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Development Perspectives for Georgian Regional Media Schools Under Conditions of Digital Divide

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Abstract. On the basis of the qualitative research conducted on the basis of several regional and central Georgian universities, the article presents the development prospects of media schools and alternative models for Georgian regional media schools. Results of the research showed that regional university education in the direction of digital media in Georgia is in a critical state, suffering from forms of inequality, both in terms of educational bases and human professional resources. As a result, young people choose central universities, which creates unequal opportunities for the development of the regional parts of Georgia. The situation of regional universities is becoming even more problematic; in the research, we tried to show that this process will bring disastrous results for the whole country if there is no professional distribution, redistribution of media students across the country and purposeful stratification of intellectual resources.

Keywords. digital divide, education digitalization, forms of inequality, digital skills, centre and region, post-Soviet, reflection

Introduction

Our study uncovered the substantial impact of shifts in urbanization processes within post-Soviet Georgia on the regional higher education framework.

Nowadays, in the era of forced development of information technologies, journalistic education is gaining special importance, more in the so-called countries of new democracy, to which Georgia also belongs. In the process of democratic transition, our country faces many problems. Among them is the issue of media literacy, which is directly related to access to digital technologies.

The transformation of traditional media into digital media has even more radically changed people's attitudes to information. This reality somehow "gave birth" to the era of "confused people" who found it difficult to adapt to the new informational environment. And the media has a vital role in the process of managing informational influence mechanisms. Accordingly, the issue of media literacy is outlined, which is complex and is designed to strengthen journalism education and introduce modern media standards.

The goal of our research, from the point of view of access to digital capital, is to study the current situation in the country based on the problems of regional and central media schools; to study the current situation in several regional media schools and outline the main features that determine their similarity.

Identify differences and unequal opportunities between regional and central universities; in addition, the emphasis is on "journalistic education", because media and media literacy have acquired a significant importance for Georgia and in for similar "new democracy" countries in general.

Therefore, we aimed to consider the situation created in terms of digital inequality in Georgian regional media schools in terms of the problems that arose in the process of post-Soviet democratization, such as: the impact of increased urbanization, uneven regional development, forms of inequality caused by digital inequality, digital development and the acquisition of digital skills and the availability of professional resources.

The relevance of the topic is reasoned by the importance of the issue itself - the fact that the problem of the digital divide is very urgent in the modern world. We tried to present the mentioned topic as an example of one specific country, in terms of the relationship between the region and the centre, and by demonstrating the levels of inequality regarding the specific topic.

The issue we are researching is about the uneven distribution of digital education and the regional divide, and we present this situation on the example of the media schools of the leading universities of Georgia. The paper focuses on the challenges in post-Soviet Georgia and discusses them in terms of educational policy based on the liberal democratic model.

Indeed, authentic studies on the legitimacy of educational policy based on the liberal democratic model are found every day, but the issue of the correlation between digital education and regional inequality has not been the subject of a special study until now. Henceforth, the relevance of our research increases.

Here we should note the structure of the paper. To illustrate our arguments, we have developed a relevant mechanism for implementing the set goal. The first phase of the study focused on a literary review on the digital divide and media literacy. As a result of the library research, the points of view surrounding the issue were identified, the consideration of which helped us outline the theoretical framework of the study and plan the next stages of the methodology. Qualitative content analysis was chosen as the research method for the next stage. The study was based on the following qualitative research methods: student surveys in focus groups at selected universities; in addition, we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with professional experts.

For the research, as **the theoretical framework**, we used the theory of technological determinism of communication, which we considered relevant for studying the given issue. This theory is one of the most relevant and daily evolving (following the development of media technologies) types of media society theory. This type of theory searches for, reveals and examines the relationships between the dominant communication technology of the era and key features of the public. Important for our research was the key role of media technology in the architectonics of this theory and its influence on various spheres of society, in this case - journalism education.

At first glance, this theory seems unable to fully address the issues of inequality and legitimacy of governance, which are the main topics of our work. However, the connection between them will be seen if we consider that technological transformations cause changes in

society. The main premise of this theory is that technology in any society determines its nature. In turn, digital inequality in higher education has a significant impact on the formation of human capital and the improvement of the quality of life of the population. The analysis of the digital divide in higher education is directly related to the technological changes that we can consider as the main driving force of culture in society, determining the course of its development (Munday, 2011).

The understanding of the digital divide in higher education is proposed by us as different possibilities of access to digital resources, information and communication technologies, and the Internet in the learning process. In this way, the possibilities and barriers to the digitization of higher education are highlighted, and the characteristic factors of the growth of digital inequality are identified.

Scientific literature on the digital divide and media literacy

The research is an attempt to study how relevant the process of media education, digital media learning and teaching in regional universities is; we used valid scientific literature to analyze and evaluate the current situation. Our library research brought together a number of interesting sources from the thoughts of modern theoreticians about the research question.

It should also be said from the beginning that the term "digital divide" was first used in a 1999 US Government Report (Vassilakopoulou, P... 2021). The term soon expanded to refer to "the gap between those who can effectively use new information and communication media (such as the Internet) and those who cannot" (Gunkel 2003). A similar opinion is shared by the American political scientist R. Brown, who presents the digital divide as a dichotomous division in view of people's access to information and communication technologies (Brown, 1995).

In general, the concept of the digital divide during the 1990s-2000s was dominated by the problem of physical access to information and communication infrastructure, which was associated with the problem of mass use of the Internet at that time (due to its high cost or technological backwardness). Later, with the development of digital technologies, attention was shifted not only to the availability of infrastructure but also to various skills in working on the Internet, which was caused by various factors. For example, T. Thomson's 2001 study showed that at that time men used the Internet more often than women and the younger generation of Internet users were much more active than the older generation (Thomson 2001). As you can see, in this case, the demographic factor has become the main determinant of the digital divide. You would agree that today this situation has significantly changed.

In their empirical study, P. Johann and P. Valkenburg concluded that adolescents with rich socio-economic and cognitive abilities used the Internet more for information than for entertainment, in contrast to their peers lacking such skills, who preferred entertainment (Johann and Valkenburg, 2006). Dorsen and J. Van Dijk argued that educated people use the Internet more for self-development, profit or other useful activities than less educated people (Dorsen and Van Dijk, 2014). Scientists also note the difference between employed and unemployed users. In their opinion, the unemployed are more active Internet network users than the employed (Zielen, Hargitay, 2009).

In recent studies, scholars emphasize the so-called "**Matthew Effect**" (a term originating from the Gospel of Matthew, established in science by R. Merton, 1968) - a social phenomenon

that determines the proportions of success. The Gospel says: "To those who have, it will be given and more will be given, but to those who do not have, even what they have will be taken away." If we consider the Gospel maxim in relation to the digital divide, it will say: Those who have an advantage in the digital environment have the opportunity to accumulate knowledge and improve skills, while those who do not have such an advantage are at risk of further backwardness.

E. Helsper's and A. van Dorsen's representative survey data analysis shows that the Internet contributes to the lives of many individuals, be it economic, social, political, educational, or institutional fields (van Dorsen and Helsper 2015). The economic advantage is expressed in the dividends gained through information technology. The social benefits obtained from the Internet include the formation of new contacts and friendships through networks, which can then be continued in real life. The Internet also helps the user to raise the level of education through distance learning technologies or self-education. In addition, the Internet facilitates the process of institutional interaction - it allows users to connect with state bodies online. As for the educational aspect of the digital divide, this problem showed itself most apparently in the process of distance learning during the spread of the new coronavirus.

Georgian reality also clearly revealed the aforementioned problem, which was first of all manifested in the unequal distribution of academic resources. In addition to the problem caused by a specific factor, in the case of our country, we must also take into account the historical context. The educational space of the post-Soviet country maintains the inertia of the past even in digital conditions and many challenges and difficulties can be explained right by these circumstances.

Based on the aforementioned, in order to evaluate media teaching in regional universities, in the first place it was necessary to analyze the strategies of deconstruction, reinterpretation and fundamental reevaluation of the post-Soviet reality in the country. That is why we used the collection of lectures of the famous philosopher - Merab Mamardashvili - *Conversations on Philosophy*; the book offers a deep epistemological analysis of the "Sovak" consciousness, presenting with vivid philosophical reflections the intellectual paradoxes and anthropological aberrations that accompanied the narratives of the Soviet reality.

One of the key segments of the modern socio-cultural field is the regional microenvironment and it is in the reception of this environment that the British researcher - David Buckingham guided us with his book - *The Media Education Manifesto 1st Edition*. The

author's critical evaluations helped us to see the crucial role of the media in the modern era; to understand the dangers faced by the media and the dangers faced by society...

The book - *Media Literacy Education in Action Theoretical and Pedagogical Perspectives* (Edited By Belinha S. De Abreu, Paul Mihailidis; 2014) gave way to the new thought landscape and showed us a virtual theoretical vector of media literacy; at the same time, it helped us to perceive a reduced picture of conceptual genesis. The work also showed us the meta-pedagogical horizon of media literacy in the global context, which further strengthened the methodological base of our research.

Education Research and the Media Challenges and Possibilities (Edited By Aspa Baroutsis, Stewart Riddle, Pat Thomson Copyright 2019) has become a focal point in the methodological foundation of empirical studies and the appropriation of traditional media discourses; the book also helped us to interpret the meta-critical discourses of the global media.

The book - *Social Media: Dynamism, Issues and Challenges* Paperback (by Ainin Sulaiman (Author), M. Muzamil Naqshbandi (Contributor)) opened up to us the field of modern media communications and presented the system of sociocultural codes.

The literature research showed us that in the modern post-Soviet environment, learning and teaching digital media in regional universities is a strategic problem of fundamental methodological importance.

Urbanization and Education

The phenomenon of urbanization is very important for the sustainable development of the state. Moreover, it represents a kind of social transformation and is a participant in the social, economic and ecological processes of countries. Urbanization to a significant extent determines the stages of development of education and culture of countries. The relationship between urbanization and education is causal and reciprocal; To some extent, urbanization conditions the development of education processes in the country; On the other hand, education processes also affect urban processes.

How complex the phenomenon of urbanization is, what path this or that country is taking on the way to becoming a strong urban state, and what causes urban inequality, can be clearly seen in the letter of Italo Pardo and Giuliana B. Prato- „Querying Urban Inequalities“. (<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgzGxSIQdzMvKhnhKzFLGWnfjDHH?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1>). The authors rightly point out that „We gain sociologically significant insights from the ways in which people experience and speak about inequalities and the damage they cause, and how they envisage change. We learn important lessons from cross-cultural indications that as significant political change is denied in the presence of inequality ordinary people’s popular revulsion becomes increasingly anti-political, and rejection of the legitimacy of rulers and of their rule inevitably follows“.

In the process of eliminating urban inequality, education centers have an important role to play. The distribution of universities in Georgia also depends, first of all, on urban processes. Clearly, urbanization is consistent with the increasing level of state incomes and the improvement of social indicators; Social indicators also include the level of education. Strong urban countries are characterized by high income levels, stable economies and strong institutions. It is this stability that determines the resistance to global economic fluctuations.

Georgia is not yet a strong urban state, but it is on its way. It is no coincidence that the three universities we studied are located in the three most important urban areas of the state - Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University was founded in the capital in 1918 and is the first higher education center in Georgia; It is still among the three strongest universities in the country; Therefore, it was determined from the beginning that, from an urban point of view, it was better to establish a university space in the capital city, namely in Tbilisi (Eastern Georgia). The idea paid off! Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University is always leading in the ranking list of universities in the Transcaucasian region prepared by Webometrics Ranking of World Universities, which includes a total of 30 examples (<https://old.commersant.ge/ge/post/romeli-qartuli-universitetebi-lideroben-amierkavkasiis-universitetebis-ranjirebis-nusxashi>).

Akaki Tsereteli State University has been operating since 1933 in the city of Kutaisi, Western Georgia; from the beginning, the state's policy was based on urban redistribution - Georgia's highest university spaces should be in both eastern and western Georgia. The university had the most important urban function - equal distribution of the population in East and West Georgia. It had to play a huge role in political, economic, cultural and educational

terms. The idea paid off; Akaki Tsereteli State University is consistently in the ranking of the universities of the Transcaucasian region and plays a major role in the process of urbanization to this day.

Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University was founded in 1933. Perhaps, from an urban point of view, the establishment of this university had the biggest impact, because according to the Treaty of Brest signed on March 3, 1918, Russia ceded Batumi to the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans occupied not only the whole of Adjara but also Guria and took the city of Ozurgeti. On June 4, 1918, a treaty was signed in Batumi between Georgia and the Ottoman Empire, thereafter Adjara was left to the Ottomans. Soon it came under British influence and returned to the Democratic Republic of Georgia in 1920. Consequently, Adjara became one of the main interests of the state in urban and political terms.

To understand the importance of urban processes in a countries' political, economic, cultural, and educational development in the context of Georgia, we find the letter by Guiliana B. Prato - "On the legitimacy of democratic representation: Two case studies from Europe" – highly valuable. The author discusses the so-called "erosion process" in post-Soviet countries; He writes of the Iron Curtain and the rebellions therein, which grew daily in the 1980s.

Giuliana B. Prato analyzes the urban processes in Italy and Albania, which played an important role in the political development of these countries. These processes coincide with the way of establishing Georgia as a strong urban state and allow us to make a number of predictions in this regard; it assures us that the road is difficult and full of problems, but also demonstrates what will be in the Georgia of tomorrow: „As I mentioned, the above categories are found in every society, but the way in which they are allowed to operate makes the difference. According

to Cipolla's Fifth Law, in a country that 'moves uphill' the fraction of Stupid people is kept at bay, allowing that society to make progress and produce gains for the members of the community. In contrast, in a society that 'performs poorly' the Stupid members 'are allowed to become more active and take more actions', with dire consequences; specifically, such societies experience an 'alarming proliferation of the bandits with overtone of stupidity' among those in power and an 'alarming growth of helpless individuals' among those not in power. For Cipolla, all this inevitably increases the destructive power of stupidity and 'the country goes to Hell'. This seems to be a fitting image of what is happening in today's Italy“

(<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgzGxSlQdzMvKhnhKzflGWnfjDHJH?projector=1&messagePartId=0.2>).

Our research and observation of three state universities showed us that the urban design of education centers in Georgia is diverse and closely related to the country's political and economic processes; The study once again confirmed the fact that urban design is not just a dividing line. It often includes and integrates many disciplines, including education. Academic institutions, on the other hand, offer education to customers and transform into territorial units.

Research Methodology

We chose qualitative content analysis as the research method. We also used the following methods of qualitative research as research tools: case analysis, and semi-structured in-depth interviews (with the so-called "snowball" principle). Along with this, we used the comparative method to compare media schools.

To fulfil the set tasks, we formulated the following **research questions**:

Q1: What challenges did regional media schools face under the conditions of education digitalization?

Q2: How professionally trained are the teaching staff?

Q3: To what extent do students have access to digital communications?

Q4: Is the influence of the political context noticeable and is the inertia of the Soviet past still there?

Q5: What is the infrastructural and literary base and how relevant is it for modern requirements?

Q6: To what extent are regional media schools able to provide their graduates with a qualified education adequate to market demands?

As we have noted, we use one of the basic methods of qualitative research - semi-structured in-depth interviews. Using it in research allows us to get information from experts and people related to the issue. As part of the research, we conducted a semi-structured interview with 4 respondents. Based on their qualifications in the research issue we selected experts, with whom we talked about the problem of the digital divide and its impact on the specifics of teaching in regional journalism schools. All experts were interviewed with the same questionnaire.

In order to achieve the set goal, we also used the survey method. With a specially prepared questionnaire, we interviewed students of journalism schools in several leading universities of the capital; students who moved from regional universities to study in Tbilisi. As a result, the main reasons for their "educational migration" were identified.

Research location – Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University; Caucasus International University (Tbilisi); Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Cinema State University of Georgia (Tbilisi);

Participants – 1st and 4th year students of media schools;

Participants selection model – Selection of students who have moved from regions to the capital for education (38 – Imereti Region; 22 – Adjara Region);

Target segment - 18-22 years of age;

Number of research participants - 60 (51 – females; 9 - males);

Research geographic area – Kutaisi-Batumi;

Research period - 2023 – January/February/March.

Our goal was to identify the reasons for student flow from regions to the capital. For the cause, we asked them the following three questions:

Where and why would you prefer to get a university education?

Which of the central and regional university bases is more modernly equipped?

Which of the central and regional university programs do you prefer in terms of professional-academic staff and educational literature?

The research has confirmed that student flow from regions to central universities is caused by three main reasons:

- Young people want to start an independent student life far from their home regions - in the capital;
- Young people believe that Tbilisi universities are much better equipped for studying media and have more modern multimedia centres;
- It is considered that regions suffer from a shortage of media education professionals and lack relevant educational literature.

Overall, the research has shown that the media schools of regional universities require updating; under the conditions of the modern digital divide, their survival will be most difficult if the connection between the central and regional university systems and the training of academic staff and the corresponding re-institutionalization are not developed.

Regional media schools: problems and challenges – Expert interview results

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in Georgia precipitated an urban revolution, characterized by a significant migration of the populace from rural areas to Tbilisi. These transformations not only shaped the political, economic, and cultural landscape of the nation but also exerted a profound influence on the educational sector. Consequently, the capital's role in educational affairs expanded, while regional higher education domains encountered challenges. By observing the situation in the regional media schools of Georgia, it's possible to identify various forms of inequality. As per Atalay (2018), "Today there is growing world-wide discontent about the way liberal democracy operates". This dissatisfaction extends beyond the fundamental legitimacy of governance to encompass specific domains such as education, where examining details can reveal flaws and indicators of inequality within the broader context.

In the rapidly changing digital environment, the training of qualified specialists relevant to the modern media industry is of utmost importance. However, media education is more relevant in the universities in Tbilisi, the capital of the country, while the situation in the regions is not so favourable, and the level of equality among the universities of Tbilisi and the ones in the regions suffering a great disbalance. This is evidenced by the two regional universities we studied - Akaki Tsereteli Kutaisi State University and Shota Rustaveli Batumi State University; the research has shown that there is a huge disbalance between the regions and the capital in terms of media literacy.

Modern media standards of teaching are mostly implemented in the universities in Tbilisi; the issue of qualified personnel is more or less settled; Media Schools have modern theoretical literature, multimedia centers adapted to quality teaching and educational programs focused on the journalistic community.

At Kutaisi Akaki Tsereteli State University (founded in 1933), the direction of journalism has existed since 1990 - that is, immediately after the restoration of the country's independence, which is undoubtedly an interesting fact - the media, as a guarantor of freedom, immediately entered the educational field of the regional university. This is logical because right after gaining independence, it was determined that sustainable media should have become the main condition for independence.

Until 2011, the Department of Journalism existed as an independent segment of the University and was considered one of the successful media schools in Georgia; however, everything changed after it became part of the Faculty of Business, Law and Social Sciences. Integrated Program of Social Sciences was created and journalism was included in it only as a module. This meant the cancellation of the independent journalism program. The Integrated Program of Social Sciences consisted of three modules - Public Administration, International Relations and Media Education; out of the total 240 credits, only 120 were calculated in the media direction. The rest 120 belonged to other social sciences; As a result, students were unable to get a complete media education either. In addition, when passing the entrance exams, the entrant did not know that social sciences included the journalism program. Accordingly, if at the end of the 90s, more than 200 students were studying in that direction, today 51 students study in all four years of the bachelor's program, and 3 in the master's program.

As a result of an interview with Mzia Tadumadze, Head of the Department of Journalism, it became clear that, despite numerous attempts, up until 2022 it has failed to separate journalism into a separate program at the Akaki Tsereteli State University; for the 2022-2023 academic year, 21 students were admitted to the Mass Communications Program, which is undoubtedly a good result. The Program is accompanied by the so-called Minor Program (60 credits), in which 93 students from different faculties receive media education, tailored to the needs of the public. Among them are 30 first-year students; second-year – 35 students; third-year students - 28.

Despite the claim of the Head of the Program, that the problems of the media school were caused by the loss of teaching staff, we believe that the issue requires a deeper analysis; although the university traditionally has experience in teaching print and broadcast media and they intend to strengthen the new program with training in digital media, still the situation with staff is unfavourable.

Moreover, the Media School still does not have a professor in the field of digital media and is trying to retrain local personnel in the near future. These issues were also raised by the accreditation expert during last year's accreditation process of the Program - that the direction cannot be brought closer to modern standards without the development and empowerment of digital media. This is a prolonged process and requires new forces and personnel reclassification. In addition, the Media School still does not have a student radio, although it is equipped with a modern TV and photo lab; the challenge is the scarce modern scientific library, which hinders the process of getting a fundamental education.

Unfortunately, the Master's Program of the Media School, which has existed since 2006 and has given the country many successful theoreticians and practitioners, is in a bad state. It is yet unclear if the Program will be able to pass accreditation in the near future.

The situation is even more difficult at **Shota Rustaveli State University of Batumi** (founded in 1935), where undergraduate and graduate educational programs in journalism and mass communication were completely annulled in 2010; it is undoubtedly interesting or even a strange coincidence that in Kutaisi and Batumi, in fact, at the same time - in 2010-2011, media programs were closed down or weakened.

As for the closing of the programs, it was largely due to the lack of staff, lack of knowledge of the teaching methodology, and inadequate infrastructure. It should be noted that the journalism program at the Shota Rustaveli Batumi State University has existed since 1992. However, at that time the training was still carried out with Soviet inertia. After the activation of the Bologna process, it was necessary to adapt the program to the new reality, which was not possible due to the above-mentioned reasons.

Despite the special requirements for qualified journalist personnel in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, which is explained by the variety of regional broadcasters and publications, the journalism educational program still could not exist. Since 2010, the university has transferred the program to a decremental mode, which was eventually canceled.

The cancellation of programs in Adjara resulted in a serious shortage of journalistic staff; furthermore, the Adjara Public Broadcaster Television and Radio and the Georgia-wide online publication Netgazeti operated in the region.

It was only possible to reopen the journalistic department in May of 2022 (11. 05. 2022, according to the decision of the accreditation council). In 2022 - after a 12-year hiatus -

the Digital Media and Innovations Master's Program has already been launched at the University of Batumi, together with the Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. The US Embassy in Georgia was actively involved in the development of the Program, with the financing of which it was possible to carry out market research, which identified the need for the development of the Program and the main directions that were defined as the goals of the Program. The US Embassy was involved as much as possible in the development of new programs for media schools of Kutaisi State University and Batumi State University.

However, it is a fact that regional media schools need help from both the state and local universities in order to achieve sustainability. Only this way it will be possible to eliminate the disbalance between regional and Tbilisi media schools. "Change is impossible without action" (Mahatma Gandhi). Now is the time for these changes. Development of a higher education system based on learning outcomes is a time-consuming and long process; accordingly, it causes significant changes in the system. Learning outcomes are the basis for the formation of training courses. Therefore, it is clear that creating an effective and successful combination from the beginning is difficult, but it is manageable and it takes time.

Regional media literacy should undoubtedly become a priority, as it is important to ensure that our societies in the regions are better prepared, make informed decisions and demonstrate flexibility in identifying credible information in the face of information surplus. Media staffed by graduates of local media schools should adapt to the role of regional monitoring implementers.

Media, as the guarantor of freedom, is constantly under threat in Georgia, at home and abroad. That is why media literacy is a priority. European researchers have repeatedly noted - "despite the fact that during the last 20 years, Georgia has actively implemented the practical use of media technologies in schools and universities, media literacy and the development of mass media education here still lags behind European standards" (UNESCO 2014). The situation in the regions is even more complicated.

Key findings of the study

Finally, as a result of the research, were identified the main problems of Georgian regional journalism schools in terms of access to digital communications. The key findings of the research can be formulated as follows:

- Under the conditions of digitization of education, regional university media schools face a number of challenges: mainly, it is the problem of access to media technologies and
- shortage of academic staff having digital skills.
- The imbalance between regional and Tbilisi media schools was highlighted.
- Students in the regions have limited access to digital communications, which becomes one of the main conditions for their flow to central universities.
- The influence of the political context is also noticeable and in many cases, the inertia of the Soviet past shows itself.
- In regional media schools, the scarcity of modern professional literature, as well as the lack of original textbooks, was identified as a problem.
- In fact, regional media schools, are unable to provide the educational process with the necessary material and technical base, which is directly related to obtaining adequate qualified education for market demands. However, in this regard, the situation is relatively better in Batumi State University.

Conclusion

The post-Soviet university space faced a real crisis after the Soviet-proven system was dismantled. Thereafter, the development and establishment of an alternative model became difficult. Therefore, the regional university system suffered a serious collapse, as a large part of the professional and student resources flowed to the central universities. This process equally affected media school programs. The research showed that it is time to start strengthening the regional university media schools and their systemic inclusion in the world educational process. By identifying the challenges faced by Georgian media schools and showing the problems of the country's regional universities, the gaps that are directly related to the problem of the digital divide were outlined. We believe that the obtained results and research findings will be very useful not only to those interested in the problem of Georgian education. Generalization of the results of the research will allow researchers to have a certain understanding of the problems faced by the post-Soviet countries in terms of higher education.

Based on statistics from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, projections indicate that by 2050, approximately 75% of Georgia's population will reside in urban areas, with a significant proportion favouring the capital city as their primary place of habitation in pursuit of improved prospects. To avoid the long-term effects of such disbalance and inequality there is a necessity for an action. It is evident that without proactive measures and a genuine commitment to addressing these issues, the challenges confronting regional education are likely to intensify over time, necessitating immediate attention and concerted efforts towards resolution.

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