

"Whose university is it? – Students at work - Changing value preferences among Generation Z"

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ABSTRACT:

One of the dilemmas in higher education research is the issue of paid employment of full-time students during their studies and its related characteristics. The controversy arises from a perspective that has been prevalent since the 1960s, according to which the university years are intended for study and obtaining a degree, whereas work has a subsequent role in young people's lives. Another, also widespread, argument is that student employment has a number of negative effects. Until the 1990s, this was the predominant approach (Szócs 2024). In this article, I start out by attempting to break down this segment of youth research into sections, and then, through a pilot analysis of the data from a survey among students (N=1,043) of a Central European university, I examine their work-related attitudes and the underlying variables that influence these. I do so because, according to my previous research (Szócs - Birinyi 2013; Szócs – Hamvas 2015, Szócs 2021, 2024), I found no significant differences between the work attitudes of students who regularly participate in employment during their studies and of those who do not. Thus, we can assume that there may be some other reason behind paid employment in addition to studies, which goes beyond its function of generating income, building social capital and providing a meaningful use of leisure time.

INTRODUCTION:

By presenting the available data in an experimental way, I intend to lay the foundations for a theory that could justify my earlier, hitherto unproven hypothesis that young people's work attitudes are influenced to a significant extent by family background and childhood socialisation.

Milestones

1. The first milestone in this field of research was the issue of institutional integration and drop-out (as seen in the research of Bean & Metzner (1985) and Tinto (1993), who were pioneers in distinguishing between followers of traditional and non-traditional patterns of behaviour.
2. Since the mid-1990s, the focus of higher education research on the subject has shifted to exploring the reasons for student employment, with the socio-ethnic status of parents, differences in family types, and the certain academic year as explanatory variables, most of which associate student employment with a lack of economic capital (Barke 2000; Callender 2001).
3. A novel feature in the late nineties was the increasing emergence of positive aspects of student employment in international literature - some referred to it as compulsion with positive effects (Lucas & Ralston 1997), while others saw it as a constraint on financing studies (Wolbers 2003). Smith - Taylor (1999) argues that students acquire incorporated knowledge and skills through employment, while Curtis - Williams (2002) considers it as a factor of advantage for later employment.
4. Since the turn of the Millennium, there has been an increasing focus on exploring the link between student employment and the transition to the labour market. Teichler, Jahr, Rivza clearly articulate that the university, as an institution that prepares and facilitates the transition to the labour market plays an important role in this process, as a necessary provider of the so-called preparatory phases: different opportunities to acquire competences alongside the degree.
5. In the last decade, labour market regulations and laws have become increasingly flexible regarding the employment of young people. According to Pastore & Zimmermann (2019), employment alongside academic education increases the chances of subsequent integration into the labour market, facilitating intra-generational mobility by providing experience, socialisation (for working and community standards), promoting the development of labour values, individual attitudes and responsibility towards finances, and last but not least, positive future perspectives through the cultural and relational capital incorporated in the process. Sanaullah (2018) identifies young people as the labour market of the future, suggesting that the world we live in undergoes drastic changes, so-called megatrends, the outcome of which may depend on the skills of our youth in the future. Neyt et al (2010) underline the importance of balance in student employment. Brennan et al. (2009) emphasize personal development, while Pryor et al. (2012) describe a new empathy-based student attitude, whereby young people increasingly seek to support their parents in providing the costs of their education.

6. The issue of employment during studies has also received increasing focus in surveys by international collaborative education research and development organisations (OECD 2012; 2015; NCES 1998; 2020), which record that around one half of young people in higher education are involved in paid employment during academic studies, prompting calls for more intensive research on the topic. Both aspects of student employment, its positive and negative consequences are discussed, and its motives are linked not only to the growing need for the accumulation of economic capital, but also to individual aspirations to raise the standard of living, to the motivation to expand social ties and, finally, to the shift in demographic indicators (ageing societies), which, according to the authors, must be addressed promptly by the labour markets of the respective societies.

The role of higher education systems in the integration of students into the labour market

A relevant issue of research, according to Matti (2009), is to allocate the aspects that drive students to make their transition between study and labour to be so successful, that in order to be eligible for employment they decide to change their field of study or even their institution. He labels this as 'student mobility' and the professional relocations of (recent) graduates as 'early career mobility' (Matti 2009:339). He argues that both can contribute to the achievement of a favourable labour market position in the future. The higher education policies of Western countries pay considerable attention to how students migrate between different specialisations, programmes and institutions. Data from a survey of students in four countries (Germany, Finland, Italy and the UK) were used to investigate student mobility and its above-defined major characteristics, as well as the early career mobility of graduates after completing their studies. The comparative analysis addressed the transition from higher education to the labour market, in addition to students' mobility opportunities, concluding that these two types of mobility are interlinked and that there is also a correlation between employment during studies and the extended duration of student status.

Johnes (1990) and Robinson (2004) have investigated the role of the host institutions themselves in addition to student perspectives. According to them, higher education institutions can do four things to facilitate students' transition to the sphere of labour: first, they need to motivate students in their studies and their vocational training (OECD 2021, 2024). On the other hand, there is a current (emphatic) statement in higher education research, namely that the 'new type' of student is active, flexible and spontaneously adapts to changing market conditions, which can be viewed in a critical manner. Many believe that the conditions for this flexibility need to be created (Jongbloed 2002, Brown - Hesketh 2004, Quintini 2007, 2015; OECD 2019, 2023). On the third place, it can still be a general perception that the demand for multidisciplinary skills in the labour market has increased (Teichler 1999, García-Aracil and Van der Velden 2008, OECD 2023). According to Russell et al. (2008), this demand is also strongly influenced by the university incentives and opportunities for students' transition to the sphere of labour, as well as by the market value of their training, knowledge and skills. A fourth factor is the increasing value of multidisciplinary skills and international competences in the labour market (Teichler 1999; Rivza - Teichler 2007).

However, it is also important to distinguish between international and internal (national) mobility: while both forms reflect student needs, their most effective realisation can be ensured by active participation in multiple programmes/institutions, although this challenges educational policies and student assessment. In a paper, Scherer (2005) discusses that there is an ongoing debate in Europe on the issue of tackling high rates of youth unemployment, and that, along with the deregulating, legislative simplifications, many fail to sufficiently take into account the existing national institutional differences. He suggests (as the OECD 2015, 2022, 2024) focusing on a combination of different institutional operational systems instead of individual aspects.

Outcomes

The research is called "SAPI 2024", and its base population is one of the minority language universities in Central Europe, Sapientia EMTE, where the research was conducted using an online pre-programmed survey during 2024. The survey research was representative by gender and faculty and was conducted among full-time students, with a sample size of 1,043 students. The sample of students who work regularly (2-8 hours per day, 14-40 hours per week) in addition to studies was 27.3%. However, a remarkable proportion of students also undertake paid labour (39%) as well as voluntary unpaid work (13.2%) on an occasional basis.

The questions were designed to explore the occurrence and frequency of employment during student status, the prevalence of employment abroad during studies and the attitudes regarding labour, which provided relevant information regarding the subject. We observed that in 2024, 27.3% of full-time students at Sapientia EMTE were involved in regular employment during their higher education studies (Table 1), with a total of 66.3% of students involved in various (including voluntary) forms of labour, with a somewhat - but not significantly - different gender composition.

Table 1: Occurrence of student employment (%)

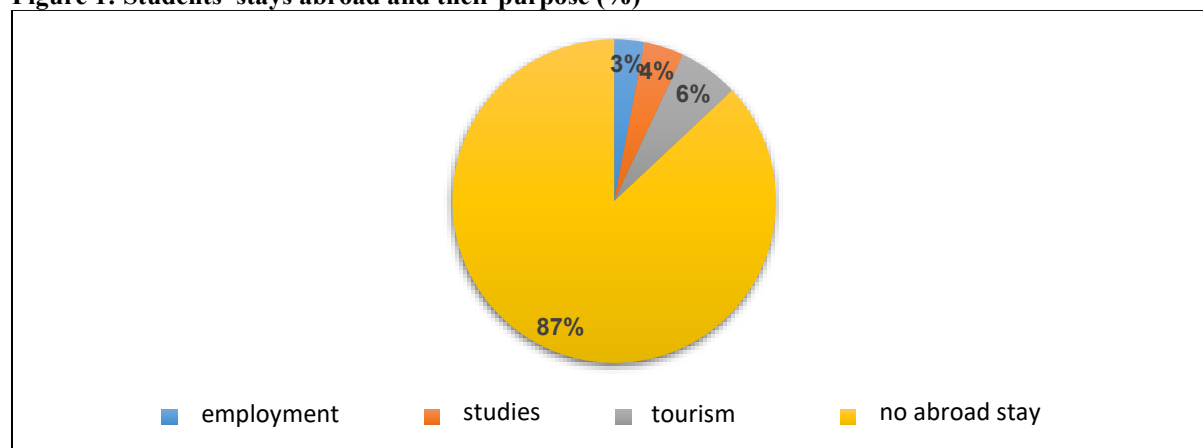
Gender	regular employment	occasional employment	unpaid. labour	voluntary	no employment	Total
male	14.1	39	13.2		33.7	100
female	13.2	38.8	15.5		32.5	100

Source: SAPI research 2024; respective edit

Chi square 0.030

The data indicate that more than half of the students are involved in some form of labour, the most common of which is occasional paid employment. However, there is a growing tendency regarding unpaid voluntary labour, which according to our consideration is mainly motivated by the need of gaining experience and the intention of expanding the network of contacts. We found no significant differences by gender. Figure 1 below illustrates that a significant proportion of students are not yet involved in staying abroad, with only 13% having spent a longer period of time abroad during their studies, with a small proportion (3%) of these serving work purposes.

Figure 1: Students' stays abroad and their purpose (%)



Source: SAPI research 2024; respective edit

Considering that the questionnaire inquired about stays abroad of at least three months, we can assume that a much higher proportion of full-time students of the Sapientia EMTE have been abroad for shorter periods.

Labour value characteristics

The significance of research on young people's labour values has already become relevant for the demand side of the labour market in the second half of the twentieth century, and is still of great importance today, mainly because it provides information on young people's expectations regarding the labour market (for example, see the research outcomes of Friedeburg 1968; Curtice 1993; Laky 2011; Gábor 2012; Medgyesi - Róbert 2008, Kóródi 2007, Bócsi 2013, 2015).

Table 2: Working attitudes of students (N=10.43)

Labour values	Average (decreasing)
Labour should not be strenuous	3.08
Most decisions could be made autonomously	3.02
Working as part of a team	2.93
Adequate time for the family besides work	2.82
Labour should involve responsibility	2.77
Labour should give you the opportunity to help others	2.66
Opportunity to meet people	2.61
Secure job (low chance of dismissal)	2.60
Pleasant working atmosphere	2.57
Labour should be useful to society	2.57
Labour should be interesting	2.56
Labour should offer a sense of achievement	2.53
Good opportunities for career progression	2.53
Labour should be dynamic and diverse	2.52
High level of income	2.41

Source: SAPI research 2024; respective edit

The mean figures on a four-point scale reflect the importance of students' work related expectations in decreasing order. The highest average value was assigned to the difficulty of the work. This reflects a kind of expectation of work comfort, but may also indicate that students are more interested in intellectual work instead of physical labour. Students' expectations regarding career mobility and high income were given lower average scores, which

primarily suggests that students in general do not have sufficient work experience nor optimal knowledge of the labour market. The security of the job can be described as an average labour value preference. We also investigated (Table 3) which labour value variables show significant differences by gender, and then grouped the relevant four-point labour value variables into two (non-important- important) categories.

Table 3: Expectations regarding high level of labour income (%)

Gender	Request for high available level of income		Total (N)
	Male	Female	
not important	281	354	643
	58.4%	63.2%	61.6%
	-2.3	2.3	Adj. reside.
important	201	207	400
	41.6%	36.8%	38.4%
	2.3	-2.3	Adj. reside.
Total	482	561	1043
	100%	100%	100%

Source: SAPI research 2024; respective edit Chi square 0.020

The students' expectations regarding high available income revealed a significant difference between genders, with the level of financial recognition being a more important consideration for males than for females. The expectation of autonomous decision-making, the preference for working in a team, the expectation for optimal time with the family and for the responsible nature of the job, all imply value-oriented students. A significant gender-based difference was found in terms of the labour value preference for the amount of time available for family (Table 4). Both genders show a high proportion of this expectation: they prefer jobs that are family-friendly, i.e. that provide sufficient time for family life. Females have a significantly high proportion of this labour value, which may be explained by a difference in gender roles.

The intention to maintain family relationships and the labour value of providing care were more prevalent among female participants than among male candidates.

Table 4: Expectation of adequate family time (%)

Gender	Adequate time for the family besides work		Total (N)
	male	female	
not important	162	146	298
	33.6%	26.0%	28.6%
	3.9	-3.9	
important	320	415	745
	66.4%	74.0%	71.4%
	-3.9	3.9	
Total	482	561	1043
	100%	100%	100%

Source: SAPI research 2024; respective edit

Chi square 0,000

Cross-table 5 below shows that boys are characterised by a labour value of wanting to take responsibility for the smooth operation of the family: the responsibility aspect of work is significantly higher than that of girls.

Table 5: Expectation of work involving responsibility (%)

Gender	Work should involve responsibility		Total (N)
	male	female	
not important	250	336	597
	52.0%	59.9%	57.2%
	-3.7	3.7	Adj. reside.
important	231	225	446
	48.0%	40.1%	42.8%
	3.7	-3.7	Adj. reside.
Total	482	561	1043
	100%	100%	100%

Source: SAPI research 2024; respective edit Chi square 0,000

A primary overview analysis of the data reveals that the relevance of student employment is significant.

As a next step, we conducted a factor analysis (Table 6) to reduce the number of labour value variables. The analysis followed Maximum Likelihood analysis methodology, thus eventually producing four factors, which are presented below:

Table 6: Labour value factors - rotating factor weights

Labour values	Factors Max-likelihood analysis with Varimax rotation KMO=0.563. variance explained 29.46%			
	experience-oriented	comfort-oriented	independence-oriented	community-oriented
Interesting nature of labour	.621	.047	-.032	-.083
Labour should offer a sense of achievement	.619	.113	.121	.014
Labour should not be strenuous	.052	.997	-.054	-.037
autonomous decisions	-.114	.082	.960	.081
Teamwork	-.082	.012	.224	.517
Opportunity to meet people	.043	.004	-.080	.514

Source: SAPI research 2024; respective edit

In terms of labour values, we found that the preference for 'non strenuous' was the most important for students, which is understandable if we assume that the desire for subsequent intellectual 'white collar' jobs brought them to higher education. However, it can also refer to underlying attitudinal considerations of comfort. In addition, however, the importance of autonomy, teamwork and adequate time for family are also apparent, which ultimately point to an over-representation of students' value orientations over instrumental (material) labour attitude traits. The main characteristics are experience, comfort, independence and community orientation.

Finally, we used multivariate logistic regression to investigate how students' employment during academic education is influenced by different background variables (dependent variable 1: students who regularly undertake employment during the academic year, otherwise 0). For this purpose, (following the primary, experimental analysis), 54 independent variables were included, most of which were also transformed into binary variables (gender, form of financing, financial situation, parents' educational attainment, parents' labour market activity, parents' financial support, religious affiliation, labour values, employment during the academic year in secondary school). The confidence interval (level of confidence) in each case was set at the generally accepted 95% (CI for exp B: 95%), under the assumption that the distribution of estimation errors is normal.

Experimental approaches - primary effects analysis of independent variables using regression analysis

We consider it important to report the first experimental steps of the regression analysis, in which we examined the individual effects of the independent variables. Upon investigation of the individual effects of the variables, we found that there were several cases of significant values, which were then significantly reduced in the joint effect analysis. In case of individual effect analysis, the labour value variables of preference for a stable, reliable job, the opportunity to meet people, the social benefits of work and the expectation of flexible work hours increased the likelihood of regular employment among students, in other words, these labour values were more frequent among those who worked on a regular basis. One of these is the expectation of a stable job, which, in addition to being a frequent feature of young people's job expectations, should be considered as a relevant aspect of the future employment of young people. The sense of security needs, as we have seen in the outcomes of the qualitative analysis, or as Daftuar (1982), Csepeli (2001) and Medgyesi - Róbert (2008) also point out, is an important aspect of analysis and a frequently reported expectation not only among adults. The effect of the social utility of work and the expectation of flexible work hours again show a significant effect upon covariate analysis as these labour value variables are also frequently found among students' expectations and undoubtedly have a positive effect on employment during studies. Finally, it is also important to consider the impact of students' employment in secondary school. Twenge (2017) points out that paid employment among secondary school students is not an occasional occurrence, but that in the United States, for example, youth employment is part of the weekly programme in many places, just as social work activities, sports and learning are. The outcomes of our logistic regression so far indicate that the effect of regular employment during secondary school years has the most positive effect on the employment of university students.

During the first stages of the regression analysis, we also conducted further experimental procedures. Since there are more similarities than differences between the two groups of students, we removed the labour value variables from the analysis, leaving only the variables that already had significant values regarding the background of origin, and including the social capital variables (parental relationship, friendship, contact with job agencies, student

relations) that had significant values in the individual effect analysis as independent variables. Independent variables were analysed using the "Enter" procedure. A cumulative analysis of the coefficients of the model yielded a significance value of 0.000, with the Cox&Snell R square index explaining 16.9% and a modified version of this, the Nagelkerke R square index, explaining 29.8% (Table 7) in terms of the variance of the dependent variable:

Table 7: Explanatory effect of independent variables on the variance of the dependent variable:

Explanatory effect of the combination of variables	-2 Log Likelihood	Cox & Snell R square index	Nagelkerke R square index
Step 1.	410.019 ^a	.169	.298

Source: SAPI research 2024; respective edit

The primary (non-joint) effect analysis of the independent variables revealed that friendship sig. 0.027; Exp(B) 2.002), general relationships with other students (sig 0.050; Exp(B) 1.627), and relationships with recruitment agencies/career offices (sig 0.007; Exp(B) 2.860) have the most positive effect on student employment. This is illustrated in the table below (Table 8):

Table 8: Joint effect of certain social capital variables on the dependent variable (Nag. R = 0.285)

Inclusion of social capital variables	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							low	high
gender	-1.049	.340	9.582	1	.002	.348	.175	.678
secondary school employment	3.989	.603	43.903	1	.000	3.326	1.661	6.417
parental support	-1.393	.341	16.862	1	.000	.245	.124	.483
friendship relations	.693	.284	5.971	1	.014	2.003	1.151	3.495
relationships with recruitment agencies	1.048	.392	7.180	1	.008	2.857	1.323	6.163
general relationships with other students	.485	.283	2.955	1	.044	1.624	.931	2.837
constant	-1.677	.842	3.938	1	.048	.184		

Source: SAPI research 2024; respective edit

The experiment revealed that the previously significant effect of financial background was eliminated by the inclusion of the social capital variables. We considered this as an important evidence to demonstrate the positive effect of social capital on employment during academic education. We cannot argue that the effect of financial background would be undetectable using a different type of regression and research analysis approach, as the provision of financial needs is also a fundamental human security demand, which is also true for young adults. We can, however, argue that the existence of social capital - in this case, extensive human relationships - that characterises students undertaking paid work on a regular basis during academic studies is not a mere coincidence. The students' pursuit of social capital increasingly emphasises the appreciation of human relations, whereby the positive impact of friendships, student relations and institutional connections with recruitment agencies is significantly detectable. The effect of being in a relationship does not have any impact on student employment, and neither do parental relationships, upon consideration of cumulative impacts. However, it is also worth mentioning that the impact of the latter variable in the course of individual independent variable analysis was found to be non-incentive in terms of employment: students who have a close, familiar relationship with their parents, who receive financial support and who regularly participate in family and cultural activities, are less likely to undertake employment alongside their studies (cf. <0.04; Exp(B) <0.67, Nag.R <0.11%).

CONCLUSION

Whose university is it? The data, and in particular the outcome of regression analysis, suggests that it belongs to everyone: those who work and study there, those who send their children to university (parents), and that the university integration of students (relationships with other students and friends within and without the university) has an impact, while the university also has an influence on students' employment and the accumulation of social capital. Previous, secondary school employment experience, friendships, interactions with recruitment agencies and fellow students can be, tentatively speaking, a cradle of employment, which can easily be inhibited by strong parental support.

In terms of labour values, the importance of financial development and family is well-balanced among the surveyed target population, Generation Z. The presence of work responsibility, autonomous decision making, comfortability, team thinking and social sensitivity all indicate that in terms of full-time employment it is worth

investing in young people who cumulate social capital. This can provide new ideas for higher education policy decision-making in Europe and beyond.

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