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Meanings of Work Among Young People in Vocational Education and Training. A Youth-centered Analysis in Romania

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RESEARCH
BACKGROUND

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Young people (YP) are negotiating their prospects at the time of **global transformations in the meaning of work**;

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

Physical work → **service sector**;

RESEARCH DESIGN

Long term, stable jobs → **precarious work** (Standing, 2011; Winlow and Hall, 2013; Sweet and Meiksins, 2013);

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

De-standardisation of youth transitions.

RESEARCH
BACKGROUND

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The collapse of the **'heavy industry'**

→ The **'crisis' in male roles** (Beynon, 2002);

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

Crisis of **craftsmanship**: **'skill for its own sake'** (Sennet, 2008)

RESEARCH DESIGN

The potency of work in shaping **young people's sense of self** and social value may change.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Romania (I)

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

RESERCH DESIGN

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- Fall of the **centralized industry** during the 90s;
- High focus on the **IT sector**:
- 1st in Europe no. of certified IT specialists (Global Skills Report, 2005);
- 3rd in the world in offshore software development (romanian startups, 2016)
- **Small industrial sector**; focus on services;
- Corporate big names, but also **SMEs as employers**;
- Variance in the **capacity to provide work-based learning**;

Romania (II)

RESEARCH
BACKGROUND

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

- **Big regional disparities;**

- **Skills drain;**

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

- A generation of qualified workers is approaching retirement;

- Almost half of the population in the **countryside;**

RESERCH DESIGN

- The **second-poorest** member of the EU.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

VET in Romania (I)

RESEARCH
BACKGROUND

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Mandatory education → 16 yrs;
8th Grade (14 yrs): national standardised test



POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

-High school trajectory (Theoretical or **Technical**): 4 yrs →
Level 4 qualification + *bacalaureate*).

or

RESEARCH DESIGN

-Vocational education (VET): 3 yrs → Level 3 qualification.
(possibility to continue at high school level).

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Each year, $\frac{1}{2}$ of places in VET remain unfilled.

VET in Romania (II)

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

VET is of a relatively low **standing**;

The most **reformed** segment of the education;

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

Cancelled, then, re-established;

Isolated examples of good practice;

RESEARCH DESIGN

Many **pilot projects** not replicated;

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

'Transformation fatigue' (Powell, 2015)

VET in Romania (III)

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

RESEARCH DESIGN

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- 3 years: 40% theory + 60% practice;
- School accreditation and human resources;
- Outdated infrastructure;
- Some **financial support** to all students in VET;
- Proactive **campaigns** from schools;
- Strong policy endorsement for the German **dual model**.
- Political ambitions to expand VET by 2020;

RESEARCH
BACKGROUND

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

RESEARCH DESIGN

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

EU: move towards reinstating the attractiveness of VET

OECD (2014):

-VET systems can ‘help to **reduce early school leaving** by offering an alternative to general education’ .

-In the next few years, about two-thirds of the overall EU **employment growth** will be not in the highly professional category, but **in the technician and associate professional group**;

- **Skills mismatch.**

RESEARCH
BACKGROUND

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

RESEARCH DESIGN

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Objectives:

- To examine young people's own **meanings of work** and the possible sources informing their perspectives;
- To explore the views of teachers and employers on the recent **changes in VET and labour market.**

RESEARCH
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ECONOMIC CONTEXT

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

RESEARCH DESIGN

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Methods:

- **Interviews and focus groups** with over 200 young people from VET (10th grade, rarely 11th – 16-17 years old);
- Interviews with over 50 teachers, local school authorities;
- Over 30 schools visited.

VET areas:

- Mechanics
- Forestry
- Textile workers
- Work in the hospitality sector and retail

RESEARCH
BACKGROUND

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

RESEARCH DESIGN

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Major themes:

- The **image** of different occupations;
- **Training** experience;
- Previous **working experience**;
- Perception about **unemployment** and the **jobs available**;
- **Lessons learned** from parents' occupational history;
- Alternative professional paths: **migration, entrepreneurship, higher education, grey economy**;
- Plans for the **future** (or lack thereof).

Young people's views on VET (I)

RESEARCH
BACKGROUND

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

RESEARCH DESIGN

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- VET is **not attractive** for parents & children;
- **High school & university**: normative (white collar promise)
- Many in VET '**not for the trade**' (rare exceptions);
- VET – inequality issues and lack of opportunities to choose.

RESEARCH
BACKGROUND

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

RESEARCH DESIGN

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Young people's views on VET (II)

- High variance in companies' involvement in VET training:
dual type of learning---- **cheap labour**---'sweeping the floor'
 - Companies focus on **technologies** vs. **craftsmanship**;
 - Apparently, companies demand **old occupations**:
carpenters, welders, lathe men (??)
- But
- YP's preference for **services and auto-mechanics**.

RESEARCH
BACKGROUND

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

RESEARCH DESIGN

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Young people's views on VET (III)

- **Short term courses** (adult learning) **not** seen as a threat;
- Stronger focus on learning a trade in small towns;
- **The financial support:**
 - **'Social aid'** for children commuting from the countryside;
 - **Consumption** and **'payment for attendance'** in the cities.

Young peoples' views on the future

RESEARCH
BACKGROUND

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

RESEARCH DESIGN

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- YP tell a story of **personal achievement**, independent of 'social networks' of influence;
- **Unemployment** as a personal failure;
- Anticipate **conventional life trajectories** (having a family and 2-3 full time jobs during the entire life course);
- **'Reasonable' expectations for employment:** to be listened to, good teams, trustful employers;
- Temporary **migration** not excluded, but **rarely a dream.**

RESEARCH
BACKGROUND

Parents are influential

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Who are they?

-The young generation of **the '90s**;

-Often precarious workers, themselves

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

↳ Often outside the notion of skills and occupations;

RESERCH DESIGN

-A **crisis of occupational models** and possible life trajectories;

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

-**High & unclear expectations** for their children.

RESEARCH
BACKGROUND

Further steps and dilemmas...

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Interviews with **employers**/ training providers;

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

What is VET for?

-A solution to **dropout**?

-... to **poverty**?

-...to a genuine **need for skills**? and of **what type**?

-... **another policy** discourse? A product of crisis?

RESEARCH DESIGN

-... a **solution in search of a problem**?

-....?

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

RESEARCH
BACKGROUND

Further steps and dilemmas...

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Where are we heading to?

Issues of VET 'ownership'

POLICY CONTEXT IN VET

Who has a stake (= **who are the clients**)?

-Young people? Schools? Employers? Society ...?

RESEARCH DESIGN

-Technical + general knowledge. How much of each?
'training for employability' → What is **left out**? ...**Why?**

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

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Thank you.

