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THESES

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**SOCIOLOGICAL QUESTIONS RAISED BY SCHOOL STUDENTS'
APPROACH TO THE MILITARY PROFESSION
AND HOMELAND DEFENSE**

Summary of PhD thesis

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Preface

The Hungarian Army, which is closely connected to the society and interacts with it on a daily basis, is an important element of the state organization. The most significant task of the Hungarian Armed Forces, which have undergone substantial changes over recent decades, has been to secure Hungary's favorable position in terms of security politics and to be able to provide citizens with the highest level of security despite the increasing global threat. These tasks could not be completed unless there is a trustworthy and widely-approved organization that is capable of taking the responsibility exerted by increasing social respect.

After the regime change of 1989, there was an urgent need for the reorganization of the Armed Forces. The mass army based on draft needed to be replaced by a professional army capable of meeting the military and social demands of the 21st century.

In the long run, this transformation process will affect younger generations, so their knowledge could be of utmost importance in the future. Thanks to the main characteristics of this age group, secondary school students could be crucial in terms of long-term human strategy. Historical military traditions, students' agility, interest and readiness to act along with proper career guidance and counseling can guarantee that there will always be a layer taking interest in the Hungarian Army. The main aim of this present paper is to explore the approaches needed in order to put the strategies outlined above into realization, the ways the youth can be addressed, the characteristics of their sets of values and those of their preferences, along which we can find a common ground and they can easily be addressed.

The topic I examined required an interdisciplinary approach. While clarifying terminology used in this paper I kept including terms taken from various fields of sociology (youth, military and empirical sociology), psychology and pedagogy (career counseling, career guidance).

1. Methodology of Research

1.1 Main purposes of my research

When choosing the topic of my research, my main aims and intentions were

- to call attention to potentials of the age group of secondary school students in terms of labor pool.
- to draw attention to the hidden and not-yet-exploited potentials in the process of recruiting.
- to draw attention to the creation of such efficient communication strategies requiring new methodologies and forms of communication.
- to help human resources development of the Hungarian Army interpret and benefit from the theoretical approaches and methodology of career planning, career counseling and career choice.
- to introduce public education and the pedagogical relevance of the Military Education Program and that of the Military Studies subject. (These were new elements in my research.)
- to measure secondary school-age students' knowledge of and approach to homeland defense.

The topicality and necessity of research conducted in this field are supported by the fact that former military sociological research has ignored this age group. There are a lot of questions to be asked, though. Do they have real knowledge of current military and political situation? What do they think about being employed by the Armed Forces? What forums help the youth form their opinion about the Armed Forces? Is homeland defense an issue in their everyday discourse? If yes, in what form does communication take place? Have they ever met a citizen who was once employed by the Army? What kind of incoming information do they

have about the challenges homeland security and defense have been facing? Which media do they get their information from? Are students familiar with the complexity and difficulty of tasks a well-trained soldier has to perform?

Not being ready for making clear decisions about their future career served as another motive for the research because this uncertainty holds not-yet-exploited potentials. These can only be benefited from if we are familiar with their attitudes and their positive and negative feelings about the Hungarian Army.

In the transformed education structure the youth are expected to make conscious decisions much earlier this way greatly affecting the years they spend in secondary education as well as their future lives. The revival of spreading national defense interests and knowledge of homeland defense has begun but it is still on its starting blocks. In my opinion, these age groups should be targeted and addressed first, and in terms of recruitment they should also be considered to be the primary target age group. By getting to know the affected age groups, a more effective career guidance process can be developed to create a reserves base which is of better quality and larger quantity.

The new army's human resources conditions have been going through significant changes, too. Performance and its efficiency have to be provided by creating and maintaining a quantitative and qualitative staff base. We need to explore what personal and professional competences a certain job requires, what general and special personality traits and skills are needed to accomplish tasks successfully. Being aware of these can reduce personal and interpersonal conflicts induced by undereducation and overeducation. In this way, a more effective human political strategy can be designed in the long run.

1.2 Stating the problem and hypotheses of the research

The Hungarian Armed Forces based on voluntary recruitment has been present in the labor market. To provide a steady number of personnel, the Army must find new ways and techniques to be added to the system of personnel supply exclusively based on recruiting offices. Taking the characteristics of the age group of secondary school students into account, they can be the first ones to be addressed by the Army applying these new ways and techniques.

On the basis of this, the following hypotheses can be stated:

- *My first hypothesis is that there are secondary school students who take interest in the Hungarian Armed Forces.*

They have various reasons and motives to think about taking a job in the Army. Some of them are driven by patriotic feelings and discipline, some are motivated by their affection for weapons, and still others are attracted by the possibility to work abroad.

- *Secondly, I also hypothesize that the youth of today know nothing or little about the organization and the major bodies of today's homeland security and defense.*

In my views, the main causes of this lack of knowledge are rooted in the chasm between the society and the Armed Forces. The most relevant causes are the low number of personal encounters with professional soldiers, eroded and distant family ties, loss of prestige and the erosion of traditional values.

- *Thirdly, I hypothesize that the overwhelming majority of the youth have good digital competences, so this is the reason why, social networking sites and military computer games could be treated as an important supplement to the process of recruiting.*

Today's youth who are often referred to as Y-Z generation use diverse multimedia facilities as a fundamental skill. The daily use of these facilities makes it obvious that they could successfully and effectively be addressed via these channels.

- *The way I see it, the Military Education Program and the Military Studies subject could contribute to a dynamic rise in the level of awareness and knowledge of problems and issues related to the military profession and homeland defense.*

For both being a new initiative, one might expect some difficulties. Despite these, in my own and my students' experiences the social gap between the Armed Forces and the groups of youth can be reduced with the help of the opportunities specified above.

1.3 Participants of the research

I did a couple of empirical research on the general and concrete views of younger generations on the Army and the Armed Forces and their willingness to take jobs in the previously-mentioned organizations. 99 students (74 females – 74.7 %, 25 males – 25.3%) participated in the survey I conducted in 2008. Next data gathering was undertaken a year later (2009) in the second week of November. The number of students (aged 15-20 years) taking part in research was 372. Gender affiliation was more or less similar to that of the previous survey: 71.7% female, 28.3% male.

1.4 The Process and Methodology of Research

In the second chapter of my dissertation, I will elaborate upon some theoretical approaches which are crucial to my topic.

To conceptualize my topic, I processed all related literature dealing with military and social psychology because the processing my topic required a multidisciplinary approach. Besides studying and adapting several theoretical models, I also explored earlier empirical research done in Hungary which helped me verify the validity of these models, moreover, I utilized their findings as well. While carrying out my research, I regularly consulted and relied on the Internet, which is essential in the daily lives of the youth.

I attempted at gaining different measuring variables (nominal, ordinal, interval, proportion scales) for my analysis while designing the questionnaires. Thus, I included multiple-choice questions, conditional questions, matrix questions as well as Likert-type scales.

Besides these, I also benefited from my own first-hand experiences, my teaching practice and various viewpoints gained as a teacher and a head teacher.

When designing the questionnaires, my main aim was to get answers which foster better understanding of their age group, help me explore the potentials found in their sets of values and their approach to the Army and a military career. To get an overall picture about the areas specified above, I examined the structure of their spare time activities (computer games, Internet use, watching TV), their willingness to pursue their studies in tertiary education and their orientation.

By asking specific and general questions, my research also focused on their sets of values, their affection for post-material values (homeland, nation, religion) and how important

material values (money, work place, and success) are to them. The rest of the questions attempted to find out their knowledge related to the Armed Forces as well as the factors that largely affect their willingness to take a job in the organization. The interpretation of the data collected from students (attending the same school) can only be done on a regional scale. But at the very same time, the results of and experiences gained from the previously-mentioned research could contribute to the success of a survey undertaken on the Hungarian population after choosing the right representative group.

2. Findings and Conclusion

2.1 Interpreting results

In the first half of the research, I inspected the basic characteristics of the younger generations (value orientation). I also explored the nature of effect these might have on their future career choice. I described the structure of their free time activities, this way making the creation of common communication space possible (Internet, social networking sites).

The process of social integration and socialization of the youth have undergone significant changes over recent years. In general, passivity has increased, adaptation problems have become more frequent and the intensity of social contacts has decreased. The level of students' (making up the specimen) social activity and interest in political affairs are still rather low. Only 5% of these students watch programs dealing with politics daily. Their levels of interest in news programs are low; they get information neither from state media nor from daily newspapers distributed countrywide. The vast majority seldom reads these. Although in the written press, weekly and monthly publications (tabloids) are the most popular. They do not read them on a regular basis. On the other hand, it should be noted that the use of Internet as a source of news has grown considerably and gained a monopoly.

Free time activities are usually done individually, the lack of company and community appears to be common. One of the not-yet-clarified points of my thesis is whether this relationship is interpersonal or it is maintained on the Internet. In my opinion, high level communication has partly disappeared. One fifth of the youth spend their free time passively partly or totally with virtual relations (90% use the Internet daily). The daily use of the web is beyond doubt an essential component of their lives. The Internet penetration is 92%, its use is not usually used for learning purposes but for keeping contact and entertainment.

The personal computer can be regarded as a basic element of students' activity structure, students are split in terms of computer games (32% play these games daily or more times a week). Those who play them regularly have already tried out military games.

The use of social networking sites is more remarkable. These sites nearly perform all functions in students' lives because these can be treated as means of seizing information, keeping in touch with each other, creating communities, rating events, entertainment and playing.

Global processes have generated mischievous social processes in terms of staff development.

The promotion of individualistic self-image, following western consumption models and the degradation of the sense of community all result in the suppression of values which are significant in a military career. Cultural homogeneity, intermingling traditional and modern sets of values, the identification of international and national cultural models presupposes the vision of a society in which the Armed Forces could hardly be regarded as a unique national value.

In the second half of my paper, I attempted to explore students' views on the Hungarian Army. I touched upon various questions concerning the reason for existence of the modern army, social and financial esteem, the NATO and qualifications paying particular attention to those factors on the basis of which students would opt for the military service. Supporting my initial hypotheses, I reckon students approach military service in different ways. The majority of students were unable to decide in favor or against the Army, but every fifth student thought about it rather positively.

From security politics points of view, they consider Hungary's position firm and steady (38%) not fearing any considerable terror threat. They feel that Hungary's security political position is stable enough. Although they consider NATO membership an advantage, more and more students also think that the Hungarian Army would be able to protect our country (in 2008 one fourth of students, in 2009 one third of students). Among students I did the survey on, there are some students who are attracted to the military profession (in 2008: 15%, in 2009: 20%).

There is a shift between the two data gatherings in terms of future employment. In 2008, challenge came in the first, good financial prospects came in the second place, whereas a year later this was the other way round. About one third of participants regarded patriotism as a considerable motive. This draws attention to a complex question: to what extent can we preserve our national identity while being the member of an international military

organization. Making a career abroad was also important, but it was not given as many scores as the leading ones. It was not at all surprising that discipline and wish for power can also be found on the list, but these are not thought to be as relevant as the previous ones regarding employment. This change in the order of motivating factors, good financial prospects in particular attests to the change within the sets of values of the youth, which reflects a change in the values of the society.

The first hypothesis of mine has been verified.

In my research, I have explored and proven that one part of the youth are interested in the Hungarian Army. These students could only be addressed as potential employees, if the recruiting process is complemented by career guidance and career planning designed for long term. As I see it, these are needed to restore and strengthen trust and communication between the society and the Army. Processes aiming at the restoration and the strengthening are under way, and this will make its influence felt in future generations. By career planning and guidance, the habits of the youth and the ways they get informed and communicate ought to be taken into account, thus information should be given more emphasis.

The second hypothesis of mine has also been confirmed.

In light of the results and personal communication, it can be stated that students' knowledge of the military service is hardly real and accurate. Their lack of knowledge can be attributed to several causes: firstly, their interests and the questions did not overlap; secondly, they do not have any access to this kind of information. Their preliminary studies do not make them be open to such knowledge, since they lack historical knowledge.

The lack of personal relations, a wide chasm between the society and homeland defense can clearly be detected in these age groups. This is the reason why their social activity and level of interest in politics are still rather low. For being uninterested in politics, their conscious participation in democracy can be questioned. Thanks to these above-specified reasons - indirectly though – they are no at all familiar with the current issues of homeland defense.

Sometimes these above-mentioned issues (e.g. red mud disaster, fatalities in missions) appear in the media, but students are generally ignorant and lack knowledge.

My third hypothesis has also been proven.

Using the Internet is a basic daily activity, moreover, Internet penetration among the students attending my school is quite high (92%). They do not use it for learning purposes but for keeping contacts and entertainment. Community relations – if they exist at all – are withering away unnoticed. These are being replaced by impersonal and unreal online personalities and groups. Therefore, it is understandable why online commercials, advertisements, special offers, websites raising awareness and active presence are needed in the age of cyber kids. The PC and the web can be seen as basic constituents of students' activity structure. Being aware of their relevance, my research also focused on exploring those channels and mechanisms through which the youth can be addressed. The use of social networks (IWIW, Facebook) is becoming more and more important because these sites nearly perform all functions in students' lives. These sites might be used as sources of information and as means of keeping in touch, creating groups, rating events, entertainment and playing. This is why it is of utmost importance for the Hungarian Army to be present on such websites.

My fourth hypothesis has also been verified.

At the time I was doing my research, the Military Education Program was not so widespread so I could only rely on my own pedagogical experiences. I have seen immense interest and demand from students' side. This statement is well supported by their willingness to meet professional soldiers and the success of such events, moreover, their eagerness to take and study Military Studies as a school subject.

2.2 My views and suggestions

The marketing strategies and marketing means will play an important role in developing the personnel of the modern Army, which might help restore the esteem of professionals employed in the defense sector within the society. In public awareness, military marketing policies are supposed to create an image of an attractive and powerful Hungarian Army, according to which serving and protecting the homeland are treated as a recognized, professional, knowledge-based activity requiring responsibility. The Internet, which is a necessary element of our information-based society, has a lot to offer.

The age group of secondary school students is the first which could partly solve the problems recruitment in the Hungarian Army. This is true for contract personnel and the training of army officials alike. Due to the close-down of military schools it is quintessential to learn more about their attitudes towards the Armed Forces. Knowing these might facilitate the preparation process of a more successful and more efficient marketing campaign whose primary target age group is the age group of secondary school students.

Starting the Military Education Program at an early age (primary education) would contribute to the formation of a proper approach to homeland defense laying the foundations for latter career socialization. Secondary education institutions would be in charge of making students aware of the duties and tasks military personnel have and making them decide whether or not they are ready for such career, whether or not they are fully aware of the importance of serving their homeland, and whether or not they can take all responsibility.

In light of the results of my research, I firmly contend that a short-term and a long-term action plan need to be designed and carried out. In the short run, I think there is a need for forming a partnership network in which secondary education institutions and their students could also be involved (Katonasuli Program). Websites with official military content should be improved; new, versatile and entertaining content must be added to them. As a long-term program, a well-established career guidance system ought to be set up. This system would track students' development and involvement from awareness raising to vocation forming a career model whose elements are built on one another (awareness raising, motivation, affection, vocation) and promote a career in the Hungarian Army (applying vertical and horizontal models).

2.3 New scholarly findings

1. I have revealed that current recruiting system should be accompanied by a career guidance process, in addition to this; we need a clearer picture about the motives and reasons that compel students to opt for a career in the Armed Forces.

In the process of creation of a professional army, the age group of students aged between 14 and 19 years ought to be given much more emphasis. These students mainly get information either from the Internet or from television, so my initial point – saying that communication channels need to be changed - has proven to be true. All in all, besides

traditional modes and means of recruitment, there is an urgent need for introducing web-based recruiting techniques.

2. I have also revealed that permanent presence on the Internet, social networking sites and in computer games is of utmost relevance. Without introducing new widely-used multimedia equipment and techniques in schools, no one can expect their sets of values replaced by sets of values placing emphasis on patriotic feelings and the willingness to act on behalf of their homeland.

3. I have pointed it out that the first step to be taken to change students' attitude, convince them and to reduce the gap between the Army and the civil population is to reach out to their parents' generation.

A lot of parents from this generation do not have military past or first-hand experiences which may be bestowed upon their children. At the same time, they might have a stereotypical image of the Army in their minds, though. The transformation of this stereotypical image is an important component of the strategy.

4. I have also proposed a model examining activities - both vertically and horizontally- that are necessary to form an approach to homeland defense.