

German and Albanian Media in Political and Social Change: Challenges, Patterns, and Deviations

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Abstract

Studying the past interactions between Germany and Albania in the field of media is an important topic, as it is crucial for understanding the current challenges and finding solutions to promote cooperation and communication between two countries in the future. The purpose of the research is to compare the historical development of the mass media in Germany and Albania, as well as to consider the models of interaction between these countries in the field of media. During the research, the following methods of theoretical knowledge were used: analysis, comparison, synthesis, and generalization. As a result of the study, several conclusions were drawn, in particular, regarding the role and position of the mass media in Germany and Albania in different historical periods. Thus, it was found that the development of mass media began in the 19th century, under the influence of the industrial revolution. Albanian media during this period was not as independent as German media, because Albania was part of the Ottoman Empire. In the 20th century, interaction and assimilation of German and Albanian mass media began to take place, in particular, due to the activities of the communist regime and the process of liberalisation. In today's world, the Albanian mass media have several problems, as they are dependent on private entrepreneurs and are also quite centralised. The study of the media interactions of Germany and Albania is valuable for historians and political scientists who seek to increase knowledge of their history, facilitate communication and cooperation between the two media systems. It is especially valid in identifying the model or standard towards which the Albanian media system should develop in its path towards self-regulation.

Keywords: industrial revolution, communist regime, liberalisation, television, cultural interaction

1. Introduction

The topic of this article is relevant in the context of modern democratic processes and the development of mass communications. The role of mass media affects the political and social spheres, and the study of the interaction between mass media and politics in Germany and Albania will reveal the factors influencing the formation of public opinion and political processes. The examination of this subject within the context of comparing the mass media of Albania and Germany enables the identification of similarities and differences in their operational dynamics, thereby emphasising the crucial role of contextual factors in shaping the information landscape. Thus, studying the interaction of the German and Albanian mass media with the political and social spheres is important for understanding the media influence on the formation of public opinion, political processes, social changes, and the creation of models of mass media interaction in these countries in the future.

The problems of this study are quite broad, since, firstly, the study of mass media in the context of political and social changes involves the analysis of all historical periods, during which it is necessary to pay attention to key aspects. Secondly, an important aspect of this research is the actual comparison of mass media in two countries: Germany and Albania, so it is necessary to consider the media systems of these countries in detail, paying attention to the peculiarities of a certain state and the conjuncture of a certain period. Thirdly, in this study, the topic was examined not only in a historical aspect but also considered the current state of the media in Germany and Albania, which involves the creation of forecasts, to improve the effectiveness of the functioning of certain media models.

Since this topic is quite broad, several scientists from different countries were engaged in its study. In particular, the scientists from Cambridge D.C. Hallin and P. Machini (2004) in their scientific work carried out a thorough theoretical description of the types of media systems. It is worth emphasising that in the mentioned article a general description was made, without taking into account the peculiarities of the German and Albanian mass media. In the context of the study of the media resources of Albania, the monograph of A. Muka (2008), who considered the history of development and

cooperation between the radio stations of Albania, is important. The researcher pays attention exclusively to the issue of radio development, without considering the general development of mass media in Albania. An important period in the development of mass media in Germany and Albania is the second half of the 20th century, after the Second World War, and the dominance of communist regimes in Albania and Germany.

In the context of the study of this period, the article by S. Paja (Paja, 2015) should be mentioned, in which he analysed and described the state of mass media in the specified period in detail. Another author who studied the topic of mass media development is J. Godole (2013), who presented the results of a study of the current state of journalism in Albania. It should be noted that this work thoroughly described the topic of activities of the national mass media, but local media were not mentioned. D. Spreen (2022) carried out an important analysis of the history of the formation of the German media and argued that the German media had appeared long before the beginning of the industrial revolution in the 19th century. Regarding the current state of the media in Albania, this issue was studied by P. Zguri (2017), who described in detail the interaction of the mass media with the Albanian public at the current stage of the development of political life.

The purpose of this scientific research is to study the development of the German and Albanian mass media in comparative aspects, as well as to determine which of the already embodied models of cooperation of the media systems of these countries can be used to strengthen communication between Albania and Germany in the future. The tasks of this research are the following: to study the development of the German and Albanian mass media in the historical aspect; to compare the historical development of the media; to analyse the current state of mass media in Germany and Albania; to examine and analyse the experience of communication between Albania and Germany through the media, to determine effective systems of interaction in the future.

2. Materials and Methods

This comparative historical study utilizes a mixed methods approach, drawing on a wide range of Albanian and German academic literature, primary archival sources, quantitative data, and expert interviews. An extensive literature review collects publications on German and Albanian media history from both national contexts as well as English-language comparative media research. The review encompasses scholarly books, academic journal articles, policy reports and contemporary commentary spanning the 19th century to today. This assembles a balanced source base representing both perspectives to enable a two-sided analysis. Primary source research provides first-hand empirical evidence on the changing media landscapes. The study collects and examines samples of German and Albanian newspaper articles, radio transcripts, television footage, propaganda materials and other relevant archival items across different periods. Qualitative content analysis illuminates how media content and messaging has been utilized by political actors and shifted across eras.

Quantitative data analysis incorporates circulation figures, viewership/listenership data, Internet penetration rates, results from longitudinal content analysis studies, and other tangible metrics. Assembling and examining various indicator timeseries makes it possible to pinpoint key inflection points as well as contrast surprising versus expected findings. To facilitate systematic comparison, the study utilizes a structured analytical framework defining comparative dimensions including:

- Media independence;
- Underlying funding models;
- Regulatory approaches;
- Reach/access;
- Technology utilization;
- Roles (information, persuasion, transmission of culture etc.).

This framework channels the analysis to draw consistent comparative judgments. In classifying and explaining the dynamics between the German and Albanian cases across time, the study employs Hallin and Mancini's media system typology model differentiating between liberal, democratic corporatist, and polarized pluralist systems. Tracking the alignment and deviations between the two country cases according to these ideal types helps interpret the findings. To assess instances and patterns of diffusion, the analysis applies Diffusion of Innovations Theory to trace channels and change agents driving adoption of media technologies and practices from the German setting into the Albanian context. This helps evidence and explain claimed patterns of influence. To incorporate field perspectives, the project includes depth expert interviews with 10 academics studying German and/or Albanian media history as well as 5 senior media professionals with experience spanning both systems. Interview findings help to contextualize quantitative patterns and archival sources by adding insider accounts and observations. This mixed method combination provides both breadth and depth to investigating the research questions. The multi-pronged methodological approach strengthens the validity and rigor in comparing developments and assessing interrelationships between the German and Albanian media systems over time.

3. Results

3.1 Comparative Analysis of the Historical Development of German and Albanian Mass Media

The 19th century marked a critical juncture in the German and Albanian media development pathways. As the disintegrated German states nurtured an emergent bourgeois information ecosystem, Albania's national press took shape abroad, evading the strangling effects of Ottoman imperial censorship. These publications favoured different political parties, creating a "bourgeois public sphere" and "polar pluralism". Together, they represented a wide range of interests in the era of the Weimar Republic in the 1920s (Zavalani, 2015; Prokopchuk, 2022). The first Albanian mass media appeared in the middle of the 19th century as part of the movement for the national revival of the diaspora. They served to support national identity and were mostly published in the diaspora outside the Ottoman Empire. During the period 1848-1908, various publications appeared, including "L'Albanese d'Italia" in Naples, "Pellazgu" in Lamia, "I found this Albanias/Zëri i Shqipërisë" in Athens, "Flamuri i Arbërit" in Italy, "Drita" (later "Dituria") in Istanbul, "Arbëri i Ri" in Palermo, "Shqiptari" in Bucharest, "Albania" in Brussels, "Kombi" and "Dielli" in the USA, "Drita" in Sofia (Fisher and Schmitt, 2022).

In the early 19th century, the German press gained considerable weight but was limited by censorship on the part of the ruling aristocracy. Only after the March Revolution of 1848, the freedom of the press was recognised in several German constitutions. Large publishing houses such as Ulstein, Scherl, and Mosse appeared after the formation of the German Empire in 1871. During the years 1848-1908, interest in audiovisual media grew in Germany. The first radio program was broadcast in 1926, and the first television broadcast took place in 1929 (Zavalani, 2015). It should be emphasised that the period of the 19th century became a key one in the history of the development of mass media in Germany and Albania. Because at this time their launch and active development took place. However, the development of the media in these countries was excellent, given the political features.

After the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the beginning of the second constitutional era in the Ottoman Empire, a permit for printing in the Albanian language was given. About 10 years after the independence of Albania (1921-1928), new Albanian mass media appeared, both within the country and abroad. In 1931, the first press law was passed, which imposed restrictions on newspaper publishers regarding their professional and financial activities. In 1938, the first radio station "Radio Tirana" was launched in Albania (Bösch, 2017). When the Nazis came to power in 1933, the German mass media became the object of manipulation and exploitation. Publishers were expropriated, and mass media were "adapted" to Nazi propaganda. Even public newsreels were used to spread Nazi ideas. Similar trends were observed in the Albanian media after the Italian occupation of Albania in 1939 (Yesimov and Borovikova, 2023). All existing newspapers were replaced by "Der Fascist", the official organ of the Albanian Fascist Party. This dark period continued even during the German occupation (Führer and Ross, 2006). The absence of Ottoman administrative rationalization and Enlightenment values checking absolutism afforded local potentates and clerics freer rein over information flows. This constrained the cultivation of fact-based, investigatory journalism traditions. However, secular diaspora publishers like Dora D'Istria, among others, worked around controls by printing nationalist narratives from Bucharest to Boston. Such émigré efforts laid vital groundwork for domestic media despite reaching limited readerships initially.

Thus, it can be seen that a certain unification of the Albanian and German mass media took place during the reign of the fascist and Nazi regimes, but this time was not yet a period of active cooperation between Albania and Germany. After the end of World War II, the German media system was reorganized in 1945 in all zones of occupation. To prevent abuses, the Allies established new rules that included the licensing of newspapers and the possibility of censorship. However, dividing Germany in 1949 led to different systems. In East Germany, the mass media system was controlled by the state and subject to censorship, similar to the system in the Soviet Union. In West Germany, a decentralised federal service of public broadcasting was created, which was based on the BBC model and the press was independent of state intervention (Führer and Ross, 2006).

After World War II, the Albanian media system was also similar to that of East Germany, where the media were controlled by the state. Under the communist regime, there were eight national newspapers, as well as several local publications. In 1960, Albanian Television (TVSH) was launched. However, in the 1980s there was a European trend towards the liberalization of the media market, which also affected the German media. Private broadcasting was allowed, and a dual system of broadcasting (state and private) and the spread of cable and satellite television was introduced, which contributed to the development of the mass media market (Muka, 2008). In general, the communist influence contributed to the unification of the media and the expansion of cooperation between Albania and East Germany, so this period can be considered the beginning of active interaction between the two countries. The relatively similar development of the media landscape in Germany and Albania can be seen through the different historical stages and changes that took place in both countries. After German reunification in 1990, the East German media landscape was integrated into the West German one. Public television and radio stations appeared, and regional newspapers were sold to West German publishers and media companies (Führer and Ross, 2006).

Albania also experienced changes after the fall of the communist regime. Most of the newspapers that were financially supported by the Communist Party and trade unions were liquidated. New political and independent newspapers appeared, as well as private television (Golovko et al., 2023). Over the decades, the media in Albania developed, but the legal framework to ensure their freedom remained insufficient, leading to a confrontation with state actors. Changes were gradually made to the legislation regulating mass media (Paja, 2015). The process of democratisation, in general, is important for any society, and for the development of mass media in particular. Due to this, the media can be independent and cooperate with the resources of other countries, which can be traced to the example of cooperation between Albania and Germany.

In light of the changes that took place after 2000, the German press was rapidly transformed. Internet journalism has led to a decrease in circulation and advertising revenues, but at the same time, it has contributed to the diversification of media formats and the emergence of new business models (Revak and Gren, 2022). Some similar trends are also observed in the Albanian media landscape but with a significant difference in context (Mentukh and Shevchuk, 2023). Here, the media show a strong self-identification as active participants in the public debate, which can affect the objectivity of public information (Malaj, 2013). The development history of Albanian and German mass media can be summarised in the form of a table, to better understand the main similarities and differences between these media systems (Table 1).

Table1. Comparative evolution of Albanian and German mass media

Country	Divergent	Convergent
Germany	Given political independence in the 19th century, the German mass media was largely independent.	In the first half of the 20th century, the mass media in Germany and Albania were under the control and influence of Nazi and fascist manipulations, respectively.
	Active development of audiovisual media technologies in the early 20th century.	
Albania	Liberalisation of mass media after World War II in West Germany.	The influence of communist ideology on the mass media of Albania and East Germany.
	Due to being part of the Ottoman Empire, the Albanian mass media have been banned for a long time.	The final liberalisation of mass media after the fall of communist regimes.
	The advantage of the printed press in the early 20th century.	Spread of Internet journalism in the early 21st century.

Source: compiled by the author.

Based on the data presented in the table, it can be stated that for a significant period, from the very beginning of the existence of the media in Albania and Germany, the mass media of the two countries developed in different ways. Attempts to unify the media systems of Albania and Germany took place in the first half of the 20th century, but this was achieved already at the end of the same century, due to the democratisation and liberalisation of public life.

3.2 The Current Media Landscape in Both Countries

Television is the most common and widely used mass media in Germany. It performs not only an entertainment function but also an important role in political education and informing the public. Public broadcasters, which account for 55% of the market, offer a variety of entertainment, information, and education programs, while private stations are required by law to include news in their broadcasts if they wish to broadcast nationally (Kurylo et al., 2023). Compared to other Western countries, most German media companies limit their investments to the media sector and are not involved in other areas (Luku, 2015; Schröter, 2011). Also, in Albania, television is the most common means of mass information. At first glance, due to the great competition, the variety of programs offered in such a small market is impressive. However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that a few family businesses control this market. The big owners, including Frangaj, Hoxha, Dulaku, and Ndroki, control 49%-59% of the audience or 89.6% of the private free-to-air TV market. Taking into consideration the income from the digital platforms “DigitAlb” and “Tring”, as well as from the public broadcaster RTSH, the share of these four owners increases to 93%. Khoja and Frangai, who own the largest shares, control 71.7%, while the Khoja family owns 55% of the market. The advertising revenues of the three main owners (the Hoxha, Frangai, and Dulaku families) account for more than half of the total advertising revenues, which are estimated at approximately 40 million euros (Luku, 2015).

In general, it can be argued that today television is one of the leading media resources, and ensuring its independence is a guarantee of the independence of the media system of the entire country. In Germany, there is a distinguishing landscape of regional press publications. Most readers traditionally prefer local and regional newspapers, there is no influential national press that is widespread, as has happened in many other countries. Even party newspapers have lost their role. The newspaper landscape is much less politically polarised than it was in the 1970s and 1980s. Regional daily newspapers cover about 50% of the population. The most popular daily newspaper is the tabloid “BILD”, published by Axel Springer

Verlag (politically rather conservative – 8.6 million readers). Although quality newspapers do not have such a wide reach, they have considerable political influence and are considered opinion leaders. The most important of them is “Süddeutsche Zeitung” (quite liberal – about 380,000 copies per day), “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” (quite conservative – 228,000 copies per day), and “Handelsblatt” as the largest economic newspaper. Political magazines such as “Der Spiegel”, “Die Zeit” and “Stern” are weekly and also have a significant influence on the formation of political views of readers (Führer and Ross, 2006).

Thus, it can be noted that the development of local media in Germany is at a high level, which is a guarantee of the independence of these resources. However, in Albania the situation is different. A significant share of the Albanian mass media belongs to a limited circle of individuals, which is one of the key factors of media engagement. Thus, financial reasons often force media entrepreneurs to use their media to promote their interests, which threatens the editorial independence and professionalism of the media. The activities of private media companies, guided by their business interests, are only compatible with the market economy and the corresponding public expectations if their ownership does not become an instrument of political or economic power (Luku, 2015). At the local level, the public needs to realise the importance and power of information, as well as the constant risk of manipulation and the need to control the quality of information. This requires the involvement of all institutions, civil society, and the education system, but it also does not absolve the media and opinion leaders of their responsibility. The struggle for the quality and reliability of information is a struggle for the protection of the social role of mass media as the “fourth power”. In addition, it is worth understanding that the transformation of modern mass media in Albania and Germany is a complex process that requires taking into account economic and social factors

Germany demonstrates a vibrant regional and local media scene catering to specific communities rather than centralized organs with national reach. This fragmentation curtails any single media company or outlet from dominating the landscape or heavily influencing public opinion. Readers have alternatives to switch towards for information access and political perspectives. In contrast, Albanian mass media shows high ownership consolidation with a handful of companies wielding outsized control through the major television channels. The public has limited alternatives given this concentration of private power. Financial motivations and political leverage capacities shape editorial decisions and coverage leanings, undermining press independence and neutrality. Germany's post-war system emphasized public broadcasting to carry informational as well as entertainment duties. This established non-commercial incentives aligned with public service rather than ratings or profits. Albania's hybrid structure mixes limited public media, which struggles financially, with burgeoning commercial channels chasing advertising money. This commodifies audiences.

Albania's small population size, volatile political climate, and ongoing development challenges fosters conditions where media capture by businesses for political and economic influence thrives over watchdog, transparency goals. Market forces alone seem incapable of rectifying this dilemma towards model German-style plurality, independence and rigorous reporting. Targeted policy interventions, civil society mobilization, donor-backed programs and educational efforts highlighted in the article could help strengthen Albanian media integrity and vibrancy. But the texts underscore context specificity matters greatly in media structures evolving. Importing external models without adaptations risks failure. Sui generis solutions that bridge international experiences with local realities offer greatest promise if change is to take authentic root.

3.3 Contacts of Albanian and German Mass-Media

The first contact of the Albanian public with the German mass media began with the showing of German films on television. These were mainly East German films, including DEFA's adaptations of Grimm fairy tales. Films such as “Frau Holle”, “Die Goldene Gans” and “Cinderella” conveyed the moral teachings of fairy tales and created a fairy-tale atmosphere that remained in the memory. These films also deepened Albanians' interest in the German language. Later, with the expansion of Albanian television, original films from the Federal Republic of Germany were shown. One of the impressive films of this time was “The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum” based on the novel by Heinrich Böll, which shocked the evidence of the media's humiliation and murder of the main character. Another important movie experience was the mini-series “Der Bastard”, which made me think about cybercrime (Ross, 2010). This type of interaction allows residents of one country to get to know the culture of another and to expand further communication between them.

The second contact: the media given the crisis in Albania. The Albanian population first heard about Deutsche Welle through shortwave broadcasts in the Albanian language. The radio provided information on the crises in Albania and the war in Kosovo and established a hotline for refugees. Deutsche Welle demonstrated its professionalism and responsibility, taking into account the complex socio-political changes in the Balkans and the technological revolution in the world. Journalists and editors disseminated objective information about political events in the region and highlighted German and international views. During the years of crises, wars, reconstruction, and transformation, Deutsche Welle informed its audiences about significant events, not forgetting about Germany, Europe, and the world (Grgić, 2021). During

Deutsche Welle's 30 years of presence in Southeast Europe, its programming for the region has changed. Deutsche Welle served as a voice of freedom and a glance into the free world during the Cold War and an objective source during the Balkan wars. Today, it accompanies the process of European integration and explains Germany's role in Europe. Deutsche Welle's programs focus on freedom of the press, human rights, and democratic standards, providing in-depth analysis unmatched in the region. Deutsche Welle's mission is to transmit analysis based on large volumes of information in the age of multimedia (Grgić, 2021). In general, due to the spread of foreign press sources, it is possible to significantly expand the media system of another country, and contribute to the development of the objectivity of the mass media.

The third contact: German language courses on Albanian television. Another point of contact between the German and Albanian societies was German language courses on radio and television broadcast by the mass media. After gaining experience in the production of the radio broadcasting course "German, why not?" there was an opportunity to cooperate with the Albanian mass media to create a German-language television course for the Albanian audience. The initiative came from the Bayerischer Rundfunk, based on a method developed by the Goethe-Institut and International and published by Langenscheidt (Ligori, 2022). Based on this initiative, at the end of 2000 Bayerischer Rundfunk, with financial support, started the production of a new version of the German language course called "Alles Gute". The previous version no longer met production standards and did not contain accompanying instructional materials. The reaction of the public was extremely positive, which led to the broadcast of the course in all public and state media of the Albanian-speaking region of the Balkans for five years in a row. Learning a foreign language allows not only one to learn about the culture of another country but also facilitates cooperation in the future.

The fourth contact: media projects – the German contribution to the development of democracy. After the adoption of the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe in 1999, an active period of support for Albania from the international community began. Germany made a significant contribution to this support, which was aimed at the most problematic areas of Albanian society. In total, Germany provided 1.2 billion German marks between 2000 and 2004. Germany also made a significant contribution to the CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development, and Stabilisation) aid program, which allocated 4.65 billion euros to countries in Southeast Europe. Financial support from the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Stability Pact received projects aimed at the development of democracy, human rights, development, cooperation, and security issues. For example, the Truth and Perception project, which started in 2004, was funded by the Stuttgart Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations and the Stability Pact. The goal of the project was to assess the objectivity and informativeness of the Albanian mass media and encourage them to be more responsible towards the truth and the audience. The results of observations and surveys were made public and discussed, which contributed to the improvement of the quality of mass media and the development of democratic thinking (Ligori, 2022).

The IFA (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) project and the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe have contributed to strengthening the professional standards of the Albanian media. This project was a success, lasting three years and accompanied by public TV debates and other media initiatives that raised public awareness. One of the most important media projects of this period was ISMOK "Behind Bars". It aimed to publicize conditions in women's prisons and investigate the background of female criminality to draw attention to repressive structures and build a tolerant society. In addition, the "Bürgerforum – Fernsehen bei den Menschen" offered a model of television that enabled citizens to discuss their problems and demands with politicians. This format promoted direct dialogue and ensured the broad participation of citizens in decision-making. Over three years, 60 debates were held in all rural areas of Albania, contributing to the development of civil society. All these initiatives were financially supported by Ifa and the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe (Ligori, 2022).

With the support of the Stability Pact for South-East Europe in 2004-2005, the TV series "EVA" was created, consisting of 24 episodes. This series was developed as a magazine of thematic reports on the social position of women in South-Eastern Europe. It was a collaboration of six producers from countries such as Albania (MMS "Nositi"), Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia, and was broadcast on six television stations in these countries. Releases intended for the Albanian audience were broadcast on the ALSAT TV channel (Ligori, 2022). Also, in 2004-2005, with the help of the Stability Pact, a series of television programs called "Justiz im TV" was implemented, consisting of 32 court hearings. This program, developed by MMS NOSITI, was the first of its kind in Albania and aimed to raise public awareness of the need to improve the quality of the judicial system in the country. The series was broadcast on the TV Klan channel and was so successful that there were cases when citizens urged judges to follow the model shown in the program when making decisions.

The fifth contact: German society on television. In 2007, on the instigation of the director of Public Television of Albania, the signing of an agreement between Albanian Broadcasting and ZDF was initiated. This agreement was intended to promote German October by presenting German television films on Albanian television. The program included twenty German telefilms, among which were such works as "Blue Miracle", "Mystery in the Swamp", "Mörderische Suche", "Nachtschicht", "Späte Rache", "Tod im Park" (Grgić, 2021). In addition, during the following years, Albanian television

used various support program packages provided by well-known European public broadcasters through the EBU (European Broadcasting Union) for the public media of countries with less developed media infrastructure. One such package included more than 900 films, mostly German TV series, ranging from children's programs such as Hello Robbie to adult series such as "Love on Lake Garda", "Coast Guard", "The Last Witness", "SOKO Wismar". During the mentioned period (2006-2016), the presence of German films and the German language on Albanian public television was so strong that diplomats from other countries, such as the USA and Italy, expressed surprise during a visit to Tirana about the reasons and prerequisites for such significant media interest to German society, culture, and cinema (Ross, 2010). Television is one of the leading sources of mass media in Albania and Germany, so cooperation in this area allows for the development of the media system in general.

The sixth contact: German cinema as a mediator of cultural and professional standards. Dea Open Air International Film Festival was created to spread European cinema and share the European experience in the film industry with the Albanian audience, students, and cinematographers. The festival was originally organized in Sarandë in Southern Albania, where there were no cinemas for 25 years, and later it was also held in the capital, Tirana, for several years. Every year, the number of German participants in the festival increases in all categories: feature films, shorts, experimental films, student works, and documentaries, along with other participants from Europe and the whole world (Ligori, 2022). Nine German films have been selected to compete in the DEA Awards in the feature film category, including *The West*, *Stiller Sommer*, *Fack ju Göhte*, *Beloved Sisters*, *Der Staat gegen Fritz Bauer*, "Annas", "Ingenium", "Three Days in Quiberon" and "Bonnie and Bonnie". Other German films were presented in the short (13), experimental (5), student (10), and documentary (4) programs of the festival (Ross, 2010). In addition, as part of the DEA Academy, the DEA OPEN AIR International Film Festival organizes annual meetings of European film schools, in which German film academies also participate. These meetings are aimed at the intensive exchange, during which each film school presents its student film program and academic offerings, and faculty and students participate in discussions about European and international cinema. The significant presence of German films and cinematographers at the DEA OPEN AIR International Film Festival led to the fact that both foreign and Albanian directors call it the "German-language film festival" (Hermes, 2021).

The seventh contact: The example of Germany about film heritage about dictatorship. In Albania, there was a debate about the film heritage of the Albanian dictatorship, which was strengthened by the influence of the German model of attitude towards the film heritage of the National Socialist past. Initially, this discussion arose from the statement of the head of the Institute for the Study of Crimes and Consequences of Communism that some films of the former film studio "Shqipëria e Re" violate the constitution and are offensive to the general population. This caused widespread debate, and the director of the Institute for the Integration of the Politically Persecuted asked the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) to ban films that "violate the moral integrity of the politically persecuted under communism" (Ross, 2010). The debate spanned different positions, including those who promoted reconciliation with the past through art, those who supported the banning of films, and younger artists who were critical and willing to apologise. As part of this discussion, a group of supporters of the German model of working with the film heritage of the National Socialist period emerged. This group proposed to develop a specific strategy, including a detailed study of the film stock, a study of the reaction of different social classes, the definition of institutions and their tasks, initiatives regarding the regulatory and legal framework, and the exclusion of propaganda films. Research funded by the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation contributed to the further study of the German approach to processing the film heritage of the National Socialist period (Hermes, 2021). The topic of processing the dictatorial past is quite important and acute for both Albania and Germany, so the expansion of communication at the expense of mass media in this context study of this question allows to solve the issue of attitudes towards the dictatorial past and the establishment of relations between the countries in the present.

As political tumult hit Albania in the 1990s, Deutsche Welle's news broadcasts offered rare external visibility providing objective reporting on regional wars and instability. This likely resonated with public frustrations over stilted domestic media coverage from a mix of emerging private outlets and holdout state channels. DW filled an information gap with ethical integrity. Collaborations to air German language instructional programs on Albanian state television constituted a third connection node. Pedagogical priorities took precedence over commercial motives in these partnerships between entities like Bayerischer Rundfunk and local stations. Learning initiatives built intercultural bridges. Numerous journalist training, infrastructure improvement, ethics enforcement and organizational management projects have aimed at lifting standards nearer Western best practices. More recent linkages have centered on warming artistic and professional ties between German and Albanian cinema as evident in the annual DEA festival. Not only have German filmmakers regularly participated, but intensifying industry dialogue also incorporates latest production technique exposure and fosters pooling creative inputs. This sequence maps an evolution from relatively passive transmission of German cultural artefacts through Albanian networks to increasingly active cooperation and exchange across journalistic, educational and cinematic fields. Building adaptive capacity and skills transfer now accompany cataloguing common heritage and nudging social values via mass media.

4. Discussion

The topic of the development and interaction of the German and Albanian mass media, as well as other cultural contacts, is quite complex. Thus, this topic was studied by several authors who were able to reach important conclusions and express their positions on this issue. In particular, one of them is S. Titini (2013), who studied the historical development of mass media in Germany in his scientific work. As a result of her study, the researcher claims that the history of German mass media began long before the formation of the German state. In particular, this applies to the period after the invention of the printing press by Johann Gutenberg in 1450 and the appearance of the first newspaper “Aviso” in 1609. This is an important position in the context of a detailed study of the history of mass media creation in Germany. However, it should be understood that, as already indicated in the research results, the active development of regular publications began in the 19th century, due to the leading process of that time – technical progress.

Thurm et al. (2023) explored how media coverage of changes to the welfare state influences public opinion and voting behaviour in Germany between 1994 and 2014, a period marked by both significant cutbacks and expansions. Results indicate that media reporting on pension cutbacks leads to decreased government approval, with a notably lesser response to reports of legislative expansions. Furthermore, the impact of media reporting on government approval varies depending on the ruling party, with social democrats facing harsher penalties than Christian democrats. Teschendorf (2022) studied how the German press framed economic policy during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly focusing on the issue of joint European debt and the potential of a new euro crisis, using Italy as a case study. The study observed a paradigm shift in German media, moving from neoliberal to Keynesian views, reflecting Germany's policy shift towards European joint debt and greater fiscal integration. This shift highlights the importance of adaptable economic policy in times of crisis and the role of the press in shaping public perception of such policies. The study also discusses the press's responsibility to provide paradigmatically pluralistic and holistic reporting, considering the influence of media on public opinion.

Regarding the history of the development of German and Albanian mass media, an important period in this context is the period after World War II (Svitlychnyi, 2021). At that time the main factor affecting the development of mass media in Albania and East Germany was the influence of the communist regimes. However, in his research, D. Spreen (2022) examines the topic of interaction between the mass media of Albania and West Germany, in the context of the spread and support of Maoist ideas. The author claims that in the period of the 1950s and 1960s, the spread of communist and socialist ideas in the media space of West Germany was prohibited. However, some citizens of this country found a way out of this situation and were able to spread the ideas of Maoism in Europe through cooperation with the Albanian radio station of Tirana. This fact is quite important for the study of the interaction of the media of Albania and Germany since it is possible to deepen the knowledge about this period of the historical development of Albania and Germany due to this fact.

In her scientific work, researcher V. Hamiti (2020) studied the issue of interaction between Albanians and Germans in a broad context. In particular, the author considered in detail the topic of the development of non-verbal communication between representatives of Albania and Germany. The researcher focuses on seven key channels of non-verbal communication in a contrasting Albanian-German perspective. These channels include proxemics, eye contact, facial expressions, body language, touch, appearance, and the extralinguistic field. The researcher also emphasises that many people perceive the sphere of non-verbal communication as inferior to verbal interaction, however, the author does not agree with this point of view and claims that both of these spheres play an important role in the context of communication between peoples. However, one should not agree with the opinion of the author that the development of cooperation between Albanians and Germans can only happen due to live meetings and communication. This opinion is not correct, because, as already indicated in the results of the research, interaction between Albania and Germany can take place without direct contact with representatives of these peoples, due to the use of mass media and the implementation of various projects. In particular, an example of the demonstration of German films in Albania was given, which contributes to the knowledge of the culture of the people of another country.

One of the important issues related to this topic is the relationship between the Albanian mass media and the public. In particular, one of the researchers who deeply studied this issue is P. Zguri (2017), who examined in detail the peculiarities of the interaction of the Albanian media with the general public. Thus, the author concluded that in Albania, the problem of mass media ownership arose from close ties between media organisations and political subjects. This raises doubts about the independence and objectivity of the mass media. Political interference has also been identified, where journalists face pressure and censorship, especially during elections, which limits their ability to report objectively. In addition, the use of mass media for political propaganda and the spread of disinformation to satisfy party interests is a serious problem. It is worth agreeing with this opinion, and emphasising that the mass media in all countries should be independent and objective, so this issue should be studied in detail in the future, to find ways to transform the media in Albania.

The topic of local mass media is important in the context of the development of the general media landscape in any country, because, local mass media is an important tool for ensuring pluralism and freedom of speech in any country.

Given the importance of this topic, E. Çela (2019) was engaged in its research. The author notes that Germany has a developed model of local mass media, which prevails in the general aspect of all media in the country. The researcher also claims that the development of local media in Albania is important for the socio-political context. New media organisations provide relevant information at the local level, expanding the media space and increasing the voice of citizens. The government supports this development through financial and professional support. Thus, the researcher claims that local mass media play an important role in the overall media system of Albania. However, one should not agree with this position, since, as already indicated in the results of this study, a greater share of media resources in Albania at this stage of development belong to representatives of certain families, and political propaganda media also have an advantage. Therefore, it is worth noting that local media in Albania should play a greater role in the general aspect, however, at this stage of development, national media resources have an advantage.

In general, it can be concluded that during a considerable period, the Albanian and German mass media developed in different ways, and in the 1990s they became similar and began to interact with each other. Today, the problem of ensuring the objectivity and independence of media resources in these countries, and especially in Albania, is important. In addition, several projects were implemented at the expense of mass media, which allow countries to get to know each other's cultures better and to interact in the future.

5. Conclusions

As a result of the research, the development of German and Albanian mass media was considered in historical retrospect. It was found that since the beginning of the mass distribution of the press among many countries of the world in the 19th century as a result of technical progress, the German and Albanian print media differed greatly. In the early 20th century, there was also a split both in the content of the actual information and in the form of mass media, since audiovisual methods of information dissemination were actively developed in Germany during the mentioned period. Since the 1930s, the Albanian and German media have become similar, given the censorship imposed by the fascist and Nazi regimes, respectively. However, active interaction in the context of the media between Albania and Germany began already after the Second World War, given that Albania and East Germany were under the influence of the communist regime. This cooperation intensified after the unification of the two parts of Germany into a single state and the spread of liberal ideas in the 1990s.

Given these historical conditions, various contradictions between the Albanian and German mass media have been formed over a considerable period, which play an important role today, in particular, they are: the length of time Albania has been part of various states that have played a leading role in media censorship, and the quality of information presented; the duration of the process of democratisation of Albania, one of the aspects of which is the transformation of the mass media, after the fall of the communist regime; absence of the influence of foreign countries in the modern period, which would allow the process of mass media transformation; geographical distance from the German media system, which is the reason for the lack of acceptance between representatives of both countries of other mass media; a high level of politicisation of information channels, and a significant role of organised crime, which affects the activities of mass media.

This study offers one of the first in-depth comparative analyses tracing linkages between the German and Albanian media systems over nearly two centuries. Prior scholarship has extensively examined development trajectories within each country individually. Yet, little research has systematically investigated the intersections and mutual influences between these often separately analyzed European contexts. By structuring a side-by-side chronological review from the 19th century emergence of early print media through to today's hybridized digital landscape, the analysis unveils intriguing inflection points of divergence, convergence and mutual isolation along the timeline. Contextualizing technological shifts, economic pressures, and political contingencies reveals hidden explanatory threads tying together seemingly disparate events.

The research assembles an unprecedented breadth of indicators quantifying audience reach, media independence, content patterns and sector concentration levels over eras. Combining this data assemblage with archival records and expert qualitative perspectives exposes unseen contours in how external shock triggers propagated complex changes. This paper constitutes an inaugural exploration situating the co-evolution of German and Albanian media ecosystems within a coherent analytical prism. The embedded comparisons illuminate macro conditions, actor agency and disruptive stimuli that worked for or against greater integration even among proximal European societies. They underline both structural and happenstance factors at play. While not definitive, this early rigorous juxtaposition helps compose critical empirical baselines for future research programs to build upon using similar or extended methodological toolkits. Deepening the evidence base could enable tighter causal inferences and generalizable mechanisms behind regional media system development as well as crystallize prescriptions tailored for lagging settings that wish to emulate features of leaders.

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Authors contributions

MO was responsible for study design, data collection, drafting, and revising the manuscript. MO read and approved the final manuscript.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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