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SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE

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Sustainable Employment and the Quality of Life

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Abstract

The accumulation of human capital through the acquisition of knowledge and skills is recognized as central for economic development. More educated workers should have better employment opportunities, earn more, and have more stable and rewarding jobs. Education and employment are key not only to the strategies and the socio-economic measures that increase the living standards of the population, improve health, the family life, and reduce violence, but also to the strategies developed in order to overcome periods of crisis such as the one the world is facing today, as well as increase affordability and accessibility in education. This paper aims to identify what are the main actors that impact the relationship between education, the labor market, and the quality of life; how they impact upon this relationship; and what is the nature of this relationship.

Keywords:
human capital, labor market, quality of life, sustainable employment

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I. Introduction

Since free markets aim to offer a fair and efficient system where talent and hard work would be appropriately rewarded, the future of individuals seems to become heavily reliant on maintaining, if not increasing, the market value of their knowledge, skills and credentials. Jobs should flow to individuals able to upgrade their skills to meet the competitive conditions of the knowledge economy relied on new ideas, technologies, and innovations (Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2012;Ginther & Zavodny, 2002). The future economy is presented as a world of new opportunities for creative talents and prosperity, driven by the ability of the educational system to enable people to become marketable in the global competition. Significant amounts of money are spent on education. Higher education has been massively expanded. Numerous policies, programs, and initiatives have been introduces in anticipation of an innovative age of high-skills, high-wage work. The question that rises is: *are the results as good as expected?*

II. Premises and objectives

In this material we propose to analyze the relationship between employment and quality of life. The measures that need to be taken in order to increase employment rates have to be developed in connection with the major factors that impact employability: education and the quality of life. The relationship that develops between education, employment, and the quality of life is complex and interdependent. Individuals need to achieve the highest level of education to be able to access good jobs and increase the overall quality of life. At the same time, individuals should have a high standard of living in order to be enable students to remain in school as long as possible and increase their chances to obtain safer and better paid jobs.Creating a full-employment economy seems a utopic goal, which cannot be achieved due to a multitude of reasons ranging from political (Pollin, 2012) to economic and social factors (Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2012). How can sustainable employment be obtained in an ever-changing world? How can people access the labor market regardless of their economic and social position?

III. Theoretical and methodological aspect

The relationship education - labor market - quality of life can be investigated by using both quantitative methods (questionnaires) and qualitative methods (in-depth interviews, focus group). In this article, the

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authors present the results of the research carried out on representative samples of non-institutionalized adult population in Romania, which included issues related to education and the labor market. If the data published by different statistical institutes, both national (National Institute of Statistics) and international (EUROSTAT), are more accessible to individuals interested in the evolution of the labor market and the relationship between education and employment, the data obtained by carrying out in-depth research at national level are less known, but equally important to describe the socio-economic development.In this material we'll focus on how people perceive the relationship between education, employment and quality of life.

The data that we are going to appeal: Diagnosis Quality of Life 1990-1998, 2003, 2006, 2010, Research Institute for Quality of Life, Attitude toward the work, Soros Foundation Romania, 2008, Romanian Employers (public and private) and labor market, Center for Public Opinion and Market, 2008. The data will be analyzed by the program SPSS.

III. Data analysis

III.1 Employment and the quality of life

Employment is an area that can be analyzed both in terms of quantity, such as the total number of employees, the unemployment rate (Keynes, 2011) and quality, such as the working conditions, the involvement in decision making, or the impact of employment on family life and on leisure. It is very important that the employment rate reaches high values, but its effects on the level of socio-economic cohesion, and the long-term development of a country is reduced if they are not accompanied by the existence of a balance between the work and the personal lives of the employees (Laakmann McDowell, 2011) and by a high level of the quality of the work (Wentz, 2012). For these reasons, no community can afford today to approach employment without taking into account both the quantitative and the qualitative perspectives.

Sustainable employment cannot be achieved without considering the main factors that impact it: education and the quality of life. The labor market is in the grip of transforming change. Part of this change emerges from the growing impact of information technology and globalization, part from the concern that the skills and attitudes young people bring to their roles as workers are inadequate. The challenging role of education is to meet the future needs of the economy by increasing the accessibility and the affordability of education to a greater share of the population

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(Landon Darden & Astin, 2009) and by enhancing the skills of the employees of tomorrow (Newman, Couturier & Scurry, 2004). An educated population is one that is able to integrate professionally, and also to contribute to the development of new jobs, to exploit knowledge and skills in order to increase the living standards, to improve family life and health, to increase the involvement and participation in community life etc. Improvement of the quality of education and training, anticipation of the skills required on the labor market, professional orientation services are some of the measures that can enable a country to overcome times of crisis.

The quality of life is defined not only by the content and the nature of the activities that people carry out, the characteristics of the relations and of the social processes in which they take part, and the goods and services they have access to, but also by the assessment of the circumstances and of the results of the activities that meet the populations' expectations, the subjective states of satisfaction/ dissatisfaction, happiness, frustration, etc. (Marginean, Blasa 2005). Also, two of the seven classes regarding the quality of life refer to employment: the people's perceptions on the quality of employment, and the people's perceptions on labor market accessibility.

III.2 Key actors on the Romanian labor market

The main actors able to intervene in the relationship between education and the labor market are the state - represented by its institutions (central and local administrative authorities, educational institutions, training agencies and labor employment etc.) and the employers (operating in the public and private sectors). The state creates the educational policies by establishing the duration of compulsory schooling, organizing and structuring education, fostering early specialization etc. it impacts upon the labor market in a positive or negative manner. For example, a positive effect is the extension of compulsory schooling which reduces the pressure on the labor market in terms of jobs demand since the working age population spends more time in school. The introduction of selection exams, especially in pre-university education, or fostering earlier specialization have a negative impact upon the labor market, since those who fail to pass the selection and have reached the legal age to be employed will require a job often without having a professional qualification. For those who will continue schooling, early and exclusive specialization will make it difficult for them to adapt to

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future requirements of the economy that emphasizes rather the labor flexibility in terms of meeting their professional responsibilities.

The situation in Romania is characterized by extremes: on one hand, the share of population that leave school at an early stage is one of the highest in the EU (20%), but on the other hand, in the last two decades, there has been a significant increase in the number of people with higher education. Beyond the low standards of living of the great majority of the population in Romania that impacts the access to education and its success and thereof, inconsistent educational policies are another source of school failure. In Romania there is no coherent national policy on lifelong learning and learning, and therefore it is not a popular means of learning.

The State also has a word important to say, as far as training is concerned, may require public and private firms to organize such courses, may lay down a type of their contribution for the organization of training courses, shall decide on the content of such courses. The main partner of the member he represents employers: they can negotiate the content of education involved at different levels of education, there may be some of the world's leading providers of continuing training and may determine type of qualifications etc. Employers use the labor force supplied by the school system. The differences between the private and the public employers are significant in terms of the volume of labor required, the level and quality of education and professional training required, the methods and techniques of recruitment, the promotion etc.

Finally, the third actor that impacts the relationship between employment, education, and the quality of life is represented by the people. The people's perceptions of the various aspects concerning education and the labor market – the labor market accessibility, the quality of work life, the willingness and the ability to engage in decision making, the attitude towards work, are some of the elements to be taken into account when analyzing this relationships.

III.3 The relationship between education and employment in Romania

The action taken, in the strategies, attitudes which they adopt people shall be guided and depending on citizens' perception and a form of a system, or another of the company which they belong. Referring us strictly to the labor market, attitudes and behavior of this population are based on how you perceive accessibility or difficulty getting a job,

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especially one that can meet their expectations, interests and education population.The transition from a centralized to a market economy has been a long lasting process in Romania and, unfortunately for its population, it was followed by an economic crisis. The socio-economic situation in the last two decades is not without consequences. A large part of Romania's population remains unemployed and the living standards of many households has declined significantly, as well as the confidence of the people regarding the role of the state institutions, and also the economic environment be it public or private.

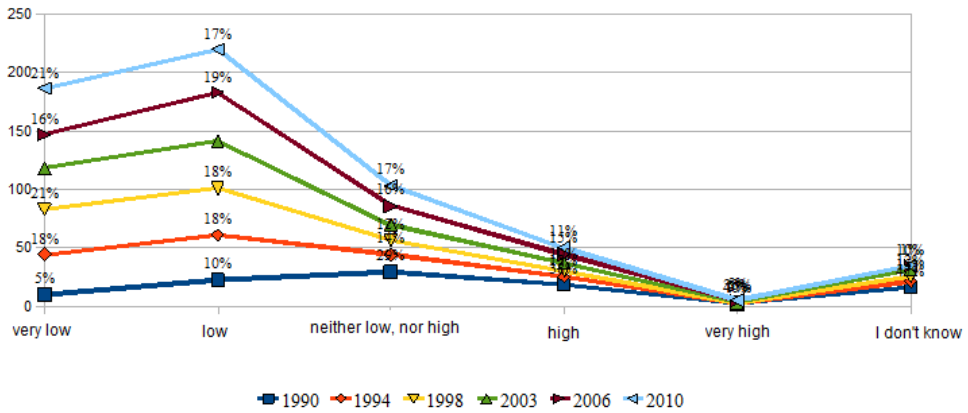


Figure 1. The individuals' perception of the possibility to obtain a job based on their education and vocational training (Diagnosis of Quality of Life, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2006, 2010)

In the two decades of market economy, the people's perceptions on the opportunities provided by the labor market remained at very low levels (Chart 1). A detailed analysis of this issue - people's perceptions of opportunities to get a job based on age, sex, area of residence, level of education - reveals that the rural population, young people (18-24 years) and those with a low level of education (ISCED 0-2) appreciate their chances of getting a job at a much lower level in comparison with the urban population, those with higher levels of education (ISCED 5 -6) and those that are between 34-45 years old. No significant differences were observed in terms of gender. The improvement of the individuals' perception towards the labor market depends on their personal efforts,

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e.g. achieving the highest possible level of education and training - and also on the economic developments.

Data that allow us to analyze this "in the mirror" awareness for the labor market: on the one hand potential employees or employees and on the other hand employers.

The best way of judging and to anticipate changes in the economic environment are employers.

Table 1 Employers' opinions concerning the present state of the particularly difficult market situation of employment (%)

	bad	no better, no worse than	good	I don't know/Not Responding
Total institutions (1212)	26	38	35	1
Privat institutions (904)	30	34	34	1
Public institutions	14	48	37	1

Source: The employer's (public and private) and labor market, CSOP, 2007

Employers Romanian people who carry out their activity in the environment, or those belonging to private economc environment are of the opinion that the state of the labor market in Romania is at least satisfactory. (Tab. 1).To keep in mind that the research was carried out at the beginning of the period of economic crisis, after a period in which Romania had been able to record even a slight economic growth.At the level of 2007 there are very few of Romanians, be they employees or employers caught vetted out as undesirable were often recruited into a global economic crisis. That's the explanation for perception more than optimistic employers in Romania on labor market developments from us.

Table 2 People's perception on the conditions of employment (%)

	1991	1995	2003	2010
very bad	3,7	3,5	2,3	1,6
bad	10,5	8,5	8,5	5,0
satisfacatory	26,6	17,3	16,0	13,5
good	30,0	26,1	20,4	20,3

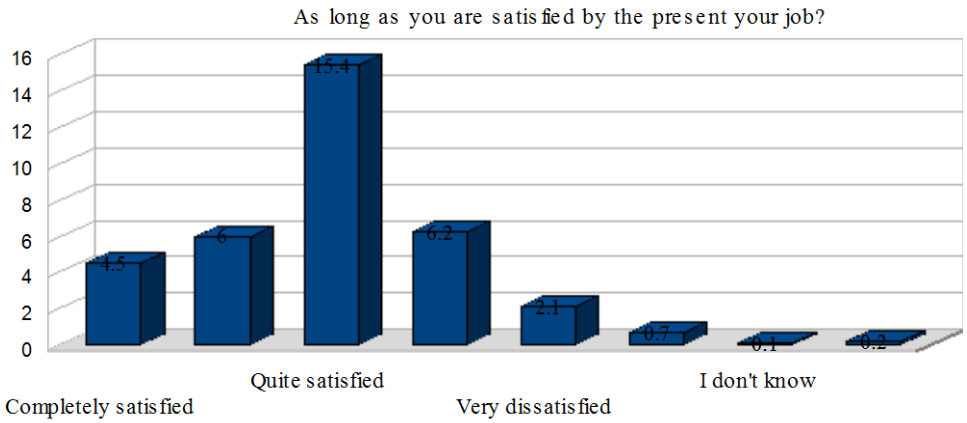
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very good	3,7	3,2	3,3	3,6
is not the case	25,6	41,0	43,4	38,8
is not responding	2,5	0,4	6,0	17,1

Source: Diagnosis Quality of Life, ICC 1991.2003 V„ 2010

On the whole, population in Romania considers the working conditions at a satisfactory level. (Tab.2). Notice, also, differences at the level population estimates in the first three years after transition to market economy and in the present. During the first few years of decentralised economy satisfaction of the population was found to be raised and that the measures taken by the authorities in this direction has been a compensatory character: reduction of the number of working days from 7 to 5 days in very many areas, avoid unemployment by early retirement, the maintenance of tax facilities for certain groups of occupations, etc. as market economy and to consolidate our country's level, the degree of satisfaction of the population occupied tends to fall.

Grafic 2 The level of satisfaction of the employees from the workplace



Source: Attitude toward the work, Soros Foundation Romania, 2008

As the vast majority of occupied population is of the opinion that the conditions of employment at most satisfactory it was expected that, as regards the extent of satisfaction vis-a-vis the workplace as a whole to record similar values. (Chart 2)

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The Romanian population experiencing pain for two decades free access to decisions at the place of work. Until the early 1990s decisions in any field of life belonged politics. Their skills, expertise, involvement in the life and work institution in which-and carrying on their activities people were not accepted by the communist authorities in Romania.

Table 3 What is your opinion as far as you can influence decision-making at your workplace? (%)

	1991	1995	2003	2010
bad	9,8	8,8	8,0	6,6
very bad	18,6	15,6	12,8	10,8
bad	20,8	12,2	10,4	13,5
satisfacatory	10,7	11,9	9,0	6,6
good	3,9	3,4	3,0	2,2
very good	30,5	47,4	54,5	59,0

Source: Diagnosis Quality of Life, ICCV, 1991, 1995, 2003. 2010

The finishing touches to two decades people's perception of opportunities to influence decisions in the workplace have not been major positive values (Tab.3). Difficulties encountered in the labor market makes those more connationali to be satisfied with finding a job and to drive away the desire to infleunta in any way conditions under which carries out its activities.Experience those of friends, family support, the discussions with the teachers have determined young people of Romania was individually floating more confidence in education as the main way of access to a job is even better, a better paid job, more secure. Research data on a representative sample of the people involved in school education school in Romania argued that almost all students (90% of high school students) they want to pursue higher education. (*Quality school education in Romania*, Metro Media Transilvania, 2008)

IV. Recommendations

The research has revealed that the actors that have a significant impact on the labor market in Romania need to better cooperate to decide which strategies are most appropriate for the Romanian society in order to enable it to achieve effective, long term results. Schools must prepare employees for the future that meet the requirements from the labor

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market. In this sense, teachers should take into account the proposals and the suggestions collected from the economic environment. Employers should not wait for schools to provide the perfect employee. They should organize their own training sessions to enable their employees learn and perfect the required skills. Romanian population must learn to acquire a proactive behavior: it is not enough to accumulate knowledge in school; individuals must form the skills and the abilities required by the job market. And this is a lifelong process!

V. Conclusion

The paper has analyzed the relationship between employment, education and the quality of life. The research has shown that the population with the highest level of education has a higher employability rate, with positive effects on all areas that concern the quality of life. There is a lack of communication and cooperation between the main actors involved in the education-employment relationship (educational institutions, employers, the population as a whole). Increasing the level of education and the employment rate represent medium and long term solutions that support development and the improvement of the living standards.

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