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THE ANALYSIS OF THE INTENTIONS TO CONTINUE THE STUDIES IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION. CASE STUDY.

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of a survey conducted in the high schools of Calarasi county. The purpose is to estimate the education option of the future graduates. The survey was conducted on a stratified sample, of 630 future graduates of 7 high schools in Călărasi county. In order to inform closer to reality, the design of the questionnaire sought to identify options for the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Bucharest, following the evaluation by the pupils, of the group of university education offers. Almost all, of 96.7 % of pupils expressed their intention to continue their studies in the higher education, most of them continuing the tradition of the past years, to direct their options to the economic education, respectively 31%. The school population was divided into five layers, depending on the number of graduates registered in the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Bucharest, in the academic year 2014/2015. The demand for the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Bucharest represents 27% of the demand for the public education, most of them coming from the high schools with agricultural and economic profile. In order to improve the promotion strategy, along with the options estimation, the investigation aimed also to identify the main reasons for the choice made and to highlight the main sources of information. Analyzing the distribution of reasons, we found out that the first reasons are: good training, existing specializations, internships abroad, providing accommodation.

Key words*: agricultural profile, economic profile, education option, high schools, school population*

INTRODUCTION

According to the European Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 concerning the strategy of the European Union (EU) in education and training sector in the period 2010-2020 [10], at least 40% of people aged 30-34 years should have completed tertiary education (ISCED levels 5 and 6) in 2020.
The graduation of a faculty is an essential condition in the context of the EU desire to have a knowledge-based economy, implicitly a workforce with a high level of education, able to face the competition in the common market. A high level of education is associated, at the micro level, with the chance of obtaining a higher income and at the macro level, with a high degree of economic development [6].
The motivational aspects and attitude towards the school in the context of Internet competition as an information tool constitute together only one dimension explaining the school performance and the desire to continue the studies [3].
The family income, the parents support to their children, the size of the locality in which the educational institution is situated (with emphasis on the difference between the urban and rural area), the distance between school and pupils house (measured by the time required to cross the road from home to school) are other variables that the researches in education have taken into account when studying the intention to continue the studies in the higher education [4].
The main purpose of the present study was to identify the key factors that may be considered when discussing about the policies in the education sector regarding the access and equity at the university level, and regarding encouraging the young people to continue their efforts to pass the bachelor degree studies, respectively master studies.

The European policies regarding the education and employment highlight the need to continue study for a larger number of young people, this is the only way to build a knowledge-based economy [8]. However, in Romania, the number of students is continuously decreasing, consequence of the lack of interest of the young people for the higher education, but also of the reduced number of high school graduates who do not pass the baccalaureate exam. Thus, it must increase the percentage of people who still want a university degree, as a key objective of the European Union, both in the employment and in the education sector [7].
Therefore, in this study, we sought theoretical explanations (models) that allow us to understand, mainly, the young people reporting to the higher education and possible sources of inequity when it refers to the access to the higher education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Assuming that the educational and employment options of the high school graduates are influenced by the current socio-economic context, we initiated a sociological survey based on a questionnaire with the objective of identifying the factors that influence the decision of the high school pupil to continue studies at university level, the options of the high school graduates in order to identify the potential candidates to USAMV Bucharest.
The research was based on the questionnaire method applied to the pupils in the sample. The instrument used had 11 closed/semi-closed items and an open item, focused on: the profile of classroom in which the pupils is; intention after graduation; sources of information about the faculty/occupation they choose; the locality where they want to study; the field of study they choose; the reasons to continue education; the criteria for the faculty selection; the state/ country in which the student wants to work after the high school; the sector they choose employment; the current residence and the financial situation of the parents etc. Some features of the future candidates of the university, the profile of high school study and gender distribution were highlighted, too. The sample was made up only of the pupils present in class hours when the questionnaire was given.
In relation to the structure of the candidates and the possible resources of the research - direct administration in schools of the instruments, by the representatives of the Faculty of Management-Calarași branch, the survey was conducted on a stratified sample, of 630 future graduates of 7 high schools in Calarași county, in the period 8-15th December 2014.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The distribution according to the pupils gender in the research sample was: 47.5% boys and 52.5% girls, as it is shown in figure 1.

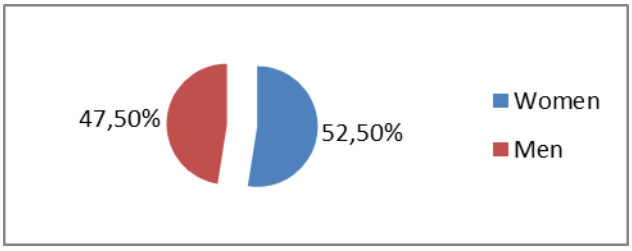

Fig. 1. The structure of sample from the point of view of the respondents gender

The distribution depending on the pupils background, respectively the profile they graduated, is presented in figures 2 and 3.

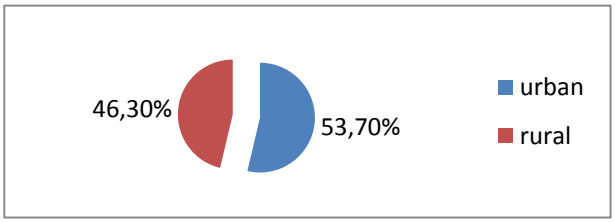

Fig. 2. Distribution of pupils in the sample, according to their background

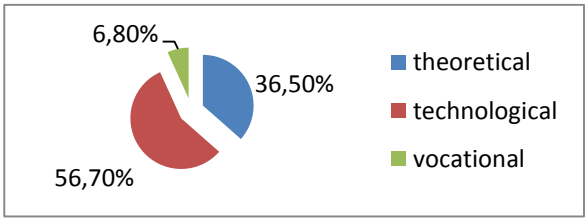

Fig. 3. Distribution of pupils in the sample, according to the high school profile

When asked about the intention they have

after graduation, pupils had as option to continue education, employment or both in parallel (Table 1).

Most high school pupils are decided after graduation to attend a faculty in Romania (91.3 %). A low percentage of the respondents want to go to the university abroad (5.4 %). Many students want after graduation to employ and to attend a faculty in Romania (31.6 %). We can say that, among the high school pupils, the option of leaving abroad (for studies or not) is less present than the option of remaining in Romania.

Comparing the intention after graduation depending on the respondents gender it results that girls are more focused on continuing study, and boys more on employment. It also results that more pupils from the urban area seek to continue education, compared to those from the rural area, who rather aim the integration on the labour market.

Table 1. Structure of respondents, on the intention to continue studies

INTENTION AFTER GRADUATION	STRUCTURE, ON GENDER –no-		AREA THEY LIVE IN -no-	
	GIRLS	BOYS	URBAN	RURAL
I continue studies	228	189	229	179
I employ	8	15	6	17
I continue studies and employ at the same time	95	104	103	96
TOTAL	331	299	338	292

A stage of career planning is the collection of information on the educational and occupational opportunities. The accuracy of the information obtained is essential for the graduates to choose according to their interests, values and lifestyle (Johnstone, Bruce and all., 2010).

When asked about the sources they use for information, the graduates could choose more options than those listed in the questionnaire. The family and the group of friends are the main sources of information the graduates choose for making decisions after completing the high school, the direct promotional campaign made in the high school regarding the educational offer is considered as a second source of information, the third source is the Internet and media. The subjects in technological high schools have given more importance consultation with third parties, compared with those from the theoretical high schools.

These differences are due to the differences in the general areas in the previous school year between the respondents in the three types of high schools.

As regards the place where they would like to study, Bucharest University Center remain in the pupils preferences, followed by Constanta University Center. Most of them go to universities situated near Călărasi county. At the time of the survey, 7.2 % of the respondents said they want to continue their studies in Călărasi, and of these 74 % intend to employ.

Table 2 highlights the study options depending on the graduate profile. In general, there is a good correlation between them, but there are also options that are not in the profile graduated by the pupils.

Table 2. Options for the study field, depending on the graduated profile

The field option	Graduated profile					
	real	human	services	technical	natural resources	other
Exact sciences and IT	22	8	1	12	6	2
Nature sciences	5	4	3	3	11	1
Human sciences	2	9	1	2	2	3
legal sciences	7	13	3	4	1	1
Social and political sciences	3	14	6	4	2	2
Economic sciences	12	10	61	5	3	-
Architecture and town planning	4	6	-	1	-	-
Agricultural sciences and veterinary medicine	11	10	53	42	51	15
-of which, USAMV Bucharest	*11*	*10*	*51*	*39*	*46*	*13*
Engineering sciences	13	11	6	25	3	2
Management and economic engineering	15	6	15	15	16	5
-of which, Călăraşi branch	*6*	*2*	*11*	*10*	*11*	*5*
Military sciences and information	1	1	-	1	1	1
Medicine/pharmacy/ stomatology	9	7	-	-	1	-
Psychology/education sciences	2	11	2	1	3	2
others	2	5	-	3	4	2
TOTAL	108	115	149	118	104	36

The analysis of the options for the study field depending on the gender of subjects, highlights that girls are more attracted by the economic, legal, human sciences, while boys rather aim a career in IT field, engineering and public safety.

It is surprising, perhaps, that pupils from the technological profile want to follow at a much higher rate, faculties of economic sciences (22.8%) than the faculties of engineering sciences (12.5%). A first explanation is that 41.1% of the pupils in service profile (the Technological profile) are interested in attending a faculty in the field of economics. A second explanation relates to the crisis of the economic sectors that need engineers in the context of reducing the industrial sector and increasing of the service sector.

Table 3. Motivation of choosing the faculty, depending on the graduated profile

How important are, for you, the following criteria to decide for the faculty?	Theoretical PROFILE	Technological PROFILE	Vocational PROFILE
	NUMBER OF PUPILS		
Own aspirations	65	20	1
Material gain	41	88	8
Faculty profile	19	34	2
State faculty	19	21	1
Near home	7	34	2
Taxes	11	29	4
Profession prestige	41	29	2
Admission based on file, without exam	6	53	4
friends/colleagues who attended or are preparing to attend this faculty	7	11	7
There is practice abroad	2	33	3
There is distance learning (no attendance)	5	19	2
TOTAL	223	371	36

Comparing the respondents' answers according to their origin, we consider that the option for the study fields is influenced by the existing employment opportunities, that is, graduates are prepared for those professions that are more likely to employ in their residence.

From the processed data, it results that the majority of the pupils believe that the most important criterion in choosing a university is that of *own aspirations*, followed by *material gain* and *professional prestige* for which they prepare. For 8% of the pupils *near the home* is the most important criterion in choosing the faculty (Table 3).

The comparative analysis of the data on the past two years shows a higher valuation by the graduates in 2013 of the material gain and professional prestige. It also notes that the family influence tends to grow.

Ranking the criteria for the selection of the faculty is not significantly influenced by gender or origin, but still we can appreciate that for boys, material gain and professional prestige are important criteria than for girls.

When choosing a faculty, compared to the pupils from the high schools with theoretical profile, for the pupils in the high schools with technological profile is more important that the taxes are low, easy admission, based on the file, or to be able to attend distance learning. These results also arise due to the differences between the averages obtained at school, as long as those in the technological profile have significantly lower average than those in the theoretical high schools. Also, those in the high schools with technological profile give more importance to the idea of "having friends/acquaintances who attended, or are preparing to attend this faculty".

Paradoxically, the pupils in the high schools with technological and vocational profile are those who want to know if the faculty can be distance learning, due to the low average. However, the technical and vocational fields can be taught in a difficult way in the form of "no attendance" (given the existence of laboratories, practical tests), but rather the prerogative of the classic education, with compulsory attendance. Beyond the low averages, it is possible that the pupils in the technological and vocational high schools to move towards distance learning because they think to get a job, compared with those who completed theoretical high schools.

As it is shown in Figure 4, the majority of respondents, respectively 56.85%, come from families with a monthly income of up to 2,000 lei. These pupils are going to continue their studies, to state faculties that have more budget places, but they not follow their own aspirations.

The pupils in the rural area are less interested in attending a faculty.

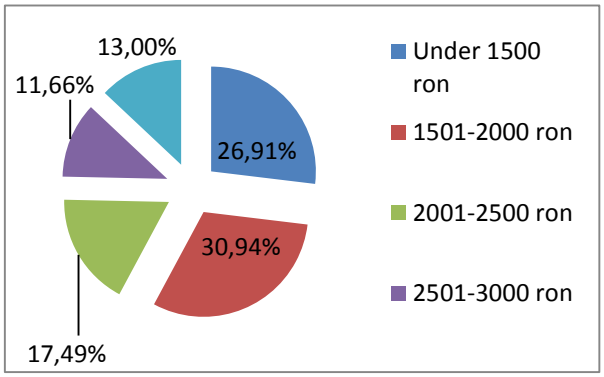

Fig. 4. Structure of pupils in the sample, according to the family monthly income

A first possible explanation is that parents of the pupils in the rural area have a lower education level and this creates lower expectations from the pupils to continue their studies at university level. A second possible explanation is based on the reality that there is a positive correlation between the family income and the locality size (the pupils in the rural area live in families poorer than the pupils in the urban area), which implies an inequality on the chances of a pupil in the rural area to attend a faculty.

Although the image of higher education in Romania since the late 80s may seem more idyllic, in fact it is a distorted image, given that only 9% of the high school graduates had access to a place in higher education institutions and to state support (scholarships, homes, transport facilities, student camps, student clubs, etc.) to complete their studies [9]. Thus, it is required an education system able to function as a key element of progress and of socio-economic development, by ensuring a fair access to the higher education programs for the children who come from all social backgrounds.

In addition to information about future graduates, the following features of the segment of pupils who expressed their intention to continue studies in USAMV Bucharest, are presented:

* in terms of the graduated study profile, the sample distribution is shown in Figure 5. The first place is service profile, with 29.8% of the pupils' intentions, followed by natural resource profile, with 27% and technical profile with 22.9%.

* the gender distribution of possible candidates to USAMV Bucharest, reflect a relation of 61.7% compared to 38.3%, for boys.

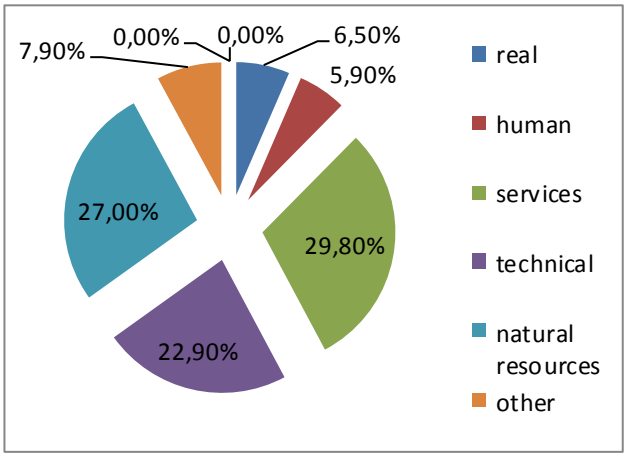

Fig. 5. Study profile of potential candidates of USAMV Bucharest

The main reason to continue the studies is the premise that the diplomas/knowledge/ skills gained after completing higher level studies would increase the chances for employment, in better paid jobs [5].

Many of the young people surveyed believe that our society values the education and, therefore, continuing study is a way to form a better image at the community level. These issues we encountered in other studies of graduates with leadership [2].

CONCLUSIONS

The results presented in this study confirmed a number of older assumptions (eg the correlation between income and parents' education level and children's educational path) [1].

After the information is obtained from the acquaintances and friends (31%), the direct promotion done in the high school, regarding educational offer of our university is the second source of information (29%), for the graduates who expressed the option for the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Bucharest, the third source being the Internet (22%).

Other elements, relatively newer, but appeared on the agenda, such as the higher concern for quality of the programs that pupils

graduated and how they correlate with the labour market.

The increasing number of graduates who intend to employ at the end of the high school correlates with the socio-economic situation at national level, which is reflected negatively on the family budget.

Based on the graduates' aspirations and parents expectations, it can explain why a greater number of graduates from the urban area wants to continue education, education is more valued in this area.

In general, there is continuity between the specialization in the faculty which pupils choose, and the profile they graduate.

However, there are options for a completely different field of study that enables us to believe that either the initial orientation of the pupils was not appropriate to their interests and competences, or their choice today is not well founded.

The graduates of the technological profile are to a great extent the "nursery" for the labour market both at home and abroad.

Their own aspirations and the material gain are issues that are on the top two positions in the hierarchy of the criteria according to which graduates choose both the faculty and the profession. This reflects on the one hand, the stability of their motivational system, and on the other hand, the method of the graduates adaptation to the current socio-economic context.

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