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YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT CAREER − CAREER PERCEPTION IN ADOLESCENCE AND EARLY ADULTHOOD

Abstract: Introduction: Research and observations highlight the multiplicity of career patterns in the culture of postmodern societies. This phenomenon is inextricably linked to the emergence of a new, opaque social order in which the socio-cultural situation forces the abandonment of the linear narrative of life. **Research Aim:** The primary aim of the research was to characterize and describe the perceptions, views, evaluations and attitudes of young people regarding the postmodern career construct. They have been captured at two stages immediately preceding the transition: 1) from middle school education to high school and technical schools (15–16 year olds, sample size: 179 respondents) and 2) from higher education to the labour market (age range of respondents 20–30 years, sample size: 223 respondents). **Method:** As part of the diagnostic survey the author's original questionnaire *Career in Postmodern Reality* has been applied. Only open-ended questions included within have been used, which allowed the respondents to speak freely, and then the answers were analyzed qualitatively. **Results:** The ways of perceiving and defining a career and associations connected with it were presented. Also categories of people who, according to youth at the stage of adolescence and early adulthood, successfully pursue careers, as well as catalysts and inhibitors of careers mentioned in the statements of young people were discussed. **Conclusions:** A review of the respondents' narratives leads to the following insights, among others. For them, career means the following: 1) the need for achievements and successes, which are defined by others; the pattern of a career related to promotion, prestige and material gratification is most often evoked; 2) the need to make it public, to appear in the media world, in virtual space; 3) popularity and fame as an important component of a desired career; 4) the inability to defer gratification in the professional sphere; 5) perceiving dissonances in career development: on the one hand, valuing activity, creativity as catalysts for success, on the other hand, conformism, using patronage, connections; 6) attributing the responsibility for failures and difficulties in career development to the outside.

Keywords: career, youth, career patterns

INTRODUCTION

Career (in the English-speaking tradition) or professional biography (in the German-speaking tradition) is perceived as a course of professional life, which consists of all experiences of an individual connected with work. Career discourse can be analysed on multiple levels. A career is most often verified by socially imposed standards of evaluating its course, i.e. it is a social fact, which can be described by a hierarchy of statuses achieved by an individual in the course of professional life, or individual (though socially rooted) models of professional success. Therefore, both its objective social perception and subjective dimension are indicated, without giving them an evaluative character, referring to the overall relations of an individual with the labour market. On the other hand, the axiological-evaluative dimension, so often present in popular discourse, makes a career an object of moral judgments and evaluation, it is preferable or, on the contrary, disadvantageous in a given form. (Bauman, 1960; Bańka, 2007; Piorunek 2009; Cybal-Michalska, 2013, 2016; Jakimiuk, 2019).

Careers are transformative in nature. Evolutionary changes characterizing the transition of industrialized societies of the modern stage to the postmodern period are associated with the destandardization of the family life cycle, deconstruction of the three-phase course of professional career and deregulation of standards in the work-life relationship (Piorunek, 2015; Tomaszewska-Lipiec, 2018). Transformations occurring within these spheres are particularly dynamic in the 21st century, when development processes often have a chaotic, multidirectional character, and their effects lose the foundations of legitimacy before they are *de facto* implemented, i.e. they are already outdated at the moment of their actual implementation (Bauman, 2007a, 2007b). However, this century is a period of enormous opportunities to pursue individualized careers, also in the transnational dimension (Bańka, 2007), in the global reality of the postmodern world.

Clear differences in the patterns of careers/occupational biographies of different social groups in different historical periods are visible, as well as the multiplicity of these patterns in the culture of postmodern societies (Suchar, 2003; Baruch, 2004, 2006; Sarzyńska-Mazurek, 2013). This phenomenon is inextricably linked to the emergence of a new, opaque social order, in which the socio-cultural situation leads to people being deprived of certainty, lack of anchorage in the past, moral-ethical dissonances and multiplicity of life patterns, while the progressive globalisation of the world of culture and economy sets a qualitatively new framework for everyday life and work of human beings (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 2002; Giddens, 2007; Guichard, Huteau, 2005; Piorunek, 2009). Individuals experience difficulties in creating a coherent narrative organized around a career (Marody, 2014). The

linear construction of professional biography is not confirmed by the reality in which work disorganizes life, although it fills such a significant part of it, while the extension of working time, blurring of the boundaries between professional and family life and the increased importance of availability as a distinguishing feature of a good employee are becoming a fact (Marody, 2014). On the one hand, this creates new boundary conditions for constructing individual careers. On the other hand, it calls for a different approach to the processes of assistance and counselling in designing professional life (Savickas, 2011, 2012; Bańka, 2007) as well as career education (Piorunek, Kozielska, Drabik-Podgórna, Podgórny, 2020).

The multidirectionality of changes, individualization of career trajectories and crossing the organization boundaries in the course of its realization (careers outside, between organizations) make it very difficult to create typologies of career patterns. The linear dimension of careers developing in horizontal, vertical or "inward" perspective in order to achieve mastery in a specific, defined range of professional duties and responsibilities (Buehler, 1999; Suchar, 2003; Baruch, 2004a, 2004b), is increasingly rarely observed and is gradually being replaced by a decentralized mosaic model (Piorunek, 2009, 2010). Regardless of the terms used to describe the specificity of careers (e.g. portfolio career, kaleidoscopic career, protean career, intelligent career), postmodern thinking about careers is linked by the conviction of personal responsibility for the construction of professional life in the reality without boundaries (physical, but often also mental) and the necessity to accumulate diverse professional experiences, which may constitute an individual's career capital and be used at different times, under different conditions of an individual's involvement in the labour market.

These are not career patterns present in Polish reality for a long time, as before the political breakthrough of 1989, stability, linearity and predictability largely marked the course of professional life (Piorunek, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). It was not until the political transformation, the transition to a free market economy, entering the globalization stream along with the changes related to Poland's accession to the European Union, fundamentally changed professional careers, including those of young people who are just preparing to enter the labour market, for whom the objectively "new" reality is the only one available to them.

Entering the labour market is preceded by a long period of educational preparation in the course of which an individual, as part of gaining experience and socialization training, shapes his/her ideas, views, judgments, attitudes towards professional career as a construct present in the social discourse and experienced personally.

The studies of young people entering the labour market conducted in Poland so far dealt with the expectations, educational and occupational plans of the young

population and activities undertaken for their fulfilment. Young people were asked about their preferred occupations and types of employment, the position of their occupation within their hierarchies of values, salary expectations, work organization and nature. Hence, the studies had not as much examined perception and description of the career construct as a component of an individual's biography but as concrete plans an individual had for their occupational life (Wierzejska, Sanecki, Nowosad, 2019; Pracuj.pl Report "Kariera Generacji Z", 2020 https:// media.pracuj.pl/88312-kariera-generacji-z-mlodzi-o-pracy-i-karierze).

RESEARCH AIMS AND ADDRESSED ISSUES

The main aim of the research whose selected fragments are referred to in this text was to characterize and describe the aforementioned perceptions, views, assessments and attitudes of youth towards the construct of career. At the same time, they are captured at two stages immediately preceding qualitatively differentiated transition processes connected with structural changes and the necessity to take decisions regarding further education and/or work, forcing reflection on career as a path of individual professional development. The following transition stages are concerned: 1) from middle-school to comprehensive secondary school or professional secondary education (15–16 year old adolescents) and 2) from tertiary/higher education to the labour market (age range of the subjects 20–30 – early adults).

How do young people describe and define careers, what associations do they have with careers, what categories of people represent for them the realisation of careers, in which areas of individual functioning and social context do they look for catalysts and inhibitors of careers?

To what extent is the narrative of dynamically changing career patterns and the specificity of their post-modern shape experienced by youth? To what extent is it internalized by young people, studying in a country which bridges the gap between a centrally controlled economy and free market reality in a relatively short period of time, a country in which the generation of their parents, at least at the beginning of their professional career, had a different (stable, predictable, devoid of risk but also the possibility of individual development) career path? These are the main research questions to which answers were sought in the course of the conducted research.

The respondents were asked more detailed questions about their definitions of the career construct, associations evoked by this phenomenon, career embodiments, i.e. specific persons who pursued or are pursuing carriers, career catalysts *vs* career inhibitors, and general plans influencing careers built by the respondents. This paper does not analyse the context of personal career plans.

RESEARCH METHOD, SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS,
DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

The method used was a survey (Babbie, 2003) conducted on a randomly selected group of 179 third-grade middle school students from several large-city state middle schools and a randomly selected group of 223 young adults studying full-time and part-time at selected humanities faculties at large-city state and private universities[1]. Students from the selected schools and schools of higher education and faculties in the Poznań Metropolitan Area were selected randomly and the research tool was made available to the individuals taking part in the study. In schools, the tool was distributed by teachers, and in schools of higher education – the research tool was either given out by the academic teachers or handed out directly to potential respondents. The division of the former research group according to a gender criterion was as follows: 55.87% of the respondents were girls, 44.13% – boys. Whereas the latter research sample consisted mainly of women between 20 and 30 years of age pursuing studies in the field of pedagogy (specialization: care and upbringing, prevention and crisis intervention), cultural studies and counselling and coaching. As the respondents are students of the humanities and social sciences that examine the course of human occupational life and deal with career guidance as part of their curricula, this must have influenced the outcome of the study. However, due to the initial assumptions on which the studies were based, the open-ended questions, and the plan to conduct a qualitative analysis of the research material, the studies were designed for students who were expected to have in-depth understanding of social phenomena, also in the context of a generalized analysis of selected phenomena. Not designed to examine dependencies, the studies did not focus on demonstrating corelations between the results and the faculty or studies pursued by the respondents.

The survey used a proprietary questionnaire *Career in Postmodern Reality*. The same research tool was applied in both groups of respondents. The specificity of the

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[1] References to the research findings in this text (conducted between 2015 and 2017) can also be found in two of the author's texts: Piorunek M. (2016). Kariera według młodych, czyli nowy paradygmat kariery na dysonansowym rynku pracy. *Studia Edukacyjne*, 38, 83–96 and Piorunek M. (2017). Career in the narratives of early adolescents. *Culture – Society – Education*, 1(11), 37–49, (English version) and (2017) "Kariera w narracjach młodzieży na etapie wczesnej adolescencji", *Kultura – Społeczeństwo – Edukacja*, 1(11), 39–52 (the Polish version of the above mentioned text). The results published in this paper refer to the comparative aspect associated with career perception by adolescents and young adults. Though verified a few years ago, the results were presented without the comparative background. Particular attention was given to descriptive and typological analyses whose objective is to illustrate the process of changing the attitudes and awareness of the young people in the longer perspective of postmodernity. Personal plans of the respondents, assumed to be influenced to a larger extent by the current social situation, were not included.

diagnostic tool was to use only open-ended questions, allowing free, narrative, and unlimited in volume statements of the respondents. The abandonment of closed questions resulted from the conviction that the cafeteria imposed on respondents may affect the shape of their answers and impede the real, spontaneous reflections of pupils and students. The responses obtained in this way (sometimes longer sentences, sometimes single sentences, phrases or words) were then subjected to qualitative analysis. Written statements of the respondents that were reactive (i.e. responses to the general questions asked and the issues raised by the researcher) were analysed using a hermeneutics method to reconstruct and describe the meanings attributed by the respondents to the career phenomenon. The answers were arranged by identifying recurring categories of the objective *vs* subjective contexts of the career analysis, the positive *vs* negative consequences of pursuing career, psychological *vs* colloquial terms used to describe career, the terms illustrating the life values and objectives shared and mentioned by the respondents in their statements. These were subsequently grouped in some more general patterns from which conclusions were drawn demonstrating career perception by young people, which has become the subject of this paper. As regards other questions asked in the questionnaire, answers given by the respondents were also used to arrange the information by categories that emerged during the study and to typologize it (Miles, Huberman, 2000; Silverman, 2007). The research was anonymous and voluntary; in the case of schools, it took place with the consent of the headmasters and teachers.

The obtained research results, due to fact that the research sample is under-representative and that only qualitative analysis of the research material was conducted, do not allow any generalized conclusions. However, they indicate typical ways of approaching a career among the studied group of young people.

RESEARCH RESULTS – POSTMODERN CAREER IN PUPILS' AND STUDENTS' RESPONSES

Referring to the detailed research questions mentioned earlier in this paper, the description of the following research results is concerned with:

1. The way the respondents define the career construct.
2. The ideas associated with the career construct by the respondents.
3. The career embodiments, i.e. specific persons who pursued/are pursuing careers (the analysis uses categories describing these groups of people).
4. The career catalysts identified by the researchers.
5. The career inhibitors identified by the young persons.

Re 1. The definition of career by respondents was multidimensional, and most statements indicated the complexity and coexistence of many elements of this construct. However, these statements can be organized into several groups, emphasizing their constitutive features.

Respondents often treat career as an external construct an objective phenomenon in a functional-structural perspective (Cybal-Michalska, 2013). Thus, for them it constitutes a configuration of positions and social prestige ascribed to specific professions and professional roles. It is subject to social evaluation and constitutes a factor of environmental ennoblement, which is particularly strongly emphasized by the following definitions, which appear both in the group of middle school and university students[2]. It should be noted, however, that the duality of career as an entity belonging to and shaped by an individual appears, as it were, in the background of these statements[3]. Noteworthy is also the adoption of diverse criteria of both environmental and personal assessment, which at the same time become a reflection of the recognized system of values of respondents (hence different determinants of career development emphasized in the definitions).

Career means **climbing up4** the ladder (male pupil).
Career – I don't know how to put it […], a path which you follow **to do something unusual,** to achieve something incredible (female pupil).
Career means **fame**, thanks to it you become famous, not always liked and mostly such person is loaded […] (male pupil).
Career means **making dough** (money) (male pupil).
Career means **achieving success** when other **people praise and admire** you (female pupil).
A career means achieving one's goals and fulfilling one's dreams, which also involves **earning a lot of money** and **"standing out"** from other people. Often a person who has made a career is **well-known, widely respected** (female student).
A career is a certain stage in life that opens **a door to get a better income**. It enables us to **improve our living conditions**. However, when it goes too far our life changes, not always for the better (female student).

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[2] Only the content of the statements was analyzed, leaving aside their form, which, due to differences in the development of language skills, varied. The differences concerned e.g. the length of the text, the choice and variety of vocabulary, the maturity of expressions reflecting the respondents' view of reality. The statements of the middle school pupils were more succinct, often far more literal.

[3] The respondents' original statements throughout the text are in italics. In selected portions of the respondents' narratives, original vocabulary and syntax were preserved, while spelling and punctuation errors were eliminated.

[4] All emphases in bold in the italicised text were added by the author of the article.

Career is something that can be achieved; it is **something great**, not everyone can experience, something that changes our life and is associated with **better earnings**, a certain activity (female student).

It is noticeable in the above statements, that promotion is treated as a distinctive criterion of a career, acquiring considerable financial resources, achieving fame or social prestige as a condition *sine qua non* of making a career, so a career is a characteristic of a "profession", "occupation", which is pursued by a particular person, and making it is possible only within the framework of selected types of activity and positions. Middle school pupils much more often than students referred to the external measures of career evaluation, and they focused on fame, popularity and material gratification as the basic criteria of "making" a career. However, they were also present in the statements of young adults.

The subjective, individualized dimension of a career, however, is emphasized by the following exemplary statements:

Career is a job or work which will **make you happy** (male pupil).

A career is the constant pursuit of advancement (including social advancement), a **career is made by whoever thinks so**. Career is a concept that **everyone must consider individually**, because people have different aspirations. In my opinion, a career is the achievement of such a social position that allows you to influence important things, not only in a narrow area, but on a larger scale (female student).

What draws attention is the personal attribution of a career and its evaluative character, yet the point of reference of these evaluations has shifted from social expectations and value systems, to mainly subjective, individual judgments and emotions. It is impossible not to notice, however, that they are not formed in a social vacuum, they are the result of internalizing the scripts of primary socialization, modified in the course of current interactions, i.e. the components of secondary (institutional) socialization.

An important new element in subsequent attempts to understand and define career is to indicate its pro-developmental character, associated with the achievement of goals and life objectives or realization of valued values and defining life plans.

Career – the path of professional life. It is different for everyone because everyone wants to achieve something else. In order to pursue and make a career one has **to establish a goal one would like to achieve in life** (male pupil).

A career is the pursuit of getting rich, but also of achieving some goals, e.g. prestige, respect. A career is **a continuous development** (male student).

Dual character of career is quite well reflected by the following statement:

On the one hand, **an evaluative definition,** i.e., a "career" is a widely admired profession (doctor, lawyer) or a professional and social position and recognition (being an important person, a good specialist, who has a high position on the labour market). On the other hand, **career is a course of professional path** (no matter how it is evaluated qualitatively): e.g. "in my career as an educator I have not encountered such a case" (female student).

Awareness of the above distinction is occasionally verbalized by middle school pupils, as is the non-evaluative, lifelong and holistic nature of career.

Career is a process that accompanies us in our adult life until retirement and is connected to our professional life, but it also strongly influences our private life. It affects us most of all, but it also influences our loved ones and their presence [...] in our lives. In every stage of our adult life we can pursue a career – a career as a salesman, as a mom/dad, as a farmer, as a clerk, as an educator... It is one of our roles (female student). Career, in my opinion, is a concept, or rather a process, associated with a particular walk of life. It does not necessarily have to be our profession, or position, or status. **It can refer to any aspect of life** (male student).

It is noteworthy that the construct of career is spread in two dimensions: temporal i.e. reference to the entire adult life of an individual and other (non-work) planes of biography (here: recalling the professional and family roles).

On the other hand, some of the respondents at both stages of development, focusing on the evaluative dimension of career definition, assign negative ratings to it, pointing to the possible adverse effects of career development on the achievement of life balance, with students being more critical in this regard.

Career is a poison that makes people blind, one of the reasons to turn people into monsters […] (female pupil).
Career means stress, earnings, hard work and lack of sleep […] (female pupil).
It seems to me that "career" takes away personality. It is something negative for me. I would like to do something that will give me joy and at the same time it will put bread on the table. I don't want to throw myself into something that won't be rewarding (female student).

Such statements are probably a consequence of a well-established assumption about the relationship between career and a number of phenomena with negative

connotations, e.g. lack of balance between work and other spheres of life, overwork, the need to join the structures of the organization at the expense of the individual's subjectivity, not always effective defence of ego against external influences.

Re 2. The category of career is associated with many connotations, which the respondents recalled in the questionnaire. Their extraordinary richness (and variety of forms – both noun, verb and adjective phrases) is not surprising given the enormous popularity of the concept of career, also in everyday vocabulary. Associations related to the following groups of statements were characteristic of both middle school and university students.

Among several hundreds of associations recalled by the respondents, the first group of specified terms are those of neutral descriptive nature, such as: *work, profession*, *education*, *science*, *competence*, *corporation*. Among them there are also terms of metaphorical nature, i.e. a career is *a staircase*, *a ladder* (however, these terms may also be associated with evaluative associations related to promotion).

Another large group of terms describes career in a way correlated with its subjective dimension. Within the above categories, career is simply: *personal success*, *achievement (these terms recorded with the highest frequency)*, *development*, *goal*, *promotion*, *result*, *victory*, *self-improvement*, *gaining experience*, *fulfilment of dreams*, *commitment*, *sense of accomplishment*.

The next most numerous group of terms consists of gratifications associated with the realization of career mentioned by the respondents. Among them were the following: *promotion*, *social recognition*, *position*, *prestige*, *money*, *fame*, *power*, *authority*, *respect*, *good life* (however ambiguous this term might be), but also probably expressing the needs of many people in the socialization circles of respondents, i.e. *a permanent job* and *a sense of security*. There were also associations related to the negative consequences of professional careers, but these associations were mainly shared by the students surveyed. They mentioned, for example: *sacrifices*, *workaholism*, *lack of personal life*, *lack of time*, *chasing*, or *running*.

The characteristics, qualities and competencies associated with the active construction of an individual career path were mentioned much less frequently. Among them were: *perseverance*, *power*, *resourcefulness*, *intelligence*, *creativity*, *self-confidence* and *professionalism*.

The selected groups of associations clearly indicate, taking into account the frequency of the recalled expressions, that career means, to a large extent, achieving success and having certain achievements. The question about the criteria of success remains open, to what extent they are defined in individual, inner psychological categories, and to what extent they are related to socially created, fixed patterns in (pop)culture. Therefore, who is *de facto* successful, the one who feels satisfaction from their work and positively evaluates the balance of professional experience,

or rather the one who is marked by others as successful, whether in terms of hard indicators of life and professional achievements or temporary fashions? It seems that the answers of respondents to subsequent questions clearly indicate that they represent mostly the latter view.

Re 3. This is evidenced, for example, by respondents' reaction to the request to name three people who, in their individual opinion, have made a career. A review of this extremely broad, diverse catalogue of indications leads first to the conclusion that in the opinion of the dominant group of respondents *sine qua non* condition of making a career is to make it public, which in the media culture of individualism (Jacyno, 2007) is not surprising. Such opinions were voiced by both groups of respondents, but particularly often by younger respondents.

In the first place, therefore, the career is made by *well-known*, *media people*, whose lives or actions are mentioned in the public space. Among them there are people whose professional functioning is inscribed in the media and interpersonal relations of an indirect nature, representatives of professions that are performed *for and in front of* people, individuals functioning in the circle of popular culture or even created by it such as actors, singers, but also participants of popular talent shows and the category of people "known for the fact that they are known" (the category of celebrities), as well as people popular on the Internet – bloggers, youtubers.

Students are more distanced from these figures, but they also emphasize that the "magnitude" of a career is determined by the proportion between the contribution (work, skills, competence) and the degree of publicity. The smaller the input and the bigger "media" effect (recognition, popularity, fame), the greater the career is. Career is thus legitimized by the media image and ubiquity of a given figure's presence in various contexts of popular culture.

Another group of figures, mentioned by respondents (less frequently, but still significantly frequent), who are credited with having made a career is the category of people also present in the media, but primarily because of their achievements in other fields. The media in this case serve as an intermediary in presenting the non-media achievements of these people. This category for students includes mostly specialists in various fields who created global products, creators of business fortunes, moral authorities, discoverers, specialists in various fields. Whereas for middle school pupils this category includes more often sportsmen and sportswomen who achieved measurable successes and some particularly popular politicians (although here it seems that their permanent presence in the media and the conviction that they have the ability to influence social reality plays a greater role).

The next group of figures, indicated only by students, consists of people professionally related to the fields studied by the respondents; here the names of

professional coaches or motivational speakers known in specific circles were most often mentioned, occasionally also educators, scientists or practitioners, as well as representatives of other professions (managers, directors of financial companies, etc.). Regarding this group of people, in some cases, making their careers public was also part and parcel of its course, although it had a specialised dimension.

The group of significant persons from the closest socialization circles, most often parents, less often valued teachers and representatives of various professions, mentioned as persons who in the course of life recorded a significant social advancement, successfully struggled with biographical adversities or skilfully reconciled professional and family functioning, was relatively small, however present among the indications of respondents both pupils and students.

Although there are no surprises when we look at answers to the question of what a career is and who creates it, answers to the question of what determines it, facilitates it or hinders it, reveal such surprises.

Re 4. When it comes to catalysing the process of constructing and implementing careers, middle school pupils notice the facilitating power of such factors as *family support*, *acquaintances* and *contacts*. Also students quite often mention the possibility of support from the closest ones, however, this is not only emotional or informational support. The young rather refer to *connections*, *patronage*, *contacts* and *nepotism*, which facilitate entering the labour market and ensure fast career advancement paths. On the other hand, among the constructive features and characteristics one should mention the often-repeated individual categories, such as: *knowledge*, *passion and experience*, as well as the formalised ones, such as: *education*, here the role of higher education is emphasised by middle school pupils, but students very rarely refer to educational credentials in the form of specific degrees, which as such, according to them, contribute only slightly to career advancement.

Among the characteristics and skills desired from the point of view of shaping a career, respondents focus on soft (social) skills. These include: *flexibility*, *openness to change*, *communicativeness* and *creativity*. The question remains open, to what extent the characteristics listed within this syndrome, as popularized terms, almost common in the "market-guided" discourse (employers declaratively seek such employees, the education system tries to educate such people), are used consciously, or to what extent they are an empty declaration, where defining particular descriptors does not bring any specific content. The next group of features considered socially desirable includes: *commitment*, *persistence*, *activity*, *perseverance*, *tenacity*, *talent*, *skills*, *courage*, *self-confidence* and *assertiveness*, important constituents of proactive behavioural orientations. What is striking, neither the statements of middle school pupils, nor in the statements of students include any

"hard" competencies associated with specific skills desired in specific professions. Perhaps the respondents took it for granted, but possibly being focused on soft competences, often referred to in social discourse, they paradoxically forget about the skills necessary to perform a given profession at a satisfactory level of expertise.

Among the features and characteristics that facilitate the career construction, a separate place is occupied by *appearance* or *beauty*. It is particularly often mentioned by the respondents at both stages of development. Such statements are especially frequent among students of middle schools. However, also young adults are convinced (which is certainly supported by experience) that in postmodern culture the body and appearance, especially adapted to the media-created canons of beauty, are an important element of individual identity formation (Jacyno, 2007; Melosik, 2013), but also a considerable asset on the way to professional success.

Another group of characteristics indicated by respondents consists of cynical terms, probably fuelled by professional frustrations and previous difficult experience of respondents in the labour market (after all, students already gain it during the entire period of tertiary education). On the other hand, it may be an accurate diagnosis of the specifics of postmodern reality and free market economy, to which they in a conformist way relate. I mean here, for example, such expressions of respondents referring to career catalysts as: *compliance*, *abandoning one's own opinion*, *entering the existing schemes*, *sometimes lack of knowledge*, *ability to compete*, *ability to manipulate*, *lack of emotions*, *not caring about the opinion of others* or *availability*. Some also recognized the role of *luck* as a factor in career building. They also pointed to *money* as a prerequisite for realizing professional goals. The last factor is also clearly noticed by middle school pupils.

Re 5. Inhibitors of professional careers are often sought by respondents outside themselves, there is an attribution of responsibility to the outside, at best spreading responsibility for the shape of professional careers to a syndrome of subjective and environmental factors.

Thus a number of statements, especially of students, indicate difficulties in effective planning and realization of a career, which are connected to objective living conditions or complicated situation on the labour market. Apparently small absorptive capacity of the labour market and lack of interesting job offers in smaller towns (*distance from large cities*, *not very interesting labour market*) were most often indicated here. The students' attention was also drawn to the mismatch between the educational market and the labour market needs (*lack of adequate education*, *required qualifications*, *lack of experience*, *excessive expectations of employers*). An interesting diagnosis in this respect was presented by one of the respondents, i.e. that *a fundamental obstacle in making a career is the education system, which promotes learning "about everything"*. This probably refers to deficiencies of education in the

area of key competences for specific professions. Another respondent pointed to the trend with regard to professions fuelled by extensive marketing strategies of various educational entities or media creations. On the list of problems of the Polish labour market affecting professional opportunities of young people appear also such factors as *high unemployment*, *corporate collusion* (however the respondents understand this phenomenon), *bureaucratization of undertakings*, *improper labour law*, *high fees for young employees*, *exploitation of employees*, e.g. *junk contracts*, *lack of assistance or financial support from the state*, *profession opening or bitter lack of perspectives*, i.e. *too little profit for too much money invested* or the belief that *nothing can be done in Poland*. Youth therefore expect active state policy in terms of creating new, attractive jobs which will enable them to obtain satisfactory (?) material gratifications. Their diagnosis of the market reality, which is not devoid of adequate evaluations and apt comments, is based on exposing the specificity of the labour market that is unfriendly to the young. Interestingly, respondents relatively often considered the *lack of clout due to "connections"*, *nepotism* or *human jealousy* as the obstacles to professional development. Their reading of the reality is therefore (in a simplified form) as follows: it is not enough that the state (here the persisting myth about the caring role of the state) does not create opportunities for attractive employment, or employment at all, but also in the growing competition for entering and remaining on the labour market, there are no transparent rules based on clearly defined standards of moving around this professional world. This must, at least for some young adults, give rise to frustration, a sense of injustice and dissatisfaction. In the case of middle school students, such macro-social diagnoses are rarely conducted, but the statement of one of the students remains symptomatic: *career is hindered by corruption*, *"cronyism"*, *high taxes*, *large corporations that dominate the market*.

Another, much more self-critical way of describing professional reality is presented by those respondents who above all in the subjective dimension perceive the basic reasons for the difficulties met by young people constructing their careers. This area includes, for example, the statement of a middle school girl regarding the inhibitors of professional careers, among which she mentions *shyness*, *inappropriate appearance*, *lack of tolerance*. This thinking is echoed by students, who usually mention *lack of faith in their own abilities*, *lack of self-confidence*, *lack of awareness of their resources*, *inability to stand up for themselves*. Middle school pupils making decisions about the next stage of education are separated by a considerable time distance from their entry into the labour market, so their opinions and assessments are rather the result of the influence of family and school socialization, indirect participation in the discourse of the adult world, but university students, when confronted with the reality of competitive, free market economy and its ethical

dissonances, notice their uncertainty, lack of ability to display their strengths and low professional self-esteem. The transition from the role of a student to the role of an employee requires mastering new realization competences and recognizing standards of operation in the world of work, which does not have to be accomplished yet by middle school pupils in the adolescent psychosocial moratorium phase (Erikson, 2004). Among the factors of subjective nature, respondents also indicate: *convenience and comfort of making minimal effort*, *lack of imagination among young people, but also laziness*, *lack of patience*, *greed for too much money without work* or *vanity*.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

What career narrative, then, is characteristic of the group of school and university students surveyed?

Respondents perceive careers in three dimensions: social advancement (more often indicated by middle school students than by university students), personal characteristic of an individual and a dual construct which is not subject to evaluation (the latter dimension is present mainly in the minds of students). Respondents, probably noticing the specificity of constructing non-linear, individualised, flexible careers in the post-modern era, relatively often verbalise dissonances related to this process.

Both pupils, and to a much greater extent, young adults are aware of what is expected of them on the labour market, but they also notice difficulties, ambiguities, ethically reprehensible behaviours connected with pursuing a career. On the one hand, they adequately verbalize expectations of the new professional reality, efficiently recall categories of activity, creativity, involvement in the course of professional life, on the other hand, they blame the state, social reality, rules (or rather the lack thereof) of the market game for potential failures. Careers are life-long, but achievements are often expected immediately, and their measure is to note this fact in the media, e.g. on social networking websites.

The review of narratives of the respondents, both middle school and university students leads to the following observations. According to the respondents, careers are founded on such factors as:

- the need for achievements and successes that are defined by others (this implies a multiple change of their measures, often established in the short run by fads); promotion, prestige, money are often given a special place among the measures of success (more often among younger respondents); some of the respondents emphasize the individual, pro-development char-

acter of the career, but its pattern related to the accumulation of diverse experiences, deprived of the progressive character in the classic sense of social promotion, has not been assimilated by many;

– the need to make it public; existing in the media world, in the virtual space is a career in itself; "visibility" in the creations existing in popular culture is particularly desired, especially among younger respondents;

– popularity and fame (being popular, well-known, recognizable or "liked") as an end in itself rather than an outcome of professional achievement;

– inability to postpone gratification in the professional sphere, which in the culture of immediacy characterizes all areas of life, so it is not surprising that also in the sphere of participation in the labour market, quick and spectacular results are desired;

– perceiving (but if accepting?) many dissonances in the sphere of professional life: on the one hand, valuing activity, creativity, diligence as catalysts for success, and on the other hand, the role of conformism, distancing oneself, using protection, connections and acquaintances in career development;

– attributing responsibility for failures and difficulties to the outside world (macroeconomic mechanisms unfavourable to employees at the stage of transition from the education system to the labour market), this thinking is present in the consciousness of middle school students only occasionally;

– high aspirations and hopes of young people (whether reasonable or not) in relation to professional reality which they will have to face; and in the case of middle school students, most often focusing the present life perspective and postponing reflections on their own professional future, which for a large group of respondents, also at the stage of early adulthood (practically entering the labour market), does not have a defined shape; this conclusion is based on examination of the career plans presented by school and university students in the questionnaire, that, however, were not further analysed in this paper.

The content of the evoked career narratives involves both common and scientific knowledge, as well as the individual's beliefs, which constructs an internal, mental representation of this fragment of reality. If an individual is capable of conducting a narrative, i.e. interpreting the information at his/her disposal, selecting, prioritizing, describing and analyzing the selected fragment of social reality and building self-knowledge and self-evaluation, he/she can predict, build plans and make certain career decisions on their basis.

The question remains whether and to what extent these referenced career narratives will contribute to the formation of individuals' life experiences, will be reflected in the educational and professional choices they make, and will play a role in personally constructed careers.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study results selectively presented in this paper are subject to certain limitations. These limitations mostly result from the non-representativeness of the research sample involved in this study. Given that the study was intentionally aimed to obtain responses only from humanities students and considering the size of the research samples in the groups of adolescents and young adults, the results of the study cannot be generalized to the entire population. Further, the research tool used in the study allowing the respondents to freely give their answers to the open-ended questions asked by a researcher, as well as the qualitative analysis employed to analyse these answers, are subject to some limitations specific for such analyses. Specifically, qualitative analysis is alleged to have low reliability (as individual statements can be assigned to different categories by different researchers or by the same researcher in different contexts), some reports from similar studies are claimed to be anecdotal, undermining the accuracy of the relevant verifications (Silverman, 2007). Neither can the study results be generalized to a wider population due to the way they were analysed. Namely, the results are referred to a specific and verified research group, while the logic of hermeneutics analysis of content says that numbers cannot be used for describing and statistically analysing the data obtained. However, studies of this type have different epistemological assumptions and objectives.

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MŁODZIEŻ O KARIERZE – POSTRZEGANIE KARIERY
NA ETAPIE ADOLESCENCJI I WCZESNEJ DOROSŁOŚCI

Streszczenie: Wprowadzenie: Badania i obserwacje uwidaczniają wielość wzorców karier w kulturze ponowoczesnych społeczeństw. Jest to zjawisko nierozerwalnie związane z pojawieniem się nowego, nieprzejrzystego ładu społecznego, w którym sytuacja społeczno-kulturowa wymusza rezygnację z liniowej narracji życia. **Cel badań:** Zasadniczym celem badań było scharakteryzowanie i deskrypcja wyobrażeń, poglądów, ocen i nastawień młodzieży odnośnie do ponowoczesnego konstruktu kariery. Przy czym są one uchwycone na dwóch etapach bezpośrednio poprzedzających tranzycję: 1) z edukacji gimnazjalnej do szkół licealnych i techników (15-, 16-latkowie, wielkość próby: 179 respondentów) oraz 2) z edukacji wyższej na rynek pracy (przedział wiekowy badanych 20–30 lat, wielkość próby: 223 respondentów). **Metoda badań:** W ramach sondażu diagnostycznego zastosowano autorski kwestionariusz *Kariera w ponowoczesnej rzeczywistości*. W jego ramach wykorzystano tylko pytania otwarte, umożliwiające swobodne wypowiedzi badanych, które następnie poddano analizie jakościowej. **Wyniki:** Zaprezentowano sposoby postrzegania i definiowania kariery, asocjacje z nią związane, kategorie osób, które zdaniem młodych na etapie adolescencji i wczesnej dorosłości pomyślnie realizują karierę zawodową, katalizatory i inhibitory karier zawodowych przywoływane w wypowiedziach młodzieży. **Wnioski:** Przegląd narracji badanych prowadzi między innymi do następujących spostrzeżeń. Kariera oznacza dla nich: 1) konieczność osiągnięć i sukcesów, które są definiowane przez innych, wzorzec kariery związanej z awansem, prestiżem i gratyfikacjami materialnymi jest najczęściej przywoływany; 2) konieczność jej upublicznienia, zaistnienia w świecie medialnym, w przestrzeni wirtualnej; 3) popularność i sławę jako istotny komponent pożądanej kariery; 4) nieumiejętność odraczania gratyfikacji w sferze zawodowej;

5) dostrzeganie dysonansów w rozwoju kariery: z jednej strony – docenianie aktywności, kreatywności, jako katalizatorów sukcesu, z drugiej zaś – konformizmu, korzystania z protekcji, koneksji; 6) atrybucję odpowiedzialności za porażki i trudności w rozwoju kariery na zewnątrz.

Słowa kluczowe: kariera, młodzież, wzorce karier