JOURNAL OF LAW AND POLITICS

©Author(s)

DOI: https://doi.org//10.69648/RIYD8712

Journal of Law and Politics (JLP), 2026; 7(1): 137-152

jlp.ibupress.com

Online ISSN: 2671-3438

Application: 31.01.2026

Revision: 28.02.2026

Acceptance: 15.04.2026

Publication: 30.04.2026

Zullufi, N. (2026). Institutional suspension and student subjectivity. Journal of Law and Politics, 7(1), 137-152. https://doi.org//10.69648/RIYD8712

Institutional Suspension and Student Subjectivity

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Abstract

This article reconceptualizes student status as a form of institutional and existential suspension in post-transitional societies. Drawing on critical analyses by Ivan Illich, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault, it argues that universities do more than produce cultural capital: they generate a subjectivity structured by deferred responsibility and prolonged anticipation. In contexts of structural uncertainty, especially in post-socialist Balkan societies, student suspension emerges as a rational strategy rather than a moral failure. Engaging with Ulrich Beck's risk society and debates on youth precarity, the article shifts the analysis of student disengagement from moral critique to structural explanation. The Balkan case illustrates how institutional frameworks extend "waithood," legitimizing a liminal period between dependence and full societal integration. This framework highlights the university not only as a site of knowledge production but also as an architect of social time, where postponement and anticipation are normalized. The study thus provides a lens to understand how late-modern higher education institutionalizes suspension and shapes student subjectivity.

Keywords: Institutional suspension, student subjectivity, cultural capital, waithood, risk society

Introduction

Higher education in modern discourse is commonly perceived as an emancipatory mechanism and as a preparatory phase for professional and civic integration. The figure of the student has traditionally been defined as a subject "in formation," investing in cultural and social capital in order to later integrate into the labor market and public life. This linear narrative, from education to work, from dependence to autonomy, represents one of the most powerful myths of educational modernity. However, in the context of the socio-economic transformations of recent decades, this linear scheme appears increasingly unstable, as the expansion of higher education has not been proportionally accompanied by professional stability and civic integration.

In reality, the student period often coexists with unemployment, precarious work, and migration. This context of uncertainty has prolonged the duration of studenthood and created an intermediate space: a suspended condition between dependence and responsibility. The student is no longer simply "on the path toward" integration but often remains in an intermediate state where full economic and civic responsibility is postponed, and the extension of studies becomes a strategy for managing uncertainty.

This article proposes to interpret this condition not as a moral crisis or youth apathy, but as a form of institutional suspension. Student status is produced as a social category that legitimizes the postponement of full engagement in the public and economic spheres. Suspension is not merely a subjective experience; it is the product of the interaction between educational structures, the logic of cultural capital, and structural uncertainty.

Ivan Illich's critical analyses of the institutionalization of learning demonstrate that the university colonizes the individual's time and life trajectory, transforming learning into a certified dependency (Illich, 1971). According to Pierre Bourdieu, education functions as a mechanism for converting cultural capital into social advantage and as an instrument for the reproduction of existing social structures (Bourdieu, 1986). In this sense, the diploma is not simply a document recognizing knowledge but an instrument of legitimation and a marker of status. Meanwhile, Michel Foucault argues that institutions produce disciplined subjects through evaluation, control, and performance (Foucault, 1977).

The modern student, evaluated according to credentials and academic results, becomes a liminal subject: organized around anticipation, not fully autonomous, and structured to cope with uncertainty.

At the same time, late modernity is characterized by the individualization of risk and structural uncertainty, as emphasized by Ulrich Beck (Beck, 1992). Biography becomes an individual project to be managed, while success and failure are interpreted as outcomes of personal choices. In this climate, investment in higher education appears as a rational strategy to minimize risk. The postponement of public and professional engagement becomes part of a rational calculation in the face of a fragmented and unstable labor market.

Post-socialist Balkan societies offer a particularly meaningful terrain for analyzing this phenomenon. Political and economic transition has produced high levels of unemployment, informality, and migration, while higher education has expanded significantly. The university often functions as a mechanism of postponement in the face of an uncertain labor market. Studies are prolonged, enrollments in new programs increase, and student status becomes a legitimized form of waiting. In this sense, the diploma is not merely cultural capital; it is an instrument for managing uncertainty and a means of preserving biographical flexibility.

Public discourse in the Balkans often interprets student disengagement as apathy, a lack of idealism, or a crisis of values. Sporadic protests and limited political participation are read as indicators of the weakening of civic culture. However, a structural analysis suggests that such disengagement may instead be understood as the result of rationality imposed by socio-economic uncertainty. When professional integration and economic stability are uncertain, individuals shift their priorities toward accumulating credentials and managing the time of waiting.

Through the concept of institutional suspension, this article aims to move the analysis away from moralizing youth and toward a deeper structural understanding. The student is not viewed as a passive or failed subject but as an actor positioned within an institutional configuration that produces waiting as a normalized condition. Suspension thus becomes an analytical category for understanding the relationship between knowledge, time, and responsibility.

Within this framework, the Balkans are not merely a local case; they offer a comparative and analytical perspective for understanding dynamics that are increasingly present in global higher education: the mass expansion of studies, credential inflation, the prolongation of the transition to work, and the transformation of youth into a temporary category of suspension. By combining classical critical theory with post-transitional analysis, this article proposes that the contemporary university is not only an institution that produces cultural capital but also a mechanism that institutionalizes suspension.

In the sections that follow, the article develops this argument through an expanded theoretical framework that links the institutional colonization of life, the reproduction of cultural capital, and the disciplinary production of the subject with the analysis of structural uncertainty and post-socialist transition, positioning the Balkans as an analytical space and a regional contribution to the global debate.

Methodological Approach and Theoretical Framework

This article adopts a theoretical - conceptual approach, focusing on the critical analysis of student status as a form of institutional suspension. It does not rely on primary empirical data; instead, it draws on classical and contemporary literature from critical sociology, youth studies, and post-transition research. The aim of this methodological approach is to interpret student status not as an individual or moral phenomenon, but as the product of the interaction between educational institutions, social structures, and economic uncertainties.

One of the central foundations of this article is the analysis of the institutional colonization of life as articulated by Ivan Illich, in Deschooling Society (1971), he argues that educational institutions are not merely transmitters of knowledge but monopolize the process of learning and transform the individual into a subject dependent on certifying structures. The duration of studies, continuous assessments, and credentialism compel students to invest not only in knowledge but also in a social and structural process that reproduces dependency. According to Illich (1971), the university colonizes time and the life trajectory of individuals, turning the student's future into an object planned and controlled by institutional logic.

Another essential dimension is cultural capital and social reproduction, as emphasized by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu (1986) argues that education functions as a mechanism for converting cultural capital into social advantage and as an instrument for reproducing existing hierarchies. The diploma is not merely a document certifying knowledge, but a symbol of legitimacy and status. In contexts marked by economic uncertainty and fragmented labor markets, students tend to perceive studying not primarily as an ethical or civic commitment but as a strategic investment for securing future social mobility. Credential inflation and the mass expansion of education intensify this expectation: student status becomes a legitimized period of suspension that creates space for risk management and biographical flexibility.

According to Michel Foucault (1977), institutions produce subjects through disciplinary techniques in which duration, evaluation, and performance become instruments of subject formation. In this sense, the student becomes a liminal subject, organized around anticipation and credentials, evaluated through performance, and structured to cope with socio-economic uncertainty. Through disciplinary mechanisms, the university not only determines academic trajectories but also manages the individual's waiting and future time. Institutional suspension is not accidental; it is the outcome of a structural rationality that links knowledge with control and the capitalization of time.

In the context of late modernity, this configuration is closely linked to structural uncertainty and the concept of the risk society, as argued by Ulrich Beck (1992). The postponement of professional and civic engagement becomes part of a rational strategy for managing individual risk. The student's biography is transformed into a project in which success and failure are interpreted as the result of personal choices and the capacity to manage uncertainty. Within this framework, institutional suspension is not a deficit but a rational strategy for coping with uncertainty.

Moreover, the concept of waithood, introduced by Anani Honwana (2012), adds an empirical–theoretical dimension to the analysis. Waithood describes the prolonged period of waiting during youth, in which individuals lack stable access to employment, economic autonomy, and full civic responsibility. In the Balkans, this condition illustrates how universities assume a role not only in academic preparation but also in the administration of uncertainty, legitimizing suspended time and postponing integration into the labor market.

The theoretical framework of this article therefore connects three analytical levels:

(1) institutions that colonize time and produce dependency (Illich, 1971),

(2) cultural capital as a mechanism of social reproduction and mobility (Bourdieu, 1986), and

(3) the disciplinary production of the liminal subject (Foucault, 1977), all situated within a global context of modern uncertainty (Beck, 1992; Honwana 2012).

The Balkans are used as an analytical space to illustrate how these processes converge: the expansion of higher education, youth unemployment, and migration transform student status into a legitimized period of suspension and risk management.

In this way, the expanded theoretical approach of this article seeks to demonstrate that student disengagement is not an individual or moral phenomenon but the result of a complex interaction between institutions, cultural capital, and socio-economic uncertainty. Institutional suspension thus becomes an analytical category that helps us understand the relationship between knowledge, time, and responsibility, positioning the Balkans as an illustrative case with global relevance.

The University as a Producer of Deferred Time

The contemporary university is not merely a space for the production and transmission of knowledge; it is an institution that structures time, organizes waiting, and rationalizes suspension. In this sense, the student period does not represent only a linear transition from education to employment, but an institutionalized liminal condition in which time becomes a strategic resource for managing uncertainty.

Drawing on the critical analyses of Illich (1971) Bourdieu (1986), and Foucault (1977) as well as debates on the structural uncertainty of late modernity (Beck, 1992), this section argues that the university functions as a producer of deferred time, making suspension not a deviation but a normal effect of institutional rationality.

In Illich's analysis (1971), the educational institution monopolizes the process of learning and transforms knowledge into a certified product. This monopoly is not limited to the content of knowledge; it also includes the organization of individual time.

The university determines the rhythm of student life through the structure of academic years, credits, examinations, and graduation cycles. Thus, the student's time is no longer a spontaneous time of personal development but an institutionalized time, regulated and legitimized by the logic of certification. In this way, the university colonizes life trajectories, transforming the future into a project managed within the academic framework.

This colonization of time creates a specific space: the student period becomes a suspended time in which full economic and civic responsibility is postponed. Rather than being interpreted as passivity, this condition should be understood as an institutionalized strategy in response to uncertainty. In contexts where the labor market is fragmented and opportunities for professional integration are unstable, as in many post-socialist societies of the Balkans—the prolongation of studies and

continuation into new academic cycles become rationalized forms of waiting (Honwana, 2012). The university thus not only prepares individuals for the future but also administers the time of transition toward it.

From Bourdieu's perspective (1986), this deferred time is directly connected to the accumulation of cultural capital. A degree functions as symbolic capital that can be converted into social and professional advantage. In a context of credential inflation, where a bachelor's degree no longer guarantees stable integration, students invest in master's programs, additional training, and new certifications. This is not simply a desire for knowledge; it is an investment rationality. Time spent at the university becomes a period of strategic accumulation of capital, where each additional year of study represents an opportunity to increase symbolic value in the labor market (Standing, 2011).

However, this investment also produces a structural side effect: the prolongation of the liminal condition. Students remain for extended periods in an intermediate space, neither fully professionally integrated nor entirely dependent. Suspension becomes legitimized, even necessary, in order to maintain competitiveness. Thus, cultural capital and deferred time intertwine: the university creates the conditions for an economy of waiting, where youth becomes a prolonged period of investment.

The disciplinary dimension analyzed by Foucault (1977) deepens this process. The university is not only a space for capital accumulation but also a mechanism for the production of subjects. Through grades, credits, and systems of evaluation, the institution organizes the behavior and time of students.

Each semester constitutes a cycle of control and performance, where students learn to manage waiting, plan deadlines, and structure ambitions according to institutional demands. This discipline produces a liminal subject: an individual who experiences time as a manageable project oriented toward certification and performance.

At this point, deferred time is not merely a result of economic conditions; it is the effect of the interaction between institutional colonization, the accumulation of cultural capital, and the disciplining of the subject. The university produces a rationality in which suspension is perceived as normal and necessary. Students are not simply waiting; they are investing, certifying themselves, and preparing within a structure that legitimizes waiting as part of future success (Arnett, 2004; Woodman & Wyn, 2015).

This process is closely related to the structural uncertainty of late modernity. As Beck (1992) argues, individuals in the risk society must manage their biographies as individual projects in which success and failure become personalized. In this context, the university provides a controlled space where risk can be postponed and managed. Studying becomes a means of minimizing uncertainty, while institutional suspension provides time to prepare entry into an unpredictable labor market.

In the Balkans, this dynamic takes particularly concentrated forms. Youth unemployment, informality, and migration make professional integration uncertain. For many students, continuing education represents a safer alternative than immediate entry into the labor market (OECD, 2024; Eurostat, 2023). The university functions as a mechanism for the administration of waiting: it legitimizes suspended time and transforms it into potential future capital. Student status thus becomes not only an academic identity but also a social strategy.

This liminal condition corresponds with Honwana's concept of waithood (2012), which describes the prolonged period of waiting during youth. In the case of students, waithood is not passivity; it is structured and institutionalized waiting. The university gives this waiting form, rhythm, and legitimacy. Each cycle of study adds symbolic capital but also extends the time of suspension.

In this way, the university as a producer of deferred time creates a new configuration of the relationship between knowledge, time, and responsibility.

Suspension is not a moral defect of youth but the result of an institutional and economic rationality that transforms time into a strategic resource. The student period becomes a space where risk is managed, capital is accumulated, and full responsibility is postponed for a supposedly more secure future, even though that future remains increasingly uncertain.

The university, therefore, should not be seen only as an institution of knowledge but as an architect of social time. It produces and organizes deferred time, structuring waiting as part of student life and transforming suspension into a normalized dimension of the transition toward adulthood. In this sense, the student period represents not only educational investment but also an institutionalized form of managing uncertainty in contemporary societies.

Suspension, Liminality, and Waithood

If the university produces deferred time through its institutional structures, then suspension should not be understood as a side effect of the transition toward employment, but rather as an institutionalized form of social temporality. It represents a regime of time in which the present is organized through investment in a projected yet uncertain future. The student experience in late modernity constitutes a space where the transition to adulthood is no longer a clear moment of passage, but a prolonged, fragmented, and uncertain process.

The concept of liminality, developed by Victor Turner (1969), describes the intermediate phase of rites of passage, in which the individual exists "betwixt and between" two social statuses. In classical anthropological analysis, this phase was temporary and clearly structured. In late modernity, however, life transitions have become less linear and more unstable. As Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2004) argues, the phase of "emerging adulthood" represents a prolonged period of identity exploration and professional uncertainty that delays the consolidation of adult roles.

Student status represents precisely this extended liminality. The student is no longer fully dependent, yet not stably integrated into the labor market. The degree functions as a symbol of entry into the professional order, but real integration is often postponed beyond the completion of studies. This makes the university an institution that not only prepares individuals but also prolongs the transition.

The concept of waithood, articulated by Anani Honwana (2012), reinforces this analysis. Honwana argues that many young people experience an extended period of waiting for stable employment and economic independence, despite significant investment in education. Waithood is not merely an individual experience but the product of structural transformations in the labor market. In this sense, the university functions as a mechanism that institutionalizes waiting and legitimizes it as a rational investment.

These dynamics must be understood within the framework of Ulrich Beck's (1992) analysis of the risk society. According to Beck, late modernity is characterized by the individualization of uncertainty. Economic and professional risks shift from structural arrangements onto individuals, who must manage them through personal strategies. The extension of studies, the accumulation of credentials, and academic mobility appear as forms of adaptive rationality within an unstable labor market.

However, as Guy Standing (2011) argues, the rise of the precariat has produced a class of individuals characterized by contractual insecurity and fragmented professional identity. The transition from university to employment often does not represent entry into stability but rather the continuation of uncertainty in new forms. Literature on youth transitions emphasizes that the linear model of education-to-work has significantly weakened (Furlong, 2013; Woodman & Wyn, 2015).

In the context of the Western Balkans, these processes are particularly visible. According to the OECD (2024), youth unemployment in the region remains significantly above the European Union average. Data from Eurostat (2023) confirm that youth unemployment rates in several Western Balkan countries are considerably higher than the EU average.

However, suspension should not be reduced solely to economic indicators. It also has cultural and psychological dimensions. For the student, university time is simultaneously a time of investment and a deferred time. It produces a continuous sense of preparation: preparation for the labor market, for competition, for possible migration, and for additional certifications. This permanent preparation creates a subject who lives in the horizon of the future but rarely experiences that future as secure.

At the symbolic level, the university constructs the narrative of meritocracy: success is presented as the result of individual effort. This narrative makes suspension appear as a personal choice rather than a structural constraint. Students often interpret the prolongation of studies as a strategic investment, postponing important life decisions, such as marriage, family formation, and territorial stabilization, until the moment when "things stabilize." Yet this moment is often continually deferred.

In this way, suspension becomes a normalized condition. It is not perceived as an open crisis but as an expected phase of the biographical trajectory. Nevertheless, its prolongation produces long-term consequences: delayed economic autonomy, extended dependence on family, fragmentation of professional identity, and a strong orientation toward migration as an alternative.

The university, therefore, is not merely a space for intellectual formation. It is an institution that organizes the social time of youth by creating a prolonged period of mediation between dependence and autonomy. Under conditions of structural uncertainty, this deferred time functions as a social buffer: it keeps youth within an institutional framework, delaying direct confrontation with an unstable labor market.

In conclusion, suspension, liminality, and waithood constitute essential analytical categories for understanding the transformation of the student experience in late modernity. The university appears not only as an institution of knowledge production but also as a structure that organizes the time of waiting and shapes the biographies of young people under conditions of structural uncertainty. In this sense, it becomes the architect of a prolonged transition that does not guarantee stability but normalizes uncertainty as a permanent condition of entry into adult life.

The Post-Transitional Balkan Context

The political and economic transformations that swept across Southeast Europe following the collapse of socialist regimes at the end of the twentieth century created a new social configuration in which transition itself became a prolonged historical condition. Rather than representing a temporary period of passage toward institutional stability and economic development, transition in many Balkan countries produced enduring structures of uncertainty, institutional fragmentation, and labor market instability.

Within this context, the university assumed a particular social role: it became not only an institution of knowledge production but also a mechanism for managing the waiting and uncertainty experienced by young people.

The sociological literature on post-socialist transition emphasizes that the economic transformations of the 1990s produced a profound restructuring of class structures and professional trajectories. Privatization, deindustrialization, and economic liberalization were often accompanied by job losses and rising structural unemployment, particularly among youth (Brunnbauer, 2011). In this context, the transition from education to work, which during the socialist period had been relatively direct and largely guaranteed by the state, became increasingly uncertain and fragmented.

In the socialist systems of Southeast Europe, higher education was closely linked to state economic planning. University degrees often guaranteed relatively secure integration into the public sector or state-owned enterprises. After the collapse of this system, this mechanism disintegrated, creating a situation in which the university degree continues to hold symbolic value but no longer guarantees direct integration into the labor market. As a result, the relationship between education and employment became more uncertain and increasingly mediated by other social factors, such as social networks, social capital, and international mobility.

Within this new structural context, the university began to function as a space in which the timing of professional integration could be postponed and managed. The extension of the study period, participation in master's and doctoral programs, and involvement in various training initiatives became common strategies for young people facing an unstable labor market. Sociological studies on youth in Southeast Europe show that this extension of the transition period toward adulthood is a widespread phenomenon in the region (Furlong, 2013; Woodman & Wyn, 2015).

This prolonged condition of transition is closely related to the concept of waithood, developed by anthropologist Anani Honwana. Honwana uses this term to describe the extended period of waiting that characterizes the lives of many young people in contexts of economic and institutional uncertainty (Honwana, 2012). Although the concept was initially developed to analyze African contexts, it has increasingly been used to understand youth experiences in other uncertain environments, including Southeast Europe. In the case of Balkan students, the university becomes one of the key institutions that organizes and legitimizes this period of waiting.

Another important dimension of the post-transitional context is migration. For many young people in the Balkans, university studies are closely linked to projects of international migration. A university degree is often perceived as symbolic capital that can be used to access labor markets abroad or to pursue further studies at Western universities. Studies on migration from Southeast Europe show that higher education frequently functions as part of family and individual strategies for social and economic mobility (Brunnbauer, 2011).

In this sense, the university is not only a space of professional preparation but also a platform for projects of global mobility. Academic exchange programs, international scholarships, and academic networks create opportunities for temporary or permanent migration. However, this dynamic also produces a new tension: the university may function as a mechanism that prepares the emigration of young people, thereby contributing to the phenomenon of brain drain, which has characterized many countries in the region over the past decades.

From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, this situation can be interpreted as a transformation in the ways educational capital is converted into economic and social capital. In societies where the labor market is unstable and where institutional meritocracy is weak, the cultural capital represented by a university degree does not automatically convert into professional advantage. Instead, it must interact with other forms of capital—particularly social capital and international mobility, in order to produce concrete outcomes in individuals'

professional trajectories (Bourdieu, 1986).

This situation produces a structural paradox: while universities continue to produce degrees and increase the number of graduates, real opportunities for professional integration remain limited. This phenomenon is often described in the literature as credential inflation, where the relative value of academic degrees declines due to their increased supply. In such a context, students feel compelled to continue accumulating academic credentials in order to remain competitive in the labor market.

This dynamic is closely connected to broader processes of late modernity, which sociologist Ulrich Beck describes as characteristic of the risk society. According to Beck, individuals in contemporary societies must manage their biographies under conditions of structural uncertainty, where responsibility for success or failure increasingly shifts to the individual (Beck, 1992).

In this sense, students in post-transitional societies face a situation in which they must strategically plan and manage their educational and professional trajectories, often without guarantees of future outcomes.

Within this context, the university functions as one of the institutions that offers a space of relative stability within an uncertain social environment. Student status allows young people to temporarily postpone entry into an unpredictable labor market while investing in the accumulation of cultural capital and the construction of social networks. This period of institutional suspension creates a space in which economic risk can be managed and deferred to a later moment.

However, this strategy also has its limitations. The longer the study period extends, the greater the tension becomes between social expectations and economic realities. Families and societies often expect higher education to produce social mobility and economic stability, while the reality of the labor market does not always fulfill these expectations. This tension produces feelings of uncertainty and ambivalence within the student experience, where studying is experienced simultaneously as an opportunity and as a form of unavoidable postponement of confrontation with economic realities.

In conclusion, the post-transitional Balkan context creates the structural conditions under which the university functions as a producer of deferred time. Economic transformations, labor market uncertainty, and migration dynamics make the student period a strategic space for managing the transition to adulthood. In this sense, student status is not only an educational category but also a social form for managing uncertainty in post-transitional societies.

Conclusion

This article has sought to reconsider the contemporary experience of students by shifting the focus from the traditional interpretation of the university as a simple space for the production of knowledge toward a broader sociological understanding of its role in structuring time and life transitions. The central argument developed throughout the analysis is that the student period should be understood as a form of institutional suspension, in which individuals remain temporarily in an intermediate condition between education and full integration into economic and social life. In this sense, the student is not only a subject of learning but also a subject of an institutional order that organizes their time, postpones the full responsibilities of adulthood, and manages the waiting for an uncertain professional future.

The theoretical analysis has argued that the university functions as a producer of deferred time, structuring the student experience through cycles of study, academic credentials, and mechanisms of certification. This structure creates a temporal space in which the transition to the labor market is extended and institutionalized. Rather than being interpreted simply as a delay or deviation from the normal life trajectory, this period can be understood as a social mechanism in response to the uncertainties of late modernity. In a context where labor markets are increasingly fragmented and professional careers more unstable, the university offers an intermediate structure within which individuals can postpone confrontation with economic risk while investing in the accumulation of cultural capital.

From this perspective, the student emerges as an institutionally suspended subject. This suspension is not merely an individual or psychological condition but the result of the interaction between educational institutions, economic structures, and social expectations of social mobility. The university creates conditions in which waiting becomes both legitimized and rationalized. Students continue their studies, pursue additional academic cycles, and invest in further credentials not only because of a desire for knowledge but also as a strategy to increase their opportunities in an increasingly competitive labor market.

The analysis of the post-transitional Balkan context has shown that this dynamic takes particularly pronounced forms in the region. Economic and institutional transformations following the collapse of socialist regimes have produced persistent structures of uncertainty for young people.

High youth unemployment, economic informality, and large-scale migration have made professional integration no longer a linear process. In this situation, the

university often functions as one of the few institutions that provides relative stability and a temporal structure during youth. Student status thus becomes not only an academic identity but also a social strategy for managing uncertainty.

From this perspective, the experience of students in the Balkans should not be viewed merely as a peripheral case but as an important contribution to global debates on higher education and youth transitions. Many of the processes observed in the region, such as the extension of studies, credential inflation, and labor market uncertainty, are part of broader transformations that characterize contemporary societies. For this reason, the analysis of the Balkan context can contribute to a wider understanding of how universities around the world are reshaping the relationship between education, time, and social integration.

In this sense, the concept of institutional suspension offers an analytical framework that may also be applied in comparative international studies. It enables the examination of different ways in which universities organize young people's transition into professional life and how these processes relate to the economic and political structures of their respective societies. In some contexts, the university may function as a mechanism of selection and social mobility; in others, it may become a prolonged space of transition and the administration of waiting.

However, this study remains primarily theoretical and interpretative, relying on sociological literature and the analysis of the regional context. For this reason, an important direction for future research is the development of empirical studies that examine the concrete experiences of students across different universities. Qualitative research, such as interviews with students and graduates, could help illuminate how individuals experience institutional suspension and how they construct their strategies in response to uncertainty. Likewise, quantitative studies could provide data on the duration of the transition from university to the labor market and on the role of academic credentials in social mobility.

Another important research direction concerns the analysis of graduate migration and the role of universities in producing human capital that is often realized outside countries of origin.

In regions such as the Balkans, where migration constitutes a significant component of youth life strategies, institutional suspension may be connected not only to entry into the domestic labor market but also to migration projects and international mobility.

In conclusion, this article has argued that the university should be understood not only as an institution of knowledge but also as an architect of social time. Through its academic and symbolic structures, it produces institutionalized periods of suspension that organize the transition of youth into adulthood. By conceptualizing the student as an institutionally suspended subject, it becomes possible to more clearly understand how higher education intersects with the uncertainties of the contemporary economy and with the transformations of young people's life trajectories. This perspective opens the way for new sociological analyses of the role of universities in modern societies and of the ways in which educational institutions shape the experience of youth in an increasingly uncertain world.

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