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The Sense of Chances in Life of the Students of a Private University School

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THE SENSE OF CHANCES IN LIFE OF THE STUDENTS OF A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL

1. Introduction

Although private university schools have existed in Poland for fifteen years, their students are still a poorly known group. The study that I have performed does not aim to describe this social category in detail, I have dealt with a study of a fragment of the students' reality – the sense of life chances as far as private university education is concerned.

To start with I would like to explain what I will mean by **the sense of life chances**. The term of a “sense” suggests an emotional factor, yet it will be here understood as a connection of two aspects – emotional and cognitive. It seems that in the situation of evaluation of our position in society and of the possibility to migrate in it, emotional and so-called reasoning elements influence it unavoidably, yet not always equally. I am not endowed with the competence to measure the relations (psychologists deal with that) and it is not the purpose of the given study. I would merely like to notice that it were both the factors that certainly influenced the fact how the researched group “senses” their life chances. Therefore, the sense will be understood here as a subjective evaluation of their own chances, filtered through experience, emotions and cognitive possibilities.

I will understand the term of life chances, present for so long in sociology, as *the likelihood that a person of a given status will reach a specific goal or experience a specific failure*¹. The aim will be here to achieve the planned, expected position in society, especially in reference to professional position (which is in turn connected with the possibility of gaining various goods). I deliberately use the term of a planned, expected position, not a “better” one, since I want to avoid the simple association with improving our position. In the research, I treat “success” as the fulfillment of my plans, which does not have to be synonymous with a rise in position, but e.g. with keeping the present

¹ R. Meighan, *Socjologia edukacji*, Toruń 1993, p. 327.

one (the situation of people that have worked for a long time and have to educate themselves to keep their work and post).

From conversations with students conducted by me in relation to the didactic work there can be drawn conclusions that the context of education in a private school can influence this sense. It is connected with encountering negative opinions of private education, views that paying for university education is paying for the diploma, good grades without the necessary work. Even though such pathologies exist², transmitting it to the whole private university education seems an overstretched simplification, what is more, a socially negative one. As much as the stigma put on individual schools can bring profit to some, the generalizations, negative labels put on private schools in advance, can harm both the ones that study there and the whole local community. A student, having graduated from such a school, can face obstacles from which the school was supposed to free them – resentment and disbelief in their qualifications. These external, “objective” obstacles can be multiplied by subjective barriers – the sense of little life chances, and as a result, a fall in motivation and ambition. What is more, the community where the university is located will “devoid itself” from an institution that could contribute to its development, not only by absorbing and transforming the young part of the community into a more useful one for themselves and others (the development of human potential), but also by building social potential and prestige of the specific place.

The value of university education today is also reflected in the creation of “the proper” attitude to the world, one that will help young people to deal with the condition of constant and sudden change. Education at the university level is not only achieving knowledge. It also gives access to various views, people with whom a young man could otherwise not meet (lecturers and students), it is taking part in actions they would not otherwise deal with. Modern world requires first of all openness and flexibility (the features of the so-called modern personality according Alex Inkeles³), which cannot be learned by closing in a specific environment. Simultaneously, in today’s economic situation, where work needs constantly more time and involvement not to be promoted but to keep it (and to earn one’s living) – to my mind work itself does not always contribute to such development. It rather leads to the development of reserve and to avoiding risk, without which, in today’s world, success is impossible. Therefore, universities, both private and public, have an important task apart from educating – developing in the young generation the right features (such as an open mind to innovation and change, prospective orientation, the sense of subject power, anticipating events and planning future actions⁴).

² Comp. K. Wasielewski, *Niepubliczne szkoły wyższe w Polsce*, “Kultura i Edukacja” 2001, no. 2.

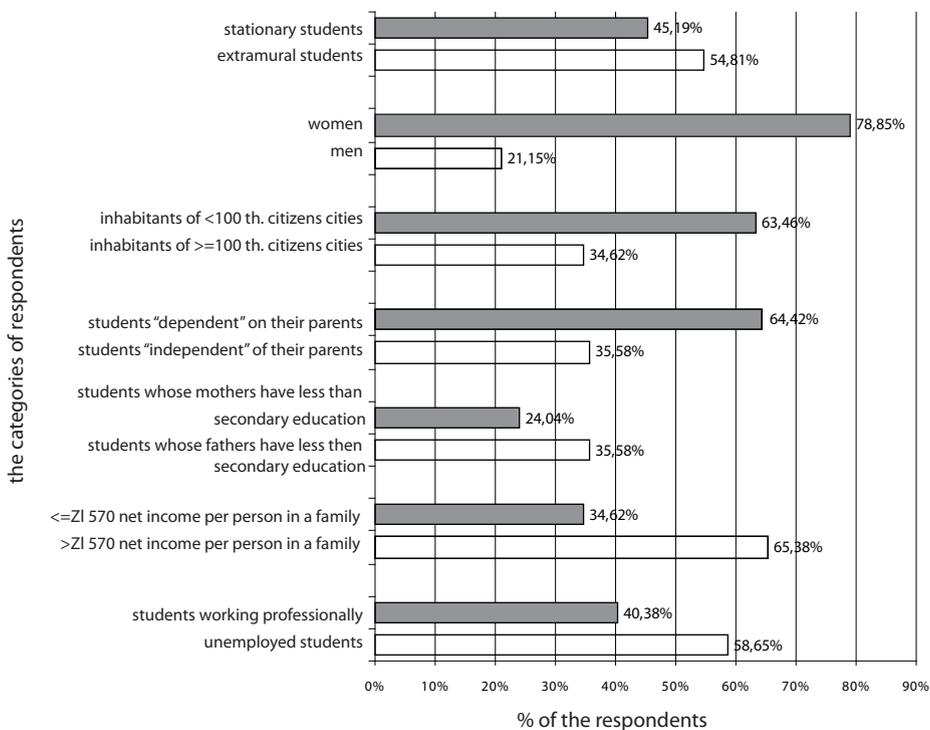
³ P. Sztompka, *Socjologia*, Kraków 2002, pp. 564–567.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 565–567.

2. The method and organization of research. Characterizing the researched

This research is a pilot study to a bigger project that analyses the sense of life chances of private universities students. It was conducted in May 2006, on a group of 104 students of the third year of Bachelor-degree stationary and extramural studies in pedagogy of one of private schools in a voivodeship city (this group constitutes 35,49% of the whole population of the third year students at this university). The study was performed using a survey-quantitative method, in an auditory way on the present group of students.

The characteristics of the respondents



In the researched group, stationary students constitute 45,19%, and the extramural ones – 54,81%, which practically reflects the proportion of the features in the whole population of third-year students at this university. It is worth noticing, since even a few years ago it was said that the number of extramural students seriously exceeded the number of stationary ones in private schools⁵. Therefore, I paid extra attention to this feature.

⁵ Comp. K. Wasilewski, op.cit.

Women in the group constitute 78,85%, and men – 21,15% (which also reflects the proportion in the whole researched population). Most of the studied people were born in 1984 and inhabit cities (74,04%), 25,95% of the researched live in the countryside. Most of them come from small or middle-sized towns (up to 100 thousand inhabitants), i.e. 63,46% of the respondents (2 people did not give the size of their place of living – that is why the numbers do not sum up to 100%).

Most of the respondents (64,42%) still live in their “family home” and are dependent on their parents, others have become independent” of them. 40,48% of the respondents claim to have a job, 23,88% of whom are the “dependent” students (dependent on their parents): 29,73% of the “independent” students do not have a job.

An important factor to the presented data is a characteristic of the families from which the respondents come. As many as 41,35% of them come from families where one or both parents have lower than secondary education (18,27% from families where both parents have lower than secondary education). It means 35,58% of fathers with such education, and 24,04% of mothers. It is, to my mind, an important characteristic. The students must have probably been considerably motivated to overcome obstacles, since due to the characteristic of their cultural capital⁶ it was difficult for them to reach this level of education.

A group of people, identified by me as a group of low income (namely such that guarantee a social scholarship and just above this line – i.e. Zł 570 net per person in a family) comes up to 34,62% of the respondents. People with higher income (i.e. above Zł 570 net per person in a family) constitute 65,58% of the researched.

3. “Common” anxiety or not

The main aim of the research was to study the sense of chances as far as the fulfillment of their life plans is concerned. The situation of these people, as I write above, is specific. On the one hand, young people cannot deny the fact that it is the highest possible level of education that guarantees the way to the fulfillment. On the other hand, they face not always positive opinion on the place they study at. In addition to the long-lasting unemployment, the fall of which has not probably been sensed by them, yet, it is not surprising that as many as 42,31% of them experience *fear* when thinking about the future. Only 17,31% feel joy when thinking about it (the rest chose the answer *calm* as defining their state). In the following part of the article I use the terms of fear and anxiety interchangeably, though it is not entirely accurate. However, in the questionnaire of the survey I use the term of fear when thinking about the future. I realize that the usage of the term “anxiety” would probably change the results of the research. Nevertheless, I assume that the general mechanisms that produce such an answer would be

⁶ Comp. *Słownik socjologii i nauk społecznych*, (ed.) G. Marshall, Warszawa 2005, p. 142.

similar – thus the simplification, which, of course I will try to eliminate in the proper study.

In today's "society of risk"⁷ it is difficult to find people that can fully satisfy their need of security. We have probably become already adjusted to anxiety. However, the pessimist attitude to the world of young students must be worrying. Eventually, it can be a source of numerous negative phenomena. If only it was a reserve in commencing action (negative to whole economy), a fall of the motivation to achieve aims that are higher⁸ than basic, a fall in self-esteem. Yet, it must instantly be noticed that this study does not show if the fear is higher or lower than in other groups of young people. Therefore, I will analyze not the level of fear, but the factors that influence its creation and, consequently, can influence the sense of life chances. I will also analyze how it happens that in spite of the fear, youth will still "plan" their future instead of sinking into complete torpor.

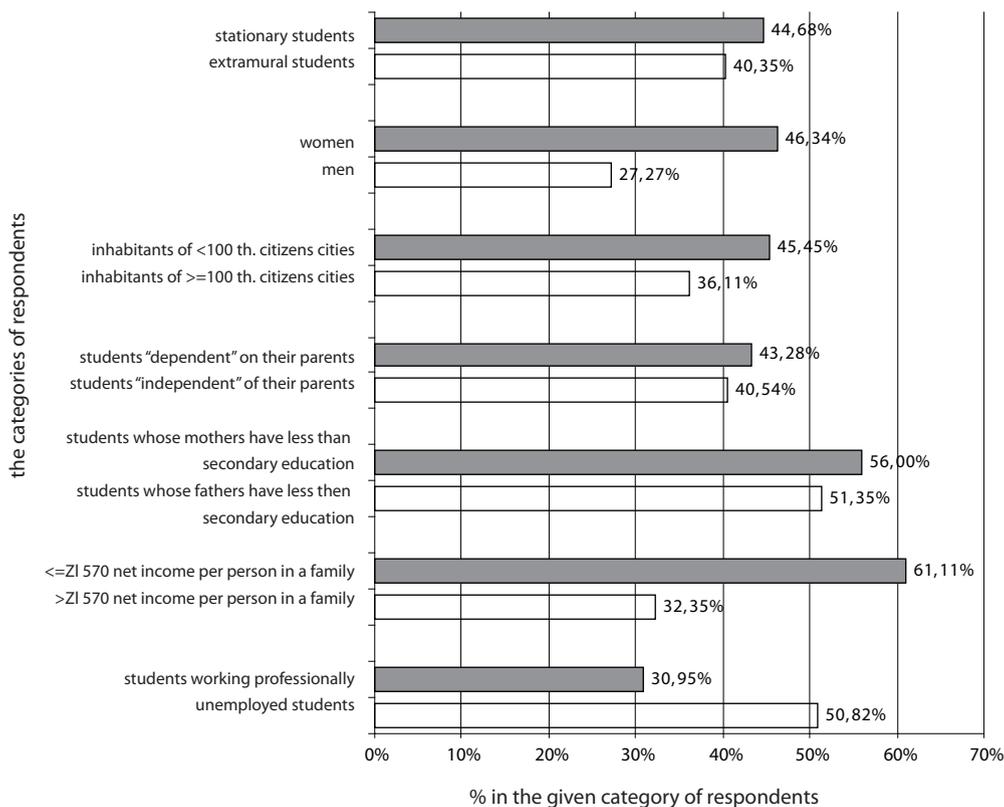
Nevertheless, first, it must be considered which category of the respondents experiences the anxiety in a most powerful way, and which in the least.

As we might have assumed, the strongest anxiety is experienced by people with low income per person in a family – by as many as 61,11% of them (i.e. almost 19 per cent more than among all the surveyed). A similar role is performed here by another common factor – low education of parents, which rises the feeling by 13,69 per cent in case of mothers, and 9,04 in case of fathers with education below secondary level. These are common factors, present in whole society and understandable. The lack of economic or cultural capital is a hindrance in the rivalry for a better position in society, thus evoking insecurity. There is a question, which factors can decrease the insecurity? Once again, there can be seen a co-relation with the previously mentioned elements of capital. Lower fear (9,96 percent lower than the average) is experienced by people with higher income and people from "educated" families. Additionally, it appears that the higher education of a mother does not lower the anxiety. Anxiety falls by 11,06 per cent when a father has university education, and by as many as 25,64 per cent when both parents are educated. These two factors are presumably connected, granting the sense of security and thus rising the motivation⁹ to achieve higher aims and the feeling of causation, eliminating anxiety. Moreover, less anxiety is experienced by men (by 15 per cent), which is probably a reflection of the situation of women in the job market and already employed people (11,36 per cent), among whom the fact of working probably is also a result of the given above theory of motivation.

⁷ Comp. U. Beck, *Spółeczeństwo ryzyka. W drodze do nowoczesności*, Warszawa 2002.

⁸ Comp. M. Maciejewska, *Koncepcja Frederica Herzberga, czyli o zadowoleniu i niezadowoleniu z pracy*, "Personel. Zatrudnianie – Motywowanie – Szkolenie" 2000, no. 5, pp. 16–17.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 16–17.

The experience of fear in thinking about the future ($X=42,31\%$)

In the given situation, it becomes interesting how the respondents evaluate their own life chances in comparison to the time before going to university, as well as whether they see the study in a private university school as their chance or not (and what influences it). However, it must also be analyzed if the respondents follow their declaration as to the actions they consider successful in fulfilling their life aims, since the so-called wishing strategy¹⁰ is an enemy of achievement. Certainly, I will predominantly refer to achieving success in the professional sphere, which today, in the highly professionalized world, for people who do not gain an important economic or cultural capital from their family homes, is the only way of any change of position in the social structure.

¹⁰ Comp. C. Timoszyk-Tomczak, *Strategie konstruowania własnej przyszłości*, Szczecin 2003, pp. 47–48.

4. The present position and plans

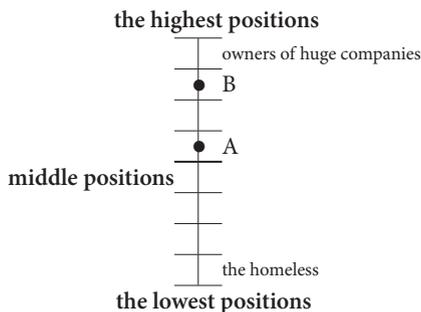
The experience of constant anxiety and the resulting stress¹¹ can be demotivating in consequence, yet the respondents venture into activities to form their future. Youth knows that university education is no longer in the modern world an extravagance reserved only for the interested, but a necessity. Do they really know, though, what to do not to be left behind, not to experience constant fear?

In the beginning I would like to present how I asked the respondents where in their opinion they are situated in society and where they would like to “get”. Realizing that the term of social hierarchy or stratification can be unknown or known insufficiently, I posed the question in the following form:

“Society consists of individuals/groups that are organized hierarchically – some are higher some lower in social hierarchy (thus they have a better or a worse access to various important goods). Taking the above into consideration, please place on the scale that represents Polish society today:

A – yourself today B – the position you would like to finally reach”

Moreover, I added a chart on which I had marked the extreme, it seems, social categories. The respondents place themselves relatively high (A), if the middle of the hierarchy is 0, and its extremes -4 and +4, they placed themselves on 0,11 on average. It can be understandable in people who are independent and have relatively high income, or in “dependent” people whose parents have high incomes or are highly educated (so-called “old intelligence”). Although I used the picture of social-professional variety defined at least eight years ago¹², it appeared that it was not entirely known to the respondents. How else could it be explained that people with low income pointed at a similar position (equal to or above 0) to people with higher income (as many as 94,45% of them), as well as dependent people whose parents are poorly educated (25 such cases!).



¹¹ Comp. G. Mietzel, *Wprowadzenie do psychologii*, Gdańsk 2002, pp. 326–341.

¹² Comp. H. Domański, *Miejsce w szyku*, “Polityka” 1998, no. 9, p. 5.

Therefore, there seems to be a more important question of how many levels the students want to advance. The survey suggests that they want to make a jump over 2,23 of a level on average (B). There are no important differences in the level of this jump between people with a better and worse start (see the paragraph above).

The aim seems to be right, yet do the respondents commence in as ambitious activities so as to be able to fulfil their plans, in spite of various obstacles that they find on their way.

5. Plans and actions

Do the respondents believe that learning and studying alone (*gaining university education itself*) [way no. 1] will guarantee success in the profession they study for? Well, they, rightly, do not. Only 2,88% of the respondents is of the opinion. Most of them bend towards some connection of studying with working – as many as 87,49%.

52,88% percent of the respondents think that the best solution is *to study and start some (even without payment) work – but related to the subject of their study (e.g. Voluntary work, apprenticeship)* [way no. 2]. Such activity adds to formal education a verification of the gained theoretical knowledge, practical experience and additional skill. It is essential in the system of education, in which the programmes prepared in advance change too slowly in relation to the modern world.

Even though the question referred to success only in the specific, chosen profession, and from this point of view the question should be really satisfactory. However, at this point, a certain important phenomenon should be noticed. Today, it is practically impossible to predict exactly what will be happening in economy (and in our professional life) in five years, not to mention in 10 or 15 years. It is rather outdated today to invest in a one-way manner. It is widely known that on today's work market hardly anyone works in one (even in related) profession. Therefore, just as positively, in my opinion, can be evaluated the point of view of the next group of people (27,88% of the respondents), who think that the best solution is *to study and to undertake any work with payment* [way no. 3]. Gaining experience, even not related with the subject of study is in the modern world, I presume, a very rational choice. It is positive to gain as much qualification and experience as possible. In addition, it develops the aforementioned and so inevitable openness and flexibility in attitude to our professional life (as well as to other areas of life) and the habit of constant further education.

Much more rarely chosen means of achieving success in a selected profession are: *to start any job as soon as possible and only after achieving a stable material position to begin education* (6,73% of the respondents) [way no. 4] (here, the distinguished people are independent and working) and *to start working as soon as possible – as much as possible reflecting the most wanted one – and to try and “work out” the success (without starting formal education)* (5,77 of the respondents) [way no. 5].

It is worth noticing here that people who already work and study in the extramural system tended much more frequently to choose the way no. 3, and more seldom the way no. 2 (even about 17 percent less often than the average). Respectively, the unemployed and stationary students chose the opposite (the difference in percent was similar). The ones that work and study in the extramural system, have probably already realized the aforementioned phenomena.

The researched group had started to study, and 58,65% of them earn money at work. All of them had to undergo 15 weeks of apprenticeship and 2 terms of the so-called mid-year practice, which is a part of their curriculum (visits in some institutions, meetings with practitioners, etc.). Is it enough to achieve success today – it is a problematic issue. What I am interested in is whether from the point of view of the respondents, education in a chosen school intensifies their chances in comparison to the period before the beginning of study and in comparison to other groups of young people.

A brief explanation of a particular issue must be given here. Every action will be more successful if it will be found reasonable (also education). It first of all depends on the fact that we lack proper motivation if our action seems nonsensical. Motivation, according to motivation theories, is the product of the value of the outcome of an action and the likelihood of achieving it¹³, and in case of nonsensical action, the score is 0. Secondly, recognizing the usefulness of a particular direction of our actions, here – education, we undertake a lot more, not always conscious actions to fulfill the conviction¹⁴. Therefore, our chances grow even if the circumstances are not entirely supportive.

Basic remains the question whether the researched venture into proper action to make their plans come true, and if graduating from a private university will, in their opinion, contribute to the success or will it raise even stronger anxiety. Perhaps graduating from school is seen as something that simply must be “gone through”, yet without any influence on our life chances? What is it that according to the respondents defines life chances in modern Poland?

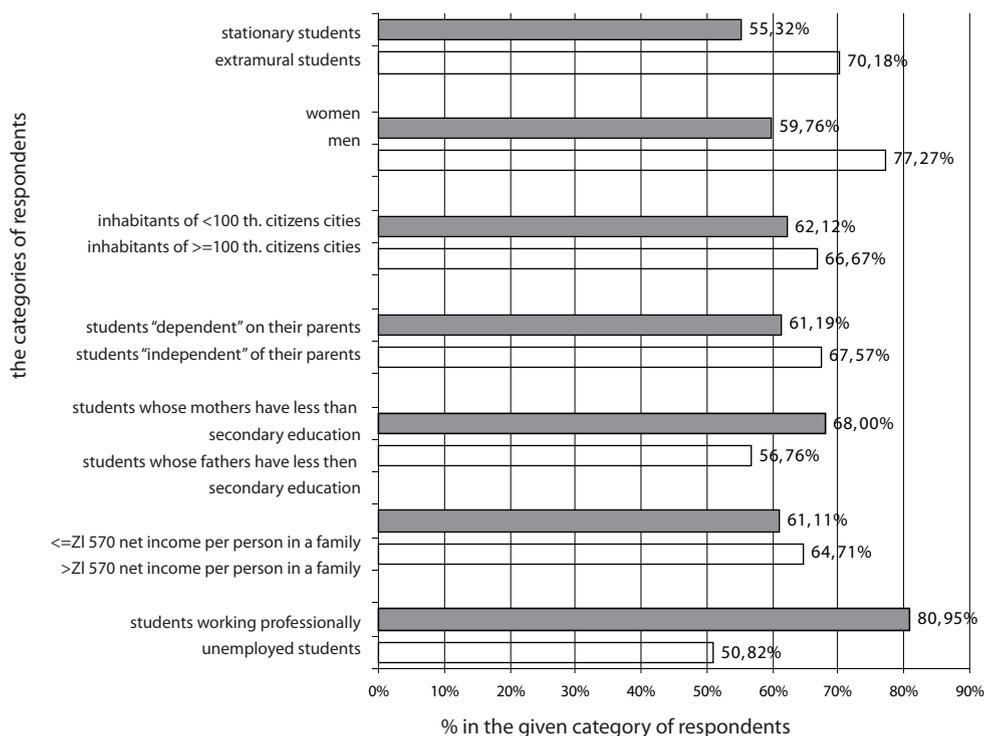
Since the respondents themselves found limiting themselves to formal education alone as not satisfactory today, I also asked them if they got involved in some other, systematic action to fulfil their plans.

The percentage of people that had done it, as far as the above statement is concerned, is not impressive – 63,46%. However, I did not mark in the question whether professional work can be such an action or not (40,38% of the respondents had one), thus the scope of people who undertake such action may be wider (though not necessarily, since among the working people it is the highest anyway – 80,95%). The proper analysis of the state of the matter must be performed further and in more detail, there-

¹³ M. Maciejewska, *Skutek w zależności od celu. Motywowanie na przykładzie koncepcji oczekiwań*, “Personel. Zatrudnianie – Motywowanie – Szkolenie” 2000, no. 8

¹⁴ It is explained in detail by psycho-social theories of self-fulfilling prophecy and cognitive dissonance of Festinger.

The statement of venturing into a systematic action (apart from studying)
to fulfil their life aims (X=63,46%)



fore I will limit to the above. I will only mention that, unfortunately, the stationary students present themselves in a negative manner, as far as the issue is concerned (there is a difference of about 8 per cent in comparison to the average), explaining themselves most often with lack of time (though only 8,5% of them have extra work!) or with the need/necessity to focus on their study. As far as the problem is concerned, extramural students are better disciplined and they undertake such actions more often (which I will mention again later), not excusing themselves with lack of time (though most of them work – 66,67%).

Will the situation change in future? As could be expected, the percent of declarations to take up such action in future rises considerably (on average up to 85,58%), yet, this number is known to change noticeably in realization. However, it is worth pointing out that "fortunately" the percent of stationary students that want to venture into such action rises considerably (it is even higher than the average – 89,36%), though extramural students are not worse (82,46%). More "active plans" characterize the inhabitants of big cities (94,44% of them), yet none of the categories can be distinguished "in minus". It is a very high score, it is widely known, though, that to plan is not enough. A vast

proportion of the respondents did not write what they would like to do, but gave enigmatic answers “courses, trainings”. It should be hoped that the planning process itself will not be too comforting and will not replace the actual actions in future. It is worth making young people realize even more the inevitability of constant self development and of investing in themselves.

Do the respondents think that (due to these and other actions and their own features) they will manage to overcome the difficulties that lay between them and achieving success? As many as 75% said that *definitely* or *rather yes* and none of the categories falls below this level (the citizens of big cities are located even above it). 5,77% claimed that it is *difficult to say*, and 14,42% did not give an answer. Only 4,81% of the respondents chose to say that they will *rather* or *definitely not* overcome them. Where does this pessimism (in the question about the future) come from, then, if obstacles can be overcome? It seems that the respondents are confused in the blurred social and economic situation of Poland, which does not necessarily have to become clearer¹⁵. On the one hand, they experience fear, on the other hand, they know that nobody but them will change their situation. It is impossible, as people once did, to trust the state, the state does not guarantee jobs today. Neither can they stand still, because today it means to fall – the competition on the job market is too strong today (which the respondents themselves notice) to stop running. Therefore, in spite of the fear, everybody runs, though not everyone will arrive at the planned destination.

To fully analyze the rationality and adequacy of the activity commenced by the researched, it must be checked which factors do they consider meaningful to achieve success in life. Even if the consideration is false, acting in accordance with the factors can be viewed as at least partially positive because coherent and rational. Then, the only thing to work on will be to make them realize the real factors, and motivation will already exist. If the consciousness of factors remains contrary to actions, it may, unfortunately, mean lack of the right motivation, lack of self-belief, etc., which requires a more serious interference, and is much more difficult to change.

The respondents were given 14 factors to evaluate, among which were present the typical ascribed factors (parents' education, parents' material status, the place of living, ethnic origin, handicap, sex) and the factors that are considered meaningful in the meritocratic theory (their own university education, the choice of the subject of study, the choice of university, actual qualifications and skills, hard work, their own initiative, entrepreneurship, cleverness, cunningness) and the categories of “connections” and “luck”.

¹⁵ Comp. L.W. Zacher, *Ryzyko społeczne* [in:] *Encyklopedia socjologii*, vol. 3, Warszawa 2000, pp. 357–361.

| The meaning of particular factors for achieving success in life (from 2 – very big meaning, 1 – big meaning, 0 – average meaning, -1 – little meaning, -2 – not meaningful for an achievement) | |
|---|-------|
| parents' education | 0,39 |
| parents' material status | 1,33 |
| the place of living (city/countryside) | 0,57 |
| ethnic origin | -0,13 |
| handicap | 0,81 |
| sex | -0,47 |
| “connections” | 1,62 |
| their own university education | 1,47 |
| the choice of the subject of study | 1,1 |
| the choice of university | 0,73 |
| actual qualifications and skills | 1,3 |
| hard work, their own initiative, entrepreneurship | 1,42 |
| cleverness, cunningness | 1,28 |
| luck | 1,29 |

The first place among the factors that influence the achievement of success in life the respondents gave to “connections”. The researched accredited it with the value of 1,62 (on a scale: 2 – very big, 1 – big, 0 – average, -1 – little, -2 – not meaningful). “Luckily”, *their own university education* comes next (1,47), and *hard work, their own initiative, entrepreneurship* (1,42). Next places go to *parents' material status* (1,33) and *actual qualifications and skills* (1,3). The enumerated factors do not differentiate the studied group from the rest of youth¹⁶. At the top come here first of all the “meritocratic” factors, which means that the respondents believe in the possibility to change their status on their own, they have a sense of cause and effect, which is enormously valiant for the sense of their own life chances. At the same time, they also realize the inequality of beginnings, i.e. the existence of ascribed factors, such which they cannot influence, which I consider to be a virtue because their evaluation of reality will be in consequence more accurate, which can give them a stronger sense of control¹⁷ and render their aspirations more real.

It is disturbing that just behind the meritocratic factors there is *luck* (1,29), which could mean fatalism and lack of the feeling of cause and effect. Nevertheless, such a schizophrenic connection finally, explains, at least partially, the anxiety that the respondents experience. Our society is in majority “a society of risk”, a society of constant transformation, which makes it difficult to plan anything¹⁸, yet, quite stable factors are

¹⁶ Comp. M. Falkowska, *Równość życiowych szans*, 1999, a communicate of CBOS no. 2102.

¹⁷ Comp. P.G. Zimbardo, *Psychologia i życie*, Warszawa 1985, pp. 384–385.

¹⁸ Comp. M. Piorunek, *Projektowanie przyszłości edukacyjno-zawodowej w okresie adolescencji*, Poznań 2004, pp. 54–59.

still present in Poland (e.g. family), which can to some extent eliminate the instability (especially as far as work is concerned) and motivate. The respondents confirm the above in the open questions. The obstacles in achieving their aims are mostly: the changeable situation on the job market, and lack of connections (or protection used by others). As far as the factors that help to achieve an aim are concerned, family support and education are very common.

The factors that according to the respondents have little influence on their “fate” are: *sex* (-0,47), and *ethnic origin* (-0,13), i.e. the ascribed factors that should be evaluated in such a way for any active motivation to appear (some things cannot be “exceeded”).

Parents’ education got an average meaning (0,39). According to the theory of cultural capital and its reproduction by Pierre Bourdieu¹⁹, this factor is, to my mind, a little underestimated. On the one hand, it could have a liberating effect, give hope that obstacles can be overcome. On the other hand, it could result in cultural aspirations that are too low for people who are supposed to own a university degree. It could result from the negation or neglect of some differences in the original cultural capital, and consequently, too little work on the capital.

To conclude, it must be stated that the students approach the fulfillment of their plans in quite a rational and adequate (to the present social and economic situation) way. Although their scope can be possibly limited in future, “counting on” not only university education, but hard work, own initiative, entrepreneurship and actual qualifications and skills is at present mostly praised. Unfortunately, the meaning of social background, family economic and social capital (connections) cannot be denied – they do play an important role. And the social instability and ignorance of all social and economic factors that influence the success in fulfilling aims can result in an impression that it is “luck” that determines our lives. Therefore, the researched students’ evaluation of the means of succeeding in achievements seems quite adequate to the situation, and, what is important, motivating to action.

6. Plans and university education

The respondents have already got involved in one of the ways, and during the analysis they were in the process of finishing one of its basic stages (just before taking the Bachelor degree exam). Therefore, I wanted to check in more detail how much they value university education itself.

As I have mentioned, it is for the respondents a highly estimated instrumental value. However, simultaneously, as many as 69,23% of them think that apart from enhancing the possibility of getting a better job it is also necessary e.g. for their own satisfaction and raising their own esteem, i.e. it has a self-explanatory value. It suggests

¹⁹ Comp. P. Bourdieu, J.C. Passeron, *Reprodukcja. Elementy systemu nauczania*, Warszawa 1990.

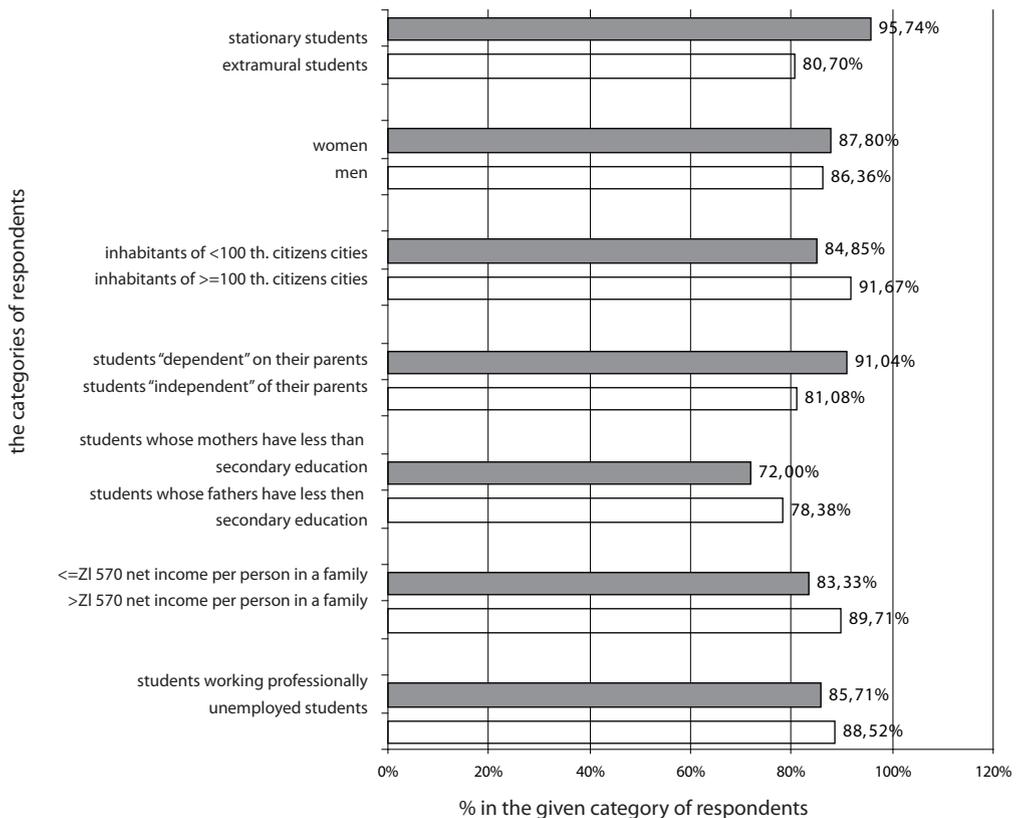
that they do not only educate themselves as an obligation. There are no noticeable differences among the categories. The only one is such that the less wealthy students appoint to these features of education about 14 per cent more often (the wealthier ones valued it similarly to the average value), which in their situation can be an advantage on the one hand (they do not have to wait for for an instant change of their situation and can prepare for a longer effort because they have already achieved a kind of prize), on the other hand it can be a disadvantage (demotivating sense of achievement). Though, I assume it is not the case, since as many as 83,33% of people from this group intends to educate further. None of the respondents strongly claimed that once they have the Bachelor degree they would not educate themselves further. 12,5% answered that they still do not know whether they will undertake such action, and as many as 87,5% that they are going to undertake it.

The ambition to study more, after achieving the Bachelor degree is presumably a good measure of the high estimation of education. In the group that is going to continue their education, stationary students create a positive majority (95,74% of them), yet they are mostly dependent on their parents (living in their “family home”) (84,44% of them) and not working, but with higher income in their family (73,33% of them). In my opinion, it explains the almost 8-point difference. The least motivated to further study are the children of people with less than secondary education (about 10 per cent less), and it is mostly these people that do not know whether they will take up further education (about 2 per cent more than the average). It can be the result of lack of forming higher aspirations in their family homes, also an aforementioned achievement of a chosen aim.

A similar indicator of the self-explanatory value of education is an answer to the question what would the respondents do if at the first year of their study they received a huge fortune (that would allow them to live without work). Only 6,73% (i.e. 7 people) said they would not continue their education!

The value of university education as a means in achieving a goal is expressed e.g. in the opinion of the respondents on whether employers take the education under consideration in prizing and promoting. However, the question was not asked in a dichotomous way, yet it was also supposed to verify what, according to the respondents (from the enumerated factors in a cafeteria), employers pay most attention to: a – *actual qualifications, which do not have to be connected with the degree*, b – *actual qualifications referring to the achieved education*, c – *a certificate, “an affidavit” of graduation (preferably at the best possible university)*. A majority of the respondents (75%) chose the first two answers. It can only be hoped that it is also most of employers that consider university education as a benefit (not excluding, “of course”, just as the respondents say, the actual qualifications). Since the working people, i.e. those who had already verified the above in practice, chose the answer “b” a little more often than others (about 6 per cent more often), and a little less frequently (about 7 per cent) they pointed at the answer “c”, we can have positive predictions about their education.

The statement of an intention to continue education after being granted the Bachelor degree (X=87,5%)



The respondents highly estimate university education as a both self-explanatory and instrumental value, yet, “luckily not that much” as to think that actual skills and qualifications can be replaced by a “piece of paper”. To the question: *Will university education help you to achieve your life goals?*, 54,81% of the respondents claimed that *definitely yes*, and 45,19% – that *rather yes*. There were no other answers.

7. Plans and school

Being aware of the above relations, there must finally be asked a question whether it is the education in a private school that the respondents perceive as a factor that raised their chances, or not.

First of all, I inquired the students how they evaluated their school in comparison to other public and private universities as far as the quality of education and preparation for their future profession is concerned (i.e. what they will really get from the school).

The evaluation is very positive. A vast majority of the respondents describe their university as comparable, in the specified field, to public schools (70,19% of the respondents think so) and as many as 23,08% consider it even better. This, in my point of view, is a high score. Only 6,73% of them claim that their school is worse in this respect. The causes will be hinted at in the following part of the article. The evaluation of their school when compared with other private ones is even better. 43,27% of the respondents claim that their school is better, and 54,81 think it is comparable.

Another question that refers to the influence of the educational situation of the respondents on their sense of life chances is the inquiry of how the respondents evaluate it in comparison to other peer groups. Below is presented a table with the results of the comparison (the per cent of the whole analyzed group; the columns do not sum up to 100 because a lack of an answer was not classified).

| My chances are: | In comparison to peers who: | | | | |
|----------------------|--|--|---|---|--|
| | have not begun studying at university and work | have begun studying at a public university and do not work | have begun studying at a public university and work | have begun studying at a private university and do not work | have begun studying in a private university and work |
| bigger | 58,65% | 14,42% | 23,08% | 31,73% | 19,23% |
| comparable | 23,08% | 63,46% | 33,65% | 53,85% | 53,85% |
| smaller | 5,77% | 7,69% | 31,73% | 5,77% | 14,42% |
| difficult to specify | 8,65% | 11,54% | 8,65% | 12,5% | 9,62% |

As can be seen, the respondents feel quite well in comparison to their peers. Only in comparison to the category of peers who have begun studying at a public university and work, there is quite a noticeable percentage of people that estimate their chances as smaller (though, this per cent is still lower than in the answer – “comparable”). Therefore, it can be assumed that the respondents do not feel much “harmed” by their situation – i.e. studying in the particular university. However, either to affirm or to contradict the hypothesis, more questions must be asked.

In the question: *Will the finished school help them succeed in life, achieve their life goals?*, 25% of the respondents answered that definitely yes, and 49,04% that rather yes, which according to me is a very good score, though, in comparison to the evaluation of university education alone, a little lower. On the other hand, 15,38% of the respondents claimed that rather not (no one that definitely not, 9,62% were not able to provide an answer). It does not constitute a vast percentage, yet it should be analyzed. None of the studied categories distinguishes itself in negative evaluation. In the question which is even more direct: *Thinking about the future, do you consider the fact that you study at this university as your chance, an obstacle or is it difficult to say?* – 49,04% found it as a chance (men distinguished themselves “in plus”, and the children of poorly educated

mothers “in minus”), for 46,15% it was difficult to make a choice (the most indecisive were the children of poorly educated mothers and the inhabitants of smaller towns, the least – men and the inhabitants of big cities). Only three people (all inhabitants of big cities) in the whole group stated that the school will constitute an obstacle for them in the future. Still, it is worth it quoting here all their explanations:

- “Because there still exists a stereotype about private schools: if you pay you do not have to do anything and that a person cannot do anything after such a school”.
- “Because the private ones are perceived as worse (a bribe and you get a 5), and it’s not like that.”
- “Because nobody will employ me after a private school if there is someone else after a public one.”

Even if a researched person claims that the school is an obstacle for him, it is not the quality of education that is the reason, but the social evaluation of private university education. Presumably, it does not need further consideration. The students are not able to win the uneven “fight” on their own – the will of people with power is necessary.

As described, a majority of the respondents presented studying in their school as a positive factor in the fulfillment of their life plans. What are, in my opinion, the results of this fact?

As I have mentioned, in agreement with the theories of education, I assume that the more positive is the opinion of the undertaken way to success, i.e. education in a private university (positive evaluation), the more “helping” factor it will become because of stronger motivation. The students that have a more positive attitude to their school will be more engaged in their classes, since they will consider them beneficial, they will seize as much as they can from them and spend enough time on preparing to the classes. Such attitude will also contribute to venturing into extracurricular activity at school, for example creating academic circles, student organizations, taking part in charities organized by the university, etc. Provided that such circumstances are created, even if a given school is of poor educational quality (which is not the case in the analyzed school, since the university was granted a positive opinion of PKA [The National Accreditation Commission] and received the right to educate at the Master level), a properly involved and motivated person will be able to benefit from the education much more than an unmotivated one, he or she will develop undertaking various activities, which, apart from specific skill, will imprint in him or her the so much valued today habit of constant self-improvement. To contrast with, it is possible that the students of the third year, asked for an evaluation of the school to which they attended for so many years, will not “be able to” evaluate negatively even a worse school, because there might appear an instance of the cognitive dissonance reduction²⁰. To reduce the feeling of mistake, of the wrong

²⁰ Comp. P.G. Zimbardo, *Psychologia...*, pp. 549–550 and W. Łukaszewski, *Motywacja w najważniejszych systemach teoretycznych* [in:] *Psychologia. Podręcznik akademicki*, (ed.) J. Strelaua, Gdańsk 2000, vol. II, pp. 435–437.

choice of school – I will evaluate it in a positive way, I will deny facts, because every person wants to be right. However, it does not have to exclude the evolutionary effect of the positive evaluation of a school given above. Though, it can also result in, for example, the lack of venturing into activities other than learning, as an outcome of the subconscious resentment towards the confrontation of the acquired knowledge with practice and in the perseverance of our own vision of reality. Psychologists deal with these mechanisms in detail, I only suggest here some possibilities.

In the analyzed case, I will assume that the positive evaluation of their own educational situation is and will be a benefit for the students, i.e. a situation that motivates them to self-development and achieving the planned goals.

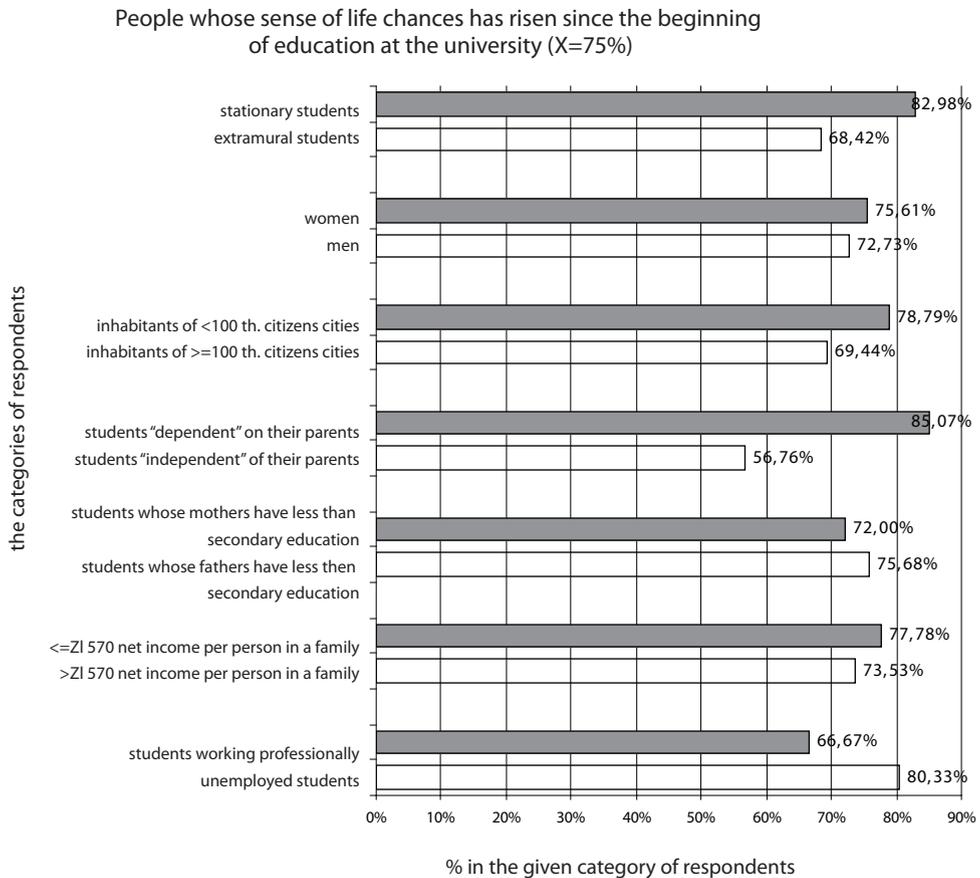
8. The sense of life chances – final remarks

Finally, the respondents were asked to evaluate whether their life chances had risen since the beginning of education in their school. They were supposed to specify the percent of chances to fulfil their plans from 0% – no chances to 100% – full success in the given stages of life (past and future). The first was the moment when the students started education in the given school, the second – the time just after graduation with a Bachelor degree. The difference will specify if during their study the sense of life chances had risen or not. It is certain that in the lives of the researched group there are/have been situations other than education that modify their sense of life chances. Nevertheless, I tried to ask the question in a way that would make them separate it and answered how it was that education in the particular school influenced this sense. As before, also in this question I resolved to focus on the chances that first of all refer to the professional sphere.

30,84% of the respondents stated that their chances for achieving success (in the professional sphere) after graduating from the school with the degree of a Bachelor will rise noticeably (above 30%), 26,92% – that it will be an average rise (from 20 to 30%), and 17,31 – that the increase will be small (less than 20%). As described, as many as 75 of the respondents found education at this university as their professional chance (it was similar in questions about other spheres of life). Only 11,54% of the respondents claimed that school will not change anything in this respect (0%), and 4,41%, (i.e. only 5 people) that it can cause a fall of their chances.

Who is it that “expects the least from the school” (thinks that their chances will not change or decrease)? Majority is composed of the already independent people – 76,47% of the ones sharing the opinion. It is not alarming news, because these respondents are usually older (born in about 1978), with a higher, in my estimation, income, thus probably mostly settled down in life. School can therefore be for them e.g. only a means of keeping their post.

The most “trusting” in the power of education seem to be the stationary students – as many as 87,97% of them think that the studies will raise their chances, and 38,3%



– that it will be a noticeable improvement. In spite of the aforementioned mechanisms, it is not an entirely positive score, since as many as 92,31% of the people from this group have not started to work yet (the third year of studies!), and as I have mentioned, a big part of them – 48,72% – (the groups overlap) have not commenced any other systematic activity (apart from studying) to achieve life success. It is an overindulgent luxury in the modern world.

In this respect, extramural students, though a little less trustful in the effect of school (68,42% believe in its “efficiency”), are more disciplined. Apart from professional work, which have started 66,67% of people from the “trustful” group, 71,79% of them have got involved in other systematic actions – therefore the percentages can overlap, yet it is still a high score (these respondents do not excuse themselves with lack of time).

Commencing additional activity that supports development in order to stay on the job market is a necessity today, “even” for people who already have university education. I do not claim that the specified students do not do anything for their development. On

the contrary, they must do something (e.g. learn how to use IT, which is required when living among other young people, voluntary work popular on this course, etc.). It is worth it for them to undertake more activities, yet it is also important that they realize what they are already involved in. From the point of view of today's job market, which demands not only the concrete factors, such as formal qualifications, rights, education, but the more elusive ones, as well (if only interpersonal competence), it is worth it for all young people to realize their strengths and use them to their advantage.

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