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Research Article

How to adapt the education offer to job market needs – A case study of territory reform in Albania

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Abstract

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in developing countries are faced with new and updated demands from the job market and must adapt their offering accordingly. This paper provides a methodological framework to adapt study and training programmes to address labour market needs. The case of territory administrative reform in Albania and the identification of the new skills required will be an illustrative example of that methodological framework.

Albania has undertaken important reform that has completely modified its territory planning process from the traditional urban planning approach to a more holistic one referred to as territorial planning and development. However, a successful reform application must be focused on well-trained professionals. The main objective of this research is to address changing job market needs to be induced by new and forthcoming Albanian public policies on sustainable territory administration. Open interviews and structured questionnaires have been used to identify the required skills and competencies. Three skill clusters have been identified: 1) territory management skills, 2) environmental management skills, and 3) rural development policy skills with some specificities related to the scale of activity (central vs local). The results show that a corpus of skills appears to be transversal and useful for a large range of job descriptions at a local and central level.

Keywords: Bottom-up approach, rural and territorial management, curriculum, skills, employer, higher education Albania

JEL Codes: A29, O13, O21

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Introduction

Higher education often suffers from minimal connection to the work market. Generally, the information imparted to higher education students during their study programmes is limited in terms of both the theoretical and practical elements (Gondwe & Walenkamp, 2011). This statement relates to a larger and more general question regarding the current role and organisation of the university. The question posed asks whether the university should in the future become an 'ivory tower' or a 'convenience store' (Claes, 2005). The latter is considered to dominate the higher education system of the majority of developing countries. The gaps between the HEI study programme offer and job market need result in increasing unemployment or forces graduates to enter the unskilled/temporary job market (Gebel & Giesecke, 2011). The HEI should adapt their educational offer within their structure, because 'educational performance cannot be measured in terms of years of educational attainment exclusively' (Bol et al., 2019). A paradox has ensued in terms of the amount of knowledge imparted to HEI graduates and the level of unemployed or underemployed people (Livingstone, 2018). Young workers are even more at risk of unemployment compared to other population groupings. During periods of economic fluctuation, this trend is even more evident (Caliendo et al., 2011). Studies on employability show that 'workers have higher earnings when they are in occupations that match their educational level and field of study, but the size of this earnings boost depends on the clarity and strength of the pathway between their educational credential and the labour market' (Bol et al., 2019). The authors further contend that the educational match with the job market, and the strength of this linkage, is related to at least two factors: i) educational credentials and ii) the type of higher education system developed in a specific country. Educational credentials are related to the link that exists between the education provided and the job market need. These links may be affected by several factors like the field of education; some fields of education are much narrower and have a stronger link with the job market compared with others, e.g. medicine vs. political science studies. At the national level, the links between education and the job market are related to the characteristics of the education system or generic education vs. vocational education.

Youth unemployment is a central issue in Mediterranean countries and is even more urgent where a large portion of the young population is not employed (Eichhorst & Neder, 2014).

In the Western Balkans, there is an important gap between the skills of new graduates and the job market demand. According to Bartlett and Uvalić (2019), only one out of three new graduates in countries in the Western Balkans has the skills required in the job market. In the same vein, the UNDP notes that youth unemployment in Albania is twice as high as other working-age groups at a national level. This can be attributed to several factors. According to Lamo and Messina (2010), post-socialist countries have a higher level of mismatch between education and the job market offer. In the Western Balkans, less than one

employee out of two (48%) is adequately matched in terms of education and the job market demand (Bartlett & Uvalić, 2019). Albania follows this general trend, with 46% of employees working in job positions matching the education level of employees and the rest, 54%, having an education level that is above or below the requirements of the job market (Bartlett & Uvalić, 2019). According to UNDP, this is produced partly by 'shortcomings in the educational and vocational education and training systems, coupled with the challenges to equip youth with knowledge and skills relevant to the labour market'. Lack of information about the labour market is attributed as one reason for the educational mismatch. In many cases, higher education institutions in Albania cannot obtain this information to use to produce labour market-based study programmes. e. According to a study undertaken recently on unemployment amongst HE graduates in the Western Balkans found that unemployment was three times higher compared with the EU28 (i.e. 16.2% for the Western Balkans and 5.6% for the EU28) and that one out of three (37%) recent HE graduates in the Western Balkans is not employed at all (Bartlett & Uvalić, 2019). Thus, the region has a double objective to tackle; firstly it must adapt HE graduates to the new job market need and offer attractive new study programmes for recent graduates. Albania follows the general pattern of the Western Balkans region (respectively with an unemployment rate of 17.2% for all HE graduates and 27.7% for recent graduates).

In conclusion, there is a higher chance that a recent HE graduate in Albania will be unemployed or work in a job position that requires greater or less education than that attained. This conclusion requires thorough reflection on study programme design, by the country's HEI, based on the job market need.

The main objective of this research is to provide a methodological framework to address improvements required in responding to the latest job market demand, as in the case of new skills identified by the territory administration reform in Albania in 2014.

The territory administration reform presents an ideal example of a multidisciplinary study programme construction that is underdeveloped in Albania's Higher Education Institutions (HEI). In this case, the challenge is not only to build up a study programme strongly based on the job market demand but also to organise a study programme that is adapted to the needs of administrative workers who are already employed in central or local administration who are faced with an updated job description, requiring new interdisciplinary skills in local administration that they do not currently possess.

In Albania, territory administration reform has been a much-debated topic since the fall of the communist regime. Albania has already faced important reforms that have completely modified its territory planning process from the previous divided urban-rural planning approach to a more comprehensive one. For a long time, spatial planning in Albania has been chara

cterised by a highly hierarchical system where national interests are prioritised over local concerns (Cotella & Berisha, 2016). The fall of the Soviet bloc and the

Europeanisation process paved the way to new laws (from 1993 to 2014) that address the logic of territory administration, perceived as a technical and regulative process through which urban-rural territorial development are addressed. The last law approved on the matter (Law 115/2014) reduced the number of first-level local units to 61 municipalities. This territorial consolidation establishes the economies of scale, through which the larger local government units can provide more effective and cost-efficient services. In the same vein, it aims to answer the requirements of the EU integration process by setting up an administrative structure capable of efficiently managing the pre-accession process.

The territory administrative reform has erased the communes related to rural areas. Since 2014 the basic local territory administrative unit is the municipality, which encompasses both urban and rural areas. The local and central administration has limited knowledge of the holistic vision of sustainable territory administration related to both urban and rural areas, including their interactions. Coming from former urban or rural administrative units, they are faced with new issues and development strategies without having extra, often specialised, methodological tools to perform these new tasks. Beyond the public sector, new institutions, including civil society organisations and private companies involved in consultancy and information management, are also emerging and represent the potential for future employment in this sector.

The paper also aims to explore the possibilities in identifying the differences that exist between the skills required at a central and local level. The paper is organised as follows: the second section provides a general overview of the methodological approach and sampling method, while the following section presents the results and discussions and notes the identified skills required for the local and central administration related to territory administration and economic development. Finally, section four provides some conclusions and recommendations.

Theoritical background

The development of a methodological approach regarding the skills needed in a specific economic sector requires the cooperation of several existing methods. The first step is to identify the skills required within a specific sector, and how this translates into improving the teaching competencies of an existing study programme or the development of a new study programme. In the case of the skills required by municipalities and other local actors following the implementation of territory reform in Albania, these required are being developed in line with the early stage of territory reform implementation. According to Clardy (2008), the Human Development Resources theory aims to assess ‘the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) needed for a job or task performance, as well as the competencies that ‘include qualities such as motives, traits, self-concept, values, and so on’. The second stage of the approach is to define an adequate study programme that can complete these skills and competence requirements by updating or organising a new HE study programme. Hernández-de-Menéndez and Morales-Menendez

(2016) consider Competency-Based Education (CBE) as an appropriate tool to fill in the gaps between HE study programmes and the needs of the sector. This model, widely developed in western countries, is one of the main pillars of HE programme improvement. The CBE model is defined:

'problem-based learning, mastery-based learning, outcome-based learning, and performance-based learning. On a general level, CBE model is an outcome-based approach to education that incorporates modes of instructional delivery and assessment efforts designed to evaluate mastery of learning by students through their demonstration of the knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and behaviours required for the degree sought' (Gervais et al., 2016).

This model is particularly appropriate for study programmes that are drawn from multidisciplinary resources and disciplines and are based on practical information and the mastery of the latter (Albanese, 2000). Our methodological approach will develop over these two pillars, firstly identifying the needed competencies for the new study programme and secondly, organising a study programme according to the CBE model with a strong practical and multidisciplinary component.

The main issue of our methodology lies in how to identify the needed competencies since the sector is at the very beginning of its development. The literature agrees that several dimensions may be grouped in at least 13 dimensions, including the (1) organisational dimension (language and documents, leadership, creativity and innovation, interpersonal interactions, information and computer, team worker); (2) field-specific dimension (field-specific operational skills, field-specific knowledge, and field-specific experiences); and (3) individual dimension (ambitious, discipline, persistence, and ethics) (Ho, 2015). Our main work on skill identification in a study programme is to specify the skills that should be part of the second group and to develop these in a way that increases the skills in the first and third group.

Stakeholders interested in aligning higher education with the labour market usually focus on two different theoretical goals. The first, job vacancy alignment, involves corresponding graduate numbers from particular programmes with the demand for workers. The second goal involves aligning the skills and competencies offered by HEIs with those demanded by the labour market (Cleary & Noy, 2014).

Little agreement exists in the literature regarding the best method for data. collection on job market demand. However, several instruments are employed depending on context. Publicly available data includes that produced by governmental organisations, such as Labour Offices or Statistics Institutes. This source of information is not always available in developing countries for two reasons; first, because of the scarcity of capacity to gather data related to the labour market and, second, the information provided does not detail needed skills.

Real-time job data relies on proprietary systems to collect and analyse unstructured data. According to Milfort and Kelley (2012), data validity and reliability in terms of representativeness of real-time labour market information are not well known. Another frequently used approach, to collect information on demanded skills in

target labour markets, involves surveying employees directly through focus groups and in-depth interviews, etc. This approach has been used recently in several capacity-building projects in developing countries†. Direct engagement with employers on Developing a Curriculum (DACUM) methods provides a structured way to identify and validate the specific skills and knowledge needed for particular professions (Cleary & Noy, 2014).

The identification of field-specific dimensions in our methodological approach is based on a participative approach with professionals who are currently dealing with jobs that are similar to the professional identity we are going to create. The gaps identified in their day to day work should provide information on missing skills that need to be improved. Our approach is applied in the identification of a skills gap that prompted the development of a HE study programme on local and territorial development in Albania; this came about following territory administration reform that changed the country's local organisation and with it the tasks of local authorities.

Methode and procedures

This paper proposes a sequenced path methodological framework that can be used by universities and other vocational education institutions for similar studies regarding the job market need in both the public and private sectors.

The methodological approach is not based on the identification of discrepancies existing between the actual skills and importance of needed skills, but rather on a participatory approach based on three consecutive steps: i) skills identification, ii) level of acceptance for each skill, and iii) identification of the proficiency required for each level of skills. At the end of this procedure, we will have identified the skills required in the job market and the level of proficiency required for these skills. This information can be easily transformed into a study programme.

To apply this methodological approach, three steps are applied: 1. stakeholder mapping, 2. open interviews with the stakeholders, and 3. a closed questionnaire.

Stakeholder mapping was built up by using keywords such as territory planning and management, rural development, environment, etcetera. An inventory of 30 organisations was used for sampling reasons. The respondents were employees from different backgrounds in several institutions dealing with rural development, the environment, and the territory administration of both urban and rural areas.

Following the completion of stakeholder identification, 30 open interviews were organised. The main objective was to identify the skills and competencies most frequently requested in the labour market. The open interview was structured into two sections; data from the first part of the questionnaire was collected concerning the demographic characteristics of respondents and the organisation for which they work, its scope, size, etcetera. The second section details information on future

† Erasmus+Eu project on capacity building, EU Commission Tirana/Albania.

training needs. The analysis of the open interviews provides a consolidated list of skills regrouped into three categories according to their affinity. These groups are 1. Rural development policies and instruments, 2. Territory Management, and 3. Environmental management.

To obtain a better view of the work profiles and need assessment process based on the open questionnaires, four professional profiles were identified. Information collected included respondents' actual job position, tasks, the organisations in which they work, and/or for whom they work. The pool of skills was established and used in the closed questionnaire.

Administrators - recognised staff members who lead a group of specialists to put in place elements of public policies.

Field Specialists (Extension service) - the mission of these specialists is to provide technical support to projects and collect monitoring and evaluation data in the field in a defined domain: agronomists, veterinarians, forestry specialists, etc.

Planners (specialists and sector heads) - under the supervision of an Administrator, they analyse the context of the territory and design a framework that will allow other stakeholders to put projects/policies in place.

Data Managers as Field Specialists - undertake fieldwork and their remit is mostly around surveys and investigations. They organise surveys, collect data, organise databases (including GIS), process, and forward the same to the planner for further use.

To acquire perceptions about the importance attributed to each of the skills and competencies identified during the open interviews, the identified skills were included in a structured questionnaire.

Snowball sampling was applied for governmental and public stakeholders dealing with territory administration, rural development, and the environment at both local and national levels. This technique is also named exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). In terms of researchers and academia, Google Scholar was used to identifying potential stakeholders based on published research, such as rural development, environmental management, territory administration, innovation, and territory development, etc. The need assessment process was undertaken in two regions: one at a central level and the other focused at a local level in Tirana. The selection of both regions was made intentionally to obtain a broader representative perspective of the required skills at both the national and local levels. This is important to understand the two different institutional structures (local versus national), labour market needs, and competencies required. 66 questionnaires were completed, 41 at a central level and 25 at a local level.

The structured questionnaire is organised in two main parts, the first one collects information on the demographics, and the second on the level of proficiency required for the skills identified in step two of the methodology.

About 66% of respondents correspond to the 25-40 year age group. This sample characteristic is in line with the age structure of the Albanian population. Related

to the gender of respondents, 42% were female and 58% male. This sample does not reflect national gender figures, but rather the employment structure of respondents in both regions. The study found that males are more preponderant at a local level than centrally.
Years of experience was also an important factor of this job review and the analysis of results show that 60% of the sample have 1 to 4 years of experience, 21% reported having 5 to 10 years, and 19% have over 10 years. The large percentage (60%) in the first category reflects the high employee turnover in Albanian public administration due to political changes.

Results

Traditionally the information offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), particularly in Albania, tends to be highly specialised in one field and provides limited interdisciplinary knowledge. Although the HEIs tend to enlarge their offering range, particularly at the postgraduate level (Master's degree), much more needs to be done. Nowadays the majority of job positions in public administration and civil society require the incumbent to have diverse knowledge at a high interdisciplinary level.
Table 4 presents the respondent profiles and most important skills (horizontally) according to the level of proficiency required for each profile (where 1=very little proficiency and 5=very high proficiency). The distribution of skills is rather similar between profiles, meaning that there is a corpus of skills lacking in central and local administration and civil society employees. On the other hand, this corpus of skills appears to be transversal and useful for a large range of job descriptions at both levels. That said, some skills are more requested for some profiles and less so for others (e.g. project management for field specialists, environmental management for project managers and field specialists). Two reasons were identified as to why some differences exist among worker profiles: i) while the main skills are general and requested for nearly all profiles related to territory management at a central and local level, some are more appropriate for specific roles than others. In this case, the difference between profiles is not important. ii) Some differences are related to the minimal information of experts regarding skills. This lack of information can explain the broad differences identified in some profiles and be identified as the main issue during the expert interviews. Raising information and awareness is essential for successful reform application.

Table 1: Mean comparison - Rural development policies and instrument skills

Skills	Region	N	Mean	Mean difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
Project design preparation, evaluation	Local	25	3.04	-1.082	.005
	Central	41	4.12	-1.082	.013
	Local	25	3.12	-.880	.022

Economic and financial evaluation	Central	41	4.00	-.880	.043
Innovation in rural areas	Local	25	3.28	-.037	.913
	Central	41	3.32	-.037	.916
Institutions in rural development	Local	25	2.96	-.967	.009
	Central	41	3.93	-.967	.023
Pre-accession EU funds (project fiches)	Local	25	3.36	.409	.286
	Central	41	2.95	.409	.336
Common Agriculture Policy	Local	25	4.64	1.006	.000
	Central	41	3.63	1.006	.000
Policy evaluation quantitative methods	Local	25	4.48	.529	.027
	Central	41	3.95	.529	.031

Source: Authors

This is indicative of the most needed skills according to different job positions dealing with territory administration issues. The following paragraphs will analyse each of the identified skills and their respective importance at both central and local levels.

Rural development policies and instruments

The participation of Albania in EU funded projects opens up new requirements on project evaluation. The importance of evidence-based decision making, the identified impact evaluation gap, and the potential for impact evaluations to improve the effectiveness and accountability of development policy raise the need for better comprehension of "Policy evaluation quantitative methods". About 85% of the interviewed professionals consider that high and very high proficiency are required in this regard. Currently, policy quantitative evaluation methods are used only on a limited scale. In many cases, assessment is based on qualitative evaluation. Future steps for policy instrument implementation require the large scale use of quantitative evaluation methods. These new requirements for evidence-based results were also strongly expressed by the interviewed experts during the open interviews.

To the EU integration process and access to the funding of activities in rural areas, public actors are becoming more aware of the innovation concept. Although this is quite a new concept in Albania, the need to be in line with other countries is evoked as a necessity. In this framework, the respondents stress the need to enhance awareness of innovation, strategies to develop it in urban and rural areas, the special competencies of rural actors, and willingness to innovate. This is supported by the results on aptitude linked to innovation in rural areas: 69% of respondents reported that high and very high proficiency is needed. Despite this

skill being highly required, public actors are not fully aware of what and how innovation can occur in a multidisciplinary territorial action.
The third most required skill is project management, about 68% of respondents consider that high proficiency and very high proficiency is needed in "Project design, preparation and evaluation" to better perform their job. More specifically, project evaluation is considered very important in terms of policy and strategy elaboration, while project design is deemed very important at a local level, mainly for municipalities and Centres for Transferring Agriculture Technologies.

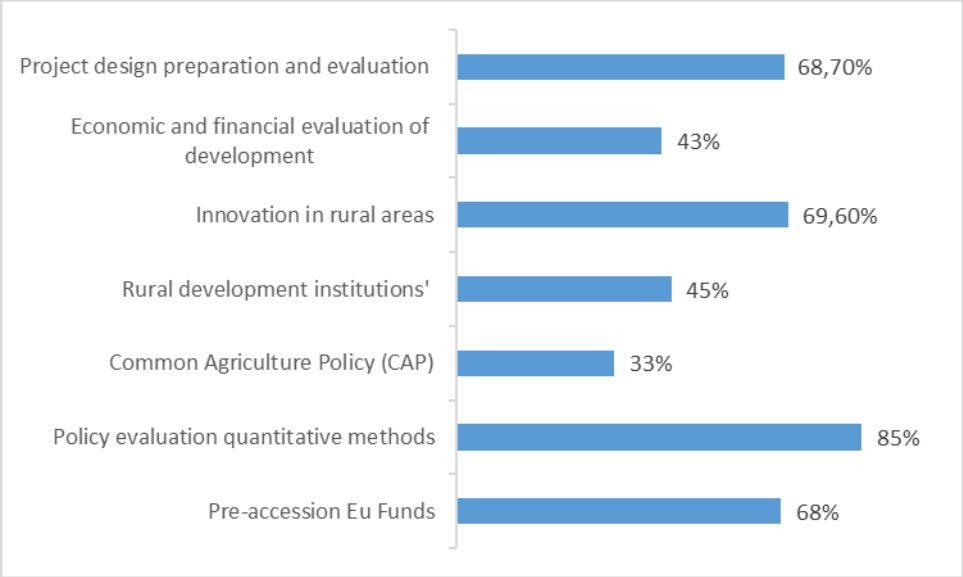

Figure 1. The Rural development policies and instrument skills

Source: Authors

Skills such as "*Economic and financial evaluation of development projects*", "*Rural development institutions*", and "*Common Agriculture Policy (CAP)*" were considered to be important and very important by less than 50% of the interviewed professionals. The first skill plays a key role in achieving the expected economic outcomes during project design and implementation. The lack of this type of knowledge was highlighted by several respondents. Specialists noted that the EU guidelines on financial and economic analysis might offer a good opportunity to become familiar with the general evaluation process.

Strengthening rural institutions and developing organisational capacity at a local and national level is crucial to the development and management of the new rural-urban spaces emerging from recent territorial reform applied in Albania. The need for cooperation between institutions is considered important, and high proficiency in "*Rural development institutions*" is required to cope with other activities in rural and urban areas that also deal with innovation, the environment, and tourism. Rural institutions remain a weak point in terms of development strategies. The limited willingness to be organised to reduce the difficulties encountered by the rural

population stems from historical factors (i.e. negative memories of socialist production cooperatives). These memories are still present and reduce considerably the organisational network in rural and urban areas. This is considered to be one of the main obstacles to the application of development strategies. The respondents suggested that it is important to obtain more information about how to bypass these difficulties. Further, harmonisation with EU legislation to optimise access to EU market opportunities raises the need to acknowledge the procedures in a sustainable way (high staff turnover in public institutions due to government changes) and the university may offer this opportunity.

Experts, especially those working at the Ministry of Agriculture and other agricultural bodies, require information concerning the "*Common Agriculture Policy (CAP)*". This is of critical importance for future negotiations with the EU related to the agriculture and rural development chapter. However, the results show that there is minimal consideration given to the CAP. In the coming years, the agricultural experts of Albania's Agricultural Ministry will have to develop negotiations with EU institutions. The low result for this competence (33%) may be linked with the measuring tool used in this survey. In the rural development policies and instruments skills family, the stakeholders differentiated their preferences by assigning higher scores to the most vitally-needed skills.

One of the main aims of this study is to identify whether there are differences in labour market needs between central and local administration employees. A comparison is made between the two regions, central and regional, regarding the required skills proficiency of each area. It is necessary to also understand if differences exist in the typology of skills required in each region. A student t-test for different sample sizes is effectuated to gain more accurate information on skill proficiency levels. The results show statistical differences concerning the Rural Development Policies and Instruments set of skills between the level of proficiency required at a central and local level. At the central level, the most requested skills are related to project design, economic and financial evaluation, and rural development institutions. At a regional level, the emphasis was placed on skills related to EU funds, CAP, and policy evaluation methods.

Somewhat surprisingly, the results suggest that familiarity with agriculture policies and their instruments is more often considered to be important at the regional level than centrally, perhaps related to the fact that a large number of agricultural policy experts are located in the capital. At the central level, Tirana Municipality and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development employ a large number of experts, while the other municipalities lack such expertise; this is reflected in the need for the latter to improve its knowledge around national and EU agriculture and rural development policies. 52 per cent of the professionals interviewed at the regional level (Korça) consider that knowing Policies and Instruments in Rural and Territorial Development is highly important/required. Such information is highly appreciated in the municipalities for at least two reasons: firstly, the local competencies and duties of municipalities have increased considerably and local authorities are responsible for applying such policies. Secondly, the main part of the funding in rural areas originates from these national and EU funding schemes

and local experts are required to provide information on how to apply these to local actors.

Territory management skills

The respondents considered that rural and urban area management requires important theoretical concepts on spatial economics dealing with where, what, and how to distribute different economic activities. About 61% consider that high and very high proficiency is required in this set of skills. Regional analysis is also a requirement because, within the new planning units, regional management departments deal with several interrelated economic activities in proximity within specified areas or types of areas. Knowledge of regional development is considered very important in the departments of regional development, territory planning, and other related departments at both central and local levels. About 70% of respondents stated that high and very high proficiency is a requirement for improved activity deployment.

According to the data derived from the open interviews, there is a great need for Geographical Information Systems (GIS) training, particularly at a local level (municipalities). Employees at the local level handle maps and other map-related data management tools with difficulty. Training around GIS was also suggested at the central level (ministries) since very few people are skilled in such programmes. About 62% of respondents considered data management tools to be very important, thus high and very high proficiency is required.

About Territory Management skills, the analysis of results shows that spatial economics and regional development are considered more important at a central level than local, an important statistical difference shown in table 4. Territory and data management received almost the same evaluation in both regions. This result is explained by the fact that methodological instruments around territory planning are needed at a central, regional, and local level. 46% of the respondents at the local level perceived these skills as having very little importance and consequently not required in their profession. Centrally, however, only 5% perceived this skill set as being of little importance; most respondents (33%) considered it to be of high importance and 30% felt it was of very high importance.

Environmental management skills

These skills are very important not only at the central level but also in the municipalities. Local municipalities are dealing with forestry and rural development, and professionals require more skills in terms of environmental asset evaluation. Local municipalities are required to understand and deal with ecosystems and biodiversity interactions, measurement and monitoring techniques, risk management methods and techniques, environmental impact evaluation, environmental performance evaluation methods, environmental design concepts and practices, and have an understanding of natural resource management methods. These are just some of the skills highlighted by employees during the open interviews.

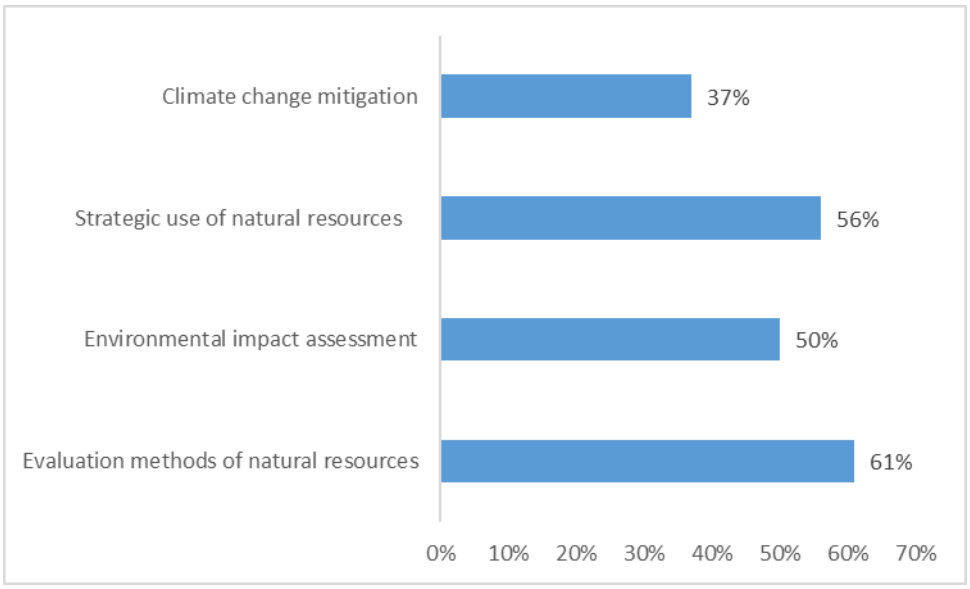

Figure 2: Environment management skills

Source: Authors

61% of respondents considered that high and very high proficiency in evaluating natural resources is a requirement. The results show also that about 30% of the surveyed professionals do not consider this skill to be important. This may be linked to a general lack of awareness about environmental issues in Albania. According to Dunlap and York (2008), awareness of environmental problems and support for environmental protection has been a phenomenon limited to wealthy, highly industrialised, and primarily Northern-hemisphere nations. This suggestion is consistent with the perspective of neoclassical economics in which environmental amenities are viewed as "luxury goods" of concern mainly to those whose more basic needs for food, housing, and survival are adequately met (Cropper & Oates, 1992; Pearce et al., 2013).

Regarding the decentralisation process framework, a large scale of local natural resources will be managed by local administrative units. This can be quite an issue for local government employees who are not prepared to deal with these issues. The environmental impact assessment is another key element that must be mainly managed by local government authorities. This transversal analysis should be more developed, even for the central authorities, around the framework related to the strategic use of natural resources.

Effective climate change mitigation strategies will be achieved only if all actors and institutions act with strong cooperation. Within this framework, knowing the principles of climate change mitigation is an important issue, not only to align our policies with the EU but also in the broader context. However, about 37% of respondents considered that high proficiency and very high proficiency is needed. Protected areas and international ecological networks are other skills mentioned as important for the improved management of environmental assets. According to NGO employees, natural disasters (flooding and landslide risk) and prevention

measures are not covered in Albania and do not currently receive enough attention. An integrated approach to local strategic planning is a priority and the environment should view it as a higher priority on the political agenda.

The perception that environmental management is an important skill did not have much impact on territorial organisations at the local level, with more than half of the interviewees considering it unimportant. Only a small cohort (5%) stated that it is important. By contrast, at a central level, this skill is considered as being of high proficiency by 33%, with only 10% considering it to be not at all important.

Conclusions

The identification of training skills and the construction of new study programmes is one of the main challenges facing HEIs. In a reforming job market environment, it becomes even more important and at the same time difficult to tackle.

The identification of such skills must be the result of sound scientific methods that incorporate the main actors in the job market for different regions of the country. The HEIs ought to be aware that the information provided should be in line with regional specificities and market needs.

This skills identification methodology is not appropriate only for Albania, but all Mediterranean countries experiencing territory reforms and the decentralisation process. Mediterranean EU member states must modify the central and local administration role due to national reform, or reshape the role of the national or local administration regarding territory administration.

Since the 1990s, Western Balkan countries (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania) have initiated important territory reforms as part of their political and EU integration agenda (Cotella & Berisha, 2016). In that regard, the fate of decentralisation or administrative reform depends on the capacities of local administrations to implement such reform.

Capacity building at the local level is another reasonable concern, especially taking into account the fact that many local government units are located in remote areas and unable to attract qualified staff. Numerous local government units, in particular municipalities, have benefited from technical assistance and training programmes offered by various donors. Concluding the quality of local administration, in general, is not an easy task, as the latter depends on the local context and the needs and priorities of each community. A thorough debate should be developed regarding the skills lacking by public servants in terms of communication and proactive attitudes with other local actors. This should be analysed in a post-communist historical context.

In Albania, the local administration is affected by a continuous exodus toward the capital or abroad, and as a result is continuously understaffed, requiring a constant need for training. The high turnover of Albanian administration makes life learning training more necessary at central and local administration levels.

Territory management in Albania is a new and multidisciplinary field that requires skills training in at least three main domains, i.e. rural development policies, territory management, and environment management.
The needs at central and local levels are diversified, with methodological skills more in demand at the central level and policy instruments and application more required at a local level.
Although the instrument used in this case provides sound results regarding the present need at a local and central level, it provides only minimal information on the future development of need.

Acknowledgements

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Annexes

Table 2: Mean comparisons - Territory Management skills

Skills	Region	N	Mean	Mean difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
Spatial economics	Local	25	3.00	-.951	.012
	Central	41	3.95	-.951	.030
Regional Development	Local	25	2.36	-1.103	.007
	Central	41	3.46	-1.103	.014
Territory management instruments	Local	25	3.60	-.107	.757
	Central	41	3.71	-.107	.784
Data Management	Local	25	3.60	-.107	.757
	Central	41	3.71	-.107	.784

Source: Authors

Table 3: Mean comparison - Environmental Management

Skills	Region	N	Mean	Mean difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
Evaluation method of natural resources	Local	25	3.32	-.582	.056
	Central	41	3.90	-.582	.082
Economic evaluation of environmental goods	Local	25	3.16	-.352	.288
	Central	41	3.51	-.352	.297
Environmental impact assessment	Local	25	1.40	-1.917	.000
	Central	41	3.32	-1.917	.000
Strategic use of natural resources	Local	25	3.12	-.587	.070
	Central	41	3.71	-.587	.079
Climate change mitigation	Local	25	1.68	-1.881	.000
	Central	41	3.56	-1.881	.000

Table 4: The level of proficiency required of the skills for each profile

Skills	**Project Managers**	**Administrators**	**Field Specialists**	**Planners**	**Data Managers**
Instruments and Policies	5	5	5	4	4
Project Management	5	5	1	4	5
Environmental Impact Assessment	1	5	4	4	1
Data Management	5	5	5	3	5
Environmental Management	1	5	1	3	5
Territorial	5	4	1	3	5

Administration					
(Total number of surveys)	16	12	13	21	4

Source: Authors