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Selection of University Study Programs in Albania and its Implications in Academic Performance and the Labor Market²

ABSTRACT: High school graduates frequently struggle making decisions when it comes time to select their study programs and universities, especially because there are so many options and that these choices are frequently influenced by the market. One of a student's most crucial choices is the program they enroll in because it will shape who they become in the years to come. Choosing entails picking one course of action while rejecting others. As this decision is made at a young age and is influenced by a number of variables, it is even more challenging. The examination of the variables influencing a student's preference for a course of study at a university and their effects on the student's performance are the main objectives of this study.

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Data collection and analysis were done using primary and secondary sources. Three different approaches—a survey, a focus group, and structured interviews—were used to gather primary materials. Text analysis was used to provide secondary sources. Based on the results, the study concludes that selecting a study program is a very important procedure that affects how an individual will develop in terms of their career, employment, and professionalization.

KEYWORDS: Students, labor market, university, study program, internal factor, external factor.

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. - 2. Literature Review. - 3. Methodology. - 4. Empirical Results. - 4.1 Selection of Study Program and Influencing Factors. - 4.2 The Choice of Study Program and Students' Performance. - 4.3. Implications of the Choice of the study program in the Labor Market. - 5. Conclusions.

1. Introduction.

Universities in Albania are working to equip graduates with the skills they need to thrive in the labor market of today as a result of the increased focus on improving student services in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in recent years. This can be done either by creating innovative curricula that are centered on skills and are in line with today's worldwide markets, or by having career services departments in HEIs advise students.

Notwithstanding these measures, there is still a disconnect between what young people have studied and what the labor market demands. This leads to young people often not working in their specific study programs (MAS, 2022). According to the “Albanian Youth 2018-2019” study of the “Friedrich Ebert” Foundation, which is based on a national survey with 800 respondents ages 14 to 29 years old, several findings reveal the reality of Albanian youth. The report claims that “48% of the young people interviewed, who are in employment, affirm that they do not work in the profession for which they are educated and qualified, and 36% of the young people work in jobs where a lower level of education is required than the one they have.

In addition, the study found that the percentage of people with higher education is greater among girls than boys (18.2 percent and 14.5 percent respectively). The division is also visible based on fields of study, female students attending higher education are heavily concentrated in the fields of education, health and welfare, humanities, and arts, while male students in these fields are few (INSTAT, [instat.gov .al](http://instat.gov.al), 2021). The percentage gap of girls achieving higher scores is even greater when it comes to science and reading in Albania (10.7% in science and 20.1% in reading) than the average in OECD countries (2.4% in science and 10.2% in reading) (OECD, 2020).

In general, when the time comes for high school graduates to choose their study programs and university, they often find themselves in a dilemma regarding these decisions, especially when the options are so numerous

and often driven by the market. Before every high school graduate, the question arises, where should I study and what should I study? Most choose a profession based on the financial reward rather than personal inclination and aptitude. Yet many career specialists believe that a profession chooses a person, not the other way round. Is this phenomenon really happening with our graduates? What are the factors driving these choices? Do graduates make their selection based on their talents and passions or on the needs and prospects of the labor market?

HEIs are constantly improving their academic offerings to best meet the expectations of students and address the great importance attached to the selection of a study programs, the process of deciding, as well as the implications of the choice to continue their studies. Despite these enhancements, they have not been properly studied in Albania, especially in relation to students' academic performance and later their entrance into the labor market. Today, HEIs, give greater importance to readying students for the labor market and perfecting their curriculum than focusing on the students themselves and their choices. Certain questions arise and must be analyzed, such as the reason why students select one study programs over another, why are more girls than boys oriented towards a certain study program, are their choices oriented towards a preferred study programs or “imposed” by social agents (parents, peers, mass media, teachers, etc.).

Through a clear and scientifically based methodology, this study aims to contribute regarding the selection process of a field of study by graduates,

its implications on their academic performance, the gender gap in the selected study programs, and the potential to be competitive in the labor market.

2. Literature Review.

According to Brown and Oplakta, the reasons underlying the selection of studies, based on a study of 75 scientific papers dealing with this issue, can be grouped into seven major categories: demographic, academic, geographical, expectations and bene-fits, characteristics of the institution, quality, information, and price (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015, p. 78). Regarding the gender component, studies show that gender no longer plays any specific role in the selection of university studies (Su-Je Cho; Cynthia Hudley; Soyoung Lee; Leasha M Barry; Melissa Kelly, 2008, pp. 95-107) although in certain cases there may be an impact regarding the cost of studies as a criterion on which the selection is based (Drewes & Michael, 2006, pp. 781-800)

Social status (Baker & Brown, 2002, pp. 377-391), economic income (Bonnema & Waldt, 2008, pp. 314-327.), and social class (Diane Reay; Jacqueline P. Davies; Miriam Elizabeth David; Stephen Ball, 2001, pp. 855-874) are factors (often interrelated) which substantially influence the selection of university studies by student candidates. De-veloped in the two different social contexts of the United Kingdom in the case of Baker and Brown as well as Reay on the one hand and South Africa in the case of Bonnema and van der Weldt on the other, studies show that social class,

economic and social status are essential factors that influence the priorities that student candidates set in the process of selecting a university and a field of study.

From studies conducted in relation to the educational level of the parents of student candidates and the impact that this educational level has on the selection of the university and the field of study, it has been noticed that the educational level of the parents is an essential factor in the selection of the field of study and of the university. For example, it has been observed that the children of university professors make diametrically different choices from the children of parents who belong to the same economic level but who come from a non-academic environment (Siegfried & Getz, 2006, pp. 201-210). It has also been noticed that the educational level of the parents, especially the mother, is essential in the selection of a university by the children (Παπακωνσταντίνου, 2016).

The geographical factor is also a factor that plays an important role in the selection. Placed in the context of a geographically large country like Canada, a study concluded that the geographical proximity of the university to the country of residence plays a relatively important role in the selection of the institution and that Canadian students chose a university located up to 273 miles from the parent's place of residence (Drewes & Michael, 2006, pp. 781-800).

The information on which student candidates support their decision-making regarding the field of study and the university has been the subject

of various studies. Some student candidates place great importance on the need for information gathering before making their choice (Veloutsou, Lewis, & Paton, 2004, pp. 160-171). The most frequent sources of information are the media, the social circle, and direct contact with the university. The type of information source selected depends in particular on social status (Bonnema & Waldt, 2008, pp. 314-327). Parents' opinions and university web-sites are the most used sources of information according to another study (Areces, Mu-niz, Alvares, Roca, & Cueli, 2016, pp. 253-259). These sources of information continue to be considered the most reliable by student candidates in the process of selecting the field of study and the University (Vivar, 2009, pp. 73-81).

Neoliberalism manifests mainly through three trends in higher education. These are: privatization (not considering the provision of higher education as an obligation of the state), commercialization (considering education as a product subject to market rules), and corporatization (introduction of managerial practices in its operation and administration) (Kezar, 2004, pp. 429-459). These trends have influenced several aspects of higher education and are seen through the re-stratification of academic disciplines (Gumport, 2000, pp. 67-91) through the reduction of funding for social and human sciences and the increase for exact and applied ones. (Slaughter, 1998, pp. 209-244). In this way, academic disciplines are completely subject to the logic of the market, where applied sciences, information technology, and medicine see an increase in their value, while

social and human sciences are increasingly devalued (Rhoades, 1988, p. 78).

3. Methodology

Primary and secondary sources were used to collect and analyze the data. Primary sources were provided by using three methods: survey, focus group, and structured interviews. Secondary sources were provided by text analysis method. Regarding the survey, the CAWI technique (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing), otherwise known as data collection via the Internet, was used for data collection. This process was carried out in the period of November-December 2022, on the Google Forms platform. The study included a sample of 800 students in their First Cycle of Studies (Bachelor) at universities in the country, belonging in their second and third year.

According to the official data of the Institute of Statistics (IN-STAT, 2021) for the academic year 2021-2022, about 70 thousand students are enrolled in the First Cycle of studies in public and non-public education. This means that the results of this study are representative of all students attending the First Cycle of Studies with a margin of error of $\pm 3.44\%$ and with a confidence level of $\alpha=95\%$. The sample selection procedure used the methods of stratification and a random selection, arbitrarily selecting the groups that held lessons on a given day. Participation in the study was conditional and based on two criteria that had to be fulfilled simultaneously by the potential participants. A student was considered

eligible to be part of the survey if he/she met the inclusion criteria:(i) attends their First Cycle of studies at an Albanian public or private universities;(ii) is in their second or third year. Both of these criteria were an integral part of the questionnaire and guaranteed the inclusion of only those students who fulfilled these requisites. The sampling pool was 800 respondents. The universities where the questionnaire was completed were selected according to the following criteria: location, number of students enrolled at the Bachelor's level, and programs offered. Referring to these criteria, a total of twenty-five HEIs were included in this study, of which: fourteen public universities and eleven non-public universities. The 18-20 age group has the highest percentage of respondents in total 61% (47% female students and 14% male students), followed by the 21-23 age group with 28%. Even in this age group, the highest percentage is that of female students. Respondents over 23 years old make up about 11% of the total, (8% female students and 3% male students). The questionnaire shows that the highest percentage of respondents consists of female students about 74.8% of the total number of respondents. Regarding the focus groups, they were carried out with second- and third-year university students. The sampling size was 55 students in total. The selection of students was based on the following elements: year of study, gender, results in lessons, location, and public/non-public HEIs. Specifically, 13 students were selected at "Fan S. Noli" University in Korça, 18 students at "Ismail Qemali" University in Vlora, 9 students at "Luigj Gurakuqi" University in Shkodër, and 15 students at "The

Mediterranean University of Albania” in Tirana. The focus groups were recorded and interpreted. Also, 12 structured interviews were conducted with specialists, academics, and high school principals. The sampling method used was purposive heterogeneous sampling. In the selection of the sample, the targeted participants were not only education policy researchers but also managers of pre-university education institutions who are close to the situation. The data obtained from the structured interviews were included in the study in the form of comments and opinions.

4. Empirical Results

4.1 Selection of Study Program and Influencing Factors

In this study, we aimed only at the factors that directed the students’ choice toward their preference, which is summarized in Table 1. The answers of the surveyed students who answered “yes completely” and “mostly yes” to the questions below to conclude which factors turn out to be most influential in the choice of the study programs for university. The results reveal that desire and preference are contributing factors regarding students’ selection for university studies. For about 69% of students, this was the most decisive factor which was classified as the first in the list of influencing factors. 41.8%, assessed the influence of their desire and preference to the extent of 100%. Furthermore, 63% of students agreed and affirmed that the employment perspective was a determining factor in the selection of the field of study, ranking it as the second highest factor. The selection of the study programs at a university has been guided to a

considerable extent by high school results. For about 61% of the surveyed students, this was a factor of high importance, ranking as the third influencing factor. About 58% of the students agreed that the family played a role in a deeper comprehension of the skills, capacities, and opportunities that justified their preference for the proper program. 27.6% of them assessed the influence of the family was 100% the deciding factor for their choice in studies. According to students, media and social networks were powerless factors, with 15% and 17%, respectively. The data reveals that for more than 60% of students, these two factors had no effect.

Table 1. Evaluation of influencing factors in the selection of the study programs for university studies

| Questions / influencing factors in study programs selection | In (%) |
|---|---------------|
| Have your personal desires and preferences prompted you to choose a major for university studies? | 69 % |
| Have employment prospects influenced the choice of preferred university major? | 63 % |
| Did your high school results reinforce your preference in choosing your preferred major at university? | 61 % |
| Has the family played a role for you to better understand the skills, capacities and opportunities that justify your preference in the selection of the study programs at the university? | 58 % |

| | |
|---|------|
| Has the family income influenced the choice of the preferred study programs in the university? | 32 % |
| Did the career counseling office in high school play a role in helping you better understand the skills, capacities and opportunities that justify your preference in choosing a university major? | 25 % |
| Have your peers played a role in helping you better understand the skills, capacities and opportunities that justify your preference in choosing a major at the university? | 25 % |
| Did the staff of private universities play a role during the information campaign and the registration process to better understand the skills, capacities and opportunities that justify your preference in the selection of the study programs at the university? | 22 % |
| Have public university staffs played a role during the information campaign and the registration process to better understand the skills, capacities and opportunities that justify your preference in selecting the study programs at the university? | 20 % |
| Have social networks influenced the choice of the preferred study programs in the university? | 17 % |
| Has the media influenced the choice of the preferred study programs in the university? | 15 % |

* Only the answers “yes completely” and “to a large extent yes”

Source: Questionnaire and authors' elaborations

The preference aspect is very complex and controversial. The factors that fuel the preference among high school students should be analyzed in advance. Quite a few studies considering these aspects show that a student's preference is often borrowed from the models of parents' professions. The latter, intentionally or not, market their choice as the right choice for a career and professional self-realization. For expert Kamberi: "...this phenomenon is more pronounced in the middle classes than in the lower classes, as they try to project in their children their professional future that they exercise themselves, for example, doctor, pharmacist, architect, IT or lawyer, regardless of whether the child has capacity or preference for this career. On the other hand, the 'curriculum mania' observed in some Albanian families to engage children in various courses, especially foreign languages and IT, is a kind of 'career gym' that they think can be useful for future studies and professions. The courses do not test the child's skills and capacities, but orientate them towards specific credentials that are required in certain study programs at university, or to fill gaps that have been created by high school..."

Expert Alička claims that: "it is not rare for parents, regardless of the educational level, to try to impose the study profile on the child, according to the principle: "you are young, you don't understand what is the best for you" which replaces the principle "the child must determine his life destiny..." This role of the family, according to Kabo: "...has resulted in a lot of anthropological energy being lost, because many people have chosen

the wrong path of education and profession, not choosing based on their inclinations. This practice has caused damage to the individual and society as well...”

The other question, shown in Table 2, sought to evaluate on a point scale from 1 to 5 the influence that the listed factors have on the selection of the preferred study programs at the university. According to the Likert scale, the average is quite essential, ranges from 1 to 1.80 shows that the participants evaluated the factor as not important at all; 1.81 to 2.60 shows that they rate the factor as less important; 2.61 to 3.40 is a neutral rating (50-50), while 3.41 to 4.20 the factor is considered significant and 4.21 to 5 quite significant. After processing the data it was found that, according to the Likert scale, factors such as “employment perspective” (3.58) and “family role” (3.53) are considered to be factors with essential influence on the selection of the preferred study programs for students. “Results in high school” (3.39) are listed near the limit of the criteria to be considered important factors, while “family income” (2.88) is a neutral factor. “Media”, “social networks” and “high school career counseling office” are evaluated as the least important factors as their average value descends in the range of 1.81 to 2.60. Other factors of “slightly important” factors are “peers” (2.24) and “role of career counseling of public and private university staff during the information campaign and registration process” (2.02).

Table 2. Average assessment of the impact of factors

| Factory | Importance Level | | | | | Average | St Dev. |
|--|------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|---------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| High school career counseling office | 434 | 152 | 112 | 43 | 59 | 1.93 | 1.248 |
| The role of family | 63 | 115 | 213 | 151 | 258 | 3.53 | 1.287 |
| Peers | 276 | 219 | 184 | 81 | 40 | 2.24 | 1.173 |
| The role of career counseling of public university staff during the information campaign and registration process | 383 | 173 | 140 | 57 | 47 | 2.02 | 1.212 |
| The role of career counseling of private university staff during the information campaign and registration process | 380 | 186 | 127 | 53 | 54 | 2.02 | 1.228 |
| Results in secondary school | 79 | 118 | 215 | 185 | 203 | 3.39 | 1.279 |
| Family income | 171 | 166 | 199 | 113 | 151 | 2.88 | 1.396 |
| Employment prospects | 75 | 86 | 211 | 153 | 275 | 3.58 | 1.308 |
| Social networks | 422 | 146 | 140 | 49 | 43 | 1.93 | 1.195 |
| Media | 409 | 148 | 153 | 49 | 41 | 1.96 | 1.187 |

Source: Questionnaire and authors' elaborations

The internal consistency of the answers is essential in this section. It is typically measured using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha is a measure used to assess the reliability, or internal consistency, of a set of scale or test items. In general, a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.6 or higher indicates that it has acceptable consistency. The value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient calculated is 0.846 and is found between 0.8

$\leq \alpha < 0.9$. This assessment indicates a strong internal consistency of the data in this section and a high level of confidence. It is noteworthy the data regarding “perspective of employment” and the “role of the family” is given more importance compared to “high school results. The first two factors are not necessarily related to the individual’s ability, capacity, and desire, whereas the third is. According to expert Alikaj:”...if students in their last years of high school do not follow their preference to choose a study programs of study for their Bachelor’s degree in line with their capacity and abilities, but rather follow the dictates of their parents and the conjecture of the market, it will lead to the creation of a ‘numerical student,’ meaning a higher number of registration of students for that study programs of study. The inconsistency of the selection of the program of study with their skills, opportunities, and especially their desire naturally causes their dissatisfaction which creates the ‘motivational void’ that can be filled with indifference, minimal effort to benefit from years of study, and eagerness to complete it as soon as possible.”

Another issue of interest was when students began to think about choosing a preferred major. From the data of the questionnaire, it appears that almost half of the respondents have started to think about the selection of their favorite study programs in the third year of high school. Meanwhile, 23% of them started thinking about this selection in the first year of studies in high school, 20 % in the second year, 47 % in the third year and 11 % fourth year.

The counseling office is considered a very important link in this phase of the child's development. For expert Onuzi: "...the role of career counseling offices has not been inherent; we should have a decisive and fundamental effect within a selection quality of the educational future. Often, even when these offices have taken on a regular administrative role, they have had and continue to have marked deficiencies, either at the motivational level or at the reference level, as well as a lack of knowledge of the labor market, students' skills, conditions, opportunities and time necessary to adapt to what surrounds them..."

Expert Lila acknowledges this as well, saying: "In some cases, especially in small districts or remote rural centers, their role appears somewhat sluggish, influencing the contingent but not properly identifying a suitable path according to the inclinations of each student, and in many cases leaving the choice of the direction they choose to chance..."

On the other hand, expert Kamberi states: "Career Counseling Offices in high schools should function according to the 'tailor made approach.' High schools should build counseling sessions with groups of students or individual students by getting pre-liminary profile, results and information about their achievements in subjects or groups of subjects from teachers. Determining the elective subjects that high school students take is a moment that places them in the "hallway" of their field of study and their future profession. In this case, the Career Counseling Offices should be more connected to this process, aiming to properly orient the students towards the selection of this group of subjects..."

In fact, the Ministry of Education and Sports through the Guide: Elements of Ca-reer Orientation (MAS, arsimi.gov.al/, 2022) has defined a four-step structure for Ca-reer Counseling Offices, which includes: a) self-assessment b) recognition of opportunities c) decision-making d) action plan in which interviews and group activities prevail as the main methodology that make students improve reasoning and analysis techniques in order to make the right decisions in choosing a study programs of study for university. However, it should be noted that this structure is not properly respected by the career offices in their daily work.

4.2. The Choice of Study Program and Students' Performance

Other questionnaire aims to identify the impact that the choice of the preferred study programs has on students' motivation, their results and the continuation of further studies. As a whole, it is observed that the students are satisfied with the choice of the study programs they have made, where 78% of them affirm that they are satisfied completely or in large part. When asked if they would choose the same field of study again, half of the respondents answered "Yes completely," 50%; "a large part yes" 16% and "somewhat yes" 15%.

This data highlights a paradox. As noted, a small percent is inclined to change their first preference to a choice that is closer to the market requirements, compared to the vast part that does not consider it necessary to change based on the market. Having said that, the idea is created that there is no problem regarding the factors that determine the

preference in the selection of the study programs as long as the majority are satisfied with the choice made. Therefore, all social agents have done their job properly. However, as we have argued above, the family factors, career counseling offices in high schools, career counseling offices in universities, peers or mass media, etc. do not perform their role properly. For expert Malaj: "...Statistics regarding the way of selecting the direction of studies repeatedly show a selection carried out on the basis of desires and society, not on the basis on a cold and rational selection..." Addressing the latter, Kabo expresses that this lack of rational selection The development of cognitive skills that the child creates for them self begins in the early stages, then other social agents come into play during further develop. It is not done at a single given moment. The family, and our society, do not have these mechanisms properly developed..." This fact is emphasized by Demaliaj when he says: "...The development of mechanisms that enable the recognition of the child's capacities and opportunities is a complex and very important process at the same time. Studies show that in Albanian society these mechanisms are sporadic or unconsolidated..."

The surveyed students were asked if choosing their favorite study programs affects the achievement of high results. 45% of the surveyed students totally agree with the opinion that the choice of the preferred study programs will affect their results and performance at the university; 30% strongly support that choice of preferred study programs has an effect on results, 16% partially support it and 7% think that there is no

relation between being in preferred study programs and results. For the participants in the focus group, the link between preferred study programs and results is a simplified correlation, as there are many other factors that influence it. These were confirmed by one student claiming that: "...Choosing the preferred study programs is a factor that affects the achievement of high results, but even if a student cannot achieve for some reasons to choose the study programs, he/she wants, the subjects and lecturers may be the ones that attract them..." Another respondent says: "...The favorite study programs is a plus in terms of motivation, but the lecturers are also the ones who influence to some extent how they carry out teaching, making the lecture less tiring and fun for the student..." Another student says: "...The choice of study programs affects the achievement of high results because if you have chosen this study programs willingly, you also study the subjects willingly to get the highest grades in the exams..." For the expert Zenuni, the correlation between preference and results is commented as follows, "...Experience shows that the vast majority of students who follow the subjects they prefer have higher results compared to those who do not have this preference..." Treska holds the same position, which evidences the psychosocial effects if the graduate does not follow their preferred study programs at the bachelor's level: "...These effects the lowers the impact of level of motivation of the student to continue their studies in the program they follow. This lack of preference is associated with a lower level of self-esteem and with the student following the wrong paths to graduate with

the highest possible results without absorbing and learning along the way...”.

4.3. Implications of the Choice of the study program in the Labor Market

Finally, the surveyed students were asked the influence that the choice of the preferred study programs in their First Cycle (Bachelor) has on the continuation of similar studies in the Second Cycle (Master). One in two respondents are of the opinion that the choice of the preferred study programs affects the continuation of the Second Cycle in a similar field/subfield of study as in the First Cycle. 6.5% of students think that Master's studies are not affected by the study programs selected in the Bachelor's. It is interesting that the highest percentage of students who would not choose the same study programs of study again belong to the field of study “Social Science.” For the participants in the focus group, the opinions are almost the same as in the survey. One student said: “...Yes, it is true that the choice of bachelor's study programs also affects the continuation of studies at the master's level, since if you are studying it willingly you want to deepen your knowledge in that study programs even more. But I would say that other factors influence this as well, such as where the intended job position is, perhaps, or where a master's degree may be required...” Another student says: “I am satisfied with the study programs I have chosen. I think that I will follow the same study programs in my master's degree as well...” Another says that: “...Choosing an-other

study programs in the master's gives me more opportunities to position myself in the labor market...".

In the opinion of education expert Lila, the preference at the bachelor's level is a very significant indicator in the continuation of studies at the master's level: "...I think there is a correlation between preference, information about the labor market and the deepening of knowledge in the master's degree. I say this because there are many cases where students have selected the study programs they prefer, but due to the information received from the labor market and the work experiences of their peers, they modify their preference by switching to another study programs at the master's level..." With the same pragmatic logics expert Alička says that: "...Students make the transition from a bachelor's study programs to a related master's study programs in order to diversify their knowledge to have more opportunities in the labor market..."

From observations, it turns out that students who come from some study programs of Social Sciences and Humanities, who are not in high demand in the labor market, display this tendency more. Students studying in fields such as engineering, IT, medicine, physiotherapy, finance and management are less likely to do switch at the Masters level. This can be related to the way social sciences have developed from the 1960s and onwards, but more notably to the impact that neoliberal policies have had on the devaluation of all social and human studies. Thus, under increasing pressure from the neoliberal reforms imposed on the education sector (especially as related to the decline of public funding, the obligation of

universities to secure their own funding, the application of market logic and of managerial practices) the social sciences have found themselves in an unfavorable position compared to the applied sciences. Faced with existential dilemmas, social science faculties have shrunk and started following the practice of cross-disciplinary in their study programs, especially at the master's level. To "become more attractive in the market," an increasing number of programs are trying to overlap the "demands of the market" with classic social studies, causing them to effectively lose the genuine critical character that social sciences should have. Thus, master's study programs in real social studies such as Political Science, Sociology, Political Philosophy, Political Analysis, etc. give way to master's programs that are closer to the fields of management, public relations or (not always) other related fields. This practice of constantly changing study programs also affects the selection of master's studies by student candidates. Students faced with market pressure and constantly changing graduate programs often feel compelled to completely change their field of study. The preference component is of little importance when it comes to "investment in human capital." The individual must choose as a neoliberal subject. He must suppress his preferences or adapt in accordance with the demands of the market.

Referring to the data below, it turns out 50% of respondents think that the study programs they currently follow will help them in the future and position themselves close to their profession; 17% are of the opinion that the chosen study programs will partially help them secure a job close to

their profession; 5% think that the study programs they are currently following will not help them find a job close to their profession. Despite the fact that “employment perspective” was mentioned above as a factor that guides students’ choices, almost 1 in 2 students would choose the same study programs. If the “employment perspectives” were to change based on the structure of the labor market, only 17% of students would change their preference. This data shows that students generally believe that choosing to study for a profession they prefer will enable more motivation and satisfaction level in their introduction to the labor market. This data is also confirmed by the majority of the opinions given in the focus groups. One respondent says: “...I am convinced in my choice of future profession will enable me more opportunities for employment and self-realization...”.

Another participant says: “...You can’t study something you don’t like or a work at a job that doesn’t motivate you...” Yet another said: “...For me the conjecture of the market is important, especially for those professions that are not much sought after, the case is different for professions that are among the most sought after in the market today...”.

At this point the researchers Boudon (1992), Bourdieu (2005) attach importance to two components of market capacity assessment, knowledge of the trends offered by the market and the individual ability to decide independently are simply not enough. They suggest the undertaking of continuous studies over conjecture of the market, and most importantly, to evaluate the observational capacities of the market while aiming to

minimize the inflating qualifications of some professions. Allowing the market to adjust the relationship between the qualifications provided by a university degree and the opportunities offered by the market does not avoid the problems of devaluing these qualifications in a later period.

In order to further complete the analysis, what is noticed is that students who are currently pursuing their studies in the field of “Health and Welfare” have the highest belief that they will be able to secure a job in their field in the future, as compared to students who are being educated in other fields. This data shows the connection that exists between the structure of professions in the labor market and the depth of studies in a certain field. The majority of participants who respond positively to further and deepen their studies at the master’s level were those in fields of study that the labor market and salary system favor as opposed to some other fields of study. As a whole, students studying in the humanities and some study programs of the social sciences are often forced to modify their studies at the master’s level by following a related study programs. The tendency of students for interdisciplinary studies is not an Albanian phenomenon but a wide reaching one, especially for those who study programs of social sciences and humanities.

The correlation between the most sought-after professions and the depth of a specific program is significant. This phenomenon is also widespread in other countries. Pierre Bourdieu explains this trend: “...the general trend that the individual with a degree in x profession infinitely increases the chances of being privileged in the labor market fall to a minimum. This

is because the orientation in some professions creates a large number of graduates concerning the limited needs of the market...” (2005, 667). This connects with what Herbert Marcuse (2006) has defined as the “artificial need” of the market. Within a short time, an inflation of diplomas and high unemployment of graduated persons is generated.

5. Conclusions

Preference is a determining factor regarding the choice of the study programs for university studies.

About 69% of students considered preference as the most fundamental factor in the selection of the study programs at the university, 63% of students agreed and affirmed that the employment perspective was a determining factor in the selection of their study programs of studies, 61% of the surveyed students listed their high school results, and about 58% of students agreed that the family has played a role for them in enhancing and understanding the skills, capacities, and opportunities that justify their preference in the selection of the study programs at the university. The factors with the weakest influence are listed as the role of the career counseling office in the high school, peers, private university staff during information campaigns and registration processes, and media and social networks. Specialists focused more on the function of career counseling offices in high schools. Their role was not inherent and should have been decisive and fundamental within the framework of a students’ qualitative

selection of their educational future, referring to the models that are offered by different EU countries.

Regarding the influence that the choice of a preferred study programs has on academic results, 45% of students thought that the choice of a preferred study programs affects their results and performance at university, 30% support it to a large extent, 16% support it partly, and 7% think that there is no relation between being in a preferred study programs and academic results. As argued in the focus groups, the connection between preference and results is not the only factor, other determinants are also involved, but this does not diminish the role of choice in results. Additionally, one in two respondents believed that the choice of a preferred study programs affects the continuation of the Second Cycle similarly to the field/subfield of study in the First Cycle.

The preferred study programs and the continuation of studies at the Master's level are very significant. One in two respondents thinks that the choice of a preferred study programs affects the continuation of the Second Cycle in a similar field/subfield of study as their First Cycle, only 6.5% of students think that the master's studies are not influenced by the chosen study programs in the Bachelor but from other factors. This data creates the impression that preference is not modified by the perspective of work when moving from the bachelor's level to the master's level. The data in the study shows the opposite. Specifically, what is observed is that students who are currently studying in the field of "Medical and Health Sciences" have the highest belief compared to students who attend other

study programs that they will be able to secure a professional related to their field of study in the future. This conviction also justifies their attitude that they will continue to attend the same study programs even at the master's level. Students who do not believe that their study programs has employment prospects are more likely to not to enroll in the same study programs of study for their master's. Students studying in the humanities and some study programs of the social sciences are often compelled to modify their studies at the master's level by following a related study programs with higher employment prospect. The majority of students claim that finding a job close to their preference of field of study is more important than the salary offered. Only 19% of the respondents think that payment is more important than finding a workplace close to their preferences. The tendency of students to continue in interdisciplinary studies is not only an Albanian phenomenon but wider than that, seen mainly in study programs that are close to social sciences and humanities.

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