

UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI
FAKULTETA ZA DRUŽBENE VEDE

Mensur Zeqiri

Kultivacijske strategije pri upravljanju medetičnih odnosov
Cultivation Strategies in Inter-ethnic Relationship Management

Doktorska disertacija

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Mensur Zeqiri

Mentor: Prof. Dr. Dejan Verčič

Somentor: Prof. Dr. Ralph Tench

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Kultivacijske strategije pri upravljanju medetičnih odnosov

Disertacija obravnava odnose med vlado in albansko skupnostjo v Republiki Severna Makedonija. Pri oblikovanju teoretskega okvira za disertacijo smo sledili koorientacijski perspektivi odnosov z javnostmi. Ta jih obravnava kot vodstveno funkcijo, ki omogoča vzpostaviti in vzdrževati vzajemno koristne odnose. Razdelujemo koncept kultivacije odnosov in rezultatov odnosov, ki sta ga razvila Grunig in Huang (2000). Strategije kultivacije odnosov zaobjemajo strategije, ki jih uporabljamo za oblikovanje in vzdrževanje kakovostnih odnosov med organizacijo in javnostmi. Hon in Grunig (1999) ter Grunig in Huang (2000) so konceptualizirali šest strategij kultivacij odnosov, ki jih organizacije lahko uporabijo za oblikovanje in vzdrževanje odnosov z različnimi javnostmi: dostopnost, pozitivna naravnost, odprtost, zagotavljanje upoštevanja, skupne naloge in mreženje. Končni rezultati predstavljajo kakovost odnosov ali pa posledice učinkovitih strategij kultivacij odnosov (Grunig & Hunt, 2000). Hon in Grunig (1999) sta identificirala štiri izide odnosov – zaupanje, zavzetost, zadovoljstvo in vzajemni nadzor.

Ko teoretiki odnosov z javnostmi razvijajo teorije in preverjajo učinke strategij kultivacij odnosov na rezultate kakovosti odnosov, se v raziskavi posvečamo nadaljnemu preverjanju kultivacijskih strategij v kontekstu odnosov med vlado in skupnostjo. V raziskavi, umeščeni v politični kontekst Republike Severne Makedonije, smo analizirali strategije kultivacij odnosov - dostopnost, pozitivno naravnost, odprtost in zagotavljanje upoštevanja ter razložili, kako te prispevajo k doseganju zaupanja in zadovoljstva o odnosih med vlado in skupnostjo. Raziskava je predstavila vpogled v pomen in pomembnost dostopnosti, pozitivne naravnosti, odprtosti in zagotavljanja upoštevanja pri zagotavljanju pozitivnih odnosov med vlado in skupnostjo, ki temeljijo na vzajemnem zaupanju in zadovoljstvu.

Upoštevajoč relacijsko perspektivo odnosov z javnostmi je bil namen raziskave oceniti koliko dostopa do vlade in njenih ustanov imajo predstavniki albanske skupnosti v Republiki Severna Makedonija. Prav tako smo želeli ugotoviti, kako pozitivno naravnani so javni uslužbenci v sodelovanju s predstavniki albanske skupnosti. V študiji smo ugotavljali preglednost delovanja vlade in njenih institucij, pa tudi vladnih zagotovil, da bodo predstavniki albanske skupnosti in njihovi interesi upoštevanji. Z raziskavo smo si prizadevali oceniti, koliko predstavniki albanske skupnosti zaupajo vladi in v kolikšni meri so z vlado zadovoljni. Ob tem smo z raziskavo poskusili tudi ugotoviti v kolikšni meri stopnje dostopnosti, pozitivnosti, odprtosti in zagotavljanja upoštevanja vplivajo na zaupanje in zadovoljstvo v odnosih med vlado in albansko skupnostjo v Republiki Severna Makedonija.

V raziskavi smo želeli zagotoviti ovrednotenje kultivacijskih strategij in njihovih rezultatov z vidika več javnosti; to je oceniti dinamiko odnosov z vidika vseh javnosti, ki so bile vključene v razmerje organizacija – javnosti. V študiji smo uporabili koorientacijski pristop za merjenje odnosov med vlado in (albansko) skupnostjo, ki je zaobjel vse vključene v ta odnos. Uporaba koorientacijskega pristopa je pomagala tudi razumeti kako so člani skupnosti in vladni uslužbenci razumeli odnos med njimi.

Kot glavno raziskovalno metodo smo uporabili kvalitativne poglobljene intervjuje. Podatke smo zbrali s poglobljenimi intervjuji z 19 Albanci in 20 javnimi uslužbenci osrednje (makedonske) vlade. V vzorec javnih uslužbenci smo vključili 8 predstavnikov albanske skupnosti in 12 Makedoncev. Vzorec smo predhodno preverili s 5 predstavniki albanske skupnosti, 2 albanskima državnima uradnikoma in enim makedonskim uradnikom.

Uporabili smo tri vzorčne strategije: teoretično vzorčenje, vzorčenje snežne kepe in vzorčenje z merili. Analiziranju podatkov so sledile tri interaktivne analize podatkov: reduciranje

podatkov, prikaz podatkov ter zaključno risanje in verificiranje. Analiza in prikaz podatkov nista bili opravljena ročno, temveč z uporabo programske opreme CAQDAS (računalniško podprta programska oprema za kvalitativno analizo podatkov) in programskega orodja Atlas.ti, s katerim smo znatno poenostavili proces analize podatkov, zlasti v procesu prepisovanja dokumentov, arhiviranja in kodiranja. Programska oprema je pomagala kodirati in izboljševati kodiranje med samim analiziranjem.

Rezultati kažejo, da so predstavniki albanske skupnosti in albanski javni uslužbenci negativno ocenili odnos med vlado in albansko skupnostjo, medtem ko so makedonski državni uradniki videli ta odnos v precej bolj ugodni luči. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti in albanski državni uradniki so poročali tudi o nižjih ravneh dostopnosti, pozitivnosti, odprtosti in zagotavljanja upoštevanja v primerjavi z makedonskimi javnimi uslužbenci, ki so vlado ocenili višje v teh kultivacijskih strategijah. Makedonski državni uradniki so menili, da jim predstavniki albanske skupnosti zaupajo in so v veliko večji meri zadovoljni z vlado v primerjavi s predstavniki albanske skupnosti in albanskimi javnimi uslužbenci, ki so v opisu vladno-albanskih odnosov poudarjali nezaupanje in nezadovoljstvo. Na splošno so Albanci poročali, da vladi sploh ne zaupajo. Večina albanskih javnih uslužbencev je tudi potrdila, da niti sami ne zaupajo vladi, čeprav so vladni uslužbenci.

Albanci na splošno niso zadovoljni s strokovnostjo, vpljdnostjo in profesionalnostjo državnih uslužbencev. Večini se zdijo javni uslužbenci precej arogantni. Rezultati so pokazali nezmožnost, da bi predstavniki albanske skupnosti vplivali na evalvacijo odnosa. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti so v mnogih primerih trdili, da so javni uslužbenci nekompetentni in nestrokovni za delo, ki ga opravljajo.

Ugotovitve te raziskave kažejo na povezave med kultivacijskimi strategijami odnosov - dostopnost, pozitivnost, odprtost in zagotavljanje upoštevanja ter rezultati kakovostnih odnosov, ki se kažejo v zaupanju in zadovoljstvu. Rezultati kažejo, da bolj ko je bila vlada pozitivno ocenjena na ravni kultivacijskih strategij odnosov, ugodneje sta bila ocenjena tudi zaupanje in zadovoljstvo kot rezultata kakovosti tega odnosa. Medosebno komuniciranje po modelu osebnega vpliva je bilo prav tako opredeljeno kot pomembna kultivacijska strategija v odnosih med vlado in državljani v Severni Makedoniji. Raziskava je ponudila dokaze o »izpolnjevanju obljub« kot eni od kultivacijskih strategij. Kot glavni razlog, zakaj predstavniki albanske skupnosti niso zaupali vladi in niso bili zadovoljni z odnosom vlade do njih, se je med analizo podatkov izkazalo izpolnjevanje obljub skupaj z diskriminacijo. Poleg njiju se je za pomembno dimenzijo v evalvaciji zaupanja v odnosu vlade do skupnosti izkazala integriteta.

Diskriminacija je bila prepoznana kot glavni razlog, da so predstavniki albanske skupnosti občutili, da z njimi ne ravnajo pošteno in pravično. Prav zaradi diskriminacije so se počutili nepošteno in nepravično, kar je zmanjšalo zaupanje v odnose med vlado in njimi. Politične stranke navadno veliko obljublajo, kar se kasneje izkaže neskladno z možnostmi, da se obljube uresničijo. Uresničevanje obljub velja v Severni Makedoniji za »merilo resnice«, s katerim se lahko ugotavlja, koliko vlada drži besedo.

Prav tako so se spori in upravljanje sporov izkazali za pomemben pokazatelj odnosov med vlado in skupnostjo. Načini, kako državni uradniki obravnavajo konfliktna situacija s predstavniki albanske skupnosti vplivajo na zadovoljstvo državljanov. Rezultati so tudi pokazali, da profesionalnost in kompetentnost državnih uradnikov vplivata na pozitivnost (odnosov), kar se posledično odraža na zadovoljstvu državljanov. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti sploh niso bili zadovoljni s profesionalnostjo in kompetentnostjo javnih

uslužbencev. Profesionalnost se je izkazala za ključno za ugodno vzajemno delovanje med Albanci in javnimi uslužbenci.

Rezultati raziskave so tudi pokazali, da sta udejstvovanje in zadovoljstvo zaposlenih pomembna za zadovoljstvo državljanov. Pomanjkanje profesionalnosti in usposobljenosti so vplivali na udejstvovanje javnih uslužbencev. Albanci so menili, da javni uslužbenci vedno delujejo pod stresom, ker niso sposobni opravljati dela, ki so ga prevzeli. Albanci so tudi menili, da javni uslužbenci niso vljudni, ker so prevzeli preveč odgovornosti, in zato ves čas delujejo pod stresom. Zato so posledično postali arogantni do državljanov.

Naslednja ključna ugotovitev te raziskave je vpliv zaupanja na kultivacijske strategije odnosov. Pomanjkanje zaupanja je vplivalo na zaznano zaupanje vlade in vladnega komuniciranja. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti so menili, da vlade ne morejo obravnavati kot poštene ali resnicoljubne. Zaradi pomanjkanja zaupanja predstavniki albanske skupnosti svojih zahtev ali pritožb niso nikoli naslavljali na vladne institucije, ker so bili prepričani, da vladi ni mar za njihove pomisleke in jih ni bila pripravljena reševati.

Odsotnost zaupanja je predstavnike albanske skupnosti odvrnilo od naslavljanja njihovih vprašanj, pomislekov ali pritožb na vlado. Pomanjkanje zaupanja je močno vplivalo tudi na vladno komuniciranje in razširjanje informacij. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti so dvomili v vse informacije, ki so jih prejemale od vlade. Menili so, da te informacije ne odražajo dejanskega stanja; ocenili so jih za prirejene za trženjske in propagandne namene. Pomanjkanje zaupanja je vplivalo tudi na izkazovanje poročanja o odgovornosti delovanja. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti so menili, da poročanje o vladnem delovanju ne predstavlja realne slike dejanskega vladanja.

Ugotovitve te raziskave so, upoštevajoč koorientacijski pristop, na splošno pokazale nestrinjanje med predstavniki albanske skupnosti in javnimi uslužbenci. Rezultati so pokazali nestrinjanje makedonskih in albanskih javnih uslužbencev o odnosih med albansko skupnostjo in vlado. Rezultati so odkrili, da se albanski javni uslužbenci in predstavniki albanske skupnosti strinjajo o večini kultivacijskih strategij odnosov in rezultatov teh odnosov. Pregled teh ugotovitev po koorientacijskem modelu kaže, da makedonski javni uslužbenci in predstavniki albanske skupnosti niso soglasni o kultivacijskih strategijah odnosov in rezultatov odnosov, so pa predstavniki albanske skupnosti in albanski javni uslužbenci soglašali pri vseh spremenljivkah razen pozitivnosti in zagotovil upoštevanja.

Ključne besede: odnosi z javnostmi, upravljanje odnosov, zaupanje, zadovoljstvo, koorientacijska teorija, medetnični odnosi

Cultivation Strategies in Inter-ethnic Relationship Management

The study detailed the relationship between the government and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia. In developing the theoretical framework for the dissertation, the study followed the relational perspective of public relations that views public relations as a management function that helps establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships. The study explored Grunig and Huang's (2000) concepts of relationship cultivation and relationship outcomes. Cultivation strategies cover the strategies used to build and sustain quality organization-public relationships. Hon and Grunig (1999) and Grunig and Huang (2000) conceptualized six relationship cultivation strategies that organizations can use to build and maintain the relationships with the various publics: access, positivity, openness, assurances, shared tasks, and networking. On the other side, relationship outcomes represent relationship quality or the consequences of effective relationship cultivation strategies (Grunig & Huang, 2000). Hon and Grunig (1999) identified four relationship outcomes, trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality.

As public relations scholarship continues to theorize about and test the effects of relationship cultivation strategies on relational quality outcomes, the study sought to provide further testing of the cultivation strategies in the context of government – community relations. Specifically, situated within the political context of the Republic of North Macedonia, the study analyzed relationship cultivation strategies of access, positivity, openness, and assurances of legitimacy and explained how they contributed to achieving trust and relationship satisfaction in government-community relations. Thus, the study provided insights into the importance of access, positivity, openness, and assurances to achieving positive government-community relations based on mutual trust and satisfaction.

Using the relational perspective of public relations, the purpose of the study was to assess how much access Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia have to the government and its institutions. Also to assess how positive the state officials are in their interactions with Albanians. The study also examined the transparency of the government and its institutions and the assurances of the government towards Albanians that they and their concerns are legitimate. Additionally, the study aimed to evaluate how much Albanians trust the government and to what degree they are satisfied with the government. Moreover, the study attempted to assess to what extent the level of access, positivity, openness, and assurances influences the degree of trust and satisfaction in the relationship between government and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The study also intended to provide a multiple-publics evaluation of cultivation strategies and outcomes; i.e., evaluate the dynamics of the relationship from the perspective of parties involved in organization-public relationships. Therefore, the study applied the coorientational approach to measure government-community relationships from the perspective of all the parties involved in the relationship. The application of the coorientational approach helped understand how members of the community and government officials perceived the relationship between them.

Qualitative in-depth interview was chosen as the main research method. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with 19 Albanians and 20 civil servants of the central government. The sample of civil servants included 8 Albanians and 12 Macedonians. A pretest was conducted with five Albanians, two Albanian civil servants, and one Macedonian civil servant. Three sampling strategies were applied: theory-based sampling, snowball or chain sampling, and criterion sampling. To analyse the data, three interactive data analysis processes were followed: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and

verification. For this study, the data analysis and display were not done manually, but using a qualitative data analysis software widely known as CAQDAS (computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software). The researcher made use of Atlas.ti essentially to ease the process of data analysis. Atlas.ti was mainly used in the process of transcribing documents, archiving and coding. The software helped code and revise codes easily while doing the analysis.

Results showed that Albanians and Albanian civil servants negatively view the government-Albanian relationship, and Macedonian civil servants viewed the relationship much more favorably. Albanians and Albanian civil servants also reported low levels of access, positivity, openness, and assurances compared to Macedonian civil servants that rated government higher on these cultivation strategies. Macedonian civil servants also perceived that Albanians trust and are satisfied much more with government compared to Albanians and Albanian civil servants that claimed mistrust and dissatisfaction to characterize government-Albanian relationships. Overall, Albanians reported not to trust the government at all. The majority Albanian civil servants also confirmed that even they themselves do not trust government, though they are government employees. With regards to satisfaction, Albanians, in general, are not satisfied with the knowledgeability, politeness, and professionalism of civil servants. The majority of them find civil servants quite arrogant. Results showed incompetence to influence the evaluation of the relationship from the side of Albanians. In many instances, Albanians reported civil servants to be incompetent and unprofessional for the job they were doing.

In addition, the findings of this study suggested linkages between relationship cultivation strategies of access, positivity, openness, and assurances with the relationship quality outcomes of trust and satisfaction. Results showed that the more favorably the government was evaluated on the relationship cultivation strategies, the relationship quality outcomes of trust and satisfaction were also favorably evaluated. Face-to-face communication using the personal influence model were also identified as an important relationship cultivation strategy in government-citizen relationships in North Macedonia. The study provided evidence on “keeping promises” as a relationship cultivation strategy. Keeping promises, together with discrimination, appeared during the data analysis to be the main reasons why Albanians did not trust government and were not satisfied with the relationship the government has had with them. Additionally, integrity was found to be an important dimension in the evaluation of trust in government-community relations. Discrimination was the main reason why Albanians felt they are treated unfairly and unjustly, which showed that citizen discrimination made citizens feel unfairly and unjustly treated which reduced trust in government-public relationships. Political parties usually make lots of promises, which in most of the cases are inconsistent with their true capability in fulfilling them. In the Republic of North Macedonia, keeping promises is used as a “truth meter” to check how much the government keeps its promises.

Besides, conflict and conflict management proved to be important to government-community relations. How civil servants handled conflict situation with Albanians influenced citizen satisfaction. Results also showed professionalism and competence of civil servants to affect positivity which in turn influenced citizen’s satisfaction. Albanians were not at all satisfied with the professionalism and competence of civil servants. Professionalism also was crucial to enjoyable interaction between Albanians and civil servants. The results of the study also showed how important employee engagement and satisfaction is to citizen satisfaction. Besides, results showed lack of professionalism and competence to influence civil servants engagement. Albanians felt that civil servants were always stressed because they have taken a job they were not capable of doing. Albanians also thought that civil servants were not

courteous because they have taken more responsibilities than they can carry, which always keeps them stressed. This, in turn, made them arrogant towards citizens.

Another important finding of the study was the influence that trust had on relationship cultivation strategies. Lack of trust influenced the perceived trustworthiness of government and government communications. Albanians considered that the government could not be relied on as honest or truthful. Due to the lack of trust, Albanians never addressed their inquiries or complaints to government institutions, because they believed and were convinced that the government did not care about their concerns and was not willing to address them. Lack of trust discouraged Albanians from addressing their questions, concerns, or complaints. In addition, the lack of trust highly influenced government communications and dissemination of information. Albanians doubted all information disseminated from the government. They considered that the information did not portray the actual reality and considered them to be made-up information for marketing and propaganda purposes. Lack of trust further influenced reporting and accountability of government. Albanians considered that reports provided by government do not portray the actual reality of governance.

Regarding the coorientational state, the findings of the study, in general, showed disagreement between the Albanians and civil servants. The results also showed disagreement between the Macedonian and Albanian civil servants regarding Albanian-government relations. Results further revealed an agreement between Albanian civil servants and Albanians about most of the relationship cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes. Reviewing these findings using the coorientational model shows that Macedonian civil servants and Albanians are in the state of dissensus on all the cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes. Moreover, Albanians and Albanian civil servants are in the state of consensus on all the variables besides positivity and assurances.

Keywords: public relations, relationship management, trust, satisfaction, coorientation theory, inter-ethnic relations

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1 PURPOSE AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Public relations as an applied communication science discipline has developed in the past thirty years from a predominantly persuasive, mass communication focused area of research into a study of communication and relationships at all levels, from intraorganizational to societal. Public relations scholars have come to believe that the fundamental goal of public relations is to build and then enhance on-going or long-term relationships with an organization's key constituencies (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

The call for focusing on relationships in public relations dates back to Ferguson. Ferguson warned that relationships, "not...the organization, nor the public, nor the communication process should be the unifying concept of public relations " (1984, p. 166). Since then, the relationship between an organization and public has been explored as a unit of study by public relations scholarship (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997, 2000; Bruning, 2000; Bruning & Ledingham, Bruning, McGrewb & Cooper, 2006; 1999; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Huang, 1997, 2001a; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Hung, 2002; Ledingham, 2001; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Ledingham, Bruning, & Wilson, 1999).

From 1997, the research on relationships started to move forward. Broom et al. (1997, 2000), frustrated by a lack of definition of "relationship" reviewed the literature and constructed a definition for organization-public relationships. They were the first to discuss organization-public relationships and produced a model that described the antecedents and consequences of organization-public relations. In addition, some of the first relationship management studies were focused on defining relationships (Broom et al.1997, 2000; Brunner, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998), identifying dimensions to evaluate relationship quality (Huang 1997; Hon & Grunig, 1999), and designing multiple-item, multiple-dimension scales to measure relationships (Huang, 2001a; Ki, 2006; Ki and Hon, 2009).

Public relations scholarship has identified strategies in which organizations can engage to cultivate relationships with publics and outcomes that measure the quality of relationship between organizations and publics. Huang (1997) identified trust, control mutuality, relational commitment, and relational satisfaction as relationship indicators. Hon and Grunig (1999) provided guidelines for measuring organization-public relationships and identified the following six relationship indicators: control mutuality, trust, commitment, satisfaction,

communal relationships, and exchange relationships. The scale proposed by Hon and Grunig (1999) which found its roots in Huang (1997) has been the most common scale used in the literature to measure the strength of an organizational-public relationship.

Grunig and Huang (2000) developed a theory of organization-public relationships and provided methods for evaluating relationships in each stage: relationship antecedents, cultivation strategies, and relationship outcomes. They proposed several relationship cultivation strategies: access, positivity, openness, assurances of legitimacy, networking and sharing of tasks, and relationship quality outcome dimensions: trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality. The relationship outcome dimensions determine the relationship quality between an organization and its publics. Ever since, the measures created by Hon and Grunig (1999) and Grunig and Huang (2000) appeared to have been constantly tested more often, although researchers have created multiple measures to explore the organization-public relationship.

Hung (2000, 2002, 2005) adopted Grunig and Huang's (2000) theory of relationship cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes and developed a basic model of relationship management. Ki and Hon (2009) developed measures to help public relations professionals better understand how to nurture and sustain relationships with their target publics. In addition, they developed a multiple-item scale meeting the standards of reliability and validity in measurement for measuring relationship cultivation strategies.

Moreover, studies have used the relationship cultivation strategies and relationship qualities proposed by Hon and Grunig (1999) and Grunig and Huang (2000) to explore organization-public relationships in different settings: university-student relationship (Hon & Brunner, 2002; Ki & Hon, 2006), manufacturer-retailer relationship (Jo, 2003), multinationals-local community relationship (Hung, 2005), municipal utility-community relationship (Hall, 2006); Air Force base-community relationship (DellaVedova, 2005); nonprofit-donor relationship (O'Neil, 2007; Waters, 2007); political party-public relationships (Seltzer & Zhang 2011); and local government-citizen relationships (Graham 2014). The relationship between government and citizens is an area of organization-public relationship research that has received little scholarly attention.

Besides, scholars (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999) posited that several relationship cultivation strategies (e.g., access, positivity, openness, sharing of tasks, networking, and assurances) could produce better relationship quality outcomes (e.g., control

mutuality, satisfaction, trust, and commitment). In studying the relationship between non-profit organizations and donors, Waters (2007) found that every relationship cultivation strategy, except reciprocity, had a direct influence on evaluation of the relationship dimensions. He found that access, networking, responsibility, and relationship nurturing all significantly affected trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, and commitment. Sharing of tasks had a significant impact on trust, and openness significantly influenced satisfaction. Positivity had a strong influence on how control mutuality was evaluated (Waters, 2007). In addition, Jo (2003) found that in a manufacturer-retailer relationship, retailers perceived satisfaction more distinctively compared to other relationship qualities such as control mutuality and face and favor. Ki (2006) was also one of the scholars that investigated how different types of cultivation strategies resulted in the varying levels of relationship outcomes as well as behavioral and attitudinal outcomes.

These studies showed that cultivation strategies are not successful to the same extent when applied to different organization-public relationships settings. Some cultivation strategies might be successful in managing the university-student relationship, but might not be successful to the same extent when managing government-community relationships. Furthermore, some relationship strategies compared to others have the most impact on relationship quality outcomes.

Additionally, Hung (2007) suggested that research in the future should move from concentrating on relationship outcomes to relationship cultivation strategies; i.e., how to sustain and cultivate quality relationships with a focus on which relationship cultivation strategies, access, positivity, openness, assurances of legitimacy, networking and sharing of tasks, can achieve the relationship qualities, such as trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction.

The purpose of the research was in part to fill that void. As public relations scholarship continues to theorize about and test the effects of relationship cultivation strategies on relational quality outcomes, the study sought to provide further testing of the cultivation strategies in the context of government – community relations. The study was designed to explore the relationship cultivation strategies of access, positivity, openness, and assurances of legitimacy and explain how they contribute to achieving trust and relationship satisfaction in government-community relations. Thus, the study also provided insights into the

importance of access, positivity, openness, and assurances to achieving positive government-community relations based on mutual trust and satisfaction.

In addition, previous public relations studies, with certain exceptions (Graham 2014; Waters 2007), have provided a one-sided measurement of the organization- public relationships. Studies have mainly focused on the evaluation of the stakeholder perspective. The study intended to provide a multiple-publics evaluation of cultivation strategies and outcomes; i.e., evaluate the dynamics of the relationship from the perspective of parties involved in organization-public relationships. Therefore, to measure government-community relationships from the perspective of all the parties involved in the relationship, the coorientational approach advocated by Broom (1977) and Broom and Dozier (1990) is applied. The application of the coorientational approach was deemed ideal as it reveals the degree of agreement, accurate perception, and perception of perceived agreement (congruency) between government and community when assessing cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes. The method was used to help understand how members of the community and government officials perceived the relationship between them.

The study was situated within the political context of the Republic of North Macedonia. The Republic of North Macedonia, previously known as the Republic of Macedonia or the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, changed its name to the Republic of North Macedonia under the Prespa agreement, signed by The Republic of North Macedonia and Greece in June 2018. The agreement ended 27 years of bilateral disputes over the use of the name Macedonia between Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia. The name deal was sealed between Athens and Skopje on January 25, 2019, when the Greek parliament ratified the Prespa Agreement that saw the Republic Macedonia (the Former Yugoslav Republic of The Republic of North Macedonia - FYROM) change its name to the Republic of North Macedonia. The Republic of North Macedonia's parliament had previously passed an amendment to the constitution on January 11, 2019 to rename the country Republic of North Macedonia in line with the agreement with Greece.

The Republic of North Macedonia, formerly part of Yugoslavia, is situated in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula. Kosovo borders it to the northwest, Serbia to the north, Bulgaria to the east, Greece to the south, and Albania to the west. The Republic of North Macedonia declared independence on 8 September 1991. The capital is Skopje. According to the last census of 2002, the Republic of North Macedonia has a population of 2.022.547 (State

Statistical Office, 2002). In the Republic of North Macedonia live people of different ethnicities: Macedonians comprise 64.2%, Albanians 25.2%, Turks 3.9%, Roma 2.7%, Serbs 1.8%, and others 0.7%. In terms of religion, approximately 65% of the population is Macedonian Orthodox, and 32% is Muslim, about 3% belong to various other faiths (State Statistical Office, 2002). The Republic of North Macedonia is known for its cultural diversity. The cultural diversity is expressed through the use of different recognized languages in the country, Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Vlach, Roma, Serbian, and through different religious affiliations, mainly Orthodox and Muslim. Still, fragile inter-ethnic relations characterized the Republic of North Macedonia since the day it declared independence in 1991.

The Republic of North Macedonia is a parliamentary representative democratic republic. The Prime Minister is the head of government. The government exercises executive power in the country, parliament is in charge of legislative duties, whereas the judiciary is independent of government and parliament. According to the Freedom House's 2016 report, the Republic of North Macedonia is considered to be a partly free country. As reported by Freedom House (2016), the Republic of North Macedonia also lost its designation as an electoral democracy in 2016. The overall democracy score of the Republic of North Macedonia in 2016 was 4.29 out of 7.00, which dropped to 4.43 in 2017 classifying it as a transitional government or hybrid regime in which democratic institutions are fragile and substantial challenges to the protection of political rights and civil liberties exist (Freedom House, 2016).

The Republic of North Macedonia belongs to the group of emerging and developing economies. Corruption and crime are considered to be the main factors in slowing the economic development of the Republic of North Macedonia. Activism in the Republic of North Macedonia is highly controlled by the government. As the democratic governance in the Republic of North Macedonia continued to deteriorate in the last years, so the space for activists and members of civil society has also shrunk. Besides, the judicial system in the Republic of North Macedonia currently struggles with a damaged reputation. The mass wiretapping scandal in 2015 revealed the interference of the executive branch in recruiting and promoting judges. The scandal also revealed the exerted pressure of the executive branch in individual cases (Freedom House, 2016).

The Freedom of the Press 2016 report by Freedom House showed the Republic of North Macedonia's status declined from partly free to not free due to revelations indicating large-

scale and illegal government wiretapping of journalists, corrupt ties between officials and media owners, and an increase in threats and attacks on media workers. Besides, the Freedom of the Press 2016 report described the media landscape in the Republic of North Macedonia as deeply polarized along political lines. Due to pressure from media owners tied to political or business interests, self-censorship is common among journalists in the Republic of North Macedonia.

1.2 Organization – Public Relationships: Cultivation Strategies and Relationship Outcomes

In developing the theoretical framework for the dissertation, the study followed the relational perspective of public relations that views public relations as a management function that helps establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships. The study explored Grunig and Huang's (2000) concepts of relationship cultivation and relationship outcomes. Cultivation strategies cover the strategies used to build and sustain quality organization-public relationships whereas relationship outcomes represent relationship quality or the consequences of effective relationship cultivation strategies (Grunig & Huang, 2000).

The broadly used definition of organization-public relationships tells us that relationships arise when organizations and their strategic publics are interdependent, and this interdependence results in consequences to each other that organizations need to manage constantly (Hung, 2002). Broom et al. (2000) have proposed a specific definition of the organization-public relationship as:

Organization- public relationships are represented by the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics. These relationships have properties that are distinct from the identities, attributes, and perceptions of the individuals and social collectivities of the relationships. Though dynamic in nature, organization-public relationships can be described at a single point in time and tracked over time (p. 18).

In a multi-ethnic country like the Republic of North Macedonia, different ethnic communities form part of the strategic publics that the government needs to manage relationships with. These different ethnic communities simply by residing in the Republic of North Macedonia and their respective communities put them within the group of government stakeholders, and place them in the government-community relationship. This relationship means that they do not choose to be a public of the government; however, they are one of the publics by being part of a community and citizen of the country.

Relationship cultivation: According to Grunig and Huang (2000), the concept of relationship cultivation describes the way organizations communicate with publics and how they manage conflicts to build positive relationships or restore damaged relationships. Hon and Grunig (1999) and Grunig and Huang (2000) conceptualized six relationship cultivation strategies that organizations can use to build and maintain the relationships with the various community/publics: 1). access which allows members direct contact with decision-makers within the organization; 2). positivity which makes interactions more pleasant or enjoyable; 3). openness which creates sharing of thoughts and feelings among parties involved in the relationship; 4). assurances for assuring the other party in the relationship that they and their concerns are legitimate; 5). shared tasks - participating in tasks of mutual interest; 6). networking through building coalitions with groups in which organization and public have mutual interest. To study the cultivation of relationships between the government and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia, the study focused only on four strategies: access, positivity, openness, and assurances.

Relationship outcomes: relationship outcomes represent relationship quality or the consequences of effective relationship cultivation strategies. Hon and Grunig (1999) identified four relationship outcomes, trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality. These outcomes are considered to be the essential indicators and dimensions representing the quality of organization-public relationships. Hon and Grunig (1999) argued that research in interpersonal communication and the psychology of interpersonal relationships shows that the four outcomes are good indicators of successful interpersonal relationships. They further explained that public relations research shows that they also apply equally well to organization-public relationships. They focused on four dimensions: trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality.

The study focused only on two relationship outcomes: trust and satisfaction. Trust has been regarded as a crucial concept in understanding the relationship between organizations and publics. Verčič and Grunig (2000) held that without trust existence of an organization is uncertain. Grunig and Grunig (1998) defined trust as “the extent to which both management and publics express willingness to make themselves vulnerable to the behavior of the other - confidence that the other party will take its interests into account in making decisions” (p. 4). The study also applied Hon and Grunig’s (1999) subdimensions of trust scale: 1) integrity, the belief that an organization is fair and just, 2) dependability, the belief that an organization will

do what it says it will do, and 3) competence, the belief that an organization has the ability to do what it says it will do.

Satisfaction is the other relationship outcome that the study explored. Hon and Grunig (1999) defined satisfaction as “the extent to which one party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced” (p. 20). Moreover, Hon and Grunig (1999) noted that “a satisfying relationship is one in which the benefits outweigh the costs” (p. 3).

1.3 Study design

A qualitative in-depth interview research methodology was chosen as the main research method. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with 19 Albanians and 20 civil servants of the central government. The sample of civil servants included 8 Albanians and 12 Macedonians. The questions developed assessed the perceived level of access of Albanians in the government institutions, the positivity of civil servants in interacting with Albanians, the openness of government institutions and assurances of the government that Albanians and their concerns are legitimate. Moreover, the questions assess the degree of Albanians trust and their satisfaction with the government. A pretest was conducted with 5 Albanians, two Albanian civil servants, and one Macedonian civil servant. Civil servants that were recruited had to be employed in government institutions and sectors in which they interacted with citizens. Experiences in dealing and interacting with Albanians was the main condition for civil servants to participate in the study. The same applied for Albanian citizens, who were required to have had interacted and received services from civil servants in the last five years.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study focused on the relationship cultivation strategies and their contribution in achieving a quality of relationship based on mutual trust and satisfaction in government-community relationships. This is an inquiry into the relationship between the government and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia. Thus, the purpose of the study was to assess how much access Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia have to the government and its institutions. Also to assess how positive the state officials are in their interactions with Albanians. The study also examined the transparency of the government and its institutions and the assurances of the government towards Albanians that they and their concerns are

legitimate. Additionally, the study aimed to evaluate how much Albanians trust the government and to what degree they are satisfied with the government. Moreover, the study attempted to assess to what extent the level of access, positivity, openness, and assurances influences the degree of trust and satisfaction in the relationship between government and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia.

From an academic point of view, the researcher believes the finding of the study would be beneficial to public relations scholars studying organization – public relationships. Besides, because the study extends organization-public relationships to a different political and cultural context, findings would also be useful to public relations scholars who are interested in global public relations. Additionally, the study would also benefit practitioners in charge of developing, maintaining, and evaluating organization-public relationships, in particular government-citizen relationships. Moreover, the study should be useful also to scholars who are interested in inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of North Macedonia.

In addition, the study contributes to public relations scholarship by extending the application of the relationship cultivation strategies and relationship quality dimensions to a different organization-public relationship setting. The relational perspective of public relations has been used to explore organization-public relationships in different settings, the university-student relationship, the manufacturer-retailer relationship, multinationals-local community relationship, the municipal utility-community relationship, the nonprofit-donor relationship, and political party-public relationships. Moreover, the relational perspective has been explored in the context of various public relations functions, including public affairs, community relations, issues management, crisis management and media relations (Ledingham, 2003). The researcher applies the relational perspective of public relations in exploring the government-community relationships, an organization-public relationship that is considered to be under-researched.

The study will contribute to the body of public relations research by examining the applicability of the relationship cultivation strategies of access, positivity, openness, and assurances in the context of government-community relations. It contributes to the scarce literature explaining the importance, role, and capacity of cultivation strategies in building government-community relations. Thus, an additional aim of the research was to further provide theoretical understanding of the relationship between government and citizens.

Additionally, the aim was to provide practical suggestions and implications of the findings for how governments can improve their relationships with citizens.

The study also was designed to explore and explain the link between the concepts of relationship cultivation and relationship outcomes. Public relations research studies have not yet explored the interrelations between specific cultivation strategies and the four main dimensions of organization-public relationships, trust, control mutuality, relational commitment, and relational satisfaction. Moreover, as Hung (2007) suggested, research in the future should move from concentrating on relationship outcomes to relationship cultivation strategies, how to sustain and cultivate quality relationships with a focus on which relationship cultivation strategies, as Hon and Grunig (1999) and Grunig and Huang (2000) proposed, can achieve the relationship qualities, such as trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction. Likewise, the research is designed to contribute to filling that void as well.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The study is broken down into six chapters. In the second, theoretical, chapter, the researcher examined the theoretical framework that guided the study. A history and overview of the perspectives that guide the study, the relational perspective of public relations and coorientational approach, is provided. Chapter 2 also contains studies on organization-public relationships. The concepts of relationship cultivation and relationship outcomes are further explored and the specific cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes conceptualized. In chapter 2, the researcher elaborated on the decision to study only the specific cultivation strategies and outcomes, and not include all the cultivation strategies and outcomes as Hon and Grunig (1999) and Grunig and Huang (2000) proposed. After thorough review of studies on organization-public relationships and the definition of the main concepts, the chapter concludes with the main research questions that guided the research study.

In the third chapter, government-community relationships are placed in the Macedonian context. The chapter begins with the history of democracy in the Republic of North Macedonia, including the civil war in 2001, inter-ethnic relations and the transition process from 1991 which were crucial in determining the political and social development of the country. The researcher presented the specific political circumstances surrounding the relationship between government and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia. Moreover, the chapter included information about public administration in the Republic of

North Macedonia and the equitable representation of Albanians in the public administration. Because civil servants are the sample representing the government in the study, a clear picture of public administration will help to understand better the context in which the relationship between the government and Albanians takes place.

Chapter four is an elaboration on the research design employed in the study. The research is a qualitative in-depth interview research study. Therefore, the researcher elaborates on the appropriateness of qualitative research to study the relationship between government and Albanians, the method used in collecting data, the data analysis strategy, sampling method and the sample recruited for the study, and some ethical concerns in conducting the research.

The fifth chapter is devoted to the results and the main findings of the research. In the first part the findings are presented according to the research questions previously developed. The second part of the chapter applies the coorientational approach to the findings from the in-depth interviews to evaluate the degree of agreement, accurate perception, and perception of perceived agreement (congruency) between civil servants and Albanians in assessing cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes. The final chapter is devoted to the conclusion and suggestions about future research direction.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In chapter 2, the researcher examined the theoretical framework that guides the study. To reach the purpose of the study by exploring the contribution of relationship cultivation strategies in determining the quality of the relationship between government and community, the researcher constructed a theoretical framework by consulting literature from studies on relationship management and organization-public relationships, relationship cultivation strategies, and relationship quality outcomes. These were the theoretical ground on which the relationship cultivation between the government and Albanian community in the Republic of North Macedonia was explored.

The first section introduces public relations theory and provides a review of other social sciences theories and disciplines in which public relations is rooted. The researcher also reviewed studies on organization-public relationships and conceptualized the concepts of relationship cultivation and relationship outcomes. After a thorough review of studies on organization-public relationships and the definition of the main concepts, the researcher concluded with the main research questions that guided the research study.

2.1 An Overview of Public Relations Theory

Public relations scholarship had a history of fewer than four decades when it expanded significantly. However, in the last twenty years the body of knowledge in public relations has grown extensively, with a lot of potential for future growth. This section introduces public relations theory and reviews other social sciences theories and disciplines in which public relations theory is rooted.

While reviewing public relations literature it is obvious that public relations theory can be and, in fact, is rooted in a number of disciplinary fields, such as mass communications, interpersonal/speech communications, (social) psychology, economics, and sociology, and in different schools of thought, such as functionalism, constructivism, feminism, Marxism or cultural theories (Van Ruler & Ihlen, 2009).

Holmström (1996) supported the anchoring of public relations research within social science generally and placed a special emphasis on sociology in which the actual focus of public relations is on conflicts between the different norms or interests of society. She argued that

public relations should be examined in connection with developments in structures and processes in society.

From sociology, according to Newsom, Turk, and Kruckeberg (2004), there are four general theories found to be important to public relations theory:

- *structural functionalism* –stability comes from the organization or structure of society;
- *evolutionary perspective*: social change follows a set of natural laws and that mass communication systems have developed with needs for communication;
- *social conflict*: social struggle occurs between groups with competing needs and goals;
- *symbolic interactionism*: the media presents constructs of reality that offer information from limited sources.

In addition, two psychological paradigms important to public relations theory have further been identified (Newsom et al., 2004). First, the *sociocultural paradigm* emphasizes sociocultural variables that enable a particular individual to interpret or present reality. Second, the *psychodynamic model*, which studies how an effective message makes a person do something desired by the communicator (Newsom et al., 2004).

In addition, anchoring of public relations in a specific field of study has always been a hard decision to make. Many would argue that public relations research should be anchored in the sciences of business economics or organizational theory, whereas others would place it in the field of communications theory.

Ehling, White, and Grunig (1992) traced the theoretical foundations of modern public relations to four conceptual systems. First, the *inter-organizational theory* provides insights into the type of social interrelationships and interactions affecting groups of organizations and institutions. *Management and decision theory* explains the type of management responsibilities and decision making processes influencing the operation of the public relations function. *Communications theory* provides insights into the various elements and processes involved in both one-way and two-way communication between individuals, groups, and organizations. Finally, *conflict resolution theory* suggests ways of interpreting and dealing with a variety of confrontational situations that may arise under different social settings (Ehling et al., 1992). These perspectives have been used to develop theories and frame research in public relations. They have guided public relations scholars in explaining different phenomena related to the field of public relations.

In examining the origins of public relations theory, Verčič and Grunig (2000) argued that, despite the fact that most scholars and practitioners of public relations have failed to make the theoretical connections to theories of economics and management that are necessary to explain the contributions that the management of public relations makes to the overall management of organizations, only by locating public relations within these domains, it is possible to explain fully the potential contribution which public relations can make to the overall management of organizations. They further concluded that

middle-range theories such as the situational theory of publics, the models of public relations and their relationship to organizational and environmental conditions, strategic public relations and its role in organization-wide strategic management, corporate social reason, and the global-specific theory of global public relations were developed individually and on the basis of several bodies of knowledge in economics, management, sociology, political science and communication. Nevertheless, the roots of all of these elements of a general theory of public relations can be traced to the simple concepts of neoclassical microeconomics, and to the adjustments made to those concepts to take account of the organizational, social and political factors that affect decisions made by managers, publics, and markets. It is ironic, however, that public relations theories that arose from economic theory should add a social, ethical, and political dimension to management theory. By contributing the basic element of trust to the relationship between organizations and publics, the public relations function provides what is the most important outcome of management decision making: public relations allows the organization to exist. (Verčič & Grunig, 2000, p. 49)

Because at the center of analysis was relationship cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes, it was important to understand and review other perspectives taken from studies and theories of social sciences that use relationships, trust, symmetry, mutuality, and interdependence as a central concept. Some of the important and useful theories included government-citizen theories, nation-building, trust, communications, systems theory, and social exchange theory.

The concept of nation-building has had significant implications for public relations theory. Nation-building has political foundations and refers to building political institutions in newly formed or transformed states (Huntington, 1968). Taylor and Kent (2006) argued that if people were to shift the focus of nation-building research to focus on relationships, it would fall within the public relations perspective which has the unique potential to create, maintain and change relationships between government and citizens. Nation-building studies (Taylor, 2000; Taylor & Kent, 2006) suggested that as a part of a democratic nation-building process, governments should use public relations to communicate and keep citizens informed about changes. Taylor (2000) further suggested that adoption of two-way, symmetrical communication is necessary to establish relationships between governments and publics as well as creation of new relationships between unrelated publics. Moreover, Taylor and Kent

(2006) emphasized the importance of public relations in successfully implementing nation-building objectives only when it is understood as a tool which creates and maintains relationships.

Systems theory (Luhman, 1995; Holmström, 1996) has also provided essential contributions to the relational perspective of public relations. Systems theory provides the rationale for why organizations need relationships (Grunig, Grunig & Ehling, 1992; Spicer, 1997) and point out that there is interdependence between organizations and publics that should be managed by organizations. From the perspective of Luhman's systems theory, public relations encodes and decodes images to be used in the reciprocal reflection in social systems with the objective of strengthening public trust between systems (Holmström, 1996). In addition, in cases where the establishment of mutual trust and confidence are important components in a relationship, Goffman theories of sociology are found to be important in analyzing relationships (Johansson, 2007).

Last but not least, but studying relationship cultivation, individuals can build on elements from communications theory. For more effective long-term communication campaigns, Rogers' diffusion theory (1995) encouraged the combination of both mass media communication and face-to-face interaction. Grunig's (1984) four models of public relations are essential to public relations theory. The two-way symmetrical communication emphasizes the two-way communication and dialogue to manage conflicts, reach an understanding and build relationships with publics. Moreover, Murphy's (1991) mixed-motive model best described the two-way symmetrical model in which organizations try to satisfy their interests while simultaneously trying to help a public satisfy their interests. In addition, Grunig's (1997) situational theory of publics suggested that publics are situational and keep us focused on the kinds of information that publics want rather than the organization's choice of information to distribute.

According to Ki and Shin (2006), researchers predominantly brought an interpersonal perspective into organization-public relationship studies, followed by marketing, psychology, intra-organizational approach, economics, and international perspectives. Ki and Shin also evidenced that "approximately 45% of the studies utilized the excellence theory ($N= 17$, 44.7%) as the major theoretical framework. System theory ($N= 3$, 7.9%), social exchange ($N= 2$, 5.3%) and coorientation ($N= 1$, 2.6%) were also used as a theoretical framework" (2006, p. 195).

To sum up, Grunig (2009) defined two competing approaches important to public relations research: the symbolic paradigm and strategic management, behavioural, paradigm. In the symbolic paradigm public relations is used mainly to influence how publics interpret the organization's behavior. Emphasis is put on messages, publicity, media relations, and media effects. In contrast, the strategic management or behavioral paradigm focuses on the participation of public relations in strategic decision-making to help manage the decisions and behaviour of organizations. The central focus is on relationships, with communication acting as a tool in initiating, nurturing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships (Grunig, 2009). It is the second paradigm which incorporates the relational perspective of public relations, the theoretical framework for the study. The next section details the relational perspective of public relations and defines the relationship cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes.

2.2 Relationship Management and Organization-Public Relationships

2.2.1 Definition of Relationship

In the past thirty years, public relations has moved from a predominantly persuasive, mass communication focused area of research toward a focus on building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics. Public relations scholars have come to believe that the fundamental goal of public relations is to build and then enhance on-going or long-term relationships with an organization's key constituencies (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

In his foreword to the second edition of the book *Public Relations as a Relationship Management: A Relational Approach to the Study and Practice of Public Relations*, Grunig (2015) criticized both scholars and practitioners for having failed to recognize the concept of relationship as the field's guiding paradigm. He argued that both scholars and practitioners have been preoccupied with such concepts as media portrayals, public opinion, image, reputation, brand, persuasion and the like that have failed to recognize that public relations provide value to organizations, publics, and societies through relationships (Grunig, 2015).

The call for focusing on relationships in public relations dates back to Ferguson in 1984. Ferguson (1984) warned that relationships, "not...the organization, nor the public, nor the communication process," should be the unifying concept of public relations. Additionally, in

the last three decades, researchers have also evidenced the use of the term relationship in many of the definitions of public relations. In 1985, as Grunig (2015) noted, for the first time relationship was also incorporated into the formal definition of public relations to the textbook *Effective Public Relations*, which has remained in every edition since. Cutlip, Center, and Broom (1985) defined public relations as “the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 4).

Besides, in the Excellence study funded by the International Association of Business Communicators Research Foundation, two-way symmetrical communication has been identified as one of how organizations can practice “excellent” public relations (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995; Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002). According to the study, for an organization to be effective, it must behave in ways that solve the problems and satisfies the goals of stakeholders as well as of management. If it does not, stakeholders will either pressure the organization to change or oppose it in ways that add cost and risk to organizational policies and decisions. Further, the study identified the importance of environmental scanning to identify stakeholders who are affected by potential organizational decisions or who want organizations to make decisions to solve problems that are important to them. The study also identified a two-way symmetrical model of public relations for organizations to communicate with the different kinds of publics found within these stakeholder categories to develop high-quality, long-term relationships with them (Grunig, 2006).

According to Ledingham (2001), there have been four pivotal developments that have led to the emergence of the relational perspective as a paradigm for public relations study and practice: 1). recognition of the central role of relationships in the study and practice of public relations; 2). reconceptualizing public relations as a management function; 3). the emergence of organization-public relationships measurement strategies, components and types of organization-public relationships, and linkage of organization-public relationships to public attitudes, perceptions, knowledge and behavior; and 4). the emergence of organization-public relationships models that accommodate relationship antecedents, process, and consequences.

Also, Coombs and Holladay (2015) identified two ways “relationship” has entered the consciousness of public relations. First, relationship management theory is offered as a general theory of public relations that can guide research (Ledingham, 2003). Theory acts as a

research generator. For example, in 2010, relationship management was identified as the second most cited theory in a citation analysis of the public relations literature by Pasadeos, Berger, and Renfro (2010). Becoming the dominant outcome variable in general public relations research is the second-way “relationship” entered the consciousness of public relations. Getting back to the definition of public relations by Cutlip et al. (1985), demonstrates that the idea of “mutually beneficial relationships” between organization and various publics is an unquestioned outcome for public relations. Grunig (2006) also argued that “if it develops good relationships with strategic publics, an organization is more likely to develop goals desired by both the organization and its publics and is more likely to achieve those goals” (p. 158–159).

However, even if Ferguson’s call to studying relationships as a unit of analysis in public relations is considered the momentum to have triggered a paradigmatic shift in public relations research, it was not until 1997 that the research on relationships started to move forward. Broom, Casey, & Ritchey (1997, 2000), frustrated by a lack of definition of “relationship,” reviewed the literature in interpersonal communication, psychotherapy, interorganizational relationships, and systems theory to construct a definition for organization-public relationships. They also concluded that

the absence of useful definition precludes measurement of organization-public relationships and forces both scholars and practitioners alike to measure one part of them or another and make potentially invalid inferences about the relationships. The absence of fully explicated conceptual definition of organization-public relationships limits theory building in public relations” (p.96).

As evidenced by Ki and Shin’s (2006) articles review of organization-public relationships studies, by 2004 only four out of the reviewed articles provided organization-public relationships definitions by authors, and 12 articles provided an organization-public relationships definition using other sources.

Ledingham and Bruning (1998) responded to Broom et al. (1997) call and offered a tentative definition of the organization-public relationships as “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, and political and/or cultural wellbeing of the other entity” (p. 62). Thus, according to them, an ideal organization-public relationship would be “the state that exists between an organization and its key publics that provides economic, social, political, and/or cultural benefits to all parties involved, and is characterized by mutual positive regard.” (p.62)

Moreover, there are other definitions that have defined organization-public relationships in several ways. Huang (1997) cited in Huang (2001a) defined organization-public relationship as “the degree that the organization and its publics trust one another, agree on one has rightful power to influence, experience satisfaction with each other, and commit oneself to one another” (p. 12). According to Hutton (1999) “relationship management refers to the practice of public relations as an exercise in identifying mutual interests, values and benefit between a client-organization and its publics” (p.208). Thomlison (2000) suggested another definition defining relationship as “a set of expectations two parties have for each other’s behavior based on their interaction patterns” (p. 178).

Rhee (2004), in her dissertation, maintained that from a public relations perspective, an organization-public relationship develops only after repeated communication takes place between the organization and publics. She brings into attention the fact that the important component of communication is often neglected in the process of relationship building. In this line of thinking, Rhee offered the following definition of an organization-public relationship: “An organization-public relationship can be defined as a connection or association between an organization, and a public that results from behavioral consequences an organization or a public has on the other, and that necessitates repeated communicative interaction” (p. 42).

In their manual that provides guidelines for measuring relationships, Hon and Grunig (1999) pointed out that “relationships form because one party has consequences on another party” (p. 12). Their definition suggests that an organization-public relationship begins when actions and decisions of an organization have consequences on publics inside or outside of the organization or when the behavior of these publics has consequences on the success of the organization.

Following this line of thinking, Hung (2007) provided another definition of organization - public relationships. Rooted in the systems theory, the definition emphasized how organization-public relationships begin, the mutual impact that relationships have on organizations and publics, and the dynamic nature of relationships. According to Hung, “organization-public relationships arise when organizations and their strategic publics are interdependent, and this interdependence results in consequences on each other that organizations need to manage.” (p.396).

The definitions provided by Hon and Grunig (1999) and Hung (2003) are adopted for the study. Based on the systems theory, the two definitions reflect very much the nature of the

relationship between the government and citizens. The relationship is very much characterized by interdependence derived from a “contract” between government and citizens to govern on their behalf. This is what makes government different from all other organizations; it must take account of all the desires, needs, actions, thoughts, and sentiments of the citizens (Appleby, 1945). The next section reviews in detail the studies on organization-public relationships and the application of the relational theory to different public relations functions and organization-public relationships.

2.2.2 Review of Studies on Organization-Public Relationships

In the last two decades, “relationship” has dominated academic, public relations research. The number of studies citing or using relationship management theory as a theoretical framework has increased extensively. This emerging trend in organization-public relations research is evidenced by Ki and Shin’s (2006) and Huang and Zhang’s (2013) content analysis of articles published from 1985 to 2004 and from 2000 to 2011 respectively. Moreover, relationship management is identified as the second most cited theory after the Excellence theory (Pasadeos et al., 2010), and the three most popular sources for relationship management theory have been cited over 1000 times (Coombs & Holladay, 2009).

Cheng (2018) provided an important overview of organization-public relationships studies. Cheng conducted a comprehensive review of 156 relevant studies from 1998 to 2016 and grouped them into five clusters based on their research focus. The first cluster focused on the outcomes of organization-public relationships by measuring its consequences from the perception of publics (Bruning & Ledingham, 1998, 1999; Hong & Yang, 2009; Ki, 2013) or organizations (Huang, 2001a, 2001b). The second cluster focused on the antecedents of organization-public relationships (Bortree, 2010; Huang, 2001b, 2008; Jo & Kim, 2003) and tested how the antecedents influenced organization-public relationships (Huang & Zhang, 2013). The third cluster focused on the mediation of organization-public relationships, whereas the fourth cluster had at the center of analysis the process of organization-public relationships. The studies of the cluster adopted a dynamic approach to examine the information flow between organizations and publics in conflicts. The research focus of the final cluster was the structure of organization-public relationships (Cheng, 2018).

Following Ferguson’s (1984) call for a shift of focus on the concept of relationship, the very first studies were focused on defining relationships (Broom et al., 1997, 2000; Brunner, 2000;

Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998), identifying dimensions to evaluate relationship quality (Huang, 1997; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999), and designing multiple-item, multiple-dimension scales to measure relationships (Huang, 2001a; Ki, 2006; Ki & Hon, 2007a, 2009; Kim, 2001).

Broom et al. (1997, 2000) explored and defined the concept of relationships in public relations theory and practice. They were also the first to discuss organization-public relationships and produced a model that described the antecedents, concepts, and consequences of organization-public relations. According to them, antecedents include the perceptions, motives, needs, behaviors, and so forth that are posited as contingencies or causes in the formation of relationships. On the other side, the consequences of relationships are the outputs that have the effects of changing the environment and of achieving, maintaining or changing goal states both inside and outside the organization (Broom et al., 2000).

Broom et al.'s (1997) call to defining the concept of relationships in public relations lead to the publication of the first edited book on relationship management by Ledingham and Bruning in 2000. The first edition comprised of studies about the state of organization-public relations research, applications of the relational perspective to other public relations functions, and implications of the relational perspective. Grunig (2015) considered the book to be "a book that has revolutionized thinking and research in public relations" (p. xxvi). The second edition to the book edited by Ki, Kim, and Ledingham (2015) focused on the evolution of relationship theory, expansion of organization public relationships, and new emerging perspectives: culture, globalization, and new technologies.

Huang (1997), in her dissertation, integrated models of public relations, conflict resolution strategies, and relationship outcomes to develop a theory. She identified four outcomes for evaluating the quality of relationships: trust, control mutuality, relational commitment, and relational satisfaction. Huang (2001a) replicated Huang's (1997) to develop an organization-public relationship assessment (OPRA) scale and added face and favor to the previous four relationship outcomes. Huang considered OPRA to be a concise multiple-item scale with good reliability and validity that an organization can use to better understand its publics' perceptions toward their relationship quality and thus improve public relations practice.

Ledingham, Bruning, Thomlison, and Lesko (1997) consulted a variety of academic disciplines and identified 17 different dimensions to explore the organization-public

relationship could be explored by looking at 17 different dimensions. They recommended studying investment, commitment, cooperation, mutual goals, interdependence, power balance, comparison of alternatives, adaptation, non-retrievable investment, shared technology, summative constructs, structural bonds, social bonds, intimacy, and passion. Later, Ledingham and Bruning (1998, 2000) reduced the number of these dimensions to five relationship dimensions: trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment. These relational concepts and scales developed by Ledingham and Bruning later were used as the focus for the second cluster of research identified by Huang and Zhang (2013).

In an attempt to develop a multiple-item, multiple-dimension organization-public relationship scale that can determine the status of the relationship between an organization and its key publics, Bruning and Ledingham (1999) identified three types of relationships between organizations and key publics: professional, personal, and community. They argued that the organization-public relationship measure developed should provide an instrument that can be used to measure the influence that perceptions of the organization-public relationship have on consumer attitudes, predispositions, and behavior, as well as an opportunity to track changes in organization-public relationship over time.

Hon and Grunig (1999) identified six important indicators of relationship outcomes and developed reliable measures of these indicators and provided a report on how to measure relationships in public relations. They added exchange and communal relationship to the four relationship dimensions of trust, control mutuality, relational commitment, and relational satisfaction previously identified by Huang (1997). Grunig and Huang (2000) developed a model and a complete theory of organization-public relationships. They consulted Huang's (1997) relationship outcomes and Stafford and Canary's (1991) cultivation strategies, management theories for organizational effectiveness, and conflict resolution strategies (Plowman, 1995). They also provided methods for evaluating relationships in each stage: relationship antecedents, cultivation strategies, and relationship outcomes.

Grunig and Huang's (2000) theory of relationship cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes were adopted by Hung (2000, 2002, 2005, 2007) to develop a basic model of relationship management. Hung also focused on the role culture plays in relationship cultivation and found out that characteristics of Chinese culture, such as family orientation, guanxi, relational orientation (role formalization, relational interdependence, face, favor,

relational harmony, relational fatalism, and relational determination) had an influence on multinational companies' relationship cultivation strategies.

Kim (2001) devised a valid and reliable four-dimension scale with sixteen items for measuring the organization-public relationship. Through content validity test, 51 items were chosen from the original 113 items, and five dimensions and 21 items identified after initial exploratory factor analysis. The confirmatory factor analysis finalized the four-dimension (trust, commitment, local or community involvement and reputation), and 16-item scale for measuring the organization-public relationship.

Ki (2006), in her dissertation, measured relationship maintenance strategies and relationship quality outcomes and studied the casual relationships between and among them. The results indicated causal relationships between maintenance strategies and relationship quality outcomes, meaning that the four strategies of access, positivity, sharing of tasks, and assurances represent effective, proactive approaches that organizations can implement to maintain or cultivate relationships with their strategic publics. However, openness and networking were found not to improve the public's perception of any relationship quality outcome (Ki, 2006).

Ki and Hon (2007a) tested Hon and Grunig's (1999) scales for four relationship dimensions using multiple-item measurement procedures to develop reliable and valid measures of the outcomes of quality relationships. The final measurement items of relationship quality outcomes included twenty-eight items, consisting of eight items for control mutuality, eight items for satisfaction, seven items for trust, and five items for commitment. In another study, Ki and Hon (2007b) also tested a model that posits the linkages among perceptions of the organization-public relationships, attitudes, and behavioral intentions toward an organization among members of a key public. The study found perceptions of satisfaction and control mutuality to be the best predictors of a positive attitude toward the organization. According to the study, positive attitude was also a precursor to supportive behavioral intentions toward the organization.

To help public relations professionals better understand how to nurture and sustain relationships with their target publics, Ki and Hon (2009) developed a multiple-item scale meeting the standards of reliability and validity in measurement for measuring relationship cultivation strategies and the essential day-to-day activities of public relations practitioners. Factor analysis suggested the inclusion of 23 items consisting of four items for access, five

items for positivity, four items for openness, three items for sharing of tasks, three items for networking, and four items for assurances.

These were the very first research studies on relationship management that focused on definitions, dimensions, types of organization–public relationships, maintenance strategies, and developmental and process models of organization-public relationships. These studies, based on distinct clusters of authorship and research foci, were clustered by Huang and Zhang (2013) into two main streams of organization-public relationships research. Cluster one included thirteen empirical studies that adopted and developed Hon and Grunig’s (1999) relationship measurement scale and Huang’s (2001a) OPRA (developed based upon Huang’s (1997) doctoral dissertation). According to Huang and Zhang, the research cluster views organization-public relationships as a relational outcome by exploring it as a dependent variable or as a relationship characteristic that mediates various effects of public relations practice including digital communication, crisis communication strategy, and relationship cultivation strategy. The cluster of studies examined trust, relational satisfaction, relational commitment, and control mutuality regardless of methodology.

The second cluster of scholars identified by Huang and Zhang is represented by Bruning, Langenhop, and Green, who adopted the scale developed in Bruning and Ledingham (1999), Ledingham and Bruning (1998, 2000), and Ledingham et al. (1997). The cluster defined organization-public relationships from the perspective of the public’s attitudes toward an organization. The research falling in the second cluster tends to treat organization-public relationships as an independent variable and to explore its effects on the public’s attitudes, evaluations, and behaviors.

Although researchers from both organization-public relationship research streams have created multiple measures to explore the organization-public relationship, measures, and scales created by Hon and Grunig (1999) and Grunig and Huang (2000) appeared to have been repeatedly tested more often. Because these dimensions developed by Hon and Grunig’s (1999) and Grunig and Huang (2000) have proven to be both reliable and valid, the researcher used them and the indicators that measure trust and satisfaction to study government-community relations in the Republic of North Macedonia.

In addition, the relational perspective and models proposed by Hon and Grunig’s (1999) and Grunig and Huang (2000) have been applied by public relations scholars to various public relations practices, including crisis management (Brown & White, 2011; Coombs, 2000,

Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Park & Reber, 2011), issues management (Bridges & Nelson, 2000; Vasquez, 1996), public affairs (Ledingham, 2001), community relations (Ledingham & Bruning, 2001; Hall, 2006), media relations (Ledingham & Bruning 1998b, 1999), public diplomacy (Lee & Jun, 2013) and lobbying (Wise, 2007). Besides, the relationship management model has been used to explore organization-public relationships in different settings: the university-student relationship (Hon & Brunner, 2002; Ki & Hon, 2006), the manufacturer-retailer relationship (Jo, 2003), museum-public relationships (Banning & Shoen, 2007), multinationals-local community relationship (Hung, 2005), the municipal utility-community relationship (Hall, 2006), the Air Force base-community relationship (DellaVedova, 2005), consultant-client relationships (Chia, 2005), the nonprofit-donor relationship (O'Neil, 2007; Waters, 2007, 2008, 2009;), and political party-public relationships (Seltzer & Zhang, 2011).

A framework for applying a relational perspective to crisis management is provided by Coombs (2000). He argued that relational perspective is valuable to crisis management because it gives additional insights into how stakeholders perceive the crisis. Additionally, perceptions of the crises are useful in deciding which strategies to select that will be most effective in rebuilding relationships and protecting reputation. In another study, Coombs and Holladay (2001) integrated ideas from the relational management perspective of public relations with the symbolic approach to crisis communication to understand better how performance history affects the crisis. The results found that relationship history does shape how people perceive the crisis and the organization in crisis in which an unfavorable relationship history or crisis history leads people to perceive the organization as having more responsibility for the crisis.

Studies have also examined the impact of organization-public relationships in choosing crisis response strategies, and how organization-public relationships and crisis response strategy affect the attribution of crisis responsibility (Brown, 2009; Brown & White, 2011). Results from these studies showed that people with a positive relationship with the organization were less likely to place blame for the crisis on the organization regardless of crisis response strategy. This proves to maintain positive relationships with stakeholders to be more important than individual crisis strategies. Park & Reber (2011) examined the effect of organization-public relationships on publics' perceptions of a crisis and attitudes toward an organization in crisis. The study proved that relationship cultivation with publics and the use of crisis-response strategies effectively constitute an essential part of successful crisis

management. The findings also showed that regardless of the level of relationship, the perception of the crisis cause had a significant effect on attribution of responsibility. Unique effects of relationship, crisis responsibility, and the type of crisis-response strategy on attitudes toward the organization in the crisis were also found in this study. Ki and Brown (2013) also investigated the effects of crisis response strategies on the attribution of an organization's crisis responsibilities and relationship quality outcomes and determined the linkages among relationship quality outcome indicators. Findings showed that none of the tested crisis response strategies were helpful in reducing public blame surrounding the featured organization's responsibility in the crisis. Additionally, the study found that crisis tends to negatively affect relationship quality and that the used crisis response strategies did not exert any effect on the publics examined.

Lobbying often is considered a specialization of public relations, and in many of the undergraduate textbooks, lobbying is defined as a function of public affairs. For example, Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2000) defined it as a function of public affairs that builds and maintains relations with government primarily for the purpose of influencing legislation and regulation. Wise (2007) considered his study to be the first in studying lobbying from the relational perspective of public relations and argues that public relations scholars have largely ignored lobbying. Wise studied relationships between lobbyists and those working on governmental positions on Capitol Hill, in particular, he examined health care lobbyists' perceptions regarding their relationships with members of Congress, congressional staff, federal bureaucrats, and other lobbyists. The study identified interpersonal relationships to be critical of healthcare lobbyists in doing their job. Besides, the study found ethics to play a key role in maintaining positive organization-public relationships on Capitol Hill. Wise concluded that the relational perspective holds promise for future studies of lobbying in both the public relations and political science.

Public diplomacy is also explicated as organization-public relationship (Lee & Jun, 2013). The study applied Hon and Grunig's (1999) measures in evaluating the quality of relationships between the US embassy and South Korean college students. The findings suggested that public diplomacy outcomes are related, to some degree, to organization-public relationships management. The findings are considered a step forward to further advance the theoretical and practical convergence of public relations and public diplomacy. Besides, Vasquez (1996) reconceptualized and advanced the notions of public relations as negotiation within the issue development perspective.

Men and Hung (2009) explored the value of organization-public relationships in strategic management. The study aimed to build links between relationships, organizational resources, and strategic management. Results showed that relationships were organizational resources because relationship cultivation was an organizational capability that could generate quality relationship outcomes as intangible assets. Being the foundation for strategic analysis and strategy formulation and the participation in each management stage is the way relationships as organizational resources could contribute to strategic management and organizational effectiveness (Men & Hung, 2009). Ni (2006) studied the link between public relations and strategy. Ni incorporated the resource-based view to examine the contribution of relationships to strategy implementation. The findings showed relationships to possess these key features for resources that could lead to competitive advantages: valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and hard to be substituted. The study also concluded that relationships contributed to strategy implementation in general and were used also to achieve a fit with different strategies (Ni, 2006). In another study, Ni (2009) studied the link between employee-organization relationships and globalization strategies, in which a positive relationship was found between global strategies and different types of relationships, as well as quality of relationships of multinationals with employees in the local subsidiaries in China.

In addition, Cheng (2018) has identified a cluster of organization-public relationships studies focusing on the mediation of organization-public relationships. A study by Huang (2001b) found the effect of public relations strategies on conflict resolution to be mediated by the type of organization–public relationships, which contributed to the relationship management and conflict resolution. Ni and Wang (2011) studied the impact of anxiety and uncertainty management of organization–public relationships. Results indicated direct and indirect effects of cultivation strategies on relational outcomes, partially mediated by uncertainty and anxiety. Kang and Yang (2010) examined the mediation effects of relationship outcomes on key antecedents of stakeholders' support for a not-for-profit organization, which include awareness, attitude, and behavioral intention toward supportive relationship-building. A positive relationship was found between effects of awareness of organizational relationship-building activities in beliefs about organization-public relationships outcomes and on the intention to engage in relationship-building, such as giving donations. The study found organization-public relationships outcomes to play a critical role in connecting effects of awareness to the intention of supportive behaviors.

Although public relations scholars have identified relationships as the critical value that public relations produce for an organization, practicing professionals have widely embraced reputation management as a way of explaining the bottom-line effects of public relations (Yang & Grunig, 2005). The link between organization-public relationships and reputation has emerged as an important topic in some organization-public relationships studies (Grunig & Hung, 2002, 2015; Yang, 2007; Yang & Grunig, 2005).

Grunig and Hung (2002) studied the effect of relationships on reputation and reputation on relationships. In the study, Grunig and Hung theorized that reputation could not be managed directly and that reputation is a direct product of organization-public relationships and relationships should be the focal variable for measuring the value of public relations. To support their theory, they developed a cognitive theory of reputation and an open-end measure of the cognitive representations that publics have of organizations. They asked a sample of the general population to “describe in a sentence or two what comes to mind when you think of” the five organizations that they had chosen for their study - General Electric, the National Rifle Association, the Social Security Administration, Microsoft, and the American Red Cross. Results showed that recall of good and bad behaviors had the greatest effect on the evaluation of relationship.

Yang and Grunig (2005) decomposed common reputation measurement systems into behavioural organization–public relationship outcomes, cognitive representations of an organization in the minds of publics, and evaluations of organizational performance. They proposed a model and suggested propensity for active communication behaviour and familiarity as correlated precursors of organization–public relationship outcomes (e.g. trust, satisfaction, commitment and control mutuality). They hypothesized that organization–public relationship outcomes have a direct effect on evaluations of organizational performance as well as an indirect effect via the mediation of cognitive representations of the organization. To validate their model across different types of organizations, Yang and Grunig investigated different types of five Korean-based organizations, two domestic corporations in different industries, a multinational corporation, a sports association, and a non-profit organization. The findings of the study suggested that relationship outcomes lead to favorable representations of an organization and positive evaluations of performance of the organization.

Kim and Chan-Olmsted (2005) investigated how the dimensions of organization public relationships, i.e., trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction, are related to brand attitude formation. The study also compared the effects of organization public relationships on brand attitude to those of product-related attribute beliefs. Results showed that both organization public relationships and product-related attributes were significantly related to attitude towards the brand. However, only satisfaction among the dimensions of organization public relationships was a significant predictor of brand attitude. Yang (2007) tested a theoretical model regarding the effect of organization–public relationships on organizational reputation. The results showed that across all organizations studied, organization-public relational outcomes were associated positively with favorable reputation of the organizations studied.

With the increased use of the Internet and social media and the emergence of Millennials as important publics an extensive number of studies have focused on studying relationship management in the online environment (Hong, 2013, 2014; Ki & Hon, 2006; Men & Tsai, 2012). Ki and Hon (2006) examined how organizations enact positivity, openness, access, sharing of tasks, and networking through their web sites. They argued that web sites seem to offer a unique and innovative opportunity for stewardship of the organization-public relationship. Jo and Kim (2003) examined the relationship between web characteristics and perceptions toward relational components. Findings showed interactivity, and multimedia orientation has significant effects on relationship building. Williams and Brunner (2010) conducted a content analysis of 129 websites of non-profit organizations to explore their relationship management with publics. The study found that most organizations engaged in all six of the relational strategies (access, positivity, openness, shared tasks, networking, and assurances), however, the level at which these strategies are engaged is low. The findings showed positivity to be the most often used strategy, and assurances were the least engaged strategy.

There have also been several more recent studies exploring relationship management in the online environment. Saffer, Sommerfeldt, and Taylor (2013) tested if levels of organizational Twitter interactivity affected the quality of organization–public relationships. Findings suggested a positive relationship between an organization’s level of Twitter interactivity and relationship quality. Hong (2013) explored whether experience of individuals with government websites and social media do influence their perception of the government-public relationship. A positive relationship between online interaction and public trust was derived

from the results. In another study, Hong (2014) studied the relationships among public perceptions of the Internet for government-related information, the transparency of city government, and perceived government–public relationships. According to the study, individuals that consider the Internet as a useful source of government information perceived greater transparency of city government, leading to a more favorable relationship with the city government. Uzunoglu and Kip (2014) conducted a content analysis of Turkish environmental non-profit organizations’ (NPO) websites to explore building relationships through websites. They provided insight into the dialogic potential of Turkish environmental NPO websites, including social media adoption. Men and Tsai (2012) explored relationship cultivation on social media from a cross-cultural perspective. The study examined and compared how companies use popular social network sites to facilitate dialogues with publics in two culturally distinct countries: China and the United States. Findings indicated culture plays a significant role in the dialogue between organizations and publics in different countries. Zhu and Han (2014) investigated the relationship maintenance strategies of official state tourism websites and online travel agencies’ websites in the U.S.

Sisson (2017a) examined the impact of astroturfing or inauthentic communication in undermining the authenticity and trust within online organization-public relationships. Findings suggested significant associations of positivity and networking strategies with dimensions of trust. In another study, Sisson (2017b) examined the role of control mutuality in social media engagement to provide insight into social media strategy creation for nonprofit organizations. A positive relationship between control mutuality and social media engagement was found, in which donors who ‘liked’ or followed their local animal welfare organization’s social media platforms perceived greater control mutuality than those who did not.

As explained earlier, the relationship management model has also been used to explore organization-public relationships in different settings: the university-student relationship (Hon & Brunner, 2002; Ki & Hon, 2006), the manufacturer-retailer relationship (Jo, 2003), multinationals-local community relationship (Hung, 2005), the municipal utility-community relationship (Hall, 2006); consultant-client relationships (Chia, 2005); the Air Force base-community relationship (DellaVedova, 2005); the nonprofit-donor relationships (O’Neil, 2007; Waters, 2007, 2008, 2009;) and political party-public relationships (Seltzer & Zhang, 2011).

Hon and Brunner (2002) studied the university-student relationship and examined how students perceive their relationship with the University of Florida. Results showed that overall, students described the relationship as one characterized by trust and satisfaction and they tended to feel more neutral about control mutuality, commitment, and an exchange relationship.

Banning and Shoen employed the organization–public relationship scale to measure member perceptions of an art museum. The study confirmed the appropriateness of using the organization–public relationship scale with museums. Results of the study showed that perceptions of the museum-public relationships differentiated members that were likely to continue their membership from those likely to discontinue their membership with the museum. Jo (2003, 2006) studied the relationship between manufacturer and retailer. Jo examined the measurement of organization-public relationship by testing previous measures on one organization and the key public in Eastern culture. Jo attempted to replicate and extend Huang’s (2001a) research by adding relational dimensions that could capture specific features that may characterize the organization-public relationship in South Korea. Specifically, the study assessed the reliability and validity of the proposed measures of trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment, and face and favor were developed by Huang (2001a) as the core relational dimensions to measure organization-public relationships in Taiwan.

Waters (2007, 2008, 2009) explored the relationship between the donors and the nonprofit hospitals by examining the relationship dimensions of control mutuality, commitment, satisfaction, and trust, and the following cultivation strategies used to build and maintain relationships: access, assurances, networking, openness, positivity, reciprocity, relationship nurturing, reporting, responsibility, and sharing of tasks. He applied coorientation theory to study the relationship from the perspectives of both the donors and the hospitals.

Bortree (2010) examined the adolescent volunteer–nonprofit organization relationship and identified three key relationship maintenance strategies that influence an adolescent public: guidance, assurances, and shared tasks. Control mutuality was found to play a key role in the adolescent volunteer–nonprofit relationship. It was also more influenced by maintenance strategies than any other relational outcome (trust, satisfaction, and commitment). The mediation effect of organization-public relationship outcomes on public intentions for organizational support has been examined by Kang and Yang (2010). Findings showed that organization-public relationships outcomes to be crucial in connecting awareness, attitude,

and behavioral intention to a supportive behavior for a not-for-profit organization, i.e. the intention to engage in relationship-building, such as giving donations. Harrison, Xiao, Ott, and Bortree (2017) tested the relationships between stewardship, involvement, and organization-public relationship outcomes. The relationship maintenance strategies of stewardship may help nonprofit organizations strengthen relationships with their volunteers, particularly if organizations can influence volunteers' feelings of involvement. The results indicated that stewardship strategies could positively contribute to volunteers' involvement and their evaluations of OPR outcomes. This means that stewardship helps strengthen volunteer-nonprofit organizations relationships when the organization can influence feelings of involvement of volunteers.

Many other studies have had the relationship between donors and non-profit organizations at the centre of analysis. Wiggill (2014) focused on donor relationship management practices in the South African non-profit sector to determine how NPOs practice donor relationship management within their unique context and whether these NPOs' donor relationship practices correspond with theory. In another study focusing on the relationship between non-profit organizations and donors, Park and Rhee (2010) studied the relationships among relationship maintenance strategies, organization-public relationships, and support for the organization. They focused on non-profit organizations in South Korea, and they conceptualized and measured the support for organizations' intention to donate and volunteer. Findings of the study showed that relationship maintenance strategies are critical antecedents of organization-public relationships and the quality of organization-public relationships significantly affected the public's intention to support non-profit organizations.

Bruning, Langenhop, and Green (2004) examined city-resident relationships. They did evaluations of housing satisfaction, and evaluations of city services to determine the ways in which each of these variables may affect resident perceptions of whether the city has fallen short, met, or exceeded the expectations of the respondent. The study showed the city-resident relationship to be an important influencer. Bruning et al. (2004) also suggested that public relations managers are aware of how relationship building activity can affect positively resident attitudes, evaluations, and intended behaviors. According to the study, practitioners must design relationship-building programs that (a) engage public members and the organization in a highly interactive process, (b) fulfill the needs and expectations of both the public and the organization, and (c) provide benefit to both the public and the organization.

In another study, Bruning, Mcgrew, and Cooper (2006) explored town-gown relations. They explored university–community engagement from the perspective of community members by investigating the benefits that can be accrued by a university when community members are encouraged to explore the cultural, intellectual, athletic, and artistic benefits that are provided in college and university campuses. Kim, Brunner, and Fitch-Hauser (2006) examined the role of community relations in higher education. Findings showed that various contributions made to local communities might lead to a favorable public perception of a university manifested in various forms of public support, including making donations, attending sporting events, purchasing university products, looking for a job at the university, and sending children to the university. This showed that community relations play a crucial role in promoting a positive image of the university, which in turn attracts greater public support.

Hall (2006) studied the impact of corporate philanthropy and corporate community relations programs on the relationship between a company and its customers. Hall used communal and exchange relationship characteristics as well as the relationship factors of trust, mutual control, commitment, and satisfaction, to study the relationship between a municipally-owned utility company and its customers. The study compared the strength of the relationship between customers who were aware and unaware of the corporate philanthropy and community relations programs of the company. Results demonstrated that these programs and customers' awareness of them leads to a stronger relationship, and a more communal than exchange relationship between the company and its clients.

Research studies have also used a relational perspective to evaluate employee-organization relationships (Men, 2011; Men & Stacks, 2014; Shen, 2009, 2011; Seltzer et al., 2012). Men (2011) examined the link between employee's perceptions of empowerment and the quality of the organization–employee relationship. Findings showed that both dimensions of employee empowerment—feelings of competence and feelings of control—serve as positive predictors for organization–employee relationship. However, the study concluded that feelings of control wielded more weight in the prediction of the quality of organization-employee relationship compared to feelings of competence. Shen (2009, 2011) explored how organizations built and maintain relationships with internal publics and developed a valid and reliable instrument to measure relationship maintenance strategies in the context of organization-employee relationships. The study identified six distinct strategies: openness, assurances of legitimacy, networking, distributive negotiation, avoiding, and compromising. Seltzer et al. (2012) conducted a study on a university-affiliated emergency department investigating the

antecedents and outcomes of internal organization-public relationships as well as the cultivation strategies used to manage internal organization-public relationships. Men and Stacks (2014) studied the effects of authentic leadership on strategic internal communication and employee-organizations relationships. Findings showed that authentic leadership as an antecedent factor plays a critical role in nurturing an organization's symmetrical and transparent communication system, which in turn, cultivates quality employee-organization relationships. Transparent communication, characterized by information substantiality, accountability, and employee participation, largely contributes to employee trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction.

Men et al. (2017) studied relationship cultivation and public relations practices in start-up companies in China. The results of qualitative in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs suggested that employees and customers are the most important strategic publics for start-ups, followed by investors, the media, and the government. Findings also suggested that symmetrical relationship cultivation strategies apply to the start-up context in China with specific variations. The study identified new cultivation strategies such as vision and value communication, empowerment, authentic communication, and proactive reporting.

Seltzer and Zhang (2011) examined the organization-public relationship between citizens and their political parties. They investigated the interaction of politically relevant relationship antecedents, relationship cultivation strategies used by political parties, perceptions of the organization-public relationship between voters and their party, and outcomes of the relationship to test a model of political organization-public relationships (POPRs). Sweetser, English, & Fernandes (2015) studied the impact of digital interaction on the political organization-public relationship. The aim was to test whether interaction with a political organization facilitated a relationship and if that relationship might manifest into political support. Findings showed that active engagement enhances the organization-public relationship. The study also concluded that organization public relationship is also predicted by internal political disposition such as political cynicism, political information efficacy, or strength of ideology.

Chia (2005) studied consultant-client relationships. Chia argued that as relationships are always changing, consultants and clients need to constantly adapt to develop relationship characteristics such as trust. According to the study, trust is not the key element in consultant client-relationships. Rather, consultant-client relationships were primarily conducted and

managed as business-to-business transactions in which trust developed or declined according to the results and outcomes of project and programme management. Besides, Chia postulated that trust could assist in developing positive relationships if understood and valued the same way by both consultants and clients. Chia concluded that because of this unclear understanding of trust, it could only be connected mainly to outcomes and not to the development of relationships.

A type of organization-public relationships that have been studied within the relational perspective, though not extensively, is the relationship between government and citizens. Although Grunig and Jaatinen (1999) contended that the principles of public relations for government are the same as for other types of organization, the fact that government differs from other organizations makes government-citizen relations different from that of other types of organizations. Lee (2012), an experienced government public relations practitioner illustrated this difference as follows:

Government is different. It must be responsive to the public. If a business or nonprofit opts not to answer the complaint of a neighborhood organization, that's legal and OK. But government agencies can't. That's because their external relationships are not one dimensional, such as with customers or clients, and not even with stakeholders. Rather, for a government agency, everybody is a citizen. Even people who aren't being served by an agency have a claim on it. That's the difference between government and other sectors in the political economy (p.17).

The next section is focused on more details regarding the nature of the government and what makes it different from other organizations, the role of public relations to the government, and a review of studies focusing on government-citizen relations.

2.2.3 Government – Citizen Relations

The nature of government makes government-citizen relations different from that of other types of organization-public relationships. It is the government's role and purpose in a society that makes it different from other organizations. Government's ultimate goal is to enhance public good in contrast to private or business organizations' goal to make a profit. In his book *Big Democracy*, Appleby (1945) concluded his first chapter "Government is Different" with the statement "Government is different because it must take account of all the desires, needs, actions, thoughts and sentiments of 140,000,000 people. Government is different because government is politics" (p.10). Appleby in explaining the essential character of government argued that governmental function and attitude have at least three complementary aspects that

go to differentiate government from all other institutions and activities: a) breadth of scope, impact, and consideration; b) public accountability; and c) political character.

Besides, Appleby argued that by its public nature - how it is subject to public scrutiny and public outcry - government administration differs from all other administrative work. "Each employee hired, each one demoted, transferred, or discharged, every efficiency rating, every assignment of responsibility, each change in administrative structure, each conversation, each letter, has to be thought about in terms of possible public agitation, investigation, or judgment" (p. 7).

Graber (2003) has identified three dimensions along which he distinguishes public from private organizations. First is the environmental factors-consequences. He described the environment of public sector institutions as less open to market competition with less incentive to reduce costs, less concern with consumer preferences. Besides, public organizations are more subject to legal and formal constraints and politically influenced. The second dimension is organization-environment transactions. Within this dimension, Graber identified four sub-dimensions that distinguish public organizations: *Coerciveness* - greater coercion because of government's unique sanctions and coercive powers, including financial controls; *breadth of impact* - greater symbolic significance of actions of public sector personnel; *public scrutiny* - greater public scrutiny of public officials and their actions; and *unique public expectations* - greater expectations of fairness, responsiveness, accountability, and honesty. The final dimension distinguishing public from private sector organizations is internal structures and processes (Graber, 2003). In terms of complexity, public organizations tend to be more complex than private organizations, meaning there are greater multiplicity and diversity of objectives as well as greater vagueness and obscurity of objectives that lead to greater possibility of conflicting goals. In terms of top-level control, public organizations are characterized with less decision-making autonomy and flexibility, weaker and more fragmented authority over subordinates and lower levels, greater constraints in devising incentives for effective and efficient performance, greater reluctance to delegate, more levels of review and greater use of formal regulations, and more political and promotional roles for top managers.

Regarding organizational performance, public organizations are characterized by greater cautiousness and rigidity and less innovativeness, and more frequent turnover of top leaders disrupting plans. Concerning employees in public organizations, normally there are variations

in personality traits and needs, such as higher dominance and flexibility, and a higher need for achievement on the part of government managers. Besides, employees in public organizations are also characterized by lower work satisfaction and lower organizational commitment (Graber, 2003).

Government public relations is also considered by public relations professionals to be different from the public relations practiced in corporations, associations, and not-for-profit organizations. In introductory textbooks of public relations, special chapters are devoted to government public relations. However, Grunig and Jaatinen (1999) argued that the principles of public relations for government are the same as for other types of organization, but the specific conditions to which the principles must be applied are different. According to them, governmental organizations are more likely than other organizations to practice a public information model of public relations and less likely to engage in two-way communication. According to Grunig (1997b), the concept of public captures well the active and symmetrical relationship between government agencies and citizen publics assumed in democracies. In a democracy citizens are expected to take an active part in policy making and be involved in their government. As Feinberg (1997) said: “for democracy to work, citizens must have access to information about what their government is doing and how decisions have been reached” (p.377).

Besides, Young (2007) stated that “communication between citizens and their governments is a key measure of the health of any democracy” (p.iii). In her opinion, communication is inseparable from how governments operate, a dimension of every action or decision taken by the government, the way government makes, promotes and enacts policies, how government is organized and the relationships it builds with citizens as well as the media and other groups such as business and community organizations (Young, 2007).

It is the purpose of public relations in governmental organizations, i.e., informing the publics, which makes them more likely than other organizations to use the public information model. The public information model is a one-way model which regards public relations only as of the dissemination of information. As Grunig (1997b) stated,

With the public information model, an organization uses "journalists-in-residence" public relations practitioners who act as if they are journalists to disseminate relatively truthful information through the mass media and controlled media such as newsletters, brochures, and direct mail. Although information communicated through this model is truthful, it usually does not reveal the whole truth, only "facts" that the organization chooses to release. (p.261)

Lee (1999) considered that in government communications, public relations is “the means by which an administrator interacts with the citizenry and is held accountable” (p. 452). Besides, Lee (2012) has identified three different purposes of government public relations. The first purpose is mandatory and refers to democratic purposes of public relations. It includes media relations, public reporting, and responsiveness to the public (as citizens). The second purpose of government public relations is named optional, referring to pragmatic purposes of public relations. It includes responsiveness to the public (as customers and clients), increasing the utilization of services and products (public outreach), public education and public service campaigns (public outreach), seeking voluntary public compliance with laws and regulations and using the public as the eyes and ears of an agency. The final purpose is identified as “dangerous, but powerful” and embodies the political purposes of government public relations which aim at increasing public support (Lee, 2012).

Lee (2012) further argued that the qualitative difference between public administration and business administration is the governmental context of agency management. According to Lee,

in a democracy, public administrators must engage in certain activities that are expected as the sine qua non of government. For example, government managers must respond to inquiries from the news media, whether the particular issue would put the agency in a good light or a bad one. Similarly, given the central role of public opinion in a democracy, public administrators have a duty to report to the citizenry on the work of the agency and its stewardship of taxpayer funds. Again, these are part of the rubric of public relations. Hence, when focusing on these purposes, public relations is integral to public administration, not ancillary to it. (p.14)

Another important issue in government-citizen relationships is transparency, and one of the strategies to be explored in this study is openness or transparency. Transparency and trust in government also make government different from other organizations. Graber (2003) recognized as a crucial difference between public and private organizations the fact that public organizations operate or are presumed to operate in an atmosphere of transparency. Besides, Piotrowski (2007) stated that “trust in government is fundamentally linked to transparency” (p. 21). In his opinion, “governmental transparency equates to open government through avenues such as access to government records, open meetings, and whistleblower protections” (p. 10). He further argued that governmental transparency is quite important to executive agencies and other governmental organizations such as advisory committees. He held that governmental transparency allows the public to develop a more accurate picture of what is happening inside a government. Besides, he considered

transparency to be a prerequisite for democratic accountability in government, which enables the electorate to hold the government responsible for its actions (Graber, 2003). Concerning the definition of government public relations, there is no agreed definition. In the literature, it is also identified with different terms, such as government communication, public affairs, political communication, public diplomacy, etc. Vandebosch (2004) cited in Gelders and Ihnen (2010) differentiated government public relations from political communication and defined both of the concepts. He defined government public relations as “communication efforts in which the government/administration tries to be non-partisan, balanced and concise. These efforts are not aimed to put a political party or politician in the picture but focus on the interest of the receiving citizen who needs to be informed” (p. X).

On the other hand, political communication is defined as “persuasive communication coming from politicians explicitly or implicitly striving for political, image and electoral points” (p. X). Gelders and Ihlen (2010) also argued that “government public relations just as likely aims to be persuasive and tries to influence the knowledge, attitude and/or behavior of citizens, for example, to avoid driving when drinking” (p. 60). They also argued that more and more definitions and ethical guidelines about government public relations and propaganda allow ministers to score political points in secondary order by using government public relations, as long as this is not the main goal of the communication act.

Canel and Sanders (2011) argued that often the term “government communication” is used to refer solely to top-level executive communication. According to them, it can also be used to refer to institutions established by government to do its work at national, regional, and local levels. In line with this, they provided a definition that included both conceptual as well as functional aspects of government communication. Canel and Sanders (2011) defined government communication as “The role, practice, aims and achievements of communication as it takes place in and on behalf of public institution(s) whose primary end is executive in the service of a political rationale, and that is constituted on the basis of the people’s indirect or direct consent and charged to enact their will” (p. 4). Another definition is provided by Crespo and Echart (2011) who defined government communication as “the cultivation of long-term relationships oriented to mutual understanding rather than being modeled on short-term, vote-winning approaches to communication” (p. 109).

So far, the number of studies focusing on the organization-public relationship in the governmental context has been scarce. Ledingham (2001) has been the first to extend the

relational theory of public relations to government-community relationships. He studied relationship between government and citizenry in Eastside, a suburb of a major Midwest metropolitan center. The study focused on explaining if public relations functions as community builder and testing the ability of the relationship scale to predict public behavior. His focus was only on the three types of relationships: professional relationships, personal relationships, and community relationships (Ledingham, 2001).

Graham (2014) studied the relationship between local governments and the citizens and analyzed the different aspects of the relationship. The study also focused on public relations activities and tactics employed to cultivate relationship. Graham evaluated citizen's communication behaviors to help local government communicators in the development of message and strategy as well as identify the most effective issues and tactics.

Waymer (2013) studied democracy and government public relations. Waymer argued that the unique nature of the US government poses significant barriers to the practice of democratic governmental public relations in and by the US. Waymer concluded that the success of public relations is dependent upon the quality of democracy where without a healthy democracy, a fully functioning public relations is stifled.

However, some of the studies of organization-public relationships identify external validity or generalizability as one of the main challenges of the studies on organization-public relationships. For example, Waters (2007) when discussing the limitations of his PhD dissertation concluded: "Though this is the first organization-public relationship study that looks at the dynamics of a relationship across multiple organizations of the same public-relations specialization, it is difficult to say that the results are generalizable beyond nonprofit hospitals in Northern California" (p. 239). In another case, Ki (2006) and Ki and Hon (2009) when developing the measures of relationship cultivation strategies, described one of the limitations of her study as follows:

this study used random sampling so that the results may be at least suggestive for other state farm bureaus. However, external validity is still questionable. Future studies should apply the developed measures to other types of organizations such as profit, nonprofit, governmental organizations, etc., as well as various industries to refine the scales. (p. 20)

Additionally, scholars (; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999) hypothesized that some relationship cultivation strategies (e.g., access, positivity, openness, sharing of tasks, networking, and assurances) could produce better relationship quality outcomes (e.g., control mutuality, satisfaction, trust, and commitment;). Moreover, some of the above-cited studies

also found out that cultivation strategies are not to the same extent successful when applied to different organization-public relationships settings. Some cultivation strategies might be successful in managing university-student relationship, but might not be to the same extent successful when managing government-community relationships. Furthermore, some relationship strategies compared to others have the most impact on relationship quality outcomes. For example, Waters (2007) in studying non-profit-donors relationship, found out that every relationship cultivation strategy except reciprocity had a direct influence on evaluation of the relationship dimensions. However, there were mixed results for the rest of the cultivation strategies. He found out that access, networking, responsibility, and relationship nurturing all significantly affected trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, and commitment. Sharing of tasks had a significant impact on trust, and openness significantly influenced satisfaction. Positivity had a strong influence on how control mutuality was evaluated. In addition, Jo (2003) found out that in a manufacturer-retailer relationship, retailers perceive satisfaction more distinctively compared to other relationship qualities such as control mutuality and face and favor. Ki and Hon (2007b) also found perceptions of satisfaction and control mutuality to be the best predictors of a positive attitude toward the organization compared to other relationship outcomes.

Besides, from the studies reviewed, it can be seen that empirical research exploring specific cultivation strategies lead to the development of quality organization-public relationships, and the influence of specific cultivation strategies on specific relationship quality dimensions are insufficient. Moreover, as Hung (2007) suggested, research in the future should move from concentrating on relationship outcomes to relationship cultivation strategies, how to sustain and cultivate quality relationships with a focus on which relationship cultivation strategies, as Hon and Grunig (1999) and Grunig and Huang (2000) proposed, can achieve the relationship qualities, such as trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction. The purpose of the research is in part to fill that void. Thus, the study was intended to explore the relationship cultivation strategies of access, positivity, openness, and assurances of legitimacy and explain how they contribute to achieving trust and relationship satisfaction in government-community relations. Relationship cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes proposed by Hon and Grunig and Grunig and Huang (2000) are explicated next.

2.2.4 Relationship Cultivation

The concept of relationship cultivation describes the way organizations communicate with publics and how they manage conflicts to build positive relationships or restore damaged relationships (Grunig & Huang, 2000). Relationship cultivation strategies are the strategies used to maintain relationships with publics. Grunig (2002) defined cultivation strategies as “the communication methods that public relations people use to develop new relationships with publics and to deal with the stresses and conflicts that occur in all relationships” (p. 5).

In some of the very first studies, public relations scholars (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Hung, 2000) have used the term maintenance strategies to describe the strategies employed in managing organization-public relationships. However, Hung (2007) proposed replacing the term maintenance with cultivation. She noted that “Grunig (personal communication, February 26, 2002) considered using the term cultivation in place of maintenance” (p. 459).

In support of her argument, Hung referred to Dindia and Canary’s (1993) four definitions of relationship maintenance:

- to keep a relationship in existence;
- to keep a relationship in a specified state or condition;
- to keep a relationship in satisfactory condition; and
- to keep a relationship in repair.

In one of her studies, Hung (2004) adopted the third and the fourth definitions to conceptualize the relationship cultivation as the efforts put to keep the relationship in a satisfactory state and keep damaged relationship in repair. This conceptualization is also used to define relationship cultivation in studying the relationship between government and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia. Considering the problematic relationship between the government and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia throughout the years, this conceptualization emphasizes government’s efforts to build a positive and mutually beneficial relationship as well as restore a decaying or declined relationship.

The concept of relationship cultivation strategies is believed to be the heir to the models of public relations, and the two-way symmetrical model, in particular (Grunig, 2006; Grunig & Hunt, 1984) proposed four models of public relations. The first three models, press agency, public information, and two-way asymmetrical communication are described as asymmetrical.

The two-way asymmetrical model of public relations is characterized by an unbalanced, one-sided communication. The model employs scientific methods to develop more persuasive communication. It incorporates lots of feedback from target audiences and various publics; however, the feedback is used by organizations to persuade publics to accept the organization's point of view or to behave as the organization wants (Grunig, 2006).

The last model, two-way symmetrical communication, uses two-way communication and dialogue to manage conflicts, reach an understanding and build relationships with publics. The model relies on honest and open two-way communication rather than one-way persuasion (Grunig, 2006). According to Grunig (2006), the symmetrical model proposed that individuals, organizations, and publics should use communication to adjust their ideas and behavior to those of others rather than to try to control how others think and behave. Additionally, Hon and Grunig list symmetrical relationships as the key attribute of successful relationship cultivation, “the most productive relationships, in the long run, are those that benefit both parties in the relationship rather than those designed to benefit the organizations only” (p. 11).

Grunig and Huang (2000) argued that they referred to the literature on interpersonal communication for concepts to use in their theory because scholars of interpersonal communication have studied how different communication strategies affect the development, maintenance and dissolution of relationships (Canary & Stafford, 1994). Stafford and Canary (1991) cited in Grunig and Huang (2000) identified five dimensions that determine the quality of relationship between romantic couples: “positivity (such as attempts to make the relationship enjoyable for both), openness (such as disclosure of thoughts and feelings), assurances (of love and commitment), networking (having common friends), and shared tasks (taking joint responsibility for household tasks)” (p.36). Symmetrical strategies suggested by Grunig and Huang (2000) encompassed the following: access, positivity, openness or disclosure, assurances of legitimacy, networking, and sharing of tasks.

Additionally, Hon and Grunig (1999) and Grunig and Huang (2000) suggested strategies for maintaining relationships that deal with conflict resolution derived from previous studies by Plowman (1995) and Huang (1997). These strategies are grouped into three categories.

Integrative - these approaches are symmetrical because all parties in a relationship benefit by searching out common or complementary interests and solving problems together through

open discussion and joint decision-making. The goal is a win-win solution that values the integrity of a long-term relationship between an organization and its publics.

Distributive - incorporate a win-loss perspective and often result in one side benefiting at the expense of the other. These strategies are asymmetrical because one party seeks to maximize gains and minimize losses within a win-lose or self-gain perspective.

Dual Concern - Dual concern strategies take into consideration the role of balancing the interests of publics with the interests of the organization. However, some dual concern strategies are asymmetrical because they emphasize the organization's interest over the public or vice versa:

- *contending* - The organization tries to convince the public to accept its position;
- *avoiding* - the organization ignores the conflict either physically or psychologically;
- *accommodating* - the organization yields, at least in part, on its position and lowers its aspirations;
- *compromising* - The organization meets the public partway between its preferred positions, but neither is completely satisfied with the outcome.

Other dual concern strategies are symmetrical and are most effective at building and maintaining a relationship over the long term. Plowman (1995) identified the following symmetrical strategies: a) *Cooperating* - Both the organization and the public work together to reconcile their interests and to reach a mutually beneficial relationship; b) *Being unconditionally constructive* - The organization does whatever it thinks is best for the relationship, even if means giving up some of its position and even if the public does not reciprocate; and c) *Saying win-win or no deal* - If the organization and public cannot find a solution that benefits both, they agree to disagree— win-win or no deal (Plowman, 1995).

For the study, the focus is on four relationship cultivation strategies, access, positivity, openness, and assurances of legitimacy. These strategies are explicated next in more detail.

Access. Hon and Grunig (1999) suggested access as one of the relationship cultivation strategies, although it is not included in the interpersonal relationships' literature. Hon and Grunig (1999) asserted that the use of access in organization-public relationships entails the willingness of both parties to directly address complaints and questions to each other without discussing it with a third party. When referring to access, Hon and Grunig described access as follows:

Members of publics or opinion leaders provide access to public relations people. Public relations representatives or senior managers provide representatives of publics similar access to organizational decision-making processes. Either party will answer telephone calls or read letters or e-mail messages from the other. Either party is willing to go to the other when they have complaints or queries, rather than taking negative reactions to third parties. (p. 14)

Ki and Hon (2009) considered access a strategy that two parties use to reach each other to express or share opinions and thoughts. Based on Hon and Grunig's guidelines, they defined access as "the degree of effort that an organization puts into providing communication channels or media outlets that assist its strategic publics in reaching it" (p. 6).

Spicer (2000) when describing the functions of public relations in the government contended that

public relations should ensure equal access to the process and equal participation in setting ground rules that ensure goodwill as witnessed in speaking and listening civilly. In essence, public relations should serve as the referee for the often contentious problem-solving conversations necessary for a democratic society to thrive (p. 129).

Access entails contact between the organization and the public being it in person, on the phone, via e-mail, or on the internet willing to answer questions and responds to concerns of the other. The opportunity provided to both parties to meet each other helps voices and concerns of both parties to be heard and later applied when the organization needs to make decisions about future issues (Williams & Brunner, 2010).

Positivity. Hon and Grunig (1999) defined positivity as "anything the organization or public does to make the relationship more enjoyable for the parties involved" (p. 14). Positivity refers to the actions taken by both parties in the organization-public relationship to make the relationship pleasant and more enjoyable. Ki and Hon (2009) have defined positivity as "the degree to which members of publics benefit from the organization's efforts to make the relationship more enjoyable for key publics" (p. 12). In the interpersonal communication literature Canary and Stafford (1994) described positivity as "any attempt to make interactions pleasant" (p. 15).

Hon and Grunig (1999) provided an example of the cultivation strategy of positivity on how the CEO of an agency sees the relationship between the organization and its publics:

We want to be a resource to every one of our publics in some way, shape, or form. It's in the way we've set up our web site, the way we've set up everything we do as far as our newsletter, as far as the service we provide, as far as the way we interact with all of these publics—whether they're the media or a client or a not-for-profit organization or whatever—we want them to look at [name of agency] as a resource, as something that has value to their organization in some way, shape, or form. So, what we try to do is operate on the principle

of providing something that is of self-interest to every one of our clients...so there is a reason why they should care about us. (p. 17)

Canary and Stafford (1994) have identified certain actions that compose positivity, such as cheerful and nice behavior, courteous and polite communication, and uncritical behaviors toward partners. In some of the interpersonal communication studies (Canary & Stafford 1992, 1993; Stafford & Canary, 1991) results have shown positivity as an essential predictor of control mutuality

Openness. Openness is considered a type of two-way symmetrical communication strategy (Hon & Grunig, 1999). According to Hon and Grunig (1999), openness refers to disclosure “of thoughts and feelings among parties involved” (p.14). Hence, in organization-public relationship, transparency occurs when both parties are willing to share their thoughts and feelings. Ki and Hon (2009) defined openness as “an organization’s efforts to provide information about the nature of the organization and what it is doing” (p. 8).

In the interpersonal communication literature, Canary & Stafford (1994) defined openness “direct discussion about the nature of the relationship and setting aside times for talks about the relationship” (p. 12). They also gave some examples of openness in interpersonal communication such as: “We share things with each other that no one else knows;” “We discuss our problems in the relationship;” “We often talk about how things used to be;” “I try to provide advice through past experience,” and “I rely on her for advice” (p. 15).

To illustrate better the strategy of openness, Hon and Grunig also provided the example given by an associate vice president of university relations: “Much of what public relations in a public university is about is providing disclosure—saying, ‘Here is what we are doing with your money. Here is what’s going on. This is a public institution. Here’s what we do.’” (1999, p. 15). Williams and Brunner (2010) also mentioned some examples of this strategy including when an organization explains what it does, provides organizational history, and discloses how funds are used; shares organizational news, both positive and negative.

Transparency is important to governments more than to any organization. It is also recognized as a crucial difference between public and private organizations, where public organizations operate or are presumed to operate in an atmosphere of transparency (Graber, 2003). Piotrowski (2007) contended that governmental transparency equates to open government through avenues such as “access to government records, open meetings, and whistleblower protections” (p. 10).

Balkin (1999) has studied mass media's contributions to the political values of openness and democratic accountability. According to him, the metaphor of transparency encompasses three separate political virtues. He identified the first kind of transparency as informational transparency: knowledge about government actors and decisions and access to government information. The second type of transparency is participatory transparency: the ability to participate in political decisions either through fair representation or direct participation. The final type of transparency is accountability transparency: the ability to hold government officials accountable – either to the legal system or to public opinion – when they violate the law or when they act in ways that adversely affect people's interests. Balkin has further identified three ways mass media can help in making the political system more “transparent”: “mass media can help people understand the operations of government, participate in political decisions, and hold government officials accountable” (Balkin 1999, p. 394).

Open communication and being open to the publics is often linked to trust-building and good relationships. This is emphasized in an example given by a director of public affairs for a county government:

The main strategy is open communication--by being open, in touch with your various publics, determining what their needs and wants are, how they can best be achieved, and how you can all work together toward common goals. And, I think that's key with any group and organization that you bring together. That's what you build trust on, that's what you build relationships on, and that's what you accomplish goals with. (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 11-12).

Assurances of Legitimacy. Hon and Grunig defined assurances as “attempts by parties in the relationship to assure the other parties that they and their concerns are legitimate.” (p.15). According to them, assurances might also involve attempts by the parties in the relationship to demonstrate they are committed to maintaining the relationship (Hon and Grunig). Ki and Hon (2009) defined assurances as “any efforts by an organization to assure its strategic publics that they and their concerns are attended to.” (p .9).

In the interpersonal relationship literature, Canary and Stafford (1994) regarded assurances as behaviors that imply an expression of love between two individuals (Canary & Stafford, 1994). Studies (Canary & Stafford, 1992, 1993; Stafford & Canary, 1991) found assurances to be most effective in nurturing commitment between two individuals in an interpersonal relationship. Canary and Stafford (1992) found that assurances most affected the commitment of both partners, whereas in two other studies, Canary and Stafford (1993) and Stafford and Canary (1991) found assurances to be a strong predictor of trust in interpersonal relationship.

Hon and Grunig (1999) illustrated assurances with the example provided by a director of external relations for a university agricultural extension office regarding how his organization demonstrates to its publics that their needs are legitimate:

The whole land grant system is based on the needs of people. We're not a bunch of bureaucrats or what some folks would call ivory-tower, pointy-headed professors who are sitting in [name of city] and handing down things that we think are important to people. Our programs are developed truly along the needs of people....That's the relationship. People tell us what they need...and we try to deliver that in the form that they want. (p. 15)

Lee (2012) also contended that “one of the basic democratic purposes of public relations in public administration is listening to the public on multiple levels. Active listening then leads to modified agency behavior so that it can do a better job and be more responsive to the citizenry.” (p. 17). Besides, public relations contributes to organizational effectiveness when it helps the organization reconcile its goals with the expectations of the strategic constituencies. (Grunig et al., 1992). When doing this, public relations assures the publics that they and their concerns are legitimate to the organization.

2.2.5 Relationship Outcomes (Relationship Quality)

Relationship outcomes represent relationship quality or the consequences of effective relationship cultivation strategies. Scholars have identified a variety of dimensions that determine the state of a relationship. Grunig et al. (1992) identified reciprocity, trust, credibility, mutual legitimacy, openness, mutual satisfaction, and mutual understanding as determinants of relationship. Ledingham and Bruning (1998b) suggested five relationship quality dimensions, including trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment. Hon and Grunig (1999) and Grunig and Huang (2000) argued that research in interpersonal communication and the psychology of interpersonal relationships shows that the following four outcomes are good indicators of successful interpersonal relationships. They further explained that public relations research shows that they also apply equally well to organization-public relationships. They focused on four dimensions considered to be the essential indicators and dimensions representing the quality of organization-public relationships: trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality. The study is limited only to the relationship dimensions of trust and satisfaction.

Trust. Based on the dimensions proposed by public relations scholars, trust has been viewed as fundamental in understanding the organization-public relationship. Trust or the lack thereof has a measurable impact on the financial health of an organization (Paine, 2003). Verčič and

Grunig (2000) went further and concluded that without trust an organization could not exist. Trust is required by stockholders, employees, consumers, governments, and communities. Without trust, stockholders will not buy stock, employees will not work, consumers will not buy products, and governments will interfere with the organization's mission (Grunig & Huang, 2000). To emphasize the importance of trust, Verčič (2001) quoted the saying he considered to be a necessary starting point for every contemporary investigation of the phenomenon of trust. According to Simmel (1978),

Without the general trust that people have in each other, society itself would disintegrate, for very few relationships are based entirely upon what is known with certainty about another person, and very few relationships would endure if trust were not as strong as, or stronger than, rational proof or personal observation (p. 178–179).

In public relations literature, Grunig and Grunig (1998) defined trust as “the extent to which both management and publics express willingness to make themselves vulnerable to the behavior of the other - confidence that the other party will take its interests into account in making decisions” (p. 4). To illustrate the link between trust and effective public relations, Hon and Grunig (1999) provided the following example given by a director of news and public affairs at a private college:

One of the principles that underlies [public relations] strategies is the development of a sense of trust, and I think that is something that needs constant attention, constant vigilance. If we can start trusting each other, there is a lot we can do. And, trust breaks down all sorts of barriers that have hindered the relationship over the years ... It is all built around trust ... You can develop all kinds of strategies, but if you do not have trust, you are not going to get very far. (p. 19)

One of the classic definitions of trust is provided by Rotter (1982), which emphasized reliability as central to the concept of trust. He defined trust as “a generalized expectancy held by an individual that the word, promise, oral or written statement of another individual or group can be relied on.” (p. 288). Moorman, Deshpande, and Zaltman (1993) characterized trust as “a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence” (p. 23). In another definition, Mishra (1996) defined trust as the “willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the belief that the latter party is (a) competent, (b) open, (c) concerned, and (d) reliable” (p. 265). According to Morgan and Hunt (1994) trust is the “confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity” (p.23). Wheelless and Grotz (1977) argued that “trust occurs when parties holding certain favorable perceptions of each other allow this relationship to reach the expected outcomes” (p. 251). In the field of marketing, Barney and Hansen (1994) considered the ability of the organization to develop trusting relationships to be an important source of competitive advantage.

Trust in government or political trust is mainly studied in political science research. Political trust is considered “a central indicator of public’s underlying feeling about its polity” (Newton & Norris, 2000, p. 53). Miller and Listhaug (1990) defined political trust as the “judgment of the citizenry that the system and the political incumbents are responsive, and will do what is right even in the absence of constant scrutiny” (p. 358). As such, Levi and Stoker (2000) considered political trust an essential indicator of legitimacy in democratic regimes. Besides, Marien and Hooghe (2011) contended that low levels of political trust might undermine the effectiveness and legitimacy of government action and its ability to implement legislation. The results of their study showed that respondents with low levels of political trust were more likely to accept illegal behavior than respondents with high levels of political trust. Abravanel and Busch (1975) argued that political trust provides three benefits for the political system: a) promotes legitimacy; b) it is conducive to system stability, and 3) it provides discretionary power for political elites.

In public relations, research trust is considered a complicated concept with several underlying dimensions (Hon and Grunig, 1999; Welch, 2006). Hon and Grunig have identified three dimensions to measure trust scale: 1) integrity, the belief that an organization is fair and just; 2) dependability, the belief that an organization will do what it says it will do; and 3) competence, the belief that an organization has the ability to do what it says it will do. The same three dimensions are also applied in this study to measure the level of trust between government and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia.

Satisfaction. Relational satisfaction has been widely acknowledged as a crucial attribute of relationship quality (Ferguson, 1984; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Ferguson (1984) contended that the degree to which both the organization and publics are satisfied with their relationship is one of the significant indicators to measure the quality of the relationship between the organization and its strategic public (Grunig & Huang, 2000). Grunig and Huang (2000) held that “unlike control mutuality and trust, which involve cognitive dimensions, satisfaction encompasses affection and emotion” (p. 45). For example one of the Hon & Grunig’s (1999) scales used to measure satisfaction read, “I am happy with this organization” (p. 4).

Hon and Grunig (1999) noted that “a satisfying relationship is one in which the benefits outweigh the costs” (p. 3). They further defined satisfaction as “the extent to which one party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are

reinforced” (p. 20). Hon and Grunig also maintained that satisfaction also could occur when one party believes that the relationship maintenance behaviors of the other party are positive. According to Stafford and Canary (1991) a satisfying relationship is one in which “the distribution of rewards is equitable, and the relational rewards outweigh costs” (p. 225). Ledingham and Bruning (2000) argued that satisfaction was a dimension of the organization-public relationship that could easily be increased if time and resources were invested by the organizations.

2.3 Coorientational Approach

A majority of organization-public relationships studies reviewed earlier are limited to exploring only one side of the story. Despite the call of Grunig and Huang (2000) for more coorientational studies of relationships in public relations, studies exploring relationships from the side of both organizations and publics are scarce.

To compare the perceptions of both sides involved in the relationship, the application of coorientation theory were considered in this study. A coorientational approach to organization-public relationships helps measure four perspectives of the relationship: a) the organization’s view of the relationship (the organization’s perspective), b) the public’s view of the relationship (the public’s perspective), c) the organization’s estimate of the public’s view of the relationship (the organization’s meta-perspective), and d) the public’s estimate of the organization’s view of the relationship (the public’s meta-perspective).

Verčič (2008) posited that the coorientation model of public relations assumes that organizations prefer harmony to conflict and that they can use communication for that purpose. He further argued that

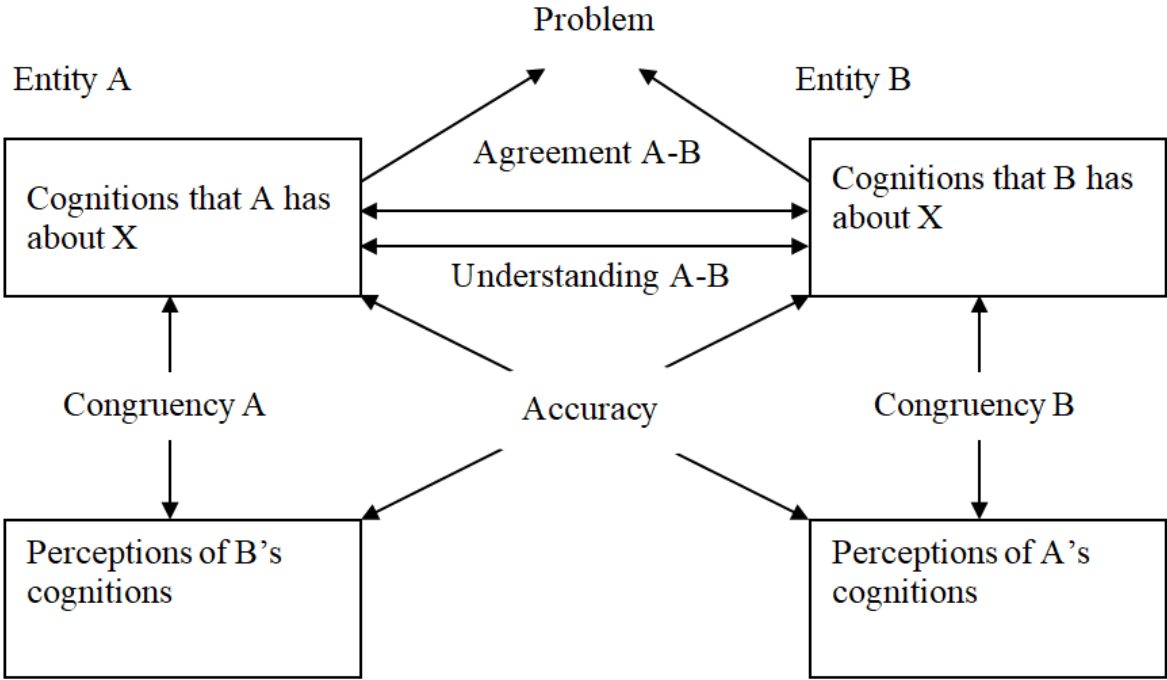
coorientation in PR exists when an organization and its strategic constituency are simultaneously oriented to one another and something of mutual interest. Based on its original assumptions, the coorientation model enables organizations to adjust their goals in response to the expectations of their strategic constituencies and vice versa. (p. 997)

According to Taylor and Kent (2006) coorientation meant “that two or more individuals or parties have an awareness of how they are perceived by others, not just a guess about what they think the other group or public thinks about them” (p. 353).

In figure 1, entities (A) and (B) have a certain idea (i.e., cognition) of what the other side thinks about a problem or issue. Besides, both sides have a certain evaluation of that

cognition, that is, an attitude toward the issue or problem in question. The two entities alike have a perception of the idea and evaluations of the other side—‘what each side thinks the other is thinking’, or put, how the other side evaluates (Verčič, Tkalac-Verčič, & Leco, 2006).

Picture 2.1: Coorientation model. Source: adapted from Verčič et al. (2006).



In addition, Verčič et al. (2006) identified four key variables of the coorientation model:

- *Congruency or perceived agreement* – the degree to which each of the sides believes that the idea or evaluation of the other side is similar to theirs;
- *Accuracy* – the degree to which the perceptions or evaluations of side B by side A approximate to the real ideas or cognitions of side B. The degree to which the approximations of one side match the real attitudes of the other;
- *Agreement* – the degree to which two (or more) sides share similar evaluations of a particular issue of common interest; and
- *Understanding* – the degree of similarity between definitions given by two or more parties (Verčič et al., 2006).

According to Verčič et al. (2006) to quantify the understanding, one needs to calculate the difference that conveys the gap between the cognitions of either side. The difference, therefore, shows how far apart the beliefs of the two groups are. The smaller the difference, the greater the understanding between the two sides is, and the greater the difference, the

lower the level of understanding is. Verčič et al. also concluded that the same principles could be used in measuring the level of understanding of the agreement between two entities.

Additionally, *intraorganizational congruency* describes how close the views of an organization are with the views of its constituency, whereas *intraconstituency congruency* describes how close the views of a constituency are with views of an organization (Verčič, 2008). Besides, *organization-constituency agreement* reveals the extent to which an organization and its constituency share similar evaluations of something of mutual interest, and *organization-constituency understanding* tells the extent to which an organization and its constituency similarly define something of mutual interest. *Organization-constituency accuracy* highlights the extent to which an organization's view of a constituency's actual view is correct, and "constituency-organization accuracy" tells us the other way around (Verčič, 2008).

Verčič (2008) further argued that by putting the accuracy of perceptions into the focus of the coorientation model, foci of the model instead become descriptions of agreement between an organization and its constituencies. The model is then used to gather data and answer questions such as: how does an organization view something of common interest with a strategic constituency? How does that constituency perceive that area of common interest? How does the organization perceive the constituency's views? And how does the constituency perceive the organization's views? By answering these questions we get four possibilities:

- *consensus*: an organization and its strategic constituency have similar evaluations and definitions of a situation;
- *dissensus*: an organization and its strategic constituency do not agree either on an evaluation or on definitions of a situation, or both;
- *false consensus*: one or both sides perceive a higher level of consensus than there is; and
- *false conflict*: an organization or its constituency perceives a higher level of disagreement than there is (Verčič, 2008).

The coorientation model has been used for studying different organization-public relationships (Graham, 2014; Seltzer, 2007; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2009; Waters, 2007, 2009;). Seltzer (2007) applied the coorientational approach to study the organization-public relationship between the university police department and students living on campus. Waters (2007) used the coorientation model to explore relationships between charitable nonprofits

and their donors. Graham (2014) applied the coorientation model to study the relationship between local governments and the citizens they serve.

The coorientational approach also has been used in public relations research to develop PR ethics (Pearson, 1989), analysing consultants (Johnson, 1989), nation-building research (Taylor & Kent, 2006), international relations (Verčič et al., 2006), and journalists and public relations specialists relationship (Tkalac-Verčič & Colic, 2016).

Johnson (1989) used coorientation theory to study client-consultant roles and came up with a coorientation model for public relations consultant roles. Taylor and Kent (2006) applied coorientation theory to nation-building. They held that coorientation theory might help governments and organizations to identify and measure issues in which organizations and publics differ. Coorientation theory also examines how groups see each other and what they believe the other groups think about them. Besides, Taylor and Kent identified understanding and tolerance as one of the starting points of a coorientational approach to nation-building. Verčič et al. (2006) applied coorientation model to study communication behavior between nations. Using coorientational approach, Verčič et al. compared attitudes towards specific issues relevant in international relations between the publics of the two nations and examine the degree of agreement between the public of two nations on the specific issues. Tkalac-Verčič and Colic (2016) used coorientational model to analyze level of (dis) satisfaction with working conditions of each group and their perceptions about the other profession. They also analyzed the perceptions and cross-perceptions of journalists and public relations experts on their role in organizational reputation building.

2.4 Problem Statement and Research Questions

As discussed in the literature review, research in public relations has shown relationship cultivation strategies to lead to quality relationship outcomes, and symmetrical communication to be more successful than asymmetrical communication in building relationships between organizations and publics (see, for example, Grunig, 2001; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999). Additionally, scholars (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999) posited that several relationship cultivation strategies such as access, positivity, openness, sharing of tasks, networking, and assurances, can produce better relationship quality outcomes: control mutuality, satisfaction, trust, and commitment.

Although initial research by Hon and Grunig (1999) and Grunig and Huang (2000) proposed six relationship cultivation strategies (access, positivity, openness, sharing of tasks, networking, and assurances), and four relationship outcomes (control mutuality, satisfaction, trust, and commitment) to define the quality of organization-public relationships, in the study the researcher decided to study only four cultivation strategies and two relationship outcomes. The purpose of the study made the researcher decide to study only the above-mentioned strategies and outcomes. In conceptualizing the study, the researcher followed suggestions by Hung (2007) that research in the future should move from concentrating on relationship outcomes to relationship cultivation strategies; i.e., how to sustain and cultivate quality relationships with a focus on which relationship cultivation strategies, access, positivity, openness, assurances of legitimacy, networking and sharing of tasks, can achieve the relationship qualities, such as trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction. Thus, the intention was not to study the quality of relationship between government and Albanians but also to understand and explore the chosen cultivation strategies and how these strategies individually contribute to trust and satisfaction between government and community. Thus, having this in mind, the researcher thought that the omission of the two cultivation strategies and outcomes would not jeopardize the relevance of the study considering the fact that the aim was to understand the contribution of individual relationship cultivation strategies on trust and satisfaction between government and the Albanian community, rather than their contribution to the quality of relationships between government and Albanians, which in that case would be best represented by the four relationship outcomes. Also, this did not mean that the rest of the strategies and outcomes not included in the study were less relevant and important in studying government-community relations.

The second reason for limiting the scope of the study to only four cultivation strategies and two outcomes is related to one of the disadvantages of in-depth interviews, which is that they are time-consuming. As Boyes and Neale (2006) suggested in-depth interviews can be a time-intensive evaluation activity because of the time it takes to conduct interviews, transcribe them, and analyze the results. The researcher believed from the beginning that studying all the strategies and tactics qualitatively would go beyond the scope of the study, and make it a quite hard process to accomplish. The interview protocol that was used for the study included thirty main questions that asked respondents to elaborate extensively on the issues. Also, the interview protocol included an extensive number of questions that had two or three sub-questions. Even during the pretest the participants complained that the interviews were long

and there were too many questions. During the pretest, no interview lasted less than an hour, and the researcher thought from the beginning that including all the strategies and outcomes would make it even harder to have people participate in the interviews.

Likewise, the proposed study focused on studying access, positivity, openness, and assurances. The research questions developed sought to explore and understand how the parties in the relationship, government, and Albanians, evaluate government on the four cultivation strategies, access, positivity, openness, and assurances. The study considered these strategies to be important factors influencing trust and satisfaction as relationship outcomes determining the quality of the relationship between government and Albanians. Thus, the study also focused on the contribution of these four relationship cultivation strategies to achieving trust and relationship satisfaction in the relationship between government and community. The following research questions have been developed for the study:

- RQ1: Does the government think they are providing access to Albanians and do Albanians perceive they are given access by the government?
- RQ2: How does access produce trust and relationship satisfaction?
- RQ3: What is the level of positivity in the relationship according to the government and the level of positivity according to Albanians?
- RQ4: How does positivity contribute to trust and relationship satisfaction?
- RQ5: What is the level of openness/transparency according to the government, and what is the level of openness/transparency according to Albanians?
- RQ6: How does openness produce trust and relationship satisfaction?
- RQ7: What is the level of assurances perceived by the government and the level of assurances according to Albanians?
- RQ8: How do assurances produce trust and relationship satisfaction?
- RQ9: What is the level of trust according to the government and the level of trust according to Albanians?
- RQ10: What is the level of satisfaction in the relationship according to the government and the level of satisfaction according to Albanians?
- RQ11: What coorientation state exists between government and Albanians?

As can be seen from the research questions identified, the intention was to explore access, positivity, openness, and assurances as perceived by the government, and the real access, positivity, openness, and assurances as seen by the Albanian ethnic community. Since the

study was mainly built on previous quantitative research studies about organization-public relationships, the researcher had no intention whatsoever to quantitatively study the level of access, positivity, openness, and assurances. Although the researcher used the phrase “what is the level of,” the aim was like in the first research question to understand based on narrations from participants if both the government and Albanians perceive and evaluate positively or negatively that Albanians have access to the government, government is being positive towards Albanians, government is being open to Albanians about what it is doing, and whether government assures Albanians that they and their concerns are considered legitimate by the government. Besides, the study also aimed to explain whether and how access, positivity, openness, and assurances produce trust and relationship satisfaction between the government and Albanian ethnic community.

Besides, the literature reviewed suggested that an organization-public relationship arises when there is interdependence between the organization and the strategic public that results in consequences needed to be managed constantly by the organization (Hung, 2002). In a multi-ethnic country such as the Republic of North Macedonia, the ethnic communities are also strategic publics that the government needs to manage relationships with. Also, one of the main qualities of good governance of the government is its ability to respond to the needs of citizens and uphold their rights. This incorporates the willingness and ability of the government to speak with citizens, to listen to them, incorporate their needs and preferences into its programme and implement them through laws and policies. By being attentive to the needs and preferences of the citizens, the government can build quality relationships with them.

In public relations, the symmetrical model (Grunig & Hunt, 1994) and symmetrical relationship cultivation strategies (Grunig & Huang, 2000) are used to accommodate the public's interest and balance it with the organization's interest. The concept of symmetry in public relations entails use of two-way symmetrical communication to manage conflicts, reach an understanding, and build relationships with publics. The aim was to adjust own ideas and behavior to those of others rather than to try to control how others think and behave. In public relations the two-way asymmetrical model of public relations is also used which is characterized by unbalanced, one-sided communication. It incorporates lots of feedback from target audiences and various publics; however, the feedback is used by organizations to persuade publics to accept the organization's point of view or to behave as the organization wants (Grunig, 2006). Scholars (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999) have also

suggested that several relationship cultivation strategies which are symmetrical (access, positivity, openness, sharing of tasks, networking, and assurances) can produce better relationship quality outcomes (control mutuality, satisfaction, trust, and commitment;). In line with this, the aim of the study was to explain and explore the interrelations between cultivation strategies of access, positivity, openness, and assurances and the two dimensions of organization-public relationships, trust and relational satisfaction, and to also explain how these cultivation strategies contributed to producing trust and relationship satisfaction in government-citizen relations.

3 THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA AFTER INDEPENDENCE

3.1 Introduction

The Republic of North Macedonia, formerly part of Yugoslavia, is situated in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula. Kosovo borders it to the northwest, Serbia to the north, Bulgaria to the east, Greece to the south, and Albania to the west. The capital is Skopje. According to the last census of 2002, the Republic of North Macedonia has a population of 2.022.547, out of which Macedonians comprise 64,2%, Albanians 25,2%, Turks 3,9%, Roma 2,7%, Serbs 1,8%, and others 0,7%. In terms of religion, approximately 65 % of the population is Macedonian Orthodox, and 32 % is Muslim, about 3% belong to various other faiths (State Statistical Office, 2002). There is also a general correlation between ethnicity and religious affiliation in the Republic of North Macedonia. The majority of Orthodox believers are ethnic Macedonian, and Islam is commonly practiced by the majority Albanians.

The Republic of North Macedonia declared independence on 8 September 1991 at a referendum boycotted by the Albanians, in which 95% voted for independence and secession of the Republic of North Macedonia from the Yugoslav federation. On 17 November 1991, a constitution was adopted defining the Republic of North Macedonia as the national homeland of Macedonians. In January 1992, a referendum held in the Albanian-populated areas endorsed territorial autonomy (Bechev, 2009).

The Republic of North Macedonia had an unresolved issue regarding the name dispute with Greece which until recently had delayed progress in the Republic of North Macedonia. Greece blocked the efforts of the Republic of Macedonia to gain UN membership under the name “the Republic Macedonia.” The name dispute is also the main reason behind the Greek veto of the Republic of North Macedonia's admission to NATO and the EU. The Republic of North Macedonia was admitted to the UN in 1993 as “The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,” and at the same time it agreed to UN-sponsored negotiations on the name dispute. In 1995, in an interim deal with Greece, The Republic of North Macedonia agreed to change its constitution and state symbols, however, no solution to the name issue followed (Bechev, 2009). Under this agreement, Greece lifted its economic blockade on The Republic of North Macedonia that was imposed in February 2009. On 12 October 1995, The Republic of North Macedonia joined the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe (Bechev, 2009).

A historic agreement was signed between the Republic of North Macedonia and Greece in June 2018 in the city of Prespa, the Republic of North Macedonia. Under the Prespa agreement, the previously known Republic of Macedonia or the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia changed its name to the Republic of North Macedonia (Bechev, 2009). This agreement ended 27 years of bilateral disputes over the use of the name Macedonia between Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia. The name deal was sealed between Athens and Skopje on 25 January 2019, when the Greek parliament ratified the Prespa Agreement that saw The Republic of Macedonia (the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - FYROM) change its name to the Republic of North Macedonia. The Republic of North Macedonia's parliament had previously passed an amendment to the constitution on 11 January 2019 to rename the country Republic of North Macedonia in line with an agreement with Greece (Bechev, 2009).

A history of inter-ethnic tensions has characterized the Republic of North Macedonia since the day it declared independence in 1991. From the very beginning, Albanians living in the Republic of North Macedonia contested different elements of the first constitution, census-taking methods, different laws on education, use of language and national minority symbols, local self-government, as well as participation in the police, army, and public administration. All these grievances over the perceived political and economic discrimination of Albanians escalated into an armed conflict in 2001 (Daskalovski, 2009). An armed conflict took place between the state army and the National Liberation Army (NLA) which demanded equal rights for Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia. This six-month armed confrontation ended in August 2001 when under close monitoring of the international political factors the parties in conflict signed the Ohrid Framework Agreement. Over the last ten years, the Ohrid Framework Agreement has been regarded as an agreement that would ensure a functioning multi-ethnic democracy and a cohesive society based on mutual trust (Daskalovski, 2009).

This was only a short country profile of the Republic of North Macedonia. Following the theoretical framework for global public relations research and practice developed by Sriramesh and Verčič (2009), the following sections of the chapter are devoted to the environmental variables, which according to the authors influence the research and practice of public relations in different countries. The aim was to provide more information on these variables to better understand the context in which the relationship cultivation strategies are applied. Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) collapsed these five environmental variables into three factors: a country's infrastructure (political system, economic development, and level of

activism), media environment, and societal culture. The last two sections of the chapter are devoted to inter-ethnic relations and public administration in the Republic of North Macedonia. Because civil servants are the sample representing the government in the study, an understanding of public administration in the Republic of North Macedonia is important to understand better the context, and make sense of the main findings.

3.2 Political System

The Republic of North Macedonia is considered a parliamentary representative democratic republic, whereby the Prime Minister is the head of government (Spirovski, 2001). Executive power is exercised by the government, whereas the legislative power is vested in the parliament, and the judiciary is independent of the executive and the legislature. The governance of executive and legislative powers in the Republic of North Macedonia is highly interrelated. According to Spirovski (2001) the government derives from the parliamentary majority, and it is accountable only to the Parliament. On the other side, the parliament carries out political control over the government through representative's questions, interpellations, survey committees and can force the government to resign by a vote of no confidence. The prime minister is the one who proposes the composition of the government, as well as the program for its work, before the parliament. The Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia is a unicameral legislature, and it is defined as a representative body of the citizens and bearer of the legislative power. The legislative power is exclusively vested in the parliament, without a possibility of its delegation, except in a state of war or emergency when, by the Constitution, the government, and not the president of the Republic, adopts decrees with the force of law (Spirovski, 2001).

According to the Freedom House's report (Freedom House, 2016a), the Republic of North Macedonia is considered to be a partly free country. As reported by Freedom House, the Republic of North Macedonia also lost its designation as electoral democracy in 2016. Three countries achieved electoral democracy status: Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Sri Lanka. Three countries—Honduras, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Maldives—lost their designation as electoral democracies.

The overall democracy score of the Republic of North Macedonia in 2016 was 4.29 out of 7.00, which dropped to 4.43 in 2017 classifying it as a transitional government or hybrid regime (Freedom House, 2017). The ratings of the Freedom House are based on a scale of 1 to

7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and seven the lowest. The overall democracy score covers seven categories: electoral process, civil society, independent media, national democratic governance, local democratic governance, judicial framework and independence, and corruption. The National Democratic Governance rating declined from 4.25 to 4.75 and further to 5.0 in 2017 due to the deterioration of the political crisis, indications of large-scale illegal surveillance of citizens, and indications of massive abuse of power by high-ranking government officials (Freedom House, 2017).

According to the methodology of Freedom House, transitional or hybrid regimes that receive a democracy score of 4.00-4.99 are defined as electoral democracies that meet only minimum standards for the selection of national leaders. Democratic institutions are fragile, and substantial challenges to the protection of political rights and civil liberties exist. National elections are regular and competitive, but substantial irregularities may prevent them from being free and fair. Government pressure on opposition parties and candidates may be common. Civil society is independent and growing, and rights of assembly and association are generally protected. Media are generally independent and diverse. The legislative framework to protect media may be in place but is not matched by practice. National and local systems of government are weak and lacking in transparency. The judiciary struggles to maintain its independence from the government. Respect for basic political, civil, and human rights is selective, and equality before the law is not guaranteed. Corruption is widespread and presents a major impediment to political and economic development. Anticorruption efforts are inconsistent (Freedom House, 2016a).

The legislation of the Republic of North Macedonia is considered to be occupied by the political parties in power. Dragsic (2016) reported that nearly 60% of the legislation brought to or ratified in the parliament from 2011 to 2014 was through urgent or abridged procedures, that is to say without any discussion by the "people's representatives." One day in February 2014, the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia passed 112 laws in abridged procedures. Compared to the mandate period of 2011-2014, 2015 alone ended with 60% of the legislature passed or ratified through abridged or urgent procedures. Dragsic further elaborated that

the channels for scrutinizing, criticizing or even appealing to the state institutions and the government were all shut down. In addition to the occupation of the Macedonian legislation, the institutional order was disrupted with the massive employment of large numbers of people in public administration. (p. 27- 28)

Corruption is also a serious problem in the Republic of North Macedonia. While anti-corruption legislation is in place and measures to clarify party funding and prevent conflicts of interest have been strengthened, implementation is weak (Freedom House Report 2016). Graft and misconduct are widespread in public procurement. Corruption rating of the Republic of North Macedonia declined from 4.25 to 4.50, which further worsened in 2017 to 4.75 due to indications of high-ranking government officials' involvement in several corruption schemes (Freedom House Report 2016). The Republic of North Macedonia was ranked 107 out of 180 countries in 2017, with a score of 35/100. The score represents the perceived level of public sector corruption on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). The Republic of North Macedonia was ranked 90 out of 168 in 2016 and 66 out of 168 countries in 2015 in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. According to Transparency International (2016), the lower-ranked countries in their index are plagued by untrustworthy and badly functioning public institutions like the police and judiciary. Even where anti-corruption laws are on the books, in practice they are often skirted or ignored. People frequently face situations of bribery and extortion, rely on basic services that have been undermined by the misappropriation of funds, and confront official indifference when seeking redress from authorities that are on the take (Transparency International, 2016).

The European Commission's 2016 progress report on the Republic of North Macedonia states that democracy and the rule of law continued to be challenged, in particular, due to the capture of institutions such as judicial bodies, regulatory agencies and media outlets. The country suffers from a divisive political culture and a lack of capacity for compromise. Narrow party interests continue to prevail over the interests of the country and its citizens on key issues. The EU report also criticized the work of the parliament, underlining once again its weak legislative and oversight functions and the need to substantially improve its performance as a forum for constructive political dialogue and representation. The focus needs to be on active participation of all parliamentary parties, proper consultation, and impact assessment prior to the enactment of legislation, credible functional oversight of the work of government and the intelligence services, establishing political accountability for the illegal wiretaps, and the capacity to monitor the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country. Independent regulatory, supervisory and advisory bodies are not able to carry out their functions proactively, effectively and free from political pressure, leading to limited oversight of the executive. The European Commission's 2016 progress report suggests

that the government needs to restore credibility by implementing robust reforms, preparing and holding credible elections (European Commission, 2016).

3.3 Economic Development

The Republic of North Macedonia belongs to the group of emerging and developing economies. According to the World Bank (2016), the Republic of North Macedonia has a GDP of 10.9 billion USD and GDP per capita of 4845 USD. The poverty rate (\$5/day 2005 PPP terms) as of 2013 was 34.3. The Republic of North Macedonia is an upper-middle-income country that has made great progress in reforming its economy over the past decade. Strong economic growth characterized the country during the period 2002–2008 averaging 4.3%; however, the average GDP growth has declined to 2.1% per year since 2009 (The World Bank, 2016). The main drivers of growth since 2009 have been construction, industry (particularly manufacturing), and wholesale and retail trade. Despite significant progress in terms of its economic development, the Republic of North Macedonia still needs efforts across a range of areas to generate economic growth that will create jobs and improve living standards for all. However, real GDP growth would need to accelerate to around 4.5% for the Republic of North Macedonia's living standards to converge with those of the new European Union (EU) member states within the next 20 years (The World Bank, 2016).

The latest data from the State Statistical Office (2017a) show that the growth rate of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the third quarter of 2017 was 0.2% compared to 2,4 % in the fourth quarter of 2016. In this quarter, the biggest increase was recorded in wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, transportation and storage, accommodation and food service activities by 9.8%; agriculture, forestry, and fishing by 3.8%; and real estate activities by 0.9%. In the same quarter, export of goods and services increased by 9.8% in nominal terms, while the import of goods and services increased by 5.0%. (State Statistical Office, 2017a). The main sectors of the Macedonian economy remain services (69.2% of GDP), industry (22.1% of GDP), and agriculture (8.7% of GDP). According to Petrevska (2011), in the last couple of years, tourism has been one of the important contributors to the economic development of the Republic of North Macedonia with 1.8% of the GDP.

Concerning unemployment in the Republic of North Macedonia, according to the State Statistical Office (2017b) in the 3rd quarter of 2017, the labor force numbered 954 814

persons, of which 743451 were employed, while 211 363 were unemployed persons. The activity rate in this period was 56.6; the employment rate was 44.2 compared to the unemployment rate of 23.1. According to a report by the Swiss Embassy in the Republic of North Macedonia, youth unemployment remains very high at 53.8% and is believed to be the main driving force of economic migration which on an annual basis is in alarming level between 40000 to 60000 citizens leaving the country (State Statistical Office, 2017b).

The Global Competitiveness Index 2016–2017 by the World Economic Forum (2016) ranked the Republic of North Macedonia 68 in its latest edition. The Global Competitiveness Report assesses the competitiveness landscape of 138 economies, providing insight into the drivers of their productivity and prosperity. Based on this report, the first five pillars for the competitiveness of the economy of the Republic of Macedonia are institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic environment, health, and primary education and higher education and training. The World Economic Forum's Executive Opinion Survey 2016 also shows the most problematic factors for doing business in the Republic of North Macedonia: policy instability, access to financing, inadequately educated workforce, poor work ethic in national labor force, inefficient government bureaucracy, inadequate supply of infrastructure, corruption, crime and theft, etc. However, in the latest Doing Business 2017 report by the World Bank, the Republic of North Macedonia is ranked 10th, an increase for six places from 2016 which was considered and propagated as a huge success by the current government (World Economic Forum, 2016).

Tosheva (2016) argued that due to the extremely high interdependence of the economy of the Republic of North Macedonia with those of the euro-area, the euro-crisis (and particularly the meltdown of the Greek economy) have had extremely detrimental repercussions on the economy in terms of macroeconomic performance, growth, FDI, trade flows, remittances, etc. . In Tosheva's opinion, there are several factors that affect the weak economy of the Republic of North Macedonia: the Eurozone crisis which resulted in declining exports and foreign investment; the blocked process of EU accession, failed privatization processes of four large state-owned enterprises, reduction of the credit growth as a result of the conservative credit policy of the banks, and high unemployment rate of around 30%, especially among youth of above 54%.

However, corruption and crime are also considered to be the main factors in slowing the economic development of the Republic of North Macedonia. Ruzin (2016) explained how

politicians and businesspeople from the Republic of North Macedonia used offshore companies to steal public money. He stated that

Macedonian politicians and businessmen started transferring money to small cross-ocean exotic countries – the tax havens of the Virgin Islands, Belize, etc. Part of the stolen money was then invested into the Republic of North Macedonia by different offshore companies for the construction of many grand hotels, purchase of land, construction of industry complexes, private buildings, new TV studios and privately owned yachts kept in Greek harbors. This way, the state of Belize – one of the most indebted countries in the world that gained its independence in 1981 – became the biggest foreign investor in The Republic of North Macedonia in 2013. Known as a tax haven state, Belize is a member of the Commonwealth and Caricom – the Caribbean Community. (p.15)

Criticism also arrives from the latest progress report of the European Commission, which states that no progress was made in the reporting period in the process of ensuring a functioning market economy and capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces. According to this report, the Republic of North Macedonia has a good level of preparation in developing a functioning market economy. However, no progress was made during the reporting period. The report outlines that macroeconomic stability was preserved and the macroeconomic environment strengthened further in 2015, unemployment decreased to 24% but remains high, particularly for youth, and certain vulnerabilities remained such as the low competitiveness of the domestic private sector which is hampered by weak contract enforcement, the large informal economy, and difficult access to finance (European Commission, 2016). In addition, according to the report, the management of public finances did not improve, and public debt levels have been rising fast to 46.5 % of GDP between 2008 and 2015. Regarding readiness to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union, the economy of the Republic of North Macedonia has a moderate level of preparation. Some progress was made to foster innovation, and foreign investments and digitalization are progressing fast. However, the economy continued to suffer from weaknesses in education curricula, low innovation rates and significant investment needs including in public infrastructure (European Commission, 2016).

3.4 Level of Activism

Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) argued that the political system of a country has a direct influence on the extent of activism in that country because only pluralistic societies tolerate activism of any sort. As the democratic governance in the Republic of North Macedonia continued to deteriorate in the last years, so has shrunk the space for activists and members of civil society.

Dragsic (2016) claimed that the general occupation of the state and the legal system, the media and the physical space, combined with the stated methods of personal pressures, sent a strong message that civil society actors and their opinions were not welcome, not only in the realm of the public but in the country of the Republic of North Macedonia. She considered that it is not a state of shrinking, but rather a complete loss of space for civil society. Deralla (2016) said that the physical limitations of civil society actors and limiting public spaces for civic engagement are a daily reality in the Republic of North Macedonia. According to him, there is a hostile legal framework and even more hostile legal practice against civil service organizations. Revenue services, inspections, and financial police are turned into a tool for putting pressure on the whole society, including civil service organizations. Deralla further argued that sustainability of civil service organizations in such hostile environment created by the ruling party, politicized institutions, and media, is practically impossible. No business entity would dare to sponsor some public event of the demonized civil society organizations because inspections and financial police will knock at their doors right away.

In an article, *Activism in Macedonia (2016)*, an environmental activist reported intimidation to be just the tip of the iceberg. The activist described the current state of activism in the Republic of North Macedonia as follows:

space has been shrinking for activists like myself that are critical of, and think or speak differently than the government. While the dramatic worsening of the situation in the past year is to a certain extent the result of the severe political crisis in the Republic of North Macedonia, I have nonetheless witnessed a general deterioration in the space for civil society. (para. 2)

This environmental activist further argued that public consultation in the Republic of North Macedonia is a formality and that public hearings are only advertised at the very last minute and offered for a limited audience. Officials are rude and often ignore public opinion. She explained that now the situation is even worse because officials not only refuse to take on board what the public says but also block access to information. For example, the government refused to give them information about environmental studies related to hydropower plants in protected areas, claiming that these reports are subject to copyright laws. In addition, she described two serious instances of harassment she experienced. While participating in the Bern Convention standing committee in December 2015, which was voting on a resolution for the government to stop its hydropower plans, she was approached by someone from the Macedonian power plant company who said: “You will see what kind of ‘cases’ await you when you return home.” On another occasion, after an interview in which she

explained the impact on the country if corruption was proven in the corridor X motorway project, she was approached by an official from the ministry coordinating the project who asked: “How would you like to spend the next 20 years in jail?” She concludes that “the space for activists, members of civil society, has shrunk to the point that it has to be rebuilt completely, rather than just improved.” (para.12)

Dragsic (2016) explained three levels the main political party has occupied public space and exercises control in the Republic of North Macedonia. The first level of occupation is identified as *the narrative of anti-state elements*. According to Dragsic, politics itself was occupied and stigmatized by those in power. Soon after any publicly articulated political attitude, individuals and groups were stigmatized as relatives of opposition party members, foreign mercenaries, antichrists and people who "generally hate and don't wish well upon Macedonia." (p. 29). The *resources* represent the second level of occupation. Dragsic considered resources to be a major parameter in losing this battle, because the opponent to the civil society at the moment is the party-occupied state, having the state budget and institutional resources at its disposal. In her opinion, all of the civil society's brochures, studies, informal educational courses and multi-media projects, cannot compete with the almost industrial-like production of knowledge by the party in power through all media possible, at the disposal of publicly subsidized, profit-oriented private contractors who suit the needs of the public bids, not public interest. The third level of occupation is identified by Dragsic as *micro-occupations*. Dragsic explained that in the past decade in the Republic of North Macedonia the private space of the activists, civil society members, and simply active citizens has been shrinking. According to her

Ad hominem attacks in the media have stopped, or at least tamed many out-spoken individuals. It has prevented many others from even speaking out. Even citizens that would draw attention to certain topics in the public space were slandered, their faces circled in red color and some part of their privacy exposed. Some lost their jobs, some did not get the promotion they were legally eligible for - mostly people that worked in public institutions or international organizations in communication with the Macedonian public institutions. Others' cars were damaged or robbed, they were offended or yelled at in the street, even followed, or their houses were raided. (p. 29-30).

Deralla (2016) maintained the use of online media to be a way out. He described that “few civil society organizations have developed a dynamic and multifaceted online production that provides comprehensive content to serve as an independent informative resource, but also as a civic education and mobilization tool” (p. 25). However, Deralla claimed that the ruling party has small armies of party soldiers who guard the online space, attacking every online outlet

that is not in line with the ruling party. Besides, he thought that citizen journalism, independent online news production, and regular online activism provides civil society with resources to mobilize and act in the public space.

According to the European Commission's 2016 progress report, civil society organizations in the Republic of North Macedonia complained about the deterioration of the climate in which they operate and the limited government commitment to dialogue, as well as about public attacks by politicians and pro-government media. They reported being subject to harsh and disproportionate criticism by politicians and certain media. The environment in which civil society organizations operate worsened. The European Commission (2016) suggested that both government and non-governmental actors should cooperate more constructively. The state must ensure relevant legal, financial, and policy frameworks to ensure the functioning of civil society. An empowered civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system and should be recognized and treated as such by state institutions (European Commission, 2016).

3.5 Legal System

The judicial system in the Republic of North Macedonia currently struggles with a damaged reputation. The mass wiretapping scandal in 2015 revealed the interference of the executive branch in recruiting and promoting judges. The scandal also revealed the exerted pressure of the executive branch in individual cases. According to Dragsic (2016), based on the published wiretapped materials, dubbed "the bombs" public institutions such as the courts were highly corrupt and useless for the regular citizen. In a public survey conducted by International Republican Institute (IRI) (2016), the IRI asked about the degree citizens trusted the courts, 25% answered that they have no trust at all, 24% have no trust, 25% neither trust nor distrust, compared to 18% who answered to trust the courts and only 3% to fully trust them

The judicial system of the Republic of North Macedonia is comprised of three tiers: basic courts, district courts, and the Supreme Court. A constitutional court handles issues of constitutional interpretation, including protection of individual rights. According to article 98 of the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, the judiciary power is exercised by courts. Courts are autonomous and independent. Courts judge based on the Constitution and laws and international agreements ratified under the Constitution. An independent Republican

Judicial Council appoints judges, who are confirmed by parliament. The constitution guarantees the autonomy and independence of the judiciary (Ministry of Justice, 2014).

Regarding the judicial power in the Republic of North Macedonia, the Supreme Court is the highest court in the Republic, providing uniformity in the implementation of the laws by the courts. The court exercises judicial power on the entire territory of the Republic of North Macedonia. The Administrative Court provides judicial protection of the rights and legal interests of natural and juridical persons and ensures legality in administrative disputes. The Higher Administrative Court decides appeals against decisions of the Administrative Court and decides in case of conflict of competences between the bodies of the Republic, municipalities, as well as in disputes concerning conflict of competences between holders of public powers. The Courts of Appeal are second-instance courts, i.e. are deciding on appeals against the decisions of the Basic Courts. The Basic Courts operate as first instance courts and decide in first instance on criminal matters and misdemeanors, civil disputes, and execution of criminal sanctions (Ministry of Justice, 2014).

The autonomy and independence of the judicial system guaranteed by the constitution do not match practice in the Republic of North Macedonia. According to the European Commission's 2016 progress report, there was no progress in ensuring the functional independence of the justice system. Reports of selective justice in certain high-profile or politically sensitive court cases continued. Public demonstrations illustrated the climate of political tension surrounding the work of the judiciary, especially with the wiretapping scandal. Although the President of the Judicial Council and the President of the Supreme Court have pointed publicly to the need to respect the independence of the judiciary, there is no framework in place to protect judges against external pressure. In addition, the work of the Special Prosecutor's Office (SPO), established in 2015 to investigate cases linked to the wiretapping scandal, continued to be hampered in practice (European Commission, 2016). Criminal courts regularly refused to grant pre-trial measures requested by the SPO as part of its investigations and the Council of Public Prosecutors, and the ruling party publicly criticized its work. Additionally, the Freedom House's 2016 report showed that the judicial framework and independence rating of the Republic of North Macedonia declined from 4.25 to 4.50 due to indications of political interference in the work of the judiciary (Freedom House, 2016a).

3.6 Media Environment

According to the Media Sustainability Index Europe and Eurasia 2016, the number of active media outlets in the Republic of North Macedonia was as follows: Print: 10 daily newspapers (one specialized sports daily), three weeklies, 20+ other periodicals; Radio: 3 public radio channels and four commercial radio stations broadcast nationally, 17 radio stations broadcast regionally, 53 radio stations broadcast locally; 3 non-profit university/student radio stations; TV Stations: five state channels, five DVB-T national broadcasters, nine national cable stations, 16 regional DVB-T stations, 12 regional cable stations, and 24 local cable stations (International Research and Exchanges Board – IREX, 2016). Regarding internet access, the latest statistics from the State Statistical Office show that in 2018 79.3% of households had Internet access and 79.2% of the population aged 15-75 are using the Internet (State Statistical Office, 2018). Freedom House (2016b) also reported that the use of social media continues to increase, and we see an expansion of news sites and blogs. However, traditional media remains the biggest news content generator in the Republic of North Macedonia.

Although the constitution guarantees freedom of media and freedom of expression, in practice both of them are seriously undermined in the Republic of North Macedonia . In a visit to the Republic of North Macedonia, Gutierrez, The General Secretary of the European Federation of Journalists, EFJ, described the state media in the Republic of North Macedonia to be the worst in the Balkans. Gutierrez further elaborated that the fact that the Republic of North Macedonia is one of the few countries in Europe to have imprisoned a journalist, not for the first time, speaks a lot about the state of media freedom here (Marusic, 2016a).

The decline in the rankings of international organizations like Reporters without Borders and Freedom House in the last eight years shows that freedom of media and freedom of expression are seriously undermined in the Republic of North Macedonia. Looking at the Freedom of the Press 2016 report by Freedom House, the Republic of North Macedonia's status declined from partly free to not free due to revelations indicating large-scale and illegal government wiretapping of journalists, corrupt ties between officials and media owners, and an increase in threats and attacks on media workers. According to the Reporters without Borders' World Press Freedom Index 2017, the Republic of North Macedonia is ranked 111 out of 181 countries on freedom of the press. In 2009 the Republic of North Macedonia ranked 34 out of 169. In their explanation, Reporters without Borders state that

Defamation was removed from the criminal code in 2012 but prosecutions have been replaced by civil actions with the possibility of heavy fines and jail terms for reporters and media owners. At least 580 defamation suits have been brought since the end of 2014, several dozen of them against journalists. (para. 3)

Regarding media control, the Freedom of the Press 2016 report described the media landscape in the Republic of North Macedonia as deeply polarized along political lines. Due to pressure from media owners tied to political or business interests, self-censorship is common among journalists in the Republic of North Macedonia. According to this report, the state-owned media tend to support government positions, due to the continued exercise of undue political influence by the government over the content of public outlets and control over their supervisory bodies during 2015. Freedom House also reported that journalists face low salaries, a lack of job security, and poor working conditions, threats and harassment for engaging in investigative or critical reporting, leaving them more vulnerable to editorial pressure from owners (Freedom House, 2016b).

A report released at the end of 2015 by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), and the South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO), detailed how the practice of soft censorship is undermining the media industry across the Republic of North Macedonia. The report considered the erosion of media rights in the Republic of North Macedonia to be both a symptom of growing authoritarianism and a tool to further it. The report outlined that soft censorship increased with the rise to power of the current ruling party, and accelerated with its efforts to dominate the country's media space through new laws and increasingly partisan use of state resources to support friendly media outlets.

Dragsic (2016) also argued that the situation in the media worsened under the rule of VMRO-DPMNE after getting elected in 2006. The same party was in power from 2006 until 2017. According to Dragsic, under their rule, the first Macedonian private television broadcaster was shut down, two other major TV broadcasters occupied, one of which was the public broadcasting service, and the most resilient journalists banished from mainstream media into marginal web-portals. In addition, in recent years until the culmination of the political crisis, the government was the biggest advertiser in electronic media, reaching 3/4 of the broadcast time in pre-election periods.

According to the Association of Journalists of the Republic of North Macedonia, the fact that the government continues to be one of the biggest advertisers in the media, the potential, and

risk for corruption in this field is quite high. According to them, the bigger share government has in advertising in the media, the greater are the possibilities to influence the editorial policies of editor's office. They considered the failure of the authorities to provide favorable environments for the safe work of journalists and the media to be the main reasons for the dramatic drop in media freedom. The authorities frequently initiated court proceedings against media owners and journalists to silence independent and critical media. The Association of Journalists of the Republic of North Macedonia also protested against the amendments to the Public Procurement Law in 2014 labeling them as scandalous. With the new amendments, public institutions are not obliged to publish a tender for advertising in the media. They accused the government of not intending to establish an order in the media advertising, but to increasing the pressure on them and to buying their affection. They also considered the amendments to be against the recommendations of the European Commission and as a tendency to open the doors for non-transparent spending of the public money in the media (Association of Journalists of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2014).

The researcher concludes the section with the remarks of the European Commission on the progress of the Republic of North Macedonia as an overview of freedom of expression and state of media. The European Commission's 2016 progress report showed the freedom of expression and the situation of the media to remain a serious challenge in the current political climate in the Republic of North Macedonia. The European Commission reported that

there was no progress in this area over most of the past year. Relevant figures on government advertising, which can constitute a tool to exercise influence over broadcasters, have still not been made public by the authorities. Balanced and diversified reporting by the mainstream media still lacks, although there were some encouraging signs over the summer in terms of reporting by the public broadcaster and some private channels. (European Commission, 2016, p. 19)

3.7 Culture

The Republic of North Macedonia is known for its cultural diversity. The cultural diversity is expressed through the use of different recognized languages in the country, Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Vlach, Roma, Serbian, and through different religious affiliations, mainly Orthodox and Muslim. As said at the beginning of the chapter, there is also a general correlation between ethnicity and religious affiliation in the Republic of North Macedonia. The majority of Orthodox believers are ethnic Macedonian, and Islam is commonly practiced by the majority of Albanians. The western part of the country is mainly dominated by Islam, whereas the east-central part is mainly dominated by the orthodox tradition.

Siljanovska-Davkova (2013) considered that “the different, even parallel, ethnic and religious worlds, in which different Macedonian citizens live, make the Republic of North Macedonia a divided society.” (p. 125). According to her, in divided societies racial, ethnic, and religious segments live socially divided, side by side. Siljanovska-Davkova held that dominant division in society between the ethnos of Macedonian society and that of Albanian society exist in the Republic of North Macedonia. Although there is a certain religious overlap between Macedonians and Albanians – with some Macedonians adhering to Islam, and some Albanians professing Orthodox or Catholic religious identities – this does not prove to be a factor of interlinking and integration.

However, Iseni (2013) noted that the current trend in the Republic of North Macedonia is the reconstruction of ethnic identities, shaping them into religious identities (Orthodox Christianity versus Islam). Iseni considered that the conflict opposing the two ethnic groups is not ethnic in itself, but it could become such, and the religious element could add to this polarity. As an example of this trend, Iseni described the scuffles that broke out on 13 February 2011 in Skopje during a protest held by Albanians to demonstrate their strong opposition to the construction project of an Orthodox church on the grounds of the historical Ottoman castle “Kale” located in the Albanian part of Skopje.

Considering contemporary societal values, Ramet (2017) considered that the Republic of North Macedonia remains, in some ways, a traditional society. In addition, compared to other European countries, Ramet found citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia to be roughly as “traditional,” which is to say, patriarchal, in their views of the proper view of women as citizens in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, but more patriarchal than citizens of Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia, and less patriarchal than citizens of Kosovo (Ramet, 2017).

According to Gjurovska (2015) life in the Republic of North Macedonia generally is organized in families, in which 65% are married couples who live together with their children, and 25 % are married couples without children. In the Republic of North Macedonia cases of unmarried cohabitation are rare, and according to the 2002 census, only 1% of unmarried couples had children. Gjurovska also found traditional values still exist in the Republic of North Macedonia where the attitude toward particular issues present in contemporary debates is explicitly negative among citizens in the Republic of North Macedonia. Regarding homosexuality, data showed men to have lower level of acceptance (7.7%) than women (9.2%). Gjurovska argued that these statistics indicate that

men are more apt to think in terms of traditional stereotypes, meaning that zero tolerance is allowed with respect to the likelihood of developing a new concept of masculinity, as well for the likelihood of introducing changes in the definition of roles, including a readiness to accept a responsibility for assuming roles traditionally assigned to women. (p. 144 – 145)

Concerning divorce, Gjurovska found that 72.5% of the Albanian population disapproves of divorce, compared with 53% of Macedonians, showing a higher connection of the Albanians to traditional values. Gjurovska maintained that this is a result of the high degree of religiosity of the population that influences the maintenance of traditional opinions. In the same survey, Gjurovska found that 83.3% of the participants declared themselves as religious, 14.8% as not religious, and 1.2% as atheists.

Ringdal, Simkus, and Listhaug (2013) maintained that the Republic of North Macedonia is characterized by low social or interpersonal trust, typical of a post-communist country. Besides, they found the levels of happiness to be quite high in the Republic of North Macedonia where more than 80% answered that they were very or quite happy. Concerning traditional versus modern and secular values, the Republic of North Macedonia scored lower than average on modern gender-role attitudes, but at the same level as several other Yugoslav successor states as well as Western European countries such as Switzerland and Italy. On secularization, the Republic of North Macedonia scored above average and markedly higher than Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo. Ringdal et al. (2013) concluded that the civic values of Macedonians conform to the expectations one might have for a rather poor post-communist country. Still, they warn that their findings focus on the average values of all Macedonians, irrespective of ethnicity, where important differences between the Macedonians and Albanians are said to exist (Ringdal et al., 2013).

Jashari and Simkus (2013) provided comparisons between Macedonians and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia concerning some societal values. Their findings showed that Macedonians and Albanians to be separated by very significant social distances involving most spheres of life. Respondents indicated the greatest social distances concerning the possible marriage of a close family member (child or sibling) with someone from another nationality. Besides, for Macedonian respondents the distance regarding “Albanian Macedonians” was greater than the distances regarding any of the smaller nationalities among native citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia. For Albanian respondents, the greatest social distances involve relationships with Macedonian Serbs, followed by those with Roma.

Jashari and Simkus (2013) compared Macedonian-Albanian perceptions regarding four important dimensions of values: ethnic intolerance/exclusionism, gender-role traditionalism, traditionalism about mores concerning divorce, sexual orientation, and abortion, and attitudes toward state policies to reduce inequality. They found that Albanians show substantially higher levels of intolerance/ethnic exclusionism and religiosity than do Macedonians. Results showed Albanians to be far more traditional regarding gender roles than Macedonians, although the two groups shared roughly the same very traditional values. Albanians and Macedonians also differed regarding traditionalism about mores concerning divorce, sexual orientation, and abortion where Albanians showed more traditional responses. Jashari and Simkus noted that considering the close correlation between social mores and religious belief and participation, the very strong religiosity of the Albanian population affected the important value differences with regards to social mores.

3.8 Public Administration

The 2017 annual report of the Ministry of Information Society and Administration showed that a total of 139,009 people are employed in the public sector in the Republic of North Macedonia. The number stemmed from the registry of employees in the public sector. The report included an analysis of the structure of data of 109,304 public sector workers, excluding data structure for 19,418 people employed in the Macedonian Army, the Interior Ministry, and the Intelligence Agency due to data sensitivity. Of 109,304 employed, 58,564 (54%) are women, and 50,740 (46%) are men. In terms of their ethnicity, 82,374 are Macedonians, 21,112 Albanians, 2,012 Turks, 994 Serbian, 1,245 Roma, 429 Bosniaks, 408 Vlachs, and 730 identified as others (Ministry of Information Society and Administration 2017).

The Law on Civil Servants of the Republic of North Macedonia defined civil servants based on two criteria: functional and organizational. According to the function that they perform in a public institution, Article 3 paragraph 1 of the Law on Civil Servants defined a civil servant as a person who performs professional, normative-legal, executive, administrative-supervising activities and decides upon administrative matters per the constitution and law. On the other side, based on the organizational criteria, Article 3 paragraph 2 defined a civil servant as a person employed in the bodies of state administration and in the expert services of: the Assembly of the Republic North Macedonia, the President of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Constitutional Court of

the Republic of North Macedonia, the Supreme Court of the Republic of North Macedonia, the courts, the Republic Judicial Council, the Ombudsman, the Public Prosecution, the Civil Servants Agency, and the State Audit Office. Article 6 paragraph 1 of the same law, depending on the official tasks they perform classifies civil servants into the following groups and positions: managerial civil servants, expert civil servants, and expert-administrative civil servants (Law on Civil Servants, 2000).

One of the main problems facing public administration in the Republic of North Macedonia is the politicization of public administration. According to a policy report published by Analytica

the issue of politicization in the Republic of North Macedonia's PA system, as in many other former socialist countries, has become more complex after democratization, as now (varying) election outcomes determine the makeup of the administration. Unlike in socialist Yugoslavia, where the same party remained in power for almost fifty years, and the political power exerted on the administration remained constant; today practices demonstrate that, when a different party is elected, civil servants employed by the previous government are either replaced by loyalists of ruling party or horizontally shifted within the PA system. (p. 2-3)

The EU Commission report in 2016 also reported allegations of pressure on the public sector employees, which reinforced the perception of high levels of politicization (European Commission, 2016). Besides, the final report of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission (2016) noted that there are credible allegations that public sector employees suffered intimidation, pressure, and threats to their employment to attend counter-demonstrations. OSCE also reported allegations of intimidation to attend demonstrations. According to OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission

in four verified instances public employees or teachers were ordered by text message to attend counterdemonstrations in Skopje. Two public sector employees in Struga informed the OSCE/ODIHR EOM that they were instructed by a VMRO-DPMNE representative to go to the counter-protests in Skopje on 13 April. A Bitola Deputy Ombudsman stated to the OSCE/ODIHR EOM that 20 individuals had come to the office asking how to respond to threats of transfer, downgrading and termination of employment, coming from managers at state companies and institutions, if they not support VMRO-DPMNE. (OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, 2016, p. 5).

Additionally, according to the same policy report by Analytica (2016), politics not only determines the function of the administration, it also plays a key role in the selection, promotion, and dismissal of its employees. Besides, according to Analytica,

it would have come as no surprise had the tradition of politicizing the administration applied only to high positions related to the cabinets; but in the case of the Republic of North

Macedonia, politicization has contaminated even positions of the lowest rank, completely unrelated to politics. (p. 3)

Another important issue of public administration in the Republic of North Macedonia is the employment of civil servants from other ethnic groups, especially Albanians. Their right of equal representation was guaranteed by the Ohrid Framework Agreement in 2001. Under the Ohrid Framework Agreement the government was obliged to increase the number of Albanian civil servants to reflect their actual proportion of the country's population. From the latest report published in 2017 by the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, from 110.311 civil servants, 82.900 or 75,15% are Macedonians, 21.279 or 19,29% are Albanians, and the rest belong to other minority groups (Ministry of Information Society and Administration, 2017).

However, even nowadays the government is still struggling to find workplaces for 1,750 ethnic minority civil servants, mainly Albanians, who have been employed in line with the 2001 peace accord but who remain on the state payroll at home. Although the official number of "unassigned" minority civil servants is 1,750, opposition parties suspect the real number of those who receive civil service wages but sit at home to be far higher (Marusic, 2016b).

A more accurate picture of public administration in the Republic of North Macedonia is provided on the latest report of the EU Commission published in 2016. According to the report there was some progress, although limited, over the past year. Still, the Republic of North Macedonia failed to implement the Commission's 2015 recommendations. Some of the main concerns continue to be ineffective accountability lines, the use of the public sector as a political instrument, allegations of pressure exerted on public employees and alleged politicization of administration. Besides, according to the report the lack of political commitment to deliver on necessary reforms in public financial management led to a significant reduction of EU financial assistance in 2016.

In addition, the European Commission (2016) suggested that the Republic of North Macedonia needs a strong political commitment to guarantee the independence of the public administration and respect for the principles of transparency, merit and equitable representation. The European Commission made the following suggestion to the Republic of North Macedonia for the coming years: a) addresses serious concerns about politicization of the public service; ensures full implementation of the principles of accountability, transparency and merit; c) suspends and reviews the implementation of the law on transformation of temporary positions into permanent contracts until the principle of merit is

fully observed; and e) adopts a public administration reform strategy and a public financial management reform programme, which will address the weaknesses identified, including budget transparency (European Commission, 2016).

3.9 Inter-ethnic Relations

The literature on inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of North Macedonia has increased after the conflict in 2001. At the center of analysis has been the Ohrid Framework Agreement and what has been achieved with its implementation after the conflict in 2001 concerning inter-ethnic relations. The issue of inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of North Macedonia has been mainly tackled from a political, legal, and historical perspective (Adamson & Jovic 2004; Atanasov, 2011; Bieber, 2008; Daskalovski, 2002; Deskoska, 2009; Dimova, 2010; Lozanoska, 2011; Reka, 2011).

The Ohrid agreement and what changed after the conflict in 2001 have been at the center of analysis (Atanasov, 2011; Bieber, 2008). Atanasov (2011) focused on the Macedonian model of multiculturalism and its functioning after the agreement. The agreement is perceived to have created more ethnic divide and parallelism in the society, though it is still considered to be the sole and all-encompassing solution to inter-ethnic problems in the Republic of North Macedonia. On the other side, Bieber (2008) provided a more objective and real picture of the agreement and inter-ethnic relations after the war. He sees the agreement as a failure, as it was unable to fundamentally transform inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of North Macedonia. Additionally, he emphasized that the agreement is perceived mainly as a zero-sum game, where the gain for one community inevitably must signify the loss for another. He criticized the agreement as it only addresses the basic legal and institutional issues, but does not provide mechanisms and tools to build inter-communal trust and support for the institutions the agreement created or transformed.

However, the above-mentioned literature is more of an analysis of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and what has been changed since then, rather than analyzing inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of North Macedonia. Bieber (2008) was being critical to the agreement for not providing mechanisms and tools to build inter-ethnic trust; still, he did not provide suggestions or a model on how to foster better inter-ethnic relations. The preconditions set by the agreement and legal mechanisms and strategies used by the government to foster better

inter-ethnic communication that would help build a cohesive society are not addressed as well.

An analysis of government tools and mechanisms is given by Deskovska (2009) who focused on the constitutional mechanisms that help build inter-ethnic dialogue in the Republic of North Macedonia and the role they played since the agreement was signed in 2001. Still, her work is only a description of the tasks and legal obligations that these constitutional mechanisms, the Committee for Inter-Community Relations, the Secretariat for the Implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, Ombudsman, etc. have in managing inter-ethnic relations. There is no attention devoted to the practical implementation of projects and proposals by these committees and their effects in building better inter-ethnic relations and cohesive society.

Several other studies (Arnakolas & Feta, 2012; Atanasov, 2004; Czymmeck & Viciska, 2011; Daskalovski, 2009; Engström, 2002a, 2002b; Ilievski & Wolff, 2011; Jovanovska & Stojmenov, 2010; Keiichi, 2004; Latifi, 2011; Maleska, 2010; Nijboer, 2011; Ortakovski, 2001; Reka, 2008; Staniševski & Miller, 2009; Tanevski, 2005; Vankovska, 2011) have analyzed the relationship between Macedonian and Albanian ethnic groups from the perspective of multiculturalism and inter-ethnic relations. Even this literature, with a few exceptions, is mainly an individual assessment and author-centered analysis through different paradigms to explain the current state of inter-ethnic relations and multiculturalism in the Republic of North Macedonia. No research study has been implemented, using appropriate research methods and analysis, to evaluate and understand inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of North Macedonia. How different ethnic groups perceive the state of inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of North Macedonia has not been researched as well.

In addition, managing ethnic differences is seen to be a crucial process in restoring trust and improving inter-ethnic relations between Macedonians and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia (Atanasov, 2004). The manifestation of nationalism has also been vital in building a multicultural society in the Republic of North Macedonia. Thus, Atanasov (2004) suggested that to preserve the unitary character of the state; the Macedonian government must manage the reconciliation of the two nationalisms, the Macedonian and the Albanian one. If the two nationalisms are managed efficiently, the multicultural democracy will enable existence of one society, contrary, if the ethnic identification deepens, it would mean creating of two societies.

Social inclusion, an important strategy in creating better dialogue and communication between ethnic groups, has been analyzed within the Macedonian context as well. Jovanovska and Stojmenov (2010) reviewed the reform process in the Republic of North Macedonia as a multicultural society after the Ohrid agreement, where for many years, inter-ethnic relations have affected both the stability of the country and the progress. They focused on the implementation of the decentralization and the local policies, especially those concerning the social inclusion process of the ethnic-minorities. However, their study is only an analysis and review of the legal background and the process of reforms in local self-government and some of the implemented legal changes.

In addition to social inclusion, classroom inclusion, and integration (Nijboer, 2011) has shown positive effects in the interaction between primary and secondary school students of different ethnic groups. Nijboer (2011) measured ethnic identity and inter-ethnic relations of primary and secondary school students in the Republic of North Macedonia. Differences between students in mono-ethnic Albanian and Macedonian classrooms and mixed ethnic classrooms were examined. The results showed that education in mixed ethnic classrooms has a positive effect on student's willingness to interact with other ethnic groups. As a result, it is suggested that more multiethnic study environments should be promoted compared to the current trend of ethnic segregation in education.

Malevska (2010) has been the only one to provide a people-centered analysis of the inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of North Macedonia. Her analysis is a result of large empirical research that included 943 respondents. The findings show the social capital of Macedonian society to be very weak which affects social cohesion within the society, its political stability, and inter-ethnic relations. Moreover, as a result of the lack of engagement, results showed that people rarely addressed the government regarding their problems or other issues of interest to society. The study also showed that most people have a high level of mistrust in the political institutions, the mayor, the local government and the media, compared to family and the education system that enjoy a higher level of confidence as a factor that positively affects inter-ethnic relations.

In managing inter-ethnic relations in a divided society, the role of the government and the strategies used are vital to restoring trust and building strong multicultural communities. So far, only Stanisevski and Miller (2009) have questioned the possible role of the government in managing intercultural relations to transform countries like the Republic of North Macedonia

having difficult social–cultural–political conflicts into democratic moments. They compared the multicultural features of three theoretical models majoritarian, consociational, and deliberative democracy in the context of one divided society, the Republic of North Macedonia. Their data suggested that involvement of government organizations in managing intercultural relations could assist in the stabilization of the peace, resolution of conflicts, and in enhancing the social inclusion of minority voices (Stanisevski & Miller, 2009).

Nonetheless, the literature reviewed is at large, a descriptive analysis of the current state of inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of North Macedonia. Primarily, the literature focused on the period after the war and what was achieved after the Ohrid Framework Agreement. Moreover, the descriptive literature on inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of North Macedonia emphasized the current state of the relationships rather than studying how the relationship evolved from the antecedents, objectives, and cultivation strategies to outcomes of the interaction between these two main ethnic groups in the Republic of North Macedonia.

Moreover, the literature is mainly an author-centered analysis. It is based on how the author sees inter-ethnic relations rather than based on an implemented field research study to evaluate how different ethnic groups perceive their inter-ethnic relations or observation on how they interact and relate to each other in everyday life. In my opinion, single-sided analysis would not be useful to get a holistic picture of this relationship, thus recommending instead that the perceptions of all the parties in a relationship are essential to building a comprehensive picture of relationship quality.

In addition, the government's role, efforts, and strategies implemented after the conflict in 2001 to foster better inter-ethnic relations between Albanians and Macedonians have not been researched. The relationships between government and ethnic groups seem to be overlooked as well. The government enacts legislation and develops strategies and mechanisms to foster better inter-ethnic relations. The relationship of the government with different ethnic groups is crucial in fostering better inter-ethnic dialogue. Moreover, relationship between government and different ethnic communities will also reflect on the relationships among ethnic communities living in the country. All the studies reviewed so far are from historical, political as well as legal perspectives. They have not addressed the relations of the government with specific ethnic groups in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The dissertation emphasized the relationship between government and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia. The dissertation was not a single-sided analysis; instead the

perceptions of all the actors in the relationship were considered to construct a comprehensive picture of government-Albanian community relationship quality. In addition, the focus was on the role of government and the strategies they employ to build positive relationships and restore trust with the Albanian community. The intention was to understand the importance of the relationship cultivation strategies of access, positivity, openness, and assurances in building a positive relationship based on mutual trust and satisfaction. This issue was tackled from the perspective of relationship management theory of public relations and the chosen theoretical framework reviewed in the next sections.

4 METHODOLOGY

Although there is some consensus on how to measure organization-public relationships (Ki & Shin 2006), most organization-public relationship research has focused on establishing quantitative research measures of the relational outcomes (e.g. Hon & Brunner, 2002 ; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2001b; Jo et al., 2004; Ki & Hon, 2007, 2009; Kim, 2001;). In Ki and Shin's (2006) study of organization-public relationship articles published between 1984 to 2004, only five out of 38 articles used qualitative methods to study organization-public relationships. As Ki and Shin (2006) found survey design to be the most frequently used because it is the most appropriate and feasible way to measure organization-public relationships. The same research trend followed through 2011. According to Huang and Zhang (2013), quantitative approaches (75 %) were the main methodological preferences in the examined studies, followed by qualitative approaches (15 %), and review or meta-analysis (10 %). Among the 30 articles using quantitative methods, survey questionnaires were the most frequent (85.7 %), followed by experiment (10.7 %). Six studies, individually or in combination with quantitative methods, used interviews. The researchers also observed that a limited number of organizations-public relationships studies adopted methods such as longitudinal research or network analysis.

For the research, a qualitative inquiry was conducted, and qualitative in-depth interviewing was used as the main research method. In this chapter, the researcher elaborates on the appropriateness of qualitative research, the data collection method, data analysis, sampling strategy, and some ethical concerns in conducting the research.

4.1 The Appropriateness of Conducting Qualitative Research

There are plenty of definitions of qualitative research. Each book on the subject has defined qualitative research. However, the focus of these definitions is diverse.

Some definitions focus on the nature of the data. Punch (2009) defined qualitative research as “empirical research where the data are not in the form of numbers” (p. 3). Saldana (2011) also stressed the nonquantitative nature of the data. According to Saldana, in qualitative research

the information or data collected and analyzed is primarily (but not exclusively) nonquantitative in character, consisting of textual materials such as interview transcripts, field notes, and documents, and/or visual materials such as artifacts, photographs, video recordings, and Internet sites, that document human experiences about others and/or one's self in social action and reflexive states. (p. 3-4)

Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined qualitative research in terms of what it is not. According to them “by the term 'qualitative research' we mean any research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (p. 11).

In some other definitions, the focus is on the process and context of data collection. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) defined qualitative research as

a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

To Creswell (1998) qualitative research is “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct and methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or a human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p.15).

In general, researchers are faced with the challenge of choosing between qualitative and quantitative research methods. According to Patton (1990), there are no rigid rules for making data-collection and methods decision; however, the art of evaluation includes creating design and gathering information that is appropriate for a specific situation and particular decision making context.

Nevertheless, Creswell (2007) has provided answers to the question when it is appropriate to use qualitative research. According to him, individuals conduct qualitative research because

- a problem or issue needs to be explored,
- needs a complex, detailed understanding of the issue,
- to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study,
- to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue,
- to follow up quantitative research and help explain the mechanisms or linkages in causal theories or models,
- to develop theories when partial or inadequate theories exist, or existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem being examined,

- when quantitative measures and the statistical analyses simply do not fit the problem (Creswell, 2007).

Patton (1990) further outlined the main differences between qualitative and quantitative research that can help us choose between the two research inquiries. One of the main advantages of qualitative research is the possibility to study selected issues in-depth and detail. Besides, according to Patton (1990), approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative research. In comparison to qualitative, quantitative research uses predetermined set of answers, a standardized approach that makes it possible to measure the reactions of a great many people to a limited set of questions. This method facilitates comparison and statistical aggregation of the data. The quantitative method also helps generate broad and generalizable set of findings compared to qualitative research that produces a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases. Besides, in quantitative research validity depends on careful construction of instrument that measures what is supposed to measure, whereas in qualitative research validity is very much dependent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the research. In qualitative research the researcher is the instrument (Patton 1990).

Miles and Huberman (1994) have also discussed the character and strength of qualitative data. According to them, qualitative data are based on observation, interviews, or documents; or to put it the other way, obtained through watching, asking or examining. One of the major strengths of qualitative data is that “they focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings so that we have a strong handle on what “real life” is like.” (p. 10). In addition, local groundedness – collected close to a specific situation, richness and holism, collection of data over a sustained period, and the emphasis of the data on people’s “lived experience” are some of the important features of qualitative data (Miles & Huberman 1994). Regarding the power of qualitative data, Miles and Huberman claimed that qualitative data are the best strategy to develop new hypothesis, the data also have strong potential for testing hypotheses (whether specific predictions hold up), and the data help supplement, explain, illuminate or reinterpret quantitative data.

Another crucial difference between qualitative and quantitative research is the nature of the data. According to Patton (1990), quantitative data are systematic, standardized and easily presented in a short space, compared to qualitative data that are longer, more detailed and variable in content. Although qualitative data are more difficult to analyze because they are

neither systematic nor standardized, still, the open-ended responses permit one to understand the world as seen by the respondents (Patton 1990). Wolcott (1994) identified three modes through which qualitative researchers gather their data: “participant observation (experiencing), interviewing (enquiring), and studying materials prepared by others (examining)” (p.10).

Qualitative studies are also considered to be a very powerful and well-suited research method to study causal relationships (Huberman & Miles 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Huberman and Miles (1994) contended that qualitative studies

can look directly and longitudinally at the local processes underlying a temporal series of events and states, showing how these led to specific outcomes, and ruling out rival hypotheses. In effect, we get inside the black box; we can understand not just that a particular thing happened, but how and why happened. (p. 434)

This means that qualitative studies allow us to observe a series of events and the specific outcomes following these events. This gives insights into how and why an event happened, allowing researchers to observe the causal relationship of an issue under research. Moreover, Saldana (2011) held that qualitative inquiry would most often address how, what, in what ways, and why social action happens and phenomena exist as they do. Ormston, Barnard, and Snape (2013) also contended that a qualitative study is concerned with ‘what’ ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions rather than ‘how many.’

The objectives of the research, as well as the research questions, developed seek to answer how relationship cultivation strategies of access, positivity, openness, and assurances of legitimacy influence the relationship outcomes of trust and satisfaction. Thus, Miles and Huberman’s argument of causality in qualitative research was used to support the researcher’s decision in choosing qualitative research methods to answer the research questions developed for the study. The research questions were not developed to answer “how many” questions, rather the main concern was to understand what is the level of access, positivity, openness, and assurances and how these strategies lead to positive relationship based on mutual trust and satisfaction. As a result, the focus and objectives of the research guided the researcher to the qualitative research methodology.

Also, Grunig (2002) argued that situations exist in which it would be better to assess a relationship using qualitative methods. Grunig (2002) posited that,

relationships cannot always be reduced to a few fixed-response items on a questionnaire. Or, one might want more detail on the nature of the relationship and more insight from members

of publics and management on why they have described the relationship as they have done. Qualitative methods, for example, would be most useful for research with leaders of activist groups, government officials, or journalists who might not respond to a questionnaire or from whom more depth information can be gained. With qualitative methods, the researcher also knows who the participants in the research are, which is usually not the case with survey research. The researcher also can develop a better relationship with the research participant with qualitative methods, which usually means the participant will provide a more candid assessment of the organization-public relationship. (p. 2-3)

Following Grunig's (2002) suggestions, qualitative methodology was deemed more appropriate to achieve the objectives of the study and answer the research questions developed for the study. The researcher opted for qualitative in-depth interviews to study more details of the nature of the relationship between the government and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia and to get more insights and detailed answers from members of publics and the government regarding how they perceive this relationship and why they do so.

In addition, the researcher's previous research experience in the Republic of North Macedonia impelled him to go for qualitative research instead of quantitative. During the researcher's master's project, he studied the involvement of public relations in strategic management in the Republic of North Macedonia. The researcher used both survey questionnaire and in-depth interviews. First, difficulties and obstacles in conducting public relations research in the Republic of North Macedonia made me choose qualitative research. Due to a lack of tradition in researching general and public relations research in particular, it is quite challenging to obtain a large and representative sample in the Republic of North Macedonia. Research also is not valued in the country, and normally respondents turn researchers down if the questionnaire is long and requires them to invest extra efforts to answer the questions. Second, quality of the answers to survey questionnaire was low. In-depth interviews revealed that many respondents to the survey questionnaire are driven by social desirability bias and had chosen highly desirable answers to portray themselves in a more positive light. These discrepancies were uncovered by comparing the answers of respondents participating in both the interview and the survey questionnaire, in which they had indicated how public relations should be practiced rather than how it is being practiced in their organizations.

4.2 Qualitative In-depth Interviews: Advantages and Disadvantages

In-depth interviewing is one of the most common methods used in qualitative research. Webb and Webb (1932) have described the method of the interview as being "conversation with a purpose" (p. 130). According to Boyce and Neale (2006), in-depth interviewing is a

qualitative research technique in which intensive individual interviews are conducted with a small number of respondents in order to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation. To Boyce and Neale, in-depth interviews are useful when the aim is to obtain detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviors or want to explore, in-depth, new issues. Grunig (2002) contended that the most common qualitative methods that could be used for assessing relationships are interviews and focus groups. These two qualitative methods help researchers grasp what motivates people and explain what people think and do in their terms (Grunig, 2002).

In the **Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods**, Cook (2008) referred to in-depth interviews as "interviews in which participants are encouraged and prompted to talk in-depth about the topic under investigation without the researcher's use of predetermined, focused, short- answer questions" (p.422). According to him, in-depth interviews are often also referred to as semi-structured interviews because the researcher retains some control over the direction and content to be discussed, even though participants have the freedom to elaborate or take the interview in new but related directions.

Legard, Keegan, and Ward (2003) have identified some key features of in-depth interviews. First, an in-depth interview is intended to combine structure with flexibility. Interviews are generally based on some form of topic guide setting out the key topics, yet, with a flexible structure to permit topics to be covered in the order most suited to the interviewee, allowing responses to be fully probed and explored and to allow the researcher to be responsive to relevant issues raised spontaneously by the interviewee. The second feature is that the interview is interactive. Data, answers are generated by the interaction between the researcher and interviewee. Third, the researcher uses a range of probes and other techniques to achieve depth of answer in terms of penetration, exploration, and explanation. The fourth key feature is that the interview is generative in the sense that new knowledge or thoughts are likely to be created (Legard et al., 2003). King and Horrocks (2010) have also identified three defining characteristics of qualitative interview: 1). it is flexible and open-ended in style; 2). it tends to focus on people's actual experiences more than general beliefs and opinions; 3). and the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is crucial to the method.

Rubin and Rubin (2008) also identified some of the main strengths of qualitative in-depth interviews. First, in-depth interviewing allows researchers to explore in detail others' experiences, motives, and opinions and learn to see the world from perspectives other than

their own. In-depth interviewing also helps researchers to reconstruct events they have never experienced. Researchers construct portraits of complicated processes by putting together descriptions from individual interviews. Qualitative interviewing is important when the processes being studied are nearly invisible, thus allowing researchers to study and explain what did not take place and could not be seen (Rubin and Rubin 2008). Also, in-depth interviews provide researchers with an opportunity to get large amounts of data quickly (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

In-depth interviews also have their disadvantages. First, researchers have to rely on the cooperation and honesty of small groups of respondents. Besides, in-depth interviews are prone to possible misrepresentation as a result of the interviewer's bias and lack of ability to properly comprehend responses (Adler & Adler, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Rubin & Rubin, 2008). Moreover, in-depth interviewing provides limited opportunity for interpretation by the researcher because recalling experience in an interview does not replicate actual observation of the experience. Additionally, reliance on the in-depth interview as the sole method of data collection might not allow a full investigation of the topic (Cook, 2008). In-depth interviews are also prone to bias, time-intensive, and not generalizable (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

Although focus groups would be the best method to explore how groups of people think and feel about a topic and why they hold certain opinions bringing together six to 12 participants to discuss a topic in-depth guided by a trained facilitator (Grunig, 2003), in this case was deemed an impossible mission to study government-community relations in the Republic of North Macedonia due to the following reasons. First, the researcher felt it would be hard to get people to participate in focus groups, especially in a situation in which he had to bring together state officials with ordinary citizens to discuss the relationship between the government and Albanians. Besides, he felt that the topic under investigation is considered sensitive, which would have led to deep disagreements, irrelevant discussions and arguing that might have distracted the discussion from the main focus. Focus groups are also impersonal, not appropriate for personal revelations, and in this case deemed not suitable for such perceived sensitive or controversial topic. As Boyce and Neale (2006) suggested, in-depth interviews are used in place of focus groups if the potential participants may not be included or comfortable talking openly in a group, or when researchers want to distinguish individual opinions. Moreover, the researcher felt it would be hard to control and manage such sensitive, inter-ethnic debates.

The foci of the research guided the in-depth interviews. As mentioned earlier, the interest was to explore and answer ‘what’ ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions rather than ‘how many.’ Following Grunig’s (2002) suggestions that relationships cannot always be reduced to a few fixed-response items on a questionnaire, qualitative in-depth interviews were deemed more suitable to study holistically and into more details the nature of the relationship between government and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia, and to get more insights and detailed answers from members of publics and government on how they perceive this relationship and why they do so. Besides, budget constraints and perceived obstacles in researching in the Republic of North Macedonia convinced the researcher that in-depth interviews would be the best method to collect data to answer the research questions and achieve the objectives of this dissertation.

4.3 Sampling

Sampling in qualitative research differs from sampling in quantitative research. Qualitative researcher is characterized by small samples, which tend to be purposive rather than random (Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to Patton (1990) nothing better captures the difference between quantitative and qualitative research than the different sampling approaches. Compared to quantitative inquiry which depends on larger samples selected randomly, qualitative inquiry typically focuses in-depth on relatively small samples, even single cases which are selected purposefully. Patton stated not only are the sampling techniques, but also the very logic of each approach is unique because the purpose of each strategy is different. Patton also contended that in qualitative inquiry the main concern is not the quantity of the sample, but the richness and depth of data. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), sampling in qualitative research can evolve once fieldwork begins, contrary to the pre-specified samples in quantitative research.

The main sampling strategy applied in the study was purposeful sampling. Following Patton’s (1990) suggestions that qualitative studies are especially suited for purposeful sampling, the same strategy was applied. Denzin and Lincoln (2001) also asserted that many qualitative researchers use theoretical or purposive sampling. According to Patton (1990), purposeful sampling allows researchers to select information-rich cases for in-depth study. Therefore, size and specific cases depend on study purpose.

Patton (1990) suggested 16 purposeful sampling strategies. From the 16 sampling strategies, the researcher applied three strategies: theory-based sampling, snowball or chain sampling, and criterion sampling. The researcher started first with theory-based sampling and criterion sampling. Snowball sampling was mainly applied when recruiting participants among Macedonian state officials because he had difficulties in recruiting them. The researcher asked the first few participants from Macedonian state officials if they could suggest someone from their colleagues to participate in the study. The researcher also asked Albanian state officials if they have Macedonian colleagues that could participate in the study. In the end, the strategy proved to be the best in a country like the Republic of North Macedonia where the culture of acquaintance introductions is common and crucial in getting something done, in this case recruiting participants.

When applying theory-based sampling, researcher “samples incidents, slices of life, periods, or people based on their potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs” (Patton, 1990, p. 177). The main difficulty was to identify the proper sample to represent the government. Because there are different layers of the government and its administration, it was crucial for the study to choose the government employees that regularly interact with citizens.

To identify the proper sample to represent the government, the researcher prepared a list of questions that were sent to ten Albanians. These were people that the researcher knew and did not know personally. The questions were about government, what government means to them, what do they think when they hear the word “government,” have they met any government representative in the last few years, in which institutions they were working and where and why did they meet. In general they would refer to government as an executive entity chosen by the people to govern on their behalf. In all ten cases, they had only met civil servants from different ministries at central level or local branches of the central government ministries.

This issue was a clear indicator that civil servants should be the sample population to represent the government and the sample that would better represent and manifest the theoretical constructs and variables chosen for this study. Civil servants that are regularly interacting with Albanians can provide more accurate information and share experiences on how much access, positivity, transparency, and assurances are provided to them from the side of the government.

In line with this, civil servants are the people that daily interact with Albanians, and it is based on this interaction that Albanians create their perceptions about government. Besides, research on employee communication shows that people evaluate the organization based on the positive or negative interaction they have with organization's employees. Rhee's (2005) dissertation demonstrated how committed employees become a valuable asset to public relations functions. Findings from her study showed that when the external publics have positive interactions and develop trusting individual relationships with employees, they tend to evaluate the overall organization positively. It is from this perspective that the inclusion of civil servants as the main sample deemed important in studying the government-citizen relationship.

In addition, government public relations departments or professionals were not included in the sample due to certain reasons. First, government ministries and agencies do not have established public relations departments. During the researcher's master's research project, he studied the involvement of public relations in strategic management in North Macedonia. The results indicated that government has increasingly recognized the value of public relations. Still, the data showed that the government ministries and agencies mostly practice the press agency model, though public information model was also widely used. The findings also showed that their main duties revolved around media relations activities, and almost all practitioners employed in the government sector were assigned the role of a spokesperson and had previously worked as journalists. The final reason why public relations practitioners were not involved is to avoid biased evaluation of government-Albanian relations. People responsible for public relations in government bodies are usually people appointed by the political parties in power and are always replaced with the change of the government. So, the researcher would not expect an objective and honest evaluation of this relationship from political party militants. Their desire to portray their political party part of the government in a positive light would lead to biased description and evaluation of the relationship in this study.

The second sampling method applied for the study was snowball sampling. According to Patton (1990) snowball or chain sampling "identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know people who know what cases are information-rich, that is, good examples for study, good interview subjects" (p.183). According to Patton, this sampling approach is used to locate information-rich informants or critical cases. The process begins by asking well-situated people: "Who knows a lot about? Who should I talk to?" (Patton, 1990).

Mainly after each interview with civil servants, the researcher would ask them how the interview went and how did they find the questions. In some cases, interviewees feared the questions of the interview due to lack of self-confidence in answering them; however, after the interview, they admitted that the questions were easy and part of their daily routine and would easily recommend to their colleagues. The researcher normally ended the meeting with civil servants by asking them if they knew someone well-suited to answer the questions of the interview. This technique was quite helpful in recruiting Macedonian civil servants. For example in the researcher's last visit to the Republic of North Macedonia in May 2017, he had scheduled an interview with a civil servant in Tetovo. After the interview, he called a friend of his in another institution and scheduled an interview with him. The same day, the researcher conducted three interviews of about 50 minutes each using snowball sampling.

The last sampling method applied was criterion sampling. According to Patton (2002), the logic behind the strategy is to "review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance." (p.238). Patton contended that the point of criterion sampling is to be sure to understand potential information-rich cases. The sampling approach was helpful to narrow down the sample population.

One of the criteria that civil servants had to fulfill to participate in the study was to have daily interaction with citizens. Not all the layers of public administration interact with citizens. In the Republic of North Macedonia, according to the law on civil servants, based on the official tasks they perform civil servants are classified into three groups and positions: managerial civil servants, expert civil servants. and expert-administrative civil servants. The last group generally interacts more often and provides services regularly to citizens. The group of expert-administrative civil servants includes independent officer, senior officer, officer, and junior officer. The same law predicts managerial and expert civil servants shall have university degree, and expert-administrative civil servants shall have college degree or high-school education. Thus, all the civil servants that were recruited for this study were from the expert-administrative group because they interact regularly and provide services to citizens.

Regarding Albanians, there were some predefined criteria that the researcher had defined before recruiting them for the interviews. First, they had to be a minimum of 18 years old. Participants had to be living in the country which means that diaspora was excluded. Participants also should have had recent contact with a civil servant. Considering the last

criterion, respondents contended that institutional red tape is highly prevalent in the Republic of North Macedonia which leads to frequent interactions with civil servants.

Regarding their demographics, the majority of the participants were male. The researcher had only three females from the total number of 19 Albanian interviewees. With regards to education, the researcher had only one participant with elementary school education and two others with high school education. The rest of the participants had already attained bachelor or master degrees in different fields. Regarding their designations, the researcher had a journalist participating in the study, NGO activists, students, entrepreneurs of small enterprises, as well as two participants that were unemployed but looking for employment. However, when recruiting participants the purpose was to have participants that would provide rich information on the constructs studied. Before considering them for the interview, the researcher would first consider the criteria that he described earlier. Once the criteria were fulfilled, the researcher was very much interested in how frequent was their interaction with government officials, and when was their last interaction with a government official. Participants with more recent experiences were more valuable as they could easily retrieve information when talking about their interaction with government officials. Thus, in the end the researcher would include those participants that had often and most recently come into contact with civil servants.

4.4 Recruiting

The sensitivity of the topic brought a lot of challenges and disappointment in recruiting participants for the study. The main challenge was to recruit civil servants, in particular, Macedonian civil servants. The researcher started recruiting by sending official e-mails to all government ministries, and local offices in different cities attaching to it informed consent and interview protocol. The researcher then followed up with phone calls to check if they had received the e-mail. Many would respond that they had not checked their e-mails and that they will get back to me once they go through it. However, the researcher received no single reply from more than 40 e-mails sent. The next step was to contact political parties considering that public administration is highly politicized and political parties have their members employed in the state administration. However, even in this case, the researcher received no response from any of the political parties.

The researcher then contacted the School of Journalism and Public Relations to see if they could help recruit Macedonian state officials. The school does research from time to time, and the researcher hoped their connection could be used to recruit participants. However, they answered that no one positively replied to the request. They also added that they had to cancel certain research projects because state officials show no interest, or in some cases are even afraid to participate in research projects. Part of the e-mail received at the end of May 2017 was as follows:

Dealing with civil servants at the moment is hard!!! Nobody wants to talk about anything, and we also had a serious problem for some of our research projects that made us change the whole target group because nobody wants to talk, though interviews are secret and their anonymity is guaranteed. Unfortunately, now I think you will have serious problem with civil servants due to the political crisis, no one wants to talk.

Last, the researcher tried to recruit participants through introductions from acquaintances. First, he used the list of respondents he had from his master thesis and contacted them to see if they could help him with the recruiting process. The researcher had kept in touch with some of them after the project, and they answered positively to his request. This method turned out to be quite useful, and within his first stay in the Republic of North Macedonia he managed to get the first four Macedonian state officials to participate in the research. The researcher even had to turn down some participants because they did not have direct contact with citizens, which was one of the main criteria for state officials to join the study.

As Alder and Alder (2002) contended when dealing with limited access researchers should approach respondents by providing compensation. While the researcher did not offer this directly, he told his acquaintances that if the potential participants find the interview time consuming, he was also ready to offer compensation. However, none of the participants recruited asked for compensation.

The researcher had no difficulties in recruiting Albanians and Albanian state officials. Because he is Albanian by ethnicity, many of them responded positively to his request. However, he tried to obtain a sample that would better represent Albanians and would include Albanians living in the main cities where they constituted 20% or more of the population. At the end, he managed to recruit participants from all the cities, with large number of interviewees coming from the cities where Albanians are the ethnic majority like Tetovo, Gostivar, Struga or cities where Albanians comprise more than 20% of the population like Skopje, Kumanovo, etc. The researcher also used online social networks to recruit Albanian

state officials. He managed to get two interviewees through Facebook, even though they were not on his friend's list.

An issue came up during the recruitment process of Macedonian state officials. Some state officials refused to meet for an interview and were willing to only answer the questions in writing. They were open to answer the questions through e-mail or using the Microsoft Word file of the interview protocol. They also openly stated that they were willing to answer additional questions that the researcher might have after they had first answered the interview protocol. Although the researcher had eight e-mail interviews answered in writing, at the end he only included three of them in the data analysis as they had thoroughly answered the questions and they also did answer some additional questions that he had after he read their answers.

In qualitative research, the number of interviews a study should have is a dilemma for each researcher. In general, in qualitative research the sample size is a question of breadth and depth of the data. Rubin and Rubin (2008) provided an answer to the question and identified two criteria that good data should fulfill: the criteria of completeness and saturation. Completeness is achieved when the data provide satisfactory, in-depth information, and saturation is reached when no new information emerges (Rubin & Rubin, 2008). Although the concept of saturation is hotly debated by authors, Mason (2010) considered saturation to be the guiding principle of sample size in qualitative research.

Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) in their study, found only seven sources that provided guidelines for sample size. As cited by Guest et al. (2006), Bernard (2000) observed that most ethnographic studies are based on 36 interviews, while Bertaux (1981) argued that 15 is the smallest acceptable sample size in qualitative research. Morse (1994) recommended at least six participants for phenomenological studies, approximately 35 participants for ethnographies, grounded theory studies, and ethnoscience studies, and 100 to 200 units of the item being studied in qualitative ethnology. Creswell's (1998) recommended between five and 25 interviews for a phenomenological study and 20 to 30 for a grounded theory study. Kuzel (1992) tied his recommendations to sample heterogeneity and research objectives, recommending six to eight interviews for a homogeneous sample and 12 to 20 data sources when trying to achieve maximum variation. Guest et al. (2006) based on their data analysis posited that data saturation, for the most part, was achieved after 12 interviews, although basic elements for meta themes were present as early as six interviews (Guest et al., 2006).

Mason (2010) studied the sample size and saturation in Ph.D. studies that use qualitative interviews. His objective was to find out how many participants are used in Ph.D. studies utilizing qualitative interviews and do these numbers vary depending on the methodological approach. The results of the study showed that the smallest sample was a single participant in a life history study, and the largest sample that was used in a case study approach was 95. The median and mean were 28 and 31 respectively. The results also revealed that the most common sample sizes were 20 and 30, followed by 40, 10 and 25. The study also showed that 80% of the samples analyzed in the study adhered to Bertaux's (1981) guidelines of 15 being the smallest number of participants for a qualitative study irrespective of the methodology (Mason, 2010).

Mason (2010) drew three conclusions as a result of his analysis:

- On the one hand, Ph.D. researchers (and/or their supervisors) don't understand the concept of saturation and are doing a comparatively large number of interviews to make sure that their sample sizes and data are defensible.
- Alternatively, Ph.D. researchers do understand the concept of saturation, but to be on the safe side, they find it easier to submit theses based on larger samples than are needed.
- Irrespective of their understanding of saturation, Ph.D. researchers are using samples in line with their proposal to suit an independent quality assurance process. (Mason, 2010, paragraph 56).

The researcher came up with the number 40 by reviewing other qualitative studies in public relations research, in particular, relationship management studies. From the review done, the sample size would vary between 30-40 interviews. The initial plan was to conduct 40 interviews in total, 20 interviews with both Macedonian and Albanian civil servants and 20 interviews with Albanians. In the end, the researcher managed to conduct 39 interviews in total, 12 interviews with Macedonian civil servants, eight interviews with Albanian civil servants, and 19 interviews with Albanians.

Tabel 4.1: Data Collection Summary of Interviews

Participants	Frequency
Macedonian civil servants	12
Albanian civil servants	8
Albanians	19
Total	39

However, during the data collection, the researcher felt the need to conduct more interviews with a particular group compared to the other. After the first few interviews with Albanian

civil servants, the majority of the main themes appeared, and the information started to repeat, except that the examples and experiences varied from interviewee to interviewee. The same case occurred with the Albanians, where the saturation was reached within the first ten interviews. Because the researcher is of Albanian ethnicity, he felt that Albanians, both civil servants, and citizens could easily build a rapport which made them talk freely and openly and discuss the questions in details. There was no single case they did not want to answer a question or discuss an issue at hand. At times the researcher felt that some of them felt relieved after discussing some of the issues during the interview as they lack public space and opportunities to express their opinions and worries.

The case with Macedonian civil servants was different. In general, they were hesitant to participate in the study. There were cases they openly admitted that they do not want to participate in the study because of the topic and the questions at hand. For example, the researcher had scheduled an appointment for an interview with a civil servant in Skopje. The interview was arranged by another participant that the researcher had interviewed earlier. However, the interview was canceled immediately once she went through the questions before even starting with the interview. Although the interview protocol was sent to her earlier, it was evident she had not read the questions. The moment she understood the main themes of the interview, she was not willing to participate.

Also, there were cases they were not willing to answer certain questions, or they would only answer shortly, and even after a few probes, they did not want to detail their answers. The sensitivity of the topic derived from its focus on issues deemed to be related to politics and the questions on the relationship between government and Albanians could have prevented Macedonian civil servants from responding to such questions.

Additionally, there were cases among Macedonian civil servants that they required not to record the interview, or they requested to interview in writing. Thus, the researcher had to continue with data collection among Macedonian civil servants even though he was done interviewing Albanian civil servants and Albanians. The researcher had to travel two additional times to the Republic of North Macedonia to conduct more interviews with Macedonian civil servants. In the end, the researcher included 12 interviews from Macedonian civil servants in the data analysis, although the number of interviews he conducted exceeded 30. Many of the interviews, especially those in writing were discarded as

they provided poor information. The researcher only chose information-rich cases among Macedonian civil servants.

4.5 Pretests

Six pretests for the qualitative interviews were conducted. Three pretests were conducted with Albanians, two with Albanian civil servants, and one with a Macedonian civil servant. All the pretests were conducted via skype video calling except the pretest with a Macedonian civil servant that was done via e-mail. The researcher had no opportunity to travel to the Republic of North Macedonia for the pretest and used skype video calls to conduct the interviews.

The pretest helped to get ready for the fieldwork. The researcher was able to practice interview styles and techniques as well as time control before entering the fieldwork. Because the researcher had both, active and passive interviewees, the pretest helps him practice how to ask probing questions, be a good listener, and dig for more information.

Also, the pretest helped him avoid influencing the data collection process. The researcher remembered a case during the pretest when the interviewee was stuck and irresponsive for a moment. He and the interviewee glared at each other, and for a moment, the researcher jumped in with a question which was in the form of statement that influenced the answer of the interviewee and made him comply with the researcher's statement. The researcher understood that it was a mistake on his part, but at the same time he learned he should not repeat such mistakes during the data collection process. The researcher should have probed with questions that would have elicited more detailed answer from the interviewee rather than a question that made him comply with my statement. Thus, the pretest helped him discover how to be effective in asking questions during an interview, especially when asking about issues that touch the sensitive aspects of government-community relations in a country with a conflicting past between the government and an ethnic community. Therefore, controlling the discussions not to get off the main themes planned to be discussed during the interview was crucial in succeeding with the interviews. The pretest also helped for practicing of note-taking during an interview as well as time management and control before doing the actual interviews.

The pretest was helpful in identifying the best possible ways to build a rapport with the interviewees, especially with Macedonian civil servants. The researcher had fewer difficulties in building rapport with Albanian interviewees, both civil servants, and citizens. During the

interview, the researcher felt that when interviewing the Albanians he was siding on the side of powerless and marginalized voices and felt that they needed someone to give them space to voice their opinions especially in a situation where their anonymity was guaranteed.

It was different with Macedonian civil servants. From the pretest and recruiting process, the researcher understood it was crucial to convince them that the research had no political objectives whatsoever and that the main objectives were purely scientific and not related to daily politics. The researcher felt that they related the fact that an Albanian was researching the relationship between government and Albanians to the daily politics in the country and the struggle of Albanians for more political power and rights in the country. Thus, the researcher understood from the pretest that when recruiting Macedonian civil servants it is highly important to inform them about the main objectives of the research and let them know that the research has no political intentions whatsoever.

In addition, the pretest also helped to find inappropriate protocol items and identify some necessary changes to the interview protocol before entering the fieldwork. Because the questions were prepared in English, the researcher had to check the vocabulary in the Albanian and Macedonian languages to see if that appropriately expressed the original version of the protocol in the English language. It was quite helpful to have English speakers from all the three groups participate in the pretest. The protocol for the pretest had the questions in both languages, English-Albanian and English-Macedonian. The interviewees were able to read the questions in both languages and comment if the translations matched the original version in English. Besides, one of the interviewees during the pretest was a translator, which was quite helpful in wording the questions of the interview into Albanian to appropriately match the original version in English. Thus, pretest helped me identify some vocabulary issues, as well as identify important changes to the protocol.

After the pretest, the researcher did not have to do major amendments. From the feedback received, three questions were removed related to trust and satisfaction, which were repeating and more or less were asking the same thing.

There was also a vocabulary issue that came up during the pretest. Related to satisfaction, one of the questions was asking how competent Albanians thought the civil servants are. Although the question intended to ask Albanians if civil servants “had the necessary ability, knowledge, or skill to do something successfully,” the question was misunderstood and by the word “competent” they were referring to civil servant’s duty and responsibility to do a certain task.

Once the question was reworded to ask about civil servants level of competence, their ability, knowledge, and professionalism to do something, the answers changed in the opposite direction. After these amendments, the final versions of the interview protocol in Albanian and Macedonian were ready for the fieldwork.

4.6 Interview Protocol

The researcher conducted personal interviews with Macedonian and Albanian civil servants, and Albanians. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions. The questions related to relationship cultivation strategies were adjusted from Hon and Grunig (1999) and Ki and Hon (2009) studies that developed quantitative measures of relationship cultivation strategies. The qualitative questions were developed to reflect the same dimensions and operational definitions of the relationship dimensions as the quantitative questions. The qualitative questions related to trust and satisfaction were taken from Grunig's (2002) qualitative methods for assessing relationships between organizations and publics. There were some additional questions added in line with the study's objectives and research questions.

The interview protocol consisted of three parts. The first part included grand-tour questions. As suggested by Grunig (2002), each interview should begin with the grand tour questions to make it easier for the interviewees and build a rapport with them. Grunig (2002) recommended starting an interview with the following grand-tour question:

Would you begin by telling me what are the first things that come into your mind when you hear the name of this (organization)(public)? What else do you know about it? Do you feel that you have a relationship with (organization)(public)? Why or why not? And Please describe your relationship with (organization)(public)? (p. 4)

In the study, grand tour questions for civil servants were different from those of Albanians. Grand-tour questions for Albanians included: Can you remember how many civil servants have you met in the last five years? Who were they? Where did the meeting take place, and what was the reason for the meeting? From the pretest, the researcher felt that these grand-tour questions suggested by Grunig (2002) were rather abstract for the Albanians as they had difficulties in describing their relationship with the government. Instead, as grand-tour questions the researcher used the questions that focused on their latest encounters with civil servants. It was lot easier for them to recall a recent encounter with a civil servant, rather than speak about their relationship with the government.

Grand-tour questions for civil servants intended to assess the relationship between government and Albanians from the perspective of civil servants. Grand-tour questions for civil servants included: Would you begin by telling me what are the first things that come into your mind when you hear about the relationship between the government and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia? What else can you tell me about it? The second part of the interview protocol devoted to relationship cultivation strategies included questions to assess the level of access, positivity, openness, and assurances as perceived by both Albanians and civil servants.

Qualitative questions about access aimed to evaluate the level of access given to Albanians by the government. The aim was to understand what kind of contact information is provided to Albanians, how adequate they thought this contact method was, how easy they thought it was to meet a civil servant or someone higher in the hierarchy, and how do Albanians usually address their questions and concerns to civil servants.

To assess positivity, respondents were asked how often they interacted with the civil servants. They were asked if the government provides regular information to Albanians, what kind of information do they usually get, and how useful do they find this information provided by the government. In addition, the questions also intended to evaluate how courteous are civil servants in their interaction with Albanians, how much effort do they put in making their interaction with Albanians enjoyable, and how cooperative they are in handling concerns raised by Albanians. The last bunch of questions related to positivity asked civil servants and Albanians about disagreement and dissatisfying interaction between them, and how cooperative the parties are in handling these disagreements.

The questions on the government's transparency focused on how government informs about its governance and activities, and how much and what kind of information do they usually share with Albanians about the governance. The questions also intended to uncover if the government regularly publishes annual reports and how valuable these reports are to Albanians to understand what the government has done. The set of questions on transparency ended with the questions on how government communicates new issues to Albanians, to what extent are issue briefings practiced, and how helpful these briefings are to Albanians to understand new issues.

The second part of the interview protocol ended with questions evaluating the assurances of legitimacy. The questions asked the respondents to what extent civil servants provide personal

responses to concerns of Albanians, and in their interaction with Albanians, how much do civil servants communicate the importance of Albanians to them. The questions also sought to answer how seriously concerns are taken that are raised by Albanians and how much do respondents think that Albanians believe that the government cares about them and their concerns. The last question on assurances focused on how law and policy development functions in the Republic of North Macedonia, and to what extent Albanians could influence and participate in law and policy development. Respondents were asked: To what extent do you think the law and policy development allows Albanians to raise an issue and propose a solution? How well do you think your institution or the government, in general, consider the views of Albanian community members in their decision and policymaking? What are the opportunities for Albanians to influence government decision and policymaking?

The last part of the interview protocol was devoted to relationship outcomes and consisted of questions about trust and satisfaction. To assess the level of trust, respondents were asked to describe actions and decisions taken by the government that has treated Albanians fairly and justly, or unfairly and unjustly. Additionally, they were asked to describe what the government has done that indicates they can be relied on to keep their promises. To assess government's competence, respondents were asked how confident they are that government has the ability to accomplish what they say they will do. The questions on trust ended with a general question on how much they trust the government, and why do they trust or not trust the government.

The questions to measure satisfaction focused on how satisfied are Albanians with civil servants' professionalism, competence, and courtesy/politeness. The questions also tended to uncover how much Albanians enjoy dealing and interacting with civil servants. In the end, the respondents were asked how happy do they think Albanians are with the government and how much do they think Albanians are satisfied with the relationship that they have had with the government.

4.7 Data Collection

The researcher began with data collection in August 2016 and ended in May 2017. Within this period, the researcher travelled to the Republic of North Macedonia four times to conduct the interviews. The researcher started to recruit participants three months before his first visit to the Republic of North Macedonia which was in August 2016. The second time he visited the

Republic of North Macedonia was the end of September 2016, and then in March and May of 2017. The whole data collection process took place during the political crisis that started in February 2015. On 1 December 2016, an interim government was appointed to carry out general elections on 11 December 2016. The researcher finished with data collection only a week before the new government was appointed in the Republic of North Macedonia on 31 May 2017, six months after the elections that took place on December 2016.

With Albanians, the researcher conducted 13 face-to-face interviews, three online interviews that were conducted through Skype video calling, and two telephone interviews. With Albanian civil servants five interviews were conducted face-to-face, two online interviews, and one telephone interview. With Macedonian civil servants I conducted eight face to face interviews, one telephone interview, and three e-mail interviews.

E-mail interviews were conducted only with Macedonian civil servants. Although the researcher had eight e-mail interviews conducted, in the end, he included only three of them in the data analysis. James and Busher (2006) referred to e-mail interviews as asynchronous interviews. According to them, interviews that are conducted in non-real-time, or asynchronously, are mainly facilitated via e-mail. These interviews are also easier to set up in terms of technological requirements. Participants can answer the questions at a time suitable to their personal or work-based schedules. These interviews are useful when the researchers need to work with participants located in different time zones, work in different time patterns, or who may be difficult to interview face-to-face or by telephone. In addition, as there are no time restrictions, participants can take as much time as they wish to reflect on the questions and potential answers, rereading and reflecting on what they have written before sending the final answers. James and Busher thought that this approach facilitates more open and honest exchanges than socially desirable responses (James & Busher, 2006).

Tabel 4.2: Data Collection Summary for Type of Interviews

Type of interviews	Albanians	Albanian Civil Servants	Macedonian Civil Servants
Face to face interviews	13	5	8
Online interviews	3	2	0
Telephone interviews	3	1	1
E-mail interviews	0	0	3
Total	19	8	12

The longest interview was conducted face-to-face and lasted for 102 minutes. The shortest interview was 46 minutes. In total, the researcher had 2419 minutes or 40.3 hours of recordings. The average length of an interview was 69.10 minutes. From the total of 36 interviews conducted by talking directly to participants only one refused to be recorded.

Interviews with Albanians were all conducted in public spaces, such as restaurants, coffee shops, shopping malls, etc. Albanian civil servants were also more comfortable when the interviews were conducted outside of their offices. In some instances, they openly admitted that they might have problems if their superiors saw them being interviewed. The only two interviews that the researcher conducted in the workplace were with two Macedonian civil servants. One of them was a participant during the researcher's master's degree research project. The same interviewee brought a colleague to his office from another institution to conduct the interview. In general, the researcher realized that civil servants feared to be interviewed in their institutions. Also, the researcher preferred to interview them in a place that would make them feel comfortable to freely and openly discuss the questions. Possibly, if the interviews were conducted inside the institutions they would not be able to give the same answers and share the same experiences. In general, outside the institutions was easier for the researcher to build a rapport with them which in turn helped get more detailed information illustrated with real examples from the participants.

4.8 Data Analysis

During the data collection and after, the documentation of the data, including the transcription of the recorded interviews was done. All the interview materials were saved and archived using my PC, external hard drive, and Google Drive, online file storage provided by Google. All this was done to ensure that the original research materials were safely archived to avoid any loss or misuse of the data. The recorded interviews were then transcribed into word and archived as well. Even if it was time-consuming, the researcher conducted a verbatim, word-by-word transcription of the interviews. The texts analyzed in the study are from the transcription of in-depth interviews.

No matter the analysis technique chosen in analyzing qualitative data, there are some common actions involved throughout the analysis. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), qualitative

data analysis involves “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, and deciding what you will tell others” (p. 145).

Wolcott (1994) referred to data analysis as “data transformation” and identified three ways to transform the data: description, analysis, and interpretation. Description refers to staying close to the data as originally recorded and treat them as facts. Analysis refers to the process which builds upon description in which the researcher expands and extends beyond the raw data to carefully and systematically “identify key factors and relationships among them” (p. 10). Interpretation, according to Wolcott (1994), refers to the process in which the researcher tries to “make sense of what goes on, to reach out for understanding or explanation beyond the limits of what can be explained with the degree of certainty usually associated with analysis” (p. 11).

Miles and Huberman (1994) also defined three interactive data analysis processes: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

Data reduction. Miles and Huberman define data reduction as “a process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions” (p.10). The data reduction as a process continues throughout the whole research project, before the data are collected, during the data collection, and even during the data analysis process until a final report is completed.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), before the data collection, data reduction is occurring as the researcher decides which conceptual framework, which cases, which research questions, and which data collection methods to use. During the process of data collection, data reduction occurs in the form of summary writing, coding, teasing out themes, making clusters, making partitions, and writing memos. Miles and Huberman also consider data reduction a “form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified” (p. 11).

Data display. The second stage of the interactive data analysis process is data display which refers to the “organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action” (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 11). By observing data displays, which can be in the form of matrices, graphs, charts, and networks, researchers can understand what is happening, and based on this understanding, either can take justified conclusions or move to the next step of analysis suggested by display. Data display also includes analytic activities

such as deciding on the rows and columns of a matrix for qualitative data and deciding which data and in what form should be entered in the cells (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Conclusion drawing and verification. This stage of analysis of conclusion drawing is an analytic activity in which the researcher begins “to decide what things mean” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 11) based on displayed data. In drawing conclusions, the researcher notes regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows, and propositions. As the analysis proceeds, conclusions need to be verified as well. Conclusions can be verified by a second thought of the researcher, short excursion back to the field notes, lengthy argumentation and review among researchers to reach “intersubjective consensus,” or efforts to replicate a finding in another data set (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

All these three stages of data analysis involve the researcher’s interpretation of the data. As an integral part of the interpretation and analysis process, the researcher transforms the data to better recognize and read them to draw conclusions. How the researcher interprets the data is related to how he reads and makes sense of the data.

Mason (2002) has identified three ways of reading interviews: literal, interpretive, and reflexive readings. Literal reading involves reading the data in their literal form, structure, content, style, layout, and so on. So, for example, when analyzing interview transcripts, researcher might be interested in the words and language used, the sequence of interaction, the form and structure of the dialogue, and the literal content. On the other side, the interpretive reading of the data involves the researcher in constructing or documenting a version of what the researcher thinks the data mean or represent, or what he thinks he can infer from them. Finally, a reflexive reading locates the researcher as part of the data he has generated and will seek to explore his role and perspective in the process of generation and interpretation of data (Mason 2002).

On the other side, Kvale and Brinkman (2009) identified three different contexts of interpretation in qualitative analysis:

- *self-understanding* where the researcher formulates in condensed form what the subjects themselves mean and understand;
- *critical common sense understanding* where the researcher’s interpretation goes beyond reformulating the subjects’ self-understanding, and analysis includes a wider frame of understanding than that of the subjects themselves, researcher is being critical of what is said, and may focus either on the content of the statement or the person making it; and

- *theoretical understanding* in which the researcher applies a theoretical frame to interpret the meaning of a statement.

Data analysis for the study mainly included interpretive and reflexive reading of the data. Self-understanding, critical common sense understanding, and theoretical understanding were employed to interpret and draw conclusions out of the data. Walcott (1994) suggested that during the interpretation of the data, the researcher goes beyond data and begins to question “what is to be made of them” (p. 36). Wolcott also warned that some researchers ignore their theoretical framework and provide interpretations that have no relation to the proposed purpose of study. However, in the research, during the interpretation of the data the researcher regularly turned to theoretical framework of this study and then extended the analysis of the data and elaborated the findings of the study.

During the data analysis, the three interlinked processes suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) were followed for the study. First, during the data collection process, to reduce the data after each interview, the researcher would listen to the interviews again and enhance them with the notes taken as well as additional comments that he might have missed. Also, interviews were regularly compared to those of previous interviewees to identify significant points and ask the other participants to comment on them. Significant points that came up during the interviews with civil servants were compared with those of Albanians and vice versa. For example, during the first interview with an Albanian, he discussed the difference he perceived when dealing with an Albanian civil servant and Macedonian civil servant. The point was then brought up during the interviews with both Albanian and Macedonian civil servant if they thought there was perceived difference in treatment between Albanian and Macedonian civil servants. During the interviews, the researcher made sure that he understood all that participants said. In case there were things he was confused about or did not understand, he would further ask the interviewees to clarify their points or opinions.

During the data analysis, the data were reduced when transcribing the interviews. Although the researcher did a verbatim transcription of the interviews, he would highlight important data and issues that he noticed during the transcription. He would then read the transcriptions of the interviews and highlight the passages he thought were relevant to the research questions. Because software was used during the transcription, the same software allowed him to add comments or memos to the pieces of data he thought were important and could be used in the later stage of the analysis to display the data and draw conclusions. This method helped

the researcher to eliminate irrelevant information and include important data needed for the study.

However, the data analysis and display were not done manually, but using a qualitative data analysis software widely known as CAQDAS (computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software). According to Spencer, Ritchie, and O'Connor (2003) the advent of CAQDAS methods has been beneficial to the analytical process, and compared to manual methods

the main benefits are seen to be the speed that CAQDAS methods offer the analyst for handling large amounts of (textual) data; the improvements in rigor or consistency of approach; the facilitation of team research; the ability of computer software to assist with conceptualization of data and theory building; and the relative ease of navigation and linking (or 'consolidation' (Weitzman, 2000)) of data. (p. 207)

Mason (2002) also contended that CAQDAS both facilitates and enhances the indexing and retrieval process. CASDAQS enables researchers to index a large (sometimes unlimited) number of categories, more efficiently than could be done by hand.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011), in **The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research**, listed computer-assisted analysis as a method of analysis and argued that “faced with large amounts of qualitative materials, the investigator seeks ways of managing and interpreting these documents, and here data management methods and computer-assisted models of analysis may be of use” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 14).

Gibbs (2013) argued that the adoption of CAQDAS in academia has only taken off since 2000. However, Gibbs believed that CAQDAS is not doing the analysis, meaning that is not a distinct method or approach to analysis. He further explained that “On the contrary, a major function of the software is to help organize the analysis. In particular, it is a way of managing the data and the analytic thoughts that are created in the analysis. The software no more ‘does’ the analysis than the word processor I am using now writes this chapter for me” (p. 278). Gibbs contended that the use of CAQDAS would make most sense when most, if not all, of the source files being used are in digital form, which means having transcriptions of interviews, focus groups and field notes as word-processed files (Gibbs, 2013).

After reviewing three potential software, ATLAS.ti, HyperRESEARCH, and NVivo, I decided to use ATLAS.ti. The decision was mainly based on the price, the available resources, and help for students lacking experience in applying CAQDAS to qualitative data analysis, and the tools that the software provided for the qualitative analysis.

As described on their website, ATLAS.ti is a powerful workbench for the qualitative analysis of large bodies of textual, graphical, audio, and video data. ATLAS.ti helps arrange, reassemble, and manage research material in creative, yet systematic ways. ATLAS.ti serves as a container for any project’s data where access to all basic project components such as documents, highlighted/coded data segments, codes, memos, hyperlinks, groups, or networks is fast and comfortable. Coding can be done easily. The researcher simply drags codes onto the selected piece of data. Object Managers, the Project Explorer, and the Co-occurrence Explorer let researchers browse and navigate through project data. ATLAS.ti also supports Visualization of findings and interpretations in a digital mind map. Besides, ATLAS.ti supported variety of media types compared to the other two software reviewed. ATLAS.ti supports documents in all major formats – including txt,.doc, .docx, .odt, and, of course, .pdf, and dozens of graphics and audio formats (.wav, .mp3, .wma, etc.) as well as most common video types (.avi, .mp4, .wmv, etc.). (“What IS Atlas.ti,” 2019).

Picture 4.1: Cooccurrence table on the overall trust of Albanians in government

Code Document Table				
	Albanians	Civil Servants AL	Civil Servants MK	Totals
albanians do not trust much government			1	1
albanians trust government			2	2
averagely trust government			1	1
do not trust at all government	14	7	1	22
do not trust government	2	1	1	4
i personally do not trust government		2		2
majority do not trust government			1	1
majority trust government			3	3
some trust and some do not trust government			1	1
total mistrust	1			1
trust very little	1			1
Totals	18	10	11	39

Quotations of Code do not trust at all government

6:72 Jo nuk i besoj aspak

8:83 Duke ditur se njëra nga shtyllat e shtetit është qeveria, duke ditur rolin dhe rëndësinë e egzekutiv...

Duke ditur se njëra nga shtyllat e shtetit është qeveria, duke ditur rolin dhe rëndësinë e egzekutivit, qytetari të vetmen shpresë e ka konceptin e shëndosh të sistemit dhe funksionimin e drejtë në respektimin e akteve dhe normave ligjore.

Qeveritarët tanë janv ata që na kanë detyruar të heqim dorë nga besimi në këtë qeveri.

The researcher made use of Atlas.ti essentially to ease the process of data analysis. As Gibbs 2013 argued, the qualitative data analysis software does not analyze; rather the software mainly helps organize the analysis and manage the data. Atlas.ti was mainly used in the

process of transcribing documents, archiving and coding. The software helped the researcher code and revise codes easily as he went through the analysis. Because all the documents were either in the Macedonian or Albanian language, Atlas.ti helped him easily create memos, comments, and quotes in English which would be later used when writing the dissertation. Thus, the researcher mostly used Atlas.ti to assign relationships between codes, and link codes during the process of coding to memos, quotes, and comments. The same could be easily retrieved at later stage during the analysis and reporting of the results. The researcher used Atlas.ti also to conduct some analyses and make sense of the findings by using features like code cooccurrence tables, display of networks, and word cruncher.

Likewise, mainly using cooccurrence tables (Picture 1), the researcher tried to make sense of the data during the analysis. The tables derived from Atlas.ti made it easier for him to identify patterns and evaluate how participants described government and their experiences with regards to the constructs studied.

Picture 1 shows how Albanians responded to the question, “Overall, how much do you trust the government? Please explain why do you trust and not trust” for Albanians and “Overall, how much do you think Albanians trust the government? Please explain why you think they trust or do not trust government.” The results demonstrate that Albanians claimed not to trust the government at all. From the total number of 18 responses, 14 of them answered they do not trust the government at all. Albanian civil servants also agree with Albanians with regards to trust claiming that Albanians do not trust the government at all. On the other side, the table shows Macedonian civil servants evaluated trust more favorably. Only in one case a Macedonian civil servant mentioned Albanians do not trust the government at all. Tables like the one derived from Atlas.ti data analysis tools were not used to statistically provide empirical evidence. Instead, the analysis that Atlas.ti derived were used to display the results to better arrange them, to better read the data, identify patterns, and make sense of the data to come to more accurate potential conclusions. When analyzing the table the software also provided with the quotations of the code which were helpful to relate to the comments made by the participants regarding why they had described the construct the way they had.

4.9 Researcher as Instrument

Patton (1990) stated that in qualitative research, the “researcher is the instrument,” which tells us that the credibility of qualitative research findings relies to a great extent on the

researcher's competence to conduct qualitative research. According to Patton (2002) self-awareness of the interviewer can be an asset in both fieldwork and analysis because a real, live person makes observations, takes field notes, asks interview questions, and interprets responses. Thus, Patton contended that developing appropriate self-awareness can be a form of sharpening the instrument.

In line with this, Patton (2002) promoted reflexivity as a necessary tool for the qualitative researcher. Reflexivity emphasizes "the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one's perspective" (Patton 2002, p. 64). Patton further argued that being reflexive involves self-questioning and self-understanding; to be reflexive is to examine on an ongoing basis, "what I know" and "how I know it" (p. 64). Reflexivity reminds the qualitative researcher "to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one's perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those one interviews and those to whom one reports" (Patton, 2002, p. 65).

Self-understanding shows that the role of the researcher in qualitative research is crucial. For the researcher to remain unbiased, he ensured that he am driven by objectivity in conducting the research. It was quite important that he monitor and reduce bias during the project. He tried his best to be fair, accurate, and confidential. Because he belongs to the ethnic community under investigation, it was quite important how Macedonian civil servants people regarded him. The researcher never allowed personal feelings to guide him in his research so the results would be skewed, biased, or subjective. During the interviews, he tried his best to remain neutral and never take a stand pro or con. When interviewing Macedonian civil servants it was quite important to remain neutral as well, in order not to portray a bias toward Albanians.

Coming from the same background helped the researcher build a rapport easily with Albanians which made them feel comfortable and share detailed information on their own experiences and relationship with the government. The researcher could understand very well the need for Albanians to talk to someone freely about their experiences, especially negative ones. He could understand Albanians very well regarding the bad experiences they have had with civil servants. He had also had some bad experiences in the past, as well as during the process of recruiting civil servants, having faced arrogant civil servants but extremely polite

as well. This information was not shared with Albanians as it could have influenced their narrative and supported their instilled bad perceptions about civil servants.

On the other side, the researcher's ethnic background could have hindered Macedonian civil servants from expressing their objective opinion regarding Albanians. Although the researcher had received some very offensive and arrogant answer from Macedonian civil servants like “I don’t care about Albanians,” he believes that they might have been cautious when expressing negative opinions about Albanians.

With regards to data analysis, the researcher tried his best to remain unbiased when analyzing and interpreting the results. he did not let his ethnic background interfere with objectively interpreting the results and findings of the study. He objectively reported the results even if they were not supporting his perspective or that of the Albanians.

Although the researcher has lived abroad for almost 16 years, he was still aware of the political issues and inter-ethnic problems that society faces in the Republic of North Macedonia. He has always kept myself updated with the latest political developments in the country. Besides, during his master's research project, he also researched in the Republic of Macedonia. He used both questionnaires and in-depth interviews with people responsible for public relations in the government. Having the previous experience, he was aware of the obstacles and challenges in researching Macedonia. Likewise, coming from the same ethnic background eased his work because he was already informed and aware of the context and challenges he might experience in the field.

4.10 Ethical Considerations

Before starting the data collection process, some ethical considerations related to consent, deception, privacy, and confidentiality were recognized. Physical, psychological or economic risks were not foreseen for the participants in the study; however, because their interview could be recorded, the project presented some risk to participants as their responses could be associated with them. Therefore, during the recruiting process, interviewees were sent the consent form (see appendices A and B) in which the researcher described the purpose of study, what is required from the interviewees, confidentiality, risks and benefits, and if participation was compulsory. Informed consent also described whom participants could contact for further information, procedures to be used, and how the researcher planned to use the results of the study.

Regarding the fact that humans participated in the study, they were assured that the results would be used for academic purposes only and all responses would remain strictly confidential. Moreover, to guarantee the privacy and anonymity of the participants, special identifiers, such as their name, or government body were not used during the interviewing and in analyzing and reporting the data. All the information learned from the participants was kept strictly anonymous and confidential.

Moreover, during the recruiting process and before conducting the interviews, the researcher asked for permission to record the session. In addition, due to the sensitive nature of the topic under investigation, many of the interviewees felt relieved after the researcher had ended the interview and switched off the voice recording programme on his phone, but continued talking and giving more information. Although this is the moment they revealed highly sensitive information, the researcher asked their permission if he could take notes and include the “off the record” data during the data analysis process.

Participants were not required to answer any questions that they did not wish to answer, and they were not forced to participate or disclose information. Participants were informed that their participation in the research was completely voluntary, and they could choose not to take part in the study. Even if they decided to participate in the research, they could stop participating at any time. The researcher had a case in which a civil servant declined to be interviewed after going through the questions. Although informed consent and questions were sent earlier, after the researcher met with the participant to conduct the interview, she quickly skimmed through the questions and decided not to participate in the study.

When probing for more details, the researcher tried his best not to be pushy, and paid close attention to comfort with disclosure, especially when the participants showed that they could not or were not willing to talk about certain issues. Flick (2007) argued that in research, researchers are often not satisfied by first answers which are then followed by second questions and probing. Likewise, Flick contended that it is important that interviewer develops a feeling for the limits of interviewees when it comes to issues they cannot or do not want to talk about, and for when the interviewer should stop insisting.

When it came to the results and analysis, deception was also avoided. According to Drew, Hardman, and Hosp (2008), research deception involves an intentional misrepresentation of facts related to the purpose, nature, or consequences of an investigation. In the research study, data were not manipulated or reported in a manner that showed the research was successful, to

put a positive spin on an otherwise negative result, either through omission or a commission from the researcher was avoided as well. An omission deception could mean that the investigator does not fully inform participants about important aspects of the study. Part or all of the information is withheld. A commission involves a situation in which the researcher gives false information about the investigation, either partially or totally (Drew et al., 2008).

5 RESULTS

5.1 State of Government-Albanians Relations

The state of government-Albanians relations as described by both Macedonian and Albanian civil servants are more negative than positive. Albanians, in general, described the relationship as negative compared to their Macedonian colleagues that see some improvement in the past few years in the relationship between government and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia.

An Albanian civil servant talked about mistrust, skepticism, and feelings of discrimination to describe government-Albanians relationships. Albanian civil servants also spoke of being treated as second-class citizens compared to Macedonians.

When I hear of the relationship between government and Albanians, it reminds me of mistrust, skepticism, feelings of discrimination and exploitation of citizens by the government. In a short term basis this mistrust will continue for quite some time; however, on a long term basis this will depend very much on the quality of governance, equal implementation of the law for all citizens, and the rule of law.

For some of the Albanian civil servant participants, discrimination is the main problem that characterizes the relationship government has with Albanians. A civil servant working in the central government referred to the government as “an executive body that discriminates me in every aspect. At work as a civil servant I am discriminated with little opportunities for career development, and as an Albanian citizen I always feel being a second-class citizen not equally to Macedonians.” Another civil servant added that

as any Albanian in the Republic of North Macedonia, we do experience discrimination on ethnic basis. This means you always feel a second-class citizen compared to Macedonians. We have also been discriminated earlier by the government during the Yugoslav federation, which is unfortunately also inherited by the current government in the Republic of North Macedonia.

Albanian civil servants contended that Albanians are not discriminated only with regards to their national rights and aspirations, rather discriminated by the government in fulfilling their basic human rights and securing equal treatment guaranteed by the constitution and the laws of the country.

Although in the juridical and legal aspect, they proclaim all the time equality among citizens, unfortunately, in reality, this is not what it should be. We can freely say that the battle that exists within the coalition partners where the national issues are quite emphasized, the same battle is transferred among Albanian and Macedonian citizens. We can say without doubt that Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia are second-class citizens where they

always have to fight for their basic rights which the government has to guarantee them in accordance with the constitution and law. Here I am not talking about national rights and aspirations, but about basic human rights. Let me give you an example which better illustrates what I mean here. Last year we had the case of two flooded villages near Skopje. One small Macedonian village Stajkovci and an Albanian village Hasanbeg probably ten times larger than Stajkovci. All the state institutions including police, army, and the Centre for Crisis Management were concentrated in this small village of Stajkovci despite the fact that the other village, inhabited by Albanians, was largely destroyed and needed more help.

Albanian civil servants are not satisfied also with the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement of 2001 that guaranteed Albanians equal rights and treatments and equal representation in the government. An Albanian civil servant working for the regional center of one of the ministries in Tetovo stated,

Relationships are not good. All the laws that had to be implemented after the Ohrid Framework Agreement are forgotten and overlooked. We are not politically represented equally. Where I work, there are 35 Macedonians employed and only around 10 Albanians, which are mainly administrators of lower rank. All this in a city where Albanians comprise more than 90% of its inhabitants. Besides, I work at the regional center of the ministry, and in many cases I feel I do not have the same access at central level compared to my Macedonian colleagues when we call them or ask for their assistance. I have had cases to go to the ministry personally where I felt overlook, and I was not assisted only because I had no one I personally knew there. This is what should be changed; we should not look at our ethnicity when dealing with each other.

Similarly, Albanian civil servants criticized the role of the Albanian political party in the coalition that constitutes the government. Since 2002, excluding the period from 2006 to 2008, Albanians have been represented by the same political party in the government. A civil servant felt that at the beginning when the new program for the government is approved and negotiated, the Albanian political party manages to incorporate only a small part of its own program and agenda in the main program for the government. The civil servant added,

Relationships are not good. This government is not what it is supposed to be. If the two largest Macedonian and Albanian political parties make a coalition to form the new government together, the new program for the government should reflect the nature of this coalition. In this case in the Republic of North Macedonia, unfortunately, the largest Macedonian political party incorporates and implements more than 60% of its program whereas the Albanian political party cannot even achieve to incorporate and implement 40% of its political program.

On the other side, according to Macedonian civil servants, the relationship between government and Albanians is now at a satisfactory level, in which significant improvements have been achieved after the Ohrid Framework Agreement. They think that political representation of Albanians in the government is significantly improved in terms of both quality and quantity and that Albanians now enjoy rights that lift them to having the status of equal citizens of the country. A Macedonian civil servant stated that “the relationship is in

many aspects improved now with the participation of Albanians in the government, and with their increased participation and presence in all government institutions. I think that the relationships are positively improved after the Ohrid Framework Agreement.” Following are some of the responses received from Macedonian civil servants when they were asked about the first thing they could think of when they hear of the relationship between government and Albanians.

Although I do not follow politics very much, except my personal experience, I think that Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia in the last few years enjoy equal status in all the government institutions, including government itself.

I see the relationship very much improved compared to ten years ago. More rights are enjoyed now by Albanians that tell us that their status is significantly improved. I think now if they are qualified, they can compete with the rest of the citizens in securing a job in any of the government institutions.

The first thing I would say about the relationship between government and Albanians is that in the last ten to fifteen years Albanians have a crucial role in the constitution of the government. They are also represented in large numbers in the government compared to the past. I think that the rights that they enjoy now are at a satisfactory level with regards to creation and enactment of new laws and policies at any state level.

Civil servants think that tensions and intolerance characterize the government-Albanian relationships. The Macedonian civil servant commented that “unnecessary tension and intolerance is the first thing that comes into my mind when I hear of the relationship between government and Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia. The unnecessary stirring of people against each other.” A Macedonian civil servant held that the relationship between Macedonian and Albanians is significantly improved and that citizens are getting back to the traditional values that they enjoyed before the war in 2001. However, he blames the government, in particular the Albanian and Macedonian political parties in position that are closely related to each other through business ties and corruption affairs that usually create inter-ethnic tensions to hide these illegal affairs and ties. He stated that,

Usually, after the Ohrid Framework Agreement Albanians secured some rights that help them improve their status. They have now 24% representation in government institutions. Besides, Albanian language is an official language in municipalities and cities where Albanians comprise 20% or more of the population. I think that after the agreement the relationships are improved and we are getting back to the traditional values and respect we enjoyed among us before the war in 2001. However, I think the main problem is the business relations between the coalition partners in the government where they mainly use inter-ethnic tensions to hide their corruption affairs and illegal business relations.

Unfortunately, there were also Macedonian civil servants whose answers also reflected this unnecessary intolerance between Macedonians and Albanians. This tells that the inter-ethnic tensions and intolerance are still present not only among citizens in the Republic of North

Macedonia but also in the government institutions that are supposed to treat all the citizens equally despite their ethnic background. When asked to comment regarding the relationship between government and Albanians, a Macedonian civil servant responded shortly that “Government tolerates Albanians very much. They deserve nothing.”

Albanians were not asked to comment on their relationship with the government. However, when they were asked what government to them is, they compared their perception of government in the Republic of North Macedonia with their perception of what government should be in a democratic state. One of the participants from among the Albanians stated government is “the highest executive institution that governs on behalf of people. However, in the Republic of North Macedonia government is an institution or a group of people elected to steal, torture, and discriminate us.”

Another participant emphasized that at the moment in the Republic of North Macedonia government is comprised of a group of people that are bound together by personal interests and benefits. This civil servant believed that government is “a political organization controlled by several people that are led by personal interests and benefits. Our perception of government in the Republic of North Macedonia is the opposite from government in democratic and developed countries.” Another participant added that government constitutes

a group of people that through elections have gained legitimacy to govern on our behalf. However, in the Republic of North Macedonia the first thing that comes into my mind when I hear the word government is a group of people that govern for their benefits and personal interests and the benefits and interests of the group they belong.

5.2 Relationship Cultivation Strategies

5.2.1 Access

Following guidelines from Hon and Grunig (1999), Ki and Hon (2009) defined access as “the degree of effort that an organization puts into providing communication channels or media outlets that assist its strategic publics in reaching it” (p.6). Based on these guidelines and the items developed by Hon and Grunig (1999) and Ki and Hon (2009) to measure access, the questions for the study focused on the available contact information that citizens have to contact or make an appointment with a civil servant. Additionally, participants were asked about the adequacy of these contact information in contacting civil servants. The study aimed to uncover how easy it is for citizens to meet civil servants in the lower ranks as well as civil servants higher in the hierarchy. Participants were also asked to share their experiences with

civil servants, what were the opportunities given to them to interact with civil servants, how easy was it for them to meet a civil servant and in what kind of settings their meetings took place. The questions also probed for more information about how citizens address their problems and concern to the government institutions, and how much do they feel civil servants were willing to answer their questions or concerns

Regarding the contact information available to Albanians, all sides agreed that direct meetings or meetings through personal connections are the most frequent contact methods used by Albanians to contact or make an appointment with a civil servant. Participants among Albanians mentioned mainly direct meetings as the main contact information available, followed by telephone and e-mails which were used less frequently. A majority of them also asserted that even though telephone and e-mail are available as contact information, using them would not bring any success to contact or secure an appointment with a civil servant. A small number of Albanians also were not aware that they could use telephone or e-mail to contact civil servants as they mainly relied on the traditional form of meeting them directly in their offices. Albanians also admitted that e-mails are not used in the Republic of North Macedonia, although in the latest statistics from the State Statistical Office (2018) 79.3% of households in the Republic of North Macedonia have Internet access and 79.2% of the population aged 15-74 are Internet users.

All the Albanian participants confessed that direct meeting is the most adequate contact method to meet civil servants. However, they admitted that in most of the cases direct meetings do not help resolve their problems and it is better if direct meetings are done through personal connections or using referrals. Using personal connections or referrals is the best method to succeed in contacting and dealing with civil servants in the Republic of North Macedonia. This is understood from the response of an Albanian living in Tetovo who commented that

it depends on your needs and nature of service which method would be most suitable. However, I think that in most of the cases direct meetings are the most preferred contact method, whereas most fruitful are suggestions from personal connections. The telephone can help you sometimes, while e-mails are not helpful at all. I think that professionalization of public administration in the Republic of North Macedonia is a very low level. This makes telephone and e-mails not adequate. Going to the office with or without referrals is the best and most adequate method to succeed in getting your issue handled.

One of the participants explained in details how someone could succeed in contacting civil servants and getting the job done in the Republic of North Macedonia. This participant also emphasized the crucial role of personal connections in dealing with civil servants.

Before contacting any civil servant, you start by analyzing who from these civil servants can help you with the problem that you have. Here, unfortunately, personal connections play crucial role in getting your job done. Thus, if I need to meet a civil servant that I think can help me; I will call someone that is connected to him to help me simplify this process. Use of telephone in the Republic of North Macedonia is quite difficult, you call them on the phone, and no one answers the phone. Even if it happens to pick up the phone someone tells you that civil servant that you need is not around, or you cannot make an appointment. Whereas with e-mails, it is regarded as a highly formal and institutional form of communication . Besides, it takes normally two months or more to get a response to your e-mail. From my experience the best way to interact with them is direct meeting in the office.

Another participant emphasized the importance of personal connections and stated that it does not really matter which method is chosen to contact civil servants; however, phones or e-mails should be avoided if an individual is not personally connected to a civil servant. Only going directly to the office can overcome this obstacle, although in his opinion personal connections would still be crucial in getting work done.

In the Republic of North Macedonia only direct meetings in the institution can help you. They feel lazy to pick up the phone, e-mails I don't think they even read them or most probably they are not functional. Thus, it is better to use personal connections. If they do not know you they don't pick up the phone or answer your e-mail. I have written an e-mail, and have been three months. I have not received an answer. The researcher intended to see if they are going to respond to my e-mail or not. Hence, I firmly believe that they think that it is not important to respond to people because either way they secure their votes in the upcoming elections. I think it is abnormal to expect an answer to an e-mail sent to state officials or civil servants.

Another participant further elaborated that “e-mails and telephones are not used at all in the Republic of North Macedonia to contact civil servants. Personal connections are the most adequate method and contacts available.”

One participant explained how sending an e-mail to government institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia works. “Anytime I have had to send an e-mail to any government institution; The researcher had not received any answer from their side. In the Republic of North Macedonia e-mail remains a very difficult tool of communication with government institutions and civil servants.” Another participant also confessed that “E-mails are not yet functional in the communication between government and citizens; maybe they have now started using them in their inter-institutional communication. I think functional is still the old method of communication through direct meetings and less through telephone calls.”

However, younger generations of Albanians are not satisfied with direct meetings as the only available method to contact civil servants. They believe that telephone and e-mails should now be used more in daily communication between civil servants and citizens. In their opinion, the telephone and e-mails provide more comfort. One of the participants, a student in one of the local universities finds it difficult that he must always go to the office even for a simple question or clarification he might need when e-mails or telephone could ease his job or the job of civil servants in attending to his needs. This participant added

I think that in general physical contact is necessary with civil servants in the Republic of North Macedonia because other methods are not functional and are difficult to use, here I mean e-mail and telephone. They might respond to your e-mail but after long time, and even if they respond they will provide only superficial information. Although direct meetings are seen as the best method to contact civil servants, in my opinion I find them not adequate and consider them to be a waste of time. I think they should use more telephone and e-mail communication because even for single information we cannot always go to the respective institution.

On the other side, both Macedonian and Albanian civil servants also admitted that direct meetings are their preferred and widely used method of contact with Albanians. An Albanian civil servant working for a regional office in Tetovo explained that it is the nature of their work that requires citizens to be personally present in their office. This participant added that the “nature of our work is such that direct meetings are necessary. Even to obtain the information they have to come to our institution even though they can obtain some information from our website.” Another Albanian civil servant working in the central government explained that

direct meetings are usually preferred because they can bring with them all the documents needed. We make an appointment, and they come to our office so we can see what we can do for them. Thus, we receive very little e-mails, telephone calls are a bit more often compared to e-mails, and direct meetings happen quite often.

Some of the Albanian civil servants affirmed that appointments are not needed to contact them unless they have to meet someone higher in the hierarchy. An Albanian civil servant claimed that “Appointments are not used because of the value of time to citizens as well as the effectiveness needed to get the work done.” Another Albanian civil servant working in the central government confessed that “In the institution I work there is no need to make an appointment to meet civil servants of the lower rank. However, if they need to meet someone higher in the hierarchy we have available consulting hours with citizens.”

To a large number of Macedonian civil servants, direct meetings are the most adequate method. “I think all contact information is adequate, especially direct meetings through

personal connections; you get your job done easier.” Another Macedonian civil servant added that

I think that in the Republic of North Macedonia we still use private or personal connections, which in my opinion is not good. Citizens can use telephone or e-mail, but these are not adequate. Citizens mainly use personal connections, friends, and political party connections to make an appointment as soon as possible.

However, a Macedonian civil servant admitted that even through direct meetings, citizens have their difficulties in meeting civil servants. This civil servant also considered that contact information is not adequate for Albanians to meet a civil servant. According to this civil servant “to meet or make an appointment with a civil servant the contact information provided are not adequate. Direct meeting is the most adequate; however for this citizens need lots of patience, persistence and privileges.”

A Macedonian civil servant explained that some of the civil servants of the older generation are not good at using computer and at the same time are not willing to learn, and this makes the use of e-mails difficult for them. “Unfortunately I have to admit that colleagues of older generation are not really good at computers. They are also not willing to learn and this makes usage of computers and e-mails difficult for them.” A civil servant explained that now there is a law that punishes civil servants if they do not provide prompt reply to citizens.

E-mail and telephone are both functional. To go directly to the office is better. However, now we have laws that oblige us to respond to citizens. First we receive a warning if we do not respond, next we are punished with reduction of salary and finally they can fire you if you do not follow the laws and rules of the institution.

However, like any other law in the Republic of North Macedonia, it only remains a law on paper and lacks implementation. As seen from the answers of many of the participants, they have difficulties in contacting civil servants by e-mail or telephone. Phone calls are not answered, whereas e-mails usually take months to receive a reply. The researcher can add his own experience during the recruiting process for the study. He sent more than 40 emails to different government institutions. The researcher has always followed up by phone calls, and at the end, he did not receive a single response from any of them. This shows that communication with civil servants in the Republic of North Macedonia is mainly done through direct meetings in the institutions, while e-mail or telephone are not used.

To assess the level of access that Albanians have in the government, participants were also asked about their meetings with civil servants, the opportunities given to them to interact with civil servants, place of the meeting and how easy was for Albanians to meet a civil servant.

All participants agreed that it is quite easy to meet civil servants in the Republic of North Macedonia. All of them mentioned that meetings usually take place in institutions. However, Albanians revealed some of the difficulties that they face in meeting civil servants such as long waiting lines, not respected office hours, discrimination on political party affiliation, and unequal treatment or privileging personal connections.

Although they all agree that meeting civil servants is quite easy, they also claimed that getting your job done or problem solved is still questionable. An Albanian added that “To meet the lowest level of public administrators is quite easy; however, getting your job done is still questionable.”

An Albanian illustrated in details how meetings with civil servants take place in the Republic of North Macedonia.

Administrators of the lowest level of public administration are quite easy to meet. I have myself many times gone directly to the institution and have never had problems meeting them. Anyways, there are no appointments needed; you have to always respect waiting lines in front of the door.

The same participant also described that individuals may face difficulties if they criticize the government or the Albanian political party in position. He added that

What is important to mention here is that the place I live is a small suburb, and we know each other. I have always enjoyed excellent treatment when I have met civil servants from my own neighborhood. However, in certain cases I have openly criticized government and the Albanian political party on Facebook, and during my next visit I was left to wait longer outside. Besides, I could also notice that their behavior had changed for 360 degrees.

Also, this participant explained that personal connections are necessary because everything becomes more complicated without connections. He added,

I think that it is necessary to know someone. If you go there as an unknown you won't have the privileges of those that have connections in the institution. You will have to wait longer, and you won't enjoy any privilege. I think that citizens without any personal connections are discriminated, and often overlooked.

Another participant among Albanians emphasized that it is the overloaded public administration that makes it easier for Albanians to meet a civil servant. As explained in chapter three, the government in the Republic of North Macedonia still struggles to find jobs for Albanian civil servants who have been employed in line with the Ohrid Framework Agreement but who remain on the state payroll at home. There are more than 130000 civil servants in the Republic of North Macedonia, or when divided to the total number of population it is 15 administrators per citizen. This participant explains that

It is more than easy to meet civil servants in the Republic of North Macedonia because of the overloaded public administration. Public administration is overloaded because for a single workplace there are more civil servants allocated. Besides, public administration has become the main job market in the Republic of North Macedonia. In an office which is meant for five civil servants you can meet up to fifteen. Five civil servants work and ten of them drink coffee. This makes it easier to meet them as there are always civil servants available to serve you.

Civil servants, both Albanians, and Macedonians, admit that it is quite easy for citizens to meet them. All of them when asked how easy it is for Albanians to meet them, they would start with the sentence “It is quite easy and simple to meet us.” They also contended that meetings normally take place in their office. A civil servant stated that “It is quite easy and simple to meet us. If there is no waiting line, you simple knock on the door and we are here always available for them.”

Some Macedonian civil servants acknowledged language to be a barrier in their meetings with Albanians. Not all Albanians can communicate in Macedonian, though the Macedonian language is an obligatory subject for all schools starting from first-grade elementary school. On the other side, Macedonians do not learn the Albanian language at school, and it is difficult to find a Macedonian able to speak Albanian in the Republic of North Macedonia. A Macedonian civil servant admitted that “Honestly speaking, Albanians, especially younger generation do speak poorly Macedonian language. I do not speak Albanian. We really have difficulties in communication.”

In addition, Macedonian civil servants compared to their Albanian colleagues and Albanians think that meeting civil servants higher in the hierarchy is not that difficult. However, they admit that following formal procedures is a must. They also confessed that personal connections, especially connections within the political party in position ease the way to civil servants higher in the hierarchy. A Macedonian civil servant explained that

opportunity is given to all to meet civil servants higher in the hierarchy; however they have to follow protocol. We have to announce their arrival; otherwise they will not let them in. If we have to be honest, personal connections shorten and ease the steps to meeting civil servants.

The same was confessed by another civil servant in the central government.

To meet someone higher in the hierarchy, you have to go through formal procedures and protocol. This is a must. But even here, like everywhere in the country, using personal connections you come easier to a meeting. At times you must have someone you know in order to secure a meeting, although there are standard procedures to follow, but are not respected.

On the other side, some Macedonian civil servants also pointed out that they try to make it easier for Albanians to meet civil servants higher in the hierarchy. They say that the contact information of their superiors is always provided and in some cases they are personally involved in helping Albanians come to a meeting with their superiors. A Macedonian civil servant in the central government revealed that

I am in the same office with my superior, or head of the department which makes it easier for me to direct citizens to her. There are no formal or bureaucratic steps they have to follow. There is also no need for a formal communication to make an appointment. However, to meet our director, I do personally make efforts to help them meet the director immediately if he is available or make an appointment for a future date if necessary.

In general, Albanian civil servants think that it is difficult for Albanians to meet civil servants higher in the hierarchy unless government institutions are led by Albanians. They think that Albanians higher in the hierarchy feel obliged to help Albanians although this might not always be the case. In some cases there is discrimination for being a member of different political party or for not sharing the same political ideology with the civil servants. Albanian civil servants admitted that they have limited access to officials higher in the hierarchy, which leaves no comment on how difficult it can be for citizens to meet them. An Albanian civil servant working for the regional office of one of the main ministries stated,

in our regional office directors have been mainly Albanians, and citizens have not had any problem meeting them. However, meeting directors at central level is quite difficult. We as civil servants have difficulties meeting them, now imagine how easy it can be for citizens.

Another civil servant from the central government pointed out,

In the last three mandates, the minister has been Albanian. I have seen that it has been a bit easier for citizens to meet officials higher in the hierarchy. Access to the minister has been a bit easier as well. Not that he wants, but he feels obliged to, or probably worries for the next elections. However, the truth is that if the minister is Macedonian, then political connections are more than necessary, and usually the only connection remains his deputy which is usually Albanian. Friendly or political connections with someone related or close to the civil servant in the hierarchy is necessary.

In general, Albanian civil servants considered personal or political connections necessary to meet civil servants higher in the hierarchy. This Albanian civil servant considered that

Unfortunately among us, Albanians, personal connections are the only way to get to officials higher in the hierarchy. You send regards from someone you know, or you meet together for a coffee, and it is all settled. However, using protocol and official procedures might not be adequate because officials higher in the hierarchy always find excuses when they do not know the person, so they keep postponing for days, weeks, months and at the end you are not able to meet them.

In addition, civil servants also admitted that for people without connections, access can be highly restricted. They are normally refused until they find someone that is connected to the civil servant in charge. This civil servant also considered the personality of the civil servant is important in giving opportunities for people to meet him.

To meet officials higher in the hierarchy, you have to call the secretary to his cabinet. If he sees interest and knows him personally the meetings takes place immediately. People without connections are refused. They might not even get a chance to meet them until the end of mandate. Besides, personality of civil servants is crucial. There are civil servants more open that admit them immediately and try to help. There are also civil servants that just try to get rid of them, direct the citizens to different departments, to different people, just to get over him.

In general, Albanians think that it is impossible to meet civil servants higher in the hierarchy without personal connections. They think that there are lots of bureaucratic difficulties that only political connections can help you overcome them. Participants among Albanians also considered that because political parties in the Republic of North Macedonia do control the state, and in some instance are even more powerful, using political connections is necessary to overcome all the bureaucratic difficulties which these parties have enacted to control people.

I think in the Republic of North Macedonia is quite important to use personal connections, or better to say it is necessary. However, using personal connections within the political parties in position is the best way to get to officials higher in the hierarchy. In the Republic of North Macedonia, the party is more powerful and important than the state; thus if you need to meet someone higher in the hierarchy the first thing you should do is look for connections within the political parties in power. Although formal procedures exist, these procedures are secondary, and you might never succeed. Bureaucratic difficulties make it also more complicated for citizen to meet officials higher in the hierarchy. Thus, political party is above all, above hierarchy, above all bureaucratic difficulties, above all the difficulties you might face, which means that it is better to avoid formal procedures and stick to political party connections. You might follow all the formal procedures; you can have a strong reason for a meeting; however, you can be refused only because you are not a member of the same political party, or because you have no personal connections.

Another participant explained the difference of meeting a civil servant higher in the hierarchy using personal connections versus trying to meet them directly without using personal connections.

The first thing you feel when you try to get direct access to officials higher in the hierarchy is contempt. Their behavior, the way they look at you, makes you feel overlooked, unimportant because they always try to get rid of you and direct you to other institutions or departments. However, when appointments are done using referrals or personal connections, or when you send regards from political personalities you know, you are always accepted politely, served with coffee, you see them smile all the time during the conversation, and they try to seriously get your problem solved. Although there are legal and lawful ways to solve your problem, they will always opt for political procedures, which at times are unlawful and illegal just to get your problem solved. Likewise, it is not important in this country who you are, but who you know from those people in power.

Besides, Albanians think that civil servants higher in the hierarchy do try to keep a distance from citizens as they feel less important or afraid of losing their social status if they get closer to them. This participant described his own experience in trying to contact officials higher in the hierarchy “I have the impression that the request for a meeting with officials higher in the hierarchy is quite difficult because of bureaucratic procedures as well as the distance that civil servants higher in the hierarchy keep from citizens.” Another participant observed that the distance higher officials keep from citizens has remained from the communist ideology which seems to be still present in the country. This participant explained that the higher the distance between civil servants and citizens, civil servants feel more powerful towards them, and the closer they get to them they feel like they lose the power.

I think that the main problem exists within the communist ideology or the remnants of this ideology in country's governance. The bigger the distance between them and citizens, the more powerful they feel; and the closer they get to citizens, the more they feel they lose power or importance. I think here comes at play the closed and open system of governance. Here in the Republic of North Macedonia all government institutions are closed; even their buildings are all in concrete, all concreted like in those old communist days.

Last but not least, Albanians think that personal interest of civil servants or the interest of the political party can make it easier for you to meet them. If they see that they can benefit personally from someone or that the political party can get financial donations or voters, then they will open the doors to that person. This participant stated,

I think that it is quite difficult to meet civil servants higher in the hierarchy. Even if they provide you contact information, without intermediary or personal connections it is quite difficult for you to be received. Also, if civil servants see no personal benefits or benefits for his own political party, you have minimal chances to meet them.

Finally, to evaluate access of Albanians to the government, participants were asked how Albanians usually address their concerns to civil servants, and in their opinion, how willing are government institutions and civil servants to address and solve their problems and concerns. Regarding the methods Albanians use to address their concerns and problems, all participants agreed that Albanians mainly address their complaints personally in the institution or through personal connections, mainly via their contacts in the political party in position. Both Macedonian and Albanian civil servants think that they are willing to help Albanians. However, they point out that they also have limited jurisdictions which hinder them from helping Albanians and can be perceived as they are not willing to help Albanians.

Macedonian and Albanian civil servants are aware that Albanians do not believe that they are willing to consider their concerns; that is why they do not even bother to address them.

Albanians are convinced that their complaints and concerns are not considered which makes them avoid official procedures to address them. An Albanian participant commented “I think that Albanians from the beginning start with the conviction and prejudices that their questions and concerns are not considered. This makes them not to address their issues and concerns to government institutions.” This makes them look for other opportunities to get their problems solved. This participant added that “I think that because of mistrust Albanians try to address their concerns through the local council of the political party in position, or their connections in the government.” Another participant explained how he addresses his concerns to civil servants.

Usually, I address questions and concerns directly in the institution because there are huge communication difficulties between citizens and government institutions. The first thing that you feel when you address your concerns is pessimism because even before you contact them you have no hope that your concerns will be considered. They will always find useless justifications to get rid of you, instead of getting your problems considered or solved.

It can be seen from this comment that given by an Albanian civil servant that Albanians do not believe that formal procedures are helpful and practical, he stated,

Albanians address their concerns using personal connections. This is the easiest and most practical way. This is our reality. Albanians do not use at all the formal procedures to address their concerns or problems they might have. We have a complaint form which they can fill out and address it to the institution; however, they do not use it. Even when they are refused, or they cannot obtain a document, they will not use these formal procedures to officially complain. Nevertheless, they will try to find any connection they might have and come back to get their job done although according to the law we should not issue this document or handle their problem.

A Majority of participants among the Albanians thought that there is no willingness from civil servants and government institutions to consider their concerns. They reported that civil servants in some cases are arrogant and portray bossy attitude towards them. To succeed, Albanians admitted that people have to be pushy and persistent all the time; otherwise, their cases are forgotten.

Regarding their willingness to help, I think civil servants are never willing to help; this is only something you can dream of in the Republic of North Macedonia. You really need to pressure them in order to successfully accomplish something.

Albanians also reported that now in many of the government institutions complaints forms are available and also on their websites there is a special section where they can address their complaints; however, this is only for the sake of being there and is not functioning at all. They will remain silent to concerns voiced by citizens. According to this participant,

Because of the monitoring from international institutions, now many government institutions have complaint forms in their institutions and on their webpage where citizens can address their problems they might have. However, this is not practically implemented, and in most of the cases government institutions do not respond to questions or concerns addressed by citizens. They remain deaf to concerns voiced by citizens. I have personally two times filed a complaint form online and directly to the institution, but never got an answer from them”

To sum up, on the relationship strategy of access, Macedonian civil servants think that Albanians have enough access to government institutions compared to Albanian civil servants and Albanians who think that Albanians have limited access. In addition, all participants agreed that an adequate method for meeting civil servants as well as civil servants higher in the hierarchy is direct meeting through referrals or personal connections. All participants agreed that meeting civil servants of the lower rank is quite easy and no appointments are needed. Still, meeting them requires patience and persistence because of waiting lines, discrimination, and privileges based on personal connections, not respected office hours, etc.

Macedonian civil servants also think that it is easy for Albanians to meet officials higher in the hierarchy, compared to Albanian civil servants who think that it is difficult and Albanians who think that it is impossible to meet officials higher in the hierarchy if there are no personal connections to the political party in power. They all agreed that Albanians usually address their problems and concerns personally in the institution. However, Albanians and civil servants disagree on the willingness of civil servants to respond to their concerns and questions. Albanians perceived that civil servants do not care about them and show no willingness to respond to their questions. This results in pessimism from the side of Albanians that makes them avoid formal procedures to address their concerns. Albanians complained that they had experienced arrogance and a bossy attitude from civil servants. On the other side, civil servants confessed that they are always willing to help Albanians. However, they think that in some cases they cannot help because of limited jurisdictions which can be perceived by Albanians as an unwillingness to help them.

5.2.2 Positivity

The relationship cultivation strategy of positivity was adopted by Hon and Grunig (1999) from interpersonal communication literature and applied to public relations. They defined positivity as “anything the organization or publics do to make the relationship more enjoyable for the parties involved” (p. 14). Ki and Hon (2009), following Hon and Grunig’s definition, defined positivity as “the degree to which members of publics benefit from the organization’s efforts to make the relationship more enjoyable for key publics” (p. 7).

To assess positivity, participants in the study were asked about the regularity of interaction between Albanians and civil servants. Additionally, they were asked if regular information is provided to Albanians and how useful they perceive to be the information provided. The questions also aimed to understand how enjoyable are the interactions between Albanians and civil servants. The questions focused on how courteous was their interaction, to what extent civil servants attempt to make their interaction enjoyable, and how cooperative both sides think that civil servants are in handling their concerns. The last set of questions on positivity focused on their bad experiences and conflict situations they might have had. The aim was to understand how the two sides handled the situation and if civil servants were cooperative in handling conflict or disagreements with citizens.

Both sides, Albanians and civil servants revealed that their interactions happen daily. Albanians acknowledged that usually they meet civil servants because of certain documents they might need, paying bills, taxes, fines and other personal needs they might have. Albanians are not satisfied with the information they receive from government institutions. They complain that the information they obtain is not regular, outdated, and most of the cases useless. An Albanian citizen working for a private medical clinic explained how they obtain information.

Information is not regular, we do not get to receive them on time, and they do not inform us about new changes or laws that are important to us. In most of the cases, word of mouth between colleagues helps obtain more useful information about new changes. Sometimes we use official gazettes that are published monthly or quarterly. They do not inform us based on our needs, which means that we have to be proactive and regularly seek information because they are never served to us by government institutions. On the other side, using word of mouth, the essence of the information is distorted and most of the time comes to misunderstanding because we are not properly informed. We mainly receive second-hand information and not information directly from the source.

Albanians also complained that the information is also not made available to them on the website of the government institutions which would ease their way for obtaining useful information. They also admitted that now government institutions more often use websites to inform citizens; however, they acknowledged that their updates are not timely, and in most of the cases the information on their websites are outdated.

I do not think that these government institutions give regular information. Usually, the basic information is found on their websites; however, even their websites and their content not updated regularly. For example if there is something happening, like new laws, amendments, or there is something new implemented, I do not think that they update their websites fast for people to receive the information on time. This means that you never get to receive correct information. Besides, I also think that the information we obtain is useful and superficial, and there is no detailed explanation. I have had cases to obtain information and application

form from the website, however, once I have gone to meet the civil servant directly, I have understood that all I have read online is not correct and does not correspond to the correct procedures.

Albanians also asserted that information of public interest is not provided, even if the law on free access to public information guarantees access to such information. Even if citizens officially request the information, this participant confirmed that no answer is received. This citizen explained that

information that would be in the interest of society is not given, even if requested. I remember there was a project carried on by the government in my neighborhood. I wrote an official letter to ask for information about the project to the respective ministry, information that should normally be given by them in advance. They never replied, nor used my letter to publicly inform us about the project. Besides, in the Republic of North Macedonia there are no deadlines, and deadlines are not respected as well. This means that you wait for information until you lose hope that the information will be provided.

Albanians also considered that if they own a business, they receive mainly information about punishments, debts, or bills they have to pay to government institutions. They complained that information for public procurement are mainly made available to businesses with which they are personally connected.

If we are, to be honest, communication with government institutions is mainly disciplinary than informational. The information we mainly receive from them are about punishments, debts, fines, taxes, and not access in decision making or information of public character. Besides, it is quite interesting how public procurement is done in the Republic of North Macedonia. Our businesses need very much public procurement information in order to survive in the market; however, this information is directly given only to businesses connected to them. Besides, when it comes to paying fines and taxes, then they inform you, and you have really short deadline to settle the payment otherwise there are additional charges that involve high-interest rates if the payment is not done within the deadline.

Albanians also complained that they receive only superficial information, and for the more detailed information, they have to actively seek other sources of information. Even if civil servants promise to get to them with more information, they never do that. A participant owning a small business explained that he never expects to be informed, rather actively follows the government institutions related to his business. He added that

I regularly follow the institutions that are related to my business for useful and updated information; I never wait for them to provide information because they never do that. I am active and use different sources to obtain information about new laws, procedures, news, etc.

Another participant also acknowledged that they have to push hard to obtain more information.

Information is usually superficial; they do not provide detailed information. Even if we require detailed information, they tell that we will get in touch soon, we will call you back,

but in reality, they never contact you. You really have to be proactive and seek actively information if you really have to succeed in getting your job done. Regular communication and information is not provided for the citizens.

This is also confessed by another participant who also adds that citizens usually use word of mouth from people that might have had previous experiences to get informed. Albanians also think that the information provided is of no use to the public and mainly used for propaganda or political marketing purposes.

Information of public character and public interest is very little. They usually publish their information on their website; however, I do not see them useful for the citizens. Usually the information is meant for propaganda, to portray the government in positive light. In the institutions there are also notice boards, but even there you do not find much information. It is possible that significant procedural changes are carried on and people are not informed about that. Usually citizens are proactive and seek actively information, or they get alarmed through word of mouth from people that might have had previous experiences.

Among Albanians, there were also participants that complained that information is only available in Macedonian. The researcher conducted some quick research of the websites of the main ministries and government bodies. Only when the minister or the director of the institution is Albanian was there an Albanian version of the website. In two cases, even if the minister was Macedonian, there was only an outdated Albanian version of the website left from the time of the previous minister that happened to be Albanian. This was confessed by an Albanian civil servant who admitted that

our website is bilingual because current minister is Albanian. However, when the minister is Macedonian there is no available version in Albanian, or in some cases there is an outdated Albanian version of the website that has remained from the previous minister.

Albanian civil servants also acknowledged that Albanians prefer to use word of mouth to obtain information. They think that Albanians find it easier and usually avoid the official procedures to obtain information. This civil servant thought that using second-hand information complicated their job because they go to them not properly informed which in most of the cases results in conflict or misunderstandings.

I think that Albanians do not use the opportunities given to them to officially obtain information directly from the source. I have noticed that when they come to us they have been falsely informed; they have not called us to obtain information, rather have asked someone they think knows something about that and did not address his questions to the proper institution. I think that in general Albanians follow the traditional method of obtaining information among them by asking people they think are knowledgeable, and not by contacting the civil servants competent about the issue at hand.

Albanian civil servants also thought that the information provided is not regular and mainly superficial. They confess that financial information is often hidden. Also they confessed that it

is a practice in many government institutions to make public procurement information available, although in advance they know who is going to win. So, the information is published only to fulfill the legal requirements. This Albanian civil servant explained that

Sometimes the information that we provide is useful, but in most of the cases are superficial. For example, sometimes we provide information about public procurement, although it is known in advance, or the decision is already taken who is the winner of the public procurement. The information is made public only to satisfy the legal requirements and avoid criticism from the opposition.

Compared to Albanians and Albanian civil servants, Macedonian civil servants though that like any other citizen, Albanians are also regularly informed. A majority of them also confessed that Albanians have information available to them in the Albanian language.

I think that our institution regularly informs Albanians, and the information is mainly of public character and interest, information campaigns, etc. The information is provided in both, Macedonian and Albanian language, and I think the information is useful to Albanians as they are to any citizen in the country.

However, there was a civil servant among Macedonians that acknowledged that in her contact with Albanians, she has noticed that they are uninformed compared to their Macedonian counterparts. In her opinion, language barriers are crucial.

Based on the contacts I have had with Albanians, I have noticed they are uninformed. For example, there was a free cancer screening campaign provided by our ministry, and we noticed that Albanian women were less informed, and in most of the cases it is because they do not understand the language. Besides, their medical doctor has not communicated further the information which I am sure was provided to them by us. I think that in general we face various difficulties in informing Albanians which are mainly organizational, lack of human resources, and language barriers.

Albanians and civil servants also do not share their opinion regarding courtesy of civil servants. Albanians find civil servants, not at all courteous in their interaction. From 19 participants, 11 of them described civil servants as not at all courteous in their interaction. They report being ignored and overlooked often, lack of gentle vocabulary, arrogance, bossy attitude, and desire to get rid of you as soon as possible. Albanians also stated that it is hard to see them smile in your interaction with them.

Their behavior is quite bad; at times they even offend or curse you. They are not at all gentle in their vocabulary, they are not smiley, there is always present some dose of arrogance, and they try to give you information just to get rid of you as soon as possible. They look at you so strangely that at times make you think that you require from them something that is not within their jurisdictions or competences. I can definitely say that their behavior is quite arrogant.

Albanians think that civil servants are not courteous because they usually take more responsibilities than they can carry, which always keeps them stressed. Albanians also complained about lack of professionalism which they think is a result of employment based on political connections rather than meritocracy. This participant believed that civil servants

are not professionally prepared for the jobs they carry. They are mainly employed through the political parties in power as militants. There may also be cases that you can meet illiterate civil servants, and from this kind of people you cannot expect to be courteous in their interaction with you.

Citizens also think that civil servants are not trained to communicate properly with citizens. Another participant added that although he considers courtesy to be personal quality, in his opinion all the civil servants he had met "... lack professional training on how to behave and treat citizens." Surprisingly, in some of the cases Albanians acknowledged Macedonian civil servants to be more courteous compared to Albanians.

I think that there is a difference between Macedonian and Albanian civil servants. I think that Macedonians, especially older generation of civil servants, are more polite, more educated and professional. Albanian civil servants do not maintain that required level of professional communication with citizens. On the contrary, I have also met Macedonian civil servants; they are clearer in communication, explain things better and clearly, inform you about the deadlines, they behave better, smile, etc.

Albanians also think that courtesy, attempts to make interaction enjoyable and cooperativeness are very much expressed when you meet civil servants using personal connections, or when they know you are related to someone politically powerful.

When civil servants know your connections and your position within the political party in power, you can see them smile all the time, they even offer you a drink, and they make extra efforts to get your problem solved. On the other side, if you are not personally connected, the door is closed for you, they do not pay much attention, you can even be ignored.

Albanian civil servants believed that they are being courteous in their interaction with Albanians, although they think that it is Albanians that should evaluate them. They also confessed that politeness depends very much from the person in front of them. They stated that often they have to deal with arrogant and uneducated citizens, and in these cases, they only try to get rid of them.

I think it depends very much on the person in front of you. We have cases that citizens, usually those that have personal connections, express highly arrogant behavior, so we only try to get rid of them as soon as possible. However, in many cases, if they behave themselves, if they do touch us emotionally with the issues they have, in a way we feel obliged and we are touched emotionally to help them, and we will take additional steps, at times even outside of your jurisdictions to help them.

All Macedonian civil servants confessed that they are courteous in their interaction with Albanians and that they do not make any difference between Albanians and Macedonians in treatment. However, a Macedonian civil servant admitted that she is polite only because she has to be, because of the job she carries, although she does not want to be courteous with Albanians. This shows that there are still present some signs of hatred among the two ethnic groups. This Macedonian civil servant answered with an arrogant tone that “I am being courteous because I have to, though I do not want to be courteous with Albanians.” Nevertheless, another Macedonian civil servant thinks that courtesy is a human trait; thus, being courteous to people has nothing to do with their ethnicity. This civil servant added that “Courtesy is a human trait that should not be selectively applied. You are courteous with all or with no one. Before all, we have to be humans and respect and love all people despite their ethnic or religious background.”

Similar to courtesy, Albanians reported that civil servants do not even try to make their interaction enjoyable. They think that civil servants lack acceptable elementary behavior and think that they are arrogant as well. In some cases, Albanians reported that civil servants do not even greet them the moment they meet each other. Even here Albanians think that it is “lack of professionalism that makes civil servants express always some dose of arrogance and not respect the ethics of elementary communication between a civil servant and a citizen.” Albanians also think that civil servants do not bother to get their job done, important for them is that the office hours pass by and the salary is received at the end of the month. According to this citizen they do not put extra effort to get as much as possible citizens served or problems solved.

It is quite interesting here in the Republic of North Macedonia, I talk about different cases I have had, the role and perception of civil servants about the position they have in the institution is such that they think they are at work to do as much as they can, just to pass those office hours, and is not really important how many people they have served or how many cases they have managed to close. There is a saying that civil servants here use when they have nothing to do, swing the door and receive the salary. The attitude of civil servants is such that they want to get their salary but not do their tasks.

Still, some Albanians also showed some understanding with civil servants and acknowledged that dissatisfied civil servants usually leads to dissatisfied citizens. They thought that civil servants are not satisfied with the treatment they receive in their institutions which is reflected in their interaction with citizens.

I think they only try to get their job done, and in most of the cases only because of the pressure they face from their superiors. I never see them do their work with pleasure which

immediately reflects on the service that we receive from them. I think that majority of them are not satisfied with their job or the treatment they receive from central government, which makes them only get their job done, without any extra motivation in treating citizens.

Albanian civil servants thought that they made their interaction with Albanians enjoyable. They believed that Albanians feel relieved once you speak to them in Albanian because “language can be a barrier to Albanians when interacting with Macedonian civil servants.” They confessed that some dose of nervousness is always present among Albanians when they interact with civil servants, which requires them to make their interaction enjoyable. Civil servants also admitted that “making interaction with citizens enjoyable is crucial to their job. The nature of our job requires that we always make citizens enjoy their interaction with us.” Another civil servant working for one of the regional offices in Tetovo thought that “people have lots of problems, and I think they are very much in need of positive and enjoyable communication. At times you feel that despite all the problems they have, they only need a smile, and some dose of humor.”

Macedonian civil servants also think that they make their interaction with Albanians enjoyable. Some of them confessed that from the feedback they have received, they are sure Albanians enjoyed their interaction with them. A Macedonian civil servant stated that “personally I try to make our interaction enjoyable, I let them feel comfortable in our meetings and try to communicate to them that all citizens are equally important to me and to the institution I work for.” However, another Macedonian civil servant thought that enjoyable interaction is equal to a successfully solved problem of a citizen. This civil servant thought that if you manage to help citizens to get their job done, they perceive their interaction as enjoyable. This participant added that “Interaction with civil servants is not meant to enjoy. You are there to help them solve their problems or get their work done. If you can achieve this, interaction is more than enjoyable for them.”

Regarding cooperativeness, a majority of participants among the Albanians thought that civil servants were not at all cooperative compared to civil servants, in particular, Macedonian civil servants that think that they are quite cooperative in handling people’s concerns. Albanians think that civil servants do not even feel they are servants of the people. Albanians think that if you do not pressure them, your case or problem can bring you unpredictable consequences and problems.

Many of the civil servants do not feel they are there to serve people. I have had recently a case which has not been solved and delayed for long time. I went to the office, and the civil servant hardly managed to find the documents. Then he looked at them and said that he

needs to contact someone else and will get back to me as soon as possible. If you are not persistent in getting your problem solved, they do not care, even though they are responsible to solve your problem. They should keep in touch with us until the case is closed. I have had another case regarding a fine that I had to pay for fast driving. The case goes that far that the police had to come and apprehend me at home, only because I have not received the letter. They have had all the contact information to contact me; however, they do not care about the consequences that you might face if they do not cooperate.

Additionally, Albanians think that civil servants feel powerful towards citizens leading to arrogant behavior. This makes civil servants try to get rid of citizens and not cooperate to solve their problem. This participant stated that civil servants

are not at all cooperative. In some of the cases I have had, they have tried to solve my problem because I have known some of them personally. However, I have myself seen some older people be arrogantly refused or directed somewhere else by civil servants rather than cooperate to get their problem solved. They are quite arrogant, and I do not understand where they get this freedom and power to act like bosses towards citizens.

Albanians also are aware that there are always exceptions, and that generalizations should not be made based solely on bad experience. Additionally, Albanians think that civil servants of the lower rank lack decision making power. Albanians think that civil servants are there “only to gather documents and process them to officials higher in the hierarchy where decisions are taken.” Albanians also acknowledged that civil servants have limited jurisdictions and they depend very much on the orders they receive from their superiors which they have to obey.

I think that they are not at all cooperative, and in most of the cases not because of their fault, but because they have limited jurisdictions. They always work under the directions and orders they receive from someone higher in the hierarchy which they have to obey.

Albanians also reported that cooperative behavior of civil servants changes if personal connections are used, or if they see some personal benefit in serving certain citizens. A participant explained that “civil servants do not even try to cooperate, only in cases where they see some personal interest their behavior changes radically, or if you are sent to them from someone they personally know then they have completely different behavior.”

On the other side, the majority of Albanian civil servants think that they are cooperative. Besides, being civil servants employed after the Ohrid Framework Agreement to represent Albanians they feel “obliged and responsible to cooperate with Albanians.” They claimed that they have to “cooperate with them in order not to feel overlooked by the institutions.” At times, Albanian civil servants confessed that they even “give them personal contact information to contact them privately just to get their problems solved.”

However, in general, Albanian civil servants admitted that they only cooperate within the limited jurisdictions and competencies they might have. They claimed that when they are not competent to solve their problems, they provide additional information or direct them to the institution that can help them get their problem solved. This civil servant admitted that their “cooperativeness depends very much on the jurisdictions that we have. If we have jurisdictions to help them, we do that immediately; however, when we have no jurisdictions, we try to guide them and direct them to the adequate institution to address their problem”.

A majority of Macedonian civil servants also claimed that they are cooperative with Albanians only within their jurisdictions and competencies. When analyzing their answers, 11 out of 12 Macedonian civil servants answered to cooperate with Albanians only within the jurisdictions and competencies that they have. They also believed that there could be cases when Albanians were not satisfied with the cooperativeness of civil servants; however, they claim that this was also due to their limited jurisdictions to help them. Macedonian civil servants admitted that they do not have decision-making power and the only duty that they have is to bring cases to civil servants higher in the hierarchy.

I think that I am quite cooperative within the competencies and the possibilities that I have. I am not in any managerial position, and in all the cases, all the requests that are directed to me I have to address at higher levels in the hierarchy. Thus, there is no request or application that I have not addressed to my superiors, no matter the nationality of the citizens.

Still, there were civil servants among Macedonians that confessed they do not care about the problems of Albanians. This civil servant admitted that “I only try to do my job professionally. Honestly, I do not really care about the problems of Albanians.”

Last, participants were asked to share any experience of conflict that they might have had. A majority of Macedonian civil servants claimed that they have never had any conflict or disagreement with Albanians. Only two out of the twelve Macedonian civil servants confessed to having had minor disagreements which they ended peacefully. This civil servant explained that “normally there have been disagreements between us. However, that never escalated to any verbal or physical conflict. We are all humans, so I think all these disagreements should end up peacefully through negotiations.” The other civil servant also admitted that “nothing extraordinary happened, minor disagreements which we ended up by apologizing to each other.”

On the other side, the majority of Albanian civil servants claimed that verbal conflict is a normal part of their job. They also claimed that in many cases citizens are not aware that civil

servants do not make decisions, so according to this civil servant “when they receive a negative or unexpected answer, we are the people they can release their frustration at. So this is where conflict is inevitable. This shows that we have to always be calm, careful and patient.” They also confessed that they have to deal with aggressive citizens. This requires, they say, patience and maturity from their side to avoid physical conflict. In most of the cases Albanian civil servants reported that they are accused by Albanians for incompetence if they do not solve their problems, even if that is not within their jurisdictions and competences. Albanian civil servants also consider that Albanians are convinced and think that they are obliged to always help them even if that is not within their jurisdictions.

We have had cases of aggressive citizens; they come and shout at us when they are not satisfied with the answer that they have received or if we could not help them. We explain to them that it is not within our jurisdictions, and we guide them to the adequate institution; however, they accuse us of negligence or incompetence. We have to be careful because at times they even offend us, fortunately this does not happen often. We always try to calm them down in order to avoid any physical conflict.

All Albanians, without any exception, reported having had verbal conflicts with civil servants.

Sometimes to obtain a single document from government institutions, you can get into conflict with civil servants, in most of the cases verbal conflict. I have witnessed cases of physical conflict between citizens and civil servants, but fortunately I have been involved only in verbal conflicts with them. I had a case that I complained about a civil servant that was not in his workplace, and we had to wait for him for about 45 minutes. After his colleagues called him, he arrogantly told me “is it you that is going to teach me how I have to work here,” and then he closed the door and refused to receive me. I complained further; however, this resulted without success as this civil servant had strong ties within the political party in position. Some other civil servants explained to me that he feels “untouchable,” leading to such bossy and arrogant behavior. I learned the lesson that in such cases you have to be patient and not complain a lot as it can escalate into verbal or physical conflict. If in any developed country a civil servant is always available to serve citizens, this is not the case in the Republic of North Macedonia. We are used to their bossy attitude and arrogance.

Some participants reported that in some cases, personal security is at jeopardy because they are threatened by civil servants not to process their complaints further. They think that civil servants “simply feel quite powerful towards citizens. They never feel they are servants and representatives of their interests.” This participant from among Albanians believed that “any conflict, being it physical or verbal is never in favor of citizens. You really can suffer personally, and at the same time they can revenge you by refusing to serve you. I think that citizens know this, so most of the time they try to avoid conflicts with civil servants.” Albanians also accuse civil servants of being stubborn and not cooperative in resolving disputes. This participant pointed out that “It is really hard to resolve a dispute or conflict with civil servants. It is us citizens that should always tolerate; in return we risk not getting

the work done. They are normally stubborn, and persevere on their stand even if they might be wrong.”

Overall, Albanians and civil servants do not agree regarding the level of positivity. In general, Albanians reported that level of positivity in their relationship with the government is low. They claim that government does not regularly provide information to them. Even that information provided is of propaganda character, aimed at portraying government in positive light.

In addition, Albanians reported that civil servants are not polite in their interaction with Albanians and that their meetings are mainly characterized by arrogant behavior from civil servants. Albanians also contended that civil servants do not even try to make their interaction enjoyable. They think that civil servants lack acceptable elementary behavior and professional communication. According to the Albanians, failure to make interactions enjoyable is due to lack of professionalism, lack of training on how to deal with citizens, and employment-based on political connections rather than meritocracy. Some reported that civil servants have their problems and are always stressed because they have accepted a job they are not capable of doing. Albanians also think that these civil servants lack training and formal education for the job they are doing. Albanians think that civil servants are not satisfied with the treatment they receive in their institutions which is reflected in their interaction with them. Thus, Albanians believe that too many civil servants are more important office hours to pass by rather than serving citizens. This leads to arrogance and negligence of civil servants in properly serving citizens.

Albanians also find civil servants not cooperative at all. Thus, they suggested that citizens should be persistent and pressure civil servants if they want to get their work done. However, Albanians, in general, were aware that cooperativeness of civil servants is affected by their limited jurisdictions, lack of decision making power, and regular control from civil servants higher in the hierarchy. Albanians also confessed that attempts of civil servants to make interaction enjoyable, courtesy and cooperativeness change significantly if citizens use personal connections or in cases when civil servants see any personal benefit or gain in serving particular citizens.

Last, all the participants from the group of Albanians reported having had conflicts, in particular verbal conflicts and disagreement with civil servants. They also believed that conflicts are never in favor of citizens as they can be avenged by civil servants. Albanians

claimed that civil servants feel quite powerful towards citizens; they are stubborn and never cooperate to end up disagreements with citizens. Albanians believed that civil servants are never penalized for unprofessional behavior, which can lead to arrogance and bossy attitude.

Macedonian and Albanian civil servants gave a more favorable rating to positivity. Macedonian civil servants think that Albanians, as any other citizen in the country, receive regular information. Compared to them, Albanian civil servants also think that the information provided is not regular and mainly superficial. Macedonian civil servants reported they treat all citizens equally and not make any difference between Macedonians and Albanians.

Both groups of civil servants claimed to be courteous in dealing with Albanians. They also thought that they tried to make interaction enjoyable; however, often, they have to deal with aggressive citizens. Compared to Macedonian civil servants that did not report any conflict with Albanians, Albanian civil servants complained that conflicts, especially verbal conflicts, are a daily routine. Regarding cooperativeness, all civil servants agreed that they have limited jurisdictions, making it difficult for them always to be cooperative. Albanian civil servants reported that Albanians are not always aware that civil servants have limited jurisdictions. This leads to conflict because citizens have higher expectations.

5.2.3 Albanian Versus Macedonian Civil Servants

Although Macedonian civil servants report that they do not differentiate Macedonians from Albanians, Albanian civil servants and Albanians are divided in their opinion. A majority of them think that there is a difference in treatment toward Albanians between Macedonian and Albanian civil servants. However, there are also Albanians that find Macedonian civil servants more polite, competent and professional in doing their job. This participant from among Albanians considered that

... Macedonian civil servants are a bit more polite and professional which is a result of their education and professional experience. I think that even if they are employed through political party connections, Macedonians still respect certain criteria where employment in public administration is usually done based on their professional qualifications. Among Albanians there might be cases they are employed with high school diplomas, but the same people might not have completed even elementary school, and might even be illiterate. Besides, I think that Albanian civil servants lack professional responsibility. We as Albanians lack experience in institutional management.

Another participant stated that:

When I have had to deal with Macedonian civil servants, they behave better, they know to clarify and explain things better, they are more polite, you can see them smile, etc. I have had personally a case with a civil servant regarding registration of an NGO, and I had to contact them in advance. This civil servant behaved extremely well and was quite polite with me that made me go to the institution to look for her. When I went to the office, there were 3-4 civil servants present. I told them that I came to see the person that attended me on the phone. The girl stood up and introduced herself. I told her I came only to thank you and bring you this simple gift as a sign of your courteous behavior. This treatment I have been able to receive only in developed countries. She refused the gift at first saying that it was her duty to attend to my request. I told her that I only want to give you this gift as a sign of your polite and professional behavior. I am not exaggerating, honestly such a behavior and professional handling of my request I have never had in the Republic of North Macedonia. But to be honest such cases are also rare in here.

Some Albanians also found Macedonian civil servants to be more competent and communicative in handling their requests. Albanians also found Albanian civil servants to be “lazier, less hardworking, arrogant, and more negligent towards Albanians.” A participant recalled his experience with a Macedonian civil servant thought that

for the same issue I have had the opportunity to have my case handled by Macedonian and Albanian civil servant. I have had once a case with a Macedonian civil servant, he was a little bit old, about to retire, and he was experienced and quite communicative. Considering the fact that filling up some application forms was quite complicated, he helped me a lot and guided me to get this application form ready. In comparison to this, a year later for the same application I had to deal with an Albanian civil servant. He just threw that application form to me did not even greet me, and did not offer any help, just behaved like a boss. He only said that I should get to him once I have properly compiled the application form and all the documents required.

However, there were Albanians that still think that Macedonian civil servants discriminate against them. According to this civil servant, “usually Macedonian civil servants are polite but only to Macedonians, but arrogant and discriminatory towards Albanians.” Albanians also think that discrimination mainly happens at central levels of the government. This participant stated that

discrimination mainly happens at central government. If a Macedonian is employed in a city with Albanian majority, they are more polite and helpful to Albanians than Albanian civil servants. However, if a Macedonian civil servant comes from a city of Macedonian majority, they still discriminate Albanians and consider them citizens of second-class and inferior to Macedonians. This is then reflected in their service to Albanians which is not polite and professional. Still majority of Albanians thought that nowadays personality and individual character dominates nationalism, although cases of discrimination on ethnic basis are present.

Albanian civil servants also thought the personality of a civil servant and his or her behavior affects the way they treat each other. This civil servant thought that

treatment depends on his personality, the institution he is working for, and the citizen asking for service. Lately I have seen some positive changes. I work together and share the office

with Macedonian civil servants, and they behave well and are knowledgeable about cultural differences between two ethnicities. However, in the east part of the country where there are no Albanians, they do not know much about Albanians, and they have built their opinion and perceptions based on what has been served to them through the media and political parties. They perceive Albanians to be less civilized, less educated, and more arrogant people. However, once you meet them they are surprised with our behavior which is the opposite of their own perceptions.

Albanian civil servants think that their Macedonian colleagues “professionally do their job.” Albanian civil servants still think that treatment of Albanians by Macedonian civil servants is different. They claimed that

Macedonian civil servants treat Macedonians better compared to Albanians. Nationalism and discrimination on an ethnic basis are still present although disappearing slowly. There have been cases Albanians have asked Macedonian civil servants in our institution for help, and civil servants have been obliged to help. I think in our presence there is no discrimination. However, there are institutions that Albanians are represented with zero civil servants, and in this cases treatment might differ. Still, majority of Albanian civil servant described their colleagues as correct, attentive, helpful, and professional.

Macedonian civil servants, without any exception, confessed that they treat citizens equally. They claimed never to discriminate citizens based on ethnic or religious basis. Although they think that there might be cases of discrimination and double standards, they admitted that they are against division of society on ethnical basis. This civil servant stated that “usually we do not divide citizens into Albanians, Macedonians, Romas, Turks, etc. I do not understand why we have to privilege Macedonians to Albanians, or Albanians to other ethnicities. Principally, I am against it.”

5.2.4 Openness

According to Hon and Grunig (1999), openness in public relations involves disclosing “thoughts and feelings among parties in a relationship” (p. 14). This very much reflects the concept of disclosure studied in interpersonal communication which is defined as “direct discussion about the nature of the relationship and setting aside times for talks about the relationship” (Canary & Stafford, 1994, p. 12). Ki and Hon (2009) defined openness as “an organization’s efforts to provide information about the nature of the organization and what it is doing” (p. 8). This definition is very much similar to the concept of transparency in relation to the government, which is obliged to share information with citizens about its governance.

The definition by Ki and Hon is also similar to many definitions of transparency as used in international relations, public policy, and public administration literature. Bell (2009), for example, studied the evolving definition of transparency and claimed that the definition of

transparency reveals three metaphors: transparency as a public value embraced by society to counter corruption, transparency synonymous with open decision-making by governments and nonprofits, and transparency as a complex tool of good governance in programs, policies, organizations, and nations. According to Transparency International (2016), transparency “is about shedding light on rules, plans, processes, and actions. It is knowing why, how, what, and how much. Transparency ensures that public officials, civil servants, managers, board members, and businesspeople act visibly and understandably, and report on their activities. And it means that the general public can hold them to account. It is the surest way of guarding against corruption, and helps increase trust in the people and institutions on which our futures depend” (para. 4).

In the study, the questions related to openness aimed to uncover how much information the government shares with citizens about its governance. Participants were asked how government institutions are reporting on their activities. They were also asked how much and what kind of information they usually share with citizens about their governance. Citizens and civil servants were also asked if government institutions publish annual reports and how valuable do they think annual reports are to them in understanding what the government has done. Participants were also asked how the government communicated new issues to them, and how effective do they find news briefings to be in understanding new issues.

According to the Albanians, most of the reporting by the government institutions is done through their websites. However, Albanians think that reporting online has certain problems that affect the quality of reporting, such as overloaded webpage, not regularly updated webpage, messy websites that make it difficult to find online information, limited online information, and missing version in Albanian on their webpage.

In addition to their websites, Albanians also claimed that government institutions use print and electronic media controlled by the government to report on their activities. However, as this participant claimed, all of this is done as part of their public relations strategy,

it is really funny when you analyze how government institutions report on their activities. If you visit their websites you get the impression that they are the best, and they have accomplished a lot. They are very good in propaganda; they are quite good in praising and advertising the people that manage with these institutions. Aside from websites, government institutions mainly use television to promote their activities. In the Republic of North Macedonia there are around five pro-government TV stations, or better to say government linked media. They always follow government ministers and political leaders in position to promote every single activity that can be used for political marketing.

Another participant answered shortly that “They report only about the prime minister and the ministers and all their moves and activities.”

Albanians are also of the opinion that government institutions do not make public much information about their governance. What is made public is mainly information about their daily activities which can be used for political marketing.

I think that very little information about governance is made public, although they are obliged by the law all the information related to their governance to report to citizens. Although they mainly use their websites to report, I have never seen an open data website where you can get all the information. As usually they do publish their daily activities and some simple statistics which are of no use to citizens.

Besides, Albanians claimed that more is reported on the people that manage the institutions rather than information that would be of any use to the citizens.

Government institutions report mainly on the activities of the people that run these institutions. If we check their websites, they are overloaded with information about the activities of the minister and vice-minister, very little information of public interest, or related to their governance is made public.

Albanians are also of the opinion that government institutions do not portray the real picture of their governance. They think that they are quite selective in the information they make public, thus publishing only information that is in their favor, information that portray them in positive light. This participant added that “They do not make much information public, they only publish information that is in their favor, they are quite selective in the information they make public.” Another participant added that “We need to differentiate between reporting and propaganda. All the information provided by government institutions is lies and disinformation.” Other participants also reported that the information provided by government institutions to not correspond to the actual reality.

It is interesting that the information they publish do not correspond to reality, and the information is tilted to their group or political interests. For example, they claim huge economic growth, whereas on the other side we have economic crisis, this means that these two situations do not correspond to each other. In reality all their reporting is a camouflage, to cover the actual situation rather than report accurately

Albanians also reported that government institutions do not provide financial information about their projects. This participant criticized the government that

... although they promote their main projects as their huge achievements, they never provide detailed financial information related to costs or information related to procurement. This is information that citizens would need to know to understand where their money is spent. This information is also made public in all democratic countries in order to provide accountability to their citizens. Here even if you ask them, such information are never provided.

Another participant also complained that

all the information are propaganda and promotion of their activities. It is really difficult to receive information of public character. For example there have been some important projects in our city, but has been quite difficult to obtain information about how much all that costs, which company was hired to complete the project and all other main developments throughout the project.

On the other side, civil servants also claimed that reporting is mainly done through the websites of government institutions. The official Gazette, daily print, and electronic media are also some of the tools that government institutions use to report on their activities. From all the 20 civil servants that participated in the study, 18 of them mentioned websites and print and electronic media as the main tools government institutions use to report on their activities.

Albanian civil servants shared the same opinion with Albanians that government institutions do not make public much information about their governance. What is made public is main information about their activities that can be used for political marketing purposes? This civil servant working for one of the ministries claimed that

Government institutions literally report nothing. Only during election campaigns they try to report in front of citizens about their main achievements. They never provide information on how they govern with their institutions. For example, our TV stations are full of advertising campaigns of the Ministry of Health, which have nothing to do with the reality in the health sector in the country.

Macedonian civil servants also reported that the information provided by government institutions included mainly daily activities, information about projects implemented, and procedural information. They also claimed to often run information campaigns. Although none of them confessed that information about governance is provided, they think that the information provided is public and useful to all citizens. This civil servant working for one of the agencies of the Health Ministry explained that “All the information we make public are shared with all citizens equally. We provide information about our main activities, health information, etc. We also run on a regular basis health campaigns.” Another civil servant shortly answered that “All information provided is of public character and available to anyone.”

Regarding annual reports, the majority of Albanians claimed that government institutions do not provide annual reports. Even participants that reported that have no idea if annual reports are published; they doubted that annual reports contain truthful information. Besides, no matter if an annual report is published or not, Albanians claimed these annual reports to contain false information that makes it difficult for them to understand what the government

has done. This participant from the city of Struga stated that “I have never had a chance to see or read an annual report from public institutions. Even if they publish, I think that the information provided is useless, camouflaged, and made-up only to positively portray their governance.” Another participant added that:

Although some institution might publish annual reports, the same cannot be trust as the information are normally not true and made up only to portray these institutions or the government in a positive light. The facts are normally manipulated. For example, when it comes to the project Skopje 2014, the government says they have spent 220 million on this project, whereas the opposition accuses the government that the project’s costs were around 800 million Euros. This shows two different views that lets us understand that the information is manipulated.

Albanians also claim that they do not trust whatever is reported from government institutions because of the huge discrepancy between what is reported and what is accomplished in reality. This participant claimed that

It is difficult to trust the information government institutions put down in annual reports. Annual reports provide quite positive picture of these government institutions different from what we experience in reality. Thus, it is hard from these annual reports to understand what has been actually done. We read information that are served to us, information that are not based on facts. I think that these reports are even prepared much earlier than the time they make them public.

Another participant claimed that in these annual reports individuals can find projects or things they have not accomplished, or only partially implemented. This participant added that “I think that the information in annual reports is literally a make-up. Simply, things they have not done they present as done, or projects they have partially accomplished, they report them as finished projects.”

Some Albanian civil servants confessed that annual reports are not published. A civil servants working in the central government claimed that “Annual reports are not published. Some of the previous ministers have published annual reports, however, for the past three years no annual report is published.” Albanian civil servants also conveyed that annual reports that their institutions prepare are sent to the government that then makes it public for the citizens at the end of the year. Thus, they claimed that their institutions do not report directly to the public, rather indirectly through the government. They also claimed that information can be claimed for propaganda or political marketing purposes. This civil servant confessed that

We as a ministry prepare annual reports for the government, meaning that we do also report to someone. What from all these that we report reach citizens I honestly have no idea; we receive no feedback at all. Besides, I think that these annual reports are not based on facts. I think numbers are changed for the sake of propaganda and political marketing.

Another civil servant explained that:

We send annual reports to the government about what we as a ministry or an agency have done. Then the government in a very refined way selects only the information that suits them and then makes it public. They keep saying we have done this, we have done that; however, main problems of citizens are never solved. Thus, all these annual reports are out of reality. From these annual reports you can never obtain an actual picture of their governance. Even when they provide financial information, the information is not detailed, only superficially reported.

Regarding annual reports, Macedonian civil servants reported that their institutions regularly publish annual reports. This participant from among Macedonian civil servants claimed that “Yes, yes, every year we prepare annual reports that are available in both Albanian and Macedonian language. I think citizens from these annual reports can understand what has been done in our institution.” Another civil servant also confessed that

We provide accountability at the end of the year what we have done and report that to citizens. That should always be made available to citizens to let them know what has been done with their money.

Some of the Macedonian civil servant, same as Albanian civil servants, reported that annual reports are prepared for the government which further reports them to the citizens. This Macedonian civil servant explained that

We have internal and external annual reports. We as a regional office of the main ministry provide annual report to the central ministry, which further reports to the government, which then makes the information public to the citizens.

The last two questions about openness focused on how government communicates and inform citizens about new issues, and to what extent news briefings are used and help citizens understand the issues.

Participants claimed that the main channels the government uses to communicate issues to citizens are news conferences, notice boards, daily print, and electronic media, social media, websites, and official gazette. The majority of participants from among Albanians think that news conferences are rarely used, whereas the rest of participants reported that news conferences are not used at all. Albanian civil servants think that news conferences are used, though rarely. Only one of the participant claimed news conferences to be held regularly. A majority reported news conferences to be held regularly at the end of the year for reporting purposes. A majority of Macedonian civil servants also reported news conferences to be used regularly to inform citizens about new issues, and a small number claimed that news conferences are rarely used.

Regarding the use of news conferences in informing citizens to help them understand new issues, Albanians think that news conferences are not used often to inform citizens. They believed that news conferences mainly are held annually to close fiscal year, inform citizens, and praise government for their achievements. This Albanian citizen claimed that

I think that information about new issues is mainly published online or printed and attached to notice boards in the institutions. I think news conferences are not used much, personally have not seen to be held often, mainly press releases distributed to printed and electronic media. News conferences are annually held, when they report to citizens at the end of fiscal year and inform them about their achievements.

Albanians think that news conferences are not meant to inform citizens, but rather used as a tool for propaganda. They think that government uses news conferences only when they have to brag about their achievements. This participant claimed that

They never hold news conferences to inform us about new issues or keep us informed during crises. They hold news conferences only when they have to praise themselves, even in such cases they leave not much room for questions regarding projects or promises they did not manage to accomplish.

Another participant added that

I have mainly seen them to use news conferences to promote their activities, projects and achievements, and in most of the cases the main objective of these conferences is propaganda or political marketing rather than public information.

In addition, they also think that the information provided during news conferences is highly superficial, and not useful to citizens to understand the issues. This makes citizens actively seek additional information in order to understand new issues. An Albanian contended that

Usually information about new issues is published in the official Gazette, daily printed and electronic media and sometimes news conferences. I think news conferences are mainly used to alarm citizens about very important issues, however, to understand the issues at hand you have to actively seek information which can be received from their website, or directly in the institutions.

Of the same opinion was another participant who claimed that “News conferences are only a routine and provide only superficial information. To understand the problem or the issue you need to further seek information either on their website or directly in the institution.”

On the other side, Albanians think that word of mouth is used by Albanians to get informed and consider this method to be more effective compared to news conferences in informing citizens. One participant reported that

press releases and press conferences are mainly used to inform citizens about new issues. However, you can obtain very little information during these press conferences to help you

understand the issues. People are better and faster informed using word of mouth rather than the official information provided from the institutions.

Another participant claimed that

From my personal experience, I think that word of mouth is the most effective way citizens use to get informed about new issues. People that have had previous experiences are mainly asked and referred to in order to obtain information. I think they do not use news conferences for that purpose, news conferences are mainly used for big issues or crises, or when they have to report annually to citizens. Besides, they publish information in the official gazette, however, even there detailed information are not easily accessible to citizens. Thus, citizens obtain information from the news on the media or press releases from the institutions. Still, the information is superficial, and you need to actively seek information to get yourself informed, or you should go directly to the institution for additional information. If the issue at hand does not affect all the citizens it becomes even harder to obtain additional information without being actively involved in seeking additional information.

Citizens are also not satisfied with how the government communicates with them during crises. This citizen considered government to be passive and inactive in providing updated information to citizens during a crisis. He added that

communication and informing citizens in the Republic of North Macedonia is quite bad. I can bring here an example during the floods in the village of Hasanbeg near Skopje. I and other activists have done much more personally to inform citizens with our Facebook page than the government institutions. There was no official communication from the Centre for Crisis Management or other government institutions on what is being done to manage this crisis. They never provided updated information. People got informed more through social media and posts from local citizens about the actual situation in the village. Only when the situation was under control, even though 25 people lost their lives, then they tried to do something and provided very little information. I can say that throughout the crisis they behaved like humanitarian organization and not like a government institution.

On the other side, Albanian civil servants are of the same opinion with Albanians regarding news conferences. Albanian civil servants think that news conferences are not helpful to understand new issues. Instead, they think that they only provide superficial information that results in misunderstandings. One of the participants claimed that

As usually we use websites to inform about new issues, whereas news conferences are only held in urgent cases. I personally do not find news conferences useful and needed, and not at all effective in informing citizens. In some cases news conferences even bring us more problems at work as they do not provide detailed information and bring more misunderstandings, which we have to then handle at work with citizens.

Albanian civil servants also think that news conferences are held annually to report in front of citizens. According to this civil servant,

for new issues or changes we mainly use our website or official gazette. Press conferences we do not hold, normally news conferences are annually when achievements and adoption of new program is promoted to citizens. Thus, citizens should always check our website for updated information.

Still there were participants from among Albanian civil servants that also considered news conferences to be helpful and effective. They measure their effectiveness with the increased number of citizens visiting them after news conferences. An Albanian civil servant stated that “News conferences are helpful, because after each news conference the number of citizens coming to us for help is increased. We are now somehow used to it and after each news conference we expect increased number of citizens.” Another civil servant working in the central government claimed that

I think that the best way to inform citizens is using news conferences. Thus, when there are new issues, news conferences are used and transmitted during prime time news, in both Macedonian and Albanian media. I think this is the most adequate method to inform all citizens.

Compared to Albanians and Albanian civil servants, Macedonian civil servants claimed news conferences to be used regularly when needed. A majority of them answered that news conferences are being used regularly. They also find them helpful for Albanians to understand new issues.

Always, at any time, all new issues or problems have been transparently brought to citizens through news conferences. I find news conferences quite helpful and effective for Albanians and all citizens equally to understand new issues or problems that might arise.

However, there were Macedonian civil servants that thought that it is the issue at hand that makes news conferences or other methods helpful in informing citizens. One of the civil servants working for the Ministry of Health thought that the nature of their activities makes news conferences not adequate in informing citizens. This civil servant added that

citizens, mainly patients are adequately informed through consulting sessions, lectures, flyers, and our official website. News briefings are not used often, and I think that our activities are such that make news briefings not adequate to use. Civil servants working for our ministry are always available to answer and consult citizens about any problem or issue.

To sum up, Albanians and Albanian civil servants evaluated the openness of government institutions to be quite low. On the other side, Macedonian civil servants positively evaluated openness of government institutions. Overall, participants reported notice boards, daily print, and electronic media, social media, websites, official gazette and news conferences to be the main tools used by government institutions to inform citizens. Albanians and Albanian civil servants also claimed that government institutions do not provide much information about their governance. A majority of information provided are related to their daily activities and used mainly for propaganda and political marketing. On the other side, Macedonian civil servants think that all the information provided are meant for all citizens and Albanians are

not discriminated in regards to this. Although they did not claim that information about governance is provided, Macedonian civil servants think that all the information provided are of public character and useful to all citizens.

Regarding annual reports, Albanian and Albanian civil servants thought that annual reports are not published. Besides, even if annual reports are published, Albanians and Albanian civil servants questioned the truthfulness of the facts and information these annual reports contained. Additionally, Albanians and Albanian civil servants also considered that annual reports do not help citizens understand what government has done. On the other side, Macedonian civil servants claimed annual reports to be regularly published. Even if not available directly to the public, Macedonian and Albanian civil servants claimed that they regularly prepare internal annual reports which are sent to the government that further reports to the citizens.

In addition, all participants claimed websites and daily media to be used to communicate new issues to citizens. Albanians think that news conferences are rarely used. They also do not find news briefings to be useful to understand new issues because they only provide superficial information. Macedonian and Albanian civil servants confessed news conferences to be more regularly used. They also find news conferences adequate to inform citizens about new issues.

5.2.5 Assurances

Hon and Grunig (1999) defined assurances as

attempts by parties in the relationship to assure the other parties that they and their concerns are legitimate. This strategy also might involve attempts by the parties in the relationship to demonstrate they are committed to maintaining the relationship. (p.15)

In line with the definition provided by Hon and Grunig, Ki and Hon (2009) defined assurances as “any efforts by an organization to assure its strategic publics that they and their concerns are attended to” (p .9). To measure level of assurances between government and Albanians, the questions focused on how much are civil servants involved in providing personal responses to concerns raised by Albanians. In addition, the aim was to understand to what extent civil servants communicate to Albanians their importance to civil servants. Participants were asked how seriously are concerns raised by Albanians considered, and how much Albanians believe that civil servants care about their concerns. The last set of questions

focused on how much the voice of people is heard in government decisions and to what extent they can influence government decisions.

Albanians think that civil servants are not involved in providing personal responses to their concerns. Albanians felt that civil servants do not really care much about their concerns. This participant described his experience with a civil servant as follows:

I had once a problem and a request I addressed to a civil servant. They do not even try to resolve your problem or help you out, it is easier for them to say we cannot do it, or someone higher in the hierarchy has decided like that. They do not get involved personally to resolve your issue. Mainly when they are not capable to do something, they say “cannot be done,” without even at least asking to give them some time to see if there is something that can be done about this. Simply I saw no personal involvement from civil servants.

Besides, Albanians feel that civil servants only do something they are obliged to; otherwise individual should not expect much help in addressing their concerns. This participant contended that

No, you cannot expect from civil servants to provide personal responses to your concerns. I have the feeling that they are not personally committed; they just do something they are obliged to do, otherwise they just want their office hours to get over”. Another participant added that “At professional level, you can notice they try to help you, however, personally they do not really care much to help you or provide responses to your concerns.

Additionally, Albanians feel that at the lower level of public administration civil servants are more personally involved compared to those at managerial positions. This participant claimed that

At lower levels of public administration Albanians feel that civil servants are more personally involved compared to higher levels of public administrations. At lower levels of public administration I have had few cases and I think they try to help you, however, I think the main problem is at higher levels of public administration where you see no willingness from their side to help you. Civil servants at lower ranks have limited jurisdictions and they cannot do anything without the permission from these people at higher levels of hierarchy. I think this is where the problem starts, because civil servants feel their work is not recognized, or they might even feel not capable to do the job, which further affects their relationship and service they provide to citizens.

Besides, Albanians feel that newly employed civil servants, who are normally employed through political connections, are less involved personally in answering citizen’s concerns. This participant claimed that

personally I have had experiences when civil servants have provided personal responses to my concerns and when they have not been personally involved. In my opinion, I think that newly employed civil servants, or better to call political party militants, they are less committed to help personally, important to them is salary and working hours.

Still, citizens think that they need to persist if they want to get their job done. If individuals are not being pushy and persistent it takes longer to get the job done. In most of the cases, their personal involvement has been quite low. One of the participants confessed that based on all his experiences “the personal involvement of civil servants has been quite low. You really need to pressure them a lot to get your job done.” Another participant further commented that “In all the cases I have had, civil servants showed no personal involvement in answering my request. As usually you have to pressure them, to remind them often, otherwise your request or problem will have to wait quite long to get solved.” One of the participants explained in details how he sees the involvement of civil servants in providing personal responses to their concerns.

Let me explain how I see this. Usually citizens deal with civil servants that are only obliged to do bureaucratic work, collect documents, provide information. This means that these are civil servants that lack decision making power. Personally I have not had any problem because in most of the cases civil servants have been people I have personally known. Thus, I can say that in most of the cases my problems have been solved only because they have known me, and this is not what other citizens without connections normally go through. On the other side, you have to regularly contact them, insist to obtain more information about the stage of the process otherwise your concerns won't receive any response.

Albanians also feel that sometimes individuals need to behave like a beggar to get their attention and get them personally involved in solving the request. Reflecting on his experiences, this participant thinks that

civil servants get your job done only because they have to, or when you pressure them, not arrogantly pressure them, but behaving like a beggar in order to get your job done. Besides, there are cases when civil servants want to get rid of you, so they bring you to other institutions or other people higher in the institution. At times we know that they can get it done, however, for them is easier to direct you somewhere else only to get rid of you.

In addition, Albanians think that cases are rare in which civil servants provide personal responses to their concerns. This might happen only when “civil servants are afraid this can bring them negative consequences” otherwise, “citizens really have to insist to get your job done or problem solved.” Albanians also find civil servants quite involved in providing personal responses when they are personally connected.

I think this very much depends on the personality of civil servants as well as personal connections. If you have someone that you know, everything runs fast and smoothly, and your problem gets solved really fast. For example, it happened to me recently when I went to one of the regional offices of the Ministry of Interior for some documents, and on the main hall I met a civil servant we have studied together. He took all the documents from me, and within few minutes he was back with all that I needed. So it is this easy when you know someone, otherwise, you have to wait a lot, even though your problem can be solved immediately.

On the other side, Albanian civil servants claimed to be committed to providing personal responses to Albanians; however, they complained again of limited jurisdictions. Thus, limited jurisdictions seem to dictate how much they can personally help citizens:

Honestly speaking we try our best, however, how much we can help does not depend on us, we really have limited jurisdictions. We know that our society faces huge problems, people need not only help, a simple smile can help a lot in certain cases. However, we are really limited, even if we want to personally help them, we cannot decide something on our own, because we have huge repercussions immediately, including losing your job.

Still, Albanian civil servants confessed that their involvement in providing personal responses to citizens is not at a satisfactory level. According to them this can be due to professional deficiencies, or low participation of Albanian civil servants in managerial positions. An Albanian civil servant working at the central government thinks that

the level of involvement of Albanian civil servants in providing personal responses to Albanians is not satisfactory. Unfortunately this can be because of professional deficiencies of Albanian civil servants. Besides, Albanians are not much represented at higher levels of public administration. For example in our ministry there are more than ten departments, however, none of them is led by an Albanian.

In addition, Albanian civil servants also claimed that they try to do their job professionally, although that might not be seen as being personally involved by Albanians. According to this Albanian civil servant

any problem that Albanians report to me and is within my jurisdictions, I try my best to help them. I try to professionally handle their request, although they might not like it, or might perceive it as we do not care much about them. However, in most of the cases, even if we cannot help, we direct them to the appropriate institutions. I think that in our institution even other civil servants do their job professionally and according to the law on Public Administration.

Macedonian civil servants, on the other side, claimed to be more personally involved in answering concerns raised by Albanians. A majority of them claimed that “they and their colleagues are maximally involved in helping citizens.” This Macedonian civil servant claimed that “her efforts are always at highest level within my human and professional competencies. My impression is that I and my colleagues in my institution do our best to help citizens despite their ethnic or professional background.” Still there were civil servants that confessed that they do not care much about the concerns of citizens. This civil servant shortly answered “Honestly I am not worried about their problems.”

They also confessed that everything is done within their assigned jurisdictions and competencies. This civil servant accepted that they

try to help all citizens that might need their assistance. However, honestly I do not make any extraordinary efforts to help them, only what I simply can do. Thus, I do not make exceptional efforts to address their problems, only if there is someone that personally addresses his concerns to me.

Besides, they again claimed to treat all citizens equally, despite their ethnic or religious background. This Macedonian civil servant confessed that “I personally try and work to help solve the problems or fulfill requests that citizens might have. I do not look at their ethnicity or religious background, I behave professionally and I am personally involved to serve all citizens.”

Regarding communication of citizen’s importance to civil servants, Albanians claimed that in their communication with civil servants they never feel they are important to them. Some of the responses received from Albanians included: “only in your dreams,” “the term importance does not exist for them,” “citizen is never important to government institutions.” “they do not care about us,” and “you never feel you are important to civil servants.” Albanians also do not think that civil servants seriously take into consideration concerns raised by them. Additionally, Albanians do not believe that civil servants and government institutions care about their concerns.

Albanians also find civil servant quite arrogant, and in their opinion, with “their arrogance and bossy attitude it is hard to communicate to citizens that they are important to them.” Albanians also think that if in all democratic countries civil servants are considered “servants of the people,” in the Republic of North Macedonia it is the opposite. This participant thought that

you never feel important if you go to any government institution or deal with civil servants. They always feel superior to citizens, as well as bosses of their position. You often notice their bossy attitude towards citizens.

Albanians also think that unprofessional behavior and lack of training can be the reason civil servants do not communicate to Albanians their importance to them. According to this participant

it is all related to unprofessional public administration. Civil servants are not competent for the position they hold, thus they do care only about their salary at the end of the month, and they never manage to convey to citizens that they are civil servants, they are there to serve people, here they do not feel like that nor convey that to citizens.

Another participant thinks that this can be a matter of personality; however

lack of training and professional behavior makes civil servants fail in communicating to citizens their importance”. This participant adds that “civil servants feel they have always

rights, and politeness is something you can rarely experience when dealing with civil servants.

Albanians also think that personal connections and strong political ties can make civil servants seriously consider your concerns. They also claimed that citizens without any personal connection are often discriminated and prone to arrogant behavior. Albanians think that civil servants can treat you seriously only if they “doubt that you have strong political ties, because they can then have serious repercussions. If people without connections go to them, they can suffer a lot from their arrogance.” This Albanian participant explained how personal connections give you priority in government institutions:

Personally I can confess that I have managed to get things done really fast only because I have known people. However, I know cases that have asked for help and they have not been able to get their problems solved only because they do not know anyone working in that institution. Overlooking of citizens without connections is quite normal here, and those people that have personal connections are always privileged not only within public administration, but also in other public institutions like hospitals. If you personally know someone you overcome all the barriers, and even if there might be a lot of people waiting to be served, you will overpass them and be served immediately. And all this results in frustration, mistrust, and dissatisfaction because people feel discriminated and overlooked.

Albanians also believe that civil servants care more about their salary and office hours rather than concerns raised by citizens. Albanians believe that civil servants “do not really care if you have a problem or any urgency, they do care only to get those office hours done, and to receive their salary at the end of the month.” Albanians also believe that civil servants do not care how much effective work they manage to do within those 8 hours. Thus citizens should be pushy if they want their problems to be treated seriously.

Still, Albanian civil servants claimed that they try their best to communicate to Albanians their importance to them. They also claimed they “personally do not discriminate citizens” based on personal connections. They confess to treating all citizens equally. Albanians civil servants think that communication of importance is perceived only if you manage to help them solve their problem.

I don't know how can you communicate importance when you have limited competencies and jurisdictions to get their job done. They measure importance to them with the accomplishment of their request or their problem being solved. Once you can manage to help them, they feel automatically important, if you say that you cannot help them, they will automatically start with accusations.

Albanian civil servants also think that they personally take seriously all concerns raised by Albanians. They also claim that they feel more obliged to help Albanians because they are employed there to serve and represent them. However, civil servants think that at institutional

level concerns raised by Albanians are not considered seriously. They say that they have limited jurisdictions and it is at higher levels where decisions are taken that their concerns should be taken seriously. This civil servant thought that “concerns raised by Albanians are not at all considered seriously, being it personally, at group level or even political level.” Another civil servant explained how concerns raised by Albanians are treated at institutional level, within their organization.

Sincerely, concerns raised by Albanians are not considered seriously, even if they are being pushy chances are high to be overlooked or neglected, or there will be given hundreds of justifications not to fulfill their requests. Still, I think that Albanians know that government does not care about them, and they are used to this politics, and they know that this kind of discrimination is obvious. They are aware how the country is governed, how decisions are taken, and how much the government cares about citizens.

Albanian civil servants think that Albanians do not believe that they and the institutions they work for care about concerns raised by Albanians. One civil servant explained that

Albanians do not believe at all that government institutions care about their concerns. I say this because they have never proven them the opposite. Let me give you an example. Before a year, in August 2015 Tetovo was flooded, and we saw no interest from government institutions to help us. There was a damaged bridge, the police or other competent institutions hesitated to even put assign that people are exposed to risk if they use the bridge. I personally tried to use my authority as a civil servant and asked for help from authorities. I did ask for something they are obliged to do, and at the end they still showed no interest to help. Now how can Albanians believe that government cares about their concerns.

Albanian civil servants also think that in general Albanians go to them with previously held prejudices that civil servants do not take seriously their concerns. In some cases they claimed to have convinced them that we do really care about them and their concerns.

Macedonian civil servants also confessed to always communicate to Albanians their importance. They say that they treated all citizens equally and preferred not to differentiate Albanians from other ethnic groups. They also contended to seriously consider all concerns raised by Albanians. Same like Albanian civil servants, there were also participants from Macedonian civil servants that think that not only Albanians but all citizens do not believe that government cares about them: “We as a public institution, we always care to reduce concerns and problems that people might have. Generally, I think that not only Albanians, all citizens believe that government does not care about citizens.” Another participant added that

To me all citizens are important, I never label people based on their ethnic or religious background, to me this has no importance, we are all the same. Besides, I think that we do always seriously consider all their concerns raised by Albanians. However, from my own experience, and from the people that I know, I think that majority of Albanians do not believe that government institutions care about their concerns, although there are people that

believe the opposite. However, it is the same with the rest of us, some do believe and some don't, no matter what their ethnicity or religion is.

There were also participants that confessed to only do their job professionally, and people are not important to her. This Macedonian civil servant kept it short : “I just do my job, people are not important to me.”

One Macedonian civil servant explained how trust and respect could be increased between people of different ethnicities. This civil servant believed that

All of us regardless if he is Albanian or Macedonian should try to help others, to create more interpersonal trust and respect, which I think results in more inter-ethnic tolerance. When we all do this there would be no doubts from both sides about the sincerity of our behavior and respect.

From among Macedonian civil servants, there were also participants that think that Albanians believe that the government cares about their concerns. This civil servant thought that

majority of citizens believe that government care about them and their concerns. However, I can say that there is a serious percentage, especially among youngsters that have lost hope and do not believe that government institutions can change their situation for better. However, I think that this is the same among Albanians and Macedonians as well.

However, Macedonian civil servants also think that Albanians do not believe that the government cares about them only because they do not want to believe. They think that this is all influenced by nationalism, which in their opinion is still very much present in the country.

This civil servant added

I think that they do not believe, nor they want to believe that government cares about their concerns. I think that they only believe that they cannot get what they deserve, that they are discriminated, however this is not true. From my own experience, I think that Albanians are more of a collectivist culture, always ask for their own people, which I think that should not be emphasized much. To me individuals are more important. I see no need for Albanians to socialize collectively. I think that services are available to all citizens, and I do not understand why for example they should search for certain doctor, lawyer, or civil servant only because he is Albanian. We should emphasize more quality and competence of people and not ethnic or religious belongingness.

The last few questions about assurances focused on the level of involvement of Albanians in decision making, and law and policy development. A majority of Albanians think that in the Republic of North Macedonia it is still possible to raise an issue or propose a solution. However, the problem is that such moves from citizens are never considered; their voices are never heard. This participant thought that

In the Republic of North Macedonia you have the opportunity to propose something, file a request, complain about something, however, the crucial problem is that your complaints, suggestions are never considered nor implemented. This means that you can speak, raise

your voice but nobody hears you from government, from those that have to hear you. Thus, you have the freedom to express something but not to get heard at the same time.

This participant also added that in the Republic of North Macedonia it is also impossible for Albanians to influence or change government decisions, both as an individual or in groups. According to this participant

No, in any way you cannot as an individual influence or change any government decision. There have been cases, even myself have been personally involved in groups of NGOs, even as a student I have been part of different student associations, and all our activism went in one ear and out the other. Thus, even as a group we were not able to change government decisions. To make it clear will provide an example. The government took a decision that priority in employment is given to students from universities that rank higher in the Republic of North Macedonia. We as a student association protested in front of the government asking that individuals and not universities are evaluated. Thus, we used all the opportunities at hand to change this government decision, signed a petition, filed complaint and a request to the parliament to initiate law amendment, however it was never considered. This shows how unimportant we are to the government. This also shows that everything in the Republic of North Macedonia depends on the will of the coalition partners. Honestly there are lots of cases like this that is even hard to count.

Overall, Albanians think that it is impossible to influence government decisions. They also firmly believe that the voices of people are never heard. This participant thought that “It might be written in the law that you can propose something or you can raise concerns, however, in reality this is impossible, such initiatives are never considered.” According to this participant

being it individually or in groups the opinion of citizens is never considered. We have the case of “Jugohrom.” This factory pollutes the whole Polog region, and been quite long that the population protests and ask that the factory installs filters or stops its operation. They protest because they are being poisoned. The number of people diagnosed with cancer has increased, and people are quite worried. And been quite long and they have not managed to find a solution . Government can help resolve the case, but does not care, they are more worried about their interest. Thus, individually chances are zero to influence decision. As a group only huge radicalization can somehow influence government decisions, for example street blocking, factory entrance blocking, etc. Maybe they could have more effect. However, chances as an individual to influence government decisions or to get them consider any of your proposals are below zero.

Albanians also think that it is possible to influence decisions only if there is political will within the coalition partners or if they see it important to incorporate in their political agenda. This participant thought that to change government decisions or get your voice heard in the Republic of North Macedonia

is possible only in your dreams. There is no way, even if you create a group, or different other groupings. In most of the cases it will all depends if the same problem or solution is in the political agenda of the political parties in position, or if there exists political will among these political parties.

Albanians also think that only before elections “meetings with citizens intensify, and after elections you won’t be able to meet or talk to them until the next elections. Public debates or hearings even for the most crucial issues are not practiced in the Republic of North Macedonia.” However, according to Albanians, although political parties call these meetings before elections public hearings, they consider them nothing but “political marketing” because after elections all their promises “fall in deaf ears.”

Albanians also think that it is difficult for the main Albanian political party to influence government decisions, not to talk about other groups, NGOs, or individuals, which is impossible. This participant thought that

for the representatives of Albanians in the government as well as Parliament, being in position or opposition, is difficult to influence government decisions and implementation of government programme. It is clear now how easy it can be for other groups, NGOs, or individuals. Level of activism is quite low in the Republic of North Macedonia, even if there is little activism from time to time, government stems it and does not want to hear about people. Everything depends on their political will and the interest of the political parties they represent.

Albanians also consider that government has turned citizens into voting machines only, and there is no two-way communication that would help citizens propose solutions or influence decisions. When asked if it is possible to influence government decisions, this participant answered that it is

absolutely not possible, in the Republic of North Macedonia. People are turned into tools and machines to win elections, to elect “kings” to steal and torture you for the next four years. Institutions play the role of a monarchy and not democracy in the Republic of North Macedonia. Communication always comes from top-down and there is no two-way communication. This shows that public opinion is not important to government as long as they can win elections.

Albanian civil servants also agree with Albanians that it is hard to influence government decisions. Same like Albanians, Albanian civil servants also think that people’s voices are not heard and that everything, all the decisions are taken depend on the political will of the parties in position. They also think that in the Republic of North Macedonia laws are not a problem; the implementation of the law is the main problem. According to this Albanian civil servant

influencing government decisions in the Republic of North Macedonia is possible only in our dreams. The laws in the Republic of North Macedonia are not bad, they have somehow tried to enact copy-paste laws according to the EU legislation. However, the main problem is implementation of the same law, which all depends on the political will of the parties in coalition.

Albanian civil servants think that it is economic development and poverty that stems activism in the Republic of North Macedonia. Civil servants think that people do not really know their true power, and they think that they will have to wait until people are fed up in order to initiate changes.

... If there is not the earthquake to destroy your house, you won't build a new one. People in general now in the Republic of North Macedonia are living in poverty, many migrated for better economic wellbeing, and those left do not react or stand up although they know and experience these problems every day. However, they have not yet recognized their true power. As individuals Albanians cannot influence government decisions, we are not Europe: as a group it will all depend on the political will, and the political parties in position. Been cases these parties have isolated or corrupted two, three main people from activist groups and managed to stem activism. We have experienced many cases when activist groups have stopped activism after few days, or citizens movements that have disappeared. In the Republic of North Macedonia everyone has people employed in the government institutions, and their economic sustainability and wellbeing of their families depends very much from this employment. They will immediately threaten them, intimidate, making them act according to their will and desire. Whereas to the question if the voice of people is being heard, I think that it only happens superficially, during elections to show that they are true democrats and that they care about people, however, it only remains a pre-election political campaign.

There are also civil servants among Albanians that think that everything depends on the will of the Macedonian political party in position. This civil servant expressed the inferiority and inability of the Albanian political party in position. According to this civil servant, interest and power of Albanian NGOs are also quite low.

Any law, any policy that has to be passed in the parliament has to go through different commissions where Albanian representatives are also involved, and they can in any case raise their voice or communicate to them the concerns raised by Albanians. However, to influence government decisions chances are very low, in our ministry as well as other government institutions. Even as a group they can propose something, or come up with certain movement which sees no results at the end. Besides, the interest of Albanian NGOs is quite low. For example in different government commissions we have representative from different NGOs, local and international, but from Albanian NGOs we do not see to send any representative, or to at least have proposed something in the last few years I have worked here. In any case, I think everything depends on the political will of the Macedonian political party in position. This is now a public secret, they all know that for the Albanian political party to become part of the coalition is to respect the programme and agenda of the Macedonian political party that has won elections.

Moreover, Albanian civil servants blame the political system and lack of democratic values prevailing in the country to stem public debates and activism. This civil servant thinks that

we are far away from Europe and democratic values. We can protest every day, however success depends from the agreement of the two political parties in position, meaning their political will. Until know nothing has changed or succeeded as a result of protests or civic demands.

It is also the way laws and new policies are enacted in the Republic of North Macedonia that makes civil servant doubt that proposals from citizens or their representatives are considered.

According to this civil servant

we are witnessing that laws and new policies in the Republic of North Macedonia are enacted that fast that lets us understand that Albanians and other citizens have very little access or possibility to raise concerns or propose solutions about new laws, policies or government projects. Thus, access of publics in these procedures is quite limited and not transparent. When a new law has to be enacted, or there should be amendments to current laws and procedures, opinion of experts, affected publics, NGOs should be considered through public debates and then parliament should continue with its procedures to enact the law or policy. However, Albanians have no access or possibility to influence any decision or raise concerns they might have regarding certain laws or policies. All this is due to political environment in the country and the inferior position of the Albanian political party in the government.

On the other side, Macedonian civil servants think that in the last few years the status and political power of Albanians have extensively improved so that their voices are heard. This Macedonian civil servant thought that “Albanians are equal citizens in the Republic of North Macedonia, so I think they take part equally in creating issues and proposing different solutions. They play important role in influencing decision making.” Another participant added:

Up to now, from my personal experience regarding the Albanians, I think that they have made great progress in their involvement in all institutions and segments of life, and most of the issues that they themselves have been appealing at lately, they have them achieved. They are actively involved in the Government in the adoption of laws, policies, and regulations. They have the right to discuss and express their opinion and are properly represented from other minorities in the country.

However, there was a civil servant that considers involvement of Albanians in decision making exaggerated, saying that “they are involved in all the areas of political life and decision making, even more than they deserve to be involved.” Macedonian civil servants also blamed Albanians that to them important are only their “ethnic issues and they have no other aspirations or interests in relations to creating and proposing policies for the good of the whole society.”

Nevertheless, the majority of Macedonian civil servants think that government institutions and government, in general, consider views of Albanians in decision and policymaking.

Our institution, and my department in particular, at large considers the views of citizens, because all policies and programmes developed are based on an open process where all interested citizens can participate to express their opinion or their ideas they might have, and to a large extent their views are considered if they match with the strategic priorities of the government. Let’s take for example our national strategy for youth which was an open

process where our agency called all those interested no matter of their ethnicity or religion to participate together with our work groups in discussing the topics part of the national strategy.

Still, there are Macedonian civil servants that blamed the political system and government for not considering the views of all citizens, not only Albanians in decision and policymaking.

I think that Albanians like any other citizen in the country are equal citizens. According to me, government should always consider the views of citizens, Macedonians, Albanians and all other ethnicities that live in the country in their decision and policy making because this is for the good of the society. Political system and ruling coalition is such that the views of all citizens not only views of Albanians and Macedonians are taken into consideration. This makes it hard for individuals as well as groups to influence government decisions.

Macedonian civil servants also think that the government only declaratively considers citizens views, which does not mean that they will succeed at the end because it depends on the political will if their views are considered in decision making. According to this civil servant “Everything depends on the political will of the ruling parties, even if they ask citizens for an opinion that is only declarative, just to hear them, does not mean they are going to implement the same.” According to Macedonian civil servants, even if the voice of Albanians is being heard, it is a little bit difficult to influence government decisions. This civil servant admitted that

It is really difficult to influence government decisions. Maybe they can be heard individually or as a group, but to influence government decisions is really hard. We have not yet come to that position or better say level of democracy that individuals or group could influence government decisions.

To sum up, on assurances, Albanians felt that civil servants are not involved in providing personal responses to their concerns. Albanians felt that civil servants do not really care much about their concerns and they only do something they are obliged to do. Albanians considered that at lower level of public administration civil servants are more personally involved compared to those at managerial positions. To get the attention of civil servants and involve them personally in solving your request, Albanians considered that you either should be persistent or behave like a beggar. Albanians also claimed that civil servants provide personal responses to your concerns only when civil servants are afraid this can bring them negative consequences, or when you are personally connected to someone higher in the hierarchy or in the political parties in position. Regarding communication of citizen’s importance to civil servants, Albanians claimed that in their communication with civil servants they never feel they are important to them. Albanians also find civil servant quite arrogant. Albanians again considered that only personal connections and strong political ties can make civil servants

seriously consider your concerns. With regards to involvement in decision making, majority of Albanians thought that in the Republic of North Macedonia it is still possible to raise an issue or propose a solution. However, the problem is that such moves from citizens are never considered; their voices are never heard. Albanians think that it is impossible to influence government decisions. They also firmly believed that the voices of people are never heard. Albanians also believed that it is possible to influence decisions only if there is political will within the coalition partners or if they see it important to incorporate in their political agenda.

On the other side, Albanian civil servants claimed to be committed to providing personal responses to Albanians. Still they complained again of limited jurisdictions. Besides, Albanian civil servants confessed that their involvement in providing personal responses to citizens is not at a satisfactory level. Albanian civil servants also claimed that they try to do their job professionally, although that might not be seen as being personally involved by Albanians. Regarding communication of importance, Albanian civil servants claimed that they try their best to communicate to Albanians their importance to them. They also claimed they “personally do not discriminate citizens” based on personal connections and that they personally take seriously all concerns raised by Albanians. Albanian civil servants thought that Albanians do not believe that they and the institutions they work for care about concerns raised by Albanians. Albanian civil servants also agreed with Albanians that it is hard to influence government decisions. Same like Albanians, Albanian civil servants also thought that people’s voices are not heard and that everything, all the decisions are taken depend on the political will of the parties in position. Albanian civil servants blamed political system and lack of democratic values prevailing in the country to stem public debates and activism.

Compared to their Albanian colleagues, even though there were few cases in which Macedonian civil servants confessed that they do not care much about the concerns of citizens, a majority of Macedonian civil servants claimed to be more personally involved in answering concerns raised by Albanians. Macedonian civil servants also confessed to always communicate to Albanians their importance. They also contended to seriously consider all concerns raised by Albanians. There were also participants from Macedonian civil servants that think that not only Albanians but all citizens do not believe that government cares about them. However, the majority of them thought that Albanians believe that government cares about their concerns. Macedonian civil servants think that in the last few years the status and political power of Albanians have extensively improved so that their voices are heard.

Moreover, majority of Macedonian civil servants think that government institutions and government, in general, consider views of Albanians in decision and policymaking.

5.3 Relationship Outcomes

5.3.1 Trust

The questions related to trust probed to understand how much Albanians trust the government and its institutions. The questions aimed to explore integrity, dependability, and competence. Regarding integrity, participants were asked if the government treated Albanians fairly and justly. In addition, to explore dependability participants were asked to describe things that the government and its institutions have done that indicate that the government can be relied on to keep promises. Participants also were asked about the competence of government institutions, their ability to accomplish whatever they have promised. The last question was used to uncover overall how much Albanians trusted government in the Republic of North Macedonia. Almost all Albanians confessed that the government treats them unfairly and unjustly. From all nineteen participants, eighteen of them answered to be treated unfairly and unjustly. Albanians feel to be treated unfairly and unjustly not only by government institutions but by civil servants as well. They admit that citizens are not treated equally and fair and usually people with personal connections are privileged. This Albanian citizen felt that “as an equal citizen in this country I feel I’m not treated fair and correctly, being it from civil servants or from government in general. For example when dealing with civil servants they usually favor some citizens compared to other.”

Other participants confessed that even if they are being treated fairly by civil servants, they think Albanians are in general treated unfairly and unjustly by the government. This participant claimed that

From my own experience I have been treated fairly by civil servants when I had to issue various documents. I think the treatment was fair. However, if we speak about treatment of Albanians by government it is unfair and unjust. Even 15 years after the war there is still discrimination on ethnic basis, and all citizens are not treated equally. Normally Macedonians are more privileged and benefit much more from central government. For example municipalities where live Macedonians receive much more funds and budget from central government than municipalities where Albanians are majority.

When asked to ground their answers why they think they are not treated fairly, Albanians listed few reasons that make them feel that way, such as discrimination, unequal representation, economic discrimination, corruption, and lack of meritocracy and

professionalism. One of the participants, a student at the State University of Tetova felt that the government treats Albanians unfairly. As an example he mentioned his university which according to him

even though is the second largest university in the country where Albanian is used as a medium of instruction, it receives two or three times less budget from the government than other universities in Macedonia that have much less students than State University of Tetova.

Besides, Albanians felt they were less represented in the government compared to Macedonians. According to this participant

We are being treated unfairly and unjustly as Albanians. I would mention the number of Albanians working in the public institutions. It is quite low which I consider to be unfair in comparison to the actual number of Albanians living in the Republic of North Macedonia. Besides, we are discriminated in infrastructure. There is a huge infrastructural difference between places inhabited mainly by Macedonians compared to those where Albanians are majority. Even in the capital Skopje there is huge infrastructural difference between the so called "Albanian part" and "Macedonian part" of Skopje.

Albanian civil servants do share the same opinion with Albanians. All of the interviewees from Albanian civil servants admitted Albanians to be treated unfairly and unjustly by the government. They also feel that Albanians are still discriminated and not treated equally to Macedonians. According to this Albanian civil servant

Albanians are not treated fairly. I would here bring into attention the law on natality which was considered to be a racist and later was rejected by constitutional court as it favored Macedonians only. This law tells us how fairly government treats Albanians.

To provide further explanation, in 2008 the Republic of North Macedonia adopted a law to stimulate natality, where government pays a monthly sum of 135 Euros for 15 years for the third child. This law was quite selective when it was first enacted as it applied only to municipalities that suffered from low birth rate. Considering the fact that Albanian municipalities have high birth rates, they felt discriminated and protested the law and asked that the same is applicable to all citizens. The law was later amended to apply equally to all citizens. Albanians felt that government was afraid and worried about the growing number of Albanians. For example, Marusic (2011) explained that the data from the State Statistical Office in 2009 showed that there were 2,000 less ethnic Macedonians at the end of 2009, as deaths outnumbered births that year in the country's mainstream community. On the other side, the same year the number of Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia increased by about 4,500. The number of Albanians has grown steadily throughout the years. In the 1981

census they numbered 377,000, in the 1981 census, 429,000 in 1991 and 506,000 in 2002 (Marusic, 2011).

Other civil servants think that treatment is, in general, unfair and unjust and the main reason is discrimination on ethnic basis. This civil servant claimed that

in general government treats us unfairly and unjustly. If I have to give you an example, I have plenty of them, especially ethnic discriminations. For example the law on natality, publication of encyclopedia that was quite offensive to ethnic Albanians, budget allocation, etc. It is quite obvious if you visit the capital city, you can see huge difference between the two sides of river Vardar. The Albanian part is quite different and less developed than the Macedonian part. Besides, government divides citizens and discriminates them in various ways through investments and projects, schools, sport halls, etc. Schools where Macedonians learn are quite different from those where Albanians learn. Usually schools of ethnic Albanians are quite old, and bad conditions. In general government invests less in places where Albanians are majority. For example there was a school in an Albanian village that burned down. It took quite long until the school was restored, and it was built privately by citizens. I'm sure if this happened among Macedonians the state would rebuild the same school within a week.

Albanians also thought that it is through the selective application of the law that government treats Albanians unfairly and unjustly, although laws in paper are equal to all citizens. This civil servant thought that "law is the same for all citizens, it is the approach that is quite selective. There is no different law for Albanians or Macedonians, the law is for all, however, the law is not applied the same to Macedonians and Albanians." However, this civil servant blamed coalition partners from among Macedonian and Albanian political parties that because of "business connections and corruption fail to implement the law and projects equally to all citizens. They do have a political agreement among them from the beginning how they are going to govern, so it is quite obvious why there is lack of investments among ethnic Albanians."

Contrary to Albanians and Albanian civil servants, Macedonian civil servants thought that after the Ohrid framework agreement Albanians were treated fairly and justly. They mentioned that Albanians now have all that they need, schools, and universities in Albanian, official use of Albanian language, ministers, increased employment of Albanians in government institutions, and equal treatment like all other citizens in the country. According to this civil servant

After the Ohrid Framework Agreement I consider that Albanians have improved their rights and conditions, state university, proportional employment, institutional use of Albanian language, etc. Thus I think that they are treated fairly and correctly like all other citizens.

In addition, Macedonian civil servants also think that Albanians are not discriminated. This Macedonian civil servant claimed that

Albanians are treated fair and correct not only at institutional level, but at government level as well. At governmental level I think they have now achieved a lot through politics. I think that a qualified Albanian can easily achieve and enjoy all the rights that government has to offer. Although I think that everything is highly politicized in the Republic of North Macedonia, still there is no ethnic or individual discrimination.

Regarding dependability, Albanians think that government and government institutions cannot be relied on to keep promises. According to Albanians government usually promised more than they can achieve. Thus, this huge promise-achievement discrepancy makes Albanians think that government cannot be relied on to keep promises.

Usually they promise a lot and usually only a quite small percentage of it can be achieved. In the last few elections parties in power have won elections by promising accession into NATO and EU, reduce unemployment, prevention of migration, etc. Even after two or three mandates they have not managed to accomplish what they have promised, it has even become worse.

Besides, Albanians believed that during elections “we have a repetition of the same promises” which is a crucial indicator to how much citizens can rely on government to keep promises. Another participant added:

Well, in general government in the Republic of North Macedonia from the very first day of independence and even in the last few mandates is characterized and known for not keeping promises. Been a decade they keep promising access to NATO, EU, reducing unemployment rate, salary increase, etc. All these remain difficult challenges for the government in the last 15 years. Let me give you a simple example, during the last election campaigns, vice prime minister promised 60000 new employment opportunities, but even he himself is aware that they are not able and they lack strategy to employ 6000 and not 60000.

According to Albanians, they usually have irrational promises, but in practice, they do nothing. Albanians are also critical to the Albanian political party in power for not being able to keep its promises. According to this participant

Now I personally think that we should differentiate institutions run by Macedonians and Albanians. Macedonians manage to achieve large number of their promises, whereas institutions run by ethnic Albanians fail to accomplish their promised projects.

Another participant added that “As the most accurate indicator of promised given by the Albanian political party is their election programme and platform. If we check their election programme we find promises they have kept promising for the last 15 years.” Albanians considered all promises given by politicians to be lies as practice has shown that they do not keep promises.

Promises are really huge compared to how much they can achieve. Zero can be achieved in comparison to what they promise. Personally I think that all promises are lies, and there is nothing true when they promise something. For example, economic development, new employment opportunities, whereas on the other side we have exodus of youth in the western countries. This shows how much they keep promises.

Albanian civil servants do share the same opinion with Albanians regarding promises. They think that only a small portion of what is promised is kept at the end of each mandate. Albanian civil servants think that all their promises are made for political marketing to get as many votes as possible. This civil servant thought that people do not believe anymore that they can achieve anything from what is promised.

I think that they really promise a lot that makes people not trust them anymore. They keep repeating the same promises each election campaign, they will only play with the numbers to confuse voters. Thus, when you hear the government say that will open 6000 new job opportunities is hard to believe that can be achieved, and not 60000 which to people is something impossible to achieve. 600 is the actual number that corresponds to how much they have been capable to achieve in the last few years. Thus, economic regression and lack of new employment opportunities has resulted in making public administration the main job market in the country. We have people that are employed but stay at home because public administration is overloaded. You can see offices with 10 civil servants and only one or two computers. Because there is no space for new employments in public administration, government is forced to employ them and let them stay at home just to reduce unemployment rate and secure voters because usually those employed by the political parties will have to bring votes during the elections. So all this is done for political marketing purposes, just to stay as long as possible in position.

Albanian civil servants also think that the inferior position of the Albanian political party in position has made Albanians lose hope that promises given by them can be met. This civil servant claimed that

In the Republic of North Macedonia government is divided in two parts, one part is constituted by the party that has won the elections among Macedonians and the second part is represented by the political party winner from Albanian political parties. Considering the inferior and bad position of the Albanian political party in the coalition, people hardly can believe that even the smallest promises can be achieved, being it promises related to improving political, economic, and cultural status of Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia. I think that nothing in practice is done which has made people lose trust in government and its institutions.

On the other side, there are also Macedonian civil servants that thought that there is huge difference between what is promised and what is actually achieved. This civil servant thought that “government promises are that big that only in your dreams can be achieved.” However, there are Macedonian civil servants that could confirm and assure us that “all promises are met without any exception.” Another civil servant added that “Albanians can rely on government to keep its promises because all what is promised is kept until know from government.” However, a significant number of Macedonian civil servants differentiated their

institutions from central government, although they are all controlled by central government. Some of them confessed that “our institutions has achieved completely all that we have promised, however, I cannot say the same for the government in general.” In general, Macedonian civil servants think that Albanians can rely on government to keep promises.

The next question regarding trust aimed at understanding how confident are Albanians that civil servants and government institutions have the ability to accomplish what they have said they will do. It was surprising to hear that a significant number of Albanians thought that government institutions have enough capacity to accomplish what they say they will. However, they fail at turning words into actions, which they considered to be due to lack of desire to govern responsibly. Albanians thought that personal and group interest prevails over the interest and welfare of the society. One of the participants claimed that “we should not under evaluate their capacity. I think they do not lack capacity, they only lack desire to govern responsibly. Besides they do have other personal and group interests and priorities that prevail over the interest of society.” Another participant thought that it was the will that they lack and not capacity. This participant added that

it is not a matter of capacity to accomplish what they say they will do but a matter of will. No one tries to do more than they have to. Main problem is that they have no willingness to work hard to do more.

According to another participant

capacity exists, but the desire to govern properly lacks. I think that if they have capacity for corruption, money laundering, stealing, misuse of government capacities, I think that they do also have capacity to govern properly as they are supposed to govern.

Albanians also think that it is the underground “mafia” that controls the government and not capacity why they do not accomplish what they say they will. This participant considered that “this state is controlled by the “mafia,” and such a government and way of ruling the country is in their favor. Simply, they just want the country to run the way it does at the moment.”

However, the majority of Albanians thought that the government has no capacity to accomplish what they say they will. According to them it is lack of meritocracy and unprofessionalism that government institutions lack. Also, Albanians thought that “usually compared to their capacity they promise much more than they can do.” Another participant stated

there is lack of managerial, financial and technological capacity to keep their promises. Besides, I think there is exaggerated bureaucracy, and defects in the system. According to

me the main problem are unqualified civil servants employed as political party militants which we have in large groups in the Republic of North Macedonia. I think there is some room for improvement, but that is how they want it to be.

Another participant took as an example the Gallery of Arts in Tetovo which is directed and managed by someone with a veterinary degree and appointed by the political party without considering his qualifications and suitability for the position. He claimed that such cases in the Republic of North Macedonia, especially among Albanians are numerous. Other participants think that is not capacity, but mismanagement that makes government fail to accomplish what they promise.

It is quite interesting if we analyze the position of the Republic of North Macedonia, its population, strategic position, natural resources, it can be compared to countries like Slovenia or Switzerland. However, if we analyze governance, it is way behind these two countries. Thus, a country of two million people not to be able to manage its resources, the problem is mismanagement and nothing else. The Republic of North Macedonia has young labor force, natural resources, strategic position, and at the same time it has economic crisis, which I find illogical. I think this is a matter of mismanagement. For example this business that I run here, despite the resources that I have, if I do not manage properly I think I will fail at the end, same as this country of ours fails.

Albanian civil servants without any exception thought that capacity exists. They think the main problem is the desire to govern properly.

I think that they have capacity, however, once they get into the government seats they become “demotivated” and lack willingness to govern and work hard to achieve what they have promised. I think that their government programme is acceptable and can be implemented.

Another civil servant claimed that it is the financial capacity that the government lacks to accomplish what they promise. According to this participant “they make promises for a budget of 20 billion Euros whereas country’s budget is 3 billion euro”. Another participant commented as follows:

I think that they do have human resources capacity, however, I think that they lack other resources, financial resources mainly. They do have deficit in their budget, and for most of their promised project they lack financial resources. There are numerous projects that have failed due to lack of financial resources”.

Same like their Albanian colleagues, Macedonian civil servants also think that capacity exists; however they lack willingness and desire to govern responsibly for the good of the society. This Macedonian civil servant considers that “capacity honestly exists, however will for improvement and successful governance is missing.” Macedonian civil servants also thought that it is a matter of priority and not capacity why the government does not accomplish what

they say they will. They also thought that “government gives priority to projects and politics that are of interest to them personally and to the grouping they belong.”

The last question aimed at testing how much Albanians trust the government. Albanians, in general, answered that they do not trust at all. Only one participant answered a little bit milder by saying “I do not trust government.” The rest of the participants started their answers with the phrase “I do not trust government at all.” One of the participants answered with the phrase “a total mistrust.” This showed that Albanians do not trust at all the government in the Republic of North Macedonia. Some of the main reasons that make Albanians not trust the government include perceived ethnical discrimination, economic development, life quality, unfunctional state institutions, failure to keep their promises, mismanagement, corruption, etc. Some of them went as far as stating that they do not consider this government as their government. The following is a list of some of the answers provided by Albanians.

I do not trust government at all. I think the way they govern is against the will and interest of society. Everything that you do in life, all the steps that you take, government is always an obstacle and not a facilitator. This shows how much government supports and is close to citizens.

I do not trust government at all. Not only recently, but since independence there have always been tendencies to cause inter-ethnic conflict, we have seen no movements and efforts for economic development, quality of life is not improving. Thus, I see no positive development in the past 25 years.

Not at all, a total mistrust. I think I mentioned the reasons during the interview. However the most important for me is the fact that we have a country and unfunctional institutions that are not there to serve citizens, including us Albanians.

Personally I do not trust government at all. It has been proven so far that whatever they say and promise during the elections they never accomplish it, they do not keep promises. For example they always promise economic development, increased foreign investments, new employment opportunities, whereas on the other side we see economic crisis, less job opportunities, migration of the youth for better opportunities. Thus there are facts that all they have promised, it has remained unaccomplished. I think that we cannot trust them if they do not keep their promises and if they are not transparent to us. We do not know what is actually done with public money.

In general I do not trust at all this government. I have millions of reasons why I do not trust government. I will need hours if I have to mention all of them. But the most important to me is that even all these years after independence and the war I am still discriminated on ethnical basis. I still do not feel this government as representing me.

I do not trust government at all. I do not trust them because they have brought the Republic of North Macedonia in a very bad situation, worse than never before. The Republic of North Macedonia is now a country where crime and corruption prevails, where human rights are not respected. The Republic of North Macedonia is now a country where there is no freedom of expression and freedom of press. Freedom of the press is at the level of countries with authoritarian regimes. Besides, there are tendencies to turn the Republic of North Macedonia into an authoritarian state. Public administration is overloaded with political party militants,

whereas government services are below any acceptable standard. Judiciary is highly politicized and controlled by the government, serving political parties in power. In addition, we are in a very bad economic condition, unemployment rate is high, salaries are low, etc.

Albanians do not trust government at all. I think there are lots of cases to illustrate why they do not trust. Constant and ongoing despair leave no room for Albanians to feel they are being treated fairly and with dignity. Neglect and degrading treatment they experience everyday in every aspect of their lives gives you no opportunity to think you are being treated fairly and correctly. Thus, if we are to list here the cases Albanians were treated unfairly and unjustly we would need days, starting from: census, budget allocation, economic discrimination, discrimination in employment, and division of ministries or departments. There are still ministries or certain departments which are unachievable to Albanians starting from the ministry of interior, ministry of finance, customs, prime minister, president of the state, public revenue office, etc. We can talk all day long for discriminations and public institutions inaccessible to Albanians.

Albanian civil servants also thought that Albanians do not trust government at all. All the participants without any exception confirmed this. The majority of them confirmed that even they themselves do not trust government, though they are government employees. This civil servant claimed that

They do not trust government at all, starting from myself as well. What we also hear from citizens, they do not trust government. Whatever they hear now, whatever government promises they do not trust anymore. Before has been difficult, people have been isolated. Nowadays is quite different. People have access to different media, local and international, social media as well, so they can compare their country to other countries worldwide. Besides, they are free to move as well, they have visited many European countries and now they know how well government functions there and how people live there. People cannot be cheated anymore. I feel they are quite desperate now, that is why the youth is leaving the country.

Albanians civil servants also thought that Albanians do not trust government because they feel misused. They thought that the government “uses them to get their taxes, but gives nothing back in return through public investments.” Another participant stated that Albanians do not trust government at all; however they are not left with many options. This participant thought that “to Albanians government is a necessary evil, they are there so they have to function this way.” Another participant listed a bunch of reasons why Albanians and this participant himself do not trust government.

My personal opinion is that Albanians do not trust at all government. Considering the anti-Albanian politics in the last two mandates, or better to say since independence, I think there is no hope that this coalition ruling the country can be trusted to change things for better. Albanian language is not yet recognized and used as an official language, state budget is not proportionally divided, investments, public and foreign are directed only to the cities inhabited mainly by Macedonians, tortures, unjust and biased rulings against Albanians, corruption, crime, misuse of public funds, money laundering, and discrimination in every social aspect. I think all these are crucial factors why Albanians have lost trust in government.

There were also among Macedonian civil servants that thought that Albanians do not trust the government, recognizing also the fact that Albanians feel discriminated. This participant claimed that “if we are to analyze the whole picture, Albanians do not trust government. I think they feel discriminated.”

However, the majority of Macedonian civil servants thought that the majority of Albanians trusted the government although there can be people that do not trust. According to this participant, the crucial role in this was personal experiences as well as political conviction. This civil servant thought that the “majority of Albanians trust government, and some actually do not trust. That depends most probably from personal experiences and political convictions and affiliations.” Another participant answered that

I think that majority, around 60% trust government, the rest do not trust. I think that they have experienced and have gone through a transitory political system that gave them no opportunity to believe that their position in the country will improve. However, I think that there have been huge achievements and advancements in education, they are now significantly represented in public institutions and in the government. Still, I think they need time to regain trust.

To sum up, Albanians do not trust the government at all. They think the government treats them unfairly and unjustly. Albanians also think that the government cannot be relied on to keep promises. They think that there is huge difference between what the government promises and what they actually accomplish. Albanians were divided on their opinion about the capacity of government and its institutions to accomplish what they promise. A significant number of Albanians thought that government has capacity; however, it is personal and group interest that prevails over the interest of society. They thought that if they have capacity to steal, do money laundering, they do also have capacity to work for the good of the society. The majority of Albanians think that government actually lacks capacity, which is mainly due to the lack of meritocracy in employment in public institutions. According to them, this has resulted in an unprofessional public administration filled up with militants of political parties in power.

Albanian civil servants also thought that Albanians do not trust government at all. They themselves confessed not to trust the government as well. They mentioned discrimination, double standards, failure to keep promises as the main reasons why Albanians do not trust government. On the other side, the majority of Macedonian civil servants thought that Albanians trust government, though there are people among them that do not trust. There

were however civil servants that thought that Albanians do not trust government. They also recognized the fact that Albanians feel discriminated.

5.3.2 Satisfaction

Satisfaction was the second relationship outcome that the researcher studied in the relationship between Albanians and government. The questions aimed at understanding how satisfied are Albanians with how knowledgeable, polite, and professional were the state officials in handling their requests. In addition, the questions inquired to understand how much Albanians enjoyed dealing and interacting with civil servants. The last set of questions aimed at understanding how happy Albanians were with the government, as well as how satisfied are they with the relationship that the government has had with them.

Albanians, in general, are not satisfied with knowledgeability, politeness, and professionalism of civil servants. The majority of them found civil servants quite arrogant. They also thought that public administration in the Republic of North Macedonia is overloaded with political party militants. Albanians thought that incompetence, arrogance, and unprofessionalism of civil servants is a result of lack of employment criteria in public administration as well as lack of meritocracy. This participant claimed that

based on my personal experience civil servants were quite arrogant, not at all polite, and not at all professional. Usually they have been employed through the Ohrid Framework Agreement from the political party in position without fulfilling elementary criteria to be employed in public administrations.

Another participant also added that

in 90% of the cases I have had they have been incompetent, not at all polite and unprofessional. If we look at the reports of EU, in most of the cases the Republic of North Macedonia is criticized about the professionalization of public administration.

Albanians also thought that civil servants are quite incompetent which leads to arrogant behavior. They also thought that professionalism is quite low in public administration due to bought degrees which they thought are easy to obtain in the Republic of North Macedonia.

This participant thought that

Civil servants are not at all competent and capable for the job they have taken. As a result of their incompetence they behave arrogantly and are disrespectful towards citizens. Their level of professionalism is a result of bought degrees that are quite easy to obtain in the Republic of North Macedonia and some neighboring countries.

Albanians also think that due to unprofessional and highly politicized public administration citizens are not able to receive service quality. This participant described from his experience

that “very little of civil servants have been competent, knowledgeable, polite and professional.” This civil servant thought that “professionalization and extremely politicized public administration are two crucial problems why citizens receive below average service from civil servants employed in public administration.” Another participant added that:

Their competence and politeness is below average. In the Republic of North Macedonia in the last ten years government has been the biggest employer in the country. As a result of this public administration is overloaded with incompetent and unprofessional civil servants who are considered “political party soldiers.” They are accepted in public administration without any defined criteria to evaluate their professional competence and suitability for the position. However, we should not generalize as there are exceptions, though quite rare.

Albanians also found Macedonian civil servants to be more competent, polite, and professional compared to Albanian civil servants. Albanians thought that this is a result of their education and schooling as well as experience in public administration. According to this participant, civil servants

are not at all polite, knowledgeable and professional. I think that Macedonian civil servants are a bit more polite and professional which is a result of their education and professional experience. I think that even if they are employed through political party connections, Macedonians still respect certain criteria and employment in public administration is done based on their professional qualifications. Among Albanians there might be cases they are employed with high school diplomas, but the same people might have not completed even elementary school and might even be illiterate. Besides, I think that Albanian civil servants lack professional responsibility. We as Albanians lack experience in institutional management.

On the other side, Albanians also admitted that they do not enjoy dealing with civil servants. They claimed not to be satisfied with their communication with civil servants. Albanians also think that majority of civil servants, “lack elementary communication behavior. They do not know how to formally communicate and interact with citizens.” Albanians also thought that civil servants lack

elementary knowledge and training” to carry the job of a civil servant. Another participant commented that “in all the cases I have had, civil servants have really been bad in their communication. In many cases their communication was accompanied with arrogance which was even exaggerated.

Another participant described into more details his experience with civil servants.

Personally, I have never been satisfied with communication with civil servants, especially the introductory part when you go to the institution. I think they lack that initial presentation *bon ton*. At times they do not even greet you. Besides, even during the whole process of solving your problem they lack proper communication and interest to solve your problem. As a conclusion, I think they lack elementary ethics in communication.

Another participant owning a private business compared the behavior of civil servants to that of private businesses in dealing with clients. This participant commented that “coming from

private business, when I analyze the way civil servants communicate, I feel sorry and pity them for the position they are in.” Albanians also think that communication with civil servants is always “filled with dread and fear that there will always be problems and we need to always be careful when dealing with civil servants.” Albanians felt that civil servants do always try to keep a distance between them and citizens to show their superiority towards citizens. This participant admitted that

I am not satisfied with contact and communication with civil servants. Their level of arrogance is quite high. Besides, they always try to keep certain distance with citizens trying to portray superiority of the state towards citizens. This in fact shows low level of democracy prevailing in the country, as well as acting as a warning for the upcoming authoritarian state where the rule of law is absent.

Albanians admitted they are not happy with the government. They claimed that they are also not satisfied with the relationship that the government has had with them. Some of the main reasons for their dissatisfaction are mismanagement, ethnical and economic discrimination, the government does not care about citizens, they do not fulfill their obligations, failure to keep promises, government provides no accountability, corruption, massive migration, double standards, nepotism, etc. This participant described in details why he is not satisfied with government:

I am not at all happy with government. I consider it an anti-citizen government in general and an anti-Albanian government in particular because there are lots of cases of discrimination, for example ethnical discrimination, discrimination in budget allocations, increase of dissatisfaction and massive migration among Albanians, discrimination in every aspect, inequality, etc. On the other side, institutional hegemony, controlled media, double standards, politicization of every public institution have destroyed professionalism and have made the government lose its meaning of being a government serving citizens. Thus, I’m not only dissatisfied, I am also disappointed and as a citizen I cannot wait for changes to take places and that this government is replaced by another government that would bring a new model of governance fulfilling its obligations towards citizens.

Albanians also associate government with the Albanian political party in power.

They claimed that they do not believe that the Albanian political party has decision-making power which leads to mistrust. Albanians also claimed trust to be related to the expectations that citizens have from government. This civil servant commented that

In general I am not happy with government and the relationship this government has had with me as a citizen. Let me just explain something. In general among Albanians, when you mention government they associate it with the Albanian political party in position. I think that all what they have promised, have not accomplished anything so far. For example economy and infrastructure of the cities where Albanians are majority is in very bad condition. I think Albanians do not trust government anymore because they know that the Albanian political party in position has no decision making power, thus trust is lower with regards to keeping their promises. Besides, personally I think this depends very much on the

expectations that citizens have from the government. Someone can be satisfied with this little that this government might have achieved only because they had lower expectations compared to someone that had expected much more from this government. To better illustrate this, some citizens might now be quite happy and satisfied only because they can now get certain personal documents in Albanian language. They regard this as a great achievement, though in many other aspects there might be regress.

Albanians also claimed not to be satisfied with “a government that even after 25 years of independence denies to Albanians the elementary human rights.” This participant admitted that the government

does not yet recognize us to be equal participants in state formation. I think that the best solution would be federalization of the country, where Albanian municipalities would have more jurisdictions and competencies, as well as more power in decision making.

Albanians also felt that government does not care about citizens. According to Albanians, a priority of this government is their personal interest and the interest of the groups they belong to. This participant stated that

is not at all satisfied with government and the relationship that government has had with me as a citizen, and as an Albanian. The reasons are numerous. I think that they as a government, including the Albanians in the government, they never cared about citizens, to make citizens feel that this government has certain duties and obligations towards these citizens. Government thinks that they have no obligations towards us, I think they even say live the way you can, we will only work for the interest of our people and the interest of our groups. I think that government and public institutions have given us this impression so far.

Albanians feel that “government does care the same for the well-being of all citizens; citizens are still discriminated on ethnical basis.” Albanians also accused the government of double standards. They felt that the government behaves differently with Macedonians; favoring them before all other ethnic communities in the country.

A government that for some is being a mother, whereas at the same time for other people it behaves like a step-mother, hope this government never existed. Thus, I’m not satisfied with government and the projects accomplished so far. Usually they overlook cities with Albanian majority . I think it is also obvious the treatment of Albanian and Macedonian citizens. For example, east part of the country differs very much in terms of public investments and capital projects from the west part of the country with Albanian majority. Each aspect that you look, I think we are being discriminated.

The following are some of the answers that Albanians gave about their satisfaction with government and the relationship that government has had with them.

I’m not at all satisfied with this government and the relationship this government has had with me. Simply, I don’t see this government treats all citizens equally and to end discrimination. Moreover, I do not see any change in governing the country, corruption and nepotism are increasing and we have and extreme politicization of all public institutions.

I cannot be satisfied when I see no improvements in the country. Public administration is in a very miserable condition as a result of its politicization from the political parties in power. Politicization has excluded all individuals and groups that do not support and agree with the political parties in position. Dissatisfaction is higher among Albanians because institutions for Macedonians are “mother” whereas for Albanians “step-mother.

I'm not at all satisfied with government and its relationship with me. Reasons are numerous starting from discrimination to incompetence, and failure to keep their promises.

Albanian civil servants also admitted that Albanians are not satisfied with the knowledgeableability, politeness, and professionalism of civil servants. However, Albanian civil servants thought that Albanians built their perceptions based on a single unsatisfying experience they might have had. According to this civil servant Albanians

are not at all satisfied with politeness and professionalism of civil servants. However, there is a fact that they over generalize their experiences, and they always start from the same stereotypes. They have a single bad experience and make generalizations based on that single experience. For example it happens that a civil servant asks for them money to help them get something done, and they generalize that all civil servants ask for money.

Albanian civil servants also thought that if they should be self-critical, civil servants, especially Albanian civil servants do rank low on all three dimensions: competence, politeness, and professionalism. According to this civil servant the main reason is

employment and selection of civil servant out of any acceptable criteria and standards. In most of the public institutions we do have civil servants that are not suitable for the position they hold. We have to be self-critical that we Albanians do not have suitable and professional staff in many of the public institutions.

Albanian civil servants were aware that Albanians perceived them to be less competent than Macedonian civil servants. They thought this is a complex they have inherited from the communist regime, in which Albanian civil servants have always been seen as inferior to Macedonian civil servants due to limited jurisdictions and competencies. This Albanian civil servant added:

They are not very much satisfied. They do accuse and criticize sometime for being incompetent, maybe as a result of an inferiority complex that Albanians are not capable and competent compared to Macedonian civil servants. We have had cases they have come to us, we have provided with the information and they have addressed their concerns to our Macedonian colleague thinking that they are the ones that make the final decision. Although this colleague might have been of a lower rank, still that inferiority complex makes them think that because he is a Macedonian he knows better his job and has more competencies. This is not good, though this has remained from the past, I think from those years of communism. I also think that they have righteously built this perception, because might have been cases they address their concerns to Albanian civil servants, which due to laziness, incompetence might direct them to Macedonian civil servants. This is from where Albanians have built their prejudices and stereotypes about Albanian civil servants.

There were also Albanian civil servants that thought that majority of Albanians considered them to be competent, polite, and professional. This civil servant stated that the

majority of Albanians think that we are competent, polite and professional in doing our job. Although in most of the cases they generalize their experiences, they have a bad experience and build prejudices based on that. There are also cases you might help them a lot, once you are not able to, they will start criticizing or even offending you.

Albanian civil servants also thought that Albanians should consider in what conditions these civil servants, especially Albanian civil servants worked before they evaluate their experiences with them.

Albanians should consider that civil servants work in very bad conditions. From the very first day they have been employed they have not been upgraded to higher positions in the hierarchy. Most of them are employed in a position that requires only high school, whereas they have even obtained bachelor, or master degrees. Very few of them are in managerial positions. Equal representation in public administration should also be at managerial positions. Thus, the frustrations of Albanians are mainly directed at Albanian civil servants without considering the fact that they can only do this much, because they are in a position that cannot decide anything. They are not aware that decisions depend on our jurisdictions and competencies that we have.

On the other side, Albanian civil servants think that Albanians enjoyed their communication with Albanian civil servants. In their opinion the fact that they can communicate in Albanian makes communication easier and satisfactory because the majority of Albanians cannot communicate in the Macedonian language. This Albanian civil servant claimed that

from my experience in my interactions with Albanians I think that they are more than satisfied with our communication; satisfaction has been two sided. I think there are cases when they are not satisfied; however I think it is in the interaction between Albanians and Macedonian civil servants.

Another Albanian civil servant further commented that:

I think that the very first moment when we talk to them in Albanian language they have some positive impression, because majority of them have difficulties to communicate in Macedonian language. I think that in general Albanians are satisfied with our communication; however, they might not be satisfied with the decisions taken. Still, they should not blame civil servants for the decisions taken, because they are only civil servants, they do not make decisions.

Albanian civil servants did share the same opinion with the Albanians regarding their overall satisfaction with the government, and relationship the government has had with them. All of them admitted that the Albanians are not at all satisfied with government. Albanian civil servants did share the same opinion regarding the reasons Albanians are not satisfied with government. This Albanian civil servant explained in details why he thought that Albanians do not trust government.

I think Albanians are not satisfied with government. Albanian language is not recognized as an official language, budget is not proportionally divided, one sided investments directed only to Macedonian majority cities, tortures, imprisonment of innocent Albanians, repression of Albanians, corruption, crime, and discrimination in every aspect of their lives. I think all these are crucial factors why Albanians have lost their trust in government.

Albanian civil servants also recognized the double standards employed by government when it comes to Macedonians in comparison to other ethnicities in the country. According to these civil servants

Albanians are not at all satisfied with government and the relationship government has had with them. I think that government starting from the very first day of independence has not treated equally Albanians compared to Macedonians; double standards have been always applied. Government for someone is being a mother, whereas for the rest a stepmother. Considering how government has treated Albanians so far, government has given us the impression that it has acted as a stepmother to Albanians, being it with regards to investments, employment, infrastructural investments. We can obviously see major investment projects are directed to municipalities with Macedonian majority. To say it simply, Albanians are discriminated. Albanian civil servants also think that the migration trend going on among Albanians in the Republic of North Macedonia is a result of dissatisfaction of Albanians with government. This makes them look for better opportunities in developed countries to apply their professional capacity.

Albanians are not at all satisfied. If they were satisfied they would stay to work in their country. We actually have a massive migration going on in the country especially among the youth. Not being able to find a job here, they look for better opportunities in the western countries.

Macedonian civil servants were of the opposite opinion from Albanians and their Albanian colleagues with regards to competence, politeness, and professionalism of civil servants. They thought that Albanians were satisfied with the knowledgeability, politeness, and professionalism of civil servants. Compared to Albanians, Macedonian civil servants thought that “now in Macedonian there is a highly professionalized public administration.” According to this Macedonian civil servant

behavior of civil servants towards Albanians, and towards all citizens is more polite and professional each day, which makes me think Albanians are satisfied with civil servants. Although there might be Albanians not satisfied with government, still this civil servant thinks that majority of Albanians are satisfied.

According to this civil servant

There always exists dissatisfaction in certain groups, but I think majority of Albanians are satisfied. I confess this based on my interactions and communication that I have with Albanians living near me, at my working place and in every opportunity given to me to communicate with them.

There were also Macedonian civil servants that confessed that not only Albanians but also all citizens in the Republic of North Macedonia are not satisfied with politeness, patience, competence, and professionalism of civil servants. This civil servant stated:

None of us is satisfied with impatience, arrogance, and intolerance of civil servants as well as officials at higher levels of public administration that with their inhuman behavior act humiliating towards citizens, being Albanians or Macedonians. Still there are very polite and professional people employed in public institutions that are always available and ready to help citizens. With regards to government, I think Albanians are not satisfied. Albanians think they are discriminated.

Same as their Albanian colleagues, Macedonian civil servants also admitted that Albanians do not enjoy with civil servants. They also thought that “interaction with civil servants is not meant to enjoy.” Almost all civil servants claimed that “Albanians do not enjoy their communication with civil servants.” Macedonian civil servants further claimed that “if Albanians manage to get their job done, they forget their negative experience and interaction they might have had with civil servants.”

Macedonian civil servants recognized language to be the main problem in their interaction with Albanians. They thought that the presence of Albanian civil servants was crucial in such cases to help Albanians obtain their service. According to this civil servant,

We have often cases when citizens do not understand Macedonian language, but we have colleagues Albanians that help accommodate their requests, and help them out. I think language is the biggest problem in the communication and interaction between civil servants and Albanians.

Macedonian civil servants also thought that “not only Albanians, none of us does not enjoy anymore in their interaction with civil servants.”

Regarding the overall satisfaction of Albanians with the government, Macedonian civil servants were divided in their opinion with a majority of them thinking that Albanians were satisfied with government. There were still Macedonian civil servants that thought that “no one in this country is satisfied with this government. Reasons are numerous, including increased unemployment, inflation, politicization of public institutions, etc.”

However, the majority thought that Albanians were satisfied with the government. According to this civil servant

Albanians are generally satisfied, even over satisfied with government. If I was to rate their satisfaction from 1 to 5 I would say 4,5. After the Ohrid Framework Agreement many things changed positively and their position and influence in the country positively changed. They

have ministers in the government, in the public administration they are represented with more than 20%, universities in Albanian language, etc.

Macedonian civil servants also confessed that Albanians are treated as equal citizens compared to Macedonians and all other ethnicities living in the country. They refuted the claims made by Albanians that the government discriminated against them. According to this civil servant

all ethnicities in the country enjoy their rights equally in this sovereign state where the law guarantees the rights of all citizens. There will always be citizens not satisfied with government; however, government should always try to work harder for the good of the society.

Macedonian civil servants also considered that the answer to the question depended very much on political convictions. This civil servant stated that “Satisfaction and dissatisfaction with government depends very much on political convictions. Albanians in general are satisfied if we consider their involvement in every area of government”.

To sum up, on satisfaction, Albanians are not satisfied with the knowledgeability, professionalism, and politeness of civil servants. They find them to be incompetent and arrogant in their interactions with Albanians. Albanians also confessed not to enjoy their communication with civil servants. They thought that civil servant lacked elementary communication behavior as well as elementary ethics in communication. Albanians claimed also not to be satisfied with government in general. They felt they are being discriminated. Albanians criticized government for applying double standards, corruption, crime, nepotism, and failure to keep their promises.

The majority of Albanians and Macedonian civil servants claimed Albanians to enjoy their communication with civil servants. Albanians civil servants, on the other side, thought that Albanians were not satisfied with competence, professionalism, and politeness of civil servants compared to Macedonian civil servants that believe that Albanians consider civil servants to be knowledgeable, polite and professional. In addition, the majority of Albanian civil servants thought that Albanians are not at all satisfied with the government. Macedonian civil servants thought that Albanians were satisfied with the government considering the fact that their status and position in the country had significantly improved after the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

5.4 Detrimental behaviors leading to negative relationships

From the findings reported in the above sections, it is obvious that negative relationships exist between government and Albanians in Macedonia with regards to trust and satisfaction. Concurrent with Hon and Grunig's (1999) theory, the results show that based on participants descriptions government-community relations occurred when an organization, in this case, the government and its publics had behavioral consequences with one another. Several detrimental behaviors from both sides that influenced Albanians' subjective perception of the relationship between government and Albanians can be identified.

An important factor identified is arrogant behavior. Arrogant behavior from both sides seems to seriously undermine the relationship between two parties. Civil servants complained that they deal with frustrated citizens daily, citizens that do not know their jurisdictions and come to blame us even if we are not responsible for any decision making. On the other side Albanians also reported that civil servants behaved arrogantly. They reported that civil servants mainly feel like bosses of citizens and not their servants.

There are other behaviours identified mainly from Albanians that can be related to the arrogant behavior of civil servants. Neglect from civil servants was mainly reported from the side of Albanians. They stated that they were never important in the sight of civil servants. They also reported that civil servants were not involved in providing personal responses to citizens. They felt that they are being overlooked because once they interacted with civil servants the way they are treated gives them the impression that civil servants just want to get rid of them.

Besides, Albanians complained about "lack of elementary communication behavior." According to Albanians, civil servants did not know how to formally communicate and interact with citizens. This shows that the lack of courtesy from the side of civil servants definitely had a detrimental impact. Many Albanians also answered that interaction with civil servants is never enjoyable. Albanians also found civil servants to be less cooperative in solving problems or concerns they might have.

This also brings to attention the importance of competence and professionalism of civil servants. Albanians questioned civil servant's capability in getting their job done. Many of the Albanians respondents commented that the courtesy of civil servants also was a result of the lack of professionalism and competence of civil servants. They found Macedonian civil

servants to be more polite and competent. They also reported having received better services from Macedonian civil servants compared to Albanians. In general, Albanians reported unprofessional behavior from the side of civil servants.

Another detrimental behavior from the side of civil servants was conflict and conflict management skills. Albanians reported that interactions with civil servants are always filled with dread and fear that there will always be problems and we need to always be careful when dealing with civil servants. The claimed civil servants felt quite powerful towards citizens. They expressed that criticizing civil servants or the political parties in power can have serious repercussions for them. Instead of cooperating with citizens in solving the conflict, participants reported being threatened by civil servants. An Albanian reported that he was refused to be served only because he criticized a civil servant for being late and another participant from among the Albanians also reported that he was forced to wait longer only because a civil servant that he knew had seen a post he had published on facebook criticizing the political party in power. However, civil servants explained that citizens are not aware that civil servants do not make decisions, so according to them when they receive negative answers, they release their frustrations at civil servants. Albanians also complained of social distance that civil servants try to keep from citizens fearing to lose social status. They have the feeling that the higher this social distance between them and civil servants, the more powerful and higher in social status feel civil servants towards citizens.

In addition, there were also some issues related to service that seem to impact Albanians' perception of the relationship between government and Albanians. Discrimination on personal connections, discrimination on political party affiliation, long waiting lines, language competence of civil servants, and not respected office hours. Albanians claimed that privileging individuals based on personal connections are quite common in North Macedonia. Personal connections are crucial to getting your job done, at times even if it is considered illegal and unethical. Considering the fact that long waiting lines are common in Macedonia, personal connections are crucial to overcoming these barriers. Unfair and unjust treatment was reported from Albanians. Office hours are not strictly respected in Macedonia. Respondents reported that it is normal to go to the office and not find civil servants there. Language barriers seemed to be important especially when dealing with Macedonian civil servants. Macedonian civil servants complained that not all Albanians speak Macedonian language, and they do not speak Albanian language which hinders their communication.

5.5 Coorientation State between Government and Albanians

The final research question aimed at understanding what coorientation states exist between Albanians and civil servants on the evaluation of the Albanian-government relationship. As discussed in the literature review, a majority of organization-public relationships studies are limited to exploring only one side of the story. Despite the call of Grunig and Huang (2000) for more coorientational studies of relationships in public relations, studies exploring relationships from the side of both organizations and publics are really scarce.

To compare perceptions of all sides involved in the relationship, the application of coorientation theory was considered in the study. The coorientational approach to organization-public relationships helped measure four perspectives of the relationship: a) the organization's view of the relationship (the organization's perspective); b) the public's view of the relationship (the public's perspective); c) the organization's estimate of the public's view of the relationship (the organization's meta-perspective); and d) the public's estimate of the organization's view of the relationship (the public's meta-perspective). In the study, only the first three perspectives were possible to evaluate. The public's meta-perspective was not measured in the study. In the study, I was not able to measure how the constituency does; in this case Albanians perceived the government's views. Although during the pretest questions were prepared to test public's meta-perspective regarding trust and satisfaction, it confused participants and a majority of them refused to answer considering them very subjective questions that differ from individual to individual.

Regarding the evaluation of the relationship, the findings of the study, in general, showed disagreement between the Albanians and civil servants. The results also showed disagreement between the Macedonian and Albanian civil servants regarding Albanian-government relations. Results further revealed an agreement between Albanian civil servants and Albanians about most of the relationship cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes.

With regards to access, all the sides agreed that it is easy for Albanians to meet civil servants. However, disagreement was revealed between the Macedonian civil servants on one side and the Albanians together with Albanian civil servants on the other side regarding access of Albanians to higher level of government hierarchy. Macedonian civil servants claimed that access is provided to Albanians to higher levels of government hierarchy. Albanians and Albanian civil servants agreed that it was difficult for Albanians to gain access to officials higher in the hierarchy. All the sides were in agreement that Albanians usually addressed their

problems and concerns personally at the institution. In addition, Albanians and civil servants disagreed with the willingness of civil servants to respond to their concerns and questions. Albanians underestimated civil servants willingness claiming that they did not care about them, and showed no willingness to respond to their questions. On the other side, civil servants seemed to overestimate their views confessing that they were always willing to help Albanians.

Regarding positivity, results showed Albanians and civil servants to be in a state of disagreement. Albanians described levels of positivity quite low compared to the more favorable evaluation given by both Albanian and Macedonian civil servants. Civil servants also overestimated their politeness, enjoyable interaction, and cooperativeness, which were evaluated to be quite low from Albanians. Albanians claimed that civil servants, in general, are arrogant, not cooperative, and interaction with them was never enjoyable. There was a perceived agreement from the side of civil servants as many of them recognized that Albanians did not perceive civil servants to be polite and cooperative. Albanians and Albanian civil servants evaluated openness of government institutions to be quite low. They disagreed with the majority of Macedonian civil servants that rated more positively the transparency of government institutions. Concerning annual reports, Albanians and Albanian civil servants claimed that annual reports are not published, and even if they are published they contain made-up information. Macedonian civil servants disagreed with them claiming that annual reports are regularly published and that they contain truthful information.

With regards to assurances, Albanians claimed assurance to be quite low compared to civil servants that evaluated it more positively. Albanians confessed that civil servants provide no personal responses to their concerns and they never communicated citizens important to them. Albanians also thought that civil servants, as well as government institutions, do not take seriously their concerns. Compared to them, both groups of civil servants, Macedonians and Albanians overestimated their performance on these three dimensions. They confessed that they are always there personally to help Albanians. Besides, they also claimed that they and their institutions seriously take concerns raised by Albanians. Here there was a perceived agreement only between Albanians and Albanian civil servants because Albanian civil servants, in general, claimed that Albanians did not think that their concerns are seriously taken by government institutions. Civil servants also disagreed with Albanians about communication of citizen's importance to civil servants. Civil servants considered that they did always communicate importance of Albanians to them as civil servants . There was

agreement between Albanians and Albanian civil servants on the possibility of Albanians to influence government decisions. They claimed that their voices are never heard, and they have no power either individually or in groups to influence government decisions. On the other side, Macedonian civil servants disagreed. They considered that Albanians after the Ohrid Framework Agreement could propose solutions, or raise their concerns. They considered that voice of Albanians is now heard and that they do have power and possibilities to influence government decisions mainly in groups.

Macedonian civil servants also disagreed with Albanians and Albanian civil servants about trust. Although they accepted that trust is not at its highest level; still, they considered that Albanians do trust government. On the other side, there was a state of agreement between Albanians and Albanian civil servants that there is no trust in the relationship between government and Albanians. Albanians and Albanian civil servants also agreed that government treats Albanians unfairly and unjustly. They also agreed that government and its institutions do not keep their promises, and lack capacity to fulfill their promises. Even in these two dimensions Macedonian civil servants disagreed with Albanians and Albanian civil servants claiming that government keeps promises as well as having capacity to keep its promises.

Regarding satisfaction, civil servants and Albanians were in disagreement. Albanians claimed that they are not at all satisfied with politeness, professionalism, and competence of civil servants. Despite the fact that civil servants overrated themselves on all these three dimensions, still, they admitted that Albanians did not think they are competent, professional, and polite. This reveals the prevailing perceived agreement between civil servants and Albanians. However, Albanians and Albanian civil servants agreed that Albanians are not satisfied at all with government, whereas Macedonian civil servants evaluated that Albanians are satisfied with government.

Recapping the study's findings, Albanians and Macedonian civil servants are in disagreement on all four cultivation strategies and two relationship outcomes. Albanians and Albanian civil servants are in agreement on the relationship cultivation strategies of access and transparency, and relationship outcomes of trust and satisfaction, whereas on the relationship strategies of positivity and assurance they are in disagreement. Macedonian and Albanian civil servants were also in disagreement regarding access, transparency, trust and satisfaction, and in agreement on positivity and assurances. Applying the coorientation states to these findings, it

can be concluded that civil servants and Albanians are in the state of dissensus on all the cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes. Albanians and Albanian civil servants are in the state of consensus on all the variables besides positivity and assurances. Macedonian and Albanian civil servants were also in the state of dissensus on the above-mentioned variables.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The research extends the relationship management theory into the realm of government. To achieve the main objectives of the study, eleven research questions were developed and answered. In chapter 6, a brief summary of the results is provided, as well as a discussion of the research questions grounded in relevant academic research studies. In chapter 6, the researcher discusses the soundness of the research study. The last two sections of the chapter focus on the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

6.1 Summary of findings

Before interpreting the results of the study, a brief summary of the findings related to the study's research questions is necessary. Overall, Macedonian civil servants described the relationship between government and Albanians more favorably as compared to Albanians and Albanian civil servants. Macedonian civil servants held that the relationship between the government and Albanians is now at a satisfactory level, where significant improvements have been achieved after the Ohrid Framework Agreement in 2001. On the other side, Albanians and Albanian civil servants described negatively the relationship between government and Albanians. Albanians when referring to the government-Albanian relationship talked about mistrust, skepticism, and feelings of discrimination.

With regards to access, direct meetings or meetings through personal connections were the most frequent contact information used by Albanians to contact or make an appointment with a civil servant. These were also regarded as the most adequate contact method, followed by telephone and e-mail respectively. E-mails were considered dysfunctional, although some participants from younger generations preferred e-mails to other contact methods. All participants agreed that it is quite easy to meet civil servants and no appointment was needed. However, Macedonian civil servants and Albanians disagreed with regards to meeting civil servants higher in the hierarchy. Albanians and Albanian civil servants considered meeting civil servants higher in the hierarchy to be quite difficult or impossible without using personal connections, whereas Macedonian civil servants considered that easy if necessary formal procedures were followed. In addition, all participants agreed that Albanians mainly addressed their complaints personally in the institution or through personal connections, primarily via their contacts in the political party in position. However, Albanians did not believe that government considered their complaints and concerns which made them not

proceed further with their concerns with civil servants. Albanian and Macedonian civil servants were aware that Albanians did not believe their concerns are considered, though they confessed to be willing to help them.

Positivity was used to measure efforts by civil servants to make their interaction with Albanians enjoyable. Civil servants more favorably evaluated positivity compared to Albanians. Civil servants confessed that interactions happen daily, mainly involving administrative tasks and problems citizens might have. Albanians considered the lack of information from government which they received. They stated the information was irregular, outdated, useless, and biased. Websites were considered the main tool to disseminate information, however, websites were mainly considered outdated and lacking a version in Albanian language. Macedonian civil servants disagreed with them considering that information was publicly available to anyone despite their ethnic background. Additionally, Albanians found civil servants not at all courteous and cooperative. Macedonian and Albanian civil servants disagreed claiming that they are always courteous and cooperative but in certain cases courtesy and cooperativeness was dependent on the other party standing in front of them. Albanians considered lack of courtesy and cooperativeness to be a result of unprofessional public administration. The two parties also disagreed about the attempts made by civil servants to make interaction with Albanians enjoyable. Even here, participants agreed that personal connection impacted how enjoyable the interaction between the two parties was, as well as how cooperative and courteous were civil servants towards Albanians. Except for Macedonian civil servants, conflict, in particular verbal conflict was considered normal in the civil servant-citizen interactions.

Related to openness, Albanians reported that the government does not share much information about its governance. They considered that information was carefully selected and used for political marketing. They also claimed that government institutions do not portray the real picture of their governance selecting and publishing only information that was in their favor and portrayed them in a positive light. Reporting is stated to be done through the websites of government institutions, the official Gazette, and daily print and electronic media. Contrary to Macedonian civil servants, Albanians also claimed that annual reports are not published. Even if annual reports were published, Albanians questioned the trustworthiness of the information contained. They claimed that they do not trust whatever is reported from government institutions. Macedonian civil servants confessed that annual reports are published; however, they explained that these are internal reports to the government, which later are made public

by the government. itself. Regarding communication about new issues. the government used news conferences, notice boards, daily print and electronic media, social media, websites, and official gazette. Still, Albanians considered that news conferences are not meant to inform citizens, rather used as a tool for propaganda.

Assurances. like positivity. were evaluated more favorable by civil servants compared to Albanians. Albanians considered that civil servants were not involved in providing personal responses to citizens. They believed that civil servants did not care much about them and their concerns. Albanians also disagreed with civil servants that importance of citizens to civil servants is communicated. They consider that through arrogance is difficult to communicate importance. Participants, in general, agreed that involvement of citizens in decision making is not considered. Participants also considered that even it is still possible to raise an issue or propose a solution, the problem is that such moves from citizens are never considered, their voices are never heard. Macedonian civil servants also considered that government only declaratively considered citizens views, but never implements anything suggested. Participants also agreed that it is hard to influence government decision in North Macedonia. The political system and lack of democratic values prevailing in the country stem public debate and activism.

Macedonian civil servants and their Albanian counterparts disagreed about the trust and satisfaction of Albanians. Macedonian civil servants considered that Albanians trust and are satisfied with government. They also considered being justly and fairly treated. Albanian civil servants and Albanians are of the same opinion with regards to trust and satisfaction. They claimed not to trust nor be satisfied with government. Contrary to Macedonian civil servants, Albanians also agreed that government could not be relied to keep promises. The majority also thought that government has no capacity to accomplish what they say they will. The majority were also not satisfied with knowledgeability, politeness, and professionalism of civil servants. Albanians also admitted that they do not enjoy dealing with civil servants. They found them to be incompetent and arrogant in their interactions with Albanians. Overall, Albanians claimed not to be happy with government. Macedonian civil servants disagreed claiming that Albanians are happy and satisfied with government, though cases of dissatisfaction may be present. The findings reported also that there were some important issues that influenced the Albanians' subjective perception of the relationship between government and Albanians. Arrogant behavior, competence, professionalism, conflict and

conflict management, and quality of service received were considered detrimental to the negative perceptions of Albanians about government-Albanian relationships.

6.2 Discussion of research questions

6.2.1 Access and its contribution to trust and satisfaction

The first and second research questions were used to evaluate if civil servants thought access was provided to Albanians and did Albanians perceive they are given access by the government, and to what extent and how access contributed to trust and relationship satisfaction. Findings of the study showed that Albanians perceived they have limited access to government, especially accessing civil servants or other officials higher in the hierarchy. However, all the sides agreed that it is quite easy to meet civil servants lower in the hierarchy. Still, Albanians agreed that meeting these civil servants is quite easy, but getting the job done is questionable. Albanians were aware that civil servants lower in the hierarchy have limited jurisdictions. Macedonian civil servants also acknowledged language to be a barrier in their meetings with Albanians.

Overall, when looking for patterns, all participants that evaluated the government low on access, they also evaluated trust and satisfaction to be low. Even among Albanians, those that mentioned access to be a little bit higher, they also evaluated a little bit better trust and satisfaction, answering that Albanians do not trust government and Albanians are not satisfied with government. It is important to mention that Albanians mainly answered that they do not trust at all government and they are not satisfied at all with the relationship government has had with them.

Only in one case, did the researcher evidence a surprising pattern. A Macedonian civil servant rated access to be high, however trust and satisfaction to be quite low. After becoming friends on Facebook, the researcher got to understand that the surprising evaluations of this participant are due to his political convictions. This participant was quite involved and active in the Colorful Revolution in 2016 in which Macedonians protested against the government. These protesters called for the prime minister to step down, a new transitional government, the resignation of the president, and transparent measures toward democratic elections. All his links, Facebook posts, and comments were critical to and against the current government. Thus, his answers seemed to be a reflection of his personal convictions and beliefs. This

participant answered that not only Albanians but all citizens do not trust government and are not satisfied with government, despite his favorable evaluation of government on all the cultivation strategies.

Albanians also complained about the available communication tools. All participants without exception mentioned direct meetings to be the most used and most suitable method to contact civil servants. It was strange that despite the fact that usage of the Internet is quite high in the Republic of North Macedonia, e-mails are not used at all in the communication of government with citizens. Even if telephone numbers and e-mails are provided, using them to reach civil servants is a hassle. The majority of Albanians from among the younger generations complained about lack of e-mail usage. They believed that telephone and e-mail, or even the latest social media platforms should now be used more in the daily communication between civil servants and citizens.

All the participants in the study agreed that direct meetings are the best and mainly used channel to reach civil servants in the Republic of North Macedonia. They considered e-mails and telephone dysfunctional. However, participants, particularly Albanians, acknowledged that even direct meetings should be done through personal connections, or using connections within the political party in position to achieve success in getting requests answered. In many cases, they mentioned that citizens without connections or citizens belonging to other political parties are discriminated in obtaining services from public administration.

In addition, considering the Freedom House's overall democracy score of 4.43 out of 7, (1 is the highest score) of the Republic of North Macedonia in 2017 classifying it as a transitional government or hybrid regime, it was of no surprise to hear that Albanians have difficulties meeting officials higher in the hierarchy. Although certain rules exist that citizens should follow to meet officials higher in the hierarchy, they confessed that even if you follow the rules, chances of meeting officials higher in the hierarchy are quite low. Albanians, in general, think that it is impossible to meet civil servants higher in the hierarchy without personal connections, or better to say political party connections. They think that there are lots of bureaucratic difficulties that only political connections can help you overcome them.

This can be illustrated better by a case reported by one of the Albanian civil servants. This participant mentioned that he had asked for an appointment with his manager with regards to his position upgrade, and he had received no answer even if few months had passed by. According to this participant if he is not able to meet his superior in the hierarchy with an

office near to his office, imagine how easy that can be for citizens. This participant admitted that political party connections are crucial. This participant mentioned that he is running a personal blog, and in some of his articles he had criticized the current government which made him an “enemy” to his superiors that come from the political parties in power. This participant also mentioned that previously when he was quiet, he used to enjoy many benefits, such as training, conferences, travelling abroad with different delegations, etc. However, being critical to the government had serious repercussions for him, especially to his career development. He mentioned that civil servants with less experience and qualifications had been upgraded to higher positions only because they are militants of the political parties in power.

Macedonian civil servants compared to their Albanian colleagues and Albanians think that meeting civil servants higher in the hierarchy is not that difficult. Yet, they admitted that following formal procedures is a must. They also confessed that personal connections, especially political party connections ease the way to civil servants higher in the hierarchy.

These findings from the interview showed that the personal influence model is quite common in the cultivation of relationships between government and Albanians in North Macedonia. Grunig, Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang, and Lyra (1995) were the first to identify the personal influence model of public relations which refers to the relationships that public relations practitioners developed with key individuals in media, government, politics, or activist groups to cultivate relationships to achieve an organization’s objectives. The Personal Influence model emerged in authoritarian cultures (Huang, 2000) and as Falconi (2011) argued personal influence is based on a person’s position and power in a social network. Sriramesh, Kim, and Takasaki (1999) found further evidence of the model in Asian cultures where it was used by practitioners as a *quid pro quo* favour-granting and favour-gaining role. They argued that practitioners build personal influence with these individuals by doing favors for them so they can solicit these favors in return when the organizations need them. Falconi (2011) also held that due to the fact that evidence on the personal influence model is found on studies conducted in Asian cultures with strong power distance and collectivism, personal influence model might have more currency in more rigid cultures in which power and social class have more bearing on decision making. Some of the participants mentioned that in North Macedonia political parties use these favors they do to citizens to ease their access to these officials higher in the hierarchy or get a problem solved are later used by these political party

militants during the elections to win as many votes as possible from the citizens and their relatives.

Using the personal influence model, Albanians also address their complaints personally in the institution or through personal connections, predominantly via their contacts in the political party in position. Albanians are convinced that their complaints and concerns are not considered which makes them avoid official procedures to address them. As mentioned, they mainly revert to personal political connections to address their concerns. They were aware that political connections are crucial in getting a problem solved or a complaint to reach their destination.

Referring back to the definition of access, Ki and Hon (2009) have defined it as “the degree of effort that an organization puts into providing communication channels or media outlets that assist its strategic publics in reaching it” (p.6). Even if participants answered that e-mails and telephone contacts are usually available, in the Republic of North Macedonia citizens are mainly constrained to the use of direct meetings because e-mails and telephone are not functional. Direct meetings were the most adequate methods to get in touch with a civil servant.

Still, Albanians suggested that government should now use e-mails, telephone, and social media more in their communication with citizens. The government should provide citizens with other methods and communication channels for public to reach it. As participants mentioned, it is a hassle to always go to the respective institution when they might have only a simple question to ask. E-mails and social media now provide the fastest and most convenient way for citizens to get in touch with government institutions. This would also help citizens avoid long waiting lines as well as the anxiety they said they felt when they knew they had to deal with civil servants.

Modern internet technologies, in particular e-mail, websites, and social media have significantly changed and enhanced communication between government agencies and their citizen clients. With regards to the importance of the Internet, Fawkes and Gregory (2001) argued that internet facilitates communication at all levels and identified three features which distinguish internet from traditional media: its reach is vast, to virtually all parts of the world — access does not depend on location; it is not time-bound, it can be accessed when the user wishes; and it is capable of providing interactivity in a manner unprecedented in any communication medium.

With the introduction of the Internet, many developed countries have moved further to implementing E-government. According to Scholl (2008) e-government is “the use of information and technology to support and improve public policies and government operations, engage citizens, and provide comprehensive and timely government services” (p. 23). According to Fahnbulleh (2005), the implementation of e-government among other helps create a stronger and closer relationship between citizens and government, provides easier access to government for all, improves the level of service to citizens, empowers citizens, and provides more transparency in government with more responsibility.

In addition, although Albanians reported having quite limited access to officials higher in the hierarchy, this seems not to be quite important in their relationship with government. Albanians were more concerned with efficiency and professionalism of public administration. Many of them reported that no matter if it is easy or not to meet civil servants, being served properly and getting your job done is highly questionable. In many instances they mentioned that they had to revert to personal connections to get their job done. As Rosenbloom (cited in Cooper) has maintained "professionalism requires an understanding of constitutionalism." (1984, p. 149) insisting that "public bureaucrats who interact with people must learn to understand, respect, and protect the constitutional rights of those individuals." (Rosenbloom, 1984, p. 149)

Moreover, the social distance between citizens and civil servants was reported. Albanians thought that civil servants higher in the hierarchy did try to keep distance from citizens as they felt less important or afraid of losing their social status if they get closer to them. According to Albanians, remnants of communist ideology made these civil servants keep distance with citizens. In their opinion, distance between them and civil servants showed their superiority and power towards citizens. Magee and Smith (2013) defined social distance “as a subjective perception or experience of distance from another person or other persons” (p.159). The social distance reported in the study is in line with the first principle of the social distance theory of power proposed by Magee and Smith (2013) that suggested “that asymmetric dependence between individuals (i.e., power) produces asymmetric social distance, with high-power individuals feeling more distant than low-power individuals” (p.158).

Still, Albanians deemed to be used to this huge social distance between them and civil servants. They were aware that civil servants, in order to feel powerful in front of citizens, try to keep distance and limit the access of citizens to them. In their opinion, the higher this

distance, the more powerful civil servants feel. According to one of the participants the main cause of this distance is

the communist ideology, or the remnants of this ideology in country's governance. The bigger the distance between them and the citizens, they feel more powerful, and the closer they get to citizens they feel they lose this power or importance. I think here comes at play the closed and open system of governance. Here in the Republic of North Macedonia all government institutions are closed, even their building are all in concrete, all concreted like in those old communist days.

As Cooper (1984) argued

the ethical obligations of the public administrator are to be derived from the obligations of citizenship in a democratic political community. These obligations include responsibility for establishing and maintaining horizontal relationships of authority with one's fellow citizens, seeking "power with" rather than "power over" the citizenry. (p. 143)

Although Albanians showed to be used to this social distance between themselves and state officials, these barriers between them and citizens should be removed in order to build positive government-public relationships based on mutual trust. This would also help citizens get rid of that feeling of contempt, neglection, and inferiority they reported to experience when dealing with civil servants. In return they would feel supportiveness, comfort, sympathy, importance, and satisfaction. This would also convey to them the feeling that the government cared about them and their concerns. As Fischer & Roseman (2007) argued feelings of contempt emerge in part from sensing distance in otherwise close relationships or from a desire to avoid social contact with another person.

Albanians reported being discriminated with regards to access to government if they have no personal connections. This showed the influence that discrimination based on personal connection has on integrity. This makes citizens feel unfairly and unjustly treated. In the healthcare industry Glover, Sims, and Winters (2017) examined the association of multiple dimensions of perceived discrimination with reported trust and satisfaction with healthcare providers. Their findings showed a relatively strong association between perceived discrimination (every day, lifetime, stress from discrimination, and unfair treatment in medical care) and mistrust and dissatisfaction with providers.

In the study, discrimination was often mentioned to be one of the main reasons why they felt government treats them unfairly and unjustly. As was confessed by Albanians, they felt contempt when meeting civil servants without personal connections. They claimed to feel overlooked and unimportant because civil servants only try to get rid of them. This is better illustrated by the comparison this participant made:

The first thing you feel when you try to get direct access to officials higher in the hierarchy is contempt. Their behavior, the way they look at you, makes you feel overlooked, unimportant, because they always try to get rid of you and direct you to other institutions or departments. However, when appointments are done using referrals or personal connections, or when you send regards from political personalities you know, you are always accepted politely, served with coffee, you see them smile all the time during the conversation, and they try to seriously get your problem solved. Although there are legal and lawful ways to solve your problem, they will always opt for political procedures, which at times are unlawful and illegal just to get your problem solved. Likewise, it is not important in this country who you are, but who you know from those people in power.

With regards to the willingness of civil servants to answer citizen's inquiries, Albanians think that civil servants are not willing to attend to their inquiries. They also explained that unwillingness to attend to their inquiries makes them feel that the government does not care much about them. This also results in pessimism before addressing concerns or inquiries to government institutions, because even before they contact them they said they have no hope that their concerns will be considered. Albanians, as well as Albanian civil servants, also confirmed that Albanians do not believe that government and civil servants are willing to address or solve their concerns, which discourages them from addressing their questions, concerns or complaints. The lack of trust and bad experience made them directly go to the institution to solve the problems they might have. They confessed that in case they do not pressure civil servants it takes months for their cases to be solved. On the other side, Macedonian and Albanian civil servants thought that they were willing to help Albanians. However, they pointed out that they also have limited jurisdictions which hindered them from helping Albanians and can be perceived as they are not willing to help Albanians. Macedonian and Albanian civil servants were aware that Albanians did not believe that they were willing to consider their concerns. This is the reason they said why they did not even bother to address their concerns.

6.2.2 Positivity and its contribution to trust and satisfaction

The third and fourth research questions probed to evaluate positivity in the relationship according to government and Albanians as well as its contribution to achieving trust and satisfaction. Macedonian civil servants again more favorably evaluated positivity compared to Albanian civil servants. Albanians without exception negatively evaluated the relationship cultivation strategy of positivity. In general, Albanians report that level of positivity in their relationship with the government as very low. In general, Albanians considered that courtesy, attempts to make interaction enjoyable and cooperativeness was very much expressed when

they met civil servants using personal connections, or when civil servants know the citizen was related to someone politically powerful.

The fourth research question, in particular, aimed at understanding how positivity contributes to achieving trust and satisfaction in the relationship between government and Albanians. Looking at both of the definitions used to define positivity, it refers to all what the organization or publics do to make the relationship more enjoyable. Ki and Hon (2009) following Hon and Grunig's definition defined positivity as "the degree to which members of publics benefit from the organization's efforts to make the relationship more enjoyable for key publics" (p.7).

Studies in the past have revealed that an organization's effort to make an organization-public relationship more enjoyable through courteous communication and interaction with the public positively affect trust and satisfaction (Ki 2006). In the case of the government-Albanian relations' results showed positivity to contribute to trust and satisfaction in the relationship between Albanians and government. Those participants that evaluated government low on positivity, their evaluation of trust and satisfaction was also low. Starting from the way the government disseminated information, the services provided, and how civil servants interacted with citizens, Albanians considered that all these affected the relationship they had with government.

In addition, all the sides answered that their interactions happen on a daily basis. Albanians acknowledged that usually they met civil servants because of certain documents they might need, paying bills, taxes, fines and other personal needs they might have. Albanians were not satisfied with the information they received from government institutions. They complained that the information they obtained was not regular, outdated and most of the cases useless. Despite the fact that the law guaranteed citizens free access to public information, Albanians also asserted that information of public interest is not provided, affirming that they are fed mainly with information meant for propaganda or political marketing purposes. Albanians also complain that they receive only superficial information, and for more detailed information they had to actively seek other sources of information. They admitted that they used word of mouth to obtain more information about issues not clear to them. Albanians also thought that the information provided was of no use to the public and mainly used for propaganda or political marketing purposes.

Albanians also complained that the websites of government institutions did not provide them with updated information, and the majority of these websites did not have a version in the Albanian language. To check if government institutions have websites available in the Albanian language, the researcher conducted quick research of the websites of the main ministries and government bodies which confirmed the Albanians claims. Only when the minister or the director of the institution is Albanian was there an Albanian version of the website. In two cases even if the minister was Macedonian, there was only an outdated Albanian version of the website left from the time of the previous minister who happened to be Albanian.

On the other side, Albanian civil servants also acknowledged that Albanians preferred to use word of mouth to obtain information. They thought that Albanians found it easier and usually avoided the official procedures to obtain information. Albanian civil servants also thought that the information provided was not regular, and mainly superficial. Compared to Albanians and Albanian civil servants, Macedonian civil servants thought that like any other citizen, Albanians were also regularly informed. The majority of them also confessed that Albanians have information available to them in the Albanian language. However, there was a civil servant among Macedonians that acknowledged that in her contact with Albanians she has noticed that they are uninformed compared to their Macedonian counterparts.

The study showed that Albanians found word of mouth as convincing and credible source of information. In marketing research Allsop, Bassett, and Hoskins (2007) argued that abundant research has demonstrated that word of mouth is one of the most influential channels of communication in the marketplace. They considered that the power of word of mouth lied in the fact that it is seen as more credible than marketer-initiated communications because it is perceived as having passed through the unbiased filter of “people like me.” At a time of declining trust in institutions, research showed that its influence is growing stronger (Allsop et al. 2007). Marketing literature suggested that word of mouth is generally employed to illustrate advice from other experienced people (Argan & Argan, 2012). The study showed that because of lack of information obtained from the government as well as lack of trustworthiness of all government communications Albanians reverted to word of mouth as a credible and effective source of information.

Positivity appealed more to the citizen’s emotions. They reported being ignored and overlooked often. They also reported having experienced a lack of gentle vocabulary,

impoliteness, arrogance, bossy attitude, and desire of civil servants to get rid of them as soon as possible. Albanians also felt that despite the fact that civil servants were there to serve people, as this is the case in any developed country in the world, in the Republic of North Macedonia civil servant did not give citizens this feeling. As Cooper (1984) argued “public administrators are "professional citizens," or "citizen- administrators"; they are fiduciaries who are employed by the citizenry to work on their behalf.” Albanians thought that civil servants simply felt quite powerful towards citizens, and not servants and representatives of their interests. Albanians also confessed that the way they interact makes them feel they are a burden to civil servants.

Regarding courtesy of civil servants, Albanians and civil servants, in general, were of different opinion. Albanians found civil servants, not at all courteous in their interaction. Albanians also stated that it was hard to see them smile in their interaction with them. Albanians thought that civil servants were not courteous because they usually took more responsibilities than they could carry, which always kept them stressed. Albanians also complained that civil servants lack professionalism which they thought was a result of employment based on political connections rather than meritocracy. Albanian civil servants believe that they are courteous in their interaction with Albanians, although they thought that it is Albanians that should evaluate them. They also confessed that politeness depends very much on the person in front of them. They stated that often they have to deal with arrogant and uneducated citizens, and in these cases they only try to get rid of them. All Macedonian civil servants confessed that they are courteous in their interaction with Albanians and that they do not make any difference between Albanians and Macedonians in treatment.

Politeness has been excessively studied in interpersonal communication. Scholars have claimed that the affect individuals feel towards one another also influences their relations (Brown & Fraser, 1979; Brown & Gilman, 1989; Coupland, Grainger, & Coupland, 1988). Brown (2000) defined politeness as “[...] a special way of treating people, saying and doing things in such a way as to take into account the other person’s feelings” (p. 83). According to Lakoff (1989), politeness revolves around the avoidance of offence and the reduction of any possible conflict resulting from social interaction. Leech (1983) argued also that politeness aims “to reduce the expression of impolite beliefs and increase the expression of polite beliefs” (p.81). Relinque et al. (2012) considered that “ultimate goal of politeness is to achieve a certain degree of social harmony by reducing aggressiveness or avoiding conflict between interlocutors” (p. 7).

Like courtesy, Albanians reported that civil servants did not even try to make their interaction enjoyable. They thought that civil servants lacked elementary acceptable behavior and thought that they were arrogant as well. Albanians claimed lack of professionalism and formal education to influence their interaction with civil servants, which in turn influenced their satisfaction with government and services obtained. They claimed that civil servants lacked elementary acceptable behavior and a dose of arrogance is always present. In some cases, Albanians reported that civil servants did not even greet them the moment they got to interact with each other. This was also confessed by Albanian civil servants that claimed to have noticed some dose of nervousness in citizens when they interacted with civil servants. Still, some Albanians also showed some kind of understanding with civil servants and acknowledged that dissatisfied civil servants usually leads to dissatisfied citizens. Albanian civil servants thought that they make their interaction with Albanians enjoyable. They believe that Albanians felt relieved once you speak to them in Albanian. Macedonian civil servants also thought that they made their interaction with Albanians enjoyable. However, Macedonian civil servants mainly considered that enjoyable interaction is equal to a successfully solved problem or addressed concern of a citizen.

In customer service research focus has been on the unique contribution of interpersonal relationships between contact employees and customers to positive relationship outcomes for the retail service firm (e.g., Bloemer, Odekerken-Schröder, & Kestens, 2003; Gremler & Gwinner, 2000; Price & Arnould, 1999). The main interest has been on the factors that contribute to the creation of a strong bond between the customer and the service provider employee (Beatty, Mayer, Coleman, Reynolds, & Lee, 1996; Bendapudi & Berry, 1997). Gremler and Gwinner (2000) studied rapport as a component of customer employee relationship. They considered rapport “(a) to be the customer’s perception of having an enjoyable interaction with a service provider employee, and (b) to be characterized by a personal connection between the interactants” (p. 83). They undertook a quantitative study to examine the impact of perceptions of an enjoyable interaction and a personal connection on satisfaction with the service, customer loyalty intentions, and word-of-mouth communication. They concluded that results showed that two particular dimensions of rapport—enjoyable interaction and personal connection—appear to be particularly salient in services contexts. They contended that rapport is related to three outcomes of interest to marketers: satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of mouth communication. Previously, Price and Arnould (1999) also found

commercial friendships to be strongly correlated with three key “marketing objectives: satisfaction, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth communication” (p. 51).

However, civil servants thought that enjoyable interaction is equal to solved problem. This showed they underestimated the importance of courteous communication which on the other side was quite important to Albanians. Still, some civil servants were aware that “people have lots of problems, and I think they are very much in need of a positive and enjoyable communication. At times you feel that despite all the problems they have, they only need a smile, and some does of humor.” This also showed how positive and enjoyable communication can help increase satisfaction in government-public relationships.

Regarding cooperativeness, the majority of participants among the Albanians though that civil servants were not at all cooperative. Compared to Albanians, civil servants, in particular Macedonian civil servants, thought that they were quite cooperative in handling people’s concerns. Albanians though that civil servants did not even feel they were servants of the people. Albanians also confessed that if people do not pressure them, regarding their case or problem, unpredictable consequences and problems can result. Albanians thought that civil servants felt powerful towards citizens which led to arrogant behavior. A Ibanians also reported cooperative behavior of civil servants to change if personal connections are used, or if they see some personal benefit in serving certain citizens. On the other side, a majority of Albanian civil servants thought that they are cooperative. However, in general Albanian civil servants admitted that they only cooperated within their limited jurisdictions and competencies they might have. A majority of Macedonian civil servants also claimed that they are cooperative with Albanians only within their jurisdictions and competencies. Still, there were civil servants among Macedonians that confessed they do not care about the problems of Albanians.

In research studies, the precise relationship between trust and cooperation has remained indefinable, whether trust leads to cooperation or the other way around (Yamagishi, Kanazawa, Mashima, & Terai, 2005). Leading theorists disagree on the causal direction (Hardin, 2002; Macy, 2002). However, Bostrom (1995) considered cooperation to be a “fundamental part for the customers' experience of the perceived quality of the service and may therefore not be overlooked” (p. 152). von Matern (1989) cited in Bostrom (1995) carried out a survey among customers of professional service firms where results showed that the providers’ ability to cooperate was the most important customer attribute.

To conceptualize cooperative behaviors, Brito, Brito, and Hashiba (2014) used four cooperative behaviors as Heide and Miner (1992) proposed to represent cooperation — information exchange, flexibility, joint problem solving, and restraint in the use of power. They found that that cooperation with customers affects mostly firm growth while cooperation with suppliers affects firm profitability. In addition, with regards to cooperative behavior, studies have found organizational culture, individual and organizational values among other aspects to influence cooperative behavior (Bercovitz, Jap, & Nickerson, 2006; Koza & Dant, 2007). As some of the civil servants in this study mentioned “it depends very much how courteous and cooperative we are from the person in front of us.” A civil servant contended that service and treatment citizens receive from civil servants depends very much “on civil servant’s personality, the institution he is working for, and the citizen asking for service.”

Concerning experiences of conflict, Macedonian civil servants generally claimed that they have never had any conflict or disagreement with Albanians. However, the majority of Albanian civil servants claimed that verbal conflict is a normal part of their job. They considered that in many cases citizens are not aware that civil servants do not make decisions, and they release their frustrations of negative decisions at them. Albanians, without any exception, reported having had verbal conflicts with civil servants. Albanians also complained that they had only bad experiences when dealing with civil servants. This has made them build a perception that interaction with civil servants is not meant to be enjoyable. The majority of them also thought that verbal conflict was inevitable when interacting with civil servants. Albanians also claimed that conflict is never in favor of citizens because it led to revenge from civil servants, long waiting time, job not getting done, etc. Some participants reported that in some cases personal security was jeopardized because they were threatened by civil servants not to process their complaints or inquiries further.

Conflict and the way civil servants tackled conflict with citizens appear to play a crucial role in the relationship between the government and Albanians. Albanians thought that civil servants did not even cooperate to get the conflicts solved. They said that keeping quiet is the best strategy as serious repercussions are inflicted if they tried to react to their conflict with civil servants. Some studies on conflict management suggested that managing conflict for mutually benefit very much contributes to trust and high-quality relationships (Chen & Tjosvold, 2007; Hempel, Zhang, & Tjosvold, 2009; Segal & Smith, 2014; Tjosvold & Chen, 2010). Tjosvold and Chen (2010) proposed that “conflict, typically believed to be an

impediment to trust, can enhance trust, when it is constructively managed, even between people of different status, companies, and countries” (p. 2). They further argued that when conflicts are managed constructively, they strengthen trust; when managed ineffectively, they weaken trust. Tjosvold and Chen also consider that trusting those who believe they have cooperative goals is likely to induce trust and mutually beneficial interaction. Segal and Smith (2019) considered conflicts an opportunity for growth and contend that trust-building happens with positive conflict resolution which enhances the relationship; “When you are able to resolve conflicts in a relationship, it builds trust” (p. 1).

6.2.3 Openness and its contribution to trust and satisfaction

The fifth research question focused on openness. The aim was to understand to what extent the government was open in its governance according to civil servants and Albanians. Albanians and Albanian civil servants reported very low levels of openness compared to Macedonian civil servants that positively evaluated openness of government institutions. The contribution of openness in producing trust and relationship satisfaction was the objective of the sixth research question. The results showed that openness compared to the first two cultivation strategies was quite important to government-Albanian relations. Even for openness participants that rated government low or high in openness, they rated also government low or high in trust and satisfaction.

With regards to reporting, Albanians claimed that most of the reporting by government institutions is done through their websites. However, Albanians mentioned some obstacles of reporting online affecting the quality of reporting, such as overloaded webpage, not regularly updated webpage, messy website that made it difficult to find online information, limited online information, and missing Albanian language version of their webpage. Albanians asserted that government institutions also use print and electronic media controlled by the government to report on their activities. On the other side, civil servants also claimed that reporting is mainly done through the websites of government institutions. The official Gazette, daily print, and electronic media are also some of the tools that government institutions used to report on their activities.

Albanians also maintained that government institutions did not make public much information about their governance. What is made public was mainly information about their daily activities which can be used for political marketing. Albanians claimed that more is reported

on the people that led the institutions, promoting certain politicians or political leaders rather than information that would be of any use to the citizens. Albanians were also of the opinion that government institutions did not portray the real picture of their governance. They also confessed that government institutions do not provide financial information about their projects. Albanian civil servants also shared the same opinion with Albanians that government institutions did not make public information about their governance. They also thought that what is made public was mainly information about their activities that could be used for political marketing purposes. Macedonian civil servants also reported that the information provided by government institutions included mainly daily activities, information about projects implemented and procedural information. They also claimed to often run information campaigns. Although none of them confessed that information about governance was provided, they think that the information provided was of public character and useful to all citizens.

Concerning annual reports, the majority of Albanians claimed that government institutions did not provide annual reports. Even participants that reported that having no idea if annual reports were published still doubted that annual reports contained truthful information. No matter if annual report were published or not, Albanians claimed these annual reports to contain false information that made it difficult for them to understand what the government has done. Albanians claimed that they do not trust whatever is reported from government institutions because of the huge discrepancy between what is reported and what is accomplished in reality. Albanian civil servants also confessed that annual reports are not published. Albanian civil servants also conveyed their institutions prepare only internal reports that are sent to the government. The government then at the end of fiscal year in a refined way, made them public for the citizens. Thus, they claimed that their institutions did not report directly to the public, rather indirectly through the government. They also claimed that information is mainly used for propaganda or political marketing purposes. Regarding annual reports, Macedonian civil servants reported that their institutions regularly publish annual reports. Some of them, like the Albanian civil servants, reported that they prepared only internal annual reports for the government which further reported them to the citizens.

When new issues arise, participants claimed that the main channels government used to communicate issues to citizens are news conferences, notice boards, daily print, and electronic media, social media, websites, and the official Gazette. The majority of participants from among Albanians thought that news conferences are rarely used, whereas the rest of

participants reported that news conferences are not used at all. Albanian civil servants thought that news conferences were used, though rarely. The majority reported news conferences to be held regularly at the end of the year for reporting purposes. Macedonian civil servants also reported news conferences to be used regularly to inform citizens about new issues.

Albanians thought that news conferences were not used often to inform citizens. Mainly news conferences are held annually to close fiscal year and inform citizens and praise government for their achievements. Albanians thought that news conferences are not meant to inform citizens, but rather were used as a tool for propaganda. They thought that government used news conferences only when they have to brag about their achievements. In addition, Albanians also thought that the information provided during news conferences is highly superficial and not useful to citizens to understand the issues. Albanians thought that word of mouth is used by Albanians to get informed and consider them to be more effective compared to news conferences in informing citizens. Albanians are also were not satisfied with how the government communicated with them during crises. They considered the government to be passive and inactive in providing updated information to citizens during a crisis.

Albanian civil servants also were of the same opinion with Albanians regarding news conferences. Albanian civil servants thought that news conferences were not helpful in understanding new issues. Instead, they thought that they only provided superficial information leading to misunderstandings. Albanian civil servants also thought that news conferences were held annually to report in front of citizens. Still there were participants from among Albanian civil servants that also considered news conferences to be helpful and effective, measuring the effectiveness of news conferences with the increased number of citizens visiting them after news conferences. Macedonian civil servants claimed news conferences to be used regularly when needed. They also found them helpful for Albanians to understand new issues. Macedonian civil servants thought that it was the issue at hand that made news conferences or other methods effective in informing citizens.

Ki and Hon's (2009) definition of openness the emphasized organization's efforts to provide information to the publics about the nature of the organization and what it is doing. Compared to public organizations, government within a democratic political system is obliged to share information with citizens about its governance. Graber (2003) recognized transparency as a crucial difference between public and private organizations, in which public organizations operate or are presumed to operate in an atmosphere of transparency. Nye, Zelikow, and King

(1997) held that transparency helps people to become more familiar with government, bringing them closer together and creating understanding. According to Transparency International “transparency also ensures that public officials, civil servants, managers, board members, and businesspeople act visibly and understandably, and report on their activities.” This is what makes openness important to government-public relationships more than to any organization-public relationship.

Interviews with Albanians showed that open communication and being open to the public affect trust-building and good relationships (Hon & Grunig, 1999). With regards to openness, Hon and Grunig (1999) have also recognized some key strategies to build relationships, such as honesty and the open sharing of information and decisions with the public. The results showed that government is not open to citizens. The government does not provide information to citizens about its governance. Failure to be open to citizens is perceived by Albanians that government institutions do not portray the real picture of their governance. This also makes them think that the government is being quite selective in the information they make public, thus publishing only information that is in their favor, information that portrays them in positive light.

Participants claimed that the main channels the government used to report and communicate new issues to citizens were news conferences, notice boards, daily print, and electronic media, websites, and the official Gazette. Citizens reported that government only makes use of the media that were under their control, converting all this information into propaganda and political marketing. This showed government was not being honest with citizens in information dissemination. This also proved once again that government and governmental organizations are more likely than other organizations to practice a one-way communication model (press agency or public information model of public relations) and less likely to engage in two-way communication (Grunig & Jaatinen, 1999). During the researcher's masters research project, he studied involvement of public relations in strategic management, and the data revealed that public relations practice in the Republic of North Macedonia is defined by the press-agency model. In the Republic of North Macedonia, a majority of those interviewed perceived public relations as being synonymous with publicity. When asked on the purpose and role of public relations, most of participants stated that the role of public relations is to build a favorable image of the organization via dissemination of positive information through the media. In fact, image building and maintaining regular contacts with the media to ensure transparency with the public was an answer typical of many respondents.

Albanians perceived all the reporting done by the government through their websites and government-controlled media to be nothing more than a well-planned public relations strategy. They believe that government websites do not portray the actual achievements and projects of government institutions. Citizens claimed that “if you visit their websites you get the impression that they are the best, and they have accomplished a lot. They are very good in propaganda, in praising and advertising the people that manage with these institutions.” This also showed that there is discrepancy between what the government has accomplished and what it actually reports to the citizens. Albanians claimed that they do not trust whatever is reported from government institutions because of the huge discrepancy between what is reported and what is accomplished in reality. All this puts at jeopardy the trustworthiness of the whole government communications, which in return affects trust in government-public relationships.

The study also showed that Albanians regarded openness as a tool used by them to hold government officials accountable. This is what Balkin (1999) referred to as accountability transparency. Citizens complained that government institutions provided no financial information, which made them wonder where the government spent their tax money. Considering the fact that corruption is high in the Republic of North Macedonia, citizens are convinced that hidden financial information means misuse of public money. Bovens (2007) also argued that citizens, officials, and researchers often recognize that the foundation for accountability is weakened when government processes and outcomes are not transparent.

Transparency and trust are mainly studied in political science and public administration research. Nowadays, transparency is even considered to be a moral imperative in all democratic systems (Mobillard & Pasquier, 2015). Mobillard and Pasquier (2015) investigated the complex relationship between transparency and trust, and concluded that despite the fact that trust in government is most of the time regarded as a positive effect of transparency, it should also be considered as a factor influencing citizens’ perceptions of transparency, and not only as a result of transparency measures. They also considered that transparency is supposed to have a positive impact on four dimensions: a) supporters of transparency reforms often claim that corruption will be reduced; b). they argue that administrations will be more efficient.; c) As a result of a more transparent system, they will finally assume that transparency will increase citizens’ participation; and d) trust in government.

Grimmelikhuijsen (2012) used experiment linked transparency, knowledge and citizen trust in government. His experiment started from the assumptions that increasing people's knowledge by providing factual knowledge about government performance outcomes is seen as an important way of increasing citizen trust in government. The results of his study demonstrated that the link between transparency and trust in a government organization is determined by a mix of knowledge and feelings. The findings further showed that the overall effect of transparency is limited. Pre-existing and fundamental ideas about what government does and whether it is benign or not are far more determining than a single experience with a government organization. Kim & Lee (2012) also studied e-participation, transparency, and trust in local government. They found out that "assessments of government transparency are positively associated with e-participants' trust in the government" (p. 7). Norman et al. (2010) studied the impact of leader's level of positivity and transparency on followers' perceived trust and evaluation of leader effectiveness where results indicated positive relationship. Héritier (2003) found a clear link between transparency and democracy, proposing that more transparency is supposed to reinforce democratization.

Transparency is a serious precondition for the countries aspiring to join the European Union. As North Macedonia is aspiring to join the European Union, in many of the assessments from the European Commission on the Republic of North Macedonia transparent governance of its government has been highly criticized. In some of the latest reports of the European Commission, it is suggested that North Macedonia needs strong political commitment to guarantee the independence of the public administration and respect for the principles of transparency, merit and equitable representation.

The researcher would conclude this section on the impact of transparency on trust by citing Kirby (2012) in one of the Harward Business Review's editions who contended that

The truth is that transparency is something that a company mostly controls and that mostly reassures its customers. By giving people a window into its workings, a company can show it has a sound process that it's adhering to. It can avoid asking customers to have faith in a black box. The greater the transparency, in other words, the greater the trust.

6.2.4 Assurances and its contribution to trust and satisfaction

The seventh research question explored the level of assurances as perceived from two groups, Albanians and civil servants. As with the previous three relationship cultivation strategies, Albanians and Albanian civil servants reported very low levels of assurances of legitimacy.

Macedonian civil servants again more favorably evaluated government in terms of assurances. The eighth research question focused on how assurances contribute to achieving trust and relationship satisfaction. Assurances involved attempts by the organization to ensure stakeholders that they and their concerns are legitimate (Ki and Hon 2009). Overall, interviews suggested linkages between assurances and trust and satisfaction considering the fact that participants that evaluated level of assurances to be low, they also reported low levels of trust and satisfaction in the relationship between government and Albanians.

Albanians thought that civil servants were not involved in providing personal responses to their concerns. Albanians felt that civil servants did not really care much about their concerns; and that they only did something they were obliged to; otherwise, citizens should not expect much from them to help address their concerns. Albanians also thought that they needed to persist if they wanted to get jobs done. In their opinion, if people are not pushy and persistent it takes longer to get jobs done. Albanians also felt that sometimes people need to behave like a beggar to get the attention of civil servants and get them personally involved in solving requests. Albanians also considered civil servants at lower level of public administration to be more personally involved compared to those at managerial positions. In addition Albanians thought that cases are rare when civil servants provided personal responses to concerns. This happens only when civil servants are afraid this can bring them negative consequences or when they are personally connected.

Albanian civil servants claimed to be committed to providing personal responses to Albanians. However, they complained again of limited jurisdictions. Nevertheless, Albanian civil servants confessed that their involvement in providing personal responses to citizens is not at a satisfactory level. According to them, this could be due to professional deficiencies, or low participation of Albanian civil servants in managerial positions. Albanian civil servants also claimed that they tried to do their job professionally, although that might not be seen as being personally involved by Albanians. Macedonian civil servants on the other side claimed to be more personally involved in answering concerns raised by Albanians. The majority of them claimed that they and their colleagues are maximally involved in helping citizens. Macedonian civil servants also confessed that whatever they do is within their assigned jurisdictions and competencies.

Regarding communication of citizen's importance to civil servants, Albanians claimed that when they communicated with civil servants, they never felt they were important to them.

Albanians also did not think that civil servants seriously take into consideration concerns raised by them. Additionally, Albanians did not believe that civil servants and government institutions cared about their concerns. They also found civil servant quite arrogant, and in their opinion, with their arrogance and bossy attitude it was hard to communicate to citizens that they were important to them. Albanians also thought that personal connections and strong political ties could make civil servants seriously consider their concerns. In addition, Albanians also believed that civil servants care more about their salary and office hours than concerns raised by citizens.

Albanian civil servants claimed that they try their best to communicate to Albanians their importance to them. They also claimed they personally do not discriminate citizens based on personal connections and treat all citizens equally and that they personally take seriously all concerns raised by Albanians. They also claimed that they feel more obliged to help Albanians because they are employed there to serve and represent them. They stated that they have limited jurisdictions and it is at higher levels where decisions are taken that their concerns should be taken seriously. However, Albanian civil servants were aware that Albanians did not believe that they and the institutions they work for care about concerns raised by Albanians. Macedonian civil servants also confessed to always communicate to Albanians their importance. They say that they treated all citizens equally and preferred not to differentiate Albanians from other ethnic groups. They also contend to seriously consider all concerns raised by Albanians. Like Albanian civil servants, there were also participants from Macedonian civil servants that thought that not only Albanians but also all citizens did not believe that the government cares about them. Macedonian civil servants confessed to only do their job professionally, and people were not important to them. Compared to Albanians and Albanian civil servants, Macedonian civil servants also thought that Albanians believed that government cares about their concerns.

Concerning involvement in decision making and law and policy development, Albanians thought that in the Republic of North Macedonia, it is still possible to raise an issue or propose a solution. However, the problem is that such moves from citizens are never taken into consideration. Overall, Albanians thought that it is impossible to influence government decisions. They also firmly believed that the voices of people were never heard. According to Albanians, it might be written in the law that people can propose something or raise concerns; however, in reality this is impossible, such initiatives are never considered. Albanians also thought that it was possible to influence decisions only if there was political will within the

coalition partners or if they saw it was important to be incorporated in their political agenda. Albanians also thought that only before elections meetings with citizens intensify, and after elections you would not be able to meet or talk to any government official until the next elections. Public debates or hearings even for the most crucial issues were not practiced in the Republic of North Macedonia. However, according to Albanians, although political parties call these meetings before elections public hearings, they considered them nothing but political marketing because after elections, all their promises “fall in deaf ears.” Albanians also thought that it was difficult for the main Albanian political party to influence government decisions, not to talk about other groups, NGOs or individuals, which was impossible. Albanians also considered that the government had turned citizens into voting machines only, and there was no two-way communication that would help citizens propose solutions or influence decisions.

Albanian civil servants also agreed with Albanians that it was hard to influence government decisions. Like Albanians, Albanian civil servants thought that the people’s voices were not heard and that everything, all the decisions were taken depends on the political will of the parties in position. They also thought that in the Republic of North Macedonia laws were not a problem; the implementation of the law was the main problem. Albanian civil servants thought that it was economic development and poverty that stemmed activism in the Republic of North Macedonia. Moreover, Albanian civil servants blamed political system and the lack of democratic values prevailing in the country to stem public debates and activism. On the other side, Macedonian civil servants thought that in the last few years the status and political power of Albanians have extensively improved so that their voices were heard. Macedonian civil servant considered that Albanians are equal citizens in the Republic of North Macedonia and they take part equally in creating issues and proposing different solutions, and they play important role in influencing decision making. In addition, the majority of Macedonian civil servants thought that government institutions and the government, in general, considered the views of Albanians in decision and policymaking. However, Macedonian civil servants thought that the government only declaratively considers citizens views, which does not mean that they will succeed at the end because it depends on the political will if their suggestions and opinion are considered in decision making.

These findings showed that citizens are not involved in decision making in North Macedonia. Involvement, collaboration, participation of citizens are some of the ways through which leaders or elected officials can decentralize some of the power, authority, and responsibility to

citizens. Quick & Bryson (2016) argued that through public participation, stakeholders might interact with government agencies, political leaders, nonprofit organizations and business organizations that create or implement public policies and programs. Studies have shown citizen participation to be correlated to policy outcomes and improvements in local service delivery and public programs (Ebdon & Franklin, 2006; Risner & Bergan, 2012; Roberts, 1997). Fleming and Barnhouse (2006) also showed the connection between citizen participation and satisfaction helps increase public confidence in the ability of the local government to effectively and efficiently deliver services. King & Stivers (1998) also suggested that increased citizen participation can stem the deterioration of public trust. Citizen involvement also is considered to produce better decisions, and thus provide more efficiency benefits to society (Beierle, 1999; Thomas, 1995).

In democracies, public participation is a fundamental part of the public–government relationship (Bryson, Quick, Slotterback, & Crosby, 2013; Jacobs, Cook, and Carpini, 2009; Roberts 2004). Quick & Bryson (2016) considered that in countries where democracy prevails “citizens are presumed to be important stakeholders in that they are able to participate either directly or indirectly through elected representatives in the formation, adoption, and implementation of the laws and policies that affect them” (p.1). In this case of the Republic of North Macedonia where the democratic governance continued to deteriorate in the last years, the results of the study showed that to Albanians is quite important if the government considers their views in policymaking and decision making. Citizens asserted that they feel that they and their concerns are legitimate to government only when their voices are being heard and being implemented by the government through public policies.

Assurances, like positivity, appealed to the emotional state of citizens. Research in public relations has found assurances to be the strongest predictor of relational quality outcomes in the organization-public relationship (Ki, 2006). The findings of the study suggested that assurances influence citizen’s perceptions of how important they as citizens are to government and its institutions. When analyzing data, statements such as

government does not care much about us, civil servants want only to get rid of us, citizen is never important to government institutions, they do not care about us, you never feel you are important to civil servants” were often found in the comments of Albanians. This shows how lack of assurances portrayed how unimportant Albanians felt and perceived themselves to be for the government. Within these comments we can identify some of the forms that assurances is manifested which are found in the interpersonal relationship literature such as “supportiveness,” “comfort,” “need satisfaction” and “overt expression. (Canary et al., 1993, p. 9-10)

Besides, Albanians, when asked to evaluate how civil servants communicate importance of citizens to them, they claimed to never feel important in any encounter they might have with civil servants. Like in the case of positivity, they also asserted to find civil servant quite arrogant, and in their opinion through arrogance and bossy attitude civil servants could never communicate to citizens that they are important to them. Arrogance made Albanians feel contempt and inferiority when dealing with civil servants. This, in turn, affects communication between civil servants and citizens. In many instances Albanians reported arrogance to be the reason why they are not satisfied with communication with civil servants. They also evaluated communication with civil servants not to be enjoyable.

Moreover, assurances provide evidence on the importance of two-way symmetrical communication to help citizens propose solutions or influence decisions. Albanians complained that government communication “always comes from top-down and there is no two-way communication. This shows that public opinion is not important to government as long as they can win elections.” In public relations, the symmetrical model (Grunig & Hunt, 1994) and symmetrical relationship cultivation strategies (Grunig & Huang, 2000) are used to accommodate the public's interest and balance it with the organization's interest. The concept of symmetry in public relations entails use of the two-way symmetrical communication to manage conflicts, reach an understanding and build relationships with publics. The aim of this model of public relations is to adjust own ideas and behavior to those of others rather than to try to control how others think and behave.

Assurances also show how much the governing programs of the government are developed along the needs of people. Failure to provide assurances means that government does not listen to the voices of people to incorporate their needs and suggestions in its governing program. One of the main qualities of good governance of the government is its ability to respond to the needs of citizens and uphold their rights. This incorporates the willingness and ability of the government to speak with citizens, to listen to them, incorporate their needs and preferences into its governing program and implement them through laws and policies. Being attentive to the needs and preferences of the citizens the government can build quality relationships with them. Thus, through assurances, the government shows to citizens that they and their needs and concerns are legitimate, which in turn enhances trust and satisfaction of citizens with government. This is also what Appleby (1945) considered making government different from all other organizations; it must take account of all the desires, needs, actions, thoughts and sentiments of the citizens.

6.2.5 Relationship Outcomes: Trust and Satisfaction

The ninth and tenth research questions evaluated trust and satisfaction according to civil servants and Albanians. Almost all Albanians confessed that the government treated them unfairly and unjustly. When asked to ground their answer regarding why they think they are not treated fairly, Albanians listed a number of reasons that make them feel that way, such as discrimination, unequal representation, economic discrimination, corruption, and lack of meritocracy and professionalism. Albanian civil servants did share the same opinion with the Albanians. All of the Albanian civil servants' interviewees admitted Albanians to be treated unfairly and unjustly by the government, and the main reason was discrimination on ethnic basis. Albanians also thought that it was through the selective application of the law that the government treated Albanians unfairly and unjustly, although laws in paper are equal for all citizens. Contrary to Albanians and Albanian civil servants, Macedonian civil servants thought that after the Ohrid framework agreement Albanians were treated fairly and justly.

Regarding dependability, Albanians thought that the government and government institutions could not be relied on to keep promises. According to Albanians the government usually promised more than they could achieve. Thus, this huge promise-achievement discrepancy made Albanians think that the government could not be relied on to keep promises. Albanians consider all promises given by politicians to be lies as practice has shown that they do not keep promises. Albanian civil servants did share the same opinion with Albanians regarding promises. They thought that only a small portion of what was promised is kept at the end of each mandate. Albanian civil servants thought that all their promises are made for political marketing to get as many votes as possible. Albanian civil servants also thought that the inferior position of the Albanian political party in position has made Albanians lose hope that promises given by them could be met. On the other side, Macedonian civil servants could confirm and assure us that all promises by government and their institutions are met without any exception. Still, a minority of Macedonian civil servants thought there was huge difference between what is promised and what is actually achieved in practice.

It was surprising that some Albanians considered that government institutions have enough capacity to accomplish what they say they will. However, according to Albanians, civil servants failed at turning words into actions, which they considered to be due to alack of desire to govern responsibly. Albanians thought that personal and group interest prevailed over the interest and welfare of the society. Thus, Albanians thought that it was the will that

government officials lacked and not capacity. Albanians thought that it was the underground “mafia” that controlled the government and not capacity as to why they do not accomplish what they say they will. Still, the majority of Albanians thought that the government had no capacity to accomplish what they said they would. According to them, it was a lack of meritocracy and unprofessionalism that government institutions lacked. Albanians also thought that compared to their capacity the government promised much more than they could do. Albanian civil servants, without any exception, thought that capacity exists. They thought the main problem was the desire to govern properly. Albanian civil servants also claimed that it was financial capacity that government lacked to accomplish what they promised. They considered that government made promises for a budget of 20 billion euros, whereas the country’s budget is 3 billion euro. Macedonian civil servants also thought that capacity existed; however, they lacked willingness and desire to govern responsibly for the good of the society.

Overall, Albanians reported not to trust the government at all. Only one participant answered a little bit softer and stated “I do not trust government,” whereas the rest of the participants started their answer with the phrase “I do not trust the government at all.” Albanian civil servants also thought that Albanians do not trust government at all. All the participants, without any exception, confirmed this. The majority of them also confirmed that even they themselves do not trust government, though they are government employees. Albanians civil servants also thought that Albanians do not trust government because they feel misused. According to Albanian civil servants, Albanians thought that the government used them to get their taxes, but gave nothing back in return through public investments. Another participant stated that Albanians do not trust government at all; however they are not left with many options. There were a few participants among the Macedonian civil servants that thought that Albanians did not trust government, recognizing also the fact that Albanians felt discriminated. Still, a majority of Macedonian civil servants thought that a majority of Albanians trusted the government although there can be people that do not trust. According to Macedonian civil servant personal experiences and political conviction play crucial roles in the trust between the Albanians and the government.

With regards to satisfaction, Albanians, in general, are not satisfied with the knowledgeability, politeness, and professionalism of civil servants. The majority of them find civil servants quite arrogant. They also thought that public administration in the Republic of North Macedonia is overloaded with political party militants. Albanians think that

incompetence, arrogance, and unprofessionalism of civil servants is a result of a lack of employment criteria in public administration as well as a lack of meritocracy. Albanians also found Macedonian civil servants to be more competent, polite, and professional compared to Albanian civil servants. Albanians also admitted that they do not enjoy dealing with civil servants. They claimed not to be satisfied with their communication with civil servants. Albanians think that a majority of civil servants lack elementary communication behavior. They do not know how to formally communicate and interact with citizens. Albanians also admitted they are not happy with the government. They claimed that they are also not satisfied with the relationship that the government has had with them. Some of the main reasons for their dissatisfaction are mismanagement, ethnical and economic discrimination, the government does not care about citizens, they do not fulfill their obligations, failure to keep promises, the government provides no accountability, corruption, massive migration, double standards, nepotism, etc. Albanians also associated the government with the Albanian political party in power. They claimed that they do not believe that the Albanian political party has the decision- making power which leads to mistrust. Albanians also claimed trust to be related to the expectations that citizens have from government. Albanians also claimed not to be satisfied with “a government that even after 25 years of independence denies to Albanians the elementary human rights.” Albanians also felt that the government does not care about citizens. According to Albanians the priority of this government is their personal interest and the interest of the groups they belong to.

Results showed incompetence to influence the evaluation of the relationship from the side of Albanians. In many instances, Albanians reported civil servants to be incompetent and unprofessional for the job they were doing. Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990) studied relationship quality in services selling and found expertise important employee characteristic that contributes to customer trust. Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, and Evans (2006) have defined expertise is defined as the knowledge, experience, and overall competence. In his study, Macintosh (2009) also found both expertise and dependability to be related to trust, suggesting that competence is very important to building trust in the service domain. On the importance of competence and professionalism, Bostrom concluded that

The professional services are all the same in one dimension. A service provider offers professional knowledge to the market. The professional knowledge is the essence in the service, no matter that an architect, lawyer, or accountant is the professional service provider. This knowledge has been accumulated over generations of professional service providers. It might therefore be assumed that they all carry a strong and specific set of professional values-values that guide the service provider in the service production. (p.164)

Wisniewski (2001) also contended that citizen satisfaction with governmental actions is based on their consideration and assessment of their experience on service quality, which shows that performance of officials in providing service quality influences citizen views of their governments.

However, Albanian civil servants thought that Albanians built their perceptions based on a single unsatisfying experience they might have had. Albanian civil servants also thought that if they were to be self-critical, civil servants, especially Albanian civil servants, do rank low on all three dimensions: competence, politeness, and professionalism. There were also Albanian civil servants that thought that majority of Albanians consider them to be competent, polite, and professional. Albanian civil servants thought that Albanians enjoy their communication with Albanian civil servants. In their opinion, the fact that they can communicate in Albanian made communication easier and satisfactory because the majority of Albanians cannot communicate in the Macedonian language.

Albanian civil servants did share the same opinion with Albanians regarding their overall satisfaction with the government, and the relationship the government has had with them. All of them admitted that Albanians are not at all satisfied with the government. Albanian civil servants also did share the same opinion regarding the reasons Albanians are not satisfied with government. Albanian civil servants also recognized the double standards employed by government when it came to Macedonians in comparison to other ethnicities in the country.

Macedonian civil servants were of the opposite opinion with Albanians and their Albanian colleagues with regards to competence, politeness, and professionalism of civil servants. They thought that Albanians were satisfied with the knowledgeability, politeness, and professionalism of civil servants. Compared to Albanians, Macedonian civil servants thought that now in North Macedonia there was a highly professionalized public administration. Still, there were also a few Macedonian civil servants that confessed that not only Albanians but also all citizens in the Republic of North Macedonia were not satisfied with politeness, patience, competence, and professionalism of civil servants.

Like their Albanian colleagues, Macedonian civil servants also admitted that Albanians do not enjoy dealing with civil servants. They claimed that interaction with civil servants was not meant to enjoy. Macedonian civil servants further claimed that if citizens managed to get their job done, they forgot their negative experience and interaction they might have had with civil servants. Regarding overall satisfaction of Albanians with government, Macedonian civil

servants were divided in their opinion. The majority of them thought that Albanians were satisfied with the government. There were still Macedonian civil servants that thought that no one in the country is satisfied with this government. They mentioned some reasons, such as increased unemployment, inflation, politicization of public institutions, etc. However, the majority thought that Albanians were satisfied with the government. Macedonian civil servants also confessed that Albanians were treated as equal citizens compared to Macedonians and all other ethnicities living in the country. They refuted the claims made by Albanians that the government discriminates against them.

To sum up, the results of the study suggested linkages between relationship cultivation strategies of access, positivity, openness, and assurances with the relationship quality outcomes of trust and satisfaction. Results showed that the more favorably the government was evaluated on the relationship cultivation strategies, the relationship quality outcomes of trust and satisfaction were also favorably evaluated. Findings further provided evidence on the contribution and importance of these relationship cultivation strategies to building positive government-public relationships based on mutual trust and satisfaction. Face-to-face communication using the personal influence model were also identified as an important relationship cultivation strategy in government-citizen relationships in North Macedonia.

The study provided evidence on “keeping promises” as a relationship cultivation strategy. Hung (2002) suggested “keeping promises” as the fundamentally essential cultivation strategy among the various relationship types. Keeping promises, together with discrimination, appeared during the data analysis to be the main reasons why Albanians did not trust government and were not satisfied with the relationship the government has had with them. Additionally, integrity was found to be an important dimension in the evaluation of trust in government-community relations. Discrimination was the main reason why Albanians felt they are treated unfairly and unjustly, which showed that citizen discrimination made citizens feel unfairly and unjustly treated which reduced trust in government-public relationships.

Political parties usually make lots of promises, which in most of the cases are inconsistent with their true capability in fulfilling them. In the Republic of North Macedonia, keeping promises is used as a “truth meter” to check how much the government keeps its promises. There is also a website in the Republic of North Macedonia www.truthmeter.mk which aims at increasing awareness among citizens to hold the government accountable. This truth meter includes all the promises made by the political parties in position during the campaign, state

of fulfillment of promises, the political party that made the promise, and the dates it was promised and accomplished. Different values are used to label promises such as: fulfilled, unfulfilled, partially fulfilled, true, false, half true, in progress, inconsistent, vague, and under research.

Conflict and conflict management proved to be important to government-community relations. How civil servants handled conflict situation with Albanians influenced citizen satisfaction. Albanians complained that conflict, in particular, verbal conflict, is a daily routine in interacting with civil servants. This makes them feel uncomfortable when meeting civil servants, especially when they have to complain about something. Some participants reported that in some cases personal security was jeopardized because civil servants threatened them not to process their complaints further.

Results also showed professionalism and competence of civil servants to affect positivity which in turn influenced citizen's satisfaction. Albanians were not at all satisfied with the professionalism and competence of civil servants. Professionalism also was crucial to enjoyable interaction between Albanians and civil servants. Albanians evaluated that civil servants lacked elementary acceptable behavior and thought that they were arrogant as well. They thought that the lack of professionalism made civil servants always express some level of arrogance. Although Albanians considered courtesy to be a personal quality, in their opinions all the civil servants they had dealt with "... lack professional training on how to behave and treat citizens." Albanians also thought that a lack of professionalism and proper training made civil servants not respect the elementary ethics of communication between civil servants and citizens. As discussed by Grunig (2000) "organizations cannot rely solely on the ethics and responsibility of individuals. They also must incorporate ethics and responsibility into the formal rules, structure, and cultural values of organizations" (p. 28).

The results of the study also showed how important employee engagement and satisfaction is to citizen satisfaction. Albanians expressed some kind of sympathy with civil servants. They confessed that "civil servants are not satisfied with the treatment they receive in their institutions which is reflected in their interaction with citizens." Albanians also complained that civil servants cared more about their salary at the end of the month rather than than being in their office hours and their service quality and to citizens. This shows how many civil servants enjoy and are engaged in doing their job. Besides, results also showed lack of professionalism and competence to influence civil servants engagement. Albanians felt that

civil servants were always stressed because they have taken a job they were not capable of doing. Albanians also thought that civil servants were not courteous because they have taken more responsibilities than they can carry, which always keeps them stressed. This, in turn, made them arrogant towards citizens. As a participant commented

civil servants are not professionally prepared for the jobs they carry, they are mainly employed through the political parties in power as militants. There may be also cases that you can meet illiterate civil servants, and from this kind of people you cannot expect to be courteous in their interaction with you.

Another important finding of the study was the influence that trust had on relationship cultivation strategies. Lack of trust influenced the perceived trustworthiness of government and government communications. Albanians considered that the government could not be relied on as honest or truthful. Due to the lack of trust, Albanians never addressed their inquiries or complaints to government institutions, because they believed and were convinced that the government did not care about their concerns and was not willing to address them. Lack of trust discouraged Albanians from addressing their questions, concerns, or complaints.

In addition, the lack of trust highly influenced government communications and dissemination of information. Albanians doubted all information disseminated from the government. They considered that the information did not portray the actual reality and considered them to be made-up information for marketing and propaganda purposes. Lack of trust further influenced reporting and accountability of government. Albanians considered that reports provided by government do not portray the actual reality of governance. They also considered that citizens could not understand from annual reports what the government had done because these reports contained false information used for political marketing purposes. As discussed earlier, Albanians claimed that they do not trust whatever is reported from government institutions because of the huge discrepancy between what is reported and what is accomplished in reality. All this did put at jeopardy the trustworthiness of all government communications, which in return affected trust in government-Albanians relationships. This suggested that the government should make sure all their communication, as well as all information disseminated to citizens is honest and based on facts. The government should be careful in making promises. The Government should make realistic promises and should not promise more than they can achieve. Failure to keep promises deteriorates public trust in government.

Taking into consideration the state of politics in the Republic of North Macedonia, and the fragile inter-ethnic relations, the findings are not surprising. The lack of public trust in the government has been reported for the last several years in the Republic of North Macedonia leading to a weak government-public relationship. The polls conducted by Eurobarometer in Autumn 2017 revealed that the Macedonian citizens have the least confidence in the judiciary system, the police, the public administration, the government, the parliament, and the political parties. With over 50%, Macedonian citizens trust the army (51%) and the European Union (53%).

6.2.6 Coorientation state between government and Albanians

The final research question addressed the extent that government and citizens agree on the evaluation of the quality of the government-Albanian relationship. The findings of the study, in general, showed disagreement between Albanians and civil servants. In particular, the results showed disagreement between Macedonian civil servants and Albanians as well as Albanian civil servants and Macedonian civil servants regarding the government-Albanian relationship. Results further revealed an agreement between Albanian civil servants and Albanians about the relationship cultivation strategies of access, openness, and relationship outcomes of trust and satisfaction. Overall, Macedonian civil servants viewed the relationship much more favorably than Albanian civil servants and Albanians.

Applying the model adopted from Verčič et al. (2006) conflicting perceptions of the two ethnic groups can be identified. Cognitions that Macedonian civil servants and Albanian civil servants had about trust and satisfaction of Albanians were not matching, despite the fact that both of the groups represented government. Thus, there was a disagreement between Macedonian and Albanian civil servants. The cognitions of Albanian civil servants were in agreement with Albanians' cognitions about their trust and satisfaction with government. This showed agreement between Albanians and Albanian civil servants with regards to trust and satisfaction. On the other side, the cognitions of Macedonian civil servants did not match those of Albanians regarding trust and satisfaction, showing disagreement between these two parties.

On the other side, the model also helped understand how congruent and accurate were the cognitions of Albanian and Macedonian civil servants with their perceptions of the actual cognitions of Albanians about trust and satisfaction. Findings showed that there was

congruency between Albanian civil servants' cognitions about trust and satisfaction with their perceptions of Albanians' actual cognitions. Albanian civil servants accurately described that Albanians do not trust government nor were they satisfied with the government. The same congruency and accuracy were not found between cognitions of Macedonian civil servants and their perceptions of the actual cognitions of Albanians. The cognitions of Macedonian civil servants that Albanians trusted and were satisfied with the government were not compatible nor accurately described the actual cognitions of Albanians that they do not trust the government nor were they satisfied with government.

Regarding cultivation strategies, Albanians and Macedonian civil servants were in disagreement on all 4 cultivation strategies. Albanians and Albanian civil servants were in agreement on the relationship cultivation strategies of access and transparency, whereas on the relationship strategies of positivity and assurance they were in disagreement. Macedonian and Albanian civil servants were also in disagreement regarding access, transparency, and in agreement on positivity and assurances

Reviewing these findings using the coorientational model it can be concluded that Macedonian civil servants and Albanians are in the state of dissensus on all the cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes. Albanians and Albanian civil servants are in the state of consensus on all the variables besides positivity and assurances. According to Dozier and Ehling (1992) a state of dissensus exists when "dominant coalitions and publics hold conflicting views about an issue and both parties are aware of the disagreement" (p. 180). As was explained earlier in the findings chapter, the public's meta-perspective was not measured in the study. In the study, the researcher was not able to measure how the constituency does, in this case Albanians, perceived the government's views. Although during the pretest questions were prepared to test public's meta-perspective regarding trust and satisfaction, it confused participants and the majority of them refused to answer considering them very subjective questions that differ from individual to individual. Thus, the study failed to evaluate the congruency and accuracy between the cognitions of Albanians with their perceptions of the cognitions of civil servants about the actual cognitions of Albanians about trust and satisfaction.

6.2.7 Implications for Public Relations Theory

The aim of the study was to examine how publics' perceptions of the government's relationship cultivation strategies of access, positivity, openness, and assurances affected their evaluations of the relationship quality outcomes of trust and satisfaction. Relationship management theory literature (Grunig & Huang 2000; Hon & Grunig 1999) assumed relationship quality outcomes to be positively affected by the public's assessment of relationship cultivation strategies.

Hung (2007) also suggested that research in the future should move from concentrating on relationship outcomes to relationship cultivation strategies; i.e, how to sustain and cultivate quality relationships with a focus on which relationship cultivation strategies, access, positivity, openness, assurances of legitimacy, networking and sharing of tasks, can achieve the relationship qualities, such as trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction.

First, the study provided evidence on the importance and contribution of specific relationship cultivation strategies to government-public relationships in general and to relational outcomes of trust and satisfaction in particular. The results of the study showed detrimental behaviors from both sides civil servants and Albanians to affect why Albanians negatively evaluated trust and satisfaction in their relationships with the government. The findings supported the initial assumptions that relationship cultivation strategies constitute important factors in predicting the government-citizen relationship quality. The study embarked based on the researcher's assumption that access, positivity, openness, and assurances from the part of the government would affect how much Albanians trust and are satisfied with the government in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The next contribution of the study to public relations literature is the evidence it provides on the individual contribution of the relationship cultivation strategies of access, positivity, openness, and assurances of legitimacy to the relationship outcomes of trust and satisfaction. Findings of the study indicated strong relationship between access, positivity, openness, and assurances to achieving trust and relationship satisfaction in government-community relations. Participants that rated government low on relationship cultivation strategies also claimed lack of trust and satisfaction in government-community relations. On the other side, those that rated government more favorably on the four relationship cultivation strategies also claimed Albanians to trust and be more satisfied with the government.

The results of the study indicated that the four relationship cultivation strategies applied in the study varied in their relevance to the relational outcomes of trust and satisfaction. Openness and assurances deemed to be more relevant to government-public relationships, especially in nurturing trust between government and publics, followed by positivity and access respectively. One of the main reasons why Albanians did not trust the government was the lack of transparency (openness) and failure to keep promises (assurances). Additionally, Albanians reported being discriminated with regards to access and positivity if they had no personal connections. This showed the influence that discrimination based on personal connection has on integrity. Perceived discrimination made citizens feel unfairly and unjustly treated. Discrimination was mentioned from all the participants to be one of the main reasons why they felt government treats them unfairly and unjustly.

Additionally, the study provided additional evidence on “keeping promises” as a relationship cultivation strategy. Hung (2002) suggested “keeping promises” as the fundamentally essential cultivation strategy among the various relationship types. Keeping promises, together with discrimination appeared during the data analysis to be the main reasons why Albanians did not trust the government and were not satisfied with the relationship the government has had with them.

The study also showed that the cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes proposed by Hon and Grunig (1999) and Grung and Huang (2000) are appropriate and reliable in the government-citizen context. Thus, the research study extends the body of knowledge of public relations to a specific context, government-community relations in a multiethnic country with fragile inter-ethnic relations and a hybrid regime in which democratic institutions are fragile and substantial challenges to the protection of political rights and civil liberties exist.

Additionally, although the concept of distrust is not extensively discussed in the relationship management literature (Welch 2004), the study showed distrust to be an important dimension in evaluating relationship quality. Shen (2017) has also proposed distrust as an additional dimension of organization-public relationship quality where statistical tests demonstrated that distrust was an organization-public relationship quality dimension related to but distinct from trust.

Scholars (Barber, 1983; Lewis & Weigert, 1985) have viewed distrust as simply the opposite of trust. In public relations research, Shen (2017) considered that the dimension of distrust is excluded although it has been considered a component of relationship quality in other

disciplines. However, contrary to scholars that viewed distrust as the opposite of trust, Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies (1998) maintained that trust and distrust are “separate but linked dimensions” (p. 439). In their opinion distrust does not necessarily entail absence of trust. They rather defined trust “in terms of confident positive expectations regarding another’s conduct” and distrust “in terms of confident negative expectations regarding another’s conduct” (p. 439). They further explained that “another’s conduct” includes “words, actions, and decisions”; and “confident positive expectations” are “a belief in, a propensity to attribute virtuous intentions to, and a willingness to act on the basis of another’s conduct” (Lewicki et al., 1998, p. 439). Lewicki et al. (1998) clarified that the “negative expectations” involved “a fear of, a propensity to attribute sinister intentions to, and a desire to buffer oneself from the effects of another’s conduct” (p. 439).

The study also suggested that distrust requires further attention in the public relations literature. The same way relationship quality outcomes are studied to evaluate the quality of relationship; research should also focus on studying and conceptualizing distrust as a negative relationship quality variable. Albanians, in general, answered that they “do not trust at all government” which showed absence of trust in their relationship with government. In one instance, a participant when asked how much he trusts government, his answer was short and straightforward, an absolute mistrust. These answers of Albanians suggested distrust in the sense of “absence of trust” referred by some scholars (Adams, Highhouse, & Zickar, 2010; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Rotter, 1980) as distrust.

To further identify distrust, the researcher referred to Kang & Park (2017) who suggested dimensions of distrust: discredibility (i.e., assumptions about an organization’s past violations of obligations and reckless behavior) and malevolence (i.e., assumptions about an organization’s intended harm and lack of commitment to public welfare). Although the study did not directly measure distrust, complaints from participants indicate the presence of discredibility and malevolence from the side of the government. Those participants that reported not to trust the government at all complained to be treated unfairly and unjustly by the government. When asked to ground their answer why they think they are not treated fairly, Albanians listed a number of reasons that make them feel that way, such as discrimination, unequal representation, economic discrimination, corruption, and lack of meritocracy and professionalism. In addition, corruption index is quite high in North Macedonia. Albanians reported that personal and group interest prevails over the interest and welfare of the society. All these showed a lack of commitment to public welfare from the side of the government. In

addition, Albanians also thought that government and government institutions could not be relied on to keep promises. They also considered all promises given by politicians to be lies as practice has shown that they do not keep promises. This continuous violations of past promises from the government assured Albanians that the government lacked credibility.

The study provided evidence on the importance of environmental variables suggested by Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) which according to the authors, influence the research and practice of public relations in different countries. Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) collapsed these five environmental variables into three factors: a country's infrastructure (political system, economic development, and level of activism), media environment and societal culture. The study provided evidence on the importance of political system, in particular democracy and democratic values in applying the relationship cultivation strategies. In a country in which a democratic political system prevails, government institutions provide more access to citizens, are closer to citizens, are less corrupted, provide more transparency and accountability, incorporate suggestions and concerns raised by people in their governing programs, citizens are granted power to influence government decisions, activism is high, media freedom is guaranteed, public administration is depoliticized, etc. All these issues were reported by citizens to be undermined by the government in the Republic of North Macedonia. For example in the case of the Republic of North Macedonia, as the democratic governance in the Republic of North Macedonia continued to deteriorate in the last years, so had shrunk the space for activists and members of civil society. This is also evidenced by Dragsic (2016) who claimed that the general occupation of the state and the legal system, the media and the physical space, combined with the stated methods of personal pressures, sent a strong message that civil society actors and their opinions were not welcome, not only in the realm of the public but in the country of the Republic of North Macedonia.

This proved what Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) have concluded; political system of a country has a direct influence on the extent of activism in that country because only pluralistic societies tolerate activism of any sort. According to Grunig (1997), the concept of public captures well the active and symmetrical relationship between government agencies and citizen publics assumed in democracies. In a democracy citizens are expected to take an active part in policy making and be involved in their government. As Feinberg (1997) said: "for democracy to work, citizens must have access to information about what their government is doing and how decisions have been reached" (p. 377).

Besides, Young (2007) stated that “communication between citizens and their governments is a key measure of the health of any democracy” (p.iii). In Young’s opinion, communication is inseparable from how governments operate, a dimension of every action or decision taken by the government, the way government makes, promotes and enacts policies, how government is organized and the relationships it builds with citizens as well as the media and other groups such as business and community organizations.

Another important contribution that the study makes to public relations literature is the evidence that it provides on the importance of two-way symmetrical communication in nurturing positive government-public relationships. In particular, two-way symmetrical communication deemed crucial to the application of the relationship cultivation of assurances. Findings showed two-way symmetrical communication to be essential in helping citizens propose solutions or influence decisions. Albanians complained that government communication “always comes from top-down and there is no two-way communication. This shows that public opinion is not important to government as long as they can win elections.” The study showed that external communication from the government is mainly done through mass media as their channel, message is mainly formal, purpose is promotion and propaganda, and the direction is on-way. Adoption of two-way, symmetrical communication is necessary in order to establish relationships between governments and publics as well as creation of new relationships between unrelated publics (Taylor, 2000). The findings of the study once again proved that that government and governmental organizations are more likely than other organizations to practice a one-way communication model (press agency or public information model of public relations) and less likely to engage in two-way communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig & Jaatinen, 1999; Sriramesh 1994;).

Last, another contribution that the study makes to the literature is the two-way measurement of organization-public relationship. The majority of organization-public relationship studies have conducted one-sided measurement of relationships, mainly from the perspective of external publics, despite the encouragement of different scholars (Ferguson, 1984; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998) to conduct two-way measurement of organization-public relationship. The application of the coorientational approach revealed the degree of agreement, accurate perception, and perception of perceived agreement (congruency) between government and community when assessing cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes. It helped evaluate and understand how both sides involved in this relationship, Albanians and government officials perceived the relationship between them.

6.3 Implications for Government-Citizen Relations

The findings of the study can be used to come up with significant suggestions for the government in order to improve public relationships. Based on the findings of the study the following practical implications to government are suggested:

- The government should make sure that their communication efforts reach all the ethnic groups in society. Different ethnicities should be equally represented in the government in line with the demographic characteristics of society. To make sure that their communication efforts do also reach all the ethnic groups in the society, government should use the different languages spoken by different ethnic groups in the country. The study proved language to be an obstacle in the communication between civil servants and citizens.
- In a multi-ethnic society, the government should plan programs that cater to a broad spectrum of citizens in order not to make minority groups or ethnicities feel discriminated.
- Citizens should all be treated equally in all government institutions. Public administration services should be equally available to all citizens without exception. Privileges based on political or personal connections should be avoided as it leads to citizen discrimination. Citizen discrimination further makes citizen feel unfairly and unjustly treated which reduces trust in government-public relationships.
- The government should provide more communication channels or media outlets that assist its citizens in reaching it. The government should not stick only to direct meetings. As suggested by citizens, government should more often use e-mails and telephone.
- Reforms towards digitalization of public administration are crucial. Citizens complained that even for a simple question or document, they always have to go to the respective institutions. Digitalization would shorten and ease these procedures for citizens and get rid of long waiting lines in front of government institutions.
- The government should move forward further with decentralization. Decentralization increases government efficiency and responsiveness to citizens. It brings government to the local people, easing their access to the various government services.
- The government should conduct transparent government practices. The government should let citizens know how their tax money is being spent.
- The government should regularly report to citizens. Annual reports should also be published on a regular basis. Through reporting government provides accountability to citizens who can lead to increased levels of public trust in the government.

- The government should inform citizens on a regular basis about government operations and programs. The more knowledgeable are citizens, the more they actively engage in society and government activities.
- The government should use two-way communication with citizens. Voices of citizens should be heard and incorporated in government programs and policymaking. Thus, government should encourage public debate in order to receive feedback from the public and nurture interaction. Symmetrical relationship cultivation strategies (Grunig and Huang 2000) help accommodate the public's interest and balance it with the organization's interest. Use of two-way symmetrical communication also helps manage conflicts, reach an understanding and build relationships with publics.
- In line with this, the government should make use of the latest technology and social media platforms. Social media, in particular, provide an important tool for citizen engagement in order to get feedback on government services and citizen satisfaction. In the Republic of North Macedonia 72% of households are connected to internet, which provides great opportunity for the government to communicate and keep citizens informed. Besides, studies have found that government websites and social media “have the potential to facilitate high-quality government-public relationships” (Hong, 2013).
- The government should engage citizens in decision making and problem-solving. Therefore, law and policymaking in the country should provide citizens with opportunities to raise concerns and provide solutions.
- Accordingly, the government should encourage activism and not stem it. The government should provide conditions for NGOs to operate normally in the country. Activism provides an important opportunity for citizens to influence government decisions and make people’s voices be heard in the government.
- The government should be aware that media freedom and good media relations are crucial to positive government-public relationships. Citizens do not trust all that is propagated through the government-controlled media.
- The government should improve employee engagement and satisfaction. Engaged and satisfied employees provide better services to citizens leading to citizen satisfaction. The findings also showed that empowerment of civil servants is crucial to excellent citizen services. Many of the civil servants complained of limited jurisdictions in serving citizens.
- Lack of professionalism and politicization of public administration seem to be the main cause of bad citizen service. The government should apply meritocracy in employing civil

servants. Employment of militants without adequate formal education should be avoided. The government should regularly train civil servants to ensure that public administration provides good citizen services.

- The government should make sure all their communication is honest. Besides, government should be careful in making promises. The government should make realistic promises and should not promise more than they can achieve. Failure to keep promises deteriorates public trust in government.

6.4 Evaluation of the Soundness of the Research

The research was exploratory in nature. It aimed at discovering the government Albanians relationship. In-depth interviews were the sole qualitative method used allowing Albanians and civil servants to share their opinions and experiences in their own words about the relationship between government and Albanians. This section evaluated the soundness of the research. Considering the fact that the four criteria from Lincoln and Guba (1985) were mainly used in evaluating qualitative research, the same was applied in the study. The first aspect is truth value, which is known as credibility in qualitative research or internal validity in quantitative research. The second aspect is applicability, which refers to transferability in qualitative research and external validity or generalisability in quantitative research. The third criterion is consistency, which qualitative term is dependability or quantitative term is known as reliability. The final aspect is neutrality, which is known as confirmability in qualitative research or objectivity in quantitative research.

– Credibility

according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) to demonstrate the truth value or credibility the research must show that the researcher has “represented those multiple constructions adequately” (p.296) and the findings and interpretations of the research “are credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities. (p.296)” Lincoln and Guba further suggested some evaluation techniques which include: collaboration with the participants in making sure the findings really represent their views, validating findings via outside auditors or participants (member checks), peer debriefing, attention to negative cases, independent analysis of data by more than one researcher, verbatim quotes, persistent observation, etc.

In the research, during the interviews as well as during the data analysis, the researcher contacted participants to clarify certain misunderstandings to avoid misinterpretations. He was

quite thankful to all of the participants because they were always available and gave him the opportunity to raise questions to clarify a certain point or elaborate further on certain themes. They were collaborative even after the fieldwork was over. After the fieldwork, the researcher often contacted those participants that used e-mail interviews. During the interviews, he engaged in a lot of discussion with participants. In addition, after each recorded interview, he used to listen to them and contacted participants accordingly if there was something unclear that he had not clarified during the interview.

The researcher also sent a summary of the results to a majority of participants for their feedback; however, he received very little feedback. Only three of them replied to his request. The researcher believed the main obstacle was language. Due to time constraints, the researcher was not able to translate the results into the Albanian and Macedonian language, and the same was sent to participants in English language. However, as Miles and Huberman (1994) argued, when the findings of the study make sense to the readers, it can be concluded that credibility is reached. The researcher believes that the study provided a detailed description, in particular Chapter 5 provided extensive verbatim quotes from participants, that helps reader and future applicators to judge the credibility of the findings and conclusions of the study.

– **Transferability**

Transferability is an alternative strategy for judging external validity in qualitative research proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The aim of the evaluation aspect of transferability is to evaluate whether the findings of the qualitative study can be transferred to other specific settings. According to Lincoln and Guba transferability is concerned with how can one determine the extent to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects (respondents). Lincoln and Gruba further explained that the researcher

cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility. (p. 316)

The main transferability evaluation technique is thick description. Thick description of a phenomenon provides sufficient details that can be used to evaluate the extent to which the same conclusions drawn can be transferred to other settings, times, situations, and people. Thus, it is not the researcher responsible for providing an index of transferability. The

researcher is responsible for providing the databases that make transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In the dissertation, to achieve the degree of potential transferability of the findings in chapter three, the researcher provided extensive contextual information. The researcher provided detailed information about the political system, economic development, level of activism, media environment and societal culture of the country which help readers and potential future appliers understand the context in which this study is applied. Additionally, detailed information was provided about public administration in the Republic of North Macedonia. The researcher also provided detailed descriptions of his theoretical framework, research methods, and the participants and their setting. Moreover, he selected the participants that come from different cities and of different backgrounds and of various demographics.

– **Dependability**

Dependability is the equivalent of reliability in qualitative research. Dependability refers to the reliability of the research. According to Lincoln and Gruba (1985) dependability is concerned with “How can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry would be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context?” (p. 290).

According to Miles and Huberman dependability in qualitative research is concerned with the fact if things have been done with reasonable care. In particular, dependability’s underlying issue is “whether the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278).

The researcher considered having conducted a logical and clearly documented research study with detailed description of the methods chosen and all decisions made by him as research. All the steps in the research are in details documented. The researcher considered that dependability in the research is established because the interview protocol in all its versions was clearly stated and carefully conducted. Starting from the pretest, he used to take notes and reflect after each interview on what he did wrong and how he could improve. Pretests were quite helpful in preparing him for the fieldwork. First, the researcher was able to practice interview styles and techniques as well as time control before entering the fieldwork. The pretest also helped him practice how to ask probing questions, be a good listener, and dig for more information. On the other side, the researcher conducted pretests with participants from

all the groups involved in the relationship, which helped him find the best approach to handle questions with different participants.

For example interviewing Albanians was easy and not much probing was needed as they extensively without hesitation used to answer all the questions. Moreover, different approaches and interviewing skills were needed with Macedonian civil servants. More probing was needed as they were not quite open and usually would not like to provide information about topics they deemed sensitive. The researcher thought that pretests helped him understand better the context and the approaches to consider when interviewing different participants. Despite his previous interviewing experiences, he thought that after each interview he acquired new skills which helped him uphold the quality of data collection. In addition, following closely the interview protocol helped me also secure the quality of data. On the other side, the researcher has also been constantly in contact with his supervisor in cases problems or uncertainties arose during the study. All the decisions of the research have been taken after prior approval and discussion with his supervisor.

– **Confirmability**

Confirmability is concerned with the objectivity of the research. It evaluates the neutrality of the research, i.e. “the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the inquirer” (Lincoln & Gruba, 1985, p. 290). Reflexivity is suggested as an important evaluation technique of confirmability. Patton (2002) promotes reflexivity as a necessary tool for qualitative researcher. Reflexivity emphasizes “the importance of self awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 64). Patton further argued that being reflexive involves self-questioning and self-understanding; to be reflexive is to examine on an ongoing basis, “what I know” and “how I know it” (p. 64). Reflexivity reminds the qualitative researcher “to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one’s own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those one interviews and those to whom one reports” (Patton, 2002, p.65).

As discussed in the chapter detailing research methods and data collection, this shows that the role of the researcher in qualitative research is crucial. The researcher ensured that he was driven by objectivity in conducting this research. It was quite important that he monitored and reduced bias during the project. He tried his best to be fair, accurate, and confidential.

Considering the fact that he belong to the ethnic community under investigation, it was quite important how Macedonian civil servants people regarded him. The researcher provided them with detailed information about himself, his educational background and detailed objectives of the research. The researcher never allowed personal feelings to guide him in his research so the results would not be skewed, biased, or subjective. During the interviews, the researcher tried his best to remain neutral and never take a stand pro or con. When interviewing Macedonian civil servants it was quite important to remain neutral as well, in order not to portray himself in favor of Albanians. The researcher had already mentioned an experience he had during the pretest when instead of probing he made a personal statement that influenced the answer of the interviewee and made the participant comply with his statement. The researcher understood that it was a mistake from his side, but at the same time he learned he should not repeat such mistakes during the data collection process. The researcher understood that he should have probed with a question that would have elicited more detailed answer from the interviewee rather than a question that made the participant comply with his statement. However, these experiences were not repeated during the data collection. In chapter 4, the researcher has discussed his field experiences in details which can assist readers in understanding the research context, what he had observed and how the data were collected, analyzed and interpreted from my perspective.

6.5 Limitations and Future Research

Although the study was original and convincing in several ways; still, several limitations were identified which could s help guide future research studies. The first major limitation of the study is related to its methodology. The study was only conducted using one methodology, qualitative interviews. As mentioned in Chapter 4, focus groups would be the best method to explore how two or three groups think and feel about a topic, and why do they hold certain opinions. Grunig (2003) contended that the most common qualitative methods that could be used for assessing relationships are interviews and focus groups. These two qualitative methods help researchers grasp what motivates people and explain what people think and do in their terms. In the future the same relationship between government and Albanians could be studied quantitatively using the items developed by Hon and Grunig (1999) and Grunig and Huang (2000).

Moreover, it is known that interviews yield self-report data. Although in the researcher's opinion, he managed to build a good rapport with his participants, still, the sensitive topic of

the research on government-Albanian relationships could have affected answers from participants. It is possible that participants, in particular civil servants in order to portray themselves in a positive light to have provided only positive answers and avoid negative answers or experiences they might have had.

Another limitation of the study is related to the credibility of the research. As mentioned, the researcher asked several participants for a review of the results; however, very few responded to his request. Still, the researcher believes that credibility of the research was established through other methods, in particular thick description which can help future applicators judge the credibility of the research. The researcher believes that the study provided detailed description, in particular Chapter 5 provided extensive verbatim quotes from participants, that can help readers and future applicators to judge the credibility of the findings and conclusions of the study. The study excluded environmental variables such as political system, economic development, level of activism, media environment and societal culture which deemed important in order to have relevant and sufficient findings. Future studies should include these influencers such as political systems and economic systems in researching government-public relationships.

The findings of the study showed political system, in particular democracy to provide suitable conditions and environment to nurture positive government-public relationships. In addition, though the study managed to capture the organization's and public's view of the relationship, as well as the organization's estimate of the public's view of the relationship (the organization's meta-perspective), it failed to evaluate the public's estimate of the organization's view of the relationship (the public's meta-perspective). The study did not measure how does the constituency, in this case Albanians, perceived the government's views. Although during the pretest questions were prepared to test public's meta-perspective regarding trust and satisfaction, it seemed a bit complicated to citizens and majority were confused refusing to answer the questions considering them very subjective questions that differ from individual to individual. Future studies should apply correlative approach to also evaluate the public's meta-perspective.

In the study, the researcher only studied four cultivation strategies (access, positivity, openness, and assurances) and two relational quality outcomes (trust and satisfaction). Future research in studying government-community relations should also include the rest of cultivation strategies, networking, and sharing of task, as well as the two other relational

outcomes, commitment, and control mutuality. This can help provide broader and thorough understanding of the importance and contribution of individual cultivation strategies to relationship quality outcomes.

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9 APPENDICES

9.1 Appendix A: Informed consent (Albanians)

Project Title: Cultivation Strategies in Inter-ethnic Relationship Management

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this research project is to explore the level of access, positivity, openness and assurances perceived by both the government and Albanian community and how does that contribute to achieving trust and relationship satisfaction between government and Albanian community.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to participate in an interview (either in person or over the phone, skype) lasting between 45 to 60 minutes; we will conduct the interview in person, by phone or skype if this is what you prefer. The interview involves open-ended questions about your experience, encounters and communication with state officials or Albanians. Your name and organization will remain strictly confidential. For the sake of accuracy and completeness, we will ask permission to make an audio tape of the interview, but you can, of course, decline permission. The principle investigator will be the only person who has access to the responses.

I agree to be audio taped during my participation in this study.

I do not agree to be audio taped during my participation in this study.

What about confidentiality: We will strictly keep your name, personal information, and the institutions you discuss confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, following the interview, the recordings and/or email responses will remain in the locked offices of the researcher, who will be the only people who have access to them. All data will be destroyed (i.e., shredded or erased) when their use is no longer needed but not before a minimum of five years after data collection.

Risks and benefits: There are no anticipated physical, psychological, or economic risks involved with the study. Because your interview may be audio-taped, this project presents some risk to you as your responses can be associated with you. Nevertheless, in all cases, your name, identity and affiliations will remain confidential. Your participation is voluntary and you can decline to answer specific questions or end your participation at any time without

penalty. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study; however, the results of this research will help provide helpful insights in managing and nurturing positive government-community relations.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time? Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. There will be no costs for being in the study, other than your time. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact:

Mensur Zeqiri, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, 0041762363803, mensurzeqiri@gmail.com.

Prof.Dr. Dejan Verčič, Head of Centre for Marketing and Public Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Kardeljeva ploščad 5, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia, e-mail: dejan.Verčič@fdv.uni-lj.si.

Agreement: By signing on the following line, I acknowledge that I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research project, and I have received a copy of this description.

—
Signature of Participant Date

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Section 1: The Grand-Tour Questions

1. Would you begin by telling me what government to you is? How do you perceive government?

2. Can you remember how many government representatives have you met in the last five years? Who were they? Where did the meeting take place and what was the reason of the meeting?

Section 2: Strategies for Cultivating Relationships

Access:

1. Prior to your meeting(s) with the state officials, what kind of contact information did you have at hand to contact them?
2. How adequate did you find the contact information provided to schedule an appointment or meet a state official?
3. Can you tell me about your meetings with state officials? What were the opportunities given to you to interact with the state officials? How easy was it for you to meet a state official? In what kind of settings did your meetings take place?
4. Moreover, if you had a need to contact a specific staff on specific issues or meet someone higher in the hierarchy, were you provided with adequate contact information and an opportunity to meet a specific staff on specific issues?
5. How do you usually address questions or concerns you have to the state officials and state institutions? How much do you feel they are willing to answer your questions or concerns?

Positivity

1. How often do you interact with the state officials you mentioned?
2. Do you receive regular information from them and the government institutions they work for? What kind of information are usually provided to you? How useful do you find the information provided?
3. Considering your meetings with the state officials, how courteous was their interaction with you?
4. To what extend do you feel the state officials attempted to make their interaction with you enjoyable?
5. How cooperative did you find the government representatives in handling your concerns?
6. As we know, not all the interactions we have with others are satisfying. Please think of a time when, you had a particularly dissatisfying interaction with any of these government representatives? When did the incident happen? What specific circumstances led up to this situation? Do you remember exactly what did the government representative say or do? What did you say or do? How cooperative were they in handling disagreements with you?

Openness

- How are these government institutions reporting on their activities?
- How much information do they share with you? What kind of information do they usually share with you about their governance?
- Do they usually publish annual reports about their governance? How valuable do you think the annual reports are to you in understanding what they have done?
- When new issues arise, how are these institutions communicating them to you? To what extent do the issue briefings these government institutions provide help you understand the issues?

Assurances

- To what extent do the state officials provide personal responses to your concerns?
- In your interaction with them, how much do you think the state officials communicated your importance to them?
- How seriously were your concerns raised by you? How much do you believe that they really cared about your concerns?
- To what extent do you think the law and policy development of these government institutions allows you to raise an issue and propose a solution? How well do these government institutions consider the views of residents like you in their decision and policy making? What are the opportunities for residents like you to influence their decision and policy making?

Section 3: Relationship Outcomes

Trust

1. Would you describe any things that these government institutions have done to treat you fairly and justly, or unfairly and unjustly? (*integrity*)
2. Would you describe things that these government institutions have done that indicate they can be relied on to keep its promises, or that it does not keep its promises? (*dependability*)
3. How confident are you that these government institutions have the ability to accomplish what they say they will do? Can you give me examples of why you feel that way? (*competence*)
4. Overall, how much do you trust the government? Please explain why do you trust and not trust.

Satisfaction

1. How satisfied are you with how competent, polite and professional the state officials acted towards you?

2. How much did you enjoy dealing and interacting with the state officials?

3. Overall, speaking of the government in general, how happy are you with the government?

How satisfied are you with the relationship that government have had with you? Please explain why you are satisfied or not satisfied.

9.2 Appendix B: Informed consent (Albanians)

PËLQIM I INFORMUAR

Titulli i Projektit: Strategjitë e Kultivimit të Marrëdhënieve në Menaxhimin e Marrëdhënieve Nderetnike (Cultivation Strategies in Inter-ethnic Relationship Management).

Qëllimi i këtij studimi: Qëllimi i këtij studimi është të hulumtoj nivelin e qasjes (access), pozitivitetit (positivity), transparencës (openness) dhe garancisë së legjitimiteti (assurances of legitimacy) e përceptuar nga të dyja palët, qeverisë dhe komunitetit shqiptar dhe se si keto kontribuojnë në arritjen e besimit dhe kënaqshmërisë midis qeverisë dhe popullit shqiptar.

Çfarë do të kërkohet nga unë të bëj: Nga ju do të kërkohet që të merrni pjesë në një intervistë që zgjat nga 45 deri në 60 minuta; ne do të zhvillojmë intervistën personalisht, me telefon ose Skype, cila do metodë që do të preferonit ju. Intervista përmban pyetje në lidhje me përvojën tuaj, takimet dhe komunikimin me nëpunës shtetërorë. Emri juaj dhe cdo informacion tjetër do të rruhen në mënyrë konfidenciale. Për hir të saktësisë dhe lehtësimit në analizimin e të dhënave, ne do të kërkojmë leje tuaj për të bërë një audio incizim të intervistës, por ju, natyrishtë, keni te drejtë që të refuzoni audio incizimin nese dëshironi. Studiuesi do të jetë i vetmi person që ka qasje në përgjigjet.

___ Jam dakord që të bëhet audio incizim gjatë pjesëmarrjes sime në këtë studim.

___ Nuk jam dakord që të bëhet audio incizim gjatë pjesëmarrjes sime në këtë studim.

Konfidencialiteti: Ne në mënyrë rigorozë do të mbajmë emrin tënd, të dhënat personale, si dhe institucionet që do t'i diskutojmë konfidenciale. Për të të mbrojtur dhe fshehur të dhënat tuaja, pas intervistës, regjistrimet dhe / ose përgjigjet me email do të mbetet anonime dhe të mbyllura nga studiuesi, I cili do të jenë i vetmi person që ka qasje në to. Të gjitha të dhënat do të shkatërrohen (dmth, do të fshihen) kur përdorimi i tyre nuk është më i nevojshëm, por jo të paktën pesë vjet pas mbledhjes së të dhënave.

Rreziqet dhe përfitimet: Nuk janë të parapara rreziqe fizike, psikologjike ose ekonomike me pjesëmarrjen tuaj në studim. Për shkak se intervista juaj mund të incizohet, ky projekt paraqet një rrezik pasi përgjigjet tuaja mund të asocohen me ju. Megjithatë, në të gjitha rastet, emri juaj, identitetin dhe cdo informatë tjetër që ka të bëjë me ju, do të mbeten konfidenciale. Poashtu, pjesëmarrja juaj është vullnetare, dhe ju mund të refuzoni për t'iu përgjigjur pyetjeve që nuk dëshironi, ose mund të ndërpritni intervistën kur të dëshironi ju. Nuk ka përfitime direkte për ju nëse merrni pjesë në këtë studim; megjithatë, rezultatet e këtij hulumtimi do të ndihmojnë të sigurohen njohuri të dobishme në menaxhimin e marrëdhënieve pozitive ndërmjet qeverisë dhe popujve të ndryshëm që jetojnë ne Maqedoni.

A duhet që patjetër të jem në këtë hulumtim dhe a mund të ndërpres pjesmarrjen në çdo kohë: Pjesëmarrja juaj në këtë hulumtim është plotësisht vullnetare. Ju mund të zgjidhni të mos merrni pjesë aspak në hulumtim. Sidoqoftë, pjesmarrja nuk ju kushton asgjë, përveç kohës suaj. Poashtu, nëse ju vendosni që të merrni pjesë në këtë hulumtim, ju mund të ndërpritni pjesmarrjen në çdo kohë.

Kë të kontaktoni nëse keni pyetje në lidhje me studimin: Ju keni të drejtë të kërkoni, dhe në të njëjtën kohë të ju jipet përgjigje për çdo pyetje që mund të keni në lidhje me këtë hulumtim. Nëse keni pyetje, apo shqetësime, ju duhet të kontaktoni:

- Mensur Zeqiri, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, 0041762363803, mensurzeqiri@gmail.com.
- Prof.Dr. Dejan Verčič, Head of Centre for Marketing and Public Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Kardeljeva ploščad 5, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia, e-mail: dejan.Verčič@fdv.uni-lj.si.

Marrëveshja: Me nënshkrimin e mëposhtëm, unë pranoj se kam lexuar procedurën e përshkruar më sipër. Unë vullnetarisht jam dakord që të marrë pjesë në këtë hulumtim, dhe pranoj që unë kam marrë një kopje të këtij përshkrimi.

—
Nënshkrimi i pjesëmarrësit

Data

INTERVISTA

Pjesa 1: Pyetje të përgjithshme

1. Do kisha dashur të fillonim me pyetjen se çfarë është Qeveria për ju? Si e perceptoni ju Qeverinë? Cfarë ju shkon së pari në mend kur përmendet fjala Qeveri?
2. A mbani mend sa nëpunës shtetërorë/përfaqësues te qeverise keni takuar në 5 vitet e fundit? Nga cilat institucione ishin? Ku u takuat dhe cila ishte arsyeja e takimit?

Pjesa 2: Strategjitë për kultivimin e marrëdhënieve

Qasja (Access):

1. Para takimit (takimeve) me nëpunësit shtetërorë, çfarë kontakt informatash kishit në dispozicion që të bini në kontakt ose të takoheni me ta?

2. Sa adekuate ishin kontakt informatat që posedonit ju për të bërë një termin për t'u takuar me nëpunësit shtetërorë?
3. A mund të më tregoni më shumë për takimet e juaja me nëpunësit shtetërorë? Çfarë ishin mundësitë që kishit për të komunikuar me nëpunësit shtetërorë? Sa e lehtë ishte për ju që të takoheni me nëpunësit shtetërorë? Në çfarë mjedisi takimet e juaja ndodhën?
4. Për më tepër, nese kishit nevojë që të kontaktoni ndonjë nëpunës tjetër për ndonjë çështje specifike, ose të takoni dikë në hierarkinë më të lartë të institucionit, a u pajiset me kontakt informata adekuate dhe një mundësi për tu takuar me këta nëpunës specifik për ndonjë çështje specifike?
5. Si zakonishtë, si i adresoni pyetjet dhe shqetësimet e juaja që i keni tek nëpunësit dhe institucionet shtetërore? Sa shumë ndjeni se ata janë të gatshëm të u përgjigjen pyetjeve dhe shqetësimeve tuaja?

Pozitiviteti (Positivity)

1. Sa shpesh kontaktoni me nëpunësit shtetërorë që përmendët?
2. A mbani komunikim të rregullt ose a merrni informata të rregullta nga ata dhe institucionet për të cilat punojnë? Çfarë informatash si zakonishtë ju jipen? Sa të dobishme ju duken informatat që ju jipen?
3. Duke pasur parasysh takimet e juaja me këta nëpunës shtetërorë, sa të sjellshëm ishin ata në komunikim me ju?
4. Deri në çfarë mase nëpunësit shtetërorë që keni takuar mundoheshin që të bënin komunikimin ndërmjet jush të këndshëm?
5. Sa bashkëpunues ishin nëpunësit shtetërorë në zgjidhjen e problemit tuaj?
6. Siç e dimë, jo gjithë takimet dhe kontaktet që kemi me të tjerët janë gjithmonë të kënaqshëm dhe pozitive. Ju lutem, kujtoni ndonjë rast që keni pasur ndonjë eksperiencë të hidhur me ndonjë nga këta nëpunës shtetërorë? Kur ka ndodhur incidenti? Çfarë faktorësh specifik bën që të ndodhte ky incident? A mbani mend çfarë saktësisht nëpunësi shtetëror ju tha ose veproi? Çfarë thatë ose vepruat ju? Sa bashkëpunues ishin ata në zgjidhjen e konfliktit me ju?

Transparenca (Openness)

1. Si raportojnë këta institucione mbi aktivitetet e tyre?
2. Sa shumë informata bëjnë publike këto institucione? Çfarë lloj informatash si zakonisht ata bëjnë publike për qeverisjen e tyre?

3. A publikojnë raporte vjetore mbi qeverisjen dhe aktivitetet e tyre? Sa të vlefshme i konsideroni raportet vjetore për të kuptuar se çfarë në fakt këta institucione kanë bërë?
4. Kur çështje dhe probleme të reja dalin në sipërfaqje, si këto institucione i komunikojnë këto çështje dhe probleme tek ju? Në çfarë mase konferencat në lidhje me këto probleme që jepen nga institucionet qeveritare ju ndihmojnë juve të kuptoni problemin?

Sigurimi i legjitimitetit (Assurances of Legitimacy)

1. Deri në çfarë mase nëpunësit shtetërorë ju dhanë një përgjigje personale të shqetësimeve dhe problemeve që kishit ju?
2. Në komunikimin tuaj me ata, sa shumë mendoni që këta nëpunës shtetërorë komunikuan tek ju se sa të rëndësishëm jeni ju për ata?
3. Sa seriozishtë u morrën çështjet dhe problemet që ju kishit? Sa shumë mendoni se me të vërtetë ata kujdeseshin për shqetësimet e juaja?
4. Deri në çfarë mase mendoni se mënyra e miratimit të ligjeve dhe politikave të këtyre institucioneve shtetërore ju lejon juve që të ngreni ndonjë shqetësim ose të propozoni zgjidhje? Sa shumë këta institucione shtetërore i konsiderojnë mendimet e qytetarëve si ju në marrjen e vendimeve dhe zhvillimin e politikave? Sa janë mundësitë e juaja si qytetarë që të influenconi vendimet dhe politikat e këtyre institucioneve?

Pjesa e 3: Rezultatet/Frytet e marrëdhënieve

Besueshmëria (Trust)

1. A mund të përshkruani gjërat që këto institucione shtetërore kanë bërë që juve të ju trajtojnë fer dhe me korrektësi ose jo fer dhe jokorrekt?
2. A mund të I përshkruani gjërat që këto institucione shtetërore kanë bërë që japin indikacione që mund të u besohet se mbajnë premtimet ose nuk I mbajnë premtimet?
3. Sa i sigurtë jeni ju që këto institucione shtetërore kanë kapacitet të realizojnë atë se çfarë premtojnë? Mund të na jepni shembuj se përse mendoni kështu?
4. Në përgjithësi, sa shumë i besoni qeverisë? Spjegoni se pse I besoni ose nuk I besoni.

Kënaqshmëria (Satisfaction)

1. Sa të kënaqur jeni me atë se sa të aftë, të sjellshëm dhe profesional ishin nëpunësit shtetërorë në trajtimin e kërkesës tuaj?

2. Sa ju pelqeu kontakti dhe komunikimi me nëpunësit shtetërorë?
3. Duke folur për qeverinë në përgjithësi, sa të kënaqur jeni me Qeverinë? Sa të kënaqur jeni me merrëdhëniet që qeveria ka pasur me ju? Ju lutem sqaroni pse jeni të kënaqur ose pse nuk jeni të kënaqur.

9.3 Appendix C: Informed consent (Civil Servants)

Project Title: Cultivation Strategies in Inter-ethnic Relationship Management

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this research project is to explore the level of access, positivity, openness and assurances perceived by both the government and Albanian community and how does that contribute to achieving trust and relationship satisfaction between government and Albanian community.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to participate in an interview (either in person or over the phone, skype) lasting between 45 to 60 minutes; we will conduct the interview in person, by phone or skype if this is what you prefer. The interview involves open-ended questions about your experience, encounters and communication with state officials or Albanians. Your name and organization will remain strictly confidential. For the sake of accuracy and completeness, we will ask permission to make an audio tape of the interview, but you can, of course, decline permission. The principle investigator will be the only person who has access to the responses.

___ I agree to be audio taped during my participation in this study.

___ I do not agree to be audio taped during my participation in this study.

What about confidentiality: We will strictly keep your name, personal information, and the institutions you discuss confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, following the interview, the recordings and/or email responses will remain in the locked offices of the researcher, who will be the only people who have access to them. All data will be destroyed (i.e., shredded or erased) when their use is no longer needed but not before a minimum of five years after data collection.

Risks and benefits: There are no anticipated physical, psychological, or economic risks involved with the study. Because your interview may be audio-taped, this project presents some risk to you as your responses can be associated with you. Nevertheless, in all cases, your name, identity and affiliations will remain confidential. Your participation is voluntary and you can decline to answer specific questions or end your participation at any time without penalty. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study; however, the results

of this research will help provide helpful insights in managing and nurturing positive government-community relations.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time? Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. There will be no costs for being in the study, other than your time. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact:

Mensur Zeqiri, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, 0041762363803, mensurzeqiri@gmail.com.

Prof.Dr. Dejan Verčič, Head of Centre for Marketing and Public Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Kardeljeva ploščad 5, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia, e-mail: dejan.Verčič@fdv.uni-lj.si.

Agreement: By signing on the following line, I acknowledge that I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research project, and I have received a copy of this description.

—
Signature of Participant

Date

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Section 1: The Grand-Tour Questions

1. Would you begin by telling me what are the first things that come into your mind when you hear about the relationship between the government and Albanians in Macedonia? What else can you tell me about it?

Section 2: Strategies for Cultivating Relationships

Access:

1. What kind of contact information do you normally provide to Albanians?
2. How adequate do you think are the contact information provided by you to schedule an appointment or meet state officials?
3. Can you tell me more about your meetings with Albanians? What are the opportunities given to them to interact with you? How easy it is for them to meet you or other state officials? In what kind of settings your meetings take place?
4. Moreover, if an Albanian has a need to contact a specific staff on specific issues or meet someone higher in the hierarchy, do you provide them with adequate contact information and an opportunity to meet a specific staff on specific issues?
5. How do Albanians usually address questions or concerns they have to you and your institution? How much are you willing to answer their questions or concerns?

Positivity

1. How often do you come to an interaction with Albanians?
2. Do you keep them regularly informed? What kind of information do you usually provide to them? How useful do you think they find the information provided?
3. Considering your meetings with Albanians, how courteous are your interactions with them?
4. To what extent do you feel you make your interaction with Albanians enjoyable?
5. How cooperative are you in handling concerns raised by Albanians?
6. As we know, not all the interactions we have with others are satisfying. Please think of a time when, you had a particularly dissatisfying interaction with any Albanian? When did the incident happen? What specific circumstances led up to this situation? Do you remember exactly what did the Albanian say or do? What did you say or do? How cooperative were you in handling disagreements with them?

Openness

1. How is your institution reporting on its activities?
2. How much information do you share with Albanians? What kind of information do you usually share with them about your governance?
3. Do you usually publish annual reports about your governance? How valuable do you think the annual reports are to Albanians in understanding what you have done?

4. When new issues arise, how is your institution communicating them to Albanians? To what extend the issue briefings your institution provides help them understand the issues?

Assurances

1. To what extend you or other state officials at your institution make genuine efforts to provide personal responses to concerns of Albanians?
2. In interaction with Albanians, how much do you communicate their importance to you?
3. How seriously are taken concerns raised by Albanians? How much do you think that Albanians believe that the government really cares about their concerns?
4. To what extend do you think the law and policy development allows Albanians to raise an issue and propose a solution? How well do you think your institution or the government in general consider the views of Albanian community members in their decision and policy making? What are the opportunities for Albanians to influence government decision and policy making?

Section 3: Relationship Outcomes

Trust

1. Would you describe any things that your institution and the government in general have done to treat Albanians fairly and justly, or unfairly and unjustly? (*integrity*)
2. Would you describe things that your institution or the government in general has done that indicate they can be relied on to keep their promises or that they do not keep promises? (*dependability*)
3. How confident are you that your institution and the government has the ability to accomplish what they say they will do? Can you give me examples of why you feel that way? (*competence*)
4. Overall, how much do you think Albanians trust the government? Please explain why do you think they trust or do not trust government.

Satisfaction

1. How satisfied do you think Albanians are with how competent, polite, and professional the state officials act towards them?
2. How much do you think Albanians enjoy dealing and interacting with the state officials?

3. Overall, speaking of the government in general, how happy do you think Albanians are with the government? How much do you think Albanians are satisfied with the relationship that they have had with government? Please explain why they are satisfied or not satisfied.

9.4 Appendix D: Informed consent (Macedonian Civil Servants)

ИНФОРМИРАНА СОГЛАСНОСТ

Наслов на проектот: Стратегиите за одгледување на односи во менаџирањето на меѓуетничките односи (Cultivation Strategies in Inter-ethnic Relationship Management).

Целта на истражувањето: Целта на оваа студија е да се испита нивото на пристап (access), позитивноста (positivity), транспарентност (openness) и гаранција на легитимитет (assurances of legitimacy) од од гледна точка на двете страни, Владата и албанската заедница и како тие стратегии придонесуваат за постигнување на доверба (trust) и задоволство (satisfaction) меѓу владата и Албанците.

Што ќе се бара од мене да се направи: Ќе се бара да присуствувате на интервју која трае 45 до 60 минути; и ќе се спроведе во лична средба, или по телефон или Skype, во зависност што најмногу вас ви одговара. Интервјутото вклучува прашања за вашите искуства, средби и комуникација со Албанците, додека сте на должност. Вашето име и институцијата ќе се чува во тајност. За ефикасност и леснотија во анализа на податоци, се бара ваша дозвола да се направи аудио снимка на интервјутото, но, секако, вие имате право да одбиете ако не сакате аудио снимање. Истражувачот ќе биде единственото лице кое ќе има пристап до одговорите.

___ Се согласувам да се направи аудио снимка за време на моето учество во ова истражување.

___ Јас не се согласувам да се направи аудио снимка за време на моето учество во ова истражување.

Доверливост: Вашето име, лични податоци, и институцијата ќе бидат задржани доверливи. За да се заштити и да се кријат вашите податоци, по интервјутото записниците или одговорите со e-mail ќе останаат доверливи и затворени од страна на истражувачот, кој ќе биде единственото лице кое ќе има пристап до нив. Сите податоци ќе бидат уништени (на пример, ќе бидат избришани) кога нивната употреба не е потребно, најмалку пет години по собирањето на податоците.

Ризиците и придобивките: Не се предвидени физички, психолошки или економски ризици со вашето учество во истражувањето. Бидејќи интервјутото може да биде снимена, овој проект претставува ризик поради тоа што вашиот одговор може да биде поврзан со вас. Меѓутоа, во сите случаи, име, идентитет и сите други информации поврзани за вас ќе останат строго доверливи. Исто така, вашето учеството е доброволно, и имате право да не одговорите на прашања кои не сакате или да го

прекинете разговорот кога сакате. Вие немате директна корист ако учествувате во истражувањето; сепак, резултатите од ова истражување ќе помогнат да се обезбеди увид во одгелдувањето на позитивни односи помеѓу владата и различните народи кои живеат во Македонија.

Дали е задолжително моето учество во истражувањето, и дали може да го прекинам учеството во истражувањето во секое време: Вашето учество во ова истражување целосно на доброволна основа. Можете да изберете да не учествувате во истражувањето. Меѓутоа, учеството нема да ве чини ништо освен вашето слободно време. Исто така, ако се одлучите да учествувате во ова истражување, можете да престанете да учествувате во секое време.

Кого да контактирате доколку имате било какви прашања во врска со истражувањето: Имате право да прашувате, и во исто време да ви се даде одговор на сите прашања кои може да ги имате за ова истражување. Ако имате било какви прашања или проблеми, треба да им се обратите на:

- Mensur Zeqiri, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, 0041762363803, mensurzeqiri@gmail.com.
- Prof.Dr. Dejan Verčič, Head of Centre for Marketing and Public Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Kardeljeva ploščad 5, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia, e-mail: dejan.Verčič@fdv.uni-lj.si.

Договор: Со потпишувањето подолу, јас потврдувам дека ги прочитав постапките опишани погоре. Јас доброволно се согласувам да учествувам во ова истражување, и потврдувам дека имам еден примерок од овој опис.

Потпис на учесникот

Датум

ИНТЕРВЈУ

Прв дел: Општи прашања

1. Ќе можете да ми кажете што се првите нешта што ви доаѓаат на ум кога ќе слушнете за односите меѓу владата и Албанците во Македонија? Што друго можете да ми кажете за тоа?

Втор дел: Стратегии за одгледување на односи

Пристап (Access)

1. Каков вид на информации за контакт, вообичаено, се обезбедени за граѓани Албанци?
2. Колку мислите дека се адекватни информациите за контакт за да се закаже состанок или да се сретне државен службеник?
3. Може ли да ми кажете нешто повеќе за вашите состаноци со граѓани Албанци? Кои се можностите кои им се дадени за да комуницираат со вас? Колку е лесно за нив да се сретнат со вас или други државни службеници во вашата институција? Каде вообичаено се одржуваат или се случуваат вашите состаноци со граѓани Албанци?
4. Покрај тоа, ако еден Албанец има потреба да се поврзе или сретне со специфични кадри за одредени прашања или да се сретне со некој повисоко во хиерархијата, дали им обезбедувате соодветни информации за контакт и можност за состанок?
5. Како граѓани Албанци вообичаено ги адресираат нивните проблеми и прашања до вас и до вашата институција? Колку сте вие подготвени да одговорите на нивните прашања или проблеми?

Позитивност (Positivity)

1. Колку често доаѓате до интеракција со членови на Албанската заедница?
2. Дали ги одржувате граѓаните Албанци редовно информирани? Каков вид на информации се обично обезбедени за нив? Колку мислите дека се корисни информациите обезбедени од ваша страна?
3. Имајќи ги во предвид вашите состаноци и интеракции со Албанците, колку сте љубезни во вашата интеракција со нив?
4. До кој степен чувствувате дека ја правите вашата интеракција со Албанците пријатна?
5. Колку сте кооперативни во справувањето со загриженостите и проблемите покренати од страна на Албанците до вас или до вашата институција?
6. Како што знаеме, не се сите интеракции што ги имаме со другите задоволувачки. Ве молам да мислите на некој случај кога сте имале особено незадоволителна интеракција со некој Албанец. Кога се случи инцидентот? Кои беа одредените околности што доведе до оваа ситуација? Дали се сеќавате на она што кажа или направи тој? Што

рековте или направивте вие? Колку бевте кооперативни во справување со несогласувањата со нив?

Транспарентност/Отвореност (Openness)

1. Како вашата институција известува за своите активности?
2. Колку информации споделите со Албанците во врска со управувањето на вашата институција? Каков вид на информации обично споделувте со нив за управувањето на вашата институција?
3. Дали вообичаено објавувате годишни извештаи за управувањето на институцијата? Колку вредни мислите дека се годишните извештаи за Албанците да разбираат што сте направиле?
4. Кога нови прашања (issues) и проблеми се појавуваат, како вашата институција ги комуницираа тие нови прашања (issues) до Албанците? До кој степен мислите дека брифинзите од ваша страна им помагаат на Албанците да ги разбираат новите прашања (issues) и проблеми?

Уверување на легитимитетот (Assurances of legitimacy)

1. До кој степен вие или други државни службеници во вашата институција прават вистински напори да обезбедите лични одговори на загриженоста на Албанците?
2. Во интеракција со Албанците, колку им ја комуницираате нивната важност за вас?
3. Колку сериозно се земаат загриженоста и прашањата на Албанците? Колку мислите дека Албанците сметаат и веруваат дека Владата навистина се грижи за нивните проблеми?
4. До кој степен мислите дека изработката/креирањето на нови закони и политики им овозможува на Албанците да подигнаат прашања и да предложат решение? Колку мислите дека вашата институција или воопшто Владата ги зема во предвид ставовите на Албанците во своите одлуки и креирањето на политики? Кои се можностите за Албанците да влијаат на владините одлуки и креирањето на политиките?

Трет дел: Резултат на односите

Доверба (Trust)

1. Дали ќе можете да ми опишете било што вашата институција и Владата во целина има направено за да ги третираат Албанците фер и праведно или нефер и неправедно?

2. Дали ќе можете да ми опишете тоа што вашата институција или владата во целина има направено што укажуваа на тоа дека Албанците може да се потпираат на нив за задржување на своите ветувања или за неисполнување на ветувањата?
3. Колку сте сигурни дека вашата институција и владата ја имаат способноста да постигнаат она што тие ветувале дека ќе го направаат? Може да ми дадете примери за тоа зошто се чувствувате и мислите на овој начин?
4. Генерално, колку мислите дека Албанците му веруваат на владата? Ве молиме објаснете зошто мислите дека тие му веруваат и не му веруваат на владата.

Задоволство (Satisfaction)

1. Колку мислите дека се задоволни Албанците со тоа колку компетентно, љубезно и професионално државните службеници се однесуваат кон нив?
2. Колку мислите дека Албанците уживаат да во интеракција со државните службеници?
3. Генерално, говорејќи за владата во целина, колку среќни и задоволни мислите дека се Албанците со владата? Колку мислите дека Албанците се задоволни со односот што го имаат со Владата? Ве молиме објаснете зошто мислите дека тие се задоволни или не се задоволни.

9.5 Appendix E: Informed consent (Albanian Civil Servants)

PËLQIM I INFORMUAR

Titulli i Projektit: Strategjitë e Kultivimit të Marrëdhënieve në Menaxhimin e Marrëdhënieve Nderetnike (Cultivation Strategies in Inter-ethnic Relationship Management).

Qëllimi i këtij studimi: Qëllimi i këtij studimi është të hulumtoj nivelin e qasjes (access), pozitivitetit (positivity), transparencës (openness) dhe garancisë së legjitimiteti (assurances of legitimacy) e përceptuar nga të dyja palët, qeverisë dhe komunitetit shqiptar dhe se si keto kontribuojnë në arritjen e besimit dhe kënaqshmërisë midis qeverisë dhe popullit shqiptar.

Çfarë do të kërkohet nga unë të bëj: Nga ju do të kërkohet që të merrni pjesë në një intervistë që zgjat nga 45 deri në 60 minuta; ne do të zhvillojmë intervistën personalisht, me telefon ose Skype, cila do metodë që do të preferonit ju. Intervista përmban pyetje në lidhje me përvojën tuaj, takimet dhe komunikimin me shqiptarët gjatë ushtrimit të detyrës tuaj si nëpunës shtetërorë. Emri dhe institucioni juaj do të rruhen në mënyrë konfidenciale. Për hir të saktësisë dhe lehtësimit në analizimin e të dhënave, ne do të kërkojmë leje tuaj për të bërë një audio incizim të intervistës, por ju, natyrishtë, keni te drejtë që të refuzoni audio incizimin nese dëshironi. Studiuesi kryesorë do të jetë i vetmi person që ka qasje në përgjigjet.

___ Jam dakord që të bëhet audio incizim gjatë pjesëmarrjes sime në këtë studim.

___ Nuk jam dakord që të bëhet audio incizim gjatë pjesëmarrjes sime në këtë studim.

Konfidencialiteti: Ne në mënyrë rigorozë do të mbajmë emrin tënd, të dhënat personale, si dhe institucionet që do t'i diskutojmë konfidenciale. Për të të mbrojtur dhe fshehur të dhënat tuaja, pas intervistës, regjistrimet dhe / ose përgjigjet me email do të mbetet anonime dhe të mbyllura nga studiuesi, I cili do të jenë i vetmi person që ka qasje në to. Të gjitha të dhënat do të shkatërrohen (dmth, do të fshihen) kur përdorimi i tyre nuk është më i nevojshëm, por jo të paktën pesë vjet pas mbledhjes së të dhënave.

Rreziqet dhe përfitimet: Nuk janë të parapara rreziqe fizike, psikologjike ose ekonomike me pjesëmarrjen tuaj në studim. Për shkak se intervista juaj mund të incizohet, ky projekt paraqet një rrezik pasi përgjigjet tuaja mund të asocohen me ju. Megjithatë, në të gjitha rastet, emri juaj, identitetin dhe cdo informatë tjetër që ka të bëjë me ju, do të mbeten konfidenciale. Poashtu, pjesëmarrja juaj është vullnetare, dhe ju mund të refuzoni për t'iu përgjigjur pyetjeve që nuk dëshironi, ose mund të ndërpritni intervistën kur të dëshironi ju. Nuk ka përfitime direkte për ju nëse merrni pjesë në këtë studim; megjithatë, rezultatet e këtij hulumtimi do të ndihmojnë të sigurohen njohuri të dobishme në menaxhimin e marrëdhënieve pozitive ndërmjet qeverisë dhe popujve të ndryshëm që jetojnë ne Maqedoni.

A duhet që patjetër të jem në këtë hulumtim dhe a mund të ndërpres pjesmarrjen në çdo kohë: Pjesëmarrja juaj në këtë hulumtim është plotësisht vullnetare. Ju mund të zgjidhni të mos merrni pjesë aspak në hulumtim. Sidoqoftë, pjesmarrja nuk ju kushton asgjë, përveç kohës suaj. Poashtu, nëse ju vendosni që të merrni pjesë në këtë hulumtim, ju mund të ndërpritni pjesmarrjen në çdo kohë.

Kë të kontaktoni nëse keni pyetje në lidhje me studimin: Ju keni të drejtë të kërkoni, dhe në të njëjtën kohë të ju jipet përgjigje për çdo pyetje që mund të keni në lidhje me këtë hulumtim. Nëse keni pyetje, apo shqetësime, ju duhet të kontaktoni:

- Mensur Zeqiri, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, 0041762363803, mensurzeqiri@gmail.com.
- Prof.Dr. Dejan Verčič, Head of Centre for Marketing and Public Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Kardeljeva ploščad 5, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia, e-mail: dejan.Verčič@fdv.uni-lj.si.

Marrëveshja: Me nënshkrimin e mëposhtëm, unë pranoj se kam lexuar procedurën e përshkruar më sipër. Unë vullnetarisht jam dakord që të marrë pjesë në këtë hulumtim, dhe pranoj që unë kam marrë një kopje të këtij përshkrimi.

—
Nënshkrimi i pjesëmarrësit

Data

INTERVISTA

Pjesa 1: Pyetje të përgjithshme

1. Do të mund të më tregonit se çfarë ju bjen në mend për se pari herë kur ndëgjoni për marrëdhëniet ndërmjet qeverisë dhe shqiptarëve në Maqedoni? Çfarë mund të na thoni më shumë për këte?

Pjesa 2: Strategjitë për kultivimin e marrëdhënieve

Qasja (Access)

1. Çfarë lloj informatash për kontakt si zakonisht ju ofroni shqiptarëve?

2. Sa mendoni se janë adekuata këto kontakt informata që te caktojnë një termin ose të takojnë nëpunësit shtetërorë në institucionin tuaj?
3. A mund të më tregoni më shumë për takimet tuaja me shqiptarët? Cfarë mundësish kanë ata që te takohen me ju? Sa e kanë të lehtë ata që të ju takojnë juve ose ndonje nëpunës tjetër shtetërorë aty ku punoni? Si zakonishtë në cfarë ambienti ndodhin takimet me shqiptarët?
4. Për më tepër, nëse ndonjë shqiptarë ka nevojë të takojë ndonjë nëpunës për ështëje më specifike ose të takojë dikë në hierarkinë më të lartë, a ju jepni kontakt informata adekuate dhe mundësi për të I takuar këta nëpunës specifik?
5. Si shqiptarët zakonisht ju adresojnë juve ose institucionit tuaj pyetjet ose shqetësimet e tyre? Sa jeni të gatshëm të u përgjigjeni pyetjeve dhe shqetësimeve të tyre?

Positiviteti (Positivity)

1. Sa shpesh ju bjen që të takoni ndonjë shqiptarë në institucion gjatë punës tuaj?
2. A mbani komunikim dhe informim të rregullt me shqiptarët? Cfarë lloj informatash si zakonishtë ju jepni atyre? Sa të dobishme mendoni se janë për shqiptarët informatat e dhëna nga ana juaj?
3. Duke pasur në konsideratë takimet e juaja me shqiptarët, sa të sjellshëm jeni në komunikim me ta?
4. Deri në cfarë shkallë mendoni se e bëni komunikimin ndërmjet jush të këndshëm?
5. Sa bashkëpunues jeni në trajtimin e shqetësimeve të ngritura nga shqiptarët?
6. Sic dihet jo gjithë takimet që kemi me të tjerët janë gjithmonë të kënaqshëm. Ju lutem mendoni rreth ndonjë moment që keni pasur ndonjë takim të pakënaqshëm ose konfliktuoz me ndonjë shqiptarë? Kur ka ndodhur incidenti? Çfarë rrethanash çuan deri te incidenti? Mbani mend çfarë saktësisht bëri ose tha? Çfarë bëtë ose that ju? Sa ishit bashkëpunues në zgjidhjen e këtij konflikti me të?

Transparenca (Openness)

1. Si raporton institucioni juaj mbi aktivitetet dhe qeverisjenë saj?
2. Sa shumë informata në lidhje me qeverisjen ndani me shqiptarët? Cfarë lloj informatash në lidhje me qeverisjen e institucionit tuaj ndani me ata?
3. A publikoni raporte vjetore për qeverisjen tuaj? Sa mendoni se janë me vlerë raportet vjetore për të kuptuar se cfarë pune keni bërë?

4. Nëse çështje dhe probleme të reja shfaqen, si I komunikoni institucioni juaj tek shqiptarët? Në çfarë mase konferencat në lidhje me këto probleme që jepen nga institucioni juaj ju ndihmojnë shqiptarëve të kuptojnë problemin?

Sigurimi I legjitimitetit (Assurances of legitimacy)

1. Deri në çfarë mase ju ose nëpunësit tjerë shtetërorë në institucioni tuaj mundoheni që në mënyrë personale të u përgjigjeni shqetësimeve dhe problemeve që raportojnë shqiptarët?
2. Në komunikimin tuaj me ata, sa shumë ua komunikoni atyre se sa të rëndësishëm janë ata (shqiptarët) për ju?
3. Sa seriozisht merren shqetësimet e ngritura nga shqiptarët? Sa shumë mendoni se shqiptarët mendojnë se ju me të vertetë kujdeseni për shqetësimet e tyre?
4. Deri në çfarë mase mendoni se mënyra e miratimit të ligjeve dhe politikave në institucionin tuaj ju lejon shqiptarëve që të ngren ndonjë shqetësim ose të propozojnë zgjidhje? Sa shumë institucioni juaj shtetërorë i konsideron mendimet e shqiptarëve në marrjen e vendimeve dhe zhvillimin e politikave? Sa janë mundësitë e shqiptarëve që të influencojnë vendimet dhe politikat e institucionit tuaj?

Pjesa 3: Rezultatet/Frytet e marrëdhënieve

Besueshmëria (Trust)

- A mund të përshkruani gjërat që institucioni juaj ose qeveria në përgjithësi ka bërë që të i trajtojnë shqiptarët fer dhe me korrektësi ose jo fer dhe jokorrekt?
- A mund të I përshkruani gjërat që institucioni juaj ose qeveria në përgjithësi ka bërë që japin indikacione që mund të u besohet se mbajnë premtimet ose nuk I mbajnë premtimet?
- Sa i sigurtë jeni ju që institucioni juaj ose qeveria në përgjithësi ka kapacitet të realizojnë atë se çfarë premtojnë? Mund të na jepni shembuj se përse mendoni kështu?
- Në përgjithësi, sa shumë mendoni që shqiptarët i besojnë qeverisë? Spjegoni se pse I besojnë ose nuk I besojnë.

Kënaqshmëria (Satisfaction)

- Sa të kënaqur mendoni se janë shqiptarët me atë se sa të aftë, të sjellshëm dhe profesional janë nëpunësit shtetërorë me ta?

- Sa shume mendoni që shqipëtarët kënaqen ose ju pëlqen komunikimi me nëpunësit shtetërore?

- Duke folur për qeverinë në përgjithësi, sa shumë mendoni që shqiptarët janë të kënaqur me Qeverinë? Sa mendoni që janë të kënaqur me merrëdhëniet që qeveria ka pasur me ta? Ju lutem sqaroni pse mendoni që janë të kënaqur ose pse nuk janë të kënaqur.

9.6 Appendix F: Sample letter of solicitation

Subject: Research Inquiry from a Ph.D. student of the University of Ljubljana

Dear Ms./Mr. _____

I am a doctoral student at the University of Ljubljana planning to conduct research on how the relationship cultivation strategies of access, positivity, openness and assurances help and contribute to achieving trust and satisfaction between the government and Albanian community in Macedonia.

I am writing to inquire about the possibility of conducting an interview with a civil servant at your institution. My doctoral dissertation will explore what is the level of access, positivity, openness and assurances perceived by both the government and Albanian community and how does that contribute to achieving trust and relationship satisfaction. My research is meant to build theory, and has no other intention whatsoever. I will guarantee confidentiality throughout the research process. In return for your time, I will provide with an analysis of the results which in turn can help you manage and nurture better relationships with the Albanian community. And of course, your help in this endeavor will contribute greatly to the growing knowledge base in public relations as well as the development of public relations discipline in Macedonia.

The interview would take no more than an hour and I'm happy to schedule it at your convenience, either in-person or on the phone or skype. I'm also happy to send you the list of questions ahead of time in order for you to know exactly what this study entails.

I hope that you will consider participating in this study. I am also happy to answer any further questions at 0041762363803 or mensurzeqiri@gmail.com.

Mensur Zeqiri

9.7 Appendix G: Razširjeni povzetek doktorske disertacije

Kultivacijske strategije pri upravljanju medetničnih odnosov

V disertaciji obravnavamo odnose med vlado in albansko skupnostjo v Republiki Severna Makedonija. Etnične skupnosti so v večetnični državi, kot je Republika Severna Makedonija, tudi strateška javnost, s katero mora vlada upravljati odnose. Ena od glavnih lastnosti dobrega vladovanja je sposobnost vlade, da odgovarja na potrebe državljanov in podpira njihove pravice. To vključuje pripravljenost in sposobnost vlade, da komunicira z državljani, jih posluša, vključi njihove potrebe in želje v svoj program in jih implementira skladno z zakoni in politikami. Vlada lahko z državljani vzpostavi kakovostne odnose, če upošteva njihove potrebe in želje.

V odnosih z javnostmi se organizacije s simetričnim modelom (Grunig & Hunt, 1994) in simetričnimi strategijami kultivacije odnosov (Grunig & Huang, 2000) prilagajajo interesu javnosti in ga usklajujejo z interesom organizacije. Koncept simetrije v odnosih z javnostmi vključuje uporabo dvosmernega simetričnega komuniciranja za obvladovanje konfliktov, za razumevanje in vzpostavljanje odnosov z javnostmi. Cilj je prilagajati lastne ideje in vedenje drugi strani, ne pa poskušati nadzorovati, kako druga stran razmišlja in se obnaša. V odnosih z javnostmi se uporablja tudi dvosmerni asimetrični model odnosov z javnostmi, za katerega je značilno neuravnoteženo enostransko komuniciranje; povratne informacije organizacije v tem modelu uporabljajo, da prepričajo javnost, da sprejme stališče organizacije ali da se vede, kot želi organizacija (Grunig, 2006).

Strokovnjaki (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999) menijo, da lahko več simetričnih strategij kultivacije odnosov (dostopnost, pozitivna naravnost, odprtost, delitev nalog, mreženje in zagotovila upoštevanja) prinese boljše rezultate kakovosti odnosov (vzajemni nadzor, zadovoljstvo, zaupanje in zavezanost). V skladu s tem teoretičnim izhodiščem so nas v disertaciji zanimale medsebojne povezave med kultivacijskimi strategijami dostopnost, pozitivna naravnost, odprtost in zagotovila upoštevanja ter dvema dimenzijama odnosov na relaciji organizacija-javnost: zaupanje in zadovoljstvo. Posebej nas je zanimalo, kako strategije kultivacije odnosov prispevajo k ustvarjanju zaupanja in zadovoljstva v odnosih med vlado in državljani.

V disertaciji smo raziskali dostopnost, pozitivno naravnost, odprtost in zagotovila upoštevanja, kot jih zaznava vlada Republike Severna Makedonija, ter dostopnost, pozitivno

naravnost, odprtost in zagotovila upoštevanja, kot jih vidijo predstavniki albanske etnične skupnosti v tej državi. Zanimalo nas je, ali in kako dostopnost, pozitivna naravnost, odprtost in zagotovila upoštevanja ustvarjajo zaupanje in zadovoljstvo v odnosih med vlado Republike Severna Makedonija in albansko etnično skupnostjo v tej državi. Preučevali in iskali smo odgovore na naslednja raziskovalna vprašanja (RV):

- RV1: Ali vlada meni, da zagotavlja dostopnost predstavnikom albanske skupnosti ter ali predstavniki albanske skupnosti menijo, da jim je omogočena dostopnost?
- RV2: Kako dostopnost ustvarja zaupanje in zadovoljstvo v odnosu?
- RV3: Kakšna je raven pozitivne naravnosti v odnosih v odnosu do vlade in kakšna je stopnja pozitivne naravnosti v odnosu do predstavnikov albanske skupnosti?
- RV4: Kako pozitivna naravnost prispeva k zaupanju in zadovoljstvu v odnosih?
- RV5: Kakšna je stopnja odprtosti/transparentnosti v odnosu do vlade ter kakšna je stopnja odprtosti/transparentnosti v odnosu do predstavnikov albanske skupnosti?
- RV6: Kako odprtost ustvarja zaupanje in zadovoljstvo v odnosih?
- RV7: Kakšno raven zagotovil upoštevanja zaznava vlada in kakšna je raven zagotovil upoštevanja po mnenju predstavnikov albanske skupnosti?
- RV8: Kako zagotovila upoštevanja ustvarjajo zaupanje in zadovoljstvo v odnosih?
- RV9: Kakšna je stopnja vzajemnega zaupanja s stališča vlade in kakšna s stališča predstavnikov albanske skupnosti?
- RV10: Kakšna je stopnja zadovoljstva v odnosih s stališča vlade in kakšna s stališča predstavnikov albanske skupnosti?
- RV11: Kakšno je koorientacijsko stanje usklajevanja med vlado in predstavniki albanske skupnosti?

Široko uporabljena definicija odnosov med organizacijo in njenimi javnostmi nam pove, da odnosi nastanejo, ko so organizacije in njihova strateška javnost vzajemno odvisne, ta soodvisnost pa ima posledice, ki jih morajo organizacije nenehno upravljati (Hung, 2002). Broom et al. (2000, str. 18) so predlagali posebno opredelitev odnosa organizacija-javnost kot:

Odnosi med organizacijo in njenimi javnostmi so predstavljeni z vzorci interakcije, transakcij, izmenjav in povezav med organizacijo in njenimi javnostmi. Ti odnosi imajo lastnosti, ki se razlikujejo od identitet, lastnosti in dožemanja posameznikov in družbene kolektivnosti odnosov. Kljub dinamični naravi je mogoče odnose med organizacijo in javnostmi opisati v enem trenutku in slediti skozi čas.

Grunig (2009) je opredelil dva konkurenčna pristopa, pomembna za raziskovanje odnosov z javnostmi: simbolno paradigmo in vedenjsko paradigmo strateškega upravljanja. V simbolni paradigmi se odnosi z javnostmi uporabljajo predvsem za vpliv na to, kako javnosti razlagajo vedenje organizacije. Poudarek je na sporočilih, oglaševanju, odnosih z mediji in medijskih učinkih. V nasprotju s tem se strateška usmeritev upravljanja ali vedenjska paradigma osredotoča na sodelovanje odnosov z javnostmi pri sprejemanju strateških odločitev, da bi pomagali upravljati odločitve in vedenje organizacij. Osrednji poudarek je na odnosih, pri čemer komuniciranje deluje kot orodje za vzpostavljanje, negovanje in vzdrževanje vzajemno koristnih odnosov (Grunig, 2009). Ta druga paradigma, ki vključuje relacijsko perspektivo odnosov z javnostmi, je teoretični okvir te disertacije.

Dosedanje raziskave odnosov z javnostmi, z določenimi izjemami (Graham 2014; Waters 2007) so uporabljale enostransko merjenje odnosov med organizacijo in njihovimi javnostmi. Osredotočile so se predvsem na evalvacijo perspektive deležnikov. V disertaciji smo želeli opraviti evalvacijo kultivacijskih strategij in rezultatov odnosov z več javnostmi; ovrednotiti smo želeli dinamiko odnosa z vidika strani, ki sta vključeni v odnos organizacija-javnost.

Strategije kultivacije odnosov in gojenje odnosov: Grunig in Huang (2000) koncept kultivacije odnosov opisujeta način, kako organizacije komunicirajo z javnostmi in kako upravljajo konflikte, da vzpostavijo pozitivne odnose ali obnovijo načete odnose. Koncept kultivacije odnosov opisuje način, kako organizacije komunicirajo z javnostmi in kako upravljajo s konflikti, da vzpostavijo pozitivne odnose ali obnovijo načete odnose (Grunig & Huang, 2000). Strategije kultivacije odnosov so strategije, ki se uporabljajo za vzdrževanje odnosov z javnostmi. Grunig (2002) jih je opredelil kot "komunikacijske metode, ki jih ljudje uporabljajo za razvijanje novih odnosov z javnostmi in za spopadanje s stresi in konflikti, ki se pojavljajo v vseh odnosih" (str. 5). V nekaterih prvih študijah so znanstveniki (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Hung, 2000) uporabljali izraz »vzdrževalne strategije«, da bi opisali strategije, ki se uporabljajo pri upravljanju odnosov med organizacijo in javnostjo. Vendar je Hung (2007) predlagal nadomestitev izraza vzdrževanje s kultivacijo. Ugotovil je, da je "Grunig razmišljal o uporabi kultivacije namesto vzdrževanja" (str. 459). V podporo navaja štiri definicije vzdrževanja odnosov avtorjev Dindia in Canary (1993), in sicer: 1) ohranjati odnose; 2) ohranjati odnose v določenem stanju; 3) ohranjati odnose v zadovoljivem stanju; in 4) popraviti načete odnose. Hung (2004) je sprejel tretjo in četrto definicijo, s katerima je zasnoval kultivacijo odnosov kot prizadevanja, da bi odnos ohranili v zadovoljivem stanju in popravili načete odnose.

To konceptualizacijo smo uporabili tudi za opredelitev kulture odnosov pri preučevanju odnosa med vlado in albansko skupnostjo v Republiki Severni Makedoniji. Ob upoštevanju težavnosti odnosov med vlado in albansko skupnostjo v Republiki Severni Makedoniji skozi vsa leta ta konceptualizacija poudarja prizadevanja vlade za izgradnjo pozitivnega in obojestransko koristnega odnosa ter za obnovo odnosov, ki so načeti ali pa so v nezadovoljivem stanju.

Hon in Grunig (1999) ter Grunig in Huang (2000) so zasnovali šest strategij kulture odnosov, ki jih organizacije lahko uporabijo za izgradnjo in vzdrževanje odnosov z različnimi skupnostmi/javnostmi: 1) dostopnost, ki članom omogoča neposreden stik z nosilci odločanja znotraj organizacije; 2) pozitivna naravnost, zaradi katere so interakcije prijetnejše; 3) odprtost, ki ustvarja izmenjavo misli in občutkov med strankami, ki so vključene v odnos; 4) zagotovila drugi stranki v odnosu, da sta ona in njeni pomisleki legitimni; 5) deljene naloge - sodelovanje pri nalogah skupnega interesa; 6) povezovanje z oblikovanjem koalicij s skupinami, v katerih imata organizacija in javnost obojestranski interes.

Za preučevanje strategij kulture odnosov med vlado in albansko skupnostjo v Republiki Severna Makedonija smo se v raziskavi osredotočili le na štiri strategije: dostopnost, pozitivna naravnost, odprtost in zagotovila upoštevanja.

Dostopnost sta predlagala Hon in Grunig (1999) kot eno od strategij kulture odnosov, čeprav ni vključena v literaturo o medosebnih odnosih. Menita, da dostopnost v odnosih med organizacijo in javnostjo pomeni, da sta obe strani pripravljene neposredno obravnavati pritožbe in vprašanja. Ki in Hon (2009) sta dostopnost opredelila kot "stopnjo navora, ki jo organizacija vložijo v zagotavljanje komunikacijskih kanalov ali medijev, ki pomagajo njenim strateškim javnostim, da jo dosežejo" (str. 6).

Pozitivna naravnost sta Hon in Grunig (1999) opredelila kot "karkoli, kar organizacija ali javnost naredi, da bi bil njun odnos bolj prijeten za vpletene strani" (str. 14). Pozitivna naravnost se nanaša na dejanja obeh strani v odnosu organizacija-javnost, da bi ta odnos naredili kar se da prijeten. Ki in Hon (2009) sta pozitivno naravnost opredelila kot "stopnjo, v kateri imajo člani javnosti korist od prizadevanj organizacije, da bi naredili odnos bolj prijeten za ključne javnosti" (str. 12). V literaturi o medosebnem komuniciranju sta Canary in Stafford (1994) pozitivno naravnost opisala kot "vsak poskus, da bi bila interakcija prijetna" (str. 15).

Odprtost velja za vrsto strategije dvosmernega simetričnega komuniciranja (Hon & Grunig, 1999) in se nanaša na razkritje "misli in občutkov med vpletenimi stranmi" (str. 14) oziroma na "prizadevanje organizacije za zagotavljanje informacij o naravi organizacije in njenem delovanju" (Ki & Hon, 2009, str. 8). Zato se tudi v odnosu organizacija-javnost pojavi transparentnost, ko sta obe strani pripravljene deliti svoje misli in občutke. Transparentnost je za vlade bolj pomembna kot za katero koli drugo organizacijo. Piotrowski (2007) je trdil, da vladna transparentnost pomeni odpiranje vlade s pomočjo poti, kot so "dostop do vladnih evidenc, odprtih sestankov in zaščita žvižgačev" (str. 10). Po Balkinu (1999) metafora transparentnosti obsega tri ločene politične vrline: informacijsko transparentnost, to je znanje o vladnih akterjih in odločitvah, ter dostop do informacij vlade; participativno transparentnost, to je sposobnost sodelovanja v političnih odločitvah bodisi s pošteno zastopanstvo ali z neposrednim sodelovanjem; transparentnost odgovornosti, to je zmožnost vladnih uslužbencev, da so odgovorni bodisi pravnemu sistemu ali javnemu mnenju kadar kršijo zakon ali kadar ravnajo na načine, ki škodujejo interesom ljudi (str. 394).

Zagotovila upoštevanja sta Hon in Grunig (2009) opredelila kot "poskuse ene strani, da bi drugi strani v odnosu zagotovili, da so ona in njene skrbi legitimne" (str. 15). Canary in Stafford (1993; Stafford in Canary, 1991) sta ugotovila, da so zagotovila upoštevanja močan napovedovalec zaupanja v medosebne odnose.

Rezultati odnosov predstavljajo kakovost odnosov ali posledice učinkovitih strategij kultivacije odnosov. Hon in Grunig (1999) sta identificirala štiri rezultate odnosov: zaupanje, zavzetost, zadovoljstvo in vzajemno obvladovanje/vzajemni nadzor. Ti rezultati se štejejo za bistvene kazalce in razsežnosti, ki predstavljajo kakovost odnosa med organizacijami in njihovimi javnostmi. Hon in Grunig (1999) trdita, da raziskave medosebnega komuniciranja in psihologije medčloveških odnosov kažejo, da so ti štirje rezultati dobri kazalci uspešnih medosebnih odnosov. Osredotočila sta se na štiri dimenzije: zaupanje, zavzetost, zadovoljstvo in vzajemni nadzor (vzajemno obvladovanje).

Mi smo se v disertaciji osredotočili le na dva rezultata odnosov, in sicer na zaupanje in zadovoljstvo.

Zaupanje je ključno pri razumevanju odnosa med organizacijami in javnostmi. Verčič in Grunig (2000) sta menila, da je brez zaupanja obstoj organizacije negotov. Grunig in Grunig (1998) sta zaupanje opredelila kot "stopnjo, v kateri menedžment in javnost izražata pripravljenost, da postaneta ranljivi za vedenje drugega - zaupanje, da bo druga stran pri

sprejemanju odločitev upoštevala njihove interese" (str. 4). Zaupanje ali pomanjkanje tega ima merljiv vpliv tudi na finančno zdravje organizacije (Paine, 2003). V disertaciji smo uporabili Hon in Grunigovo (1999) pod-dimenzionalno lestvico zaupanja: 1) integriteto, prepričanje, da je organizacija pravična in poštena, 2) zanesljivost, prepričanje, da bo organizacija storila, kar pravi, da bo storila, in 3) kompetentnost, to je prepričanje, da ima organizacija zmožnost delati, kar pravi, da bo storila. Zaupanje vladi ali politično zaupanje velja za „osrednji pokazatelj osnovnega občutka javnosti“ (Newton & Norris, 2000, str. 53). Miller in Listhaug (1990) sta politično zaupanje opredelila kot "sodbo državljanov, da se sistem in politični sodelujoči odzivajo in da bodo storili, kar je prav, tudi če ne bodo pod stalnim nadzorom " (str. 358). Levi in Stoker (2000) sta politično zaupanje štela za bistveni kazalnik legitimnosti v demokratičnih režimih. Nizka raven političnega zaupanja spodkopava učinkovitost in legitimnost vladnih ukrepov ter njeno sposobnost izvajanja zakonodaje (Marien in Hooghe, 2011). Abravanel in Busch (1975) sta trdila, da politično zaupanje zagotavlja tri koristi političnemu sistemu: 1) spodbuja legitimnost; 2) ugodno je za stabilnost sistema in 3) daje diskrecijsko moč političnim elitam.

Zadovoljstvo je drugi rezultat odnosov, ki ga v disertaciji raziskujemo. Hon in Grunig (1999) sta zadovoljstvo opredelila kot »to, v kolikšni meri se ena stran počuti prijetno v odnosu do druge, ker se pozitivna pričakovanja glede odnosa krepijo« (str. 20). Hon in Grunig (1999) sta ugotovila, da je "zadovoljiv odnos tisti, v katerem koristi odtehtajo stroške" (str. 3). Ferguson (1984) je trdil, da je stopnja zadovoljstva organizacije in javnosti z njunim odnosom eden pomembnih kazalcev za merjenje kakovosti odnosov med organizacijo in njeno strateško javnostjo (Grunig & Huang, 2000). Grunig in Huang (2000) sta menila, da „za razliko od medsebojnega nadzora in zaupanja, ki vključujeta kognitivne razsežnosti, zadovoljstvo vključuje naklonjenost in čustva“ (str. 45). Hon in Grunig sta trdila, da bi lahko prišlo tudi do zadovoljstva, kadar ena stran verjame, da je vedenje druge strani glede vzdrževanja odnosov pozitivno.

Za evalvacijo odnosov med vlado in etničnimi skupnostmi z vidika vseh v ta odnos vključenih strani smo uporabili *koorientacijsko perspektivo*, ki ga zagovarjata Broom (1977) ter Broom in Dozier (1990). Koorientacijska perspektiva odnosov z javnostmi obravnava odnose z javnostmi kot vodstveno funkcijo, ki omogoča vzpostaviti in vzdrževati vzajemno koristne odnose. Koorientacijska perspektiva do odnosov na relaciji organizacija-javnosti pomaga meriti štiri vidike odnosa: 1) pogled organizacije na odnos (perspektiva organizacije), 2) pogled javnosti na odnos (perspektiva javnosti), 3) pričakovanja organizacije o pogledu

javnosti na odnos (meta-perspektiva organizacije) in 4) pričakovanja javnosti o pogledu organizacije na odnos (meta-perspektiva javnosti). Verčič et al. (2006) so identificirali štiri ključne spremenljivke koorientacijskega modela: 1) kongruentnost ali zaznani dogovor - stopnjo, do katere vsaka od strani verjame, da je ideja ali pričakovanje druge strani podobna njihovim; 2) natančnost - stopnjo, do katere se dojemanje ali vrednotenje strani B s strani A približa resničnim idejam ali spoznanjem strani B, oziroma stopnja, v kateri se pričakovanja ene strani ujemajo z resničnimi stališči druge; 3) dogovor - stopnjo, v kateri si dve (ali več) strani delita (delijo) podobne ocene o določenem vprašanju skupnega interesa; 4) razumevanje - stopnjo podobnosti med definicijami, ki sta jih dali dve ali več strani (Verčič et al., 2006). Uporaba koorientacijskega pristopa je primerna, saj razkriva stopnjo dogovora, natančnega zaznavanja in dojemanja zaznanega dogovora (usklajenosti, kongruentnosti) med vlado in etničnimi skupnostmi pri ocenjevanju kulturalizacijskih strategij in rezultatov odnosov. Metodo smo uporabili za lažje razumevanje, kako člani skupnosti in vladni uradniki dojemajo odnose med njimi.

V disertaciji smo pri razvoju teoretičnega okvira sledili tudi *relacijski perspektivi odnosov z javnostmi*, ki odnose z javnostmi obravnava kot vodstveno funkcijo, ki pomaga vzpostaviti in vzdrževati vzajemno koristne odnose. Po mnenju Ledinghama (2001) so bili štirje ključni dogodki, ki so privedli do pojavnosti relacijske perspektive kot paradigme za preučevanje in prakso odnosov z javnostmi: 1) prepoznavanje osrednje vloge odnosov pri preučevanju in izvajanju odnosov z javnostmi; 2) ponovna konceptualizacija odnosov z javnostmi kot funkcije upravljanja; 3) nastanek strategij za merjenje organizacij in javnih odnosov, sestavnih delov in vrst odnosov med organizacijami in njihovimi javnostmi ter povezave med odnosi organizacije-javnosti in javnimi stališči, zaznavami, znanjem in vedenjem; ter 4) pojav modelov odnosov med organizacijami in njihovimi javnostmi, ki ustrezajo predhodnikom odnosov, postopkom in posledicam.

Ledingham in Bruning (1998) sta ponudila okvirno opredelitev *odnosov med organizacijami in javnostmi* kot "stanje, ki obstaja med organizacijo in njenimi ključnimi javnostmi, v katerih ukrepi katere koli entitete vplivajo na ekonomsko, socialno ter politično in/ali kulturno blaginjo druge entitete« (str. 62). Tako bi bil po njunem mnenju idealen odnos med organizacijami in njihovimi javnostmi "stanje, ki obstaja med organizacijo in njenimi ključnimi javnostmi, ki vsem vključenim stranem prinaša gospodarske, socialne, politične in/ali kulturne koristi prinaša in za katerega je značilno medsebojno pozitivno spoštovanje." (str. 62). Huang (2001a) je odnos med organizacijo in javnostjo opredelil kot "stopnjo, v

kateri organizacija in njena javnost zaupata drug drugemu, se dogovorita, da imata pravico vplivati, doživljati zadovoljstvo drug drugega in se zavezati drug drugemu" (str. 12). Hutton (1999) trdi, da se "upravljanje odnosov nanaša na prakso odnosov z javnostmi kot na izkušnjo ugotavljanja medsebojnih interesov, vrednot in koristi med stranko in njeno javnostjo" (str. 208). Thomlison (2000) opredeljuje odnos kot "skupek pričakovanj, ki jih imata dve strani za medsebojno vedenje glede na svoje vzorce interakcije" (str. 178). Rhee (2004) opozarja na dejstvo, da je pomemben sestavni del komuniciranja v procesu gradnje odnosov pogosto zapostavljen in da je odnos med organizacijami in javnostmi mogoče opredeliti kot "povezavo med organizacijo in javnostjo, ki izhaja iz vedenjskih posledic, ki jih ima organizacija ali javnost v odnosu do druge strani, kar zahteva večkratno komunikacijsko interakcijo« (str. 42). Po Hungu (2007) "odnosi med organizacijo in javnostjo nastanejo, ko so organizacije in njihova strateška javnost medsebojno odvisne, ta soodvisnost pa ima za posledice, ki jih organizacije morajo upravljati" (str. 396).

Upoštevajoč sistemsko teorijo te definicije zelo odražajo naravo *odnosa med vlado in državljani*. Za odnos je zelo značilna soodvisnost, ki izhaja iz „pogodbe“ med vlado in državljani, da vlada v njihovem imenu. Zaradi tega se vlada razlikuje od vseh drugih organizacij; upoštevati mora vse želje, potrebe, dejanja, misli in občutke državljanov (Appleby, 1945). Zaradi narave vlade se odnosi med vlado in državljani razlikujejo od odnosov med drugimi organizacijami in javnostmi in tudi vlade se, zaradi vloge in namena v družbi, razlikujejo od drugih organizacij. Končni cilj vlade je povečati javno dobro v nasprotju s ciljem zasebnih ali poslovnih organizacij. Appleby (1945) je v svoji knjigi *Velika demokracija* zaključil svoje prvo poglavje "Vlada je drugačna" z izjavo "Vlada je drugačna, ker mora upoštevati vse želje, potrebe, dejanja, misli in občutja 140.000.000 ljudi. Vlada je drugačna, ker je vlada politika« (str. 10). Appleby je v razlagi bistvenega značaja vlade trdil, da imata vladna funkcija in odnos vsaj tri dopolnjujoče se vidike, s katerimi se vlada razlikuje od vseh drugih organizacij in dejavnosti: 1) širina obsega, učinka in upoštevanja; 2) javna odgovornost; in 3) politični značaj.

Teoretiki in strokovnjaki za odnose z javnostmi prav tako menijo, da se *vladni odnosi z javnostmi* razlikujejo od odnosov z javnostmi, ki jih izvajajo v korporacijah, združenjih in nepridobitnih organizacijah. V učbenikih za odnose z javnostmi so posebna poglavja posvečena vladnim odnosom z javnostmi. Vendar sta Grunig in Jaatinen (1999) trdila, da so načela odnosov z javnostmi za vlado enaka kot pri drugih vrstah organizacij, so pa različni in posebni pogoji, pri katerih je treba ta načela uporabiti. Po njunem mnenju vladne organizacije

bolj verjetno kot druge organizacije izvajajo model obveščanja javnosti in manj verjetno bodo sodelovale v dvosmernem komuniciranju. Po Grunigu (1997b) koncept javnosti dobro zajame aktiven in simetričen odnos med vladnimi agencijami in državljani v demokracijah. V demokraciji se od državljanov pričakuje, da bodo aktivno sodelovali pri oblikovanju politik in da bodo vključeni v delovanje vlade. Kot je dejal Feinberg (1997, str. 377): "da demokracija deluje, morajo imeti državljani dostop do informacij o tem, kaj počne njihova vlada in kako so bile sprejete odločitve".

Van de Bosch (2004) je razlikoval vladne odnose z javnostmi od *političnega komuniciranja* in opredelil oba koncepta. Vladne odnose z javnostmi je opredelil kot "komunikacijska prizadevanja, pri katerih poskuša uprava biti nestranska, uravnotežena in jedrnata. Ta prizadevanja niso usmerjena v to, da bi postavili politično stranko ali politiko, temveč da se osredotočijo na interes državljana, ki sprejema informacije o zadevah, o katerih je treba biti obveščen" (str. X). Po drugi strani pa je politično komuniciranje opredelil kot "prepričevalno komuniciranje, ki izhaja iz politikov, ki eksplicitno ali implicitno stremijo k političnim, imidž in volilnim točkam" (str. X). Gelders in Ihlen (2010) sta trdila, da so "vladni odnosi z javnostmi prav tako verjetno prepričevalni in poskušajo vplivati na znanje, odnos in/ali vedenje državljanov, na primer, da se izognejo vožnji med pitjem alkohola" (str. 60). Prav tako trdita, da vse več definicij in etičnih smernic o vladnih odnosih z javnostmi in propagandi ministrom omogoča, da z uporabo vladnih odnosov z javnostmi sekundarno dosežajo politične točke, če to ni glavni cilj komunikacijskih aktivnosti. Crespo in Echart (2011) sta vladno komuniciranje opredelila kot "gojenje dolgoročnih odnosov, usmerjenih v medsebojno razumevanje, namesto da bi jih modelirali na kratkoročnih, zmagovitih pristopih k komuniciranju" (str. 109).

Young (2007) trdi, da je "komuniciranje med državljani in njihovimi vladami ključni ukrep za zdravje vsake demokracije" (str. iii). Po njenem mnenju je komuniciranje neločljivo odvisno od delovanja vlad, razsežnosti vsakega ukrepanja ali odločitve vlade, načina, kako vlada oblikuje, spodbuja in sprejema politike, kako je vlada organizirana in od odnosov, ki jih gradi z državljani in mediji in druge skupine, kot so poslovne skupnosti (Young, 2007). Prvotni namen odnosov z javnostmi v vladnih organizacijah je obveščanje javnosti, zaradi česar bolj verjetno kot druge organizacije uporabljajo model javnega obveščanja. Model javnega obveščanja je enosmerni model, ki se za odnose z javnostmi nanaša le na razširjanje informacij. Kot je izjavil Grunig (1997b, str. 261):

Z modelom javnega obveščanja organizacija uporablja strokovnjake za odnose z javnostmi, da delujejo, kot da bi bili novinarji, da širijo razmeroma resnične informacije prek množičnih medijev in nadzorovanih medijev, kot so glasila, brošure in neposredna pošta. Čeprav so informacije, posredovane prek tega modela resnične, po navadi ne razkrijejo celotne resnice, temveč le "dejstva", ki jih organizacija izbere.

Drugo pomembno vprašanje v odnosih med vlado in državljani je transparentnost/preglednost, zato je ena od strategij, ki jo je bilo treba raziskati v tej disertaciji, odprtost ali preglednost/transparentnost. Preglednost in zaupanje v državo prav tako razlikujeta vlado od drugih organizacij. Graber (2003) je kot ključno razliko med javnimi in zasebnimi organizacijami priznal dejstvo, da javne organizacije delujejo ali domnevajo, da delujejo v ozračju transparentnosti. Piotrowski (2007) trdi, da je "zaupanje v vlado v osnovi povezano s transparentnostjo" (str. 21). Po njegovem mnenju "vladna transparentnost pomeni odpiranje vlade s pomočjo poti, kot so dostop do vladnih evidenc, odprtih sestankov in zaščite žvižgačev" (str. 10). Nadalje je trdil, da je transparentnost vlade zelo pomembna za izvajalske agencije in druge vladne organizacije, kot so svetovalni odbori. Menil je, da vladna transparentnost omogoča javnosti, da razvije bolj natančno sliko o dogajanju znotraj vlade. Poleg tega je menil, da je transparentnost temeljni pogoj za demokratično odgovornost vlade, ki volivcem omogoča stanje, v katerem je odgovorna za svoja dejanja (Graber, 2003).

V disertaciji smo preučili koncepte Gruniga in Huanga (2000) o kultivaciji odnosov in rezultatih odnosov.

Kultivacijske strategije zajemajo strategije, ki se uporabljajo za gradnjo in vzdrževanje kakovostnih odnosov med organizacijo in javnostjo, medtem ko rezultati odnosov predstavljajo kakovost odnosov ali posledice učinkovitih strategij kultivacije odnosov (Grunig & Huang, 2000). Hon in Grunig (1999) ter Grunig in Huang (2000) so konceptualizirali šest kultivacijskih strategij odnosov, ki jih organizacije lahko uporabijo za oblikovanje in vzdrževanje odnosov z različnimi javnostmi: dostopnost, pozitivna naravnost, odprtost, zagotavljanje upoštevanja, skupne naloge in mreženje. Končni rezultati predstavljajo kakovost odnosov ali pa posledice učinkovitih strategij kultivacije odnosov (Grunig & Hunt, 2000). Hon in Grunig (1999) sta identificirala štiri izide odnosov – zaupanje, zavzetost, zadovoljstvo in vzajemni nadzor.

Koncept strategij kultivacije odnosov naj bi bil dedič razvojnih modelov odnosov z javnostmi, zlasti dvosmernega simetričnega modela (Grunig, 2006; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Prvi trije modeli, model tiskovnega agenta, javnega informatorja in dvosmerni asimetrični model, so opisani kot asimetrični. Za dvosmerni asimetrični model odnosov z javnostmi je značilno

neuravnoteženo enostransko komuniciranje. Model uporablja znanstvene metode za razvoj prepričevalnega komuniciranja. Vključuje veliko povratnih informacij ciljne javnosti in različnih javnosti; vendar povratne informacije organizacije uporabljajo, da prepričajo javnost, da sprejme stališče organizacije ali da se vede, kot to želi organizacija (Grunig, 2006). Zadnji model, dvosmerno simetrično komuniciranje, uporablja dvosmerno komuniciranje in dialog za obvladovanje konfliktov, doseganje razumevanja in vzpostavljanje odnosov z javnostmi. Model se opira na pošteno in odprto dvosmerno komuniciranje in ne na enosmerno prepričevanje (Grunig, 2006). Po Grunigu (2006) posamezniki, organizacije in javnosti v simetričnem modelu uporabljajo komuniciranje, da svoje ideje in vedenje prilagodijo drugim, ne pa da bi jih poskušali nadzorovati, kako naj razmišljajo in se obnašajo. Hon in Grunig (1999) navajata simetrične odnose kot ključni atribut uspešne kulture odnosa: „dolgoročno so najbolj produktivni odnosi tisti, ki koristijo obema stranema v razmerju in ne tisti, ki so namenjeni samo organizacijam“ (str. 11).

V disertaciji torej izhajamo iz koorientacijske teorije odnosov z javnostmi in preizkušamo učinke strategij kulture odnosa pri upravljanju medetničnih odnosov med vlado Republike Severne Makedonije in albansko skupnostjo.

Teoretiki odnosov z javnostmi so opredelili strategije, ki jih lahko uporabljajo organizacije za kultivacijo odnosov z javnostmi, in za evalvacijo rezultatov, s katerimi merijo kakovost odnosov med organizacijami in javnostmi. Huang (1997) je kot kazalnike odnosov opredelil zaupanje, medsebojno nadzorstvo, odnos do zavezanosti in razmerja. Hon in Grunig (1999) sta podala smernice za merjenje odnosov med organizacijo in javnostmi ter opredelila naslednjih šest kazalnikov odnosov: medsebojni nadzor, zaupanje, zavzetost, zadovoljstvo, skupni odnosi in izmenjava odnosov. Lestvica, ki sta jo predlagala Hon in Grunig (1999), ki je svoje korenine našla v Huang (1997), je bila najpogostejša lestvica, ki se v literaturi uporablja za merjenje moči odnosa med organizacijami in njihovimi javnostmi.

Strategije kulture odnosa smo v političnem kontekstu Republike Severne Makedonije analizirali glede dostopnosti, pozitivnosti, odprtosti in zagotovil upoštevanja ter pojasnili, kako te prispevajo k doseganju zaupanja in zadovoljstva v odnosih med vlado in skupnostjo. Tako disertacija daje vpogled v pomen in pomembnost dostopnosti, pozitivnosti, odprtosti in zagotovil upoštevanja pri doseganju pozitivnih odnosov med vlado in skupnostjo, ki temeljijo na vzajemnem zaupanju in zadovoljstvu.

Upoštevajoč navedeno je bil *namen raziskave* oceniti koliko dostopa do vlade in njenih ustanov imajo predstavniki albanske skupnosti v Republiki Severna Makedonija. Prav tako smo želeli ugotoviti, kako pozitivno naravnani so državni uslužbenci v sodelovanju s predstavniki albanske skupnosti. Ugotavljali smo preglednost/transparentnost delovanja vlade in njenih ustanov, pa tudi vladnih zagotovil, da bodo predstavniki albanske skupnosti in njihovi interesi upoštevani. Z raziskavo smo si prizadevali oceniti, koliko predstavniki albanske skupnosti zaupajo vladi in v kolikšni meri so z vlado zadovoljni. Ob tem smo z raziskavo poskusili tudi ugotoviti v kolikšni meri stopnje dostopnosti, pozitivnosti, odprtosti in zagotavljanja upoštevanja vplivajo na delež zaupanja in zadovoljstva v odnosih med vlado in albansko skupnostjo v Republiki Severna Makedonija.

Z raziskavo smo želeli tudi *ovrednotiti kultivacijske strategije pri upravljanju medetničnih odnosov in njihove rezultate* z vidika več javnosti; to je, oceniti dinamiko odnosov z vidika vseh javnosti, ki so bile vključene v razmerje organizacija-javnosti. Uporabili smo koorientacijski pristop za merjenje odnosov med vlado in (albansko) skupnostjo, ki je zaobjel vse vključene v ta odnos. Uporaba koorientacijskega pristopa je pomagala tudi razumeti kako so člani skupnosti in vladni uslužbenci razumeli odnos med njimi.

V disertaciji smo raziskali in razložili tudi povezave med koncepti kultivacije odnosov in rezultatov odnosov. Študije raziskav na področju odnosov z javnostmi še niso raziskale povezav med posebnimi strategijami kultivacije odnosov in štirimi glavnimi razsežnostmi odnosov organizacija-javnosti: zaupanjem, vzajemnim nadzorom (vzajemnim obvladovanjem), vzajemno povezanostjo in relativnim zadovoljstvom. Poleg tega, kot je predlagal Hung (2007), bi se morale raziskave premakniti od osredotočanja na rezultate odnosov k strategijam kultivacije odnosov, k temu, kako vzdrževati in negovati kakovostne odnose s poudarkom na strategijah kultivacije odnosov, s katerimi se lahko dosežejo lastnosti odnosov, kot so zaupanje, vzajemni nadzor (vzajemno obvladovanje), zavzetost in zadovoljstvo. Raziskav, ki so se osredotočale na odnos organizacija-javnosti v vladnem okviru, je izjemno malo. Ledingham (2001) je prvi razširil relacijsko teorijo odnosov z javnostmi na odnose med vlado in skupnostjo. Analiziral je odnos med vlado in državljani v Eastsideu, predmestju velikega metropolitanskega središča Srednjega zahoda. Študija se je osredotočila na razlago, ali odnosi z javnostmi delujejo kot graditelj skupnosti, in na preizkušanje u možnosti lestvice odnosov za napovedovanje vedenja javnosti. Njegov poudarek je bil le na treh vrstah odnosov: poklicni odnosi, osebni odnosi in odnosi v

skupnosti (Ledingham, 2001). Naša raziskava pa je zasnovana tako, da prispeva k zapolnitvi te praznine.

Disertacija je razdeljena na šest poglavij.

Prvo poglavje je teoretično, s kratko kritično-analitično predstavitevijo teoretičnega okvira, ki smo ga uporabili v disertaciji. Predstavljeni so zgodovina in pregled perspektiv, uporabljenih v disertaciji, relacijska perspektiva odnosov z javnostmi in koorientacijski pristop.

Drugo poglavje vsebuje kritičen prikaz študij o odnosih med organizacijo in javnostmi.

Literatura s področja odnosov z javnostmi je zakoreninjena v številnih disciplinarnih področjih, kot so množično komuniciranje, medosebno komuniciranje, (socialna) psihologija, ekonomija in sociologija ter na različnih šolah, kot so funkcionalizem, konstruktivizem, feminizem, marksizem ali kulturne teorije (van Ruler & Ihlen, 2009). Holmström (1996) je na splošno podpirala zasidranje raziskav o odnosih z javnostmi v družboslovne vede s posebnim poudarkom na sociologiji, v kateri je dejanski poudarek odnosov z javnostmi na konfliktih med različnimi normami ali interesi družbe. Trdila je, da je treba odnose z javnostmi preučiti v povezavi z razvojem struktur in procesov v družbi.

S stališča sociologije obstajajo štiri splošne teorije, ki so pomembne za teorijo odnosov z javnostmi: 1) strukturalni funkcionalizem - stabilnost izvira iz organizacije ali strukture družbe; 2) evolucijska perspektiva: družbene spremembe sledijo naravnim zakonom, sistemi množičnega komuniciranja so se zato razvili iz naravne potrebe ljudi po komuniciranju; 3) družbeni konflikt: socialni boj se odvija med skupinami s konkurenčnimi potrebami in cilji; 4) simbolni interakcionizem: mediji predstavljajo konstrukte resničnosti, ki ponujajo informacije iz omejenih virov (Newsom, Turk in Kruckeberg, 2004).

Poleg socioloških so za teorijo odnosov z javnostmi pomembni tudi dve psihološki paradigmi: sociokulturna paradigma, ki poudarja sociokulturne spremenljivke, ki določenemu posamezniku omogočajo razlago ali predstavitev resničnosti, ter psihodinamični model, ki proučuje, kako učinkovito sporočilo človeka naredi, da komunikator stori nekaj, kar želi (Newsom in sod., 2004).

Verčič in Grunig (2000) sta pri preučevanju nastanka teorije odnosov z javnostmi trdila, da kljub temu, da večina učenjakov in praktikov za odnose z javnostmi ni uspela vzpostaviti teoretične povezave s teorijami ekonomije in menedžmenta, ki so potrebne za razlago

prispevkov, da upravljanje odnosov z javnostmi prispeva k celotnemu upravljanju organizacij in da je le z lociranjem odnosov z javnostmi na teh področjih mogoče v celoti razložiti potencialni prispevek, ki ga lahko odnosi z javnostmi doprinesejo k celotnemu upravljanju organizacij. Nadalje sta zaključila, da so

teorije srednjega obsega, kot so situacijska teorija javnosti, modeli odnosov z javnostmi in njihovi odnosi do okoljskih pogojev organizacij, strateški odnosi z javnostmi in njegova vloga v strateškem menedžmentu organizacije, družbeni smisel obstoja podjetja in globalno-specifična teorija odnosov z javnostmi so se razvile ločeno, na osnovi več področij znanja: ekonomije, menedžmenta, sociologije, politologije in komunikologije.

Izvore vseh teh koščkov splošne teorije odnosov z javnostmi pa lahko zasledimo v enostavnih konceptih neoklasične mikroekonomije in prilagoditvah teh konceptov, ob upoštevanju organizacijskih, družbenih in političnih dejavnikov, ki vplivajo na odločitve menedžerjev, javnosti in tržišč. Vendar pa je ironično, da teorije odnosov z javnostmi, ki so nastale iz ekonomske teorije, teoriji menedžmenta dodajajo družbene, etične in politične razsežnosti. S tem, ko odnosu med organizacijami in javnostmi dodaja osnovni element zaupanja, daje funkcija odnosov z javnostmi tisto, kar je očitno najpomembnejši rezultat menedžerskega odločanja: odnosi z javnostmi organizacijam omogočajo obstoj (Verčič & Grunig, 2000, str. 49).

Ker so v središču analize strategije kultivacije odnosov in rezultatov odnosov, je pomembno razumeti in pregledati tudi druge poglede iz raziskav in teorij družbenih ved, ki kot osrednji koncept uporabljajo odnose, zaupanje, simetrijo, vzajemnost in soodvisnost. Nekatere pomembne in uporabne teorije so vključevale teorije vlade in državljanov, oblikovanje nacije, zaupanje, komuniciranje, sistemsko teorijo in teorijo družbene menjave.

Koncept oblikovanja nacije je imel za teorijo odnosov z javnostmi pomembne posledice. Gradnja nacije ima politične temelje in se nanaša na gradnjo političnih institucij v novo nastalih ali preoblikovanih državah (Huntington, 1968). Taylor in Kent (2006) sta trdila, da če bi ljudje preusmerili fokus raziskav s področja izgradnje države na osredotočenost na odnose, bi to sodilo v perspektivo odnosov z javnostmi, ki ima edinstven potencial za ustvarjanje, vzdrževanje in spreminjanje odnosov med vlado in državljani. Študije o krepitvi nacije (Taylor, 2000; Taylor & Kent, 2006) so predlagale, da bi morale vlade kot del demokratičnega procesa oblikovanja nacije uporabljati odnose z javnostmi za komuniciranje in obveščanje državljanov o spremembah. Taylor (2000) je nadalje predlagal, da je za vzpostavitev odnosov med vladami in javnostjo potreben dvosmerni, simetričen način komuniciranja, pa tudi vzpostavitev novih odnosov med nepovezanimi javnostmi. Poleg tega sta Taylor in Kent (2006) poudarila pomen odnosov z javnostmi za uspešno uresničevanje ciljev za vzpostavljanje nacije le, če se odnose z javnostmi razume kot orodje, ki ustvarja in vzdržuje odnose.

Odnosi z javnostmi so se kot aplikativna disciplina komunikacijske znanosti razvili v zadnjih tridesetih letih iz večinoma prepričevalnega, množičnega komuniciranja, področja raziskovanja komuniciranja, osredotočenega na odnose na vseh ravneh, od znotraj organizacijskih do družbenih. Teoretiki odnosov z javnostmi verjamejo, da je temeljni cilj odnosov z javnostmi izgradnja in nato krepitev stalnih ali dolgoročnih odnosov s ključnimi deležniki organizacije (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

Poziv k osredotočanju na odnose v odnosih z javnostmi sega v sredino osemdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja. Ferguson je takrat opozoril, da »ne organizacija, ne javnost, niti komunikacijski proces ne bi smeli biti unificirani koncept odnosov z javnostmi« (1984, str. 166). Od takrat odnos med organizacijo in javnostmi raziskujejo kot enoto preučevanja odnosov z javnostmi (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997, 2000; Bruning, 2000; Bruning & Ledingham, Bruning, McGrewb & Cooper, 2006; 1999 ; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Huang, 1997, 2001a; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Hung, 2002; Ledingham, 2001; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Ledingham, Bruning, & Wilson, 1999).

Od leta 1997 se je raziskovanje odnosov začelo premikati naprej. Broom et al. (1997, 2000), frustrirani zaradi pomanjkanja opredelitve "odnosa", so pregledali literaturo in sestavili definicijo odnosov med organizacijami in njihovimi javnostmi. Analizirali so odnose med organizacijami in njihovimi javnostmi ter izdelali model, ki je opisal predhodnike in posledice odnosov organizacija-javnost. Nekatere prve študije upravljanja odnosov so bile usmerjene v določanje odnosov (Broom et al. 1997, 2000; Brunner, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998), v določanje dimenzij za evalvacijo kakovosti odnosov (Huang 1997 ; Hon & Grunig, 1999) in oblikovanje več-elementnih, večdimenzionalnih lestvic za merjenje odnosov (Huang, 2001a; Ki, 2006; Ki in Hon, 2009).

Grunig in Huang (2000) sta razvila teorijo odnosov med organizacijo in javnostmi ter zagotovila metode za ocenjevanje odnosov na vsaki stopnji: na stopnji predhodnih odnosov, kultivacijskih strategij in rezultatov odnosov. Predlagala sta več kultivacijskih strategij odnosov: dostopnost, pozitivno naravnost, odprtost, zagotovila upoštevanja, mreženje in deljenje nalog, ter dimenzije rezultatov kakovosti odnosov: zaupanje, zavzetost, zadovoljstvo in medsebojni nadzor. Mere rezultatov odnosov določajo kakovost odnosov med organizacijo in njenimi javnostmi. Odtlej se zdi, da so bila merila, ki so jih kreirali Hon in Grunig (1999) ter Grunig in Huang (2000), vedno pogosteje preizkušena, čeprav so raziskovalci oblikovali več meril za raziskovanje odnosa med organizacijo in javnostmi.

Hung (2000, 2002, 2005) je sprejel Grunigovo in Huangovo (2000) teorijo strategij kulture odnosov in rezultatov odnosov ter razvil osnovni model upravljanja odnosov. Ki in Hon (2009) sta razvila ukrepe za pomoč strokovnjakom za odnose z javnostmi, da bi bolje razumeli, kako negovati in vzdrževati odnose s svojo ciljno javnostjo. Poleg tega sta razvila lestvico z več postavkami, ki ustrezajo standardom zanesljivosti in veljavnosti merjenja za merjenje strategij kulture odnosov.

V raziskavah so bile uporabljene strategije kulture odnosov in lastnosti odnosov, ki so jih predlagali Hon in Grunig (1999) ter Grunig in Huang (2000), za raziskovanje odnosov organizacija-javnosti v različnih okoljih: odnosi med univerzami in študenti (Hon & Brunner, 2002; Ki & Hon, 2006), odnosi med proizvajalcem in trgovcem na drobno (Jo, 2003), odnosi med multinacionalkami in lokalno skupnostjo (Hung, 2005), odnosi med mestom in uporabniki javnih storitev (Hall, 2006); odnos med zračnimi silami in skupnostjo (DellaVedova, 2005); odnos med neprofitnimi organizacijami in donatorji (O'Neil, 2007; Waters, 2007); odnosi med politično stranko in javnostjo (Seltzer & Zhang 2011); in odnosi med lokalno vlado in državljani (Graham 2014).

Odnos med vlado in državljani je področje raziskovanja odnosov med organizacijami in javnostjo, ki je dobilo malo znanstvene pozornosti. Poleg tega so znanstveniki (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999) trdili, da lahko več strategij kulture odnosov (npr. dostopnost, pozitivna naravnost, odprtost, delitev nalog, mreženje in zagotovila upoštevanja) prinese boljše rezultate kakovosti odnosov (npr. vzajemni nadzor, zadovoljstvo, zaupanje in zavzetost). Waters (2007) je pri preučevanju odnosa med neprofitnimi organizacijami in donatorji ugotovil, da je vsaka strategija kulture odnosov, razen vzajemnosti, neposredno vplivala na oceno razsežnosti odnosov. Ugotovil je, da dostop, povezovanje v mreže, odgovornost in odnosi, ki negujejo bistveno vplivajo na zaupanje, nadzorujejo vzajemnost, zadovoljstvo in predanost. Delitev nalog je pomembno vplivala na zaupanje, odprtost pa je pomembno vplivala na zadovoljstvo. Pozitivna naravnost je močno vplivala na oceno medsebojnosti nadzora (Waters, 2007). Poleg tega je Jo (2003) ugotovil, da trgovci na drobno v razmerju med proizvajalcem in trgovcem zaznavajo zadovoljstvo bolj izrazito v primerjavi z drugimi lastnostmi odnosov, kot so nadzor medsebojnosti in obraz ter naklonjenost. Ki (2006) je raziskoval, kako so različne vrste strategij kulture odnosov povzročile različne ravni rezultatov odnosov. Te raziskave so pokazale, da strategije kulture odnosov niso v enaki meri uspešne, če se uporabljajo za različne ureditve odnosov med organizacijami in njihovimi javnostmi. Nekatere strategije kulture odnosov so lahko

uspešne pri urejanju odnosov med univerzami in študenti, vendar morda ne bodo uspešne v enaki meri pri urejanju odnosov med vlado in skupnostjo. Poleg tega nekatere strategije odnosov v primerjavi z drugimi bolj vplivajo na rezultate kakovosti odnosov.

Hung (2007) je predlagal, da se raziskave v prihodnosti premaknejo od osredotočanja na rezultate odnosov na strategije kulture odnosov; tj. kako vzdrževati in gojiti kakovostne odnose s poudarkom na to, katere strategije kulture odnosov (dostopnost, pozitivna naravnost, odprtost, zagotovila upoštevanja, mreženje in deljenje nalog) lahko dosežejo lastnosti odnosov, kot so zaupanje, vzajemni nadzor, zavezanost in zadovoljstvo.

Namen te raziskave je delno zapolniti to praznino. Ker teoretiki odnosov z javnostmi še naprej razpravljajo in preizkušajo učinke strategij kulture odnosov na rezultate kakovosti odnosov, smo s to raziskavo želeli zagotoviti nadaljnje preizkušanje kulture odnosov v kontekstu odnosov med vlado in skupnostjo. Raziskavo smo zasnovali za preučitev strategij kulture odnosov glede dostopa, pozitivnosti, odprtosti in zagotovil upoštevanja ter pojasnil, kako te strategije prispevajo k doseganju zaupanja in zadovoljstva v odnosih med vlado in skupnostjo. Z raziskavo smo tako omogočili tudi vpogled v pomen dostopnosti, pozitivnosti, odprtosti in zagotovil upoštevanja za doseganje pozitivnih odnosov med vlado in skupnostjo, ki temeljijo na medsebojnem zaupanju in zadovoljstvu.

V nadaljevanju smo preučili koncept kulture odnosov in rezultatov odnosov ter konceptualizirali kulture odnosov in rezultate odnosov. Argumentirali smo odločitev, da bomo preučili samo posebne kulture odnosov in rezultate, ne pa vseh, kot so predlagali Hon in Grunig (1999) ter Grunig in Huang (2000).

Po temeljitem pregledu raziskav o odnosih med organizacijo in javnostmi ter opredelitvi glavnih konceptov smo drugo poglavje zaključili s predstavitev in argumentacijo glavnih raziskovalnih vprašanj, ki smo jih preučili v disertaciji. Da bi dosegli namen raziskave z odkrivanjem prispevka strategij kulture odnosov pri določanju kakovosti odnosov med vlado in skupnostjo, smo razvili teoretični okvir upoštevajoč literaturo in raziskave o upravljanju odnosov in odnosov med organizacijo in javnostmi, strategijah kulture odnosov in rezultatov kakovosti odnosov. To je bila teoretična podlaga, na kateri smo raziskovali kulture odnosov med vlado in albansko skupnostjo v Republiki Severna Makedonija.

V tretjem poglavju smo odnose med vlado in skupnostjo umestili v kontekst Republike Severne Makedonije ter medetnične odnose med albansko in večinsko makedonsko skupnostjo. Poglavje smo začeli z orisom zgodovine demokracije v Republiki Severna Makedonija, vključno z državljansko vojno leta 2001, medetničnimi odnosi in prehodnim procesom iz leta 1991, ki so bili ključni za določitev političnega in družbenega razvoja države. Podrobneje smo predstavili posebne politične okoliščine v zvezi z odnosi med vlado in albansko skupnostjo v Republiki Severna Makedonija. Vključili smo informacije o javni upravi v Republiki Severna Makedonija in pravični zastopnosti Albancev v javni upravi. Ker so javni uslužbenci vzorec, ki predstavlja vlado v pričujoči disertaciji, bo jasna slika javne uprave pripomogla k boljšemu razumevanju konteksta, v katerem potekajo odnosi med vlado in albansko skupnostjo v Republiki Severna Makedonija.

Republika Severna Makedonija je znana po svoji kulturni raznolikosti. Po zadnjem popisu prebivalstva 2002 živi v Republiki Severna Makedonija 2.022.547 prebivalcev, pripadnikov različnih etničnih skupin: Makedoncev 64,2%, Albancev 25,2%, Turkov 3,9%, Romov 2,7%, Srbov 1,8% in drugih 0,7%. Približno 65% prebivalstva je makedonskih pravoslavcev, 32% prebivalcev je islamske veroizpovedi, približno 3% pa je pripadnikov različnih drugih veroizpovedi (Državni statistični urad, 2002). Kulturna raznolikost se izraža z uporabo različnih priznanih jezikov v državi - makedonščini, albanščini, turščini, vlaščini, romščini, srbščini in prek različnih verskih pripadnosti, predvsem pravoslavni in muslimanski. Kljub temu so že od razglasitve neodvisnosti Makedonije od Jugoslavije v letu 1991 značilni krhki medetnični odnosi.

Po poročilu Freedom House iz leta 2016 je Republika Severna Makedonija delno svobodna država in je v letu 2016 izgubila oznako volilne demokracije, saj je bila ta ocenjena s 4,29 točkami od 7 možnih, v letu 2017 je bila ocena 4,43, kar Freedom House označuje kot hibridni režim, v katerem so demokratične institucije krhke in obstajajo pomembni izzivi za zaščito političnih pravic in državljanskih svoboščin (Freedom House, 2016). Obenem spada Republika Severna Makedonija v skupino gospodarstev v vzponu in v razvoju. Korupcija in kriminal sta glavna dejavnika pri upočasnitvi gospodarskega razvoja Republike Severna Makedonija. Vlada zelo nadzira aktivizem v Republiki Severni Makedoniji. Ker se je demokratično upravljanje v Republiki Severna Makedonija v zadnjih letih še naprej slabšalo, se je tudi prostor za aktiviste in člane civilne družbe zmanjšal. Pravosodni sistem se otepa slabega ugleda, škandal z množičnim vladnim prisluškovanjem leta 2015 pa je razkril vmešavanje izvršilne oblasti v zaposlovanje in napredovanje sodnikov. Navedeni škandal je

razkril tudi močan pritisk izvršilne oblasti v konkretnih sodnih primerih (Freedom House, 2016). Navedena razkritja, ki kažejo na obsežno in nezakonito vladno prisluškovanje novinarjem, koruptivne vezi med uradniki in lastniki medijev ter povečanje števila groženj in napadov na predstavnike medijev je nedvoumno vplivalo na te ocene Freedom Housa. Poleg tega je poročilo Freedom of the Press 2016 medijsko pokrajino v Republiki Severna Makedonija opisalo kot globoko polarizirano v političnih okvirih. Zaradi pritiskov lastnikov medijev, vezanih na politične ali poslovne interese, je samocenzura med novinarji v Republiki Severna Makedonija pogosta.

V večetnični državi, kot je Republika Severna Makedonija, so različne etnične skupnosti del strateških javnosti, s katerimi vlada mora upravljati vzajemne odnose.

V četrtem poglavju smo predstavili raziskovalni načrt. Uporabili smo kvalitativno raziskavo s poglobljenimi intervjuji. Utemeljili smo primernost kvalitativnih raziskav za proučevanje razmerja med vlado in albansko skupnostjo, metodo, uporabljeno za zbiranje podatkov, strategijo analize podatkov, metodo vzorčenja in vzorec ter nekatere etične pomisleke pri izvajanju raziskave.

Kot glavno raziskovalno metodo smo uporabili kvalitativne poglobljene intervjuje. Pripravili smo vprašanja, s katerimi smo želeli ocenjevati zaznane raven dostopa predstavnikov albanske skupnosti do vladnih institucij, pozitivna naravnost javnih uslužbencev v interakciji s predstavniki albanske skupnosti, odprtost vladnih institucij in zagotovila vlade, da se Albanci in njihovi pomisleki upoštevajo. Poleg tega smo s pripravljenimi vprašanji želeli oceniti stopnjo zaupanja predstavnikov albanske skupnosti in njihovo zadovoljstvo z vlado.

Podatke smo zbrali s poglobljenimi intervjuji z 19 predstavniki albanske skupnosti in 20 javnimi uslužbenci osrednje (makedonske) vlade. V vzorec javnih uslužbencev smo vključili 8 Albancev in 12 Makedoncev. Vzorec smo predhodno preverili s 5 predstavniki albanske skupnosti, 2 albanskima državnima uradnikoma in z enim makedonskim državnim uradnikom. Pogoj za uvrstitev javnih uslužbencev v raziskavo je bil, da so zaposleni v vladnih institucijah in sektorjih, v katerih sodelujejo z državljani, pri čemer je bil glavni pogoj njihove vključitve njihove izkušnje pri ravnanju in sodelovanju s predstavniki albanske skupnosti. Enako je veljalo za državljane albanske narodnosti, saj so morali v zadnjih petih letih sodelovati in prejeti storitve javnih uslužbencev. Uporabili smo tri vzorčne strategije: teoretično vzorčenje, vzorčenje snežne kepe in vzorčenje z merili.

Peto poglavje je namenjeno predstavitvi rezultatov in glavnih ugotovitev raziskave. Analiza in prikaz podatkov nista bili opravljena ročno, temveč z uporabo programske opreme CAQDAS (računalniško podprta programska oprema za kvalitativno analizo podatkov). Uporabili smo raziskovalno orodje Atlas.ti, da bi poenostavili proces analize podatkov, zlasti v procesu prepisovanja dokumentov, arhiviranja in kodiranja. Programska oprema je pomagala kodirati in izboljševati kodiranje med samim analiziranjem.

V drugem delu poglavja smo uporabili koorientacijski pristop k ugotovitvam iz poglobljenih intervjujev za oceno stopnje dogovora, natančnega zaznavanja in zaznave zaznanega dogovora (kongruenca) med državnimi uradniki in predstavniki albanske skupnosti pri ocenjevanju kultivacijskih strategij in rezultatov medetničnih odnosov. V prvem delu so ugotovitve predstavljene glede na predhodno razvita raziskovalna vprašanja. Analiziranju podatkov so sledile tri interaktivne analize podatkov: reduciranje podatkov (*data reduction*), prikaz podatkov (*data display*) ter zaključno risanje in verificiranje (*conclusion drawing and verification*).

Rezultati naše raziskave kažejo, da so predstavniki albanske skupnosti in albanski javni uslužbenci negativno ocenili odnos med vlado in albansko skupnostjo, medtem ko so makedonski državni uradniki videli ta odnos v precej bolj ugodni luči. Na splošno so makedonski državni uslužbenci odnos med vlado in predstavniki albanske skupnosti opisali ugodneje v primerjavi s predstavniki albanske skupnosti in albanskimi javnimi uslužbenci. Makedonski državni uslužbenci so menili, da so odnosi med vlado in Albanci zdaj na zadovoljivi ravni, saj so bile po Ohridskem okvirnem sporazumu leta 2001 dosežene pomembne izboljšave. Na drugi strani pa so predstavniki albanske skupnosti in albanski javni uslužbenci negativno opisali odnos med vlado in predstavniki albanske skupnosti, poudarjali so nezaupanje, skepticizem in občutek diskriminacije.

Predstavniki albanske skupnosti in albanski javni uslužbenci so poročali o nižjih ravneh dostopnosti, pozitivnosti, odprtosti in zagotavljanja legitimnosti v primerjavi z makedonskimi javnimi uslužbenci, ki so vlado ocenili višje v teh kultivacijskih strategijah.

Najpogostejši načini, ki jih predstavniki albanske skupnosti uporabljajo za navezovanje stikov ali srečanja z javnimi uslužbenci (*dostopnost*), so bili neposredni sestanki ali sestanki, dogovorjeni prek osebnih povezav. Sledita telefonski klici in elektronska pošta, ki sicer velja za najmanj funkcionalno v odnosu do drugih načinov dostopnosti. Vsi intervjuvanci so se strinjali, da se je z javnimi uslužbenci precej enostavno sestati. Vendar se makedonski javni

uslužbenci in predstavniki albanske skupnosti niso strinjali glede sestajanja s hierarhično višje pozicioniranimi javnimi uslužbenci. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti in albanski javni uslužbenci so menili, da so srečanja z javnimi uslužbenci, ki so v hierarhiji višje pozicionirani, precej težko ali celo nemogoče izvedljiva brez uporabe osebnih povezav, medtem ko so makedonski javni uslužbenci menili, da je treba, če je potrebno, upoštevati formalne postopke. Vsi intervjuvanci se strinjali, da Albanci svoje pritožbe v glavnem obravnavajo osebno v instituciji ali prek osebnih povezav, predvsem prek svojih stikov s politično stranko, ki je takrat na oblasti. Vendar predstavniki albanske skupnosti ne verjamejo, da vlada upošteva njihove pritožbe in pomisleke, zaradi česar ne nadaljujejo s svojimi pomisleki glede javnih uslužbencev. Albanski in makedonski javni uslužbenci se zavedajo, da Albanci ne verjamejo, da so njihove skrbi upoštevane, čeprav so priznali, da so jim pripravljene pomagati.

Pozitivna naravnost je bila uporabljena za merjenje prizadevanj javnih uslužbencev, da bi omogočili njihovo interakcijo s predstavniki albanske skupnosti. Javni uslužbenci so pozitivno ocenili pozitivno naravnost v primerjavi s predstavniki albanske skupnosti. Javni uslužbenci so povedali, da se interakcije dogajajo vsak dan, večinoma pa gre za administrativne naloge in reševanje vsakdanjih težav, ki jih imajo državljani. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti so menili, da od vlade niso prejeli nobenih informacij, oziroma, da so bile te nepravilne, zastarele, neuporabne in pristranske.

Spletna mesta so veljala za glavno orodje za razširjanje informacij, vendar so informacije na spletnih straneh večinoma veljale za zastarele in brez različice v albanskem jeziku. Makedonski javni uslužbenci se z njimi niso strinjali, saj so informacije javno dostopne vsem, čeprav so etnično povezane.

Predstavniki albanske skupnosti so menili, da javni uslužbenci niso vljudni in kooperativni. Makedonski in albanski javni uslužbenci se s tem niso strinjali in so trdili, da so vedno vljudni in pripravljene sodelovati, v nekaterih primerih pa sta bili vljudnost in sodelovanje odvisni od druge strani. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti so pomanjkanje vljudnosti in sodelovanja ocenili kot rezultat neprofesionalnosti javnih uslužbencev. Vsi intervjuvanci so se strinjali, da osebna povezava vpliva na to, kako ugodna je interakcija med obema stranema.

V zvezi z *odprtostjo* so predstavniki albanske skupnosti poročali, da vlada ne deli veliko informacij o svojem upravljanju, temveč, da so vladne informacije skrbno izbrane in uporabljene za namene političnega trženja. Menili so, da vladne institucije ne prikazujejo

resnične slike upravljanja, saj da so izbirali in objavljajo le informacije, ki so jim bile v prid in ki jih prikazujejo v pozitivni luči. V nasprotju z makedonskimi javnimi uslužbenci so albanski javni uslužbenci trdili, da vladne institucije ne objavljajo letna poročila o delu. Tudi, če bi bila letna poročila objavljena, so predstavniki albanske skupnosti dvomili o zanesljivosti informacij, ki bi jih ta poročila vsebovala. Zatrdili so, da ne zaupajo vsemu, kar poročajo vladne institucije. Makedonski javni uslužbenci so priznali, da se letna poročila ne objavljajo; vendar so pojasnili, da gre za notranja poročila vladi, ki jih vlada pozneje objavi sama. Čeprav je vlada uporabljala tiskovne konference, oglasne deske, dnevne tiskane in elektronske medije, družbene medije, spletna mesta in uradni list kot sredstva komuniciranja, so predstavniki albanske skupnosti menili, da tiskovne konference niso namenjene obveščanju državljanov, temveč, da jih vlada uporablja kot sredstvo za propagando.

Zagotovila upoštevanja, enako kot *pozitivna naravnost*, so javni uslužbenci ocenili ugodnejše v primerjavi s predstavniki albanske skupnosti. Slednji so menili, da javni uslužbenci niso vključeni v zagotavljanje osebnih odzivov državljanom. Menili so, da javnih uslužbencev ne skrbi veliko zanje in da jim ni mar za njihove skrbi. Intervjuvanci so se na splošno strinjali, da vključevanje državljanov v procese odločanje ne obstaja. Menili so, da je sicer mogoče sprožiti vprašanje ali predlagati rešitev, težava pa je v tem, da se takšnih potez državljanov nikoli ne upošteva, njihovi glasovi niso nikoli uslišani. Makedonski javni uslužbenci so menili, da vlada samo deklarativno upošteva stališča državljanov, vendar nikoli ne izvaja ničesar, kar ti predlagajo.

Makedonski in albanski javni uslužbenci se niso strinjali glede *zaupanja* in *zadovoljstva* predstavnikov albanske skupnosti. Makedonski javni uslužbenci so menili, da predstavniki albanske skupnosti zaupajo vladi in so z vlado zadovoljni ter da so pravično in pošteno obravnavani. Albanski javni uslužbenci in predstavniki albanske skupnosti pa so nasprotnega mnenja glede zaupanja in zadovoljstva. Trdili so, da ne zaupajo in da niso zadovoljni z vlado. V nasprotju z makedonskimi javnimi uslužbenci so se predstavniki albanske skupnosti strinjali, da se na vlado ne morejo zanesti, da bi ta držala obljube. Večina intervjuvancev je menila, da vlada ni sposobna doseči tistega, kar obljubi.

Prav tako večina intervjuvancev ni bila zadovoljna z znanjem, vljudnostjo in strokovnostjo javnih uslužbencev. Ugotavljajo, da so ti v svojih interakcijah s predstavniki albanske skupnosti nesposobni in arogantni. Na splošno so predstavniki albanske skupnosti menili, da niso zadovoljni z vlado. Na zadovoljstvo predstavnikov albanske skupnosti z vlado vplivajo

arogantno vedenje, usposobljenost, strokovnost, reševanje sporov in konfliktov ter kakovost opravljenih storitev s strani javnih uslužbencev. Makedonski javni uslužbenci so menili, da jim predstavniki albanske skupnosti zaupajo in da so v veliko večji meri zadovoljni z vlado v primerjavi z albanskimi javnimi uslužbenci, ki so v opisu vladno-albanskih odnosov poudarjali nezaupanje in nezadovoljstvo. Večina albanskih javnih uslužbencev pa je potrdila, da niti sami ne zaupajo vladi, čeprav so vladni uslužbenci.

Ugotovitve te raziskave kažejo na povezave med strategijami kulture odnosov - dostopnosti, pozitivnosti, odprtosti in zagotavljanja upoštevanja ter rezultati kakovostnih odnosov, ki se kažejo v zaupanju in zadovoljstvu. Rezultati kažejo, da bolj ko je bila vlada pozitivno ocenjena na ravni strategij kulture odnosov, ugodneje sta bila ocenjena tudi zaupanje in zadovoljstvo kot rezultata kakovosti tega odnosa. Medosebno komuniciranje po modelu osebnega vpliva je bilo prav tako opredeljeno kot pomembna kulture strategija v odnosih med vlado in državljani v Republiki Severna Makedonija.

Naša raziskava je ponudila dokaze o »izpolnjevanju obljub« kot eni od kulture strategij odnosov. Kot glavni razlog, zakaj predstavniki albanske skupnosti niso zaupali vladi in niso bili zadovoljni z odnosom vlade do njih, se je med analizo podatkov izkazalo prav izpolnjevanje obljub, skupaj z diskriminacijo. Poleg njiju se je za pomembno dimenzijo v evalvaciji zaupanja v odnosu vlade do skupnosti izkazala integriteta.

Diskriminacija je bila prepoznana kot glavni razlog, da so predstavniki albanske skupnosti občutili, da z njimi ne ravnajo pošteno in pravično. Prav zaradi diskriminacije so se državljani počutili nepošteno in nepravično, kar je zmanjšalo zaupanje v odnose med vlado in javnostjo. Politične stranke navadno veliko obljublajo, kar se kasneje izkaže neskladno z možnostmi, da te obljube uresničijo. Uresničevanje obljub velja v Severni Makedoniji za »merilo resnice«, s katerim lahko ugotavljajo, koliko vlada drži besedo.

Prav tako so se spori in upravljanje sporov izkazali za pomemben pokazatelj o odnosih med vlado in skupnostjo. Načini, kako državni uradniki obravnavajo konfliktne situacije s predstavniki albanske skupnosti vplivajo na zadovoljstvo državljanov. Rezultati naše raziskave so pokazali, da profesionalnost in kompetentnost državnih uradnikov vplivata na pozitivno naravnost (odnosov), kar se posledično odraža na zadovoljstvu državljanov. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti niso zadovoljni s profesionalnostjo in kompetentnostjo javnih uslužbencev. Profesionalnost se je izkazala kot ključna za ugodno vzajemno delovanje med predstavniki albanske skupnosti in javnimi uslužbenci.

Rezultati raziskave so tudi pokazali, da sta udejstvovanje in zadovoljstvo zaposlenih pomembna za zadovoljstvo državljanov. Pomanjkanje profesionalnosti in usposobljenosti so vplivali na udejstvovanje javnih uslužbencev. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti so menili, da javni uslužbenci vedno delujejo pod stresom, ker niso sposobni opravljati dela, ki so ga prevzeli, ter da javni uslužbenci niso vljudni, ker so prevzeli preveč odgovornosti, in so zato posledično postali arogantni do državljanov.

Naslednja ključna ugotovitev te raziskave je bil *vpliv zaupanja na strategije kulture odnosov*. Pomanjkanje zaupanja je vplivalo na zaznane zaupanje vlade in vladnega komuniciranja. Albanci so menili, da vlade ne morejo obravnavati kot poštene ali resnicoljubne. Zaradi pomanjkanja zaupanja predstavniki albanske skupnosti svoje zahteve ali pritožbe naslavljajo na vladne institucije, ker so bili prepričani, da vladi ni mar za njihove pomisleke in da jih ni pripravljena reševati.

Odsotnost zaupanja je predstavnike albanske skupnosti odvrnilo od naslavljanja njihovih vprašanj, pomislekov ali pritožb na vlado. Pomanjkanje zaupanja je močno vplivalo tudi na vladno komuniciranje in razširjanje informacij. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti so dvomili v vse informacije, ki so jih prejemale od vlade. Menili so, da te informacije ne odražajo dejanskega stanja; ocenili so jih za prirejene za namene političnega trženja in propagande. Pomanjkanje zaupanja je vplivalo tudi na izkazovanje poročanja o odgovornosti delovanja. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti so menili, da poročanje o vladnem delovanju ne predstavlja dejanskega slike o delovanju vlade.

Upoštevač koorientacijski pristop, ugotovitve naše raziskave so na splošno pokazale nestrinjanje med Albanci in javnimi uslužbenci. Rezultati so pokazali nestrinjanje makedonskih in albanskih javnih uslužbencev o odnosih med albansko skupnostjo in vlado. Albanski javni uslužbenci in člani albanske skupnosti se strinjajo o večini strategij kulture odnosov in rezultatov teh odnosov. Pregled teh ugotovitev po koorientacijskem modelu kaže, da makedonski javni uslužbenci in Albanci niso soglasni glede strategij kulture odnosov in rezultatov odnosov, predstavniki albanske skupnosti in albanski javni uslužbenci pa so soglasni v vseh spremenljivkah razen pozitivnosti in zagotovil upoštevanja.

Zaključno poglavje je namenjeno zaključku in predlogom o prihodnji raziskovalni smeri.

Namen disertacije ni bil preučiti kakovosti odnosov med vlado Republike Severna Makedonija in albansko etnično skupnostjo, temveč razumeti ter raziskati izbrane strategije

kultivacije odnosov predvsem s stališča, kako posamezne strategije prispevajo k zaupanju in zadovoljstvu med vlado in skupnostjo. Naš cilj je bil razumeti prispevek posameznih strategij kultivacije odnosov k zaupanju in zadovoljstvu med vlado in albansko skupnostjo, ne pa njihov prispevek h kakovosti odnosov med vlado in albansko skupnostjo.

V disertaciji smo se osredotočili na strategije kultivacije odnosov in njihov prispevek k doseganju kakovosti odnosov, ki temelji na vzajemnem zaupanju in zadovoljstvu v odnosih med vlado in skupnostjo. Konkretnije, osredotočili smo se na raziskavo odnosa med vlado in predstavniki albanske skupnosti v Republiki Severna Makedonija. Namen študije je bil torej oceniti, koliko imajo predstavniki albanske skupnosti v Republiki Severna Makedonija dostopa do vlade in njenih institucij, oceniti kako pozitivni so javni uslužbenci v svojih odnosih s predstavniki albanske skupnosti, preučiti transparentnost vlade in njenih institucij ter zagotovila vlade do Albancev, da se oni in njihovi pomisleki upoštevajo. Poleg tega je bila raziskava namenjena tudi oceni, koliko predstavniki albanske skupnosti zaupajo vladi in v kolikšni meri so z vlado zadovoljni. Poskušali smo oceniti, koliko vplivajo stopnja dostopa, pozitivnosti, odprtosti in zagotovil upoštevanja na stopnjo zaupanja in zadovoljstva v odnosih med vlado in albansko etnično skupnostjo v Republiki Severna Makedonija.

Prvo in drugo raziskovalno vprašanje sta bili uporabljene za ovrednotenje, ali javni uslužbenci menijo, da je predstavnikom albanske skupnosti omogočena *dostopnost* in ali predstavniki albanske skupnosti menijo, da jim je omogočena dostopnost, ter v kolikšni meri in kako dostopnost *prispeva k zaupanju in zadovoljstvu v odnosih*. Ugotovitve naše raziskave so pokazale, da predstavniki albanske skupnosti menijo, da imajo omejen dostop do vlade, zlasti do javnih uslužbencev ali drugih uradnikov višje v hierarhiji. Vsi intervjuvanci so se strinjali, da se je enostavneje srečati se z javnimi uslužbenci nižje v hierarhiji. Kljub temu so se predstavniki albanske skupnosti zavedali, da imajo javni uslužbenci, ki so nižje v hierarhiji omejene pristojnosti. Makedonski javni uslužbenci so tudi priznali, da je jezik ovira pri njihovih srečanjih s predstavniki albanske skupnosti. Na splošno so vsi intervjuvanci, ki so ocenili, da je dostopnost vlade nizka, tudi zaupanje in zadovoljstvo ocenili kot nizko. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti, ki so dostopnost ocenili nekoliko višje, so tudi zaupanje in zadovoljstvo ocenili kot nekoliko boljše. Pomembno je omeniti, da so predstavniki albanske skupnosti v glavnem odgovorili, da vladi sploh ne zaupajo in sploh niso zadovoljni z odnosom, ki ga je vlada imela do njih.

Tretje in četrto raziskovalno vprašanje sta bili namenjeni ovrednotenju *pozitivnosti* v odnosih med vlado in predstavniki albanske skupnosti ter njenega *prispevka k doseganju zaupanja in zadovoljstva*. Makedonski javni uslužbenci so znova bolj ugodno ocenili pozitivno naravnost v primerjavi z albanskimi javnimi uslužbenci. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti so brez izjeme negativno ocenili strategijo kulture odnosov in na splošno kot zelo nizko ocenili stopnjo pozitivnosti v odnosih z vlado. Menili so, da so vljudnost, poskusi, da bi interakcija postala prijetna ter kooperativnost zelo izraženi, ko so se srečali s državnimi uslužbenci zahvaljujoč osebnim povezavam ali ko so javni uslužbenci vedeli, da je državljani povezan z nekom s politično močjo. Četrto raziskovalno vprašanje je bilo zlasti namenjeno razumevanju, kako pozitivnost prispeva k doseganju zaupanja in zadovoljstva v odnosih med vlado in predstavniki albanske skupnosti. Naša raziskava je pokazala da *pozitivnost prispeva k zaupanju in zadovoljstvu v odnosih* med vlado in predstavniki albanske skupnosti. Udeleženci, ki so vlado nizko ocenili glede pozitivnosti, so nizko ocenili tudi zaupanje v vlado in zadovoljstvo z njo. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti so menili, da na odnos, ki ga imajo z vlado, vpliva kako vlada širi informacije, kako zagotavlja storitve in kako so javni uslužbenci komunicirali z njimi. Niso bili zadovoljni z informacijami, ki so jih prejeli od vladnih institucij, pritožili so se, da pridobljeni podatki niso ažurni, da so zastareli in so v večini primerov neuporabni, informacije na spletnih straneh vladnih institucij pa da nimajo različice v albanskem jeziku. Albanska različica spletnih strani vladnih institucij je namreč obstajala le, če je bil minister ali direktor institucije albanske narodnosti in samo v dveh primerih, kjer je bil minister makedonske narodnosti (in sicer je od prejšnjega ministra (albanske narodnosti) ostala zastarela različica spletnih strani v albanskem jeziku). Pozitivnost in vljudnost so namreč tisti, ki pritegnejo čustva državljanov.

Peto raziskovalno vprašanje se je osredotočilo na *odprtost*. Namen je bil razumeti, v kolikšni meri je bila vlada odprta pri svojem delovanju v odnosu do javnih uslužbencev in predstavnikov albanske skupnosti. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti in albanski javni uslužbenci so poročali o zelo nizki stopnji odprtosti v primerjavi z makedonskimi javnimi uslužbenci, ki so pozitivno ocenjevali odprtost vladnih institucij.

Cilj šestega raziskovalnega vprašanja je bil preučiti *prispevek odprtosti k ustvarjanju zaupanja in zadovoljstva v odnosih*. Rezultati naše raziskave so pokazali, da je odprtost v primerjavi s prvima dvema strategijama kulture odnosov zelo pomembna za odnose med vlado in albansko etnično skupnostjo. Glede odprtosti so predstavniki albanske skupnosti trdili, da večina poročanja o delu vladnih institucij poteka prek njihovih spletnih strani, ki so

pogosto preobremenjene, neredno posodobljene, z manjkajočo različico na albanskem jeziku, poročanje o vladnih dejavnosti prek tiskanih in elektronskih medijev, ki jih nadzoruje vlada, pa da služi predvsem političnemu trženju in politični propagandi. Makedonski javni uslužbenci so poročali, da informacije, ki jih zagotavljajo vladne institucije, vključujejo predvsem dnevne dejavnosti, informacije o izvedenih projektih in informacije o postopkih. Rezultati so pokazali, da vlada ni odprta za državljane in državljanom ne zagotavlja informacij o svojem delovanju. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti zaznavajo, da vladne institucije ne predstavljajo prave slike o vladnem delovanju, če niso odprte za državljane. Menijo, da je vlada precej selektivna do javnih objav informacij o svojem delovanju, zato objavlja le podatke, ki so v njeno korist, ter informacije, ki jo prikazujejo v pozitivni luči.

S sedmim raziskovalnim vprašanjem smo preučevali *stopnjo zagotovil upoštevanja*, ki so jih zaznali dve skupini, predstavniki albanske skupnosti in javni uslužbenci. Tako kot pri prejšnjih treh strategijah kultivacije odnosov, so predstavniki albanske skupnosti in albanski javni uslužbenci poročali o zelo nizki stopnji upoštevanja zagotovil upoštevanja. Makedonski javni uslužbenci so znova bolj ugodno ocenili vlado v smislu zagotovil upoštevanja albanske skupnosti.

Osmo raziskovalno vprašanje se je osredotočilo na to, kako *zagotovila upoštevanja prispevajo k doseganju zaupanja in zadovoljstva v odnosih*. Na splošno so rezultati pokazali povezavo med zagotovili upoštevanja in zaupanjem ter zadovoljstvom, saj so intervjuvanci, ki so raven zagotovil upoštevanja ocenili kot nizko, poročali tudi o nizki ravni zaupanja in zadovoljstva v odnosih med vlado in Albanci.

Predstavniki albanske skupnosti so namreč menili, da javnih uslužbencev pravzaprav ne skrbijo veliko njihovi pomisleki in težave, da delajo le tisto, kar so dolžni in da državljani od njih ne bi smeli veliko pričakovati, da bi jim pomagali pri reševanju njihovih skrbi. Po njihovem mnenju se morajo državljani včasih obnašati kot »berači«, da bi dobili pozornost javnih uslužbencev in jih osebno vključili v reševanje njihovih prošenj. Glede udeležbe pri odločanju ter pri razvoju zakonskih rešitev in politik so predstavniki albanske skupnosti menili, da je v Republiki Severna Makedonija še vedno mogoče sprožiti vprašanje ali predlagati rešitev. Težava pa je v tem, da se takšne poteze državljanov nikoli ne upoštevajo. Na splošno so predstavniki albanske skupnosti menili, da je nemogoče vplivati na vladne odločitve in da glasovi ljudi niso nikoli uslišani. Menili so, da je mogoče vplivati na odločitve le, če je znotraj koalicijskih partnerjev politična volja ali če menijo, da je pomembno, da se

vključijo v njihov politični program. Vlada je po njihovem mnenju državljane spremenila v volilne stroje brez kakršnega koli dvosmernega komuniciranja, ki bi državljanom omogočilo, da predlagajo rešitve ali vplivajo na sprejemanje odločitev.

Z devetim in desetim raziskovalnim vprašanjem smo vrednotili *zaupanje* v vlado in *zadovoljstvo* z vlado. Skoraj vsi intervjuvani predstavniki albanske skupnosti so izrazili mnenje, da jih je vlada s selektivno uporabo zakonodaje obravnavala nepošteno in nepravilno, pri čemer so navedli številne razloge, zaradi katerih se tako počutijo, kot so diskriminacija na etnični osnovi, neenaka zastopanost, ekonomska diskriminacija, korupcija ter pomanjkanje meritokracije in profesionalizma. Ta mnenja so z njimi delili tudi albanski javni uslužbenci. Nasprotno pa so makedonski javni uslužbenci menili, da so po Ohridskem okvirnem sporazumu predstavniki albanske skupnosti obravnavani pošteno in pravično. Na splošno so vsi intervjuvani predstavniki albanske skupnosti in albanskih javnih uslužbencev poročali, da vladi sploh ne zaupajo, saj da vladi ni mar za državljane, pač pa le za osebne interese ter interese skupin oz. političnih strank, ki jim pripadajo.

Glede *zanesljivosti* so predstavniki albanske skupnosti menili, da se na vlado in vladne institucije ni mogoče zanašati, da bodo izpolnili dane obljube. Na drugi strani pa je manjšina makedonskih javnih uslužbencev menila, da obstaja velika razlika med obljubljenim in dejanskim doseženim.

Zadnje raziskovalno vprašanje se je nanašalo na to, *v kolikšni meri se vlada in državljani strinjajo v oceni kakovosti odnosov med vlado in albansko skupnostjo*. Naše ugotovitve so na splošno pokazale nestrinjanje med predstavniki albanske skupnosti in javnimi uslužbenci, zlasti med makedonskimi javnimi uslužbenci in predstavniki albanske skupnosti ter med albanskimi javnimi uslužbenci in makedonskimi javnimi uslužbenci glede odnosa vlade do predstavnikov albanske skupnosti. Rezultati so razkrili tudi dogovor med albanskimi javnimi uslužbenci in predstavniki albanske skupnosti glede strategij kultivacije odnosov, in sicer glede dostopnosti, odprtosti in odnosov, ki izhajajo iz zaupanja in zadovoljstva. Na splošno so makedonski javni uslužbenci na odnos gledali precej ugodneje kot albanski javni uslužbenci in predstavniki albanske skupnosti.

Glede kultivacijskih strategij se predstavniki albanske skupnosti in albanski javni uslužbenci niso strinjali z makedonskimi javnimi uslužbenci. Prvi so bili soglasni glede dostopnosti in transparentnosti kot strategij kultivacije odnosov, ne pa tudi glede strategij pozitivnosti in

zagotovil upoštevanja. Tudi makedonski in albanski javni uslužbenci se niso strinjali glede kulturalnijskih strategij dostopnosti, preglednosti, pozitivnosti in zagotovil upoštevanja.

Če pregledamo te ugotovitve po koorientacijskem pristopu, je mogoče sklepati, da so makedonski javni uslužbenci in Albanci (albanski javni uslužbenci ter predstavniki albanske skupnosti) neskladni glede vseh kulturalnijskih strategij in rezultatov odnosov. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti in albanski javni uslužbenci so poleg pozitivnosti in zagotovil v stanju popisa vseh spremenljivk.

Cilj študije je bil preučiti percepcijo javnosti o tem, kako vladne strategije kulturalnijske odnosov - pozitivnost, odprtost in zagotovila upoštevanja - vplivajo na njihove ocene rezultatov kakovosti zaupanja in zadovoljstva. Z raziskavo smo ugotovili pomemben prispevek posebnih strategij kulturalnijske odnosov k odnosom med vlado in javnostjo na splošno ter zlasti medsebojno povezanost med zaupanjem v vlado in zadovoljstvo z vlado. Rezultati študije so pokazali, da so ravnanja obeh strani javnih uslužbencev in predstavnikov albanske skupnosti vplivala na to, zakaj so predstavniki albanske skupnosti negativno ocenili zaupanje in zadovoljstvo v odnosih z vlado. Ugotovitve so podprle začetne domneve, da so strategije kulturalnijske odnosov pomemben dejavnik pri napovedovanju kakovosti odnosov med vlado in državljanji. Domnevali smo namreč, da dostopnost, pozitivnost, odprtost in zagotovila upoštevanja s strani vlade vplivali na to, koliko Albanci zaupajo in so zadovoljni z vlado v Republiki Severna Makedonija. Vendar v raziskavi nismo merili meta-perspektivo javnosti tako, da nismo mogli izmeriti, kako celotna etnična skupnost, v našem primeru Albanci, dojemajo stališča vlade. Čeprav so bila v času predtestov pripravljena vprašanja za preizkušanje meta-perspektive javnosti glede zaupanja in zadovoljstva, je to zmedlo intervjuvance, večina pa jih ni hotela odgovoriti na ta vprašanja, saj so se jim zdelo zelo subjektivna, od posameznika do posameznika različni. V disertaciji tako ni bilo mogoče ovrednotiti skladnosti in natančnosti med spoznanji predstavnikov albanske skupnosti z njihovo zaznavo spoznanj javnih uslužbencev o dejanskih spoznanjih Albancev o zaupanju v vlado in zadovoljstvu z vlado.

Naša raziskava je pokazala močno povezavo med dostopnostjo, pozitivnostjo, odprtostjo in zagotovili upoštevanja za dosego zaupanja in zadovoljstva v odnosih med vlado in skupnostjo. Intervjuvanci, ki so ocenili vladno strategijo kulturalnijske odnosov, so zatrdili, da ni zaupanja in zadovoljstva v odnosih med vlado in skupnostjo. Rezultati študije so pokazali, da so bile štiri strategije kulturalnijske odnosov, uporabljene v raziskavi, različne glede na relativni

rezultat zaupanja in zadovoljstva. Odprtost in zagotovila se štejejo za pomembnejša za odnose med vlado in javnostjo, zlasti za negovanje zaupanja med vlado in javnostjo, sledita jim pozitivnost in dostopnost. Eden glavnih razlogov, zakaj Albanci ne zaupajo vladi, je pomanjkanje preglednosti/transparentnosti (odprtosti) ter neizpolnjevanje obljub (zagotovil). Ob tem so predstavniki albanske skupnosti poročali, da so diskriminirani glede dostopnosti in pozitivnosti, če nimajo osebnih povezav, kar kaže na integriteto. Raziskava je prav tako zagotovila dodatne dokaze o „izpolnjevanju obljub“ kot strategiji kulture odnosov. Upoštevanje obljub je skupaj z diskriminacijo med analizo podatkov postalo glavni razlog, zakaj predstavniki albanske skupnosti ne zaupajo vladi in niso zadovoljni z odnosom, ki ga je vlada imela do njih.

Uporaba koorientacijskega pristopa je razkrila stopnjo dogovora, natančno zaznavanje in zaznavanje dojemanja dogovora (kongruenca) med vlado in skupnostjo pri ocenjevanju kulture odnosov in rezultatov odnosov. Pomagala je oceniti in razumeti, kako obe strani, vpleteni v odnos, Albanci in vladni uradniki dojemajo odnos med njimi.

Ta raziskava razširja znanje o odnosih z javnostmi na poseben kontekst, na odnose med vlado in skupnostjo v večetnični državi s krhkimi medetničnimi odnosi in hibridnim režimom, v katerem so demokratične institucije krhke in v kateri obstajajo pomembni izzivi za zaščito političnih pravic in državljskih svoboščin. V državi, v kateri prevladuje demokratični politični sistem, vladne institucije zagotavljajo več dostopa državljanom, so bližje državljanom, so manj skorumpirane, zagotavljajo večjo preglednost in odgovornost, vključujejo predloge in pomisleke, ki jih ljudje izrazijo v svojih, državljani dobijo moč vplivati na vladne odločitve, aktivizem je velik, zagotovljena je svoboda medijev, javna uprava je depolitizirana itd.

Ugotovitve te disertacije nakazujejo, da bi morala vlada v večetnični državi:

- poskrbeti, da bodo njena komunikacijska prizadevanja dosegla vse etnične skupine v družbi (enaka zastopanost v skladu z demografskimi značilnostmi družbe; uporaba jezikov različnih etničnih skupin v državi);
- načrtovati programe, ki bodo skrbeli za širok spekter državljanov, da se etnične skupine ne bi čutile diskriminirane;
- zagotoviti, da bodo storitve javne uprave brez izjeme na voljo vsem državljanom enakovredno, brez privilegijev na podlagi političnih ali osebnih povezav, saj to vodi do diskriminacije državljanov, kar zmanjšuje zaupanje v odnose med vlado in javnostjo;

- zagotoviti več kanalov za komuniciranje z državljani in več komunikacijskih orodij, vključno z uporabo družbenih medijev;
- pregledno in redno poročati državljanom;
- uporabljati dvosmerno komuniciranje z državljani;
- vključiti državljane v odločanje in oblikovanje politik;
- izboljšati angažiranost in zadovoljstvo zaposlenih, ki zagotavljajo storitve za državljane;
- uporabljati meritokracijo pri zaposlovanju javnih uslužbencev;
- se zavedati, da neupoštevanje obljub poslabša zaupanje javnosti v vlado.

Pomemben prispevek, ki ga ta disertacija prispeva k literaturi o odnosih z javnostmi, so dokazi o pomembnosti dvosmernega simetričnega komuniciranja za negovanje pozitivnih odnosov med vlado in javnostjo. Prav dvosmerno simetrično komuniciranje se zdi ključno za uporabo kultivacijske strategije zagotovil upoštevanja. Raziskava je namreč pokazala, da je dvosmerno simetrično komuniciranje bistveno pri predlaganju rešitev ali vplivanju na sprejemanje odločitev. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti so se pritožili, da vladno komuniciranje „vedno prihaja od zgoraj navzdol, da ni dvosmernega komuniciranja, kar kaže, da za vlado javno mnenje ni pomembno, dokler lahko zmaga na volitvah“.

Raziskava je pokazala, da zunanje komuniciranje vlade poteka predvsem prek množičnih medijev kot glavnega komunikacijskega kanala, da je komuniciranje v glavnem formalno, namen pa sta promocija in propaganda. Tako so ugotovitve raziskave še enkrat dokazale, da vlada in vladne organizacije pogosteje kot druge organizacije uporabljajo enosmerni komunikacijski model (tiskovni predstavnik ali javni informacijski model odnosov z javnostmi) in manj verjetno sodelujejo v dvosmernem komuniciranju.

Čeprav pojem nezaupanja v literaturi o upravljanju odnosov ni obsežno obravnavan, je ta raziskava pokazala, da je nezaupanje pomembna razsežnost pri ocenjevanju kakovosti odnosov in da zahteva nadaljnjo pozornost v literaturi o odnosih z javnostmi. Na enak način se preučujejo rezultati kakovosti odnosov za ocenjevanje kakovosti odnosov; raziskave bi se morale osredotočiti tudi na preučevanje in zasnovo nezaupanja kot spremenljivke kakovosti negativnih odnosov. Predstavniki albanske skupnosti so namreč na splošno odgovorili, da "sploh ne zaupajo vladi", kar kaže, da v odnosu do vlade ni bilo zaupanja, oziroma, da je "odsotnost zaupanja".

Ugotovitve te disertacije so lahko koristne za znanstvenike, ki se ukvarjajo z odnosi z javnostmi, ki preučujejo odnose med organizacijami in njihovimi javnostmi. Ker disertacija širi odnose med organizacijo in javnostmi v drugačen politični in kulturni kontekst, bi bile ugotovitve koristne tudi za strokovnjake za odnose z javnostmi, ki jih zanimajo globalni odnosi z javnostmi. Prav tako lahko ugotovitve te disertacije koristijo tudi strokovnjakom, zadolženim za razvijanje, vzdrževanje in ocenjevanje odnosov med organizacijami in njihovimi javnostmi, zlasti odnosov med vlado in državljani. Navsezadnje, ugotovitve te disertacije lahko koristijo tudi vsem tistim, ki jih zanimajo medetnični odnosi v Republiki Severna Makedonija.

Disertacija prispeva k teoriji odnosov z javnostmi, saj razširja uporabo strategij kultivacije odnosov in razsežnosti kakovosti odnosov na drugačno organizacijo (vlado) in odnos do javnosti. Disertacija prispeva k raziskovanju odnosov z javnostmi s preučevanjem uporabnosti strategij kultivacije odnosov za dostop, pozitivno naravnost, odprtost in zagotovila upoštevanja v kontekstu odnosov med vlado in skupnostjo. Prispeva k redki literaturi, ki pojasnjuje pomen, vlogo in sposobnost strategij kultivacije odnosov pri vzpostavljanju odnosov med vlado in skupnostjo. Poleg teoretičnega razumevanja odnosa med vlado in državljani smo z disertacijo zagotovili tudi praktične predloge in posledice ugotovitev, kako vlade lahko izboljšajo svoj odnos z državljani.