# HIGHSCHOOL STUDENTS' PROFESSIONAL VALUES PROFILES

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***Abstract:*** *The main purpose of this study is to determine the work values of high school students and to compare the differences between students from different residence places (developed and underdeveloped cites). We used a quantitative approach in order to determine the influence of the variable mentioned above on the attitudes and beliefs regarding work values. To collect data, we used The Multidimensionality Work Ethic Profile, an inventory that measures seven dimensions of work values: self-reliance, morality, leisure, hard work, centrality of work, wasted time and delay of gratification. The research tool was applied on a sample of 214 high school students coming from two different residence environments characterized by different levels of development. We performed a series of Independent T tests in order to compare the scores that were given to each dimension. We discovered that the students, regardless of their residence environment, place the same value on the seven dimensions.*

***Key words:*** *students, high school, profession, value*

## 1. Introduction

Values are a very important aspect of social existence because they are criteria according to which each of us behaves. The study of values has sparked and continues to spark interest for researchers both in the field of philosophy (Sauer, 2019; Weber, 2017), psychology (Bailey et al., 2018; Cohen et al., 2016; Matziari et al., 2017; Swami et al., 2019), sociology (Bachika, 2011, Barni et al., 2016; Comşa, Rughiniş and Tufiş, 2008; Fjellvang, 2011; Țîru, 2014, 2018; Țîru, 2019; Voicu and Voicu, 2007) or anthropology (Naess et al., 2009; Sliwinski, 2016). Thus, the origins of values, their usefulness, the way of formation, the roles, as well as the social functions performed or the link between values and other elements of social or individual life are studied. Over time, a variety of definitions of the concept of value have been formulated and expressed, indicating not necessarily disagreement about the existence of a common definition, but its multidimensionality.

In daily activity, social actors do not always realize the importance of values, the roles and especially their effects on actions, attitudes, types of behaviour. However, they

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constantly influence us, are a dynamic element in the orientation of the personality and serve to outline and analyze the relationship between the individual, group and society. Most definitions emphasize the following terms: principle, utility, desirability, norm and action. One of the most appreciated definitions is that formulated by Kluckhohn (1951) "Value is a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive for an individual or characteristic for a group, of what is desirable, influencing the selection of available modes, means and purposes of action" (p. 389). In the same direction is Rokeach (1973), who talks about the system of values specific to each individual or social group and defines it as a long-term organization of beliefs, concepts, principles, as well as desirable ways by which the goals of existence can be achieved. In a broader way, values can be considered "expressions of principles, basic orientations and collective beliefs according to which people usually guide their life" (Coman, 2013a, p.184). A primary need is for specialists from all fields, but at least those working in the same field sociologists, social-workers, psychologists etc should use the same terms in their formal professional language (Goian, 2010, 2012). In many cases such skills should be developed during the period of the university studies or consequently through workshops or conferences (Goian, 2004).

The American anthropologist, Linton (1968), talked about the value – attitude system and its major role in the orientation of personality, action patterns and the formation of motivation. For him, value was an element capable of provoking a response, and attitude was the default response. A major contribution in the study of values is represented by the theories of modernization and post-modernization, proposed by Inglehart (1997). It builds its conception around the process of changing values according to the stages of modernization of a society. Thus, we have materialistic values specific to modern societies and post-materialist values specific to postmodern ones. He starts from two hypotheses, that of rarity and that of socialization, both suggesting the transition from modern to postmodern values. Inglehart also bases his theory on Maslow's (1943) conception of the hierarchical pyramid of needs. Therefore, if society has a low level of development, individuals will turn to the choice of values that satisfy basic (materialistic) needs, such as: the need for food, shelter, rest, security, etc. Otherwise, if the level of development of society is high and individuals live a rich life, already managing to meet their primary needs, then they will tend to give priority to values that satisfy their higher needs (the need for esteem, self-realization, self-development, aesthetic, cognitive needs, etc.). The second hypothesis, that of socialization, refers to the effects of socio-economic development on the pre-adult period of individuals. If in the period of childhood (primary socialization) individuals benefited from a high level of quality of life, then they will have a (post-materialist) set of values oriented towards the fulfilment of higher needs. Values can also be approached in the context of different types of societies. According to Coman (2019) in a male type society, there is a tendency to focus on subordination, and the dominant values refer to financial success and prosperity. However, societies focusing on female culture, are characterized by the fact that the values of both men and women refer to cooperation, mutual care and perseverance. Inglehart (1997) divides values into two dimensions, also indicating the direction of evolution: (1) traditional values versus

secular - rational values and (2) survival values versus self-realization values. Traditional values emphasize the importance of religion, family and the bond between parents and children, respect for authority and rejection of the concepts of divorce, abortion, euthanasia and suicide. At the opposite end lie the secular – rational values that are oriented towards the freedom of the way of thinking. The values of survival refer to the physical and economic security of individuals (a satisfaction of basic needs), and the values of self-realization give priority to the affirmation of individual identity, protection of the environment, increasing tolerance towards strangers and people with other sexual orientations, promoting gender equality, but also involvement in social problems in a broad sense in terms of the evolution of society. Accepting the growing number of elderly people in society (Vintila et al., 2009), people with chronic illnesses (Vintila et al., 2019) various disabilities, mental illnesses (Swami et al., 2020, Barron et al, 2020), those with different addiction related problems (Tudorel and Vintila, 2018)and of all those who are different from the large majority is a priority at present (Voracek et al., 2002, Voracek et al., 2007) The values of self-realization most accurately reflect post-materialism and are widespread in all areas of the public and personal life of the individual. In work, these are manifested by the desire of the individuals to surpass themselves, to specialize in as many areas as possible, to carry out activities whose ultimate goal is involvement in social, economic and political life. The desire of individuals to get involved in the decision-making process regarding the changes in the society in which they live, to demand transparency in the most important aspects, to express their beliefs through the work done is strongly visible. Also, in the personal life individuals take decisions meant to increase their self-esteem and personal well-being (Swami et al., 2020).

Another author whose theories about basic individual values had a significant impact is Shalom Schwartz. The research (Schwartz, 1992, 2012), conducted in 20 countries, on samples mainly composed of students and teachers, resulted in the identification of 10 universal values, namely: universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, security, power, self-realization, hedonism, stimulation and autonomy. These 10 universal values of each culture studied are structured by Schwartz into two dimensions: openness to new (change) versus conservatism and focus on self versus universalism (transcendence of self). The values in these dimensions have a dynamic relationship which means that the actions taken towards the acquisition of a certain value may contradict other values already appreciated. A third contribution is Hofstede's theory of values (2001). He studied the values of IBM employees in 70 countries, focusing first on the individual and then on groups. The discovery he made is that values (as central elements of culture) can be analyzed in any society, from the perspective of five cultural dimensions (value orientations): social distance, avoidance of uncertainty, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity and orientation towards the future.

Social distance (power distance) refers to the expression of inequality in the societies studied and to the fact that the least powerful members of an organization or institution accept and expect power to be distributed unevenly, as a matter of course. A comparison is made between societies with a small social distance and those with a large social distance. Thus, in the first category of society there is a tendency towards an

equal behaviour towards peers, both in the family parents encourage their children to think and act freely) and in state institutions or organizations (different treatment is avoided for those who hold leadership positions, hierarchical organization is carried out more horizontally, and the differences between incomes are reduced). Thus, in structures that tend to be more horizontal, there can be seen an increased level of trust, communication and interaction between people (Coman, 2013b, p.112). In the second category of societies, the one characterized by a great social distance from power, respect for others is required according to age and status, and in organizations there is dependence on those in leadership positions. They are granted privileges, and the hierarchical system between them and subordinates is based on inequality. The second value dimension, uncertainty avoidance, is oriented towards avoiding risk, change, novelty or their acceptance. Individuals have a choice between being open to the idea of uncertainty, being more tolerant and flexible or reacting with anxiety, emotionally and resolving boundary situations by creating rules and norms. The third dimension identified is individualism versus collectivism, imposing here an analogy between societies characterized by these value orientations. Thus, in individualistic societies, the emphasis is on the personal interests, needs and worries of the individual, on his own well-being. In opposition, collectivist societies are concerned not with the personal interests of the individual, but with the interests of the group, the collective. In this type of society, individuals are strongly integrated, there are strong links between them, and they are defined by reference to the group to which they belong.

The fourth value dimension, masculinity versus femininity, finds its origins in gender inequality. Men are expected to perform physical, hard work, to hold dominant positions, and move toward material success. At the opposite end, women perform jobs that do not require much physical effort, but are oriented towards feelings, towards relationships between people, towards understanding between people.

Long term orientation implies a long-term orientation in which individuals plan their activities and expect to obtain rewards by showing perseverance, involvement and thrift. In contrast, individuals who orient their actions in the short term appreciate past or present values, such as respect for traditions, fulfilment of social norms, and expect immediate gratification. The conclusion reached by Hofstede is that employees acquire and accept the values, norms and obligations of the organization, but they retain the values proper of the culture from which they come, values that are instrumental in the activity of the individual.

Regarding the professional values and the way in which they are reflected in specialized studies, we mention, for the Romanian space, the work "Attitudes towards work in Romania" (Comşa, Rughiniş and Tufiş, 2008). Here the attitudes of Romanians about the type of job they prefer, its significance, commitment to work, etc. are presented. In order of the rank values of the respondents (adult population and employed population) they consider motivation in the work place, they expressed, on a Likert scale of five points, their opinion regarding eight advantages: steady job, being allowed to work independently, having the possibility of promotion, consistent salary, interesting work, being able to help other people, being of any use to society, and having the freedom of choice in the work schedule. Both the adult and the employed

population rated two of the eight characteristics as very important: safety at work (75-78%) and high income (65-68%). There are differences between the two populations, with the employed population considering the remaining six benefits to a greater extent as very important in a job. Both groups rank flexibility lowest. A research carried out on 494 XI-grade students in Israel tried to analyze the effects of gender on the appreciation of a certain set of values (Erez, Borochov and Manheim, 1989). Students were asked to appreciate the following work values according to their preferences: humanism, independence, democracy, leisure time, altruism, income, group orientation versus individual orientation and activity achievement versus time loss. The results indicate that gender had a direct effect on two of the values: independence and leisure time. Female respondents showed a high interest in independence and a low interest in leisure time, unlike male respondents.

To understand the attitudes and behaviours of individuals, a sample of 3,570 students in the first year in the bachelor's degree program were questioned about decisions to pursue a long-term professional career (Duffy and Sedlacek, 2007). They were asked to assess the most important values in relation to career choice. The questionnaire included 10 values of work: intrinsic interest, anticipation of high incomes, contribution to society, prestige, work with other people, the possibility of rapid career advancement, independence, opportunity to find other jobs, working with ideas and the ability to avoid pressure. Four categories of values were subsequently formed: intrinsic (intrinsic interest, independence), extrinsic (anticipation of high incomes, opportunity to find other jobs), social (contribution to society, work with other people) and prestige (prestige, the possibility of rapid career advancement). Two other variables were introduced for the possibility of carrying out more diverse analyses: the average household income and the level of education to which the students aspire (Bachelor's degree, master's degree or PhD).  As a result, we observe that students, in total, capitalize on intrinsic interest, high income, contribution to society and prestige as the most important values of work. Male respondents also tend towards extrinsic values, and female respondents towards social values. Students who want to follow a higher level of education have capitalized on prestige.  Thus, since education is an essential factor in the "creation and dissemination of knowledge and universal-humanitarian cultural values" (Coman et al., 2020, p. 27), it can be inferred that education can influence or shape the values according to which people guide and live their life. Further research has been conducted to identify links between work values and job choice (Judge and Bretz Jr., 1992) as well as the effects of labor values on perception and decision-making process (Ravlin and Meglino, 1987). Studies on the value systems of different generations were also carried out Cennamo and Gardner (2008), Parry and Urwin (2011), Twenge et. al (2010), Večerník (2006) or Whiteoak et al (2006).

## 2. Methodology

This study was conducted on twelfth grade students. The analysis of the value options of young high school students can be a prospective guide for both universities and employers, who are aware of the identity of future generations of students and

employees. We proposed as a general objective of the work to make a portrait of professional values for students of Liceul Teoretic Traian Vuia in Reşiţa and those of Colegiul Naţional Bănăţean in Timişoara in 2018. As specific objectives we set ourselves:

- SO1: Determining the profile of professional values of students in the last year of high school.
- SO2: Making comparisons between the professional values of students from a large city in full development (Timişoara) and a smaller city whose perspective is uncertain now (Reșița).

The tool used in this research is a questionnaire based on Likert type questions. Thus, the professional values of students were measured by the Multidimensional Inventory of Work Ethics (MWEP). The original tool comprised 65 items (Miller, Woehr, and Hudspeth, 2001, p. 33). Following the translation of the scale from English and an interpretation with the help of a team of students of the Romanian variant I noticed similarities between certain items and decided to reduce it. The last variant of the instrument comprises 51 items with 5 response possibilities, where 1 = Total disagreement, 2 = Disagreement, 3 = Neither agreement nor disagreement, 4 = Agreement and 5 = Total agreement. The scale is structured on seven dimensions: self-reliance, morality/ethics, leisure, hard work, centrality of work, wasted time and delay of gratification. An unequal number of items was excluded from each dimension. For the choice of research subjects, we used the method of non-probability sampling, based first of all on the idea that the two educational units chosen must have at least one element in common, namely the type of specialization (theoretical). The sample was one of convenience, so the data collected and interpreted are not generalizable at the level of the entire population of high school students. We thus have a first limit of research.

There were 214 participants in the study. The questionnaire was applied face to face and the data collection period was 16-19 May 2018. The application of the questionnaire was carried out during class hours and not during breaks, as the students would not have been all present in the classroom or would have rushed to complete the questionnaire. We also wanted to have a teacher present in the classroom under the supervision of which to carry out the data collection process. During this process we encountered no difficulties. Access to the two educational units was easy, as was the case during class hours, and teachers were willing to cooperate and supervise the process. A number of 103 questionnaires were collected from the students of the High School in Reşiţa and 111 from the High School in Timişoara, resulting in a total of 214. The valid questionnaires on which we performed the analyses are 188 in number, the rest being eliminated due to the lack of completion of several requirements and following the choice of the same variant for more than 30 items, this being an eliminatory criterion. For the final analysis, the group of students from Reşiţa was 91 (36 males and 55 females), and the one from Timişoara totalled 97 respondents (38 males, 58 females).

## 3. Results

As we set out, a first set of objectives aimed at comparing the value profiles of the two groups of students. We started somehow from the assumption that we would have

differences between the values promoted by students from a large city, in full development as Timișoara and students from a smaller city that struggles with depopulation and social and economic underdevelopment. Next, we conducted t-tests on independent samples for each value dimension studied and for the residential environment variable, trying to find out if there are statistical differences between the way students from Reşiţa and those from Timisoara appreciate professional values. Thus, the first t test performed for the value dimension of hard work compares the answers of the two samples of students.

*Independent T-test for Hard Work*                              Table 1

| Highschool from… | HARD WORK VALUE | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | Mean | SD | t | df | Sig |
| **Reşiţa** | 91 | 4,07 | 0,64 | 0,13 | 186 | p>0,05 |
| **Timișoara** | 97 | 4,06 | 0,63 | | | |

After conducting a student test for independent samples (Table 1), we can observe that we do not have statistically significant differences between the responses of the respondents of Reşiţa students (M=4.07; SD=0.64) and those of Timișoara (M=4.06; SD=0.63), where $t(186)=0.13$; p>0.05. In other words, the students from the two living environments equally appreciate the importance of hard work and effort in everyday life.

*Independent T test for Self Reliance*                              Table 2

| Highschool from… | SELF RELIANCE VALUE | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | Mean | SD | t | df | Sig |
| **Reşiţa** | 91 | 3,95 | 0,67 | 0,63 | 186 | p>0,05 |
| **Timișoara** | 97 | 3,90 | 0,58 | | | |

To compare the responses of the two samples in terms of how respondents live their lives based on their own strengths, we conducted a t-test on independent samples (Table 3). Thus, the value of $t(186)=0.63$; p > 0.05 indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between the students from Reşiţa (MD=3.95; SD=0.67) and those from Timișoara (MD=3.90; SD=0.58). We conducted another Independent T test to see if there are any differences between students from different residence backgrounds, regarding the relationship they have with the morality / ethics dimension (Table 4). We observed that there are no statistical differences for residential environments, Reşiţa (MD=4.02; SD = 0.44) and Timișoara (MD=4.05; SD=0.40), the value of the significance threshold exceeding 0.05, at which $t(186)=0.47$; p>0.05.

*Independent T test for Morality/Ethics*                              Table 3

| Highschool from… | MORALITY/ETHICS VALUE | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | Mean | SD | t | df | Sig |
| **Reşiţa** | 91 | 4,02 | 0,44 | 0,47 | 186 | p>0,05 |
| **Timișoara** | 97 | 4,05 | 0,40 | | | |

*Independent T test for Leisure*                                    Table 4

| Highschool | LEISURE VALUE | | | | | |
| from… | N | Mean | SD | t | df | Sig |
| **Reșița** | 91 | 3,65 | 0,62 | 1,37 | 186 | p>0,05 |
| **Timișoara** | 97 | 3,52 | 0,65 | | | |

Regarding the leisure time dimension (Table 5), the average obtained on the sample from Reşiţa is 3.65 (SD=0.62), and the average on the sample from Timișoara is 3.52 (SD=0.65). According to the Independent T test, there are no statistically significant differences between samples: *t*(186)=1.37; p>0.05. We note that students from both residential environments give equal importance to the need to have leisure time and to engage in relaxation activities.

*Independent T test for Wasted Time*                                 Table 5

| City | WASTED TIME VALUE | | | | | |
| | N | Mean | SD | t | df | Sig |
| **Reșița** | 91 | 3,67 | 0,55 | 0,78 | 186 | p>0,05 |
| **Timișoara** | 97 | 3,73 | 0,46 | | | |

The relationship of the respondents with the wasted time dimension was analyzed by a t-test for independent samples. We observe that there were no statistically significant differences between the students from Reşiţa (MD=3.67; SD = 0.55) and the students from Timișoara (MD=3.73; SD=0.46), both having the same attitude towards the importance of time that should be used in an effective way, analysis confirmed by the value of *t*(186)=0.78; p>0.05.

*Independent T test for Delay of Gratification*                      Table 6

| City | DELAY OF GRATIFICATION | | | | | |
| | N | Mean | SD | t | df | Sig |
| **Reșița** | 91 | 3,69 | 0,70 | 0,82 | 186 | p>0,05 |
| **Timișoara** | 97 | 3,61 | 0,63 | | | |

The last t test performed for the residential environment variable is related to the students' appreciation of the reward time, or rather the waiting time before receiving a reward. The value of the t test (186)=0.82 with a significance threshold p>0.05 shows that there are no significant statistical differences between the way in which students from Reşiţa (MD=3.69; SD=0.70) and those from Timișoara (MD=3.61; SD=0.63) value this dimension. The seven t-tests conducted on independent samples were aimed at comparing the two samples of students. The analysis did not result in statistically significant differences for any of the seven value dimensions, but the most appreciated dimension by both samples is hard work (MD=4.07).

## 4. Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to determine the attitudes of students toward work values. To achieve this goal we used a research tool that is composed of seven values and we applied it on two samples of twelfth grade students, the first sample coming from a small residential environment (Reșița) and the second from a large residential environment (Timișoara). Following the data collection process, we advanced to their statistical analysis. In this regard, we conducted t-tests on independent samples to compare the responses obtained.

Thanks to the statistical analyses, we were able to determine the values appreciated by the students and to create a hierarchy of them. Thus, it turns out that at the top of the ranking are the values that reflect hard work, morality and confidence in one's own forces. We can form the image of a student who understands how important work and effort are to achieve goals, who is based on principles and has a moral behaviour, but also who is aware that help from others does not only have a negative aspect. Following the t tests performed on independent samples, we observed the average residence variables in the structuring of responses. We expected the students from Reșița (a small residence environment, with a precarious economic situation, with a major shortage in the field of jobs, surrounded by uncertainty even in the field of university studies, but an area with enormous development potential ) to value hard work and self-confidence more than students in Timișoara, this also due to the existence of a larger number of cases of families with parents who went to work abroad. The students from Timișoara live in a large residential environment, which has made a strong economic, technological and urban progress, being a favourable environment for business development especially in the IT and automotive fields, but also representing a major university centre for western Romania. Under these circumstances, students become aware of the multiple choices and possibilities they have in their way. The multicultural ethnic character of the city, the higher level of education, the accessibility of the labour market are the variables that we assume would have an influence on the value system of individuals. The results show, however, that both students from Reşiţa and those from Timișoara place the same value on these. To see if there are any differences, studies could be carried out in the future on smaller residential areas as compared to other large residential areas.

It is recommended that future research should be conducted using the same instrument to see the stability of the results obtained. In addition, longitudinal studies on work ethics, on samples of students or pupils are interesting for those who want to know the profile of the attitudinal-value orientations of young people. The specifics of the jobs and positions can be adapted according to the most appreciated values, namely the values existing on the market, and this may make it possible to have an equal demand to supply ratio.

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