



REGIONAL IDENTITY OF RUGOVA REGION IN KOSOVO

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Abstract

This article explores the complexity of regional identity in the context of the Rugova region of Kosovo, examining how historical, cultural, geographical and social factors shape people's feelings and connections to their place of origin. Through a mixed-method the research explores the formation and evolution of regional identity over time. Findings reveal a strong sense of belonging to the Rugova community, transcending geographical boundaries and generational shifts. The analysis proves also the significance of cultural heritage, traditions, and geographical features in fostering regional identity, while also highlighting concerns about the impact of modernization and globalization on the preservation of traditions. Ultimately, the study elucidates the complex interplay between individual experiences, societal changes, and external influences in shaping regional identity dynamics, offering insights into the multifaceted nature of identity construction and preservation in the Rugova region.

Keywords: region, identity, Rugova, belonging

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REGIONALNA IDENTITETA REGIJE RUGOVA NA KOSOVU

Izvleček

Članek obravnava kompleksnost regionalne identitete v kontekstu regije Rugova na Kosovu in proučuje, kako zgodovinski, kulturni, geografski in družbeni dejavniki oblikujejo občutja in povezave posameznikov z njihovim krajem izvora. S pristopom mešanih metod raziskava proučuje oblikovanje in razvoj regionalne identitete skozi čas. Ugotovitve razkrivajo močan občutek pripadnosti skupnosti Rugove, ki presega geografske meje in generacijske premike. Analiza opozarja tudi na pomen kulturne dediščine, tradicij in geografskih značilnosti pri spodbujanju regionalne identitete, hkrati pa izpostavlja pomisleke glede vpliva modernizacije in globalizacije na ohranjanje tradicij. Na koncu članek pojasnjuje kompleksno medsebojno delovanje med posameznikovimi izkušnjami, družbenimi spremembami in zunanjimi vplivi pri oblikovanju dinamike regionalne identitete ter ponuja vpogled v večplastno naravo konstrukcije in ohranjanja identitete v regiji Rugova.

Ključne besede: regija, identiteta, Rugova, pripadnost

1 INTRODUCTION

The regional identity has not been given enough importance in geographical research for a long time, as traditional approaches to the region and regionalism were of little significance (Paasi, 2003). Over time, the region and regional identity have become important categories for geographers, reviving academic and institutional research, and have become part of political debates since 1990 (Paasi, Zimmerbauer, 2011). Today, regional identity is one of the main objectives of European Union (EU) territorial policies, promoting regional cohesion and competition among regions (Prokkola, Zimmerbauer, Jakola, 2012). The concept of “identity” relates to answering the question: “Who am I?”. Often this question becomes differentiated and leads to other questions like: “Where do I come from?” and “Where do I belong?” (Pohl, 2001). Based on these questions, we observe that regional identity is not an isolated individual status quo, but plays an essential role in the context of social development (Pohl, 2001). The initial theoretical assumption is that the region as a social construct influences the creation of regional identity, which is linked to identity politics and foreign policy (Pace, 2006). Regional identity is formed and changed within the context of social and cultural interactions of a region. This development is influenced by a variety of sources, including individual childhood experiences, personal space perception, and other experiences (Pohl, 2001). Regional identity is an integral part of every state, and these two aspects are deeply interconnected but vary from one state to another.

Kosovo, like any other state, has several regional identities represented in its ethno-geographic regions. Ejupi (2022) noted that in the case of Kosovo, regional identity is

a lower scale identity than the Albanian identity. Although Kosovo is a small territory, it has very diverse natural conditions which are reflected in regional differences. The Dukagjini plain, the Kosovo plain, Rugova, Anamorava and Drenica are some of the regions that are distinguished not only by their natural conditions, but also by their social, demographic and economic characteristics.

Borders drawn and revised throughout history, physical characteristics of the region, regional stereotypes, and population characteristics form the basis for the formation of ethnogeographic regions (Terlouw, 2001). In the territory of Kosovo, there are several ethnogeographic regions distinguished by borders, physical characteristics (relief, climate), population (although in more than 90% of these regions in Kosovo, Albanians are the overwhelming majority), culture (dialects, customs, traditions, clothing, cuisine, etc.). Regional differences based more on ethnogeographic characteristics and less on natural conditions have led to the formation of regions with elements of regional identity, such as the Rugova region. The authentic mountainous landscape (alpine), the rich natural and cultural heritage enable the regional identification and differentiation of Rugova. Throughout history, this region has been occupied by various rulers, starting from ancient periods, Ottoman period, Yugoslav period, etc. However, the inhabitants of the area have continued to preserve the traditional ethnographic characteristics of the area, giving this region the attributes of a distinct geographic region.

The regional identity of this region survives and is maintained through social and cultural combinations, expressing the customs, traditions, and unique relationships of the inhabitants living in Rugova. This paper aims to present how the regional identity of Rugova has formed and changed over time, emphasizing the importance of the natural landscape, the history of the region, and culture in shaping the sentiments regarding the region. Socio-economic influences on the formation of the region and the efforts of the population to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of Rugova will also be analyzed. It should be emphasized that the change and development of regional identity are long and complex processes that may undergo changes over time, in different situations and circumstances. Nowadays, the Rugova region, like many other regions, has evolved based on various factors. It is important for us to recognize how much this region has changed from the past and to what extent political, economic, social, and cultural factors have influenced the changes in the regional identity of this region.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Before delving into the issues of regional identity, we need to define the “region”, which is the fundamental unit of research on regional identity (Zepeda, 2020). The definition of region is a very fundamental concept for geographical studies and at the same time very difficult to define precisely (Robinson, 1953). Since ancient Greek

and Roman times, the part of geography that studied the region was called regional geography, used to describe the physical and human characteristics of regions and nations (Bailly, 2009). The word “region” comes from the Latin *regere*, which means to manage, but at that time it meant managing the kingdom or empire (Bailly, 2009). In the broadest sense, the region is defined as a delimited area that possesses a certain unity or organizational structure (Bailly, 2009). The concept of “region” gained importance in the 19th century when explorers presented newly discovered lands to European geographic societies (Bailly, 2009). Today, based on scientific dictionaries, the definition of the region is understood as: (a) an area of unspecified size on the Earth’s surface, the elements of which form a functional environment; (b) the region is part of a system of regions covering the globe; and (c) a distinct part of the Earth, with climatic or economic characteristics (Gregory et al., 2009). The region is often studied as a product of the interaction of individuals or social groups in different economic, political, and cultural contexts (Vujadinović, Šabić, 2017). There are three different approaches in contemporary geography to identify the region: (a) the region is treated as a response to contemporary economic processes; (b) it is presented as a medium for social interaction, harmonizing with people, nature, and society in specific times and spaces; and (c) the region appears as a center of identification (Gilbert, 1988, as cited in Vujadinović, Šabić, 2017).

Given that the region is the subject of study for geographers, it is not surprising that there have been many geographers who deal with regional identity and its spatial expression (Ejupi, 2022). Like the region, regional identity is a concept that became attractive in the 1980s and is recognized as an important element in the creation of regions as social and political spaces (Paasi, 2009). People need to feel they belong to a social group, share a common identity with others, and distinguish themselves from others in how they perceive themselves as individuals in the society they live in (Hildebrandt, Trüdinger, 2021). Regarding the definition of regional identity, there are many ambiguities and changes in human stereotypes (Turner, 2010). According to Paasi (2011), identity is a category that combines many elements, making it one of the most important categories for study by social and cultural sciences. Identity, fundamentally, is self-recognition and recognition by society, while those who are different are categorized as others (Culcasi, 2011, as cited in Stiperski, Ejupi, 2023). Meanwhile, Ejupi (2022) states that regional identity is a set of characteristics that define the peculiarities of an individual or group, especially in relation to similarities or differences between individuals or other groups.

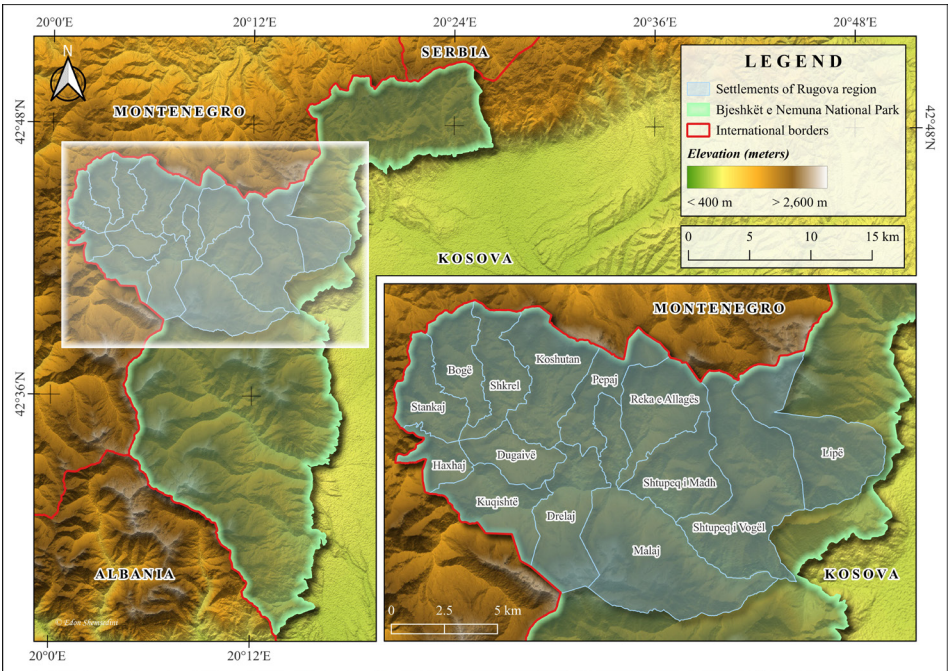
The formation of regional identity depends on a variety of factors. These factors are related to the region where the person lives. The type of landscape can play an important role, along with the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the population in the region (Anděl, Balej, Bobr, 2019). In one way or another, regional identity is not just a personal feeling about the place but is an integral part of the collective (Pohl, 2001). Regional identity narratives rely on various elements, such as

ideas about nature, natural landscapes, cultural environments, ethnicities, dialects, etc. All of these are used to construct regional identities (Passi, 2003). The distinctiveness of each region, beyond natural, social, and economic factors, is shaped by the behavior and attitude of individuals toward the region. This includes their recognition of the local environment, their societal role and status, among other factors. This phenomenon, known as affiliation (individual perception of geographical space), is examined in the way individuals or broader social groups perceive themselves within a regional context (collective consciousness of regional affiliation) (Šabić, Pavlović, 2007). By integrating socio-psychological attitudes of the population toward regional identity alongside geographical criteria, it further underscores the uniqueness of each geographical region. What is problematic in many studies discussing regional identity is not that identity is something to be taken for granted and enduring, but that it is considered a feature, something that regions have (Kuss, 2007, as cited in Prokkola, Zimmerbauer, Jakola, 2012). According to sociologist Nikolas Enrikin, countries and regions have no inherent or “inborn” meaning or “identity”, but people assign and value them in relation to their needs; in other words, the construction of region and regional identity is a consequence of politics, economy, culture and community interests (Prokkola, Zimmerbauer, Jakola, 2012). Regional identity differs from various forms of localism, nationalism, and patriotism (Pohl, 2001). Above all, regional identity is a cultural, social, and psychological phenomenon, but also political, although the latter depends on the degree of influence (Pohl, 2001). According to Pohl (2001), regional identity consists of 4 intensities: (I) when a person has vague feelings about a specific region where they live, (II) close ties to the region where they live, (III) a person has a stronger level of regional identity where an individual not only feels connected to a particular region but also actively accepts and identifies with that region, and (IV) a person has a higher level of regional identity where an individual not only accepts to identify with a region, but also takes active steps to contribute to the improvement or advancement of that region. Understanding regional identity often begins with the assumption that surveys of ordinary people can reveal the nature and power of identity, which often results in theoretical and methodological challenges in the study of human behavior (Paasi, 2009).

3 STUDY AREA

Rugova is a mountainous region that stretches in the western part of Kosovo. This area begins from the source of the Lumbardhi i Pejës/Pečka Bistrica River and continues until its exit from the Rugova Gorge, thus extending into the upper and middle sectors of the Lumbardhi i Pejës/Pečka Bistrica (Çavolli, 1997; Hysenaj, 2015).

Figure 1: Geographical location of the Rugova region (author: E. Shemsedini).



The Rugova region is situated within the Bjeshkët e Nemuna (serb: Prokletije) also known as the Albanian Alps (Lajçi et al., 2017). It stretches in an east–west direction, being 20 km long and 10 km wide (Ivanović, 1988). Rugova has an area of 197 km², which is 4.6% of the Dukagjini Plain, and it is inhabited by 203 residents, based on the Population Registry data from 2011 (ASHAK, 2019; 2020; ASK, 2011; Çavolli, 1997). Rugova, with its position, exhibits the characteristics of a border region. It is located between two states, Kosovo, to which it belongs, and Montenegro, which surrounds it on all three sides, north, west, and south. Rugova is a typical mountainous region. About 96% of its territory is above 1000 meters above sea level, while 4% consists of lower parts where the elevation does not exceed 1000 meters, found mainly from Peja/Peć to Kuqishtë/Kučiste, these lowlands are located along the Lumbardhi i Pejës/Pećka Bistrica River (Çavolli, 1980).

Figure 2: A picturesque part of the Rugova region (Photo: Sh. Lushaj, 2023).



4 METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this work is based on a survey that was used as a quantitative tool to study and describe the natural, social and cultural characteristics of the Rugova region. The total number of respondents in this study amounted to 106 individuals. They were selected using the snowball sampling method. Finally, the findings from the survey were analyzed and interpreted. The data analysis was carried out using the SPSS program (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

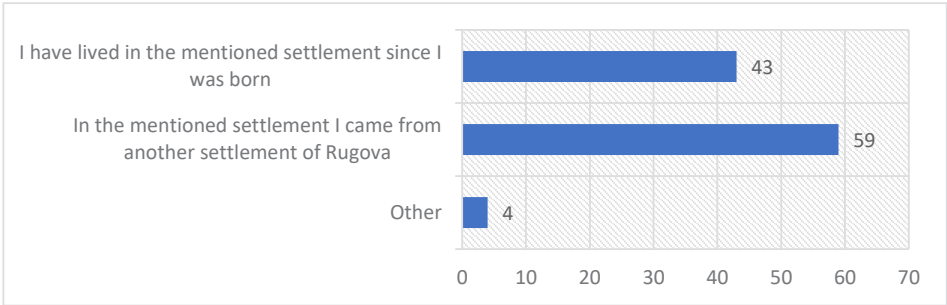
Considering that this paper deals with regional identity in the Rugova region, our sample population, besides focusing on this region and its 14 villages, also includes respondents from the municipalities of Peja/Peć, Pristina/Priština, Gjakova/Đakovica, Prizren/Prizren, Istog/Istok, Deçan/Dečani, etc., as well as a small number of individuals living outside of Kosovo but with family ties to the Rugova region. With the help of GIS software, various maps were created to illustrate and depict the geographical dimensions of the Rugova region.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The various natural, social, economic, cultural, anthropological elements, etc., provide the starting point for the analysis of regional identity through which the forms

and ways in which people are connected to their place, history, cultural heritage, their sense of being residents of this region, the proximity between the residents, etc. are examined. All these elements play a role that, in one form or another, is becoming increasingly important when it comes to identifying the region, in this case, the Rugova region chosen for the research. Rugova, as one of the numerous regions of Kosovo, has a well expressed and preserved regional identity. This is evident in the detailed analysis of the respondents' answers regarding what we call the identity of Rugova. The proximity between the Municipality of Peja/Peć and the Rugova region has influenced the fact that the majority of residents or others with various connections to the Rugova region are from the Municipality of Peja/Peć, indicating that this municipality has the largest concentration of Rugova residents.

Figure 3: Categorization of respondents' residences according to their origin.

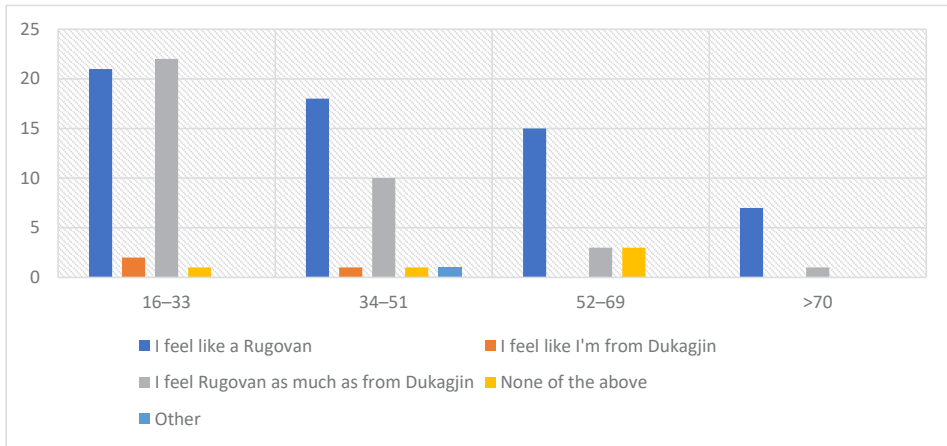


Data source: Questionnaire, 2023, n = 106.

The analysis of the data on the respondents' place of residence yielded interesting results. For instance, over 55% of them come from another settlement within Rugova, while around 40.6% have lived in their current place of residence since birth (Figure 3). Conversely, only a small portion, approximately 3.8%, were born outside the Rugova region but have familial ties to the area. This indicates considerable population mobility within Rugova itself and a strong emotional and cultural connection of individuals to this area, even if they may have migrated from their birthplaces.

The analysis of regional identity in the Rugova region includes an in-depth study of the influence of historical, cultural, geographical factors, etc. on the formation and development of this identity. It also includes an examination of the historical aspects of the region's development, including the historical events that have influenced the formation of regional identity.

Figure 4: Determination of regional affiliation by age group.



Data source: Questionnaire, 2023, $n = 106$.

The majority of respondents stated that they identify themselves as members of the Rugova community or feel Rugovans even though they live in different places, both inside and outside Rugova. This indicates a very strong attachment to the Rugova region, regardless of where they live. From the results, it emerges that approximately 60% of all respondents identify or feel themselves to be Rugovan (Figure 4). The term “Rugovan” implies that the inhabitants are from Rugova, born there, live there, or even if they are not born there, they have strong family ties to the area. Another widespread sense of belonging is the feeling of being both Dukagjinas and Rugovan. About 35% of respondents declared themselves as both Rugovan and Dukagjinas. A symbolic number of respondents indicated that they felt neither Rugovan nor Dukagjinas, totaling only 5 or 4.7%. Other categories are only very slightly represented.

A further categorization of regional sense of identity is shown in Figure 4, which provides an insight into the distribution of identity based on the age groups of individuals. A more detailed description of the table includes an analysis of regional identity, changes and differences in regional perceptions across age groups and provides a deeper understanding of the relationships between regional identity and the age of the individuals studied. These results show how feelings and perceptions of regional belonging may vary and evolve across different stages of a person's life.

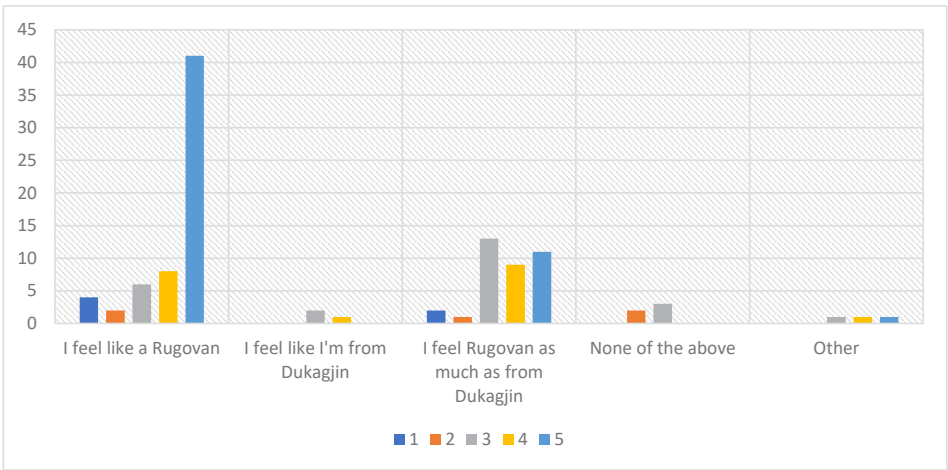
The youngest age group, 16–33 years old, shows an imbalance regarding the sense of regional belonging. In this group, there is a shift in feelings regarding regional identity, especially in how they feel about the Rugova region. Most of the respondents in this group were born and raised outside of Rugova, bringing different perspectives on regional identity. In total, 47.8% of participants in this group expressed feeling as

much Rugovan as Dukagjinias. An important fact is that 45.6% of respondents feel Rugovan, indicating a strong connection to the region. What is more interesting about these respondents is that most of them were not born or do not have direct ties to this region. In this group, only 4.3% feel like Dukagjinias, while 2.3% do not feel they belong to any of the aforementioned categories.

In the 34–51 age group, 57.8% of respondents expressed a strong Rugovan identity. Many in this group were born in Rugova but now live elsewhere in Kosovo, with few still residing there. This strong sense of belonging reflects a deep connection to the region. Despite living outside Rugova, Rugovan identity remains important to the majority in this age group, who may resist changes to their identity. Additionally, over 30% feel both Rugovan and Dukagjinian simultaneously, while 3.2% identify solely as Dukagjinian, 3.2% have no strong identity feelings, and 3.2% identify differently.

In the age groups 52–69 and 70 years and older, a strong sense of belonging to Rugovan identity is evident, which is influenced by having been born and raised in the region. In the 52–69 age group, 71.4% expressed feeling Rugovan, with 14.3% feeling both Rugovan and Dukagjinian, and 14.3% not identifying strongly with any category. Among those aged 70 and older, 87.5% feel Rugovan, while 12.5% feel both Rugovan and Dukagjinian. This shows that older people in the study group identify strongly as Rugovan, which is probably due to the fact that they were born and live in this region. Younger groups show a sense of dual identity, reflecting evolving perceptions of identity across the generations.

Figure 5: Level of identification of respondents with their regional identity.



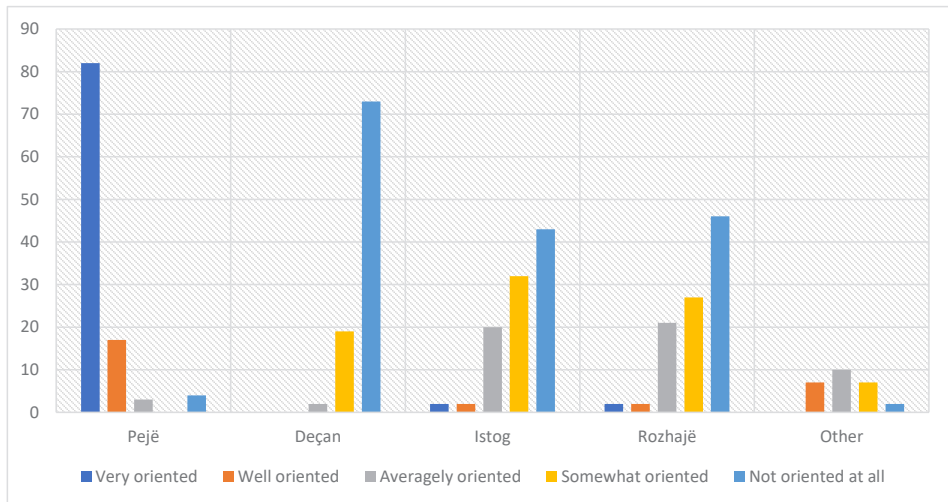
Data source: Questionnaire, 2023, n = 106.

Note: Scale 1–5, 1 – not identified at all, 2 – somewhat identified, 3 – moderately identified, 4 – well identified, 5 – very identified

Among those identifying as Rugovans, the majority show a strong connection and clear identification with this identity. Over half of these participants strongly identify as Rugovans, with only a few (4 participants) feeling no connection at all to this identity. Others who identify with both Rugovan and Dukagjinian identities describe themselves as moderately determined (see Figure 5). In total, 13 participants feel moderately identified, 11 very identified and 9 well identified. These findings indicate a broad spectrum of identification and determination between Rugova and Dukagjin, suggesting a simultaneous connection and belonging to both regions.

Concerning the question of how close the respondents feel to other residents of Rugova, we can observe a variety of responses. Nearly half (47%) reported a strong connection, while less than a quarter (21%) felt less close. This reflects a strong connection and retained sense of identity with their original community, despite early or recent changes in place of residence.

Figure 6: The cities and directions to which the residents of Rugova are oriented.¹



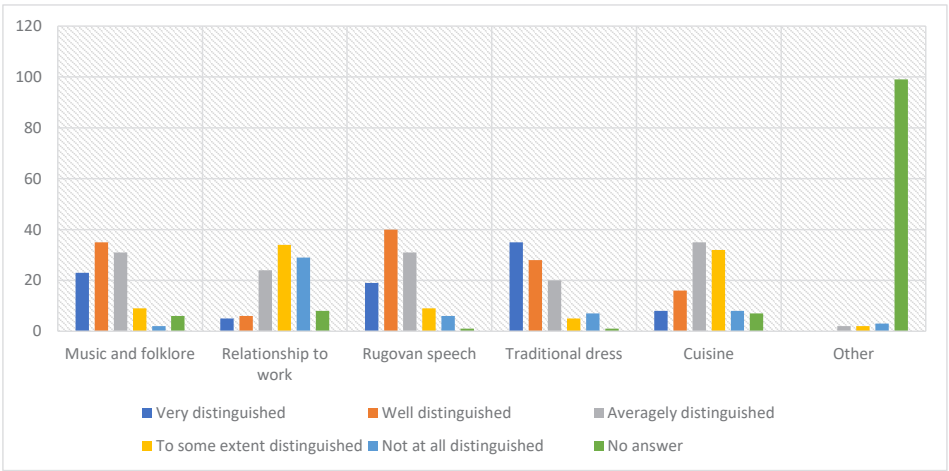
Data source: Questionnaire, 2023, $n = 106$.

A key part of the research is assessing the orientation of Rugova residents who have relocated during migrations. Understanding the historical migration patterns, mainly to the Dukagjin Plain and nearby areas, helps clarify their orientation. This study used various measurement variables to explore this orientation. These variables cover cities near Rugova and Peja/Peć, as well as other cities and countries outside Kosovo that are

¹ The cities mentioned in the chart have alternative names in different languages. For example, Peja is also known as Peć, Deçan is referred to as Dečani, Istog is called Istok, and Rozhajë is known as Rožaje.

preferred destinations. Analyzing these characteristics has given a clearer perspective on how Rugova residents orient themselves during migration. Over two-thirds of survey participants indicated that during migration, residents of Rugova are primarily oriented towards Peja/Peć and its surrounding settlements (see Figure 6). This is due to the proximity and ease of relocation to Peja/Peć. A smaller percentage mentioned orientation towards Rozhajë/Rožaje in Montenegro, influenced by its border location and cultural ties with neighboring communities. Additionally, 12.3% of participants noted moderate orientation towards cities like Prishtina/Priština, Gjakova/Đakovica, Prizren/Prizren, and foreign countries such as Germany, Norway, the United States, and Switzerland.

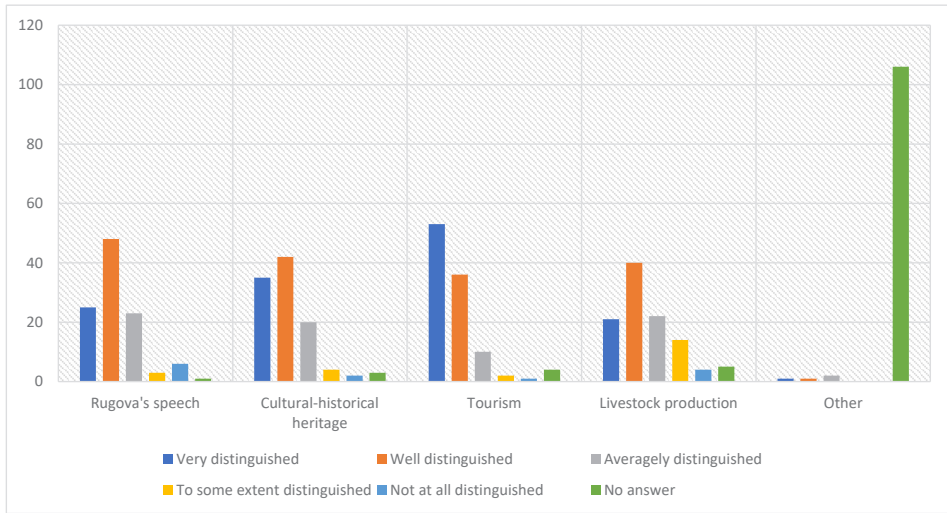
Figure 7: Respondents’ assessment of what distinguishes Rugovans from other residents of Dukagjin.



Data source: Questionnaire, 2023, n = 106.

Another aspect of regional identity focuses on what sets apart the people of Rugova from other Dukagjin inhabitants. Data analysis shows that cultural, social, and economic factors play a significant role in shaping their identity and living environment (see Figure 7). Music, folklore, work relationships, the Rugova dialect, traditional clothing, and cuisine highlight the differences between Rugovans and other Dukagjin residents. A majority of respondents (54.7%) view music and folklore as key elements distinguishing Rugovans from other Dukagjin residents. Respondents also note that the Rugova dialect differs significantly, with 55.6% considering it a distinguishing feature. Traditional clothing is similarly seen as distinct by 68.9% of respondents. However, opinions vary on Rugova cuisine, with many perceiving no significant differences from Dukagjin. Additional differences highlighted by respondents include trust, lifestyle, hospitality, family ties, mentality, and physical appearance.

Figure 8: Respondents' assessment of the characteristics that distinguish and identify Rugovans.



Data source: Questionnaire, 2023, $n = 106$.

It is worth emphasizing that the inhabitants of the Rugova region and those who identify themselves as such have a variety of characteristics that distinguish them from others and help them to identify themselves as Rugovans. This region has many distinguishing features, but some stand out more clearly than others. Key distinguishing elements include the Rugova dialect, cultural-historical heritage, tourism, and livestock products (see Figure 8). The analysis of the survey shows that the Rugova dialect is highly rated for its role in community identification. Approximately 24% of participants consider it 'very distinctive', underscoring its strong influence on their identity. The results show that many participants rate the cultural-historical heritage as 'good' (18%), 'very distinctive' (40%), or 'very identifying' (33%) among Rugovan residents. Tourism is the most agreed-upon distinguishing feature, with 50% stating it strongly identifies Rugovans, while only 1% disagree. Additionally, 38% of participants consider livestock products as a well-distinguished characteristic of Rugovans. This suggests that livestock products play a crucial role in distinguishing Rugovans from other residents. Around 20% of participants rated them as 'very distinctive', highlighting their significant influence on identity.

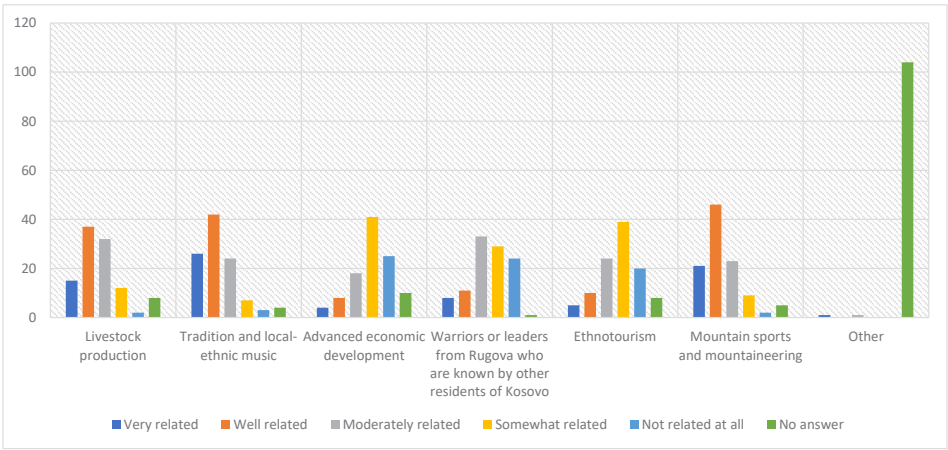
Important elements associated with Rugova's regional identity include livestock products, traditional music, economic development, notable leaders, ethno-tourism, mountain sports, and other factors highlighted by survey participants.

The analysis shows that livestock products play a crucial role in connecting Rugova residents with their identity. About half of the participants (49%) see livestock as the

primary link to the region, with 30% rating this connection as average, and 19% perceiving it as weak (see Figure 9). The survey participants state that the residents are more closely associated with their region through traditions and local-ethnic music. In fact, most of them see this connection as very strong (64.2%). A minority (2.8%) have doubts about the connection between tradition, music, and regional identity.

Economic development is not strongly linked according to most participants (62%), who consider it weak or unimportant. Regarding the warriors or leaders from Rugova known in Kosovo, responses vary from ‘somewhat connected’ (27%) to ‘moderately connected’ (31%). A significant number (22.6%) believe that there is no connection between fighters and the Rugova region.

Figure 9: Respondents’ assessment of what other residents of Rugova most often associate Rugova with.



Data source: Questionnaire, 2023, n = 106.

The majority of respondents (85%) believe that the other residents of Rugova are most connected to their region through sports, especially mountain sports and mountaineering (Figure 9). This can easily be confirmed as most mountain sports, skiing and mountaineering, are very common in this region. However, a very small number (6%) do not share this opinion. It is worth noting that a very small number believe that other residents of Rugova are most connected to their region through food.

To the question ‘Do you think that Rugova is sufficiently recognized by the residents of Kosovo’, respondents gave different answers. Over 60% answered yes, while about 35% answered no. A very small number (4%) did not answer this question, while only 1% think otherwise. This confirms our a priori assertion that the Rugova region is known by the other residents of Kosovo.

Another very important aspect of the regional identity of a region are also the traditional arts of the region, the music, or even the special dances that have special cultural significance. What adds diversity to a region is the fact that these arts, music, or dances are accepted, loved by people, and preserved by them with enthusiasm. These sentiments are also shared by the residents of Rugova, who identify closely with these cultural elements. The traditional arts, music, and dances in Rugova are highly distinctive and deeply valued by residents, enduring through time. Participants in the survey overwhelmingly identify traditional dances as integral to the region's cultural identity. The 'Dance of Rugova' is widely recognized as a prominent traditional dance, performed during local festivals with energy and grace. Other notable dances include the sword dance, featuring historic yata-ghan swords, and the 'spinning of the tray by women,' a unique and cherished traditional form accompanied by song, considered highly significant by many respondents.

Respondents in Rugova also highlight men's songs, traditional sword calls, lahuta songs (a special Albanian instrument), and leaf instruments as distinctive elements. Today, according to survey participants, various annual festivals in Rugova serve to preserve regional identity and remind people of their heritage. These festivals not only entertain but also foster community unity and strengthen bonds within the region.

The main festival aimed at strengthening identity and entertainment is the 'Traditional Games.' The traditional sports held at this festival are tug of war, arm wrestling, stone throwing, wrestling, pole climbing, horse races, kapuqash game, stone throwing, etc. But besides these games, there are also other festivals such as the Rugova Camping Festival, etc. Other sports that are practiced in this region today, according to the respondents are: hiking, horseback riding, rock climbing, skiing, mountaineering, mountain biking, etc. Rugova is therefore a very suitable place for the development of mountain sports or even winter sports, but also for dangerous sports that increase people's adrenaline levels.

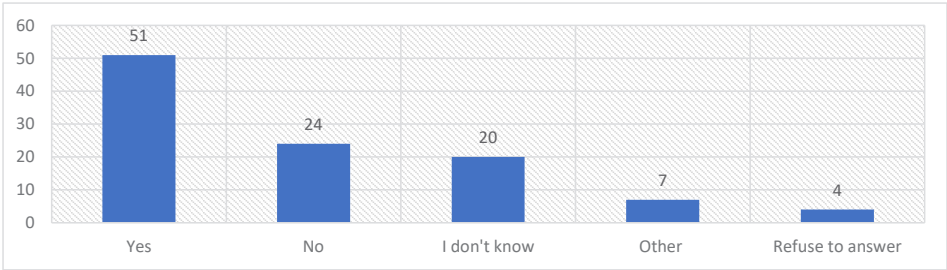
Figure 10: Traditional dance of Rugova (photo: V. Dumoshi, 2020).



Another characteristic of the Rugova region is the traditional Rugova cuisine, which does not differ much from other cuisines in Dukagjin and Kosovo in general. Given the small size of Kosovo and the predominantly Albanian population, as in Rugova where 100% of the population is Albanian, it is to be expected that all respondents note similarities in the cuisine of the different regions of Kosovo. According to 90% of all survey participants, the identifying food, or the food that identifies the Rugova region, is boiled cornmeal. Boiled cornmeal is a traditional dish typically prepared with animal fat or milk, though sometimes other fats are used. It also contains cornmeal flour, cheese according to preference, and salt. Boiled cornmeal in earlier times was made only on certain occasions such as when an important guest came, there were various festivals, or other things. But there are also many other well-known foods throughout Kosovo, such as flija, kaqamaku, various types of pies, shllina, abundant tamale, paqamurri, leqeniku, korelana, corn bread, pepper with maize, bread made of cornmeal, boiled cheese, walnut cake, etc. Therefore, considering all the responses given by the respondents, we see that all the foods are similar everywhere in Kosovo, as well as in Rugova. This is a good indicator of the uniformity of the Rugova region with other parts of Kosovo.

The survey participants were divided into two groups regarding the impact of modernization and globalization on the preservation of traditions and customs in Rugova, sparking questions about the future. Some survey participants believe that the future will be positively influenced by the advancement of new technologies, which will bring greater advantages and development opportunities. The other group expresses pessimism regarding the influence of modernization and globalization on the traditions and customs of this region. This group assumes that the Rugova region and its people will not be able to preserve their traditions and cultures in the future due to population movements and the world becoming smaller as a result of technological and information developments, and that they will therefore change and adapt to more modern and global ones. Some expressed that the identity as inhabitants of Rugova will change for the worse in the future, some others expressed that it will be very

Figure 11: Attitudes towards the continuation of life in Rugova.



Data source: Questionnaire, 2023, n = 106.

difficult to preserve it in the future due to external influences, while one group goes to the other extreme and assumes that the regional identity of this region will disappear forever. In contrast, another group of respondents believes that the identity of the residents of Rugova will evolve but will never disappear as an identity. In addition, there are also those who believe that the identity will remain unchanged.

The fact that a considerable percentage of respondents (48%) expressed a willingness to return and live in Rugova in the future is very important. A smaller proportion (23%), on the other hand, expressed a lack of intention to return to Rugova in the future to continue their lives. Another portion of respondents (19%) expressed uncertainty about whether they would continue to live in Rugova. On the other hand, 6% expressed a desire to live in Rugova only on weekends, while 4% refused to give an answer (Figure 11).

Survey data shows a slight difference in opinions on youth engagement in preserving regional identity, with 40% believing the youth are actively involved and 36% thinking otherwise—a 4% difference. Additionally, 16% are unsure. Most people believe that youth should play a key role in maintaining this identity, especially amidst technological and global changes. There is hope that the youth will help keep the Rugova identity alive for the future.

Figure 12: A view of some houses in a village in Rugova (photo: Sh. Lushaj, 2023).



6 CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research highlight the complex dynamics of regional identity in the Rugova region of Kosovo. Some of the key findings are as follows: the majority of respondents feel a strong connection to the Rugova region, with approximately 60% identifying or feeling themselves to be Rugovan, indicating a deep emotional and cultural attachment to the area. Despite the significant mobility of the population within Rugova, residents have retained a strong sense of identity, even those who were born outside the region but have family ties. The majority of respondents (over 55%) have moved within Rugova, indicating a strong attachment to the region. The results show that regional identity varies between the different age groups. Older individuals show a stronger attachment to the Rugova identity, while younger ones, especially those who were born and raised outside of Rugova, display a shift in identity perceptions.

Elements such as the Rugova dialect, traditional arts, music, dances, cuisine, and festivals play significant roles in distinguishing Rugovans from other inhabitants of Dukagjin. These cultural markers contribute to a sense of belonging and identity preservation.

There is uncertainty regarding the influence of modernization and globalization on the preservation of Rugovan traditions and customs. While some believe in the resilience of regional identity, others express concerns about its potential erosion over time. There is a slight difference in opinion regarding the active engagement of the younger generation in preserving regional identity. While some are optimistic about their involvement, others express concerns, emphasizing the importance of youth engagement in maintaining Rugova's identity into the future. A significant percentage of respondents expressed a willingness to return and live in Rugova in the future, indicating a strong attachment to their homeland, even though they currently live elsewhere.

All the aforementioned findings indicate that regional identity among the residents of Rugova and people originating from this region plays a very important role in shaping them as individuals, while the fact that there is a strong sense of community among the residents speaks volumes about the preservation of regional identity. From the research results, it can be concluded that the future of this identity is promising, as people are determined to continue living in this region. However, it is worrying that the commitment of young people to preserving the regional identity of this region is insufficient. Many Rugova residents hope that their regional identity will continue to be preserved, and that young people will engage in its preservation because as such, it has survived through centuries when others sought to erase it, and the younger generation should cherish it with even greater sympathy. This identity is not a mere identity that some residents of a region have and should be proud of, but it is an integral and inseparable part of Kosovo's history.

Overall, the findings reflect a multifaceted understanding of regional identity in

Rugova, which is shaped by historical, cultural, social and economic factors, and emphasise the importance of preserving this identity amidst ongoing societal changes.

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REGIONALNA IDENTITETA REGIJE RUGOVA NA KOSOVU

Povzetek

Kljub svoji skromni velikosti se Kosovo ponaša z raznoliko paletto naravnih krajin, skozi čas pa ga je oblikovala zapletena geopolitična in zgodovinska dinamika, kar je vplivalo na oblikovanje različnih regionalnih identitet na njegovem ozemlju. Rugova, kot ena od številnih regij Kosova, ima dobro izraženo in ohranjeno regionalno identiteto. To je razvidno iz rezultatov izvedene anketne raziskave oziroma podrobne analize odgovorov anketirancev o tem, kar imenujemo identiteta Rugove. Analiza vključuje poglobljeno proučitev vplivov zgodovinskih, kulturnih, geografskih in drugih dejavnikov na oblikovanje in razvoj te identitete. Rezultati pomagajo razumeti občutja lokalnega prebivalstva glede vprašanja regionalne identitete v Rugovi. Ugotovitve osvetljujejo večplastnost regionalne identitete, ki zajema naravne, družbene, gospodarske, kulturne in antropološke elemente.

Kljub mobilnosti prebivalstva velik del anketirancev izkazuje globoko čustveno in kulturno navezanost na Rugovo. Ključna ugotovitev je, da identifikacija s skupnostjo Rugove presega geografske meje. Izraz »Rugovan« ne označuje le kraja izvora, temveč globoko zakoreninjen občutek kulturne identitete in pripadnosti. Poleg tega sobivanje identitet *Rugovan* in *Dukagjini* poudarja prepletanje med regionalnimi pripadnostmi in širšimi kulturnimi konteksti. Na dožemanje regionalne identitete pomembno vpliva starost, pri čemer so v različnih starostnih skupinah prisotni različni vzorci. Medtem ko starejše generacije izkazujejo trdno zvestobo regionalni identiteti, mlajše starostne skupine kažejo bolj tekoč in spreminjajoč se občutek pripadnosti, na katerega vplivajo različne življenjske izkušnje in družbeni konteksti. Kulturni elementi, kot so glasba, folklor, tradicionalna umetnost in kulinarika, se pojavljajo kot vidni označevalci regionalne identitete, ki razlikujejo njene prebivalce od prebivalstva sosednjih regij. Festivali in tradicionalne igre ne služijo samo ohranjanju kulturne dediščine, temveč tudi spodbujanju kohezije skupnosti in krepitvi kolektivne identitete. Regionalna identiteta je tudi vir kolektivnega ponosa.

Zaključki opozarjajo na pet ključnih vidikov:

- Ponos na identiteto: večina prebivalcev, vključno z mlajšimi generacijami, izraža ponos na svojo rugovsko identiteto, kar predstavlja pomemben dejavnik njene ohranjanja.
- Posebnost Rugove: anketiranci v veliki večini dojemajo Rugovo kot drugačno od drugih delov Kosova, to edinstvenost pa pripisujejo njeni glasbi, folklori, tradicionalni noši in narečju.
- Turizem in kulturna dediščina: anketiranci poudarjajo turizem in kulturno dediščino kot ključna identifikatorja Rugove.

- Kulinarčna dediščina: hrana ima velik pomen za prebivalce Rugove in je še en odločilni dejavnik njihove identitete.
- Zgodovinska zavest: zgodovinska zapuščina regije močno odmeva med prebivalci, saj odraža globoko razumevanje in spoštovanje njihove skupne preteklosti.

Ti vidiki skupaj poudarjajo ključno vlogo regionalne identitete pri oblikovanju individualnih identitet prebivalcev Rugove. Tesno prepletene skupnostne vezi dodatno prispevajo k njenemu ohranjanju. Čeprav se zdi prihodnost te identitete obetavna, obstaja zaskrbljenost zaradi premajhne zavzetosti mladih za njeno ohranitev. Mnogi prebivalci upajo, da bodo mlajše generacije dejavno sodelovale pri varovanju svoje regionalne identitete, pri čemer se bodo zavedale njenega trajnega pomena. Med anketiranci je prisotna negotovost glede vplivov modernizacije in globalizacije na ohranjanje regionalne tradicije in običajev. Medtem ko nekateri izražajo zaupanje v odpornost regionalne identitete, drugi kažejo zaskrbljenost glede njene morebitne razvodenitve skozi čas. Čeprav trenutno prebivajo drugje, jih veliko izraža željo po vrnitvi in bivanju v Rugovi, kar opozarja na njihovo globoko zakoreninjeno navezanost na domačo regijo.