ANXHELA LEPURI

CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS OF YOUTH IN PRISHTINA ON DEMOCRACY AND THE FUTURE

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Belgrade, 2026

Book Series SQUARE

Edited by:
Maja Pupovac

Title:
Conceptual metaphors of youth in Prishtina on democracy and the future

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Publishers:
Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade
Regional Center for Advanced Studies of Humanities – RECAS
Regional Network of the Centers for Advanced Studies of Southeast Europe

Proofreader:
Lucy Stevens

Cover design:
Nikola Stevanović

Typesetting:
Sonja Nikolić, Tijana Baltić

Place and year of publication:
Belgrade, 2026

ISBN:
978-86-6190-043-3

Replicate:
Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade

Production run:
50 copies

This publication was created within the Regional Fellowship Program, implemented by the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade, in partnership with the Regional Center for Advanced Studies of Humanities – RECAS and the Regional Network of the Centers for Advanced Studies of Southeast Europe, with the support of the Open Society Foundation Western Balkans, Erste Foundation, and Rockefeller Brothers Fund.
The views expressed in the text represent the views of the authors.

Conceptual Metaphors Of Youth In Prishtina On Democracy And The Future

Abstract

This study examines the conceptual metaphors of young people in Prishtina regarding democracy, European integration, and the future. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), it explores the broader perceptions, emotions, and political attitudes among youth underlying their metaphorical language. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining semi-structured interviews with an online questionnaire conducted with participants aged 18-25. The data were analyzed using Conceptual Metaphor Analysis to identify recurring patterns and interpret them in relation to participants' socio-political experiences. The findings show that democracy is often conceptualized as fragile and incomplete, while European integration is framed as a difficult, externally constrained process. The future is understood through both hopeful and uncertain imagery, reflecting an ambivalent outlook. Additionally, metaphors

related to youth political voice reveal feelings of exclusion and limited agency. Overall, the study highlights the role of metaphor as a cognitive tool through which young people make sense of political realities.

Keywords: *conceptual metaphor, youth discourse, democracy, European integration, future, Prishtina.*

Introduction

"It feels like speaking to a wall." This is how a young participant from Prishtina described communicating with political institutions. Others portrayed democracy as "a young tree," European integration as "a closed door," and the future as "a foggy road." These metaphorical descriptions reveal more than personal opinions; they show that young people have emotional experiences of democracy, political participation, uncertainty, and the future in contemporary Kosovo.

Democracy today is understood beyond formal institutions and political structures, in the ways individuals interpret, imagine, and emotionally respond to it. Language plays a crucial role in this regard, since it is through language that political realities are interpreted and expectations articulated. Among the linguistic strategies used to express such perceptions, metaphor occupies a particularly important place. According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), metaphors are not merely stylistic devices; they are cognitive structures through which people understand one concept in terms of another.

This perspective is particularly relevant to the study of youth discourse. Young people play an important role in democratic societies (Androutsopoulos, 2005). They are future citizens, but they are also already involved in social and political life in various ways. Public debates, broader socio-political circumstances, and everyday experiences shape how youth understand democracy, institutions, European integration, and the future (Deželan, 2023). To express these views, they often use metaphorical language. Such language reveals what young people think and, crucially, how they make sense of and emotionally experience political life.

In Kosovo, especially in Prishtina, this issue is particularly significant. As a society marked by democratic transition, institutional development, and aspirations toward European integration, Kosovo offers a meaningful context for examining how younger generations imagine democracy and their place within it. Young people in Prishtina grow up in an environment shaped by both opportunity and uncertainty: they are exposed to democratic ideals, civic participation, and European aspirations, yet they also face political distrust, unemployment, social insecurity, and limited institutional responsiveness. These tensions are likely reflected in the metaphors they use to speak about democracy and the future.

The present study explores the conceptual metaphors used by young people in the Municipality of Prishtina to speak about democracy, European integration, and their own future. More specifically, it aims to identify the metaphorical expressions that emerge in youth discourse and to analyze how these metaphors reflect broader perceptions, emotions, and political attitudes. The study assumes that metaphors are not random stylistic choices, but meaningful conceptual structures that reveal how young people interpret their social and political reality. To address this, the research asks which conceptual metaphors young people use when discussing the stated topics and how these metaphors are linked to emotions and attitudes such as hope, disappointment, distrust, and resistance.

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining semi-structured interviews with an online questionnaire. The data are analyzed through Conceptual Metaphor Analysis, drawing primarily on Lakoff and Johnson (1980). This approach enables the identification of recurring metaphorical patterns and their interpretation in relation to the social and political experiences of the participants.

From a broader perspective, this study is relevant both linguistically and socio-politically. On the one hand, it contributes to research on metaphor by exploring how conceptual metaphors operate in youth discourse within a specific socio-political context. On the other hand, it provides insight into how young people

in Prishtina interpret political life, relate to institutions, and imagine what lies ahead, shedding light on the expectations and concerns of a generation that is often discussed in political debates but less often heard in its own voice.

Theoretical Framework

Metaphors are traditionally understood primarily as rhetorical and stylistic devices used for persuasion and artistic expression. More recent approaches, however, have emphasized their cognitive role in shaping how people understand and interpret reality. This shift is closely associated with Conceptual Metaphor Theory, developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). According to their theory, metaphors are not merely decorative linguistic elements but important tools that help people understand abstract ideas by relating them to more familiar, concrete experiences. In this framework, conceptual metaphors involve connections between a source domain, which is usually concrete and experiential, and a target domain, which is typically more abstract.

Metaphors are particularly important in political discourse, where concepts such as democracy, institutions, governance, and European integration are often difficult to explain in purely literal terms. As Musolff (2012) points out, metaphorical language helps make political ideas more understandable while also expressing emotions, attitudes, and broader social experiences. In this sense, beyond reflecting political perceptions, metaphors also influence how political realities are understood and discussed.

The analysis of metaphors has gained a notable place within discourse studies. One influential contribution is Charteris-Black's *Critical Metaphor Analysis* (2004), which combines the identification of metaphorical expressions with the interpretation of their social, emotional, and ideological meanings. This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study because it examines metaphors as reflections of broader socio-political experiences rather than merely linguistic expressions.

The study of metaphor is especially relevant in the context of youth discourse. Sociolinguistic research has shown that young people use emotions to communicate information, express emotions, construct identities, and position themselves socially and politically (Androutsopoulos, 2005; Bucholtz, 2011). At the same time, political participation and civic engagement remain central elements of democratic life (Verba et al., 1995; Prior, 2018). Examining metaphorical language in youth discourse, therefore, sheds light on how younger generations perceive democracy, European integration, political participation, and the future, as well as their role in contemporary social and political life.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive perspective on the use of metaphorical language among young adults in Prishtina. The study included 70 participants aged 18 to 25 from the Municipality of Prishtina, including university students, final-year high school students, and youth activists. Data collection was conducted from January to March 2026 and involved 10 semi-structured interviews and 60 online questionnaire responses. Participants were conveniently sampled from different universities, high schools, and youth organizations in Prishtina to explore their perceptions of democracy, politics, and the future.

Data were collected through two methods: semi-structured interviews and an online questionnaire. The interviews, which lasted approximately 15–20 minutes, included open-ended questions, while encouraging the use of comparisons and figurative expressions. The online questionnaire, distributed via Google Forms, collected demographic information and open-ended responses, allowing for the inclusion of a broader range of perspectives and metaphorical expressions. The questionnaire included separate thematic sections that combined demographic and attitudinal questions with open-ended prompts to elicit participants' broader reflections and metaphorical expressions on democracy, European integration, political participation, and the future.

The collected data were analyzed using Conceptual Metaphor Analysis, drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theoretical framework. The theory states that conceptual metaphors consist of a source domain, typically concrete and experiential, and a target domain, usually more abstract, connected through systematic conceptual mappings. Following this approach, the metaphorical expressions identified in the data were classified by their source domains, target domains, conceptual metaphors, and broader interpretative meanings, as presented in the tables below. The interviews and the questionnaire invited participants to discuss through open-ended responses. Participants were also encouraged to use comparisons, figurative language, and metaphorical descriptions when appropriate. As a result, some metaphors emerged spontaneously from broader reflections, while others were produced in response to prompts encouraging more figurative forms of expression. The metaphors identified in interview transcripts and questionnaire responses were grouped according to recurring conceptual patterns and interpreted in connection to participants' perceptions, emotions, and political attitudes. Interview and questionnaire data were analyzed comparatively to identify recurring metaphorical structures across both sets of responses. Ethical principles were respected throughout the study: participation was voluntary, participants were informed about the study's purpose, and all data were handled confidentially and used solely for academic purposes.

Analysis of Conceptual Metaphors in Youth Discourse

This section analyzes the metaphors that emerge in the discourse of young people in Prishtina regarding democracy, European integration, and their future prospects. Before proceeding with the metaphor analysis, a brief overview of the participants is provided to contextualize the findings. The descriptive and percentage-based findings presented in this section are based on the full sample of participants, which included both questionnaire respondents and interview participants.

The sample primarily consists of young people aged 18 to 25. Half of the participants (50%) are in the 18-20 age group,

36.7% are between 24 and 25 years old, and a smaller proportion (13.3%) falls within the 21-23 age group. Overall, participants are young adults in the early stages of their academic and professional development. The majority of participants identified as female (80%); thus, male participants accounted for 20% of the sample. Regarding their current status, most participants (78.3%) are university students, followed by employed individuals (11.7%), final-year high school students (6.7%), and unemployed participants (3.3%). Political engagement levels indicate that most participants are at least somewhat involved in political life. A majority (60%) reported voting regularly and following political developments, while others reported occasional participation (20%) or indirect engagement through following politics without voting (11.7%). Only a small proportion (8.3%) reported no engagement at all. This relative level of awareness provides an important backdrop for interpreting how participants construct and express political meanings through metaphor.

Participants' emotional responses to democracy reveal a complex picture. While hope is the dominant feeling (56.7%), a substantial proportion expressed anger (11.7%), frustration (10%), distrust (10%), and indifference (10%), with very few (1.7%) expressing clear trust. This combination of optimism and dissatisfaction suggests an ambivalent emotional orientation, likely reflected in both positive and critical metaphorical framings of democracy. Perceptions of Kosovo's integration into the European Union are similarly mixed. The largest group (26.7%) expressed uncertainty, while comparable proportions reported skepticism (23.3%) and optimism (23.3%). Smaller groups indicated stronger confidence (18.3%) or strong skepticism (8.3%). These responses point to an overall ambivalence, where hope coexists alongside doubt, an important dynamic that may shape how the integration process is metaphorically constructed.

Expectations about the future also reflect this sense of uncertainty. While 43.3% of participants see their future in Kosovo, a considerable proportion (35%) remain undecided, and 21.7% envision their future abroad. This suggests that, alongside attachment to the country, there is a notable openness toward migra-

tion, shaped by broader socio-economic and political conditions. Perceptions of youth representation in political processes highlight a sense of limited influence. Only 8.3% believe that youth voices are clearly heard, while 48.3% report that they are heard only occasionally, and 43.3% believe they are not heard at all. This widespread perception of limited political agency helps explain why communication with institutions is often conceptualized through metaphors of distance, blockage, or ineffectiveness.

Taken together, these descriptive and attitudinal patterns provide the socio-political context in which metaphorical expressions emerge. Young people in Prishtina display varying levels of engagement, mixed emotions, and ambivalent expectations about both their future and Kosovo's European trajectory. To better understand these perspectives, the following sections examine the conceptual metaphors identified in participants' discourse.

Metaphors of Democracy				
Original Expression	**Conceptual Metaphor Conceptual Metaphor**	**Source Domain**	**Target Domain**	**Interpretation**
"Një ëndërr" (A dream)	DEMOCRACY IS A DREAM	Dream	Democracy	Democracy is perceived as an ideal rather than a fully realized political reality.
"Një sistem që nuk funksionon" (A system that does not function)	DEMOCRACY IS A MACHINE	Machine	Democracy	Democratic institutions are perceived as malfunctioning or ineffective
"Një shtëpi në ndërtim" (A house under construction)	DEMOCRACY IS A BUILDING	Construction	Democracy	Democracy is seen as an unfinished or developing system
"Demokracia në Kosovë është si një pemë e re."/ "... si një fidan në një tokë të fortë!" ("Democracy in Kosovo is like a young tree."/ "...like a sapling in solid soil!")	DEMOCRACY IS A TREE	Tree / Plant growth	Democracy	Democracy is perceived as young and still developing.

(Table 1)

The metaphors in *Table 1* capture the most frequent patterns in the data and reveal several recurring ways in which young people in Prishtina conceptualize democracy, most notably as a dream, a machine, a building, and a living organism. These metaphorical constructions point to a shared perception of democracy as incomplete, fragile, and not fully aligned with its expected function.

Democracy is a dream

As shown in *Table 1*, some participants conceptualize democracy as "një ëndërr" ("a dream"). In this framing, democracy is viewed as an aspirational ideal rather than a lived reality. The metaphor suggests a perceived gap between expectations and actual political experience, indicating that democracy is desirable but not yet fully realized.

Democracy is a machine

Another prominent metaphor in *Table 1* presents democracy as a malfunctioning system, as reflected in the expression "një sistem që nuk funksionon" ("a system that does not function"). In this conceptualization, democratic institutions are mapped onto mechanical structures whose value depends on their efficiency. The idea of malfunction reflects dissatisfaction with institutional performance and signals a lack of trust in their effectiveness.

Democracy is a building

Table 1 shows that democracy is also described as "një shtëpi në ndërtim" ("a house under construction"), framing it as an ongoing and unfinished project. This metaphor suggests that democracy requires time, effort, and continuous development, implying that existing structures are not yet fully stable or complete.

Democracy is a tree

Finally, the data presented in *Table 1* include organic metaphors such as "young tree" or "a sapling in difficult soil." Demo-

cracy is conceptualized as a living entity whose growth depends on surrounding conditions. The emphasis on fragility and environmental difficulty suggests that democracy is seen as vulnerable, yet still capable of development over time.

Taken together, the most frequent metaphors presented in *Table 1* reveal a consistent pattern in how young people in Prishtina understand democracy. Across different source domains, democracy is framed as something unfinished, fragile, and not yet fully functional. While some metaphors emphasize dysfunction (machine), others highlight development and growth (building, tree), or a gap between ideals and reality (dream). This combination reflects an ambivalent perception: alongside skepticism toward the current functioning of democratic institutions, there is also a degree of cautious optimism about future development. These findings are consistent with the broader attitudinal patterns identified earlier, particularly the coexistence of hope and dissatisfaction in participants' emotional responses.

Metaphors of European Integration				
Original Expression	**Conceptual Metaphor**	**Source Domain**	**Target Domain**	**Interpretation**
"Një rrugë e gjatë" (A long road)	EU INTEGRATION IS A JOURNEY	Road / Travel	EU integration	The integration process is perceived as long and difficult.
"Një derë e mbyllur" (A closed door)	EU INTEGRATION IS A DOOR	Door	EU integration	Kosovo is perceived as waiting outside the EU.
"Një udhëtim me pengesa" (A journey with obstacles)	EU INTEGRATION IS A JOURNEY	Travel obstacles	EU integration	Integration is perceived as a challenging process with barriers.

(Table 2)

The metaphors in *Table 2* represent the main patterns emerging from the data and show that young people in Prishtina primarily conceptualize European integration as both a movement toward a desired destination and a boundary to be crossed. These metaphorical constructions frame EU integration as both a journey and a form of access to a restricted space.

EU integration is a journey

As illustrated in *Table 2*, many participants describe European integration through journey-related expressions such as "një rrugë e gjatë" ("a long road") and "një udhëtim me pengesa" ("a journey with obstacles"). In this conceptualization, EU integration is understood as a gradual and demanding process that unfolds over time. The presence of obstacles emphasizes difficulty, uncertainty, and delays, suggesting that progress is neither linear nor guaranteed. This metaphor highlights the need for persistence and effort, while also reflecting frustration with the perceived slowness of the process.

EU integration is a door

Another recurring metaphor in *Table 2* frames European integration as "një derë e mbyllur" ("a closed door"). The European Union is conceptualized as an enclosed or selective space, while Kosovo is positioned outside, waiting for access. The image of a closed door suggests exclusion, restriction, and lack of control over the process of entry. It also implies that integration depends not only on internal progress but also on external acceptance.

Taken together, the most frequent metaphors in *Table 2* reveal a coherent understanding of European integration as both a prolonged journey and a controlled point of entry. While the journey metaphor emphasizes time, effort, and obstacles, the door metaphor highlights boundaries and exclusion. This combination reflects a dual perception among young people: on the one hand, EU integration is seen as a necessary and desirable path toward progress; on the other, it is experienced as a slow, externally constrained process. The coexistence of movement (journey) and blockage (door) suggests a sense of limited agency, with pro-

gress dependent not only on internal efforts but also on decisions beyond local control. These findings are consistent with participants' overall feelings of uncertainty and ambivalence about Kosovo's European future, as discussed in the previous section.

Metaphors of the Future of Youth				
Original Expression	**Conceptual Metaphor**	**Source Domain**	**Target Domain**	**Interpretation**
"Një rrugë e vështirë" (A difficult road); "një udhëkryq" (a crossroads); "një rrugë e gjatë" (a long road);	FUTURE IS A JOURNEY	Road	Future	The future is perceived as uncertain and challenging.
Një diell që po lind" / "agim i ri" (A rising sun / a new dawn)	FUTURE IS LIGHT / SUNRISE	Sunrise	Future	The future is associated with hope and new beginnings.
"mjegull" (fog); "autostradë me mjegull" (foggy highway); "labirint" (maze); "anije në stuhi" (ship in a storm); "rrugë e paqartë" (unclear road)	FUTURE IS UNCERTAINTY (FOG / LABYRINTH / STORM)	Darkness	Future	The future is associated with uncertainty or pessimism.
"Një farë / një pemë e re" (A seed / a young tree)	FUTURE IS GROWTH (PLANT / SEED)	Seed / Plant	Future	The future is seen as something that can grow with effort and care.

(Table 3)

Table 3 provides examples of the most common metaphors in the database and suggests that youth in Prishtina perceive their future in terms of journey, light, ambiguity, and growth. Taken together, these metaphorical concepts point to a complex, often ambiguous notion of the future shaped by both hope and uncertainty.

The future is a journey

Many participants describe the future through journey-related expressions such as "një rrugë e vështirë" ("a difficult road"), "një udhëkryq" ("a crossroads"), and "një rrugë e gjatë" ("a long road"). In this conceptualization, the future is understood as a path that unfolds over time and requires navigation and decision-making. However, the emphasis on difficulty and uncertainty suggests that this journey is not straightforward, but rather marked by challenges and unclear directions.

The future is light / sunrise

In contrast, some participants use more optimistic imagery, describing the future as "një diell që po lind" ("a rising sun") or "agim i ri" ("a new dawn"). These metaphors frame the future as a moment of renewal and possibility, associated with hope, change, and new beginnings. They indicate that, despite existing challenges, young people believe there is still potential for positive transformation.

The future is uncertainty (fog / labyrinth / storm)

A prominent set of metaphors emphasizes uncertainty, using images such as "mjegull" ("fog"), "autostradë me mjegull" ("a foggy highway"), "labirint" ("maze"), and "anije në stuhi" ("a ship in a storm"). The future is framed as unpredictable, confusing, and difficult to navigate. The recurring imagery of limited visibility and disorientation suggests a perceived lack of clarity about available opportunities and life trajectories.

The future is growth (plant / seed)

Finally, some participants describe the future using organic metaphors such as "një farë" ("a seed") or "një pemë e re" ("a young tree"). Within this framework, the future is conceptualized as something that can develop over time, depending on care, effort, and external conditions. These metaphors highlight potential and agency, suggesting that although the future is uncertain, it is not fixed and can be shaped through individual and collective action.
The most frequent metaphors in *Table 3* reveal a multidimensional view of the future among young people in Prishtina. While journey metaphors emphasize progression and decision-making, uncertainty metaphors highlight confusion and lack of clarity. At the same time, light and growth metaphors convey hope and potential. This combination reflects an obvious ambivalence, as the future cannot be defined solely by pessimism or optimism; rather, it is seen as a place of struggle between restriction and opportunity. The coexistence of all three elements – hardship, ambiguity, and hope – is indicative of the socio-economic environment in which these young people grow up.

Metaphors and Emotional Attitudes (Hope, Distrust, Resistance)				
Original Expression	**Conceptual Metaphor**	**Source Domain**	**Target Domain**	**Interpretation**
"Si mi fol murit" (Like speaking to a wall)	YOUTH VOICE IS IGNORED	Talking to a wall	Youth political voice	Young people feel their opinions are not heard by political institutions.
"Si një radio që nuk e dëgjon askush" (Like a radio nobody listens to)	YOUTH VOICE IS IGNORED	Radio	Youth political communication	Youth perceive a lack of responsiveness from political actors.
"Si një zog që këndon brenda një kutie" (Like a bird singing in a box)	YOUTH VOICE IS TRAPPED	Bird in a box	Youth political participation	Youth voices are perceived as restricted or confined.
"Si një burg shtëpiak" (Like house arrest)	POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IS CONFINEMENT	Prison	Political participation	Young people perceive limited freedom or influence in political life.

(Table 4)

The metaphors presented in *Table 4* reveal the dominant patterns of youth political voice and emotional attitudes, showing how young people in Prishtina conceptualize their position within political processes. These metaphorical constructions primarily emphasize themes of being ignored, restricted, or excluded, pointing to a perceived lack of influence and agency.

The youth voice is ignored

As shown in *Table* 4, several participants describe expressing their political voice as "si mi fol murit" ("like speaking to a wall") and "si një radio që nuk e dëgjon askush" ("like a radio nobody listens to"). This conceptualization frames communication with political institutions as one-sided and ineffective. Young people position themselves as speakers without listeners, suggesting a perceived absence of responsiveness from those in power. This metaphor highlights a sense of frustration and disconnection from institutional decision-making.

The youth voice is trapped

Another set of metaphors emphasizes restriction, as in expressions such as "si një zog që këndon brenda një kutie" ("like a bird singing in a box"). In this mapping, youth voices are both unheard and confined within limiting structures. The imagery suggests that expression is possible, but constrained, pointing to structural barriers that limit meaningful participation.

Political participation is confinement

Along similar lines to this understanding of limitation, there is also metaphorical language that likens political engagement to imprisonment, evident in terms such as "si një burg shtëpiak" (literally, "like house arrest"). In contrast to metaphors that emphasize being unheard, this conceptualization highlights the limited freedom with which participation occurs. Here, engagement in political life is experienced as constrained and controlled, rather than open and empowering. Across different source domains – walls, radios, confined spaces, and prisons – political participation is framed as ineffective, restricted, and without reciprocity. These figurative representations indicate frustration and convey a sense of alienation from any effective involvement in politics.

Conclusion

This study explored how young people in the Municipality of Prishtina use metaphorical language to conceptualize democracy, European integration, and the future. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), the study examined metaphorical expressions from interviews and questionnaire responses in order to understand the conceptual structures underlying participants' political perceptions and emotional attitudes. It shows that metaphors serve as important cognitive tools through which young people interpret and communicate complex social and political realities. By framing abstract concepts such as democracy, institutions, and the future through more concrete and familiar experiences, participants make sense of their socio-political environment.

One important finding concerns the perception of democracy as fragile and still developing. Organic metaphors such as "young tree" or "plant" suggest that participants view democracy in Kosovo as requiring time, stability, and continuous support in order to mature. At the same time, metaphors of malfunctioning systems reflect dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of democratic institutions and signal broader doubts about political functionality and institutional trust.

Another key finding concerns how young people imagine their future. The most frequently occurring conceptual metaphor was "future is a journey," expressed through images such as roads, crossroads, and long paths. These metaphors suggest that young people perceive the future as a process shaped by choices, effort, and direction. Alongside these metaphors of movement and possibility, participants employed imagery associated with uncertainty, including fog, labyrinths, and storms. Such expressions indicate that, while young people recognize opportunities for development, they also experience uncertainty regarding employment prospects, social mobility, and political stability.

At the same time, many participants expressed hope through metaphors of light, growth, and renewal. Images such as sunrises, seeds, and young plants suggest that participants continue to associate the future with the possibility of improvement,

personal development, and social change. The coexistence of hopeful and uncertain metaphors reflects the complex emotional landscape surrounding youth expectations and aspirations in contemporary Kosovo.

Overall, the findings support the central idea of Conceptual Metaphor Theory that metaphors are not merely linguistic ornaments but fundamental structures through which people understand and communicate experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In the context of youth discourse in Prishtina, metaphorical language plays a significant role in shaping how young people perceive democracy, European integration, and their future. Beyond their theoretical relevance, these findings also contribute to broader linguistic and socio-political discussions by highlighting the importance of youth discourse for understanding contemporary democratic realities. The metaphors used by young people provide valuable insight into their attitudes, emotions, and expectations, while also revealing how they position themselves in relation to political institutions and social change. Paying closer attention to young people's metaphorical language may help policymakers, educators, and public institutions better understand their concerns and expectations.

This study is among the first attempts to examine the role of conceptual metaphors in youth political discourse in Kosovo. As an exploratory study, it also points to several directions for future research. Future studies may expand the number of participants, include regions beyond Prishtina, compare metaphor use across different generations, or examine metaphorical discourse in other socio-cultural contexts. Such approaches would contribute to a deeper understanding of how metaphors shape the political imagination and social perceptions of young people.

Policy relevance and implications for practice

Beyond its relevance to linguistic research, the study also has implications for institutions, educators, policymakers, and organizations working with young people in Kosovo. The metaphors used by participants offer insight into how young people emotionally experience democracy, political participation, Euro-

pean integration, and the future. In this sense, metaphor analysis enables understanding not only of what young people think about political and social issues, but also of how they interpret and experience them in everyday life.

Several of the metaphors identified in the study reflect feelings of uncertainty, frustration, and limited political influence. Expressions such as "speaking to a wall" or "a radio nobody listens to" suggest that many young people feel unheard or insufficiently represented within political processes. Similarly, metaphors that describe democracy as fragile, unfinished, or not fully functioning indicate broader concerns about institutional effectiveness and political trust. These perceptions are important because they reveal emotional dimensions of political experience that may not always emerge from direct survey questions alone.

The findings may also be useful for institutions and organizations involved in civic education and youth participation initiatives. If young people experience political communication as distant or ineffective, simply encouraging participation may not be enough. Greater attention may need to be given to creating forms of engagement that young people perceive as meaningful, responsive, and inclusive. In a similar way, metaphors related to European integration, such as "long road" or "closed door," reflect uncertainty and ambivalence regarding Kosovo's European future, highlighting the importance of clearer communication and stronger institutional dialogue with youth.

More broadly, this study shows that metaphor analysis can be a valuable tool for understanding youth discourse and political perceptions. Metaphors reveal emotions, expectations, frustrations, and hopes that are often difficult to capture through direct political questions alone. For this reason, metaphor analysis may also be useful in future research on youth discourse in media, public debates, civic education, and other forms of political and social communication.

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CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији
Народна библиотека Србије, Београд

316.663-053.81(497.115)
321.02-053.81(497.115)

LEPURI, Anxhela, 1994–
Conceptual metaphors of youth in Prishtina on democracy and the future [Elektronski izvor] / Anxhela Lepuri.
- Belgrade : Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory : Regional Center for Advanced Studies of Humanities – RECAS ; Rijeka : Regional Network of the Centers for Advanced Studies of Southeast Europe, 2026 (Beograd : Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory). - 1 elektronski optički disk (CD-ROM) : tekst ; 12 cm. - (Book Series Square ; [Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade])

Sistemski zahtevi: Nisu navedeni. - Nasl. sa naslovne strane dokumenta. - Tiraž 50. - Bibliografija.

ISBN 978-86-6190-043-3 (IPST)

а) Омладина -- Грађанско учешће -- Приштина б) Омладина -- Политичко понашање -- Приштина

COBISS.SR-ID 198925065