

Proceedings

International & Interdisciplinary Conference

Toward an Intelligent Society: Challenges & Opportunities”

University Fehmi Agani Gjakove, Kosovo
22-23 May 2026



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Proceedings

**“Toward an Intelligent Society: Challenges & Opportunities”
International & Interdisciplinary Conference:**

21st International Conference of AIS-ALBSA & Institutional Partners

**6th Annual Conference of Center for School Leadership (CSL – AADF)
&**

**Midterm Conference of the Balkan Sociological Forum (BSF) -
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17th Annual International Conference: The role of Technology in the Shaping of Society

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15th Annual International Conference: Comparative Studies in Modern Society; Balkans in European and Global Context

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Tirana-Albania: 22 May 2009

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Tirana-Albania: 15 June 2007

Funding Meeting and the Founding AIS Conference: Sociology in Albania and the need of its Institutionalization

Tirana-Albania: 21 November 2006; Tirana International Hotel

Contents:

I.	Scientific Committee and Local Organizing Committee.....	4
II.	General Conference Program.....	6
III.	Next International & Interdisciplinary Conference.....	9
IV.	Abstracts Book & Full Papers.....	11
	4 th Peace Studies Forum of UPF & AIS	11
	Midterm Conference of the Balkan Sociological Forum, marking its 15 th Anniversary	17
	6 th Conference of School Leadership (CSL – AADF)	28
	“Toward an Intelligent Society: Challenges & Opportunities” (21 st Annual International & Interdisciplinary Conference	57
	TS 01. Culture, Arts, Public Sphere and Communication	
	TS 02. Population, Migration and Diaspora	
	TS 03. Education and Sport	
	TS 04. Politics, Democracy, Integration and Law	
	TS 05. Religion, Collective Behavior and Social Movements	
	TS 06. Marriage, Family, Welfare, Social Policy and Community	
	TS 07. Childhood, Youth, Leisure, Aging and Gender	
	TS 08. Work, Professions and Organization	
	TS 09. Comparative, Historical, Regional, Global and Future Studies	
	TS 10. Security, Public Health, Deviance and Social Control	
	TS 11. Ethnic Relations, Nationalism, Human Rights	
	TS 12. Environment, Economy, Tourism and Development	
	TS 13. Science, Technology, Digitalization and Innovation	
V.	Index – Presenters & Contributors.	388

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FOUNDATIONS OF A LIFE IN ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

The Career Trajectory of Prof. Luljeta Bozo

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the career trajectory of Prof. Luljeta Bozo as a pioneering woman in civil engineering in Albania. Using a qualitative case study approach based on document analysis and a semi-structured interview conducted in 2022, the study explores her contributions to geotechnical engineering and her role in shaping women's participation in science. The findings highlight how early academic excellence, particularly in mathematics and physics, combined with institutional pathways, enabled her entry into a traditionally male-dominated field. Drawing on existing research on gender and STEM, the paper situates her trajectory within broader patterns of gender inequality, while also emphasizing the importance of female role models in strengthening women's confidence and engagement in scientific disciplines. The analysis further connects this individual case to broader structural dynamics, including evidence that developing contexts may display narrower gender gaps in STEM participation. The case of Albania during the socialist period provides a relevant illustration, where state policies expanded women's access to higher education, partly in response to workforce demands. The findings suggest that women's participation in STEM is shaped not only by individual ability and institutional support, but also by wider policy frameworks and socio-economic conditions. In this regard, the study underscores the importance of early engagement with science education. As argued by Nathanaili (2024), the foundations of scientific interest must be established from the earliest stages of education in order to support more inclusive and sustained participation in STEM, particularly among girls.

Keywords: *Women in engineering; STEM education; gender barriers; role models; Albania*

INTRODUCTION

The participation of women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) has been widely recognized as a key dimension of social and economic development. However, gender disparities in STEM education remain a global concern. Although more girls are enrolled in school than ever before, they continue to face structural barriers that limit their participation in scientific fields. Women represent only around 35% of STEM graduates worldwide, a figure that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade (UNESCO, 2026). In this context, examining individual trajectories of women who have succeeded in traditionally male-dominated fields becomes particularly important and provide valuable insight into the structural and cultural conditions shaping access to scientific professions. This paper focuses on the case of Prof. Luljeta Bozo, one of the first women in Albania to pursue a career in civil engineering. Her professional path offers an opportunity to examine the intersection between gender, scientific development, and socio-political context.

CONTEXT: ENGINEERING AND GENDER IN ALBANIA

Until the mid-1960s, civil engineering in Albania was largely a male-dominated profession. The entry of women into this field was limited, reflecting broader gender norms and structural barriers in access to technical education and professional opportunities. At the same time, the socialist system promoted women's participation in education and employment, creating conditions that, at least formally, supported women's entry into scientific professions.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine the career trajectory of Prof. Luljeta Bozo as a woman in engineering. The analysis is based on a combination of document analysis and a semi-structured interview. Documentary sources include biographical data, institutional records, and professional documentation, including a curriculum vitae provided directly by Prof. Bozo, which are used to reconstruct key stages of her academic and professional development.

These materials are complemented by a semi-structured interview conducted with Prof. Bozo, which provides additional insight into her personal experiences, professional challenges, and perspectives on women's participation in engineering. The interview was conducted in 2022 at Prof. Bozo's private residence, in a quiet and familiar setting that facilitated open and reflective discussion. The meeting had been arranged in advance, and the interview materials were shared with the participant prior to the interview. The interview was conducted by one of the authors (Dr. Nathanaili) and followed a semi-structured format. The setting contributed to a comfortable and focused exchange, supporting detailed reflections on professional experiences and career development.

The data are analysed thematically, focusing on key dimensions such as career development, institutional context, gender-related challenges, and professional contributions. This combined approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the interaction between individual trajectory and broader socio-historical conditions.

Career Trajectory - Based on the CV, biographical data, institutional records, and professional documentation

Prof. Bozo's career began in 1965 at the Polytechnic University of Tirana, at a time when civil engineering in Albania was a male-dominated field. As one of the first women to enter this profession, her trajectory reflects broader processes of gender boundary crossing

in technical disciplines. Her academic development was shaped by both institutional constraints and opportunities, including the interruption of studies in the Soviet Union and their continuation in Albania. Her early research focused on construction materials, later evolving into a long-term specialization in geotechnics, particularly in soil behavior and structural stability. The following section provides a summary of the academic and professional profile of Prof. Luljeta Bozo, based on her curriculum vitae as provided by the author, biographical data, institutional records, and professional documentation.

- ***Academic Titles and Honors.*** Prof. Luljeta Bozo obtained her PhD in 1981 and was awarded a Doctorate in Philosophy in 1984. She was granted the title of Full Professor in 1994. In 2011, she became a member of the Albanian Academy of Arts and Sciences, and in 2018, she was granted the title of Professor Emeritus, in recognition of her long-standing academic and professional contributions.
- ***Publications:*** Prof. Bozo academic output includes: 3 monographs, 30 books in engineering, 3 teaching manuals, 6 national research projects and 72 scientific articles, conference papers, and international presentations.
- ***Supervision and Mentorship:*** Prof. Bozo has supervised 11 doctoral dissertations, 35 Master's theses and over 100 undergraduate engineering theses. She has also served as an external reviewer for 65 doctoral and Master's theses.
- ***Scientific Activity.*** Prof. Bozo scientific activity includes participation in 3 government-funded research projects; organization and leadership of 12 training courses; organization and leadership of 14 international scientific conferences and symposia; membership in scientific committees in over 10 countries; research in geotechnical engineering, including slope stability, retaining structures, and foundation deformation; contribution to the development of technical standards for design and implementation; membership in scientific councils of the Ministry of Construction and the University of Tirana; membership in academic senates and councils of several institutions, including the Faculty of Civil Engineering (University of Tirana), Polis University, and others; member of the National Committee on Large Dams; Engineering Projects.
- ***Her professional work includes the design of:*** Multi-storey buildings (8–12 floors); Educational facilities; Infrastructure projects; Various geotechnical support structures.
- ***Teaching Activity:*** Prof. Bozo has taught 23 courses in geotechnics, environmental engineering, and planning at both undergraduate and graduate levels. She has lectured at Faculty of Civil Engineering, University of Tirana; Epoka University; Polis University; State University of Tetovo. At the Faculty of Civil Engineering (University of Tirana), she has held several leadership roles, including: Vice-Dean, Head of the Department of Structures, Head of the Geotechnical Sector, Chair of the Professors' Council, Chair of the Didactic Council
- ***She has also served as:*** Director of the ALTEA Laboratory and President of the Albanian Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Insights from the Interview

As Prof. Bozo recalled in the interview, she excelled as a high school student, particularly in physics and mathematics, which facilitated her initial opportunity to pursue undergraduate studies in architecture in the former Soviet Union. However, following the interruption of diplomatic relations between Albania and the Soviet Union, she returned to Albania and continued her studies at the Polytechnic University of Tirana, specializing in civil engineering.

Her early scientific work focused on the production of light construction materials, a process that required extensive effort both on site and in the laboratory. Reflecting on this period, she noted humorously:

I spoke to the structural elements as if they could understand me, urging them to resist at least until the completion of technical testing (Interview, 2022).

From 1968 onward, her academic focus shifted to “Building Construction, Basis and Foundations,” a field concerned with ensuring the structural stability of buildings, particularly in relation to seismic resistance. Over time, she became one of the key figures contributing to the development of geotechnical engineering in Albania. In parallel with her research, Prof. Bozo was actively involved in teaching, delivering courses such as Soil Mechanics, Foundation Techniques, and Building Construction. Her long-term commitment to both teaching and research contributed to the training of multiple generations of engineers. As she recalled,

colleagues referred to me as a “bookworm,” reflecting her strong dedication to studying and academic work (Interview, 2022).

The period leading up to the completion of her doctoral work in 1981 was shaped by two key factors: the geotechnical characteristics of Tirana’s clay soils and the broader context of the Cold War. The widespread construction of bunkers and underground structures during this period created practical opportunities for field research, enabling easier access to soil samples. As she described,

“Relatively simple tools and field access allowed me to conduct extensive empirical work across different construction sites” (Interview, 2022).

In 1985, Prof. Bozo specialized in rock mechanics at a leading laboratory in Paris. From that point until 1993, she served as a member of the Scientific Council of the Ministry of Construction, contributing to research and policy discussions on critical engineering and environmental issues, including seismic risk, soil stability, erosion, landslides, coastal dynamics, and infrastructure vulnerability. As she described in the interview, she follows a highly structured work routine, noting that she “checks emails only in the morning and goes through them one by one.”

Throughout her academic career, she also held several leadership positions at the Faculty of Civil Engineering, including Vice-Dean and Head of Department. Her contributions were instrumental in the establishment of a geotechnical engineering profile within civil engineering education in Albania, formally introduced in 2005.

ANALYSIS: GENDER, SCIENCE, AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Breaking Gender Barriers

Existing research suggests that girls tend to disengage from STEM disciplines during middle and high school (Dasgupta & Stout, 2014). Against this pattern, the case of Prof. Bozo represents a notable divergence, as she demonstrated strong performance



Figure. Prof. Luljeta Bozo during field excursions to major construction sites (*Photo courtesy of Prof. Luljeta Bozo*)

in mathematics and physics during this formative period. This contrast highlights the importance of early academic achievement and sustained engagement in supporting women's participation in STEM fields.

Prof. Bozo's subsequent entry into civil engineering further reinforces this trajectory, representing an early example of women entering a traditionally male-dominated profession in Albania. Her career illustrates how individual academic excellence, combined with institutional pathways, enabled access even in a context where gender norms remained influential.

This case can be situated within broader and more recent efforts to expand women's participation in technical and scientific fields in Albania. Contemporary initiatives increasingly link capacity building with policy reform. For example, a UNDP report notes that 208 participants, 79 percent of whom were women, took part in specialized training programs covering areas such as climate modelling, environmental economics, climate budgeting, and stakeholder engagement (UNDP, 2026).

Scientific Contribution and Practice

Engineering in the Albanian context was closely linked to practical outcomes, where professional credibility depended on performance in real construction environments. As reflected in her own account, "I spoke to the structural elements as if they could understand

me...” (Interview, 2022), her work demonstrates a strong engagement with the material and technical dimensions of engineering practice. Her contribution to geotechnics, particularly in foundation engineering and soil analysis, positioned her among the key figures in the development of this field in Albania.

Evidence from her professional record, including the curriculum vitae provided by the interviewee, indicates that this close connection between academic expertise and practical application was further reinforced through her involvement in working groups and expert consultations with state institutions, particularly before the 1990s. During this period, academic professionals were actively engaged in addressing technical challenges in collaboration with ministries and public enterprises. In the post-1990 period, such forms of engagement appear to have declined, reflecting a broader shift in the relationship between academia and state institutions. This trend contrasts with the continued development of Prof. Bozo’s professional expertise, which expanded significantly over time. Evidence from the interview and professional record suggests that her expertise was mobilized more visibly during periods of crisis, for example, following major earthquake events, when she was called upon to provide expert assessments of building safety (Interview, 2022). This pattern indicates a more episodic rather than systematic use of academic expertise in public decision-making, raising questions about the continuity of knowledge transfer between universities and state institutions.

Professional Identity and Role Model

Beyond her technical work, Prof. Bozo played an important role in academic and institutional development through teaching, supervision, and leadership positions. Her long-term involvement in higher education contributed to the training of new generations of engineers.

Beyond her individual trajectory, her long-term role as a faculty member also reflects a broader dynamic identified in the literature. As noted by Dasgupta and Stout (2014), the presence of female faculty can increase female students’ confidence and strengthen their identification with STEM disciplines. In this sense, Prof. Bozo’s academic career can be understood not only in terms of scientific contribution, but also as a form of representation that reinforces women’s visibility in engineering and role model.

Her career also spans two distinct periods, before and after 1990, each characterized by different institutional and socio-political conditions. Despite these differences, a consistent element is her role in supporting and motivating women to pursue education and professional careers.

CONCLUSIONS

The case of Prof. Luljeta Bozo illustrates how individual dedication, professional competence, and institutional engagement can contribute to both scientific development and social change. Her trajectory reflects broader dynamics of women’s participation in engineering, highlighting both progress and ongoing challenges. In this sense, her role extends beyond individual achievement, contributing to the visibility of women in a traditionally male-dominated field and reinforcing the importance of role models in shaping future generations.

The findings of this study can also be interpreted in light of broader cross-national research, which suggests that developing countries often display narrower gender gaps in mathematics and science compared to more economically developed contexts (Perez-Felkner et al., 2020). The case of Albania during the socialist period provides a relevant illustration of this dynamic. While Prof. Bozo's trajectory clearly reflects individual academic excellence, it was also shaped by state policies that actively promoted women's participation in higher education, particularly in technical fields. These policies were not driven solely by gender equality considerations, but also by the need to expand the skilled workforce. As a result, women's participation in scientific disciplines increased significantly, in some cases leading to higher female representation in fields such as physics during the early 1980s.

These findings suggest that access to scientific careers is shaped not only by formal equality, but also by the interaction between policy frameworks, institutional opportunities, and social context. In this regard, the case of Prof. Bozo highlights the importance of both structural conditions and individual agency in supporting women's participation in STEM.

Finally, the study underscores the importance of early engagement with science education. As argued by Nathanaili (2024), the foundations of scientific interest must be established from the earliest stages of education, including at the preschool level. Early exposure to science can help prevent later disengagement, broaden access, and support more inclusive pathways into STEM, particularly for girls.

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