Riding the Wave.
Social Science Curriculum and Teaching in Higher Education in an Age of Crisis

Edited by Adrian Hatos

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Social Science Curriculum and Teaching in Higher Education
in an Age of Crisis

Adrian Hatos

editor

Scientific referees of the volume:

dr. Cecilia Sas, University of Oradea

dr. Cătălin Glava, Babeș-Bolyai University – Cluj

dr. Valentin Blândul, University of Oradea

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The Authors

Claudia Bacter (Ph.D. in Sociology), social worker and psychologist, is an Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology and Social Work of the University of Oradea. Her main areas of interest are in social protection of people with disabilities, social protection of family and child. She is author and co-author of various publications and papers in these fields. Between 2014-2015 she was part of the project SocioPlus "Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs", financed by EU through a grant from the Human Resource Development Operational Program (project ID: POSDRU/156/1.2/G/139751), as Social Work Program Director.

Evelina Cornelia Balaş (Ph.D., born 1978) is Assistant Professor at the Department of Educational Sciences, Psychology and Social Sciences of the "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad. She has been working during the last years in the area of psycho-pedagogy, interactive pedagogy and inclusive education, new paradigm in teacher training. Between 2014-2015 she was one of the curricula implementation experts, from the partner "Aurel Vlaicu" University, in the SocioPlus project "Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs", financed by EU through a grant from the Human Resource Development Operational Program (project ID: POSDRU/156/1.2/G/139751).

Sergiu Bălţătescu (Ph.D., born 1967) is Full Professor of sociology and head of Department of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Oradea, Romania. He is editor-in-chief of the Romanian Sociology, founding co-director of the Journal of Social Research & Policy) and vice-president of Romanian Sociological Association. He participated in numerous national and international projects, including SocioPlus "Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs". He has expertise in subjective well-being, quantitative analysis, sociology of culture, quality of life and sociology of transition.

Bottyán Zsolt (Ph.D., born 1971) is a Lecturer at the Department of Sociology and Social Work of the University of Oradea where he is presenting courses such as "Technics and Methods used in Social Sciences", "History of Sociology" and "Sociology of Globalization". Between 2014-2015 he was a researcher of the project SocioPlus "Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs", financed by EU through a grant from the Human Resource Development Operational Program (project ID:

POSDRU/156/1.2/G/139751). His area of expertise in the project concerned the comparative analysis of programs of Sociology from Romania and the European Union.

Bran Camelia Nadia (Ph.D. in Educational Sciences), University Lecturer, within the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Psychology and Social Work of University "Aurel Vlaicu" of Arad. In 2015 she acted as curricular expert within the project SocioPlus "Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs", financed by EU through a grant from the Human Resource Development Operational Program (project ID: POSDRU/156/1.2/G/139751).

Raluca Buhaș (Ph.D. in Sociology) is an Assistant Lecturer at the Department of Sociology and Social Work of the University of Oradea. Her main areas of interest are in sociology of family, methodology of social research and sociology of virtual spaces. Lately, she has also been involved in educational sociology research. Between 2014-2015 she was part of the project SocioPlus "Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs", financed by EU through a grant from the Human Resource Development Operational Program (project ID: POSDRU/156/1.2/G/139751), as Study and Analysis Expert.

Floare Chipea (Ph.D. in Sociology) is the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Oradea. Over the years she held various management positions, including the coordination of The Doctoral School of Sociology and the coordination of The Department of Sociology and Social Work. Also, she is a member of several professional associations and editorial boards for scientific journals. Her key areas of research are in sociology of family, sociology of deviant behaviors, general sociology and sociology of work. She is the author and co-author of over 40 books and articles. Between 2014-2015 she was part of the project SocioPlus "Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs", financed by EU through a grant from the Human Resource Development Operational Program (project ID: POSDRU/156/1.2/G/139751), as Scientific Coordinator.

Ionel Cioară (Ph.D., born September, 1965) is a Lecturer at the Department of Sociology and Social Work of the University of Oradea. He has been working during the last years in the areas of professional ethics and didactics of social sciences. Between 2006-2008 and 2010-2012 he was president of the Ethics Comission of the University of Oradea. He has developed University of Oradea Codes of Ethics and Romanian Sociological Society Codes of Ethics.

Alina Costin (Ph.D., born 1976) is an Associate Professor at "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, Department of Pedagogy, Psychology and Social Work. She teaches in the areas of direct practice, in case management in child protection, the social work system in Romania. She is passionate about child protection issue and she is involved in coordinating volunteer activities in social assistance. During the last year she participated as an expert researcher in the project Socioplus "Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs"

Carlton James Fitzgerald (Ph.D. in Education, born 1949) is a visiting Associate Professor of education at New England College (NEC) teaching in the online graduate program and hybrid doctoral program. He is the former associate dean of education for NEC. He is teaching leadership courses for teachers and administrators, curriculum design and instructional practices. He also teaches and Introduction of Sociology course for the undergraduate online program. Since 2013 he moved to Oradea, Romania, where he is a guest instructor for the Master program of the Department of Sciences of Education, Faculty of Social and Humanistic Sciences, University of Oradea. Prior to his full time work at the college and university level, Carlton was a school administrator for 24 years.

Simona Laurian-Fitzgerald (Ph.D., born 1974) is a Lecturer at the Department of Sciences of Education, Faculty of Social and Humanistic Sciences, University of Oradea (Romania). Her specialty is children's literature, education, and English. She teaches classes in literature, drama in the classroom, cooperative learning, practicum experiences, and the capstone research projects for graduating students at University of Oradea. She teaches each student to develop and implement curriculum, lesson plans and assessment strategies. She incorporates strategies that instill cooperative learning techniques into the repertoire of students. Simona taught a number of online classes for the NEC graduate program and is teaching in a weekend hybrid program at the University of Oradea.

Mihaela Gavrilă-Ardelean (Ph.D., born 1974) is Associate Professor at the Department of Pedagogy, Psychology and Social Work of the University Aurel Vlaicu of Arad, Social Work Academic Director at Master Programme of Social Work Services. She has been working during the last years in the area of Social Work Services. Between 2014-2015 she was Short Term Expert in the project SocioPlus "Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs", financed by EU through a grant from the Human Resource Development Operational Program (project ID: POSDRU/ 156/1.2/G/139751).

Adrian Hatos (Ph.D., Habil., born 1972) is Full Professor at the Department of Sociology and Social Work of the University of Oradea, head of the Doctoral School of Sociology. He has been working during the last years in the area of educational sociology. Between 2014-2015 he was manager of the project SocioPlus "Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs", financed by EU through a grant from the Human Resource Development Operational Program (project ID: POSDRU/156/1.2/G/139751). The present volume is a product of the project.

Roländ Hegedűs (born 1989) is Ph.D. student in the Doctoral Program on Educational Sciences, University of Debrecen (Hungary). He is a researcher of the Central for Higher Education Research and Development (CHERD). He graduated in 2014 as a Biology and Geography teacher. His areas of interest are territorial differences, disadvantaged students and catchment area of higher education institutions.

Gabriela Kelemen (Ph.D.) is Full Professor at the Faculty of Educational Science, Psychology and Social Work of "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, Romania, and Head of Department of Pedagogy, Psychology and Social Work. She has a Ph. D in Science Education, BA degree in Philology, Specialization: Didactic Theology-Romanian Language and Literature, MA – master's program organized by the Orthodox Theology Faculty, Specialization: Biblical Studies. MA-master's program graduate, Department for Teaching Staff Training – Specialization: Educational Management. Her domain of interest is gifted children, pedagogy of early education, psycho pedagogy of play, Romanian language education.

Albert-Lőrincz Enikő (Ph.D.), University Professor, and director of Doctoral School of Sociology of Sociology and Social Work Department, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. "Babeş-Bolyai" University, Education: Faculty of History – Philosophy, Psychology. Her field of research deals with the: Study of the social and school adaptation problems; The special characteristics of adolescents' affectivity with adaptation difficulties; Prevention and Health promotion; Group therapy. She was director or member of several research projects. He has published seven books, has edited one, and she is author of dozens scientific articles.

Albert-Lőrincz Márton (Ph.D.), university assistant professor, Departament of Applied Social Sciences, Faculty of Technical and Human Sciences, Sapientia University of Transylvania, Targu Mures, Romania. Scientific career: more than 70 individual or co-author studies, several book chapters, conference papers and four books published, editor for a book.

Cristiana Marc (Ph.D. in Sociology) is Lecturer at the Department of Sociology and Social Work of the University of Oradea, Bachelor in Social work and Law. Author and co-author of scientific papers on issues like social protection of child, burnout and supervision in social work, pension systems. She was a Research Expert in the project SocioPlus "Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs".

Șerban Olah (Ph.D., born 1972) is Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology and Social Work of the University of Oradea. He has been working during the last years in the area of economic sociology and sociology of organizations. Between 2004-2005, he was regional trainer within Curriculum Resource Center of the Central European University Budapest.

Carmen Alina Popa (Ph.D., born 1975) is a Reader at the Department of Sciences of Education, Faculty of Social and Humanistic Sciences, University of Oradea (Romania). Her specialty is Sciences of Education. She is organizing the courses and seminars in Theory and Methodology of Instruction, Pedagogy of Pre-School Education, Cooperative Learning, Theory and Methodology of Curriculum, coordinating the practicum classes for the entire department, guiding the research projects for undergraduates. She acquired a grant research entitled A Cross-Cultural Study of Implementing the Cooperative Learning Model in Primary Schools in Finland and Romania from Finland, University of Helsinki, Department of Psychology, Center for Research on Networked Learning and Knowledge Building (2004). Since 2010 she is the educational coordinator of the weekend hybrid program of the Faculty of Social and Humanistic Sciences.

Alina Felicia Roman (Ph.D., born 1971) is Full Professor at the Department of Pedagogy, Psychology and Social Work, Dean of the Faculty of Education Sciences, Psychology and Social Work within "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad. She has been working during the last years in the area of education sciences: academic teaching and learning strategies, development of assessment and self-assessment competences, development of competences for teaching career, development of academic curriculum. Between 2014-2015 she was programme manager of the project SocioPlus "Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs", financed by EU through a grant from the Human Resource Development Operational Program (project ID: POSDRU/156/ 1.2/G/139751).

Sorana Săveanu (Ph.D.) is a Researcher at the Studies on Social Transformations Research Center from University of Oradea, Department of Sociology and Social Work. She is involved in sociological research since 2003. She is specialized in

social research methodology and applied research and has a strong background in social surveys and statistical analysis. Her field of expertize covers the Sociology of Education. Her Ph.D. thesis was framed within the subject on school achievements from the status attainment process point of view.

Florica Ştefănescu (Ph.D., Habil., born 1956) is Full Professor at the Department of Sociology and Social Work of the University of Oradea, coordinator of the Master Degree Program in Human Resources Management. She has been working during the last years in the area of economic sciences. She was a member of projects such as: SocioPlus "Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs", financed by EU through a grant from the Human Resource Development Operational Program (project ID: POSDRU/156/1.2/G/139751); Practipass, Practice program for students "Child protection – from theory to practice" financed by EU through a grant from the Human Resource Development Operational Program (project ID: POSDRU /90/2.1/ S/61957).

Riding the Wave:
Social Science Curriculum and Teaching in Higher Education in an Age of Crisis.

A Foreword

ADRIAN HATOS[1]
University of Oradea (Romania)

While many of the current higher education specialists assess that the most significant event in higher education on the long run is expansion (Pusztai, 2015), one has to be sure that in some parts of Eastern Europe, and in Romania certainly, in recent years, tertiary education was affected by expansion followed by contraction (Kwiek, 2013). The quick decrease in enrollment numbers which came after a correspondingly rapid rise in access produced many perverse effects on the functioning and also on the legitimacy of universities to fulfill their official roles. The disenchantment of aspirations of social ascension that came after the saturation of the demand for certain university diplomas – most of them in social sciences as will be quickly clear – had the ironic upshot of forcing stakeholders in the field to become more reflective about the expected results of university education. In simple terms, demand has become more careful about labor market outcomes: employers are increasingly critical about the capacity of Romanian universities to deliver specialists endowed with the knowledge and competencies required by their jobs while eventual students spend more time analyzing the career prospects of each field of study. As a consequence, demand for some fields of study has fallen, even forcing some of them to close. This development is pressing academic managers to consider radical changes in the structure of educational supply and/or in the everyday conducts in universities including the ways of teaching and extra-curricular interactions on campus.

Therefore we have been responding to the described pressure among other things by attempting and evaluating curricular and methodical solutions to improve student engagement and satisfaction whereas adjusting the content to the requests obtained from the world of employment in the fields of Sociology and Social Work at the License (Bachelor) and Master's degrees from Universities of Oradea and Arad[2]. In

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the process we have felt increasingly the necessity to share some of the experiences and reflections that entailed from the project as well as to invite colleagues in similar or close situations to do as well. My introduction will start by framing in the next pages the articles included in the volume by highlighting the changes that occurred in the landscape of Romanian higher education and especially the crisis of social sciences and will give a brief overview of the way in which each contribution attempted to answer the topic of adjusting teaching in the areas of Sociology and Social Work to the needs of students and of employers.

The saturation of demand for social sciences degrees in Romanian higher education

Generally speaking, the tertiary sector has been witnessing in the last five years a contraction in the number of students of a degree rarely seen in the recent educational history. It comes after an unprecedented expansion that occurred between 2004-2009, during which the enrollment rates multiplied radically, and by a much larger factor than in any other country in the developed world. Although higher education expansion was a common phenomenon in most of the countries of the region the sheer size of increase in enrollments numbers, as well as the corresponding decrease that followed highlight the exceptional character of the Romanian situation.
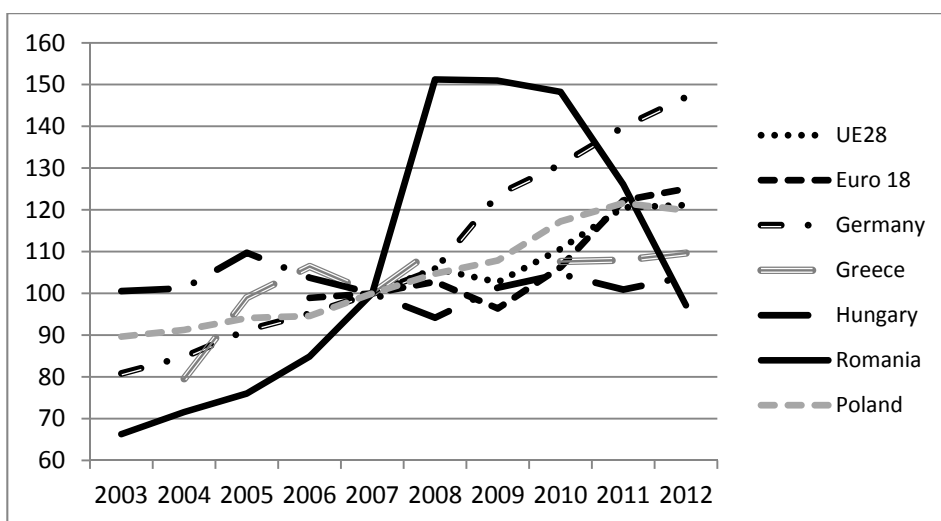
Figure 1. *Evolution of tertiary enrollment in EU,*
Euro area and selected EU countries (2007=100).
Data: Eurostat

Between 2009-2012 the Romanian Higher Education lost 397,560 students which is almost one third of the tertiary students counted at the beginning of the interval, a change of cataclysmic size if we compare to the decreases recorded in other countries like Poland or Bulgaria.

Several factors can be named to have caused these abrupt changes in enrollment figures. In Romania specifically the later evolution of enrollment is correlated with demographic background: the sudden increase and subsequent fall in numbers of tertiary education students overlaps slightly with the entrance and the exit of a larger generation of corresponding age (Figure 2). A look at the figure shows that demographics alone cannot, however, explain the entire jump in numbers: between 2005-2010 the numbers of new entrants into higher education was larger than that of high school graduates, almost double in 2009 actually. We can assume that great portions of the new entrants were made up of older high school graduates, that is they became mostly non-traditional students. The rush for higher education cannot be fully understood unless the available supply provided by both public universities and by the then flourishing private universities is also taken into account. As elsewhere in the region, the expansion in higher education was accompanied by its privatization (Kwiek, 2015) followed by de-privatization as the enrollments shrunk. On the opposite side of the slope, the economic crisis that began in 2009 can be easily invoked as a trigger of the decline. The contraction of the labor market, especially in the public sector, could have prompted a lowered interest for tertiary education.
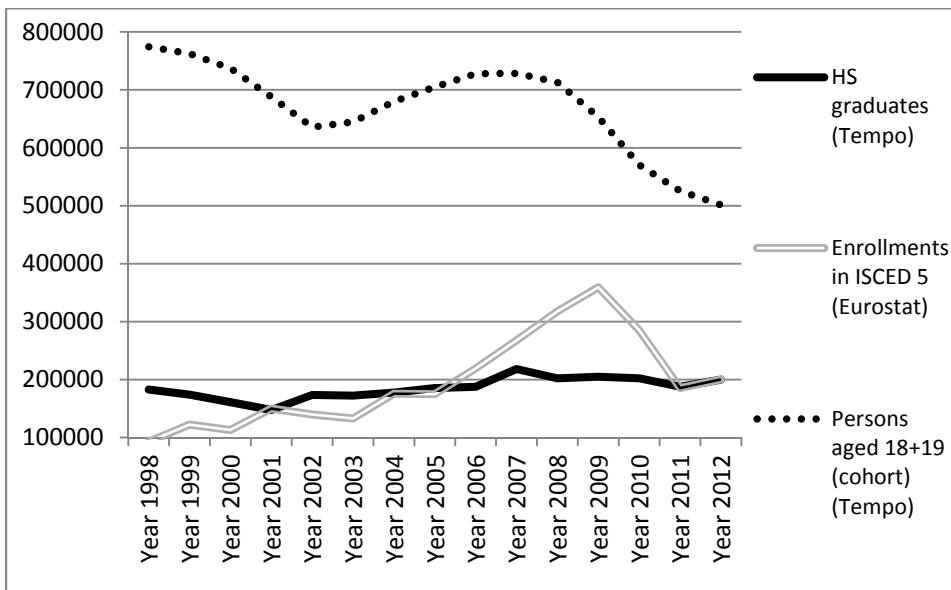
Figure 2. *High school graduates,*
new enrollments in ISCED 5 programs and persons aged 18-19.
Data from Eurostat and National Institute of Statistics Romania.

The causes for expansion and contraction become more fully available if we notice that many of the changes in the enrollment figures affected significantly only a limited number of domains/fields of study: losses from business and administration, social and behavioral sciences and law account for more than 80% of the entire decline recorded between 2009-2012 (Figure 3).

It is suffice to say that while for social sciences, as well as for law or business, the demand has been fading, the reverse is true in the case for health sciences or for information technology.
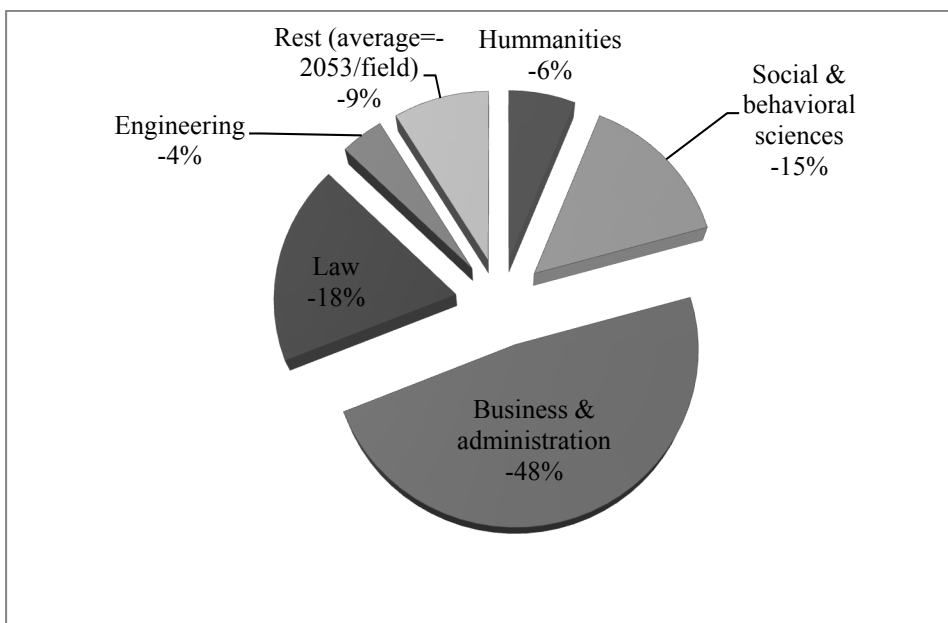
Figure 3. *Balance 2012-2009: losses in number of students*
by fields of study in Romanian tertiary HE (ISCED5&6).
Data: Eurostat.

Lowering of appeal of fields of study in the area of social sciences can be highlighted in a convincing way not only via describing the enrollment figures but also considering the evolution of selectivity measured via the minimum GPA of the admitted candidates. For this objective we have collected data on the minimum admission GPA of freshmen in various fields of study in several public universities in Romania during the last 7 years. Figures 4-5 show a clear downward tendency in the case of Sociology and Social Work with the decline being the steepest from 2010 to 2011 and a stabilization of selectivity thus measured at the lowest end of the interval.
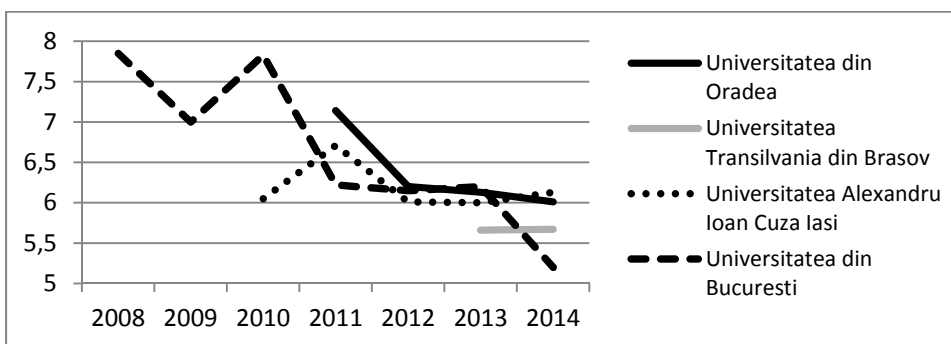
Figure 4. *Minimum GPA for admission for fee paying students in Social Work*
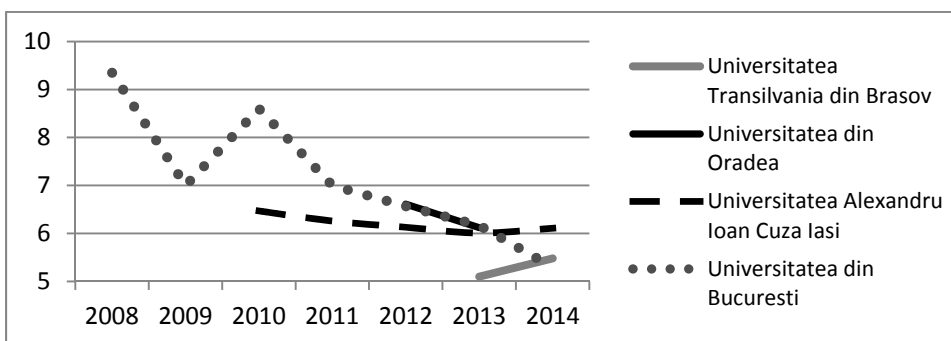
Figure 5. *Minimum GPA for fee paying admission to Sociology*

For contrast, entering medical school has become more difficult during the last two admissions of 2013 and 2014 (Figure 6).
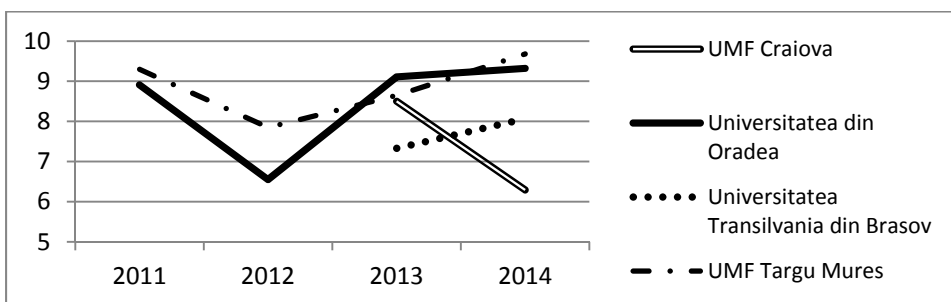
Figure 6. *Minimum GPA for admission for fee paying students in Medicine*

The conclusion of the above figures is that social sciences departments in Romania are facing increasing difficulties in finding students for their programs. Because the admission standards are lowered quality teaching is under significant

challenge and the outcomes – student retention or graduate employability – are more often unsatisfactory and request urgent action.

Without entering in depth into the sociological specifics it is obvious that the recent expansion/contraction cycle in Romanian higher education was a by-product of shifts of generosity and austerity in hiring in public offices on the one hand and of demand and subsequent saturation for high status domains which can best understood using the theories of maximally maintained inequality (Raftery & Hout, 1993) and effectively maintained inequality (Lucas, 2001). The decline in demand for social science degrees is the outcome, on the other hand, of moves in the structure of the labor market which has followed changes in the structure of the economy entailing the adjustments made in response to the economic crisis. Besides the obvious closure of employment in the public sector, one can mention the externalization of many public services to more outcome-oriented private suppliers and an increase in efficiency claims on behalf of the private demand for the services and expertise that the social science experts like sociologists and social workers usually provide.

The SocioPLus project

In the new cash poor economic reality when every employer is considering carefully the competitive edge brought by each employment candidate the labor market relevance of the contents covered by the university curricula has increased. The pressure is even more understandable in Romania where universities are client oriented (Shavit, Arum, Gamoran, & Menachem, 2007), relying heavily on public funds provided on a per capita basis or on tuitions paid by students. In order to regain or preserve trust, Universities have to signal to their partners in the area of employment and that of funding that efforts are being made to permanently tune fields of study and contents to the changing requirements of labor. Fortunately or not, the Humboldtian narrative of universities has lost most of its relevance being replaced by that of entrepreneurial or vocational institution of education and training.

This was the context, and has been ever since, in which we have started, in May 2014, the project *SocioPlus – "Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs"*, financed by EU through a grant from the Human Resource Development Operational Program (project ID: POSDRU/156/1.2/G/139751). Among the activities more relevant for the project's objectives were the analysis of 5 social sciences study programs and the adjustment of their curricula to the requirements of the labor market. These programs had been Sociology and Social Work, at the BA level, and Human Resources Management, Social Service Management, and Social Work Services at the MA level from the University of Oradea and 'Aurel Vlaicu' University in Arad. At a **first stage** of the project our team has made a diagnostic of the contents of the five programs using various techniques appropriate in curriculum research:

tracer survey with graduates, survey with employers, content analysis of curriculum, comparing the expected teaching outcomes (knowledge and competencies) of our 5 programs with hundreds of similar programs across Romania and Europe. All of these curriculum research activities produces recommendations concerning the topics, the approach, or the readings to be used in improved contents. Nine of the disciplines taught in the 5 programs had been consequently adjusted on the bases of the evidence-based recommendations and taught to our students **in the second stage** of the testing of adjusted curriculum. At the end of this process we tested the satisfaction and the engagement of the students that were delivered the improved content using new instruments developed within the project. The delivery of the improved contents took two months during the second semester of academic year 2014-2015 and included more than 200 BA and MA students.

The aim of the present volume

Most of the results of the curriculum research were already made public in public conferences in Oradea and Bucharest and in a volume published in Romanian (Hatos, 2014). That volume has described in detail the methodology and the results of the curriculum research we did during the first half of the project to establish the foundations of the adjustment of the programs included in the project.

While that volume, written as a result of the project, was rather technical and constrained by the contingencies of our project, we felt that it has to be completed with some writings covering a larger area and more topics. This is how the present volume took shape along the organization of the International Conference 'Social Science Curriculum and Teaching in Higher Education in an Age of Crisis' which was held in Oradea in November 2015.

'Riding the wave: Social Science Curriculum and Teaching in Higher Education in an Age of Crisis' brings together contributions from both members of our project and colleagues who joined only in this endeavor of publishing an edited book, from our universities and others, from Romania and Hungary, experts in various areas – educationalists, sociologists, and social workers. The most significant and valuable result, I hope, is the diversity of the topics and approaches of the content and the means and outcomes of the teaching in areas we label social sciences usually.

Regarding the tracing of the professional career of social sciences graduates we received valuable input in the article of Roländ Hegedűs (University of Debrecen) who discusses in great detail, using the data of the 2013 Hungarian Graduate Tracking System (HGTS) survey, the processes of transition from school to work and the mobility of graduates and their experiences in the labor market. Aside the general conclusion that social science graduates are in a bad position on the Hungarian labor market I can but emphasize the value of the analyses in the article as well as that of the entire HGTS survey. Both are worthy of being translated in other countries which are contemplating means to monitor the careers of graduates. This is not,

though, the only article that focuses on the careers of social sciences graduates. Sources of professional contentment among social workers drive the attention of the article authored by Enikő Albert-Lőrincz (Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj) and Albert-Lőrincz Mártin (Sapientia University – Târgu-Mureş). Relying on the data of a survey with a large sample of Social Work graduates from Cluj-Napoca (Romania) and Eger (Hungary) they conclude that helper's professional satisfaction is hindered by low social prestige of the profession, low wages, improper allocation of resources in the system and poor practical training.

Most of the articles in the volume rely directly on the outputs of the SocioPLus volum. Florica Ştefănescu and Sorana Săveanu underline in their article (*Occupational standards and skills. Case study for Human Resources Management Program*) the recommendations that entail from the comparison of the curriculum of University of Oradea's MA program in Human Resource Management with similar European study program. The authors conclude that an appropriate approach to the elaboration of curriculum should start from the analysis of the occupational standards of the concerned profession, in this case Human Resources Manager.

Other participants in the project refer to actual improvements in pedagogy and teaching methods that had been implemented while adjusting their own programs. Thus Alina Roman and Evelina Balaş highlight the uses and benefits of interactive pedagogy while providing several examples of exercises put in practice during seminars aiming to improve the communication skills of future social workers.

Some of the authors that have taught improved disciplines within the project relied in their articles on their own experiences. Mihaela Gavrilă, in her article "*Improving the Curriculum for a Social Services Masters' Degree Program*", delivers the results of the evaluation of piloting of the adjusted course content. Camelia-Nadia Bran, from the 'Aurel Vlaicu' University in Arad, describes also the results of evaluation of engagement and satisfaction of students in Social Work who were involved in the delivery of improved contents within the project. A related topic is approached in the paper by Serban Olah who describes the theoretical and practical rationale of teaching Sociology in higher education, on the one hand, and the outcomes of evaluation delivery of his own adjusted course in Economic Sociology. With a larger focus but a similar topic, the article authored by Sorana Săveanu and Raluca Buhaş presents the results of the evaluation of the adjusted curriculum on all the 210 students involved in the SocioPlus project. Complementary to their article is the one authored by Sergiu Bălţătescu, Floare Chipea, Claudia Bacter, Zsolt Bottyán and Cristiana Marc describing the methodological issues involved in developing reliable and valid instruments for monitoring and evaluating of study programs.

While most of our contributors that took part in the SocioPlus project, we have very valuable input from outside the project inspired also by the efforts of overcoming the challenges of teaching in university. Simona Laurian-Fitzgerald, Carmen Popa and Carlton Fitzgerald build on their experiences with non-traditional students in

Oradea and New England (USA) from whom the conventional expectations are lower than from the other students. They conclude that by adjusting teaching practice to the students' teaching and emotional needs educators in universities can bring non-traditional students to reach the same levels of learning results as obtained from traditional students. Close to this topic is the article by Gabriela Kelemen and Alina Costin who evaluate ways to increase student engagement during seminar and conclude that motivation and involvement on behalf of students can be boosted by using 'dynamic, modern, interactive' methods by a teacher interested in the needs of the group of learners.

Concerned also with the issues of quality teaching in social sciences programs several articles in this volume are more general in topics they are addressing. Cristiana Marc and Claudia Bacter sum up in a resourceful literature review several important reference points concerning teaching in undergraduate Social Work programs. Ethical aspects in the practice and teaching of sociology are discussed by Ionel Cioara in his article that pleads for the institutionalization of ethics in sociology as a means, among others, to its professionalization.

Our book is a mere teaser of the enormous tasks that lie ahead of Central and Eastern European universities and their social science programs in the near future. We are hoping that our readers will find in the articles of the present volume at least some inspiration in their reflections on what the aims, contents and methods of teaching Sociology, Human Resources or Social Work in the tertiary education are and should be in order to ride the wave of impressive changes universities and societies are going through.

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The Situation of Social Science Graduates in Hungary

ROLÁND HEGEDŰS[1]
University of Debrecen (Hungary)

Abstract

Our aim is getting information about situation of social science graduates on the labor market in Hungary. We analyzed several aspects of the HGTS of 2013 (Hungarian Graduate Tracking System) with SPSS program. We draw maps from data with MapInfo program. We used only full-time graduates' data because part-time graduates have rather more work experience (than university experience). We concentrated on finding a job, the mobility of graduates and their experience in the labor market. Firstly we showed some information about the '14-year-old residency' and that in which higher education institutions these students have studied. Where did these students find a job after graduation? We would like to do a comparative research, so we gave information about other fields of science. Social science graduates find a job with great difficulty (4,5 months). Only 62 % of these graduates find a job related to their degree, and 45% of them cannot utilize the knowledge gained in higher education. Compared to other fields of science, this result is under the average. A high proportion, 50% of social science graduates are unemployed in general, and 12% of the subjects interviewed are unemployed today. In conclusion, we can say that social science graduates have a lower position on the labor market. A solution can be refining the curricula with a special focus on labor market needs.

Keywords: *Labor Market; Social Science, Mobility; Hungary; Catchment Area of Higher Education Institutions.*

Introduction

In this study we would like give some information about social science graduates regarding some features of their experience on labor market based on the Hungarian Graduate Tracking System of 2013 (HGTS). Firstly, we provide a profile of the social science training in Hungary (where the institutions are located, number of student etc.). Secondly, we examine where the graduates after graduation move and where they find a job, why they delayed their graduation and what the situation is with their current job. This might have a relationship with education or not. We focused only on the full-time graduates because we believe that part-time graduates have a job and more experience on the labor market. We would like to do a comparative research, so we will give information about other fields of science.

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[1] E-mail: hegedusroland1989@gmail.com

Literature review

This study tries to give a wide range of information on social science, so we need to examine three aspects. First, is the mobility of student, second is the mobility of graduates and finally, the experience of graduates on the labor market.

In the following paragraphs, I will review some studies about the mobility of students and higher education institution's choice. Higher education institutions network is very much unbalanced in Hungary because a lot of institutions are located in the capital, Budapest (Rechnitzer, 2009). It is the reason why around 50 percent of students are studying in the capital (Hegedűs, 2015). Based on the catchment area literature and research results, it is claimed that only the capital institutions have national catchment area and a few institutions have regional catchment area in the countryside (Teperics & Dorogi, 2014). In Hungary, these analyses focus rather on the mobility of students of bigger institutions in smaller areas. For example, the catchment area of University of Pécs is in the Southern Transdanubia. It has effects only on its own region and little on neighboring regions. University of Pécs lost 10.000 students in the last 5-10 years. Császár & Wusching in their study (2014) helped to identify the places that are not covered by the institution's catchment area. Another study examines higher education institutions in Western Transdanubia. This study has similar results with the results related to the University of Pécs, namelythe catchment area of both institutions extends only to their own region (Rechnitzer & Smahó, 2007). We find similar results in the international literature, for example, students of higher education institutions of Stuttgart come from their own province (Haussmann, 2008) and the situation is similar in Switzerland where students come from canton to university. However, Switzerland is a special case because there are four official languages (Kanton Zürich in Zahlen, 2002). On what basis do students choose higher education institutions? Financial situation of students and the availability of the training preferred influence student's choice. Furthermore, students do not want to leave the local socio-cultural environment (Denzler & Wolter, 2010). Other research reveals similar results in Scottish higher education. According to Hazel (2007) the local culture is important for Scottish students so they rarely choose higher education institution out of Scotland. In Hungary students travel longer distances to rarer training so they have not a chance to study in nearby institution (Forray & Híves, 2005).

In Netherlands, researchers examined how long employees travel per day. They found a difference between the northern and western regions. The employees who live in the northern region travel more kilometers than the employees of the western region. Other difference was found between graduates and workmen because graduates travel more (40 km) than workmen (13 km). The authors say about graduates that they are spatially more flexible (Hensen et al., 2009). In Sweden, the government tries to decentralize higher education because a lot of students do not go back to their families, their home town but they settle down closer to the university. As a result, countryside

loses graduates as they are clustered in the central region (Stockholm, Göteborg, Malmö). Students studying in older universities are more mobile than students of new universities (Chudnovskaya & Kolk, 2014). It was a spillover-effect, which means that there are some students who come from a different place. Their studies and graduation are supported by their parents and surroundings financially. However, these students do not go back to their own town/region after graduation. It means that this region loses knowledge and investment (Varga, 1998). A large portion of the students of big countryside universities (University of Pécs, University of Szeged and University of Debrecen) take a job in the capital, whereas, a lower proportion of them take a job in the town of the university or the university region. If we consider the higher education institutions in the capital, we found that the most students take a job in the capital and capital agglomeration, and very few students go to the countryside (Hegedűs, 2014).

Educatio Nonprofit Kft prepared the HGST research, so they published several studies on this topic (Garai & Veroszta, 2012; Veroszta, 2013; Veroszta, 2014). These authors analyzed the complete database, while I have examined only the full-time students (graduates)' database. There are other examples of researches about young graduates on the labor market in the millennium since 82 percent of young graduates had a workplace. Arts training, medical science, and technical science are considered the best positions, but graduates of social science have an above average employment rate. Social science is on the second place from all disciplines on the unemployed rate (3.3%) (Galasi, 2002). Szilvia Vincze (2012) focuses on a similar research. She states that in Hungary migration is typical from east to west, with the exception of the central region and the capital city. The new research highlights that social science graduates chose other disciplines because they got a better salary with 10 percent (Varga, 2010). In another research, a researcher asked the young graduates how much their job was related to their higher-education studies The results showed that in medical science and arts training that relation is stronger (4.6-4.7 average on five-pont Likert-scale). Furthermore, agricultural science is in the worst position with 3.5 point average. There are big differences regarding the salary of different disciplines and the level of training because university graduates have bigger salary than college graduates. Social science is a tail-ender (Galasi et. al., 2001).

Introduction database and using methods

In this analysis, we used two databases. First is the admission database of 2013, the other is HGTS of 2013 (Hungarian Graduate Tracking System). We used only full-time students' data from both databases. In the admission database, those are 49 higher education institutions and 109,722 accepted students. We selected only the social science students from the database. So we got the result that 3,788 social science students were accepted in 30 higher education institutions, but this result contains higher vocational education that we dropped out because they are not in

HGTS. Finally, we analyzed 3,190 students in 26 higher education institutions. Using this data, we created a profile of the students based on where the social science trainings are offered in the country and how many students were admitted in these institutions in 2013. We drew a map using this data with the MapInfo program.

In HGTS, there are 24,271 replies of graduates from 32 higher education institutions, from which 15,731 are full-time graduates. These students finished higher education in 2008 or 2010 or 2012. If we select only the full-time social science training graduates, there are 1,111 replies from 25 institutions. First, I drew maps from where the students lived when they were 14 years old and where they were working at the moment of this study. Then I analyzed their achievement in higher education, the causes of the delay in their studies, whether they had a job during university, how long they searched for job and whether they can use their degree in their work. I would like to give information mainly about social science, but I consider important that the readers get some information about other fields of science, so that the data can be compared with each other.

Results of the study

Regional distribution of full-time social science in Hungary

In this section, I would like to give some information about the social science training. Figure 1presents where the social science training is available in Hungary and which higher education intuitions offer them. I only presented the full-time BA and MA training because these trainings give a degree, so it is comparable to HGTS database. The circles on the maps show how many students applied to a single location and in which higher education institutions they were admitted. It is clear that a lot of students applied to the capital city: 2,202 out of 3,190 students. Only less than 1/3 of the students study in the countryside.

In two parts of Hungary there is no social science training. These are the West/South-West (including Zala, Vas County) and more parts of the Great Plain (Bács-Kiskun, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County). The social science is distributed unequally in the county. In the countryside, there are only three universities outstanding: University of Debrecen (UD), University of Szeged (USZ) and University of Pécs (UP). UD[2] is in a special situation because it is located on three towns. In Győr, there are two universities, the University of West Hungary and the Széchenyi István University providing social science training. Close to the capital can be found the International Business School (IBS) and Pázmány Péter Catholic University (PPCU).

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[2] In Figure 1, I do not indicate Debrecen Reformed Theological University. Only 5 students applied in Debrecen. Other higher education institution that I do not indicate is Veszprém College of Theological where 8 students applied.
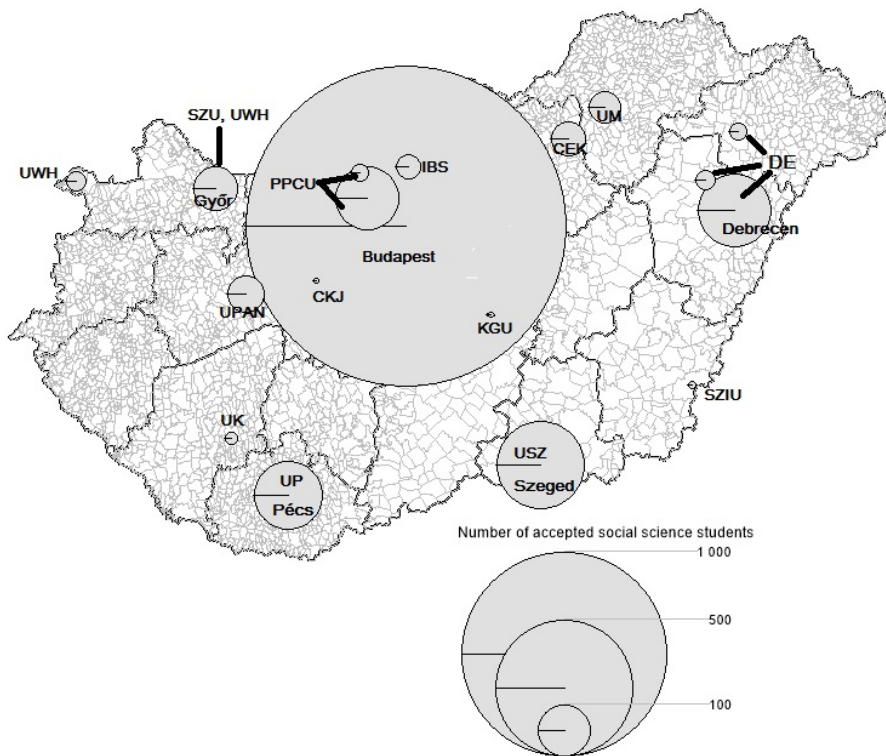
Figure 1: *Full-time training of social science*
with starting institutions and number of applied student (N=3190)
Source: admission database (2013)

You can see on the images of Figure 1 that the capital is in a special situation because there are more higher education institutions there. There are 14 higher education institutions that I do not indicate in the figure because it would distort the result. I rather present all the students who applied. These institutions are very different in number of students because, for example, Eötvös Loránd University has 900 students and Corvinus University of Budapest has 657 students and there are 9 institutions where we have less than 100 students.

Social science graduates mobility

In the following section, I analyze the mobility of students and graduates based on HGTS. In the previous part it can be seen that a lot of higher education institutions have social science training, so I needed to select them. I only examined institutions with more than 40 questionnaires answered by graduates. As a result of the selection, I got seven institutions. Figure 1 shows the towns from which social science students come.
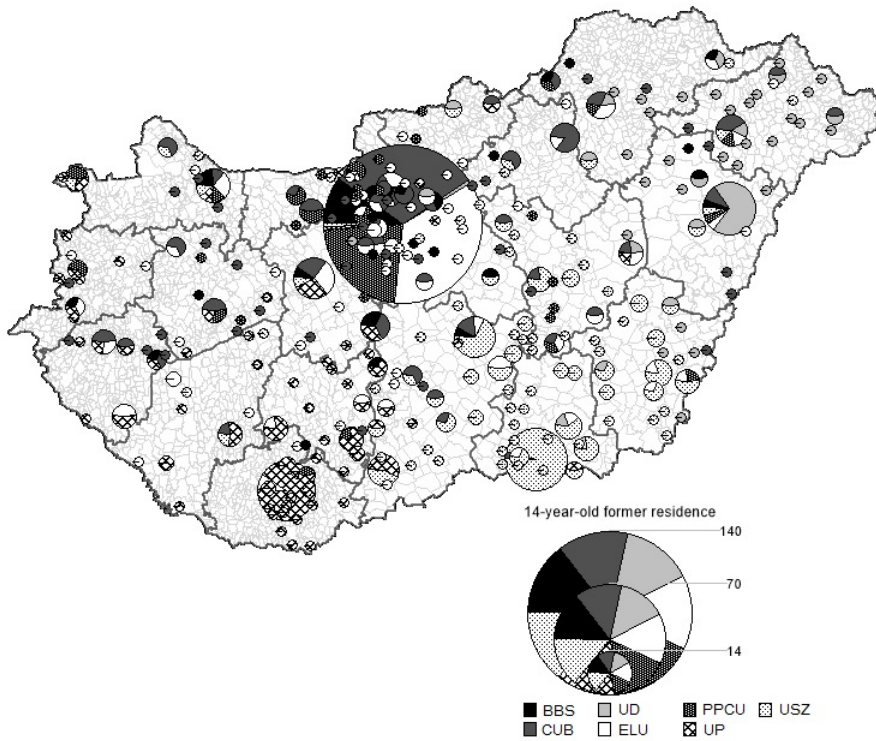
Figure 2: *14-year-old former residence of applied student*
and catchment area of higher education institution (N=698)
Source: HGST (2013)

Analyzing the catchment area of higher education, I found that the Corvinus University of Budapest (CUB) has a great effect on the countryside because more students come from Northern Hungary region and the north of Lake Balaton. Other institution of the capital having effect on the countryside is Eötvös Loránd University (ELU), but the effect of ELU is lower than the effect of the CUB. Universities of the countryside are dominant in their own town and own region. University of Szeged (USZ) has the biggest effect because it crosses the line of the region and it has more students from Northern Hungary but there are more students coming from Transdanubia. It is a tendency that more students come from little towns and little villages.

In Figure 3, the places where graduates took a job are presented. I first selected the higher education institution. The limit was 30 graduates per institution, so I got seven institutions similar to the previous section. The graduates are attracted to the capital, bigger towns and county seats.
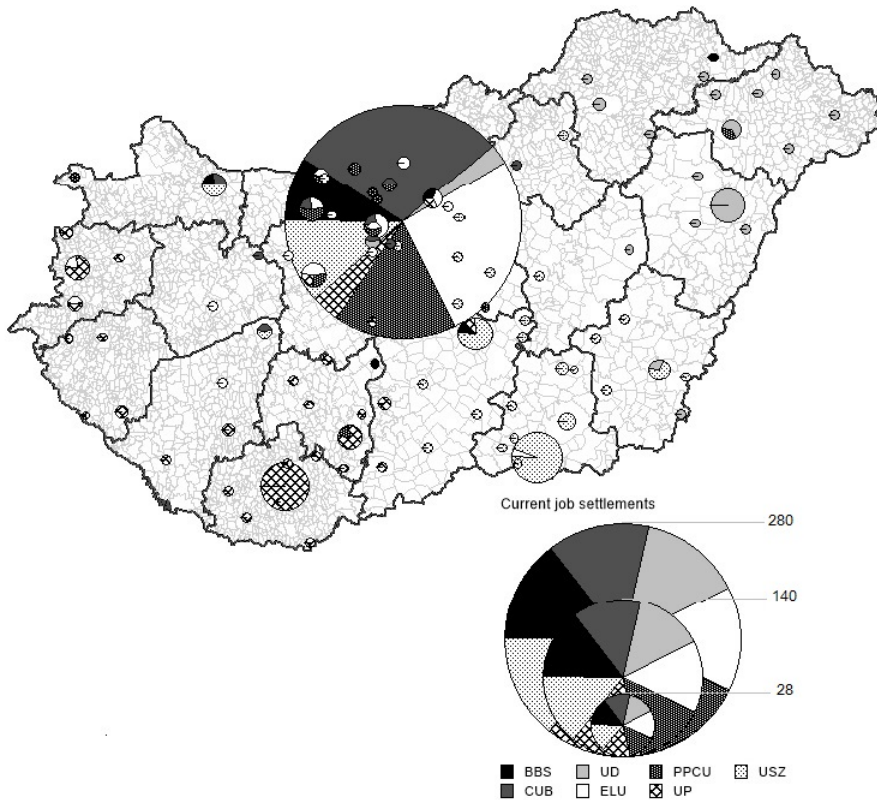
Figure 3: *Graduates of current job settlements*
and higher education institutions (N=464)
Source: HGST (2013)

Figure 3 depicts that all universities on countryside supply their own region. It is an interesting thing because of the distance. In Győr there is a very big number of Szeged graduates. Students who come from countryside to capital do not go back to take a job. So those countryside areas lost labor. We have seen on Figure 2 that the catchment area of CUB extends on the countryside but after graduation we cannot detected any domination of this university. The data shows that students who graduated from countryside universities increase the proportion in capital. I conclude from this that the capital is the most attractive for graduated.

Social science graduated in the labor market

In this section, I analyze the experiences graduates have on the labor market. First of all, I would like to start with some information about students' academic achievement at the end of their higher education. It is important because based on

their results we can check whether their academic performance influences their position on the labor market or if there is any other influencing factor.

In the HGST database, there is information on the results of full-time graduates of the higher education institutions. This is shown in Figure 4. In Hungary, there is five-point scale for grading, one means the worst grade and five means the best grade.
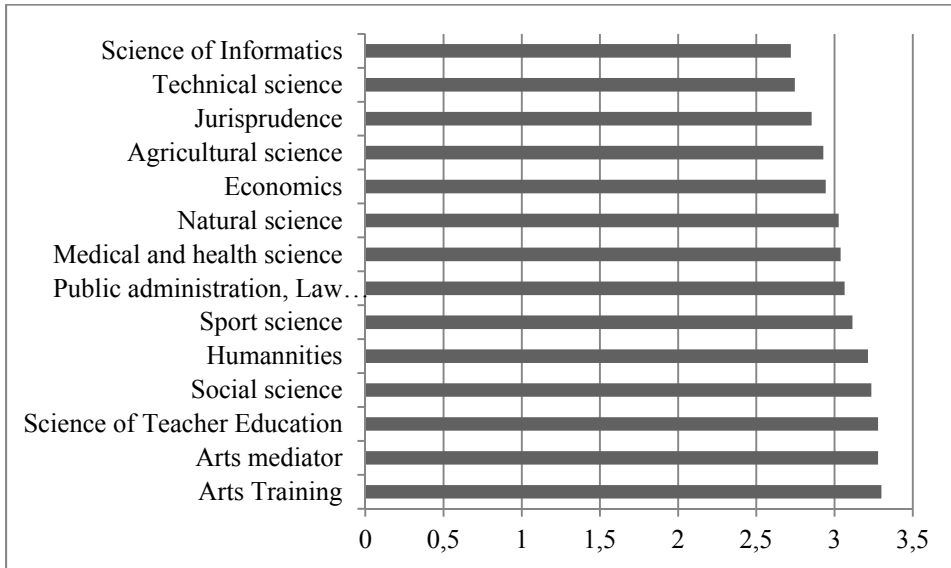
Figure 4: *Academic achievement of full-time student in different disciplines (N=14974)*
Source: HGST (2013)

Figure 4 shows that social science students have one of the best results (3.24). The best is arts training (3.3) but there is not a big difference between arts and social science. Students of technical science (2.75) and students of informatics (2.72) have the worst results.

Another important thing presented is the efficiency of students who delayed their graduation. This result is depicted in Figure 5, more specifically, it shows the percentage of students who finished the university in time. It is important because maybe there is a relationship between these results and efficiency on the labor market.

Data shows that students of medical science finished the training in time as opposed to arts mediator and arts training students. I found that social science students were below the average. Figure 5 is a little different than Figure 4 in the sense that students who take longer to graduate have better achievements.

I also got the data about the reason of the delay. We have 4,125 answers from all sciences 2,929 students (72%) choose not to have a language exam, and only 28 percent choose other reasons. Figure 6 represents the differences between each discipline.
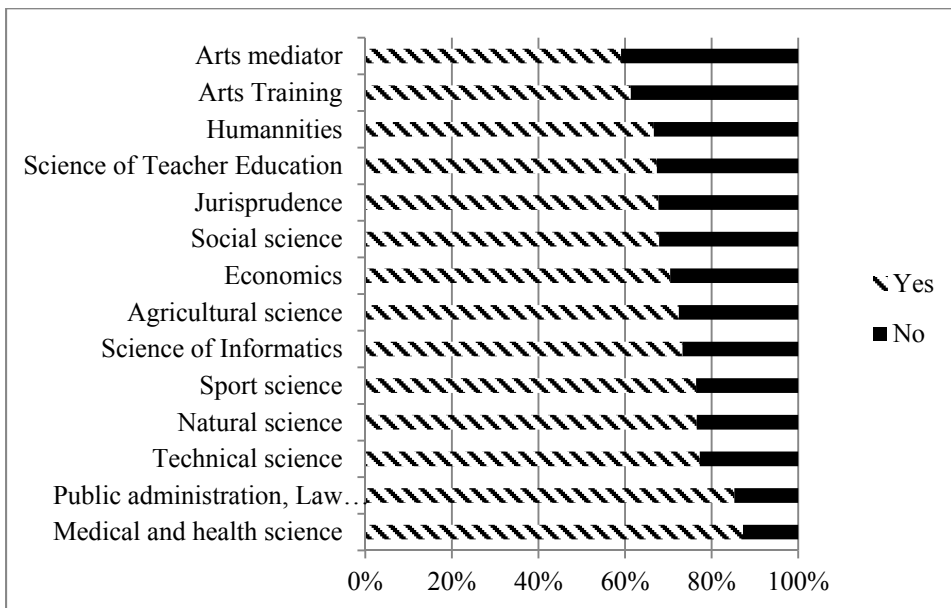
Figure 5: *How many students were late with graduating (N=15021)*
Source: HGST (2013)
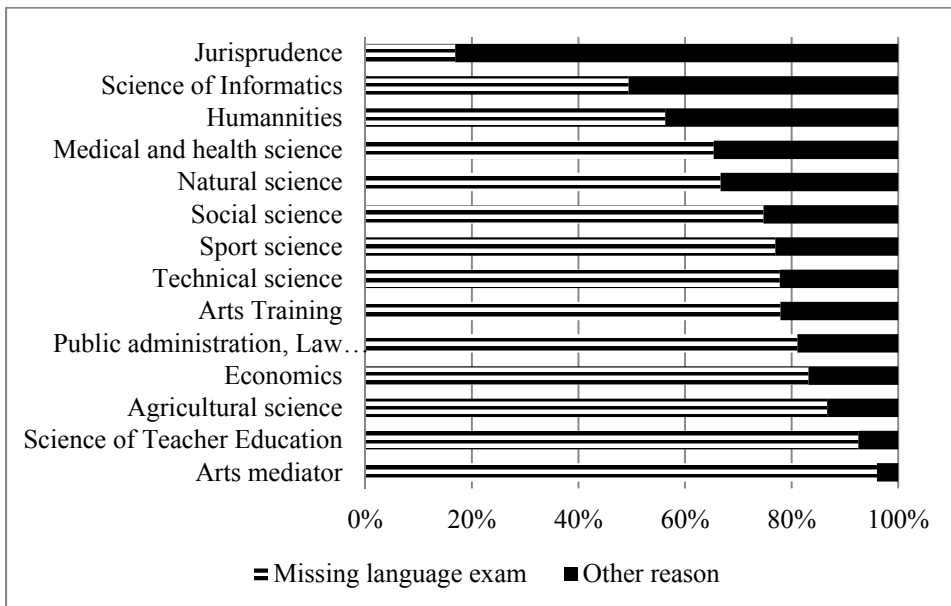
Figure 6: *What was reason of delay?(N=4125)*
Source: HGST (2013)

In case of most disciplines, the reason for delay was the lack of having a language exam. Arts mediator, science of teacher education and agricultural science have the highest proportion in terms of language exam problem. Student of jurisprudence and informatics choose other reasons only to a lesser extent. Social science stands in the middle with 74.7 percent.

Turning to the world of work, the survey asked this question: Did students work during their universities studies? Merely 19 percent of students said they worked, which means 2,792 persons. This rate is very low.
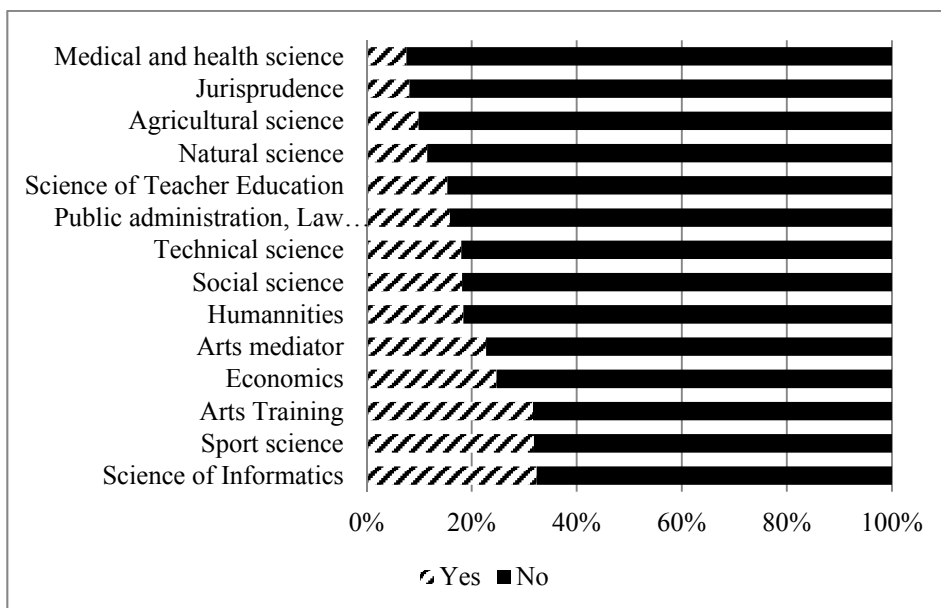
Figure 7: *Working during higher education (=14694)*
Source: HGST (2013)

According to the database students of three disciplines worked during universities studies, they studied arts training, informatics and sport science. These disciplines support working. For example competitive athletes can compete so they get money or artists can do work of art so they can work in their field. This is not the case for teachers, lawyers etc. More than 90 percent of students of working arts training and informatics said they work in connection with their studies. Students of agricultural science, jurisprudence, natural science and teacher training are the least developed. We find again that social science is in the middle with 18.2 percent. From 1,067 social science students only 194 persons worked.

The next step was to move to the experience with world of work. The first important question is how fast graduates find a job. There are three alternatives (immediately, after research and not found). We can see very big differences between disciplines. Three disciplines, arts mediator, sport science and social science students, did not

find a job immediately. Furthermore, after searching only the latter were in a better position. Technical science, teacher education, informatics, jurisprudence, medical and health science found a job after search. They produced more than 90 percent.
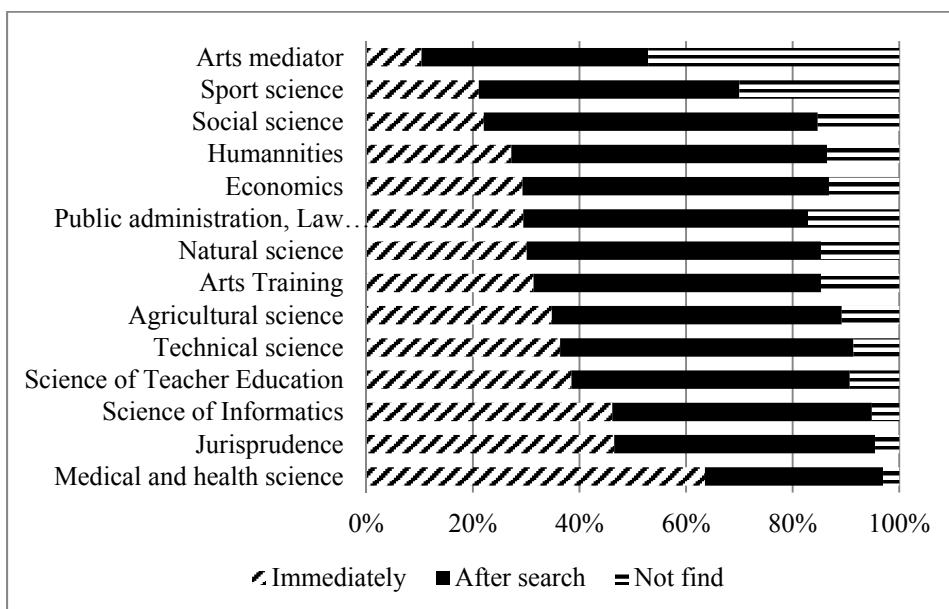
Figure 8: *When did graduates find their first job (N=8671)*
Source: HGST (2013)

As a conclusion, students of social science are in a lower position when they start searching for a workplace, but after searching, more than 80 percentage students find a job. In Hungary, medical, informatics and jurisprudence graduates are very sought after because there are lots of workplaces, but more graduates take a job abroad since they get more money for the same work.

A very interesting part is how fast they find a job after graduation. This is shown in Figure 9 in months. Data gives similar results with the previous figure. Medical and health science graduates start working in two months in average as well as in informatics, jurisprudence and public administration. Law enforcement and military graduates get a job in 3-3.5 months.

Two disciplines are standing out on a negative direction. These are arts mediator and sport science because the graduates get a job in more than a half of a year. It is a very big interval. Social sciences are in a better position but it is below the average, the students find a job in more than 4.5 months.
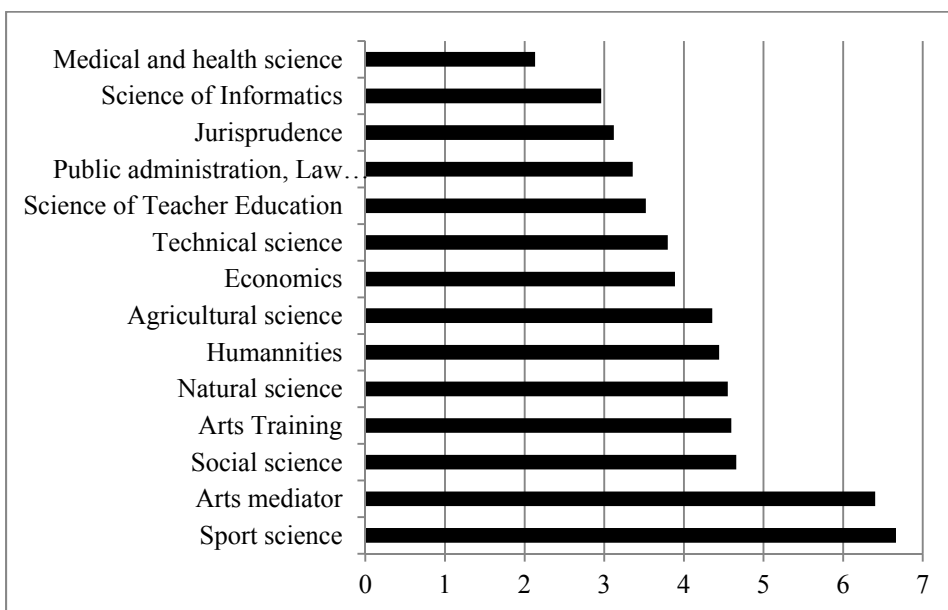
Figure 9: *On average, how long it took to find a job (N=7509)*
Source: HGST (2013)

I was also interested in the graduates' first workplace, and which degree is the best for their job (Figure 10.). Responders could choose from four statements: they were own studies, own and related studies, completely different and anything. I merged the first two statements because those are related to the degree. Data shows that the job of graduates of three disciplines are in the least connection with their studies. These are social sciences, humanities and art training because 60 percent of their graduates work only according to their corresponding studies. And 40 percent say this work is not related to their studies.

I find medical and jurisprudence again in a better position. 90 percent of jurisprudence and informatics and 95 percent of medical science say that their work is connected to their studies. It is a very high rate. Of course in this part, I could analyze the graduates having work. It is the reason for the change in the several cases.

The next questions were: Were they unemployed after graduation? I analyzed disciplines again. Results are similar with the last results (Figure 11). Twenty-five percent of graduates were unemployed and medical and health science, informatics and public administration, law enforcement and military science are in the best positions because only 25-30 percent of their graduates were unemployed.
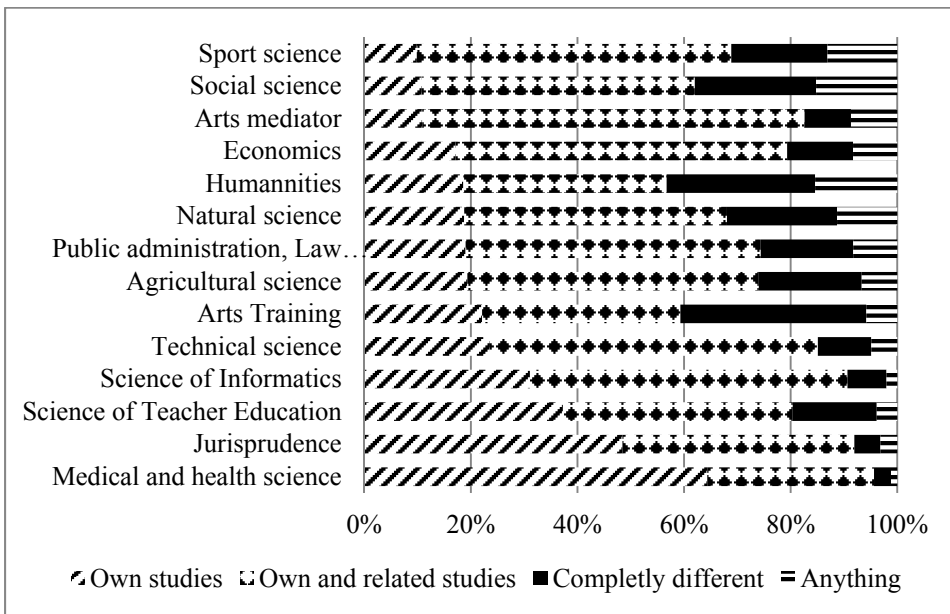
Figure 10: *Which studies are in accordance to the first job (N=7529)*
Source: HGST (2013)
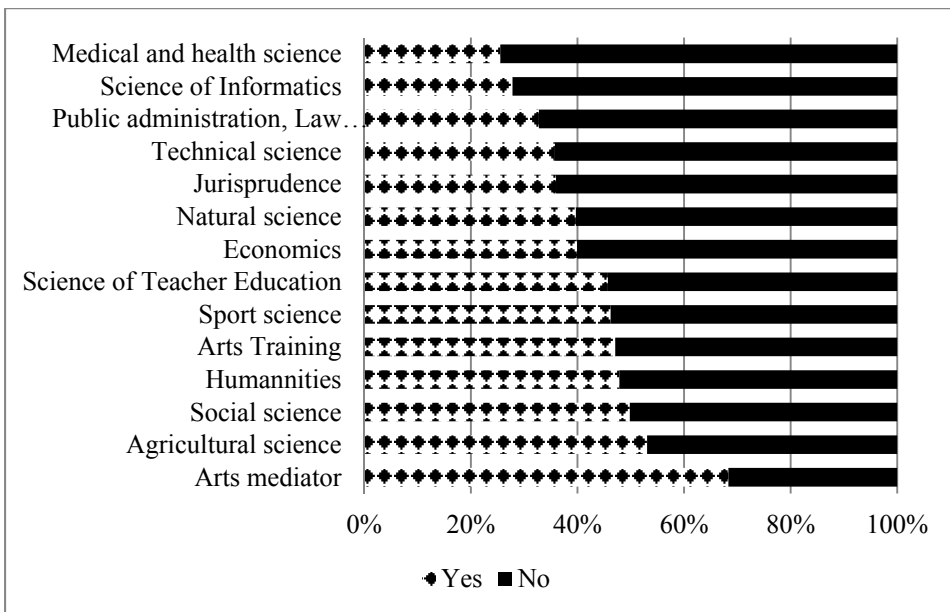
Figure 11: *The rate of unemplyment between graduation and the present (N=14635)*
Source: HGST (2013)

More than 50 percent of graduates of social science, agricultural science and arts mediator science were unemployed which is a high rate. An interesting thing was to find the agricultural science here because it was not in a low position in the previous part of the article.

In the previous section I mentioned how long they were searching for a job. I present now the information about how long they were unemployed. We see in Figure 12 that graduates of three sciences did not a work for a long time. Those are the arts mediator, the arts training and the sport science. They were unemployed for more than 9 months.
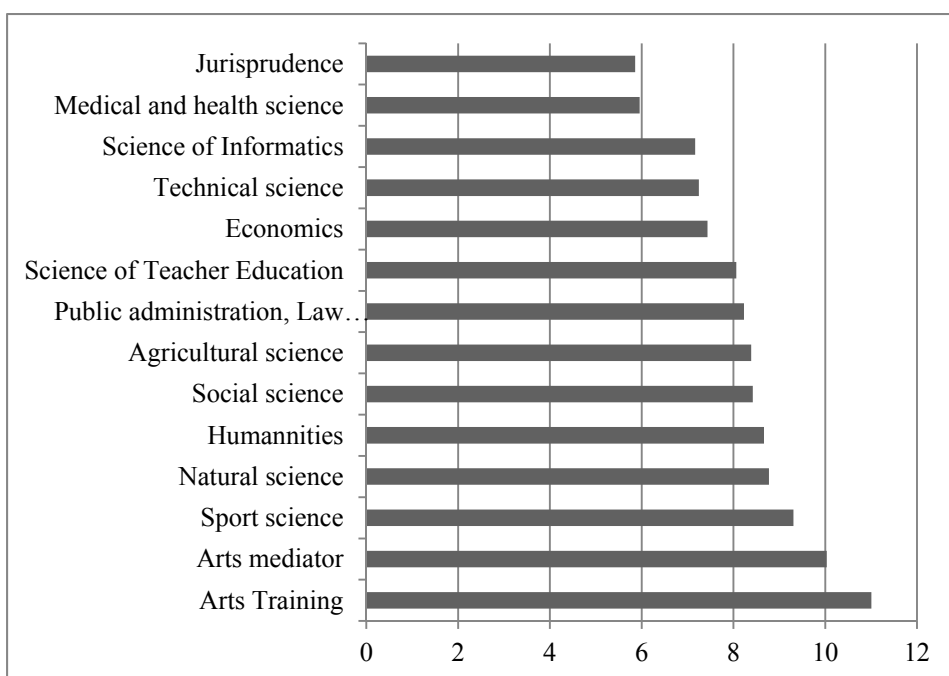
Figure 12: *How many month take the unemployed period (N=5845)*
Source: HGST (2013)

We find again jurisprudence, medical and health science in a good position because graduates of these sciences were unemployed for less than 6 months. It was a relationship with the demand for those sciences' degree. On average, graduates were unemployed for 7-8 months.

This database contains their current status on labor market. Graduates could choose from seven statements (employee, self-employed, full-time student, child care, entrepreneur, unemployed, and dependent). More students are employees, the most students (more than 80 percent) work from the field of science of teacher education, technical science, economics, medical science, informatics and jurisprudence.

I found few employees in arts mediator, and arts training. More students are unemployed in arts science, arts training and sport science.
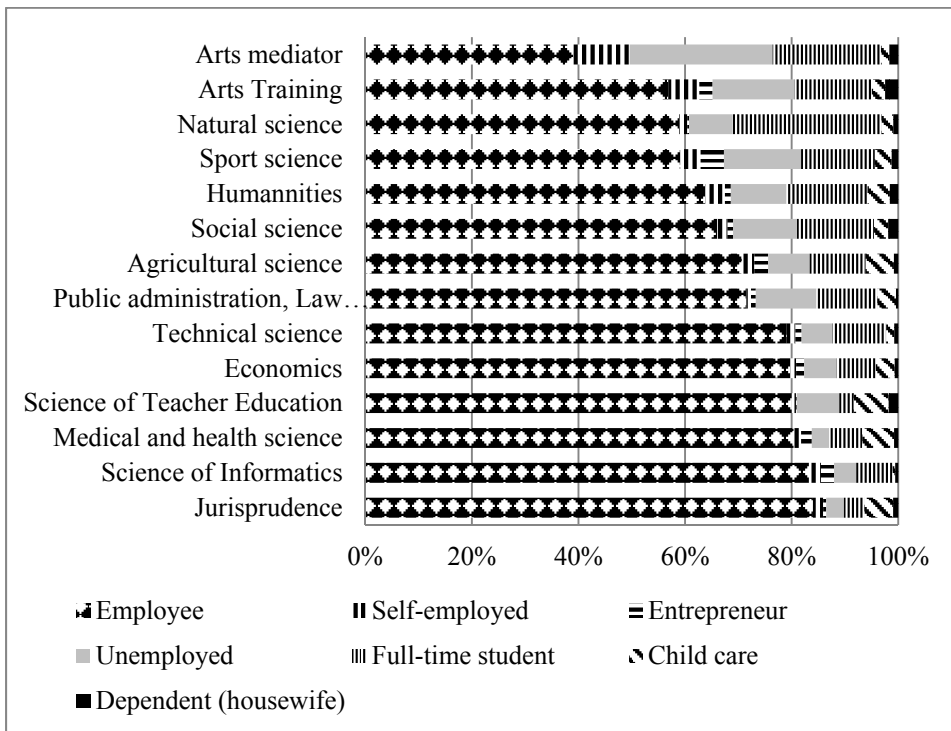
Figure 13: *What is the current status of labor market (N=14444)*
Source: HGST (2013)

The other important statement is about full-time student. I highlighted between it and the relation with the structure of training because more students continue their studies in natural science, humanities, and social science because these disciplines have two-level training (BA/BSc MA/MSc). Other statements represent a very low rate.

The last part is whether it is related with their current job. I analyzed only those students who have a job. If we consider the proportion of graduates having a job, which relates to their studies the data shows that medical science has close to 60 percent. The job of graduates of social science relates the least to their studies. We need to merge two statements (own studies, own and related studies) then we find humanities in the worst position. More than 40 percent of graduates do not have a job related to their studies. Social science is not in better position because it has 39 percent.
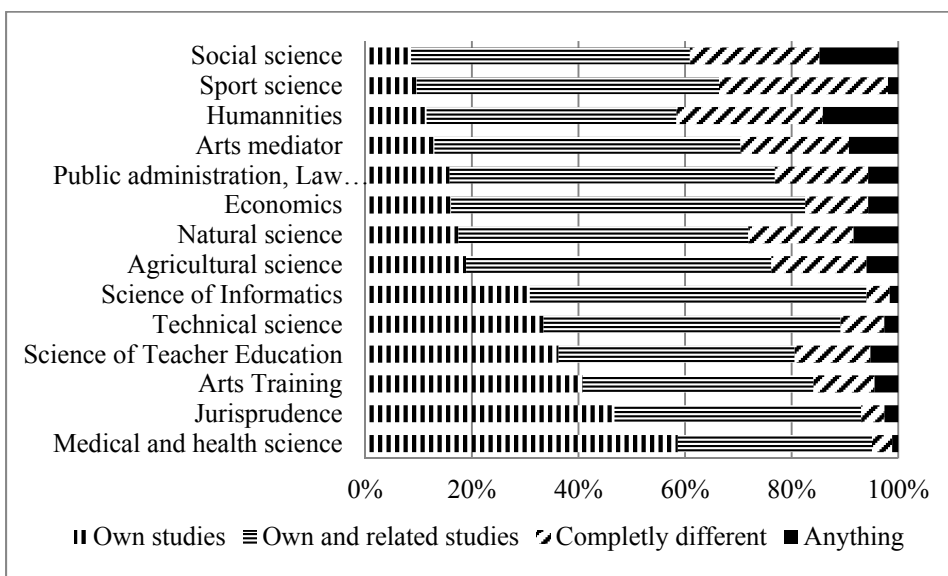
Figure 14: *Which studies are connected to actual jobs (N=7529)*
Source: HGST (2013)

Interestingly enough, their first job (see Figure 10) relating to their studies rate do not change nowadays. Medical and health science, jurisprudence and informatics have more than 90 percent in terms of relationship between studies and job. A lot of disciplines do not show big differences in rates. We can observe a reduction in two disciplines (sport science, arts training), and an increase in three sciences (informatics, arts training, technical science). Position of art training has improved a lot because the rate of the first job after graduation in relation to studies was only 60 percent, and now this rate is more than 85 percent. This is the highest growth.

Conclusions

In this article I present mostly some information about the situation of social science in Hungary and social science graduates' experience on the labor market. Firstly, I analyzed which higher education institutions offer social science training in Hungary. As a result, those institutions disperse consistent because I found territories where there are not any trainings. I also analyzed the catchment area of the biggest higher education institutions; I have identified three dominant institutions on the countryside (University of Pécs, University of Debrecen and University of Szeged). There is an absolute dominance of the capital when it comes to social science students in Hungary.

As a conclusion, I can say that there is no relationship between students' achievement and their efficiency on labor market because, for example, social science graduates had good achievement but their job is not related to their studies. They spent more

time on search for jobs than other graduates and more of them are unemployed. These graduates are in a worst position on the labor market than other graduates. It depends on several things. There are not appropriate workplaces for them and despite of their good achievement in higher education, they do not have good skills. Furthermore, the curriculum is outdated and has not been adapted to present expectations. As a result, social science needs changes in order to train graduates, who will be successful on the labor market.

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Comparative Review
of Professional Contentment in Helper
Graduates from Cluj-Napoca and Eger

Enikő Albert-Lőrincz[1]
Babeş-Bolyai University (Romania)

Mártin Albert-Lőrincz
*Sapientia-Hungarian University
of Transylvania (Romania)*

Abstract

This study is an intrinsic part of the project we have been carrying out alongside our PhD candidates for the last four years on the topic of **Complex Career Support for Social Worker Undergraduates**. Currently, our goal is to ascertain the traits of professional adjustment in the helper professionals living in these two institutions in Central-East-European regions (Cluj-Napoca and Eger).

Data gathering was started in 2013 with undergraduates and in 2014 among graduates from Cluj-Napoca and Eger. Data was collected through the use of questionnaires (both online and offline), and focus group interviews. We present the data analysis from 234 valid answers where professional contentment is considered to be the main issue.

We examine working relationships, workplace contentment, working conditions, difficulties arising while performing work tasks, the sense of vocational adequacy, as well as the overall disposition of the helper professionals and their sense of perspective (their attitude towards the future).

The results have been distressing. The survey has revealed that the development of the professional self presents difficulties in helper career paths because the process is burdened with a low social prestige of the profession, low wages, the difficulty of working with clients with multiple issues, a disproportionately higher need for assistance than the capacity of health care systems, as well as the fact that universities chiefly provide theoretical training. Internships are not sufficient to solidify practical skills, as well as develop the personality traits that ensure the tolerance for stress, and the ability to cope with challenges.

Our goal is to seek out the opportunities that, even in the current situation in which helpers find themselves, may serve as resources, as well as facilitate the development of vocational adequacy. In order to realize these goals, the results of the research have led to two main paths being outlined: organizing vocational socialization trainings and strengthening community resources.

Keywords*: Professional Self; Professional Adjustment; Contentment with the Profession; Vocational Adequacy; Sense of Life and Perspective.*

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[1] E-mail: e.albert.lorincz@gmail.com

Topic introduction

Successful professional adjustment, as well as successfully carrying out one's work, requires that the professional role be incorporated into the personality as an element of identity. The development of the professional self is necessary. This means that the person has an inner image that condenses the essence of the profession, and it also contains the professional aspects of self-identification. It is a complex construct that contains both cognitive (competencies: professional know-how, knowledge, and skills) and affective elements and approaches (Jacobi, 1999). If this is achieved, the person will integrate harmoniously into society; they will be content with their profession and have a positive disposition towards life as well as a sense of perspective.

Our research has convinced us that this process does not happen smoothly. The worries encountered at the beginning of the career and the negative dispositions associated with it are overly taxing to young professionals; they take up creative energies and make the beginning of a career more difficult (Albert-Lőrincz & Ludányi, 2014).

Institutes training helper professionals must devote attention to career socialization. Learning the basics of the profession, as well as factual and methodical knowledge, is indispensable in acquiring professional skill; yet this is not sufficient in the case of helper professions. It is necessary to acquire the skills that will be used when working with clients, as well as to internalize, assume, and experience the profession (Jung, 1993). Only thus can the inner harmony that contains professionalism be created, without which nobody is able to acquit themselves as an effective helper professional. One must, however, prepare for it, meaning that professional training must take into account the fact that professional socialization is still ongoing when helpers begin their career. Postgraduate training – with respect to graduates' needs – can be helpful for practicing professionals in overcoming the obstacles posed by the work field.

Helper professionals, who must bear the weight of not only their own, but their clients' lives as well, must, next to permanent maintenance (supervision), constantly be developing their interpersonal skills and their resilience. Specialists who are trainers for the helper professional understand this need. The self-study guide was developed primarily for the California State Maternal and Child Health Branch's Adolescent Family Life Program (AFLP) and Adolescent Sibling Pregnancy Prevention Program (ASPPP). In order to do their jobs effectively, all case managers in these programs require certain core skills and subject area expertise (Center for Health Training, 2003). Their professional role is not an easy one: their wages are low, they hardly ever receive any gratitude for their work, and, furthermore, it is not rare for them to have to bear reproach addressed to them by the very people they help. The demand for care is larger than what they can fulfill. Helper workers offer people assistance while helping people to become functional. Genuine helper work manifests itself by helping clients to become capable. "Students are likely to be interested in the career opportunities these fields present and the academic preparation necessary

for each" (Sue, Sue & Sue, 2006, p. 4.). The essence of this work is involving the client in the fulfillment of a need. This professional process, involves complex and lengthy work. The professional must also be careful while they are helping someone to not allow their own strength reserves to be drained. This requires them to have adequate theoretical knowledge, efficient skills, and good resilience (http://www.upt.ro). "In essence, social work activities empower client systems to enhance their competence and enable social structures to relieve human suffering and remedy social problems" (Linwood, 2013).

Training institutions can only help their graduates if these programs possess knowledge about how prepared helper professionals feel about carrying out their work, how adequate they are for the challenges of the practice in the field and what practical difficulties the new professionals are combating. Additionally, programs must understand what competencies are helpful and what shortcomings new professionals face in the field; how they are able to integrate their profession into themselves; and what level of contentment they derive from the profession – which will ultimately determine their life satisfaction and their sense of perspective. During the assessments our department has undertaken, we have been searching for the answers to these questions in order to enable us to contribute all the more to promoting the strengthening of professional socialization and professionalism. In the last five years, the number of students in Cluj-Napoca has dramatically diminished; we have barely been able to fill state-sponsored slots. This is why we deem it important to address the issues of career preparation and to examine the specific life disposition and career satisfaction of our graduates.

The concept and methods of the assessment

We began data collection in 2013, interviewing undergraduates. The sample was made up of graduating students majoring in Social Pedagogy at the Eszterházy Károly College in Eger and those majoring in Social Work at the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca[2]: 28 persons from Cluj-Napoca (32.9%), 56 persons from Eger (65.9%), complemented by 1.2% (1 person) studying in Eger but living in another country. In 2014 recent graduates (max. 5 years) were asked to complete a survey generated in an online environment. Since a relatively low number of graduates had filled out the survey (68 completely and 63 partially filled out surveys, with the latter being disregarded), it seemed necessary to administer surveys personally, using snowball sampling system. This system generated a sample size of 232 valid surveys.

The main dimensions of the assessment were the following: demographic characteristics, employment, helper work fields, financial circumstances, attitude towards the profession, working conditions, preparation (to what extent the university had prepared them for practical challenges), usefulness of training, the extent of social

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[2] Note: the training concept of the two departments are identical, there are many common subjects – this is what made it possible to compare the opinions given by students and graduates.

and professional adjustment, and attitude towards the future. We also collected data about relationships with local communities connected to the participants' work activity and professional resources, but we only analyzed the data related to contentment within the bounds of this paper.

The following illustrates the conceptual model of the research:
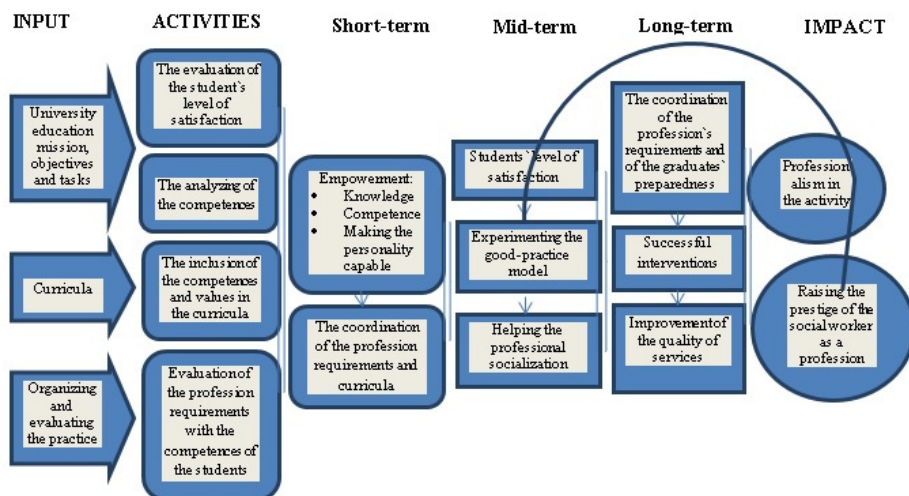
Figure 1: *The conceptual model of the research*

In this paper we will only analyze the data pertaining to the existential and professional satisfaction in the helpers examined.

Demographic and employment market overview

The sample from Hungary is more populous because the number of both under-graduates and students who had graduated in previous years is more than double in the numbers in Cluj-Napoca (see Table 1). The data shown in the Table 1 indicate that a decisive majority of the students make use of their degree in the country in which they had acquired it.

Table 1: *The place of training, as well as the current residence*

In which country did you graduate?			In which country do you live and work?		
	N	**%**		**N**	**%**
In Romania	72	31.0	In Romania	66	28.4
In Hungary	160	69.0	In Hungary	157	67.7
			In another country	9	3.9
Total	**232**	**100.0**	**Total**	**232**	**100.0**

With respect to the departments, 66% of respondents indicated social pedagogy, 27%, social work, and 7% indicated other helper professions (special education, family care, psychology etc.) as second degrees.

The profession is becoming remarkably geared towards women, which is a factor to be considered when promoting study programs, and care should be taken to present them in such a way as to attract boys as well, by pointing out than in certain fields, having a male social work practitioner can be an advantage (see Table 2).

Table 2: *Sample distribution according to gender*

Genders	N	%
Male	27	11.6
Female	205	88.4
Total	**232**	**100**

In order to analyze the opinions pertaining to the training programs, it was important for us to know the extent of the experience the respondents have in the helper professions. From Table 3 below it is revealed that half (47.9%) of the sample works currently in the field and has finished their studies, and 31% is enrolled in a master's degree course, but many of them (42%) are also working. 12.1% of the graduates have no work experience, aside from internships done at university. The remaining 7.8% has experience, but is not currently working in a social field. Consequently, our respondents have enough experience (68.2%) for us to consider their opinions about the profession well-founded.

Table 3:
The distribution of the sample according to the professional status of the respondents

Professional status	N	%		N	%
working in the field for more than 3 years	54	23.3	Working in the field	111	47.9
working in the field for less than 3 years	57	24.6			
working, but not in the field, has professional experience	18	7.8			
still studying, does helper activities	29	12.5	Currently studying	72	31.0
still studying, does not take part in helper activities	43	18.5			
working, but not in the field, no professional experience	28	12.1			
inactive	3	1.3			
Total	**232**	**100**			

We find it important to point out that in spite of a majority of respondents working in the field, this does not mean that 80% of graduates can find employment in the profession. In this case, our goal was not to examine the proportions of employment; we were specifically curious about the experience of those who are working in the field and have insight into which shortcomings in training would cause difficulties later on in field work.

In order to have insight into the extent of safety that the profession offers to respondents, we have also looked at what the employment market situation of those working in the field is. Table 4 below reveals that in both countries, barely more than half of the respondents have indeterminate term working contracts. Lack of a stable workplace can damage the sense of existential safety, which can also negatively impact professional disposition.

Table 4: *The employment market situation (%) of those working in the field (N=111)*

Employment market situation	Graduated in Romania	Graduated in Hungary	Total
I am an employee with an indeterminate term working contract	53.3	56.2	55.5
I am an employee with a fixed term working contract	13.3	27.5	23.6
I am working in my field at a management level	16.7	13.8	14.5
I am raising a child, I receive child support benefits	10.0	1.2	3.6
I am self-employed, an individual entrepreneur, a freelancer	0	1.2	0.9
I earn my income from casual labor	3.3		0.9
I am studying (second degree, master's, PhD)	3.3		0.9
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Among those who are working in the field, we can see an interesting correlation between the place of origin and the type of settlement the place of work is (see Table 5). A higher proportion of those who study or had graduated in Hungary are from small-town environments; the proportion of those who came from rural areas fails to reach 20%. Cluj-Napoca students, who are primarily from rural areas and municipalities, tend to target smaller settlements after graduating. The opposite tendency can be seen in Hungary, where helpers seek employment in cities.

Further questions are needed in order to explain the situation, because it is possible that there are more social issues in larger cities; however, it is also conceivable that a better livelihood and the hope of personal wellbeing drives Hungarian helpers to larger cities, Budapest in particular.

Table 5: *In which country did you graduate? *
In what type of settlement <u>were you born</u>? (Working in the field)

In which country did you graduate?	In what type of settlement were you born? – type			Total
	Village	**Small town**	**Municipality**	
In Romania	25.8%	19.4%	54.8%	**100.0%**
In Hungary	17.7%	32.9%	49.4%	**100.0%**
Total	**20.0%**	**29.1%**	**50.9%**	**100.0%**

Table 6: *In which country did you graduate? *
In what type of settlement <u>are you currently living</u>? (Working in the field)

In which country did you graduate?	In what type of settlement do you currently live? – type			Total
	Village	**Small town**	**Municipality**	
In Romania	27.6%	27.6%	44.8%	**100.0%**
In Hungary	18.2%	26.0%	55.8%	**100.0%**
Total	**20.8%**	**26.4%**	**52.8%**	**100.0%**

In order to ascertain which area of the helper profession our respondents came from, we have prepared Table 7 below. The table shows that in both countries, most of the graduates are involved in helping adults and children living in difficult conditions. The table below does not show the helpers not directly involved with clients and carrying out administrative tasks in one of the social fields.

From among those graduating in Eger, the majority works with people in multiple adverse situations (Romani, deviant young people, and families), while those graduating in Cluj-Napoca work mostly with children, the disabled, and the elderly. With the help of the alumni system, universities should pay more attention to where the graduates find employment in a given period, and place more emphasis on the characteristics of market needs during training.

The data presented reveals that the training in Eger is still more sought-after than in Cluj-Napoca; the classes that graduate are more numerous. The profession has become geared towards women in both regions. Only half of those working in the field have indeterminate term working contracts. To advance their careers, graduates from Cluj-Napoca target smaller towns, while those from Eger look for employment in municipalities. Graduates from Eger work mostly with families, the young, and within this category, the Romani, while graduates from Cluj-Napoca make their living by caring for the disabled, the children, and the elderly. In both cases, the workload is strenuous, because the clients come from categories of marginalized individuals and groups; people who are living in multiple adverse conditions.

Table 7: *If you are a helper professional, what target group do you work with?*

Clients	Graduated or studying in Romania		Graduated or studying in Hungary		Entire sample ↓	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
people living in difficult conditions	18	33.3%	38	39.6%	56	37.3%
children	18	33.3%	35	36.5%	53	35.3%
schoolchildren	10	18.5%	36	37.5%	46	30.7%
the young	4	7.4%	37	38.5%	41	27.3%
families	9	16.7%	31	32.3%	40	26.7%
Romani	6	11.1%	33	34.4%	39	26.0%
endangered children	8	14.8%	23	24.0%	31	20.7%
the elderly	16	29.6%	13	13.5%	29	19.3%
the disabled	15	27.8%	10	10.4%	25	16.7%
substance abusers, addicts	2	3.7%	18	18.8%	20	13.3%
women, mothers	2	3.7%	15	15.6%	17	11.3%
the ailing, the chronically ill	9	16.7%	6	6.3%	15	10.0%
the homeless	4	7.4%	10	10.4%	14	9.3%
victims of domestic abuse	1	1.9%	12	12.5%	13	8.7%
orphans	9	16.7%	3	3.1%	12	8.0%
refugees			1	1.0%	1	0.7%
Total indicated	**54**	**100.0%**	**96**	**100.0%**	**150**	**100.0%**

The life disposition of the helpers surveyed; professional satisfaction

We examined contentment from several points of view. We were primarily interested in the satisfaction pertaining to the profession, as well as the extent to which the university prepares their graduates; however, because physical factors of life also influence disposition as well as the experience of the profession, we also inquired about their financial situation, their accommodations, how successful social adjustment was, as well as their life disposition.

Satisfaction with the physical conditions of life

We asked the subjects of our inquiry to what extent they are content with the **material conditions** of their lives. Table 8 below shows that contentment among Cluj-Napoca graduates is significantly (Pearson Chi-Square 0.001) higher. This does not mean that living conditions are better in Transylvania, but that the respondents relate them to the national average, and thus, expectations are lower, as the follow-up focus group interviews have shown.

Table 8: *Satisfaction with material conditions*

To what extent are you satisfied with your material living conditions?			below average	average	above average	Total
Where do you live?	**In Romania**	N	8	52	2	62
		% Where do you live?	12.9%	83.9%	3.2%	100.0%
		% of sample	3.6%	23.5%	0.9%	28.1%
	In Hungary	N	32	111	7	150
		% Where do you live?	21.3%	74.0%	4.7%	100.0%
		% of sample	14.5%	50.2%	3.2%	67.9%
	In another country	N	0	6	3	9
		% Where do you live?	0.0%	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
		% of sample	0.0%	2.7%	1.4%	4.1%
Total		N	40	169	12	221
		% Where do you live?	18.1%	76.5%	5.4%	100.0%
		% of sample	18.1%	76.5%	5.4%	100.0%

Table 9: *Accommodation*

The accommodation you live in is		self-owned	owned by your or your partner's parents	rented	service accommodation	Total
In Romania	N	14	29	15	7	65
	% Where do you live?	21.5%	44.6%	23.1%	10.8%	100.0%
	% of Total	6.1%	12.7%	6.6%	3.1%	28.5%
In Hungary	N	54	66	33	1	154
	% within Where do you live?	35.1%	42.9%	21.4%	0.6%	100.0%
	% of Total	23.7%	28.9%	14.5%	0.4%	67.5%
In another country	N	2	1	5	1	9
	% within Where do you live?	22.2%	11.1%	55.6%	11.1%	100.0%
	% of Total	0.9%	0.4%	2.2%	0.4%	3.9%
Total	N	70	96	53	9	228
	% within Where do you live?	30.7%	42.1%	23.2%	3.9%	100.0%
	% of Total	30.7%	42.1%	23.2%	3.9%	100.0%

With respect to **accommodation**, it can be said that in both regions, the proportion of those who live in their parents' home is around 40%. More people in Romania can avail themselves of service accommodation than in the Hungarian region examined (Table 9).

There are significant differences with respect to the aspect examined in the accommodation conditions of the helpers employed in the two regions. (Pearson Chi-Square 0.001).

The success of social adjustment

General contentment connected to how one's life has progressed also indicates the extent to which the person has succeeded in adjusting to the given social environment. There are no significant differences between Romanian and Hungarian respondents from the point of view of **the extent to which they have found their place in life** (The suggested scale had 5 degrees). As can be seen from Table 10 below, contentment averages fail to reach the 4th degree of the scale in both regions. Help given during career socialization can strengthen work motivation, which can positively influence contentment as well. These data also show that in order to prevent burnout, universities must become involved in developing their graduates' suitability to their career.

Table 10: *To what extent have you found*
*your place in life? * In which country did you graduate or do you study?*

Adjustment	In which country did you graduate or do you study?		Entire sample
	In Romania	**In Hungary**	
I consider it a failure (1)	4.2%	1.9%	2.6%
I consider it bearable (2)	5.6%	10.1%	8.7%
I am moderately content (3)	29.2%	26.6%	27.4%
I consider it adequate (4)	43.1%	39.2%	40.4%
I feel successful (5)	18.1%	22.2%	20.9%
Scale average	**3.69**	**3.71**	**3.70**

Undergraduates are the most content in Romania, while those who are working in fields outside of their specialization are the least content. In Hungary, those with seniority are the most content. Students here are less content than their Transylvanian counterparts.

Table 11: *General contentment according to current professional status. Scale values*

Professional status	Graduated or studying in Romania	Graduated or studying in Hungary	Entire sample
Working in the field for more than 3 years	3.79	4.02	3.96
Working in the field for less than 3 years	3.65	3.73	3.70
Working, but not in the field, has professional experience	3.86	3.82	3.83
Still studying, does helper activities	3.94	3.67	3.83
Still studying, does not take part in helper activities	4.00	3.44	3.46
Working, but not in the field, no professional experience	3.21	3.50	3.36
Total	**3.69**	**3.71**	**3.70**

Disposition (good spirits) and the sense of perspective (future prospects) are also indexes of social adjustment. There are no valid differences in this sense between helpers from the two regions. Because of this, we will discuss the data pertaining to the two regions together. Figure 2 below illustrates how common Eastern European fate condenses in the life dispositions of the helpers examined.
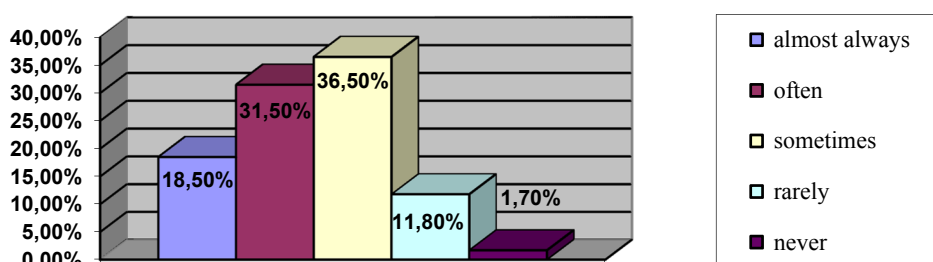
Figure 2: *Life disposition in the regions examined*

Half of the respondents consider themselves to be generally in good spirits; the proportion of those who never or only rarely experience positive moods barely exceeds ten percent, while a third of the sample experiences varying moods.

With respect to **the future**, the respondents offer an adequate picture as well: 60% look to the future with hope; they possess a sense of perspective. The number of people living in worry and fear barely exceeds 20%.
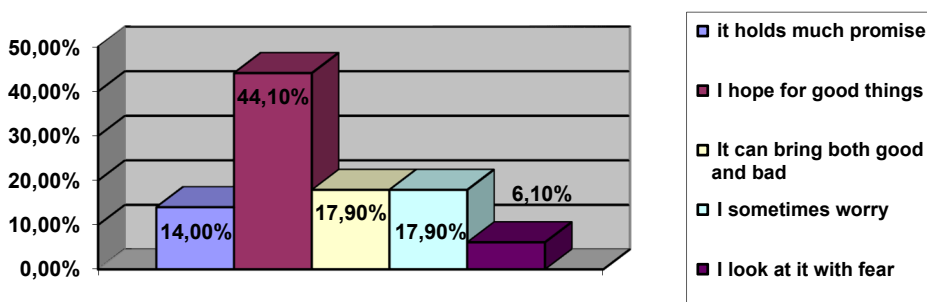
Figure 3: *Sense of perspective in the regions examined.*

Altogether, we can assert that there is higher satisfaction with the financial aspects among Cluj-Napoca graduates than among Eger graduates. It is characteristic of both samples that 40% of the young are still living in their parents' home, but more Romanian respondents live in service accommodation than Hungarians.

We have attempted to determine *the success of social adjustment* through the assessment of the degree of adjustment as well as through life disposition and the attitudes towards the future. There are no valid differences between the two samples according to any of the criteria, and we can assert that the situation is satisfactory in the case of all indexes. The emotional state and disposition of the helpers examined can be considered good, which may constitute an important resource in their work. They should receive aid chiefly in strengthening the sense that they have found their place in life. Contentment on the part of those already on their career path could influence local communities in having the young choose a career in a social work field.

Indexes of training utility

In order to describe training utility, we have taken into account self-assessed career suitability, satisfaction with university training, professional success, workplace satisfaction and difficulties encountered in the profession.

Self-assessed career suitability does not show a valid difference in the case of the professionals having graduated from the two universities examined. In both cases, a decisive majority (70%-80%) consider themselves to be moderately or adequately prepared.

The professional contentment of helpers having graduated or studying in Hungary is higher, as evidenced by the data in Table 12. The issue is that the scale values pertaining to professional contentment do not reach the 4th degree, which is a value lower even than what we had calculated in the case of *To what extent have you found you place in life?* As to what concerns the profession, ten percent (Cluj-Napoca), as well as twenty percent (Eger) believe themselves to be genuinely successful from

a professional standpoint. This fact carries with it the danger of burnout, because a low level of satisfaction requires a higher level of motivation and a surplus of energy when performing work that is already taxing.
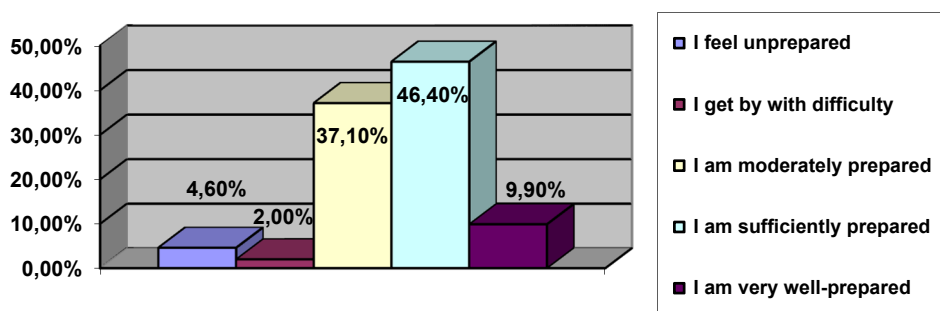
Figure 4: *Self-assessed career suitability in the regions examined*

Table 12: *To what extent do you feel successful*
*from a professional standpoint? * In which country did you graduate or do you study?*

Professional success	In which country did you graduate or do you study?		Entire sample
	In Romania	In Hungary	
I consider it a failure (1)	7.0%	3.9%	4.9%
I consider it bearable (2)	7.0%	7.7%	7.5%
I am moderately content (3)	46.5%	28.4%	34.1%
I consider it adequate (4)	28.2%	38.7%	35.4%
I feel successful (5)	11.3%	21.3%	18.1%
Scale average	3.30	3.66	3.54

The sense of professional success is highest among those with seniority in the profession. The contentment of those at the beginning of their career, those still studying and those currently not working in the profession, but possessing professional experience are similar. While there is no difference in the case of those currently studying, the professional contentment of those at the beginning of their career in Romania falls considerably behind their Hungarian colleagues. Satisfaction is lowest among those who are not employed in the field; the sense of failure is, in this case as well, more pronounced in the case of Romanians.

Table 13: *Professional contentment according to current professional status. Scale values*

Professional status	Graduated or studying in Romania	Graduated or studying in Hungary	Entire Sample
Working in the field for more than 3 years	3.79	4.02	3.96
Working in the field for less than 3 years	3.25	3.65	3.54
Working, but not in the field, has professional experience	3.43	3.55	3.50
Still studying, does helper activities	3.53	3.64	3.57
Still studying, does not take part in helper activities	3.50	3.55	3.55
Working, but not in the field, no professional experience	2.64	3.23	2.93
Total	**3.30**	**3.66**	**3.54**

With respect to **workplace satisfaction**, it can be established that contentment is highest: in the case of the relationship with coworkers, the interest in the work performed, rewarding work, the atmosphere of the working community, as well as the professional and content aspects of the activities carried out. Contentment is lowest with regard to: income, benefits, the protection of emotional wellbeing, burnout prevention, prospects for advancement, opportunities for supervision, professional prestige, and recognition.

Several differences have been ascertained regarding the two regions examined, but these are *not statistically significant*; these are:

- relationship with coworkers – contentment is higher in Hungary,
- professional and content aspects of the activities – contentment is higher in Hungary,
- fulfillment of promises made when hired – contentment is higher in Romania,
- professional prestige and recognition – contentment is higher in Romania.

We have also identified statistically significant differences in whether individuals were working in the field or not. Such differences are, for instance:

- professional and content aspects of the activities – contentment is higher among those working in the field,
- income and benefits – contentment is higher among those not working in the field,
- atmosphere in the working community – contentment is higher among those working in the field,
- prospects for advancement – contentment is higher among those working in the field,

- relationship with coworkers – contentment is higher among those working in the field,
- interesting and rewarding work – contentment is higher among those working in the field.

The characteristics of the profession in which contentment is higher among those working in the field, such as instances of gratification connected to the profession, can constitute important resources for those who practice the profession, and we can also regard them as factors in preventing burnout (see Table 14).

Table 14: *Regardless of whether you are working in the field or not, to what extent are you satisfied with your current place of work according to the following criteria? (1 – very dissatisfied, 5 – very satisfied) – Scale values*

Place of work:	In Romania			In Hungary			Entire sample		
Working conditions	Working in the field	Not working in the field	Total	Working in the field	Not working in the field	Total	Working in the field	Not working in the field	Total
relationship with coworkers	4.10	3.71	**3.96**	4.31	4.05	**4.25**	4.25	3.89	**4.16**
interesting and rewarding work	4.10	4.00	**4.07**	4.24	3.73	**4.13**	4.20	3.85	**4.11**
atmosphere in the working community	3.83	3.65	**3.76**	4.06	3.55	**3.95**	4.00	3.59	**3.89**
professional and content aspects of the activities	3.72	3.53	**3.65**	4.09	3.50	**3.96**	3.99	3.51	**3.86**
with the extent to which work can be reconciled with your family life	3.82	4.06	**3.91**	3.73	3.45	**3.67**	3.76	3.72	**3.75**
personal circumstances of the activity	3.48	3.53	**3.50**	3.86	3.50	**3.78**	3.76	3.51	**3.69**
prospects for professional development	3.62	3.25	**3.49**	3.75	3.27	**3.64**	3.71	3.26	**3.60**
with the extent to which work can be reconciled with having children and parenting	3.52	4.06	**3.72**	3.56	3.42	**3.53**	3.55	3.72	**3.59**
how much free time it affords	3.28	3.88	**3.50**	3.62	3.18	**3.52**	3.52	3.49	**3.51**

Place of work:	In Romania			In Hungary			Entire sample		
the material conditions of the activity, equipment, work supplies	3.57	3.41	**3.51**	3.47	3.50	**3.48**	3.50	3.46	**3.49**
workplace stability and security	3.50	3.88	**3.64**	3.37	3.52	**3.40**	3.40	3.68	**3.48**
work stability and security	3.25	3.88	**3.49**	3.46	3.43	**3.45**	3.40	3.63	**3.46**
fulfillment of promises made when hired	3.64	3.71	**3.67**	3.36	2.90	**3.25**	3.44	3.27	**3.39**
with the workload	3.07	3.06	**3.07**	3.35	3.36	**3.36**	3.28	3.23	**3.27**
professional prestige and recognition	3.28	3.29	**3.28**	2.81	3.18	**2.89**	2.93	3.23	**3.01**
opportunities for supervision	2.76	2.75	**2.76**	3.03	2.86	**2.99**	2.95	2.81	**2.92**
prospects for advancement and career building	3.21	2.71	**3.02**	2.77	3.00	**2.82**	2.89	2.87	**2.88**
the protection of emotional wellbeing, burnout prevention	2.93	2.29	**2.70**	2.78	2.77	**2.78**	2.82	2.56	**2.75**
income and benefits	2.68	3.29	**2.91**	2.55	2.91	**2.63**	2.58	3.08	**2.72**

The central issue of our research was the extent to which graduates are content with the way universities prepare them for practicing the profession. The extent of **satisfaction with the training** is illustrated by Table 15 below.

Table 15: *Satisfaction with training programs*

Satisfaction with training	Frequency	Percentage	Valid	Total
Completely	32	13.8	14.0	14.0
Very	63	27.2	27.6	41.7
Moderately	106	45.7	46.5	88.2
Slightly	16	6.9	7.0	95.2
Not at all	11	4.7	4.8	100.0
Total	228	98.3	100.0	
No answer	4	1.7		
Total	**232**	**100.0**		

Considering the entire sample (not just those who are currently practicing), we can see that the proportion of those who are completely and very satisfied with the training programs is slightly more than 40%; the number of the moderately satisfied is roughly the same, and slightly more than 10% are dissatisfied or who declined to answer this question. Based on the assessment of the respondents, it seems that the training programs examined meet the needs of 90% of the students. (We have not observed valid differences between graduates from the two universities).

We were also curious about the extent to which the **theoretical and practical competencies**, that the universities offer, can be utilized in the field. We involved the entire sample in this topic, regardless of whether they are working or not, in the field or not. Scale values ranged from 1 to 7. In the table below, we show the assessment of the practical utility of competencies in descending order. In cases where significance is emphasized, the differences are also statistically significant.

Table 16: *In your opinion, to what extent do you need*
the following knowledge, skills and abilities in performing your work?

In which country do you live?	In Romania	In Hungary	Total ↓	Sig.
ability to perform tasks independently	6.55	6.43	6.46	0.404
ability to perform tasks as part of a team	6.43	6.26	6.31	0.325
calling and dedication	6.34	6.28	6.30	0.759
organizational skills	6.11	6.15	6.14	0.810
professional experience and routine	6.05	5.87	5.92	0.400
constant self-improvement	6.02	5.80	5.87	0.294
consulting, case-working and group leadership skills	5.67	5.84	5.79	0.475
familiarity with mental hygiene	5.79	5.75	5.76	0.842
knowledge of legislation	5.56	5.49	5.51	0.778
computer skills	5.54	5.49	5.50	0.841
proficiency in drawing up plans	5.69	5.35	5.45	0.232
strategic thinking, planning skills	5.86	5.22	5.41	**0.006**
theoretical knowledge (knowledge of theories, models and methods)	5.43	5.35	5.38	0.749
knowledge of societal processes, research methodology, needs assessment	4.67	4.73	4.71	0.832
financial knowledge, project management, proposal writing	4.75	3.89	4.14	**0.002**
driving skills	4.44	3.44	3.74	**0.002**
knowledge of foreign languages (communication and professional terminology)	5.42	2.99	3.72	**0.000**
knowledge of Romanian (communication and professional terminology)	6.14	1.77	3.13	**0.000**

It seems interesting that the respondents tended to indicate competencies that are more indirectly related to practicing the profession (strategic thinking, planning skills, financial knowledge, project management, proposal writing, driving, foreign languages) than theoretical or practical skills needed for interventions. This leads us to conclude that more emphasis should be placed on these during training than before, because they are prerequisites for successful fieldwork.

From the point of view of the work done with clients, the following seem more difficult: observing and understanding verbal and non-verbal behavior, establishing trust, targeted listening, assigning goals, planning and establishing a relationship. All of these point to the fact that further efforts must be done in the interest of developing models for professional practice, case discussions, and ensuring supervision.

With regard to *the attitude towards the profession*, we can ascertain that self-assessed career suitability is at an adequate level, and so is satisfaction with university training programs; professional success, however, fails to reach even the level at which general satisfaction with how one's life has progressed was evaluated to be; concerning work satisfaction, it can be asserted that the helpers examined enjoy the content-associated parts of work, but dissatisfaction is high regarding income, recognition and advancement prospects, which may endanger the emotional wellbeing of practitioners. The difficulties observed in practicing the profession are mostly related to certain aspects of working with clients, which suggests that more attention should be given to organizing internships during the university years.

Career suitability as seen by practicing professionals

The aspects shown below were more firmly established over the course of the focus group interviews performed with the helpers.

The nature of helper professions makes it necessary for practitioners to be provided with a range of training, and to continue professional socialization even after graduating from university, because the development of the professional self is a much more involved process in the case of helpers than in professions where it is not the person itself who is the means of performing the work. Preparation for practicing the profession must focus on at least three components: theoretical training, personality development and acquiring competencies.

1. *Theoretical preparation:* basic knowledge from individual and interdisciplinary fields. The transfer of ideas must focus on independent assessment and con-templation, and establishing efficient thought processes.
2. *Personality development:* Making one's own personality suitable for working with clients. In this respect, compiling the material from the focus groups led to the following avenues of development being established:
   a. a state of physical, emotional, spiritual and social equilibrium, which requires experiencing psychological wellbeing,

b. a sense of reality, which means both genuine self-knowledge and adequately responding to the reactions of the social and physical environment,

c. self-knowledge assumes recognizing needs as well as reviewing the possibilities related to their fulfillment,

d. orientation towards task and activity is related to a correctly undertaken workload (only tackling tasks and such an amount that we can perform without resorting to heroic efforts. Spontaneity and creativity must appear in behavior.)

e. a system of values and a conception of life and world that is mature, knowledge of one's place and role, a sense of capability,

f. an ability for self-expression and self-assertion,

g. a sense of self-identity and independence, a robust identity requires the integration of the professional self, the knowledge of personal boundaries and resources, interior and exterior control,

h. adequate dynamics, vitality and preparedness for the proper level of motivation and the ability to utilize inner forces.

Practicing helpers believe that the basis for an efficient fulfillment of their role is self-acceptance, self-confidence, resilience, openness, humor, initiative, a stable set of values, a positive attitude towards change as well as cooperation in carrying out one's work tasks.

3. *Acquiring skills:* Aside from developing interpersonal skills, acquiring orientation and problem-solving skills is indispensable for working with clients. In organizing the work process, proposal writing, good planning skills and foreign languages are also needed.

From the facts established over the course of our examinations, we would like to emphasize, as an outline, that: In Romania, professional contentment is higher in those who take part in postgraduate training, and lowest in those who are not working in a field they specialize in. In Hungary, those with seniority are the most content. Life disposition, the attitude towards the future and the sense of career suitability are at the appropriate level in the case of the helpers queried. They derive satisfaction from the professional and content aspects of the activities, as well as from the fact that they consider their work interesting and worthwhile. However, income and benefits account for higher contentment among those not working in the field. The atmosphere of the workplace and the relationship with coworkers is better in social institutions than in other workplaces, as we have determined in our previous research (Albert-Lőrincz et al. 2007). Satisfaction with training shows a good level, 40% of the sample is very satisfied with the training and a further percentage of over 40% is moderately satisfied.

Of the competencies acquired at university, strategic thinking, planning skills, financial knowledge, project management, proposal writing, driving skills and foreign languages are used the most in field work. Certain aspects of communication, work with the clients, and lack of supervision cause them difficulties.

During needs assessment, they have theorized that a professional involved in the social issues of society or performing any human services who considers it their task to aid in attaining individual and collective wellbeing by using dynamically applicable knowledge must have a mature personality and well-developed social skills. Institutions offering training in helper professions must, in deference to these needs, fulfill a mental hygiene role as well, paying attention (via development and training courses tailored to the needs of field work) to aiding professional socialization even after graduation from the university.

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Occupational Standards and Skills.
A Case Study for Human Resources
Management Program[1]

FLORICA ŞTEFĂNESCU[2]
University of Oradea (Romania)

SORANA SĂVEANU
University of Oradea (Romania)

Master level studies – a challenge?

Are the organization and content of Master level (MA) study programs still a challenge for Romanian higher education, 10 years after the implementation of the Bologna system? If so, what are the questions hanging over this system, and what answers/solutions can be given to clarify important issues?

Do MA study programs represent a benefit for teachers, students, the educational system, employers, and society as a whole, or is it just another directive, this time not just a national one, but a European directive?

All of these are legitimate questions asked by those involved in the organization and development of MA study programs and by other stakeholders, especially by the employers of graduates with higher education diplomas.

In response to these questions, in our paper we will describe some aspects that characterize our MA program: Human Resource Management, conducted by University of Oradea.

The Bologna Process regarding MA studies:
intentions and achievements

Concerns regarding the standardization of academic services and university regulations existed prior to the Bologna Declaration (1999). The Sorbonne Declaration from 1998 had as its main objective the redefinition of the architecture of the European education system. 29 Ministers of Education met on June 19th 1999 in Bologna, at the

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[2] E-mail: florica.stefanescu@gmail.com

oldest university in Europe, in order to sign the Bologna Declaration, designed to create a European Higher Education Area – EHEA until the end of 2010.

The Bologna documents support the necessity of implementing this system with relevant considerations such as: the creation of a common European higher education area (EHEA), the facilitate the recognition of diplomas, an increase in the international competitiveness of the European higher education system; in other words, the uniformity of organization, content, standards, and aims of study programs of higher education, with a major role assigned to the European Qualifications Framework (Singer & Sarivan, 2006; Singer et al., 2006).

One of the most important aspects of the Bologna system lies in its recommendation for the organizational structure of higher education on three levels: bachelor (3 years), Master (2 years), and PhD (3 years) (with some differences). The Table 1 below compares the knowledge, skills, and competences conferred to BA and MA graduates: scientific approach of specialty areas to ensure understanding, innovation, and creation of new knowledge and effective oral and written communication in the field and in various cultural contexts.

Table 1: *Knowledge, skills, and competences conferred to BA and MA study programs*

Knowledge, skills and competences granted by the diploma	BA studies	MA studies
General knowledge	Scientific approach of a specialty field that ensures the understanding, innovation, and creation of new knowledge and also effective oral and written communication in the field and in various cultural contexts.	Getting familiar with the latest and most advanced knowledge developments in the field; To gain independent research skills; The ability to apply theory to new and unpredictable situations.
Speciality knowledge	Processes of knowledge, reproduction and understanding specific to the field of study taken as a whole; the ability To establish relationships with knowledge from other disciplines and professional areas; Become familiar with the latest developments of knowledge and professional applications; Understand and apply basic principles and methods of specific investigations.	Accumulate substantial amounts of new knowledge; Identify, address and solve cognitive and new professional problems; Compare new knowledge with traditional and the ability to establish relationships between them, in order to bring new paths for knowledge growth and development of profession; Creative application of research techniques and problem solving.

General competences	The ability to collect, analyze, and interpret data and information, qualitatively and quantitatively, from multiple sources, in real professional contexts and from literature in the field, in order to develop and elaborate arguments, decisions, and create new approaches; Use different forms of written and oral communication, including in a foreign language; Use of information technology; take responsibility to develop a personal program of self-improvement; Effectively design and manage domain-specific processes.	Creative application of research techniques and problem solving; Development of studies and reports that can be published or professionally applied; Ability to lead working groups and communicate in the most diverse contexts; Ability to act independently and creatively in approaching and solving problems; Evaluate objectively and constructively critical conditions, to creatively solve problems and communicateresults demonstratively; Leadership skills and commitment on their own professional development path.
Cognitive skills	Apply concepts, theories, and fundamental investigation methods from the field of study to formulate projects and professional approaches; Ability to synthesize and interpret information to solve basic problems and evaluate the possible conclusions; Independent analysis problems and communicate and demonstrate the chosen solutions; Ability to assess complex problems and to communicate the results of self evaluation; Initiative in analyzing and solving problems.	Critically evaluate new research results; Formulation of interpretative alternatives and demonstrate their relevance; Creative application of research methods; Design and management of domain-specific processes.
Speciality competences	As established by the regulations of each field.	As established by the regulations of each field.

Source: Law no. 288/2004 http://www.edu.ro/index.php/articles/1263

Summarizing, compared with undergraduate programs, MA programs have: in terms of *general knowledge*, a broader scientific dimension; in terms of *specialty knowledge*, a more pronounced novelty; in terms of *general skills*, an emphasis on creativity, independence, critical thinking, and leadership; in terms of *cognitive skills*

the emphasis is on design, assessment, and relevance; and for *specialty competencies* both BA and MA are under their own regulations for each field.

It follows from this comparative analysis that undergraduates may be assigned to executive/middle management jobs and posts of execution and graduates to leadership or coordination positions. But this is not very clear for the academics[3], and even less for employers[4]. This makes the labor market too often encounter a reversed situation: undergraduates to be in leadership positions (based on previous experience, availability, and so on) and MA graduates find themselves in executive positions.

It is true that the two cycles confer different levels of qualification (level 6 for undergraduates and level 7 in the case of the MA).

Table 2: *Description of levels of qualification*

Level 6	Knowledge	*Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles;*
	Skills	*Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialized field of work or study*
	Competence	*Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups*
Level 7	Knowledge	*Highly specialized knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research* *Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields*
	Skills	*Specialized problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields*
	Competence	*Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams*

Source: Descriptors defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/content/descriptors-page

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[3] A study on this subject reveals the difficulties encountered in the construction of the academic curriculum for the MA study programs (Săveanu & Stefanescu, 2012)

[4] The study highlights the lack of employers' knowledge on potential differences between undergraduate and graduate competences (Stefanescu & Săveanu, 2012)

Human Resources Management program

Located in field of Sociology, the MA study program Human Resources Management (HRM) from the University of Oradea is described by professional skills (6) and transversal skills (3). They are adapted and aligned with Sociology competencies found in undergraduate programs, since the program is organized under the Sociology field.

In order to assess the competencies, there are established performance standards set out in terms of concrete tasks or indicators. For graduates of this study program we can identify 12 occupations found in COR (Classification of Occupations in Romania).

There are 20 disciplines, included in the HRM study program, spread over 4 semesters with a total of 120 credits in order to develop the skills described above. Most of these credits are assigned to the following competencies: The management of work relations in organizations (19), Recruitment, selection and promotion of personnel (16), Personnel records database management (15), Organizing training programs and internships, evaluation and insurance of their quality (15), and fewer credits are found in the case of: Professional counseling and organizational communication (8), Planning and organizing human resources in order to improve the organization's activities (9).

Research methodology

Our paper presents some comparative results obtained in the study of the curricula of MA programs that train specialists in human resources management in the country and in several other European countries. The approach is part of an attempt to improve our HRM study program from University of Oradea.

For our work we developed the following objectives:
- analysis of compatibility between the curricula and competencies found within study programs included in our research
- evaluation of the relationship between competencies achieved through the HRM study program and occupational standards for human resources manager[5]
- evaluation of employers' expectations regarding the training of HRM graduates
- description of training needs of graduates

In our paper we use data collected within the SocioPlus project "Training services, documentation and access for students in BA and MA study programs in Sociology and Social Work fields", funded by the European Social Fund. The project aims to improve the relevance of study programs' curricula for Sociology and Social work fields within the labor market and to meet the concrete needs of training specialists in these fields by adjusting the educational program of studies.

In this project there were two levels of analysis regarding the ways of organizing and implementing social sciences study programs. First, in order to achieve the project's

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[5] These standards were developed in 2000 under COSA (Council for Occupational Standards and Certification)

general objective, it was necessary to assess the current status of study programs in the areas covered by the project, using a comparative approach. Therefore, our first level of analysis covered the identification and selection of universities in the European Union and Romania and the identification and selection of BA and MA study programs within these universities. Second, the analysis focused on the educational contents of selected study programs. In this step, we used content analysis, focusing on the thematic areas covered within the Sociology, Social work and Human resources fields.

In this paper, we want to present the results obtained in the case of Human Resources Management study program. More details regarding the research methodologies can be found at the SocioPlus website (http://www.socioplus.eu/biblioteca).

For the first level of analysis, we started with the evaluation of the current status of other HRM study programs identified in European universities (40 top universities) and in Romania (all advanced research universities and the University of Oradea and University Aurel Vlaicu from Arad). 72 European universities were selected according to their position in official classifications (*U--Multirank*). These universities are found in 22 countries, 69 cities (more details can be found in Hatos (Ed.), 2014). For the final analysis we selected 69 universities where we found relevant HRM study programs.

We identified 29 MA programs of Human Resources Management or similar programs to HRM in the following countries: Belgium (2) Czech Republic (1), Cyprus (1), France (1), Germany (1), Italy (2), Netherlands (7), Poland (1), Portugal (1), Slovenia (1), Spain (6), Sweden (4), and Hungary (1). Most of these programs can be found in Social Sciences faculties, but some of them are organized by Economics faculties, law, or psychology.

The study of the HRM programs involved the analysis of educational contents and learning outcomes based on the curricula and/or other documents describing the topics from each curricula. Content analysis then involved encoding study programs and related disciplines by thematic areas and learning outcomes (specific and transversal competencies for each discipline). The classification of thematic areas included the *Field classification scheme*, with three categories (Sociology, Social Work, and Human Resources), which contained *Major thematic areas* for each field, and *Minor thematic areas* related to all *Major areas*. So the entire curriculum was classified thematically and according to specific and transversal competencies. For details regarding the construction of the thematic area schemes see Hatos (2014, Appendix B, pp. 113-115).

Our results also refer to data found found in two surveys developed by SocioPlus experts. One survey addressed the employers of undergraduates and graduates and the other survey referred to students who graduated from these social sciences study programs.

Research results

Disciplines, thematic areas and competences

For the Romanian universities organizing this MA study program, we found that 51.4% disciplines are assigned to the appropriate classification schemeand 28.3% are being thematically classified according to the *General scheme of Sociology*.

Most subjects in the curriculum are assigned to the thematic area *Performance management/ employee relations /working relations* (19.1%), followed by *Related disciplines* (economics, psychology (12.7%), *Human resources development* (11.0%), and *Recruitment and Placement* (5.8%). It was surprising to find the high percentage of subjects assigned to the thematic area of *Research methodology and techniques* from the Sociology scheme (10.4%), and a similar value identified in the case of Sociology programs (12.1%). It was also surprising to find the low number of courses related to the thematic area *Mass phenomenon* (2.9%) (apparently, with no connection with HRM). Beyond the comprehensive nature of the thematic classification scheme used for Sociology programs, this situation can be explained by the fact that the HRM program is organized under the Sociology domain, therefore some disciplines are included in the curricula according to the teachers' needs rather than according to necessary skills of graduates.

Regarding the distribution of disciplines by years of study, the analysis shows that in the two years there are mainly subjects on *Performance management/ employee relations /working relations*. Also, in the first year of study the emphasis is on teaching subjects on Human resources development, and the second year we find *Related disciplines* (economics, psychology). Regarding the type of disciplines, 75.3% are compulsory and 24.3% are optional. The analysis of specific competences shows that the highest value is registered for descriptive skills (86.8%), followed by the explanation skills (81.1%), functional skills (73.6%), and behavioral skills (34%). These results suggest that there are major differences among similar programs from abroad which transmit predominantly functional skills, followed by explanatory and behavioral skills and lastly, descriptive skills.

Regarding the transversal competencies, we identified that the highest value is recorded for attitudinal skills (48.9%) and strategic skills (48.9%), followed by social skills (39.1%), communication skills (37%), and IT skills (13%).

In analyzing the thematic areas specified in the curricula of HRM study programs from European universities, we analyzed 145 disciplines. 52.7% of these disciplines are classified according to the *Human Resources thematic area*, 20.2% of them are found under the *Sociology classification scheme*, 2.5% are recorded according to the *Social Work classification scheme,* and 24.6% of them do not fall under any of the scheme's components. We can explain the high percentage of subjects not classified by the fact that this study program is organized under three fields: sociology, economics, and psychology, and therefore the department focuses on subjects related to these

fields. On the other hand, HRM study programs include several general disciplines, such as practical training, preparing the graduation thesis, economics, management, etc.

Most of the disciplines analyzed in the case of HRM programs from European universities are classified according to the *Human Resources thematic scheme*: *Performance management/ employee relations /working relations* (13.8%), *Recruitment and Placement* (10.3%), *Human resources development* (12.3%), *Human resources policy* (7.9%), *General disciplines* (21.4%), and complementary disciplines (9.9%). Regarding the disciplines classified according to other classification schemes, we identified a high percentage (7.9%) in the case of *Sociology thematic scheme*: *Research methodology and techniques*. This situation makes sense if we take into account the fact that MA programs should have a significant focus on scientific activities. We registered also high percentages in the case of *Foreign languages* and *Economics*.

Human resource development and *Performance management, Employee relations/ labor relations* are topics studied mainly in the 1st year of study. In the second year we find mainly general disciplines, such as elaboration of final thesis, practical training. Regarding the type of disciplines, 67.2% are compulsory and 32.8% are optional.

Further we analyzed the specific and transversal competencies corresponding to the educational contents found in the case of HRM study programs. We encountered difficulties at this step of the analysis due to the lack of information available online. Even though the results do not follow scientific strictness, we present here the values registered. We found higher values for functional competencies (87.1%), which correspond to the professional nature of this study program, followed by explicative competences (85.1%), descriptive ones (73.3%), and behavioral ones (57.4%). For transversal competencies we found the following values: 80.2% strategic skills, 59.4% attitudinal skills, 56.4% social skills, 52.5% communication skills, and 10.9% IT skills.

Skills and occupational standards

The analysis of the contribution of disciplines from the curricula of HRM study programs to the formation of professional and transversal competencies was based on analysis of the contents of discipline sheets and, for greater data accuracy, we talked to teachers and asked them to indicate in the case of their subjects, which skills from the whole list are transmitted.

According to the data synthesis regarding the competencies corresponding to each subject, we found the following aspects: the score for professional competences includes 202 units, of which 84 units refer to knowledge and 118 units refer to skills, and 34 units refer to transversal competencies.

The lowest scores related to competencies are recorded in the following cases: Using procedures and software applications for database with personnel records management (3); Elaboration of research and intervention projects in communication and assessment of the improvement of debated issues (3 units); The operationalization of concepts for explanation and interpretation of new situations in the design of social research (4); Construction and evaluation of relevant indicators, and the

combination of established methods and techniques to develop new research tools (4); Full and detailed description of the terminology and communication strategies within the HR field (4); Develop strategies to solve behavioral problems characteristic to the field (4); Deepening knowledge of paradigms and methodological guidelines related to the design of social research (5); Assessment, review and quality assurance of programs and training sessions (5); Development of strategies for staff recruitment, selection, promotion and assessment (5); Using the terminology, communication strategies and methodologies for the communication analysis (5); Identify and describe types of communication (5); Analysis and evaluation of communication strategies and processes (5).

Results also indicate some overrepresented competencies (in terms of their frequency recorded in our data base): Identification of specific needs of target groups in organizational environments and the labor market (13); Explanation and interpretation of new working contexts (12); Development of effective solutions to manage labor relations in conditions of limited information (11); Knowledge about the management of labor relationships system within organizations, using specific concepts (10); Critical and constructive assessment instruments used to provide realistic judgments about the organizational environment (9); Use, explain, and interpret research tools and data collection; more accurate methods of analysis and data processing in line with labor market needs (9); Using criteria and assessment methods for grounding pertinent and constructive decisions (9); Identify new ways to address specific organizational environment and HRM processes (9).

Transversal competencies are well represented. However greater attention is paid to the Self-evaluation of the need for continuous training for adapting professional competencies to the organizational environment dynamics and labor market and acquisition of learning methods and techniques. In a changing society, the formation of this competence is essential for HRM graduates, both in what concerns themselves, and in terms of the personnel that they manage.

Although frequency analysis of knowledge, skills and competencies based on the content of discipline sheets can be considered useful, the fact that this analysis was accompanied by the consultation of teachers gives more weight and relevance.

Teaching techniques, skills and knowledge compared to international practice

Compared with the international practice and with top universities in Romania, HRM study program is well designed. Compared to our previous results, 48% of disciplines are classified according to the *HRM classification scheme* (51.4% for Romanian top universities and 52.7% for European universities), 28% of them are under the *Sociology thematic scheme* (28.3% for Romanian top universities and 20.2% for European universities), and 20% are not classified in any of the thematic scheme that we used (19.1% for Romanian top universities and 24.6 % for European universities).

Most disciplines from the HRM study program developed by University of Oradea are found within other national and international programs, either with the same name or a similar name.

Approximately 16% of subjects taught in this program are related to the *theme Performance Management / Employee Relations / labor relations*. This is a similar value as for other Romanian universities (19.1%), but with a higher value compared to European universities (13.8%). It is obvious for Romanian universities, including the University of Oradea, that HRM study programs are organized under the Sociology field, but we register in European universities more coverage of topics such as economics and psychology.

We found some disciplines that are not included in the HRM program from the University of Oradea, but are present in other universities (especially those from abroad). These disciplines are: *Talent management*, *Strategic marketing,* and *Negotiation techniques*. It is worth mentioning that unlike European universities in Romania foreign languages are not taught in MA study programs.

The distribution of disciplines in the two years of study is well balanced and logical in the sense that in the first year we find more general disciplines and in the second year subjects are more focused on specialization.

We appreciate that in the case of this professional program, the European model for competence hierarchy (1. functional, 2. explicative, 3. descriptive, 4. behavioral) is the right one. HRM study program from the University of Oradea fits well with this model, better than other programs from Romanian universities, where we find a greater amount descriptive competencies.

The specific skills are represented as follows: 100% explicative skills, 65% functional competencies, 65% behavioral competencies, and 80% descriptive competencies. In Romanian universities, the classification is different: descriptive skills (86.8%), followed by the explicative ones (81.1%), functional (73.6%), and behavioral (34%). In European universities the values are: functional skills (87.1%), followed by the explicative (85.1%), descriptive (73.3%), and behavioral (57.4%).

If we look at transversal competencies, we find that the HRM study program from the University of Oradea is closer to the European model where there is more focus on strategic skills, compared to other programs from Romanian universities. However, our program is poor in terms of IT skills, extremely important in today's human resources management. Transversal competencies are as follows: 35% strategic skills, 40% communication skills, 55% attitudinal skills, 50% social skills, and 10.5% IT skills. In other Romanian universities the percentages are as follows: attitudinal skills (48.9%) and strategic (48.9%), followed by social (39.1%) and communication (37%), IT skills (13%). In European universities the data reflect that: 80.2% strategic skills, 59.4% attitudinal skills, 56.4% social skills, 52.5% communication skills, and 10.9% IT skills. These findings on HRM curricula require some considerations on the pedagogical techniques used by teaching staff.

The analysis shows that in European universities these skills are implemented in a student-centered education philosophy that focuses on the independent work of students carried out on the basis of plans of study and recommended bibliography for every subject. In Romanian universities, the University of Oradea included, the approach follows the classic model of teaching, focused on presentations and debates. In this case the teacher is in the center, even though students have already gained academic experiences acquired within the BA programs.

Employers point of view

Employers consider that master's graduates in the field of human resources must have mostly abilities regarding the use and administration of data bases for employee's records, recruiting, management of work relations, training and evaluation of personnel, as well as the identification, analysis, and solving ofconflicts within organizations and the community. Regarding the desired transversal competencies as declared by employers, in order these are: *knowledge regarding their own specialization, the ability to work well under stress, the ability to acquire fast knowledge, team work ability, and time-management.*

More, employers propose the following improvements, presented in the order of their statement: focus on practical training, thorough knowledge on assessment, psychology of the employee, and human resources management.

On behalf of the employers those pedagogical techniques are desirable which lead to an interdependence between conducting work related tasks and a consistent contribution to the success of the organization. In other words, independent work, projects, activity portfolios, and practical training could fit better the exigencies of employers and could be the most adequate methods for reaching the objectives of this study program.

Graduates point of view

The majority of graduates appreciate the academic reputation of Human Resources Management study program (81.6%), as well as the fact that it is oriented towards a professional training, for a specific job (57.9%). However, regarding the acknowledge-ment by employers of the competencies offered by this program and the correspondence of these competencies and the ones needed at the labor market, the opinions vary even if there are more positive evaluations of these aspects. The same can be said about the possibilities for practical training and the involvement in the programs implemented by the department. More than half of the graduates appreciate that there is a need in further development of competencies through other forms of education and professional training.

More important is the fact that all graduates of this study program have had at least one job since graduation. That is an average of 1.3 jobs after graduation, meaning that most have kept their initial jobs.

Most of our graduates have had jobs in the field of their studies, obtained with the help of family, friends, or acquaintances and started their master's studies probably to validate the knowledge needed at their work. In obtaining their first job, the most important were the previous relations/recommendations (above 80%), followed by the domain of study (55.5%), previous work experience (27.3%), the university/ faculty/ department reputation (18.2%), and a very low degree school results (9.1%).

Almost 90% of graduates are employed, most of them with a permanent contract 82% , half of them in the public sector and half in private sector, 37% in leading positions, 63% executive positions, and 11.4% entrepreneurs.

Most of the graduates of this study program consider that the obtained knowledge and competencies through the BA and MA studies could be used at the work place. Even if they consider that more practical training is needed, some the of them understand the need for theory in their professional training: "without neglecting the importance of theoretical aspects, it is much needed a better structuration of disciplines of the study program so that graduates would know to search and correctly interpret legislative aspects, not to learn the legislation as it often changes, but to know the main elements which need to be followed when closing a work contact". In fact, the idea that can be driven from the statements of this group refers to the "pragmatic approach" of the study program regarding the structure, content and its outcomes: "more hours for courses specifically for HRM such as: job analysis, performance evaluation, compensations and benefits, career plan, etc.".

Conclusions and recommendations

General aspects

A first recommendation driving from the above findings is to consider and organize the human resources management (HRM) master program (MA) as an interdisciplinary program that integrates specialists from the fields of economics, psychology, and sociology.

"The pragmatic approach" of the study program, in terms of structure, content and, aims should start with: the educational plan's structure (curriculum) that should be created or modified after an analysis of the occupational standards for the human resources manager profession and the knowledge and skills needed to achieve them; the content of the disciplines should be focused on the practical aspects of the profession of human resources manager, correlated with appropriate theoretical knowledge in the field of study with an emphasis on new research, possibly from other geographical areas; the pursued objectives of the curriculum should be structured in a few clear categories (e.g. professional, scientific, behavioral) and followed by each subject.

Conclusions and recommendations regarding the educational plan

Following the European model, we recommend the incorporation in the HRM study program of a course of Applied Modern Languages (albeit only optional). Also we

propose the introduction of a Human resources economics discipline in order to help the students understand how HRM can contribute to the increment of company performance: reducing of costs, increasing productivity, profit, etc. (Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Huselid, 1995). The program would also require the introduction of the discipline of Strategic human resource management (Delery & Doty, 1996; Boxall, 1992).

The restructuring of the educational plan should be made also by switching from the classical distribution of the study subjects per year, to a modern model of association of more general subjects, namely those associated with narrower specialized disciplines (e.g. Studying in the same semester the disciplines: *Human resource management, Personnel selection, Career development* and *Staff evaluation*), possibly the subjects of each semester to be complementary, grouped around a large theme (perhaps with the exception of the first semester that should focus on introduction disciplines such as *Management, Economics, Psychology, Sociology organizations, Marketing)*.

As long as during the hiring process, data indicate that the performance of candidates at the selection interviews is the main criterion, followed by the past experience, both in terms of employment history and experience acquired during the specialized practice in school. The prestige of the graduated university and the results achieved during the years of study matter less, so we recommend, once again, the increase of importance of professional practice in the curriculum and the organization of activities simulating job interviews with the support of specialists.

Based on the proposals of employers on improving the curriculum, we suggest the introduction in the curriculum of the following courses: *Psychology of Labor*, *Personnel Evaluation,* and the allocation of a greater number of hours for the course *Human Resource Management* (or turning it in a course of a year).

Of interest could be the organization of *Practice* during the three months of summer holiday between the first and second year of study (which would also allow the preparation of the dissertation thesis), which would allow for the integration of the proposals with the needs of the employers concerning the increasing importance of practice in the study program. In this perspective the structuring of the educational plan should be considered in order to include, in the first year, the disciplines that would allow for the implementation of *Practice* to a serious degree .

In the context of restructuring of the educational plan, with the same purpose of increasing employability, it would make sense to include disciplines that respond to a narrower specialization in the field of Human Resources (*Staff recruitment, Selection, Continuous professional training, Personnel evaluation, Wage system, and other compensation*). This latter aspect is important because the results of the conducted study reveal that the graduates of HRM program are positioned mainly in executive positions and less in positions of leadership.

The distribution of transferable credits (ECTS) on disciplines, which represent the quantity of work submitted by students to acquire a subject, are arbitrarily allocated and are not related to the complexity of competencies required by each discipline.

We recommend the redistribution of the credits based on the analysis referring to skills training which is assumed by one discipline or another.

Improvement of competences

From our analysis- of specific and transversal competencies acquired through the HRM study program we recommend that the program should have a stronger emphasis on professional knowledge and skills and the improvement of functional skills which should be reflected in the manner in which the contents of the courses are developed.

Being a MA program, we consider that it is excessively theorized, the concern for theoretical knowledge being almost equal with the acquiring of practical skills (84 to 118) and the transversal skills being somewhat neglected (having only 34 units). A careful analysis of professional standards is needed as a basis for restructuring the curriculum and educational content of the disciplines.

The fact that some competencies are deficiently represented and others are over-represented is only partly relevant because there are general subjects that help the development of general competencies without which the more specific competencies could t be acquired only through specific courses.

However, given the deficiencies highlighted above, our analysis of the under representation of skills like communication, strategic management, organizational behavior, and data management in various aspects of HRM specialization lead us to recommend the allocation of independent courses for these important areas.

Concerning the overrepresentation of some competencies we recommend that an analysis of the contents of the disciplines that contribute to the formation of these over represented items be conducted to determine whether or not to remove of some chapters, topics, problematic that are repeated in several disciplines.

Improvement of learning techniques

From our analysis of the teaching techniques used in HRM, we recommend a gradual transition from the classical education system to the student-centered system in at least two stages: 1. the involvement of MA students, as they experience each course, to create presentations based on the bibliography suggested by the teacher, thus waiving the classical clear demarcation between lecture and seminar and the thematic organization of the curriculum content; 2. the teaching system should be focused on independent work of students (individual or in work groups) on the basis of thematic planning and the bibliography recommended by the teacher.

One of the drawbacks arising from the analysis of the study program is represented by the fact that there is no competence evaluation system, despite the existence of performance standards,. Therefore, we recommend that all instructors should acquire and apply performance standards to assess competences formed by their discipline. For example, instructors of the disciplines: *Human Resources Management, Socio-economic entrepreneurship, Educational and training systems, Labor legislation,*

Performance Management, Financial Management, Career Development, Health and safety, Psychodiagnosis, Specialized practice should evaluate the competencies of their courses using *The organization and training of programs and internships, evaluation and quality assurance,* starting from the minimum standard "Designing a set of programs and training activities."

By analyzing the syllabus from other European universities we observed that the teaching system is implemented on the principle of student-centered education, which is based on individual work carried out on the basis of plans of study and recommended bibliography for every topic. In Romanian universities, including the University of Oradea, the teaching approach of those managing the HRM MA program follows the classical teaching method consisting of lectures and debates or presentations of papers in seminars, making the teacher the center of this process, despite the fact that we are talking about a master's program and therefore the academic experience of students who have already graduated a BA program.

From the perspective of the employers, the desired pedagogical techniques are those that lead to independence of the person in carrying out their work tasks and accumulation of theoretical knowledge that will help them in giving a consistent contribution to the success of the organization. In other words, employers consider independent work, project preparation, portfolio of activities, and practice are supposed to be the most appropriate methods to achieve the objectives of HRM study program.

In agreement with the graduates we recommend the use of methods and techniques of interactive teaching such as: role-play, network discussions, the gallery and mosaic method, problem solving, case studies, learning activities that involve direct students to solve problems, finding solutions and making decisions. In the disciplines that address specific aspects of human resources management (career management, personnel selection, training programs, staff evaluation, etc.) we recommended the use of simulation as a method that puts students in situations similar to those in the workplace.

We believe that these proposals can be implemented in the study of human resources both in the BA and MA programs, five years being sufficient to ensure complete and quality preparation of graduates. Currently this is only partially achieved within two year MA program because most of the students come from different fields of study.

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Interactive Learning Situations for the Development of Student Communication Skills in Social Work Study Program

ALINA ROMAN[1]
"Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad (Romania)

EVELINA BALAŞ
"Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad (Romania)

Abstract

The overall objective of the SocioPlus project, organized by the University of Oradea in partnership with "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, is the curricula development of educational programs and to increase student access to quality services (documentation, teaching materials, and training techniques). Developing/adapting the curriculum was based not only on studies and recommendations from practitioners, but also on the adaptation to the needs of students by testing/modular piloting of the selected subjects for 2 months. In the present study, we intend to present the importance of interactive pedagogy, in working with students, and some examples of good practices/exercises applied to seminars that facilitate the development of these communication skills required by the labour market, applied to third year students – Social Work study program within the communication techniques classes.

Keywords: *Learning situation; Communication skills; Didactical strategies; University curricula; Students*

Introduction

The study aims to present from a theoretical point of view aspects related to the ways the learning situations for students are constructed, learning situations which lead to achieving behavioural changes. Also, we will present and analyze the efficiency of some learning situations constructed with the aim of developing communicational competences in students.

Theoretical frame

Modern pedagogy outlines new dimensions, tendencies and educational effective orientations. New theoretical models take on dynamism, flexibility and adaptation to individual and community training needs. The nature and content of learning

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[1] E-mail: romanalinafelicia@yahoo.com

experiences, the relationship among teacher-learner, teacher-teacher, student-student, and the connections between school, education and real-life experiences are under analysis and subjected to pedagogical reformation.

Current education tends to be structured on four fundamental learning types which turn into pillars of knowledge during one`s lifetime: *learning to know,* which involves acquiring knowledge tools; *learning to do* and thus individuals get in touch with the surrounding environment; *learning to live among others* to cooperate with other people and take part in human activities; *learning to be*, which is an important element that emerges from the first three. All these four paths of knowledge are part of a whole because there are many overlaps, intersections, and exchanges between them.

The features of learning in terms of learning situations bring about behavioural changes with students at some levels: as inference situations – permanent process through which the student is taught to learn and how to learn; performance related changes – when students are motivated and ranked; by experiencing interaction, communication, and practice which are predetermined by teachers and characterized by certain stability. This shows that behavioural changes brought about by learning should be "long-lasting".

The timing of learning situations is part of the mostly analysed pedagogical scenarios. Consequently, it is believed that there are three formative times when learners face learning situations. These times must be applied by all teachers to come to a proper progress of instructive-educational process.

These significant times are (Roman & Balas, 2014):
- Time 1: preparing, planning the activity
- Time 2: conducting direct activities
- Time 3: reflection, integration and structuring of learning acquisitions

Student-centred education takes these timings into account without relating them to inertness of achieving T1, or the indifference of achieving T3 (Le Boterf, 1998). It can thus result in a decrease of the quality of education.

The following psycho-pedagogic elements must be taken into account during the preparation of learning activities:
- Transfer of knowledge by discovering the previous level and their integration in the newly taught notions,
- Practical application of newly acquired knowledge by using it in contextual or procedural contexts, questioning new notions, stimulating learning by discovery by challenging pupils to make hypothesis, etc.
- Teachers` anticipation of uncertainties, misunderstandings and queries caused by new learning topics, based on previous experiences,
- Differentiated interrogation concerning the difficulties faced when trying to achieve learning regulation and self-regulation activities.

For instance, awareness of regulation and self-regulation processes places the student in learning situations by volitive motivation. Firstly, they discover learning

issues and the will effort which is stimulated to clear out misunderstandings is diminished and changed into learning ability.

In T2 the activities of pedagogic scenarios involve elements of real teaching-learning-assessment activity, whose aim is to reach finalities of different degrees and types.

If these visible and noticeable competencies are stated by the teacher at the beginning, they can be easily followed and reached by students. "You will be able to do this thing / process/ operation!" How? Through levers of: exploring, questioning, investigating, researching, building, developing, creating, etc.

The created learning endeavour and situations should follow disciplinary but also inter and transdisciplinary aims.

In operational terms, a learning situation requires the designation of visible components applied in teachers` activities. The result is the emergence of five stages that can be targeted by any learning situation. The interactions among teachers and students aims:

- to state the subject/topic/ project and its objectives. The engagement into an activity or teaching project is preceded by certain cognitive premises. The teacher anticipates the level of students` knowledge, explores the most appropriate possibilities to make students understand the subject and drafts the methods that can be applied.
- to identify proper information sources but also personal resources that can bring about changes in terms of acquisition of new knowledge.
- to apply previous cognitive schemas to favour an efficient transfer of knowledge. Using learning situations in practice facilitated by knowledge and not by ignorance of prior knowledge.
- to place students in learning situations by using teaching strategies and teaching methods chosen based on previous stages. This stage is about questioning, interpreting, and debating the new topic.
- to understand the teaching-learning process must be accompanied by significant examples at any subject matter. The following examples are to be mention: pictures, demonstrations, case studies, experimental situations, etc. which are designed to underpin the understanding of new knowledge.
- to place students in application-practice areas where students can use new information and newly acquired notions and then accommodate them to the overall structure of their knowledge and thus become creative.

T3 is mostly about revaluing, maybe the most efficient in terms of learning regulation and self-regulation processes. The stage of integrating learning situations can be verbalized by stating learning procedures, by indicating the methods and the difficulties, the achievements and the failures, and/or the paths taken to overcome negative elements. At this point emerges a significant retroaction, which needs to fix and improve the learning situation on two levels, namely teacher-students relationship

but also on three levels, namely student-student relationship. The retroaction can also be modular as consequence of the development of self-learning mechanisms. The partition of new information, applicative or creative experience exchanges, communication, and argumentative-contradictory debates, presentation of work and learning methods, of documents as well as of strategies are significant elements used in learning regulation and self-regulation functions.

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There are numerous definitions of competence but in procedural terms they all share functional notions like: „a set of resources" – cognitive, motrical, affective etc. bound by knowledge, self-knowledge, attitudes and abilities, action schemes or habits that are "mobilized" integratively and dynamically "to deal with" a variety of problem situations, problem solving tasks and projects that need a positive answer (Le Boterf, 1998; Paquay et al., 2001; Rey, 1996; Wittorski, 1998 etc.).

Models for building competencies can be generated. They are the consequence of learning activities and learning situations in which students are placed. A learning situation which favours the development of competencies involves sequential, gradual involvement in ten types of activities (Roman, 2014):

1. Facing problem situations (new and challenging);
2. Exploring resources (available through learning);
3. Acting internally or externally
4. Interacting (for research, confrontation, analysis, understanding, etc.)
5. Reflective activities, attitudes
6. Co-evaluative activities
7. Structuring new acquisitions
8. Integration in inter and transdisciplinary contexts and systems (for new long-term acquisitions)
9. Building meaning activities and
10. Preparing transfer possibilities.

Learning situations that enhance the development of communication competence

The course and seminar contents, the bibliography, and the teaching strategies and techniques used for the study programme Social Work within Aurel Vlaicu University have been changed through the *SocioPlus Project – Training, Documentation and Access Services for students of undergraduate and master programmes in Sociology and Social Work.* The purpose is to adjust the contents of the undergraduate programme in social work. According to these changes, the syllabus for the course in Communication techniques has been piloted with 3rd year students for 20 hours.

The transversal competences aimed by this discipline have been:

1. Development of efficient communication abilities and problem solving in a vulnerable group
2. Objective and reasoned approach, both theoretical and practical of problem situations for their efficient settlement in compliance with social work values and principles;
3. Applying efficient work techniques with transdisciplinary teams on various hierarchical layers at intra-and interorganizational levels;
4. Applying participative strategies in social intervention techniques;
5. Self-evaluation of continuous training needs so as to adapt professional competencies to the dynamics of social context;
6. Conducting professional tasks according to deontological principles of this profession.

Considering the above presented theoretical aspects as well as the objectives of SocioPlus project, we want to list some of the learning situations designed to develop transversal competences used in efficient communication and problem solving situations with vulnerable groups.

Description sheet of learning situation 1

Objectives:

- Interpersonal relations are based on communication through which the individual knows him/herself and the people around him.
- Communication ability defines human personality because each of us wants to be understood properly and individually.
- The necessity of knowing the purpose of communication helps the individual define behaviour and language.

Duration: two hours.

Topic of the activity: The importance of communication
Description of the activity:

1. **Icebreaker**: "Seasons"
   - Students are invited to sit in a circle, then to turn right, sitting with their back or the face towards someone
   - Students are invited to walk in a circle, making movements/ "massage"/ imaginary drawing with their fingers on the back of the person standing in front of them using seasons as a topic; e.g. It is *spring* ...the sun is shining, the grass is growing, the flowers are blooming, people are walking; the *summer* is here… people go on holidays/vacation to the sea or to the mountains;
   - Students are invited to change the walking direction and continue the exercise – e.g. *Autumn* is here...it is raining, the wind is blowing, the birds are flying to warm countries; *Winter* rushed to arrive...it is snowing, everything is covered with snow, it is slippery, people go sleighing and skating.

2. The activity continues with a presentation using PowerPoint with the topic COMMUNICATION, debates and questions (Pânişoară, 2003).
   - Communication is defined
   - The communication schema is discussed
   - The communication components are analysed
   - The types of communication are enumerated
   - Communication barriers are discussed
   - Communication styles are exemplified
   - The qualities of communication are analysed

3. **Application.** *What do you say after you greet?*
   Students are divided into small groups and practice one of the situations below:
   1. You have applied for a job that you want very much. The interviewer doesn`t smile, when you enter the room. What do you say after greeting?
   2. You have gotten a job, and today is your first day at work. When you enter the factory, the supervisor comes to you. What do you say after greeting?
   3. You get a phone call and find out that your best friend has died in a car crash. You are very upset and rush to his/her parents` house. The mother opens the door. What do you say after greeting?
   4. A very good friend of yours has been admitted in the hospital for a long period of time. You get a phone call from his/her parents who inform you that s/he is terminally ill and that her/his life expectation is between 6 and 12 months. You friend hasn`t called to inform you but the parents want you to visit him/her. You go to the hospital and enter the room. What do you say after greeting?
   5. You had a serious argument with your parents, whom you haven`t spoken for almost two years. Your sister or your brother wants you to meet them and make up with them. You go to their house and enter the door. What do you say after greeting?
   6. Your boss is a very formal man and highly educated. He constantly admonishes you in front of the others until one day when you don`t accept such treatment anymore. You stand up and defend yourself although you know that he will be displeased. Your boss tells you to shut up because you are nothing but a warm body occupying the space. He orders you to go to his office after the meeting. You go there and see him waiting with an extremely grave demeanor. What do you say after greeting?

Translated and adapted after: Communication Research Associates. A workbook for interpersonal communication.

Methodological resources: presentation, exemplification, debate, questioning, conversation, exercise.

Material resources: laptop, video projector, power-point presentation flipchart paper, marker

Description sheet of learning activity no 2

Objectives:
- Identification and analysis of communication barriers
- Study of reduction and distortion phenomena of a message transmitted through several consecutive networks.

Duration: two hours

Topic of the activity: Communication barriers
Description of the activity:

1. **Icebreakers**: DIVERSITY AND UNITY (after Dughi, 2014)
   *Objective***:** favours self-disclosure and knowledge of others
   *Group structure***:** 21 people
   Duration: 20 minutes
   *Description***:** All participants stand in a circle, at least one arm stretch distance between them. All participants have to tell something about themselves, a unique experience they had. If no one from the group shares the same experience, the narrator takes a step forward; if someone has the same experience, the narrator remains at his/her place. The action along the circle continues a few times until all players are almost in the middle of the circle. The value of the exercise lies in its end. Many people say what they think – and what many of us would think – unique experiences, only to find out that there are other people with the same unique experiences. This game shows not only how different people are but also how these differences can enrich the cohesion of a group. They will also discover things people have in common, unexpected things sometimes.

2. The activity continues with a presentation using PowerPoint with the topic COMMUNICATION BARRIERS, debates and questionings.
   - communication barriers are defined;
   - communication distractors are discussed.

3. **Application:** *The Exercise entitled Rumours* (after Peretti, A., Legrand, J-A., & Boniface, J, 2001*)*
   *Objectives***:** Establishing the laws that govern the emergence and propagation of rumours in community.
   Materials: A4 sheets, writing tools
   Description: Two subgroups invent a story starting with a given number of words (selected by the participants) and transmit it through several networks.
   The exercise is conducted in three successive phases.
   1. *Elaboration of messages:* The facilitator divides the group into two and gives the instructions. For instance, the facilitator forms two subgroups A and B from a group of 16 people. Then s/he gives the following instructions: "*Each of you should write three random words and then reunite all 24 words selected*

by your group by making up a five-six sentences long story. It is compulsory to use these 24 words. The timing allotted for this activity is between twenty and thirty minutes". In case timing is reduced, one should use a previously made up story.

2. *Transmission of messages:* Immediately after the two subgroups A and B have finished writing their story, the facilitator asks all members of group B except for one to leave the room (B1). A member from group A has to read the story made up by his/her group. Later on, the facilitator introduces another member from group B (B2) with the following instruction: *"B1 will deliver you a message, which you can also deliver to someone else. You can ask B1 questions but you cannot take notes".* Thus the first group goes through the filter of eight successive networks of the second group. Then the second group presents its story through the filter made up of the eight members of the first group.

3. *The study of distortions:* The facilitator calls forth what has been previously said or plays the recorded tapes. S/he asks the participants to stop the presentation or recording each time they notice a relevant distractor/ distortion. The group discusses with the facilitator the causes of the distortion. The group is mostly surprised and amused by the richness of observed or recorded distortions. There are cases when the story has no connection at all to the initial story.

Timing: 40 minutes

Formative value: awareness of the mechanisms of information distortion and implicitly of one of the causes of prejudice emergence; avoiding labelling, transmission of unchecked information, and use of prejudices.

Methodological resources: presentation, exemplification, debate, questioning, conversation, exercise

Material resources: laptop, video projector, power-point presentation, flipchart paper, marker

Description sheet of learning activity no 3

Objectives:

- Knowing the characteristics of the interview as an intervention technique in social work
- Making a dyadic interview to know someone well enough to introduce her/him to someone else.

Duration: two hours

Topic of the activity: The interview
Description of the activity:

1. **Icebreaker**: Subjective perception of time (after Dughi, 2014)
Objective: highlighting subjectivity in perception even when we deal with exact, unanimously accepted reality.

Materials: –

Description: Participants are asked to stand up with their eyes closed and sit down again after they believe a minute has passed by.

Timing: 5 minutes

Formative value: Awareness of the relativity of individual perception as well as the importance of time-serving. An analogy with the perception of other people will be made by highlighting the prejudices in interhuman relations.

2. The activity continues with a presentation using PowerPoint with the topic THE INTERVIEW, debates and questionings.
   - The interview is defined
   - Different types of interviews are analysed
   - The characteristics of interviews are discussed

3. **Application:** *Dyadic interview*

   Aims: To interview another person and know him/her well enough to introduce him/her to someone else.

   Introduction: We are all the centre of our world. As I cannot enter your world completely, you cannot enter mine. If we want to communicate, we have to define a mutual world. Even in this mutual world (or mutually accepted world) my answers for you are dictated by my perception of myself. When I talk to you, I actually talk to the picture I have about you, which is probably different than the picture you have. Then how can I know the real you? I ask questions. As questions are based on my own perceptions, they cannot give me an accurate picture of how you see yourself. What questions should I ask to have an accurate perception of you?

   Procedure:
   1. Make a list of 10 questions you would like to be asked by someone and write them on a separate sheet of paper.
   2. Choose a partner and exchange the lists of questions.
   3. You have 30 minutes to interview each other. Write your partner`s answers to the questions you are asking from his/her list. Your partner has to do the same thing.
   4. Form a group of you and your partner along with two other couples, namely six people. Present your partner to the rest of the group using the information you received during the interview.

   Questions
   After everybody has presented the partner, discuss the following questions:
   1. *Have you noticed a situation when the conversation focused on one side? Was it an equal exchange of information? Why?*
   2. *Why is an interview different from a regular conversation?*
   3. *After you have spent several minutes with a classmate, how do you feel about him/her? Do you know him/her?*

4. *Do you think that the impression you have about the person you have interviewed is a correct one? Why?*
5. *The information your partner has received after interviewing you are as clear and revealing as the questions from your list. Were your questions honest? Were they carefully expressed? Have you purposely written on the list questions that might annul or avoid an important aspect of your life? How open do you think your partner`s questions were?*

Methodological resources: presentation, exemplification, discussion, questioning, conversation, exercise.

Material resources: laptop, video projector, power-point presentation, flipchart paper, marker.

Analyzing the three learning situations above and implemented through the Sociplus project in the "Communication Techniques" course regarding the transversal competences envisaged to be made, the following considerations are to be made:

A thorough analysis is not possible at this time given the relatively short period of time since the implementation of these methods. But a mainly theoretical analysis related to the achievement of behavioral changes in the target group, we consider that can be achieved, followed by a future analysis based on statistical data obtained that will either confirm or refute these assumptions.

We mentioned at the beginning of the study with the delimitation of the theoretical framework, that learning peculiarities in terms of learning situations lead to behavioral changes in students, grouped into several levels. We will try to analyze the existence of such behavioral changes as a result of applying the learning situations set out above, differentiated on each plan, trying to analyze, in theory at least, the effect of the proposed methods.

Regarding to the first level, of the inference situations, viewed as an ongoing process by which the student is taught to learn and how to learn, we appreciate that the effect of the three learning situations is medium. The main benefit of these practical methods is that the student is encouraged to learn and learn how to learn. The student perceives the teaching/learning as a new situation that he/she is facing and in which he/she involves more having the comfort of knowing that these situations are only simulations. Thus, the learning process is not seen as an imposed one, but rather as an approach in which the student chooses to and is interested in participating. Of course, such a participatory attitude positively affects the student learning process, regarding this first level analyzed.

The second level mentioned in the theoretical part of the study, namely the relation to performance, whereby students are motivated and assessed, is also the one in which the effects of the application of the three learning situations reach a minimum level. Clearly, the methods presented do not seek to create competitive situations between students and are not intended to rank the participants. A feature of these

learning situations is that there are no wrong answers. On the contrary, the failure may consist only in the absence of answers, the refusal of students to actively engage. Often an unexpected or unprecedented response from a student, for example in the application "*What do you say after you hello?*" is likely to generate the most discussion within the group and thus achieve the objective of improving the communicational capacity is facilitated. This minimal impact on the performance level should not be regarded as necessarily a negative factor. The lack of hierarchy could facilitate learning by eliminating a factor of stress for the students.

By far the strongest effects of the application of these learning situations can be found on the level of experiences of interaction and communication. The impact of the proposed methods on this level is in our opinion a major one. All three proposed situations are based on the existence of relationships between participants. The success of the implementation of some of the suggested exercises: "Seasons", "Diversity and unity" or "Rumors" is closely linked to the existence of effective communication between and among participants. The students gradually realize that, even by finding the opposite effect (eg. exercise for "Rumours") they are encouraged to communicate consistently and effectively. The simple fact that students are encouraged to communicate with people in the group whom they may or may not know, will increase their confidence in their own communicational abilities and will lead to a more frequent use determining a future progressive improvement of communicational skills. The level of interaction is also high, noting that as such methods are implemented it is likely that this level will continually increase as the students develop their own communication skills. We expect a kind of "snowball" effect with such learning situations being implemented, followed by an increase in the level of interaction, resulting in an improvement of students' skills and a future enhancement in the level of interaction within such learning situations.

Finally, the fourth level referred to the relative stability of the behavioral changes observed in the group of students participating in learning activities proposed in this study. We are stating from the beginning that in our opinion, this effect is the most difficult to quantify. Of course it would be desirable for these behavioral changes to be permanent for all the students involved, but we are aware that achieving such a goal is impossible. Some students will be more likely to engage in the conduct of the exercises, some will be more reluctant, some will use the acquired skills in the future with a higher frequency and others may and will lose them by not practicing. Perhaps the secret for a lasting behavioral change consists precisely in practicing the communicational skills. If our proposed methods are sufficiently attractive to induce the student to participate in the future in such learning activities, there are grounds for achieving sustainable effects over time. Thus, not by chance, some good parts of the proposed methods benefit from some elements with a strong emotional impact. As an example we mention the app "What do you say after you hello?", in which the student is forced to think about a situation in which he has to notify the family about

the death of a close relative or face a boss that has just put him in a humiliating situation in front of the entire staff, or the exercise "Diversity and unity" in which he is being encouraged to present his own fears to the group.

The emotional involvement thus achieved is likely to bring stability to the results, the student later easily recalling the particular circumstances faced. In conclusion, and regarding this final level, the effects of applying these learning situations are estimated to be from average to high.

Conclusions

Performance nowadays is not measured in terms of quantity, through the amount of memorized and reproduced knowledge but in terms of students` ability to solve problems and cooperate with others. We should show tolerance and mutual respect towards human diversity, as well as solidarity and abilities to take part in professional and public life in a responsible and efficient manner. The rules of an honest social competition should be accepted by everyone.

All these capabilities are dependent upon the existence of an effective communicational skill set. In the absence of communication, a student's ability to solve problems that he confronts is put in serious doubt. The ability to communicate with others is not an innate quality but one that can be learned and improved, especially later in life.

The indispensable nature of the communicative competence also attracts a responsibility from teachers to direct more of their attention to this component, to new teaching and learning techniques aimed at its development. We can even talk about an interdependent relationship: in order to lead an exercise, a technique for improving the communication for students, the teacher should in turn improve his own communication skills; active involvement in teaching these techniques will determine both an increase in communication efficiency for students as well as for the teacher.

All the learning situations presented and analyzed in this article are based on the unique nature of the learning situation facing the students. As mentioned above, the existence of elements with strong emotional impact underpins lasting behavioral changes. It also begs the constant need from teachers to innovate, to design new learning situations, to want to be actively involved in designing such methods, and to aim to develop their communicational skills.

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Improving the Curriculum
for a Social Services Master's Degree Program

MIHAELA GAVRILĂ-ARDELEAN[1]

"Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad (Romania)

Abstract

In order to improve our academic curriculum in one of our higher education programs, the Master of Social Services (SS), we developed a pilot questionnaire to assess our program and how well we prepare our students for their work in the field. This process was developed as the result of a European interuniversity project, SOCIOPLUS, developed between the University of Oradea, Faculty of Social Sciences and "Aurel Vlaicu" at the University of Arad. The Questionnaire was comprised of a total of 77 items, questions aimed at assessing teaching methods, the usefulness and relevance of the training for students in the Master SS program, the integration of the curriculum, and usefulness of course syllabi. Beyond performance, the major aims of the European integration of quality in higher education for social sciences were to improve the university curriculum for the Social Services Master's Degree program and to increase the students' chances of employment by improving the transversal skill of our students. The questionnaire was field tested, and the final questionnaire was developed after assessing the results of our field testing.

Keywords: *Academic Curriculum; Masters Degree; Questionnaire.*

Introduction

Through our exploration and assessment of the needs in the field of the Social Sciences labor market for highly-specialized knowledge and the practical skills necessary for students, our instructors decided to adapt both the theoretical and practical content of the curriculum in the at the Bachelor's Degree (BA) and Master's Degree (MA) levels of our program. The SOCIOPLUS European project was developed and implemented between two partner universities: the University of Oradea, Faculty of Social Sciences and "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad.

In this paper we refer to the curriculum as: Career development in the field of social and medical services. This process included: Project, Preparation services, documentation and access for students in bachelor and master's degree in Sociology (SOCIOPLUS), part of the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007-2013, POSDRU/156/1.2/G/139751.

Our project implementation period was May 14, 2014 – November 13, 2015.

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[1] Email: miha.gavrila@yahoo.com

The main objective of the project was to build and implement more effective curricula for the students in five programs (two at the undergraduate level and three at the Master's level) and increase the relevance of curricula in relation to the labor market, based on a needs assessment from the business community.

In the next section, I will discuss the roles and tasks of the master level curriculum for the subject: *Career development in the field of social and health services* and its relevance in preparing the students with the theoretical and practical skills necessary to increase their employability in the field.

The responsibilities, duties, and the key skills of the short-term implementation component of the curriculum for master level students were established in the project and will be shown as they appear in the individual employment contract for this project. Participants must:

- Be responsible for adjusting curricula with a view to developing a pilot program;
- Comply with the delivery of an adjusted curricula pilot modules for students;
- Participate in thematic workshops about analyzing the results of application testing and validation tools;
- Study reports with proposals to adjust the curriculum;
- Participate in project events: workshops, conferences, etc.;
- Perform administrative activities;
- Get involved in organizing conferences and participating in them;
- Prepare monthly activity reports;
- Participate in meetings/work sessions in the project when required;
- Participate in regular meetings of the team;
- Take some temporary tasks of another member of the implementation team, if circumstances require, at the request of the Project Manager;
- Respect the working procedures and methodologies of the project, legislation, funding, and guidelines contract MA/IB;
- Perform other duties stipulated by the project manager within the limits of competence, as required by law.

The subject, *Career development in the field of socio-medical services*, is part of the second year of study of the Master Degree of Social Work in semester II, with 2 course hours/week and 2 hours of seminar/week, with a total of 28 hours of curriculum of which 14 course hours and 14 hours seminar. This is a compulsory subject, which is assessed through a final exam.

The overall objective of the discipline is the knowledge of the main elements of employment law and relevant opportunities for career development in the field of social and medical services.

The specific objectives are:

- Identification of specific knowledge and skills for medical and social services;
- Development of an integrated vision on work and career;

- Development of views on the strengths and opportunities for a socio-medical career;
- Development of the Skills Needed for Career Development.
- Specific competences accumulated in the two main groups of knowledge and skills: professional skills and transversal competences.

There are there types of Professional skills:

- Cognitive: the ability to understand and use specific language, appropriate to social work and cultural awareness. The ability to explain and interpret relational concepts necessary for the effective training of social workers;
- Operational – action, forming abilities/skills: intra- and interpersonal communicative competence development, to strengthen professional training, capacity building, and transfer of the application of knowledge to cope with situations; and stimulating creativity and problem identification through transformative learning experiences of the contents of the subject;
- Attitude, aimed at developing the capacity to adapt to change, acquisition of psychic mechanisms to achieve behavioral self-control, and balance in all educational situations, and motivation for continuing professional development (Holdevici, 2000).

Transversal competences are:

- Develop autonomy and responsibility in students through learning and applying the principles and rules of professional conduct, based on explicit values specific to a specialized social service career;
- Develop the capacity to be open minded to various social interactions in a diverse, multicultural, and globalized world;
- Display effective collaborative skills in professional work teams, interdisciplinary teams, project teams, and programs of social assistance;
- Establish one's own training needs in reference to national and European legal frameworks governing their social service career.

Discipline course that pilots the curriculum to improve and adapt SPE has the following contents:

- Defines work, occupation, profession, career;
- Implements career development program through school and professional guidance (Silvaş, 2009);
- Enhances the development Stages of career development by introducing Practical ways of building careers (Klein, 1997);
- Develops an understanding of the profession of the social worker with the specific socio-medical services;
- Builds the ability to develop interpersonal relations (Golu, 1989);
- Enhances the development Self-knowledge; Self-esteem (Golu, 1993);
- Builds an awareness of personal and professional skills (Linton, 1968);

- Enhances the ability of students to make critical decisions for vocational and personal development;
- Develop the ability to reflect on Personal Promotion (Holdevici, 1995);
- Assist students in the creation of employment opportunities;
- Assist student to develop resources for finding a job;
- Increase knowledge and skills of the interview process (Miclea, 1997);
- Assist students in their decision making processes for career social worker responsible for the socio-medical services;
- Advise students in their design and career planning (Iosifescu, 2000);
- Offer Vocational Training (Jigău, 2001);
- Review factors that influence professional options;
- Engage students' entrepreneurial experiences;
- Create an understanding of the legal issues surrounding entrepreneurship;
- Understand the rights and obligations of employer and employee;
- Develop an understanding of the responsibilities and role of career development in the field of social and medical services.

The seminar is focused on topics such as advice about the development of a social worker career, including options such as: specialized services, socio-medical worker, the compliance of the indexing Occupations in Romania (COR) of the social work profession in Romania and the European Union (EU) as potential labor markets; Develop knowledge of personality in their career role, including the implementation of temperament and personality tests (Hedges, 1999). The capacity of the master students to make a curriculum vitae, a letter of intent, and letters of recommendation. An important role of the seminaries was exploring the students' skills as future highly specialized professionals and to actively communicate both with other specialists in the field and/or in other areas such as social and communication social worker – beneficiary (Marşieu, 2005). Teaching methods for seminars included: interactive lectures, demonstration, debates, heuristic approaches, modeling, questioning, algorithmic, brainstorming, cooperative learning, reflections, workshops, exercise reflections, case studies and projects, visit work and study -mode cards (Mățăuan, 1999).

The courses and practical activities were adapted to the labor market demand in terms of career development in the field of social and health services. It was intended to integrate the discipline's content expectations with the epistemic community representatives' demands, professional associations, and representative employers in the field of this program.

Research Methodology

The study group included a total of 21 students from the second year of study in the Master of Social Services of the University "Aurel Vlaicu" of Arad programs.

Research Methods and Tools

The methodology consisted of implementing a pilot for the discipline: *Career development services in social care field* since Master II SS, and then we implemented a questionnaire to the students in the study group. The questionnaire included a total of 77 items, covering techniques and teaching methods. Results were scored on the scale of 1 to 10 and have been translated and interpreted in SPSS. The questionnaire and pilot study were useful and relevant to the students' professional training.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised 77 items (see Annex 1); Tool 1: Teaching techniques; Tool 2: Teaching materials; Tool 3: Bibliography; Tool 4: The structure of curriculum. The scale of assessment was comprised of values from 1 to 10.

Research results

In figures 1 and 2 below we can see the areas assessed in this study: teaching techniques, teaching materials, bibliography, and structure of curricula. Each category was rated by students of the Master Services Social. Each participant rated each category on a scale of 1–10 (1 being low and 10 being high). The range of scores was 6–10, with the majority of scores rated in the 8–10 range.

The highest scores in relation to the pilot program for the Subject: *Career development in the field of social and medical services*, was Tool 4: The structure of the curriculum has been improved substantially, being folded into the acquisition of skills and the specialization skills for social workers in the highly specialized service of the social-medical field. The next highest scores were recorded for the bibliography, because it is current, accessible (even in electronic form through links), and has appropriate curricular content. Tool number 2: Teaching materials were considered by half of the students as being accessible, being only available in electronic format at the time of the evaluation. The scores for teaching techniques indicate a need for improvement in technical and academic support. It would be useful to develop a laboratory/study center in social field and for a career in social and health services. It would also be wise to consider our teaching techniques in relation to the concept of student-centered teaching, as recommended in the Bologna agreement.

From figures 1 and 2 there can be found the working tools that have been used: teaching techniques, teaching materials, bibliography, structure of curricula were rated by students of the Master Services Social as useful and were marked mostly with notes on the scale 10, with a range of 8–10.

The most relevant for the usefulness of piloting the Subject: *Career development in the field of social and medical services*, was Tool 4: The structure of the curriculum has been improved substantially, being folded on acquisition of skills and the specialization skills of social worker in the high-specialized service of the social-medical field. In second place, the bibliography was considered relevant, because it is current, accessible (even in electronic form through links) and has an adequate curricular content. Tool

number 2: Teaching materials were considered by half of the students as being accessible, being only available in electronic format at the time of the evaluation.

Teaching techniques need improvement as technical support, it would be useful to develop a laboratory / study center in social field and for a career in social and health services.
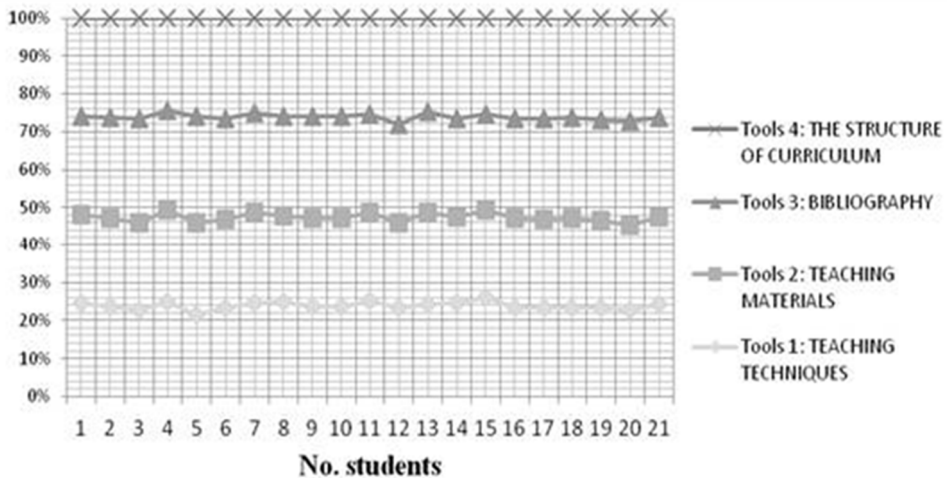

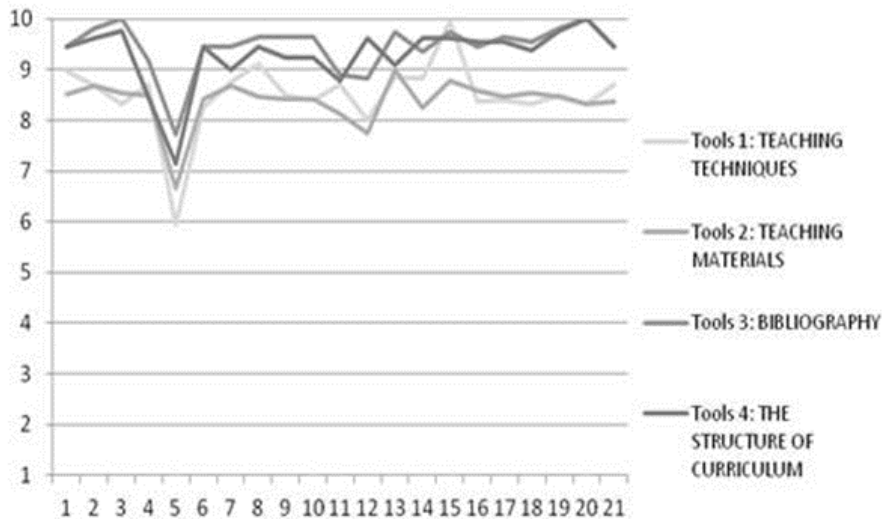**Figure 1:** *Impact Scale 10, work tools from SS students*

Figure 2: *Scale 10, students working tools at SS*

Conclusions

The main objective of the project SOCIOPLUS was to build and implement a better curriculum for the students through curriculum development at the master level (SS) by piloting the discipline: *Career development services in social care* in order develop a more relevant curriculum that is connected directly to the labor market, based on the analysis of needs in the labor sector.

Our efforts to create a more relevant curriculum were successful in our pilot program, being rated highly by our students (ratings of 8–10). Students also indicated an appreciation for our efforts to update the bibliography section of our resources for students. Since our resource materials were only available in an electronic format, half of our students rated that these resources were not readily available to students. Its relevance was appreciated (80-100%) in preparing students for acquiring skills and practical skills to increase their employability in the field. The course and practical activities were adapted to the demands of the labor market in terms of *Career development in the field of social and health services* was made by corroborating the contents of the discipline with the expectations of the epistemic communities' representatives and representative employers from the field of the labor market.

The data from the students indicate that they would appreciate teaching methods be improved by our instructors. This appears to indicate a discrepancy between the quality of our materials and the variety of pedagogy. We will work to develop this process during the next two years based on our results. We will monitor results, collect and analyze data, interpret results, and disseminate our findings in two years.

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ANNEX 1 – The questionnaire used in collecting data from students

Number questionnaire;
University;
Specialization;
Study year;

1. Teaching Module was best suited to the themes addressed;
2. The topics addressed would be better suited to other ways of teaching;
3. Method of teaching helped me to understand and to retain as much of the topics discussed;
4. I would have understood better if I would have been otherwise taught in these courses and seminars;
5. During the educational activities topics relevant to the topic of the disciplines were often discussed;
6. The teachers used different teaching methods;
7. Direct Teaching was one method used;
8. Classes, seminars, and laboratories were attractive to me;
9. The teaching was pleasant to experience;
10. I would like to have courses /seminars / labs taught in the same way;
11. Teaching Module made me treat my training more seriously;
12. The attitude of the teacher made me treat my preparation more seriously ;
13. I felt I had to prepare myself better for the courses / seminars in question;
14. The teaching methods used in the content courses / seminars are understandable;
15. Teachers involved many students in their teaching activities;
16. Teachers gave opportunities for students to ask questions;
17. Teachers asked questions during lectures / seminars;
18. The students answered the questions raised during teaching;
19. Responses from teachers were prompt;
20. Responses from teachers were useful;
21. The courses included enough practical activities;
22. The activities created by staff made me feels more prepared for my profession;
23. Teachers showed me what it means to be a professional;
24. The courses and seminars \often discussed new topics related content;
25. Teaching activities have stimulated me to think on the issues discussed;
26. We developed individual projects for teaching;

27. I wrote essays / papers in seminars and laboratories;
28. Teachers \ used projectors or other modern equipment during class;
29. Know discipline sheets of courses / seminars / laboratories;
30. The teaching material regardless of themes and references presented in the course;
31. I understand the information presented in the course materials;
32. Educational materials were well placed on the page;
33. Educational materials are written in characters easier to read;
34. The text for the educational materials contained figures , and suggestive images;
35. The text of teaching materials contains bibliographic references easily found in the text;
36. Chapters, subsections and text type Annex have been clearly defined;
37. The materials received included practical examples;
38. I understand the issues being addressed;
39. I believe that the issues addressed during training were relevant to my professional;
40. We were introduced at the beginning of the course to our learning objectives;
41. The courses pursued objectives set by the teacher at the beginning;
42. There is a correlation between the presentation of the course subjects and their order in the material;
43. The themes were presented in a logical sequence;
44. The level of expression, the language used in the teaching material, was at my level of my understanding;
45. I would have expected more scientific language to be used in courses ;
46. Courses / seminars led me to be more interested in these topics;
47. The courses included information not relevant to the subject matter;
48. The courses address too many issues;
49. Training materials \ been made readily available;
50. Training materials are available online;
51. Training materials are available at the library;
52. Training materials are available as printed document;
53. In literature courses / seminars / laboratories appear to be Referred to as work in progress;
54. The sources that are mentioned in the bibliography can be found either at the library or online;
55. The bibliography contains most of its sources in Romanian;
56. The bibliography contains both theoretical and research papers;
57. The bibliography contains both classics and recent work in the field;
58. The bibliography is written in an easy to follow manner;
59. Internet resources mentioned in the bibliography are easily accessible on links;
60. Sources are generally
61. Browsing the bibliography helps the student understand and deepen the content disciplines;
62. During courses / seminars / labs we discussed topics from the recommended bibliography;
63. The sources included in the bibliography are correct;
64. I am informed about the subjects covered in the curriculum (I know the curriculum);
65. The number of subjects included in the curriculum is sufficient for the provision of training;
66. The ratio of the number of compulsory and optional is ideal;
67. The ratio of the number of classes and the number of seminars from the curriculum is optimal;
68. The ratio of theoretical and practical disciplines within the university training is optimal;

69. The number of hours of practice contained in the curriculum is sufficient for the provision of training;
70. The volume of knowledge \ transmitted is appropriate disciplines for training;
71. The order of subjects in the curriculum helps students to assimilate content;
72. The curriculum includes subjects / themes that address similar content (overlap);
73. The subjects in the curriculum have an interdisciplinary character (addresses themes related disciplines);
74. Subjects in the curriculum contribute to a job in the field of specialization;
75. I am informed of occupational standards of qualification offered by specialization;
76. The subjects in the curriculum correspond to occupational standards in the field;
77. It is necessary to update the information taught in courses.

ANNEX 2 – Students` responses for each tool

Table 1: *Results of responses to the tools 1, 2, 3 and 4*

Tools 1: TEACHING TECHNIQUES	Tools 2: TEACHING MATERIALS	Tools 3: BIBLIOGRAPHY	Tools 4: THE STRUCTURE OF CURRICULUM
251	204.15	104	123
242.85	208	108	125
233	205	110	127
243.60	204	101	110
166.20	160	85	93
231	202	104	123
245	208	104	117
255	203	106	123
238	202	106	120
235	202	106	120
244	195	98	114
224	186	97	125
248	216	107	118
247	198	103	125
279	211	107	125
234	206	104	124
235	203	106	124
232.85	205	105	122
238	203	108	127
233.05	200	110	130
244	201	104	123

Table 2: *Scores tools variables, scale 1 to 10*

Tools 1: TEACHING TECHNIQUES	Tools 2: TEACHING MATERIALS	Tools 3: BIBLIOGRAPHY	Tools 4: THE STRUCTURE OF CURRICULUM
8.96	8.51	9.45	9.46
8.67	8.67	9.82	9.62
8.32	8.54	10.00	9.77
8.70	8.50	9.18	8.46
5.94	6.67	7.73	7.15
8.25	8.42	9.45	9.46
8.75	8.67	9.45	9.00
9.11	8.46	9.64	9.46
8.50	8.42	9.64	9.23
8.39	8.42	9.64	9.23
8.71	8.13	8.91	8.77
8.00	7.75	8.82	9.62
8.86	9.00	9.73	9.08
8.82	8.25	9.36	9.62
9.96	8.79	9.73	9.62
8.36	8.58	9.45	9.54
8.39	8.46	9.64	9.54
8.32	8.54	9.55	9.38
8.50	8.46	9.82	9.77
8.32	8.33	10.00	10.00
8.71	8.38	9.45	9.46

Curriculum Adjustment in Social Sciences. The Example of "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad

CAMELIA-NADIA BRAN[1]

"Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad (Romania)

Abstract

Improving the relevance of a study program at the university level can only be achieved through continuous development / adjustment of the proposed curriculum, taking into account the requirements of a globalized society, of the labor market dynamic, but especially of the solutions offered by the higher education pedagogy. Between March and June 2015, within the "SocioPlus" project, a curricular adjustment was piloted for two disciplines of the of Social Work study program of the Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad. The adjustment was done on four dimensions: content adjustment; teaching strategies adjustment from the perspective of students' participation in order to develop their professional and transversal competencies; references actualization, and resources diversification. Results of questionnaires to measure the impact of this adjustment on students show a significantly increased level of appreciation of the curriculum development process by students. Second year students have appreciated mainly the updating of the bibliography and the teaching techniques. Piloting results will extend to the implementation of the other subjects within the Social Work program.

Keywords: *Higher Education Pedagogy; Curricular Adjustment; Study Program; Skills; Teaching Techniques; Bibliography; Teaching Resources.*

Introduction

The aim of the project "SocioPlus – Training, Documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs" developed in partnership by the University of Oradea and Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad was to offer higher quality study programs for the students enrolled in sociology and social work through curriculum adjustments and to increase students' access to qualitative services (i.e. documentation, didactical resources, teaching strategies). Five study programs proposed by the two universities were chosen to participate in this endeavor. The curriculum adjustment was based not only on the recommendations of the employers and practitioners, but also on the students' learning needs through pilot testing for 2 months in the spring of 2015 (Project SocioPlus (according to official

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[1] E-mail: brancamelia@gmail.com

site of the project http://www.socioplus.eu/despre-proiect/obiective) I have acted as curricular expert within the project, between March and September 2015.

The objective of this article is to present the particularities of the piloting process in the case of the second year Social Work students enrolled at the Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad. In their case, the discipline chosen for the testing of the proposed adjustment was *European reinsertion projects for ethnic discriminated groups*.

Between March and June 2015, 30 students from second year were selected according to a precise methodology, to test the adjustments of the curriculum for the discipline mentioned above. In order for the students to be included in the piloting process, they needed to be enrolled in the second year Social Work programme at Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad. Due to the fact that not all the enrolled students could have been included in the pilot testing, we have established some differentia criteria: prior academic year's general average; the existence of a language competence certificate; volunteering activities done by the student; motivation essay. The candidate students were invited to an interview that assessed their interest in curriculum development for the Social Work programme, their abilities to pass on the knowledge and the skills obtained during the piloting sessions; their availability and capacity to assess and analyse the adjustment process. A panel of experts (the directors of the programmes, the local director of the project) have assessed the students' dossiers and their performances at the interview. They have selected a number of 30 second year Social Work students.

In this article, we will present the premises of the curriculum reform in the universities, the dimensions of the intervention in the case of curriculum adjustment for the discipline "European reinsertion projects for socially discriminated groups" and the students' opinions on the pilot sessions collected through a questionnaire.

Points of reflection on higher education reform models

When we refer to the reform of the higher education institutions we take into account "a series of innovations within a unitary and balanced system where functional changes of both general framework (for example the duration and ratio between the subsystems, the balance between the core syllabus and the selective education ramifications, the articulation of successive levels, the age limit for formal education etc.) and its inner part i.e. the curriculum, processes and resources (for example updating technologies, perfecting textbooks and syllabuses, changes in the teacher-student relationship, etc.) occur periodically" (Bran, Petroi, 2010, p. 430, apud Bîrzea, 1976). Within the higher education system, the structural changes aim at the paths of access to higher education, at the articulation between higher education and other forms of instruction, and at the organization of educational programs (bachelor, master and doctoral studies). At the curriculum and process level the reforms operate on: the duration of each cycle, the organization of the studies on specialization fields, the ratio of the subjects common for the specialization filed and the subjects specific to a narrow specialization, the

computerization of education, the methodological orientations, the teacher-student relationship, etc.

The contemporary education reforms show a series of tendencies such as: (Bran & Petroi, 2010, pgs.430-431, apud Bîrzea, 1976)

a. *The tendency to operate simultaneously and globally at all education levels,* in an integrated and non-fragmentary way, for different education cycles. This tendency underlines the systemic character of education, each of the components interacting and influencing the others. We can say that the whole system reflects the performance of its weakest component. This means that, if primary education functions at low standards, the effects will be felt on the efficiency of higher education.

b. The second characteristic of the education reforms is their *universality*. The educational reforms have a global character; they act within any education system. This is a result of understanding the importance of education for the social progress and social welfare.

c. The contemporary reforms bear resemblance with regard to their problems and strategies. Up to the first half of the 20th century the reforms carried out at a national level bore little resemblance. Today we can talk about a globalization of education, of the problems it faces and of the reforms carried out in reply. Most of the universities have to contend with a massive increase in the number of students, a diversification of departments, an increased demand for adult education, an unprecedented growth of the influence of new communication techniques, and, as a result, the reforms implemented in different countries share certain characteristics.

There are different types of reforms, according to the impact they have and to the level at which they operate (Chiş, 2002).

The reform by extension put into practice by generalizing the successful experiences gained at a local or regional level. At the higher education level this type of reform was brought into being by generalizing the successful experiences from European and world-wide level. Thus, the credit transfer system, the adoption of a three-cycle program based on the 3-2-3 system, the admission based on application files, the use of interactive pedagogy, etc. are some of the consequences of introducing inter-national best practice to the Romanian higher education system. "It is assumed, in this case, *a model or prototype of the change*, developed under certain circumstances but invested with more or less general traits" (Chiş, 2002, p. 81). The risk associated with this type of reform consists in the impossibility to adapt the reforms to the cultural, national, and local characteristics of the regions where the universities are located. This may lead to the existence of structures and models that cannot be put into practice.

The innovation reform. This type of reform was promoted in the Romanian Higher Education after 1997 and especially after signing The Bologna Declaration on the European Space for Higher Education in 1999.

The systemic reform is done by restructuring the whole educational system and thus higher education. "The reform of the system is built on coherent educational politics and it forms the starting point for all other innovations" (Chiş, 2002, p. 82). Has there been a real systemic reform in post-communist Romania? Significant changes occurred especially at the curriculum level. At the higher education level the reform of the study structure will lead to innovations in the curriculum, to openness towards the educational market, etc.
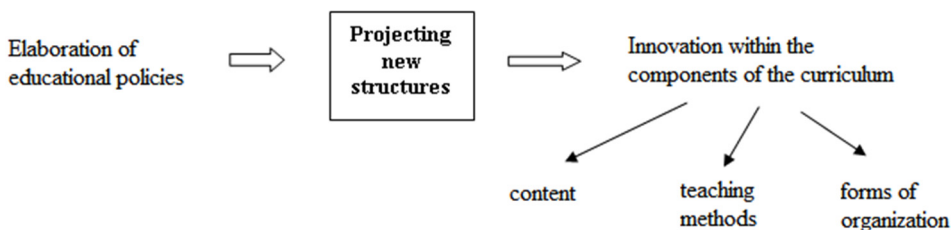

Figure 1: *Systemic reform model*
Source: Chiş, 2002, p.83

The necessity of higher education pedagogy

The complexity of problems in higher education, the theoretical and practical aspects related to the educational policies, the managerial policies of the universities, and especially the challenges related to the implementation of the educational process in universities, make compulsory the existence of **higher education pedagogy**. Its goal is "the scientific analysis and the improvement of educational activities in the institutions of higher education, the development of the learning, of the theoretical and practical education of students and of the scientific research" (Ionescu & Bocoş, 2000, p. 227). Starting from the research in the field of higher education pedagogy, (Ionescu & Bocoş, 2000; Ionescu, 2005) we can identify the main orientations in contemporary university pedagogy:

- Placing the student at the centre of the educational process in universities;
- The change between informative and formative approaches in higher education,
- The promotion of the Heuristic strategies in designing the learning activities for the students;

The higher education didactics is called upon to devise and experiment new ways of conceiving and implementing learning, according to new pedagogies (i.e. constructivist and metaconstructivist, active and interactive, cooperative and creative), emphasizing the metacognitive dimension of university pedagogy and the democratization of the educational activities in universities;

- Stimulating and promoting students' scientific research;
- Providing the premises for lifelong learning

- Higher education should integrate and value the pedagogical valences of the New Information and Communication Technologies.

In addition to these courses of action, current higher education didactics must reconfigure as a corpus of discipline within educational sciences that provides the teachers not only with rigid procedures and techniques of action (i.e. sets of principles, methods, means, and forms of organization), but also a flexible and comprehensive approach to different ways of organizing and conducting the educational process.

An example of social sciences curriculum adjustment
Levels of adjustments
Increasing the relevance of a study program at the university level can only be achieved through continuous development / adjustment of the proposed curriculum, taking into account both, the requirements of a globalized society and the labour market dynamics, but especially the solutions offered by the higher education pedagogy.

Between March and June 2015, within the project called "Socio Plus", a curricular adjustment was piloted for two disciplines of the of Social Work study program of the "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad. The adjustment was done on four dimensions: *content adjustment; teaching strategies adjustment from the perspective of students' participation in order to develop their professional and transversal competencies; references actualization, and resources diversification.*

Within the discipline „European reinsertion projects for the ethnic discriminated groups" proposed to the second year students, the team of curricular experts have analyzed the curriculum documents specifically for the mentioned discipline. The analysis was conducted against the **graduates "competencies profile"** elaborated by the employers, beneficiaries and graduates themselves. It is not the purpose of this article to describe the methodology of this analysis, but we state that it was elaborated within a specific activity of the project, namely Activity 4: "Conducting studies / analyzes to adjust the 5 programs of study to correlate with the labour market". Within this activity, based on the scanning of universities' websites, the research experts have identified similar programs in at least four top universities from EU countries and in all universities of advanced research and education from Romania. Curricula of the identified programs were analyzed, aiming to content, subject areas, and skills. Also the experts have identified the relevant actors on the labour market and collected data from a minimum of 100 employers' surveys and two focus groups. Each of the partner universities made a tracer study following the labour market insertion of their graduates. The survey helped identifying the competencies gap among the graduates. Based on the obtained data, each university has elaborated a diagnostic analysis published in the "Guide Book. Sociology and Social Work on labour market" which included recommendations for changing the curricula of the

five programs of study in terms of introducing new subjects or adjusting the existing disciplines, in terms of themes, the references, teaching techniques, etc. (Hatos, 2014).

Taking into account the results of the curriculum documents' analysis and the Report within Activity no.4, we have improved the curricular documents within the following dimensions:

a) **The syllabus** of the "European reinsertion projects for the ethnic discriminated groups" discipline was enriched with *5 new professional competencies and 7 new transversal competencies* needed to be developed for a social work specialist. The old syllabus contained only 3 professional competencies and 2 transversal ones. We have enhanced the importance of developing the skills in proposing alternative measures for solving social problems. This competence was identified by the employers and practitioners as a poorly developed one within the study program. We have restructured the contents of the syllabus from the perspective of project management theory and practice, correlated with social policies for the ethnic discriminated group. The new contents were presented in correlation with new, active student-centered teaching strategies such as: *The cube, the World cafe, the jigsaw, the investigation, study cases,* etc. The evaluation design reflected the importance of students' work in developing a grant proposal for the specific target group.

b) **The training materials** consisted in the elaboration of different complex documents such as:
   • Teaching scenarios, one for each face-to-face meeting, elaborated after the ERR model (Evocation-Sense making and Reflection);
   • A new course support, a comprehensive booklet of 100 A4 pages, containing units' objectives, contents and working tasks, references;
   • Working sheets, leaflets, movies, brochures and other material for each training session.

c) **The training sessions** were conceived after the model introduced by Kurtis S. Meredith and Jeannie L. Steele (1995) in order to assure a creative-reflective frame for the educational process. In each session, the students were challenged to evoke their knowledge about the training topic, to propose ideas for social projects, to interact with the new information, and to reflect on how they can use the new information into the professional life. Interactive, critical thinking, and learning through cooperative methods were used. We also included methods like: thinking hats, role play, study case, cube, reciprocal teaching and learning, simulation etc.

d) **The reference adjustment** was done by incorporating into the syllabus the latest Romanian and international resources on project management and social inclusion.

Students' perception about the adjustment process

In order to measure the impact of the adjustments on students, we applied, in June 2015, 150 questionnaires that tested and validated curricular adjustment tools:

teaching strategies, didactical resources, references, and curriculum structure. Also, as an expert in curriculum implementation I have completed a specific questionnaire for assessing the pilot program. The questionnaire was constructed utilizing opinion items on a Likert scale, with 10 intervals. Students were asked to state their agreement or disagreement on each item of the questionnaire. 1 meant „not at all true", 10 meant „Perfectly true". When analyzing the results, I tallied the results of each student for the 4 dimensions and I have converted them on a scale from 1 to 10.

The following results emerged:

Table 1: *Descriptive results*
referring to the appreciation of each adjustment instrument by the second year students enrolled in Social Work program of Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad

	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation
Instrument 1: TEACHING STRATEGIES	5.99	10.00	8.2583	.98061
Instrument 2: DIDACTICAL RESOURCES	5.92	9.79	8.1385	.97654
Instrument 3: REFERENCES	7.00	10.00	8.8216	.69550
Instrument 4: CURRICULUM'S STRUCTURE	1.00	10.00	8.1141	1.57668

As can be seen, the distribution of the results is positively skewed, the average obtained by each of the four instruments hovering in the upper one-fifth of the distribution range (over 8). The highest average was obtained by the items referring to the adjustment of course references. The lowest average, but also with a high score, was obtained by the structure of the study program's curriculum.

The structure of curricula obtained the most scattered results, having the highest standard deviation. The most compact results were obtained by the variable "references" the results being distributed only between 7 (min) -10 (max). Taking into account that the results are not significantly different, precaution is needed when interpreting them.

In order to complete the impact study of curricular adjustment, we made a one-way ANOVA analysis of variance related to scores that indicated a significant effect of the curricular adjustment within the four conditions (F=6.40 to p<.05). Correlations between scores for these variables are significantly positive. This signifies that the adjustment process, as a whole had obtained a positive appreciation from the students.

We were interested in analyzing the appreciation level for each variable. In order to identify which of the four variables has obtained significant differences in their

averages, we have applied the paired samples t test. The values of t were significant for $p < .05$ when comparing the means of the variables 1, 2, and 4 with the mean for variable 3. Variable "References" has generated a significantly higher average compared with the average obtained by each of the other three variables: teaching strategies ($t=-3.854$, $p<0.001$), didactical resources ($t=-5.356$, $p<0.001$), and curriculum structure ($t=3,236$, $p<0.01$). None of the other three variables (teaching strategies, didactical resources, curriculum structure) have shown differences between their means. These results show that students have similar positive appreciation levels for the variables teaching strategies, didactical resources and curriculum structure, but they mostly appreciated the adjustments done for actualization and relevance of the course bibliography. Further analyses within each variable need to be done in order to obtained more refined results.

Conclusions

In this study we have presented the premises, the methodology, and the results of the curriculum adjustment process within one discipline of the social work study program of "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad. We have asked the 30 selected students to state their opinions regarding the four dimension of the adjustment process.

The curricular adjustment pilot program within the discipline "European projects for the reinsertion of the discriminated ethnic groups" revealed the students' positive perception on the improvement of teaching strategies, didactical resources, references and structures of curriculum. The improvement was more evident regarding the adjustment of course references, while the curriculum structure highlighted various perceptions of students.

The approach used in curriculum adjustment was a bottom-up one, taking into account the learning needs of the students and the demands of the practitioners and employers. The positive feedbacks from the students and from the curricular experts encourage us to take further steps in curricular reform, for other disciplines and study programs.

The process of curricular adjustment piloted at the "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad was developed around the principles of higher education pedagogy, taking into account the competencies profile of the social work program graduates. The pilot study showed the success of the curricular adjustment as a process needed for each program of a 21 century university.

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Teaching Sociology of Organizations

ȘERBAN OLAH[1]
University of Oradea (Romania)

Abstract

This paper is focused on teaching students within a course on Sociology of Organizations developed and implemented in the Sociology Department at University of Oradea, Romania. The first part is theoretically oriented, debating the policy and conceptual framework within Sociological Higher Education in Romania. The second part is a secondary analysis of the teaching and learning outcomes of the students who attended the Organizational Behavior course. The social data have been collected within SocioPlus project – "Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs", financed by EU through a grant from the Human Resource Development Operational Program (project ID: POSDRU/156/1.2/G/139751), implemented at the University of Oradea and the University of Arad between 2014 and 2015. The last part is dedicated to conclusions.

Keywords: *Teaching Techniques; Teaching Activities; Sociology of Organization.*

Introduction

When starting a new academic year, it would be a very effective idea to reflect on a few questions concerning our activity as sociology academics. What do we teach? What should we teach as sociologists? Whom do we teach? What does teaching means in our context? Is our teaching effective? What learning outcome skills should our students acquire? Is there any linkage between the skills of our students and the labor market requirements? (Olah, 2006).

In a very important analysis of teaching and learning in higher education it is asserted that the whole educational activity should be seen starting with the idea that our student is an active person who shares responsibilities, thinks, cooperates, and has an ongoing dialogue with the academic curriculum, classmates, and the professor (Dochy, Segers & Sluijsmans, 1999).

After ten years from a previous international project financed by the Central European University and having focused on new courses development in Central and Eastern Europe's universities, I had the chance to participate in an EU funded project of which the main objective has been to assess the correlation between higher education outcomes and labor market requirements. In this project I had to develop and implement a new course of Sociology of Organizations for the BA Sociology specialization students.

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[1] E-mail: serbanolah2002@yahoo.com

In addition to writing the content of the course I had to teach this discipline in a new way, more student-centered and using a modern educational infrastructure.

The course, Sociology of Organizations, comprises a number of issues such as: multinational corporations, motivation and job satisfaction, organizational culture, organizational change, prison organizations, and institutional analysis. Through this course I wanted to make students understand the main themes, theories, and research in the field of organizational analysis.

The field of sociological analysis of the organizations is a border one, connected to the economic analysis, the management, and the psychology of organizations. At the same time, the sociological analysis of the organizations has a great practical utility in the sense that those who want to become managers or leaders have to know this area extremely well. It is true that a number of leader skills are innate, but without a scientific knowledge of the human resources of the organizations, the management of the business relies more on intuition and common sense.

On the other hand, even if a good part of the course focuses on the analysis of the main theories in the field, I personally believe that those who want to move on to empirical studies have no other way but knowing in great detail the major achievements in the field; otherwise we have to "reinvent the wheel " again and again.

It should be noted that many contemporary empirical researchers surveyed classic models such as the Weber (1978) or Taylor (2003). Let us not forget that, for example, an important part of the studies on bureaucracy is represented by the post-Weberian analyses, such as Peter Blau's (1962), Robert King Merton's (1957), Alvin Gouldner's (1954) or Philipp Selznick's (2011) studies. As a brilliant continuation of Robert Michels's theory about the iron law of oligarchy other theorists such as Lipset, Trow's & Coleman (1956) research: that there is a "French" pattern of bureaucracy revealed by Michel Crozier (1963) in his study "Le Phenomen bureaucratique"; that even the post-bureaucratic organization does not mean the end of the bureaucracy as Damian Hodgson's (2004) study suggests; that the contemporary organization based on temporary projects may mean the strengthening of the features of the bureaucratic model. Therefore, I believe that in the psycho-sociology of organizations we have to start from the classical theories and link classical research to the contemporary theories. What is important is that the students need to clearly understand the starting points, such as the Weberian bureaucratic model, in order to understand ideas such as why today's Romanian state bureaucracy inhibits entrepreneurship and fosters corruption.

On the other hand, the model of the "economic man" developed by Frederick Taylor's (2003) classic scientific management is a concept with many implications for organizational analysis. That is why I insisted on this key concept. But in order to understand the "economic man" we need connections with Economics and that is the reason I raised the familiar ideas of the father of Economics, the Scottish Adam Smith (1962), whose work, "The Wealth of Nations" is currently one of the most cited papers in the contemporary literature in the field.

Last but not least, the Weberian bureaucracy and the classic Taylorian management are, in the opinion of a well-known and quoted contemporary sociologist, George Ritzer (2003), two elements which ironically led to the most efficient organizations of sweeping human lives that was the awful Auschwitz concentration camp.

A very important aspect of my course focuses on issues of leadership, motivation, and job satisfaction. Basically it's the ABC of the organizational analysis. I presented in my course the main theories and research, the typologies, the sociological, and also the psychological perspective.

Finally, inspired by the well-known work of Peters & Waterman Jr (2010), I focused on the basic characteristics of the most successful organizations in the American corporate world, a piece of work considered one of the most important in the business thinking worldwide.

My students have noticed very well that much of the literature is essentially Anglo-American, even if the French, Dutch and Germans have a substantial contribution. I explained to them that countries that politically, and especially economically, dominate the world provide the main contributions to science. If Germany and France were two great economic and political superpowers until the Second World War, and intellectual elites including Americans were shaped by doctoral studies in Paris, Berlin and Heidelberg, after the Second World War, the economic, political and scientific – university center moved beyond the Ocean. This move appears to have had profound implications in terms of the US advance and subsequent supremacy regarding scientific production, discoveries, inventions and innovations worldwide. Not only in Sociology and Socio-Behavioral Sciences we find that US dominates the field, but if we look at the Nobel Prizes in areas such as Physics, Chemistry, Medicine, Economics, American scientists dominate the world rankings after World War II.

On the other hand, we should not forget that when the United States was not yet a superpower, in the early twentieth century and in the interwar period, many scientific achievements in the knowledge of organizations came from US. Scientists like Friedrich Taylor, Elton Mayo, Fred Roethlisberger or industrialists like Henry Ford marked the beginnings of this field of knowledge.

Although the course focuses largely on the theoretical analysis, I included many analyses of empirical research using plenty of articles from worldwide top journals. So the student who wants to understand the techniques this research domain uses can easily understand them by going on the thread of these scientific articles. On the other hand, I believe that the role of a university course is not to give everything in a specific field. This would be impossible. Rather it must give the main lines, references, so that the student or graduate interested in this area can continue and deepen into them.

Data analysis of the survey applied to the students who attended the course of "The Sociology of the Organizations"

The following analysis is based on a series of questions I asked myself from the beginning. To what extent will my students understand what I intend to teach them? How well will I manage to transmit what I want to? How good are my teaching methods? How attractive are the courses and seminars? To what extent does my course challenge them? To what extent does it develop practical skills?

The quantitative data was difficult to analyze because only 11 students attending the course of Psycho-sociology of the organizations expressed their views on the issues requested by my colleagues from the Department of Sociology, who administered the questionnaire. Unfortunately, this is due to the fact that there are small groups of students specializing in Sociology, which may be seen as an advantage, the fewer they are, the easier to work with them, it is easier to work with each of them separately, it is easier to keep discipline in groups of this size, and it is easier to discuss with them than with a larger group occupying an entire amphitheater for the course. In the analysis I used the same scale from 1 to 10 for each graph (where 1 means not at all and 10 means to a great extent).
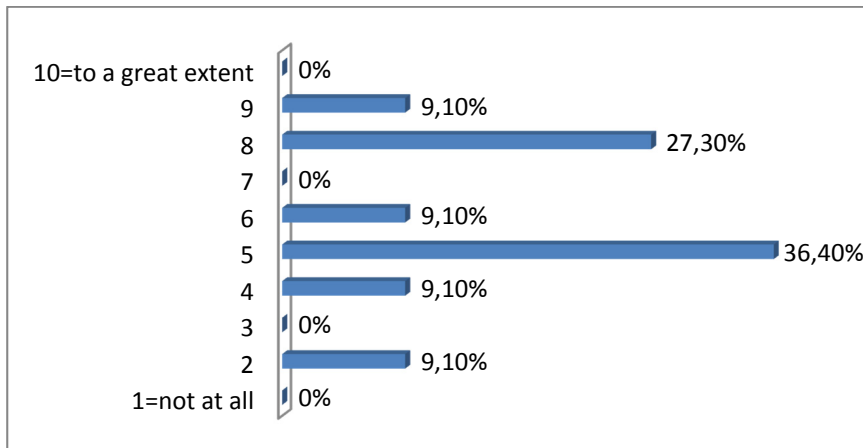

Figure 1: *The teaching method helped me understand and retain more of the topics discussed (Scale: 1=not at all, 10=to a great extent)*

Figure 1 shows that most of the students (45%) understood and retained the topics discussed; I consider it a pretty good percentage. An important goal of any course is to facilitate understanding of the course content to students. There are some teachers who are brilliant in research, but fail to help students understand what they need to understand. I tried to give many examples and presented analyzes using PowerPoint to facilitate the students' understanding. On the other hand, I have always tried to create much interactivity, so that this subject matter, rather arid and complex, becomes more attractive. I tried to make my course not a boring and inefficient monologue,

but rather a fruitful dialogue always requiring my students to think. I gave many examples, because without examples it is impossible for the students to understand the content.
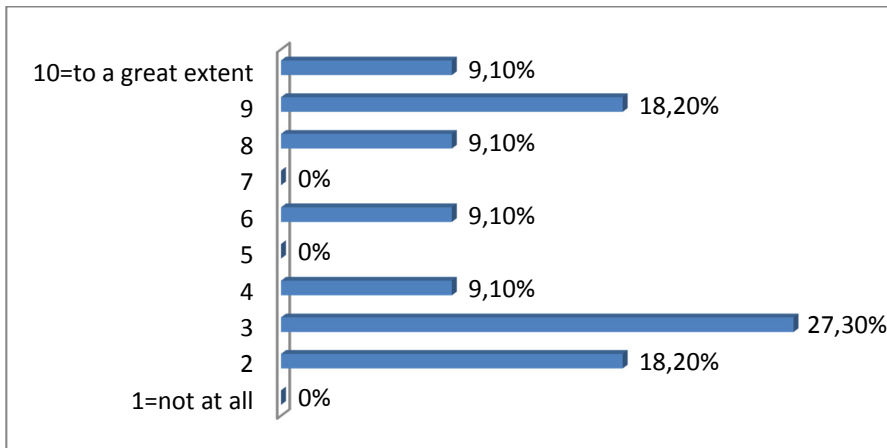

Figure 2: *I would have understood easier if I had been taught otherwise (Scale: 1=not at all, 10=to a great extent)*

This can be considered a control question for the previous one and it shows that the percentage of those 45%, who remember and understand the training topics responded that there was no need for another way of teaching. In addition, there are a further 9.1% that make around 54.1% favorable responses. There is always room for improvement, of course. Anytime, even the same teacher can teach better the same course. Approximately 45.9% believe that this course could have been taught better and they are right, as I will suggest, at the end of the report, the ways this course can be adjusted and improved in the future, even if this process is not so simple.
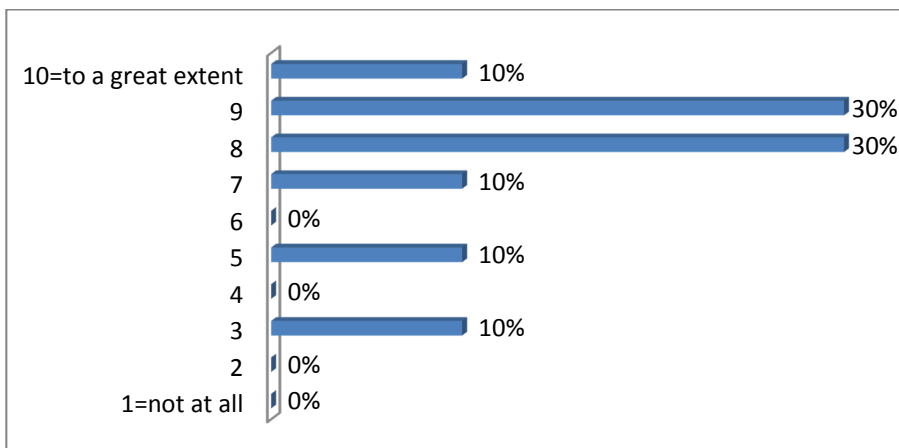

Figure 3: *The teaching methods make the content of the courses/seminars more understandable (Scale: 1=not at all, 10=to a great extent)*

Figure 3 is highly relevant to the quality of teaching. About 70% thought that to a large and very large extent that the teaching methods made the course understandable, which is a very good result. The teaching methods used were interactive; I used many examples and tried to stimulate the students' critical thinking. I suggested to my students that the uncritical look at the theories of the organizational analysis is the biggest mistake they could make. A feature of the social sciences is that the theories have space and time validity. On the other hand, all the theories, ranging from that of Max Weber and up to the contemporary ones underwent criticism, were tested, and often what works for Western organizations does not for the Central and Eastern European organizations. As many comparative researches between Western and post-communist European societies suggest, there are big differences in all dimensions. What could we say then about the difference between post-communist societies and the North American space? From the practical experience, the American and the post-communist societies are extremely different and the biggest mistake is applying the American theories to the Central and Eastern European space.
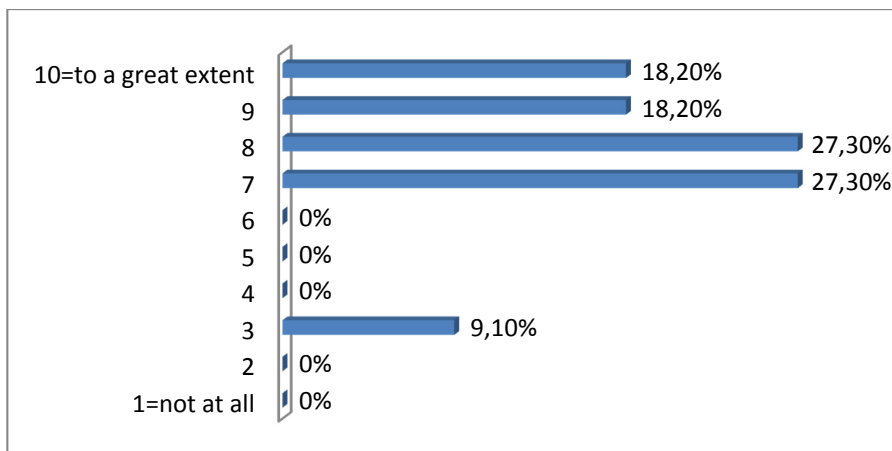

Figure 4: *Did the teachers use various teaching methods?*
(Scale: 1=not at all, 10=to a great extent)

Figure 4 shows that my students' answers are rather favorable (their views converge on 7, 8, 9 and 10) at about 90% of the subjects. This is the result of the fact that we used not only the classical teaching method of exposure, but a variety of methods such as role play, brainstorming and practical examples. The methods used were designed to focus on students both at the courses and seminars, as modern pedagogy of Anglo-American inspiration recommends. I also tried to stimulate the students by asking questions, through a permanent dialogue, to take a more participative role in the lectures.
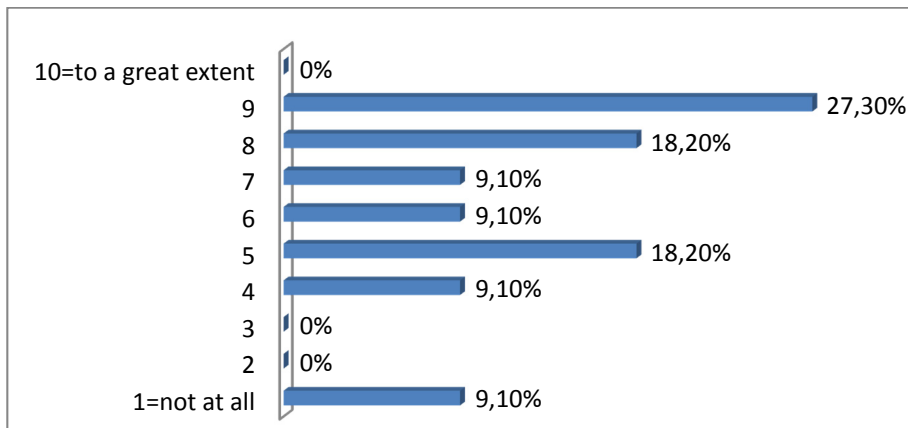
Figure 5: *Did you find the courses/seminars attractive?*
(Scale: 1=not at all, 10=to a great extent)

We notice in Figure 5 that a majority of the students (about 54%) considered the courses and seminars attractive, which is considered to be very good, given the difficulty of my course. Perhaps the exposure was considered attractive, or the examples offered, or the fact that I tried to put my students, who do not have a great organizational experience, in practical situations that needed a solution. Attractiveness also comes as a result of my efforts to try to simplify the extremely complex issues of organizational and institutional analysis. Perhaps the most complicated course was the institutional analysis. Typically, in the past, I found it difficult to help my students understand what the institutions represent and the way we apply the institutional analysis. This time I called the idea of rules and regulations which can be found in many situations, such as driving cars, playing cards, sports games etc. Nothing can function without rules in the society. They understood then that the institutions are extremely important elements of the society; they are basically like a "binder" of social order.

Figure 6 shows that the course activity had a high degree of interactivity. Thus, about 82% considered the courses interactive and highly interactive. This result is explained by the fact that my way of teaching aims primarily to make the course more interesting, to prompt always the students' thinking, not allowing them to have downtime to think about other things or even fall asleep. On the other hand, I did exercises involving either brain-storming or role play. I remember the time when I myself was a student and some teachers made me sleep with their teaching style, others who did not detach from the PowerPoint slides and basically did not come with explanations, they were mere slide readers. But I met also positive role models, charismatic teachers who came very well prepared, and their performance was close to that of a brilliant actor, so getting bored during the course was impossible. I also participated in international contexts, where distinguished researchers used few slides, but offered some very interesting explanations.
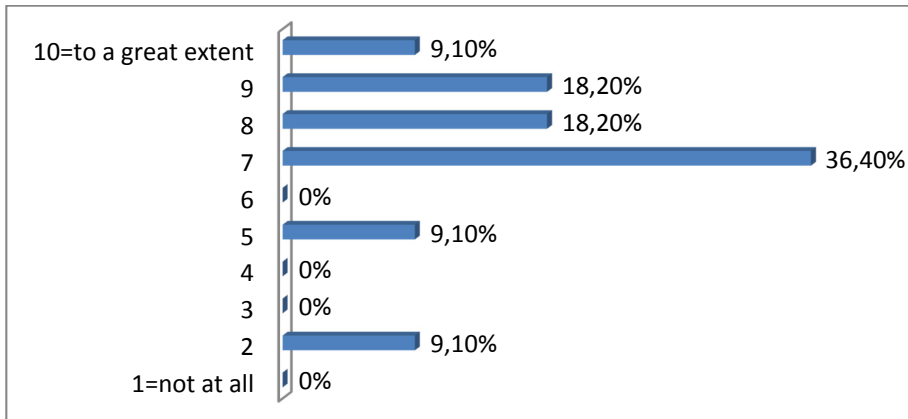
Figure 6: *The teachers involved more students in the teaching activity*
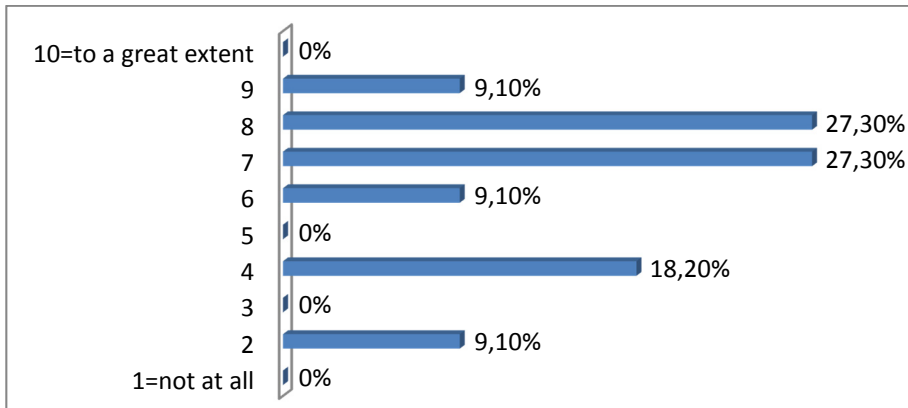*(Scale: 1=not at all, 10=to a great extent)*

Figure 7: *The activities made me feel better prepared in my profession*
(Scale: 1=not at all, 10=to a great extent)

More than half of the students (65%, as seen in Figure 7) think that the teaching activities of the course of Psycho-sociology of the organizations helped them feel better prepared in their profession of sociologists; this is a very good outcome, since this is the final purpose of the graduate degree: to shape very well trained specialists. I used to question my students about the strengths and weaknesses they encountered during their studies and I noticed that they felt less prepared in terms of statistics and methodology knowledge. Therefore, we decided, in the meetings of our Department, to insist on the methodological issues in each course and seminar. That is exactly what I did at the Psycho-sociology of the organizations, giving them a series of examples of research published in top international journals, to facilitate their understanding of how to apply various research methods and also how to select the statistical instruments without which it is difficult to get to relevant outcomes.
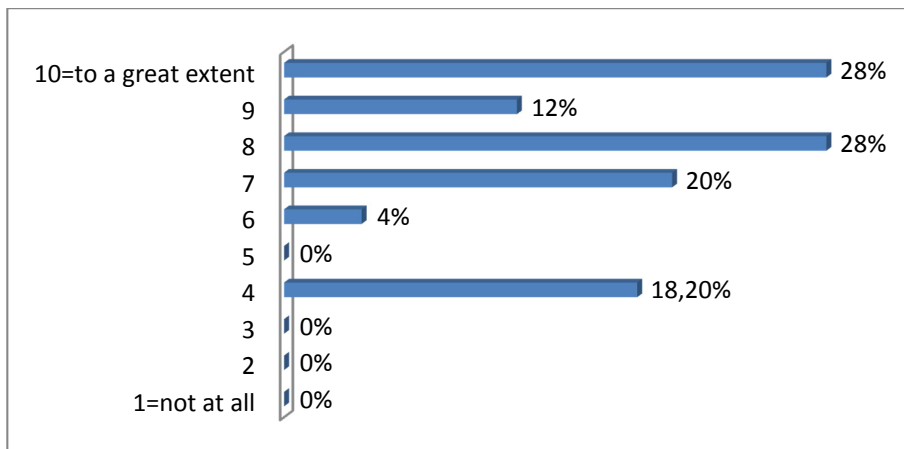
Figure 8: *The teaching activities stimulated me to think about the issues discussed (Scale: 1=not at all, 10=to a great extent)*

As shown in Figure 8, the course largely stimulated the critical thinking. 88% of the students consider that this course stimulated much and very much their thinking, which is a very good result. Perhaps this is the result of the fact that both the teaching methods used (that included not only academic lectures, but also role play, brainstorming or practical examples), the questions that stimulated the epistemic curiosity both at the courses and the seminars, and the assessment methods used, I managed to make my students think, and this is probably the most important result of the courses and seminars.

Conclusions

Exploring the answers of my students to the questions from the questionnaire I consider that Sociology of Organizations lectures and seminars have been well organized and taught. Of course as always there are things which can be improved but it is very easy to understand that:

1. The vast majority of students believe that the "Sociology of the organizations" is an attractive and interactive course.
2. The teaching method made the students treat teaching in a very serious manner.
3. The teacher involved in the teaching process a large number of students and addressed not only the best and more interested in the subject matter in question.
4. The teaching methods were modern and efficient.
5. The course content is relatively easy to understand.
6. The course stimulates critical thinking and generally stimulates the students to think about the issues discussed.
7. The course helps the students to become more trained in their profession as sociologists.

Probably the next academic year I will introduce a few changes. First of all, I will use more data from the current sociological research in the Organizational Analysis. Secondly, I will probably change the assessment method requesting students to do field work during the semester and to participate with group projects at the exam. Thirdly, I will introduce a few case studies of national and international organizations. These case-studies will be discussed during the seminars.

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Some Empirical Results
Regarding the Assessment of Study Programs
and Educational Process

SORANA SĂVEANU[1]
University of Oradea (Romania)

RALUCA BUHAȘ
University of Oradea (Romania)

Abstract

One of the main concerns of the providers of educational services consists of the permanent commitment towards ensuring the quality of their services. Educational objectives must be designed so they can be consistent with the socio-economic context in which the teaching-learning process takes place and to respond effectively to the training needs of individuals. For this, monitoring and evaluation have an essential role in the management of educational programs. Quality assurance in higher education is governed by different legislative procedures established at international and national levels. Besides assessing the institutional capacity of the educational organizations (external evaluation), an important aspect for increasing the relevance of contents transmitted through university courses on the labor market refers to the feedback from students. They, as the main beneficiaries of the educational services, are able to assess how study programs effectively manage to combine several techniques and methods specific to the educational environment in order to transmit knowledge and skills and achieve the educational objectives established initially. Such assessments allow the elaboration of recommendations to improve educational offerings, adjust the curricula, and design study programs. Our paper addresses the methodological aspects that follow the processes of monitoring and assessment of training programs. Within our research we aimed to present the dimensions for the evaluation of the educational process and a possible assessment model, starting from the construction and empirical results obtained within the validation/evaluation process. The paper presents several results achieved by applying five assessment tools to 210 students from the University of Oradea and University Aurel Vlaicu from Arad, and indicates methodological recommendations necessary for the design of the monitoring and evaluation processes of study programs. Research was conducted within the SocioPlus project "Training services, documentation and access for students in BA and MA study programs in Sociology and Social Work fields", founded by the European Social Fund.

Keywords: *Higher Education; Study Programs; Quality Assessment; Quality Management; Student Feedback; Evaluation Tools.*

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[1] E-mail: soranasav@gmail.com

Introduction

In a dynamic contemporary society, universities are seen as being the main provider of a well-trained and qualified labor force and they try to assume this important social role by developing and implementing a qualitative educational process. Ensuring quality in higher education became an element of central focus especially in the last decades. A literature review shows that various regulations, performance indicators, institutional standards, and methods of assessment were developed over the last years at European or national context level (Vlăsceanu, 2005; Mizikaci, 2006). This concern came from the necessity to fold knowledge and competencies transmitted through education, with labor market professional demands. In order to achieve this goal, universities must deploy an ongoing process of monitoring and assessing study programs, thereby able to constantly improve the educational process. Thus, quality management in higher education is a key-element when approaching the assessment of study programs and education.

Starting by debating the permanent concern about ensuring quality in education, addressing the main levels of educational and main social actors involved in this process, presenting performance standards at the national level, our paper offers a methodological insight of a reliable assessment tool that can be used in higher education.

Ensuring quality in education. The assessment part as a constant concern

At the European or national level, higher education faced major changes in the last decades, some of them being even radical. In Romania, these changes became more obvious after 1990. The internationalization of higher education, the establishment of new private universities, the emergence of new study programs and specializations, the need for an international recognition of qualifications, the massification of higher education, and the necessity to respond to the needs of labor market (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994; Vlăsceanu, 2005; Mizikaci, 2006; Puşcaş, 2011;) are only some of the factors that generated interest for standards and quality assurance. At the end, it is about increasing the institutional responsibility towards stakeholders.

The concepts of *quality* and *quality management* are subjects of many theoretical debates, since 1980 (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994). Depending on the context, quality is defined in several ways: quality as excellence, quality as transformation, quality as threshold, or quality as enhancement or improvement (Mizikaci, 2006). But, there is no theoretical consensus regarding a clear definition of quality when it comes to higher education (Michael, 1998), being frequently misunderstood or misrepresented (Doherty, 2008). This issue arises from the difficulty to measure education services due to their complexity.

From a general point of view, quality assurance is a process of regulation in order to achieve educational objectives in an optimal way (Puşcaş, 2011). It implies

dimensions as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Tsinidou, Gerogiannis & Fitsilis, 2010; Bărbulescu, Toderaş & Ion, 2012). We talk about quality in every type of training or educational activity or program and the only way to ensure it is through a constant assessment. A good quality of the provided services ensures institutional competition on the market. A general look over the concept of assessing training programs emphasizes some basic elements: it is a complex process, specific to any training program, through which the quantity and quality of transmitted information can be measured in order to improve the educational process (Maier & Ilica, 2009). This approach enhances the trainer/teacher – student relation. Thus, quality assessment becomes an activity of collecting and interpreting data regarding the direct effects generated by this relation. Taking into consideration all these elements, we state that the management of training/educational programs should focus on: elaborating programs, providing them on the market, monitoring their implementation, assessing their quality and, last but not least, adjusting them accordingly.

The need of assessing quality in higher education was and still is a major concern at administrative and public levels. The main objectives of the Bologna process aim at assuring academic quality (ARACIS, 2006). Most governments have considered their agenda in this sense and elaborated regulations and built specific bodies at national levels, in order to properly assess higher education institutions. Law no. 88/1993 was adopted in Romania after a big expansion of private universities and regarded the accreditation of higher education institutions and their degrees. Based on this regulation, the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (CNEAA) was established and activated between 1993 and 2006. To comply with the Bologna process, Romania established a national agency for quality assurance in higher education – ARACIS (The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education).

Its methodology is elaborated according to the principles of the European Higher Education Area, which delineates two dimensions of quality assessment in higher education: internal and external (ARACIS, 2006). The external dimension considers performance standards established by the national agency and framed by certain regulations, while the internal one refers to contextual mechanisms established at the university level (Puşcaş, 2006). Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education ensures the external assessment in higher education. Its main role is to periodically evaluate the activity of the educational provider, so assure its educational objectives are being achieved. The external evaluation regards three major dimensions of quality assurance: institutional capacity, educational efficiency, and quality manage-ment (ARACIS, 2006). Performance standards and indicators are elaborated based on these dimensions:

A. *Institutional capacity* regards: Institutional, administrative, and managerial structures; Material base; Human resources

B. Educational efficiency: Study program content; Availability of educational resources; Educational outcomes; Scientific research; Educational and research results values in the economic and social context; Financial activity of the institution

C. Quality management regards: Strategies for assuring quality; Mechanisms of a periodic adjustment of educational activities; Mechanisms of assessing learning outcomes; Mechanisms of assessing teachers/trainers; Up to date data base regarding internal assurance of quality; Transparency of information regarding study programs and degrees; Functionality of educational quality assurance structures; Assuring the process of external evaluation.

In our paper, we will focus on approaching the second dimension of quality assessment – the internal one. Each university or educational program provider has the responsibility to ensure the quality of the training process at the internal level and should constantly adjust the educational process accordingly. We can talk about an institutional self-assessment (Puşcaş, 2011). We should delineate the difference between the assessment of students and the assessment of study programs. The first one comprises students` evaluation based on transmitted knowledge and achieved skills and is realized by teachers/trainers using specific assessment methods and techniques. It regards the evaluation of educational outcomes and reflects competencies transmitted through study programs. Assessment of study programs is another component of internal institutional evaluation. According to Kirkpatrick (1994) there are four levels of criteria when assessing training in organizations: reaction (customers` satisfaction), learning (learned knowledge and skills), behavior (the way learned knowledge and skills are used at the work place), results (the impact of learning outcomes seen within the organizational context). Although controversial, his model is by far the most widely used and popular method of evaluating training/educational organization.

In order to build the theoretical background for our paper, we will focus on the first level of assessment. Level one measures customers`/trainees` satisfaction and reaction to the training programs and it discusses reactions in term of how much did the participants like the training program (Kirkpatrick, 1994). In this point, debates arise and researchers state their opinion based on the dynamics of the educational process: nowadays, participants` satisfaction regards more the quality or the relevance of training (Bates, 2004). Kirkpatrick`s model of training assessment can be used also within higher education. In this context, students become the customers of the educational process and they are the main pillar when assessing study programs. Their feedback is an important performance indicator for higher education organizations and since the 1970s a major focus was put on this research (Chonko et al., 2002), although, student ratings of training in higher education is rather controversial. Supporters state that this type of evaluation comes only with benefits for the improvement of educational process (Theall & Franklin, 2001), provides a constructivist framework of the educational process, where teachers learn from students (Carless et al., 2011), and feedback is seen as a corrective tool (Evans, 2013). Opponents state that such

an evaluation is unreliable and invalid, because it can be influenced by subjectivity, removing the assessment from an effective measure of the teaching process (Kulik, 2011; Spooren, Mortelmans & Denekens, 2007).

Assessment strategies – some methods, techniques and measurement instruments

Considering students' feedback on training processes as a main pillar of an effective assessment in higher education, researchers developed various methods, techniques, and measurement instruments in this sense, based on the specificity of each educational institution. Methods and instruments were elaborated and implemented and their results were used for the development and improvement of the teaching process (Tan & Kek, 2004; Spooren, Mortelmans & Denekens, 2007; Indira, 2008). Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used in order to assess educational programs from students` perspective (Tsinidou, Gerogiannis & Fitsilis, 2010; Falchikov, 2005; Clewes, 2003; Shevlin et al., 2000).

Measurement instruments for student evaluation of teaching should fold on certain dimensions of the educational process, comprising all major elements. By doing a review of the literature, we can state that there is no consensus regarding the nature and number of dimensions of quality in education (Patrick & Smart, 1998; Clewes, 2003; Tsinidou, Gerogiannis & Fitsilis, 2010). Shevlin et al. (2000) designed a scale to measure two dimensions of teaching effectiveness, based on six items related to lecturer ability and five items regarding attributes of the training program. The SERVQUAL questionnaire contains 22 items and measures tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Tan & Kek, 2004). Some other researchers developed instruments aiming to measure seven areas of evaluation: the academic personnel, the administration, the library, the curriculum, the location of the institute, the available infrastructure, the services, and future career prospects (Tsinidou, Gerogiannis & Fitsilis, 2010). Some measurement instruments put a great emphasis also on sub-dimensions. Spooren et al. (2007) based their scale on a theoretical construction with eight main dimensions (course objectives, subject matter, course structure, teaching activities, course materials, course feasibility, coaching, and evaluation), each of them having between 1 to 4 sub-dimensions or indicators. Tan & Kek (2004) adapted some items used in SERVQUAL survey and constructed an instrument consisting of 76 items categorized into eight dimensions: course organization, workload and assessment, learning, teaching and advising, university facilities, social activities, library facilities, and computing facilities.

Hence, an insight of the literature emphasizes some major common dimensions when assessing the educational process: lecturer`s skills of transmitting the educational content, structure and content of study programs, and additional materials used (regarding also the physical environment). Although, universities and training institutions fold

on this elements, they should review their educational necessities and create a valid quality measurement instrument based on specific criteria.

Methodological approach

We aim to present in this paper some results and practices conducted in order to assess five study programs by analyzing students' feedback. We intend to present some important dimensions for the assessment of study programs, and based on them, to build a testing/evaluation tool. Our paper presents some of the results obtained following the application of the assessment tools, making suggestions regarding the methodological issues encountered during this process.

Designing the assessment tools

Our approach is part of the objectives of SocioPlus project "*Training services, documentation and access for students in BA and MA study programs in Sociology and Social Work fields*". The project aims to improve the curricula of five study programs in social sciences (2 BA programs and 3 MA programs): Social Work, Sociology, Human Resources Management, Management of Social Services and Social Work Services. One important aspect about achieving this objective refers to the evaluation of study programs by getting feedback from students.

To assess these programs, we followed five essential dimensions that characterize the way in which they are organized and run. These dimensions are: teaching methods, teaching materials, bibliography, the structure of curricula (general aspects and the assessment of curricula), and how the educational contents contribute to the transmission of specific skills (12 items specific to each study program: 12 for the acquired skills and 12 for the necessary skills). So, for each dimension an instrument was developed and adapted to each study program analyzed.

For the construction of the five assessment tools, eight experts were involved. Each of them contributed to the construction of items: 4 experts were involved in developing the first 3 instruments regarding the teaching methods, teaching materials, and bibliographic resources, and 3 experts were involved in the elaboration of the 4th and 5th instruments regarding the structure of the curricula and the specific competencies provided through it (for methodological details see Bălțătescu et al. in this volume).

Regarding the working strategy, for the development of the assessment tools team meetings were organized to establish the main themes included in the instruments; further, every expert has made proposals for items needed for the evaluation. In order to establish a uniform way of working, it was agreed for each instrument to use Likert scales with 10 points. The items are made up as statements, students will have to respond to what extent the statements are true (1 *Not at all true* and 10 *Perfectly true*). All scales were pretested in order to verify the consistency and validity of scales (see also Bălțătescu et al. in this volume).

In the next step, we prepared all 5 instruments for all 5 study programs. Students were instructed properly before completing all questions. Instruments were completed in groups organized by specialties and the activity was supervised by a teacher.

The assessment of five study programs. Some results

210 students were selected to participate in the SocioPlus project. All of them completed 5 assessment instruments (corresponding to each dimension for evaluation). Therefore, at the end we had 1,050 questionnaires completed.

The number of students who completed the instruments is distributed according to study programs as follows:

Table 1: *The number of students who completed the assessment tools*

University	Study program	Year of study	Number of students
Oradea	Social work	1	14
	Social work	2	33
	Social work	3	12
	Sociology	2	14
	Sociology	3	11
	Management of Social Services	1	15
	Management of Social Services	2	20
	Human Resources Management	1	8
	Human Resources Management	2	11
Arad	Social work	2	30
	Social work	3	21
	Social Work Services	1	21

We present in the following the scales analysis, depending on study programs and universities and then the results obtained for the analysis of courses and skills targeted for each specialization. The structure of the analyses is corresponding to the five dimensions of evaluation.

Teaching techniques

In the following figure we present the mean values recorded for each item included in the first assessment instrument. We registered high values in the case of the interaction in classes (students asking questions and teacher offers useful and prompt answers). The figure shows lower values recorded for the negative items: the topics were irrelevant, other method should have been better. So, most of the students appreciate that the teaching methods are the appropriate ones to ensure a well trained professional in the field.

Figure 1: *Items from the 1ˢᵗ assessment instrument*

In general, for the Teaching techniques dimension, average values obtained for the University of Arad are higher than those recorded for the University of Oradea, both at the bachelor and the master levels. Exceptions are the values recorded for the item on using modern technology, and for items that capture the communication during teaching activities between teachers and students, these mean values are higher in the University of Oradea.

Further we will present values recorded for each study program. For presentation we will use codes for each item.

Table 2: *Items codes for the 1ˢᵗ assessment instrument*

I1.1	Teaching method was the best one for the topics addressed in classes
I1.2	For topics addressed there would have been better other ways of teaching
I1.3	Teaching methods helped me understand and retain most of the topics discussed
I1.4	I would have understood better if the teaching was otherwise in these courses and seminars

I1.5	During teaching activities there were often irrelevant topics discussed
I1.6	Teachers used diverse teaching methods
I1.7	In teaching there was only one method used
I1.8	Courses, seminars and laboratories have seemed attractive to me
I1.9	I came with pleasure at teaching activities
I1.10	I would like to have more courses / seminars / labs taught in the same way
I1.11	Teaching methods made me treat my training more seriously
I1.12	The attitude of the teacher made me treat my training more seriously.
I1.13	The courses / seminars in question I felt I had to prepare myself better
I1.14	The teaching methods make the content easy to understand
I1.15	Teachers involved during the teaching activity many students
I1.16	Teachers gave the opportunity to ask questions
I1.17	Teachers asked questions during lectures / seminars
I1.18	Students received response to their questions
I1.19	Responses from teachers were prompt
I1.20	Responses from teachers were useful
I1.21	The training activities included enough practical applications
I1.22	Educational activities have made me feel more prepared for my profession
I1.23	Teachers have shown what it means to be a specialist
I1.24	In courses and seminars were often questioned new topics
I1.25	Educational activities have stimulated me to think about the issues discussed
I1.26	We have developed individual projects
I1.27	We wrote essays / papers in seminars and labs
I1.28	We used a projector or other modern technology for teaching

In the case of Social Work programs from University of Oradea, mean values registered for the MA program Social Service Management are generally higher compared with those obtained for the undergraduate program, except for the case of items relating to the adoption of different ways of teaching and the use of modern technology in teaching. Compared to the overall scale mean values, those recorded for the MA program are generally close to them or above, while the undergraduate program, the mean values are under the general level, with the exception of the items mentioned above.

For programs from Sociology field, in most cases we register lower mean values than those found in the general scale. Only in some cases, especially in the case of MA students, we have higher values than those found in the general scale. In other words, from all of the students involved in the assessment, those from the Sociology field are less convinced that the teaching methods used are appropriate. Similarly with the situation presented before, students from MA program generally have higher values compared to those from BA Sociology program.
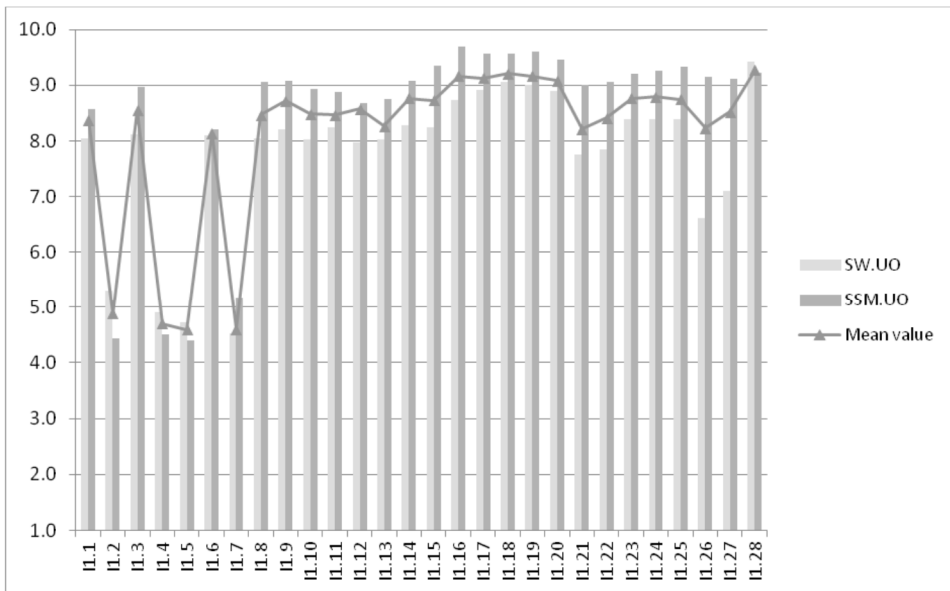
Figure 2: *Mean values for specializations in the Social Work field (Social Work and Social Services Management) from University of Oradea (BA and MA), comparative reporting to the mean value of the general 1st instrument scale*
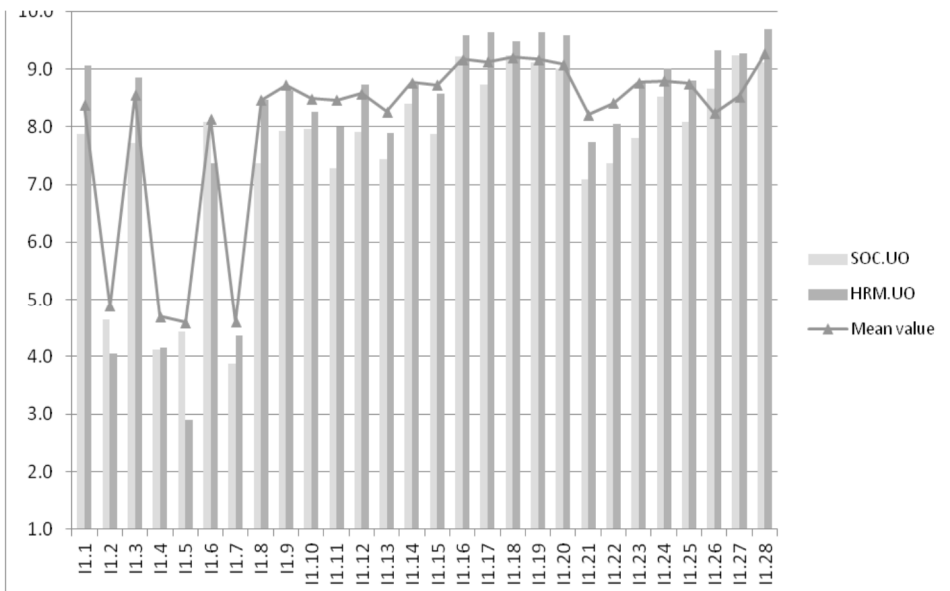

Figure 3: *Mean values for specializations in the Sociology field (Sociology and Human Resources Management) from University of Oradea (BA and MA), comparative reporting to the mean value of the general 1st instrument scale*

Regarding the mean values obtained in the case of the University of Arad, values registered for the MA program Social Work Services are higher than those obtained for the undergraduate program in the case of each item used in our scale. Also MA students register higher mean values compared to the mean values registered for the general scale and those from BA program have values close to the ones for the general scale.
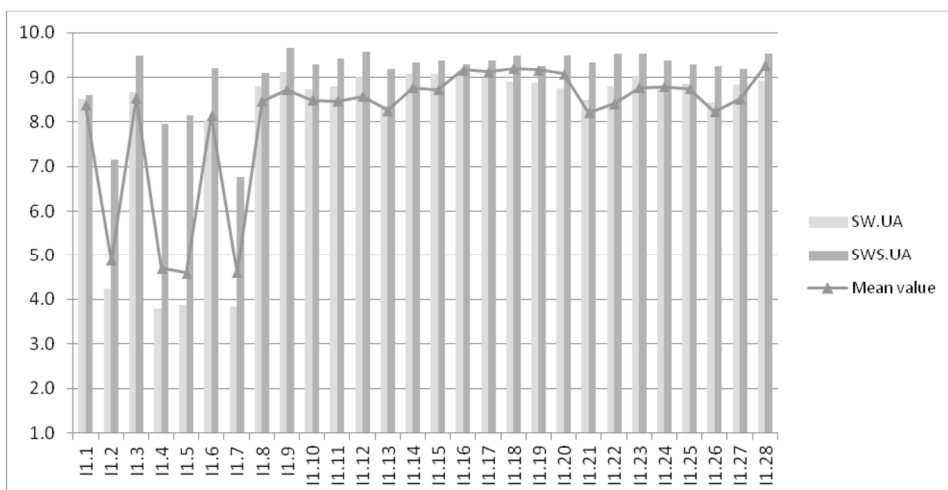

Figure 4: *Mean values for specializations in the Social Work field (Social Work and Social Work Services) from University of Arad (BA and MA), comparative reporting to the mean value of the general 1st instrument scale*

We computed the score for this 1st assessment instrument, including all items (some of them reversed) (Cronbach alpha above .700). The mean value for this score is 8.34 and recorded for the University of Oradea is 8.24 and for Arad is 8.53.
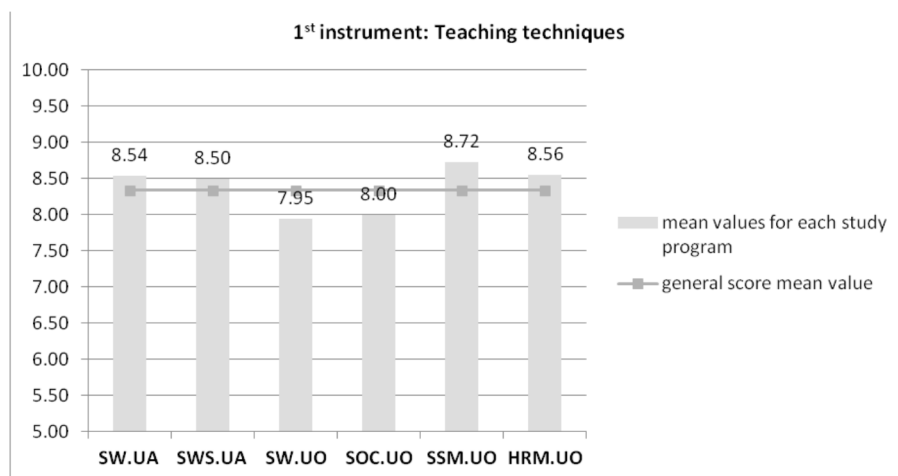

Figure 5: *1st assessment instrument score, mean values for each study program*

The analysis on each study program shows the fact that the lowest mean values are recorded for undergraduate programs of the University of Oradea, while MA programs from the same university have the highest values. Study programs from Arad and MA programs from Oradea have higher values than the average.

Teaching materials

Regarding our second assessment instrument, results suggest that students appreciate that the teaching materials received in classes are well suited for their training. Also for this dimension, we have again higher values recorded in the case of students from Arad, compared to those from Oradea.
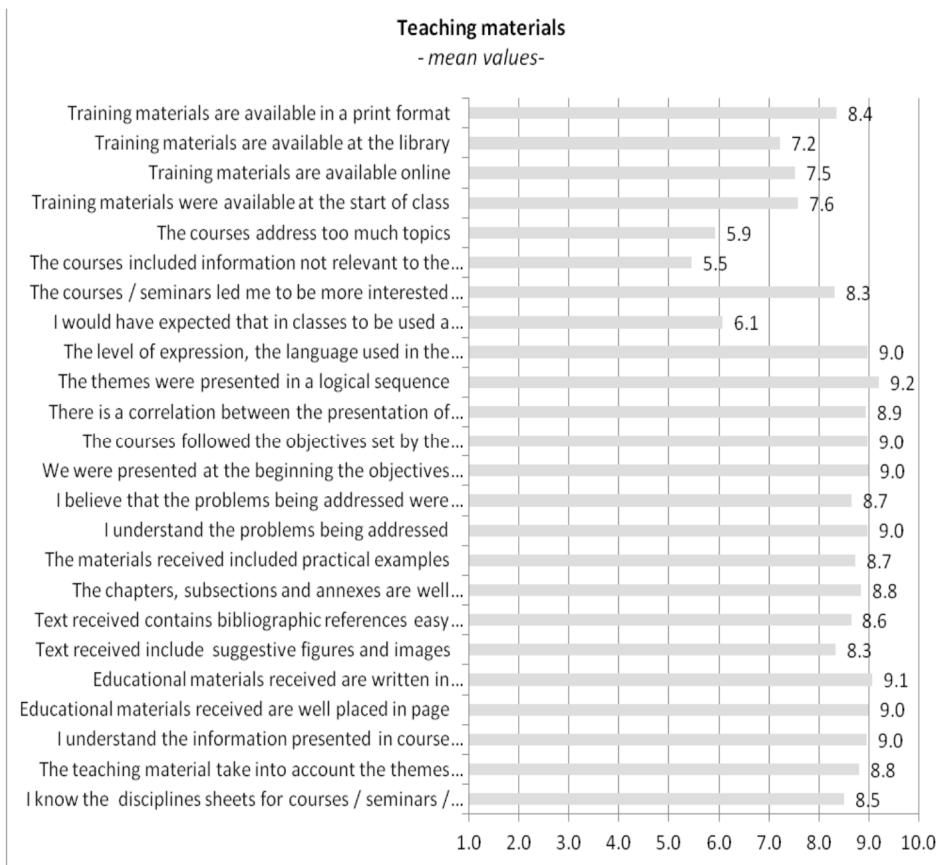

Teaching materials
- mean values-

Item	Value
Training materials are available in a print format	8.4
Training materials are available at the library	7.2
Training materials are available online	7.5
Training materials were available at the start of class	7.6
The courses address too much topics	5.9
The courses included information not relevant to the...	5.5
The courses / seminars led me to be more interested ...	8.3
I would have expected that in classes to be used a...	6.1
The level of expression, the language used in the...	9.0
The themes were presented in a logical sequence	9.2
There is a correlation between the presentation of...	8.9
The courses followed the objectives set by the...	9.0
We were presented at the beginning the objectives...	9.0
I believe that the problems being addressed were...	8.7
I understand the problems being addressed	9.0
The materials received included practical examples	8.7
The chapters, subsections and annexes are well...	8.8
Text received contains bibliographic references easy...	8.6
Text received include suggestive figures and images	8.3
Educational materials received are written in...	9.1
Educational materials received are well placed in page	9.0
I understand the information presented in course...	9.0
The teaching material take into account the themes...	8.8
I know the disciplines sheets for courses / seminars /...	8.5

Figure 6: *Items from the 2ⁿᵈ assessment instrument*

For further analysis we used the following codes for each item included in our 2nd instrument:

Table 3: *Items codes for the 2nd assessment instrument*

I2.1	I know the disciplines sheets for courses / seminars / labs
I2.2	The teaching material take into account the themes and references presented in the sheet
I2.3	I understand the information presented in course handout
I2.4	Educational materials received are well placed in page
I2.5	Educational materials received are written in characters easier to read
I2.6	Text received include suggestive figures and images
I2.7	Text received contains bibliographic references easy to find
I2.8	The chapters, subsections and annexes are well defined
I2.9	The materials received included practical examples
I2.10	I understand the problems being addressed
I2.11	I believe that the problems being addressed were relevant to my professional training
I2.12	We were presented at the beginning the objectives pursued in courses
I2.13	The courses followed the objectives set by the teacher at the beginning
I2.14	There is a correlation between the presentation of the course topics and their order in the teaching material
I2.15	The themes were presented in a logical sequence
I2.16	The level of expression, the language used in the teaching material was suitable for my level of understanding
I2.17	I would have expected that in classes to be used a more scientific language
I2.18	The courses / seminars led me to be more interested in the topics addressed
I2.19	The courses included information not relevant to the subject matter
I2.20	The courses address too much topics
I2.21	Training materials were available at the start of class
I2.22	Training materials are available online
I2.23	Training materials are available at the library
I2.24	Training materials are available in a print format

The analysis for Social Work study programs from Oradea show higher values in the case of the MA program, compared to the BA program for almost all items. Also, values for the MA program are above the average of the scale. This situation is similar to the one found in the case of the first dimension analyzed.
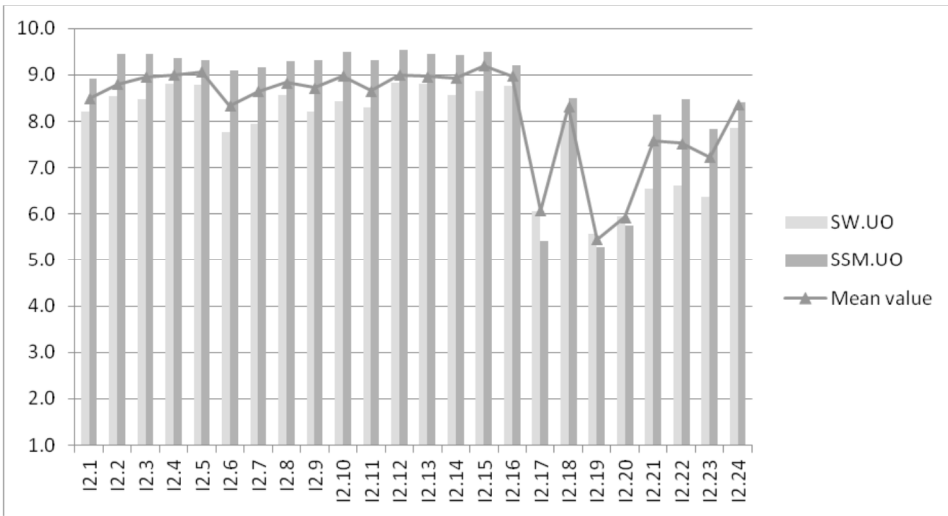
Figure 7: *Mean values for specializations in the Social Work field*
(Social Work and Social Services Management) from University of Oradea (BA and MA),
comparative reporting to the mean value of the general 2ⁿᵈ Instrument scale

For Sociology study programs from Oradea we have some items with lower values than the average recorded for the general scale, and some items where values are higher. Also in most cases, the MA study program scores higher than the BA program (except the 17, 19 and 20 items, the ones referring to negative aspects – use of scientific language, irrelevant information presented and the crowding of topics).
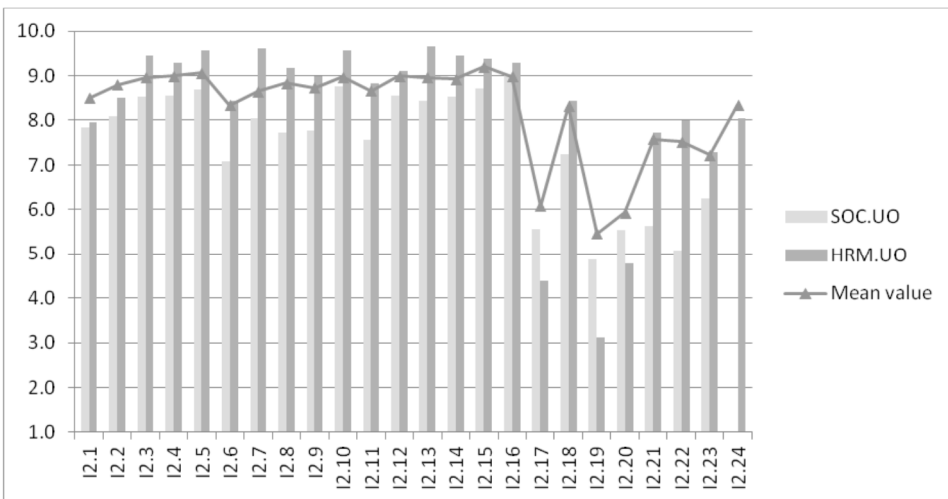
Figure 8: *Mean values for specializations in the Sociology field*
(Sociology and Human Resources Management) from University of Oradea (BA and MA),
comparative reporting to the mean value of the general 2ⁿᵈ instrument scale

So, regarding the teaching materials received, students from Human Resources Management consider in a greater amount that these materials are well presented, useful, and correspond for achieving the educational objectives of classes.

This situation is similar for students from Arad. The figure below shows that in most of the cases, students from MA study programs from Arad register higher mean values than those from the BA program (the exception is found in the case of *The themes were presented in a logical sequence* item). Also, in most cases, values are closer to the average of our scale. We can see that there are major differences in the case of items 17, 19, and 20. These items are the ones referring to negative aspects (expect to use a more scientific language; irrelevant information included in the course; too many topics addressed), so we think that in the case of MA students there was a misunderstanding regarding the interpretation of these questions.
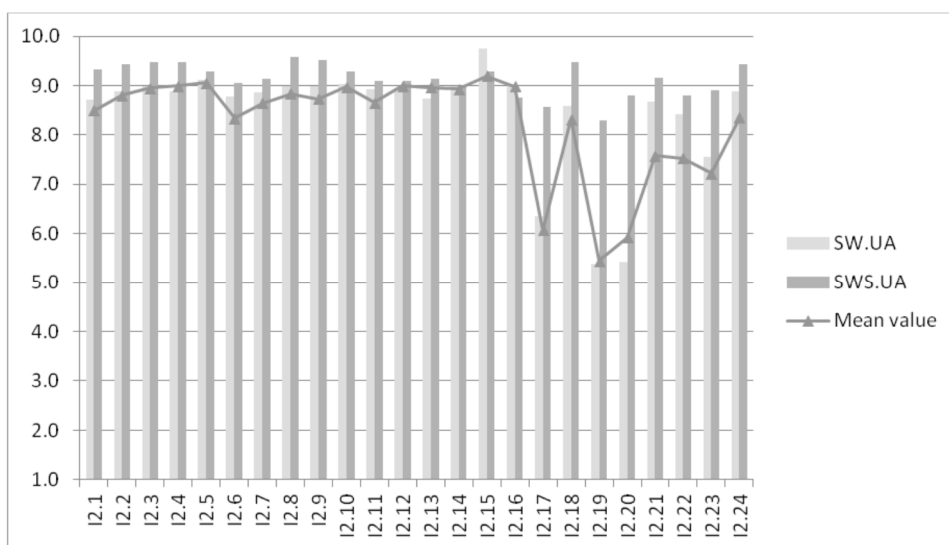

Figure 9: *Mean values for specializations in the Social Work field (Social Work and Social Work Services) from University of Arad (BA and MA), comparative reporting to the mean value of the general 2nd instrument scale*

We further summed up the items for this scale (we reversed values for the 17, 19, and 20 items) and computed a general score. Validity is confirmed for Cronbach alpha above .700. The mean value of the 2nd Instrument score is 8.17. The value for University of Oradea is 8.06 and for Arad is 8.39.

In the figure below we present mean values of this score registered for each study program. The situation is similar with the results presented in the case of our 1st Instrument. We have lower mean values in the case of BA programs from University of Oradea (Social Work and Sociology), but the highest values in the case of MA programs from this university. Values recorded for the BA and MA programs from University of Arad are closer to the average of this score.
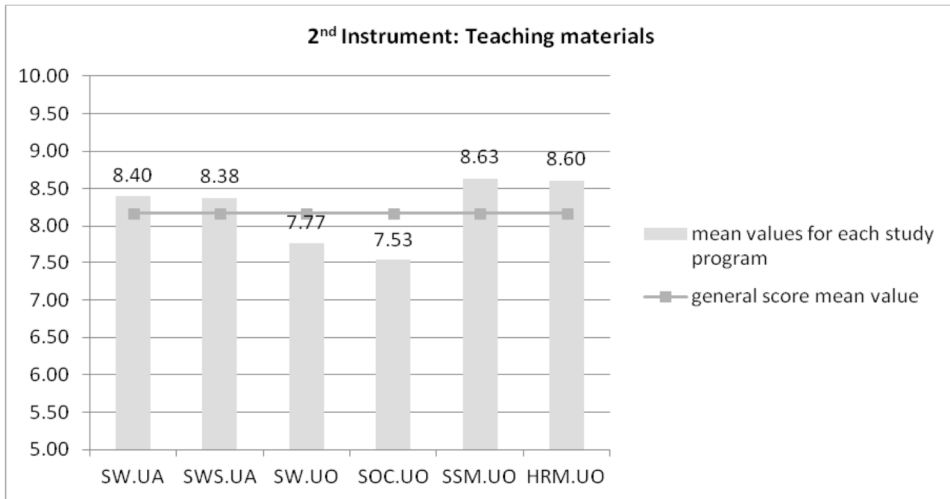
Figure 10: *2nd assessment instrument score, mean values for each study program*

Bibliographic resources

Our next step in the analysis was the 3rd assessment instrument referring to biblio-graphic resources. We register mean values from 8.2 to 9.1 for the items used for this dimension of assessment.
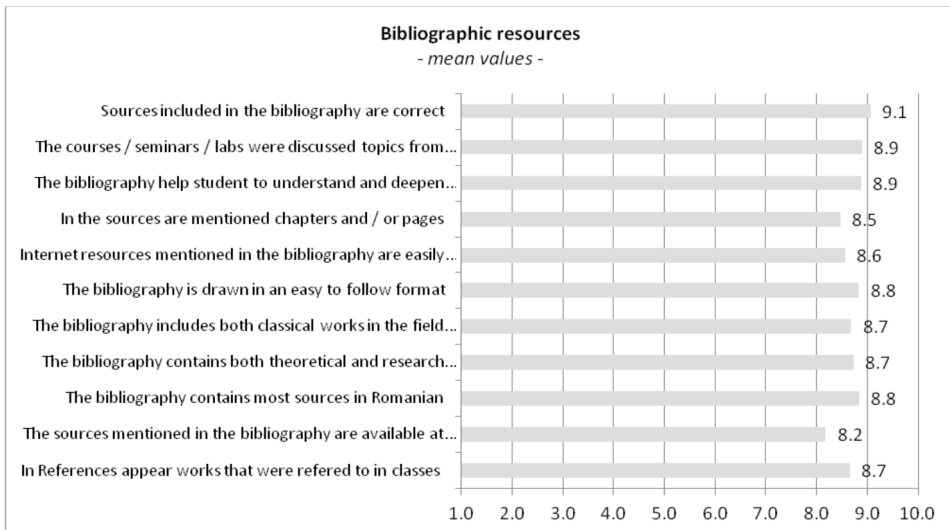

Figure 11: *Items from the 3rd assessment instrument*

If we look at the differences recorded for Social Work programs from University of Oradea, we see that again we have higher values in the case of MA students, all values are above the average of the general scale. The results for BA program show values that are below the average.
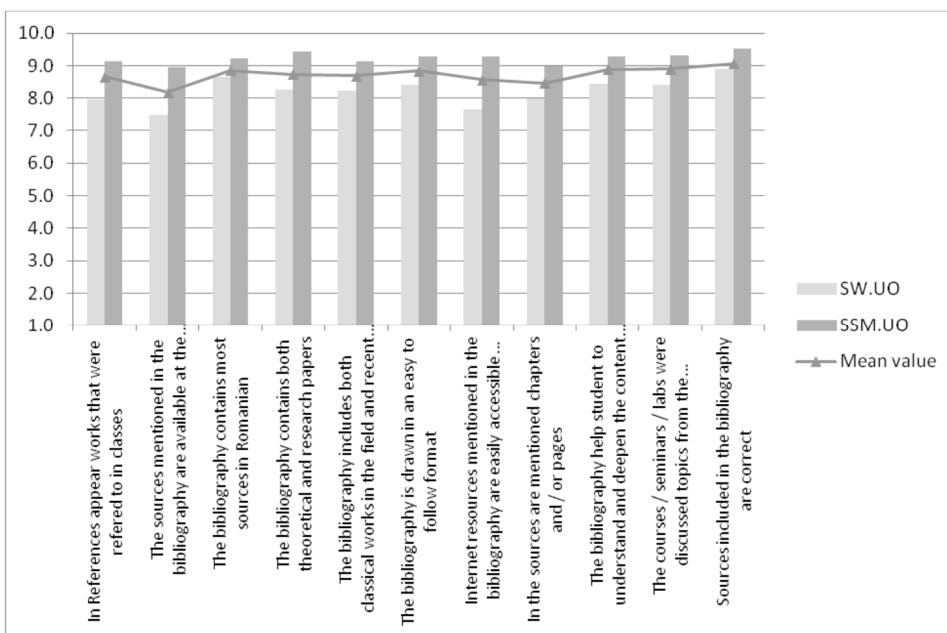
Figure 12: *Mean values for specializations in the Social Work field (Social Work and Social Services Management) from University of Oradea (BA and MA), comparative reporting to the mean*
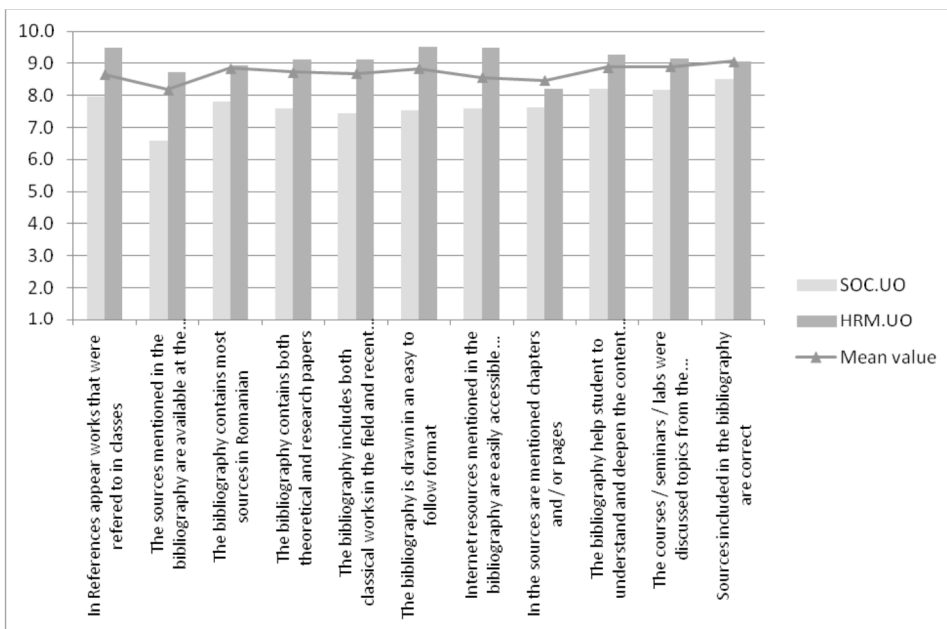

Figure 13: *Mean values for specializations in the Sociology field (Sociology and Human Resources Management) from University of Oradea (BA and MA), comparative reporting to the mean value of the general 3rd instrument scale*

For Sociology programs (BA and MA) the situation is the same: higher values for all items in the case of HRM study program and in most of these cases values are above the average of the scale.

Social work programs from University of Arad show more close values. We also find in this case higher values for the MA program, but the BA program has also values above the average recorded for the general scale.
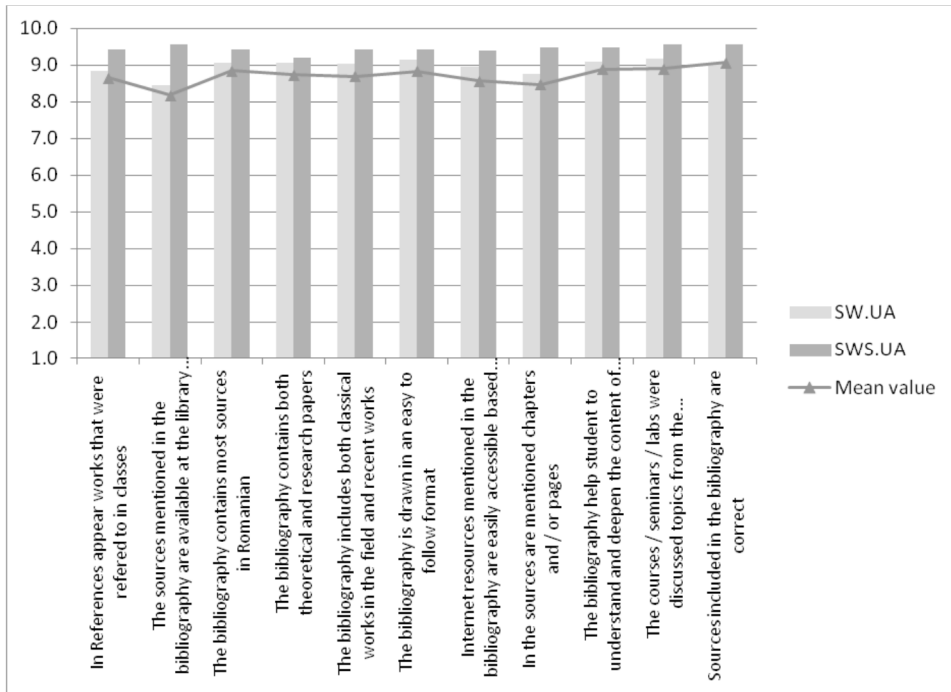

Figure 14: *Mean values for specializations in the Social Work field (Social Work and Social Work Services) from University of Arad (BA and MA), comparative reporting to the mean value of the general 3rd instrument scale*

We computed a general score for this dimension. The validity of this scale is confirmed for Cronbach alpha above .700. This score has a 8.71 mean value, 8.51 for University of Oradea and 9.10 for University of Arad. BA programs from University of Oradea register the lowest mean values, and we find the highest values in the case of MA programs.
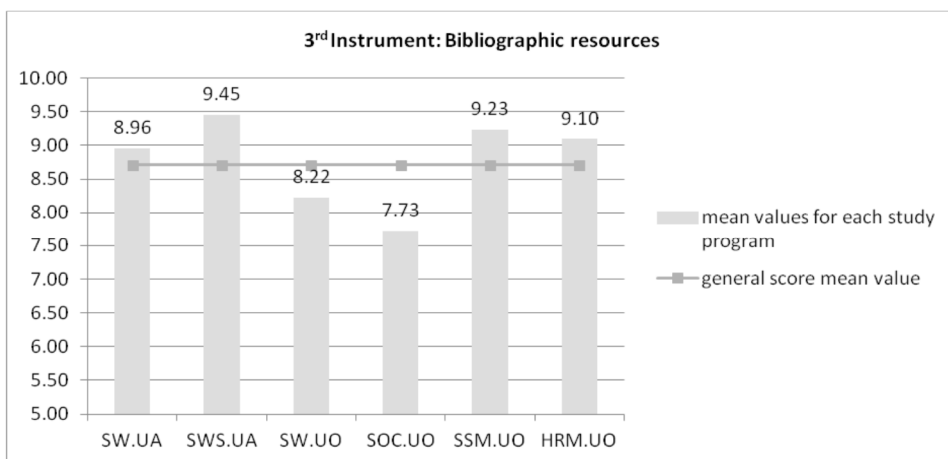
Figure 15: *3ʳᵈ assessment instrument score, mean values for each study program*
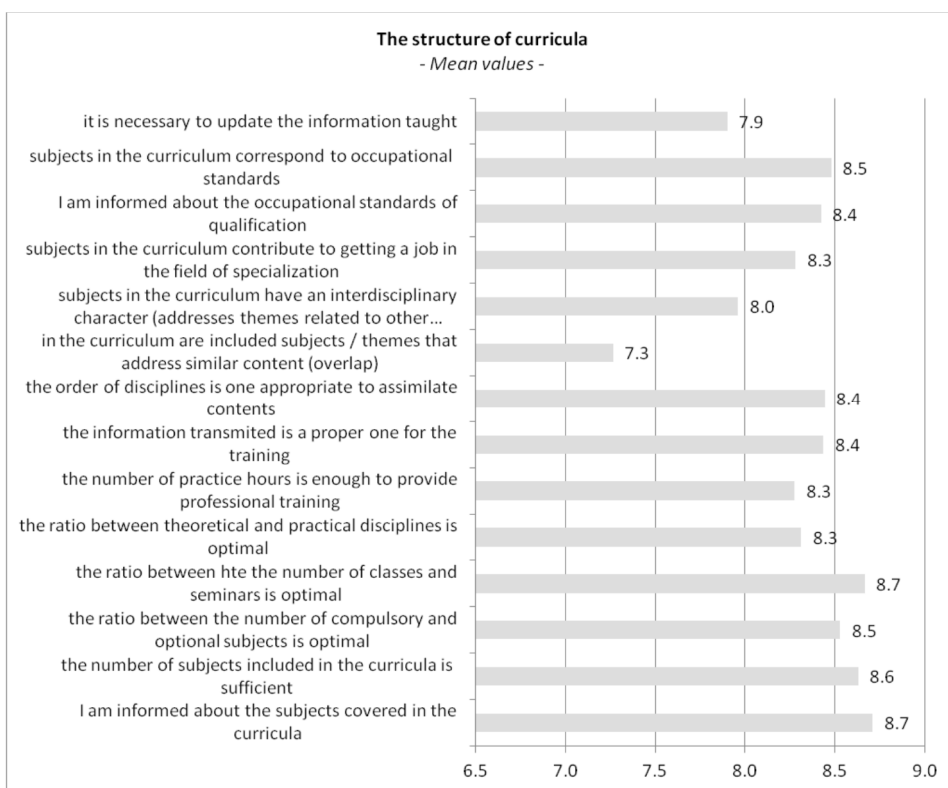
The structure of the curricula

Figure 16: *Items from the 4ᵗʰ assessment instrument*

Our 4ᵗʰ dimension used for the assessment of study programs refers to the structure of the curricula. We can see in the figure below that the lowest value is registered in

the case of similar educational content found in the curricula and high values in the case of the information available about the curricula and the balance between compulsory and optional courses, seminars, and courses, and theoretical classes and practical ones. According to these results we can say that students consider that the curricula is logically structured, well balanced.

In our further analyses we looked at the mean values recorded for each study program. For Social work programs from the University of Oradea we have higher values in the case of the MA program, exception 2 items referring to interdisciplinary contents and overlapping educational content. In most of the cases, values are close to the average of this scale. Only in the case referring to the practical training we have a higher value registered for the MA program.
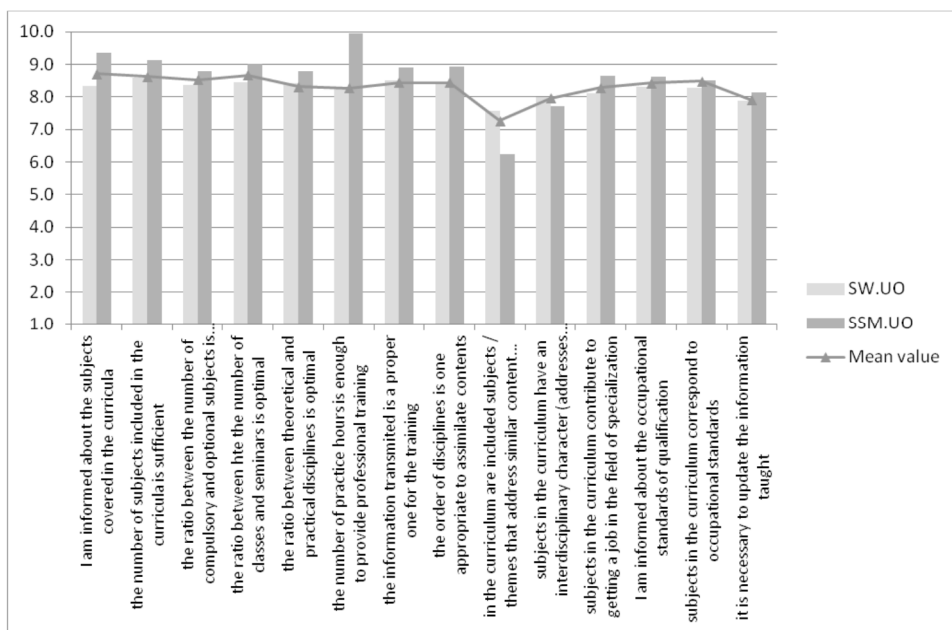

Figure 17: *Mean values for specializations in the Social Work field (Social Work and Social Services Management) from University of Oradea (BA and MA), comparative reporting to the mean value of the general 4th Instrument scale*

Results obtained for Sociology programs from Oradea show lower values than the average recorded for the general scale. In most cases we have higher values for the MA program compared to the ones registered for the BA program.

Similar situation we find for Social Work programs from Arad. Again we have higher values for the MA program for all items. These values are above the average of the scale.
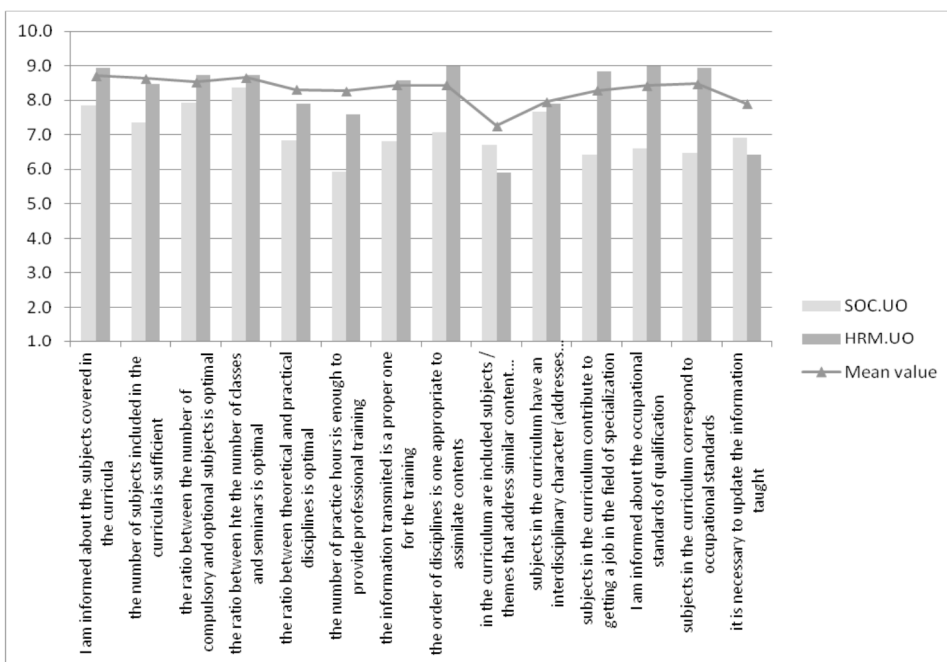
Figure 18: *Mean values for specializations in the Sociology field (Sociology and Human Resources Management) from University of Oradea (BA and MA), comparative reporting to the mean value of the general 4ᵗʰ instrument scale*
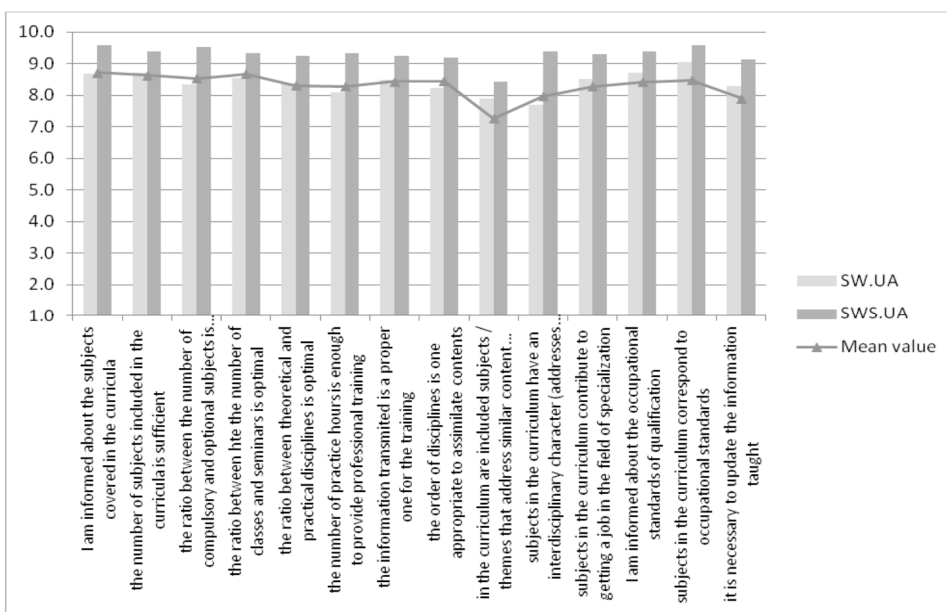

Figure 19: *Mean values for specializations in the Social Work field (Social Work and Social Work Services) from University of Arad (BA and MA), comparative reporting to the mean value of the general 4ᵗʰ instrument scale*

The items used in our 4th assessment instrument compose a valid scale for Cronbach alpha above .700. We computed a score for this scale which had a mean value of 8.34 (8.17 for University of Oradea and 8.67 for University of Arad). The figure below shows the values recorded for each study program included in our study. As we can see we have again lower values recorded in the case of BA programs from the University of Oradea, but with a smaller difference from the average for Social Work program. The highest value is registered for the MA program from Arad.
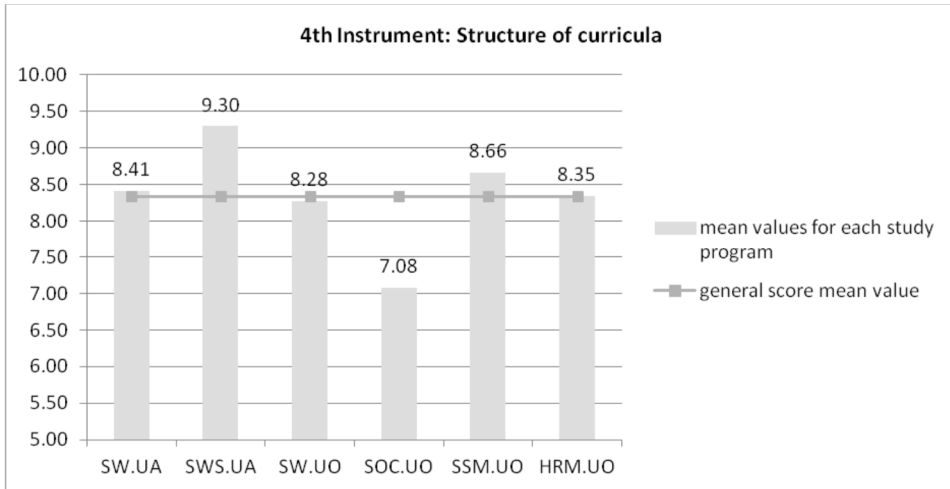

Figure 20: *4th assessment instrument score, mean values for each study program*

The 5th assessment instrument – specific competences

Our 5th assessment instrument addresses the part regarding the specific competences covered by study programs. We focused on the idea of capturing the differences regarding the assimilation of certain competencies throughout classes and the assessment of their importance/necessity. For each study program, we made up a list that includes 12 competences. All elements included in the list are based on the specific competencies provided by the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education (available online at www.rncis.ro). This online portal is a useful tool that ensures the centralization of all study programs in higher education, with detailed information regarding all qualifications delivered by higher education institutions in Romania, offering in this way an overall picture of the educational offer.

Through our assessment instrument we asked students to evaluate in what manner the program ensures the assimilation of certain skills and to evaluate whether those skills are needed for carrying out tasks related to the profession. We will further present differences recorded for each study program.

Social work (BA) – University of Oradea

Students' assessment about the acquired and necessary competencies passed through the study program show that in most cases, students consider that the skills from our list are important in order to perform the tasks related to the profession. Only in three cases the values registered for the acquisition of skills are higher than those for the necessity: Defining concepts, theories and methods of diagnosis and intervention to reduce social risks; Identify appropriate techniques and methods of communication with beneficiaries; Identification and implementation of appropriate response mechanisms for problematic situations faced by persons, groups and communities. We have to point out that these differences are not very large (values are between 0.8 and 0.13).
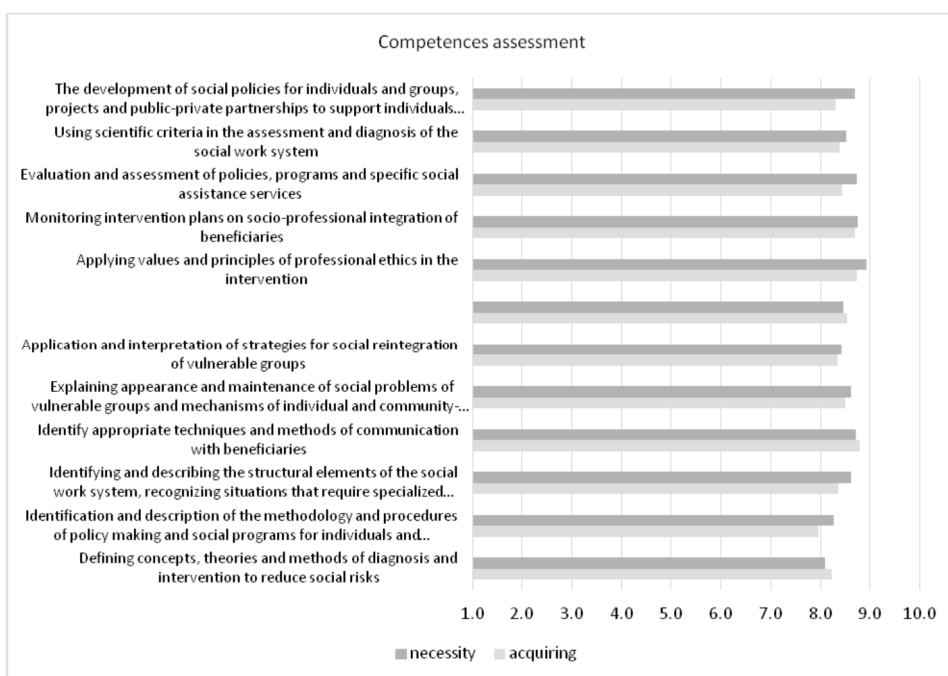
Figure 21: *Assessment of competences – Social Work study program*

Social services management (MA) – University of Oradea

For Social services management program, all values recorded for competence necessity are higher than those for the acquisition. In this case we can say that the program meets the requirements and expectations of students and comply with the requirements of the labor market.
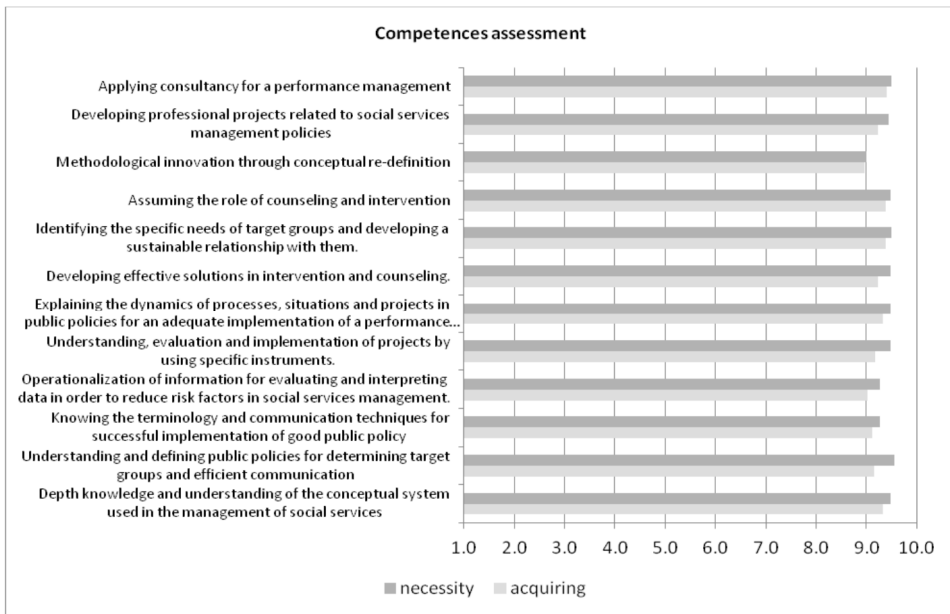
Figure 22: *Assessment of competences – Social services management study program*

Sociology – (BA) – University of Oradea

Only in the case of one item from our list of skills we register a higher value for the acquisition of this competence rather for the necessity: Definition, classification,
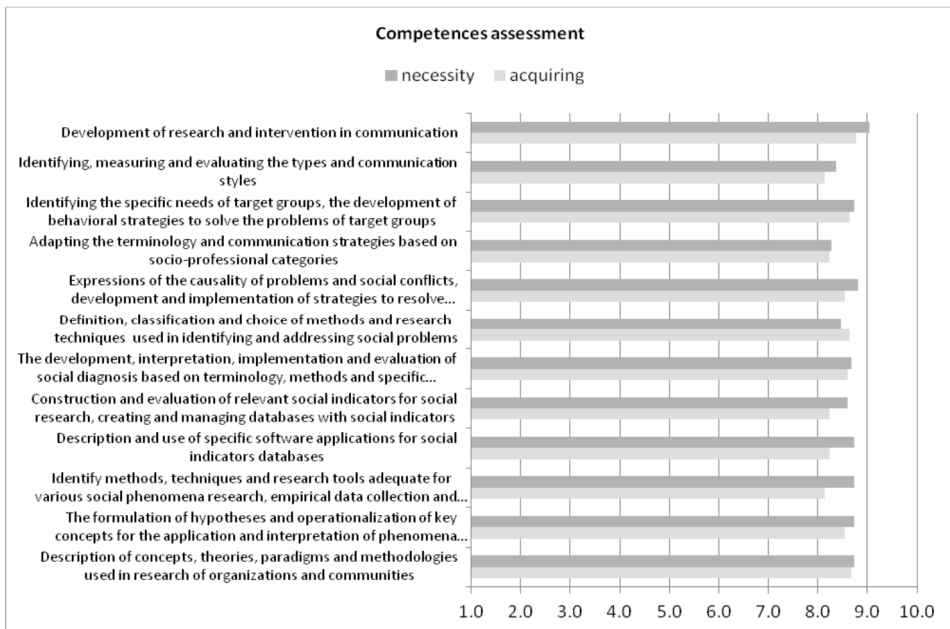
Figure 23: *Assessment of competences – Sociology study program*

and choice of methods and research techniques used in identifying and addressing social problems. As can be seen in the case of this study program is that the differences between the acquisition and necessity of skills are larger. This could be interpreted as that the labor market require skills provided by this program, but the organization and implementation of it do not contribute significantly to the transmission and learning of these skills.

Human resources management (MA) – University of Oradea

We find higher mean values for the acquisition of skills compared to the necessity of them in the case of two competencies from our list: Identify methods, techniques and research tools in human resources and their full and proper use for research purposes; Develop strategies for recruitment, selection, promotion and assessment of staff.
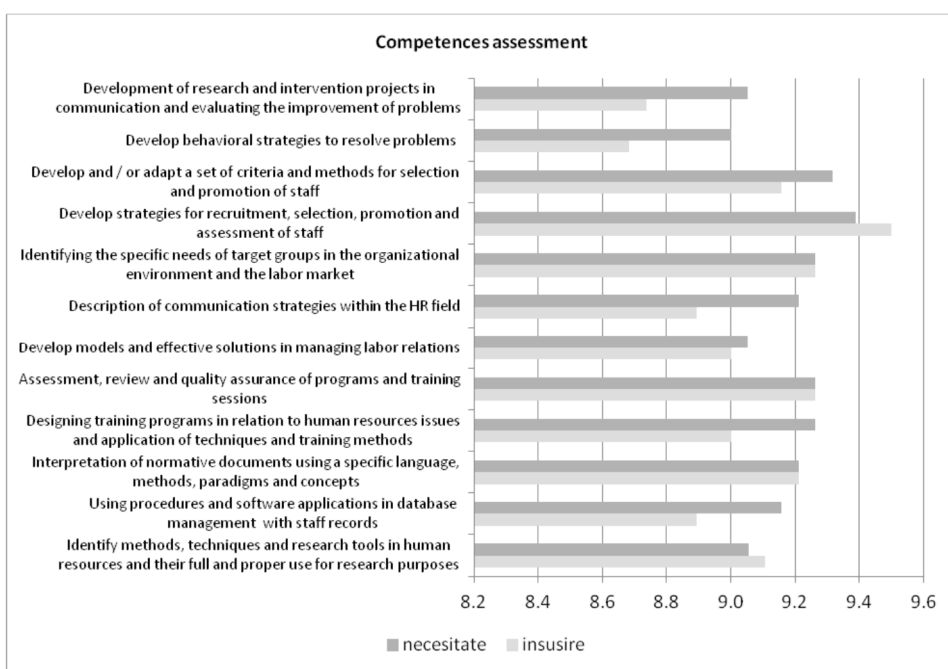
Figure 24: *Assessment of competences – Human resources management study program*

Social work (BA) – University of Arad

The Social work program from Arad register most of the differences between the necessity and acquisition of competences. Differences are recorded for 5 items: Defining concepts, theories and methods of diagnosis and intervention to reduce social risks; Identification and description of the methodology and procedures of policy making and social programs for individuals and vulnerable groups; Explaining appearance and maintenance of social problems of vulnerable groups and mechanisms of individual and community-level intervention; Application and interpretation of strategies for social reintegration of vulnerable groups; Using scientific criteria in

the assessment and diagnosis of the social work system. Yet the difference between values is not very high.

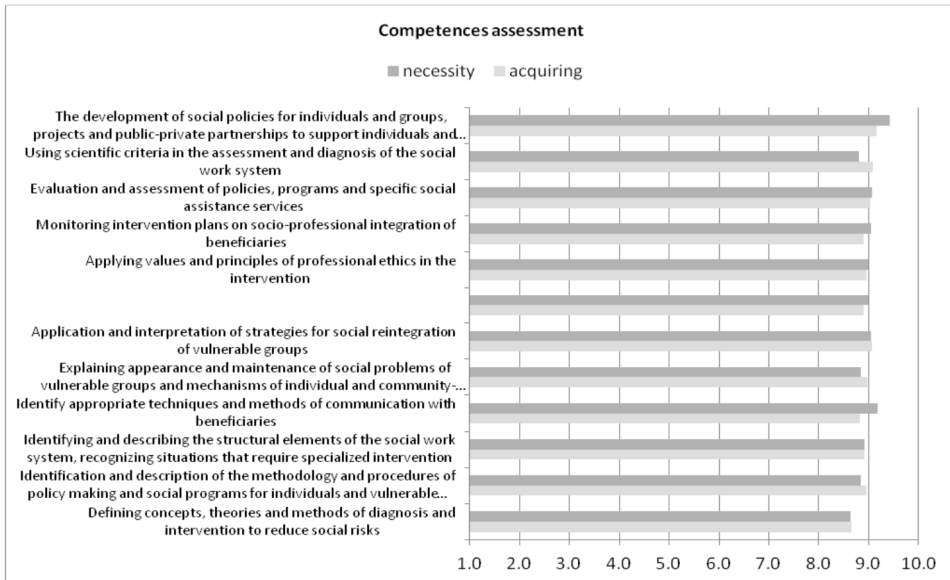**Figure 25:** *Assessment of competences – Social work study program from Arad*

Social work services (MA) – University of Arad

Finally, for the MA study program from Arad we find three situations in which the values registered for the acquisition of skills are higher than those for the necessity
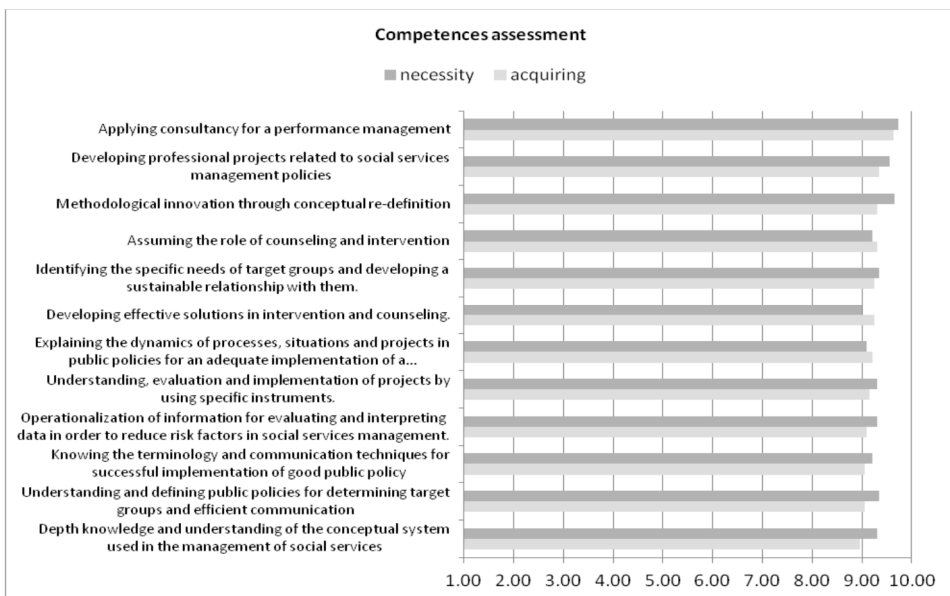

Figure 26: *Assessment of competences – Social work services study program from Arad*

of skills: Explaining the dynamics of processes, situations and projects in public policies for an adequate implementation of a performance management; Developing effective solutions in intervention and counseling; Assuming the role of counseling and intervention.

Some concluding remarks

Our analysis emphasizes the major importance that an efficient quality assessment has on the improvement of the educational process. Evaluating study programs through the perception of students, the main beneficiaries of the education, provides a complex perspective on the learning process and results can be successfully used for adjusting the necessary elements. As our study shows, students manifested an open attitude towards this and provided helpful information and suggestions for improving study program quality. Although the literature is controversial at this point, we align with the supporters who state that students` feedback is an important component of the evaluation process in higher education.

In what regards the methodological steps in elaborating a measurement instrument, we wish to draw attention to the fact that a clear delineation of educational dimensions is needed in this sense. According to our results we state that educational competences and skills should be better assessed by using traditional methods in this sense; thus, competences ought to be evaluated by assessing knowledge, rather than by assessing assimilated competences. Therefore, in our case, the 5th assessment instrument regarding specific competences could also be excluded as a dimension from the general measurement instrument. At this point, we have to emphasize also the necessity regarding a higher degree of clearness and transparency when elaborating and formulating competences, in order to be more understandable and accessible to students. However, students` feedback is influenced by various variables like year of study, level of study etc.

Generally speaking, we received a more positive feedback from MA students for each dimension in the assessment. Furthermore, students from BA study programs from University of Oradea offer us a less positive feedback, for each dimension that we analyzed. If we look at the figure below, it is obvious that Sociology students are less excited about the ways in which the study program is organized and run. Also, in the case of the MA program from University of Oradea, students from the program organized in the Sociology field (Human Resources Management), are less satisfied with all aspects evaluated.

Now let's focus on the dimensions included in our assessment. Teaching techniques have higher mean values compared to teaching materials for all study programs, except for HRM. Also we have higher values for bibliographical resources than for structure of the curricula. In any case, we can say that the dimensions that we have followed really capture the overall assessment of our study programs. Regarding the methodological issues, the five developed instruments are well built. We were able to validate each scale that we used, and therefore we believe that our proposed model

and tools can be useful in future efforts to monitor and evaluate study and training programs in higher education. However, measurement instruments used to assess the quality of training or educational programs should be elaborated based on a deep analysis of educational process dimensions and should be accessible to students, so they can provide a valid and valuable feedback for quality improvement.
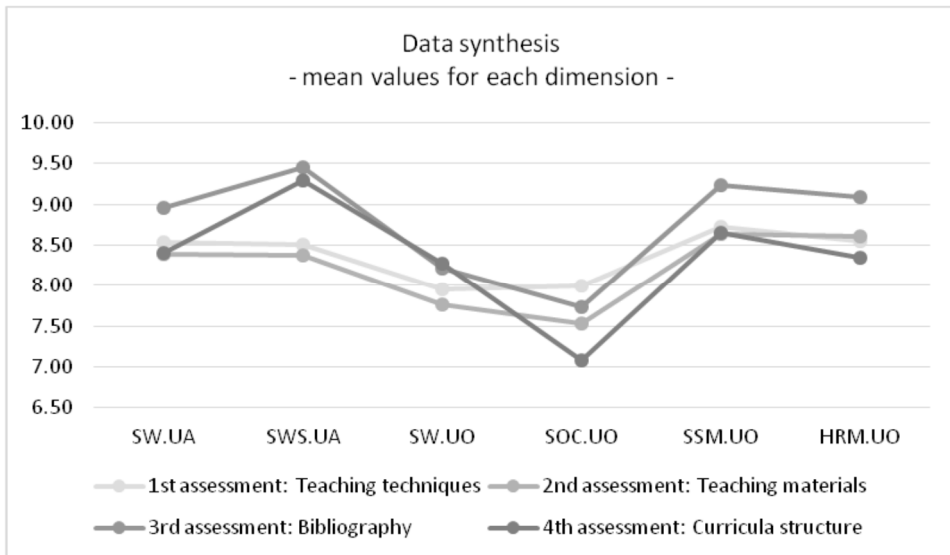
Figure 27: *Mean values recorded*
for each assessment instrument, for all five study programs

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Developing Indicators
for Student Evaluation of Teaching:
A Case Study at the University of Oradea

SERGIU BĂLȚĂTESCU[1]
University of Oradea (Romania)

FLOARE CHIPEA
University of Oradea (Romania)

CLAUDIA BACTER
University of Oradea (Romania)

ZSOLT BOTTYÁN
University of Oradea (Romania)

CRISTIANA MARC
University of Oradea (Romania)

Abstract

Curricular improvement and evaluation is an ongoing process, and should be motivated by the need to continually improve the quality and transparency of the educational process. In this chapter we describe the phases for elaboration of an instrument of student evaluation of teaching at the University of Oradea. Realized within the project „Training services, documentation and access for students in BA and MA study programs in Sociology and Social Work fields" (SocioPlus), this was one of the fewest applications in building student evaluation of teaching scales. The resulting instrument has 63 items with three dimensions (teaching methods, teaching materials, and bibliography). The scale for each dimension displayed excellent internal consistency. Overall, this is a more precise way of measuring student assessment of the curricula and teaching.

Keywords: *Student Evaluation of Teaching; SocioPlus; Educational Instruments; Curricula Assessment; Romania.*

Introduction

In the last few decades, universities experienced fundamental processes of change that are expected to radically change the global picture of the higher education. Romania cannot elude involvement in this transformation. Important reforms took place in the

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[1] E-mail: bsergiu@uoradea.ro

Romanian system of higher education, as a response to the pressures that the changing social system exerts on all the stakeholders in this process.

Irrespective of the choices that national states or universities take, there are some pillars of reform that cannot be excluded. One is the involvement of the students in decisions and in evaluations of the quality of the teaching.

Student evaluation of teaching is now a standard in higher education institutions from all over the world, and proves the commitment of all stakeholders to keep a standard of teaching quality and to develop a student-centered educational process. Nonetheless, the existing practices of assessment by students face strong contestations, partially justified by their biases.

In Romania these practices were gradually developed and have been included in the list of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Nevertheless, the process of development of instruments for student evaluation of teachers is still in the incipient phases. Usually the Senates of each university developed a short questionnaire that became for many years a standard of evaluation.

We think that this activity should be continued, with methodological improvements based on the theory of the evaluation. In this paper we describe the process of elaboration of such an instrument at the University of Oradea, within the project "Training services, documentation and access for students in BA and MA study programs in Sociology and Social Work fields" (SocioPlus). Specifically, we will critically describe the methodology of elaboration and pretest of the instrument corresponding to three dimensions: teaching methods, teaching materials and bibliography.

The structure of the paper is set as follows: In chapter 1 we will argue for the need for curricula assessment instruments. In Chapter 2 we will review the main methodological options of student evaluation of teaching, such as numbers of item involved, the theoretical basis for it, the number of dimensions, and the possibility to compute an index. Then we will describe the context of the approach, namely the programs of sociology and social work at the University of Oradea, the procedure used until now and the aims of the project SocioPlus, within which the instruments were developed. The next chapter will contain a description of the phases of building an instrument for student evaluation of teaching: theoretical analysis and the identification of dimensions, constructions of items, pretest of the questionnaire and the reduction of items. Finally, we draw conclusions and we discuss further work.

The need for curricula assessment instruments

As Cappell & Kamens (2002) wrote, "the effort to design a coherent program of study is embedded within the factional and segmented character of the discipline as a whole, a segmentation often replicated within individual departments to varying degrees". They confess they grew pessimistic about the ability of sociological departments to build a coherent program of study that will integrate individualism in teaching and contradictory paradigmatic orientations of the faculty members. On the

other side, they acknowledge the pressures that stakeholders in the higher education (such as administrators, students, the State and the general public) exert upon universities to follow coherent learning objectives, and to improve teaching.

We think that this is the case with all programs of study, at least in the social sciences. In Romania, giving the need for integration in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), there is also a strong need for designing and transforming the programs of study, according to the need for better integration of curricula with the requests of the employers and labor market in general. Assuming the student-centered learning, the Communiqué of Leuven highlights the necessity of curricular reform, "an ongoing process leading to high quality, flexible and more individually tailored education path" (European Higher Education Area Ministerial Conference, 2009, p. 3). One of the requests of the National Alliance of Student Organizations is "Curricular reform in universities to make education programs relevant to labor market needs and interests of today's students" (National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania, 2015).

The fact that the university programs have to focus on the labor market needs was emphasized by the Quality Barometer 2010, elaborated by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). 39% of surveyed faculty members stated that a qualitative study program is one that has a higher number of graduates employed in the labor market (Hâncean, Florian & Tăriceanu, 2011). Regarding the views on system's capacity to produce well-prepared graduates for the labor market, there is strong contrast between the views of employers and those of faculty members, the last ones having a much more positive vision. The link between higher education and the labor market is, for the student, the main point of interest. Employers tend to evaluate positively the contribution that universities have to the theoretical preparation of the graduates, while having a more negative image on the quality of their practical training (Tufiş & Voicu, 2011).

One of the main pillars of curricula assessment is the student evaluation of study programs and of teaching. This is in line with the recommendation of EHEA ministerial conference in 2012, which calls for establishing „conditions that foster student-centered learning, innovative teaching methods and a supportive and inspiring working and learning environment, while continuing to involve students and staff in governance structures at all levels" (European Higher Education Area Ministerial Conference, 2012). Indeed, student evaluation of teachers is now a standard in all higher education institutions. It has the purposes of improving teaching quality, offering a base for teacher's evaluation in general (e.g. for promotions), and proving that the institution is committed to apply procedures that will keep a standard for teaching quality (Kember, Leung & Kwan, 2002). For Romania, such procedures were included in the quality-assurance processes and should be checked within the accounting process (ARACIS, 2011).

Methodological options for student evaluation of teaching

The way the evaluation of teaching by students takes place poses strong challenges on the universities, specialists, and agencies involved. The process is based on the idea that students are in the best position to evaluate their teachers' abilities. This raises strong doubts, especially when the objectives of the students (to receive high grades) collide with the objectives of professors and administrative staff of the universities (to ensure and motivate good learning) (Braga, Paccagnella & Pellizzari, 2014). There is considerable evidence that teachers who lighten the workload and give higher grades are better evaluated by the students (Braga, Paccagnella & Pellizzari, 2014; Brockx, Spooren & Mortelmans, 2011; Koper et al. 2014; Vaillancourt, 2013). Moreover, factors such as attractiveness of the teacher (Shevlin et al., 2000), class attendance, and examination period (Brockx, Spooren & Mortelmans, 2011) may also bias the teacher's evaluation by students. As a result, there is often no correlation between teacher's competence and its evaluation by students (Koper et al., 2014), which in turn transforms objections to the evaluation from the faculty members into a tradition (Ory & Ryan, 2001).

While these problems which may definitely compromise the validity of students' evaluation of teachers are also the hardest to tackle, there are several methodological issues which are easier to approach. Among these, are the choice of the items, the structure on which these instruments are applied (paper-and-pencil or electronic), and issues linked with the validity and reliability of instruments used. In the following we will make a short review of these problems.

One or several items

Most experts agree that there is not any aspect of teaching quality which may be evaluated by a single question. This is due mostly to the low reliability of the single items in any kind of evaluation by subjects (Ginns & Barrie, 2004). A response on a single item is more sensitive to accidental fluctuations, social desirability, and different understandings of the meaning of the question or rating scale by different students (Spooren, Mortelmans & Denekens, 2007). As a result, the use of the multiple item scales is rather generalized. For example, all the instruments reviewed by Spooren, Brockx & Mortelmans (2013), who published the last literature review on this topic, are multidimensional.

Theoretical basis

The generalized use of the multi-item instruments is based also on the efficiency of their use. Indeed, as the above cited authors write, "institutions need instruments that will allow them to gather information (preferably comparable) for different types of courses as quickly as possible. Such surveys must also be highly economical" (Spooren, Brockx & Mortelmans, 2013). Thus, many surveys are designed in-house (by universities themselves) and not many of them are developed with a clear definition

of effective teaching (Ory & Ryan, 2001, apud. Spooren, Brockx & Mortelmans, 2013). This brings them in great danger of failing the content validity requirement, by not measuring what they claim to measure. We should also note that these instruments reflect the educational values, visions, and policies of the respective institutions (Penny, 2003). As an overall conclusion, the construction of the items continues to be data-driven rather than theory-driven[2].

Numbers of dimensions involved

Giving the diversity of the instruments designed according to different theoretical approaches (or no approach at all), the number of the dimensions also varies strongly. Spooren, Brockx & Mortelmans (2013, pp. 9-10) include in their literature review eleven such instruments, and the number of dimensions varies from 2 to 13 (with the average a little over 5). For example, the ETCQ (Ginns, Prosser & Barrie, 2007) includes nine dimensions (*Understanding fundamental content, Relevance, Challenging beliefs, Active learning, Teacher–student relationships, Motivation, Organization, Flexibility, Assessment*) while SCEQ (The University of Sydney (Institute for Teaching and Learning, 1999) comprises only five (*Good teaching, Clear goals and standards, Appropriate assessment, Appropriate workload, Generic skills*).

The possibility of computing an index

Another important debate in the field is on the possibility to compute an overall score based on the items collected. Educationists insist that having an index score is better than having individual scores (Spooren, Brockx & Mortelmans, 2013). Research on indicators in general shows that this is rather a poor choice, because similar scores may reflect very different configurations of answers (Maggino, 2013). Using a single indicator does not permit comparisons of strengths and weaknesses related to different aspects of teaching of the faculty members. Also it does not allow the monitoring of improvements in time. However, this choice is preferred by departments because it serves the purposes of ranking the teachers, which in turn can be used for giving promotions and tenures.

In this paper we will describe the process of building a set of indicators for the student evaluation of teaching at the University of Oradea, within the project SocioPlus. Our Aim is to improve study programs by optimizing the access of graduates in the labor market. The project SocioPlus "Training services, documentation and access for students in BA and MA study programs in Sociology and Social Work fields" funded by Grant HRD / 156 / 1.2 / G / 139 751, was conducted over 18 months in partnership between the University of Oradea and "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad.

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[2] Noll (2002) distinguish between three approaches to build a system of indicators: data-driven, when the indicators is built from the data available, policy-driven, when the policy concerns conduce to collecting new data, which is used along with the existing data, and theory-driven, when dimensions and indicators are constructed based on theoretical analysis and operationalization. It is implicit that the last one is the most valid among the three alternatives.

The activities of the project include the analysis and adjustment to labor market needs of five study programs, including those of Sociology and Social Work (at undergraduate level). It includes the activity of developing tools for testing and validation of the curricula of these programs and adjusting content and form of these programs by delivering nine pilot modules and their evaluation by 210 students.

Context

The program of Sociology at the University of Oradea was founded in 1996 within the Faculty of Social and Humanity Sciences with other programs such as Social Work, Psychology and Educational Sciences. In the early stages the sociology program had a close working relationship with the sociology departments from the University of Bucharest and with the Babes-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca. Many prestigious professors have lectured important courses thus helping the development of this study line. The sociology program became fully accredited in 2003 and was restructured in 2005 according to the Bologna process. In 2007 and 2012 it was verified by the Romanian Agency for Ensuring Quality in Higher Education. Today, the Department Sociology and Social Work has three professors, an associate professor, five lecturers and an assistant lecturer specialized in sociology. The department offers another undergraduate program in the field of sociology: Human Resources.

The Social Work program offered by the Department of Sociology and Social Work started in 1999 and now operates within the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Oradea, organized administratively within the Department of Sociology and Social Work and accredited in July 2012. As in the other universities in the country, at first the training was done during four years of study. After the introduction of the Bologna system, the undergraduate program has been in existence for three years. This educational program aims for students to acquire knowledge and skills for practicing the profession of social worker in accordance with the standards published in the National Register of Qualifications and labor market requirements. Besides the specific activity of lectures and seminars, a significant share of the curriculum works on professional practice, which allows students to have access in social work institutions/organizations. These students have the opportunity to acquire knowledge and develop skills through direct relationships working with specialists and beneficiaries of social services.

In order to improve the quality of the teaching process, within the Department of Sociology and Social Work the students evaluate the teachers and the disciplines at the end of each semester. The students have to express the extent of their agreement with 10 statements presented in a questionnaire, according to the scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Items for the evaluation of teachers*
and disciplines in use within the Department of Sociology and Social Work

Item
1. The teacher is well trained professionally.
2. The teaching time was used judiciously.
3. The teacher provided us with textbooks and audiovisual materials/seminar support.
4. The teacher has succeeded to capture our interest.
5. The teacher managed to adequately explain the concepts, theories, and models.
6. The teacher was available to answer our questions about the course/seminar.
7. The teacher was available to solve our other problems related to student life
8. The references, examples and other material provided were useful.
9. The language and behavior of the teacher was appropriate.
10. The knowledge assessment by the teacher was correct.

As seen above, the questionnaire addresses several dimensions of the teaching process such as the quality of the teaching materials and textbooks or the quality and fairness of the learning process. The scores of the answers are added and the result is linearly converted to 0-100 scale and will be part of a final score (which contains the evaluation of the scientific research, professional prestige, and activity with students) which is taken in consideration for differentiation of wages or for promotion of teaching staff members.

The survey with students is obviously parsimonious in what concerns the number of dimensions of teaching measured. As a result, there is still a strong need for a more detailed evaluation of teachers by students.

Building an instrument for student evaluation of teaching

One of the activities within the project SocioPlus has the target of developing tools for testing and evaluation of the curricula of the study programs involved, by the 210 students participating in the project. The activity started with a theoretical analysis, in which we identified five dimensions of the evaluation by students of the curricula. In the second phase, items were generated for each dimension. In the third phase, the questionnaire was pretested and we proceeded to make a reduction of items.

Phase 1. Theoretical analysis and the identification of dimensions. Four faculty experts with different qualifications were involved in all phases. The activity started with a theoretical analysis. The experts reviewed the literature in relation to the assessment by students in higher education of the educational activity of their teachers. As Spooren, Mortelmans & Denekens (2007) stated, we decided that the evaluation of teachers cannot be analyzed distinctly by the assessment of the courses and seminars. Then the experts participated in meetings in which the dimensions were developed.

The number and content of dimensions were decided by consensus. Finally, five dimensions of the evaluation by students of the curricula emerged: *teaching methods, teaching materials, bibliography, the structure of curricula,* and *how the educational contents contribute to the transmission of specific skills* (see also the paper by Săveanu & Buhaș, 2015, included in this volume). We will discuss here the first three instruments which are linked directly with student evaluation of teaching.

Phase 2. The constructions of items. Following the phases of operationalization of the concepts, we generated several indicators for each of the three dimensions involved. The dimensions and indicators are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: *Dimensions and indicators tested*

Dimensions	Indicators
1. Teaching methods	1. Content adequacy
	2. Efficiency of teaching
	3. Diversity of methods
	4. Attractiveness of courses/seminars
	5. Support for learning behaviors
	6. Support of the teacher for personal development of the student
	7. Accessibility of the course
	8. The participative character of the method
	9. Closeness to the practice
	10. Openness to the assimilation of competencies
	11. Feedback to the students and the openness towards debate
	12. Stimulates independent action of the student
	13. Stimulates for team work
	14. Use IT & multimedia resources
2. Teaching materials	1. Content adequacy
	2. Accessibility
	3. Readability
	4. Includes practical examples
	5. It's clear and clarifying
	6. Well structured, logical and sequential
	7. Coherent
	8. It's stimulative for the individual study
	9. Pleasant formatting
	10. Has stimulative graphics
	11. The material follows closely the taught course
	12. The material is delivered in due time

Dimensions	Indicators
3. Bibliography	1. Includes all the literature referenced in the course
	2. Is accessible
	3. Contains most of the sources in Romanian
	4. Contains both theoretical and research texts
	5. Contains both classical and recent authors
	6. It is written in an easy to follow format
	7. Has links to sources on the Internet
	8. Includes number of chapter/s and pages
	9. It is useful and relevant for the course
	10. It is discussed during the course and seminary
	11. The bibliographical sources are correct

Next, one or two items (indices) were generated for each indicator used. This resulted in an instrument with 73 items: 33 for the dimension 1 (Teaching methods), 27 for the dimension 2 (Teaching materials), and 13 for the dimension 3 (Bibliography).

Phase 3. Pretesting the questionnaire and reduction of items. The pretest of the teacher evaluation tools is an important step in their design. The instruments developed were applied to a sample of 37 respondents (third-year students from the study programs Social Work and first-year students from Human Resources).

Students were explained the purpose of pretesting, were asked to read each item, to assess on a scale 1-10 each item, and to complete the answers to open questions, where applicable. They also were asked to indicate and make comments on each item that was difficult to understand. The results were coded and the database was analyzed in SPSS 15, in order to exclude items. The exclusion process targeted several categories of questions (see the reccomended procedure StatSoft Inc., 2013):

1. Items difficult to understand (as marked by students or with higher number of non-responses), with contradictory assertions and double negations. For example, in case of the first dimension items such as *In teaching there was only one method used* were excluded, while in case of the second dimension the items *Training materials were available at the start of class* received the highest level of non-responses.
2. Items with floor or ceiling effects, i.e. items with which all respondents tend to agree or disagree.
3. Items uncorrelated with others. For this purpose, we performed a reliability analysis and excluded the items that would strongly reduce the reliability of the scale.

Following these procedures, we obtained an instrument that comprises 28 items for dimension 1(*teaching methods*). These items have a good internal consistency

(Cronbach alpha = 0.858), and the distribution is normal. For the dimension 2(*teaching materials*), the number of items was 24. It also has an excellent reliability (Cronbach alpha = 0.858) and a normal distribution. The third dimension (*bibliography*), with 11 items, also shows excellent psychometric proprieties (normal distribution, Cronbach alpha = 0.965). The items of the scales are listed in the chapter by Săveanu & Buhas (2015, in this volume).

Conclusions

In this chapter we describe the national and international context in which curricula improvement in Romania takes place. We emphasized the necessity to introduce new and improved curricula assessment instruments, and we reviewed the main challenges that such a process poses, including the methodological choices that should be made in the construction of such an instrument.

We then describe all the phases for elaboration of an instrument used at the University of Oradea, within the project "Training services, documentation and access for students in BA and MA study programs in Sociology and Social Work fields" (SocioPlus). This was one of the fewest applications in building student evaluation of teaching scales. The resulting instrument has 63 items with three dimensions, and is a more precise way of measuring student assessment of the curricula and teaching.

Further work can be also useful. First, by using this instrument with a larger sample, the number of items can be further reduced. This would involve the use of more complicated statistical procedures such as confirmatory factor analysis, as it was the choice in previous approaches (Spooren, Mortelmans & Denekens 2007).

Finally, we should bear in mind that the curricular improvement and evaluation is an ongoing process, and should be motivated by the need to continually improve the quality and transparency of the educational process.

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Teaching Adult Social Science Learners in Online or Hybrid Programs

SIMONA LAURIAN-FITZGERALD[1]
University of Oradea (Romania)

CARMEN POPA
University of Oradea (Romania)

CARLTON J. FITZGERALD
New England College (USA)

Abstract

In our institutions we work with what some people call traditional and non-traditional students. Our traditional students are undergraduate full-time day students. We have developed our programs during the past five years for our non-traditional students in a hybrid weekend program for teacher certification at the University of Oradea in Oradea, Romania and in an online undergraduate liberal arts program at New England College in Henniker, New Hampshire, USA. Both programs have experienced growth and we have gained valuable experience as we have worked with our students. We no longer call our students non-traditional because they are great learners. They are intelligent, dedicated, and achieve at the same rate as most of our other students. Like all of our students, they come from diverse backgrounds and have diverse hopes, dreams, and needs. We have developed an understanding that our adult learners need the same kinds of thoughtful programming and support as do out on-the-ground day students. As we are developing our ideas we have realized that more and more of our students are becoming more successful. By gearing what we do on the notion, that teaching and learning is about our students, and their learning and emotional needs, we are meeting our students where they are and assisting them in taking their selves to the same levels of proficiency as our other students. This shift in thinking has been exciting for us and we believe it is exciting for our students.

Keywords: *Adult Learners; Online Programs; Hybrid Programs; Weekend Programs; Non-Traditional Learners.*

Introduction

More and more young people and older people are deciding that they want to receive higher education (college and/or university). The number of students enrolling in our undergraduate online and hybrid programs is now almost equal to our undergraduate on-the ground programs. More students are applying for what used to be thought of as

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[1] E-mail: mmonalaurian@yahoo.co.uk

non-traditional programs, which we believe are quickly becoming typical programs. We have learned a great deal about how to help students be successful in higher education programs, in many cases, through trial and error. We began our work believing that older students came to us as adult learners with the following characteristics: 1. they were self-directed learners, 2. had extensive depth of experiences, 3. came ready to learn, and 4. were task motivated (Knowles, 1984). Instructors in our programs were ready to help these dedicated and intrinsically motivated learners soar and gather those promotions for which they were seeking. What we found out was that many of our students did possess those characteristics and accompanying skills, but we also found some different things about our students. Many of our older students were not prepared for the academic rigors of higher education. Especially for the students who were not enrolled in the teacher education program, many had no idea of what they wanted to do with their lives. They all believed that a college degree would gain them more opportunities for a better career, but many had yet to determine what those careers would be. Other students came to class not having gained the necessary reading and writing skills to be successful in higher education level. And, many students came to us ill prepared for the studying necessary for success at the college or university. During the first year of our undergraduate programs we found half of our students were dropping out of school. That told us that half of our students came to us ready to jump into a "traditional" form of college and half of our students were not. We knew that changes were necessary.

We learned the hard way that adult learners have the same, if not more needs than their younger counterparts do (Council on Adult and Experiential Learning, 2000). Our college decided to assess incoming students and to assign them to remedial classes if they needed more training in writing or mathematics. After one semester we found that idea to be ineffective. After some discussion we decided to use our introductory courses to help students work on their writing and reading while learning in an environment that was supportive and the material inviting. The hope was that if students found college engaging and if they could enjoy some success in their efforts, then they would become more prepared both from a self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) perspective and from a motivational (Fitzgerald, 2003) perspective to work on their weaker areas. The results have been very positive. Our retention rates have risen to 90% and 87% respectively for our classes at the university and college.

Additionally, we realized that by looking at some students as being "at risk" we were buying into the notion that we had two groups of students – the smart students and the not-so smart students (Brine, 2006). We did not want to fall into the trap of thinking that we had to lower standards for students who had educational training needs. On the other hand, we did not want to continue to invest in a two tiered system of education. Our goal was to prepare all of our students to be successful in the real world by assisting them in their development rather than judge them to be acceptable or not. We agreed with Bash (2003) that our adult students:

- Are self-directed
- Thrive on encouragement and nurturing
- Learn from and share experiences
- Rely on discussions, experience, experiments, simulation and problem solving to learn
- Want to apply knowledge and skills immediately
- Internally experience a need to learn (p. 140).

Our philosophy became the espoused belief that all students can learn given the appropriate environment, assistance, and teaching and learning opportunities (Sousa, 2011). So we set out to develop those facets of our program for our students.

Setting the Stage

In order to learn well, we believe that the setting of the environment is critical for student success (Caine et al., 2009; Sousa, 2011). They have developed the idea of relaxed alertness, the state of being ready to learn, supported to learn, and challenged appropriately to learn. The environment has to first be a place of caring. Poison tells us, "Adults, perhaps more than any other student population, need someone within the institution who cares" (in Peck & Varney, 2009, n.p.). The basis of everything else we do is set up by how the teacher sets the environment for the interactions among students and their peers and with their professor. Feedback in this kind of environment is honest, specific, and positive (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 2008). The point of the interactions and feedback from students and the professor is to assist in the growth of all of the students. The environment has to help to produce a growth mindset in the students (Dweck, 2008). In a growth mindset environment learning is based on effort and the belief that hard work is what helps people learn, not a set intelligence number. We believe that if we can get students to help each other, accept our help, work hard, and be willing to take risks, then they would learn and be successful college students. We agree with the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL, 2000) that adult learners can and should be co-developers or creators of knowledge. Their life experiences are extensive and should add to, not subtract from, their academic experiences. By setting up an environment in which we all use a sociologist's perspective, an open mind and a non-judgmental attitude, (Ferris & Stein, 2014) in our work with each other. In this environment success is the goal and support is the watchword.

In order to assist students in their academic development, we have work to develop ways to assist students in their abilities to be successful at the college or university. At our institutions, each cohort has a person responsible to mentor the students, with the institution and with their progress. Tutoring is available and encouraged for the students. They receive reminders and offers for assistance on a regular basis from the institution. Students must voluntarily seek for assistance, but our institutions make

them aware of what kind of help is available and make it easily accessible to the students. Since learning is the goal and an ongoing process, students who put forth an honest effort may edit any assignment from the feedback given to them from their professors and/or peers and resubmit for grading. At college, courses in writing and reading are also for students who have needs to raise their level of expertise. We introduced those courses once we believed students are strong in the self-efficacy to move forward. In our introductory courses, we utilize instructors who understand the developmental nature of learning (Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000). During the online discussions students are encouraged to assist their peers in their efforts. Each student must respond to multiple students in the process so that every student receives feedback from other students. By creating multi-faceted approach to support, our hope is that every student is reached in a way that works for that student.

Learning opportunities are geared to be more student-oriented, less teacher-controlled. Students are asked to respond to writing and discussion prompts in two ways. First students are asked to display an understanding of the material they have read from texts or articles and viewed and listened to through video presentations or talks. They are asked to do this by connecting their ideas to the authors/presenters by summarizing and analyzing the material in their own words and thoughts. Second, we ask our students to develop a real life example that shows the concepts in action. They are asked to relate as much as possible to their experiences in life. We tell our students that we want to hear their voices in their writing, not our voices. Students must back up their ideas logically and positively, but independent thinking is the goal of each prompt. Prompts developed for the students include open ended ideas in order to give our students room to maneuver.

Almost all projects are student driven and individually developed with our assistance. Students have the opportunity to choose their topics, develop their essential questions, and choose and develop their ways of presenting their knowledge and skills. As much as possible material is presented in various formats, and in order to have students engage with the material, using as many of their senses s possible (Sousa, 2011). We also have developed more assignments that are shorter during the course with the more substantial assignment due at the end of the semester. For example, in our seven weeks online course for the Introduction to Sociology class, students participated in 21 assignments (13 discussions and 7 written papers of 1-2 pages, as well as their final project).

Relevancy

Baptista (2013) tells us that adult students tend to be relevancy oriented. We agree, and actually believe that most students are relevancy oriented. Sousa (2011) believes that all students need relevancy is their school work. In order to be motivated to learn something adult learners want and need sense and meaning connected to their work. Adult students want to know the answer to the when and why questions. "Why

am I learning this?" "When and how am I going to use this?" Adult learners who have families and who have full-time jobs do not have time to fool around doing things for the sake of it. If they are learning something they tend to want to be able to use the concepts and skills fairly quickly. It is sometimes a little more compacted to create ways to do that, but it is worth it when we see the differences in student work. In our experiences when we can develop experiences that are relevant, make sense, and are meaningful for the students then they respond with work that is engaging and thoughtful. In our Introduction to Sociology class we ask students to define and to give examples of effective and ineffective examples of sociological perspective. Then we ask students to practice its use for the rest of the course. Most students talk about their experience in their final reflections. At the end of last semester's class a student wrote, "It was very uncomfortable at first; like wearing a new pair of glasses. As the class went on I got more used to looking at things differently. I had to change how I treat some people in my family." Is not the goal of education to help people transform themselves? Adult learners do not just want to know what professional sociologists think and do, they also want to know how sociology will help shape their lives now.

Recommendations

Based on our experiences at both university and college, discussions with our colleagues, and our review of the literature in the field, we have developed ten recommendations for instructors of adult learners. We believe that if instructors develop a mindset about their adult learners based on these characteristics, then they will be well on their way to developing great learning experiences for their adult learners. In many ways we believe that adult learners are learners just like any other age group. They have the same basic needs of all people (Fitzgerald, 2003). They have to persevere just like all students do (Duckworth, 2014). They have to take ownership of their own education in order to reach their full potentials (Caine et al., 2009). They have to function effectively in the modern world (Wagner, 2014). Adult learners are also different from other learners. From our experiences and those of our colleagues have developed, our list of what we think adult learners bring to the classroom.

Adult Learner Characteristics

We believe adult learners:
1. Are intelligent (Baptista, 2013; Peck & Varney, 2009).
    We believe that each brain is uniquely developed and that all students are capable of learning. We also believe that the more students learn, the more they are able to learn (Sousa, 2011). Our practical experiences with our students tell us that they are intelligent in many different ways. We disagree with the notion that there is one and only one way to be intelligent. We believe in multiple ways to be intelligent (Gardner,

2006). Their life experiences give the knowledge from which we all can and should benefit.

2. Are diverse (Baptista, 2013).

We believe that adult students, like any other group of students are diverse. They come from very different backgrounds, have experienced life inside and outside of school very differently, and they have different ways to learn and process information (Sousa, 2011). Our adult learners come to us with very different levels of academic knowledge and skills and readiness for the academic rigors of higher education. They have very different life situations and the cultural backgrounds vary greatly (Baptista, 2013). All of these differences impact their needs from the university and college.

3. Have full lives outside of school (Baptista, 2013).

Our students come to us with very different, but full lives. Most work, many full-time. Many have families of their own. Some are taking care of older parents. Some are working multiple part-time jobs. Some are single parents. The reality for many if not most of our adult learners is that higher education is one of the important areas of their lives.

4. Want to succeed (Bash, 2003).

Adult learners are coming back to school for the most part. Some have had many years from their last encounter with schooling. Many adult learners quit school at some point in their lives (Bash, 2003). For many adult learners this is a frightening experience. They are returning to school because they now feel they are ready to succeed (Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000)

5. Want to better their lives (Kenner & Weinerman, n.d.; Knowles, 1984; Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000).

Many, if not most, adult learners are coming to school to transform their lives (Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000). They are looking for positive changes in their lives. They all have different goals and their sights are on different levels of change, but they are certain that they want positive change in their circumstances.

6. Do not want to waste their time (Baptista, 2013).

Because many adult students have full lives outside of school, they want to get down to business and they want to get the job completed. Adult students generally do not have the time, nor the patience for fluff in their education. They are attempting to make changes in their lives. They have already done the young people activities and they are now ready for more serious work (Baptista, 2013).

7. Want and need support (Peck & Varney, 2009; Kenner & Weinerman. n.d.).

Adult learners, like any other learners, need to be supported (Peck & Varney, 2009). They need to find their place in college or the university. They need to learn the system (Kasworm, 2008). Many are lacking skills that they need to develop. Many adult learners lack confidence (Kenner & Weinerman, n.d.).

8. Want to use their learning the right way (Baptista, 2013; Knolwes, 1984; Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000).

Adult learners live in the real world. They work, they raise families, they pay taxes, they pay bills, and they often struggle to keep their heads above water. They have a real world context and they want to learn how to deal with that context more effectively. In order to accomplish their goals, they have to be able to apply their learning now. They do not feel as if they have four more years to think about life, because they are in the middle of the real world every day. They have a real need to put theory into practice now, not in the future

9. Want help to reach their goals (Kenner & Weinerman, n.d.; Peck & Varney, 2009).

Adult learners come to college or university either with a very specific goal or with the need to develop a very specific goal for their education. They want their program to help them find and/or reach their goals. These adults need mentoring, brainstorming, knowledge, and skills to accomplish their goals. They need people to advocate for them and to encourage them in the process.

10. Need people to care about them (CAEL, 2000; Kasworm, 2008).

Adult learners need people to care for them. Many of our adult learners have lost confidence in themselves and they need a boost. Teachers of adult learners need to be positive and encouraging. Many adult learners hated school because they felt different or not good enough or not smart enough. Those of us who teach adult learners have the opportunity to make school a place of joy for our students.

Programmatic Ideas

From our work with our students and our discussions with our colleagues we have developed ideas about the characteristics listed above for our adult learners. From those characteristics we have developed suggestions to consider for our program and any other adult learning program that might be interested. We have five recommendations for programs for adult learners to consider:

1. Base learning on the concept that all learning is developmental (Caine et al., 2009; Kenner & Weinerman, n.d.; Sousa, 2011)
2. Base learning in effort (Sousa, 2011; Dweck, 2008),
3. Integrate intellectual and practical learning (Caine et al., 2009; Sousa, 2011),
4. Build flexibility into the program (Baptista, 2013), and
5. Build in support for students (Peck & Varney, 2009).

Program is Developmental

Experience has taught us that there is not a silver bullet out there that will fix all of the issues that adult learners face when they return to their education at the higher education level. We know that our students come to us with wealth of experiences, and we have learned that many also come to us with gaps in their academic skills.

So, our first recommendation is to develop the program as a developmental process the students. First, we believe that students should have an assessment of their writing and mathematics (and maybe reading) ability prior to the beginning of their classes. This can be a voluntary process or a matter of routine prior to the students' first class. We also recommend that the student's first course (or semester) not be the time to take a course in her/his weakest subject unless classes are face-to-face and the student has other courses in which they can be successful. At the beginning of the program students, in our view, should take courses that are engaging and in which the instructors understand the developmental nature of an introductory course for adult learners. We believe the introductory courses should begin with more frequent assignments that are smaller in nature, and geared to allow for success of the students. This does not mean watered down assignments, but rather, the breaking of assignments into smaller chunks. As the semester progresses, the length and depth of the assignments should increase and the frequency of due dates decrease, leading to a final project or other product. Part of this process should include instructor feedback in relation to the writing process. Again, we believe this should be developmental, increasing the depth of expectations as the semester progresses. This may require some strategic professional development for professors who want to gather more ideas to help their students in developing their writing skills. The program should have tutoring program for their adult learners. This program should have strong writing and mathematics tutoring components to it, in addition to the tutors needed for all aspects of the program. Each year of the program should raise the level of expectations for the students while also continuing to offer tutoring for students who need those services. By the last year of their program students should be working independently, unless they have identified educational handicaps or there are special circumstances.

Caine and collaborators (2009) believe that all learning is developmental. They suggest that teaching and learning should support that notion. Instructors should consider develop their students' experiences move from concrete to symbolic to abstract experiences for their students as often as possible. Bruner (1960) believes that we can teach any student anything as long as we structure the learning experiences developmentally appropriately. His ideas can be related to higher education as well as to younger students. If the goal the university or college experience is learning, then his ideas make good sense. In order to accomplish this recommendation, we need instructors willing to work this way. In our program at the college, some instructors have decided not to teach in the online program because they do not want to teach in this fashion. We believe that our students need this kind of support, and we think the results of the retention rates and reflections of our students indicate that this is an important aspect of the success of our students. The goal is that students grow to become independent, educated, articulate, and creative thinkers by the time they graduate. We believe students develop those traits through strategic teaching and learning experiences.

Learning Is Based on Effort

Carol Dweck (2007) believes that we should not think of intelligence as a static number. She does not believe that intelligence is a matter of the genetic game of chance. Neuroscience has shown that the brain does change and grow as we learn (Caine et al., 2009; Sousa, 2011). The idea that success in school and in life is dependent upon a fixed IQ is a detriment to the teaching and learning process. We know that the people who succeed in college and in life are those who have other ingredients in their makeup than high IQ. People who have GRIT (Duckworth, 2014) are the most successful people in college, not the people with the highest SAT scores. People who work hard, persevere, stick with it, take advice, and remain focused, are the people who succeed. We believe we should take advantage of those facts and make programs that deal with adult learners be based on effort. We tell our students that if they work hard, take advice and use it, stay with the process, believe in themselves, and believe in us, they will succeed. We are educators, and we know how to set up the experiences for our students so that they will learn. If they do not work hard, we tell them that they will not succeed.

Program based on effort sets up a system so that the goal is learning and that the students work until they do learn. We tell students that they may resubmit any assignment, if they have put forth an honest effort. An honest effort means they have shown up and actively participated in class (either face-to-face or online), they have completed their homework in a timely manner, they have read the material and viewed the videos (and their work shows it), and they have asked for help if they need it. Excuses that tell us how busy they are compared to their classmates or how tired they are because of school work are not considered to be acceptable. Things do happen in life and we are very willing to work with those times. Adult learners often have unforeseen issues come up in their lives. We deal with that with our students. But we also fairly quickly find out who the pretenders are and who the real deal students are. We know who has read the material and who has not; we quickly find out how has real writing issues and whether or not they are willing to accept help; we know who is willing to work hard and who is not. We are not afraid to give a student a break, but we are not willing to allow students not to work hard. In the end, those who want to play games end up being disappointed, and we can sleep well at night knowing that we gave each student multiple opportunities to be successful.

Integrate Intellectual and Practical Learning

Adult learners have goals in their lives and most of their goals are around very practical things (Baptista, 2013). Many adult learners are in jobs that have a short ceiling, and they are ready for more. Some adult learners have opportunities to advance in their company, but they require college degree to move to that next level. Some adult learners want to start their own businesses, but they do not have any training in

business. Some adult learners have been in a career and now want to do something different, so they come back to school to get the training that they need for their new career of choice. Some adult learners do not know yet what they want to do and they are looking for guidance prior to choosing their major. Some adult learners know what they want to do and they have chosen their career path. Whatever the case, most adult learners have a purpose for being in the university or college (Popa et al., 2014). They want to accomplish something and they expect the college or university to take their education seriously. Adult learners are not looking to mature, they have been in the world and have grown up. They want to learn important material and they want to be able to apply what they are learning in their lives and in their careers (Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000.). The goal for the program is to help their adult learners reach their goals and to respect their status as adult learners. Many have families of their own, have been working for a long time, and are contributing members of their communities. They want to be respected for what they know and they want to be able to use what they learn. Therefore, classes should integrate intellectual knowledge with practical application on regular basis. As one of our students wrote about sociology, "I loved this class because it is about our real lives. I am using almost everything we learned at my job, in my family, and in my neighborhood. I want more classes like this."

In our assignments we attempt to integrate the academic with the practical. There are four elements to our assignments, whether discussions, written papers, presentations, or projects. We first attempt to have our students define the elements or components of whatever the topic of the assignment is. For example, define capitalism and socialism and describe how each system functions. The second level is to give an example of how this applies itself in the real world. So, we would ask the students to find a real example of capitalism in action and an example of socialism in action and describe each example. The third area of the assignments asks students to analyze the concept. For example, we ask students to analyze the American economic system to answer the following prompt: Does America employ a capitalist economic system, a socialist economic system, or some combination of both systems? Explain your reasoning and back up your response with real examples. The fourth level of the process is to ask students to connect the ideas to their real lives. For example, we ask students to give us a real life example (e.g. the Affordable Care Act) and discuss it in relation to the topic (socialism and capitalism) and how it affects their lives.

In the teacher certification program (a hybrid program) almost every course has a practical component built into the course. Students have to spend time in schools every semester to observe, tutor, work with small groups of students, or teach lessons. The university supervisor observes the students in action and gives them feedback about their efforts. The students also maintain journals of their observations and reflections of their efforts. These efforts are connected directly to the theory learned during their university classes.

Flexibility Built into the Program

In order to accommodate adult students, the program should consider ways to build in some flexibility into the program (Baptista, 2013). For example, the completely online program at the college is in synchronous program. Assignments have due dates, but when the assignments are done is up to the students. For example, one discussion may be due by Tuesday and another due by Thursday, and responses to other students due by Sunday. As long as the assignments are done by the due date, when the student accesses the discussion is up to the student. Some students do their reading and viewing and do all of their assignments at once and then do their responses on Saturday. Some students log on every day and make one assignment at a time. Some students log on early in the morning, some in the afternoon, and some in the evening. Each student creates her/his own schedule.

The program at the university means students have face-to-face classes on the weekend only. They have assignments online, again in an asynchronous manner. The students also have all of their material for each class online: the schedule, due dates, tests and quizzes, and their textbooks and other materials. The texts have been developed by their instructors using a system developed specifically for the weekend program adult learner. The weekend program students are accomplishing the exact same goals as the day students, but they are using a very different process to accomplish that goal.

Build in Support for Students

Students need support in their work. They need advocates at the university and college (Baptista, 2013; Peck & Varney, 2009). At both university and college students have tutors and mentors to assist the students. Students need a go to person that they can contact if they need assistance. Each cohort of students has a mentor or advisor to help guide her/his progress. Tutoring services are also available for students. The online program has writing tutors available, it is for students to review their writing, and to give students tips and to help edit their writing. We have seen great writing growth in students who take advantage of these services. At college the students who have been referred to tutoring and who use tutors regularly have much higher achievement levels than students who do not avail themselves of these services. The hybrid program assigns a mentor to meet with the students on a regular basis to review issues and discuss progress. We have seen a huge difference in achievement and retention since the implementation of the mentors and tutors in both programs.

Conclusions

We used to call adult learners non-traditional students. The more we work with adult learners the more we realize that they are students. They make a very significant

part of most universities and colleges. Treating adult learners as non-traditional implies to us some sort of hierarchy of education. The real students go to school full-time during the day and live near or at the institution. In reality if we combined the online, hybrid, graduate adult students, and continuing education students in many places they far outnumber the "traditional" students. We believe it is time to treat our adult learners as top tier students, both in thinking and in our actions. This diverse group of students needs the same forethought and programming as all of our other students. These adult learners need support and learning experiences that are thoughtful and based on their needs, just as we should be doing for our on-the-ground full-time students. Adult learners are in our communities and they are attempting to better their lives for themselves and their families. For those who have struggled, they are trying to pull themselves up from the mire in order to become more positive contributors to society. This is a noble cause and institutions of higher education have an opportunity to change the worlds of these learners and make the world a better place in the process.

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Theoretical Highlights Concerning Motivation as a Dimension of Learning

GABRIELA KELEMEN[1]
"Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad (Romania)

ALINA COSTIN
"Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad (Romania)

Abstract

The modernization of higher education imposed by the social context and psychological and sociological particularities of students imposed, among other things, a modernization of the teaching strategies that specifically target the motivational dimension of learning. In the case of academic learning, the students have the necessary maturity to conduct learning activities; they have autonomy, and intrinsic motivation, features that increase their interest for learning and for documentation. They also have the capacity to self-regulate their activities. University seminars are an excellent framework for organizing and directing activities to boost emotional and motivational dimension of learning activities. There are numerous theories which underline the importance of motivation in learning (Graham & Weiner, 1996). In this paper we would like to stress some of the strategies that motivate students in learning activities in Higher Education. In this context, we think that it is important to encourage reflection, active implication and effective product knowledge through academic learning by formal and non-formal education, to design expectations to a higher level, especially for professional skills practice and to increase the potential mechanisms as volitional and motivational attitudes (Neacșu, 2006). We consider that all these are essential objectives of the seminars.

Keywords: *Academic Learning; Motivation; Self-Efficacy; Seminars; Learning Strategies; Relationships; Engagement.*

On motivation in academic learning

Motivation issues are a fundamental topic in Educational Psychology and they are in a close connection to learning. It is believed that there is an interdependent relationship between them.

A feature of academic learning is its independence as pointed out by several authors in the defintions of academic learning listed below:

- it is a complex, mental, affective or movement exercises characterized by deep reflection and multiplying engaging accents towards the universe of studied knowledge;

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[1] E-mail: gabriela.kelemen@uav.ro

- a process of translating new knowledge, experiences and abilities into cognitive behaviours (facts, concepts, theories, problem-solving etc.), emotional affective behaviours (attitudes, values, beliefs), psycho-motor behaviours (skills, algorithms, models of abilities), socio-moral-character related and spiritual behaviours (Saljo, 1979 apud Neacşu, 2006; Orell, 2005 apud Neacşu, 2006).

The same authors include academic learning among other types of learning, because the process of learning is characterized by informational selection, understanding, memorizing, and reconstructive integration in terms of relationships between behaviours. Academic learning involves cognitive control.

In academic learning where students guide and control their activity, motivation plays a fundamental role, namely the awareness of the importance of learning results increases the motivation for studying and "energizes learning" (Sălăvăstru, 2004, p. 70). The author is also emphasizing the importance of knowing the students' reasons, as well as their temperament and character which will influence their behaviour, their success and their failure in learning, too. Motivation in learning also leads to more effective results. Reference is often made to Schunk, Pintrich, Meece (2008, p. 4) definition of motivation, namely that "motivation is a process by means of which goal oriented activity is initiated and sustained". Moenikia and Zahed-Babelan (2010) adapt this definition to school environment where motivation refers to the student`s need, desire and compulsion to take part and be successful in learning.

Related literature uses several theoretical frameworks in the study of school motivation: Bandura (1977) supports the *Theory of Efficiency*; Weiner (1985) believes that the dimension that needs to be taken into account in learning success or failure refers to the distinction between internal and external causes which empower people in the activities they conduct. Other theories, equally valuable, refer to the interest shown by people involved in other activities, value-expectancies (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), the theory of goals (Elliot & Murayama, 2008) or the theory of motivational self-regulation. Other studies on the student`s motivation for learning can be found in Ambrose and Kulik (1999), and Constantin (2005), in Romanian related literature.

Thus Albert Bandura`s theory (1977) explains the students` real involvement in learning and training activities, in general, the effort they are willing to make as a consequence of students` self-efficiency. This self-efficiency is therefore understood as "*a person`s belief in his/her own ability to empower cognitive and motivational resources that are required by a successful fulfilment of assigned tasks*" (Bandura, 1977, p. 3). This is a quality which relies on previous experiences, on physiological feedback and prior persuasion.

Therefore, we are witnessing a circuit where students` performance is conditioned by their self-efficiency on one hand, and the teaching methods used by professors, on the other. Self-efficiency must be built and it is an intrinsic goal of learning. It is based on students` achievements and results, and indirectly on modern, interactive, student centred teaching strategies.

Studies conducted in the past years support the theory that self-efficiency is a positive predictor of cognitive engagement, of self-regulation activities and it is also considered a mediator in the relationship with previous performance (Walker, Greene & Mansel, 2006 apud Wagner, 2012, PhD. thesis).

Weiner`s Cognitive Theory of Motivation developed in 1985 and was used by Schunk and Zimmerman (2008). It is based on the relationship between expectancy-value. It perceives attributions as beliefs that refer to outcomes. According to this theory, a person`s motivational behaviour (including the one which refers to learning, engagement in study, documentation, etc.) is determined by expectancies and affections. They are developed as a consequence of a person`s causative attributions.

The study of school motivation brings forward another well-known theory, namely the attribution theory. How does the process of attribution take place with students? Dunn, Osborne and Rakes (2012 apud Wagner, 2012) show in their studies that students attribute internal causes to success and external causes to failure. According to the attribution theory developed by Heider (1958) for the explanation of behaviours, people believe that a person acts based on his/her internal bias or based on external forces. In the attribution process, the students` motivational force (in our case) is based on causative properties which play an important role in building emotions, namely the students` motivational behaviour. The involvement of emotions and expectancies leads to the development of motivated behaviour. A certain "formula" of predicting performance results from the properties given by the subject to the causative relation (locus, stability and controllability).

The quality of learning, the level of effective involvement supported by learning activities, the intensity and attention span and ultimately, the academic performance are subject to the interest for a particular situation or a certain topic or field of study.

Thus students have all the tools they need to show not only responsibility and engagement but also the ability to control emotions and use their energy. They have the ability to think in logical, abstract notions, which actually enhances knowledge. Under these circumstances "*at academic level, not only the development of a system of general and field related information should be developed but information should be integrated in complex cognitive systems that would enhance students` understanding of phenomena, development of mental operations and creative approach if various tasks*" (Bran, 2012, p. 14).

According to Vinţanu (2001, p. 91) "the students carry with themselves the means of their own development", which means that the students` intellectual, emotional features shouldn`t be taken into consideration. Despite all these, the diversity of the group of students (high school graduates, graduates of one or two faculties, adults with a family and career, etc.) calls for a curricular reconsideration and the reconsideration of strategies used to meet the students` training needs (Bran, 2012, p. 7). If we consider Piaget`s stages of genetic development (1965) we can rank students in the stage of formal intelligence from the perspective of cognitive development. Thus students have the ability to use abstract thinking, though Bran (2012, p. 10) shows

us that not adults manage to reach the stage of formal operations. Organized and systematic learning ability, reconstruction of learning schemes, permanent assessment of learning needs, identification of classification and organization strategies are only some of student learning characteristics.

Academic seminar as means of stimulating interest for study

The issue of student centred instructive-educational process conducted in universities is not a new approach; in 1984, Knowles set a few principles in approaching students as adults:

- people become more and more independent, autonomous and more capable of directing their own lives as they grow up;
- adults have gained experience which is a rich resource in completing learning;
- adults are willing to get engaged in various activities when and if they are aware of the need to know more in a certain field and enrich their knowledge and abilities;
- adults are centred on learning seen as problem solving;
- the most powerful motivational force in learning at adults comes from the inside.

Based on these principles as well as on the above mentioned data referring to the characteristics of academic learning, I believe that academic seminar activities, especially in the field of social work should allow:

Table 1: *A model of motivational seminars activities of a social work program*

Seminar objectives	Concrete activities to reach objectives
Highlighting practical and significant aspects, key points identified in studies, materials and topics	Conducting social inquiries, using different tools to assess beneficiaries through preparing Eco maps or genograms
Ensuring an optimal framework for questioning, debates and free discussions	Running round tables – workshops on given topics
Encouraging intellectual work contexts	Interpreting legislation in the field of social work, interpreting reference works, making portfolios, studying case studies, identifying solutions to social problems etc.
Enhancing documentation activities, approaching up-to-date topics so that the acquired abilities and skills are resources for students in facing real problems of their field of study	Giving assignments that require extra documentation; e.g. studying policies in the field of school dropout conducted by other European countries
Offering opportunities for the development of sum up and problem solving abilities	Suggesting assignments such as: Elaborating papers on complex topics e.g. *Sociology at the beginning of the 21st century, The Dynamics of Human Trafficking in Romania*

Seminar objectives	Concrete activities to reach objectives
Creating the premises for the development of critical thinking	Analysing controversial and relevant topics in the field of study: *The issue of refugees, Wellbeing in Romania*
Ensuring an optimal framework for learning by cooperation	Making a collage on how to handle real cases by completing all case management

If we refer to social work, the academic seminar is the perfect context to develop competencies and abilities required by this profession. Based on the principles of constructivist and cognitive school, teachers have the opportunity to help students in problem solving situations, decision making but mostly in proving their cognitive abilities and competencies.

This student "classification" based on their interests leads to another ranking according to their learning style (Entwistle, 1988 apud Neacşu, 2006; Chessell, 1997 apud Neacşu, 2006), namely:

- The student is intrinsically motivated, is capable of deep learning, uses associative methods and the ability to self-organize the study;
- There is both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the student often monitors his/her learning results;
- The monitoring is extrinsic and the learning process is superficial. Students experience fear of learning, mostly due to the use of associative, retrieval methods;
- The student has a superficial attitude to learning and the status of student learning is discontinuous and superficial.

How can these different types of personality associated with different learning styles can be properly, efficiently and correctly approached in the same seminar hours? Modern teaching strategies allow this fact but the issue of stimulating certain students` motivation becomes almost impossible to solve.

In the last 10 years, we have encountered all types of above mentioned students enrolled in Social Work study programmes. In each generation we had students who already worked in the field of social work for the same years (most of them were city hall referees in child protection services).

Various studies show that the students` interest for a discipline can be influenced by the following variables: interest for the approached topics and contents, interpretation abilities, connection making skills, the general picture created by the tenure professor, representations inherited from former students (Neacşu, 2006, p. 29).

How motivated is the student to learn? It is obvious that the quality of educational product depends to a large extent on the teachers` professionalism but also on the students` motivation and interest. According to the student`s type of motivation, the determination level will be different. Thus intrinsic motivation defines those students who have cognitive interests, who understand that learning is necessary and who are

confident that they will have professional success if they train hard. Students with poor involvement in learning have generally intrinsic motivation, probably because they have enrolled in a field of study selected by their parents. Some of these students didn`t even want to attend higher education studies. A pretty superficial motivation can be found in students who attend university only out of a desire to rise from the ranks, or to have a certain social status. They consider this level of studies as a natural stage in the process of professional training.

We believe that professors are facing an important challenge, namely the identification of strategies that would motivate students and determine them to study more. Nowadays we are experiencing low involvement in the learning act and teachers notice that their students have different profiles, which invite them to use new approaches. These need to be varied and adapted to students` age, maturity and interests.

Teaching strategies for seminars

An analogy can be made between the dimension seminars and the concept of reflexive school as both favour the development of a dialogue based environment. Their aim can be achieved by using active and interactive teaching methods. Teachers are invited to reflect upon the teaching methods they use and upon the perspectives they offer for the development of students` critical thinking. They should encourage communication, problem solving, team work and documentation.

In this respect, the Reflexive Journal is a successful method which places students in the situation of handling their own learning and of relating to learning tasks and contents. This method can be used even by teachers, who should reflect upon their own benchmarks and manner of teaching. Their aim is to rank the teachers` efficiency and availability to analyse all factors which interfere into or influence teaching.

Social work is a very comprehensive field in terms of study contents and thus favours the use of this method during seminars. The teacher can use it for the seminars in *Case management* and simulate work on a case by involving students in the stages of case management (role play). Concretely, students are grouped according to their preferences in a pluridisciplinary team (consisting of several specialists), coordinated by a case manager. The specific case that is going to be handled is collected by the students and suggested by one of the teams. Each team will develop its own vision on the solutions it considers real and efficient. The follow-ups are constructive discussions on this topic. In this case, the reflexive journal will stimulate a thorough analysis of the interventions listed in the individual intervention plan. Students try to find answers to questions like: What is the problem? What are its causes? What are the aggravating factors? What are the consequences? What are the most appropriate measures that I should take? Have I taken into account this aspect when I decided that …? There are numerous questions like these which involve introspection, objectivity, honesty and determination. This type of learning by cooperation can be motivating for students if they are aware

of the relevance of the task for them as future specialists, and are conscious of the boundary between professional success and competencies.

The teacher, as mediator between teams, applies the same reflexion method consciously or not, when s/he assesses his/her own performance, in this case, the efficiency of this method. Here are a few dimensions that teachers need to take into consideration when selecting the teaching methods:

- Efficiency of the methods is ensured by their diversity and adjustment to contents and objectives
- The teaching methods are various and aim the students` activation
- The methods must favour communication and dialogue between teacher and students
- Methods should develop competencies
- Teachers should use methods which encourage collaboration

In the work *Capturing complexity – a typology of reflective practice for teacher education*, Jay and Johnson (2002) describe a teacher`s "path" in the reflection on the methods s/he uses in teaching:

Table 2: *A typology of reflective practice for teacher education*

Descriptive	Defines the issue under reflection	What is going on? For whom does it work? For whom they don`t? How do I feel? What worries me?
Comparative	Restructures the issue under reflection from more perspectives and alternatives	What other perspectives are there on what is going on? How do others see? What research is there in the field? How can I improve? How do others reach their objectives?
Critical	Renews perspectives as consequence of the implications generated by the issue	What implications emerge from alternative perspectives? What is the appropriate thing to do if I take into account alternatives, implications and my own ethical system? What does this tell us about moral and political dimensions of education?

Source: Jay, J.K., & Johnson, K.L. (2002). Capturing complexity – a typology of reflective practice for teacher education, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(1), pp. 73-85(13).

Following the same pattern, or individually, students can make their own journal with reflections on other topics. *Introduction into Sociology* offers endless debate, argumentation and negotiation possibilities. Culture can be exemplified during seminars by debating on attractive topics such as: *the status of women in Islam culture, the issue of death punishment worldwide* or selection of cultural elements pertaining to a nation. Extremely exciting and constructive for the development of students` negotiation discourse is the approach of controversial issues such as the issue of refugees.

Approaching such topic involves knowledge of legislation in the field of refugee situation; topics can be approached interdisciplinary which is a good opportunity to develop transversal competencies. Practice shows that students respond very well to situations which call for connections between theory and practice. They mostly agree concrete activities, which shouldn`t be used to the detriment of theoretical training. Actually, emphasis on the practical character of disciplines is one of the objectives set by teachers for changes to the curriculum of social work.

When selecting the most appropriate methods to awaken students` interest, we need to take into consideration that more and more students lack the ability of systematic, organized learning or have poor abilities in autonomous learning.

Conceptual map is especially efficient in teaching highly abstract contents or just to make connections between concepts in the learning process. The method is very useful in the enhancement of understanding, schematization of contents, representation of learning process but also in the assessment stage. The method adds value to efficient teaching strategies, replacing learning through memorization. Logical organization of ideas and concepts and emphasis of the relationship between them is conducted in a personal manner. Therefore, the effort and the schematic representation of contents lead towards the development of valuable learning skills.

Organization of data related to case management, information on who, when and how interferes in the case or presentation of the most important stages in the development of social occupational policies. There are only two situations when this method can be successfully used in seminars conducted with social work students.

Defined as "the salt and pepper" of learning, the motivational and strengthening process is the last functional component of the learning process (Dobridor & Pânişoară, 2005).

Stimulating motivation through development of feelings in the learning environment

Optimistic attitude, understanding of one`s own emotions and a high level of comfort in relationship with the others and with one`s self are the characteristics of emotional intelligence. The feeling of comfort is the perfect background of a strong motivation and inferentially of action, involvement and performance. How can motivation be developed in learners if they lack confidence in their abilities, a positive picture of themselves and deep self-knowledge? Daniel Goleman`s perspective (2001) places the teacher in the position of interfering when necessary and offering support when these pre-requisites are missing. It is also true that "it`s not the teacher`s task to entertain students; however, s/he has the duty to keep their attention alive" (Marzano, 2015). By extrapolation to academic environment, the learner`s constant interest, motivation, epistemic curiosity can be encouraged by developing a warm climate which stimulates respect and confidence based dialogue. An optimistic, open to novelty, reflective teacher is an important pillar in keeping the students`

motivation and interest awaken even though these elements should have an intrinsic character.

This dimension of emotional comfort whose benefit is the improvement of motivation can be approached by means of interactive activities conducted during seminars. Drama, debates, watching movies and commenting them, preparing counselling files, creating the circle of compliments (as method for increasing one`s self-esteem) develop the students` emotional and social abilities. In the seminars for the course Introduction into Psychology and Social Psychology students should learn conflict mediation techniques and communication techniques with difficult people. These activities improve the students` self-esteem and also develop conflict mediation competencies that are very frequently with the beneficiaries of social work services.

The "*Obstacle map*" technique, adapted after Clegg and Birch (2003) allows students to analyse and visualize their own professional training path (but this technique as the technique of "3 chairs" can aim other aspects besides learning, such as personal development). The students`/learners` active and motivating engagement in teaching activities, increase of their interest in study and reading are goals of Socratic seminars. They give students the opportunity to express their own opinions, support them through arguments, debates, discussion guided by one of the students. The method offers multiple personal development possibilities by accepting other points of view, ability of interpreting and noticing subtleties, development of critical thinking, thus generating powerful positive feelings and experiences.

Conclusions

We have adapted Dobridor and Pânişoară`s (2005, p. 193) organizational example of fishbone technique to the context of learning in academic seminars and have concluded that there are 4 categories of factors which create a proper background for a disinterested, poorly motivational attitude towards study and even for school dropout.
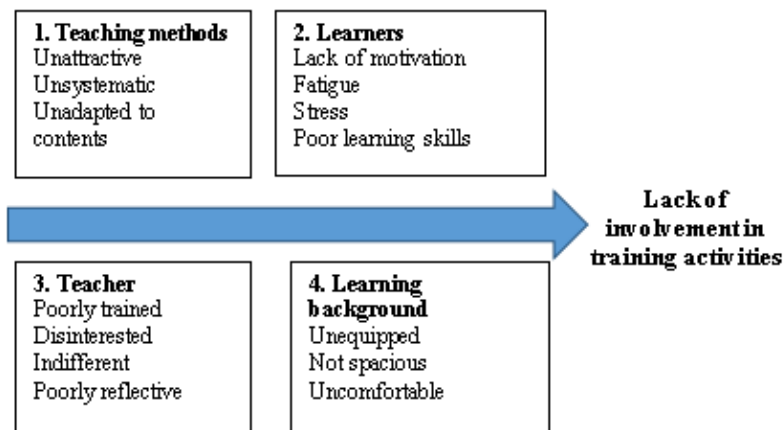

Figure 1: *A schematic of the motivational factors in learning*

Without taking into account aspects related to the conditions provided by the environment/organization where learning takes place, we can state that dynamic, modern, interactive methods used by a reflective professor who is interested in the group`s needs, are the perfect recipe to increase students` motivation and involvement in their own training.

We conclude that "the encouragement of reflexion, active and efficient use of knowledge acquired through academic, formal but also nonformal learning, expansion of expectations to a higher level especially in terms of professional and practical competencies as well as intensifying volitional and motivational mechanisms, represent a priority for academic learning", as seen in Neacşu (2006, p. 13).

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Aspects of Teaching
in Undergraduate Social Work Programs

CRISTIANA MARC[1]
University of Oradea (Romania)

CLAUDIA BACTER
University of Oradea (Romania)

Abstract

The Bologna process and student-centered learning entail a modern approach to teaching, one that is based on teacher-student and student-student interaction, diversity of methods and constructive feedback. This paper aims to present some reference points of teaching in undergraduate Social Work programs taking into account papers written on this issue, practices of some European universities, and students' recommendations. Teaching Social Work requires the use of didactic strategies which create an interactive environment, placing the student in situations similar to those they will face in their professional activity, ensure the understanding and practical application of theory, as well as the acquisition of the professional culture, challenge them to think and find solutions and methods of intervention, encourage them to express their opinions and develop the skills needed in their work.

Keywords: *Romanian Higher Education; Relating to Students; Social Work; Student-Centered Learning; Teaching Methods*.

Introduction

The training of social workers is a complex process due to the nature of activities the experts working in this field have to carry out. Thus, the social workers' training process has two components: the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and the development of the skills needed to practice the profession and to apply the knowledge acquired (Roth, Ducu & Rebeleanu, 2008). As both components are equally important, during the training process the focus should be both on providing specialist knowledge and on developing those skills that are needed to meet the standards required by the social work profession when providing services. In order to become a competent professional, besides acquiring theoretical knowledge and becoming aware of the limits of professional practice, during the training process the social worker should become able to transfer into practice the intervention theories, methods and techniques studied (Roth & Rebeleanu, 2007).

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[1] E-mail: cristiana_marc@yahoo.com

Starting from these premises, it is obvious that a crucial role is played by higher education, which, in order to meet the expectations imposed by the contemporary society, should be concerned with quality; they should offer those modern programs and curricula which can provide the competences required by the profession and the labor market and should focus on the needs and interests of students.

The first part of the paper deals with the issue of student-centered learning and the changes it brought to teaching in Romanian higher education. The second part includes some reference points of teaching in undergraduate social work programs, taken from European practices, as well as based on the expectations of the beneficiaries of the education process. In addition, the teaching methods used in the undergraduate social work programs of the University of Oradea are also mentioned.

Teaching in Romanian higher education – requirements and reality

Introduced in Romania from 2005, the Bologna Process aims, among others, to ensure quality in higher education and it also supports the modernization of the education systems. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) currently covers 47 states and was launched in March 2010, during the Budapest-Vienna Ministerial Conference. The EHEA was meant to ensure more comparable, compatible, and coherent systems of higher education in Europe (http://www.ehea.info/). On 14-15 May 2015, in Yerevan, at the Ninth European Ministerial Conference of the Bologna Process, the ministers of education laid down four major priorities for the future, one of them being *enhancing the quality and relevance of learning and teaching,* "main mission of the EHEA" (EHEA, 2015, p. 2). The Report on the Implementation of the Bologna Process (2015), prepared for the above mentioned conference, shows that "in the great majority of countries *student-centered learning* is mentioned in laws or steering documents and all individual aspects of student-centered learning are highly valued" (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015, p. 85).

In Romania, the Education Law no.1/2011 "promotes the vision of an education based on values, creativity, cognitive capacities, volitional capacities and capacities for action, fundamental knowledge and knowledge, competences and abilities which are directly applicable both in profession and in society" (Art. 2 (1)). According to Article 3 and Article 118, one of the principles that govern higher education is the principle of *student-centered learning*. Article 199 (1) stipulates that "students are considered partners of the higher education institutions and are equal members of the academic community".

The Methodology for External Evaluation of the Romanian Higher Education's Quality, elaborated by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) provides in Area C, Quality Management, under Criterion C.5 called Access to adequate learning resources, the corresponding performance indicator *Learning resources and Student services*.

The modernization of higher education also requires structuring and expanding the methodical register (Albulescu & Albulescu, 2000). "Student-centered pedagogy provides learning opportunities that are shaped by the needs and interests of the students. Using this approach, students are active learners, and instructors work to facilitate student learning" (Shear et al., 2009, p. 30).

Student-centered learning is "characterized by innovative methods of teaching that involve students as active participants in their own learning" and assumes "a supportive and inspiring working and learning environment" (EHEA, 2012, pp. 2-5). Student-centered learning includes active learning, cooperative learning, inductive learning, which means that the students answer the teacher's questions, formulate questions, discuss, debate, solve problems, study cases, implement projects (Schreurs & Al-Huneidi, 2011), learn by practical application, by teamwork, in an open environment, which stimulates thinking, imagination, creativity, originality, and learner autonomy (Todorescu, 2009). Unlike traditional learning, in this case, teachers have to focus mainly on the students' learning, motivation, counselling and guidance needs.

The motivation of students, a key factor in the implementation of this learning approach, can also be achieved by including students in the development of attractive courses, by using teachers' research work to enrich students' learning experience, by asking questions about the methods used and by being open to alternatives, by holding discussions with people who have specific expertise or by inviting alumni as role models. (Attard, Di Iorio, Geven & Santa, 2010)

Liliana Todorescu (2009) presents some reference points for the teachers involved in organizing student-centered teaching, such as updating the information taught, knowing the students (potential, personality traits, learning style), choosing a moderate teaching pace, preparing well-structured presentations, combining different didactic strategies, diversifying teaching styles, while keeping their attractiveness, presenting the content of courses in ways that raise the students' curiosity, using active-participatory methods, logical structuring of the content taught, using critical thinking and argumentation, and encouraging students to express their opinions.

A teaching process based on interactivity requires a diversification of the teacher's roles, as well as a greater involvement on the student's side, a "positive attitude towards human relationships, towards the importance of teamwork and openness towards cooperation, the attitude of supporting ideas that arise during cooperation with others" (Oprea, 2012, p. 12).

The results of a study carried out by Kember (2009) show that the students' active involvement in interactive learning activities helps the development of the capacities graduates need. Moreover, active learning and teaching to understand are factors that contribute significantly to achieving the desired outcomes. To all these, the teacher-student relationship, the feedback received to assist learning, the relationships among students, cooperative learning, group work (communication and interpersonal skills)

should also be added. The aspects related to critical thinking, creativity, adaptability, problem solving should not be excluded either.

In addition, a particular emphasis is placed on using modern teaching aids (using information technology), on "fully exploiting the potential benefits of digital technologies for learning and teaching" (EHEA, 2015, p. 2).

According to "Bologna with Student Eyes 2012", improvements in teaching/ learning processes at institutional levels might be affected by the increased emphasis placed on *research*, Romania being mentioned as a country in which the superior status reached by research in financing methodologies is "placing pressure on institutional management to shift priorities" (The European Students' Union, 2012, p. 96).

In an article which analyzed, *from the students' perspective,* the status of implementation of the main action lines of the Bologna process in Romania, the authors concluded that in 2010 traditional teaching methods, lectures, a teacher-student relationship marked by the distinction expert-novice and the lack of a regular feedback from the student and the teacher were some of the characteristics of the country's higher education, the idea of student-centered learning being present "mainly at theoretical and formal levels" (Gavra, Alexe & Drexler, 2010, p. 18).

According to the Quality Barometer 2010 prepared by Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), the interpretation of the study results shows a significant distance between the perception of teachers (strongly positive) and that of the students (mainly positive but with some criticism) on the quality of the education process. Higher differences were noticed in the student-teacher relationship, namely, in the aspect of feedback, in the advice provided, in the way teaching was performed, and in marking (Voicu, 2011). Next year's study, that of 2011, presented similar conclusions (Voicu & Tufiş, 2011). Regarding the teaching methodology, even though two-thirds of the students who took part in the study stated that there was too much emphasis on rote learning and memorization, on theory to the detriment of practice, the answers concerning the frequency of some methods show the following: there are significant majorities which state that during courses, information synthesis and organization is used, analysis of real-life situations is done, theories and concepts are applied in practical situations, critical evaluation of information, arguments and methods are performed, while team work and role play are also present; social work students show high values of the use of modern methods summary indicator; the use of the aforementioned methods and activities increases along with study years (Voicu, 2011). In the 2011 research, to the question what type of course they preferred, 89% of the students included in the sample chose courses based on teacher-student dialogues (Voicu & Tufiş, 2011).

Supporting the idea of a personalized higher education in Romania, the writers of the "White paper. For Quality and Leadership in Romanian Higher Education in 2015" proposed measures such as: students' access to a variety of teaching methods, especially alternatives like e-learning, blended learning, and open courses; students also suggested

involving non-academic experts and practitioners in curricular activities with the aim of sharing applied knowledge (Andreescu et al., 2011).

Regarding student-centered learning, the National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR) has the following recommendations for teachers: paying a greater attention to students' needs, involving students in developing courses, using case studies, role-playing, teamwork, debates, focusing on creativity, problem solving and critical thinking during courses, seminars, practical classes, and focusing on developing transversal competences (ANOSR, 2013).

Reference points of teaching in undergraduate Social Work programs

Considering the above mentioned things, but also the specific features of the social work profession and of social work education, the instructors' mission regarding teaching should be looked at from different points of view. Besides the content of courses, the teaching methods used and the relationship with students are also very important aspects. Thus, the teaching methods should be diverse, attractive, accessible to students, active-participatory (based on involvement, action, research), and they should encourage both individual study and cooperation within teamwork. The relationship with students is important to be based on effective communication, on asking students questions, on accepting questions from students, and encouraging them to ask, on dialogue, on alternative views, on constructive criticism, on quick and relevant feedback, on responsiveness to students' individual needs, on availability and support offered to students, and on providing counseling.

According to Jeane Anastas, social work education includes knowledge, values and skills and teachers must be able to socialize students into the profession (Anastas, 2010). Thus, professional socialization is strongly influenced by teaching, during courses and seminars, and, of course, during field placements in various relevant institutions. Perfecting didactic strategies assumes increasing the active aspect of the teaching methods and techniques, adding problematization to traditional methods in order to fully develop the potential of learners, as well as using interactive strategies in groups (Oprea, 2009). It is also important to complete these with practical activities, projects, case studies, which entail searching, looking for alternatives, doing studies and research, writing essays (Albulescu & Albulescu, 2000; Cerghit, 2006).

Stimulating students' critical thinking is strongly linked to a fundamental principle of student-centered learning, which is the need for a continuous reflection process. Without critical thinking skills, applying the theories in social work to practice will be difficult and the students "will find themselves confused by the plethora of theories or by the complexity of applying theories to the situations that arise in practice" (Mumm & Kersting, 1997, p. 3).

Guides of courses (available online) included in the Social Work study programs (undergraduate degree) of some European universities show the use of interactive teaching methods. Thus, at the University of Valencia, the teaching methodology

(mentioned in the Course Guide, Teaching Guide) of the Social Services course includes: lectures, debates and participatory discussions, expository activities – theoretical presentations, seminars, presentation of documents; students' teamwork; preparing conceptual maps and synoptic tables; online discussions using various software owned by the university; individual, group or virtual tutoring. In the case of the External Internships course, the following teaching methods are used: initial preparatory activities for the introduction in the practice center, workshops, sharing good practices; training activities in practice center – becoming familiar with resources, observing professional intervention, attending meetings of the work team; individual supervision by tutors in the practice center/in the university. The Techniques and Procedures in Social Work course is taught using: lectures on the content of each thematic unit, debates, and participatory discussions about approaches to interventions, presenting working or field placement tools; practical activities – role-playing, workshops, case studies; students' teamwork; group tutoring (http://www.uv.es).

At the University of Sussex, students are offered a variety of learning opportunities – problem-based learning and learning from practice-based scenarios, the following teaching methods being used: lectures, led by academic staff, researchers, practitioners, service users and careers, discussion seminars, workshops, tutorials and the students are encouraged to develop both skills for learning independently and in a group (http://www.sussex.ac.uk).

At the Higher Institute of Social and Political Studies of Lisbon University, the methods used to teach courses within the Social Services study program are explanatory, which means using scholarly articles and books to teach theory and learn about aspects of field work, discussions on various topics, tutoring activities with the aim of developing analytical skills in students, as well as critical thinking in compliance with scientific rigor, expository teaching and practical classes, and group work (http://www.iscsp.ulisboa.pt).

At the University of Nicosia, the teaching and learning strategies of the Social Work Program enable the students to apply theories to practice. This means that exercises, experiments, problem solving, case studies, role-playing, and expository teaching are used during training, that is, methods and techniques that help students broaden their intellectual horizons and to understand the social, economic, political, cultural etc. problems. In addition to this, the experience gained during field place-ments enables students to apply theory to practice, to work independently, and to experiment in real life situations, which they do following the principles of social work (http://www.unic.ac.cy).

The teaching guides of the courses taught within the undergraduate Social Work program of the Social-Humanistic Sciences Faculty at The University of Oradea show that the main teaching methods used during courses and seminars are: *oral communication methods,* that is, expository methods – lectures, lecture-debates, presentations, explanations and interactive methods – conversations, discussions and debates, brainstorming, problematization, group activities, *reality exploration methods*

(intuitive) – observation and case study, as well as *learning by practical activity methods* – role-playing, projects, writing reports, and the exercise method. For instance, within the course Intervention Techniques in Social Work, teaching is based on lecture-debates, term explanation, exercise, working in small groups, case study, and role-playing, the aim being the acquisition of specific intervention techniques and the development of the skills needed to work in the social work profession.

A key aspect of the university education of future social workers is Field placement, which takes a high share within the undergraduate programs. The study conducted within SocioPlus project – „Training, documentation and access services for bachelor and master students enrolled in Sociology and Social Work programs", financed by EU through a grant from the Human Resource Development Operational Program (project ID: POSDRU/156/1.2/G/139751), shows that 93% of those who graduated from the Social Work programs at University of Oradea and at "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad consider that the involvement in field placement activities is something good or very good (Săveanu & Buhaş, 2014). Regarding the field placement within the program carried out at University of Oradea, it includes initial preparatory and training activities organized at the university and activities within the hosting institution where the field activity is performed. The teaching methods include explanation, learning by discovery, study/analysis of documents, role-playing, observation, case study, and project implementation (work group).

The analysis of the answers given by the graduates included in the aforementioned study to the question on improvements suggested to the organization of the Social Work study programs of University of Oradea and of "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, shows that the graduates suggest courses that focus mainly on field work (Săveanu & Buhaş, 2014). Based on the diagnostic analysis of the Social Work study program at the University of Oradea, the recommendations for the improvement of the program, presented in the "Guide Book – Sociology and Social Work on the labour market", include: avoiding information overload, presenting theory in attractive ways, with concrete examples; students should be taught to look for information; teaching methods based on interaction with students, debates, case studies, role-playing, promotion of good practices, and inviting practitioners active in the field of social work (Roman, Oşvat & Marc, 2014).

Conclusions

Even though the implementation of student-centered learning in the Romanian higher education system still raises discussions and draws criticism, it is beyond doubt that changes have already taken place in the education process. The education model based only on the teacher and the content to be taught does not meet the requirements of our times and even less those of the future. As it has been noticed by experts in the field of education, the teaching culture in the Romanian higher education should be "centered on training and on knowledge facilitation", which

requires "institutional mechanisms to encourage the universities to undertake such a culture" (Vlăsceanu, Miroiu & Păunescu, 2010, pp. 27-28).

A good teacher, concerned with the quality of the teaching process, will find the appropriate way to organize their courses and seminars, in line with the students' educational needs, with their learning styles, and in an attractive way, which arouses the students' interest; he/she will know how to share knowledge and to guide students in the knowledge acquiring process, and will provide them with positive feedback. A good teacher will know how to present information in a language accessible to students, stimulate the student-teacher and student-student interaction, and develop a climate of trust, respect and dialogue. Teaching Social Work requires the use of didactic strategies that create an interactive environment, place the students in situations they will encounter in their professional practice, ensure understanding and application of theory, as well as the acquisition of the professional culture, challenge them to think and to find solutions, methods of intervention, encourage them to express their opinions and develop the skills they need in their work. The lecture-debates (discussions), devised to explain the contents of courses and to provide the information that enable students to learn independently, case studies, role-playing, presenting good practices, and group work on projects, are only some examples of the practical implementation of the student-centered approach.

Permanent adaptation to the challenges of the contemporary society, continued professional development and openness to new ideas and improvement, to modern, innovative teaching methods, and the concern for optimum communication with students are indispensable to an academic interested in the quality of education.

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Moral Implications
of Sociological Research and Practice.
A Plea for Ethics

IONEL CIOARĂ[1]

University of Oradea (Romania)

Abstract

The paper was devised as a plea for the consideration of ethical issues and concerns posed by sociological professions. Starting from emphasizing the role and place of ethics in defining professions, the paper develops arguments in favor of supporting the importance of ethics in sociological practice and the need for institutionalizational ethics in professional organizations in the area of social research. At the same time, in this new form, the paper is a plea for introducing and developing ethical education in the universities and faculties which form social sciences specialists. In this respect we have address and discussed the following topics: the role of ethical formalization (development of codes of ethics), the specifics of ethical management, and models of moral development of organizations. For illustrative purposes we present ethical aspects and issues that may arise in sociological research and practice. We consider that under current conditions, professional organizations can no longer ignore the ethical aspects involved in all actions and activities of their members, and also cannot be limited to sharing the restrictive vision of moral legalism.

Keywords: *Organizational development; Management of ethics; Ethics of social research; Sociological deontology; Ethics education.*

Note

In a first form (Cioară, 2014), this work was developed as a plea for the consideration of ethical problems that the practice of sociological professions presumes. Starting with the highlight of place and purpose of ethics in defining professions, this work develops arguments for claiming the importance of ethics in social practice and the need for institutionalization of ethics in the professional organizations from the social research domain. We consider that under actual conditions, professional organizations, and other groups, cannot ignore ethical aspects involved in the actions and activities developed by their employees. In addition to these urgent changes, which are the task of professional organizations from social sciences, educational institutions bear responsibility to play an important role in the development of an ethical culture in

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[1] E-mail: ionelcioara@yahoo.com

their formation of future professionals. That is the reason for which this text is pleading for introducing and developing ethical education in the universities and faculties which form social sciences specialists. Currently in the education plans, the statute of professional ethical discipline (deontology) is complementary or optional; study programs at the level of college or master degree which have in the structure compulsory ethical and deontological disciplines are almost inexistent and the number of hours is ridiculously low. We want doctoral degrees without plagiarism, but we do not know how to teach students to do that. The statute of the discipline makes it difficult or even impossible for students who would not choose this discipline to reach the competences which should be well formulated in the study plan. These requirements are stipulated, as it is well known, in the description of study programs from the National Register of Higher Education Qualifications. We will give a single example in this case. In the case of Human Resources program from Sociology domain, transversal competency CT 1, Application of rigorous, efficient work strategies, punctuality, and personal commitment for the result, based on the principles, norms, and values of professional ethics code, it is obvious that only a discipline in the domain of ethics can propose and assume an objective to form it; on the other hand, this formation should include all the trainees of the program. By its objectives, the discipline intends not only to develop the analytical abilities of the trainees, but also to increase their personal responsibility; the importance of these aspects of training must be highlighted and consolidated by the education Plan. The first task, which is the responsibility of universities, is the introduction of professional ethics in all study programs, at all programs and study levels (including doctoral level) and the assignment of a reasonable number of hours for this discipline, so that the objectives of these courses can be successfully reached by all future professionals.

Introduction

In this work, we want to erect the arguments for supporting the importance of ethics in sociological practice and the necessity for the institutionalisation of ethics within professional organisations from the social research domain. We start from a disparity regarding the institutionalisation of ethics, on the one hand, between the North American and European space, and on the other hand, between the corporational and professional organizations. We consider that the increase of interest for ethics is not just a fashion of American organizational culture, but we see it as a part of natural evolution for a society structured around principles promoting human fundamental rights and liberties; among these liberties there are also the right for dignity, the right for private life and property (we only remind these as examples) which could be harmed during social research (Etzioni, 1989).

Any attempt to define a profession cannot presume the prevalence of moral values, not only in creating a professional identity but also in the performance of one's professional responsibilites. In addition to expertise, the other fundamental component

of any professional culture is the ethical culture. No occupation can wish for the legitimate stature of being considered a profession unless it creates a system for governing the ethical aspects involved by the actions of its practitioners.

The professionalization of an occupation supposes more actions and measures: the development of professional principles by elaborating and taking responsibility for a deontological code by building some mechanisms and instruments for implementing professional values and also for monitoring the behavior within the organization; by developing some policies and strategies for ethics management. We want to properly signalize the development of ethical management within the organizations, a new domain whose importance for the professional activity is constantly increasing.

Considering these premises, we want to present and to discuss the following themes: the role of ethical formalization, the importance, the role and the objectives of ethical codes, the specifics of ethical management, and the issues of moral development of organizations. For representational purpose we shall present some ethical aspects and problems which may appear in the sociological practice and research and which could be avoided or solved by an efficient ethical management system.

Professions and the Importance of Ethics

Regardless of the domain, the organizations are made of professionals. Professionalism gradually became the dominant ideology for specialists and it characterizes the way in which groups of people share the same ideas, beliefs and values, act for solving problems and for meeting social needs in a domain – academic, business, research (Miroiu & Blebea, 2001). In order to understand why the professions are important, first they must be defined. Trying to define the profession might seem discouraging, under the conditions of great diversity in the activity categories included in the term, from musicians and sportsmen to lawyers, doctors, economists, psychologists, teachers and sociologists. In order to understand what a profession represents, it is more appropriate to clarify which are the necessary and sufficient conditions, meaning to identify the *family affinities* (Wittgenstein, 2003), which affiliate different occupations including theme in the sphere of professions. This strategy is applied by many authors (Downey, 1990; Gortner, 1991), in a similar way. Consequently, H. Gortner identifies the following *ideal* characteristic of professions:

- Professional practice has at the basis a massive body of abstract knowledge; mastering this knowledge supposes a consistent preparation during long stages;
- Initiation, maintaining, and promotion of standards are established by a professional team;
- For serious transgessions, the professional team may impose sanctions against transgressors, including their elimination from the professional association;
- The highest purpose of professions is the satisfaction of social needs, any social practice being legitimate by the community to which it refers to;

- The members of a profession are bound by an oath, or by an ethical code, by which it is stipulated that among the central purposes of the organization can also be found the code for altruistic service in the favor of society;
- Professionals must prove cooperation and mutual respect among colleagues, the behavior of each member being monitored in this respect;
- Professionals must be prepared in case of chaos due to a natural disaster to risk their lives or even to sacrifice themselves (Gortner, 1991, pp. 129-130).

Downey emphasizes the autonomy, the need for the professional to manifest oneself in an independent way, both regarding the influence of the state and the requests of the market. Another important aspect mentioned by Downey, is the fact that an organization grants legitimacy and it is socially validated only by meeting all of professional the characteristics (Downey, 1990, p. 154). We may conclude that professionalism, as an ideology, or as a dominant feature of specialists` interventions in a domain, is based on some values. Some of the most important values are:

- The belief in the expertise ability of an occupation;
- The belief in the autonomy of the decisions taken along the practice of the profession;
- Identification with the profession and the colleagues;
- Commitment of whole life for the profession chosen with vocation;
- Bearing the moral obligation for working in the service of the beneficiaries without getting emotionally involved;
- The belief in the self-adjustment ability and maintenance of professional standards (Filley, House & Kerr, 1976).

We can observe that professionalizing is not reduced and is not over when the fundamental knowledge is known, or when the fundamental knowledge is mastered, or when the specific skills and basic knowledge are acquired, or when the compulsory competences for fulfilling the tasks and activities in a certain domain are acquired (Lester, 2014). By analyzing the main accomplishments of the career, one may observe the importance of axiological dimension, the emphasis placed on the cultivation of moral values (strict regulations and severe behavioral requirements, the commitment for social needs, and the duties for colleagues). It clearly results that the main bond of professionalism is *the altruistic serving by the members of the same profession, devoted to a morally admissible ideal* and their commitment to promote the specific values of the profession (Gortner, 1991). On the other hand, professionalizing supposes the development of a moral sensitivity and taking the responsibility for a commitment to promote the social values that a profession promotes. Being given the prevalence of moral values, not only in building the professional identity, but also in performing any profession, in addition to epistemic authority, the other fundamental component of any professional and organizational culture is the ethical culture of the organization.

A profession is identified, as we have already mentioned, by its structuring and by its articulation around some ethical values (Gal, 2008). Hofstede defined the term value as "a largely spread tendency to prefer certain working condition as compared to other working conditions" (Hofstede, 1980, p.19). Value concept has been assigned an important role in literature about organizational culture. At the level of the organization, the values represent the beliefs and the attitudes shared by the organization, attitudes by which it builds its own identity. The values bind the members of the organization in ways which help them reaching the objectives (Man, 2008; Meglino & Ravlin 1998).

It is not accidental that during the last decades, the development of ethical culture and the preoccupations for managing ethical problems have become, for organizations, the main coordinates for professionalizing. Conclusively, ethics is the ingredient which must be added to a certain career so that it may develop into a profession (Miroiu & Blebea, 2001). No occupation can accede to this stature unless it builds its own system for governing the ethical aspects that involve the actions developed by its practitioners (Kutlgen, 1988). The formalization of the professional principles and the adoption of a deontological code is the sign of a professional job, it is the sign of its transformation into an autonomous profession which proves that it is capable to govern by its own rules (Abbot, 1983).

This work is a plea for considering the ethical aspects and problems conjectured by sociologic professions. After making obvious the role and the place of ethics in defining professions, we want to develop arguments for supporting the importance of ethics for sociological practice and the need for institutionalizing ethics within professional organizations in the social research domain. To begin this process, we shall formulate some explicit answers to a very precise question: why is ethics important for sociologists?

At the beginning of any science, and sociology is not an exception, research was carried on without any concern for deontological considerations. From scientific perspective, the first researchers of social reality, including A. Comte and E. Durkheim, considered that the development of a research methodology similar to that of natural sciences, is sufficient in order to insure the correctness of a study regarding the causes of social phenomena. M. Weber, though considered that social sciences` academics must be aware of their personal values, so that they might present the results of their research without excluding or distorting significant data, even if the results contradict personal opinions or socially accepted convictions. In all investigations, sociologists must respect neutrality as a value of the research during the process until the results are published; they also must block the interference of their own theory with the interpretation of the results (Drăguşin, 2009).

From actual perspective though, ethical aspects have a major importance for sociologists because the application of research methods supposes direct interaction with human subjects. Both during the stage of collecting the data, and during the

subsequent stages of research, the incorrect application of questionnaires or deficient use of the data, which may be strongly connected to private life and values and to personal preferences of the respondents, can create severe drawbacks for the participants. One of our basic concerns and duties as human beings and moral subjects, is precisely avoiding evil. The request that the participants in a sociological inquiry suffer no harm, is the most important within the sociological research (Peach, 1995; Babie, 2012; Kelman, 1982). In order to reach this exigency, the sociological practice must be strongly anchored in a rigorously ethical system (which may supply analysis instruments and decision mechanisms) which may precisely establish the professional principles and standards regarding the treatment of human beings. Hence, for example, the sociological research should take place only after obtaining the informed consent of the subjects and after completely informing them on the significant details of the study; this includes informing them about the risks and advantages regarding the participation to the study and on the ways in which the collected data will be used and kept. This thing is achievable only if there are precise and unambiguous regulations regarding the formalities and the procedures for obtaining the consent. It is also absolutely necessary for the participants to be informed that they may remove themselves from the research at any time (Hesse-Biber, 2006).

Moral norms contribute to reaching the objectives of the research and to obtaining some valuable results due to their conformity with social reality. Hence, the deontological norms forbidding the forgery and preparation of data or fake statements, contribute to obtaining veridical data, to avoiding errors and to obtaining results bearing scientific value (Babbie, 2010). Ethical behavior of sociologists contributes to provide a climate of trust during the research. When sociologists act honestly and honorably, the respondents will understand they can rely on their availability to admit their needs and sensitivities; the respondents will be more open to contribute to the research work and this will considerably improve the quality of the results obtained (Israel & Iain, 2006, pp. 3-4).

On the other hand, the research often involves the cooperation between many people from different disciplines and institutions. Ethical standards are meant to promote values which are essential for collaboration such as: trust, responsibility, mutual respect, and correctness. Hence, many ethical norms in research, such as copyright guidelines, patenting rights, the policies regarding data exchange, and *inter-pares* confidentiality norms are designed in order to protect the interests based on the intellectual property and they encourage collaboration at the same time. Many of the research norms recommend a variety of moral and social values such as social responsibility, human rights, health and safety. Practicing and spreading these social values leads to human wellbeing and to the wellbeing of the society as a whole, and this is precisely the mission assumed by sociology as a profession (Resnik, 2011).

Ethics is therefore important due to the advantages it brings to all the people involved, when it is included in the organizational activities. Researchers are interested

in the results of the investigations as they can increase notoriety and their publishing can also mean an important step ahead in their career. The organization gains authority and a plus for their image. The public (the academic community) gains extra knowledge and this leads to the progress of science.

Ethics is important because it is the only viable alternative of a professional organization; the other options including ignoring ethics may lead to bad reputation and a bad public image, to stagnation or even bankruptcy.

How consistent is the request to manage the ethical problems for the professional organizations which act in research and education? Is it appropriate for the members of professional associations in social research domain to assume a moral commitment towards the society? Is it appropriate for them to act according ethical principles, and ethical standards, based on moral duties and to follow a deontology?

The Need for Institutionalizing Ethics

During the last decades the institutionalizing of ethics had a real boom, concretized in an increased interest for establishing ethical issues within organizations. Ethics Research Center, the oldest American organization dealing with monitoring research activity since 1922, observed explosive increases of the corporations which had ethical codes from 105 in 1980 to 1700 companies in 1990. With regards to ethical codes of professional organizations, in 1981 the Centre had in evidence 241 codes, in 1989 the number of the codes increased to 338 and in 1997 there were 764 ethical codes (Davis, 1999, p. 8). Although interesting, a debate on the differences between cor-porations and other professional domains regarding the development of ethical culture, is not the purpose we have for this work.

Although there were deviations, many professional associations, government agencies and universities started to pay a special importance to ethics, by adopting specific codes, declarations, regulations, and policies regarding ethics in research. Ethical and deontological codes initially appeared as reactions to polemic experiences which lead to negative results for the participants. Obtaining indisputable social benefits from experiments, where human subjects suffered abuses raised many questions about ethics. During the trial from Nurnberg, The *Nurnberg Code* (1949) was issued, made from a set of standards for judging the physicians who carried out experiments on the prisoners during the Holocaust. Later, this code became the prototype for many codes. Another great experiment which propelled the institutionalization of ethics by issuing new codes, was the experiment of S. Milgram who used "fraud" when recruiting subjects for a psychological experiment. The subjects were told that the research focused on the effect of punishments on learning process, but in fact they studied the obedience to authority (Milgram, 1974).

In the USA, in 1974 The National Commission for the protection of Human Subjects in the Bio-medical and Behavioral research was created; after five years of activity the commission issued and adopted a document called *Ethical Principles*

and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subject of Research, known as the *Belmont Report* (1979). The report identified three basic principles every research, including human subject, should start from: respect for the person, benefaction and justice; it had observations, recommendations and considerations related to the orientations which should be followed so that research with human subjects can take place according to these principles. The report was designed as a support instrument for scientists, but also for other people interested in understanding ethical problems inherent to this type of research; it was also meant to be an analytical frame to direct researchers in solving ethical problems which may appear during the research which involves human subjects. The report was proven to be a valuable inspiration source for ethical culture of organizations around the world.

Although the discussions and the debates about the need for a code started at the beginning of the `50s, the American Sociology Association (ASA) adopted its first Ethical Code in 1970. They did this after a series of scandals during the `60s, related to some research in social and behavioral sciences (besides the Milgram experiment, we mention the one initiated in 1971 by the American psychologist Philip Zimbardo at Stanford University, which had the theme of behavior in detention) that drew the attention to the need for regulations in the domain of research ethics (Schuler, 1969). The code suffered minor revisions in 1984 (as a consequence of adopting Belmont Report), in 1989 and in 1991. In 1994 there started a process of substantial revision of the code which took until 1997, when it was voted and adopted in the actual form. In the *Preamble* of the Code it is indicated that its purpose is to articulate the mutual set of values that sociologists promote in their professional and scientific activity. There is also mentioned that it is meant to supply both the general principles and the norms to cover the professional situations which sociologists face. The main declared purpose is wellbeing and the protection of persons and groups woth whom sociologists work. This document was meant to be a bench and an inspiration source for sociologists` associations all over the world. Here are a few examples in this purpose.

In 2002 British Association of Sociology adopted the *Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association*. The declared purpose of this declaration is for the members to be aware of the ethical problems which may appear during the research process and to encourage them to take full responsibility for their own practical interventions.

In 2003, the Australian Association of Sociology adopted the Ethical Code in order to set the guidelines for the orientation of sociological practice and to harmonize it with ethical principles in all activities developed (research, teaching, results distribution and publishing).

In 2012, the Canadian Sociological Association adopted the *Statement of Professional Ethics,* hoping this document would determine the consideration of ethical problems which might appear during the design and implementation of social research and during practicing sociology in Canada.

In 2009, the French Sociology Association inaugurated the project of a deontological code (*Une charte de déontologie)*, but so far it has not been finished.

Although in the domain of social research there was a delay as compared to others (for example business or medical practice), ethical codes began to spread all over the world, mainly starting with the new millennium, when the preoccupations for cultivating a new correct and responsible behavior intensified. These accomplishments have answered the needs generated by research and by sociological professional practice. The principles of social research ethics claim, as a result of the above mentioned codes, that the rights of the subjects and of the other people taking part in the research (operators, subjects, beneficiaries – *stakeholders*) should not be harmed.

An ethical code is also meant to clarify the mission, the values and the principles of the organization, its associations with professional behavior standards. The code is relevant for the way in which the organization works, sets its priorities and is concerned with creating the guidelines of members` behavior. It may serve as an important means of communicationwhich "reflect the vow that an organization made in order to support its most important values, the way in which it deals aspect such as the commitment to employees, its business standards and the relations with the community" (Driscoll and Hoffman, 2000, p. 77). Behavior codes offer a priceless opportunity for responsible organizations to create their own public positive identity; this may lead to a more favorable political and regulation environment, to a higher level of public trust, and trust between researchers and beneficiaries (Principles of Stakeholder Management, 1999, p. 12).

How can the fact that contrary to all advantages of ethical preoccupations, the development of ethical culture is hardly at the beginning in the greatest part of the world, except North American space be explained? A first obstacle, and the most important against the institutionalization of ethics within professional organizations, is the legalist conception on morals (almost unanimously shared in our country, but in other countries too: El Miri & Masson, 2009). According to this vision everything a professional is asked to do, is stipulated by the law (Davis, 2006). Consequently, it is necessary and sufficient that a sociologist, or any other professional, should respect the state, and the fundamental rights and liberties of the person; these aspects affect in a small measure the private life of common people and it is easy to respect. Everything that is required is the conformity, abstinence from harming other persons` rights so that they are not sanctioned according to the law. It is sufficient, for example, that any professional (if he/she activates in this country), observes the provisions of the Law *206/2004 regarding the fair behaviour in the scientific research, development and innovation.* From the perspective of moral legalism, it is considered that a defining behavior for the statute of correct persons is in conformity with the law. Our duty is reduced to the observation of some requests, strictly formulated according to the law. The weak point of this vision is that if the law has some deficiencies then some people may take advantage of them, for some actions, nobody can be sanctioned. You can

still be a teacher at the university even if you plagiarized, as long as the university or the law does not elaborate clear procedures and mechanisms in order to incriminate, to prove and to sanction plagiarism. An organization which sets its limits to this limited and short perception on morality cannot prove a sincere attachment for social and professional values which justify its existence; the predictable consequence is that it will not be seen by the public opinion as a responsible organization. As professionals, more than the practitioners of other branches, we should understand that "we are the members of an ethical community and not only the free agents or the guardians of our own virtues and we should be concerned for the fate of others and for the community as a whole" (Davis, 2006, p. 246). This preoccupation cannot be ignored, and cannot be reduced to the observation of standards and norms or to performing the professional duties (the elaboration of a deontological code does not solve the problems, but it is a first step in managing them), but "by the active interest of people in promoting the good for the others" (Davis, ibid.).

The first step for the institutionalization of ethics – the elaboration and adoption of a deontological code is not sufficient; it does not eliminate and it does not solve the problematic aspects which appear while practicing a profession, despite the ambitious objectives that any ethical code has: it occupies the free space in the frame values of a community and the law; it contributes to the reputation, trust, and respect that the beneficiaries of an activity have for the institution which provides the service; it represents a moral contract between the beneficiaries and organizations, between those who are part of the organization, and finally it maintains the cohesion of an institution; it protects the organization against unfair or opportunist behavior and supplies a behavioral model; it promotes a positive image of the organization; it is an instrument for establishing the adhesion and the commitment of the collaborators; it influences the uniqueness and belonging feeling for the members of the group; it is a reference frame in decision and action orientation; it shows the principle commitment of the leaders; it correlates purely contractual relations with trust and responsibility; it creates the ethical climate, and the climate where actions are seen as being right; it guides the behavior in case of ethical dilemmas (Mercier, 1999 – apud. Miroiu & Blebea, 2001, p. 60).

The following steps of ethics institutionalization suppose a series of measures, actions, and activities which complete the content of an ethics management concept. This concept refers to a new domain of management which resides in the activities aiming at the configuration of behavior amongst the members of the organization (corporatist or professional), so that besides reaching its objectives and interests, the organization could also promote the social values in the name of which it justifies its stature. According to Mureşan, one of the most famous masters in this domain, the management of ethics resides in the ensemble of activities and measures which aim *the institutional organization of ethics* in order to have *integral organizations* (Mureşan, 2009, p. 39). The management of ethics must be distinguished from the ethics of

management or business; the ethics of management or business has as the object the monitoring and solving of ethical problems caused by the application of management in financial domain or aspects related to quality or human resources management. Also, this new domain is distinguished from the organizational ethics which analyses ethical problems of organizations, by the means of theories and the methodology specific to moral philosophy; its purpose is the normative clarification and the clarification of a moral orientation (Jeurissen, 2005).

A model of moral development of organizations

Organizations are conceived as entities in continuous change and transformation (Bradford & Burke, 2005). In the circles of authors and management specialists the concept of organizational behavior is more and more known (Johns, 1996); there is also a famous discipline called Organizational Development which did not leave behind the issues of ethical development. Some explicative tentatives of morality within organizations were attempts to adapt the models of individual development– for example Kohlberg`s (1981) in the case of organizations (Logsdon & Yuthas, 1997; Sridhar & Camburn, 1993). Kohlberg claimed that there was a consonance between individual`s cognitive and moral development; as the individual develops his ability to formulate and to understand more and more complex moral judgements, the individual also gets through many moral stages (pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional).

Rossouw and Vuuren rejected these modalities of applying the theories of individuals` moral development in the case of organizations (Rossouw & Vuuren, 2003). Before them, G. Coleman (2000) identified six levels, considered by him natural, of the way in which an organization evolves: 1) commitment, 2) elaboration, 3) action and feedback, 4) reassessment, 5) integral ethical culture, 6) complete alienation and integration. He observed that each level which was reached was translated by a higher integration degree as compared to the former. He concluded that levels reflect the attempts of the organization to manage its morality in a more focused and sophisticated manner as time passes. Inspired by his approach, the two above mentioned authors built a *descriptive* model of *evolutionist* facture which has a heuristic character and we will further resume it.

Organizations deal with more and more complex ways of managing ethical aspects. Each modality (starting with completely ignoring ethics up to its total integration in the life of the organization) is characterized by a preferred strategy of managing morality and it is considered a step forward. The authors describe each modality from the perspective of nature, of the purpose, of the strategy they prefer and of the challenges and risks which can be prefigured.

The first modality – *immorality* – is the one where ethical dimension is completely ignored. It is the phase where it is considered that ethics and success are incompatible, that the preoccupations for ethics should not be amongst the activities of an organization.

In this phase, somehow Machiavellian, the preferred behavior is the immoral one as it attracts the most important advantages. The organization does not have any ethical management strategy and the difference between personal values and those of the organization could gradually increase.

The next modality – *reactivity* – represents a refreshing of the moral sense; formal actions are being initiated, (the adoption of ethical codes), but the immoral actions are covered and remain unpunished. The organization wants to protect itself against unethical behaviors and to reduce to silence critics and sceptics. This strategy is a permissive one, the values and the principles are strictly formal, the organization being incapable of moral management. The reputation of the organization is reduced and has serious credibility problems with beneficiaries and public opinion.

The next phase – *conformity* – is assigned a direct involvement in ethical monitoring. Ethics is applied from the perspective of rules, and breaking them invokes sanctions. The assumed purpose is to prevent unethical behavior, doubled by the desire of an increased reputation. The strategy preferred is of transactional type (immoral behavior is a cost which must be reduced). A new, ampler and clearer ethical code is being adopted and ethical management systems are being explored. Risks which may appear: restriction of autonomy, proliferation of conformism, and bureaucracy.

The passage to the next step – *integrity* – is done in conjunction with the internalization of the standards and values which derive from them. Ethics is approached from the perspective of internal values and not from the perspective of external norms. An internal ethical investigation is initiated and there are ethical debates. Ethical performances are improved and ethics gains a strategic importance. Managers gain ethical competences, beneficiaries are involved and top management is a transformational one. Predictable challenges can be: the apparition of moral factionalism, impairment of ethical mechanism by powerful leaders, and the lack of ethical identity.

In the last stage – *totally alignement* – ethics is integrated in the purpose, strategy and operations of the organization; it becomes integrated and inalienable part of culture and purpose of the organization. The responsibility of ethical management is shared by all and the discrepancies between moral values and behavior are eliminated. The most probable evolutions and challenges: self-satisfaction/ethical arrogance; moral laxity; neglecting of new employees` ethical formation; lack of coordination in ethical management (Rossouw & Vuuren, 2003, pp. 392-393).

This model can be a reason for reflection and an extremely useful instrument for those interested in the development of their own organization. We consider that any professional in this situation could think: "Like this we can easier locate ourselves and we can reasonably guess what changes expect us" (Mureşan, 2009, p. 46)

Problematic ethical aspect in the practice of sociology

The main purpose of this work is to highlight the importance of preoccupation for ethical aspects in sociological professional practice. We will present as information,

a list of problematic situations and actions which may be met in daily practice in research and formation:

- Sending of the same paper to be published to two different publications without informing the editors.
- Including a colleague as co-author of a work, in exchange of a favor, even if the colleague had a minor contribution to the work.
- Talking to a colleague about some confidential data about a work reviewed for a magazine/journal.
- Eliminating a set of data from the research without having a just cause for this action in the work.
- Using inadequate statistic elaboration methods or techniques in order to increase the relevance of the work.
- The acceptance of printing works without citing the contribution of other authors in the domain or relevant result previously obtained.
- Distorted presentation of the truth about a project at a grant contest in order to convince that the research will have a significant contribution in the domain.
- Distorted presentation of the truth in applying for a job or in the resume (*curriculum vitae)*.
- Assigning the same project to two students in order to see who finishes first.
- Overstressing, neglecting, or exploiting students, graduates, master degree students and PhD Students.
- Negligence in safe storage of the data collected.
- Depreciative, offending, and abusive comments or the use of personal attacks during the evaluation of students, colleagues, and subordinates.
- The promise of some advantages to students in exchange of sexual favors.
- The use of racist epithets in any situation.
- The rejection of a publishing manuscript without even reading it.
- The acceptance of some articles without appropriate review procedures.
- The sabotage of other colleagues` or researchers` work.
- Steal of equipment, disposables, books or data.
- Unauthorized copying of data, works, and computer programs (arrangement from Resnik, 2011)

An exhaustive presentation of all situations and all types of deviations from desirable behavior in the case of sociologists is practically impossible to be done, and it would also be useless. Sociologists are not executants or robots to whom one may inoculate precise instructions and they apply them mechanically. By ethical preparation they will gain the ability to understand the principles and they will be able to discern and to choose the correct decision in all problematic or difficult situations. It is possible that the people who read these considerations have not done anything like the above mentioned subjects, but it is less probable that they have not witnessed or heard

about these kind of abuses. If this is true, it means that they are in a positive and favorable climate, they should be happy and they should consider themselves lucky; they should do everything so that things do not change. Even if the examples offered might be considered irrelevant or lacking gravity, they are not like that. Any deviations, as ''insignificant'' as it may seem, can lead to the most dangerous consequences for the affected persons; ignoring these aspects is not only immoral, maybe not necessarily illegal, but certainly disadvantageous for the profession.

Instead of conclusions

Managing ethical problems, as indicated by the evolutions of other domains, cannot remain at status quo – optionally. By legal regulations, by pressure generated by competence spirit, or simply due to trends, organizations are or soon will be obliged to calibrate from a moral point of view the behavior of their members. By their mission and objectives, professional organizations want to be seen as integral organizations, but for this to happen they must bring ethics into their organizational daily lives (Rossouw & Vuuren, 2003). The main responsibility for the management of ethics, at least during the first phases of organizational development, is delegated to the professional association's leadership. Ethics concerns are also related to organizational culture and this means significant cultural variations (Jackson, 2001). Although there are notable cultural differences in the way ethical management is being applied, it is hard to justify why this side of an organization is still ignored, while some authors see it as the defining side of organization (Man, 2008), and others see it as being constitutive (Rossouw & Vuuren, 2003). Etymologically culture derives from to cultivate... neither organizational culture, nor ethical culture are exceptions, they are not spontaneously, tacitly, or implicitly developed. They are the result of efforts and passion, preoccupation and arduousness of many people, of profound and constant interventions, constantly practiced and during a long period of time.

No organization has the right to impose a monopoly on the practice of a profession. If this happened, we could desist to a *mafia style confiscation of the profession prototype*. (Davis, 1999, p. 144). That is why it is absolutely legitimate for a domain to have many professional associations, just like the case of sociology, where there are two organizations: Romanian Sociology Association (created in 1990) and Romanian Society for Sociology (created in 2009). Expression of free will, of free initiative, and of the fundamental right for associations to develop, this kind of situation do not contribute each time to the affirmation of the domain, and to increase the reputation of the profession. We dare to claim that the next and urgent task of the two professional organizations – from our point of view- is to unify their efforts and to act together in order to develop, strengthen, and to promote ethical culture within sociologists` professional frame.

Each profession expresses the preference of a society elite group for certain social values that they cultivate and promote; in order for these social values to be met,

specialists from other domains, or specialists having other occupations have a more important contribution. T. Airaksinen presents a list of values that he associates to some professions: healthcare – physician, personal development – educator, wellbeing (the assistance of vulnerable people) – social assistant, autonomy – psychologist (Airaksinen, 1998, p. 674). Which is sociologists` ethical value? Sociology, as a profession, has a contribution to the production of knowledge with truth value for the social realities; the purpose is to solve the problems and the challenges that the society deals with in order to improve social conditions. Social research deontology cannot be limited by the restrictive vision of moral legalism because next to the principle forbidding the harming others, the professional value of sociologists is wellbeing, their mission and duty being the contribution to a better society. And this mission stays above any specialist's particular or group interests, as it connects sociology to the highest aspirations and social values. Maybe before considering themselves professionals, those practicing sociology may wish to consider themselves persons who chose to live "guiding themselves according to fair principles" (Fried, 1978, p. 13).

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