

THESIS OF A PH.D. DISSERTATION

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Structural changes of work value preferences in light of improvement of professionalization and changes in training curriculum



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Objectives of the Dissertation:

The dissertation presents the shaping of the opinion of the future representatives of a profession which is quite new in Hungary – as for as the training programme, career and the profession itself is concerned.

In order to demonstrate the social embedding we outlined the social circumstances which justified and at the same time made possible the starting of social worker training in Hungary, as well as the roots and circumstances of the newly started training programmes. Since we assign value oriented activity to this human helping profession, we started with a brief survey of the important psychological, sociological and philosophical approaches of the conceptual apprehension and relevant empirical problems of value research. By presenting the above issues we aim at widening the theoretical knowledge related to our topic.

One of the basic ideas of the dissertation is that the work activity within one's career as well as the training itself are not considered discrete events or a mere cycle of events but rather a kind of coherent development process. D.E. Super's theory and the methodology based on it were of great help in elaborating our approach.

Our aim was to make a comprehensive survey of the above in order to contribute to a better understanding of the conceptual frame.

The aim of the research presented in the dissertation was basically to find out and examine the motivation of the students choosing social work profession. As social work is quite a new profession in Hungary it is also interesting to investigate what students think of and what they expect from their future career. Consequently we tried to determine what students consider to be the criteria and the main points of the training programme. All these play an important part in working out a more efficient structure of the training, making a more relevant definition of the contents of the training, as well as in considering the changes which may occur. Revealing the cultural differences became also possible by comparing the determined trends with the similar data of certain foreign samples. By comparing the results of the follow – up examinations as well as the results of other examinations we can point out the constancies and changes that can be observed as far as the social worker students' work related value preferences are concerned.

Outlining the applied methods:

During the research we used three questionnaires. Two of the questionnaires were our own productions and the third questionnaire was a standard one. Both of our own questionnaires had undergone preliminary examinations and had been tested.

The standard questionnaire

In all three phases of our research we used the Csepeli – Somlai adaptation of Super's value oriented questionnaire (Csepeli and Somlai, 1978). In the dissertation we have given a detailed presentation of the questionnaire and also its theoretical framework. The questionnaire contains 45 items. These are statements concerning the values related to the chosen work. These statements have to be evaluated on a five-grade scale according to the attributed importance. Groups of 3 statements make up value circles. The scale of the different value circles is made up of the total number of points given to the 3 items belonging to the given value circle. Thus the score of the value circles can range from 3 to 15 points. The ranking of the value circles is done on the basis of the total number of points. The one getting the greatest number of points is considered the most preferred value circle and it is followed by the others with decreasing number of points. The order established in this way shows the value preferences related to work of the person of investigation. The orders established in case of the different samples are brought about on the basis of the average value of the value circles.

The non-standard questionnaires

I. The questionnaire used for the first examination consists of 24 items. Making use of open questions we tried to get information about the socio-economical status of the students as for as their ideas and expectations about application, training programme, future career and relevant notions related to the content of the career are concerned. Then the findings were subjected to a content analysis one by one. In addition, we classified the given answers thus being able to make numeric data production too, which enabled us to use statistical tests too when interpreting the data.

II. The questionnaire used for the third examination was developed on the basis of the first questionnaire and it was simplified on the basis of the findings of former research and the preliminary examination. It consists of 11 items. It contains closed questions related to the preferred topics of the first examination and scales for surveying the attitudes related to items which are relevant from the point of view of the topic. In order to check the correctness of our interpretation, the data collected by means of the questionnaires were statistically tested. We also made use of the statistical methods which made the cross – checks of the results of the different examinations possible.

During the processing we used the following data-analysing procedures:

- determination of basic distribution
- content analysis
- factor analysis
- variance analysis
- determination of cross – connections
- calculation of correlation

Short description of the examination sample:

College and university undergraduate students participated in the examinations. There were students of social work and of other fields of study as well. Social worker students of the foreign sample were from three countries: Finland, Germany and Italy. The total element number of the different examinations are the following:

1. Basic examination: 318 people (171 Hungarian and 147 foreign people)
2. The follow-up phase: 1.802 (out of which 1505 Hungarian and 297 foreign)
3. Concluding phase: 188 people – all being Hungarian

Thesis – like enumeration of the results:

Since the dissertation presents the results going along the three stages of examination, we considered it was practical to summarize the present theses accordingly.

Summing up the results of the basic examination:

The results have clearly shown that students gave preference to the contents related to the personal element. This could be obviously seen in all projections. Consequently, the subjects

taught within the competence sphere of psychology were emphasized in the range of expectations. The will merely to help played an important role in the career motivation and it also correlated well with the other value choices. However, it was thought – provoking that the students had a very unfavourable inner picture concerning society, fact which predicted the difficult social integration of the profession.

The content of consciousness related to the career of the Hungarian students was less ‘pragmatic’ than that of the foreign students or of the medical students serving as control group. This could be characterized by a Kind of ‘pioneer romanticism’. The work value preference structure broadly corresponds to the value structure stated at the earlier examinations in our country, both in case of the preferred and rejected values. It is important to note that altruism was considered the mostly preferred value, fact which – considering the profession – is natural, logical and desirable. The appearance of self – assertion among the preferred values foreshadows the seeking of the position in case of the new profession.

During the factor analysis it seemed that Super’s value circles continue to converge and five factors could be determined altogether. The values of the factor weights showed a definite relatedness. Among the given value circles three co-existence, could be observed, but it was close only in case of the value circles of prestige and self – assertion.

Taken as a whole the results were roughly equal to our previous expectations. Our findings and the gained experience have been used in curriculum development within the training programme. Since then time has of course surpassed some of our findings but there are several consequences which are still effective.

Summing up the results of the follow-up examination:

The results of the international examination were roughly equal to our expectations. In case of the different sub – samples the order of the preferred and rejected values was roughly in accordance and followed the work value preferences which could be observed with earlier examinations. At the same time there were significant deviations in certain elements in case of the different nations. Presumably the existential identities and those concerning the age determine the similarities while the professional and cultural deviations give the differences. The greatest and most significant deviation was the answer given by German students of social work rejecting altruism.

The situation was the same in case of factor analysis. As far as the choices of social worker students are concerned it seems that the number of co-existence tends to consolidate along 4 or 5 factors. The structure of the factors also shows more similarities within this sample than

in case of other professions. The differences observed in case of the certain nations were typical and could be explained either by cultural difference or by the different history and status of social work profession in the respective countries, more over the difference observed is probably one of multicausality character.

In course of the comparative examinations concerning the different university faculties it was remarkable that the role of social relations at the workplace could be found at the top of the list although the research was not focused only on the human and helping professions but also on the university as a whole. Besides, on the list of the five leading choices we can find variety, self – assertion, security and altruism. However, workplaces in the market economy are less able to comply with the above values. These values got ahead of prestige, independence, and work performance which could directly determine the advancement within one's job, the sense of achievement and perhaps career building.

Hierarchy and control characterizing the classical work relations fall into the background fact which draw a kind of idealized and romantic picture of the conceptions concerning work. Behind the social and individual components of human values a kind of rebellion on behalf of the students against realistic and authoritarian power relations can be detected, however undertaking the leading role can be noticed only in case of some of the faculties. This corresponds to the findings in case of other examinations as well. The students under survey were at the very beginning of the career socialization process, fact which may have had an impact upon the above findings. At the same time it would be useful to investigate by what kind of factors and in what way are the students prepared for undertaking the respective professional roles. Is it enough for them to participate in the training programme with all the examination procedures or would it be necessary to develop the practical side of the professional training.

The training programmes which are more practice – oriented show a more realistic value preference and a stronger professional identification than the theoretical training programmes. Moreover, the professions with a higher prestige also help the students to get stronger professional identification (greater extent of agreement of the opinions.) It has to be mentioned, that the faculties do not mirror the situation at the different departments (Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Sciences and College faculty of Health). In their case a more detailed examination concerning the training of scientists and teachers would be necessary. The comparative examination pointed out a high degree value stability in case of the students of social work. This is especially true relating to the rejected values. The value circle of compensation is the only one which presents a difference of two gradations among the results

of the examination. The preferred value circles correspond to the traditional values of the profession and training, as well as to the claims originating from the age and status of the students. The subsequent convergence of the value circles is also typical in this case. True factors in case of one examination could be determined. The content and nature of the factors were very similar.

Summing up the results of the concluding phase of the examination:

If we compare the order of rank of the different value circles to the work value preferences of earlier examinations, we will observe almost full concordance of the rejected value circles. Consequently, in spite of the impact which could have been generated by the chosen career, type of school, social environment and historic age, a full constancy is shown in case of the university and college populations as far as the rejected values are concerned.

It is absolutely necessary to underline that the frequently remembered material interest did not come out of the zone of natural value circles in either of the examinations. We have got only one result – found in one of the samples of the first examination – when material interest was placed at the beginning of this zone. We can conclude that the primacy of the material interests has been established later, perhaps due to the radical changes which occurred within the life conditions. When summing up the results of the previous examinations we have referred to the differences which could be detected at the faculties with different student composition. As compared to the examination performed in case of the foreign sample we can state that basically only the relation to altruism of the German students can be considered a radical deviation. All things considered, referring to the order of rank of the work – related value choice of the population can be characterized by a high degree of stability, a fact which is more dependent on the characteristic features concerning age groups and life conditions than on the nature or the social context of the career.

In the career motivation and 'beauties' attributed to the profession there still exists the great and romantic ideal of helping people, which is completely in harmony with the preference of altruism. However, an essential change can be observed as far as important factors of practising the profession are concerned. Things of pragmatic nature, such as professional qualification got more importance than in the earlier examinations pushing into the background the attractive personality features. In this last examination a significantly smaller value was attributed to the attractive personality features of philanthropic nature, as well as to creativity than in the examination done 15 years ago. It seems that the more and more complete professionalization of the career started to appear in the students' thinking when

considering their career. The opinion belittling the importance of the attractive physical appearance could be expected although it disagrees with the suggestions of up-to-date career trainings. The convergence of the value circles determined during the earlier examinations can be observed here as well. Four factors could be determined in a fairly well-balanced structure.

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