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## **MORE THAN JUST A DIPLOMA IS REQUIRED FOR SUCCESSFUL JOB MATCHING**

### **A B S T R A C T**

**This paper introduces the role of social capital as one of individual resources which, besides human capital should contribute to the increased competitiveness of young highly educated job seekers. Two theoretical perspectives on the role of social capital are exposed: its interrelation with human capital, as well as its importance for providing additional knowledge and skills required for proper job matching in changed labour market conditions.**

**The inter-relatedness between human and social capital has been tested in the explorative research on the random sample of Slovene students and graduates. The results of this study, presented in the paper show that the students and graduates from the sample do not adequately prepare during their study for the problems awaiting them on the labour market. They seldom participate in extra-curricular study work, they do not perform work that would complement their studies and professional careers, and they rarely have a clearly outlined career. As regards their social capital, they mainly limit themselves to their primary social environment and do not spread their social networks into the professional sphere and the work domain. The establishing of social capital is underestimated as well by the students, as educators – faculties and universities. Since the importance of social capital is not recognised (yet), human capital has the predominant role in matching the proper job.**

**The establishment of contacts between students and employers is highlighted as one of the possibilities for improving the equipment of graduates with social capital and for widening their possibilities for matching the proper job. The “extra” curriculum is proposed for higher education institutions, especially those in studying fields for which the demand on national labour markets is constantly decreasing. The graduates from such fields must be taught during their studies knowledge, skills and practices which would improve their success, competitiveness and competence in the transition process from higher education to adequate job.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The development of highly innovative and creative knowledge and knowledge-based economies is increasingly perceived as the ‘key’ to the doors of competitiveness, employability and social inclusion. In general it is assumed that the key resources for achieving and maintaining competitive advantage on the increasingly competitive global markets are: economy restructuring, changes in the company’s organizational structure, technological innovations and a well-educated workforce. However, it may be

observed that education and knowledge, which have been recognised as two key factors facilitating the development of post-industrial societies as knowledge based societies (Bell, 1974), for a "learning society" (Hutchins, 1969), and, at the turn of the new millennium, for a "knowledge society" (Drucker, 1993, Delanty, 2001, Stehr, 2005) have hit obstacles in exercising this function. It may be observed that the role of knowledge and education in solving new structural problems has decreased, while more and more national economies appear to be unable to fully utilise existing human resources.

The potential over-production of graduates triggered by greater education expansion has attracted much research attention. A. Chevalier and J. Lindley (2007) call attention to somewhat contradictory conclusions of the existing literature: »*Whilst over-education has been prevalent, with about 30 per cent of graduates over-educated (see Sloane, 2003 for the survey), the returns of higher education have not fallen over time (see Machin, 1999 and Dearden et al., 2002)*» (A. Chevalier and J. Lindley, 2007, p. 8). Yet they point out that most empirical evidence has been based on pre-expansion cohorts. One exception is Walker and Zhu (2005). They estimate that for young graduates, the labour market returns of investments in education, as well as the probability of occupying a professional/manager position, began declining in the late 1990s.

Recent findings show that especially particular "soft" education fields yield less employment opportunities, which results in a greater incidence of unemployment (Reimer et al, 2008) and a greater risk of job mismatch (Wolbers, 2003). At the same time, official data on enrolment in higher and university studies indicates that a great imbalance exists in favour of non-technical studies (EUROSTAT, 2008). Employers have adjusted to the education expansion by increasing the education requirements they expect of their work force. Moreover, they have introduced new tools for assessing job applicants' true competences which make up for the seemingly decreased informative value of higher education diplomas, and also look for additional skills and competences which may not be delivered as part of the formal curriculum, but learned in other environments, such as the workplace. If young graduates are to be able to provide a prompt response to new employer demands, they should be provided with opportunities to gain new skills and competences, as well as opportunities to invest into social and human capital, either with the support of their educational institution or in their individual arrangements, as early during their education as possible.

While studies on labour market returns depending on the durations and levels of education have been well established in the field of social stratification studies, sociologists have only recently began investigating the differences in labour market returns provided by different fields of education (see Reimer et al, 2008). On the other hand there is a lack of studies dealing with student responses to the changed employment situation. The presented study should contribute to this strand of research.

Social theories have ascertained that the opportunities offered by the development of science, technology and globalisation processes can be taken advantage of only by well-educated individuals, and that only the young on the lower half of the education hierarchy are pushed to the margins. Nonetheless, the data on the

employment of well-educated young people shows that they have also started to find themselves marginalised in ever greater numbers. As argued by some authors, the altered competitive conditions in the labour market mainly affect the least competitive individuals (Coleman, 1991; Sprangers, 1992), including young first job seekers.

During the last decade, economic restructuring has resulted in the creation of new jobs and the disappearance of the old. As concerns the 'altered nature' of the new jobs, over 60% of all newly created jobs in Europe between 1995 and 2000 were technologically demanding and in knowledge-intensive sectors and required higher level of cognitive skills (Greenwood and Stuart, 2003). Nevertheless, the evidence draws attention to the fact that in the EU, the creation of 'net' jobs is lagging behind the increase in active population which can be clearly seen in the unemployment rates within particular social groups (ibid.).

All European countries have seen rising enrolment in tertiary education in the course of educational expansion and thus an increase in the education level of young people entering the labour market. However, considerable differences exist among the countries.

The great majority of the tertiary education students in the EU countries are enrolled in programmes that are 'theoretically based', 'research preparatory' or offer access to 'professions with high skill requirements', while only a minority are enrolled in shorter, more job oriented programs (ibid.). Moreover, a great imbalance in enrolment exists between technical and natural study fields on the one hand and the field of social sciences, humanities and services on the other hand (ibid). The data indicates that non-technical students largely outnumber students in technical and natural sciences (ibid). This has led to significant discrepancies between the qualification requirements in the labour market and the supply of qualifications and, consequently, increased the share of young people on transition from schooling to employment whose labour market outcomes are not in line with their attained level and type of education (Walker and Zhu 2005; Wolbers, 2003).

## YOUNG (GRADUATES) ON THE LABOUR MARKET

Therefore, transition from studying to employment is a rather turbulent and uncertain experience since newcomers to the labour market are competing for the same jobs with experienced job seekers and those who are employed and looking for a different job. . In terms of qualification of young jobseekers looking for their first job, the research is based on stratification factors and has a longer tradition, whereas research into successful employment based on study programmes is more recent. (van de Werfhorst, 2004). There seems to be a link between (mis)matched employments, potential for professional career development, job positions and study programmes that the young job seekers graduated from. (Reimer, Noelke and Kucel 2008, in Ivančič, 2011). Results show that the risk of not finding employment is the highest for graduates of humanities who, nevertheless, maintain a relatively high professional status measured in terms of ISEI grades, whereas graduates of technical and educational disciplines are the least likely to be exposed to unemployment and have the highest

ISEI grades. . Low unemployment and also a rather low professional job position are characteristic of graduates in medicine and social sciences, while an average employment rate and professional status are typical for graduates of natural sciences. .

Young, highly educated jobseekers respond to labour market changes by adapting their career development. Since the early nineties, the traditional career concept has been replaced with more modern concepts which put to the very front individuals, who develop their careers independently of the organisation they work for (Arthur and Rousseau, in Podmenik, Černigoj Sadar, 2008) through development of a multitude of careers, lateral rather than vertical career movements, life-long learning and development, as well as by accumulation of cultural and social capital. .

First researches of transition from education to employment approached the issue with explanatory studies of situations and trends based on statistical data and opinion surveys (e.g. Müller and Shavit, 1998) and it was not until the late nineties that researchers focused also on the young jobseekers (e.g.. Teichler, at al.: CHEERS, 1998-2000). Such views, based on researching “overqualified” and “underemployed” young jobseekers looking for their first employment, opened a number of new questions, the more important of which are those relating to potential for (self)involvement and (self)investment of students and graduates in resources which in changed market conditions provide more appropriate and faster employment. Along with this development, at the level of theoretical reflection, the concepts of human and social capital became more important as they both focus on a more complex and (predominantly) positive meaning of individual’s investment in obtaining new knowledge and skills (in addition to formal education) to ensure a more competent presence on the labour market..

## EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENTS AND HUMAN CAPITAL

Studies based on market models and balancing supply and demand cannot be applied to university studies in a quickly changing social and economic environment. According to Schomburg and Teichler (2006), there are three relevant conceptual approaches to the issue of the changed relationship between higher education and the labour market: (1) the concept of interconnection between investments in tertiary education and economic growth; (2) the concept of a coherence between the level of education, shortages of labour and economic growth indicators; and (3) the human capital concept. In the authors’ opinion, the last conceptual approach was gaining in importance during the last ten years since the other two, which are based on the models of labour market and on the relations were not adequate for the higher education in changing environment.

Goldthorpe (1996) draws attention to the fact that comparative empirical data offers little basis for the claim that firms and enterprises in modern societies primarily rely on formal qualifications obtained from the educational system as a typical form of workers selection. Some other authors state that as the general education level improves, the information value of higher levels of education decreases (Freeman, 1976; Jonsson, 1987). Employers may also down-play the importance of educational qualifications by employing individuals whom they trust or whom they know personally. Goldthorpe (1996, p. 276) and Coleman (1988) stress that in the eyes of management, merit is often conceived through attitudinal and behavioural attributes, to which education bears little relation. In advanced post-industrial enterprises, workers selection for a wide range of positions is guided by more or less elaborate techniques of personality and life-style assessment which are typically aimed at identifying qualities such as loyalty, commitment, adaptability, capacity for team work and the like. Consequently, employers may intensify their selection processes in the case of more rewarding positions.<sup>1</sup>

Understanding the role of educational achievements in the recruitment and allocation processes assumes theoretical models that in general explain the labour market outcomes provided by different educational achievements of individuals. The human capital model (Becker, 1962) and filtering and signalling models (Arrow, 1974; Spence, 1973; Stigler, 1961) are most well-known. The human capital thesis proposes that greater investment in education and skills<sup>2</sup> increases individual productivity which yields better rewards in the labour market in terms of individual earnings and occupational prestige. Taking into account filtering and signalling models educational certificates and degrees are the only reliable information on individual skills and competences available to employers while hiring and allocating job applicants looking for the first job after their graduation. They use them as a filter or a signal indicating the level of general skills and abilities possessed by job applicants.

Depending on the organisation of a particular education system and its inter-linkages with the employment system, the skills produced by the education system may be more general or more occupation-specific (see Shavit and Müller, 1998). In light of the human capital thesis, some authors argue that there is a difference between individual education fields in terms of learning environments as well as the skills and competences obtained (van de Werfhorst and Kraaycamp, 2001). Certain education fields may deliver more productive skills than others. Moreover, education fields may differ in the degree of occupation-specific skills they deliver.

It is further argued that the selection processes of certain study fields are more strongly based on pre-developed individual academic abilities than others; hence they give employers stronger signals. Based on the findings of Arcidiacono (2004), Reiner et al. (2008) suggest that certain study fields such as engineering,

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1 As shown by the 2002 research on the position of young people on the job market (Trbanc, Verša, 2002), Slovene employers, besides personal characteristics, ascribe increasing importance to social and cultural capital, which includes characteristics young job seekers obtain during socialisation, education, previous work experiences and through connections with potential employers.

2 Including skills not achieved through schooling, such as on-the-job training which, besides better workplace achievements, influences appropriate job matching and wider professional connections (Becker, 1962). Young people receive more on-the-job training since they change jobs more frequently than older persons (Ibid., 10).

computer sciences and natural sciences require more developed pre-existing academic abilities compared to other fields. As a result, ever stronger competition for study places means that less able students are not given access to these more academically demanding studies.

Taking into account the human capital thesis, employers are interested in hiring workers with productive skills and skills that best fit the requirements of vacancies they are about to fulfil. On the other hand, according to the signalling thesis, graduates from education fields that are expected to take in less able students are more likely to end up with less favourable outcomes in the labour market.

### SOCIAL CAPITAL AS MEDIATOR BETWEEN EDUCATION AND THE LABOUR MARKET

It has already been mentioned that, in addition to educational achievements some authors stress the significance of accumulated social capital as an important determinant of individual chances on the labour market. In the last decade, social capital has been an important subject of much discussion in the frame of social sciences. But despite this, social capital research is still carried out from fragmented, sometimes controversial conceptual standpoints, since the appropriate conceptualisation and measurement solutions are still being searched. Grootaert and Bastelaar recently wrote that the conception and measurement of social capital may currently be at the same early stage of development as the human capital theory was 30 years ago (Grootaert, Bastelaar, 2002, p. 341). Most authors agree that three traditions basically influence the concept of social capital. The first is derived from the work of Bourdieu (1985) in the context of the critical theory of society; the second, which provides a normative theory of society, originates from Coleman (1988); the third offers a network-based theory of society (Burt, 2001 in: Adam, Rončević, 2003, p. 160).

The interrelation between human capital and social capital has been proven by the most eminent social capital authors. Among the classics, Putnam (1993) stated that social capital generates human capital through the influence of local social ties, while Coleman (1988) defined social capital as complementary to human capital and also suggested that social capital can be converted into human capital. According to Bourdieu (1985), a positive correlation exists between cultural capital, social capital and educational achievements. In his opinion, cultural capital can be “fully-capitalized” by investments into “self-cultivation” and institutional success, including gaining education and other forms of knowledge. Similarly to Coleman, he asserts that social capital is located not only in the individual’s early primary environments, in his relations with parents, friends and other members of the community, but also in his norms and social networks. In Bourdieu’s opinion, social capital can be accumulated through long-term investment into the social networks consisting of existing and potential relations.

Coleman’s understanding of the transmission role of social capital is focused on the young person’s cognitive development and exposed the meaning of social capital as mediator of the human capital from older to younger generation (Coleman, 1988, p. 109). Since Coleman was primarily interested in adolescents

relationships, his view was biased towards a single type of educational institution and he paid little attention to the later stages of the formal education system, and none to learning in informal settings such as the workplace (Field, 2003, p. 48).

Coleman's view is confirmed by the results of subsequent studies which show that social and human capital have a reciprocal empowering effect. Dika and Singh (2002) examined the relationship between social capital and educational achievement in fourteen studies, and in the majority of cases they discovered a positive association. They also considered the relation between the educational achievements and parental social capital.<sup>3</sup>

In most recent studies tackling the relations between human capital and social capital, indirect connections between them are exposed.<sup>4</sup> The positive correlation between community learning and good study achievements resulting from investment in human capital has been proven in a Slovene study (Vidovič, 2003, pp. 178 – 181). As claimed by Broth (2002), feelings of self-competence, developed through students' talking about educational matters with different persons (parents, administrators, teachers and neighbours), contribute to better study results as well as to the establishment of social relations. In addition, individual engagement in academic activities, such as regular attendance of lectures and other obligatory studying activities, contributes to greater study and social networking achievements (ibid.).

As mentioned earlier, there is also a lack of theoretical and empirical studies on the influences of social capital in the transition from (higher) education to the labour market, and especially on finding appropriate first employment. In knowledge transfer from the academic to economic environment, social capital plays an important role in this transmission (Lenarčič, 2008), since human capital does not ensure appropriate interaction between these two very different environments. Individuals who transfer from the academic to the economic environment need not only have a high level of education, but also be trained for team work, cooperation and communication, as well as be experienced in establishing and growing social networks (ibid.). As ascertained by Adam and Rončević (2003, p. 175), social capital can be defined as a "catalyst of the dissemination of human and intellectual capital", since the existence and maintenance of different social networks (based on trust, reciprocity and co-operation) bridge the academic sphere with others, including the labour market and work.

Informal social networks are a proven, efficient method of better job matching in most European countries, as well as in the United States. It is indicated that they are widely used by both firms and workers (Pellizzari, 2004<sup>5</sup> in Ponzio and Scoppa, 2009). However, Ponzio and Scoppa (2009) find for the Italian labour market

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3 Older findings from Becker's study (1962) suggest that social capital may provide a counter-weight to economic and social disadvantages, including the lower education of parents.

4 The educational level significantly increases not only successful transition to the labour market but also mobility in various life domains and the accumulation of social capital, and is especially indicated in the female population (Černigoj Sadar, 1999).

5 In the study which uses data from the European Community Household Panel for the period 1994-1999, differences among EU countries in using personal contacts for employment are also exposed; personal contacts are frequently used in Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy, France and Germany and rarely in the UK and in Scandinavian countries

that informal networks are more useful for low-skilled job seekers and that the quality of job match (measured by individual earnings) tends to be lower. They find that informal networks *»rather than being an efficient channel of information transmission, tend to interfere with genuine processes of worker selection, favouring socially connected people in place of more talented ones«* (Ponzo, Scoppa, 2009, p. 20). In their opinion, attention should be paid to the important distinction which emerges in empirical studies exploring informal networks with regard to *»professional contacts«* and *»family contacts«*. In studies which explored professional contacts, the effects of informal networking are positive (measured by the wages perceived by workers); while a negative effect is found in the studies which investigated the help of acquaintances and friends in finding a job.

As concerns formal networking, it was discovered that taking part in activities of voluntary associations, as well as being a member of such associations, is useful in finding a suitable job (Degli Antoni, 2009). The author exposes that relational networks and human capital are resources developed by unemployed volunteers through associational membership or/and with volunteer work, which significantly affect the probability of employment. The results of econometric analysis and nonparametric tests show that some volunteer activities are positively connected with obtaining a job through the association.

## INVESTMENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION – THE CASE OF SLOVENE STUDENTS AND GRADUATES OF LESS “MARKETABLE” STUDIES

### **Some general data**

Like other European countries, Slovenia has experienced considerable improvement in educational attainment of the population over the recent decades, which holds especially true for younger generations. After completing primary school, 90% of students continue their education at the secondary level. Since the beginning of the 1990s – to a certain extent as a consequence of limited employment possibilities – there has been a growing trend of enrolment into tertiary education. According to statistical data, the number of those enrolled in full-time higher and university study programmes increased from 43,654 in the 1998/99 study year to 68,354 in the 2008/09 study year (SORS 2000; 2009). Taking also part-time students into account, enrolment in 2008/09 may have increased by at least 20%. As expected, the number of graduates has also increased<sup>6</sup>; in 1999, there were 9,345 graduates while in 2008, this increased to 13,786 (SORS, 2000; 2009). During 1998 to 2005, differences among fields of study have also increased; the highest increases in the number of graduates appeared in services (407%), social sciences (283%), agriculture (248%), health and social care (241%) (SORS, 2006). Some of these increases overgrew the demand for such jobs on the labour market and as a result, a surplus of higher educated young first job seekers has appeared. At the end of 2005 there were 2,878 young unemployed graduates registered at the National employment office, while with

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(Pellizzari 2004; in Ponzo, Scopa, 2009, p. 5).

6 Despite the fact that the graduation rate from higher and university education is rather low in Slovenia.

regards to studying fields, the greatest discrepancies between enrolment and employment occurred in agriculture (the rate of unemployed vs. enrolled amounted to 40%); arts and humanities (22%); social sciences (20%) and education (19%)<sup>7</sup> (National employment office, 2006).

From 2005 to the end of 2009, the number of young graduated first job seekers did not change significantly (2,841 in 2009), but differences among study fields with regard to the increase of registered unemployed graduates changed; they grew enormously in the field of health and social care (+86%), less in education (+49%); art and humanities (+25%); and business & administration (+20%), while they decreased in natural sciences (-9%) and social sciences (-8%) (National employment office, 2010).

In Slovenia, as in other EU countries, problems accompanying the entry of graduates to the labour market, especially with regard to differences among academic disciplines, have not yet been systematically researched.

### **Research on students' investments to improve the personal human and social capital**

Below, some data from the research project exploring and evaluating investments in higher education on a sample of Slovene students<sup>8</sup> is presented. The intention of this presentation is to illustrate how and to what extent students invest in their curricular and extra-curricular education as well as into other skills and social capital to increase their labour market competitiveness. The rationale of the study is that those students and graduates who do not have good employment perspectives should invest more in those (extra)curricular education activities as well as additional skills, knowledge and forms of social capital, which contribute to their better (future) job seeking prospects (on the Slovene labour market). The (self) investments in accumulation of human and social capital in regard to their interrelatedness should increase their chances of finding a suitable job.<sup>9</sup>

### **Data and sample**

Since the study is focused on a relatively unexplored subject, an explorative approach and method of triangulation have been used. In the first step, secondary resources and statistic data were analysed; in the second step, a survey was performed on the sample of 150 students, while in the third step, a group of graduates - first job seekers - was interviewed by using semi-structured interviews.

The survey and interview sample was purposely chosen.<sup>10</sup> It consisted of students<sup>11</sup> from the following study

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7 Services 18.6%; health and social care 13%; natural sciences 12%.

8 The research project was carried out in the period 2004 - 2006 under the title »Evaluation of Investments in Educational Capital and Youth Labour Market« in the framework of the national Targeted research program "Competitiveness of Slovenia in the period 2006-2013" (Podmenik, Černigoj Sadar, Ivančič, 2006).

9 It must be mentioned that the new version of above mentioned research under the working title "Vložki v študij in poklicno kariero" (*Investments in study and professional career*) is currently carried out and will be finished in the year 2012. Its results will allow the cross time – for a five-year interval, – comparability of results and partly also at international level enabled by four questions which were added to the survey from CHEERS and REFLEX questionnaires.

10 Respondents were intentionally selected on the basis of purposeful, instead of empirical representativeness. The selection of the 'exemplary' respondents, i.e. those who are representative of the research conceptions and relate to practices which illustrate the concept, does not allow the results to be generalized on the whole population.

fields: social sciences (sociology, social work, educational studies) and humanistic sciences and art (philosophy, geography), i.e. disciplines whose graduates are ever more difficultly employable first job seekers. During the time the survey was conducted, the students attended the final classes of the Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Social Work, all in Ljubljana, as well as the Faculty of Humanistic Sciences in Koper<sup>12</sup>

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 15 graduates of the same studying fields as those of the survey respondents.<sup>13</sup> Data gathered through the survey questionnaire was analysed at the descriptive level (frequency tables and relative shares) with SPSS. The semi-structured interviews were transcribed and processed with the content analysis method.

### **Investments in »extra« knowledge and skills**

The presentation of findings attempts to explore the two main following premises: Students from the survey sample should invest in different sorts of (self)education and accumulate social capital in order to be prepared for competition they will encounter when they enter the (Slovene) labour market. In addition, investments in education and social capital should be connected with students' and graduates' human capital.<sup>14</sup>

As shown in Table 1 below, students regularly take part in activities which are part of formal education and in addition, they earn money by doing occasional work. This occasional work has no connection with their studies since the results showed that students do not discuss their studying career or professional aspirations at the places they do occasional work. Although almost one third of all students taking part in the survey said that they often attended informal student activities and one quarter of them does this intermittently, the majority of them admit that they do not attend additional lectures, roundtables or symposiums. Therefore we concluded that students view leisure and fun activities as extracurricular activities. .

*Table 1: Investments in obtaining an additional knowledge and working skills – percentages*

<b>Forms of investment :</b>	<b>Never or rarely</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Often/ very often</b>	<b>%</b>
Voluntary work	63	24	13	100
Paid work	43	19	38	100

11 Average respondent age was 23 years.

12 The survey was carried out during lectures, seminars and after exams, under the supervision of trained professionals.

13 Interviews were conducted by the researchers and lasted from one and a half to three hours.

14 The following indicators are used: participation in curricular and extracurricular study activities; investments in obtaining additional skills and knowledge (attending complementary lectures, round tables, symposiums, conferences, excursions, study visits abroad); investments in on-the-job learning (participation in voluntary and paid work); investments in accumulation of social capital (building professional and non-professional personal networks, including ties with potential employers); human capital inherited from parents - education of both parents (a special index for the education levels of the father and mother of the interviewed student was established).

Study practice	34	28	37	100
Extracurricular activities	43	25	32	100
Attending complementary lectures	48	36	16	100
Attending round tables, symposiums, conferences	91	5	4	100
Excursions, study visits abroad	93	6	1	100

Source: Podmenik, Černigoj Sadar, Ivančič (2006).<sup>15</sup>

A rather worrying trend is shown by data on studying and visits abroad and one which was confirmed by surveyed graduates – studying abroad or any kind of updating of skills abroad is an exception rather than a rule.

### Investments in social networks

Contrary to findings about discussions at the workplace (mentioned above), the data suggest that the respondents are quite successful in establishing communication networks relating to their studies and careers with colleagues and friends (table 3).

Table 2: Building of »professional« networks - percentages

Type of networking	Never or rarely	On special occasions	A few times a month	A few times a week	Total	
					%	N
Discussions with peers	4	5	26	66	100	149
Discussions with mentors, lecturers	27	39	30	5	100	149
Discussions with other people	14	16	45	26	100	148
Talking about one's career with other people	25	18	42	14	100	149
Talking about one's study and career at work	64	25	8	3	100	130

Source: Podmenik, Černigoj Sadar, Ivančič (2006)

It is also evident that they lead frequent discussions with »other persons«, but surprisingly, study matters were rarely discussed with professors and mentors (rarely or on special occasions - 61%). The majority of respondents plan their future employment and career and discuss this with others (91% have someone to discuss their future plans with). In most cases the exchange of ideas takes place in the narrowest social circle: amongst friends (81%) and study colleagues (64%); parents (62%) and partners – if applicable (55%). Only an extremely low share discusses their plans with mentors (7%). These findings lead to the conclusion that respondents are much more skilled in communication and social networking on the primary level - with those closest to them. However, they do not have enough contacts on other levels, especially on the

<sup>15</sup> Data presented in tables 1 and 2 are not cited but are computed from the database.

professional level, and they are in danger of not obtaining experience in successful professional networking.

### **Investments in access to future employment**

As much as 89% of the respondents often or very often think about what they want to become, and almost all of them think about becoming financially independent. However, one third of them do not know precisely what they will do once they graduate. Slightly less than one third plan to continue their studies, slightly over one quarter of respondents have some ideas as regards their future employment, but only 4 per cent have a plan for how they will find employment.

Concretely established contacts, or even networks, with potential employers (as an important form of social capital) should be at the disposal of future young employment seekers as early during their studies as possible. As mentioned above, most respondents performed various jobs during their studies, but only a few had the opportunity to work in fields for which they were prepared by their studies or at least in a similar field. The main motivation of the questioned students to work is to earn money and not to obtain connections for future employment.

Approximately a quarter planned to obtain new skills and broaden their social contacts beyond their study obligations. The rest leave these possibilities more or less to chance. Once they graduate (as seen from the interviews with the graduates), these occasional jobs usually prove to be helpful while looking for their first stable job. They provide young people with the required skills to communicate with employers and overcome administrative procedures related to employment.

Orientation into establishing connections and networks with potential employers remains predominantly the task of educators, however our results suggest that faculties do not perform this task successfully; 40 per cent of respondents replied that their faculty did not provide them with sufficient information on employment possibilities, while 50 per cent stated that they were only partially acquainted with it; only 11 per cent of the respondents stated that their faculties gave them sufficient knowledge as regards their employment possibilities. Most respondents also estimated that their faculties did not set up enough contacts with future employers (68%). To a certain degree such contacts were provided to one quarter of the respondents, while only 7 per cent were of the opinion that sufficient contacts were established.

### **Significance of human capital**

Two indices of respondents' human capital should be taken into account: individual investments in obtaining the diploma degree and parental education. In accordance with data presented above, almost 90% of respondents regularly attend the curricular study activities, which suggests that the respondents invest enough in activities required for successful graduation. In other words, they are on a good path to reaching their diploma degree.

Regular participation in curricular activities is linked to parental education: those respondents whose parents only have primary education more frequently participate in lectures compared to colleagues with well-educated parents (50% vs. 42% attended lectures daily; 47% vs. 32% seminars; 21% vs. 7% individual studies every day). Regular attendance of lectures and other obligatory studying activities can be thus

understood (among other interpretations) as compensation for parental education deficiency. However, taking into consideration the finding that parents' education has a decisive influence on the type of extracurricular activities the respondents participate in, it could be assumed that respondents with less educated parents come from a weaker socio-economic background and are therefore limited in their opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. But it can be assumed that respondents with less educated parents more frequently work for money (45% frequently or very frequently) compared to colleagues whose parents have a higher (35%) or middle level of education (17%) and do not participate in activities which cost »additional« funds.<sup>16</sup>

Although all respondents rarely participate in voluntary work, the data shows that voluntary activities are closer to those who come from educationally disadvantaged families compared to colleagues with fairly or highly educated parents.<sup>17</sup> However, despite data indicating that the respondents whose parents have the lowest education level participate more in voluntary work, they do not provide strong enough evidence to enable the conclusion that this provides them additional skills or/and social contacts relevant for future employment.

Moreover, the data shows that respondents' investments into social capital are significantly influenced by their parents' education: one quarter of those with highly educated parents and one third of those with fairly educated parents frequently look for connections with persons and institutions, while only 18% of those with less educated parents try to build such relations. Although the frequency of contacts with colleagues and friends does not significantly depend on the level of the parents' education, there are important differences in the frequency of talking with professors, mentors, and 'others persons of importance',<sup>18</sup> which are (regarding theoretical predispositions) much more important for professional career and employability.

Students whose parents have only primary education seem to be more likely to consider their future plans on their own. They also more seldom discuss their careers and employment opportunities with parents than those whose parents are fairly or well educated. It seems that the lower human capital which they have at their disposal also influences their abilities in accumulating social capital. However, despite a deficiency in obtaining extracurricular knowledge and connections, respondents whose parents have only primary education are more self-reliant regarding their future after graduation; none have yet guaranteed employment, but they are more willing (compared to their colleagues) to continue their studies, as well as to explore the chances outside their professional field.

Table 3: "Do you think about your professional and employment future after graduation?"

Parental education:	Primary	Secondary	Higher
Yes, I have a concrete plan about my employment		2	6

16 The average respondent with less educated parents invest only a third of the funds in social connections and attending public events compared to the annual amount invested by colleagues with highly educated parents.

17 58% of respondents whose parents have only primary education never or rarely participate in voluntary work; the figure is 66% for those with parents with a fair level of education and 61% for those with highly educated parents; 12% of those from the first, 14% from the second and 15% from the third group frequently or very frequently participate in such work.

18 Have discussions with professors and mentors frequently (weekly and monthly): less educated parents: 24%; fairly educated parents: 44%; highly educated parents: 33%.

Yes, I have an idea about my employment	21	41	21
Yes, I shall continue studying	38	17	33
Yes, I plan to do something outside my field of study	12	2	7
No, I have no idea what to do after graduation	29	37	33
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100

Source: Podmenik, Černigoj Sadar, Ivančič (2006).

Respondents with less educated parents also show the lowest rate of indecisiveness. The most indecisive and the least self-reliant are respondents with fairly educated parents.

### **Graduates' investments in education and their preparation in obtaining an adequate job**

The descriptions, statements and evaluations gathered through the semi-structured interviews on the sample of graduates should be understood as a sort of commentary and illustration (as well as predispositions for further research).

Most of the interviewed graduates admitted that their investments into regular and extra-curricular activities were selective; for some the reasons were personal, and for others »professional«.

The results of investing in studying activities are evaluated very differently by the interviewees. When assessing the suitability of investments in curricular and extra-curricular study activities with regard to the demands they meet as job-seekers, some interviewees expressed satisfaction, while others thought that they should have invested more. Those who assessed their investments as satisfactory are more successful in achieving their educational and employment goals. Although some expressed very high self-esteem and confidence in their career building, most of the interviewees (with the exception of two) did not mention employment abroad as an option to solving their unemployment issues. Such low interest in trying to find a proper job abroad can be explained by a shortage of professional experiences and contacts which should be accumulated during studies. Only two female interviewees studied abroad (one for a shorter period) and one of them even wanted to get employment there, but she did not have sufficient experience.<sup>19</sup>

The interviewed graduates state that their investments in social capital or social networking during their studies are unintentional and unrelated to opening paths for their professional careers or improving their chances of employment. In their contacts with colleagues and friends as well as their 'significant others', their main goals were linked to their studies. But during job seeking<sup>20</sup> they realized that social connections are important, especially with regard to successful job matching. As is apparent from some statements one's political involvement may also be important.<sup>21</sup>

19 She mentioned: *I have already studied abroad... I do not know, at the time I was still too young, in fact I was not sure if I wanted to stay there... I did not speak the language, they have a very complex language, just like Slovene ...and the country... let's say D is not a very welcoming country. Then I somehow decided to return home... It is hard anyway, but abroad it is at least two or three times harder* (Maja, graduate of the Faculty of humanities and art).

20 Mostly using all possible ways and paths available on labour market, even semi-legal.

21 *Of course they* (social relations, note by P.D.) *were* (important, note by P.D.)... *and in fact they are increasingly so. Unfortunately, that is the way it is, and to tell you the truth this is extremely important... to which side you belong... Where you stand politically. This is very important, even if you do not define it yourself... I personally do not define myself, and I was especially opposed to doing so when I was younger... But if you do not define this yourself, others do it for you. For me it is important that I work, that I am good at it.* (Mira, graduate of the Faculty of Arts),

After completing their studies, all the interviewed graduates searched for appropriate jobs, including those who were already employed part-time and those who decided to continue their studies. The ways of looking for jobs were similar; most of them had experience with the National employment agency through which they had performed various temporary, often also public works, but had not obtained enough connections to get a proper job.<sup>22</sup>

Participation in voluntary work is not an option for the interviewed graduates, although they occasionally work without payment, since they expect certain benefits, e.g. future employment.

Evaluation of the on-the-job learning results is positive in almost all gathered interviews. As in Alja's example (... *What I want to say is that every work you accept, even if it is for a lower level of education or a lower salary, can help you in the long run.* See the footnote 22), most interviewees appreciate accumulated work experience even if such experience is not complementary to their professional needs and wishes. They are combined the new skills and knowledge obtained during job seeking with those gained during their studies.

Interviewed graduates' experiences with employers (described as different and interesting) are usually not so good; most often their applications result in rejection.<sup>23</sup> They ascribe part of the responsibility for their problems with finding the proper job to inadequate information concerning employment opportunities, delivered by the education institutions. Tea, the graduate of the Faculty of Arts explained: *During my studies, I was suddenly hit hard with the realization that it is hard to find employment. Of course our professors had warned us about this beforehand and had told us that we should join various projects and that we should expand our social networks already now and so on... and that all of this would make it easier to find employment... if you are active already before. I think that the professors talk very positively, too positively even, as if we can find employment somewhere... but this is just not true.*

Regarding the interviewed graduates' different approaches to adjusting to the situation on the job market,

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22 Alja, a human resource management graduate, stated: *Yes, I registered with the employment agency, I followed all job ads, in the newspapers, on the internet, and you go to interviews, good ones as well as bad ones, appropriate ones or inappropriate ones... I just continued sending my applications, I think I got involved in public works quite quickly... I was mainly a business secretary and I did all sort of things. ... But then, after one year, the public works ended, they extended them for a while but then I was back at the job agency... What I want to say is that every work you accept, even if it is for a lower level of education or a lower salary, can help you in the long run.*

23 As described by one of the female graduates who worked in numerous agencies during her studies and tried to invest the obtained work experiences in gaining permanent employment: *I got called for an interview by the agency representing the employer, I saw the advertisement in the Delo newspaper, where the actual employer was not stated, but providing it was a company dealing in cosmetics, I thought: 'This is a job for me.' The work position was for an assistant marketing manager and in my interview with a Russian gentleman I was very successful. They were looking for someone who spoke English and French, the interview took place in French ... at the interview I could not pick up on anything, not like*

three patterns of adjustment can be recognised: active one, which is represented by those interviewees who adjust to new challenges and quickly grasp the new possibilities without neglecting their personal aims and professional plans;<sup>24</sup> adjustable - those who are prepared to neglect their personal aspirations and are looking for relatively satisfying employment and passive/ indecisive represented by those who either leave the choice of employment to a 'lucky' coincidence or are still thinking and daydreaming (Černigoj Sadar, Podmenik, 2007).

As concerns the proposed adjustment patterns, a hypothetical connection between parental education and the interviewed graduates' adjustment pattern can be made. Those who practice an »active« pattern describe the professional career of both or at least one of their parents as successful. It may thus be considered that they are following the positive career patterns set by their parents. They also expressed well developed feeling of self-competence and positive evaluation of educational and professional achievements during their studies, as well as during the job seeking period. For them, this period represents the continuation of the learning process, even though they are not enrolled in post graduate study.

## Conclusions

The results obtained from questionnaires point out that the observed students are mainly »diploma oriented« since they invest much more in curricular compared to extracurricular activities. They do not seem to be aware of the demands they will face on the labour market as first job seekers. This passivity, which can be partially ascribed to the lack of information<sup>25</sup>, has important consequences in regard to other resources which they should obtain during their studies. Most of them dedicate considerable time to paid work which is not even indirectly complementary to their studies and does not provide on-the-job learning or matching respondents goals, such as support in becoming financially independent, building one's own professional career, neither does it support the establishment of social networks necessary for future employment. Moreover the respondents (and interviewees) are not interested in participating in voluntary activities which could support obtaining additional skills and social networks, as well as developing individual competences and self-reliance.

For the majority of students in our sample, earning money seems to be unavoidably necessary for covering living and studying expenses, but it seems as well that they do not take advantages of all opportunities.<sup>26</sup>

Underinvestment in social networks - especially professional networks - narrows opportunities for

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24 »Active« students participate in multiple fields at the same time, for instance they continue studying while working (in some cases in different places) and looking for new employment possibilities. Some also mention possibilities of self-employment, as one of the female respondents described the possibility of gaining employment within the family company. At a certain stage of looking for a suitable job, 'adjustable' students realize that regular employment and income are most important, but they do not give up their aspirations completely; they only postpone them. The 'passive' and 'indecisive' do not have a clear perspective nor clear experience as they have not obtained them during their studies nor during the job seeking period.

25 Education institutions proved to be ineffective in educating and informing; i.e. preparing the students for successful entrance to the labour market.

26 Average covering of the one year living and studying expenses among the sample of questioned student are: 37% by themselves; 53% by parents and other relatives and only 10% with scholarship.

establishing contacts with potential employers, even informal ones, which are assumed effective in the job matching process.

In general, the results of the questionnaires point towards the fact that most respondents were involved in networks at their primary social level, i.e. with those closest to them. Their social networks on other levels, especially on the professional level, are in most cases weak. As becomes evident from interviews with graduates, social and professional networks become important through job seeking experiences. The interviewees exposed that before and during study they were not aware of the importance of such networks.

Human capital, defined as the education of the respondents' parents, has proven to be a very important determinant of the various investments made by the respondents. It could be stated that family background, including the cultural capital as well, remains one of the most influential factor of students' living standard, investments into extracurricular activities, in social and professional networks and gaining career and employment opportunities. It can be presumed that very close interrelation between social capital and human capital diminishes the opportunities for compensating one with the other. Namely, first job seekers whose parents are less educated are not in the position to compensate their parents' educational disadvantages with investments in social capital, since the higher parents' education opens social networking channels. But other forms of compensation could be assumed for the group of exploring respondents with less educated parents. The significantly regular attendance of lectures and other obligatory studying activities should be a way to counter their parental education deficiency and underprivileged opportunities for participation in activities which cost money. In addition, they show greater self-reliance and decisiveness with regard to their future after graduation compared to their peers with middle and higher educated parents. In order to improve graduates' competencies and self-confidence when entering the labour market, it would be necessary to introduce in university programmes, particularly in those disciplines where graduates have traditionally found it difficult to find appropriate employment, a practicum that would be designed to prepare students for problems associated with finding the right jobs. <sup>27</sup>

One of the possibilities for improving the position of the great number of students on the job market is to engage the faculties in establishing contacts among students, their mentors and professors, as well as with potential employers. In Slovenia, some faculties have already started creating networks between students from the study disciplines with poor employment prospects and potential employers; however, such networks would need to be formed quickly and permanently also in lower grades. It would also be wise to begin evaluating faculties also on the basis of the employability of its graduates.

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27 Such a practicum was one of the results of the research "Evaluation of Investments in Educational Capital and Youth Labour Market" (Podmenik, Černigoj Sadar, Ivančič, 2006) and was presented to all Slovene universities especially to those with over-production of graduates. Nevertheless, only two minor universities adopted this practicum and are running it as an optional subject.

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#### KEY WORDS:

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