Identify the reasons for its decline in contemporary scenography.
- Consider the specific context of its use in Albania.

Research questions

This study is guided by the following key questions:

- How did the revolving stage emerge and develop from Kabuki theatre to European theatre?
- Which technical, dramaturgical, and aesthetic needs made it a significant mechanism between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries?
- In what ways did the revolving stage influence scenic movement and contribute to the development of cinematic thinking?
- Which recent technologies and aesthetic shifts led to the loss of its function?
- How was the revolving stage used, and why was it removed, in Albanian theatres?
-

Research methodology

The study adopts a historical analytical approach to examine the transformation of the revolving stage within cultural, technical and aesthetic contexts. The research is based on three methodological pillars:

- Historical analysis: tracing the chronological development of the mechanism from Kabuki theatre to the twenty first century.
- Scenic technology analysis: examining the mechanical function and technical evolution of the revolving stage.
- Aesthetic analysis: interpreting the role of movement in structuring theatrical space and audience experience.

Data collection methods

- Literature review: analyzing historical, theatrical, and scenographic sources related to stage technology and theatre development.

- Case studies: examining the use of the revolving stage in Kabuki theatre, European theatres (eighteenth - twentieth centuries), and selected contemporary productions.
- Visual documentation: including photographic materials, technical drawings, mechanical diagrams and archival documents.

Criteria for material selection

- Reliable academic sources on Kabuki theatre and the history of scenic mechanisms.
- Professional literature addressing the technical development of the revolving stage.
- Representative examples from different historical periods.
- Scenographic projects or documents containing data on the mechanical and aesthetic functioning of the revolving stage.

Methods of analysis

- Comparative analysis: comparing the functions of the revolving stage across different contexts and periods.
- Interpretative analysis: examining how technology and aesthetics are addressed in theatrical literature.
- Historical - cultural analysis: situating the revolving stage within specific cultural, economic, and technological developments.

Limitations of the study

- Limited documentation regarding the technical functioning of the *mawari-butai* in its earliest phases.
- Subjectivity in the interpretation of visual sources, as many early illustrations and descriptions were artistic rather than technical in intent.
- Imbalance between Eastern and Western sources in the historiography of scenic mechanisms.

The origin of the revolving stage – Kabuki (Japan)

The history of the revolving stage as a scenic mechanism does not begin in European theatres of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but much earlier, within the Japanese theatrical tradition of Kabuki, a distinctive form of performance that developed in the early seventeenth century. In this cultural context, a rotating stage known as the *mawari-butai first appeared: a revolving platform beneath the stage used for instantaneous spatial transformations. This mechanism constitutes the direct origin of what later became known in the West as the revolving stage. In Kabuki theatre, the stage was characterized by heightened dramatic intensity, abrupt changes of atmosphere and a strong demand for visual dynamism.*
The *mawari-butai* was created precisely to respond to these needs. Through the rotation of the platform, one scenic setting could disappear while another emerged before the audience without interruption and without diminishing dramatic rhythm. This mechanism generated continuous spatial movement and an internal rhythm that integrated the actor's body with the transformation of the environment. The role of the *mawari-butai* was not merely technical but also aesthetic.

Kabuki theatre intertwines stylization, ritual and visual spectacle, and the movement of the stage reinforced musicality, choreography and dramatic tension. In this way, space assumed the role of a silent performer, actively communicating with the audience. This approach to scenic thinking was revolutionary for its time and laid the foundation for the modern concept of spatial transformation. From a technical perspective, the *mawari-butai* initially functioned manually, using small wooden devices installed beneath the platform and operated by stage workers. While simple in construction, the mechanism proved highly effective in performance. Over time, its structure was refined, allowing smoother and more precise rotation. This technical evolution became the basis for the revolving stages later adopted in Western theatre.

Influence on western theatre

The concept of a revolving stage spread in Europe during the XVIII-XIX centuries, a period marked by major technological and architectural transformations in theatre. The *mawari-butai* inspired new mechanisms adapted within European aristocratic and operatic theatres. Although it was not directly imported, the idea of spatial movement significantly influenced scenic thinking, contributing to the development of dynamic stage practices and to the emergence of what is now known as the revolving stage.

Problematic issues

The significance of the *mawari-butai* has often been underestimated in European theatre history, where the origin of the revolving stage is usually attributed exclusively to Western theatrical innovations. This limited perspective minimizes the contribution of non-European traditions to the global development of scenic technology. The lack of translated sources and the dominance of Western scholarship have resulted in Kabuki being treated more as a cultural curiosity than as a fundamental contributor to the technical evolution of the stage.

Conclusion

The origin of the revolving stage in Kabuki demonstrates that technological transformation in theatre is not confined to Europe but emerges from broader processes of cultural exchange. The *mawari-butai* established the foundations of the modern concept of mobile space, creating a model that was later adapted, transformed and integrated into Western theatres. This early connection between artistic expression and mechanical innovation marks the beginning of the history of the revolving stage, which would reach its full development in subsequent centuries.

*Figure 1. (*Mawari-butai *mechanism, Izushi Kabuki Theatre, Japan). Eirakukan Theatre Archive.*

The revolving stage in European Theatre

After the concept of the revolving stage emerged in Japanese Kabuki theatre, the idea of transforming space through movement gradually spread westward, becoming one of the key elements of scenic mechanics in European theatre during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. European theatre of this period was characterized by a growing demand for spectacle, large-scale scenographic compositions and rapid scene changes that served dramatic narration. Within this context, the revolving stage became an essential mechanism, granting the stage a dynamic function that had not previously existed. Unlike the *mawari-butai* in Kabuki, which carried ritual and aesthetic functions rooted in Japanese tradition, the European revolving stage initially developed as a technical response to the challenges of contemporary scenography. Theatres were becoming larger, scenic constructions more complex, and audience expectations for visual spectacle increasingly high. Within this theatrical climate, the revolving stage was perceived as a modern invention that enabled directors and scenographers to control scenic rhythm, transitions and the overall atmosphere of the performance.

Technical reasons for the development of the revolving stage

The technical reasons behind the spread of the revolving stage in European theatre are closely linked to the demand for efficiency and the increasing complexity of scenography. XVIII-XIX century stage designs relied on heavy wooden structures, monumental painted backdrops, platforms and volumetric elements that required considerable time to change. The revolving stage offered an immediate solution: entire scenic settings could be mounted on a rotating

platform, allowing rapid transitions from one environment to another without interrupting the performance. In operatic theatres, where scene changes needed to correspond precisely to musical rhythm, the revolving stage became an indispensable tool. This technical innovation not only increased efficiency but also reduced production time, eased the physical workload of stage crews and opened new possibilities for the creation of far more complex performances. Beyond its technical advantages, the revolving stage contributed to an emerging aesthetic ideal by enabling new visual compositions that were impossible to achieve with static stages. It introduced a cinematic dimension to the stage, creating the impression of a world in constant movement and transformation.

Problematic issues

The revolving stage had a significant impact on the development of European theatre; however, it was often regarded merely as a technical device rather than as an integral part of the artistic language of performance. In theatre studies, its role in shaping narrative structures, visual perception and scenic rhythm remains only partially examined. Moreover, there is a lack of analyses that clearly connect its Eastern origins with later developments in Western theatre, creating gaps in the understanding of the historical trajectory of this mechanism.

Conclusion

The revolving stage in European theatre represents a crucial phase in the evolution of the stage, during which technology became an inseparable component of theatrical narration and aesthetics. It enabled a new form of visual expression that influenced not only contemporary theatre but also later developments in visual arts and cinematic language. Understanding its role within European theatre is essential for subsequently analyzing the reasons behind its gradual disappearance.

The revolving stage and cinematic influence

The revolving stage introduced an entirely new mode of spatial transformation in theatre, creating immediate scene transitions that anticipated the logic of cinematic montage. Through this mechanism, space was no longer a static environment but an element capable of movement, actively shaping the visual rhythm of the narrative. This continuous transformation of the stage generated a form of "real time montage," which shaped early modes of perception later adopted by film. Rapid scene changes achieved through rotation produced the effect of a visual cut occurring in real time. The audience experienced transitions from one setting to another without rhythmic interruption, preparing them aesthetically for what would later become cinematic montage. The revolving stage allowed theatre to experiment with time and rhythm prior to the emergence of film. Movement created contrasts, smooth or abrupt transitions and visual structure, directly influencing the development of cinematic thinking in the twentieth century.

Conclusion

The revolving stage generated an early form of visual narration by integrating space into dramatic rhythm and directly influencing the way cinema later constructed its language of montage. It remains one of the key links connecting theatre to the emergence of film.

Why did the revolving stage decline in contemporary theatre?

The revolving stage, which for centuries had been a central element of European scenography, began to lose its significance with the advent of the twentieth century and more markedly, in contemporary theatre. Profound aesthetic, conceptual, technological and institutional changes rendered this mechanism increasingly incompatible with the new demands of scenic art. What was once considered a symbol of modernity and scenic efficiency is now often perceived as a rigid, costly structure and in many cases, unnecessary in relation to contemporary performance practices. The theatrical aesthetics of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries gradually shifted away from symmetry and monumentality toward minimalism, visual fragmentation and spatial freedom.

At the same time, contemporary scenography tends to emphasize:

- the displacement of focus from a central point toward distributed spatial configurations;
- the creation of nonlinear and irregular compositions;
- an emphasis on process rather than on a completed illusion;
- a more direct interaction between the actor's body and space.

The revolving stage no longer serves this aesthetic logic, as it is a predetermined structure with a single trajectory of movement and strict limitations on scenographic configuration.

Problematic issues

Contemporary studies on the revolving stage remain limited, making it difficult to fully analyze the reasons for its decline. There is a lack of specialized literature that directly connects aesthetic, technical and dramaturgical changes with the disappearance of this mechanism. Furthermore, the impact of modern technologies on the transformation of the stage is often underestimated, leading to the mistaken perception that the revolving stage "lost its value," when in fact it simply lost its function within a new performative logic.

Conclusion

The decline of the revolving stage in contemporary theatre is not the result of technical or aesthetic deficiency, but rather part of a broader transformation in the way stage space, movement and narration are conceived. Contemporary theatre prioritizes flexibility, spontaneity, and spatial freedom.

The revolving stage in Albania: installation, use and disappearance

The history of the revolving stage in Albania is closely linked to the technical, institutional, and aesthetic developments of theatres in the post Second World War period. Unlike Europe, where revolving stages became part of theatrical practice as early as the XVIII century, Albania adopted this mechanism much later, primarily during the construction of institutional theatres in the second half of the XX century. The installation of the revolving stage was regarded as a sign of modernity and as a means of enhancing the technical capacities of the stage, providing Albanian theatre with a system that had already been standard in many other countries for decades. However, the use of the revolving stage in Albania proved to be limited and short lived.

Beyond technical factors, modes of artistic production, the lack of maintenance, institutional rhythms and aesthetic transformations led to the rapid obsolescence of revolving stages installed in Tirana and in several other theatres, ultimately resulting in their removal. Their disappearance reflects not only practical challenges but also conceptual shifts in the way stage space has been understood in Albania.

Why were revolving stages removed?

The reasons for the removal of revolving stages from Albanian theatres are multiple and reflect the country's technical and cultural developments.

- **Lack of technical maintenance.** Revolving stages require regular inspection, maintenance and repair. Albanian theatres often lacked sufficient budgets, technical staff, or spare parts to keep these mechanisms operational.
- **Rapid wear and deterioration.** Revolving stages installed in the early years deteriorated quickly due to limited materials and construction that did not always meet international standards.
- **Aesthetic changes.** Over time, Albanian scenography moved toward minimalism and lightweight modular solutions, within which the revolving stage no longer served a functional role.
- **Architectural transformations of theatres.** Modifications to stage spaces, reductions in technical funding, and the reconfiguration of theatrical environments often made it impossible to preserve revolving structures.

Problematic issues

The analysis of the revolving stage in Albania faces a lack of technical, archival, and institutional documentation. There are no comprehensive records regarding installations, technical failures, maintenance processes, or administrative decisions that led to their removal. This absence of data makes it difficult to reconstruct an accurate technical and aesthetic history of this mechanism. Furthermore, the lack of specialized studies has left this topic largely outside academic discussions on Albanian theatre.

Conclusion

The revolving stage in Albania represents a brief yet significant chapter in the history of the national stage. Its installation reflected aspirations toward modernization, while its disappearance reveals the technical, economic, and aesthetic realities of Albanian theatrical institutions. Examining this mechanism contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between art and technology within both local and global contexts.

Conclusions and recommendations

The revolving stage marks a pivotal moment in the history of scenography, signifying the shift from a static stage to a dynamic space capable of real time transformation. Originating in Kabuki theatre through the *mawari-butai* and later adopted in European theatres, it fulfilled

both technical and aesthetic functions by enabling rapid scene changes and structuring dramatic rhythm. Its decline in the XX century resulted not from technical failure but from broader aesthetic, dramaturgical and technological transformations that favored flexibility over heavy mechanical systems. As Marvin Carlson[3] notes, **"Transformations of scenic space create an early form of visual montage."** This observation underscores the role of the revolving stage as a conceptual bridge between theatrical spatial movement and the later development of cinematic language. In Albania, the revolving stage had a limited lifespan due to late adoption, high costs, lack of maintenance and institutional changes. Nevertheless, it remains an important element of theatrical memory and a marker of efforts toward modernization. This study proposes reconsidering the revolving stage as a conceptual link between theatre and film, highlighting how movement and space generate meaning across evolving scenic technologies. **The revolving stage did not fail; theatre changed.**

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3 Marvin Carlson is an American theatre theorist, best known for his concept of theatre as a "memory machine," in which scenic and performative elements continually reactivate traces of the past within the spectator's experience (Carlson, 2001).

From ancient mechanics to intelligent stages: the transformation of technology and theatrical scenography

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Abstract

Scenography is an important element of stage art, which serves to build the dramatic atmosphere and mediate the relationship with the spectator. From its overall perspective as a necessity of stage works, it creates what is called the psychology of the atmosphere, which in addition to an organic connection with the theatrical part creates in the spectator an imagination that leads him towards a stronger focus on the theatrical part, thanks to the effects and visual forms that create different states always in accordance with the overall perspective of the show. The tools used and the different forms of executions from painting the canvases to the lights, the use of technologies to create effects that are surprising and cause strong emotional appeals, make this art a necessity for a successful and powerful realization of the message of the work. Technological evolution has been an important factor in the transformation of the theatrical stage, moving from mechanical structures to dynamic, electronic and digital systems. This study aims to analyze the transformation of the theatrical stage in history, tracing the technological developments of the time, their impact on scenic aesthetics from antiquity to the present day. So, the role of scenography from a decorative element to an important interactive system has changed significantly with technological evolution. A qualitative approach with a historical-analytical character was used to carry out this study, analyzing technological evolution in the historical, cultural and artistic context throughout the history of the development of theater.

Keywords

Technological evolution, scenography, theatre

Introduction

The forms of development of scenography throughout the centuries are different. This is related to the relationship created between scenography and theatrical work. Since the beginning of theater, it has been built on the concept of a kind of critical reflection on the social reality of the time. In this context, theater has functioned as a space of reflection, where human and spiritual reality was treated through the work. Scenography served as a supporting tool in this experience. But what were these scenographies like and what did they represent, which had to respond to the works of the authors and what technology did they use to achieve effects that stimulated different states in accordance with the works and moving through time.

Literature review;

Greek Theater – The Origin of Stage Technology

Greek theater was born and flourished in ancient Greece as early as 700 BC. Its main development was in the City-State of Athens. Theater was first institutionalized there as part of the Dionysia festival. From here, three genres arose; tragedy, comedy, and satirical drama. Athens spread the festival to its colonies. Modern Western theater takes its origin from ancient Greek theater. (Brockett 1999)

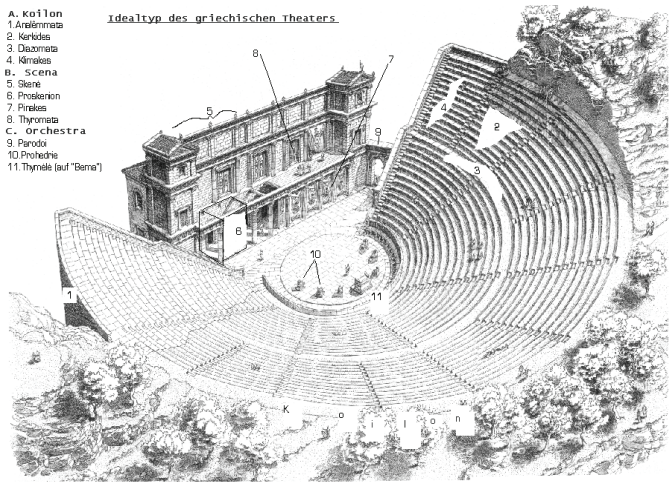

Figure 1. Reconstruction of a Greek Theater. Source: Flamingo, 2003, Wikimedia Commons.

The use of various elements of stage technology can be found in the early Greek theater in the 6th-3rd century BC. The Greeks, although without sophisticated technological or electrical means, managed to create efficient mechanical and architectural systems and in this way directly influenced the way the performance was interpreted and developed.

Greek theater represents the first organized phase of stage technology in the history of dramatic art.

The orchestra in the Greek theater was a central space built in a circular or semi-circular shape. It was paved with solid stones and positioned between the stage and the spectator stands. Its diameter varied from 20 to 30 meters, depending on the theater. Its function was initially to accommodate the choir, as a ritual space and to serve as a center of dramatic action. The most important function of the orchestra was acoustic.

Figure 2. The Great Theatre of Epidaurus, designed by Polycleitus the Younger in the 4th century BC. Source: Carole Raddato, 2014, Wikimedia Commons

Another innovation brought by Greek theater was the construction of the "Scene". In the beginnings of Greek theater, actors performed without a special built structure. The scene was built at the back of the stage where the performance was taking place. The word "Scene" means a tent or a temporary wooden building. At first, it consisted of a light structure built with only a piece hanging on a rope, but later it was significantly changed. The scene served for changing costumes, storing props, or for dramatic entrances and exits. On the front side there were usually 3 doors which symbolized palaces, temples, and noble houses. Its facade was located behind the orchestra and provided a support for the scenography. The decorations were painted and created the illusion of cities or landscapes. This structure marks the beginning of theatrical scenography.

Figure 3. Greece, Peloponnese, Ancient Theater, Epidaurus. ***Source:*** *Digr, 2003, Wikimedia Commons*

The ekkyklema[1], an important element of the development of stage technology, was a revolving platform or a platform that was pushed on wheels, placed inside the stage. (Brockett, Hildy 2007) It was brought out onto the stage to show murder scenes, the tragic consequences of which were that in Greek theater violence was not shown directly on stage. For moral reasons, murders took place off stage. The ekkyklema is one of the first mechanical devices used on stage. It was the predecessor of the moving scenes that were developed later. (Rehm 1992)

1 Greek: ἐκκύκλημα - "rotating machinery"

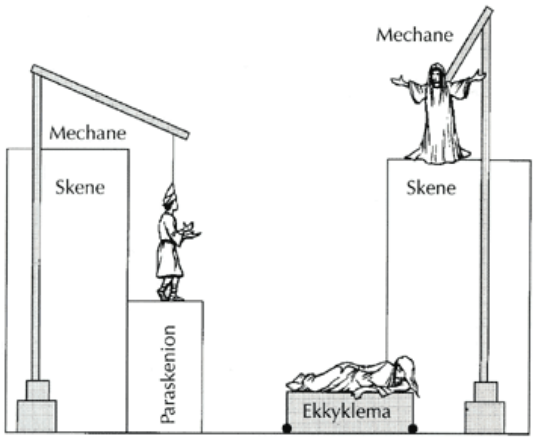

Figure 4. Usage of ekkyklema. ***Source:*** *ritabay.wordpress.com, 2011.*

Mechane (Deus ex Machina)[2], was a crane built with wood, ropes and pulleys. It was placed behind the stage and had the function of raising and lowering actors from the height of "the sky". (Bushnell 2005) The actors were connected with belts and ropes to create the effect of "flying over the stage". The mechane had a dramatic function and was used mainly for the characters of gods, divine beings and mythological creatures, a function from which it took its name. Although it was often criticized for providing an artificial resolution of the conflict, it can be called the beginning of special effects used in the theater. (Mastronarde 1990)

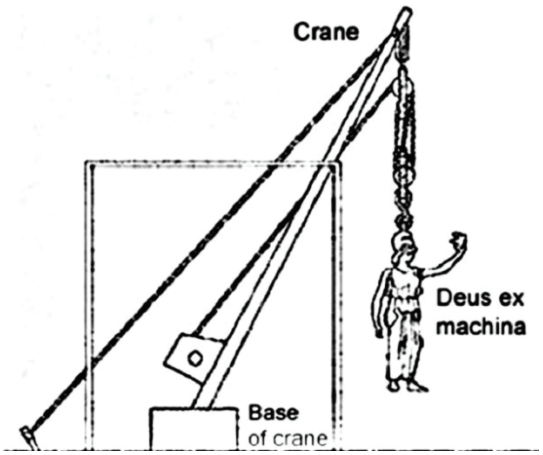

Figure 5. Mechane (Deus ex Machina). ***Source:*** *Joe Vasicek, "Deus Ex Machina", onelowerlight.com, 2012.*

Roman Theatre – Development of Architecture and Stage Mechanism

The development of theatre in ancient Rome dates back to the 1st century BC to the 3rd century AD, but may date back to the 4th century BC. Roman theatre of the period is divided into two genres: tragedy and comedy.

2 Latin "God from the machine"

These two genres represented a particular style of architecture and stage performances, which were presented to the audience as a form of entertainment. (Hammer 2010) The Romans seemed to prefer entertainment and comedy, rather than tragedy and drama, bringing about a more modern form of theatre.
Roman theatre is considered to be the stage of institutionalisation and mechanisation of the performing arts. Inheriting the Greek basis, the Romans transformed theatre into a more monumental, technical and spectacular one.

Scaenae Frons (Monumental Facade of the Stage) was a permanent architectural background decorated with details of the stage of the Roman theater. Given its forms, it seems an attempt to imitate the facades of imperial palaces. It was built as a support and for a permanent roof or tent. It had two functions, that of the stage and in the back as a dressing room for the actors. With an influence from the Greek theater as mentioned above, the "Scene" was its equivalent although in the Greek theater it was simply with a tent. The space in front of the stage was called the "proscenium". It served as a permanent architectural decoration. The innovation was the improvement of acoustics, it created a permanent scenic background, the entrances and exits to the stage were better organized and emphasized Roman power. In terms of historical importance, the stage turned into a "monumental palace", combining architecture with dramaturgy.

Figure 6. Frontal scenes of the Roman Theater in Palmyra. Source: Jerzy Strzelecki, 2007, Wikimedia Commons.

Aulaeum[3] (Roman Stage Curtain) was the main curtain, which moved mechanically. It was positioned behind the parascene wall. Unlike today, the mechanism was built differently. It was built with rollers placed in a channel. Before the start of the performance, the curtain was raised from below and at the end of the performance it was lowered again. Archaeological evidence reveals that the curtain mechanism consisted of wooden poles attached to the fabric that were inserted into stone blocks placed at intervals in a 3-5 meter deep crack, running the full width of the stage. From a directorial concept, the Auleum organized a dramatic opening, created emotional anticipation, structured the acts.

3 From Ancient Greek αὐλαία (aulaía)

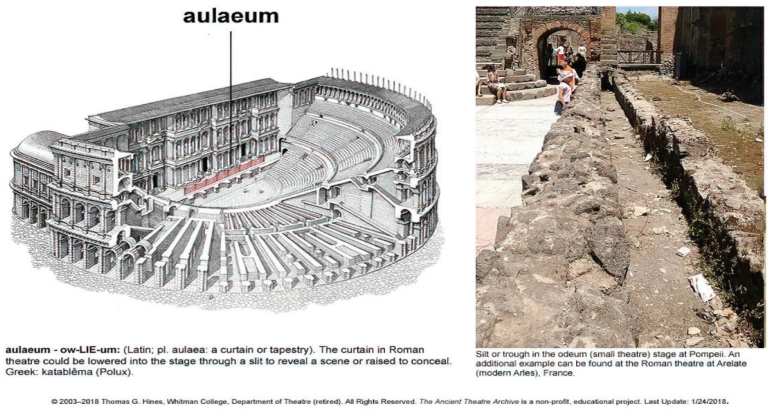

Figure 7. Aulaeum (Roman Stage Curtain). Source: Thomas G. Hines, "Aulaeum", The Ancient Theatre Archive, 2022.

Hypogeum, a vast underground complex, with two levels of tunnels, with underground rooms located beneath the floor of the theatre. It allowed for unexpected stage appearances by actors, animal performances, magical effects and rapid stage changes.
The velarium "curtain" was a fabric covering system which extended over the entire seating area of the theatre, to protect the audience from the sun. Although many details are not known, the tent is thought to have consisted of wooden poles, poles, ropes and textile sails. (Yarwood 1987) Retractable tents were relatively common throughout the Roman Empire.

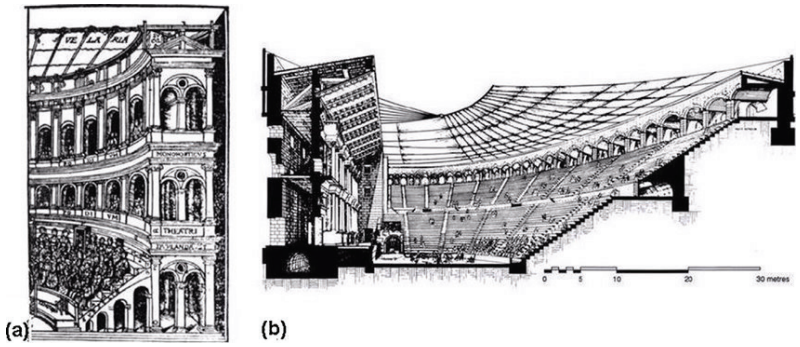

Figure 8. Drawing of the velar in a Roman theater by Cesare Cesariano. Source: Iannace et al., 2014, ResearchGate.

Ultimately, Roman theater influenced the development of stage technology by making the stage a mechanical system, institutionalized spectacle, and prepared the ground for the later developments of opera and the Baroque.

Middle Ages and Renaissance – The Restoration and Modernization of Stage Technology

Medieval theatre spans the period from the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century to the beginning of the Renaissance in the 15th century. A wider range of genres developed in medieval theatre, including mystery plays, morality plays, farces and masques. The thematic

content was almost always religious. In the later Middle Ages, plays became more secular, yielding a greater number of surviving records. (Banham 1998)
Pageant wagons were a movable stage or carriage used to accommodate mystery and miracle plays from the 10th to the 16th centuries. These plays were religious in nature and developed from biblical texts; at the height of their popularity, they were allowed to be staged inside churches, with special stages erected for them. The origins of religious plays began precisely in medieval churches. Their structure began simply by being used to convey the messages of the Bible to people. The moving scenes were built as platforms on wheels, decorated on top, with space below for the actors. Technically they were able to move from one place to another, creating a "moving theater" enabling the creation of many scenes within a day. Each moving scene represented a biblical episode (Creation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, etc.). (Nagler 1959)

Figure 9. Illustration of a scene from the Middle Ages. Source: Wikimedia Commons, aksesuar më 26 prill 2026.

Another form was the stage stimulation, where several scenic locations were present simultaneously. These were called residences and represented: Heaven, Earth, Hell, Temples, etc., small wooden platforms were built, with roofs and supports. The actors could move within the residences according to the specific requirements of the play. The residence was placed around the acting area. (Brockett, Hildy 2007)

Figure 10. An image from the Valenciennes Passion shows the layout of the scaffolding. Source: The History of European Theatre Blog, 2026 (aksesuar).

The special effects used in medieval theater were artificial smoke, real fire, and mechanisms to create "flying angels" which represented the first forms of stage effects in religious theater. In the historical context, moving scenes were developed and visual effects were experimented with, although primitive, laying the foundations for Renaissance theater and stage.

Renaissance Theatre (15th – 17th centuries)

Until the 15th century, amateur actors in Italian theatre performed classical comedies on unadorned stages, with only a row of curtained booths. By 1650, Italy had developed the stage practices that would dominate European theatre for the next 150 years.
The scenography was constructed by grouping several medieval-style dwellings together to form a single large unit. Here we notice two new elements not seen before. The dwellings were framed by decorative columns. This was the first step towards the construction of the proscenium arch, the arch that encloses the curtain and frames the stage from the audience's point of view. Another innovation was that the dwellings, being connected, were treated as an integral part of the city street in which they were located. The first painted background according to the rules of perspective was found in 1508 in Ferrara, the scene included houses, churches, towers, etc. With the perspective of the Renaissance, professional scenography was born. Painted scenes created the illusion of depth, visually expanded space, simulated streets, palaces, cities, etc.

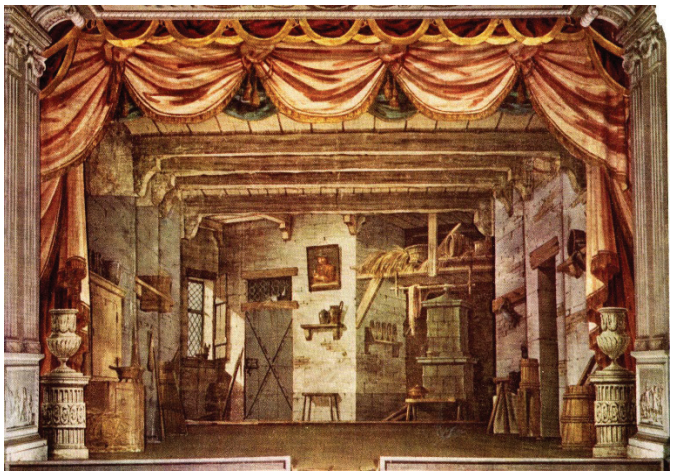

Figure 11. Illustration of a Renaissance scene. ***Source:*** *Josef Platzer, Wikimedia Commons.*

Periactos or Rotating Scenes

The periactos was a rotating device used to rapidly display and change theatrical scenes. It found widespread use in Renaissance theater. It was constructed from a rotating equilateral triangular wooden prism. A different scene was painted on each face of the prism. As the periactos rapidly rotated, a different scene was displayed before the audience.

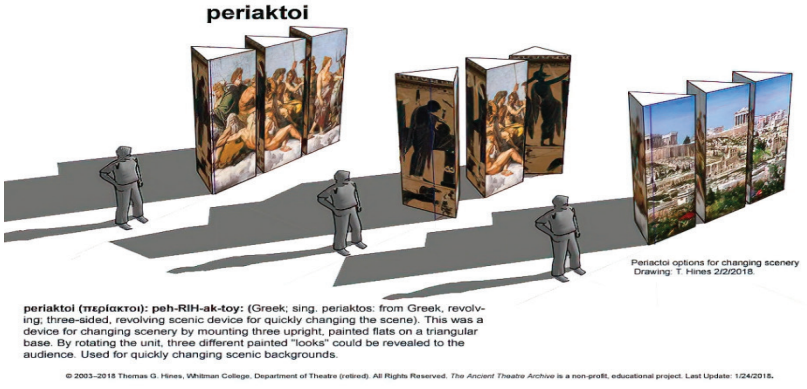

Figure 12. Example of Periactin. ***Source:*** *The Ancient Theatre Archive, Whitman College.*

Baroque (17th – 19th centuries) – The Age of Machinery and Illusion

Baroque theater came as a result of two artistic innovations that preceded it, the laws of perspective in the 15th century and the first opera in 1597. The era of baroque theater lasted until the 19th century. The classical dramas of the 16th century gave way to diverse entertainments such as ballet, opera, etc. The innovations it brought were new means for spectacular visual effects, the installation of machinery that brought the dominance of the spectacle in all aspects. The innovation of the period was the placement of an orchestra pit in front of the stage. The stage was deepened further away from the proscenium arch to accommodate the scenographies,

various equipment and to create the space for dancing. The scenographies were perspective, elaborate, mobile, with complicated stage machinery to achieve changes in the scene, during the development of the show. (Music of the Baroque 2022)
The stage was equipped with mechanisms, with systems of rollers for raising and lowering and moving edges while the flat wings and grilles that made up the elaborate stage were mounted on frames connected to carriages that moved on rails below the stage and could thus be easily changed. The Carriage and Pillar System was first built by Giacomo Torelli[4], with the function of changing the scenery. The system was changed from carts mounted on long poles, which ran through gaps with double rails to small 2-wheeled carts, placed under the stage. The system was composed of a series of ropes, pulleys, cranes and all the carts under the stage moved in parallel up to ten carts. One cart moved the scene, the other in front or behind it was pulled out of the stage.
Technically it enabled the scene to change in a few seconds and impressive transformations.
During this period, special effects were developed, such as cloud machines, artificial sea, fire effects, storms, flights of angels, etc. All these effects were realized mechanically. Candles, oil lamps, torches, etc. were used for lighting, which were placed on the stage, floor or ceiling.

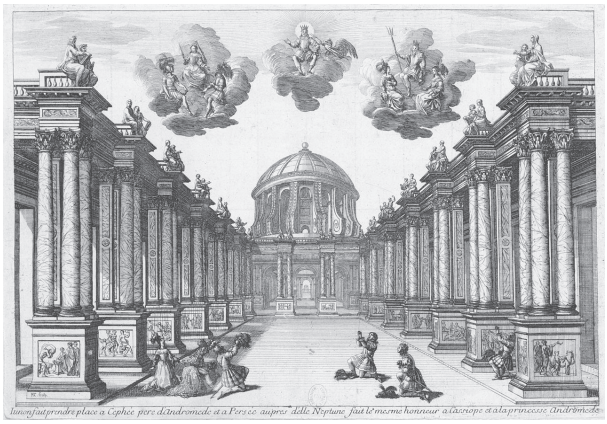

Figure 13. Torelli's set design for Act 5 of Pierre Corneille's opera Andromède, 1650. Source: Giacomo Torelli, 1650, Wikimedia Commons.

Neoclassicism (17th-18th centuries) – Rationalization of the Stage

Neoclassical theatre developed in the 17th-18th centuries, mainly in France and England. It revived classical Greek and Roman principles by emphasizing order, realism and moral education. Neoclassical theatre adhered to three principles; time, place, action, favouring structured performances set on stages with perspective and proscenium arches. In contrast to the excesses of Baroque theatre, in neoclassical theatre became more controlled, orderly and functional.
The Wing and Shutter System dominated the scenography of European neoclassical theatre, constituting the main visual component of theatrical production. The system was composed of wings, painted canvases stretched over wooden frames, placed on both sides of the stage, parallel to the proscenium. The shutters were large, painted squares with two sections at the back of the stage that met in the middle. When paired with the wings, they created a full, closed perspective

4 Giacomo Torelli (1 September 1608 – 17 June 1678) was an Italian set designer, landscape painter, engineer and architect.

view. The wings and shutters were installed in grooves in the stage floor and overhead rails. To change scenes, stagehands simply slid the wings and shutters to the side, revealing the new set immediately. (Nicoll 1966)

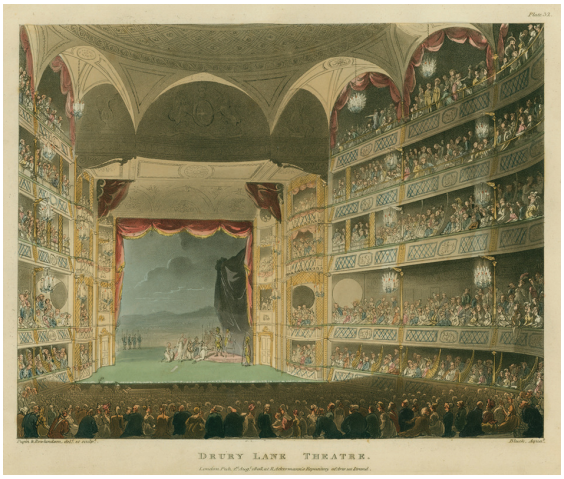

Figure 14. Interior of Drury Lane Theatre by Pugin and Rowlandson, 1808. Source: Thomas Rowlandson, 1808, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Industrial Revolution (19th century) – Mechanization and Electrification of Theater

With the flourishing of the industrial revolution and the developments it brought in the 19th century, theater moved from artisanal mechanisms to true industrial technology. Stage sets were developed with metal machines, energy, and systems of a standard. Initially, it was switched from the use of gas to the use of electricity, after 1880, thus avoiding a major fire risk that gas could cause. The use of electricity brought safety, control, and focusing of lights.
Fly Tower, also known as the flying tower (or fly loft) is a vertical extension built over a theater stage which was used to house and operate mounting systems for stage sets, lights, and curtains. This system enabled rapid changes of scenes, built at least 2.5 times higher than the proscenium arch, allowing the elements to be raised completely out of sight of the spectator. The system consisted of steel cables, counterweights, and pulleys. Enabling vertical lifts, quick scene changes, and scenery hiding.

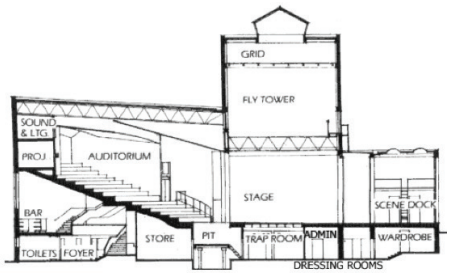

*Figure 15. Northcott Theatre, Exeter, Devon, United Kingdom, built in 1967. **Source:** Quizlet.*

The Box Set was a complex with a proscenium arch stage and three walls, the proscenium opening constituting the fourth wall, thus creating the illusion of a room on the stage. A real room was created with walls, windows and furniture. The spectator sees through the fourth wall. The technology used thus brought an illusion of reality, character psychology and maximum detail.

Figure 16. Model Box Set. Source: Otterbein University Theatre & Dance, 2012, Wikimedia Commons

Modern Theatre (20th century) – Electronics and Experimentation

The scenography of modern theatre in the 20th century brought a transformation in stage design where painted backdrops were replaced by dynamic, 3-dimensional spaces. Lighting, sound, technology were integrated in the function of performance. It moved from rigid realism, to avant-garde and expressionist styles. The surge of technological developments included the integration of multimedia. Scenography moved in order to use the entire stage space. Electric lighting, projections, on-screen videos and later digital technology with LED screens were implemented, at the end of the 20th century, bringing dynamic and constantly changing environments. Sound systems with microphones, loudspeakers, etc. were also implemented. (Baugh 2005)

Figure 17. Theater stage in the 20th century. Source: Moscow Philharmonic (meloman.ru)

Contemporary Digital Theatre – Virtualization of the Stage (21st century)

Contemporary theatre is an interdisciplinary, inclusive art form that goes beyond traditional stage scenography, shaping the entire performance space with the audience's experience. It combines digital technologies, live video, projection and physical materials.
Projection Mapping, the development of projection design, the combination of art and technology, to complement the immersive experiences and leave the audience amazed, using specialized projection mapping software and equipment to create immersive environments, visual effects and optical illusions, replacing the physical decor. (Zhang 2023)
Immersive theatre is distinguished from traditional theatre by removing the stage and immersing the audience within the performance itself. Often, this is achieved by using a specific location, allowing the audience to talk to the actors and interact with the surrounding environment (interactive), thus breaking the fourth wall. The audience interacts with the performance and becomes part of the action.

Methodology;

The paper was carried out through a historical-analytical research work, studying the development of scenography alongside the evolution of technology. This paper focuses on the artistic and historical dimensions of the technological developments of the time in theatrical stages.

Results and discussions;

In this paper, the developments of scenography and technology, the transformation of theatrical space came as an evolution intertwined with the social, architectural and technological developments of each era were highlighted. Starting from the acoustic and mechanical organization of the Greek theater, the further development of the Roman theater, the experimentations of the Middle Ages and the development of the Renaissance perspective, the Baroque mechanism and industrialism, technology has been a structuring factor of scenography. By moving the scenography from a simple architectural structure to integrated mechanical, electrical and digital systems. Each technological phase has brought a reconceptualization of the actor, space, spectator relationships. These developments conclude that technology is not simply an auxiliary element, but a key element in the aesthetic shaping of the theater.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study shows how the technological evolution of the stage has directly influenced the transformation of the structure and function of the theater stage. Technological evolution has changed not only the visual form of the theatrical performance, but also the way the spectator is perceived and involved.

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The Gjama: A sung and danced ritual

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Abstract

This paper provides a comprehensive ethno-choreographic and historical analysis of the Gjama, a unique funerary ritual within the Albanian tradition, geographically confined to the northern regions of Albania and the Gjakova Highlands (Malësia e Gjakovës). Unlike female laments, which are primarily vocal and improvisational, the Gjama represents a collective male rite, strictly codified, that combines rhythmic shouting, synchronized bodily movement, and chest beating in a canonical form. It is dedicated exclusively to men of high virtues, serving not merely as an expression of grief but as a ceremony of honor and a post-mortem investiture. The study draws upon primary and secondary sources, including the foundational work of Johann Georg Hahn, Albaneische Studien, the choreographic studies of Skënder Selimi and Ramazan Bogdani, oral testimonies from the northern regions, as well as comparative analysis with Lab mortuary dances. Through an interdisciplinary approach, the paper analyzes the ritual's origins (with roots in the lament for Skënderbeg in 1468 and in Illyrian pagan beliefs), its geographical variants, the canonical structure of its movement, and the semiotic transformation the Gjama underwent during the communist period, when attempts were made to convert it from a cry of pain into a heroic cheer. The paper argues that the Gjama represents one of the highest forms of primitive European art, testifies to the extraordinary resilience of the Albanian pagan substrate, and offers a unique case study for the anthropology of totalitarian regimes. Today, the authentic Gjama has almost completely disappeared, giving way to folklorized and staged forms. The study emphasizes the necessity of scientific documentation and artistic recontextualization of this endangered cultural heritage.

Keywords

Ethno-choreography, cultural heritage, mortuary dance, communism

Introduction

Ritualistic phenomena surrounding death constitute one of the most archaic and resilient layers of Albanian cultural heritage. Within this ceremonial universe, the Gjama stands as a unique phenomenon, notable not only for its sophisticated artistic form but also for the profound symbolic weight it carries. It represents the apex of collective male grief expression—a strictly codified mortuary dance reserved exclusively for men of high virtues.
This paper aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of the Gjama phenomenon across three primary dimensions: ethnographically, by examining its origins, ritual, and geographical variants; choreographically, by analyzing the plastic elements and canonical movement structure; and historico-politically, by scrutinizing the impact of the communist period on the transformation and suppression of this practice. Our approach is supported by primary and secondary sources, including testimonies gathered by Albanian ethnologists of the 20th century.

Literature review

This literature review aims to critically analyze the main sources that address the phenomenon of Gjama and Albanian funerary rites. The identified literature spans a time frame of more than four centuries, ranging from the early testimonies of sixteenth-century humanists to the ethnochoreographic studies of the late twentieth century. The category of primary sources constitutes the backbone of any serious ethnographic study. In the case of Gjama, oral testimonies hold particular importance, given that the very nature of the ritual is closely linked to oral transmission from generation to generation. The November 1978 expedition in the Mat district, documented in the field notes of Skënder Selimi, offers a detailed overview of lamentation practices in one of the northern regions, realized in his major work *Folklori Koreografik Shqiptar* [Albanian Choreographic Folklore]. The study "Rite e zakone të vdekjes" ["Rites and Customs of Death"], published in the volume *Etnografia Shqiptare* [Albanian Ethnography] in 1983, represents an important contribution of Albanian female ethnography, written by Yllka Selimi (1983). *Historia e jetës dhe veprave të Skënderbeut* [The History of the Life and Deeds of Skanderbeg] (1508–1510) represents the earliest written source describing a lamentation ceremony in Albanian territory. Barleti's description of Lekë Dukagjini's lament at Skanderbeg's funeral in 1468 – with hair pulling and face scratching – has been considered by ethnologists as the prototype of the later Gjama (Barleti, 1967). The value of this source lies not only in its antiquity, but also in the fact that it documents a practice belonging to the fifteenth-century Albanian aristocratic elite, demonstrating that Gjama was not merely a peasant custom, but part of the culture of the higher strata of medieval Albanian society. Albaneische Studien (1854) is the foundational work of German Albanology and an irreplaceable source for the study of Albanian customs, beliefs, and folklore of the nineteenth century. Hahn, who traveled extensively in Albania, scientifically documented lamentation practices, beliefs about the afterlife, and other elements of Albanian spiritual culture. The compilation Mbledhës të hershëm të folklorit shqiptar (1635-1912) [Early Collectors of Albanian Folklore (1635–1912)] offers a valuable overview of the history of Albanian folklore collection, including testimonies about laments and death rituals. *Vallet dhe Muzika e të Parëve Tanë* [The Dances and Music of Our Ancestors] (Sokoli, 1958) represents one of the first attempts to study Albanian dances in their historical and cultural context. The literature review shows that Gjama as a cultural phenomenon has been addressed from a plurality of perspectives and disciplines (Xhangolli, 2007), ranging from the

early historical testimonies of the sixteenth century to the specialized choreographic studies of the twentieth century.

Methodology

This study is based on an interdisciplinary approach, combining methods from ethnology, cultural anthropology, choreology, and oral history. The primary sources utilized include:

1. Classical Ethnographic Literature: The foundational work of Johann Georg Hahn, *Albaneische Studien* (1854), which contains the first systematized testimonies on Albanian mortuary customs.
2. Albanian Choreographic Studies: Materials by Prof. Assoc. Skënder Selimi and Prof. Ramazan Bogdani, published in the work *Albanian Choreographic Folklore* (Bogdani, 2003), which constitutes the most complete documentation of the Gjama technique.
3. Oral Testimonies and Memories of the Older Generation: Collected in the northern regions (Hot, Grudë, Dukagjin, Mirditë, Mat) before the near-disappearance of the rite in its original form.
4. Comparative Analysis: References to the funerary customs of other Illyrian and Balkan peoples, as well as to the pagan rites of ancient Europe.The method of analysis is descriptive-analytical, focusing on the semiotic interpretation of ritual actions and the historical contextualization of changes undergone during the 20th century.

Results and discussion

The Gjama, known in Albanian ethnology also as "Albanian wailing" or "men's lamentation," constitutes a distinct form of funerary ritual, geographically confined to the northern highlands of Albania and the Gjakova Highlands (Malësia e Gjakovës). Unlike female laments, which are primarily vocal and improvisational, the Gjama is a collective, strictly codified rite that combines rhythmic shouting, synchronized bodily movement, and chest beating in a canonical form.
It is not performed for every deceased person (Instituti i Folklorit, 1983), but only for esteemed men—those who have distinguished themselves through high moral virtues, bravery, hospitality, wisdom, or patriotism. This selection indicates that the Gjama is not merely an expression of pain but a ceremony of honor, a post-mortem investiture that places the deceased in the pantheon of collective memory.

Historical origins and stratification

The etymology of the word "gjama" is linked to the onomatopoeia of a piercing cry, as well as the concept of "jamë" as a powerful lament. The roots of this ritual are lost in the depths of centuries. Historical sources lead us to the 15th century, specifically to the year 1468, with the death of the National Hero, Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu.
The Albanian humanist Marin Barleti, in his biography of Skënderbeu, describes in detail the lamentation ceremony of the Albanian princes in Lezhë (Barleti, 1967). According to Barleti (1967), Lekë Dukagjini, present at the funeral, expressed his grief by tearing out his hair and scratching his face—actions that ethnologists consider the prototype of the later Gjama. This is not merely a biographical detail; it suggests that the Gjama, as an elite male rite, was shaped in

the specific circumstances of the 15th-century Albanian warrior aristocracy, later democratizing within the tribal society of the mountains.
Another, older layer connects to pagan Illyrian beliefs. Hahn and other ethnologists have observed that many elements of the Gjama—calls directed to the deceased as if they were still alive, stamping the ground, physical contact with the body—are remnants of the cult of ancestors and the belief that death is a "change of life," not an absolute disappearance.
Even within the northern area, the Gjama is known with distinctive nuances:

- In Hot and Grudë, it is more massive and longer in duration, often including elements of oral epic poetry sung by rhapsodes.
- In Dukagjin, it is considered purer and more faithful to the traditional canon.
- In Mirditë and Mat, it has undergone reciprocal influences with the female laments of the area, while nevertheless retaining its male essence.

Choreography of grief – anatomy of the ritual

Preparatory phase and announcement

The Gjama ritual does not begin abruptly. It follows a clearly defined script where every action has its specific place and time. The first phase is the announcement of death. A man from the household, usually a relative of the deceased, steps onto the terrace of the tower house (kullë) or a high place. Placing his left hand behind his ear (to focus the sound) and his right hand to his mouth (as a trumpet), he emits a characteristic cry. His call, repeated from clan to clan, spreads the news throughout the highlands within hours (Fig. 1).

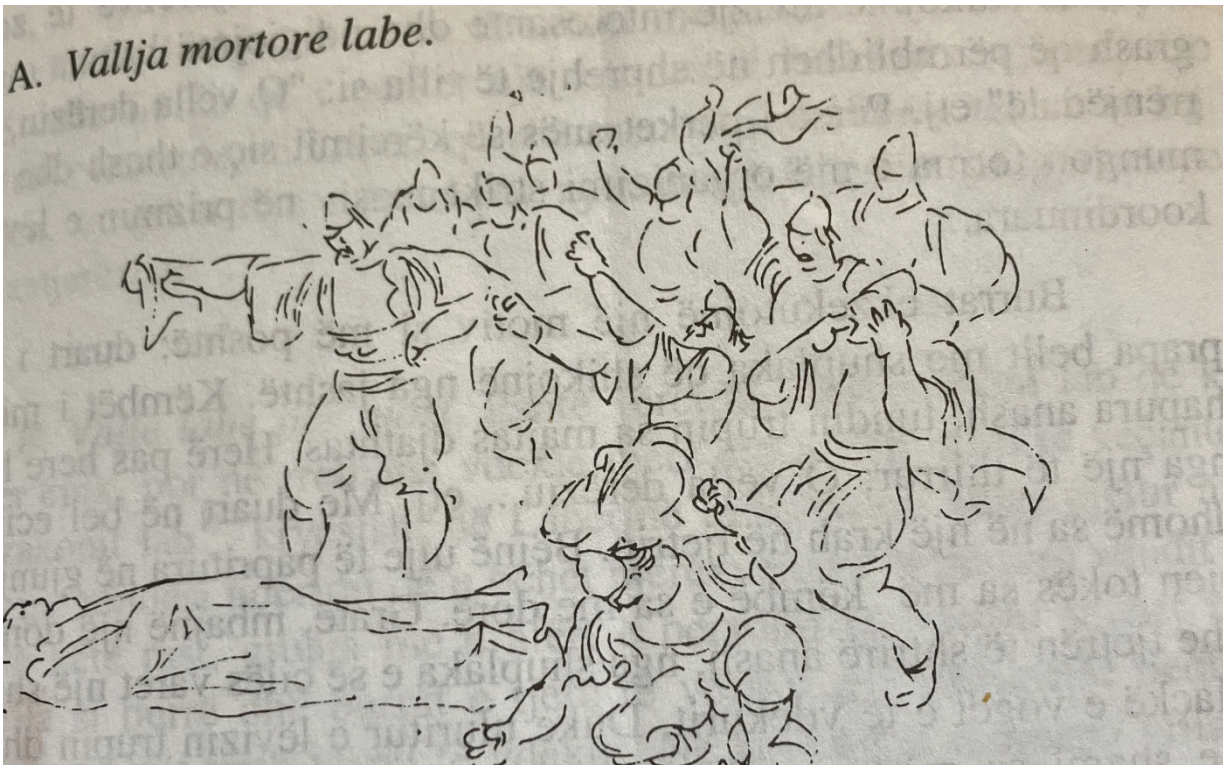

Figure 1. Lab funeral dance (Folklori Koreografik Shqiptar", 2003)

Gathering and spatial organization

Upon receiving the news, men gather at the boundary point (pika kufitare)—the symbolic place separating the deceased's territory from the rest of the highlands. Here, the funeral column is formed. The spatial organization is rigid:

- The men line up in a single file, facing the house of the deceased. At the head stands the eldest or most authoritative man of the group.
- The women line up in a parallel line, 2-3 steps behind the men. Their role is secondary and often supportive, repeating the cries or performing freer laments.

The plastic canon – movement technique

The culminating moment of the Gjama is the execution of the plastic canon. This choreographic mechanism is one of the most sophisticated achievements of Albanian choreographic folklore and functions as follows:
The inducer (the first man) thrusts his left foot forward, bends his body towards the ground with his hands over his head, and utters the cry: *"O i mjeri u bre vëlla!"* (Oh, my wretched brother!). As he rises, he repeats *"Oh! Oh! Oh!"* three times, forcefully stamping his left foot on the ground.
The critical moment: While the first man is uttering his third "Oh," the second man begins his cry. This overlap creates an auditory and visual effect similar to a musical canon (like a Baroque fugue), where the same phrase is repeated at regular time intervals. The second is followed by the third, the third by the fourth, and so on, until the entire mass of 40-50 men is engulfed in a single, rhythmic, uninterrupted wave of movement.
Alongside the cry, the men perform chest beating. This is not a random hitting; it is organized like a hailstorm, with closed fists falling rhythmically upon the sternum. This action, combined with the foot stamping, creates a complex polyrhythm: the foot marks the strong beat (arsis), while the fists fill the space between beats with faster notes (Figure 2).

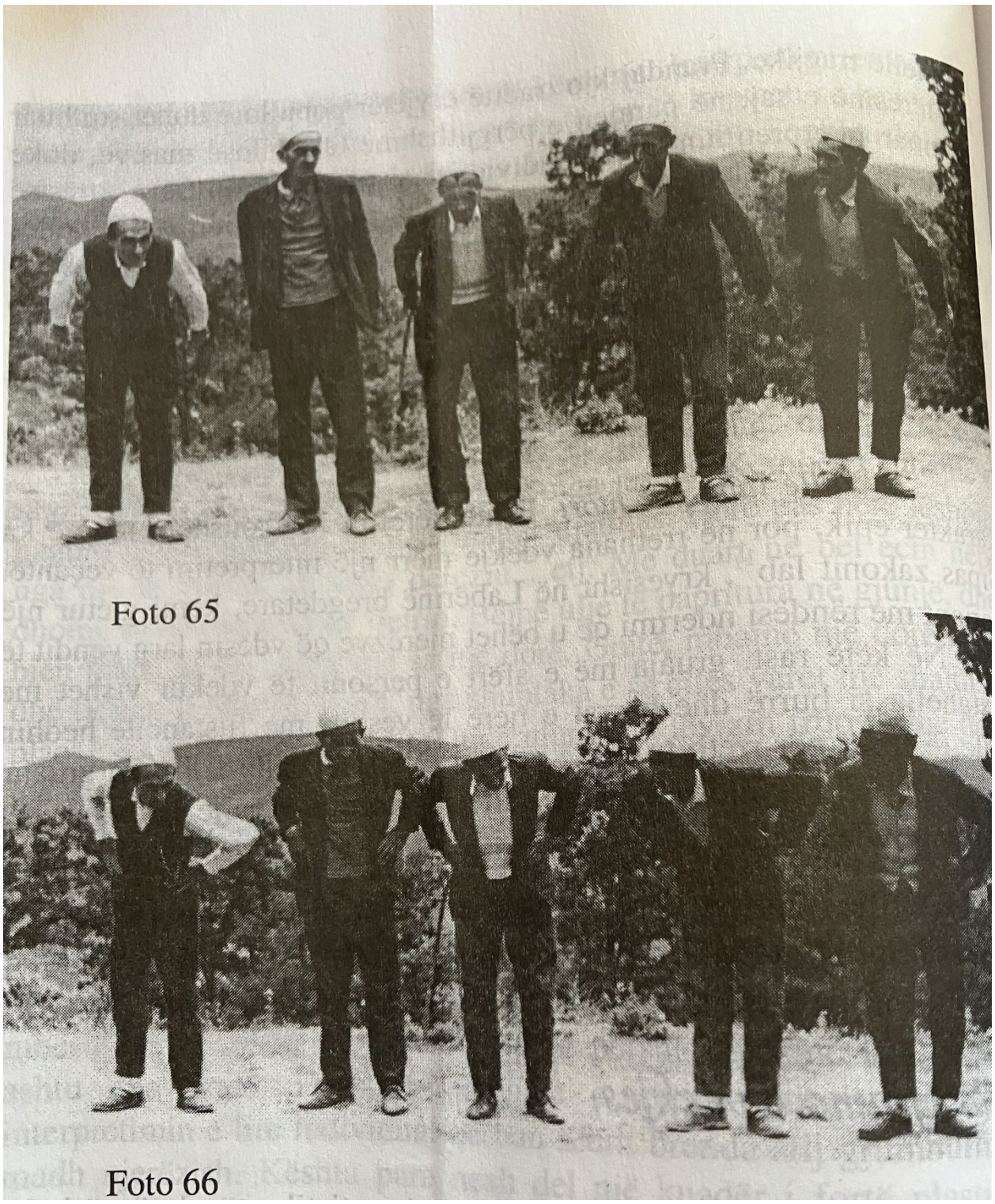

Figure 2. The execution of the plastic canon (Folklori Koreografik Shqiptar, 2003)

The bipartite structure of the ritual

A full Gjama is divided into two major phases, separated by an interval of rest:

- The First Gjama: Takes place at the boundary point. It has a "warming-up" character, both psychological and physical. It aims to create group cohesion and prepare the emotional state for the climax to come.
- The Second Gjama: Takes place in the yard of the deceased's house. Here, emotions reach their peak. Participants no longer address each other but directly address personified death. The characteristic phrase of this phase is: *"Ti më more krahët!"* (You took my arms away!), accompanied by stretching the arms forward, as if to grasp something that is no longer there.

An essential element in this phase is mpleksja (the embrace/confrontation). According to custom, a representative of the deceased's family (usually the son or brother) sits on a stool in the yard, awaiting the lamenters. The confrontation with this grieving, seated, and silent figure triggers a second emotional explosion among the participants, elevating the Gjama to its highest dramatic point.

Lab mortuary dances – an alternative paradigm

To better understand the uniqueness of the Gjama, it is necessary to compare it with the southern form of funerary ritual: the Lab mortuary dances. This comparison highlights the duality of Albanian culture: the North developed a collective, structured, canonical rite; the South developed an individualistic, free, ecstatic rite.
Characteristics of the lab dances:

1. Absence of Music: They are "silent" dances, accompanied only by spontaneous cries and exclamations.
2. Individualism of Movement: Each participant (man or woman) performs freely, without the obligation to synchronize with others.
3. Typical Movements: Men walk with their hands behind their backs, suddenly drop to their knees, strike the ground with their palms and feet. Women hold a handkerchief or a garment of the deceased in their hand stretched out to the side, moving their body in a swaying motion.
4. The Special Case of Emigration: In coastal Labëria (Vuno, Dhërmi, Pilur), when a man died far from his homeland, his wife would dress in a fustanella (men's kilt) and lead a dance of men in his honor—a unique case in Albanian ethnography where a woman leads men in a dance.

This comparison demonstrates that while Labëria developed a free, unrepeatable physicality, the North, through the Gjama, succeeded in codifying grief into a reproducible, teachable language, transmitted from generation to generation.

The gjama and the communist state – from prohibition to transformation
Official position and ideological taboo

With the Communist Party's rise to power after 1944, Albania entered a violent process of modernization and secularization. The Gjama, as a rite with pagan and tribal roots, immediately clashed with the new norms of socialist realism.
For the regime, the Gjama represented:

- A remnant of tribal culture that needed to be eradicated.
- An expression of fatalism and despair, contradicting the historical optimism of Marxism.
- An irrational ritual, incompatible with the propaganda of the new socialist man.

As informants of Prof. Bogdani testify, speaking about the Gjama during communism was "forbidden" and "impossible." However, unlike many other religious rites that were forcibly banned, the Gjama was never officially prohibited by decree; it was systematically discouraged through social pressure and propaganda.

Semiotic transformation: From cry to cheer

Since the complete eradication of a centuries-old tradition was impossible, the regime undertook an effort for its semiotic transformation. This is perhaps the most interesting and contradictory aspect of the Gjama's history.
The death of a partisan or a soldier defending the borders became the ideal case for this transformation. Communist propaganda began promoting the idea that lamenting for these men was unnecessary, as their death was a "heroic act." The old phrases of despair were replaced with new sayings, such as the one from Shkodra: *"Kush bjen për atdhe nuk ka dek, por ka le"* (He who falls for the homeland has not died, but has been born).
In this way:

- The cry of pain was attempted to be transformed into a cheer of glory.
- Despair was attempted to be transformed into pride.
- Death was attempted to be transformed into birth (symbolic rebirth).

This transformation, however, was merely superficial. Deep within the popular consciousness, especially in the remote highlands, the Gjama continued to be practiced in its traditional form, albeit hidden from the eyes of the authorities. It survived not as an act of political rebellion, but as a quiet cultural resistance, a way to preserve identity in the face of an imposed modernity.
After the fall of communism, the Gjama re-emerged into the open (Stahl, 1980). However, it was no longer the same. Demographic changes (abandonment of the mountains, migration to cities), compulsory education, and military service meant that the younger generations no longer knew the canonical technique. Today, the authentic Gjama, with 40-50 men lined up in canon, has almost completely disappeared. What remains are reduced forms, often folklorized and staged for festivals.

Conclusions and recommendations

The study of the Albanian Gjama leads us to several essential conclusions that transcend mere ethnographic significance, touching upon issues of identity, memory, and modernity.

Firstly, the Gjama represents one of the highest forms of primitive European art (Uçi, 1986). Its plastic canon, empirically discovered and codified by Albanian highlanders centuries ago, is a choreographic solution of rare sophistication, standing shoulder to shoulder with any creation of Western cultured music. The fact that this art developed in isolation, without the influence of academic institutions, makes it even more valuable.

Secondly, the Gjama testifies to the extraordinary resilience of the Albanian pagan substrate. Despite centuries of pressure from monotheistic religions (Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Islam) and later from state atheism, the pagan worldview of death as a "change of life" and the need to communicate physically with the deceased survived into the 20th century. This demonstrates that Albanian cultural identity is much older and more resistant than is commonly believed.

Thirdly, the case of the Gjama during communism offers a unique case study for the anthropology of totalitarian regimes. It demonstrates that the direct suppression of tradition is not always the most effective way to eradicate it. More dangerous for tradition is appropriation and semantic transformation—the attempt to change its meaning, to turn the cry into a cheer. This transformation, although it failed to completely destroy the Gjama, managed to weaken it from within, creating an entire generation of people who no longer knew "how the Gjama is done."

Fourthly, faced with the irreversible disappearance of the Gjama as a living ritual, the responsibility of researchers and cultural institutions is twofold: on the one hand, the scientific, accurate, and complete documentation of what remains; on the other hand, artistic recontextualization—the creation of new forms of stage expression that, without pretending to replace the original ritual, keep its spirit and memory alive.

The Gjama is no more. What we hear today at weddings and festivals is an echo, an imitation, a memory. But precisely as a memory, it remains essential. Because in that collective cry, in that striking of fists upon chests, in that desperate dance of men, lies an inseparable part of what it means to be Albanian: the recognition of grief as an integral part of honor, and the confrontation with death not with fear, but with dignity.

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Albanian folk creativity in life rituals as a carrier of collective memory

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Albanian folk choreographic creativity as a complex phenomenon, treating it not merely as an aesthetic spectacle, but as an essential mechanism of collective memory and cultural identity. Drawing on an interdisciplinary approach that combines ethnological, anthropological, and ethnocoreographic perspectives, the article aims to argue that Albanian dance is an integral part of the rites of passage from birth to everyday life, serving as a medium for collective experience and the transmission of community values. Albanian folkloristic and ethnographic research has passed through various stages, from the romantic collection of material in the 19th century to its institutionalization and ideologization during the post-war period. However, despite political contexts, one thing has remained constant: the value of intangible heritage as a clear sign of identity. Choreographic folklore, in particular, constitutes one of the oldest and most resistant layers of this heritage. Unlike material objects that are consumed or destroyed, dances, games, and ceremonies are transmitted body to body, generation after generation, preserving ancient codes of human communication. This argument is illustrated through the analysis of concrete examples, such as the "Dance of Kabash" and the men's dances of Luma, where ritual transforms everyday movement into a symbolic act, strengthening social and identity cohesion. Finally, the paper emphasizes that Albanian folk choreography is a living and dynamic process, which preserves, reworks, and transmits historical memory and cultural identity from generation to generation, demonstrating that the body is a powerful instrument of memory.

Keywords

Folk creativity, life rituals, albanian dance, collective memory, symbolism

Introduction

Albanian folk creativity has never existed as an isolated artistic phenomenon, but has always been closely linked to the rhythms of life, to the practical and spiritual needs of the community. Various researchers of cultural heritage have emphasized that folk art is an "applied art," where aesthetic value serves social function and ritual. In the Albanian tradition, every important moment of life – birth, marriage, death – is accompanied by a totality of artistic creations: songs, dances, special garments, ritual objects, which are not merely "decoration," but integral parts of the ritual itself. These creations cannot be understood separately from their functional context, as they realize, reinforce, and sanctify the ritual action (Tirta, 2004).

The aim of this paper is to explore the organic relationships between Albanian folk creativity and life-cycle rituals, focusing particularly on dance as a carrier of collective memory. The main objectives of the study are: (a) analysis of the manifestations of folk creativity in the ritual of birth and childhood; (b) exploration of the relationship between dance, everyday life, and ritual; (c) interpretation of the symbolism of movements and choreographic formations; and (d) evaluation of the role of dance in preserving historical memory and cultural identity. The resilience of these forms of creativity constitutes powerful evidence of Albanian cultural continuity.

Literature review

The study of Albanian folk creativity has attracted the attention of a host of local and foreign scholars. Mark Tirta, in his study on Albanian ethnoculture, emphasizes that "the pantheon and symbolism of customs and codes in Albanian ethnoculture" testify to a close intertwining of ancient beliefs, rites, and artistic creativity (Tirta, 2007, p. 12). He argues that myths related to production, agriculture, and pastoralism, as well as the cult of the earth and celestial bodies, are densely present in folk creativity, where the sun often appears in songs and decorative motifs as a symbol of life and health.

Bukurije Mustafa, in her study "The Meaning and Symbolism of Hair Rituals in Folk Tradition," extensively discusses the importance of hair as a mystical part of the spiritual tradition of Albanians. She emphasizes that "hair is connected with beliefs, primarily pagan, but also with folk calendar rituals or various life cycles and, as such, it carries symbolic meanings, which are expressions of superstition and folk mentality" (Mustafa, 2026). This study is particularly important for understanding the symbolic dimension of birth rituals. Robert Elsie, in his "Dictionary of Albanian Folk Culture," provides an encyclopedic overview of ritual practices and the artistic creations that accompany them (Elsie, 2005). Ramazan Bogdani, in his analysis of the men's dances of Luma (Kukës), classifies them as dances with a "military and heroic spirit," where the internal dynamics symbolically reflect masculinity and Albanian strength (Bogdani, 2003). His study of dances such as "The Dance of the Caps" shows how these creations are condensed choreographic narratives of the battles fought in those lands.

The Albanian Encyclopedic Dictionary offers a rich overview of applied folk arts, including woodworking, embroidery, and textile weaving (Albanian Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1985). It highlights regional diversity and symbolic motifs such as 'the vine,' 'the branch,' as well as figures of the double-headed eagle. Drita Halimi Statovci, in her work "Albanian Costumes of Kosovo," has documented the richness of motifs and techniques, providing a basis for understanding the connection between clothing, regional identity, and ritual (Statovci, 2009). Atdhe Hykolli and Seniha Krasniqi, on the other hand, emphasize that life-cycle songs are "oral

creation, generation after generation" and that they "survived the tragic ruins of centuries, being continuously renewed and enriched" (Hykolli & Krasniqi, 2020, p. 45). This review shows that, despite numerous studies, an integrated approach linking applied and intangible creativity within the context of life rituals is lacking, a gap this paper aims to fill.

Methodology

This scientific paper is based on a qualitative research approach. Data sources include a broad corpus of written sources: ethnological and anthropological studies (Tirta, Mustafa, Elsie), ethnocoreographic studies (Bogdani), encyclopedic publications (Albanian Encyclopedic Dictionary), studies on ritual poetry (Hykolli, Krasniqi), as well as documentation of intangible cultural heritage. Analytical-synthetic methods were used for the deconstruction and synthesis of information; the comparative method to compare manifestations of creativity across different cycles and regions; the semiotic method to interpret symbols in choreography, clothing, and ritual objects; and the functionalist method to understand the social and ritual role of this creativity. The approach is qualitative and interpretive, aiming for a deep understanding of cultural phenomena.

Results and discussion

Folk Creativity in Birth and Childhood Rituals: Protective Symbolism and Transition

Birth rites in the Albanian tradition are filled with folk creativity expressed in various forms, all with protective and integrative functions. One of the most important practices is the preservation of the child's first hair, accompanied by numerous beliefs about protection from the evil eye. Bukurije Mustafa documents that hair was considered a carrier of vital force and its preservation was a way to ensure the child's longevity and health (Mustafa, 2026). This practice shows that folk creativity is not limited to artistic objects but also includes symbolic practices carrying deep cultural meanings. The child's hair was often embroidered onto a piece of red cloth (a protective color) and kept in the cradle or at home.

Another important manifestation is the artistic carving of the cradle. According to the Albanian Encyclopedic Dictionary, applied folk arts include "woodworking," and among the items artistically decorated, cradles are mentioned (Albanian Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1985, p. 74). These carvings are not merely decorative; they carry protective symbols (sun, moon, cross) and wishes for a long life. The sun motif, for example, in Albanian tradition symbolizes life, warmth, and the dispelling of darkness and evil (Tirta, 2004). Likewise, the child's first shirt (reinforcing images 1-3 in the original text) was embroidered with geometric and zoomorphic motifs, transforming everyday clothing into a textile amulet. This dual function, aesthetic and apotropaic (evil-averting), is characteristic of all folk creativity in rites of passage.

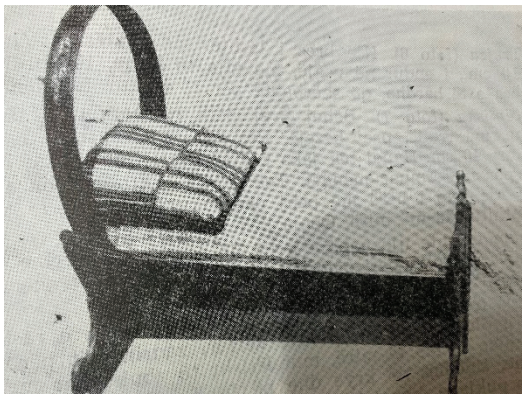

Figure 1: The cushion and pillow of the cradle. Source: Publication "Etnografia Shqiptare" (Albanian Ethnography), 1981

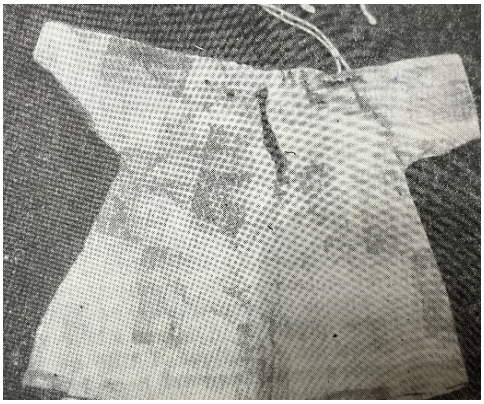

Figure 2 : Child's shirt. Source: "Etnografia Shqiptare" (Albanian Ethnography), 1981

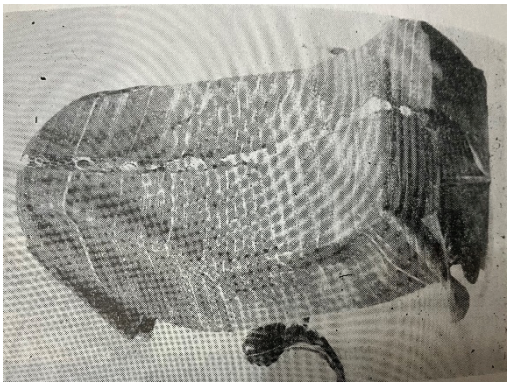

Photo 3: Cradle cover. Source: "Etnografia Shqiptare" (Albanian Ethnography), 1981

Folk Dance – The Living Archive of Collective Memory

Everyday life permeates choreography through the imitation of village work. Arm movements, characteristic of the beauty of Albanian dance, often derive from gestures of sowing, harvesting, or sheep shearing. This shows that dance is not detached from reality but has its origin in it, elevating everyday movement to the level of symbolic gesture. This close connection between work and dance testifies to a worldview where human activity in its entirety has a rhythmic and aesthetic dimension.

Different choreographic formations – the closed circle, the semicircle, the line – have different social meanings. The closed circle symbolizes unity, equality, and common protection; the line symbolizes movement, journey, or the wedding procession; the separation of men from women in dance reflects the gender division of social roles in traditional society (Bogdani, 2003). These formations are not random but spatially structured codes that communicate community values.

The men's dances of northern Albania, illustrated by the "Dance of Kabash" in Pukë and the dances of Luma, are not merely a display of strength. According to oral tradition, the four men dancing together in a closed circle represent the four brotherhoods of the Kabashi tribe. The dance thus becomes a rite reaffirming tribal unity, blood ties, and the land. The powerful stamping of the foot on the ground ("the accentuated step") is not just a choreographic figure but a symbolic act connecting man to the earth (the cult of the earth), giving him strength and courage (Tirta, 2007; Bogdani, 2003). In the dances of Luma, such as the "Dance of the Caps," the fast movements and high jumps imitate rifle fights and the throwing of comrades, becoming a condensed choreographic narrative of the region's martial history.

These dances have been recognized for their ability to reflect historical events, resistance to invaders, heroism, and the cult of the warrior. They constitute an alternative source, a kind of "body history" that speaks through movement, especially for periods with few written documents. The monodic music, played on the lahuta, çifteli, or kaval, reinforces this sense of antiquity and epic, creating a sound environment that transports the dancer and viewer to that mythologized time (Elsie, 2005). Dance thus becomes a living "text," read and re-read by each generation, preserving historical memory. Photos 4 and 5, showing schoolchildren and folk costumes from Kabash, testify to the continuity of this tradition and efforts for its preservation.

Evolution of Forms and Preservation of Tradition in Modernity

Like language, dance is not static. It changes, simplifies, or enriches depending on historical, social, and economic conditions. The "Dance of Kabash" offers an interesting example. Over time, the number of dancers in its pure male version (four) has decreased. However, this decline has not led to the disappearance of the dance but to the birth of new variants, such as the epic-lyric and lyric ones, with two dancers or mixed participation (men and women). This transformation shows how an ancient ritual form adapts to new social conditions, moving from a purely tribal ritual to a more artistic and social performance (Bogdani, 2003; personal observations). This process is not a "degradation" but a testament to the vitality and adaptive capacity of tradition.

National folklore festivals, such as the one in Gjirokastra, have played a dual role. On the one hand, they have helped preserve, document, and present this heritage, making it part of the national identity and giving a stage to folk masters. On the other hand, they have influenced the creation of a "cultivated folklore" for the stage, where dances taken from villages are artistically processed to fit the stage and the expectations of the urban audience (Institute of Folk Culture,

2008). This cultivated creativity, although removed from its original ritual and daily context, creates a new layer, demonstrating that tradition is not a museum but a living process that continues to communicate even in modern times.

Photo 4: School students. Source: Official website http://kabashipukës.wordpress.com

Photo 5: Folk costumes of Kabash. Source: Official website http://kabashipukës.wordpress.com

Conclusions and recommendations

From the above analysis, several important conclusions can be drawn:
First, Albanian folk creativity in life rituals is characterized by an organic intertwining of different genres and forms: song, dance, clothing, embroidery, carving interact to create a total aesthetic and spiritual experience. This shows that in the folk mentality there is no strict division between the different arts; they all unite in the service of ritual and community.
Second, Albanian dance is much more than art; it transmits ancient codes of belief, social organization (such as the tribe), and historical resistance. It constitutes a living archive of collective memory, where the body becomes the primary instrument for preserving and transmitting cultural values from generation to generation. The "Dance of Kabash" and the dances of Luma are powerful testimonies to this role.
Third, this heritage is living and dynamic, not static and museal. It continues to be renewed and adapted, as shown by the evolution of choreographic forms and their adaptation to festival stages. This vitality guarantees its continuity.

Recommendations:

For cultural heritage institutions: (a) Intensify the documentation of living creativity in rural areas; (b) create programs for transmitting traditional knowledge to younger generations (mentorship with folk masters); (c) promote an integrated approach to heritage, treating applied and intangible heritage as a whole.
For the education system: (a) Include elements of folk creativity in curricula not only theoretically but through living practice (dance workshops, embroidery, carving); (b) organize field trips and collaboration with folk masters.
For researchers: (a) Undertake new field studies; (b) develop interdisciplinary approaches (ethnology, choreography, anthropology); (c) study the transformation processes of folk creativity under the conditions of globalization and cultural tourism.

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The ethics of authorship in choreographic education in the age of artificial intelligence

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Abstract

The growing integration of artificial intelligence in artistic practices has raised intricate ethical and pedagogical questions regarding authorship, originality, and responsibility. In choreographic education, these questions are particularly pressing since the creation of dance is based on embodied exploration and intentional agency. This paper explores how AI-based generative tools affect the notion of authorship in higher education choreography programs. Contrary to the notion that artificial intelligence is a replacement for human creativity, this paper contends that AI instead redefines the notion of authorship by creating a mediated structure where human intentionality is still paramount but is instead enacted through technologically mediated processes. Based on interdisciplinary research in AI ethics, creativity studies, performance studies, and educational integrity, this paper proposes a normative evaluative framework that is organized around three interconnected principles: embodied transformation, proportional agency, and transparent disclosure. These principles are contextualized in contemporary European regulatory frameworks, such as the European Union AI Act, and are also briefly discussed in the context of Albanian law, where authorship is exclusively attributed to natural persons. The results of this research indicate that the ethical integration of AI in choreographic education is based on conceptual clarity rather than prohibition. In this way, choreographic education programs can utilize technological innovation while maintaining artistic integrity by redefining originality as transformative embodied engagement rather than origination.

Keywords

Authorship, academic ethics, generative systems

Introduction

"Artificial intelligence is increasingly entering creative fields at rapid speeds, and its sophistication is growing accordingly." The systems that are able to create text, images, music, and movement are no longer experimental tools locked away in research facilities, but are now readily available within the realm of everyday creative practice. With regard to systems of dance and choreography, for instance, "generative systems are now able to create movement sequences, spatial configurations, and compositional ideas based on algorithmic models." What does this mean for institutions of higher learning that are charged with teaching emerging choreographers? The real question is not the technical potential of artificial intelligence to produce movement material. This potential is evident, and it is growing. Rather, the real question is whether the use of artificial intelligence changes the epistemological and pedagogical premises of the education of the choreographer. Choreography is considered a practice that is rooted in the body. Movement is produced through improvisation, sensitivity, repetition, and the body's negotiation. The process of creative development is rooted in the experience of the body. If artificial intelligence is used to provide movement suggestions, the initial generation of the material is no longer rooted in the body but in the computer. This leads to a discussion of the role of the creator.

Choreographic authorship is not merely a matter of individual invention. It entails intentionality, structural integration, aesthetic value, and responsibility for expression. It entails human agency and accountability, even in collaborative practices. The incorporation of artificial intelligence does not negate these conditions; it rearranges the steps in which these conditions are realized. The conditions are prompting, selecting, transforming, contextualizing, and performing.

This paper contends that artificial intelligence does not supplant, but reconfigures, authorship in choreography. The role of intentionality in human beings is the ultimate source of meaning and value. Yet, because artificial intelligence reconfigures the structure of creative mediation, there is a need to define more precise criteria for evaluation. Otherwise, students and teachers are likely to equate technological innovation with artistic originality.

The research establishes a normative framework intended to inform the ethical integration of AI technology into choreography courses. Based on an interdisciplinary literature review, the research identifies three interconnected principles: embodied transformation, proportional agency, and transparent disclosure. These principles are intended to ensure the continued developmental objectives of arts education, despite technological shifts.

While the discussion is framed within international higher education settings, the research also locates the debate within European regulatory frameworks, specifically the European Union AI Act[1], and makes a brief mention of the Albanian copyright framework[2]. The aim is not to offer a legal commentary but to locate educational responsibility within wider governance frameworks. By reconceptualizing originality as embodied transformation instead of origination, the educational process of choreography can address the challenges of artificial intelligence constructively without compromising its anthropocentric foundation.

1 European Parliament, Regulation Laying Down Harmonised Rules on Artificial Intelligence (Artificial Intelligence Act) (2024).

2 Republic of Albania, Law No. 35/2016 on Copyright and Related Rights (2016).

Literature Review

Artificial Intelligence and the concept of creativity

Discussions around artificial intelligence and creativity often center around the difference between combinational novelty and intentional meaning-making. Margaret Boden[3] proposes that there are different kinds of creativity. She states that computational systems can create novel combinations of items within a set of rules. However, Boden states that computational systems do not have any form of subjective consciousness. Another writer, Marcus du Sautoy[4], states that artificial intelligence can mimic creative actions but does not have any aesthetic intention.

These differences can be applied to the process of creating choreography. It is evident that computational systems can create novel combinations of movement motifs, but it does not have the experience of the sensations that provide movement with depth. Algorithmic creativity is not experiential.

Recent studies focus on "co-creativity" or "distributed creativity"[5], which suggests that there can be a co-production between humans and machines that leads to creativity in art. This view contests the idea that there can be a binary opposition between human originality and mechanical reproduction.

In the context of choreographic education, mediation between humans and machines must be assessed. The role of AI in creative authorship contests traditional assumptions.

Authorship in performance and dance studies

The scholarship of dance has long recognized the collaborative aspects of authorship. Choreographic pieces may involve multiple dancers who contribute to improvisational sections, rehearsal processes that transform structure, and staging choices that develop over time. Susan Leigh Foster[6] points to the kinesthetic empathy by which viewers experience dance, suggesting the embodied nature of expressive meaning.

Even in collaborative frameworks, authorship is rooted in deliberate direction and agency. The choreographer, or student choreographer, brings meaningful aesthetic form to movement. The integration of AI throws this dynamic into relief by adding algorithmic mediation to the early stages of composition.

However, authorship in dance has never been solely the domain of initial creation. It encompasses curation, structuring, and realization. By recognizing this more expansive definition, institutions can begin to think of AI-assisted authorship in a way that avoids simplistic notions of authenticity.

Academic integrity and generative technologies

This is particularly true for debates on academic integrity, where the rise of AI-generated content is said to require a shift beyond prohibition to a more reflective approach to policy development[7]. For artistic fields, prohibition may limit scope for experimentation, but unregulated adoption

3 Margaret A. Boden, The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004).

4 Marcus du Sautoy, The Creativity Code: How AI Is Learning to Write, Paint and Think (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

5 Anna Kantosalo and Hannu Toivonen, "Modes for Creative Human–Computer Collaboration," in Proceedings of the International Conference on Computational Creativity (2016).

6 Susan Leigh Foster, Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance (London: Routledge, 2011).

7 Mark Bearman, Phillip Dawson, and J. Ajjawi, "Artificial Intelligence and Academic Integrity: Policy, Pedagogy, and Practice," Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 48, no. 7 (2023): 1123–1138.

may threaten educational standards. A nuanced approach is said to be necessary to distinguish between transformative and substitutive engagement.

Regulatory context and legal responsibility

European governance frameworks are starting to take steps in regulating artificial intelligence from a risk-based perspective. The European Union's "AI Act" outlines principles of transparency, accountability, and human oversight in regulating artificial intelligence[8]. Choreography programs in higher education are not considered to be "high-risk" domains in artificial intelligence.

In Albanian law, copyright and related rights are governed by Law No. 35/2016. The law grants authorship to natural persons[9]. The law does not directly refer to artificial intelligence. However, its anthropocentric perspective supports the view that authorship in creative output is attributed to humans. In educational settings, this would support the institution's ability to set standards in authorship.

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative normative methodology. It does not use empirical methods to gather evidence but develops a conceptual evaluative framework based on interdisciplinary scholarly resources.

The methodology is presented in four stages.

In the first stage, literature on AI and creativity was reviewed to determine major conceptual differences between computational generation and human intentionality.

In particular, literature on distributed creativity and algorithmic mediation was considered.

In the second stage, literature on performance and dance was reviewed to determine major concepts on embodied creativity.

In particular, literature on choreographic creation was considered to determine major concepts on embodied transformation.

In the third stage, literature on academic integrity was reviewed to determine major concepts on how to deal with generative technology.

In particular, literature on emerging consensus on dealing with generative technology was considered.

In the fourth stage, these major concepts on dealing with generative technology were integrated to develop a framework on embodied transformation, proportional agency, and transparent disclosure.

There is no empirical evidence presented to support the study because it aims to provide a framework for various educational contexts to use for their purposes.

Results and Discussion

Reconfiguring choreographic authorship

Artificial intelligence redefines the distribution of creative work in the education process for choreography. While traditional methods focus on movement generated through direct improvisation from the body, AI-based processes may involve suggestions at the outset through algorithms. This redefines authorship from creation to orchestration and transformation.

8 European Parliament, Artificial Intelligence Act.

9 Republic of Albania, Law No. 35/2016.

Human agency remains the determining factor. The student who develops the prompts, rearranges the outputs, restructures the composition, and performs the movement remains the author. The contextual integration and embodiment of AI-based materials remain meaningful only through their enactment.

Embodied transformation

Embodied transformation is the threshold criterion that separates mediated authorship from delegated production. Algorithmic sequences will be external artifacts until transformed through the body. Transforming the timing, dynamic intensity, spatial orientation, and qualitative nuances of the algorithmic sequence is the sign of engagement with the algorithm.
Without embodied transformation, the use of AI will be a substitute for developmental learning. Choreographic education is supposed to provide students with somatic intelligence.

Proportional agency

The use of AI is on a continuum, and when AI is a catalyst for improvisation, human agency is more prominent, whereas when AI's output is more prominent than compositional structure, even when slightly modified, student contribution is less apparent.
Quantitative proportional agency requires a qualitative evaluation of intentional involvement, and institutions are not obligated to impose a specific percentage but to consider whether human decision-making is clearly evident in the end product.

Transparent disclosure

Transparency helps ensure that there is no breach of academic integrity. Documentation of the use of AI will help teachers gauge creative processes more precisely. This follows the general European standards for accountability[10]. It will help in clarifying responsibility as per Albanian laws[11].

Cultural and aesthetic considerations

Generative systems are developed using the most statistically represented data sets. Therefore, they may represent the most represented aesthetic styles while ignoring the representation of less-documented styles of movement. In choreography programs focused on the preservation of regional styles, such an approach may result in the homogenization of styles.
Understanding the role of AI in art is essential, particularly in terms of the bias in the data sets used in the creation of the technology, as well as its role in the expansion of aesthetic styles rather than the standardization of the same.

Psychological and identity dimensions

Choreographic authorship is an important element in the formation of the artist's identity. Students may lose confidence in their individual creativity if they consider AI as the choreographic author.

10 European Parliament, Artificial Intelligence Act.
11 Republic of Albania, Law No. 35/2016.

Educators should make students understand AI as an exploratory instrument, not an authoritative source.New models of evaluation should emphasize the depth of interpretation, the coherence of the concept, and the integration of the body, rather than the novelty of the work.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Artificial intelligence does not portend the end of authorship in choreographic creation, but it does require a conceptual redefinition. Authorship is grounded in intentional agency, transformation, and ethical responsibility. Artificial intelligence reconfigures creative mediation without inhabiting bodily experience.

This research articulates three interrelated principles: embodied transformation, proportional agency, and transparent disclosure. These principles sustain pedagogical goals while incorporating technological innovation.

Educational institutions must incorporate AI literacy education, develop guidelines for disclosure, and develop assessment rubrics that incorporate mediated creativity. Faculty discussion is necessary for consistent assessment.

European governance structures prioritize transparency and human oversight[12]. In Albania, for example, where copyright law grants authorship solely to natural persons[13], authorship of AI-assisted choreography is unequivocally human.

Choreography, as a field of study grounded in bodily realization and affective transfer, demonstrates the ontological finitude of computational production. Artificial intelligence can reconfigure formal organization, but it does not inhabit bodily experience. The future of authorship in choreographic education will depend not on opposing technology but on maintaining the primacy of embodied intentionality in its use.

12 European Parliament, Artificial Intelligence Act.

13 Republic of Albania, Law No. 35/2016.

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Contemporary dance inspired by Albanian folklore

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Abstract

This paper examines the aesthetic and structural relationship between contemporary dance and Albanian folklore, analyzing the way in which symbolic, ritualistic, and rhythmic elements of folkloric dance can serve as a source of inspiration for contemporary creation. The study is based on a theoretical and comparative approach, referring to philosophers of aesthetics such as Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Nietzsche, and Croce, as well as to the historical developments of modern and contemporary dance. Through the analysis of movement language, asymmetric rhythms, and the regional character of Albanian dances, it is argued that folklore constitutes a strong foundation for the construction of a contemporary aesthetic with national identity. The results of the analysis show that the combination of intuitive folkloric impulse with rational stage structuring can produce authentic works, as long as the character and symbolism of the original movement are preserved. In conclusion, the paper recommends a research-based and academic approach to folklore, considering it not as material for direct modernization, but as a foundation for the development of an indigenous contemporary movement language.

Keywords

Process, creativity, aesthetics, identity, asymmetric rhythms

Introduction

Contemporary dance emerged as an evolution of earlier movements such as free dance, modern dance, modernism, postmodernism, dance theatre, and others, movements that trace their origins back to the late nineteenth century. This development came as a revolution against classical dance, its schemes, and its codification. Modern dance sought to provide freedom to movement language and creativity, and to avoid confinement within academic technique, which had deprived many individuals of the possibility to pursue their desire to experiment through the language of the body.

The aim of this movement was to move away from the technical and aesthetic limitations of classical ballet, to abandon heavy costumes and rigid structures, and to return to content. This implied the discovery of movement expression within oneself, personal energy, the "birth" of movement from internal impulse, improvisation, as well as the exploration of themes different from those of classical ballet.

Thus, this movement required a new philosophy and a new aesthetic, one that focused on the creation of a body that speaks, feels, and thinks, moving away from earlier forms that were based on the body as decoration, on schematic classical figures, and on repetition. Modern dance aimed to move away from classical "beauty" toward personal sensation and emotional expression.

This movement developed in the United States and Europe and was represented by numerous figures and personalities. Performances, companies, and schools were established that followed this approach to dance. It should be noted that this movement was not uniform and did not follow a single approach among its representatives. The developments of this period are described as individual experiments by different choreographers.

Notable names of this movement include Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, Sergei Diaghilev, Michel Fokine, and Vaslav Nijinsky, followed by Mary Wigman, Rudolf von Laban, Leonid Massine, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, José Limón, Charles Weidman, George Balanchine, Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, Alvin Ailey, Pina Bausch, Trisha Brown, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Ohad Naharin, Akram Khan, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, and others.

Some of them were inspired by antiquity, mythology, rituals, and folklore; others combined classical ballet with expressivity, while some experimented with musical form and costume design. In seeking new forms and returning to experience and emotion, early thematic explorations were inspired by mythology, ritual, and folklore.

Isadora Duncan, considered a pioneer of modern dance, drew inspiration from Greek mythology. She used rituals and symbols of ancient muses, seeking to revive the "free dance" of antiquity. *Le Sacre du Printemps* ("The Rite of Spring"), choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky, is considered a precursor of modern dance, and its subject is inspired by pagan rituals and rites of spring.

Similarly, Martha Graham's work was influenced by Greek mythology, drawing from myths such as Medea and Electra, using ritual as an internal dramatic and symbolic structure. Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui was inspired by Sufi mysticism, Asian rituals, and Eastern philosophy, blending folklore with contemporary dance. Zora Neale Hurston and Katherine Dunham, through the Dunham Technique, as well as Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno through Butoh, created ritual-based movement forms. Ohad Naharin developed the Gaga system inspired by Hebrew traditions, while Akram Khan drew from Hindu mythology, Bangladeshi folklore, and South Asian ritual practices, integrating them with Kathak.

The approach of modern dance toward rituals, folklore, myths, and forgotten cultural elements was not a regression, but rather a strong inspirational connection with origins, with the archaic and the spiritual[1].

Folklore as a Source of a New Aesthetic?

In many cases, we encounter phenomena or ideologies that aim to modernize folkloric dance, attempting to introduce innovations in choreographic creation. Although such ideas may serve to open new paths, they can directly affect what folklore itself represents. This occurs particularly when such approaches are proposed by individuals who lack a professional background in folklore, who do not possess educational and research-based knowledge of it, and who do not fully understand what is meant by the modernization of folklore.

Firstly, from a linguistic perspective, the terms folklore and modern represent different temporal, cultural, and functional concepts. This does not deny the fact that in art they have continuously coexisted through the interaction and combination of their representative elements. However, this interaction has not primarily occurred as a modernization of folklore, but rather through the continuous reference that contemporary dance has made to folklore.

In fact, many concepts of contemporary dance have their origins in folklore and can be observed in many of the dances of our country, in rituals, and in national mythology. For this reason, modern dance returned to the archaic, drawing inspiration from the way in which folklore itself was formed.

This conceptual approach does not limit experimentation or individual creative imagination; rather, it argues for and analyzes the aesthetic forms that must be respected in order to cultivate the audience's perception of beauty. Creative freedom is controlled by the choreographer, and there are cases where it does not conform to the academic and educational rules established in relevant institutions, thereby creating new artistic trends but also, at times, distorting originality—especially when referring to folklore.

For example, in folkloric dance in Albania and Kosovo, the technique known as Floor Work is not commonly found. In some regions, one may observe the presence of movements performed on the ground, but not within the conceptual framework of what Floor Work represents. Similarly, Contact Improvisation is a technique widely applied in contemporary dance today. In folklore, however, partnering is more limited, focusing primarily on support, hand-holding, and visual dialogue. This form has been preserved in accordance with tradition and the way of life within which this folklore was created.

It cannot be said that such techniques—or others—are prohibited from being applied in new creations based on folklore. What must be taken into consideration is the presentation of such works, not as folkloric works, but as processed or adapted ones.

A similar approach can be observed in the repertoire of the National Ensemble of Songs and Dances in Albania. In many dances considered masterpieces of Albanian folk dance, there is a combination of folkloric and original movements with classical technique, primarily influenced by the Russian school. This interaction of different styles has been carefully filtered to preserve the character of each dance and to avoid deformation of its essence.

Although these dances have retained their defining characteristics, they are classified as processed dances, acknowledging the intervention in the original material—the creative expression of the people.

1 Giambattista Vico, The New Science (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

As mentioned above, experimentation and the blending of different artistic currents with folklore require careful presentation. Such works should not be presented as pure folklore, but rather as hybrid creations, combining authentic folkloric elements with techniques borrowed from other traditions. Otherwise, their presentation risks directly affecting the structural integrity of folklore, leading to the loss of originality, codes, and symbols upon which it was built, and ultimately cultivating incorrect aesthetic perceptions among audiences.

The necessity of this distinction is directly related to the aesthetic dimensions of art—to what is considered innate, spiritual, and intuitive, as opposed to what is rational, "artificial," and easily readable. For this reason, modern artistic movements often returned to such forms—not only in dance, but also in other arts such as sculpture and painting.

How Can We Understand the Aesthetic Difference and Relationship Between Folklore and Contemporary Dance?

In order to understand what folklore represents aesthetically and what contemporaneity represents, it is necessary to reflect upon philosophical approaches to art and beauty. Philosophical ideas concerning beauty and art appear as early as antiquity, particularly in the work of Plato, who considered art as an imitation of reality (*mimesis*) and maintained a critical stance toward it, regarding it as a potential threat to morality.

This thesis was not supported by Aristotle, who did not view art in the same way as Plato. Instead, he considered art as a form of spiritual purification (*catharsis*)[2]. During the Middle Ages, philosophical thought focused primarily on the relationship between art and the divine, as reflected in the works of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas.

In contrast, Benedetto Croce regarded art as intuition and expression, rather than imitation or purely biological sensation. For him, every artistic creation is an individual and spiritual act[3]. These philosophical perspectives, along with many others, are present and observable in both major streams of choreographic art—folklore and contemporary dance.

Starting from folklore, the movement vocabulary of folkloric dance can be situated within all these philosophical frameworks. Folklore, being the oldest form of artistic expression, can be related to Plato's concept of *mimesis*. Imitative dance may be considered one of the earliest and most widespread forms in folkloric dance. At the same time, it aligns with Aristotle's ideas: when viewed through the concept of *catharsis*, folkloric dance can be understood as a form of "spiritual purification," present in many cultures through mystical, pagan, and ritual dances.

Similarly, during the Middle Ages, as with other art forms, dance was influenced by religion, often becoming a form of prayer, an expression of devotion, or other spiritual practices. Croce's perspective is directly connected to a significant portion of folkloric dance, particularly those dances created spontaneously, as intuitive and spiritual expressions manifested through movement.

The aesthetic of folkloric dance does not value form alone but also meaning. It is not merely visual but also emotional, ritualistic, and communal. It represents a form of beauty rooted in memory and identity, which survives through the body and rhythm.

Many of these parallels can also be observed in contemporary dance. Numerous works and choreographers have drawn inspiration from these philosophical principles, and many have

2 Aristotle, Poetics (London: Penguin Classics, 1996).

3 Benedetto Croce, Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic (London: Macmillan, 1909).

directly engaged with specific philosophical frameworks, shaping their artistic practice according to these ideas.

From this perspective, contemporary dance maintains a close relationship with folkloric dance, often originating from it. However, contemporary dance tends to be closer to rationality and conceptual clarity than folklore. This distinction arises from the very nature of folklore's origin—its mystery and the enigma surrounding its creation.

In contemporary dance, elements such as reference, rationalization, codification, and interpretability are unavoidable. This phenomenon is also connected to historical context, the period in which the work is created, and the cultural identity of the creator.

Folklore initially emerged as a necessity for communication, without references, rationalization, or cultivated aesthetic preferences. In contrast, contemporary dance, while still rooted in necessity, intuition, and spirituality, is also subject to rationalization and stage codification[4].

Folk or popular creativity represents a distinct aesthetic closely tied to the concept of beauty and served as the starting point for the ideas of the aforementioned philosophers. The expression of the body was instinctive, inspired, or momentary, connecting the individual to the inner and the invisible. In this way, creation occurred unconsciously, without awareness of its external image or interpretation by others.

Contemporary dance seeks a similar path; therefore, it often refers to folklore, ritual, and mythology. However, the integration of the original impulse with a cultivated or pre-learned movement language creates a distinction between what might be considered "pure" art and what may be seen as aesthetically "corrupted."

The only case in which aesthetic "purity" can be preserved is through careful processing, where the original aesthetic intention and integrity remain intact.

Movements in Folkloric Dance: A Rich Movement Language with Symbolism and Inspirational Value for Contemporary Creation

The movement language of folkloric dance is highly rich, not only within Albanian culture but also in other parts of the world where traditional dances are still preserved. It is constructed upon symbolism and regional "dialects," narrating elements of identity, history, social formation, and the culture of a nation.

In fact, communication through the body and the earliest forms of dance existed before the conceptualization of art itself; they were part of life and a mode of living. In this way, gestures or movements that may appear simple at first glance represent a vast symbolic wealth, originating as a necessity for communication. These movements conveyed fertility, birth, pain, mourning, productivity, prayer, magic, epic narratives, heroism, eros, and love; they also imitated and created elements of the comic, thus forming a complete and unique artistic expression.

This richness of expressive language in our folkloric dance has been preserved up to the present day, despite the undeniable processes of deformation and the loss of certain values, vocabulary, and symbolic elements previously mentioned.

Such a diverse movement language, characterized by numerous "dialects" and a highly natural expressivity, requires thorough study in order to transcribe the meaning of each movement, facial expression, physical plasticity, and the dances as a whole. Rather than remaining at a superficial level of interpretation—such as defining "dance" merely as the imitation of sea waves or as a continuous chain-like movement, or understanding "jumping" simply as free or solo

4 Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

jumping—it is essential to deepen our understanding of the movement itself, its origin, and the meanings it conveys.

Focusing on solo dancing, and particularly on the heavy women's dances of northern regions, one can observe a rich and varied movement vocabulary. These dances express complete meanings even through very simple gestures. For example: the circular movement of the hands around the abdomen symbolizes fertility; emphatic hand movements often signify flight and freedom; placing the hand over the forehead while limiting vision symbolizes loyalty and honor; touching the ground with the finger represents sowing; placing the hand on the forehead can signify labor and physical effort.

Similarly, the meaning of masculine movements in northern dances can be observed. Their dynamics and movement accents are directly connected to psychosocial aspects and historical-geographical conditions. These movements are sharp and dynamic, with emotional outbursts that express pride, determination, and dignity. They reveal resistance, strength, and an epic character. Alongside this epic dimension, the movement language of this group is also rich in gestures that symbolize eros. These are particularly visible in dialogue, in the extension of the arms and their placement near the heart, and in poetic comparisons of women with elements of nature, such as the snow of the mountains.

A similar phenomenon is observed in other regions, such as central and southern Albania. For example, in the Lab dances of men, where the feet strike the ground, one observes not only strength, endurance, and epic qualities, but also a symbolic meaning that can be described by the expression "A heavy stone remains in its place."

Likewise, in the dances of Cham women, the calmness of movement, delicacy, and dignity reflect the social position of women, their hospitality, and their sincerity.

Such interpretations can be extended to nearly all movements within folkloric dance. Their combination forms "words," "sentences," "phrases," and ultimately a choreographic "text," in which each movement plays a role within a specific passage. These elements are particularly evident in ritualistic and pantomimic dances, which contain a rich movement vocabulary that deserves to be studied, analyzed, and preserved as a unique and valuable language.

Understanding the meaning of movements in folkloric dance allows for a deeper perception of the origin of this language, which emerged as a necessity for communication, belief, entertainment, and emotional expression.

In this way, contemporary dance maintains a direct relationship with folklore, as it also generates movement from psychophysical necessity rather than purely formal beauty. Both forms, by approaching inner beauty and aesthetic perception, establish a direct and spiritual connection between the artist and the spectator.

Their presentation engages the audience by provoking reflection, experience, and emotions that are often difficult to articulate, moving away from mere entertainment or the passive observation of forms and figures.

In this manner, contemporary dance in many contexts has referred to folklore and has often experimented with its movements and meanings. Although this approach introduces innovation, it also presents challenges. Modernization and intervention without sufficient knowledge can lead to ambiguity regarding the content and subject represented by a particular dance.

At the same time, when approached rationally and with awareness in choreographic composition, such interventions can contribute to progress—both in the development of folklore, through renewal and reinterpretation, and in the preservation of its archaic qualities and national identity.

Why Is It Important to Refer to Folklore in Contemporary Creative Practice?

Based on the reasoning and analysis presented above, it can be concluded that both streams of dance—folkloric and contemporary—share significant similarities in the way they originate. Although they differ in form and artistic presentation, these forms are closely connected in their genesis. This approach is not new on a global scale; it can also be observed in other artistic movements that originate from folklore.

The reason why this genre remains consistently present in contemporary creation is related to personal sensitivity and the reactivation of embodied memory within each individual. Folklore represents a form of cultural heritage that accompanies the individual throughout different stages of development, leaving traces that are often visible and deeply embedded.

This can be observed in language and dialect, in the stories one tells, in childhood tales and songs, as well as in traditional games and dances inherited from one's place of origin and cultural background. In this way, the creative process unconsciously recalls the past, incorporating elements that have left an imprint on the creator's memory.

This phenomenon is closely related to the unconscious and the emotional—psychological concepts that are inseparable from art, the creative process, and the artist—demonstrating once again that folklore, beyond its cultural value, reflects the psychosocial conditions of the region it represents.

Thus, referencing folklore would function as a form of reform, directly contributing to the preservation, cultivation, and transmission of this significant cultural wealth. Considering the diversity and richness of our folklore, contemporary creations would not only achieve originality without borrowing external movement "languages," but would also represent new art grounded in national identity.

In this way, the foundations for a national contemporary movement could be established, similar to what occurred with the development of national ballet. Furthermore, unlike many other countries, Albanian folklore contains a rich diversity of musical rhythms.

In contrast to more common Western rhythms such as 4/4 or 3/4, Albanian rhythms (5/8, 7/8, 9/8) are asymmetric. This asymmetry creates dynamic tension and an unpredictable sense of movement, which serves as a rich source of inspiration for contemporary choreographers. Movement can become more irregular, more organic, and more closely connected to the internal perception of rhythm rather than symmetrical structure.

The use of traditional Albanian rhythms within a modern context creates a cultural dialogue, combining folkloric roots with contemporary bodily expression. This gives the artistic work both an authentic national identity and a universal emotional resonance.

Many Albanian dances contain strong rhythmic impulses, sudden changes, and characteristic pauses that inspire expressive movement. This alternation of energy is particularly suitable for contemporary dance structures, which often seek internal sensations, tension, and release[5].

From an artistic perspective, this approach would directly contribute to enriching the repertoire with original and autochthonous works. Such works require research and systematic exploration in order to develop a movement language that belongs to us[6], without reliance on borrowed forms and without creating hybrid distortions.

The establishment of a solid foundation in this direction would also influence audience perception, bringing the spectator closer to what is presented. Instead of confronting an entirely

5 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

6 Sadik Batku, Karakteri i Vallëzimit Shqiptar (Tiranë: Botime Akademike)

unfamiliar stylistic language, the audience would experience a movement language that resonates emotionally as part of their cultural "DNA."

From a scientific perspective, the benefits of this approach are also numerous. It is directly connected to research expeditions focused on the discovery, documentation, and analysis of dance, rhythms, and folkloric subjects. In this way, a functional "chain" of processes could be reactivated, many of which are currently inactive.

Interest in folklore would not only serve as inspiration for new creations but would also represent the only way to document and preserve it—not as something outdated, but as a fundamental value of national identity.

Beginning with research, multiple working groups could be activated in the field, establishing a process of gathering "raw material" and continuing through analysis and further development. With a rich body of material, specialists would be able to identify regional characteristics of folklore.

Subsequently, it would become possible to reestablish and revitalize the standards set by Sadik Batku through the development of the subject *Karakteri i Vallëzimit Shqiptar*, where folkloric dance was elevated to academic standards by being adapted to [7]classical methodology.

In the same way, reforms could be developed to modernize this method or to create a parallel relationship between classical and contemporary approaches. Such reforms would require a significant number of specialists and would generate new demands within the field, making it possible to integrate dance into the National Curriculum and increase participation and contribution in this domain.

State and private artistic associations would assume greater responsibility and operate under a system of supervision that prevents the misuse and deformation of authentic art. A healthy culture of critique would emerge, and the attention of aesthetic scholars would be restored, alongside the presence of this art form in media platforms and academic discussions.

By connecting these elements, it would become possible to represent a rich and highly developed form of dance, capable of competing in the global artistic market with contemporary works that maintain a strong national identity.

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Constructing national identity through music education: A comparative analysis of school curricula in Kosovo and Albania

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Abstract

Music education plays an important role in shaping cultural awareness and transmitting collective values within national education systems. Beyond its artistic and pedagogical functions, school music curricula often contribute to the construction and reinforcement of national identity through the selection of repertoire, historical narratives, and representations of cultural heritage. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from nationalism studies and critical curriculum theory—particularly Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" and Michael Apple's understanding of curriculum as a process of cultural and ideological selection—this study examines how music education participates in the construction of national cultural narratives in Kosovo and Albania. In addition, perspectives from music education scholarship, particularly Lucy Green's work on the social and cultural contexts of music learning, provide a framework for understanding how musical content and pedagogical practices influence students' cultural perceptions and identities. The research adopts a qualitative comparative methodology based on the analysis of official curriculum documents, music textbooks, and selected teaching materials used in primary and lower secondary education in both countries. The analysis focuses on the representation of folk traditions, the inclusion of national composers, the presence of patriotic repertoire, and the ways musical heritage is framed within educational discourse. The strong emphasis on national musical heritage in both contexts reflects the historical importance of cultural preservation and identity formation, particularly in societies shaped by political transition and nation-building processes. However, in an era characterized by globalization and increasing cultural interconnectedness, this study also considers whether such nationally oriented curricula sufficiently engage with broader intercultural perspectives in music education. The paper therefore contributes to ongoing discussions about how music education can balance the transmission of national cultural heritage with the development of intercultural understanding in contemporary educational contexts.

Keywords

Music education, national identity, curriculum studies, cultural heritage, Kosovo, Albania

Introduction

Music education occupies an important place within general education systems, widely recognized as an important component of holistic education. While it specifically focuses on artistic development, it also contributes to the overall students' cultural understanding, creativity, and social engagement (Elliott, 1995; Reimer, 2003; Swanwick, 1999). Through engagement with musical practices and traditions, students develop aesthetic awareness and gain insight into the cultural contexts in which music is created and performed (Green, 2002; Campbell, 2004). Music education research demonstrates that engagement with music supports emotional development, social interaction and academic achievement among children and adolescents (Blasco-Magraner et al., 2021). Music learning also enhances students' motivation, confidence and opportunities for self-expression within the classroom (Kiss et al., 2025). In addition, musical practice has been associated with improvements in cognitive skills and overall school performance (Knaus, 2018). Studies on music-based educational programs further suggest that music education can contribute to broader social development and community engagement (Rodriguez et al., 2024; El Sistema research).

Music itself serves as a medium through which cultural values, traditions, and collective identities are transmitted. Through the selection of music repertoire, the presentation of musical heritage, and the narratives embedded in teaching materials, music curricula often reflect broader cultural and social priorities. In many educational contexts, the inclusion of folk traditions, national composers, and historically significant musical works serves to strengthen students' awareness of cultural heritage and national belonging, reflecting the broader role of music in the construction and transmission of national identity (Benedict Anderson, 1983; Philip V. Bohlman, 2004; John Blacking, 1973).

In societies where national identity has been shaped by complex historical and political processes, the role of music education in preserving cultural heritage becomes particularly significant. In Kosovo and Albania, music education has historically been closely connected with broader efforts to maintain and promote national cultural identity. Previous research has shown that musical practices and educational initiatives in Kosovo often functioned as important cultural resources during periods of political constraint and social transformation (Luzha, 2016). Similarly, in Albania, educational and cultural policies have long emphasized the importance of national musical traditions as part of broader nation-building processes (Lici, 2023; Mehmeti & Dhoska, 2024).

At the same time, contemporary educational discourse increasingly highlights the importance of intercultural competence and global cultural awareness. In an era characterized by globalization, mobility, and cultural exchange, music education is increasingly expected to expose students to diverse musical traditions and perspectives. Within this context, an important question emerges regarding the balance between the transmission of national musical heritage and the development of broader intercultural musical understanding.

This paper examines how music curricula in Kosovo and Albania represent national musical heritage and considers the extent to which these curricula also engage with intercultural perspectives in contemporary music education.

Literature review

Theoretical perspectives on music and national identity

A number of scholars have explored the role of music in the formation and expression of national identity. According to Benedict Anderson (1983), national identity is constructed through shared cultural narratives and symbols that allow members of a community to imagine themselves as part of a collective entity. Music often functions as one of these symbolic cultural forms. Similarly, Philip V. Bohlman (2004) emphasizes that musical traditions—particularly folk music—have historically played a crucial role in the development of European national movements. Earlier ethnomusicological perspectives, such as those proposed by John Blacking (1973), highlight the broader relationship between music and social structures, arguing that musical practices reflect and reinforce cultural identities.

From a curriculum perspective, Michael W. Apple argues that school curricula represent a process of cultural and ideological selection, reflecting broader social and political priorities rather than neutral bodies of knowledge. Within music education research, Lucy Green has shown how musical learning is embedded within social and cultural contexts that shape students' musical experiences and identities. The ways in which music education (deliberately) preserves existing social differences by reproducing old patterns of evaluation, has been explained i.e. in Lucy's Green recognized investigation on ideology in music education (1990, 2003).

Music education and the construction of national identity

Within the field of music education, several scholars have examined how educational systems contribute to the transmission of national identity. Research suggests that school curricula frequently include national repertoire, patriotic songs, and culturally significant musical works as a means of reinforcing collective cultural values (Davis, 2005; Folkestad, 2002). Studies in different national contexts demonstrate how music education can function as a tool for promoting patriotic ideals and national belonging (Kallio & Partti, 2013; Kennedy & Guerrini, 2013). Similarly, research by David G. Hebert and Heimonen (2016) highlights the role of music education in shaping national identity narratives within educational policy and curricular practices

Empirical studies from different educational contexts

A growing body of empirical research has examined the relationship between music education and national identity in various cultural contexts. For example, Kiilu (2013) demonstrates how music education contributes to the development of collective identity among students in Estonia. Similarly, Fu and Tu (2023) explore the influence of national music education on students' sense of national identity in China, while Koval et al. (2025) discuss the role of music education in shaping cultural identity in contemporary societies. Other studies have also examined the relationship between music education, nationalism, and globalization in diverse educational systems (Ho, 2016; Lum, 2017). In certain countries and regions, music education is actively contributing to the promotion of national identity and cultural development through national musical art (Ho and Law, 2020). National music is considered as a source of national identity construction (Boer et al, 2013). This study provided empirical evidence based on six cultures

that national music preference is linked with one's national identity. National music lessons offer students the chance to gain knowledge of national cultures, aiding them in developing a stronger sense of national identity. Thus, national music lessons may contribute to the national identity of university students in a positive manner.

Historical context of music education in Kosovo and Albania

The development of music education in Kosovo and Albania has been closely intertwined with broader historical, political, and cultural processes. In both contexts, music education has served not only artistic and pedagogical purposes but also broader cultural and social functions, particularly in relation to the preservation and articulation of national identity. During the twentieth century, educational systems in the region were shaped by different political regimes, which influenced both the institutional development of music education and the cultural narratives transmitted through school curricula (Breznica, 2018, 2023; Luzha & Breznica, 2024; Lici, 2023; 2024; Luzha, 2015; 2016; Perkola, 2023; Mehmeti & Dhoska, 2024).

Following the political transformations of the 1990s, both Kosovo and Albania underwent significant educational reforms aimed at modernizing curricula and aligning them with broader European educational frameworks. Nevertheless, the historical importance of music education in preserving and promoting national cultural heritage continues to influence the structure and content of contemporary music curricula in both countries.

While this type of influence in contemporary educational discourse and curricular design has been researched, discussed and well documented, less attention has been given to how current music curricula balance the transmission of national heritage with the development of intercultural perspectives in increasingly globalized educational contexts.

Research questions and methodology

This study examines how contemporary music education contributes to the construction and transmission of cultural identity through school curricula in Kosovo and Albania. Building on previous research that has highlighted the historical role of music education in preserving and articulating national identity in Kosovo and Albania the paper analyzes how these historical dynamics are reflected in current curricular frameworks. In this context, the study also draws on theoretical perspectives from nationalism studies and critical curriculum theory, which emphasize that curriculum content represents a process of cultural and ideological selection (Apple, 2004; Anderson, 1983). Furthermore, research in music education has demonstrated that music learning is closely connected to the social and cultural contexts that shape students' musical experiences and identities (Green, 2002).

Within this framework, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How is national musical heritage represented in the music curricula of Kosovo and Albania?
2. What types of repertoire, composers, and musical traditions are emphasized within curriculum content and teaching materials?
3. To what extent do these curricula balance the transmission of national musical heritage with the promotion of intercultural or global musical perspectives in music education?

The research adopts a qualitative comparative approach based on document analysis (Bowen,

2009). The primary sources include official curriculum frameworks, music textbooks, and selected teaching materials used in primary and lower secondary education in Kosovo and Albania. Through thematic analysis, the study identifies patterns in the representation of national musical heritage, including references to folk traditions, national composers, and patriotic repertoire, as well as the presence of musical content from other cultural contexts**.**

Results and discussion

To understand how music education contributes to the construction of cultural and national identity, this study analyzes and compares the main curriculum framework documents guiding pre-university education in Kosovo and Albania: the Kosovo Curriculum Framework (KCF) and the Albanian Pre-University Education Curriculum Framework. The comparison focuses on three key dimensions: the general aims of education, the competency frameworks, and the pedagogical principles underlying curriculum design. These documents provide insight into how national education systems conceptualize the role of education in shaping cultural awareness, identity formation, and intercultural understanding.

Recent curriculum reforms in both Kosovo (2011) and Albania (2024) aim to balance the cultivation of national identity with openness to broader intercultural perspectives. Both frameworks emphasize that education should foster students' awareness of local and national cultural identity while preparing them to participate in an increasingly interconnected global society. Reflecting contemporary educational trends, both countries have adopted a competency-based approach aligned with the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning promoted by the European Parliament and Council of the European Union (2006).

The Kosovo Curriculum Framework defines six general aims of education, five guiding principles, and six key competencies, whereas the Albanian curriculum maintains the original eight competencies. In Kosovo, the first curriculum aim highlights the development of multiple identities—personal, cultural, national, and state identity—reflecting the country's contemporary social and political context. The competency of citizenship is particularly emphasized as the ability to eliminate prejudice and discrimination.

Similarly, the Albanian curriculum framework places strong emphasis on national identity. The need to "strengthen national identity" is explicitly stated in the section outlining the rationale for curricular reform (Position 2.4, p. 6) and is reiterated in the first curriculum aim, which calls for cultivating personal, national, and cultural identity. At the same time, the framework promotes broader educational perspectives; for instance, one of the guiding principles (Principle 4.8) encourages teachers to foster students' "global competence and cultural awareness" (p. 13). The theme of strengthening national identity is also presented as an intercurricular theme linked to the promotion of peaceful coexistence.

V.1 Model me dy tema ndërkurrikulare të sjella si shembull tregojnë qartë lidhjen njohurive të muzikës me temën: ***Identiteti Kombëtar*** dhe ***Bashkëjetesa paqësore.***

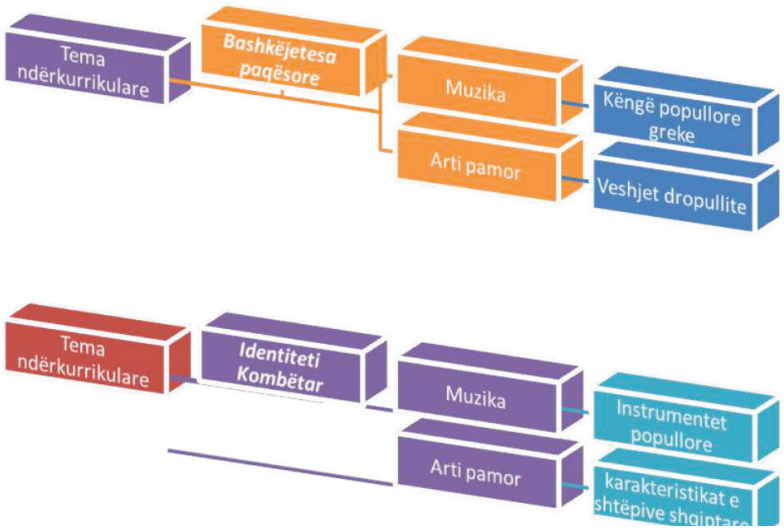

Figure 1. Udhezuesi kurrikular lendor per muziken (Shqiperi) f.13

Music curriculum and teaching materials

Both curricula documents have identified subject components in which the subject content is distributed. Kosovo curricula has four components 1. Creation and Performance 2. Artistic Language and Communication 3. Music and Society 4. Music Appreciation and Assessment

Figure 2. Albanian music curricula has 3 components: 1. Music language and communication 2. Techniques and processes and 3. History, Music and Society

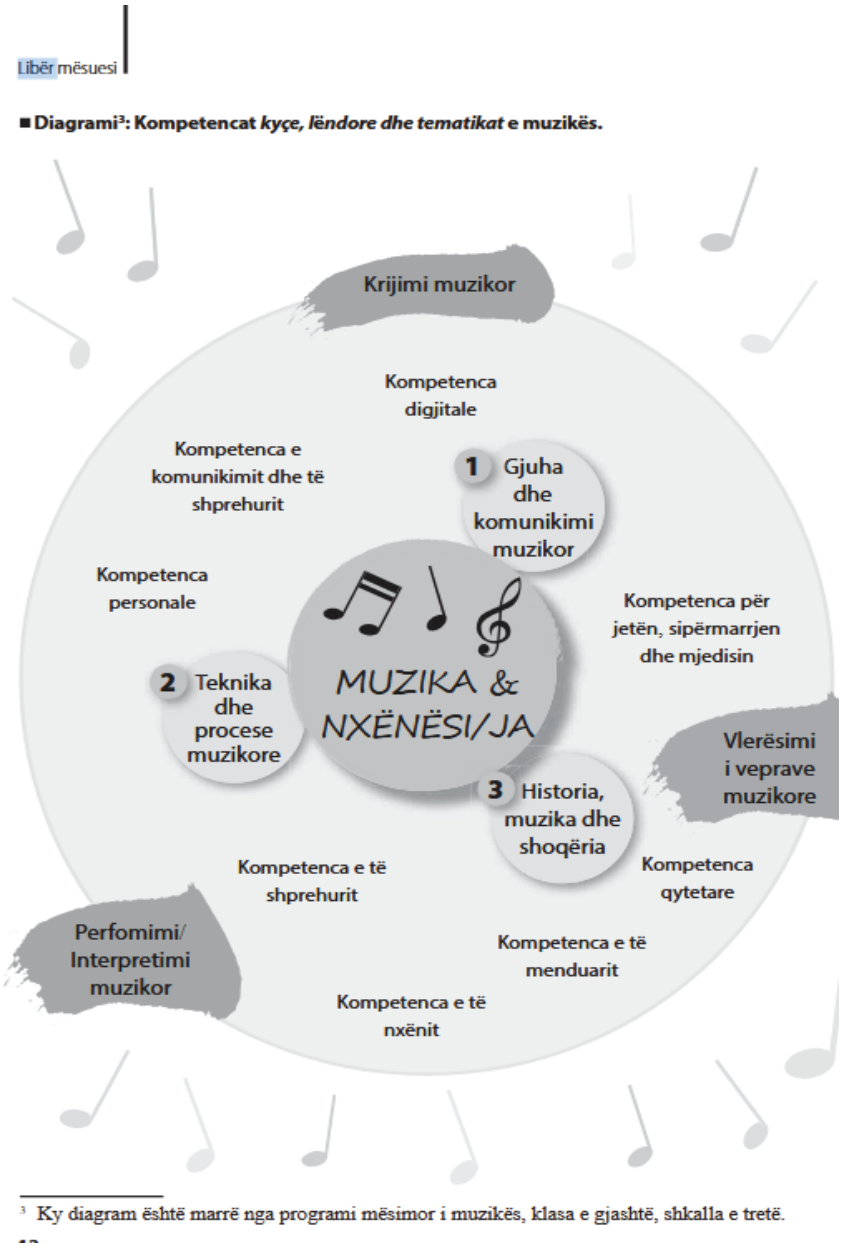

Figure 2. Libri I mesuesit klasa VI Art Muzikor (Shqiperi)

Representation of national musical heritage in curriculum materials

The analysis of music curricula and teaching materials in Kosovo and Albania—particularly textbooks for grades 1–9—reveals a strong emphasis on the transmission of national musical heritage. In both systems, curricular content is largely dominated by European art music from different historical periods alongside folk traditions, nationally significant composers, and repertoire associated with cultural identity and historical memory. Folk songs and traditional musical forms occupy a central place in music education and frequently serve as the main material through which students encounter musical culture.

In Kosovo, teaching materials often incorporate traditional Albanian songs and musical practices

aimed at reinforcing cultural continuity and collective identity. Works by Albanian and Kosovar composers are also presented as part of the national cultural canon. However, the representation of music from minority communities living in Kosovo is largely absent, and references to musical traditions beyond the national context are limited. Occasionally, examples from international popular music appear as informational material or performance repertoire.

Similarly, the Albanian curriculum strongly emphasizes national musical heritage, reflecting longstanding cultural policies that prioritize the preservation and promotion of folk traditions and nationally oriented repertoire. Folk music, choral songs, and compositions inspired by traditional idioms are widely included in textbooks. However, references to Kosovar composers and repertoire are relatively limited.

Overall, while these curricular choices highlight the historical importance of cultural preservation, musical traditions from other cultural contexts remain comparatively underrepresented. In an increasingly interconnected world, this predominance of nationally oriented repertoire raises questions about the extent to which music education also promotes broader intercultural musical understanding.

Comparative overview of repertoire representation

Element	Kosovo	Albania
European art music	High presence	High presence
Folk repertoire	High presence	High presence
National composers	Albanian and Kosovar composers	Mainly Albanian composers
International and minority musical traditions	Limited	Limited

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the central role that music education continues to play in the transmission and reinforcement of national cultural identity in both Kosovo and Albania. The strong presence of folk traditions, nationally recognized composers, and culturally symbolic repertoire within the curricula reflects the historical importance of music as a medium for preserving cultural heritage and collective memory. In contexts such as Kosovo and Albania, where national identity has been closely linked to historical struggles, political transformation, and processes of nation-building, the emphasis on national musical heritage in education can be understood as both culturally meaningful and historically grounded.

At the same time, contemporary educational discourse increasingly emphasizes the importance of intercultural competence and global cultural awareness. From this perspective, the predominance of nationally oriented musical content within the analyzed curricula raises important pedagogical questions. While the transmission of national cultural heritage remains a fundamental component of music education, the limited presence of musical traditions from other cultural contexts may restrict opportunities for students to develop broader intercultural musical understanding. In an increasingly interconnected world, music education may benefit from approaches that balance the preservation of national heritage with greater engagement with diverse global musical traditions.

Conclusion

This paper examined the representation of national musical heritage in music education curricula in Kosovo and Albania. The analysis suggests that both educational systems place a strong emphasis on the transmission of national musical traditions, including folk repertoire, nationally significant composers, and culturally symbolic musical works. This emphasis reflects the historical and cultural importance of music in the formation and preservation of national identity, particularly in societies shaped by complex political and historical processes.

At the same time, contemporary discussions in music education increasingly stress the importance of intercultural competence and global awareness. While the promotion of national musical heritage remains an essential component of music education, the predominance of nationally oriented content within the curricula raises questions regarding the extent to which students are exposed to diverse musical cultures.

In an increasingly interconnected world, music education may benefit from approaches that balance the preservation of national cultural heritage with broader intercultural engagement. Such a balance could support both the strengthening of cultural identity and the development of a more inclusive and globally aware musical understanding among students.

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Between artistic merit and scientific metrics: Promotion to full professor in European arts higher education and Albania

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Abstract

This paper examines the criteria and procedures for the promotion of academic titles in artistic higher education through a comparative analysis between Albania and several European systems. While European frameworks are increasingly recognizing artistic research and practice-based artistic products, the Albanian system remains more dependent on traditional and quantitative academic metrics. Academic promotion to the title of "Professor" in universities of the arts represents a complex field between artistic creativity and standardized scientific measurement. Therefore, this paper undertakes to comparatively analyze the European models of academic artistic promotion of titles in Italy, France, Germany and Austria, placing them in relation to the Albanian system regulated by Law no. 80/2015 and the relevant DCMs (DCM No. 112, dated 23.02.2018, DCM No. 128, dated 6.03.2024). The paper seeks to examine three research questions: How are the academic promotion criteria determined in the case of UART in Albania? To what extent do they comply with European practices for the acquisition and management of higher education institutions in the arts? What are the challenges in assessing artistic creativity? The methodology used in this study is a qualitative and comparative analysis, taking into account legal acts, DCMs and international literature. Through this analysis, the paper examines the way in which academic merit is conceived, the relationship between scientific research and artistic creativity, as well as the level of university autonomy in decision-making for the promotion of titles in the field of arts. To address these questions, the paper relies on three theoretical approaches: first, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of academic potential, an approach that conceives the academic career as an accumulation of scientific and symbolic capital; second, the concept of "academic capitalism", which sees the university as an institution oriented towards performance and competition; third, the concept of "artistic research", which recognizes artistic creativity as a form of knowledge production. The findings show that European systems are divided into several models: an autonomous-qualitative model (Austria and partly Germany), a standardized scientific model (Italy and France), and a procedural-numeric model (Albania). Although European systems develop their approach to universities of the arts towards the integration of "artistic research" as an equal form of knowledge, the Albanian system remains oriented towards numerical indicators and normative standardization. The paper concludes that legal and sub-legal acts should be exhaustive and not create a "functional epistemological vacuum" for the assessment of artistic creativity and artistic merit by properly implementing legal acts at the University of Arts.

Keywords

Artistic merit, scientific metrics, promotion to full professor, arts higher education, research in art

Introduction

Academic advancement to the highest title of "Full Professor" represents one of the most important mechanisms through which universities and higher education institutions build intellectual authority, regulate and damage academic careers and define the limits of epistemic legitimacy. In higher education, particularly in the artistic field (music, visual arts, theater, film, and choreography), this process exhibits a significant and higher structural complexity than in traditional scientific disciplines. This complexity stems from the dual epistemic status of artistic creativity, which functions simultaneously as both an aesthetic creative product and as a potential process of generating new knowledge.
In disciplines known as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) or in the humanities, academic growth and promotion of titles is based on clear and widely accepted rules:

- publications in journals with impact factor,
- works with citation indexes (h-index),
- rigorous peer reviews (double-blind peer review) and grants obtained for scientific research.

The opposite occurs with artistic disciplines which involve other, often non-bibliometric, forms of epistemic evaluation. These forms include:

- international exhibitions,
- stage performances,
- musical compositions,
- curatorial projects and other practice-based research outputs.

For decades, this distinction has created a constant tension between traditional university logic and the autonomy of arts institutions.
Since the signing of the Bologna Declaration and the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), artistic disciplines have undergone a profound epistemological transition. Artistic creativity has begun to be theorized and recognized as a legitimate form of research in its own right, labeled as "research
artistic" (artistic research). But this theoretical acceptance has not been uniformly translated into institutional policies or academic advancement systems in all countries. In some countries we observe adaptation in their structures by creating an equivalence between artistic achievements and scientific research, in some other countries they maintain a more conservative approach, insisting on bureaucratic and quantitative criteria that often penalize or ignore the specific nature of artistic formation.
Therefore, this study is motivated by this discrepancy not only in Albania but also beyond and aims to answer three main research questions:

1. How is advancement to the title of Professor in higher education structured in arts institutions in different systems?
2. How is artistic creativity classified epistemologically, within the framework of academic evaluation (as scientific research, as artistic - professional activity or as symbolic capital)?
3. Is the doctorate (PhD) a non-negotiable prerequisite for promotion to the title of professor in arts disciplines?

The central thesis of this article is that the authority and benefit of the title of professor in the arts does not follow a linear trajectory nor is it entirely dependent on the possession of a doctoral degree (PhD). Rather, it is constructed through different arrangements of epistemic, symbolic and institutional capital, which differ fundamentally according to the model of academic governance of each country. Through a comparative analysis between European models (Germany, Austria, France, Italy), the Anglo-Saxon Canadian model and the transitional models of the Western Balkans (Kosovo and Albania), this paper aims to clarify the boundaries between doctoral training (PhD) and the academic title of Professor, as well as to propose ways to reform the closed procedural systems.

Theoretical framework

Bourdieu: academic capital and symbolic power

To understand the hidden mechanisms that govern evaluation and promotion in universities of the arts, the theory of fields and capital of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1988) offers the most productive analytical approach. According to Bourdieu, academic institutions are not simply neutral spaces of knowledge dissemination, but structured social "fields" where actors engage in ongoing struggles to acquire, accumulate and monopolize different forms of capital. In the academic sphere, we distinguish specifically between cultural, scientific and symbolic capital.
In the field of the arts, academic authority is not regulated by "pure scientific capital" (measured by the number of publications or citations), but by "symbolic capital", which includes reputation, recognition by prestigious cultural institutions, artistic charisma and legitimacy within the field of artistic and cultural production. When an artist is promoted to the level of Professor, the institution is not simply valuing the quantity of his work, but is performing an "act" of institutionalization, converting his external artistic capital into internal academic capital. Consequently, the clash between scientific and artistic criteria can be seen as a battle for epistemic dominance: who has the right to define what constitutes "knowledge" and who possesses the authority to certify excellence?

Academic capitalism and measurement

On the other hand, contemporary developments in higher education are strongly influenced by what Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) call "academic capitalism", a concept that describes the transformation of universities into competitive markets, where knowledge is treated as a commodity and where the spirit of New Public Management prevails. Based on this model, institutions are forced to measure every academic product through key performance indicators (KPIs), international rankings and standardized algorithms of platforms such as Scopus or Web of Science.
This process of measurement / "metrification" creates a deep existential crisis in art schools. Since artistic research is natural and qualitative, embodied, subjective and often manifested in unique objects or ephemeral events (such as a concert or performance), it categorically resists quantitative measurement. When states or universities blindly follow the matrices of academic capitalism over the arts, they produce an alienation of academic work, forcing artists to engage in artificial textual "padding" or in worthless publications simply to fill procedural numbers.

Artistic research theory

To overcome this impasse, the international artistic research movement, led by theorists such as Henk Borgdorff (2012), has rethought the epistemological status of art. Borgdorff proposes an important distinction between three approaches:

- "research on art" (the traditional historical and musicological approach),
- "research for art" (instrumental research where art is simply the end product), and
- "research in and through art" (artistic research proper).

In this latter model, artistic creativity itself functions as a methodology and as a sphere of knowledge discovery.
Borgdorff argues that art does not always need to be explained by an external theory to be research; The creative process itself carries an unspoken and embodied knowledge, which is articulated through artistic form. But, for this activity/creativity to gain the status of academic research, it requires that the creative process be accompanied by systematic documentation, critical reflection, and a contextualization that makes this knowledge communicable to the peer community. This epistemological positioning serves as a pillar for systems that recognize the professional equivalence of art without the need for a conventional PhD.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative comparative methodology with a threefold focus: analysis of national legal and regulatory frameworks, analysis of institutional policies of specific universities, and an interpretative epistemological analysis of evaluation criteria. The comparative approach is chosen not to simply provide a superficial description of the rules, but to reveal the "internal epistemic logics" that motivate these policies.
The selected cases intentionally represent different historical and administrative trajectories:

- Europe: Germany, Austria, France, Italy systems representing the traditional model with high external validation mechanisms and consolidated disciplinary autonomy.
- Canada: represents the North American model based on the tenure-track system, where professional excellence has flexible channels for evaluating artistic creativity.
- Kosovo: represents a hybrid model in transition, which has formally integrated artistic pathways within its public university.
- Albania: represents the procedural-administrative model, where the state maintains a strongly centralizing role and where scientific metrics prevail over the specificity of art.

For each country, higher education laws in force until 2026 were analyzed, as well as specific guidelines from quality assurance agencies and professorial advancement regulations.

Comparative epistemic models

Epistemic-research model Germany, Austria, France, Italy

European education systems are characterized by the existence of high-level post-doctoral

qualification mechanisms, but with a very clear division or adaptation for the academies of arts. In Germany and Austria, the traditional route to obtaining the title of professor has been the Habilitation. However, in the universities of the arts (Kunstuniversitäten), this rule has been radically modified. For the position of professor in performance, composition or visual arts, German and Austrian law recognize the so-called "qualification equivalent to artistic achievement" (künstlerische Eignung). This means that an artist of high international reputation, who has exhibited at the Venice Biennale or played at the Berlin Philharmonic, is considered fully qualified to become a Professor (W3 in Germany), without the need for either a doctorate or a Habilitation. Their authority stems from their acceptance into the larger "field" of global art, which is considered the highest possible peer validation. Meanwhile, Austria has also created genuine Artistic PhD programs (Doctor Artium), offering a path where practice and research merge, but without making it an administrative obligation for all professors of artistic creativity. In France, there is the Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches (HDR), which is required to become a professor at classical universities. But the higher art schools (Écoles Nationales Supérieures d'Art), which operate under the Ministry of Culture, recruit their professors mainly on the basis of artistic corpus and cultural influence. In Italy, the Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale (ASN) system regulates advancement in state universities, but AFAM (Alta Formazione Artistica, Musicale e Coreutica) institutions have dedicated channels where artistic creativity and concert/exhibition activity are assessed through well-defined tables of artistic points, thus preserving the epistemic autonomy of the artistic field.

The hybrid model based on artistic creativity Canada and Kosovo

Canada

The Canadian higher education system operates under the North American structure of academic performance and tenure-track. In major Canadian universities (such as the University of Toronto, McGill or UBC), promotion to the title of "Professor" is not guided by a rigid bureaucratic list imposed by the ministry, but by internal regulations negotiated through professor unions (Faculty Associations) and peer review committees.
In the arts disciplines, Canadian universities apply the principle of "Research/Creation". This concept formally recognizes that the creation of an original work of art is a research process that produces new knowledge. During the evaluation process for the title of Professor, the candidate must demonstrate three elements:

- continuous excellence in teaching,
- institutional leadership, and, above all,
- a research-creative profile with international impact.

Canadian law and practice specify that if a professor is employed in a practical profile (e.g., professor of piano or painting), a doctorate (PhD) is not required for advancement to the highest ranks. In many cases, a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) combined with an exceptional professional career is considered the "terminal degree" for this field. The evaluation is done through letters sent to 3 to 5 international external referees, who are full professors at other elite universities. They assess the quality, weight, and epistemic impact of the candidate's works, ensuring a substantive process rather than simply counting lines or formal procedures.

The Republic of Kosovo represents a unique and highly interesting case of a hybrid system in transition in the Western Balkans. At the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina" (the main public higher education institution), the rules of academic advancement are clearly defined in the University Statute and internal regulations, which reflect efforts to align with the EHEA, but respecting the specificity of the arts. Unlike Albania, Kosovo has created a parallel and clear evaluation structure for the Faculty of Arts. To earn the title of "Regular Professor" in the arts, the UP Statute stipulates that the candidate may choose the artistic path. The law requires that the candidate have a certain number of performances, exhibitions, concerts or major works presented at an international or national level of high importance, which are subject to evaluation by a review committee of three members of the field. This regulation clearly separates the need for a PhD from the field of performance: while for theoretical branches (such as Musicology or Art History) a doctorate is mandatory, for practical artistic branches such as (Musical Performance, Acting, Directing, Painting, Sculpture) the title of Regular Professor can be fully achieved through artistic capital and verified public works. This model proves that it is entirely possible for a Balkan country to build a system that maintains academic density without stifling creativity through metrics mistakenly borrowed from the exact sciences.

Procedural-administrative model, Albania

The system of obtaining titles in Albania is rigidly regulated by Law No. 80/2015 "On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania", as well as by the Decisions of the Council of Ministers (VKM) that define national criteria, the most recent of which include VKM No. 112/2018 and the subsequent radical amendments to VKM No. 128/2024. This system is classified as "procedural-administrative" due to the high degree of state centralization and the predominance of quantitative criteria over qualitative and substantive ones. In Albania, the path to the title "Professor" passes through a unique matrix that makes no substantial distinction between a professor of neurosurgery and a professor of cello or painting. According to the current legal framework, to apply for the title of "Professor", the candidate must meet a series of strict quantitative conditions:

- Possession of the scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) – which is mandatory for any type of department, including those of performance and artistic creation.
- A certain number of scientific articles published in journals indexed in the Scopus or Web of Science databases (where the candidate must be the first author or corresponding author).
- Participation in international scientific conferences with papers published in indexed journals.
- Leadership of research projects and successful defense of doctoral students.

This legal framework creates a serious epistemological impasse at the University of Arts in Tirana. Since art and performance do not find space in Scopus-indexed journals (which are almost exclusively verbal scientific texts), professors of arts are forced to write artificial theoretical articles to meet the administrative criteria. This obligation ignores the fact that their main capital, the one for which they are employed and for which they train the younger generations, is their embodied art. The Albanian system classifies artistic production simply as a "complementary criterion" or as a "professional activity", never recognizing its status as genuine research or independent epistemic capital. Decision-making remains deeply bureaucratic, with

files controlled by ad-hoc commissions and ministry officials who verify formal certificates and journal barcodes, rather than being subjected to in-depth peer review by an international jury of artists.

Comparative matrix of advancement systems towards the title of professor

To visualize and synthesize the structural differences between these countries, Table 1 presents a comparative matrix of advancement criteria to Professor based on the type of dominant capital, the role of the PhD and the nature of the assessment.

NATIONAL SYSTEM	ADMINISTRATIVE MODEL	STATUS OF PhD IN PRACTICE BRANCHES	OMINANT CAPITAL IN EVALUATION	PEER VALIDATION MECHANISM
Germany / Austria	Epistemic-Research (Decentralized)	Not mandatory (Equivalent artistic qualification)	International Symbolic Capital & Epithemic Autonomy	External international commissions and artistic jury
Canada	Hybrid Practice-Based (Tenure-track)	Not mandatory (MFA accepted as terminal degree)	Research-Creation & Professional Impact Confidential Evaluation by 3-5 External Reviewers	Secret evaluation by 3-5 external international reviewers
Kosovo	Hybrid in Transition (UP)	Not mandatory (Clear structure)	Verified Artistic Corpus & National/International Publications	Review committees of the Faculty of Arts
Albania	Procedural-Administrative (Centralized)	Mandatory without exception (Law 80/2015)	Quantitative Scientific Metrics (Scopus / WoS)	Bureaucratic administrative institutional and state verification

Table 1: A comparative matrix of advancement criteria to Professor based on the type of dominant capital, the role of the PhD and the nature of the assessment.

The difference between a PhD and a professor of arts

One of the biggest misunderstandings that has damaged higher education policies in some Eastern European countries and especially in Albania is the conceptual equivalence or merging of the scientific degree “Doctor” (PhD) with the academic title “Professor”. This discrepancy requires a strict theoretical and institutional clarification.

The PhD degree (Doctor of Philosophy/Arts) represents a certification of initial research training. It proves that the individual has acquired the necessary methodological competencies to conduct independent scientific research, to produce an original thesis and to enter the academic community as a new researcher. PhD

is an academic degree that is obtained once in a lifetime and marks the completion of the third cycle of university studies. It does not in itself carry any hierarchical leadership or management authority within the university.

In contrast, the title of Full Professor is not a degree of study, but the highest level of academic

career and a position of high intellectual and institutional authority. This title demonstrates proven leadership in the field, a massive corpus of works or works that have changed or profoundly influenced the discipline, high mentoring skills, and unanimous international recognition by colleagues in the field.
In universities of the arts throughout the developed world, this distinction becomes even more radical. Since the traditional PhD requires a purely discursive and scientific framework, imposing it on performing artists creates a paradox: a brilliant pianist who spends 8 hours a day at the instrument has neither the time nor the methodological interest to write an 80,000-word thesis on the history of keyboard structure; his true art appears in the performance. Therefore, in advanced systems, the path of the PhD is definitively separated from the path of the Professor: an artist may not have a PhD, but he can be an excellent Professor because he possesses the symbolic capital and the highest possible technical mastery, which he transmits to his students.

Discussion: epistemology and its consequences

When we analyze the Albanian model in the light of Bourdieu's theories and academic capitalism, we observe a situation of what could be called "crippled epistemology". By forcing the University of Arts to follow the same metrics as polytechnic or medical universities, the Albanian state is exercising a form of "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu 1991). This violence consists in delegitimizing artistic practice as a source of knowledge.
The consequences of this system are numerous and serious for the future of culture and higher education in the country.
Firstly, it blocks the advancement of the best artists. Young Albanian artists who have active careers on European stages refuse to join the University of the Arts because they know they will face a bureaucratic wall that requires them to publish articles in indexed ghost journals, instead of evaluating their concerts or exhibitions.
Secondly, this system encourages plagiarism and a decline in quality: since serious Scopus journals do not accept simple descriptive writings on art without a strict sociological or scientific methodology, candidates often turn to "predatory" journals that publish anything for a fee, feeding precisely the darkest side of academic capitalism.
Kosovo and Canada offer a way out of this impasse. They prove that accepting the principle of Research/Creation or creating a parallel artistic path increases the quality of the institution, as it keeps it connected to the real world of cultural production. The authority of a professor of the arts should be assessed in the concert hall, in the gallery and on the stage, and not in the administrative control offices of the ministry.

Conclusions

This comparative study has shown that academic advancement towards the title of Professor in higher education in the arts is not guided by a universal logic, but is the product of clashes between systems of academic governance and the conclusions of knowledge. Through our analysis, we have identified three main models:

1. The epistemic-research model (Europe): which is based on full disciplinary autonomy and the recognition of artistic equivalence without imposing a formal doctorate for performing artists.
2. The hybrid practice-based/creativity model (Canada, Kosovo): which integrates the concept

of Research/Creation and allows for a clear and fair progression of professors through external peer letters and the artistic corpus.
3. Procedural-administrative model (Albania): which suffers from high centralization, incorrect scientific metrification and a structural inability to recognize art as knowledge, leading to career blockage and decline in academic quality.

The conclusion of this article is that the idea that a PhD is a necessary and universal prerequisite for being a professor in the arts is empirically false and epistemologically harmful. To save higher arts education in to save higher arts education in Albania from procedural asphyxiation, it is urgent that the legal framework (Law 80/2015 and related DCMs) be amended, taking as a model the successful system of Kosovo or Canada. Artistic practice documented and evaluated by an international peer jury should be recognized as the main epistemic capital equivalent to any scientific research.

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Integrating arts and English language learning: An empirical examination of the methodological impact

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of integrating the arts into English language instruction within the framework of English for the Arts (EFA). Drawing on interdisciplinary methodologies—including Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), project-based learning, drama-based instruction, and technology-mediated approaches—the research evaluates the effects of arts integration on vocabulary acquisition, oral fluency, student engagement, and creative development. Using a mixed-methods design, the study combines quantitative statistical analysis with qualitative reflection to assess both measurable linguistic outcomes and affective dimensions of learning. The findings indicate that arts-integrated instruction produces significant improvements in language proficiency and learner motivation, suggesting important implications for curriculum design in secondary education contexts.

Keywords

CLIL, arts, english language learning

Introduction

The integration of the arts into English language teaching represents an innovative and interdisciplinary approach that bridges linguistic, cognitive, and cultural learning. Traditional language instruction often prioritizes grammar, vocabulary, and discrete skill practice, sometimes at the expense of meaningful contextualization. By contrast, English for the Arts (EFA) situates language acquisition within creative and culturally rich experiences, providing learners with opportunities to engage in authentic communication while exploring artistic content. In this model, English becomes both a tool for expression and a medium through which students interpret, critique, and produce art.

Arts-integrated instruction encompasses a wide range of modalities, including visual arts, drama, music, literature, and digital media. For instance, learners may analyze the techniques of a painting while discussing aesthetic principles in English, perform a dramatic scene to explore character motivation, or compose song lyrics and poetry that require precise vocabulary and syntactic control. Such activities create a dual-layered learning environment: students acquire language skills while simultaneously developing artistic literacy and critical thinking abilities. This approach aligns with contemporary pedagogical frameworks that emphasize student-centered, experiential, and interdisciplinary learning (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010, 5).

The educational benefits of combining arts and language learning are multifaceted. Research suggests that arts-based tasks can enhance motivation, reduce anxiety, and increase learner engagement by making abstract concepts tangible and emotionally resonant (Maley and Duff 2005, 7; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris 2004, 63). Furthermore, embedding language within meaningful artistic contexts supports deeper cognitive processing, facilitating retention of vocabulary and structures, improving oral fluency, and fostering creativity (Eisner 2002, 72–74). From a cultural perspective, arts integration exposes learners to diverse artistic traditions and cultural narratives, strengthening intercultural competence and enriching their understanding of global perspectives.

Despite the theoretical and anecdotal support for arts-based English instruction, empirical research measuring its concrete impact on linguistic outcomes remains limited. Most studies focus on affective or qualitative indicators such as enjoyment, engagement, or self-perceived confidence, leaving a gap in understanding measurable gains in vocabulary, oral proficiency, and creative expression. Addressing this gap, the present study employs a mixed-methods design to investigate how integrating visual arts, drama, music, and project-based tasks into English instruction affects vocabulary acquisition, oral fluency, student engagement, and creative performance.

By examining both cognitive and affective dimensions, this research aims to provide actionable insights for educators seeking to implement interdisciplinary approaches in secondary and tertiary English classrooms. The study positions EFA as not only a pedagogical innovation but also a practical framework for enhancing linguistic proficiency, cultural literacy, and creative thinking simultaneously.

Literature review

The integration of the arts into language education is grounded in interdisciplinary scholarship spanning applied linguistics, educational psychology, and arts pedagogy. Rather than viewing language learning as a purely structural or grammatical endeavor, contemporary research

increasingly conceptualizes it as a socially situated and cognitively complex process. Within this broader paradigm, arts-based methodologies provide meaningful contexts for communicative practice, interpretation, and creative production.

One of the most influential frameworks supporting interdisciplinary instruction is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). CLIL proposes that language acquisition is strengthened when learners engage with substantive subject matter through the target language (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010, 4). The model emphasizes the "4Cs" framework—content, communication, cognition, and culture—which aligns closely with arts-integrated instruction. In the context of English for the Arts (EFA), students simultaneously explore artistic themes (content), develop discipline-specific vocabulary (communication), engage in analytical interpretation (cognition), and gain intercultural awareness (culture). Research indicates that this dual-focus approach enhances retention and promotes deeper conceptual understanding compared to isolated language instruction (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010, 29).

Drama pedagogy has also been widely recognized as an effective tool for second language development. Performance-based learning creates opportunities for spontaneous interaction, negotiation of meaning, and embodied communication. Maley and Duff argue that drama reduces affective barriers and fosters confidence, allowing learners to experiment with language in low-risk environments (Maley and Duff 2005, 6–9). Role-play, improvisation, and scripted performance not only improve pronunciation and fluency but also strengthen pragmatic competence. By assuming fictional roles, students distance themselves from personal anxiety, which can significantly lower communicative inhibition.

From a cognitive perspective, arts engagement has been linked to higher-order thinking and emotional investment. Eisner contends that the arts cultivate interpretative judgment, imagination, and reflective thinking, all of which contribute to intellectual growth (Eisner 2002, 70–75). Artistic tasks require learners to analyze symbolism, evaluate aesthetic choices, and articulate personal interpretations. When conducted in a second language, these processes demand sophisticated lexical and syntactic expression, thereby reinforcing linguistic development through cognitively demanding tasks.

Project-based learning (PBL) further strengthens the theoretical foundation for arts integration. PBL emphasizes inquiry, collaboration, and the production of tangible outcomes. In language education, this model encourages learners to apply vocabulary and structures in extended communicative tasks rather than discrete exercises. Hall and Cook highlight that specialized domains, such as the arts, provide authentic contexts for English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where vocabulary acquisition becomes purposeful and functionally embedded (Hall and Cook 2012, 44). By designing exhibitions, producing performances, or curating digital portfolios, students use English as a practical tool rather than an abstract subject.

Motivation theory also supports arts-based instruction. According to engagement research, meaningful and emotionally resonant activities increase intrinsic motivation and sustained attention (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris 2004, 63). Artistic expression naturally integrates emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement, creating multidimensional learning experiences. Students involved in creative tasks often demonstrate greater persistence and willingness to communicate, factors strongly correlated with second language success.

Despite this substantial theoretical support, empirical studies measuring the quantifiable linguistic impact of arts integration remain comparatively scarce. Much of the literature emphasizes qualitative benefits—such as increased confidence or enjoyment—without systematically assessing vocabulary gains or fluency development. Consequently, there is a need for research

that combines rigorous statistical analysis with qualitative insights to determine the measurable educational value of arts-based methodologies. The present study seeks to contribute to this emerging field by examining both linguistic outcomes and affective dimensions of learning within an arts-integrated English classroom.

Research questions and hypotheses

This research addresses three central questions:

1. Does integrating arts into English instruction improve vocabulary acquisition and oral fluency?
2. How does arts integration influence student motivation and engagement?
3. Does participation in arts-based instruction enhance creativity and cultural literacy?

It was hypothesized that students exposed to arts-integrated instruction would demonstrate significantly higher linguistic gains and engagement levels than students receiving traditional instruction.

Methodology

Research design

A mixed-methods approach was employed to assess both cognitive and affective learning outcomes. Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-tests, while qualitative data were gathered through classroom observations, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews.

Participants

The study involved sixty high school students aged 16–18 enrolled in an advanced English course. Participants were divided into:

- Experimental Group (n = 30): Arts-integrated English instruction
- Control Group (n = 30): Traditional communicative English instruction

Procedure

The intervention lasted eight weeks. Both groups completed baseline language assessments. The experimental group participated in three weekly sessions incorporating visual arts analysis, drama activities, music interpretation, and project-based tasks. The control group followed a standard curriculum without explicit arts integration.

Results and discussions

Results

The results of this study reveal substantial differences between students who participated in arts-

integrated English instruction and those who followed traditional curricula. Both quantitative and qualitative measures indicate that incorporating the arts enhances linguistic outcomes, motivation, and creative engagement.

Vocabulary acquisition

Group	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Mean Gain	t-value	p-value
Experimental	26.4	41.2	+14.8	8.72	< .001
Control	27.1	33.5	+6.4	3.11	.003

Table 1. Vocabulary test results

The independent samples t-test comparing gain scores indicated a statistically significant difference between groups ($p < .001$). The calculated effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.12$) suggests a large educational impact.

Students in the experimental group demonstrated a marked improvement in arts-related vocabulary. Pre-test scores were similar across groups (Experimental: $M = 26.4$; Control: $M = 27.1$), indicating comparable baseline knowledge. After the eight-week intervention, the experimental group achieved an average post-test score of 41.2, reflecting a mean gain of 14.8 points, compared to a gain of 6.4 points in the control group (Table 1). The independent samples t-test confirmed that this difference was statistically significant ($p < .001$), with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.12$).

These findings suggest that learning vocabulary in the context of meaningful artistic activities—such as analyzing paintings, interpreting song lyrics, and writing descriptive captions—enhances retention. Reflective journals from the experimental group further support this observation. Students frequently noted that vocabulary "felt alive" when used to describe or critique creative works, highlighting the value of contextualized, content-based learning.

Oral fluency

Performance-based assessments revealed stronger fluency development in the experimental group.

Group	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Mean Gain	F-value	p-value
Experimental	11.8	17.6	+5.8	18.45	< .001
Control	12.1	14.2	+2.1	—	—

Table 2. Oral fluency assessment (scale 1–20)

The ANOVA confirmed a significant interaction effect between instructional type and improvement level ($F = 18.45$, $p < .001$).

Oral proficiency was assessed through performance-based activities, including role-plays, discussions, and short presentations. At baseline, both groups exhibited comparable oral fluency (Experimental: $M = 11.8$; Control: $M = 12.1$). After the intervention, the experimental group's mean score rose to 17.6, whereas the control group improved more modestly to 14.2 (Table 2). ANOVA analysis confirmed a significant interaction effect between instructional type and

improvement level ($F = 18.45$, $p < .001$).
Qualitative observations provide insight into the mechanisms behind this improvement. Students engaged in drama, role-play, and collaborative project presentations displayed more fluent and expressive speech, used a wider range of vocabulary, and demonstrated increased confidence in improvisational dialogue. The integration of arts facilitated authentic speaking opportunities, prompting students to communicate ideas more spontaneously and effectively than in traditional classroom exercises.

Engagement levels

Post-intervention engagement scores were substantially higher in the arts-integrated group.

Dimension	Experimental	Control	p-value
Behavioral	86.5	71.3	< .001
Emotional	89.2	74.5	< .001
Cognitive	84.7	70.8	< .001

Table 3. Engagement scores

Students frequently described the arts-based lessons as immersive and motivating, reinforcing quantitative findings.
Engagement was measured across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. The post-intervention scores reveal higher engagement levels for the experimental group in all dimensions (Table 3). For instance, behavioral engagement averaged 86.5 in the experimental group versus 71.3 in the control group, while emotional engagement showed a similar trend (89.2 vs. 74.5). Cognitive engagement, reflecting attention, problem-solving, and conceptual participation, was also higher among arts-integrated students (84.7 vs. 70.8).
Reflective journals and interviews confirmed these quantitative findings. Students frequently described arts-based lessons as “immersive,” “enjoyable,” and “motivating,” reporting that creative tasks reduced the anxiety typically associated with language learning. Several students indicated that project-based activities, such as curating digital galleries or performing dramatic scenes, encouraged collaboration and problem-solving, which made learning feel more meaningful and purposeful.

Creativity and Cultural Literacy

Creative output was evaluated using a rubric assessing originality, linguistic accuracy, and cultural interpretation.

Criterion	Experimental	Control	p-value
Originality	8.7	6.1	< .001
Linguistic Accuracy	8.3	7.0	.002
Cultural Interpretation	9.0	6.5	< .001

Table 4. Creative output evaluation

Students in the experimental group demonstrated more nuanced cultural analysis and stronger expressive abilities.
Creative output was evaluated using a rubric assessing originality, linguistic accuracy, and cultural interpretation. Students in the experimental group consistently outperformed the control group across all categories (Table 4). For example, originality scores averaged 8.7 out of 10 for the experimental group compared to 6.1 for the control group, while cultural interpretation showed a similar disparity (9.0 vs. 6.5).

Discussion

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that integrating the arts into English language teaching significantly enhances linguistic, cognitive, and affective outcomes. Across quantitative and qualitative measures, students exposed to arts-integrated instruction demonstrated higher vocabulary acquisition, improved oral fluency, elevated engagement, and more sophisticated creative and cultural literacy compared to peers in traditional instruction. These results align with prior theoretical frameworks advocating for interdisciplinary and experiential approaches to language education (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010; Eisner 2002).

Linguistic development

The experimental group's gains in domain-specific vocabulary and oral fluency underscore the effectiveness of contextualized language learning. Vocabulary acquisition was particularly robust, suggesting that embedding language within meaningful artistic activities facilitates semantic retention and functional usage. These findings support the CLIL principle that content and language reinforcement operate synergistically (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010, 4–5). By engaging with visual arts, music, drama, and literature in English, students encountered new terminology in authentic communicative contexts, reinforcing both comprehension and productive use.
Oral proficiency gains were similarly pronounced. Drama-based activities, role-play, and collaborative presentations provided repeated opportunities for students to practice spontaneous communication in meaningful contexts. Maley and Duff (2005, 7–9) assert that drama reduces communicative anxiety and encourages experimentation with language forms, which appears consistent with the qualitative observations in this study. Students were not only speaking more but using English expressively and creatively, integrating nuanced vocabulary and syntactic structures appropriate to artistic interpretation.

Engagement and motivation

Arts integration also positively influenced student engagement and motivation. The experimental group demonstrated higher behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, reflecting greater attention, participation, and investment in tasks. Students frequently reported that creative and performative activities made English learning more enjoyable, personally meaningful, and intellectually stimulating. This supports the notion that arts-based pedagogy fosters intrinsic motivation by connecting language learning to students' interests, emotions, and creativity (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris 2004, 63).
The interactive and multimodal nature of arts-based tasks—such as curating a digital gallery or

performing a scene—encouraged collaboration and problem-solving, which further sustained engagement. These findings suggest that when learners perceive language learning as relevant and participatory, they are more likely to persist, take risks in communication, and develop communicative competence.

Creativity and cultural literacy

The study also demonstrates that arts integration fosters higher-order thinking, creative problem-solving, and cultural awareness. Experimental group students produced original, linguistically precise, and culturally informed creative outputs. This aligns with Eisner's assertion that artistic engagement cultivates interpretive judgment and imaginative thinking, which are essential for cognitive and affective development (Eisner 2002, 72–74).

By interpreting paintings, analyzing musical compositions, or dramatizing literary texts, students not only practiced English but also engaged critically with cultural content. Such activities encourage learners to synthesize knowledge, evaluate multiple perspectives, and articulate informed interpretations, thereby linking language proficiency with cultural literacy and critical thinking.

Pedagogical implications

The results have several practical implications for educators and curriculum designers. First, arts integration can be used strategically to enhance both language proficiency and motivation, particularly in secondary and tertiary education settings. Second, project-based and technology-mediated approaches allow for the creation of tangible outputs that reinforce language use in authentic contexts. Third, implementing such interdisciplinary approaches requires careful planning, including the selection of suitable artistic materials, scaffolding of language input, and structured reflection activities to maximize learning outcomes.

Conclusions and recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that integrating the arts into English language instruction has significant positive effects across multiple dimensions of learning. Students in the experimental group who experienced arts-integrated lessons demonstrated greater gains in vocabulary retention and oral fluency than those in traditional classrooms. Embedding language learning within activities such as visual arts analysis, dramatic performance, and music interpretation allowed learners to apply terminology and structures in meaningful contexts, enhancing both comprehension and productive use (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010, 4–5).

Arts-based instruction also contributed to heightened levels of engagement and motivation. Measures of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement, supported by students' reflective journals and interviews, revealed that interactive and creative tasks encouraged sustained attention, active participation, and intrinsic interest. Learners reported that the arts made English learning more stimulating and personally relevant, reinforcing the connection between engagement and meaningful content (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris 2004, 63).

Beyond linguistic and motivational gains, the experimental group exhibited marked improvements in creativity and cultural literacy. Students produced original work that was linguistically precise and culturally informed, demonstrating the ability to analyze, interpret, and communicate artistic

concepts in English. These outcomes align with Eisner's (2002, 72–74) view that arts engagement enhances cognitive, affective, and interpretive skills.

Finally, the study underscores the effectiveness of interdisciplinary approaches, including project-based learning, drama, and technology-mediated activities, in creating authentic and contextually rich learning experiences. Such methods foster the development of collaborative skills, problem-solving abilities, and higher-order thinking, while reinforcing language competence.

While the findings are promising, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted over eight weeks with a relatively small sample from a single school, which may limit generalizability. Future research could explore longitudinal effects, larger and more diverse populations, and variations in arts modality to determine which approaches are most effective. Additionally, further investigation is needed to assess the long-term retention of language skills and the transfer of creative competencies to other academic and professional contexts.

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From physical archive to digital memory: A sustainable approach to archiving artistic heritage in public universities

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Abstract

The transformation of physical archives into organized structures of digital memory constitutes a fundamental challenge for academic institutions in the technological era. Universities with an artistic profile face increased complexity, as their output includes diverse forms of documentation—from academic papers to musical scores, audio recordings, and visual documentation. This paper approaches digital archiving as an institutional act with cultural and ethical weight, one that requires standardization, internal governance, and a long-term guarantee of the sustainability of memory infrastructure. Drawing on a long-term case study (2011–2026), the paper analyzes the model implemented at the Library of the University of Arts in Tirana, built on an open-source architecture (Koha ILS and DSpace), organizational institutionalization, and interdisciplinary collaboration. The methodology includes documentary analysis, institutional observation, and practical reflection on the processes of implementation, maintenance, and consolidation of the system. The results show that building a digital institutional repository in a resource-constrained context is feasible through metadata standardization, clear division of responsibilities, and integrating the archive into everyday academic processes. The proposed model highlights the structural factors that influence the long-term sustainability of digital memory infrastructures, positioning archiving not only as a technical solution but as a strategic component of academic autonomy and the preservation of cultural heritage within the context of public universities.

Keywords

Digital memory, digital institutional repository, archive governance, infrastructural sustainability, open-source

Introduction: artistic heritage in the technological era

The digital transformation of academic institutions over the past two decades has changed the way knowledge is produced, preserved, and disseminated. University archives are no longer merely physical storage spaces; they are becoming technological infrastructures that mediate between institutional memory and public access. This process is not simply technical, but fundamentally institutional.

Universities with an artistic profile face a dual challenge. They produce theoretical knowledge in traditional academic formats — articles, dissertations, critical studies — while at the same time generating creative outputs of an ephemeral nature: musical performances, theatrical productions, visual installations, compositions, audio recordings, and film materials. These forms constitute cultural heritage. Without a structured archival infrastructure, they remain fragmented and vulnerable.

In contexts with limited financial resources and prolonged institutional transitions, this gap deepens. Investments in technology are often perceived as administrative modernization rather than a strategic necessity. In this sense, the absence of digital archiving is not only an organizational void, but a risk to the loss of academic and cultural memory.

Digital archiving represents a cultural and academic responsibility, guaranteeing the continuity of institutional memory and the public transparency of scientific and artistic output.

Open-source solutions for managing libraries and digital institutional repositories create real opportunities to build sustainable infrastructures without dependence on costly commercial models, strengthening institutional control over data and access policies.

This paper analyzes the transformation of a traditional physical archive into an organized structure of digital memory within a public university with an artistic profile. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the institutional and cultural dimensions of archival transformation, using the case study as a basis for articulating a transferable model for public universities.

From physical deposit to accessible memory

Traditional university archives have historically been built upon the logic of physical deposit. Scientific works, dissertations, musical scores, and other materials are preserved in dedicated spaces, organized according to library criteria and primarily accessible within the premises of the institution. This model has guaranteed for decades the preservation of academic documentation materials, but at the same time has limited the circulation of knowledge within the physical boundaries of the library.

In institutions with an artistic profile, physical limitation becomes even more problematic. Audio materials, performance recordings, film materials, and visual archives cannot be treated merely as objects of storage. They require structures that allow reproduction, consultation, and controlled dissemination. Physical deposit ensures preservation, but not necessarily access.

The transition from physical deposit to accessible memory constitutes a paradigm shift: the digital archive is not an electronic copy of physical documents, but a structured system that integrates cataloguing, metadata, and access policies, making the material usable and not merely preserved.

In this sense, academic transparency acquires a practical dimension. Scientific and creative works become consultable by other researchers, students, and the wider community. This increases the quality of academic discourse and creates conditions for verifiability and referentiality.

The ethics of open access is linked to the public role of the university[1]: as an institution funded by public resources, it bears the responsibility that scientific and artistic production be consultable and verifiable.
The transition toward digital archiving requires clear decision-making, unified standards, and well-defined policies. Without these, the archive risks becoming a temporary project.
The digital institutional repository must be treated as an integral part of academic infrastructure, considering artistic heritage as institutional capital and not merely administrative documentation.

Case study: Building a digital infrastructure in a public university of arts

The transition from the theoretical conceptualization of digital archiving to its practical construction requires more than technical implementation; it requires the articulation of a vision and its institutionalization. The case study presented here analyzes the progressive construction of a digital memory infrastructure within a public university with an artistic profile, as a process conceived and implemented internally, without a dedicated external funding line.
The approach developed in this case was supported by a conceptual reflection carried out in parallel with practical implementation, treating archiving not merely as a technical solution, but as a long-term institutional project.

Institutional context and personal impetus

The case study of the University of Arts in Tirana analyzes the progressive construction of a digital memory infrastructure within a public university with an artistic profile, which possessed considerable physical collections but lacked a structured and accessible digital institutional repository.
The conceptual approach to the digital institutional repository was developed as a result of the intersection between expertise in information systems and a library-oriented vision for modernization and standardization. These two dynamics — technological and institutional — were articulated in a joint initiative that treated archiving as a long-term institutional project.
The project was not financed through a dedicated budget line and was not part of an external program. It was developed as a professional and institutional investment, with the aim of consolidating academic memory in a sustainable manner.

Selection of technological tools

Instead of adopting high-cost commercial platforms, internationally recognized open-source solutions were selected for library management and digital institutional repository. For the electronic cataloguing of the physical collection, a system was implemented, while for the preservation and serving of digital materials a digital institutional repository was built.
The selection of these systems was based on several principles:

- Standardization according to international practices;
- Institutional control over data;
- Long-term scalability;
- Financial sustainability.

1 Peter Suber, Open Access (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

In practice, cataloguing was supported by an ILS (Koha), while digital institutional repository was implemented through a repository platform (DSpace), both oriented toward metadata standards and interoperability.

Implementation process

Implementation included installation, configuration, customization according to institutional needs, and staff training for system use. This process was carried out within the existing institutional structure and progressively, without external funding and without the creation of a parallel time-limited project.
Beyond the technical aspect, internal policies were drafted for the deposit of academic works and for the organization of digital collections. Continuous collaboration between the information technology sector and the library leadership was a determining element for the sustainable functioning of the system.
A fundamental characteristic of this case is that the digital infrastructure was built as a result of personal and institutional engagement, not as a response to external funding. It was conceived as an investment in the long-term memory of the institution.

Maintenance and Long-Term Evolution

Since its initial implementation, the system has undergone various phases of updating and optimization. Continuous maintenance, ensuring data integrity and adaptation to new academic requirements have been integral parts of the process.
The long-term dimension distinguishes this case from short-cycle technological interventions. The digital infrastructure was internalized as part of regular institutional functioning.

Institutional impact

The implementation of the digital infrastructure directly influenced the systematic structuring of the academic collection, increased accessibility of scientific and creative works, and strengthened institutional transparency. The system was integrated into accreditation, reporting, and evaluation processes, linking archiving to academic performance.
The analyzed case represents not merely technical implementation, but a consolidated articulation of an institutional vision on the management of academic memory.
Continuous operation for more than a decade has ensured stability and adaptability over time. In this context of consolidated functioning, the inclusion of the project among the three best initiatives in the category “ICT Public Service of the Year” in 2015 constitutes external institutional validation of the sustainability of the implemented model.

Institutional implications and structural dimension

The digital archive represents a structural mechanism for the institutionalization of academic memory. It formalizes the relationship between scientific production, institutional preservation, and public access. The central question is: which structural factors made the model functional and sustainable under limited infrastructural and financial conditions?

Structural integration and progressive development

The determining factor of sustainability was the integration of professional vision within the existing organizational structure. The initiative did not remain at the individual level, but was internalized into daily administrative and academic functions, becoming a component of institutional practice. This aligns with theoretical approaches on the institutionalization of technology in organizations[2].
Development was carried out progressively and in accordance with the real capacities of the institution, ensuring operational stability and long-term adaptability. Sustainability did not derive from the intensity of the initial investment, but from the gradual consolidation of procedures and clearly defined responsibilities.

Sustainable technological choices

The adoption of open-source solutions constituted both a pragmatic and strategic choice. Beyond cost reduction, this enabled operational control over data, flexibility in configuration, and preservation of technical autonomy. The institution avoided dependency on closed licensing models and created a foundation for interoperability with international standards.

Collaboration between structures

Another key element was the sustained collaboration between the information technology sector and the library. This coordination ensured that the system was not only technically accurate, but also functional in relation to the real needs of users and the academic structure of the institution. The integration of technical competencies with professional knowledge of the library collection created a balance between technological architecture and academic content, strengthening the institutional dimension of the system.

Impact on transparency and institutional performance

The implementation of digital archiving directly influenced increased accessibility of works and the systematic structuring of the academic collection. This contributed to improving institutional transparency and supporting accreditation, evaluation, and academic reporting processes.
In this context, the digital archive was consolidated as a structural mechanism that formalizes the administration of knowledge produced within the university.

A transferable approach

The approach presented is transferable because it does not depend on exceptional financial conditions, but on structural integration, professional motivation, and sustainable technological choices. These factors are attainable in most public universities operating in similar contexts.

The archive as cultural infrastructure

2 W. Richard Scott, Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014).

Up to this point, digital archiving has been addressed as a technical, organizational, and institutional process. However, beyond the operational dimension, it represents a deeper transformation: the transition from the archive as a document repository to the archive as cultural infrastructure.

Conceptualizing the archive as cultural infrastructure implies that it is not treated as a peripheral function, but as a central component of the university mission. In this sense, digital infrastructure becomes a means for articulating academic identity and ensuring its continuity over time.

This dimension is particularly significant in contexts where institutional history has been interrupted by political, administrative, or structural transitions. The digital archive creates structural stability of institutional memory that transcends cyclical changes in leadership or development policies.

Moreover, the archive as cultural infrastructure strengthens the relationship between the university and the public. By making scientific and artistic production accessible, the institution affirms its role as an active contributor to the cultural and academic life of society.

Within this framework, technology functions as an instrument for the systematic structuring of institutional memory. The value of the digital archive is not measured solely by the number of deposited documents, but by its ability to structure, make searchable, and sustainably preserve academic and creative production[34].

An archive conceptualized in this way creates conditions for interdisciplinary interaction, comparative studies, and critical return to its own institutional history. It becomes a platform for new research and not merely a repository of the past.

In the context of developments in artificial intelligence, a structured archive creates a foundation for advanced research and semantic analysis. However, these capacities depend on metadata standardization and systematic organization of content, making prior institutionalization a prerequisite for sustainable technological integration.

The digital archive as cultural infrastructure represents a strategic choice for public universities, placing technology in the service of the academic mission and institutional continuity.

Proposal for a transferable model

Based on the above analysis, a structured model can be articulated for the construction of digital archives in public universities with an artistic profile or with limited financial resources. The model articulated here derives from a consolidated practice in the library of a public university of arts and represents a mode of institutionalizing technology in the service of cultural memory. This model is not presented as a rigid formula, but as a guiding framework grounded in practical experience.

3 Christine L. Borgman, Scholarship in the Digital Age: Information, Infrastructure, and the Internet (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

4 Abby Smith, Preservation in the Digital Age (Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2007).

Fundamental principles

The model is based on four core principles:

1. **Integration within the existing structure** – Digital archiving must be built upon current organizational capacities and not as a parallel project detached from daily functions.
2. **Gradual and controlled development** – Implementation should be carried out in manageable phases, ensuring operational stability at every step.
3. **Sustainable technological choices** – Preference for open-source solutions or systems that ensure flexibility, standardization, and control over data.
4. **Shared responsibility among structures** – Structured collaboration between the information technology sector and the library or relevant academic units.

Implementation steps

Operationally, the model includes analysis of the existing situation, definition of metadata standards, installation of the technological platform, drafting of internal policies, staff training, and periodic monitoring.
The determining factors are primarily structural and organizational, not financial.

Minimum infrastructural conditions

For the basic functioning of the model, the following are required:

- Stable server infrastructure or reliable hosting;
- Regular backup and security mechanisms;
- Standardization of deposit procedures;
- A designated technical lead and a designated library lead.

These conditions are attainable in most public universities, provided that coordination and planning exist.

The dimension of university policymaking

Beyond the technical aspect, the model requires minimal formalization through internal acts: guidelines for the deposit of works, definition of roles and responsibilities, and integration into academic evaluation processes.
Formalization should not be excessive, but sufficient to guarantee sustainability and continuity beyond administrative changes.
In conclusion, the proposed model demonstrates that building a sustainable digital archive is feasible even in contexts of limited financial resources. The decisive element is not the initial budget, but the coherence between professional vision, organizational structure, and technological choices.

Theoretical anchoring

Digital archiving and "digital humanities"

The transformation of physical archives into accessible digital structures is directly connected to developments in the field of "Digital Humanities." As Drucker argues in her work *Digital Humanities* [5], digital infrastructure is not merely a technical tool, but a new way of organizing and interpreting knowledge. In this sense, the digital archive is not simply a repository of documents, but a structured space for interaction and analysis.
Within this theoretical framework, the case of the University of Arts confirms that digital infrastructure functions not only as a technical tool, but as a structure that reformulates the way artistic knowledge is organized, interpreted, and circulated within the institution.

Digital institutional repositories and "open access"

The literature on Digital Institutional Repositories emphasizes the importance of digital institutional repository as a mechanism for transparency and open access. According to Clifford A. Lynch, in his article *Institutional Repositories: Essential Infrastructure for Scholarship in the Digital Age* [6], digital institutional repositories represent essential infrastructure for contemporary academic communication.
This perspective is reinforced by the analysis of Crow[7], who argues that institutional repositories are strategic mechanisms for increasing the visibility and preservation of academic production.
The analysis presented here reinforces this perspective, demonstrating that digital institutional repository in the context of Albanian public universities constitutes a structural element of academic communication and institutional transparency.

Cultural memory and the institutional dimension

The concept of the archive as cultural infrastructure can be linked to the theory of cultural memory developed by Jan Assmann. In *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization* [8], Assmann argues that institutions play a key role in stabilizing and transmitting collective memory through formalized structures.
Along the same line, Erll [9] argues that cultural memory is structured through media formats and institutional mechanisms that stabilize and transmit it over time.
In this sense, the university digital archive can be considered a formalizing mechanism of creative memory in an institutional context, materializing the theory of cultural memory into organizational practice.

5 Johanna Drucker, Digital Humanities (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).
6 Clifford A. Lynch, "Institutional Repositories: Essential Infrastructure for Scholarship in the Digital Age," ARL Bimonthly Report 226 (2003).
7 Raym Crow, The Case for Institutional Repositories: A SPARC Position Paper (Washington, DC: SPARC, 2002).
8 Jan Assmann, Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
9 Astrid Erll, Memory in Culture (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Technology, organization, and sustainability

From the perspective of studies on organizations and technology, the integration of digital systems into daily practices is related to theories of the institutionalization of technology. Authors such as Wanda J. Orlikowski [10] have emphasized that technology acquires meaning and sustainability only when embedded in organizational routines.
The analyzed case confirms that technological sustainability is a function of organizational internalization, not of the platform itself, shifting attention from the platform toward the structure. In this sense, even in the era of artificial intelligence, technological sustainability remains conditioned by organizational institutionalization and not vice versa.

Conclusions

Digital archiving in higher artistic education represents an institutional restructuring of the management of academic and creative memory. The analyzed case demonstrates that sustainability derives from the integration of technology into the organizational structure and daily institutional practice, not merely from financial investment.
Models based on open-source architecture, international standardization, and structured collaboration among internal units create long-term stability and adaptive capacity. The discussion consequently shifts from the choice of platform to its institutionalization.
The digital archive does not represent peripheral administrative modernization, but essential infrastructure for university functioning in the digital era. It formalizes the relationship between knowledge production, institutional preservation, and public access, placing technology in service of the academic mission.
The institutionalization of digital memory is not an optional matter of modernization, but a condition for consolidating academic autonomy and the public responsibility of universities in the digital age.

Acknowledgments

The author expresses gratitude for the professional collaboration with Mrs. Miranda Bakiasi, Director of the Scientific Library of the University of Arts, for her institutional engagement in the implementation and consolidation of the digital systems addressed in this study. He also thanks Prof. Petrit Malaj, Rector of the University of Arts during the period of the project's initial implementation, for his institutional support, as well as Prof. Dr. Petraq Papajorgji, in his capacity as scientific supervisor of the Master's thesis defense, for academic guidance during the conceptual phase of the project.

10 Wanda J. Orlikowski, "Using Technology and Constituting Structures: A Practice Lens for Studying Technology in Organizations," Organization Science 11, no. 4 (2000): 404–428.

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From archive to research infrastructure: Integrating the RTSH audiovisual archive at the University of Arts (Tirana)

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of limited research access to the audiovisual archive of Albanian Radio Television (RTSH), which constitutes the primary source for documenting Albanian music throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Although this archive contains a substantial body of audio and audiovisual recordings, the lack of a structured research infrastructure and systematic access mechanisms limits its use in musicological and artistic studies. This mismatch between the existence of the archive and its accessibility represents a fundamental obstacle to the development of Albanian musicology. Drawing on literature in archival theory, ethnomusicology, and audiovisual heritage preservation, the paper highlights the role of recording as a primary source for musical analysis—a role that, in the Albanian context, remains constrained due to the lack of structured access. Within this framework, the study proposes a model of institutional collaboration between RTSH and the University of Arts (UART), aimed at integrating the archive into a functional research infrastructure. This process would enable the development of a controlled access system, the digitization and cataloguing of materials according to international standards, and their use for scholarly research without infringing copyright. In conclusion, the audiovisual archive is positioned as a key component of cultural sovereignty, emphasizing the need for national policies that link heritage preservation with the production of scientific knowledge.

Keywords

Radio televizioni Shqiptar, universiteti i arteve, Albanian music, musicology, digital preservation

Introduction

The audiovisual archive of Albanian Radio Television (RTSH) constitutes the most comprehensive repository of Albanian musical production from the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries[1]. However, despite its significance, it is not adapted for systematic scholarly research due to the lack of a structured research infrastructure and standardized access mechanisms.
In recent years, the University of Arts in Tirana (UART) has developed a doctoral program in musicology focused on the study of Albanian music. This program has generated an increasing demand for primary research materials. Researchers face a structural gap between the existence of the RTSH audiovisual archive and its effective use in academic research.

Literature review

Collective memory is constructed and organized through institutions that preserve and structure documents of the past, thereby shaping the ways in which a society articulates and transmits its history. In this sense, the archive is not merely a repository of materials, but a mechanism that determines which elements become part of historical knowledge, directly influencing its formation[2].
In the field of music, the development of recording technology has transformed the very nature of the object of study, shifting the focus from the score to documented performance[3]. As a result, recordings have been established as primary sources for musical analysis, as they document performance practice beyond the limits of musical notation[4]. This is particularly evident in ethnomusicology, where, in the absence of scores, recordings often constitute the sole source for scholarly analysis[5]. This phenomenon is also observable in the Albanian context, where traditional repertoire, pop music, and, in many cases, film music have been preserved primarily in the form of audio or audiovisual recordings[6]. Consequently, audiovisual archives represent a crucial—and often the only—source for the study of musical history and practice.
However, the preservation of these historical materials faces serious technical challenges, particularly due to the degradation of magnetic media, which threatens the loss of these recordings[7]. This makes digitization an urgent process[8].

1 Santana Xheladini Myftaraj, "Music on Radio Tirana: A Cultural Heritage," in ICAE Conference Proceedings (Tirana, 2025), 714–726, https://uart.edu.al/media/Book-of-Proceedings-2025-final.pdf.
2 Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 127–131.
3 Mark Katz, Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1–22.
4 Nicholas Cook, Beyond the Score: Music as Performance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 45–60.
5 Bruno Nettl, The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).
6 Myftaraj, "Music on Radio Tirana," 714–726.
7 Richard L. Hess, "Tape Degradation Factors and Challenges in Predicting Tape Life," ARSC Journal 39, no. 2 (2008), https://www.richardhess.com/tape/history/HESS_Tape_Degradation_ARSC_Journal_39-2.pdf.
8 Mike Casey et al., Sound Directions: Best Practices for Audio Preservation (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2011), 3–12, https://hdl.handle.net/2022/27339.

At the same time, the research use of audio materials depends not only on their physical preservation, but also on the existence of structured metadata systems, which enable the search, identification, and advanced analysis of materials[9]. At the international level, the preservation of audiovisual heritage is considered a strategic priority that requires coordinated policies and institutional collaboration[10].

Existing models demonstrate that audio archives can be organized at a national scale and integrated into scientific research through dedicated programs and specialized infrastructures[11]. In this regard, the integration of music archives into university archival structures creates favorable conditions for the development of musicological and historiographical research, transforming archives from passive repositories into active laboratories of knowledge production[12]. In parallel, the development of digital platforms has demonstrated their potential for long-term preservation and expanded access to archival materials, opening new perspectives for their use in scientific research and education[13].

Methodology

This study is grounded in an interdisciplinary approach that combines theoretical analysis with institutional analysis and the empirical practices of musicological research. At the theoretical level, the article draws on literature concerning archival theory, the role of collective memory, and the function of recording as a primary source for musical analysis, establishing a conceptual framework for interpreting the audiovisual archive as a structure of knowledge production. At the methodological level, the analysis is based on the principles of empirical approaches to the study of audio materials, including critical listening, the identification of musical parameters, and the comparison of interpretative variants. This approach reflects contemporary practices in ethnomusicology and performance analysis, where the recording is considered the central object of study.

In parallel, the study includes an institutional analysis of the roles of RTSH and UART in relation to the preservation and use of musical heritage, as well as a comparative analysis with international models of audiovisual archive management. This methodology aims to identify existing limitations and to propose a functional model for integrating the archive into a sustainable research infrastructure.

9 Federico Bressan, "Analytical Description of a Data Sheet for Audio Preservation," *Journal of the Audio Engineering Society 66,* no. 3 (2018): 132–145.

10 UNESCO, *Recommendation concerning the Preservation of, and Access to, Documentary Heritage Including in Digital Form* (Paris, 2015), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244675.page=5; International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), *Guidelines for Audiovisual and Multimedia Materials*, 2004, https://www.ifla.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/assets/hq/publications/professional-report/80.pdf.

11 "The National Recording Preservation Plan," Library of Congress, accessed January 13, 2026, https://www.clir.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/pub156.pdf; "Sound and Vision," British Library, accessed February 9, 2026, https://bl.libguides.com/reference-services/sound-and-vision.

12 "Hogan Archive of New Orleans Music and New Orleans Jazz," Tulane University Libraries, accessed January 7, 2026, https://library.tulane.edu/places/Tulane-University-Special-Collections/hogan-archive-of-new-orleans-music-and-new-orleans-jazz.

13 "Audio Archive," Internet Archive, accessed January 8, 2026, https://archive.org/details/audio.

The RTSH Archive as a National Repository of Albanian Music and Its Limitations for Systematic research use

Initially Radio Tirana, and later the Albanian Radio Television (RTSH), have played a decisive role in documenting Albanian musical creativity throughout the twentieth century. In the absence of a developed recording industry, this institution undertook the systematic recording of the national repertoire. The RTSH archive includes opera and operatic excerpts, symphonic and orchestral repertoire, film music, choral works, light music, and folklore, both in authentic and arranged forms[14].

In the Albanian context, these recordings constitute primary documents of musical history. In many cases, they represent the only complete version of a work, as scores may be unpublished or lost. The recording thus remains the concrete evidence of both the work's existence and its interpretative realization.

The RTSH archive functions *de facto* as a national repository of Albanian music; however, it has not been adapted for systematic research use. According to its statute, RTSH prioritizes content production and broadcasting rather than the development of research infrastructure[15]. As a result, a gap has emerged between the existence of the audiovisual corpus and its scholarly use.

As evidenced in the literature, recordings constitute primary sources for musical analysis within a performance-based approach, as they document not only compositional structure but also its concrete interpretative realization over time. According to Nicholas Cook, such materials provide empirical data on performance parameters, enabling the analysis of instrumental practice, the comparison of interpretative variants, and the identification of stylistic and acoustic features[16].

In ethnomusicology, recordings often constitute the sole source of analysis, particularly in the absence of scores or when repertoire is transmitted aurally[17]. In such cases, the object of study is the documented performance itself, and analysis relies on critical listening, structural segmentation, parameter identification, and transcription. As Mark Katz emphasizes, recording technology has shifted the focus of study toward performance[18].

Albanian folk repertoire and popular music are preserved primarily in audio and audiovisual recording formats, while scores are often absent, incomplete, or unpublished. For this reason, recordings do not function merely as auxiliary sources, but as primary documents for musicological analysis. Consequently, researchers of Albanian music face the following challenges:

- Limited physical and procedural access to the archive;
- Lack of detailed musicological cataloguing;
- Incomplete digitization of magnetic tapes;
- Absence of an advanced search system (musicological metadata by composer, form, orchestration, historical context);
- Lack of infrastructure within the archive for empirical music analysis, acoustic analysis, and comparative study[19].

14 Myftaraj, "Music on Radio Tirana," 714–726.

15 "Statuti i Radio Televizionit Shqiptar (RTSH)," Media Ownership Monitor, accessed January 8, 2026, https://albania.mom-gmr.org/uploads/tx_lfrogmom/documents/125-1206_import.pdf.

16 Cook, Beyond the Score.

17 Nettl, The Study of Ethnomusicology, 82–95.

18 Katz, Capturing Sound, 1–22.

19 These challenges have been identified through the author's musicological research within the RTSH archive.

Research on musical heritage as a national interest

In international discourse on cultural heritage, audiovisual archives are considered an integral part of national identity. UNESCO emphasizes that audiovisual heritage represents a form of collective memory and an important resource for understanding the cultural development of societies[20]. For this reason, international organizations recommend the development of clear national policies for the preservation, digitization, and structured access to such materials.
In this sense, the RTSH audiovisual archive is not merely a technical collection of recordings, but constitutes an essential component of Albanian cultural heritage. It documents the development of Albanian music during a historical period in which radio and television recording were the primary means of fixing musical works, and in which the technical infrastructure of RTSH served as the principal medium for the production of these historical recordings.
The preservation and administration of this archive are directly linked to what contemporary literature defines as cultural sovereignty—that is, the capacity of a state to preserve, manage, and ensure the continuity of its cultural heritage[21]. In the field of archives, cultural sovereignty implies not only the physical possession of materials, but also the establishment of institutional structures that guarantee long-term preservation, standards-based cataloguing, and controlled access for scholarly research.
The statute of the University of Arts (UART) defines artistic and scientific research as one of its fundamental missions. [22] The third-cycle program, the Doctorate in Musicology, focuses on the study of Albanian music[23]. In this context, the study of musical heritage is not merely an academic activity, but an investment in national culture and in the production of knowledge that structures it.

The research capacity of UART and the need for archival integration

Between 2022 and 2025, thirty doctoral students have been enrolled in the Doctorate in Musicology program at the University of Arts (UART), conducting advanced research on Albanian music[24]. In fulfilling its research mission, the university has established cooperation agreements with national and international institutions aimed at creating an inter-institutional research network that includes studies on Albanian music[25].
Nevertheless, the university library—equipped with technical capacities for digital preservation, server management, and cataloguing, as well as specialized research support—remains the primary hub for doctoral research activity. Its bibliographic collections are organized according to academic standards, enabling fast and accurate retrieval through its web platform.

20 "World Day for Audiovisual Heritage," UNESCO, accessed February 8, 2026, https://www.unesco.org/en/days/audiovisual-heritage?utm_source.
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24 "Regjistri i Temave - Doktoratura FM," Universiteti i Arteve, accessed February 9, 2026, https://www.uart.edu.al/index.php?pg=faqe&id=1427.
25 "Marrëveshje," Universiteti i Arteve, accessed February 9, 2026, https://www.uart.edu.al/index.php?pg=-faqe&id=1089&niveli=367.

The phonotheque, an integral part of the UART library, contains audio recordings, reference materials, musicological collections, and documentation related to the history of music. It is integrated with existing cataloguing and digital archiving systems and supports users in accessing audio materials for study, comparative reference, and theoretical analysis. The laboratories of electroacoustics, composition, and sound are equipped with workstation-class computers and software for recording, notation, musical analysis, processing, and digital consultation[26]. However, the audio holdings of this structure related to Albanian music remain limited and include only a small portion of existing recordings. As a result, the library's existing capacities remain to a considerable extent underutilized, while the principal audiovisual archive of national music remains concentrated within RTSH.

International models demonstrate that the integration of archives into university structures is a key condition for the development of research. Cases such as the Hogan Jazz Archive illustrate that audiovisual archives function effectively as active research infrastructures when embedded within academic systems[27]. In the absence of such a model, the archive of Albanian music remains isolated from its scientific use. Other international archival institutions likewise demonstrate that audio archives can become integral components of national strategies for culture and scientific research[28]. These models are based on three essential elements: preservation according to technical standards, structured cataloguing with advanced metadata, and controlled access for researchers.

The legal framework for the management of audiovisual archives

The management of audiovisual archives containing musical works involves a significant legal dimension related to copyright. Musical recordings preserved in the RTSH archive are not only historical documents of cultural heritage, but also legal objects encompassing multiple categories of intellectual property rights. A musical recording includes the copyright of the musical work, the rights of the performers who realize the performance, and the rights of the phonogram producer or the institution that produced the recording—in this case, RTSH. For this reason, any institutional policy governing the archive must balance the preservation of cultural heritage with compliance with the legal framework regulating the use of recorded materials.

International practices demonstrate that this balance can be achieved through a clear distinction between research use and the commercial exploitation of materials. Existing models show that audiovisual archives can provide controlled access for researchers and academic institutions, while the economic rights of authors and producers remain protected[29]. Within such systems, materials may be used for scholarly analysis, historical research, or educational purposes without infringing copyright.

In the Albanian context, a similar model could be implemented through an institutional agreement between RTSH and UART, providing controlled access to digital copies while ensuring full respect for copyright. Such an approach would render the archive functional for academic

26 "Biblioteka e Universitetit te Arteve," Universiteti i Arteve, accessed February 9, 2026, https://www.uart.edu.al/index.php?pg=faqe&id=88&niveli=221.

27 "Hogan Archive of New Orleans Music and New Orleans Jazz,"

28 "The National Recording Preservation Plan," Library of Congress; "Sound and Vision," British Library.

29 "Conditions générales d'utilisation," Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (INA), accessed February 13, 2026, https://www.ina.fr/conditions-generales-d-utilisation; "Terms and conditions," British Library, accessed February 13, 2026 https://www.bl.uk/terms; "Legal," Library of Congress, accessed February 13, 2026, https://www.loc.gov/legal/.

research without compromising its legal integrity.

Conclusions and recommendations

The integration of the RTSH audiovisual archive into the UART Library can be considered a strategic investment in the development of scientific research and the preservation of Albanian musical heritage. A useful analogy can be drawn from other academic fields, such as the collaboration between universities and university hospitals in medicine, where healthcare institutions serve as practical laboratories for research and education. Similarly, the RTSH archive can function as a laboratory for musicological and artistic studies at UART, providing primary sources for the analysis of musical works and performance practices.
Audiovisual recordings of Albanian musical creativity constitute part of the cultural memory upon which music historiography and its scholarly study are built. If these materials remain fragmented, uncatalogued, or inaccessible to researchers, research on Albanian music risks remaining partial, and national music history risks being constructed on an incomplete documentary basis.
From a broader perspective, the development of the UART Library's capacities could gradually extend beyond musical recordings to include audiovisual materials related to other artistic fields, such as film, drama (acting and directing), television programs, and documentaries on the arts. Such integration would transform the library into an advanced research center for artistic and cultural studies in Albania. The realization of this perspective requires adherence to international standards for the digital preservation of audiovisual materials, as well as the development of cataloguing systems based on structured metadata[30].
In conclusion, this paper recommends:

- the establishment of an institutional agreement between RTSH and UART for the transfer of digital copies of recordings for research use;
- the creation of a controlled access system for researchers, in compliance with copyright and performers' rights;
- the development of a shared infrastructure for the digitization and cataloguing of materials according to international standards;
- the strengthening of the technological capacities of the UART Library for the preservation and management of audiovisual archives;
- the gradual integration of archives from other artistic fields into the UART Library.

The implementation of these recommendations would enable the integration of the RTSH archive into a national research infrastructure for the study of Albanian audiovisual heritage, based at the UART Library. Institutional collaboration between RTSH and UART should not be viewed merely as a formal transfer of documents, but as a strategic priority for the preservation of cultural heritage. In this way, the archive of Albanian music can be transformed into a scientific laboratory, directly supporting doctoral research and the development of Albanian musicology at an international level.

30 Bressan, "Analytical Description of a Data Sheet," 132–145.

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Beyond the screen: Community film screenings as psychosocial infrastructure for youth mental health

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Abstract

This research analyses the effectiveness of community film screenings, followed by moderated discussions ("talkbacks"), as accessible psychosocial resources for adolescents with mental health issues. The paper indicates that global evidence shows approximately one in seven adolescents suffers from a mental health disorder, yet frequently encounters stigma, bullying, and societal silence regarding their issues. Consequently, many youths remain distanced from formal clinical services and instead depend on everyday community environments for support and meaning-making. It posits that meticulously organized arts-based events can facilitate communal engagement through controlled civic dialogues on sensitive topics such as depression, anxiety, shame, and bullying. The research utilizes an integrative literature-based desk design, synthesizing scholarship on teenage mental health and protective factors, narrative identity and storytelling, participatory arts and cultural democracy, as well as dialogic and trauma-informed facilitation in community arts. The paper delineates four interconnected mechanisms by which film-based talkbacks may enhance adolescent wellbeing in non-clinical environments: collective viewing as a communal emotional experience; storytelling as a means of safe distance that facilitates projection and diminishes defensiveness; moderated talkbacks as "micro-publics" that redistribute voice and cultivate empathy; and experiences of belonging and self-expression as protective outcomes. The discussion also addresses ethical hazards, such as re-traumatization, inadequate moderation, and tokenistic engagement. It emphasizes the significance of trauma-informed facilitation, voluntary engagement, and explicit referral mechanisms when an individual is experiencing distress. The study concludes by discussing the roles of schools, youth centers, cultural institutions, and municipal cultural policies, while also identifying key areas for future research on arts-based civic dialogue and adolescent mental health.

Keywords

Youth mental health, community arts, film screenings, talkbacks, belonging

Introduction

Context: youth mental health and public silence

Adolescence is a crucial and transforming stage of life, marked by substantial biological and psychological changes as individuals strive to integrate their self-representations into a cohesive identity (Esposito and Stanghellini 2026). This time is inherently unstable, frequently representing a crucial stage for the onset of psychological suffering and complex mental health illnesses, ranging from mood disorders to psychosis (Esposito and Stanghellini 2026; World Health Organization 2025). Approximately 14.3% of adolescents aged 10 to 19 globally experience a mental health disorder. This demographic constitutes 15% of the overall global burden of disease and disability for this age cohort (World Health Organization 2025). Despite the alarming nature of these statistics, there frequently exists a "public silence" on teenage mental health. This results from widespread stigma, discrimination, and profound humiliation that prevent adolescents from seeking necessary assistance (World Health Organization 2025; Esposito and Stanghellini 2026). The silence is exacerbated by bullying, affecting almost 32% of in-school adolescents globally (Man, Liu, and Xue 2022). Marginalized groups such as transgender youth experience 'enacted stigma'—harassment, exclusion, and violence—correlating with significantly increased rates of depression and suicide attempts (Veale et al. 2017).

The consequences of disregarding these conditions endure throughout adulthood, negatively impacting both physical and mental health while limiting prospects for a satisfying existence (World Health Organization 2025).

Traditional clinical infrastructures often remain inaccessible, medicalized, or culturally distant from the social realities of youth (Rose-Clarke et al. 2019). Adolescents frequently regard professional services as a 'last resort' linked to additional stigmatization (Eisenstadt et al. 2025). Consequently, there is an urgent need for 'low-threshold' psychosocial infrastructures—community-integrated environments offering safer, less stigmatized spaces for collective discourse and self-expression (Vercillo 2026).

Art as more than aesthetic practice

Participatory arts are increasingly recognized as 'social infrastructure' fostering community mobilization rather than serving merely aesthetic functions (Hart 1992; Carrillos et al. 2024). Community art events provide accessible, non-clinical platforms for adolescents to address identity and mental health issues (Vercillo 2026). These events function as 'civic spaces' or 'micro-publics' enabling structured dialogue, moving young people from consultation to co-authorship (Participedia 2015; Carrillos et al. 2024). Collective witnessing transforms individual stigma into shared social realities, forming protective networks that lessen isolation (Vercillo 2026). From this perspective, the artistic event transcends mere aesthetic presentation; it serves as a systematic instrument for cultivating "political literacy" and reinforcing the social cohesion of the adolescent community (Participedia 2015; Carrillos et al. 2024).

Research Problem and Question

The central inquiry of this paper asks:

How do moderated post-screening discussions ('talkbacks') function as structured civic dialogue tools that strengthen adolescents' sense of belonging and self-expression when addressing sensitive topics such as mental health, bullying, and shame?

To address this question, the paper utilizes a literature-based desk research methodology, synthesizing findings from developmental psychology, participatory arts, and mental health studies. Section 2 reviews relevant literature; Section 3 outlines the methodology; Section 4 presents four mechanisms of change; Section 5 concludes with practical recommendations and future research priorities.

Literature review

Youth mental health and protective factors

Adolescence is a pivotal developmental phase for fostering social behaviors and psychological resilience, wherein the need for "belonging"—defined as the extent to which a student perceives personal acceptance, respect, and support from their surroundings—emerges as a fundamental psychological necessity (World Health Organization 2025; Allen 2024). A robust sense of belonging within the educational environment is a crucial protective factor. Longitudinal studies indicate that adolescents who experience a sense of belonging within their school community at age 15 exhibit significantly reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and stress in their late twenties (Allen 2024). When this fundamental need remains unmet, adolescents often experience social isolation, a situation exacerbated by the pervasive stigma and prejudice associated with mental health issues (World Health Organization 2025). External stressors such as bullying and 'enacted stigma' intensify isolation (Man, Liu, and Xue 2022; Veale et al. 2017). Marginalized populations, especially transgender youth, show positive correlation between discrimination and severe mental health crises (Veale et al. 2017). Stigma acts as an additional barrier preventing help-seeking (World Health Organisation 2025). The notion of protective factors elucidates how certain environmental elements can mitigate these dangers. Resilience is not inherent but developed through connectedness to familial, educational, and peer networks (Veale et al. 2017; Allen 2024). This underscores the need for trustworthy social infrastructures prioritizing adolescent autonomy and safety (Eisenstadt et al. 2025).

Narrative identity and storytelling

"Dan McAdams' narrative psychology posits that identity is constructed through an internal life story integrating past, present, and future. For adolescents, creating 'narrative identity' is crucial as they integrate self-representations into unified temporal synthesis through socially mediated peer scaffolding (Esposito and Stanghellini 2026).
Narrative therapy uses 'externalizing the problem' to mitigate shame: by distinguishing the individual from the problem ('the anxiety' rather than character deficiency), adolescents restore agency and perceive themselves as capable of change (Psychology Town 2024).
Creative expression via storytelling enables emotional regulation through 'aesthetic distance,' allowing examination of challenging themes via fictional perspectives (Esposito and Stanghellini 2026). This safe distance reduces defensiveness and facilitates discussion of sensitive subjects without direct involvement."

Participatory arts and community engagement

Participatory art theory distinguishes itself from traditional "fine art" by prioritizing the collective process of creation over the final aesthetic object, emphasizing shared ownership and decision-making among participants (Participedia 2015; Carrillos et al. 2024). In this framework, art is positioned as a "bottom-up" social infrastructure that bypasses elitist political language to foster dialogue and community mobilization (Participedia 2015; Carrillos et al. 2024). This shift aligns with the principles of "cultural democracy," which advocates for the right of all citizens—

particularly those from marginalized backgrounds—to be active co-authors of their own cultural narratives rather than mere spectators (Hart 1992; Participedia 2015).
Within this civic context, community art events function as "micro-publics" or safe arenas where participants can rehearse new relational dynamics (Hart 1992; Carrillos et al. 2024). By utilizing creative methods such as performance or storytelling, these spaces facilitate "epistemic justice" by validating the lived experiences of youth and challenging dominant social narratives that often silence marginalized perspectives (Carrillos et al. 2024; Ranasinha et al. 2025). The therapeutic potential of these engagements lies in "collective witnessing," where the presence of a community audience transforms individual trauma or stigma into a shared social reality (Ranasinha et al. 2025; Sakhi et al. 2022).
Meaningful engagement requires moving beyond 'tokenism'—where youth appear involved but have no real influence—toward genuine participation with shared decision-making (Hart 1992). When adolescents are empowered as co-creators, they develop political literacy and cooperative skills for engaged citizenship (Hart 1992; Participedia 2015). Participatory arts thus bridge individual expression and community health, providing low-threshold platforms for addressing sensitive issues like mental health (Vercillo 2026).

Dialogue, contact, and stigma reduction

Effective stigma reduction requires structured encounters aligning with the 'contact hypothesis': substantive, regulated interactions can dismantle preconceptions. In community settings, 'dialogic pedagogy' establishes safe spaces promoting adolescent self-expression without judgment, helping youth transition from public silence to self-advocacy.
Trauma-informed facilitation' is crucial for moderated discussions. Facilitators must recognize emotional distress indicators and establish clear boundaries to prevent harm, prioritizing participant autonomy through voluntary involvement and transparent power dynamics (Vercillo 2026; Harden, Thirumalai, and Emerson 2021). Well-moderated dialogue links artistic expression with clinical safety, ensuring community screenings function as protective psychological frameworks.

Methodology

Research design

This study employs qualitative desk research using an integrative literature review approach. This framework synthesizes diverse theoretical perspectives and empirical findings across developmental psychology, sociology, and participatory arts to construct a holistic conceptual model of how community-based creative interventions address social determinants of youth mental health (Rose-Clarke et al. 2019).

Data sources

Evidence was curated from peer-reviewed journal articles, seminal books, and institutional reports. Sources include global studies on bullying impacts (Man, Liu, and Xue 2022; Kim et al. 2022), systematic reviews of peer-facilitated interventions (Rose-Clarke et al. 2019), and scoping reviews on narrative identity development (Esposito and Stanghellini 2026). Institutional data and trauma-informed guidelines were sourced from WHO and arts-health research networks (World Health Organisation 2025; Vercillo 2026).

Inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria ensured relevance to adolescent development and community arts: (a) youth populations aged 10–24 (WHO 2025); (b) art-based interventions such as film, performance, storytelling; (c) community dialogue and moderated facilitation models (Hart 1992); and (d) insights into stigma reduction, belonging, and resilience frameworks (Veale et al. 2017; Eisenstadt et al. 2025).

Analytical approach

The analytical framework followed a process of thematic synthesis and conceptual mapping across disciplines (Bogdani and Coku 2026). This involved identifying and categorizing recurring mechanisms of change, such as "belonging," "empathy," "voice," and "normalization" within the existing literature (Bogdani and Coku 2026). Mapping these concepts allowed for an exploration of how specific artistic practices, like "collective witnessing" and "aesthetic distance," transform individual experiences into shared social realities (Ranasinha et al. 2025; Sakhi et al. 2022; Bogdani and Coku 2026).

Data for this study were collected through a desk research approach. Key databases and repositories were searched for peer-reviewed articles, theoretical frameworks, and empirical studies addressing the topics of youth mental health, narrative identity, participatory arts, and civic engagement. The selected literature was then subjected to a thematic analysis to extract common themes, patterns, and best practices.

No primary data collection was conducted due to the exploratory and theoretical scope of this study (Bogdani and Coku 2026). The study relies solely on the rigorous synthesis of established evidence to address the proposed research question (Bogdani and Coku 2026).

Results and discussion

Mechanism 1: Collective viewing as shared emotional experience

Literature suggests collective viewing generates 'shared affect'—a collective emotional state disrupting isolation characteristic of contemporary adolescent life (Ranasinha et al. 2025). Unlike solitary digital media consumption (Orben 2020), community screenings facilitate 'emotional synchronization' (Ranasinha et al. 2025). The presence of others creates collective witnessing, where individual emotional responses are validated by visible group reactions (Sakhi et al. 2022). This synchronization functions as low-threshold psychosocial intervention by reducing 'pluralistic ignorance,' wherein individuals erroneously believe their experiences of shame or anxiety are unique (World Health Organisation 2025; Ranasinha et al. 2025).

Mechanism 2: Storytelling as safe distance

A notable thematic revelation is the function of storytelling in providing "aesthetic distance" or "safe distance" (Sakhi et al. 2022; Ranasinha et al. 2025). By engaging with a fictional narrative, adolescents can project their internal conflicts onto characters and symbols, enabling the examination of delicate themes such as bullying or familial discord without the fear of direct personal exposure (Sakhi et al. 2022; Psychology Town 2024). This technique reduces psychological defensiveness, enabling a more objective consideration of the "externalized" issue (Psychology Town 2024; Esposito and Stanghellini 2026). The film functions as a metaphorical conduit, enabling discourse on difficult topics by providing a common lexicon that alleviates the immediate weight of individual trauma (Sakhi et al. 2022; Ranasinha et al. 2025).

Mechanism 3: Moderated talkbacks as micro-publics

The controlled "talkback" following a screening transforms the aesthetic event into a "micro-public," an organized civic arena for democratic discourse (Carrillos et al. 2024; Hart 1992). For optimal effectiveness, these talks must be conducted in a manner that ensures all participants have a "equal voice," particularly individuals from marginalized groups (Hart 1992; Participedia 2015). Talkbacks foster empathy development by shifting from a hierarchical educational model to a dialogic pedagogy, enabling participants to interact with diverse perspectives on a shared narrative (Carrillos et al. 2024; Hart 1992). This structured confrontation of perspectives within a framework of collective accountability facilitates the dismantling of the "public silence" surrounding mental health. It normalizes discussions about mental health, transforming them from solely clinical conversations into integral aspects of daily life (World Health Organization 2025; Hart 1992).

Mechanism 4: Belonging and voice as protective outcomes

"Several critical risks require attention. Without trauma-informed approaches, discussions on sensitive topics can trigger re-traumatization (Harden et al. 2021; Vercillo 2026). Facilitators must have clinical literacy to manage discussion 'hot spots' and provide clear referral pathways (Vercillo 2026). There is significant risk of 'tokenism,' where youth appear engaged but lack actual influence (Hart 1992). Genuine psychosocial infrastructure requires youth transition from consultation to co-authorship (Hart 1992; Participedia 2015). Support must be perceived as effective and non-judgmental; overly authoritative adult presence can inadvertently silence voices the event seeks to empower (Kim et al. 2022). A primary limitation is reliance on desk research without field data; practical efficacy is highly context-dependent and requires localized empirical validation (Rose-Clarke et al. 2019; Ranasinha et al. 2025)."
While the literature supports the potential of community screenings, several critical risks and ethical boundaries must be addressed to show "academic maturity" (Hart 1992; Harden, Thirumalai, and Emerson 2021).

- **Risks of re-traumatization and poor moderation:** Without a "trauma-informed" approach, discussions regarding sensitive topics like bullying or self-harm can inadvertently trigger re-traumatization (Harden, Thirumalai, and Emerson 2021; Vercillo 2026). Facilitators must have the clinical literacy to manage "hot spots" in the discussion and provide clear referral pathways to professional services (Vercillo 2026; Kim et al. 2022).
- **The trap of token participation:** Following Hart's (1992) "Ladder of Participation," there is a significant risk of "tokenism," where youth are included in these events for the appearance of engagement but have no actual influence over the themes or structure. Genuine psychosocial infrastructure requires that youth transition from "mere consultation" to "co-authorship" of the dialogue (Hart 1992; Participedia 2015).
- **Support effectiveness:** As noted by Kim et al. (2022), the mere presence of supportive adults is insufficient; support must be perceived as effective and non-judgmental by the adolescent. In the context of a talkback, an overly authoritative adult presence can inadvertently silence the very voices the event seeks to empower (Kim et al. 2022; Eisenstadt et al. 2025).
- **Limitations of literature-based inference:** A primary limitation of this study is the reliance on desk research without primary field data. While the theoretical synthesis is robust, the practical efficacy of moderated screenings is highly context-dependent (Orben 2020; Rose-Clarke et al. 2019). The "digital paradox"—where digital consumption can both foster and hinder connection—requires localized empirical validation to determine

how cultural specifics influence the "shared affect" of a screening (Orben 2020; Ranasinha et al. 2025).

Conclusions and recommendations and implications

Key conclusions

Moderated film talkbacks represent a promising intervention strategy at the intersection of art, civic engagement, and mental health. By fostering narrative identity, encouraging structured dialogue, and providing opportunities for constructive peer feedback, these sessions help adolescents combat stigma, bullying, and isolation. They not only enhance mental health outcomes but also promote a sense of belonging and self-worth among young people.

Key findings:

- **Narrative Engagement:** Moderated film talkbacks harness the power of storytelling to help adolescents reframe personal experiences, thus promoting mental resilience and self-identity 2.
- **Community cohesion:** The participatory approach encourages collective experiences that contribute to a stronger sense of community and belonging. This is evident in the way community-based screenings foster recognition and mutual support 2.
- **Stigma reduction:** Structured discussions and constructive feedback reduce the negative impacts of stigma and bullying by creating safe spaces for dialogue and self-expression 2.
- **Policy implications:** Integrating moderated talkbacks into school curricula and community programs can transform educational environments to be more community-oriented and supportive of mental health needs

Practical implications

The practical implications of these findings extend across various social and educational sectors:

- **Schools:** Integrating moderated screenings can address the fundamental psychological need for "belonging," serving as a long-term protective factor against depression and anxiety (Allen 2024).
- **Cultural institutions and Youth Centers:** These settings can move beyond "decoration" to foster genuine youth citizenship by allowing adolescents to co-author the themes and dialogues of creative projects (Hart 1992; Participedia 2015).
- **Municipal cultural policies:** Local governments should recognize participatory arts as a cost-effective, peer-led supplement to formal mental health services, particularly in low-resource settings (Rose-Clarke et al. 2019; World Health Organization 2025).

Recommendations for implementation

For community screenings to serve as safe psychosocial tools, the following implementation standards are recommended:

- **Trauma-Aware Facilitation:** Facilitators must receive specialized training to manage emotional "hot spots" and prevent the risk of re-traumatization during discussions (Harden, Thirumalai, and Emerson 2021; Vercillo 2026).
- **Clear Moderation Frameworks:** Discussions should be governed by frameworks that

ensure equal voice and prevent adult-led tokenism (Hart 1992; Participedia 2015).
- **Voluntary Participation:** Engagement must remain strictly voluntary to respect participant agency and psychological boundaries (Harden, Thirumalai, and Emerson 2021).
- **Clear Referral Pathways:** Organizers must establish immediate referral pathways to professional clinical services if acute distress is identified during an event (World Health Organization 2025; Kim et al. 2022).

Future research

As this study is based on a theoretical synthesis, future research must prioritize empirical longitudinal studies to track the impact of collective screenings on adolescent resilience over time (Allen 2024; Orben 2020). Comparative research across different socio-cultural contexts is necessary to identify how specific cultural norms influence the efficacy of "shared affect" and "collective witnessing" (Man, Liu, and Xue 2022; Kim et al. 2022; Ranasinha et al. 2025). Finally, mixed-method approaches—combining qualitative "voice" with quantitative psychological metrics—would offer a more robust understanding of the specific mechanisms that turn a creative event into a protective outcome (Rose-Clarke et al. 2019; Eisenstadt et al. 2025).

The present analysis underscores the importance of moderated film talkbacks as a multidimensional strategy for promoting mental health and belonging among adolescents. By combining the best practices of narrative engagement and participatory arts, moderated sessions can serve as a vital protective intervention in today's digital and fast-paced society.

Future research should focus on empirical evaluations of these interventions through randomized field studies and longitudinal assessments. Such studies will help to validate the observed benefits and further refine the model for broader implementation in educational and community health settings.

In summary, moderated film talkbacks uncover a latent potential in structured civic dialogue by interweaving narrative identity, community solidarity, and active engagement. As mental health challenges among adolescents continue to rise, particularly in the era of digital media saturation, interventions that promote dialogue and self-expression will play an indispensable role in fostering healthier, more inclusive communities.

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Musical interpretation as a research process in the technological era: An analytical and reflective approach to contemporary performance

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Abstract

Musical interpretation in the contemporary context can no longer be considered merely an act of artistic execution, but rather a complex research process that involves analysis, reflection, and interaction with the technological environment. This paper examines performance as a scholarly practice in which the performer constructs artistic meaning through the analysis of the score, the historical context, and the aesthetics of the work, while simultaneously integrating digital tools that influence both the creative process and the stage presentation. Employing a theoretical-analytical methodology grounded in contemporary musicological literature and critical performance studies, the study investigates how audio-visual recordings, music analysis software, and digital platforms have transformed the way artists prepare, evaluate, and communicate their performances. The paper analyzes the relationship between the performer, the score, and technology through a review of key theoretical frameworks and an illustrative case study of digital-aided preparation. The findings emphasize that interpretation represents a dynamic research space where tradition, innovation, and critical reflection intersect. This study contributes to the reassessment of the performer's role as both researcher and creator, positioning performance within a new theoretical and practical dimension in contemporary musicological discourse.

Keywords

Musical culture, artistic research, aesthetics, performance studies, digital technology

Introduction

Musical interpretation has traditionally been conceived as the final act of the creative process, in which the score comes to life through the mediation of the performer. However, contemporary musicological discourse has shifted the focus from the idea of faithful reproduction toward the conception of performance as a creative and analytical process. Nicholas Cook argues that music does not exist solely as a written text, but is actualized through performance, which generates meaning in the very moment of interpretation [1].

In this context, the performer is no longer a passive mediator, but an active subject who constructs meaning through aesthetic decision-making. As John Rink emphasizes, the relationship between analysis and performance is inherently dynamic, making interpretative practice itself a form of research [2]. The development of digital technology has intensified this reflective dimension: high-quality recordings, acoustic analysis software, and digital platforms have transformed the way performers self-evaluate and present their work.

This paper addresses the following research question: in what ways has technology influenced the reconceptualization of musical interpretation as a research process? It aims to demonstrate that contemporary performance practice constitutes a structured epistemological activity that integrates theoretical analysis, practical experimentation, and critical reflection.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, theoretical-analytical methodology. The research is based on three principal strategies. First, a systematic review of contemporary musicological and performance studies literature was conducted, drawing on foundational theoretical works by Cook, Rink, Goehr, Leech-Wilkinson, Small, and Auslander. Second, an analysis of the epistemological frameworks proposed within artistic research discourse was undertaken, examining the extent to which performance practice can be understood as a knowledge-producing activity. Third, an illustrative case study was developed to demonstrate the practical application of digital tools in the preparation of a musical work.

The study does not employ empirical data collection in the form of surveys or interviews. Instead, it draws on critical theoretical reflection to construct an argument for the reconceptualization of interpretation as a scholarly practice. This approach is consistent with the tradition of speculative musicology and artistic research methodology.

Theoretical framework

Interpretation as a creative and aesthetic act

The debate on the nature of musical interpretation evolved significantly during the twentieth century. In the classical musicological tradition, the score was regarded as a normative authority, while the performer was seen as the executor of the composer's will. Contemporary performance studies have fundamentally reconceptualized this relationship, placing the performer at the center of the production of musical meaning.

1 Nicholas Cook, Beyond the Score: Music as Performance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

2 John Rink, ed., Musical Performance: A Guide to Understanding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002),

Lydia Goehr argues that the concept of the 'musical work' as a fixed, autonomous entity is a nineteenth-century historical construct, and that performance practices of earlier periods demonstrate considerably greater flexibility and interpretative freedom [3]. This implies that the score contains open-ended semantic potential, which is actualized through artistic decision-making rather than mechanical reproduction.
Daniel Leech-Wilkinson's analysis of early twentieth-century historical recordings further supports this view, demonstrating that performers of that era employed far greater rhythmic and expressive freedom than the precision-oriented standards of contemporary performance culture [4]. These findings collectively suggest that interpretation is a dynamic practice shaped by aesthetic and cultural contexts, and that it cannot be reduced to faithful reproduction.

The epistemological dimension of interpretation

In contemporary discourse, interpretation is increasingly viewed as an epistemological process — that is, as a means of producing knowledge through artistic practice. This perspective aligns with the broader field of artistic research, which seeks to legitimize practice-based inquiry as a form of academic scholarship.
Christopher Small's concept of 'musicking' emphasizes that music exists not as a static object but in the act of performing and in the relational dynamics created among participants [5]. This ontological repositioning shifts the focus from the work as fixed artifact to the performance as site of meaning-making. The performer thus becomes a research subject who, through analysis, experimentation, and reflection, actively constructs the meaning of the work.
This paradigmatic shift has directly influenced the understanding of how a musical work is prepared, transforming artistic practice into a structured analytical process with identifiable methodological stages.

Traditional Approach	Contemporary Approach
Fidelity to the score	Critical analysis and interpretation
Reproduction of the text	Creative and generative act
Authority of the composer	Dialogue between text and performer
Performance as execution	Performance as research process
Stable, fixed meaning	Dynamic, contextually constructed meaning

Table 1. Paradigmatic shift in the conception of musical interpretation
Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Cook (2013) and Rink (2002).

Interpretation as an analytical and reflective process

The preparation of a musical work involves several interconnected and iterative stages that together constitute a research cycle. This cycle begins with structural analysis and culminates in public performance, with multiple reflective loops throughout.
Initially, the performer undertakes a formal analysis of the score, examining thematic development, harmonic relationships, formal structure, and expressive markings. This analytical phase is followed by a historical study of relevant recordings and performance traditions, which situates the work within its broader cultural and aesthetic context. Practical experimentation

3. Lydia Goehr, The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 231.
4. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, The Changing Sound of Music (London: CHARM, 2009), 45.
5 Christopher Small, Musicking (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 9.

on the instrument or voice allows the performer to test and refine aesthetic choices. The self-recording of rehearsals and critical listening to the resulting audio constitutes a central reflective phase, enabling the identification of rhythmic deviations, phrasing ambiguities, and dynamic imbalances. These observations prompt revision, which feeds back into further experimentation and reflection.

Stage	Description
1. Score Analysis	Examination of form, harmonic structure, thematic development, and historical context
2. Historical Study	Study of recordings and performance practices of earlier interpreters
3. Practical Experimentation	Testing of aesthetic choices on the instrument or voice
4. Recording & Playback	Self-recording of rehearsals and critical listening
5. Reflective Evaluation	Identification of weaknesses: rhythmic deviation, phrasing, dynamic balance
6. Revision	Adjustment of interpretative choices based on analytical findings
7. Performance	Public presentation integrating all prior research dimensions

Table 2. The research cycle of interpretation
Source: Authors' own elaboration.

This cycle represents an internal research model in which the performer functions simultaneously as artist and analytical scholar of the musical material. The iterative nature of the process aligns it with qualitative research methodologies in the social sciences and humanities.

The role of technology in shaping performance

From the concert hall to the digital domain

The development of digital technology has significantly transformed interpretative practice. While in the nineteenth century performance was largely confined to the physical space of the concert hall, contemporary performance exists simultaneously in the acoustic, visual, and digital dimensions.
Philip Auslander has argued that in the age of digital media, the boundary between 'live' and mediated performance has become increasingly unstable. Performance is now designed with the camera, the recording, and online distribution in mind, and these considerations directly affect aesthetic choices and stage presence. In this context, technology is not merely a supplementary tool but a co-shaping factor in the construction of contemporary artistic identity.

Acoustic analysis and interpretative self-reflection

High-resolution audio recordings enable performers to analyze parameters such as intonation,

phrasing, dynamic balance, and vibrato control with a precision previously unavailable to them. The use of acoustic analysis software and visual spectrograms provides further possibilities for examining frequency, intensity, and the spectral structure of sound, bringing performative practice closer to scientific methodology.
Digital platforms have simultaneously created vast archives of performances, enabling immediate comparisons between interpretative styles across historical periods and cultural traditions. This situation enhances critical awareness among performers, while also creating normative pressure toward aesthetic uniformity — a tension that itself constitutes a productive site of interpretative reflection.

Illustrative case Study: Digital tools in the preparation of a slassical work

To illustrate the research dimension of interpretation in the digital era, the following case presents a representative model of preparation applicable to vocal or instrumental works from the classical or contemporary repertoire. This is not a single empirical case but a composite illustration of documented professional practices.
The process begins with structural analysis of the score: the performer identifies formal sections, climactic points, harmonic progressions, and the relationship between text and musical line (in the case of vocal works). This analytical phase is followed by an immersive study of historical recordings: comparing, for instance, recordings of the same Lied by Fischer-Dieskau, Dietrich Henschel, and Thomas Hampson reveals significant divergences in tempo, articulation, dynamic shaping, and textual emphasis.
The performer then records their own rehearsal sessions and subjects them to critical listening, augmented where appropriate by spectrographic analysis of intonation and dynamic consistency. Through this process, specific elements are identified for revision: a tendency toward rhythmic rigidity in transitional passages, insufficient dynamic contrast at structural climaxes, or a failure to differentiate between legato and portamento articulation.
This iterative cycle of recording, analysis, and revision demonstrates that digital technology does not replace the performer's artistic judgment but rather creates the conditions for a more systematic and evidence-based exercise of it. The performer emerges from this process as simultaneously an artist and a scholar of the work.

Discussion: Between tradition and innovation

Contemporary musical interpretation unfolds within a space where tradition and innovation coexist in productive tension. On one hand, the performer relies on knowledge of historical practices and the study of musicological sources; on the other, they navigate a technological landscape that fundamentally restructures the conditions of musical production, reception, and self-assessment.
Nicholas Cook has emphasized that performance is a continuous process of negotiation between text and context [6]. In the digital age, this context extends far beyond the concert hall to encompass online platforms, streaming archives, and global critical audiences. The contemporary performer is aware that their performance may be documented, distributed, and analyzed instantaneously, a condition that encourages a more systematic and reflective preparation process.

6 Nicholas Cook, Beyond the Score: Music as Performance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 89.

These developments suggest that the boundaries between artistic practice and scholarly inquiry are increasingly permeable. Interpretation, as argued throughout this paper, is not merely an aesthetic act but a structured form of knowledge production that merits recognition within academic musicological discourse.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that musical interpretation in the contemporary context constitutes a complex research process in which theoretical analysis, practical experimentation, and critical reflection are organically intertwined. Digital technology has intensified the reflective dimension of interpretative practice by providing instruments for documentation, acoustic analysis, historical comparison, and self-evaluation.

The contemporary performer emerges from this analysis as a research subject who produces knowledge through artistic practice. Performance becomes a space where tradition, technology, and critical reflection converge, placing interpretation at the center of contemporary musicological discourse.

Reconceptualizing interpretation as a research process contributes to expanding the theoretical framework of music studies and affirms artistic inquiry as a legitimate academic endeavor. Future research could extend this framework through empirical investigation, examining how performers across different traditions and institutional contexts integrate digital tools into their preparatory practices, and what effects this integration has on both the process and the artistic outcomes of their work.

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Technology integration in music teaching

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the role of Music Education Technology (TEM) in improving music teaching, focusing on the use of platforms and applications SoundCloud, Solfeg.io and Flat for Education, as well as the use of digital audio workstations in learning environments. The study addresses how these tools help in the development of music theory, performance, composition, active listening and music creation, while supporting differentiated learning and real-time assessment. The integration of technology in music education represents one of the most important contemporary developments in the teaching and learning process. The use of digital platforms, interactive applications, audio workstations (DAWs) and online tools has created new opportunities for the development of musical skills, increased motivation and active involvement of students in the creative and performing process. In the conditions of rapid technological transformations, music education is no longer limited to traditional methods, but is built on a combined approach where technology serves as a pedagogical, creative and collaborative tool. The paper also presents experiences of implementing these methods with students during the learning process. The use of SoundCloud has helped students share their musical recordings and gain more confidence in interpretation. Solfeg.io has been used to develop rhythmic and intonation skills, increasing engagement and active participation in classes. While Flat for Education and DAWs have helped students in the practical understanding of music theory and in the development of creative skills through the implementation of compositional exercises and audio projects. The observed results show increased motivation, improved collaboration, and a faster acquisition of theoretical and practical concepts. In conclusion, the study argues that the sustainable integration of technology in music education creates a more dynamic, interactive, and responsive learning environment for 21st century students. It also highlights the importance of ongoing teacher training and the systematic inclusion of technological tools in music education programs.

Keywords

Music education, technology, teaching, music applications, interactive learning

Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology over the past decades has significantly influenced the transformation of educational practices, including the field of music education. From the use of basic tools such as audio recorders and simple notation programs to online platforms, digital audio workstations (DAWs), interactive applications, and virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies, music teaching is undergoing a profound methodological and pedagogical reconceptualization. In this context, it becomes necessary to analyze the role of technology not merely as a supporting tool, but as an integral component of the learning process that affects the acquisition of knowledge, the development of creative skills, and the formation of musical competencies. This paper aims to examine the opportunities, challenges, and perspectives associated with integrating technology into music education, emphasizing a balanced approach between pedagogical tradition and digital innovation.

Literature review

Contemporary literature on technology in music education consistently emphasizes the transformative role of digital tools in the development of musical and pedagogical competencies. Various authors have argued that the integration of technology not only increases students' motivation and engagement, but also fosters creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking in the process of musical creation and analysis. Studies included in publications such as The Oxford Handbook of Technology and Music Education, edited by S. Alex Ruthmann and Roger Mantie, show that technology shifts the focus from traditional reproduction toward the active creation of music.[1] Similarly, research by authors such as C. K. Lam and S. Nart highlights the importance of using music software and interactive platforms to support differentiated learning and improve learning outcomes.[2] Nevertheless, the literature also identifies challenges such as the lack of professional training and resistance to change, underscoring the need for sustainable professional development and the systematic inclusion of technology in music education curricula.

Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative approach of an analytical and descriptive nature, grounded in a review of contemporary literature and in the analysis of concrete practices for integrating technology into music education. Within the methodological framework, various digital platforms and applications, such as SoundCloud, Solfeg.io, and Flat for Education, were examined, along with the use of digital audio workstations (DAWs) in the instructional process. The analysis focused on how these tools support the development of skills in performance, composition, music theory, and audio production, as well as on their influence on students' motivation and involvement. By comparing traditional approaches with technology-mediated approaches, the study aims to identify effective models of pedagogical integration and to offer practical recommendations for university and pre-university contexts.

1 Ruthmann, S. A., & Mantie, R. (Eds.). (2017). *The Oxford handbook of technology and music education.* Oxford University Press.

2 Lam, C. K. (2023). Technology-enhanced creativity in K-12 music education: A scoping review. International Society for Music Education.
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Technology in the service of education in music classrooms

Research studies on music education technology show a broad interest in the possible applications of technology for the teaching and learning of music. Whether these applications can be fully realized in school classrooms has been the subject of many recent discussions.
Music teachers are increasingly using technology when developing new strategies for student engagement.[3] Whereas acoustic instruments, pencils, and paper were once regarded as the principal tools of learning, it is now possible for students to participate in creative music learning by using technologies such as iPads, personal computers, and educational applications.
This paper enables an examination of the current state and future prospects of the discipline of Music Education Technology (MET).
With a particular focus on examining the actions and possibilities of technology in music education, this paper seeks to bring conceptual clarity to discussions surrounding the phenomenon.

Understanding music, education, and technology

The terminology surrounding technological tools, devices, affordances, and objectives in music education is so varied that it is not always clear whether authors themselves share the same understanding of which terms and concepts should be used, and why. Here, MET (Music Education Technology) is understood as a discipline with a specific interest in information and communication technology (ICT) in the teaching and learning of music.
ICT in music education has been described as:
Digital tools used by students and teachers to perform, create, reflect, respond, analyze, listen to, and communicate about music.
ICT may include different types of:
media, software, devices, online technologies, desktop and laptop computers, digital instruments, smartphones, tablet computers, and other technologies that allow people to facilitate musical experiences and musical learning.
In other words, MET is understood here as a field of inquiry that "lies at the intersection of musicology, educational sciences, and technical sciences" and aims to study - and often also to develop - music education technologies and the methods for using them in pedagogical environments.[4]
Thus, MET is a field of interest connected both to educational technology and to music technology. In 2024, the growth of online music-learning platforms, AR and VR technologies, and AI software is providing musicians and music teachers with supportive and advanced tools that can be used in music classrooms as well as in instrumental learning. These software tools can support musical composition and creation, promote individualized and personalized learning, and diversify the classroom experience. Although a lack of training may make music teachers hesitant to use new technologies, this article examines how embracing digital resources and blending technology with traditional teaching methods can benefit both students and teachers.

3 Gall, M. (2013). *Trainee teachers' perceptions: Factors that constrain the use of music technology in teaching placements. Journal of Music, Technology and Education, 6*(1), 5–27.

4 Mouza, C., & Lavigne, N. C. (2012). Emerging technologies for the classroom: A learning sciences perspective. Springer.

Approach

The application of technology in music learning enables students to access high-quality and convenient instruction while minimizing barriers such as:

- *location,*
- *learning materials*
- *financial costs.*

Online applications and learning platforms (such as Yousician, Perfect Ear, and others) provide students with a low-cost and flexible way to develop and refine their musical skills, adapting to each individual's needs and requirements.[5] This allows students to work independently at their own pace and gives them the opportunity to learn music from home, thereby providing greater autonomy over how they learn and creating a work-life balance that suits them as individuals.

Creative collaborations

Virtual learning offers students the opportunity to work with other musicians from around the world. Young musicians can develop their skills with renowned industry experts by using websites such as Coursera to access exclusive online modules. These virtual courses allow users to pursue their musical interests without the need to travel. Videoconferencing software such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams facilitates the delivery of remote music lessons and also enables students to choose the teachers who best match their needs.[6]
Online communication with other musicians from around the world helps build connections, friendships, and musical communities that would otherwise be impossible to create. This opens spaces for collaboration and composition, encouraging musicians' creativity to reach new levels of experimentation and innovation.

The experience of music production

Free music-production software and digital audio workstations (such as Soundtrap) ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to develop production skills, eliminating the need for interested musicians to visit a studio in order to create music of professional quality.[7] Students can learn how to navigate digital audio workstations with simplified designs and interfaces, increasing their confidence and understanding of the music production industry. Platform users can create songs, record and edit vocals and instruments, mix tracks, and add effects. The wide range of available features enables young artists to experiment with different styles and genres, giving them opportunities to release their creativity and discover their identities as musicians. The practical experience students gain from using digital audio workstations equips them with transferable skills for future careers in the music industry.

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5 Gordon, E. E. (2012). *Learning sequences in music: A contemporary music learning theory.* GIA Publications.
6 Mouza, C., & Lavigne, N. C. (2012). *Emerging technologies for the classroom: A learning sciences perspective.* Springer.
7 Freedman, B. (2017). *Music fluency: How technology refocuses music creation and composition.* In S. Alex Ruthmann & R. Mantie (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of technology and music education* (pp. 367–382). Oxford University Press.

Personalized learning

Music-learning applications and platforms can provide real-time feedback on musical compositions.[8] They can offer preliminary assessments of performances by highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of a piece. Teachers can use this analysis as a starting point for a more focused and complex discussion and assessment session. The exercises generated by the software help students improve their skills by concentrating on the areas in which they need the most practice. The creation of an individualized learning plan can respond to students' learning styles and needs, accelerating progress toward the achievement of their goals.

Interaction

Technology has helped make the often difficult task of learning instruments and creating compositions a more enjoyable and interactive experience through the use of simulations. Applications that incorporate game-like features, such as challenge-based activities, quizzes, and levels, allow students to monitor their progress visually and encourage them to continue pursuing their musical ambitions. Difficult concepts in both music theory and sight-reading can be managed by applying knowledge and reinforcing understanding while maintaining interest and engagement. Teachers may be cautious about the increasing gamification of music learning, uncertain as to whether music games are an effective and valuable resource. If their use is monitored and employed as a supplement to other teaching methods, gamified applications can be a valuable additional tool that consolidates fundamental concepts already taught in classroom and tutorial settings. Emerging VR (virtual reality) and AR (augmented reality) technologies are offering students and teachers new and engaging experiences that allow musicians to be transported into immersive virtual environments.

By using VR, students can visit a music studio, attend concerts, and conduct an orchestra virtually, while AR simulations can overlay digital information and support onto real-world instruments. Experiences facilitated by VR and AR allow students to participate in simulated real-life scenarios, improving their learning and helping them gain authentic and realistic experiences that would otherwise be inaccessible. Although VR and AR technology is currently an expensive investment and not widely available in private and educational settings, it represents a rapidly growing and exciting market with untapped potential.

Methodology

Creating a soundCloud account

One alternative for offering resources to music students would be the use of the SoundCloud platform. SoundCloud can be used free of charge, and students can access it wherever they are. They can upload songs as well as complete song recordings. Students can listen to and practice songs and upload their own recordings made at home.

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8 Lam, C. K. (2023). *Technology-enhanced creativity in K-12 music education: A scoping review. International Society for Music Education.*
Nart, S. (2016). *Music software in technology-integrated music education. The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, 15*(2), 78–84.

During the application of this platform with students, it was observed that they felt freer to record and share their musical performances. Students who usually displayed insecurity during in-class performance showed greater self-confidence when recordings were made individually and uploaded to the platform. Through listening and mutual comments, their self-assessment skills and critical reflection on musical interpretation improved.

Figure 1.
Figure 2.

Because it is audio-only, the platform removes the pressure on pupils and students to create a video. If they wish to make a video, they can create their own YouTube channel. Each person can choose whether these uploads are private or public.

Learning with the solfeg.io application

Solfeg.io is a music education application based on songs. Registration and access to a limited number of songs are free. Solfeg.io works very well with an interactive whiteboard. For each song, a high-quality recording is provided. Complete notation is also available for the vocal and instrumental parts.

Figure 3.

In practice with students, the use of Solfeg.io proved effective in developing rhythmic and intonation skills. The integration of visual and audio elements helped students understand theoretical concepts more quickly and maintain concentration during class. Increased active participation and interest in practical exercises were also observed, particularly among students who had difficulties with traditional music reading.

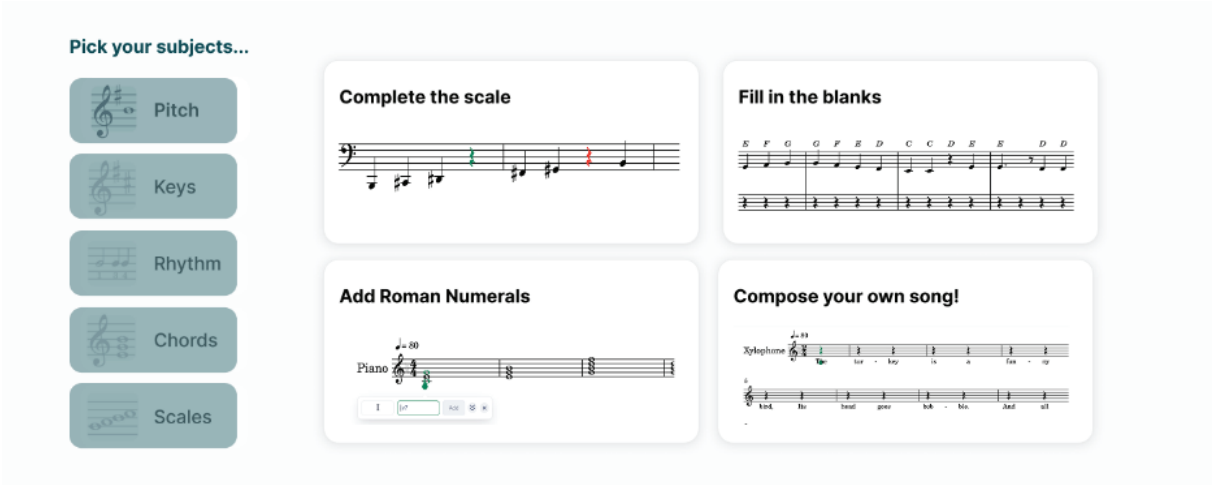

Figure 4. Applying Theory through Performance Tasks

Performance-based learning strengthens the understanding of music theory.
Flat for Education allows students to record themselves performing rhythms, demonstrating chords, or playing notated musical excerpts, all within the assignment. In addition, Flat for Education integrates with DAWs (digital audio workstations) such as GarageBand and Soundtrap, bridging the gap between notation and sound and making theoretical concepts tangible.
The use of Flat for Education with students created opportunities for a more interactive approach to learning music theory. Students completed practical exercises by combining musical notation with audio recordings, which helped connect theory with practice. Observations during the instructional process showed that students were able to understand rhythmic and harmonic structures more clearly, while both individual and collaborative work developed more effectively.

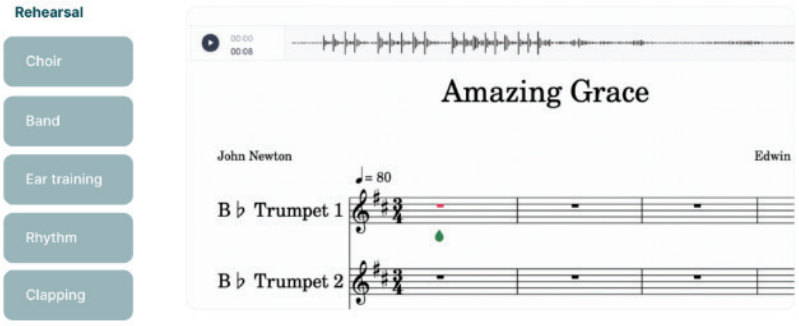

Figure 5. Music Theory Worksheets with Automatic Assessment

Flat for Education also offers customizable music theory worksheets to reinforce key concepts. With automatic assessment for multiple-choice and short-answer questions, teachers can quickly evaluate:

- *Key-signature identification*
- *Interval and chord analysis*

- *Rhythmic dictation*
- *The fundamentals of music theory*
-

This flexibility saves time and supports continuous theory and practice.

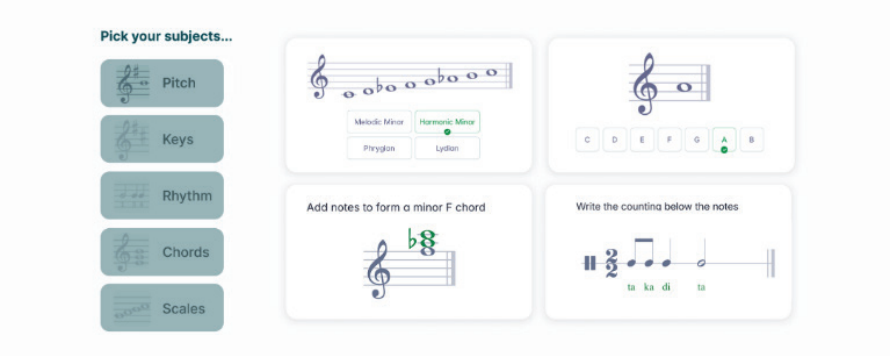

Figure 6. Supporting Differentiated Learning in Music Theory

Flat for Education is designed to support differentiated teaching by offering a range of learning modalities:

- Visual learners engage through notation and score creation
- Auditory learners benefit from playback and recording features
- Kinesthetic learners deepen their understanding through performance tasks
- Analytical learners excel with structured worksheets and theoretical questions
- This flexibility means that teachers can assign tasks based on students' individual strengths, needs, and learning styles, all through an easy-to-use platform.

Recommendations

Continuous Use of Music Software

The use of music software for students in music education is an appropriate, accessible, and contemporary strategy that can be applied at the university level. As a first step in implementation, it should be used only for selected musical content in the general music education course. Gradually, over the semesters, the use of technological tools can be added further to instructors' repertoire for teaching additional musical content.

Continuous training

A progressive training program may be included as part of the general music program. Training can be scaffolded and may involve experts in the field who facilitate training for lecturers and, at another level, for students.

Introducing technology into teaching practice

The university may consider introducing an assessment component into its practicum program that encourages the use of technological strategies in music with children in schools. Each practicum includes a rubric that supervisors use to evaluate their students. In the current rubric, there are no defined criteria for the use of technological tools. Administrators and coordinators could include such criteria to measure a trainee teacher's competence in using technology to achieve learning outcomes in lessons.

Conclusion

The integration of technology into music education is an important evolution that is reshaping the way music is taught and learned.
From online collaboration tools to interactive theory websites, technology is offering educators and students innovative ways to engage with music.
As we continue to embrace these technological advances, the future of music education appears increasingly dynamic and inclusive, offering unlimited opportunities for creative expression and learning.
For educators, keeping pace with these changes is essential, andfor students, the use of these technologies opens the door to a richer and more interactive musical journey. [9]
Technology enhances the understanding of complex musical concepts and techniques by making them more accessible and easier to comprehend. The interactive nature of AR helps maintain students' engagement and interest, especially among younger learners.

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Artistic terminology in Albanian: Between borrowing and Albanianization in a cross-linguistic perspective

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Abstract

This study analyzes the structure and origin of terminology in the fields of music, visual arts, and performing arts in Albanian, focusing on the relationship between borrowed terms and their Albanian equivalents, as well as on terminological asymmetry in comparison with German, French, and Italian. It examines how a smaller linguistic community negotiates between international terminological authority and native lexical development. Artistic terminology constitutes a core component of academic and pedagogical discourse. Its study contributes to an understanding of processes of linguistic standardization, lexical internationalization, and conscious terminological planning. In the Albanian context, these processes are closely linked to cultural history and sustained European influence. The research is based on a lexicological and cross-linguistic comparative analysis. A representative corpus of terms from the three artistic fields was compiled from university textbooks, normative dictionaries, and specialist literature. The terms were classified according to their etymological origin (Italian, French, Greek, Latin, English) and their status in Albanian (established borrowings, Albanianized forms, descriptive equivalents). German serves as the primary comparative model due to its strong tradition of conceptual translation. The findings indicate that Albanian artistic terminology is predominantly borrowing-based, particularly from Italian (notably in music) and French (especially in the performing arts). Albanian alternatives exist but often remain descriptive or pedagogical rather than fully standardized. In contrast, German demonstrates a systematic tendency toward the formation of native equivalents through compounding and semantic translation. Terminological asymmetry does not signal lexical deficiency but reflects different models of linguistic development. The study recommends encouraging the creation and institutional support of Albanian equivalents where feasible, while preserving the international stability of technical terms, alongside the compilation of standardized academic glossaries.

Keywords

Albanianization, cross-linguistic asymmetry, lexical standardization

Introduction

Artistic terminology in the Albanian language represents a rich reflection of Albania's intercultural and historical contact with European academic and artistic traditions. It encompasses the fields of music, visual arts, and performing arts, reflecting historical experiences of education, foreign influences, and the process of language standardization. Through borrowings from Italian, French, Latin, and Greek[1], as well as more recent English influences, Albanian has developed a rich terminological repertoire, in which some terms have been fully integrated, while others retain their borrowed origin. From a theoretical perspective, the choice between borrowing and the creation of a native term forms part of what Haugen defines as *corpus planning*[2], while Wüster's theory of terminology emphasizes systematization and conceptual univocity[3].

The aim of this paper is to analyze this phenomenon by classifying artistic terms according to fields, examining possible Albanianized forms, and comparing cross-linguistic terminological strategies with German, French, and Italian. The paper also examines the functional asymmetry of the use of terms in Albanian and other European languages, reflecting cultural and political differences in terminological standardization.

The central hypothesis of this study is that Albanian artistic terminology relies predominantly on borrowings — rather than on the systematic formation of native equivalents — as a direct consequence of delayed linguistic standardization and sustained European cultural influence, particularly from Italian and French. This tendency stands in structural contrast to the German terminological model, which developed native equivalents through conscious language policy (*Sprachpurismus) from the eighteenth century onwards. It is further hypothesized that terminological asymmetry between Albanian and other European languages does not reflect lexical deficiency, but rather different historically conditioned models of corpus planning, as defined by Haugen (1971).*

Literature review

The theoretical foundation of this study rests on two complementary but partially divergent traditions: the sociolinguistic model of language planning and the terminological systematization school. Haugen (1971) established the foundational distinction between corpus planning — the codification and elaboration of linguistic form — and status planning, which concerns the social functions assigned to a language. His framework is directly applicable to the Albanian case, where the delay in corpus planning until the Congress of Orthography (1972) left artistic terminology largely unregulated and open to unsystematic borrowing. However, Haugen's model, developed primarily in the context of Norwegian language planning, does not fully account for the specific pressures exerted by cultural and institutional prestige of donor languages such as Italian and French on smaller receiving languages such as Albanian.

Wüster (1979), founding figure of the General Theory of Terminology, proposed that terminological systems should be built on the principle of conceptual univocity — one concept, one term — and advocated for deliberate, systematic term formation over spontaneous borrowing.

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1 Alison Latham, ed., The Oxford Companion to Music (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

2 Einar Haugen, The Implementation of Corpus Planning, in Can Language Be Planned ?, ed. Joan Rubin and Björn H. Jernudd (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1971), 281–295.

3 Eugen Wüster, Einführung in die allgemeine Terminologielehre (Bonn: Romanistischer Verlag, 1979).

While Wüster's model has been influential in technical and scientific terminology across European languages, including German, its prescriptive dimension has been challenged by later scholars such as Cabré (1999), who argued that terminology is not only a normative but also a cognitive and communicative phenomenon, shaped by the actual usage communities of specialists. The Albanian case illustrates precisely this tension: normative dictionaries attempt to impose Wüsterian univocity, while actual usage in artistic practice and university teaching often diverges toward internationally recognizable borrowed forms.

Within Albanian linguistics specifically, three scholarly traditions are relevant to the present study. Çabej's monumental etymological work (1976–2014) provides the indispensable historical basis for tracing the entry of foreign artistic terms into Albanian, documenting their phonological adaptation and semantic evolution. Kostallari (1973) and Demiraj (1988) addressed the normative dimension of Albanian standardization, establishing principles for lexical integration that remain operative in the dictionaries consulted for this study. More recently, Lafe (2008) and Shkurtaj (2009) have examined the sociolinguistic dynamics of Albanian lexical development, highlighting the tension between international orientation and linguistic autonomy. What remains underexplored in this tradition, however, is the specific domain of artistic terminology — a lacuna that the present study aims to address by applying the cross-linguistic comparative framework to a systematically compiled corpus of terms from music, visual arts, and performing arts.

Methodology

This study adopts a lexicological and cross-linguistic comparative methodology. The primary analytical framework draws on the theoretical principles of corpus planning as defined by Haugen (1971) and the terminological systematization model proposed by Wüster (1979). The research proceeds in three stages: corpus compilation, etymological classification, and cross-linguistic comparison.[4]

The corpus was compiled from two categories of sources. The first category comprises normative lexicographic references, specifically the *Fjalori i gjuhës së sotme shqipe (Akademia e Shkencave, 1980) and the Fjalori i Madh i Gjuhës Shqipe (Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, 2006), which provided the standard Albanian forms and definitions of artistic terms. The second category consists of specialist musicological, art-theoretical, and theatrical literature, including the Harvard Dictionary of Music (Apel, 1969), The Oxford Companion to Music (Latham, 2011), The Story of Art (Gombrich, 1995), and Performance Studies: An Introduction (Schechner, 2013). These sources supplied the international terminological references against which Albanian forms were compared. Etymological data were cross-referenced with Çabej's Studime etimologjike në fushë të shqipes (1976–2014) and with the works of Kostallari (1973), Demiraj (1988), and Lafe (2008) on Albanian linguistic standardization. The corpus comprises approximately 90 terms distributed across three artistic fields: music (approximately 35 terms), visual arts (approximately 25 terms), and performing arts (approximately 30 terms). Terms were selected on the basis of three criteria: (a) attestation in at least one of the two normative Albanian dictionaries consulted; (b) active use in Albanian university-level textbooks in the respective artistic disciplines; and (c) availability of a documented equivalent or parallel form in at least one of the comparative languages (German, French, or Italian).*

4 M. Teresa Cabré, Terminology: Theory, Methods and Applications. Translated by Janet Ann DeCesaris. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1999).

Terms attested exclusively in specialist literature but absent from normative dictionaries were excluded from the core corpus and treated as marginal cases where relevant.
The terms were classified according to two criteria: (a) etymological origin (Italian, French, Greek, Latin, English), and (b) their status in contemporary Albanian usage (established borrowings, phonologically or morphologically Albanianized forms, and descriptive native equivalents). German was selected as the primary comparative model on account of its well-documented tradition of conceptual translation (Begriffsverdeutschung) and native compound formation, which offers a structurally contrasting model to the Albanian borrowing tendency. French and Italian were included as secondary comparative reference points, given their historical role as source languages for much of Albanian artistic terminology.
For the purposes of this study, the three classificatory categories are defined as follows. Established borrowings are terms adopted into Albanian without phonological or morphological modification, attested as standard entries in both normative dictionaries consulted (Akademia e Shkencave, 1980; 2006); examples include *tempo, solo, aria, relief*. Albanianized forms are terms that have undergone systematic phonological adaptation (vowel insertion, consonant substitution) or morphological integration (Albanian inflectional suffixes) while retaining the etymological base of the source language; examples include *orkestër (orchestra → orkestër), partiturë (partitura → partiturë), teatër (theatron → teatër).* Descriptive native equivalents are multi-word or semantically repurposed Albanian expressions that convey the conceptual content of the borrowed term without sharing its etymological base; examples include *bashkëtingëllim (for harmoni), fuqi zanore (for dinamikë), vijë melodike (for melodi). Where a term exhibits characteristics of more than one category, classification follows the dominant criterion of lexicographic attestation in the normative dictionaries.*

Borrowed terms (mainly from Italian & Latin)

Allegro, Adagio, Andante, Largo, Presto, Crescendo, Decrescendo, Forte, Piano, Solo, Duet, Trio, Orkestër (gr. orchestron), Simfoni (gr. symphonia), Sonata (it.), Koncert (lat. concertare), Opera (it. /lat.), Aria (it.), Recitativ (it.), Partiturë (it. partitura), Harmoni (gr. harmonia), Polifoni (gr.), Ritëm (gr. rhythmos).
Borrowings in Albanian often preserve the original form in order to maintain the connection with international discourse and to reflect the tradition of European music, especially the Italian one. The comparison with German shows an opposite tendency: German uses native equivalents such as Aufführung (interpretim/performancë), Zeitmaß (tempo), Lautstärke (dinamikë), Mehrstimmigkeit (polifoni), thus avoiding foreign borrowings.
The analysis of this process shows three main tendencies:

- The preservation of borrowings as a standard for terminological stability and internationalization.
- The use of Albanianized forms in didactic contexts and in presentations for the Albanian public.
- The integration of academic terms (e.g., sonatë, polifoni, koncert) mainly at the professional and pedagogical level.

This dynamic reveals a specific Albanian model of balancing between borrowing and practical Albanianization.

Musical terminology

Musical terminology in Albanian consists of a combination of Albanian terms and borrowings mainly from Italian, Latin, and Greek[5]. Basic terms include melodi, harmoni, ritëm, metër, tempo, dinamikë, timbër, intonacion, akord, tonalitet, modus, polifoni, homofoni, kontrapunkt, formë muzikore, variacion, improvizim, partiturë, interpretim, ekzekutim, artikulim and frazeologji muzikore.
In some cases, Albanian alternatives have been used to facilitate understanding in educational and practical contexts, for example: Ritëm - rrahje / kadencë, Harmoni - bashkëtingëllim, Melodi - vijë melodike, Tempo - shpejtësi, Dinamikë - fuqi zanore, Interpretim - shpjegim artistik, lojë artistike. The preservation of these forms is connected to the international tradition of musical notation.
Albanian contains numerous borrowings from other languages. Below are presented several terms which, in other languages, have been replaced by consolidated native equivalents that serve as comparative parallels.

Interpretim: *Albanian – interpretim (Lat./It.); German – Aufführung / Interpretation; English – performance; French – interprétation. German possesses a native term (Aufführung), whereas Albanian relies on a dominant borrowing. Partiturë: Albanian – partiturë (It.); German – Partitur (a borrowing, but integrated at an early stage); English – score; French – partition. English uses a native lexical form (score), while Albanian preserves the Italian borrowing. Tempo: Albanian – tempo (It.); German – Zeitmaß; English – speed / tempo; French – tempo / vitesse. German has developed a fully native replacement. Dinamikë: Albanian – dinamikë (Gr./ Lat.); German – Lautstärke; English – dynamics; French – dynamique. In this case, German avoids the borrowing entirely.*

Visual arts terminology

In the field of visual arts, basic terms include kompozicion, perspektivë, proporcion, simetri/ asimetri, ngjyrë, ton, nuancë, dritë dhe hije, teksturë, formë, vëllim, hapësirë, linjë, plan, figurë, sfond, stil, teknikë, medium, instalacion dhe performancë vizuale.
Albanian has preserved borrowings from Latin, Italian, and French, while also using Albanianized forms for clearer understanding:
(Latin, Italian, French origins) Art (lat. ars), Estetikë (gr. aisthesis), Kompozicion (lat. compositio), Perspektivë (lat. perspectiva), Proporcion (lat. proportio), Simetri (gr. symmetria), Asimetri (gr.), Grafikë (gr. graphikos), Pikturë (it. pittura), Skulpturë (lat. sculptura), Relief (fr.), Mozaik (it. /lat.), Freskë (it. fresco), Portret (fr.), Stil (lat. stilus), Teknikë (gr. techne), Material (lat.), Instalacion (fr./angl.).
The history of aesthetic concepts in Europe has directly influenced the standardization of this lexicon[6][7].

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5 Eqrem Çabej, Studime etimologjike në fushë të shqipes, I–VII Vols (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, 1976–2014).

6 E. H. Gombrich, The Story of Art, 16th ed. (London: Phaidon, 1995).

7 Stanley Sadie, ed., The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 2nd ed., 29 vols. (London: Macmillan, 2001).

Comparative analysis shows that German prefers terms derived from the German language such as Kunst (art), Malerei (pikturë), Zeichnung (vizatim), Skulptur (skulpturë), Museum (muze), creating a system that is semantically clear and transparent. French and Italian preserve borrowings as part of the Romance tradition. This model shows a clear differentiation among languages: Albanian has preserved borrowings for stability and connection with European tradition, German for linguistic awareness and semantic transparency, while French and Italian preserve the standardized foreign form.

Performing arts terminology

Main terms in performing arts include skenë, regji, dramaturgji, interpretim skenik, rol, personazh, monolog, dialog, mizanskenë, koreografi, lëvizje skenike, ekspresivitet, gest, mimikë, ritëm skenik, hapësirë skenike, kostumografi, skenografi, ndriçim skenik, performancë dhe publik. Albanian has borrowed terms from Ancient Greek, Latin, French, and Italian, integrating some Albanianized forms: Skenë → skenë, Shfaqje → performance, Regji → regji / drejtim skenik, Personazh → personazh, Dialog → dialog, Monolog → monolog, Koreografi → koreografi (gr. e lashtë, lat., fr., it.), Teatër (gr. theatron), Dramë (gr. drama), Tragjedi (gr. tragōidia), Komedi (gr. kōmōidia), Akt (lat. actus), Skenë (gr. skēnē), Regji (fr. régie), Regjisor (fr.), Aktor (lat. actor), Personazh (fr. personnage), Dialog (gr. dialogos), Monolog (gr. monologos), Koreografi (gr. choreia + graphein), Balet (fr. ballet), Pantomimë (gr.), Performancë (fr./angl.), Repertor (lat.), Mizanskenë (fr. mise en scène), Skenografi (gr.).
Cross-linguistic comparison shows that German uses native equivalents and conceptual translations: Bühne (skenë), Aufführung (shfaqje), Regie / Inszenierung (regji), Figur (personazh), Gespräch (dialog), Selbstgespräch (monolog), Bewegungsentwurf (koreografi). French and Italian preserve borrowings, often with adapted inflection. This shows a combined model: Albanian preserves borrowings to demonstrate authority and international connection, German uses conceptual translation, while French and Italian preserve tradition and inflection of borrowing.[8]

Artistic Term	Use	Note
Pikturë	Visual art with paint	Borrowing from It. pittura, integrated
Skulpturë	Art with physical materials	Borrowing from Lat. sculptura
Balet	Moving and dramatic art	Used for years in Albanian
Teatër	Dramatic stage	From Greek through Latin, assimilated
Poezi	Literary creation with rhyme	Albanian form
Film	Cinematographic art	Assimilated form in Albanian

Table 1: Artistic terms in albanian

8 Erika Fischer-Lichte, The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics (London: Routledge, 2008).

Borrowed Term	Albanian Alternative	Usage Note
Ritëm	Rrahje / Kadencë	"Ritëm" standard; "rrahje" more didactic
Harmoni	Bashkëtingëllim	Albanian, but rarely used
Melodi	Vijë melodike	Descriptive, not core term
Tempo	Shpejtësi	Descriptive use
Dinamikë	Fuqi zanore	Didactic
Partiturë	Notim muzikor	More descriptive
Interpretim	Shpjegim artistik	"Interpretim" predominates
Koncert	Shfaqje muzikore	Loses technical meaning
Orkestër	Ansambël	"Ansambël" broader
Solo	Njëshe / i vetëm	Not terminological
Polifoni	Shumëzëri	Stable Albanian alternative

Table 2: Music borrowed terms and albanian alternatives

Borrowed Term	Albanian Alternative	Usage Note
Art	Mjeshtëri	Archaic, not technical
Estetikë	Ndjeshmëri artistike	Descriptive
Kompozicion	Ndërthurje / Renditje	Not standard term
Perspektivë	Pamje në thellësi	Descriptive
Proporcion	Përpjesëtim	Accurate alternative
Simetri	Njëtrajtshmëri	Rarely used
Grafikë	Vizatim	Narrower meaning
Stil	Mënyrë shprehjeje	Not terminological
Teknikë	Mjeshtëri	General meaning
Instalacion	Vendosje artistike	Descriptive use

Table 3: Visual Arts borrowed terms and albanian alternatives

Borrowed Term	Albanian Alternative	Usage Note
Teatër	Skenë shfaqjeje	Not core term
Dramë	Vepër skenike	Descriptive
Tragjedi	Vepër tragjike	Explanatory
Komedi	Vepër humoristike	Loses technical meaning
Aktor	Luajtës / interpretues	"Aktor" standard
Regji	Drejtim skenik	Used in parallel
Regjisor	Drejtues skene	Less used
Personazh	Figurë	More general
Dialog	Bisedë	Not dramatic
Monolog	Ligjëratë e vetme	Descriptive
Koreografi	Arti i baletit dhe valleve	Didactic
Balet	Vallëzim skenik	Not technical
Performancë	Shfaqje	Loses conceptual load

Table 4: Performing arts borrowed Terms and albanian alternatives

Cross-linguistic terminological asymmetry

The comparative analysis of Albanian and German shows a functional asymmetry. Albanian privileges stability and internationalization: terms such as interpretim, performancë, perspektivë, polifoni, regji preserve the borrowed form. German uses conceptual translations and word compounds (Komposita), such as Aufführung, Bildaufbau, Tiefenwirkung, Mehrstimmigkeit. French preserves most Romance borrowings such as mise en scène, personnage, installation, while Italian, as the source language for music and performing arts, has consolidated historical terminology without changes. This asymmetrical model reflects cultural and historical factors:

- The delayed standardization of Albanian.
- German language policy of lexical enrichment and semantic transparency, rooted in the tradition of *Sprachpurismus* (linguistic purism) developed from the eighteenth century onwards, which actively promoted native word formation over foreign borrowing.
- The preservation of tradition and inflection in Romance languages.

The German tendency toward native equivalents is not arbitrary but reflects a deliberate and historically documented language policy. From the seventeenth century, societies such as the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft and later the prescriptive tradition of Sprachpurismus actively promoted the replacement of Latin and French borrowings with native German compounds. This policy produced systematic formations such as Zeitmaß (for tempo), Lautstärke (for dinamikë), and Mehrstimmigkeit (for polifoni). Albanian, by contrast, underwent standardization only in 1972 with the Congress of Orthography, leaving insufficient institutional time and resources for the systematic development of native artistic terminology. The asymmetry is therefore not a reflection of lexical capacity, but of divergent historical trajectories of language planning.*
Asymmetry is not a sign of terminological poverty, but indicates different models of linguistic and pedagogical planning, where Albanian relies on borrowings for international communication, while German aims at clarity and lexical autonomy.

Statistical overview of borrowings by source language

Source Language	Relative Weight*	Examples	Note
Italian	Predominant	canto, partiturë, aria, opera, sonata, regia	Dominant in music & performing arts; historical influence
French	Significant	mise en scène, personnage, installation, regji	Mainly performing arts and installations
Greek (classical)	Moderate	harmoni, polifoni, monolog, dialog, estetikë	Mainly theoretical, academic
Latin	Limited	tonalitet, modus, ars	Academic and theoretical terminology
English	Marginal	performance, art, installation	Modern publications and artistic technology

Table 5: Qualitative Distribution of Borrowings in Albanian Artistic Terminology by Source Language

** Note: The relative weights presented in Table 5 represent qualitative assessments derived from the analysis of the approximately 90 artistic terms examined in this study, as documented in the normative dictionaries (Akademia e Shkencave, 1980; 2006) and the specialist literature consulted. The categories Predominant, Significant, Moderate, Limited, and Marginal reflect the observed relative frequency of each source language across the three artistic fields analyzed, without claiming statistical precision. Cases of dual or uncertain etymological attribution — where a term has passed through more than one source language before entering Albanian (e.g., terms of Greek origin transmitted via Latin or Italian) — are classified according to the most proximate donor language.*

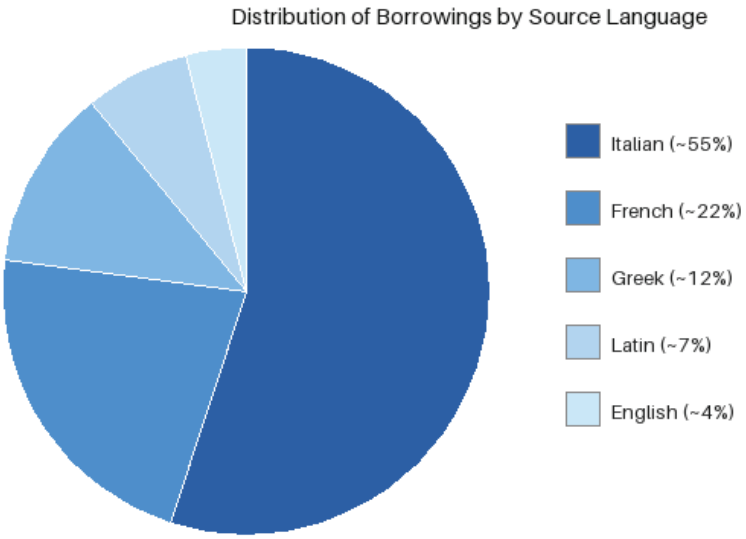

Figure 1: Qualitative Distribution of Borrowings by Source Language (based on Table 5). [Figure to be inserted here]. Note: Percentages are indicative estimates; totals may differ from 100% due to rounding and etymological overlap between source languages.

Issues of artistic terminology in albanian lexicography: problematic casesand competing cariants

The analysis of artistic terminology in relation to lexicographic codification highlights several issues related to the absence of certain units in normative dictionaries, orthographic fluctuations, and the coexistence of Albanian variants and international borrowings. In this context, the examination of several specific cases – kanto, dirigjim/dirizhim, xhaz/jazz, as well as shfaqje/performance – demonstrates interesting dynamics in the development of artistic terminology in Albanian.

The case of "kanto" and the use of the alternative "këngë/këndim"

The term kanto, widely used in the European musicological tradition (from Italian canto), does not appear as an independent entry in normative Albanian dictionaries, including the Fjalori i Madh i Gjuhës Shqipe. Its absence as a separate entry suggests that normative lexicography has

not considered it necessary to codify this Italianism, perhaps due to the existence of functional Albanian alternatives. In Albanian-speaking areas outside Albania, particularly in Kosovo, the term këndim is observed as a functional equivalent of kanto in academic and pedagogical musical contexts. This indicates a tendency toward replacement with a native lexeme, in accordance with the principle of linguistic economy and terminological purification. The absence of this term in normative dictionaries may be interpreted as a lexicographic choice to privilege the native alternative "këngë/këndim".[9]

"Dirigjim" or "dirizhim": orthographic problematics

Another problematic case appears in the use of the forms dirigjim and dirizhim. The term derives from Italian dirigere (lat. dirigere) and has been adapted into Albanian through the form dirigjoj. The variant dirigjim is more consistent with the morphological structure of Albanian, preserving the base dirig-, whereas the form dirizhim reflects a phonetic fluctuation that is not supported by the etymological model[10]. These two forms demonstrate a transitional normative period in which orthography and the standardization of artistic terminology are not fully stabilized in academic and media practice. The form dirigjim is morphologically more stable, as it preserves the Latin etymological base dirigere[11].

"Jazz" and "xhaz": the standardization of borrowings

A clear case of phonetic adaptation is that of the term jazz. In normative Albanian dictionaries it appears in the form xhaz, defined as a type of American music that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Albanianized form xhaz conforms to the phonetic system of Albanian and to the principles of graphic adaptation of borrowings[12].
However, in university academic practice the original form jazz is observed, particularly in study programs and specialized literature. In pre-university education, according to school textbooks, the form xhaz is mainly used, which indicates a functional division between the normative-didactic level and the internationally oriented academic level.
This graphemic dualism reflects the tension between national standardization and integration into international musicological discourse.

"Shfaqje" and "performance": Semantic Expansion and Lexical Competition

The terms *shfaqje and performance currently coexist in Albanian and both are included in dictionaries. The semantic differentiation between these two terms is related to the conceptual expansion of performance in contemporary theatrical theory*[13]. According to lexicographic definition, *shfaqje denotes: 1. the act of making something visible; 2. the presentation or staging of an artistic work. Meanwhile, performance is defined as the presentation of a drama, concert, or another form of entertainment.*

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9 Gjovalin Shkurtaj, Sociolinguistika (Tiranë: SHBLU, 2009).

10 Androkli Kostallari, Gjuha letrare shqipe dhe problemet e saj (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave, 1973).

11 Shaban Demiraj, Gjuha shqipe dhe historia e saj (Tiranë: 8 Nëntori, 1988), 148–156.

12 Emil Lafe, Studime për gjuhën shqipe (Tiranë: Toena, 2008).

13 Richard Schechner, Performance Studies: An Introduction, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013).

From a semantic point of view, shfaqje appears as a broader and more integrated unit in the lexical system of Albanian, with a longer history of usage and a more complete semantic field. However, the term performance, widely used in contemporary theatre studies and associated with the development of performance studies[14], has already entered the morphological system of Albanian, as demonstrated by the derivatives: performim, performoj, performohet, performuar, performues, performuese. This indicates a considerable degree of morphological assimilation, making the borrowing functionally productive within the language.

Conclusions and concluding remarks

The analysis of Albanian artistic terminology reveals a particular model of intercultural and historical interaction. Albanian has preserved borrowings mainly from Italian, French, Greek, and Latin, while integrating certain Albanianized forms for practical use.

Cross-linguistic asymmetry, especially in comparison with German, clearly demonstrates that terminological choices are not solely linguistic, but reflect cultural traditions, histories of standardization, and conscious language policies. Albanian favors stability and internationalization, German favors semantic transparency and lexical autonomy, while French and Italian preserve inflectional patterns and the Romance tradition.

The cases analyzed demonstrate that artistic terminology in Albanian is in a continuous process of negotiation among normative lexicography, academic practice, the international tradition of artistic disciplines, and the tendency to preserve native elements.

The absence of certain terms in dictionaries, orthographic fluctuations, and the coexistence of Albanian variants with international borrowings show that the field of the arts is particularly sensitive to cultural interaction and terminological globalization. This situation requires a balanced approach between normative standardization and openness to international scientific discourse.

This study is important for artistic education, the development of professional dictionaries, and the harmonization of Albanian terminology with international standards.

14 Ibid.

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Teaching through performance: Women and the formation of interpretative schools in Albanian music education

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Abstract

This study explores the fundamental contribution of women performers and music educators to the development of music education and artistic life in Albania between 1940 and 1995, a period marked by the establishment of the first professional music institutions and by profound sociopolitical transformations. Although women played a decisive role as singers, pianists, composers, and pedagogues in secondary and higher music education, their impact has remained largely underrepresented in Albanian music historiography. Drawing on a qualitative, historical-analytical methodology, the research is based on archival sources from the Central State Archive, educational programs, personal artist archives, published literature, and semi-structured interviews with musicians and educators. The study examines the interaction between pedagogical practices, institutional development, and broader political and cultural conditions, highlighting how women shaped curricula, performance traditions, and the professional training of new generations of musicians. Special attention is given to the first generation of Albanian women trained in major European conservatories and to their role in founding vocal and instrumental schools, introducing collective performance practices, and linking artistic activity with formal music education. Despite operating within restrictive ideological contexts and long periods of cultural isolation, women educators contributed to the consolidation of a national music pedagogy and to the creation of a sustainable artistic and educational legacy. By situating their activity within the framework of feminist musicology and music pedagogy, this research offers a new perspective on Albanian music history and on the cultural transmission of interpretative and pedagogical models. The findings aim to enrich the historiography of music education in Albania, promote gender-aware approaches in musicological research, and support contemporary pedagogical reflection on the relationship between artistic practice, education, and cultural identity

Keywords

Music pedagogy, women in music, albanian artistic education

Introduction

The development of music education in Albania during the twentieth century represents one of the most significant cultural transformations in the country's modern history. Between 1940 and 1995, Albania witnessed the transition from fragmented and largely informal musical practices to the establishment of a centralized and institutionalized system of professional music education. This transformation was closely tied to broader sociopolitical changes, including state-led cultural policies, ideological regulation of artistic production, and the construction of a national cultural identity. Within this complex historical framework, women performers and educators emerged as key agents in shaping both the pedagogical foundations and the artistic directions of Albanian musical life.

Despite their substantial contributions, women have remained largely underrepresented in Albanian music historiography. Existing narratives have tended to focus primarily on institutional milestones, composers, and political frameworks, while the role of performers and educators particularly women has often been treated as secondary or implicit. This omission reflects a broader pattern identified in international musicological research, where women's contributions to music education have historically been marginalized or confined to less visible domains of practice.[1] As Howe argues, women have consistently played a central role in teaching, mentoring, and shaping musical communities, yet their work has frequently been excluded from dominant historical narratives.[2]

In the Albanian context, this historiographical gap is particularly striking, given the extent to which women were actively involved in both artistic performance and pedagogical development. From the early emergence of concert culture in the interwar period to the consolidation of institutional education after World War II, women contributed to the establishment of vocal and instrumental traditions, the formation of curricula, and the professional training of new generations of musicians. Figures such as Jorgjia Truja, Lola Aleksi, and Maria Kraja were instrumental in introducing European standards of musical training, while later pedagogues such as Margarita Kristidhi and Hamide Stringa played a decisive role in consolidating institutional teaching practices and shaping interpretative traditions.[3]

The significance of these contributions becomes even more evident when considered within the constraints of the sociopolitical context in which they operated. During the socialist period, artistic production and education were subject to strict ideological control, and cultural activity was expected to align with state defined objectives. Within this framework, women educators occupied a complex position: while they were widely present in teaching roles, their authority was often limited by structural gender hierarchies and by the broader organization of cultural institutions. As Gould notes, gender functions as a determining factor in shaping professional status and recognition, often influencing not only access to opportunities but also the visibility of contributions within historical narratives.[4]

Nevertheless, Albanian women musicians demonstrated a remarkable capacity to navigate these constraints and to exercise agency within institutional structures.

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1 Sondra Wieland Howe, "A Historical View of Women in Music Education Careers," Philosophy of Music Education Review 17, no. 2 (2009): 162–165.

2 Ibid., 163–164.

3 Taila Sali, Disa figura të pedagogjisë muzikore shqiptare para dhe pas Luftës II Botërore (Tiranë: Universiteti i Arteve, 2016), 5–8.

4 Elena Skënderi, Margarita Kristidhi: Vështrim Monografik (Tiranë: Universiteti i Arteve, 2012), 5–7.

Their work extended beyond the transmission of technical skills to encompass the development of pedagogical models, the adaptation of European methodologies to local contexts, and the preservation and reinterpretation of national musical traditions. In this sense, they functioned not only as educators but also as cultural mediators, bridging different musical systems and contributing to the formation of a distinct Albanian music pedagogy. Evidence from archival sources and monographic studies shows that many of these women were deeply involved in curriculum design, repertoire selection, and the organization of artistic life within educational institutions.

This study aims to re-examine the history of Albanian music education by foregrounding the role of women performers and educators and by analyzing their contributions within a broader theoretical framework that integrates feminist musicology and music pedagogy. Drawing on archival materials, diploma theses, periodical publications, and oral testimonies, the paper explores how women shaped the interaction between artistic practice, pedagogical processes, and institutional development. It argues that their contributions were not peripheral but foundational, and that any comprehensive understanding of Albanian music history must account for their role in constructing both the educational system and the artistic culture that emerged during this period.

By situating Albanian developments within wider international discussions on gender and music education, this research also contributes to ongoing efforts to rethink the historiography of music through a more inclusive and critical lens. Ultimately, the study seeks not only to recover overlooked contributions but also to offer new perspectives on the relationship between education, artistic practice, and cultural identity in modern Albania.

Review of literature

The existing scholarship on women's contributions to music education in Albania may be situated within three interrelated domains: international feminist and historical studies on women in music education; theoretical frameworks addressing gender, professional status, and hierarchies within musical and educational fields; and Albanian biographical, archival, and historiographical materials documenting individual women performers and educators. While these strands provide a substantial empirical and conceptual foundation, they simultaneously expose a significant analytical gap: despite the availability of extensive documentation, there is no sustained, theoretically informed synthesis that positions Albanian women musicians as historical agents who actively shaped institutional music education, performance culture, and pedagogical authority between 1940 and 1995.[5] This gap is not merely empirical but epistemological, reflecting the persistence of historiographical paradigms that privilege formal authorship and institutional leadership over pedagogical labor and interpretative practice.[2] Within this context, feminist musicology has played a crucial role in redefining the field by challenging gendered assumptions embedded in canonical narratives and by foregrounding alternative sites of musical production, including teaching, mentoring, and community-based artistic engagement. In this perspective, pedagogy is reconfigured as a central mode of cultural production through which musical knowledge is constructed, embodied, and transmitted. Sondra Wieland Howe's work is particularly influential in demonstrating that women have historically occupied a structurally central though often underrecognized role in music education systems, contributing through

5 For an overview of Albanian and international scholarship, see Eliona Lici, "Women's Contributions to Music Education and Artistic Life in Albania (1900–1950)," RAST Musicology Journal 12, no. 4 (2024): 445–462.

sustained involvement in teaching, curriculum development, and professional mentorship, thereby shaping the ethical, organizational, and pedagogical foundations of the field[6]. This theoretical reorientation finds strong resonance in the Albanian context, particularly in the work of Lici's, who explicitly identifies women educators as foundational actors in the development of music education and artistic life in early twentieth-century Albania, arguing that they constituted "the most important part" of its development across multiple levels[7]. Importantly, Lici's study moves beyond descriptive biography by situating women within broader institutional and socio-cultural processes, highlighting their role as pedagogical agents operating across schools, cultural institutions, and public performance contexts[8]. Complementing this perspective, Elizabeth S. Gould's theoretical framework on gender and professional status provides a critical lens through which to interpret the Albanian case, conceptualizing gender as a "master status" that structures access to authority, recognition, and legitimacy[9]. Within this framework, music educators occupy a paradoxical position: they are indispensable to the reproduction of musical culture, yet their work is often assigned lower prestige, particularly in contexts where teaching is feminized and consequently devalued as an extension of care labor rather than recognized as intellectual or artistic production [10]. The Study findings offers strong empirical confirmation of this dynamic, demonstrating that women were highly concentrated in pedagogical roles within early institutions such as the Feminine Institute "Nana Mbretneshë," where they taught, directed ensembles, developed curricula, and contributed to methodological innovation, yet remained comparatively underrepresented in historiographical narratives. This tension between structural centrality and symbolic marginalization reflects a broader issue identified in international feminist scholarship: the coexistence of high participation with low historical visibility[11]. As such, the literature calls for a methodological shift from biographical recovery to structural analysis, emphasizing the need to examine the institutional, cultural, and epistemological conditions that shape both professional trajectories and historical recognition. Albanian scholarship, while rich in empirical detail, remains largely descriptive, often privileging narrative documentation over theoretical interpretation; however, Lici's work represents a significant methodological advancement by situating women educators within institutional processes and highlighting early educational settings such as the Kyrias Institute and the Feminine Institute "Nana Mbretneshë" as sites of pedagogical innovation where European methods were adapted, curricula developed, and artistic practice integrated with formal education. [12]. Taken together, the literature reveals a clear analytical deficiency: insufficient engagement with feminist theoretical frameworks, under-conceptualization of pedagogy as a form of artistic and institutional authorship, and fragmentation of historical analysis into isolated biographies rather than integrated institutional narratives.

6 Elizabeth S. Gould, "Music Education in Historical Perspective: Status, Non-Musicians, and the Role of Women," College Music Symposium 32 (1992): 10–15.

7 Sondra Wieland Howe, "A Historical View of Women in Music Education Careers," Philosophy of Music Education Review 17, no. 2 (2009): 162–165.

8 Lici, "Women's Contributions," 445–447.

9 Ibid., 448–452

10 Gould, "Music Education in Historical Perspective," 10–13.

11 Lici, "Women's Contributions," 450–455.

12 Howe, "A Historical View," 178–180

The present study addresses these limitations by bringing Albanian empirical materials into dialogue with feminist musicology and the sociology of music education, reconceptualizing women not as peripheral figures but as central agents in the construction of pedagogical systems, the mediation of cultural knowledge, and the formation of institutional musical practices, thereby contributing to a more theoretically grounded and analytically integrated historiography of Albanian music education.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, historical-analytical approach to examine the role of women performers and educators in the development of music education and artistic life in Albania between 1940 and 1995. The research is informed by an interdisciplinary framework that integrates feminist musicology and the sociology of education, enabling a critical reassessment of pedagogical labor, performance practice, and institutional development as interconnected forms of cultural production.[13]The analysis is based on the triangulation of primary and secondary sources, including archival documents from the Central State Archive of Albania, institutional curricula, periodical press, and biographical materials, alongside Albanian scholarly studies and international literature. In addition, semi-structured interviews with musicians and educators are used to complement documentary evidence and provide insights into pedagogical practices and institutional dynamics. Data were selected according to their relevance to the study period and their capacity to illuminate women's roles in performance, teaching, and institutional formation. The analytical process combines historical reconstruction, thematic analysis, and critical interpretation, focusing on key dimensions such as pedagogical practices, performance–teaching interrelations, and gendered patterns of visibility and recognition. By integrating empirical evidence with feminist theoretical perspectives, the methodology enables a shift from descriptive historiography toward a more analytical and gender-aware interpretation, positioning women as active agents in the construction of pedagogical systems and the transmission of musical knowledge.

Discussion

The findings of this study challenge dominant historiographical narratives of Albanian music by demonstrating that women performers and educators were not peripheral contributors but central agents in the construction of music education, performance culture, and institutional practice between 1940 and 1995. By situating their work within a feminist musicological framework, the analysis reveals that pedagogical labor—traditionally undervalued in canonical accounts functioned as a primary site of cultural production, knowledge transmission, and artistic formation. A key insight emerging from the study is the interdependence between performance and pedagogy. Albanian women musicians frequently operated across both domains, maintaining active artistic careers while simultaneously shaping educational systems. This dual role enabled them to embed interpretative practices directly into teaching processes, thereby ensuring the continuity and standardization of musical knowledge across generations. In this sense, pedagogy did not merely reproduce existing traditions but actively participated in their transformation.

13 Sondra Wieland Howe, "A Historical View of Women in Music Education Careers," Philosophy of Music Education Review 17, no. 2 (2009): 162–165; Elizabeth S. Gould, "Music Education in Historical Perspective: Status, Non-Musicians, and the Role of Women," College Music Symposium 32 (1992): 10–13.

Furthermore, the study highlights the role of women as cultural mediators, particularly in the transfer and adaptation of European pedagogical models into the Albanian context. Rather than acting as passive recipients of foreign training, women educators selectively reinterpreted these models, aligning them with national cultural objectives and institutional constraints. This process was especially significant during the socialist period, when music education was embedded within a centralized ideological framework. Despite these constraints, women educators maintained a degree of pedagogical autonomy, contributing to the development of a distinct national approach to music education.

At the same time, the findings confirm the persistence of gendered hierarchies within musical professions, as identified in the broader literature. Women were highly present in pedagogical roles but less visible in positions associated with institutional authority or historiographical recognition. This reflects a structural tension between functional indispensability and symbolic marginalization, where pedagogical labor is essential yet systematically undervalued. From a feminist perspective, this dynamic underscores the need to reconceptualize teaching not as supportive work but as a form of intellectual and artistic authorship.

The Albanian case thus contributes to wider debates in feminist musicology and the sociology of education by illustrating how gender, pedagogy, and institutional structures intersect in shaping musical cultures. It demonstrates that the historical invisibility of women is not due to a lack of contribution, but to the frameworks through which contributions are recognized and recorded.

Conclusion

This study has examined the role of women performers and educators in the development of Albanian music education between 1940 and 1995, arguing that their contributions were foundational to both institutional formation and artistic life. Through a qualitative and historically grounded analysis, supported by feminist theoretical perspectives, the research has shown that women functioned as key agents in the construction of pedagogical systems, the transmission of musical knowledge, and the shaping of performance traditions.

By bringing together archival materials, biographical studies, and theoretical frameworks, the study addresses a significant gap in Albanian music historiography, moving beyond descriptive accounts toward an integrated analytical interpretation. It demonstrates that pedagogy must be understood as a central domain of cultural production, and that women's work within this domain constitutes a critical component of musical history.

The findings also have broader implications for contemporary music education and research. Recognizing the historical role of women educators encourages a more inclusive and critically informed approach to curriculum design, historiography, and institutional practice. It highlights the importance of integrating gender-aware perspectives into the study of music education, not only as a corrective measure but as a means of enriching our understanding of how musical knowledge is produced, transmitted, and valued.

Future research may build on this study by expanding the comparative dimension, examining similar developments in other regional contexts, or by exploring the post-1990 transformations of music education in Albania. Such work would further contribute to the ongoing effort to develop a more comprehensive and inclusive historiography of music.

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Albanian television directing in the digital era: From institutional practice to aesthetic transformation

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Abstract

Digital transformation has significantly influenced the way television programming is produced, structured, and perceived, placing the director in front of new creative and institutional challenges. This paper analyzes the evolution of Albanian television directing in the context of digital technologies, focusing on the relationship between institutional practice and the aesthetic transformation of television language. Taking as a reference point the experience of television production within the public institution, the study examines how the digitalization of technical processes, the automation of editing, the accelerated pace of broadcasting, and the use of multimedia platforms have affected directorial decision-making. In this framework, the tension between technological efficiency and the preservation of artistic authorship is addressed, as well as the impact of these developments on visual aesthetics and television narrative. The methodology of the study is based on qualitative analysis of professional practice, comparison of directing models before and after digitalization, and review of contemporary literature on post-media directing and television in the digital era. The paper argues that technology is not merely a neutral tool, but a factor that reconfigures the role of the director, creative hierarchies, and the aesthetic identity of the television product. In conclusion, the study aims to contribute to the debate on television directing as a creative and research practice, proposing the need for a critical and conscious approach to technology, so that digital transformation serves as a means of artistic enrichment rather than a limitation of creative expression.

Keywords

Television directing, digitalization, television aesthetics, institutional practice, artistic authorship

Introduction

In recent decades, Albanian television has undergone a profound transformation, both technically and aesthetically, as a direct result of digitalization processes and the development of new media technologies. This transformation has not only altered the methods of television content production and transmission, but has also reconfigured the role of the director as a creative author within institutional media structures.

Traditionally, television directing functioned within a clearly defined hierarchical system, in which artistic decision-making was built upon the collaboration between the director, camera operator, editor, and editorial structures. With the transition toward digital systems, the automation of technical processes, and the increasing pressure for rapid and continuous production, this balance has undergone significant changes. Technology has begun to intervene not merely as a tool, but also as a determining factor in shaping televisual language.

Within this context, there emerges a need to reconsider the role of the television director not only as a technical coordinator, but also as a critical and creative subject who must make aesthetic decisions within institutional and technological constraints. This paper aims precisely to analyze this tension between institutional practice and aesthetic transformation, situating Albanian television directing within the broader context of post-media developments.

Drawing on the analysis of professional practice and the review of contemporary literature, the study seeks to identify the ways in which digitalization has influenced directorial decision-making, visual aesthetics, and the identity of the Albanian television product, while also proposing a more conscious and critical approach to the use of technology within the creative process. Television should be understood not merely as a technology, but as a cultural form that reflects social structures.[1]

This paper is organized into five main sections: the introduction, the literature review, the methodology, the analysis of findings, and the conclusions accompanied by the respective recommendations.

Literature review

Television directing and the institutional model

Television directing has traditionally been approached as an intermediary practice situated between artistic creativity and institutional organization. Scholars of media and television studies have defined the television director as a key figure in coordinating visual language, narrative rhythm, and program structure, particularly within institutional contexts where editorial and technical constraints are present. In public broadcasting models, such as Albanian Public Radio Television (RTSH), directing develops within a standardized production system in which the need for efficiency is balanced against artistic and cultural responsibility.

The literature on public television emphasizes the role of the institution as a guarantor of quality, but also as a factor that directly influences the limitation or orientation of directorial choices. In this sense, directing cannot be analyzed separately from the organizational and technological structures through which it is produced.

In his analysis of filmic and televisual language, David Bordwell argues that visual organization, editing rhythm, and shot composition constitute essential elements in the construction of

1 Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Routledge, 2003).

narrative meaning. According to Bordwell, the director is not merely a technical coordinator, but an interpretive subject who constructs meaning through the aesthetic structuring of the image. This perspective contributes to an understanding of Albanian television directing as a practice that intertwines institutional organization with artistic authorship.
Public television operates within a continuous tension between its cultural mission and institutional constraints.[2]

Digitalization and post-media aesthetics

With the development of digital technologies, television has entered a new phase, defined by several scholars as the post-media phase, in which the boundaries between traditional television, online platforms, and social media become increasingly blurred. Digitalization has brought not only technical changes, but also aesthetic transformations, influencing editing rhythm, frame composition, and the relationship between image and narrative.
Scholars such as Lev Manovich and Francesco Casetti argue that digital media does not function merely as a means of transmission, but as a system that reshapes the ways in which images are perceived and produced. John Ellis further argues that television in the contemporary era is characterized by the fragmentation of information, accelerated rhythm, and media uncertainty, elements that directly affect the ways in which audiovisual content is perceived and constructed. In this sense, digital television transforms not only the technology of transmission, but also the relationship between the spectator and televisual image and narrative.
Within this context, the role of the television director is reconfigured, as aesthetic decision-making becomes increasingly intertwined with the logic of software systems, automation, and the demands of rapid production.
Digital media does not merely constitute a technical evolution of traditional media, but rather a profound transformation in the logic of image production and perception.[3] Along the same lines, television in the post-media era loses its traditional boundaries and is reconfigured as a hybrid space situated between different media forms.[4]

Albanian television directing in the contemporary context

Studies on Albanian television directing remain limited and fragmented, focusing primarily on the institutional history of television and less on the analysis of contemporary directing practices. This gap is also evident in the literature on media in Southeastern Europe, where Albania is frequently addressed in broad and generalized terms rather than through an aesthetic or professional analysis of television directing.[5]
According to studies on public television in post-socialist countries, technological and institutional transformations have significantly influenced both the production of media content and the role of media professionals. However, in the Albanian case, detailed analyses concerning the impact of digitalization on visual language and directorial decision-making remain largely absent. This research gap justifies the need for studies that combine theoretical analysis with professional practice, approaching television directing not merely as a technical function, but as an evolving

2 John Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).
3 Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).
4 Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy: Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
5 Jonathan Bignell, *An Introduction to Television Studies* (London: Routledge, 2012).

aesthetic and interpretative practice.

Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative research approach, oriented toward the analysis of directing practices within the context of Albanian public television. The methodological objective is to understand how digitalization has influenced aesthetic decision-making and the role of the television director.

Research questions

In order to guide the analysis and structure the research approach, this study is directed by a series of research questions that seek to explore the relationship between digitalization, institutional practice, and directorial decision-making within the context of Albanian Public Radio Television (RTSH).

- How has digitalization influenced the role of the television director at RTSH?
- In what ways does digital technology affect aesthetic and narrative decision-making?
- Has digitalization led to the uniformization of televisual visual language?
- How does the director negotiate between institutional constraints and artistic authorship?

Sample and object of analysis

The study focuses on the analysis of directing practices at Albanian Public Radio Television (RTSH), including:

- News editions and informational broadcasts.

- Television productions with structured formats
- Editing practices and live broadcasting operations

The sample is not statistical in nature, but rather represents a case study of a public media institution in Albania.

Data collection methods

The study employs the following methods:

- Direct observation of professional practice.
- Analysis of television production processes.
- Diachronic comparison (before and after digitalization).
- Theoretical analysis of the relevant literature.

Limitations of the study

This study is partially based on the professional experience of the author, which may influence the subjectivity of the analysis. Nevertheless, an effort has been made to balance this perspective through theoretical references and comparative analysis.[6]

Results and discussion

Television directing as a creative space under conditions of digitalization

The first research question aimed to analyze the ways in which digitalization has influenced the role of the television director at Albanian Public Radio Television (RTSH).
The analysis of directing practices at RTSH demonstrates that digitalization has produced a dual transformation: on the one hand, it has significantly increased the technical efficiency of television production, while on the other, it has reshaped the manner in which aesthetic language and visual narrative are constructed. The director no longer operates solely as an organizer of the television scene, but rather as a subject who continuously negotiates between technological demands, institutional constraints, and artistic intuition.
One of the principal outcomes of this transformation is the alteration of the relationship with time. The accelerated rhythm of broadcasting, particularly in news programs and live formats,

6 John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2014).

has reduced the space available for aesthetic reflection, pushing the director toward immediate decision-making. Nevertheless, this situation has also generated new forms of expression, in which improvisation and visual sensitivity assume an increasingly important role in the construction of the televisual message.

From an aesthetic perspective, the use of digital technologies has led to a certain uniformization of visual appearance, dictated by standardized graphics, editing templates, and the logic of production software. Within this context, directorial authorship risks becoming diminished, shifting from the creation of the image toward the management of production processes.[7]

Nevertheless, the analysis demonstrates that it is precisely within these constraints that the need emerges for a more artistically conscious form of directing, one that seeks to restore visual sensitivity and narrative rhythm as essential elements of television communication.

At Albanian Public Radio Television (RTSH), this tension becomes clearly visible in the intersection between the tradition of public television and the demands of the digital era. The director is confronted with a creative paradox: technology offers advanced tools of expression, while simultaneously imposing structures that risk transforming directing into a merely technical function. The findings of this study suggest that only through a critical and artistic approach toward technology can television directing preserve its identity as a creative and interpretative act of contemporary reality.

For example, in RTSH news editions, the use of graphic templates and predetermined editing structures reduces the space available for individual aesthetic intervention, directing the television director toward standardized forms of decision-making.

The findings further indicate that digital technology, although providing advanced tools for visual and narrative realization, has also created conditions for aesthetic uniformization and the reduction of creative space. This phenomenon is related to what John T. Caldwell defines as "production culture," in which industrial practices directly influence the aesthetic form of the media product.[8]

Television directing as the construction of space and gaze

The second research question sought to understand the ways in which digital technology influences the aesthetic and narrative decision-making of the television director.

Under conditions of digitalization, television directing is no longer limited to the linear organization of visual representation, but is transformed into a process of constructing visual space and shaping the spectator's gaze. The camera, mediated through digital technologies, is no longer merely an instrument of recording, but an active subject that shapes the perception of televisual reality. Within this context, the director operates as an architect of media space, determining what is seen, how it is seen, and through what rhythm it is perceived.

At Albanian Public Radio Television (RTSH), the use of digital broadcasting and editing systems has increased the possibilities for technical control, while simultaneously producing a tendency toward the homogenization of perspectives and camera movements. This situation creates an aesthetic paradox: the greater the degree of technical control, the more limited visual experimentation risks becoming.

7 John T. Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

8 John T. Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

In this sense, directing confronts the challenge of preserving artistic sensitivity through subtle elements such as editing rhythm, the use of long takes, or the management of scenic space. These elements shift the focus from technique toward perception, approaching television directing as a practice that constructs the relationship between image and viewer, rather than merely as a mechanism for content production.

The body, silence, and rhythm as elements of contemporary directing

The third research question addressed whether digitalization has led to the uniformization of televisual visual language. One underestimated aspect in the analysis of television directing is the role of the body and silence in the construction of visual meaning. In the digital era, where rapid rhythm and informational overload dominate the screen, directing tends to eliminate moments of silence and reflection. Nevertheless, the analysis of directing practices at Albanian Public Radio Television (RTSH) demonstrates that precisely these elements constitute significant artistic potential. The body of the character on screen, the manner in which it is positioned within the frame, the distance from the camera, and its relationship with scenic space are all directorial decisions that directly influence the viewer's emotional experience. Silence, as an aesthetic choice, creates narrative tension and gives meaning to the image, liberating it from the continuous dominance of speech. Within this context, Albanian television directing faces the need to rethink rhythm not as a function of technology, but as an aesthetic and narrative element. Digitalization should not lead to the elimination of directorial sensitivity, but rather to its reconfiguration, granting space to the body, silence, and rhythm as means of artistic expression.
In certain cases, the use of long takes and moments of silence has been avoided in favor of a rapid informational rhythm, thereby reducing the emotional potential of the image.

Television directing as an act of artistic interpretation in the digital era

The fourth research question focused on the ways in which the television director negotiates between institutional constraints and artistic authorship. In contemporary discourse on media and technology, television directing risks being reduced to an operational function, primarily associated with the management of technical resources and the adherence to standardized formats. Nevertheless, the analysis of directing practices within the context of Albanian public television demonstrates that directing remains, fundamentally, an act of artistic interpretation, mediating reality and reshaping it through visual language. The director does not merely reproduce events or content, but interprets them through aesthetic choices: the camera perspective, the relationship between close-up and wide shots, the rhythm of editing, and the interaction between sound and image. In the digital era, these decisions are often made under conditions of temporal and institutional pressure, yet it is precisely within this tension that the artistic dimension of directing emerges. At Albanian Public Radio Television (RTSH), where television production intersects with cultural and public responsibility, directing acquires a dual role: it is simultaneously a creative act and an interpretative act of social reality. Digitalization, rather than diminishing this role, renders it more complex, requiring from the director an increased aesthetic and ethical awareness. Technology provides advanced tools of expression, but it does not guarantee meaning in itself; meaning is constructed through the artistic intervention of the director. This layer of reflection suggests that television directing cannot be treated solely as a result of technology, but rather as an interpretative practice that constructs meaning through the selection, rhythmization,

and organization of the image. In this sense, Albanian television directing possesses the potential to develop as a distinct artistic form, intertwining reality, technology, and artistic sensitivity within a shared creative space.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study analyzed Albanian television directing in the digital era, approaching it not merely as a technical process, but as a creative practice directly influenced by institutional structures and technological developments. Through the analysis of professional practice at Albanian Public Radio Television (RTSH), it was demonstrated that digitalization has transformed the modes of television production, reconfiguring the role of the director and the relationship between directing and artistic authorship.

The accelerated rhythm of production, the standardization of formats, and the automation of technical processes have contributed to shifting the directorial focus from aesthetic construction toward operational management. Nevertheless, the analysis indicates that these constraints do not eliminate creativity, but rather require a more conscious and critical approach to technology. In this sense, television directing within the Albanian context should be repositioned as an interpretative and aesthetic act that combines technology with artistic sensitivity and the cultural responsibility of public television. The role of the director remains essential in preserving the visual and narrative identity of the television product, particularly within a fragmented media reality dominated by the speed of information. This study aims to serve as a foundation for further research in the field of Albanian television directing, opening pathways for more in-depth empirical and comparative analyses within an international context.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Since the analysis revealed a tendency toward aesthetic uniformization as a consequence of technology, the integration of practices that encourage visual experimentation within television production structures is recommended.
2. Since the accelerated rhythm of production limits aesthetic reflection, it is suggested that the organization of work processes be reconsidered in order to create greater space for creative decision-making.
3. Since the role of the director is increasingly shifting toward a technical function, strengthening the artistic dimension within the professional training of television directors is strongly recommended.
4. Given the lack of scholarly studies in this field in Albania, further empirical research on Albanian television directing is recommended.

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Theater as a laboratory of citizenship the role of the subject "theatre" in cognitive, civic and democratic development in the pre-university education curriculum (Albania) compared to the region and Greece

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Abstract

This article raises two main theses: first, that theater has a profound impact on individual formation, and second, that collective citizenship comes directly from exposure to artistic practices in the pre-university education system. The study examines the role of Theatre in pre-university education as a transformative tool for the cognitive, civic and democratic development of students, with a primary focus on Albania, compared to the Western Balkan countries (Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia) and Greece as a member state of the European Union. The study consists of an analysis of the curricular policies of each country and a model dataset that simulates the impact of theatre participation on three main dimensions: self-confidence, empathy and civic competence. In many cases, policies towards art and theatre in particular remain peripheral to educational decision-making. In Albania, theatre has often been considered a decorative or extra-curricular activity, although pedagogical practices and foreign studies clearly show that it plays a crucial role in the development of self-confidence, empathy and civic competences. The methodology used combines comparative documentary analysis with a statistical model, based on a Likert scale (1–5) for assessing the impact of theater on students' personal and social development. It is also based on participant observation and reflective analysis, to highlight the direct impact of the theater subject on the development of critical thinking, empathy and collective responsibility. The results show that countries with stronger integration of theater in the curriculum correspond to higher average values in civic development indicators, while Albania presents a structural gap with limited theatrical presence. The Albanian problem is paradoxical: a rich artistic culture does not translate into institutional support for the arts in schools. This has obvious consequences for the development of collective citizenship among students.The discussion connects these findings to theories of democratic education and arts pedagogy, arguing that theater functions as a laboratory of citizenship, which prepares students for active democratic involvement. The study concludes with concrete recommendations for educational policymakers to increase the impact of art and theater in the pre-university system.

Keywords

Theater, cultural education, collective citizenship, Albania, regional comparison, educational policy

Introduction

In contemporary debates on the reform of pre-university education, the focus often falls on technical skills, standardized test scores and preparation for the labor market, dominated by the paradigm of measurability and standardized performance, where cognitive, social and civic dimensions often remain on the margins of educational policies, causing artistic subjects, and in particular theater, to risk being reduced to supplementary roles. This is particularly evident in Albania, where the subject Theater is often not treated as a mandatory component of the curriculum, despite its connection to fundamental democratic competences.
In this study, I argue that theater is not just an artistic discipline, or an aesthetic addition, but it is a structural mechanism for the development of citizenship, a necessary and irreplaceable space, like a laboratory, for aesthetic, emotional and civic education that helps in the development of:

*Critical thinking.
*Emotional and social awareness.
* Of empathy and cooperation.
* Democratic relations within the school community, and beyond.

This study has three main objectives:

1. To analyze the way in which the subject of Theatre is integrated into the pre-university curricula of Albania, the Western Balkans and Greece as an EU member state.
2. To demonstrate, through a data-setting model (comparative table), the impact that participation in theater has on the cognitive and civic growth and development of students.
3. To provide policy recommendations for a stronger integration of theater into the educational system in Albania.

Theoretical framework

The purpose of art and science is to recreate by correcting the flaws of nature, using the suggestions of nature itself.
The arts and sciences are not isolated from each other, but rather, they are all interconnected. *They correct nature where it has failed*
The major arts are divided into smaller arts, in hierarchical order, and each of the latter contains specific elements that make up the former. Always a group of arts combine to form a broader, larger, and more complex art.
For example, we have the art of handicrafts (embroidery, folk and everyday clothing), but we also have the art of those who make these materials, as well as the art of those who prepare the paint for coloring the pieces, to come to the art of ***costume design***.
Theater art is like that too. It is an aesthetic combination of many other arts and sciences.
Theatre, as an artistic and pedagogical practice, represents a space where cognitive development, social interaction and civic formation are intertwined. In this context, Lev Vygotsky's theories emphasize that the development of mental functions is rooted in social and cultural interaction, making theatre an ideal environment for the internalization of social experiences through symbolic play and role-playing. This approach is reinforced by the materialist perspective of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, according to whom consciousness is formed through concrete social

practice; in this sense, theatre serves as a form of symbolic action where the individual experiences and reflects on social relations.
From a pedagogical perspective, John Dewey conceived of learning as a process based on experience and reflection, which directly aligns with the nature of theatre practice, which involves action, interaction and analysis. This is reinforced by Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, where theatre simultaneously activates interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence, helping the individual to understand themselves and others more deeply.
In the social and civic dimension, Augusto Boal's practices position theatre as a tool for critical awareness and democratic dialogue, transforming the spectator into an active participant ("spect-actor"). This is closely linked to the ideas of Martha Nussbaum, who emphasizes the role of the arts in developing "moral imagination," an essential capacity for empathy and active citizenship.
Along the same lines, studies by Ellen Winner, Thalia Goldstein and Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin show that arts education influences the development of cognitive and social skills, such as critical thinking and problem-solving. These findings align with the Council of Europe's framework for democratic competences, where empathy, cooperation and civic responsibility are considered essential for the functioning of democratic societies.

Cognitive development, symbolic play and the social dimension of learning

The cognitive development of the child cannot be understood outside the social and cultural dimension of interaction, a thesis strongly articulated by Lev Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57; p. 90), who considers symbolic play as one of the main mechanisms for the formation of higher mental functions. According to Vygotsky, in imaginative play the child operates "beyond the current level of development", entering what he calls the zone of proximal development, where interaction with others and the internalization of social roles promote cognitive growth. In this sense, symbolic play, which is the foundation of theatrical practice, creates a space where social rules, norms and relations are explored through dramatic representation. This approach is related to the historical materialist concept of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who argue that consciousness is formed through social practice and concrete relations of production and cooperation. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life . (Marx & Engels, 1845/1970, p. 47). In this perspective, theatrical activity in school can be seen as a social practice that simulates structures of relationships and collective roles, placing the student in an active process of constructing meaning. Theatre, as an organized form of symbolic play, reinforces the ability for abstraction, perspective-taking and critical reflection, essential elements for cognitive development and for the formation of a conscious civic subject. Thus, its integration into pre-university education does not only represent aesthetic enrichment, but a structural intervention in the process of constructing thought and social awareness.

Theatre and holistic education

In pedagogy, theater is perceived not only as an artistic practice, but as a tool for the development of *holistic education*. The goal of holistic education is to cultivate the physical, emotional, moral, psychological, and spiritual attributes of a developing child. Learning for the whole child means providing opportunities that are personalized to a child's abilities and sensibilities. Many school systems are increasingly accepting the theory that learning conditions, services for the

whole child, and social and emotional development are measurable variables of education and can improve equity and outcomes, (Education Counsel 2018) .
According to John Dewey's "Learning by Doing" or "Learning through Experience" theory (Dewey, 1938, pp. 25–29; 38–44), aesthetic experience contains elements of reflection and interaction that promote critical thinking and problem solving. Similar theories are also supported by (Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013, pp. 20–27; 55–62) who assess the impact of the arts on students' cognitive development.

Multiple intelligences

Howard Gardner emphasizes the importance of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence, which are systematically activated in theatrical practice. (Gardner, 1983, pp. 60–68; 239–276)
Multiple intelligences and the theatrical dimension in education constitute one of the most important theoretical frameworks for understanding the impact of art and especially theater on student development. Gardner challenges the traditional concept of intelligence as a unique ability, measurable through standardized tests, proposing the existence of several forms of intelligence, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. In this context, theater constitutes a pedagogical practice that activates in an integrated way some of these intelligences: bodily-kinesthetic intelligence through the use of the body as an expressive instrument; linguistic intelligence through the analysis and interpretation of the dramatic text; interpersonal intelligence through interaction with partners on stage; and intrapersonal intelligence through self-reflection and identity construction. of the dramatic character. The multiple dimensions that theater carries make it a powerful tool for cognitive and emotional development, transcending the limits of traditional linear teaching.
In the context of Albanian pre-university education, the systematic integration of the subject "Theater" can contribute to the creation of a learning environment that respects the diversity of learning styles and promotes the full development of students' individual potential, in accordance with the paradigm of inclusive and democratic education.

Theatre and democratic awareness

International studies on civic engagement have shown clear links between participation in artistic activities and social inclusion. Reports published by the National Endowment for the Arts (2011, pp. 3–5; 15–18) show that individuals engaged in the arts exhibit higher levels of community participation and social responsibility.
On the other hand, theatre practices with a social dimension, such as those developed by Augusto Boal (Boal, 1979, pp. 19–23; 98–104; 122–134; 155–162), demonstrate that theatre is not simply a form of entertainment, but a powerful tool for social awareness and democratic dialogue. Boal developed methodologies such as the Theatre of the Oppressed, where participants are not just passive spectators, but active actors who explore social problems, politics and unjust relations in the community. Through interactive scenes and improvisations, individuals can test different solutions to conflicts, understand the consequences of their actions and develop empathy for the experiences of others.
This approach highlights the emancipatory potential of theatre, enabling communities to reflect on injustices, interact democratically, and build critical skills for social change. For Boal, theatre thus becomes an active practice of awareness-raising, which not only informs but also empowers

participants to act towards personal and social transformation, making theatre an important tool for democratic awareness-raising and dialogue.
Although the school context is different from that of political theater, the mechanism remains the same: simulating conflict, exploring alternatives, and collective reflection.
In the classroom, the theatrical process creates: structured debate, respect for differing opinions, awareness of the consequences of actions, and exercise of collective responsibility.
In this sense, the theater hour is a micro-model of democratic society.

Theatre and democratic citizenship

According to the Council of Europe, (Council of Europe, 2018, pp. 33–36; 47–49; 52–65) the democratic competences that the article examines are:
Empathy / the ability to understand and feel the experiences of others.
Critical thinking / the capacity to analyze situations and social relationships, looking at them from different perspectives.
Collaboration /ability to work in a group and achieve collective goals.
Civic responsibility / understanding of the individual role in society and acting in accordance with democratic values. As well as decision-making in different social contexts.
Foreign literature and empirical studies show that theatrical practice fosters all of these competencies. Theater, as a laboratory of emotional expression and collaboration, is a unique pedagogical tool that cannot be replaced by theoretical subjects.
Theatre provides a space for the exercise of these skills through role-play, improvisation and dramatic analysis (Boal, 1979, pp. 98–104; 122–134). Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2010, pp. 95–105; 132–135), notes that the arts contribute to the development of the "moral imagination" that is essential for active citizenship. She argues that the arts, through literature, theatre, music and other creative forms, help individuals develop "moral imagination". This is the ability to understand and feel the experiences, emotions and perspectives of others, even when they are not part of our own personal experience. In practice, this helps citizens make more just decisions, be more empathetic and actively engage in social and political life.
So, art is not just aesthetic pleasure; according to Nussbaum, it is a pedagogical and civic tool, because it helps to form individuals who can understand the complexity of human life and act responsibly and justly.

Methodology

This study uses a combined approach of data from:
Ministry of Education, Albania. (2021). Pre-University Education Curriculum. Tirana: Government of Albania.
Ministry of Education, Kosovo. (2016). Curriculum Framework for Arts Education. Prishtina: Government of Kosovo.
Ministry of Education, North Macedonia. (2018). National Curriculum Reform: Arts Education. Skopje: Government of North Macedonia.
Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, Montenegro
Ministry of Education, Serbia. (2019). Arts Education Programs in Secondary Schools. Belgrade: Government of Serbia.
Greece (Drama Education Curriculum, 2020)

This analysis has a particular focus on:

- The number of hours dedicated.
- The status of the theater subject (compulsory/elective).
- Integration with civic competencies.

Data set statistical simulation model.

To demonstrate the impact of theater participation, I built and distributed a model dataset for Albania/Tirana, which assesses the impact of theater participation in three dimensions:

https://forms.gle/pBpq2yQwThSWVuoa8
1. Individual self-confidence
2. Social empathy
3. Civic competence

The instrument for this simulation is a Likert-scale questionnaire (1–5) with 24 questions divided into three dimensional groups. The average of the model scores was used for statistical and visual comparisons.
I must emphasize that it was difficult to contact and distribute this questionnaire to school students as special permission was required for this.

Case study

- To illustrate the pedagogical impact, I have analyzed my work on children's plays. "Windmill" 2022, with the children of "Zëri 16+ Elbasan", in collaboration with Save the Children Albania. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jf4n09zZ4Vk
- The work of students from the University of Arts in Tirana, with a children's show ("Pip-it's Superpower" 2026), with students from the "Zyber Hallulli" Children's Home.
- My involvement as a coach and jury member in the "Poetry Fever" competition, held on the "E Diell" 2017 show , on Top Channel. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKgG-riIUCd0

Results

Comparative analysis of regional curricula

From the documentary analysis, it results that:
Greece has a relatively structured integration of dramaturgy into the curriculum, with specific lessons and modules linked to civic education.
Serbia and Montenegro feature curricula where the subject of theater is part of artistic structures, with a focus on communication, cooperation and culture.
North Macedonia and Kosovo have theater as part of the "Art" or "Artistic Culture" subject, but without detailed modules on citizenship.
Albania has a minimal theater presence in the curriculum, often fragmentarily integrated into other subjects without a specific schedule.

This creates the Theatre Attendance Index (TEI) for the countries compared:

country	Annual hours	StatUS	Civic integration	Theater projects	IPT (0-20)
Albania or	***1.5***	***2***	***2***	***2***	***7***
Chuang	***2.0***	***3***	***2***	***3***	***9***
North Macedonia	***2.5***	***3***	***3***	***3***	***11***
Montenegro	***3.0***	***4***	***3***	***3***	***12***
Serbia	***3.5***	***4***	***4***	***4***	***13***
Greece	***4.0***	***5***	***4***	***4***	***15***

Table 1. Theatre Presence Index (TPI) in countries in the region

Model dataset resultsTirana/Albania

The simulation shows that students with theater involvement report higher averages in all three dimensions:

index	With Theater	Without Theater	Difference
overconfidence	***4.42***	***3.61***	***+0.81***
empathy	***4.34***	***4.05***	***+0.29***
Civic competence	***4.56***	***4.09***	***+0.47***

80+ students from grades VI-XII participated

1. Self-confidence - the biggest difference. +0.81, is a very significant difference and shows that theater has a direct impact on: expression, confidence in public, initiative.
2. Empathy - smaller but positive difference. Both groups are high (above 4.0) +0.29 for theater and shows that Empathy is a more universal competence, but theater deepens and refines it.
3. Civic competence−clear effect. +0.47 in favor of theater, indicates: more cooperation, more sense of responsibility, more community orientation.

The comparative conclusion is very clear and very strong.

Between students engaged in theater activities and those not engaged, clear differences are shown in all three dimensions studied. The most pronounced impact is evidenced in the development of self-confidence, while empathy appears relatively high in both groups , with a slight advantage for the group involved in theater. Civic competences also show a significant increase in students who practice theater, supporting the idea that theater practices function as a socializing and formative environment, in line with Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory.
Theatre does not function only as a means of individual expression and is not only an art that

takes place on stage, it is a pedagogical mechanism, a laboratory of civic formation, where the individual develops through interaction, reflection and collective experience. Theatre builds citizenship, through shared experience, increasing the courage to express oneself more than just sensitivity.

Directorial practice

Students who initially had difficulty focusing attention, articulating due to emotions from the presence of the audience, or discipline, not just the stage, through exercises for the stage space, collaboration with friends to manage dramatic conflicts, showed:

- Increased individual self-confidence for everyone.
- Development of empathy and the ability to understand different perspectives.
- Strengthening personal and collective responsibility, as well as increasing group discipline.
- Understanding and implementing their rights as children.

These practical examples demonstrate that theater functions as a citizenship laboratory and directly impacts students' democratic skills.

Discussion

The results suggest that the systematic inclusion of theater in the curriculum is related to the development of democratic competences in students. This suggests that theater should be considered, not as an isolated artistic discipline, but as an interdisciplinary component with systemic impact.
These findings are consistent with international literature linking the arts to the development of "moral imagination" (Nussbaum, 2010), critical thinking (Eisner, 2002), and active civic participation (Council of Europe, 2018).
In the Albanian context, the lack of a consolidated theater plan may contribute to creating a gap in the development of active citizenship at a young age, limiting the space for critical reflection and social cooperation.

Conclusions and recommendations

Main conclusions

1. Between pedagogical practice and educational policies, there is a contradiction, indicating that the institutional undervaluation of art has direct consequences on the development of collective citizenship.
2. Theater is a powerful pedagogical tool for the cognitive and democratic development of students.
3. Its integration into the curriculum is positively linked to civic skills.
4. Albania has a relatively low presence of theater in pre-university education compared to countries in the region and Greece.

The results of this study suggest that the subject of theatre contributes directly to the development of active citizenship, emotional intelligence and critical thinking and that the role of theatre is essential in individual and collective formation. At a time when the education system risks being reduced to a performative mechanism, theatre offers a humane and democratic model of civic formation. Its underestimation, by educational policy, limits the development of collective citizenship in Albania. If education aims to produce only measurable performance, theatre may seem unnecessary, but if it aims to form individuals capable of democratic coexistence, conflict management and social empathy, then theatre is irreplaceable.
Theater is not a luxury . It is a laboratory of citizenship.

Recommendations for educational policies

Mandatory integration of theater in grades 6-12, with clear development objectives.
Specialized training for theater teachers.
Not only performative, but reflective assessment
Infrastructural support for theatrical activities.
Monitoring and evaluation of pedagogical and civic impact.

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The city as a character urban narrative and aesthetic education in contemporary children's literature

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Abstract

In the context of digital transformation and the challenges facing the cultural education of younger generations, literature as a whole and children's literature in particular, often remains overlooked, despite its significant potential as a powerful tool for transmitting cultural heritage. This paper examines the book In the Heart of the Old City, aimed at children aged 5–10, as an educational model that intertwines artistic narrative with the exploration of the historical monuments of the city of Shkodër. Through the motif of a magical map and the discovery of valuable sites such as Rozafa Castle, the Mesi Bridge, and historic houses, the book creates a learning experience that combines emotion, imagination, and the shaping of children's cultural identity. Its narrative approach seeks to make cultural heritage tangible and understandable for early-age readers, shifting the learning process from a purely informative model toward an interactive and emotionally engaging experience. The study explores the role of the book in fostering cultural awareness among children and proposes it as a replicable model for heritage education in the age of technology. The methodology employed is based on questionnaires and field meetings conducted during the promotion of the book in various schools in the city of Shkodër, analyzing children's perceptions and responses to its content.

Keywords

Shkodër, cultural heritage, children's book, cultural identity

Introduction

In an era dominated by technology, social networks, and digital media, the way children interact with urban spaces and historical memory has undergone profound transformations. Increasingly, the city is perceived as a functional reality, tied to movement and practical use, while its historical and educational dimensions remain overshadowed. In this context, children's literature presents a unique potential to mediate the relationship between the child and cultural heritage

The storybook "In the Heart of the Old City" builds a narrative where two children are guided by a magical map toward the main monuments of Shkodër. The city does not appear merely as a backdrop for events, but as a space that communicates, orients, and shapes the characters' experiences. This approach places the work within the paradigm of urban narrative, where the built environment takes an active role in the story's structure.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how urban narrative in contemporary children's literature can contribute to aesthetic education and the construction of cultural consciousness, using the aforementioned book as a case study.

Children's literature and aesthetic education

Numerous scholars emphasize that children's literature plays a fundamental role in the development of imagination and aesthetic perception. Aesthetic experience at an early age influences how an individual builds relationships with art, space, and culture. Illustrative books, in particular, create a multimodal environment where text and image interact to produce meaning. This interaction is especially effective for children aged 5–10, who process information through visual and narrative channels simultaneously

Scholar Rudina Alimerko[1] emphasizes that children's literature represents an essential instrument in transmitting cultural values and shaping creative thinking in young readers. According to her, this literature, through its linguistic richness and imaginative dimension, helps children recognize the history and tradition of their country, functioning as a bridge between aesthetic and cultural education. In this sense, a children's book should not be viewed merely as a means of entertainment, but as a formative space that influences the development of a child's critical and emotional perception.

This theoretical approach supports the interpretation of the work In the heart of the Old City[2] , where the urban space of Shkodër is constructed through a narrative that activates the reader's imagination and cultural consciousness. By placing the city at the center of the narrative experience, the book materializes what Alimerko considers a fundamental function of children's literature: the intertwining of aesthetic, cognitive, and cultural dimensions. In this view, the book's urban narrative serves not only for spatial orientation but for the formation of an emotional relationship with heritage, precisely the function that Ms. Alimerko attributes to children's literature in the contemporary context.

Analytical overview of the book

1 Rudina Alimerko, Letërsia për fëmijë: (Nga Rilindja deri në kohët e sotme) (Disertacion doktorature, Universiteti i Tiranës, 2014

2 Sabrina Kuçi, Në zemër të qytetit të vjetër: Përshtatur për fëmijët e moshës 5–10 vjeç (Shkodër: Fiorentia, 2025)

In the heart of the Old City [3] is constructed as an educational-artistic narrative where the city of Shkodër appears not merely as a backdrop, but as a "character" possessing memory, voice, and rhythm. From the outset, two children, Serena (aged 7) and Rian (aged 5), are placed in a warm, typically Shkodran family environment where childhood curiosity is ignited by a symbolic object: the "Memory Map". The map is discovered in a cellar among "trunks of memories" and is described as a living entity that "breathes," appearing to those ready to listen to the "voices of the city". This immediately establishes a narrative logic where urban memory is both tangible and active

The structure of the work is organized into episodes, where each stop on the journey connects a monument with a "mystery" and an emotional experience. This approach transforms monuments from cold, informative objects into communicative "actors". The episode at Rozafa Castle utilizes time travel and legend as tools for identification; the castle is no longer "just stone," but a space filled with life and voices where children experience history as a "living dream". This mechanism makes heritage understandable for early ages without reducing it to didactic explanation.

The same logic is followed at the Mesi Bridge, which appears as a metaphor for connection—not just spatial, but human and temporal. The dialogue explicitly emphasizes that the bridge "keeps connections alive... between people, between times, between hearts," while the children's experience transforms the river into a "flow of time". In this way, urban space becomes an instrument of aesthetic education, and the child "feels" the city rather than just learning facts about it.

In terms of narrative structure, the figure of the grandfather serves as a generational mediator and a guarantor of emotional credibility. He reads the map, names the sites, explains them as heritage, and guides the children toward "listening" to the city . this figure softens the magical elements and links them to family tradition, creating a bridge between private and collective memory.

A significant symbolic axis of the work is religious coexistence, articulated not as an abstract statement but as a narrative experience that children "see" and feel. In the Lead Mosque episode, the story links the monument to collective memory and rebuilding: the returning minaret, "rising proudly over the city," becomes a sign that Shkodër's identity "can be wounded, but not extinguished". Complementarily, at the Great Church, the ceiling painted by Idromeno is experienced as "a tale of stars that never fade," where aesthetic beauty is transformed into an ethical message of harmony and coexistence. Thus, both sacred spaces function as "actors" of the same idea: that the city-character educates through aesthetics and memory.

The book does not rely solely on the storytelling of histories carried by each monument, nor exclusively on the construction of an urban narrative where Shkodër appears as an active character. Within its pages, careful consideration has been given to the aesthetic treatment, utilizing a visual language that builds atmosphere, emotion, and rhythm, thereby making the experience of the city accessible to children. The illustrations do not serve merely as text decoration but as a distinct layer of meaning in their own right. They guide attention, spark imagination, and reinforce the young reader's relationship with the narrative space. Although interaction with the reader is not achieved through direct forms (such as frequent questions or open instructions) it is present indirectly through a structure that invites the child to pause, observe, reflect, and return. An important element of this educational design is the supplementary sections, such as the

3 Sabrina Kuçi, Në zemër të qytetit të vjetër: Përshtatur për fëmijët e moshës 5–10 vjeç (Shkodër: Fiorentia, 2025)

message at the end of the tales and the glossary, which function as clear pedagogical pillars. These are not random choices but part of a strategy aimed at introducing children to the idea of learning through research, encouraging them to acquire new vocabulary, understand that unfamiliar terms require explanation, and recognize that consulting a source (a dictionary, parent, or teacher) is a natural part of the cognitive process. In this way, the book builds not only cultural content but also a nascent culture of "study" and sustained curiosity.

Equally significant is the potential for personalization of each tale, turning the work into a type of memory album. The opportunity for a child to place a photo, a drawing, or a short note after visiting a monument shifts the book from an object of reading to an object of experience, where personal memory intertwines with the city's memory. This strengthens the emotional bond with heritage and makes the city feel closer, as the child sees themselves as part of the history being discovered.

inally, the technological dimension of the illustrations, although realized with the help of AI, maintains an intentional connection to reality: the figures are based on the features of real children, creating identification, while the coloring space in each tale adds another layer of interaction and fun. Thus, the book positions itself as a contemporary model where technology does not replace experience but serves it. Aesthetic education, cultural heritage, and creative play coexist in a format that invites the child to read, explore, question, and remember. The work emerges as an integrated model: narrative + emotion + aesthetics + cultural identity + entertainment, where the city is constructed as a "character" that invites the child to enter into a relationship with it

Methodology and questionnaire analysis[4]

The data collected through the online questionnaire, with a participation of 72 respondents, provide a stable empirical basis for how the book In the Heart of the Old City is perceived and experienced by children aged 5–10, according to reports from parents, various family members, and teachers/educators. In general, the results demonstrate a high level of engagement during the reading process, where the majority of ratings regarding the children's interest are ranked in the highest levels (4 and 5).

4 Sabrina Kuçi, Në zemër të qytetit të vjetër, Google Form, accessed February 26, 2026

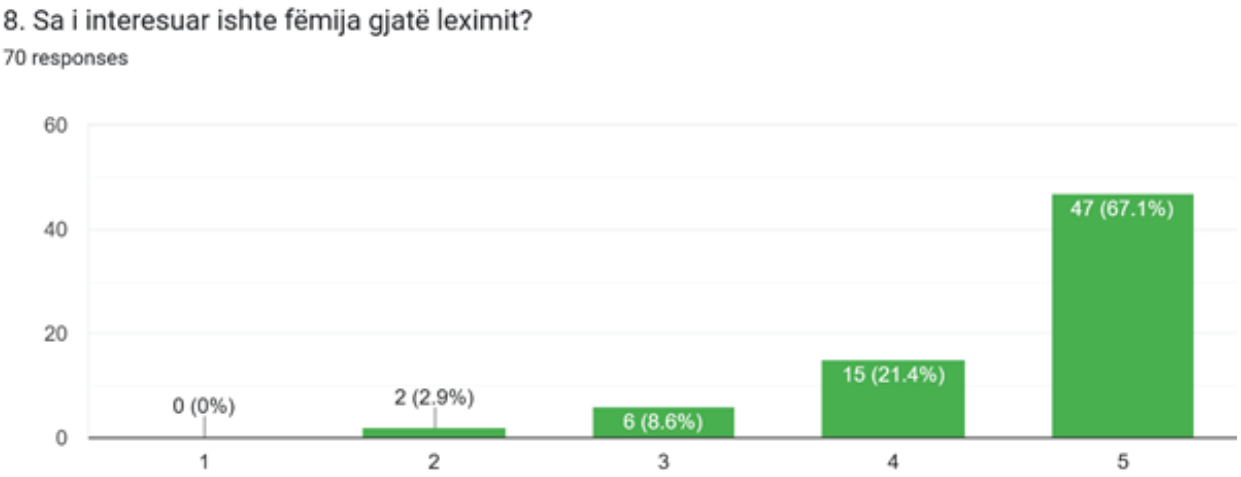

Figure 1. Grafiku i përgjigjeve për pyetjen nr.8

In particular, the dominant portion of responses positions interest at the maximum level (5), suggesting that the narrative structure built upon the exploration of the city activates not only attention but also the emotional involvement of the young reader, a crucial component of aesthetic education in early childhood.

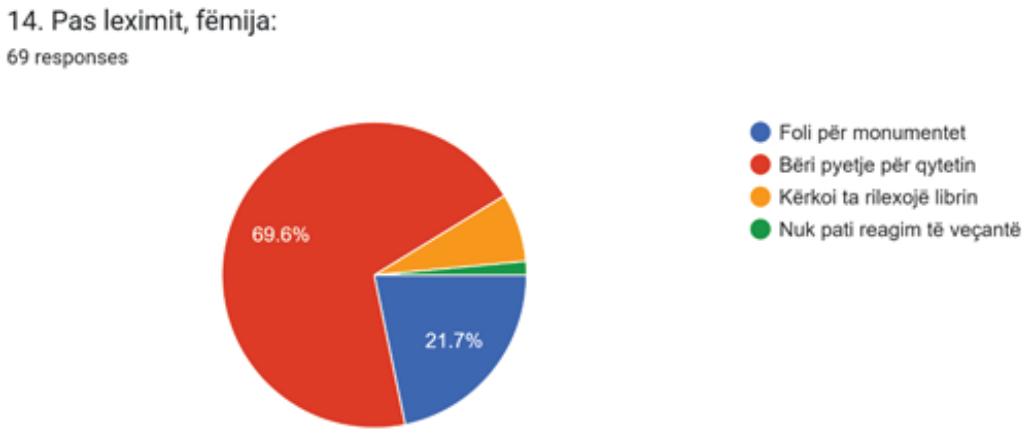

Figure 2. Grafiku i përgjigjeve për pyetjen nr.14

A significant indicator of narrative effectiveness is the presence of active reactions following the reading. The frequency of responses stating that children "asked questions," "talked about the monuments," or "requested a re-reading" suggests that interaction with the text goes beyond passive consumption and transforms into a reflective and dialogic process. This aligns with contemporary children's literature, where a narrative is considered most successful when it encourages active participation, curiosity, and an expansion of the perceptual horizon.

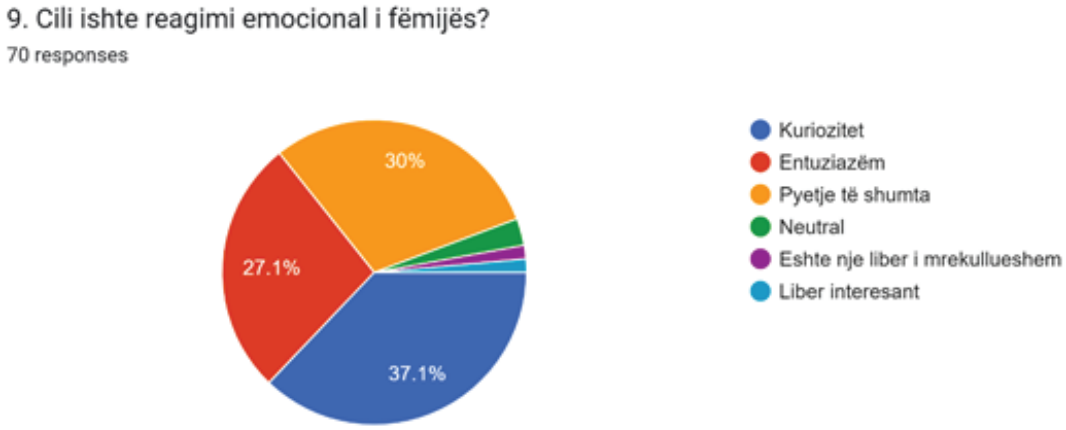

Figure 3. Grafiku i përgjigjeve për pyetjen nr.9

In this framework, the monuments included in the narrative (e.g., Rozafa Castle, Mesi Bridge, historic houses) do not function merely as carriers of cultural information, but as narrative actors that structure the journey and the reader's emotional orientation. Through personification and symbolic significance, the urban space of Shkodër shifts from the traditional role of a decorative backdrop toward an active presence within the story. This transformation supports the central thesis of the paper: that the city, when constructed through a narrative language adapted for children, can be perceived as a "character" that interacts with the reader and influences the formation of cultural perception.

Another important dimension relates to the way reading is mediated. A significant portion of the children experienced the book through shared reading with a parent or teacher, or within a classroom context, which reinforces the social character of reading and the role of the adult as a facilitator of understanding. This finding creates a natural parallel with the internal structure of the book, where the figure of the grandfather builds a symbolic bridge between generations and serves as a guide in the discovery of the city.

From the perspective of aesthetic education, the results are particularly encouraging: ratings for the quality of the illustrations are very high, and almost all valid responses indicate that the book sparks the imagination. This suggests that the visual component, as part of a multimodal approach (text + image), plays a decisive role in the acquisition of cultural content and in increasing its memorability. Furthermore, the majority of valid responses report the children's desire to visit the mentioned monuments, demonstrating that the book's urban narrative not only activates the experience during the moment of reading but also produces impulses for further interaction with heritage in real space.

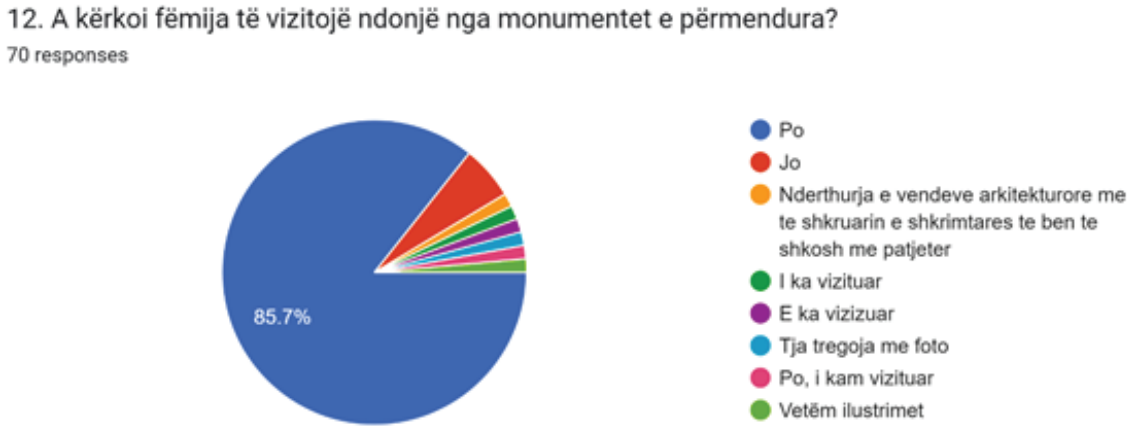

Figure 4. Grafiku i përgjigjeve për pyetjen nr.12

Overall, the data support the hypothesis that *In the Heart of the Old City* represents an effective model of urban narrative for children, where the city of Shkodër emerges as a dynamic and formative presence in aesthetic and cultural education, with reproducible potential in broader educational and cultural practices.

Conclusions

The results of the questionnaire suggest that the value of the book *In the Heart of the Old City* is not limited solely to the aesthetic experience during reading but extends to its potential for integration into various educational and community environments. In particular, responses regarding the question "In which environment do you think the book is most useful?" show that the book is perceived as a tool usable in more than one context: in the family, in school/ kindergarten, and in cultural activities. This result supports the idea that the book's urban narrative, where the city appears as a "character," functions as a bridge between formal and informal education, providing the work with pedagogical flexibility.
n equally significant finding is the interest expressed toward the question "Would you be interested in educational activities related to the book (monument visits, guided readings, etc.)?". The high readiness for activities shows that the book acts as a catalyst for direct experience, where the child does not remain solely within the narrative but seeks (or is expected to seek) to transform the narrative into practice through visits, dialogue, and exploration. This reinforces the paper's thesis that the city, when treated narratively, is not just an object of learning but a space for aesthetic and cultural experience
Furthermore, responses to "Would you like more similar books about the city's heritage?" indicate a clear demand for continuity and the expansion of this model. This indicator is important not only as an evaluation of the current book but also as a signal for the possibility of replicating the approach: a series of similar books for neighborhoods, monuments, other cities, or even for themes of intangible heritage.

On a qualitative level, the open-ended comments from the questionnaire serve as a layer of interpretation that deepens the analysis. Within them, several recurring directions of reflection

are observed:

(i) An appreciation of the educational dimension and the simple method of explanation;
(ii) The importance of illustrations and visual appeal;
(iii) A desire for more accompanying materials, such as activities, guides for parents/teachers, and organized visits
(iv) The evaluation of the book as a catalyst for curiosity and family conversations regarding the city and its monuments.

These comments reinforce the conclusion that the book functions as an integrated tool for aesthetic education: capable of producing emotion, encouraging dialogue, and opening pathways for a real experience of heritage.
The recommendations arising from these findings emphasize that the use of the book in schools and kindergartens as supporting material for cultural education and language development is both important and necessary. This should be accompanied by the development of a companion package for educators, including short guides with questions, games, and visit proposals. Furthermore, special emphasis should be placed on developing activities related to the monuments, such as guided readings, itineraries, and simple family visits. Finally, focus should be directed toward expanding this model through similar publications for other heritage objects and other cities

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"The highland lute" a monumental work in Albanian literature: An overview

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Abstract

Aim: The aim of this study is to safeguard and advance the spiritual legacy of a nation. "The Highland Lute" is a significant contribution to the field of Albanian literature. It encompasses the comprehensive exploration, cultivation, analysis, study, and promotion of the spiritual legacy of Albania, all of which are intricately intertwined with the multifaceted character of Gjergj Fishta. Object: The objective of this research on Gjergj Fishta is to determine how important historical memory is to the instructions he penned for his literary masterwork "The Highland Lute". Methodology: This study presents a synthesis of several techniques and a critical examination of multiple methodologies, including hermeneutic, semiotic, sociological, and anthropological methods. Collectively, these approaches will form the methodology employed in this study. Results: Upon revisiting "The Highland Lute", it became evident that the author lacked proficiency in playing the lute as a musical instrument and singing like a rhapsody of the mountains. However, the author possessed a profound understanding of the psyche and thinking of the residents of North Highland. Discussion: The songs depicted in "The Highland Lute" serve as a reflection of the historical events within the context of the traditions, customs, and mindsets prevalent in the northern Albanian regions. Through a thorough examination, several recommendations can be derived. Recommendations: "The Highland Lute" is undeniably a significant piece of Albanian literature that profoundly connects with the historical recollection and spiritual legacy of the Albanian populace. Despite being examined by linguists, writers, folklore trackers, jurists, and others, it is recommended that this work be endorsed as a valuable possession of the Albanian museum's spiritual legacy. If feasible, it should be transcribed into the contemporary Albanian language to ensure maximum accessibility for all generations, as well as for local and international researchers interested in studying the spiritual and cultural heritage of Albania.

Keywords

Lute, highland, rhapsody, tradition, song

Introduction

Gjergj Fishta (1871-1940) emerged as a very influential figure in Albanian literature and national culture, exhibiting notable qualities as a publicist, nationalist, diplomat, and clergyman while also possessing exceptional spiritual and intellectual attributes. He epitomized the preeminent and influential personality in Albanian literature during the initial half of the twentieth century, surpassing all other writers in artistically articulating the inquisitive essence of the nascent autonomous Albanian nation.

Gjergj Fishta, widely regarded as a highly knowledgeable authority on both written and unwritten cultural legacy, has significantly influenced the development of Albanian national identity over the course of several decades. Fishta's publications on the topic of heritage revolve upon his *"exceptional understanding and appreciation of the country's customs and traditions."* (Çabej 1990, p.1450). The Albanian linguist Eqrem Çabej brought attention to this argument.

He was born and raised in a cultural milieu where oral epics, along with various forms of oral poetry, held significant prominence across diverse strata of society. These literary forms were highly regarded and viewed as having spiritual and artistic merit.

Within this context, specifically pertaining to a comprehensive understanding of the customs and traditions of the nation and their manifestation in the societal dynamics of a specific Albanian community, the artistic prowess of Gjergj Fishta is also evident. This is exemplified through his renowned masterpiece, *"The Highland Lute"*.

"The Highland Lute" is organized into 30 units or songs, as the author calls them, in 17,000 verses, is the result of over thirty years of work, the beginnings of which date back to 1905, within the framework of several publications assessed as *"Foundation stones of the National Epic."* (Gjeçaj 2007, 44), to take a final form in 1937, since the audience of researchers has been described as an *"epic poem with Albanian Homeric values."* (Kulli 2022, 102).

It is important to acknowledge that *"The Highland Lute"* serves as a testament to Fishta's lifelong artistic endeavors, thereby establishing his enduring significance within the annals of national history.

This work embodies the author's life and creative experiences, influenced by the customs, traditions, values, myths, and canon of the Northern Highlands. *It aims to honor and preserve the essence of the world through artistic means while also reflecting the Albanian spirit throughout history.* (Berisha 1996, 91).

Fishta authored *"The Highland Lute"* with the aim of disseminating its lines as melodious tunes within the collective consciousness of individuals. Recognizing the significance of folk art, Fishta composed his work by heavily relying on oral poetry. He incorporated the folkloric expressive figurative system, traditional rhetoric models, and the direct emotional message conveyed through his verses, although many of his peers lacked literacy skills. The Historical, Literary and Ethnocultural Background of "The Highland Lute"

Gjergj Fishta's work *"The Highland Lute"* focuses on the Northern Highlands of Albania, exploring the traditions, customs, myths, virtues, worldviews, and social life of the Albanian population residing in these regions.

All of these components, particularly manifested in units that he referred to as songs, are connected to the lute, not only as a musical instrument but also as a synonymous representation of traditional narrative. The lute is a musical instrument that has been extensively utilized by the residents of northern Albania. They have sung about significant events that have had a lasting impact on the history of the Albanian people, particularly through epic ballads.

To put it otherwise, this significant piece of literature encapsulates the fundamental aspects of the Albanian nation, including the name Albania, the Albanian language, and our long-standing traditions and customs.
Gjergj Fishta's *"The Highland Lute"* depicts conflicts spanning two generations, with notable events being recounted through the songs of the lute. *"The Highland Lute"* is an epic poem that deviates from the conventional structure of having a primary action or hero, which is typical of great epics. Instead, Fishta presents a multitude of heroes in this poem, such as Oso Kuka, Dedë Gjo Luli, Marash Ucit, Tringa, Abdyl Frashëri, and Ali Pashë Gucia.
The work commences by celebrating the valor of Albanians in defending their territories against Montenegrin assaults, primarily in northern Albania. However, it is carefully chosen to encompass specific Albanian events and characteristics. The work begins by examining a certain province and then expands to encompass the entire Albanian ethnic group. It initially explores the characteristics of a particular area, focusing on masculinity, and ultimately develops the concept of the nation. (Hamiti 2009, p. 18).

Gjergj Fishta delved into the profound depths of the mountaineer's innermost being, extracting from it the rich tapestry of traditions, customs, beliefs, mythology, superstitions, rituals, aspirations, curses, songs, and essence to capture the true ethnic identity, unwavering courage, warrior spirit, and deep-rooted national pride that have endured in Albanian culture to this day.

"*Not for true men cane and prison,*
Better for them noose or sabre.
A gross act when perpetrated
Only sure to breed more evil,
Flowing brooks become a torrent." (Fishta 1991, 119).

"Without a lute, an Albanian has no national epic, and without an Albanian, a lute has no subject. A lute is a gold mine where scholars, lawyers, folklorists, historians, writers, and ethnologists may all find a place to study and gather important materials for the creation of the entity known as the Albanian nation." (Duka-Gjini 1996, 88)

"Albanian culture lacks a national epic if it does not include the lute and the lute loses its significance if it is not associated with Albanian culture." The lute is a useful resource for ethnologists, lawyers, historians, writers, and folklorists to study and find valuable material for the development of Albanian countries. (Ibid, p.88).

"The Highland Lute" depicts events that primarily occurred inside limited geographical boundaries, where the poem's creative landscape is conveyed, as exemplified by this verse:

"It's the land of our forefathers,
Yes, of Scanderbeg the birthplace,
Yes, the land of Mois Golemi,
Homeland of Lekë Dukagjini.
Kuka and Muzaku
And of Streza, Arianiti,
who all with the Turks did battle.

Thus, there's no one, king or sultan,
Who can cede or sell our home as
Long's Albanians are still present
On the earth to cast a shadow.
Thus, they ended the epistle,
finished the writing and did fold it.
On its way they sent said letter,
Gave it to Berlin where gathered
All the Seven Kings and sultan,
passing judgment on the planet." (Fishta 1991, 113).

The significance of Gjergj Fishta's work *"The Highland Lute"* lies in its relationship to three key elements: the author, the reader, and the shared code that connects them.
"This communication process connects what is special (the author and the meaning of his work) with what is universal (the code of the language or of the special literary language)." (Dado 2003, 16).

"*With them, I think you'll disarm those*
Turkish soldiers up in Rapsha,
Marash Uci said to Dedë, "so
I will tell Kastrati, Shkreli,
Send words also to Kelmendi
That they hide their herds and kinfolk,
That their men guard well the passes,
Let's be off, lands!" (Fishta 1991, 474).

The artwork depicts actual people and characters from various eras of the country's history. Fishta himself has actually left us to witness the opening of the Canon of Lekë Dukagjini, where it states that, *"Folklore is the inexhaustible source of the language and literature of the country; it is the sharp mirror of the psyche of the community; it is a marble slab, on which history carves out the wanderings and health of peoples."* (Fishta 1933, XXI).

Fishta's work deeply appreciated Albanian traditions. He constructed this piece in a manner that would prevent it from being forgotten over time, ensuring its transmission by oral tradition from one generation to the next. Albanians view their national culture as having spiritual worth and consider it a spiritual inheritance. They see it as their job to preserve this culture.

"*And you'll hear that water weeping,*
Even now the Drin's lamenting
At George Castriota's grave side,
He who branded once his sabre,
Flashed it at Albania's foemen,
Like a bolt from the Almighty.
Here, too, dwelled once King Bardylis
Who the landscape drenched with foe blood?
Gere, too, reigned once Queen Teuta,

Falcon-heart, Illyrian maiden
who knew not of fear the meaning.
Like a horn-beaked mountain eagle,
Did she rush upon the Romans,
Turned blood-red the Adriatic.
Here lived Clinc and Pleuratus,
Hila, Agron and poor Genthius,
Who were raised here and did flourish.
In good luck and in misfortune". (Fishta 1991, 450-451).

The rhapsodists from the North recited Fishta's verses on the lute and passed them down as a spiritual inheritance to their relatives. The people diligently safeguarded Fishta's work, transmitting it orally across successive generations and rendering it aesthetically pleasing not only to its admirers but also to its adversaries.

"When the moon appears at night,
Do the oras, zanas gather?
Holding hands they stand assembled,
Holding hands as white as snowflakes,
Let their gentle voices sing out,
See them swaying and intoning
Battles fought by our forethfathers,
By those old Illyrian heroes,
As they mourn the bitter fate of
Our wretched land, Albania,
Wrapped in mourning robes
When the Turks invaded, they seized it,
On the death of Castriota
Scourge of God, those Turkish fighters,
And the mountains, canyons echo
To the droning and the dancing.
If you, nonetheless, are weary,
Bored of listening to my singing,
(Though without you, oh, my zana,
I would hardly get a word out,
Not a word that's worth remembering). (Fishta 1991, 451).

Certain aspects of Fishta's epic are similar to those of the Kreshnik's epic, including: lute, descriptions, exaggerations, oils, horrors, warning dreams, magical formulas addressed to clocks and fairies, correspondence exchanges, the role and characteristics of fairies, the number system, 30, 300, oaths, wishes, and curses.

Hence, it can be asserted that *"The Highland Lute" is a grandiose poetic composition that mirrors the conflicts, ideologies, and mentality of a society during its early stages of nation-building, ultimately leading to its autonomy. Fishta's perspective aligns closely with that of the people. He is the descendant of an ancient lineage in the Mediterranean with a rich history*

spanning thousands of years. He resides and engages in a dynamic pursuit, similar to only a handful of other writers at that era, within the midst of his own community, precisely at a time when that community was striving to establish its identity." (Çobani & Balalbani, 2020, 62-63).

"Therefore, men, I think it best to
Our discussions are as follows:
And be seated, write a letter,
Scribe a letter, as is custom,
To Berlin, the Seven Kings there,
Saying under shkajs we'll not live
'Toward the Drin, Shkumbin and Buna
Rivers, all three here have dried up.
Thus, Pasha of Gucia
Spoke and chieftains of Albania
Laid out paper, penned a letter,
Word for word considered wisely:
"You in Stamboul who are sultan,
Greetings form Albania's chieftains.
On the judgment you awarded,
Giving to the shkajs our homeland,
Please consider well the matter.
Doom is likely to befall us,
For to no one we'll be servants,
We'll pay no one tithes and taxes,
This our homeland, fair Albania,
God himself bestowed upon us,
Not a gift from the Italians,
From the French it was not filched or
From the English, from the Teutons,
From the Slavs for sure not stolen,
Who but lately seized the Balkans.
Who knows where they hang their hats now?
Here today and gone tomorrow,
Moving like a cloud of locusts?" (Fishta 1991, 112-113).

Gjergj Fishta, through his songs, emphasized the importance of language and ethnology in promoting national identity. In his work, Fishta argued that the reflection of a people can be traced back to its laws, canons, popular poetry, documents, and the sentiments it holds toward religion, manhood, and honor.
Language is a crucial component of a nation's identity, and Fishta remained loyal to the same words, idioms, and other phraseological units he had heard from the speech of the people living in the Northern Highlands. He transcribed them without any changes.

"Fishta's work can be considered the most monumental endeavor by Albanians to explore their own world, as it draws heavily from the expressive forms of art originating from Malsori." (Koliqi 1941, 54).

He passionately conserved the speech of the residents of the Northern Highlands, serving as a defender of the rich language of our folklore with a clear aim. *"Fishta, deeply connected to the traditions and culture of his people, had a strong desire to acquire knowledge of the language spoken by the men and women residing in the mountainous regions of Albania."* He has skillfully removed the curses and wishes from them.
Fishta's labor spanned 37 years, during which real and mythological figures peacefully coexisted, uniting in their shared objective of triumphing against the invaders of Albanian territories. In his poem, Fishta portrays several historical figures that resemble romantic heroes and, at times, even heroic ones in their descriptions and analogies.

"Fishta's epic literary work, *"The Highland Lute"*, has numerous myths about supernatural beings and legendary creatures. These myths are accompanied by mythological creatures like "Kuçedra" or "Lugati". (Leka 2022, 48).

"On Shala Ridge was a kulshedra,
Seven heads and claws, six pairs, with
But one eye upon each forehead,
Tail to Shala's river stretching,
Twisting, in convulsions writhing.
There the monster neighed and snorted,
Spewing fire and belching brimstone,
Causing boulders, cliffs to crumble,
Bent on crushing Dukagjini
For an outrage caused by Shala:
When the drangue, Vocerr Bala,
But a child, had come across her
Sleeping in a mountain cavern,
Did he seize a stake and ram it
Through an eye upon her forehead.
Shala Ridge was all in flames from
Riverbed to lofty pine trees.
Such a deed had stunned the people,
As the boulders cracked like chestnuts,
In their homes and barns they cowered.
Wild beasts fled down to the valleys,
Wolves howled in the forests up in
Gur i Lekës and Parûni,
Even rocks and trees took pity". (Fishta 1991, 176).

The key themes of *"The Highland Lute"* encompass the entirety of the work, which also align with the titles of the songs within the work, such as: Canto 1-"The Bandits", Canto 2-"Oso Kuka", Canto 3-"The Booty", Canto 4-"The Vranina", Canto 5-"Death", Canto 6-"Dervish Pasha", Canto 7-"The Congress of Berlin", Canto 8-"Ali Pasha of Gucia", Canto 9-"The League of Prizren", Canto 10-"Mehmet Ali Pasha", Canto 11-"The Vampire", Canto 12-"Marash Uci", Canto 13-"At the Church of St. John's", Canto 14-"At the Bridge of Rrzhanica", Canto 15-"The Herald", Canto 16-"The Kulshedra", Canto 17-"At the Grapevine Pass", Canto 18-"At

Sutjeska Bridge", Canto 19-"Father Gjon", Canto 20-"The Sons of Lekë Dukagjini", Canto 21-"Mediation", Canto 22-"Tringa", Canto 23 "At the Farmhouse of Curr Ula", Canto 24-"The Zana of Mount Visitor", Canto 25-"Blood Vengeance Exacted", Canto 26-"The New Age", Canto 27-"The Committee", Canto 28-"Dedë Gjo'Luli", Canto 29-"The Balkan War", Canto 30-"The Conference of London".

The central figure of *The Lute* is the Albanian populace, represented at different eras by characters like as Marash Uci, Oso Kuka, Ali Pashë Guci, Patër Gjoni, or Tringa. The Albanian populace, yearning for liberation, expresses their desire for autonomy by asserting their individual freedom:

"I exercise my personal autonomy as I see fit." (Koliqi 1999, 220).

"*Headed by Nikë Gjelosh Luli,*
Ear to ear did stretch his whiskers,
Sprang on Turkish troops in Deçiq,
Had you seen him right before you,
You'd be seized with fright and terror,
Second to him was Mark Gjeka,
Pjeter Nikë Daku, famous hero,
Maça Grizhi, Lulash Zeka,
Blood flowed everywhere they turned up". (Fishta 1991, 480).

From this, it is seen that Fishta sought with his literary work to free from the shackles of multi-century captivity his country, the lands of the first, the bloody, the trunk, the genus and the root of the Illyrian. *"The Highland Lute" is the title of a poetic masterpiece that explores the issue of edhè. It is structured in the following manner: An epic poem about the Albanian slave. The lute introduces the epic element of Malcija rodin, a group of people who have protected the area for many ages. Lahuta, the esteemed symbol of Malcija honor (Malcija e Madhe, Dukagjin, Nikaj e Mertúr), is the sole cherished musical instrument through which the soul of the people articulates its profound sentiments of the subterranean depths."* (Cordignano 1913, 550).

Historical figures appear in binomial with mythological figures, and this is done deliberately by the author.

"Daylight dawned before the sun rose,
Ali pasha, blazing hero,
Wakened early on this morning,
Put his garments and his belt on,
Donned his high knee boots, departd,
Went out, striding to the stable,
Where he saddled up his stallion,
Slipped the golden bridle on it,
And the patent leather saddle,
With three bellybands he girthed it.
Like a zana reared the stallion,
Like a zana on Mount Tomorr.

To the courtyard gate he led it
Where he called out to his mother,
Where he called out and requested:
"Dearest mother, listen to me,
Treat our guests and friends with honour,
Welcome all those to be welcomed,
Let no beggar at the door weep,
At the door let weep no beggar,
Be to him a sister, brother,
Be to him a mother, father,
As our ancestors have taught us,
For T've business to attend to
And must be off now for Peja,
Off for Peja and for reka,
There to meet with Haxhi Zeka". (Fishta 1991, 87-88).

With respect to characters, themes and historical events, the Andes not only dealt with them artistically in the historical song *"The League of Prizren"* but also in some other songs of the epopee of Albanian literature. The content of the work expands to include many historical facts and events, not only of *The League of Prizren* period but also of other previous periods.

The IX song of *"The Highland Lute"* bears the title: *"The League of Prizren",* where Abdyl Frashëri, a central figure of the Assembly of the League, is perpetuated in this work with all the special features of a popular tribune. Gjergj Fishta described the figure of Abdyl Frashëri in his work *"The Highland Lute"*, as follows:

"*He's Frashëri Bey, the hero,*
Who wherever he has wandered
The fame of Toskëria
And the pride of all Albania.
After him another leader,
Prenk Bibë Doda, noble lad he,
Who though young in ager is noted
Sagacity in counseling.
If you search for wisdom spoken,
He's the one, a captain, zana,
He is the Captain of Mirdita,
Far and wide, his words are quoted." (Fishta 1991, 103).

The poet expresses the extent of the cult of bravery through a large number of braves and distinguished warriors, such as Oso Kuka, Marash Uci, Dede Gjo' Luli, Ali Pashë Gucía, Çun Mula, Patër Gjoni, Mican Leka, Sadri Cuni, Bec Patani, Rrushman Hasani, Smail Arifi, and Nikë Daka. Fishta identifies and delineates the events, settings, and qualities of the fighters. Within the overarching framework of depicting unwavering courage, Fishta presents a distinct perspective on the situation and traits of the characters. Despite appearing as a Catholic clergyman following the Franciscan tradition, Fishta maintained a neutral stance regarding religious affiliation,

consistently prioritizing the Albanian national identity.

"*Share your thoughts and tell me, zana,*
Will I ever see my people?
All united under oath and
Out to fight and save their homeland?
Will they ever join their forces?
Ghegs and Tosks from Highlands, Lowlands,
Linked beneath our red–black banners,
Here to spend blood for their birthplace?" (Fishta 1991, 70).

This deep connoisseur of the psychology and nature of the Albanians guided them to overcome any regional and religious divisions, supporting all without distinction the national feeling, pride and self-confidence. Prior to becoming a writer, Fishta served as a cleric and expressed his ideas through the lens of morality, using the language of the community to which he belonged. Fishta skillfully intertwined different beliefs, asserting that although there are two religions, they are united under one nation.

"*However, they'll not renounce their ethos,*
Not forsake their ways and customs,
Both Christians and Muslims
Ghegs and Tosks throughout Albania,
Call themselves Albanians only". (Fishta 1991, 460).

The actual protagonists of the national history were aided in their endeavors by figures from the legendary realm, individuals and entities that Fishta *"appropriated"* from Albanian folklore, like the Clocks, Fairies, Dragons, and Kuçedras.

"*When the drangues of Albania,*
In the Highlands and the lowlands,
Saw and heard the lightning flashing,
Heard the roaring of thunder
Echoing o'er Dukagjini
From the Drin to Qafa e Diellit,
Well they understood that somewhere
Up there'd come out a kulshedra,
Planning to destroy some mountain". (Fishta 1991, 176).

Auditory perception of "the highland lute" in western languages

The portrayal of a genuine Albanian reality captured the interest of international scholars. The Highland Lute has been translated into various foreign languages. The English translation was performed by Robert Elsie, while the German translation was carried out by Maximilian Lambetz, a German albanologist. In 1913, Lambetz referred to Gjergj Fishta as a *"Dichtergenius"* (Genius Poet) and described *"The Highland Lute"* as a "masterpiece".
The translation of *"The Highland Lute"* has been accomplished multiple times in the Italian

language, notably by Monsignor Jul Bonati and writer Ernest Koliqi. In 2019, the Albanian-French researcher, historian, and sociologist Abidin Krasniqi translated it into French. The French translation of this work stands out for its meticulous preservation of certain elements, lending it a unique quality within its genre. Krasniqi has deliberately remained loyal to the original, effectively conveying the history, mentality, traditions, customs, rituals, anthropology, and psychology of the people residing in northern Albania through Fishta's work.

The French reader is acquainted not only with Fishta, the author of an epic but also with a work that may be approached from three different angles: as a historical document, as an epic, and as a straightforward literary piece. *"The Highland Lute"* holds the utmost significance in Albanian literature and warrants, through its translation into many languages, to *"establish its presence in global literature."* (Çobani, & Ballabani, 2021, 14).

The French reader engages with a highly modern Fishta since the *"The Highland Lute"* in the French language seamlessly combines mythology and history in a meticulous manner.

Gjergj Fishta advocated for the Albanian culture to gain recognition among other sophisticated European and Western nations. He highlighted the fact that our people are well versed in the world's most renowned ancient epics, including "The Epic of Gilgamesh" and other notable works such as "Mahabharata," "Ramayana", "Iliad," "Odyssey," "Digenis Akritas," "Song of Roland," and "Song of the Nibelungs."

In the translations of *"The Highland Lute"* into European languages, a nonnative reader is presented with a valuable chance to acknowledge the significant role of Gjergj Fishta in collecting, preserving, and studying the invaluable spiritual and cultural heritage of the ancient Illyrian-Arberian-Albanian lineage.

Foreign readers, by reading Fishta's work in their own language, acknowledge Gjergj Fishta as a national poet. They perceive his epic work as the personification of our national literature and consider it to be the quintessential piece of Albanian literature.

Even in its most accomplished translations, the lute of Fishta has fanatically preserved its original sounds and musicality, where *"...the signs displayed by a text are related to the ingrained customs of a certain people or culture."* (Eco 2000, 85).

Gjergj Fishta is a person who has established and continues to establish a connection between the past, present, and future through his writings.

His work has exerted and will continue to exert a significant influence on the evolution of literature, encompassing several genres and a wide range of expressive techniques, by virtue of its authoritative and authentic creative language.

Gjergj Fishta's masterpiece embodies the essence of people's spirit, a written legacy intended to preserve it for future generations and to be discovered by scholars of European civilizations.

Fishta possesses a deep understanding of the essence, cognitive processes, legal records, and mindset of Albanians. The phrase *"Fishta and the Lute, the Lute and Albanian"* (Duka-Gjini 1996, 76) is a representation of the fundamental nature of the Illyrian-Arbër-Albanian national spirit. *"The Highland Lute"* is alternatively referred to as The Lute of Northern Leks, specifically in regions where the Lekë Dukagjini's *Canon* has been implemented.

When analyzing Fishta's work, I am deeply moved by the feelings it elicits, as it generates a distinct professional sentiment that has long fuelled my admiration for the esteemed Gjergj Fishta's work.

Conclusions

Based on this study, it can be concluded that Gjergj Fishta's epic work *"The Highland Lute"* effectively communicates Albanian historical and ethnocultural spiritual values, as well as universal messages. These elements are of great significance to the academic world and scientific research, encompassing the entire process of collection, preservation, study, communication, and artistic influence. Furthermore, this work contributes to the advancement of the history of Albanian literature.

Gjergj Fishta's renowned work *"The Highland Lute"* can be analyzed for its contribution to various aspects of literary art, including the mindset, ethics, morals, spirituality, history, geography, psychology, society, ethnic customs, philosophy, economy, and religion of the people living in the Northern Highlands.

In this work, Fishta aimed to underscore a crucial facet for Albanians – their identity. Fishta scrutinizes their communal epic identity, which serves as the enduring identifying characteristic of his work. Within its confines, it amalgamates the realm of myth and legend with the realm of history and ethno culture.

Using literary techniques, Gjergj Fishta depicted the mountaineer, together with their mindset and lifestyle, traditions, customs, rituals, desires, pledges, curses, songs, and perfumes.

Gjergj Fishta is a figure who has established a connection between the past, present, and future through his writings. His work has gained global recognition, being translated into several widely spoken European languages, including English, German, Italian, and French. The French reader is fortunate to be acquainted with both Gjergj Fishta, the author of an epic, and *"The Highland Lute"*, a work that can be approached from three distinct perspectives: as a historical document, as an epic, and as a straightforward literary piece.

This work embodies the essence of Albanians, who have a deep-rooted connection to the geographical landscape of their country, as well as to their native language, ethnology, history, oral literature, ethnography, and many other aspects that are distinctly Illyrian-Arberian-Albanian.

"The Highland Lute" is undeniably a colossal masterpiece in Albanian literature, as Gjergj Fishta has immortalized the profound essence of human language in a lasting form.

Today, Fishta should be studied to acknowledge and become familiar once more with one of the most eminent authors that Albania has produced throughout the centuries.

Gjergj Fishta's literary masterpiece *"The Highland Lute"* holds such immense significance for the Albanian people, who it may be considered a revered national institution, making Fishta a revered spiritual figure for all Albanians throughout the ages.

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Voicing belonging through song: Multilingual musical practices in multicultural early childhood classrooms

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Abstract

This paper presents an empirical study examining how multilingual and multicultural musical experiences contribute to the development of cultural memory and belonging among preschool children. Conducted in three kindergartens in Athens with culturally diverse student populations (N = 72, aged 4–6 years), the research employed a mixed-method design combining classroom observation, educator interviews, and children's creative responses during intercultural music activities. Grounded in theories of cultural memory, embodied learning, and translanguaging pedagogy, the study explored how songs from different linguistic traditions Greek and Albanian lullabies and celebration songs functioned as carriers of memory, emotion, and shared identity. Qualitative analysis of children's interactions and verbal expressions revealed that multilingual musical practices fostered emotional resonance, empathy, and a dynamic sense of belonging that transcended linguistic boundaries. Teachers reported that music acted as a "bridge language," supporting inclusive participation and intercultural understanding. The findings suggest that music-based multilingual pedagogy offers a powerful means of translating cultural memory into early educational contexts. By engaging children in singing, moving, and storytelling across languages, educators can nurture embodied forms of cultural literacy and empathetic citizenship from the earliest years. The study highlights the importance of designing early childhood curricula that embrace linguistic diversity as a creative and ethical resource, reinforcing the idea that belonging is not a static identity but an ongoing, musical negotiation of meaning across worlds.

Keywords

Multilingualism, cultural memory, early childhood education, music pedagogy, intercultural learning

Introduction

The foundation of this framework is the acknowledgment that folk music encompasses significantly more than mere aesthetic or technical aspects. It doesn't just serve as a form of artistic expression; it also serves as a cultural medium through which values, worldviews, and collective memory are passed down from one generation to the next. In early childhood settings, these musical genres serve as potent pedagogical tools, facilitating young learners' connections between personal experiences and overarching cultural narratives, thereby positioning themselves within collective frameworks of meaning. In this way, folk music plays a big role in helping kids feel like they belong and who they are, since it gives them both symbolic and emotional anchors that help them recognize themselves and fit in with others.[1]

Significantly, the conveyance of cultural significance via music is not solely cognitive but profoundly embodied and relational. Children interact with music by singing, moving, repeating, and interacting with it. This combines emotional, sensory, and social aspects of learning. These embodied experiences enable children to not only replicate cultural forms but also to reinterpret and negotiate them within their own lived realities, thereby transforming tradition into an active and dynamic process. This viewpoint is in line with the ideas behind Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), which stresses how important students' cultural identities are to the learning process.[2] CRP contests deficit-focused methodologies by recognizing students' cultural knowledge as a valid and significant asset for learning. Building on this framework, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) advocates for the proactive preservation and rejuvenation of linguistic and cultural diversity in educational environments, especially in contexts influenced by globalization and migration.[3] In this integrated theoretical framework, multilingual and multicultural musical practices are recognized as highly effective pedagogical instruments. They make learning spaces that are open to everyone and where kids of different cultural backgrounds are not only represented but also actively involved and shared. By combining songs, rhythms, and stories from different language groups, teachers can create spaces where people can participate and where differences are seen as a way to connect and be creative instead of a way to divide. This framework posits that music-based pedagogy can potentially convert early childhood classrooms into venues for cultural dialogue and collaborative meaning-making. In these contexts, belonging is not predetermined or static; rather, it is perpetually negotiated through interaction, performance, and shared emotional experiences, facilitating the development of flexible, relational, and inclusive identities in children.

Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives: cultural memory, embodied learning, and translanguaging. From the standpoint of cultural memory, songs function as symbolic carriers through which values, worldviews, and emotional narratives are transmitted

1 Patricia Shehan Campbell, *Teaching Music Globally* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 45–48; Margaret S. Barrett, "Musical Identity and the Social Construction of Childhood," në *A Cultural Psychology of Music Education*, red. Margaret S. Barrett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 23–27.

2 Geneva Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, botimi i 3-të (New York: Teachers College Press, 2018), 31–35; Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," *American Educational Research Journal* 32, nr. 3 (1995): 465–491.

3 Django Paris dhe H. Samy Alim, *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), 1–10.

across generations[4] . Lullabies, in particular, preserve intergenerational experience and encode forms of collective identity that connect family practices with broader cultural frameworks. From an embodied learning perspective, meaning-making in early childhood is grounded in sensorimotor experience, where cognition emerges through the dynamic interplay of body, movement, and environment. In musical contexts, rhythm, gesture, and bodily movement serve not only as expressive components but also as essential mechanisms through which children perceive, internalize, and convey meaning. These multimodal processes facilitate a profound integration of emotional and cognitive engagement, establishing the body as a pivotal locus of learning and comprehension[5] . Musical forms such as lullabies and ritual songs, with their repetitive patterns and rocking or circular movements, create multisensory experiences that anchor memory and support affective understanding. In multilingual educational contexts, translanguaging theory provides a lens for interpreting how children fluidly mobilize their full linguistic repertoire, moving between languages in a unified communicative process[6] . Musical activities offer a particularly fertile environment for this practice, as they enable linguistic experimentation without the constraints of formal language use and allow children to combine Greek and Albanian verbal, sonic, and gestural resources. Taken together, these theoretical perspectives illuminate how multilingual music operates as a space in which cultural memory is embodied, language boundaries become permeable, and children actively negotiate identity and belonging.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method research design in order to explore how multilingual musical practices contribute to the development of cultural memory and belonging in early childhood education. The research was conducted in three kindergartens in Athens characterized by culturally and linguistically diverse student populations, where children of Albanian heritage constituted the largest minority group. A total of seventy-two children aged between four and six years participated in the study, together with six early childhood educators who provided professional perspectives on classroom interaction, identity formation, and inclusive pedagogical practices. The selected educational context reflects the contemporary multicultural reality of Greek early childhood education and enabled the observation of multilingual musical practices in naturally occurring classroom environments in which children negotiate belonging on a daily basis.

Data collection was based on the triangulation of multiple qualitative methods. Systematic classroom observations were carried out during intercultural music sessions that included lullabies, celebration songs, and ritual children's songs. These observations focused on spontaneous singing, bodily engagement, peer interaction, emotional responses, and instances of translanguaging.

4 Kati Marjanen and Sanna Pöntinen, "Music, Emotion and Embodied Learning in Early Childhood," *Early Child Development and Care* 192, no. 10 (2022)e

5 Susan Young, "Towards Constructions of Musical Childhoods: Diversity and Digital Technologies," *Early Child Development and Care* 179, no. 6 (2009): 695–705

6 Ofelia García and Li Wei, *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), p.sh. 1–15 ose 40–55.

Semi-structured interviews with teachers provided insight into classroom dynamics, the perceived pedagogical value of multilingual music, and the ways in which musical activities supported inclusive participation. In addition, children's creative responses such as drawings, bilingual storytelling, vocal improvisation, and movement were documented and analyzed as expressive forms through which emotional, cultural, and identity-related meanings became visible. This multi-layered methodological design allowed for a holistic examination of how memory, language, and embodied experience intersect within musical activity.

The musical repertoire was carefully selected in order to reflect shared and distinct elements of Greek and Albanian cultural traditions. It included lullabies with strong symbolic and emotional content, celebration songs characterized by collective rhythmic participation, and ritual songs such as Perperouna and Rona Rona Peperona, which originate in rain-invocation ceremonies and preserve imagery related to nature, agricultural life, and community survival. These musical materials function as repositories of intergenerational knowledge and provided a fertile framework for intercultural exploration. Particular attention was given to the structural and expressive features of lullabies such as their repetitive rhythmic patterns, narrow melodic range, metaphorical language, and soothing contours which support emotional regulation and facilitate the transmission of cultural memory across generations.

Grounded in the theoretical perspectives of cultural memory, embodied learning, and translanguaging, the methodological approach conceptualized music as a"bridge language" that enables participation beyond linguistic proficiency and fosters empathy, belonging, and cultural literacy. Through the integration of observational, narrative, visual, and performative data, the study sought to capture the complex ways in which multilingual musical experience operates as a space for identity negotiation and intercultural meaning-making in early childhood education.

Results and discussion

The analysis of the musical material revealed strong structural and thematic parallels between Greek and Albanian lullabies, both of which rely on simple melodic contours, repetitive rhythmic patterns, and an intimate vocal delivery designed to soothe and regulate the child's emotional state. Their poetic texts are rich in metaphors, blessings, and images drawn from nature and family life, functioning simultaneously as aesthetic expressions and as carriers of intergenerational knowledge. While Albanian lullabies frequently articulate themes of hardship, maternal aspiration, and moral formation, Greek lullabies tend to foreground narratives of migration, education, and future-oriented hope. In both traditions, however, the lullaby operates as a symbolic medium through which cultural identity, value systems, and emotional memory are transmitted, confirming its role as a powerful repository of cultural memory .

A similar dynamic was observed in the use of ritual songs such as Perperouna and Rona Rona Peperona, which represent shared elements of pan-Balkan cultural heritage. Although historically connected to rain-invocation ceremonies, these songs retain symbolic references to agricultural life, community cooperation, and ecological awareness. The Greek version is characterized by a more extended poetic narrative, whereas the Albanian version relies on shorter refrains and rhythmic repetition. When introduced in the classroom, these musical forms connected contemporary learners with historically rooted collective practices, demonstrating how traditional repertoire can function as a bridge between past and present cultural experience. In all three classrooms, music was a universal way to communicate that everyone could use, no matter how well they spoke the language.

Kids supported one another in pronouncing unfamiliar words, sang collectively, and mirrored each other's gestures and movements. These shared musical practices fostered spontaneous cooperation and reduced cultural clustering, contributing to the development of cross-cultural friendships. Teachers frequently described music as a "bridge language," particularly for children who were still acquiring the dominant language, as singing created a sense of emotional safety and enhanced confidence in participation. This finding is consistent with research on rhythmic synchrony and communicative musicality, which demonstrates that shared musical engagement enhances trust, empathy, and social bonding. [7]

Multilingual musical engagement also triggered strong connections to familial memory. Children from Albanian backgrounds frequently referred to mothers, grandmothers, and home-based rituals, while Greek children recognized familiar sleep-related practices and symbolic imagery. These moments brought both personal and collective identities into the classroom, allowing children to position themselves as cultural contributors. Notably, Albanian-background children often assumed "expert" roles when teaching their songs to peers, thereby disrupting traditional linguistic hierarchies and strengthening their sense of agency and bicultural pride.[8]

Children's creative outputs provided further evidence of deep engagement with the musical experience. Seventy-five percent of the participants incorporated cultural imagery in their drawings, including cradles, moons, birds, houses, and agricultural landscapes visual elements closely associated with the symbolic language of lullabies. Sixty-four percent produced bilingual or culturally relevant narratives, demonstrating the integration of linguistic and cultural meaning-making. Embodied engagement was the most prevalent response, observed in 88 percent of the children, who rocked during lullabies and participated in synchronized movement during celebration songs. Vocal improvisation further revealed spontaneous translanguaging practices in 68 percent of the participants, as children fluidly combined Greek and Albanian refrains. [9]

The quantitative findings reinforce the qualitative observations. Seventy-nine percent of the children demonstrated increased cross-cultural interaction, and mixed-group play rose significantly during musical activities. Helping behaviors, such as repeating unfamiliar words for peers, were observed in 67 percent of the participants, indicating the development of cooperative learning practices. Among children exhibiting behavioral difficulties, 61 percent showed improved concentration during musical sessions, highlighting the regulatory and inclusive potential of embodied musical engagement. [10]

Taken together, these results confirm that multilingual musical practices activate multiple dimensions of early learning simultaneously.

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7 Sebastian J. Kirschner and Michael Tomasello, "Joint Music Making Promotes Prosocial Behavior in 4-Year-Old Children," *Evolution and Human Behavior* 31, nr. 5 (2010): 354–364;Colwyn Trevarthen and Stephen Malloch, eds., Communicative Musicality: Exploring the Basis of Human Companionship (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–15.

8 Aleida Assmann, *Is Time Out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), 120–135; Ofelia García and Li Wei, *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 90–110

9 Kati Marjanen and Sanna Pöntinen, "Music, Emotion and Embodied Learning in Early Childhood," *Early Child Development and Care* 192, no. 10 (2022): 1589–1602.

10 Colwyn Trevarthen and Stephen Malloch, eds., *Communicative Musicality: Exploring the Basis of Human Companionship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 20–35; Sebastian Kirschner and Michael Tomasello, "Joint Music Making Promotes Prosocial Behavior in 4-Year-Old Children," *Evolution and Human Behavior* 31, no. 5 (2010): 354–364.

Movement-based responses support the principles of embodied learning [11] the spontaneous mixing of languages reflects translanguaging as a natural communicative process[12] and the emergence of family narratives and cultural symbolism illustrates the operation of cultural memory within everyday classroom practice[13] .
Most importantly, the findings demonstrate that belonging is co-constructed through shared musical participation. Rather than representing a fixed cultural identity, it emerges as a relational and dynamic process in which children negotiate voice, recognition, and emotional connection through collective aesthetic experience.

Domain	% of Children	Key Insight
Movement	88%	Embodied learning strongest
Drawings	75%	Cultural memory expression
Storytelling	64%	Bilingual narrative meaning-making
Vocal improvisation	68%	Translanguaging
Peer empathy	79%	Intercultural bonding
Bicultural pride	78%	Minority visibility

Table 1.

Statistical Results: Children's Creative Responses (N = 72)

From a pedagogical perspective, the results highlight the importance of systematically integrating multilingual musical practices into early childhood curricula. Teachers emphasized the need for professional development that would enable them to introduce songs in multiple languages with confidence and to involve families as cultural partners in the educational process. In this sense, multilingual music functions not only as an artistic activity but as a foundational framework for developing embodied cultural literacy, intercultural empathy, and early forms of ethical citizenship.

11 Kati Marjanen and Sanna Pöntinen, "Music, Emotion and Embodied Learning in Early Childhood," *Early Child Development and Care* 192, no. 10 (2022): 1589–1602.
12 Ofelia García and Li Wei, *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 90–110.
13 Aleida Assmann, *Is Time Out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), 120–135.

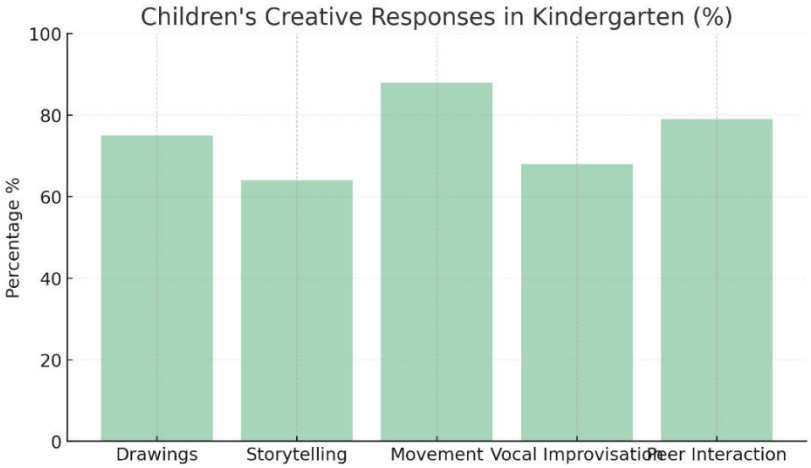

Figure 1. Children's responses in Kindergarden

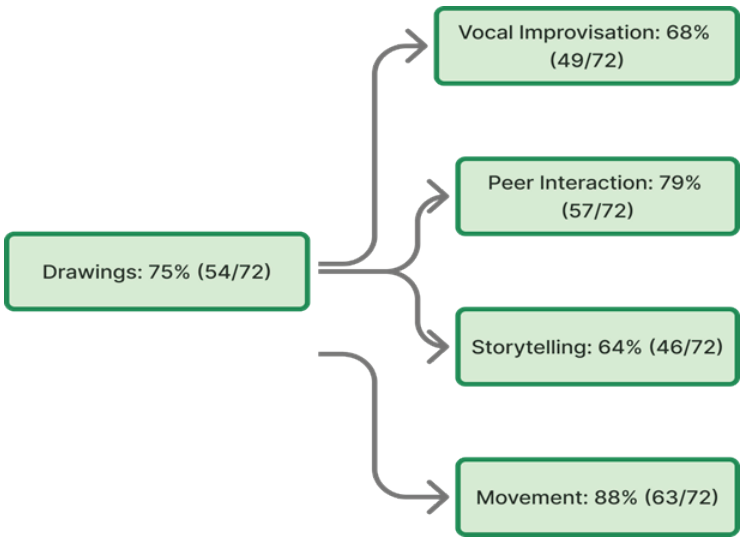

Figure 2. Responses by activities

Conclusions and recommendations

The findings of this study demonstrate that multilingual musical practices constitute a powerful pedagogical framework for fostering cultural memory, intercultural empathy, and a dynamic sense of belonging in early childhood education. Through engagement with Greek and Albanian lullabies, celebration songs, and ritual repertoire, children were able to connect school experience with family heritage, transforming the classroom into a shared space of recognition and cultural exchange. Music functioned as an embodied and relational medium through which emotional resonance, peer cooperation, and identity negotiation were simultaneously activated. In this sense, belonging emerged not as a fixed cultural condition but as an ongoing process co-constructed through collective musical participation.

The results further indicate that multilingual music enables fluid forms of linguistic expression and supports translanguaging as a natural communicative practice rather than as a deviation from monolingual norms. By allowing children to mobilize their full linguistic and semiotic

repertoire, musical activity redistributed classroom power relations and provided minority-language learners with visibility, agency, and recognition. At the same time, the strong presence of movement, visual symbolism, and narrative creativity confirmed the centrality of embodied learning in the internalization of cultural meaning and the development of early forms of cultural literacy.

From a pedagogical perspective, the study highlights the need for the systematic integration of multilingual musical practices into early childhood curricula. Such integration requires a shift from viewing linguistic diversity as a challenge to recognizing it as a creative and ethical resource for learning. Translanguaging should be embraced as a legitimate pedagogical approach that enhances participation and supports inclusive educational environments. Equally important is the active involvement of families as cultural partners in the educational process. Inviting parents and caregivers to share songs, stories, and musical traditions strengthens the connection between home and school and enriches the cultural ecology of the classroom.

The findings also underline the importance of targeted teacher education and professional development. Educators need methodological and intercultural competences that enable them to confidently introduce multilingual repertoire, facilitate collaborative musical practices, and interpret children's expressive responses as meaningful forms of knowledge production. In this framework, music can function as a foundation for equity in early childhood education, ensuring that every child is recognized as a cultural and linguistic subject with the right to voice, memory, and participation.

Future research may expand this study by exploring longitudinal effects of multilingual musical pedagogy, examining its impact in different sociocultural contexts, and integrating multimodal analytical approaches that further illuminate the relationship between embodiment, language, and identity formation. Additional investigation into teacher training models and curriculum design would contribute to the development of sustainable practices that position music as a central component of inclusive early childhood education.

In conclusion, multilingual musical practices should be understood not merely as artistic enrichment but as a transformative educational approach that activates cultural memory, strengthens empathy, supports bicultural identity, and enables equitable participation. By integrating singing, movement, and storytelling across languages, early childhood education can cultivate embodied forms of cultural literacy and lay the foundations for empathetic and socially responsive citizenship.

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The role of visual art in the development of mathematical concepts in preschool children: An interdisciplinary approach in early education

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Abstract

The integration of visual arts in preschool education represents a contemporary pedagogical approach aimed at enriching the learning process through the combination of aesthetic experiences and the development of cognitive concepts. In early childhood, children learn primarily through concrete experience, play, and visual exploration, which makes visual arts a powerful tool for building the foundations of mathematical thinking. This study examines the role of visual arts in the acquisition of basic mathematical concepts among children aged 3–5 in preschool institutions in the city of Gjilan. The research was conducted using a combined methodological approach, which included the analysis of children's artistic work, classroom observations, as well as interviews and surveys with educators and parents. Through activities such as drawing, modeling with plasticine, and constructing geometric shapes, children were encouraged to explore mathematical concepts such as counting, comparing quantities, ordering, symmetry, and shape recognition. The results indicate that integrating visual arts into mathematical activities increases children's motivation and active participation in the learning process. An improvement was also observed in conceptual understanding and in the ability to connect concrete experience with mathematical symbolization. The study concludes that visual arts constitute an effective didactic tool and recommends the systematic inclusion of interdisciplinary approaches in preschool education curricula.

Keywords

Visual arts, mathematics, preschool education, cognitive development, interdisciplinary integration

Introduction

Cognitive development and learning abilities in preschool age are essential factors that directly influence an individual's academic and personal success in the future. At this critical stage of development, children acquire knowledge primarily through play, exploration, and creative activities. Therefore, the integration of different disciplines, particularly visual art and mathematics, presents significant pedagogical potential.

Visual art, as a form of visual and creative expression, enables children to construct abstract meanings through concrete and visual experiences. Mathematical concepts, which are often perceived as abstract and challenging, can become more accessible through the use of drawings, shapes, colors, and various artistic materials. In the local context of Gjilan, where preschool institutions play an important role in early education, this study aims to analyze the impact of visual art on learning mathematics among children aged 3 to 5.

Theoretical framework

The study is grounded in the theory of dual coding, which suggests that information is processed and stored more effectively when presented simultaneously in verbal and visual forms.[1] According to this theory, the use of visual elements in teaching enhances memory retention and improves the understanding of abstract concepts, such as those in mathematics.

In preschool education, visual art serves as a bridge between concrete and abstract thinking. Through artistic activities, children develop skills such as observation, comparison, classification, and problem-solving, which are also essential for learning mathematics. These ideas are also related to the theory of multiple intelligences and the role of art in cognitive development.[2/3]

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The sample includes children aged 3 to 5 from preschool institutions "Ardhmëria I," "Ardhmëria II," "Dardania," and "Integj" in Gjilan.

The instruments used for data collection include the analysis of children's artistic works produced during mathematics activities, direct classroom observations to examine the
integration of visual art in teaching, as well as semi-structured interviews with educators and surveys with parents to assess their perceptions and experiences.

The interviews were conducted with several preschool educators in Gjilan in order to better understand how visual art is used in the teaching of mathematics. The interview questions focused on educators' experiences in integrating artistic activities during the development of mathematical concepts in children.

The collected data were analyzed thematically and comparatively, focusing on identifying connections between artistic activities and the development of mathematical concepts.

1 Allan Paivio, Mental Representations: A Dual Coding Approach (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).
2 Howard Gardner, Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences (New York: Basic Books, 2011).
3 Elliot W. Eisner, The Arts and the Creation of Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

Findings and analysis

The analysis of children's work shows that artistic activities contain a range of mathematical elements that directly contribute to learning development in preschool age. The analyzed works reveal fundamental geometric shapes, proportional relationships, spatial organization, and the use of colors as a classification element.

Figure 1. Artwork by a 3-year-old child from "Ardhmëria I" kindergarten, Gjilan (photographed by the author)

This artwork represents a clear example of how visual art can contribute to the development of mathematical concepts in a natural and creative way. The drawing includes several food-related objects associated with different geometric shapes. For instance, carrots are represented in triangular forms, while broccoli consists of circular and semi-circular shapes.

At the same time, potatoes and eggs are depicted in oval shapes, representing another important geometric form in the development of children's visual and spatial perception. Other objects, such as a milk carton, a salt container, and a jar of honey, are illustrated using rectangular and cylindrical forms, helping children better understand dimensions and spatial structures.

Another important element in this work is the use of colors and counting. The use of different colors enables children to classify and distinguish objects based on visual characteristics, thereby developing fundamental mathematical concepts. In addition, counting the objects depicted in the drawing—such as two carrots, one broccoli, one potato, one salt container, one jar, and the eggs—contributes to the development of numerical skills and the understanding of the relationship between number and quantity.

Furthermore, the arrangement of objects within the composition creates a sense of order and spatial organization, which relates to mathematical concepts such as symmetry and sequencing. The balanced and structured presentation of elements helps children understand relationships between objects in space. Additionally, the labeling of certain objects, such as the milk carton and the jar of honey, supports the development of early literacy skills, including reading, writing, and object identification.

In conclusion, this artwork demonstrates that visual art can serve as an effective tool for developing mathematical concepts in preschool children. Through artistic activities, children are able to identify geometric shapes, distinguish colors, count objects, and understand spatial organization, thereby developing essential mathematical skills in a creative and engaging way.

Figure 2. Painting created in the kindergarten "Ardhmëria II," Gjilan (photographed by the author).

This painting, created in the kindergarten "Ardhmëria II" in Gjilan, presents a clear connection between artistic elements and mathematical concepts. Several fundamental geometric shapes can be identified in the illustration. For example, the structure of the house is represented in the form of a rectangle, while the windows are square-shaped. These elements can serve as concrete examples for understanding basic geometric figures and for discussing mathematical concepts such as area and perimeter.

At the same time, the arrangement of windows and doors in the building creates a noticeable sense of symmetry and proportion. This visual organization can be used to illustrate concepts of balance and spatial relationships in mathematics. Through observing this arrangement, children can develop a better understanding of structure and the ordering of elements in space.

The colors used in the painting, such as red, green, brown, and pink, contribute to the development of classification skills and the ability to distinguish visual elements. Through the use of these colors, children can identify and compare different elements, thereby developing fundamental mathematical thinking skills.

Additionally, the size of the house in relation to surrounding elements, such as clouds and the tree, creates opportunities to discuss concepts of proportion and comparison. Besides square and

rectangular shapes, the painting also includes other forms, such as hearts and clouds, which can be used to identify and analyze different geometric shapes in a visual and creative way.
The placement of elements in the painting also creates a sense of order and structure. The windows and the door are arranged in a specific sequence, helping to develop the concept of ordering and spatial organization. In this way, although the painting is an artistic expression, it contains a range of mathematical elements that can be used to develop logical and spatial thinking in children.
In summary, this painting demonstrates that visual art can serve as an effective tool for developing mathematical thinking in preschool education. Through the analysis of visual elements, children can identify geometric shapes, distinguish colors, understand spatial relationships, and develop important logical skills in a creative and comprehensible way.

Figure 3. Drawing with numbers and geometric shapes.
Work of a 3-year-old child from the "Dardania" kindergarten (photographed by the author).

This drawing presents a combination of numbers and various geometric shapes, providing a clear example of the integration of artistic elements with mathematical concepts in early childhood education. Through this illustration, several important aspects related to the development of mathematical thinking in children can be observed.
The illustration includes several fundamental geometric shapes, such as triangles, circles, squares, and a polygonal figure. These shapes are arranged within a visual composition resembling a painter's palette. Through this organization, children are given the opportunity to recognize and distinguish different geometric shapes. The identification and differentiation of these shapes represent an important step in the development of mathematical thinking in the early stages of education.
At the bottom of the drawing, two large numbers are depicted and emphasized with different colors. The creative graphical representation of numbers helps children establish a stronger connection between numerical symbols and visual experience. The use of numbers as artistic

elements makes the learning process more engaging and understandable, helping children recognize and remember numerical forms more easily.
Another important element in this drawing is the organization of elements within space. The geometric shapes are placed within a shared area, while the numbers are positioned at the bottom of the composition. This visual organization supports the development of spatial perception and the understanding of relationships between different elements within a composition.
The combination of geometric shapes, numbers, and decorative elements demonstrates that artistic activities can serve as an effective way to develop mathematical thinking in children. Through drawing, children not only express their creativity but also gradually build an understanding of basic mathematical concepts. In this way, visual art creates a learning environment in which mathematics is presented in a visual and intuitive manner, making the learning process more enjoyable and comprehensible for preschool children.

Synthesis of findings from the analysis of the figures

The analysis of the figures presented in this study shows that artistic activities can serve as an important tool for the development of mathematical concepts in preschool education. Children's works demonstrate that through drawing and painting, they are able to express not only their creativity but also an intuitive understanding of mathematical structures.
In the first figure, the identification of several geometric shapes in everyday objects—such as triangles, circles, and oval forms—can be observed. Through these representations, children develop the ability to distinguish and compare different shapes. Furthermore, the presence of repeated objects creates opportunities for counting activities, contributing to the development of numerical skills.
The second figure presents an artistic composition in which various visual elements are organized into a structure that includes clear geometric shapes and a well-ordered spatial arrangement. The square windows and the rectangular structure of the building provide concrete examples for discussing concepts such as symmetry, proportion, and ratio.
In the third figure, numbers and geometric shapes are integrated into a single visual composition. This combination shows that children are capable of connecting numerical symbols with visual and artistic elements, making the learning process more understandable and engaging.
In all three cases, the use of colors plays an important role in the development of classification and comparison skills. Colors help children distinguish different elements and create visual categories.
In conclusion, the analysis of these works shows that visual art creates a suitable environment for the development of mathematical thinking in early childhood. Through artistic activities, children develop important skills such as identifying geometric shapes, counting objects, spatial organization, and classification. This demonstrates that the integration of art and mathematics in the learning process can contribute to a more effective and creative approach to early education.

Analysis of didactic materials from the three volumes "I learn as a student, I play as a child,"

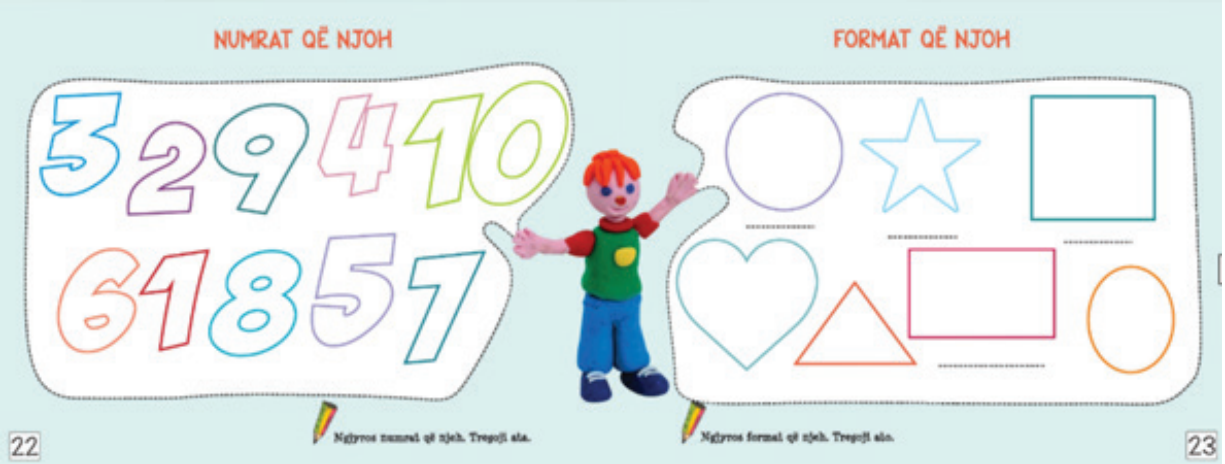

Figure 4. Numbers I know and shapes I know [4]

This illustration presents several numbers and different geometric shapes that children are expected to recognize and color. Such an activity aims to simultaneously develop numerical skills and visual perception. The use of shapes such as circles, squares, and triangles helps children identify basic geometric figures and understand the differences between them.

Through the process of coloring and identification, children develop observation skills and the ability to classify visual elements. They compare different objects and learn to distinguish between larger and smaller quantities.

The use of simple and colorful illustrations makes the learning process more intuitive and easier for children to understand.

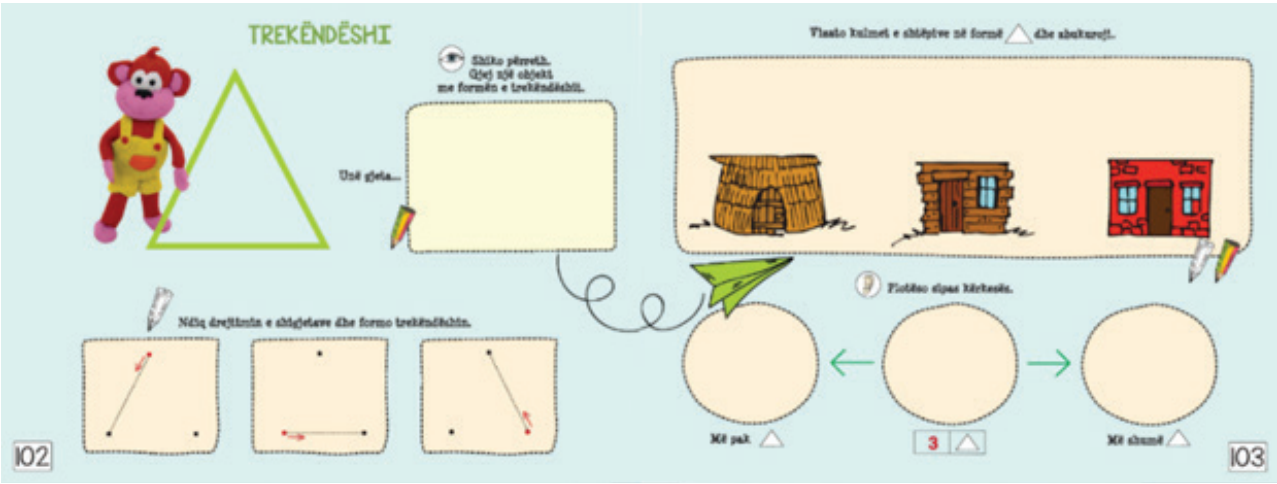

Figure 5. Concepts of "Big – Small" [5]

4 Saranda Kumnova Pozhegu and Aurela Zisi, I Learn as a Student, I Play as a Child, Book I (Prishtina: Dukagjini Publishing House, 2019), 22–23.

5 Saranda Kumnova Pozhegu and Aurela Zisi, I Learn as a Student, I Play as a Child, Book I (Prishtina: Dukagjini Publishing House, 2019), 102–103.

In this activity, children compare the sizes of different objects and learn to identify the differences between them. Through illustrations of fish or other objects, they enhance their ability to compare dimensions and to determine the largest and smallest elements.
This type of activity contributes to the development of spatial perception as well as logical comparison skills.

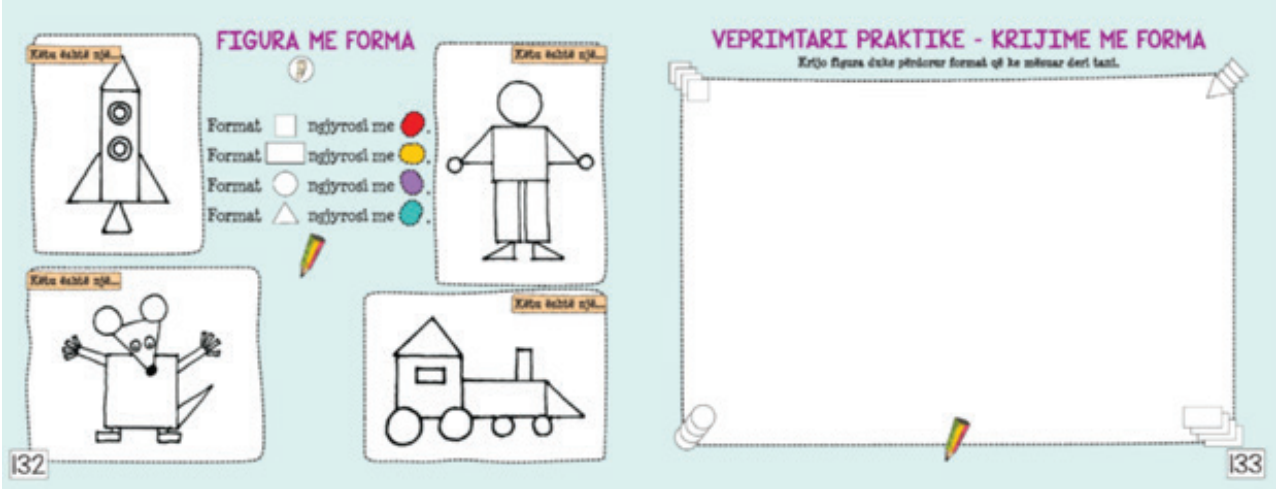

Figure 6. Constructing figures from geometric shapes[6]

In this activity, children create different figures using basic geometric shapes such as circles, triangles, and squares. This approach represents a clear example of the integration between visual art and mathematics in preschool education. Through the combination of these shapes, children develop creativity and the ability to construct more complex visual structures. At the same time, they understand that various objects and figures can be composed of simple geometric forms.
Such activities support the development of visual perception and enhance children's ability to analyze the structure of objects through geometric elements. Through this process, they begin to understand that different shapes can be combined to create new figures, thereby fostering analytical and creative thinking.
This approach can also be linked to the principles of Cubism in modern art, particularly in the works of Pablo Picasso, where objects and figures are often analyzed and reconstructed through basic geometric forms. Although at a much simpler level, such activities in preschool education help children understand that objects can be deconstructed and reconstructed through elementary shapes, establishing a connection between artistic perception and geometric structure.
A similar approach can also be observed in the works of Chuck Close, where images are constructed through an organized system of small visual units that come together to form a complete composition. In a simplified manner, children's artistic activities follow a similar process, where figures are built through the combination of simple visual elements.
In this way, visual art creates a learning environment in which mathematics is presented in a visual and intuitive manner, making the learning process more accessible and engaging for children.[7]

6 Saranda Kumnova Pozhegu and Aurela Zisi, I Learn as a Student, I Play as a Child, Book I (Prishtina: Dukagjini Publishing House, 2019), 132–133.
7 William Rubin, Picasso and Portraiture (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996); Christopher Finch, Chuck Close: Life (New York: Prestel, 2010).

For a broader analysis of these artistic approaches, see Rubin (1996) on the works of Picasso and Finch (2010) on the works of Chuck Close.

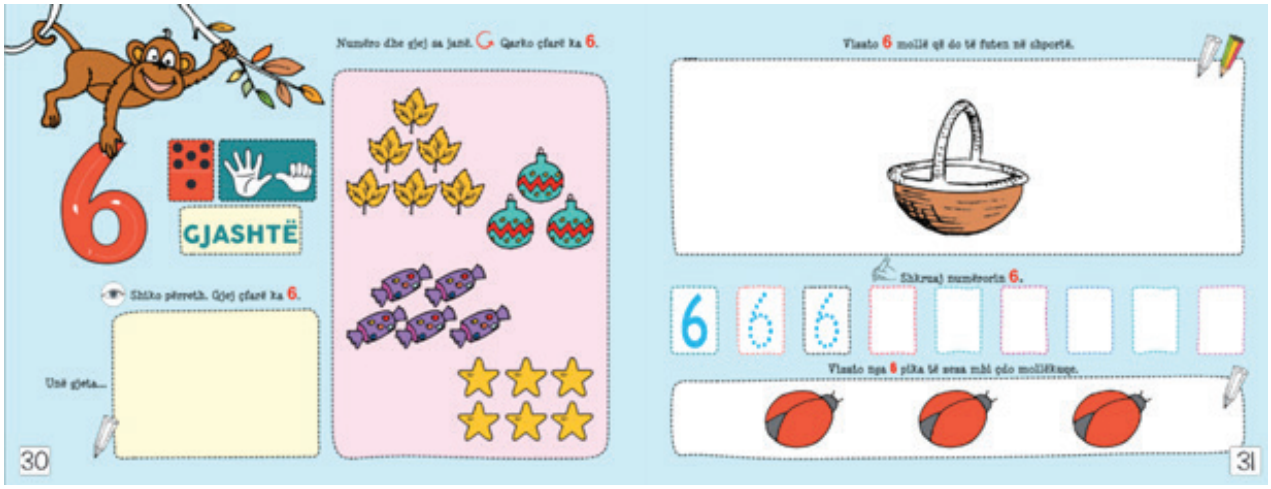

Figure 7. The number 6 and its visual representation [8]

This illustration presents a structured and interactive approach to developing the concept of the number 6 through visual and hands-on activities in preschool education. Children engage in various processes such as counting objects, identifying groups of six elements, and linking the numerical symbol with concrete representations such as leaves, candies, and stars. Activities that involve circling relevant elements, drawing objects, and writing the number contribute to the development of basic numerical skills, strengthening the relationship between quantity and symbol.

At the same time, these activities support the development of motor coordination and visual perception, enabling children to construct more stable mathematical understandings through concrete experiences. The inclusion of elements from everyday life also fosters observational skills and the application of knowledge in real-life contexts. In this way, the activity contributes to the development of mathematical thinking and creativity, making the learning process more effective, meaningful, and engaging for preschool children.

Activities related to the concept of time demonstrate that mathematics in preschool education is not presented solely through numbers, but also through everyday experiences that help children understand the structure and organization of the world around them. A concrete example of this approach is presented in Figure 8.

8 Saranda Kumnova Pozhegu and Aurela Zisi, I Learn as a Student, I Play as a Child, Book II (Prishtina: Dukagjini Publishing House, 2019), 30–31.

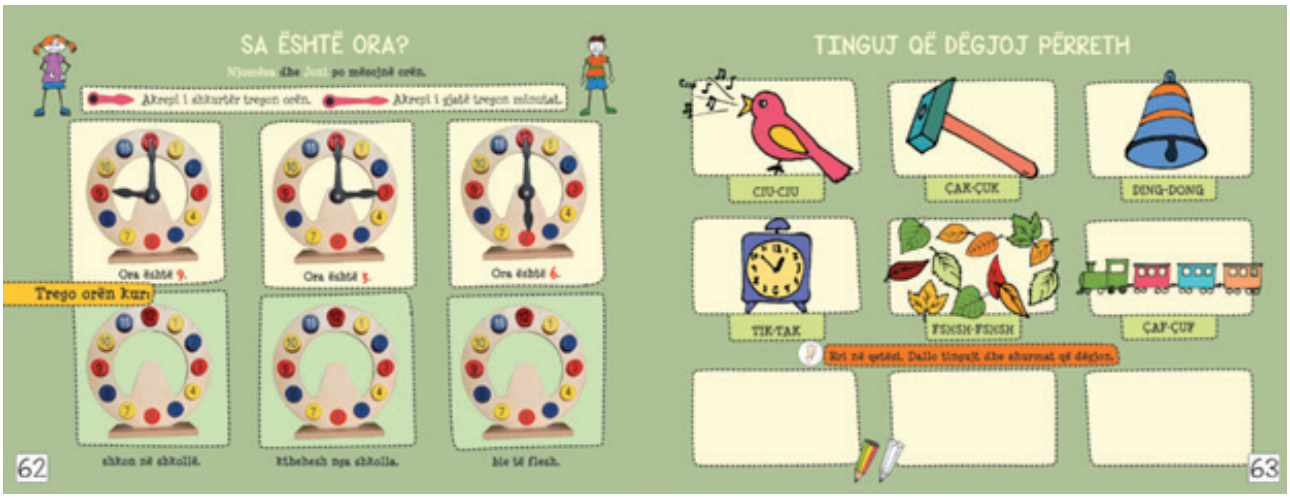

Figure 8. What Time Is It? [9]

This activity represents an example of integrating everyday experiences with the development of mathematical thinking in children. Through reading the clock, children become familiar with numbers and their arrangement within a circular structure, while simultaneously developing counting skills and spatial orientation. At the same time, they begin to understand the relationships between hours and minutes, as well as the connection between time and daily activities such as going to school, returning home, and going to sleep.

Through additional tasks, such as identifying and coloring different elements, children develop the ability to distinguish and classify objects according to their characteristics. Although the activity is related to other areas of learning, such as health education and everyday life experiences, it simultaneously involves important cognitive processes that contribute to the development of mathematical concepts such as measurement, sequencing, and the organization of events in time.

9 Saranda Kumnova Pozhegu and Aurela Zisi, I Learn as a Student, I Play as a Child, Book II (Prishtina: Dukagjini Publishing House, 2019), 62–63.

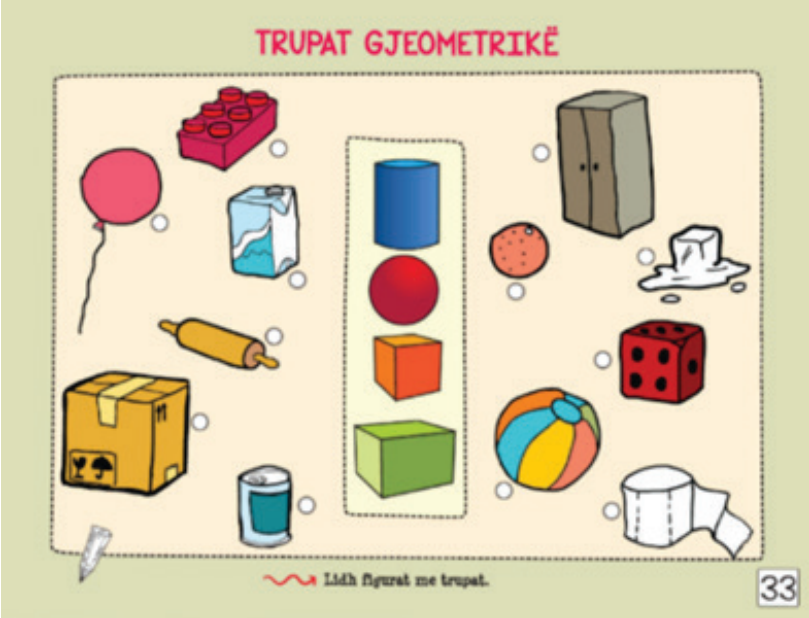

Figure 9. Geometric solids and real-life objects [10]

This figure presents several geometric solids, such as the cube, cylinder, and sphere, which are associated with everyday objects illustrated in the image, including a ball, a box, a can, and other familiar items.
This activity helps children understand the relationship between geometric forms and real-life objects. Through this process, they develop spatial perception and the ability to recognize and identify three-dimensional shapes in their environment.
Furthermore, by visually matching geometric solids with concrete objects, children strengthen their ability to make connections between abstract mathematical concepts and real-world experiences. This represents a clear example of the integration of mathematics and visual perception, which plays a crucial role in children's cognitive development.

Summary of the analysis of materials from didactic packages

The analysis of materials from the three books of the didactic package "Learning as a Student, Playing as a Child" demonstrates an integrated approach between visual art and mathematics in preschool education. The activities include concepts such as counting, basic arithmetic operations, comparison of quantities, identification of geometric shapes and solids, as well as spatial orientation.
The use of illustrations and creative activities helps children understand mathematical concepts through concrete and visual experiences, while simultaneously developing creativity and logical thinking. A comparison with children's work shows that these concepts are also reflected in their artistic activities, indicating that the integration of visual art facilitates a more intuitive acquisition of mathematical knowledge.

10 Saranda Kumnova Pozhegu and Aurela Zisi, I Learn as a Student, I Play as a Child, Book III (Prishtina: Dukagjini Publishing House, 2019), 33.

Discussion

The results indicate that artistic activities serve as an important tool for the development of mathematical concepts in preschool education. Through drawing and painting, children are able to represent geometric shapes, organize elements in space, and create visual relationships between different objects.

The analysis of the figures shows that children demonstrate an intuitive understanding of shapes, counting, and spatial organization. These findings are consistent with contemporary educational theories that emphasize the importance of visual and multisensory learning. Artistic activities encourage observation, comparison, and classification—processes that are closely linked to the development of mathematical thinking.

Classroom observations indicate that the use of art increases children's motivation and active engagement, while interviews with educators confirm that visual and creative elements facilitate the understanding of mathematical concepts. As one educator stated:

"When we use drawings, shapes, and colors during mathematical activities, children understand the concept of counting and geometric shapes more easily" (Educator, personal interview, Gjilan, 2025).

Conclusions

The analysis shows that visual art plays an important role in the development of mathematical concepts in preschool education. Through artistic activities, children develop skills such as identifying shapes, counting objects, classification, and spatial organization.

The integration of visual art into the learning process represents an effective approach, making mathematics more understandable, concrete, and closely connected to children's everyday experiences.

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The guitar as a tool for education and transmission of musical heritage in the age of technology

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Abstract

Changes in technology occurring over the last decades have found their reflection in the creation of programs for music education. In this respect, research is aimed at investigating the potential of the guitar as an instrument that promotes music education. This research utilizes the theoretical-analytical method and examines modern scientific literature related to the problematics of instrumental pedagogy, technology in education, and intangible cultural heritage. The purpose of this research is to construct a theoretical model involving the components of instrumental pedagogy, technology, and traditional repertoire culture. From this standpoint, the guitar is considered not just as a musical instrument for performance but also as a medium of mediating between aesthetic perception and cultural identity construction. By means of technologies, including audio and video recordings, digital archival storage, and internet distribution, there appear new opportunities for researching, promoting, and conserving the traditional repertoire. According to the research results, the introduction of the guitar into a technological environment will contribute to the development of interactive pedagogical practices, enhance the level of students' motivation, and facilitate the process of actively preserving music heritage. At the same time, this approach meets the challenges of modern education since it connects practical and cultural aspects with the digital competencies of learners. Finally, the research proposes a model that can be used in the Albanian educational system and in other countries.

Keywords

Music education, instrumental pedagogy, guitar, intangible cultural heritage, digital technology in teaching, cultural identity, pedagogical innovation

Introduction

Musical heritage is regarded as one of the key elements of intangible cultural heritage and reflects the aesthetic, historical, and social characteristics of particular communities. In turn, music education is the key process of its preservation, transmission, and transformation across subsequent generations to ensure cultural continuity in the face of changes in the social environment and technologies (UNESCO, 2003)[1].

Modern progress in digital technologies also significantly affects various aspects related to teaching music, including ways of performing music and its distribution. In this context, the educational process does not depend exclusively on the relationship between teachers and students; on the contrary, its components include the use of various online resources, multimedia, and other technologies to change the roles of musical instruments within formal and informal music education (Savage, 2007).[2]

In the context of changes related to new methods of education and teaching, it is reasonable to consider some potential advantages of the guitar in terms of its use in music education and transmission of musical heritage through digital means. Due to its specific properties, the guitar may be considered a particularly effective instrument to teach music and pass cultural heritage from one generation to another (Wade, 2001)[3]. In other words, the guitar is transformed from performing to an educational instrument thanks to the combination of tradition and innovative approaches. This method of teaching helps modern young people to preserve musical heritage and transform it creatively (Biasutti & Concina, 2021)[4]

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this paper is to explore the importance of the guitar as an instrument used in music education in relation to its capacity to preserve and transfer musical traditions through digitalization. The essay explains how the use of technology, in addition to the process of learning musical instruments, contributes to developing a sense of cultural identity among the learners.

The guitar as an instrument of music education

The guitar is a unique instrument in the domain of music education, as, besides performing on the instrument itself, the guitar enables the development of various aspects related to music. Playing the guitar involves not just acquiring skills for playing the instrument, but also developing the ability to work with music, such as rhythm, harmony, and melody, which enables deep analysis of music (Hallam, 2010). Teaching the guitar allows using multiple methods for instruction, ranging from direct instruction, independent practice, improvisation, and composing (Tyler & Sparks, 2002)[5].These strategies help in the creation of a more personalized learning process and also promote creativity in students. In Albania, the use of guitar takes place both in schools and individually, hence creating a link between traditional music and modern education.

1 UNESCO. (2003). *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*.

2 Jonathan Savage, *Music Education with Digital Technology* (London: A & C Black, 2007).

3 Graham Wade, *A Concise History of the Classic Guitar* (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, 2001)

4 Michele Biasutti, Eleonora Concina, Ciaran Deloughry, Sara Frate, Gabriela Konkol, Anthony Mangiacotti, Branka Rotar Pance, and Sabina Vidulin, "The Effective Music Teacher: A Model for Predicting Music Teacher's Self-Efficacy," *Psychology of Music* 49, no. 5 (2021)

5 James Tyler and Paul Sparks, *The Guitar and Its Music: From the Renaissance to the Classical Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

The incorporation of technology into teaching guitar using different software that can be used to record, learn and practice promotes learning from home and enables personalized instructions based on the requirements of students (Savage, 2007; Webster, 2016)

Figure 1 . Individual guitar instruction in a pedagogical context. Source: author's personal archive; image digitally processed for illustrative purposes in this paper.[6].

Musical heritage and the role of education

Musical heritage is not only a collection of traditional tunes but also a whole set of practices, expressions, and cultural values that must be mediated in order to ensure successful intergenerational transfer. Music education becomes the bridge between the traditions and the current context, providing tools for preserving and processing musical values (Campbell, 2004)[7]. Guitar being a highly interpretable instrument and capable of a great variety of pedagogical implementations, allows one to perform traditional tunes in adapted and reinterpreted ways for the new generation. Thus, such an educational strategy does not impair the purity of the heritage but instead opens up opportunities to involve students in creative work with the heritage actively (Shehu, 2019)[8]. Moreover, there is another aspect associated with the influence of technology on the development of musical heritage preservation and dissemination practices. Video recordings, online videos, and educational programs can become an efficient means to archive traditional repertoire and make it available to more people, ensuring intergenerational transfer and continuity. Such practices not only develop students' musical skills but also teach them to be responsible for the preservation of their cultural identity (Burnard, 2012)[9]. In such a way, using a

6 Flavio Lito, "Personal Promotional Photograph with Guitar," photograph, 2026, author's personal archive; image digitally processed for illustrative purposes in this paper.

7 Patricia Shehan Campbell, *Teaching Music Globally: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004)

8 Blerim Shehu, *Instrumentet muzikore dhe trashëgimia kulturore shqiptare* (Tiranë: Universiteti i Arteve, 2019).

9 Hallam, S. 2010. *The Power of Music: Its Impact on the Intellectual, Social and Personal Development of Children and Young People*. London: International Music Education Research Centre Burnard, P., and E. Haddon. 2015. *Creative Teaching and Learning in Music*. London: Routledge.

guitar in combination with technology makes students active participants in the educational proc ess, which brings the elements of both tradition and innovation into the pedagogical practice and ensures sustainable heritage preservation and value transfer (Biasutti & Concina, 2021).[10]
Another interesting feature about the use of the guitar in pedagogy is related to the fact that it can be used for reconstruction and adaptation of various musical repertoire, including both traditional tunes and innovative songs. It allows not only for developing the creativity of students and their ability to create unique things but also for active heritage preservation and transfer (Shehu, 2019)[11]. A combination of technical and creative skills, with the ability to work efficiently with technology, makes the guitar an ideal instrument from a pedagogical perspective.

Digital technology in music education

The adoption of digital technologies has resulted in a great number of changes in teaching music as well as the music performance itself. Nowadays, one can use the Internet, software programs, and various apps to learn music independently (Webster, 2016)[12]. With regard to guitar lessons, one may take advantage of the opportunity to record his/her performance and analyze it in order to track the improvement as well as receive personalized feedback. Such tools facilitate the active learning process, encourage creativity, and boost motivation, making learning more effective and enjoyable (Savage, 2012)[13]. In addition, through the use of technologies, one may combine tradition with innovation as one is able to learn not only using traditional teaching methods but also by applying more innovative ones at the same time. For example, using guitar apps, one would be able to practice both traditional notes and rhythms as well as modern improvisational techniques, which will result in a combination of tradition and innovation. In other words, while using technology, one does not reject the teacher or the guitar but takes advantage of this opportunity in terms of teaching and learning music.

10 Biasutti, M., & Concina, E. (2021). Music education and digital technologies. *Routledge*
11 Shehu, B. (2019). *Instrumentet muzikore dhe trashëgimia kulturore shqiptare*. Universiteti i Arteve.
12 Webster, P. (2016). Computer-based technology and music learning. *Oxford Handbook of Music Education*.
13 Savage, J. (2012). *Teaching music creatively*. Routledge.

Figure 2 The use of online learning and digital communication in guitar practice. Source: author's personal archive; image digitally processed for illustrative purposes in this paper..[14]

The guitar and the transmission of heritage in the digital age

Incorporation of technological innovations has brought about numerous changes within the scope of teaching music and playing music. Nowadays, the Internet, software programs, and other mobile applications help gain independence in learning music (Webster, 2016)[15]. Regarding guitar lessons, learners have the opportunity to record their performance and conduct analysis of their work in order to track their progress and obtain individual feedback. The use of technological innovations helps to promote active learning, develop creativity and raise motivation, contributing to greater efficiency and satisfaction gained from learning music (Savage, 2012[16]).
What is more, thanks to the use of technology, a combination of traditional and new strategies can be employed, allowing people to learn in an innovative way using classic approaches. For example, applications for guitars allow playing with notations and rhythm along with new innovative ways of learning such as improvisation. Technology does not take away from the role of the teacher and instrument; it supplements it.

14 Flavio Lito, "Personal Promotional Photograph with Guitar," photograph, 2026, author's personal archive; image digitally processed for illustrative purposes in this paper.
15 Webster, P. (2016). Computer-based technology and music learning. *Oxford Handbook of Music Education*.
16 Savage, J. (2012). *Teaching music creatively*. Routledge.

Figure 3. Guitar practice in a digital environment with headphones and online interaction. Source: author's personal archive; image digitally processed for illustrative purposes in this paper.[17]

Pedagogical and cultural perspectives

From a pedagogical standpoint, the use of the guitar in collaboration with digital technology offers opportunities for active and creative learning. The learners get to know how to recognize the qualities of their traditional music forms while incorporating new ones, thus ensuring that the tradition is maintained as well as innovation.
(Campbell, 2004)[18].
The benefits of integration in pedagogy and culture include the following:

1.Broadening the learning experience–the use of technology will enable learners to learn other kinds of music and cultivate their creative side.
2. Encouragement of intergenerational engagement in the performances and videos will be available to be viewed by teachers and students across the globe.
3. Promotion of cultural identity–the guitar acts as a means of passing on traditional music which helps maintain cultural values.
4. Facilitation of a flexible approach to teaching.

(Biasutti & Concina, 2021)[19].
Therefore, the combination of the instrument, technology, and modern teaching approaches provides a complete framework for music instruction that meets the requirements of the present-day students and ensures the preservation and promotion of Albanian music traditions.

17 Flavio Lito, "Personal Promotional Photograph with Guitar," photograph, 2026, author's personal archive; image digitally processed for illustrative purposes in this paper.
18 Campbell, P. S. (2004). *Teaching music globally*. Oxford University Press.
19 Biasutti, M., & Concina, E. (2021). Music education and digital technologies. *Routledge*.

Discussion

From the analysis, it is evident that the guitar takes on different perspectives in terms of learning through technological integration. It is not just used for replicating music pieces, but the guitar becomes a tool that helps students analyze, interpret, transform, and generate new ideas related to the piece being analyzed. Through digital learning, students can learn at their own convenience by practicing techniques at their own pace, recording their performances, and getting feedback, which is vital in helping them improve their musical skills.
(Burnard, 2012; Savage, 2012)[20]. (Webster, 2016)[21].

Another key advantage is the intersection between musical heritage and pedagogy. The integration of guitars through technology plays an important role in helping students appreciate the music tradition and culture and how they can use them creatively (Shehu, 2019; Biasutti & Concina, 2021)[22]. This discussion illustrates that the role of the guitar has been transformed into contemporary music education, becoming a learning tool and cultural and technological platform.

Conclusions

As such, from the present study, it can be established that with its integration within digital tools, the guitar is a highly efficient instrument for music education as well as cultural heritage. Using the guitar in learning processes through technological devices enhances instructional outcomes.

In using the guitar as an instructional tool, students become able to use their skills and connect with the music culture of Albania amid globalization and the digital age. (Shehu, 2019; Burnard, 2012)[23].

Combining the guitar with current teaching methods results in a complete educational system that blends tradition with the present, enables communication between generations and cultures, and aids in maintaining the identity of individuals. As such, incorporating the guitar into the digital age is more than just a method of education; it is a means that is sustainable and can be implemented in various levels of music education throughout the world, including Albania.

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The chamber music of Thoma Simaku from the 1990s to the present day (analytical study)

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the creative process of composer Thoma Simaku's Chamber Music from 1991 to the present. This body of work undoubtedly holds an important place in his creative oeuvre, both in terms of its volume and artistic merit. After an extraordinary breakthrough into the Western music world in the early 1990s, he was given the opportunity to incorporate new developments and processes in contemporary compositional techniques, which become apparent as early as his first work from that period, the String Quartet No. 1 (1991). Like a series of subsequent works, the quartet clearly stands out for its new audacity, moving away from traditional conventions of musical thought and composition; this is followed by the most important and decisive phase of his creativity, when he gradually transforms his musical language. This new approach appears in the formal conception as well as in the work's dramaturgy, and equally in the exploitation of opportunities to expand as much as possible the coloristic spectrum and the timbres of the instruments for which the work is written. In pursuing the process according to the analytical methodology, the most representative works of the composer's second creative period are examined: the piece for cello and piano, "Ed é subito sera" (1998), and String Quartet No. 2, "Radius", 2003, which are written in an extraordinary specific and unique style. From the analysis of this body of work, it emerges that Th. Simaku's chamber music holds an important place in Albanian chamber music and also has a significant international impact, thanks to his works that are being performed around the world.

Keywords

Chamber music, traditional music, coloristic spectrum, contemporary compositional techniques

Introduction

The years 1945-90 mark the second period of developments in Albanian music, its definitive separation from the previous semi-professionalism and its establishment as professional music. Many factors contributed to this; some of the most important were: 1) the formation of the first generation of professional composers in the conservatories of Eastern countries (mainly in the former USSR), such as Cesk Zadeja (1927-1997), Tish Daija (1926-2003), Tonin Harapi (1928-1992), Nikolla Zoraqi (1929-1991), Kozma Lara (1930-2019), Pjetër Gaci (1931-1995) etc., who, in the late 1950s, became involved in the country's musical life and main artistic institutions; 2) the creation of the professional music education system with the opening, in 1946, of the "Jordan Misja" high school of arts in Tirana and, in 1962, of the State Conservatory of Tirana;[1] and 3) the establishment of artistic institutions, preceded by the State Philharmonic (1950), followed by the Opera and Ballet Theatre (1953), the State Ensemble of Songs and Dances (1957), the RTSH Symphony Orchestra (1962), etc.

Depending on the general artistic developments in the country, during the 1945-90 period, Albanian music went through two developmental phases: the first, which extends from 1945 to around the late 1960s, while the second covers the two decades of the 1970s-90s. In general terms, from one phase to the next, Albanian music followed a path of professional growth, moving from rigid traditionalism toward the exploration of freer creative spaces. In the early 1970s, the first generation of post-War composers had reached their creative maturity, while a second generation of composers emerged on the music scene, trained at the KSHT (later ILA), such as Feim Ibrahimi (1935-1997), Limos Dizdari (1942), Shpëtim Kushta (1946), Kujtim Laro (1947-2004), Thoma Gaqi (1948), Aleksandër Peçi (1951), followed by Haig Zaharian (1952), Sokol Shupo (1954), Thoma Simaku (1958), etc. It is generally these names that, alongside the composers of the preceding generation, dominated the development of musical creativity in the 1970s-1990s.

Generally, in this second period of its development 1970-90, with the exception of a few cases (e.g., the two piano concertos and the oboe concerto by F. Ibrahimi, Piano Concerto No. 1 by A. Peçi and a few others), Albanian musical creativity retains a traditionalist core, nourished by the 19th-century Romantic aesthetic, by the late Romanticism of the early 20th century, as well as by Russian composers of the late 19th and 20th centuries (Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Khachaturian). Based on these models, it was clearly defined as national music, with extensive use of musical materials sourced from folklore or traditional popular music.

1 Frashëri, K. History of the Albanian People IV, Albanians During the Second World War and After It 1939-1990, TOENA PUBLICATIONS, Tirana, 2008, p. 229. In the early 1980s, Albania had eight secondary music schools, in addition to Tirana, also in Shkodër, Korçë, Durrës, Elbasan, Vlorë, Fier and Gjirokastër, and dozens of lower-cycle music schools operated nationwide.

Albanian Chamber Music[2] of the second half of the 20th century went through the same processes and reflected the same features. In fact, the works written during this period for standard chamber ensembles and genres are relatively few in number, with modest professional achievements, and, with a few exceptions (Zedesa's Sonata for Violin and Piano). The reasons for this are related both to the fact that, by its very nature, chamber music could not adequately respond to the demands of the doctrine, and to the composers' reluctance to approach the genre.
The first steps to promote "New Music" in Albania began after the '90s, initially by the "Albanian Musicians' Foundation",[3] which in the fall of 1992 organized the first concert with Albanian new chamber music. After this, with the creation of two other musical associations, modern chamber music would gain momentum through the annual organization of two events: "Days of New Music" and "International Days of New Chamber Music," which made possible the creation and performance of contemporary musical works.
As for the chamber music works of the preceding period, 1945-90, it can be said in a nutshell that they are extremely modest in compositional structure, and especially in their structural-harmonic treatment. However, on the other hand, they retain their historical significance by preceding the great change that swept through the developments of Albanian music after the 1990s, the main feature of which was the overcoming of traditionalism and the exploration of new creative paths as an expression of compositional freedom.

Methodology

In this study, an approach is used following the analytical methodology where the most representative works of the composer's second creative period are treated. The materials used include the original scores of the two selected works which are: the piece for cello and piano, "*Ed é subito sera*" (1998), the string quartet no. 2, "*Radius*'' (2003) which are written in an extremely specific and unique style. In order to examine the thematic construction, the analysis is based on the formal-structural treatment, and secondly, the interpretative analysis and sound production. For this purpose, a compositional comparison is made between the two works under analysis which are twelve years apart.

Two works by Thoma Simaku written between 1998 and 2003

Among the composers who created in the field of Albanian chamber music is Thoma Simaku, whose creative career began during the 1980s and 1990s (upon completing his studies) and flourished significantly after the 1990s, following the start of his studies at York University in England.

2 Hysi, F. *Albanian Chamber Music*, Albanian Encyclopedic Dictionary, (Academy of Sciences of the Albanian Socialist Republic), Printed: KOMBINATI POLIGRAFIK Shtypshkronja e Re, Tirana, 1985, p. 735, Chamber music was born and developed mainly after the Liberation, in the framework of socialist realism music. Its works (trios by L. Dizdar and T. Harapi, sonatas by Ç. Zadesa, etc.) are characterized by a variety of musical, lyrical, heroic, festive figures, etc. They reflect different aspects of Albanian life and nature, socialist social psychology, the inner spiritual world of people, etc. In general, Albanian chamber music is treated in close connection with folklore and is distinguished by its national color and folk spirit.

3 Ibrahimi, V. *Vikama e Tingullit*, So, it became possible that, in 1991, in North Yorkshire, England, "The Albanian Musician's Trust" was founded, with the initiative of June Emerson, Lady Caroline, Michael Oakley, and Feimi's move to Yorkshire was realized. In 1991, our best friends settled in England: Eno and Rajmonda Koço, together with their children, as well as the composer Thoma Simaku, Feimi's collaborator and close friend. (V.I), publishing house, "Onufri", Tirana, 2023. p.193

These two creative phases, of course, do not correspond to the chronological duration of the respective periods, but rather reflect the significant stylistic shifts that occurred in the composer's music.

During his early period 1980-1990, which established him as one of the most promising young voices in Albanian music, Simaku's work remained largely within the artistic context of the time; he preserved the traditional foundations of the musical language, as well as the standard forms, while also exploring new avenues in the realm of modal harmony, promising voices of Albanian music, Simaku's creative output remained more or less within the framework of the artistic context of the time; he preserved the traditional foundations of the musical language, as well as the standard forms, while, on the other hand, exploring the realm of modal harmony. After 1991, he made a complete break from all the conventions of earlier music, both in terms of his compositional approach and the sound he achieved. Given the significant place it holds among the Albanian compositions of the period, and in the context of the subject of this doctoral thesis, we have focused on two works from the oeuvre of Th. Simaku which will be analyzed below.

***Ed è subito sera*, for cello and piano, In Memoriam Feim Ibrahimi**

The piece for cello and piano, *Ed è subito sera*, was composed on January 4, 1998, in York, England, as a tribute to the composer Feim Ibrahimi;[4] it was first performed in Ryedale Festival in England, and just a few days later it premiered in London, while a year later it was performed at the "Tirana Autumn"[5] festival by cellist Gëzim Belegu and pianist Merita Rexha Tërshana.[6]

Composed at a time when the author's creative trajectory had taken a different direction, Ed è subito sera is a work with a structuralist concept, represented by an elementary, distinguishable group of musical material derived from the first two and three letters of Ibrahimi's name and surname. This melodic-harmonic material is based on the diatonic scale system, in this case the second group of the chromatic scale, constructed from chromatic and diatonic half-tones.

From a broader perspective, it should be noted that in *Ed è subito sera*, Simaku demonstrates for the first time, in a striking manner, his characteristic inclination toward sound exploration. In this work, the composer employs the punctualist technique known as *Klangfarbenmelodie* (timbre melody)[7], which shapes the entire compositional structure of the work and is presented in direct connection with the musical content.

4 Interview with composer Thoma Simaku interviewed on 08.05.2024, at the Academy of Sciences in the "Aleks Buda" Hall, "CON - RI - ZONANCA".

5 The work was performed on 03.11.1999 at the UART concert hall, by cellist Gëzim Belegu and pianist Merita Rexha.

6 Shupo, S. *Tirana Autumn `05,* ISCM Albanian Section, Ed. 6, 03.11.1999, (Tirana, 02-08.11.2005), p. 63.

7 The German notion Klangfarben (sound colors) corresponds to the English tone-colour. See also Kennedy Paul, - The Oxford Dictionary of Music. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 890). The term "timbre" (Klangfarbe) itself can be traced back to around 1822 and was then used more and more frequently in conjunction with the exploration of the structural properties and psychoacoustic foundations of sound, which began in the 19th century. Research (Hermann von Helmholtz, Carl Stumpf, etc.) always went hand in hand with new compositional trends (Hector Berlioz, Richard Wagner, Debussy, etc.). (see: Muzzulini, D. *Genealogie der Klangfarbe*, Bern 2006, p. 265).

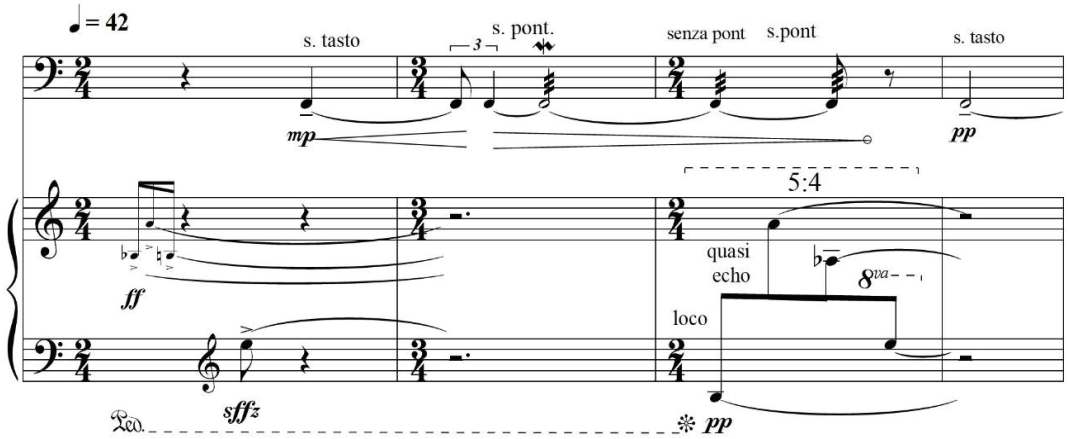
The distribution of sounds across large spaces, accompanied by the corresponding dynamics, remains one of the key factors in generating the sensitive, dramatic expressiveness that permeates the entire work.

Composed over a period of time, the work consists of three sections and a coda (A-B-C-coda),[8] in which the composer maintains nearly the same structural concept as in his two previous works composed in the early 1990s in York, England (String Quartet No. 1, 1991; Spiritual Quintet Homage to Igor Stravinsky, 1992).

A		**Connector**	**B**		**Connector**	**C**		**Code**
4/4 = 42		4/4 = 40	**b)** 4/4 = 54 **b1)** 4/4 = 42		4/4 = 42	**b)** ♪ = 120 **a)** 4/4 = 45		**1)** 4/4 = 45 **2)** 4/4 = 42
1 period (mm. 1-29)		***1 sentence*** (mm. 30-35)	***1 period*** (mm. 36-60)		***1 sentence*** (mm. 61-64)	***1 period*** (mm. 65-107)		***1 period*** (mm.108-123)
a	**a1**	**y**	**b**	**b1**	**y1**	**b**	**a**	**x**
2 sentence (mm.10+6)	***2 sentence*** (mm.8+5)	***1 sentence*** (mm. 6)	***2 sentence*** (mm. 5+6)	***2 sentence*** (mm. 6+8)	***1 sentence*** (mm. 4)	***2 sentence*** (mm. 16+11)	***2 sentence*** (mm. 11+5)	***2 sentence*** (mm. 8+8)

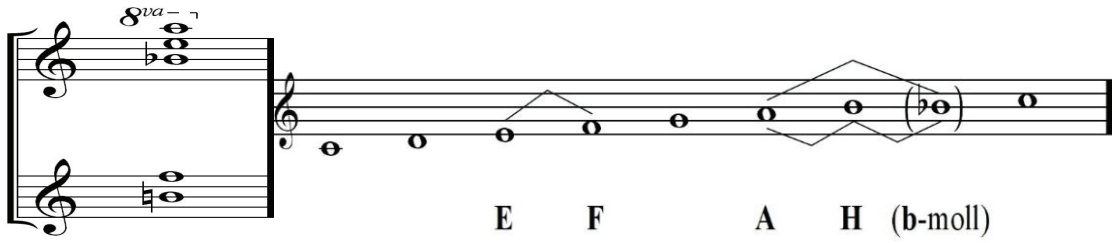
Graphic Example 1. Thoma Simaku, Structure of the Work's Form, Ed é subito sera, for cello and piano.

As can be seen from the table above, the work is proportionally structured into three sections, preceded by an introduction and concluded with a coda. However, despite this, rapid perception of the music proves difficult due to the amelodic principle, which consequently results in a lack of a motivic-thematic structural relationship. Therefore, the work must be listened to, following it detail by detail, in order to grasp the perception of the whole. This is also evidenced by the experimentation with sound, which emerges as a new phenomenon in this period and is subsequently developed throughout the composer's later output.



Musical Example 1. Thoma Simaku, Ed é subito sera, mm. 1-4

8 Chaplin E. W. *Analyzing Classical Form*, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 195.



Musical Example 2. Thoma Simaku, Ed é subito sera, basic sound structure, the chord derived from the letters of Feim Ibrahimi's name

The fundamental tonal structure of the work is a five-note chord *B-F-*(*Bb*)*-E-A*, derived from the four letters of Ibrahim's name (*B, F, E, A*). By constructing this chord and through the masterful use of various sound-production techniques (*con legno, sul ponticello, con sord, natural and artificial harmonics, pizz alla bartok*, microintervals, etc.), the composer creates the perfect atmosphere for the concept he is addressing: a meditation focused on inner reflections. All of this is entrusted primarily to the cello. It enjoys complete independence, relegating the piano part to a secondary role.

The first section (A) contains two asymmetrical phrases and a connecting passage. The first period presents a complete and finished musical idea which, in this case, is characterized by melodic-rhythmic and intonational clarity and coherence. The second period has the same structure, but with a modified repetition of the melo-rhythmic and harmonic figurations from the first period. The more dynamic linking passage serves a dual function: 1) it defines and unifies the conclusion of the musical idea presented in the first section; and 2) it plays an intonational linking role, enabling a natural transition to the subsequent section.

The second section (B) is constructed using the same concept and formal structure as the first, i.e., with two phrases and a connecting phrase. The first period (*b*) serves to develop the musical idea presented in the second sentence of the first section (*a1*). The second period (*b1*), which is more extended, develops the tonal and formal structure of the connecting phrase in the first section (A), while also maintaining the same role and function as that section. The connecting passage is composed of a four-bar phrase and prepares the tonal and harmonic structure for the subsequent section. Therefore, we can say that the central section (B) serves to develop the first section (A), without any change whatsoever in terms of structure, tempo, or other elements.

The third section (middle) maintains the same structural concept of form as the first two, but is composed of two extended periods; instead of a recapitulation, it features a coda in the form of a two-phrase period. Thus, in terms of its formal structure, this section is composed of three periods, the first two of which are the first periods of sections (A-B) arranged in the order (*b-a*). The development of the middle section is structured around two distinct elements: 1) a melo-rhythmic and tempo climax; and 2) a harmonic-dynamic climax. The first period (*b*) rigorously maintains the same elements as the first two sections: the sonic composition, the timbre, and the rhythm. In this case, the only change that creates contrast is the reduced duple tempo, ♪ 120. It is precisely this latter element that defines the climax of the entire work.

The second period (*a*) of this section serves as an intonational reprise, as in its harmonic structure, it features the same opening five-note chord, but placed vertically on a pedal that functions as achromatic cluster[9] duplicated in the piano's high and low registers at the dynamic *sfffffz*. At the same time, the cello plays the same five-note chord with the same dynamics, but arranged in a fragmented, pointillistic, and permutative distribution across different pitches and timbres. Through this development, the work reaches a second climax, in this case in terms of harmony; this also marks the second dramatic climax of the entire composition. By way of analogy, it can be said that the development of period (*a*) is presented as a kind of prelude to the dominant chords, preceding the true recapitulation. Finally, the coda, composed of a two-phrase period with a harmonic structure based on the first five-note chord placed vertically on a pedal in the piano part at the *pppp* dynamic in the upper register, and in dialogue with the cello part at the same dynamic, is presented as a timbral and harmonic-intonational recapitulation.
Coda: The ideo-emotional conclusion of the work emerges in the coda, in the form of a two-part period that is concretely constructed from the material of the static harmonic five-note motif of the introduction, enriched by the glissando movements of the artificial phrasing on the cello.
In conclusion, it can be said that throughout the work, the first five-note chord undergoes a continuous permutation,[10] constantly being altered by other groups derived from the same set of notes-namely, 4, 3, 2, and the leading tone-moving naturally from section to section, where rhythm and dynamics are closely linked to the structure of the form throughout the entire work. Thus, the escalation of drama, supported by vigorous, energetic textures, underscores the idea conveyed by the work's very title. Together, these elements bring about a high concentration of the compositional idea and, at the same time, serve as emotional release points to reach the work's conclusion and conceptual resolution. This deeply focused reflection on the human being's past life, which emerges and gradually develops, ultimately returns to the pedal of the five-note chord (with which the work begins), creating an intonational expression reminiscent of the sound of a bell, which gradually fades away in the closing section until reaching complete silence.

String quartets for violin, viola, cello, and double bass No. 2, *Radius*

Thoma Simaku composed his second string quartet, titled *Radius*,[11] in 2003, dedicated to the "Kreutzer Quartet." The work was performed for the first time that same year (May 17, 2003) at the 2003 Augsburg Festival in Germany. One year later, the quartet was selected by an international jury for the "World Music Days 2004" (ISCM Festival in Switzerland) to be performed by the Arditti Quartet, accompanied by the composer's portrait CD on Naxos Records.[12]

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9 Seachrist, D. A. *The Musical Word of Halim El-Dubh*, Kent, Ohio: Kent State University press, 2003, p. 215; A cluster of sounds is a dissonant group of sounds that are next to each-other….

10 Rahn, J. *Basic Atonal Theory*, New York: Longman, 1980, p. 137, a musical permutation is any rearrangement of the primary form of an ordered set of tone classes or, in terms of the twelve-tone series, any rearrangement of the entire set consisting of integers.

11 www.cuemath.com/geometry/radius/_
Radius is defined as a line segment connecting the center of a circle or sphere to its perimeter or boundary. It is an important part of circles and spheres and is generally abbreviated as 'r'. The plural of radius is 'radii' which is used when talking about more than one radius at a time.

12 www.uymp.co.uk/composer/thomas-simaku
Ibid.: Published by UNIVERSITY of York MUZIC PRESS Ltd. – 2003 School of Arts & Creative Technologies (ACT) Room 206, Ron Cooke Hub 133 Deramore Lane York YO10 5GE.

Compared to the previous works, the distinctive feature of the second quartet lies in its compositional concept, marking a transition from the classical serialism employed in the 1991 String Quartet No. 1 and the 1992 Spiritual Quintet to a more comprehensive form of serialism[13] However, the composer's most significant compositional development is evident in his exploration of the sonic realm. In fact, this phenomenon can be traced back to 1998, in *Ed é subito sera*, where, through the punctualist manner (*Klagenfarbenmelodie*), various qualities of the cello's sound are explored. In the Quartet *Radius,* these explorations are taken to the utmost by establishing structural relationships between rhythm and the elements of sound: pitch, duration, accent, and dynamics. The use of timbral characteristics in conjunction with other compositional parameters marks a new level in the composer's serial writing, resulting in highly nuanced sonic detail.

Rather than being descriptive, the work's title, "*Radius*", serves a structural purpose. Drawing on the geometric concept of the radius, or the horizontal segment connecting the center to the edges of the circle, at this stage of his creative career, Simaku appears determined in his quest to explore the sonic possibilities that define the linear texture of the work. Within this overall horizontality, the composer plays with various timbres accompanied by very subtle dynamic gradations.

As the critic Kenneth Carter puts it, *Thoma Simaku's String Quartets have much to commend ... Simaku has a keen ear for the texture of sound. He composes musical lines with compassion and perceptiveness, making full use of the variation in timbre within their individual sounds. An inner core of stability balances, almost invisibly and collaboratively, a series of explorations that can be loud and harsh or soft and serene. This stability gives the sound the freedom to soar and experiment. These 'voices from heaven' possess a vivid and remarkably distinct tranquility*.[14]

Kenneth Carter, Classical Source, July 2003.

In terms of structure, the Quartet for Strings No. 2 *Radius* can also be considered an extended three-part form, resulting from the merging of the sections. More specifically, the introduction serves as an expository section of the material, which then unfolds in the following two sections (A-B); the middle section of the three-part form is played by two other sections (C-D) with genuinely developmental characteristics; and the final section (E) is presented as a recapitulation featuring three varied periods, namely the introduction and the first periods of the first two sections (A-B).

13 Westergaard Peter, - Webern and "Total Organization: An Analysis of the Second Movement of Piano Variations, Op. 27", PNM, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring, 1963), pp. 107-12; In Boulez's view, Among the three representatives of the Second Viennese School, Boulez particularly appreciated Webern, who had arrived at the threshold of the new musical space: "[He was] the only one … who was aware of the new dimension of sound, of the defect of the horizontal-vertical opposition [i.e. of the traditional distinction between melody and harmony] and therefore he found in the series the only way to orient the structure towards the sound space.

14 www-users.york.ac.uk/~ts8/press.html

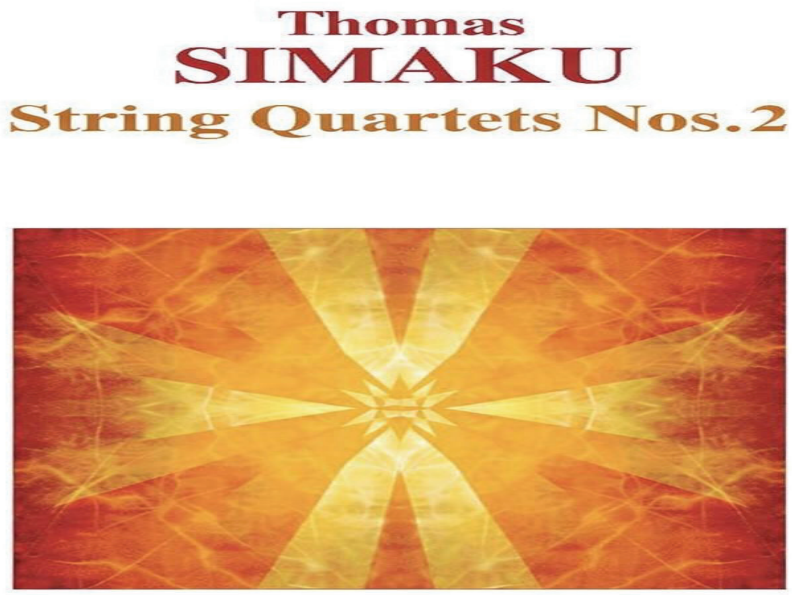


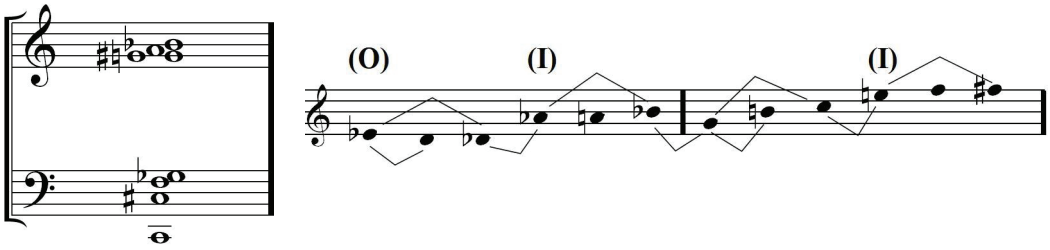
Figure 1. Cover of the Quartet of Arcs No. 2, featuring an illustration of the radius, the segment connecting the center of a circle to its perimeter or boundary.

Introduction	**A**			**B**			**C**			**D**			**E**		
1) ♪ = 80	**1)** ♪ = 70 **2)** ♪ = 74 **3)** 4/4 = 50			**1)** ♪ = 30 **2)** ♪ = 70 **3)** ♪ = 76			**1)** ♪ = 64 **2)** ♪ = 64 **3)** 4/4 = 44			**1)** 4/4 = 40 **2)** 4/4 = 40 **3)** 4/4 = 40			**1)** 4/4 = 44 **2)** 4/4 = 40 **3)** 4/4 = 40		
x	**a**	**a1**	**a2**	**b**	**b1**	**b2**	**c**	**c1**	**c2**	**d**	**d1**	**d2**	**e**	**e1**	**e2**
				x	**x**	**x**	**a**	**a1**	**a2**	**a1**	**x**	**a2**	**x**	**a2**	**x**
(mm. 1-12)	(13-23)	(24-32)	(33-37)	(38-50)	(51-64)	(65-81)	(82-89)	(90-105)	(106-116)	(117-129)	(130-148)	(149-153)	(154-165)	(166-173)	(174-196)

Graphic Example 2. Thoma Simaku, Structure and Form of the Arch Quartet No. 2, Radius

The melody[15] and harmony of the quartet are derived from a short, symmetrical hexachord series, which is constructed from an initial three-chord group consisting of two minor seconds in their original form (O) and in a perfect fourth above in inversion (I). The second form of the series, also a hexachordal form, is constructed in a permutative manner and retains the two-note group of the minor second unchanged on two occasions, while the other two-note group is combined with the notes of the first hexachord, creating the three-note structure of the original form.

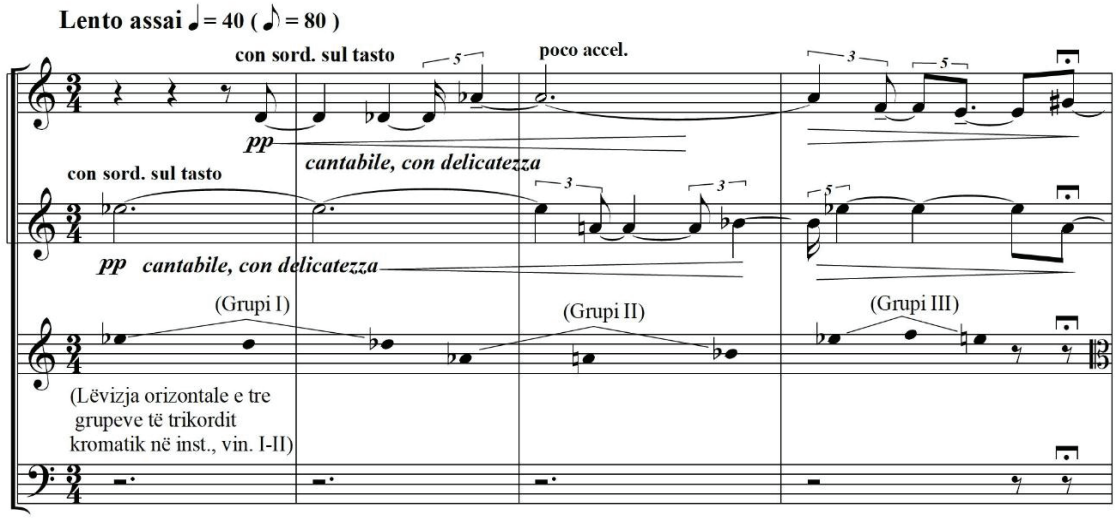
15 Josef, R. *The Works of Arnold Schoenberg*, Dika Newlin, trans., Free Press of Glencoe, 1962, p. 33, (color melody or timbre melody). This is not about multi-tone melodies developed on one instrument but about the succession of the same sound on different instruments. Schoenberg experiments with sound fields without melody in the traditional sense of the word. The music consists mainly of a slow and sustained development of chords that constantly change the orchestration is a representative example of Schoenberg's Klangfarbenmelodie.



Musical Example 3. Thoma Simaku, String Quartet No. 2, Radius, the series and the closing chord of the introduction, mm. 1–10 / 11–12

The structure of the work consists of five sections, with an introduction in the form of a period, which serves to present the melodic-harmonic and melodic-rhythmic framework for all the subsequent sections. The melo-harmonic structure of the introductory phrase and the chord derived from this same phrase serve as the concluding and defining element for the continuity of the work. Each of the sections is composed of three periods that are conceptually similar to the structure of the introduction. The periods contain independent melo-rhythmic structures, but the transition from the introduction to the final section is carried out with clarity and unity of musical thought. This is determined by the unity of the melo-harmonic structure, which is built from a single group of notes.

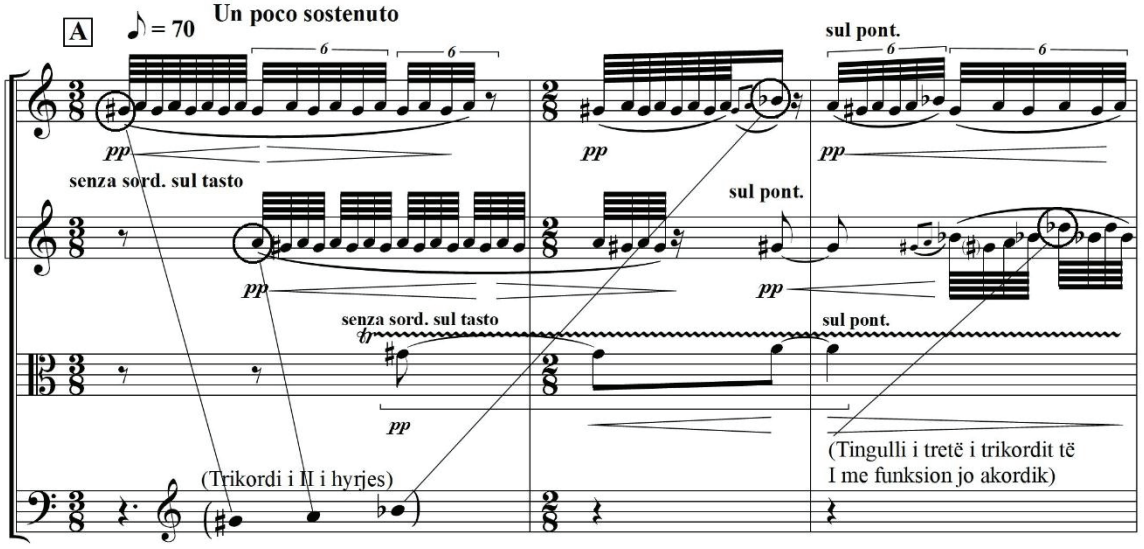
Upon a thorough examination of the work, it is evident that there are only three key elements that bring about a change in the conception of the compositional structure. Used in the introductory phrase and in the first two sections (A-B), these elements are the melo-rhythmic structure, the timbre, and the register.



Musical Example 4. Thoma Simaku, String Quartets, No. 2, Radius, introduction, mm. 1-4

As can be seen from the table above (graphic example No. 2), the structure of the three-note chord group, as it develops further in section (A), begins with the second three-note chord group of the original opening sequence, while in the other sections, it appears in a varied form. In each of these instances, it appears in the form of a varied reprise, which is distinguished as such

precisely by the rigorous use of the first three-note structure, which begins at the starting point of the minor second and then unfolds horizontally.



Musical Example 5. Thoma Simaku, String Quartets, No. 2, Radius, Section A, mm. 13-15

The second section (B) serves as a culmination, stemming from the melo-rhythmic and timbral contrast, as well as the exploitation of the characteristics of the register heights. This directly influences the expressiveness of the melodic line, while keeping the three-chord structure unchanged, which is further enriched through imitative and contrapuntal dialogue. The fact that the melo-harmonic structure remains unchanged gives this triad with a minor second the role of a center of gravity for intonative coherence and unity, as the musical thought begins and ends with a natural flow.

In the developmental section of the work (sections C-D), this series, which is based on the chromatic scale, is combined for the first time with a series of crotchets, which is also derived from the tonal elements of the three-note structure of the initial series. The vertical and horizontal use of the two three-chord series, which, in contrapuntal dialogue with the technical elements of increasing and decreasing the rhythmic values of the main structure, results in the production of new melo-harmonic and timbral colors in vertical placement. This contrapuntal melo-rhythmic dialogue enhances the dramatic quality, which directly influences the expressiveness and embodiment of the musical idea in the middle section, serving a developmental function. The dimensions of the dual structure of this section are identical to those of the inner parts of the structure in the preceding sections: the three-period composition of each section defines the balanced structure of the whole.

The combination of the two series in the middle of the work (sections C-D) introduces two distinct, vertically positioned developments: 1) the developmental elaboration of the melo-rhythmic material from the first section (A), which is developed in the third section (C) in a vertical arrangement with the new tonal material from the four-note series, contrasting with the side sections; and 2) the developmental elaboration of the tonal material from the second section (B) in the fourth section (D), again in a vertical arrangement with the tonal material from the four-note series, but in this case, the developmental independence in the registers creates

melo-harmonic instability, leaving the musical thought open. These developments represent the culmination of the developing middle section (C-D).
The final section (E) serves as an extended, comprehensive recapitulation, as it revisits the first two periods of the initial sections (A-B), as well as the introduction, but this time beginning with a retrograde ordering of the structure (b-a-x). All of this is done with the sole aim of gradually reducing the melo-rhythmic intensity of the middle section towards a calm conclusion of the work.
The coda is presented in a varied form and concludes as a static-harmonic recapitulation, constructed from two phrases featuring two three-chord groups from the first six-chord series of the introduction, placed in a melo-rhythmic dialogue both vertically and horizontally. The second phrase concludes with a pedal featuring a combination of the main hexachord tones played by the cello on the artificial harmonic flageolet in the initial register. Gradually, the notes fade out one after the other to conclude on E (the first note of the first triad), which is also the opening note of the work. Thus, in practical terms, the composer begins and concludes the work on the same note and in the same register.

Conclusions

In a final assessment, the analysis of the above works leads us to several conclusions regarding Thoma Simaku's creative evolution from 1990 to 2003.
In *Ed' é subito sera*, the break with the experience of traditional composition is evident in the overall compositional concept: a complete departure from functional or modal thematic and harmonic procedures, moving towards a free, atonal composition. Although it maintains the three-part structure with internal proportionality, in terms of sound, the work is guided by other parameters, among which a group of sounds plays the main role, serving as the fundamental unifying and generative element of the musical thought. In this way, the composer ensures the coherence of the musical thought.
Composed fifteen years later, the String Quartet No. 2 Radius, written fifteen years later, clearly marks a development in the composer's compositional style in terms of his exploration of instrumental timbre. This characteristic, evident in nearly all of his work from this period, is achieved by Simaku in String Quartet No. 2, among other means, through the treatment of timbre as a serial parameter. 2, Simaku achieves, among other things, by treating timbre as a serial parameter. Moving from the traditional serial writing of the Second Viennese School to the all-encompassing serialism of the post-World War II era, Simaku employs serial principles through an individualized approach, in service of his compositional goals. In this case, the interweaving of pitch, dynamic, rhythmic, and timbral series with microtonal harmony directly serves to deepen the fundamental characteristic of his music: nuance down to the finest details of sound production.

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Ballata the musicologist, the specificities of his musicology

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the musicological approach of Zeqirja Ballata, treating it as a structured system of interpretation in which the internal analysis of musical works is intertwined with a clear historical and identity-based awareness. In this article, we aim to argue that his musicological activity constitutes another essential component of his creative and intellectual profile, making a significant contribution to the consolidation of musicological thought in the pan-Albanian sphere. The paper focuses on three main pillars: the treatment of musical personalities, the interpretation of works, and the reflection on and analysis of significant events in Albanian and European musical life. Overall, in his writings, Ballata constructs a model in which the formal structure, cultural context, and historical function of the work are analyzed in interaction. In his treatment of music creators, he avoids dry biography, giving priority to the critical analysis of the musical work. The paper is grounded in a historical-analytical and structural approach, drawing on primary sources from the composer's personal archive (scores, manuscript materials, musicological publications, audio recordings), on archival documents and interviews with collaborators and family members, as well as on the relevant theoretical literature concerning style, aesthetic function, and the relationship between tradition and modernity in cultivated music among other authors from Albania, Kosovo, and beyond. In conclusion, the paper demonstrates that the totality of Ballata's musicological work represents a musical legacy in which music is conceived simultaneously as an aesthetic structure and as the value of a cultural product. It offers not only a model of how musicology can be practiced by a creator, but also reliable evidence on events, phenomena, and personalities influential in Albanian musical life and beyond.

Keywords

Musicological discourse, Zeqirja Ballata, musical historiography, cultural identity, albanian musical life

Introduction

The figure of Zeqirja Ballata occupies an important place in the history of cultivated music in Kosovo and in the Albanian cultural sphere, primarily for his compositional contribution. However, alongside his musical creativity, Ballata developed a sustained musicological activity, which constitutes an essential dimension of his intellectual profile and a key element in the construction of Albanian musical discourse in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. This dimension, although continuously present in his activity, has not been systematically treated as an object of study in its own right.

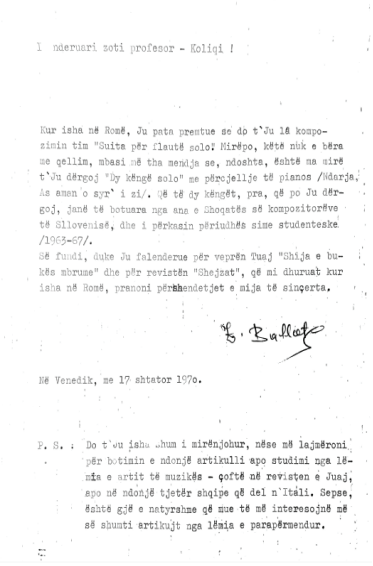
The earliest beginnings of Zeqirja Ballata's engagement in musicology date back to the late 1960s and the early 1970s of the twentieth century. A direct testimony to this orientation is the letter[1] dated 17 September 1970, addressed to Ernest Koliqi, in which Ballata, alongside information on his compositional output, clearly expresses his desire to contribute articles and studies in the field of musical art (see Figure 1). This letter constitutes a primary source of particular importance, as it attests to the author's early awareness of his role as a scholar and his interest in writing and publishing theoretical texts in the Albanian language. It marks a documented starting point of his involvement in the field of musicology, prior to this dimension becoming fully consolidated in his artistic and research activity.

Ballata's musicological discourse is not limited to the description of personalities or to the chronological recording of events in musical life. He constructs a model of interpretation in which the structural analysis of the work is interwoven with the historical, institutional, and identity context, conceiving music both as an aesthetic structure and as a cultural act with a historical function. In this sense, his writings move beyond biographical treatment without critical analysis and aim at a balanced approach between the internal analysis of the work and an awareness of its role in shaping Albanian musical culture.

The aim of this paper is to identify the specific features of this discourse by analyzing the way in which Ballata treats musical personalities, works, and significant events in musical life, as well as the methodological criteria he applies in these treatments. The study is based on published material and on primary archival sources, which include documents, papers preserved by the composer himself, materials from the book *Gjurmëve të muzës*, as well as other evidence drawn from his personal archive. These source materials provide a direct basis for illuminating his musicological orientation from the very beginnings of his scholarly activity and enable a well-grounded reading of the development of his critical thought.

In what follows, the paper will address the structure of his musicological activity and the analytical model he constructs in his writings on personalities, works, and historical processes of musical life, situating this contribution within the broader context of Albanian musical historiography.

1 Zeqirja Ballata, letter addressed to Ernest Koliqi, Venice, 17 September 1970, document in the personal collection of the author of the study: "I would be very grateful if you would inform me of the publication of any article or study in the field of the art of music […] since it is only natural that I should be most interested in articles from the aforementioned field."



I nderuari zoti profesor - Koliqi !

Kur isha në Romë, Ju patë prentue se do t'Ju lë kompozimin tim "Suita për flautë solo" Mirëpo, këtë nuk e bëra me qëllim, mbasi më tha mendja se, ndoshta, është ma mirë t'Ju dërgoj "Dy këngë solo" me përcjellje të pianos /Ndarja, As amen o syr' i zi/. Që të dy këngët, pra, që po Ju dërgoj, janë të botuara nga ana e Shoqatës së kompozitorëve të Sllovenisë, dhe i përkasin periudhës sime studenteske /1963-67/.
Së fundi, duke Ju falenderue për veprën Tuaj "Shija e bukës mbrume" dhe për revistën "Shejzat", që mi dhuruat kur isha në Romë, pranoni përshëndetjet e mija të sinçerta.

Në Venedik, me 17 shtator 197o.

P. S. : Do t'ou jishu shum i mirënjohur, nëse më lajmëroni për botimin e ndonjë artikulli apo studimi nga lëmia e artit të muzikës - çoftë në revisten e Juaj, apo në ndonjë tjetër shqipe që del n'Itali. Sepse, është gjë e natyrshme që mue të më interesojnë më së shumti artikujt nga lëmia e parapërmendur.

Figure 1. Letter from Zeqirja Ballata addressed to Ernest Koliqi, 17 September 1970. Document from the author's personal archive, identified during archival research.

Literature Review

Studies on the figure of Zeqirja Ballata are relatively limited and are mainly dispersed across partial treatments, scholarly papers, and analyses focused on particular aspects of his творчaria. Important contributions have been made by authors such as Rafet Rudi and Akil Koci, who have highlighted his place in the context of the development of cultivated music in Kosovo, as well as by Indira Çipa, who, in her doctoral study, examined Ballata's piano works in relation to contemporary style. In addition, focused analyses on his style and on his vocal-instrumental works have been carried out, including studies on the vocal-instrumental triptych, which have illuminated his compositional dimension.
However, these treatments remain primarily oriented toward stylistic and compositional analysis. To date, there appears to be no systematic study that addresses Ballata's musicological discourse in a focused and structured manner as an object in its own right. His dimension as a scholar, author of conference papers, and commentator on personalities, works, and events in musical life has remained secondary in relation to his compositional output.
On a broader theoretical level, Albanian musicological literature has consistently addressed issues such as the formation of national style, the relationship between tradition and modernity, and the process of institutionalizing cultivated music in Albania and Kosovo. In this context, studies such as that of Vasil S. Tole on Çesk Zadeja provide a methodological model for analyzing stylistic development and musical language within a defined historical and cultural framework. Likewise, reflections on the transformations of the tonal system and the concepts of harmonic expansion in twentieth-century music, as treated in contemporary international literature (e.g., Michèle Tosi on metatonality), help in constructing a theoretical framework for the interpretation of stylistic processes.
At the international level, literature on the structural function of harmony and form (Arnold Schoenberg), on the poetics of composition (Igor Stravinsky), and on the critical reflection on

modern music (Theodor W. Adorno) has contributed to the consolidation of an approach that links the internal analysis of the work with its aesthetic and historical context. These theoretical approaches provide a conceptual basis for understanding the interrelation between musical structure and cultural function—an aspect that also proves central in Ballata's musicological discourse.

Within this framework, the present paper aims to contribute by treating, for the first time in a systematic manner, Ballata's musicological discourse as an interpretative structure in its own right, analyzing the way in which he constructs the relationship between personality, work, and history in the context of Albanian cultivated music.

Methodology

This study is grounded in a historical-analytical approach that seeks to treat Zeqirja Ballata's musicological discourse as an interpretative structure in its own right. The analysis focuses on his musicological writings, the organization of his argumentation, and the methodological criteria he applies in his treatment of personalities, works, and events in musical life.

At the analytical level, the study examines the way in which Ballata constructs the musicological text: the structure of the analysis, the use of musical terminology, the relationship between description and interpretation, as well as the interweaving of the analysis of the work with its historical and cultural context. Particular attention is given to the way in which he avoids biographical treatment without critical analysis and places the work in a functional relationship with the historical and institutional processes of cultivated music.

An essential pillar of the methodology is the use of primary sources. The study draws on materials from the composer's personal archive, which includes conference papers delivered by Ballata himself and preserved in his documentation, published writings, materials from the book Gjurmëve të muzës, as well as other archival documents directly related to his musicological activity. This corpus of sources constitutes the principal basis of the analysis and enables a direct tracing of the development of his critical and interpretative thought.

The methodology aims to identify the structure, conceptual orientation, and cultural function of Ballata's musicological discourse, treating it as part of the development of musicological thought in the Albanian sphere, without shifting the analysis into the compositional dimension of style.

Three are the principal directions of Ballata's musicological interest:

1. Albanian personalities in Ballata's musicological discourse
2. International personalities in Ballata's musicological discourse
3. Musicological writings on significant events in musical life

Albanian Personalities in Ballata's Musicological Discourse

Jan Kukuzeli[2] (13th–14th century) is presented as a foundational figure of the Byzantine musical tradition, whom Ballata situates within the context of the early formation of musical culture in the Albanian sphere. He refers to the corpus of liturgical works, such as Biblical Psalm No. 117, Laudes Nos. 148–150, the Troparion of the Theotokos, the Cherubic Hymn, the Polyeleos, the Great Papadic Ison, the Anoixantaria, as well as the system of notation known as Kukuzelian notation, presenting him as a personality with a lasting influence on Byzantine musical theory and practice.

At Fan S. Noli[3] (1882–1965), in Zeqirja Ballata's musicological reading, is presented as a foundational figure in the interweaving of church music with national identity and in the establishment of the foundations of Albanian musicology. With the study "Beethoven and the French Revolution" (1947), he is regarded as one of the founders of Albanian musicological thought.
Among his musical works, the following stand out: Hymnore (1936), Byzantine Hymnal, the symphonic poem Scanderbeg, Albanian Rhapsody, The Poor Gaspar, as well as a series of liturgical works, such as the Troparion of Saint George, Sunday Entrance Hymn, and Shenjë Perëndi. Ballata emphasizes the clarity of the text–music relationship, the observance of Eastern modality, and the ritual function as central to Noli's aesthetic.
He is presented not only as a composer, but also as an organizer, educator, and a referential figure in the formation of Albanian musical culture both within the country and abroad.

Šime Dešpali[4] (1897–1981) is presented as a multifaceted cultural and pedagogical figure, with Ballata emphasizing his role in preserving Arbëresh identity and in the institutional development of musical life. In his analysis of works such as Lenës, Lulëzoi lulja, Dashnor t'u bana, Valle, Nina nana, Romanca, and Fortuna, he highlights the deliberate compositional simplicity and the pedagogical function of Dešpali's output.

Rexho Muliqi[5] (1923–1982) is presented as a central figure of Albanian music, whom Ballata treats as a model of the artist-institution. He analyzes works such as Baresha (1968), Fantasy for Orchestra (1954), Prizren Watercolors (1958), Symphony No. 2 "Kosovare" (1971), and Nita (1975), emphasizing his generic diversity and his ability to interweave artistic function with social and institutional roles.

2 Zeqirja Ballata, "The Currents of Musical Creativity through the Centuries" ["Rrjedhat e krijimtarisë muzikore ndër shekuj"], conference paper, Maribor, n.d., 1–9.
3 Zeqirja Ballata, "On Several Sacred Songs of Fan Noli" ["Mbi disa këngë të përshpirtshme të Fan Nolit"], conference paper, n.d., 1–11.
4 Zeqirja Ballata, "Šime Dešpali – A Hermit of Arbëresh National Consciousness" ["Šime Dešpali – vetmitar i ndërgjegjes kombëtare arbëreshe"], *Studime* 10 (2003): 1–10.
5 Zeqirja Ballata, "The Life and Creative Journey of Composer Rexho Muliqi" ["Rrugëtim jetësor e krijues i kompozitorit Rexho Muliqi"], *Studime Shoqërore* 1, n.d., 1–11.

Feim Ibrahimi[6] (1935–1997) is presented as a composer and pedagogue with profound institutional influence, with Ballata highlighting the wide range of his output—from children's songs such as Shqiponja e balona and Ku po shkon, o partizan, to choral works such as Ti që ke në sy lirinë and Dremitë ligeri, as well as more substantial compositions such as Peizazh i pyllit i rralluar (1986–1987) and Plaku dhe vdekja (1990–1996). He emphasizes the balance between folkloric motives and a professionally grounded harmonic structure.

Sevime Gjinali (b. 1937) is presented as the first female composer and pedagogue in Kosovo, whom Ballata treats as a foundational figure in the affirmation of women's role in musical life. He emphasizes the institutional and formative dimension of her activity, considering her a turning point in the consolidation of professional music education.

Nexhmije Pagarusha[7](1933–2020) is presented as an interpretative phenomenon of national and international stature, with Ballata highlighting her role in the professionalization of Albanian concert song and the extension of her activity to various European and international centers.

Esat Rizvanolli[8] (1936–2006) is presented as a composer and theorist, with Ballata emphasizing the interweaving of Albanian tradition with contemporary musical language and the connection between composition, pedagogy, and theoretical reflection.

Fahri Beqiri[9] (1936–2021) is presented in Zeqirja Ballata's musicology as one of the principal representatives of the middle generation of Albanian composers of the 1960s. Ballata situates him within a cohort that also includes M. Kaçinari, F. Ibrahimi, V. Gjini, E. Rizvanolli, and K. Lekaj, emphasizing that this generation, owing to differing educational backgrounds and not entirely coincident aesthetic orientations, did not succeed in creating a fully shared musical language.
Ballata dwells in particular on Beqiri's choral output, which begins during his period at the Music School in Prizren (1954–1958), with works such as *Erdh misiti* (1958), *Kënga e rinisë* (1959), *Kënga e dëshmorit* (1959), *Kënga për Silvira Tomazinin* (1959), and *Kënga e nëntorit*. During his studies at the Belgrade Music Academy (1961–1966), he continued with compositions such as *Ibri plak* (1961), *Moj e mira* (1962), *Shkoj e vij*, and around twenty songs for children's choir. In this treatment, Ballata emphasizes the continuity of his choral engagement and the educational function of this output.

6 Zeqirja Ballata, "Feim Ibrahimi, a Great Master of the Solo Vocal Genre" ["Feim Ibrahimi, mjeshtër i madh i gjinisë vokalo-solisistike"], "Figura të shquara të artit shqiptar – Feim Ibrahimi (1)" ["Distinguished Figures of Albanian Art – Feim Ibrahimi (1)"], *Bota Sot*, March 10, 2003, 21.

7 Zeqirja Ballata, "Nexhmije Pagarusha: Over Four Decades of Devotion to the Beautiful Albanian Song" ["Nexhmije Pagarusha, mbi katër dekada përkushtimi këngës së bukur shqipe"], conference paper, n.d., 1–4.

8 Zeqirja Ballata, "A Restless Spirit of a Talented Composer: On the Fifth Anniversary of His Death and on the Occasion of the Promotion of the Book *Esat Rizvanolli – Composer* by Shefeqt Hoxha" ["Një shpirt i delirë prej një kompozitori të talentuar: Në 5-vjetorin e vdekjes dhe me rastin e promovimit të librit *Esat Rizvanolli – kompozitor* të autorit Shefeqt Hoxha"], conference paper, 2011, 1–3.

9 Zeqirja Ballata, "On Three Works by One of Our Authors, Fahri Beqiri" ["Mbi tri vepra të një autori tonë, Fahri Beqiri"], in *In the Footsteps of the Muse* [*Gjurmëve të muzës*] (Prishtinë: Redaksia e Botimeve OPGBG, Rilindja, 1987), 69–77.

Mark Kaçinari[10] (1935–1985) is presented as a creator of pronounced temperament and an important figure in Kosovar musical life in the second half of the twentieth century. Ballata regards him as a passionate composer, although not fully academically trained in this field.
In his analysis of Kaçinari's opus, Ballata mentions choral songs for pioneers, such as *Nanë, o nanë*; polyphonic songs for adults, such as *Zogu i Ohrit* (1962); the choral suite *Shamikuqia* (1971); *Serenade* (1982); as well as two romances for low voice and piano: *Buzë lumit ke shtëpinë* and *Para pasqyrës* (1974–1975). These two solo songs are treated by Ballata as a meaningful segment of the opus, in which different aesthetic approaches and an effort toward professional deepening in vocal and harmonic structure are evident.

Lorenc Antoni[11] (1909–1991) is presented as a foundational figure in the professionalization of Albanian choral song in Kosovo. Ballata emphasizes that he was among the first to devote systematic attention to the harmonization and stylization of folk song, transforming it into a functional repertoire for choir.
Among the works mentioned are *Mirë mbrama*, *Kanga e Rexhës*, *Hajde t'dalim*, *Kur më del në derë*, *Hasimja trime*, *Ani moj*, *Lan vasha*, *Ç'janë këta krusha*, and *Shkojti gika*. Ballata singles out in particular *Mirë mbrama*, *Kanga e Rexhës*, *Hajde t'dalim*, and *Ç'janë këta krusha* as evidence of a clear, functional choral treatment adapted to the performance possibilities of the time.

Abdullah Grimci[12] (1909–2018) is presented as a composer with a consolidated symphonic orientation, whose output Ballata analyzes as the result of a mature process of compositional formation and a clear structural awareness. Within this framework, he dwells on *Symphony No. 1*, emphasizing that this work is grounded in his earlier experience with marches, potpourris, suites, and fantasies for wind orchestra, as well as in the cyclic (five-movement) *Suite for Symphony Orchestra* (1956).
Ballata also mentions the opera *Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu*, situating it within the context of efforts to create a stage work with historical and identity-related themes.

Engjëll Berisha[13] (1934–2015) is presented as one of the central figures of Albanian pedagogy and musicology in Kosovo. In his treatment, Ballata emphasizes Berisha's role in consolidating music education and in constructing a historiographical discourse in the Albanian language.
He underscores that, for two consecutive decades (1981–2000), Berisha devoted himself to illuminating musical life, creativity, and culture, both at the Kosovar level and at the broader national level. In this sense, Ballata presents him not as a composer, but as an academic and organizational figure who linked pedagogy with theoretical reflection and with the institutional affirmation of Albanian music.

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10 Ballata, *Gjurmëve të muzës*, 201–203.
11 Ballata, *Gjurmëve të muzës*, 60–61.
12 Zeqirja Ballata, "On Symphony No. 1 by Abdulla Grimci: Elaborations of Lyrical-Meditative and Dramatic Elements, a Variety of Tonalities, Dynamics, and Local Metro-Rhythmic Lines" ["Mbi simfoninë nr. 1 të Abdulla Grimcit: shtjellime elementesh liriko-meditative e dramatike, larushi tonalitetesh, dinamikash dhe vijëzash metro-ritmike vendore"], *Koha Ditore*, November 8, 2014, 30.
13 Zeqirja Ballata, "Academician Engjëll Berisha – A Worthy Commemorative Tribute from a Pedagogue and Music Historian among Us" ["Akademik Engjëll Berisha – një përvjetor i denjë prej pedagogu dhe historiani muzikor ndër ne"], musicological paper, n.d., 1–7.

Personalitetet ndërkombëtare në diskursin muzikologjik të Ballatës

Claude Debussy[14] (1862–1918) paraqitet në muzikologjinë e Zeqirja Ballatës si figura më përfaqësuese e impresionizmit muzikor në Evropën e fund-shekullit XIX dhe fillim-shekullit XX. Ballata e vendos atë në kontekstin e lëvizjes impresioniste franceze, duke e lidhur me zhvillimet estetike të Parisit të kohës dhe me figurat e artit pamor si Pissarro, Cézanne, Degas dhe Monet.
Në analizën e veprës, Ballata e konsideron *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* si pikë kthese historike, ku tema nuk funksionon si material tradicional motivik, por si bërthamë atmosferike që organizon një formë tripartite të lirë dhe organike. Në ciklin *Nocturnes* (*Nuages*, *Fêtes*, *Sirènes*), ai evidenton dimensionin sugjestiv të muzikës: jo rrëfim, por atmosferë; jo përshkrim, por ndriçim tingullor. Veçanërisht te *Sirènes*, përdorimi i korit të grave interpretohet si zgjerim timbrik dhe jo si element dramatik.
Në *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Ballata sheh realizimin e një kundërmodeli estetik ndaj Wagner-it, ndërsa në *La Mer* – përmes tri pjesëve (*De l'aube à midi sur la mer*, *Jeux de vagues*, *Dialogue du vent et de la mer*) – ai identifikon formën e rrjedhshme atmosferike, të ndërtuar mbi grumbullime dhe riformime të materies tingullore. Në fazën e vonë, ai vëren një prirje drejt përmbledhjes dhe disiplinës formale, të dukshme në sonatat për violinë dhe violonçel, si dhe në *Douze Études* për piano, të cilat i konsideron si sintezë të përvojës kompozicionale dhe teknike të Debussy-t.

Anton Webern[15] (1883–1945) paraqitet nga Ballata si një nga figurat më radikale dhe më konsekuente të novatorizmit muzikor të shekullit XX. Ai e dallon qartë nga Schönberg dhe Berg, duke theksuar përdorimin rigoroz të sistemit dodekafonik dhe përpjekjen për një shprehje të përqendruar, ku çdo tingull fiton funksion të veçantë.
Ballata ndalet fillimisht te *Passacaglia* op. 1 (1908), si vepër që shënon individualizimin e hershëm stilistik, dhe më tej te *Këngët për kor* op. 2, ku evidenton diferencimin formal dhe harmonik nga modelet e Shkollës së Vjenës. Në opuset e mëvonshme – *Pesë këngë* op. 3, *Pesë kohë për kuartet harqesh* op. 5, *Gjashtë bagatella* op. 9 dhe *Pesë pjesë* op. 10 – Ballata vëren zhdukjen graduale të zhvillimit tradicional tematik dhe kalimin drejt një gjuhe gjithnjë e më të "spastruar", me koncentrim maksimal dhe miniaturizim formal.
Ai thekson se këto vepra nuk janë të shkurtra në kuptimin artistik, por përfaqësojnë një estetikë të dendësisë dhe të përmbledhjes, ku ekspresiviteti arrihet përmes reduktimit ekstrem të materialit. Në këtë mënyrë, Weberni paraqitet si model i disiplinës strukturore dhe i radikalizimit të gjuhës muzikore moderne.

Matija Bravničar[16] (1897–1977) paraqitet në muzikologjinë e Zeqirja Ballatës jo vetëm si figurë qendrore e kulturës muzikore sllovene, por edhe si një nga pedagogët që ndikuan drejtpërdrejt në formimin e tij akademik. Ballata i atribuon atij një vend të veçantë në gjinitë operistike dhe simfonike, duke theksuar aftësinë për të ndërthurur traditën kombëtare me estetikën moderne evropiane.
Në analizën e veprave si *Šerbetori Jernej dhe e drejta e tij* (1938), simfonitë (nr. 1, 2 dhe 3), *Metamorfozat vallezuese*, *Koncerti për kornë dhe orkestër* dhe *Koncerti për violinë dhe orkestër* (1962), Ballata evidenton pjekurinë strukturore dhe integrimin e elementeve dodekafonike në një gjuhë të individualizuar. Si pedagog, Bravničari përfaqëson për Ballatën modelin e disiplinës

14 Ballata, *Gjurmëve të muzës,* 155–164.
15 Ballata, *Gjurmëve të muzës*, 165–174.
16 Ballata, *Gjurmëve të muzës*, 30–34.

formale dhe të vetëdijes strukturore në kompozim.

Lucijan Marija Škerjanc[17] (1900–1973) Lucijan Marija Škerjanc (1900–1973) shfaqet po ashtu si figurë me ndikim të drejtpërdrejtë në formimin e Ballatës, duke qenë një nga pedagogët e tij gjatë studimeve në Slloveni. Ballata e paraqet si personalitet universal të kulturës muzikore sllovene, ku ndërthuren krijimtaria, pedagogjia dhe publicistika muzikore. Në trajtimin e veprave si *Marzhenka* (poemë koreografike), *Muzika e dhimbshme për orkestër*, *Allegro concertante* për violonçel, *Concertino* për piano e orkestër, kantata *Kurora e soneteve*, pesë kuartetet e harqeve dhe veprat solistike për piano e violinë, Ballata evidenton larminë gjinore dhe ekuilibrin midis lirizmit dhe strukturës së disiplinuar.
Si pedagog për afro katër dekada, Škerjanci paraqitet si figurë që formoi një brez të tërë kompozitorësh ballkanikë, ndër ta edhe vetë Ballatën. Në këtë kuptim, trajtimi i tij nuk është vetëm historiografik, por edhe një reflektim mbi traditën akademike prej së cilës Ballata e kupton muzikën si sistem estetik dhe kulturor të integruar.
Në tërësi, trajtimi i figurave ndërkombëtare në muzikologjinë e Zeqirja Ballatës strukturohet mbi dy linja themelore. Nga njëra anë, autorë si Claude Debussy dhe Anton Webern përfaqësojnë horizontin estetik evropian, me të cilin Ballata e vendos në dialog diskursin shqiptar: impresionizmin si zgjerim timbrik dhe atmosferik të formës, dhe dodekafoninë si disiplinë radikale e organizimit strukturor. Nga ana tjetër, figurat e Matija Bravničar dhe Lucijan Marija Škerjanc përfaqësojnë traditën akademike konkrete prej së cilës ai është formuar, duke i ofruar modelin e integrimit midis identitetit kombëtar dhe modernitetit estetik.
Në këtë mënyrë, referencat ndërkombëtare në diskursin e Ballatës nuk janë thjesht përfshirje informuese, por pjesë e një kornize konceptuale që lidh mendimin muzikologjik shqiptar me zhvillimet kryesore të kulturës muzikore evropiane, duke e pozicionuar atë në një hapësirë dialogu dhe jo izolimi.

Musicological Writings on Significant Events in Musical Life

This study examines a group of Zeqirja Ballata's musicological writings that address events and processes with a direct impact on the development of Albanian musical life. In these texts, Ballata does not limit himself to a chronological description of facts, but constructs an analysis in which the musical event is read as a structural moment in the aesthetic, institutional, and identity formation of Albanian professional music. He discusses the trajectories of musical creativity across centuries, the contribution of the diaspora—particularly the Federation *"Vatra"*[18]—the developmental issues of musical life, the problematics of Albanian opera as an aesthetic and institutional project, the process of publishing musical works in Kosovo, the musicological analysis of the national anthem, as well as the treatment of symbolic figures such as Mother Teresa and Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu in musical creativity.
Within this corpus, musical life is conceived as a system of relationships among artistic creativity, institutions, performance practice, and cultural awareness. Ballata avoids teleological and glorifying narratives, placing the analysis in direct relation to concrete historical and institutional conditions. Creativity is presented as a discontinuous development conditioned by political and social factors, rather than as a linear progress. In his treatment of opera, he shifts the discourse

17 Ballata, *Gjurmëve të muzës*, 175–179.
18 Zeqirja Ballata, "The Contribution of the Musicians of Vatra to the Liberation of the Vlora Region" ["Kontributi i muzikantëve të Vatrës në çlirimin e krahinës së Vlorës"], conference paper, 2012, 1–3.

from patriotic rhetoric toward systemic analysis, reading opera as a culminating form that requires a fully developed institutional infrastructure. In his writings on musical publications, the act of publication is interpreted as a foundational moment in the transition from limited practice to cultural document. In the analysis of the national anthem, the approach is simultaneously historical and structural, interweaving symbolic function with musical organization.

Within this framework, the treatment of the figure of Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg in music constitutes one of the most significant topics reflected upon by Ballata and one of the most complete syntheses of his musicological thought. This text, connected to the *Lectio magistralis*[19] delivered on the occasion of the 555th anniversary of the death of the National Hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg, in Tirana on 18 September 2018, represents one of the last appearances of Academician Zeqirja Ballata at the academic lectern. Its placement in this position is directly related to the fact that it concisely encapsulates the author's method, historiographical vision, and institutional perspective.

In this treatment, Ballata shifts the figure of Skanderbeg from historical myth toward the system of musical representation. He highlights the international dimension of the theme through the operas *Scanderbeg* (1718) by Antonio Vivaldi and *Scanderberg* (1735) by François Rebel, situating the Albanian hero within the context of European Baroque opera. At the Balkan level, he refers to the choral cycle *Këngët e atdheut të Skënderbeut* (1933) by Kosta Manojlović as evidence of the cultural processing of the figure in different cultural spheres.

In the Albanian tradition, Ballata mentions a broad spectrum of works and authors: the symphonic poem *Skanderbeg* by At Fan S. Noli; *Dy lule mbi varr të Skënderbeut* by At Martin Gjoka; patriotic-themed compositions by Murat Shehu in the diaspora; the choral song *Skënderbeu* by Lorenc Antoni; the opera *Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu* (1968) by Abdullah Grimci; the opera *Skënderbeu* by Prenkë Jakova (libretto by Lazar Siliqi); the symphonic suite *Skënderbeu* by Çesk Zadeja, in collaboration with Gorgi Spirdov; the choral work *Skënderbeu* by Nikolla Zoraqi; the choral piece *Bijtë e shqipes* (1968) by Mark Kaçinari; the cantata *Fjala e Skënderbeut* (1968) by Esat Rizvanolli; as well as the output of Fahri Beqiri, including *Doli Skënderbeu* (1971) and the Arbëresh arrangement *Skënderbeu* (1991).

This panorama is not presented as an encyclopedic list, but as analytical evidence that music functions as a historical document and an act of identity. For Ballata, the figure of Skanderbeg is not merely an anniversary theme, but a node at which aesthetics, collective memory, and the cultural institutional project converge. For this very reason, this text constitutes one of the peaks of his reflection: a synthesis in which history, musical structure, and national awareness are read within a single musicological plane.

19 Zeqirja Ballata, *Lectio Magistralis on the Occasion of the 555th Anniversary of the Death of the National Hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg* [*Lectio magistralis në kuadër të 555-vjetorit të ndarjes nga jeta të Heroit Kombëtar Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu*], public lecture, Tirana, September 18, 2018, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xn-XtRs8No.

Conclusion

The examination of Zeqirja Ballata's musicological writings on personalities, works, and events influential in Albanian musical life demonstrates a consistent methodological approach in which music is treated simultaneously as an aesthetic, institutional, and identity-based phenomenon. Ballata does not construct glorifying or linear narratives; rather, he reads the development of Albanian music as a process conditioned by historical, political, and structural circumstances, placing the analysis in direct relation to the concrete cultural reality.

In his treatment of personalities—such as Matija Bravničar, Lucijan Marija Škerjanc, as well as Albanian composers and figures mentioned in the study—he constructs analytical profiles in which creative output is situated within a professional and institutional context. The figure of the composer is presented as an actor within a broader system of artistic relationships, rather than as an isolated biographical subject. Specific works, whether operas, cantatas, symphonic suites, or choral compositions, are analyzed not only on the formal level but also as evidence of the degree of aesthetic maturity and the institutional capacity of Albanian musical culture.

In his writings on key events—the problematics of Albanian opera, the process of publishing works in Kosovo, the analysis of the national anthem, the role of the diaspora through *"Vatra"* and orchestral institutions—Ballata conceives musical life as a functional system. The lack of infrastructure, interpretative continuity, or professional criticism is interpreted as a factor that directly affects aesthetic development. This approach shifts the discourse from patriotic rhetoric toward structural analysis.

One of the synthesizing peaks of this thought is represented by the treatment of the figure of Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg in music, which includes authors ranging from Antonio Vivaldi and François Rebel to Kosta Manojlović, At Fan S. Noli, At Martin Gjoka, Murat Shehu, Lorenc Antoni, Abdullah Grimci, Prenkë Jakova, Çesk Zadeja, Nikolla Zoraqi, Mark Kaçinari, Esat Rizvanolli, and Fahri Beqiri. This panorama demonstrates that, for Ballata, music functions as a historical document and an act of identity, articulated in different aesthetic and institutional forms.

In conclusion, Ballata's writings offer an integrated musicological model in which the analysis of the work, critical reflection, and historiographical reading are interwoven within a single framework. Through this approach, Albanian music is presented as an interconnected cultural process that simultaneously requires high-quality creativity, institutional organization, and critical awareness. This constitutes the essential and contemporary value of Zeqirja Ballata's musicological thought.

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Concerts for piano and orchestra by Kozma Lara (1974–1990): A historical and analytical overview

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Abstract

This paper offers an in-depth examination of the five piano concertos by the Albanian composer Kozma Lara (1930–2019), composed between 1974 and 1990. Focusing on both historiographical challenges and analytical perspectives, the study aims to reassess and enrich the understanding of several works that are significant to the Albanian pianistic repertoire. Through systematic archival research comparing diverse primary sources, including original manuscripts, concert flyers, institutional archives, and encyclopaedias, the study establishes precise dates for the compositions and their premiere performances. This approach corrects inaccuracies in existing documentation, proposing a revised chronology, particularly for Concertos Nos. 1 and 2. Furthermore, the paper analyses the stylistic evolution of these concertos within the complex sociopolitical context of communist Albania, exploring the dynamic and at times tense relationship between the ideological pressures of the period and individual artistic expression. Musical analysis reveals that while Concertos Nos. 2, 3, and 4 reflect the constraints of intensified political control during the years 1975–1986, the fifth and final concerto (1990) marks a moment of creative liberation and maturity, emerging as the composer's artistic culmination. This final concerto symbolizes not only a personal triumph, but also a hope for a new musical era on the eve of the collapse of the dictatorial system. In conclusion, this study contributes to two main areas of Albanian musicology: first, by establishing a reliable factual basis for the chronology of Lara's works, and second, by providing a detailed analysis of his stylistic development, positioning him as a key figure in the history of the piano concerto. Thus, the paper highlights both the composer's creative resilience under difficult conditions and his enduring contribution to the formation of Albania's national pianistic tradition.

Keywords

Albanian music, piano repertoire, archival methodology, communist aesthetics

Introduction

The emergence of instrumental concert music in Albania represents a relatively late phenomenon, developing primarily during the communist period (1962–1991). Unlike the long-established traditions of concert music in Europe and beyond, Albanian composers faced the dual challenge of establishing professional compositional practices while navigating strict ideological constraints. Kozma Lara (1930–2019) stands as the most prolific Albanian composer of piano concerts, having created five works in this genre between 1974 and 1990. His sustained engagement with the concert form, unique among his contemporaries, offers a valuable lens through which to examine both individual artistic development and broader trends in Albanian music during the final decades of communist rule. This paper addresses two interrelated research questions: a) the historiographical problem: what are the exact dates of composition and premiere performances of Lara's five piano concerts? b) the analytical problem: how do Lara's concerts evolve stylistically over the sixteen-year period of their composition, and what relationship exists between this evolution and the changing political and cultural context of communist Albania?

Methodology: Establishing an accurate chronology and review of the literature

This study examines seven sources representing different levels of reliability. The most reliable primary sources include musical scores (manuscripts) from the Archive of the University of Arts, the Library of the Artistic Lyceum, and the Archive of the National Opera and Ballet Theatre, together with concert flyers and recordings from the Radio Tirana Archive. Highly reliable specialized secondary sources include *History of Music* by Prof. Nestor Kraja, as well as *Grove Music Online*, specifically entries by George Leotsakos, who is described as "a scrupulous scholar" (Tougher 2018, 238). General secondary sources include the Encyclopaedia of Music by Sokol Shupo and online resources such as Wikipedia and the composer's curriculum vitae. The methodology employs systematic cross-referencing through five steps: data collection to extract all dates from each source; comparative analysis to identify consensus and divergence; evaluation of evidence by prioritizing primary archival materials; logical inference to reconcile discrepancies through contextual reasoning; and verification to confirm conclusions against multiple independent sources.

Historical background and concert developments from the 1970s to the 1990s

The genre of the piano concert emerged in Albania during the 1960s through the work of several composers, including Ç. Zadeja, T. Harapi, V. Nova, F. Ibrahimi, and K. Lara. Their works inaugurated a new chapter in Albanian music, although each composer's approach reflected different responses to the tension between Western concert traditions and domestic aesthetic–political requirements. These developments were shaped by the political climate and ideological line imposed by the party-state. By the late 1960s, Albania entered a new phase of extreme isolation, which, as a result of intensified centralization, led to the establishment of an ideological doctrine unique in Europe and beyond. Creative restrictions and strict control became increasingly evident; at the same time, however, there was continuous state support and funding for the arts in general, and for music in particular. Party plenums, directives, and the leader's speeches on art and literature, together with the proclamation of the slogan «Let us rely on our own forces» resulted in the radicalization of cultural policy and ideology in the arts (Xoxha, 1987: 37).

Kozma Lara: biographical profile

Training and education

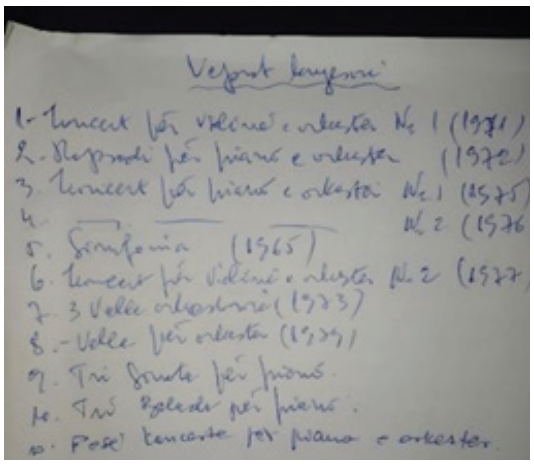
Born in Durrës in 1930, Kozma Lara received his initial musical training as a pianist in the class of Tonin Guraziu at the Artistic Lyceum of Tirana (1950–1954). His early professional experience included positions as concertmaster in the Army Ensemble and at the Opera and Ballet Theatre in Tirana. In 1958, Lara enrolled in composition studies at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow. However, the rupture of Soviet Albanian relations in 1961 forced him to complete his education in Tirana under the guidance of Çesk Zadeja, his former classmate who had returned earlier from Moscow.

Compositional creativity

Lara's compositional creativity was broad and diverse, yet works for piano occupy a central place. This sustained focus on piano literature distinguishes Lara from his contemporaries and reflects his particular passion for the piano as a compositional medium. In 2017, Shetuni wrote: "Kozma Lara, this passionate and iron-willed pianist and composer, throughout his life did not separate himself from pianistic creativity of different genres from small miniatures to concert ones. He started with the piano sonata No. 1 in 1965, which is the first piano sonata in post-war Albanian music." (Shetuni, 2017).

The problem of accurate dating

Dating Albanian concert music is highly challenging due to temporal gaps between composition, premiere, and recording, alongside retrospective manuscript revisions. Kozma Lara's five piano concertos exemplify this issue, as significant chronological discrepancies span seven distinct sources. For instance, Wikipedia lists the concertos from 1966, 1970, 1984, 1986, and 1990[1], whereas the Radio Tirana Archive logs performances in 1975, 1977, 1984, 1989, and 1990. Concurrently, Grove Music Online dates the first two concertos to 1975 and 1976, omits the third in favor of Rhapsody No. 3, and places the fourth in 1985 (Leotsakos 2001). Further contradictions emerge from the University of Arts Archive, which holds a manuscript of Concerto No. 1 annotated "April 1974" by the composer, and Nestor Kraja's History of Music, which offers an entirely different chronology (Kraja, 2021, 330). Finally, the Opera and Ballet Theatre Archive contains conflicting handwritten dates by Lara, though a 1986 May Decade festival flyer confirms Concerto No. 4's performance that year. These systemic inconsistencies necessitate a comparative table to reconcile divergences and assess source reliability. Below are individual notes extracted from Lara's National Theatre file.



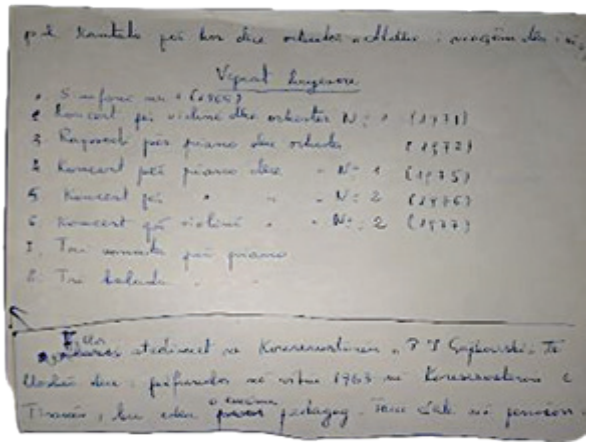


Figure 1. Handwritten notes by the author
Figure 2. Handwritten notes by the author

Based on this, we can develop a comparative table to identify both the common information and the points of divergence. By analysing the table below, which incorporates seven information sources, including Wikipedia (cited above), recordings from Radio Tirana[1] , History of Music by N. Kraja (cited above), Sokol Shupo's Encyclopedia (Shupo, 2002: 171) the CV of Kozma Lara, and the archives of the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet, we observe[2] :

No.	Wikipedia	Grove G. Leotcakos		Recordings at Radio Tirana	History of Music by N. Kraja	Encyclopaedia of Music by S. Shupo	CV Kozma Lara	Archive i TKOB
1	1966	1975		1975	1975	1966	1966	1974
2	1970	1976		1977	1970	1970	1970	1975
3	1984			1984	1984	1976	1984	
4	1986	1985		1989		1986	1986	
5	1990	1990		1990		1990	1991	

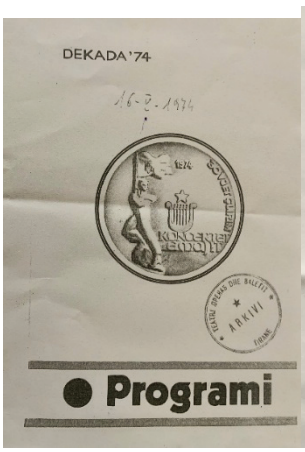
Table 1: Sources of information and dates

By analysing this table from these seven information sources, we observe:

- Concert No. 5, according to the consensus of all sources, was written in 1989–1990 and premiered by pianist Rudina Ciko and conductor Eno Koço with the RTSH Orchestra in 1990. The concert has three movements and based on the recording, lasts 18 minutes in total.

1 Radio Tirana, Inçizime, Arkiva.
2 Teatri Kombëtar i Operas dhe Baletit, Arkiva.

- Concert No. 4, based on information from the Radio Tirana recording, was certainly composed in 1985–1986, according to the notation the composer left at the end of the work. It was performed by Ekland Hasa and conductor Bujar Llapaj in May 1986 with the ILA Orchestra, and again by Ekland Hasa with Ferdinand Deda and the RTSH Orchestra in 1989.
- Concert No. 3 was most likely composed in 1984 and premiered by pianist Aleksandër Gashi and conductor Rifat Teqja with the Academy of Arts Orchestra. According to the recording, the concert lasts 12 minutes.
- Concert No. 2 was written in 1975 and premiered by pianist Johan Botka with the TOB Orchestra in the same year, and again in 1977 with the RTSH Orchestra conducted by Ferdinand Deda. This is confirmed by the May Decades 1975 program leaflet in the TKOB archive, the date written on the score in the same archive, and the written statement of premiere pianist Johan Botka. The placement of the date 1970 by the composer in online sources is incorrect, as the concrete archival evidence from TKOB confirms the correct date.
- Concert No. 1 by Kozma Lara was written in 1974. This is also confirmed by the program leaflet in the TKOB archive, according to which it was performed in May 1974 by Keti Qose with the ILA Orchestra conducted by Rifat Teqja. Below are the program leaflet and the score signed by the composer.



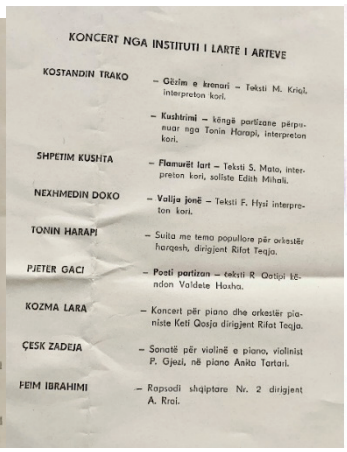


Figure 3. Leaflet- Page
Figure 4. Leaflet- Page 2
Figure 5. Score signed by

The year 1966 listed in online sources is almost certainly incorrect, even though, if it were accurate, it would have been reflected in the *History of Music* published in 1983 by a group of authors led by Albert Paparisto, who were very attentive to documenting works and genres emerging for the first time in Albanian music (Group of Authors 1983, 76). This date would have introduced a new historical sequence for piano concerts, which does not appear in any document. Furthermore, according to research in the foundational registry of compositions at the Library of the University of Arts, the catalogue number of this score corresponds to the year 1974. Finally, in the Archive of the University of Arts, we find the manuscript of this concert with the composer's own note at the end, "April 1974." This definitively establishes the date of

composition for this concert. Thus, we have determined the dates of composition and premiere performances for all of the composer's concerts, removing the uncertainty that had persisted until now regarding the creation timeline of Kozma Lara's piano and orchestra concerts.

Concert for piano and orchestra No. 1 (1974) by composer Kozma Lara (15 min)

Figure 6. Main Theme

The concert begins with a short introduction that prepares the main theme, which is grand, lyrical, and massive, performed by the orchestra and accompanied by the rhythmic chords of the solo pianist. In terms of character, pianistic texture, and the use of unison in most of the orchestra (strings, flute, clarinet, bassoon), beginning with octave leaps and, above all, for its optimistic, massive, and majestic character, this theme is reminiscent of the concert by Ç. Zadeja. This indicates that Zadeja's concert served as a reference point in the development of instrumental concert music during this period. The only exception is the intonational scale. While Zadeja constructs a tonal, modal theme to find an individual perspective within the expressive musical language, sometimes based on Romantic models (e.g., Tchaikovsky's Piano Concert) and sometimes incorporating national intonational characteristics, Lara remains in the pure key of D major. The second theme initially sounds in the orchestra under the soloist's improvisatory passages and takes on a lyrical, dreamy character, without any particularly distinctive features, aside from its mode, which is built on the A Mixolydian scale.

Figure 7. Theme II, piano score

The concert is distinguished by its thematic variety, emphasizing breadth rather than depth. The development of thematic material is limited to orchestral, dynamic, and textural elements,

while deeper compositional elaboration is largely bypassed. On the other hand, the concert is structurally complete, featuring a two-episode development and, above all, a diverse solo part of considerable pianistic difficulty.

Concert for piano and orchestra No. 2 (1975) by composer Kozma Lara (16 min)

After a short interval, the composer returned to this genre, this time with the intention of creating a cyclical concert in three movements, perhaps to present a more complete and profound concerted idea. Although only slightly longer, Concert No. 2 appears somewhat simplified in its overall construction. This period coincides with the 4th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Party of Labour of Albania, held in June 1973, which focused on the main report delivered by Enver Hoxha: *"Let us deepen the ideological struggle against foreign influences and liberal attitudes toward them"*, envisioning a "permanent and frontal ideological aggression of imperialism against Albania" (Hoxha, 1974: 277).
In their book, S. Çefa and S. Kalemi analyse this concert in detail and write:*The vitality and youthful character of this concert are clearly embodied in all of its musical figures... The first theme of the concert, built with full chords in both hands, is based on the intonations of partisan songs. By elevating the heroic and combative spirit of the partisans, it transforms into an optimistic march, a nimble and lofty hymn-song* " (Çefa Kalemi, 1979: 189).
On the other hand, in discussing the second movement of this concert, Sandër Çefa and Spiro Kalemi note: *If the lyrical figure in the first movement occupied a sensitive place and contrasted with the other epic and martial figures, in the second movement it becomes the primary and sole idea (the theme unfolds in many intimates, majestic, dreamy, and epic nuances). This expansion of emotions makes the musical figure complete and penetrating "* (Çefa Kalemi, 1979: 112).

Concert for piano and orchestra No. 3 (1984) by composer Kozma Lara (12 min)

Lara's third concert from 1984 appears reduced and lacks a distinctive individuality. The first theme is martial, while the second theme is lyrical but not highly personalized, floating over familiar waters of Southern Albanian folklore. The development begins with the first theme in a toccata-like, energetic form, which transitions into a lyrical episode with the character of a lullaby, encountering contrasting situations in its progression. The recapitulation restates the first theme in the orchestra over the massive chords of the solo piano. In this repetition, the theme becomes even more massive and dynamically intensified, leading immediately toward the conclusion. The small dimensions of the thematic segments, the contrast between the march-like first theme and the eclectic lyricism of the second theme without internal musical connections, and the rapid shifts from one situation to another, reflect a journey marked by the banners of the era, resonating consciously with the ideology of the time.

Concert for piano and orchestra No. 4 (1986) by composer Kozma Lara (13 min)

Figure 8. Concert No. 4, 1st Movement

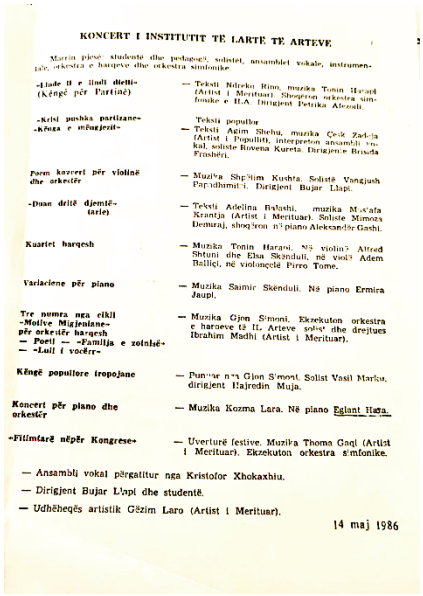
A year after the death of Enver Hoxha, the influence of the dictatorship was still quite noticeable for some creators. In Concert No. 4 of this year, Lara portrays the characteristic stereotype of the time, and some reflections of this climate are outlined. What we notice in the analysis of this concert are the unnecessary and long duplications of the solo piano with wind instruments. Uncharacterized thematic material, full of bubble repetitions, rhythmic and with almost stationary harmony. Here is a summarized fragment for piano of the introduction of the second theme to the strings.

Figure 9. Concert No. 4, 1st Movement

The thematic material is uncharacterized, full of repeated bubbles, rhythmic, and with almost static harmony. Here is a summarized piano excerpt of the introduction of the second theme as played by the strings.

It is clear that the composer seeks to place intonations of a pastoral landscape at the centre of the coloration, but this material is not substantial and lacks developmental power on its own. The theme contains no distinctive elements, much like a character who should be memorable and followed throughout the drama of the work. It colours an emotional landscape inspired by

Impressionist paintings, but in this case, it fails to create extra-musical inspirations of figurative or programmatic specificity, as this style demands. Compared to Impressionist models, the harmony remains within classical boundaries, and the tonal colouring is similarly muted. Nevertheless, the concert preserves the classical structure of the genre.



KONCERT I INSTITUTIT TË LARTË TË ARTEVE

Marrin pjesë: studentë dhe pedagogë, solistë, ansamble vokale, instrumentalë, orkestra e haqeve dhe orkestra simfonike.

-Lule të e lmoli dielli- (Këngë për Partizanë) — Teksti Nderko Rino, muzika Tonin Harapi (Artist i Merituar). Shoqëron orkestra simfonike e RTA. Dirigjent Petrika Abeshi.

-Këngë partizane- — Teksti popullor

-Këngë e mëngjesit- — Teksti Agim Shehu, muzika Çesk Zadeja (Artist i Popullit), interpreton ansambli vokal, soliste Bovena Kureta. Dirigjente Brisida Frashëri.

Poem koncert për violinë dhe orkestër — Muzika Shpëtim Kushta. Solistë Vangjush Papadhamidhi. Dirigjent Bujar Llapi.

-Duan dritë djemtë- (arie) — Teksti Adelina Babushi, muzika Mustafa Krantja (Artist i Merituar). Soliste Mimoza Demuraj, shoqëron në piano Aleksandër Gashi.

Kuartet harqesh — Muzika Tonin Harapi. Në violinë Alfred Shtuni dhe Elsa Skënduli, në violë Adem Ballliçi, në violonçelë Pirro Tome.

Variacione për piano — Muzika Saimir Skënduli. Në piano Ermira Jaupi.

Tre numra nga cikli -Motive Migjenjane- për orkestër harqesh — Muzika Gjon Simoni. Ekzekuton orkestra e harqeve të IL Arteve solist dhe drejtues Ibrahim Madhi (Artist i Merituar).
— Poezi — «Familja e zotnisë»
— «Lull i vocërr»

Këngë popullore tropojane — Punuar nga Gjon Simoni. Solist Vasil Marko, dirigjent Hajredin Muja.

Koncert për piano dhe orkestër — Muzika Kozma Lara. Në piano Eglant Hasa.

«Fitimtarë nëpër Kongrese» — Uverturë festive. Muzika Thoma Gaqi (Artist i Merituar). Ekzekuton orkestra simfonike.

— Ansambli vokal përgatitur nga Kristofor Xhokaxhiu.
— Dirigjent Bujar Llapi dhe studentë.
— Udhëheqës artistik Gëzim Laro (Artist i Merituar).

14 maj 1986

Figure 10. Leaflet of Concert No.4

The previously missing data for this concert were recovered thanks to a concert flyer found in the Archive of the Opera and Ballet Theatre, as well as confirmation from Ekland Hasa himself.

Concert for piano and orchestra No. 5 (1990) by composer Kozma Lara

At the end of the period, we have chosen to analyse, Kozma Lara composed his final concert, this time in three movements. Surveying contemporary press and encyclopaedic sources, we find that the Greek musicologist well-known in Albania, George Leotsakos, claims that in Concert No. 5, Lara took inspiration from Rachmaninoff's piano concerts.

He writes:
"Dedicated to enriching Albanian piano music, Lara sought his stylistic models from Romantic composers—from Chopin (the four Ballades, around 1976–79) to Rachmaninoff,Piano Concert No. 5, 1990" (Leotsakos, 2001).
At the conclusion of his concert cycle, Kozma Lara presents a significant contribution based on his extensive experience with the genre, reflecting the maturity of his creative development. From a general analytical perspective, we can assert that Concert No. 5 represents the composer's creative pinnacle in his piano concert repertoire. While technique, pianism, structure, harmony, and rhythm had already reached a considerable level in Concert No. 1, the developmental trajectory appears to dip in Concerts Nos. 2, 3, and 4, rising again in his final concert despite the inherent challenges it presents.

Conclusions and implications

This study advances the historiography of Albanian music through three fundamental conclusions. First, establishing the precise chronology of Kozma Lara's five piano concertos (1974, 1975, 1984, 1986, 1990) rectifies substantial scholarly errors. Archival evidence—such as annotated manuscripts, concert flyers, and performers' testimonies—proves far more reliable than secondary literature or the composer's retrospective recollections. Accepting the erroneous dates of 1966 for Concert No. 1 and 1970 for Concert No. 2 would unfoundedately distort the genre's history, as no contemporary sources support these timelines.

Second, stylistic analysis reveals a non-linear evolution driven by political-ideological shifts. While Concert No. 1 (1974) displays advanced pianistic technique under Çesk Zadeja's influence, Concert No. 2 (1975) undergoes stylistic simplification, adopting martial characters and partisan themes to meet state demands. Concerts No. 3 (1984) and No. 4 (1986) mark a creative nadir of reduced scale and muted individuality, reflecting Albania's total isolation after the 1978 Sino-Albanian split and the unstable transition following Hoxha's 1985 death. Conversely, Concert No. 5 (1990) represents a dramatic revival, achieving compositional maturity through Romantic influences (Chopin, Rachmaninov) and liberation from ideological constraints.

Third, Lara's five concertos represent the most substantial individual contribution to the Albanian piano concerto genre prior to the 1990s. Beyond reevaluating Lara's unique legacy, this chronological and stylistic framework clarifies the mechanisms of state censorship and offers an archival methodology for recovering Albania's musical heritage. Ultimately, Lara and his peers merit inclusion in twentieth-century European music history, demonstrating the resilience of artistic creation within totalitarian isolation.

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Radio Tirana. Inçizime. Arkiva.

Mapping cultural flow in music: Flux theory and an emerging analytical lexicon

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Abstract

This article advances Flux Theory through the introduction of Flux Mapping, axiom and formula, a new methodological framework that may define cultural flow as a measurable and analyzable process in music. Rather than explaining musical culture as a linear historical progression, Flux Theory understands it as a dynamic system shaped by interacting institutional, collective, individual, and technological operating forces. Flux mapping is modeled through proportional parameters such as direction, intensity, autonomy, elasticity, saturation, and compression, enabling cultural flow to be examined as an analytical construct rather than a purely metaphorical one. Introducing concepts such as Flux Compression, Flux Saturation, Flux Drift, Blocked Flux, Flux Elasticity, Accelerated Flux, and Fragmented Flux and Algorithmic Isocollectivism, mapping aims to describe how musical systems oscillate between isocollectivism, marked by centripetal and homogenizing forces, and polycollectivism, characterized by centrifugal plurality and the coexistence of multiple creative trajectories. The framework is demonstrated through selected case studies from Albanian musical history further contextualized through international examples of composers associated with impressionism and modernism. The theoretical positioning is informed by, yet distinct from, perspectives in musicology, aesthetics, and cultural sociology, engaging critically with thinkers such as Jacques Attali, Arjun Appadurai, Pierre Bourdieu, and Theodor W. Adorno. By grounding Flux Theory in a transferable analytical language and testing it through concrete musical cases, Flux Mapping may be positioned as a new methodological tool for musicological research, artistic education, and cultural policy analysis in the age of technological mediation.

Keywords

Flux formula, Flux mapping, cultural flow, isocollectivism, polycollectivism

Introduction

Why flux mapping

Musicology has long oscillated between two explanatory impulses: the desire to narrate history, and the need to understand how musical culture circulates, stabilizes, fragments, and regenerates across time. In the contemporary era — marked by mass digitization, algorithmic mediation, and intensified global interconnection — the second impulse becomes urgent. Musical practice no longer moves primarily through canonical institutions alone, but through networks: diasporas, platforms, micro-scenes, curatorial playlists, festival ecologies, and hybrid educational contexts. Flux Theory may respond to this reality by treating musical culture as a dynamic system of flow (inspired by the water cycle and flux model in physics) — a morphogenetic circulation of energy between tradition, transmission, institutionalization, and regeneration. The Albanian case is a particularly fertile ground for such analysis because it contains multiple compressed historical phases (delayed professional institutionalization; an ideologically controlled socialist era; post-1990 pluralization; and present-day digital mediation). Within this framework, the Gaussian Balloon of Cultural Flux (fig. 1) offers a concise visualization of the Albanian case, of the idea how musical culture expands, compresses, and regenerates as an energy field shaped by societal shifts (Sn).

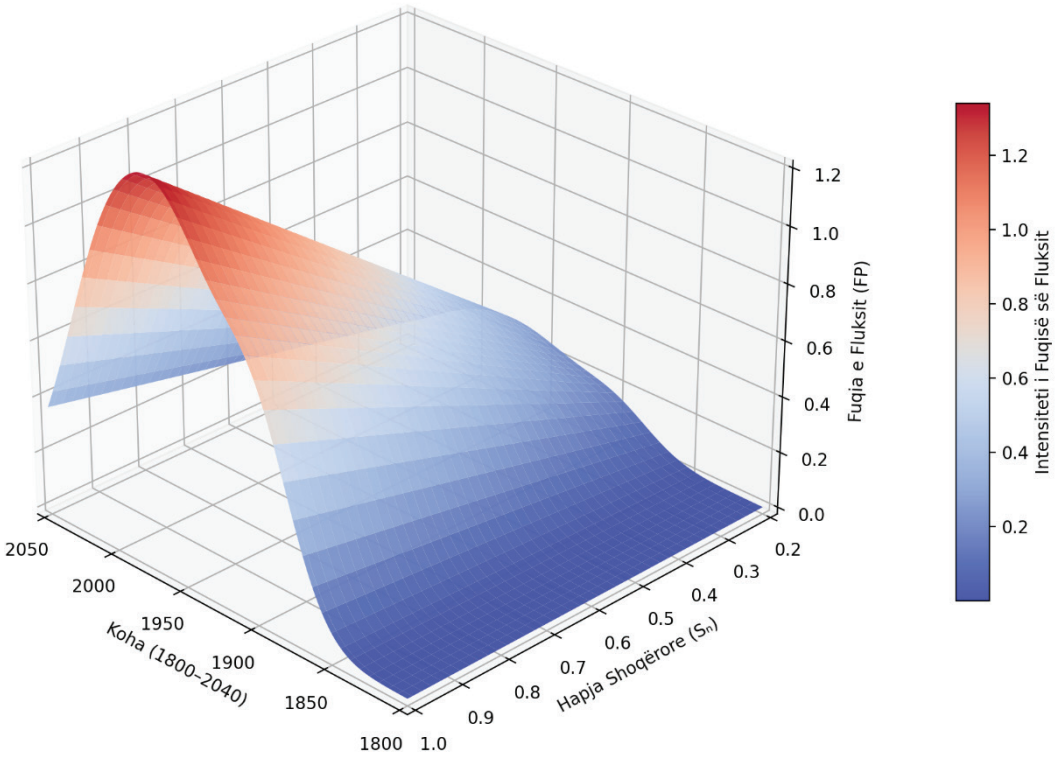

Figure 1. "Gaussian Balloon of Cultural Flux" (based on the Flux formula). The Flux Density Surface illustrates how Albanian music evolves as a dynamic field of energy, shaped by historical, social, and technological vectors. In this sense, both the diagram and the formula demonstrate that the formation (or flux) of Albanian music is inseparable from the social flux that sustains it

In this sense, flux constitutes an ontological principle of culture, expressing a tension between stability and transformation. Whereas classical models of art history — from Hegel to Gombrich — conceptualize change as a linear evolution of styles, Flux Theory defines development as a spiral, energetic circulation in which innovation emerges through the recombination of cultural layers. Within this theoretical framework, the article introduces two new terms for cultural morphology: Isocollectivism and Polycollectivism.

Isocollectivism corresponds to a phase of flux compression, in which diverse tonalities and individual expressions may flourish, yet without transgressing the aesthetic homogeneity of socialist realism.[1] The system of houses of culture, variety theatres (estradas), "decades" (annual ideological cultural festivals), and festivals of performers and creators; the local troupes; amateurs who became semi-professionals; individual creativity that emerged under the filter of ideology; as well as the way these structures produced a controlled artistic collectivism — together formed what we might call the cementing of the "cultural hydroelectric plant" of isocollectivism.

As argued by Jacques Attali, music and art are not merely aesthetic forms, but mechanisms of social and political regulation: "Music is prophecy… It makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible, that will impose itself and regulate the order of things."[2] Ironically, Attali's definition also applies to the power of art under communism, where music (and art more broadly) functioned as a bridge toward the construction of a new social order. In the decades following 1990, the Albanian cultural landscape entered a new transformative era, shifting from the homogeneity of controlled art toward a kaleidoscopic landscape of artistic freedom. Described in socio-political terms as the "democratic transition," this period can be understood as a movement from centripetal compression toward a free centrifugal — or "polycollective" — development, marked by diverse influences, directions, forms, structures, and colors. Crawford Young would characterize this developmental stage — which arrived in Albania with delay, only after the 1990s (and globally throughout the twentieth century) — as "cultural pluralism": "Cultural pluralism is a quintessentially modern phenomenon. As a global pattern, it is very much a creature of the twentieth century,"[3] that is, a chain effect of globalization.

Figure 2. Cultural flux between isocollectivism and polycollectivism. The diagram represents cultural flux as a dynamic process of transformation, in which isocollectivism is characterized by flux compression, vertical control, and aesthetic homogeneity, while polycollectivism is defined by flux expansion, horizontal distribution, and aesthetic pluralism. The arrow along the spiral indicates the increase of flux (Δ) and the regeneration of cultural energy.

However, if Flux Theory is to function as a methodological contribution — rather than remaining a productive metaphor — it requires an operational system and toolkit. This is the

1 Socialist realism was the official aesthetic doctrine of communist states, institutionalized in the Soviet Union in 1934 at the First Congress of Soviet Writers, where it was proclaimed the "fundamental method of literature and art." It required art to represent reality not as it was, but "in its revolutionary development," serving the ideological education of the masses and the glorification of labor, the collective, and the leading role of the Party. Within this framework, aesthetic pluralism was systematically excluded, style was standardized, and artistic autonomy was subordinated to political and institutional control, transforming art into a direct instrument of power; see The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

2 Jacques Attali, Noise: The Political Economy of Music, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 11.

3 Crawford Young, The Politics of Cultural Pluralism (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 23.

goal of Flux axiom, formula and mapping[4] : to translate cultural flow into analyzable parameters and a replicable lexicon, enabling scholars, educators, and cultural policy analysts to compare different musical ecosystems and understand their transformations. It can represent a bridge between research and practice. Read as a sequence, (→ aquifer → source → river → lakes/sea → ocean→ clouds/rain →), in the lens of flux, music models how invariants rooted in folk and vernacular sources persist even as styles transform and evolve.

But unlike a line of progress or a circle of repetition, Flux is shaped as a spiral. Each new cycle is not simply evolution, but recombination.

A. Structural recurrence axiom (the spiral logic) → expresses how cycles are formed (present + heritage):

$$C_{n+1} = C_n + C_{n-1}$$

That means the next cycle draws on both present developments and recent past/distant heritage. The distance between them is measured as:

$$\Delta = \|+C_n - C_{n-1}\|$$

When Δ is small, the new cycle remains close to continuity, producing stability and reinforcement. When Δ is large, the new cycle leaps outward, generating rupture, innovation, or transformation; this axiom is a musical Fibonacci too, because each new cycle or innovation reconstitutes itself from the sum of its two predecessors, creating a spiral growth.

The evolution of repertoire through the spiral of time can be formalized in the B. Unified Flux Formula:

$$R_{n+1} = R_n \cdot [1 + \Delta(\varphi, \gamma, d_t, d_s, S_n, \kappa_n)]$$

where the magnitude of transformation Δ is determined by the interaction of proportional growth, spatial and temporal distances, societal openness, and institutional stabilization:

$$\Delta = \varphi \cdot (1 + \gamma(d_t + d_s)) \cdot S_n \cdot \kappa_n - 1$$

Thus, the flux power of a given cycle can also be written in expanded form as:

$$R_{n+1} = \varphi \cdot R_n \cdot (1 + \gamma(d_t + d_s)) \cdot S_n \cdot \kappa_n$$

R_n — reach of the current cycle (audience, repertoire, influence)

φ (phi) — ≈ 1.618 — golden ratio (baseline proportional growth, Fibonacci logic)

d_t — temporal distance (gap with past cycles)

d_s — spatial distance (cross-cultural reach)

γ (gamma) — external forces sensitivity factor (how distance accelerates expansion)

Δ — observed magnitude of transformation (the flux itself)

S_n — societal force multiplier (openness or restriction of the cultural field)

κ_n — canonization factor (how institutions and memory stabilize a cycle over time)

4 Flux axiom, formula and mapping does not claim predictive precision, but analytical transferability: its value lies in comparative clarity rather than quantitative determinism.

Figure 3. The spiral of flux power: from cosmic flow to cultural reach

Flux mapping

Parameters

From "Flow" as Metaphor to "Flow" as Analytical Construct
"Flow" is often invoked rhetorically in cultural studies, but Flux Mapping treats it as an analytical object. The core methodological move is to model cultural circulation relationally, rather than narrating style changes as linear replacements. Flux Mapping asks: What forces shape musical circulation? What constraints compress it? What vectors accelerate or fragment it? How do institutions, performers, and technologies function as nodes within the same system?
Flux Mapping proposes a set of parameters:

1. Direction: Centripetal: toward canonization, standardization, institutional control, or ideological closure. Or centrifugal: toward diversification, hybridization, outward circulation, diasporic diffusion.
2. Intensity: The density of circulation: how strongly repertoire, practice, and innovations move through a system.
3. Autonomy: Degree of artistic independence from ideology, market constraints and influences, or modern day platform-driven visibility.
4. Elasticity: Capacity of a musical system to absorb change without losing coherence; e.g., how folk idioms adapt into new genres.

Globalization has profoundly reshaped how cultures circulate and intersect. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's offers a seminal model of global cultural flows, identifying key dimensions ("scapes") along which people, technology, money, media, and ideas move across the world. [5]

5. Saturation: Accumulation within a canon or repertoire such that novelty struggles to enter circulation.
6. Compression; Constraints that narrow the system: ideology[6] , censorship, institutional monopoly, or algorithmic/market driven directions.

5 Arjun Appadurai, Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996)

6 Festivali i Këngës në RTSH / Albanian National Radio-Television Song Festival (1962–) is an often an emblematic example of compressed flux during the socialist era. Its hierarchical structure and symbolic function often turned the festival into an "iso" of the state itself: each song represented not only its author, but also a segment of the official image of the collective. To illustrate the isocollectivist refraction of creative freedom under the ideological mechanism, one may recall several of the most highly awarded song titles following the "notorious" 11th edition of the festival: "My Party, Sun of My Country" (12th Festival, First Prize), "We Sing to the Party" (13th Festival, First Prize), "The Party Leads" (14th Festival, First Prize), "To the Party" (15th Festival, First Prize), as well as another song titled "Delegates Are Arriving from the 7th Congress."

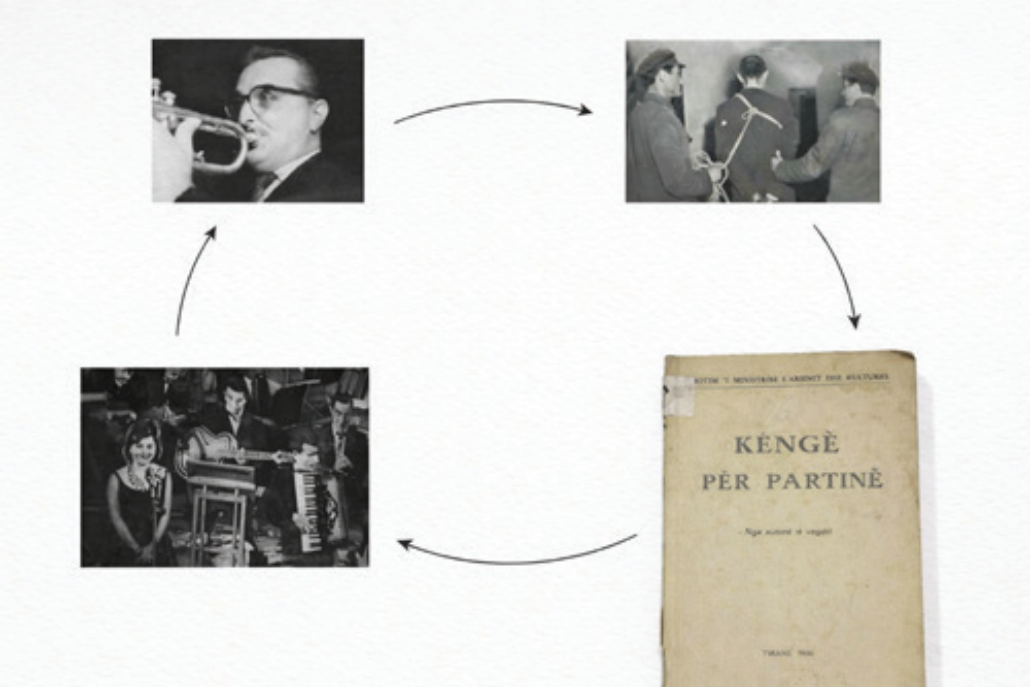

Figure 4. Attempts at cultural polycollectivism under communism resulting in compressed flux, The circular diagram illustrates how the atmosphere of the 11th RTSH Song Festival — characterized by aesthetic openness and Western influences — is absorbed by the isocollectivist mechanism of socialist culture. Creative and experimental energy is reformatted and subsequently returned in a controlled form through propagandistic songs and official publications, such as "Songs for the Party."

The Flux lexicon

Naming cultural states and transformations

Flux Mapping becomes actionable through a lexicon that describes recurrent states of cultural flow:

1. Flux Compression: A condition where cultural energy is vertically concentrated. In socialist Albania, cultural production functioned within an organized system of institutions, rituals, and mass cultural programming that disciplined not only creation but also performance bodies and voices, generating a strong centripetal logic. As Tochka observes, *"Contemporary commentators in Albania often understand such performances to index state repression, exemplifying the disciplinary society's total control in compelling performers' very bodies and voices to conform to a strict, pre-approved set of norms."* [7]

2. Flux Saturation: A condition in which a canon or repertoire becomes dense and self-reproducing. Saturation does not necessarily imply stagnation; it can also support mastery, stabilization, and high craft. But it may constrain innovation.

3. Flux Drift: Gradual transformation during transmission: melodic, rhythmic, or interpretative displacement when repertoire travels between communities, diasporas, educational systems, or genres. Among other examples, in the Albanian case, the work of Aleksandër

7 Nicholas Tochka, "Singing 'with Culture': Popular Musicians and Affective Labour in State-Socialist Albania," Ethnomusicology Forum 26, no. 3 (2017): 289–306, University of Melbourne. JSTOR

Peçi illustrates the persistence of creative identity under conditions of aesthetic and cultural pluralism. His compositional practice demonstrates a continuous concern with introducing new "capillaries" into global musical discourse. This is evident, for example, in Barokjare, where Baroque idioms and Mozartian references enter into a form of "ring exchange" with Jare — the traditional ornamental song of Shkodër, itself bearing filtered influences of the maqam. A similar logic operates in Alb Pigmei Double Dance, in which an interweaving of polyphony and the rhythmic structures of African Pygmy tribes is fused with a dance from Bradashesh in central Albania, a "Flux Drift" resulting from a "double dance" between African and Albanian folklore, unified through the authorial self.

Figure 5. "Double Dance" as a model of contemporary musical polycollectivism and Flux Drift. The figure presents Alb Pigmei – Double Dance by Aleksandër Peçi as a symbolic interweaving of the polyphony and polyrhythms of African Pygmy tribes with the Bradashesh dance (Elbasan), transformed into a "double dance" under a multicultural European horizon through the author's creative subjectivity. The piano functions as a mediating space in which sound materializes as flux. The illustrative image is rendered in a surreal style, based on the conceptual explanation provided by the article's author, using the DALL-E program.

4. Blocked Flux: A condition of interruption: censorship, institutional collapse, loss of circulation channels, or exclusion from international networks.
5. Flux Elasticity: Adaptive capacity. Elastic systems can hybridize: they absorb external influences while maintaining structural identity (modes, rhythmic memory, timbral signature).
6. Accelerated Flux; Rapid expansion driven by technological, geopolitical, or institutional shifts: mass media, migration, festival networks, streaming.

As a concrete illustration of Accelerated Flux in the Albanian context, one may point to Pentacentre Polymodale (1992) by Aleksandër Peçi[8] , which can be regarded as an early signal of musical modernism in Albanian art music. Until that moment, compositional practice had largely operated along a single modal or tonal axis. This work introduced a new compositional system based on five centers, with modal transformations that — like the five buds of a tree — generated new branches from a shared trunk. Written for string quintet and percussion (with support from the Soros Foundation), the work was recorded under the direction of Maestro Zhani Ciko and later presented at the International Workshop of Composers in Amsterdam, organized by the Gaudeamus Foundation, under the direction of internationally renowned composers Ton de Leeuw, Joji Yuasa, and Dimitri Christoph, where it received critical recognition for its originality. In this sense, broader social opening directly facilitated an accelerated flux of musical language, marking a shift toward a pluralistic, multi-centered compositional logic.

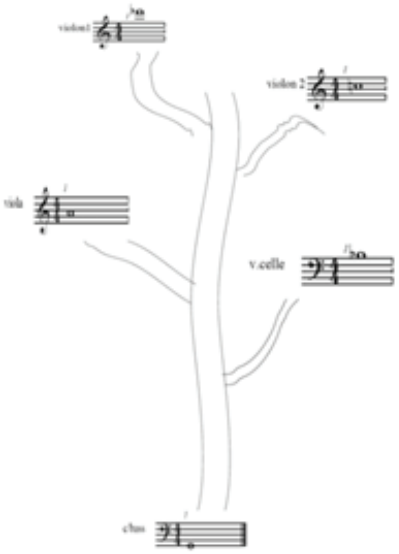

Figure 6. Structure of Pentacentre Polymodale.
The figure presents the compositional model of Pentacentre Polymodale by Aleksandër Peçi, in which five modal centers coexist and interact as the axes of a polygravitational system.

7. Fragmented Flux: Coexistence of multiple micro-trajectories without an integrating center. Fragmentation can be productive (pluralist ecosystems) or alienating (loss of shared symbolic language).

8 Aleksandër Peçi functions as a key hinge in Albanian Flux: a creator active in two systems, moving from socialist constraint to post-1990 centrifugal expansion. In socialism, he composes within official frames yet reaches beyond propaganda, demonstrating creative intensity under centripetal conditions; after 1990, he developed many signature techniques such as the Carrousel structures (rotational expansion), Mechanical harmony (treating chords as 3D/4D spaces), Kabaistic rhythm (fractured ornamental pulse) and Kabaistic polyphony, which takes the kaba of southern Albania — as a gravitational center and transforms it through advanced techniques: fragmentation of motifs, spectral filtering, prepared instrument, electroacoustic layering, and extended instrumental techniques. This case is particularly valuable for Flux Mapping because it demonstrates how "heritage" can operate not as museum material but as a technical generator. Folk polyphony became a source of new compositional techniques in his works like Kabacells, Argjiro, Deti dhe Sazan. Aleksandër Peçi translates multi-voice polyphony into pianism across four or five staves, reflecting roles such as marrës, hedhës, kthyes, and iso. In other words, heritage becomes a method of avant-garde compositional technique.

8. Algorithmic Isocollectivism (new term): a neo-isocollective condition in which uniformity is produced not by state ideology but by platform architectures that record and modulate attention, preference, desire, and perception. In the age of technology, platforms and artificial intelligence, synchronization and cognitive capture is no longer imposed by factory time or state ideology, but by the invisible algorithmic architectures.

As Shoshana Zuboff observes in her analysis of surveillance capitalism, this new regime of power no longer aims merely to collect or process information about the individual, but to intervene directly in action itself: *"The goal is no longer to automate information flows about us; the goal is to automate us."*[9] In this sense, the algorithm becomes a new form of instrumental power, producing conformity through prediction, nudging, and the real-time steering of behavior. Under this new condition, culture ceases to function as a field of critical tension and is transformed into an industrial commodity. As the authors famously write: *"Culture today is infecting everything with sameness."* [10]

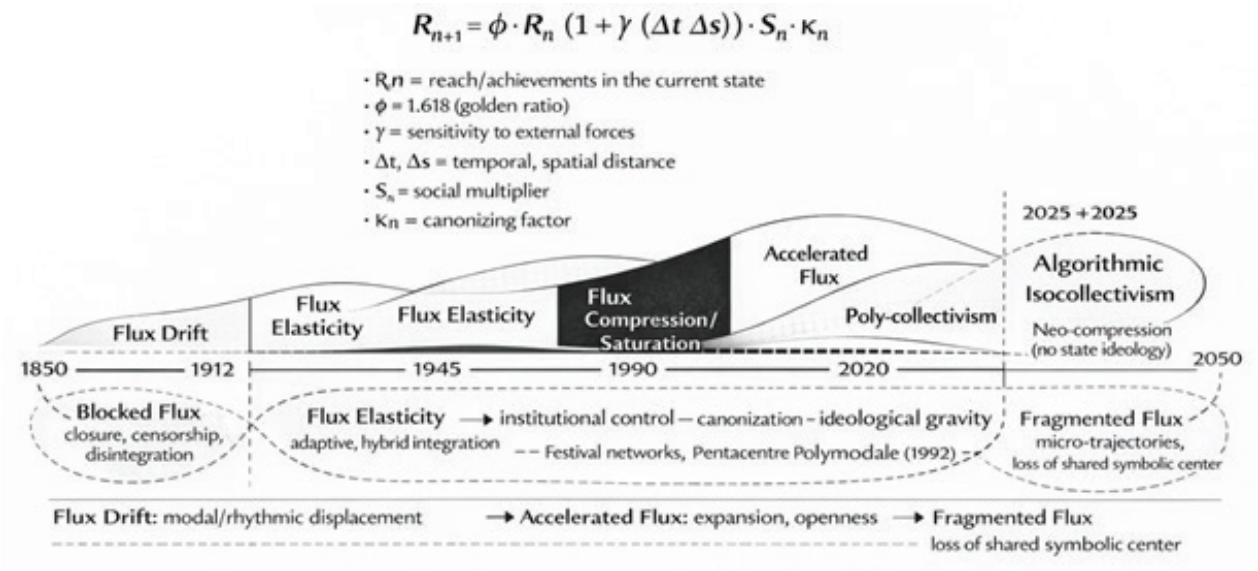

Figure 7. Flux Mapping of Albanian Music (1850–2050) schematically applies the Unified Flux Formula to Albanian musical history, mapping dominant states of cultural flow across time. The timeline visualizes shifts from Flux Drift and Elasticity (1850–1945), to Flux Compression and Saturation under socialism (1945–1990), followed by Accelerated Flux and Polycollectivism after 1990. The predictive segment introduces Algorithmic Isocollectivism as a future neo-compressive condition shaped by platform governance. Peripheral zones indicate moments of Blocked and Fragmented Flux, where circulation is interrupted or cohesion is lost.

9 Shoshana Zuboff, The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019), 14.

10 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94.

International case studies of flux

Claude Debussy

Claude Debussy represents a case of high geographic exchange distance (high d□) activated through institutional exposure. Debussy's encounter with Javanese gamelan at the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle has been shown to exert a concrete structural influence on his compositional thinking, rather than functioning merely as a source of exotic color or surface impression.[11]
Scholarly research emphasizes that Debussy did not travel to Java nor receive formal instruction; rather, his exposure was mediated by the exhibition context itself — an archetypal case of societal openness through event/venue-based infrastructure (S□) rather than through direct intercultural apprenticeship. Therefore, in FLUX terms:

Under the recursive axiom: C□□□ = C□ + C□□□ & Formula:
R□□□ (or FP / Flux Power) = φ · R□ · (1 + γ(d□ + d□)) · S□ · κ□
- C□: the late-nineteenth-century French compositional and institutional environment, shaped by the broader Impressionist artistic current spanning painting, music, and related aesthetic discourse.
- C□□□: documented gamelan exposure at the 1889 Exposition (external geography; high d□).
- C□□□: Debussy's encounter with Javanese gamelan initiated not a localized act of stylistic borrowing but a broader recalibration of compositional parameters — pitch hierarchies, registral layering, and temporal perception — that resonates across several works, including Pagodes from Estampes — in which pitch organization, texture, and temporal articulation operate within non-teleological (not subordinated to tonal function) scalar environments and layered sound fields, signaling a durable transformation of his musical language.
Debussy thus constitutes a Flux configuration in which moderate-to-high (d□), combined with world exhibition-based (S□) and strong later canonization (κ□), yields a durable renewal cycle without speculative claims about high Δ/FP and direct cultural transmission. Debussy's post-exposition practice exemplifies a state of Flux Elasticity accompanied by localized Flux Saturation, in which external musical logics are absorbed by boosting authorial coherence.

Igor Stravinsky

Stravinsky represents a paradigmatic case of high temporal exchange distance (d□). His ballet Pulcinella (1919–1920) is explicitly described as composed "after Pergolesi," grounding the backward temporal reference in the work's declared premise. As the composer noted himself: *"I am no more academic than I am modern, no more modern than I am conservative. Pulcinella would suffice to prove this."* [12]

Pulcinella can be understood as Stravinsky's decisive encounter with the musical past: a backward-oriented gesture that made his later compositional trajectory possible, functioning not

11 Richard E. Mueller, "Javanese Influence on Debussy's Fantaisie and Beyond," 19th-Century Music 10, no. 2 (Autumn 1986): 157–186.
12 Igor Stravinsky, Poetics of Music (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947), 85.

as nostalgic revival but as a reflective re-engagement through which historical materials became a mirror for redefining his own modernist identity.
The institutional embedding of this retrieval is equally well documented. Pulcinella premiered on 15 May 1920 in Paris, under Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes at the Grand Opéra — an event recorded in both publisher documentation and the Mariinsky Theatre repertoire records. This constitutes a strong marker of canonization (κ□), as well as high societal openness through elite transnational networks.
Under the recursive FLUX axiom:

C□□□ = C□ + C□□□ & Formula:

R□□□ (or FP / Flux Power) = φ · R□ · (1 + γ(d□ + d□)) · S□ · κ□

- C□: Stravinsky's post-1910 modernist compositional language.
- C□□□ : documented 18th-century source layer (Pergolesi-related materials; high d□).
- C□□□: Pulcinella as the catalytic node of a stabilized neoclassical output cycle, extended across later opus and stylistic developments

Stravinsky thus illustrates a Flux configuration in which temporal recursion functions as the primary vector of cultural transformation, while geographic displacement remains present but structurally subordinate. The retrieval of eighteenth-century Italian materials associated with Pergolesi activates a pronounced backward temporal exchange (high d□), yet this exchange does not aim at stylistic transplantation or geographic re-rooting. Instead, spatial distance operates only insofar as it supports temporal estrangement, reinforcing the historical alterity of the source without displacing the composer's modernist positionality. Within this configuration, innovation emerges not through the circulation of music across territories but across time, through the re-entry of historical strata into the present, recomposed under strong authorial creativity and stabilized through institutional embedding (κ□). The resulting neoclassical cycle thus exemplifies a form of Flux in which the past is mobilized as an active structural resource, rather than as a geographically external influence.

Pedagogical application and cultural policy

Flux Mapping can structure curricula that teach students to analyze musical systems in real contexts:

- Identify compression (ideology, market, platform, institutional monopolies).
- Evaluate autonomy (what choices are possible within constraints).
- Track drift (how meaning changes when repertoire evolves).
- Recognize elasticity (how heritage becomes innovation).
- Diagnose fragmentation (micro-scenes within a polycultural society).
- Plan counter-strategies (curation, programming, translation, diaspora collaboration).

This shifts education from "content delivery" to critical cultural navigation.
Flux Mapping reframes heritage not only as something to preserve, but as something that circulates. Flux Mapping argues that musical culture is neither a closed archive nor a free-floating market commodity. It is a living system whose health depends on balancing centripetal

stabilization with centrifugal openness — on sustaining invariants without suffocating plurality, and on embracing technology and modernity without surrendering autonomy or turning away from our roots.

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Piano interpretation and the rhapsody for piano and orchestra of Ferdinand Deda

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Abstract

During the second half of the 20th century, the rhapsody for piano and orchestra became a significant genre in Albanian concert music. Ferdinand Deda's Rhapsody represents a crucial phase in consolidating the national pianistic style. This paper analyzes the performance aspects of this composition, comparing it to international models and examining its influence on the interpretation of the Albanian repertoire. Approached from both structural and interpretative perspectives, the study utilizes analytical and comparative methods to focus on virtuosic figurations, extreme registers, and the soloist-orchestra dialogue. Special attention is given to how the performance integrates Albanian folk material, transforming it into an expressive vehicle for the work's rhapsodic character. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates that interpreting this work requires a synthesis of Romantic virtuosity and the modal-rhythmic sensitivity of Albanian tradition, establishing Deda's Rhapsody as a fundamental model of national musical identity.

Keywords

Albanian pianism, Ferdinand Deda, interpretative analysis, albanian musical folklore, modality and rhythm

Introduction

During the consolidation of Albanian concert music for piano and orchestra in the second half of the twentieth century, the genre of the rhapsody emerged as a distinctive space in which national idioms intertwine with the formal models of the European concert tradition. Ferdinand Deda's Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra constitutes a significant example of this process, placing the pianist before a dual challenge: the realization of a virtuosic discourse of dramatic scope and the articulation of musical material rooted in folkloric traditions.
This study focuses on the interpretative dimension of the work, approaching it not merely as a compositional structure but as a process of pianistic–orchestral realization. The analysis centers on elements such as dense virtuosic figuration, the use of extreme registers, dynamic contrasts, the construction of dramatic climaxes, and the dialogical relationship between soloist and orchestra. The methodological approach adopted here is analytical and comparative, grounded in theories of pianistic interpretation and in models drawn from the international concerto repertoire. The study argues that in this work, pianistic interpretation does not function merely as a vehicle for technical execution, but as a decisive factor in shaping its stylistic and expressive identity.

Literature review

Studies on the development of Albanian professional music have extensively addressed the process of shaping national identity in twentieth-century musical creation, highlighting the role of the interaction between European models and elements of folkloric tradition. In this regard, the contributions of scholars such as Shupo (2002), Kraja (2022), and Luarasi (2006) provide an important historical and stylistic framework for understanding the context in which the Albanian concert repertoire evolved.
On the other hand, the theoretical foundations of pianistic interpretation in this study draw upon international scholarship, particularly the works of Neuhaus (1973) and Leimer and Gieseking (1972). These studies emphasize the role of the performer as an active mediator between the musical text and its artistic realization, placing at the center the psychological, technical, and aesthetic dimensions of interpretation.
However, the analysis of the interpretative dimension within the Albanian repertoire for piano and orchestra remains relatively limited, as most existing studies have focused primarily on the historical and structural aspects of musical works. This situation creates the need for an approach that considers interpretation as an essential component in the realization of the stylistic identity of Albanian concert music.

Results and discussion

(Rhapsody for piano and orchestra – Ferdinand Deda, 1974)

In the May decade of the 1970s, Ferdinand Deda's Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra was heard for the first time, a work that from its very premiere attracted particular artistic attention. Pianist Donika Çili-Rodi appeared in this first performance with a refined technical background and a powerful interpretative temperament, now clearly subordinated to the architectural logic of the work. Her interpretation marked an important moment in the history of Albanian pianism and contributed to the work's recognition with first prize at this musical event.

The history of the composition and performance of this rhapsody remains one of the most compelling episodes in Albanian concert music. According to testimonies from the time and the recollections of the performers, the work was prepared and realized within an extraordinarily short period. The composer completed it in approximately one week, delivering the piano part in segments to the pianist, while the full integration with the orchestra took place only in the final days of preparation. Deda was distinguished by exceptional musical abilities; notably, he never included the piano part in the conductor's full score, having memorized it entirely.
In his memoirs, Mihal Luarasi describes Donika Çili-Rodi as a well-formed and authentic pianist, distinguished by the power of her tone, emotional temperament, technical security, and artistic awareness of her interpretative capacities (Luarasi 1983).

Analytical approach: From musical text to interpretative act

In this study, Deda's Rhapsody is examined on two inseparable levels: (1) the work as a musical text - its structure, thematic material, metric organization, and internal dramatic functions - and (2) the work as an interpretative act, in which the score is transformed into sound and the pianist's decisions directly influence its aesthetic meaning. In a work of rhapsodic character, where virtuosic figuration, lyrical episodes, and materials rooted in folk idioms intersect, interpretative elements are not peripheral; rather, they become the primary mechanism for constructing the musical narrative.
The methodological premise is clear: the score does not fully determine performance. Many indications (such as tenuto markings, dynamics, tempo fluctuations, and pedal usage) provide only general guidance. For this reason, even when faithfully observed, different performances may construct distinct acoustic and semantic "realities." This approach aligns with the view that fidelity to the score cannot be reduced to mechanical accuracy but requires conceptual understanding, contextual awareness, and artistic judgment (Davies 2003; Neuhaus 1973). In the case of this rhapsody, this duality becomes particularly evident, as the work speaks simultaneously in two "dialects": the language of Romantic concerto virtuosity and the metric and characterological language of Albanian folkloric tradition.
Drawing on documented performance materials, this study compares different realizations of the work by Albanian pianists from different periods (Rudina Ciko, Erga Halilaj, Merita Tërshana), situating this performance tradition in dialogue with established principles of pianistic interpretation in the scholarly literature (Neuhaus 1973; Leimer and Gieseking 1972). The analysis is organized around key moments in which interpretative differences become most clearly perceptible.

Performance tradition and interpretative "identities": tempo as a conceptual parameter

An initial and significant finding of the comparative analysis is that the performances examined place the work within a relatively narrow temporal spectrum, yet with clearly perceptible aesthetic consequences. The total duration ranges from 10'38'' to 11'21'', while the pulse of the principal theme fluctuates approximately between □ = 70 and □ = 77. These differences cannot be regarded merely as "tempo preferences," as they substantially influence the construction of the work's dramaturgy. A faster reading generates a more motoric and dance-like energy; a broader tempo allows for rhetorical breathing, clearer articulation of climactic points, and a more deliberate shaping of contrasts.

Pianist / Performance	Total Duration	Pulse of Principal Theme	Interpretative Profile
Rudina Ciko (1996)	11’11’’	□ = 73	narrative/rhetorical; broader phrasing
Erga Halilaj (Tirana 2012)	10’38’’	□ = 77	motoric-dance-like; strong rhythmic drive
Erga Halilaj (Prishtina 2013)	11’21’’	□ = 70	gravity and stability; more sustained climaxes
Merita Rexha Tërshana (2026)	11’21’’	□ = 72	balance between rhetorical breadth and energy

Table 1. Tempo and Pulse (Based on Observed Data)

From both pianistic experience and established interpretative literature, technique cannot be measured by speed alone, but by the capacity to render complex textures clear, organized, and artistically convincing.

The Rhapsody opens with two fortissimo measures in orchestral unison - a gesture characteristic of the grand concerto tradition - immediately followed by the piano’s entrance with a passage of parallel octaves in a toccata-like character, often referred to as “blind octaves,” ascending from the lower register toward a culminating point. This opening gesture immediately establishes the piano as protagonist and defines the emotional tone of the work. The introduction is not merely a display of virtuosity; it functions as a rhetorical mini-cadenza in which the pianist must effectively “declare” the character of the composition and pave the way for the thematic material. Its realization requires precise control of tonal weight and timbre (so that the octaves do not become dry percussive blows), careful pedal management, functional agogic shaping, and clarity of phrasing within the figuration.

This type of writing naturally aligns with Romantic concerto rhetoric: the question is not only “how loud” or “how fast,” but rather how the musical line progresses toward its climax and how that climax is articulated and marked within the broader dramatic trajectory.

Pianist	Rubato / Agogics	Pedaling	Articulation / Phrasing	Aesthetic Effect
Ciko (1996)	moderate rubato to “establish tempo”	supportive pedaling	linear ascent toward the climax	declamatory, monumental
Halilaj (2012/2013)	rubato with ritardando toward the climax	more restrained pedaling	division into two phrasing impulses	motoric, energetic
Tërshana (2026)	micro-pause before the climax (rhetorical breathing)	full, controlled pedaling	clearly articulated climax	strongly dramaturgical

Table 2. Interpretative Comparison of the Opening (Octave Passage)

Figure 1. Interpretation by R. Ciko

This comparison demonstrates that the same written notes generate three distinct interpretative "rhetorics." In Ciko's reading, linear direction and monumental projection dominate; in Halilaj's performance, rhythmic energy and motoric clarity prevail; while in Tërshana's interpretation, the climax emerges as a dramaturgical event.

These findings illustrate a central principle of performance theory: micro-decisions—such as rubato, pedaling, and attack weight—are not merely matters of personal style, but integral components in shaping the semantic meaning of the musical work.

Following the explosive introduction, the piano presents a solo episode in which the material no longer appears maestoso, but rather in a meditative and lyrical manner. Here, rubato becomes an indispensable expressive element; however, the most convincing use of rubato is that which preserves an inner pulse and constructs the phrase organically, rather than producing arbitrary fluctuations (Neuhaus 1973).

In the interpretations compared, the differences emerge primarily in the control of rhythmic freedom:

- In Ciko's performance, the passage unfolds in a more rhythmically directed and forward-moving manner, culminating in a slight ritenuto at the end of the phrase. This approach creates a clear narrative trajectory and a strong sense of musical direction.
- Halilaj emphasizes contrast between repeated statements of the material. This reading seeks coloristic variety; however, its effectiveness depends on maintaining an underlying tension to prevent the contrasts from remaining merely external effects.
- In Tërshana's interpretation, rubato appears refined and carefully controlled. Tempo fluctuations remain subtle and preserve the structural coherence of the phrase. A particularly revealing point of interpretative individuality occurs in measures 23–32. After reaching a climactic point around measure 25 (forte), an immediate dynamic contrast is introduced through a sudden descent to piano in the following measure. This decision does not function as an arbitrary expressive gesture; rather, it corresponds to the harmonic logic of the passage and serves to reconfigure the emotional space after the climax.

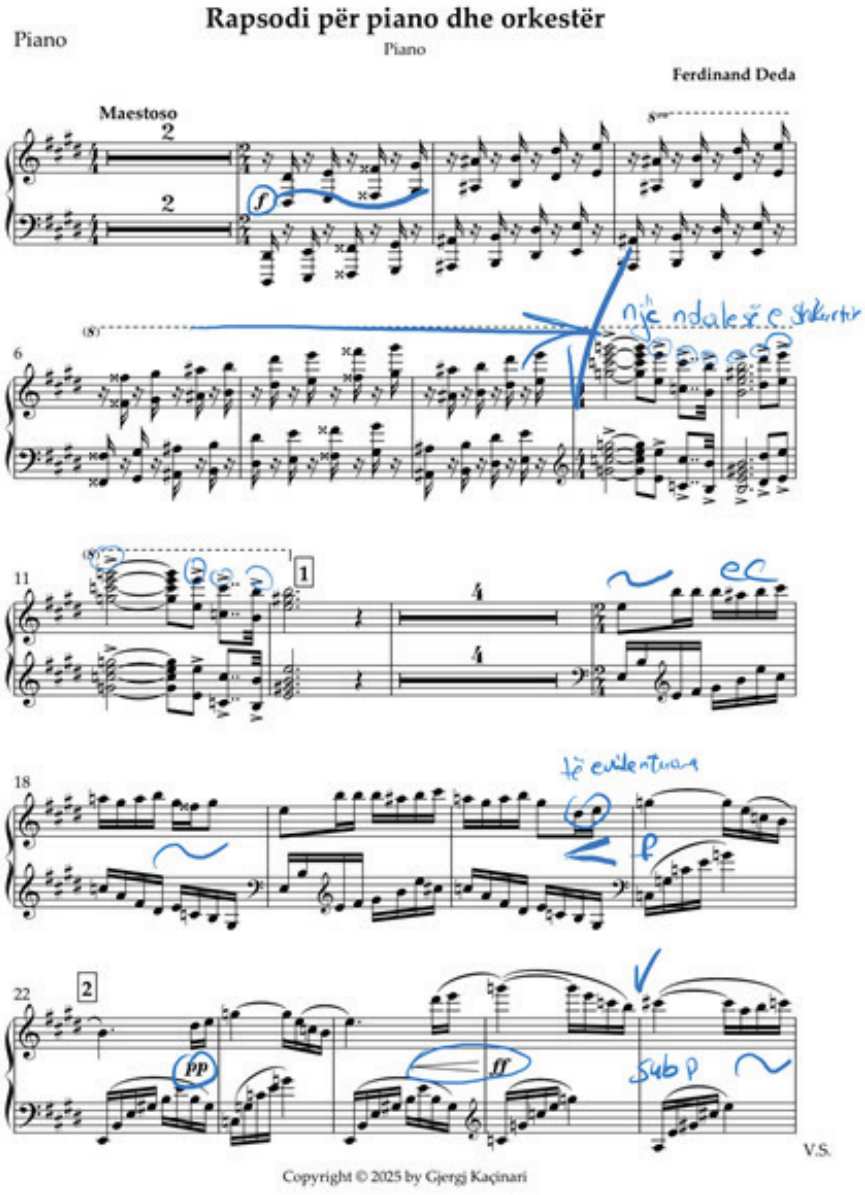

Figure 2. Merita Rexha Tërshana and Her Interpretation

The first theme

The first theme (E major) appears initially in the piano solo and is subsequently presented in unison with the flute and oboe. This moment marks a point where the stylistic identity of the work becomes clearly perceptible, as the thematic material is closely related to the character of a folk dance from central Albania, yet framed within an orchestral refinement that demands careful interpretative balance.

The primary interpretative result observed here is that differences do not lie in the written text itself, but in the way the pianist shapes the cantabile line and coexists with the woodwinds without dominating them. The unison passage does not require the piano to "prevail," but rather

to merge into a shared timbral space.
In Ciko's interpretation, the theme unfolds in a more forward-moving and connected manner, preserving continuity of tone and a clear sense of phrase direction. In Tërshana's reading, the balance between piano and orchestra is maintained with particular sensitivity, revealing a clear understanding of the piano's role as a partner within the texture. This is reflected in careful control of tonal weight and transparent pedaling.
The gradual transition from lyricism to dance constitutes one of the strongest structural points of the rhapsody. Following a crescendo and accelerando, the dance character emerges: the melody, presented in parallel thirds in the piano and accompanied by orchestral interjections, creates a distinctly giocoso atmosphere. In this segment, technical clarity and folkloric character are inseparable—only through precise articulation of the thirds and rapid figurations can the dance be perceived convincingly.
At this point, metric organization becomes decisive. Although the surface notation alternates between 5/8 and 4/8, the musical gesture extends across the full span of the 4/8 measure, producing the perception of an overarching "expanded 9/8." A convincing interpretation makes this larger rhythmic unit audible through internal accentuation and long-range phrasing; otherwise, the musical flow risks fragmentation into isolated metric units.
In Tërshana's interpretation, the tempo is slightly more restrained, allowing the thirds and technically demanding passages to emerge with clarity without sacrificing the dance character. In the other interpretations, a more animated tempo produces a stronger folkloric impulse, but also entails a greater risk of compromising technical precision in densely figurative passages.
Subsequently, the work reaches a passage that Tërshana herself identifies as particularly significant. The tenuto marking at measure 97, within the F minor tonal context, creates an internal suspension and introduces a contrasting atmosphere, despite the brevity of the segment. In this context, the tenuto functions not merely as an articulation marking, but as an expressive device that redirects emotional focus.
Interpretative differences become evident in the extent to which this effect is sustained and projected.

Figure 3. Tërshana, measures 96–103

- In Tërshana's interpretation, the tenuto functions as an emotional support at the beginnings of the measures, creating a sense of internal breathing.

- In Ciko's reading, the passage is maintained in a more restrained and globally controlled manner.
- In Halilaj's performance, the tenuto is applied primarily to the upbeat (levare), while the overall flow remains direct until measure 104, treating the effect more as a timbral coloration than as a structural pause.

The transition to 7/8 intensifies the dance character and places the performer before a very specific interpretative demand: the accentuation pattern must be clearly articulated so that the meter does not sound metrically "even." In this segment, the piano interacts with repeated orchestral notes, and the dance gradually culminates in a full orchestral tutti. The interpretative differences become particularly evident:

- In Ciko's interpretation, the internal triplet grouping within the 7/8 meter is clearly emphasized, and small dynamic crescendi are constructed in recurring passages, organizing the material toward a coherent internal direction.

Figure 4. Halilaj, measures 126–135

- In Halilaj's performance, strong dynamic contrasts (piano → subito forte) and clear alternations of intensity heighten the dramatic impact of the moment.
- In Tërshana's interpretation, the character emerges as playful and animated, resembling a dance enjoyed in real time.

Thus, three distinct interpretative identities become apparent: a structural reading, a dramatic reading, and a character-driven reading.

The return of the theme in 2/4 and its placement in D major introduces a luminous energy—almost a sense of "solar radiance"—and moves the piano toward a more orchestral function. Here, the principal interpretative challenge lies in managing energy: the climax must be constructed gradually, without being prematurely exhausted. The parallel octaves and the dense pianistic–orchestral texture require a symphonic sound and carefully controlled pedaling to preserve clarity.

The unexpected modulation to D♭ major creates a striking shift in tonal color and an original atmospheric transformation. A convincing interpretation highlights this shift through timbral change, controlled resonance, and the shaping of the phrase as a musical "event." At this point, sound aesthetics become inseparable from analytical understanding: harmonic color demands corresponding timbral color.

The second lyrical theme, in F major, appears as original material of refined internal construction. Its structure—two phrases, controlled symmetry, an interrupted cadence, and a differentiated closure upon repetition—provides the performer with a clear framework: rubato may be flexible, but it must not disrupt the 2/4 meter or detach the phrase from its architectural foundation.

In this segment, the dialogue with the flute is decisive. When the flute enters in unison, the piano must withdraw and allow space for the wind timbre; this is not a reduction of force, but an increase in timbral intelligence. The cantabile line must preserve warmth and breath, while pedaling must remain sufficiently transparent so as not to blur harmonic clarity.

The declamatory episodes of marciale character may be read as part of the optimistic rhetoric of the period; however, contemporary interpretation offers the possibility of approaching these segments from a dual perspective: either as heroic affirmation with an open, projected forte, or as aesthetic distancing (through more restrained dynamics or a drier, subtly ironic timbral shading), without altering the written text. This demonstrates that interpretation is not merely reproduction, but also semantic positioning: the same phrase may sound as a sincere declaration or as rhetoric observed from a reflective distance.

The return of folkloric motives in unison and the use of parallel octaves in subsequent passages position the piano within a bravura function. This bravura, however, is not simply a display of force; it forms part of a pianistic–orchestral identity in which the piano stands as an equal partner to the orchestra. A clear outcome of the analysis is that the Rhapsody demands a controlled symphonic sound and an approach in which pianistic virtuosity is integrated with, rather than detached from, the orchestral flow.

Moment	Ciko (1996)	Halilaj (2012/2013)	Tërshana (2026)
Opening octaves	rubato + supportive pedaling	reduced pedaling; ritardando	micro-pause; rhetorical climax
Solo, improvisatory character	forward-moving; full tone	more external contrasts	refined rubato
m.23–32	—	—	forte→piano contrast; crescendo mm. 27–32
Allegro in thirds	more animated	more animated	slightly broader; clarity
m.77	full tonal weight	steady pulse	brilliance + tonal weight
Tenuto m.97	restrained	primarily on upbeat	emotional support
7/8 (111–143)	emphasizes internal triplet; internal crescendi	subito forte; contrasts	playful, gestural
Second theme	—	—	cantabile + controlled rubato

Table 3. Comparative Matrix (Key Moments)

Conclusions and recommendations

The analysis of the key interpretative moments in Ferdinand Deda's Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra leads to several essential conclusions directly related to the stylistic nature of the work and its interpretative demands.

First, tempo and agogic flexibility constitute the primary elements shaping the interpretative identity of the piece. The differences among performances do not lie in the accuracy of the notes, but in the manner in which agogic freedoms are handled. In more motoric and rhythmically stabilized readings, the work assumes a more energetic and dance-like character, emphasizing its folkloric dimension. In freer and more rhetorical approaches, it acquires a narrative and dramatic dimension, drawing closer to the model of the Romantic concerto.

Second, passages in compound meters such as 5/8 and 7/8 require a clearly articulated hierarchy of accents and a heightened sensitivity to the internal rhythmic pulse. Without this articulation, the dance character loses its organic quality and risks becoming mechanical figuration. Interpretations that preserve rhythmic flexibility—while emphasizing structural accents without rigidifying the meter—achieve a more authentic realization of the folkloric character.

Third, the analysis demonstrates that a convincing interpretation of this work demands a complex balance between Romantic virtuosity and sensitivity to the modal and rhythmic logic of Albanian folk tradition. In this respect, performance must integrate pianistic brilliance and technical strength with rhythmic flexibility and a narrative awareness that lends dramaturgical meaning to the musical development.

In conclusion, the Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra (1974) represents a model in which pianistic interpretation extends beyond the technical execution of the score and becomes an essential means of rendering audible the work's formal architecture, dramaturgy, and stylistic identity. In this context, interpretation functions as a mediating process between the musical text, folkloric tradition, and the artistic individuality of the performer.

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The first methodical works for piano: Piano miniatures. birth and evolution, modernity and postmodernity, minimalism, Tonin Harapi

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Abstract

Piano miniatures, a very important part of the musical genre in question, have been born and evolved starting from romanticism to crystallize in their current form throughout the modern era. These musical buds, often considered as diamonds, although of a limited dimension in form but not in content, contain an incomparable power of expressiveness thanks to their immediate emotional impact, ranking from this point of view, alongside compositions of large formats. The aim is to examine its evolution among authors and eras, as well as the role of composer Tonin Harapi in the very successful cultivation of the Albanian piano miniature. The methodology followed is that of including, with analytical and comparative methods, numerous aspects in the research field, as well as a rigorous approach to the temporal and historical circumstances of the eras that we will study or talk about, starting from the 18th century onwards.. The facts and opinions that will be seen or elaborated upon during the paper have of course been analyzed faithfully based on musical scores, the history of world and Albanian music, as well as adequate studies and evidence in this field. From one side, in addition to the artistic, social and cultural perspectives, the impact on didactic processes or teaching the instrument will also be examined, but on the other side, the defining role of composers of the modern era in the evolution of the genre and the impulses of this format, such as the minimalist style, will also be emphasized, as well as the differences between them. It concludes with the deserved place that the instrumental miniature occupies, as an evolved and filtered genre in concise form, in the repertoire of professional world and Albanian music, represented by the composer Tonin Harapi.

Keywords

Era, genre, didactics, evolution, composer

Introduction

Although "The pianoforte is a comprehensive instrument, capable of containing and conveying harmonic universes in a closed space"[1] , in general, the scores of piano works would be distinguished and characterized for their grandeur and complexity, in all aspects. But in this universe of musical creativity sometimes "forget" that there is another reality, as wonderful as it is mysterious: small piano's compositions, otherwise known as miniatures. These musical buds, often called and considered diamonds, although of a limited dimension in form but not in content, contain an incomparable power of expressiveness thanks to their immediate emotional impact, ranking from this point of view alongside compositions of larger formats. We can find this phenomenon mostly in the small details that characterize these works, or otherwise in what is called: simple beauty. "It is quite the art to create a miniature, be it a small painting, a short story or piece of music. All the elements of balance, composition, colour and texture need to be there, but expressed as concisely as possible"[2] . Miniatures best express, albeit in a very concise way, expressiveness, lyricism and technical bravura. They play a key role in the immediate direction of moods, the direct evocation of images, atmospheres and impressions, exploring in detail and lyricism the grandeur and complexity of great works. Miniatures are a masterful example of how a work of art can be expressed concisely in the space/time binomial, while managing to capture the desired atmosphere and reveal the power to express in a short time and with few means the grandeur of a work of art, even in seemingly modest details.

Methodology

The methodology followed is that of involving, with analytical and comparative methods, numerous aspects in the research field, as well as a rigorous approach to the temporal and historical circumstances of the eras that we will study or talk about, starting from the 18th century to the present day. The facts and opinions that will be seen or elaborated during the paper refer to musical scores, the history of world and Albanian music, as well as opinions in writings and articles.

Scrolling of topics

One of the first composers of piano miniatures was Robert Schumann. Under his signature, the instrumental piano miniature gained the status of a serious work, full of meaning and emotion, leaving behind a large number of pieces filled with inspiration, technique and fantasy, such as: "Noble Waltz", "Reply", "Pause", "Dreams" and others.

1 Parri. P., I cinque pezzi facili per pianoforte a 4 mani di Stravinsky – Pianosolo, primo portale italiano sul pianoforte, 12. 01. 2026.
2 Terauds J., The exquisite miniatures of Sergei Prokofiev's Visions Fugitives – LudvivanTORONTO Daily Headlines, 31.10.2012.

Figure 1, 2. Schumann, "Children's scene" op. 15[3]

Tek të tjerë kompozitorë të romantiçizmit, si Shopeni apo Mendelsoni, Listi etj, preludet etydet, nokturnet, valset etj., nuk ishin thjesht miniatura intrumentale por morën një kuptim shumë më të gjërë kompozitiv pa e humbur teknikën pianistike brilante.

Figre 3. Chopin, "Prèlude op. 24", no. 1[4]
Figure 4. Liszt, "Love dream" [5]
Figure 5. Mendelssohn, "Song withour words" 1 [6]

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, in addition to the hundred romances he composed with an innovative spirit, also composed many piano miniatures: 24 children's pieces for piano, 12 piano miniatures titled "The Seasons", pieces on traditional European motifs etc.

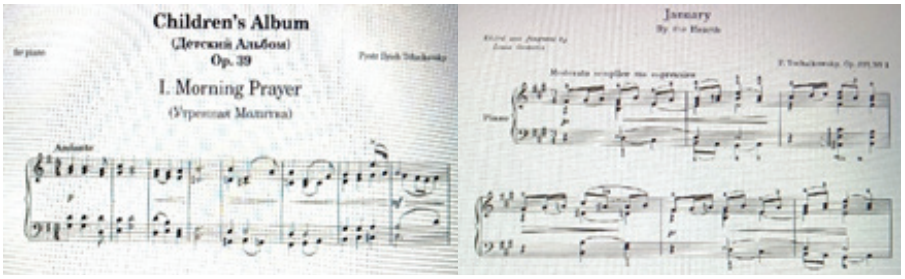

Figure 6. Tchaikovsky, "Children Album" op. 39[7]
Figure 7. Tchaikovsky, "Seasons", op. 37a [8]

3 Schumann, R. Album für die Jugend – G. Henle Verlag, Munich, 1977.
4 Chopin, F. Prelude op. 24, no, 1 – Schirmer, New York, 1915.
5 Liszt, F. Liebesträume – Schirmer, New York, 1915.
6 Mendelssohn, F. Lieder ohne Worte – Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, 1982.
7 Tchaikovsky, P. Children's Album – Schirmer, New York, 1904.
8 Tchaikovsky, P. The seasons op. 37a – Schirmer, New York, 1909.

From the end of the 18th century, nature and the human spirit, as well as the reality that surrounds it, were evoked through description and impression. Such is the piano suite "Pictures at an Exhibition" by Modest Musorgsky, a work that paved the way for modern in music.

Figure 8. Mussorgsky, "Pictures at an Exhibition" [9]

Meanwhile, the music of the French impressionists also played an important role in the time we are talking about. Debussy, Ravel, Poulenc and Roussel, etc., were dedicated to this repertoire, which was not lacking in expressions of impressionism such as: inspired melodies, instrumental lyricism, advanced technique, modal coloring, etc.

Miniatures in the modern and postmodern era

The role of miniatures in the modern and postmodern era, is much greater than in previous periods, and for this reason, has been treated and discussed more than past.

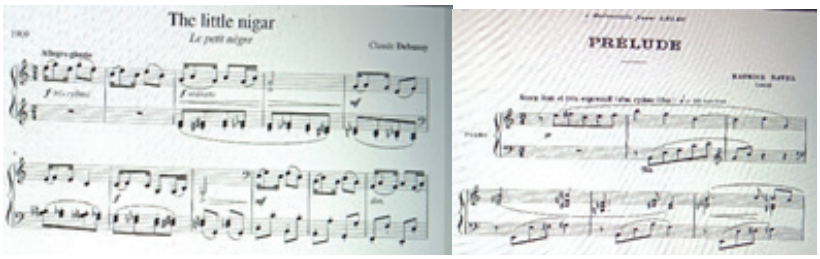

Figure 9. Debussy, "Little negro" [10]
Figure 10. Ravel, "Prèlud" [11]

This is due to a number of factors: fruitful in the period of studying the instrument, direct impact with the creative innovation of modern authors, the evocation that music induces in performers and listeners is actualized, diverse repertoire among instrumental albums, a wide range of creative styles is explored, authors adapt better to human conditions, the short time allows for quick perception and is very suitable for didactics. These are some of the objective reasons or even subjective views that make us think that: instrumental miniature and modernity in music are made for each other. Arnold Schoenberg, for example, as a representative of expressionism in music, did not remain without addressing the piano miniature, where he also implemented elements from atonal music.

9 Mussorgsky, M. Pictures at an Exhibition – Schirmer, New York, 1922.
10 Debbusy, C. Le petit nègre – Piano Practical Editions, Roma, 2018.
11 Ravel, M. Prelude – Durand & Cie, Paris, 1913.

This progress was more or less responded to by other prominent composers of the 20th century, such as: Alban Berg, Webern, Hindemith, Stravinsky, Bartok, Shostakovich, Prokofiev etc. “The five easy pieces for piano are a sort of response to the chaos that was sweeping the world stage through tools such as the precision and order of the miniatures....” . [12]

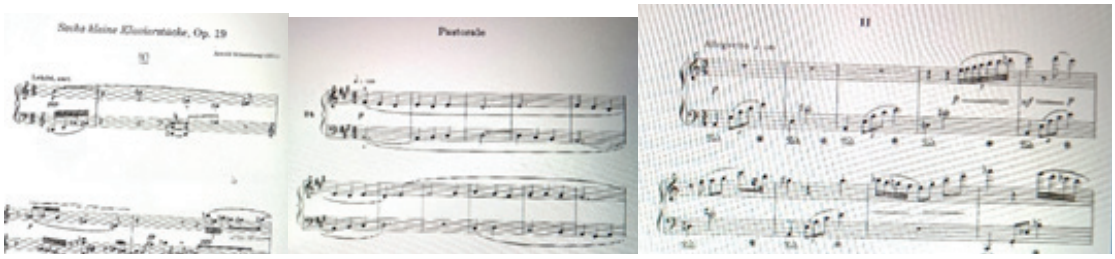

Figure 11. Schöenberg, album op. 19 [13]
Figure 12. Bela Bartok, “Mikorokozmos” [14]
Figure 13. Shostakovich, 24 prèlude op. 34 [15]

The canadian pianist and conductor John Terauds writes about Prokofieff’s miniatures “Flying Visions”: “The craft behind these pieces is impressive. Prokofiev was in his mid-20s when he wrote them during World War I.They bristle with his trademark angularity, but there is also something sensual about them. They range freely and colourfully across tonalities.They also display a keen sense of tension and release as the composer takes us through alternating dream states and wakefulness” .[16]

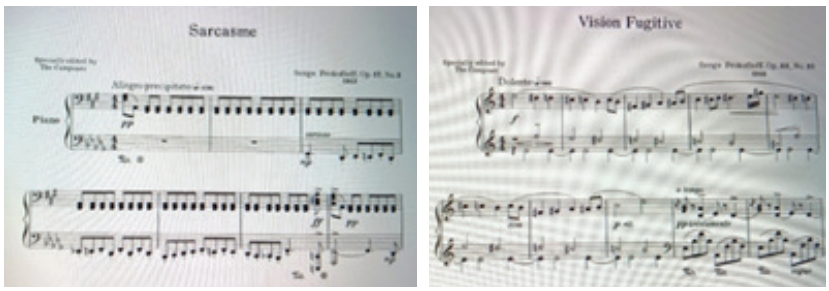

Figure 14. Prokofieff, “Sarkasme” op. 17 [17]
Figure 15. “Vision fugitive” op. 22 [18]

12 Parri, P. I cinque pezzi facili per pianoforte a 4 mani di Stravinsky – Pianosolo, primo portale italiano sul pianoforte, 12. 01. 2026.
13 Schöenberg, A. Sechs kleine Klavierstücke op. 19 – U.E. Wien, 1913.
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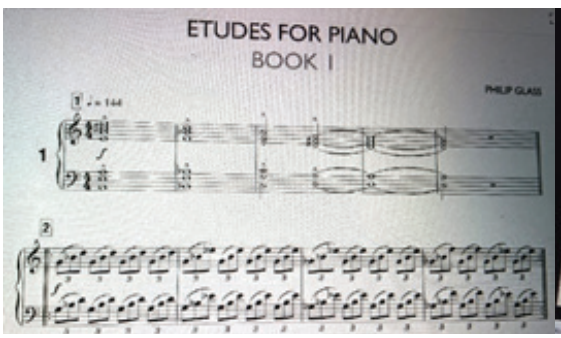
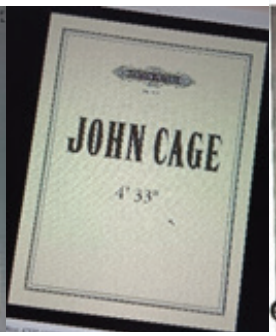
15 Shostakovich, D. 24 preludes op. 34 – Dover Publications, Mineola, 1991.
16 Terauds, J. The exquisite miniatures of Sergei Prokofiev’s Visions Fugitives – Ludvivan TORONTO Daily Headlines, 31.10.201.
17 Prokofieff, S. Collected Works – Levon Atomayer Edition, Moscow, 1955.
18 Prokofieff, S. ibid.

Musical minimalism (less is more) and miniature

It is very important for this brief study overview on instrumental miniatures to stop at the conclusion of a very interesting fact: that of the differences between pianistic miniatures and musical minimalism. The italian researcher Filippo Focosi writes: "Minimalism includes those composers who, embracing Mies van der Rohe's motto that "less is more", propose a simplification of harmonic language and a reduction of expressive means"[19] . Another italian researcher, Emanuele Arciuli, defines: "Minimalism arose from the need to make music "more acceptable" compared to the abstract music of the 1960s, which was considered "impossible to listen"[20] . So in both cases, researchers clearly agree that minimalism arose: as a form of "protest", change, change of artistic eras (postmodernism), socio-economic transformations, technological progress, etc. And indeed historically the minimalist style, otherwise minimal repetitive music, was born in the postmodern period of America in the 60s-70s, with representatives such as La Monte Young, the pioneer of minimalism, Steve Reich, and his phasing techniques, Philip Glass, notable for his obsessive rhythmic structures or Terry Riley, with the unlimited repetition. With the embodied properties of postmodernism, minimalism, in addition to the large-scale reduction of musical parts, restores the melody and the tonality through the "melodic particles", tonal and modal harmony, lyrical-meditative interiority influenced by world folk and its rhythms, etc. All of this, in stark contrast to the "complexity" of serial music. Another characteristic of this musical style is the "alienation of instruments". Hollywood composer Philip Glass, for example, used electronic keyboard and brass instead of piano. John Cage experimented on a modified piano with objects placed between the strings. In Europe, envisioned by Erik Satie, minimalism was represented by the Estonian Arvo Pärt, the British John Tavener and Michael Nyman (sacred minimalism), the Italian Ludovico Einaudi etc. Finally, it is well known that the minimalist style embraced and successfully used Afro-Asian rhythms, thus influencing pop music with all its derivatives such as jazz, rock, etc. (Pink Floyd, Soft Machine, etc.).





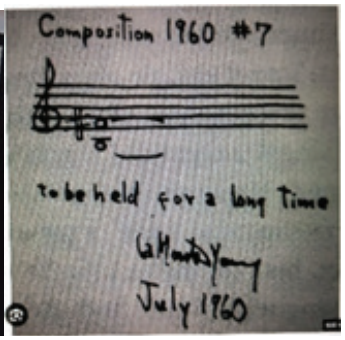


Figure 16. Glass, Etyd 1, Book 1[21]
Figure 17. Cage, 4'33" [22]
*Figure 18. Cage, composition *7* [23]

19 Focosi, F. Minimalismo e massimalismo nella musica contemporanea - Mimesis Edizioni, Milano, 29.03.2017.
20 Emanuele, A. Musica per pianoforte negli Stati Uniti. - EDT, 2010, p. 197.
21 Glass, P. Etudes for piano – Chester Music Ltd, II Edition, London, 2022.
22 Cage, J. 4'33'' – Edition Peters, Leipzig, 1984.
23 Cage, J. Composition *7 – Holograph manuscript,1960.

Regarding miniatures, the word miniature comes from the Latin "miniare", which means "the first letter of each book page is red". We cite this fact to prove that initially, the instrumental miniature was born or created as: easily recognizable red on a black and white background. So in short, it was separated as a genre on its own within the general framework of the musical format. Built "completely" in "small" dimensions, compared to large works, in the introduction to this paper we determined that miniatures are an example of mastery of how a work can be "shrunk" without losing its expressivity power. So, from what we analyzed and cited above, the differences between minimalism and miniature are evident: Minimalism is a style while miniature is a genre, minimalism is "contentment", expressed with certain or predetermined methods and techniques which is unlike anything else before or after it, while the miniature is a structure, form, communication scheme that clearly conveys messages, mimimalism is a portrayed style while miniature is a genre with form, structure or scheme to follow from the composers.

The role of composer Tonin Harapi in Albanian pianistic miniatures

Although the creativity of composer Tonin Harapi included works of various genres, it was in piano music - in all its variations - that he succeeded in revealing his creative genius. "Many of Harapi's works were written for piano... It remains the field where he expressed himself most naturally and where he achieved the best results."[24] . We encounter the aforementioned phenomenon extensively, especially in his piano miniatures. It can be said without fear that Albanian pianists have encountered the composer Tonin Harapi since their first steps, when they were straining their little fingers playing the "Prelude" in A minor, or throughout their long artistic journey, where they would eagerly play the miniatures, dances and piano variations, gradually reaching the rhapsody and piano concerto. What are some of the main characteristics of his music? What distinguished his music and miniaturism from the others? "Mozart's famous saying "music is the melody" fits Harapi's music better... simple and restrained, without nervous turns where melody is the main expressive means of his music."[25] .

Figure 19. Tonin Harapi – "Prelude in A minor" [26]

The music and, consequently, the pianistic miniatures of Tonin Harapi, are immediately distinguished from others of its kind in the Albanian repertoire of this genre: for its highly

24 Kalemi, S. Tonin Harapi – Enti Botues "Gjergj Fishta", Tiranë, 2003, p. 165.
25 Kalemi, S. ibid.
26 Harapi, T. Kompozitorët shqiptarë për pianistët e rinj – Konservatori Shtetëror, Tiranë, 1966.

personalized compositional language, i.e. creative originality, musical poetics emphasized like no one before, rich and inspired melody, expressive lyricism, adequate narrative as well as the clarity of forms or treatments (sometimes even minimalist). Although entirely in function of written music, we discover a kind of ease in the conception and acquisition of his miniatures, both in the process and methodology of teaching and in that of acquisition or assimilation. The simplicity, the almost extreme reduction of the musical figures, the references to traditional melodies, neo-romanticism and other features like these, endowed his works with a special sincerity and to be artistically honest, in a period when ideological frameworks (communist regime) were sewn to the artistic creativity of every man on the skin, shows a lot and elevates even more his artistic and human figure. One of the phenomena that attracts attention today is the fact that the miniature albums of Albanian composers – except "Happy Days" of composer Kozma Lara – were not published chronologically with the period of their composition. This is also the case with Tonin Harapi. However, there is a publication with a collection of piano miniatures by various Albanian authors, a very high-quality publication, as rarely been done in the past, with the title "Albanian Composers for Young Pianists"[27] . The title itself says a lot about the nature, issues and causes of which they have been compiled and published. In it, among other things, we also find 12 miniatures by Tonin Harapi, perhaps among the most sought-after or most artistically accomplished works in the genre of piano miniatures for children and young people. The first impression one gets when playing or analyzing his works is that they refer to different moments in the author's own life or his impressions of infantile or childish events such as: "A little pain", "Here joy returns again", "In the garden yard", "Roza-Rozina". Numerous, in this collection, are miniatures on Albanian folk motifs, usually specially created – an absolute priority of Harapi's creativity – such as: "Red Apple", "Waltz on a Folk Motif" or different "Albanian Dances". Or the lyrical ones full
of passion, expression of creative imagination and the poeticization of sounds, another main characteristic of this composer such as: "Nocturne", "Waltz", "Romance", etc.

Figure 20. Tonin Harapi – "Roza-Rozina" [28]
Figure 21. "Red apple song" [29]
Figure 22. "Romance" [30]

"To the number of miniatures written for pianoforte, if we were to add the Sonatina, the well-known theme with variations on a folk song, the miniatures or small-scale works that Tonin Harapi has written for violin, cello, clarinet, trio or quartet as well as various ensembles, we would encounter an impressive number of his production"[31] .

27 Harapi, T. *Kompozitorët Shqiptarë për pianistët e rinj,* Botim i Konservatorit Shtetëror, Tiranë, 1966.
28 Harapi, T. *ibid.*
29 Harapi, T. *ibid.*
30 Harapi, T. *ibid.*
31 Kalemi, S. *Tonin Harapi* - Enti Botues "Gjergj Fishta", Tiranë, 2003, p. 249-25l.

This shows Harapi's special attention to the genre of miniature in general and the piano miniatures in particular. From this perspective, we cannot fail to note the influences from authors of various European eras and schools such as Schumann, Mendelsohn, Tchaikovsky, Khachaturian, Shostakovich, or Kabalevsky. But, we must not forget in any way, Harap's influence from the wonderful constellation of Shkodra composers of the early 20th century. Here is what researcher Spiro Kalemi writes regarding this argument: "The personality of these music masters, their activity and especially their creativity left an impression on the young Harapi [...]. The influence exerted by Martin Gjoka's creativity since his music was cultivated but also contained pronounced national characteristics. In fact, this element was also present in Palok Kurti and Frano Ndoja, but Martin Gjoka's interests were of a different order. He did not quote from traditional music or from the melodies of patriotic songs, but created them"[32] . Isn't this element also present in the works of Tonin Harapi? Without the slightest doubt, yes. Completely different technical-professional level but essentially it is the same creative principle.

Tonin Harapi undoubtedly remains the most productive and successful Albanian author in the field of piano and instrumental miniatures, but not only that. He is among the authors who, together with composers Çesk Zadeja and Thoma Gaqi, have experimented and attempted more in the field of musical form as well as the harmonization and elaboration of folk music, so much so that it can be said without any doubt that writing Albanian music for Tonin Harapi had become a naturalness without which he could not conceive and be conceived. Let us understand that this phenomenon will be encountered everywhere and in everything he has written, from miniatures to large-scale music. Here is how the composer himself expresses himself on this issue:

The elaboration of folk music is the first phenomenon of the relationship between folklore and cultivated music. The artistic thought and taste of the people, melted and kneaded with advanced artistic techniques, grafted with the composer's thought and creative nerve, takes on an even greater emotional force as the values of folklore are limitless. It is dense thought filtered through time, given in concise form, purged of everything commonplace and superfluous. Folklore is the artistic expression of a certain attitude towards social phenomena; it is the product of the mind and very sharp feeling, which inherits collective knowledge from generation to generation [...]."[33]

32 Kalemi, S. ibid., p. 25.

33 Kalemi, S. Tonin Harapi – Enti Botues "Gjergj Fishta", Tiranë, 2003, p. 238.

Figure 23. "Valtz on folk motifs", which perhaps best represents the compositional peculiarities of Tonin Harapi[34]

34 Harapi, T. Holograph manuscript,1981.

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Between the rhapsody and the concerto: An analytical approach to the double-concerto for violin, cello, and orchestra by the composer Thoma Gaqi

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Abstract

This paper examines the work "Rhapsody–Concerto for Violin, Cello, and Orchestra" by the composer Thoma Gaqi, one of the most distinctive creations in the Albanian concert repertoire. The object of the study focuses on the analysis of this work as an original synthesis between the genre of the rhapsody and that of the concerto, as well as on its treatment as a double concerto - a relatively rare form in the compositional tradition, both in the Albanian and in the international context. The aim of the paper is to identify the conceptual and structural-formal features of the work, by examining the manner in which the relationship between the two solo instruments (violin and cello) and the orchestra is constructed, and by determining its position within the development of Albanian concert music. Particular attention is devoted to the soloistic dialogue, the dramaturgical dimension, and the thematic organization, with the purpose of identifying both rhapsodic elements and those typical of the concerto genre. Special emphasis is placed on the simultaneous cadenza for both solo instruments, which demonstrates the composer's high level of professional mastery. The methodology employed is analytical, based on the examination of formal structure, motivic treatment, tonal-harmonic development, and orchestral organization. Through detailed analysis, the study seeks to offer a conceptual generalization regarding the way in which the work achieves a synthesis between the narrative and freer treatment characteristic of the rhapsody and the structural coherence of the concerto. In conclusion, the study highlights that this work represents a significant contribution to the Albanian repertoire, both in terms of its choice of the double concerto form and in the construction of a rich dialogical space between the two soloists and the orchestra, thereby demonstrating compositional maturity and a clear aesthetic vision.

Keywords

Double-concerto, rhapsody, monothematism, single-movement structure, sonata

The Double-Concerto, or Rhapsody–Concerto for Violin, Cello, and Orchestra by the composer Thoma Gaqi, composed in 1979, is also known under the title *"My Land, My Song."* It represents one of the most significant concert works in the Albanian concert repertoire. The composition is conceived as a single-movement form; it may be noted, parenthetically, that precisely such free, mixed single-movement forms were born and developed among the Romantic composers of the nineteenth century. At their core lies the combination of principles and characteristics derived from established and crystallized formal structures.

These combinations of creative and structural principles evolved gradually, drawing upon accumulated compositional experience and exploring the expressive capacities of sonata form, as well as the considerable developmental and transformative potential of variation as a principle of internal development. In such works as symphonic poems, overtures, concertos, and at the same time rhapsodies, ballades, and fantasies, we do not encounter an arbitrary mixture of structural principles. On the contrary, these works are distinguished by clarity and precision of construction; however, composers employed in a more individual and freer manner the distinctive expressive qualities inherent in different formal models [1].

From this perspective, the "blending" of forms or genres constitutes one of the innovative approaches to the treatment of the single-movement work inherited from the Romantic tradition. Thus, within the concert-symphonic domain, works emerged that combine the instrumental concerto in particular with the rhapsody or fantasy, and even with the symphonic poem. This interaction of genres, and the resulting interweaving of their constituent elements, originates in the affinity among these genres themselves and represents a distinctive feature of the treatment of the instrumental-symphonic genre during this period. [2]" .

Moreover, with regard to this concerto, as well as to the two other concertos composed by Th. Gaqi for violin and orchestra (one of which is a three-movement concerto and the other a single-movement poem-concerto), in addition to the concerto for string orchestra, one may observe the composer's clear professional vocation for writing for the violin. In this respect, Gaqi is aided by the fact that he himself is a violinist; he possesses an intimate knowledge of the instrument's technical and expressive resources. This constitutes one of the reasons why he has made a significant contribution to the concerto genre—particularly to the violin concerto—addressing almost all of its principal typologies: the three-movement concerto, the poem-concerto, the double concerto, and others [3].

Considering the single-movement construction and the extent to which it achieves the quality of a fully developed large-scale work (bearing in mind the formal demands inherent in the concerto genre) [4] , an objective and courageous critical assessment of the time—offered by one of Albania's most distinguished music critics, A. Paparisto—observed that "most of them (single-movement concertos, author's note) possess more the value of a concerto movement than of a true single-movement concerto. " [5]. Building upon this observation, he further noted that "a more complete work of this kind, such as Th. Gaqi's Double Concerto, has for this very reason been modestly entitled by the composer a concerto–rhapsody."

1 Lara, K., Harapi, T., & Paparisto, A. 1985, Analysis of Musical Works, SHBLSH, Tirana, p. 98.

2 Group of Authors. 1985, History of Albanian Music 2, Prepared by ILA, SHBLSH, Tirana, p. 331.

3 This has also been the case with composers P. Gaci and N. Zoraqi, who mastered the violin and produced high-quality works for this instrument, particularly in large-scale forms such as the violin concerto.

4 The article cited below was published after the Fourth Plenum, during a period when the ideological struggle was particularly intense.

5 Paparisto, A. 1978, Symphonic Instrumental Music in the Period 1976–1986 (typed manuscript), available from the author's personal collection (and partly from the ILA library collection), Tirana, p. 3.

Thus, through this essential assessment, it is argued that single-movement concertos have, in themselves, entailed a certain narrowing of content and ideas, which have not always been able to unfold with the breadth of perspective, richness of contrast, and diversity of emotional spheres characteristic of cyclic works. It appears that this constitutes one of the reasons why, within large-scale instrumental concerto forms, intermediate forms—designated as poem–concerto or rhapsody–concerto—began to be cultivated, as they more adequately justify the realization of the intended musical content and ideas"[6] .

Accordingly, the treatment of instrumental-symphonic genres in this manner reflects a new conceptual approach, oriented toward a more developed dramaturgy through contrast, as well as toward the narrative dimension of a rhapsodic discourse (that is, rhapsody and concerto). Such a conception presupposes, first and foremost, a thorough knowledge of musical genres and forms—something that is clearly evident in this composer's work. At the same time, this interaction allowed the rhapsody–concerto to embody a clearer and more coherent conception of folk character, which, although often grounded in quotation, appears "not in a static and unalterable state, but in continuous development"[7] through the symphonic treatment of the material. The work is permeated, in a sense, by a semi-monothematic principle, whereby the principal theme derives from the introductory idea, while motivic landmarks are also present in the first secondary theme.

As contemporary criticism observed, "Th. Gaqi's Double-Concerto, Peçi's Cello Concerto, and certain other works established a proper equilibrium within the new dramaturgy between epic and lyric elements, preserving the social character of artistic images capable of conveying important messages of contemporary life. " [8]

Thus, through his three-movement Violin Concerto, the single-movement poem-concerto, and the three-movement Concerto for Strings, Th. Gaqi demonstrates both his inclination and his commitment to cultivating diverse formal models within the violin concerto genre. In doing so, he brings a marked variety to this field through substantial works that have been performed on the Albanian concert stage by the country's most distinguished instrumentalists.

Literature review

In this context, within the framework of the literature review, and taking into consideration analytical models of such forms in the international scholarly literature, the present study is grounded in a concrete analysis of the double concerto form. In doing so, it highlights the absence of in-depth studies devoted specifically to this work and underscores the need for a more structured analytical approach to its examination.

Methodology

The methodology of this study is based on an analytical approach, aiming to penetrate the conceptual and structural core of the work through a detailed examination of its constituent elements. This analytical study represents a personal contribution, grounded in the concrete score of the work. Through the close analysis of formal structure, thematic organization, motivic treatment, tonal-harmonic development, as well as orchestral and timbral aspects, the study seeks

6 Ibid
7 Ibid
8 Ibid

to achieve a conceptual and structural generalization regarding how the work is constructed and functions as a whole.
Particular attention is given to the relationship between the rhapsody and concerto genres, examining their points of convergence and divergence in formal, dramaturgical, and expressive terms. In this context, the analysis aims to determine whether the work's structure leans toward the freer, narrative character of the rhapsody, or toward the more stable organization and the typical soloist–orchestra dialogue characteristic of the concerto. Through this analytical process, it becomes possible not only to interpret the work as an independent artistic unit but also to situate it within broader stylistic frameworks and the concerto genre.

Development (musicological analysis)

From a formal perspective, as noted above, the Double-Concerto is conceived as a single-movement work, in which sonata form and the rhapsodic internal development of themes are interwoven with material borrowed from the Albanian folk music tradition.
The Double Concerto[9] begins with a 20-measure introduction. The introductory material is derived from the folk song "*Gjurmë të kuqe latë mbi dëborë*" from the Vlorë region, and it is developed in two sections:

- **The first section (measures 1–8)** is marked moderato ad libitum and built on the pentatonic scale F–G–A–C–D, with tonic on D (D–F–G–A–C). The pentatonic structure is rhythmically altered, moving from C in 5/4, then to C, and subsequently 6/4.
- **The second section (measures 9–29, p. 8)** is marked marcato and again based on the same pentatonic structure, emphasized by the strings in 3/4 and C.

The construction of this introductory material, divided into two sections, preserves the original form of the folk song. In this way, the composer cites the folkloric material while maintaining the original strophic-refrain structure of the song.

Figure 1. Example I: Introduction

The main section begins at measure 21 (p. 6) and continues to measure 48 (p. 12) in D major. The thematic material at the outset derives directly from the introduction (first section). Thus, there

9 Score of the Double-Concerto, provided by the Library of the University of Arts (UART), 108 pages.

is a clear continuity of monothematic [10] development from the introduction into the main theme.

Figure 2. Example II: Main Section (The First Theme)

The formal construction and its harmonic plan can be analyzed in two variants:

First variant:

The theme in the cello (measures 21–32) is considered the first phrase of the main theme, as it concludes in measure 32 (p. 9) on the two notes D–A, where the note A can be interpreted as the dominant of D, thus remaining in a half cadence. This is the harmonic rationale, whereas regarding the logic of thematic material construction, it fulfills the function of a phrase and more. Here lies one of the issues discussed in the second variant (where phrases may be treated as periods and periods as phrases—the concept of the compound or double period).
The second phrase (measures 33–48) appears in the violin as a repetition of the first phrase, but with a culminating development in the last four measures, leading to an ambiguous harmonic chord, which emphasizes a "chromatic" modulation (bass D#, i.e., a chromatic shift of a semitone from the initial D of the theme and the melody A♭).
Throughout the melodic progression of the theme, this development can be observed: it begins on D in measure 21 (p. 6); in the second movement of measure 24 (p. 7), C# appears in the melody as the raised VII degree in D, functioning as an auxiliary tone; in measures 25–31, a fluctuation occurs between the notes A♭–C# and A♭–C natural. This melodic development, supported by its harmonic underpinning, demonstrates a tendency toward its final modulation (toward A♭). I believe this meloharmonic development reflects the composer's new tendencies in harmonic language toward a more modal–tonal space, particularly regarding the "blurring" of tonality through the introduction of unstable harmonic elements.
On the other hand, I consider that this meloharmonic development of the main theme also relates to the challenges of a rhapsodic development of the material, rather than merely a concertante approach.

10 Monothematism is one of the characteristics of single-movement, free, mixed forms, but it is more prominently found in symphonic poems; here, we may consider Liszt's poems, such as Preludes and Tasso.

Second Variant:

As emphasized above, this variant is based on the concept of constructing the theme as a double theme, i.e., the main theme (M.T.) is presented in the cello (measures 21–32) and repeated as a double theme in the violin (measures 33–48).

Beyond this reasoning, which relates to the clear message conveyed by the theme through the logic of musical thought (already evident in its initial presentation in the cello), the most debatable issue concerns the "intermediate" cadence D–A. Additionally, I consider the uniqueness of this work—treated as a double concerto with two solo instruments, where the weight of material presentation must be carefully balanced—to further clarify and stabilize the argument for the second variant.

In measure 48 (p. 12), there is a two-measure interlude constructed with modulatory sequences, serving as a transition to the connecting section.

The connecting section (transition) unfolds in several stages:

- **First Stage:** begins in measure 50 (p. 13), approximately on B, incorporating elements of the main theme along with chromatic motion. Both instruments develop their lines contrapuntally (measures 50–57, with the violin supported by the clarinet), and subsequently, in measures 57–63, both instruments perform the same material in tenths. Only the strings are active in this stage.
- **Second Stage:** begins in measure 63 (p. 16) with a basis on A. This stage has its sub-stages:
  - **Second Stage (a) measures 63–68:** a new, energetic element appears in the trumpets, accompanied by brass and strings in a fifth-based harmony (while the trumpets feature second clashes). Opposing rhythmic figures are highlighted (eighth notes with two sixteenths and vice versa), along with rhythmic disruptions in C, 3/4, and 2/4.
  - **Measures 68–77:** the new connecting element shifts to the soloists in two-voice dialogues with the trumpets, under fifth-based harmony in the strings. This logic continues until measure 71 (p. 18), where the strings and bassoon, which enters at this point, develop a parallel-second harmony and elisions until measure 77 (p. 19), culminating on the note B♭ in the soloists through a chromatic modulation.
- **Second Stage (a1) measures 77–90:** the chromatic motion continues a semitone lower to A♭. The new element is passed to the horns, accompanied by other brass instruments, strings, and bassoon (measures 77–82). In measures 82–90, the soloists take up this line in unison, two octaves, accompanied by strings and bassoon, leading toward the culmination of this second stage and the return to the A tonic, which begins the third stage with the orchestra in tutti (without soloists).
- **Third Stage measures 90–107:** this stage is notable as the main theme appears in the strings, but on A (D for D). From a tonal and structural perspective, this functions as a linking passage since it lies within the D sphere of the main key. From the viewpoint of rhapsodic internal development, it relates to the main theme, heard once more in the orchestra to reinforce it as the central idea of the work through a further variant of the theme, exemplifying one of the principles of rhapsodic development.

This stage also reaches the orchestral climax and the subsequent descent toward "melting" the theme, preparing for the secondary part (S.P.). Simultaneously, in the final measures (104–107), modulation toward the thematic material is prepared: measure 107 (p. 28) – D for F+, which is also the key of the S.P. Measures 108–109 serve as two introductory measures for the S.P.

The secondary part is conceived with two themes:

- **The First Secondary Theme (measures 110–130) in F+ (gr.III):** is constructed on the source material of the song "Po vjen lumi rrema – rrema" from the Tirana region. Here, the motivic element establishes a monothematic connection through the opening notes (with entry and principal cadence).

Figure 3. Example III: The First Secondary Theme

This theme illustrates the composer's approach of adapting folk material within a concertante and rhapsodic context, maintaining its melodic identity while aligning with the overarching formal and tonal structure of the work. The rhythmic and harmonic organization emphasizes the theme's distinct character, while ensuring its coherence with subsequent developments in the orchestral texture.

The structural and meloharmonic construction of the theme proceeds as follows:

The theme is in the form of a period. Measures 110–117 constitute the first phrase of the theme, performed by the violin. It begins in F+ major, and it is noteworthy that although this song originates from the central region of Albania, it shares the same motivic nucleus (the initial notes F–G–A) found in the introduction and main theme (originating from the south), thereby linking the themes and recalling Lisztian monothematic procedures in simultaneous form.

In measure 112 (p. 29), and subsequently in the string accompaniment, the note D♭ appears first in the viola (raised VI degree), forming a harmonic major, in combination with the interval of a

minor second D♭–E, characteristic of folk music from central Albania.
The second phrase of the theme begins in measure 118 (p. 30) in the cello, while the theme in the violin develops independently until measure 123 (p. 31), where both solo instruments and the string accompaniment continue the harmonic major context. In measure 123, cadential embellishments begin, leading both solo instruments to the climax of this first secondary theme, which concludes in measure 127 (p. 32) in F+ major.
Again, with an embellishment in this measure, an interlude begins, serving as a link from the first secondary theme to the second secondary theme (transitioning from F+ major to F minor), and concludes in measure 130 (p. 32).
The second secondary theme begins in measure 131 (p. 33) marked Poco mosso and primarily consists of the shift from F+ major to F minor, as well as changes in meter and, above all, in its individual characteristics within the logic of musical thought development as a new thematic idea.

Figure 4. Example IV: The Second Secondary Theme

The second secondary theme (beginning in measure 131, Poco mosso) primarily features a shift from F+ major to F minor, as well as changes in meter and, most importantly, distinctive characteristics in its internal logic, reflecting the development of a new thematic idea.
This theme represents an independent musical thought within the larger formal and tonal structure, distinguishing itself from the first secondary theme while maintaining coherence with the overall work. Its melodic and harmonic construction introduces contrast through modal inflections and rhythmic variations, contributing to the rhapsodic development of the orchestral texture and preparing for further thematic interplay with the solo instruments and accompanying strings.
This theme is constructed in the form of a theme–phrase. In its second phrase, the principle of sequence is developed, expanding the theme (measures 131–134). While the first phrase of the second theme cadences in a plagal cadence (S), the second phrase, developed through modulatory sequences and cadencing on the tonic F minor, concludes in measure 145 (p. 34) with the theme in unison performed by the soloists. In the same F minor tonic, the orchestra (strings) then assumes the theme.
In measure 153 (p. 36), the thematic development (in D+ with C natural) naturally transitions to the soloists toward a modulation to A, culminating in measure 163 (p. 38), where the second theme of the secondary part concludes, marking the end of the exposition.

At measure 163 (p. 38), the introduction to the Development begins in A– in the orchestra, lasting four measures until measure 167 (p. 39), where the development is divided into several stages:

- **First Stage of Development (measures 167–195):** elements of the main theme (M.T.) are initially presented in the cello and subsequently in inverted form in the violin. By measure 181 (p. 43), both soloists enter into a polyphonic relationship, continuing until measure 195 (p. 46), where this stage modulates toward F minor.
- **Second Stage of Development (measures 195–214):** begins in F minor with varied elements of the inverted theme, initially presented in the cello (which in the first stage was presented by the violin). From measure 197 (p. 47), both soloists continue in unison and sixths, culminating in measure 214 (p. 51) in A+, where the next stage of development begins.
- **Third Stage of Development:** comprises two sub-stages:

1. The first sub-stage presents material from the first element of the first secondary theme in A+, introduced by the orchestra (strings), preparing in measure 217 (p. 52) the processing of the second varied element of the first secondary theme, realized in octaves by the violin.
2. The second sub-stage begins in measure 228 (p. 54), where the cello varies the aforementioned element, accompanied by the violin in chords and the orchestra in D+.

Throughout this third stage, the two soloists, interacting with each other and accompanied by the orchestra, impart energy to the development through transformed elements of the second theme, reaching a virtuosic, almost improvisatory character and elaborated variation principles in both sub-stages.

- **Fourth Stage of Development (measure 238–257):** the variational character of the soloists continues, now based on elements of the main theme (M.T.), which is expanded in the orchestra in G–. This stage lasts until measure 257 (p. 63), reaching the climax.
- **Final Stage (measures 257–270)**: the last moment of the developmental stages, incorporating thematic elements, resolves the climax toward a gradual descent through sequences, performed by the orchestra in tutti, without soloist participation.

Measures 270–273 serve as the introduction to the episode in E♭– (lowered II degree for D–). The Episode (measures 274–387) begins in the cello in E♭–. The thematic material of the episode is derived from a folk song from the Tirana region, “Erdhi trëndafili me marr borzilok”. In 3/8 time and with iambic rhythm, this episode represents one of the most beautiful lyrical moments of the double concerto, as well as one of the most lyrical passages in Albanian concert literature in general.

Figure 5. Example V: The Episode

The episode develops the folk material with careful attention to melodic contour, rhythmic nuance, and harmonic support. Through the interplay between solo cello, orchestra, and subsequent instrumental entries, the episode creates a sustained lyrical line, highlighting both the intimate character of the folk source and its transformation within the concerto's rhapsodic structure. Dynamic variation, orchestral color, and phrasing are used to enhance the expressive quality, resulting in a passage that is both folklorically grounded and concertantly sophisticated. The form of this episode is a simple three-part structure with a shortened dynamic recapitulation. Monothematic construction is evident throughout.

- **Part I (Theme):** The episode begins in the cello (measures 274–289) with the first phrase of the theme in its initial presentation. In measure 289 (p. 67), the violin takes over the theme together with the cello, initially in counterpoint, further developing the theme with the second phrase, reaching a climax in measure 313 (p. 70). At this point, cadential embellishments begin, concluding in measure 328 (p. 72) with a modulation to A♭– (or G#–).
- **Part II (Middle Section):** This middle section, forming the second part of the monothematic three-part structure, spans S, A♭– to E♭– (the key of the episode). The thematic material is the same as in the first part of the episode but presented by the orchestra in the harmony of S. The theme is fully developed (without the opening material presented by the cello) and retains all the characteristics of the initial theme, concluding in measure 372 (p. 77) on D (B♭) for E♭–.
- **Part III (Recapitulation of Episode):** The recapitulation begins at measure 373 (p. 77), shortened, where both solo instruments return in polyphonic interplay with the thematic material as initially presented by the cello in the first phrase (without the thematic development of the second phrase) and concludes in measure 387 on a subtonic pitch (D♭), enharmonically interpreted as C# (raised VII) for the tonic on D, setting the stage for the general recapitulation of the double concerto.
- **Re-transition and Recapitulation:** Measures 388–394 (or 404) serve as a re-transition into the recapitulation. The recapitulation begins in measure 394 (p. 79) with the main theme (M.T.) in D. It is dynamic, bringing the themes closer. The main theme (measures 394–422) maintains a formal structure almost identical to its exposition, with the exception of a harmonic shift at its conclusion toward F– (measure 422, p. 85). From this measure, a

shortened connecting passage begins.

o **First Stage of the Connecting Passage (measures 422–434, p. 85–87):** Spanning F– to B–, featuring orchestra–soloist dialogues, opened by the trumpets and echoed by the soloists in a lively, energetic character.

o Second Stage (measures 434–456): Begins with the closing in B– of the first stage, performed entirely by the orchestra in tutti. Against the energetic backdrop of strings and winds, the expanded main theme appears in the trumpets, supported in measures 443–444 by the previously mentioned orchestral families, leading toward modulation for the secondary theme (S.T.).

This shortened and condensed connecting passage, consisting of two stages (compared with the three extended stages of the exposition), serves to bring the themes closer in the recapitulation. Measures 457–458 prepare the entry for the secondary theme in D+, which appears in the mode + (tonic with the same name). In the recapitulation, the secondary theme is presented only with its first theme, now dynamically varied:

- **First Secondary Theme in the Recapitulation:** In measure 459 (p. 92), the first secondary theme begins in D+ in the cello (unlike the exposition, where it was taken by the violin). By measure 466 (p. 93), through continued imitation, the theme passes to the violin, concluding in the soloists in measure 473 (p. 95) in D+, without the cadential embellishment as in the exposition. The orchestra then assumes the theme in D+, ending in measure 486 (p. 97), from which cadential embellishments follow, first by the soloists, then supported by the strings in measure 488 (p. 97), and finally by the horns in measure 490 (p. 98).
- **Conclusion of Recapitulation:** Measure 493 (p. 98) marks the end of the recapitulation, harmonically open on the note E with a coronation (II degree), serving to link the recapitulation with the soloists' cadence.
- **Cadenza (measures 494–558):** As characteristic of instrumental concerti, this cadenza is particularly notable because it is performed by both soloists, which is technically challenging. It begins in D (Dorian mode) with elements of the second secondary theme, absent in the recapitulation. Initially presented by the cello in measure 494 (p. 99), the violin joins in measure 501 (p. 99) with developmental elements of the theme. The cadenza unfolds with a lively, improvisatory character from both soloists. From measure 519 (p. 99), the second phase of the cadenza development begins with sixteenth-note passages, enriched with two-voice writing and chords for the soloists. The cadenza concludes in measure 558 (p. 101), harmonically open on D, leading into the coda.
- **Coda (measures 559–594):** Begins with the opening theme material over the pentatonic scale F–G–A–C–D. This material returns dynamically, concluding powerfully, especially in the second part, with the orchestra in tutti.

Conclusions

The Double-Concerto for violin, cello, and orchestra "Toka ime, këngа ime" ("My Land, My Song"), as a new contribution to the double concerto genre—particularly at the time of its composition in 1979—demonstrates significant value in terms of its clear conception of simultaneous concert form, rhapsodic content, and compositional craftsmanship. These elements are realized through distinctive and compelling relationships within the musical language, as well as through a professional criterion that is reflected, first and foremost, in the careful selection of folkloric material. This material is enriched by the philosophical notion of "softened

harshness" (a gentle line imbued with intense expressive weight), as well as by the thread of monothematicism that runs throughout the work (the introduction – main theme and the first secondary theme).

The use of harmonic elements such as dissonances, parallel seconds, fourths, fifths, and octaves, unfinished direct chromatic modulation, alterations, and their interconnection with pentatonic tonal structures, points to a musical language influenced by Stravinsky and Bartók, as well as by the consultation of Brahms's Double Concerto as a structural model. These influences result in a work that is at once strongly national in color and contemporary in conceptual approach.

This concerto stands as one of the important and distinctive works within the Albanian concert repertoire, particularly since double concertos—even within the output of major international composers—appear relatively rarely. Its value lies not only in the choice of genre, which demands a specific dramaturgical and structural conception, but also in the ability to construct a balanced dialogue between the two soloists and the orchestra.

From the perspective of orchestral writing, the work is conceived according to symphonic principles. As a composition that is simultaneously concertante and rhapsodic, this treatment enables a cooperative and interactive relationship between the soloists and the orchestra. This is clearly evident in the natural transfer of thematic material between soloists and orchestra. The solo parts are distinguished by lively technique and virtuosity, which is further reflected in their dialogues with the orchestra, whose performance is equally dynamic and agile.

At the same time, the concerto gains artistic weight through its thematic elaboration, motivic development, and organic integration of musical material, positioning the work not only as an individual achievement of the composer, but also as a valuable contribution to the corpus of Albanian concert music.

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The first documented recital in Albania (1926): The emergence of the recital practice within the context of the formation of albanian concert culture

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Abstract

The solo recital represents a complex artistic practice that extends beyond the dimensions of a concert form, functioning as an interpretative and cultural space where relationships are built between tradition, identity and historical context. In Albania, the emergence of this form is linked to the process of forming musical institutions and professional education, in a reality conditioned by the historical and cultural circumstances of the early 20th century. In this context, the recital held on December 3, 1926 in Tirana by violinist Ludovik Naraçi is treated as one of the early testimonies of the recital practice in the country. The aim of this study is to analyze this recital as a significant moment in the birth of the recital practice in Albania, examining its historical and cultural dimension. The main research question is: In what way does this recital represent a step towards the transition from amateur musical practices to a professional concert culture? The hypothesis of the study is that this recital functions as an early reference point for the adoption of the European model of recital in the Albanian context, creating a basis for the later developments of solo music. Using historical and analytical methodology, supported by archival sources, the study aims to analyze the importance of this event in relation to time. The analysis of the program and the role of the performer as a cultural mediator, in a comparative plan, highlights the influence of European models in a musical environment still in formation. The results show that this recital does not represent only an isolated concert event, but an important moment in the construction of Albanian concert culture and in the affirmation of the figure of the solo performer. The conclusions emphasize that the study of this case offers a perspective on the beginnings of professional concert life in Albania and on the role of the recital in the history of Albanian music of the 20th century.

Keywords

Solo performance, repertoire, intercultural dialogue, musical identity

Introduction

In the historical development of western music, performative practices have held particular significance, as they have directly influenced the way music is experienced and interpreted by audiences. Within this context, the recital represents one of the most important forms of musical presentation, not only as a concert format, but as a space where aesthetic, interpretative and cultural dimensions are intertwined, placing the performer at the center of artistic communication. In this sense, the recital has played an important role in affirming artistic individuality and in building the relationship between the performer and audience, reflecting broader social and institutional processes in the concert practice of the time[1].

In Europe, the consolidation of the recital as an autonomous practice is closely linked to the cultural transformations of the 19th century, accompanied by the institutionalization of concert life and the emergence of the bourgeois audience. In particular, the figure of Franz Liszt occupies a fundamental place in this process as he formalized the model of the solo recital and transformed the performer into the protagonist of the aesthetic experience.[2] During the 20th and 21st centuries, the recital expanded and diversified, reflecting the stylistic and technical developments of the music of the time, the development of the virtuosity of the instrumentalists and the introduction of new repertoire, reflecting aesthetic transformations and the increasingly active role of the performer in the construction of artistic identity.[3]

However, unlike the international context, the specific characteristics of Albanian music are different, taking into account the historical and cultural circumstances of its development. Unlike european traditions, where the recital gradually evolved on a consolidated institutional and artistic basis, in the albanian context it initially appeared as a practice borrowed from abroad which was gradually adapted to the local reality. In the early stages, recitals were presented in a sporadic manner often adapted to the cultural and institutional reality of the country. This situation gradually changed with the development of musical life, the establishment of schools, and the influence of instrumentalists who studied abroad, in either western or eastern institutions. The subsequent path of its consolidation was long and went through several experimental phases, until after several decades the recital was consolidated and became an important component of concert life and the interpretation of albanian music.

In this context, the study of the first documented cases takes on a special importance, as they testify not only to the early presence of the recital as a concert practice, but also to the way in which it was integrated into a still-developing musical environment. One of these key moments is the first documented recital in Albania in 1926 by the violinist Ludovik Naraçi, which serves as a reference point in the history of albanian solo performance. [4]

The analysis of this recital, in addition to being an early reference in the history of albanian performance, also enables a comparison with the international developments of the time. By examining the program and cultural context, it becomes possible to identify the influences of european traditions and the ways in which these models were interpreted within the Albanian

1 Henry Kingsbury, Music, Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

2 Alan Walker, Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

3 Richard Taruskin, The Oxford History of Western Music, vols. 4–5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

4 Ina Kosturi, "Zbulohet recitali i parë muzikor shqiptar në arkivin e Lef Nosit – koncerti i violinistit virtuoz shqiptar Ludovik Naraçi ndryshon datat në historinë e muzikës," ArtMagazine.al, December 27, 2023, https://art-magazine.al/2023/12/27/2759/

reality. In this way, the case of Ludovik Naraçi serves as an entry point for understanding the early process of shaping the recital in Albania and its relationship with the international music scene.

Methodology

This study is based on a historical-musicological and analytical approach, combining the historical method, repertoire analysis, and a comparative perspective to examine the 1926 recital in relation to the international context of the time.

The historical method is used to reconstruct the context of Ludovik Naraçi's recital, relying on primary and secondary sources, such as concert programs, archival documents, musicological publications and materials from the cultural press. This approach allows the recital to be placed within the early developments of albanian musical life and in relation to the processes of institutionalization of professional music.

The analytical method is applied to the examination of the recital repertoire, analyzing the selection of works, the relationship between international repertoire and the local cultural context, as well as the stylistic and interpretative elements that characterize the program.

The comparative method is used to situate this case within a broader musicological perspective, through comparison with european recital practices of the corresponding period. This approach allows for the identification of possible influences and the ways in which international models were adapted to the albanian context.

In support of the documentary analysis, the study also includes elements of a qualitative approach through consultation of interviews with interpreters, pedagogues and researchers in the field. This evidence serves as a complementary source for the interpretation of historical data.

Literature review

The study of the recital as a performative practice is grounded in a broad corpus of international literature on musical interpretation, where performance is approached as a complex interpretative act rather than merely a concert format. Authors such as John Rink and Henry Kingsbury place performance at the center of musicological discourse, emphasizing the active role of the performer in constructing artistic meaning. [5]

From a historical perspective, the consolidation of the recital is linked to the cultural transformations of the 19th century and the formalization of the solo recital as an autonomous form, while studies on the figure of Franz Liszt by Alan Walker and the theoretical approaches of Nicholas Cook highlight performance as a form of aesthetic communication.[6] An important theoretical dimension is related to the literature on musical aesthetics, where authors such as Enrico Fubini provide a historical overview of aesthetic thought on music and performance. [7]

5 John Rink, Musical Performance: A Guide to Understanding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Henry Kingsbury, Music, Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

6 Alan Walker, Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Nicholas Cook, Beyond the Score: Music as Performance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

7 Enrico Fubini, Estetika muzikore: Vol. 1. L'estetica musicale dall'Antichita al Settecento, translated by E. Buharaja (Durrës: Acustica Edizioni & Adonis, 2019).

In the Albanian context, works such as Muzika shqiptare by Zana Shuteriqi, Historiografia e artit të tingullit by Edmond Buharaja and other publications provide an important foundation on the developments of musical life in Albania, as well as a valuable reference framework for research[8]. Furthermore, in the field of instrumental music, the study *Zhvillime të muzikës instrumentale në Shqipëri* by Nestor Kraja provides valuable data on albanian musical works. [9]
A particularly relevant reference for this specific case is the music journalism of Zamir Këlliçi, especially his article on Ludovik Naraçi's recital, which offers a direct treatment of this event. [10]
Additionally, valuable documentary sources are provided by contemporary press sources. Newspapers and cultural magazines such as Drita, Zëri i Popullit, Nëntori, Bota e Re, Gazeta Shqiptare, Panorama, among others, have offered direct data on concert programs, performances, names of performers, as well as on the critical reception of recitals during different periods. [11]

Results and discussions

The first documented recital in Albania (1926)

The analysis of archival materials and historical documentation shows that the recital of the violinist Ludovik Naraçi, held on December 3, 1926, in Tirana, represents the documented starting point of the solo recital practice in Albania. This event occurred at a time when Albanian musical life was still in an embryonic phase, without consolidated musical institutions and without a stable tradition of professional performance. The results show that the organization of this recital should not be understood only as an individual artistic event, but as an indicator of a broader process of cultural transformation. It marks the transition from semi-amateur musical practices towards a conscious professional model, built according to european standards of concert life. The very fact that such recitals are performed by musicians who have studied abroad proves their decisive role in the transfer of interpretative models to the albanian cultural space. In this context, Ludovik Naraçi himself was educated in major european musical centers such as Prague and Vienna, where he completed his studies with high results and was awarded the title of "virtuoso violinist", a testament to his professional level according to the standards of the time. [12]

Structure and stylistic analysis of the repertoire

One of the main results of the analysis is related to the structure of the recital program, which demonstrates a conscious artistic conception. Ludovik Naraçi's recital repertoire included works by representative authors of the European canon: Beethoven, Paganini, Brahms, Corelli, etc.

8 Zana Shuteriqi Prela, Muzika shqiptare (Tirana: Akademia e Shkencave, 2019); Edmond Buharaja, Historiografia e artit të tingullit në botën shqiptare: Nga Prehistoria deri në Antikitet (Libri I) (Tirana: Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, 2019).
9 Nestor Kraja, Zhvillime të muzikës instrumentale në Shqipëri (Tirana: Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, 2005).
10 Zamir Këlliçi, Zemra e madhe, botë e ngushtë: Publicistikë artistiko-muzikore (Tirana: Globus R, 2009).
11 "Jeta dhe vepra e violinistit nga Viena në Pragë dhe Tiranë: Naraçi, virtuozi që dënoi veten me heshtje të përjetshme," Gazeta Shqiptare, April 17, 2005; "Ludovik Naraçi, nismëtari i artit dhe pedagogjisë shqiptare të violines," Panorama, December 6, 2023; "Të pathënat e koncertit të 3 dhjetorit 1926, në Kino 'Nacional' në Tiranë: Shtetari kërkoi 'Napolonin' në 'Violinë Koncert Artistik'," Panorama, December 6, 2023.
12 "Ludovik Naraçi, nismëtari i artit dhe pedagogjisë shqiptare të violinës," Panorama, December 6, 2023.

This selection reflects a clear orientation toward the western classical and romantic tradition, as well as an aesthetic awareness in constructing a program that is balanced both stylistically and historically. At the same time, the absence of works by albanian composers reflects the still embryonic state of domestic instrumental works during that period.

According to the original poster of the recital held on December 3, 1926 at the "Theater Nacional" in Tirana, the program of violinist Ludovik Naraçi is presented divided into three parts, which demonstrates a clear structural conception of the recital, in accordance with the European practices of the time. The first part opens with Arcangelo Corelli's La Follia, a theme with variations from the baroque repertoire, known for its cyclical structure and the interpretative potential it offers in terms of ornamentation and phrasing. Placing this work at the beginning of the recital creates a historical and stylistic reference point, positioning the performance in dialogue with the early european tradition. This is followed by Pablo de Sarasate's Romanza Andaluza, which provides a clear aesthetic contrast through its lyrical character and romantic idiom, highlighting the performer's ability to move from a formal baroque style to a more narrative and coloristic expression.

The second part of the program is more clearly oriented toward violinistic virtuosity. It includes Niccolò Paganini's Sonata No. XII, followed by Fritz Kreisler's Caprice Viennois, Johannes Brahms's Melodie Hongroise, and Paganini's Caprice No. XIII. This block of works represents a wide spectrum of techniques and characters, providing a full demonstration of the violinist's technical and expressive capabilities. The third part concludes the recital with a combination of works such as Ludwig van Beethoven's Marche Turc and Sarasate's Danse Tzigane, which introduce stylized folk elements, directing the conclusion of the program toward broader communication with the audience. [13]

A particularly important element is the inclusion in the program of Souvenir de Qor Jakova, composed and performed by Ludovik Naraçi himself. The work is dedicated to Qor Jakova (Shtjefën Jakova), one of the emblematic figures of the "Shkodra's Aheng Songs", a well-known author and performer of old albanian songs, which places this composition in a direct dialogue between albanian musical tradition and the language of european musical art. This practice, known today as the composer–performer model, demonstrates an authorial approach by the performer and an early creative awareness in the construction of artistic identity..

The performative and socio-cultural dimension

From a socio-cultural perspective, the 1926 recital highlights the role of the performer as a cultural mediator. The results show that the figure of the soloist does not function only as a technical performer of the repertoire, but as a bearer of a new cultural model, which includes aesthetic standards, new forms of artistic communication and a new relationship with the audience. In a society where concert life was still in its formative stages, the recital creates a new symbolic space: that of individual public performance as a cultural act. This transformation has important implications not only artistically, but also socially, as it contributes to the formation of a new audience and the consolidation of a listening culture oriented towards professional music.

In this context, the recital can be interpreted as an inaugural act that lays the foundations of a new performative tradition. It creates a model that will develop in the following decades, influencing the way solo performance is conceived in the albanian cultural space.

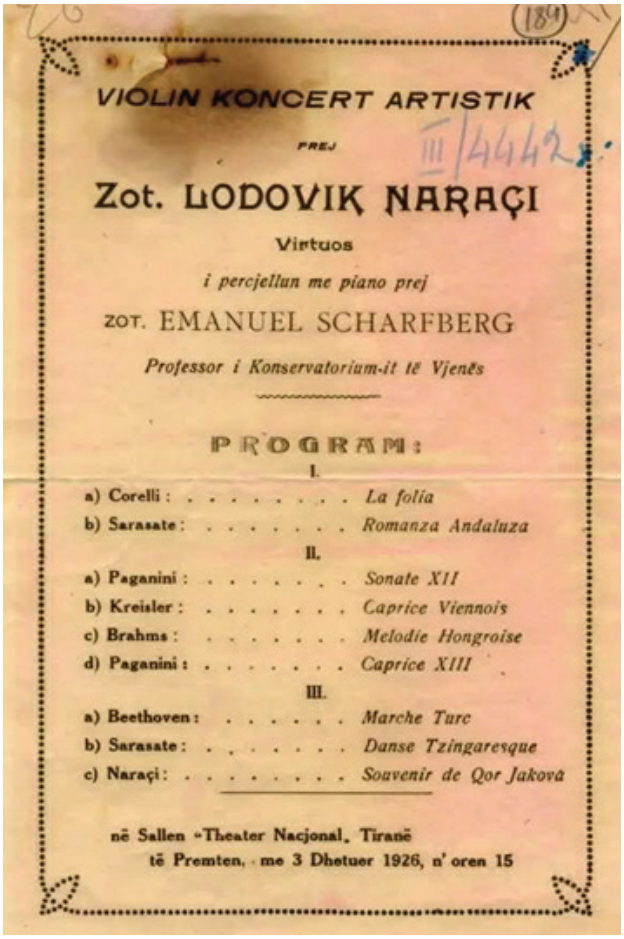
13 Ina Kosturi, "Zbulohet recitali i parë muzikor shqiptar në arkivin e Lef Nosit – koncerti i violinistit virtuoz shqiptar Ludovik Naraçi ndryshon datat në historinë e muzikës," ArtMagazine.al

Comparison with the international context and external influences

Placing the 1926 recital within an international comparative perspective highlights two essential dimensions: its structural alignment with contemporary european models and the direct influence of western tradition in shaping the repertoire or the recital program.

In terms of program selection, the choice of works demonstrates a clear orientation toward the european musical canon. The presence of composers such as Ludwig van Beethoven, Niccolò Paganini, Johannes Brahms, Arcangelo Corelli, Pablo de Sarasate, Fritz Kreisler, and others does not merely reflect an individual aesthetic choice, but rather indicates the process of cultural transfer that characterizes the early phases of musical modernization in european contexts. This repertoire was already well established within the recital tradition in Europe at the end of the 19th century and and the beginning of the 20th century, where solo recitals functioned as platforms for asserting instrumental virtuosity and interpretative individuality.

Comparatively, the results show that although geographically isolated, the 1926 recital follows the structure of european practices of the time. In this sense, the recital can be understood as an early form of cultural synchronization, where an emerging musical space adopts central models and adapts them to a local reality. This comparative dimension places the recital not only as a national historical event, but as part of a broader process of diffusion and integration of european musical practices in the early 20th century.



VIOLIN KONCERT ARTISTIK

PREJ

Zot. LODOVIK NARAÇI

Virtuos

i percjellun me piano prej

ZOT. EMANUEL SCHARFBERG

Professor i Konservatorium-it të Vjenës

PROGRAM:

I.

a) Corelli: . . . . . *La folia*
b) Sarasate: . . . . . *Romanza Andaluza*

II.

a) Paganini: . . . . . *Sonate XII*
b) Kreisler: . . . . . *Caprice Viennois*
c) Brahms: . . . . . *Melodie Hongroise*
d) Paganini: . . . . . *Caprice XIII*

III.

a) Beethoven: . . . . . *Marche Turc*
b) Sarasate: . . . . . *Danse Tzingaresque*
c) Naraçi: . . . . . *Souvenir de Qor Jakova*

në Sallen «Theater Nacjonal» Tiranë
të Premten, me 3 Dhetuer 1926, n' oren 15

Figure 1. The poster of Ludovik Naraçi's recital, 1926

Conclusions and recommendations

The analysis of the 1926 recital demonstrates that the emergence of the recital practice in Albania is linked to early processes of cultural development and the direct influence of European tradition. This phenomenon marks the transition toward a professional model of solo performance and lays the foundations for a new concert culture within the albanian cultural space. Viewed from a comparative perspective, the recital appears as part of a broader dynamic of the dissemination of performative models in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century.

The study subsequently outlines several recommendations for further research in this field, such as:

1. Expanding archival and documentary research on albanian concert life during the early period.
2. A more in-depth analysis of the evolution of recital repertoire in Albania.
3. Study of the evolution of the recital repertoire in different historical periods, with a focus on the relationship between the international and albanian repertoire.
4. Using interdisciplinary approaches to study recital as an artistic and socio-cultural phenomenon.
5. Analysis of the role of musical institutions and cultural media in documenting and promoting recital in different historical periods.
6. Development of comparative studies with regional and european contexts.
7. Building sustainable databases and recital catalogs as research tools for future musicological studies.
8. Promoting academic and artistic projects that bring the tradition of recital back into focus in Albania through publications and performance activities.

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"Ludovik Naraçi, nismëtari i artit dhe pedagogjisë shqiptare të violines," Panorama, December 6, 2023.
"Të pathënat e koncertit të 3 dhjetorit 1926, në Kino Nacional në Tiranë: Shtetari kërkoi 'Napolonin' në Violinë Koncert Artistik", Panorama, December 6, 2023.

The integration of folk songs and dances with cultivated and professional music in the ballet "Delina" by Çesk Zadeja

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Abstract

The object of this study is the analysis of the ballet "Delina" by the composer Çesk Zadeja, as one of the most representative works of Albanian professional music and as a key moment in shaping national identity in stage musical art. The aim of this research is to highlight the way in which this work achieves an organic fusion of elements of Albanian folklore with contemporary compositional techniques, creating an authentic and sustainable musical language. The study is based on a historical and musicological analysis of the context in which the ballet was created, specifically in 1964, during an important period in the consolidation of cultivated Albanian music. Zadeja's professional education at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory and his extensive experience in processing folkloric material directly influenced the construction of a distinctive compositional style, characterized by artistic depth and clarity of expression. An important part of the study is devoted to the analysis of the musical language of the ballet, highlighting features such as the creative use of folk motifs, the avoidance of direct quotation, and the construction of harmonic and rhythmic structures with national characteristics. In addition, the dramaturgical organization of the work is examined, built upon the legend of the "Stone of the Maiden," reflecting a consistent unity between the music and stage development. In conclusion, the study finds that the ballet "Delina" represents a major achievement in the history of Albanian music, serving as a model for subsequent developments in stage music and demonstrating the great potential of combining tradition with innovation in artistic creation.

Keywords

Çesk zadeja, delina, albanian music, folklore, ballet

Introduction

In the history of Albanian professional music, the ballet "*Delina*" is highlighted as the second ballet that energized the enthusiastic professional movement in music and made it possible for two major musical currents to confront one another, but also to draw closer together: that of folk songs and dances, and cultivated, professional music. As is well known, the latter—namely cultivated and professional music—was developed by the new generations of newly trained professional musicians who had studied in the former Soviet Union, as well as in other countries of the so-called Eastern European people's democracies.

The premiere of the ballet "*Delina*" by Çesk Zadeja was staged in May 1964, at a time when the composer had already become a fully formed and conscientious professional, shaped by his university studies at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow. This occurred shortly before he turned thirty-seven years old (he was born in June, while the ballet premiered in May).

Although his age at the time suggests that he was still quite young, he already had an enviable artistic biography. Ahead of others, and naturally more oriented than them, he had already composed the first Albanian symphony—the first work of Albanian professional music that placed it alongside those of other developed European countries. In addition, beyond ballads, vocal music such as cantatas and romances, instrumental miniatures, and songs, he had also composed music for cinema.

In the case of film music, particular national value should be attributed to works with historical themes, such as the film Skënderbeu, an Albanian-Soviet co-production that exalted the great figure of our national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu in the struggle against Ottoman invaders in our medieval history. Likewise, the film Tana dealt with contemporary themes and brought a modern sensibility that had not previously been heard in a major work such as feature-length cinema at that time.

Methodology

This study is based on the method of historical analysis of the context in which the ballet "*Delina*" by Çesk Zadeja was created, during an important period in the consolidation of cultivated Albanian music. It also relies on the musicological method, through the analysis of the dramaturgical concept and the compositional language of the work in question.

The processing of folkloric material has directly influenced the construction of a distinctive compositional style, characterized by artistic depth and clarity of expression. An important part of the study is devoted precisely to the analysis of the musical language of the ballet, highlighting features such as the creative use of folk motifs, the avoidance of direct quotation, and the construction of harmonic and rhythmic structures with national characteristics.

Furthermore, the paper examines the dramaturgical organization of the work, based on the legend of the "Stone of the Maiden," revealing a stable and organic relationship between the musical flow and stage development.

Development

In the history of Albanian professional music, the ballet "Delina" is emphasized as the second ballet that invigorated the enthusiastic professional music movement and made it possible for two major musical currents to confront and come closer to one another: that of folk songs and

dances, and cultivated, professional music.
As is well known, the latter—namely cultivated and professional music—was developed by new generations of newly trained professional musicians who had studied in the former Soviet Union, as well as in other countries of the so-called Eastern European people's democracies.
The premiere of the ballet "*Delina*" by the composer Çesk Zadeja was staged in May 1964, at a time when the composer had already become a conscious and fully formed professional, shaped by his university studies at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow. This occurred shortly before he turned thirty-seven years old (he was born in June, while the ballet premiered in May). Although his age at that time indicates that he was still quite young, he already possessed an enviable artistic biography. This is because, ahead of others and more oriented than them, he had already composed the first Albanian symphony—the first work of Albanian professional music that positioned it among those of other developed European countries.
In addition, beyond ballads, vocal music (romances and cantatas), and instrumental miniatures, he had also composed music for cinema. In this regard, particular national value should be attributed to his film scores with historical themes, such as the film Skënderbeu, an Albanian-Soviet co-production that exalted the great figure of the national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu in the struggle against Ottoman invaders in medieval history. We may also highlight the film Tana, which was grounded in contemporary themes and brought a modern sensibility previously unheard of in a major work such as feature-length cinema at the time.
With these achievements and many other successes - such as arrangements of folk songs and dances, vocal and choreographic stage works, partisan songs, and other mass songs that marked undeniable success in his creative life - it was believed that the composer would find it relatively easy to write a large-scale stage work, such as a ballet, and specifically his ballet "Delina".
Nevertheless, from the very beginnings of his musical creativity, Çesk Zadeja was distinguished by his scrupulousness and high standards. Although he worked with unusual speed, he found it difficult to deliver his scores without thoroughly refining them in both his sensitivity and his intellect.
He did this because he wished to present himself before the public with full conviction in what he had written and, moreover, to be certain of the clear and natural communication of the messages he conveyed. This approach characterized his major works, through which he aimed to reinforce a unique national compositional style. The same applies to his ballets, which are considered among his most accomplished compositions and have remained for a long time in the memory and attention of the public.
However, this was also the case with his instrumental and vocal music, as well as with all the other genres he composed. Although these works may not have carried the same weight as his major compositions, they nonetheless retained the flavor and character of folk and folkloric music, especially that of Albanian urban music, including folk songs and dances.
As emphasized, for example, by the composer Tonin Harapi in his publicistic article "Thoughts on the Music of the Ballet '*Delina*'," the musical language of the ballet "is profoundly Albanian; within it one hears our rich rhythmic patterns, our melodic lines, and our folk instruments. This music is not based merely on scalar intonations or cadences, but on an extract derived from the composer's experience in processing our motifs, using them with measure and in the right place, embodying them within the character or situation […]" [1].
These reflections by Tonin Harapi, along with those of other composers and musicians, contemporaries to Çesk Zadeja, once again demonstrate the complexity of his musical language.

1 Harapi, T. Thoughts on the music of the ballet "Delina", Newspaper "Drita", August 16, 1964, p. 2.

This was frequently highlighted in the press of the time when discussing the composer's creative laboratory - a process that resulted, in his compositions and especially in the ballet "Delina," in a kind of tonal indeterminacy. This feature remains characteristic of the entire ballet, but also appears in his other works, particularly in instrumental compositions.
Naturally, this constitutes one of the elements of originality of the ballet "Delina," one of the major works of Albanian professional music, a forerunner of national style and of the folk-inspired spirit found in other contemporary professional expressions.
In this context, Zadeja's contemporaries and fellow musicians have also pointed out compositional techniques such as the absence of the third (as in certain folk songs) within his harmonic language, as well as harmonic structures created through the superimposition of fourths and fifths—similar to the harmonic tuning of the çifteli—among other features.
Within the overall structural concept of the ballet, Çesk Zadeja himself wrote the libretto in collaboration and consultation with the choreographer Panajot Kanaçi. The libretto is based on the folk legend of the "Stone of the Maiden."
As cited by the composer and scholar Vasil S. Tole in his book "Çesk Zadeja in Albanian Music," the legend of the "Stone of the Maiden" serves as a narrative overture to the entire structure of the ballet and begins with the following verses:

Arban, the old man of Lik Dasha,
Cross-legged upon the "Maiden's Stone,"
Beside the fire among the walnut trees,
Whose flame raises a banner toward the sky,
On an August night filled with stars,
Beyond the mountains, across the pastures,
He tells the story of two young lovers,
A rare legend among companions,
Recounted like a fairy tale. [2]

In general, the ballet is written according to the stage tradition of closed numbers, and its entire dramaturgy is organized along these lines. Based on these numbers, the work ensures a gradual intensification of contrasts and conflicts that are present throughout.
Such numbers as "Folk Dance", *"Friends Arrive at the Celebration,"* and "Zoga and Shpendi" appear as a kind of grand introduction to the ballet. In a way, this large introduction presents the main characters and their interactions within the developmental structures of the first act, which naturally mark the starting point of the entire narrative that follows.
In the second act, the tension continues to rise, and within its specific and general situations, one can distinguish numbers such as *"Dance of the Warriors", "Trina's Tale", "Arban's Monologue", "Scene with Shoti, Arban, and the Warriors", "The Battle", "Shoti's Monologue", "Delina and Shoti", "The Leap from the Rock", "The Villagers Bring Delina"* and *"The Duel"*.
All of these, at the conclusion of the work, give way to the epilogue, which represents the final moment of the ballet. Through it, the dramatic storm created by the first two acts subsides - shaped not only by the aforementioned numbers, but also by other connecting and developmental structures that complete the overall dramaturgical unity of the work.
As the composer Tonin Harapi once again noted in his article "*Thoughts on the Music of the Ballet* '*Delina*'", written after its first performance, the ballet was "a serious three-year effort,

2 Tole S. V. Çesk Zadeja in Albanian music (Life and Works), Prishtina, 2022, p. 422.

the result of professional technical formation, following the study of well-known classical and modern world literature. At the same time, the composer possesses a rich body of our national material, which he knows and has worked on for years, especially within the Ensemble of Songs and Dances" [3].

For Çesk Zadeja, it was a major and by no means easy task to balance the relationship between his classical education and folk music and folklore. Likewise, it was not simple for him to connect new creations - guided by progressive world music - with the ethnic roots of traditional Albanian music.

He was aware that "only when professional culture reaches the peak of its maturity can it be nourished by new qualities emerging from folk culture. This is a fact recognized by all professional cultures in the course of their formation; even more so can we speak of the formation of our national culture, which is still in the process of developing its professional characteristics" [4].

With the ballet "*Delina*", Çesk Zadeja fulfilled his initial concepts that, in order to be truly national in the depth of creativity and artistic personality, one must know the roots of folk thought and creative expression.

The point here is not the mechanical transfer of folk creativity into the structures of cultivated music, because in every case this would remain an artificial relationship and would not serve the intended processes at all.

The creator must be persistent, Çesk Zadeja further emphasized, in order to uncover even the simplest tendencies within folkloric creativity through study and scientific interpretation, in accordance with the demands of contemporary art.

With this worldview and aspiration, Çesk Zadeja succeeded in composing, even during the years of the communist dictatorship, a work that transcended the dogmatic principles and characteristics of socialist realism. Ultimately, it has been recorded in the annals of Albanian musical culture as a work of free patriotic inspiration, as the ballet "Delina" essentially is - a work that, not only at the time it was written but also afterward and up to the present day, has been widely discussed, often with a tendency to critique its free and non-dogmatic expressions.

In its overall character, it belongs to all times. The masterful pages of Zadeja's music -such as "Arban's Monologue", "Love Duet", "Dance of Protest", "Shoti's Variation", the iso-polyphonic girls' dance "Dance of the Flowers", based on pentatonic scales, and especially the final music of the ballet, the "Epilogue" - may be regarded as treatises of the new school of national music. These works, regardless of the significant developmental shifts in Albanian professional music and the new spaces it has created for its audiences, have remained and will continue to remain as foundational cornerstones for any new development with a contemporary sensibility.

They will remain such not only for new initiatives in the creation of large-scale musical works, but especially in the defined direction of Albanian stage music, particularly opera and ballet. Above all, they will endure as foundational elements of the national and folk identity that this music achieved throughout different periods of development in stage composition - an identity that, without any doubt, has gained recognition in every era of Albanian music with a national orientation.

In fact, this working practice was conceived and implemented by Çesk Zadeja over the years, as he himself attested through his own words:

"In the search for objective professional criteria, as a creator, I have not been guided simply by intuition or creative imagination, however well-argued, but by a determined and persistent study,

3 Harapi, T. Thoughts on the music of the ballet "Delina", Newspaper "Drita", August 16, 1964, p. 2.

4 Zadeja, Ç, The Self-Perception of the Process, Tirana, 2007, p. 17.

which has led me precisely to the conscious acceptance of the fundamental criteria that, to a certain extent, have also shaped my convictions as a creator".
Nevertheless, the name of Çesk Zadeja would lay the foundation stones of these processes. As a result of these aspirations, Albanian music began to acquire a long-missing identity within the professional sphere - one characterized by strong national content and vivid expressive colors.
In reality, this was not surprising, as the ranks of composers, singers, and instrumentalists trained in prestigious music schools with long-standing traditions had begun to expand in Albania as well, making such expectations entirely natural.
These processes continued to exert influence even as Albanian national music began to seek clearer paths toward Western European orientation, bringing with it new national values shaped by clearly contemporary aims.
According to the composer Kozma Lara, in his writing "Some Thoughts on the Ballet 'Delina' by Çesk Zadeja", "in 'Delina' we hear deeply Albanian music, with vivid characteristic colors and the weight of inherited traditional thought. The dance-like melodicism of the ballet is based on the intonations of folk music, which are not taken directly, not quoted, but have served as an initial embryo for the construction of the musical material. The composer freely expands, develops, and refines this material".
Along this path, not only did the professional musical creativity of Çesk Zadeja continue in consolidating the professional foundations of cultivated music, but so too did the creative work of other contemporary Albanian composers.
Likewise, the path would continue with younger composers, who also relied on musical and folkloric creativity collected from across Albania by skilled and passionate musicians. In this sense, the most important contributions of Albanian folklore and of folk songs and dances had reached such a level of maturity that they could be readily compared, even competitively, with their counterparts around the world. Wherever they were performed - on Albanian stages as well as international ones - they left lasting impressions through their quality, originality, and contemporary relevance, both in their conceptual and thematic dimensions and in their formal musical construction, especially in melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, and vocal-timbral expression.

Conclusions

Çesk Zadeja composed the ballet "Delina" not only with heart, but also with intellect, thereby offering a valuable testament to his creative seriousness and to his professional convictions - shaped during his studies at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory - as well as to the highest human sentiments and their importance in every individual's life.
For these reasons, the beautiful, meaningful, and nationally flavored music of this work stands as evidence of a deep affinity with traditional music, while at the same time demonstrating a tendency toward its refinement through the professional selection, processing, and use of musical material - whether in intonation or rhythm - without falling into folklorism, but rather carefully distilling its "essence".
These are precisely the reasons why the national music of the ballet "Delina" remains not only beautiful, striking, and rich in diverse contrasting colors, but also a powerful testament to the devoted spirit of the composer and the ballet's performers toward their country and its evolving cultural identity.

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The albanian flute repertoire in the context of composers educated in modern times

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Abstract

On the eve of the 1990s, together with the overcoming of ideological barriers, the need arose to integrate the Albanian musical world into the contemporary European music scene. European and world music, in relation to the process of musical and compositional evolution, underwent different stages of experience and development, whereas in Albania the lack of information and artistic exposure caused the musical creativity of the 1990s to appear somewhat strained. The aim of this study is to examine, through both theoretical and practical perspectives, the characteristics and modernist approaches found in Albanian flute repertoire, highlighting its development through the lens of composers shaped in the modern and digital period. The significance of this research lies in its educational and referential value, as well as in its contribution to contemporary discourse by analyzing the expressive potential of the flute. The selected works were composed by two young composers who were educated during the flourishing of modernist and avant-garde trends in Albania. The works "Echi d'Oriente" by Lodi Luka and "Trio for Two Flutes and Piano" by Ajet Çekiçi, part of my concert repertoire, are examined through both theoretical analysis and performance practice. The methodology employed in this study is primarily based on systematic research and analytical examination of the selected works, incorporating a comparative approach as well as the analysis of both theoretical and practical sources. Through the identification and evaluation of the defining characteristics of Albanian flute repertoire from the perspective of contemporary Albanian composers, this study concludes that the flute with its extensive range, brilliant timbre, and rich coloristic capacity, offers considerable expressive potential in the communication of emotions and ideas.

Keywords

Sound, melodic line, melodic fragments, elements

Introduction

Musical education in Albania, in comparison with other European countries, developed relatively later due to historical, political, and economic circumstances. The evolution of Albanian instrumental art has similarly experienced its own ups and downs[1] . The flute, regarded as a traditional instrument within Albanian culture, has occupied a significant role in the country's musical creativity. It has contributed both to the sphere of traditional music, through its presence in various folk ensembles and to academic instrumental art, where it appears in chamber music ensembles, symphony orchestras, and also in a soloist role [2].

In the period immediately following the 1990s, Albanian flute repertoire experienced significant development and transformation. Elements drawn from traditional music and the influence of classical music, which had largely shaped the repertoire for this instrument, began to intertwine with new and modern compositional elements, giving the flute a different artistic perspective. Broader aesthetic changes and technological developments led composers to consider the flute not only as a musical instrument that produces sound, but also as a multidimensional experimental instrument. Through the exploration of extended techniques and innovative sonic possibilities, the instrument expressed a wider and more nuanced spectrum of emotional states. According to Prof. Vasil Tole, Albanian music, in comparison with other European countries, experienced a non-linear[3] development. Albanian compositions for the flute in the 1990s, represented by experienced composers, in some cases appeared in the form of a kind of artistic revolt, reflecting the accumulated pressure of restrictions and limitations imposed by the political circumstances of the time[4] . Among younger composers, educated and trained in the modern contexts, the perception and transmission of new compositional models emerged, to a considerable extent, through more "linear" developments. Likewise, their approach to flute composition, particularly in relation to contemporary techniques, evolved in a more natural manner.

Lodi Luka, a composer, pianist, and conductor, was born in Shkodër in 1980. He graduated from the Conservatory "Giuseppe Verdi" in Milan in 2005 with a degree in piano and later completed his studies in composition at the Conservatory "Stanislao Giacomantonio" in Cosenza in 2008. His work "*Echi d'Oriente*" [5] for flute and piano is distinguished by its rich expressive language and the instrumental technical elements it employs, in which musical influences from various currents of contemporary music are interwoven with elements of Albanian traditional music.

Ajet Çekiçi, a composer, was born in Pogradec in 1983 and graduated in composition the Academy of Arts in Tirana (today the *University of Arts*) in 2005. His work "*Trio for Two Flutes and Piano*," written in an atonal style, is distinguished by the use of innovative compositional elements.

1 Shuteriqi-Prela, Z. World New Music Magazine 3" (November 1993), p. 46.
2 Sokoli, R. Albanian musical folklore - Organography, 1975.
3 Tole, S. V. On a Chronicle of Albanian Music, Revista AKS, 1999, p. 44.
4 Brahimi, R. Arts and their development in RPSSH, Printing House "8 Nëntori", 1981.
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Methodology

The methodology used is mainly based on the research-scientific analysis of selected materials.
• Comparative method.
• Research method.
• Analysis of theoretical and practical sources.

Lodi Luka – "*Echi d'Oriente*" for flute and piano (2011)

The sound of the flute is frequently associated with notions of distance, exoticism, and mystery. The title of this composition evokes these elements, which shape its character and are realized through rhythm, harmonic language, melodic elements, timbre, and contrasting musical ideas. The piece is constructed through different episodes that create both contrasts and interconnections, forming a musical mosaic which, over time, results in an approximately three-part ABA structure[6] . In the opening section, we hear a clearly defined theme that constitutes the first episode and introduces the elements that will be further developed in the following bars (1–32).

Figure 1. Example 1

It can be observed that the soloist's theme in bars (1–5) is constructed on a scale containing two augmented seconds B, C, D#, E, F#, G, A#. This corresponds to the Divan mode scale (perde e ahengut DIVAN), a musical scale of Oriental origin characterized by two augmented seconds, as described by Vasil Tole in *Musical Folklore: Monodia*[7] . The same scale reappears in bar 21, transposed a semitone higher C, B♭, A, G♭, F, E, D♭, C.
The melodic line of the flute is therefore constructed using augmented-second intervals,

6 See more: Lara, K. Harapi, T. & Paparisto, A. Analysis of Musical Works, Higher Institute of Arts, SHBLSH, 1985.
7 See more: Tole, S. V. Musical folklore: Albanian Monody, Tirana: SHBLU, 1999. See more: Tole, S. V. Musical folklore: Albanian Monody, Tirana: SHBLU, 1999.

characteristic of the so-called "Arabic" scale, or Divan mode, producing rhythmic-melodic figurations reminiscent of arabesque designs. In the piano accompaniment, we observe the constant repetition of a rhythmic model with a continuous character in the bass register, along with a dialogic exchange between the two instruments. The harmony alternates between static moments and rather harsh parallel shifts of chords [8]. The overall is marked by a certain essentiality that immediately places the listener within a distinctly tribal sonic atmosphere. At bar 33, a contrasting episode begins, where the previous rhythmic frenzy gives way to a more meditative moment.

Figure 2. Example 2

From a timbral perspective, the use of microtones further emphasizes over an extended duration, the intervals of the Divan scale. The archaic atmosphere that emerges, along with the interplay of timbres across different registers, is also highlighted by the piano part through its coloristic chords. This meditative episode is interrupted by two soloistic interventions: the piano in bars (43–53) and the flute in bars (68–76), which create an additional contrast with the previously suspended temporal and atmospheric setting.

Figure 3. Example 3

In bars (83–142), we observe the central episode of the piece, which extensively develops the elements introduced in the first episode.

8 Seemore: De la Motte D. Harmony, Original title: "Harmonielehre, Bärenreiter", translated by Sokol Shupo, ASMUS, 2000.

Figure 4. Example 4

The character of this section is highly rhythmic, with the instruments engaging in dialogue through virtuosic passages or jointly creating timbral figurations. The writing remains quite essential, yet rhythmic and intervallic elements are continuously developed. Attention to timbre is evident in the exploration and combination of different registers across the instruments.
The return of the meditative episode in bars (97–106), serves as a connecting bridge to the reprise of the first episode[9] .

Figure 5. Example 5

Which reappears in a shortened form and leads to a climax in bars (121–132). Here, the instruments maximize their energy through intensified rhythm, dynamics, and register shifts.

9 See more: Caplin, E. W. Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Figure 6. Example 6

At the point of highest intensity, the flute remains suspended in the extreme register, treated in a rather harsh manner through repeated staccato notes and frullato effects. Here, a bar with a fermata sustains the tension between a technical and energetic impossibility to continue on the flute and the final reprise of the meditative episode. This episode returns briefly, as a distant memory, and concludes with a few suspended piano chords, closing the composition in a mysterious manner and evoking, like an echo, a distant atmosphere.

Figure 7. Example 7

Ajet Çekiçi – "Trio" for two flutes and piano (2020)

This work is structured in the form of a rondo with two episodes[10] . Since traditional functional harmony is not observed, the conventional rondo structure is likewise not strictly maintained.
The rondo form in this piece consists of: A, B, A1, C, and Coda.
The first section is marked Allegro (A) and continues until bar 53.

10 See,more: Rossen, Ch. The Clasical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, New York: Norton, 1972.

Figure 8. Example 8

This refrain is constructed in 3/8 meter. During its development, and based on my experience in studying, analyzing, and performing the piece, we observe contratempos that provide a clear panorama of the rhythmic patterns characteristic of Northern Albanian dances. In bars (3–8), we encounter the sequences of chromatic motion over a pedal of an undefined five-note chord [11] (B, C, C#, D, G), which recurs intermittently throughout this section. This creates a sense of harmonic ambiguity, combined with expressive dynamics (f and ff) in bars (11–15), imitating the accompaniment of a percussion instrument.

Figure 9. Example 9

In bar 10, a melodic motion reminiscent of the Schoenbergian style appears in the right hand of the piano accompaniment, based on the twelve-semitone scale. This is supported by the left hand through harmonically indeterminate chords that function primarily in a percussive[12] , supportive role. Following this, the soloist enters with the theme of the refrain (A) in bar 11. The theme is more extended and develops through long notes, accompanied by movements within selected twelve-semitone scales, occasionally in fragmented forms.

11 See more: Schoenberg, A. Basics of Musical Composition, translated by Sokol Shupo, SHBLU, Tirana, 1998.
12 Ibid.

This creates a fresh and somewhat suspended atmosphere, which gradually stabilizes between bars 36 and 45, leading into the connecting section with the first episode (“B”). The second section, the first episode (“B”), is marked Adagio and spans bars (54–83).

Figure 10. Example 10

In this episode, the extreme crescendos (<) are particularly striking; thus, nuance and dynamics play a central role in conveying the composer’s idea. Harmonically, the coexistence of the tonic with the altered double dominant immediately introduces a sense of tonal instability at the outset of the episode. From a thematic perspective, the first episode (“B”) is constructed using material derived from the refrain and its introduction. From a harmonic perspective, the presence of major and minor seconds in the bass produces an effect of tension, fear, and uncertainty. This atmosphere is further intensified by the accompaniment in the higher register, which is altered in relation to the lower the registerbars (60–80).

Figure 11. Example 11

The presentation of the refrain “A1” bars (84–133) mirrors its initial appearance in the Rondo. The flute technique may be slightly simplified on this occasion, but the accompaniment remains unchanged from its first initial entry.

Figure 12. Example 12

The passage connecting the refrain "A1" to the second episode "C" follows the same pattern as the connection between "A" and "B", featuring a unison in *ff* , between the two solo instruments bars (128–131).

Figure 13. Example 13

The second episode, "C", represents the climactic section of the piece. In this section, the melothematic, melorhythmic, and harmonic material from the refrain "A" and episode "B" is further developed and elaborated. Within the 3/8 meter, the dialogues between the instrumental lines increasingly unfold with vivid coloristic contrasts. This episode, "C", functions as a variation of the first two parts of the rondo, harmonically and metrically, as well as in the accompaniment. The piano pedal part remains almost identical to the dissonant and harmonically indeterminate chords of the first section "A".

Figure 14. Example 14

Next, we encounter the fifth and final section, the *Coda*, which is brief and marked accelerando. In this section, the contratempo element and the melorhythmic element are presented simultaneously. Additionally, an [13]indeterminate five-note chord is employed, bringing the work to its conclusion.

Figure 15. Example 15

In conclusion, based also on my interpretative experience with these works, it can be stated that both compositions are constructed with a rich harmonic language and melodic elements, featuring pronounced timbral and rhythmic contrasts. In Lodi Luka's "*Echi d'Oriente*" (2011), beyond the contrasts between episodes, we also observe their interweaving, offering a structural panorama that resembles a three-part form (A–B–A). The themes are clearly defined, and the harmonic line is built upon the Divan mode, a scale characteristic of Oriental music.
In contrast, Ajet Çekiçi's "*Trio*" for two flutes and piano (2020) is composed in an atonal framework, incorporating elements of twelve-tone techniques and overlapping functions. This work is constructed upon a percussive foundation derived from the rhythmic motifs of Northern Albanian dances , with the 3/8 meter and contratempos linking these elements. The left hand of the piano functions as a percussive instrument, playing over harmonically unstable dual or triple function, which gives the work a distinctly modern character, enriched with contemporary colors and sonorities, leaving behind the traditional sound world of pre-1990 compositions.

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Music as emotional architecture: Dramatic atmosphere and the role of sound in performing arts

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Abstract

This study reconceptualizes music in theatre as a semiotic structure and a mechanism of performative temporality, approaching it as an emotional architecture that shapes the audience’s aesthetic experience. Beyond its illustrative or accompanying function, music is analyzed as a constitutive force of dramaturgy, capable of organizing stage time, articulating dramatic tension, and constructing an affective aesthetic that dynamically interacts with the actor’s body and the performative space. In this sense, sound does not function as a peripheral layer, but as an active system of meaning that generates narrative, rhythm, and emotional density. The methodological approach combines musical analysis with dramaturgical reading and the observation of performative processes, including case studies from diverse contemporary stage practices. Particular attention is given to the creative relationship between director and composer as a space of aesthetic negotiation, where music is conceived and developed as an integral component of the directorial vision. The study also examines the perceptual dimension of the audience, exploring how sonic structures influence the formation of anticipation, memory, and emotional response during performance. Additionally, it addresses the role of technology in transforming the materiality of sound and in creating immersive sonic environments that expand the expressive potential of the stage. The findings suggest that music functions as a regulator of dramatic energy and as a medium that intensifies affective experience, establishing a deeper coherence between narrative structure and emotional reception. The study argues that the strategic integration of music in contemporary dramaturgy represents a new paradigm of scenic thinking, where sound, body, and space interact in constructing a complex and interdisciplinary performative experience.

Keywords

Musicality, dramaturgy, rhythm, directing, performance

Introduction

Music in theatre represents a fundamental dimension of artistic communication, closely interacting with both the dramatic text and stage performance. It is not merely a background or accompaniment to the action, but a distinct structure that shapes the rhythm, intensity, and emotional nuances of the performance. In this sense, music can be understood as the "emotional architecture" of the stage: a mechanism that builds tension, generates anticipation, and regulates the relationship between the audience and the dramatic world of the characters. The title of this study, *"Music as Emotional Architecture: Dramatic Atmosphere and the Role of Sound"*, reflects this perspective, emphasizing the active and structuring role of music in performing theatre.

In the history of dramaturgy, Bertolt Brecht stands as the clearest example of employing music as a tool to structure and communicate dramatic concepts. He regarded sound not merely as an accompaniment, but as a component that guides the audience's emotional perception and reinforces the message of the drama.[1] From a contemporary perspective, Jill Dolan emphasizes that music can function as an "emotional architecture" shaping the rhythm, tension, and dramatic experience of the stage, making it an element that closely collaborates with both the structure of the work and the stage performance. [2]

The dramatic atmosphere emerges from the interplay of multiple elements—text, movement, lighting, space, and acting—but sound occupies a distinct and singular role. It acts directly upon the audience's emotional dimension, often eliciting immediate and unconscious responses. Musical parameters such as rhythm, timbre, dynamics, and deliberate silence construct an internal language that shapes perception and the intensity of the staged situation, positioning music as a subtle yet powerful guide of dramatic atmosphere.

Collaboration between the director and composer is essential to integrate sound in a way that functions as an emotional framework. Directorial decisions determine the rhythm of performance and the logic of the drama, while music structures the narrative not merely as a background but as an active component of the theatrical experience. This approach grants music an independent and indispensable role in shaping both the emotional and dramaturgical experience. Musical theatre is a highly comprehensive art form that encompasses various artistic fields such as music, drama, dance, and more. Originating in Europe and the United States in the 20th century, it represents a type of musical art that embodies the cultural choices and aesthetic sensibilities of people.[3] The aim of this study is to analyze the principal functions of music in theatre, focusing on its role in constructing dramatic atmosphere and influencing the emotional and narrative organization of performance. By employing an interdisciplinary approach that combines musical and dramaturgical analysis, this research seeks to provide an in-depth perspective on music as a structural, semantic, and emotional component in performing theatre.

A broad definition of theatre is: "any event in which all participants find themselves in the same place at the same time, taking part in a limited set of activities." [4]

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2 Jill Dolan, The Feminist Spectator as Critic (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988).

3 Bian, "On the Artistic Characteristics and Practice of Musical Theater in Music Education in Colleges and Universities," International Journal of Education and Humanities 18, no. 2 (2025): 132–136, https://doi.org/10.54097/c5f0tk83.

4 Erika Fischer-Lichte, The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2014), 18.

Literature review

Studies on music in theatre have emphasized its role in shaping the atmosphere and supporting dramatic action. However, empirical analysis of compositional practice shows that music often operates beyond an illustrative function, directly influencing the structuring of stage rhythm, emotional intensity, and the organization of dramatic tension. [5]

Studies on the performing arts are often fragmented, and interdisciplinary communication is lacking. As Brown (2024) points out, 'There is very little interaction between the scientific fields devoted, respectively, to music, theatre, literature, and visual art. [6]

This highlighted the need for a more integrated approach and for a deeper dialogue among scholars of music, theatre, and art, creating space for research that interweaves these fields and contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the performing arts.Within the literature review on the role of music and sound in theatre, Ross Brown, in the preface to the book *Music and Sound in European Theatre: Practices, Performances, Perspectives,* points out several key issues that emerge in the treatment of this field. He emphasizes that a 'sense of the discipline being mapped out' continues to exist in a field that is still 'struggling to find its lasting stability,' while 'taxonomic uncertainty' remains an ongoing challenge that frustrates both professionals and students (cited in Frendo 2025, xii, xiv).[7] In contemporary theatrical practice, the creative process between composer and director demonstrates that musical decisions actively intervene in shaping performance timing, dramatic transitions, and emotional climaxes. This suggests that music functions as an organizing structure of the stage experience, constructing an emotional framework within which the performative action unfolds. While the existing literature provides theoretical analyses of the aesthetic role of music in theatre, studies examining composers' professional perceptions of music's structural function are lacking, opening a research space to analyze music as emotional architecture—not only at a theoretical level but also based on concrete creative experience..[8] According to Kaye and LeBrech, sound design is a creative and aesthetic practice in which silences, sounds, and accompanying music are purposeful and influence the rhythm of the performance.[9] In my view, this makes sound a fundamental and active element in the theatrical creative process, affecting not only rhythm but also the intensity and dramatic dynamics of the performance.

Building on the studies of Leonard Meyer and Daniel Levitin, I understood that music exerts a powerful influence on emotional perception, eliciting responses at various levels of consciousness.[10] For me, this underscores that in contemporary theatre, music is not merely a background element but an active tool that shapes the emotional dynamics of the performance and intensifies the tensions that actors aim to convey, making my perception of the performance more conscious and profound.

This project draws on the theories of Richard Schechner and Erving Goffman, who emphasize that performance is not merely a presentation but an act that transforms and generates meaning

5 Jill Dolan, The Feminist Spectator as Critic (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.

6 Steven Brown, "The Performing Arts Combined: The Triad of Music, Dance, and Narrative," Frontiers in Psychology 15 (2024): Article 1344354, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1344354.

7 Mario Frendo, "Book Reviews: Music and Sound in European Theatre: Practices, Performances, Perspectives, ed. David Roesner and Tamara Yasmin Quick," Studies in Theatre and Performance (2025), xii, xiv, https://doi.org/10.1080/14682761.2025.2560710.

8 Bertolt Brecht, Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

9 Dolan, The Feminist Spectator as Critic.

10 Meyer 1956; Levitin 2006.

in real time.[11] Schechner views performance as a dynamic and interactive process, in which actors, audience, and environment engage with one another, blurring the boundaries between reality and representation. Goffman expands on this idea by showing that all social interactions are performances, in which individuals construct their identities through body language, speech, and behavior.. [12] This perspective indicates that music in contemporary theatre is not merely a background element but an active part of the performance, intensifying tension and directly influencing the audience's emotional experience.

Interestingly, according to Jill Dolan, performance can create a highly powerful emotional and social connection between actors and audience, elevating the theatrical experience to a moment in which the audience feels not only what might appear as a "better world" but also how that world might be experienced, even if only for an instant. [13] This concept leads me to think that music in contemporary theatre, beyond its dramaturgical function, plays a similar role in creating a shared emotional atmosphere, intensifying the audience's reactions and privileging the emotional-aesthetic experience of the performance.

The fundamental aim of artistic education is to 'educate people.' Even if a person possesses a rich reserve of knowledge, it is difficult to become a useful pillar of society without positive values and ideological understanding. In general terms, based on social changes and historical upheavals, the goal of artistic education is continually deepened and improved, while the influence of aesthetic and artistic education activities increasingly contributes to the comprehensive development of knowledge, emotions, and understanding.The combination of music and speech/language in songs with words is one of the most powerful examples of inter-domain coupling in the arts. [14]

The combination of music and speech/language in songs with words is one of the most powerful examples of inter-domain coupling in the arts. [15]

From my personal experience and reflection, I find it remarkable how music can influence theatrical perception in such diverse ways. In Bertolt Brecht's work, sounds fragment emotion and provoke critical reflection, prompting me to pause, analyze, and discern the hidden messages within the stage action.[16] In contrast, in Richard Wagner's work, music becomes the backbone of dramatic intensity, immersing me in the emotional flow of the piece and creating a continuity that links every moment on stage to a profound feeling, the leitmotifs serve as musical memory and carriers of meaning.[17] This duality helps me understand that music is not merely an aesthetic support: it can serve as a tool for critical distancing or as an architecture for emotional intensification—and this dual function makes the theatrical experience both unforgettable and transformative for my personal and critical perception.

In a critical reading of the ideas of Richard C.

11 Schechner, Richard. Performance Theory. Revised and expanded edition. New York: Routledge, 2003.

12 Goffman, Erving. The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. New York: Anchor Books, 1974.

13 Dolan, Jill. Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005

14 Yu Chang, "Research on Modern and Contemporary Art Education Thought," Adult and Higher Education 5, no. 16 (2023): 3, https://doi.org/10.23977/aduhe.2023.051607.

15 Steven Brown, "The Performing Arts Combined: The Triad of Music, Dance, and Narrative," Frontiers in Psychology 15 (2024): Article 1344354,https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1344354.

16 Brecht, Bertolt. A Short Organum for the Theatre. London: Methuen, 1949; Brecht, Bertolt. Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic. Edited by John Willett. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.

17 Wagner, Richard. The Artwork of the Future. Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1849.

Beachem and Peter Brook, I identify a shared theoretical axis that positions music at the center of the ontology of performing arts. Beachem's assertion that the art of stage realization can be authentic only when its source is music [18], according to my interpretation, this implies a structural conception of sound as the organizing foundation of dramatic action. This idea suggests that music does not function as a supplementary element, but as the rhythmic and emotional matrix upon which the aesthetic coherence of the performance is constructed.

Complementarily, Peter Brook frames music as a dynamic force that shapes the theatrical experience, positioning it as a "dramatic character" within the performance. [19] In my interpretation, this approach transforms music from a decorative element into a fundamental factor of stage meaning. It intensifies tension, guides the audience's perception, and co-shapes the narrative development with equal weight to the text and acting.

In conclusion, my reflection on this theoretical review leads me to assert that music should be understood as a constitutive component of the emotional and semantic architecture of the stage—not merely as a decorative element, but as a foundational structure that ensures the aesthetic unity of the theatrical work.

Methodology

Qualitative research broadly refers to a category of research approaches that produce findings without reliance on quantitative measurement or statistical analysis. [20]

To explore the role of music as emotional architecture in shaping dramatic atmosphere, this study employed a quantitative approach by collecting data directly from composers. A structured electronic questionnaire was distributed to 10 composers with experience in theatrical productions, providing a comprehensive overview of their professional practice.The instrument included 10 closed-ended questions designed to capture their perceptions of music's impact on stage emotion, the use of musical elements to build dramatic tension, and collaboration with directors during the compositional process.

The data were analyzed using descriptive methods, highlighting key trends and the ways in which composers perceive music as a fundamental dramaturgical and aesthetic component in theatrical performances.

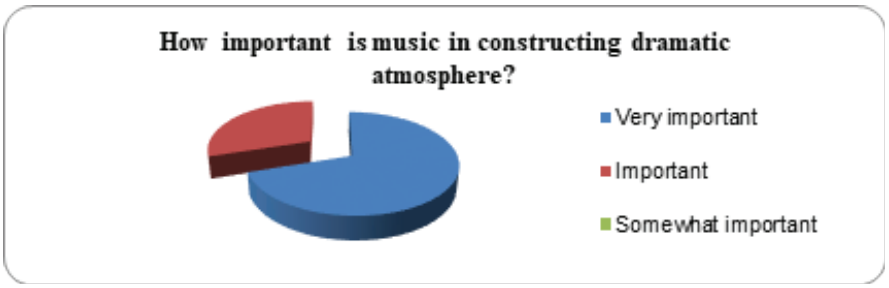

Figure 1. The importance of music in constructing dramatic atmosphere

This figure shows that 7 composers (70%) consider music to be very important, while 3 composers (30%) consider it important, in constructing dramatic atmosphere.

18 Richard C. Beachem, Adolphe Appia: Artist and Visionary of the Modern Theatre (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994)

19 Peter Brook, The Empty Space (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1968)

20 Corbin J. M. and A. L. Strauss, Basics of Qualitative Research, 4th ed. (California: Sage Publications, 2015).

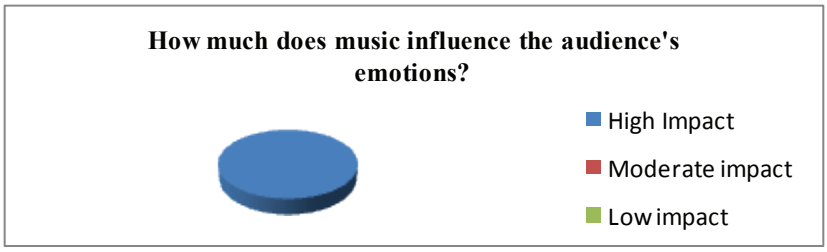

Figure 2. Music influences the audience's emotion

This figure shows that all 10 respondents (100%) agree that music has a high impact on the audience.

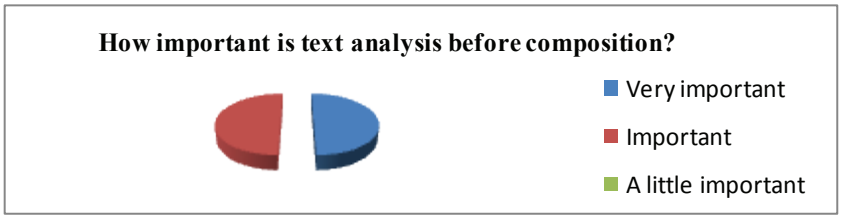

Figure 3. The importance of text analysis before composition

This figure shows that the respondents are divided into two groups: 5 (50%) consider it very important, and 5 (50%) consider it important.

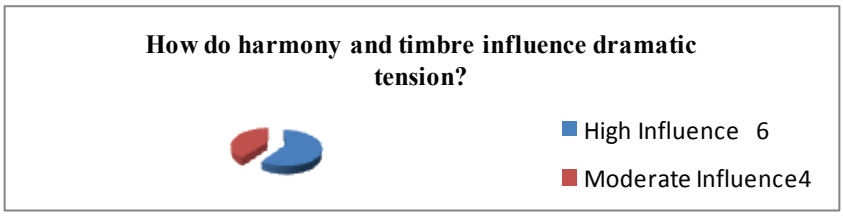

Figure 4. The influence of harmony and timbre on dramatic tension

This figure shows that 6 respondents (60%) consider the impact to be high, while 4 respondents (40%) consider it moderate.

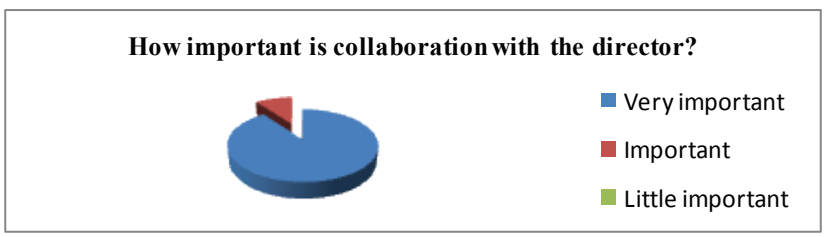

Figure 5. Importance of collaboration with the director

This figure shows that it is very important for 9 (90%) and important for 1 (10%)

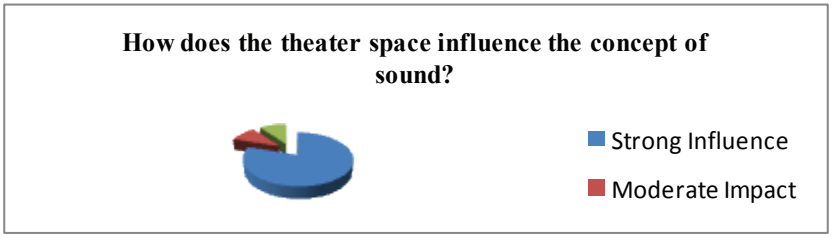

Figure 6. Influence of theater space on the conceptualization of sound

This figure shows that the space has a strong influence for 8 participants (80%), an influence for 1 participant (10%), and a minor influence for 1 participant (10%).

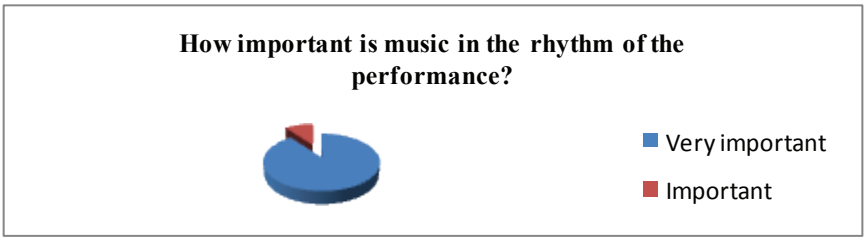

Figure 7. Importance of music in the rhythm of the performance

This figure shows that 9 respondents consider it very important (90%), and 1 respondent considers it important (10%).

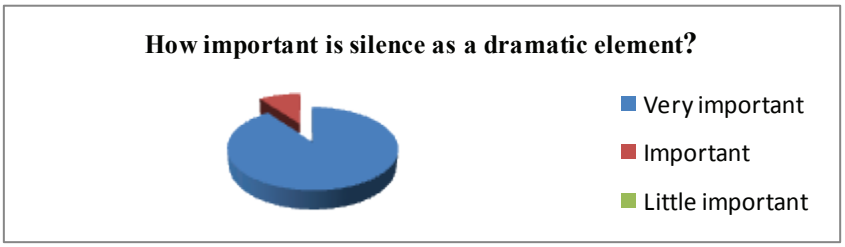

Figure 8. Importance of silence as a dramatic element

This figure shows that silence is considered very important by 9 participants (90%) and important by 1 participant (10%).

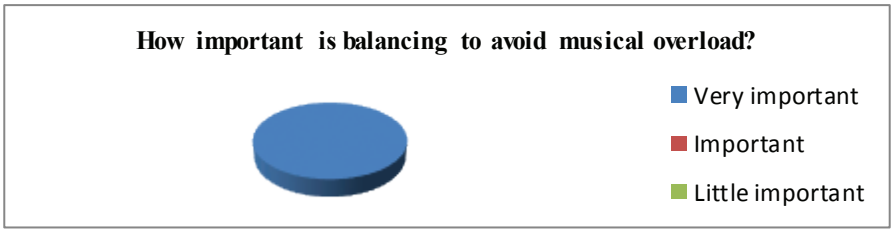

Figure 9. Balance in avoiding musical overload

This figure shows that all respondents consider avoidance to be very important (10 participants, (100%)

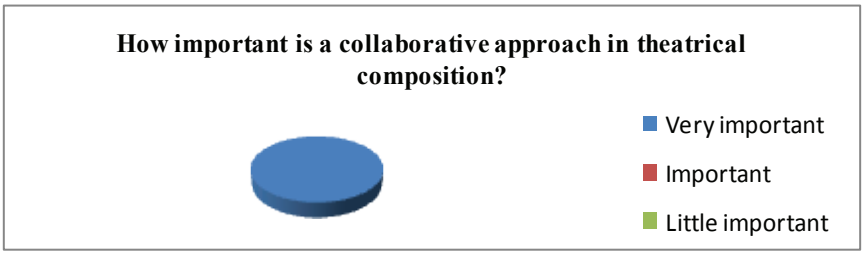

Figure 10. Collaborative approach in theatrical composition

This figure also shows that all 10 respondents (100%) consider it very important

Results and discussions

The results of this study indicate that music in theater is not merely an external layer placed over stage action, but a component that constructs the emotional interior of the scene and intentionally organizes the dramatic experience. Sound does not simply accompany the drama; it guides it on levels often inarticulable by words, creating a parallel emotional reality that coexists with the text and acting, directly influencing how the audience perceives conflict and tension.

Thus, the results of this study show that music in theatre is not merely an accompaniment to stage action, [21] but constructs the emotional dimension of the scene[22], guides the dramatic narrative, and creates a parallel emotional reality that coexists with the text and the actors' performance.[23] This confirms the findings of the existing literature, according to which music directs emotions and the perception of conflict in performance(Brown, 2024; Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008; Koelsch, 2014).

One of the key findings is that music functions as a structure organizing the dramatic atmosphere, akin to architecture: it creates emotional space, directs the flow of sensations, and shapes a "psychological environment" in which the action unfolds. It establishes the internal boundaries of the dramatic situation and determines whether a scene is perceived as heavy, tense, or calm.

21 Steven Brown, "The Performing Arts Combined: The Triad of Music, Dance, and Narrative," Frontiers in Psychology 15 (2024): Article 1344354, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1344354.

22 Patrik N. Juslin and Daniel Västfjäll, "Emotional Responses to Music," Proceedings of the Royal Society B 275, no. 1634 (2008): 2803–2810, https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2007.1230.

23 Stefan Koelsch, "Brain Correlates of Music-Evoked Emotions," Nature Reviews Neuroscience 15 (2014): 170–180, https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn3666.

Sound often impacts the audience even before dialogue conveys full meaning, setting the emotional tone and anticipating feelings.
Music plays a decisive role in organizing the internal rhythm of the scene. Through variations in tempo, intensity, and dynamics, it structures the dramatic flow, defines performance timing, and guides tension. It accelerates, halts, or emphasizes action and frequently prepares the emotional climax of the scene. In this way, music acts as a dramaturgical instrument, building expectation and emotional intensity rather than merely serving as background.
Music also functions as a language of dramatic subtext: it can complement dialogue, but equally often it contradicts it, revealing the anxiety, fear, or internal conflict of the characters. This interpretive layer enriches dramaturgical meaning and provides an emotional experience that cannot be constructed through words alone.
Silence and musical pauses play an important role: the absence of sound creates space for reflection and psychological tension, making music a fully integrated dramatic component. This positions sound within a broad dramaturgical dimension, where both its presence and absence serve as tools for shaping the atmosphere.
A crucial aspect is the composer–director relationship. Music is most effective when planned from the early stages of the directorial concept and organically integrated into the dramaturgical vision. Early and continuous collaboration allows the composer to construct sound as part of the narrative, influencing the actor's emotional expression, spatial movement, and the dramatic climax. This creative relationship demonstrates that music and direction are two languages that build a shared system of communication.
Ultimately, music should be understood as a force that constructs the emotional structure of a theatrical performance. It organizes rhythm, tension, and psychological state, shaping the dramatic core of the scene and the audience's experience. The concept of "emotional architecture" emphasizes its significance as a dramaturgical element, not merely an aesthetic one, and suggests a practical approach for composers and directors aiming to use music as an integrated creative tool within the stage vision.

Conclusions and recomandations

The research has clearly shown that music in theater is not merely an aesthetic support for the performance, but an emotional and dramaturgical architecture that structures, guides, and enriches the dramatic experience. Sound creates a space where the scene and emotion interact, transforming both the interpretation and the audience's perception. Music organizes rhythm, intensifies tension, and contributes to constructing the meaning of dramatic situations, acting as a direct partner to the actors' performance.
The questionnaire results strongly support this conclusion: 100% of participants perceive the impact of music on the audience's emotions as very important, 90% consider that music influences the rhythm of the performance, and 100% regard a collaborative approach in theatrical composition as very important. These findings indicate that practitioners' practical perception aligns with theoretical literature: music is not merely background, but an active dramaturgical language that shapes tension, rhythm, and the audience's emotional experience.
Musical parameters—such as tempo, timbre, dynamics, and intentional silence—are not merely technical elements, but tools that construct the dramatic atmosphere, the work's subtext, and the emotional connection with the audience. Sound becomes a partner in acting, enriching how characters and the audience experience the action and increasing the emotional impact of the

performance.
From a practical perspective, this study offers clear recommendations for composers and directors:

- Music should be integrated from the earliest conceptual stages of the performance, treated as an essential dramaturgical element.
- Early and continuous collaboration between the composer and director establishes a shared stage language, where sound guides the rhythm, tension, and emotional sensitivity of the scene.
- Composers can use musical structures to build atmosphere, emphasize dramatic climaxes, and enrich actors' interpretation.
- Directors can employ sound to harmonize visual and performative elements, guiding the audience's perception and emotional experience.

In conclusion, based on existing literature and the empirical results of the questionnaire, music should be conceived as a constitutive component of the emotional and dramaturgical architecture of the stage. It constructs atmosphere, rhythm, and subtext, making the performance integrated and emotionally powerful. Composers and directors should treat music as a creative partner equal to the actors and the text, transforming sound into an active tool for shaping the theatrical experience. This approach not only enriches aesthetics but also strengthens the emotional and meaningful impact of the work, making theater a fully integrated and immersive experience.

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Postmodern opera: Re-coding tradition, fragmented subjectivity, and late-modern society

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine postmodern opera as a privileged site in which aesthetic processes, politics of memory, and the tensions of late modern society intersect. Drawing on musicological and cultural studies of opera (Abbate & Parker, Hutcheon, Till, Fulcher), as well as on broader postmodern theory (Lyotard, Jameson, Eco, Kramer), the article argues that postmodernism in opera is not merely a new "style," but a new way of thinking about the relationship between tradition, subjectivity, and theatrical institutions. The starting point is the observation that opera, historically bound up with the "grand narrative" of nation, hero, and metaphysical destiny, undergoes in the postmodern period a dismantling of these very narratives: fragmentation of dramatic structure, polystylism, ironic citation of tradition, and a shift of focus from the heroic figure to the vulnerable body and the "broken" voice. Through a review of the literature and an interdisciplinary methodology—combining musical analysis, performance studies, and cultural theory—the article explores several typical configurations: opera as an "open work," as intertextual palimpsest (Eco, Sciarrino), as a laboratory of decomposed voice (Aperghis, post-serialism), and as a field in which postmodern directing and scenography rewrite the very relationship between audience and stage.

Keywords

Postmodern opera, polystylism, fragmented narrative, open work, postmodern scenography

Introduction

The classical view of opera history is often constructed as a straight line, running from the Baroque through Romanticism and then into Modernism, with each period seemingly replacing the one before it. In recent decades, this teleological model has been seriously called into question. Scholars such as Abbate and Parker[1] —among the most insistent when it comes to this genre—have argued that the development of opera has always been less linear and far more discontinuous, marked by returns, misreading, and reinventions of tradition1. Hutcheon[2] , for her part, understands opera as a site where Western culture has reflected on death, crisis, and the limits of the modern subject.

It is perhaps still somewhat premature to draw firm boundaries and speak with full certainty about specific characteristics of so-called postmodernist terminology in opera and music. Over the course of the two-year trajectory of my doctoral research, I have become increasingly aware that when we invoke the term 'postmodernism', we cannot be content merely to label it as an era that succeeds modernism. Rather, we must understand it as a particular way of conceiving art and society under conditions of aesthetic pluralism, the collapse of grand meta-narratives[3] (Lyotard)[3] , the logic of late capitalism (Jameson)[4] , and the redistribution of authority among author, performer, and spectator.

The operatic genre, as an expensive and historically elite stage form, may at first glance appear to be an "anachronistic" medium for this sensibility. Yet precisely because of the weight of its heritage and the density of its archive, it becomes an ideal laboratory in which to observe how tradition is reworked under postmodern conditions.

On the one hand, there are works constructed as palimpsests upon the historical repertoire, suffice it to recall the operas of S. Sciarrino[5], where the silent citation of madrigals, Richard Wagner or Carlo Gesualdo becomes a deconstructive strategy.On the other hand, there are stage experiments in which scenography, video projections and stage direction "overturn" the traditional relationship between the score and the visual field, producing a kind of "opera within the museum of itself."

On a broader level, my aim is to sketch some of the key coordinates of postmodern opera, approaching this genre not only in terms of musical innovation, but also as an indicator of wider social transformations: new ways of experiencing the body, the collective, history, and memory.

1 Two of the most influential musicologists in contemporary opera studies are Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker. Carolyn Abbate is an American musicologist and professor at leading universities (Harvard, Princeton), known for her work on musical narrative, the voice, the body, and the relationship between music and stage. She insists that opera should be understood not only as a score, but as a living performative event. Roger Parker is a British musicologist specializing in nineteenth-century Italian opera (Rossini, Donizetti, Verdi), professor at King's College London, with major contributions to the cultural history of opera and to the critical study of text and score.

2 Linda Hutcheon is a Canadian literary and cultural theorist, best known for her studies on postmodernism, irony, and adaptation.

3 Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998) was a French philosopher associated with the tradition of continental philosophy and is frequently counted among the central figures of what is commonly termed "postmodernism."

4 Fredric Jameson, an American literary scholar, cultural critic, and Marxist philosopher (born 1934), is widely regarded as one of the most influential theorists of postmodernism at the end of the twentieth century.

5 Salvatore Sciarrino (born 1947, Palermo) is one of the most important composers of the Italian and European avant-garde of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Literature review

The literature on opera in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has expanded significantly, moving from general histories towards cultural studies and theoretically inflected analyses of postmodernism.

First, the synthetic studies. Abbate and Parker's *A History of Opera* offers a wide-ranging panorama in which the twentieth century appears as a zone of transition from "repertory opera" to new modes of listening and viewing.They insist that late opera cannot be understood without accounting for the role of the director, stage technology, and institutions that select and frame the repertory.

Along similar lines, *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, edited by Till[6] , assembles a set of approaches that move opera away from the model of the "closed work" and situate it within performance studies, reception studies, and critical theory. The contributions consider, among other topics, how postmodern opera constructs gendered and racial identities, and the role of conceptual directing in rewriting historical works.

Fulcher [7], in *The Oxford Handbook of the New Cultural History of Music*, shifts the focus toward the "new cultural history": music (and opera) is read as text saturated with power relations, political discourses, and national ideologies. For my research on Albanian opera, the book is particularly valuable for its analytical framework: opera and the state, opera and the public, opera and national identity, opera as "the other" – precisely the fields within which we are situating both the broadly discussed works ("Oirat" by A. Peçi and "Dhoma" by E. Dergjini) and the wider Albanian operatic production after the 1990s. Within this framework, postmodern opera is not viewed merely as a formal game, but as a site where identities and social structures are actively problematized.

Likewise, in the theoretical literature on postmodernism we encounter the work of philosopher Jean-François Lyotard[8] , who defines postmodernism as a distrust of metanarratives, that is, of those "grand narratives" which claim to provide a unified meaning of history.Umberto Eco[9], through his concept of the "open work," anticipates these developments by arguing that the contemporary artwork is destined to receive multiple meanings, co-constructed by performers and audience alike.

In musicology, Kramer and others have discussed "postmodern knowledge" as a regime in which classical music loses its privileged status but gains new possibilities for dialogue with different cultures and media.Jonathan D. Kramer, in his influential essay on the nature of musical postmodernism, proposes criteria such as stylistic heterogeneity, blurred boundaries between "high" and "low," and a mixture of irony with seriousness.

6 Nicholas Till is a British scholar of opera and music theatre, and a professor at the University of Sussex.

7 Jane F. Fulcher is an American musicologist and one of the leading figures in what is known as the "new cultural history of music."

8 Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998) was one of the key figures of postmodern thought. He is known above all as the thinker who unsettles the security of "grand narratives," compelling us to question official history and to listen instead to the small voices, minor languages, and marginal forms of discourse that are so often concealed beneath it.

9 Umberto Eco (1932–2016) was an Italian writer, semiologist, and philosopher, and one of the most influential intellectuals of the twentieth century. As a theorist, he is best known for his concept of the "open work" (Opera aperta, 1962), in which the artwork is understood as a structure that allows for multiple interpretations rather than a single, closed meaning.

From this perspective, I have also drawn on specific studies of opera and postmodern staging. Scholarship on Salvatore Sciarrino has highlighted his use of short, continually recombined modules, as well as the way in which the citation of early texts (such as Claude Le Jeune's elegy in *Luci mie traditrici*[10]) generates a dramaturgy of a "time spiral," in which past and present are interwoven in a permanent vortex. This strategy aligns naturally with Eco's concept (mentioned above), according to which the musical text no longer delivers a single, stable meaning, but rather opens a field of possible interpretations.

In scenography, Ewa Kara speaks of "*postmodern design for opera*" as a practice that disrupts the former hierarchy between the score and the visual image: space, objects, video projection, and the placement of the audience become co-authors of meaning. This corresponds to wider discussions on "contemporary opera design", which stress stylistic pluralism, the return of abstraction, and the critical function of visuality in relation to musical narrative.

As conclusion, my point of view is that; considerably a large number of recent studies speak explicitly of "the opera of postmodernism" and of the challenges it presents to traditional criticism: open structures, intertextual games with the canon, and ways in which the audience is drawn into the process of meaning-making demand analytical tools that go beyond linear synopsis and isolated harmonic analysis.

Methodology

Given that this is primarily a theoretical study, the methodology is analytic–synthetic and interdisciplinary.

First, in the chosen methodology I have aimed to construct a dialogue between musicological sources (historical and analytical studies of the genre), postmodern theory, and cultural studies. This approach is adopted with full awareness that the term postmodern is contested and often overloaded; therefore, I have sought to employ it with caution, as a functional label to describe a set of aesthetic practices (polystylism, citation, fragmentation, self-reflexivity) that become particularly visible in opera at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Second, the article proceeds from a broad review of the literature (Abbate & Parker, Hutcheon, Till, Fulcher, Kramer, etc.) and then concretizes the discussion through selected examples from the international repertory:

- Sciarrino's operas, such as Luci mie traditrici, where exemplary strategies of citation, silence, and sonic micro-scopy are displayed;
- the practice of composers and directors who move along the border between music theatre, opera, and installation (for instance Georges Aperghis);
- postmodern scenographies that treat the operatic space as an immersive environment, challenging the traditional stage/auditorium divide.

10 The opera Luci mie traditrici by Salvatore Sciarrino presents an intimate story of jealousy, betrayal, and murder, loosely based on the life of the Renaissance composer Carlo Gesualdo. It is less a "drama of events" than a study of silence, gazes, and sotto voce utterance: an atmosphere of extreme psychological tension, sparse verbal text, and exceedingly soft sounds, in which every breath and every vocal fissure becomes an integral part of the tragedy.

Third, the article assumes that opera is not only a score, but also an institution and a social practice. Aesthetic analysis is therefore viewed in light of broader processes: the globalization of the opera market, the transformation of audiences, the use of digital technologies in production and dissemination, and discussions of inclusion and representation (gender, race, class) in the contemporary repertory.
Although no statistical empirical data are presented, the approach is grounded in a "refined empiricism" of stage practice: reviews, interviews with composers and directors, production documents, and observations accumulated through interpretive practice itself. This situates the study close to the tradition of the new cultural history, where the work of art is read simultaneously as an aesthetic artefact and as a social document.

Definitions and configurations of postmodern opera

First, in the chosen methodology I have aimed to construct a dialogue between musicological sources (historical and analytical studies of the genre), postmodern theory, and cultural studies. This approach is adopted with full awareness that the term postmodern is contested and often overloaded; therefore, I have sought to employ it with caution, as a functional label to describe a set of aesthetic practices (polystylism, citation, fragmentation, self-reflexivity) that become particularly visible in opera at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Palimpsest and the open work

Many late twentieth-century operas are built as palimpsests upon pre-existing texts: returns to myths (Orpheus, Elektra), to national histories, or to the canonical repertory (Wagner, Verdi, Puccini). But instead of simply "refreshing" them at the level of staging, they dismantle the source text and reconstruct it in a new context. Eco's concept of the open work becomes especially fruitful here: the opera no longer offers a codified meaning, but invites the spectator to become co-author of the interpretive trajectory.
Sciarrino, for example, in Luci mie traditrici, constructs a dramaturgy where the silent citation of sixteenth-century music appears as scattered fragments, only occasionally surfacing recognizably, while for the most part functioning as an implied presence—a "vortex of time" drawing subjects and listener into its orbit. This mode of musical writing/language stands in sharp contrast to the linearity of Romantic opera, where citation or leitmotif served to consolidate identity.

Fragmentation of subject and narrative

Theoretical literature has stressed that one of the core features of postmodern art is the fragmentation of the subject. Jameson speaks of "the weakening of the sense of history" and the transformation of the subject into a node saturated with images. In opera, this translates into a shift from the unified heroic figure (e.g. Otello, Turandot, Tosca) towards fractured, divided subjects, often placed in situations where language itself fails.
Vocal and orchestral technique (in postmodern opera) mirrors this disintegration: the voice moves away from bel canto toward a wide spectrum of techniques—sforzato utterances, rhythmic speech, whispering, extreme register breaks—that expose fragility rather than heroism.

The practices of composers such as Aperghis[11] , with their fragmented "music theatre" and half-communicative language, are paradigmatic in this respect.

The role of postmodern scenography and directing

In many contemporary productions, scenography assumes a critical function with respect to opera's own tradition: it no longer illustrates the action, but problematizes it. Kara describes postmodern design for opera as a practice that often relocates the action into semi-abstract spaces, where objects, projections, and even the movement of the audience become part of the dramaturgy24.

This aligns with the broader tendency of "conceptual scenography," in which opera is staged in industrial sites, art galleries, urban spaces, or quasi-immersive formats, thereby challenging the conventional "black box" model. Under such conditions, postmodern opera is no longer viewed merely as a closed musical object but as a negotiated social event in a specific environment.

Opera as social laboratory

An important line in the literature views opera as a social laboratory. Fulcher, for instance, reads the repertory in relation to national, class, and colonial ideologies25. In a postmodern context, where these ideologies are openly questioned, opera itself becomes a site of debate about identity, race, gender, and migration.

Operas addressing themes such as genocide, refugees, ecological crisis, or financial collapse illustrate how this old form is adapted to articulate the stress of the present. In such works, elements once deemed "decorative"—choruses, ensembles, orchestral background—are read as figures of collectivity, of the crowd, of the social "Other". At this point, the intervention of social studies becomes indispensable: formal analysis must naturally lead toward questions of power, representation, and class relations.

Conclusions and recommendations

The analysis of the literature and examples suggests that postmodernism in opera cannot be reduced to a list of stylistic features; it represents a deeper shift in the way the genre thinks itself, its publics, and its place in contemporary culture.

First, postmodern opera acknowledges the disintegration of grand narratives but does not simply surrender to total relativism. It re-quotes tradition precisely in order to place it under scrutiny, exposing it as a historical construct rather than a given nature. In this sense, it becomes an "art of critical memory"—close to what Hutcheon has described as an art of death, but also of the relentless return of cultural ghosts26.

Second, postmodern opera gives voice to fractured subjects, peripheral voices, and vulnerable bodies. This is not only a matter of content but also of technique: the ways in which vocal lines, orchestral textures, and scenography are written reflect the tensions of a world in which stable identity is impossible.

11 A Greek–French composer of contemporary music theatre, he systematically dismantles the boundaries between music, language, and gesture. His work is marked by fractured rhythms, fragmented text, absurdist humour, and vocal writing in which voices speak, scream, sing, and "disintegrate" simultaneously—constantly putting into question the very act of communication itself.

For the scholar and pedagogue, this opens a new field of work: the analysis of these operas requires tools that combine music theory with psychology, sociology, and philosophy.
Third, postmodern opera shifts attention from the score as sacred object to performance as process. Each production becomes a case study in its own right: directorial choices, stage design, treatment of the singer's body, and relations with the audience are as important as note-by-note analysis. The recommendation here is clear: opera studies should move closer to performance studies and to ethnographies of spectacle.
Fourth, from the standpoint of social studies, postmodern opera is a valuable terrain for investigating how late-modern societies process historical traumas, migration, changing gender roles, and the crisis of trust in political institutions. A research agenda for the future might include:

- comparative analyses of postmodern operas in different national contexts (e.g. Western Europe, Eastern Europe, post-socialist spaces);
- studies of audience reception and how spectators of different ages, classes, and experiences read the same works;
- collaborations between musicology, cultural anthropology, and media studies to understand the role of live transmissions, digital platforms, and social media in shaping the operatic experience.

Finally, in contexts such as Albania, where the operatic tradition has moved from socialist realism toward more experimental directions after the 1990s, the framework of postmodern opera provides a useful vocabulary for articulating the tension between ideological heritage and the demand for aesthetic autonomy. Here, the analysis of contemporary works, repertory policies, and directing practices can contribute directly to public debate on cultural identity, historical memory, and the role of artistic institutions in today's society.

Notes

Abbate and Parker, A History of Opera.
Hutcheon and Hutcheon, Opera: The Art of Dying.
Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition.
Jameson, Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.
Shih për shembull analizat mbi Luci mie traditrici te Utz dhe te studimet e cituara te Sciarrino-s.
Kara, "Postmodern Design for Opera."
Abbate and Parker, A History of Opera.
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Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition.
Eco, The Open Work.
Kramer, Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge.
Jonathan D. Kramer, "The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism."
Utz, "Static Allegory and 'Vortex of Time'"; shih edhe referencat e tjera mbi Sciarrino-n te burimi i cituar.
Kara, "Postmodern Design for Opera."
Ewa Kara, "Contemporary Opera Design," në The Routledge Companion to Scenography, red.

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Music as a practice of resistance and national identity construction in Kosovo (1980-2000)

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Abstract

This study examines the role of music in Kosovo during the period 1980–2000 as a cultural practice linked to resistance and the articulation of Albanian national identity, and how this experience is reinterpreted in collective memory after the conflict. The study adopts a qualitative approach and analyses data collected through an open-ended questionnaire completed by 14 purposively selected participants, including musicians, performers, researchers and listeners. The methodological approach seeks to capture the complexity of individual experiences and meanings associated with music in this historical period. The data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis. The findings identify four main dimensions: music as a form of resistance and mobilisation; as a carrier of national identity; as a medium through which belonging is articulated, also through musical structure; and as a field of tension between historical memory and commercialisation after 1999. The results show that music functions as an important space for the construction of identity and collective memory in conditions of social transformation, providing empirical evidence of its role in the context of Kosovo. This study contributes to understanding the relationship between cultural practices and processes of identity construction in contexts of social transformation. It also offers a perspective grounded in participants' experiences on how music mediates collective memory and the interpretation of the past in post-conflict societies. In this way, the study highlights the importance of analysing music not only as an artistic form, but as a social practice interconnected with historical experience. It also opens avenues for further research exploring the intersection of music, memory and identity in post-conflict contexts.

Keywords

Music, national identity, collective memory, cultural resistance, Kosovo

Introduction

The period 1980–2000 in Kosovo represents one of the most complex phases of its contemporary history. The revocation of autonomy in March 1989, through constitutional amendments that established direct control by Belgrade over Kosovo's institutions[1][2], was accompanied by the closure of educational and cultural institutions and the establishment of a parallel system of social and educational life[3]. These developments, followed by the war of 1998–1999, created a reality in which cultural activity unfolded under conditions of political pressure and persistent uncertainty. In this context, art became an integral part of the social and historical experience of the time.

Music occupied a significant place within this reality. Songs with historical and patriotic content, the folk repertoire, as well as genres such as rock and classical music, developed in circumstances where public spaces of expression were restricted. Under these conditions, music functioned as a symbolic space in which belonging was articulated and a sense of collective solidarity was maintained. As Frith (1996) argues, music contributes to the formation of identity through the shared experience of listening and performance. In contexts of political tension, this function becomes even more pronounced[4].

After 1999, the context changed fundamentally. Institutional opening, freedom of expression, and technological development created new conditions for the production and circulation of music. At the same time, the musical repertoire became situated within a new economic and cultural reality, where market influence and the pluralisation of genres shaped the ways in which music was created and perceived. This transformation raises questions about how the music of the earlier period is understood and evaluated in the present, as well as about the relationship between historical memory and new cultural developments.

Although the relationship between music and identity has been widely addressed in the literature, the role of music in Kosovo during the period 1980–2000 remains relatively underexplored from the perspective of participants' lived experience. This study aims to analyse the role of music during this period as an identity-related and social practice, and how this experience is interpreted today. The focus is placed on participants' experiences and interpretations, with music examined as part of collective experience and as a significant element in the articulation of identity and collective memory.

Literature review

Contemporary studies on music and identity treat music as a social practice that plays an active role in the formation of belonging. Simon Frith argues that identity is not something that music merely reflects, but something that is produced through the experience of listening and performance[5]. In this sense, music creates a space in which individuals define themselves in relation to others and

1 Qeriqi, B. "The Rise of Serbian Nationalism and the Violent Revocation of the Kosovo Autonomy in March 1989." Eminak: *Scientific Quarterly Journal* 4, nr. 48, 2025, p. 177–195.

2 Williams, P. R. "Earned Sovereignty: The Road to Resolving the Conflict over Kosovo's Final Status." *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy* 31, nr. 3, 2003, p. 387–452.

3 Rudi, R. *Libri i kujtimeve*. Dukagjini, Prishtinë, 2025.

4 Frith, S. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1996.

5 Frith, S. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1996.

to the community to which they belong. A similar perspective is presented by Turino (2008), who views music as a practice through which collective identities are constructed and experienced, particularly in contexts where cultural belonging holds specific social and political significance[6]. In situations marked by political tension, this function becomes even more pronounced, as music can serve as a medium for the symbolic articulation of belonging and solidarity.

Anderson's concept of the nation as an "imagined community" provides an important framework for understanding this role[7]. According to Anderson, national belonging is constructed through shared forms of symbolic representation, in which culture and artistic practices play a central role. Similarly, Stokes (1997) argues that music is one of the mechanisms through which the symbolic boundaries of belonging are articulated and the sense of community is reinforced[8]. Hutchinson (2005) situates this process within the context of conflict, emphasising that under conditions of institutional restriction, culture acquires a political function and becomes a space for the symbolic articulation of resistance[9].

Roli i muzikës lidhet ngushtë edhe me proceset e kujtesës kolektive. The role of music is also closely linked to processes of collective memory. Halbwachs (1992) argues that memory is a process constructed within a social framework[10]. Assmann (2011) further develops this perspective by distinguishing between lived memory and cultural memory, the latter of which is preserved and transmitted through symbolic forms, including artistic repertoires[11]. In this sense, music can function as a medium that stabilises and transmits historical experience over time.

Within the context of the relationship between music and politics, Street (2012) emphasises that music can assume a mobilising function and contribute to the formation of solidarity in periods of crisis[12]. At the same time, DeNora (2000) argues that music shapes how individuals experience and understand reality by organising their subjective and social experience[13]. This dimension becomes particularly significant in societies that have undergone conflict, where cultural practices play an important role in interpreting and processing the past. In post-conflict periods, this function is situated in relation to economic and institutional developments. Hesmondhalgh (2013) demonstrates that musical production is shaped simultaneously by its social functions and by the logic of the market, creating a tension between the preservation of historical meanings and orientation toward consumption[14].

Within this theoretical framework, music in Kosovo during the period 1980–2000 can be understood as a practice through which belonging, historical experience, and collective memory are articulated under conditions of political pressure and social transformation. Drawing on these theoretical perspectives, this study analyses participants' experiences to understand how the music of this period was experienced and how it is interpreted today.

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6 Turino, T. *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2008.

7 Anderson, B. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, London, 2006.

8 Stokes, M. *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*. Berg, Oxford, 1994.

9 Hutchinson, J. *Nations as Zones of Conflict*. Sage, London, 2005.

10 Halbwachs, M. *On Collective Memory*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992.

11 Assmann, J. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011.

12 Street, J. *Music and Politics*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 2012.

13 DeNora, T. *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.

14 Hesmondhalgh, D. *The Cultural Industries*. Sage, London, 2013.

Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative interpretative approach, situated within a constructivist perspective, which treats meaning as a product of individuals' experience and interpretation within a social and historical context. The study aims to understand how individuals experience and interpret the role of music during the period 1980–2000 in Kosovo and how this experience is understood in retrospect. Data were collected through a qualitative questionnaire with open-ended questions, distributed electronically via Google Forms. This format enabled the structured collection of individual reflections, focusing on participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations. The sample consists of 14 purposively selected participants, with the aim of including individuals with direct or indirect experience of the music of the studied period. The sample includes musicians, composers, performers, scholars, and listeners. Of the 14 participants, 9 are male and 5 females, born between 1954 and 1992. This distribution enabled the inclusion of perspectives from different generations and the comparison between lived experience and transmitted cultural memory.

The data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis, following the approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006)[15]. The analytical process was conducted in several stages. In the first stage, the material was read in full in order to achieve familiarity with the content. In the second stage, recurring units of meaning were identified, and initial codes were developed in relation to the main themes of the experience, such as resistance, identity, the symbolic function of music, and post-conflict transformations. In the third stage, these codes were grouped into broader categories, and recurring patterns were identified, leading to the development of four main analytical themes. These themes represent shared patterns of interpretation emerging from participants' experiences. To enhance the credibility of the analysis, the themes were repeatedly reviewed in relation to the original material.

In line with the interpretative nature of the study, the analysis seeks to understand experience rather than to produce statistical generalisation. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was ensured through the use of identification codes. This approach enabled the analysis of participants' experiences while preserving their confidentiality. One limitation of the study relates to the sample size and the use of written responses, which do not provide the depth of interaction afforded by direct interviews. Nevertheless, the qualitative approach enabled the identification of meaningful and interpretative patterns that contribute to understanding the role of music in this historical context.

15 Braun, V., dhe V. Clarke. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, nr. 2, 2006, p. 77–101.

No.	Code	Gender	Year of Birth
1	P1M54	Male	1954
2	P2M56	Male	1956
3	P3M62	Male	1962
4	P4F64	Female	1964
5	P5M70	Male	1970
6	P6F72	Female	1972
7	P7M74	Male	1974
8	P8M80	Male	1980
9	P9F82	Female	1982
10	P10F84	Female	1984
11	P11M86	Male	1986
12	P12M90	Male	1990
13	P13F91	Female	1991
14	P14M92	Male	1992

Table 1. Participants

Code Structure:
P = Participant
M/F = Gender
Year = Year of birth

Theme Code	Theme Title	Brief Description
T1	Music as Resistance and Mobilisation	Music is experienced as a means of resistance, mobilisation, and survival during the period 1980–1999.
T2	Music and the Construction of National Identity	The role of lyrics, language, historical motifs, and folkloric elements in preserving national belonging.
T3	Musical Structure and Emotional Experience	Traditional instruments, characteristic rhythms, and sound as carriers of meaning beyond the text.
T4	Post-war Period, Commercialisation, and Memory	The transformation of music's role after 1999, the tension between memory and the market, and its meaning for younger generations.

Table 2. Themes Identified through Analysis.

Results

T1 – Music as Resistance and Mobilisation

One of the main themes emerging from participants' responses is the role of music as a form of resistance and mobilisation during the period 1980–1999. Music was experienced as part of everyday life within a context of uncertainty and political pressure. Participants associate music with resistance, the preservation of dignity, and the strengthening of a sense of community. Some participants describe music as "courage and resistance," emphasising that patriotic songs served as a form of mobilisation and solidarity (P5M70; P7M74). One participant notes that music at that time had a "mobilising and almost non-entertainment function," as the historical context

made it impossible to separate aesthetic experience from social reality (P12M90). For other participants, music represented a space for processing emotional experience and confronting reality, being experienced as an "emotional outlet" and a form of hope (P4F64).
In several responses, participants emphasise that even genres typically associated with entertainment assumed critical and symbolic functions. Rock music is mentioned as a form of expression that articulated dissatisfaction and resistance, often incorporating elements of musical tradition to emphasise cultural belonging (P3M62; P11M86). One participant describes music as "support for efforts against injustice," directly linking it to the social experience of the time (P2M56).
Classical music is also mentioned as an important space for cultural continuity under conditions of institutional restriction, where the very act of creation and performance acquired particular significance (P1M54). In this sense, resistance was articulated through the continuity of musical activity. Based on the analysis, music was experienced as an integral part of social life and as an element that contributed to the preservation of belonging and solidarity.

T2 – Music and the Construction of National Identity

Another central theme is the relationship between music and national belonging. Participants describe music as one of the primary means through which Albanian identity was preserved and articulated under conditions of political and institutional restriction. The role of lyrics and language is frequently mentioned as a central element. Songs with historical and patriotic content are described as reinforcing a sense of belonging and connection to collective history (P7M74; P9F82). Some participants emphasise that these songs represented a direct form of identity articulation, referring to historical figures, events, and experiences (P5M70; P1M54).
Folk music is described as a carrier of cultural continuity. Participants associate it with the preservation of melodic, rhythmic, and stylistic structures identified as part of the Albanian musical tradition (P6F72; P13F91). In this sense, identity was articulated through musical form itself.
Modern genres, particularly rock, are described as spaces where traditional and modern elements were combined, creating new forms of expression that maintained a connection to tradition while simultaneously reflecting contemporary reality (P3M62; P11M86). Some participants emphasise that, in the absence of other public spaces, music was one of the primary means through which national belonging could be expressed (P4F64; P2M56). In this sense, music functioned as a practice through which identity was preserved and transmitted.

T3 – Musical Structure and Emotional Experience

Participants emphasise that belonging and meaning were articulated not only through lyrics, but also through musical structure itself. Elements such as melody, rhythm, and timbre are mentioned as factors contributing to the creation of a shared emotional experience. Traditional instruments, such as the çifteli and lahuta, are identified as elements directly associated with tradition and cultural identity (P6F72; P13F91). Characteristic rhythmic patterns are also mentioned as distinctive features of musical tradition (P5M70). These elements were used not only in traditional repertoire but also in new musical contexts, creating continuity between different forms of expression (P3M62; P11M86).
While lyrics are regarded as an important element, some participants emphasise that sound

organisation itself plays a significant role in musical experience. Melody, dynamics, and instrumental performance are described as factors that generate direct emotional experience (P4F64; P8M80). Musical experience is described as collective, particularly in performative contexts, where shared singing and listening create a sense of community (P12M90; P9F82). This suggests that the meaning of music is linked not only to its content but also to its experience as a social practice.

T4 – Post-war Period, Commercialisation, and Memory

Participants emphasise that the role of music changed significantly after 1999. The post-war period is described as a time of openness and expanded opportunities for creation and distribution (P5M70; P8M80). Technological development and broader access to media are identified as key factors contributing to increased musical production and the diversification of styles. At the same time, some participants express concern about a shift in the orientation of musical repertoire. A movement toward more commercially oriented content and a reduction in historical and identity-related themes is noted (P3M62; P11M86). Some participants associate these changes with new cultural influences and broader transformations in the social context (P2M56; P14M92).
The role of music in collective memory is experienced differently across generations. Participants who lived through the period directly describe music as an important part of both personal and collective experience (P1M54; P6F72). By contrast, younger generations tend to experience this music more as part of cultural heritage rather than as a direct lived experience (P12M90; P14M92). This indicates that the meaning of music is closely linked to historical experience and to generational differences in lived experience.

Discussions

The results indicate that music in Kosovo during the period 1980–2000 was not experienced as a practice detached from social reality, but as an integral part of it. For participants, music was closely connected to historical experience and to how the political and social context was lived and understood. These findings are consistent with Simon Frith's argument that music plays an active role in the formation of identity through the experience of listening and performance[16]. In this sense, identity was articulated not only through textual content but through musical practice as a collective experience. A similar perspective is presented by Turino (2008), who argues that music contributes to the construction and experience of collective belonging through participation and shared experience[17].
The theme of resistance and mobilisation emerging from the analysis confirms that music can assume a direct social and political role in periods of crisis. Participants describe music as a source of solidarity, a form of resistance, and a means of coping with reality. These findings are consistent with Street's (2012) argument that music can serve as a form of mobilisation and symbolic articulation in contexts of political tension[18].

16 Frith, S. *Performing Rites*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1996.
17 Turino, T. *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2008.
18 Street, J. *Music and Politics*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 2012.

Similarly, O'Connell and Castelo-Branco (2010) emphasise that in contexts of conflict, music can function as a medium through which communities articulate their experiences and maintain a sense of cultural continuity[19]. For participants in this study, music was not merely a form of expression, but part of the way reality was experienced and interpreted. This is also consistent with DeNora's (2000) approach, which argues that music shapes how individuals experience and structure their social reality[20].

The role of music in the articulation of national identity emerges as one of the most significant dimensions of the findings. Participants describe music as a space in which belonging was preserved and articulated through language, musical form, and performative practice. This aligns with Stokes's (1994) argument that music plays a central role in articulating belonging and in shaping a sense of community[21]. In this sense, music functioned as a practice through which historical experience and cultural belonging were experienced and transmitted.

The dimension of collective memory is also central to the interpretation of the findings. Participants describe music as a carrier of historical experience and as an element that preserves a connection to the past. This corresponds with Halbwachs's (1992) concept of memory as constructed within a social framework[22], as well as with Assmann's (2011) perspective, which views cultural memory as a form of preserving and transmitting historical experience through symbolic forms[23]. In this context, music can be understood as one of the mechanisms through which historical experience is preserved and acquires meaning over time.

The findings also reveal differences in how music from this period is understood today. For participants who experienced the period directly, music remains closely connected to personal and collective experience. For younger participants, it is experienced more as part of cultural heritage. This shift is related to broader social transformations and changes in the context of musical production and consumption. In this regard, the tension between historical memory and market logic identified by participants is consistent with Hesmondhalgh's (2013) analysis, which argues that musical production is shaped both by its social functions and by the conditions of the cultural industries[24].

Overall, the findings demonstrate that music in Kosovo during the period 1980–2000 functioned as an identity practice, a form of symbolic articulation, and a medium of collective memory. Its meaning was closely connected to its role as a social practice. In this way, music becomes part of the process through which historical experience is interpreted, and belonging is articulated in contexts of social and political transformation. These findings contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from a relatively underexplored post-conflict context.

19 O'Connell, J. M., dhe S. El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, ed. *Music and Conflict*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2010.

20 DeNora, T. *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.

21 Stokes, M. *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*. Berg, Oxford, 1994.

22 Halbwachs, M. *On Collective Memory*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992.

23 Assmann, J. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011.

24 Hesmondhalgh, D. *The Cultural Industries*. Sage, London, 2013.

Conclusions

This study examined the role of music in Kosovo during the period 1980–2000, drawing on the experiences and interpretations of participants with diverse backgrounds. The findings demonstrate that music functioned as a practice closely linked to social and historical experience. Under conditions of political and institutional restriction, music served as a space for the articulation of belonging, as a form of solidarity, and as an important element in preserving cultural continuity. The analysis showed that the role of music in the construction of identity was related both to textual content and to musical structure, as well as to its experience as a collective practice. Stylistic elements, the use of traditional instruments, and the performative context contributed to the creation of a shared experience that reinforced connections to historical experience and cultural belonging. In this sense, music functioned as a medium through which historical experience was articulated and acquired meaning at both individual and collective levels.

The findings also indicate that the meaning of music varies depending on participants' lived experiences and the context in which it is interpreted. For those who directly experienced the studied period, music remains closely linked to personal and collective experience. For younger participants, it is experienced more as part of cultural heritage. After 1999, social, technological, and institutional transformations reshaped the production and perception of music, situating it within a new cultural context.

This study contributes to the literature on music and identity by providing empirical evidence from the context of Kosovo and demonstrating that music plays an important role in articulating historical experience and in the construction of collective memory. One limitation of the study relates to the sample size and the qualitative nature of the data, which do not aim at statistical generalisation. Future research could expand this analysis by including larger samples, examining musical repertoire, and comparing different periods, in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the role of music in contexts of social and cultural transformation.

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The genre of song: Issues of musical terminology

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Abstract

Issues of musical terminology remain largely underexplored in Albanian theoretical discourse, while in the international arena the use of terminology in the song genre continues to be the subject of ongoing academic debate and cross-cultural comparison. In this context, terminology should not be understood merely as a matter of naming, but as a mechanism through which aesthetic, historical, and ideological meanings in music are structured. This study seeks to problematize the use of terminology in Albanian light music by identifying inconsistencies and ambiguities in its categorization, while also examining the relationship between these practices and international models of musical classification.The methodology is based on a comparative and conceptual analysis, drawing on three key theoretical approaches: the critique of the culture industry by Theodor W. Adorno, the theory of musical genre rules by Franco Fabbri, and the sociological perspective of Simon Frith. The analysis is applied to a corpus of representative songs from different periods of Albanian light music, taking into account both institutional production and broader musical practices.The results indicate that genre terminology in Albania operates in an unstable manner, reflecting tensions between institutional standardization and local practices. The influence of folk music and its transformed forms has significantly shaped musical categories, while the absence of a consolidated terminological system generates analytical and interpretative ambiguities. In conclusion, the study argues that musical terminology in the Albanian context should be reconsidered as a critical field of inquiry rather than merely a classificatory tool. By proposing a more structured and critical reading, the paper aims to contribute to the development of a more consistent conceptual framework for contemporary musicological studies.

Keywords

Musical terminology, light music, folk music influences

Introduction

The terminological problem, general concepts

In historical and musicological analyses concerning the genre of song, we encounter the terms "folk music," "light music," and "pop music." These terms have often generated confusion in relation to one another, yet in fact they represent distinct models of musical production and different cultural contexts. The confusion arises because: a) pop music frequently borrows elements from folk traditions; b) light music has functioned as an intermediary bridge between tradition and the modern industry; c) terminology has shifted according to epoch and cultural systems. In studies addressing terminology, three theoretical approaches have had particular influence: Theodor W. Adorno's (1903–1969) critique of the musical culture industry, Franco Fabbri's (1949) concept of genre rules in music, and Simon Frith's (1946) sociological perspective on music as a social practice. Confronting these theses is essential not only to understand the nature of song as a genre in the international sphere, but also to grasp how its terminology has been appropriated, arranged, and stylized within the Albanian context.

Theoretical framework

Theodor W. Adorno views pop music as a product of the culture industry, where forms are standardized and the public is offered a kind of pseudo-individualism[1]. For him, "light music" is not authentic expression but a commodity produced in series, with variations that are merely superficial. In Albania, where light music developed within state institutions and tightly controlled festivals, Adorno's argument acquires a particular nuance: standardization was not only national but also ideological. Examples such as the song "Festë ka sot Shqipëria" (1979 – 18th Festival at RTSH, music by Agim Prodani, lyrics by Zhuliana Jorganxhi, performed by Zeliha Sina, Liljana Kondakçi, and Afërdita Laçi) clearly illustrate the ideological function of music, while modern songs like "Xheloz" (2018 – music by Pirro Çako, lyrics by Çako and Gjata, performed by Elvana Gjata) reflect the commercial standardization of the free-market era. In contrast, Franco Fabbri does not regard pop music as a mere product of industry, but as a system of rules that define the genre of song. According to him, every musical genre possesses a set of aesthetic, institutional, and social norms that distinguish it from others[2]. This approach is particularly useful for analyzing the terminology of Albanian light music, where terms such as "muzikë e lehtë" (light music), "këngë popullore e përpunuar" (arranged folk song), or "këngë stilistike" (stylized song) are not simply definitions, but indicate specific rules of song creation and production, interpretation, and social reception. For instance, the Festival of Song at RTSH has functioned as an institution that codified the rules of light music, distinguishing it from pure folklore or classical music.
Simon Frith shifts attention to the experience and social function of music.

1 Adorno.Theodor, W. "Philosophy of New Music". -Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Published 1949. Introduction, pg. 8.
2 Fabbri. Franco, "A theory of musical genres: two applications", First International Conference on Popular Music Studies (Amsterdam, 1980), pg. 1-2.

For him, pop music is not merely a product or a system of rules, but a practice that creates identities, binds communities, and expresses shared experiences[3]. This perspective is crucial for understanding why Albanian light music has played such a significant role in shaping collective memory and cultural identity. Festival songs, regardless of standardization or institutional rules, have been and continue to be experienced by audiences as expressions of the aspirations and emotions of their time.
Referring to Adorno, who offers a valuable critique of the risks of uniformity and ideological instrumentalization; to Fabbri, who provides tools for understanding how terminology and genre rules have been shaped; and to Frith, who reminds us that music cannot be reduced solely to structure or industry but must be seen as a living social practice, my conclusion is: Albanian light music is a complex phenomenon. It is simultaneously standardized and institutionalized, codified by specific rules, yet also experienced as part of our cultural identity.

Conceptual framework

The issue of terminology in Albanian musicology constitutes one of the most complex and debated aspects of the field. The terms employed to describe the phenomenon of light music, folk music, arranged folk song, or stylized song are not merely linguistic labels; they carry with them institutional, ideological, and aesthetic histories. For this reason, their definition requires a careful approach that intertwines linguistic, musicological, historical, and comparative analysis.

Cultural hierarchy and the "high/low"

Sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu[4] (1930–2002) have demonstrated that the division between high art (elite) and popular culture is closely linked to cultural capital and structures of symbolic power. From this perspective, light music occupies an intermediate category: neither elite, like symphonic music, nor traditional, like folklore. In socialist countries, this division was clearly institutionalized through state cultural policies, whereas in the West it remained more flexible and closely tied to the dynamics of the market.

General characteristics of song

Folk music

The terms folk music, folk song, and folk dance are relatively late expressions, as the concept itself originated in the nineteenth century, though folk music itself emerged much earlier. These terms are extensions of folklore, a word coined in 1846 by William Thoms[5] to describe "the traditions, customs, and superstitions of the uncultured classes."[6]

3 Frith. Simon, "Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception", Cambridge University Press, pg.133.
4 Pierre Bourdieu, born in the south of France, is a sociologist and public intellectual figure. His contributions are in the fields of education and sociological theory. He has had a wide influence in the fields of aesthetics, media, art, and culture.
5 William Thoms - British writer who is credited with coining the term "folklore" in 1846.
6 Scholes. Percy, The Oxford Companion to Music, 1977, article "Folk Song"

In ethnomusicology, "folk music" is associated with oral transmission, social and ritual function, traditional instruments, collective authorship, and a repertoire that evolves across generations—above all, with music that expresses communal and national identity. These features distinguish folk music from other song models. Béla Bartók, when discussing folk music, defines it as "music that comes from the village and differs from that of the city." He considers it "the most authentic expression of a way of life from the past that is on the verge of disappearing, and which must be preserved or in some way revived." Traditionally, folk music performers were amateurs, and in this sense folk music tends to be participatory rather than presentational. The terminology used for folk music across different cultures reveals aspects of this concept. The English term "folk music" and its French and Italian analogues, "musique populaire" and "musica popolare", indicate that this music is linked to a clearly defined social class. The German "Volksmusik"[7] combines the notion of class with that of ethnic belonging. In Czech (and other Slavic languages), the term "narod" (nation) underscores folk music as the unifying musical expression of the country.In the twentieth century, particularly after World War II, the role of professionals as performers and transmitters of folk traditions expanded considerably, and the boundaries between folk and art music became increasingly blurred. This process had already begun in the late nineteenth century, when composers incorporated folk songs into urban musical culture. In the case of Albania, folk music constitutes the foundational pillar of national musical identity and has consistently served as a source of inspiration for the later development of light music. In Albanian musicology, folk music has been treated not only as a folkloric heritage transmitted across generations, but also as a field open to transformation and adaptation. Within it, two main subdivisions are distinguished: "arranged song", which encompasses adaptations of the folkloric repertoire, and "stylized song", which marks a further step toward the creation of an urban musical language.

Arranged folk song

When folklore passes into the hands of composers and orchestrators, the processed folk song emerges. In this case, the folk song undergoes transformation: the basic motif is extracted, harmonized, orchestrated, and then elevated to the stage. Thus, folk song and dance are institutionalized through various ensembles. This tradition is exemplified by the outstanding work of the "National Ensemble of Folk Songs and Dances", which refined and institutionalized the original repertoire through distinguished composers such as Çesk Zadeja, Tish Daija, Agim Krajka, Limos Dizdari, Aleksandër Peçi, among others. "The National Folklore Festival of Gjirokastër" and the "May Concerts" became the most prominent platforms for arranged folk song, bringing it to a wider audience, accessible and absorbable by the entire population. Yet, this development raises a terminological dilemma: is a song still "folk" once it has passed through the filter of professional harmonization and orchestration? The answer remains open, but it is clear that folk music has always been a source of identity and inspiration.

Stylized song

A further step, appearing later in time, is the "stylized song". In this case, the process involves not merely adaptation but the creation of a new work based on the original folk material. The

7 Volk - German, meaning "the people as a whole", which was used for folk and national music by Johann Gottfried Herder and the German Romantics more than half a century ago.

composer draws inspiration from tradition but transforms it into an original composition, producing a new style of song in which folklore intertwines with urbanity. If the processed song may be considered an adaptation, the stylized song represents a new creation rooted in tradition, where folklore becomes compositional material.

Stylization is characterized by a deep interweaving of the composer's musical language with folklore, resulting in original material that maintains a genetic link with folk melody. Two principal modes of utilizing source material can be identified: 1) A simplified connection with folklore, involving direct borrowings or quotations of original musical material.2) A structural transformation of folk material, through adaptation and integration, sometimes to the point of near invisibility.

In her study of folk song stylization, Anna Tkach observes: "The composer may employ the structure of the folk system, its melodic features, and rhythmic organization, but due to the addition and layering of new lines, the work acquires a modern sound."[8] Thus, stylization occurs through the transformation of folk music, while simultaneously concealing the degree of reliance on the original material.

The attraction of composers to stylization implies the use of folkloric sources as the foundation of their works. These songs often contain intonational formulas (usually with a narrow ambitus), rhythmic formulas (repetitive rhythms), and the principle of variation of musical material. In literary terms, stylization also extends to language, where words from folk texts are adapted to everyday vocabulary. Performers, too, frequently preserve authentic folk vocal techniques. In Albanian musical culture, the principle of stylization has been widely employed. For the purposes of this study, the stylized song is considered an intermediate category, as it appears within the broader framework of Albanian light music.

Light music in international models

Italy represents a particularly significant case, as the term "musica leggera" became a consolidated discographic and media category. Initially, light music was associated with Italian folk traditions. Until the early 1960s, the English term pop music was virtually unknown in Italy; it entered later, following the fame achieved by British groups. The Sanremo Festival, founded in 1951, created a platform where melodic urban song acquired both national and international status.The early figures of Italian musica leggera—who simultaneously served as models for Albanian song—include Mia Martini, Nilla Pizzi, Mina, Gino Paoli, Domenico Modugno, Luigi Tenco, Luciano Tajoli, and Claudio Villa. Their repertoire maintained a strong connection with the Italian operatic tradition (through the cantabile melodic line), thereby establishing a form of "aesthetic legitimacy." However, unlike in socialist countries, Italian musica leggera was not part of a centralized ideological system but rather of the market and media industry.

France: a more flexible model

France offers a different, more flexible model. The term "variété française" encompassed the repertoire broadcast on radio and television, with a clear orientation toward mass entertainment, while "chanson" often carried a kind of poetic prestige, linking the text to the tradition of French literature. Artists such as Charles Aznavour, Gilbert Bécaud, and Édith Piaf moved freely

8 Tkach. Anna, "Modern stylization of Ukrainian song folklore", Bulletin of Kyiv of National University of Culture and Arts. Series in Musical Art, 2021

between these two spheres, highlighting the functional rather than strictly institutional character of light music.

Germany: institutionalized division

In Germany, the division between Ernste Musik (E-Musik)[9] and Unterhaltungsmusik (U-Musik)[10]was institutionalized even at the administrative level, through the copyright system (GEMA). This division also had economic consequences, as tariffs and classifications depended on category. Within U-Musik was included the tradition of Schlager[11], which consolidated in the 1950s–60s as a form of sentimental melodic light music, oriented toward mass audiences and closely tied to television culture. Unlike the Eastern model, this division had no direct ideological function, but served purely categorical and economic purposes.

Eastern Europe: estrada and controlled music

In the socialist countries of Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union, light music developed within an ideologically controlled context, serving as an acceptable form of modernity. Light music was institutionalized and assumed an ideological function. In the Soviet Union, light music was formalized through the repertoire of Estrada, where artists such as Alla Pugacheva became icons of Soviet culture. Ideological standardization was strong, yet light music provided a controlled space for urban expression. Estrada included urban repertoire with simple melodies but symphonic orchestration. All texts were edited and censored to avoid themes that might contradict state ideology.
In Romania, the term "muzică ușoară" was used, while in Poland and Hungary national festivals and radio orchestras served as instruments of cultural control. Songs in these countries often combined elements of serious music, light music, and folklore, with festivals functioning as promotional platforms. In Poland, the Sopot Festival (1961) became one of the major events of light music in Eastern Europe. This institutional approach clearly distinguished Eastern Europe from the Western model, where the market, media, and ideology determined success.

Light music in Albania

Albanian "light song" gradually took shape during the first half of the twentieth century. It did not emerge immediately, but as an interweaving of musical practices situated between folk tradition and cultivated European music. The 1920s–1930s may be considered the embryonic phase of what would later be called light song. Early pioneers such as Rudolf Stamolla, Muharrem Xhadiku, Agim Prodani, Anita Take, among others, paved the way for the creation of the Festival of Song at RTSH (1962), which marked a decisive turning point for light song, ushering in a phase of strong institutionalization. For the first time, aesthetic, structural, and interpretative norms were consistently established for this repertoire.

9 E-Music, the German term for serious music
10 U-Music, the German term for urban music
11 Schlager is a style of European folk music, with simple melodies, simple and sentimental lyrics, and often accompanied by catchy instrumental accompaniment. The Northern European variant of schlager (especially in Finland) draws on elements of Finnish, Nordic, Slavic, and Eastern European folk songs, with lyrics that lean towards melancholic and elegiac themes. Musically, schlager is similar to styles such as easy listening. This style was often found in the early years of Eurovision, but has now been replaced by other styles of pop music.

In this context, Albanian light song acquired more standardized features: controlled orchestration, clear textual articulation, and predominantly optimistic themes. International influences existed, but were filtered through the ideological and institutional requirements of the time. The political changes of the 1990s brought radical transformation. The liberalization of the music market and the weakening of institutional control led to fragmentation of the scene and the strong penetration of global models of pop, R&B, hip-hop, and dance music. In this context, the traditional term light song was gradually replaced by the broader designation pop music, reflecting a new reality of musical production and consumption.

Pop music

"Pop music", both as a term and as a cultural phenomenon, is among the most debated genres in contemporary musicology. In international literature, pop is a shortening of popular music, that is, music of the people, of the masses, distinguished from classical music and elite traditions. This concept does not refer solely to a specific genre, but to a way of conceiving music as a cultural product aimed at the widest possible audience. In this sense, pop music is an open category, encompassing diverse styles, yet retaining certain fundamental traits: melodic simplicity, pronounced rhythm, repetitive structure, and accessibility for mass consumption. Historically, scholarly consensus indicates that pop music consolidated in the mid-1950s, with the emergence of rock & roll in the United States and England, which fused traditions of both white and Black popular music. This development marked a turning point, introducing a new musical language based on strong rhythm, the use of the electric guitar, and an energy closely tied to youth culture. Rock & roll was perceived as a new form of urban popular music, distancing itself from classical traditions and serious music, and creating a new space for musical expression.
During this period, the term pop began to be used not only to define rock & roll but also other genres developing in parallel, such as rhythm and blues, soul, and later beat music in England. In subsequent decades, pop music became a global phenomenon. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was associated with British groups such as The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, who transformed pop into a genre of international influence. At the same time, in the United States, artists such as Elvis Presley and later Michael Jackson turned pop into a powerful cultural industry. This period also marked the consolidation of terminology: pop music became synonymous with mass music, while distinctions between pop, rock, and other currents began to be articulated more clearly in musicological dictionaries.

Discussion and conclusions

Within this framework, song emerges as a dynamic and contextual process. The boundaries between categories are fluid and often permeable, particularly under conditions of globalization and contemporary digital production. For this reason, contemporary approaches to the study of musical genre emphasize the functioning of these categories in practice rather than the search for rigid essential definitions.
In the Albanian case, song terminology is closely tied to the institutional and historical developments of twentieth-century music. The term light song, for example, has functioned not only as a stylistic descriptor but also as a normative category codified through institutional and media practice. Yet, in today's musical reality, this term coexists and frequently overlaps with newer designations that reflect the transformations of the market and musical aesthetics.

A reasonable conclusion, therefore, is that the study of song genre terminology must remain open, critical, and historically conscious. Rather than seeking absolute boundaries, it is more productive to observe how these terms are used, by whom, and in what context—treating them as part of a broader system of musical, discursive, and institutional practices that are in constant transformation.

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Albanian light pop music and the application of technology

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Abstract

In the history of Albanian music, the development of technology has not been addressed yet. The aim of this paper is to analyze the role of technology not merely as an auxiliary tool in the creative process, but as a key factor in shaping the aesthetic and stylistic elements of this musical genre within the Albanian context. In a comparative analysis of concrete cases from the development of Albanian light music across different historical periods, the methodology used is based on a review of both musicological and technological literature. The study examines the use of analog and digital recording technologies, the introduction of synthesizers and computer software, as well as their influence on the creativity of Albanian composers and producers.
The results indicate that technological developments have directly influenced the transformation of the musical language of Albanian light music, enabling the expansion of expressive tools, increasing creative individuality, and allowing for a wider dissemination of musical production. Specifically, the transition from analog to digital technologies has brought noticeable changes in sound structure, orchestration, and style. Furthermore, the research underscores that the democratization of production tools has enabled young artists to explore new sonic textures, blending traditional elements with modern electronic ones. The use of Digital Audio Workstations (DAW) and artificial intelligence has increased creative efficiency, allowing for the precise manipulation of timbre and harmonic structure. This transformation is not only technical but has also redefined the boundaries of authorship and remote collaboration, positioning Albanian light music within an increasingly dynamic global market. In conclusion, the study highlights that the evolution of Albanian light music is closely linked to technological developments, which have influenced not only the technical aspects of production but also aesthetic perception and public taste. The study emphasizes the need for an interdisciplinary approach between musicology and sound technology to gain a deeper understanding of this interaction in the context of Albanian music after the 90s.

Keywords

Technology, light (pop) music, modern music

New developments in musical technology, such as the creation of new instruments or the modification of old ones, characterize the entire continuity of the history of Western music in the 20th century. These advances ran in parallel and became an influential factor in the expansion of compositional resources. The entire history of world music has shown that the evolution of musical language has necessarily brought about the need to improve existing musical instruments or even invent new instruments[1] and, conversely: the improvement of existing instruments or the emergence of other instruments became possible only thanks to the continuous development of production technologies. For example, the industrial revolution in England at the end of the 18th century, in addition to the extraordinary improvement of production activity, at the beginning of the 19th century the invention of steam engines influenced in the same way the improvement of existing instruments, especially wind instruments[2].

This would be one of the many examples that proves this mutual relationship, which, in the field of music, significantly expanded compositional spaces, bringing new, previously unknown possibilities. To remain in the 19th century, it must be said that the rapid growth of instrumental variety and, along with it, the increase in the possibilities brought by the modification of existing instruments, was accompanied by a significant development of chromaticism, sparking a wave of technical developments in the music of the early 20th century.The new musical orientations of the 20th century highlighted the importance of new instruments to reflect this change. The first attempts to create devices that would produce a new sound, that is, obtained from technology, appear in Western Europe since the beginning of the 20th century, when the possibilities of instrumental playing had increased significantly as a result of technological progress, but also when the activation of the sections of the traditional symphony orchestra underwent significant changes. This happened at the same time as the process of transition towards free atonalism (Schoenberg's second creative phase, the years 1908-1923), since the years when the Italian composer, pianist and conductor Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924), in his Sketch for an Aesthetic of New Music (1907)[3], predicted the important changes that the music of his century would bring, including that of "abstract sound". For example, the increase in the striking role of percussion in the orchestra and, in general, the treatment of other instruments (e.g. bows) as percussion instruments - if we take into account here especially the two Russian ballets by Stravinsky (Petrushka, 1911; and Le sacre du printemps, 1913) -, warned from the second decade of the century what was approaching Fifty years later, in his book Silence: Lectures and Writings, the American composer John Cage (1912-1992) would describe it as a necessity for "composers to confront the entire sound field"[4]. The time had therefore come for musicians to search for and experiment with new sound spaces beyond those with traditional sources (the human voice and existing instruments).

The first device with a powerful influence on the musical developments of the 20th century was the gramophone. Invented at the end of the previous century, the gramophone brought the first experience of recording, thus becoming the first technological tool with memorization power. The birth of this new device would mark the beginning of a transformative era not only for the technology of transmitting pre-recorded materials, but also for encouraging other bold research, which culminated around the 1950s-60s. As for music, among other things, it can be noted that

1 Morgan Robert P, *Twentieth-Centery Music*, W.W.Norton & Company, New Work-London, 1991, pg. 461

2 Burkholder Peter J, Grout Donald Jay, Palisca Claude V, *A History of Western Music*, Tenth edition, , W.W.Norton & Company, New Work-London, 2019, pg. 585

3 Busoni, Ferrucio, *Sketch of a New Music*, përkth. Th. Baker, New Work: Schrimer, 1911, pg. 13

4 Cage John**,** *Silence: Lectures and Writings***,** Wesleyan University Press, 1961, pg. 4

the gramophone and, after it, the invention of the radio (1895-86) and the widespread use of the latter starting from the beginning of the 20th century, brought unprecedented opportunities not only for the rapid spread of music that was being created, but also in terms of research into new, "technological" sound. The first technological instruments appear at approximately the same time. Referring to Robert P. Morgan, we mention in turn: "the teleharmonium (1906) created by Thaddeus Cahill, a two-hundred-tone instrument that produced "artificial" sounds with an electronic generator; the theremini (1920) by Leon Thermini, which by changing the frequency of an electronic oscillator could execute a series of sounds continuously; the ondet martenot (1928) by Mauricio Martenot, also capable of producing a series of frequencies continuously, but with improved sound control and greater timbral richness; the first electronic organ invented by Louis Hammond in 1929. The same period also includes the creation of new mechanical (i.e., non-electronic) instruments, among which the intonarumor of the futurist Luigi Russolo. To all of these are added the attempts to transform previously recorded sounds by changing the speed of the gramophone's rotations, initially in experimental form by Darius Milhaud, Paul Hindemith and Edgard Varèse, and later in the compositions of John Gage"[5].

Among the above instruments listed by Morgan, as the most worthy precursor to the later developments after World War II, the theremin stands out. After research in the electromagnetic field, the Russian physicist Leon Theremin (1896 -1993), in 1920, achieved the invention of this the instrument is extremely surprising both in terms of sound production and in the way it is played or produced. More than an electronic invention, as an advanced representative of the technology of the time, the theremini, with the subtleties and details of its sound, is among the first to significantly break all the barriers or boundaries of traditional music. Upon being introduced by its inventor himself, the theremini became a futuristic instrument, inspiring new generations of artists and musicians. In the most theoretical aspect of the word, it was precisely the Italian futurists who defined music as an "art of noise", using completely new techniques for this.

The theremini is one of the few musical instruments that in the history of music has made itself known to musicians, the general public, but also to scientists or music engineers. This type of hybrid instrument between emotion and technology, unlike traditional instruments in which sound is obtained through touch, sounds without being touched, one of the qualities that makes it perhaps the first representative of electronic music. The theremin manages to produce sound through the interference of radio frequency waves. The instrument consists of 2 antennas: a vertical antenna and a horizontal one. The first of them makes possible the height of the sound, that is, its frequency, intonation, while the horizontal antenna is responsible for the dynamics of the sound. The basic technique of producing sound is determined by the right hand, which the closer it is placed to the vertical antenna, the higher the intonation or height of the sound frequency. Meanwhile, the left hand controls the dynamics of the sound, moving towards and away from the horizontal antenna. So, both hands, simply moving in the air, without touching anything, manage to produce sounds and consequently music for the listener.

The great impact that the theremin instrument had on the musical world of the time was extremely important. Clara Rockmore (1911-1998), a classical violinist, became one of the masters of this instrument who, with the recognition and fame she enjoyed, gave the theremin representation in the most professional elites of the time. For the mass public of all categories and tastes, during the 1950s the theremin was used in film music and especially in genres such as thrillers and horror.

5 Morgan Robert P**,** *Twentieth-Centery Music***,** W.W.Norton & Company, New Work-London, 1991, pg. 462

Its sound characteristics were best suited to the atmospheres, mysterious or paranormal scenes of films of these categories. In the 1960s, the theremin was also used in pop and rock music: the group The Beach Boys (USA 1961) used this instrument in the song Good Vibrations, while the group the legendary Led Zeppelin (England 1968) experimented with this instrument in live performances and public performances.

But despite the longevity of the theremin, all of the above marks the prelude to the transition from purely mechanical electronic instruments to advanced technologies during the 1950s-60s, through which composers were enabled an extraordinary expansion of the range of sounds.

After World War II, Western music entered a second and much more radical phase (from that of the "atonal revolution" of the Second Viennese School) of breaking away from the past. This time, political factors were much more decisive than in the first decade of the century: European society had emerged from a devastating war in human, economic and political damage. For the new generation of musicians of the time, who had experienced the horrors of the War, the separation from the past would have to be decisive. In 1946 and thereafter, a group of composers, including Bruno Maderna (1920-1973) and Oliver Messiaen, (1908-1992), as well as representatives of the younger generation, such as Pierre Boulez (19025-2016), Karleinz Stockhausen (1928-2007), etc., became part of the meetings held in Darmstadt, Germany, at that time known as the "International Summer Courses for New Music in Darmstadt" [6]. , then known as the "International Summer Courses of New Music in Darmstadt". The "Darmstadt School", as it was otherwise known, in the first decade after the War, through conferences and performances of new works, became a promoter of new compositional platforms and experimental music. The first important result was the birth of Total (or Integral) Serialism, with Messiaen, Boulez and Stockhausen as its main representatives. The post-War serialists were dissatisfied with the results of Schoenberg's dodecaphonic serial system, judging it as a compromise system of new music with traditional music. Very significant for this judgment is a writing by Boulez in the year of Schoenberg's death, with the symbolic title Schoenberg is dead (1952): in addition to the homage to the composer, the title also signifies the closing of an era of atonal "classical" music, among other things criticizing Schoenberg for having used the serial as a theme. The post-War serialists, in the direction of implementing the serial dodecaphonic system generally They valued Anton Webern over his teacher Arnold Schoenberg, and in terms of rhythm they were admirers of Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971).

At the same time as these developments, in 1948 the composer Pierre Schaeffer[7] (1910-1995) founded the "Studio d'Essai" (Experimental Studio) in Paris to create the so-called "musique concrète" (concrete music). Together with his team, mainly weak-current engineers, Schaeffer developed a new system of recording natural sounds and manipulating them to create entirely new types of music, transforming the traditional way in which music could be composed and experienced.

The first electronic music studio was created in 1952 by the composer Herbert Eimert in Cologne, Germany. He explains how the studio used equipment such as tape recorders, filters, amplifiers, and sound generators to produce music. Unlike the modification of natural sounds, composers could now create sounds entirely from scratch, providing control over both the sound and the structure.

6 The "International Summer Courses for New Music in Darmstadt" were founded in 1946 by the German musicologist Wolfgang Steinecke (1910-1961), in those early days also known as the "Darmstadt School", creating a tradition that continues to this day. New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians

7 Schaufler, Wolfgang, Pierre Boulez, about music, December 2010, Universal Edition website.

This was essential for serial composers, as it allowed for the complete manipulation of sound materials. It is therefore no coincidence that among the first composers to experiment in the field of concrete and electroacoustic music were the serialists of the first post-war generation.
After Germany, new electronic studios began to open rapidly in Europe and the USA, exerting significant influences on the creativity of the most prominent composers of the time. Three years after Cologne, in 1955, the "Studio di Fonologia" opened in Milan, which embraced a mixture of electronic and concrete elements, influencing the works of composers such as Luciano Berio (1925-2003), John Cage (1912-1992) and others.

Application of technology in "classical" music (electro-acoustic, concrete music, etc.)

In the realm of classical music, electronic music is divided into several other subgroups, the three most important of which are: musique concrète; electroacoustic music; and acousmatic music.
Musique concrète is an earlier variant of electroacoustic music that uses real-life sound sources as a "source of musical life." This term was first used by Pierre Schaeffer around the 1940s, the originator of musique concrète as the first form of electroacoustic music, which focused on using sounds recorded from real-life environments and used them to compose musical works. Unlike musique concrète, traditional, he used the recording of all kinds of sounds selected from the living environment: noises of various natural and industrial sources, voices, road noise, railway noise, etc. He processed these through techniques such as reverse, slow down, speed up. In his first composition of musique concrète, Étude aux chemins de fer (Etude of the Railway) of 1948, also the first of its kind, Schaeffer used the sounds of moving trains. We note on this occasion that in 1923, the Franco-Swiss composer Arthur Honegger (1888-1971) had composed a truly revolutionary symphonic work for the time, Pacific 231, in which, with traditional instruments, the sounds of a moving train are imitated. In 1959, Schaffer founded the Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM; Musical Research Group), a research center for young composers in electronic music, in Paris.
Electroacoustic music is the field (subgroup) that includes any musical material that uses electronic technology to compose using sound recordings through their processing and manipulation. One of the most prominent representatives of electroacoustic music is the German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, one of the personalities who brought innovation to modern music and one of the first pioneers of electroacoustic music. After a first experience created in the French studio of P. Schaeffer, in 1953 he joined the electronic studio NWDR in Cologne, where he created his first two electronic works, Electronic Studies no. 1 and 2, in 1953 and 1954 respectively, in which additive synthesis was introduced. Experimenting with the possibilities of new technology, Stockhausen used them to introduce new compositional techniques through electronic sound construction and graphic notation. The growing dissatisfaction with the rigid serialism of electronic music during the 1950s is reflected in the change brought about by Stockhausen's later work, Gesang der Jünglinge (Song of the Youth; 1956), in which electronic and concrete sounds are combined. Gesang der Jünglinge is the first work to combine the human voice with electronic synth sounds, painting a new soundscape. In his next creation, Kontakte (1958–60), Stockhausen experimented with panoramic, motion-based, and 3D sound, using four sound sources (auto-stack speakers) placed in the hall around the audience. Through his works, Stockhausen exerted a profound influence on the emancipation and development of the Cologne Electroacoustic Studio (WDR).
Acousmatic music is a subset of electronic music that is heard through speakers, without seeing

the source of the sound. The term derives from the Greek philosopher Pythagoras, who lectured behind a curtain – the listeners could not see the person speaking. So from an aesthetic and practical point of view, in this type of music the sound prepared in the studio is the only element of orientation for the audience in a dark hall, where the latter is surrounded by a multi-directional zeroing system (surround).

The composer who first used the term acousmatic music is François Bayle, born in Madagascar in 1932 and raised in France. He first studied philosophy and then composition with two of the most important personalities of the 20th century, such as Olivier Messiaen and Pierre Schaeffer. In 1960, Bayle joined the Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM) in Paris, in 1966 he became the director of the center, turning it into one of the most innovative studios of the time in the international arena. During his work as a conductor, Bayle formulated the concept of "acoustic music", as an art form that is conveyed exclusively through hearing, without visual materials, and built the Acousmonium listening system, to present the materials in a dimensional surround way. During his career, Bayle wrote several dozen electroacoustic works, including L'Expérience Acoustique (Acoustic Experience; 1969-1972), Tremblement de Terre Très Doux (Very Gentle Tremors of the Earth; 1978) and the cycle Erosphère (1982), which constitute concrete examples of this type of music and the use and exploration of sounds in a multidimensional, artistic and philosophical way. The 1960s saw a rapid and multifaceted development of electronic music. In addition to composers, both new and old, it gained commercial value through radio, television, and film, especially for its unusual background effects. The discovery of how to integrate various components into a single keyboard led to the creation of the synthesizer. This allowed musicians to create sequences in real time, reducing the time required in classical studios where each note was recorded separately. The synthesizer made electronic music more accessible and efficient for musicians. Initially, synthesizers had limitations such as preset modules and pre-packaged sounds. However, the integration of synthesizer capabilities with traditional studio equipment led to rapid advances. The RCA Marc II (the first programmable electronic synthesizer) was one of the first examples in this direction. American composers such as Milton Babbitt (1916–2011) and Morton Subotnick (1933) used synthesizers such as the Mark II and Buchla for unique and complex works. Subotnick introduced electronic music as accessible, reaching a wider audience. wider. The success of the album Switched-On Bach (composed by Wendy Carlos), presented on a Moog synthesizer, helped further promote the synthesizer. Starting in the 1960s, the combination of live performances with electronic music became important for increasing the number and engagement of the audience, as well as for exploring contrasts.

Turning to Morton Subotnick, it should be noted that his name is often associated with small synthesizers. He describes his electronic work on a large scale and influential pieces such as Silver Apples of the Moon (1966) and others. Subotnick's style combines delicate sounds and more expressive forms, making electronic music more acceptable. His work, along with Wendy Carlos's (1939) album Switched-On Bach (1968), helped popularize the synthesizer.

In the early days of electronic music, it was common for music to be paired with visual elements such as film or dance to enhance the experience. The lack of live performance and audience interaction posed challenges. The combination of live instruments with tape began to be implemented in the 1950s, with works such as Musica su due dimensioni (second version, 1958) by Italian composer Bruno Maderna (1920–1973) and Déserts (1950–1954) by French-American composer Edgar Varèse (1883–1965). This blending of live and electronic sounds continued into the 1960s with composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen and Mario Davidovsky (1934–2019), who explored complex dialogues between recorded and live music, while refining

ways of structuring and coordinating them.
To focus a little more on one of the pioneers of electronic music like Morton Subotnick, it should be noted that he used new electronic techniques to create fresh sounds. He traces the transition from tape-based compositions to the integration of live performance, highlighting the experiments of composers such as Stockhausen and Cage.
Technological advances such as synthesizers and tape delays enabled further exploration of sound, influencing both classical music genres and popular ones such as rock and jazz. Ultimately, this shows how electronic music evolved from a peculiar experimental work to a mainstream art form. The influence of technology and its application, over the decades, has directly intervened in the characterization and categorization of pop music according to the respective styles. Musical styles such as rock and roll, pop, jazz, blues, rock, disco, psychedelic, synth pop, dance, hip-hop, EDM family, etc., crystallized even more with the evolution of sound production equipment and its processing.
By developing the ways of processing sounds such as piano, percussion, different types of guitars, and all the diversity of the symphony orchestra, musicians and sound engineers came up with impressive results never heard before.
In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Western music, initially in the USA and the United Kingdom, entered a period of spirit and musical taste called Rock & Roll. Rock & Roll is not just a musical style, but like many musical styles, it is a way of life for both musicians and ordinary people, the public. The Rock & Roll musical style family, originally in the USA and Great Britain, over the years has been transferred to many subgroups or subcategories of derived styles, such as alternative rock, indie rock, experimental rock, metal, Christian rock, power pop, punk rock, etc. All these subcategories are distinguished by details that are often quite obvious and often by details that require quite good knowledge to differentiate them. Musical elements such as harmonic progressions, bass lines, drum rhythms and percussions are more visible and tangible elements for the specialized listener and the ordinary listener, the public. While elements such as the colors of electric guitars, the color of the bass guitar, the selection of kick, snare or tom drums, the effects used on the instruments and on the performers' vocals, etc., are details that only a cultivated ear can orient to categorize these stylistic subgroups. In addition to technical and musical details, it should be borne in mind that in determining the subgroups of musical styles, a direct role has been played by the geographical origin or national traditions of the artists who applied these types of musical styles. From here, other subcategories of rock have also been born, such as Latin rock, samba rock, reggae rock, etc.
The lyrics of the songs of these orientations range from lyrical and romantic themes to verses with social or political content. All these selections made by the artists together with their managers, have been decided for a specific reason, either to be faithful to their styles, to highlight them or to emancipate or develop those styles aesthetically. Artists like Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis and many others were the ones who excelled and became heroes and examples for the younger generations and those who would come after.

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The transformation of film music in post-1990 Albania

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the transformation of film music in post-1990 Albania in the context of technological developments and the change in the figure of the music creator. The aim of the study is to identify the way in which the transition from a centralized system to a digital and decentralized reality has influenced the aesthetic, narrative, and structural function of music in film. The study is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines musicological analysis with the study of music production practices and reference to contemporary literature on film music and music technology. On a theoretical level, the paper is based on the concepts of Claudia Gorbman regarding the narrative function of film music, Michel Chion on the relationship between sound and image, and Frank Lehman on the structural dimension of music in film. On an analytical level, the study includes concrete cases from the Albanian repertoire after the 1990s, analyzing melodic structure, harmonic structure, orchestration, and their narrative function in relation to the dramatic development of the film. The results show that film music in Albania has shifted from an illustrative role to an active and structural component of audiovisual narrative, directly influencing the construction of meaning and the emotional experience of the spectator. In conclusion, it is argued that the interaction between music technology and the figure of the singer-songwriter has produced a new integrated creative model, which reflects the aesthetic and technological developments of the digital era and increases the autonomy of the creator in the process of musical realization.

Keywords

Film music, music technology, audiovisual narrative, composition, post-1990 Albania

Introduction

After the 1990s, Albania experienced a profound cultural, artistic, and technological transformation that directly influenced the creation and function of film music. In the period prior to this transition, film music developed within a centralized institutional system and primarily served an illustrative function, following the visual narrative without independently intervening in its structure. This model was closely connected to the organization of artistic production and the technological limitations of the time.

With political changes and increasing openness to international influences, this situation began to change fundamentally. The introduction of digital technology and new music production tools created new conditions for the development of film music. The composer was no longer restricted by institutional structures or limited technical resources, but gained new opportunities to experiment and to control the creative process more directly.

In this context, music began to assume a more active role in constructing meaning and shaping the emotional orientation of the spectator. As Claudia Gorbman emphasizes, film music should not be considered a decorative element, but a narrative component that structures the audiovisual experience of the film[1].

Another important aspect of this transformation is the shift in the figure of the creator. Instead of the traditional composer, who functioned within a structured system divided into separate roles, a new creative model emerges, resembling the modern singer-songwriter. This creator is involved not only in composition, but also in orchestration, production, and the realization of musical material.

Literature review

The study of film music has been extensively addressed in international scholarship, focusing on its narrative, structural, and perceptual functions in relation to the moving image. Rather than serving merely as an accompanying element, film music is increasingly understood as a fundamental component in shaping meaning and guiding the viewer's emotional and cognitive engagement with the film.

Claudia Gorbman emphasizes the role of film music as a narrative agent that structures the audiovisual experience and influences the interpretation of cinematic storytelling. In her theoretical framework, music operates beyond a decorative function, contributing to continuity, coherence, and emotional orientation within the filmic narrative. Similarly, Michel Chion explores the relationship between sound and image, arguing that sound transforms the perception of the visual by creating what he defines as "added value," a dimension through which sound enriches and redefines the meaning of the image.

From a structural perspective, Frank Lehman highlights the importance of musical organization in film, suggesting that music functions as a force that shapes temporal flow and emotional trajectory. His work underlines the capacity of music to articulate form and structure within the cinematic context, reinforcing its role as an integral component of narrative construction.

In the context of music technology, Paul Théberge argues that technological developments have significantly altered not only the tools of music production but also the ways in which music is conceived and created. The emergence of digital audio workstations, virtual instruments, and sound libraries has enabled composers to control the entire creative process, fostering a more

1 Gorbman, C. Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music, p. 15.

flexible and integrated approach to music production.
Furthermore, Philip Tagg discusses the figure of the modern music creator as a multi-functional agent who engages simultaneously in composition, performance, and production. This perspective aligns closely with the concept of the contemporary songwriter-producer, whose role extends beyond traditional boundaries and reflects the integration of artistic and technological practices. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the transformation of film music in the post-1990 Albanian context, where technological innovation and evolving creative roles have contributed to the emergence of new aesthetic and narrative possibilities.

Methodology

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach that combines musicological analysis with film music theory and the study of music production practices. The aim is to examine how music constructs meaning in film and how this process has been influenced by technological developments.
On a theoretical level, the study is grounded in audiovisual semiotics and research on the relationship between sound and image. Michel Chion argues that sound is not a secondary element, but a component that transforms the perception of the image[2]. This perspective is essential for understanding the active role of music in constructing meaning within film.
On a practical level, the analysis focuses on the Albanian repertoire after the 1990s, examining how music constructs meaning through its structural elements. This includes the analysis of melodic and harmonic structures, orchestration, and the interpretation of music's narrative function within the filmic context.

Melodic and harmonic structures, orchestration, and the interpretation of music's narrative function within the filmic context.

Film music as a narrative language

Film music represents a complex system of communication that interacts with the image and dramatic structure. It is not merely an accompanying element, but a component that actively contributes to the construction of meaning.
Frank Lehman argues that film music functions as a structural force that organizes narrative and its emotional trajectory[3]. In this sense, music can be understood as an element that structures cinematic time and guides the spectator's perception.
In the Albanian context, this musical language is characterized by the interaction between the aesthetics of light music and more advanced compositional techniques. This synthesis creates a distinctive musical identity that reflects the cultural and technological developments of the period.

The role of music technology

The development of music technology after the 1990s has significantly influenced not only the

2 Chion, M. Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen, p. 23.
3 Lehman, F. Hollywood Harmony: Musical Wonder and the Sound of Cinema, p. 41.

technical aspects of music production, but also the way compositional thinking is structured[4] .
Before the transition, the creative process was divided into clearly defined institutional stages: composition, orchestration, and performance. With the emergence of digital technology, these boundaries began to dissolve, creating a more flexible and integrated process.
Paul Théberge argues that music technology is not merely a technical tool, but a factor that transforms musical thinking[5] . The use of digital audio workstations (DAWs), virtual instruments, and sound libraries has enabled composers to control the entire creative process from the initial idea to the final realization.
This transformation has also influenced the aesthetics of film music. The use of digital timbres and sound processing techniques has created a new sonic space, expanding expressive possibilities and allowing for greater experimentation.

The figure of the singer-songwriter in the context of film music

The transformation of music technology has also brought about an important change in the figure of the music creator. Instead of the traditional composer, who was specialized in a specific aspect of the creative process, a new figure emerges that combines several roles into one.
Philip Tagg emphasizes that the modern creator assumes multiple functions in the musical process, including composition, performance, and production. This figure is close to the concept of the singer-songwriter, which represents an integrated creative model.
In Albanian film music after the 1990s, this figure begins to become increasingly present. The composer is no longer only an author of music, but a producer who constructs the entire sonic universe of the film. This change directly influences the way music interacts with film narrative.
The figure of the singer-songwriter brings a more personal and more direct approach to musical creation. Instead of a divided structure controlled from outside, there is a more free and more intuitive process, where the creator has full control over the final result.
This creative model is closely connected to the development of technology and the possibilities that it offers. In this way, the interaction between music technology and the figure of the singer-songwriter creates a new paradigm in film music.

Case study analysis

To understand this transformation in a concrete way, it is necessary to analyze specific cases from the Albanian film music repertoire. These cases clearly demonstrate how music has evolved from an illustrative function into a structural component of narrative.
Royal S. Brown emphasizes that music in film creates a hidden dimension of meaning that is not always visible in the image[6] . In this context, the analysis of specific cases allows us to understand how musical elements contribute to the construction of this dimension.
In Albanian film music after the 1990s, a significant development can be observed toward a more conscious musical language that is more fully integrated into the film narrative. This development is not only related to aesthetic changes, but also to the direct impact of music technology and the transformation of the creator's role.
In this context, music no longer functions as an illustrative element accompanying the image,

4 Owsinski, B. The Music Producer's Handbook, p. 102.
5 Théberge, P. Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music/Consuming Technology, p. 56.
6 Brown, R. S. Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music, p. 34.

but as a structural component that constructs meaning and guides the spectator's perception. As Claudia Gorbman notes, film music is an element that organizes the audiovisual experience and directly influences the interpretation of the narrative [7].

"Unë e dua erën" – Kujtim Prodani. This work represents a clear model of the interaction between light music aesthetics and the narrative function of film music. The melodic structure is built on balanced periodic phrases, creating a sense of stability and clarity. The harmony is functional and based on traditional progressions that facilitate the listener's emotional connection with the musical material. On a narrative level, the music functions as a leitmotif that reappears at key moments in the film, creating emotional continuity and a stable identity for the character. This use of the leitmotif aligns with Gorbman's concept of music as a narrative structure rather than mere decoration.

"Fillim i vështirë" – Aleksandër Peçi *(performed by Vaçe Zela)*. This work demonstrates a combination of pop style with an expanded orchestral treatment. The melody develops progressively, leading to dynamic climaxes that reinforce dramatic tension. The orchestration is rich and employs string and wind sections to create a broad sonic space. Vaçe Zela's vocal performance adds a powerful emotional dimension, transforming the music into a dominant element of the film scene. In this case, music does not simply follow the narrative, but structures it by creating a dramatic climax.

"Një vonesë e vogël" – Aleksandër Lalo. This work represents a piano miniature with a scherzo character, using lively rhythm and clear articulation to construct the cinematic situation. The structure is based on short motifs that develop dynamically, creating a sense of continuous energy. The playful character of the music creates a contrast with the image and introduces an ironic dimension into the narrative. This corresponds with Michel Chion's analysis of sound's ability to transform the meaning of the image.

"Dora e ngrohtë" – Hajg Zaharian. This work presents a more advanced compositional approach, employing extended harmonies and controlled tensions. The orchestration is rich in timbral color and creates a deep emotional space. The gradual development of musical texture contributes to an introspective atmosphere, where music functions as a reflection of the internal state of the characters.

"Parrullat" – Denis Barbier. This work reflects influences of French style and is characterized by flexible phrasing and transparent orchestration. The harmony includes modulating movements that create a sense of fluidity and elegance. The music does not build tension directly, but creates a subtle atmosphere that shapes the perception of the scene.
"Jeta në duart e tjetrit" – Thoma Simaku. This work represents a developed orchestral treatment with the use of counterpoint in the string section. The interaction of independent lines creates a complex texture and sustained tension that reflects the dramatic development of the film. In this case, music functions as a structure that carries narrative tension and develops it in parallel with the image.

7 Gorbman, C. Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music, p. 15.

"Duaje emrin tënd" – Thoma Simaku. This work presents a more modern and freer compositional approach. The musical structure is less predictable and employs harmonies that create a sense of instability. This reflects the psychological dimension of the character and makes music an introspective element that constructs a deep layer of meaning.
In all these cases, Albanian film music after the 1990s demonstrates a clear transformation from an illustrative function into a structural component of audiovisual narrative. This transformation is the result of the interaction between technological developments and the evolution of the creator's role.

The interaction between music technology and narrative structure

One of the most important aspects of the transformation of film music in post-1990 Albania is the direct interaction between music technology and the narrative structure of film. This interaction should not be seen only as a technical development, but as a profound change in the way music constructs meaning and influences the perception of the spectator.
In the period before the transition, film music was limited by technical possibilities and by the structure of institutional organization. The composer was required to work within a specific framework, where the role of music was primarily supportive and illustrative. With the development of digital technology, this situation changed fundamentally. The composer gained a new autonomy, having the possibility to control the entire creative process and to experiment with new musical forms.
In this context, music technology has directly influenced the way the narrative structure of music in film is constructed. Music is no longer limited to its traditional function, but can build an independent dimension of meaning that interacts with the image. This is in accordance with the theory of Michel Chion, who argues that sound has the ability to transform the perception of the image and to create a new relationship between them[1].
An important element in this transformation is the use of more open and more flexible musical structures. Instead of rigid and predictable forms, composers begin to use structures that adapt to the dramatic development of the film. This creates a closer connection between music and narrative and makes music an active element in the construction of storytelling.

The aesthetic and timbral dimension in the digital era

Another important aspect of the transformation of film music is the development of the aesthetic and timbral dimension in the digital era. The use of virtual instruments and digital effects has created new possibilities for the exploration of timbre and for the construction of sonic space.
In this context, timbre is no longer a secondary element, but a component that directly contributes to the construction of musical meaning. The use of sound layering and digital processing creates a new sonic space that influences the way music is perceived.
Paul Théberge emphasizes that music technology has changed the way of musical thinking, creating a more open and more experimental approach to creation[2]. In this sense, Albanian film music after the 1990s begins to display a greater stylistic diversity and greater flexibility in the use of musical elements.
This development is evident in the way composers use timbre to create atmosphere and to build tension. In many cases, timbre is used as a narrative tool that helps in constructing the emotional dimension of the film.

The role of the creator as an integrated author

The transformation of music technology has also brought an important change in the figure of the music creator. Instead of a composer specialized in a specific aspect of the creative process, a new figure emerges that combines several roles into one.
Philip Tagg argues that the modern creator assumes multiple functions in the musical process, including composition, performance, and production[3]. This figure is close to the concept of the singer-songwriter, which represents an integrated creative model.
In Albanian film music, this model begins to become increasingly visible. The composer is no longer only an author of music, but a producer who constructs the entire sonic universe of the film. This gives him greater control over the final result and directly influences the way music interacts with narrative.
This change has an important impact on the aesthetics of film music. Instead of a divided structure controlled from outside, there is a more free and more integrated process, where the creator has the possibility to experiment and to develop a more personal musical language.

Discussions

The transformation of film music in Albania should be analyzed within a broader context that includes technological developments, aesthetic changes, and the evolution of the figure of the creator. In this sense, music can no longer be seen as an isolated element, but as part of a complex audiovisual system.
One of the most important aspects is the impact of technology on the creative process. As Paul Théberge emphasizes, music technology changes the way musical thinking is structured and creates new possibilities for experimentation. In this context, the composer gains greater autonomy and has the ability to control the entire creative process.
Another aspect is the change in the relationship between music and film narrative. Music begins to construct an independent layer of meaning that interacts with the image and influences its interpretation. This is in accordance with the theory of Frank Lehman on the structural role of music in film.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the transformation of film music in post-1990 Albania appears as a complex process that reflects the continuous interaction between technological developments and cultural changes. Music can no longer be considered as an external element that accompanies the image, but as an essential component that directly contributes to the construction of the narrative and emotional meaning of the film.
In this context, the role of the composer and music creator has evolved significantly, moving from a traditional function toward an integrated model that includes composition, production, and sound design.
The development of music technology has played a decisive role in this transformation, expanding creative possibilities and changing the way musical material is constructed. The use of digital tools, virtual instruments, and modern mixing techniques has created a new aesthetic space in which sound is treated as a flexible and manipulable element in relation to film narrative.
This development has led to a more experimental and more open approach to international

influences, while at the same time maintaining local identity. In this framework, the figure of the singer-songwriter and contemporary creator represents a new artistic model, in which control over the entire creative process becomes a key element of musical identity.
This model reflects a profound change in the way music is conceptualized, placing it in a direct relationship with technology and with production processes.
In conclusion, film music in Albania can be understood as an integrated creative system in which tradition, technology, and contemporary aesthetics intersect.
This transformation is not simply technical, but represents a deep evolution of musical language, reflecting broader cultural and artistic changes in Albanian society in the digital era.

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Digitization of the music archive of Radio Tirana

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Abstract

The subject of this study is the Music Archive of Radio Tirana, an institution established in 1938, which represents one of the richest and most important documentary collections for the history of music in Albania. This archive includes recordings of professional ensembles, concerts and music festivals, vocal and instrumental works, as well as rare materials from the 20th century, providing a comprehensive overview of the development and diversity of Albanian music. The aim of the study is to analyze the process of digitizing this archive, assessing its impact on the preservation, accessibility, and re-evaluation of musical heritage. The importance of the research is linked to the risk of degradation of analog carriers, the need for standardization of technical procedures, and the integration of archival materials into contemporary research, educational, and cultural practices. The methodology followed includes archival analysis, observation of the technical digitization process, interviews with field specialists, and the review of international standards for the preservation and restoration of audio materials. The results identify the technical, organizational, and institutional challenges of the process, but also highlight the great potential of the digital format for classification, cataloging, sound restoration, and distribution on platforms accessible to researchers and the public. In conclusion, the digitization of the Music Archive is not presented merely as a technical process, but as a cultural act and a strategy for protecting collective memory, emphasizing the role of the archive as a research, academic, and educational resource. The study recommends the development of a long-term institutional strategy, the training of specialists, and the creation of a standardized database that ensures the preservation and sustainable use of this musical heritage.

Keywords

Digitization, music archive, cultural heritage, audio preservation, Radio-Tirana

Introduction

The Music Archive of Radio-Tirana constitutes one of the richest and most valuable sources of Albanian musical heritage, documenting decades of vocal, instrumental and orchestral creativity, reflecting the artistic and cultural developments of the country. This archive is not simply a fund of musical recordings, but a direct testimony of Albanian cultural identity and musical history.
The analog material of the Tirana Radio Music Archive is systematized in an organized manner and maintains very good technical quality, ensuring the preservation of the materials in a clear and reliable manner. In addition to the physical preservation of the materials, digitization is presented as a necessary step to guarantee their long-term sustainability, preventing possible degradation that may occur over the years. This prevention process does not aim to replace the current physical preservation, but to provide a digital copy of the materials, accessible to researchers, artists and professionals in the field, becoming an important tool for future research and studies.
Digitization also strengthens the active role of the archive as a source of knowledge and study, enabling systematic cataloging, sound restoration and integration into research and educational platforms. This process facilitates the use of materials in music education, interdisciplinary studies and the promotion of Albanian art in a national and international context. Through digitization, the archive not only preserves the materials, but also becomes a dynamic instrument for research, creation and appreciation of the Albanian musical heritage, guaranteeing sustainable access and use by future generations.
The presented study examines the digitization methodologies, technical and institutional challenges, achieved results and expected impact on the preservation, cataloguing and use of the Music Archive of Radio-Tirana, highlighting the importance of this process for securing musical and cultural heritage.

Study methodology

This study on the digitization of the Music Archive of Radio-Tirana is built on an interdisciplinary approach that combines methods of archival research, technical analysis of materials and cultural heritage studies. The methodological approach includes:

Inventory and analysis of archival materials

A systematic review of the holdings of the Tirana Radio Music Archive, including vocal, instrumental and orchestral recordings, as well as documents related to program's metadata, has been carried out. Special priority has been given to the oldest and most important materials for Albanian musical history, in order to determine the technical condition, format and possibilities for digitization.

Technical analysis and preparation for digitalization

The technical characteristics of analog carriers, such as recording quality, long-term stability and type of material, have been examined. This analysis has allowed the determination of the most appropriate methods for digitization and sound restoration, ensuring optimal quality of recordings and harmonized integration into digital systems.

Interviews and comparative studies

To complement the technical and archival data, interviews were conducted with archive specialists, digitization technicians and Radio-Tirana employees, who contributed with knowledge on the process, priorities and importance of digitization for the preservation and sustainable use of materials. This data was used to build an integrated and standardized digitization strategy, ensuring that the archive continues to be an active resource for research, study and education.

Historical and archival context

The Music Archive of Radio-Tirana represents one of the most important funds of the Albanian musical heritage, documenting more than eight decades of musical and programmatic activity. The first radio station in Albania was inaugurated on November 28, 1938, and since the beginning, Radio Tirana has played a central role in the development and consolidation of music in the country. The musical programs, recordings of various orchestras, ensembles and festivals have created a rich fund of materials, which today constitutes the basis of the Music Archive.
During the second half of the 20th century, with the consolidation of Radio Tirana's programming and artistic functions, the music archive expanded in volume and complexity. The holdings include vocal, instrumental and orchestral recordings, as well as accompanying documents containing program metadata and repertoire selection policies. This holding not only documents musical developments, but also reflects the social, political and cultural context of the time, making it a valuable resource for music scholars and historians.
The archive is organized and stored in appropriate technical conditions, guaranteeing accurate and systematic access to musical materials. The earliest materials are stored in stable analog formats, while the newest recordings have been gradually integrated into digital formats. This careful structuring allows for effective use of the fund for research on the musical repertoire, interpretative style and cultural impact of Radio-Tirana.
In addition to documenting musical creativity, the archive also reflects the contribution of the personnel involved in the preservation, recording and administration of the materials, making this fund a unique source of Albanian musical memory. Such a historical and archival approach creates the necessary basis for understanding the importance of digitization as a strategic step for the preservation, study and dissemination of this heritage.

Structure of the music archive of Radio Tirana

Archiving at Radio-Tirana did not occur as a passive process. On the contrary, the selection of materials for recording, the method of cataloging, and the preservation policy were guided by artistic, ideological, and aesthetic criteria, which also reflected the cultural and political developments of the time. In this sense, the music archive is a living document that preserves not only sounds, but also values, aesthetics, and ideological orientations of certain historical periods. Through this archive, today it is possible to reconstruct:

- The stylistic profiling of light music in Albania from the 1960s to the 1990s;
- Changes in the way folklore is interpreted, from authentic forms to institutionalized variants;
- The evolution of cultivated Albanian music, from the works of Çesk Zadeja and Tish Dajia, to modern creations of contemporary composers.

In the archive we also find unique recordings that do not exist anywhere else: performances by prominent artists who are no longer alive, rare forms of traditional music performed in the field, or early versions of works that have since been altered or lost.
Today, the Music Archive of Radio Tirana contains about 62,000 unique recordings, as well as copies of these recordings. It continues to be located in the Radio building, but no longer in the underground floors as it used to be, but in a completely reconstructed, standardized environment and in optimal conditions for the storage of musical materials. The audio materials of the RTSH archive are currently still produced on reels. The reels are on magnetic tapes with different speeds, through which the technology of the time was able to produce music, or audio material. The reels are divided into several types, with CPR or LGR tape and with 76, 38 and 19 speeds. Each of the reels has its own labeling on the protective box.

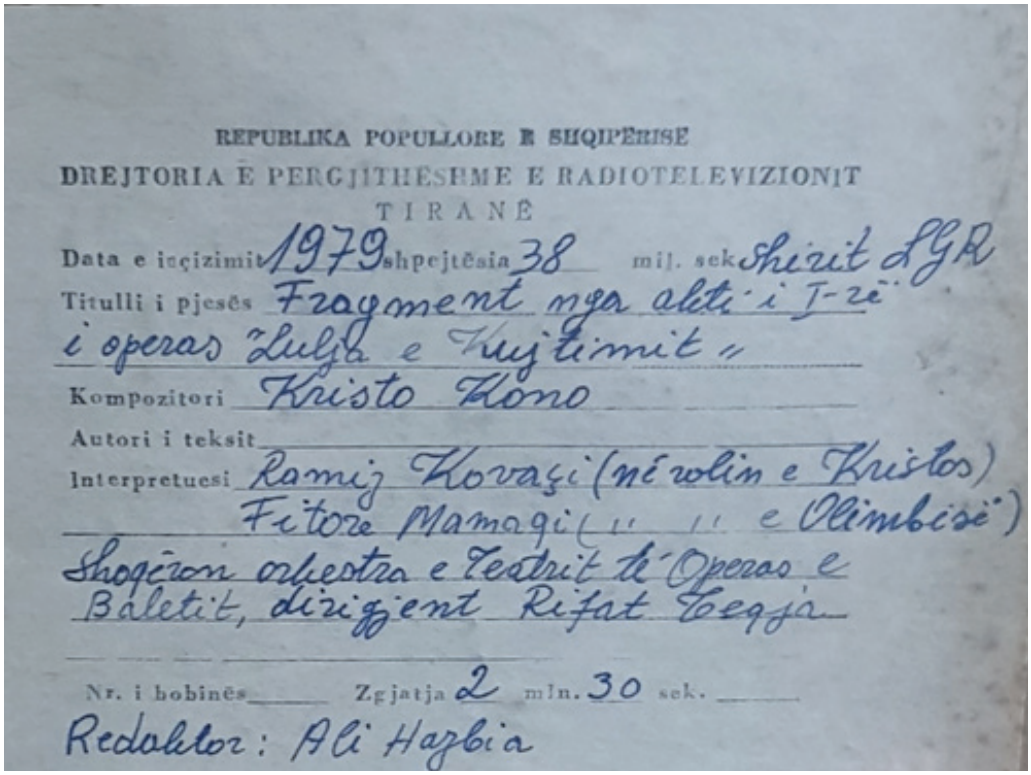
REPUBLIKA POPULLORE E SHQIPËRISË
DREJTORIA E PËRGJITHËSHME E RADIOTELEVIZIONIT
TIRANË
Data e inçizimit 1979 shpejtësia 38 mil. sek Shiriti LGR
Titulli i pjesës Fragment nga akti i I-rë i operas "Lulja e Kujtimit"
Kompozitori Kristo Kono
Autori i teksit
Interpretuesi Ramiz Kovaçi (në rolin e Kristos)
Fitore Mamaqi (" " e Olimbisë)
Shoqëron orkestra e Teatrit të Operas e Baletit, dirigjent Rifat Teqja
Nr. i bobinës Zgjatja 2 mln. 30 sek.
Redaktor: Ali Hazbia

Figure 1. Example of how a reel is labeled at the Music Archive of Radio-Tirana:

Archive cataloging

The archive structure includes various musical materials as well as shows with musical themes or subjects. The entire music collection is divided into three large sectors:
1. Classical music
2. Light music
3. Folk music

Each of these sectors has its own subdivisions, names and corresponding years.

Classical music

Concerts of the RTSH Symphony Orchestra (1963 – 2018); Albanian artistic film music (1965 – 1997); Albanian operas and foreign operas performed by Albanian artists (1954 – 1991); Albanian ballets (1967 - 1990); TKOB Orchestra (1967 - 1994); Classical instrumental music (1979 - 2008); Chamber music (1984-1997); Various classical music (1945-1996); Classical music - Diplomas and concerts of the ILA (1962-1991); High schools of music in the districts - District Symphony Orchestras - Festival of Pedagogical High Schools (1967 - 1997).

Soft music

Song Festival at RTSH (1962-2010); May Decades/May Concerts (1967-1990); Musical Surveys (1967-1990); When Spring Comes/Songs of the Season (1985-2002); Festival of Interpreters of Our Song (1983-1987); Festival of Light Music in the Districts. Brass Bands in the Districts (1972-1989); Festival of Soldier's Song. Army Ensemble (1966-1990); Amateur Artistic Ensembles in the Districts. Student' Song Festival. Young Voices Competition. (1967-1995); Shkodra Pioneer Festival and Children's Festival in the Districts (1965 - 2001); Government Concerts (1966-1987).

Folk Music

Gjirokastra National Folk Festival (1968 - 2003); Berat Folk Festival (1995); Songs and Dances from the Districts (1972 - 1998); Amateur Artistic Ensembles/National Amateur Festivals (1966 - 1974); Various Folk Singers and Groups (1969 - 2001); Folk Song Festivals and Concerts (1963 - 2013).
The broadcast book and the entry book are also integral parts of the archive. The broadcast book is a type of register compiled by the relevant editor of a music sector, for example the editor of classical music, light music or folk music.

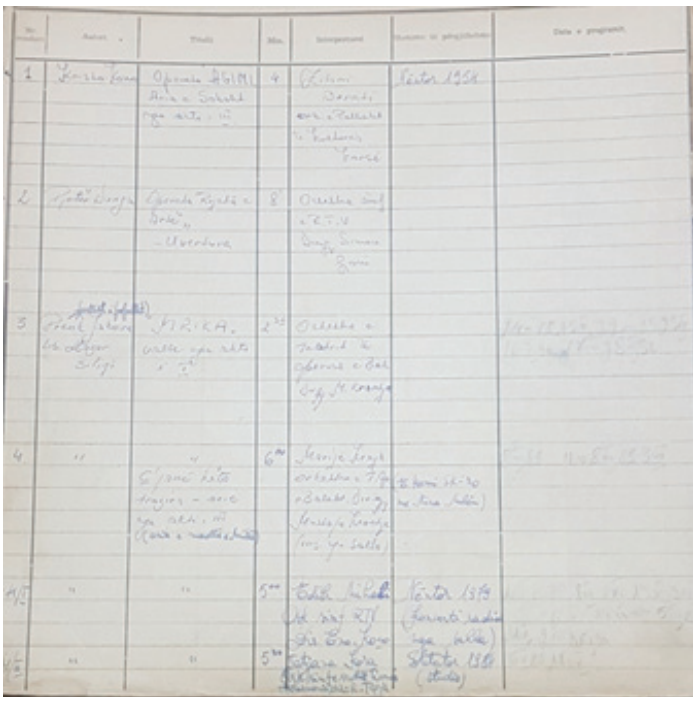

Figure 2. Example from a classical music transmission book at the Music Archive of Radio Tirana:

In the example presented above, in the column of ordinal no. the notation 4/1 and 4/2 is noted. This is called an index. The index is placed when a musical work is re-staged (e.g. with a new cast of performers). In the column of program dates, the dates when the materials were broadcast are indicated. This is done so that the music editor does not fall into repetition of the program that will be broadcast in the following days, i.e. as a form of orientation.
In addition to the broadcast book, we also have the entry book. The entry book is a book kept by the archive. In contrast to the broadcast book, where materials are recorded according to musical genre, the entry book records all materials that have entered the archive according to time chronology. Here, the large ("mother") reel is recorded, which contains several different materials within it.

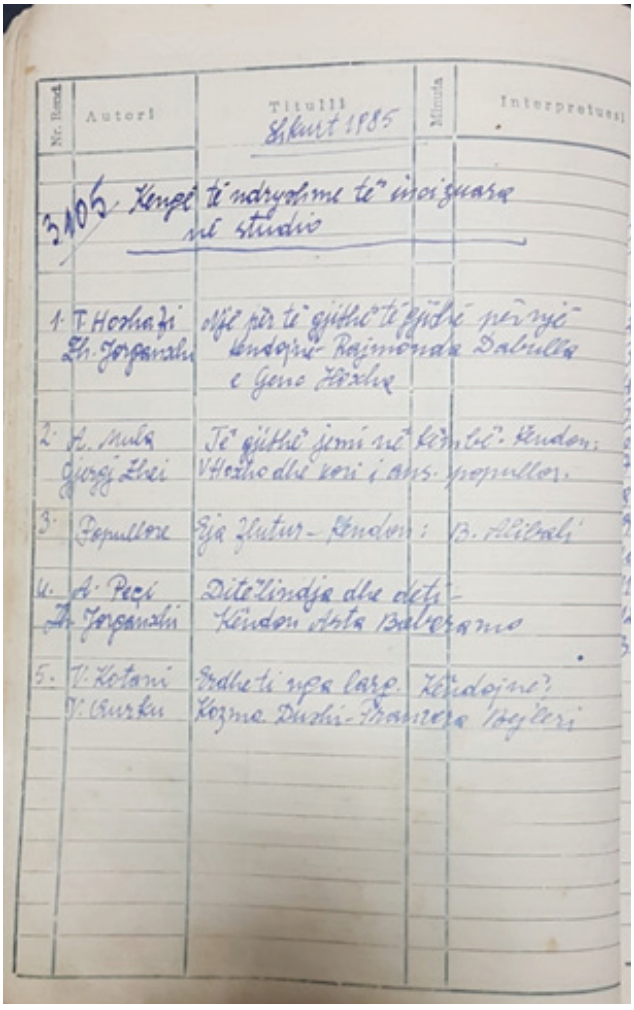

Figure 3. Example of recording materials in an entry book at the Music Archive of Radio Tirana:

The digitalizing process

The process of digitizing the Music Archive of Radio-Tirana constitutes a structural and planned intervention, which requires an organized and methodical approach to guarantee the long-term preservation and accessibility of musical materials. This process is carried out in several interconnected phases, including technical analysis, sound restoration, digitization and

cataloguing, each of which is critical for the integrity and value of the archive.
The initial phase involved the identification and inventory of recordings stored in analog formats, with an assessment of the physical and technical condition of each object. The inventory included vocal, instrumental and orchestral recordings, with priority given to the oldest and most important materials for documenting Albanian musical history. Each recording was analyzed for sound quality, type of carrier and long-term stability, facilitating the determination of the most appropriate methodologies for digitization.
Recordings that showed physical damage or reduced technical quality were processed through a sound restoration procedure, using specialized equipment to clean, stabilize, and optimize the signal. This step ensures that the digital version faithfully preserves the original characteristics of the recording and musical details valuable for study and interpretation.
In terms of technical standards, the recordings were converted into digital formats that are sustainable, in accordance with international guidelines for music archives. The process included measuring sound levels, balancing the frequency spectrum, preserving master versions and creating backup copies for long-term data security. This ensures reproducibility of the materials and access without loss of sound quality.
Each digital recording was accompanied by standardized metadata, including information on the title, composer, lyricist, performer or orchestra, date and duration of the recording, type of format, activity in which the musical material is included, and contextual content. Digital versions of the recordings are prepared for integration into research and educational databases, enabling wide access for researchers, students, educators, and the general public. This process connects the musical history of Radio Tirana with contemporary practices of documentation, study, and promotion of Albanian musical art, contributing to the consolidation of musical heritage in a national and international context.

Benefits and impacts

Digital recordings, accompanied by detailed metadata, offer opportunities for in-depth and structured analysis of the musical repertoire, interpretative style and historical development of Albanian music in different periods. These materials allow for systematized comparisons, the identification of cross-cultural influences and the study of orchestral and ensemble performances, while also enabling interdisciplinary research related to music, history, anthropology and cultural studies.
The use of digitized materials as educational resources in schools, universities, and cultural centers offers the opportunity to analyze original recordings, examine musical techniques, and understand the historical and cultural context of musical creations. This process strengthens cultural and musical skills, integrating theoretical knowledge with practice, and stimulating the development of creativity and critical interpretation[1] .
At the institutional level, digitization strengthens capacities for systematic archive management, enables inter-institutional cooperation, and creates opportunities for the development of integrated research and educational projects, positioning the archive as a strategic resource for scientific studies and for the promotion of musical heritage in a sustainable and standardized manner[2] .

1 Deegan, M. & Tanner, S. Digital Preservation, Facet Publishing, 2006, 134.
2 Giaretta, D. Advanced Digital Preservation, Springer, 2011, 442.

Challenges and recommendations

Although the digitization of the Radio Tirana Music Archive presents significant benefits in terms of the preservation and accessibility of musical heritage, this process is accompanied by a number of complex challenges that require well-structured treatment and strategic planning. Identifying and anticipating these challenges is a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring a successful and sustainable implementation of the process.

On the technical level, the heterogeneity of analogue materials – in terms of formats, recording quality and physical condition, – presents considerable operational difficulties. Each category of recording requires specific reproduction and conversion equipment, as well as specialized skills in the field of sound restoration, in order to preserve as faithfully as could be possible the original characteristics of the sound[3] . At the same time, the management of digital objects requires standardization of archival formats, the creation of "master" copies and secure backup systems, to minimize the risk of data degradation or loss in the long term[4] .

In the institutional aspect, the challenges are related to organizational and financial capacities. Training of personnel in modern digitalization technologies, ensuring sustainable budgetary resources and coordination between relevant structures constitute essential elements for the effective functioning of the project[5] . In the absence of a long-term strategy and a clear management model, there is a risk that the process will remain fragmented or will not reach the required professional standards.

Beyond the technical and organizational dimension, a particularly important challenge also arises in the educational and cultural plan. Digitization in itself does not guarantee full use of the fund, if it is not accompanied by awareness and orientation of potential users[6] . Researchers, students and the general public must be equipped with knowledge on research methods, scientific citation criteria and respect for copyright. In the absence of this formative dimension, the scientific and cultural potential of the archive may remain unexploited in an optimal way.

The recommendations for a sustainable strategy foresee that the institution should draft a clear and comprehensive plan for the digitization, preservation, improvement and use of the archive, clearly defining the priorities and resources necessary for the successful completion of the process. In view of this, it is essential to ensure a staff trained in digitization, sound restoration, cataloguing and management of digital platforms, so that the project is carried out with high quality standards[7] . In parallel, the digitized materials should be cataloged through harmonized metadata and stored in secure databases, which enable easy search and wide use. This entire process should be accompanied by continuous monitoring of the condition of the materials, updating of technical standards and continuous adaptation to best practices in the field of digital archiving, thus guaranteeing long-term sustainability and efficiency [8].

3 Bessire, L. & Fisher, D. Radio Fields - Anthropology and Wireless Sound in the 21st Century. New York University Press, New York, 2012, 258.

4 Greene, P. D. & Porcello, Th. Wired for Sound - Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures. Wesleyan University Press, 2005, p. 18.

5 Giaretta, D. Advanced Digital Preservation. Springer, 2011, p. 429-433.

6 Bijsterveld, K. & van Dijck, J. Sound Souvenirs: Audio Technologies, Memory and Cultural Practices. Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2009, p. 11-17.

7 Deegan, M., & Tanner, S., Digital Preservation, Facet Publishing, 2006, p. 103-116.

8 Dobreva, M. Digital Archives, Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 139-156.

Conclusion

The analysis of the digitization process of the Music Archive of Radio-Tirana highlights its strategic role in the management, conservation and valorization of the national musical heritage. This process is not limited to the technical conversion of materials from analog to digital format, but represents a profound restructuring of the practices of documenting, preserving and providing access to Albanian musical creativity. In this context, the archive appears as a primary source for the study of artistic developments over the decades, providing an important empirical basis for scientific research and educational activities.

In parallel, digitization contributes to the consolidation of institutional capacities through the institutionalization of professional standards in cataloguing, sound restoration and management of digital objects. The effective implementation of this process presupposes addressing technical and organizational challenges, as well as continuous investment in the professional development of human resources and in the construction of standardized infrastructures for data storage and management. Such a systematic and sustainable approach is an essential condition for guaranteeing the functionality and long-term integrity of the archive.

In a broader perspective, digitization should be conceived as an instrument of cultural memory preservation policies, which ensures the continuity of access, study and critical re-evaluation of Albanian musical creativity. In this way, the archive is transformed from a conservation structure into a dynamic knowledge platform, capable of supporting scientific production and nurturing intergenerational cultural dialogue.

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Folk song as an expression of albanian cultural identity, the life and creative work of the composer Muharrem Gurra

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Abstract

Folk music constitutes one of the most important forms of expression, preservation, and transmission of the cultural identity of a people. In the Albanian tradition, folk song has served as an artistic and cultural means for the collective memory, social values, traditions, and historical experiences of different communities. In this context, the study of the creativity of composers who have contributed to the enrichment and development of the folk music repertoire takes on a special importance in terms of Albanian cultural identity.In this paper, the aim is to analyze the life and creative activity of the composer Muharrem Gurra, viewed in a broader context as a contributor to the cultivation of Albanian cultural identity. In the study, particular importance is given to the archiving and documentation of the composer's works, the written scores, as well as audio recordings, which serve as primary sources of great importance for the preservation, analysis, and original transmission of Albanian musical heritage.The research is based on a qualitative methodology with a historical-documentary, ethnomusicological, and archival approach, focusing on the analysis of the life, creativity, and musical heritage of the composer Muharrem Gurra by examining scores, audio recordings, archived materials, studies, as well as interviews and testimonies from artists, researchers, and family members.In conclusion, it is found that through his contribution and artistic activity, as well as institutional recordings, the folk repertoire of Central Albania was preserved and consolidated as part of the national musical identity. This fact demonstrates the importance of musical archiving in the conservation of Albanian cultural heritage.

Keywords

Albanian folk music, musical documentation, cultural heritage

Introduction

Folk music constitutes one of the most important elements of a people's cultural identity, serving as a significant means for preserving and transmitting collective memory, traditions, and social values from generation to generation. In Albanian culture, folk song has played an important role in reflecting the spiritual and historical life of communities, remaining one of the most original forms of Albanian cultural heritage. In this context, the study of the creativity of composers who have contributed to the enrichment and development of the folk music repertoire takes on particular importance for the relationship between music and Albanian cultural identity.A figure of special importance in this regard is the composer Muharrem Gurra, whose творчество (creative output) occupies an important place in the repertoire of Albanian urban folk music. Academician Vasil S. Tole considers Muharrem Gurra to be one of the consolidators of the musical features of Tirana's urban folk song, linking his творчество with the pre-Ottoman diatonic musical tradition of Central Albania[1] . Meanwhile, the singer Fitnete Rexha has emphasized that his compositions were entirely based on Albanian folklore and avoided foreign influences, especially oriental ones[2] .The creative work of Muharrem Gurra, documented through scores and recordings audio and archival materials of Radio Tirana and other cultural institutions represent an important part of Albanian musical heritage. This paper aims to analyze the life and creative activity of the composer, highlighting his contribution to the preservation, documentation, and intergenerational transmission of the Albanian folk music repertoire. Literature Review Ethnomusicologists define music as the art of expressing feelings and thoughts through sounds. In the same spirit, Sami Frashëri states that the level of civilization and morality of a nation can be understood through its songs and dances. Meanwhile, the musicologist and academician Vasil S. Tole emphasizes that Albanian folk music represents a reflection of the original ethnocultural and historical features of the Albanian people, while also reflecting influences and interactions with other cultures[3] . A. L. Lloyd, an English ethnomusicologist, points out that, as in many Balkan countries, in Albania a considerable part of lyrical folk songs have an urban origin and were later spread to rural areas, where they continued to be preserved and transmitted across generations[4] . According to him, these songs carry melodic and textual elements with oriental influences, a phenomenon widespread in the regions of Southeastern Europe under Ottoman influence. In the same line, the musicologist Eno Koço emphasizes that urban song, even when it was created for the Ottoman or Albanian elite, continued to reflect the spirit and cultural reality of the local population[5] . In this context, the study and documentation of the creative work of folk music composers takes on particular importance for the preservation and identification of Albanian musical heritage. A figure of special importance in this regard is the composer Muharrem Gurra, whose creative output occupies an important place in the repertoire of Albanian urban folk music. According to researchers, the origins of sung folk music date back to the Neolithic period, around 5–4 thousand years before our era, when art had mainly an expressive and ritual character.

1 Vasil S. Tole, The Spiritual Heritage of Tirana in Music (Tirana: Mediaprint, 2020), 130.
2 Ibid.
3 Vasil S. Tole, Albanian Musical Folklore: Albanian Monody (Tirana: SHBLU, 2002), 22.
4 Eno Koço, The Albanian Musical World: Tradition and Individualities (Tirana, 2019), 122.
5 Ibid.

The terms “folk music,” “folk song,” and “folk dance” are relatively late expressions, connected to the concept of folklore, a term coined in 1846 by the English scholar William Thoms to describe the traditions, customs, and spiritual culture of the people[6] . In ethnomusicological literature, folk music is considered a collective creation transmitted from generation to generation. Although scholars provide different definitions of it, one of the most widespread approaches considers folk music as music that is preserved, performed, and transmitted by the people themselves, reflecting the life, historical memory, and cultural identity of the community.

Methodology

The study is based on a qualitative methodology that combines historical, ethnomusicological, archival, and cultural approaches, with the aim of analyzing the life, creative work, and musical heritage of the composer Muharrem Gurra. The research is built on historical-documentary, archival, and interview methods, relying on the analysis of musical manuscripts, scores, audio recordings, materials archived at Radio Tirana, institutional documents, and family archives. In addition, the study is supported by interviews and testimonies from artists, researchers, and members of the composer’s family. For the analysis of the musical material, analytical, interpretative, and comparative methods have been used, with the aim of identifying the musical features and the role of Muharrem Gurra’s (creative work) in the preservation and transmission of Albanian musical identity.

Results and discussion

In this context, a figure of particular importance in the творчество (creative work) of Albanian urban folk song is the composer Muharrem Gurra, who through his activity has contributed to the enrichment of the musical repertoire and to the preservation of the folk song tradition. His creative output represents an important part of Albanian musical heritage and reflects elements of cultural identity closely connected to the life and experience of the community. For this reason, this study aims to present and document the life and creative activity of the composer Muharrem Gurra, highlighting his contribution to the creation and preservation of the Albanian folk song repertoire. Academician Vasil S. Tole, in his book, states that: Muharrem Gurra, through his creative work, is undoubtedly a consolidator of the musical features of Tirana’s urban folk music, which was and remains a natural continuation of the heritage on which he relied, namely the pre-Ottoman diatonic musical tradition of Tirana and its surroundings[7] . The famous singer Fitnete Rexha, a cousin of the composer, has expressed that: in Rrema’s creations, the tendency and dedication not to be influenced by foreign folk music, especially Turkish music, were clearly noticeable. His compositions were entirely based on our folklore, which he collected with great care and effort in every village of Tirana, Kruja, etc[8] .[2] His creative activity dates back to the 1920s–30s of the last century. From an early age, he masterfully played the folk instruments of that period used in Central Albania, mainly in the Tirana region, such as the Pullgaria, Pipzat, Lauria, Çiftelia, and later the violin these instruments having been inherited from his grandfather and father, who crafted them themselves. Many of his early creations were instrumental, especially with the Pimza (in the popular language of the Pipzat) and the Pullgaria,

6 Percy Scholes, The Oxford Companion to Music (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), s.v. “Folk Song.”
7 Vasil S. Tole, The Spiritual Heritage of Tirana in Music (Tirana: Mediaprint, 2020), 131.
8 Vasil S. Tole, The Spiritual Heritage of Tirana in Music (Tirana: Mediaprint, 2020), 131.

which were neither written in musical notation nor recorded in audio form. With the beginning of his studies of the violin and solfeggio theory, his first folk song compositions began to take shape and be identified; these were performed at various family celebrations, through which they became known and quickly spread among the people. Many of these creations, especially those with folk instruments, according to the composer himself, have not survived to the present day due to the lack of recording or notation in musical scores[9] . With the beginning of his engagement in the Royal Band as a flugelhorn player in the years 1925–30, he began to write down his compositions in musical notation. The first well-known songs that have survived to the present day include "Qan lulja për lulen," "Po shkon xhika (goca) me korr n'arë," "Kur dole në lom," "Ç'osht ma e bukur në kët bot," "Jetë të gjatë me burrin paçit," etc. The song "Qan lulja për lulen," having gained wider popularity among the people, was recorded on disc by the great singer Tefta Tashko in 1942 and is preserved in the archives of Albanian Radio Television. In the years 1938–43, the composer went to Rome with the Royal Band, where he studied at the Santa Cecilia Conservatory, specializing in the horn. After returning from Italy, he helped in the establishment of the band of the National Liberation Army, where some of the performed pieces were also compositions by the composer Dhora Leka. After liberation, he worked as a musician in the wind band of the People's Army. During this period, he also worked voluntarily with the Executive Committee of Tirana, where he opened several mandolin courses; later, the new students learned instruments such as the mandolin, guitar, violin, accordion, clarinet, etc. He contributed to the development of cultural life in the city by preparing various artistic and folkloric concerts, organizing the orchestra and singers with different musical and choreographic materials for the stage. Thus, during this period, one can say that the identification of his creations began through the various concerts held in existing halls and on improvised stages in working environments. During this period, he composed over 11 marches for wind bands, which were performed by the Army Wind Band under the direction of conductors Kristaq Panduku, Ali Madhi, Selma Shtishi, etc. These marches include "Peza heroike," "Tirana jonë," "Marshi i sportistit," "Elegji për Shyqyri Ishmin," etc. marches that are still performed today by various wind bands. With the establishment of the orchestra of the Central Albania group at Radio Tirana, led by the composer Muharrem Gurra, folkloric materials as well as the works of various composers began to be recorded at the radio station, where today its phonotheque contains over 270 songs by Gurra. The solo singers of the Central Albania group included Agim Hoxha, Ibrahim Tukiqi, Sulejman Çela, Elmaz Çela, Zija Doraci, Ismail Tërshana, Rifat Shaqja, Xhavit Xhepa, Ramazan Zyberi, Sali Brari. Other singers included Fitnete Rexha, Hafsa Zyberi, Safete Toska, Luçie Miloti, Sabiha Toska, Nadire Herri, Qefsere Keçi, Virgjini Mile, Shpresa Nishani, etc. Muharrem Gurra's songs, in addition to Radio Tirana—where they were recorded and used as repertoire in various programs such as the morning folk music program or "Radio Posta"—were also broadcast by radio stations in other cities, as well as in neighboring countries with Albanian populations, such as Radio Prishtina, Radio Gjakova, Radio Prizren in Kosovo, Radio Ulqin in Montenegro, Radio Skopje in Macedonia, etc. At these radio stations, many Kosovar singers recorded the composer Gurra's songs with their own orchestras; among the most prominent were singers such as Ismet Peja, Luan Hajra, Qamili i Vogël, Mazllom Mejzini, Bashkim Paçuku, Shpresa Berisha, Shpresa Gashi, and later (after the 1990s): Shkëlzen Jetishi, Zenel Doli, Artan Bakia, Sinan Vllasaliu, Edi Furra, etc.

9 Ibid.

With the creation of the Folk Ensemble at the Opera and Ballet Theatre, under the artistic direction of Prof. Çesk Zadeja and orchestra leader Agim Krajka, in every premiere of the ensemble's repertoire there were always several songs by the composer, performed by Fitnete Rexha, Sali Brari, the ensemble choir, and Merita Halili. Some of these songs include: "Dil të shoh me sy," "Unë e di që ti mu më don," "Në Tiranë lulëzojnë mimozat," "Moj e bukura symëshqerrë," "Asht stolisur sot Tirana," "Qënke veshur me të bardha," "Po shkon goca me korr n'arrë," "Isha vetëm tuj menu," "Për një mot e gjymës viti," "Merr gjergjefin," "Dashurin që kam për ty," "Jam e lumtur se ja mrina," "O ju yje o ju hyjnesha," "Ke ullini m'kodërsen," "Ç'osht ma e bukur në këtë bot," etc. An extraordinary contribution to the promotion of Muharrem Gurra's songs was made by composer Agim Krajka, who orchestrated them, bringing them to the stage for the public in a classical and professional version, making them more accessible both to the orchestra and to a wider audience. The song "Në Tiranë lulëzojnë mimozat" won second prize at the first folk music festival organized by the Folk Ensemble of the Opera and Ballet Theatre. In addition to the Folk Ensemble, the composer's songs were also included in the repertoire of other artistic institutions such as the State Estrada, the People's Army Ensemble, the group "Na bashkon kënga popullore," folklore festivals, and enterprise ensembles participating in the May Decades, such as the "Migjeni" ensemble and the "Josif Pashko" ensemble, etc. The composer and researcher Mustafa Basha defended his diploma thesis on the composer's creativity; he often presented these studies in concert form, which he organized at the Palace of Culture in Tirana, where he served as artistic director together with composer Vladimir Kotani. Many of Muharrem Gurra's works were recorded at the Institute of Folklore, especially the early pre-liberation creations, including recordings with the composer's own original voice and the Central Albania orchestra of Radio Tirana. A broad collaboration also existed between the composer and cultural houses in different cities of the country such as Korça, Peshkopi, Burrel, Lezhë, etc. His compositions were used by these institutions in various concerts held in these cities, as well as in children's festivals. After the change of the political system and the advent of democracy, the composer's repertoire was widely utilized by many singers and composers, who reinterpreted them in different versions according to orchestras or ensembles that were now enriched with modern electronic instruments, which became widely spread and implemented in contemporary folk music, such as the organ, synthesizer, electric violin, electric guitar, drums, etc. There were also new folk instruments that resembled the Pullgaria, such as the Huti, Sazja, Buzuku (string instruments), and the kavalli or kaduku (wind instruments), which are played similarly to the clarinet but are more rarely used. The late Arben Tafaj of the Tirana Association wrote: If his contemporary, the great Ibrahim Kodra, would be considered the "Archaic of Modernism" in painting, Muharrem Gurra deserves to be called the "Archaic of Modernism" in Albanian music, because the songs he created transcend even [10]the periods of his own creativity; they appear both distant and close, both simple and perfected! The most widely used songs, which today can be found recorded everywhere on various devices such as cassette tapes (of the 1990s), CDs, and USBs, include "Qënke veshur me të bardha," "Isha vetëm tuj menu," "Për një mot e gjysëm viti," "Qan lulja për lulen," "Dil të shoh me sy," "Merr gjergjefin," "Unë e di që ti mu më do," "Lule të bukra ka Tirana," "Fërfëlloj fëllënza n'uj," "Ma ven qeleshen n'sy," "Me fytyr të qeshur po më vjen," and many others.

10 Ramazan Gurra, 100 Tirana Folk Songs by Muharrem Gurra (Tirana: Albtipografia, 2010).

These reworkings, with new orchestrations presented differently by various musicians over time and in accordance with musical modernization, have been performed by new folk singers such as Artjola Toska, Valbona Mema, Greta Zani, Pajtim Struga, Bujar Çiçi, Rik Buneci, Fatjeta Barbullushi, Valbona Halili, Iris Bega, Shkëlzen Jetishi, Sinan Vllasaliu, Artan Bakiu. In the year 2000, in the hall of the Academy of Arts, now UART, a recital concert was held in memory of the second anniversary of the composer's passing, organized under the care of the "Tirana" Association and directed by Milto Kutali. In the same evening, the first book featuring the 75 most well-known songs of the composer was also presented, brought to life by his son Ramazan Gurra. In it he writes: "Dozens of his creations came to life, and where were they not sung and who did not sing them. And his name, in relation to the song, remained almost anonymous. But a day comes, as generations pass the work from one to another, and it is not forgiven for us to condemn the artist to oblivion![11]" This book opened the way for a second volume entitled "100 Folk Urban Songs of Tirana," this time also accompanied by the corresponding scores, again prepared by Ramazan Gurra, with transcription by Skënder Gurra (the composer's son) and Prof. Arben Llozi. In this concert, the well-known singer Fitnete Rexha performed for the last time. In addition to young folk singers, jazz singers and professionals such as Eda Zari, with her band of German instrumentalists, have performed the composer's songs on many stages across Europe and beyond, contributing to the international recognition of his creative work. Likewise, singer Elina Duni with her Swiss band includes several of the composer's songs in her repertoire, performing them on various world stages and further promoting his name and music. Elsa Lila, together with her band in Italy, has also performed several of his works in her own characteristic style, reviving and reinterpreting them through her distinctive interpretation. The same has been done by Marsela Çibukaj in her concerts in Italy. One of the most accomplished jazz artists in the country, Gent Rrushi with his band, has performed and arranged Muharrem Gurra's compositions in jazz style. The group West Side Family has also revived the song "Lule të bukra ka Tirana," in collaboration with composer Edi Balili and Klodjan Qafoku. The composer and professor at the University of Arts, Endri Sina has recently arranged for one of his own projects the song "Ku je nis moj shtat selvi." The composer Aleksandër Peçi has incorporated several melodies of Muharrem Gurra into his sonatas. The well-known singer and pedagogue Manjola Nallbani has several of the composer's songs in her repertoire, which she has performed successfully in many concerts both inside and outside the country, such as "Qënke veshur me të bardha," "Ma ven qeleshen n'sy," "Unë e di që ti mu m'do," and the most refined and recently orchestrated by pianist Eklant Hasa, "Qan lulja për lulen." Manjola also includes several of the composer's works in her academic repertoire at the University. The well-known singer and university professor Prof. Assoc. Dr. Kastriot Tusha, a great admirer of the composer, has realized a recital concert dedicated to the works of Muharrem Gurra. In almost every one of his projects, both inside and outside the country, related to folk music, Kastriot Tusha includes several of Gurra's compositions in his repertoire. In his latest collaboration with singer Vani Gjuzi, Tusha brought back for the audience the old song by Gurra, "Me fytyr të qeshur po më vjen." The pedagogue and renowned cellist Pjetër Guralumi, at the inauguration of the "Tabake Bridge" in Tirana, performed with a string orchestra songs by the composer, which he himself arranged, orchestrated, and conducted. The BujArt Choir, composed of diplomats from foreign embassies in Tirana and led by conductor and University of Arts professor Bujar Alliu, has performed several of the composer's songs, arranged and conducted by him, both in domestic and international stages.

11 Muharrem Gurra, Urban Folk Songs: When Two Hearts Fall in Love (Tirana, 2000), 5.

For the past two years, musicologist Dr. Behar Arllati has been working on his study for the publication of a monograph on the life and creative work of the composer. In his book Musical Tradition in Gjakova, Lyrical Songs of Love, he mentions the composer, along with many other composers of that period[12] Likewise, the researcher Tole states that Muharrem Gurra was also engaged in the study and collection of Tirana's musical folklore in the ethnomusicological field. At the end of the 1920s, thanks to his investment, we have the collection of around 43 folk musical creations of Tirana, traces of which are found in the "notebook of folk songs", an archive of the Gurra family, written in the composer's handwriting. We can imagine the great work that was required to collect them during popular festivities and celebrations, in villages and cities, over many years, time that is necessary in such cases for their recognition and documentation. This contact, close with the folk musical material, as the author Tole cites, determined what Muharrem Gurra would do throughout his life: the promotion of the values of Tirana folk music[13] Recently, the well-known composer and pianist Robert Radoja has been working on all the compositions and manuscripts of the composer; he has orchestrated for solo piano over 170 songs of Gurra, a tribute to "my good friend," as Radoja himself has said. All these studies have influenced the transmission of the composer's works up to the present day. Since its founding on November 28, 1938, Radio Tirana became a key institution for the documentation and dissemination of Albanian musical culture. In conclusion of this study, we reach the conclusion that: the recording of Gurra's songs represents an important moment in the preservation and transmission of musical heritage. In a period when tradition was still transmitted orally, the recording and radio transmission of these songs created the possibility for the folk repertoire to be documented and disseminated beyond local boundaries. Through the waves of radio and later through various audiovisual media, these performances became an important source for the study of traditional music and for the preservation of national cultural identity. The continuity of their transmission to this day demonstrates not only the artistic value of the composer Gurra, but also the role that historical recordings play in the conservation and recontextualization of cultural heritage over time. In this way, these recordings function as a living archive of Albanian musical memory, linking the traditional practice of the past with the audiences and researchers of the present.Through this study we conclude that the creativity of the composer Muharrem Gurra holds an important place in the process of preservation and intergenerational transmission of the Albanian folk musical repertoire. Through his artistic activity and the creation of traditional folk songs of Central Albania, Gurra contributed both to the documentation and to the dissemination of melodic motifs, poetic forms, and characteristic elements of urban folk music. Through the recording and performance of these songs within institutions, it was made possible for this repertoire not to remain only within local practice but to be transmitted and recognized by generations of listeners. In this way, his creativity not only helped preserve a valuable musical heritage, but also contributed to the enrichment and consolidation of Albanian musical identity, strengthening the connection between the tradition of the past and the cultural developments of the present.

Results and discussion

The results of this study show that Muharrem Gurra represents one of the most important figures in the history of Albanian urban folk music and one of the main contributors to the preservation,

12 Behar Arllati, Musical Tradition in Gjakova (Prishtina: Ura, 2014), 25.
13 Gurra Family Archive, documents.

documentation, and transmission of the musical heritage of Central Albania. The analysis of archival materials, scores, audio recordings, and testimonies of artists and scholars indicates that his creative work does not constitute only an individual artistic contribution, but rather a genuine process of conserving and promoting Albanian musical identity. The study highlights that Muharrem Gurra's creativity was shaped on the basis of the folk tradition of Central Albania and his early contact with traditional folk instruments such as the Pullgaria, Pipzat, Lauria, and Çiftelia, which he had inherited from his family. This organic connection with folklore had a direct influence on his creative style, which preserved diatonic melodic structures and the authentic characteristics of Albanian urban music.He is considered one of the main consolidators of the musical features of the urban folk song of Tirana, linking his creativity with the pre-Ottoman diatonic musical tradition of this region[14] . In the same line, Fitnete Rexha emphasized that his compositions were entirely based on Albanian folklore and avoided foreign influences, especially Oriental ones[15]. A significant part of the composer's early works was not preserved due to the lack of audio recordings and musical notation in score form. This fact highlights the problem of preserving Albanian musical heritage during a period when folk music was transmitted mainly orally. However, with the beginning of his studies in violin and solfège theory, as well as his engagement in the Royal Band with the flugelhorn instrument, Muharrem Gurra began documenting his compositions in musical scores, creating the foundations for the institutional preservation and transmission of his repertoire. His early songs such as "Qan lulja për lulen", "Po shkon goca me korr n'arë", "Kur dole në lom", "Ç'osht ma e bukur në këtbot", and "Jetë të gjatë me burrin paçit" quickly spread among the people and became an important part of the Albanian folk repertoire. The song "Qan lulja për lulen", recorded in 1942 by Tefta Tashko, represents one of the earliest audio documentations of the composer's work and is preserved in the archive of Albanian Radio Television[16] . The study also highlights the importance of Muharrem Gurra's professional education in Italy, where he studied at the "Santa Cecilia" Conservatory in Rome during 1938–1943. This experience influenced the expansion of his musical knowledge and the professionalization of his artistic activity. After returning to Albania, he contributed to the formation of the band of the National Liberation Army and later worked in the Wind Band of the People's Army. During this period he composed more than eleven marches for wind bands, including "Peza Heroike", "Tirana Jonë", "Marshi i Sportistit", and "Elegji për Shyqyri Ishmin", works that are still performed today by various Albanian wind bands. Radio Tirana played an important role in the documentation and dissemination of Muharrem Gurra's creative work, as he served as the artistic director of the orchestra of Central Albania at Radio Tirana, where the folk repertoire began to be systematically recorded. In the Radio Tirana sound archive, over 270 songs of the composer are preserved, performed by well-known artists such as Fitnete Rexha, Ibrahim Tukiqi, Sulejman Çela, Agim Hoxha, Sali Brari, Merita Halili, and many other performers. These recordings today constitute an exceptionally valuable source for the study of Albanian folk music, as they preserve not only the melody and lyrics, but also the authentic manner of vocal and instrumental interpretation. The discussion highlights that radio broadcasting significantly influenced the dissemination of Muharrem Gurra's repertoire beyond local boundaries. His songs were broadcast not only by Radio Tirana, but also by Radio Prishtina, Radio Gjakova, Radio Prizren, Radio Ulcinj, and Radio Skopje, making it possible for Albanian urban folk music to be recognized across all Albanian-inhabited regions. A large number of Kosovo singers such as Ismet

14 Vasil S. Tole, The Spiritual Heritage of Tirana in Music (Tirana: Mediaprint, 2020), 130.
15 Vasil S. Tole, The Spiritual Heritage of Tirana in Music (Tirana: Mediaprint, 2020), 130.
16 Radio Tirana.

Peja, Qamili i Vogël, Shpresa Gashi, and Shkëlzen Jetishi performed his repertoire, demonstrating the wide cultural impact of the composer's work. Of particular importance is Muharrem Gurra's collaboration with Albanian artistic institutions in the process of institutionalizing folk music. His songs were included in the repertoire of the Folk Ensemble at the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet, the State Estrada, the Army Ensemble, and various folk festivals. A significant role in the promotion and professionalization of these works was played by composer Agim Krajka, who created new orchestrations, bringing Gurra's songs onto the professional Albanian stage. Songs such as "Në Tiranë lulëzojnë mimozat", "Qënke veshur me të bardha", "Dil të shoh me sy", "Merr gjergjefin", "Unë e di që ti mu më do", and "Lule të bukra ka Tirana" became part of the national repertoire of Albanian folk music. Another important aspect relates to the continuity of Muharrem Gurra's creativity in the contemporary period. After the 1990s, his repertoire was reworked and reinterpreted by artists of folk, classical, and jazz music, adapting it to modern forms of orchestration and performance. Artists such as Eda Zari, Elina Duni, Elsa Lila, Manjola Nallbani, Kastriot Tusha, Gent Rrushi, Marsela Çibukaj, and West Side Family have contributed to bringing these songs back onto national and international stages. This process demonstrates the artistic flexibility and continued relevance of the composer's work over time. The publication of the books "75 këngët më në zë të kompozitorit" and "100 këngë popullore qytetare tiranase", prepared by Ramazan Gurra, Skënder Gurra, and Prof. Arben Llozi, represents an important step in documenting the composer's repertoire. These adaptations with new orchestrations, presented differently according to various orchestrators over time and in line with modernization trends, were performed by young folk singers such as Artjola Toska, Valbona Mema, Greta Zani, Pajtim Struga, Bujar Çiçi, Rik Buneci, Fatjeta Barbullushi, Valbona Halili, Iris Bega, Shkëlzen Jetishi, Sinan Vllasaliu, and Artan Bakiu. Likewise, the studies of authors such as Mustafa Basha, Behar Arllati, and Academician Vasil S. Tole have contributed to highlighting Muharrem Gurra's role in the history of Albanian folk music. Institutional documentation and recording of the musical repertoire have played a decisive role in the preservation and conservation of Albanian musical heritage. In a period when folk music risked being lost due to oral transmission, audio recordings, scores, and institutional archives made it possible to preserve and transmit the original form of the Albanian folk repertoire. In this way, Muharrem Gurra's creativity today functions as a living archive of Albanian musical memory, connecting the tradition of the past with the artistic and cultural developments of the present. In conclusion, it can be said that Muharrem Gurra has made a valuable contribution to the preservation, documentation, and intergenerational transmission of Albanian urban folk music. Through his artistic creativity, documentation of the folk repertoire, and collaboration with Albanian musical institutions, he contributed to the consolidation of Albanian musical identity and to the preservation of an important part of the national cultural heritage.

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Historical and functional parallels between the isos of albanian polyphony and the ison of byzantine music (A reading through albanian and international researchers)

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Abstract

The object of this paper is to examine the phenomenon of iso in two vocal traditions of particular cultural and historical importance: Albanian polyphony and Byzantine music. The isos is treated as a structural and functional element, with an essential role in the construction of musical discourse, both in the practice of Albanian polyphonic singing and in the liturgical context of Byzantine music. The paper focuses on the analysis of the historical and functional parallels of this phenomenon, relying on the theoretical and interpretative contributions of local and foreign scholars on the genesis of isos. The purpose of the paper is to highlight the ways of conceiving and using the iso (bourdon) in these two musical cultures, as well as to shed light on the historical, aesthetic and functional processes that have influenced its formation. In this context, the facts will be examined as to whether the iso represents an element of common cultural origin, a parallel development of the two traditions, or a phenomenon intertwined through historical and cultural contacts in the Balkans. The methodology of the paper is historical-theoretical and comparative. In this context, it will rely on a wide fund of bibliographical sources, which include musicological, ethnomusicological and liturgical studies. Through the comparison of the musical function, structural role and context of the use of the iso, the aim is to highlight possible points of convergence, as well as the distinctive specificities that characterize each tradition. In conclusion, the paper aims to contribute to a more structured and in-depth understanding of the iso phenomenon, by offering a comparative perspective that helps in the interpretation of musical and cultural relationships and interactions in the Balkan space, by stimulating new theoretical discussions on the Balkan regional musical identity and, on the other hand, aims at a new flow within the framework of our musicological studies.

Keywords

Iso – ison (burdon), albanian polyphony, byzantine music, musical function, historical-comparative approach

Introduction

A closer acquaintance with the earliest forms of polyphonic music (both hetero and polyphonic) still remains an unresolved issue from an ethnomusicological point of view. We judge that due to the lack of facts and data about it from antiquity, even its placement in a specific historical context cannot stand, since it is initially viewed as a universal form, i.e. pre-Albanian, and, moreover, we cannot look for national characteristics within it in this period.
Based on what researchers have managed to research and define to date, regarding the pre-Albanian layer of this music, we arrive at an almost unanimous opinion that the simple forms of the musical motif are of a universal character and cannot be treated as our specific origins.
We will seek the ethnogenesis of polyphony, but also of our popular culture in general, precisely when the darkness that covers everything with mystery is "broken" even a little and, when little by little, the first identifying elements of what is Albanian emerge, especially when this culture gradually aimed for its own identity.

Methodology

The methodology of this paper is based on a historical-theoretical and comparative approach between two musical cultures – Albanian polyphonic and Byzantine music. The subject of this paper is developed through the historical and scientific examination of a wide corpus of bibliographical sources, composed of studies by local and foreign authors, who have treated in different ways the issues of the genesis, function and structural role of the iso (bourdon) in these two vocal traditions. In this context, special attention is paid to the historical context, the real function of the iso, as well as the ways of its integration into the musical structure and interpretative practice.

Development

The autochthonous character of Albanian polyphony in the period of late Illyrian antiquity is proven by its preserved traces in the old Illyrian lands of Epirus, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, etc. In particular, in the latter, some forms of two-voice polyphony have been preserved as rudiments, which the Slavic tribes inhabited by the Illyrians did not have[1] .
Regarding this evidence, the researcher C. Rihtman puts forward the thesis that the presence of two-voice polyphony in these areas (with Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular) can be explained as a tradition borrowed from the ancient Illyrian tribes or it is thought that the Slavicized Illyrians preserved it[2] .

1 Kruta, B. Polyphony - an ancient cultural heritage of the Albanian people, published in "Popular Culture", published by ASHSH-IKP, 2/1982, p. 43.
2 Rihtman, C. O iliriskom porjeklu polifonia obrka narodne muzike, Bosne i Hercegovine, Rad. Yugoslav Folklore Congress, Na Bjelasnici, 1955; I u Puli, 1952; Zagreb, 1958, p. 99.

Based on this, considering the rich three- and four-voice forms in which we know polyphony today, we still find "many of those that belong to a very early substrate, with heterophonic features and sound[3] . Alongside these forms, two-voice structures have a wide range, some of which melodically revolve in the sphere of prepentatone"[4] .

For this fact, the two-part polyphonic songs of the Arbëresh of Italy, especially of Calabria, help us even today, where the iso (burdon) and its very important function in these songs, have lost that crystallized force for a long time in the native land. The shrinkage or dissolution of the most developed forms of polyphony and the burdon as an essential part of them came as a result of the migration of the Arbëresh from the southern and northern regions of Albania, towards Italy (who came both from areas where folk songs were sung polyphonically, but also from those areas where they were sung homophonically).

Precisely, coexistence with each other, the mutual influence of their folk customs and traditions, in adaptation and with the new conditions of socio-cultural life in the second homeland, must have brought about this transformation. Although the song of the Arbëresh of Italy cannot be a determining factor for the way in which all polyphonic forms, as well as the bourdon, developed over time, it is an indication that polyphony among the Arbëresh, at least in the 14th - 15th centuries, was already crystallized and alive as a musical culture among them [5].

But, returning to antiquity, the fact of syncretism between poetry, music and dance is well known, which occupied a primary place in pagan celebrations among the ancient Greeks as well as among the peoples of the ancient East. A particular interest has been aroused by the idea put forward by Kadare in his book Autobiography of the People in Verse that "in the polyphonic song of the South, the iso, this collective murmur is an even older form than the ancient choir"[6] . Meanwhile, in the amphitheatres of Illyria "in the entertainment arenas of Bylis and Amantia, in the theaters of Butrint, Ohrid and Durrës, or in the odeon of Apollonia and elsewhere, costly concerts and performances were given, but today we know nothing about their repertoire […]"[7] .

Here, the historiography of early medieval religious music and, especially, Byzantine music (with the path and phases through which it has passed and developed) takes on a specific importance, given that these data serve as paradigmatic references between it and our polyphonic music.

In this context, therefore, in this source musical culture, another visible layer is the non-Albanian one, represented by the Roman ritual, Byzantine psalmody and Ottoman culture, which as official culture at different times, have left their mark and have interfered directly or indirectly not only in polyphony but, in general, in our folk music.

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3 The formation of a microvoice or a subvoice within the mass voice (collective voice) is a phenomenon that is justified by the very way of singing in a group, the way in which heterophonic deviations are almost present. It is precisely these phenomena that have occurred in the collective voice of the two-part song that have given rise to the birth of a third voice, initially with a heterophonic tendency, but which over time comes to crystallize and individualize. Although limited, these examples (we are talking about forms that stand between two and three-part) have an incalculable value today, because they are the living and most authentic monuments that clearly show the evolutionary path of the development of the Albanian two-part towards three and four-part forms. Cit. Kruta, B., The Place of Albanian Polyphony in Balkan Polyphony, published in "Popular Culture", published by ASHSH - IKP, 1/1990, p. 16.

4 Kruta, B. Polyphony - an ancient cultural heritage of the Albanian people….. p. 45.

5 Ref. Kruta, B. Ibid., p. 47.

6 Kadare, I. Autobiography of the people in verse, published by "Naim Frashëri", Tirana, 1980, p. 8 - 9; For more on the issue of the ethnogenesis of the burdon (isos), see: Kruta, B. "Burdon - iso in Albanian polyphony and some issues of ethnogenesis", published in "Popular Culture" 1/1991.

7 Sokoli, R. "16 Centuries", Tirana, 1995, p. 26.

In fact, few written data on the history of early Christian music are given in the book "16 Centuries" by R. Sokoli, which highlights some writings by Jerome Eusebius, the treatise "De musica" by Aurelius Augustinus, "Confessions" ("Confessions", lib. IX, X) also by him, where music is also discussed[8] .

But, the long Byzantine period with liturgical song, which begins and is documented since the 4th century, has become the subject of numerous controversies between Balkan and European scholars regarding its relationship with Albanian polyphonic song. According to the most widespread view in scientific opinion, the polyphonic song of the Balkan peoples represents a pre-Byzantine musical culture[9] .

To further strengthen this thesis of scientists, the fact of the genesis of the isos in Albanian polyphony is important.

Precisely, the genesis and role of the iso or bourdon in Albanian polyphony is one of the most discussed issues, even in comparison with the genesis and role of the bourdon (ison) in Byzantine songs. Its existence from an early age in Byzantine song is also questioned by the fact that the polyphonic song of the Orthodox church of the Arbëresh of Italy, although known for its antiquity, does not recognize the iso[10] . As the researcher Gaisser claims, the song of the Arbëresh of Italy is like "a treasure, in terms of its internal features but also for the great contribution it can bring to the history and theory of musical art, both of antiquity and of the Greco-Oriental church"[11] .

However, studies evolve and, another thesis, is put forward by the researcher A. Ahmedaja, who provides data from the beginning of our century that according to the elderly Arbëreshë (asked by him in 2000) the ostinato (sustained) sound or bourdon or isoja was sung until the middle of the 20th century among them and the subsequent absence of this sound, according to him, is related to the continuous non-attendance of church as well as the migration towards the North of a part of the population of Southern Italy, thus losing some of the connections with the culture of their homeland. This finding and judgment of the researcher in question is further reinforced by the definition that "Byzantine culture and the Orthodox religion have been decisive in preserving part of their identity, in the foreign environment, where they were forced to emigrate"[12] .

Meanwhile, the byzantologist L. Tardo (hieromonak) in relation to this problem, points out that "the liturgical melodies, in their general complex among the Arbëresh of Italy, belong to the end of the 13th and beginning of the 14th centuries" and that "the Albanians, who, hating Muslim slavery, left their land and did not take with them the musical model of Constantinople, nor the well-known and proven art of refined protpsalters, but a provincial, mountainous (rhapsodic - folk, my note, H.S.) and archaic tradition, a tradition that, having been preserved since the 400s and 500s, effectively originates from the time of the Basilians and perhaps earlier"[13] .

8 Sokoli, R. Ibid.

9 Shituni, S. Labe Polyphony (Monography), ASHSH & IKP, Tirana, 1989, p. 24.

10 Bobina 449/2, 3, 4, 5 (scientific expedition to the Arbëresh of Italy, 1965) - Archive of the IKP of the AAS (today the Archive of the Center of Cultural Anthropology and Art Studies, at the Albanian Academy of Sciences). Consultation of ref. by Kruta, B. in his article: Polyphony - ancient cultural heritage…., p. 48 - 49.

11 Gaisser, U. Canti ecclesiastici italo - greci, in "Rassegna Gregoriana", Roma, 1905, p. 9 - 10

12 Ahmedaja, A. Albanian folk songs and Byzantine singing, published in "2000 years of church art and culture in Albania", proceedings of the international symposium, Tirana 16-18 November, 2000, published by KOASH, Tirana 2003, p. 404 - 405.

13 Tardo, L. L'antica Melurgia Bizantina, kapak, V, "I Canti liturgici bizantini delle colonie Greco Albanesi d' Italia", Grottaferrata, MCMXXXVIII, i ristampa 2005, f. 111. Tardo, L. L'antica Melurgia Bizantina, kapak, V, "I Canti liturgici bizantini delle colonie Greco Albanesi d' Italia", Grottaferrata, MCMXXXVIII, i ristampa 2005, f. 111.

This thesis is also supported by other researchers, who agree on the archaism of the Orthodox liturgy of the Arbëresh of Italy, an archaism that is not found in the liturgical music of other peoples of the Balkans and Europe, not even among the Greeks themselves [14].

As an extension of these important data of scientific interest, the Albanian researcher B. Kruta also comes out with the definition that "the bourdon does not come from Byzantium, this is also evident in the fact that the folk music of other Balkan peoples, such as Serbian, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Romanian and especially Greek, although they felt an influence from Byzantine melurgy, nevertheless did not recognize the bourdon"[15] , continuing that "from these facts it follows that the bourdon is not an element that was introduced into Albanian polyphonic song mechanically from the outside, even from Byzantine culture, but is the result of the development of internal factors of this culture and logically derives from it". Other facts that prove the identity of Albanian polyphony are also its interferences in neighboring musical cultures, such as among the Slavs; in Northern Greece, but also among the Aromanians of Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, etc.[16] .

Another fact that helps to further strengthen the thesis of researchers that Albanian polyphony has been a product of "itself" is precisely that related to the function of the bourdon - isos in Albanian polyphony, which is the result of a long practice in the course of history. The lack of facts and written and documented data on the path of its birth and formation means that this issue does not have a final solution and is always in the attention of researchers, to get as close as possible to the source. Inevitably, this continuous demand for new data leads to research and analysis, even indirect ones, as well as to comparative studies with other arts and cultures developed over the centuries.

As ethnomusicologist B. Kruta claims, "in this matter, archaeological evidence has priority. The bas-relief, which depicts the double flute discovered in the territory of Southern Illyria (Apolloni and elsewhere) approximately where this instrument is still used today and is called by the locals "cyldyjare", dates back to the 6th - 5th centuries BC. One barrel of this instrument plays the melody, while the other sometimes holds the burdon, sometimes appears as a contrasting voice, as does the second voice, the "returner" of the labe songs. Concluding, the researcher claims that "this fact speaks of the early origin of the burdon in the instrumental folk music of the South and cannot be negligible for vocal music as well" although "the paths of their formation must have been different"[17] .

From historical-musicological reasoning and analysis (from in-depth knowledge of the characteristics of Byzantine and Albanian polyphonic singing) as well as the conclusions reached by ethnomusicological and musical Byzantology researchers, a common definition is more or less reached that the function of the bourdon appears different in the two respective musical cultures. In Byzantine songs, as well-known musicologists claim, this function is more complementary and not organic, since it serves more to present the harmonic basis of the mode (harmonic verticality) and to help not deviate from the initial tone, which is why it can be absent, without disrupting the balance of the musical line sung by the choir.

14 The folk song of these peoples is generally monophonic and homophonic, but even in cases of a type of two-part polyphony, which is found among Macedonians, Bosnians or Bulgarians, the appearance of the bourdon as a separate functional element is rare. Kruta, B. Ibid., p. 48.

15 Kruta, B. Ibid.

16 Kruta, B. Ibid., f. 47.

17 Kruta, B. Ibid.

In fact, in itself, the ison in Byzantine music is not really called a separate voice (as is its meaning in our polyphonic music, where it is considered a separate voice) but as a base, over which the solo voice or the group (choir) will perform.
Whereas, in our polyphonic songs, according to B. Kruta, the function of iso is determining: if it is missing it leads to the disruption of the balance of the voices (which the singers themselves do not allow) which are organically interconnected with each other [18]. These theses are controversial because, firstly, in Albanian polyphony, the phenomenon of the two-voices and the three-voices of Dukat is known, where the iso is missing – a phenomenon - which we find precisely treated in the work of B. Kruta ("The Two-voiced Polyphony of Southern Albania").
To clarify, a little more, the meaning of ison in Byzantine music, we are referring to the well-known Byzantine musicologist Lorenzo Tardo, who defines its two forms in the Greek Orient: in the so-called papadhiki and melismatic songs, the protopsalt develops a common melody, while the choir, formed by white voices (and preferably) or mixed voices, accompanies with a lightly held ison (leggero ison). While, in irmological and stiheraric songs, on the contrary, a small choir of children, even if these are not present, recites on the dominant or on the tonic (as the case may be) the variants of the stih of the melodic verse, while the protopsalt gradually resumes the modulation according to its own tonality. Of course, such an effect of the choir is original, if it is followed well[19] . Tardo, further, reaches a very significant conclusion about the use of ison and its function in Byzantine songs when he says that: [...] not all Byzantine songs are accompanied by iso (ison)[20] , but only non-soloistic songs and papadhiki songs, as mentioned above. The singing of psalms and other small psalmodic formulas do not support the iso (ison)[21] . This finding shows that Byzantine singing is transmitted in two different forms of singing: with and without the ison, where the latter is absent, as in the above-mentioned case, in psalm singing, taking into account here the ekphonetic, soloistic - recitative singing unaccompanied by the ison, while in choral songs it is present with its function evidenced above.
But, even today, according to its singers themselves[22] , the function of the iso (ison) in the accompaniment of these choral songs is necessary for the balance of the voices, and they are opponents of the thesis that "the iso - in Byzantine music - is complementary and not organic (!)".

18 A very interesting phenomenon, regarding the absence of iso in our polyphony, is demonstrated by the duet and trio of Dukat, who, singing without iso, create a microtonal movement (melodic transport, where the distance goes even less than a half tone, my note, H. S.), but "without undergoing essential changes in its melodic and rhythmic formulation". See, for more: Kruta, B. The two-voices polyphony of Southern Albania, published by ASHSH – IKP, Tirana, 1989, p. 143.
19 Tardo, L. L'antica Melurgia Bizantina (cap. XII, Esecuzione pratica del canto sacro bizantino) Grottaferrata, MCMXXXVIII, i ristampa 2005, p. 391 - 392.
20 In general, there is no iso in musicological manuscripts (codices), therefore, in old practice, not all Byzantine musical pieces were sung with iso, but there are also references to codices that note ison.
21 Tardo, L. Ibid., p. 393 - 394.
22 We have encountered such an objection during our conversations with them, while we were working on this topic. According to Harallamb Tereziu, psalt and theologian of the seminary in Shën Vlash (Durrës), he says that: there are Byzantine liturgical songs, in which the sound changes (alters) within it and when it changes, the iso bearing necessarily changes as well. Here it should be noted that the change of sound is done through Ftorà (destructors) - modulating signs, which serve to change a melody, or to pass from one sound to another during the song.

However, from listening to and analyzing Byzantine liturgical choral songs with iso (ison), we have noticed that in this singing, the iso can move above or below the tonic, while in the polyphonic song of the South the iso is built on a sustained, unchanging sound (except for small movements at the beginning and end of the song). This argument brings an interesting piece of information about the special function of the iso in both of these musical traditions.

Starting from the fact that the Byzantine choral singing rises on an ostinato sound (ison - iso), theses have been and are still being thrown about the early connection between it and our polyphonic music and, specifically, with the four-voices labe[23] , alluding to the origin of the latter from Byzantine music. In this context, in one of his articles, the professional choir director of the "Ngjallja e Krishtit" Cathedral choir - M. Vako, brings up a 'hot' thesis, that "[...] our polyphonic labe music, which is also characterized by the 'ostinato' bass, must have its basis in Byzantine music, since the lines of the voices that intertwine during the piece are very close to it"[24] .

On the other hand, we can judge that the connections between Byzantine music and our polyphony (in this case, identifying the Tosk three-voices) can be associated, perhaps more, with the common improvisational character of the voices, where improvisation is an inherent characteristic, raised above the norm in both musical cultures.

So, the points of contact between them exist, because just like the influences of Byzantine music on our folk song but also the opposite, they are first and foremost evidence of the existence of relationships that man himself creates in his coexistence with others in the social, cultural and religious environment. Consequently, these two musical cultures have also "naturally" interfered with each other, where traces of the Byzantine one appear in the folkloric one, but also the opposite: Byzantine music has also been "inspired" by the local characteristics of the area, since as the researcher V. Tole highlights, "during the practice of the Byzantine musical liturgy, in specific places of Southern Albania there have been original interpretations of it, these mainly influenced by the strong polyphonic culture of the country, [...] taking into account the southern localities and villages, in which 90% of the population lived"[25] .

Further, he explains - "in these areas, due to geographical isolation, to the audience in the church, the Byzantine rite was not transmitted or was transmitted in a fragmentary way. This means that there was no necessary and favorable time for the influence and formation of this culture on the listeners, while influences from the other side have been noticed"[26] . Here we have in mind "the specific way of making the 'iso' as well as its melodic styles, which, in the impossibility of communication through religious musical text, were transmitted to the audience by the priests, psaltes and choir in an alternative form"[27] .

23 Labe Polyphony together with Tosk Polyphony are the two subsystems of southern Albanian Polyphony. See, for more: Kruta, B. Common features and regional differences of Albanian polyphony, article published in the magazine "Popular Culture" no. 2, published by ASHSH – IKP, Tirana, 1991, p. 37.

24 Vako, M. Church music penetrated the hearts of believers, article published in the magazine "Kërkim", no. 3, KOASH, Tirana, September - December, 2009, p. 109.

25 Tole, S. V. Musical folklore, iso-polyphony and monody, published by UEGEN, Tirana, 2007, p. 44.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

In this context, we must take into account the fact that in the century. XX (until 1967) in localities and villages (but in some cases also in cities) priests and psalteries were generally not only uneducated, and even more so theologically, but also unformed in the manner of singing - psalms (often without any knowledge of the Greek language and without having a musical ear to assimilate the practice of Byzantine singing) so that, under these conditions, they could not transmit this type of music in its original form[28] .

Unable to properly perform liturgical music, they borrowed, at times "unconsciously", from the folk music of their area (with which they had grown up) some cadence, modulation or melisma. This fact was communicated to us by the bearers (from our field research, specifically in Berat) by stating that "e.g. in Berat the psalms were not sung as in Korça or Tirana, since the psalms were performed with small but noticeable changes to be distinguished by the listener's ear. In addition, each side claimed to perform the liturgy better [29] than the other area (province)" [30].

But, according to the researcher, F. Hysi, what we aim to shed light on in this article is that "[…] the Byzantine Orthodox Church, helped by its long, almost ten-century rule, came closer to the people's consciousness" and "managed to realize, under these conditions, a process of mutual relations, but always, preserving the primacy of its fixed rules and concepts" [31].

For this mutual relationship, we can refer to Durrës of Kukuzeli, as an important center of Albanian Orthodoxy, especially in the 19th century with another prominent personality of Byzantine music, such as the Greek archbishop of the metropolis of this city, Krisanthi of Maditi, at the beginning of the 19th century - a period in which this metropolis was a developed cultural center of the time, which included most of urban Central Albania and, of course, it cannot be claimed that the musical activity of this center had an Albanian character and spirit, much less a popular one, but it cannot be thought that it was without any kind of originality, however insignificant in comparison to official Byzantine music[32] , taking into account the local interferences in the practice of singing by Albanian Orthodox psalters and priests (mentioned above).

Continuing this argument, "the moral and spiritual faith in the Christian church has forced it to intensively assimilate many of the components of the cult and, in this context, even more of its musical forms […] but, while faith has the opportunity and manages to enter all the components of life, music has difficulty maintaining its pure and original forms outside the church, losing its value and importance and, if it does not lose it, it can be transformed, transfigured, deformed or reshaped according to the traditions of different peoples"[33] .

Recently, the conductor and researcher E. Koço undertook a research expedition to the South of the country, mainly in Gjirokastër and Saranda "in search of Epirote musical fossils", which, as he claims, have never been seriously studied by Albanian musicology" [34] .

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28 In these cases, we would single out priests who came from the ranks of amateur singers or craftsmen, such as tailors, samarjines, etc., this is because in our country the first theological seminary was opened in 1930 in Durrës, later transferred to Tirana, and in the first years after World War II, the Albanian state closed the seminary, gradually beginning the war against religion.

29 By the concept of "better" they meant who came closest to the original singing of the liturgy (according to them).

30 Koçi, Th. (Volunteer psaltery in the Church of Saint Spiridon, Berat), Traditions of the Orthodox Community of Berat, (manuscript, 127 pages).

31 Hysi, F. Popular trends in Albanian music, ILA, SHBLSH, Tirana, 1991, p. 40.

32 Ibid., p. 41.

33 Ibid., p. 41-42.

34 Koço, E. In search of Epirote musical fossils, article published on Shqipëria.com, the Albanian portal, 2006.

According to his point of view, "there are both aspects of polyphonic music: polyphonic music with liturgical iso sung in church and polyphony with iso sung in the people […]". From the research and studies carried out by him, it is concluded that "classical Christian music of the Byzantine era today exists only among the Arbëresh in Southern Italy, while today's Byzantine music sung in Orthodox churches is music with influences of oriental music, since the Byzantine Empire itself, in approximately ¾ of its territory, extended to territories and peoples of the East"[35]
.

"Albanian folk music was of course influenced by Byzantine music," he further claims - "but it preserved its originality, constantly strengthening the iso and its epic character. When the role of Byzantium declined, around 1453, the chromatic elements of the iso came and grew. The geographical terrain in which I stopped to make this observation, emphasizes the researcher in question - includes within it areas with a strong, prominent and very diverse identity [36].

Conclusions

Our paper reaches several conclusions:
First, the iso (bourdon) represents a fundamental structural and functional element, which has evolved in different ways in Albanian polyphony and in Byzantine music, reflecting the different nature of each tradition. Specifically, in Albanian polyphony, it is organic and closely related to the melodic lines of the voices, maintaining the balance of the polyphonic group, while in Byzantine music, the function of the iso is more often complementary and supportive, serving for modal stability and maintaining the harmonic basis.
Secondly, Albanian polyphony has a clear internal identity, which was not mechanically imported from Byzantine music, but has derived from the autochthonous development and the special characteristics that this voice carries in popular oral transmission until our days, while the influences of Byzantine music and other neighboring religious and musical cultures are judged to be late and few, for the reasons that Byzantine music was performed within the walls of the church.
Thirdly, historical-comparative analysis shows precisely the fact that there are also functional meeting points between the isos in both cultures, especially in the improvisational dimension of the Tosk voices and in the 'ostinato' of the supporting voice in Labëri, which can be interpreted as a result of cultural interactions and historical contact in the Balkan space.
Fourth, researchers, both Albanian ethnomusicologists and Byzantologists, estimate that the lack of early documents makes it difficult to determine the exact origin, but the analysis of preserved forms and living traditions shows a clear path of continuous development of iso within Albanian polyphony.
Fifth, the paper contributes to the recognition of the special role of iso as an identifying element in Albanian musical culture, and provides a basis for further comparative studies on musical and cultural interactions in the Balkans, underlining the importance of historical and social context in the preservation and transformation of musical practices of different cultures.

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.

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Musical language in original works for the guitar by Rafet Rudi and Aleksandër Peçi

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is the examination of the musical works of two composers, Rafet Rudi and Aleksandër Peçi, created for the guitar instrument in a comparative way, how compositional tradition, technique, aesthetics, and the treatment of musical ideas have been used for this instrument. Also, this research seeks to highlight for the first time, by filling the lack of proper studies, the interrelated relationship of the guitar instrument and Albanian studies. At the same time, it emphasizes the need to understand the development and influence of modern compositional processes, orchestration techniques, and recording in shaping contemporary musical identity. The methodology used in this paper is based on the analysis carried out on musical works such as: 1- "Rrojtja", a work for guitar and choral ensemble, 2- "Petite Suite" for solo guitar by composer Rafet Rudi and "Album for Guitar" Volume 1 by composer Aleksandër Peçi.The analysis is based on the complex treatment of elements of musical language, focusing on the organization of form, musical structure, melody, harmony, rhythm, instrumental technique, and timbre. Through the comparative method of the works, this approach highlights the individual characteristics of each composer, how virtuoso usage is represented in their compositional concepts, bringing findings and evaluations in the interaction of contemporary compositional techniques, the discovery of the colors of this instrument with the consonance of the integration of contemporary instruments in these works and at the same time their influence on the artistic concept.Based on these researches, as a result of the analyses it is observed that in the works created by composer Rafet Rudi, with an approach toward the atonal system, aesthetic research and structural experimentation of music is used, while in the analyzed works of composer Aleksandër Peçi, it mainly functions as a practical and communicative tool, favoring closeness with the audience. In conclusion, in both approaches, although different from each other, this approach aims to contribute to the enrichment of contemporary Albanian musical discourse.

Keywords

Guitar, structural analysis, aesthetics

Introduction

The relationship between music has deeply influenced the development of musical aesthetics in the 20th and 21st centuries. The evolution of compositional techniques, the expansion of orchestration, the use of instruments, the development of audio recording and later organizational methods have transformed not only the way the musical work is created, but also the way it is perceived and distributed. Contemporary music cannot be understood outside the context of these changes, which have influenced formal structure, the treatment of timbre, the concept of sonic space and the relationship between the composer, the performer and the listener. In the Albanian context, these transformations have been reflected in different ways, depending on the cultural, institutional and aesthetic context. While the period before the 1990s was characterized by ideological limitations, after this time a greater openness towards European trends and new means of musical creation is observed. In this background, the creativity of Rafet Rudi and Aleksandër Peçi presents a suitable ground for comparative analysis, as each of them has developed a specific relationship by offering musical modernity. In addition, the authors are composers of works for guitar, which is also the central axis of my doctoral topic. Rafet Rudi, formed in an environment influenced by European modernism, conceives the mode of expression as a means of aesthetic and structural research, exploring atonal techniques, rational organization of material and expansion of timbral possibilities. On the other hand, Aleksandër Peçi shows a more pragmatic and communicative approach, where it serves as a functional means for expanding the interpretative spectrum and for approaching the audience, combining traditional elements with contemporary means. The aim of this paper is to analyze and compare these two approaches, regarding music composed for guitar, highlighting the way in which music influences the structure, language and aesthetic concept of their works. The scientific importance of the study lies in filling a gap in Albanian music, as well as in providing an analytical perspective that helps in a deeper understanding of the developments of contemporary Albanian music. The paper is structured into several parts: initially the review of the existing literature on modern guitar music is presented; then the followed methodology is explained; followed by the analysis of the results and the comparative discussion; and finally the conclusions and recommendations for further studies are presented.

Literature review

The literature review for this study is based on three main pillars: 1- Theories on the relationship between creative music in the 20th and 21st centuries, 2- Studies on modernism and contemporary European music, and 3- Sources that address the creativity of Rafet Rudi and Aleksandër Peçi in the Albanian context. On the theoretical level, the aesthetic thought of [1] Theodor W. Adorno on modern music, especially in the work "Philosophy of New Music", emphasizes the role of technical innovation as an essential element in the transformation of musical language. Adorno considers technical development not simply as a practical tool, but as a factor that determines the very structure and aesthetic content of the work. In the same line[2], Paul Griffiths in "Modern Music and After" addresses the evolution of compositional techniques after the Second World War, analyzing the influence of serialism, atonality and in the shaping of contemporary music. In the aspect of musical stylistics, authors such as Simon Emmerson and Curtis Roads have

1 Adorno, W. Th. Philosophy of New Music, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis & London, 1949.
2 Griffiths, P. Modern Music and After, New York; Oxford: Oxford Universit, 2011.

addressed the role of electronic media, the computer and digital sound processing in the transformation of compositional practices. These studies provide a theoretical framework to understand how the treatment of this concept influences the organization of sound material, the concept of sonic space and the relationship composer–performer.
In the Albanian context, the literature is more limited. For Rudi's creativity for guitar, an important source is his autobiographical book [3] "Libri im i kujtimeve", where the author reflects on his aesthetic formation and European modernist influences. Also, in understanding the aesthetics of the composer, an important contribution is found in his previous book [4] "Sprova Estetike" Music of the 20th century. While for the composer Aleksandër Peçi, biographical and analytical data are found in the Encyclopedia of Albanian Music by Sokol Shupo, as well as in the publications of his works. However, in-depth studies that analyze these composers in relation to aesthetics and structure, especially for music for guitar, are lacking.
From this review it results that, although there exists extensive international literature on music, in the Albanian context there is a lack of a comparative analysis that treats this relationship in a systematic way. This gap justifies the need for the current study and sets the requirement on which the further analysis is built.

Methodology

This paper uses a multidimensional approach to analyze the relationship between musical works for guitar and the creativity of the composers Rafet Rudi and Aleksandër Peçi. The methodology followed is mainly analytical and comparative, which includes elements of musical analysis, comparison of aesthetic concepts and documentary examination of bibliographic and audio-visual sources. The combined approach ensures a deep understanding of compositional processes, its use and its influence on musical language.

Rafet Rudi

He was born in Mitrovica in 1949. He began his initial studies on the violin in his hometown, in order to complete his musical education at the Secondary Music School of Prishtina, where his first interests in the field of composition also appeared. In 1968 he deepened these studies in two directions; composition and conducting in Belgrade. After his studies, Mr. Rudi completed a specialization in composition in Paris as a scholarship holder of the French Government (1979–1980), in the class of the composer, where he acquired modern creative techniques of the second half of the 20th century, which were reflected in the works; the cantata "Flijimi" (1983), "Fantasia in B" (1985) for violin and piano, as well as the Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra (1986).
From 1976 until recent years, he has worked as a Professor at the Academy of Music in Prishtina (Analysis of Musical Forms and Composition). Rudi is the leader of the Kosovo Center for New Music (since 1999) and the founder of the International Festival of Prishtina (ReMusica). Meanwhile, he is the conductor of the Choir of the Kosovo Philharmonic – Prishtina, with which he has given an extraordinary contribution through concerts within Kosovo and on prestigious stages in Europe.

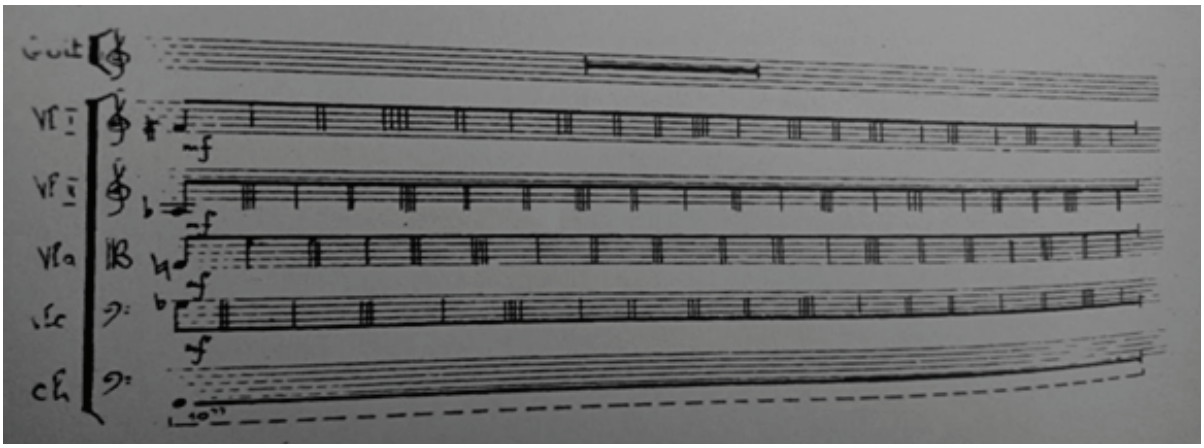
3 Rudi, R. Libri im i Kujtimeve ("My Book of Memories"), Publishing House "Dukagjini", Peja, 2025.
4 Rudi, R. Sprova Estetike - 20th Century Music, Publishing House "Dukagjini", Peja, 2002.

“Rrojtja” 1979 for guitar and string ensemble

In his book Libri im i kujtimeve (“My Book of Memories”) the author, while analyzing some of his works of this period, writes:
“In my later works (Metamorfoza - 1977, for 3 soloists and string orchestra, as well as Rrojtja - 1978, for guitar and string orchestra), which I composed under the strong influence of the Polish ‘school’, I was even more radical in relation to my past. I carried out some other researches in the field of atonal music, such as in orchestration, in the ‘implementation’ of some orchestral situations typical of new tendencies! Many years later, I have reflected on this ‘turn’ of mine in creativity. Was it a necessary course to embrace with such passion the path of atonalism?” [5]
The work is a composition of atonal compositional style and of the type of programmatic tableau music, where the title serves as a guide to the listener’s imagination.
About this work Rudi writes:
“They were performed by prestigious orchestral ensembles of the country (Yugoslav, Croatian and Slovenian), while they could not be performed in Prishtina, due to the lack of competent instrumental ensembles to realize them.[6]”
As an epic rhapsody, the work begins with the solo guitar, revealing from the very beginning the basic intervallic structure with which the author will operate throughout the entire work as its connecting and unifying element:

These transposed sounds are also found in the opening of the string chord (B flat, B natural and C. Together with the dissonant sounds E, F. The effect created is like the drama of a cry that moves even over the percussive strikes of the guitar. In the orchestra begins the play of seconds of this trichord over a bourdon in low F sharp towards a gradual increase of tension up to the chords of all the strings.
This introductory segment that presents the soloist and the orchestra is characterized by distant epic tones, portraying the two groups of participating instruments.
Organized in three movements: I - Andante meditativo II – Calmo, III - Andante sostenuto, the work constitutes one of the special pages of the guitar literature which in our country is unusual. If the unity of the work in its three movements is preserved by the trichord mentioned above, it is also the creator of the harmony of the work, being placed vertically. The rhythm reflects a wide range of figures from a slow weaving in Ad libitum to movement in quarter notes, in eighth notes and reaching in the third movement an irregular rhythm in the strings organized as a sound network creating completely special effects, such as rhythmic heterophony[7] :

5 Rudi, R. Libri im i Kujtimeve (“My Book of Memories”), Publishing House “Dukagjini”, Peja, 2025, p. 60 – 61.
6 Ibid., p. 80.
7 “Rrojtja” 1979 for guitar and string ensemble (musical score).



Overall, we can say that the work "Rrojta" by Rafet Rudi is among the first works in Albanian music literature built on a modern 20th-century language and at a high compositional level. Its performance on the stages of the former Yugoslavia at that time[8] , as well as recently, is a testament to its artistic value. In addition to this value, we also discover a deep thought of the author aiming to uncover the contradictions of his world, which is expressed not only in the title "Rrojta".

"Petite Suite" for guitar[9] by composer Rafet Rudi

Wanting to observe this work closely, let us refer to some aspects presented by the author himself. In his book, Rudi, while explaining his contacts with Ehat Musa, writes: *"Ehatin and I have known each other since our time studying in Belgrade, and by the late 1970s we had begun collaborating in the field of guitar music. While I was in Paris, we simply continued and deepened this collaboration.... In a relatively short period, a multitude of works were created, which I presented, mostly, at the Modern Music Festival in Opatija ... Among them, without any doubt, the greatest breakthrough in the vast space*
"Ehati and I have known each other since our time studying in Belgrade, and by the late 1970s we had begun collaborating in the field of guitar music. While I was in Paris, we only continued and deepened this collaboration... In a relatively short interval, a multitude of works was created, which I presented, mostly, at the Modern Music Festival in Opatija[10] ... Among them, without any doubt, the work with the greatest penetration into the broad Yugoslav space and beyond has been Petite Suite, which Ehati had in his concert repertoire and performed very often, whether in concerts in Yugoslavia or around the world... This led to the work having hundreds of performances [11] worldwide by various guitarists since that time" [12].
"Petite Suite" is a relatively small piece (about 7 minutes). So this is one of Rudi's first compositions for guitar and at the same time among the first compositions of our music for this instrument. In this compositional phase (mid-1970s, Rudi already familiar with the new avant-

8 Rudi, R. Sprova Estetike - 20th Century Music, Affinity towards modern sound, where the latest interpretations of the work in Pristina are discussed, Publishing House "Dukagjini", Peja, 2002.
9 Consulted the musical score.
10 Opatija is a city in coastal Croatia where the 'Tribune of Musical Creativity of Composers' Festival was held, especially for those from the countries of the former Yugoslavia. See: Wikipedia.
11 Rudi, R. Libri im i kujtimeve ("My Book of Memories"), Publishing House "Dukagjini", Peja, 2025, p. 130.
12 See the Biography of Rafet Rudi at https://rafetrudi.com/biografia/

garde trends of European music of his time) he studied in Paris (1979–1980) where he embraced the new tendencies of atonal music. From this period is also "Petite Suite for guitar" (1981)[13] .
It is built in a cyclical form with four parts or movements and is of a neo-classical-post-modern style, thus a work of classical form, following the example of the suites of classical authors but in a completely new atonal musical language, using harmonies and melorhythmic phrasing of contemporary practice as an expression of the most advanced examples of the XX th century [14]. In this aspect is also the instrumental technique used by the author, who has processed and assimilated a broad range of expressive specifics in this instrument.
Times are contrasting, based on the laws of the genre, with particular expressive characteristics. In them, and mainly in the first time, the laconic expression of the author is clearly seen, who, with small and short details (the separated sounds repeated in double forte at the beginning; the seventh chords; the skillful chromatic passages; etc.) are organized in their development up to the final reprise. This procedure of presentation – development – reprise has been practiced at all times, respecting the principle of reprise even within the laconicism of each time.
But, on the other hand, special elements preserve and ensure the unity of the work as a whole (intervals, accented chords in seventh or eleventh, etc.).
Its numerous performances, publications, and selections make this work, beyond its technical compositional values, a value of Albanian guitar literature.

Aleksandër Peçi

Composer Aleksandër Peçi was born in Tirana in 1951. He completed his first musical studies at the 'J. Misja' Artistic High School in the theoretical branch in the years 1965 – 1969. He pursued higher studies in composition at the Higher Institute of Arts (today the University of Arts) in the years 1969 – 1974 in the class of Çesk Zadeja. After finishing his studies, he worked for a while as a head of music at the House of Culture in Përmet (1974 – 1977), then he comes to Tirana as a composer at the State Estrade (1977 – 1979). In the years 1979 – 1986 he is appointed Artistic Director at the State Ensemble of Folk Songs and Dances. Since 1986 he has been a freelance composer and after 1991 a lecturer of composition and orchestration at the Academy of Arts in Tirana. After 1990 he traveled to the Netherlands and completed a series of qualifications (Amsterdam International Composers' Workshop with J Yuasa, T. De Leeuw, etc.). In 1993 he is co-founder of the Albanian New Music Association. His creativity is wide-ranging and includes all musical genres. His works have been performed at all major events of Albanian music, as well as in many countries around the world; Aleksandër Peçi holds the title of Merited Artist [15].

Album for guitar *(Volume 1)* [16]

The first number of this Album is a piece for two guitars titled "Awakening the Rhythms of the Day," for two guitarists but of different technical instrumental levels. The first part carries only a simple monophonic melodic line (with one voice) and at a slow tempo. This allows us to understand that the author had in mind the teacher (the second part is quite developed and written for classical acoustic guitar) and his beginner student.

13 Rudi, R. Libri im i kujtimeve ("My Book of Memories"), Publishing House "Dukagjini", Peja, 2025, p. 251.
14 See: Rafet Rudi's Biography at https://rafetrudi.com/biografia
15 Shupo, S. Encyclopedia of Albanian Music, "Asmus", Tirana, 2002; entry: Aleksandër Peçi.
16 Musical score published by "Aelfior Editions".

The melodic material of the "student" is a southern folk pentatonic melody, while the "Teacher's" part varies from two-note chords to arpeggios of diminished chords with raised seventh. This play between chords and arpeggios creates an interesting and attractive sound situation of a poetic lyricism of "awakening." On the other hand, the placement and movement of tonal arpeggios (in chordal or diminished form) from one axis to another creates a continuous tonal instability such such and capable of creating an impressionistic emotional feeling. The second piece is titled in French "L'instant poétique" and is written for two guitars. Titles in foreign languages, especially French, are now common for the author, but a common practice for the author is also the arrangement of his pieces for different instruments and the transition from one instrument to another or from one formation to another. In this case, we have a piece for piano, with the same title arranged for two guitars. The piece has pronounced lyrical pessimistic characteristics and centers on the melody from his film music "In Our House." The tonal language, rhythm, and harmony do not change, but they have been adapted for the guitar instrument. The third piece is again written for three guitars with the title "The Sky of Swallows." This piece is also an arrangement for three guitars of a previous composition by Peçi, originally written for voice and piano. In this case, the author has divided the developed piano part into two guitars and has left the first guitar with the vocal part, certainly through careful adaptations. The piece is quite virtuosic both in the case of the vocal line and for the guitar, although it has a lyrical-graceful and improvisatory character. The fourth number is titled "Waltz of the Waves" and is written for two guitars. The first leads the tonal melody and the second maintains the rhythm with chords as well as the bass line. The piece is built on a folk song which is played instrumentally by the first guitar. In formal terms, it is constructed from a verse and the chorus, both of which appear together once in E minor and then in F minor. This is done for variety since the material is relatively long. The instrumental difficulty is medium and can also be played by high school guitarists. The entire piece is harmonized with tonal harmony chords, with some chromaticism in the bass. The fifth number consists of a work of larger dimensions entitled "Land of the Sun" and and constitutes a rendition of the well-known song by the author with the same title. The piece is written for four electric guitars, that is, a guitar quartet. The lines of the different parts are arranged according to the specifics of the instruments, taking into account the principles of the instrumental quartet and developed in a polyphonic form where the first guitar plays the main role.

The sixth piece is titled "Swallow Toy" and is written for horn and two guitars. The piece is short and presents a very romantic original melodic material, within the most distinctive characteristics of the author. Besides the difficult part for the horn, the guitars also outline
diverse textural and harmonic figures ranging from folk intonations (repeated sevenths, glissandos, etc.) to chromatic passages characteristic of jazz music. Overall, the piece is intended for entertainment and a soothing atmosphere. The final number of this Album is written for three guitars and is titled "Aheng No. 2" and is conceived as a guitar ensemble. Based on a material of oriental modal scales, which are already an integral part of the repertoire of our cities, the author creates an interesting piece for a trio of guitarists. The combination of their roles creates a sound situation of our Aheng, but over the characteristic sounds of the guitars. The piece it is characterized by continuous repetition of materials even when someone experiences small rhythmic variations or even in the melodic lines. In the difficult guitar passages in the score, the placement of fingers has also been marked, indicating that the piece was consulted with an instrument professional.

Conclusions of this album

The composer Aleksandër Peçi, who is known for the high opus of his creativity and the modernity of the concepts and compositions of works in various genres, is presented with this album as a creator who will contribute to guitar music by conceptualizing it (within the general level in our country) as an instrument for entertaining ensembles. In this case, he has created some mostly lyrical pieces, in which his sound world also navigates, while promoting in this context some of his melodies that are known and widespread as instrumental or vocal parts of Albanian literature. The difference with Rudi's concepts in works for guitar is wide, but the main point is the conception as a solo instrument that Rafet Rudi gives to this instrument and as an important part of 20th-century modern instrumental music. This also reflects Peçi's modest knowledge of the instrument and his procedure in this album more as a technician, arranger rather than as a true creator of ideas and important thoughts expressed for the guitar. Peçi is interested in spreading his music for the enjoyment of people. Meanwhile, Rudi is interested in creating works with the thoughts and ideas of his time which remain in people's minds. Peçi is not interested in delving into technical secrets or the modern technique of the guitar in this century, whereas Rudi presents contemporary compositions for the guitar, also showing his knowledge of the instrument, through collaborations with the distinguished guitarist Ehat Musa. We recall Rafet's notes in his book "My Book of Memories" in which he writes:
Since with Ehat, with whom we had known each other since our student days, the conversations were more related to the topic of music (because, at that time we had just started a serious collaboration in the field of guitar, which would last for many years in a row)...[17] .
On the other hand, in Peçi, we can state that in formal terms the thematic sections are short and the material is extended through continuous repetitions regardless of small variations in different instruments or modulations of the entire block.
Finally, we can say that Peçi writes for a general audience, while Rudi writes for a cultured audience, as was the case at the Festivals in Opatija, or on other stages in Yugoslavia of that time, or in Pristina today.

17 Rudi, R. Libri im i kujtimeve ("My Book of Memories"), "Publishing House "Dukagjini, Peja, 2025, p. 129.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The comparative analysis of the creativity of Rafet Rudi and Aleksandër Peçi shows that, although both composers contribute to the development of contemporary Albanian music, their approaches to creative music are different and reflect distinct aesthetic visions.
Rudi demonstrates an experimental and intellectual orientation, using advanced contemporary techniques to explore new sound spaces and create music for a cultivated audience. He utilizes intuition as a tool for aesthetic development and for integrating new compositional ideas, contributing to the enrichment of Albanian musical literature with complex and innovative works.
Peçi, on the other hand, has a more practical and communicative approach, which is used to expand interpretative possibilities and to adapt works for different instruments, while maintaining the melodic and tonal character of the compositions. He aims for his music to reach a wider audience, making maintaining a balance between traditional elements and musical modernism.
The recommendations of this study are:
To encourage collaboration between composers and guitar performers to further explore the potential of the guitar as an instrument as well as musical creative ability.
To document and analyze more works of Albanian composers in a broader context to improve knowledge about the stylistic influences of the guitar.

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Musical Scores

Peçi, A. “ Album For Guitar” Alfior Edition (musical score)
Rudi, Rafet “Petite Suite” for guitar (musical score)
Rudi, R. “Rrojtja” (musical score)

The links

Wikipedia: see Opatija
https://rafetrudi.com/biografia/
Rafet Rudi’s Biography at https:// rafetrudi.com/biografia

The musical band of the "Afërdita" Society and the march Albanischer Lieder by Anton Cimflit

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Abstract

In relation to the period and the absence of established traditions, it can be affirmed that the situation in the years on the eve of independence (1908–1912), regarding the formation of musical bands, was marked by enthusiasm and strong cultural dynamism. Their beginnings, even as intermediate or hybrid artistic formations, constituted a novelty. Through the broad cultural and artistic movement—including the establishment of musical bands as orchestral ensembles—the Albanian nation was moving away from long-established models, mentalities, and centuries-old cultural stagnation. This article aims to examine one of the less studied aspects of this process. It begins with a brief overview of the "Afërdita" Society of Elbasan and its musical band. The discussion then focuses on the Austrian conductor and composer Anton Cimfl, who made a distinctive contribution to this band. At the center of the discussion will be his march Albanischer Lieder, dedicated to Aqif Pasha Elbasani. Alongside the musical analysis, particular attention is given to the circumstances in which the work was composed and to the history of its reception. Among the findings of the study is that the march Albanischer Lieder represents a case in which an external cultural mediator does not imagine the musical identity of the Other in terms of its most representative folkloric tradition (as the title might suggest), but rather in terms of what best fits the genre and the tradition from which he himself originates. Thus, the march constitutes a significant example of the complex interplay between the individual, the historical, political, and social context, and the musical tradition and specific genre to which the work belongs. It is concluded that the history of Albanian music of this period cannot be considered complete without a thorough examination of the contributions of foreign musicians who worked in Albania, suggesting the need to move beyond the prevailing focus solely on domestic figures.

Keywords

Music, band, march, the "Afërdita" society, Cimfl

Literature review

The revitalizing messages articulated by our National Renaissance for awakening the Albanian people from the heavy Ottoman lethargy through education, culture, and the arts encouraged music creators to move beyond the framework of folklore, steering them toward the genres of cultivated (art music) traditions. "In a brief overview of the musical situation at the beginning of the 20th century, – notes Vaso Tole, – the first thing that stands out, alongside a general national awakening, is undoubtedly the establishment of artistic and musical societies, and, more broadly, the formation of musical ensembles." (Vaso Tole)[1]. In this context of the beginnings of cultivated art in Albania, the establishment of the first musical bands is also specifically included.

Among the cities that introduced a broad and rich artistic medium into Albanian society was Elbasan as well. The city had long-standing musical traditions in the form of *saze* ensembles, feast gatherings, and urban folk songs. Since 1907, a mandolin ensemble had existed there. Alongside the society "Ylli i mëngjesit" ("Morning Star") (1907), the establishment of the "Bashkimi" ("Unity") club (1908), "Dielli" ("The Sun") (1909), the "Drita" ("Light") society, and the "Vllaznia" ("Brotherhood") society (April 18, 1908), the "Afërdita" Society was also formed on May 2, 1909.

(Leonard Shuteriqi)[2] Its first chairman was Lef Nosi. An equally important component of the society was the wind orchestra of the same name. (Pandi Bello, 2016) [3] In the society's statute, point 2 stated that it "aims to spread love, brotherhood, and unity among the inhabitants of the city and the surrounding villages so that they may take the path of civilization" (Skampa Theatre Archive)[4] , while in point 2 it was specified: The society, for the time being, shall consist of a musical band named 'Afërdita'. (AQSH)[5]

The press of the time gave prominence to this musical event. (The newspapers *Dielli and Tomorri*)[6] The society sent Filip Papajani to Vienna to purchase the instruments. This became possible only in 1916. In a small house in Elbasan, young people began to gather and learn musical instruments. The song "Për mëmëdhenë" by Mihal Grameno and "O moj Shqypni e mjera Shqypni" with lyrics by Pashko Vasa, as well as other patriotic songs, formed the first repertoire of the "Afërdita" band.

On November 28, 1917, on the occasion of the declaration of independence, the band took to the streets within the "Kalaja" (Castle) area and performed patriotic folk songs, creating great enthusiasm among the residents. Ahmet Gashi and Adem Jahja worked to give the wind

1 Tole, S. Vasil, "Në fillimet e muzikës profesionistë shqiptare". (Tirana: Studies in Art, Academy of Sciences of Albania, Centre for Art Studies, No. 12, p. 34.)

2 Leonard Shuteriqi, Historiku i Bandës në qytetin e Elbasanit dhe funksioni edukues i saj nga krijimi e deri në ditët tona. Thesis. (Tirana: Library of the Higher Institute of Arts, DM3, pp. 6–7.)

3 Interview with the musicologist Pandi Bello in May 2016, personal archive.

4 Archive of the "Skampa" Theatre, file "Renaissance Period," association "Vëllazëria," sheet 24.
Central State Archive (AQSH), file "Patriotic Cultural Associations," dossier: Association "Përparimi.".
Newspaper Dielli, 13 August 1909, Boston, USA; Newspaper Tomorri, 20 April 1910.
Afërdita Music Band (1909–2009), Catalogue. Elbasan: Elviprint, 2009, pp. 10, 64.
Newspaper Përlindja shqiptare, 21 March 1914; see also Nëndori magazine, 1968, no. 2, p. 184.
Shuteriqi, Leonard., Historiku i Bandës në qytetin e Elbasanit dhe funksioni edukues i saj nga krijimi e deri në ditët tona. Thesis. Tirana: Library of the Higher Institute of Arts, DM3, pp. 6–7)
Shih, Mato, Jakup., Rrjedhave të artit paraprofesionist, Academy of Sciences, Centre for Art Studies, Tirana, 2004, p. 214)

5 Central State Archive (AQSH), file "Patriotic Cultural Associations," dossier: Association "Përparimi."

6 Newspaper Dielli, 13 August 1909, Boston, USA; Newspaper Tomorri, 20 April 1910.

orchestra a more folk-oriented character. (Catalog, 2009)[7] The first concert of a professional and commemorative character is considered to be that of November 28, 1917, when the beautiful sounds of patriotic songs were performed by the entire people gathered in Bezistan Square. The first conductor and master of this musical formation was Thanas Floqi, followed later by Ahmet Gashi, Rrapush Bumçi, Adem Jahja, Shyqyri Demiri, Myrteza Krasta, Sulejman Gjevori, and others. The chairman of the "Afërdita" wind orchestra was Ahmet Hostopalli.

A musician of Austrian origin, Anton Cimfl, made a significant contribution to the "Afërdita" band. He was the conductor of the military regiment's wind orchestra that arrived in Elbasan at the beginning of 1916 during the First World War. He trained and professionally developed its musicians and, on November 28, 1917, conducted the well-known concert marking the fifth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. (Perlindja shqiptare)[8] The program of the first concert included, among other works, the preparation and performance of the well-known French march "La Marseillaise.". Among the most qualified instrumentalists of the band were Ahmet Gashi, Rrapush Bumçi, Adem Jahja, Shyqyri Demiri, and Myrteza Krasa.

In 1920, during the Vlora War, the band accompanied the volunteers from Elbasan, and after three days of travel it was placed on the front line. The celebration of victory in this war was something beautiful and enthusiastic. (L. Shuteriqi)[9] Also well known in Elbasan was the "Lahuta" Society (1913), founded by Thanas Floqi. The musical band group established alongside it attracted several instrumentalists from the "Afërdita" Society, thus forming a larger orchestra. It was initially directed by Thanas Floqi and later by Ahmet Gashi. Alongside the musical band, a mandolin ensemble of about 15 members was also formed, enabling a blending of different musical genres and forms. The band's repertoire most frequently included types of marches, mainly with simple melodic structures, which were adapted according to the number and type of instruments. Alongside orchestral pieces from the world music repertoire, several Albanian folk songs adapted for orchestra were also performed.

The musical repertoire of the "Afërdita" band mainly consisted of some of the most beautiful songs of the time, most of them newly created. They were performed by a choir composed of the band's instrumentalists and talented amateurs, who functioned as the "song group." Some of the songs performed, adapted for the wind band by Thanas Floqi and presented in orchestral form, included: the "*Hymn of the Flag,"* the *"March of Elbasan,"* and the "*Song of Aqif Pasha Elbasani."*

They formed an opening suite and served as a kind of prelude to the band's subsequent concerts.[10]

7 Afërdita Music Band (1909–2009), Catalogue. Elbasan: Elviprint, 2009, pp. 10, 64.
Newspaper Përlindja shqiptare, 21 March 1914; see also Nëndori magazine, 1968, no. 2, p. 184.
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Shih, Mato, Jakup., Rrjedhave të artit paraprofesionist, Academy of Sciences, Centre for Art Studies, Tirana, 2004, p. 214.

8 Newspaper Përlindja shqiptare, 21 March 1914; see also Nëndori magazine, 1968, no. 2, p. 184.

9 Shuteriqi, Leonard., Historiku i Bandës në qytetin e Elbasanit dhe funksioni edukues i saj nga krijimi e deri në ditët tona. Thesis. Tirana: Library of the Higher Institute of Arts, DM3, pp. 6–7.

10 Shih, Mato, Jakup., Rrjedhave të artit paraprofesionist, Academy of Sciences, Centre for Art Studies, Tirana, 2004, p. 214.

Later, several songs by Thoma Nassi became well known, such as "Vlora-Vlora," "The Mill Song," as well as other songs and dances from various regions, including: *"Salushe," "Beratçe," "E hequr e qarë," "Prapë erdhi vera," "O moj ty me sy të zinj," "Këmba-këmba majë gurit," "Muço's Nightingale," "The Shepherd's Flute," "Elbasan, Beautiful City,"* and others. These songs, among others, were usually arranged for wind instruments, but they were also often performed by the choir. In essence, the choir consisted of the same members of the band, i.e., the instrumentalists, who were also organized as grouped vocal parts, usually in two voices. Some of these songs were compositions by the well-known and talented musician A. P. Tepelena, which were adapted for orchestra and had an interesting sonority. They were multiplied in vocal terms, and through the form that emerged naturally from the transition to polyphonic singing, they achieved a strong impact on the many listeners and spectators. This practice of adaptation was also applied to several other songs, which took on choral or instrumental forms. The change in performance was accompanied by a different kind of affect, as it now involved a different approach and mode of perception by the audience. This precisely marked the innovation introduced by the band's orchestral performances.

In 1921, the "Afërdita" band also went to the city of Tirana on the occasion of the opening of the first Albanian parliament. (Mato, J. 2004)[11] Its impressive participation in the funeral procession of the patriot Aqif Pasha Biçakçiu has remained in the city's memory for the emotions it evoked. After its reorganization and the purchase of new instruments, the band accompanied sporting events, military parades, concerts featuring patriotic folk songs, marches and suites, and even some works from well-known world music adapted for wind orchestra. It continued its activity for a short time after the fascist occupation of the country in 1939, until it was eventually disbanded. Anton Cimfl, born in 1885, was a musician and conductor of the wind orchestra of the military regiment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the city of Elbasan. As a friend of Aqif Pasha Biçakçiu and as an act of gratitude toward him, in May 1916 he composed the march Albanischer Lieder ("Albanian Songs"). The composition preserves the classical form of marches of the period, creating a festive atmosphere. A. Cimfl is known for his contribution to the training and development of the young musicians of the "Afërdita" wind orchestra. He orchestrated many songs for it. He became a spokesperson for the patriotic and national ideals embodied in Aqif Pasha and turned into a symbol for the city. Upon returning to Elbasan, the conductor began working with young people and students of the Normal School. Marches such as the "Congress of Elbasan March," the "Afërdita Society March," and others became a favored part of the repertoire.

Anton Cimfl became friends with Aqif Pasha as a result of the latter's culture and his own love and passion for music. The two often listened to music together. Aqif Pasha particularly liked Johann Strauss's "Radetzky March." Cimfl was an admirer of this famous general as well as of the beautiful march itself. For the young Austrian composer, Aqif Pasha was a pure patriot and nationalist, a model citizen, and a statesman for the Albanians. Not leaving his Austrian friend in the barracks of the imperial army, he provided the musician with very good conditions within his own residence. In these circumstances, Cimfl began to conceive the first notes of a hymn dedicated to the Albanian patriot. In many discussions and exchanges of ideas between them, they spoke about the situation in the country as well as in the surrounding regions. Aqif Pasha openly expressed to him his sympathy for the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its army, which he referred to as a liberating force.

11 Shih, Mato, Jakup, Rrjedhave të artit paraprofesionist, Academy of Sciences, Centre for Art Studies, Tirana, 2004, p. 214.

The Austro-Hungarians had shown great consideration toward the Albanians, respecting three of their sacred values: the flag, dignity, and honor. The composer was transferred to Vienna, and in May 1916 another conductor arrived from Austria. He arrived at Aqif Pasha's residence with a package sent by A. Cimfl. It contained a CD of the "Radetzky March" and A. Cimfl's composition dedicated to him, inscribed "The Pasha's March." According to a testimony from a former instrumentalist of the "Afërdita" musical band and a witness of the time, the "March" had on its cover, in large letters: "His Excellency Mr. Aqif Pasha, former Albanian minister," followed by a photograph of Aqif Pasha surrounded by the words "Albanian Leader." In a short biography written in 1976 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Aqif Pasha's death, Cimfl stated that this march also had lyrics written by Filip Papajani. Only a few verses of them are known:

Serbia, Montenegro and Greece,
You rare man, you were never afraid.
In the duty of the homeland, you always stood firm,
For the honor and good of Albania.
Forward, Pasha, may you live long,
Show that in your veins flows Albanian blood.
Stand firm in strict loyalty,
Work day and night.

In the march *Albanischer Lieder*, A. Cimfl gave priority to musical idioms and themes, as well as to tonal, modal, and instrumental relationships, while preserving the texture. The first four measures, through the "martial tempo" used in 2/4-time, sound like a signal or a call to action. Through the musical arpeggio and the style used in the dotted eighth-note figure—characteristic of brass instruments—the composer already establishes a triumphant atmosphere from the outset. The musical key of C minor gives the opening signal a distinctive sound, generally dominated by dramatic nuances. The first section, "A," is entirely in the key of C minor and, in terms of musical form, consists of a theme structured as a period with two phrases of eight measures each. The second phrase develops by repeating the first, but doubled at the octave, with a varied cadence on the "tonic". The harmonic functions are simple and move from T (tonic) to D (dominant) and back to T (tonic), using certain auxiliary tones, both diatonic and chromatic passing tones. The the arpeggio remains a central motivic element of the theme. The first section, "A," returns, further extending the sense of a processional atmosphere.
The second section, 'B,' develops in the key of C major, which is achieved through a rapid and contrasting modulation, linked via a pivot on the note G. As musical material, the composer uses the refrain of the patriotic song "Alfabeti Shqip," with lyrics written by Parashqevi Qiriazi. The melodic line used is taken from the refrain, but it is treated in a more martial character, with the aim of making it suitable for a processional style. At the same time, this creates a contrast with the first section. The key of C major itself gives it a more optimistic, hymn-like, and triumphant character. The composer deliberately chose this musical material from the widely known song "Alfabeti Shqip," which was sung by the entire people during that historical period. The harmonic structure of section "B" is simple and clear, following the T–D–T (tonic–dominant–tonic) functions. Dotted martial figures—the dotted eighth note and the sixteenth note—are predominant. Here again we have a period form with two phrases that are repeated, where the final measure of section "B" serves as a harmonic link to transition back to the first section "A"

in the key of C minor. The second appearance of section "A," presented as a period form without repetition and in an unchanged form, recreates the same dramatic atmosphere of calls as at the beginning of the "march".
The third section, "C," develops in the key of A-flat major. At the beginning, there are two measures that serve as an introduction to the musical material of the entire section "C." The motifs of this material are those of the "National Anthem," but treated in a more martial style. This was done intentionally: first, to make this section of the march suitable for procession, and second, to avoid the usual tempo in its ceremonial form. The material is structured as a simple two-part stanza–refrain form. The harmonic language is very simple, based on the basic T–D–T chords, in order to make it easier to perform, avoiding more advanced harmonizations. As is known, the "National Anthem" was later harmonized and orchestrated with great skill by the composer Çesk Zadeja.
The martial character in section "C" is conveyed by the composer through the use of "triplets" in the accompaniment part of the melody. In that section, only the refrain is repeated twice. Later comes the material of the "Coda." This is of a general type, in the flow of the "Hymn of the Flag," and has the form of a logical conclusion. The musical tonality continues to remain in A-flat major and consists of two phrases that are repeated. The purpose of using the "coda" is to convey a triumphant and hymn-like character.
In conclusion, it can be said that:

- "Marsh Hymn" is written in the concept of a large two-part structure, where the first part follows an A–B–A form, and the second part is in a verse–refrain form, plus a coda. From a historical and musical tradition perspective, this represents a contribution of particular value.
- It is a musical work written by a foreign composer, using Albanian musical themes.
- It reflects respect and appreciation for the figure of the Albanian patriot from Elbasan, Aqif Pasha Biçakçiu.
- It is written in a simple, clear language that is easy to understand and perceive.
- A strong patriotic spirit prevails.

With the care of Zhani Ciko, as well as a masterful orchestration for symphony orchestra by the maestro Robert Radoja, this march was performed by the symphony orchestra of the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet on the stage of this theatre. I, the author of these lines, had the fortune that, as the "first trumpet player" of the symphony orchestra at that time, I was one of the performers of the "March" in its absolute premiere for the audience and television viewers. Since 2003 and onwards, in the Concert Ball held at the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet (TKOB), this musical work has been performed from time to time.
Until 2003, the "March" remained silent and unknown to the new audience. It was precisely in 2003 that Mr. Sherif Delvina, a maternal descendant of the patriotic Biçakçi family, gave the score to the symphony orchestra of the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet for the final concerts of the year, following the Viennese tradition, and its musical sounds opened the curtain of these concerts.

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Herbert L. Clarke's pedagogical paradigm: String formation, cornet methodology, and band soloism in modern brass education

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Abstract

This paper examines the pedagogical legacy of Herbert L. Clarke (1867–1945) within music performance and arts education, addressing two primary research questions. First, it investigates to what extent Clarke's early training in violin and viola served as the technical and conceptual matrix for his renowned cornet methods (Elementary, Technical, and Characteristic Studies). Second, it explores how his career as a soloist redefined the educational and cultural role of the wind band in the early twentieth century.Using a historical-analytical methodology based on Clarke's autobiography, a comparative study of his volumes, and an analysis of American band culture, the research identifies a systematic transfer of string-instrument principles into brass methodology. Findings show that Clarke's background directly informed tone production, legato continuity, phrasing, and the progressive design of exercises, establishing an interdisciplinary framework that shaped modern brass pedagogy.Furthermore, Clarke's international solo activity transformed performance into a research-oriented practice, positioning the wind band as a space for technical experimentation and cultural mediation.

Keywords

Instrumental pedagogy, performance-based research, wind band culture, methodological transfer, brass pedagogy

Introduction

The pedagogical tradition of brass instruments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is deeply rooted in the methodological innovations introduced by Joseph Jean-Baptiste Laurent Arban. *His Grande Méthode Complète de Cornet à Pistons et de Saxhorn*, published by Léon Escudier in Paris, likely no later than 1859 [1], represents not only a technical compendium but also a systematic attempt to define the cornet as a legitimate concert instrument within the classical tradition (Arban, 1860: 3-15).

Nearly seventy years later, Herbert L. Clarke reinterpreted this legacy in his 1930 publication The Arban-Clarke Method for Cornet and Trumpet, produced in collaboration with The Cundy-Bettoney Co. in Boston. Rather than constituting a simple revision, this work reflects a deeper pedagogical transformation, situated at the intersection between European conservatoire traditions and the emerging American wind band culture.

The present study originates from the analysis of a rare first edition of Arban's Grande Méthode, alongside Clarke's revision and his autobiographical text How I Became a Cornetist. These sources allow for a re-evaluation of Clarke's pedagogical identity beyond his well-documented virtuosity as a soloist with the Gilmore Band and the John Philip Sousa Band.

The central hypothesis of this research is that Clarke's pedagogical system does not break with Arban's tradition but extends it through a process of conceptual translation. This translation is shaped by two decisive factors: Clarke's early formation as a violinist and violist, and his professional experience within the American wind band system. These elements collectively reframe Arban's technical grammar into a more fluid, sound-oriented and phrase-based conception of brass performance.

The study therefore seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How did Arban's *Grande Méthode* establish the structural foundations of modern brass pedagogy?
2. How did Herbert L. Clarke reinterpret this pedagogical system in his 1930 revision?
3. In what ways did Clarke's violinistic training and wind band experience transform European brass pedagogy into a modern international model?

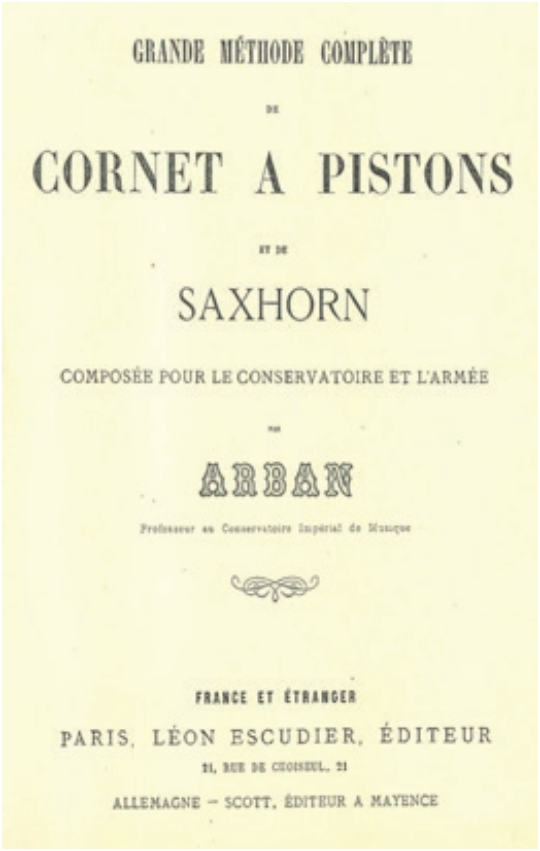
Literature review

The scholarly discourse on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century brass pedagogy has traditionally developed along two parallel trajectories: the European conservatoire tradition, centred on systematic method construction, and the American wind band tradition, oriented toward performance practice and solo virtuosity. Within this dual framework, Joseph Jean-Baptiste Laurent Arban occupies a foundational position as the first author to codify a comprehensive technical system for the cornet, integrating articulation, flexibility, and melodic virtuosity into a unified pedagogical structure (Clarke, 1912).

The Grande Méthode Complète de Cornet à Pistons et de Saxhorn has been widely studied as a normative pedagogical text, particularly in relation to its influence on subsequent French and

1 The dating of the first edition remains a subject of bibliographical debate. While 1859 is widely accepted, the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica, citing the Dictionnaire des éditeurs de musique français (1988), suggests 1853. Furthermore, the Library of Congress holds a copy cataloged as '185-', reflecting the uncertainty surrounding the exact year of its initial release by Escudier.

international brass schools (Clarke, 1934: 12-18).


GRANDE MÉTHODE COMPLÈTE

DE

CORNET A PISTONS

ET DE

SAXHORN

COMPOSÉE POUR LE CONSERVATOIRE ET L'ARMÉE

PAR

ARBAN

Professeur au Conservatoire Impérial de Musique

FRANCE ET ÉTRANGER

PARIS, LÉON ESCUDIER, ÉDITEUR

21, RUE DE CHOISEUL, 21

ALLEMAGNE — SCOTT, ÉDITEUR A MAYENCE

Figure 1. Title page of Grande Méthode Complète de Cornet à Pistons et de Saxhorn, Léon Escudier.

However, most existing literature tends to emphasise its historical importance rather than its internal structural logic.

The examined copy of the Grande Méthode presents additional material evidence that contributes to its contextual interpretation. On page 244, a handwritten signature attributed to an individual named Conseil is visible. The surname, widely attested in France from the fifteenth century onwards, does not in itself allow for precise identification; however, its recurrence within the volume is noteworthy. Two additional loose sheets, preserved between the pages, contain lists of students associated with the Military School attached to the Paris Conservatoire. One of these documents consists of an authorization note for students of the 38th Line Regiment, signed by a music instructor, while the second is a simple register of names without further specification (see Figure 2)[2] .

2 The loose documents found within the volume include a specific authorization for students belonging to the 38th Line Regiment. This archival evidence strongly reinforces the connection between this specific copy and the Military School attached to the Paris Conservatoire, where Arban served as a professor for nearly a decade.

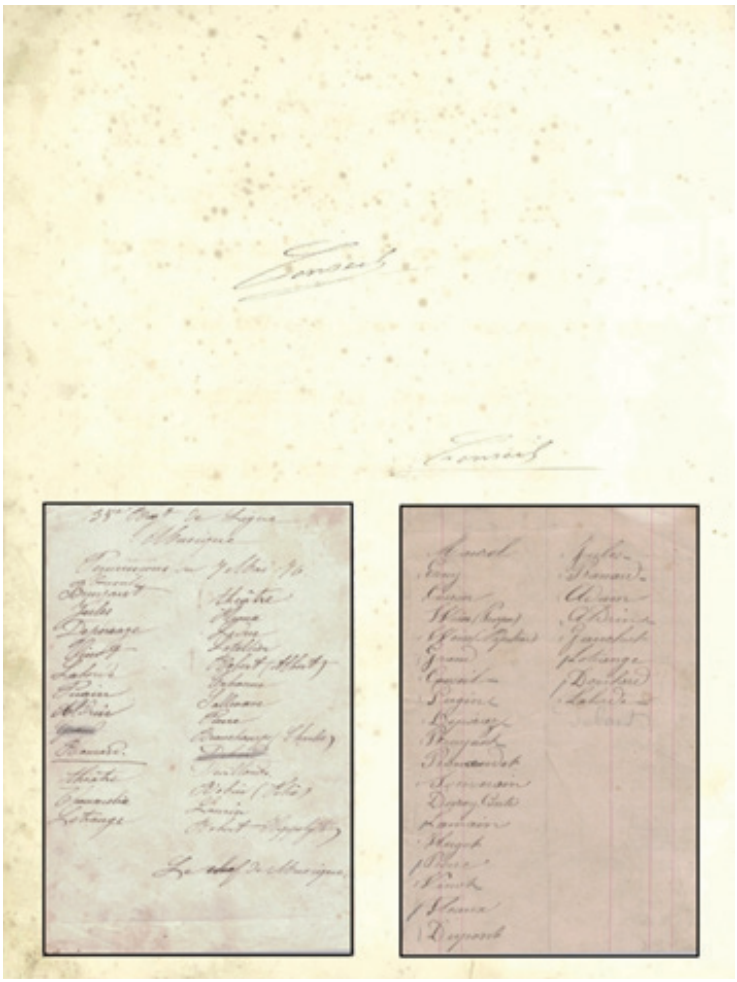


Figure 2. Scanned page 244 of Grande Méthode Complète de Cornet à Pistons et de Saxhorn, showing the handwritten signature of Conseil and two archival inserts preserved within the volume.

Given that Conseil is explicitly identified within these documents as a military student, it is plausible to hypothesise that the owner of this copy may have been a direct student of Arban himself, who for approximately a decade taught at the Military School affiliated with the Paris Conservatoire. This material evidence reinforces the view of the Grande Méthode not only as a theoretical pedagogical text, but also as an object embedded within a lived institutional teaching context.

Recent scholarship has begun to reconsider Arban's method not merely as a compendium of exercises, but as a systematic theory of instrumental technique grounded in vocal and orchestral paradigms (Clarke, 1930).

In contrast, Herbert L. Clarke has often been examined primarily through the lens of his virtuosity as a performer and his contribution to the American wind band tradition, particularly in relation to the Gilmore Band and the John Philip Sousa Band. His pedagogical output—Elementary Studies, Technical Studies, and Characteristic Studies—has been widely incorporated into conservatoire curricula, yet it has rarely been analysed in relation to its underlying historical and conceptual genealogy. As a result, Clarke is often positioned as an autonomous pedagogical figure, rather than as part of a broader continuum stemming from nineteenth-century European brass pedagogy.

A limited number of studies have addressed the relationship between Arban and Clarke, generally framing Clarke's Arban-Clarke Method (1930) as a practical revision intended to adapt nineteenth-century European pedagogy to twentieth-century American performance contexts (Tarr, 1999: 201-215). However, such interpretations often overlook the deeper structural continuity between the two systems, particularly in terms of phrasing conception, technical progression, and the integration of melodic thinking into technical studies.

A crucial but still underexplored dimension in Clarke's pedagogical identity is his early formation as a string player. His autobiography *How I Became a Cornetist* (1934) provides essential insight into this aspect, revealing sustained engagement with violin and viola practice during his formative years (Guion, 2010: 301-310). This biographical element has received limited analytical attention in brass scholarship, despite its potential relevance to his conception of tone production, legato continuity, and phrase shaping.

From a methodological perspective, recent developments in performance-based research and practice-led musicology have opened new interpretative frameworks for the study of instrumental pedagogy (Wallace, 2011: 145-160). These approaches allow for the integration of analytical, historical, and performative dimensions, offering a more comprehensive understanding of pedagogical transmission processes.

Within this expanded framework, Arban and Clarke can be reconsidered not as isolated pedagogical figures but as nodes within a continuous historical system. Arban's method represents the codification of a technical grammar for the cornet, while Clarke's contribution emerges as a recontextualisation of that grammar within a new cultural and acoustic environment. This perspective aligns with broader historiographical approaches that emphasise continuity, adaptation, and transformation rather than rupture in the history of instrumental pedagogy (Dickey, 2010: 33-48).

Despite the richness of existing scholarship, a clear gap remains in the systematic comparative analysis of Arban's original pedagogical framework and Clarke's reinterpretation of it across both textual and performative dimensions. The present study addresses this gap by integrating philological analysis, autobiographical interpretation, and performance-based inquiry into a unified methodological model.

Methodology

The methodological framework of this study is designed as a multi-layered analytical model combining historical-philological research, comparative textual analysis, autobiographical interpretation, and performance-based inquiry. This integrated approach allows the reconstruction of pedagogical continuity between Arban and Clarke across textual, historical, and embodied dimensions of instrumental practice.

Philological and source-based analysis

The primary historical source for this research is a first-edition copy of Joseph Jean-Baptiste Laurent Arban's *Grande Méthode Complète de Cornet à Pistons et de Saxhorn*, published by Léon Escudier in Paris, likely no later than 1859 [3] . The philological examination of this source focuses on its internal pedagogical architecture, including the organisation of technical exercises, the progressive construction of difficulty, and the implicit theoretical model of brass technique embedded within the method.
Particular attention is given to editorial features, typographical structure, and paratextual elements that inform the pedagogical intent of the author. The comparison with later editions, especially those disseminated by Leduc, allows for the identification of structural stability versus editorial adaptation over time.

Comparative textual analysis

The second methodological layer consists of a systematic comparison between Arban's original Grande Méthode and Herbert L. Clarke's 1930 revision, The Arban-Clarke Method for Cornet and Trumpet [4] . The analysis focuses on three dimensions:

- articulation models (single, double, and triple tonguing);
- phrasing and melodic continuity in technical exercises;
- structural organisation of progressive studies.

This comparative framework aims to identify not only differences in editorial intervention but also deeper pedagogical continuities that persist across both versions of the method. The hypothesis guiding this analysis is that Clarke's intervention does not alter the foundational grammar of Arban's system but recontextualises it within a different performance culture.

3 The authenticity and physical integrity of the rare copy examined were verified through professional restoration and certification by Dr. Maria Rosa Borraccino. Her analysis confirmed the volume as an original Escudier first edition through a comparative study of the musical plates, indices, and the specific typography used by the Morris et Comp. printing house in Paris.

4 The 1930 edition published by The Cundy-Bettoney Co. in Boston was a landmark pedagogical event. It aimed to modernize Arban's technical grammar for the American market, integrating contemporary sound concepts while preserving the rigorous structural logic of the original French conservatoire method

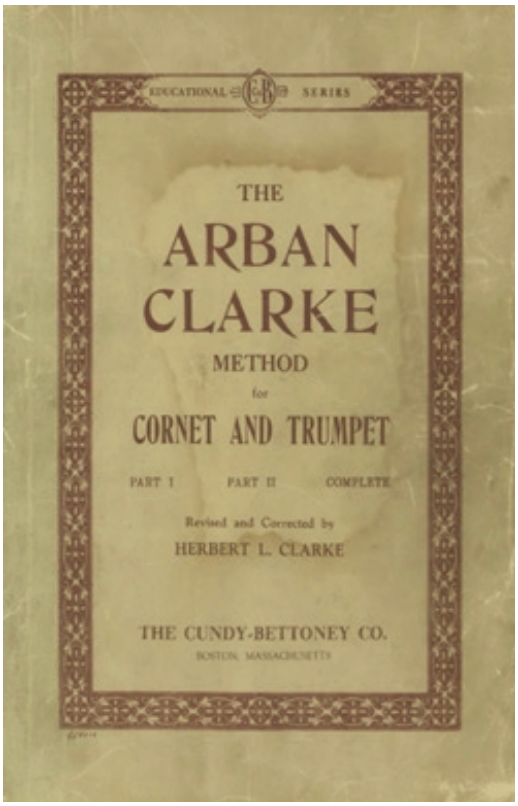
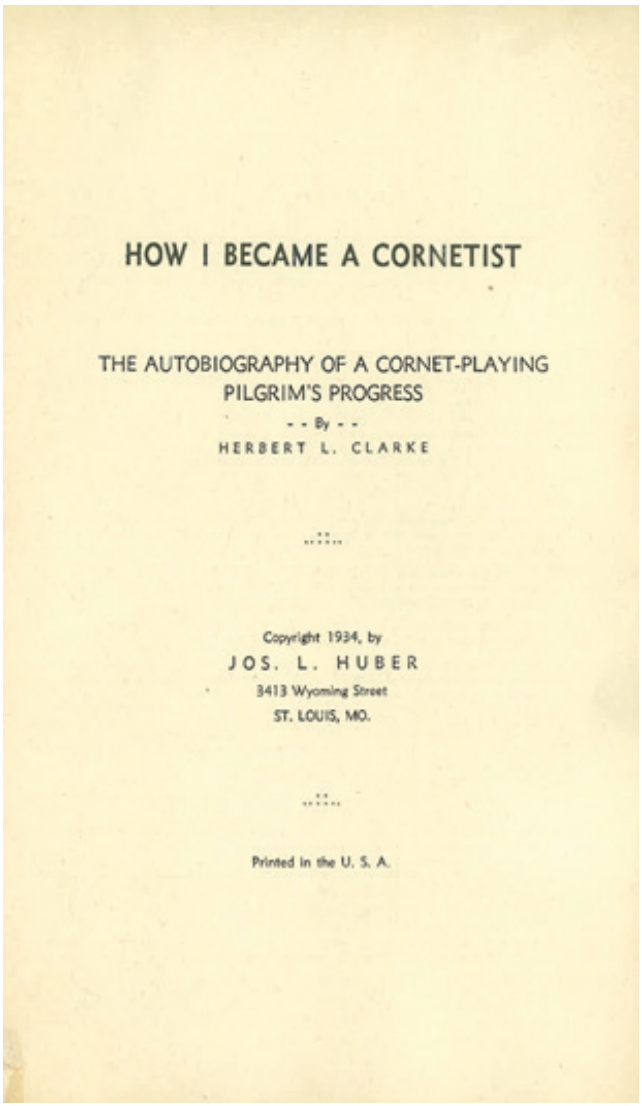


Figure 3. Title page of The Arban Clarke Method for Cornet and Trumpet, The Cundy-Bettoney Co.

Autobiographical analysis

A crucial component of the methodology is the use of Herbert L. Clarke's autobiography How I Became a Cornetist (1934) as a primary interpretative source. This document provides essential insight into Clarke's formative years, particularly his early engagement with violin and viola practice.

The autobiographical narrative is treated not as a purely biographical account but as a reflective pedagogical document, offering evidence of how string-based technical and expressive principles were transferred into brass performance practice. Particular attention is given to Clarke's descriptions of tone production, legato conception, and phrase shaping, which reveal a conceptual framework strongly influenced by string pedagogy.


HOW I BECAME A CORNETIST

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A CORNET-PLAYING
PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

- - By - -

HERBERT L. CLARKE

Copyright 1934, by
JOS. L. HUBER
3413 Wyoming Street
ST. LOUIS, MO.

Printed in the U. S. A.

Figure 4. Title page of How I Became a Cornetis, Jos. L. Huber

Analytical framework: pedagogical continuity

The methodological synthesis is grounded in the concept of pedagogical continuity, defined here as the transmission and transformation of technical and expressive principles across different historical, cultural, and performative contexts without structural rupture. Unlike models based on influence or derivation, this framework emphasises transformation within continuity, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the Arban–Clarke relationship.

Results and discussion

The comparative analysis between Arban's Grande Méthode and Herbert L. Clarke's pedagogical output reveals a consistent structural continuity underlying apparent historical and stylistic differences. Rather than constituting a rupture in brass pedagogy, Clarke's intervention emerges as a process of recontextualisation, in which the foundational grammar established by Arban is

preserved, reorganised, and extended within a new performative and cultural framework.

Arban as pedagogical architecture

Arban's Grande Méthode establishes a comprehensive system in which technical instruction is inseparable from musical discourse. The progressive organisation of exercises reflects a pedagogical model grounded in cumulative acquisition, where articulation, flexibility, and melodic execution are not isolated skills but interdependent components of a unified instrumental language.

The methodological coherence of Arban's system lies in its implicit assumption that technical mastery must always be embedded within musical phrasing. This is particularly evident in the character studies and lyrical exercises, where virtuosity is consistently subordinated to melodic intelligibility (Herbert, 2006: 98-112). In this sense, Arban constructs not merely a method, but a grammar of the cornet.

Clarke and the reconfiguration of pedagogical material

In the 1930 Arban-Clarke Method for Cornet and Trumpet, Clarke does not alter the structural foundations of Arban's system but selectively reinterprets its expressive priorities. The most significant transformation occurs at the level of articulation and phrasing conception, where Clarke introduces a more fluid, legato-oriented approach consistent with his background as a string player and orchestral soloist.

This reinterpretation reflects a shift from a predominantly articulated conception of brass technique to a sound-centred model in which continuity of tone becomes the primary expressive parameter. Clarke's editorial interventions therefore operate not as modifications of content, but as recalibrations of interpretative focus.

Violinistic influence and embodied technique

A central finding of this study is the extent to which Clarke's pedagogical conception is informed by his early training in violin and viola. [5] As documented in How I Became a Cornetist, Clarke's formative experience with string instruments shaped his understanding of sound production as a continuous, physically modulated process rather than a sequence of discrete articulations.

This violinistic paradigm manifests in his pedagogical writings through the emphasis on breath continuity, phrase shaping, and tonal homogeneity. Unlike Arban, whose method is rooted in the articulation-driven logic of nineteenth-century brass practice, Clarke implicitly transfers bow-based phrasing concepts into the domain of wind performance (Smith, 2010: 55-70).

5 Clarke's father, William H. Clarke, was a polymath musician who insisted on his sons learning string instruments to build a foundation in musical reading. According to his autobiography, the father purchased four small violins and wrote an elementary string quartet for his children, including Herbert, who initially played the viola. This experience was pivotal in developing Clarke's concept of 'singing' through the instrument and his subsequent approach to legato on the cornet

Wind band culture and the expansion of the soloist role

Clarke's activity within American wind bands, particularly the Gilmore Band and the Sousa Band, further contributes to the transformation of Arban's pedagogical system. The wind band context requires a redefinition of the soloist not merely as a virtuoso performer but as a mediator between orchestral texture and public entertainment culture.
Within this framework, technical studies acquire a dual function: they serve both as training material and as preparatory material for public performance contexts. The Elementary, Technical, and Characteristic Studies reflect this hybrid function, combining pedagogical progression with expressive immediacy.

Pedagogical continuity as structural principle

The comparative analysis demonstrates that the relationship between Arban and Clarke is best understood through the concept of pedagogical continuity rather than influence or adaptation. Arban provides the structural grammar of brass technique; Clarke extends this grammar by integrating new expressive parameters derived from string performance practice and American band culture.
This continuity is not linear but transformational. It operates through selective reinterpretation rather than direct transmission, allowing the same pedagogical structures to acquire new expressive meanings in different historical contexts.

Synthesis of findings

The synthesis of philological, autobiographical, and performance-based analysis confirms three core findings:

1. Arban's Grande Méthode functions as a systematic codification of brass technique as musical grammar.
2. Clarke's pedagogical output preserves this grammar while reorienting its expressive priorities toward legato continuity and tonal homogeneity.
3. Clarke's violin background and wind band experience constitute the mediating factors that enable this transformation.

Taken together, these findings support the hypothesis that Clarke does not replace Arban but extends him, repositioning nineteenth-century European pedagogy within a twentieth-century transatlantic musical environment.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study has demonstrated that the pedagogical relationship between Joseph Jean-Baptiste Laurent Arban and Herbert L. Clarke should be understood in terms of continuity rather than rupture. The analysis of primary sources, including the first edition of Arban's Grande Méthode, Clarke's Arban-Clarke Method, and his autobiographical text How I Became a Cornetist, reveals a coherent transmission of technical principles across different historical and cultural contexts.
Arban's contribution lies in the establishment of a systematic grammar for cornet technique, in

which articulation, flexibility, and progressive technical organisation form a unified pedagogical structure. Clarke does not reject this system; instead, he extends it by introducing a new conceptual dimension grounded in his violinistic background and his experience within the American wind band tradition.

The results of this study suggest that Clarke's pedagogical innovation is primarily interpretative rather than structural. His approach redefines the notion of sound production, shifting from an articulation-based model to a phrase-oriented conception of instrumental technique. This transformation represents a crucial step in the evolution of modern brass pedagogy.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of integrating historical performance practice with technical training. The continuity between Arban and Clarke demonstrates that modern brass education is the result of layered historical processes rather than isolated methodological innovations.

Future research should extend this comparative model to other transitional figures in brass pedagogy, particularly within the Franco-American tradition, in order to further clarify the mechanisms of pedagogical transmission in nineteenth- and twentieth-century instrumental schools.

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Sounds of Calabria: Innovation and preservation through Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

This paper presents preliminary findings from the doctoral project "Sounds of Calabria: Innovation and Preservation through Artificial Intelligence," conducted at the Conservatorio di Musica "Stanislao Giacomantonio" of Cosenza. By merging ethnomusicology, acoustic ecology, and deep learning, the research aims to preserve and valorise Calabria's sound heritage. The methodology is tripartite: systematically recording natural, urban, and traditional regional soundscapes; computationally analyzing these datasets using Python frameworks like Librosa and PyTorch; and developing a proprietary algorithm capable of generating immersive soundscapes reflecting the region's acoustic identity.The theoretical framework draws on foundational works in soundscape studies - by R. Murray Schafer, Barry Truax, and Almo Farina - alongside the ethnographic research of Antonello Ricci. His qualitative taxonomy of Calabrian ritual and everyday sounds informs the construction of a culturally annotated, ethnographic-computational dataset. This interdisciplinary approach enables the digital safeguarding of intangible heritage without eroding its profound symbolic and historical significance.Future development envisions an advanced hybrid model integrating a conversational AI interface. This will allow for semantic user control paired with detailed parametric sound manipulation, effectively positioning the system as a genuine human-machine co-creation tool. By bridging traditional preservation with cutting-edge algorithmic generation, the project opens new avenues for the practical application of soundscape research. Envisaged real-world applications span cinematic post-production and immersive sound design - potentially in collaboration with the Calabria Film Commission - as well as integration into broader therapeutic environments, acoustic ecology interventions, and general well-being programs.

Keywords

Soundscape, artificial intelligence, deep learning, generative audio, acoustic heritage.

Introduction

The recent development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies has triggered a profound paradigm shift at the intersection of engineering and creative disciplines. While fields such as text and image generation have already witnessed rapid algorithmic maturation, the domain of audio, and in particular the creation of complex sonic environments, still represents a largely open technological and aesthetic challenge. Recent literature confirms that this area of research, although in rapid expansion, remains in a pioneering phase, characterised by predominantly experimental and prototypal approaches not yet consolidated around standardised methodologies.
It is within this scenario that the doctoral research project conducted at the Conservatory of Cosenza, entitled *Sounds of Calabria: Innovation and Preservation through Artificial Intelligence*, organically situates itself. The initiative aims to bridge the gap between ethnomusicological research and computer science, with the twofold purpose of preserving and enhancing the vast regional sound heritage. The central objective consists in the collection, cataloguing and analysis of Calabrian environmental sounds, with a view to their integration into applications intended for the cinematic and audiovisual sector, and the establishment of a dynamic digital sound archive accessible to institutional operators such as the Calabria Film Commission.
The acquisition protocol employs professional portable recorders and a range of microphone configurations to map three macro-categories of sound: natural, urban and traditional. This last category, intimately linked to folk manifestations and dialectal inflections, assumes crucial significance from a preservation standpoint. From a computational perspective, the methodology relies on a Python-based framework, using Librosa for spectral feature extraction (Librosa Development Team 2023) and PyTorch for training generative neural networks (Paszke et al. 2019), enabling the algorithm to generate new soundscapes that are coherent and immersive.
The first year of the three-year project, conducted under the supervision of Prof. Francesco Perri, has been primarily devoted to building a robust theoretical and practical framework, critically analysing existing studies on AI applied to music and initiating the active configuration of the necessary algorithms.

Literature review

The preliminary investigation underlying the present research project began with a systematic and critical survey of the state of the art. In order for the use of artificial intelligence algorithms for the generation of soundscapes not to be reduced to a mere technical exercise, it is essential to anchor the computational architectures to a solid epistemological foundation. The roots of this investigation inevitably delve into the foundational work of R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. By introducing key concepts such as keynote sounds, sound signals and soundmarks, Schafer offers a rich qualitative taxonomy, grounded in deep listening and the conception of the soundscape as a "text" to be decoded culturally (Schafer 1977, p. 9). Although the original work lacks quantitative data collection protocols, its value for present-day computational research is inestimable: it demands that the soundscape not be reduced to mere background noise, but rather treated as a complex ecosystem (Schafer 1977, 23). The current methodological challenge consists in translating Schafer's descriptive categories into extractable features (spectral, temporal and spatial) via programming languages such as Python, thus objectifying the difference between environmental sounds and ritual signals within neural classification models.
A further evolution of the paradigm is traced by Barry Truax in *Acoustic Communication*, where the focus shifts from the landscape conceived as a "scenario" to sound conceived as a relational medium between source, environment, listener and technology (Truax 2001, 45). This communicative model lends itself excellently to being formalised in computational pipelines: the extraction of features and the creation of intermediate signal representations can serve as

predictors for perceptual outcomes, such as the identity of a place and its intelligibility (Truax 2001, 67). The electroacoustic transformations studied by Truax pave the way for modern practices of soundscape composition, laying the theoretical foundations for neural networks conditioned by contextual metadata.

Alongside the communicative approach, recent literature highlights a marked turn towards the quantification of environmental data, systematised by Almo Farina within the framework of *Soundscape Ecology* (Farina 2014, 12). By integrating bioacoustics, semiotics and social sciences, Farina defines specific sound patterns and promotes the use of sound as an environmental proxy (Farina 2014, p. 78). Applied to the Calabrian context, this paradigm allows recordings of rivers, forests and pastoral areas to be interpreted as measurable indicators of biodiversity and anthropic pressures, transcending the dichotomy between nature and culture.

The transition towards a fully computational methodology finds its manifesto in the works of Bryan C. Pijanowski. Expanding the ecological foundations through the categories of biophony, geophony and anthrophony, Pijanowski proposes a strongly data-driven approach (Pijanowski et al. 2011, 1215). Although the ecological literature does not provide direct implementation code, Pijanowski's methodological structuring functions as a "conceptual pseudocode" for algorithmic research: from the definition of hypotheses to the extraction of ecological variables, through to modelling via machine learning. The development horizon thus takes shape, pointing towards generative models capable of transitioning from descriptive analysis to predictive simulation of soundscapes.

However, in order to transpose these global paradigms to the territorial specificity of the present project, particular strategic relevance is assumed by the ethnographic investigation of Antonello Ricci, *Il paese dei suoni. Antropologia dell'ascolto a Mesoraca*. Ricci reconstructs the local phonosphere through an in-depth qualitative analysis of ritual sounds, sounds of artisanal and agro-pastoral labour, and everyday signals (Ricci 2007, 34). From a machine learning perspective, this text provides the interpretive reference standard, making it possible to define a culturally significant unit of analysis. The objective is not to train neural networks on generic, decontextualised clips, but to build an ethnographic-computational dataset, combining audio with symbolic metadata (Ricci 2007, 89). In this way, the algorithm is required not only to identify the acoustic nature of the sound, but to infer the specific social practice or temporal context to which it belongs.

The integration of these ecological and ethnographic substrata with modern neural networks represents the frontier explored by recent literature, where Deep Learning models have become increasingly relevant tools for separating and identifying overlapping sound sources. The intersection between territorial exploration and virtual environments highlights a further challenge: using AI not only to analyse the existing, but to synthesise immersive soundscapes. The generation of coherent spatialised audio requires neural networks to learn not only the timbral accuracy dictated by the taxonomies of Schafer and Ricci, but also the precise placement of events in three-dimensional space. It is exactly in this interstitial space, between the absence of rigorous quantitative protocols in classical ethnomusicology and the need for culturally valid datasets for neural training, that the unexplored potential of the present research lies.

Methodology

The applied dimension of the present research adopts an eminently practical-experimental methodology, structured in sequential phases proceeding from the physical acquisition of acoustic data through to its algorithmic re-elaboration. The preliminary phase of collecting sound samples from the Calabrian territory requires rigorous protocols and precise operational procedures, inescapable prerequisites for guaranteeing the fidelity and quality of the data intended for subsequent machine learning phases. To this end, the hardware infrastructure for recording campaigns involves the use of high-resolution portable digital recorders. The capture

of the environment is entrusted to a combination of microphone configurations, including omnidirectional microphones for ambient field recording and stereo or ambisonic setups where spatial information is required for immersive reconstruction.
The regional acoustic mapping is designed to explore three fundamental dimensions, reflecting the complex territorial richness: natural soundscapes, which offer a deep connection with biological rhythms and reveal crucial indices of biodiversity; urban sounds, such as the dynamics of road traffic, the tolling of bells or the ambient acoustics of historic markets, which convey the sociological narrative of everyday life; and traditional sounds, intimately linked to ancient crafts, local festivities and dialectal inflections, an intangible heritage at high risk of extinction that the present methodology aims to preserve and transmit.
The raw audio material thus acquired and archived in uncompressed format (.wav) constitutes the input corpus for the central phase of the research: the development of a proprietary algorithm for sound generation. The design of this software architecture has been conducted entirely in the Python environment. The choice of this specific programming language was not accidental, but dictated by precise strategic considerations: its remarkable syntactic versatility, the extensive availability of libraries for audio manipulation and spectral analysis, including Librosa (Librosa Development Team 2023) for spectral feature extraction, and its undisputed pre-eminence in the development of artificial intelligence systems, thanks to native support for high-performance tensor computation frameworks such as PyTorch (Paszke et al. 2019, 8024). Furthermore, the code writing process has integrated the use of Large Language Models (LLMs) as programming assistance tools for the structural optimisation of scripts and the resolution of complex algorithmic problems.
The conceptual and architectural objective of the algorithm is the creation of a system capable of generating, in a semi-autonomous and procedural manner, immersive soundscapes starting from the library of Calabrian sounds provided as input. Through the use of deep neural networks, the system is trained to manage not only the juxtaposition of samples, but also harmonic, rhythmic and timbral choices derived from the analysis of the source material. By way of example, by analysing the fundamental frequencies of environmental sounds, the artificial intelligence is able to determine progressions and modulations; in contexts where tonal or modal structures emerge from the source material, the algorithm can select specific scales, notes or intervals to shape the perceptual character of the output.
From an aesthetic and conceptual standpoint, this procedural declension of sound finds illustrious antecedents in the pioneering experiments in the field of generative music, among which the software *Bloom* and *Trope*, conceived by Brian Eno in collaboration with designer Peter Chilvers, stand out (Chilvers and Eno 2008). These applications have demonstrated how algorithmic processes can offer innovative controls for generating unique, virtually infinite and visually interactive musical sequences. Generative music, as exemplified by these works, represents a refined form of sound sculpture capable of drawing upon a broad palette of emotional states (Eno 2008). The methodological ambition of the present doctoral project lies precisely in transposing this compositional philosophy, typically confined to the domain of musical synthesis, into the field of ethnomusicology and acoustic ecology, employing neural networks to recompose the sonic identity of Calabria in original and immersive forms.

Results and discussions

The first year of the project has been devoted to building the theoretical, methodological and technical foundations of the research. The work has progressed through successive prototypes, evaluated in regular supervisory meetings with Prof. Perri. The activities completed so far include the critical literature survey presented above; the configuration of a Python-based working environment integrating Librosa and PyTorch; the development of initial prototypes for audio feature extraction; and preliminary tests on generative neural architectures. The detailed analysis

of each phase has made it possible to assess strengths, weaknesses and development potential, leading to the definition of a clear strategic trajectory for the continuation of the research.
Future development will move along two interconnected axes. The first axis concerns the construction of an original and richly annotated sound archive. This phase will entail the selection and mapping of specific geographic areas in Calabria for systematic field recording sessions. The resulting archive will serve both as the basis for sound generation and as the training corpus for a semantic search engine, a component planned for the final prototype.
The second axis concerns the technical evolution towards an advanced hybrid model. The aim is to move beyond the prototyping of individual functionalities and converge towards a single integrated system. The envisaged application will allow the user to interact through a conversational interface, describing the desired atmosphere. An enhanced artificial intelligence algorithm will not only select the most relevant sounds from the archive, but will also be capable of generating new ones or modulating them, drawing upon the representations learned in the latent space of the trained generative model. The soundscape thus generated will be presented to the user through an interactive control interface, allowing a phase of manual refinement through the modification of specific parameters. This approach aims at a synergy between the intuitiveness of semantic control and the precision of parametric manipulation, creating a true co-creation instrument between human and machine.

Conclusions and recommendations

The research path delineated in this initial phase of the project conducted at the Conservatory of Cosenza has made it possible to establish an organic and multidisciplinary connection between the classical epistemology of acoustic ecology and the most recent frontiers of deep learning. The investigation has outlined how the transition from the concept of soundscape understood as a cultural and symbolic "text" to its technical translation into numerical matrices and spectral vectors may represent the founding nucleus of a new paradigm of digital conservation and territorial valorisation. The adoption of a data-driven methodological approach, integrated with the depth of ethnographic and anthropological inquiry, suggests that it is scientifically possible to objectify the Calabrian intangible heritage without stripping it of its historical significance, treating with equal analytical and computational rigour the sounds of local fauna for biodiversity monitoring, the ambient acoustics of city markets, and the precious testimonies of dialectal expressions and folk rites.
The experimental setup, based on Python and the PyTorch (Paszke et al. 2019) and Librosa (Librosa Development Team 2023) frameworks, suggests how artificial intelligence may function not as a threat to creativity, but as an advanced instrument of procedural sound sculpture. This technology is capable of generating dynamic acoustic outputs which, far from replacing the sensibility of the human author, offer innovative controls derived directly from the analysis of the fundamental frequencies of the original soundscape.
The planned introduction of an advanced hybrid model and a dedicated conversational interface marks the envisaged transition from a simple descriptive analysis system to a human-machine co-creation ecosystem, where the user's semantic control and the generative autonomy of the neural network may converge to synthesise immersive and culturally coherent soundscapes. In parallel, the applicative potential that has emerged during this initial phase of the research, particularly in the cinematic post-production sector in collaboration with the Calabria Film Commission, confirms the project's strong vocation towards innovations with high social and scientific impact.
It is therefore of vital importance to proceed in the subsequent phases of the three-year period with an even more capillary and systematic territorial mapping, ensuring that the quality of data acquired through high-fidelity instruments continues to represent the inescapable prerequisite for the effectiveness of algorithmic training and for the creation of a cutting-edge dynamic digital

archive. In essence, the research aims to demonstrate that artificial intelligence can be placed at the service of collective memory and the protection of intangible heritage, transforming the regional sound heritage into a living, fluid matter capable of constantly regenerating itself to speak to the new languages of global communication, ensuring that the acoustic identity of Calabria does not risk progressive dispersal, but instead becomes a driver of cultural and technological innovation.

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Heritage, research and innovation: The first sample library of traditional calabrian musical instruments

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Abstract

This paper presents the preliminary research framework of a transdisciplinary doctoral project aimed at the creation of the first structured Sample Library of traditional Calabrian musical instruments, developed with the supervision of Professor Francesco Perri in the Doctoral Programme at the Conservatorio di Musica Stanislao Giacomantonio di Cosenza. The project responds to a significant gap in the field of ethnomusicological organology: despite the richness and complexity of the Calabrian musical tradition - encompassing instruments such as zampogna, chitarra battente, lira, and ciaramella - no professional virtual instrument library exists that faithfully represents this heritage within contemporary music production environments. The research integrates ethnomusicological methodology with advanced audio engineering, proposing a form of active digital preservation that goes beyond mere archival documentation. Drawing on a systematic survey of the foundational ethnomusicological and organological literature on the Calabrian tradition, the project establishes the grounding necessary to approach these instruments not as static relics but as dynamic bearers of living musical practice, embedded in their social and performative contexts. On the technical side, sampling sessions will be conducted at the highest professional quality standards in a controlled acoustic environment. The collected material will be developed into VST instruments on the Kontakt platform via KSP (Kontakt Script Processor) scripting, implementing round-robin algorithms and multi-velocity layers to achieve expressive realism. Preliminary results encompass an ethical-legal framework for the collection of sound material and an open-access distribution model, in line with the project's commitment to the free dissemination of cultural heritage. The project ultimately aims to render Calabrian musical heritage accessible for creative and compositional use within professional digital audio workstation environments.

Keywords

Calabrian organology, intangible cultural heritage, ethnomusicological research, digital preservation, virtual instrument library

Introduction

This operation aims at the valorization and digital re-functionalization of the vocal and organological heritage, transcending mere archiving to arrive at a form of *active preservation* that renders the sonic artifact a creative tool newly operable within modern production environments (Moylan 2007, 3-5).
The theoretical framework places itself in dialectical continuity with fundamental studies on regional organology. The instrumental taxonomy and performance practices find their indispensable foundation in the investigations of Antonello Ricci and Roberta Tucci, particularly in *La capra che suona. Immagini e suoni della musica popolare in Calabria*, essential for understanding the relation between sonic object and anthropological context. In parallel, the methodology regarding pastoral aerophones makes specific reference to Roberta Tucci's works, such as *Calabria 1: strumenti - La zampogna e il doppio flauto* and the essay *La ricerca etnomusicologica in Calabria*, ensuring an accurate philological reconstruction. Completing the historiographical framework is the analysis of Goffredo Plastino's *Suoni di carta*, which provides critical coordinates to interpret written sources from the sixteenth to the twentieth century (Plastino 1997, 9-11).
The operational protocol adopts a technical approach of elevated precision to preserve timbral authenticity. Audio acquisition sessions will take place at the Conservatory's Technological and Research Pole (Palazzo Sersale, Cerisano), ensuring maximum fidelity in transient response. The substantial innovation resides in post-production: samples will be treated morphologically by analyzing the ADSR envelopes (attack, decay, sustain, release). The programming on the Kontakt platform, through KSP language, will implement round-robin algorithms and velocity layers based on exerted pressure, returning to the user a humanized and realistic sonic feedback.

Literature review

Antonello Ricci & Roberta Tucci - La capra che suona. Immagini e suoni della musica popolare in Calabria (2004)
The volume by Ricci and Tucci offers a key synthesis of contemporary Calabrian ethnomusicology, interpreting musical instruments not as isolated artifacts but as sonic objects embedded in performance, work, and devotional contexts. Through extensive field research and an anthropology of listening, the authors highlight the relationship between instrumental forms, symbolic meanings, and social structures, presenting traditional music as a living cultural practice.
Goffredo Plastino - Suoni di carta. Un'antologia sulla musica tradizionale in Calabria, 1571-1957 (1997)
The investigation of Goffredo Plastino moves on a rigorous historical-philological axis, offering a precious "archaeology of the Calabrian soundscape" through written sources from the sixteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. This work dismantles the idea of a static and immutable traditional music, revealing, through travel chronicles and archival documents, marginal practices and instruments (such as the rombo) often neglected by subsequent campaigns of audio surveying. The text provides the coordinates for a conscious understanding of aesthetic mutations over time, documenting the historicity of popular expressive forms and their interaction with learned culture and literature.
Roberta Tucci - Calabria 1. Strumenti. Zampogna e doppio flauto (2010)
Recognized as a pivotal text for Italian popular organology, the work of Roberta Tucci provides an unequaled structural and performance classification of Calabrian zampogne and flutes. The punctual analysis of the constructive typologies, of the tuning systems, of the nature of the reeds, and of the fingerings defines with scientific rigor the technical functioning of these instruments. The investigations of Tucci permit the understanding of the physical limitations and the acoustic

behaviors of the drones and of the melodic pipes (right and left), offering a precise mapping of the regional variants and of the performance practices linked to the repertoires of dance, rituals, and ceremonials.

Antonello Ricci - Il paese dei suoni. Antropologia dell'ascolto a Mesoraca (2012)

Shifting the attention from the isolated musical object to the soundscape in its entirety, Ricci proposes an anthropology of listening centered on the Crotone community of Mesoraca. The text investigates the dense network of ritual sounds, acoustic signals linked to work, and natural echoes that define the local identity, laying the foundations for an approach fully referable to Sound Studies. This overview permits the interpretation of the sonic phenomenon as a structuring element of social space and time, where the boundary between "music" and "environmental sound" dissolves in favor of a holistic understanding of the perceptive categories and acoustic hierarchies of the community.

Ettore Castagna - U Sonu. La danza nella Calabria greca (2016)

The investigation of Ettore Castagna analyzes the social and choreutic dynamics of the sonu a ballu in the Greek Aspromonte. Uniting anthropological depth with direct experience in the field, the author highlights the central role of the *lira* and *zampogna* within rites characterized by high sonic density, repetitiveness, and micro-variations. The text is crucial to understand the performative dimension and the interaction between players and dancers, describing music not as an abstract entity, but as a dynamic event capable of generating and managing the energy of the dance through non-verbal communicative codes and cyclic structures proper to the Grecanic tradition.

William Moylan - Understanding and Crafting the Mix: The Art of Recording (2007)

William Moylan's treatise offers a critical framework for the analysis of phonography and music production, going beyond a purely technical discussion of mixing procedures. Recording is understood as a mediated process in which the physical dimensions of sound are captured, transformed, and reproduced within a fixed sonic artifact, whose spectral, dynamic, and temporal dimensions shape the listener's perception (Moylan 2007, 3-5). Moylan analyzes the relationship between acoustic performance and its mediated spatial representation, offering methodological tools for understanding timbre, balance, and depth in recorded sound.

Simon Cann - Sample This! (2007)

The work of Simon Cann represents a practical guide dedicated to sampling and the design of software instruments. The text addresses the structural complexity of creating sampled libraries, going beyond mere technical manuals to cover the essential phases of the production chain: from the planning of recording sessions (with attention to recording techniques necessary to obtain clean samples) to the logical mapping of velocity layers and articulations. Cann examines the architectures of modern samplers (with references to the scripting and modulation logics typical of environments such as Kontakt), discussing the use of parameters such as round robin and key-switching to preserve expressive authenticity in the virtual replica of acoustic instruments.

Mike Novy - KSP Scripting 1: Kontakt Script Processor (2010)

Mike Novy's volume provides a practical and systematic introduction to the Kontakt Script Processor (KSP), focusing on the scripting tools needed to transform a collection of audio samples into a dynamic and responsive virtual instrument. The text examines variables, arrays, callbacks, groups, zones, modulators, round-robin procedures, artificial legato, and graphical interface design, showing how KSP can be used to control sample playback and instrument behavior in real time.

Methodology

The methodology, while grounded exclusively in bibliographic research, configured itself as a multi-level investigation combining organological analysis of traditional instruments, encompassing constructive characteristics, lutherie techniques, and technical vocabularies - with

the study of vocal practices, poetic-musical forms, and repertoires rooted in specific territorial and social contexts, extending to the cultural and ceremonial dimensions that articulate the relationships between sound, gesture, ritual, and social function.
In preparation for the technological phases of the project, targeted bibliographic research focused on electronic music, sampling, and sound design. Simon Cann's *Sample This!* provided both theoretical frameworks and practical guidance for transforming pre-recorded sounds into new textures and timbres. William Moylan's *Understanding and Crafting the Mix* addressed technical and aesthetic parameters of audio recording, including signal flow, equalization, dynamics, and spatialization, essential for integrating traditional material into electronic contexts. In particular, the analysis of recorded instrumental material requires attention to the physical and perceptual dimensions of sound, including timbre, dynamic envelope, spectrum, and spectral envelope (Moylan 2007, 5-7). Spatialization was also considered as a central parameter of reproduced sound, involving stereo location, perceived distance, and environmental characteristics (Moylan 2007, 176-203).
Particular attention was devoted to two key reference texts: Mike Novy's *KSP Scripting 1: Kontakt Script Processor* and Native Instruments' *KSP Reference Manual*. Together, these works provide the theoretical and practical foundation for understanding the scripting language embedded in Native Instruments' Kontakt platform, where sample playback, MIDI interaction and instrument behavior can be programmed directly within Kontakt (Native Instruments 2014, 2). This scripting environment is therefore indispensable for transforming traditional Calabrian instruments into programmable digital instruments that faithfully reproduce or reinterpret their sonic characteristics.

Results and discussions

Having concluded the phase of bibliographic reconnaissance, the project has translated the theoretical framework into a concrete operational plan. The architecture of the thesis has been defined through a preliminary index conceived as a dynamic conceptual map, destined to evolve and adapt itself to the evidence of the field research. Such a logical structure has been thought to accompany the reader in a consequential path that departs from the theoretical foundations of Calabrian ethnomusicology and of sampling, traverses the methodology of recording and audio editing, concretizes itself in the technological development of the *Calabrian Musical Heritage* libraries on the Kontakt platform, and culminates in the critical discussion of the creative potentialities and of the cultural impact of the work.
On the strictly operational plane, the strategy for the selection of the instruments to be sampled has been determined by intersecting the musicological relevance with the effective availability of the resources on the territory. In parallel, the project established an ethical and professional framework for working with tradition bearers, based on trust, transparency, and specific releases ensuring the scientific, legal, and respectful use of the collected sonic material.
The technological feasibility study produced significant results, which guided the operational phase of the project. In relation to the Kontakt environment, this phase also clarified the need to organize the recorded audio files into playable zones and sample regions, since zone and sample-management commands provide the technical basis for mapping audio materials within the virtual instrument (Native Instruments 2014, 263-268). The behavior of the instrument was therefore conceived not only as a matter of sample assignment, but also as a programmable response to performance input: in this sense, the *on note* callback assumes particular relevance because it allows the script to respond directly to incoming MIDI note events (Native Instruments 2014, 10). At the same time, group-management commands such as allow_group and disallow_group make it possible to selectively activate different groups of samples during playback, supporting the management of articulations, dynamic layers, and alternative takes within the same instrumental structure (Native Instruments 2014, 134-135). Controlled randomization

procedures were considered to vary playback behavior and reduce the mechanical repetition typical of sampled instruments, while preserving the coherence of the performance model. In order to guarantee the widest possible dissemination and accessibility of the sample libraries, it was decided to complement the work developed on *Kontakt* with a purpose-built audio sampler, written in C++ using the *JUCE* framework, *Jules' Utility Class Extensions*. This choice is motivated by both technical and epistemological considerations: the adoption of commercial platforms such as Kontakt by *Native Instruments*, although representing a de facto standard in the professional music production sector, implies a complex and stratified licensing system that subordinates access to the content to the availability of the full version of the software on the part of the end user.

This constraint proves incompatible with a research philosophy oriented toward the open sharing of documented sonic heritage, particularly in academic, educational, and community contexts with limited resources. The custom sampler supports the loading of audio samples in multiple formats and sampling rates, thus ensuring compatibility with material recorded under heterogeneous field conditions. With regard to playback functionalities, the system implements round-robin mechanisms, that is, cyclic rotation among multiple samples of the same note, in order to reduce the artificiality of repetition, commonly described as the machine gun effect, as well as velocity layer management, which allows for the selection of distinct samples according to performance intensity, thereby returning a dynamic response consistent with the performance practices of the documented instruments (Cann 2014, 80). The software further supports the management of multiple articulations, enabling the mapping of distinct performance techniques within a single instrumental interface.

The project follows an architectural structure founded on a clear separation between the graphical interface, the data management logic, and the audio playback engine. This separation is not merely an engineering choice, but reflects a precise methodological orientation: keeping each level of the system independent and replaceable promotes code maintainability, project scalability, and the possibility of modular interventions in subsequent phases of development.

The graphical interface is managed by the *SamplerAudioProcessorEditor* class, which handles user interaction through standard components such as buttons, sliders, and text lists. It allows audio samples to be loaded, parameters such as volume and ADSR envelope values to be adjusted, and the list of available samples to be visualized dynamically. The layout adapts to the window size, while audio-file loading is handled through *FileChooser::launchAsync(),* avoiding GUI-thread blocking; reading and decoding are delegated to a separate thread to prevent latency or interruptions. The data level is structured around the *SamplerSound* class, the basic unit of representation for each sample.

Each instance contains the audio buffer, the root note, the set of MIDI notes on which the sample can be activated, and the ADSR envelope parameters, through which the temporal behavior of the sound is shaped according to attack, decay, sustain, and release (Cann 2014, 15). Once configured, the sample is registered in the internal synthesizer via the *addSound()* method, making it available for real-time playback. The audio level is managed by the *SamplerVoice* class, which, when a MIDI note is activated, calculates the pitch ratio from the sample's root note, reads the buffer with linear interpolation, and applies the ADSR envelope during audio-block generation. Since the recorded material already has its own acoustic envelope, the user-defined ADSR parameters interact with the original contour rather than replacing it, shaping the reproduced note while preserving the temporal imprint of the source sample (Cann 2014, 24).

Since the base *JUCE* engine does not provide a native implementation of round-robin, the cyclic alternation logic has been developed as a custom extension: at each activation, the system sequentially selects the next sample within a predefined set, eliminating the aforementioned machine gun effect. *Velocity layers*, by contrast, allow samples recorded at different performance dynamics to be associated with distinct MIDI velocity ranges; in this way, velocity functions as a modulation source through which the instrument responds differently according to performance

intensity, producing timbral variations faithful to the real performance practices of the documented instruments (Cann 2014, 75-80).
The custom software will be distributed in *VST3, Audio Unit, and Standalone* formats, ensuring compatibility with the main DAW platforms on macOS, Windows, and Linux, as well as autonomous use without an external host. The integration of a native MIDI piano roll, already functional in the current prototype, allows notes to be entered and managed directly within the application. At this stage, the deliberately essential graphical interface reflects a clear methodological priority: consolidating the audio engine before developing more advanced visual features.

Conclusions and recommendations/implications

The research activities described thus far have permitted the construction of a solid theoretical, methodological, and strategic framework. The perspectives for the immediate future now see the project entering into a new phase, a crucial transition from planning to action, entirely dedicated to the preparation of the field research.
In the coming months, the work will concentrate on the translation of the bibliographic research into operational decisions. One will proceed in the first place to the reasoned selection of the instruments to be sampled, based both upon their cultural relevance and upon criteria of effective availability. On the basis of this definitive mapping, the subsequent and consequential activity will consist of the construction of the human and professional network indispensable for the recordings: the identification of and the first contact with the musicians and the bearers of tradition will therefore be initiated, with the objective of establishing a transparent relationship of collaboration and of defining all the ethical and logistical aspects.
These preparatory steps are to be considered essential and propaedeutic to the forthcoming operational phases of the project, which will involve the complex campaign of sample recordings, followed by the meticulous work of post-production and technological development. The research is thus poised to transform the theoretical foundations constructed so far into an original and tangible product of scholarly work.

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Oral formulae, spectral memory, and digital preservation, computational and psychoacoustic approaches to the byzantine chant tradition of the Sicilian Arbëreshë

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Abstract

The Byzantine liturgical chant of the Albanian-Sicilian (arbëreshë) communities of Sicily represents one of the most analytically significant living repositories of Eastern Christian musical practice in Western Europe. Transmitted exclusively through oral mechanisms for over five centuries and structured around the eight-mode system of the oktoichos and the compositional device known as forma mista, this tradition exhibits remarkable inter-generational stability whose cognitive and acoustic determinants have never been subjected to systematic computational investigation. This article proposes a multi-layered research framework combining computational musicology, psychoacoustic theory, and acoustic measurement. Theoretically, the perceptual architecture of the forma mista – its alternation of formulaic and recitative passages with contrasting spectral profiles – is interpreted through Albert Bregman's model of auditory stream segregation, which provides the conceptual foundation for an automated segmentation pipeline. The pipeline integrates a Constant-Q Transform (CQT) representation, suited to non-tempered modal systems, with a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) architecture employing multi-scale dilated filters that compensate for the CQT's inhomogeneous temporal resolution across frequency bands. The proposed CQT-CNN architecture addresses a concrete methodological limitation of standard spectral analysis applied to non-tempered modal singing, and the psychoacoustic framework accounts for the documented inter-generational stability of the formulaic stream.

Keywords

Byzantine chant, constant-q transform, convolutional neural network, auditory stream segregation

Introduction

The arbëreshë communities of Sicily — settled in the towns of Piana degli Albanesi, Contessa Entellina, Mezzojuso, Palazzo Adriano, and Santa Cristina Gela from the mid-fifteenth century following the Ottoman expansion into the Balkans — have maintained an uninterrupted liturgical tradition in the Greek Byzantine rite for over five centuries. Their chant repertoire has been transmitted exclusively by oral means, without the mediation of written notation as a primary preservation tool. The result is a living tradition whose melodic material is traceable to manuscript sources of the thirteenth century, yet remains present in contemporary liturgical performance.

The scholarly documentation of this tradition is rich but analytically uneven. Existing literature has prioritised ethnographic description, historical reconstruction, and editorial transcription. The quantitative dimensions of melodic structure, vocal timbre, and acoustic ecology — dimensions that modern Music Information Retrieval (MIR) and acoustic science are equipped to address — have remained largely unexplored. This article proposes to fill that gap by developing an integrated research framework whose theoretical foundation is derived from the internal logic of the tradition itself: the forma mista, as a cognitive and perceptual phenomenon, generates the analytical categories that the research programme then operationalises computationally.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the scholarly literature on the arbëreshë tradition and on the computational tools proposed for its analysis. Section 3 presents the methodology, from audio restoration through CQT-CNN segmentation to acoustic measurement. Section 4 presents results and discussion. Section 5 draws conclusions and formulates recommendations for future research.

Literature review

The modern scholarly study of arbëreshë Byzantine chant originates with Hugues-Athanase Gaisser's presentation at the 1903 International Congress of Historical Sciences in Rome. The foundational audio document is the field recording campaign conducted by Ottavio Tiby for the Centro Nazionale di Studi di Musica Popolare (CNSMP) in 1952–53: eleven sessions yielding 185 pieces across 23 liturgical sections, performed primarily by papàs Giuseppe Petta and papàs Demetrio Cimino. This collection, archived as raccolta 20 of the CNSMP (now Archivi di Etnomusicologia, Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia), remains the primary audio document of the tradition.

The most analytically consequential contribution to the musicological literature is Girolamo Garofalo's comparative study of Psalm 140 in the first tono, which sets side by side the 1938 transcription of padre Lorenzo Tardo, the 1952 Tiby recording of papàs Petta, and the 1992 performance of papàs Elefthèrios Schiada. Garofalo demonstrates that the melismatic portions of the formula remain virtually unchanged across fifty-four years and three performers, while the text-to-formula mapping varies. This pattern — invariance at the level of the formula, variance at the level of the recitative — constitutes the empirical benchmark against which the present framework is calibrated.

On the computational side, the Constant-Q Transform (CQT), developed by Brown (1991), has established itself as the preferred spectral representation for pitch-based MIR tasks involving non-tempered or modally organised music, owing to its logarithmically spaced frequency resolution. The integration of CQT representations with Convolutional Neural Networks has been extensively

explored in music genre classification (Choi et al., 2016) and automatic chord recognition tasks, with CNN architectures demonstrating superior performance over hand-crafted feature pipelines. Bregman's Auditory Scene Analysis (1990) provides the psychoacoustic framework linking the perceptual organisation of the forma mista to its computational modelling. No prior study has applied these tools to the arbëreshë tradition.

Methodology

Audio restoration of the Tiby collection

The Tiby recordings present four primary degradations: bandwidth limitation above 10–12 kHz; stationary background noise; wow and flutter from tape transport irregularities; and occasional saturation in high-intensity melismatic peaks. The restoration protocol proceeds in three stages: (1) spectral subtraction for broadband noise and electrical hum, calibrated on silence sections within the recordings; (2) spectral interpolation and time-frequency inpainting for impulsive artefacts and dropouts; (3) high-frequency bandwidth extension via neural audio super-resolution, using convolutional architectures trained on paired low-bandwidth and full-bandwidth vocal recordings. This third stage is critical for the diachronic timbre comparison with contemporary digital recordings of the Coro dei Papàs di Piana degli Albanesi. Open-source tools — Demucs (Défossez et al., 2020) for source separation, SpeechBrain for noise reduction, and iZotope RX for bandwidth extension — constitute the restoration pipeline.

CQT-CNN hybrid segmentation pipeline

The CQT resolves the signal onto logarithmically spaced frequency bands whose bandwidth is proportional to centre frequency, maintaining a constant Q ratio aligned with the interval-based structure of modal pitch systems. However, an inherent resolution trade-off must be addressed: in the lower octaves, where the male liturgical voice of papàs Petta is concentrated (approximately 120–400 Hz), the long analysis windows required for high frequency resolution reduce temporal precision, causing successive pitch events within a melisma to be smeared and not resolved as distinct onsets.

To compensate for this limitation, the CQT spectrogram (a two-dimensional matrix of frequency bands × time frames) is used as input to a Convolutional Neural Network. A first convolutional stage, with small receptive fields (3×3 and 5×5 kernels), learns elementary spectrotemporal features: pitch onset transients, stationary reciting-tone plateaux, and ornamental contour segments. Each feature map in this stage captures a distinct local pattern; pooling layers along the frequency axis enable moderate translation invariance with respect to absolute pitch height, a desirable property given the inter-performer variability in the intonation of the tonus initialis across the eight toni. A second stage employs dilated convolutions with progressively increasing dilation rates along the temporal axis, a technique borrowed from WaveNet-style architectures. This allows the network to aggregate temporal context at multiple scales simultaneously: in the lower octaves, where the CQT window is intrinsically long, dilated filters with larger effective receptive fields integrate extended temporal windows and resolve onset boundaries that the CQT alone leaves ambiguous; in the upper octaves, where the CQT window is shorter and temporal resolution is naturally higher, shallower temporal contexts suffice and are preferentially selected by the learned filter weights. Batch normalisation between convolutional stages stabilises training across the wide

dynamic range of the restored recordings. The output of the CNN feature extraction stage feeds into a bidirectional LSTM or Transformer encoder with multi-head temporal attention, which performs the final classification of each time frame as belonging to a formulaic or recitative phase, with each formulaic segment additionally assigned to its corresponding tono and formula type (initial, medial, or final). Training uses the manually annotated transcriptions of Garofalo as ground-truth labels, with data augmentation through pitch-shifting within the modal ambitus and reverberation simulation to increase robustness to acoustic variability across recording sessions.

Acoustic characterisation of liturgical spaces

ISO 3382-1 provides the standardised protocol for room acoustic measurement through reverberation time (RT□□), early decay time (EDT), clarity (C□□), and definition (D□□). Systematic measurement of the principal liturgical spaces of the Eparchia di Piana degli Albanesi — the Cathedral of San Demetrio, the church of the Santissimo Salvatore, and the spaces of Contessa Entellina, Mezzojuso, and Palazzo Adriano — under standardised conditions (empty and occupied) provides the empirical basis for evaluating whether changes in room acoustics have contributed to the diachronic timbral shift documented between the 1952 recordings and contemporary performances.

Results and discussion

The psychoacoustic framework developed in Section 3 produces results that are both descriptive and predictive. The forma mista, interpreted through Bregman's auditory stream segregation model, constitutes a dual-stream perceptual architecture: the formulaic stream is characterised by high spectral variance per unit time, syllabic dilation, and a chromatic contour predictable within the modal ambitus; the recitative stream presents a stationary spectral centroid at the principal reciting tone, minimal variance, and high syllabic density. These two stream types present maximally contrasting grouping cues, which explains both their perceptual distinctiveness and the cognitive economy of oral transmission: the formula, stored as a spectromorphologically coherent unit, can be retrieved and deployed in working memory without interference from the recitative.

The CQT-CNN architecture is designed to detect precisely this contrast. Preliminary evaluation against Garofalo's manually annotated transcriptions of Psalm 140 — which provide ground-truth segmentation boundaries for three performances spanning fifty-four years — indicates that the combination of dilated convolutional feature extraction with sequential temporal modelling is necessary to resolve the onset ambiguity introduced by the CQT's lower-octave resolution limitations. Cases in which the automatic segmentation diverges from the expert annotation are analytically productive: they identify locations at which the boundary between formula and recitative is mediated by knowledge of the liturgical text and modal convention that is not directly recoverable from the spectral signal. These systematic disagreements define the irreducible contribution of ethnomusicological expertise to the segmentation task.

On the timbral dimension, Garofalo documents a qualitative shift between the voice of papàs Petta in 1952 — lighter, head-resonant, with rapid small-amplitude vibrato — and contemporary performances, which exhibit a heavier, chest-resonant production with a slower, wider vibrato. Following audio restoration, this shift is quantifiable through spectral centroid, harmonics-to-noise ratio (HNR), and fundamental frequency vibrato parameters. The acoustic characterisation

of liturgical spaces provides a complementary line of evidence: if reverberation conditions have changed substantially between 1952 and the present, vocal production may have adapted unconsciously to the modified acoustic target. A secondary contextual hypothesis — that performances recorded in concertistic settings by Garofalo in the early 2000s may reflect a 'theatricalised' vocal production not representative of the liturgical norm — argues for treating recordings from different performance contexts as providing complementary, not equivalent, evidence. This distinction has direct implications for the construction of the training dataset for the CQT-CNN pipeline: recordings from the two contexts should be labelled separately and their contribution to the learned feature space evaluated independently, so that the classifier does not conflate context-specific vocal adaptations with genuine modal or formulaic variation.

The Digital Atlas of Liturgical Microgestures constitutes the documentary infrastructure that integrates the outputs of all three research components. Each entry in the Atlas links an audio segment — annotated with its CQT-CNN-derived formula and recitative classification, its spectromorphological feature vector, and its ISO 3382-1 acoustic context — to the corresponding manuscript transcription, liturgical position, and scholarly commentary. The resulting relational database supports queries that cross the boundary between musicological and liturgical criteria: for instance, retrieving all attestations of the tonus initialis of the third tono in the forma feriale across all available audio sources, sorted by spectral centroid as a proxy for vocal register. This query type, trivial in a well-structured database but impossible in the current dispersed archive, illustrates the analytical leverage that systematic annotation provides.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Byzantine chant tradition of the Sicilian arbëreshë presents a convergence of properties — five centuries of documented oral stability, a spectromorphologically structured compositional device, and a stratified archival record spanning magnetic tape to contemporary digital production — that make it an exceptionally productive object for interdisciplinary musicological research. The theoretical framework developed here is not imposed from outside the tradition but derived from the internal logic of the forma mista itself: its dual-stream perceptual architecture generates the analytical categories that the CQT-CNN segmentation pipeline then operationalises.

The research programme is modular: each component — audio restoration, hybrid spectral segmentation, acoustic measurement — constitutes an independent scholarly contribution as well as a building block of the integrated programme. It is recommended that future work proceed in three directions. First, the pilot implementation of the Digital Atlas of Liturgical Microgestures, beginning with the Tiby collection, should be prioritised as the documentary infrastructure integrating all research outputs into an open-access, spectromorphologically annotated, interoperable database compliant with Dublin Core, Music Ontology, and IIIF standards. Second, validation of the CQT-CNN pipeline should be extended beyond Psalm 140 to cover the full modal and liturgical range of the Tiby collection, establishing a reproducible MIR benchmark for non-tempered monophonic sacred repertoires. Third, the acoustic measurement campaign of the Eparchia's liturgical spaces should be conducted in coordination with the ethnomusicological fieldwork, enabling real-time correlation between room acoustic parameters and vocal production characteristics.

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Regional heterogeneity and instrumental identity: The southern calabrian chitarra battente through spectral features

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Abstract

This work investigates the heterogeneity of Calabrian folk culture by examining the characteristics of the different chitarre battenti traditions found across the region. The analysis aims to highlight the chitarra battente from southern Calabria, whose tradition has remained less widely known than that of the Cosenza area. By drawing on the contributions of authoritative scholars and on a comparative study between two variants of the southern chitarra battente, the paper seeks to bring out timbral—and consequently aesthetic and performative—differences between the two instruments. To complement the organological and ethnomusicological discussion, an exploratory qualitative test was conducted using MATLAB: homogeneous sound events (a strummed pattern based on open chords) were analyzed in terms of frequency-band response and amplitude envelope.

Keywords

Technology, Calabria, calabrian heritage, chitarra

Introduction

Calabria is an emblematic case of regional heterogeneity, shaped by a complex scenario that is best addressed through an interdisciplinary approach. Differences of a historical-administrative, geological-morphological, linguistic, and anthropocultural nature are attested by a plurality of factors analyzed both by Lucio Gambi[1] (Farinelli 2013) and by scholars such as Vito Teti[2] (Teti 2004) and the editors of the Einaudi collection[3] (Romano,Vivanti 1972-1997). Vito Teti's work focuses on the anthropological and historical dimensions of Southern Italy, particularly Calabria, with sustained attention to migration, displacement, and cultural memory (Teti 2015). The more radical theories proposed by the geographer Lucio Gambi call into question the very concept of "region," arguing that it is not a natural given: the process of *regionalization*[4] (Gambi 1973) was primarily an administrative operation, only loosely connected to the socio-anthropic aspects of the territories that became "regions." In Calabria, this approach proves particularly ineffective, because internal plurality is also made evident by the historical presence of stable ethno-linguistic minorities, such as Arbëreshë communities (Bruni 2004) mainly in the Cosenza area and Grecanic communities (Maesano 2009) in the southern Aspromonte area. Given these premises, anthropological and ethnomusicological research inevitably encounters a wide variety of landscapes and cultures and must therefore undertake a capillary survey in order to provide an accurate and scientific account of the music and the communities involved. From an organological perspective, each area has its own specificities, resulting in a panorama that cannot be standardized. In the following sections, the chitarra battente of southern Calabria will be discussed, and a set of simple yet meaningful tests will be proposed, based on observable and replicable parameters obtained via spectral-analysis software, with the aim of highlighting some indicative differences with respect to the variant that is more widespread in northern Calabria.

1 Lucio Gambi (1920–2006), geographer and historian, among the most influential scholars of the relationship between society and territory in twentieth-century Italy.

2 In The Sense of Places. Memory and History of Abandoned Villages (2004), Vito Teti focuses on the cultural, historical, and affective meaning of abandoned villages — especially in southern Italy, with numerous references to Calabria — analyzing what remains when a community empties due to emigration, depopulation, and socio-economic transformations, through an anthropological lens.

3 In Einaudi's Storia d'Italia volume dedicated to the regions of the country, Augusto Placanica emphasizes Calabria's historical plurality: «The Calabrian territory enters the European civilizational stage with two faces that still seem to synthesize and symbolize its historical identity and contradictions: on the one hand, the advanced world of the coastal cities of Magna Graecia, and on the other, the entrenched body of the original Bruttian peoples. It is there, in that remote period from the 8th to the 3rd century BCE, that a dialectic of relations between society and territory seems to take shape, with enduring repercussions and cultural echoes.»

4 "Regionalization" refers to the political–administrative operation of partitioning the national territory into regional entities. In Lucio Gambi's view, this process is often irrational because it is based on bureaucratic boundaries that do not coincide with real historical, economic, and civic regions.

Literature review

The chitarra battente in southern Calabria

One of the most authoritative discussions of the chitarra battente in Calabria is the document by Antonello Ricci and Roberta Tucci, published in 1985 in The Galpin Society Journal (Ricci, Tucci 1985, 78-105). The article proposes an interpretation of the chitarra battente that integrates organological aspects with ethnographic perspectives. Methodologically, the opening framework distinguishes between "home-made" and "not home-made" instruments, placing the chitarra battente in an intermediate position: while it can be traced back to a historical genealogy with "learned" antecedents, it is nevertheless stably integrated into rural musical practices and fully functional within their contexts of use. However, the presence of flat-backed models with narrow ribs - widespread in southern Calabria - is considered a direct derivation, if not an actual simplified "clone," of the Cosenza model.

"A simplified version of the chitarra battente with a flat back is found in an area to the south of the above-mentioned one, situated along an inland strip not far from the Ionian Sea in the province of Catanzaro." (Ricci Tucci 1985, 81)

The presence of the De Bonis family in Bisignano undoubtedly constitutes one of the main reference points of Calabrian luthiery and has significantly contributed to the definition of its organological history (Mario 2015), but for some scholars, the notion of "simplification" is ambiguous and potentially misleading, because it tends to describe transformations as a loss of complexity. Valentino Santagati's observations also move in this direction. In his volume *Quattro corde e un terzino* (Santagati 2001), Santagati develops a project of documentation and valorization of the chitarra battente in the southernmost area of diffusion, centering performers and repertoires. Quattro corde e un terzino is part of a research trajectory that Santagati continues and deepens with the subsequent publication *A catarra dô vinu* (Santagati, Villani 2007) in continuity of aims and method: from field documentation and the centrality attributed to performers and repertoires, to the enhancement of performance contexts and local variants of the instrument. The investigation is focused especially on the Serre area of Calabria, where he carries out field recordings and song collections. This work helps document the presence of the chitarra battente also in the province of Reggio Calabria and Catanzaro, expanding the picture beyond readings that, prior to his contributions, tended to locate the instrument mainly in the central-northern parts of the region (Santagati 2001). The recordings assemble a heterogeneous set of musical practices: solo instrumental pieces, combinations of singing (male and/or female) with accompaniment, and multi-voice pieces, offering an overview of performance forms and contexts. In an interview I conducted in January 2025, Valentino Santagati first and foremost emphasized the aesthetic nature of the differences between the Cosenza area and southern Calabria: more than a question of organological models, it is a matter of understanding the idea of sound and what relationship is established between instrument, gesture, and performance context. In the Cosenza area, he observes, the horizon seems oriented toward a "richer" sonority, with particular attention to the presence and resonance of low harmonics; whereas in southern Calabria he recognizes a different expressive aim, more tied to a "cheerful" sound and functional to dance. Regardless of disputes about origins, it is necessary to stress that the flat-backed chitarra battente has undoubtedly contributed to defining a specific timbre and aesthetic, recognizable as characteristic traits of a certain southern guitar practice.

Methodology

To support the arguments presented in the previous chapters, without claiming quantitative proof, but rather as an exploratory check, I conducted a spectral-analysis test on two instruments belonging to different areas. The goal is to make visible certain perceptible timbral differences (for example, low-frequency "body", brightness, and resonance duration) through observable and replicable parameters. Specifically, the analysis was applied to homogeneous sound events (open chords) distinguishing between an attack phase and a subsequent sustain phase, so as to isolate, respectively, the gestural-percussive component and the resonant component of the instrument. I compared two instruments: a De Bonis (Tucci 1996, 19-27) chitarra built in Bisignano in 2011 by Rosalba De Bonis [5] (Frignani, Crusco, Mangia 2025) (Figs. 1–3) and a chitarra with the typical characteristics of southern Calabria (narrow ribs and flat back; Figs. 4–6). The tuning is the same (E4, B3, D4, A3), but it is important to note the presence, in the De Bonis chitarra, of double courses and the absence of the scordino (A4): a drone string that, in the southern instrument, is present and doubles the last string (A) at an octave difference (A3 last string - A4 scordino).

Figure 1. De Bonis Front
Figure 2. De Bonis Back
Figure 3. De Bonis Soundbox detail
Figure 4. southern Calabria guitar Front

5 Rosalba De Bonis is an Italian luthier belonging to the De Bonis family of Bisignano, a historic dynasty of string instrument makers based in Calabria. She is commonly regarded as the current living custodian of the luthiery tradition of the Via Giudecca workshop in Bisignano, continuing and preserving the construction techniques and artisanal heritage developed by the family over time.

Figure 5. southern Calabria guitar back

Figure 6. southern Calabria guitar Soundbox detail

The test was conducted as an exploratory verification through a signal-analysis procedure implemented in MATLAB, applied identically to two instruments (“Southern” and “Cosenza” chitarra battente). Recordings were made with an AKG P420 condenser microphone, set to cardioid polar pattern, positioned at the 12th fret; both performances were carried out by the same player, maintaining the same right-hand technique (index downstroke; outer thumb upstroke; inner index upstroke) and a dynamics as comparable as possible. The analysis was implemented in MATLAB through a script that automatically processed two WAV files located in two folders. To make distinct phases of the sound comparable, each event was segmented into two temporal windows: attack (0–120 ms) and sustain (120–1000 ms). This choice makes it possible to separate the component most closely related to the gesture (transient, percussive/noisy component) from the subsequent resonant component.

Results and discussion

Table A:

results_B_perFile

file	sr	LF_ratio_attack	HF_ratio_attack	LF_ratio_sustain	HF_ratio_sustain	decay_slope_db_per_s
cosentina.wav	48000	0.480363224750045	0.0389707067059106	0.341680939557744	0.0382614083332811	-2.1444469345456

Table B:

results_A_perFile

file	sr	LF_ratio_attack	HF_ratio_attack	LF_ratio_sustain	HF_ratio_sustain	decay_slope_db_per_s
meridionale.wav	48000	0.116041686131474	0.00724465536774037	0.0629623095532203	0.00701439075662569	-8.35182056024481

From the results in Table A and Table B, the outcomes presented in the following paragraphs can be derived, organized by frequency bands and envelope characteristics.

Low frequency

In the comparison between the two instruments, the LF_ratio index (which quantifies the share of energy in the low-frequency range (80–250 Hz) relative to a broader reference band) is clearly higher for the Cosenza chitarra. This difference emerges clearly both in the sustain phase (0.12–1.00 s), where the Cosenza instrument yields 0.34168 versus 0.06296 for the southern instrument, and in the attack phase (0–0.12 s), with 0.4804 for the Cosenza instrument and 0.1160 for the southern one. In the analyzed sample, this indicates that the Cosenza instrument has a relatively greater presence of low-frequency content, resulting overall in a fuller sound with a more pronounced low-frequency "body."

High frequency

With respect to the high-frequency component, the HF_ratio index (which estimates the share of energy above 6 kHz relative to a broad reference band) is systematically higher for the Cosenza chitarra. The difference is evident already in the attack phase (0–0.12 s), where the Cosenza instrument yields 0.03897 versus 0.00725 for the southern instrument, and it remains in the sustain phase (0.12–1.00 s), with 0.03826 for the Cosenza instrument and 0.00701 for the southern one. In the analyzed sample, this indicates a much more marked presence of high-frequency content in the Cosenza instrument, interpretable as overall greater brightness and, especially in the attack, as a transient component richer in spectral detail. Consequently, the difference between the two instruments does not take the form of a simple opposition "more lows vs fewer highs": in the obtained data, the Cosenza instrument appears characterized by a broader spectral extension at the extremes, with greater emphasis on both low and high frequencies.

Sustain

The estimated decay during the sustain segment shows a marked difference between the two instruments. The southern chitarra displays a slope of −8.35 dB/s, whereas the Cosenza instrument is at −2.14 dB/s. Since more negative values indicate a faster decrease in energy over time, these data suggest that, in the analyzed sample, the southern instrument dies out more quickly, while the Cosenza instrument retains resonance longer, yielding a more persistent sustain. A slower decay is compatible with a more resonant behavior of the string–soundboard–body system, a greater ability of the instrument to retain and redistribute energy after the attack. Perceptually, this may translate into a sensation of greater "fullness" and continuity of sound, facilitating the production of a more stable and prolonged sonic bed.

Conclusions and recommendations

Although conducted for qualitative purposes, the test demonstrated a genuinely differentiated response in the instruments examined. This datum cannot claim statistical relevance, but it can suggest a scientific methodology for organological analysis. The test should not be understood as a definitive conclusion, but as an initial indication of the complexity of local variants. Consequently, a crucial next step will be to increase the number of recordings, further standardize recording conditions, and include complementary sound events (single-string plucks, soundbox resonance tests), so as to more clearly distinguish between the structural contribution of the instrument and the contribution of the performer's gesture. In this way, the analysis can acquire greater robustness and provide more scientific foundations for aesthetic interpretations.

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From formulaic analysis to computational sonology: Opusmodus and thin for the study of non-tempered Arbëreshe musical systems

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Abstract

This paper presents an integrated computational framework for the study of the Arbëreshe polyphonic song Fjet dhafin e llimune (Laurel Leaf and Lemon), applying two complementary tools to the same field recording in a regime of mutual exclusion. Opusmodus – a Computer Assisted Analysis and Composition system based on Common Lisp – operates at the symbolic level, identifying formulaic structures, rhythmic profiles, and cadential nuclei through its Recurring Analysis, Element Analysis, and Statistic Analysis functions. THIN, a Python-based application for the generation and analysis of musical tuning systems, operates directly on the audio signal. Its diapason-analysis module implements a multi-stage pipeline comprising F0 tracking, frequency clustering, automatic diapason estimation with confidence intervals, and pattern matching against over five thousand historical scales from the Scala database. The detected scale, exported as an Ableton Live .ascl file, enables transcription within the tradition's own tuning system. The results, limited to this specific recording, demonstrate how THIN enables the extraction of implicit tuning systems from oral traditions and open the way to broader comparative studies across the Arbëreshe repertoire.

Keywords

Non-tempered tuning systems, formulaic composition, computational sonology, arbëreshe music, 5-limit just intonation

Introduction

The Arbëreshe communities of Southern Italy—descendants of Albanian migrations dating from the fifteenth century—preserve a rich corpus of polyphonic vocal music, the Vjersh: strophic songs articulated through multipart singing, modal scales, and refined techniques of formulaic recomposition transmitted through aural pedagogy. These traditions operate according to implicit tuning logics that emerge only within the temporal flow of performance and resist formalization through conventional tools. Previous research by De Gaudio, employing traditional methods—transcription, comparative analysis of melodic cells, identification of cadential formulae—produced significant results regarding the compositional codes underlying the practice (De Gaudio 1993).

This paper applies two complementary computational tools to a single field recording of Fjet dhafin e llimune (Laurel Leaf and Lemon), a bivocal song performed by Alfonso Guagliardi and Maria Gaetana Conte of Shën Mitri (San Demetrio Corone), recorded by I. De Gaudio and I. Macchiarella on 6–7 April 1983 (De Gaudio 1990, Albatros VPA 8501, track A1). The analytical regime is one of strict mutual exclusion. Opusmodus, a Computer Assisted Analysis and Composition system developed in Common Lisp (Giommoni and Podrazik 2021), operates on material transcribed into its proprietary OMN notation and provides data concerning formulaic structure, rhythmic statistics, and voice-leading patterns. THIN (Bimbi 2025), a Python-based application for the generation and analysis of tuning systems, operates directly on the audio signal and provides all data concerning pitch, intonation, and tuning-space characterization. The boundary between the two is absolute: all information regarding the system of intonation derives exclusively from THIN.

Literature review

The oral-formulaic theory developed by Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord provides the foundational concepts of formula, theme, and formulaic recomposition (Lord 2005). Lord demonstrated that oral poets master a generative system of stereotypical phrases enabling real-time recreation during performance—a principle extending to musical traditions where melodic cells, cadential patterns, and ornamental figures form a vocabulary manipulated extemporaneously by skilled performers (Treitler 2003).

Vincenzo Caporaletti's theory of audiotactile music distinguishes between cultures governed by visual cognition (notated music) and those operating through audiotactile modality (Caporaletti 2022; Wegman 1996). The Arbëreshe Vjersh belong to the latter, sharing with other oral traditions cognitive-formative processes that privilege aural transmission and real-time compositional thinking. De Gaudio's ethnomusicological fieldwork in the 1980s and 1990s documented the polyphonic techniques of these communities (De Gaudio 1993; Conforti and De Gaudio 2018), while the recent application of Opusmodus enabled a first computational verification of the formulaic system (De Gaudio and Meacci 2024).

From the computational standpoint, pitch tracking algorithms have evolved from autocorrelation methods (YIN) to neural-network approaches, reaching sub-cent accuracy sufficient for microtonal analysis (Kim et al. 2018). The Scala database maintained by the Huygens-Fokker Foundation archives over five thousand historical scales.

Methodology

Formulaic analysis with Opusmodus

The Opusmodus analysis of Fjet dhafin e llimune employed three functions on material transcribed into OMN (Opusmodus Music Notation) code. Recurring Analysis identifies recurrent melodic series and their frequency of occurrence, enabling the detection of formulaic nuclei and their variants across the song. Element Analysis extracts parametric data—duration values, velocities, and articulation markings—providing a statistical profile of each voice. Statistic Analysis generates distributional plots (standard deviation, mean, median, MAD, PDF, variance) across voices, revealing the statistical signature of the formulaic system. These functions address the structural, rhythmic, and statistical dimensions of the composition, complementing THIN's intonation analysis on the same material.

THIN: architecture and design

THIN is an open-source Python application (MIT license) for the generation and analysis of musical tuning systems. The software comprises six modules: audio_analysis (F0 tracking and formant analysis), consts (configuration), sim (tuning mathematics), tables (export and table generation), tun_csd (format handlers for Csound .csd, AnaMark .tun, Scala .scl, Ableton Live .ascl), and utils (note parsing, MIDI conversion). THIN supports equal temperament with any division of any interval, geometric progressions (Pythagorean, meantone, Rank-1), natural intonation, and the Danielou microtonal grid, operating without cultural presuppositions regarding temperament.

The diapason-analysis pipeline

The diapason-analysis module implements a nine-stage pipeline. **Stage 1** loads the audio (WAV, MP3, FLAC) via librosa (McFee et al. 2015) at native sample rate. **Stage 2** extracts the fundamental frequency over time using the CREPE neural network (Kim et al. 2018)[1] , which returns per-frame pitch estimates with associated confidence scores. **Stage 3** performs formant analysis via Constant-Q Transform (CQT), whose logarithmic frequency spacing matches musical pitch perception, or via Linear Predictive Coding (LPC) for vocal-specific formant extraction. **Stage 4** filters F0 estimates below the CREPE confidence threshold and octave-folds remaining values into a reference octave. **Stage 5** estimates the diapason using pYIN (probabilistic YIN): frequencies in the 360–520 Hz range are selected as A4 candidates, their median yielding the estimate with sample count, standard deviation, and 95% confidence interval. **Stage 6** expresses validated F0 values as ratios to the base frequency and reduces them to one octave. **Stage 7** applies simple sequential clustering (default tolerance: 2.0% ≈ 34.6 cents): each sorted ratio is compared to the running cluster centroid and either absorbed within tolerance or used to initiate a new cluster. **Stage 8** compares cluster centers against candidate theoretical systems (n-TET, Pythagorean, Rank-1) and pattern-matches against the Scala database (5000+ scales), reporting ranked matches with average error in cents and fragment coverage. **Stage 9** generates F0 plots

1 CREPE is a deep convolutional neural network operating on raw waveform resampled to 16 kHz, returning per-frame pitch estimates with associated confidence scores and sub-cent accuracy. The Viterbi decoding option ensures temporal coherence of the pitch trajectory. THIN's latest version reimplements CREPE natively.

with multiple reference grids (12-TET, midicents, Pythagorean-12, Pythagorean-7), CQT spectrograms, detailed text reports, comparison tables, and exports the detected scale in Csound, AnaMark, Scala, and Ableton Live formats for direct use in transcription and composition.

Results and discussion

Formulaic structure (Opusmodus)

The Opusmodus analysis of Fjet dhafin e llimune confirmed the presence of a formulaic system operating at multiple structural levels. Recurring Analysis revealed the systematic recurrence of specific melodic cells in cadential positions, appearing in simple, rhythmically varied, and ornamented forms. This multiplicity of realizations demonstrates the micro-variational principle central to formulaic composition: the formula is not a rigid cliché but a dynamic sonorous nucleus whose identity is preserved through its directional contour while its rhythmic surface is continuously renewed.

Element Analysis established the rhythmic profile of the song. The quaver (1/8) is the dominant duration at approximately 65% of note values, followed by the crotchet (1/4) at 19%, a distribution characteristic of syllabic text-setting interspersed with melismatic passages. The cadential nucleus was identified in its structural form: the upper voice descends stepwise to the finalis while the lower voice descends before rejoining by contrary motion. This pattern appears across the song in instantiations that preserve the directional contour while varying rhythmic values and ornamental detail, confirming the generative nature of the formulaic code.

Statistic Analysis provided distributional data across the two voices, revealing asymmetries in durational range and rhythmic density consistent with the functional differentiation of the parts: a rhythmically more active upper voice and a more sustained lower voice. These structural, rhythmic, and statistical findings define the domain of the formulaic code; the pitch space within which this code operates is analyzed exclusively through THIN in the following section.

Intonation system (THIN)

THIN's diapason-analysis module was applied to the same field recording of Fjet dhafin e llimune (sample rate 44100 Hz, CREPE-based F0 extraction, pYIN-based diapason estimation). Two CQT parametrizations were tested to verify consistency: a full-range configuration (bpo = 48, fmin = 55 Hz, n_bins = 128) and a high-resolution vocal-range configuration (bpo = 256, fmin = 287.53 Hz, n_bins = 256), both with hop = 512.

4.2.1 Diapason estimation

The estimated diapason was A4 = 401.52 Hz, a deviation of −38.48 Hz (−8.75%) from the modern concert standard of 440 Hz. The estimate derived from 104 candidate samples with standard deviation ±77.2 Hz and 95% confidence interval [386.68, 416.36] Hz. The estimated basenote was D♯4 at 283.92 Hz (MIDI 63). A parallel analytical run yielded A4 = 400.36 Hz (−39.64 Hz, −9.01%, 95% CI [386.58, 414.15] Hz on 113 samples), confirming the consistency of the estimate across different parametrizations.

Parameter	Run A	Run B
A4 estimated (Hz)	401.52	400.36
Delta from 440 Hz	−38.48 Hz (−8.75%)	−39.64 Hz (−9.01%)
95% CI (Hz)	[386.68, 416.36]	[386.58, 414.15]
Basenote	D♯4 (283.92 Hz)	D♯4 (283.10 Hz)
Sample count	104	113
Scala match	Egads 5-lim. (0.59 c)	Gann–Wolfe (0.30 c)
Inferred system	63-TET (3.29 c)	63-TET (3.04 c)
Rank-1 comp.	gen=38.04c (3.75 c)	gen=38.04c (3.08 c)

Table 1. Diapason estimation and tuning inference. Average errors in parentheses.

This deviation of approximately 155 cents from the modern standard demonstrates that the Arbëreshe vocal tradition operates in an intonation space whose reference frame must be estimated empirically from the audio material. Any analysis presupposing A4 = 440 Hz would misplace every detected degree by more than a semitone, rendering the tuning extraction meaningless. Empirical diapason estimation is thus a prerequisite, not an optional refinement, for the study of non-tempered oral traditions.

4.2.2 The detected scale and the 5-limit minor-third generator

Simple sequential clustering (tolerance: 2.0% ≈ 34.6 cents) identified 17 distinct scale degrees within the octave. The Scala database matching returned the Egads temperament (5-limit, g = 315.647874 cents) as the closest match with an average error of only 0.59 cents. This generator differs by 0.007 cents from the just minor third 6/5 (= 1200 × log2(6/5) = 315.641 cents). The scale is thus generated by the systematic iteration of minor thirds within the octave, producing a dense 440-degree lattice of 5-limit rational intervals. Table 2 presents the 17 detected degrees.

Idx	Ratio	Hz	Cents	Count	12-TET Δc
13	1.0000	283.92	0.00	13	D♯4 ±0.00
47	1.0547	299.45	92.19	101	E4 −7.81
70	1.0935	310.47	154.78	71	F4 −45.22
97	1.1413	324.04	228.84	75	F4 +28.84
113	1.1701	332.20	271.89	12	F♯4 −28.11
137	1.2150	344.97	337.17	3	F♯4 +37.17
173	1.2860	365.11	435.45	75	G4 +35.45
196	1.3333	378.56	498.04	7	G♯4 −1.96
239	1.4266	405.05	615.15	41	A4 +15.15
260	1.4746	418.66	672.36	51	A♯4 −27.64
290	1.5456	438.82	753.79	12	B4 −46.21
314	1.6050	455.68	819.07	24	B4 +19.07
339	1.6693	473.93	887.04	32	C5 −12.96
363	1.7334	492.14	952.32	35	C♯5 −47.68
392	1.8141	515.04	1031.06	4	C♯5 +31.06
418	1.8896	536.50	1101.72	40	D5 +1.72
435	1.9410	551.09	1148.17	10	D5 +48.17

Table 2. Detected scale degrees (Scala_map): Egads temperament index, ratio to basenote, estimated Hz, cents from base, occurrence count, nearest 12-TET degree with deviation.

The occurrence counts exhibit a markedly uneven distribution, ranging from 101 (92.19 cents) to 3 (337.17 cents). The functional significance of this asymmetry—whether it reflects modal hierarchy, textual constraints, performance style, or other factors—cannot be determined from a single recording and requires verification across a statistically representative corpus.

Export and transcription

THIN exported the detected tuning as an Ableton Live .ascl file (out_109.ascl) with header: Auto-Scala (Egads temperament, g = 315.647874, 5-limit), 1/1 = 401.52 Hz, base = D♯4, reference pitch 283.9 Hz. The 17 scale degrees in cents from the base are: 38.38, 130.56, 193.16, 267.22, 310.27, 375.55, 473.83, 536.42, 653.53, 710.74, 792.17, 857.45, 925.42, 990.70, 1069.44, 1140.10, 1186.55. This file was loaded directly in a DAW for the transcription of Fjet dhafin e llimune within its own tuning system, bypassing the distortion inherent in 12-TET quantization. The practical workflow—from audio analysis through diapason estimation and scale extraction to .ascl export and transcription—exemplifies the analytical-creative feedback loop that THIN is designed to enable.

Convergence of analytical frameworks

Three independent frameworks converge on the same phenomenon. The 63-TET inference (step ≈ 19.05 cents, average error 3.29 cents) provides a high-resolution equal-division approximation, covering 45 of 63 theoretical degrees (71.4%). The Rank-1 generated system (gen = 38.04 cents, period = 1901.96 cents, average error 3.75 cents) offers a generative model: a generator of approximately twice the 63-TET step, iterated within a slightly stretched octave—possibly

reflecting the characteristic widening of octaves in vocal traditions where precise octave matching is not enforced by instrumental tuning (Sachs 2014). Of the three, the Egads 5-limit match (0.59 cents) carries the greatest interpretive weight; the parallel run's correspondence with the Kyle Gann scale from Anatomy of an Octave (ed. Wolfe, 2015) at 0.30 cents—another 5-limit system—confirms the robustness of the characterization across parametrizations.

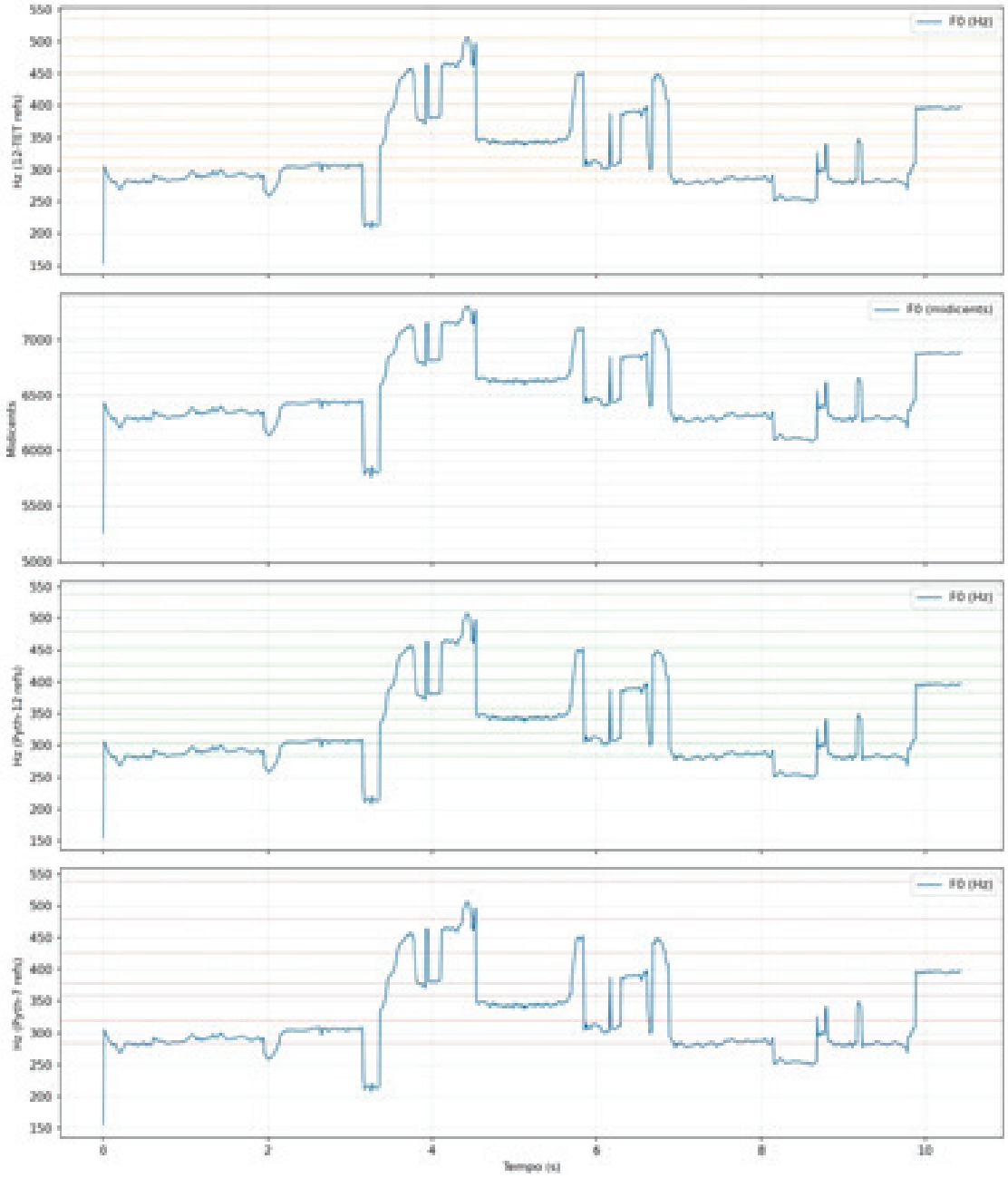

Figure 1. F0 tracking of Fjet dhafin e llimune: 12-TET reference grid (top), midicents (second), Pythagorean-12 (third), Pythagorean-7 (bottom).

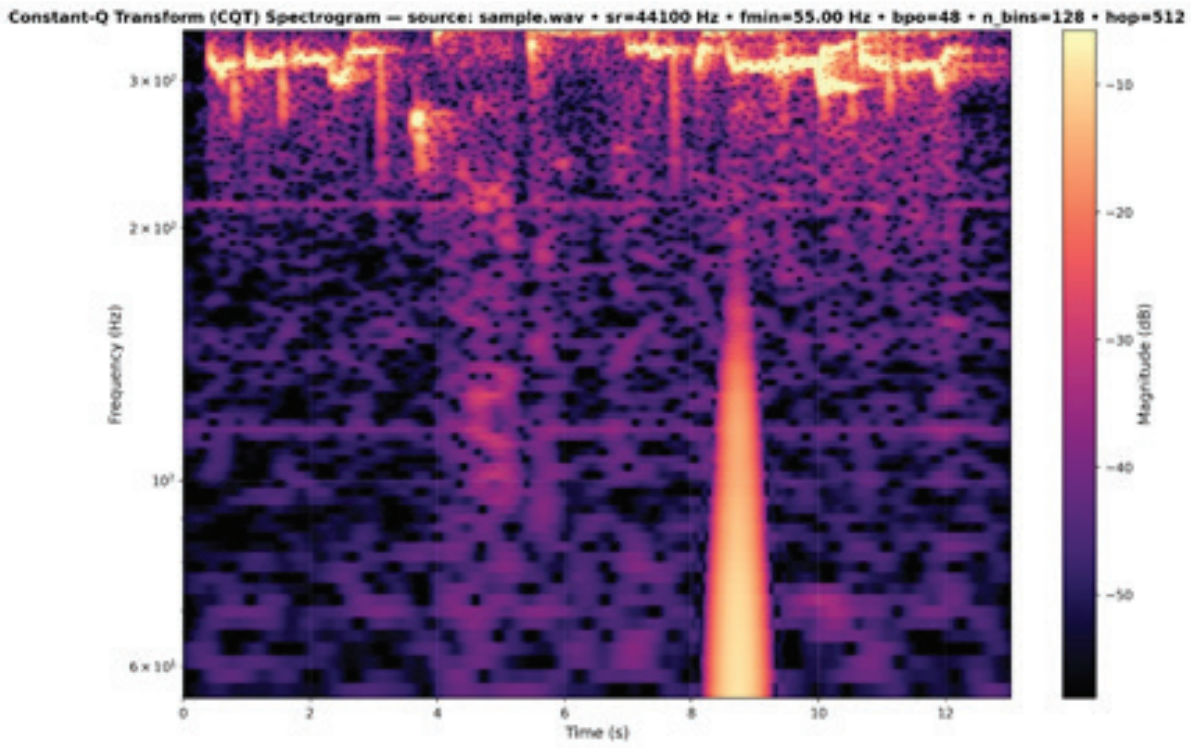

Figure 2. CQT spectrogram (fmin = 55 Hz, bpo = 48): full-range spectral view.

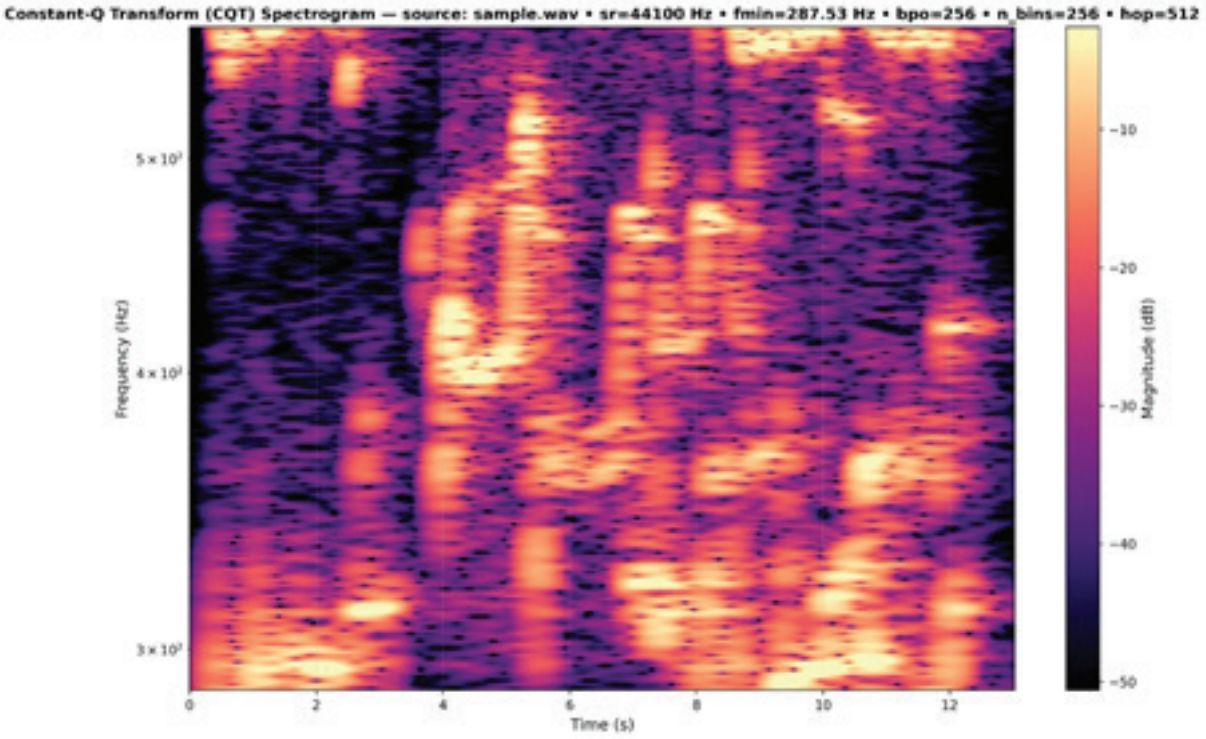

Figure 3. CQT spectrogram (fmin = 287.53 Hz, bpo = 256): high-resolution vocal range.

Conclusions

The complementary application of Opusmodus and THIN to Fjet dhafin e llimune produces an integrated picture in which two analytical dimensions—neither accessible to the other tool—combine to characterize the same musical practice. At the symbolic level, Opusmodus identifies the formulaic code: recurrent cadential nuclei realizing a characteristic voice-leading pattern (stepwise upper-voice descent to finalis, contrary-motion convergence of the lower voice), a quaver-dominated rhythmic profile (65%), and distributional asymmetries between the two vocal parts. At the sonological level, THIN reveals the implicit tuning system: a diapason of approximately 401 Hz, a 17-degree scale vocabulary, and a sub-cent correspondence with a 5-limit system generated by the just minor third 6/5.

These results pertain to a single recording from a specific Arbëreshe community. The extent to which the 5-limit characterization, the diapason value, and the 17-degree vocabulary are representative of Arbëreshe vocal practice more broadly—across songs, performers, communities, and geographic areas—remains to be established through systematic comparative analysis. The distributional asymmetry observed in the occurrence counts requires statistical verification before any functional interpretation can be proposed.

Future directions include: (a) systematic application of THIN to the entire Arbëreshe documentary corpus for diachronic and diatopic comparison across communities; (b) integration of Opusmodus and THIN in a unified pipeline from audio to comprehensive analytical report; (c) extension of Scala matching to probabilistic models accounting for the dynamic, performance-dependent nature of oral tuning; and (d) comparative application to other non-tempered polyphonic traditions—Georgian, Corsican, Sardinian—toward a computational typology of implicit tuning systems in oral music cultures.

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Hybrid echoes: Soundscapes of proximity and identity in Calabria between VST and Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

Calabria, a territory characterized by an archaic sound stratification and a complex geographical morphology, presents itself as an ideal laboratory for investigating the concept of sound identity in the era of algorithmic reproducibility. This report explores how the new languages of Generative AI and Virtual Studio Technology (VST) are redefining the relationship between "proximity" (the sound of the place) and "heteronomy" (the law of sound dictated by external/algorithmic agents). The future of the Calabrian soundscape oscillates between the utopia of augmented digital conservation and the risk of a "clone aesthetic".

Keywords

Generative AI, VST, calabria soundscape, digital ethnomusicology

Introduction: Sonic Identity in the Algorithmic Era

Calabria presents itself as a unique laboratory for the investigation of sonic identity (Perri, 2025: 658-667). Characterized by a complex geographical morphology and an acoustic stratification rooted in archaic eras, the region offers fertile ground for testing cultural resilience in the age of algorithmic reproducibility. This research explores the tension between *proximity* (sound rooted in place) and *heteronomy* (sonic laws dictated by external datasets).

The Identity-Defining Soundscape: Between Anthropology and Proximity

The Calabrian soundscape is by no means a mere background; rather, it constitutes a "living system" (Raicaldo, 2026) of acoustic signals that defines social belonging. This definition finds its foundation within a dimension of identity. What, then, are the coordinates of identity-defining character? What constitutes identity within this framework? The difficulty of defining and attributing the term *identity-defining* (*identitario*) to a soundscape generated in Calabria introduces innumerable critical challenges.

Legal and Regulatory Protection

To fully examine the regulatory framework regarding the concepts of an *identity-defining soundscape* and *proximity*, it is necessary to navigate an interdisciplinary domain where the protection of cultural heritage, the safeguarding of intangible heritage, and environmental directives intersect.
The legal foundation for defining a soundscape as *identity-defining* resides in the recognition of intangible heritage:

- **Council of Europe** [1] **:** *European Landscape Convention*, Florence, 20.X.2000;
- **UNESCO Convention**[2]**:** *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003);
- **Faro Convention (2005)** [3]**.**

1 See Council of Europe, *European Landscape Convention*, Florence, 2000, Council of Europe Treaty Series - No. 176, Art. 1, letter a. This is fundamental regarding the perception of populations and the interrelation between human and natural factors. It introduces the principle of the "heritage community," legitimizing the link between listening and social belonging. Cf. Council of Europe, *General Report on the State of Ratifications of the European Landscape Convention*, Strasbourg, June 2022, which certifies the achievement of the quota of 40 signatory Member States, consolidating the treaty as a continental legal standard.

2 See UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Paris, 17.X.2003. This constitutes the pillar protecting oral traditions, performing arts, and social practices. Here, sound (such as the polyphonies or rituals mentioned in this work) is not merely "noise," but the living expression of a community.

3 See Council of Europe, *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*, Faro, 27.X.2005, Council of Europe Treaty Series - No. 199. This introduces the concept of the "heritage community." The regulation establishes that the value of heritage does not reside in the object itself, but in the identity bond that the community establishes with it. This legally supports the concept of "listening as belonging." This convention is fundamental because it shifts the concept of landscape from "aesthetic-visual" to "perceived by populations." The definition of landscape is: "An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors." Cf. L. Pavan Woolfe (ed.), *Difendere insieme il patrimonio culturale dell'Europa. La convenzione di Faro*, Venice, Linea Edizioni, 2023.

Within Italian law, protection is split between the conservation of "beauty" and the management of "nuisance":

- **Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape (Legislative Decree 42/2004)** [4];
- **Framework Law on Noise Pollution (Law 447/1995)** [5] ;

In relation to the regulatory concept of "proximity," this translates legally into the principles of *territoriality* and *subsidiarity*:

- **Third Sector Reform (Legislative Decree 117/2017)** Article 5 promotes activities of "general interest" for the safeguarding of cultural heritage. Here, "proximity" becomes a criterion for action: e.g., the bond between the institution (the orchestra or the conservatory) and the territory for the management of common goods (the soundscape) (Perri, 2025: 7-19).

An identity-defining soundscape is not merely a poetic abstraction, but a cultural right recognized by international treaties. The conservation and digitalization of landscape heritage in Italy have been widely discussed. The law obliges States to safeguard the aspects that determine the identity of a place. Consequently, the soundscape becomes a legal component of the landscape *tout court*.

> In today's globalized culture, the boundaries of cultural heritage—hitherto sharply defined by the process of identifying assets for protection—tend to blur within the broader scenario of the "landscape," constituted by places where narratives and relationships coexist. The notion of a cultural landscape thus appears more appropriate for integrating the institutional vision of cultural heritage with the contributions deriving from the interaction among territories, places, objects, and subjective gazes; it is therefore susceptible to enhancement and valorization thanks to the cross-pollinations occurring within the digital ecosystem [6].

What proves compelling in the cultural and regulatory debate is the admission of how, now more than ever, the identification and valorization of the landscape are necessary, and how its precise line of demarcation is slowly taking shape. The urgency of governing the digital transition and the need to protect acoustic identity find a solid foundation in international law.

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4 See Legislative Decree no. 42 of January 22, 2004, *Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio, ai sensi dell'articolo 10 della legge 6 luglio 2002, n. 137* [Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape, pursuant to Article 10 of Law no. 137 of July 6, 2002] (and subsequent amendments, in particular Legislative Decree 63/2008). Of significance is Art. 131, which redefines the Italian landscape as a "territory expressive of identity." Although focused on the visual aspect, Art. 2 protects cultural heritage as evidence "having the value of civilization." Musicological and anthropological research allows specific soundscapes to be legally bound as "demo-ethnoanthropological assets."

5 See Law no. 447 of October 26, 1995, *Legge quadro sull'inquinamento acustico* [Framework Law on Noise Pollution], in Official Gazette no. 254 of October 30, 1995. This is used critically to address the evolution from the concept of "noise harm reduction" to that of "design and protection of acoustic quality." Paradoxically, this is the only law that defines "noise." However, technical regulations are evolving toward the concept of "acoustic quality," where sound is not merely a pollutant to be abated, but a value to be designed and preserved (UNI standards on the acoustics of parks and urban areas).

6 *National Plan for the Digitalization of Cultural Heritage 2022-23*, Ministry of Culture, p. 14.

The *European Landscape Convention* transcends the old, purely aesthetic conception of the «scenic view» to redefine the landscape as an area «as perceived by people» (Art. 1), reaching its full geopolitical maturity in June 2022. This milestone testifies to the birth of a transborder continental legal consciousness, within which the *identity-defining soundscape* and the *principle of proximity* are no longer configured as theoretical or poetic abstractions, but as genuine cultural rights and pillars of collective memory to be protected.

The Extension of the Perceived

The Convention safeguards, for the first time, not only exceptional landscapes but also everyday and even degraded ones; abandoned hamlets or historical fairs fall squarely within this mandate of "recovery and revitalization."

If the landscape exists insofar as it is "perceived," its acoustic dimension constitutes its foundational axis. In this massive 2022 ratification, the act of listening as an expression of belonging finds its definitive legal legitimation at the European level. Indeed, Article 1 enacts a Copernican revolution in cultural heritage law: the landscape ceases to be a purely aesthetic and visual concept, transforming instead into a *perceived space*. To put it simply, we could synthesize this by stating that if human perception is by definition *multisensory*, the acoustic dimension (the *soundscape*) is, to all intents and purposes, an integral part of the landscape protected by law.

There is an objective shift of the core focus within the legal framework toward the social and communitarian element. The soundscape is "identity-defining" (*identitario*) precisely because there is a community that inhabits it, recognizes it, codifies it, and attributes to it a sense of cultural belonging. Within this framework, "to listen" becomes synonymous with "to belong."

The identity-defining soundscape has historically functioned as a cultural border. A member of the community has always instantaneously recognized the difference between an "alien" sound and a "native" one. The tolling of a specific bell or the call of a shepherd acts as recognition signals that delimit the group. In this context, listening is an act of citizenship, and acoustic memory becomes a collective archive. Within the polyphonies of the Aspromonte or the rhythm of the *tamburelli*, sound is not merely listened to, but "inhabited." The physical proximity between performers and the community transforms the acoustic experience into a vibrational and tactile sharing. This connection is further reinforced by the *materiality of sound*: the use of local raw materials (reeds, wood, animal skins) establishes a direct physical bond between the soil and acoustic production.

Finally, the *identitario* is also characterized by *proximity*, understood both as the physical closeness of the body to the sound of the place (the material substance, the local lutheire) and as the direct action of the community upon its own habitat. The sound of the Calabrian *zampogna* or *lira* serves as a perfect example of this "interrelation"; humans employ the natural materials of the locus (wood, reed, skin) to project an anthropic acoustic signal into the landscape.

The Loss of Identity: The Paradox Between Norm and Reality

While, on the one hand, the regulatory framework defines and clarifies the concept of landscape—endowing it with significant meaning and protection—on the other hand, we witness, from a sociological and aesthetic standpoint, a profound crisis within the very concept of identity.

Contemporaneity is traversed by a sharp structural polarization. On one side, there is a progressive consolidation of the regulatory framework oriented toward the codification and safeguarding of the "landscape" (Appadurai, 2001); indeed, current legislation does not limit itself to the ecological protection of the territory, but codifies its status as cultural heritage, attempting to stem its fragmentation.
On the other side, this institutional drive toward physical and identity-based boundary-making enters into open contradiction with the sociological and aesthetic dynamics of globalization. These dynamics determine, conversely, a radical destructuring and an irreversible crisis of the very concept of identity. The massive utilization of sampled sonic material (such as VSTs, plug-ins, preset sound designs, and digital tools) is bringing about an auditory homogenization of the musical fabric, driven predominantly by industrial dynamics. Unsurprisingly, the relevant literature speaks of a true "global ear": a phenomenon of standardization that engulfs not only the timbre of sound, but also its dynamics, agogics, tempos, compositional models, and the iterative structures of loops.
An evident paradox thus emerges: the more the legislator attempts to enclose, clarify, and legally protect the concepts of "local identity" and "proximity," the more these categories crumble within everyday lived experience (Bauman, 2002).

The Homogenization of Mass Media Culture

The institutional attempt to preserve local identity often results in territorial museification, a process that risks converting living spaces into static "open-air museums" detached from the organic rhythm of daily life (Augé 2009). When protective policies focus exclusively on conserving material aesthetics and monumental folklore, they inadvertently expropriate the social fabric, transforming anthropological spaces into simulacra and ethnic showcases tailored for tourist consumption. Consequently, as Marc Augé theorizes, the locus loses its historical and relational essence, degenerating into a "non-place" despite maintaining its physical characteristics.

Concurrently, the traditional concept of proximity - characterized by localized rituals, shared spaces, and physical community roots - is being dismantled by global mass-media and algorithmic culture. The resident community experiences a profound disconnect between its geographical location and a psychological sphere colonized by the dynamics of overmodernity. Individuals physically anchored to specific territories are nonetheless subjected to a pervasive visual and auditory homogenization orchestrated by global digital networks. Traditional identity-defining codes and local heritage are thus detached from their original environments and reduced to digitized, fluid fragments floating in a cloud-based ecosystem.

This profound deterritorialization renders conventional legal instruments and international preservation frameworks increasingly anachronistic. Because these regulations remain anchored to rigid, geometric concepts of space and time, they fail to safeguard the fluid and hyperconnected soul of contemporary communities. Attempting to protect intangible cultural heritage by isolating it from its evolutionary ecosystem ultimately condemns it to a sterile, artificial stasis, transforming citizens into passive spectators of their own past and leaving society orphaned of an authentically lived identity.

The Hybridization of the "Soundscape"

Perhaps the most subtle and pervasive aspect of this identity crisis manifests through the hybridization of sonic material. Historically, every physical landscape possessed its own distinct "soundscape" (the sounds of local nature, dialects, traditional trades, and vernacular music) that decisively contributed to an identity rooted in proximity.
Today, the uniform noise pollution of metropolises and, above all, the global and ubiquitous dissemination of streaming music, sampled materials, and synthetic sounds through mass media have generated a sort of "sonic mélange." This hybridization of sonic material leads to the collapse of auditory boundaries (e.g., the exact same sounds, the same global pop music, and the same commercial jingles resonate inside a café in Tokyo, a square in Rome or Tirana, or a remote village hidden in the Sila mountains). Furthermore, it causes an aesthetic deterritorialization: sonic art and aesthetics no longer emerge from a dialogue with the territory as a *genius loci*; instead, they arise from the assemblage of digital samples sourced from across the globe, creating hybrid works that are fascinating yet devoid of any genuine geographical belonging.
In this context, the massive utilization of VST libraries over the last two decades has undoubtedly facilitated audiovisual and musical production for musicians, democratizing its usage (which was conversely once the exclusive preserve of a few with manageable budgets). On the other hand, however, this phenomenon has imposed a specific, pervasive, and standardized sound character, which functions as the brand identity of specific production companies (such as Native Instruments, Orchestral Tools, EastWest, Spitfire Audio, Ableton, Sonnox, Arturia, etc.) [7].

New Languages: AI and VSTs as the New Luthiers

The transition from physical sound to the domain of VSTs and Artificial Intelligence delineates the contours of an "active digital preservation"— an horizon already implicitly envisioned by European agendas for the digitalization of cultural heritage. Today, the advent of generative AI and latest-generation plug-ins is dismantling the traditional concept of sampling. Through physical modeling and deep learning algorithms, it becomes possible to extract the timbral essence of historical instruments and apply it to entirely unprecedented compositional contexts; the VST thus becomes a living entity, capable of extending traditional lutheire into the virtual space.

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7 While providing an exact and definitive number is practically impossible, we can formulate a highly realistic estimate based on distribution platforms, musical databases, and market breadth. Today, there are between 1,500 and 3,000 active developers of VST (Virtual Studio Technology) worldwide. The VST market is highly globalized, yet historically and culturally, it revolves around three major poles: Europe (the technological epicenter), where Germany - home to Steinberg, the very company that invented the VST format - constitutes the beating heart, alongside the United Kingdom (highly prominent in orchestral libraries), France, and the Scandinavian countries. Italy enjoys immense prestige and excellence (e.g., *Acustica Audio* for analog-modeling plug-ins or *IK Multimedia*). North America, with the United States, hosts historic giants tied to both hardware emulation software and cinematic sound design. Asia is experiencing strong growth, not only through historic Japanese giants (such as Roland or Korg digitalizing their own legacy hardware) but also through a flourishing of emerging developers in China and South Korea focused on artificial intelligence applied to vocal and sound synthesis.
See *Audio Plug-in Software Global Market Report* (May, 2026 / Research and Markets), available at: https://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/6241463/audio-plugin-software-global-market-report.
Cfr. *The Audio Plugin Software Market Global Report* (May, 2026 / Research and Markets) https://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/6241463/audio-plugin-software-global-marketreport?srsltid=AfmBOooeI1ouyBTyDvNdKeUHqvluml9XK-STahvQa2iSKNn3DVG4h6Vq

This new operational framework can no longer be evaded; rather, it asserts itself as a cornerstone of contemporary and future research. The convergence of AI, VSTs, and computational calculation opens up scenarios of extraordinary fertility, provided it is supported by the awareness that what is being redesigned is the very concept of an identity-defining and anthropological landscape, understood as a *soundscape* in continuous metamorphosis. The transition from the physical landscape to the digital one introduces two key philosophical concepts for understanding this new sonic identity: *Heteronomy* and *Sonic Heterotopia* (Simondon, 2020).

The Concept of Heteronomy

Heteronomy occurs when sonic laws derive from globalised datasets. There is an inherent risk that AI may "smooth out" or homogenise the distinct dissonances characteristic of the Calabrian soundscape to conform to standard aesthetic models; conversely, however, it presents an opportunity for hybridisation, offering novel perspectives on local identity.

Sonic Heterotopia: AI as an "Other Space"

Borrowing Michel Foucault's interpretive categories (Foucault, 1986) the digital ecosystem generated by Artificial Intelligence does not constitute a utopia (a mere abstract non-place), but rather functions as a genuine *heterotopia*. Through the development of advanced VST libraries, the acoustic trace of a historical *zampogna* and contemporary synthesis algorithms coexist within an «augmented present» capable of suspending and inverting traditional spatio-temporal relations. In this context, AI operates according to Foucault's mirror principle: it reflects a communal image - the identitarian sonic fragment - which is, nonetheless, mediated by lines of code. This gives rise to a space of critical "deviation" wherein identity is not obliterated, but rather observed, deconstructed, and reinvented. Consequently, the VST library transforms into a *heterochrony*: a heterotopic space of time in which Calabrian acoustic memory is indefinitely accumulated, safeguarded against the physical and entropic degradation of biological material, and maintained in a state of constant latency, ready to be reactivated through the performative act.

The Utopia of the Digital Soundscape

Within this framework, utopia does not represent an escape from reality, but rather the creation of an augmented soundscape characterized by:

1. **The Living Archive:** The reconstruction of the soundscapes of abandoned villages, developed from minimal acoustic fragments.
2. **Virtual Proximity:** Rendering the acoustics of symbolic sites (such as Byzantine churches and the valleys of the Sila) portable and globally accessible, thereby enabling Calabrian identity to circulate within the cloud without severing its localised roots.

Conclusion: Toward a "Neo-Ecology" of Sound

The future hinges upon the capacity to govern the digital transition. Musicians and researchers must position themselves as "curators of identitarian datasets". The overarching challenge is to ensure that Calabria continues to resonate with the power of antiquity yet mediated through the "infinite lungs" of artificial intelligence—thereby inhabiting that "other space" where tradition transforms into the future.

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Choral music in Kosovo: Historical, cultural and institutional context

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Abstract

Choral music in Kosovo, although a relatively late development, represents remarkable achievements. The aim of this paper is to present a historical, analytical, and aesthetic study of this musical heritage, which has not yet received the scholarly attention it deserves. The development of choral music is closely linked to its historical, social and cultural context. Particularly after the Second World War, the first structured and organized forms of choral singing began to consolidate as a cultivated collective aesthetic expression, imbued with a strong spiritual dimension. Primarily grounded in the Albanian folk music tradition, choral music in Kosovo evolved as a means of preserving cultural identity and promoting the artistic affirmation of the Albanian people within complex political and institutional circumstances, at a time when national existence was under threat within the framework of the former Yugoslavia. The semantic clarity of choral songs, accompanied by an authentic emotional expression across diverse directions and contexts, has enabled a high degree of collective musical experience, granting this repertoire a distinctive place within the broader scope of our musical tradition. In addition to the historical study and the periodization of its main developmental phases, particular attention is devoted to the principal creative figures and to outlining their artistic profiles in this field. One of the findings of this study is that the profile of choral music in Kosovo is directly connected to the country's specific context within the former Yugoslavia, a context which, despite its constraints, also offered certain advantages compared to contemporary developments in Albania. It is concluded that the legacy, vitality and widespread character of the choral movement in Kosovo, even after 1999, originate from this established tradition.

Keywords

Choral music, folk music, artistic identity

Choral music has been a preferred genre of vocal music in Kosovo, holding a significant place in Albanian musical culture. It can be classified into several categories, including *a cappella* works, compositions accompanied by *instruments* (organ, piano, orchestra, mandolin ensembles, etc.), and *arranged vocal forms* such as choral songs, masses, cantatas, oratorios, passions, and others. On the other hand, the choir and choral music constitute two interdependent entities that coexist and function only together. Without the choral ensemble, choral music cannot exist, as it lacks the performers who embody and realize it in sound, namely the singers. Conversely, without music, the choir loses its function and substance, becoming merely a formal structure. Musical composition forms its inner essence[1].

As an art of organizing multiple voices into a unified musical entity, choral music in Kosovo, in its most successful instances, has been realized in accordance with an internal harmonic structure and shaped through a polyphonic interplay of voices. Beyond the melodic line and all the accompanying elements that articulate and support it, at its core lies a meaningful presence and interaction of the word, of subjects and narratives that are among the most compelling and emotionally charged, namely the active incorporation of poetic texts rich in literary value and expressive depth. [2] As a leading element, the text has shaped the melody, providing the song with its substance, ideas, and layers of meaning, including social, national, historical, and psychological dimensions, as well as sentimental, lyrical, poetic, melodramatic, heroic, and epic qualities. There are numerous meaningful examples and references from the tradition of choral music in Kosovo that demonstrate precisely this, namely vocal balance, harmonic cohesion, melodic clarity, intonational accuracy, cohesive vocal interpretation, and a simultaneous unification of interpretative and emotional expression.

Choral music has achieved an organic synthesis between our folk tradition, particularly polyphonic songs, and academic and classical techniques. As a musical genre, it clearly differs from operatic solo forms. A distinctive role in its performance is played by timbre. Unlike the timbral qualities of instruments and orchestra, in choral performance it is characterized by softness, warmth, flexibility, and subtle vocal inflections. The interpretation of singers clarifies and conveys the meanings and semantic layers of the musical work through the word and the text, as well as through the expressive power of performance, thereby enhancing the human essence inherent in the music itself. A cappella choral compositions, as arrangements and stylizations of folk music, were later followed by works of original invention.

"These works are tonally stable and connected to a tonal center. The treatment of consonance and dissonance is classical, yet alterations and chromaticism are far richer in themselves, and modulations are bolder and more contemporary."[3]

Music in Kosovo, unlike that in Albania, developed later due to its specific historical and political conditions. It should also be taken into account that the Albanian territories, prior to 1912 when Albania declared independence, constituted a unified space, not divided by borders as occurred following the decisions of the Conference of London 1913, when these boundaries were significantly reduced. In the early stages of its formation, choral music in Kosovo first emerged through cultural societies, amateur artists, and educational institutions.

1 Munishi, Rexhep. Albanian Choral Creativity in Yugoslavia. Prishtina: Institute of Albanology, Prishtina; Association of Composers of Kosovo, 1988, pp. 14–19.

2 Kelmendi, F. The Text–Music Relationship in Albanian Choral Creativity. Albanian Musicological Journal, no. 4, 2010.

3 Berisha, Engjëll. The Development of Styles in the Works of Kosovar Albanian Composers. Prishtina: Textbook and Teaching Aids Publishing Center of Kosovo, 1997, pp. 27, 147.

Choral ensembles, although established and functioning under limited political and material conditions, fulfilled a dual role: artistic formation and cultural development. The preferred choral repertoire of this period was primarily based on folk melodic material, which was either harmonized in a relatively simple texture and sonority or arranged in a way that reintroduced the modal flows characteristic of Albanian musical traditions. Accordingly, early choral practices reflected a synthesis between the homophonic oral musical heritage and the techniques of European polyphonic choral music.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, collective singing functioned primarily as a means of cultural affirmation rather than as an autonomous artistic practice. Nevertheless, formal choral institutions remained limited. The cultivation of multipart singing in religious schools and patriotic associations made a valuable contribution to the artistic developments of the time. On a general level, the selection of repertoire was closely linked to Albanian poetry and folkloric traditions. Harmonizations were typically distinguished by a diatonic and tonal structure, often characterized by a homophonic texture and clearly defined musical phrasing. There was a dynamic interplay between two orientations: one that affirmed modal qualities and asymmetric rhythms, and the broader Albanian musical tradition. Gradually, choral music in Kosovo began to take shape by assimilating more advanced techniques and models, adopting increasingly sophisticated forms. Multipart composition and the contrapuntal processes accompanying it became central to the transformation of this musical genre over time, enriching its motivic material and enabling modal reinterpretations. These developments were also fostered by the intelligent use of the experiential wealth of Albanian national folk music, within a tonal and modal system marked by a clearly defined identity.[4]

The institutional consolidation of musical life, particularly after the mid twentieth century, created more favorable conditions for the professional development of choral activity. The establishment of music schools, cultural centers, and later higher institutions of the arts contributed significantly to the emergence of trained composers, conductors, and performers. Within this framework, choral music gradually achieved its artistic and technical aims, progressing toward more complex structures and ambitious compositions. Only after the Second World War did Albanians in Kosovo advance in the field of professional musical art, which led in 1944 to the founding in Prizren of the amateur Cultural Association Agimi. One of the most important developments of this society was the establishment of a mixed choir, as well as a folk music ensemble that maintained a rich repertoire of selected Albanian folk, patriotic, and urban songs from various regions of Kosovo.[5]

The same process also took place in Prishtina. Particularly important in this regard was the establishment of lower-level music schools. The first of this kind was founded in Prizren in 1948, followed a year later by the one in Prishtina in 1949. In the following years, music education expanded its scope by completing its full cycle, starting from elementary levels, then progressing to secondary music schools, and eventually reaching higher professional music education. This development was made possible with the establishment of the Faculty of Arts in 1975, within which the Department of Music also operated.

4 Antoni, Lorenc. Albanian Musical Folklore, Volume II. Prishtina: Rilindja, 1961, pp. 9–10; Sokoli, Ramadan. Albanian Musical Folklore. Academy of Sciences of Albania, Tirana, 2000.

5 Berisha, Engjëll Sh.; Shiroka, Kolë B. Half a Century of Life and Activity of the Cultural Artistic Association "Agimi" 1944–1994. Prizren, 1994, pp. 15–16.

Within a few decades, Kosovo established seven elementary and secondary music schools in the cities of Prishtina, Prizren, Gjilan, Ferizaj, and Mitrovica. During the 1970s, alongside the symphony orchestra, the professional choir of Radio Television of Prishtina was also founded. Through this institution, choral music was performed more widely, became better known, and reached a broader Albanian audience. Choral music further manifested and promoted itself through prominent local musical events, among which two stand out in particular: the Prishtina Music Scene and the Days of Kosovar Music in Gjakova.

The 1990s were entirely different, as everything contracted. Musical and artistic activity was severely restricted. Much of it took place under conditions of isolation and separation. Central artistic institutions and schools were suspended and closed. As a result, under conditions of discrimination, expulsion, and violence, choral activity followed alternative paths. It was forced to adopt semi-legal and private forms, relocating to churches, private homes, and protected or often concealed spaces, as well as to the diaspora and other locations where it could survive and continue to exist. Thus, choral music became an act of civic resistance, giving choral art and performance the form of a call and a collective appeal. It can be said that this music turned into an identity act. It created elevated national emotional situations aimed at preserving historical memory, cultural pride, and the artistic genius of the people, becoming a form of "collective language". Its repertoire was dominated by the open and defiant expression of national affirmation. Choral songs were characterized by epic expression, patriotic and heroic motifs, as well as social cohesion and resilience. [6]

After the war in Kosovo in 1999 and the declaration of its independence, a renewal of choral music was observed, followed by the re-establishment of choir groups in music schools in Prishtina, Prizren, Gjakova, Peja, and other cities. The professional choir of Radio Television of Prishtina resumed its activity, along with university choirs, musical association choirs, and church choirs. The academic choral repertoire, including works by Albanian and European composers, was revived and further enriched. All of these developments created a generative environment. A group of the most successful composers became a key supporting force in strengthening choral music in its academic and professional direction. They created refined works, introduced interesting musical poetics, modern aesthetics, and contemporary techniques and stylistic profiles.

Among those who stood out for their significant contributions were composers such as Rauf Dhomi, Fahri Beqiri, Zeqiria Ballata, Vinçenc Gjini, and Mark Kaçinari, who carried the responsibility of further shaping choral music. Their creative work developed within the parameters of modern music while maintaining a connection with elements of folk expression and our musical traditions. The aim of strengthening its identity character remained a constant and unwavering objective. [7]

In his book "The Development of Styles in the Works of Kosovar Albanian Composers", the well-known music scholar Ëngjëll Berisha writes:

"The diversity of styles in Albanian music in Kosovo, its national models based on an aesthetic and ideological sonic foundation, is a characteristic of the European musical reality. Thus, many works also arouse interest abroad, as during this relatively short period, classical Albanian music in Kosovo has managed to compensate for its delay in development." [8]

6 Rudi, Rafet. My Book of Memories. Prishtina: Dukagjini, 2025, pp. 176, 181–191, 185.

7 Bello, Pandi. Music of Kosovo until 1990. Korça: "KOTTI" Printing House, 2024, pp. 51–56.

8 Berisha, Engjëll. The Development of Styles in the Works of Kosovar Albanian Composers. Prishtina: Textbook and Teaching Aids Publishing Center of Kosovo, 1997, p. 52.

It is worth emphasizing that choral music in this period experienced a significant development of its musical language. The musical means were enriched both in vocal and instrumental performance. New codes of composition and interpretation were introduced. Singing acquired a much higher level of quality and professionalism compared to earlier decades, offering contemporary stylistic developments. Although traditional musical forms and expressions were preserved, they nevertheless underwent profound elaboration, which enhanced their artistic expressiveness without altering their strong folk character and spirit. At the same time, there was a notable advancement in the refinement of the musical idiolect within this vocal genre.

Choral music incorporated a wide range of elements from global choral traditions. Greater preference was given to choral works influenced by late Romanticism and Neo-Romanticism, as well as Neo-Classical forms and more recent stylistic approaches that required a different manner and style of singing. This approach and style stemmed from contemporary musical currents that Kosovar composers and conductors had increasingly embraced, drawing from advanced formations and formal paradigms of twentieth-century music (Rizvanolli, A. 2024).

It is also evident that the leading figures in Albanian vocal and choral music in Kosovo had completed their higher musical studies in the main conservatories of the former Yugoslav Federation, such as those in Belgrade, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, and Skopje, and later pursued further specialization in various Western European countries.

Composers have played a decisive role in the development of choral music. They have created recognizable national constructs and idioms while interacting organically with European musical currents. Their works demonstrate a deep elaboration of harmonic language, contrapuntal texture, and refined formal outlines. At the same time, the treatment of text, usually based on Albanian poetry, reveals a high level of sensitivity, highlighting semantic emphasis and nuance, as well as the unity between word and sound. The stylistic consolidation of this music has been shaped through both tradition and innovation. Certainly, the case of choral music in Kosovo is not an exception; rather, it follows a broader path of modernization seen elsewhere. The tension between traditional modal melodic structures and modern harmonic explorations represents one of the fundamental characteristics of its aesthetic evolution today. This dynamic has enabled composers to achieve both continuity and change in their works, preserving cultural specificity while simultaneously engaging in universal artistic discourse. This can also be observed in the choral works of composers such as L. Antoni, F. Beqiri, E. Rizvanolli, V. Gjini, M. Kaçinari, K. Lekaj, R. Mulliqi, R. Dhomi, R. Rudi, and others.

Five principal premises have historically conditioned, and continue to shape, the development of choral music in Kosovo:

a) the existence of a group of singers united by shared goals, motivation, and artistic quality. Without this condition, nothing can begin, nothing can be prepared, nothing can be realized at the intended level of quality, and nothing can be promoted within an advanced choral structure and substance;

b) the existence of a body of composers who create its vocal and instrumental repertoire, whether drawing from distinguished figures of world music or from Albanian composers who have contributed to this genre;

c) the existence of professional musical institutions that provide the necessary framework for choral production, including full time or part time singers and instrumentalists, rehearsal processes, facilities, artistic leadership, orchestras, and organizational support;

d) the existence of an infrastructure that enables musical performance, including stages, concert halls, and theatre buildings where performances are held, as well as their adaptation to open

spaces such as public squares, school courtyards, and civic environments;
e) the presence of an audience that appreciates, enjoys, follows, and evaluates the musical output of choral ensembles, thereby becoming a driving force for further development, promotion, and inspirational support. This also implies the cultivation of refined musical taste, namely an informed audience that becomes an active element and a premise for meaningful artistic communication.
The establishment of these premises, along with others accompanying the developmental process of choral music in Kosovo, has enabled its vitality and continuity over time.[9]
The most important developmental component of the originality of choral music in Kosovo is the Composer and the Act of Composition. Musical creativity dedicated to choral song has been, and continues to be, its national identity vector. It is precisely composition within this genre that creates and reconstructs musical material, either as: 1) an original creation; or 2) a re creation grounded in pre existing themes, motives, melodies, and resilient, inherited musical structures of folklore and folk song; or 3) an adaptation, modification, arrangement, and recontextualization of these melodies and musical structures[10]. Although not in the same proportional prominence as some of the more dominant genres of vocal music, choral music has nevertheless occupied a well deserved place in the musical art of Kosovo. By now, it has established valuable traditions and created its own history in the cultivation of choral singing forms. If vocal performance found it relatively easier to develop a national artistic tradition and identity before the Second World War, original creative work namely composition in this field was neither easy nor opportune. Prior to this war, choral song was able to draw early on Albanian folk and folkloric musical resources, as well as urban and patriotic songs, adapting them within its own choral structures, albeit not always in a fully developed or professional manner. The cultivation of choral performance lacked the necessary conditions and impetus, including the absence of national musical institutions and professionally trained composers educated in European conservatories. This creative activity began to develop and consolidate in the Albanian ethnic territories of the former Yugoslavia, namely in Kosovo, immediately after the Second World War [11] (Ballata, Z. 1987). Today, a new generation of composers and musicians has emerged, elevating choral song to a higher artistic level. [12]
In conclusion, Lorenc Antoni, Shime Deshpali, and the youngest among them, Rexho Mullaj (Mulliqi) (1923–1982), constitute the trio representing the first generation of professional composers who established the musical tradition within the Albanian ethnic territories of the former Yugoslavia.

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Modality as practice in Mediterranean Lira traditions: The Calabrian case in comparative perspective

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Abstract

This study examines modal organization in Mediterranean Lira traditions through a comparative, performance-based micro-analysis of two repertories: the sonu a ballu from Calabria and the zonaradikos from Eastern Thrace. Moving beyond scalar definitions of modality, the paper approaches modes as generative frameworks emerging in practice, shaped by the interaction of melodic patterns, instrumental configuration, and embodied knowledge. Focusing on comparable melodic segments, the analysis investigates how similar organological conditions - shared tuning systems, drone structures, and positional constraints - can give rise to distinct modal outcomes. The results show that, despite a common structural basis, the two traditions differ primarily in the organization of melodic movement and scalar orientation. The Thracian example maintains a coherent modal logic structured around a tetrachordal framework, while the Calabrian case presents a hybrid configuration combining modal features with elements associated with tonal thinking, including chordal implications and a dominant-like drone function. The study argues that modality is not determined by pitch material alone but emerges through the articulation of melodic gestures - particularly the use of leaps, phrasing, and cadential movement - within a given instrumental and cultural context. It further proposes that such systems are best understood as embodied forms of knowledge, enacted through performance. In this sense, analytical approaches and artistic research are presented as complementary methodologies for accessing both the structural and experiential dimensions of musical practice.

Keywords

Embodiment, formulaic processes, instrumental morphology, modal hierarchy, performance-based analysis

Introduction

Modality as practice in Mediterranean lira traditions

The lira, a bowed chordophone widespread across parts of the Mediterranean basin, offers a particularly effective case study for examining the persistence and transformation of modal musical systems within oral traditions. While it has often been studied from organological or historical perspectives (See Plastino 1994, 21-47; Castagna 2016, 101-128; Fera et al. 2025, 329-333), this paper shifts the focus toward musical language, specifically modality as it is enacted in performance.

Across its regional variants, the lira family displays a set of relatively stable organological features: a pear-shaped body, vertically inserted tuning pegs, three strings, and the absence of a fingerboard. Plastino (Plastino 1994, 204) and Castagna (Castagna 2016, 118–128) provide comparative overviews of the principal types of bowed lyres found across the Mediterranean. In both studies, schematic drawings complement the textual discussion by illustrating the instruments' main morphological features.

In the lira, sound production relies on lateral contact between the fingernails and the strings rather than vertical pressure, allowing for microtonal pitch inflection due to the absence of frets. Although nail-based fingering is generally regarded as the prevailing technique, alternative methods are also documented, including the use of the fingertips to stop the strings. In Calabria, for example, Giuseppe Fragomeni is reported to have employed this technique. It can be observed in one of the few surviving video recordings of Fragomeni performing on the instrument (see https://youtu.be/tncjZh_BqMo?si=aefsjFlyTb1pHVGZ, last accessed 3 June 2026). The continuous sounding of a drone string provides a stable tonal reference that facilitates intonation and plays a central role in shaping the instrument's characteristic heterophonic texture.

In a folk music tradition largely transmitted without notation, and therefore without a technology for abstracting musical concepts from practice, the instrument itself becomes a primary medium through which musical understanding is formed. The layout of strings, the tuning system, and the available fingering positions define a structured sonic space that performers learn to navigate through practice. Musical structure thus emerges from the instrument's affordances: it organizes the field of possible sounds while embodying an underlying musical logic, reflecting and stabilizing specific ways of structuring sound. This dynamic is particularly evident in oral musical cultures, where instruments are often actively adapted to local aesthetic principles. The Calabrian *chitarra battente*, for instance, demonstrates such a process: its historical modification from common guitar models, most notably through the incorporation of a drone string, aligns its organology with local musical practices and aesthetics, thereby materializing a culturally specific conception of musical structure. On the other hand, instruments are not merely passive tools for the realization of pre-existing musical ideas; rather, they help shape the field of musical possibilities available to performers. As Jonathan De Souza observes, "These objects are not neutral. They afford particular kinds of motor and perceptual habits; they reveal certain possibilities, while concealing others. Like the body, then, each of these things can be understood as a medium for having a world." (De Souza 2017, 23).

Despite regional variation, the two instruments considered in this study, the Calabrian *lira* and the Thracian *lyra*, share a basic organological feature: both are three-string

instruments with re-entrant tuning. Re-entrant tuning refers to a tuning arrangement in which the strings do not follow a continuous ascending or descending pitch sequence, because at least one string interrupts that order. I identify the open strings as a–d–g following Plastino (Plastino 1994, 147, reproduced in fig. 1). These pitch names are used here as conventional labels rather than as fixed indications of absolute sounding pitch. In practice, actual tuning may vary according to the instrument, the player, and the performance context. For the purposes of the present discussion, what matters is the relational configuration between strings and not their actual sounding pitch.
In this sense, the outer string (a) serves as the primary melodic string and is fingered, while the middle string (d) functions as a continuous drone, only occasionally touched to produce the VII degree of the scale. The upper outer string (g) is not used for melodic development but is used in a cadential function, either representing the tonic of the scale or acting as a leading tone (*subfinalis*) in relation to the tonic (a).

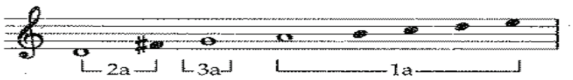

Figure 1. lira tuning (from Plastino, 1994, p. 147)

This configuration establishes a clear positional logic in which melodic activity is concentrated on a single string, while the remaining strings define a stable resonant framework. The choice of these two traditions is methodologically motivated. Although Calabria and Eastern Thrace are geographically distant, they represent comparable contexts within the broader Mediterranean distribution of lira-type instruments, since the instruments used in these areas share a substantially similar organological configuration. Their selection allows for a controlled comparison in which key organological variables—instrument design, tuning system, and general technique—remain relatively stable, while musical outcomes differ significantly. Unlike other regional variants, these two cases preserve a particularly clear correspondence in tuning and positional logic, making it possible to isolate the role of performance practice and cultural context in shaping modal organization.

Literature review

Modality, formulaic thought, and embodiment in oral musical traditions

Recent ethnomusicological approaches have moved beyond scalar definitions of modality to emphasize process, action, and embodiment. Rather than treating modes as fixed pitch collections, they are increasingly understood as frameworks that organize musical movement through characteristic patterns and tendencies. In this sense, modality can be conceived as a practical orientation—a way of structuring musical action in time. This perspective aligns with Harold S. Powers' definition of mode as encompassing not only pitch material but also "characteristic melodic behaviors" (See Powers 2001, online resource) and with Bruno Nettl's discussion of improvisation as "the creation of music in the course of performance" (Nettl 2005, 47).
Within this shift, the concept of formulaic organization has proven central. Albert B. Lord's work demonstrated that oral traditions rely on a repertory of formulas—recurrent patterns that

function as generative devices rather than fixed texts (Lord 1960, 30). Applied to music, this model suggests that oral systems need not be understood primarily in terms of abstract entities such as scales, but rather as repertories of melodic formulas, flexible patterns that are varied, recombined, and adapted in performance rather than treated as fixed forms. Alongside formulaic structure, embodiment plays a decisive role. John Blacking's notion of music as "humanly organized sound" underscores the inseparability of musical structure from bodily action (Blacking 1973, 10), while John Baily's concept of the "human/musical instrument interface" shows how performance is shaped by the spatial and motor organization of the instrument itself (Baily 2025, 140–145). Musical systems are thus not only conceptual but also embodied, emerging from the interaction between memory, gesture, and instrumental configuration.

From this perspective, the relationship between organology and modality becomes central. Modal structures do not exist independently of the instrument, but emerge from its affordances: the distribution of pitches, the presence of drones, and the available fingering positions define a field of possible actions within which musical patterns are realized. Modal organization is therefore closely tied to positional logic, with recurring gestures corresponding to recurring musical configurations, and with instruments effectively encoding and stabilizing musical knowledge in material form.

Taken together, these approaches support a reconceptualization of modality, especially in orally transmitted musical cultures, as a generative and performative system. Rather than a fixed set of pitches, a mode can be understood as a structured field of possibilities: a repertoire of patterns, positions, and movements that guide musical action. Within this framework, the present study focuses on the comparative analysis of melodic development, examining how similar instrumental configurations can give rise to different modal organizations through distinct ways of shaping, directing, and articulating musical movement in performance.

Methodology

Comparative and performance-based analytical framework

The present study adopts a comparative and performance-oriented approach. Rather than aiming to provide a comprehensive account of modal systems in Mediterranean lira traditions, this paper presents an exploratory micro-analysis of two performance excerpts, intended to illuminate specific mechanisms of melodic organization within a controlled comparative framework.

The comparison between a *sonata a ballu* from the Calabrian tradition (as exemplified by Francesco Staltari) and the *zonaradikos* repertory of Eastern Thrace provides a particularly revealing case. In both contexts, instrumental logic is comparable and musical discourse relies on formulaic patterns. Despite these shared foundations, the two traditions display markedly different melodic phrasing and developmental tendencies. This divergence suggests that, while instrumental configuration and formulaic approach establish a common framework, it is the organization of melodic thought—how phrases are shaped and articulated—that ultimately differentiates modal practice across contexts.

In the Calabrian context, dance music for lira—commonly referred to as *sonu a ballu* is not conceived as a fixed composition but as the performance-based realization of an ideal model. As Christian Ferlaino notes, in Calabria a *sunata* is perceived as "always the same" despite its variability in performance (Ferlaino 2019, 5). Its structure is based on the iterative recombination of short melodic units (*girate* or *passate*), which are continuously modified through micro-

variation. Similarly, Goffredo Plastino highlights the same characters in the specific repertoire played on the lira (Plastino 1994, 45–47).

A comparable generative logic can be observed in the Thracian *zonaradikos*, a widely diffused dance characterized by chain formation and strong rhythmic drive, typically in meters such as 2/4, 4/4, or 6/8 (Stiga and Kopsalidou 2012, 154). This dance is often played with the lyra or the bagpipe (*gajda*) accompanied by a drum (*davul*). Generally speaking, the comparison between these two traditions reveals a common reliance on iterative and formulaic principles, while highlighting differences in the organization and articulation of melodic material.

In order to examine the principles governing melodic development in these examples, the analysis focuses on a reduced yet musically meaningful segment drawn from performance. The main melodic sentence of Francesco Staltari's *sonata a ballu* is compared with the opening phrase of a *zonaradikos* performed by Vasilis Demisis. While the Thracian repertory appears relatively formalized—partly due to the circulation of transcriptions that have stabilized specific melodic phrases which are normally played in succession—the Calabrian example is more fluid, with melodic material continuously reshaped in performance and without a strict formal organization or even a clear beginning point. As Goffredo Plastino explains in fact, Staltari used to begin his performances with an introductory segment in which he traversed nearly all the degrees of the scale used, without a clear distinction with the actual *sonata* (Plastino 1994, 154). It was therefore necessary to isolate a relatively regular and self-contained phrase from the recording. This selection enables a comparison as the two excerpts selected constitute structurally comparable units within their respective traditions. Their similar length, internal organization, and function as opening or foundational phrases make them particularly suitable for analytical juxtaposition. By focusing on these equivalent segments, the analysis highlights how each tradition organizes musical movement and articulates its modal logic in practice:

Figure 2. Main phrase of sonata a ballu (Calabria), Francesco Staltari, lira. From Castagna, Ettore, ed. 2008. La lira in Calabria. Udine: Nota (GEOS CD 623). Transcription by the author.

Figure 3. Opening phrase of zonaradikos (Thrace), Vasilis Demisis, lyra. From VV. AA. 2006. Lyra Mainland Greece: The Art of the Greek Musical Instruments. Athens: Hellenicrecord. Transcription by the author.

Results and discussion

Modal organization between constraint and variation

The comparison between the two excerpts reveals both structural affinities and significant differences in the organization of melodic movement. In the *sonata a ballu* (bars 1–4), the phrase unfolds within the limited ambitus of the pentachord g-d and is structured around the interaction with the drone pitch d. The melody begins on it (the drone is doubled with the same note an octave above) and proceeds through a sequence of leaps toward the b and a notes, before descending stepwise through c–b–a–g. This descent completes a tetrachordal segment and establishes g as the point of resolution. The cadential motion a → g, heard against the drone d, creates a dominant–tonic relationship that reinforces this orientation, confirming g as the final and giving the phrase a predominantly descending profile.

The *zonaradikos* excerpt, while comparable in length and pitch range, exhibits a different internal articulation. The phrase can be divided into two sub-units (bars 1–2 and 3–4), each structured around a similar pattern. It begins with an ascending gesture from g toward c, expanding the melodic space, and continues with a descending motion characterized by successive leaps of a third (c–a and b–g). The phrase resolves on a, which functions as the final, and the cadence is achieved through an ascending approach to this pitch. In contrast to the Calabrian example, the melodic trajectory here is more balanced between ascent and descent.

These observations point to a fundamental distinction in the role of the final within the two traditions. As McAlpine has argued, the final should be understood not simply as the last pitch of a melody, but as a structural point of orientation that governs its unfolding: "a final should imbue a work as the point to which a return needs to be made" (McAlpine 2004, 170). In both examples, the melodic process can be interpreted as a movement away from and back toward such a point; however, the strategies through which this return is articulated differ. In the *sonata a ballu*, the final g is approached through a descending melodic line that clearly expresses its relationship with the dominant d: The melody moves from d toward g in a way that functions as an extended, melodic version of a dominant–tonic cadence, with the drone exploited as a common tone linking these two poles: the harmonic sequence of the first four bars delineates a I–V–V–I progression. The first bar emphasizes the notes b and d, both belonging to the tonic triad, although the root g is omitted. Bar 2 combines d and a, suggesting the dominant harmony, with only f♯ absent from the complete triad. In bar 3, the melody descends from c—the seventh of the dominant seventh chord—to a, before resolving to g in bar 4. This return to the tonic articulates the cadence that concludes the first melodic phrase. In the *zonaradikos*, the final a is established through a more explicitly directional phrasing, in which ascending and descending gestures contribute to a sense of progression toward closure.

The role of leaps further clarifies this distinction. As McAlpine observes, "the leap makes one note different to all the others" (McAlpine 2004, 169), highlighting how such gestures differentiate structurally significant pitches within a melodic context. In the Calabrian example, the initial leaps d–b and d–a articulate the role of the note d (replicated in the drone and positioned in the accented beat), as a primary melodic anchor within the pitch field, reinforcing its structural prominence. At the same time, these gestures establish its relational function, connecting it to the surrounding pitch areas associated with the tonic and dominant areas. In the Thracian example, by contrast, successive leaps (notably outlining the sequence c–b–a in the accented notes) can be interpreted as ornaments of a directional movement toward the final a.

These differing interpretations of the same pitch material can be directly related to the organological features of the instrument, particularly the tuning and functional use of the open strings. In both traditions, the instrument is tuned to g, d and a, yet the distribution of melodic roles across these strings leads to distinct modal outcomes. In the Calabrian case, the open-string pairings g–d and d–a point to different chordal configurations—respectively corresponding to a dominant and a tonic area— with the note d providing a stable drone that supports a pentachordal organization centered on g. In the Thracian case, by contrast, the tonal center is shifted to the upper string a, which assumes the role of tonic, while d is reinterpreted as the upper boundary of the a–b–c–d tetrachord. Within this framework, the g string functions as a subtonic with a structurally significant role in reinforcing the tonic a, particularly through cadential gestures moving from g to a. This behavior finds parallels in other modal systems: in Ottoman–Turkish *makam* practice, for instance in the *Uşşak makam*, the subtonic-to-tonic motion is a defining melodic feature, while similar functions can be observed in the Byzantine *protos echos* and in the second ecclesiastical (or first plagal) mode from the Latin *octoechos*.
The instrument thus does not merely provide a set of pitches, but actively shapes their hierarchy and functional interpretation, enabling different modal organizations to emerge from an otherwise comparable sonic material.

Conclusions and perspectives

Modality as an emergent and practice-based system

The comparative analysis of Calabrian and Thracian lira traditions highlights how modal organization emerges from a shared structural framework yet diverges in its internal logic. In both contexts, musical discourse is grounded in formulaic processes, limited pitch fields, and the close interaction between melody and drone. These common features point to a broadly shared Mediterranean approach to musical construction, in which repetition, variation, and embodied performance play a central role.
At the same time, the differences between the two traditions can be traced primarily to the nature of their scalar organization and to the varying influence of tonal thinking. The Thracian *zonaradikos* exhibits a clearly modal structure, articulated through a tetrachordal space and the functional use of the subtonic in relation to a central pitch. Its melodic development remains firmly within a modal logic, in which pitch relationships are defined by movement and hierarchy rather than harmonic implications. The Calabrian *sonu a ballu*, by contrast, presents a more hybrid configuration. While it retains core modal features—such as a pentachordal framework, formulaic organization, and micro-variation—it also incorporates elements associated with tonal thinking. In particular, the interaction between open strings introduces a chordal dimension, and the drone assumes a function analogous to that of a dominant, acting as a common tone linking different harmonic areas. Calabria thus blends modal and tonal characteristics within a single, coherent practice.
From this perspective, the divergence between Calabria and Thrace does not reflect a simple opposition between modality and tonality, but rather different positions along a continuum of musical organization. Within the limited scope of this analysis, modality thus emerges not as a fixed system of pitches, but as a flexible and adaptive form of musical thought, shaped by performance practice, instrumental configuration, and broader cultural processes.
Further research should expand the comparative scope to include a wider range of Mediterranean

repertoires, in order to identify both analogies and divergences within a broader cultural and musical continuum. Rather than framing these traditions through a binary opposition between "Western" and "Eastern" musical thought, future studies should adopt a relational perspective that accounts for historical exchanges, shared organological features, and common generative principles. Such an approach would make it possible to highlight processes of adaptation and hybridization along a continuum rather than rigid distinctions.

At the same time, given the nature of these musical traditions—grounded in embodiment, aural sensitivity, and memory—it is essential that research moves beyond the analysis of musical structures alone. Modal knowledge in these contexts is not only conceptual but enacted, emerging through the interaction between body, instrument, and sound. The study of such systems therefore requires not only analytical methods but also artistic research as a distinct methodological approach, grounded in practice and embodied knowledge, through which musical structures can be understood from within.

In this sense, musical instruments assume a central epistemological role. The lira, in particular, should be understood as a "textual object," in the sense that its tuning, string layout, and positional logic inscribe within its material configuration the musical knowledge required for its use. Rather than merely supporting performance, the instrument encodes relationships, hierarchies, and patterns that guide melodic organization and facilitate transmission in the absence of notation. By engaging both analytically and performatively with such instruments, it becomes possible to access different layers of musical understanding, revealing modality as a form of knowledge that is simultaneously conceptual, embodied, and materially embedded.

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Audiovisual material

Giuseppe Fragomeni playing the lira: https://youtu.be/tncjZh_BqMo?si=aefsjFlyTb1pHVGZ

Narratological and musical perspectives in "Ajkuna kján Omerin" (Ajkuna Weeps for Her Son Omer) – romance for voice (Soprano) and Piano by Edmond Buharaja

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Abstract

The objective of this study is the musical, textual, and semantic analysis of this romance composed by Buharaja in 2016 (published in 2017), which was inspired by the song of the same title from the Epic of the Kreshniks, a cycle of epic songs transmitted orally from Northern and Northwestern Albania, dating to the period between the 7th and 8th centuries. This song belongs to a cycle of epic compositions developed around the theme of the "frontier warriors" [the term kreshnik derives etymologically from the Serbo-Croatian kraishnik (from krajina – border region), meaning "frontier warrior"]. In its traditional (rhapsodic) version, the song is performed by a rhapsode who accompanies himself on the lahuta (a bowed, single-string instrument similar to the gusle), still widely used today both in Northern Albania and in the South Slavic regions. The aim of this study is to reflect on certain aspects that connect music not only with the text, but also with specific actantial, morphological, and semantic elements, which may confer upon the musical text the form of a scenographic narrative. The development of this reflection will follow these methodological stages:- The division of the work into sections and the determination of a formal scheme.- The identification of possible actantial elements (actants) present in the narrative and their role in the musical discourse, according to Greimas's theory of Structural Semantics.- The determination of metric relationships between music and text and the identification of distinctive rhythmic elements.- The determination of possible agogic, timbral, and dynamic elements that contribute to the dramatic character of the musical narrative.The expected conclusions aim to assess the author's intention in expressing the significant connections between music and text, and in reflecting its semantic and semiotic character.

Keywords

Edmond Buharaja, ajkuna, romance, epic of the kreshniks

Introduction

The Romance was composed by Edmond Buharaja in 2016 and is inspired by the homonymous song from the "Epic of the Kreshniks" (Eposi i Kreshnikëve), a body of epic songs of oral tradition from Northern and North-Western Albania. Buharaja argues that «…we may identify the principal thread of the most recent metamorphosis encompassed under the label 'Eposi Kreshnik', at least in its essential core, precisely in the initial victories and repulsions, and even in the counter-attacks or raids against the settlements of the new Slavic newcomers. From this perspective, the hypothetical period of the artistic transformation of the Albanian kreshnik narrative would be situated between the seventh and eighth centuries ».[1] The piece was subsequently published in 2017 as part of a collection of romances entitled "Albanian Romances" (Romanca Shqiptare).
Edmond Buharaja's contribution is not limited to the composition of the piece alone, but also extends into the field of historical and ethnological research, as illustrated in his work "Historiography of the Art of Sound in the Albanian World" (Volume I, published by the Academy of Sciences of Albania in 2024), in which the author devotes Chapter V (74 pages) to the "Epic of the Kreshniks", presenting comparisons, studies, ideas, and perspectives from a wide range of scholars through an extensive and well-documented bibliography.
This song belongs to a cycle of epic chants developed around the theme of the "frontier warriors" [the word kreshnik is etymologically derived from the Serbo-Croatian word krajišnik (from krajina – borderland), meaning "border guard/frontier warrior"]. Referring to Bernardin Palaj and Donat Kurti (2005, 9), Buharaja argues that …« as well as Maximilian Lambertz (1998, 5), emphasizes that the assertion that "The Songs of the Kreshniks are frontier songs" may be accepted; however, its etymological reasoning concerning the term "kreshnik" should be reconsidered, namely its derivation from the Serbo-Croatian krajišnik (from Krajina, 'borderland'), meaning "frontiersman" or "warrior on the frontier. The word "kreshnik" however begins with the syllable "kre" – meaning: "head; head" – and this may lead to a completely different etymological explanation of the term based on Albanian».[2]
From this perspective, the deeds of Albanian heroes (heronj shqiptarë) are narrated as they guard the boundary between the Albanian and Slavic worlds, in a land where various motifs and topoi typical of the Balkan area intertwine. In its traditional (rhapsodic) version, the song is performed by a rhapsode who accompanies himself with the lahuta, a single-string bowed instrument similar to the gusle, still widely present today both in Northern Albania and in the South Slavic regions[3]. Buharaja, in his monographic work Niceta i Remesiana -s, reflecting on the etymology of the name lahutë, maintains that: «It should not be forgotten—contrary to what Albanian organography believes and upholds—that the lute, from which the chordophone instruments must subsequently have derived, according to the lutenist Vincenzo Galilei, father of one of the greatest scientists of all time, Galileo Galilei, and one of the most influential members of the Camerata de' Bardi, was 'this most noble instrument,' brought from 'Pannonia under the name Lauto […] wishing thereby to signify its capacity for extreme sounds […] and, returning to the etymology of the lute, I would say that there were other opinions, namely that it was called lauto, meaning costly, marvelous, noble, and splendid'.

1 Buharaja, E. 2024, p. 197, Historiografia e artit të tingullit në botën shqiptare, Volumi I, 2024, f.197, referring to Maximilian Lambertz, 1998, p. 5.
2 Ibid., 2024, p. 198, referring to Bernardin Palajt and Donat Kurtit, 2005, p. 9.
3 Dizionario Enciclopedico Universale della Musica e dei Musicisti Vol. II, Lessico, Torino: UTET, 1988.

Here, the affinities—not only phonetic—between the designation Lauto and the geographical sphere to which Galilei refers, in relation to the lahutë or lauta of the Albanian-speaking mountainous universe, provide an altogether different orientation for the etymological explanation of the name of the cult instrument of Gheg heroic epic singing.» [4]

Ajkuna, who in the second song mourns the loss of her fourteen-year-old son Omer, killed by the Slavs, is the wife of the hero and warrior Mujo, lord of Jutbina (today Udbina, a small town near Zadar in Croatia). The tragedy of death permeates the entire piece and is present not only in the characters but also shapes and carves the environment: nature, trees, birdsong, and both sunlight and moonlight.

The text of the romance is structured in free verse, with heptasyllabic and hendecasyllabic lines and the version presented here refers to a text attributed to Mirash Gjoni, included in the edition entitled "Albanian Popular Poetry", edited by Ernest Koliqi (Scutari 1903 – Rome 1975), Albanian poet, writer and playwright.

He taught Albanian language and literature at La Sapienza University in Rome and is considered one of the founding fathers of modern Albanian poetry. Certainly, not all verses of the poetic narration are used in the romance.

The narrative content of the song may be summarized as follows: One day, when the light of the sun can no longer illuminate or warm the earth, Muji, a valiant warrior, buries his fourteen-year-old son Omer, who has fallen at the hands of his Slavic enemies. Upon returning home, his wife Ajkuna asks where their son is. The answer is tragic: Omer lies buried in the Yellow Valleys, small mountain hollows. The mother's pain erupts into a heartrending lament; she angrily curses the Moon — "may your brightness fade!" — guilty of having been a silent witness to the tragedy, incapable of warning her and thus allowing her to be buried beside her son. Ajkuna then heads toward the burial site and, upon arrival, sees that the ancient beech tree has stretched its most beautiful branch over the grave. With tears in her eyes, she addresses her son, imploring him to rise and greet his mother, while the birds suddenly fall silent. As her final wish, she commands her son to leave the "prison" that holds him, to speak to his mother, to go and play and cool himself in the streams, to chase the nymphs, for it will be the mother who watches over his grave.

Division of the work into sections and determination of a formal scheme. Determination of metric relationships between music and text. Identification of distinctive rhythmic elements, as well as possible agogic, timbral, and dynamic elements that contribute to the dramatic character of the musical narrative.

The score consists of 59 measures. The portions of text pertaining to indirect discourse are marked in yellow/purple, while those pertaining to direct discourse are marked in salmon/light blue. The two introductory measures are marked in red. The proportion between the measures corresponding to the two types of discourse is 2:1 (38 measures of direct discourse and 19 of indirect discourse), indicating structural regularity. The sectional division of the piece was carried out by taking into account the salient points of the narrative, which coincide with changes in texture and dynamics, especially in the piano part.

The piece is composed without tonal centers and with an intense use of chromaticism, often found in sequences of diminished second and major seventh chords.

4 Buharaja, E. "Niceta e Remesiana-s, teo – muzikozofia e tij në kulturën Niceane" published by the Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, 2019, p. 13, referring to Vincenzo Galilei 1581, p. 146, 147.

A particular use of the tritone is employed exclusively in passages related to direct discourse, conferring a sonic tension that closely reflects the dramatic intensity of the narrative. The predominant meter is 5/4, typical—along with other compound meters such as 5/8, 7/8, and 9/8—of the folkloric musical traditions of Northern Albania. The relationship between text and music is almost always syllabic and highly articulated.

The first section opens with a very brief piano introduction that, from an F♯ pedal in the bass, develops a diapason-like sonority, simulating the birth of daylight, which, according to the text, appears pale and without warmth. The pp–ppp dynamics emphasize this characteristic. The vocal part (indirect discourse) begins with an upbeat triplet and takes the form of a recitative. In the following three measures, through an alternation of duplets and triplets and an increase in dynamics to ff, Buharaja illustrates—without the use of accelerando—a growing state of anxiety and agitation in the words "Ç'far ka ba Gjeto Basho Muji ?" [5]

This is followed by spoken recitative that confirms the death and burial of Omer ("While on the mountain he buried his son"). The relationship between spoken text and musical text is syllabic in nature.

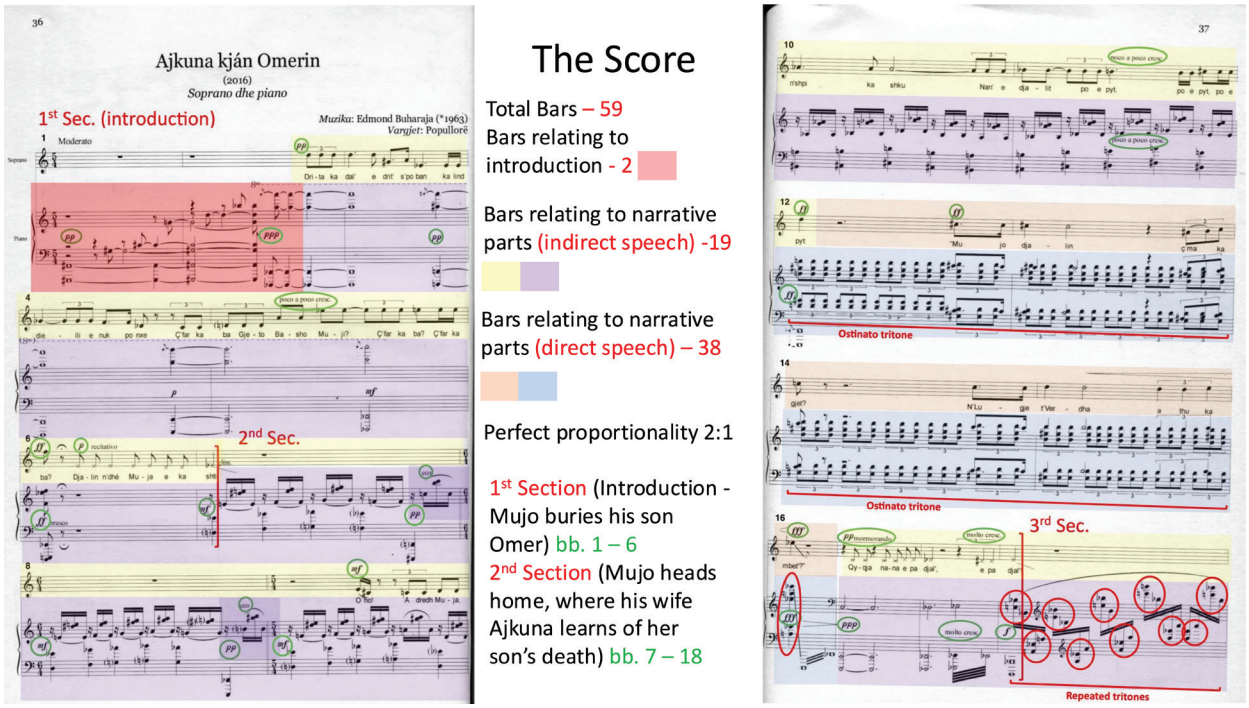

Figure 1.

The second section begins with Mujo's return home. Fear and irregular pacing are conveyed through the interruption of the 5/4 meter with the insertion of a single 6/4 measure and through the echoing of the final two quatrains in measures 7–8. The use of major seventh and minor second intervals in the piano's right hand, and the minor ninth in the left hand, heightens the anxiety of expectation, while the vocal tessitura remains unchanged.

5 "What did Gjeto Basho Muji ever do?" [trans. ed.].

Once again, Buharaja employs rhythmic figures and dynamics as elements of agitation, instead of accelerando, as Ajkuna prepares to ask her husband for news of their son. At measure 12, the discourse becomes direct: Ajkuna asks what has become of her son. The ff dynamics and the ostinato tritone triplets render the sonority dramatic, while the piano triples the vocal line, forcefully emphasizing each syllable. The text–music relationship remains syllabic, and the vocal tessitura retains its characteristics. The ff dynamic is reached at measure 16, where the mother comprehends the drama of her loss; subsequently, the spoken (murmured) recitative "Qyqja nana e pa djal' " [6] in pp indicates her profound sorrow.

The third section begins with a succession of repeated tritones introducing Ajkuna's words addressed to the Moon, the silent witness: "T'u shkimtë dita ty o mori han', që s'm'a çove at' nat' nji fjal', n'Lugje t'Verdha shpejt me dal', bashk me hy në vorr me djal'!" [7] Tremolos crowned with tritones maintain an extremely tense dramatic atmosphere.

The fourth section illustrates Ajkuna's arrival at her son's grave, and the discourse becomes indirect. The ancient beech has extended its most beautiful branch over the tomb, and as the mother's tears flow, the birds fall silent. The dynamics, ranging between p and ppp, suggest a momentary resignation, while the piano's right hand simulates—through trills—the birdsong that has ceased. At measure 31, approximately the midpoint of the piece, the dynamics reach pppp; after a prolonged solitary lament, a direct discourse begins through recitative and a passionate prayer in which the mother exhorts her son to rise and greet her. In this solitary and passionate lament, Buharaja introduces acciaccaturas—what he calls "melismatic configurations"—that simulate the rhapsodic singing accompanied by the lahuta.

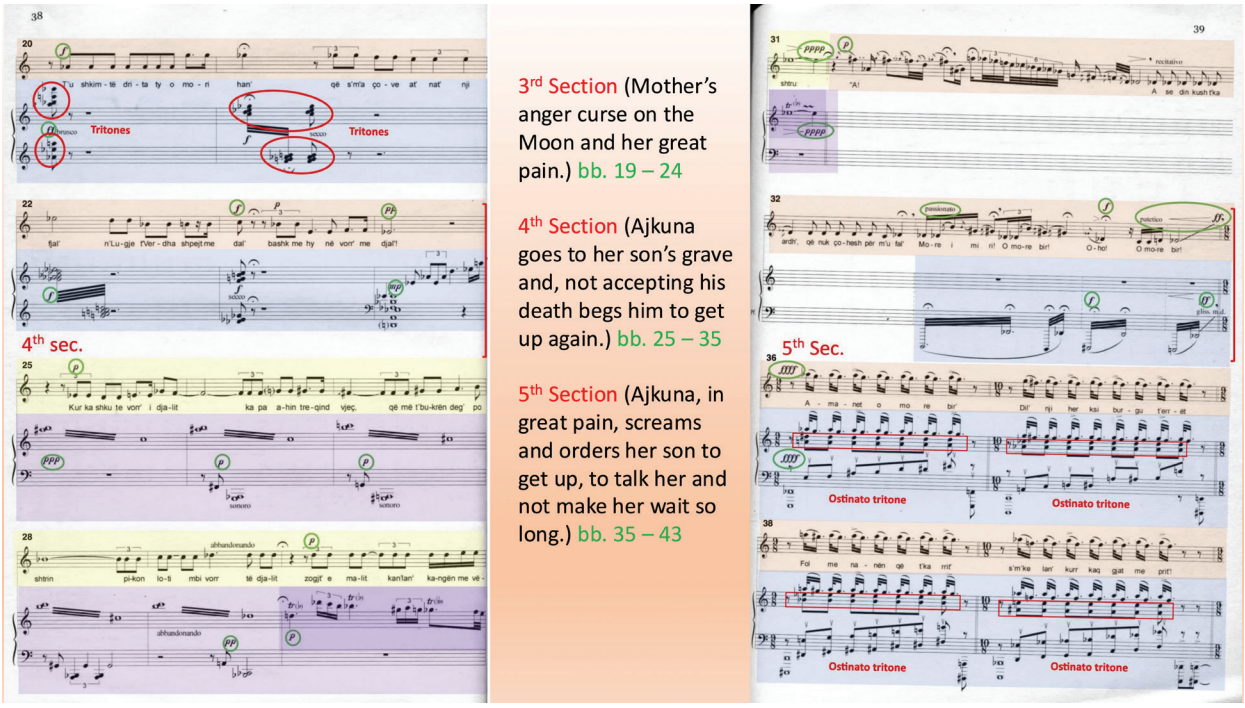

Figure 2.

6 "Wretched me! I am bereft of my son!". [trans. ed.].

7 "O Moon, may your splendor in the sky grow dim; why did you give no sign that night? I would have gone to the Yellow Valleys; with Omer I would now lie beneath the earth" [trans. ed.].

The fifth section, at measure 36, represents the apex of dramatic tension. The dynamics reach ffff, the highest point of the piece; until measure 40, the meter alternates in every measure between 9/8 and 10/8. An ostinato of tritones underlies a lament in minor seconds and dotted rhythms. The piano's right hand doubles the vocal line, further articulating each syllable of the text. Ajkuna addresses her final wish to her dead son: "Amanet o more bir', Dil nji her ksi burgu t'errët, fol me nanën që t'ka rrit', s'm'ke lan' kurr kaq gjat me prit'!" [8]. At measure 40, the vocal sighs are accompanied by repeated tritones which, while maintaining the preceding tension, lead at measure 41 to a momentary emotional equilibrium, where the meter shifts for the first time to 4/4 and the dynamics move to mf and then pp.

The sixth and final section is the longest and is introduced by the piano through a gradual intensification of an increasingly dense rhythm of triplets and repeated melodic tritones C–F♯–C, alternating between narrower and wider ranges, creating continuous tension. She urges him to go play, to cool himself in the waters of the streams, and to seek the mountain nymphs, for it will be she—the mother, now dead inside and devoid of any desire to live—who will watch over his grave.

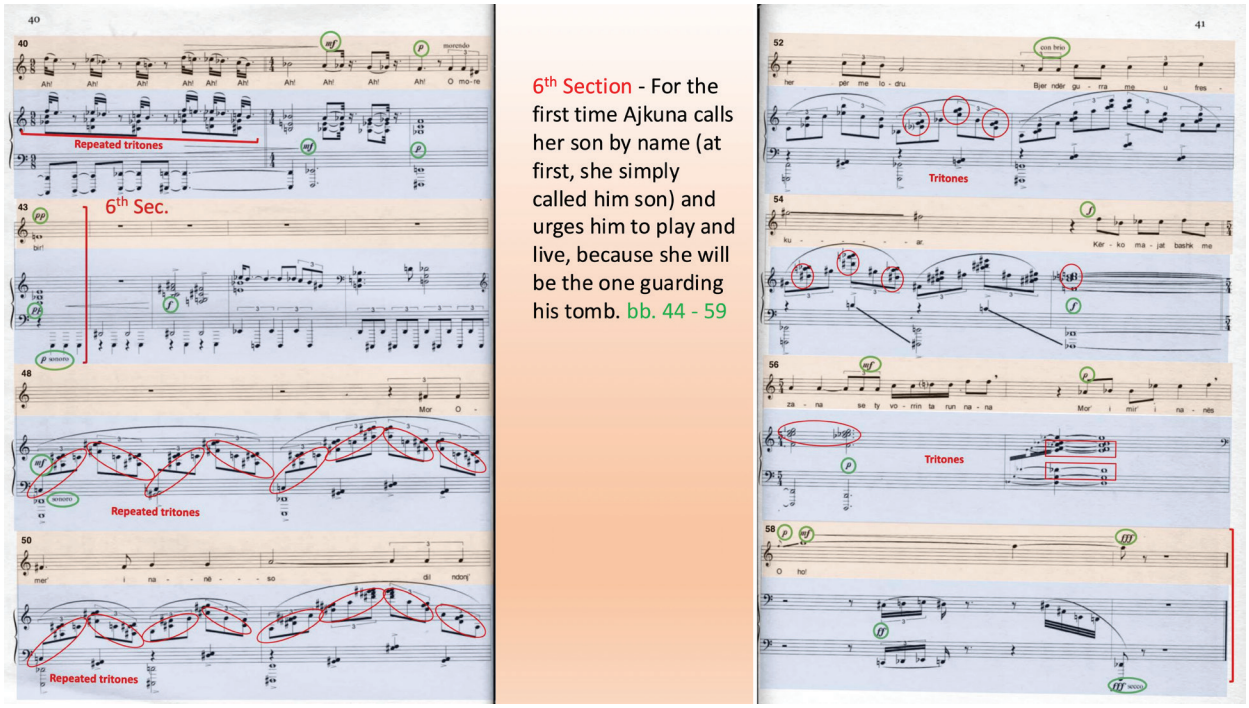

Figure 3.

Throughout the section, the 4/4 meter persists, signaling balance and regularity, which gives way to the initial 5/4 at measure 56 in the words "Se ty vorrin ta run nana" [9]. The return to 5/4 until the end of the piece marks the return of death, this time for the mother.

8 "Rise and throw your arms around my neck; you, delicate flower of my womb; leave this prison of darkness; speak, dear one, to the mother who raised you; never have you made me wait so long". [trans. ed.].

9 "While your mother, will stand guard by your grave". [trans. ed.]

Identification of possible actantial elements (actants) present in the narrative and their role in the musical discourse, according to Greimas's theory of Structural Semantics.

At this point, a proposal is presented for an analysis of the overall narrative (textual and musical) according to Algirdas J. Greimas's theory of the generative trajectory of narration. To achieve this, reference must be made to a table or grid divided into two parts: the semio-narrative structures and the discursive structures. Stefano Traini states that: "Working on the immanent level, Greimas thinks of a semantic system organized by levels of depth, and between these levels he hypothesizes a generative mechanism: it is therefore a question of thinking of deeper elements capable of generating more superficial elements according to conversion rules.
In these terms, Grimasian theory can be defined as a theory of the generation of meaning: at the deepest level there are elements of a logical-semantic type which are converted into more superficial semantic-syntatic levels, and then transformed through the mechanisms of enunciation in the discursive elements all in view of the manifestation at the moment of semiosis" [10]

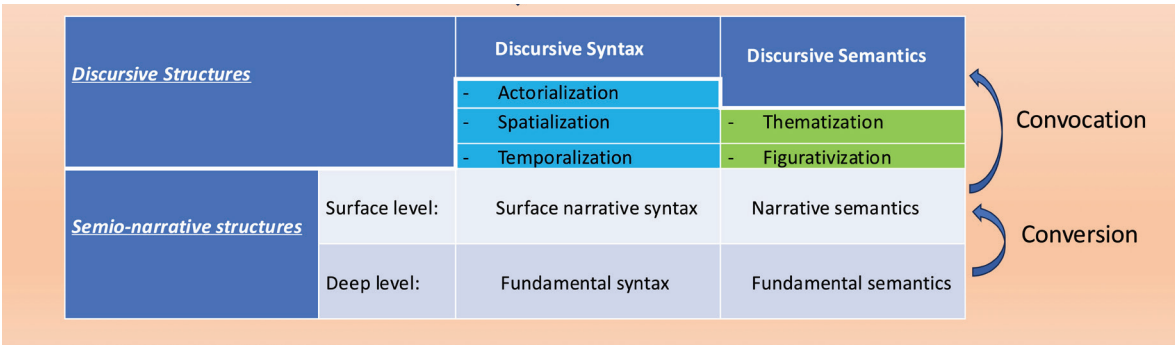

Figure 4. Table 1 The generative path

The semio-narrative structures are divided into two levels: a deep level, which concerns an abstract narrative vision of the text, and a surface level, which concerns a more concrete vision. It should be specified that the difference between the semantic and syntactic dimensions lies in the fact that the semantic dimension is static, whereas the syntactic dimension is dynamic. The passage from the deep level to the surface level within the semio-narrative structures is called Conversion, while the passage to the discursive structures is called Convocation. In this analytical proposal, the focus is limited almost exclusively to the level of semio-narrative structures, without moving to the more superficial level of discursive structures; consequently, the analysis begins with the Fundamental Semantics of the Deep Level.

10 Traini, S. Le due vie della Semiotica, teorie strutturali e interpretative, Milano: Bompiani, 2006, f. 125.

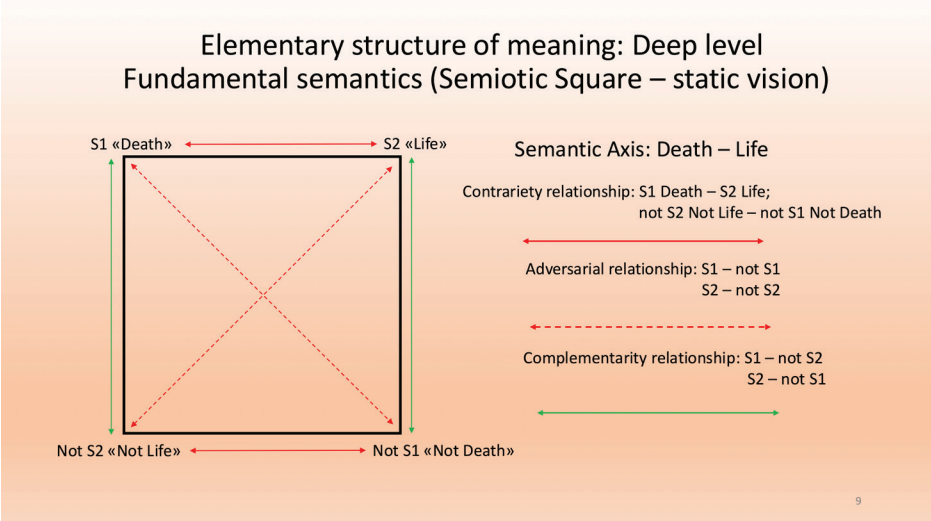

Figure 5. The semiotic square

Stefano Traini states that, «In developing the square as a deep articulation of semantics, Greimas draws inspiration from some of Lévi Strauss's studies [1958]. From a structural perspective, it is characterized by the search for constants, Lévi Strauss analyzes certain myths and finds that they reproduce themselves with the same characteristics in different regions of the world. Greimas takes up this idea of the underlying polarities and thinks of developing it in the logical articulation of the square which is placed at the deepest level of semantics»[11]

In this semiotic square, which represents the elementary structure of meaning, the upper corners show two opposing semantic categories: Death (S1) and Life (S2), linked by a relation of Contrariety. Below them are two additional opposing categories, S1 (non-Death) and S2 (non-Life), which can be considered intermediate, as they allow the description of situations not directly reducible to Life or Death. Such intermediate or transitional states are analytically useful for describing situations of this kind. The relation between Life and non-Life is called Contradiction (as is the relation between Death and non-Death), while the relations between Life and non-Death, and between Death and non-Life, are called Complementarity. In this specific narrative, the square represents a static and abstract vision, such as the coexistence of Omer's death with the life that still surrounds it.

11 Traini, S. Le due vie della Semiotica, teorie strutturali e interpretative, Milano: Bompiani, 2006, p. 130, 132, referring to Lévi-Strauss Claude, Anthropologie structurale, Plon, Paris, 1958.

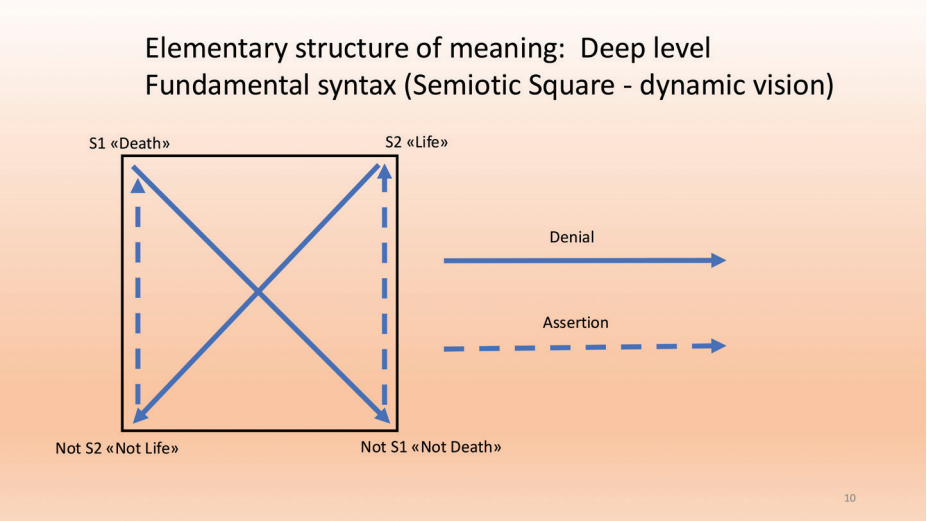

Figure 6. Elementary structure of meaning

In Fundamental Syntax, still within the deep and abstract level, the semiotic square is viewed in a more dynamic dimension through transitions from Death to non-Death or from Life to non-Life, which suggest possible narrative developments. Traini claims that « The model represented by the square is semantic (fundamental semantics), as it structures a semantic category and takes into account the articulation of meaning within a micro-universe of meaning (from this point of view it is therefore a taxonomic description); but it is also syntactic (fundamental syntax) as it allows operations: syntax in fact operates transformations on the basis of which a content is affirmed and another is denied. So if on the one hand we have a sort of semic taxonomy (static vision of the square), on the other we have the operations that a semiotic subject can do on these virtual positions (dynamic vision of the square)»[12] . By introducing connecting arrows, we observe embryonic narrative transitions. The transition Death → non-Death is called Negation, while the transition non-Death → Life is called Assertion. In the narrative context of the romance, these transitions will appear more concretely after moving to the surface level of narrative structures. Thus, in Fundamental Syntax, through the arrows, the semiotic square comes to life and begins to reveal the dynamics of a story. It is no longer a fixed taxonomy, but an initial dynamic form through which the story unfolds by moving from one value to another.

12 Traini, S. Le due vie della Semiotica, teorie strutturali e interpretative, Milano: Bompiani, 2006, p. 129, 130.

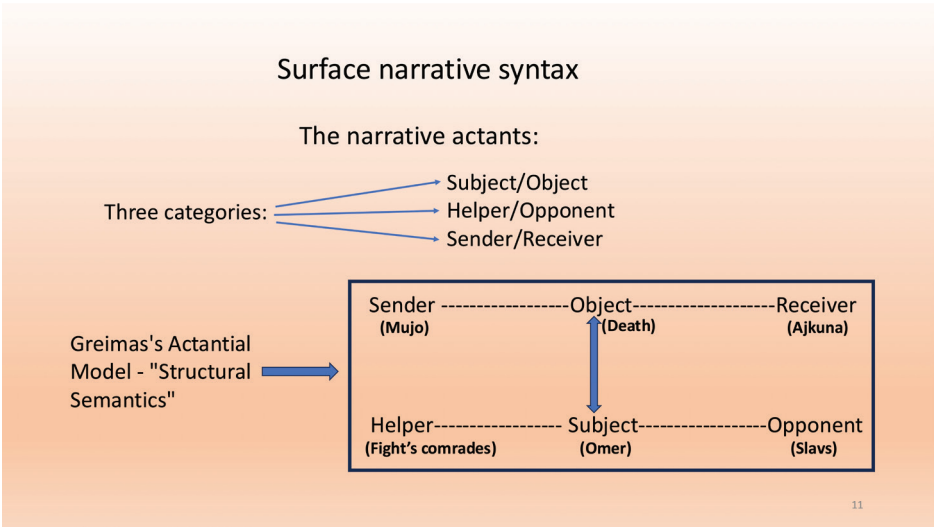

Figure 7. Surface narrative syntaxs

At the surface level of narrative structures, the story becomes more concrete. Roles and characters begin to emerge, and the narrative events are anthropomorphized.[13] In Structural Semantics, Greimas posits six narrative actants (syntactic roles), organized into three actantial categories: Subject/Object; Helper/Opponent; Sender/Receiver. The interaction among these actants is illustrated as follows: the Sender Muji transmits to the Receiver Ajkuna the Object, namely the death of the Subject Omer, who had as Opponents the Slavs who killed him and as Helpers his companions in arms, who were unable to prevent his death.

Greimas conceives textual syntax as a succession of elementary statements, which may be binary or ternary. In binary statements, the predicate creates a relationship between a Subject actant and an Object actant. In ternary statements, the predicate performs a function of transfer or communication: a first actant (the Sender D1) transfers or communicates a second actant (the Object O) to a third actant (the Receiver D2).

13 By the term "antropomorphization" one should understand the transition from the abstract notion of a role to human characters who begin to participate actively in the narrative events. [author's note].

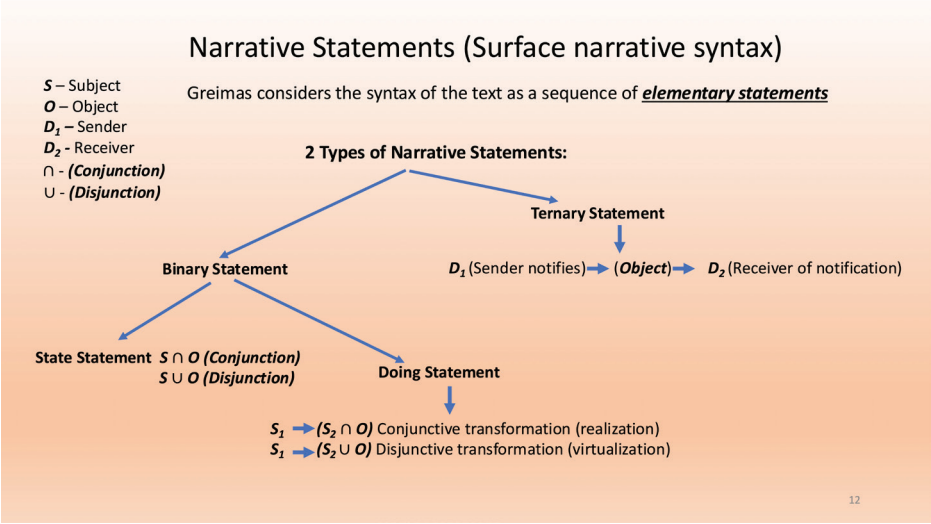

Figure 8. Narrative statements

This is the same transfer function observed in the previous slide concerning the actantial interaction model. Binary statements are of two types: states and actions. In statements of state, the Subject/Object relationship may be conjunctive or disjunctive. In action statements, the action of a Subject S1 may determine the relation of itself or of another Subject S2 to the Object in terms of conjunction or disjunction.

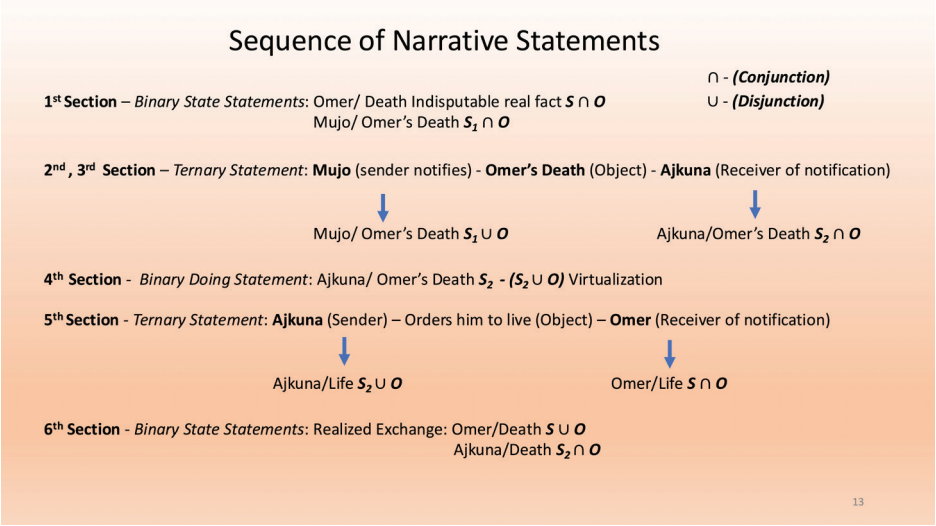

Figure 9. Sequence of narrative statements

In light of the foregoing, the sequence of narrative statements and actantial relations in the romance may be outlined as follows:

Section 1: through a statement of state, the Subject Omer (S) is conjoined with death; being an incontrovertible fact, this conjunction itself becomes an Object with respect to other Subjects. Muji (S1) is consequently conjoined with Omer's death.

Sections 2 and 3: through a ternary statement, Muji communicates Omer's death to his wife Ajkuna (S2). Through this action, Muji frees himself (according to Greimas) from the Object he transmits, while Ajkuna, upon receiving the news, painfully becomes conjoined with it and curses the Moon.

Section 4**:** Ajkuna moves toward her son's grave and, upon arrival, observing that nature itself (the ancient beech and the birds) is affected by the tragedy, reacts inversely to such immense pain and begins to imagine that her son can hear her. Through an action statement, by imagining that her son listens to her, she disjoins herself from her son's death in an operation that Greimas calls Virtualization.

Section 5: This section marks a transition: through a ternary statement, Ajkuna communicates her final wish by commanding her son to live (here, Life represents the Object). Omer imaginatively receives the notification. By the same property of the ternary statement, in commanding life to her son, Ajkuna disjoins herself from it, while the son becomes conjoined with it.

Section 6: In the final section, what Greimas calls a "realized exchange" occurs: as a consequence of what takes place in Section 5, with respect to the initial Object (Death), through a statement of state, Omer disjoins himself from his own death, while his mother Ajkuna becomes conjoined with it.

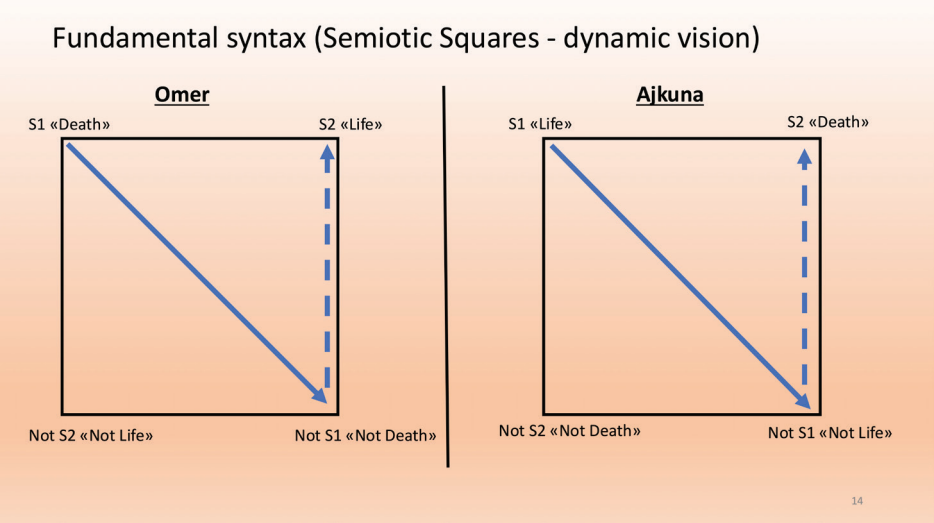

Figure 10. Fundamental syntax (Semiotic Squares – dynamic vision)

Returning briefly to the dynamic square of Fundamental Syntax, we observe inverse trajectories for Omer and Ajkuna. Omer moves from the state of Death to the state of non-Death through a Negation (in Sections 4 and 5), and subsequently to the state of Life through an Assertion (Section 6). Ajkuna, by contrast, follows the opposite path: starting from a state of Life, she moves to a state of non-Life through a Negation (Sections 4 and 5), and subsequently to a state of Death through an Assertion (Section 6).

Conclusions

In this summary graph, several data are presented: the sectional division of the piece, the dynamics of both voice and piano, changes in meter, the use of tritones indicating points of greatest tension, the placement of indirect and direct discourse, and the narrative trajectory corresponding to each section. Briefly, it may be observed that:
– The dynamics of voice and piano are almost always aligned.

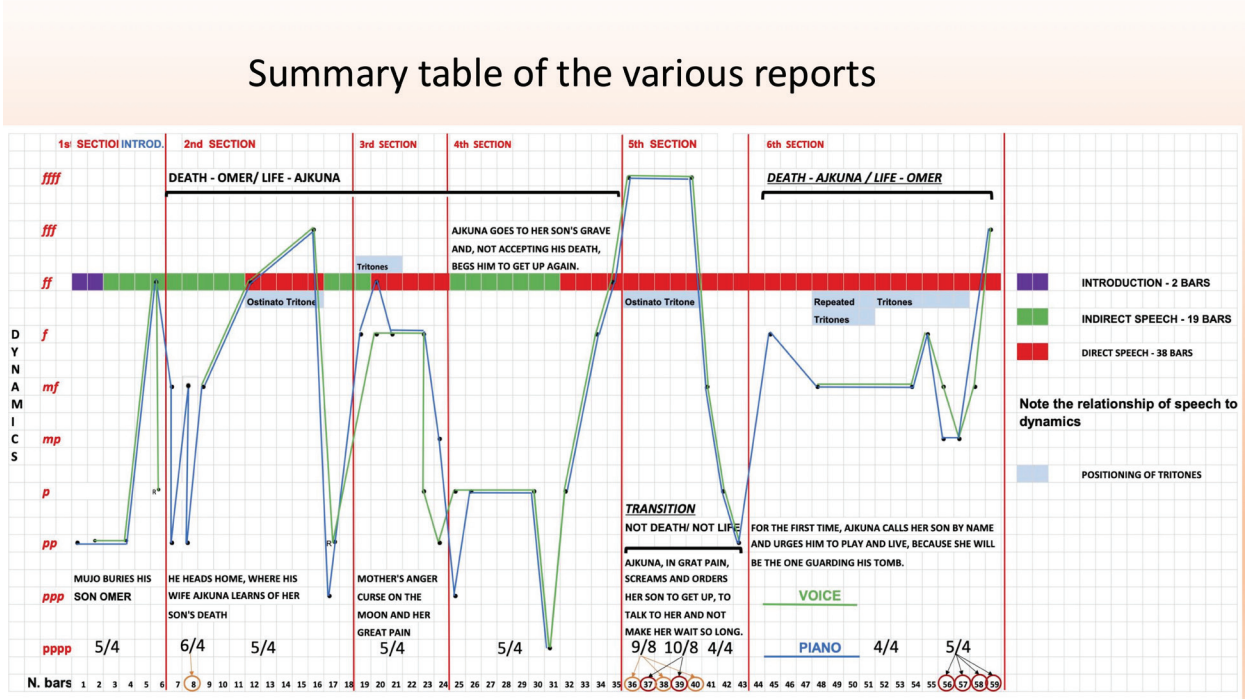

Figure 11. Summary table of the various reports[14]

– The apical dynamic moments (fff and ffff) correspond to (i) direct discourse, (ii) the use of tritones, (iii) the frequent metric changes in Section 5, (iv) the use of ternary statements, and, above all, (v) the most dramatic narrative moments.
– Intermediate dynamics generally correspond to indirect narrative discourse and to moments of transition or narrative redirection.
In conclusion, the piece presents itself as a logical and well-conceived structure. The relationship between text and music is extremely close, considering the predominantly syllabic setting of the vocal part and its doubling by the piano in the most dramatic moments. The dynamics closely follow the narrative and its dramatic charge, as does the use of meter, together with the tritone. The structure of the piece is fully compatible with the narrative structure and with the semio-narrative transitions; consequently, Greimas's semiotic method and perspective find broad and effective application in this work.

14 In the table, the model of the lines of the graph representing the level of dynamics was inspired by the model of the same graphs used by John Rink in the his analysis of other compositional works. [author's note].

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The architecture of the sign in Attila: A semiotic analysis of paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures in Early Verdi

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the musical dramaturgy of Attila (1846) through the lens of structuralist semiotics, with specific reference to the categories of syntagm and paradigm as formulated by Ferdinand de Saussure and subsequently transposed into the musicological field. The theoretical framework stems from the premise that the language of the young Verdi is not merely an aesthetic vehicle, but rather a system of signs in which meaning emerges from the tension between "selection" (the paradigmatic axis of timbral choices and harmonies) and "combination" (the syntagmatic axis of melodic linearity and its correspondence within the libretto's metrics). The analysis will focus on the deconstruction of the contrasting semiotic structures that define the opera, isolating the fundamental opposition between the Paradigm of Barbarism and the Paradigm of ancient Romanity. The former - characterized by dotted rhythms, deep brass sonorities, and harmonic instability (particularly in the "Dream" scene) -functions as an icon of disorder and threat; the latter - founded on solid diatonicism and a metrical regularity mirroring the verses of the librettist Solera - stands as a sign of moral and civil stability. It will be demonstrated how the Verdian syntagm, through the use of extreme interval leaps and monumental cadences, does not merely accompany the text but becomes its structural homologue, transforming the political conflict into a veritable collision between semiotic codes that are apparently difficult to relate directly. In this perspective, Attila emerges as a sonic architecture where the sign defines the identity of the myth even prior to the psychology of the character.

Keywords

Structuralist semiotics, verdian dramaturgy, syntagm and paradigm, structural opposition in music

Introduction

Inquiries into the dramaturgy of the early Italian nineteenth century have frequently traced the works of the young Verdi back to an instinctive *Risorgimento* workshop, thereby obscuring the structural density of scores such as that of *Attila* (1846). On the contrary, the formal solidity of this period answers to a precise necessity for dramatic expressiveness (Budden 2013: 127-143). Shifting the axis of inquiry onto textual organization, the score reveals a compelling logical system wherein meaning arises from the tension of its elements (Dahlhaus 2005: 114). Structuralist semiotics thus allows for the analysis of the operatic text as an organic network of signs (Noske 1990: 134), where each phonic choice receives value from its oppositional relationship with the others.
The opera articulates itself along two Saussurean coordinates: the axis of selection (paradigm), which governs the timbral, harmonic, and melodic options, and the axis of combination (syntagm), which presides over their chronological arrangement and interaction with Solera's libretto (de Saussure 2005: 147; Pagnini 2024: 7-28). Through this lens, the conflict between Huns and Romans elevates itself from narrative anecdote to a collision between divergent semiotic codes, wherein the sign defines the identity of the epic even before the psychology of the characters (De Van 1994: 100-107, 112).
The macrostructure of the drama is founded upon macro-signs that generate action through a spatial and temporal dialectic (Stefani 1987: 92-112). The polarization between barbarian and Roman translates into a linguistic opposition determined by closed forms, tonalities, and melodic lines (Bietti 2021: 37-54). Far from his future, mature introspection, the young Verdi works toward the clarity and immediate recognizability of dramatic functions through recurring formal elements (Nattiez 1987: 63). This rigor bestows a monumental force upon *Attila*: harmonic and rhythmic tensions become tiles of a semiotic mosaic wherein ideology and epic merge into pure signifying form, and music becomes thought objectified within self-sufficient structures (Brelet 1965: 387-408).

Comparison with the Bibliography

Establishing a semiotic approach applied to Verdian opera requires a preliminary engagement with the theoretical cruces of structuralist musicology and the critical literature dedicated to the composer. Jean-Jacques Nattiez clarified how the musical object can be understood exclusively through the examination of its threefold nature, divided among the poietic dimension of the creative act, the neutral level of the work understood as a material trace, and the esthesic dimension of reception (Nattiez 1989: 12-29, 45-52). In the case of *Attila*, the neutral level of the score offers itself as the ideal ground for a deconstruction that temporarily dispenses with the stated intentions of the author or the reactions of the audience, focusing instead on the immanent relationships of the text. The semiology of music must therefore necessarily measure itself against the concept of musical discourse as a web of formal relationships that refer to an immanent meaning (Nattiez 1987: 63).
This perspective finds a fundamental integration in Marcello Pagnini's studies on the relationship between language and music, where the structural homology between the verbal and the sonic code is theorized, defining a veritable proposal for a structuralist-semiotic investigation of the poetic-musical text (Pagnini 2024: 99-118). Pagnini invites us to consider the operatic text as a macro-system within which the libretto and the score do not merely overlap but rather activate a

process of mutual signification, wherein the rhythmic structures of the poetry bend or strengthen themselves within the articulation of the musical phrases. If general theoretical reflection rests upon these cornerstones, the understanding of Verdian practice is enriched when filtered through the insights of Gilles de Van. In his volume dedicated to Verdi's theater in music, the French scholar highlights the existence of a true grammatical dramaturgy based on the polarization of spaces, bodies, and sonic masses (De Van 1994: 112-116). De Van identifies within the early Verdi a tendency toward monumentality and the simplification of contrasts that represents the generating force of a new theatrical code. This vision dialogues closely with the analyses of Giovanni Bietti, who proposes a methodology of analytical listening focused on the structural nodes of form (Bietti 2021: 42-47). Bietti shows how the composer utilizes microscopic elements—for instance, a specific rhythmic figure or a recurring interval—to cement the macrostructural unity of the opera.

Extra-musicological semiotic literature offers categories to this model that can be effectively deployed in analysis. The theory of signs formulated by Umberto Eco provides the tools to decode the complex network of cultural and expressive references stratified within the score, insofar as the artwork configures itself as a highly structured semiotic system in which codes continuously overlap and redefine one another (Eco 1976: 24-39). Raymond Monelle highlights how linguistics and semiotics in music must necessarily avoid the risk of a literal translation of Saussurean concepts, focusing instead on the specificity of the musical sign, which unites an acoustic signifier with a cultural signified mediated by formal tradition (Monelle 1992: 85). The dimension of musical meaning is enriched through the theory of topoi and narrative structures proposed by Tarasti, according to whom music articulates itself through units of sense termed isotopies—paths of signification that orient the listening experience and structure the sonic drama (Tarasti 1994: 47). From a philological and evolutionary standpoint, Julian Budden's monumental examination of Verdi's works contextualizes *Attila* within the composer's aesthetic transition, highlighting the remarkable coherence of this opera with respect to the immediately preceding pieces (Budden 2013: 265).

Frits Noske extends structural inquiry by focusing on the examination of signifiers and signifieds in opera, isolating specific recurring elements, such as the motif of death or the sign of the sacred, which act as semantic vectors immanent to the score (Noske 1990: 134). Finally, Verdi's correspondence and the autobiography reconstructed from his letters offer testimony to the obsessive attention the author reserved for the arrangement of scenes, the choice of vocabulary, and the conciseness of the drama (Verdi 2001: 33-34, 50, 167, 306-307, 357-358). Archival documents confirm that Verdi constantly sought the *parola scenica* [scenic word], that is, that verbal expression capable of sculpting the dramatic situation and translating itself immediately into an unequivocal and explosive musical sign (Verdi 2001: 368-370, 444).

Applied Methodology

The methodological framework adopted applies the concepts of syntagm and paradigm to the Verdian score in order to isolate its segments and comprehend their relationships. The paradigmatic axis encompasses the entirety of available linguistic resources (timbral oppositions, harmonic transitions, models of expressive singing) from which the composer makes his choices. Conversely, the syntagmatic axis constitutes the temporal chain in which these elements combine, developing in a constant dialectic with the metrics and prosody of the literary text (Pagnini 2024: 33-59).

The semiotic analysis therefore intends to verify whether the music mirrors the verbal text or carries out its re-semantization through significant variances. By isolating the minimal units of signification, the «semiotemes», I have addressed the problem of how these aggregate into broader structures to generate meaning (Monelle 1992: 90). This approach demonstrates that the music does not simply describe a feeling, but rather functions as a diagram of dramatic tensions (Nattiez 1989: 118) and as thought organized within self-sufficient structures (Brelet 1965: 387-389). In *Attila*, the fundamental opposition articulates itself around the mutually exclusive dialectic between the Paradigm of Barbarism and the Paradigm of Romanitas – two inverse systems that guarantee maximum communicative clarity, alongside a non-conscious yet instinctual, and therefore immediate, perception within the spectator.
The methodology entails the decomposition of Scene 8 of Act One into the sections of the nineteenth-century melodramatic structure (*scena*, *cantabile*, transition, *cabaletta*), verifying for each one the dominance of or the collision between the two paradigms. The score thus reveals itself to be a logical map wherein the musical syntax becomes homologous to the dramaturgical one.

Semiotic Analysis of the Dream Scene

The universe of the Huns and of Attila manifests itself through a code characterized by an aggressive rhythmic articulation, where dotted rhythms, syncopations, and offbeats prevail. Regarding tone color, this block is associated with the dark and penetrating sonorities of the winds, with an extensive use of the heavy brass and percussion, while the harmonic horizon is marked by a distinct instability, with frequent modulations to distant keys and the use of diminished seventh chords. Conversely, the Paradigm of Romanitas expresses itself, as stated, through a solid diatonic conduct, melodies with a broad and regular profile, and a metric symmetry that reflects the composure of Solera's verses. The orchestral framework associated with the Roman or Christian characters privileges the transparency of the strings and the luminosity of the high woodwinds, symbols of a civil and moral order that resists the external threat.
The collision between these two distinct modalities of signification and connotation finds one of its moments of maximum semantic density in the scene and aria Number Eight of Act One, entitled in the score "Scena ed Aria," set at Attila's tent and centered on the protagonist's warning dream. This formal block offers itself as an ideal laboratory to verify the rhetorical-semiotic deconstruction of opposing musical structures. The piece opens with an orchestral prelude of very brief duration but extreme expressive density, which directly introduces the Scena, characterized by a declamation of striking modernity. In the first measures, the score shows the fluctuating key of D-flat minor, which functions as an unstable gravitational axis. The home key is not clearly asserted but is rather evoked through a tremolo of the low strings (cellos and double basses) on the fundamental pitch D-flat, while the chord is devoid of the third – a paradigmatic choice that evokes a sense of emptiness and ancestral terror. Above this sonic carpet, the melodic line of Attila's singing makes its entrance on the phrase "Uldino! Uldino!". The profile of the vocal line here is already shattered: Verdi dispenses with the square symmetries of traditional phraseology, opting for a succession of declamatory incises interrupted by rests of varying values (quarter, eighth, sixteenth notes), which musically transpose the labored breathing of the barbarian king upon awakening from a nightmare.
The harmonic design complicates itself immediately upon the arrival of the reminiscences of Attila's unease. The early Romantic *topos* of the vision and dream recounted to a confidant

shifts to F minor, a key traditionally associated in nineteenth-century semantics with mourning, anguish, and moral constraint. This tonal shift describes the passage from the real dimension to the dreamlike and frightening dimension of the supernatural. The brass, in particular the three trombones and the cimbasso, intervene with fortissimo chords alternating with sudden pianissimo markings, creating a dynamic instability that denies the regularity of the syntagmatic course. Attila's melodic line, in describing the phantom that blocks his path ("m'apparve immane un veglio"), abandons the flexibility of the recitative to rigidify into a series of repeated notes. These are four long incises that, starting from a D-flat4, progressively descend through middle C and B-flat3 to conclude on a lugubrious C3. To complete the perfect symmetry of this compositional modality, each incise is closed by an interval of a descending perfect fourth.

Figure 1: Verdi, Attila, Scene 8 Act First, block 66.

Here, Attila's voice unfolds into a progressive descending profile that mimics the fall of the divine voice, demonstrating how the musical syntagm becomes a structural homologue of the physical trajectory described by Solera's poetic text. Moreover, this static and ineluctable singing modality recalls the apparition of the Commendatore in the second act of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, just as it prepares the ground for the truly obsessive *leitmotif* that will torment Rigoletto at the memory of Monterone's curse a few years later.

Figure 2: Mozart, Don Giovanni, The Commendatore scene, Act Two.

Figure 3: Verdi, Rigoletto, Act First, number 3.

The transition toward the *Cantabile* passes, via a rapid C major seventh chord, into F major – an unexpected harmonic reversal that dissolves the dream, projecting Attila's epic and warrior spirit onto an unreal scenario of presumed victory. An obsessive pattern in the second violins and violas, featuring a dotted eighth-and-sixteenth rhythm, accompanies the character's increasingly animated singing. This «semio-rhythm» acts as the kinetic engine of the aria's entire first section, while the orchestral writing regains the driving syncopations typical of early Verdi's martial music. Attila rejects the terror of the dream, and this psychological refusal translates into a

fierce reaffirmation of his vocal conduct: the phrases lengthen, legato replaces staccato, and the intervallic leaps become more linear, as the melody proceeds primarily by stepwise motion and is enriched with quasi-bel canto embellishments.
This re-appropriation of the epic expressive code – which, in passing, mimics the expressive modalities of the Roman characters, as if Attila were momentarily conquered by that civilization and its way of speaking – culminates in the grandiose *Cabaletta*, the Allegro "Oltre quel limite," also in F major.

Figure 4: Verdi, Attila, Dream scene: Cabaletta, block 69.

The confirmation of the luminous, solid key of F major – ideal for transposing instruments and rich in natural harmonics for the brass – marks the definitive overcoming of the dream's F-minor darkness. The *Cabaletta* configures itself as a true monument to the formal epicism of the young Verdi (Dahlhaus 2005: 120). The orchestral accompaniment relies on the classic Italian march pattern, with cellos and double basses marking the downbeat while violins and violas execute the traditional accompaniment consisting of the motivic cell of an eighth rest followed by two sixteenth notes. Above this elementary yet overwhelming rhythmic structure, Attila's vocal line unfolds with a fierce, symmetrical squaring, articulated in regular periods of four-plus-four measures.
The evolution of the eighth-two sixteenths motoric styleme (or eighth rest plus two sixteenths) reflects the transition from eighteenth-century instrumental practice to Verdian dramaturgy. Originating as a keyboard formula in early *Viennese Classicism* and standardized by piano pedagogy, the module was partially adopted in melodramma by Bellini and Donizetti to provide mobility in the strings alongside the vocal accompaniment. Verdi achieves a qualitative leap: while in *Oberto* (1839) the figure retains a conventional function, by *Nabucco* (1842) the composer accentuates the downbeat, transforming the sixteenth notes into a percussive spring that generates an overwhelming drive. This rhythmic and material thickening of the orchestra is not confined to the pit, but imposes a radical metamorphosis on the vocal lines, specifically helping redefine the Bass figure. Historically bound to the static hierarchy of the Bellinian school

or the agility of Rossinian comic patter, the Bass undergoes an evolution with Verdi in the early 1840s, finding a significant milestone in *Attila*. The density of this orchestral styleme forces the low voice to double the motoric impulse, abandoning bel canto symmetries in favor of a mirrored vocalism of pure force, characterized by crescendo, controlled *puntature*, and repeated notes. Compared to contemporary scores (such as Oroveso in Bellini's *Norma*, 1831; Raimondo in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, 1835; or old Orazio in Mercadante's *Orazi e Curiazi*, from the same year, 1846), where the tension of the low register still unfolds within broad, unvirtuosic phrases, Verdi's writing in *Attila* subordinates the melodic line to the incisiveness of text and rhythm. This opens new horizons for the Bass role, liberating it from standard comic plots inherited from opera buffa, or from the repetitive tropes of the noble father or the frantic tyrant.

Verdi's solutions in *Attila* thus merge into a single formal magnetic field, rethinking the previous sonic balance between orchestra and stage, and anticipating the subtle, psychologically driven writing that would govern the characters of the *Trilogia Popolare*.

Conclusions and Further Research Developments

The application of structuralist semiotics to Attila allows for a reconsideration of the critical status of early Verdi, rescuing it from interpretations that see only a crude spontaneity or a lack of deep formal awareness. Score analysis demonstrates that the opera is sustained by an ironclad compositional logic, wherein macrotextual oppositions find a strict correspondence in choices of orchestration, harmony, and rhythm. The political and religious conflict animating the libretto is not merely illustrated by the music, but refounded by it through a dialectic of autonomous signs acting on the neutral level of the text. The contrast between the barbarian and Roman codes forms the deep framework of the drama, proving that Verdian theatrical efficacy lies in its ability to transform sonic material into a clear conceptual system, where the signifier aligns perfectly with the dramatic signified (Noske 1990: 142). From this perspective, early Verdi's score reveals an architectural complexity—meticulously codified in the first-act dream scene—that anticipates the logical rigor of the popular trilogy and late works.

This work, focused on deconstructing early Verdi's codes, is part of a long-term analytical project. Together with a study I have already dedicated to the topos of Verdian storms (Rocchi 2001, 2025), this research aims toward a systemic cataloging of the musical rhetoric through which Verdi expresses specific emotions or narrative situations, employing constant, analogous denotative and syntagmatic features across multiple operas. Such a development will verify whether the binary opposition between contrasting stylistic codes traced here represents a constant of the "galley years" or serves as a starting point for a progressive flexibilization of structures (Budden 2013: 282). The transition from a system of stark oppositions to a language based on ambiguity and continuous transition can be mapped using generative semiotics to complement this structuralist approach. The semiotic decoding of the operatic text thus confirms itself as an essential methodology for understanding the profound nature of musical dramaturgy, restoring centrality to the score through a compositional framework where music does not merely clothe the word, but rewrites it through complementary languages.

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