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Introduction

Today, in the era of a turbulent job market, career guidance is understood as a lifelong process, performing many social functions. This process plays a particularly important role in preparing young people not only to work but also to cope with the challenges of the future and to actively participate in social life. Conscious career planning helps young people find their own place in the expanding European labor market. A. Bańka writes: *career guidance is the process of helping people achieve a better understanding of themselves in relation to the type of work and the working environment, in relation to choosing the right profession, changes in employment, and appropriate professional adjustment* [Bańka 1995, p. 23].

Changing the paradigm of counseling, according to Augustyn Bańka [Bańka 2007, p.28] is, among other things, the liberation of individual initiative in the development of one's own character and the stimulation of a flexible and positive attitude to change – within lifestyles, life projects, or assigning of values and importance.

Education and career counseling, in fact, changes to a lifelong career counseling and becomes a *discovering of life scenarios* [Bańka 2008, p. 28] to widen horizons, to adapt to different environments, and to assimilate patterns enabling mental mobility. On one hand this process is focused on lifelong learning and development of an individual, and on the other – it concentrates on helping people at different stages of life in solving problems that go beyond the professional aspects – as claimed by Bańka – also associated with personal development [Bańka 2008, pp. 28–40]. Career counseling thus aims not so much to help in choosing a profession, but above all to prepare an individual to explore development opportunities and to

make changes. This is a particularly important aspect in a situation of permanent and increasingly rapid changes in the modern labour market.

As the tendency to shift responsibility for one's own career and professional development towards an individual grows, these functions of counseling become more meaningful. Bańka defines it as *the externalization of employment, development, and responsibility* [Bańka 2004, pp. 59–117]. This externalization means that individuals (employees) are held responsible for future professional situation. Numerous studies conducted in Polish enterprises (including BKL [Worek, Stec, Szklarczyk, www.bkl.parp.gov.pl, 20.10.2012]) confirm that employers are increasingly eager to shift the responsibility for training, improvement, and professional development to employees. This is also demonstrated by the trends characteristic for Polish European labor market, such as: short-term contracts (the so-called “junk contracts”), part-time contracts, self-employment forced upon employees, outsourcing of various services (resulting in reduction of employment within the company) or employee leasing – which on the one hand increases the professional mobility of employees, but on the other it causes a “blurring” of responsibility for their professional development. A modern employee must therefore be solely responsible for his or her career path and career development, although he or she is often not adequately prepared for this. Career counseling is a service generally less accessible to the average person in the labor market, especially for people who have already started their careers. Advisory Practice organized in schools is not provided to a sufficient extent. The offers from Employment Agencies are targeted mainly at the registered unemployed – few employed people know that they also can take advantage of advisory services in these institutions. Nowadays in Poland, there are many organizations and institutions that offer counseling for young people. However, young people are still struggling with a sense of helplessness and confusion in the labor market, with consequences of wrong educational choices, and unemployment among young people is steadily increasing.

Trends promoted by the European Union reflect the indicated trend to increase employees' self-responsibility for the path of their own careers. They also provide specific “tools” that help become independent on the European labor market. To facilitate educational and professional mobility and to expand training opportunities and validation of learning throughout life, tools such as the European Qualifications Framework [Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008/C111/01)], and Credit system for Vocational Education and Training ECVET [Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training] were implemented. At the same time education is supposed to prepare individuals to smoothly enter, and to

actively and rewardingly participate in the labor market. Changes in the approach to education recommended, inter alia, in the Lifelong Learning Strategy also influence the approach and practice of professional counseling, an important goal of becoming a proper preparation of individual to career planning and management.

The article is focused on a few selected issues related to the role of career guidance in preventing social pathologies caused by unemployment among the youth. It is argued that widely available and properly implemented counseling can provide for young people the chance to integrate into the labor market and improve the quality of life as well as prevent many social problems and personal human tragedies.

Youth unemployment as a source of social pathology

In Poland, in December 2012 the unemployment rate among the young (up to 25 y.o.) was 28.1% [Eurostat, March 2013] – above the EU average, which was 23.6%. Europe's highest rates in this age group were recorded in Greece (59.8%) and in Spain (55.5%). According to the report of the International Labour Organisation, by the end of 2013 there will be more than 73 million people (aged 15–29) [Zachariasz 2013] in the entire world that will be unemployed. The unemployment rate in this group was ranked the highest in the last two decades. In 2009, it slightly decreased, but recently it has started increasing dramatically. To some extent, the high rate of unemployment is the aftermath of the recent wave of crisis: the poor economic situation and the fact that economic growth is too slow. Both of these factors are not conducive to the creation of jobs. Another factor is the low level of education, which makes it difficult to find a job. *The situation of the youth at the bottom of the educational pyramid is continuously deteriorating. They've always been in a worse position than those better educated, but recently the gap between them is growing even more* [Zachariasz 2013].

Jobs that are being currently created in Europe, require high qualifications. There are few positions being created for people with the lowest education. Employers are more willing to offer a job to persons with professional experience. Moreover, the level of education of European citizens has risen in the recent years. As a result, there are many well-educated young people competing with each other. This means that young, less educated people are eliminated from the labor market. This also results in young, well-educated people working far below their qualifications. Such a phenomenon deepens the frustration of young people and discourages further learning and professional development. Unemployment, especially if it is long-term, poses a risk of social exclusion. It may also result in a number of pathologies: poverty, alcoholism, drug abuse, promiscuity, and finally stepping on the fast-track to commit crimes (petty theft, drug trafficking, etc.). Yet another phenomenon that is spreading recently is the “NEET” phenomenon.

The term NEET is an acronym standing for “Not in Education, Employment, or Training”. It applies to people between 15 and 24 years of age who not only do not show any activity in the professional and educational field. It is assumed that currently in Poland there are around 11% of NEETs, which places Poland more or less in the middle of the results in the European Union: the highest number of such persons was recorded in Bulgaria (about 19% of the young), then in Italy and Cyprus – more than 16%. The least – less than 5% in the Netherlands and Denmark [http://www.rynekpracy.pl/dla_mediow_1.php/wpis.165 NEETs – the youth who do nothing (accessed 01.12.2012)]. The unemployment rate in Europe in this age group has become in recent years very high: 14 million people are NEETs. The Eurofound [Eurofound, Youth and work: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2011/40/en/2/EF1140EN.pdf>, (accessed 01.12.2013)]. publication shows that the economic costs associated with the problem of NEETs may reach 153 billion euros. A NEET is a completely non-active person, who does not pay taxes. Such a person also requires high expenditures in the form of social benefits, and support from labor offices or other state institutions. Also, if this person happens to break the law, the state spending on crime, social rehabilitation, and maintenance of the penitentiary centers increases. Social costs of youth inactivity, which are impossible to estimate at present, may prove to result in more tragic consequences. The damage that young people inflict on themselves is dramatic [NEETs]. This concerns those who became a NEET as a result of their own decision, not due to disability or serious illness. Aside from facing deepening passivity and social isolation, they also must face other consequences: for example, deteriorating family relationships, the risk of addiction or pathological behavior (theft). These young people face the real prospect of social marginalization.

One of the causes of the NEET phenomenon is high unemployment. The group of NEETs is socially dominated by women [NEETs]. This applies especially to the age group of 20–24 year olds. Only in the group of 15–19 year olds, there are more men than women. Eurostat also calculated that the unemployed constitute to a little more than half of NEETs. Others are people who, for various reasons, withdrew from the socio-economic activity. NEETs educational profile across the EU shows that nearly 50% of the socially passive have education that is lower than the level of high school. This type of education dominates among the NEETs of the eight countries of the EU. In the remaining 19 countries, the ratio between education at the high school level and at the primary level, is relatively even. In Poland, however, most NEETs have a high school diploma (approximately 70%). For comparison – in Cyprus as many as 31% of NEETs are university graduates. The risk of being in a group of NEETs is greater among young people growing up in difficult and sometimes pathological conditions. The likelihood of social passivity is increased mainly by: growing up in broken families, parental unemployment, poor school attendance, low involvement in the learning process, abuse of alcohol

and / or drugs, incidents of violence and law breaking, developmental delays and related problems with learning, finally, staying in a correctional facility or a prison. The OECD experts note, however, that the problems of youth with social passivity are not caused only by the unfavorable conditions for maturation and development. Thus NEETs are divided into two groups: youth left behind and poorly integrated new entrants. The former constitutes of people with less ability to acquire knowledge, burdened additionally by problems at home, living in degenerating urban areas or having roots in minority or immigrant communities, etc. This group of people has generally low or very low qualifications and in varying numbers occurs in almost every country in the EU. The second NEET category includes young people who graduated at least from high school, and their main problem is not social passivity, but the problems of continuity in vocational activity. Periods of employment, usually on a so-called junk contract, are intertwined with times of unemployment. This category of NEETs is visible mainly in France, Portugal and Spain [NEETs].

According to the OECD: *the scale of social passivity of young people reflects the weakness of the education system and labor market policy in the individual countries. The spreading of the NEET phenomenon is in direct proportion with the lowering of the efficiency of the government in dealing with youth unemployment, educational needs reported by employers, and the availability of jobs for people with disabilities* [NEETs]. The researchers examining this phenomenon and analyzing youth unemployment, are looking for its causes and for solutions. They emphasize the need to support dynamic economic development, and to introduce instruments that would facilitate starting an education (or restarting it), promote entrepreneurship and enhance opportunities and efforts taken to establish and operate small businesses, and to facilitate doing internships in enterprises. A large-scale professional counseling may be an opportunity for young people to better understand their abilities, to design their own path of development and to gain a deeper knowledge of the labor market.

Professional counseling for young people as an opportunity to enter the labor market

Getting familiar with the world of professional occupations and human work should start at the earliest stages of education – preferably already in the pre-school education. At this stage, the pre-vocational education is considered. In the context of counseling, professional pre-orientation, and later professional orientation is considered. It is important not only to acquaint children with various occupations and their specificity, but also to carefully follow their interests and aptitudes. This phase can be defined as an education to work and for work. Family, kindergarten, and the local environment, which provides various forms of mobilization, organization of free time and opportunities to develop interests of the child, have the most important role in this process.

An elementary or high school student discovers not only the characteristics of different professions, but also the meaning and value of human labor. In middle school students elect their further education and career path. At this stage, it is extremely important to develop students interests, and to enable them to learn about themselves in various aspects: their aptitudes, abilities, aspirations, motives – and the limitations (eg. health). It is also important to develop skills of formulating and planning educational and professional purposes. It is during this period that imaginings – more or less specific – about future work, the place and role in society are shaped. Another important task is to shape the students' self-esteem and the ability to confront their own goals, career ambitions, resources, and opportunities with the labor market. Students should familiarize themselves with the rules governing the labor market, learn to seek and obtain information regarding educational and work opportunities (including seasonal jobs). The counseling process is also an opportunity for students to shape a broad spectrum of persona and social competencies and to learn self-presentation. They should learn about the different working environments. So as to have not only the idea, but also knowledge about the environmental conditions of the various professions. Thus, educational and vocational counseling at school plays an important role. It prepares to effectively cope with the world of work. This process should be carried out systematically and comprehensively throughout the entire education. Parents are not always good advisers: they have no preparation or knowledge of occupations and labor market trends, sometimes transfer their unfulfilled ambitions onto their offspring, driven by stereotypes or inadequate expectations towards their child and his or her abilities. Educational choices are also influenced by their peers – which is also not a good source of support. The youth are often guided by certain “fashions”, which usually does not result in them finding a job in a given profession. Environment does not always provide students with opportunities to explore and develop their interests. In contrast, a career counselor with a vast knowledge and excellent diagnostic tools available nowadays, can help each child discover their individual “asset” that will become the ticket to the labor market.

Pro-vocational education is related to the period when the student is not yet acquiring a specific qualification, but is selecting a direction of further education. A good example for this would be “liceum profilowane” – a type of a specialized high school (abolished since 2012) or the selection of a specific class profile in high school. Only vocational education provides students with professional qualifications. Currently, the work process is inextricably linked to lifelong learning – continuous training and improvement is a necessity of our times, in which knowledge and technology are developing faster and faster, and need to be constantly updated. There are ongoing changes in the structure of the various professions and professional tasks – which also requires learning. It is therefore

important to prepare the student for the future tasks by developing the skills of self-education, individual learning styles and modalities of learning.

Recent changes in the vocational education system are significant in facilitating professional mobility for young people [<http://www.ksztalceniemodulowekoweziu.pl/o-ksztalceniu-modulowym/publikacje-i-artykuly/111-zmiany-w-szkolnictwie-zawodowym-od-1-wrzesnia-2012.html>, (accessed 31.05.2013)]. On September 1, 2012 came into force the amended provisions concerning general and vocational education in secondary schools and in adult schools. The purpose of the changes is to improve learning outcomes and to enhance the effectiveness of learning and adapting to the changing labor market. With these provisions it will be easier to obtain vocational training, new skills and training in a new occupation.

The propositions:

- adjusting the structure of education in the model of vocational and continuing training,
- modifying the occupational classification,
- implementation of the curriculum for vocational education described in the language of learning outcomes,
- unifying systems of examination certifying professional qualifications and opening this system to learning outcomes:
 - formal (acquired in the learning process organized by educational institutions),
 - non-formal (acquired outside of educational institutions through achievement of goals)
 - informal (acquired outside of educational institutions through the experience gained in the workplace and in everyday life).

Starting with the academic year 2012/13 studying in high schools, technical schools and vocational schools is going to be associated with studying in middle schools [https://www.men.gov.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2676%3Anowa-klasyfikacja-zawodow-szkolnictwa-zawodowego&catid=55%3Aksztacenie-i-kadra-ksztacenie-zawodowe-default&Itemid=80, (accessed 31.05.2013)]. School content on an elementary level, started in secondary schools, will be continued in the first years. In technical and vocational school, students will have to master the same issues of general education at the primary level as students in the first year of high school. With such changes, in the new model graduates of vocational schools, in order to obtain a secondary education can continue their education in adult high schools directly from the second year. Learning in secondary school and vocational school is expected to take three years, four years in technical, and in post-secondary school from 1 to 2.5 years. A new feature in the new vocational training system is the introduction of qualifying vocational courses (so-called course forms)

that will be delegated to schools by employers. That way it will be easier for educational institutions to adjust the educational offer to the current needs of the labor market. Students, graduates, and adults outside of the revised education system will be able to participate in vocational courses. Regulations relating to vocational education will also enable the linking of vocational schools into centers of vocational and continuing training. Schools that have so far provided education for their students at the vocational, technical or post-secondary level will be able to organize professional qualification courses. As a result of these changes, secondary complementary and supplementary technical secondary schools will be closed down. Adults, who wish to have a secondary education, will be able to continue their education in secondary schools for adults.

The new professional classification and curriculum for vocational education are both an important aspect of this regulation. Qualifications have been distinguished in the classification of occupations. The qualification in the profession defines the scope of knowledge and skills, which allow for independent performance of professional tasks and allow to be employed in a given field. Each qualification is described by the learning outcomes defined in terms of: knowledge, skills, and personal and social competence. From one to three qualifications can be found in any given profession. In some occupations at a qualification level there are alternative qualifications. Qualifications will be confirmed in the course of learning. Each qualification can be confirmed by an external professional examination. After passing the exam for a qualification, the student receives a certificate, and after passing all the exams provided in the profession, and after graduation, the student receives a diploma confirming vocational qualifications.

Modernizing vocational education also provides the ability to conduct extramural examinations. Extramural exams, confirming vocational qualifications for a particular qualification, may be taken by a person who has graduated from a middle school or an eight-year elementary school. This form of examination will be also available to those, who have for at least two years been educated or worked in the given profession.

To develop personal and social competences and basic organizational skills – valued by employers – new learning courses have been introduced. These changes are intended to make it easier for young people to acquire specific skills. For those who are already working in a given profession these changes will help validate their competences and professional qualifications. They will also surely increase the youth's chances on the labor market.

It is worth noting that these changes are designated to change the “image” of vocational education – to encourage young people to choose this type of education. However, despite the increasing unemployment there are still shortages of professionals in many industries on the labor market (in Poland and other EU countries). For example, the elimination of schools/courses teaching professional

welders the employers had difficulties finding a good specialist in the industry. What is more, extending the general education programme will enable graduates of vocational schools to further education. Cooperation with employers is essential. Employers have an impact on the current shape of any given occupation and on the selection of individual skills in the profession. It is also important to pay attention to the development of social and personal skills, and basic organization of work – because these groups of competencies are always required of an employee, while not yet been taught at any stage of education. Additionally, to encourage employers to hire young people, vocational schools may organize vocational courses – on behalf of a specific employer. At the same time it will help schools cooperate with employers. It is worth mentioning that some qualifications are a common denominator for certain professions – to increase mobility. Graduates / students who already have certain qualifications may add to them other skills and in that way they can easily get a new profession. This facilitation in external examinations for people who already have knowledge and skills in a profession is a response to the needs of the labor market and at the same time is a practical realization of the principles of the Strategy Life Long Learning.

When speaking of support programs for young people wanting to become professionals, it is worth turning the attention to the activities of such institutions as Youth Education and Labour Centres VLC, which through its units (Youth Job Recruitment Offices, Mobile Vocational Information Centres, Youth Career Centres, and Job Clubs) implement comprehensive counseling programs for young people. Professional workshops and organization of seasonal work, where young people can learn about a profession in practice, in the right work environment, have an important function in these programs. Counselors working in centers organize comprehensive individual and group counseling concerning methods and forms of active job searching. They organize job fairs, conduct work mediation, help young people in their choice of future career, planning, and career development by taking independent action in starting their own economic activity. Counselors also spread awareness about opportunities and risks of running your own business.

It is good that in the vocational education emphasis is put on the real help for young people entering the labor market. Let us hope that this strategy will be continued in other areas of education.

Conclusions

In Poland, despite the fact that counseling is developing dynamically, the practice still lacks system solutions that would actually help young people make the right choices in education and training, and consciously plan their career. An example of a “weak link” in our education system is the provision in the regulation by Ministry of Education on educational and vocational counseling at school. On the one hand this provision obliges directors of schools implement programs

concerning the choice of direction for education and occupation, and planning education and career, in order to assist high school and middle school students in educational and vocational decision-making [Regulation of the Minister of National Education on the principles of providing and organizing psychological and pedagogical assistance (Journal of Laws No 228, item 1487)]. On the other hand this provision does not ensure the possibility to employ career counselors in schools. In practice, this means that comprehensive and professional counseling is not carried out in all schools, as some are missing the funds for that purpose. The negative effect of such neglect is the increase of the probability of making the wrong decisions academic and professional by students, which generate structural unemployment – particularly affecting young people. A young person is often left with such decisions alone, helpless and lost – desperately seeking answers to the questions: *what to choose? why?* Referring to the tendency to externalize professional development, which was outlined in the introduction – the labor market requires from young people self-responsibility and self-reliance in planning and managing their own career. However, for this independence, young people must be properly equipped – with competencies, knowledge and practical skills. Comprehensive counseling programs can effectively assist youth's in dealing with the problems of the future and to prevent risks of marginalization and pathology caused by unemployment.

Abstract: The issue of unemployment among adolescents as one of the causes of social pathology is examined. It is also emphasized that the NEET phenomenon is spreading and that it furthers social exclusion and pathologies. It is argued that school and career guidance at the earliest levels of education, especially developed among adolescents who face making decisions important for their education and career, is a way to prevent and minimize negative effects of these phenomena. Thus it is advised to develop various forms of guidance and to raise the need among adolescents to plan their own educational and professional development.

Key words: youth unemployment, pathology among adolescents, career guidance

Streszczenie: Rosnące bezrobocie wśród młodzieży jest jedną z przyczyn patologii społecznej w tej grupie wiekowej. Jednym z niepokojących zjawisk związanych z bezrobociem wśród młodzieży jest zjawisko NEETs, które rozprzestrzeniło się w ostatnich latach w Europie i staje się źródłem patologii. W artykule wyrażam pogląd, że poradnictwo zawodowe w szkołach jest jednym ze sposobów zapobiegania i minimalizowania negatywnych skutków wspomnianych zjawisk. Różnorodne formy poradnictwa dla młodzieży przygotowują ją do podejmowania ważnych wyborów edukacyjno – zawodowych oraz rozbudzają w młodzieży potrzebę uczenia się i planowania własnego rozwoju zawodowego.

Słowa kluczowe: bezrobocie wśród młodzieży, patologia wśród młodzieży, poradnictwo zawodowe.

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