

THE PROFESSIONAL OPTION BETWEEN VOCATION AND SOCIAL DEMANDS

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***Abstract:** The activity of school and vocational guidance (SVG) or, the school and vocational counseling or, in its new terminology – career counseling – is tightly connected to the knowledge of the socio-professional area, of its exigencies and tendencies, aspects that influence significantly the individuals’ options, and implicitly, the quality of individual and collective existence. School is the anticipating factor and it prepares people for employment, therefore it implies the correlation of multiple features: the organization of schooling styles and curricula, in accordance with the professions dynamics and the labor market, yet, at the same time providing individual progress.*

***Keywords:** professional dynamics, school and vocational counseling, career option, individual progress.*

1. THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD’S CONFIGURATION AND DYNAMICS OF PROFESSIONS

The methods by which human beings have gathered their commodities throughout time have known major mutations, with a huge impact over the evolution of the human beings’ society and over the human condition. The social divisions of labor, the industrial and informational revolutions, are but a few of the decisive moments of the change in the professions configuration. These distinctions develop not only from one epoch to another, but also within the same epoch, depending on the development stage of each country. For example, in case of developed countries, the communication and information technology sector occupies a central position in economy. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) uses data provided by this sector as key elements for comparing the levels of economic development of various countries.

In the contemporary world, the development, diversification and dynamics of professions reach unprecedented standards. During the previous century, the number of professions increased to an annual average of

370 new titles and specializations, while their mobility was increasing as well. In the year of 2000, eight out of ten professions were new, the occupational classified list being continually outdated by reality. Thus, we witness an avalanche of new specializations, in some instances, limited as necessity and application terms.

The technological and informational explosion, the diversity and multitude of new data provided by development in all sectors of activity represent the cause of this extreme dynamism. In this context, the phenomenon of adjustment a re-adjustment becomes extremely actual, and it is joined by alterations of contents and strategy in the school and vocational counseling activities and in professional guidance.

The time for a unique specialization has long declined. Our society, apparently, will need more and more “polyvalent” individuals, capable of multiple adjustments, with a vast coverage range, and capable of successive accommodations and re-accommodations, in accordance with social demands. The accomplishment of such polyvalence cannot be sustained unless the stage of narrow paths and diplomas idolatry is surpassed, in favor of pluri- and inter-disciplinary studies.

The professions' evolution, the very human existence and the man's role in the labor field - all have been caused by the spectacular improvement in technology. We witness a gradual increase in the human factor role. If, following the first industrial revolution, the adjustment of man to machine was pursued, after the second industrial revolution (post-machinist, of automation) a new type of adjustment appears. This time, it equals the machine's adjustment to human actions. Automation represents "a new integration phase, in which cerebral activities connect within the management and production control process, where the individual is no longer imitable by machine or interchangeable with the machine's functions" [1].

In the informational era, a new re-orientation of labor occurs, which "does not mean that the individual will stop working physically only, but he will be helped by information and informational or informative tools" [2].

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) foresees that the structural change, produced in economy by the communication and information technology, will lead, by 2010, to the situation in which, 55% of the labor force has been included in this sector. This may be called "labor informationalization". The structural changes on the labor market are the effect of economic, technological and social amendments and these are the cause for economic tendencies on the labor market. Knowing and understanding this interdependence become vital for designing and sustaining educational and vocational training projects.

2. ROLE OF SCHOOL AND VOCATIONAL COUNSELLING (AN APPROACH TO THE HUMAN POTENTIAL EXPLOITATION)

The activity of school and vocational guidance (SVG) or, the school and vocational counseling or, in its new terminology – career counseling – is tightly connected to the knowledge of the socio-professional area, of its exigencies and tendencies, aspects that

influence significantly the individuals' options, and implicitly, the quality of individual and collective existence. Invested with a high social responsibility SVG represents "an activity of stage planning and decision making, which may persuade a person to attend a certain type of educational institution and to have him engaged in practicing a profession" [3]. The major purpose of this activity is to develop self-evaluation and self-awareness capabilities, at the individual level, and this constitutes the premise for an adequate school and vocational option. School is the anticipating factor and it prepares people for employment, therefore it implies the correlation of multiple features: the organization of schooling styles and curricula, in accordance with the professions dynamics and the labor market, yet, at the same time providing individual progress. The focus must be on the personal integral development, by granting a proper environment for studying and working, without disregarding the socio-professional background and its exigencies. That is, each adolescent has to correlate the answer to three fundamental questions: What can I do?, What do I have to do?, and What do I want to do?

From a psychological perspective, the vocational option is a complex process involving the entire personality. A central position is occupied by individual convictions and aspirations, the life ideal and the personal system of values. Within the psychological structure of vocational option, there are three distinguishable dimensions: the intellectual dimension (I know), the affective dimension (I like), and the volitional dimension (I want). The motivation for a career selection lies at the confluence of these three dimensions. These internal (subjective) factors are, in their turn, influenced by external (objective) factors, by the socio-economic and cultural environment, or the individual's life experience.

The human existence represents a sequence of choices that make up the individual destiny. Two of such options (career selection and partner selection) hold a decisive role in the self-fulfillment and access to happiness. In the contemporary world, both choices have been perturbed and vitiated by the lack of stable

value references, the extreme life dynamism and the multitude of requirements. Wrong selections, following axiologically inconsistent criteria, irrelevant for the person's capabilities, have negative effects both upon the individual (at the level of his harmonious development and self-fulfillment) and upon society, which will be unable to capitalize its most precious wealth- the human potential.

The extreme dynamics of the social and professional life cause an uncertainty and instability feeling in the individual. Statistics show that a person may change his profession three times and his employment at least seven times in a lifetime [4]. Thus, the issue of professional insertion of young people comes to stage, a process aiming at two interdependent stages: the professional formation (qualification) and the employment (insertion). In order to prevent and diminish the dysfunctions that appear in the professional insertion process, it is important for the educational offer to correspond to the present social demands, moreover, to consider possible future changes.

Peter Grootings, the coordinator of a study on young people from the European Coordination Centre for Research and Documentation in Social Sciences in Vienna, realized that there is not a correspondence between qualifications, expectations and aspirations of young people and the labor realities of the contemporary world, which is a discrepancy between the education products and the labor market requirements. Among the most serious outcomes of this discrepancy are unemployment and under-employment (employment of young people in positions inferior to their education). Under-employment also highlights another phenomenon: the over-education of new generations, which represent *"the education stock incorporated into young people's training, which cannot find a proper and complete use on the labor market"* [5].

This is the major problem of young people in Romania: the selection of a career that may provide employment and decent living. To what extent does the pressure of this demand leave room for development and capitalization of individual potential in and for the selected

profession? If society lets the socio-professional insertion process get out of control, this means that it assumes devastating effect on a long term, while these effects may jeopardize the entire social scaffold. The studies carried out by the Center for Study and Research in Youth Problems from Romania have shown that the greatest difficulties encountered in finding employment are related to the level of education and area of expertise, added to which is the jobs offer. Therefore, young people are highly preoccupied with their professional qualification/ requalification and are perfectly aware that *"only a flexible training and an adaptive behavior to the labor market demands may increase their chance of success"* [6].

3. STUDY

The study carried out within the Air Force Academy aimed at identifying professions that interested the high-school students and establishing factors that influenced this orientation and the military career's degree of attractiveness to adolescents, in the current context of configuration and dynamics on the labor market. In addition, the social perception of military institutions and the motivational support for career option in this field of activity were pursued.

The investigation, based on questionnaires, was performed on a sample of 105 respondents, high-school students in their 12th grade at a National college from Brasov. The structure of the sample was as follows: age segment – 18 to 20 years old; gender - 70 female students, 35 male students; origins – 90 students from urban area, 15 students from rural area. The applied questionnaire consisted of 10 items. The manner in which questions were formulated presumed that twelfth graders had already made a clear career option, supported both from the aptitudinal, motivational and affective perspectives. Out of the ten questions, six were closed questions and four were open questions. Despite the difficulty in quantifying the open questions, these offered the respondents the opportunity for free and personal stances. Data analysis showed that:

1) The questionnaire was administered in a vocational high school and one of the questions aimed at the students' motivation of their selection of the school. It resulted that for most of the students (54.3%) the school selection was determined by the final scores obtained at the end of the eighth grade (national tests) and their computer-distribution to this particular high school. Only 24.8% of the respondents declared their interest in the high school's specialization, while 9.5% were influenced by their families.

2) The students' options for various professional fields, although covering a large array, were in tight connection with the specialization provided by their high-school studies (Fig. 1).

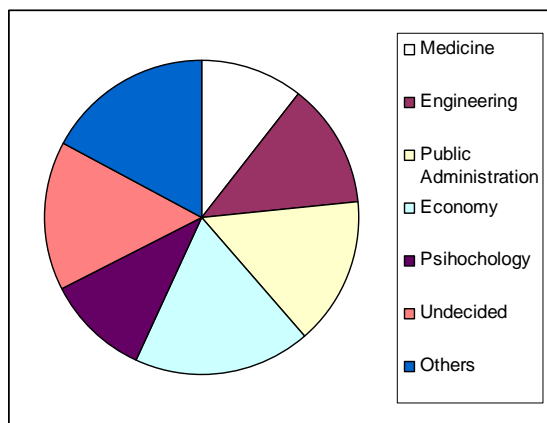


Fig. 1 The students' options for various professional fields

3) J.L. Bodden and L.E. James, appreciated, based on experimental data, that the cognitive task of making a realistic and individualized vocational selection surpasses the level of cognitive development of adolescents. Accordingly, the vocational option is strongly influenced by the family's expectations and by the data obtained from interaction with others (friends, relatives etc.). Nevertheless, the adolescents of the informational era, well anchored in the pragmatic and competitive spirit of the time and eager for self-discovery and assertion, estimated (53.3%) that aptitudes and competences played an important role in selecting and practicing a profession (Fig. 2).

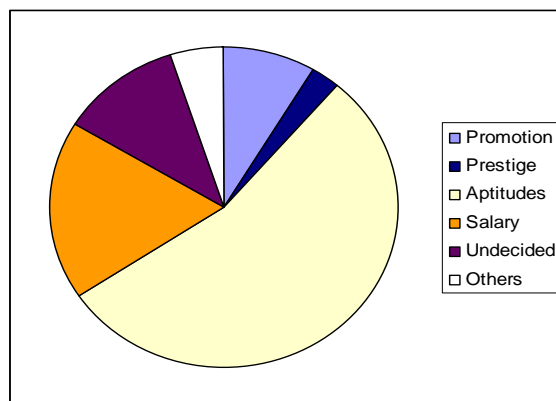


Fig. 2 Motivational support of career selection

This attitude and confidence were strengthened and confirmed by the answers to item 7: *Do you consider that in selecting a career aptitudes/competences are important?* 99% of the students answered affirmative.

The presence of indecision states and the lack of firm plans are quite normal at this age and they prefigure the opening toward new assimilations, which will gradually eliminate ambiguities, accelerating the vocational development.

4) The young people's level of information with regard to the military system, to career, in general, and to the military career, in particular, was very low (Fig. 3).

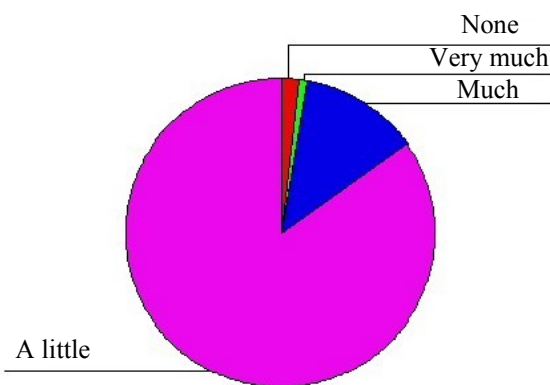


Fig. 3 Young people's level of information with regard to the military system

84.8% of the investigated respondents declared their limited knowledge regarding the military system, and the main information sources were the mass media (60%), followed by colleagues and friends (15.2%) and family (14.3%). In the actual context of the labor market configuration and dynamics, the

military career was attractive for 62.9% of the respondents, while 11.4% considered it was not interesting or “did not know” (22.9%). Even under the circumstances of this “knowledge vacuum” of the military organization by the civilian society, three elements that maintain the interest in the military career materialized in the collective mind (Fig. 4).

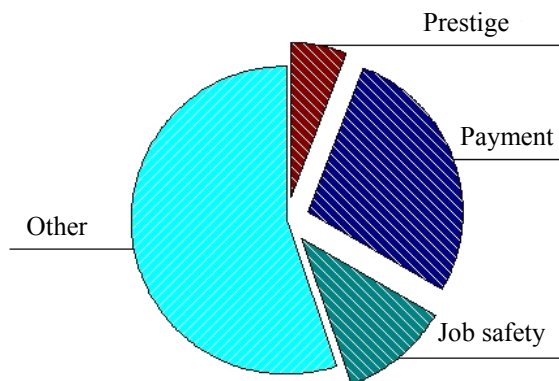


Fig. 4 Elements of attractiveness to the military career

For 44.7% of the students, payment, security of the workplace and social prestige were as many arguments favoring the option for the military career. To these added the promotion possibility, able to satisfy the assertion need of adolescents. The social perception of the army configured by establishing three distinctive features of it (Fig. 5).

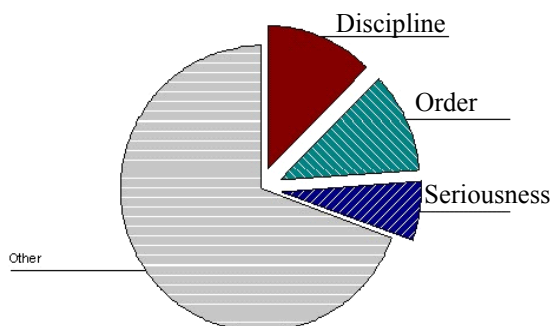


Fig. 5 Distinctive features of the military organization

Discipline, order and seriousness were characteristics that coagulated in the collective

psychology as specific to the military organization, although within the modern society this model had expanded upon all types of organizations.

4. CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, we can assert that adolescents show maturity and pragmatism in selecting their careers. Even though the extrinsic motivation in making this decision is prevalent (salary, prestige etc.), the necessity of personal qualities, aptitudes or competences in practicing a job is not ignored. The military educational offer is generous, yet, it is not sufficiently known to civilians. At the same time, it is obvious that a sustained and permanent activity of school and vocational counseling is required and it is meant to fill up the informational vacuum and to diminish the young people’s hesitations and indeterminations. Moreover, it is intended to offer a better comprehension of the socio-professional area and its tendencies, but also a better self-awareness. This activity, performed with seriousness and responsibility will contribute significantly to the professional integration of young people and to the synchronization of the educational offer and professional formation with the jobs offer on the labor market.

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