

Social Pedagogy Majors in Tertiary Education and the Labour Force Market

A, Objectives of the paper, defining the topic

The primary objective of the paper is to present the results of an empiric study with exploratory aims. It wishes to give an accurate overview of the students of a specific area, who are barely known by the public, who are situated in the lower segment of the differentiated, multi-sectored tertiary education.

For the fact that in Hungary the social branch could only later become a real profession as compared to other intellectual professions, the particular political and social conditions of the past decades are to be blamed. However, after the political change in 1989 social trainings were unfolding rapidly, not only providing fresh supply, but as it is clear from the above mentioned, also compensating for the lack.

Social and children welfare regulations introduced in the 90s provided new dimensions in helping those who need it (Herzog 19979). Besides the institutions inherited from the past, often modified or supplemented by new ones, new programs have been established, which are – in contrast to the former bureaucratic authorities – client-oriented and preventive, thus requiring a more complex and more efficient approach from the helping professionals, and at the same time increasing the demand for professionals with social degrees.

The expansion of the social pedagogue training coincided with the significant changes in the Hungarian society moving towards market economy, which affected the sub-system of tertiary education. Dramatic changes in the employment structure have called for new life strategies, in which more and more people regard obtaining a degree as an essential condition of having better chances in life, and achieving a higher status. Social demand for higher

education has increased to an extent never experienced before. We must interpret the phenomenon of mass education of the investigated major in this social context. Social pedagogy has become a popular major in a short period of time, especially among those who study besides working. Several factors have contributed to this fact: a labour force-, market demand seemingly more secure than the average in the early years; the nomination and the novelty of the major, allowing for meeting various expectations with its indefinite boundaries/profile; schooling strategy of the training institutions including the definition and facilitation of the entrance criteria; and last but not the special, physical availability of training places allowing for minimising the costs. This already foreshadows which layers' further education strategy includes the possibility of obtaining a social pedagogy degree. Positions that can be fulfilled with such a degree belong to average positions with the promise of 'market return'. This degree does not lead to the world of competition, nor to well-paid civil servant jobs, therefore it cannot be a target for children from consistently well-off families, however for social groups with fewer sources, thinking of further education on the spot, completing this major offers upwards professional mobility.

The training, considered young and new in the Hungarian tertiary education has deserved to be the focus of attention from different points of view. From among all the possible aspects of investigation I have primarily emphasised those which are most affected by the extensive expansion of the major. Thus the focal points were the investigation of the major's recruiting basis, the motivation of the students, their opinion about the training, the increments brought about by the years spent in the training, and the issues of joining the labour force market.

One focal point of the paper is **the presentation of the major's expansion process**, demonstration of the increase from different aspects, which are often

discussed by the literature in connection with expansion. (Th Green 1980) Having a look at the history of the major, we can trace the quantitative increase of the target group, faculties and institutions in time in a concentrated way. Specific institutions have been investigated in a geographical point of view, considering their area of attraction, thus giving an overview of the regional distribution of students.

Another focal point was the investigation of the **recruitment of students**. The new training has brought about 'empty statuses', new vacancies in higher education. The questions are who are attracted by the new job, with what social background, to whom it provides the possibility of obtaining a degree, whether the composition of the participants prove the decrease in educational inequality. We were interested to know what social, demographical, location aspects are characteristic of those choosing the major, what **motivational stock** they have to enter the training, what extrinsic/intrinsic motivational factors lie at the roots of their decision, to what degree was their choice well-founded. Does their approach to the choice of the career change during the training? How strong is their intention to actually work in their chosen profession? Who are those who want to be social pedagogue for sure, what distinctive characteristics do they have?

One consequence of the expansion of tertiary education is that the motivations of applying for admittance have become heterogeneous, as well. It is worth continuing one's studies in the tertiary education even without aiming at a specific career, since it can be considered as a kind of investment

From the point of view of the training institutions, and mainly of the profession it does count what proportion of the students apply for admittance only as a means, and stay in the career only as a necessity. The motivation of students acts as a filter as well, namely which socialising effects directing towards them they let to effectuate.

When investigating recruitment and motivation we must remember that we are investigating a **‘typically’ female profession**. The popular public opinion still exists that this kind of work requires less expertise, and mostly the kinds of ability, aptitude and characteristic that are more likely to be possessed by women than by men. (Stiegler 1994) Besides, the salary available in ‘feminine’ careers also defines which gender is more likely to choose such a career. The paper includes the relationship between genders and the career, their proportion from the beginning until now.

The **opinions of the students** make up a separate part. What are the training and the assessment of the training like from the students’ point of view? What do they think about the content, material and personal conditions of their training? What is their opinion about the quantitative and qualitative components of the study material, the importance of certain elements, the relations of practice and theory, the development of certain skills and competencies? What do they consider as the positive and negative sides of their training?

We did not intend to make an order between the different institutions based upon their answers. Our main aim was to investigate the students’ opinion in connection with the content part of the training. The opinion and criticism of students often include useful elements, which can be well adopted in up-dating the study material of a training that has already passed its initial period of defining itself.

The research also included the **weighing of the major in the labour force market**. Graduate students were questioned how they managed to enter the world of labour. What branches, what positions they were able to enter, obtain, to what extent de-qualification is characteristic among them. () We were interested to know what factors can be contributed to finding a job. To what extent they were satisfied with the various attributes of their current work, and

how they imagine their future career. We also asked what their approach was to their choice of completing the social pedagogy major, how they could reflect on the curriculum (having already work experience). Finally we also include what other personal benefits they could gain from the training, what lasting memories they have from their period of training.

B, Sampling and method of the research

As our aim was to get accurate, trustworthy and valid information— generalising from the above mentioned points of view —, the method of the research was set to this objective. The main method of the research has become the survey, which is suitable to gather data from a large number of samples. It has been completed by analysing existing statistic data, mainly in connection with the expansion, and the changes in gender profile. Besides these, interviews were used as well, as a supplementary means, partly before the questionnaires to find out relevant questions, partly interpreting and controlling the results.

Sampling was carried out with stratified sampling. 25% of the full-time students, and 15% of the correspondence students were questioned from each academic school year from all the eight training institutions in Hungary. Thus the total number of the surveyed was 925, from which 428 were full-time students, and 497 were correspondence students.

Concerning graduate students, every fourth was chosen from those completing their studies between 1994 and 2001 by systematic random sampling. Surveying was carried out by post, the number of respondents was 246. The research was carried out during the academic year 2001/02. In the case of full-time and correspondence students the research can be regarded as representative. Representativity in the case of graduate students has been defected to the extent that in one institution there was no access to the data of students graduating in the last two years surveyed. This information was replaced by students from the

two institutions closest geographically. Data processing was carried out by the SPSS program.

C, Results

Based on the received data we can say that the increase in the number of students on certain areas, their motivations for choosing an area, their uncertainty regarding their choice, their weighing on the labour force market can only be interpreted in the complex correspondence of social reproducing correlations. We cannot deny the necessity of adapting to the demands of the labour force market, but we must also see that over-qualification does not have only negative aspects.

The training structure still existing today was formed in the mid 90s. According to the latest data about 7000 students learn in the eight colleges. The constantly increasing number of students shows that there is still a solid demand for this major. The number of students admitted to the first year was rising for several years, then settled at different levels in different institutions. The number of students is the highest in the colleges that could not expand their pedagogue training profile with other kinds of training. The majority of the institutions started with full-time student training, and after some years they started correspondence trainings as well. The number of correspondence students is higher in all institutions than that of full-time ones, their proportion is about 71%.

The high number of correspondence students means various things from various points of view. Concerning the prestige of the profession, we must face a certain unfavourable tendency. On the other hand, concerning those taking part in the training, the possibility of a correspondence course means – broadly interpreting – a chance for mobility, for obtaining or keeping a desired position, or at least the hope for these.

Similarly to the tendency experienced in the tertiary education as a whole, the number of students paying a fee has risen on the major surveyed as well. Among

correspondence students this proportion is 35%, among full-time students, 7%. Based upon our research paying a fee is significantly related to gender. Among male students 61.5% pays a fee, while among women only 26.7%. There is one more significant difference between those paying a fee and the rest of the sample, namely those having completed their secondary school leaving exam on a part-time course are overrepresented.

The majority of students are admitted to the chosen institution at the first trial, which is mostly the one closest to their habitat.

In the context of settlements and settlement types it means that the expansion of the major clearly favoured the population of small towns and settlements. The distribution of students based on their permanent habitat reflects the location and the capacity of the institutions. Regarding the distribution upon counties, on full-time course Győr–Sopron–Moson, on correspondence course Hajdú–Bihar counties have the highest number of social pedagogues per 1000 inhabitants. The concentration around the residence of these institutions foreshadows difficulty in finding a job.

Concerning gender proportions, they are defined by the correspondence students due to their overrepresentation in number. Among correspondence students the proportion of males increased by the turn of the century from the mid 90s, but this increase has proved transitional. The proportion of males has started to decrease again. Concerning full-time students the expansion of training has not resulted in a modification of the proportion of male students either. The social pedagogue major has thus stayed a typically female profession

In the social background of male and female students we have found a rather significant difference among full-time students. A higher number of full-time male students come from families where both, but at least one of the parents are graduates.

Less strict entrance criteria and the expansion of the correspondence training favoured mainly those male students, who were less successful in their secondary education for some reason.

Regarding the parents' qualifications together has proved to be a wise decision in general. If we have a look at the parents' qualifications separately, we can say that the most frequent categories among fathers are the skilled workers, and among mothers secondary grammar school leaving examination. Among part-time students the skilled worker qualification is the most frequent for both parents, closely followed the mothers' secondary technical school qualification. The slightly different family background between the two kinds of students is shown by the above mentioned, but we wish to emphasise that beside skilled worker fathers we can see a more highly qualified mother, mostly ones having a secondary school leaving examination, not rarely graduate ones. This fact shades our knowledge of the family background of those admitted to the major.

Among full-time students three-quarters of them come from families where at least one parent has a secondary school leaving exam, among correspondence students about two-thirds. It means that mostly those are admitted to the major, whose one parent's lower education is compensated by the other parent's higher one. The parents' qualifications were compared with their proportion in the population of the relevant age-group. Based on this we can say – regardless the complicated multi-dimensional social situation – that primarily students coming from families of mainly secondary education – skilled workers and ones having secondary school leaving exam regard this training an opportunity of obtaining a degree.

Relatively few come from consistently well-off families, i.e. supplied with various kinds of capital. Even those having a degree are not well supplied with capital of a financial dimension. We cannot find well-off families even among the entrepreneurs. Most of them are self-employed tradesmen working in

traditional industrial services, constructions without any employees.

The majority of graduate mothers are pedagogues with a college degree. Graduate fathers show a more varied distribution. There are few pedagogues amongst them.

There is a visible difference in some aspects (financial situation, student work, type of settlement and their employment) between students coming from the few families where the parents have a college degree, and where they have a university degree. This fact is valid both in the case of fathers and mothers as well. Those having a college degree are closer in characteristics to those having a secondary school education. A significantly higher number of the few students whose parents have a university degree find a job in their profession, and they are underrepresented in dequalified positions. Their better capital of relations can play an important role in both facts.

It has proved clear that we must differentiate between choosing the major and choosing the profession, since – as we have expected – many have chosen the major as a means of obtaining a degree, not having other alternatives. The institutions have addressed this market demand by increasing the volume of the correspondence training, and what is more they have also acted as a demand increasing factor. This type of question was the most difficult to get employable answers to, as we have expected partly because of the method of investigation, partly because of the shifting, protective (or self-protective) mechanisms of the respondents. Besides the answers considered stereotypical in helping professions, still a considerable number (20 %) admitted to have chosen the major because of some pressure. Based on the received answers we can state for sure that social aspects are more defining than the various dimensions of personality. We can consider it an unfavourable phenomenon that a considerable number of the students – mainly full-time ones – are worried even during the training about being unemployed, they are thinking of leaving the career, and

obtaining a new degree.

Present and past students have relatively similar opinions concerning the evaluation of the training, the relationship between theory and practice, the proportion and usefulness of certain subjects, the strengths and weaknesses of the training, though the past students were more willing to give a response. The kinds of answers given by present students were mainly dependent upon their willingness of becoming a social pedagogue. The responses of past students were not in connection with the type of work they were doing. It was considerably agreed on that the main strength of the training is the wide range of subjects provided, the various kinds of knowledge, the approach of the training, and the beneficial influence it all has on the students' personal development and way of thinking.

The majority would love to learn more psychology, some more sociology and social work. Mainly full-time students complain about the so-called 'filler subjects' (like music, visual pedagogy, sports pedagogy. They also share the view that more time should be spent fieldwork, and practical training should be more efficient. Among weakness the most outstanding is that the training is superficial and immature, there is much uncertainty concerning the relevant subject contents, and it does not develop competencies necessary for practice.

Concerning the competitiveness of the training on the labour force market, we can state that the social pedagogy degree meets the need of having a chance in the competition for jobs. As the data show, the rate of being unemployed is not different from that of other kinds of degrees.

Data are more depressing if we have a look at the rate of finding a job in the profession (43.5%), and of working in a position where being considered overqualified (22.7%). Graduates working as pedagogues – being double majors – can use their training in an indirect way. Finding a job in the profession is significantly in connection with dedication towards the profession and gender.

There are fewer men working in positions specifically connected to the training. Children and youth protection funds, and welfare services can be considered the biggest market for providing a job in the profession. One quarter of the graduates could find a job in these areas.

Unemployment is significant with the type of settlement and the qualification of the parents together, i.e. more characteristic of students living in small settlements and coming from families of lower education.

Finding a job as a social pedagogue is not pervasive, only few are willing to make personal sacrifices, including moving to another settlement, in order to find a job in their profession. Their main reason is that they are not willing to scarify their relationship network.

Three-tenths of the surveyed would like to change their jobs in the near future. The willingness to change work is closely related to the type of work. Mainly those are willing to change jobs who do not have any connection between their qualifications and their present job. Obtaining a new/second degree is an alternative for more than half of the surveyed. Actually about one-tenth of them have already obtained a second degree, mostly one that can be used in the national administration, 8% of the surveyed were actually studying at a tertiary institution.

Revealing their approach to their training, nearly half of the surveyed said that they would not complete this major again, despite being aware of the increments of the training, and acknowledging its positive aspects.

It is true that the social pedagogy training is a tertiary form of professional education, the received data underline its strength of its average training function.

It provides a universal education of human and social studies, improves the tudents' self-knowledge, being practice-oriented it presents real life situations, difficulties, thus promoting the strengthening of problem solving competency. What is more, it develops the relationship network, can be a stepping-stone to a

second degree, i.e. arms the students with sources. This additional increment plays an especially important role in the life of the students who bring less cultural capital from their family, for whom being a college student means encountering new sub-cultures, life-styles, habits, thus promoting to a strong middle-class in society.

On one hand dequalification can be considered an existing problem, on the other hand – mainly on an individual level – we must not forget about the ‘external’ benefits overreaching professional training goals, which improve the quality of life and chances for a better life. These could legitimate the training even if the students’ expectations of finding a job are not met in the short term.

Based on the received data we can say that the increase in the number of students on certain areas, their motivations for choosing an area, their uncertainty regarding their choice, their weighing on the labour force market can only be interpreted in the complex correspondence of social reproducing correlations. We cannot deny the necessity of adapting to the demands of the labour force market, but we must also see that over-qualification does not have only negative aspects.

D, Publikations

Hochschulausbildung Im Sozial- und Gesundheitswesen unter geanderten Bedingungen in Ungarn. Jahrbuch 2000.Hochschule Wismar.

Who are the social pedagogy training chosen by and why? The results of a Hungarian survey. Social work Education, (review in process)