

# Make Kosovo Green Again:

**Environmentalism as a Means  
of Civic Education**

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BY  
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# List of acronyms

<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>EEA</b>	European Environment Agency
<b>ERAC</b>	Equal Coalition for All Coalition
<b>KEPA</b>	Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency
<b>KGR</b>	Kosovo Glass Recycling
<b>NAO</b>	National Audit Office
<b>SERES</b>	Social Enterprise and Recycle
<b>NSD</b>	National Strategy for Development

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# 1 Introduction

Since Kosovo declared independence, environmental degradation has turned into a severe bet for almost all succeeding governments.

Despite the authorities' official commitments to the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, at the moment Kosovo seems obliged to its Promethean destiny<sup>1</sup>.

In general terms, the snake pace alignment of the national legislation with the European *acquis* and its effective implementation on the ground remain challenging to be grasped by the wider public. Kosovo's waste management issue represents a permanent challenge not only for protecting and preserving the ecosystem but, first and foremost, for citizens' health and general well-being. In particular, solid municipal waste management constitutes a major concern, as the unpleasant garbage dumped on the streets or plastic bags dispersed on riverbanks and lakes are visible to everyone and portray only the tip of an imploding iceberg. The amount of municipal waste produced by households follows a positively growing

trend. The continuous intervention delays, lack of political responsibility, multiplying malpractices, missed opportunities for investments in infrastructure and skills have led to the current system's failure. Although the country's strategic framework has frequently recognized the inadequacy of the waste management system over the years, little progress has been made to date.

Against this situation, a large number of civil society organizations (CSOs) are nevertheless showing quite an active, spontaneous, and constructive civic approach to tackling environmental issues. Many initiatives of youth and local activists deem ecology and ecologism necessary to be addressed through immediate actions. Mushroomed in the last couple of years across the country, green activists and ecological practices have remained somehow unnoticed, fragmented, and perhaps critical to the EU green agenda and related domestic political elites' behavior. Kosovo's environmentalists and youth envision restoring and creating new relationships between the

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<sup>1</sup> Luan Shllaku, Executive Director of Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, Lecture on "Energy transition – Challenges for Kosovo and the Western Balkans", Green Action Space, Prishtina, 12 March 2022



Kosovo's waste management issue represents a permanent challenge not only for protecting and preserving the ecosystem but, first and foremost, for citizens' health and general wellbeing. In particular, solid municipal waste management constitutes a sensitive issue, as the unpleasant garbage dumped on the streets or plastic bags dispersed on riverbanks and lakes are visible to everyone and portray only the tip of an imploding iceberg. The amount of municipal waste produced by households follows a positively growing trend. The continuous intervention delays, lack of political responsibility, multiplying malpractices, and missed opportunities for investments in infrastructure and skills have led to the current system's failure.

local communities and between people and nature in all aspects of their everyday life.

There is little doubt that education equips societies and local communities with knowledge and good practices to handle environmental issues adequately. When juxtaposed, education and environmentalism constitute a tandem that unveils a series of issues, such as citizens' everyday behavior toward public and protected areas, the unsuccessful awareness campaigns initiated by institutions at all levels, the distance between the expectancies of the represented and the unfulfilled duties of the representatives, and a widespread mistrust towards the institutions.<sup>2</sup> Within the public education system and beyond, there is a need to find a teaching and learning space for shaping personal and collective responsibility towards the environment sustainably.

In this context, policy paper looks at the nexus between environmental protection issues and education practices in Kosovo. Given the complexity of the environmen-

tal challenges at stake, we scale down the investigation by focusing precisely on Kosovo's waste management system at municipal level. More precisely, this paper explores the overlapping interests of CSOs and civic activism on the waste management in the country, thereby shining a spotlight on already-existing negative and positive aspects of the subject matter, as well as assessing new potential alternatives stemming from grassroots initiatives. Environmentalism is therefore considered groundwork for local communities' wellbeing and the whole education sector, from non-formal to formal educational programs, from schools and universities to spontaneous civic participation.

The paper focuses on how Kosovo authorities support out-of-school educational initiatives in praise of environmentalism as a means of civic activism. Moreover, it assesses how younger generations of activists, practitioners, and ordinary citizens engage, enhance and nurture civic practices of responsibility towards the ecosystem in Kosovo.

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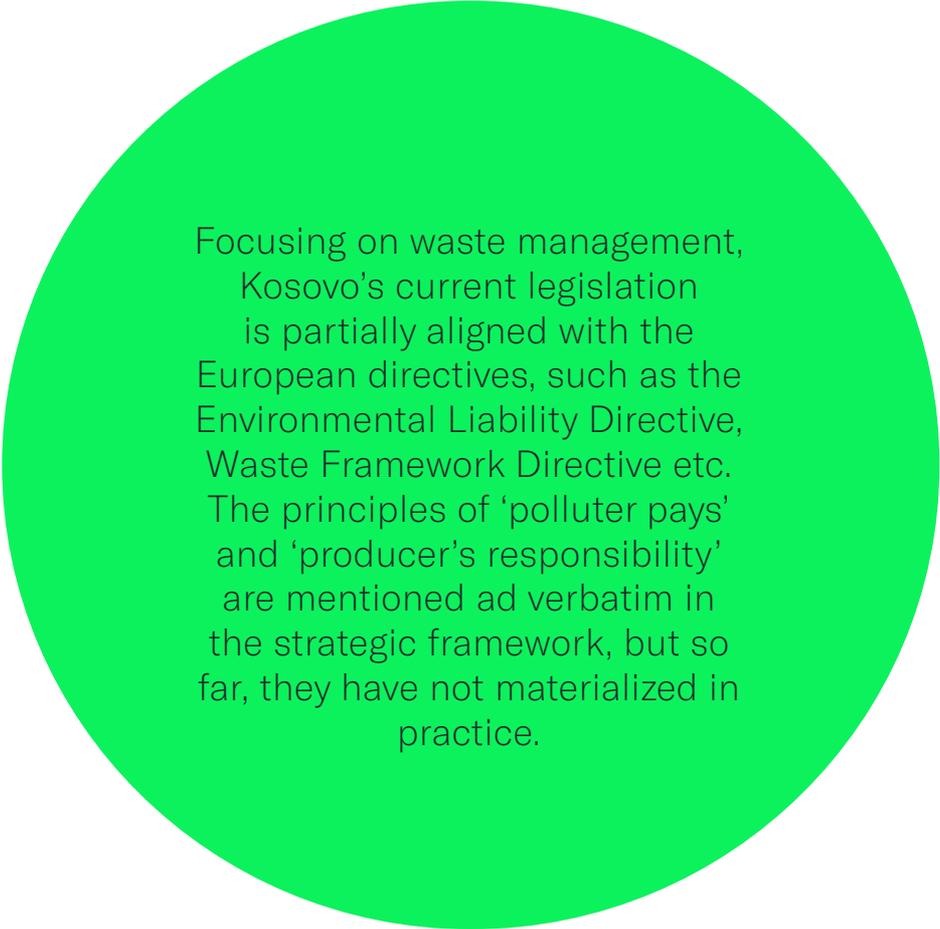
2 Interview with Urim Xhavarina, Let's Do it Peja, Prishtina, 15 March 2022.

Due to the lack of official data and ad hoc studies, the research is based on an interview-oriented approach. In fact, a series of online interviews have been conducted with activists, practitioners, and experts during February and March 2022. In addition, another series of interviews were held during fieldwork in Prishtina between 13-18 March 2022. The choice to explore the nexus between education and green activism from a bottom-up perspective is not only given by the aim to highlight the much-debated issues at the grassroots level, but it also intends to contribute to identifying new alternatives. Both perspectives contribute to a better understanding of Kosovo's complex waste management scenario, its systemic weaknesses, everyday gaps, and the dilemma of domestic institutions vis-à-vis the current activities and spontaneous initiatives against the ecological crisis.

The paper is structured around three main sections. The first section provides an overview of the policy strategies and failures of the waste management system in Kosovo. In the second section, the authors identify the role of education at all levels and green activism as a crucial tandem to analyze further the collected data, as well as insights and knowledge from experts, environmentalists, and educators. The third section identifies a virtuous and inclusive green system organized around promoting and developing the circular economy. This threefold model provides an alternative for rethinking environmental sustainability in Kosovo, a bigger space of cooperation between CSOs, authorities, and groups of experts, and a new roadmap for the educational sectors for the future of the younger generations. Spanning the tradi-

tional boundaries of education and green activism, this policy paper concludes with a wealth of recommendations on educational initiatives on environmental protection, besides raising awareness and promoting grassroots activism as a means of civic education.

Therefore, this paper shows how civic activism and green education are two faces of the same coin. They both contribute to safeguarding the ecosystem's future in Kosovo and envision its democracy through already visible alternatives among the younger generations.



Focusing on waste management, Kosovo's current legislation is partially aligned with the European directives, such as the Environmental Liability Directive, Waste Framework Directive etc. The principles of 'polluter pays' and 'producer's responsibility' are mentioned ad verbatim in the strategic framework, but so far, they have not materialized in practice.



# Municipal waste management in Kosovo: A complex domestic relation

Kosovo's level of preparedness for the environment and climate change is currently assessed as unsatisfactory, and particularly the waste management system is deemed unsustainable (European Commission 2021: 100-101). Over time, many opportunities to close the gap with the expected eco-friendly policies and practices have been certainly ignored. The European Commission has repeatedly called on national authorities to intensify the respective political commitment in addressing the long-pending recommendations on the domestic situation, along with ensuring coherence between the country's commitment to Green Agenda goals and the policy and legal framework in place (European Commission 2021: 100).

Focusing on waste management, Kosovo's current legislation is partially aligned with the European directives, such as the

Environmental Liability Directive, Waste Framework Directive etc. The principles of 'polluter pays' and 'producer's responsibility' are mentioned ad verbatim in the strategic framework, but so far, they have not materialized in practice. The authors' comparative analysis of four main national strategies<sup>3</sup> dealing partially or entirely with waste management shows that the sector's challenges in Kosovo have persisted at least since 2013. The solid waste management system is currently unsustainable due to a **lack of capacities** for waste collection in all settlements, lack of organization and **classification system** for waste separation, lack of **machinery and equipment for waste collection, lack of investments** in the sanitary landfills, creation of **illegal dumpsites**, along with a low level of cost recovery for services. The failure to implement the legislation in force, existing legal vacuums, and an unclear definition of dele-

<sup>3</sup> The consulted strategies are the following: Kosovo's Waste Management Strategy 2013-2020; Kosovo's Environmental Strategy 2013-2022; Kosovo's National Development Strategy 2016-2021; Kosovo's Waste Management Strategy 2022-2030.



**FIGURE 1**

Let's keep Prishtina clean, March 2022.

gating tasks and responsibilities have created additional room for abuse and malpractices. Not less important is the **insufficient knowledge, awareness, and education** of the sector employees and the general public on environmental protection issues.

Another critical factor is the limited capacity and, to a certain extent, the political will to establish functional **inter-institutional cooperation mechanisms** that allow addressing the issue at different levels. Despite the decentralized nature of waste management, most of landfills face challenges. They require an intervention from the central authorities - namely the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure, and related agencies - which so far have failed to achieve environmental protection, as not included yet among their top priorities. For instance, in its last report,

Kosovo's National Audit Office (NAO) highlighted that the Ministry had not drafted the expected policy documents and procedures on the categorization and management of all types of waste (Republic of Kosovo 2021) yet, as a first step towards the recycling process. On the other side, the directly involved municipal authorities struggle to establish functional procedures and practices, including frequent on-site control of the waste collection system. The municipally-contracted companies also reflect the inability of the management chain to deliver essential waste management services. Currently, there are no incentives to increase the number of private actors in this sector and consequently boost competitiveness and market expansion.



The solid waste management system is currently unsustainable due to a lack of capacities for waste collection in all settlements, lack of organization and classification system for waste separation, lack of machinery and equipment for waste collection, lack of investments in the sanitary landfills, creation of illegal dumpsites, along with a low level of cost recovery for services.

The **lack of data** and **standardized reporting procedures** from all actors continues to be another challenge, and Kosovo's Environmental Protection Agency (KEPA) is still unable to provide a full range of comparable information on state of affairs at the domestic level. According to its last report, in 2020, the waste collection service coverage for households equaled 85,3%, experiencing an increase of 7% concerning the previous year (KEPA 2022: 13). During the same period, this service reached 53,7% for the business sector and 84,8% for the public institutions. It remains disappointing the incapacity to fully cover the waste collection service for at least the public institutions. However, the above-reported success does not satisfy the official target of 100% waste collection coverage by 2020, as planned by the Waste Management Strategy 2013-2020. The amount of generated municipal solid waste for 2020 reporting year reached 480.648,62 tons, out of which 92,8% was disposed in the sanitary landfills, and the remaining part in illegal dumping and/or partially recycled by the informal sector (KEPA 2022: 12). It is crucial to underline that the reported

figures correspond solely to the collected quantities, and there are no official estimates of the uncollected segment of the generated municipal solid waste.

The **technical conditions of the sanitary landfills** in Kosovo are deteriorating significantly, and time is ticking away for as long as the authorities remain indifferent towards launching immediate rehabilitation investments. The seven sanitary landfills operating at the regional/municipal level in Kosovo are still not certified and do not operate fully in line with all the environmental standards in place (NSD, 2016: 51). Although the responsible state agency in Kosovo considers the designated areas as 'sanitary landfills', a recent report of the European Environmental Agency states that these facilities are not "completely operating according to the conditions defined in the EU Landfill Directive" (EEA 2021: 5). Therefore, the 'sanitary' status is questionable. Meanwhile, the **illegal dumpsites** continue to constitute another severe environmental threat. Most of the waste ends up in these non-properly managed sites. Despite the efforts to remove them, in the 38 municipalities of Kosovo, the reported number of dumpsites is 1.189 (KEPA 2022: 23). These illegal dumpsites are categorized by size, and it is worrisome that almost half of them (exactly 558) are significantly large in terms of surface and the amount of disposed waste. To a certain extent, the reported number of illegal dumpsites in 2021 decreased by 300 units with respect to the previous year. Meanwhile, in 2019, the number had proliferated to 2,529 illegal disposal units, constituting a serious health risk for the population and aggravating environmental contamination (European Commission 2020: 93).

The waste management situation in Kosovo appears to a certain extent, similar to the egg and chicken causal dilemma. The established vicious circle in this domain sees as protagonists both the single citizen/population on the one hand and the system in place on the other. To a certain extent, citizens can be considered direct contributors to environmental degradation. However, at the same time, the inadequacy of the present system directly affects possible virtuous behaviors of the citizens and the lack of civic ownership. The inadequate infrastructure and the considerable number of illegal dumpsites make it almost impossible for the waste to be separated at the origin.

Shifting the attention to the private sector, several discouraging factors limit the entry of private actors in the market, such as existing legal vacuums, long and bureaucratic licensing procedures, lack of fair play, lack of law enforcement, etc. So far, there are no feasibility studies on the potential of doing business in this sector in Kosovo. While investments in infrastructure constitute the first stage to focus on, the creation of a market would undoubtedly be beneficial for environment protection and new employment opportunities for the younger generations. The issue of financial envelope is no less important, and the current Environmental Strategy 2013-2022 recognizes that there are no conditions for applying economic instruments other than the state budget and donor contributions. The eventual opportunity to adopt subsidy schemes for business operators in the recycling field may contribute in a U-turn towards the emergence of a new niche. This strategy also envisions the opportunity to invest in waste incineration for energy recovery,

although this possibility has not had any follow-up so far. In its report, NAO assesses that there is no information available on the progress of the previously undertaken investments in waste treatment plants and the machinery for the waste separation at the source (Republic of Kosovo 2021), which complicates the next stage of sectoral intervention planning.

Overall, it is estimated that Kosovo exports approximately 40 million euros of recycled materials, e.g., metals, plastics, paper and glass, to neighboring countries like Albania, North Macedonia, Turkey, etc. (ERAC 2019). At the domestic level, paper and plastic waste are recycled by a few business initiatives, like Izolimi Plast recycling plant, or the newly established Kosovo Recycling Glass (Kabashi 2021). However, there is still enough room for maneuvering and boosting the market's development and environmental protection and preservation.

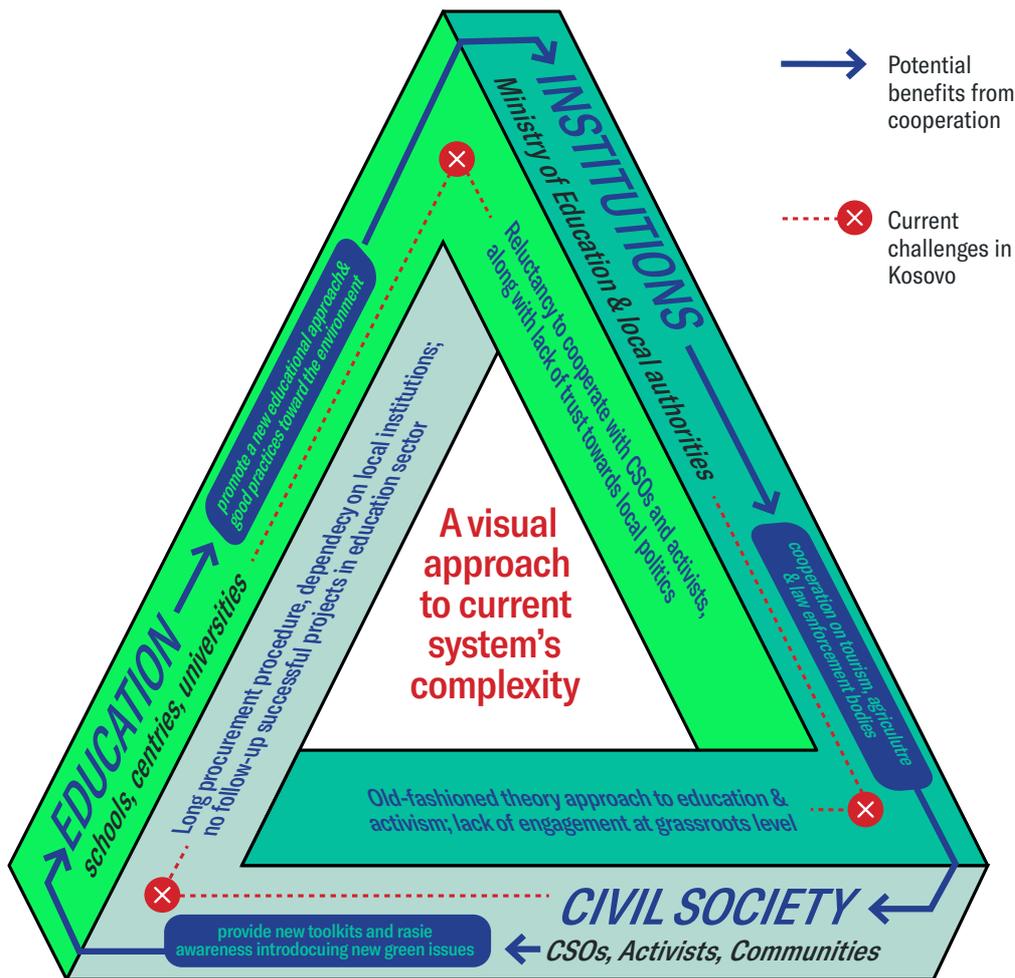


# An analysis of the system's complexity

The complexity of the waste management system in Kosovo can be visually illustrated through a triangular lens, where each side is

represented by the state institutions (both central and local ones), civil society actors, and educational institutions (see figure 2).

**FIGURE 2**  
A threefold model of indicators regarding present waste (mis) management issues



The lack of a continuous flow of information, cooperation opportunities and/or joint actions threatens the system's performance and sustainability.

In the sphere of green education, all three sides of this triangle can mutually contribute to achieving the overarching environmental protection and preservation goal. Yet, the multiple challenges (as analyzed above) highlight the absence of a deeper connection between the parties and fragmentation of civic actions.

Unlike other policy areas, education owns a transversal nature and creates spaces for the contribution of multiple actors. As Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, has argued, education can undoubtedly play a centrally paramount role in inspiring sustainable behavior and helping citizens move from awareness to action. In simpler words, the role of education can rethink and enhance civic participation by raising awareness of the issues at stake and boosting citizens' resilience on a local level. Granted that, education per se does not seem to predict people's concerns over climate change and ecology as a whole. The need to broaden both the notion and role of education would more likely facilitate and support intentional or deliberate commitments of citizens toward the environment rather than identifying a wait-and-see attitude negatively linked with the lack of top-down problem-solving and political incapacity to tackle environmental issues properly.

In the conducted interviews, it emerged that most CSO practitioners in Kosovo identify **a threefold model of indicators** (see figure 3) to better visualize the complex scenario regarding the present waste (mis) management issues - namely, (i) **awareness**; (ii) **alternatives**; and, (iii) **the rule of law**<sup>4</sup> (which will be analyzed in the following subsections). Respectively, each of these three components constitutes another "ideal triangle", whose nexuses between its angles bear upon one another. Such a triangle illustrates not only the significant issues at stake but also a potentially virtuous system for Kosovo. The **awareness** indicator helps identify the *rural/urban divide and the generational gap* on environmental issues. Moreover, the **indicator of alternatives** cannot ignore a *lack of cooperation* between the whole education sector and civil society. In turn, the **indicator of the state of the rule of law** is affected by the *political unwillingness to include environmental protection* and by the lack of law enforcement at all levels. The same three aspects of the illustrated model indicate a series of actors and potentialities that can drastically promote a U-turn on Kosovo's environmental issues. Respectively, **awareness campaigns** can come to support the already-existing good practices at the grassroots level and institutional activities aimed at supporting them. Meanwhile, **new alternative concepts** can go hand in hand with **more robust cooperation** between schools, universities, and educational centers with the civil society, capable of providing new knowledge about the environment and alternative skills to youth and law enforcement at all levels.

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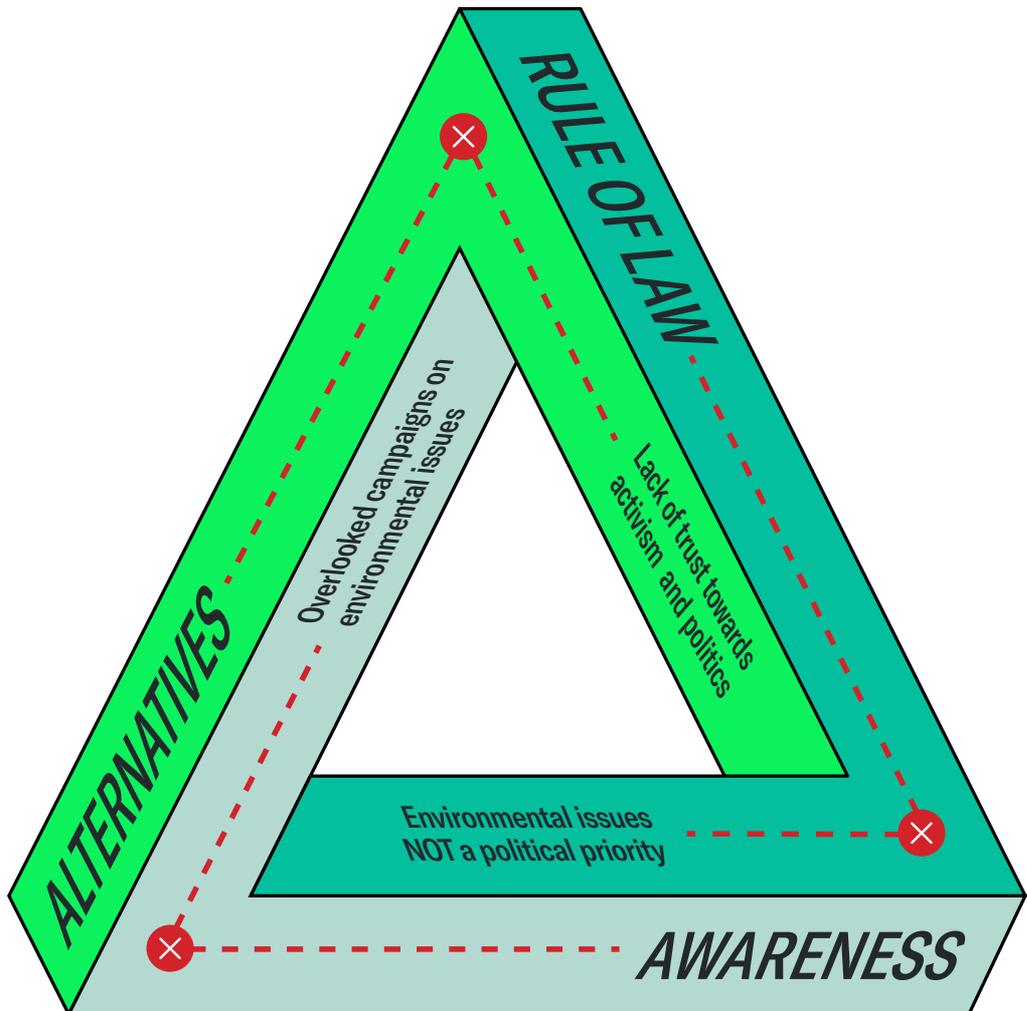
4 Interview with Urim Xhavarina, Let's Do it Peja, Prishtina, 15 March 2022.

## 2.1 The rule of law and political agenda

Although Kosovo has a good legal framework on environmental issues, the lack of law enforcement remains a crucial challenge and causes deep dissatisfaction

among the local communities.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the exclusion of environmental issues from the top priorities of the governing authorities harms further the conditions of the habitat and, to a certain extent, fuels the citizens' mistrust of the political elites.

**FIGURE 3**  
A threefold model of indicators regarding present waste (mis) management issues



<sup>5</sup> Luan Shllaku, Executive Director of Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, Lecture on "Energy transition – Challenges for Kosovo and the Western Balkans", Green Action Space, Prishtina, 12 March 2022.



**FIGURE 4**

Construction site in Arberi neighborhood in Prishtina, March 2022.

The main issues identified in the domain of waste management, as illustrated in figure 3, can be summarized as follows: (A) general **institutional incompetence** at any and all levels. Here, the Minister of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure identifies both the protection and preservation of nature, and a roadmap to crisis management model for Kosovo's environmental issues as a top priority in the political agenda; (B) **Weakness in the rule of law implementation**, given by the lack of proper criteria for law enforcement, alignment with the EU *acquis*, etc.; (C) **Financial challenges** that do not permit either to authorities or to CSOs to take proper actions and collab-

orate between each other; and (D) **Lack of institutional capacity** to duly perform the requirements of the job profile.

The lack of law enforcement has led to alterations in various sectors, such the shrinking green areas, uncontrolled constructions, and highly polluted urbanization of Kosovo's capital.<sup>6</sup> In this regard, a significant amount of waste and construction material pollutes open-air areas around the construction sites, which have turned into illegal landfills.

The construction of hydropower plants constitutes another example of the high risk of abuse and undermining of the natural eco-

6 Interview with Arta Haxhixhemajli, Center for Security Analyses and Prevention, Prishtina, 17 March 2022.



system. In the last three years, the Group for Legal and Political Studies and GAIA Kosovo have cooperated against Brezovica's hydropower plant, supporting the citizens' struggle and proactive efforts in favor of environmental protection. When Kosovo's Supreme Court overturned the earlier ruling of the Court of Appeals, suspending the construction of Brezovica's hydropower plant and accepting the requested annulment, thousands of young activists got rewarded for standing against the project. The related grassroots mobilization was not a mere act of civic participation. However, it reflected a broader willingness of youth and local communities to provide new alternatives for living sustainably and in respect of nature.



We didn't have a clue on how to win a case, but we made it. After a long period of cooperation and solidarity actions with the peoples of Shterpce/Sterpce, we did it"

HELENA POUČKI, [GAIA KOSOVO](#)

Another essential step in the rule of law was made by EcoZ organization, which is supporting cooperation between the Faculty of Law of the University of Prishtina and civic groups of early-career lawyers in establishing a structured system of knowledge on environmental issues. The initiative seeks to provide technical know-how to law students on assessing the damage of environmental pollution and proving the damages in the courthouse.

Despite the illustrated achievements, similar civic initiatives in Kosovo remain at an embryonic stage and fragmented among each other. The presence of structural challenges, like the existing distance between the Serbian community and the rest of Kosovo, should not be forgotten. In the majority of cases, the participation of the Serbian community in joint training or actions cannot be taken for granted. There is an issue of mutual trust between the communities, which challenges misunderstandings and contributes to breaking the stigma and building common green actions.<sup>7</sup> For instance, in the town of Peja, environmental issues have proven to unite local citizens from both Albanian and Serbian communities. Locals have started to collaborate beyond the institutional weaknesses of Kosovo. Although Serbia-backed parallel system could not theoretically allow its Serb-majority municipalities to cooperate with Kosovo's waste-management system, the mayor of Peja has supported the initiative of local Albanians to start cooperating with the Serbian villages. As a result, Peja's Albanian communities and Serbian villages surrounding the town have established a

partnership that has provided a sustainable system of waste collection and a decreasing impact on illegal landfills.<sup>8</sup> Suppose this grassroots cooperation has proven true that rural clusters show a slightly more positive dynamic when taking action against waste mismanagement. In that case, it is also true that the role of the central authorities in further enhancing the rule of law remains crucial for a solid judiciary system.

## 2.2 Awareness and grassroots alternatives: From knowledge to practice

A recent study conducted among high school students and some faculties of the University of Mitrovica indicates a pro-ecological orientation of the young generations. Moreover, young people from Kosovo tend to believe in the profound connection between humanity and nature (Srbnovski et al, 2020:193). Likewise, most adult citizens are aware of the challenges and societal issues that stem from waste mismanagement and take a toll on their life. Although Kosovo's institutions barely give a say on the matter of poor quality of education and educational programs in general, non-formal and unofficial activities are carried on by ordinary citizens, particularly teenagers.

However, at the same time, most people residing in urban areas are overwhelmed by the promotion of green practices.<sup>9</sup> Although many are already keen on performing sustainable behavior in their everyday life, it should also be pointed out that Kosovo does not have

7 Interview with Valon Xhibali, Ec Ma Ndryshe, 9 March 2022.

8 Interview with Urim Xhavarina, Let's Do it Peja, Prishtina, 15 March 2022.

9 Interview with Egzona Shala, Youth Ecological and Security Zone-EcoZ, Prishtina, 16 March 2022.

a proper waste sorting system.<sup>10</sup> Ordinary citizens struggle first and foremost to divide different sources of waste, thereby mistakenly relying either on throwing every sort of garbage in the same bin or, in the worst-case scenario, using public areas nearby their place of residence as a landfill.<sup>11</sup> Against this, a large number of bottom-up initiatives have been mushroomed and promoted over time. For instance, since 2014 the group of environmentalists from 'Let's do it Peja' has donated trash bins of different colors to both schools and institutional buildings by providing crash courses on how to differentiate the waste and begin with good practices of waste management. Similar initiatives have proliferated over time all around Kosovo, with the support of international donors.

Nonetheless, it is also important to reflect on the extent to which the proliferation of daily initiatives - such as "clean up campaigns" - organized throughout the year by different institutions or civil society actors embraces a sustainable solution for the environment. **Indeed, finding a common language and coordination of actions** between the citizens, local and central institutions, and contracted operators in charge of waste collection and management, is vital. Besides, **continuous, and independent monitoring can also exert proactive pressure** on the field actors.<sup>12</sup>

Ensuring sustainability in the waste management sector is a complex task that demands long-term interventions that bypass the usual four-years political term. If we refer to the domestic policy framework, one of the Envi-

ronmental Strategy's key objectives has been to increase both the institutional and final support at the domestic level to raise public awareness among citizens. Besides the insufficient financial means allocated so far to this objective, it is important to reflect also on the social aspects of conducting educational and awareness-raising campaigns on long-lasting challenges like waste management. There is a **need to diversify the same public campaigns** to target different audiences based on age, educational level, area of residence, etc. to **better address diverse community needs and understanding** across the country. This specific demand would also benefit local communities, especially those capable of handling their priorities and problems on a local level. Currently, **awareness campaigns are less likely to convey the right message to a broader audience of citizens** and provide the correct information to the rural areas rather than in urban clusters.

On the one hand, the still-lasting pandemic has brought young people's and/or middle-class attention to environmental issues and their effects on human health. On the other hand, locals residing in rural areas or low-income families for instance, continue to shift the attention from the bigger picture of the problems at stake due to other more immediate needs. When referring to **rural communities**, to a certain extent, they tend to feel disengaged and unmotivated in contributing to the new alternatives advocating for recycling, circular economy, and other related waste management initiatives. A possible explanation in this regard is the existing discrepancy between the local

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Prof. Xhevat Berisha and Prof. Bukurije Hoxha, University of Prishtina, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Prishtina, 14 March 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Martin Berisha, Kosovo Glass Recycling, Prishtina, 17 March 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Arben Nika, Center for Education and Development of Environment, online interview, 7 March 2022.

## MAKE KOSOVO GREEN AGAIN:

authorities' and donors' attention towards the rural areas when dealing with waste management issues.<sup>13</sup>

In the recent past, the intervention focus regarding waste-related topics has almost always been in the urban areas, especially major ones, leaving behind the rural communities, either for piloting or for educational activities. In fact, the conducted interviews have shown that there is a vibrant community also in the rural areas of Kosovo, which is keen to deepen the knowledge and put into practice actions that protect their land. In this regard, the ongoing contact with the land and the production cycles has contributed to a major awareness on the role and impact of nature in the rural community's life.



We are surprised with the young people from rural areas. We have often been asked to support paths or roads more suitable for cycling and parking lots for bicycles since their lack makes them travel on foot or force parents to provide transport. Furthermore, if there is infrastructure and there is a possibility for bicycle parking [...], they use it. [...] On the other hand, they feel the lack of activities and multi-functional spaces for socialization.”

VALON XHIBALI, **EC MA NDRYSHE**

Instead, the situation appears somehow different for the **older generations**, who **struggle to catch up with the always-changing paradigms**, requiring a constant up-to-date attitude toward new challenges on a daily basis. This issue deepens even further when considering the war-torn communities.



“The wounds from the past have not healed yet, and it is very difficult to advocate civic activism among the older generation. [...] But the past shall not, and should not, indicate our future”

VLERA KURBOGAJ AND VIOLA BERISHA,  
**RESPECT OUR RIGHTS INITIATIVE**

Granted that environmental paradigms are quickly shifting and are constantly in need of upgrades<sup>14</sup>, the **necessity to find new ways to harmonize the relation between community behavior and environmental concerns** is one of the top priorities. In the case of the rural areas, which are largely composed of aging citizens, the legacy of the 1998-99 Kosovo War cannot pave a further process of stigmatization against environmental education. Readapting to new forms of civic education with regard to the current environmental crisis would undoubtedly take a more considerable effort. Compared with the postwar generation residing in the capital and other urban areas, the elderly have already readapted themselves to a war-torn society.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Afrim Berisha, Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency, online interview, 10 March 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Luan Shllaku, Executive Director of Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, Lecture on “Energy transition – Challenges for Kosovo and the Western Balkans”, Green Action Space, Prishtina, 12 March 2022.

Kosovo's CSOs and state institutions should **reflect, reconsider and rethink in a broader perspective the role of green activism** across and beyond different generations and spatial contexts. Over time most awareness campaigns target primarily young people and spread messages and potential good practices in urban areas. The same public campaigns and projects show three main misconceptions of a potential new civic education and attitudes among all citizens, as well as toward the environment and its protections across the country.

Firstly, most projects and advocacy training are oriented toward the younger generations - who are already the most vocal and active citizens with a high level of awareness and consciousness on environmental issues. At the same time, the same target group continues to remain unheard, and considered untrustworthy by local, regional and national institutions.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, while CSOs run projects and actions in urban clusters among the youth, rural areas and their communities are considered groups of citizens with little knowledge about good practices and the environment on how to reduce plastic consumption, recycle different items and comply with some waste-management in their areas of residence. Paradoxically, while young generations do not need much encouragement for being involved in good practices toward the environment and the future of environmentalism, older generations have a higher level of recycling and less consumerist attitudes. In rural contexts, the divide between the public and private

spheres is much narrower than in urban contexts. Green activism and environmental efforts are uncritically presented. Being restricted to any form of critique of civic engagement, severe environmental problems in Kosovo and the other neighboring countries are not often taken seriously. Thirdly, the multifaceted issues of waste management cannot exclude other forms of air and water pollution.

As interviewed practitioners and activists have noted, waste mismanagement does not solely impinge on the environment: it also raises major concerns in other sectors of Kosovo's developing society and economy, such as agriculture and tourism. Relatedly, both CSOs and institutions align the potential problem-solving solution of waste management with the issue of plastic pollution and consumption. Hence, the promotion of green initiatives and public awareness campaigns gloss over other issues within the waste management system in Kosovo. Among others, glass consumption and recycling have been entirely overlooked despite its relevance across the country. Since its independence, tons of glass material have been entering Kosovo without any proper system of waste sorting and recycling. As a matter of fact, Kosovo's landfills are full of glass since not a single area for glass waste and potential recycling has been identified or established.<sup>16</sup>

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15 Interview with Evelin Van der Kooi, Sustainable Living Kosovo, online interview, 28 February 2022

16 Interview with Martin Berisha, Kosovo Glass Recycling, Prishtina, 17 March 2022.

## 2.3 Education and civil society: Filling the gap

Theoretically, education plays a key role in forming an ecological view of the world (Srbnovski et al 2020: 190). It is also important to tap into the expertise of CSOs toward local communities when developing policies that ensure both inclusion and sound policy-making (Clingendael 2021: 6). In Kosovo, almost the entire sphere of green education has been placed at the center of the civil society sector. The nexus between a bottom-up promotion of good environmental practices and related advocacy activities in the field of education has been considered.

According to the Kosovo's Environmental Strategy 2013-2020, plans and programs for environmental education at all different school levels have been developed. Yet, three issues deserve some attention: firstly, an assessment on the achievements and challenges of the implementation of this strategy has not been conducted; secondly, the so-called "green education" remains still marginal in comparison with the material and educational projects that relate to Kosovo to the 1998-99 war, its memories, sexual violence, and post-conflict society<sup>17</sup>; and thirdly, the curriculum about green education—which is mandatory from the third to the fifth grade at the elementary—remains facultative and at the discretion of the school's principal at the secondary and high school levels. Relatedly, other two issues come to the front: the curriculum adopted at the elementary schools does not really engage students in the subject,

providing knowledge and information that pupils can barely acquire and put into practice. Also, a large variety of local CSOs have facilitated the school system in re-thinking teaching yet promoting only in-class activities without diversifying modes of learning and practicing the acquired knowledge.



By engaging students in sport, they also experience nature - which must be protected to respect our rights. We have initiated educational activities in cooperation with schools, so far engaging more than 500 young students.”

**BARDHA UKA, DEMOCRACY THROUGH SPORT**

The lack of preparation of teachers with substantial expertise on environmental issues is also a major concern. At the high school level, other classes and curricula, such as biology, are used to link the environment with some socio-ecological perspectives.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the implementation of the same curriculum varies a lot: while some schools and educational centers regularly use the green curriculum. Yet, without professional teaching skills, others gloss over. Concerning waste management, in particular, different youth organizations have actively engaged in promoting various training and capacity-building activities to improve the youngsters' critical thinking.

17 Interview with Evelin Van der Kooi, Sustainable Living Kosovo, online interview, 28 February 2022.

18 Interview with Vlera Kurbogaj and Viola Berisha, Respect our Rights, online interview, 11 March 2022.

Messages to convey and practices to instill are related to waste management issues and “what happens to the garbage?”. While most educational trainings and projects focus on “dividing the trash”, not enough is known among students, youth, and ordinary citizens about the whole process of recycling or the principles of the circular economy. Critical thinking helps visualize the bigger mosaic of the health threats of waste mismanagement.



Schools are a place to visit and train people in. The campaign ‘Less is More’ was thought to let people know how to live with less and better. Training with pupils at school has been oriented to convey the picture of the waste process, and we have particularly emphasized the huge potential of proper recycling.”

EGZONA SHALA, ECOZ

### **Increasing inter-agency cooperation**

between the civil society sector and education institutions has been portrayed as a means to raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity. To a certain extent, this cooperation has been successfully achieved on a local level. Spontaneous initiatives have mushroomed and gone beyond ethnic and generational divides. Like-

wise, the Municipality of Vushtrri has begun to cooperate with the company “RWC Uniteti” in order to provide each house with a waste bin free of charge, and also with the so-called “Green Clubs” where pupils carry out projects on recycling and waste separation (Connective Cities 2021). The practice of “Green Clubs” has been extended also in other areas of Kosovo by different CSOs. In the last three years, and especially during the pandemic, this cooperation between the institutions, education authorities, and civil society sector has created one of the best practices in Kosovo.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, similar initiatives should be equipped with the necessary logistics and infrastructure, allowing the pupils to experience the change in practice and sustainably.<sup>20</sup>

Another interesting example is the “Eco-school”, initiated by Ec Ma Ndryshe in 2018, where students and teachers apply for grants on behalf of schools with joint project ideas. In some cases, it has been possible to rethink and convert the school’s common areas into multi-functional spaces for recreational activities or recycling of goods (like cans), and the collected incomes have been invested in the school’s renovation activities. The initiative has allowed for raising awareness, providing updated knowledge to teachers, environmental protection, and generating small funds for the educational institution itself.<sup>21</sup>

19 Interview with Merlina Beu Mucaj, PAMKOS - Association for Environmental Protection and Clean-up of Kosova, online interview, 3 March 2022.

20 Interview with Arben Nika, Center for Education and Development of Environment, online interview, 7 March 2022.

21 Interview with Valon Xhibali, Ec Ma Ndryshe, online interview, 9 March 2022.

Shifting to an older age group, several graduates in environmental management studies— a programme taught at “Haxhi Zeka” University in Peja,— have joined the civil society sector as researchers and environmental experts.<sup>22</sup> But as noted by interviewees, the lack of professionalism among the teaching personnel remains an obstacle to covering the needs of conveying a higher level of knowledge and know-how not only within the civil society but especially in the education sector. On the one hand, CSOs are paramount to educating ordinary citizens, but, on the other hand, setting proper methodologies in education based on proper research and data gathering is of great relevance in the long run. At the University of Prishtina, the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering hosts the department of Thermotechnics and Renewable Energy, which provides local students with state-of-the-art practices and knowledge about Kosovo’s main environmental issues. However, while some cooperation between university faculties, prominent students, and civil society actors takes place on a local and personal level, the distance between the latter and institutions unravel a series of issues that impinge on the same cooperation between education and civil society. Most experts and scholars do not adequately conduct detailed and in-depth studies due to the lack of data at all levels. In turn, students do not have official information and statistics to research and advance knowledge. Approximation of data and information also impinges on Kosovo’s reputation on an international level. When university faculties participate in cross-country anal-

yses, provided data are simply calculated approximately in the case of renewables, energy sector, as well as waste management.<sup>23</sup>

It goes without saying that the dialogue between universities and institutions is also a concern, especially for students. While hundreds of young students in Kosovo receive a high level of knowledge and know-how concerning environment, and related issues in the country and beyond, the establishment of cooperation for traineeships and internships in the sector of their future potential employment, is almost nonexistent. This has a double-edged impact on their future. Firstly, not having the opportunity to pursue any practical activity throughout their education leaves students without any special certification to be used in the ever shifting labor market. Secondly, this issue obliges many young graduates to leave the country for practical experience in the EU and beyond or seek permanent professional development in those countries. Tellingly, in the first case, many youngsters barely come back home after acquiring skills that cannot be practically used in Kosovo due to the undeveloped infrastructure in place. In the second case, they have no choice but to remain there.

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22 Interview with Urim Xhavarina, Let’s Do it Peja, Prishtina, 15 March 2022.

23 Interview with Prof. Xhevat Berisha and Prof. Bukurije Hoxha, University of Prishtina, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Prishtina, 14 March 2022.



# Towards a virtuous and inclusive green system

The current waste-related trajectory in Kosovo goes against the basic principles of protecting and preserving natural habitats. In the last two strategies on waste management, authorities have provided policy responses based on the circular economy model of production and consumption, which at the moment remains at an embryonic stage. Therefore, there is a need for immediate action oriented toward raising public attention, creating multi-stakeholder partnerships and efforts to change habits, as well as establishing an integrated approach for waste management based on the principles of reduction, reuse, recycling, and disposal.

Currently, only a tiny portion of collected waste is recycled, most of which is done in informal ways. **Recycling remains a considerable challenge** for the central and local institutions, first and foremost because of **lack of infrastructure**. Out of 36 municipalities in Kosovo, only 7 have in place some level of infrastructure for the separation of waste at the source for households (KEPA 2022: 30). Meanwhile, 25 municipalities lack even the five-years

local waste management plans, which are expected to rely on the principles of waste separation at source and circular economy. The last KEPA report notes that Kosovo's total number of households involved in recycling practices is equal to 15.061 units, or almost 5% at the national level (KEPA 2022: 30). Moreover, it underlines that a major part of Kosovo's municipalities cannot report the current situation in their respective territory regarding recycling activities and practices. Therefore, it is impossible at this stage to generalize.

So far, a significant role in this field has been played by foreign donors, who have attempted to encourage recycling practices by providing funding and technical knowledge and skills in cooperation with local actors. However, the attempted pilot practices have not always been successful in terms of sustainability, sometimes undermining the credibility in the eyes of the local communities.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the upcoming interventions need to be done well-coordinated and distributively across the country, starting with sustained investments in adequate recycling infrastructure, experience

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with Arben Nika, Center for Education and Development of Environment, 7 March 2022.

## MAKE KOSOVO GREEN AGAIN:

sharing from locally emerged realities, and continuous formal and informal education activities. In this regard, an adequate allocation of funds is deemed essential for establishing a model of production and consumption, which aims at reducing the impact on both the environment and poorly-maintained local economy.

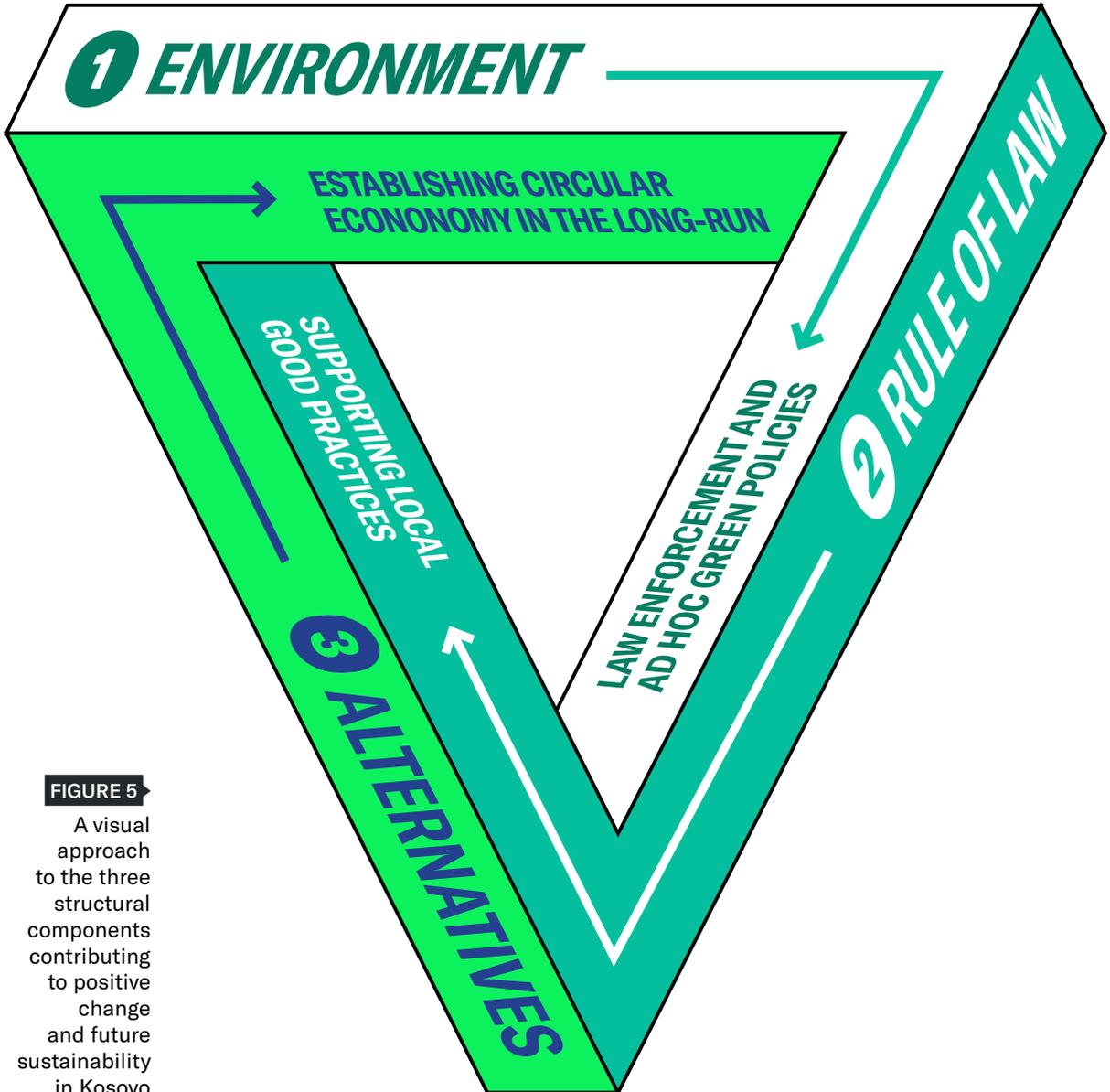
During the last couple of years, some circular economy-oriented social enterprises have been created, such as the the *Social Enterprise and Recycle* (SEREC) in Peja and the *Kosovo Glass Recycle* (KGR) in Gjakova. SEREC has established a sustainable chain of sorting out potentially in-store sales upon reception and recycling and reusing waste textile to be redesigned before the sale. This entrepreneurial project also involves CSOs providing and implementing vocational training at schools and educational centers. Likewise, in Gjakova, the successful family business of KGR has so far recycled 500 tons of glass.<sup>25</sup> Thanks to the acknowledgment and award issued by the UN Habitat programme, KGR has continued to invest in buying new machinery for glass recycling and bringing on its “mission”.

The perspective of a greener Kosovo relies on the **combination of three structural components** that contribute to a positive change and future sustainability. They are deemed mutually reinforcing and can have spill-over effects on other policy areas. As illustrated in figure 5, the first component to focus on is the **environment**, which calls on the authorities to include environmental protection among the top priorities of the current political agenda. This transversal

inclusion would firstly occur through integrating green perspectives in both legal and policy frameworks, thereby supporting green policy and decision-making processes at all levels. Finally, multi-stakeholder participation can enhance, engage and support education, as well as boost educational and awareness activities on environmental-related topics. All of these will strengthen the **rule of law**, which would have a significant impact on the preservation and promotion of a greener country. Hence, the support and replication of good local practices would be significant, too, and in line with rule of law, showing the need to encourage and stimulate a broader and larger civic compliance with the norms in place. Finally, these two components will also come to promote more coherent **alternatives** on the ground, potentially expanding circular economy actions in the medium and long run.

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Martin Berisha, Kosovo Glass Recycling, Prishtina, 17 March 2022.



**FIGURE 5**

A visual approach to the three structural components contributing to positive change and future sustainability in Kosovo

# Conclusions and recommendations

Despite the institutional constraints of developing a sustainable waste management system at the municipal level in Kosovo, some grassroots perspectives show a high level of people's capability to tackle key issues at stake, and an awareness about the ecological crisis among the young generation. Most of the interviewed experts, activists and environmentalists have confirmed such trends on a local level. Moreover, we found that educators and practitioners

are also aware of the need to expand their know-how, as well as show a readiness to catch up with the perennially-shifting paradigms of environmental sustainability while collaborating with the local and national authorities. A common indication among the interviewees shows the role of education as a crucial means to safeguard the environment in general and shape a civic form of education that unite generations and foster collaboration in the long run.

## Recommendations on waste management and environmental protection:

- 🕒 Draft expected policy documents and procedures on the categorization and management of all types of waste;
- 🕒 Develop and sustain policy-making procedures that consider new alternatives and good practices stemming directly from local communities and their knowledge;
- 🕒 Put in place and adequate infrastructure that allows for waste reduction, reuse, recycle and disposal;
- 🕒 Find a common language and coordination of actions between citizens, local and central institutions, and contracted operators in charge of waste collection and management;
- 🕒 Establish continuous and independent monitoring of municipal waste collection and management in order to exert proactive pressure on the field actors;
- 🕒 Listen to and engage with local communities in order to address their locally-nuanced needs on environmental issues;
- 🕒 Adopt subsidy schemes for business operators in the field of recycling in order to contribute to a U-turn towards the emergence of new social enterprises;
- 🕒 Create a functional operational chain that connects citizens (as waste producers), private collecting companies and the business community engaged in the recycling activities.

## **Recommendations on green education, awareness-raising and inter-agency cooperation:**

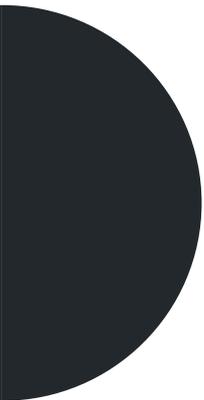
- 🕒 Update the existing curriculum on environmental education in secondary schools and make it mandatory;
- 🕒 Invest in learning and teaching programs on environmental issues for school teachers;
- 🕒 Stimulate interdisciplinary as a mode of teaching and learning about environment and waste management in particular, and the impact on the society through the promotion of the locally sustainable practices;
- 🕒 Promote and support outdoor and extracurricular activities, such as study visits around green areas of nearby towns and cities, public green areas, laboratory hours at school, etc.;
- 🕒 Enhance the establishment of small school-run vegetable and flower gardens (with the help of the parents) in order to bring the younger generations close to nature and explain the recycling processes along with the green agenda;
- 🕒 Establish recycling schemes in educational institutions as non-formal means of education and awareness raising among the younger generations;
- 🕒 Improve inter-institutional coordination on the green agenda and establish cooperation platforms between central/ local authorities with activists and CSOs dealing with green issues;
- 🕒 Enhance the cooperation between municipal authorities, companies involved in waste management and the private sector active at local level with local CSOs, educational institutions and communities of residents so as to undertake cleaning campaigns, awareness raising activities like movie nights, festivals, green fairs, artisan and flea markets, etc.;
- 🕒 Strengthen cooperation with journalists and media workers and enhance their knowledge on protection and preservation of the environment.

# List of interviews

- 🕒 Interview with Evelin Van der Kooi, Sustainable Living Kosovo, online interview, 28 February 2022.
- 🕒 Interview with Egzona Shala, Youth Ecological and Security Zone-EcoZ, online interview, 2 March 2022; Follow-up in-person interview in Prishtina, on 16 March 2022.
- 🕒 Interview with Merlina Beu Mucaj, PAMKOS - Association for Environmental Protection and Clean-up of Kosova, online interview, 3 March 2022.
- 🕒 Interview with Arben Nika, Center for Education and Development of Environment, online interview, 7 March 2022.
- 🕒 Interview with Valon Xhibali, Ec Ma Ndryshe, online interview, 9 March 2022.
- 🕒 Interview with Afrim Berisha, Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency, online interview, 10 March 2022.
- 🕒 Interview with Helena Poučki, GAIA Kosovo, online interview, 11 March 2022.
- 🕒 Interview with Vlera Kurbogaj and Viola Berisha, Respect our Rights, online interview, 11 March 2022.
- 🕒 Interview with Prof. Xhevat Berisha and Prof. Bukurije Hoxha, University of Prishtina, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Prishtina, 14 March 2022.
- 🕒 Interview with Bardha Uka, Democracy through Sport, Prishtina, 14 March 2022.
- 🕒 Interview with Urim Xhavarina, Let's Do it Peja, Prishtina, 15 March 2022.
- 🕒 Interview with Martin Berisha, Kosovo Glass Recycling, Prishtina, online interview, 17 March 2022.
- 🕒 Interview with Arta Haxhixhemajli, Center for Security Analysis and Prevention (CBAP), Prishtina, 17 March 2022.

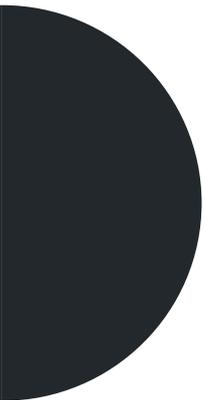
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