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About Polish youth in multidimensional approach

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“Always walk through life as if you have something new to learn,
and you will.” (V. Howard)

ABSTRACT

There have been various transformations in the Polish system of education and instruction taking place for several dozens of years. Currently, the most significant issue is to adjust the school curricula to the changing societal needs and to develop some methods that would make it easier for young people to obtain their professional experience and expertise after their entrance to the labor market. The transformation processes in the contemporary world trigger changes related to an increase in education in a human life, as they constitute the factor of socio-economic development.

Keywords: human capital, youth, education, professional choices

1. INTRODUCTION

There have been various transformations in the Polish system of education and instruction taking place for several dozens of years. Despite our country not being too far away from the developed states in that field, there still is a lot to be done to catch up with them in economic and social terms. Nowadays, the most significant issue seems to be to adjust the school curricula to the changing societal needs and to develop some methods that

would make it easier for young people to obtain their professional experience and expertise after their entrance to the labor market. The purpose of the article is to stress the multidimensional character of the situation faced by the youth in Poland, and it is intended to pose an introduction for further deliberations and research over a multidimensional role in life and economy of the country.

2. DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION OF THE YOUTH IN POLAND

As for now, the Polish economic situation is not very advantageous. There will be an increase in the share of population in retirement age, from 19% in 2014 to 23.6% in 2020.

Table 1. Population forecast according to economic age groups.

Source: www.stat.gov.pl

Poland in general, 2014	pre-working age	working age	retirement age
38,478 602	6,942,996	24,230,162	7,305,444
Poland in general, 2020	pre-working age	working age	retirement age
35,668 232	5,262 154	22,005 247	8,400,831

Nevertheless, as suggest by data from Eurostat, Poland still has one of the youngest societies in Europe - a median for the residents of our country is 39.2 years, while for the European Union it reaches 42.2. The share of youth is on the decrease as well what is demonstrated on the diagram below.

Young people aged 18-29 in Poland posed 16.4% in 2014 (6,311,029), while the forecasts for subsequent years are as follows: in 2020 - 13.4%, in 2030 - 12.4\$, in 2040 - 11.9%. The demographic forecasts prove an almost 5%-drop in the population aged 18-29 in the perspective of next 25 years. The reasons for such a state of affairs are migration processes, both the external and internal ones, and the fact that children from the demographic decline became adults.

Furthermore, it must be notices that a group of persons aged 18-29 is not homogeneous, especially when it comes to their educational and professional activity. The primary activity in the group of people up to 19 years old is education. Afterwards, a group of people up to 24 years old is varied in terms of attitudes - regarding the selection of school, a lot of them undertake a professional activity. After the 24th year of age, the job is what becomes a priority. The fact that they often start studying is the reason for a relatively high percentage of the professionally passive individuals in this analyzed age group, and the delayed - when compared to other EU member states - average age for entering the labor market.

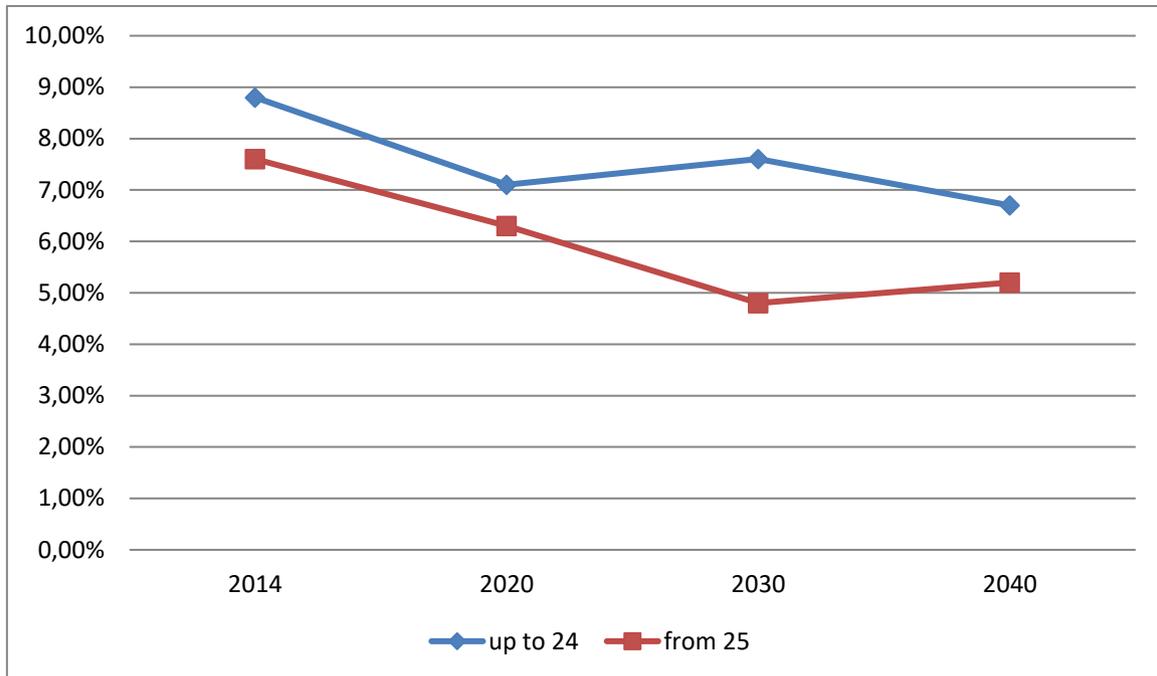


Diagram No. 1. Polish population aged 18-29.

Source: GUS (Central Statistical Office). Prognoza ludności 2014 (Population Forecast 2014).

There has been a view in recent years in the world's literature that the contemporary youth raises in the circumstances marked with ambiguity and ambivalence - in the conditions of work crisis and increase in the importance of education. Thus, the life success notion becomes increasingly more popular among such youth. [7] It is of a twofold nature, which is more of a social construct than objective reality. However, on the other hand, it is emphasized that this life success is always measured on the same scale: with stages of professional career and private life what is related to money and prestige.[10] In the holistic approach, a career is a process, the central point of which is the relationship occurring between an individual and an organization. Career development is treated as its realization, understood as fulfillment of individual objectives and values in the circumstances of limitations and facilitations, related to an individual's careers - it means an unlimited nature of the career, realized both within and outside the work. [9] Therefore, it is worth noticing that in the context of transformations in the contemporary world, the young employees do not develop their careers just on the basis of their organizational membership or their current job position, but the professional identity is rather developed by various professional experiences of an individuals. All of this is related to high mobility of an employee and flexible forms of employment. [3]

On the other hand, a big problem faced by the EU is the NEET category - i.e. young persons that out of various reasons are not in employment, education or training. This is a disturbing phenomenon because it is not marginal anymore. According to the data compiled by OECD, 1/4 of all young people around the world remain outside the area of education and science. It is 11% in Poland - slightly below the average for Europe. And the unemployment is a phenomenon exerting negative impact on individuals, families and communities.[8] Hence, it can be seen that today the young people feel free on the one hand, independent in

relation to social expectations, and on the other they do not undertake the challenges related to adulthood such quickly, they have a lot of possibilities, but at the same time they are somehow burdened by the condition of specific “suspension”.^[1] This ambivalence postpones the adulthood, and today’s thirty-year-olds are like the twenty-year-olds in the past. They are characterized with greater intensity of disorientation and greater focus on their own needs.^[2] In such conditions, it is hard not to perceive these developmental tendencies one of the reasons for increase in the NEET generation, also called the “neither-nor” generation. It is of course necessary to take a comprehensive look at this generation - to adopt an economic, social and psychological perspective.^[13] Young people have always been a subject for discussions, because they are the ones that future of the nation depends on.

3. CONCEPT OF PROFESSIONAL CHOICE

A professional career is strictly connected to a human life cycle. D. E. Super ^[14] presents five stages of human development related to development of the professional career:

- childhood (up to 14 years old): identification with persons that are important in the family and at school, fantasies regarding the professional future;
- adolescence (up to 24 years old): trying out various social roles, acquiring professional experiences during education, temporary work and spare time;
- early maturity (up to 44 years old): determination of one’s professional position, selection of the main employment field and seeking a permanent place there;
- maturity (up to 64 years old): undertaking of actions that stabilize the selected professional career path;
- elderly age (from 65 years old): reduction, vanishing of the professional activity.

There are plenty of factors that influence the professional decisions and choices of a young man¹:

- family: influence on development of interests, hierarchies of values related to work and professional life, a multigenerational message of seeing the functions in the family - female and male roles;
- peer groups: functioning in a peer groups is a special kind of experience, which impacts the choice of the profession and working environment, as a young man acquires the communication skills, learns how to stay individual at the same time being able to cooperate with others and shape group roles;
- cultural influences: schemes and stereotypes related to professional roles, culture as a carrier of values and aspirations related to work;
- political and economic situation: unemployment in the region, employment policy, functioning of the labor law, access to natural resources and to the educational system.

Knowledge about the essence, dynamics of the professional career, its conditions and specific problems, occurring on particular stages, is highly significant while designing a professional career of a young man.

¹ B. Wojtasik, Basics Of Career Counselling (Podstawy poradnictwa kariery) (2011) 12-18.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF HUMAN CAPITAL

Before the World War II, one fourth of the Polish population was illiterate, so during the post-war period, a priority for the authorities was to eliminate that phenomenon, and in 1960 the share of illiterates in our country was just 2.7%. Another step was to introduce the vocational education, which resulted in qualified blue-collar workers required by large production facilities under development. That was the time when higher education did not mean a high professional position. A breakthrough took place in the 1990s. Currently, the population structure shows the differences in the education level between particular age groups. The generation of the post-World War II baby boom has mainly vocational education, while the baby boomers from 1970s and 1980s have mostly middle and higher education.²

The young Poles' aspirations are reflected in the transformation of the educational structure that took place in 1990s. The "educational boom" of those times was also caused by the willingness to avoid the unemployment and the compulsory military service in Poland. In turn, at the beginning of 21st century, the dynamics of increase in the share of persons with higher education weakened, and strong vocational education is again becoming popular.³ There is no doubt that an increase in the level of education impacts, among others, the increase in salaries and a decrease in unemployment and social pathologies. The contemporary youth is aware of such a state of affairs what is proved by their choices of educational and professional paths.

In a modern society, knowledge is the basic capital that decides about the social status. There have been numerous empirical studies over human capital in micro- and macroeconomic terms [5,4,15], which the following conclusions can be drawn from:

- human capital is an important factor of economic growth,
- human capital investments return after plenty of years,
- the connection between formal education and economic growth is uncertain when we do not consider the quality and structure of acquired qualifications.

The notion of human capital brings a lot of difficulties to scholars, as its application is really broad. Human capital can be mentioned on an individual, organizational level and in terms of the state economy. This definition transforms along with fashion, cultural context, customs and linguistic practices of an author⁴. The human capital term was adopted for the first time in the literature of the subject by Schultz and Becker. The reason for development of human capital was to solve the problem that the increase in national income cannot be explained only with the increase in the material capital and labor force. Other researchers carried on with that thought. According to Penrose [11], the resources are not so significant in themselves, it is rather important how an enterprise makes use of them. Ehrenberg and Smith⁵ present workers as specific units equipped with adequate skills that can be hired by employers

² I. Fierla, *Economic Geography of Poland (Geografia gospodarcza Polski)* (1998) 109-114.

³ K. Malik, *Human Capital Development Through Implementation Of Sustainable Development In Regional Dimension* (in:) *Human Capital in Regional Development (Rozwój kapitału ludzkiego przez realizację koncepcji sustainable development w wymiarze regionalnym w: Kapitał ludzki w rozwoju regionu)*, ed.K.Heffner, K.Malik (2005) 88-89.

⁴ H. Król, A. Ludwiczynski, *Human Resources Management. Developing Human Capital In An Organization (Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi. Tworzenie kapitału ludzkiego organizacji)* (2006) 116-118.

⁵ R.G. Ehrenberg, R.S. Smith, *Moder labor economics* (1997) 56.

for a certain charge. Baron and Armstrong⁶ are of the opinion that strategic human resources management leads to transformation of the human capital into valuable company's resources and that the human capital refers first of all to the employees that are talented and capable of making adequate decisions in critical moments. Fitz-Enz emphasizes⁷ that the human capital is the only kind of capital that can add value to itself and through itself. Other resources add nothing to their value until a person improves their value by employing them properly, thus all investments in the employees will certainly reach an appropriate return on investment. Whitaker [16] believes that the human capital management is related to what is done for the increase and productive use of those capabilities that provide an organization with long-term achievements. Barney [6], in relation to human capital, mentions so-called strategic resources, meaning the resources that are rare, hardly imitable and basic for the company's competitive advantage. According to Roos, Roos and Dragonetti [12], the human capital is posed by the bases, competence and mind fitness, and that an organization has no greater influence on correction on the employees' attitudes what is a sizable challenge for the human capital management system. Despite the differences in understanding of the human capital, majority of scholars agree that it is the most valuable capital - on each level of deliberations. However, this shows that the human capital management concept remains in its initial phase of development.

The state development depends on the young generation, so it is worth asking about the capital that today's youth has at their disposal. An aging population is a great challenge for economies of all European countries. On one hand, it suggests the need to keep the mature employees on the labor market for as long as possible, and on the other - to guarantee employment for young people. We can expect gradual extension of the professional activity time in subsequent years, and what is more important - next generations of Poles will enter the elderly phase with completely different experiences, possibilities and aspirations.⁸ Hence, the state's policy should not be limited to regulating the retirement system and raising the retirement age, but it should also strive for easier early entrance into the labor market for young persons, activate those professionally passive, develop the life-long learning system, allowing to correct the demand and supply of competence within the labor market and support the process of active aging of the citizens. As it has been already mentioned, there are significant differences among subsequent generations of Poles in terms of formal education. Currently, lower education of older generations is often their weak side. Higher level of education, especially among the young people, means a greater probability of a job and later retirement.

5. CONCLUSION

The transformation processes in the contemporary world, demographic changes, technological advancement, globalization of markets, development of information societies trigger changes related to an increase in education in a human life, as they constitute the factor

⁶ A. Baron, M. Armstrong, Human Capital Management (2008) 18-22.

⁷ J. Fitz-Enz, The ROI of human capital (2000) 9-10.

⁸ Youth Or Experience? Human Capital In Poland (Młodość czy doświadczenie? Kapitał ludzki w Polsce), ed.J. Górniak (2014) 74-86.

of socio-economic development. The purpose of the article was also to emphasize that various transformations of the educational system in Poland force the need to adjust the school programs to the transforming needs of the society, and to develop some methods that will make it easier for the young people to obtain professional experience when entering the labor market. This is the young generation and its capital that the future and development of the country depend on.

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