

Iwona Wagner
Poland

Alternatives for Unemployed Graduates – Opportunities or Threats

Abstract:

The author discusses occupational and emotional problems of higher education graduates who cannot find employment and decent remuneration after completing their graduate school education. Their inability to find jobs allowing them to make use of their university education results in their serious emotional problems and in economic emigration. The author hopes that the approaching population decline will bring partial solution of the problem.

Key words: *the mission, unemployed graduate, labour market, social disintegration, the rat race, resentment, population decline*

It appears from the data collected by the Ministry of Economy and Labour that in the last five years the officially registered number of unemployed graduates has grown five times. There were 30K of them in 1998 and almost 150K in 2004.

The percentage of higher education graduates increased from 6.5% in 1988 to 10.0% in 2002. There is a general opinion that graduate schools store places for unemployed graduates as they curb even more massive attack on the labour market.

In the year 2003/2004, 364 thousand people graduated from all graduate schools in Poland. According to the information provided by the Central Statistical Office only 23 thousand graduates took up employment the year in which they graduated.

In my paper, I would like to focus on the growing process of social disintegration and psychic decline and, eventually, debasement.

The number of people with higher education diplomas is growing, whereas the labour market is saturated with them. Official unemployment statistics of higher

education graduates is just a tip of the iceberg irrespectively of the place considered. The situation is the same in the capital city, in large academic centres and in little towns where there are local graduate schools or branches of prestigious universities. The situation in Częstochowa is very similar.

The problem comes down to the fact that the smaller the town or academic centre, the more pronounced the issue of graduate unemployment is, with all its tones, conditioning and social effects. The problem stated in the title – Opportunities or Threats – is nothing else than the eternal philosophical and ethical dilemma: TO BE OR TO HAVE! This range of concepts contains conditioning of an alternative perception of the situation and attitudes of graduates in the current social-economic conditions in Poland.

One should also recall the “ideological mantra” of the early nineties, repeated by everyone everywhere, which propagates new axiological patterns. According to the opinion propagated at that time, after years of communism reality was returning to normal. The element stressed at that time was not so much democracy as the fact that due to the return of the healthy competition people who were clever and intelligent could “take advantage of their own resourcefulness” and succeed in achieving high financial and social status, which was to be the measure of their own value. The personal model to follow was pictured as a talented man of success, ambitious and capable of winning in competition. All the others – unsatisfied with their status, unable to win were regarded as people who have only themselves to blame for their failure, or as an inferior kind of people who in a “sound and normal” society are simply doomed to mere vegetation. Success of some young people in business, politics, financial institutions, the media and local government is still functioning in social consciousness.

The success of “the wolf cubs” – ambitious, predatory, well-educated, “ready to kill”, ruthlessly aspiring to success is still considered to be the pattern of means to achieve success, an interesting job and attractive life-style.

One should ask. “How many of them have succeeded?” There is only approximate information. No one conducted research on the subject and no one is able to provide reliable statistical data. The estimated number may be about 25K out of over one million of young people who graduated in the years 1990–2004.

I have investigated the community of Częstochowa in this respect. On the grounds of the information provided by the District and then the Powiat (County) Labour Exchange in Częstochowa (Częstochowa Labour Exchange 2004) one can say that, in all probability, there are about 90 people who have made an authentic career out of 1500 graduates of Częstochowa graduate schools, inhabitants of Częstochowa. As for the unemployed graduates – 79% of them are women and 21% of them are men.

The psychological and sociological portrait of the generation of “winners” of the period of early transformation of the new axiology has been termed “the X GENERATION” – and their methods of competition, rivalry, social and psychological consequences of their lifestyle has been generally referred to as “the rat race” (Coupland, D., 1998).

Political changes and violent social transformations were the reason for the fact that the process which took several dozen years elsewhere, was completed in less than a decade in our country. The state of constant haste, trying hard to keep up with implementing new solutions and adapting to them set up the main scene for competing and winning, perhaps a unique opportunity to attain success in the new reality.

Only a few have won the harsh competition and managed to adapt to the new reality. Most of the others feel dispirited. The graduates also feel disappointed. No one is waiting for them. No one offers them jobs that could meet their expectations and ambitions, their hopes for advancement in terms of civilisation and financial status.

The unemployed graduates feel humiliated, helpless and left to alone. In spite of many organisational and training activities that are supposed to ease the effects of the unemployment or retrain graduates in compliance with the demands of the job market, effects are unsatisfactory for both parties. It is the effect of the decreasing number of managerial posts in the entire national economy and of offering jobs to experienced, reliable employees recommended by well-known referees.

One may risk a remark that unemployment among higher education graduates has become a phenomenon of structural character, because the systematically growing group of unemployed graduates in many population centres in Poland has become the most numerous unemployed population.

While looking for permanent employment compatible with their qualifications, ambitions and, most of all, with working conditions that would give them life stability, unemployed graduates take up different jobs that periodically ease their poor financial status.

The resentment towards those who do not want to make use of their qualifications, occupational skills and life passions wreak havoc in the system of values of unemployed graduates. They develop a feeling of bitterness and injustice when they think of years of hard study and sacrifice they and their families have gone through. Many families spend the last penny or even go into debt in order to help their children attain the status of graduates. There is a growing feeling of helplessness and defiance against the social order. This, consequently, leads to embarrassment, apathy and eventually to resignation from competing on the labour market.

The greatest humiliation is the awareness of one's status of an unemployed, highly qualified person taking advantage of support provided by his or her family or by the state.

Alternatively, they can either change their occupation and training, relinquish their ambitions, aspirations and dreams, start rendering simple services, doing part-time or seasonal jobs or keep believing that not all is lost, trying again and again, looking for a job in different environments, in other cities or, in the last resort, looking for a job abroad.

An observation comes to one's mind: CARRYING OUT A MISSION IS THE PRIVILEGE OF A FEW – THE OTHERS JUST FIGHT FOR A BOWL OF FARE!

When working on this text I found optimistic information in the papers: "Population decline comes to the gates of graduate schools. By 2020 the number of young people aged 19–24 will decrease by 30%. The number of candidates for graduate schools may be even lower, even by 50%." Perhaps, the issue will find its own solution.

Bibliography

Coupland, D., (1998): *Pokolenie X* (The X Generation).

Świda-Ziemba, H., (1995): *Postawy wartościujące pokolenia X* (Evaluative Attitudes of the X Generation), Warszawa.

2004 Records of the District and the Country Labour Exchange in Częstochowa.