

## Visions of Personal Future among Adolescents with Different Orientations Toward Educational Mobility: The Case of Serbia

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### ABSTRACT

Research of contemporary societies emphasises the importance of global economic circumstances, political uncertainties and social inequalities for young people's visions of their personal future. This research is focused on general and career-specific aspects of adolescents' visions of personal future and how these relate to adolescents' orientation toward educational mobility. Educational mobility is determined by the equivalence/non-equivalence of parents' levels of education and their offspring's educational aspirations as expressed at the end of secondary schooling. According to this principle, three groups of participants were defined and their differences were analysed with respect to (a) general aspects of their visions of personal future, (b) career-specific aspects of their envisioned future, and (c) the perception of factors on which the achievement of career visions will depend. Significant differences among the three groups have been found in general and career-specific visions of the future. The findings of the study indicate that students who plan to attend university are more preoccupied with career and perceive personal characteristics as more important factors for achieving career goals than students without such plans. Finally, this paper suggests that, in order to fully understand young people's visions of personal future from a micro and a macro perspective, it is fruitful to integrate psychological and sociological approaches.

Keywords: visions of personal future, career visions, educational mobility, Serbia

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescents' thoughts about their future are a well-investigated issue in psychology, sociology and educational studies. Nowadays, this topic is being attributed additional importance. Under the transforming impact of globalisation and its associated uncertainties and unpredictability, the current generations of young people are facing great challenges on their pathway to adulthood (Crocetti et al., 2012). This transition is of crucial importance for young people since it enables them to take an active and independent role and provides them with resources for making decisions about their present and future lives (Billari and Liefbroer, 2010; Furlong, 2009; Tomanović, et al., 2012). However, the transition is especially demanding and challenging for young people that come from families with low economic and cultural capital since they have fewer chances to pursue higher education (Gamoran and Long, 2007; Weis, 2010; Hout and DiPrete, 2006), thus facing high unemployment rates (Juarez and Gayet, 2014).

In such a situation it is necessary to create conceptualisations that stress the importance of contextual factors like the global economic context, political uncertainties and the social-economic background of young people in order to reach a more comprehensive understanding of their aspirations and expectations regarding the future (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Evans, 2008; Heinz, 2009a). This is consistent with the empirical studies which indicate that adolescents' images of personal future are shaped by multiple factors at the level of the individual; the experience accumulated from previous generations, local socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions/opportunities and global circumstances/experiences that individuals are exposed to (Arnett, 2001; Côté and Bynner, 2008; Heggli, Haukanes and Tjomsland, 2013; Nurmi, 1991; Seginer, 2009). Besides, young people also differ in "the extent to which individuals think and feel about the future" as well as in "the amount of efforts they put into realization of their goals" (Andre et al., 2018: 3). Bearing this in mind, the importance and complexity of the phenomenon of a vision of the personal future can be understood only by using an interdisciplinary socio-psychological approach.

The transition to adulthood in Serbian society has been researched in numerous sociological studies (Tomanović, 2012a, 2012b; Ignjatović, 2009; Mihailović, 2004). These studies pointed out that society expects young people to actively plan and create their professional careers, to "self-direct" their decisions and to move to the adult phase of their lives. However, young people are also constrained by external, structural obstacles (i.e., lack of material and other resources, class inequalities). The current study expands on the previous findings by its interdisciplinary approach explicated through the psychological construct of "visions of

personal future” (Polovina and Jošić, 2019; Gril et al., 2018). This approach is used to explore adolescents’ general expectations (abstract and universal expectations applicable across different domains) and their domain-specific thinking about their future (i.e., regarding education and career). These two aspects of a vision of the future are considered in the context of young people’s orientations toward educational mobility. Such an approach makes a distinct contribution to the rare literature that addresses an integrated research approach (within one study) to the exploration of both the general/athematic and specific/thematic aspects of adolescents’ thoughts about the future (Kolesovs, 2013).

## 2. ADOLESCENTS’ VISIONS OF PERSONAL FUTURE

### 2.1. Psychological Perspective

There are numerous definitions of adolescents’ beliefs about the future. These conceptualisations often emphasise that their beliefs about the future have motivational power, are important for identity development and represent personality determinants (Andre et al., 2018; Massey, Gebhardt and Garnefski, 2008; Nurmi, 1991; Nuttin, 2014; Peetsma and Van der Veen, 2011; Seginer, 2009). Therefore, many studies have investigated the predictive potential of thinking about the future when it comes to motivation, attitudes and behaviours in different life domains (Andre et al., 2018). The psychological construct of “visions of personal future” is new in the field of studies that are focused on exploring adolescents’ anticipations of future goals related to adulthood (Blue-Banning, Turnbull and Pereira, 2002; Gril et al., 2018; Polovina and Jošić, 2019; Scott, Lonergan, and Munford, 2005). The construct has roots in the field of leadership and organisation development (*vision of future*, Strange and Mumford, 2002) and fits well into the Positive Youth Development (PYD) paradigm that is followed in the present study (Polovina and Jošić, 2019). The PYD is a multidisciplinary, holistic and widely inclusive approach that combines elements of theories of developmental systems, an approach based on the strengths of the individual, and the organisational approach (Larson, 2000; Lerner et al., 2005; Theokas and Lerner, 2006). Since a comprehensive review of PYD principles and constructs goes beyond the scope of this paper, only those aspects of the approach that are relevant for the present study will be briefly outlined. The PYD advocates a new approach to the development of young people’s potentials that places equal significance on the strength of the individual and the supportive conditions of the environments in which the development of an individual takes place. The central point of the approach is the idea of constructing positive future outcomes, i.e., optimising positive youth development through continued support

to the beneficial individual–context interaction and developmental transitions. Within PYD theories, special attention is given to positive future expectations of young people. These expectations, such as beliefs in the future and a possibility of self-regulation of development, are considered to be important personal strengths and a research topic of particular significance (Stoddard and Pierce, 2015).

As already mentioned, the term “vision of the future” originates from the field of organisation development, where it was defined as “a distinct image of organizational future, a framework involving a set of idealized future goals as well as directions for and coordination of activities relevant to future goal attainment” (Strange and Mumford, 2005: 122). Strange and Mumford (2002, 2005) pointed out that the construct of *vision of the future* contains both cognitive and motivational–affective components, and accentuates the broadly recognised (Andre et al., 2018) importance of considering both the general and content-specific aspects of the vision. The authors adapted these features and guidelines to the field of individual development, (re)naming the construct as *vision of personal future* (VPF) and adding new elements relevant for youth development (Polovina and Jošić, 2019). Therefore, the term VPF is defined as an individual’s imagery-based construction of a distant but time-limited self-relevant framework that includes a set of idealised future goals and potential ways of their accomplishment. Thus, “imagery-based construction” points to the cognitive aspect of the vision expressed through a conscious representation regarding one’s future that a person can articulate verbally. The motivational–affective component is contained in the part of the definition that refers to future goals (as a form of articulation of needs, hopes and expectations). It is specified as a possibility for each person to frame their goals in ways that are emotionally important and relevant for them (self-relevance). The feature “set of idealised future goals” accentuates a positive developmental orientation, while the “distant but time-limited” (for example, in a ten-year time) points to the importance of the interaction of the individual’s needs and implied normative tasks for the inbound life phase. The feature of potential ways of accomplishing new goals refers to the aspect of self-regulation which is based on a set of beliefs about how people should act to attain idealised future goals within the range of perceived environment possibilities.

The elaboration of construct components follows both the previous academic considerations and the insights gained in a preceding qualitative study conducted by the authors (see more in Polovina, Ćirović and Jošić, 2013; Gril et al., 2019), in line with the methodological tradition that has dominated this field of study for the last 50 years (Nurmi, Poole and Kalakoski, 1994; Seginer, 2019; Trommsdorff, 1983; Türken et al., 2016). That tradition of qualitative research focuses on the thematic (content) aspects of the envisioned future based on data collected by

open-ended methods. This type of analysis revealed that adolescents differ in terms of the articulation of their visions of personal future (interest in envisioning future, clearness of vision, richness of elaboration), their determination to accomplish the vision (certainty, beliefs regarding the effectiveness of future actions, importance of goal accomplishment, perception of obstacles and opportunities in the surrounding environment, probability of goal accomplishment, etc.), the topics they are focused on (density of goals regarding different life domains, importance of certain goals). This created different elaborations of construct components, which in turn resulted in differences in the focus of measurement instruments (regarding contents, type of questions) (more in Andre et al., 2018; Nurmi, 1991; Seginer, 2009).

The challenging complexity of the issue of conceptualisation and measurement is not surprising. It reflects the fact that thinking about the future is an integral part of a socialised personality and, as such, is represented in a form of a complex cognitive–motivational system (Seginer and Halabi, 1991; Trommsdorff, 1983) that has its correlates in different life-domains. It is also the focus of research in different academic disciplines. The challenging complexity of the issue is well illustrated in the interdisciplinary meta-analysis conducted by Andre et al. (2018) based on 142 recent studies that had utilised different methods (qualitative and quantitative) in order to deal with the issue of thinking about the personal future. Among the results of that analysis was the identification of 19 constructs that differed regarding the type (the way they mixed the cognitive, affective and component) and focus (more general/do not specify the context; focus on a specific life-domain). Nine of them were labelled “future time perspective” (FTP) and five “future orientation” (FO). Similarly to the previous views of the topic (Seginer and Halabi, 1991; Trommsdorff, 1983), Andre et al. (2018: pp.7-8) accentuate that the same label is used to denote different aspects of a person’s beliefs about the future that are reflected both in the definitions/conceptualisations and the measurement approaches that vary from the narrow one (only single cognitive aspect included, e.g. density of anticipated goals or coherence or perceptions and judgment of internal versus external causality; only motivational/affective aspect included, e.g. goals or hopes or wishes or fears) to the comprehensive one (encompassing a mixture of different segments of cognitive, motivational–affective and behavioural components (Andre et al., 2018; Seginer and Halabi, 1991; Trommsdorff, 1983; Zimbardo and Boyd, 2015).

Systematic dealing with the similarities and differences of the VPF and similar constructs goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, the authors will address briefly the relation of the VPF construct with two well-established and widely used psychological constructs in the field of adolescent research; *future time perspective* (as elaborated by Lens et al., 2012; Nuttin and Lens, 2014), *future orientation*

(as elaborated by Seginer, 2009; Trommsdorff, 1983). All three constructs are multi-component – they encompass cognitive, motivational–affective and behavioural aspects. The future time perspective is conceptualised as thoughts and attitudes of individuals relating to the future, including the aspects of motivation, planning (subjective time plans) and evaluation/goal accomplishment (intentional behavioural considerations) regarding a certain life domain over time (Nurmi, 1991; Nuttin and Lens, 1985/2014). Similarly, the VPF encompasses cognitive, affective and behavioural components not only regarding certain life domains but also general/athematic aspects of beliefs regarding the future. Concerning the cognitive components, the FTP accentuates time plans relating to more or less distant goals, while the VPF places more focus on the cognitive clearness of the envisioned future and goals that are projected in a limited time zone. Similar to the VPF, the construct of “future orientation” is defined as “images regarding the future that are consciously represented and self-reported” (Seginer, 2009: 3), a complex multidimensional system that includes a cognitive and affective/motivational component regarding individuals’ needs and wishes as well as their interplay with individuals’ perceptions/interpretations of values, socio-economic reality and developmental opportunities afforded by their socio-cultural setting/environment (Trommsdorff, 1983; Seginer, 2009). While the future orientation stresses that the structure of the events within different life domains is projected in the near or distant future, the VPF accentuates the importance of the projection of both the general approach of a person to a time-limited future zone and the specific goals regarding different life domains.

Altogether, what distinguishes our construct and the approach to the issue of young people’s beliefs about the future is the specific combination of features that are addressed simultaneously: envisioning the future in a time-limited frame, reflecting elements of potential self-regulation, the differentiation between general and thematic aspects of the vision (the way individuals reflect on the future and future actions in terms of importance, cognitive clarity and stability of the vision as well as determination to accomplish envisioned goals) and thematic/content aspects of the vision (the extent to which individuals focus on goals and one’s expectations in a specific life domain). The authors believe that such an approach offers an opportunity for a differentiated, yet a “whole package” approach to young people’s thinking about the future that is grounded in a single theoretical frame (PYD).

Young people’s anticipations of their individual futures have been a research topic in different countries. According to the findings, both the general pattern of orientation toward the future, in terms of future temporal frame, optimism, pessimism and hope (Zimbardo and Boyd, 1999; Ginevra et al., 2017) as well as the domain-specific goals, expectations and plans of young people (Nurmi, 1991; Nuttin

and Lens, 2014; Seginer, 2009; Trommsdorff, 1983) have been related to positive outcomes in the educational and work domain (more details in Andre et al., 2018).

It is important to notice that certain research has found that adolescents with highly educated parents tend to plan their personal future further ahead. They also assess the distant future more optimistically compared to ones at lower positions (Nurmi, 1987; Lamm, Schmidt and Trommsdorff, 1976). Besides, parents are considered a prominent influencing factor of the offspring's career choice, particularly during adolescence. Schuette, Ponton and Charlton (2012) found that career aspirations of preadolescents from low socio-economic backgrounds are related to the actual occupations of working adults in their homes. Neblett and Cortina (2006) found that adolescents' perceptions of their parents' jobs have implications for their preparation for adulthood. Furthermore, many other psychological studies have shown that the socio-economic position of parents, the role of parents and their parenting styles as role models, as well as process-oriented variables affect adolescent's images of the future concerning their career (Keller and Whiston, 2008; Heggli et al., 2013; Metheny and McWhirter, 2013; Xing and Rojewski, 2018).

## 2.2. Sociological Perspective

In the sociological literature, the way young people plan and organise their future is often analysed as a process of transition to adulthood (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002, 2005). Within these theories, the transition to adulthood is determined socially and historically (Arnett, 2001). Accordingly, demographic, economic and social factors have important effects. For this reason, it is important to consider the context in which young people envision their future and make decisions regarding private life, professional and educational career. In the literature on the transition to adulthood, this approach is close to the concepts of "self-socialization" (Heinz, 2009a) and "bounded agency" (Evans, 2008). The first concept of self-socialisation is perceived as "the notion of self-reflexive decision making into a context/related biographical learning process. Self-socialisation mediates between life course resources and standards, options and pathway decisions; it promotes adaptive processes to changing action and skill demands during school to work transition" (Heinz, 2009b: 401). It analyses both the biographical and contextual aspects of work transitions. The second concept takes into account a more personal agency approach, exploring how young people make decisions as a "bounded agency", stressing individual choices, identities and active planning for their future (Evans, 2008), but also concerns the structural context and the family habitus they possess (Tomanović et al., 2012). These two approaches show the complexity of contemporary society, which can be explained only by taking into consideration both the structural and

interactional approaches (Brannen and Nilsen, 2005), bridging the gap between the micro and macro spheres.

The question of inequality emerges in studies of youth transition since different pathways are available to young people from different social backgrounds and since they depend on their parents' social position (Heinz, 2009a). As a consequence of structural changes in the economy and economic recession, less qualified groups from a lower social background are more often faced with unemployment, labour market exclusion and social marginalisation without changes in social mobility (Bendit, 2006). In that manner, studies of youth transition are reaching conclusions similar to those of the social reproduction theory, which argues that chances of achieving career goals are higher for young people from privileged positions (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Anyon, 1980, 2006; Bowles and Gintis, 1976). In his comparative study of the UK, Germany, USA and Canada, Heinz (2009b: 391) shows that "only socially privileged and educationally successful young people succeed in transforming their agency into self-reflexive projects", confirming the thesis that structural effects take their toll and contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities worldwide. The influence of socio-economic status (SES) on educational biographies, aspirations and plans is confirmed in other contexts (Chesters and Smith, 2015; Buchmann and Hannum, 2001). It is shown that members of lower social strata have not only lower educational achievement and attainment but also lower educational aspirations. They also value education less than members of privileged social groups (Andersen and Hansen, 2012; Jaeger, 2009). Similar findings have been obtained in recent studies in Serbia (Radulović, Malinić and Gundogan, 2017; Radulović, Autor and Gundogan, 2017; Čaprić, Plut and Vukmirović, 2008) and Croatia (Baketa, Ristić Dedić and Jokić, 2020). Furthermore, educational aspirations and values influence their VPF as well as educational and career plans (Radulović, Autor and Gundogan, 2017). In the same vein, recent data are suggesting a need for interpreting different future-oriented strategies that low-SES students create in order to attain higher educational positions (Johnstonbaugh, 2018).

### 2.3. The Serbian Context

The economic situation in Serbia significantly shapes youth's life chances in the context of transitional recession and major structural changes which have affected post-socialist societies. Due to the specific context of a belated post-socialist transformation in Serbia, there is a prevalent discourse of a "blocked and prolonged" path to adulthood of new generations (Ignjatović, 2009; Mihailović, 2004). For young people in Serbia, a career starts later than in other European countries, with a



nonlinear career path including periods of employment and unemployment due to the unstable political and economic situation in which the youth start their careers (Lažetić et al., 2014). In that regard, the transition to adulthood is influenced by high unemployment, unstable labour market, lack of housing, and dependence on a family's material and social capital, which obstruct young people's path to adulthood (Tomanović, 2008; Tomanović et al., 2012; Cvetičanin, 2012). More precisely, in 2019, the unemployment of the youth (15–24 years) in Serbia was at a rate of 26% (Republički zavod za statistiku, 2019). Besides, the results of the study show that 32.8% of young people believe that social networks and contacts play an important role in finding jobs in the Western Balkans (the score for Serbia was 36%) (Lažetić et al., 2014: 52). Young people rely on family social capital and informal networks in finding job opportunities (Mojić, 2012; Stanojević and Stokanić, 2018).

Alongside the rise of poverty (in 2017, the at-risk-of-poverty rate was 25.7%), Serbia is facing an increase in inequalities (Cvejić, 2006), which ranks it among the European countries with the highest inequality (Eurostat, 2019). Studies which tackle the influence of economic aspects on access to education and educational attainment are conducted as part of the studies of intergenerational mobility and class inequalities (Cvejić, 2006; Lazić, 2011). In those studies, education is perceived as one of the crucial channels for intergenerational mobility. Explorations focusing on intergenerational educational mobility in Serbia are much rarer, but still confirm that chances to access and finish education differ for young people whose parents have different educational credentials (Cvejić, 2006; Stanojević, 2013; Stanojević and Stokanić, 2014). After the period of socialist modernisation and rapid industrialisation, and since the 1980s, the educational structures and possibilities for intergenerational educational mobility have been declining (Cvejić, 2006; Stanojević, 2013; Stanojević and Stokanić, 2014). The educational level of parents is shown to be an important factor for young people's access to education (Radulović, 2019).

The system of primary education in Serbia (which is mandatory) consists of two levels, the lower and the upper, and lasts eight years in total. When students finish elementary school at the age of 14, they enter the system of secondary education, choosing one of the two main types of secondary schools. The first choice is a grammar school (*gymnasium*; lasting four years) that provides an academic track. The main mission of the grammar school is to instil main competencies, develop cognitive and creative potentials, working habits and intellectual independence of young people and prepare them for lifelong learning (Strategy for Education Development in Serbia 2020, 2012). This type of school prepares young people for further education and does not provide any particular qualification for the labour market.

The second type of secondary school is a vocational school (three- and four-year), which prepares students for specific occupations (Spasenović, 2013). The aim of vocational education (VET) is to provide knowledge, skills and attitudes for vocational competencies in order to prepare young people for entering the labour market or higher education (Strategy for Education Development in Serbia 2020, 2012). That means that students who finish a four-year vocational school have the same opportunity to continue their education at a college or a university. Students of three-year vocational programmes are entitled to enrol in colleges (vocational higher education) directly after completing secondary education. In order to apply for university education, they have to pass an extra one-year program and obtain an additional qualification.

The results show that students from grammar schools are overrepresented among the student population. However, the educational system in Serbia provides certain opportunities for students from vocational schools (mostly four-year programs) to access higher education (Savić and Živadinović, 2016: 46). For illustration, in the school year 2018/2019, 26.3% of students finished high school, 60.2% of students finished four-year vocational schools and 13.4% three-year vocational schools.

## 2.4. The Aim and Research Questions

The data presented in this article are part of a broader survey whose aim was to shed light on young people in the process of transition to adulthood. This study focuses on the general and career-specific aspects of adolescents' VPF and how these are related to adolescents' orientation toward educational vertical mobility. The general research question was: *How do general and career-specific aspects of adolescents' visions of personal future vary among students with different orientations toward educational mobility?* More specifically, the authors asked if students with different orientations differ with respect to (a) general aspects of their VPF, and (b) career-specific aspects of their envisioned future (including their career pre-occupation and perception of factors on which the realisation of career visions will depend). More precisely, the study aimed to test the following hypotheses:

- H1: There are significant differences in general visions of the future among groups of students with different orientations toward educational mobility. Students whose parents have higher education are more optimistic than other groups. Students who aspire to vertical educational mobility are more fearful about their personal future.

- H2: There are significant differences in career-specific visions of the future among groups of students with different orientations toward educational mobility.
  - H2a: Students who plan to attend university are more preoccupied with their careers.
  - H2b: Students who plan to use higher education as a channel for social mobility perceive personal characteristics as a more important factor for achieving career goals than students who do not have such plans.
  - H2c: Students who do not plan to use higher education as a channel for social mobility perceive external factors as more important for achieving career goals than students who have such plans.

### 3. METHOD

The study was conducted using a stratified random sample of high schools (stratified based on the type of school (1. grammar school, 2. four-year vocational school and 3. three-year vocational school) and region: (1. Vojvodina, 2. Belgrade, 3. Central and Western Serbia, 4. Eastern and Southern Serbia). From each sampled high school, one class of last-grade students participated. A total of 1973 students from 94 schools (out of 506 schools in Serbia in the school year under the study) were surveyed. The mean age of adolescents was 17.84 years. This sample of students was selected because they were at the crucial moment to make a decision which would influence their career path (to continue education or to enter the labour market).

In this study, educational vertical mobility is determined by the equivalence/non-equivalence of a parent's level of education and offspring's educational aspirations as expressed at the end of secondary schooling. In that respect, three groups of respondents were singled out. The process of selecting respondents involved two steps. Firstly, respondents were differentiated into two groups: 1. Students with at least one parent who has a university education, 2. Students whose parents do not have a university education. Secondly, within each group, students with and without university education aspirations were separated based on their answers to the question regarding the highest intended level of education. In that way, only data gained from the three selected groups of participants were extracted for analysis: Group 1 – students whose parents do not have higher education and who do not aspire to university education (n1=190); Group 2 – students whose parents do not have higher education and who do aspire to university education (n2=632); Group 3 – students whose parents have higher education and who as-

pire to university education (n3=323). The unequal number of respondents in the three groups reflects the current educational structure in Serbia (the majority of the parent population has completed secondary education) and an increase in educational aspirations of the young generation in Serbia as part of the expansion of education. The answers of the students from the fourth possible group (students whose parents have a higher education but who do not aspire to university education) were not analysed since only 16 students were in this group (0.8% of the sample). Besides, data gained from students who intended to attend higher vocational education (three-year programmes) or whose parents had finished such programmes were not used because the authors believed that those cases would dim the differences among the groups (476 students, i.e., 24% of the interviewed students). They considered that, on the one hand, that educational level cannot be considered equal to the primary or secondary education, but on the other, in the context of educational expansion, those diplomas are not as valuable as diplomas from faculties.

The questionnaire was applied collectively in one school class, at the beginning of the 2015/2016 school year. The participants received instructions to think about their lives in the next 10–15 years (to imagine themselves at the age of 27–32) and having that in mind, to answer the questionnaire.

The measures used in this study are part of a comprehensive questionnaire that, among others, covers sections related to background data, general aspects of adolescents' VPF and education/career domain-specific aspects of the envisioned future.

The *Vision of Personal Future Questionnaire* (Polovina and Jošić, 2019) is a self-reporting instrument consisting of 13 items/statements aimed to assess time-limited, general (abstract and universal) characteristics of adolescents' cognitive representation of the envisioned personal future applicable across different domains. The participants answered questions in terms of the extent of their agreement with presented statements using five-degree scales, where 1 means “do not agree at all” and 5 means “agree completely”. The items of the scale refer to the two general components of future-oriented thinking: cognitive (clarity of vision, stability of vision, judgment of internal versus external causality) and motivational–affective (decisiveness in fulfilling a vision, hopes/optimism and fears about fulfilling the vision). The VPF was constructed as a basic common frame or tool to which a superstructure could be added in order to address contents relating to different life domains. One of them is a domain of career-related aspirations and estimated conditions of its realisation. The VPF is an unstandardised psychological instrument created on a two-step empirical base. The items of the scale originated from

the analysis of a previous qualitative study and a pilot study. The evaluation of some psychometric properties of the VPF scale included data from the main study conducted on a representative sample (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.71$ , more in Polovina and Jošić, 2019). Based on the analyses of the main components with Promax rotation with Kaiser normalisation, two factors were determined, explaining a total of 38.35 % variance of the 13 mentioned variables (Table 1).

Table 1 *General visions of the future: Initial eigenvalues and percentages of explained variance in the factor analyses*

Factor	Eigenvalues	Percentage of variance
Motivational/optimistic	3.321	25.545
Cognitive/fearful	1.664	12.801

As shown in Table 2, the first factor (named *Motivational/optimistic*) groups items related to motivational and positive feelings and expectations, such as clarity of vision, acting in light of the vision, decisiveness and persistence to achieve the vision, positive feelings and optimism. The second factor (named *Cognitive/fearful*) groups items related to cognitive processes and unpleasant emotions such as fearful uncertainty, instability of vision, focus on external causality, not recognising guiding aspects of the vision (items and factors are presented in detail in Polovina and Jošić, 2019).

*Career-specific aspects of the future: career preoccupation and factors relevant for achieving occupational and career visions.* Adolescents' hopes and expectations regarding their future careers were analysed with respect to three questions: (1) How often do adolescents think about a future occupation? (2) How often do adolescents think about a future career? (3) How important is it for adolescents to achieve occupational and career goals? The adolescents answered the questionnaire using the five-point scale (for questions 1 and 2 – from *never* to *every day*; and for question 3 – from *completely unimportant* to *very important*). Based on the analyses of the principal components, one factor (named *career preoccupation*) was determined, explaining a total of 61.6% variance of those three variables (Table 3). Table 3 shows that this factor has the highest loading on the *frequency of thinking about career* variable, but loadings for all three variables are above 0.6 (Table 4).

Table 2 *General visions of the future: Pattern matrix of factors after Promax rotation*

Items	Motivational/ optimistic	Cognitive/ fearful
1. I am determined to achieve my ideas about the future despite the obstacles I might encounter.	.679	
2. I have a clear picture of my future.	.678	
3. I am convinced that I will fulfil my ideas about the future.	.673	
4. I think that I will have a bright future.	.661	
5. Despite my wishes and dreams, the fulfilment of my ideas about the future will mostly depend on external circumstances and luck.		.631
6. Thinking about what my life will look like in the future fills me with anxiety and uncertainty.		.598
7. My ideas about the future will probably not come true.	-.575	.427
8. The decisions I make today are influenced by my wishes and intentions concerning my future.	.558	
9. I enjoy thinking about the future.	.553	
10. It is important to have an idea of the future, even though it might not be achieved.	.370	.519
11. I often change my ideas about the future.	-.369	.507
12. I rarely think about what my life will look like.	-.380	
13. One who does not have a clear picture of the future does not have a guiding idea either.	.326	.361

Note: saturations lower than .3 were omitted from the table

Table 3 *Career preoccupation: Eigenvalue and percentage of explained variance in the factor analyses*

Factor	Eigenvalues	Percentage of variance
Career preoccupation	1.848	61.602

Table 4 *Career Preoccupation: Component matrix of the factor*

Items	Career preoccupation
Frequency of thinking about occupation	.855
Frequency of thinking about career	.868
Importance of achieving occupation and career goals	.603

Note: saturations lower than .3 were omitted from the table

To assess the factors that adolescents perceive as important for the achievement of occupational and career goals, a ten-item questionnaire was used, including items related to personal characteristics (e.g., personal abilities), immediate social surroundings (e.g., parental expectations) and global surroundings (e.g., economic circumstances in the country). The participants expressed their views using a five-point scale (varying from 1–none to 5–to a great extent). Based on the analyses of the main components with Promax rotation, three factors were determined, explaining a total of 60.96% variance (Table 5).

Table 5 *Factors for achieving occupational and career goals: Initial eigenvalues and percentages of explained variance in the factor analyses*

Factor	Eigenvalues	Percentage of variance	Cumulative percentage
Personal characteristics	2.991	29.914	29.914
Economic factors	1.862	18.622	48.536
Immediate surroundings	1.243	12.425	60.961

Table 6 shows that the first factor (named *personal characteristics*) groups items related to personal abilities, knowledge and effort, the second factor (named *economic factors*) groups items related to global economic circumstances and family capital (economic and social), while the third factor (named *immediate surroundings*) groups items related to expectations of friends and family, as well as family capital.

Table 6 *Factors for achieving occupational and career goals: Pattern matrix of factors after Promax rotation*

Items	Personal characteristics	Economic factors	Immediate surroundings
1. Personal abilities	.782		
2. Knowledge and experience not gained in school	.724		
3. Knowledge gained in school	.581		
4. Personal effort and dedication	.778		
5. Wishes and expectations of parents			.893
6. Wishes and expectations of friends and peers			.893
7. Parents' financial circumstances		.620	.445
8. Parents' networking		.579	.481
9. Economic circumstances in the country		.832	
10. Employment possibilities		.818	

Note: saturations lower than .3 were omitted from the table



## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. General Aspects of the Vision of Personal Future

After comparing the scores of the three groups of students on the two VPF factors (Motivational/optimistic and Cognitive/fearful), the results show that Group 1 has the lowest score on the Motivational/optimistic factor, while respondents from Group 3 have the highest score. On the other hand, Group 3 has the lowest score on the Cognitive/fearful factor, while Group 2 has the highest (Table 7).

Table 7 General visions of the future: Mean and Standard deviation

Orientation to vertical educational mobility	Motivational/optimistic		Cognitive/fearful	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Group 1 (lower-educated parents; lower educational aspirations)	-.193	1.030	-.032	1.064
Group 2 (lower-educated parents; higher educational aspirations)	.106	.929	.029	.973
Group 3 (highly educated parents; high educational aspirations)	.225	.897	-.206	.904

Using One-way ANOVA, statistically significant differences were established among the groups for both factors [ $F_{(2,1142)}=12.132$ ,  $p<.001$  for the Motivational/optimistic factor;  $F(2,1142)=6.352$ ,  $p=.002$  for the Cognitive/fearful factor]. To evaluate the nature of the differences among the three means, the ANOVA was followed-up with the Bonferroni post-hoc test. Regarding the Motivational/optimistic factor, the post-hoc test showed that Group 1 has a significantly lower score than the other two groups ( $p<.001$ ). Besides, there are no significant differences between Group 2 and Group 3. In relation to the Cognitive/fearful factor, the post hoc test shows that Group 2 has a significantly higher score than Group 3 ( $p=.000$ ) and there is no difference between Group 1 and Group 3.

## 4.2. Career-specific aspects of visions of personal future

*Career preoccupations.* The results related to career preoccupation are in line with the ones regarding general visions. It is not a surprise that students from Group 2 and Group 3 have higher scores on career preoccupation questions (Table 8). Using ANOVA, statistically significant differences were established among the three groups [ $F_{(2,1109)} = 29.271$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. The Bonferroni post-hoc test showed that Group 1 has a significantly lower score than the other two groups ( $p < .001$ ). There are no significant differences between Group 2 and Group 3.

Table 8 *Career preoccupation: Mean and Standard deviation*

Orientation to vertical educational mobility	Mean	Standard Deviation
Group 1 (lower-educated parents; lower educational aspirations)	-.407	1.202
Group 2 (lower-educated parents; higher educational aspirations)	.154	.852
Group 3 (highly educated parents; high educational aspirations)	.162	.800

Factors important for achieving occupational and career goals.

Concerning factors that young people perceive as important for achieving occupational and career goals (Table 9), differences are noticeable among the three groups. More precisely, variance analysis showed statistically significant differences among the three groups on all three factors [ $F_{(2,1045)} = 24.942$ ,  $p < .001$  for personal characteristics;  $F_{(2,1045)} = 6.726$ ,  $p < .001$  for economic factors;  $F_{(2,1045)} = 25.684$ ,  $p < .001$  for immediate surroundings]. The Bonferroni post-hoc test showed that students from Group 1 value personal characteristics significantly less than students from the other two groups ( $p < .001$ ), while there is no statistically significant difference between Group 2 and Group 3. Economic factors are perceived as most important among students from Group 2, and the difference between Group 2 and Group 3 is statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), while differences between other analysed groups cannot be considered significant. Finally, the effect of immediate surroundings is valued the most among students from Group 1, and, based on the Bonferroni post-hoc, it can be claimed that these differences are significant ( $p < .001$ ).

Table 9 *Factors for achieving occupational and career goals: Mean and Standard deviation*

Orientation to vertical educational mobility	Personal characteristics		Economic factors		Immediate surroundings	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Group 1 (lower-educated parents; lower educational aspirations)	-.420	1.149	.022	1.124	.442	1.084
Group 2 (lower-educated parents; higher educational aspirations)	.144	.913	.098	.993	-.097	.955
Group 3 (highly educated parents; high educational aspirations)	.131	.827	-.158	.908	-.205	.925

## 5. DISCUSSION

Before discussing the characteristics of each group, it should be stated that most hypotheses have been confirmed. Significant differences among the three groups have been found in the general (H1) and career-specific (H2) visions of the future. Additionally, it is demonstrated that students who plan to attend university (Group 2 and 3) are more preoccupied with a career (H2a), and perceive personal characteristics as a more important factor for achieving career goals than students who do not have such plans (Group 1 – H2b). Finally, the results have partially confirmed the hypothesis arguing that students who do not plan to use higher education as a channel for social mobility perceive external factors as more important for achieving career goals than other students (H2c). Some external factors (immediate surroundings) are perceived as most important for achieving career goals by students from Group 1, but other external factors (economic factors) are perceived as most important by the group of students oriented toward educational mobility (Group 2).

Table 10 *General and career visions: summary*

ORIENTATION TOWARD EDUCATIONAL MOBILITY	General visions of the future	Domain-specific visions: career and occupation	
		Career preoccupation	Factors for achieving occupational and career goals
Group 1 (lower-educated parents; lower educational aspirations)	The lowest score on the Motivational /optimistic factor	The lowest score on the career preoccupation questions	The highest score on immediate surroundings; The lowest score on personal characteristics
Group 2 (lower-educated parents; higher educational aspirations)	The highest score on the Cognitive/ fearful factor	A high score on the career preoccupation group of questions	The highest score on economic factors
Group 3 (highly educated parents; high educational aspirations)	A relatively high score on the Motivational / optimistic factor and a low score on the Cognitive/ fearful	A high score on the career preoccupation group of questions	The highest score on personal characteristics

As presented in Table 10, students from Group 1 are characterised by the lowest score on the Motivational/optimistic factor compared to the other two groups; they think less about their career and occupation; they value personal characteristics the least and perceive the immediate surroundings as more important than other groups. It could be argued that they are aware of their chances on the labour market, so they are less optimistic and think less about their career. Previous research has shown that for students with less economic and cultural capital it is more challenging to have a clear vision about their future (Heinz, 2009a; Tomanović, 2012a). This group of students is expected to rely less on personal characteristics because they are less confident about their abilities and chances to succeed based on their abilities and knowledge. This provides them with a platform for less concern about their future and a lack of ambition (Gundogan and Radulović, 2018; Swartz, 1997). Finally, in their perceptions of factors necessary for future goal fulfilment, attitudes and considerations of their families and peers, as well as their social competencies, are especially important. Since they tend to maintain the

same educational level and social position as their parents, they possibly perceive their parents as role models (Weinger, 2000), and, in that sense, their support and opinion are of special importance.

Students from Group 2 are characterised by the highest score on the cognitive/ fearful factor; they are preoccupied with career and occupation but highly concerned about economic factors. They differ from Group 1 in terms of achieving a significantly higher score on the motivational/optimistic factor and they are more preoccupied with career. Besides, they consider personal characteristics to be more valuable than Group 1 does. All those aspects of visions make them more similar to students with higher-educated parents (Group 3) except in the segment of anxiety regarding the future and stressing the importance of material conditions. On the other hand, these students perceive economic factors as more important than Group 3 does. Group 2 is the only group which aspires towards upward educational mobility; their position is the most specific because of their transitional and risk-taking orientation (high educational preoccupation vs. uncertain material conditions). Their striving for educational mobility might be explained by psychological factors such as high optimism, which differentiates them from Group 1. Besides, it is possible that in those cases, process-oriented variables (such as family climate, parents' positive and supportive attitude toward education, etc.) that were not taken into account in the research design diminish the effect of family structural variables (e.g., socioeconomic status) on career development (Xing and Rojewski, 2018). On the other hand, their tendency toward educational mobility and the perception of constraints and obstacles they face are reflected in higher anxiety (shown on the Cognitive/fearful factor) and a high evaluation of economic factors. Even though the value systems of students were not investigated, other research might suggest that those students have to bridge the value system received at home with the one received at school and form hybrid identities (Reay, 2002). Besides, they are aware of class differences and that they and their families have to work harder and make more sacrifices in an unfair game with uncertain outcomes (Bettie, 2002).

When it comes to Group 3, as expected, they are optimistic and unfearful regarding the future (relatively high score on the Motivational/optimistic factor vs. low score on the Cognitive/fearful). Moreover, as mentioned, they achieve high scores on the career preoccupation scale. They also perceive personal characteristics as highly important, while valuing external factors (economic and immediate surroundings) less than the other two groups. As argued by the social reproduction theory, their chances of achieving career goals are higher, owing to their privileged positions (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Anyon, 1980, 2006; Bowles and Gintis, 1976). Since they come from a higher social position and have higher chances to reproduce their social standing, it is not surprising that they exhibit optimism about

their future and have a clearer perception of it (Nurmi, 1987; Lamm, Schmidt and Trommsdorff, 1976). Even though it could be claimed that their opportunities are defined by structural inequalities, it is interesting that they give primacy to personal characteristics. In that way, they are taking their privileged position for granted, projecting the power generated from their social position. They perceive that their privileged position is based on the power of personal resources, which additionally increases their self-confidence. In the same way, they neutralise and legitimise socially established inequalities. Other research has also confirmed that privileged people attribute their advantages to their talents (Brantingler, 2003).

## 6. CONCLUSION

The main findings of this study suggest that there are differences between the general and career-specific visions of the future among young people with different orientations toward educational mobility. Specifically, taking into account the general VPF, it was found that students with lower-educated parents and lower educational aspirations are the least optimistic, while students with lower-educated parents and high educational aspirations express high anxiety (the highest score on the Cognitive/fearful factor). Moreover, the analysis of career-specific visions of personal future has shown that students with lower-educated parents and lower educational aspirations are least preoccupied with their career, which, in a way, “liberates” them from uncertainties. Finally, when it comes to factors perceived as necessary for achieving occupational and career goals, the three groups differ mutually: students with lower-educated parents and lower educational aspirations value immediate surroundings the most, students with lower-educated parents and an aspiration to educational mobility stress the importance of economic factors, and students whose parents are well educated and who have high educational aspirations rely on their personal abilities.

As shown above, the conclusion is that the major difference observed among the groups of students can be explained by the reproduction theory. This theory is especially appropriate in the examined context of Serbia, where a high level of social inequalities has emerged during the post-socialist transformation. Besides, it can be argued that differences in aspirations and visions of the future are influenced by the process-oriented variables (such as relations in families, family attitudes toward education, and the effect of parents as role models) at the micro-level. In that way, it is shown that using both a psychological and a sociological perspective is useful for obtaining an extensive and far-reaching view in analysing complex realities. On the one hand, the vision of the personal future, which is a well-established research topic in the psychological literature, can be better ex-

plained by taking into consideration sociological variables and paradigms. On the other hand, sociological mechanisms leading to social reproduction can be understood more thoroughly if one bears in mind their effect on the micro-level, reflecting the vision of the personal future.

Even though the paper establishes and recognises the urge to connect the psychological and sociological perspectives, the analysis has not painted a full picture of the complex interplay of the micro and the macro due to the lack of data. More precisely, the survey that was used for the analysis does not explore the nature of parental influence, so this aspect could not be grasped fully. Regarding the sociological aspects of the research, it can be argued that more structural variables could be included in the analysis besides parental education (such as parental occupation, income, etc.). Additionally, the problem could be theorised from other theoretical standpoints, such as the rational choice theory or the interaction theory, which could shed light on processes at the micro-level. These theories were not used in addition to the theoretical positions of the authors due to the lack of data necessary for that kind of analysis.

Despite these objections, the authors believe that answers to the questions regarding educational mobility could be provided using existing data. However, for a more complete analysis of social mobility, other aforementioned variables should be included. It is important to note that significant decisions regarding educational choices are made at the end of primary school (when students choose the type of secondary education). Although the effects of those decisions influence the further educational path (so, in a way, they are incorporated in the visions of the future at later stages), it would be useful to examine visions of the future at an earlier period as well or to test the mediating role of the type of secondary school students attend when it comes to the vision of the personal future. These are the challenges for further research, which should be organised using a quantitative and qualitative methodology. This multidisciplinary approach can lead to an exhaustive and integrated analysis, which can be beneficial in the theoretical, empirical and policy-making aspects.

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## Vizije osobne budućnosti adolescenata u kontekstu težnje k obrazovnoj pokretljivosti: slučaj Srbije

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### SAŽETAK

U suvremenim društvima postoji veliki utjecaj globalnih ekonomskih okolnosti, političkih nesigurnosti i društvenih nejednakosti na formiranje vizija osobne budućnosti mladih. U ovom radu istražujemo odnos između općih i specifičnih karijernih vizija budućnosti mladih, s jedne strane, i orijentacija mladih k obrazovnoj pokretljivosti, s druge. Obrazovna pokretljivost definirana je putem usklađenosti razine obrazovanja roditelja i obrazovnih aspiracija njihovih potomaka koji su anketirani tijekom završne godine srednje škole. Na ovaj su način određene tri grupe ispitanika. Analizirali smo kako se pripadnici tih grupa razlikuju u odnosu na (a) opće aspekte vizija osobne budućnosti, (b) karijerno-specifične aspekte vizija, kao i u odnosu na (c) faktore koje pripadnici ovih grupa percipiraju kao značajne za ostvarenje karijernih vizija. Uočene su značajne razlike između triju grupa u pogledu općih i karijerno-specifičnih vizija budućnosti. Mladi koji planiraju studirati preokupiraniji su karijerom i vjeruju da su osobne karakteristike značajniji faktor karijernog uspjeha, nego oni koji to ne namjeravaju. Konačno, u radu se sugerira da bi bilo korisno, kako bi se u potpunosti razumjele vizije budućnosti mladih iz mikro i makro perspektive, ujediniti psihološki i sociološki pristup.

Ključne riječi: vizije osobne budućnosti, karijerne vizije, obrazovna pokretljivost, Srbija