

UNIVERSITY GRADUATE IN THE FACE OF TRANSITION TO THE LABOUR MARKET AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY SHAPING

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Abstract. The study is an analysis of the literature on the subject in the field of aspects of shaping the identity of a young person on the labour market. The subject of reflection is the professional activity of young people in the transition process, with particular emphasis on the dynamics and directions of changes on the labour market. As the authors of the Foundation Findings: Youth and work report emphasize, nowadays, great emphasis should be placed on helping young people transition from education to the labour market. In this process, it seems important to take actions to shape the individual ready to move from education to the labour market.

ABSOLWENT SZKOŁY WYŻSZEJ WOBEC TRANZYCJI NA RYNEK PRACY – W OBLICZU KSZTAŁTOWANIA SIĘ TOŻSAMOŚCI ZAWODOWEJ

Słowa kluczowe: absolwent, tranzycja, edukacja, tożsamość, rynek pracy

Streszczenie. Opracowanie stanowi analizę literatury przedmiotu w obszarze aspektów kształtowania tożsamości młodego człowieka na rynku pracy. Przedmiotem refleksji jest aktywność zawodowa młodzieży w procesie tranzycji, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem dynamiki i kierunków zmian na rynku pracy. Jak podkreślają autorzy raportu Foundation Findings: Youth and work, współcześnie należy położyć duży nacisk na pomoc młodzieży w procesie przechodzenia z edukacji na rynek pracy. Ważne wydaje się w tym procesie podejmowanie działań w zakresie ukształtowania jednostki gotowej do przejścia z edukacji na rynek pracy.

Introduction

Changing reality requires rapid adaptation to the existing situations, finding your own place in the modern world and adapting to it to some extent. The work, profession we do, as noted by Ulrich Beck, is an identifier with which we assess people – their personal needs, abilities, economic and social position. Professional development is often an indicator of the human position, probably through a change in the human value system, for which work has become not only a way of earning money, but also an important element of satisfaction. The specificity of work process and working conditions are constantly changing, hence it probably affects the value of work itself (Beck, 2004, p. 209), and this is constantly growing.

After a young person completes the education stage, a kind of “crisis”, breakthrough, transition from one “world” to another occurs. He or she must leave the previously known system, way of life and get used to the new challenges that come with seeking and undertaking professional work – at this moment we are dealing with the phenomenon of transition (Piróg, 2013, p.131).

It is worth emphasizing, however, that at the turn of the 20th and 21st century there were clear changes in the process of transition of young people from the education system to the labour market; this process is clearly extended, and thus generates various effects for the individual and the formation of social and professional identity.

In the search for the identity of the individual in the process of transition

The analysis of the situation of young people on the labour market seems particularly important not only in the context of changes in the structure and dynamics of employment, but also in the face of the emerging myths and beliefs regarding the functioning of the group in question in the area of professional activity. It is worth highlighting that the analysed social group is an extremely diverse group and recognizing the factors that differentiate this group is particularly important in the light of the proposed strategies or educational mechanisms that should be precisely tailored to the recipients (Wawrzonek, 2016, p. 216). Nowadays, ‘young people’ are often perceived in terms of ‘lost generation’ (Szafraniec, 2011, p. 135). An important threat nowadays is no longer the lack of jobs, but the skilful and quick taking of a specific position in the occupational structure and adaptation which affects the course and functioning in specific socio-professional roles. Young people, aware of the changes on the “labour market,

become architects of their own careers, and their activities are not accidental, but carefully planned” (Wawrzonek, 2016, p. 218).

Modern society forces the creation of a new type of man. Entrepreneurship, appropriate qualifications and skills, risk seeker – all these features should be instilled in a young person from an early age of education. The education system must somehow prepare a young person to cope with the changing reality, to minimize the feeling of uncertainty, as Margaret Mead perfectly says – “A culture in which adults and children feel lost is created. Children – because – aren’t sure if there are still adults somewhere in the world from whom they could learn what they should do in life” (Mead, 2000, p.121).

Education has a huge impact on the fate of a generation. It is significant for optimal development. According to the Poland 2050 Report, one of the development barriers for Poland may be the education system. It should be adapted to cultural changes, as it is required by civilization changes. Unfortunately, there is currently a big gap between education and the real world. Education does not shape pro-social attitudes. You can see the emphasis on individual achievements. Education should prepare for a life in which the right, thoughtful choices are made. A young person should be resistant to manipulation, be able to argue own opinion, take responsibility for decisions and obligations. The labour market requires combining soft and hard skills, quick learning, dealing with previously unknown problems, supplementing competences, and using existing knowledge. School routine does not work in professional life, which requires creativity, flexibility, constantly adapting to life (Remiszewska, 2015, p. 73-74).

During their life, a person undergoes several changes, crosses subsequent boundaries, and undertakes new challenges; goes through kindergarten, school, studies, work and retirement. Any change is associated with a certain level of stress, anxiety, and sometimes also disappointment. However, one thing is beyond doubt – these changes are necessary because they help to achieve the next intended goals and fulfil dreams. That is why the transition from the world of education to the world of work is so important, because it is one of the most difficult stages that a young person faces during their life.

Graduation is just the beginning of real professional plans. The first years of work, the first experiences verify the goals, aspirations of the individual, their individuality. Often, at the beginning of the career path, a young person decides to change the direction of education. What was assumed, how the job was imagined, collides with reality, which turns out to be different, unfriendly to a young man, a future graduate. A transition is here encountered, which

results in a change in social roles, a change in relationships and shaping professional identity. In a fairly short time, the individual is required to become an employee, which is associated with specific obligations and rules. This is obvious, the normal order of things, but many young people have a problem with it, especially when they imagined their adult life would look completely different.

A young person graduating from university loses their status, and as enters the labour market, becomes a full member of society, who is at the stage of seeking first employment, thus shaping professional identity. When becoming a member of a group of employees of a given company, a young person must be aware of a profound change in habits and quick adaptation to new conditions. Theoretical knowledge acquired at education level should be properly used to perform practical tasks in the workplace. For a young person, certain, even the simplest tasks often turn out to be a big challenge and a problem arising not from lack of experience, because it is obvious, but from the lack of a properly conducted process of professional adaptation. Difficulties encountered by a young employee in a new workplace, related even to the lack of knowledge about specific habits among employees, ignorance of the culture of the organization can lead to a sense of isolation. The transition process (i.e. all transformations occurring in the life of an individual that affect the change of life goals and paths leading to their achievement), participation in this process, also translates into a reevaluation of previous life. It is worth paying attention to the so-called “improvisation a career.” It is observed in graduates who take up their first job and is a kind of experiment, gathering experience. This type of action allows to get used to the labour market as something new and unknown, as well as contributes to gaining professional experience that opens the way to getting a satisfying job in the future.

Entering a completely new environment, a graduate clashes with a completely new reality that changes their hierarchy of values to a greater or lesser degree. The new role that awaits the graduate sometimes becomes a new path on which a person, by analysing their qualifications and skills, gets to know themselves better (Rożnowski, 2009, p. 19; Suchodolska, 2016, p. 234–235).

In addition to the changes in the work process, working conditions are evolving. The implementation and planning of the professional future are not only more difficult, but less dependent from the individual and their aspirations. As Violetta Drabik-Podgórna emphasizes, “the modern transition model associated with globalization, labour market segmentation and professional chaos is full of unforeseen, recurring and encompassing various spheres of life.” (Drabik-Podgórna, 2010, p. 100). Nowadays, it is important to be aware

of the changes taking place on the education and labour market – these changes often set new tasks and goals for future graduates in the context of transition to the labour market. All changes and transitions are accompanied by a kind of dissonance between what was, what is known and tame, and what is new and unknown, often causing anxiety. Such situations can be accompanied by both positive and negative emotions that mobilize the individual to identify roles relevant to them, to determine the direction of actions taken and redefine their expectations (Drabik-Podgórna, 2010, p. 100), which in turn helps shape the professional identity of a young person.

The transition process, for a graduate, cannot only be a test of their competences and skills, but also a preparatory period, giving the opportunity to make a mistake and finding new direction (Duda, 2019, p. 53). Such decisions at the beginning of a professional career may prove to be a great way to achieve professional success. Careers are the way we expected when we care for them and strive for their development. It is important to undertake all the activities that affect the shaping of an individual career path. When planning a career, the skills to make specific decisions are used. Acquiring this ability is achieved by getting to know yourself and confronting your strengths with the requirements of professions and the labour market. Only a person who is aware of their capabilities and goals, who knows the requirements of the profession and all the other factors affecting professional success, can proceed to pursue a professional career. It is very important to be aware of today's requirements that arise in connection with the job search process. Activities in this area must direct young people on a path of continuous development, improvement in the field of formal and informal education.

Research on the subject of the youth's experiences during the transition from education to the labour market, carried out in the last sixty years, confirmed the thesis that “the youth copes better with the transition between education and work, if during the period of study they develop awareness of the choices they need to make, and the information and plans that connect with these choices. To put it simply, students who [look forward and look around] develop a greater willingness to look for a job and adapt more quickly to the world of work” (Cybal-Michalska, 2013, p. 191). The demand of the labour market, globalization, and employer requirements are essential determinants in the transition process, but often of little importance to a teenage person who devotes much more attention to their interests than the economic situation. Hence, individual factors most often determine the future career of future graduates. The current

socio-economic reality, the difficult process of transition to the labour market and the maintaining on a once occupied professional position, foster building mosaic, unique and non-linear professional careers that go beyond common patterns (Piorunek, 2015, p. 19).

The new role that awaits a young person, a future graduate, sometimes becomes a new path on which the individual, by analysing own qualifications and skills, gets to know themselves better. The transition process can be for a young person, a future graduate, not only a test of their competences and skills, but also a preparatory period, giving the possibility of making a mistake and finding new directions.

Future graduate – a young adult in the system of labour market requirements

An area to which attention should be paid is the approach of young people to employment and the labour market. Changes in the perception of labour market requirements by young people seem necessary. Flexibility, both educational and professional, mobility are qualities very much desired by today's employers.

Getting education is just the beginning of an educational path. Lifelong learning ensures adaptation to constant changes, not just those on the labour market. A young man must not forget that their qualifications are aging very quickly and should be expanded, supplemented and, above all, he or she should care for the ever-better quality of acquired knowledge and skills. In order to keep up with changes, one must constantly learn also throughout the whole adult life. This is a feature of modern education, which has to be a global education in the 21st century (Karney, 2004, p. 251).

The development of skills and appropriate competences necessary for effective work and conditioning professionalism, takes place throughout the human life. One must “learn to act”, thus acceptance of effective action will be achieved. One should also “learn in order to exist” to develop oneself and to pursue for excellence in professional life. Of course, the more life and professional experience a person has, the greater is the tendency to develop competence.

The nature of contemporary professional work is determined by civilization progress. Therefore, higher qualifications in professional work and human involvement in the work process are expected. The employee, performing professional tasks, demonstrates the ability to use qualifications and makes the work not only a qualified one, but also a competence one (Baraniak, 2004, p. 42).

Constant improvement of one's own skills and broadening knowledge are only one of the elements of adaptation to new labour market conditions. Adaptability is another extremely important feature. Frequent job rotation is now commonplace. Until now, however, it was used mainly to eliminate the monotony of work, today it is one of the mechanisms determining the employee's competences, their suitability for the organization. Adaptability is not only the ability to work with different devices, increasingly new technologies, people, teams, but above all, learning something new from each change, finding yourself in different environments and blending in with them, without losing your own ambitions, work style and needs.

Today, the labour market appreciates above all flexibility, creativity and speed of switching to a new style of operation. The world is unpredictable and is perceived as a world of multiple crises: traditional control and power systems, work and uncontrolled growth of unemployment, social life and family, loss of a sense of identity (Jończyk-Obst, 2003, p. 189-202). Modern man must learn to live by constantly wandering. Zygmunt Bauman noticed that even if post-modern man takes root, it is shallow, just below the surface (Bauman, 2004, p. 145). On the one hand, this is due to the variability of human existence - nothing is permanent, so it is not worth getting involved. This applies not only to family life or other social contacts, even neighbourly ones, but also to professional life. "Post-modern reflection on the condition of modern man, doomed to look for their place in a constantly changing reality, is in the area of reflection around the phenomenon of globalization." (Cybal-Michalska, 2006, p. 12).

An important phenomenon that young people have to face is professional mobility, whether working outside their home, outside their home country or in another culture is a challenge that young people face and often enables them to take up work (Kukla, 2019, p. 58). Professional mobility is a flexibility that allows to adapt to functioning in the area of new job requirements. Currently, it is also necessary to move around various areas of the economy, across various areas, in different cultures and, consequently, on the global labour market.

Employers expect and value both, the knowledge and experience of graduates, which they should acquire already during their studies. Often, the personality and interpersonal skills largely determine the employment of a candidate. The increased requirements for employee qualifications are the challenges of the present day. To meet them, young people need to be flexible to change their qualifications and should be active in understanding the needs of the labour market.

“Globalization trends in the world have deprived modern society of the stabilization which is characteristic of the modern era of industrial society. However, the dialectical nature of globalization determines the societies’ ability to anticipate and deal with dangers at the individual, social and global levels. In the micro – and macro-scale, new opportunities and new opportunities are emerging, but also threats, fears and anxieties that constitute the contours of the society of the future.” (Cybal-Michalska, 2006, p. 66).

On the one hand, the modern world has given people great opportunities, while on the other, it has become a cradle of stress and competition in all areas of life. Survival in the labour market required the development of such qualities as self-confidence, self-respect and high self-esteem (http://www.rynekpracy.pl/artykul.php/typ.1/kategoria_glowna.53/wpis.135, accessed 05.09.2016). Modern youth are increasingly aware of the fact that to a large extent it depends on them how their professional lives will unfold. They become responsible for making educational decisions and want to shape their own qualifications and skills, as well as increase spatial mobility. In this aspect, it is extremely important to raise young people’s awareness of the requirements of the modern labour market.

“People representing a development attitude find themselves much better in the contemporary labour market. This approach is associated with the desire to meet the need for self-fulfilment and self-improvement. Institutionally organized training and courses are self-development tools. The goal is to improve qualifications leading to promotion – horizontal or vertical. Continuous training is to protect yourself from routine and diversify your duties at work. It is also a chance to remain attractive on the labour market, regardless of the circumstances.” (Maleszewska, 2013, p. 126)

The labour market is governed by its mechanisms, which may be incomprehensible to young people. It is important that they can navigate it and use active forms of job search, especially from the network of contacts. Already at an early stage of recruitment, graduates must be able to convince their future employer that they are the candidate they are looking for. Therefore, a growing challenge for graduates is both thoughtful building of their own career path (based on employers’ expectations) as well as appropriate presentation of their own person and the labour market (Zajac, Kukla, 2011).

At this stage of considerations, it is worth pointing out the opportunities and threats that contemporary reality poses to young people preparing to work in new socio-economic conditions.

Chances	Threats
Globalisation	
New opportunities in the area of knowledge acquisition and education (migrations, Erasmus-type programs).	Big competition on international labour markets.
Possibility to learn from each other (between societies, students from different cultures).	The disappearance of individual and national identity. "Relishing" with the possibility of migration.
Opportunity to prepare young people to work in a multicultural environment.	
Knowledge society	
Knowledge, skills and competences are an indicator of social status and professional position. Therefore, in the hands of a young man is their professional fate (our professional status is not determined by the place of birth, status of the family, but own work).	There is a high probability that the knowledge acquired once will not be enough for the rest of our career path. Permanent education, continuous education is therefore becoming extremely important. The choice of education path and professional choice is therefore even more difficult because it may not be current before the end of education. On the other hand, permanent education and retraining are an integral part of the knowledge society, a society for which technological progress is characteristic.
Information society	
The possibility of quick, basically unlimited access to knowledge. Education is a right (not a privilege) that applies to everyone. Its direction and scope depend on the individual. The information society offers many opportunities to plan and implement educational and professional careers.	Information chaos can lead to confusion. Mass media promote fashion, a specific lifestyle (often consumer, characterized by "playing for a price tag" being a substitute for prestige, position - education in this approach is only part of the game, the stage of the "rat race") (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2013, p. 9). Mass media also create a cultural context. It is thanks to information selected by the media that goes to the general public that creates the worldview of many young people (it also threatens to create populist conclusions in the style of "it is very bad in Poland", "studies give nothing" "education is not important" etc. the problem is that these slogans are often accepted uncritically by young people, which influences the planning of the future of work).

Chances	Threats
Changes of the essence of human work / changes on the labour market	
The growing importance of the services sector - employment in that sector.	Big competition on labour markets. High unemployment. Disappearance of professions, decreasing importance of many industries, professions.
Entrepreneurial individuals can create reality - new professions, they can arise thanks to creativity, innovation and the market's sense of the individual.	The need to constantly improve. The need to adapt to the requirements of the labour market (demand for new professions, new knowledge).
Remote work – the opportunity to work in any city in the world and at any time. Highly qualified employees are particularly appreciated.	Alternative forms of employment (for many, it may be a sign of insecurity).

Source: own study

Summing up the above considerations, it should be emphasized that the situation of young people on the labour market is complex. Young people must combine many skills, be aware of continuous improvement, be ready to change jobs, as well as the profession. If the education system is to prepare an employee to work in conditions that meet the assumptions and requirements of the European Union economy, then to meet the challenges of the market it should be remembered that quality standards are not only legal regulation, but also a customer requirement.

Position on the labour market is one of the main determinants of social position. This situation is starting to get worse, especially when we consider the area of family life. It is not possible to look for stability, order, transparency and certainty of life in the last few decades. The man of the 21st century has the feeling of being in a constant race, moving in many directions, heading in different directions (Piorunek, 2009, p. 29–30). This translates into a professional life which is characterized by a lack of any stability, uncertainty and further gaps that must be filled. Career path is usually a winding road with sharp turns, behind which we do not see what awaits us. All these phenomena are fuelled by the pursuit of consumption, by new needs more and more, satisfied through material goods. This also applies to our country, which by joining the structures of the European Union has become another stop for a mobile society living no longer in a specific country, on a particular continent, but in a large global village. This was made possible not only by breaking subsequent communication or mental barriers, but also by changing the approach of the individual to what is new and unknown.

Conclusion

The trends outlined above have an impact on the shape of the modern labour market, including the nature and manner of performing work. The dynamics of the modern world of work means that often an individual is forced to make difficult professional decisions. A university is the predicate that shapes a person of a certain quality, shaping their professional identity and adapting to undergoing socio-economic changes.

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