

# THESIS OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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## Specialization of Students Choosing Helping Professions in 'Partium'



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**Specialization of Students Choosing Helping  
Professions in ‘Partium’**

– Doctoral (PhD) dissertation –

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## **Description of the theme and the Goal of the thesis**

Research made in order to understand the structure and differentiation of Hungarian society and results of educational and sociological surveys have been showing the problems of disparity within the society for decades. Several studies have shown that there are close connections between one's social position and profession and between parents' social status and their children's school careers. Surveys conducted on social mobility and sciences dealing with educational sociology confirm that the educational system itself, by its own spontaneous selective mechanism, contributes to conserving the present sociological system, it does not increase social mobility. Effect studies made on the operation of the educational system point to the fact that one of the most significant factors contributing to improvement of the conditions of mobility are educational. This dissertation presents the approach that the success of social mobility depends on the help (enhancing the circumstances of schooling, the quality of teaching) given within the framework of education. Experts practising in helping the professions attach great importance to achieving good results. In the interpretation of this paper, not only pedagogues (kindergarten teachers and school teachers) but also social experts (social workers and socio-pedagogues) belong to helping professions.

The territory of 'Partium' has been chosen for the place of the survey because according to the statistics analyzing the sociological inequalities, the population living in the area shows the least favourable features in case of almost all the statistical indicators. In 'Partium', it is an critically important question, who of the students will graduate as kindergarten teachers or teachers paying determinant roles in the development of learning abilities of disadvantaged children, and who will become socio-pedagogues or social workers helping children mitigating social deprivation and in promoting the circumstances for their optimal socialization. The aim of the survey is to reveal the characteristic features of the students choosing between the teacher and the social expert professions, and to highlight the similarities and differences between the two groups with regard to socio-demographic features and professional orientations. In the paper, professional orientation is interpreted as a course of events starting from application for the higher grades of education until finding of employment after the receipt of diploma.

In reference to the beginning of professional orientation, researches have been made on candidates' school and subject choosing strategies; on their present ideas about their chosen professions and on their points of views regarding their future career. The territory of

Hungarian students living in minority in adjacent territories of Romania and in Ukraine and taking part in Hungarian social work and pedagogical higher education. It serves as a good basis for comparing their career ideas with those of students' living in Hungary.

This thesis is built on concepts of profession, and professionalization. The study not only summarizes theories of professionalizations but also the outcomes of Hungarian empirical experiences conducted amongst students specializing in pedagogy or in social work professions. The major questions addressed by the research study are the students' career expectations and visions; and also they are aimed at identifying whether the profession itself or its practice is attractive to the students.

The research also goes into identifying the role that a particular training plays in forming the candidates' knowledge, competence and professional attitude or professional visions.

Certain parts of the hypotheses based on the survey refer to differences between the two types of helping professions:

- Students choose between the social expert and the teacher orientations consciously; there are significant differences between the two groups' career orientations.
- The majority of candidates applying for both orientations come from less disadvantageous social circumstances, thus they take education itself as a possibility for them to improve their social positions by means of social mobility.
- Students attending teacher training courses have clearer and more accurate ideas about their future professions.
  - Students of both orientations are aware of the fact that they have chosen professions with a low prestige.
  - Students attending the social expert courses think that their profession receives higher social approval than the teacher's.

Other parts of the hypotheses refer to regional differences between the two types of helping professions:

- Young adults studying social work and teacher training courses in Hungarian at trans-border institutions choose their profession more purposefully than students in Hungary: they do not merely want to obtain a diploma but they want to search for and preserve their

identities. Their goal is to remain in their homeland and support Hungarian minorities abroad.

- There is a significant difference between the students of the two regions in respect to the vision about the future and the degree of intention to help; consequently, trans-border graduates are more determined to work as experts in their professions than students graduated in Hungary.

### **Applied methods**

This thesis demonstrates the result of an international comparative survey-type study carried out by the author. A total of 217 senior year regular students, comprising specializations as teachers, kindergarten teachers, social workers and social pedagogues were questioned at four colleges (in towns of Hajduböszörmény, Nyíregyháza, Beregszász, and Nagyvárad). These colleges are located in adjoining border regions of the 'Partium' connecting Hungary, Romania and Ukraine. Observations referring to senior students' visions and their career possibilities carry relevant implications and serve as important aspects for revealing the effects of the education. The influence of the education on regular students is more visible than that of on students attending correspondence or evening courses.

During the course of the survey, students were asked to fill out a questionnaire comprising multiple choice questions. From the point of views of methodology, the usage of quantitative questions proved to generate most results because on the one hand, it allowed a great number of students to take part in the survey, on the other hand, replies given to the same questions made comparisons and statistical analyses easily accessible and thirdly, because of the constraints of the resources available. Data collection was being carried out during autumn in 2005. Each questionnaire was handed out by the author herself considering the fact that direct and immediate help could be given in case of questions or difficulties emerging.

Data processing was done by SPSS programme, which gives profound description of characteristic features of the studied data, and which creates different categories and allows usage of cross-checking techniques regarding the two types of professional orientations. By means of the SPSS programme, the similarities and the differences between the two groups can be easily analysed. On basis of the students' profession choosing strategies and the

formation of their career orientations, different types of behaviours of career orientations were worked out.

General conclusions on the survey should be made with caution because the total number of students questioned was 217, amongst which the number of Romanian and Ukrainian regular students living in 'Partium' was not significant.

Several findings of the survey, however, raise further questions and motivate us to start more thorough explorations.

## **Results**

Results of the survey showed that professional orientation develops differently for those involved in social work, teacher or kindergarten teachers training. This is a particular process when aspirants taking on professional challenges deliberately, become competent professionals. During the research, mutual elements in the two groups' professional orientations were identified; their ideas about the helping profession are similar in many aspects and mirror those characteristic features that had been previously described related to both professions by corresponding literature. Choosing the helping profession mirror social function orientated models of different profession-theories; according to which the helping professions pay important social roles by serving the public weal altruistically. In spite of the fact that there is no unified public agreement on the social function of the helping professions in present Hungarian society, results of the survey confirm that students participating in both pedagogical and social work training wish to work with people and want to provide help; and these motives are dominant when choosing the profession.

Studies on factors of professional socialization emerging from profession theories concerning profession orientated models show that the two helping professions have much in common with regard to competences. Both theoretical knowledge and the experiences obtained during the training in practice pay important parts in professional socialization. This result might, on the one hand refer to the fact that profound theoretical professional knowledge helps professional identity, on the other hand, it supports those observations of profession oriented theoretical models which emphasize the importance of knowledge as basic element in labelling a job as a profession and which distinguish professions.

Self-assertion oriented models of profession theories show tendencies which require improvements. Students questioned using this survey value both vocations as jobs of low level of prestige, but with a preference for Teaching. The majority of the students, however, would not undertake a political post or positions that demand self assertion, as most of them would be reluctant to act as decision-makers. Candidates did not feel attached to tasks aiming at changing social systems or socio-political subsystems.

The survey conducted on students attending teacher or social work trainings outlines a model which shows the structure of professional orientations. The model comprises all tendencies of profession theories. It describes not only students' personal professional identifications and their gradually changing career expectations with the tendencies eliciting this change but also the functional approach of helping professions and self assertion roles. The model outlines the criteria of the professions and the differences between the vocations according to different aspects of effect mechanism. The model defines four basic dimensions of professional orientations determining students' professional socialization. The first dimension, which is also the most significant, is ideas about social functions of helping professions; the second important dimension is personal characteristic features with their multiplicity of skills and abilities. The third dimension is university education. Students' attitude towards higher education shows differences according to their specifications in teacher or social worker courses. These differences can be mirrored in the development of their career expectations, i.e. in the fourth dimension.

There are significant differences between the professional orientations of students applying for the two specializations as far as choosing a career or its prospects are concerned. Both aspirant kindergarten teachers and teachers are much more career conscious than those participating in social training. The training choice is rather defined by personal characteristics than by social status. The socio-demographic measures do not differ for the two student populations, as all students have higher living standards than those characterizing particular region of origin. Those participating in teacher and kindergarten teacher training have well-defined career expectations while those in social training have less clear views on the tasks and the boundaries of their own profession and opportunities.

Teacher-training students had better ideas about their future profession already at the commencement of their studies, with their college years mainly contributing to their

professional socialization. They felt well prepared when approaching graduation, and many of them wished to start a career in that given profession. However, those participating in social work training are less motivated upon beginning their studies. Although a large proportion of these students are satisfied with the theoretical part of their education they feel a need for more field practise to gain deeper insights into the true nature of their profession. When approaching graduation, fewer social work trainees feel professionally as competent as those graduating as teachers. They are also less determined to enter the social service system.

A clearly determined career orientation is observed in the case of students participating in Hungarian-based social and teacher training at Romanian and Ukrainian institutions. For Hungarian students in Romania and Ukraine not only the graduation in itself is important but also preserving their identities, and providing help for minority Hungarian communities.

The tendency that the majority of the youth living in Romanian and Ukrainian territories of 'Partium' applied only for one training course at institutions shows the limited possibilities of local higher education. Students living in Beregszász and Nagyvárad were motivated by all of the aspects of professional orientations (personal skills, experiences, intentions to work with people, helping attitude and attractive effects of education) to a greater extent than the others.

Overall, the results of the study clearly unravel the significance of higher education, and the robust differences in various aspects of career socialization. This can be mirrored in students' choice of different majors according to their behaviour towards professional orientation.

Setting up certain types of student groups was done on basis of the following three aspects: commitment in career orientation, intentions of choosing specializations and intention of becoming competent professionals. Half of the students involved in teacher training courses are strongly committed to the chosen specification; while half of the students involved in social worker training courses are less committed to their specification; their commitments can be evaluated as of middle or high level. Neither of the two training programmes can reach results in endearing the professions with students of middle or low commitments, the overall number of 'convinced' students is very low. In essence, the 'purposeful and committed' that is highly motivated students fulfil their own goals set at the commencement at their studies regardless of the training types.

One quarter of the students can be characterized as 'unsure' undergraduates with low level of commitment. This character type is more typical of participants of social worker trainings.

Another type is the ‘trying’ one, consisting of students with low commitment from the beginning of their studies; their goal is merely to obtain a diploma, and they usually want to leave the profession. The effect of professional orientation is more visible at teacher training courses: while the social worker training courses allow the ‘trying’ students to continue their studies and get their diplomas without commitments, the teacher training courses dismiss those students who cannot be convinced about their professional careers. There are more ‘persistent’ and ‘lost the way’ types of students among undergraduates attending teacher training courses than those attending social worker courses. This type is typical of undergraduates with high or middle levels of commitment, becoming uncertain during the course of education. ‘Persistent’ students’ commitments can not be broken down and they plan to start their career as professionals of their fields. ‘Lost the way’ students realize that the chosen training is not suitable for them and they leave the profession.

The results of the survey conducted in the territory of ‘Partium’ with the participation of students attending teacher and social worker courses do not allow us to draw general conclusions. The analysis of professional orientations and its findings, however, provide help in the two groups’ professional socialization; moreover, the achievements serve as good starting points for further professional investigations.

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