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CONTENT

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ACCESS RIGHTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES FROM THE ESCAZÚ AGREEMENT AS A WAGER FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN ECOLOGICAL CITIZENSHIP

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Abstract: *Starting from the question: what are the deontological dimensions in the regulations from the Escazú Agreement that contribute to the development of an ecological citizenship? this work described citizenship as a predefined category containing different dimensions, as that of ecological citizenship. Later on, a deontological analysis of the Escazú Agreement regulations that contribute to the configuration of this kind of citizenship in Colombia was performed. A qualitative methodology design was employed, with a dogmatic legal approach supported by the deontological dimension of the study of regulations, that can be derived from the trial vision of law, under hermeneutical guidelines, over documentary sources where the debates about citizenship and access rights in environmental issues are held. This allowed the triangulation of sources to build the analysis. It was concluded that the deontological dimensions in the Escazú Agreement connect to a citizenship conceived primarily from the correlation right-duty. Here, duty, as an element for the ecological citizenship, is progressively gaining preponderance, with a preferential differentiating approach that thinks of the reality of the human rights activists in environmental issues.*

Key words: *citizenship, ecological citizenship, access rights in environmental issues, Escazú Agreement.*

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Introduction

Crisis is the common denominator that defines two scenarios, which should not be divided due to their natural and necessary rapport: social and environmental matters. Overcoming this division is possible from a holistic, integrated and complex comprehension that, rather than dividing the human and environmental issues, considers them as a single reality affected by the same variables of a civility crisis, a *"crisis in civilization"* (Castro, Cruz y Ruiz, 2009, p. 355).

That situation opened the doors to the urgent duty of deeply reasoning and critically reflecting, in order to promote a change in people's attitudes, and with it a change in the ways of thinking the humanity; appropriating a consciousness of species with an identity that overcomes any parameter of discrimination (Kinne, 1997; Novo, 1997; Sosa, 1997; Toledo, 1997; Rozzi, 2001; Foladori, 2002; Mejía, 2006; Castro, Cruz and Ruiz, 2009).

In spite of the acknowledgement and characterization of the current civilization crisis, it is not possible to say that the human beings have an understanding of it. The variables that compose the crisis are perpetuated, and many of them are intensified and divided, which multiplies the conflicts that generate a perception of uneasiness and human vulnerability. Paradoxically, that perception resists to connect these critical variables with ways of thinking and acting of the human beings as generating facts of the same. The crisis is supported in their own lack of understanding and "*nothing seems more difficult than changing the ways of a society when the current development style is very deeply rooted*" (Rodríguez and Paba, 2013, p. 85).

The civilization crisis, as a crisis of understanding, leads to an axiological one, and with it a behavioral and a relational one. This affects the individual and collective vital dimensions. Due to their characteristics, education has been proposed as a way to resolve it (Gavilanes and Tipán, 2021), but in cases in which the social order is altered or threatened, human beings don't stop recurring to ruling entities that coerce behavior to face the situations where the most essential values end up violated.

Nevertheless, the law is not exempt of being a human elaboration in crisis as part of the civilization crisis, as it is disputed between polarized and antagonistic ends: the ideal of the realization of justice and the limitations of strict legality, the detailed formal elaborations and the deficiencies of the

material realization of rights, or the elaborated theoretical decantation facing the irregular practical implementations. In this law culture, the description of a context where "*the trust of citizens in law is not, or at least not always, product of an illusion, and the persistence of the paradox rises suspicion of higher stakes than a simple collective deceit*" (Rodríguez, 2009, p. 19) is still current. Law is an unchallenged support to overcome the crisis, but not the only one, as the responses to the civilization crisis will turn into failed attempts if they are only trusted to the efficacy of law. The solution is not only thought through a "*coercively imposed legislation, but mostly through a free adhesion and participation of citizens, based on an exercise of moral virtue of civility*" (Cortina, 1997, p. 22).

In Colombia, the civilization crisis reaches levels that exceed, by far, the limits of the respect of what is right; the cruelest acts against human nature confirm the exercise of a precarious moral virtue of civility, against those who advance in the understanding of the most essential rapport between human and environment. This comprehension is usually limited to the most affected and aggravated communities in the country, that claim for the indivisible relation between the environmental and the human. The environmental activists, defined as those who "*on their own or through a professional name, and pacifically, make an effort to protect and promote the human rights related to the environment*" (UN, 2016, p. 6), personify those attacks, as they do the appropriation of a belief that human is not different from environmental. Through their actions, they reveal the possibility of a new citizenship founded on an ecological ethics that vexes multiple sectors.

Environmental activists are one if the issues regulated by the Escazú Agreement, the regional Agreement about the access to information, participation and access to justice in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, that was approved in Colombia through the Law 2273 of 2022. Even if it has mobilized one of the most profound and polarized debates in the national environmental sector in the last years, this regional instrument has been translated into a set of articles that allows a civil vindication through which multiple social sectors, historically relegated because of their special and unique ways of understanding life with and in the environment, experience an expansion of the echo sent from the law ruling to dignify a different perspective and behavior to contribute to the resolution of the civilization crisis.

More than an international instrument that is installed with coercive character over the relational dynamics of society, the Escazú Agreement

re-opens the doors to the construction of an ecological citizenship founded over an ethical perspective that relocates the others, the otherness and the link between them. Because of that, the objective of this work is to establish the deontological dimensions present in the dispositions of the Escazú Agreement that contribute to the formation of an ecological citizenship, focusing on the citizenship, understood through different perceptions; as those of Turner (1990) who differentiates it in the public and private spheres, and in their active and passive modalities; Marshall, who proposes a civilian citizenship, a political citizenship and a social citizenship; and Dobson (2001), who introduces the modality of the ecological citizenship.

The concept of citizenship has gone through a path where it has been identified with the demandability of rights, from the acceptance of a sense of belonging to a political community, to the fulfillment of obligations, in order to support the need for an ecological citizenship based on the fulfillment of duties, as an ethical imperative for the satisfaction of the general interest, current and future. The ecological citizenship is thought of in the regulations of the Escazú Agreement, a regulating context of social behavior in the environmental sector. Its contents are focused on the exercise of the rights of access to the information, the participation and justice, and represent an axiological support that allows for the development of an ecological citizenship.

A qualitative methodology design was employed, with a dogmatic legal approach supported by the deontological dimension of the study of regulations, that can be derived from the trial vision of law (fact, value, law). Hermeneutical guidelines were employed over documentary sources where the debates about citizenship and access rights in environmental issues are held. This allowed the triangulation of sources to build reflection.

To answer the question: what deontological dimensions are present in the ruling of the Escazú Agreement that contribute to the development of an ecological citizenship? This article makes first an analysis of the citizenship as a predefined category containing different dimensions, as that of the ecological citizenship. Later on, a deontological analysis of the Escazú Agreement dispositions that contribute to the configuration of that citizenship in Colombia is performed and some conclusions are proposed.

The dimensions of a citizenship in crisis as an antecedent for the environmental citizenship

Starting from the citizenship, in a civilization crisis that is represented in threats of extinction of the ways of life known by the humans, unveils the crisis of citizenship in itself and legitimates the invitation of Adela Cortina (1997) when she explains that the study of citizenship starts from the "need, in the postindustrial societies, to generate among its members a type of identity in which they are acknowledged and made feel a sense of belonging, as this type of societies clearly suffers a deficit of adhesion" (p. 20).

However, the conceptualization of citizenship is not clear in the diverse theoretical scenario where it is built. This represents serious challenges to the institutionalization of the ecological dimension, if it is considered that "*there is not a single citizenship; it changes according to the times, the countries, the traditions, and mostly it is not homogeneous and comprises several dimensions rather contradictory among themselves*" (Dubet, 2003, p. 220). Citizenship can be defined from the legal and political status, it can refer to the vindicating efforts, to the time it has been considered as an acknowledgement that should operate among the ones belonging to society (Perez, 2002), and all of those perspectives are valid, as the citizenship changes with the social transformations and demonstrates its flexibility in the path in which it incorporates rights and duties to new groups of people (León, 2008).

Traditionally, citizenship is represented as a connection between a person and a political community, to guarantee its presence and participation in it; a connection that generates an understanding from the acknowledgement and the concern present in the political community about each one of its members. This translates into a political relationship where the person belongs to a community that acknowledges it and shows concern for it, but to which, at the same time, keeps permanent loyalty (Heather, 1990).

The richness in the debate about citizenship comes from the forms or modalities through which this connection is built and recognized. It usually leads to the confirmation of a political relationship supported by the identity that the person consolidates with the community, either by the legal status given to the person, by the agency acquired in the political institutions of the community, or by the acknowledgement of the social group of its belonging. The connection to which the person adheres

commits it to the participation and interest in the public affairs, localizes it in the public sphere with a level of responsibility that goes beyond the private scenario, which usually leads to see citizenship as a transactional category of contractual nature "*between the State and the citizen, through which the citizen claims its rights from the State, but at the same time commits to contribute to the ends of the State*" (Dobson, 2001, p. 170).

A first specific dimension of citizenship is that which privileges its understanding from the entitlement of rights (Marshall, 1998; Roche 1992; Kymlicka and Norman, 1994), where their recognition in the person is taken as a status granting a condition of equality. That is a dimension with legal nature, that recognizes as citizen the one who is declared by the ruling order as entitled to the attributes of legitimate demandability towards the others, including the State. For Marshall (1950) it is a "*Status that is granted to the members in full right of a community. Its beneficiaries are equal in terms of the rights and obligations it implies*" (p. 37). This gives basis to the citizenship in the titularity of civil, political and social rights, which is one of the traits that along equality and the connection of belonging to a political society, guarantee the three dimensions that constitute citizenship: civil, political and social. The first, includes the exercise of fundamental freedom, the second the participation, and the third the conditions for wellness (Marshall and Bottomore, 1998).

Marshall's perspective makes citizenship the political component that links the human being to the State. It makes it acquire a defined position in a community, and with that a source of the sovereign power as elector or eligible among the members of the community. The citizen is entitled to rights that demand the exercise of obligations that give it acknowledgement and self-reference (Castrillón Alzate, 2012). Aragón Rivera (2012) takes from Marshall's proposal the acknowledgement of the triad of rights of the person, the consolidation of that triad as a result of a progressive historical process motivated by the social transformations, and finally, the character of national institution of the citizenship, in which he encodes a "*feeling of belonging to the community that is perceived as a common heritage*" (Aragón Rivera, 2012, p. 142).

The dimension of citizenship as the "status granted to the members in full right of a community" (Marshall, 1950, p. 37), encoded in the entitlement to attributes of demandability, creates a formal perspective, deeply legal in nature, very oriented to the passive dimension proposed by Turner (1992),

where the citizen can turn into a "subject of an absolute authority", a subject that "claims to the State for its rights" (Benedicto and Morán, 2002, p. 12).

In addition to the dimension that favors citizenship as a legal or formal status, there is another citizenship, the "*substantial or citizenship as a performing activity is the effective and real practice of those rights given by the legal order*" (Marshall and Bottomore, 1998, p. 66). This stance serves to broaden the citizenship to a dimension where the entitlement of rights is accompanied by an entitlement of duties. It is an active citizenship (Turner, 1992) in which the duties acquire the same importance that is given to the rights, promoting the participation and involvement in the public matters.

The dimension of citizenship from a balanced understanding of the rights and the duties is a bet for the democratic empowerment and for the social cohesion so that the citizens "get behind the society where they live and defend the values associated to the democracy, the equality and the understanding of different cultures and different opinions" (Hoskins and Mascherini, 2009, p. 461-462). This is a dimension that aims at overcoming the understanding of the citizenship "centered on the rights, relatively exempt of obligations and non-reciprocal" (Roche, 1992, p. 31), to adjust it to a panorama from the contractualist perspective, where there is a reciprocity between the recognition, the ensuring and the exercise of rights with the fulfillment of duties.

From the dimension of citizenship as the reciprocity between rights and duties, a broadening of the concept can be observed; the sense of responsibility is increased, which can be explained from the "concept of the common sense of morality" (Roche, 1992, p. 31). In the case of Colombia, in the context of an iconic environmental conflict, it was explicitly recognized by jurisprudence "*One of the characteristics of almost all the fundamental constitutional rights is that they are not absolute rights that can be exercised without any burden by the entitled person, as they are subject to limits beyond which their exercise is illegitimate.*" (Corte Constitucional, 1992, T – 411).

Citizenship, defined in the correlation right-duty, places the obligations or the duty along the rights, as the elements that validate the status in the community and in front of the State. After that, it proposes the conditions for the exercise of freedom, participation and ensuring of social conditions as a common task and not centered in the role of demandability that a person can exercise towards others. This is an active citizenship, where

duty can even be considered as condition for the right, as it confirms that the satisfaction of any personal right depends upon the fulfillment that the entitled of that possibility does of its duties. Through that fulfillment, the others ensure the realization of their own personal rights:

> (…) *supposes that the one entitled to a right has, at the same time, an obligation about those behaviors protected by the fundamental right. It is not about another person having a duty regarding the right of the entitled, but that the one entitled to that right accepts the demand of a duty. It regards rights so highly valued by the community and the legal order that they cannot be abandoned to the autonomy of will, so the State establishes duties for all, at the same time it gives them faculties over them* (Peces Barba, 1968, p. 209, cited by Corte Constitucional, 1992, sentence T – 411).

Different perspectives proposing diverse implications of citizenship come from the understanding of citizenship as the correlation of rights and duties (Cortina, 1997; Aragón Rivera, 2012; Ramírez Sáiz, 2012, Castrillón Alzate, 2012). An example of this is the civil citizenship, related to equality, as the avoidance of discrimination and hierarchies or social imbalances, and freedom as the capacity of the person to exercise and realize without State limitations coming in front of it.

The political dimension is based on the exercise of association and participation in the political life of the State and is connected to the different modalities of participation. Instrumental, where the citizen participates through means that usually formalize its exercise by mediating and performing scenarios of discussion, decision making and control exercises; and normative, where the citizen has a direct intervention that is not mediated by any instrument (Sánchez Torres and Muriel Ciceri, 2007).

In its turn, the social citizenship has a strong and evident link to the tenants of the Social State of Law, in the way that it refers to the effective realization of the essential conditions that ensure social justice without limiting to the realization of the civil and political rights. The economic dimension refers to the condition of employee and employer, where the productive activities for survival are debated.   Lastly, the cultural dimension that is divided into two aspects: "*1. The right to access to the cultural goods, tangible and intangible, pertaining to a society and the responsibility towards them, and 2. The right to being different and the respect to it*" (Ramírez Sáiz, 2012, p. 21).

Without excluding the role played by rights and duties, the comprehension of an active citizenship surpasses the formalization and the status of legal origin, to take it as the status achieved due to the correlation among the people in a society and the society itself. It is a kind of citizenship founded over the "*recognition of the society towards its members followed by their adherence to the collective projects of a common currency*" (Cortina, 1997, p. 23). This is a citizenship that works from the sense of belonging to a community that is defined by the feeling and conviction of being a part and coming together with a political community, because the minimum values that lead to the realization of their life project are shared, an "*ethics of the minimum*" is shared. (Cortina, 1997, p. 25).

This refers to Levdet's (2017) third dimension of citizenship, according to which the identification of the human being in and with the group is ensured, a citizenship that "has meant belonging; concretely, belonging to the community in which you live your own life. In its turn, the sense of belonging has implied invariably degrees of participation in the community" (Held, 1991, p. 20 cited in Dobson, 2001, p. 171). This form of citizenship is proposed here as the addition of three components: it starts from the sense of belonging of a person towards a political community, a feeling that is supported on the conviction and will to belong and involve in common projects where their own projects have a place; a recognition from the political community about that sense of belonging; and a legitimate permanence, as long as the feeling of belonging, as well as the recognition of that feeling, should not be exceptional, circumstantial or occasional.

Ecological citizenship as the status to overcome the civilization crisis

The different dimensions of citizenship unveil that not even the strongest back up in legality, nor the broadening of the status from the correlation with duties, or the moral reciprocity among people, have achieved the consolidation of a link that ensures the processes of identity that allows social cohesion to work for the public affairs. On the contrary, the expressions of the civilization crisis unveil the absence of an "*interactive reciprocity among the people implied in the moral action*" (Roche, 1992, p. 31). This

demands to wager on a focused citizenship in the civilization crisis as a public problem that depends on the comprehension that the human being has of itself in and with the environment, of the value that is given to that relationship and the actions that it defines from that.

This is the sense that must be used to understand the ecological citizenship, whose reach starts from the diverse and profound challenges it faces. This dimension depends on the way the human being sees itself and reads itself in the environment, as from that understanding it interprets and signifies the own facts of the civilization crisis, gives them value, transmits that value and even elaborates dispositions to regulate the behavior and solve the environmental conflicts it faces. It is a citizenship that must face the "*unfulfilled promises of democracy*" (Prada, 2018, p. 136), as the citizen that has not been educated, the apathy, the undue favoring or the interchange vote, the manipulated participation and the tele-directed politics (Prada, 2018). The ecological citizenship must overcome patterns in which the civilization crisis is installed, as the immediatist satisfaction of sensitive wishes that overrule the communitarian affection to give place to an active responsibility for the burdens of public life. (Cortina, 1997).

What foundation can be used to support the ecological citizenship as status to overcome the civilization crisis, then? Two theoretical views are proposed, they are not opposed and motivate the individual and collective actions, private and public, and even voluntary as coercible. If the civilization crisis claiming for the ecological citizenship comes from a public problem anchored in the comprehension of the human and the environmental, the first view is to re-take the paradigmatic foundations about the environment to start paying the debt, at least, for the citizen that was not educated, the apathy, and the manipulated participation.

For this, it is necessary to retake the believed three paradigmatic foundations about the environment that have informed the decisions made in the judiciary power regarding environmental conflicts innate to the crisis, without leaving aside that they can be considered as "*ethical or axiological stances, as they are related to the attribution of values given to nature, according to the same characteristics of its existence, acknowledged or not to the society*" (Rendón Osorio, 2024, p. 343).

The first paradigmatic foundation is the anthropocentric one, and it is the one that serves the best to explain the generating facts of the civilization crisis. In it, the comprehension of the environment over locates the human

being over the other life expressions in the planet; it generates not only a hierarchization of its place over the other species but an idea of use, enjoyment and disposition that can be unlimited as long as it is committed to the satisfaction of the human needs.

The anthropocentrism "*has defined the man as the only rational, worthy and complete being in the planet. From this point of view, the only thing that matters is the survival of the human being and only in this way can the environment be protected*" (Corte Constitucional, 2016, T – 622), a way of understanding that has oriented for decades the legal order from the premise in which "the human being is the one with intrinsic value and the rest of the things or beings only acquire value and recognition as long as they are useful for men" (Prada, 2012, p. 33). It has cultivated the relations of appropriation and ecological exploitation supported on an ethical perspective lacking in solidarity and dignification of the other ways of life.

For the anthropocentrism, the vital and necessary fusion between human and environmental does not exist. It feeds the conflicts as it promotes taking advantage, using and exploiting natural resources where the vital relations that determined populations build with the environment are not contemplated. It does not acknowledge the vital complex dimensions that the human being has with those resources, either. This paradigmatic foundation harvests a comprehension of the environment serving the human being, constructs patterns of belonging to the political community conditioned to the participation in the model of exploitation of the environment, even an unlimited and irrational one, justified in the satisfaction of current needs.

The anthropocentrism was opposed by the biocentrism, that gave a new value to the environment and its relation to the human being. This paradigmatic foundation vindicates the "more global and solidary interpretations of social responsibility that claim, in much the same way, for the duties of men towards nature and the coming generations" (Corte Constitucional, 2016, T – 622). The comprehension of the environment includes broadening the political community, where the future generations and the human generational interdependence have a place. This is the reason to apprehend the reality in a form that is "*holistic, integrated, interconnected, interdependent, systemic and complex of the earth, in which everything that exists depends on the continue interrelations and each thing, each being, human or*

not, depends on its relationship to the whole" (Barros, 2010 cited in Vargas-Chavez et al, 2020, p. 90).

In the biocentrism, the comprehension of the reality gives place to the civilization crisis, so that the re-apprehension of an ecological citizenship can take place. With this paradigmatic foundation, there is a broadening of the human responsibility, and it implies a renewed way to place oneself in and with the environment and to place the solidarity obligations facing the rest of members of the political community, even in an intergenerational way. The biocentrism refutes the division of human-environmental, as well as the stance of hierarchical superiority of the human beings over the rest of the beings in the ecosystem. It manages to develop a value facing the reality supported in the interdependence, the integration and the complex thought as guidelines that unveil the necessary synergies to ensure a dignified life. That is to say, it understands that the human being is one more element with an interdependence to survive.

Lastly, the ecocentrism, ends up being a form of comprehending the environment that, far from giving place to the ecological citizenship, demands its development as a requirement for the exercise of values and the construction of law. In it, the sense of belonging to a political community, and its corresponding recognition from that plurality, is supported in a common valuing of the civilization crisis as a public problem that generates a broadening of the acknowledgement of the entitling of rights to the non-human living beings that require protection and defense as the crisis advances: *"The human species is only one more event in a long evolution chain that has lasted thousands of millions of years, so in no way it is the owner of the rest of the species, the biodiversity or the natural resources"* (Corte Constitucional, 2016, Sentencia T – 662).

The paradigmatic foundation determines the ethical stance that a person takes, and with it, the forming of an ecological citizenship. Biocentrically or ecocentrically, the ecological citizenship is defined by the fulfillment of duties without focusing on the entitlement of rights. According to Dobson (2001), it means a correlation of rights and duties that is supported in the compassion and justice and not in the reciprocity. That is to say, there is a relation between rights and duties that is not conditioned to a transactional logic in which duties are fulfilled as long as the rights are ensured. On the contrary, the duty is fulfilled because of the sense of

justice and compassion felt for the present and future generations, not waiting for something in return.

Hence, the ecological citizenship is timeless, as it is concerned by the intergenerationality. Its fulfillment also goes beyond the defined composition of the political community of the current generation, as it is not exercised to benefit a specific person or group; as a result, it fades away the contractual tradition that has defined the citizenship. As explained by Dobson (2001), its obligations are one-sided and non-reciprocal: "the fundamental duty of the ecological citizen is to act with care and compassion towards the unknown and distant beings (human and also non-human) in place and time." (Dobson, 2001, p. 172).

Contributions of the Escazú Agreement to the formation of an ecological citizenship

The still recent approval of the Escazú Agreement offers an uncertain scenario whose legal efficacy cannot be guaranteed. However, the issues that integrate it and the goals that justify it go beyond the limits of the symbolic efficacy, as this instrument installs in the legal order a set of powerful contents to face the civilization crisis. The deontological dimensions of the Escazú Agreement define contents of what should be and of justice, belonging to an ecological citizenship supported in the moral reciprocity of people by articulating the facts that characterize the crisis, the values that are broken, and the law that aims at stopping it. Beyond its legal and coercive nature, the Escazú Agreement is supported on a set of values and principles that remind that "*In the evolution of the species, the setback is possible; thar some "humanizing guidelines", learnt by repetition and punishment do not have other future than their disappearance in the short, medium or long term*" (Cortina, 1997, p. 17).

The first deontological dimensions that contribute to the ecological citizenship are written in the article 9, dedicated to the human rights activists focused on environmental affairs. Seen through the different perspectives of citizenship, the article 9 highlights elements that consolidate the ecological citizenship. From the most traditional interpretation, it formalizes the entitlement of fundamental rights that are inferred from an interpretation oriented by the matter and end of the dispositions: to provide guarantee to the exercise of the defense of the

environment, articulated to the protection of life, personal integrity, freedom of thought and movement; as well as with the right of association and assembly. It implies a recognition of the rights that strengthen the civic and political citizenship, to which the right to access to information, participation and justice are added. It privileges the protection of values belonging to a democratic society, where the human being personifies the end in itself of a legal order that, when it is protecting it, is also protecting the rest of the environment.

Over the interpretation of citizenship as the exercise of rights, the interpretation that intertwines rights and duties becomes more relevant in article 9, as the sense of justice claimed by the Escazú Agreement conditions the warrant of the rights the entitled is defending, from the fulfillment of the duty of the State. That is to say, it moves the fulfillment of the duties to the State, as highest authority in the political community, as a condition for the effective exercise of rights from the activists of human rights in environmental issues.

Each of the three paragraphs that comprise the article 9 proposes the realization of a series of ends that depend on the materialization promoted by the State, without being limited to it. Contrary to the thought that the bond that configurates citizenship is reduced to the right-duty that can intertwine the activists of human rights in environmental issues to the authorities of the State, the citizenship is supported by the status that the activist acquires from the connection to the State, when the political community recognizes it as an activist. This recognition operates when the State fulfills the duties established in the article 9 of the Escazú Agreement.

The fulfillment of rights, comprising the generation of measures and scenarios for the due exercise of the defense of rights, translates into an obligation that comes from the State to the political community, and that has to be later on appropriated and replicated in the members of that community. That is why, the Escazú Agreement acknowledges the scarce and irregular conditions of people who claim belonging to the social structure and not only to the groups with which they share mission statements in the defense of the environment. The threats and intimidations translate into violations of their constitutional rights, in a public scenario defined by the absence of acknowledgement of the exercise of defense, evidenced through the indifference and the lack of identity of the other members of the political community.

The article 9 contributes to the consolidation of an ecological citizenship when it acknowledges the condition and quality of defender in the other who interacts in the public sphere from a biocentric or ecocentric understanding of the environment; who expresses its wish and conviction to belong to the political community, from the exercise of the defense of values where public interest is based, without limiting it or determining it through specific people or particular groups. It constitutes an environmental defense that is timeless, as it is intergenerational, because its concerns include the generations to come, enriched by a cosmovision that expands the titularity of values to non-human living beings.

Even if the article 9 in the Escazú Agreement gathers diverse deontological dimensions, justified in a fraction of the population that is dedicated to the defense of the environment, other contents express dimensions of duty and of a sense of justice that can support the consolidation of the ecological citizenship in people who do not exercise the role of defenders. There, the law about the access to information, to participation and to justice are established. It highlights that, in these rights, the humanity has seen "*the best way to treat environmental issues*" (UN, 1992, Principle 10). These are three procedural rights, or fulfilling mediation obligations, interdependent and fundamental, through which it is reached the exercise of access to information, from where the due participation derives, and relies on justice for the solution of environmental controversies.

Adhering to the sequence deriving from the interdependence of these three rights, deontological dimensions are deposited in the articles 5 and 6 of the Escazú Agreement. From them, it is possible to envision the consolidation of an environmental citizenship. More than evidencing a traditional citizenship that recognizes the entitlement of the right to information, the articles 5 and 6 reinforce a contribution to citizenship from the correlation between right-duty, where the fulfillment of duties is transferred to the State, as a necessary condition for the effective exercise of the right to the access to environmental information for the members of the political community.

It aims at confirming the citizen status to that one who aside from exercising the right to access to environmental information, receives from the State, and the other mandatory actors, the conditions to make effective the knowledge of that information. The bond of belonging to the political

community depends on the recognition that operates through the ensuring of the access of information that is not legally reserved. Because of that, the citizenship is confirmed when the person receives the information from the authorities without demanding justification as to why it is demanded; when the State informs a person if it has the information required, and when the ones obligated to it, inform the person of the right it has to demand or not the delivery of the required information.

Citizenship, as the exercise of the right that depends on the correlative fulfillment of the duty, also stems from the provision of information in the required format, in the defined times and with the notification of any exceptional information that delays the delivery. All of them are medium warranties that acknowledge the other as a legally and institutionally credited actor, to get to information that can be directly or indirectly connected to the civilization crisis. Citizenship is evidenced also when there is a recognition of the vulnerable conditions that define certain social sectors, where the exercise of belonging to the political community is verified by the fulfillment of the right to ensure all the access media to environmental information by acknowledging the specific and special conditions the person has.

However, more than the fulfillment of duties through which the exercise of rights is made possible, and through which the activity in the public sphere where common interests are debated is made effective, the environmental information is a kind of genre in the right to information that links to the knowledge as a public problem in the civilization crisis. All of the guarantees that comprise the access to environmental information are guarantees of the access to knowledge about the environment and only as one person can have access to knowledge, it would be possible to measure itself in and with the civilization crisis.

This is why, some of the biggest deontological dimensions brought by the Escazú Agreement to Colombia consist of filling the void in the legal order about environmental information, compensated today by the literal C in the article 2. To clear the void about what environmental information is contributes to the understanding of the environment and the forms through which the understanding from the mandatory actors is generated, validated and registered. Clearing and detailing what environmental information is constitutes then a contribution to the values of knowledge, information and transparency; which can ensure the resources for the people and the

population to redefine its feelings and convictions of belonging to a political community, from the access and appropriation they have of the information, and with it, strengthen the political dimension of it by providing the input that supports the exercise of democratic participation.

On the other hand, the Escazú Agreement imposes the creation of an institution or independent entity, autonomous and unbiased, that promotes "the transparency in the access to the environmental information, surveilling the fulfillment of the regulations, as well as supervising, evaluating and guaranteeing the right to access to information" (Escazú Agreement, 2018, article 5. 18). This entity is not clear in Colombia, and it must ensure that the knowledge is being generated to be appropriated by those who debate in the public sphere. At the same time, this translates in aiming at qualifying the relation scenario of the members of the political community and of them with the State authorities.

Similarly, the deontological dimensions related to the access to environmental participation are stated. This kind belongs to the genre of law of democratic participation, and it is a component of the political citizenship. In the same way as the access to information, the citizenship is expressed by the correlation duty-right, where the fulfillment of the duties in the article 7 is moved to the State as a necessary condition for the effective exercise of the right to access to environmental participation.

The recognition of the status of citizen is supported in the realization of the duties that allow for an open and inclusive participation, through participation mechanisms, in reasonable times, and articulated to the ensuring of information. The deontological dimensions present in the access to participation are material to overcome the apathy and the manipulation in the decision making and exercising, and in the performance of control, recognizes the belonging of the person through the delivery of observations and proposals and bears them in mind in consultation moments.

Conclusions

The civilization crisis is a crisis of understanding over the complex character of the environment and over the historical division made from the human. The multiple forms of understanding this relation, unveils the

paradigmatic advances that the scientific sector has been doing from the expressions of the crisis. These advances have been appropriated by an international community that aims at introducing them in legal and political instruments that motivate the renovation of the internal order of the States that, in the end, regulate the behaviors and relations of all the political community. Hence, the scientific structures, through which the environment is understood, imply ethical considerations that are set over the legal institutions that define the role that the human being should exercise in the public sphere in which the crisis is debated. With that, the consolidation of diverse dimensions of citizenship is consolidated.

In the last century in Colombia, the foundations of anthropocentrism, biocentrism and ecocentrism have stood out. These three paradigms integrate different ethical perspectives about the environment, its components, its reach and the values and principles comprised in them. These are three paradigms that, in their juxtaposition, have been mobilizing generational transformations from the new ways to see and comprehend the values, to appropriate them, and to take them on as basis for human actions. This has progressively been reflected in the entities of the national legal order that reveal the stances taken by the people, by the public powers facing the conflicts that evidence the crisis, as well as the interpretation they make of it in the political community.

The Escazú Agreement is an instrument that re-opens the debate of those scientific and ethical foundations, not meaning that its contents give place to all of them. Even if the Escazú Agreement deals with the human being as an object of protection through the access to information, the participation and the justice in environmental matters, contrary to reproducing an anthropocentric comprehension, it has deontological dimensions that correspond to the biocentric and ecocentric foundations. They ensure the access to information, that translates into having people with the necessary knowledge about the crisis of civilization that triggers the conflicts produced by social alterations; that is to say, people who understand that the crisis is a public problem that involves them in the public scene.

Reaching an understanding about the environment through the access to information allows having people with the resources to exercise the participation, and having an informed participation can be an opportunity to prevent and mitigate conflicts; or to legally follow hem based on the

certainties given by the access to knowledge and its socialization and confrontation in the processes of participation. These are potential results coming from the Escazú Agreement beyond its legal character, as the deontological dimensions corresponding to values and principles allowing for the consolidation of conceptions of citizenship that can help overcome the crisis beyond the understanding that divides the human and the environmental are contained in it.

The deontological dimensions identified in the Escazú Agreement stem from values and principles that support its regulations. They go beyond those legally positive and unveil conceptions of citizenship that are transcended, so a form of ecological citizenship can be built. The Escazú Agreement makes a first assessment that is adjusted to a positive differentiation that promotes affirmative actions, as it proposes the realization of special duties for the population sector called human rights activists in environmental issues, clearly different to those contemplated to the general of the political community.

The differential approach contained in the Escazú Agreement is supported initially in the traditional perspective of a citizenship acknowledged from the recognition of rights that have been claimed by the activists in environmental conflicts. These rights are limited to those of access in the case of non-activists. Beyond contributing to a citizenship coded in the titularity of attributes of demandability, what is right and the sense of justice of the Escazú Agreement rises from a citizenship where the fulfillment of duties as condition for the effective exercise of the right to environmental access of the members of the political community is moved to the State.

That is to say, the duty that conditions the recognition and the exercise of law gains greater importance in the effective realization of the bond that defines citizenship between a person and the State. As a general rule, the duty is the starting point and suspensive condition of the integration of a public scenario, where the existence of a political community that gathers the sense of belonging and recognizes the public interest at stake can be ensured. Provided that without the fulfilment of the duty, environmental information cannot be discussed, neither is participation, which affects a citizenship in its political and civic conceptualizations. The Escazú Agreement aims at an ecological citizenship as long as the person can feel

acknowledged, belonging and accepted from the realization of duty as correlative to the possibility to exercise the right.

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The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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THE ACTUALIZATION OF 'FREEDOM TO LEARN' INDEPENDENT CAMPUS PROGRAM AS A STRATEGY TO ENHANCE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION TO BUILD VILLAGES

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Abstract: *This study investigates the involvement and impact of students and community in MBKM projects for rural development. Using a qualitative descriptive methodology, data was collected from community members, local authorities, and pertinent literature at a rural in Gorontalo District Region, Indonesia, through observations, interviews, and documentation, based on empirical research. The findings emphasize the cooperative endeavour between students and the community, resulting in a wide range of educational, cultural, religious, and youth development activities that improve village governance and the overall quality of life. This study offers significant findings for scholars and professionals, providing direction for comprehensive and enduring development initiatives.*

Keywords*: community education; MBKM; rural development.*

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Introduction

The increasingly powerful and rapid development of science and technology has significantly impacted progress and changes in the standard of living and livelihood of the people of the nation in a particular country. It is necessary to have the ability to adapt to the conditions of changes, potentials, and characteristics of the community so that they can survive while making consistent efforts to follow their identity through a progressive, sustainable development movement. The current phenomenon, among other things, is that more and more jobs are being lost at the same time that various new jobs are developing that utilize technological devices. This condition shows and makes us aware that there is a paradigm shift. Gradually human labor can soon be replaced by machines. In responding to the determinants of change referred to, it is necessary to design and program efforts to improve the quality of human resources who are competent, superior, and competitive, following the needs, dynamics of change, and demands of the times. One of the strategic development sectors as a priority is education because education is a potential investment in the future that has many positive impacts on change for oneself, others, and the interests of the nation and state (Yanuarsari *et al.*, 2021).

According to Suryadi, adapted by Satiti (2019), three primary considerations for the education sector as a long-term investment priority exist. First, education is a means for economic development, not just economic growth. Modern education management says that one of the five functions of education is a technical-economic function both at the individual and global levels. The technical-economic part refers to the contribution of education to economic development. Generally, it is proven that the more educated a person is, the higher his income level will be. Second, investment in education provides a higher rate of return than physical investment in other fields. The return value of an education means comparing the total costs incurred to finance education with the total income that will be obtained after a person graduates and enters the world of work. Third, investment in education has many functions apart from technical-economic functions, namely social-human, political, cultural, and educational functions. The social-human function refers to the contribution of education to the development of human qualities and social relations at various levels of different social institutions in society.

In another context, through various programs that have been, are being, and will even be developed with a focus on village-based activities, this will also influence the movement of the socio-economic dynamics of the community in the village to further improve itself in developing the potential of natural and human resources as essential assets to enhance welfare of villagers. In order to support the improvement of the quality of life and welfare of the community, efforts based on the education system are needed for the community because such an approach is a good and meaningful endeavor as well as an ongoing concern for changing their life behavior so that they have economic resilience based on supportive environmental conditions and have an impact on increasing income and welfare of the people (Isa & Zubaedi, 2022). Additionally, Bukhori (as cited from Dwiningrum, 2021) argues that a healthy education system should be able to understand its era and try to meet the demands of that era, including the changes in the times to come.

The national development paradigm that makes the village a potential sector in the development movement is a strategic and even productive effort. This paradigm is based on the consideration that the village is the basis for implementation and the target of various development program objectives that place the village as the subject of development actors (Law Number 6 of 2014). Now villages and their communities with suitable organizational arrangements have complete discretion to manage and carry out village development. Aside from other resources and potential in the village, the capital is supplemented by a village fund allocation policy, which is also relatively adequate to support the village development movement.

Understanding that economic, social, and cultural changes continue to accelerate in the dynamics of village development, higher education institutions as educational development institutions and modernization of progressive changes should be responsive in responding to this and transform learning to equip and prepare graduates who are superior, competent, cultured and capable to face the challenges of the times.

Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 3 of 2020 concerning National Higher Education Standards regulates efforts to improve the quality of learning and tertiary graduates. The Freedom to Learn Independent Campus programs

initiated by Minister Nadiem Anwar Makarim basically respond to the transformation of the quality of learning. Another substance invites higher education stakeholders to synergistically build a strategic plan to prepare student competencies in a mature way to be better prepared to face the challenges of the times.

According to Rodiyah (2021), the Freedom to Learn Independent Campus (MBKM) program is one of the innovations to accelerate the development of human resource quality, character, and noble character because, through this program, it is hoped that both students and lecturers will be able to have a good experience which in turn will enrich their knowledge, skills and attitudes, the advantages of character accompany networks. Etymologically there is an essential meaning in "Freedom to Learn" and "Independent Campus". First, the concept of independent learning implies independence in thinking. Educators must initiate the essence of freedom of thought. This view is an attempt to appreciate changes in learning in educational institutions, both in primary, secondary, and tertiary schools. Second, the independent campus is part of the separate learning policy, which provides a vast space for students to hone their potential and abilities according to their talents and interests by going directly into the world of work as preparation for future careers. The MBKM program offers programs that students can carry out outside their home campus, through apprenticeships/work practices, village projects, teaching at schools, student exchanges, research/research, entrepreneurial activities, independent studies/projects and humanitarian projects.

The project to build a village is one of the programs from the Freedom to Learn Independent Campus (MBKM). In the constellation of the national development movement, the village plays a vital role, because the village is the lowest government structure of the national government system. Law Number 6 from 2014 mandates that village development aims to improve the welfare of village communities and the quality of human life. The program's priority targets focus on accelerating poverty alleviation through basic meeting needs, developing adequate village facilities and infrastructure, developing creative economic potential based on local excellence, and using natural resources and the environment sustainably. Based on regulations and policies, village development activities are carried out through two integrated approaches, namely "village builds and builds villages," both of which are integrated into village development planning. The Village Law opens village

autonomy in the decentralization process of development centered on village government (Yanuarsari R. et al., 2021).

The paradigm of developing village development currently provides broad and adequate space for village communities to enable themselves to become empowered to participate in the development process. According to Sumardjo and Saharudin (as cited from Isa & Anu, 2021) that community participation is necessary because participation means: (1) improving program success is guaranteed, focused and faster; (2) having closer understanding between planners, program managers and the needs of the target group; (3) as a means to foster productive community skills, kinship, and self-confidence; and (4) achieving the target of positive participation as a characteristic of an advanced, independent and modern society.

Kartasasmita (Surahmi & Farid, 2018) explains empirical studies that the phenomenon of lack of success in achieving development goals is due to the lack of community participation. Even in certain cases, the people can often hinder development activities. Strategies in building community participation are not only essential to support development activities by the government, but so that the community takes part in activities they can carry out themselves. Therefore, stakeholders at all levels of development leadership are responsible for guiding, mobilizing, and creating a conducive climate for community development activities.

Active involvement, or community participation, means taking part in the stages of determining direction and/or goals, regulations, policies and development strategies carried out together with the government. Another meaning of involvement is defined as bearing the burden and responsibility of carrying out development, maintaining and utilizing development results as much as possible for people's lives equitably and socially. Commitment and support from all elements of society for the implementation of development are one of the factors that can determine the success and failure of each development program and activity. Therefore, support for developing community participation should always be well maintained and paid attention to and endeavored to exist in every space and time as well as the stages of the development activity itself. This study starts from the problem of whether the actualization of the Freedom to Learn Independent Campus (MBKM) program can become a participatory community strategy to develop villages. From the literature study, data was obtained that studies on implementing MBKM in the context of village-building activities and community education

had not been studied relatively previously. It was believed that many factors contributed to optimizing community participation strategies to build villages.

This study focused on examining aspects, namely: the characteristics of population data, MBKM programs, and activities to build villages, forms of student and community participation in MBKM activities to build villages, as well as the achievements of the MBKM program to build villages in one of the village areas in the Gorontalo Regency area. The target of this study is as reference material that can be used both for the development of scientific studies, as input for stakeholders and practitioners engaged in community empowerment to carry out movements to enable and foster communities in an integrated and sustainable manner in improving the quality of life through the activities of the MBKM Developing Villages Program which in turn beneficial for the village community.

Method

The approach used in this research is a qualitative descriptive type with a phenomenological formula that refers to an empirical study of a learning program as a participatory strategy for empowering communities in building their villages. This approach deals with real phenomena or studies of visible symptoms accompanied by the researcher's awareness according to the study's focus. The application of the phenomenological approach focuses on the activities of the MBKM program, which is carried out in one of the village areas in the Gorontalo Regency Region. This is in line with Sugiyono's formula (2018) that qualitative research is a research method used to examine the conditions of natural objects.

The data used in this research comes from primary and secondary data. Primary data sources come from community informants, local government, and theoretical sources, namely a number of literatures related to the study's problem. Other secondary sources are data and information, as well as documents obtained from the community. Data collection techniques were through in-depth interviews, observation, and document review. The data analysis technique uses the Miles and Hubermen interactive formula (Sugiyono, 2018) dividing three stages in analyzing the research: data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions.

Miles and Hubermen divide the stages in analyzing qualitative research as shown in the following figure:

Figure 1. Data Analysis Models
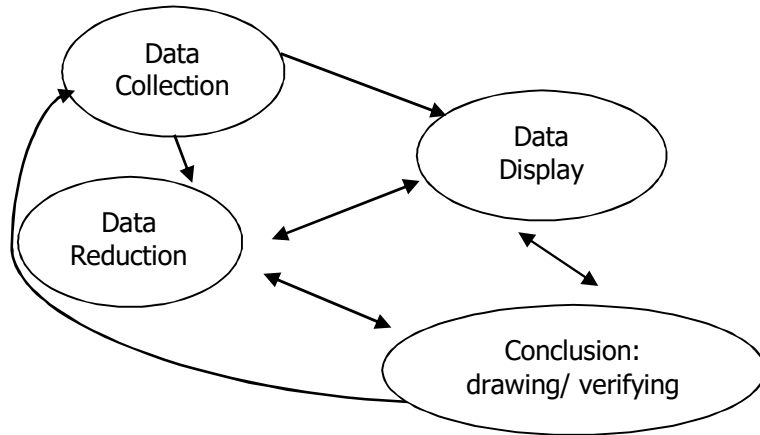
To obtain the level of validity of the data, four main standards or criteria are carried out, namely (1) credibility standards; (2) transferability standards; (3) dependability standards; and (4) confirmability standards.

Result and Discussion

Result

As stated in the previous description, national development activities focus on village-based activities. This national agenda will also influence the movement of the socio-economic dynamics of the community in the village, so that they can further improve themselves in developing the potential of natural and human resources as essential assets to enhance the welfare of rural communities. In order to support the improvement of the quality of life and the interest of the community, efforts based on education are needed because such an approach is a good and meaningful endeavor as well as an ongoing concern for changing life behavior. The Freedom to Learn and Independent Campus (MBKM) program, as a national policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture, is one of the

dimensions of its activities to build villages. Implementing MBKM programs and activities facilitated by the government through student program intervention directly influences life behavior, especially community participation in developing their village.

From the implementation of the MBKM program to build villages, the findings of the research data are described, including data characteristics of villagers, the realization of the MBKM program to build villages, forms of student and community collaboration in the MBKM program, as well as data on the achievements of the MBKM program to build villages.

Figure 1-3. Data on Population Characteristics of MBKM Locations

Jumlah Penduduk Desa Yosonegoro – Kecamatan Limboto Barat

Pemerintah Kabupaten Gorontalo.
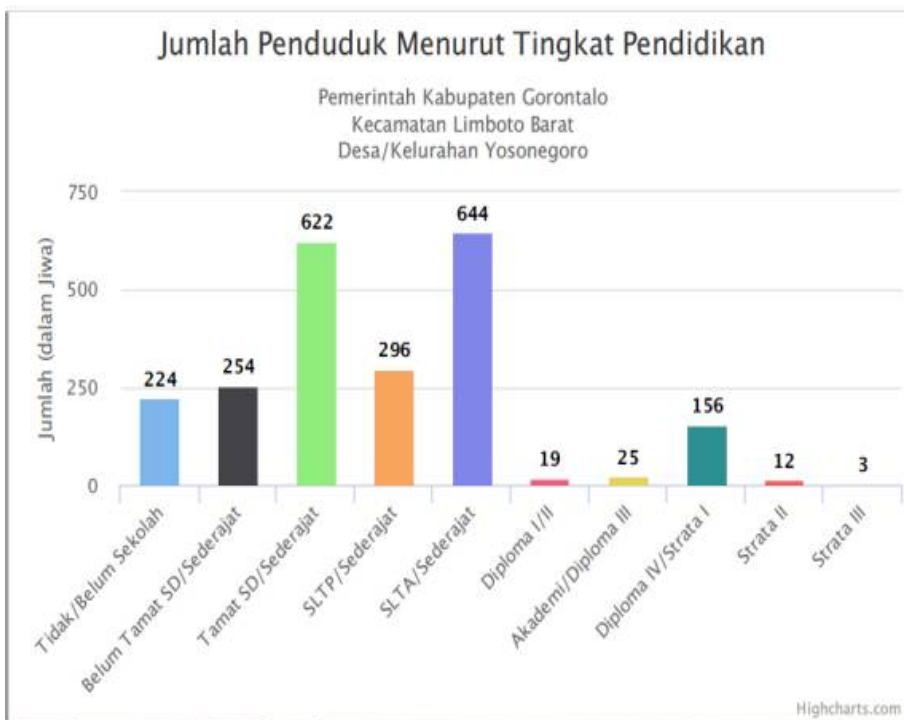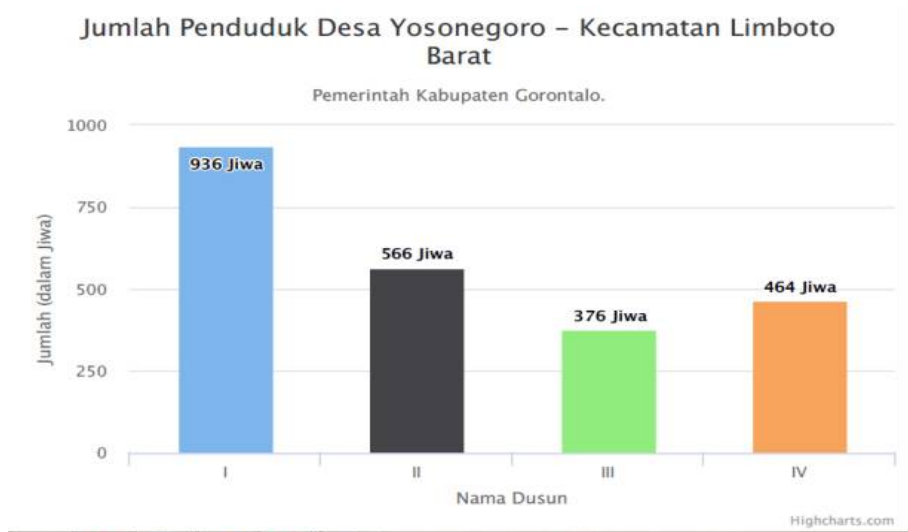
Jumlah Penduduk Berdasarkan Jenis Kelamin

Pemerintah Kabupaten Gorontalo
Kecamatan Limboto Barat
Desa/Kelurahan Yosonegoro

Perempuan : 1185 (50.6%) Orang

Laki-laki : 1157 (49.4%) Orang
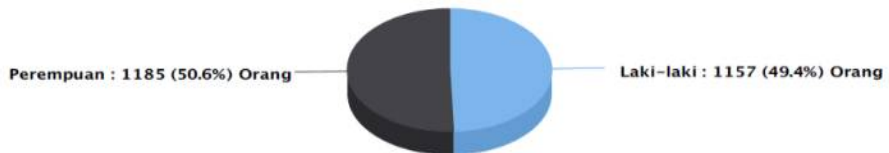
Highcharts.com

The data presented above can explain the characteristics of the population according to gender composition, the distribution of communities according to the village or neighborhood, and what is very important is the education level of the people. From the design of the village population according to gender, there were 1185 women (50.6%) and 1157 men (49.4%). The population distribution data by village community

is mostly in hamlets I and II, while hamlets III and IV are relatively small compared to the previous hamlets. Population data by level of education, that residents who do not/have not attended school, have not completed SD/equivalent are 478 people (20.41%), have completed SD 622 people, SLP/equivalent 296 people (39.19%), SLTA/equivalent 644 people (27.49%)), diploma I, II and III have 44 people (1.87%) Diploma IV/S1, Bachelor degree 156 people (6.66%), Master degree (S2) 12 people (0.51%) and Doctorate (S3) 3 people (0.12%). From this data it can be stated that efforts still need to be made to improve the quality of education for the population in the village because some residents have not had primary education (SD). Residents with basic education qualifications are relatively low in number. Even high school/equivalent education qualifications, Diploma, Bachelor, Master, and Doctorate still need improvement in various strategic programs to develop the quality of human resources, one of which is with the priority program of Freedom to Learn Independent Campus learning with thematic build a village.

Table 1. Data on MBKM Activities Building Villages.

No.	Types of Programs	Participant Characters	Number of People	Execution Time
1.	Updating of Village Population Data	Village Officials and Students	17	May - June 2022
2.	Organizational Strengthening and Youth Organization Programs	Management and Members of Karang Taruna	12	June - July 2022
3.	Construction of Village Facilities: village boundaries, gates and trash cans	Students and Youth	20	June - July 2022
4.	Reading and Writing Guidance	Elementary students	20	July 2022
5	Teaching in schools	Elementary students	30	July 2022
6.	Workshop on Strengthening Scientific Writing Competency for Elementary School Teachers	Elementary teachers	25	July 2022
7.	Creating Learning Media	University students	15	June - July 2022
8.	National Webinar	Student and Teacher	100	July 2022
9.	Development of Cultural and Religious Activities for Youth	Youngster	25	July – August 2022
10.	Art Sports Development and productive skills for youth	Youngster	30	August - September 2022

The MBKM program with the theme of building villages as a component of MBKM activities has shown its impact on the continuity of various programs and activities in the village. The intended activities include updating population data, organizational strengthening and fostering youth organizations, making village community public service facilities, reading and writing guidance, teaching in elementary schools (SD), workshops on strengthening the competence of writing scientific papers for elementary teachers and developing learning media. National Education Webinars, fostering cultural and religious activities for youth and artistic sports and productive skills for youth. These programs have involved community components as activity participants, students, village officials, teachers and elementary school students, youth committee members, and village youth. The implementation of these various activities took place over a period of 5 (five) months, from May to September 2022.

Table 2. Data on Forms of Student and Community Participation in the MBKM Program

No.	Program Update	Form of Participation	Other information
1.	Education Program Strengthening	Data identification activities, program planning and facilitation of the implementation of educational activities.	Development and Governance
2.	Village Administration	Staff assistance in data updating, verification, data analysis and visualization activities as well as socialization of village development programs.	Governance and Development
3.	Cultural and Religious Development	Socialization and coaching activities, cultural preservation and strengthening of religious programs	Social Society
4.	Organizational Strengthening and Youth Organization Programs	Strengthening the organization and active participation of youth both in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages of the youth youth program	Development and Social Community
5.	Sports and Arts Development and youth productive skills	Actualization of talent development activities for youth interests in sports and arts as well as development of potential productive skills for youth	Development and Social Community

Table 3. MBKM Program Achievement Data for Building Villages.

No.	Activities	Program Achievements
1.	Education Program Strengthening	a) Increased public understanding of the importance of developing quality education for self-development and quality of life. b) Increased the more optimal level of community participation to take part in educational activities, especially among the younger generation.
2.	Village Administration	a) Educating the community to be able to manage the potential resources in the village to support government, development and social activities in the village. b) Growing public awareness that governance and full development really need to involve active, productive and beneficial community participation.
3.	Pembinaan Budaya dan Keagamaan	a) Provided a broad space for the community to actively participate in various efforts to preserve and develop regional cultural assets to support national culture b) Increased productive and useful activities, especially related to religious development for the community and the village's younger generation, as an important pillar in supporting the village development movement.
4.	Organizational Strengthening and Youth Organization Programs	a) Increased awareness of youth to organize as a forum for developing potential resources needed for future life. b) Used youth organizations a part of developing skills that are economically productive and useful
5.	Sports and Arts Development as well as youth productive skills	a) The increasing enthusiasm of the youth to be active in sports and arts coaching activities as an effort to ward off negative influences on the potential of the youth. b) As a venue for strategic coaching to develop talents, interests possessed by youth to be further used as a mapping of achievements based on the types of sports and arts and the skills, they are involved in. Fostering the competence of productive skills and the creative economy of youth according to the resources available in the village.

Based on tables 2 and 3, it can be explained that the MBKM program has actualized the development of cooperation between students and the community in the form of activities to strengthen educational programs, village government, cultural and religious development, organizational strengthening and youth programs as well as coaching sports, arts and the development of productive youth skills. The five programs implemented in the MBKM activities have supported improving the performance and quality of village development, including village government, village development, and social community development. Another important aspect is that implementing the MBKM program has facilitated increased

community participation in village development movements and activities. The participatory characteristics referred to include: (1) Increasing public understanding of the importance of developing quality education for self-development and quality of life, (2) Growing public awareness that governance and development really need to involve active, productive, and beneficial community participation, (3) Providing a broad space for the community to actively participate in various efforts to preserve and develop regional cultural assets to support national culture, (4) Increasing youth awareness to organize as a forum for developing potential resources needed for future life, (5) The increasing enthusiasm of the youth to be active in sports and arts development activities as an effort to ward off negative influences on the potential of the youth, except for fostering the competence of productive skills and the creative economy of youth according to the resources available in the village.

Discussion

The research findings show that in fact the MBKM program is a village building project that can encourage and develop active community participation in building their villages. On another dimension, the creation of empowerment potential in the context of village building projects can facilitate community members together on a common interest to be able to identify various problems, find appropriate alternative solutions based on the characteristics and potential that exists in the village to be further utilized in accelerating the achievement of village development goals. In the project to build a component village, students can participate in the empowerment process by being involved in socializing the urgency of participation in the implementation of the village management system, both through the village government and the community. The target of the MBKM program is through the project to build villages so that the presence of students can gain experience and competence in the form of knowledge, skills, and attitudes as valuable and useful capital in the process of future human development.

MBKM activities at the service location are helpful so that students can understand, live, and discover directly as an implementation of the material studied in lectures so that the knowledge learned is theoretical and contextual with what is found in the community environment. In the

operational activities of the MBKM students apply their knowledge, experience and mental attitude in natural situations which will ultimately benefit them after graduating from campus to serve based on their passion and scientific field. In this context, universities are at the forefront, playing a vital role in solving various social problems such as natural disasters, social conflicts, and everyday problems in society (Baharuddin, 2021).

In addition, for tertiary institutions, implementing MBKM can be a forum for establishing cooperation and partnerships with the role of strategic planning and management consultants for village development as well as being an effort to improve the quality of government, development and social performance in villages. This mechanism can benefit the various parties involved, including consultants and village development planners who receive student assistance. Universities have the opportunity to apply knowledge, research, community service, and other productive activities. On the other hand, students can gain experience and productive skills that means that he did not get while studying in college (Caritra, 2020).

Through the MBKM program basically, the local government also indirectly benefits because in the process it involves experts, researchers and academics who are qualified in their scientific fields. In other words, various village development agendas will be more effective and efficient, so it is expected to significantly accelerate the realization of productive and independent villages in Indonesia.

The research findings show that community participation is the role of a person or group of people in identifying problems, formulating problems, and providing alternative solutions through thought, expertise, time, and capital to be used in achieving the goals of development programs implemented by the government. As a goal, participation produces empowerment. That is, everyone has the right to express their aspirations and opinions as an alternative to making decisions that affect their lives. In an alternative form, participation is also interpreted as a mean to achieve efficiency in managing programs and activities to implement a policy product.

In the study of the ontology of community education, the dimensions of community participation are the rights and obligations of a citizen to make a real contribution to achieving goals for the common good. Participation can be in the form of mental and emotional as well as physical involvement in using all the abilities they have, both their potential and initiative, as well

as productive and beneficial activities for other parties as a consequence of involvement. In the context of the general implementation of development policies, the dimension of participation based on mental attitudes and emotions is called autonomous participation. In contrast, participation that is encouraged by force can be called mobilization.

Participation is the potential of a person or group to contribute or support activities following common goals and agreements based on volunteerism so that a sense of shared responsibility for the interests of the group or organization grows. Participation is a cooperation between the people and the government in planning, organizing activities and implementing them, preserving and maintaining the results of development. Participation as a two-way communication process takes place continuously to strengthen mutual understanding agreements that are implemented in concrete actions in a particular program or activity. Participation means the participation of a person or group of people in the development process either in the form of ideas, ideas, and statements (non-physical) or in other forms of activity (physical) by contributing labor, time, expertise, capital, and or material, and taking part in utilizing and enjoy the fruits of development (Muchlisin, 2020).

From a societal epistemological perspective, it is argued that mobilizing community participation is essential for supporting development activities by the government, but also for the community to play a more significant role in activities that are productive and beneficial to themselves. In other words, it is an important task for stakeholders, including academics, to guide, mobilize and create a climate that supports community development activities (Surahmi & Farid, 2018).

The activeness and synergy of stakeholders and academics in the synergy of MBKM activities in village building projects should be accompanied by efforts to increase the role of the community in village development activities as a means of forming sustainable community empowerment. This act is intended so that the community can be actively involved in the process and results of development because with the community's support and involvement, there will be more effectiveness in development activities. It is in this context that it can be argued that the MBKM program with the thematic building of villages has directly had a significant impact on the formation of active community participation in building

their villages. Thus, the actualization of the MBKM program has become one of the community's participatory strategies for building villages.

Conclusion

Government policies through the Ministry of Education and Culture with the MBKM program in tertiary institutions have received a significant response, especially in implementing village project programs in developing community participation in village development. The implementation of the MBKM program for village building projects is able to mobilize community members to take part in every stage of village development activity, from identifying problems, planning and organizing alternative solutions to problems, and finding the right solutions to then be utilized in building according to the characteristics and potential of the village. In other aspects, through the MBKM program, students can participate in the empowerment process by being involved in the management process of strengthening village administration, community social development, and public governance in the village. This involvement is solely an effort to facilitate learning experiences for students to live in a community environment as one of the targets of the MBKM program policy.

The implementation of the Freedom to Learn Independent Campus program has a role in fostering synergetic cooperation between students and the community in the form of activities to strengthen education programs, village government, cultural and religious development, organizational strengthening of the Karangtaruna program as well as coaching sports, the arts and developing productive youth skills. The five programs implemented in the MBKM activities also support improving the quality of village development performance, including village government, village development, and social community development. Another important aspect is that implementing the MBKM program has facilitated increased community participation in village development activities. The existence and contribution of the MBKM program through the village building project program, in turn, is one of the community's participatory strategies to build their village.

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FAMILY SUPPORT IN PROMOTING ACTIVE LIFESTYLES AND PREVENTING RISKY BEHAVIORS AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract: Adolescence is a critical period for establishing healthy lifestyle habits and avoiding risky behaviors. The aim is to identify how different forms of family support influence adolescents' physical activity levels and engagement in risky behaviors, and to provide insights for enhancing adolescent health and well-being. A cross-sectional study was conducted with 403 adolescents from various communities. Data were collected using four validated instruments: the Family Support Scale (FSS), Physical Activity Questionnaire for Adolescents (PAQ-A), Risky Behavior Scale (RBS), and Leisure Time Activity Scale (LTAS). The study found that emotional support (B=0.125, p=0.003) and informational support (B=0.106, p=0.046) from family significantly positively affected adolescents' active lifestyles. Sports participation had the strongest positive impact on physical activity (B=0.452, p<0.001). Non-constructive recreational activities were associated with decreased physical activity (B=. -0.022, p=0.013). Practical support did not significantly impact the active lifestyle (p=0.185). Physical education classes also had a positive effect on physical activity (B=0.025, p=0.015). Family support plays a crucial role in promoting active lifestyles and

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reducing risky behaviors among adolescents. Emotional and informational support from family contribute significantly to increased physical activity, while sports participation is the most influential factor.

Keywords: *Adolescents; Family Support; Physical Activity; Risky Behaviors*

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a critical period in individual development, marked by the formation of identity and the establishment of habits that can have long-term impacts on physical and mental health (Noble et al., 2015). During this period, adolescents are particularly susceptible to the influence of their surrounding environment, including family, peers, and the community in which they live.(Liberali et al., 2021; Michaelson et al., 2021) The role of the family, especially parental support, is crucial in shaping adolescent behavior and promoting a healthy lifestyle (Smith, 2024).

Family involvement in adolescents' lives has been widely shown to positively impact their participation in physical activities and sports, contributing to improved physical and mental health (Allman-Farinelli & Nour, 2021). Parents who actively encourage their children's involvement in sports or other positive community activities, such as youth organizations, play a significant role in reducing the likelihood of harmful behaviors, such as smoking, alcohol consumption, or drug use (Millanzi et al., 2023). Furthermore, strong family support helps guide adolescents in using their leisure time wisely, thereby decreasing the probability of engaging in risky behaviors (Pistoni et al., 2023).

Despite the existing evidence supporting the role of family support in adolescent health and behavior, there remains a significant gap in understanding how different dimensions of family support specifically influence active lifestyles and the prevention of risky behaviors across diverse community settings (Kanellopoulou et al., 2021). Previous studies have largely focused on the general relationship between parental involvement and adolescent well-being but have not thoroughly explored how specific family practices, such as encouraging physical activity or providing guidance on leisure time, directly affect adolescents' propensity to engage in risky behaviors (Dariotis & Chen, 2022; Irwin & Shafer, 1992).

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the multifaceted role of family support in promoting active lifestyles and preventing risky behaviors among adolescents (Champion et al., 2019). Unlike previous research, which often examines these factors in isolation, this study will investigate the interconnectedness of family support, community engagement, and adolescent behavior (Singh, 2023; Sluijs et al., 2021). By focusing on the dynamic interplay between these elements, this research will provide novel insights into how targeted family interventions can effectively foster healthier, more active lifestyles in adolescents and reduce the prevalence of risky behaviors (Tomova et al., 2021; Xiao et al., 2019).

This exploration is particularly relevant in today's context, where adolescents face growing challenges from peer pressure, easy access to harmful substances, and a lack of supportive community structures (Steinfeld, 2021). By offering a deeper understanding of the specific contributions of family support to adolescent health, this research aims to provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and families, ultimately contributing to better health outcomes for adolescents.

2. Aim

This study aims to determine the correlation between the role of family support in encouraging an active lifestyle and preventing risky behavior among adolescents. By gaining a deeper understanding of how families can influence adolescent choices and behaviors, this study is expected to provide valuable insights for policy makers, educators, and families in efforts to improve adolescent health and well-being.

3. Methods

Study design

This research utilizes a cross-sectional study design to examine the role of family support in promoting active lifestyles and preventing risky behaviors among adolescents. The cross-sectional design allows for the collection of data at a single point in time from a diverse group of participants, enabling the identification of correlations between family support variables and adolescent behaviors.

The study a sample of 403 adolescents aged 12 to 18 years, selected from various community settings, including schools, youth organizations, and sports clubs. The sample size was determined based on a power analysis to ensure adequate statistical power to detect significant associations between family support and adolescent behavior, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%.

A multi-stage stratified random sampling technique employed to select participants. In the first stage, communities within the study area stratified based on urban and rural settings to ensure representation of different environmental contexts. In the second stage, adolescents randomly selected from each stratum. This approach ensures that the sample is representative of the broader population of adolescents, accounting for potential variations in family support and community engagement across different contexts.

Inclusion criteria is adolescents aged 12 to 18 years, reside within the selected communities, and parental consent and adolescent assent. Exclusion criteria is adolescents with chronic medical conditions, adolescents not currently living with their parents or guardians, and inability to complete the survey.

Instruments

The instruments used in this study were the Family Support Scale (FSS), Physical Activity Questionnaire for Adolescents (PAQ-A), Risk Behavior Scale (RBS), and Leisure Time Activity Scale (LTAS). It is a well-established instrument used to measure the level of support adolescents perceive from their families. The scale includes items assessing emotional support, informational support, and practical support from parents or guardians. It consists of 20 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate greater perceived family support. Previous research has demonstrated high reliability and validity of the FSS. Cronbach's alpha for the FSS typically ranges between 0.85 and 0.92, indicating excellent internal consistency. The instrument has also demonstrated good construct validity, with factor analysis supporting a multidimensional structure of family support.

PAQ-A is a self-administered 7-day reminder instrument designed to assess general physical activity levels among adolescents. It consists of 9

items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of physical activity. The questionnaire covers a range of domains of physical activity, including sports participation, recreational activities, and physical education classes. It has been widely used in research and has demonstrated strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values typically ranging from 0.70 to 0.88. It has also demonstrated good criterion validity, correlating well with other measures of physical activity and health outcomes.

RBS is designed to assess the frequency and severity of risky behaviors among adolescents, such as smoking, alcohol consumption, drug use, and involvement in other risky activities. It consists of 15 items, with responses measured on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (never) to 3 (often). The scale is designed to provide a composite score that reflects the overall profile of adolescent risk behaviors. It has demonstrated strong psychometric properties in previous research, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.75 to 0.89, indicating good internal consistency. The scale has also demonstrated good construct validity, with significant correlations observed between RBS scores and health outcomes, such as substance abuse and mental health problems.

LTAS measures how adolescents spend their leisure time, with a focus on constructive (e.g., hobbies, sports) and nonconstructive (e.g., excessive gaming, loafing) activities. It contains 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, in which respondents indicate how often they engage in a particular activity during their leisure time. It has been validated in several studies, with reported Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.72 to 0.85, indicating good internal consistency. The scale has also demonstrated criterion-related validity through significant correlations with indicators of psychological well-being and academic performance.

Data analysis

Data normality test using Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test and the results are normal. Correlation analysis using Pearson test and regression analysis using multiple linear regression. Statistical analysis using IBM SPSS version 28.

4. Results

All domains in FSS consisting of Emotional Support, Informational Support, and Practical Support showed p values > 0.05 in both tests (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk), indicating that the data were normally distributed. Similarly, all domains of Physical Activity, Sports Participation, Recreational Activities, and Physical Education Classes in PAQ-A showed p values > 0.05, indicating a normal distribution in these data, in table 1. The domains of Smoking, Alcohol Consumption, Drug Use, and Hazardous Activities in RBS showed p values < 0.05 in both tests, indicating that the data were normally distributed. Finally, for LTAS, the Domains of Constructive Activities and Non-Constructive Activities showed p values > 0.05, indicating a normal distribution.

Table 1: Normality test results (N=403)

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	p-Value (K-S Test)	Shapiro-Wilk Test	p-Value (S-W Test)
FSS				
Emosional Support	0.059	0.101	0.984	0.115
Informational Support	0.052	0.121	0.979	0.060
Practical Support	0.051	0.114	0.970	0.030
PAQ-A				
Physical Activity	0.058	0.210	0.987	0.080
Sports Participation	0.052	0.260	0.981	0.050
Recreational Activity	0.056	0.112	0.975	0.040
Physical Education	0.064	0.156	0.982	0.070
RBS				
Smoking	0.071	0.210	0.955	0.005
Alcohol Consumption	0.068	0.115	0.942	0.003
Drug use	0.064	0.112	0.960	0.008
Hazardous Activity	0.057	0.118	0.967	0.014
LTAS				
Constructice Activity	0.055	0.112	0.986	0.090
Non-Constructive Activity	0.069	0.175	0.974	0.042

*FSS: Family Support; PAQ-A: Physical Activity Questionnaire for Adolescents; RBS: Risky Behavior Scale; Leisure Time Activity Scale (LTAS)

Source: Primary Data (2023)

The results showed that emotional in table 2, informational, and practical support from family all contributed to increased physical activity and

sports participation in adolescents (p<0.05). Strong family support was associated with higher active lifestyle. Constructive activities such as hobbies and sports were positively associated with active lifestyle and physical education (r>0.300). Emotional, informational, and practical support from family helped reduce risky behaviors such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and drug use. Constructive activities can also play a role in reducing risky behaviors by diverting adolescents' attention from dangerous activities.

Table 2: Correlation test results (N=403)

Variable	FSS			r
	Emotional Support	Informational Support	Practical Support	
PAQ-A				
Physical Activity	0.001	0.112	0.081	0.325
Sports Participation	0.102	0.000	0.067	
Recreational Activity	0.056	0.059	0.088	
Physical Education	0.061	0.078	0.001	
RBS				
Smoking	0.023	0.056	0.059	0.287
Alcohol	0.011	0.077	0.066	
Consumption	0.055	0.022	0.102	
Drug use	0.077	0.004	0.012	
Hazardous Activity				
LTAS				
Constructice Activity	0.012	0.001	0.004	0.380
Non-Constructive Activity	0.025	0.045	0.022	

*FSS: Family Support; PAQ-A: Physical Activity Questionnaire for Adolescents; RBS: Risky Behavior Scale; Leisure Time Activity Scale (LTAS)

Source: Primary Data (2023)

Sports Participation had the most significant positive effect on active lifestyle with a coefficient of B = 0.452 (p < 0.001), indicating that increased sports participation was associated with increased physical activity. Emotional Support and Informational Support also showed significant positive effects with B coefficients of 0.125 (p = 0.003) and 0.106 (p = 0.046), respectively, indicating that emotional and informational support from family were associated with active lifestyle. Recreational Activities showed a significant negative effect with a

coefficient of B = -0.022 (p = 0.013), indicating that non-constructive recreational activities were associated with decreased physical activity. Practical Support did not show a significant effect on active lifestyle in this model with p = 0.185. Physical Education Classes showed a significant positive effect with a coefficient of B = 0.025 (p = 0.015), indicating that involvement in physical education classes was associated with increased physical activity, in table 3.

**Table 3: Results of multiple linear regression analysis
to predict active lifestyle based on family support
and leisure time activity variables**

Variable	Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	t	p
Constant	2.355	0.505	4.701	0.001
Emotional Support	0.125	0.043	3.021	0.003
Informational Support	0.106	0.050	2.332	0.046
Practical Support	0.083	0.061	1.980	0.185
Sports in Participation	0.452	0.055	6.871	<0.001
Recreational Activity	-0.022	0.057	-2.252	0.013
Physical Education	0.025	0.081	2.445	0.015

Source: Primary Data (2023)

In table 4, Emotional Support showed a significant negative effect on risky behavior with a coefficient of B = -0.250 (p < 0.001), indicating that emotional support from family can reduce risky behavior. Informational Support also had a significant negative effect with a coefficient of B = -0.155 (p = 0.014), indicating that informational support from family was related to a decrease in risky behavior. Smoking, Alcohol Consumption, and Drug Use showed a significant positive effect on risky behavior with a coefficient of B of 0.332 (p < 0.001), 0.251 (p = 0.006), and 0.353 (p < 0.001), respectively, indicating that increased smoking, alcohol consumption, and drug use were associated with higher risky behavior. Practical Support and Hazardous Activities did not show a significant effect on risky behavior in this model, with p = 0.153 and p = 0.070.

Table 4: Results of multiple linear regression analysis to predict risky behavior based on family support and leisure activity variables

Variable	Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	t	p
Constant	4.501	0.662	7.551	<0.001
Emotional Support	-0.250	0.051	-5.034	<0.001
Informational Support	-0.155	0.067	-2.565	0.014
Practical Support	-0.101	0.071	-1.443	0.153
Smoking	0.332	0.078	3.751	<0.001
Alcohol Consumption	0.251	0.065	2.678	0.006
Drug use	0.353	0.061	3.565	<0.001
Hazardous Activity	0.207	0.055	1.822	0.070

Source: Primary Data (2023)

5. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that emotional, informational, and practical support from the family contribute significantly to increasing physical activity and sports participation in adolescents. Strong family support is associated with a higher active lifestyle, and constructive activities are also positively associated with an active lifestyle and physical education. In addition, family support helps reduce risky behaviors such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and drug use, while constructive activities play a role in reducing risky behaviors by diverting adolescents' attention from dangerous activities (Hanifah et al., 2023).

Family support including emotional, informational, and practical support has been shown to increase adolescent participation in physical activity. Research by Romero-Rodríguez et al., (2022), showed that emotional support from parents is associated with higher engagement in physical activity and sports among adolescents. This support creates a supportive environment and motivates adolescents to be physically active. Informational support from the family, such as providing knowledge about the benefits of exercise and providing information about available activities, also plays an important role. This is in line with the findings of Morrow et al., (2022), which stated that information provided by parents

can motivate adolescents to participate in physical activity and physical education. Practical support, including the provision of facilities and time for exercise, showed a positive effect on sports participation. This shows that family support is not only emotional and informational but also practical, which is important to facilitate engagement in physical activity (Smith, 2024).

Constructive activities such as hobbies and sports have a significant positive correlation with an active lifestyle. Research by Leo et al., (2023), found that involvement in constructive activities is closely related to increased physical activity and physical education, and contributes to a healthier active lifestyle. These activities not only improve physical health but also contribute to adolescents' mental well-being.

The results of this study also show that family support can reduce risky behaviors such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and drug use. Emotional and informational support from the family play an important role in reducing risky behaviors. Research by Brown & Shenker, (2021), shows that emotional support from parents reduces the likelihood of adolescents engaging in risky behaviors, including alcohol and drug use. Informational support, which involves providing knowledge and prevention strategies, also serves as a protective factor against risky behaviors. The study showed that adolescents who received good information about the dangers of smoking, alcohol, and drugs from their parents were less likely to engage in risky behaviors. Constructive activities play an important role in diverting adolescents' attention from dangerous activities. Findings by Carter et al., (2015), indicate that involvement in hobbies and sports not only increases physical activity but also reduces the tendency to engage in risky behaviors by providing positive alternatives that occupy adolescents.

Sports participation had the most significant positive effect on active lifestyle. This suggests that increased sports participation is strongly associated with increased physical activity. Previous research supports this finding, with a study by Sevil et al., (2019), showing that participation in regular sports is directly associated with increased physical activity and a healthy lifestyle in adolescents. In addition, Harmelen et al., (2016), emphasized that regular exercise not only improves physical fitness but also contributes to adolescents' mental well-being, supporting the importance of exercise in daily routines. Emotional and informational

support from family showed significant positive effects on active lifestyle. Emotional support from family plays an important role in motivating adolescents to participate in physical activity. This finding is in line with research by Butler et al., (2022) who found that emotional support from parents is associated with increased motivation and engagement in physical activity. Informational support, which includes providing knowledge about the benefits of physical activity and ways to participate, also contributes to an active lifestyle. Research by Choi & Yang, (2021), shows that information provided by parents about the benefits of exercise can increase adolescent involvement in physical activity. Recreational activities showed a significant negative effect, indicating that non-constructive recreational activities, such as excessive gaming, are associated with decreased physical activity. This finding is consistent with research by Abdelghaffar et al., (2019), which showed that time spent on non-constructive recreational activities can reduce the time allocated to beneficial physical activity. Non-constructive recreational activities can lead to a less active lifestyle pattern, contributing to health problems such as obesity and decreased physical fitness.

Practical support from family did not show a significant effect on active lifestyle. Although practical support, such as the provision of sports facilities or time to exercise, is important, these results suggest that this factor may not have a strong direct influence on active lifestyle in this study. Research by Tafuri et al., (2024), suggests that practical support may act more as a supporting factor than a primary factor in increasing physical activity, which may explain this finding. Physical education classes showed a significant positive effect, indicating that involvement in physical education classes is associated with increased physical activity. These findings support the results which emphasized the importance of physical education classes in improving physical activity habits in adolescents and encouraging an overall healthy lifestyle (Laddu et al., 2021).

6. Conclusion

Family support plays a significant role in shaping active lifestyles and preventing risky behaviors. Strategies that focus on strengthening family support and promoting physical activity can improve adolescent health outcomes and contribute to their overall well-being. Implications of the

results of this study could include developing workshops or seminars for families that focus on how to provide effective emotional and informational support to adolescents. These programs could include positive communication techniques, motivation, and how to provide useful information about physical activity and healthy lifestyles. In addition, creating practical guidelines for parents on how they can support sports participation and reduce risky behaviors. These guidelines could include tips for encouraging sports, involvement in constructive recreational activities, and strategies to guide adolescents away from risky behaviors.

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Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declares no conflicting interests.

Ethical Approval

The study was granted ethical approval by the Health Research Ethics Committee under reference number 200.6/II.3.AU/F/KEPK/VII/2023. All participants received detailed information regarding the study's objectives and procedures, and their involvement was entirely voluntary. The researcher maintained the confidentiality of the respondents' personal information, ensuring it was used solely for the purposes of this research. Written consent was obtained from each participant prior to the commencement of data collection.

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BULLYING IN SCHOOLS: A PERSISTENT PROBLEM, AFFECTING STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH

Cristina TOMESCU[9]

Abstract*: Bullying in schools is an issue that has drawn significant attention in the last 15 years from researchers, educators, and policymakers. Bullying can have different forms, including physical, verbal, or even cyberbullying, each with implications not only for the victims, but also for the bully and the school environment. In spite of different types of measures that have been implemented, the problem is still persistent, affecting students' mental health and furthermore potential mental disorder in adulthood. The article plans to explore the prevalence of the phenomenon, highlights on factors that can be triggers and on proposal of effective intervention strategies in order to better understand the dynamics of the phenomenon. It also talks about the new face of bullying, the cyberbulling, enabled by nowadays constant access of teenagears to technology,*

Keywords*: bullying, school, education, prevalence, types, factors, intervention.*

Theoretical aproach

Bullying is characterised by repeated aggressive behavior that involves an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim. It can have various forms, including physical, verbal, and relational aggression, can take place both in traditional enviroment, as schools or offices, but also in digital environments, in form of cyberbullying. The definition and perception of bullying can influence how individuals respond to these

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behaviors in daily live, so there is important to understand the meaning of this behavoiur and what types of bullying exist, in order to have efficient responses (Aia-Utsal & Kõiv, 2019).

There are several dimensions of the bullying phenomenon: physical bullying - includes but is not limited to repeated behaviors such as: hitting, obstructing; slapping, destruction / dispossession of personal items; verbal bullying - includes but is not limited to repeated behaviors such as: name-calling, insulting, teasing, humiliating, intimidating, sending messages with homophobic or racist content; social bullying, often hidden, difficult to identify / recognize, carried out with the aim of destroying social reputation of a child and to place him in a situation of public humiliation - includes but is not limited to behaviors repeated types: lying and/or spreading rumours, making pranks with the aim of humiliating / creating embarrassing situations, encouraging social exclusion /isolation, gossip. (Grădinaru et al, 2016)

The cyberbullying, a new form of bullying, can be hidden or obvious and refers to any technology-mediated bullying behavior identified in the space of social media (websites, messaging, etc.) includes but is not limited to repetitive behaviours of type: emails, posts, messages, images, films with abusive / insulting / offensive content; deliberate exclusion of a child in the online space; hacking passwords of personal accounts (e-mail, Facebook, etc.) (Grădinaru et al, 2016)

Significant amoount of research (Bogart et al., 2014; Dantchev et al., 2019, Juvonen et al., 2003, Aia-Utsal & Kõiv, 2019 and others) indicates that the danger of bullying comes from the fact that it has profound and lasting effects on mental health. Studies based on longitudinal investigation have explained that individuals who experience bullying during childhood are at higher risk for developing mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation in adulthood (Bogart et al., 2014; Dantchev et al., 2019).

Dantchev found that sibling and peer bullying have independent and cumulative effects on mental health outcomes, underscoring the need for awareness among parents and healthcare professionals regarding the long-term consequences of victimization (Dantchev et al., 2019). Juvonen noted that bullying not only affects the direct victims but also has larger implications for standers that assist in front of it and the school environment and can lead to a culture of fear and disengagement in school,

if measures are not taken to combat the phenomenon (Juvonen et al., 2003).

The dynamics of bullying implies also the roles that individuals occupy in it, such as the bully, the victim, the bully-victim relationship. Twemlow (2006) talks about two distinct types of bullies: the sadistic bully, who derives pleasure from inflicting harm, and the bully-victim, who may provoke bullying behavior and then react as a victim (Twemlow et al., 2006). This duality stresses the psychological complexity involved in bullying behaviour and need for intervention that address both the aggressor and the victim. Most of the time, the bully is a person that also faced trauma or different form of mental distress that were not discussed or seen.

Prevalence of verbal bullying has been shown to have particularly severe impacts on adolescent mental health, frequent verbal abuse correlating with declines in mental well-being (Man et al., 2022) and important factors such as gender, disability, and social identity plays a important role in understanding impact of bullying. Cappadocia highlighted that children with autism face unique challenges in bullying situations, often intensified by their social vulnerabilities (Cappadocia et al., 2011).

Other research (Wang & Chen, 2023, Jansen et al., 2012) shows that socio-economic status of the students has a role in the prevalence of bullying behaviors among students. Wang and Chen's study stresses that lower family economic socio-cultural status correlates with higher instances of both overall and physical bullying among adolescents (Wang & Chen, 2023). Jansen also reveals that children from disadvantaged social backgrounds are more susceptible to victimization and aggression. The implications of these findings emphasize the need for interventions that considers the socio-economic enviroment of the students in order to address bullying. (Jansen et al., 2012).

The psychological impact of bullying extends the victims, affecting the academic performances and psycho-social functioning inside the schools. Experiences of bullying are associated with depressive symptoms and poor functioning in school and social relationships. Also, bullying can lead to long-term psychological distress, that can persist into adulthood (Sattar et al., 2019, Ortega et al., 2012).

The role of school authorities, particularly teachers, is very important in prevention and intervention upon bullying. Hektner and Swenson discuss

that teachers are key instruments of change in anti-bullying programs, but often do not have adequate training and awareness related to the complexity of bullying behaviors (Hektner & Swenson, 2011). This gap in knowledge can limit effective responses to bullying incidents. Bjärehed emphasizes the importance of addressing moral disengagement among colleagues, as witness behavior significantly influences the prevalence of bullying (Bjärehed et al., 2019). Programs that educate students on the importance of adequate social behavior and empower them to intervene can achieve a supportive school cultural enviroment.

Parental involvement is also very important in combating bullying. Some research (Cortes & Ladd, 2014, Malm et al., 2016) signs that classrooms where teachers actively involve parents in addressing bullying cases report lower levels of victims This focuses the necessity of a cooperative method that involves families in conversation about bullying, providing them the tools to assist their children. Also, parental responses to bullying incidents can significantly influence the school climate and the efficacy of anti-bullying strategies

The prevalence of bullying is not uniform across different educational settings. Community schools seem to report bullying more often compared to private institutions. This gap suggests that the school environment, including its policies and culture, plays a major role in influencing bullying behaviors, so the context of each school should be measured with its challenges and available resources. (Sah & Sharma, 2022).

Cyberbullying has emerged as a particularly concerning form of bullying, especially among nowadays adolescents. Cyberbullying prevalence have peak during middle and high school years, highlighting the need for targeted interventions in these age groups (Selkie et al., 2016). The anonymity and easy reach of online platforms can exacerbate the effects of bullying, making it necessary for schools to educate students about responsible online behavior and the consequences of cyberbullying upon other collegues and themselves.

Bullying in educational settings has profound psychological impacts on students, influencing their mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being. Victims of bullying are at higher risk of developing psychological problems as anxiety, depression or suicidal ideation. Students who experience bullying often report higher levels of sadness and

hopelessness, that are important predictors of victimization and perpetration in bullying scenarios, also the studies show that there is a strong correlation between bullying experiences and increased suicidal thoughts and behaviors among youth (Xu et al., 2020, Holt et al., 2015).

Bullying in schools in Europe and Romania

Bullying appears to be widespread in the EU, with more than 30% of students that reported to have noticing somebody being bullyied in front of them. Recent surveys, such as those conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and the European Commission, have highlighted the prevalence of bullying in schools. For example, the FRA's 2020 survey on the rights of children in the EU found that around 18% of children reported being bullied in school at least once in the past couple of months. Also, the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) provides insights into various issues, including bullying among adolescents.

Cyberbullying has emerged as a significant worry, especially with the increased use of technology among students. (FRA, 2020). The same report shows that one of the most concerning facts about bullying in schools in Europe is the persistence of both traditional and cyberbullying. With the increasing use of technology among young people, cyberbullying has become more prevalent and can occur 24/7, making it harder for victims to find or require help. Additionally, the impact of bullying on mental health is alarming, in a context that already shows that mental issues are increasing among teenegears.

Over the past two decades, there has been a significant increase in mental health problems among teenagers. Studies indicate that rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues have all risen. Research from various health organizations, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that the prevalence of anxiety and depression among adolescents has increased by approximately 25-30% in many regions since the early 2010s, suicidal thoughts and attempts among teenagers have also risen, with some surveys indicating that up to 20% of high school students have seriously considered suicide in recent years. More, COVID-19 pandemic

exacerbated these issues, through increased isolation, loneliness, lack of routines, higher stress, that affected the mental health of young people.

Estimates of bullying prevalence can vary, but countries like Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria and Romania have reported higher levels of school bullying in various surveys and studies. For instance, the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) and reports from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) have indicated these nations often show elevated rates of bullying incidents. It is important to consider that cultural factors, practices regarding reporting, and definitions of bullying can influence these statistics. Some countries might have better reporting mechanisms or more awareness campaigns, leading to higher reported rates, while others may underreport the issue

For Lithuania, reports from the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights show that around 15-20% of students are reported being bullied at school. For Latvia, in a 2021 study, approximately 18% of students reported experiencing bullying, with a notable percentage also indicating they had bullied others, the same survey pointed to high levels of cyberbullying, which have been in rise. For Bulgaria, a 2020 survey revealed that around 20% of students reported being bullied at school, particularly verbal and social bullying has been identified as a major concern in Bulgarian schools.

At the other end, nordic countries reports lowest prevalence of bullying.

Countries in Europe that typically report lower levels of bullying in schools include Finland, known for its comprehensive education system and strong anti-bullying policies, Finland often reports lower instances of bullying. Norway, similar to Finland, emphasizes a supportive school environment and has effective anti-bullying initiatives. Sweden with a focus on inclusion and emotional well-being, often sees lower reported rates of bullying. Denmark, its educational approach includes strong social and emotional learning, contributing to lower bullying rates, Iceland, this country has reported low levels of bullying, aided by small school sizes and community involvement. These countries often implemented proactive measures and adopted a positive school culture, which helped mitigate bullying.

Table no 1. Percentage of Students Reporting Bullying in different European countries

Country	Percentage of Students Reporting Bullying	Year of Survey	Sourse of data
Finland	5-10%	2020	"National School Health Promotion Study"
Norway	8%	2019	Sourse of data: "The Health Behavior in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study"
Sweden	10%	2021	"Swedish National Survey of Children and Youth"
Denmark	6-8%	2019	"The Danish National School Survey"
Netherlands	15%	2021	"Monitor Bullying in Schools"
Lithuania	15-20%	2021	"Children's Rights Monitoring Report"
Latvia	18%	2021	"Bullying in Latvian Schools: A National Survey"
Bulgaria	20%	2020	"National Survey on School Bullying"
Ireland	12%	2020	"National Anti-Bullying Research and Policy"
Germany	13%	2020	"German Health Interview and Examination Survey for Children and Adolescents (KiGGS)"
Romania	28%	2022	Violence of any kind affects children's physical and emotional health, Save the Children (Salvați copiii) Report.

Sourse of data: mentioned National Reports

Romanian schools have been documented in various studies, indicating that approximately one in three children experienced bullying, despite governmental initiatives pointed at prevention and education (Palade & Pascal, 2023). This alarming statistic stresses the need for effective interventions and a larger understanding of the dynamics of the phenomenon in the Romanian educational context. The nature of bullying in Romania encompasses various forms, including physical, verbal, and cyberbullying.

Data from nonprofit organisation Save the children (Salvati copiii) shows that 28% of the children say that they have witnessed bullying with high frequency (often and very often) in the educational unit they attend, data collected in 2022 (Salvati copiii, 2024). The percentages are higher than those indicated by the Save the Children study from 2016, when only 22.7% of respondents stated that. In this context, Save the Children

Romania developed and in time expended a program for the prevention of bullying in kindergartens and schools, considering that the whole community can support the schools, in order to facilitate the functioning of the anti-bullying action groups. (Salvati copiii, 2024)

Research indicates that verbal bullying is the most common type of aggression reported in Romanian schools, with significant implications for the mental health and academic performance of victims The detrimental effects of bullying extend beyond immediate emotional distress; victims often experience decreased concentration and increased frustration, which can lead to declines in academic performance. Furthermore, the long-term consequences of bullying can manifest as anxiety, depression, and other psychological issues that persist into adulthood (Muresan & Porkoláb, 2017).

In Romania, the school environment plays a crucial role in either mitigating or exacerbating bullying behaviors. Studies have shown that inadequate teacher involvement and poor student-teacher relationships can perpetuate a culture of bullying within schools. Teachers' responses to bullying incidents significantly influence the school climate, and their passive presence may inadvertently validate bullying behaviors among students. Thus, training teachers to recognize and effectively intervene in bullying situations is essential for fostering a safer school environment.

Cyberbullying has emerged as a significant concern in Romania, particularly with the increasing use of digital platforms among adolescents. Studies have shown that Romanian students report higher rates of cyberbullying victimization compared to their peers in other countries (Calmaestra et al., 2020). This trend necessitates a dual focus on both traditional bullying and cyberbullying in prevention strategies, as the two forms of aggression can intersect and exacerbate the overall bullying landscape (Negrilă & Braşov, 2019).

Moreover, the legislative framework surrounding bullying in Romania has evolved to address these issues more effectively. Recent legislative changes emphasize the importance of professional development for teachers regarding bullying prevention and intervention strategies (Diac & Grădinariu, 2022). This shift reflects a growing recognition of the need for systemic changes within the educational framework to combat bullying effectively. Despite these efforts, challenges remain in the implementation

of anti-bullying programs. A study indicated that many existing programs in Romania lack the necessary resources and support to be fully effective (Karmaliani et al., 2020).

In Romania, the prevalence of mental disorders among children and adolescents is alarming, necessitating a holistic approach that addresses both bullying and mental health support (Rahbar et al., 2021). Furthermore, the role of parents in shaping children's attitudes towards bullying is significant. Studies suggest that children raised in environments where bullying is normalized may be more likely to engage in bullying behaviors themselves. Thus, parental involvement in anti-bullying initiatives is crucial for fostering empathy and understanding among children.

Solutions to tackle the problem

The psychological impact of bullying on students is affecting not only those directly involved but also the broader educational environment. The evidence strongly supports the need for comprehensive anti-bullying strategies that include psychological support and intervention to mitigate these adverse effects.

A solution that is proposed by several experts include an anti-bullying action group established in each school/high school, which will include the director of the educational unit, the school counselor teacher, teaching staff trained in the issue of violence, including psychological violence-bullying, representatives of students and parents' representatives. The role of this group is to prevent, identify and resolve bullying situations between students, which can take place through physical, verbal, relational and/or cyber actions.

Reports from organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) and various educational institutions (like World Health Organization (WHO), European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), UNICEF, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) From UK) advocate for such comprehensive frameworks as part of effective anti-bullying initiatives.

Save the children Report from 2016 collected data also refering to proposed solutions for stopping bullying. The data reveals that presently

taken measures are declared not being successful in the long term. The present measures seem to be a a mix of parents- teachers intervention, the bully being labeled and/or receiving a sanction at school and anti-bullying measures are related to singular events, and mostly to the cases of physical violence or an act of severe humiliation. Adults are generally described, by children from the mentioned study, as tolerant to psychological and emotional forms of bullying. As a result, classic intervention in bullying usually comes very late, when the conflict escalates, and physics violence had already taken place. (This represents a paradox: while children stated that humiliation was one of the most severe forms of violence, they tend to seek and receive help mainly if the violence is physical).

In some cases, even physical violence is overlooked or ignored: children mentioned that there are some teachers who don't want to get involved ("the unwritten rule is that as long as the fight takes place outside the school, it's fine, they told us to keep the fight outside"). Conclusions of the study show that schools do not have a common approach in cases of violence (not only bullying) and that some teachers are more involved in stopping violent behavior, whereas others remain passive ("what matters is whether the teacher cares"). Some kids mentioned that there are situations when some teachers encourage bullying or bullies (constantly humiliating some children themselves).

When asked about the intervention of school counselors, most children stated that they either did not know what to do or that the intervention is only done if the teachers send the children with problems to a counselor. In terms of interventions coming from parents, the interviewed children tended not to provide many comments or examples. In short, they believe that the impact of parental intervention may vary - there are parents who make worse the relationship between children (for example, when parents come to school to "defend" their son/daughter by asking for explanations or "disciplining" the child with whom their son / daughter is in conflict) but also other parents who contribute to reducing violence. (Grădinaru C. et al. 2016)

Conclusions

Addressing bullying in schools requires a multidisciplinary approach that considers the interplay of individual, familial, and societal factors. Effective interventions must be evidence-based, culturally sensitive, and

inclusive of all stakeholders, including students, parents, and educators. By adopting a comprehensive understanding of bullying and its impacts, schools can create safer and more supportive environments favourable to learning and personal development.

The cumulative evidence suggests that addressing bullying is not only a matter of immediate intervention but also a long-term commitment to promoting supportive school conditions that prioritizes mental health.

Empowering students to take an active stance against bullying through initiatives has shown promise in other contexts, suggesting that similar approaches could be helpful in case of Romania (Arënliu et al., 2019). Nonetheless, the effectiveness of such programs may be limited if not supported by adult intervention, highlighting the need for a complete approach that involves both students and teachers (Arënliu et al., 2019).

The impact of socio-cultural factors on bullying behaviors in Romania cannot be overlooked. Research indicates that individualism-collectivism dynamics influence bullying victimization rates, with collectivist cultures potentially offering more strong support systems for victims (Smith & Robinson, 2019). In Romania, where collectivist values are prevalent, the community's response to bullying can significantly affect the experiences of victims and perpetrators alike. Understanding these cultural shades is vital for developing targeted interventions that resonate with the local context.

Additionally, the stigma associated with bullying can deter victims from seeking help, further complicating the issue (Rahbar et al., 2021). Therefore, creating a supportive environment where students feel safe to report bullying incidents is paramount. The intersection of bullying with mental health issues is another critical area of concern. Research has identified a correlation between bullying victimization and various mental health disorders, including anxiety and depression (Rahbar et al., 2021).

Bullying schools is a complex phenomenon that requires a comprehensive approach involving students, teachers, parents, and policymakers. While significant steps have been made in addressing bullying through legislative changes and educational initiatives, the persistent prevalence of bullying indicates that more work is needed. Effective interventions must consider the unique cultural, social, and psychological factors of every country to

create a safer and more supportive educational environment for all students.

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PERCEPTIONS OF THE PRESENT AND EXPECTATIONS FROM THE FUTURE: QUALITY OF LIFE IN A LOCAL ENVIRONMENT AND LIFE SATISFACTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN VUKOVAR-SYRMIA COUNTY (CROATIA)

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Abstract: In recent decades, the quality of life in the local environment has become a key issue in research focused on neighborhoods, cities, and smaller regions. The quality-of-life concept is used to determine positive and negative aspects of life in the local community, which makes it a complex and multidimensional concept. Having that in mind, this paper tries to evaluate the quality of life based on dimensions related to the socio-material aspects of life in a settlement but also to the social opportunities important for young people's transition to adulthood and planning their future. This paper is based on the data collected from a survey of third and fourth grade students of high schools in Vukovar-Syrmia County, on the eastern border of the Republic of Croatia, conducted in 2019.

The goal was to answer the following research questions: 1) to what degree do certain dimensions of life quality impact general satisfaction of young people with their lives, 2) how relevant are certain assessments of the life quality dimensions for understanding the future of the local community. Since both individual lives and the lives of local communities are rooted in the temporal dimension, the quality of life

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research enables us to find the link between the present state and the perception of the future. The results of the research not only contribute to a better understanding of local living conditions on attitudes and satisfaction of young people, but they also motivate reflections of change and planning of local realities in the future.

Keywords: *quality of life, local community, youth, life satisfaction, expectations from the future*

1. Introduction

After the declaration of independence in 1991, the Republic of Croatia experienced a number of significant social, economic, and political changes. The 1990s were marked by war and transitional challenges, followed by the economic and migration crisis and the accession to the European Union in the 21st century. It is therefore interesting to analyze how the residents of Croatia think about the local and national future, but also how they evaluate satisfaction with their lives. According to the results of research conducted in 2016, it was shown that mild pessimism prevails among citizens when it comes to expectations for the future development of Croatia (Pilar's Barometer of Croatian Society, 2016). When asked whether the situation in Croatia will improve, remain the same, or worsen in two to three years, more people believed that the situation would worsen than that there would be positive changes. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents were satisfied with their lives, and slight optimism prevailed when it came to expectations for their personal future. The discrepancy between personal satisfaction and social pessimism is also noticeable in the results of research conducted in 2020 among residents of the Vukovar-Syrmia County. Again, there was a noticeable distinction between satisfaction with one's life and the prevailing attitude that in a few years, life in that county would be worse than today (Živić, 2022).

The question arises as to what affects life satisfaction and expectations of the local future, and to what extent the quality of life in the local environment affects these assessments. Establishing a relation between the quality of life in the local environment, satisfaction with one's own life and expectations for the future gains particular importance if one accounts for the demographic crisis as one of the most prominent challenges the Republic of Croatia is facing. From 2011 to 2021, the number of residents in Croatia decreased by 413,056 people, or by 9.64% (Živić, Šimunić, 2023). It is noticeable that the situation is particularly dramatic in the five

counties in Eastern Croatia, Vukovar-Syrmia County being one of them. All those counties have recorded a population decline of more than 15%. The question is, therefore, whether the negative migration balance can be stopped by increasing the quality of local life and which aspects of local life particularly influence the way the local future is imagined.

The aim of this paper is to determine the connection between satisfaction with the local life quality and personal life satisfaction and expectations of local future on the example of young people from Vukovar-Syrmia County. In order to better capture the way in which young people evaluate life in the local environment, satisfaction with the immediate socio-spatial aspects of life will be investigated by studying satisfaction with housing and satisfaction with the neighborhood, as well as the quality of life at the settlement level and social conditions in the county as a wider social space. This way, young people's view of the quality of life aspects important for the development of their daily life will be connected with their evaluation of the social environment dimensions relevant for the development of abilities and the transition to adulthood. Therefore, the analysis will take into account young people's assessment of employment opportunities, trust in institutions, and social tensions in the county.

It is through quality of life that we will try to understand the essential relationships that exist in local communities, those between the collective and the individual and between the present and the future. Therefore, an effort will be made to capture both the spatial and temporal aspects of social life and to determine to what extent the assessment of the current quality of life in the settlement and county affects expectations from the local future.

2. Quality of (local) life: research on the quality of life in the spatial and temporal context

Quality of life is a multidimensional, and multifactorial concept (Cantarero, Potter & Leach, 2007), but also a "complex and amorphous concept" (Estoque et al., 2019: 619), which enables determining positive and negative aspects of life in a local community. In literature, quality of life is often associated with the concept of well-being, life satisfaction, and community satisfaction when it comes to community research (Potter, Cantarero, 2014). According to Ferriss (2004:37) "Quality of life refers to well-being as indicated by either/or/and subjective indicators and

objective indicators". Studies using objective indicators include a range of available statistical and other data related to indicators such as the size of housing facilities or the availability of certain services in an area. On the other hand, it is investigated how the residents themselves evaluate the area they live in, which makes it possible to determine how the residents' expectations and values affect their subjective assessment of the living environment (Marans, 2012). This raises the question of what is needed or necessary for the well-being of the people and communities. Quality of life research is often supported by approaches dealing with human needs, in which the idea is presented that people have quality lives when their needs are satisfied. Jankowska (2014:6) emphasizes that the quality of life is related to "the method of satisfying the needs", more precisely:

- "The need for security (due to risks relating to, among others, the economic situation)";

- "The need for self-realization (mainly satisfaction which comes from the work)";

- "The need to maintain psychological balance";

- "The need for social recognition (identifying to the group with which an individual can identify) (Gałęski, 1977)" (cited in Jankowska, 2014: 6).

Additionally, structural models investigating how satisfaction with certain domains of life affects the general feeling of well-being or general satisfaction with life are used. It is important to decide which domains concerning the local environment should be taken into account in the research. Also, it is necessary to consider different geographical scales at which satisfaction is assessed. Marans thus identifies satisfaction with housing, neighborhood, city, and region as different levels, each relevant in its own way for considering the quality of life (Marans, 2012). This way of linking different scales is very useful when analyzing the quality of life in the local environment, that is, conducting research covering both cities and rural areas. The most immediate spatial framework of individual and social life is that of housing and neighborhood. The fact that as many as eleven theories dealing with this topic were identified in one paper proves that various factors influence satisfaction with housing (Šiljeg et al., 2018). The neighborhood is also a complex socio-spatial context that remains important despite globalization trends, so the importance of different forms of neighborly relations is emphasized, as well as the specific

importance attributed to the built environment and public spaces in the neighborhood (Farahani, 2016).

To determine satisfaction with the quality of life in a settlement, it is necessary to consider a whole series of different dimensions, of which security, satisfaction with traffic and infrastructure, satisfaction with services and facilities, and satisfaction with the natural environment are particularly important (Slavuj, 2012a; Potter et al., 2012).

Finally, when analyzing the influences from the regional scale, it is necessary to take into account those concerning opinions about institutions, the perception of social divisions, and economic opportunities.

In addition to determining the spatial aspects and the level of research, it is also necessary to bear in mind how different groups of residents, according to gender, age, education, and other relevant characteristics, value certain spaces and elements of the local environment.

In this context, it is particularly interesting to study the youth population. Namely, recent research indicates that the life of young people is marked by significant changes, whereby they stay in the parental home longer and marry later, but there are also significant changes in accepted values. For example, interest in political processes is decreasing, but the importance of education and interest in environmental protection is increasing (Tvaronavičiene et al., 2020:1101-1102). The abovementioned changes are essential for understanding what young people expect from the local environment and to what extent the local community influences the well-being of young people and its various aspects (economic, social, health, psychological, etc.) (Barker et al., 2022). However, it should also be kept in mind that young people (Generation Z), as a significant part of the human capital of a country (and local communities) represent important "contributors to local well-being" (Brennan, Barnett and Baugh, 2007:2). In general, young people are seen as key factors for decision-making, maintenance, and future development of the local community (Tvaronavičiene et al., 2020). Magiera and Pac (2022:2) point out that when assessing the quality of life of young people (adolescents), the most important domains and problems for this population have to be covered. Research on the quality of life of young people, improvement of "problematic" areas and systematic planning and implementation of youth-friendly programs/projects/policies is essential for the future development and prosperity of the local community. It is crucial to give

voice to all local actors in a way that establishes, encourages, and maintains their mutual interactions and communication to identify the problems, needs, and aspirations specific to each group (Brennan, Barnett and Baugh, 2007). In this kind of relationality and engagement, a sense of place is strengthened and the local community maintained. All of the above suggests that in order to assess the quality of life of young people, in addition to the immediate socio-spatial aspects of life such as housing and neighborhood, it is necessary to take into account wider social conditions in which young people grow up and in which they assess their chances for personal development and transition to work.

In addition, when researching the quality of life in a certain local community or spatial context, one should certainly account for a simple but important fact – social actors who live in a geographically defined area of a certain local community perceive that community and the quality of life in it in a temporal context. Local social actors place their evaluations, projections, experiences, and expectations within a temporal continuum that includes the local past, present, and (imagined) future. The temporal dimension of the quality of local life depends on the subjective assessment and evaluation of the current state and personal expectations and aspirations for the local future. The quality of life enables us to find the link between the present and the future. Finally, it can be summarized that it is important to research how young people evaluate the current quality of life in their communities and settlements, but also what they expect from the future of the local community. If young people are satisfied with the local context, there is a good chance that they will plan their future within it, which is especially the case in peripheral areas that are experiencing a significant population decline.

3. Vukovar-Syrmia County – quality of life and a look to the future

Vukovar-Syrmia County is located on the eastern border of the Republic of Croatia. The Homeland War caused great destruction in this area, which slowed down its progress after Croatia became an independent country. According to several indicators, this county is one of the least developed Croatian counties, which causes dissatisfaction among its residents.

According to research conducted in 2009, 55% of residents thought that pessimism prevails among the residents of their settlement, while slightly less than 25% thought that optimism prevails (Mišetić et al., 2012). The respondents pointed out unemployment, bad economy, and economic problems as the biggest issues. The largest number of respondents were dissatisfied with the way the county takes care of young people and their future. When Croatia accessed the European Union in 2013, the question of young people, i.e. creating conditions in which young people would want to continue to live, gained importance. Namely, in addition to the previously detected migration of young people towards urban centers, the emigration of young people from Vukovar-Syrmia County to foreign countries also increased. All this had an impact on the severe population decline in this county, where the number dropped from 179,521 in 2011 to 143,113 in 2021.

Research conducted in 2020 showed that a degree of dissatisfaction and lack of optimism among the residents still remains. Namely, as many as 51.2% of the residents assessed the current situation in the county as mostly bad or very bad, while only 12.7% of respondents assessed the situation as mostly good or very good. Respondents pointed out unemployment, nepotism, corruption, and emigration (of young people) as key problems burdening the county. Considering the above findings, it is not surprising that the residents are not very optimistic about the future of their county. There are more of those who think that the situation will worsen (31.9%) than those who think that it will improve (22.5%). However, the largest number of respondents (42.9%) believe that the situation will remain mostly the same. However, despite the expressed dissatisfaction, the residents are quite happy with their lives. Thus, on a scale from 0 to 10, the largest number of respondents rated their satisfaction with life as 7 and 8, and the average rating of life satisfaction was M=6.9. When these results are compared with research conducted at the national scale, it can be concluded that the residents of this county show the same level of life satisfaction as those from other Croatian counties (Kaliterna Lipovčan and Brajša Žganec, 2022). Therefore, it is important to mention the aspects of life with which the residents of this county are very satisfied. The results showed that the respondents are satisfied with their family life (M=8.3), their relations with other people (M=7.6), the sense of security (M=7.5), and the sense of belonging to their community (M=7.3).

To summarize, the research showed that they are satisfied with informal social relations, i.e. only a small number of respondents feel alienated, and at the same time, they are dissatisfied with the political and economic processes that affect life in this area. This, of course, raises the question of how life satisfaction and expectations from the local future are related to the perception of the current situation in local communities.

4. Implementation, research objectives, and instruments used

The data used in this analysis was collected in a survey conducted in 2019. The target population were students of third and fourth grades of secondary schools from Vukovar-Syrmia County, and a total of 744 respondents participated in the research. The research was conducted using stratified probability sampling to ensure a proportional balance of the respondents, concerning their grade, education program (grammar school or vocational), and the location of their school. The sample included secondary schools in Vukovar, Vinkovci, Županja, and Ilok, and the survey was conducted in groups, during classes. Minor deviations of the realized sample from population values according to stratification criteria were subsequently corrected by applying weights. Earlier analyses have already determined the extent to which young people are satisfied with certain dimensions of the quality of life in the local environment, so the following two objectives were set in this paper (Žanić et al., 2019).

The first objective is to research the extent to which the quality of life in the local environment is related to the life satisfaction of young people. Considering that life satisfaction is affected by many factors, both individual and social, here we wanted to find out whether the perception of the situation in the local socio-spatial environment affects life satisfaction. The local environment is gradually determined by considering the immediate living environment represented by the residential building and the neighborhood, the quality of housing in the settlement, and the social conditions at the county level.

The second objective is to determine whether certain dimensions of the quality of life are related to young people's expectations of life in the local community in the future. A certain concern when thinking about the future is especially visible in the peripheral areas of the county. Therefore,

we considered it important to determine, regarding local development, which aspects of local environment increase optimism.

The following instruments were used in the research. Life satisfaction was measured with a simple instrument that is very often used for these purposes, where on a scale from 1 (completely dissatisfied) to 5 (completely satisfied) respondents answered the question "Taking everything into account, how satisfied are you with your life?" (Raboteg Šarić et al. 2009).

For the perception of the future situation in the place of residence, we used the question "Please give your opinion about life in your settlement in five years", and the respondents could answer on a scale from 1, significantly worse than today, to 5, significantly better than today.

Satisfaction with housing, the neighborhood, and the quality of life in the settlement was operationalized based on similar research conducted in Croatia (Slavuj, 2012a). The quality of housing was evaluated based on questions related to the equipment of the facility, the size of the facility, and expenses for an apartment or house, while satisfaction with the neighborhood was measured by the degree of satisfaction when socializing with neighbors, the willingness of neighbors to help, and daily behavior of neighbors. The quality of life in the settlement was measured through four dimensions, namely the quality of services and facilities, satisfaction with the natural environment, satisfaction with safety, and the quality of transport and infrastructure.

When it comes to the research of the assessment of social limitations and opportunities in the county, they were researched through three dimensions: employment opportunities, social relations among residents, and trust in institutions. To capture the Transition to Work dimension, which is often listed as one of the key dimensions for the quality of life of young people, the dimension of satisfaction with the possibility of employment in the county was researched in this paper. This dimension was operationalized based on qualitative research on the quality of life, conducted through interviews at the end of 2018 and the beginning of 2019 (Žanić et al., 2019). The formatted instrument consists of five parts in which the following was researched: respondents' satisfaction with the possibility of finding a job, the availability of well-paid jobs, the transparency of employment procedures, the availability of diverse jobs, and the availability of jobs that enable progress.

Moreover, the trust in the institutions that operate in the county area, i.e. the police, local authorities, judiciary, political parties, and the media, was also researched. A one-factor structure with 56.2% of the explained variance was determined on the researched items, and the average scale value was used in further analyses.

Finally, the research covered an assessment of social relations in the county, and the respondents were asked about the extent to which ethnic divisions and divisions between the rich and the poor negatively affect the development of the county. In addition, in the regression analysis, control variables were also used, namely gender and self-assessment of the standard of living.

Table 1: Normality test results (N=403)

| Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	p-Value (K-S Test)	Shapiro-Wilk Test	p-Value (S-W Test)
FSS				
Emosional Support	0.059	0.101	0.984	0.115
Informational Support	0.052	0.121	0.979	0.060
Practical Support	0.051	0.114	0.970	0.030
PAQ-A				
Physical Activity	0.058	0.210	0.987	0.080
Sports Participation	0.052	0.260	0.981	0.050
Recreational Activity	0.056	0.112	0.975	0.040
Physical Education	0.064	0.156	0.982	0.070
RBS				
Smoking	0.071	0.210	0.955	0.005
Alcohol Consumption	0.068	0.115	0.942	0.003
Drug use	0.064	0.112	0.960	0.008
Hazardous Activity	0.057	0.118	0.967	0.014
LTAS				
Constructice Activity	0.055	0.112	0.986	0.090
Non-Constructive Activity	0.069	0.175	0.974	0.042

*FSS: Family Support; PAQ-A: Physical Activity Questionnaire for Adolescents; RBS: Risky Behavior Scale; Leisure Time Activity Scale (LTAS)

Source: Primary Data (2023)

5. Results

The results of the research showed that the majority of young people living in this county are satisfied with their lives. As shown in Figure 1, as many as 71.5% of the respondents stated that they are mostly or completely satisfied with their lives. On the other hand, only 9.7% of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their lives, while the remaining 18.8% stated that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Earlier research showed that most young people in Croatia express satisfaction with life, however, the results of this study show slightly higher numbers compared to previous findings. According to research conducted on a national sample, 59% of young people stated that they are satisfied with their life, while around 15% stated that they are dissatisfied (Raboteg Šarić et al. 2009).

Figure 1. Share of respondents according to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with life
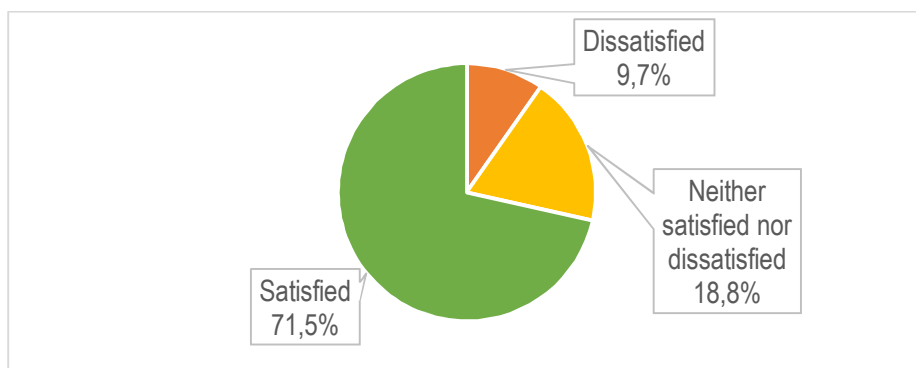
In contrast to the expressed high level of life satisfaction, the respondents are not very optimistic when it comes to the future of their settlement. Only about 24.4% of the respondents think that life in their settlement will be better in five years than it is now, while 38.4% think that life will be worse. The remaining 37.2% think that it will remain the same.

Figure 2. Share of respondents according to the assessment of what life will be like in their settlement in five years
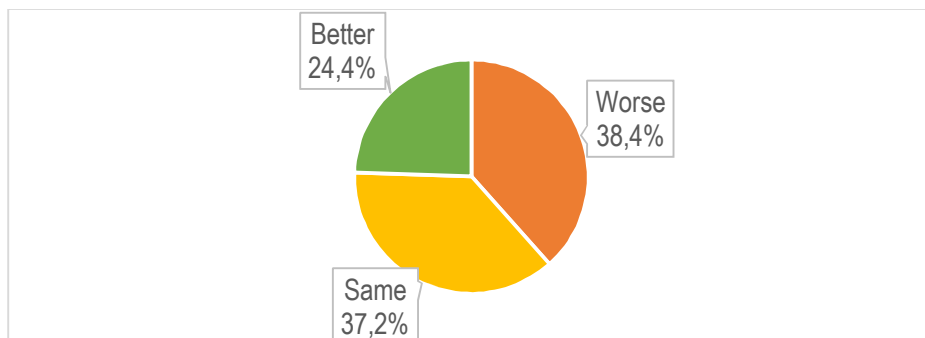
As previously stated, each dimension used for measuring certain aspects of the quality of life and the perception of social limitations and opportunities was operationalized through several items, and Figure 3 shows the average scale values for the variables formed this way. If we use the theoretical mean value of 3 as a reference point, we see that more respondents have a positive experience of most of the measured dimensions than a negative one. The respondents were mostly satisfied with the level of security, followed by the quality of housing and the quality of transport infrastructure, while, when it comes to the trust in institutions and the perception of job opportunities in the county, more were dissatisfied than satisfied. Young people expressed dissatisfaction with all researched aspects of the perception of the possibility of employment. The results showed that 63% of young people are dissatisfied with the transparency of employment, while 78% are dissatisfied with the availability of well-paid jobs in the county (Žanić et al, 2019).

Comparing the results regarding the three levels of the living space, we see that the respondents are more satisfied with the dimensions of the quality of life that belong to the immediate social-spatial environment, as well as those that determine the quality of life at the settlement level, while they are significantly less satisfied with the factors related to the socio-economic characteristics of life in the county.

Figure 3. Comparison of satisfaction with certain aspects of the quality of life (arithmetic mean)
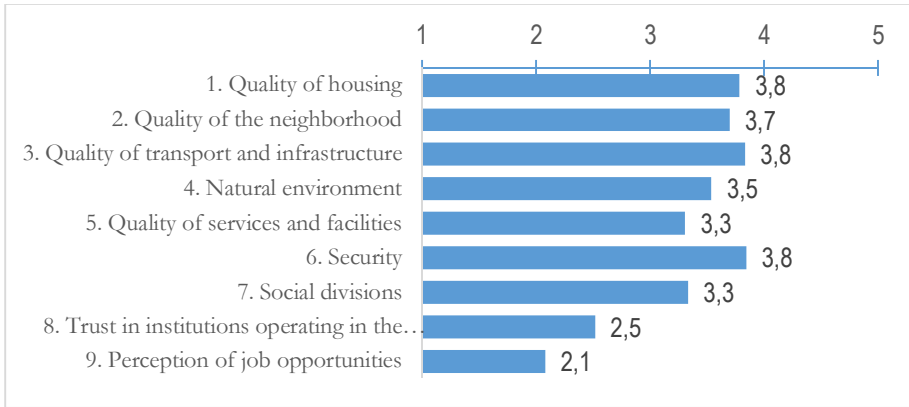
In the next step, we used regression analysis to examine the effect of the mentioned dimensions of the quality of life in the immediate living environment, followed by those at the community level and wider socio-economic determiners of life in the county on life satisfaction on one hand, and the assessment of living conditions in the community in five years on the other. Before developing the regression model, we analyzed the bivariate correlation of all variables included in the analyses. Table 1 shows that most of the predictor variables are not correlated or that there is a low level of correlation between them ($r<0.36$). Nevertheless, a few predictor variables show a slightly higher but still moderate correlation ($0.36 \leq r < 0.67$). In particular, we detected a positive moderate correlation between the natural environment and the quality of housing as well as the quality of transport and infrastructure, between security and the quality of neighborhood, between security and natural environment, and the quality of services and facilities with the quality of transport and infrastructure as well as with the trust in institutions and perception of job opportunities. In the end, a moderate correlation between the perception of job opportunities and trust in institutions was established. Apart from the listed correlations, correlation analysis did not show that there is any stronger bivariate correlation between the predictor and criterion variables nor between the criterion variables themselves.

Table 1: Pearson's correlation coefficient between the variables included in the regression analysis

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Life satisfaction	1											
2. Assessment of the living conditions in five years	.211**	1										
3. Gender	-.015	-.138**	1									
4. Assessment of standards of living	.275**	.165**	.031	1								
5. Quality of housing	.321**	.251**	-.045	.320**	1							
6. Quality of the neighborhood	.225**	.166**	-.061	.025	.269**	1						
7. Quality of transport and infrastructure	.289**	.233**	.056	.110**	.313**	.256**	1					
8. Natural environment	.228**	.226**	-.075**	.157**	.421**	.296**	.390**	1				
9. Quality of services and facilities	.213**	.243**	-.175**	.070	.330**	.237**	.411**	.308**	1			
10. Security	.286**	.302**	-.292**	.137**	.327**	.389**	.334**	.420**	.328**	1		
11. Social divisions	-.122**	-.167**	.110**	-.120**	-.184**	-.056	-.112**	-.148**	-.080**	-.221**	1	
12. Trust in institutions operating in the county	.255**	.280**	.030	.072	.314**	.233**	.359**	.297**	.370**	.238**	-.162**	1
13. Perception of job opportunities	.286**	.303**	-.135**	.159**	.253**	.159**	.291**	.289**	.365**	.226**	-.070	.456**

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

The following table shows the results of the regression analysis. Given that we were interested in measuring the effect of the listed living conditions on life satisfaction in general, as well as the assessment of the living conditions in the community in five years, we created two regression models with different criterion variables but the same predictor set. In both cases, the predictor set statistically significantly predicts the outcome of the criterion variable. The first model explains 22.4% of the variance with six variables having a statistically significant effect on the criterion variable "life satisfaction." To be precise, life satisfaction was positively associated with the assessment of standards of living, quality of housing, quality of the neighborhood, quality of transport and infrastructure and the perception of security and job opportunities. The second model explains 17.1% of the variance but only three predictor variables had a statistically significant effect on the criterion variable. Respondents who think that the standards of living in their settlement would improve in five years are the same respondents who have a higher sense of security in their community, followed by those who have greater trust in institutions and those who have a more optimistic view of job opportunities in the county.

Table 2: Results of linear regression analysis for predicting life satisfaction and the assessment of living conditions in five years

	Life satisfaction	Assessment of living conditions in five years
	β	β
Gender	.035	-.054
Assessment of standards of living	.167**	.072
Quality of housing	.138**	.061
Quality of the neighborhood	.105**	-.007
Quality of transport and infrastructure	.128**	.034
Natural environment	-.039	.022
Quality of services and facilities	-.030	.030
Security	.115**	.136**
Social divisions	-.028	-.070
Trust in institutions operating in the county	.060	.111*
Perception of job opportunities	.148**	.168**
F	.18.289**	.12.870**
Adjusted R²	0.224	0.171

** $p < 0.01$;* $p < 0.05$

6. Discussion

The research aimed to find out how the assessment of the quality of life in a settlement affects young people, i.e. their life satisfaction but also their assessment of future development of their settlements. It has been shown that the quality of life in the settlement and county is correlated with these two dimensions of personal and communal life in different ways.

When it comes to general life satisfaction of young people, it was shown that it is significantly affected by satisfaction with the immediate spatial framework. The quality of housing was proved to be a significant predictor of life satisfaction, just like in some previous studies (Potter et al., 2012).

Like in previous research, it was shown that the neighborhood is relevant for general life satisfaction. Previous research had already indicated that a higher level of satisfaction with the neighborhood has a positive effect on satisfaction with one's own life (O´Brien and Ayidiya, 1991). Although neighborhoods in Vukovar-Syrmia County are no longer as strong and cohesive as before according to some interpretations, the results of this study show that they still have a significant effect on life satisfaction of young people (Žanić et al., 2022a).

When it comes to dimensions related to the assessment of the quality of life in a settlement, it has been shown that security and quality of transport and infrastructure are correlated with life satisfaction of young people. As expected, young people who express a higher sense of security and who are more satisfied with transport connections and infrastructure are also more satisfied with their own lives. Regarding the control variables, the gender of the respondents had no statistically relevant effect on life satisfaction but the perception of the standards of living did. That result is also in line with some previous results according to which a better financial situation has a positive effect on life satisfaction of young people (Raboteg-Šarić et al., 2009).

Finally, the perception of job opportunities was significantly related to life satisfaction. This is an interesting finding given that young people from this county also showed high migration aspirations. It has been shown that just over a third of the respondents would like to live in their county after completing their education, a third would like to live somewhere else in Croatia, and a third would like to live abroad. However, the results concerning young people's attachment to their place of living show that they have a high level of emotional connection with it (Žanić et al., 2022b). Even though a lot of young people intend to leave, most of them have a strong emotional connection with this area, which can affect their personal dissatisfaction with the fact that is not economically developed enough to provide them with job opportunities.

The key result is that different factors affect the shown level of one's life satisfaction and the assessment of the development possibilities of places to live, i.e. the assessment of life in the settlement in five years. Generally speaking, in the case of the assessment of life in the local environment, the significance of the immediate environment decreases and the significance of broader social opportunities increases. That way, neither satisfaction with housing nor with the neighborhood is related to the assessment of the local future.

The assessment of security is the only dimension of the quality of life in a settlement that proved significant. That is an interesting finding, which is not easy to interpret. However, as mentioned in the introduction, the need for security is one of the basic human needs and it must be satisfied for a quality life. In addition, it is important to underline two contextual factors that could have affected this result. First, this area was struck by war thirty

years ago, which left a strong mark on its life today and could have influenced the fact that the sense of security is an important factor in the temporal understanding of local processes. Second, this area is on the very eastern border of the Republic of Croatia, which has been under particular pressure since the outbreak of the great migrant crisis in 2015. We believe that this also could have been a factor in the result, although, for a better understanding of this result, a comparison with similar research dealing with expectations of the local future of young people would certainly be necessary.

The assessment of the future situation in the county was also affected by the assessment of job opportunities and the trust in institutions operating in the county. Since economic issues are listed as key problems in this area, it is not surprising that the perception of job opportunities proved to have the most pronounced effect in this model. It is, therefore, obvious that the slim employment opportunities are not seen only as a temporary difficulty, but also as a structural problem that determines the way how the area is perceived in a temporal dimension. In short, if they believe that there are fewer opportunities for career development in the present, it significantly influences how they imagine the future.

Another aspect of broader social effects on the perception of the future is the (lack of) trust in institutions. According to earlier research, Croatia is one of the countries with a history of distrust in institutions (Žanić and Miletić, 2023; Nikodem and Črpić, 2014). It is obvious that this distrust also generates a certain type of pessimism toward the future, the impression that nothing will change for the better.

For a better understanding of how the quality of life in the local environment affects the two studied dimensions, we believe that it would be useful to conduct longitudinal research, but also to obtain more findings from other countries measured by the same or similar instruments.

Also, we believe that future research should investigate the effect of values on the correlation between the evaluation of the quality of life in the local environment and life satisfaction. Although it is noticeable that the environment is more important for young people, this study did not show that greater satisfaction with the environment affects greater life satisfaction. Thus, it would be useful to examine whether the differences between accepting materialistic and post-materialistic values play any role.

Environmental protection is considered to be a part of the post-materialistic world view which is, according to some claims, more pronounced in large cities and cities with better universities (Reckwitz, 2023). It would be useful to research whether post-materialistic value orientations, including preoccupation with environmental protection, are underrepresented in smaller settlements that are researched in this paper. So, we still have to discover whether the different sets of values influence the fact that young people pay special attention to different aspects of the quality of life in the local area.

This study and the obtained results open the door for new research but also for international comparisons of the results. One of the important topics for future research is how the local environment, as well as national and international circumstances affect life satisfaction. Including the dimensions of travel, maintaining social connections outside the place of residence, and some other dimensions related to broader social influences on everyday life would enable us to better understand the level of importance of the local community for life satisfaction of young people.

7. Conclusion

One of the important fields of research when studying quality of life is the way in which different dimensions of quality of life affect the inhabitants of an area and their general experience of the local environment. We thought it important to raise those questions with young people because they represent great capital for local communities but also because of the changes they are undergoing.

Previous research was focused on the impact of individual dimensions of the quality of life on general life satisfaction in a neighborhood, settlement, or city (Slavuj, 2012). This paper has somewhat different objectives and the research was set around the effect of the quality of life in a community on overall life satisfaction of the young on one hand, and their expectations of the local future on the other. Therefore, the goal was to get insights into elements of the quality of life which are crucial for the temporal dimension of the local environment and their lives.

The research has shown how different dimensions of the quality of life have different effects on satisfaction with the personal life and on the

assessment of the future in the place of residence. The only two dimensions with a significant effect in both cases were the sense of security in the community and the ability to get a job in the county. Still, looking at the overall personal life satisfaction, aspects of the direct socio-spatial surroundings, meaning the housing conditions and the neighborhood, have a significant effect, while there was no correlation between those two elements and the assessment of the future in the area.

When assessing the future of a settlement, the effect of broader social processes grows, so trust in institutions operating in the county becomes a significant predictor. Correlations can be found between these results and the results of research conducted in this county on the general population (Živić, 2022). It is again shown that a certain level of satisfaction with immediate social relationships also generates satisfaction with life, but also that assessing the development potential of the area as low is caused by institutional and economic instability. To raise optimism about the local future, it is necessary to ensure the security of young people, and along with that, to work on building trust in institutions as well as creating an economic environment in which young people would have better job opportunities. This means that local communities will find it hard to prevent young people from leaving unless they succeed in finding ways to improve the work of institutions and encourage economic development that would enable them to develop a career in the areas they live in now.

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Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declares no conflicting interests.

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