

May 2019

Youth Civic Engagement in Albania

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YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN ALBANIA

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
International Family & Community Studies

by
Ana Uka
May 2019

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ABSTRACT

Civic engagement is beneficial for young people and for democracy, especially for post-Communist countries like Albania which is struggling to establish a stable and fair democracy. To describe citizens' civic behavior using social capital as a framework, this work hypothesized that there would be significant age, gender, and urbanicity differences related to youth civic engagement. Moreover, both youth optimism and young people's attitudes to the political system were hypothesized to be positively associated with youth civic engagement when controlling for age, gender, and urbanicity. Finally, this study hypothesized that age, gender, and urbanicity would significantly moderate the associations between youth optimism and young people's attitudes to the political system with youth civic engagement. Using data from the Child Well-being 2016 dataset, results showed that there are significant age differences related to youth civic engagement where younger adolescents ages 12-14 had significantly higher levels of civic engagement than older adolescents ages 15-19. Next, the results revealed that there were unique associations between youth optimism and young people's attitudes to the political system with youth civic engagement when controlling for age, gender, and urbanicity. Young people's attitudes to the political system, youth optimism, and age (12-14 years old) contributed most to the prediction of youth civic engagement. In addition, moderation analysis uncovered that age (12-14 years old) significantly moderated the associations between youth optimism and young people's attitudes to the political system with youth civic engagement. Finally, the results indicated that urbanicity (urban youth) significantly moderated the association between youth optimism and youth civic

engagement. This work was limited by its use of secondary data reported by adolescents. Future research is needed to develop more strategies and programs to increase and improve youth civic engagement, especially among older adolescents living in rural areas in a post-Communist country like Albania.

Keywords: youth civic engagement, political system, attitudes, optimism, post-Communist

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, my students, and all young people living in Albania: May you find joy and happiness in your life!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life at Clemson University for affording me the opportunity to complete my doctoral studies here, despite all challenges encountered during this endeavor. Thank you to those at Marin Barleti University especially, Dr. Migena Kapllanaj for all the administrative work and the coordination of some classes for Clemson University. Thank you to Beder University for providing flexibility and support to finish my doctoral studies.

I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to all the professors at Clemson University, including Dr. Jim McDonell, Dr. Arelis Moore DePeralta, and Dr. Marian Turcan whom for without their patience, guidance, and understanding, I wouldn't have made it this far. I would especially thank my committee members, Dr. Mark Small (chair), Dr. Martie Thompson (co-chair), Dr. Sue Limber, and Dr. Natallia Sianko for their encouraging comments, which have been always enlightening. Mark, thank you for guiding and encouraging me to do this work, persevere with it, and finally get done. I really appreciate your critical view and invaluable recommendations which helped me a lot during my research. Martie, thank you so much for your prompt feedback, patience, and help with your suggestions and for showing confidence in my work. You have been such a great co-chair! Sue, thank you a lot for your suggestions and comments through all the chapters. They were so helpful to me and improved my work a lot. Natasha, thank

you very much for your continuous support and recommendations in developing this research.

I would also like to thank World Vision Albania and especially Ms. Ariola Kallciu, Director of Evidence and Learning and Ms. Eljona Boce Elmazi, National Director of World Vision for the Western Balkans who helped me obtain access to the original dataset used in this research. Without this collaboration, it was not possible to write this report.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge with gratitude, the great support, patience, care, and love of my parents, my sisters, my brother, my parents-in-law and my family – my children, Besart, Raisa, and Brilant and my husband, Arban, I am blessed to have you in my life. I would also like to thank my dear friends and colleagues, well-wishers who helped me in the completion of this research, and of course the Almighty God, for His grace in me.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Fair and effective democracy demands civic engagement (Diamond, 2008; Roberts, 2004; Smith, 2009). To achieve popular sovereignty (i.e., that the government is created by and subject to the will of the people), they need opportunities to practice making decisions that affect them and fellow citizens (Flanagan, 2015; Renn, Webler, & Wiedemann, 2013). Civic engagement matters for three broad categories of reasons: (a) the development of the capacities of the individual; (b) the creation of community and the cultivation of democratic virtues, and (c) the equal protection of interests in public life (Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 1999). Civic engagement is very important for individual, family, and community well-being (Hope & Jagers, 2014; Levine & Youniss 2006; Zaff, Boyd, Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010). Young people, in particular, play a key role in building a stable and equitable democracy. Thus, civic engagement is beneficial for young people and for democracy, and influences the practices in developmental settings that allow adolescents to experience a larger sense of community (Flanagan, 2015; Sherrod, 2007).

Youth civic engagement is considered a core principle of both youth advocacy and advanced democracy (Collins, Augsberger, Gecker, & Lusk, 2018; Flanagan, 2013; Shiller, 2013). Youth civic engagement is about educating young people for citizenship which, in other words, is a matter of choosing and transmitting values to citizens, so that they will build and sustain societies characterized by ethics, justice, and virtue (Levine & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2010). People who hold values and wish to transmit them to

younger generations are willing to guide the youth toward community service or recruit them as activists for their own rights (Flanagan, 2015; Morgan & Streb, 2001). Youth equipped with civic skills and strong commitment to civic engagement are more likely to engage in political discussions and democratic actions.

During the past several decades, studies conducted mainly in the United States or Canada have focused more on the risks youth pose to themselves and to society (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Recently, scholars of social sciences started pointing out the potential of adolescents to develop social values, create just societies, or end oppression (Iwasaki, 2016; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Young people are viewed as a community resource with their voices to be taken very seriously. In this way, studies shift their attention from individual outcomes toward collective experiences and the power of collective voice.

Scholars who study youth civic engagement have proposed that community service is a specialized means of fostering a civic/political identity development among adolescents (Youniss, McLellan, & Mazer, 2001). According to Westheimer and Kahne (2003) youth civic engagement can develop through the image of “good citizen” by viewing it in different ways: (a) as a responsible member of the society who demonstrates citizenship through volunteering; (b) as an active member of the community who engages in local issues and is interested also on national issues; and (c) as a justice-oriented member of the society who engages in collective work towards community improvement while remaining critical to the social, political, and economic issues. Still, scholars agree that there exist some structural (i.e., lack of community institutions) and individual (i.e., differential opportunities) barriers, which undermine youth civic engagement.

Findings from different studies show that youth civic engagement has shown variations among U.S. citizens (Park, Phillips, & Johnson, 2004; Scott, 2014; Syvertsen, Wray-Lake, Flanagan, Osgood, & Briddell, 2011). According to Verba and colleagues (2003), in the U.S., people with higher levels of education have been historically engaged in civic issues more than those with less education. These scholars fear that this has happened because of the differential opportunities for youth, which has provided more educated youth with such advantages. Studies consistently show that youth who come from families with high socio-economic status (SES), have more opportunities and feel more motivated to volunteer and get engaged with civic affairs.

As in the U.S., Europeans' interest in civic engagement has declined significantly over the past few decades, leading to what some consider a crisis in citizenship. Especially among young Europeans, there is a dramatic fall in youth activism in politics, community issues, or voluntarism (Crocetti, Erentaitė, & Žukauskienė, 2014). Young people are increasingly faced with an "unstable society" in the modern world where, on the one hand, they have to develop their own social, political, and economic identities (Cieslik, & Pollock, 2017) and on the other hand they have to be faced with global issues such as increased university tuition fees, budget cuts in youth services and education, financial crisis, and unemployment within a rapid changing society often characterized by uncertainty of a changing labor market. Indeed, Sennett (1998) argues that young people's lives are characterized by uncertainty which has become an inherent characteristic of the current economical systems. One way whereby youth can challenge

the demands of the new economy is to learn to reframe themselves, to get equipped with knowledge, new skills, and training to fit ever-changing market needs.

In countries with a fragile democracy like Albania, there are problems with regard to representation of young people in decision making processes. Many young people feel disconnected from or discouraged about a system that seems to leave them out. They agree that the kind of democracy that operates in Albania today, works better for some than for others. This is noted also in the report of the United Nations on Albanian Volunteerism (2009), which found that young people frequently feel excluded from almost all the societal and political processes in Albania, even though they represent a large group of the current population. Willingness to engage in civic actions and a sense of efficacy come from a feeling of being included. Therefore, civic work typically occurs when all citizens are gathered with a goal of finding a common ground regardless of status, socio-economic background, or beliefs (Flanagan, 2015).

In recent years, for many reasons - from disillusionment with politicians to frustration with youth unemployment – there is still a target group that has been involved with connective actions: young, highly educated, technologically savvy citizens who prefer to get civically engaged through the Internet and the social media (Bers & Chau, 2006). This is the most recent form of civic and political participation among European youth. Hence, it occurs through diverse repertoires of participation across multiple networks, borders and continents – from North Africa to Europe, to the U.S. and back again – to demand political, economic, and social change (Sloam, 2014).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study examined the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ₁: To what extent are youth in Albania civically engaged? Are there age, gender, and urbanicity differences in youth civic engagement?

H1.a. There will be significant age differences in youth civic engagement such that older youth will show significantly higher levels of civic engagement than younger youth.

H1.b. There will be significant gender differences in youth civic engagement such that males will significantly show higher levels of civic engagement than females.

H1.c. There will be significant urbanicity differences in youth civic engagement such that youth from urban areas will significantly show higher levels of civic engagement than youth from rural areas.

RQ₂: Are youth optimism and their attitudes to the political system associated with youth civic engagement, after controlling for age, gender, and urbanicity?

H2.a. Youth optimism will be positively associated with youth civic engagement, after controlling for age, gender, and urbanicity.

H2.b. Young people's attitudes to the political system will be positively associated with youth civic engagement, after controlling for age, gender, and urbanicity.

RQ₃: Do age, gender, and urbanicity moderate the associations between youth optimism and young people's attitudes to the political system with youth civic engagement?

H3.a. Age will significantly moderate the association between youth optimism and youth civic engagement such that this association will be stronger for older youth than for younger youth.

H3.b. Gender will significantly moderate the association between youth optimism and youth civic engagement such that this association will be stronger for males than for females.

H3.c. Urbanicity will significantly moderate the association between youth optimism and youth civic engagement such that this association will be stronger for youth from urban areas than for youth from rural areas.

H3.d. Age will significantly moderate the association between young people's attitudes to the political system and youth civic engagement such that this association will be stronger for older youth than for younger youth.

H3.e. Gender will significantly moderate the association between young people's attitudes to the political system and youth civic engagement such that this association will be stronger for males than for females.

H3.f. Urbanicity will significantly moderate the association between young people's attitudes to the political system and youth civic engagement such that this association will be stronger for youth from urban areas than for youth from rural areas.

Organization

This dissertation is organized as follows. First, in Chapter 1, there is an introduction to the problem, research questions, and the hypotheses. The second Chapter

provides a review of the literature including the theoretical framework. Next, Chapter 3 includes the method section where there is information about the data source, procedures, study sample, data collection, design and measures of the study. Chapter 4 provides the results of the statistical analysis used in this study. Last, Chapter 5 includes the discussion part which consists of a summary of the findings, limitations of the study, implications for social capital, as well as recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

There are different models and theories that describe and explain citizens' civic behavior, including rational choice, social capital, and civic voluntarism (Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley, 2003). These theories highlight the role of costs and benefits of civic actions, social interactions and interpersonal trust, and SES on civic engagement. According to Bekkers (2005), civic engagement is driven by social capital, human, and financial resources. This study is influenced by a social capital framework and the importance of civic voluntarism.

A popular framework for describing how civic behavior is shaped among individuals is the social capital model developed by Putnam (1993; 2000). The social capital model focuses on the importance of social interactions or interpersonal trust among individuals, which directly influences the voluntary participation that prepares citizens for civic engagement. Interpersonal trust is a central component of social capital model (Stolle, Soroka, & Johnston, 2008). This model claims that people who get more involved in social and volunteering behaviors are more likely to express prosocial behaviors such as civic actions or voluntary work and prosocial dispositions such as extraversion, social responsibility, or empathy (Putnam, 2000).

The reciprocity and the trustworthiness that people develop based on their interactions with other people help the community to create an asset called 'social capital'. According to Putnam social capital has been defined as "features of social

organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit” (2000, pp. 35–36). People who have lived for a long time in a certain community have more access to opportunities to expand their social network than those who are new arrivals in that community. Communities characterized by high levels of social capital have citizens who are civically engaged. Being active in voluntary work through participation in different organizations is considered a form of social capital, since these individuals become members of a large network of relationships. Such connections can lead citizens to develop civic skills and abilities (Duke, Skay, Pettingell, & Borowsky, 2009; Teorell, 2003).

According to Putnam (1993; 2000), there exist two types of effects of participation in voluntary work: ‘internal’ and ‘external’ effects. Internal effects are related to the benefits received by the individuals such as their democratic actions or attitudes, while external effects refer to the link between civic associations and democratic actions (Howard & Gilbert, 2008). This model also claims that as citizens develop a sense of belonging because of their civic participation, they are more likely to respect the norms, rules, and duties of community life (Letki, 2006).

Putnam (1995b, 1996) argues that there is a strong relationship between civic engagement, social trust, and exposure to mass media. He added that television may threaten the development of social capital and civic engagement meaning that as people spend time in front of the television, they socialize less with others and become less involved in political or community activities. Nowadays, not only mass media, but also social media is often considered as a tool that keeps people at home and away from civic

engagement or community work. However, others argue that what matters is not the time spent but the type of programs watched whether that is related to news or entertainment (Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley, 2003). Most modern democracies and political actions demand citizens' collective attention (Teney & Hanquinet, 2011). Thus, scholars agree that media can play a crucial role in attracting people toward civic participation by providing information and organizing the public collectively (Livingstone & Markham, 2008).

In comparison, a civic voluntarism model of political participation focuses on the socio-economic aspect of participation which has been proposed by Verba and the colleagues (Burns, Schlozman, & Verba, 2001; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). This model refers to the social movement participation predicted by different socio-demographic characteristics. As such, it considers economic, educational, and time resources. The civic voluntarism model consists of four elements. The first element consists of resources, related to time, money, and organizational skills, that help the individuals to become politically active. From this perspective, individuals who come from higher SES backgrounds are more likely to participate in civic activities than people from low SES backgrounds (McClurg, 2003). Therefore, this model recognizes the importance of SES for political activism. The second element is psychological involvement with politics, or perceptions that motivate citizens to become politically active. Such attitudes include interest in political debates, political efficacy, and the trust in political leaders. A third element of civic voluntarism model is related to the membership of citizens in different social networks.

People are greatly influenced by other network members to participate in community or political activities. Such networks can be found in work places, voluntary organizations, or religious settings where people often get involved in political discussions. The fourth and the final element of civic voluntarism model is issue engagement, or citizen's interest in dealing with different issues that may lead them toward participation in political activity (Barkan, 2004). The more people feel that citizens in general should contribute and participate for the good of the society the more likely they are to engage in political action. Thus, the model argues that citizens' general involvement in the political system should lead them toward civic engagement. These four components provide a general explanation for effective citizenship and other forms of civic engagement. Even though people may have many resources, they may still be unaware of how important it is to get involved in voluntary work. Therefore, political parties or community leaders should mobilize citizens through electoral campaigns and invite them to vote or contribute to community work.

Understanding youth civic engagement is critical to increasing social capital and civic voluntarism. Commitment to community service and civic responsibility are important indicators of a healthy youth development. The establishment of social bonding, a sense of belonging, and supportive relationships encourages youth to live according to the values and norms provided by the family and community. Thus, these key socializing domains cannot only protect youth from risk and minimize adverse youth outcomes, but they can also act as facilitators of youth civic engagement. Stronger connections with family, school, community, and peers increase the likelihood of

participating in volunteer community service, social action, and extracurricular activities through school and community-based youth organizations. Youth equipped with democratic values, attitudes, and skills feels motivated and confident in their ability to make a change in the society.

Youth Civic Engagement: Definitions and Forms

Civic engagement is typically understood to have both behavioral and attitudinal components. Such components are increasingly accepted as important developmental characteristics for young people (Voight & Torney-Purta, 2013). Scholars believe that attitudes to the political system and behaviors related to civic engagement develop from lessons in early childhood. It was not until after 1970's that scholars interested in civic engagement shifted their attention to late adolescence, a period when youth develop participation habits, political views, and civic actions that will influence their lives. Habits shaped at home, lessons learned at school, and other experiences they receive from organizations, all positively influence youth civic engagement (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003).

Thomas Ehrlich (1997) defined civic engagement as the process of perceiving that one can make a difference in improving and enhancing the community. Others define civic engagement as individual and collective actions ranging from political acts such as protesting to civic acts such as volunteering, designed to identify and address issues of public concern (APA 2012; Youniss, Bales, Christmas-Best, Diversi, McLaughlin, & Silbereisen, 2002). Youth civic engagement is a concept which has been shaped by other related domains such as youth participation, youth leadership, youth voice, youth

empowerment, and youth organizing (Cammaerts, Bruter, Banaji, Harrison & Anstead, 2013; Williams & Gilchrist, 2004). Several scholars claim that youth civic engagement is a process through which young people may have a direct impact on the institutions that play a key role in their lives (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2006; McBride, 2008; Pritzker & Metzger, 2011). Other scholars argue that civic engagement is about building new relationships among individuals of the society, making use of resources for advocacy and promote community well-being (King 2008; Campbell & Wiesen, 2009).

Amnå (2012) views civic engagement as a concept that is ‘outward-looking,’ which means that individual shows more interest in the outside world which could be related to politics or community development. Ataman and the colleagues (2017) also added that activities related to civic engagement, such as volunteering or participation in community help the individuals develop a sense for the common good and social responsibility. However, to develop the community, one should be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and values that are reflected by attitudes and/or behaviors deeply-rooted in a civic identity. Democracy requires such citizens to get equipped with these features of social life as well as committed to democratic principles such as justice, equality, and the protection of human rights (Atkins & Hart, 2003; Scott, 2014).

Youth civic engagement is an important tool that can transform youth into becoming active and responsible citizens for their family and society. Verba and Nie (1972), as pioneers of research on civic engagement, have followed an approach which emphasizes social status, civic attitudes, organizational involvement, group consciousness, and age to explain participation in civic engagement. From their

rationalist approach, this construct has been explained in terms of psychological and sociological forces. Verba and Nie (1972) identify civic orientations, which are defined as psychological involvement in politics or commitment to the community, as the most important factor in civic engagement. In addition, the authors explain that civic orientations, which are thought to be strongly influenced by status, increase the psychological benefits of engagement and the resources for effective civic engagement. The pioneers of civic participation argue that this construct is determined by three main components: (a) resources (time and money) needed for the participation; (b) interest (civic motivation) that facilitates engagement; and (c) recruitment (social networks) that mobilizes citizens toward civic actions and promote participation (Verba et al., 1995). State officials, non-profit agencies, schools, and families play a significant role in promoting youth involvement in political discussions, social responsibility, and civic engagement. According to Flanagan & Campbell (2003), these are institutions, which help children socialize with the others and also shape different views that adolescents develop during their course of development.

There are different forms of civic engagement such as volunteering, voting, belonging to voluntary groups, attentiveness to the news, and collaborating with other people on public issues (Kirby, Marcelo, Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2009). Volunteering is related to youth civic engagement in two ways. First, as a form of participation, it is based on a sense of efficacy and social responsibility that young people should display toward the others for free. Second, it is considered as a way to participate to other domains of democratic life from education to employment. According to Jordan and

Jordan (2000), there are many cultures and societies that support youth participation in community life and involve them in such activities as active citizens.

In improving and enhancing young volunteers' skills, knowledge, and social networks, volunteering can help them become even more active citizens in their communities and countries (Cammaerts, Bruter, Banaji, Harrison & Anstead, 2013). Even though young people (ages 15-25) make up half of the population in several developing countries, they often feel excluded from politics and civic life (Taleski & Hope, 2015). Such an exclusion, when combined with limited educational, social, and economic resources, can leave young people both inert and irritated with the status quo. Furthermore, concerns have been raised about younger generations who develop negative attitudes about the political system and who are getting less and less engaged with their communities. Scholars claim that such a decline in political and civic life and lack of participation in community service may add more to the declining interest in civic engagement (Park, Phillips, & Johnson, 2004; Scott, 2014; Stepick, Stepick, & Labissiere, 2008).

Today's youth need real opportunities and models to be involved in democratic processes as well as opportunities to contribute to economic issues that can enhance development in the communities. Purposeful community work and activities are considered as an intervention that can be used to teach young people the concepts of building social responsibility and relationships within their respective neighborhoods (Doolittle & Faul, 2013). Camino & Zeldin (2002) report that young people expect that

more experienced adults will provide support in the form of coaching, and help them with connections to different institutional and community resources.

Civically engaged adults, who directly work with young people by organizing activities and clubs, act also as role models displaying prosocial behaviors and civic actions. They coach their teams and help organize their clubs, and also model prosocial community standards and behaviors (Atkins & Hart, 2003; Duke, Skay, Pettingell, & Borowsky, 2009). Findings from an in-depth study on youth participation in politics and civic life show that young people are as diverse as adults, have diverse political views and perceptions of how best to influence the lives of their political system (Cammaerts, Bruter, Banaji, Harrison & Anstead, 2013). As such, young people are not ‘victims’ or ‘problematic’ as often viewed, but different and critical citizens in democracy, who need an orientation to the public good and a willingness to actively engage in the political discourse. Young people, furthermore, are energetic and full of innovative ideas about how to civically participate and improve their representation and the democratic system at large. Democracy is, in fact, built on institutions and laws, but it demands citizens’ participation in policymaking and an active collaboration of all related stakeholders (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Therefore, citizens should learn about this democratic culture which is also fostered by the democratic institutions (Barrett, 2016).

The Benefits of Civic Engagement

Many recent discussions focused on civic engagement point to its influence on youth development. Field experts and other practitioners who work with young people agree that civic participation may have lasting benefits for youth, and for society as a

whole (Balsano, 2005). It is therefore considered to be intrinsically rewarding behavior that should be promoted amongst youth (Mason, 2013). Several studies show that civic engagement is correlated with positive developmental outcomes (Hawkins, Villagonzalo, Sanson, Toumbourou, Letcher, & Olsson, 2012; Mahoney, Harris & Eccles, 2006; Sun & Shek, 2012; Wray-Lake, Schulenberg, Keyes, & Shubert, 2017).

A National Longitudinal Health Study conducted by Ballard and the colleagues (2018) found that all forms of civic engagement were positively associated with socio-economic status especially, income and education level of adolescents. Moreover, this study argued that demonstrating civic actions is good for young people, which may also influence the child's future success, such as early academic performance (Ballard, Hoyt, & Pachucki, 2018). It can further improve young people's social skills and self-esteem, develop a sense of initiative (Sun & Shek, 2012), and better decision-making skills (Sinclair, 2004). Youth civic engagement, in other words, fosters a sense of belonging and social responsibility and makes policy processes more accessible and accountable towards young people (Cammaerts, Bruter, Banaji, Harrison & Anstead, 2013).

Moreover, there is quite consistent and strong empirical evidence of a positive association between youth civic engagement and a variety of indicators of positive development ranging from academic achievement, post-secondary educational attainment, psychological adjustment (Hawkins, Villagonzalo, Sanson, Toumbourou, Letcher, & Olsson, 2012), lowered rates of substance use (van Dommelen-Gonzalez, Deardorff, Herd, & Minnis, 2015), peer relationships (Sun & Shek, 2012) and quantity and quality of interactions with their parents (Mahoney, Harris & Eccles, 2006).

Scholars also suggest that engaging youth in civic life is worthwhile for society as it can help enhance community, satisfy social needs, change policies, and build a healthy and stable democracy (Cammaerts, Bruter, Banaji, Harrison & Anstead, 2013; Duke, Skay, Pettingell, & Borowsky, 2009; Fahmy, 2017). Moreover, young people can serve as dynamic and energetic change agents in their communities and countries. Youth initiatives can serve as tools that help them get directly involved or committed to civic engagement (Berisha, Shtraza, & Hazizaj, 2015). Educating youth for citizenship transmits values to them so that they will build and sustain societies that manifest certain forms of justice and virtue (Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010). By encouraging youth to feel competent and capable about how to address issues of concern to them, we prepare them to have a voice for themselves and the others, communicate their expectations in their communities, and act as role models for the other kids and their peers (Jones, 2018).

Developmental psychologists consider adolescence as a transitional period characterized by unstable, rapid, and intensive physical, sexual, and psychosocial changes which can interfere with the adolescent's coping skills. Adolescence is also a period of life in which young people start shaping a social identity related to citizenship and community membership. When young people are provided with opportunities to get engaged, organized, and have a voice in political discussions and youth organizations, they will be more likely to be committed to active citizenship within their own communities (Williams & Gilchrist, 2004). Thus, they will be more willing to built and

protect democracy, and have a greater sense of belonging (National Democratic Institute).

Therefore, young people should be given the opportunity to shape their own civic identity through voluntary community work, knowledge, and a commitment to democratic principles and actions (Atkins & Hart, 2003). Doing so, can enhance their development and status in society as well as prepare them as adults for their future. The more adolescents volunteer in high school and college, the more they participate in political activities, engage in community service, and other forms of civic life as adults. Students who have been active in organized activities or youth organizations in high school become more involved as adults. By actively participating in community work and trying to address the community challenges, young people contribute to a change within themselves (Jones, 2018).

Youth Civic Engagement across the World and in Transitioning Societies: A Historical Overview

When analyzing youth civic engagement, it is important to observe the timing when these terms were first appeared and trends in civic engagement over time. Several studies conducted in the U.S. examined the engagement of youth in demonstrations or boycotting as early as the 1970s, but these concepts were not mentioned in countries in Eastern Europe because the ruling models would not allow such actions and the punishments for civic activism were very harsh (Dalton, 2011; Henn, Weinstein, & Forrest, 2005; Hope & Jagers, 2014; Nygard & Jakobsson, 2013; Syvertsen, Wray-Lake,

Flanagan, Osgood, & Briddell, 2011). Active engagement in politics of the civil society in Eastern Europe began in the late 1980's and early 1990's (Taleski & Hoppe, 2015).

Civic Engagement in Developed Countries

Findings from a study conducted in the U.S. on recent trends in youth civic engagement described the many different ways in which young people are involved in civic and political life (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), 2011). By using Census civic engagement data from 2008 and 2010, this study found that, the majority of young people (ages 18-29) in the U.S. were engaged in their community or in politics. The nature and extent of engagement varied and included assuming different leadership roles, voting, donating money, and actively discussing political issues, and being disengaged (CIRCLE, 2011). Studies that analyzed historical trends in youth civic engagement in the U.S. report that conventional political civic engagement (e.g., writing or donating to politicians, contributing to electoral campaigns) saw a steady decrease from 27% in 1977 to 17% in 1991, a slight increase to 20% in the mid-1990s, and a subsequent decrease to 17% by 1997. Civic engagement involving activities such as demonstrations and boycotts initially decreased from a 28% in 1977 to 18% in only 6 years, exhibiting an all time low for 5 years in a row at 17-18% from 1983 to 1988. Over the next 4 years, this type of civic engagement increased sharply to 29% in 1992, before decreasing to 20% in 2005. In the late 70's, community service was lower than the other two types of civic engagement reported above. From 1977 until 1991 it was stable, involving 22%-24% of the youth population. Community

service increased after 1992 and became the primary form of civic engagement, engaging 35% of youth in 2001 (Syvertsen, Wray-Lake, Flanagan, Osgood, & Briddell, 2011). As these figures reveal, rates of different forms of civic engagement among American youth have varied considerably over relatively short periods of time. Civic engagement is related to the trust level of youth in the government. In the case of youth in the U.S., trust in the government decreased from 61% to 30% from 1986 to 1994 (Syvertsen, Wray-Lake, Flanagan, Osgood, & Briddell, 2011).

Civic Engagement in Transitioning Countries

While witnessing different rates and very diverse forms of youth civic engagement among different developed countries across the world, one is faced with another situation of civic engagement in developing countries of South-Eastern Europe (SEE).

In a study in SEE countries, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Romania, and Slovenia, youth in Croatia (26%), Kosovo (24%), and Albania (24%) showed the highest level of satisfaction with the state of democracy (Taleski and Hoppe, 2015). The lowest levels of youth satisfaction were reported in Bulgaria (12%), North Macedonia (6%), and Slovenia (8%). The percentage of youth that believe they can influence the governmental institutions are highest in Kosovo (41%), followed by Albania (40%). Only 17% of the Croatian youth believe that they can influence the governmental institutions. The percentages of youth who are engaged in volunteer activities are lower in Albania (16-18%) compared with Romania, Bulgaria, and Kosovo (21-23%). The percentage of youth engaged in civil

society activism is highest in Kosovo (46%) followed by Slovenia (28%). Youth optimism is a critical variable for countries in Eastern Europe, as decreases in youth optimism are associated with increases in unemployment, poverty, job insecurity, and intention to emigrate. Among the youth population of Southeastern Europe, 46% express the intention to leave their countries (Taleski and Hoppe, 2015). This rate is highest in Albania (67%), followed by Kosovo (55%) and North Macedonia (53%).

The development of many social factors associated with democratic values was not considered at all on the agendas of many East European countries. Scholars (Karpati, 1996; Pastuovic, 1993) reported that during the Communist period (1945–1990), one of the major tasks of educating organizations such as schools, media, and youth groups was to achieve political homogenization by minimizing differences between individuals. During the 1970s in the West, the public stance against the war and the ensuing protests corresponded with the authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe where the protests against the state officials were prohibited. Thus, that generation of young people grew up with almost no opportunity to participate in political discussions. During the same time, youth in the U.S. showed a drastic decrease in trust in their government (Syvertsen, Wray-Lake, Flanagan, Osgood, & Briddell, 2011). According to Syvertsen and the colleagues (2011), trust in government among youth in the U.S. eroded from a high of 61% in 1986 to 30% only eight years later. During this period of time, there are no data to measure the trust in the government officials in the East European countries. Moreover, there were strong norms of patriotism and civic involvement through memberships in groups such as Young Pioneers. Although these groups provided opportunities for the social integration

of young people and for their commitment to the country, they did not seek to instill democratic values (Flanagan et al., 1998).

Researchers report that even after more than two decades of transition from the Communist system to capitalism, Eastern European countries are still in a state of transformation (Walker & Stephenson, 2010). This continuous and long period of transformation may be as a result of never-ending economic struggles and political changes. In Albania, a country with a fragile post-Communist democracy, findings from a national study show that the situation for youth is problematic, especially when it comes to engagement within civil society organizations (Berisha, Shtraza, & Hazizaj, 2015). Berisha and colleagues (2015) found that Albanian youth feel incompetent in terms of their civic knowledge and unmotivated to take up an active role within the government and their community. The Albanian politicians often invite young people to come and vote at elections, respect their representatives, and join political organizations. However, these same elected officials do not meet with the youth groups after the electoral campaign. Unfortunately, although citizens are expected to support politicians, their voices are not heard (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014). Therefore, young people do not feel motivated and encouraged to engage in electoral political activities (Stepick, Stepick, & Labissiere, 2008).

Youth are always seen as a catalyst of change, and in the case of Albania, they also have played a major role in collapsing the Communist system and changing it from a single-party system to a multi-party system. However, after all of their efforts, young people in Albania are still living in a very problematic social, political, and economic

environment. After the collapse of the Communist system in Albania in 1990, the structures that focus on youth issues have changed frequently, thus weakening the expected support. The directorate for the Coordination of Youth Policies was established in 2007 to oversee three subunits: The Directorate for Arts & Literature, The Directorate for Sports, and The Directorate for the Coordination of Youth Policies. At the same time, the National Youth Strategy 2007-2013 was developed aiming at integrating youth in policies to address their issues. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has supported the establishment of local youth parliaments where young people from 14-19 years old gather and discuss issues of importance to youth. In the last two decades, politicians have shifted their attention to youth-related problems such as unemployment, inequality, social exclusion, addiction, poverty, and discrimination (National Youth Action Plan, 2015-2020). In this most recent document, which was prepared under the lead of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and with the contribution of eleven other ministries, there was a detailed analysis of the reforms taken during the last two decades. Despite these efforts, young people are still faced with challenges such as limited access to updated educational resources, poor living conditions, corruption, exploitation, juvenile delinquency, and a lack of consistent and robust youth policies or programs. They suffer the consequences of violations of their rights, and their well-being is almost never considered as a priority issue by politicians and other responsible agents. As youth are faced with all these difficulties, it is hard for them to find ways to address and fix such issues in a country struggling to establish a European democracy.

Although many Albanian people understand the benefits of civic engagement, it is difficult for them to comprehend volunteerism, primarily because of the nature of the volunteer work they used to do during the Communist regime. During the Communist era, voluntary work was compulsory for everyone and was strictly imposed by the state. Thus, older generations feel confused and less likely to motivate young people to volunteer or become active citizens at a local or national level (Gjeka, 2009). Young people and civil society representatives in Albania believe that there would be another picture of civic engagement if institutional, cultural, and educational barriers were minimized, if more was done by politicians and community leaders to reach all young people, and if a variety of forms of civic engagement were embraced and encouraged (Berisha, Shtraza, & Hazizaj, 2015).

According to a report released in 2008, which examined a seminar about promoting local and international youth volunteerism post-conflict in Europe, it was recommended that to have an enhanced form of civic engagement, a country must build and support civic participation among its citizens, value the importance of volunteering, promote the values of civic engagement in schools, and design national policies that are both youth and volunteer friendly (Association of Local Democracy Agencies, 2008). Another report published by Cammaerts and colleagues (2013), recommended that the leading authorities must not only consult with young people, but they should also get them actively involved in the implementation of different programs to address youth related issues. As citizens are equipped with civic knowledge, they are better able to develop a political identity, understand public policy, trust both the politicians and

governmental institutions, and display tolerance among minority groups (Flanagan and Gallay, 2008). As citizens express overwhelming levels of distrust, pessimism, skepticism, disappointment and/or frustration with politics and public policy, their efforts and initiatives that aspire to build democracy often are perceived as inadequate by the Albanian people. A sense of citizenship is developed through the way democratic institutions function, as they act as a bridge, connecting the individuals with the state by communicating the respective expectations from both parties. During the Communist regime, citizens expected the state to make everything possible for them such as food, housing, job, children's education, and even a pension. Youth raised by parents who were citizens with such expectations, lacked a sense of social citizenship. As a post-Communist country, Albania may also lack the institutional mechanisms to channel the tidal wave of youth activism in societies with a large population of young people into constructive activities like volunteerism (Hart, Atkins, Markey, & Youniss, 2004). Although there has been some progress during recent years in building the necessary legal framework, policies, and structures for civic engagement, Albania still lacks the technical capacities to develop youth related mechanisms, structures, and systems for an effective implementation of youth civic engagement.

Youth Civic Engagement and Young People's Political Attitudes

There is an extensive literature on the factors associated with youth civic engagement (Benedicto & Moran, 2007; Collins, Augsberger, Gecker, & Lusk, 2018; Evans, 2007). Among these factors, there are young people's attitudes to the political system and young people's involvement in politics (Lakin & Mahoney, 2006; McGuire &

Gamble, 2006; Stepick, Stepick, & Labissiere, 2008; Wray-Lake, Schulenberg, Keyes, & Shubert, 2017). It is one of the most well-established findings in the study of political participation that young people's active participation in political discussions and their positive attitudes toward the political system are positively correlated with civic engagement (Andolina, Jenkins, Keeter, & Zukin, 2002; Bekkers, 2005; Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014; Teorell, 2003). A study conducted in the Netherlands, using data from the third edition of the Family Survey of the Dutch population, showed that political values and attitudes were strongly related to civic engagement. According to this nationwide study, citizens with a greater interest in politics were more likely to volunteer for an association (Bekkers, 2005). Voluntary organizations are viewed as social settings or as 'schools of democracy' where citizens develop civic actions and abilities that are essential assets of democracy (Iglič, 2010; Teorell, 2003). As people show more political interest and political activism, they are more willing to be civically engaged (Livingstone & Markham, 2008; Stepick, Stepick, & Labissiere, 2008).

Scholars claim that citizens participate in voluntary work for different reasons, including advocating their interests in politics, contributing to a healthy democracy, finding meaning in life, expressing their social identity, and contributing to the well-being of others (Bekkers, 2005; Howard & Gilbert, 2008; Iglič, 2010). Other scholars acknowledge that young people's interest and participation in politics and civic engagement are essential for the sustainability of democracy (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014; Teorell, 2003). Recent studies mainly conducted in the U.S. show that young people are the least politically involved group, which may influence the rates of youth

civic engagement (Levine, 2007; Park, Phillips, & Johnson, 2004; Stepick, Stepick, & Labissiere, 2008). Evidence shows that such a decline in civic participation does not occur among all forms (e.g. formal and informal) of civic engagement. In most western democracies, while the young adolescents are less involved in democratic actions such as voting, they are more involved in other forms of civic engagement that are informal, such as protesting or boycotting (Henn, Weinstein, & Forrest, 2005; Hope & Jagers, 2014; Nygard & Jakobsson, 2013).

Flanagan and Gally (2008), in a study conducted by using data gathered from two waves of surveys with ethnic minority students ages 12-19 from 80 social studies classes in the U.S., reported that participants with high levels of government trust were committed to active citizenship (e.g., voting) and those with low levels of government trust participated in justice-oriented political action. These findings are supported by another study conducted in the U.S. that used data from the Black Youth Project – Youth Culture Survey with Black youth ages 15-25. This study showed that the more youth believed they could positively impact the political system, the more they reported being civically engaged. This study underlined the importance of civic education in relation to civic engagement, as youth equipped with civic knowledge during high school were involved in more civic and political activities. There is also evidence to support the assumption that young people’s attitudes to the political system and governmental institutions are related to civic engagement (Hope & Jagers, 2014).

In contrast, a cross-sectional study conducted by The National Center for Social Research using The Young People’s Social Attitudes Survey of 663 adolescents ages 12-

19, indicated that young people in general show negative attitudes toward politics, but they would show interest in politics if their parents had more positive attitudes toward politics and if they were from high SES backgrounds (Park, Phillips, & Johnson, 2004). In line with these findings, Rotolo and Wilson (2012) reported that more advantaged youth who come from high SES engage in more political activities and community work. Similar findings were reported in another study conducted in the U.S., which used data from two National Surveys of Political and Civic Engagement of Young People aged 18 to 24 years old in 2006 and 2007. This report noted that having well-educated parents who were interested in politics affected women more than men (Portney, Niemi, & Eichenberg, 2009).

Other studies claim that many organizations focused on youth view young people as potential agents of change and aim at providing opportunities for the development of youth civic participation (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). These scholars highlighted that young people from high SES were markedly more interested in politics than average.

Regarding the studies conducted in SEE, there exist a number of representative national youth studies which assess the attitudes and aspirations of young people ages 14-29, interviewed between 2011 and 2014, from eight countries of SEE, including Albania. The findings of these studies revealed a high level of distrust of political institutions among youth and dissatisfaction with the representative democracy in their home countries (Taleski & Hoppe, 2015).

Youth Civic Engagement and Youth Optimism

Youth optimism is another factor that should be considered as an important indicator of youth civic engagement. The study of the influences of such factors on civic engagement has received a great deal of attention from different scholars (Boden, Sanders, Munford, Liebenberg, & McLeod, 2015; Evans, 2007; Uslaner, 1998). Scholars of positive psychology, who are focused more on positive constructs that characterize human strength and virtue such as life satisfaction, trust, happiness, or optimism, are now interested to investigate how these factors influence outcomes such as youth civic engagement. According to a meta-analytic review conducted by Nes and Segerstrom (2006), optimism is related to one's skills to use adaptive coping strategies and the ability to have control over the stressors. Usually, optimists are considered as people with positive attitude who welcome the future and believe that good rather than bad things will happen to them. Some review studies indicate that optimism shapes interpersonal trust, which in turn may positively influence civic participation and life satisfaction (Flanagan & Christens, 2011; Putnam 2000, p. 335). Therefore, as people have high levels of life satisfaction and gain trust (Putnam 1993; 2000), they are more willing to participate in civic life. As such, people can learn about civic habits, which promote democratic citizenship (Howard & Gilbert, 2008).

It is important to assess how optimistic youth are today, compared to their parents. Usually, young people are considered to be optimistic and energetic, thus ready to tackle the many challenges they face. According to the RBC Youth Optimism Survey (2015) that has been conducted with a large sample of both Canadian youth ages 10-25 and their parents, most youth reported that they were happy, excited, and optimistic about

their life. Overall, they were satisfied and they were very excited about their own future. Drivers of happiness included: being a positive person, expecting to have a good day, the feeling that they had a good life, excitement in the future, and having a family that made them feel good. However, findings from this study reported that parents remembered being more excited for the future and more optimistic than youth currently reported being. Moreover, currently parents appear happier and more optimistic than youth are today. The fact that youth are less happy and excited than their parents used to be at their age could be a function of the fact that parents believe, on balance, that it is harder for youth today than it was when they were growing up. However, parents as adults can break down barriers and create supportive structures for youth participation in civic actions. With their support, young people can become meaningful contributors to the community and as such, experience themselves as capable and positive.

Another study conducted using in-depth interviews with American teenagers ranging in age from 15 to 18, who were part of Youth Leadership Program found that as young people felt heard, they also felt that they were an integral part of the community, and as such they felt more powerful and optimistic (Evans, 2007). The more they felt optimistic and influential, the more connected they were to the community. Young people reported how adults in those programs encouraged them develop new skills and knowledge and build their confidence around people for community involvement (Evans, 2007).

Demographic Factors and Youth Civic Engagement

There are a number of demographic factors such as age, gender, and urbanicity that are associated with youth civic engagement.

Age and Youth Civic Engagement

Age is one critical factor, where young adolescents approach to civic activism in a different way when compared to older ones. According to Albanian youth, civic engagement is not considered as something ‘cool’ and they think that they are not equipped with the knowledge of civic engagement both at home and at school (Dhembo, Duci, & Ajdini, 2015). This young generation is being raised by parents who lived much of their life under Communism and who lack the understanding and knowledge about civic engagement and as such they fail to act as role models for their children. If they are not able to find support in the family, they should be provided with support from the community to learn how to develop civic skills. Communities are social places where people interact with each-other and through this they may affect civic knowledge and civic participation. As adolescents approach to young adulthood, they are more involved in daily interactions with other people, and as such they have more experience in their societies and they should have more civic knowledge than adolescents at a younger age. `

Studies report different findings regarding age trends in civic engagement. A study conducted in the U.S with a nationally representative sample testing cohort differences in community service, indicated that youth may postpone their civic engagement until they transition to young adulthood (Wray-Lake, Schulenberg, Keyes, & Shubert, 2017). Another study conducted in the U.K., which examined citizen’s perceptions of political connection and disconnection by conducting quantitative and

qualitative surveys, found that citizens were not very interested in attending political discussions and this was fairly evenly spread across age, social class, and gender (Coleman 2005).

In an analysis of findings from several longitudinal studies conducted in the U.S., it was reported that as young people get more civically engaged during early adolescence, they are more likely to develop and display political and civic behavior in late adolescence and emerging adulthood (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). Studies show that there exist variations in the levels of political interest among different age groups of young people (Fahmy, 2017; Henn, Weinstein, & Forrest, 2005; Monitor, 2003). Park and colleagues (2004), conducted study of American young people's attitudes towards politics and their overall political interest, found that those aged 16-19 (12%) had more positive attitudes and interest in politics than those aged 12-15 (6%). This finding is supported by another study conducted with American youth ages 15-25, that explored young people's political attitudes and behaviors and found that about half of those ages 15-to-25 were disengaged in political activities and 15% were involved in electoral politics only (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002).

Several studies conducted with nationally representative samples, show that young people who live in communities with a large population of children lack more civic knowledge than their counterparts in communities with a low number of children. Scholars indicated that young people who live in a community with too many children were considered as they live in 'a child-saturated community' where they could interact more frequently with their peers than those who live in a community with few children

and more adults which was called as 'adult-saturated community'. Young people living in child-saturated communities were less prepared to display civic actions and have political knowledge when compared to those living in adult-saturated communities. These studies concluded that if young people are given the opportunities and support to be equipped with civic knowledge and skills about civic participation, they may have an impact on political transformation as well (Hart, Atkins, Markey, & Youniss, 2004).

Gender and Youth Civic Engagement

Another factor that has been examined extensively by scholars of civic engagement is gender (Akiva, Sugar, Smith, & Brummet, 2011; Cassell, Huffaker, Tversky, & Ferriman, 2006; Hooghe & Stolle, 2004; Jenkins, 2005; Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002; Metzger & Ferris, 2013; Zaff, Boyd, Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010). Findings are mixed with regard to civic activity and gender (Jenkins, 2005; Matthews, Hempel, & Howell, 2010; Zaff, Boyd, Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010) Research indicates that the types of civic activities appear to be different such that girls engage more in non-political groups like community groups or organizations that improve people's lives, whereas boys participate more in political groups such as political forums or electoral campaigns (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002; Voorpostel, & Coffé, 2010; Williams & Gilchrist, 2004).

In a study of youth (ages 9-16), from 139 countries, researchers found that both boys and girls were engaged in civic actions and leadership roles, but boys were more committed to civic actions than girls (Cassell, Huffaker, Tversky, & Ferriman, 2006).

Research suggests that young women today are not as involved in politics and civic activities to the extent that young men are (Akiva, Sugar, Smith, & Brummet, 2011; Barkan, 2004). There appear to be several reasons for these trends such as self-reported lack of interest and time, feeling uninformed and inconvenienced, and also the political process resonates less with young women than young men (Jenkins, 2005). In addition, a study conducted with secondary analysis of Survey Data in the U.S. reported that there still exist structural and sociological barriers to getting young women involved in politics and civic life (Jenkins, 2005). However, findings from this study show that young women seem to participate more in some activities than young men. Compared to the percentage of young men between the ages of 15 and 25 who said they volunteered for a non-political group over the last year (36%), almost half of all young women (45%) reported volunteering for at least one type of nonpolitical group during the same period of time. Of those who reported volunteering, 59% donated time to a civic or community group involved in health services, and the majority of them worked for organizations that improve the lives of youth (76%) (Jenkins, 2005).

The National Citizen Engagement Survey (2002) conducted with American youth ages 15-25 measured young people's political attitudes and behaviors. This study reported that young women seem to be slightly more engaged in civic actions than young men are in areas such as 'volunteering for a non-political group', 'raising money for a charity', 'collaborating with others to solve community issues', and 'participating in group activities for fun' (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002). This finding can be explained by the fact that girls are more concerned about their community and

environment and have a more prosocial orientation than boys (Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009).

Urbanicity and Youth Civic Engagement

Findings are very scarce and inconsistent about the effect of urbanicity on youth civic engagement. Political scientists have found that small cities and homogeneous neighborhoods have larger number of voluntary groups (Newton, 2007). This is in line with Putnam's work (1993) on democracy where Gamm and Putnam (1999), argue that civic actions occur more in small rural areas rather than in large urban areas because these voluntary groups are sustained more easily in less developed and homogeneous communities. However, the rates of volunteering and civic participation are elevated by the neighborhood poverty level. While young people who often come from privileged families have access to opportunities to be engaged with community work, those who live in impoverished communities have limited resources and a number of barriers to community participation, which is reflected in lower rates of volunteering and civic engagement (Evans, 2007).

Another study conducted on American youth showed that youth from rural areas had slightly higher rates of civic actions, regardless of educational level, than youth from urban or suburban areas (Kirby, Marcelo, Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2009). Such findings are consistent with another study conducted by Bekkers (2005) in the Netherlands, which indicated that citizens, who live in rural areas, are more likely than their peers in urban or suburban communities to be interested in politics and be civically engaged. Similar to Bekker's work, a study conducted by Scott (2014) indicated that there is an

understanding among scholars that civic participation and knowledge among urban youth is disappointing, and that there is a need to help social studies teachers in high school classrooms implement effective practices to close the civic empowerment gap. Teachers have the opportunity to help urban students reflect on their experiences in a way that can help them be empowered agents of change in the future for their own lives and their own community (Levinson, 2012; Malin, 2011).

Why this study?

This study is significant in that, to the best of our knowledge, it is the first study to provide insights into associations among youth optimism, attitudes towards the political system, and civic engagement among youth in Albania. Albanian youth reported the highest emigration intention (67%) among all youth in SEE and this is inversely related to youth optimism (Taleski & Hoppe, 2015). Among eight SEE countries, Albanian youth reported the highest level of satisfaction with the state of democracy (24%) and, at the same time, they reported the highest belief (40%) that they could influence the governing institutions (Taleski & Hoppe, 2015). These two outlying values are directly related to the young people's attitudes to the political system and for this reason, this study analyzed the relationship between this variable and youth civic engagement. Also, scholars conducting research in this field in different countries will have an opportunity to compare their results with the findings from the Albanian sample. Moreover, research explicitly investigating determinants of youth civic engagement is scarce. Very little is known about the influence of demographic variables such as urbanicity on correlates of civic engagement. This work attempts to fill this gap for

Albania, for the countries that have similar political and socioeconomic background, and for the whole research community. Finally, this study is expected to lay the groundwork for future studies aimed at understanding the predictors of youth civic engagement in terms of age, gender and urbanicity, in a SEE and a post-Communist country like Albania. The findings of this study may inform policy and program development to promote the most beneficial forms of civic engagement including disengaged youth from disadvantaged areas.

Summary

The current theoretical framework of social capital and the model of civic voluntarism suggest that youth civic engagement is an important indicator of the health of democracy. As noted in the literature review, there have been many operational definitions of constructs related to youth civic engagement but the one common denominator is that all of the studies sought to understand how youth civic engagement might be increased to improve society. In countries with young democracies, there is no more important question than how young citizens develop a democratic mindset. In Albania, with so little research on youth civic engagement and so much at stake in terms of the future of democracy, this study represents an important first step.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Sample

Participants were drawn from a nationally representative study conducted in Albania among registered children of World Vision Albania (WVA). Initially, this study included 3704 participants (ages 8-19 in grades 2-12) who completed the survey. For the purpose of this study, a total sample of 2216 (59.7%) child participants ages 12-19 in grades 6-12 was selected. Regarding sampling methodology, as shown in Table 3.1, systematic random sampling, 95% CL, 5% margin of error has been used.

Table 3.1

Sampling strategy for each area programme that WVA project are being implemented

Area Program (AP)	Registered Children (RC) Total Population	Sample size Child Situation (CS) monitoring	10% Non-Response Rate (NRR) of sample size	Sample size total CS monitoring (+10% NRR)
Dibra	3866	315	32	347
Durres	1898	300	30	330
Elbasan 1	1966	300	30	330
Elbasan 2	2312	300	30	330
Korca	3382	315	32	347
Kurbin	4117	320	32	352
Lezha	2374	300	30	330
Librazhd	3842	315	32	347
Shkoder	2569	305	31	336
Tirana	3578	315	32	347
Vlora	1446	280	28	308
<i>Total</i>	31350	3365	339	3704

Procedure

An automatic selection of children who would be part of the sample was made from the lists of registered children in each area program. After the sampling procedure was conducted, staff members who were involved as supervisors in monitoring the survey and data collectors went through an orientation process. Such an orientation included their recognition of the survey, the techniques of data collection based on interactive methodology and their sharing experiences of the administered survey in the previous year.

Data Collection

Data for this study were drawn from a Nationally Representative Study conducted by World Vision on Child Well-being in Albania during the year of 2016. Data collection followed two main methodologies by adapting to each region:

- Survey administration at home
- Survey administration in small groups (with maximum at 10 persons per group)

The data were collected during 2016. Participants were recruited from the lists of registered children of WVA in the area program from several cities including all regions in Albania. The selection criteria were that the child should be between the ages of 12 and 19 years and in grades 6-12. Data were collected in one of two ways. One strategy to collect the data involved administering a survey at home. Child participants and the families were visited at home, and the survey was administered by a trained researcher. After providing information about the aim of the study to the parents, the survey administrator asked closed-ended questions to the child participant. It took approximately

30 minutes to answer all the questions in the survey. If the participant was not clear about a question, the administrator provided needed explanation.

A second strategy for data collection was through survey administration in small groups, with a maximum of 10 persons per group. The participants were organized in small groups in a school environment where the survey administrator explained the objectives of the study, discussed confidentiality, and then distributed the questionnaires to willing child participants. This strategy also took about 30 minutes to complete.

Design

This study used a quantitative research methodology by utilizing an exploratory and descriptive design relying on secondary survey data. Therefore, descriptive analysis was used to find out to what extent youth were civically engaged. Next, *t*-tests were conducted to investigate whether there were significant, age, gender, and urbanicity differences for youth civic engagement. To determine whether there was a statistically significant association between youth optimism and young people's attitudes to the political system with youth civic engagement (when controlling for age, gender, and urbanicity) simultaneous method of multiple regression was used. Finally, six moderation models were tested to determine if age, gender, and urbanicity moderated the associations between youth optimism and young people's attitudes to the political system with youth civic engagement. The independent variables included in this study were as following: youth optimism, young people's attitudes to the political system, age, gender, and urbanicity. The dependent variable was youth civic engagement.

Measures

The measures used in this study are described below. Appendix A provides more detailed information about questions on the survey, the variable measured by each, and their source of each item.

Youth Civic Engagement

Youth civic engagement was measured with five items. Four items were derived from the Civic Engagement Scale (CES) developed by Doolittle and Faul (2013) and one item asked the respondents about their active citizenship. The five items measure actions of young people to become active citizens. Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with statements such as “I am involved as a volunteer in the activities of the community” or “I participate in discussions about the responsibilities we have in the community (village/neighborhood)” using a 4-point response scale ranging from 1 = *not agree at all* to 4 = *totally agree*. The reliability analysis revealed a Cronbach's alpha of .97 for this scale.

Predictor Variables The measures predicting youth civic engagement are described below.

Young People’s Attitudes to the Political System

Young people engage in forming opinions to bring about positive change in society. Young people’s attitudes to the political system was measured through the use of a three-item scale that included statements such as: “I know how political system works here in Albania” and “The political system in Albania gives the opportunity to young people to express freely their opinion”. Possible responses ranged from 1 = *not agree at*

all to 4 = totally agree. The reliability analysis showed that Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .96.

Youth Optimism

Youth optimism is about young people holding positive expectancies for their future. Optimism or having positive generalized outcome expectancies is characterized by the belief that things are likely to go well most of the time. Optimism is predictive of a variety of behaviors and characteristics including positive mood, achievement, extraversion, and longevity (Peterson, 2000). This variable was measured by using the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994). LOT-R is a six-item self-reported measure assessing generalized expectancies for positive versus negative outcomes. The scale used for the purpose of this study consisted of five items. Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with statements such as “I always look at the positive side of the things” and “I am always optimistic about my future” using a 4-point response scale ranging from 1 = *not agree at all* to 4 = *totally agree*. The reliability analysis showed that Cronbach's alpha for the overall scale was .96.

Demographics

These data contained basic demographic information including: age, gender, and urbanicity. Age was limited to 12 to 19 years and was recorded as a numerical variable by asking the respondents the question, “How old are you?” For the purpose of the analysis, we recoded this variable and used only two categories: (1) “Young youth” (12-14 years) and (2) “Old Youth” (15-19 years). Gender was coded as “Male” (1) and “Female” (2). Urbanicity was a measure created out of the municipality variable which

initially consisted of 10 categories. From these categories, it was recoded and dichotomized by “Rural” (1) or “Urban” (2). Urbanicity was defined as the percentage of people living in urban areas. Tirana, Vlora, and Durres have the highest urbanization level with 75%, 69%, and 58%, respectively. These three cities constitute the urban set, whereas Korce, Shkoder, Elbasan, Lezhe, and Diber that have urbanization level of 40%, 38%, 36%, 32%, and 18%, respectively, constitute the rural set (UNDP, 2010).

Statistical Analysis

This work employed quantitative analysis of using IBM-SPSS statistics version 22. Initially, the data were screened for missing values, outliers, creating scales, checking reliability of scales such as Cronbach’s alpha values, checking violations of the assumptions for multivariate analyses, conducting necessary transformations of the variables of interest, and creating an inter-correlation matrix for all study variables.

Next, statistical analyses were conducted including a variety of techniques that were related to univariate and bivariate analyses. Initially, Pearson correlations were used to investigate how the main study variables were related to each other. Next, independent samples *t*-test analyses were conducted to examine whether there were significant age, gender, and urbanicity differences for youth civic engagement. To investigate if there was a statistically significant association between youth optimism and young people’s attitudes to the political system with youth civic engagement (when controlling for age, gender, and urbanicity) a simultaneous method of linear regression analysis was used. Finally, by conducting hierarchical linear regression analysis and post hoc test analysis to investigate how the predictor variables were operating for the different groups of

moderator variables, six moderation models were tested to find out whether age, gender, and urbanicity significantly moderated the associations between youth optimism and young people's attitudes to the political system with youth civic engagement.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The normality of the distribution of the data was checked for all study variables. The distribution of the data is defined as normal if the standardized skewness and kurtosis values are between the values of -3 and +3. All the variables used in this study were approximately normally distributed. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, range, standardized skewness, and standardized kurtosis) and frequency distribution for the study variables are presented in Table 4.1. The descriptive analysis for Youth Civic Engagement, Youth Optimism, and Young People's Attitudes to the Political System indicated that the respondents have reported almost an average level on a range from 1 to 6, as shown in Table 4.1.

As indicated in Table 4.1 for the demographic variables, descriptive analysis provided frequencies and percentages such that for age, 61% of the sample was 12-14 years old and 39% were between 15-19 years old. The analysis also showed that the sample was fairly evenly divided by gender (47.7% male and 50.7% female), and urbanicity (25.1% urban and 74.9% rural).

Table 4.1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (n=2216)

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1. Youth Civic Engagement	2.74 (.81)	1-6	0.24	0.49		

2. Youth Optimism	3.14 (.58)	1-6	0.34	2.53	
3. Young People's Attitudes to the Political System	2.66 (.92)	1-6	0.18	-0.13	
4. Age					
	12-14				1351
	15-19				865
5. Gender					
	Male				1056
	Female				1124
6. Urbanicity					
	Urban				556
	Rural				1660

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

Independent Samples T-test Analyses

In order to answer research question on to what extent are youth in Albania civically engaged and whether there are age, gender, and urbanicity differences on youth civic engagement, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and range) for youth civic engagement and Independent Samples *T*-test analysis were conducted. As indicated in Table 4.1, the respondents reported almost an average level on a range from 1 to 6 for youth civic engagement. Albanian youth have a moderate level of civic engagement. Next, as shown in Table 4.2, Independent Samples *T*-test analysis revealed that 12-14 years old adolescents displayed significantly higher levels of civic engagement when compared to 15-19 years old adolescents ($p < .01$); The effect size d is approximately 0.11 which is according to Cohen (1988) a small effect. Next, the Independent Samples *T*-test analysis showed that males did not differ significantly from females on youth civic engagement, ($p=.17$). Finally, the analysis showed that youth from urban area did not significantly differ from youth from rural area on youth civic engagement ($p=.23$).

Table 4.2

Comparison of 12-14 vs. 15-19, male vs. female, and urban vs. rural youth on Youth Civic Engagement (n=2216)

Variable	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>P</i>
Age		2.59	0.01
12-14	2.77 (.83)		
15-19	2.68 (.78)		
Gender		-1.39	0.17
Male	2.71 (.81)		
Female	2.76 (.81)		
Urbanicity		-1.21	0.23
Urban	2.70 (.90)		
Rural	2.75 (.78)		

Bivariate Data Inspection

Intercorrelations between all study variables can be found in Table 4.3. Bivariate analysis showed that the strongest positive correlation, which would be considered a large effect size, was between youth civic engagement and youth optimism, $r(2216) = .41, p < .001$, and young people’s attitudes to the political systems, $r(2216) = .49, p < .001$, which is considered a large effect size (Cohen, 1988). Youth optimism was also positively correlated with young people’s attitudes to the political systems, $r(2216) = .34, p < .001$, which is considered a medium to large effect size.

Table 4.3

Intercorrelations for the main variables of the study (n= 2216)

Variable	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
1. Youth Civic Engagement	..	0.41*	0.49*
2. Youth Optimism	0.34*

3. Young People's Attitudes
to the Political System

* $p < .001$

Simultaneous Linear Regression Analysis

To be able to answer research question of whether youth optimism and their attitudes to the political system are associated with youth civic engagement when controlling for age, gender, and urbanicity, simultaneous method of linear regression analyses were conducted. Linear regression analysis showed that the overall model was significant, $F(4,2211) = 116.44$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 17% of the variance in civic engagement. According to Cohen (1988), this is a large effect. The beta weights, presented in Table 4.4, indicate that youth optimism contributes most to predicting youth civic engagement and that age also significantly predicted civic engagement such that youth ages 12-14 showed higher levels of civic engagement when compared to youth ages 15-19.

Table 4.4

Simultaneous Linear Regression Analysis for Youth Optimism, Age, Gender, and Urbanicity Predicting Youth Civic Engagement (n = 2216)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β
Youth optimism	0.58	0.03	0.41*
Age	-0.11	0.03	-0.06*
Gender	-0.01	0.03	0
Urbanicity	0.04	0.04	0.02
Constant	1.12	0.13	

Note. $R^2 = .17$; $F(4,2211) = 116.44$

* $p < .001$

Next, by using a simultaneous method of linear regression analysis, this study examined if there was a statistically significant association between young people’s attitudes to the political system and youth civic engagement when controlling for age, gender, and urbanicity. This combination of variables predicted youth civic engagement. Among the predictors, young people’s attitudes to the political system was uniquely associated with youth civic engagement, $F(4,2211) = 178.50, p < .001$. The adjusted R squared value was .24 and $r = 0.49$. This indicates that 24% of the variance in youth civic engagement was explained by the model. According to Cohen (1988), this is a large effect. The beta weights, presented in Table 4.5, indicated that ‘young people’s attitudes to the political system’ significantly predicted youth civic engagement while controlling for the demographic variables.

Table 4.1

Simultaneous Linear Regression Analysis for Young People's Attitudes to the Political System, Age, Gender, and Urbanicity Predicting Youth Civic Engagement (n = 2216)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β
Young people's attitudes to the political system	0.43	0.02	0.49*
Age	-0.03	0.03	-0.2
Gender	0.03	0.03	0.02
Urbanicity	0.08	0.04	0.04
Constant	1.48	0.12	

Note. $R^2 = .24; F(4,2211) = 178.50,$

* $p < .001$

Moderation Analysis. Hierarchical Linear Regression Analysis

In order to answer the research question of whether age, gender, and urbanicity moderate the associations between youth optimism and young people’s attitudes to the political system with youth civic engagement, hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted. In the first step, two variables were included: youth optimism and age. These variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in youth civic engagement, $F(2,2213) = 232.18, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .17$. This means that 17% of the variance in youth civic engagement could be predicted by youth optimism and age. Next, the interaction term between youth optimism and age was added to the regression model, $F(1,2212) = 5.88, p = .02$, which accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in youth civic engagement, indicating that age is a significant moderator of the association between youth optimism and youth civic engagement. The beta weights and significance values are presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.2

Hierarchical Linear Regression Analysis Summary Predicting Youth Civic Engagement from Youth Optimism and Age (n=2216)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1				0.17	0.17
Youth Optimism	0.58	0.03	0.41*		
Age	-0.11	0.03	-0.06		
Constant	1.19	0.11			
Step 2				0.18	
Interaction Term	-0.14	0.06	-0.35**		
Constant	0.18	0.43			

* $p < .001$

** $p < .05$

In addition, a post hoc analysis was conducted to investigate how the predictor variable is operating for the two age groups. Beta weights presented in Table 4.7 indicate that the effect of youth optimism on youth civic engagement is stronger among youth ages 12-14 than among youth ages 15-19.

Table 4.3

Post Hoc Analysis Summary Predicting Youth Civic Engagement from Youth Optimism for Two Age Groups (n=2216)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	R^2
12-14				0.2
Youth Optimism	0.62	0.03	0.45*	
Constant	0.82	0.11		
15-19				0.12
Youth Optimism	0.49	0.05	0.34*	
Constant	1.15	0.11		

* $p < .001$

Next, to investigate whether gender significantly moderated the association between youth optimism and youth civic engagement, a hierarchical linear regression analysis was computed. In the first step, two variables were included: youth optimism and gender. These variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in youth civic engagement, $F(2,2213) = 225.69, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .17$. This means that 17% of the variance in youth civic engagement could be predicted by youth optimism and gender.

Next, the interaction term created between youth optimism and gender was added to the regression model, which did not account for a significant proportion of the variance in youth civic engagement, $F(1,2212) = 1.35, p = .25$, indicating that gender did not

significantly moderate the association between youth optimism and civic engagement.

The beta weights and significance values are presented in Table 4.8.

Table 4.4

Hierarchical Linear Regression Analysis Summary Predicting Youth Civic Engagement from Youth Optimism and Gender (n=2216)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1				0.17	0.17
Youth Optimism	0.57	0.03	0.41*		
Gender	-0.01	0.03	-0.01		
Constant	-0.95	0.09			
Step 2				0.17	
Interaction Term	0.06	0.05	0.15		
Constant	1.23	0.26			

* $p < .001$

Next, a hierarchical linear regression analysis was computed to investigate whether urbanicity significantly moderated the association between youth optimism and youth civic engagement. Firstly, two variables were included: youth optimism and urbanicity. These variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in youth civic engagement, $F(2,2213) = 226.41, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .17$. This means that 17% of the variance in youth civic engagement could be predicted by youth optimism and urbanicity.

Next, the interaction term between youth optimism and urbanicity was added to the regression model, which accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in youth civic engagement, $F(1,2212) = 9.32, p < .001$, indicating that urbanicity significantly moderates the association between youth optimism and civic engagement.

The beta weights and significance values are presented in Table 4.9.

Table 4.5

Hierarchical Linear Regression Analysis Summary Predicting Youth Civic Engagement from Youth Optimism and Urbanicity (n=2216)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1				0.17	0.17
Youth Optimism	0.57	0.03	0.41*		
Urbanicity	0.04	0.04	0.02		
Constant	0.87	0.11			
Step 2				0.17	
Interaction Term	-0.18	0.06	-0.38*		
Constant	-0.08	0.33			

* $p < .001$

In addition, a post hoc analysis was conducted to investigate how the predictor variable is operating for the two groups of urbanicity, urban vs. rural. Beta weights presented in Table 4.10 indicate that youth optimism contributes more to youth civic engagement in the urban group than in the rural group.

Table 4.6

Post Hoc Analysis Summary Predicting Youth Civic Engagement from Youth Optimism for Two Urbanicity Groups (n=2216)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	R^2
Urban				0.25
Youth Optimism	0.7	0.05	0.50*	
Constant	0.52	0.17		
Rural				0.14
Youth Optimism	0.52	0.03	0.37*	
Constant	1.12	0.1		

* $p < .001$

To test the hypothesis that age significantly moderates the association between young people's attitudes to the political system and youth civic engagement, a

hierarchical linear regression analysis was computed. In the first step, two variables were included: young people’s attitudes to the political system and age. These variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in youth civic engagement $F(2,2213) = 353.23, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .24$. This means that 24% of the variance in youth civic engagement could be predicted by young people’s attitudes to the political system and age.

Next, the interaction term between young people’s attitudes to the political system and age was added to the regression model, which accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in youth civic engagement, $F(1,2212) = 7.04, p = .01$, indicating that age significantly moderated the association between young people’s attitudes to the political system and youth civic engagement. The beta weights and significance values are presented in Table 4.11.

Table 4.7

Hierarchical Linear Regression Analysis Summary Predicting Youth Civic Engagement from Young People’s Attitudes to the Political System and Age (n=2216)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1				0.24	0.24
Young People’s Attitudes	0.43	0.02	0.49*		
Age	-0.03	0.03	-0.02		
Constant	1.7	0.09			
Step 2				0.24	
Interaction Term	-0.09	0.03	-0.27**		
Constant	1.1	0.23			

* $p < .001$

** $p < .05$

Then, a post hoc analysis was conducted to investigate how the predictor variable was operating for the two age groups. Beta weights presented in Table 4.12 indicate that young people’s attitudes to the political system contributes more to youth civic engagement in the 12-14 age group than in the 15-19 age group.

Table 4.8

Post Hoc Analysis Summary Predicting Youth Civic Engagement from Young People’s Attitudes to the Political System for Two Age Groups (n=2216)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	<i>R</i> ²
12-14				0.27
Young People’s Attitudes	0.47	0.02	0.52*	
Constant	1.51	0.06		
15-19				0.19
Young People’s Attitudes	0.38	0.03	0.44*	
Constant	1.71	0.07		

**p* < .001

Next, to test the hypothesis that gender significantly moderates the association between young people’s attitudes to the political system and youth civic engagement, a hierarchical linear regression analysis was computed. In the first step, two variables were included: young people’s attitudes to the political system and gender. These variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in youth civic engagement $F(2, 2213) = 353.37, p < .001, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .24$. This means that 24% of the variance in youth civic engagement could be predicted by young people’s attitudes to the political system and gender.

Next, the interaction term between young people’s attitudes to the political system and gender was added to the regression model, which did not account for a significant

proportion of the variance in youth civic engagement, $F(1,2212) = .29, p = .59$, indicating that gender did not significantly moderate the association between young people's attitudes to the political system and youth civic engagement. The beta weights and significance values are presented in Table 4.13.

Table 4.9

Hierarchical Linear Regression Analysis Summary Predicting Youth Civic Engagement from Young People's Attitudes to the Political System and Gender (n=2216)

Variable		<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1					0.24	0.24
Young People's Attitudes		0.43	0.02	.93*		
Gender		-0.03	0.03	-0.002		
Constant		1.54	0.06			
Step 2					0.24	
Interaction Term		-0.02	0.03	-0.04		
Constant		1.47	0.14			

* $p < .001$

Lastly, a hierarchical linear regression analysis was computed to test the hypothesis that urbanicity significantly moderates the association between young people's attitudes to the political system and youth civic engagement. In the first step, two variables were included: young people's attitudes to the political system and urbanicity. These variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in youth civic engagement $F(2, 2213) = 353.77, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .24$. This means that 24% of the variance in youth civic engagement could be predicted by young people's attitudes to the political system and urbanicity.

Next, the interaction term between young people’s attitudes to the political system and urbanicity was added to the regression model, which did not account for a significant proportion of the variance in youth civic engagement, $F(1,2212) = 0.02, p = .90$, indicating that urbanicity did not significantly moderate the association between young people’s attitudes to the political system and youth civic engagement. The beta weights and significance values are presented in Table 4.14.

Table 4.10

Hierarchical Linear Regression Analysis Summary Predicting Youth Civic Engagement from Young People’s Attitudes to the Political System and Urbanicity (n=2216)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1				0.24	0.24
Young People’s Attitudes	0.43	0.02	.49*		
Urbanicity	-0.04	0.03	-0.03		
Constant	1.64	0.06			
Step 2				0.24	
Interaction Term	0.004	0.03	0.01		
Constant	1.66	0.14			

* $p < .001$

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The major findings of this study are reviewed first for consistency with similar literature on youth civic engagement. Next, implications of the findings for social capital and civic voluntarism are discussed. Specifically addressed are how the findings might inform the development of policies and programs to improve youth civic engagement. Next, limitations of the study are noted and finally, future research directions are identified.

Youth civic engagement is a very important factor for a stable and fair democracy. When youth civic engagement is combined with several other positive youth developmental factors such as youth optimism and their attitudes to the political system, it can provide a bigger picture of how youth get involved with democratic actions in a post-Communist country like Albania.

Youth Civic Engagement in Albania. Age, Gender, and Urbanicity Differences on Youth Civic Engagement

The question about the extent to which youth are civically engaged and whether youth civic engagement is displayed differently among different groups of young people based on age, gender, and urbanicity, is very important to be explored in Albania. This question is of particular interest considering its transition from a country with a Communist regime to a country aspiring to integrate into the European Union. After almost three decades since the collapse of the Communist system, Albania is still struggling to establish an effective and stable democracy. This study contributes to the

existing literature on youth civic engagement, by exploring such factors in the 2016 Child Well-being Study in Albania.

Age, gender, and urbanicity differences on youth civic engagement. This study sought to test the hypotheses that there were age, gender, and urbanicity differences in youth civic engagement such that older youth would significantly show higher levels of civic engagement than younger youth, males would significantly show higher levels of civic engagement than females, and urban youth would significantly show higher levels of civic engagement than rural youth. The hypotheses were partially confirmed. Descriptive analysis showed that Albanian youth reported almost an average level of civic engagement. Results from the independent samples *t*-test analyses revealed that youth civic engagement is manifested differently among different age groups.

Age. The findings uncovered that young adolescents ages 12-14 were more likely to be civically engaged than old adolescents ages 15-19. This finding is very important for Albania, as it is the second country in Europe with the youngest population where 23.4% of its citizens are between 0-14 years old (USAID, 2018) and an increased focus on their education would have a large positive effect. Such a finding is also supported by longitudinal studies which claimed that as young people get more civically engaged during early adolescence, they are more likely to develop and display political and civic behavior in late adolescence and emerging adulthood (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). Such a finding is supported also by other studies where scholars claim that early adolescence is an important developmental period for civic development (Youniss, McLellan, & Mazer, 2001; Flanagan 2015; Voight & Torney-Purta, 2013). In contrast,

literature indicates that older adolescents as they approach to young adulthood show very little or no interest at all in civic engagement such as community work or political discussions (Coleman, 2005). Researchers suggest that they lack the knowledge and skills necessary for effective citizenship (Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010). In the Albanian context, this finding can be explained by the fact that older adolescents are under the pressure of their parents' expectations about their educational career as they approach college life. Therefore, instead of getting more education about citizenship or leadership and develop civic skills to contribute to the good of the society, they are more occupied with the preparation for their future educational plans (Berisha, Shtraza, & Hazizaj, 2015).

Gender. Results also uncovered that male adolescents did not significantly differ from female adolescents in their civic engagement. Evidence concerning gender differences in youth civic engagement in the literature is mixed. Our findings are in line with a study conducted by Portney and the colleagues (2009) with two large representative datasets that found no significant gender differences in youth civic engagement. This finding is also supported by another study conducted in the U.S. which found that both boys and girls were engaged in civic actions and leadership roles but the kind of activities they would participate were different (Cassell, Huffaker, Tversky, & Ferriman, 2006). However, other studies claim that gender differences exist in terms of the type of activity young people get involved with. They typically report that young women are more likely to engage in service and community work and to volunteer for nonpolitical groups than young men (Akiva, Sugar, Smith, & Brummet, 2011; Barkan,

2004; Jenkins 2005). Usually, studies highlight significant gender differences in youth civic engagement (Hooghe & Stolle, 2004; Metzger & Ferris, 2013).

Urbanicity. Though findings about the effect of urbanicity on youth civic engagement were mixed in our study, previous studies show that small cities and homogeneous neighborhoods have larger number of voluntary groups (Newton, 2007). Political scholars argue that civic actions occur more in small rural areas rather than in large urban areas because voluntary groups are sustained more easily in less developed and more homogeneous communities (Bekkers, 2005; Gamm & Putnam, 1999; Kirby, Marcelo, Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2009; Putnam, 1993). However, the rates of volunteering and civic participation are elevated by the access to the resources and opportunities in Albania. Young people, who often come from cities with a high urbanization level such as Tirana or Vlora, do have more access to many resources and opportunities to be engaged with community work than those who live in cities with a low level of urbanization such as Dibra or Elbasan, who have limited resources and a number of barriers to civic engagement.

Predictors of Youth Civic Engagement when Controlling for Several Demographic Variables

Another question that was explored in this study was whether youth optimism and youth attitudes toward the political system were associated with youth civic engagement, when controlling for age, gender, and urbanicity. The simultaneous method of linear regression analyses conducted in this study, shed light on predictors of youth civic engagement when checking for several demographics.

Youth optimism. The hypothesis that youth optimism is positively associated with youth civic engagement when controlling for age, gender, and urbanicity, was supported. The analysis showed that the overall model was significant, indicating that youth civic engagement was significantly associated with youth optimism when controlling for all demographics, especially age. Youth optimism is an important indicator of youth civic engagement which has received a great deal of attention from different scholars (Boden, Sanders, Munford, Liebenberg, & McLeod, 2015; Evans, 2007; Uslaner, 1998). Several review studies indicate that optimism may positively influence civic participation and life satisfaction (Flanagan & Christens, 2011; Putnam 2000, p. 335). In line with our findings, other studies show that the more youth felt optimistic and influential, the more connected they were to the community (Evans, 2007; RBC Youth Optimism Survey, 2015).

Young people's attitudes to the political system. By using a simultaneous method of linear regression analysis, the hypothesis that young people's attitudes to the political system is positively associated with youth civic engagement when controlling for age, gender, and urbanicity was supported. The linear regression analysis showed that the overall model was significant, where youth civic engagement was significantly associated with young people's attitudes to the political system when controlling for the three demographic variables: age, gender, and urbanicity. This finding is supported by several other studies which claim that young people's active participation in political discussions and their positive attitudes toward the political system are positively correlated with civic engagement and this was found to be fairly evenly spread across age

and gender (Bekkers, 2005; Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014; Monitor 2003). Other scholars also suggest that as people show more interest in politics, they are more willing to show civic engagement (Fahmy, 2017; Henn, Weinstein, & Forrest, 2005).

Albanian young people regardless of age, gender, or urbanicity seem to be interested in politics or willing to participate in political activities, which leads them toward involvement with civic actions. As stated by many scholars, adolescence is an important period when political views and civic behaviors start shaping (Flanagan 2015; Voight & Torney-Purta, 2013). Despite the different barriers, young people living in Albania are open toward political discussions and they spend a considerable amount of time in talking about politics.

Moderation Models of Youth Civic Engagement

This study examined the question whether age, gender, and urbanicity significantly moderated the association between youth optimism and young people's attitudes to the political system with youth civic engagement.

Youth optimism, age, gender, and urbanicity. This study also investigated if the association between youth optimism and youth civic engagement would be stronger for older youth than for younger youth, for males than for females, and for youth from urban areas than for youth from rural areas. Very few studies have explored correlates of youth civic engagement moderated by demographics, and those that exist have focused on positive developmental outcomes such as educational achievement, life satisfaction or supportive peer relationships (Ballard, Hayt, & Pachucki, 2018; Hawkins, Villagonzalo, Sanson, Toumbourou, Letcher, & Olsson, 2012; Sun & Shek, 2012).

Age. Findings indicated that age had moderating influences on the association between youth optimism and youth civic engagement. More specifically, the effect of youth optimism on youth civic engagement depended on age. The analysis revealed that this association was stronger among younger adolescents than among older ones. Developmental psychologists agree that early adolescence is a period when young people start viewing the outside world very ideally and have a high confidence that they can make a change in their community (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 2012). In the case of Albania, youth in late adolescence become a little bit more realistic about the economic and political situation in their country, therefore they do not believe that they can transform the society and contribute to democracy. This is a strong reason why the majority of them who are in late adolescence make plans to study, work, and live, in a more developed country such as Germany, Great Britain or the U.S. In the long term, this shift of the young population toward other European countries or overseas will have a huge impact on the development of the Albanian society.

Gender. Results showed that gender did not have a moderating effect on the association between youth optimism and youth civic engagement. The association between these variables did not depend on gender. As research investigating gender effect on such association is very scarce, this finding calls for the need to conduct more research considering these predictors of youth civic engagement.

Urbanicity. This study also found that urbanicity had a significant moderating effect on the association between youth optimism and youth civic engagement. The association between these two variables varied as a function of urbanicity. The effect of

urbanicity on this association was stronger among urban youth than among rural youth. Depending on urbanicity, youth optimism seems to be strongly related to youth civic engagement.

Young people's attitudes to the political system, age, gender, and urbanicity.

This study also tested the hypothesis that the association between young people's attitudes to the political system and youth civic engagement would be stronger for older youth than for younger youth, stronger for males than for females, and stronger for youth from urban areas than for youth from rural areas.

Age. Results showed that age had a moderating effect on the association between young people's attitudes to the political system and youth civic engagement. The association was stronger among younger adolescents than among older adolescents. This finding is supported by the study conducted by the pioneers of this field who have used age as a variable that explains participation in civic engagement (Verba & Nie, 1972). When this variable is combined with another variable such as young people's attitudes to the political system, it can significantly predict youth civic engagement.

Gender. Next, findings revealed that gender did not have moderating influences on the association between youth optimism and youth civic engagement. The association between these variables did not change as a function of gender. Studies that investigate moderating effects of gender on such associates are very scarce. Some studies report that both boys and girls from different living areas display different levels of civic engagement, but the forms of engagement vary by gender (Akiva, Sugar, Smith, & Brummet, 2011; Barkan, 2004). Further research is needed to explore the moderating

influences of gender on the association between youth optimism and youth civic engagement.

Urbanicity. Finally, the moderation analysis showed the effect of young people's attitudes to the political system on youth civic engagement did not depend on urbanicity. In the context of Albania, many important parameters such as income depend on urbanicity, when urbanicity is defined as the percentage of people living in the urban areas. At the same time, researchers have found that in Albania, poverty is related more to location than to the rural and urban division (UNDP, 2010). Periphery effects are reported as important factors affecting regional disparities and the periphery effects include parameters such as access to the capital city, access to international hub, travel distance to the national roads and road density.

Implications for Social Capital and Civic Volunteerism

By using the theory of social capital and the civic voluntarism model as organizing frameworks, this study explored associations between youth optimism and young people's attitudes to the political system with youth civic engagement controlling for age, gender, and urbanicity. This study revealed that there were significant differences among demographics variables on youth civic engagement. More specifically, this work found that younger adolescents (12-14) displayed significantly higher levels of civic engagement than older adolescents (15-19). These findings underline the importance of considering the developmental stage of young people and thus, acknowledge that older youth may need different ways of getting involved in civic actions when compared with younger youth.

To increase social capital, future policies and programs targeted at young people in late adolescence should be developed. In social contexts, young people are able to establish relationships with socializing agents including parents, neighborhood, school, and peers. Social capital is generated through such relationships and young people are encouraged to develop important social roles and get prepared for active community life and civic engagement. These democratic skills can be learned through both school and community-based youth programs designed to promote youth-leadership. Such programs connect participants with a large network of socially committed members of the society sharing a mutual interest in social or political issues. By engaging in different activities such as campaigns or discussions focused on changing policies on those issues, they are provided with the opportunity to participate in voluntary work and develop the social capital resources and benefits.

As social capital appears to be more developed among young people who come from families with sufficient economic and human resources, those who come from disadvantaged families should especially be targeted by youth policies and programs (McClurg, 2003; Park, Phillips, & Johnson, 2004; Rotolo & Wilson, 2012). Although, these adolescents come from families struggling every day with their living as they approach emerging adulthood, they definitely need to benefit from being a member of a community with high social capital to get prepared as future adults (Bekkers, 2005; Jones, 2018).

Although higher levels of optimism were associated with more civic engagement for both younger and older adolescents, findings also uncovered that younger adolescents

with higher levels of optimism and positive attitudes to the political system showed higher levels of civic engagement than older adolescents. Older adolescents seem to feel less motivated and optimistic to get civically engaged and thus, exploring how other individual factors may contribute to the prediction of civic engagement among this population is notably important. Additionally, this research suggested that age showed a moderating effect on the associations between youth optimism and young people's attitudes to the political system with youth civic engagement. The association between youth optimism and youth civic engagement varied as a function of urbanicity. These findings suggest that the strength of the correlations between adolescent's characteristics such as youth optimism and youth civic engagement depends more on young people's age and urbanicity rather than gender.

To increase civic voluntarism among adolescents, policies and programs might target urban and rural areas differently. Policies and programs aimed at increasing civic engagement should provide young people everywhere with real and equal opportunities to enable their full and effective participation in civic life. Albania has the second highest percentage of youth population in Europe and any structural measure taken would inherently have a considerable positive effect. Young people, as a target group, have been the focus of public policies in Albania, with an increased interest since 2007 (National Youth Action Plan, 2015). These policies consider youth a homogenous group, thus offering similar approach, which means that they expect that youth from all over Albania can make use of different opportunities. However, scholars agree that there exist some structural (i.e. lack of community institutions) and individual (i.e. differential

opportunities) barriers, which undermine youth civic engagement (Westheimer and Kahne, 2003).

According to Bekkers (2005), civic engagement is affected by social capital, human resources, and financial resources. One important factor that differentiates Albanian youth in the urban and rural areas is the geographic distance from major centers of service. This leads to youth detachment in rural and mountainous areas because of firstly the lack of accessibility and secondly because of massive migration. These two factors negatively affect the human resources and consequently the civic engagement too. Youth participation in civic life is conditioned by the geographical proximity of their residence to other institutions in big cities as well as the lack of resources in the schools and communities of those regions to get youth more civically engaged. As they lack these opportunities, they feel less optimistic and motivated to participate or contribute to community service. As such, youth living in rural areas need different levels of motivation to participate in civic activities when compared with youth living in urban areas. Another important factor differentiating youth in the urban and rural areas is the financial resources. In the case of Albania, the financial resources are strongly correlated with the level of urbanicity, as they increase linearly with the increase of the urbanicity, namely from Tirana city that has the highest urbanization of 75% to Dibra city that has the lowest urbanization of 18%. Different ministries have established several directorates for youth policies and issues where youth from urban areas can easily access them and participate in decision-making processes and political bodies. Young people living in smaller cities which are also less developed and considered as disadvantaged areas, find it

more difficult to reach such institutions, therefore, feel more excluded. Therefore, to encourage disadvantaged youth living in rural areas to contribute in civic life, youth policies and programs should be designed and implemented to take into account the diverse profile of this group and the ways how to reach those resources.

The study has implications for those wishing to increase civic engagement in Albania. There is a clear need for increased opportunities for civic engagement for young people in order to secure democracy. Specific recommendations would include offering real opportunities especially for older adolescents living in the rural areas to participate in democratic life such as:

Participation in democratic processes including voting, electoral campaigns, membership in political parties or involvement in discussion on municipal budgets and planning;

Involvement in civil society such as school or community-based youth organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or volunteering;

Participation in youth forums such as discussions about youth or community issues, participating in online forums, or following blogs;

Participation in workshops or trainings to learn more about democracy, attending meetings of political groups, observing formal decision-making in institutions, or engaging in youth leadership programs.

Participation in trainings organized by different companies aiming at outreaching and motivating disengaged youth to gain the necessary skills needed to enter the workforce in agro and adventure tourism sector especially for youth in rural areas.

Community work and activities are considered as an intervention that can be used to teach disadvantaged and disengaged youth the concepts of civic engagement, social responsibility, and the sense of belonging within their respective neighborhoods. Examples of current activities include summer camps with school aged children organized mainly by NGOs in cities with a low level of urbanization. Older adolescents can be trained and get equipped with leadership skills to work as coaches or mentors of younger children who participate in summer camps. They can also participate in summer schools organized mainly by universities in collaboration with high schools from rural areas who can invite them in big cities like Tirana to attend these schools on a specific topic related to democratic life.

Recommendations for policy and program development around civic engagement include the design of more effective youth programs and civic education programs to be implemented especially for older adolescents living in disadvantaged areas of Albania. Policy makers, civil society, practitioners, and researchers by recognizing the potential of young people to change their communities, should create and support initiatives to increase youth involvement in community change, provide access to economic and social opportunities especially for youth from rural areas, encourage them to have an active role in civil society, and have a stronger voice in local government processes. Another important recommendation would be the improvement of educational curricula by including topics on civic engagement, democratic values, social inequalities, environment issues awareness, preservation of cultural heritage, and community transformation.

Limitations

The findings of this study must be considered in light of several limitations. First, this study employed secondary data collected in Albania and it is not clear whether the findings from this study are generalizable to other places in the world, particularly to other youth groups, who may have different cultures and lifestyles and face different political life situations. Second, the present study used adolescents' self-reported data and rather than include caregiver and teacher-reported data. This may lead us to collinearity issues between the measures and the inability to check for bias. Another problem with child-reported data is that even though participants try to be honest, they might have encountered difficulties with the understanding of different concepts or with the interpretation of specific questions especially young adolescents. Third, almost all of the questions included in the questionnaire used a 4-point rating scale. Considering the fact that respondents have different ways of filling out rating scales, sometimes we come across people who are called as 'extreme respondents' who prefer to use the extreme scores of the scales, whereas others prefer to stay around the midpoints and rarely use the edges of the scales. This might result in differences in scores among the participants which might not reflect what the survey aimed to measure. Fourth, though using data from a nationally representative sample, this work was limited by its use of secondary data where the statements related to youth civic engagement scale were limited to the behavioral component of youth civic engagement, especially civic participation. An integrated construct of civic engagement should include behavioral, cognitive, and socioemotional components (Zaff, Boyd, Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010). Finally, the participants included in this study are only registered children of WVA, who come from

each area program, where the project has been implemented, which means that there have not been included child participants who have not participated in the area program.

Therefore, it is unknown whether these findings would generalize to other children who were not part of such programs.

Future Research

The aim of this study was to investigate how child-related factors such as youth optimism and young people's attitudes to the political system relate to youth civic engagement when controlling for several demographics. Similar studies should be conducted regularly (i.e., every decade) to monitor these important variables for the young people, as changes in the economic situation or similar factors could have an effect on youth civic engagement overall, or may cause a difference among the urban and rural areas. In the last two decades, Albania has seen many changes where most of them have been positive in terms of the quality of life and/or in terms of the services offered (National Youth Action Plan, 2015). Among many important factors that exhibit the greatest change is the respect for the rule of law and the increase of awareness in accountability. The positive trends in these two factors may drive many positive changes both directly through the improvement of the youth optimism and similar predictors of civic engagement and indirectly through the increase of the quality of life such as social capital, human and financial resources. Future work may focus on the relationship between the youth perception on the rule of law and the civic engagement. Previous studies conducted on such correlates show that young people's active participation in political discussions and their positive attitudes toward the political system are positively

associated with civic engagement. Existing research reports higher levels of civic engagement focused on non-political activities such as charity, solving community issues, and fun activities among young girls and higher levels of civic engagement among young boys focused on political discussions and elections.

This study made use of a nationally representative large sample size drawn from a very recent dataset. Based on this study's framework, youth optimism and their positive attitudes to the political system especially among young adolescents are very important factors for the development of youth civic engagement. The current study and other future studies investigating civic engagement among adolescents, may contribute in identifying other individual characteristics that encourage adolescents to get involved in democratic actions. Understanding and recognizing such constructs may not only contribute to helping young people participate in youth programs or community service but may also equip them with knowledge about citizenship and democratic life, thus preparing them as future adults.

The findings and recommendations in this study are intended to inform youth policy makers' and youth sector's future work in the field of youth civic engagement and the objectives to support young people's positive attitude to influence decisions in democratic processes and increase their participation in community development. In addition, though this work contributed to the literature by considering youth individual characteristics in relation to youth civic engagement still, more research is needed to identify and develop youth related policies and programs by targeting both male and female older adolescents from rural areas to increase youth civic engagement.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Children’s Survey

Questions of interest: Items used for the predictor variable “ Young people’s Attitudes to the Political System ” (19.6 -19.8)	The variable measured	Source
<p>19.00 How much do you agree with the statements below?</p> <p><i>19.6 I believe in the government and the laws in Albania.</i></p> <p><i>19.7 I know how political system works here in Albania.</i></p> <p><i>19.8 The political system in Albania gives the opportunity to young people to express freely their opinion.</i></p>	<p>Descriptive data for the situation of youth at the place where they live. WVA</p> <p>Descriptive data that are related to the tendency for radicalization of youth.</p> <p>Descriptive data about pessimism among youth.</p>	<p>Changed by using main concepts related to the tendency for radicalization among youth, pessimism ...</p>
Questions of interest: Items used for the outcome variable “ Youth Civic Engagement ” (19.9 & 21.4-21.7)	The variable measured	Source
<p>Please provide your opinion about the statements below:</p> <p><i>19.9 I am involved with political groups where I advocate for issues of concern about youth and children.</i></p> <p><i>21.4 I am involved as a volunteer in the activities of the community.</i></p> <p><i>21.5 I help the members of my</i></p>	<p>Active citizenship among youth</p> <p>Opinions and actions to become active citizen.</p>	<p>Civic Engagement Scale, Doolittle, A. & Faul, A. C.</p>

<p><i>community/neighborhood.</i></p> <p><i>21.6 I stay informed about activities that happen in my community/neighborhood.</i></p> <p><i>21.7 I participate in discussions about the responsibilities we have in the community (village/neighborhood)</i></p>		
<p>Questions of interest: Items used for the predictor variable “Youth Optimism” (22.1 -22.6)</p>	<p>The variable measured</p>	<p>Source</p>
<p>22.00 Please provide your opinion about the statements below:</p> <p><i>22.1 During difficult times I usually hope and think positively.</i></p> <p><i>22.2 I always look at the positive side of the things.</i></p> <p><i>22.3 I am always optimistic about my future.</i></p> <p><i>22.4 I believe in the idea that "every bad thing happens for something good"</i></p> <p><i>22.5 If something is meant to go wrong, that is what will happen.</i></p> <p><i>22.6 I rarely expect that good things will happen.</i></p>	<p>Optimism and pessimism in youth.</p> <p>Hope in the future as a full scale</p>	<p>Revised Life Orientation Scale, Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S. & Bridges, M. W.</p>

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