

## PLANNING CAREER IN SERBIA: WHICH FACTORS ARE IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31410/EMAN.2018.502>

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**Abstract:** *The beginning of the 21st century in Serbia was characterized by numerous social changes which overwhelmed economic and educational sphere. Transformation from socialist to capitalist mode of production brought with it uncertain economic situation, high unemployment rate, as well growing mismatch between educational system and labor market. Simultaneously with economic changes in Serbia, educational system reforms were implemented which concerned changes in curricula, introduction of new subjects in elementary and secondary education, as well as implementation of Bologna process in higher education. Taking into account this social context, we wanted to find out which factors young people in Serbia perceive as important for fulfillment of their career aspirations. Furthermore, we investigated to what extent perceived factors are connected with class position young people strive for. For the purpose of this paper, the data obtained in the research "Education and transition towards adulthood in young people's visions about future in Serbia and Slovenia" are used. In this research, 1946 final year students from 99 secondary schools in Serbia participated. More precisely, the used data are obtained by using Likert scale which tests the effect of every single factor (personal abilities, knowledge obtained during formal education; knowledge and experience obtained out of formal education; hard work and devotion; parents' expectations; expectations of peers and friends; parents' financial situation; parents' connections and acquaintances; economic circumstances in the country; employment prospects; luck) for fulfillment of young people's career goals. Research data show that young people in Serbia perceive personal abilities alongside with hard work and devotion as the most important factors which might influence their career. Additionally, the knowledge which students obtained during and out of formal education is proved to be very significant. However, it is important to note that 74% of respondents consider that knowledge obtained informally will have valuable asset on their career. Meanwhile, the smaller number of respondents thinks that the knowledge obtained in formal education (66%) will have significant impact. Concerning economic factors, around half of young people (51%) believe that parents' financial situation will affect fulfillment of their career goals, while slightly more than one third of respondents (37%) perceive economic circumstances in the country as important. Research affirmed that statistically significant differences exist between students which strive towards different class positions: young people who see themselves in professional occupations consider more factors related to personal abilities, hard work and devotion, as well as knowledge obtained in formal education, while students who expect to occupy positions of qualified workers appreciate more factors related to parents' connections and acquaintances, parents', peers' and friends' expectations as well as luck. Persons who strive to professional occupations believe more in their abilities which is in line with existing individualist values which are promoted in the contemporary labor market.*

**Key words:** *young people, Serbia, career, education.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the 21st century in Serbia was characterized by numerous social changes which overwhelmed economic and educational sphere. Those changes have been affected by global economic crisis, flexible labor market and a mismatch between labor market and educational system. Besides those global factors, economic and educational sphere in Serbia are influenced by specific local factors. Starting from 1990s, Serbia has begun the process that is usually referred to as post-socialist transformation or transition. Post-socialist transformation can be defined as radical system change of society that is transforming from socialism to capitalism, i.e. as „series of changes in social system and social structure that marks crisis of reproduction of socialist mode of production“ [1].

### *Social changes in Serbia: economic sphere*

Most of the post-socialist societies have problems with reestablishing economy, institutions and value systems based on new grounds, and Serbian society is no exception. Furthermore, Serbian society had specific and slower path toward establishing new system, since it has been burdened with pauperization, wars, isolation, sanctions and state regulation of economy that prevented privatization.

Some authors claim that transformation in Serbia differed from most of other post-socialist countries and that two phases can be distinguished. The first phase is called „blocked transformation“ and during this phase multi-party system and market economy were introduced, but the full introduction of market economy was delayed by state interference. The second phase that has started from the year 2000 and is usually referred to as „unblocked transformation“, is characterized by rapid introduction of market economy and its institutions[2].

During the second „unblocked“ phase of transformation, Serbia opened up its economy and started the processes of integration into international organizations (Serbia rejoined UN in year 2000 and oriented towards joining EU). In this period GDP begun rising (up until 2008 and the start of global financial crisis) and inflation was restrained. Social structure started transforming towards typical capitalist social structure: new elites appeared (most of the members of the new elites used to be members of elite during socialist period as well, but the mode of production of elites changed), while middle class position was improved (which was very poor during the 1990s). On the other hand, material inequalities rose as well as cross-class differences[3]. In

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these new conditions social mobility has decreased and social classes begun closing. [4]. The collapse of the economic sector has influenced the rise of unemployment which led to the impoverishment of the population. These structural changes are affecting the lives of youth as well (their educational chances, place in the labor market, lifestyle). Some of the consequences of these new conditions on the lives of youth are difficult transition from education to labor and severe competition in the labor market [5].

### *Social changes in Serbia: educational sphere*

In the pedagogical literature, one can often come across Mladen Radulović, M.A in sociology, currently a Ph.D. candidate in the department of Sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. Working as a Research Assistant at the Institute for Educational Research and being engaged in the organization of lectures at the Faculty of Philosophy on the subject Sociology of Education. Main interests are: Sociology of Education, educational aspirations of pupils, correlation between cultural capital and educational practices. the stand that education should respond to changes in the society. However, the question is whether that is really possible. Contemporary society is changing at high speed and education is a big system which is not always capable to respond to those rapid changes. Due to these changes in the system of production, Post-Fordism is characterized by: the rise of the service workers, new information technologies, and economies of scope. This kind of production requires different profile of workers in comparison to the Fordist production; therefore, when it comes to the education, it is usually argued that in order to achieve economic success, country must have highly educated and flexible labor force [6]. In the same vein, it is usually claimed that in order to be able to operate in ever-changing economy people must have high quality general education, and that development of intellectual abilities has much greater importance than deployment of competences for particular occupation [6].

In order to respond to the requirements created by economic changes in Serbia, from 2001 onwards a profound educational reform has been established. The educational system reforms have been implemented concerning changes in curricula, introduction of new subjects in elementary and secondary education, as well as implementation of Bologna process in higher education. The new curriculum has been introduced and old ones reformed, occupational/educational standards defined, the modular approach to education set up, the scope of practical education and professional practice increased. Furthermore, schools' buildings have been reconstructed and school workshops equipped, while more attention is being paid to teachers' training. Also, one of the important changes was the establishment of sturdier connection between secondary schools and social partners [7]. Moreover, in that period, the National framework of qualifications started to develop, but that document is still unfinished.

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In Serbia today there is a big gap between what educational system offers to the students as future employees and the demand in the labor market. One of the important shortcomings of secondary education in Serbia is inadequate structure of enrollment quotas and a mismatch between educational profiles and economic structure on one hand and its needs on the other [8]. This means that students are educated for profiles for which there is no need or there are surplus workers in the labor market. At the same time, there is not enough enrollment for certain craft occupations which are needed in the labor market. Therefore, enrollment policy for secondary schools is not coordinated with conditions in the labor market. Concretely, the biggest enrollment rate is in the sectors of economy, law and administration, but this working area has very high unemployment rate. The number of students who wishes to enroll to the 4-year vocational schools is higher than the available capacities, while 3-year vocational schools have significantly higher capacities than the existing students' demand.

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## METHODOLOGY

Taking into consideration aforementioned social context which is characterized by uncertainty and young people's inability to plan their future, we are interested in analyzing in which ways this context influences career visions of students of the final year of secondary education in Serbia. Concretely, we investigated which factors young people in Serbia perceive as important for fulfilling their career aspirations. We were particularly interested in how young people estimate the importance of knowledge they obtained during formal education in relation to the other important factors. Furthermore, we explored to what extent perceived factors are connected with class position young people strive for.

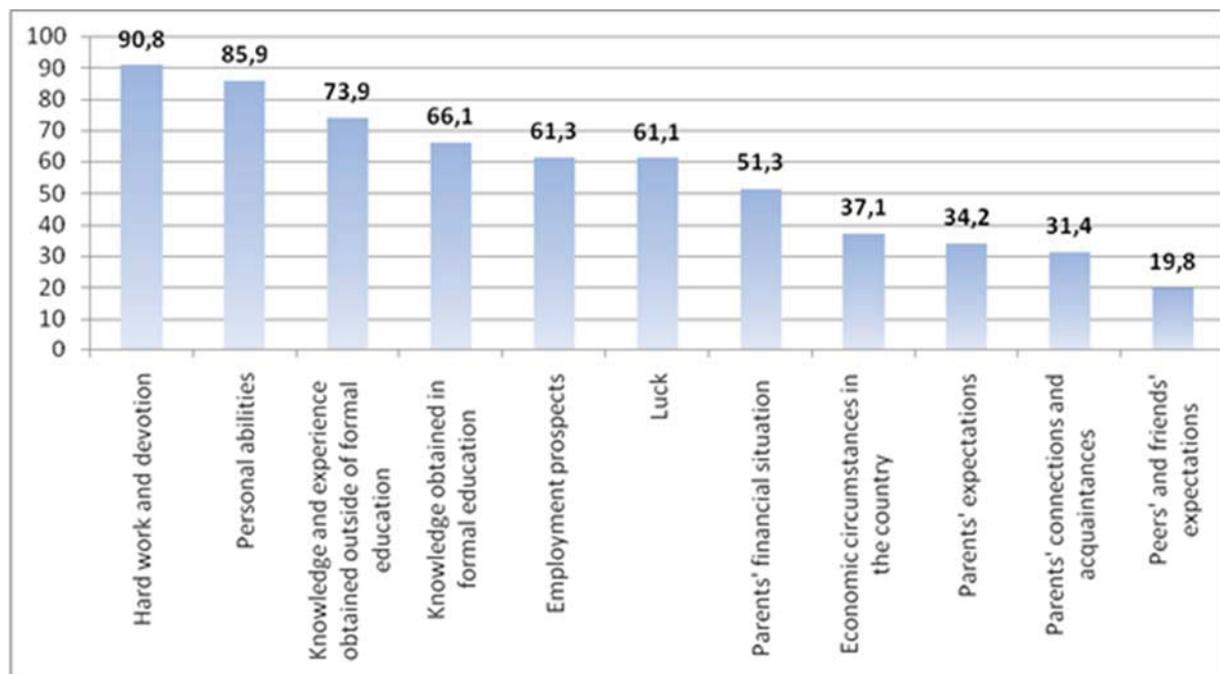
For the purpose of this paper, the data obtained in the research "Education and transition towards adulthood in young people's visions about future in Serbia and Slovenia" are used. In this research 1946 final year students from 99 secondary schools in Serbia participated. The used data are obtained by using Likert scale which tests the effect of every single factor (personal abilities, knowledge obtained during formal education; knowledge and experience obtained out of formal education; hard work and devotion; parents' expectations; expectations of peers and friends; parents' financial situation; parents' connections and acquaintances; economic circumstances in the country; employment prospects; luck) which is perceived as important for fulfillment of young people's career goals.

We observed young people's career plans through class position they strive for, which is operationalized by occupational structure. In order to determine class position young people strive for, we used responses on two open-ended questions which were in connection to desired occupation and its description, as well as closed-ended question which referred to desired educational level. Based on those responses, we classified respondents into one of the class position of the 7-degree scale: agriculturers, unqualified workers, qualified workers, technicians and clerks, professionals, lower-higher and upper-higher class [3]. Since the answers were

concentrated around the three middle class positions, for the analysis we used only answers of respondents who chose the most frequent answers. For data analysis, descriptive statistics and variance analysis (Bonferroni test) were used.

## RESULTS

Investigating factors which young people in Serbia perceive as important for the fulfillment of their career aspirations, it is noticed that more than half of respondents observe the high influence of following factors: hard work and devotion, personal abilities, knowledge obtained during formal education, knowledge and experience obtained out of formal education, employment prospects, luck, parents' financial situation (in the Graph 1 factors are ranked according to the proportion of respondents which find them important).



Graph 1: Factors which influence fulfillment of career goals according to significance

Research data show that young people in Serbia perceive as the most important factors which might influence their career those related to their own personality such as hard work and devotion (91%) and personal abilities (86%). Additionally, the knowledge which students obtained during and out of formal education is proved to be very significant. However, it is important to note that 74% of respondents consider that knowledge obtained informally will prove to be valuable asset to their career. Meanwhile, the smaller number of respondents thinks that the knowledge obtained in formal education (66%) will have significant impact on their professional development. Concerning economic factors, around half of young people (51%) believe that their parents' financial situation will affect fulfillment of their career goals, while slightly more than one third of respondents (37%) perceive as important economic circumstances in the country. Nevertheless, even though, economic circumstances are not perceived as too important, the employment prospects are recognized as a factor which can significantly influence future career of youth (61%). Furthermore, young people in Serbia proved their independence in making decisions about their career, meaning that parents' and peers' expectations are seen as the least important factors. It is interesting to point out that 61% of respondents consider that the luck will affect the fulfillment of career goal to greater or lesser extent.

Therefore, findings show that young people mostly trust themselves and their abilities and they do not rely on parents' help and support. Furthermore, research data point out that, from the young people's perspective, formal education in Serbia loses its influence comparing to informal modes of education. The reason for that we can find in a mismatch between educational system and needs of the labor market, i.e. young people consider that educational system in Serbia does not offer functional knowledge which would be useful in building their career.

The second goal of our research was to investigate in which extent perceived factors are linked to the class position young people strive for. Using variance analysis, we affirmed that statistically significant differences exist between students which strive towards different class positions. This difference is observed within all factors except those which are related to parents' financial situation and economic conditions in the country (Table 1.).

<b>Factors</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Personal abilities	18,100	,000
Knowledge and experience obtained outside of formal education	3,359	,035
Knowledge obtained in formal education	3,311	,037
Hard work and devotion	18,426	,000
Parents' expectations	17,447	,000
Peers' and friends' expectations	17,881	,000
Parents' financial situation	,318	,728
Parents' connections and acquaintances	21,906	,000
Economic circumstances in the country	,818	,441
Employment prospects	3,838	,022
Luck	5,634	,004

Table 1: Desired class position and perceived factors

Further comparisons showed that young people who see themselves in professional occupations regard more factors related to personal abilities, hard work and devotion, as well as knowledge obtained in formal education comparing to their peers who see their future class position among technical and working occupations. Therefore, on one side, young people who see themselves in professional occupations consider that their class position mostly depend on themselves, i.e. factors on which they have direct influence. On the other side, students who expect to occupy positions of qualified workers appreciate more factors related to parents' connections and acquaintances, as well as parents', peers' and friends' expectations and luck. Those results highlight the fact that young people who strive towards lower class positions state that factors on which they do not have influence are more important (luck, influence of immediate surroundings: parents, peers, friends).

## CONCLUSIONS

Post-socialist transformation brings along uncertain economic situation, high unemployment rate and influence on aforementioned mismatch between educational system and the labor market. Young people are aware that formal education and knowledge is insufficient thus they value more knowledge obtained informally. Furthermore, skills related to the ability to adjust in the flexible labor market are also appreciated. Moreover, as previous analysis based on same data showed, as a consequence of uncertain context in which they take decision about their

career, around 20% of students is not sure which occupation they want to pursue [9]. Results also indicate that career and educational aspirations of young people are tightly connected with their current social position [10]. Having that in mind, it is significant to observe young people's career plans and relate class position they strive for with factors they consider important for the realization of those career plans. In that manner, the mechanism used to interpret and perceive career opportunities and ambitions in existing economic and social contexts is portrayed. Likewise, analyzed factors interfere with the reproduction of social stratification system. Persons who strive to professional occupations believe more in their abilities which is in line with the existing individualist values which are promoted in contemporary labor market. Hence, we can conclude that students who strive towards professional occupations (and whose parents presumably already occupy higher positions) accept better the existing ideological matrix of the emerging capitalist system in Serbia.

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