

Research group:
Social Transformation: Education, Digitalization, Organizational and Institutional Change
Research area: Social Sciences (Political Sciences, law, educational sciences)

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THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARED SOCIETY IN A DISRUPTED WORLD



METHODOLOGY

The project adopts an interdisciplinary approach, combining political science, social theory, and empirical research. It investigates Shared Society across multiple analytical dimensions: 1) Political dimension: democratic participation, electoral integrity, rule of law; 2) Governance dimension: accountability, transparency, and social inclusion; 3) Socio-economic dimension: equality, opportunity structures, and regional disparities; 4) Conflict transformation dimension: peacebuilding, resilience, and civic dialogue. The research employs the following methodology: Comparative cross-national analysis (EU member states and Western Balkans); Quantitative survey data (N=1006) on civic attitudes and behavioral patterns; Qualitative methods (focus groups, discourse analysis, case studies); The theoretical framework integrates: Social ontology and collective intentionality (Searle 1995, Tuomela, 2007). Theories of justice and public reason" (Rawls 1999, Peirce 1998, Finnis 1980).



The research is based on understanding the performative practices of resilience of democracy, social justice and fairness as "patterns of practical reasoning, as a way of thinking and acting, constituting appropriate form of mutual concern among members. Social unity in a polity with debates "joint activity approach and provides a more dynamic understanding and inclusive sense of solidarity" (Sevinc 2022). Phenomenology - insights on values and politics as an activity. It contributed with the analysis of solidarity bonds and effective forces of the acts of persons. "Sharing a community with others and sharing the responsibility for the community with others is the context in which the person is formed and realized" (Scheler, 2021). Psychological approach of the 'shared social burden'. Conceptualization of shared common grounds, sense of belonging and togetherness, national identity and multiculturalism.

RESULTS

The results of the project contribute to the expansion of its conceptual scope. This is presented in two of the publications, where the theses of the shared society are applied to documentary-historical research and analysis of specific historical issues: 2 articles in Web of Science – NASLEDIE and EPOHI Journals. The general approach of shared society concept has been published in the WoS Journal PHILOSOPHIA, with co-author – Dr. Melanie Hussak (Freiburg, Germany). The project outcomes and results include comparative analysis of countries from Bulgaria, Germany, the Western Balkans including (Kosovo, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Israel with indicators in four dimensions: political (democracy, civic participation and rule of law); public governance (accountability, integrity, social inclusion); economic (equality and economic indicators, competitiveness); and conflict resolution (social transformations and resolution of conflicts, peace-building, sustainability and resilience). Significant results of the work on the project in terms of its interdisciplinary nature and potential for further development is the thematic focus of the Eighth International Scientific Conference of the Public Administration Department, entirely dedicated to the topic of the Shared Society: "Politics and Policies for the Shared Society" with the presentation of 34 papers. The discussions took place in four thematic areas of the Shared Society: 1) Manifestations of the Shared Society; 2) Factors for the Shared Society; 3) The Shared Society as a Focus of Policies and 4) Mapping Cases of Shared Society. Their publication in a scientific collection of articles is forthcoming (October 30, 2024). A quantitative study was conducted by Trend Agency (among 1006 respondents). The focus of interest is on the perceptions of the respondents – the subjective feeling of the members of society with an emphasis on the behavioral status in different situations and a focus group - conducted in May 2024. Three core dimensions of Shared Society are operationalized: 1) Dignity, rights, and empowerment; 2) Pluralistic coexistence and participatory inclusion; 3) Shared responsibility for the common good.



CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide a robust basis for both theoretical advancement and policy-oriented reflection on the concept of Shared Society. Empirical results indicate clear potential for targeted strategic interventions aimed at mitigating polarization and strengthening social cohesion. Key policy directions emerging from the analysis include: (1) the systematic integration of civic and democratic education within formal schooling; (2) the enhancement of literacy and inclusion policies in marginalized and minority communities; and (3) increased investment in peripheral and small-scale settlements to counter socio-economic marginalization and restore prospects for local development. The analysis confirms that societies operate along a dynamic continuum between fragmentation and integration, shifting over time in response to political, economic, and socio-cultural factors. Socialization within environments structured around shared values, such as mutual recognition, responsibility, and civic participation, contributes significantly to the reproduction of pro-social attitudes and the strengthening of social trust. In this context, inclusive public policies function as critical mediating mechanisms that enable progress toward social integrity and collective well-being. At the same time, contemporary geopolitical tensions and internal political disruptions continue to intensify fragmentation processes. Empirical evidence from Southeast Europe underscores these dynamics. The democratic backsliding coexists with civic innovation, youth mobilization, and emerging forms of solidarity. Parallel to this, widespread protest waves across the Balkans in 2025 - triggered by corruption scandals, governance deficits, and declining institutional trust, demonstrate the structural drivers of polarization and the fragility of democratic legitimacy. These developments reveal both deep societal dissatisfaction and the rise of new forms of civic agency, particularly through youth-led mobilizations and digitally mediated participation. Beyond the relationships, variability and fragmentation, shared society may lead to a more collaborative model through active political participation and deliberation, to bring forward an intricate balance between the government and citizens, in a more responsible and knowledgeable decision-making process, that takes into consideration legitimacy and positive outcomes for society, based on joint contribution by stakeholders, rather than partial interests of some social groups. The project's comparative analysis further demonstrates that even in contexts where institutional frameworks for democratic consolidation formally exist, social phenomena may generate persistent oppositional dynamics in public spaces. This highlights the limits of procedural democracy when not accompanied by substantive inclusion, trust-building, and shared normative commitments. At the same time, the findings identify pathways toward transformation: diverse trajectories of social change can support the emergence of cohesive and resilient societies, particularly when accompanied by favorable socio-economic conditions and inclusive governance practices. Shared Society extends beyond adjacent frameworks such as multiculturalism, interethnic coexistence, or rights-based approaches, by offering a more integrative and relational paradigm. It emphasizes active co-participation, deliberation, and the co-construction of social reality by citizens and institutions. This implies a shift toward a collaborative governance model in which legitimacy derives from inclusive participation and collective responsibility, rather than from the aggregation of competing group interests alone. The empirical findings support the need for a broader paradigm shift toward relational forms of social collaboration, where actors continuously co-create shared meanings, practices, and institutional arrangements "partners co-construct their reality as equal participants continuously" (Kuttner 2017). Such an approach foregrounds the importance of social connectedness, collective action, and trust as foundational elements of democratic resilience. It also highlights the necessity of embedding Shared Society principles within public policy frameworks through normative commitments, institutional safeguards, and cross-sectoral cooperation. Vision for everyone, highlighting leaders' commitment and responsibility to achieve desired goals. Shared Society emerges as a multi-level, integrative approach particularly suited to contexts of heightened polarization. While it does not eliminate conflict, it provides mechanisms for its transformation into constructive engagement. Social cohesion, in this perspective, is understood not as the absence of difference, but as **the outcome of sustained social interaction, participatory governance, and a shared commitment to the common good.**

trend

Country	Age Group	Gender	Education Level	Income Level
Bulgaria	18-24	Male	High	Low
Bulgaria	25-34	Female	Medium	Medium
Bulgaria	35-44	Male	Low	High
Bulgaria	45-54	Female	High	Low
Bulgaria	55-64	Male	Medium	Medium
Bulgaria	65-74	Female	Low	High
Bulgaria	75-84	Male	High	Low
Bulgaria	85-94	Female	Medium	Medium
Bulgaria	95-104	Male	Low	High
Bulgaria	105-114	Female	High	Low

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INTRODUCTION

This research project advances a comparative and empirical analysis of the concept of *Shared Society* as a normative and analytical framework for addressing contemporary polarization and fragmentation. In the context of accelerating geopolitical uncertainty and societal disruption, cities and regions increasingly require inclusive public forums, participatory governance mechanisms, and deliberative civic spaces capable of mitigating social cleavages. The concept of Shared Society is grounded in a long-standing philosophical tradition of collective flourishing and ethical coexistence, referring to a community structured around shared values, mutual recognition, and joint responsibility. It denotes not merely coexistence, but an active, reflexive process of co-creation of the social order through civic engagement and public reasoning. There is also a need for more proactive strategies that address the underlying drivers of polarization. The project explorations is focuses upon shared society in multiple contexts and varieties of social interactions, referring to the core philosophical meaning of the term, understood as to conscious, virtuous life, and the true essence of shared life and happiness (εὐδαιμονία, συζῶ, ζῶν, הברכה Ha Eivrah) - common values upon which citizens jointly deliberate together. A Shared Society enhances adaptive capacity by transforming social tensions into productive forces for development, innovation, and democratic resilience. Conversely, when institutional and social environments fail to respond adequately to emerging challenges, conflicts may solidify into durable cleavages, resulting in social atomization and democratic erosion.

PROJECT GUIDELINES

The research project approach on *shared society* identifies and supports local communities, civic initiatives, social networks and other democratic engaging activities with guiding principles to help society to develop inclusive strategies. It promotes self-reflective learning processes to dismantle discriminatory structures and engage constructively with diversity. The project team has conducted research in several dimensions: *cleavages, conflict resolution and civic engagement practices, youth participation and collaborative forms of democratic civic participation at the municipal level, electoral process analysis and monitoring and mapping of models of shared society*. One of the key prerequisites for the existence of a shared society is the sharing of common value orientations regarding the joint political life and the norms of the political behavior of the members of society. Electoral participation is the most important and prominent aspect of citizens. One of the main goals of research is to discover what are the psychological experiences of these people, whether their experiences are determined by their orientations towards the values. Mapping Meanings in the spirit of time with is urgent need of peace, integrity and human understanding, we seek ways beyond disruptions. We reflect the conscious choice of not being just "an island in its entirety" but being "part of the main" (Donne) contributing to its diverse unity. The research aims to explore dimensions of the evolving concept in social sciences of 21st C. and its positive impact. The concept is defined as "a society not owned by one group, but belongs to everyone, with a common shared responsibility to maintain it and make it work for everyone" (McCartney, 2021). , resembling "distant galaxies", far away from us and from each other. In the existence of "parallel worlds", when each narrative brings in a different story of truth, each polarized group is able to perceive only its own side of the argument, fact-checking and verification of opinion's bias is a distant option and then integrity is lacking, consensus is forgotten, common goals and values fall apart.

