RESEARCH OF POSSIBILITIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE PLACEMENT

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Abstract

The main purpose of the article is to identify problems and possibilities of young people placement in employers’ approach. The paper examines the main means of youth labour potential formation and the role of employers in early career designing. The article also introduces the results of empirical research performed in Lithuania, Czech Republic, Austria, Slovakia and Spain. The empirical research was performed during the implementation of Life Learning program Leonardo da Vinci Innovation transfer project “DISCOVER YOUR STRENGTH & YOUR EDUCATIONAL AND LABOUR MARKET POSSIBILITIES” (No.2011-1-ES1-LEO05-35775). The results of empirical research showed that employers, participating in the research, paid little attention to early development of practical skills of young people. Usually employers require practical skills, otherwise they are wasting a lot of time and financial resources in order to prepare young employee for a new job. There are less young employees engaged in Lithuania, Czech Republic and Slovakia than in Austria or Spain. Inadequacy of candidates to requirements and lack of skills are indicated as the main problem of placement of young people. In the research young people are considered to be youth aged 14-25 year old.

The type of the article: Research paper.

Keywords: young people placement, employers, career, practice, practical skills.

JEL Classification: M12, M51, M54.

1. Introduction

Employment of young people is a topical problem all around the world. During the worldwide crisis the problem of young people employment became more central. According to data from Eurostat, the rate of youth (aged between 15 and 24) unemployment is generally much higher than unemployment rates in other age groups. The youth unemployment rate in the EU doubled the overall unemployment rate in 2011. More than one young person looking for a job and capable to work had no job. The biggest youth unemployment was recorded in Spain (46.4 %), Greece (44.4 %), Slovakia (33.2 %), Lithuania (32.9 %), and Portugal (30.1 %), while the least unemployment rate was recorded in the Netherlands (7.6 %), Austria (8.3 %), and Germany (8.6 %).

Possibilities of young people placement depend on many social, economic, demographic and other factors. Nonetheless an important role in deciding the problem of youth placement goes to employees as well. The employees not only require primal work skills and competences, but also create possibilities to acquire and develop them further in the workplace. The problem of youth placement possibilities, factors determining it and reasons are widely examined by both Lithuanian and foreign scientists. The effects of demographic and education changes on unemployment rates in Europe have been analyzed by Biagi & Lucifora (2008), Madsen at al. (2013), problems of youth integration to labour market and early career designing – by Adamoniene & Ciutiene (2010), young people’s placement problems that are usually related to the attitude of organizations’ managers towards the first employment of young person – by Makstutis & Vijeikis (2008), impact of organizational support for career development – by Barnett & Bradley (2007), relation between personality traits and unemployment duration - Uysal & Pohlmeier (2011), complex process of young people’s insertion into the labour market by focusing on the antecedents, processes, and the outcomes of the school-to-work transition – by Buchmann (2011).
Adamoniene & Ciutiene (2010) discussed the most important means of youth labour potential formation and placement: general education improvement, development of professional information, orientation and consulting, development of primary and continuous training, youth enterprise development, development of active application of means of labour market politics, integrated youth placement development.

General education improvement. General education is one of the basis for the development of human capital as well as it is one of the factors influencing cultural and social value, social career (Laužackas, 2004, 2005). Higher general education ensures young people higher professional education possibilities, acquisition of professional qualifications which enhances possibilities of employment in turn. Education qualifications are still the best insurance against unemployment, which clearly increases the lower level of education attained (Verhaest & Omey, 2010; Starrat & Grandy, 2010). According to data of Eurostat (2013) as the average unemployment rate in the EU-27 for those having attained at most a lower secondary education was 16.7 %, much higher than the rate of unemployment for those who had obtained a tertiary education qualification (5.6 %).

Development of professional information, orientation and consulting. Youth professional orientation and responsible early career designing determine better placement possibilities, especially in selection of the first job. According to vocational and counselling psychologists, professional orientation and consulting are helping to identify professional interests and abilities that directly determine individual’s career indecision (Feldman, 2003). In order professional consulting activity to be efficient, it should be coordinated, by joining all institutions working in this area in national, regional and local levels. Vocationally oriented programs of study help in determining real career goals and evaluating possibilities to reach them (Feldman, 2003).

Development of primary and continuous training. Foreign scientists (Baruch, 2003; Greenhaus, 2000; Peiperl & Baruch, 1997) note that profession’s acquisition is an important assumption of integration to labour market, low educated youth are treated more to be out marketed of labour market. Requirements of professional skills and capabilities are dictated by labour market. Primary and continuous training should rightly response to labour market needs. Verhaest & Omey (2010) highlighted the significant role of informal and workplace training for skill acquisition in the first job of young workers’.

Youth enterprise development. Youth enterprises as work skills development means are very widely used. Young people are learning by doing. Youth entrenchment in labour market needs not only academic skills, but often employability skills, such as teamwork, practical thinking, punctuality and business-like behavior, required by employees and etc.

Development of active application of means of labour market politics. Lithuania’s labour market policy is oriented towards application of priority active labour market policy means. It is striving every year to increase participation of registered unemployment in programs of active integration to labour market. The main attention in reducing youth unemployment should be paid to their professional consulting and training, but in case of insufficient demand of labour, importance of temporal forms of employment remains.

Integrated youth placement development. To increase matching of labour supply and demand, it is purposeful to study continually a need for professions and qualifications in labour market. It is important to create favorable and attractive economic conditions for employers to participate in labour formation and youth placement increase programs.

The European Commission (Europe. Summaries of EU legislation, 2013) has identified several factors in youth unemployment:

- early school leaving without qualifications;
- lack of relevant skills and lack of work experience;
- precarious employment followed by spells of unemployment;
- limited training opportunities;
- insufficient / inappropriate active labour market programmes.

In order to improve young people’s access to employment, the Commission suggests several means:
• **Using the European Social Fund.** European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF) focus on education and employment measures. Participation of young people in apprenticeship/traineeship programmes are emphasized as new approaches.

• **Improving the transition from school to work.** The link between education and vocational training should be improved through dual/twin-track learning and apprenticeships. There is highlighted preparation for professional career and formation of skills in the early stage of career.

• **Supporting the mobility of young people in the labour market.** There is highlighted support for young people and employers through transnational recruitment and job placements. EC stimulates voluntary work of youth as well. Transnational recruitment, job placements and voluntary work create possibilities to not only develop work abilities but also to acquire cross-cultural experience.

**Role of employer in youth early career designing and placement.** Career designing can be defined as constant endeavor of individual to study and plan processes of developing one’s own professional activity. From the modern career point of view, responsibility for career success falls on the person himself/herself. Every person at the early juvenility has to start career designing, observe and evaluate constant changes in the labour market, identify new professional requirements and foresee tendencies for changes.

Hirschi & Vondracek (2009) note the importance of setting career goals in successful career preparation. Based on Super’s (1990) life-span career development theory, youth (14-24 years age) start to create vocational goals, based on self-understanding and knowledge about work world. Career goals, with reference to career decision making, should be identified in accordance with personal interests, personal abilities and actual opportunities and restrictions in the environment (Hirschi & Vondracek, 2009).

Unfortunately, youth often lacks clear perception and understanding of what work or profession to choose and what skills to develop. Bigger problems arise when search for a job starts, during the meetings with employers. Frequently, the employers have to spare a lot of time and financial resources for training new employees (Muehlemann et al., 2010). Budria (2012) states that training provided by employer not only gives opportunities to develop skills and competencies required for work it also helps to fulfill career goals, achieve professional success and strengthen emotional attachment to the company.

While improving possibilities of youth placement and developing skills and abilities, better results are being reached by keeping close relationship with employers at the early stage of career already. Scientific literature more often presents the experience of Germany as one of the successful examples. Tomasik (2002) states that “transition from school to work is a period of instability with heightened potential for downwards as well as upward, <...> The German vocational system channels adolescents through apprenticeships, which provide entry into vocational career tracks for adult employment”. Besides, work councils and unions still play an important role for apprenticeship training of organizations in Germany. Similar system, combining vocational education at schools with work-related trainings in companies, is functioning in Switzerland as well. Apprentices acquire theoretical and practical knowledge required to perform work. Training usually takes two days a week, apprentices have external examinations and receive a nationally recognized certificate at the end of apprenticeship period (Muehlemann et al., 2010). Scientific literature describes Germanic Career Map, where the idea of internship and functional career is expressed. Despite of internship that is usually intended for workers, many enterprises are practicing it for young employees. Internships are characterized by rotation, besides internship of employees is complemented with trainings. Thus an employee gets a possibility to become familiar with organization; after testing few jobs or functions the most suitable for the employee is being found. This helps to orientate the employee towards corresponding job or function where he/she could develop his/her competence and move through organizational hierarchy.

This article is striving to identify problems and possibilities of young people placement in employers approach.
2. Method

In-depth interviews have been used for data collecting. In-depth interview is a useful qualitative data collection technique that can be used for a variety of purposes, including needs assessment, program refinement, issue identification, and strategic planning. In-depth interviews are most appropriate for situations where the researcher wants to ask open-ended questions that elicit depth of information from relatively few people (as opposed to surveys, which tend to be more quantitative and are conducted with larger numbers of people). Semi-structured format has been used, key questions have been pre-planned. The interview has been promoted to be conversational, with questions flowing from previous responses when possible.

Questionnaire of semi-structured interview has been prepared based on the theoretical findings. The questionnaire contains questions related to the means, that employers are using for new employee search, trainings and hiring of new employees, problems related with search for relevant young employees and skills required by employers. Thus, the questionnaire of interview consists of 4 blocks of questions.

1. The question “What sources do you use for new employee search” was aimed to evaluate if employers are starting the search of employees in the early period of their career, if they appeal to schools and communicate with prospective employees while they are studying at schools. It is important to emphasize that German and Switzerland vocational systems are based on close cooperation between schools and employers, seeking that employees acquire practical skills and employers have possibilities to contact with prospective employees (Tomasik, 2002). Labour exchange and career consulting companies are indicated as mediums for young people employment. Thus authors of the research are aiming to understand how often employers are using these mediums while searching for new employees.

2. The workplace is related not only to professional requirements but also claims to have relevant personal abilities (Hirschi & Vondracek, 2009). Within the research it has been evaluated which personal abilities and skills of young new employees are required by employees.

3. Trainings of new employees often take a considerable amount of time and cost (Muehlemann et al., 2010). Therefore, employers must carefully select new employees. The interview has explored how employers verify new workers’ abilities, how long it takes until they find the right person and the problems commonly faced by searching for new employees.

4. Theoretical problem analysis has indicated that the most of young people employment possibilities are related with development of their competences and skills. The interview has explored if employees are training new young employees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Main characteristics of the participating companies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size (number of employees)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The list of companies that participated in the research has been prepared. This research has been carried out with 110 representatives’ employers. One person who is responsible for staff recruitment and development has been interviewed in each company. The research has been implemented in Lithuania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria and Spain. Main characteristics of the participating companies are presented in Table 1.

3. Results

The secondary data research on young people unemployment and placement situation has been carried in every country. The extent of the paper does not allow to present the whole analysis.
Thus only the main indicator on youth unemployment that reveals the situation in every country is excluded. The main focus is given to the primary research aiming at identifying problems and possibilities of young people placement in employers approach in five EU countries.

Analysis of secondary data on youth unemployment in the age group under research. Unemployment of young people in the EU and research countries is presented in Figure 1.

The fastest-growing unemployment was observed in Spain, Lithuania and Slovakia. Lower than the EU unemployment rate was in Austria 2003-2012. From 2007 until 2012 the unemployment rate of Czech Republic was lower than the EU unemployment rate.

Employers approach on young people employment. While searching for new employees, employers are using different means. Those means differ from country to country. For example, Austrian employers most of all are using announcements in daily newspapers or are applying to national labour market. Czech, Spanish and Slovakian employers are mostly using special web pages. Lithuanians and Austrians are cooperating with schools more than in other countries. Other mentioned means are - collaborating with commercial associations, word of mouth, recommendations, and career days at universities/schools.

The interviewing of employers from different countries has revealed that most of them are training new young employers by themselves, in companies. Most of them are using trial period, several of them have their own training programs. 34 of 117 companies are cooperating with universities and professional schools and offering placements for students. Still, it depends on the company’s size, possibilities and approach of owners to organizing trainings themselves. The trial period for new employees in all analyzed countries is more or less the same - 2 months, but companies are not using this period for placements and season jobs. There are no big differences related to training new employees among the countries.

While asking employers how they are hiring new young employees, the most popular method is job interview, followed by the trial period. About 10% of the interviewed are using tests, online tools are the most popular in Slovakia and Austria. The opposite situation is in Spain, where online tools are not used at all among the interviewed companies.

Employers from five EU countries were also asked about the problems, related to search for relevant young employees (Figure 2).
Employers in all the countries had the same opinion on the discussed problems, i.e. practical experience needed, no eligible candidates and lack of skills. The main problem is practical experience urgency. Still while comparing countries, Spanish are most lacking skills and their abilities are not up to standards. Slovaks and Lithuanians have problems with eligible candidates and difficulties to present themselves. Czech employers are highlighting the need of university degree, Austrian young employees are uninterested to work and having no clear ideas for the future.

Taking into account that employers do not find new skilled and experienced employees, the question about personal traits was asked. The most important traits required by employers according to the importance are presented in Table 2.

### Table 2. The most important traits profile required by employers according to countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits required by employers</th>
<th>Lithuania</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
<th>Austria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed work</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress resistance</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self confidence</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work in a team</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapidity</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk joy</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reliable mode of operation</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Orderliness</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance to work over time</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Readiness to accept something new</td>
<td>x</td>
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</table>

The analysis of interviews has indicated that employers are requiring flexibility, activity, ability to work in a team as the main traits urgent for new young employee. Still there are some differences in every country. Lithuanians are emphasizing the importance of self-employed work and stress resistance, Slovak employers need self-confident, reliable and enjoying risk employees. Spanish and Austrian employers are also stressing rapidness, Czech employers - mobility and attendance to work over time.

While interviewing the employers about the skills important for new employee, it was indicated that practical skills, ability to organize, foreign languages, logic and accuracy skills are the most important for employers. Here the situation is quite similar in all five countries. Still
knowledge of foreign languages is more important for small countries. Slovak and Austrian employers are also excluding concentration and spatial orientation as quite important skills for young people willing to find a workplace in company.

To summarize, the situation related to young employees’ problems and skills required from employers are quite similar in Lithuania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Spain and Austria. All of them are emphasizing lack of practical skills but not paying enough attention on training of young employees. Still there are some differences, related to country development level, employees’ motivation to work (welfare system) and cultural peculiarities of the country. Austria has quite a good welfare system that led to indifference to work; Spanish employers lack flexible and active employees. Young Lithuanians are quite active but uncertain about their own abilities and they do not often know how to present themselves. Czechs and Slovaks have problems with eligible candidates.

4. Discussion

This study has indicated that the problem of youth placement remains topical and unsolved despite the set of the means proposed in both theoretical and practical approaches. Summarizing the literature, it is important that while solving youth placement problems all interested parts should participate and cooperate: an individual himself/herself, the state, work councils and unions, education and vocational institutions, employers. However, the research has indicated that even though every country has policies and programs for youth placement solution, statistical indices reveal worsening situation. Economic crisis contributed to the growth of the problem of youth unemployment as well. Every economic crisis determines redistribution of country’s economical activities, when some professions become irrelevant or even unwanted, new professions appear. All this, of course, causes the need for new qualifications or just retraining. Although, in accordance with theoretical findings, the youth has to design early career thoroughly, this process becomes more and more sophisticated. The empirical research has shown that employers usually expect practical skills or even work experience from young employees already. The question is how a young person could acquire primary skills when employers avoid engaging without these skills? It is obvious that while solving this problem, the close cooperation between employers and education/teaching institutions is necessary. There are several issues that should be emphasized. Firstly, education and teaching institutions should quickly react to changes in the labour market. During the preparation of specialists, practical trainings, practices or apprenticeships in future workplaces should be organized. Verhaest, Omey (2010) emphasize that different types of training and skills acquisition should be taken into account. Formal, informal co-worker training, learning by watching and learning by doing can be used to develop specific and general skills. Old workers are very valuable resource of knowledge and experience. Old workers can be involved in to knowledge and work experience transfer to young employees (Goodwin, O'Connor, 2012; Starratt, Grandy, 2010). Secondly, career planning should start early enough, while studying at school. A perfect example is a career model which is running in Germany, Switzerland and Austria, when pupils are given possibilities of practices or apprenticeships.

Empirical research showed that employers are poorly using different hiring methods. Youth coming to practices or apprenticeships, employers should have possibilities to become acquaint with future employees, their abilities and, of course, their possibilities for development. Thus, the employer would not spend time and financial resources for training new employees.

Summarizing theoretical findings and empirical results, the role of employers in designing and developing of youth early career should be consolidated by paying special attention towards formation of primal practical skills.

References


