

EDITORIAL

Art and culture in a transformative world _____

_____ ***Associate Professor Dr. Belina BUDINI*** _____

This issue of *Polis*, the academic journal of the Faculty of Humanities, Education and Liberal Arts at EUT, focuses on Art and Culture in a transformative world. Volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous are among the most ubiquitous adjectives describing the challenges and urgencies we are facing nowadays. While we are still dealing with the consequences of a world pandemic after COVID19, other dynamics have taken place, leading to further disruptions and a lack of stability, but also bringing transformations and potential for change. Amidst this turnaround, it is of special relevance to reflect on potential consequences from different perspectives when trying to consider the developments, growth, or reductions in the field of arts and culture, but also in the media systems, education, as well as in the entertainment industries and in the society at large. The main aim is to understand how cultural values and practices are changing in terms of production, dissemination and reception among creators and audiences.

The current issue of *Polis* opens therefore a discussion on the applications of arts and cultural initiatives in various contexts, trying to relate with technological settings, communication practices and greater issues of politics and society.

The first article of the issue deals with the social media forms of arts and the so-called phenomenon of media-influencers. From memes to podcasts and the tyranny of reels, the internet is now the new public sphere flourishing as an entertainment industry, but also as a platform for art manifestations, bringing therefore transformations to the traditional forms of art and culture, as well as impacting today institutions and creating potential for change. Among other perspectives, in this issue a special place takes therefore the evaluation of the Social Media Influencers in Albania, in an article of our scholar Irena Myzeqari. Her systematic re-evaluation, updating the data from a previous group-study on the Albanian social media influencers, then goes on further elaborating the

dilemma of a hyper-machine phenomenon or a self-promotion engine, or both. While in the previous study conducted by the Department of Humanities and Communication at the European University of Tirana, entitled “Online Albania”, aimed to conduct a descriptive analysis of the most followed social media profiles in Albania, this study endeavors to take things one step further and builds an analytical model on the reasons why people, especially younger generation, tend to follow and appreciate their online presence. The purpose of this study is therefore to understand why the younger generation tends to follow social media influencers in the first place and its methodology is based on the data collection through a questionnaire, spread out to students at the European University of Tirana. When trying to understand the reasons that motivate younger generation in following a social media influencer, Dr. Myzeqari finds out that from all four theoretical features such as, attractiveness, trust, authenticity and similarities, attractiveness stands out as the most noticeable feature that drives them in choosing their SMI-s, whereas authenticity and similarity seem to be highly valuable as well with 70 respondents taking them into consideration when following someone online. As the author concluded, being famous is however enough reason to draw genuine interest.

In addition, arts have started to become integral parts of school curricula and it would have been of special interest to analyze its effects on individual growth and success as well as evaluate its role and impact on the educational system in Albania. However, more contributions on those terms are expected in the future, especially from the Departments of Arts and of Education. Instead, researchers from the Department of Education, Psychology and Sports at the EUT, are focusing more on the effects of the pandemic situation to wellbeing, technological implications in the educational systems related to coding and critical thinking, as well as multiple intelligence and its implications in education, and finally a presentation of the current state of the Fitness centers in terms of their management and marketing in accordance with the socio-economic changes that our country is going through.

Closer to the topic of this issue, related to arts and education, the first contribution in this section comes from a group of researchers in the fields of clinical psychology and film directing. In this article, authors Albana Xhemali, Elkjana Gjipali, and Elona Hasko set to analyze the impact of Albanian cartoon films on the learning process, stimulating thought, imagination, and their use as an instructional tool for improving and facilitating the implementation of the preschool curriculum. Based on an experiment realized with children 4-6 years in 4 public and private preschools in Tirana, while showing cartoon films for children in Albanian language and produced by public artistic institutions during the years '80, '90, it was noticed that the children were more interested and engaged in discussing about the topics of the cartoon films content.

In the article “The implications of obsessive-compulsive disorder due to Covid 19 Pandemic situation” by Dr. Dorina Xhani, MSc. Joida Porozaj, Dr. Brunilda Hoxhaj, Dr. Elside Sinaj, Stela Kapo and Eneida Sala, the authors aim to explore how obsessive-compulsive disorder affects various aspects of quality of life such as family life, social relationships, and activities of daily living. Their study is based on a case study model of a clinical population of persons diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder in Tirana and shows that obsessive-compulsive disorder has major impacts on areas such as family life and activities of daily living and a significant impact on social relationships.

In the article “Critical thinking development in students during coding in the subject of “Information and Communication Technology”; A Case Study at “Harif Halil Sulaj” high school, Mamurras, by M.Sc. Pranvera Krasniqi, AP. PhD. Tomi Treska, Doc. Anduela Lile, M.Sc. Andromeda (Keci) Lalaj, the group of authors explore the possibilities and perspectives of the interaction between coding and encouraging and how they also help developing critical thinking among students in the 15-18 age group. A field survey was carried out through questionnaires and focus groups, both for teachers and for students at an Albanian local school, and it was finally observed that the introduction of coding in the school curriculum in higher secondary education has a very positive impact on students, even on ones with a below average level, and helped in increasing the involvement of students and encouraging critical thinking. The authors give a few recommendations to extend the curriculum in general to encompass coding hours and algorithms, as well as increasing the ICT hours pertaining to the 11th grade.

In the article about “Multiple intelligence and its implications in education”, PhD(c). Etleva Haxhihseni and PhD. Briseida Andoni aim at giving a definition and meaning to multiple intelligence and identify its implications in good manners and education. The article is literature research in the form of a meta-analysis in pedagogical and psychological studies.

A contribution by Dorian Isufaj focuses on “Efficient management of fitness centers, an important link of sport for all”, that is a descriptive article presenting the current state of Fitness Centers in Albania, their management and marketing in accordance with the socio-economic changes that our country is going through.

The article, “The road to nowhere: Loer Kume’s “Snowman” a Rhetorical Analysis”, Dr. Klementin Mile applies the method of rhetorical analysis to critically assess the story “Snowman” from the book *Amygdala Mandala* of the Albanian writer Loer Kume., winner of the prestigious prize in literature, ‘Kadare Prize’ 2019. The acclaimed purpose of this article is “to analyze the reasons for failing to fulfil the literary ambition of the author Kume, as well as to clearly delineate the contribution of such works in their mission as literary narratives”. Mile suggests that the story “Snowman” fails to convince the readers when offered with too much

guidance and becomes an aesthetic liability. He emphasizes that overall, this tale represents an ambitious attempt to enter the debate on morality, but this very thematic interest has not managed to move the authorial audience in the direction desired by the author, since aesthetically it has created more problems than it has managed to solve.

In the same vein, that of the critical essay, in the article “Art in small circles,” author Evi Veliu critically assesses the current state of arts in Albania, especially located in the city’s space. However, her quest is more of an essentialist and conceptual endeavor in trying to discover truthfulness and the inner emotional power through art, in a creative context.

In his article on “Views of Albanian Literature for Children”, author Dr. Ermir Nika offers a descriptive retrospective view of the period after the New Age when oral traditions and fairy tales became a primary source of subjects. Regarding the Albanian literature for children during the period of the National Renaissance, in the wake of the numerous social, political, and cultural contributions undertaken by the protagonists of this movement, Nika affirms that a very useful work was done for the drafting of textbooks for Albanian schools. He further claims that the renaissance saw the creation of books for the younger generations as a major obligation, and in this way, the number of writings dedicated to children increased significantly.

In this section about literature and art, the final article, that of Dr. Denis Bizhga brings a contribution on the legendary epic songs in the Homeric tradition of epic poetry and its intertwining in the literature of the most prominent Albanian writer Ismail Kadare. His article further goes on to describe the rhapsodes of the Albanian mountains and especially the Epic of “Cikli i Kreshnikëve” as one of the most important artistic pillars of the spiritual culture of Albanians.

Articles from young researchers, Master of Science Students, constitute an important section of this issue of Polis in the best tradition of collaboration between students and their supervisors. Therefore, the researcher Xhois Kuta in her article, “Hate Speech and its Impact on Albanian Youth”, previously submitted as a Master thesis in the Department of Humanities and Communication at the European University of Tirana, under the supervision of Dr. Irena Myzeqari, focuses on how hate speech affects young Albanians. The research is based on a survey conducted with students of the EUT aged 18-24 years old. The author identifies a lack of information on hate speech, and how young people (students) do not know how to identify what can be hate speech or not, and consequently they are not aware of how to manage cases of hate speech and how much this affects their emotional well-being and their daily lives.

In the article, “Online media and broadcasting ethics,” researcher Xhejson Zogu brings a synthesis of his thesis in ethics related to the online media and