

## THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO THE LABOUR MARKET- A QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

*This article presents the results of a qualitative research which had as main objective the analysis of the population's perceptions regarding the transition process from school to the labour market. From the theoretical point of view, we will mainly resort to those theories and perspectives arguing that in the analysis of the transition from school to the labour market a relevant part is played by the understanding of the behaviour, attitudes and perceptions of the individuals involved in the process. From the empirical point of view, the analysis of the transition process from school to the labour market is based on the views and perceptions of 54 people, men and women, aged between 20 and 60 years of age, with different occupations and levels of education, who have been surveyed in the time period January 2015 to June 2015.*

**Key words:** Personal and professional development process, snow ball/chain sampling method, transition from school to the labour market, semi-structured interview

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### Introduction

Not long ago, the process of transition from school to the labour market was analysed as a method to assess the effectiveness of the educational system: the higher the number of graduates who found a job, the higher the efficiency of the educational system. Subsequently, it was found that the transition from school to the labour market was a much more complex and should be analysed as an independent process.

In the literature, there are numerous traditional and modern theories and perspectives regarding the transition process from school to the labour market. As a general rule, the perspective of the traditional approach to this process favours statistical, quantitative data, whereas the modern

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perspective promotes results obtained by qualitative research. In view of the fact that the transition process from school to the labour market is still little known, even though the volume of statistical data is huge, more and more researchers believe that the analysis of the opinions and perceptions of a population can be a solution to better understand the stages and the factors impacting job time and career trajectory etc. In the first part of the article, we will present the research objectives, the hypotheses and the main approaches to the process of transition from school to the labour market. In the second part, we will describe the research methodology and the data analysis. The last section of our paper comprises conclusions and possible directions for further development of the topic we have addressed.

### **Objective and analysed data**

Our objective was to analyse the transition from school to the labour market as it is perceived by the public at large. The way in which people perceive this process will vary depending on their individual characteristics (gender, age), education level, the stage in the process of transition from school to the labour market at which responder is at the time of data collection, the (re)sources used to access the labour market etc. The main research question is “how do the interviewed persons perceive the process of transition from school to the labour market?”, as well as:

- Is the process of transition from school to the labour market complete once the respondents have obtained a job?
- Does the educational “history” of the respondents (type of school attended, profile, specialisation etc.) influence the process of transition from school to the labour market?
- Will the respondents adopt their strategies to accomplish their socio-professional goals or will they be subject to the conditions imposed from the outside (the socio-economic and political context, the employers’ offer etc.)?

### **Theoretical and methodological framework**

The process of transition from school to the labour market is a theme that may be analysed both by using quantitative, statistical data, as well as by means of qualitative data. Statistical data obtained by quantitative methods have the advantage of allowing comparisons - international comparisons between different social systems involved in the process of transition from school to the labour market (the educational system, the economic system, the system of

social protection) and the different components and dimensions of the systems. Also, the analysis of the data obtained by quantitative methods and the conclusions thus generated may be generalized for the entire population – people's awareness of labour market accessibility, for example –, or for some segments of the country's population – graduates of a certain level of education, for example.

Analysing the process of transition from school to the labour market also requires qualitative research. Such an analysis implies looking at individuals with unique personalities, influenced by the environment in which they live (family, school, group of friends, colleagues etc.), educated, working but who, in their turn, influence the course of things and events. The information obtained through in-depth interviews with people at different times/stages in the process of transition from school to the labour market reveals concrete, immediate situations that may challenge an individual, the strategies adopted, the reasons behind the decisions made etc.

The process of transition from school to the labour market is regarded by all researchers and analysts as highly relevant not only in the life of individuals but also for the society to which they belong. For this reason, qualitative research is much more appropriate than the use of data resulting from quantitative research. Qualitative research reveals the reactions, representations, perceptions of individuals and communities to a greater extent than quantitative research. The action taken in relation to one event or another, the strategies and attitudes adopted depend on the citizens' perception regarding this process of transition. Referring strictly to the process of transition from school to the labour market, a positive perception on the labour market leads to favourable actions, inclusion as well as education and professional training, building strategies and individual projects on the medium and long term. On the other hand, a negative perception increases distance between the individual and the systems involved in this process, increases the likelihood of the individual's dropping out of the educational system and training, as well as his leaving the labour market, with effects on all of the members of the society to which they belong (increased unemployment and crime, conflicts among different categories of the population etc.).

In the literature, there are developed numerous perspectives and theories on the process of transition from school to the labour market, both traditional and modern. It is noted, however, that the traditional perspectives (human capital theory, signal theory etc.) are much more oriented towards quantitative data. Modern theories focus on the role of the population's attitudes, behaviour, perceptions of the process and, therefore, are much more open to qualitative data analyses. Given the fact that the data serving as the basis for our analysis is qualitative and

considering the perspectives to which we shall mainly resort, our approach may be classified as modern.

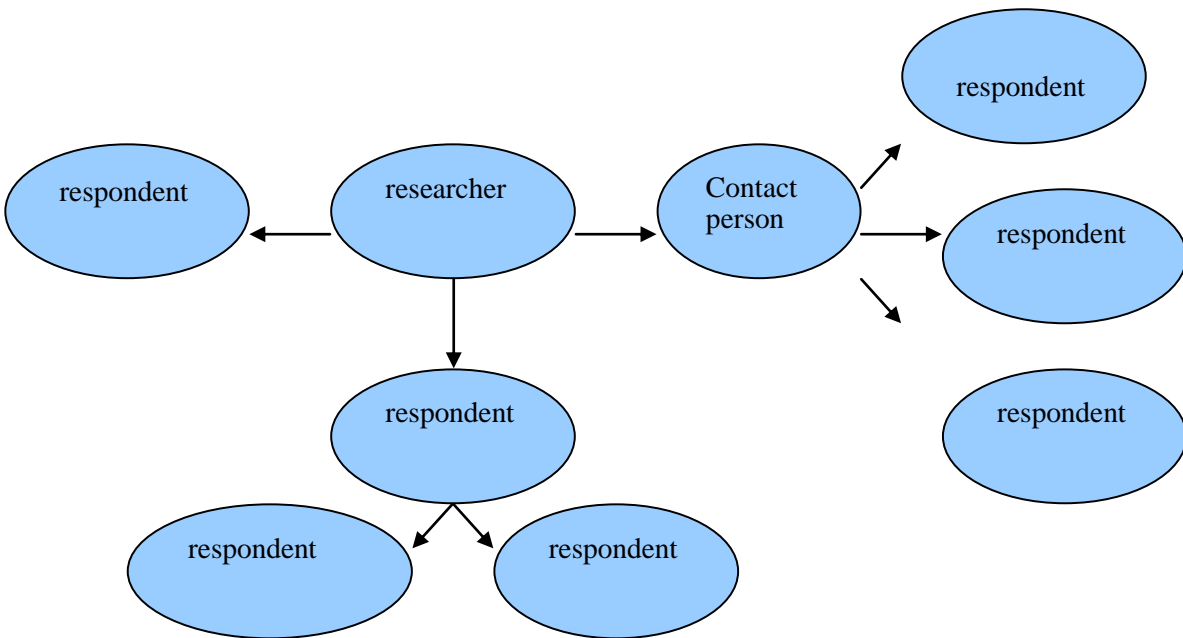
One of the perspectives regarding the transition process from school to the labour market belongs to J. Vincens (1997); Vincens discusses the individual's conduct in a rational search for a job: an individual allocates time to analysing the employment offer, looks for a job with indefinite period working contract and also an occupation that may correspond to his educational level or training. All these actions are influenced by the conditions specific to the respective society, as well as by the individual's psycho-intellectual, socio-economic and family characteristics etc.

In an article published in the *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, G. Fournier et. al. (1992) present a series of approaches to the process of transition from school to the labour market, from the perspective of personal development. The central idea of these approaches is that this school-labour market transition process is part of the wider process of individual development. For Levinson and collaborators (Levinson et collaborators 1978 apud Fournie et. all. 1992:272) the process of transition from school to the labour market involves a series of changes at the individual and personal level, with the role of helping the individual adapt to the labour market. According to the authors, the process has two stages: the first stage, where the individual looks at professional options and tests the labour market, assuming various professional positions; a second stage, characterised by adaptation to the labour market and the individual's search for job stability. Our data analysis will try to reveal whether the respondents have "tested" several qualifications, professional positions, whether they have reached the conclusion that they have identified a profession that is suitable to them and that they intend to keep.

The perspectives proposed by Riverin-Simard and Neugarten (Riverin-Simard, 1984,1990; Neugarten, 1976 apud Fournie et. all. 1992:273-274) focus on the idea of compromise. These researchers claim that the period of transition from one system to another (from the educational to the economic system) is one in which individuals face their own limits, aspirations, professional skills and the conditions imposed by the socio-economic reality. It is possible that at their first contact with the labour market, individuals may find a relevant gap between their own expectations and reality. A successful transition process consists in identifying the strategies needed to create balance between individual desires and the labour market offer. Discussions with the people included in our research included descriptions of their expectations regarding the labour market, assessment of the distance between expectations and what they have found in reality but also perception of their future developments of the particularly difficult market situation at work.

Gilligan (Gilligan, 1982 apud Fournie et. all. 1992:276) proposes an analysis of the process of transition from school to the labour market from the gender point of view: the differences between women and men as regards the system of values, life style, reporting to the other etc. are factors that also reflect on the transition from school to the labour market. In the analysis of the perceptions, attitudes, strategies adopted by our respondents in the transition process from school to the labour market, we will draw a comparison between women and men to see if there are any gender-based differences regarding this issue.

The research methods used for data collection and interpretation are qualitative: the method of “snowball” or “chain sampling”, to identify the target population, the semi-structured interview for data collection (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Snow ball/chain sampling method

Like other research methods, the method of chain sampling has both advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage is linked to the costs, which are much lower in comparison with quantitative research carried out on large samples, which are representative of the population of the country. Another advantage of the chain sampling method is that it enables faster access to the target population - because it relies on advice received from persons one already knows – and meaningful results are obtained in a shorter time.

The main disadvantage of this method is whether the sample is representative or not. The surveyed persons are not selected by statistical methods, but as a result of the choice of other respondents. For this type of research, the sample size is determined by a researcher and increases until it is considered to be sufficient by the data collector, in the light of the research objectives. We believe that the investigation of 54 persons may support the identification of the characteristics of the process of transition from school to the labour market. The target population comprises persons aged over 20 years, men and women, who already have an occupation or are in search of employment and have at least graduated high-school – secondary education.

The “chain” – also known as “snowball” – sampling relies on a simple rule: respondents recommend other respondents as possible research subjects. This mode of selecting the respondents makes it easy to include, in the research sample, those persons with multiple relations, but leaves aside those who are “isolated”.

Although it relies on the subjective choices of respondents, sample selection is not carried out randomly, but on the basis of accurate, consistent criteria. The criteria used for the selection of the respondents are set by a researcher in agreement with the research objectives and hypotheses. In this case, we have established as the main selection criterion the education level – the respondents have at least the secondary level of education (12 grades). The application of this criterion is supported by the fact that the population’s socio-professional integration requires as higher a level of education as possible. Regarding persons with low education levels, we cannot talk about a process of transition from school to the labour market, as that is rather a process of socio-professional exclusion and marginalisation. In agreement with the research objective and also considering the given theoretical framework, the respondents were selected so as to cover different categories of age, men and women, so that the process of transition may be approached at its different stages and also in relation to gender etc.

The main features of the research tool – the semi-structured interview – were: designing an interview guide (a list of pre-defined questions) and guiding discussion through specific questions. The interview guide used in this research included four large-scale dimensions which we have considered essential in the transition process: education, the socio-relational capital, occupation and perspectives on the medium and long term regarding the respondents’ professional activities. For the purpose of determining these dimensions, we have taken into account the fact that:

- the results obtained in the context of other qualitative or quantitative research demonstrate the relevant part played by the educational level in the transition process from school to the labour

market: the higher the level of education, the shorter and easier the transition, increased access to employment and to a better and safer job.

- employment offers are gradually decreasing whereas the school provides the labour market with an increasing number of highly educated people. In these circumstances, employment does not depend exclusively on the level of education, but also on the personality traits and behaviour of the applicant, his/ her possessions, recommendations, family support, the group to which he/she belongs. Also, people with at least secondary level of education are more actively engaged in searching for a job, compared to people with lower levels of education or those who are professionally inactive.

- having a job means that we can say that a person has completed the process of transition from school to the labour market, but that is not always the case. The individual's relations with co-workers, superiors or subordinates, professional evaluation, income satisfaction, chances of promotion etc. are factors that may influence the transition: it can be terminated or still in progress, if the person intends to change his job in the next 2-3 years. Although it is to be expected that this process will not be manifested at younger ages, the data shows that, in the modern society, the school to labour market transition can be a continuous process: people can complete studies, may change their jobs at ages when other people are preparing for retirement.

- the medium and long term professional perspectives represent a dimension directly connected to the transition stages. Thus, if a person intends to continue the transition process, he/she will take into account the results and experiences acquired both as a student and as an employee. One of our hypotheses is that positive experiences will determine an optimistic view regarding the social and professional future whereas, on the contrary, negative experiences, failures or educational and/or professional dissatisfaction will result in negative views.

The persons involved in the research were given details regarding the research objective before the interview, and were encouraged to develop each dimension discussed in more detail. There was no time limit for completing the interview, each person being allowed to submit comments, points of view as long as considered necessary.

## **Results**

Research data analysis requires the establishment of specific stages. One of them consisted in controlling the coverage of all the topics of the interview, or the socio-demographic data of the respondents, for example. Of the 54 interviews carried out, we found out that all are consistent

with the conditions imposed by the methodology and, therefore, we ranked them according to gender, age group and level of education. To facilitate analysis, we have determined three age groups - a group of age under 35 years, a second age group between 36 years old and 50 years old and the third group composed of persons aged over 51 years. With regard to the level of education, we have established three categories: secondary-level, post-secondary level and higher level of education. The research sample characteristics are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics of the population surveyed

gender		age			level of education		
women	men	under 35 years	36-50 years	51 years and over	high school (12 classes)	post-secondary level	higher education
42	12	20	24	10	6	8	40

The next stage of the process of analysis consisted in establishing a scheme for the analysis of the research data, to connect the dimensions at the basis of our interview (education, relational capital, occupation and perspectives on the medium and long term) with the main stages of the transition process from school to the labour market: preparation process, the onset, professional integration process, stage of transition from school to the labour market.

**Table 2.** Scheme for research data analysis

Preparing the transition process	Beginning of the transition to labour market	Professional integration	The stages of the transition process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- motivation for learning;</li> <li>- the type of educational establishment frequented (educational institution prestige; specialisation, the criteria for their selection of the institution);</li> <li>- family role;</li> <li>- school results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the time needed to obtain a job;</li> <li>- correspondence between level of education and job;</li> <li>-sources, methods to search for an employment;</li> <li>- the number of jobs ;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- satisfaction with work;</li> <li>- relations with co-workers;</li> <li>- chances of promotion;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- intention to change place of work;</li> <li>- intention to leave the country for a much better job;</li> <li>- expectations regarding the labour market</li> </ul>



### **Preparing the transition from school to the labour market**

The school represents an important step in the preparation of the process of transition from school to the labour market: apart from the fact that an individual is expected to display certain skills and knowledge required for a certain job, he should also comply with a working schedule, carrying out certain responsibilities, integrate into a collective etc. All the interviewed people chose to continue their studies beyond elementary education. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the respondents asserted that their graduation from elementary school (8 classes, 9 or 10 classes according to the changes made to our educational system) implied a graduation exam/test of knowledge. Favourable results at such examinations allowed the respondents not only to continue their studies but, in some cases, also to choose their educational institution. As regards secondary schools, most of the selected respondents have graduated high school with very good results. The respondents who obtained the best school results during high school also got the same type of results in faculty. The motivation was different for each of them; but, quite a large number of the respondents have associated educational performance with responsibility, the desire to do well in what they were doing. Regarding the relevance of good school results in relation to the process of transition from school to the labour market, it was demonstrated that these are in many cases an indicator of the ability of individuals to meet the responsibilities assigned at work and also a proof of their interest for knowledge and enhanced performance. Supporters of the signal theory for example, (Arrow & Turow, apud Nauze-Fichet et Tomasini, 2002:4) believe that it is not only the level of education completed by a person that will be taken into account by potential employers when assessing candidates for a place of work, but also the candidate's school results. School results support the employer in identifying the candidate's level of involvement, commitment to objectives and responsibilities. Regarding the choice of higher education establishments and particularly of specializations, the criteria have been different: some of them have chosen to specialise in a certain domain in agreement with their interests, others chose a certain specialisation because it was "fashionable" and others because a higher level of education could provide them with easier access to the labour market.

*"After completing high school I have decided to continue with my studies so that I would not remain only with high-school studies for the rest of my life" (woman, 50 years old, teacher)*

*"There has been no time for me to think that I would not continue my studies after high school. I have found that it would be best for my future, to go as far as I could with my studies" (woman, 30 years, economist)*

*"I've got a better paid job" (woman, 31 years old, teacher)*

*"In choosing faculty, my passions and objectives counted most" (woman, 44 years, teacher)*

*"In secondary level, we decided to go to the Academy of Economic Studies. It was "fashionable"  
... so demanding when on the market" (woman, 34, accountant)*

*"We've chosen a technical specialist in college ... it was cool - " (man, 44 years old, engineer)*

We may notice that a compulsory education system, like the Romanian system, organised on distinct sectors – vocational, high school education - where the allocation is made according to student preference has an impact on the process of transition from school to the labour market. On the one hand, only upper secondary education provides access to higher education. Those who complete vocational training have to complete studies to obtain a graduation diploma enabling them access to top-level education. This means that the time spend by a population in school is longer or shorter, depending on the type of education attended. On the other hand, the content of education involved in the two sectors is different: greater emphasis on practical skills in vocational schools (Măță, 2015) and academic training in high schools.

Higher education promotes academic competence, which means more chances for high school graduates to have favourable socio-professional directions. Not just any type of high school leads directly to university. The impact of the type of education institution attended or the type of the class of students are more frequently analysed in the studies on access and success in education. So, researchers claim that the "likelihood that students continue their studies beyond the secondary level is not merely connected to the disadvantaged socio-economic background of their origin, but rather to the category of the school attended." (Sevigny, 2003, 39-40, apud Bissonnette at all, 2005:89). Under these circumstances, I have found that the process of transition from school to the labour market may be affected by the type of school attended, the specialization or the school results obtained.

Studies focused on the relationship between education and occupation, conducted in developing countries, like Romania, have revealed the fact that persons who attended prestigious educational institutions have better chances to find a job by comparison with those who have attended a low-prestige educational establishment (Vernières et all, 1994:741). Others focused on the impact of the specialization attended and have reached the conclusion that this is not to be neglected. The results of an opinion poll conducted in Portugal have shown that graduates of informatics and engineering find jobs faster compared to graduates of other specializations (Gaio Alves, 2005:38).

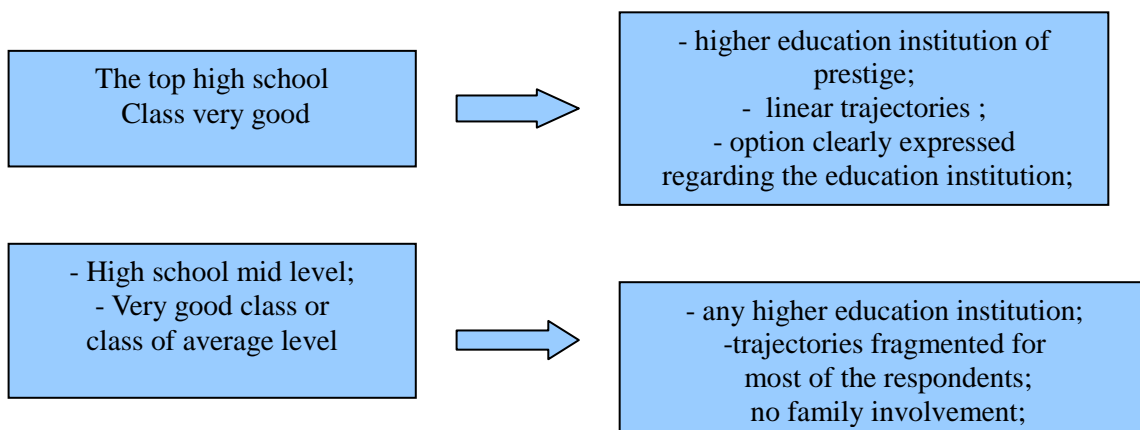
To check the relevance of the results of other studies in relation to our research, we have included in the first part of the interview guide, questions relating to the type of institution attended, the

specialisation followed but also the existence of a connection between the type of high school and the type of post-secondary studies. Analysis of the data research supported the idea that the educational institution's prestige, quality education, attract prestige and quality: regardless of the respondents' age, both women and men claiming to have attended a reputed or top institution of secondary education and were part of a class of students quoted as being the best in the institution concerned, continued studies in higher education immediately after high school graduation. Not only did most of them continue their studies, but they also opted for higher education establishments rated as very good: universities with tradition, single colleges with specializations at a national level.

*"The Police Academy is a unique institution in our country, I would have attended it anyway, irrespective of its location" (man, 45 years, police officer)*

*"The only university in the country at that time - light industry, which was set up in 1977. It was only at the end of the week and the profile, specialisation were on the rise" (man, 60 years old, engineer)*

I have also noted that the educational and professional trajectory of the respondents who have attended prestigious institutions is, in several cases, linear: secondary education, higher education and employment in less than 1 month after graduation. The path of those who attended an institution of secondary education regarded as average level, regardless of the fact that they were part of a class quoted as being very good, proved to be, in several cases, fragmented (secondary-level education, entry into the labour market or return to the educational system after a longer or shorter period of time, or attending a higher education institution in parallel with carrying out a professional activity etc.) (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Educational path

Our research data shows that *"the school effect"* has had a greater influence on the transition process from school to the labour market than *"the class effect"*.

Regarding the specialisation/educational institution profile, I found out that on the whole, with respect to the people included in this research, there is no direct indication of an easier or more difficult transition from school to the labour market. The research data have nevertheless highlighted a particular aspect of our society and of the Romanian educational system in particular. A large proportion of respondents have indicated that they have completed secondary level with the profile Mathematics-Physics. In Romania, before 1990 and after the changes in the economic and political regime, the classes of Mathematics-Physics from secondary schools had the best-trained teachers and the best students in that institution. Even if the specialisation/profile selected in higher education has been another one, the fact that they had been taught by well-trained teachers may have supported the respondents during their higher education and later on the labour market. Success obtained in a sector of activity generates self-confidence and positive attitudes which may prove very important in the process of transition from school to the labour market. The quality of the education institution is particularly important, but the family and individual involvement is a determining factor. As seen in the above chart (Graph 2), the respondents who have followed an educational path with a higher level of education quality and institutional prestige also referred to family support. Family support in the process of transition from school to the labour market has been referred to in a variety of forms: covering the costs of education, the decision regarding which educational institution to attend; some respondents claimed that they felt obliged to reach a higher level of education because their parents had higher education, for example.

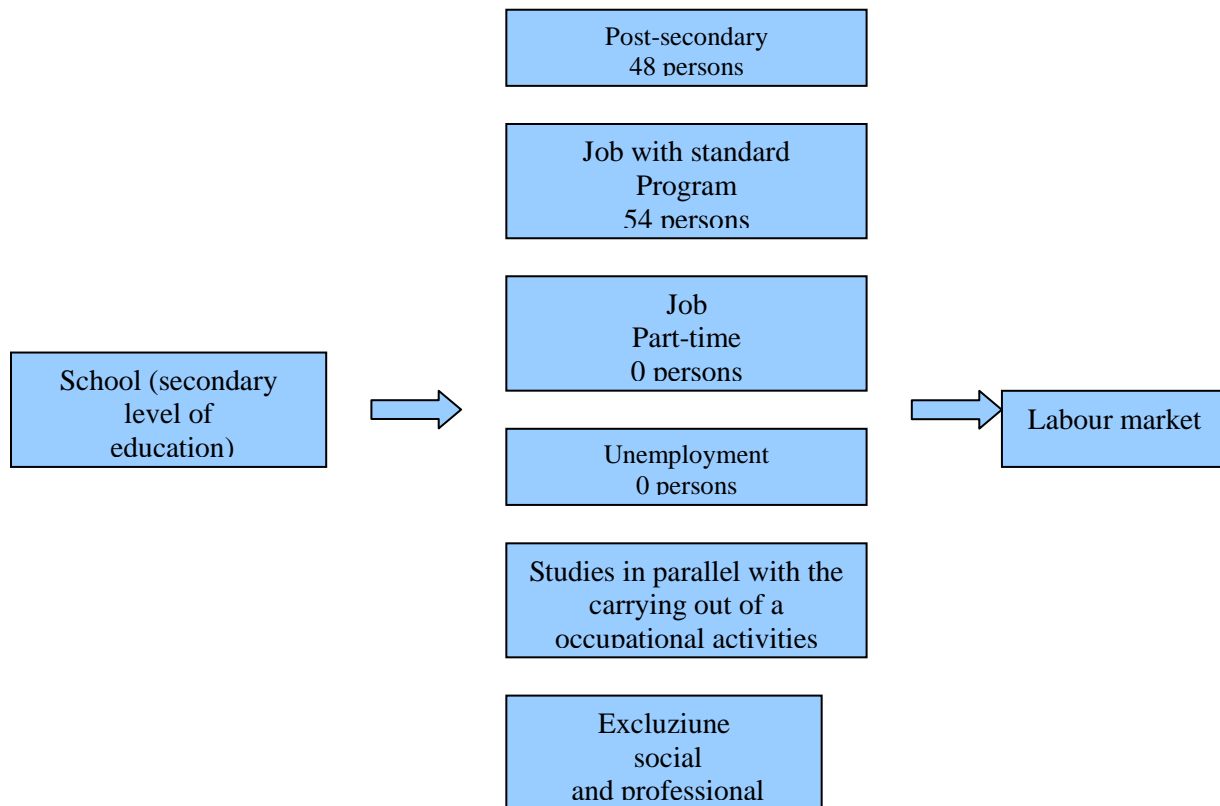
*"It was natural, with both parents with higher education... "* (woman, 34, accountant)

*"I never imagined I would stop studying after completing high-school. Both parents are graduates of higher education"* (man, 36 years old, research analyst).

Thus, as American sociologists Blau and Duncan (1967) claim, the social status of parents (level of education, occupation, financial capital etc.) impacts the occupational status of their children in an indirect way. On the one hand, having an occupation means parents can afford to financially support their children in school until graduating a higher educational level. On the other hand, they themselves are an example that educational and professional success can be achieved.

### Beginning transition to labour market

Some researchers (Levinson et al., 1978 apud G. Fournier et al., 1992) claim that the process of transition from school to the labour market is a predictable, inevitable step in someone's life for which they are being prepared: attending school, looking for a job. Other researchers believe that, on the contrary, it is a step perceived as a source of stress. The transition is a process of personal and professional change, involves leaving a familiar environment - family, school, community - for another one, little or not at all known: the labour market, a new home etc. (Gould, 1978, apud G. Fournier et al., 1992). Beginning the process of transition from school to the labour market is a socio-professional stage of the individual. Obtaining, from the outset, a job according to one's school education, with a standard program, allows efficient utilisation of the knowledge acquired, self-esteem, and a possible means of starting to climb the professional ladder etc. Inclusion in the target population of this research of different categories of age allows us to test several variants regarding the process of transition from school to the labour market but, above all, we will be able to highlight the impact of the socio-economic context in which the process of transition from school to the labour market begins, the effect of the type of school attended etc. According to the followers of the multidimensional or multiple trajectories theory (Rose, 1984, apud Anctil, 2006), populations in the process of transition from school to the labour market may choose different directions (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Mutidimensional or multiple trajectoies

Analysis of the data research reflected in the form of a graph (Graph 3) shows us that most of the respondents have chosen further studies at a higher level of education, and only after that entrance on the labour market. That none of the respondents fell into the category of those excluded from the labour market could be not only the effect of their level of education, but also the effect of the method for selecting the target group: the persons excluded from a social and professional point of view are more rarely part of the "social networks" and therefore more rarely included in such studies.

The socio-economic and political context has been one of important factors that marked the start on the labour market of some respondents. Thus, those who are more than 50 years of age started in a centralized economy with limited occupation choices, at least for some places. The centralized economy of the communist regime in Romania until 1989 also influenced the structure of the educational system: the number of seats in high schools and universities was established by reference to the "applications" communist system. For this reason, those who completed their schooling during that period are also those who have benefited from the increased safety of the workplace and of a direct link between their level of education and occupation. Without exception, they all have that at school they have received is complete governmental distribution. As an item specific to this category of respondents, there should be mentioned that the motivation for learning had something to do with the prospective workplace: the job distribution was made, at least in theory, on the basis of the average school results obtained during the 5 years at the university. Some respondents have confirmed this:

*"In college I obtained very good school results. I liked what we learned but I also wanted a good distribution. I didn't know governmental distribution would be abolished" (woman, 47 years old, psychologist)*

An active behaviour to search for an employment occurred, for many of these respondents, after years of professional activity and, most often, along with the passage to the market economy. Some of them have always wanted this change, while others have been forced to accept the change as a result of the effects of economic transition (winding up of some institutions, the disappearance of certain occupations etc.) For some participants in research, respondents who said that they entered the labour market immediately after completing high school are, in their great majority, those who had attended vocational education (medical high school, economic high school etc.), the graduation of which had secured a job. For most of these respondents, returning to the educational system after a longer or shorter period has been a decision taken out of necessity and not of their own accord: the legislation in force does not allow them to hold certain professional positions only with a secondary level of education.

*"The main reason was a Governmental law on education law which stipulates that all teachers should have post-secondary education" (woman, 50 years, teachers)*

On the other hand, the respondents who have completed vocational schools are also most of those who attended upper studies in parallel with carrying out a professional activity. (Graph 3) The market economy has offered most young people multiple options but also greater professional instability on the labour market. Also, school diplomas of all levels of education no longer guarantee a job, but only the chance to enter the competition for employment.

Some of them have understood that only a diploma is not enough and have carried out temporary professional activities at school. Not only the labour market has changed, but also the education system of Romanian: after 1990, there have been set up several educational institutions, specializations, profiles etc. Whereas the educational system has experienced expansion in the first decades after 1989, the Romanian economic system has been faced with limitation of activity, loss of productivity, increased labour market imbalances etc. and, under the circumstances, completing higher education has nevertheless remained, for all the respondents, the best solution to meet the process of transition from school to the labour market.

For the respondents who studies before 1990 but also in the first years after the political and economic changes, carrying out a professional activity in parallel with school attendance was a very rare case. We included in our questionnaire a question relating to the way in which respondents perceive involvement in professional activities during school time. Both those who worked and those who did not work during college years or during post-secondary education, all the respondents claimed that carrying out a professional activity during studies plays a very important part in the future of socio-professional evolution. Some related to their own experience: accumulation of practical experience helped them to find a job more quickly, to cope better at their jobs. Of those who did not work, in light of their work experience, believe that having a job during studies familiarises them with the labour market and supports the process of transition from school to the labour market. But opinions are contradictory. Some of the people are of the opinion that carrying out a professional activity during studies may be of assistance:

*"To go to work during studies can be a great help as regards professional experience" (a woman, 39 years old, teacher)*

Others did not deny the relevance of work during studies, but only under certain conditions:

*"If you are at school, an occupation related to your studies will help you later, otherwise I don't think it is of relevance, except for financial reasons" (woman, 40 years old, doctor)*

There are views that question the importance of this type of activity:

*"It is with outbound and inbound. For me, it never worked. School should be school and if it is well done (applied, with labs and various cooperation) then it can be called that you managed to get some practical experience to help you at your first job. In any case, the idea is that now, at least in the private environment, there is no enterprise-level of a wide variety of internal procedures for the approach and resolution of the job tasks, as you might need a "training" or a specialization at the place of work including where you would be transferred after, let's say, 10 years of work in a company, to another in the same field of activity (e.g. a competitor). (man, 36 years old, research analyst)"*

Carrying out an activity during schooling may represent, as indicated, also a source for job search efficiency: in addition to the practical experience gained, individuals can build relational capital which they may use to ease their transition from school to the labour market. But this is not the only means by which a person may obtain a job. People surveyed in this research have indicated numerous other methods they have used in their attempts to get a job: mass-media, including the online, recommendations received at their previous jobs, direct contact from the employer, recommendations from teachers etc. If we apply the layout proposed by Sabatier (2002) to our respondents, there would result the following distribution (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Distribution of respondents depending on how to search for a job\*

commercial mode	network mode	intermediate mode	other
16	27	3	1

\* Note: 7 of the respondents did not want to discuss this topic

According to M. Sabatier (2002), "commercial mode" refers to the situations in which the person interested in obtaining a job is directed by his employer to competitions organised by other different employers. The employment "network" sometimes consists of the applicant's own socio-relational capital or family. In modern society, various institutions which are designed to handle the relationship between applicants and potential employers fail: "intermediate" national agencies or local employment companies specializing in recruitment and placement of personnel, centres for counselling and professional guidance etc. Such institutions have begun to operate in Romania after 1990; persons seeking employment call on these structures for support. There are also categories of persons using other means and sources to access the labour market but that are less frequently used.



Most of our respondents fall in the “network” category: they have either resorted to the relational capital of the family of origin, or have built their own capital and used it when seeking employment. Being asked to make a hierarchy of the sources used in searching for a job, I have found that social networks are shown to be the most effective. Important social-relational capital in the process of transition from school to the labour market showed that the results of this research is also supported by data published by Eurostat: at both EU-27 over 70% of young people are turning to friends, relatives, acquaintances to find a job and in Romania more than 80% of young people use this method. (Eurostat, 2014).

The next source for finding a job is contacting the employer. Perhaps this is one of the most specific search methods of a place of employment in the market economy, based on competition, a pro-active attitude. This type of behaviour is typically characteristic of respondents with a higher education as confirmed by the theory according to which the more educated persons are the more active, willing to decide their own social and professional future.

The third way – “intermediate model” – is very rarely accessed by people surveyed in this research. And Eurostat data reflects the fact that mediation institutions specialized in relationship between potential employers and employees are very rarely used by persons seeking employment.(Eurostat, 2014) This makes us draw the conclusion that national agencies and local employment centres for counselling and professional guidance have not proved effective and may not have won people's confidence. As mentioned at the very beginning of the material, people act depending on their perceptions they have on a social system, on an institution. Systems and institutions have an obligation to take into account public perceptions and attitude to improve their activity. Our research data shows that all respondents have been unable to obtain, at their debut in the labour market, an occupation with a standard program, under a contract of indeterminate duration and according to their level of training.

### **Professional integration**

If we are to analyse the transition process as a route with several stages, then professional integration is just one of the stages. From the point of view of some researchers (Gould,1978, apud Fournier et al. 1992) professional integration is the stage in the process of transition from school to the labour market when the individual becomes, through employment, from an *outsider* an *insider*. One of the selection criteria on the basis of which there were recruited the respondents for this research consisted in whether the people were interviewed for a job, for becoming an *insider*. At least from this point of view, all the participants in this research are integrated professional persons. Given this situation, we have focused on the steps they covered to reach the position they held at the

time of our data collection. We identified the time needed to reach professional integration and it was found that only in a single case, the duration was greater (12 months), whereas all the others have had less than 6 months. With some respondents, who have greater professional experience, the professional path has been highly fragmented or, on the contrary, linear.

In most studies it is estimated that a person has an average of 3-4 jobs during working life. Our research has confirmed these findings: only 6 respondents (4 women and 2 men have had more than 4 jobs), most of them having had a single place of work (11 women and 2 men), 14 people having had two jobs (9 women and 5 men), 10 women and 1 man having had 3 jobs and 8 women and 3 men having had 4 jobs. As it was expected, occupational mobility is higher among men and young people than it is among women and those aged over 50 years. The causes underlying mobility intentions are also different: in the case of young people, they are the initiators of mobility, while in the case of aged persons, they may be subject to the socio-economic context that had forced them to change the place of work. Most of the people questioned revealed that men changed jobs for financial reasons and the desire to promote, while women pursued personal aspects (schedule, family time). Young people are the most open to emigration but only under certain conditions (income, the country of destination etc.)

*"I have a satisfactory income level, good relations with colleagues, and not so good a work program ... 12 hours a day. I feel appreciated at work. I don't think that my professionalism, intelligence, insight and objectivity are appreciated. I haven't actually been looking for another job but in the next 2-3 years I would like to change it. "* (woman, 30 years, economist)

The results of the analysis of this research data relating to the duration necessary to arrive at a place of employment has been confirmed by the statistical data published by the National Statistics Institute (INS) or by Eurostat, as well as the results from other quantitative research in the last few years in Romania. (Lambru, 2012): people with a high level of education are able to find a job in 3-6 months after completion of studies. The next step was to understand the process of transition from school to the labour market as influenced by other factors than the level of education, type of school attended, family support etc.

The vast majority of the respondents have followed the same way to access employment, but we have identified a few separate categories of professional integration. One of the first categories includes respondents who have continued studies only to keep their place of employment. They don't find what they are looking for, but stay on the labour market. There are respondents who have worked during the period of studies and having completed post-secondary education helped them keep their workplace, or be promoted. Another category of respondents have completed

military education institutions which still offer jobs to all graduates at present. In this case, even if their institutions they worked for have been dismantled, the employer (The Ministry of National Defence, for example) supported them in searching for a job. These respondents are persons for whom, according to the conclusions of researcher C. Trotier, professional integration means stability in the labour market through the occupation, the institution in which they work. (Trotier et al., 1997:72) For many researchers and analysts of this process, professional integration is not only taking up work. In an article presenting the results of a qualitative research carried out on higher education graduates, C. Trotier and his colleagues (Trotier et al., 1996:72) speaks of professional integration into the work, and professional integration in the social environment of the place of employment. A person may have a job, but if you do not establish collaborative relationships with colleagues, if you are not willing to get involved in team work, you may not be considered integrated professionally and you cannot talk about having completed the process of transition from school to the labour market. Also, when a person likes what he is doing, and the subsequent occupation has exploited his strengths, qualities, his involvement in work is higher. Professional integration is a stage in the process of building the individual's social and professional identity.

Discussions with respondents also included an assessment of the relationships they have at work with colleagues, subordinates, superiors. The difficulty or the ease with which some people cover the process of transition from school to the labour market results not only from objective causes (reduced supply of jobs, economic crisis), but also from the ability or inability of individuals to establish relations, collaboration in the workplace. Most respondents have described relations with co-workers as good and very good. Most of them feel valued at work.

*"This is a good job, advantageous, with good relations with colleagues. They are appreciated for the work they do and no, I do not have any intention to change my place of work because I like it..." (a woman, 28 years old, teacher)*

On the other hand, one of the reasons invoked by many of them as regards the lack of intention to change the workplace has to do with the relations at the place of work: those who feel valued and feel they have good relations are more daring or exclude the possibility to leave the country. With more or less experience at work, all the respondents have indicated that they have good relations with colleagues, superiors or with their subordinates. This means that, from the professional point of view, regarding the integration into the social environment, the situation is favourable.

The chances of promotion of the respondents vary, as expected, depending on the field in which they work. There are situations where the field of activity allows one to climb the career ladder (education, military area) but also situations where this is not possible. However, most of them,

upon accepting the job, have been informed or have known the situation linked to the chances for promotion and have accepted it. For this reason, for them, the chances for promoting do not seem to be an important aspect of the process of transition from school to the labour market.

### **The stages of the transition process**

In most cases, completing the process of transition from school to the labour market is deemed to have been concluded when the man gets a job. But, as we have found, not all researchers agree with this aspect and arguments are numerous. In our research, we I have analysed the transition process stage taking into account the following items: perception of the labour market before and after obtaining a job and an intention to change jobs in the next 2-3 years. I have found that, once having invested in education, the individual builds an image of what he would get from this investment, aspirations and professional projects.

*"I had high expectations because I knew I would find a job in my field" (woman, 48 years old, teacher)*

*"I thought best ... it was more safety at the workplace" (man 51 years old, engineer)*

*"To offer a wide range of jobs, remunerated as in such a way as to encourage their employment" (man, 45 years officer)*

With very few exceptions - mostly people who have only a secondary level of education - other respondents had high expectations regarding the labour market. How far or close to the reality was their expectations of the labour market will be established at the time they leave the institution of education. After a period spent in the economic system, individuals are able to form an image that is closer to reality. It may overlap with the one they had one or it may be completely the opposite.

*"Now, there are unfortunately people with small chances to find a job" (woman, 48 years old, teacher)*

*"Chances to find a job are few especially as you grow older " (man 51 years old, engineer)*

*"The employers' attitude is not at all encouraging. Employers want experience ... but what about young graduates?! " (man, 45 years, officer)*

Perceptions of the labour market are totally opposite: optimism from the period of education can now be found after reaching stability on the labour market. Depending on the way in which process of transition from school to the labour market is perceived, in general, and the labour market in particular, individuals may decide to conclude or continue this process. Taking into

account the fact that most respondents did not intend to change work and the perception on the situation in the labour market in Romania, which is not a favourable one, we believe that most of them are in the final stage of the process of transition from school to the labour market, as shown by Levinson (apud G. Fournier et al., 1992).

## **Conclusions**

One of the main findings of this study was that the transition process is an extremely complex one and when analysed only on the basis of statistical data, it is difficult to understand. Being a multidimensional process, it requires a detailed analysis in which quantitative data must be accompanied by detailed descriptions obtained by qualitative studies. I have also found that, under the conditions in which we are dealing with a population with the same level of education, the transition process from school to the labour market is perceived differently:

- For some, the transition process has been one of the most difficult stages covered (a period of time to find a job, professional mobility, integration difficulties at the place of work etc.) while others raised no problems whatsoever;
- the process of transition from school to the labour market may not be broken in the context of the socio-economic and political in which they are to be undertaken;
- in the Romanian society, there is no significant difference between men and women with regard to the process of transition from school to the labour market;
- A successful transition means, for some, good relations with colleagues at work, professionalism and recognition of professional skills, while for others success is linked to their income.

The theme discussed in this article may be developed on different levels - each of the 4 stages in the process may be the subject of a separate analysis. It is important that the analysis of the process of transition from school to the labour market combines quantitative and qualitative research, in order to have a complete picture of it.

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