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Social-economic dilemmas of graduates of colleges and universities in the labor market in Poland

Abstract: The transition of university graduates from the stage of education to employment seems to be one of the most complex and difficult processes taking place on the labor market. Economic transformation resulted in the tendency to have a correlation between the level of education and ones position on the labor market. This formed the strong belief in society that higher education graduating can guarantee profitable employment relevant to ones level of education. Meanwhile in Poland and in other European countries there has been a constant increase in the percentage of unemployed people with higher education. The purpose of the research firstly is to present the dynamic of the number and specialization of higher education graduates between the years 1990–2010; secondly to show the consequences of these changes regarding the procurement of jobs by the graduates and thirdly attempts at pin-pointing the possibilities of optimizing their successful transition into the labor market. The conducted research has proven that the situation of higher education graduates on the labor market in Poland is steadily worsening. The afore-mentioned ways of optimizing their situation is conducting qualitative and quantitative surveys of the transition process and implementing the results of these surveys into the conception of an entrepreneurial university.

Keywords: graduate; higher education; labor market; transition; unemployment

Introduction

“One of the biggest threats in a period of rapid transformation in the modern world is not keeping up with the pace and effects of changes caused by the people.” J. Botkin, M. Elmadrja, M. Maltiza, in the report “Learning without Borders”, simply speak about “human gap”, which arises as a result of a larger effort put into the technical and economic development than in the development of the people themselves. “Human gap” – is the distance between the increasing complexity of the world and our ability to meet it” The Delors report “L’Education: un tresor Est un cache dedans”¹, developed in 1996 lists the four fundamental pillars of education:

- learn to live together,
- learn to know,
- learn to act,
- learn to be².

These most important pillars remind all those who are responsible for the education systems in different countries, to what they should aim for in education. In short, one could describe the challenges that we educate a man to tolerance towards other cultures, religions and values, and besides that human knowledge is used to develop the interests, to train individual research competences, to accomplish dreams and move them to practical activity. Knowledge has to develop human manners, increase his intellectual and social value, prepare to work in a team. Science under any circumstances should not depart from humanism, in the broad sense of the meaning, in the twenty-first century. Dehumanized man will not be able, nor could build their own identity, autonomy and democratic social relations, in which a variety of activities is an advantage. Classical education should be an advantage and a great value of universities. In Poland, the colleges have resigned from wide, multidisciplinary education, while Western universities don’t restrict this type of science to one discipline, educating widely and multidisciplinary. They are able to successfully raise young people to future scientists, researchers, explorers. Changes related to the rise of the economy, based on knowledge determined the common belief that in the conditions of globalization and integration expenditure on education is one of the most effective forms of investment.

¹ J. Botkin, M. Elmadrja, M. Maltiza, *Uczyć się bez granic*, Warszawa 1992,

² *Raport a L’unesco de la commission international sur l’education pour le vingt et unime sciecle, presidee par Jacques Delors, L’education, un tresor Est coche dedans*, Paris 1996.

In Poland, since the 90's of twentieth century, we can see dynamic growth of young people's interest in taking higher education. The main reason to take education was primarily to obtain the best professional, economic and social position on labor market. Young, educated university graduates felt that having a good education will increase the likelihood of obtaining employment on favorable terms to pay, which in turn would lead them to achieve a higher standard of living and higher social status, as well as personal and professional mobility. This is presented by a table made by Danuta Piróg³, which discusses the benefits associated with getting an education.

Table 1. The benefits of getting education

Benefits	Private area	Public area
Economic	Employment	Better productivity
	Higher salaries	Higher economic potential
	Better conditions of work	Increase in national and regional development
	Savings	Increase of consumption
	Mobility (personal and professional)	Lower government expenses on financial support
Social	Higher quality of life	Democratic contribution and increased social consensus
	Healthier lifestyle	Social mobility
	Higher social status	Increase in quality of education – basic and after-basic
	Increased educational opportunities	
Subjective	Higher self-esteem	Reduction of unwanted stereotypes
	Increase in aspirations and life ambitions	Higher culture and quality of work
	Higher level of happiness, satisfaction	Lower expenses on health
	Increase in probability of self-realization in work	More intensive participation in culture

³ D. Piróg, *Absolwenci szkół wyższych na rynkach pracy w warunkach kryzysu*, „Przedsiębiorczość – Edukacja”, 2013, p. 303.

It should also be mentioned that for many years completing the university in Poland had a significant cultural value and was a ticket to the sphere of intelligent people. It decidedly raised the possibility to do the highly prestigious work⁴.

The current situation of graduates

In the twenty-first century occurred great organizational and cultural change in universities. Their mission was mainly social education and the provision of resources needed for entrepreneurs. In the same period, expenditures on education are falling all the time and they are among the lowest in the entire European Union. Academic salaries are decreasing while responsibilities are increasing, and are often very difficult to implement, among other things, related to increased bureaucracy. Thus, the time spent on research is constantly decreasing.

Such a situation means that universities are typical vocational schools which do not have much in common with the ideas of the university. This situation leads to the fact that universities are being left by people who are little creative, not capable of dealing with social, economic reality in the country and not competitive abroad.

The current situation of college graduates in the labor market is particularly tough due to the difficulty in obtaining their employment. This is a complex issue which has multiple conditions, which are the interest to specialists in various disciplines.

This paper aims to describe the dynamics of changes in the labor market of graduates from the years 1990–2011 and to present the result of all the changes in obtaining employment, especially for newly promoted graduates.

In the period 1990–2011 in Poland we can see constant and dynamic growth in the number of students. In the academic year 1990/1991 higher education was completed by 56 078 people. Within next six years the number of graduates has doubled to 115 868 people (1996/1997), and the next doubling took only three years (1999/2000, 215 423 graduates). Meeting the growing educational aspirations and accelerating the pace of growth in the number of graduates was largely contributed by the opportunity provided by the Higher Education Act of creating non-public schools, which intensified the development of a network of institutions within the higher education sector. The activities of private universities has resulted in even faster growth in the number of students, and thus the

⁴ A. Kobylarek, *Sytuacja społeczno-zawodowa absolwentów uniwersytetu na przykładzie Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego*, Toruń 2004.

graduates. In the academic year 1997/1998, they promoted its first graduates in the number of 22 625, and in the year 2001/2002 103 712 graduates of these schools were reported, representing a five-fold increase over just three years. In the year 2010/2011 private universities graduated 169,039 students. An important reason for such dynamic growth in the number of students first, and then the graduates could also enter the market of academic education of people born during the baby boom of the 70s. The trend of permanent increase in the number of graduates in the twenty-first century. Persisted, and was exceeding four hundred thousand in 2006/2007 (410 107 people). Today, that number is 478 916 (2009/2010) (CSO, 1990–2010, CSO, 2004–2010). Currently, Poland belongs to the group of European Union countries in which there has been one of the highest numbers of students per 10 thousands residents (ranks fifth with indicator 568). Higher rates are only in Lithuania, Finland, Slovenia and Latvia (Central Statistical Office, 2010). Education has become a way to adapt to the observed changes in the labor market for the young people. Raising the level of education was also inspired by the actions of subjects in the field of educational policy of public education, continuous improvement and expansion of educational offer (direct and specialized).

The situation of graduates entering the labor market is also affected by, in addition to the presented dynamic growth in their number, the mode, program, and degree of completed studies. In the period under review the number of universities increased, and within them – range of courses and specializations to choose from, so graduates and faculty structure clearly showed changing trends as well. In the academic year of 1990/1991 the largest community were technical education graduates (19.4% of all graduates), ahead of pedagogical graduates (17.5%), medical studies graduates (10.1%), graduates of courses related to business and management (9.8%) and the humanistic studies graduates (9.6%). The percentage of people with a technical diploma, however, was relatively low compared with the year 1980/1981, when they accounted for about 32% of the total. Since the beginning of the 90s. studies such as business, finance, banking, management, social sciences and law enjoyed the growing popularity. In the next decade, since the academic year 2000/2001, the structure was already dominated by economists graduates (33.7%). The second position were manned by people finishing pedagogical studies (16.2%), and third place in the hierarchy (14.3%) belonged to the graduates of society studies. Year 2005/2006 was also dominated by graduates of business and administration studies (27.1%), pedagogical universities graduates were right behind them, on the second position (15.6%), although the

number of them was slightly less than five years earlier. Third place was taken by graduates of social studies (14.7%), and humanities (8.4%) and engineering and technology (5.4%) graduates were ranked right behind them. The changes in the structure of the directional leading group of graduates were much smaller in the twenty-first century. Economic and administrative studies graduates maintained an advantage (from 31.5% in 2000 to 25.7% in 2010). Differences in the proportion of graduates of courses were and are affected by many factors. The most important include changes in demand on the labor market, resulting from the reduction of industrial production, industrial restructuring, the emergence of new types of corporate enterprises, development of financial institutions, banks and the stock exchange.

In recent times, we can notice a decrease of interest in technical studies. However, it is those graduates who have the best position on the labor market. Therefore, for two years the Ministry of Science and Higher Education subsidizes so-called ordered studies programs, mainly technical. Colleges that run these courses of study may receive additional funds to improve the attractiveness of education for example by arranging compensatory courses in mathematics and physics, organizing complex language courses in English, science camps, classes conducted by eminent specialists from various fields, courses which give additional qualifications and competencies, study trips to companies offering employment to graduates. On the directions of these Quite high motivational scholarships for students are paid on such studies faculties. In the academic year 2011/12 the "ordered studies programs" faculties include: business analytics, automation and robotics, electronics and telecommunications, information technology, biotechnology, construction, chemistry, energetics, nuclear energetics, physics and technical physics, computer science, applied information technology with the computer science of materials, economic and water engineering, materials engineering, environmental engineering, nanotechnology and material processes technology, mathematics, engineering, and mechanical engineering, mechatronics, environmental protection, mathematics and natural sciences studies, environmental protection technology, design and advanced materials and nanotechnologies⁵. It is difficult to assess whether the skills acquired by students of ordered studies programs are those that significantly improve the competitiveness in the process of obtaining employment, because there are no published researches of graduates' situation – the representatives of these trends on the labor market.

⁵ Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare 2012.

Currently, community of colleges graduates is composed of people holding a PhD title, master's title, bachelor's title, engineer title; full-time and part-time graduates of studies, held in large academic centers and renowned universities, as well as the newly established schools, often with poor scientific and educational experience and difficult contact with the best specialists and libraries⁶.

The dynamic growth of the number of graduates, characterized in the earlier part of the study, occurred in the period of a growing unemployment in Poland. The difficulties of a smooth transition into the labor market by newly promoted graduates are alarmingly escalated, which is more often threatened by risk of failure. In the fourth quarter of 2011, University graduates accounted for about 36% of the unemployed. The observed process of problems with obtaining work by graduates were new and contrary to common belief of society. Having a university diploma was no longer the key to get a good job. Marketization of education also resulted in the fact, that studies may be accessed not only by people with higher intellectual abilities, but also by the people with values of average and below average. University management systems, mainly in the area to ensure the quality, proved to be unprepared for such a big change. The result of this negative trend is the large number of people who hold a university degree and at the same time they often lack the level of specialistic, psychosocial, cultural and social competences which are incompatible with the degree of education written on the diploma. Regardless of the intentions and verbal declarations, universities largely matched the requirements of teaching to the possibility of perception of customers. This process has devalued the quality of higher education and distorted confidence of employers towards education at this level⁷.

In Poland, the number of jobs for workers with high qualifications and competences is much smaller than the supply of potential employees. There is a high demand for workers with higher education, but mainly for engineers and project managers. One piece of evidence for the existence of a surplus, except the increasing the proportion of unemployed graduates, is large and persistent labor market demand for workers in occupations that do not require university graduation (first place and the highest number of vacant jobs, i.e.: 32.6% belongs to workers with vocational education). According to the report of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the most scarce occupations / jobs (based on the intensity ratio of

⁶ A. Orczykowska, *Szkolnictwo wyższe a wymagania rynku pracy*, „Nauka i Szkolnictwo Wyższe”, 2/28/2006, p. 49–64.

⁷ E. Kryńska, *Studia i co potem? Bezrobocie wśród absolwentów szkół wyższych*, „Polityka Społeczna”, 5–6/2002, p. 6–10.

surplus) in the first half of 2011 is “practicing unconventional or complementary therapy methods, carpet cleaner, a doctor - medical rehabilitation, nurse, nursing specialist of long-term care, home personal care workers, tax clerk, salesman of online advertising, confectionery decorator, laborer of drying and fumigating buildings, MIG welder.” In the group with the lowest level of intensity index, based on surplus we can find: “political scientist, agribusiness technician, philologist – Polish philology, nutrition and household technician, rail transport technician, philologist – foreign language philology, other home services employees, electrical equipment for measurement electrician, food technology technician – processing of milk, the owner of a small shop”⁸. In this situation, the employer may place unrealistic demands for graduate, he is aware of the high supply of highly qualified people and he often suggests a low basic salary, which is derogatory for human dignity, saying that it depends on the performance of employee’s work, and the mechanism of its evaluation is not clear. Many university graduates is therefore facing the necessity of taking up employment, which does not match the level of their education, which entails adverse social and personal costs. These include: financial outlay which Polish society carried for education, which in this case are an unprofitable investment. The study also showed that the work below one’s qualifications reduces the efficiency of the employee⁹.

Another negative consequence of this surplus is the displacement of the lower, but fully competent in relation to the tasks to be done at a given position, level of education for people with higher education, which means working below their competences and qualifications – the so-called brain draining¹⁰.

The reasons for the increasing difficulties of graduates, while entering the labor market are multiple. One of these is undoubtedly the economic downturn resulting from the reduction in global demand which determines the demand for labor and the economic slowdown. Another important issue is that the employer has quite different expectations of a young graduate than he can offer him in his young age. For example, the basic factor in reducing the chances of employment after graduation, set by employers includes the requirements to have considerable seniority and experience. The employer, therefore, that the labor market is

⁸ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2012.

⁹ A. Kiersztyn, *Racjonalne inwestycje czy złudne nadzieje: nadwyżka wykształcenia na polskim rynku pracy*, „Polityka Społeczna”, 1/ 2011, p. 14

¹⁰ A. Jakubowska, A. Rosa, *Problemy dopasowania oferty kształcenia szkół wyższych do potrzeb rynku pracy w Polsce. Zarządzanie szkołą wyższą. Dylematy i wyzwania*, Zeszyty Naukowe WSB, 14, Gdańsk 2011, p. 29–43.

invaded by unemployment, has no respect for either the future employee or the of education, which he got at a reputable university. Graduate is one of many who are trying to get a job, and often take it below its intellectual capacity. The employer in Poland is also not in the habit of submitting money for the training of his staff, he often just puts requirements and has a great unjustified claims to the university that it did not provide the employee-worker who is assumed to be an imitative man, not a creative one.

Conclusion

The research and analysis of the literature presented in this document only describe part of reality in which there are graduates of Polish universities in times of crisis. In connection with the organizational limitation on writing this type of publication, I wasn't able to put here the results of research studies related to mental and social traumas of graduates, which are always associated with the process of unemployment. It should be noted that the Polish graduates in the labor market are a social group, underestimated by future employers, badly prepared by universities in psychosocial, communicational and marketing terms.

Considering the situation of graduates in the labor market, it is clear that it is derived from a number of factors, which include:

- economic crisis, which is characterized by a decrease in production, real income and rising unemployment in all social groups,
- the limited ability of the economy to absorb labor resources,
- demographic situation, especially entry into the labor market by the baby boom generation,
- mismatch between the size of education, the structure of studies chosen by the youth and the real needs of the labor market,
- decreasing requirements for candidates during recruitment to higher education and within studies that provide a nominally higher education, but in reality far below accepted standards,
- specialized, directional, narrow training, that does not make a human creative but restorative,
- discriminatory, simply absurd recruitment practices,
- deficiencies of desired attitudes for effective job search by future graduates.

In light of the researches, university graduation is after all still a valuable component of intellectual capital and creates a better chance of obtaining employment than identifying yourself by the documents of lower stages of education

degrees. Due to the excess of supply over demand of graduates of most fields of study, they must have more and better competitiveness, and employers can use almost unlimited selection in the recruitment of candidates and propose much less favorable working conditions for employees, expressed in a lower salary and employing in positions that do not require a diploma of college.

Polish demographic situation, and as a consequence – decreasing demand for educational services at a higher level – makes both less prestigious universities with smaller academic experiences as well as the reputable universities with long traditions start soliciting or will start to solicit, in the near future, for own position, and sometimes continued existence in the market of educational services. It is expected that employment rates (as in many Western European countries) will become one of indicators, measuring the quality of work of universities and will influence on its position in the market of educational services. The vast majority of universities have undertaken intensive activities beyond existing solutions, consisting mainly in the creation of new courses or specializations within these fields of studies. It is hoped that many universities will intensify efforts for the highest quality of education focused on graduates equipped with a wide range of competencies that will ensure their success in the labor market.

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