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— Dr. Vladimir Karadzhov

Editor in Chief

Assessment of Physical Components in Young Boys' Volleyball Players

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ABSTRACT

In collective sports such as volleyball, football, basketball among other technical elements that these kinds of sports contain parameters of other physical abilities are also required. The aim of this study was to find out the trend of improvement and differences in the age of anthropometric and physical abilities of boys who practice the sport of volleyball in Albania. Methods: Participants in this study were (N=120) volleyball players from three age categories as follows; 12-14 yrs. N=40, 14-16 yrs. N=40, and 16-18 yrs. N=40. Measurement for Body Weight (BW), Body Height (BH) and waist circumference. Physical abilities; push up test, curl-up test, standing long jump and vertical jump test. Results: Results from ANOVA analysis between three age categories show significant differences. Data of this study for jumping performance using vertical jump CMJ test between groups show (mean difference= 16.7 cm; Sig= 0.026). Data show (mean difference= 21.3 cm; Sig= 0.004) while for vertical jump Run up test between groups. Conclusion: Final results show a statistical increase between age categories for body weight, height and stranding long jump, vertical jump (CMJ and run-up) while for the other measurement of physical fitness components no significant improvement was to be found mostly in boys volleyball players with regard to age groups.

Keywords: boys, physical abilities, volleyball, anthropometric.

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INTRODUCTION

Team games require a comprehensive preparation of skills such as technical, tactical, physical and mental or psychological aspects. These skills are of particular importance to every player who plays but specifically, physical skills play a crucial role and affect the intelligence and tactics of the game because during these games a high physical performance is required. Volleyball is characterized by continuous jumps combined with blocks and spikes, numerous short-distance sprints as well as short agility movements that occur repeatedly throughout the match or training session (Viitasalo et al., 1987). The performance of these precise and structured movements depends on anthropometric parameters and physical abilities (Thissen-Milde and Mayhew, 1991). Physical condition is the degree of state of a person's body, be it in prime condition or not (Subekti et al., 2021). Therefore, volleyball players need to be in top physical condition to handle the physical demands of playing at a high level of competition. For this reason, players need to focus a lot to improve their physical capacity (aerobic and anaerobic) in order to have a high performance in the game, fast and long-term movements throughout the game both in offense and defence.

As a consequence, in youth ball sports, later-born and less mature players are strongly underrepresented, especially at the elite level (Hill B and Sotieiadou, 2016). This phenomenon is a well-documented selection bias and is known as the relative age effect (Musch and Grondin 2001). Nevertheless, a pilot study from (Papadopoulou et al., 2019) shows no quarter differences in anthropometric and physiological characteristics in youth volleyball female players. In contrast, late-born youth basketball players have a "double disadvantage" in body height compared to their peers (Rubajczyk et al., 2017). Also, players in volleyball need to have strength and power in high performance during the game (Tania and Eliane 2003). Especially in the game of volleyball, this type of physical ability is of great importance (Tsunawake et al., 2003) knowing that volleyball is a sport with short intervals and efficient physical loads combined with rest phases. The coaches who deal with the training are convinced and oriented quite accurately that there is a difference in performance for the anthropometric parameters and physical abilities according to gender and positions in the field with regard to volleyball (Jacque et al.2007), (Tim and Boris 2007), (Zoran et al.2006), (Zoran et al.2007), (Katic et al. 2006) and (Smith et al.1992) and in other team sports (Mohamed et al. 2009 and Reilly et al. 2000).

Bompa and Buzzichelli (2018) revealed that the advantages of training using Circuit are: a) improving various components of physical condition simultaneously in a relatively short time., b) each sportsman can train according to his own progress, c) each sport can correct his own progress, d) training is easy to supervise, e) saving time, because with a relatively short time it can accommodate many people practicing at once. The circuit should not be used as a test or to make comparisons between sportsmen. Comparing sportsmen is unfair, because of the speed of performance. Instead, achievements need to be only compared to the abilities of previous sportsmen (Ikenna, et al., 2020).

The aim of this study was to find out the trend of improvement and differences with the age of anthropometric and physical abilities of boys' volleyball players in Albania.

MATERIALS & METHODS

Participants in this study were (N=120) volleyball players from three age categories as follows; (12-14 yrs.) No.40, (14-16 yrs.) No. 40, and (16-18 yrs.) No.40. Measurement for anthropometrics Body Weight (BW), Body Height (BH) and Waist Circumference (WC) and physical abilities (push up test, curl-up test, standing long jump and vertical test) were assessed. Measurements were done in Tirana which is the capital city of Albania.

Protocols of the test

Body weight and height; Weight- Players were asked to remove their footwear (shoes, slippers, sandals etc.) and socks and step onto a scale stadiometer. It was recorded the weight measurement in kilogram. Height- Players were asked to remove their footwear (shoes, slippers, sandals etc.) and socks and step onto a scale stadiometer. They were asked to stand on the board facing the coach and also were asked to stand with feet together and heels against the backboard. It was recorded the height measurement was in centimetres.

Circumference Waist (CW); <https://www.topendsports.com/testing/tests/girth-waist.htm> the measurement was taken without clothing, that is, directly over the skin. The measurement was taken at the end of a normal expiration, with the arms relaxed at the sides and under the midline of the participant's armpit, at the midpoint between the lower part of the last rib and the top of the hip.

Push up test; <https://www.topendsports.com/testing/tests/push-up.htm> . Push up test measures upper body strength and endurance. A standard push-up begins with the hands and toes touching the floor, the body and legs in a straight line, feet slightly apart, the arms at shoulder-width apart, extended and at a right angle to the body. The time performed at maximal was 30 seconds.

Curl up test; <https://www.topendsports.com/testing/tests/curl-up-partial.htm> . Curl-Up test measures abdominal muscular strength & endurance. The curl-up abdominal fitness test requires the subjects to perform as many curl-ups as possible for 30 seconds.

Standing long jump test (SLJ); <https://www.topendsports.com/testing/tests/longjump.htm> the volleyball player's place their feet over the edge of the sandpit, crouches down and using the arms and legs jump horizontally as far as possible landing with both feet into the sandpit. The coach measures and records the distance from the edge of the sandpit to the nearest impression made by the athlete in the sandpit. The players repeat the test 3 times

Vertical test CMJ and run-up; <https://www.topendsports.com/testing/tests/vertical-jump-runup.htm> CMJ- The countermovement jump (CMJ) is a simple, practical, valid, and very reliable measure of lower-body power. (Sargent Jump, Vertical Leap). Arm-Swing: The player must keep their hands on the hips throughout the test. In which case, the coach must also pay strict attention to the player's hands to ensure they are not using them to press additional force through their legs. During the flight: During their time spent in the air, it is essential that the player maintain extension in the hip, knee, and ankle joints to prevent them from achieving any additional flight time by bending their legs (Markovic et al.2004) and (Glatthorn et al. 2011). The player must perform a minimum of three jumps so that performance averages can be calculated. Run up; the coach decides before testing to include the use of the arm-swing and steps.

Statistical Analysis

ANOVA is a statistical analysis for testing whether there is no significant difference between two or more group's means. This study used one-way ANOVA to investigate the significant difference by age groups for volleyball boys' players. We also used the multiple comparisons statistic - LSD post hoc analysis showed results for variable measures in this study. After collecting field test data, it was used SPSS version 23, at $p \leq 0.05$ level

RESULTS

Data from table 1 show descriptive statistics (mean, Std. Dev.) for anthropometric variables for the three age categories group with regard to volleyball boys. Participants in this study were (No.120) volleyball players from three age categories as follows; (12-14 yrs.) No.40, (14-16 yrs.) No. 40, and (16-18 yrs.) No.40. Descriptive mean data are shown for body height, body weight and waist circumference.

Table1. Descriptive statistics for anthropometric

	Subjects	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Body Height	(12-14)	40	148.6	15.4
	(14-16)	40	160.2	7.3
	(16-18)	40	166.5	7.4
	Total	120	158.8	12.8
Body Weight	(12-14)	40	45.1	14.0
	(14-16)	40	55.2	8.7
	(16-18)	40	64.7	13.0
	Total	120	55.4	14.4
CW	(12-14)	40	67.0	9.6
	(14-16)	40	66.6	6.9
	(16-18)	40	72.9	9.9
	Total	120	69.0	9.3

Data from table 2 show descriptive statistics (mean, Std. Dev.) for physical abilities variables for the three age categories group with regard to volleyball boys. Descriptive mean data are shown for Push



up Test (strength upper body); curl up test (strength core body) and standing long jump test (explosive power lower limbs).

Table2. Descriptive statistics for physical abilities

	Subjects	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Push ups 30s	(12-14)	40	3.6	3.8
	(14-16)	40	6.4	4.2
	(16-18)	40	7.3	6.0
	Total	120	4.9	4.5
Curl up 30s	(12-14)	40	18.8	4.0
	(14-16)	40	20.6	3.6
	(16-18)	40	21.7	3.3
	Total	120	19.7	3.9
SLJ	(12-14)	40	125.2	24.5
	(14-16)	40	161.2	23.1
	(16-18)	40	178.9	17.9
	Total	120	156.2	31.1

Data from table 3 show descriptive statistics (mean, Std. Dev.) for physical abilities variables for the three age categories group with regard to volleyball boys. Descriptive mean data are shown for vertical jump CMJ test (strength lower body limbs), vertical jump Run up test (strength lower body limbs).

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for vertical jump CMJ test.

	Subjects	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
CMJ	(12-14)	40	216.6	26.7
	(14-16)	40	233.3	26.6
	(16-18)	40	254.7	18.8
	Total	120	235.8	28.5
Vertical Jump Run Up	(12-14)	40	218.1	27.1
	(14-16)	40	237.7	27.0
	(16-18)	40	260.0	18.8
	Total	120	239.5	29.6

Data from table 4 show comparison data analysis (ANOVA) for anthropometric variables between the three age categories group with regard to volleyball boys. Comparison data between groups shown for body height (F= 16.4; Sig= 0.000), body weight (F= 14.7; Sig= 0.000), and waist circumference (F= 3.7; Sig= 0.031).

Table 4 Comparison data analysis (ANOVA)

	ANOVA	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
BH	Between Groups	3648.0	2	1824.0	16.4	0.000
	Within Groups	7122.4	64	111.3		
	Total	10770.4	66			
BW	Between Groups	4326.3	2	2163.2	14.7	0.000
	Within Groups	9427.6	64	147.3		
	Total	13753.9	66			
WC	Between Groups	583.8	2	291.9	3.7	0.031
	Within Groups	5084.1	64	79.4		
	Total	5667.9	66			



Data analysis from (ANOVA) for physical variables between the three age categories group with regard to volleyball boys, comparison data between groups shown for push up test ($F= 2.5$; $Sig= 0.097$), curl up test ($F= 1.7$; $Sig= 0.204$), and standing long jump test ($F= 34.5$; $Sig= 0.000$). Data from analysis (ANOVA) for physical variables between the three age categories group with regard to volleyball boys, comparison data between groups shown for vertical jump CMJ test ($F= 14.1$; $Sig= 0.000$), vertical jump Run up test ($F= 16.6$; $Sig= 0.000$). According to Multiple Comparisons- post hoc analysis (LSD) for anthropometric variables between the three age categories group with regard to volleyball boys, comparison data for body height between groups 12-14 vs.

The group 14-16 years show (mean difference= 11.5 cm; $Sig= 0.001$). The group 16-18 data show (mean difference= 6.3 cm; $Sig= 0.045$). Comparison data for body weight between groups 12-14 years is different group 14-16 show (mean difference= 10.1 kg; $Sig= 0.008$). Group 16-18 years data show (mean difference= 9.4 kg; $Sig= 0.010$). Comparison data for waist circumference between groups 12-14 and 14-16 show (mean difference= 0.4 cm; $Sig= 0.895$) while for 16-18 years data show (mean difference= 6.3 cm; $Sig= 0.019$). While the data of Multiple Comparisons- post hoc analysis (LSD) for physical variables between the three age categories group with regard to volleyball boys, comparison data for push up test between groups 12-16 show (mean difference= 2.9 counts; $Sig= 0.105$) while for 16-18 years data show (mean difference= 0.8 counts; $Sig= 0.699$). Comparison data for curl up test between groups 12-16 years show (mean difference= 1.7 counts; $Sig= 0.245$) while for 16-18 data show (mean difference= 1.1 counts; $Sig= 0.583$). Comparison data for standing long jump test between groups show (mean difference= 36 cm; $Sig= 0.000$). Data from Multiple Comparisons- post hoc analysis (LSD) for physical variables between the three age categories group with regard to volleyball boys. Comparison data for vertical jump CMJ test between groups 12-14 years show (mean difference= 16.7 cm; $Sig= 0.026$) while for 14-16 years and group 16-18 years data show (mean Difference = 21.3 cm; $Sig= 0.004$). Comparison data for vertical jump Run up test between groups 12-14 years show (mean difference= 19.7 cm; $Sig= 0.010$) while for 14-16 years and 16-18 years group data show (mean difference= 22.3 cm; $Sig= 0.003$).

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the differences between the 3 age groups for boys' volleyball players for anthropometric parameters and physical fitness components. Results from ANOVA analysis between three age categories show significant differences. Comparison data for body height between groups 12-14 and 14-16 -years show (mean difference= 11.5 cm; $Sig= 0.001$) while for 14-16 and 16-18 - years data show (mean difference= 6.3 cm; $Sig= 0.045$). The findings of this study are in line with the results of (Tessutti et al. 2019) which found significant differences for body height but results showed and differences for standing long jump where players +17 years old performed better than -14 years old. Data from this study for body weight between groups 12-14 and 14-16-years group show (mean difference= 10.1 kg; $Sig= 0.008$) while for 14-16 -and 16-18 years group data show (mean difference= 9.4 kg; $Sig= 0.010$). Comparison data for waist circumference between groups 14-16 years group show (mean difference= 0.4 cm; $Sig= 0.895$) while for 16-18 years group data show (mean difference= 6.3 cm; $Sig= 0.019$). Other data results from (Pantelis et al. 2015) showed that anthropometric parameters are age dependent but also significant differences were found between these 2 age categories which showed that physical performance seems to be dependent on the playing positions.

Data results from this study for strength using push up test between groups (mean difference= 2.9 counts; $Sig= 0.105$) while for 16-18 years group data show (mean difference= 0.8 counts; $Sig= 0.699$). Finding from different studies (Marques et al. 2009), (Seits et al. 2014) and (Hegedus et al. 2015) showed that significant differences in fitness parameters were found between game positions in a wide range of sports.

Comparison data of this study for the core strength using curl up test between groups 12-14 and 14-16- years show (mean difference= 1.7 counts; $Sig= 0.245$) while for 14-16 and 16-18-years data show (mean difference= 1.1 counts; $Sig= 0.583$) while for standing long jump test between groups 12-14 and 14-16 years show (mean difference= 36 cm; $Sig= 0.000$) while for 14-16 and 16-18 years data show (mean difference= 17.7 cm; $Sig= 0.008$).

Data of this study for jumping performance using vertical jump CMJ test between groups 12-14 and 14-16- years show (mean difference= 16.7 cm; Sig= 0.026) while for 14-16 and 16-18-years data show (mean difference= 21.3 cm; Sig= 0.004) while for vertical jump Run up test between groups. Also, most studies reveal that physical and physiological characteristics between playing positions in boys' volleyball players are age dependent (Miclic et al. 2017), (Paz et al. 2017). This study has limitations with regards in the sampling number of boys' volleyball players which is justified for not having sufficient funds. In the best interest of the study, it would be good if other teams were involved from different cities of Albania. Suggestions for other studies we recommend in comparing data by positions in the field.

Final results show statistical increase between age categories for body weight, height and stranding long jump, vertical jump (CMJ and run up) while for the other measurement of physical fitness components no significant improvement was found mostly in boys' volleyball players with regard to age groups. Physical fitness abilities, mostly jumping and strength performance enable good performance for the spike and the block, as well as higher contact with the ball above the net (Paz Ga et al. 2017).

CONCLUSION

The final results show a statistical increase between age categories for body weight, height and stranding long jump, vertical jump (CMJ and run-up) while for the other measurement of physical fitness components no significant improvement was found mostly in boys' volleyball players with regard to age groups. Results showed that anthropometric parameters are age-dependent. This study has limitations with regards to the sampling number of boys' volleyball players which is justified for not having sufficient funds. In the best interest of the study, it would be good if other teams were involved from different cities of Albania. Suggestions for other studies we recommend in comparing data by positions in the field.

Declaration by Authors

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Dark Tourism in Bulgaria - A Conceptual Guidebook

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the phenomenon of dark tourism in Bulgaria, a niche tourism sector that focuses on sites associated with tragedy, death, and the macabre. The author proposes a general classification of dark tourism sites, offering a framework to understand this unique form of tourism. The study further introduces the first exemplar guide to dark tourism in Bulgaria, presenting a comprehensive list of site based on the author's extensive research. These include locations tied to Bulgaria's turbulent history, such as abandoned Communist-era structures, post-war labor camps, and sites of cultural mythology. Visualizations of key destinations enhance the analysis, showcasing their significance and potential for tourism development. A detailed literature review situates Bulgaria's dark tourism potential within global and regional contexts, identifying gaps and opportunities for sustainable growth. This study aims to stimulate further research and establish Bulgaria as a notable destination for dark tourism enthusiasts.

Keywords: *Dark tourism, Thanatourism, Disaster, Cultural Heritage, Guidebook*

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism has always been about exploring the unknown, whether it be distant cultures, breathtaking landscapes, or historical landmarks. However, in recent years, a growing trend has emerged that draws travelers to places connected with tragedy, mystery, and the macabre. This phenomenon, known as dark tourism, caters to a curiosity for the unconventional and the deeply human stories tied to these sites. It offers a unique opportunity to reflect on history, human resilience, and sometimes, the darker aspects of society.

What is Dark Tourism?

Dark tourism refers to the practice of visiting places associated with death, tragedy, or the macabre. This form of tourism attracts people who are intrigued by the history, mystery, and emotional resonance of such locations. Popular examples globally include cemeteries, former concentration camps, sites of historical disasters, abandoned military bases, and locations tied to famous crimes or tragedies. The phenomenon is growing in popularity as tourists seek unique and unconventional experiences that go beyond traditional sightseeing.

Dark tourism consumers are often driven by a desire for adrenaline and strong emotions, particularly feelings of horror, fear, and excitement. These individuals possess a strong sense of curiosity and an adventurous spirit, often seeking to test their own limits.

They are drawn to the unknown and the unconventional, looking for experiences that challenge their perspectives and leave a lasting impression.

Dark Tourism in Bulgaria

Bulgaria offers a rich variety of locations that could appeal to dark tourism enthusiasts. The country's turbulent history, spanning ancient times, the Ottoman period, and the Communist regime, has left behind numerous sites with dark or mysterious associations. Some of these include the haunting Buzludzha Monument, the remnants of the Belene concentration camp, and abandoned military structures scattered across the country. Additionally, Bulgaria's natural landscape hosts eerie caves, underground tunnels, and abandoned industrial sites that further enrich its potential for dark tourism.

Aim and Tasks of the Article

The primary aim of this article is to explore the potential for dark tourism in Bulgaria by identifying and presenting notable sites that fit within this niche. Specific tasks include:

- Conducting a review of existing possibilities for dark tourism in Bulgaria.
- Identifying and describing significant locations that could attract tourists interested in dark tourism.
- Proposing the creation of a map highlighting dark tourism sites in Bulgaria.

This article aims to serve as a starting point for further research and to provide insights into how Bulgaria can capitalize on its untapped dark tourism potential.

Dark tourism not only offers unique and unconventional travel experiences but also provides an opportunity to reflect on history, human behavior, and the resilience of societies. By exploring Bulgaria's potential in this niche, tour operators can uncover new ways to attract adventurous travelers while preserving and promoting the stories tied to these hauntingly fascinating locations. This article sets the stage for understanding and developing dark tourism as a meaningful and sustainable part of Bulgaria's tourism landscape.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

The research methodology for this study combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to ensure a comprehensive understanding of dark tourism in Bulgaria. The methods employed are described below:

Data Selection and Analysis

The process of data selection was fundamental to identifying objects of interest that align with the concept of dark tourism. This step involved reviewing academic literature, historical documents, and existing studies on dark tourism to understand global and local trends. Potential dark tourism sites were identified through field research, media reports, and local accounts. Selection criteria, such as historical significance, emotional resonance, or association with tragedy, were applied to ensure the relevance of each site. This careful selection forms the foundation of the study, ensuring that the included sites genuinely reflect the diversity and richness of Bulgaria's dark tourism potential.

The collected data underwent thorough analysis to extract meaningful insights and patterns. Sites were grouped into categories based on shared characteristics, such as type (e.g., post-Communist structures, cemeteries, or natural landmarks) and thematic connections (e.g., mythology, political history, or disaster sites).

The historical and cultural value of each site was assessed to understand its potential appeal to dark tourism audiences. Additionally, gaps in existing literature were identified, and lesser-known sites were explored to enrich the study's scope. The analysis not only highlighted the diversity of dark tourism in Bulgaria but also revealed untapped opportunities for development and promotion.

Data Visualization

To enhance understanding and accessibility, the research findings were visualized through a variety of mediums. Graphs and charts were created to present the General Classification of Dark Tourism Sites (Fig. 1), offering a clear overview of the categories and subcategories of sites. Photographs and illustrations were included to showcase key sites, emphasizing their unique features and potential appeal to tourists. Maps were developed to highlight the geographical distribution of dark tourism sites, helping readers and potential tourists plan their visits. This visual approach not only aids comprehension but also engages readers by providing a vivid representation of Bulgaria's dark tourism landscape.

Conceptualization

The final stage of the methodology involved conceptualizing a Dark Tourism Guide for Bulgaria, which is visually represented in Figure 2. The guide showcases an exemplar list of dark tourism sites across the country, categorized by type and significance. It serves as a resource for potential tourists, researchers, and tourism stakeholders, offering a practical starting point for exploring Bulgaria's dark tourism potential. By combining conceptualization with practical insights, the guide bridges the gap between academic research and real-world application, positioning Bulgaria as a compelling destination for dark tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dark tourism, as a niche sector within the broader tourism industry, has garnered significant academic and public interest over the past three decades. Defined by its focus on sites associated with death, tragedy, and the macabre, this phenomenon reflects a deep human curiosity about mortality and history. This section reviews key literature on dark tourism, addressing its definitions, typologies, psychological dimensions, and global trends. Furthermore, it highlights the potential for developing dark tourism in Bulgaria, a country rich in history and cultural heritage, while identifying opportunities for innovation and challenges in sustainable development.

Dark Tourism: Definition and Scope

Dark tourism, also known as thanatourism, refers to visiting sites associated with death, tragedy, or suffering. The term gained prominence with Foley and Lennon (2000), who highlighted the commercialization of death through tourism, linking it to modern media and collective memory. Stone (2006) expanded on this concept by introducing the "dark tourism spectrum," which categorizes sites by the degree of darkness, from lighter, entertainment-focused attractions to somber, educational locations. This phenomenon encompasses a wide range of sites, such as historical atrocity locations (e.g., Auschwitz), disaster zones (e.g., Chernobyl), and mythical or paranormal sites (e.g., Dracula's Castle) (Sharpley & Stone, 2009; Wight & Lennon, 2007). Hartmann (2014) argues that managing such sites often involves navigating ethical dilemmas, particularly regarding commodification and respect for affected communities.

Psychological Motivations and Emotional Engagement

Visitor motivations in dark tourism are diverse, often blending curiosity, education, and reflection. Sharpley and Stone (2009) emphasize that dark tourism enables individuals to confront mortality and explore collective memories. Dunkley, Morgan, and Westwood (2011) explored battlefield tourism, finding that motivations range from a desire to honor the past to an emotional connection with personal heritage. Cohen (2011) examined dark tourism as an educational tool, particularly at Holocaust memorials, where visitors often experience empathy and grief. Stone (2006) highlighted how emotional engagement contributes to transformative experiences, a perspective supported by Wight and Lennon (2007), who argue that the interplay between sensationalism and commemoration is a defining feature of dark tourism.

Global Trends in Dark Tourism Research

Research on dark tourism has grown significantly in recent decades, with Mora Forero, Nieto Mejía, and León-Gómez (2023) identifying a surge in publications exploring themes such as visitor motivations, site management, and ethical considerations. Hamidah and Hakim (2023) conducted a systematic review using the PRISMA framework, highlighting the importance of expanding research beyond Western contexts to include underrepresented regions like Eastern Europe.

Assylkhanova et al. (2024) noted that dark tourism often intersects with postcolonial narratives, particularly in former colonies and regions affected by historical atrocities. The integration of technology, such as virtual and augmented reality, has been identified as a key opportunity to enhance accessibility and engagement (Light, 2017; Mora Forero et al., 2023).

Dark Tourism in Bulgaria

Bulgaria's rich and complex history offers a wealth of opportunities for dark tourism, yet these remain largely underdeveloped. Sites like the Buzludzha Monument and the Belene Labor Camp illustrate the country's Communist past, while natural and mythical locations such as Devil's Throat Cave and Perperikon showcase its cultural and folkloric heritage (Miles, 2002; Hartmann, 2014).

Key Sites

- **Buzludzha Monument:** This iconic structure symbolizes the rise and fall of Communism in Bulgaria, offering a compelling narrative for visitors (Sharpley & Stone, 2009).
- **Devil's Throat Cave:** Steeped in mythology, this site connects visitors with legends of Orpheus and the underworld (Dunkley et al., 2011).
- **Belene Labor Camp:** A poignant reminder of political oppression, providing opportunities for education and reflection (Foley & Lennon, 2000).
- **Perperikon:** Known for its connections to vampire folklore, this site appeals to both history enthusiasts and myth hunters (Stone, 2006).

Challenges and Opportunities

While dark tourism has significant potential in Bulgaria, challenges such as insufficient marketing and a lack of thematic narratives hinder its development. Mora Forero et al. (2023) suggest integrating digital tools and immersive storytelling to boost engagement, a sentiment echoed by Light (2017), who highlights the role of technology in making dark tourism accessible. Hartmann (2014) emphasizes the importance of ethical site management to balance commercialization with respect for historical narratives. Dunkley, Morgan, and Westwood (2011) also note the need for careful interpretation to ensure that sites serve as spaces for education rather than mere entertainment.

Future Directions. Dark tourism offers unique opportunities to address contemporary challenges in tourism, including:

- **Post-Pandemic Recovery:** Assylkhanova et al. (2024) identify dark tourism as a resilient niche capable of revitalizing the tourism sector.
- **Sustainability:** Pernecky and Jamal (2010) highlight the importance of integrating dark tourism into broader cultural and ecological frameworks.
- **Technological Integration:** Virtual tours and augmented reality can make sites more accessible while preserving their historical integrity (Light, 2017; Cohen, 2011).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of Bulgaria's potential as a dark tourism destination. By combining field research, literature review, and data visualization, this section presents the proposed General Classification of Dark Tourism Sites (Figure 1) and the Conceptual Dark Tourism Guide for Bulgaria (Figure 2). The discussion integrates visual evidence, such as maps and images, to highlight specific locations and categories of dark tourism sites. These findings not only underscore the diversity of Bulgaria's dark tourism assets but also address opportunities and challenges in developing this niche within the country's tourism industry.

Figure 1 presents in detail the author's division of dark tourism as a tourism industry into sub-industries, their interrelationships and hierarchical sequence. This is a first attempt at a conceptual division of dark tourism into sub-industries and as such it will be developed and supplemented in the future, both by the author's research and by other authors investigating this topic.

General Classification of Dark Tourism Sites

The **General Classification of Dark Tourism Sites (Figure 1)** provides a holistic framework for organizing the diverse range of locations that fall under the definition of dark tourism. This classification reflects the multi-dimensional nature of dark tourism and showcases the historical, cultural, and environmental aspects that contribute to the appeal of these sites.

Below, each category and subcategory is explored in greater detail, with specific examples from Bulgaria and the broader dark tourism context.

- **Hazardous for Life**

This category encompasses sites that are dangerous due to natural or human-made conditions. These places attract visitors seeking adrenaline and the thrill of confronting danger.

- **Prisons, Camps, and Political Sites**

This category focuses on locations associated with political oppression, incarceration, and social injustice. These locations encapsulate significant historical narratives and provide opportunities for visitors to reflect on human rights and societal resilience.

- **Mythical and Folklore Sites**

Myth and folklore play a significant role in shaping dark tourism experiences, combining cultural heritage with the thrill of the supernatural.

- **Architectural Sites**

Architectural remnants from different historical periods reflect the social, economic, and political shifts in Bulgarian history. These sites combine historical narratives with physical exploration, making them attractive to adventurers and history enthusiasts.

- **Disaster Sites**

Disaster sites highlight the impact of natural and human-made calamities on communities and the environment. These locations serve as educational platforms for understanding disaster preparedness and environmental resilience.

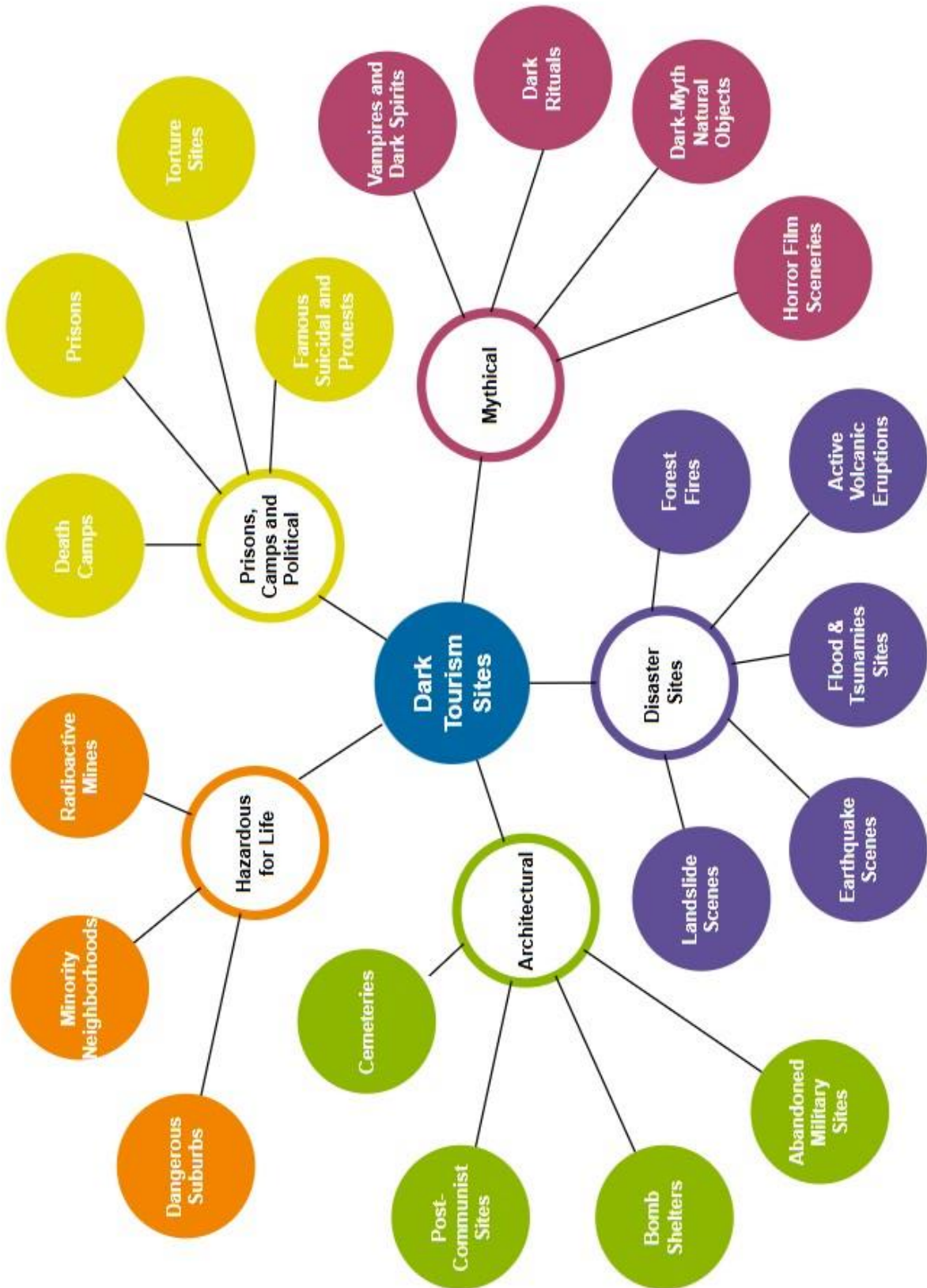


Fig. 1. General Classification of Dark Tourism Sites. Source: *The Author*

Exemplar Dark Tourism Sites in Bulgaria				
Architectural	Mythical	Hazardous	Prisons, Camps and Political	Disaster Sites
Buzludzha Communist Memorial	Film sceneries of "Devil's Throat" – The Devil's Throat Cave, Rhodope mountains and villages, Veliko Tarnovo, Arbanasi	Roma suburbs – "Fakulteta" and "Filipovtsi" in Sofia, "Stolipinovo" – in Plovdiv, "Kornelka" in Sliven	Belene Labor Camp (associated with political prisoners)	Kozhuhva volcano with the memorial of the airplane crash of 1955
Sofia underground tunnels	The Devil's Throat Cave and the myth of Orpheus	Closed uranium ore mines in Southern Bulgaria, for ex. near Eleshnitsa village	Lovech Camp	Strazhitsa town and the earthquake of 1988
Abandoned military bunkers	Vampire's grave in Sozopol	Meden Rudnik Suburb in Burgas	The remains and memorials of tens of communist labour-foreigner-political- and other camps all over Bulgaria	Tsarevo and the flood of 2023
Secret nuclear bunkers	Tsarichina excavations – seeking alien contact	Roma suburbs in all major cities in Bulgaria	Prisons that allow visits	Major floods in recent years in Teteven, Miziya, Asparuhovo and Biser
Post-communist architecture in towns like Pernik, Radomir and Dimitrograd	Klyuch village and the UFO meetings	Refugee camp in the town of Harmanli, District of Haskovo	Stara Zagora Prison Museum	Landslides in Varna
Shahtyor building in Pernik		Refugee camp in Ovcha kupel quarter in Sofia,		Forest fires - Approximately 600 each year devastating about 10 000 hectares of land. (Source BTV)

Fig. 2. Conceptual Dark Tourism Guide for Bulgaria. Source: *The Author*

CONCEPTUAL DARK TOURISM GUIDE FOR BULGARIA

This part of the study presents the first attempt to create a conceptual guide to dark tourism in Bulgaria.

The Conceptual Dark Tourism Guide for Bulgaria (Figure 2) offers an in-depth overview of Bulgaria's most notable dark tourism sites, categorized into five thematic groups: Architectural, Mythical, Hazardous, Prisons, Camps, and Political, and Disaster Sites.

This guide serves as a practical tool for tourists, researchers, and stakeholders to explore and develop Bulgaria's untapped potential in this niche.

Architectural Sites for Dark Tourism in Bulgaria

Architectural dark tourism sites in Bulgaria reflect the country's complex socio-political history and post-industrial transformations. Key locations include:

- **Cemeteries:** Cemeteries provide a direct connection to history, culture, and mortality. They serve as spaces for remembrance and reflection: Bulgaria has numerous cemeteries of historical significance, including war memorial sites and culturally significant burial grounds. Cemeteries also act as artistic and historical archives, showcasing unique architectural styles and inscriptions.
- **Abandoned Military Bunkers:** Scattered across the country, these bunkers provide a chilling reminder of Bulgaria's strategic role during the Cold War.



Fig. 3. The Abandoned Monument House of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Source: *Nikola Mihov, from the series Forget Your Past, 2008 – 2012*

- **Secret Nuclear Bunkers:** These highly secretive locations, revealed only in recent years, highlight the country's preparations during the nuclear arms race (Figure 5).



Fig. 4. Sofia underground tunnels. Another forgotten city. Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

- **Buzludzha Communist Memorial:** An abandoned relic of Communist-era ideology, this monument has become a symbol of decay and the fleeting nature of political power (Figure 3).
- **Sofia Underground Tunnels:** A hidden network of tunnels beneath the capital city, once used for defense and secrecy, offering visitors a glimpse into Bulgaria’s Cold War history (Figure 4).



Fig. 5. The secret nuclear bunkers in Bulgaria. Source: YouTube, Abandoned Crew Channel

- **Post-Communist Architecture in Towns like Pernik, Radomir, and Dimitrograd:** These industrial towns showcase a unique blend of urban planning influenced by Communist ideology.
- **Shahtyor Building in Pernik:** A decaying structure tied to Bulgaria’s mining history, evoking themes of economic collapse and abandonment.

These sites combine interesting and frightening facts from the country's history with a hands-on physical experience. This makes them unique and preferred by adventurers and history enthusiasts.

Mythical Sites for Dark Tourism in Bulgaria

Mythical locations in Bulgaria blend folklore with natural and cultural landmarks, offering visitors a unique, immersive experience:

- **Dark-Myth Natural Objects:** For example The Bloody Wall – a steep rock formation in Kaliakra cape, where 40 virgin girls jumped of and took their lives away, in order to not be caught by the Ottoman Turks.
- **Film Sceneries of scary or thrilling movies, for ex. “Devil’s Throat”:** Locations in the Rhodope Mountains and villages, Veliko Tarnovo, and Arbanasi serve as the backdrop for the popular series “The Devil’s Throat,” intertwining cinematic appeal with local myths.



- **Devil’s Throat Cave and the Myth of Orpheus:** This natural wonder is steeped in legends, drawing visitors intrigued by its connection to the underworld.

- **Vampire’s Grave in Sozopol:** The discovery of a medieval “vampire” burial sparked global fascination, placing Sozopol on the map of dark tourism enthusiasts (Figure 6).

- **Tsarichina Excavations:** Known for speculative tales of alien contact, this site captivates visitors with its blend of mystery and conspiracy theories.

- **Klyuch Village and UFO Meetings:** Rumored sightings and local lore about extraterrestrial encounters add an otherworldly dimension to dark tourism in Bulgaria.

These sites combine terrifying myths and legends with universal human and philosophical values that are timeless. This connection between past and present, seen through the eyes of terrifying events from the past, makes them great sites for dark tourism.

Fig. 6. The vampire grave in Sozopol. Source: *Trip.Dir.bg*

Hazardous Sites for Dark Tourism in Bulgaria

Mythical locations in Bulgaria mix folklore with natural and cultural landmarks, offering visitors a unique, immersive experience:

- **Refugee camps** – For example – the refugee camp in Harmanli, district Haskovo (Figure 7). Refugee camps are dangerous places, especially for unfamiliar outside visitors. There are frequent clashes between residents, poor living conditions, and people involved in shady and illegal activities or people with dangerous pasts.
- **Roma Minority Suburbs** – In almost every town of Bulgaria there is a Roma suburb. These neighborhoods are typically dangerous places, where even police rarely enters to intervene. They better be avoided. (Fig. 8).
- **Radioactive Mines:** Uranium mines near Eleshnitsa in Bulgaria are stark reminders of the environmental and human risks associated with radioactive mining.

Visiting this type of sites is a real challenge for the average, adventurous tourist, and poses real dangers to his life and health. A good option during such visits is to use a local guide, a representative of the local community or minority, as a guide, who can serve as a mediator in possible communication or conflict situations.

In some cases, it is good for this guide to be armed, if he has the legal right to carry a weapon. In any case, any form of security and protection should be very discreet and unobtrusive, so as not to make the local inhabitants hostile towards the unknown tourist.



Fig. 7. Refugee Camp in the Town of Harmanli, District Haskovo. Source: *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*

The tourist himself should also look as everyday and ordinary as possible for the place, and not arouse suspicion, not appear to be an outsider or a typical tourist, etc.



Fig. 8. The roma suburb in the town of Troyan, district Lovech. *Source: News.bg*

Landmarks of this kind show today's generations the economic and political mistakes that people made while governing their countries in past eras. Their significance as frightening objects is complemented by the lessons they can teach future generations about avoiding mistakes.

Prisons, Camps, and Political Sites for Dark Tourism in Bulgaria

- **Death Camps:** Sites like the **Belene Labor Camp** exemplify the horrors of political imprisonment during the Communist regime (Figure 9).
- **Prisons:** Historical prisons and their museums, such as the Stara Zagora Prison Museum, provide insights into Bulgaria's penal history.
- **Torture Sites:** Locations tied to historical accounts of physical and psychological abuse under oppressive regimes.
- **Famous Suicidal and Protest Sites:** Squares or landmarks associated with political protests or tragic personal events in Bulgaria.

These type of sites serve as memorials to human vulnerability and resilience, making them exceptionally valuable sites for dark tourism visits.

These places serve as monuments to human vulnerability and resilience, making them extremely valuable places for dark tourism. Many historical lessons can be not only learned but also experienced emotionally when visiting places of this nature. These landmarks should be preserved and promoted so that they can have their impactful educational and moral effect on as large an audience as possible.

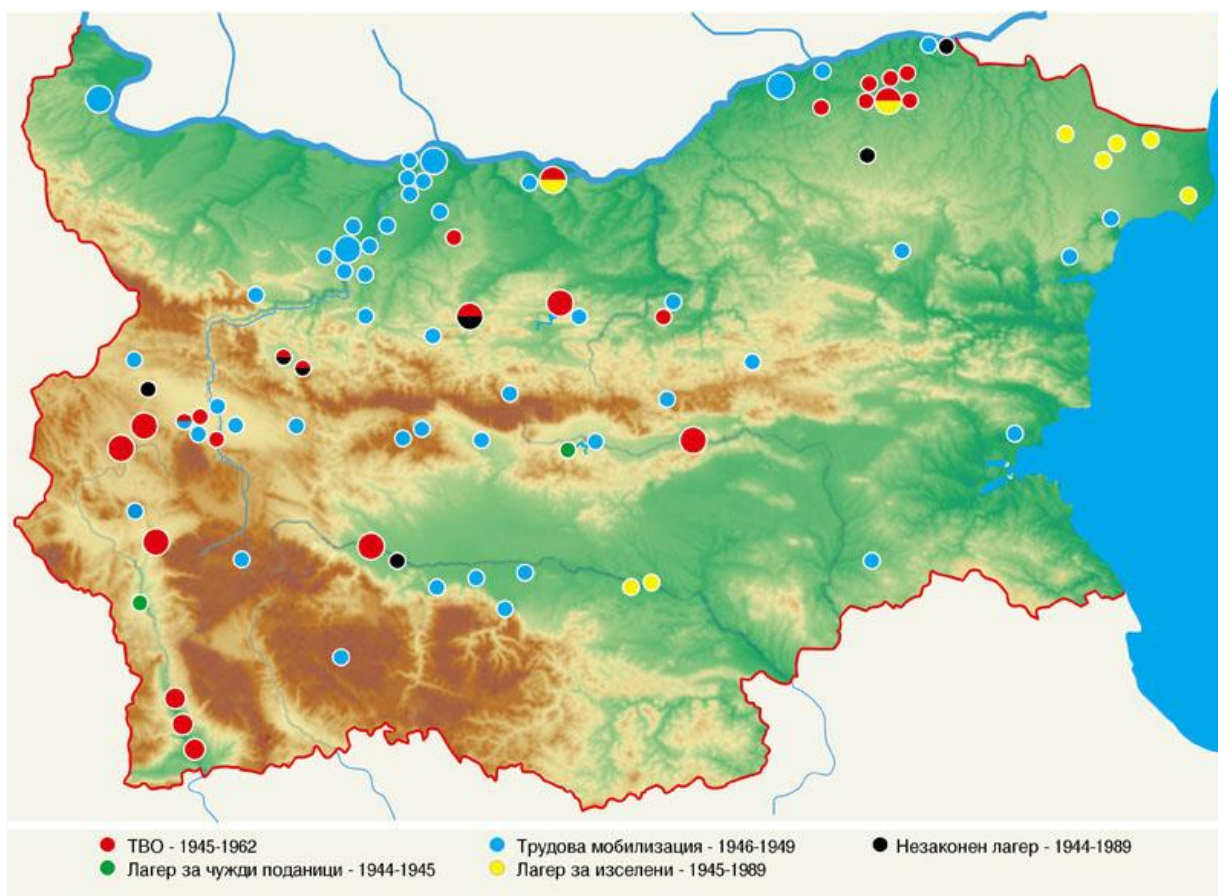


Fig. 9. A Map of the Concentration Camps in Bulgaria during the Period 1944–1989. Labor-Reformatory Dormitories (red), Labor Mobilization (blue), Illegal Camps (black), Camp for Foreign Nationals (green), Camp for Displaced Persons (yellow). Source: *Decommunization.org*

Disaster Sites for Dark Tourism in Bulgaria

Places that have experienced disasters are particularly striking to the dark tourist, due to the scale of their tragedies and the temporal proximity that makes them literally part of the everyday life of every modern person.

Although some disaster sites represent events that occurred in the distant past, such as the plane crash at the crater of the extinct volcano "Kozhuha", the majority of such sites have occurred very recently - places of forest fires, floods or explosions, such as the one on the train in the village of Hitrino.

- **Earthquake Scenes:** The aftermath of the 2012 earthquake in Pernik showcases the resilience of local communities and the devastating power of natural forces.
- **Flood Sites:** Areas affected by historical flooding, such as regions along the Iskar River, reveal the challenges of disaster management and recovery. More notable floods in the recent years in Bulgaria include the floods in the village of Biser and the town of Tsar Kaloyan.
- **Active Volcanic Eruptions:** While not directly applicable to Bulgaria, this subcategory remains relevant for dark tourism globally. In Bulgaria, there is only one volcano, which is not active for about 1 million years – "Kozhuha".

- **Memorial of the El Al Israel Airlines airplane crash** in the volcanic crater of “Kozhuha”, near the village of Rupite, Petrich municipality, district Blagoevgrad. This tragedy happened in 1955 and still attracts visitors and ancestors of the victims (Wikipedia, 2025a).
- **The site of the train explosion** in the Shumen village of Hitrino (Fig. 10), where part of a private freight train derailed, leaking propylene gas, which exploded and caught fire. Seven people died and 29 were injured. Many houses were destroyed. (Wikipedia, 2025b).



Fig. 10. The train explosion in the village of Hitrino (2016). Source: *Novini.bg*

These places are exceptionally impactful and bring emotions of sadness, despair, devastation and impasse - strong feelings that provoke users of dark tourism.

It is important to notice that disastrous dark tourism sites have their expiration dates, i.e. they are suitable for visiting only while they are devastated. Sooner or later they will be recovered, which is a good thing for the society and the local people, but they lose their meaning as a dark tourism object.

An interesting feature of these sites is that they can engage visitors not only as tourists, but also as volunteers, that are ready to help. This is especially valid for the flood or hurricane affected areas. Every year, hundreds of volunteers join efforts to help in flooded sites. Tourism industry can adapt and promote this dual form of contribution-plus-affection type of opportunities in order to achieve a double mission – people could learn valuable moral, ethical and ecological lessons and help others on the spot, while also experience dark and hard emotions of devastation and tragedy, typical for the tourists practicing dark tourism

CONCLUSION

With this first-of-its-kind in-depth review of dark tourism sites in the country, this article presented a model for Bulgaria's first dark tourism guidebook.

Its comprehensiveness is sufficient for a first step in the field of dark tourism in Bulgaria, but in the future it can and will be repeatedly expanded and updated. The sites presented in this study are among the best known to the general public, but there are countless smaller, local or forgotten similar sites.

Despite these current limitations, the goals achieved in this study will give a boost to dark tourism in several directions.

In the scientific direction, they will serve as a methodological basis for understanding this type of tourism, its shares, motivations and features.

In terms of marketing, the systematization of dark tourism sites by category and their presentation in a specific plan in this guide will facilitate the work of tour operator companies, which can more boldly start offering this type of tourist product to their clients. Thus, the industry will receive even better market conditions for growth.

And last but not least, the discussion of this new alternative type of tourism, which sites should be classified as it, which motivations drive consumer attitudes, what benefits it can have for society and the specific presentation of the sites and landmarks of dark tourism, will be a huge advertisement for this sector of the tourism industry in Bulgaria, and as a consequence - in neighboring countries and around the world. Many countries can adopt this campaign of discussing and promoting dark tourism in their markets and thus the dark tourism sector can develop even better globally.

In this way, this article marked the beginning of these processes in Bulgaria and the goals and tasks that were set at the beginning can be considered fulfilled.

In the future, new categories of dark tourism sites will appear, which will complement the first author's classification of dark tourism sites presented here. So the topic will have a future both in terms of scope and methodology.

Dark tourism in itself suggests that it will be a significant factor in the tourism industry, with its data on the tourism market. The sector is among the fastest growing in tourism. Its deep emotionality and psychological complexity give it great advantages over other types of tourism and guarantee it a trouble-free future of prosperity and growth.

All this can be of enormous benefit to humanity, especially if the lessons from the mistakes of the past are understood and remembered.

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The Influence of Citizenship Education on National Identity in the EU

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the complex relationship between citizenship education and national identity within the European Union (EU), focusing on the role of education as a key agent of political socialization. Citizenship education serves a dual function: it fosters a balanced sense of national belonging grounded in democratic values, and it acts as a safeguard against extreme forms of nationalism. In an era marked by globalization, migration, and rising populist movements, citizenship education equips young people with the knowledge, skills, and civic awareness necessary to navigate both national and European identities responsibly. The research underscores the compatibility of national and pan-European identity, highlighting that individuals can simultaneously identify with their cultural heritage and shared European values such as democracy, pluralism, and human rights. This dual identification contributes to social cohesion and intercultural understanding across the EU. Citizenship education is positioned as a proactive tool in countering polarization, xenophobia, and authoritarian populism, helping learners develop critical thinking, civic responsibility, and respect for diversity. Referring to EU policy frameworks and educational practices, the paper demonstrates that effective citizenship education can mitigate societal fragmentation and foster a politically literate and engaged civil society. It provides insights into how national and European dimensions of identity can be harmonized through inclusive, values-based education. The findings aim to support educators and policymakers in enhancing citizenship education's capacity to reinforce democratic culture and sustain identity in the European context.

Keywords: identity, citizenship, nations and nationalism, education, EU, politics

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INTRODUCTION

Education and educational institutions play a central role in political socialization by shaping the perception of values, ideas, and symbols, institutionalizing political roles, and contributing to the development of political culture, public opinion, and behavioral patterns in democratic societies. Within the framework of citizenship education, a key objective is the preservation and transmission of national identity - particularly in the context of the European Union, where maintaining a balance between national and European identity is of critical importance. Citizenship education not only cultivates an understanding of democratic principles and civic responsibilities, but also strengthens the sense of belonging to both the nation-state and the European community. National and European

identities need not be seen as contradictory; rather, they can be complementary, as individuals may simultaneously identify with their national heritage while embracing shared European values such as democracy, human rights, and cultural diversity. In this context, learners take their first significant steps toward civic and political participation - an outcome that can be regarded as one of the fundamental achievements of modern political culture.

This study **aims** to examine the role of education as a fundamental channel of political socialization, with a particular focus on citizenship education as a mechanism for the formation and affirmation of national identity. The analysis highlights the *dual nature* of citizenship education: on one hand, it contributes to *fostering a constructive and inclusive sense of national belonging* grounded in democratic values, civic responsibility, and social cohesion; on the other hand, it functions as a *preventive tool against the rise of extreme nationalist manifestations*, such as chauvinism, xenophobia and even neo-fascism. Situated within the broader context of European integration, the study also addresses *the compatibility and potential synergy between national and European identity*, and explores how citizenship education can promote intercultural understanding, respect for diversity, and the principles of democratic coexistence. This leads to the **sub-objectives** of the research to contribute to the ongoing discourse on identity in the EU, the importance of citizenship and to provide recommendations for educators and policymakers to enhance citizenship education in promoting harmonious identities within the EU framework. Given the evolving dynamics of national and European identities, it is imperative to examine the influence of citizenship education on national identity within the EU. Sustaining the main objective, the research investigates the role of citizenship education in shaping national identity, considering the balance between national and European dimensions, as well as it seeks to provide insights into how citizenship education can effectively navigate and contribute to the complex landscape of identity in the European Union.

National identity, characterized by shared culture, language, history, and values, plays a crucial role in fostering social cohesion and a sense of belonging among citizens. However, the EU's unique supranational structure introduces complexities in balancing national identities with a collective European identity. This duality presents both opportunities and challenges for citizenship education, as it must address the coexistence and potential tensions between these identities.

Citizenship education has emerged as a pivotal component of educational policies within the European Union, aiming to cultivate individuals who are not only aware of their rights and responsibilities but also actively engaged in societal and political processes. This educational focus seeks to equip young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate and contribute to both national and European contexts (De Coster, I., et al., 2012). The Eurydice report on citizenship education reveals that EU countries incorporate citizenship education into their curricula, either as a standalone subject, part of another subject, or as a cross-curricular theme (De Coster, I., et al., 2012, p. 2).

Citizenship in liberal democracies encourages tolerance towards differing points of view, regarding it as a "defining virtue" (Fukuyama, 1992, 122, 160, 215). *Tolerance* is a fundamental human principle and right (United Nations, 1948, 1948) (European Union Charter, 2012, Art. 21, 22), and a fundamental value of the EU, along with the *pluralism* (European Union, 1992, Art. 2) enshrined in the European Union's legal and political framework. The principles of tolerance and pluralism, fundamental to democracy and European values, present challenges when interacting with civilizations that hold differing views, especially in the context of migration flows into Europe. This interaction has contributed to the resurgence of extreme nationalist sentiments within Europe over the past two decades. Such developments pose obstacles to the processes of enlargement and integration, as well as to the effective implementation of European policies. (Popova, 2016).

In the era of globalization, the nation-state is positioned at the center of contradictory processes. On one hand, it faces increasing pressure from global forces and processes, while on the other, it is called upon to meet the growing expectations of its citizens. Contemporary societies are witnessing dynamic transformations that challenge traditional models of the nation-state. Globalization, regional integration, migration crises, climate change, and the rise of nationalism and euroscepticism are simply some of the factors shaping the new challenges confronting the nation-state and national identity, as well as their interaction with the international community. This suggests examining whether education has the capacity to sustain democratic values as a means of addressing the alienation among young citizens.

The interplay between citizenship education and national identity has garnered significant attention in academic and policy-making circles. Research indicates that citizenship education can influence students' perceptions of their national identity, particularly in multicultural societies where diverse backgrounds contribute to the national fabric. For instance, studies in Sweden have explored how citizenship education addresses national identity in the context of increasing cultural diversity (Ljunggren, 2014). The NESET¹ report emphasizes the growing importance of the connection between identity, active citizenship, and education in EU policy discussions. Initiatives like the 2015 Paris Declaration and EU Council Recommendations aim to promote common values, inclusive education, and a European dimension in teaching (NESET, n.d.). Moreover, the EU has prioritized citizenship education as a means to foster a European dimension in national curricula, aiming to promote a sense of European identity alongside national identities. This initiative reflects the EU's commitment to encouraging active citizenship and democratic participation across member states.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of National Identity

The right of every nation to self-determination, first articulated in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (National Assembly of France, 1789, Art. 3), and later enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations (United Nations, 1945, Art.1), stands as a fundamental principle of contemporary international public law. Recognizing territorial boundaries, as well as respecting the sovereignty and equality of nations as foundational tenets that preclude domination, are essential conditions for peaceful and free existence, and cooperation among nations. Nations develop as stable and enduring communities of people who share a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members" (Smith, 1991, p. 14). On this basis, national solidarity is built, along with the awareness of common national interest and identification, distinguishing each nation from other nations (Aleksandrov, 2001, pp. 264-265).

Nationality and *national affiliation* are typically viewed in two ways. The first represents the "objective" approach, which sees nationality as a natural fact for individuals, consisting of elements such as language, origin, etc. The second is the "subjective" approach, which regards nationality as a psychological and consciously experienced phenomenon (Blackwell, 1997, pp. 331-333). The topic of national identity concerns *national consciousness*, as for national identity to exist, it must be consciously recognized by individuals. National consciousness can be considered as a shared sense and emotional attitude among a group of people regarding their belonging to a particular nation. It is one of the first and fundamental factors in the creation of a nation and the manifestation of

¹ Network of Experts working on the social dimension of Education and Training.

nationalism. National symbols, common territory and culture, shared language, history and traditions, later on strong political and educational institutions, social solidarity etc., play a particularly important role in the emergence and development of national consciousness. All these elements contribute to the formation of collective consciousness and a sense of belonging to the nation. These symbols create a feeling of “us” versus “the others”, which strengthens internal unity, fosters a sense of community and continuity, and deepens the sense of national belonging. *Provided that the national consciousness of the members of a nation weakens, the strength of the nation itself also diminishes.* National consciousness may not be an innate trait but rather something that is acquired. National identity can also be acquired, which links it to the psychological disposition of individuals.

Among all the forms of collective identity that people share today, national identity is perhaps the most fundamental and comprehensive. National identity is a driving force for both the pursuit of sovereignty and democracy, as well as authoritarian, totalitarian, and tyrannical regimes. Other forms of collective identity - such as class, gender, race, or religion - may overlap with or complement national identity, but they rarely surpass it in significance, although they are capable of influencing its direction (Smith, 2000, p. 193).

The formation of national identity is significantly influenced by factors such as the development of the printing industry, the population’s level of literacy, culture, national symbols and traditions, living conditions, and the social opportunities and prospects that the nation presents to individuals. Anthony Smith defines the core elements that shape national identity as follows: 1) A historic territory or homeland; 2) Common myths and historical memories; 3) A shared mass public culture; 4) Common legal rights and duties for all members; 5) A common economy and territorial mobility (Smith, 1991, p. 14). Citizenship education is closely linked to national identity, as it helps individuals understand the key elements that shape their nation. It promotes knowledge of the nation’s history, territory, and cultural heritage, fostering a sense of belonging. It also teaches the rights and responsibilities of citizens, emphasizing legal duties, economic participation, and the importance of engaging in public life. *Through this, citizenship education strengthens national identity and encourages responsible participation in society.*

The examination of national identity unavoidably leads to an analysis of its connection with nationalism, as national consciousness often serves as the foundation for nationalist ideas, movements, and manifestations. *Nationalism* can be defined as one of the most widespread modern ideologies. It is a key phenomenon in the contemporary world, largely because of the global scope of its manifestations (Popova et al., 2019). According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary* (n.d.) nationalism, as a concept, is defined as “devotion to one’s country, national spirit or aspirations, desire for national unity, independence, or prosperity” (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). It can be regarded as a political ideology, political philosophy, or political doctrine. On the other hand, it is a phenomenon that materializes in practice through political parties, nationalist movements (which are not registered as political parties), national liberation struggles, etc. The sense of national belonging is often reinforced in response to external threats or conflicts. It is a key element in distinguishing individuals in contemporary reality. It can also be explained as a psychological and emotional disposition (Miscovic, 2023) of individuals. The ideology of nationalism addresses fundamental questions concerning its main functions related to the nation and national identity, encompassing unifying and integrative roles; public mobilization and defense functions. However, it also possesses divisive, exclusionary, and radicalizing aspects, capable of generating social tensions, interethnic conflicts, and extreme forms of nationalist aggression

In the context of the provision of nation’s sustainability, maintaining a sense of national identity must be a continuous process, even if it requires for the national identity to be “invented”

(Anderson, 1983). One of the mechanisms for this is *education*, including the teaching of a common language and shared history in schools, the organization of public events and cultural activities, the elevation and reference to national heroes, the honoring of national symbols and holidays, and the homogenization of culture. In this sense, one of the key functions of education is to instill patriotism. The role of the school, therefore, extends beyond fostering national and patriotic sentiments to also promoting unity among members of the nation. Since the 19th century, the expansion of education has fundamentally contributed in shaping national consciousness (Guibernau, 1996, p. 69). A shared identity has largely been constructed through the promotion of a common language and culture within schools, as well as through the influence of the printing industry. The education system, along with the system of national symbols, holds some of the most effective means for shaping and reinforcing perceptions of the nation - and the nation itself. These systems have the potential to function effectively even within nations composed of members from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

In summary of this discussion, as it has been outlined, *national identity* refers to a sense of belonging to a nation, shaped by shared elements such as culture, language, history, values, and traditions. It is primarily a psychological and cultural construct that helps individuals situate themselves within a broader social community. *Nationalism*, on the other hand, is a political ideology or movement that builds on national identity, often advocating for the interests, unity, and sometimes superiority of a particular nation. It can manifest in both inclusive and exclusive forms - ranging from civic nationalism, which emphasizes shared political values and citizenship, to ethnic nationalism, which centers on shared ancestry or heritage. *In short*, national identity provides the emotional and cultural foundation upon which nationalism is constructed. While national identity is more personal and descriptive, nationalism can be considered as collective and prescriptive, often mobilizing national identity for political aims. Education is the channel for direct engagement with future generations; It facilitates the “invention of tradition” (Anderson, 1983) of the nation, emphasizing its “glorious” or “tragic” past. This process fosters an early sense of national identity, unity, belonging, and attachment in young citizens, thereby reinforcing the collective sense of “We”.

Citizenship Education: An Overview

Citizenship education is crucially involved in the proper and sustainable development of democratic societies. The importance of citizenship education stems from the complexity, dynamic nature, and other characteristics inherent in modern societies. In order to understand the foundational concepts and significance of citizenship education in shaping informed and active members of society, it is essential to delve into the definition of citizenship. The *citizen* is a “member of a political community who enjoys the rights and assumes the duties of membership” (Leydet, 2023). The term *citizenship* is often associated with the “status, rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a citizen” (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). Considering citizenship, Hoskins (2020) refers to the legal rights and obligations states grant to their citizens, typically designated by their nationality. Marshall (1973) asserts citizenship is “a status bestowed on all those who are full members of a community. All who possess this status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed.” This legal definition emphasizes the crucial relationship between the citizen and the state, as well as the rights granted by the state to the individual (Hoskins, 2020). Other than the legal status, citizenship implies the role of citizens as political agents actively engaged in state’s political institutions and a third dimension refers to citizenship as “membership in a political community that provides a distinct source of identity”; it is also referred to as a “psychological” dimension of citizenship (Leydet, 2023). Understanding the significance of this relationship and the complex

interactions between society and state is directly related to comprehending the essence of *citizenship education*.

As a concept and subject area, citizenship education aims to promote harmonious co-existence and foster the mutually beneficial development of individuals and the communities in which they live (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2023 p.1). De Coster and Sigalas (2017) argue that within democratic systems, citizenship education helps learners develop into “active, informed and responsible citizens who are prepared to take responsibility for their own future as well as for the well-being of their communities at the national, European, and international levels” (European Commission, 2017). Citizenship education can also function to uphold the rule of law and justice by fostering legal awareness and promoting an understanding of the importance of legal order and justice in society (Dimitrova, 2025).

Citizenship education can be categorized into three main types, each with distinct characteristics and goals: *traditional*, *critical* and *transformational* citizenship education. *Traditional citizenship education* (also known as civics education) focuses on transmitting knowledge about political systems, government structures, and legal frameworks. It aiming to create informed and loyal national citizens. It concentrates on national citizenship and developing loyalty, commitment, and allegiance to the nation-state. *Critical citizenship education* goes further by empowering learners to question societal inequalities and power dynamics, fostering critical thinking and active civic engagement. *Transformative citizenship education* emphasizes collective action for social justice and global change, encouraging learners to challenge unjust systems and advocate for a more equitable world. Additionally, scholars distinguish between *minimal* and *maximal citizenship education*. Minimal citizenship education is content-heavy and teacher-led, presenting citizenship as a legal status, while maximal citizenship education promotes student participation, skill development, and experiential learning, viewing citizenship as an active, lived process. Effective citizenship education also includes *non-formal* and *informal approaches*, such as *service-learning*, which links academic learning with community-based engagement to develop democratic competencies, responsibility, and real-world problem-solving skills (European Commission, 2023, pp. 14-15).

The Bulgarian Ordinance No. 13 of September 21, 2016, on Citizenship, Health, Environmental, and Intercultural Education defines the institutional policies supporting citizenship education, aimed at the formation of active and responsible citizens. As stated in Article 3, paragraph 2 of the Ordinance № 13, *citizenship education* is aimed at fostering civic awareness and civic virtues. It is related to knowledge about the structure of a democratic society, the rights and duties of citizens, as well as skills and willingness for responsible civic behavior. The desired outcomes as specified in the Ordinance include development of an autonomous and active individuals who understand and uphold universal human values, the principles of democracy, and human rights; who participate in civic, political, and social life in a manner that is responsible and effective both for themselves and for society; and who are also familiar with the institutions, structures, and procedures of democratic society, as well as the economic and political realities of the globalizing world. The Ordinance also emphasizes the importance of respecting each individual’s identity within the diversity of their personal, cultural, and national backgrounds, recognizing the right and value of differences, and accepting the equality of all in shared social spaces. It also fosters an awareness and appreciation of one’s own cultural identity (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2016, Article 4). This is directly related to the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the individual’s identification of their national identity, patriotic education and the development of national self-esteem, tolerance, and intercultural dialogue. Among the desired results of citizenship education stipulated in the Ordinance’ regulations, students are expected to acquire the knowledge,

skills, and attitudes necessary to understand their identity as both “citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria” and “citizens of the European Union” through shared civic values and cultural traditions. (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2016, Appendix № 1).

The defined general and specific objectives of citizenship education vary across each EU member state, depending on the national context, traditions, cultural heritage, and the selected curriculum approach. Regardless of the specific goals, they are aimed at addressing the challenges² of contemporary liberal democracy in Europe (Popova, 2024).

Citizenship Education and the EU: National and European Identities

One of the functions of education is to “teach” individuals of patriotism. In this context, schools not only focus on cultivating national and patriotic sentiments but also on fostering unity among the members of a nation that has long been divided by religion, culture, language, and social divisions. Since the 19th century, the expansion of education has played a foundational role in shaping national consciousness (Guibernau, 1996, p. 69). Citizenship education, traditionally, has often been linked to the fostering of national identity (European Commission, 2017). Historically, citizenship education was integrated into national education systems and curricula to shape citizens according to national ideals. It has been and continues to serve as a tool for nation-building, used by governments to promote specific civic norms, including patriotic and/or nationalistic values (Hoskins, 2020, p. 1).

In the past decade, Europe has witnessed a rise in extremism, terrorist attacks, and various threats that endanger not only the safety of European citizens but also the fundamental values of freedom, democracy, equality, respect for the rule of law, human rights, and dignity. These challenges pose a significant threat to national identity, as they instill fear among Europeans, which can, in turn, intensify nationalistic sentiments. These events contradict the vision of a European society based on modern democratic values, characterized by pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and gender equality. In this regard, and more specifically as a reaction to the terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen in 2015, the education ministers of the EU member states adopted in Paris the Paris Declaration on Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance, and Non-Discrimination through Education in 2015. The declaration emphasizes the need to promote active citizenship and sets out common goals for member states, along with four overarching priorities for cooperation and the exchange of ideas and best practices at the EU level:

- Ensuring that children and young people acquire social, civic and intercultural competences, by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and nondiscrimination, as well as active citizenship;
- Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly in the use of the Internet and social media, so as to develop resistance to all forms of discrimination and indoctrination;
- Fostering the education of disadvantaged children and young people, by ensuring that our education and training systems address their needs;
- Promoting intercultural dialogue through all forms of learning in cooperation with other relevant policies and stakeholders. (European Commission & Eurydice, 2016)

² These include: populism, extreme nationalism and Euroscepticism; polarization of public opinions and attitudes; distrust in national and European institutions; a decline in voter turnout; apathy towards socio-political processes; apoliticism; immigration; disinformation and manipulation of public opinion; fake news; public reactions against ethnic and cultural diversity, characteristic of the modern globalized world, especially within the EU; the crisis in political leadership, and others.

The integration of citizenship education into the educational institutions of EU member states has been influenced by the distinctive characteristics of the 21st century. Notably, the adoption of the Declaration on Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance, and Non-Discrimination through Education, together with the Recommendations on Education for Democratic Citizenship adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2002), contributed significantly to this development. These recommendations emphasize the multidisciplinary nature of citizenship education, highlighting that it encompasses not only the study of content but also the development of attitudes and skills. This approach aims to empower students to actively participate in society and underscores the importance of such education in fostering democratic societies. As defined in these recommendations, education for democratic citizenship includes specific disciplines and various cross-curricular areas of study within member states, tailored to each country's unique characteristics and traditional educational approaches (Council of Europe: 2002). The contemporary challenges that democratic societies are facing can be regarded as potential obstacles in integrating national identity themes within citizenship education curricula.

The 20th century was marked by the active engagement of the international community in the protection of human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, influenced numerous other fundamental and key international agreements in this field. The Council of Europe, the EU, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have been key contributors in formulating and establishing mechanisms for the protection of human rights under international law. The EU became directly committed to human rights protection with the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force on December 1, 2009. At that time, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union was annexed to the Treaty of Lisbon, making it legally binding for all member states. The Charter encompasses civil, political, social, and economic rights, organizing them into six main categories: *dignity, freedoms, equality, solidarity, citizen's rights, and justice* (European Union, 2012, Title I-VI). All of this underscores the necessity of citizenship education and an understanding of democracy to address the key challenges facing contemporary society. What is more, the *six titles* of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU are deeply connected to *national identity*, as they *both protect the fundamental values of EU member states and shape the way national identities are expressed and safeguarded within the European legal and political framework*. The principles enshrined in the Charter not only uphold fundamental rights but also reflect and interact with national identities, which are shaped by historical, legal, and cultural traditions across member states. National identity is deeply intertwined with the values and rights outlined in the Charter, as these principles stem from the constitutional and legal traditions of EU member states. As stipulated in the Charter, the EU helps sustain and cultivate the shared principles and values “while respecting the diversity of the cultures and traditions of the peoples of Europe as well as the national identities of the Member States and the organisation of their public authorities at national, regional and local levels” (European Union, 2012); The Union also “seeks to promote balanced and sustainable development and ensures free movement of persons, services, goods and capital, and the freedom of establishment” (European Union, 2012). The concept of *dignity*, as protected in the Charter, is rooted in the historical and philosophical traditions of European nations, influencing their national identities and legal frameworks. The *freedom* of expression, religious liberty, and the right to education are not only fundamental rights but also essential components of national identity, shaping cultural and political traditions within EU member states. The Charter's commitment to *equality*, including the recognition of cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity, ensures that national identities are protected and respected within the EU framework. By prohibiting discrimination, this title ensures that national and regional identities coexist within a shared European space without being marginalized. The rights to **political participation** and free movement outlined

in the Charter challenge traditional notions of national identity while fostering a complementary European identity. The legal protections under the Charter draw heavily from national legal traditions, demonstrating how justice systems contribute to shaping national identity while ensuring adherence to common European values. These principles illustrate how national and European identities are not mutually exclusive but rather coexisting and evolving in a complementary framework, both contributing to a shared yet diverse political and cultural space. The Charter of Fundamental Rights illustrates the commitment of the EU in preserving national identities while fostering a European identity, ensuring that fundamental rights are upheld across diverse legal, political, and cultural traditions within the EU.

Citizenship competence has been defined by the EU as “the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life, based on understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability”. This also includes an understanding of European common values, knowledge of contemporary events, and a critical understanding of the main developments in national, European and world history (European Commission, 2023, p. 3). Promoting the development of competences, including citizenship competence, is one of the key objectives towards the creation of a European Education Area. Citizenship education is an integral part of this framework, aiming to “harness the full potential of education and culture as drivers for ... active citizenship as well as means to experience European identity in all its diversity”, as stipulated in the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning.

Recognized as a core competence for lifelong learning, active citizenship is understood by the European Union as the capacity to engage responsibly and effectively in civic and social life, grounded in knowledge of socio-economic, legal, and political concepts and structures. The Council Recommendation highlights citizenship competence as essential not only for democratic participation and social inclusion, but also for developing critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving abilities, and personal resilience - skills increasingly vital for navigating the complexities of contemporary society (Council of the European Union, 2018).

The deepening of European integration and the ongoing process of globalization, along with the contemporary threads and crises require a generation of Europeans with increasing engagement in political processes at multiple levels. This engagement should be grounded in an understanding of both European and national identities, ensuring that individuals organize their lives while upholding the principles of diversity and respecting their national heritage. The importance of education in these processes is emphasized in the European Pillar of Social Rights, which states: “Everyone has the right to access quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning, in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to fully participate in society and successfully transition in the labor market” (European Commission, 2021, Principle 1). Through education, individuals not only gain the competencies necessary for civic participation but also develop a deeper connection to their national identity, which remains a vital component of their social and political engagement.

To summarize the key points discussed above, citizenship education holds the potential to equip individuals with the knowledge and self-confidence, necessary to effectively address contemporary challenges European societies face nowadays, thereby preventing extreme behaviors and fostering social cohesion. By promoting critical thinking, a sense of belonging and reinforcing a shared commitment to democratic principles, citizenship education can serve as a vital tool in countering radicalization and strengthening democratic values.

DISCUSSION

The literature review analysis has revealed that within EU institutions, education has been regarded as a central element of policies and practices aimed at fostering active citizenship. The European Union's commitment to citizenship education can be considered as a *pillar of democracy*. It is necessary that citizens engage in civic and political life to uphold state accountability and reinforce the legitimacy of democracy.

It is reasonable to suggest that the collective identity is largely constructed through the imposition of a common language and culture in schools. The education system, alongside the system of national symbols, provide some of the most effective means of provoking and shaping national identity, as well as the nation itself. These systems could function effectively even within nations composed of members from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Direct engagement with future generations of the nation within educational institutions facilitates the "invention of tradition" (Anderson, 1983). In this way, a sense of national belonging, unity, and attachment is instilled in the younger generations from an early age, thereby reinforcing the collective "We". In this framework, while individuals may identify with various social groups as already has been stated, in the context of citizenship education, national identity is the one that unites citizens and guides the nation's political and cultural direction.

Scholars have postulated that young people tend not to have already developed enduring beliefs and are therefore open to be influenced by external factors (Schulz et al., 2023, p. 3). In addition to that, it can be argued that intergenerational continuity is disrupted, and the connections between generations and historical periods are neglected (Pachkova, 2024) which can be an obstacle to national identification. That is why it is important to reinforce the sense of identity and foster critical thinking, which can help isolate external influences that pose a potential threat of extreme behaviors among young people.

While national identity remains a central pillar of individual and collective belonging, the development of the EU and the emergence of European identity introduces a *broader, supranational dimension that reshapes traditional understandings of identity* within the EU context. European identity and its characteristics, as well as the extent to which people recognize their belonging to the EU, have been the subject of extensive and diverse discussions in recent years. Some perspectives reflect the belief that national and European identities can coexist positively (Verhaegen, 2018, p. 1), while others argue that national identification is an obstacle to effective European integration. According to the findings of the Special Eurobarometer 508 on values and identities of EU citizens, a majority of EU citizens identify with their nationality (Becuwe & Baneth, 2021, p. 71). However, this issue is not placed on a particular research focus of the current paper as it is a subject of a more thorough analysis. The role of education in these processes is rather the focus. EU policies and studies underscore the essential role of citizenship education in shaping national and European identities and some of these findings are discussed below. By promoting democratic values and active participation, it strengthens citizens' connection to both their nation-state and the broader European community.

Surveys consistently indicate that younger individuals are more inclined to identify with multiple articulated identities beyond their national identity (IEA, 2023, p. 33). It can be observed that students with higher levels of trust in civic institutions expressed a stronger sense of European identity (IEA, 2023, p. 5). (Verhaegen, 2018, p. 1) Studies reveal the significant role of schools when analyzing student involvement in politics, as Barber et al. relate classroom environment to the enhanced student interest in politics, their trust in civic institutions and willingness for citizenship participation (IEA, 2023, p. 72). The observed correlation between higher levels of trust in civic institutions and a stronger sense of European identity among students can be understood through the

lens of citizenship education, which plays a pivotal role in shaping both civic trust and European identity. Educational initiatives that promote democratic values and civic engagement such as the citizenship education not only strengthen trust in institutions but also reinforce a multifaceted identity that includes both national and European dimensions. This dual identification enriches individuals' sense of belonging and supports the cohesion of the European community.

Citizenship education is usually related to the notion of nation-states. However, the development of a supranational institution like the European Union, the deepening of European integration and the ongoing process of globalization, issues with growing migration etc., have shaped the notions of “European” and “global” citizenship. These current challenges confronting democratic societies present potential barriers to incorporating national identity into the citizenship education curricula. To illustrate, due to the growing linguistic and cultural diversity in classrooms, teachers may face challenges in addressing nuanced discussions on controversial topics and in raising issues that might be particularly sensitive for students from certain communities. At the same time, this diversity offers valuable opportunities for enriched learning experiences (European Commission, 2023, p. 24). Citizenship education can address these challenges by *promoting inclusive dialogue and democratic values*, and *intercultural competence*. It equips students with critical thinking skills and fosters empathy and respect for others. Additionally, it supports teachers through culturally responsive pedagogy, enabling them to navigate sensitive issues and create inclusive learning environments. Through these mechanisms, citizenship education strengthens social cohesion and sustains a shared sense of belonging in diverse societies.

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), through its *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2022* and the published *Report on the Views and Engagement of Young Citizens in a Changing Europe*, addresses issues such as the rise of populist movements, authoritarian governance practices, as well as challenges related to climate change and environmental protection. The Report indicates that the greater number of students across participating countries identified themselves as European, “being proud to live in Europe and feeling part of Europe” (Damiani et al., 2025, p. 5). The study also examines the relationship between *civic knowledge, competences, and attitudes among students* and issues related to *tolerance*, including gender equality, equal rights for immigrants and different ethnic groups in society, and students' support for environmental cooperation as well. The findings indicate *students with higher levels of civic awareness score significantly higher* on the scale measuring support for these societal aspects (Schulz et al., 2025, p. 123).

In the context of citizenship education and the formation of national identity, it is essential to theoretically substantiate and systematize knowledge. As Ivo Minkov (2024) argues, “the need for theorizing knowledge, its systematization and theoretical assimilation, structuring, methodologizing, and subsequent operationalization arises” (p. 51 [translated by author]). This underscores the importance of a structured approach in studying these key concepts, forming the foundation for their effective application in educational practice, particularly in teaching and internalizing concepts such as citizenship responsibility and national identity. By employing contemporary and interactive teaching methods and techniques, it becomes possible to develop comprehensive social and citizenship competencies among learners. This includes the ability to create *informed opinions* on issues of public concern (such as environmental well-being), defend personal rights and freedoms, fulfil civic responsibilities, make informed decisions regarding their civil rights, liberties, and obligations, and understand the relationships and interconnections between the state and society. Additionally, it fosters an understanding of how society and state institutions function and encourages critical analysis of socio-political processes (Ministry of Education). *By investing time and resources*

in building fundamental political literacy among the younger population, the state, as a political entity, lays the foundation for a strong and educated civil society. Awareness and understanding - knowledge of the specifics of social processes - enhance citizens' confidence and ability to engage with their own and collective rights. In other words, the more an individual understands the interrelations between the state and society, the more they will recognize their role in shaping various social processes.

In democratic societies, every citizen has their social and political roles. A stable democratic society requires the engagement of citizens and an active civil society, which is expressed not only when exercising their active and passive suffrage. In this sense, it is essential for young people to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to fulfill these social and political responsibilities as full-fledged citizens (European Commission, 2017).

Citizenship education has some important *functions* that are discussed below, indicating the role of education institutions as socializing agents transmitting political culture and a sense of national identity. Democratic systems are also characterized by the presence of a specific *political culture*. It is important to highlight the connection between political culture and its components and functions related to citizenship education. Culture is defined by UNESCO as a set of “distinct spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features characterizing a society” (UNESCO, 2001). It encompasses aspects of art and literature, but also embodies a way of life, value systems, traditions, and beliefs (UNESCO, 2001). In other words, culture is the fundamental human characteristic that expresses the nature of individuals as conscious social beings, guiding their behavior (Hague, Harrop, 2010, p. 121). There are different types of culture, and the one most directly related to the state and its citizens is the *political culture*. The concept of political culture was introduced by Gabriel Almond (1956). The concept aims to explain how individuals influence the political system and vice versa. Ernest Gellner develops the cultural approach to the concept of the nation by emphasizing the pivotal role of cultural factors in its formation and highlighting the significance of high levels of literacy and education (Gellner, 1999, p. 77). *Political culture is both an aspect of politics and a comprehensive approach to political science.* The term refers to the overall model of beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, practices, and values in society regarding the political system. It reflects ways of thinking and feelings, sometimes more emotional than rational. It may include moral judgments, political myths, elements of history, and tradition. All these elements are related when shaping the political behavior of citizens. The presence of political culture is crucial for understanding the processes occurring in a society. The political cultures of separate countries differ in characteristics, which can explain how and why their political systems are organized in a certain way; what is the nature of the challenges they face, and also the status of their relations with citizens and international partners (Popova, 2024).

The process of introducing individuals to political culture is *political socialization*. It represents the learning process through which political norms and behaviors, considered acceptable at a particular moment for a changing political system, are transmitted from generation to generation. Political socialization affects the processes through which values, ideas, and symbols are adopted, and political roles are institutionalized. According to Almond and Coleman, it is necessary for people to learn their political behavior early enough and to defend it properly in order to maintain order and prevent the emergence of chaos (Tanev, 2001, 213). Political socialization is carried out by various socializing agents such as family, educational institutions, political parties, peers, mass media, and others. States have mechanisms for shaping political culture and public opinion, and one of the key mechanisms as already stated, is education. Schools are among the main institutions for *acquiring behavioral attributes* among students. In the context of citizenship education and the formation and expression of attitudes toward the functioning of the state as a political entity, learners take their first

serious steps toward engaging in *civic and political participation*, which can be considered one of the characteristic achievements of contemporary Western political culture.

Political participation refers to the various ways people can influence the current state of society or the policies or decisions made by the government. In a liberal democracy, individuals can choose whether to participate in politics, to what extent, and through which channels. Active and effective political participation by citizens depends on the political resources that the state provides to its citizens (education, communication skills, social status, etc.) and the political interest of the citizens. The more educated a society is and the more developed communication skills are, owing to state's mechanisms, the greater the interest of its citizens will be in the ongoing political processes and crises in society. The level of communication skills is directly related to individual's ability to clearly formulate their views and standpoints and to express them in society - through public debates or by participating in elections at national and European levels. Education itself is a source of information - citizenship education provides a systematic approach to information that relates to the functioning of the state, its relationships with civil society, and political processes both domestically and internationally (Hague, Harrop, 2010: 161, 163). Building upon this discussion, and in combination with the teaching approaches, citizenship education should aim to develop fundamental skills for interpreting political information. If contemporary representative governance allows forms of control by citizens over state institutions and the ruling political elite, citizenship education can be seen as a tool for shaping societies that not only exercise political control but also nurture a strong sense of national belonging. By cultivating a developed political culture and active participation, it empowers citizens to contribute to the preservation and development of national identity while ensuring democratic engagement and accountability within the state.

The Analytic Report researching on Participatory Citizenship in the European Union Institute of Education indicates that embedding citizenship education within authentic, real-world contexts significantly enhances all aspects of participatory citizenship. This approach, known as situated learning, involves conducting educational activities in environments directly related to the subject matter (Hoskins, B. & Kerr, 2012, p. 5). The citizenship curriculum can provide a platform for school settings, thus entailing an engagement of students in genuine civic experiences, such as participating in school governance or community projects. In this manner, they develop a deeper connection to their nation's values, traditions, and societal norms. This active involvement helps inculcate a sense of belonging and responsibility towards their community in the first place, and consequently their country. By understanding and practicing their roles as citizens in meaningful settings, students internalize the principles that define their national identity, thereby contributing to its preservation and evolution. Such engagement also fosters a generation of informed and active citizens committed to the principles of democracy and communal well-being. By acquiring knowledge about political systems, legal frameworks, and societal structures, students gain a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms that govern their communities.

Another clear linkage between citizenship education and national identity is evident through the political process, political institutions, and political systems, as nationalism continues to shape political dynamics across Europe. A key example of this is the results of the elections for the European Parliament, where nationalist parties have been increasing their support. In the previous parliamentary term (2019-2024), nationalist and far-right parties made significant electoral gains, reflecting a broader trend across EU member states. In the 2024 European Parliament elections, far-right parties increased their representation, with the Patriots for Europe (PfE) securing 84 seats and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) obtaining 78 seats (European Parliament, 2024). This trend reflects a broader shift in the European political landscape, as nationalist parties continue to

gain influence across the continent. These parties, which advocate for sovereignty, stricter immigration policies, and the protection of national identity, have influenced political debates at both the national and European levels. Their growing presence in the European Parliament underscores the role of citizenship education in fostering awareness of democratic processes, political ideologies, and the implications of nationalist movements on European integration. There exists however a potential threat that initiatives focused on promoting national identity might veer toward nationalism or even be co-opted by far-right and extreme movements, especially when national identity is framed in a way that excludes certain groups or emphasizes superiority over others. When national identity is portrayed as something fixed, ethnocentric, or tied to ethnic or racial purity, it can easily turn into an ideology of exclusion, fueling division and intolerance. These types of movements may use the concept of national identity to justify xenophobia, racism, and anti-immigrant sentiment, which can be harmful in multicultural societies.

The research findings emphasize the importance of the *dual nature* of citizenship education as an educational pillar for fostering national identity and recognizing the alarming consequences of its extreme manifestations. Rather than that, citizenship education can emphasize on this characteristic and view of the national identity that it is not about excluding others but about shared values, rights, and responsibilities, promoting the so-called *inclusive nationalism* (Seneca Learning, n.d.). This is also related to the *promotion of awareness of rights and responsibilities* citizens have toward their community and the broader society, thus contributing to the rule of law and social justice. Development of *critical thinking and reflection* is another primary function of citizenship education. By exploring both the positive and negative aspects of national identity, students can develop a more nuanced understanding and avoid being swept up in extreme ideologies that promise easy answers but often lead to division, polarization and conflicts. Citizenship education can *teach and emphasize the democratic values* that underpin a healthy national identity - such as equality, freedom, human rights, and respect for diversity. Educating citizens about the historical context of national identity and nationalism can help them recognize when national identity is being manipulated for harmful purposes. Understanding extreme movements allows citizens to differentiate between the sense of belonging as a patriotic pride and harmful nationalism that threatens social cohesion and is destructive. Citizenship education can also encourage dialogues about appreciating differences and solving common challenges. This can involve addressing questions of how national identity coexists with global identities in a multicultural world, promoting respect, tolerance, and cooperation over division and exclusion. Citizenship education aims to *encourage* individuals to *engage and participate in democratic processes*, such as voting, decision-making, advocating for policies or reforms, volunteering etc. It fosters active citizenship by teaching the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic society. Citizenship education *helps individuals recognize* their role in building a harmonious society, despite differences in background, culture, and beliefs. It emphasizes shared values, such as tolerance, respect, and equality, to *foster social cohesion* within diverse societies.

CONCLUSION

One of the functions of the citizenship as a phenomenon is the “promotion of a sense of identity and belonging” (Heater, 2004, p. 180). In this sense, citizenship education in the context of EU provides a foundation for development of a sense of both national and European identity. Striking a balance between national and pan-European values presents a significant challenge in the present-day context. The issue of national identity has become increasingly relevant amidst the ongoing processes of globalization.



The nation-state serves as a framework wherein identity is institutionalized through education, legislation, and national symbols; within this structure, the educational system plays a central role in the socialization of citizens, namely the political one, with citizenship education fostering an understanding of values, rights and responsibilities, acting as a safeguard against extreme forms of nationalism, and cultivating a political culture grounded in shared norms and active participation in public life.

Based on the analysis provided, citizenship education is an *objective necessity for the successful development of the political process in democratic societies*. In its substantive part, it consists of various knowledge about the civil status of the individual, the functioning of society, institutions, the state, and more. These pieces of knowledge are related to ongoing processes and phenomena, with an undeniable part of them being the impact of human activity on national identity. The effects of these actions are reflected at the subregional, regional, national, continental, and global levels. In addition to the territorial aspect, issues of national identity affect social, political, economic, cultural spheres, etc. National identity is an important aspect of citizenship education. By studying issues related to national identity and building national awareness, a more active, responsible and cohesive society can be developed. It can be concluded that the study of the interconnection between politics, national identity, and societal cohesion in citizenship education curricula is of great importance for the security, development, and well-being of society.

Citizenship education functions both as a *reflection of an established democratic state* and as a *strategic instrument* for cultivating and sustaining democratic values within the state. If the state invests time and resources in building basic political literacy among the younger population, it lays the foundation for a strong and educated civil society. Awareness and understanding of the specifics of social and political processes increase citizens' confidence and capacity for engagement with their own rights and those of their loved ones while reducing levels of apathy. This means that the more an individual understands the interconnections between the state and society, the more easily they will recognize and respond to violations and injustices (Popova, 2024). *A stable democracy requires continuous citizen engagement and an active civil society that extends beyond electoral participation*. Well-informed and citizens with developed critical skills are equipped to identify and assess the strengths and weaknesses of their communities, identify pressing issues and initiate actions to address them through democratic mechanisms. Moreover, the advancement of digitalization gives new opportunities for European citizens to participate in political processes across the continent, especially among the younger generation.

Distrust in political institutions often stems from citizens' limited understanding and awareness of how these institutions operate. The problematic aspects of a democratic society, as well as the possibilities for resolving them, largely depend on the stage of development of a given country's society. There is no universal formula for addressing problems and responding to contemporary challenges, as the specific characteristics of each society is also important in these processes (Popova, 2024). However, this may result in an identity crisis, characterized by a weak sense of belonging, diminished patriotism, and apathy and even in extreme manifestations of nationalism. Such dynamics often lead to the polarization of public attitudes. In the long run, citizenship education can become an instrument for preventing such crises. In the context of sustaining multiethnic democracies - characterized by ethnic and cultural diversity, a defining characteristic of today's globalized world, particularly within the European Union - citizenship education can contribute to *foster respect for diverse identities and promoting intercultural understanding*. Regarding the extremist and populist appeals and actions of political leaders and parties within the EU, citizenship education provides an opportunity to develop *critical thinking skills*

and conduct *objective analysis of facts*, which can help *mitigate the harmful effects of extremism and populism on society*.

Beyond acquiring a comprehensive conceptual framework and in-depth theoretical and factual knowledge in key political domains - such as public administration, human rights, equality etc. - citizenship education provides students with opportunities to develop a range of competencies and practical skills across various levels, as presented. The analysis of the significance of citizenship education for modern nation-states in Europe should not be limited solely to its role in transmitting knowledge about political institutions and processes; its *potential for societal development* must also be recognized. The goals of contemporary citizenship education should focus on developing competencies for effective and constructive interaction between individuals, as well as between individuals and political institutions at both national and international levels, fostering critical thinking, and promoting a socially responsible attitude.

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Business and Moral Conflicts. Ethical Challenges in Contemporary Management

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ABSTRACT

As society and business evolve rapidly, ethical dilemmas surrounding their governance are becoming increasingly significant. This article examines the complex landscape of moral conflicts in the business world, highlighting the pressures and stress experienced by corporate leaders. It explores the roles of various stakeholders, the erosion of trust, and the challenges to managerial integrity and honesty under continuous scrutiny. The discussion focuses on the root causes of ethical tensions across multiple levels – employees, organizations, trade relations, society, and the global business environment. The analysis reveals that ethical issues are not isolated incidents but deeply embedded problems within modern management. As such, they require a comprehensive exploration and a reasoned framework for identifying corrective strategies. Through ethical leadership and improved decision-making, organizations can enhance stakeholder satisfaction and promote more responsible and sustainable business practices.

Keywords: *Ethical pressure, Ethical stress, Trust, Integrity, Honesty*

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, despite the expansion of business management tools and frameworks, ethical dilemmas have grown in both scope and complexity. Corporate responsibility, transparency, and accountability have emerged as critical focal points across global industries (Bernstein, 2016). Ethical concerns such as legal liability, employee safety, child labour, bribery, cybercrime, overbilling, privacy breaches, and deceptive practices are no longer peripheral—they now lie at the heart of modern business operations (Kaur, 2017).

The widespread use of digital technologies and social media has further intensified ethical scrutiny. Managers and executives often find themselves under pressure from diverse stakeholders, including owners, regulatory bodies, employees, customers, suppliers, and competitors. Trust, integrity, and honesty—core pillars of corporate credibility—are constantly being tested in this environment.

Business leaders face moral challenges on multiple fronts: internally, in managing personnel and workplace dynamics; organizationally, in shaping culture and ethics; externally, in market behaviour and global practices. These challenges arise not only from overt misconduct but also from subtle pressures such as conflicts of interest, ineffective communication, poor people management, or the

mishandling of diversity and inclusion efforts. Moreover, the pace of global commerce and cultural convergence exacerbates ethical tensions in decision-making.

As Leonard (2018) emphasizes, ethical missteps—once hidden—are now exposed and amplified via digital platforms, magnifying reputational risks. Public perception and consumer loyalty can deteriorate rapidly, leading to financial and strategic consequences. Thus, addressing ethical issues is no longer optional; it is essential for sustainable management and long-term corporate resilience.

This paper seeks to examine the roots and manifestations of ethical conflict in business and offer a critical discussion on the structural and cultural factors that intensify moral pressure. It also outlines the need for actionable strategies to address these concerns and improve outcomes for all involved stakeholders.

MORAL CONFLICTS IN BUSINESS

The emergence and development of global markets, cost-driven corporate relocations, and rapid technological advancement have introduced a growing number of moral conflicts in contemporary business. These dilemmas often arise from the tension between economic efficiency and ethical responsibility, particularly when businesses operate across countries with varying legal standards, cultural values, and labour practices.

The Modern Moral Picture

In the 1960s and 1970s, a significant number of companies from developed countries began relocating production to less-developed regions to reduce labour costs. This transition gave rise to the proliferation of sweatshops—facilities widely criticized for their poor working conditions and inadequate compensation. Sweatshops often exemplify broader moral concerns within global production systems, especially where working environments fall short of international labour standards. Critics argue that such operations exploit vulnerable populations, offering minimal wages for long hours under substandard conditions. Supporters, however, suggest that sweatshops may offer valuable employment in regions with limited economic alternatives, thus contributing to economic development.

Child labour represents another deeply controversial issue. While it is banned or heavily restricted in many parts of the world, it persists in economically challenged regions, where families often rely on the income generated by their children. From a Western perspective, child labour is considered an unacceptable violation of human rights. Yet in other societies, it is sometimes viewed as a socio-economic necessity. This raises the complex question: can moral standards be considered universal, or must they be evaluated within cultural and economic contexts?

Concerns over worker safety provide further examples of moral conflict. The refurbishment of the SS United States cruise ship, for instance, illustrates this tension. When asbestos removal was required, U.S. regulations estimated the cost at around \$100 million. To reduce expenses, the company attempted to outsource the task to workers in Turkey and eventually Sevastopol, Russia—locations where labour protections were significantly weaker. This case highlights how economic interests may come into conflict with basic human health and safety considerations.

Environmental ethics also occupy a central place in modern business debates. Oil companies have often faced criticism for exploiting natural resources and damaging ecosystems, particularly in countries where environmental regulations are weak or poorly enforced. In Argentina's Vaca Muerta shale field, for instance, local communities have raised concerns about the long-term impact of hydraulic fracturing. Similarly, multinational corporations are often accused of dumping toxic waste or e-waste in less-developed regions, thereby shifting environmental risks to vulnerable populations.

Historical cases such as IBM's cooperation with the Nazi regime during the 1930s, or more recent examples of Western companies adapting operations to align with authoritarian government policies, illustrate the ethical dilemmas of corporate complicity. These examples raise the issue of whether

businesses should operate by the principle of value-neutral engagement or take a stand when faced with morally questionable regimes.

Another source of moral complexity involves cultural relativism. Should international businesses conform to local norms—even when those norms contradict the company’s stated values? For example, in some countries, restrictions on women’s rights may limit their participation in the workforce. Companies operating in such environments must navigate between respecting cultural practices and adhering to principles of equality and non-discrimination.

Moral Aspects of Products and Services

Corruption and bribery also remain persistent ethical challenges in global business. Although foreign bribery is prohibited by international law—including the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act—such practices are still common in regions where corruption is embedded in the business environment. The distinction between facilitation payments and unlawful bribery often blurs, complicating decision-making for companies trying to maintain ethical integrity while also achieving commercial success.

Research by Vitell and Festervand (1987) underscores that moral conflict often emerges not only from internal decisions but also from external interactions—especially in relationships with customers and suppliers. Ethical tensions are particularly pronounced in small businesses, where intense competition may pressure owners and managers into ethically questionable decisions. Issues such as gift-giving, price manipulation, misrepresentation in communication, and confidentiality breaches are among the most frequently cited ethical dilemmas, many of which go unreported or unresolved.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that moral conflicts in business are neither isolated incidents nor limited to a single region or industry. Rather, they are systemic and multifaceted, shaped by economic pressures, cultural expectations, and legal variations. As such, addressing them requires not only adherence to legal frameworks but also a strong ethical foundation that supports consistent and principled decision-making in a globalized business landscape.

MORAL CONFLICTS AND STAKEHOLDERS

In the contemporary business environment, moral conflicts are deeply intertwined with the expectations and actions of various stakeholders. These include shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, regulatory institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and society at large. Each stakeholder group brings its own values, interests, and pressures, which may conflict with one another or with the internal goals of the organization.

Pressure for Moral Compromise

Business leaders are frequently required to balance these conflicting interests in their strategic decision-making. For example, shareholders typically prioritize profitability and growth, while employees may focus on job security, fair compensation, and respectful treatment. Customers demand quality, safety, and transparency, whereas governments enforce legal compliance, ethical conduct, and social accountability. NGOs and advocacy groups, meanwhile, may hold companies to even higher moral standards—expecting environmental responsibility, labour rights protection, and active contributions to the public good.

These competing expectations often lead to ethical dilemmas. When faced with a decision that could please one stakeholder group but harm another, managers must carefully weigh short-term gains against long-term reputational and ethical consequences. For instance, outsourcing production to a country with lower labour costs may satisfy shareholders but lead to criticism from human rights organizations if working conditions there are substandard. Similarly, implementing environmentally friendly practices may appeal to consumers and activists but increase operational costs, raising concerns among investors.

Moreover, businesses are increasingly aware of the importance of stakeholder trust. Ethical lapses—whether related to financial manipulation, environmental harm, or labour violations—can lead to a rapid decline in public trust and long-term damage to brand reputation. Stakeholders today are more informed,

engaged, and vocal, especially in the digital age, where information spreads instantly and reputational damage can be swift and severe.

An important dimension of moral conflict arises internally, particularly in the relationship between employers and employees. Ethical issues such as discrimination, harassment, lack of transparency in promotion decisions, or unfair labour practices can create a toxic work culture and erode trust within the organization. These internal conflicts not only affect employee morale and productivity but can also become public issues, attracting legal attention and public criticism.

At the same time, stakeholder expectations vary significantly across cultures, industries, and regulatory contexts. Multinational corporations must navigate diverse ethical landscapes, adapting their stakeholder strategies to fit different social and institutional environments. This requires culturally sensitive leadership and a flexible but principled approach to stakeholder engagement.

Stakeholder theory, as proposed by Freeman (1984), argues that businesses must create value for all their stakeholders, not just shareholders. This broader view of corporate responsibility has gained significant traction in recent years, supported by concepts such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), environmental, social, and governance (ESG) metrics, and stakeholder capitalism. Yet, implementing these ideals in practice often exposes firms to moral conflict, especially when stakeholder interests diverge or ethical priorities clash with business imperatives.

In conclusion, moral conflicts in business cannot be understood without considering the diverse and often competing interests of stakeholders. Ethical decision-making requires not only legal compliance and managerial skill but also moral courage, empathy, and a commitment to fairness and transparency. Navigating these complexities successfully is essential for building resilient, responsible, and respected organizations in the modern world.

SOLUTIONS

How then can a business professional effectively engage in the public world of business without compromising their moral convictions, without violating someone's civil rights, and without losing either their business or their career? With moral values in society evolving and laws changing with respect to civil rights and accommodations, clearly business professionals and business owners find themselves on shifting sand. They need principles on which they can anchor a viable approach to effectively manage those situations where their moral conscience and social moral values might be at odds.

Haidt suggests that the key to resolving the moral dilemmas that polarize society in general is to approach life and every incidence of disagreement or incompatibility with moral humility (Haidt, 2014).

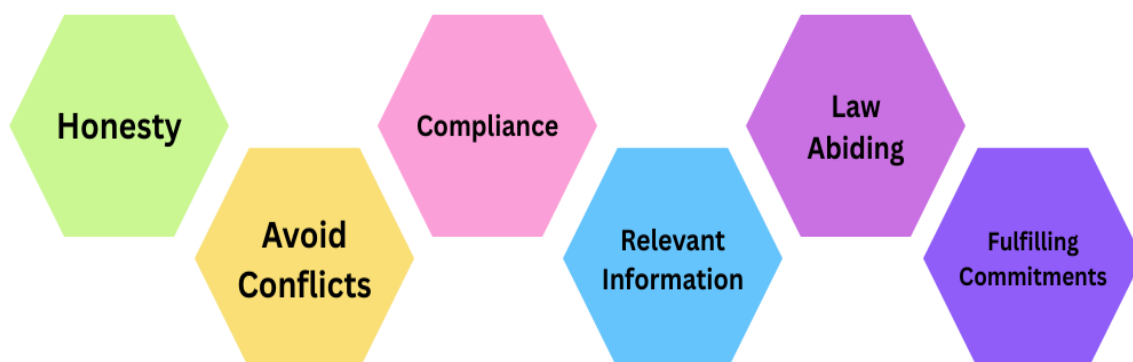


Figure 1. Business Ethics. *Source: Hanh, 2023*

It is possible to engage in business without compromising one's principles or violating someone's civil rights, but it requires recognition of some important principles. Some of these are:

Practice Equality and Fairness: Possibly the most pressing response for all business professionals is to ensure that they demonstrate impartiality in all business interactions. With respect to the treatment of customers, suppliers, and business associates, equal and fair treatment is a requirement not an option. There is a relatively universal acceptance that individuals have a fundamental human right to fairness and justice. A *prima facie* moral principle, equality suggests that people commonly deserve even treatment and a level of respect regardless of their moral beliefs or moral lifestyle (Ross, 1932). Equal and fair treatment is indeed a generally accepted moral principle, but it is all required under the law. With respect to human resource management, there are several laws to insure fair and equitable employment practices. Laws insure equal employment opportunity, equality with respect to compensation and benefits, and equal and fair treatment in labour relations. (Griffin, 2014, p. 217).

Commit to Maintain Moral Values without Condemnation: Condemnation is not an inevitable result of upholding a strong moral conscience. An article in the field of evolutionary psychology underscored the distinction between moral conscience and moral condemnation. (Marczyk, 2013) The author claims that moral condemnation is about regulating the behaviour of others resulting in punishment for violators while moral conscience is about regulating one's own behaviour. The key distinction is that moral condemnation leads to the application of punitive consequences for violators whereas moral conscience is simply a recognition of one's moral values and the commitment to stand by them with respect to personal behaviour. Moral conscience without moral condemnation is to retain one's moral values while still genuinely acknowledging the dignity of the other person; not to cast stones, not to disparage the offender, not to attack or criticize, but to show consideration for them as an individual.

Consider Outsourcing and Strategic Alliances: Outsourcing products and services has long been an accepted and integral aspect of the business environment. In a study by Pricewaterhouse Coopers (2004), researchers surveyed 1,400 CEOs from organizations that spanned globally about the current business climate and emerging practices to help organizations build value. The results reflected that CEOs favour and are inclined more now than in the past to outsource core business functions. The study showed that 56 percent in 2003 favoured outsourcing. Additionally, 73 percent of the CEOs indicated that outsourcing was an integral part of their business strategy.

Promote Tolerance and Accommodation: Tolerance and accommodation are not always pursued in cases where individuals believe their deep-seated values come under attack. However, there are ample models where society has made accommodation respecting individual moral beliefs while recognizing the varying norms within culture. There are several notable institutions that have grappled with this moral dilemma on how to address those for whom participating in certain activities is deemed immoral. These institutions have emerged with rather effective methods to offer exemptions that accommodate these differing moral positions.

CONCLUSION

In today's complex and fast-evolving business landscape, moral and ethical conflicts are increasingly at the forefront of organizational management. Companies are no longer judged solely by their financial performance but also by how responsibly they engage with employees, customers, communities, and the environment. This shift reflects growing societal expectations for transparency, fairness, and accountability in both strategic and day-to-day decisions.

Ethical dilemmas often stem from conflicting interests among stakeholders, cultural and regulatory diversity in global operations, and the relentless pursuit of competitive advantage. Business leaders face mounting pressures to navigate these challenges with integrity, while simultaneously delivering value and maintaining profitability. In this context, ethical leadership becomes a core component of effective management, requiring vision, courage, and empathy.



The analysis presented in this article underscores that ethical problems are not peripheral—they are embedded in the very fabric of contemporary business. Whether manifested in labour practices, environmental decisions, stakeholder relations, or internal governance, these issues require deliberate attention and structured responses. Ignoring them not only undermines employee morale and stakeholder trust but also poses long-term risks to reputation and sustainability.

To address these challenges, organizations must integrate ethical considerations into their strategic planning and operational frameworks. This includes:

1. **Establishing clear ethical codes of conduct**, which articulate company values and expected behaviors for all employees, from senior executives to entry-level staff.
2. **Promoting ethical leadership**, where managers model integrity, transparency, and fairness in their decision-making and communication.
3. **Implementing regular training programs** to raise awareness of common ethical dilemmas and equip employees with tools for responsible decision-making.
4. **Encouraging open dialogue and whistleblower protection**, so employees can report unethical behavior without fear of retaliation.
5. **Adopting stakeholder-centered approaches**, ensuring that the interests of shareholders, employees, customers, communities, and the environment are considered in all key decisions.
6. **Monitoring and evaluating ethical performance**, using measurable indicators and regular audits to ensure accountability and continuous improvement.

Business ethics must be treated as a dynamic and evolving field—one that adapts to changing societal norms, technological advancements, and the growing complexity of global markets. By embracing ethical principles as a strategic imperative, companies can foster stronger relationships with stakeholders, enhance their reputational capital, and contribute meaningfully to the broader social good.

In conclusion, the future of responsible business lies not in avoiding moral conflict, but in recognizing it early, engaging with it honestly, and resolving it through principled leadership and inclusive decision-making. Only then can organizations truly fulfill their role as ethical actors in a globalized and interconnected world.

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