

## Academic Research for Dynamic Societies

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In an ever-changing world, higher education in social sciences is required to make a mark and engage with key issues, including tools to analyse, understand and critically interpret the societies we live in.

We are a team of lecturers at the University of Tirana - Faculty of History and Philology. During our ongoing experience with research and the mission to transmit its results to our students, academics and the Albanian society, we have realised the insufficiency of intra- and inter-disciplinary studies in our curricula and the shortage of communication and debate between major social disciplines.

At the beginning of the academic year 2017-2018, we had the precious opportunity to present our methodological concepts to PERFORM, a project of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. With their support, we conceptualised an extracurricular, interdisciplinary module within the Faculty of History and Philology, open for attendance to students from other humanities faculties as well. To enhance the relevance of research in humanities, from November 2017 to March 2018, PERFORM supported our team to implement a multidisciplinary **Module Academic Research within Dynamic Societies**. The significance of the Module is to familiarise and equip MA students with a thorough and comprehensive knowledge on research methodologies applicable within the humanities. It is also important to note here that this is the first time that an interdisciplinary course on research methodology took place at the University of Tirana.

The Module course addressed 30 students majoring in different humanities fields, which have expressed their motivation to improve their academic and research skills, foster networks among young and senior researchers and focus on multidisciplinary academic writing. During the teaching part of the Module, the students had the opportunity to participate in a series of lectures with renowned professors of history, political sciences, anthropology, as well as practical study visits to national museums, libraries and archives. Our students and all of us were thrilled to have as visiting lectures some of the most prominent scholars in contemporary Albanian and Balkan studies, such as Prof. Bernd J. Fischer from the Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, Prof. Christina Koulouri from the Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences in Greece, and Prof. Dubravka Stojanovic from the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. Sharing their experiences and the methodological challenges they face in their research fields, they gave young students and researchers some very interesting and inspiring viewpoints for their professional future.



Another fundamental part of the Module consisted in the collaboration between students and selected mentors to research and present in essay form, specific topics of their interest. The purpose of the final assignment was to give the students the opportunity to put in practice the knowledge gained during the Module. Most of the essays were inter-disciplinary, interesting and well written. They surprised us in a positive way, as it is clear that societies are not precisely labelled, so their inquiry may come in very different research paths.

In order to have a final reflection on the impact and role of the Module, as well as give students a chance to engage with each other's work and exchange ideas between one another, a final workshop will be organised, where students will present their essays. The best students will have the chance to continue working on another intervention of PERFORM where they will engage in archival research.

Due to the success of this initiative and positive feedback received from the students, the module will become part of the permanent curricula in our faculty's MA courses. This course serves as a pilot initiative upon which the University of Tirana, at large, can further engage and acknowledge the need to officially include such research methodology courses in its curricula. New academic research in social sciences needs to (re)start by strongly committing to interdisciplinary studies within contemporary dynamic societies.