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**EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF  
FACTORS AFFECTING THE  
CHOICE OF A MILITARY CAREER**

**A KATONAI PÁLYAVÁALSZTÁST MEGHATÁROZÓ  
TÉNYEZŐK EMPIRIKUS VIZSGÁLATA**

**ABSTRACT**

**(angol téziszüzet)**

**2013**

## **Introduction**

I have been observing the philosophy of the military career for almost forty years. I was born into it, and was able to observe it as a child thanks to my father's occupation, I was following up on the changes as a member of society, and as a public servant I took part in the training and education of military officers.

I can call myself lucky, as I was given a rewarding task at the National University of Public Service, Faculty of Military Sciences and Officer Training, where I had the chance to work as the cultural manager of the Ludovika Battalion. In my work I managed to build a good relationship with the students. Although my research is objective in nature and relies on questionnaires, my conversations with the young people contributed to developing a true picture. I could find out about those motives and reasons that led them towards the military profession, hear their opinion on the university's training and education, and have an idea what attracts them and what makes officer-candidates uncertain about this profession.

The country is going through changes and we can also witness a global transformation. This makes the economy, education, the infrastructure and all aspects of society's life face challenges. The country needs a short-term and long-term strategy to preserve its competitiveness. The stability of the economy and a competitive economic policy must be established through new structural reforms.

The two determinant changes of the past years, i.e. accession to NATO and the European Union must also be taken into account. Although these events took place almost two decades ago, the process is on-going, the tasks are being executed in steps, and the transformation is process-like in nature.

One of the important elements and tools of the strategy is education, and through that to build and create a knowledge-based society. The European Union determines the introduction of a kind of standardisation in all aspects of life, including the level of education, and finds it important to implement high-quality education and training for society in order to ensure continuous development and preserve competitiveness. Life-long learning has a special significance, as, in addition to preserving competitiveness, our personality is also continuously developing and we acquire new knowledge. It is also important though what kind of skills and knowledge the students receive.

Not less important that it should be reality which men striving for knowledge would come to know and that they learn the practice. Knowledge should be shared, higher education should be universal. The purpose of university education is to make students learn proper professional skills and to raise and educate such intellectuals who are capable of logical thinking and problem-solving.

At present the goal that has top priority is to define the tasks of the defence force accurately, to recognize the participants and to build the strategy of the defence forces. Government Decree No. 1656/2012. (XII.20.) on the approval of Hungary's National Military Strategy actually addresses this goal, according to which

„The Strategy is one of the important tools of the modernization of the Hungarian Defence Forces; it provides mid- and long-term guidance for the Hungarian Defence Forces, determining their role in defending Hungary and asserting her interests. For that purpose the Strategy sets the main principles of using and maintaining and gives directions for developing the armed force. It also determines the purposes and means by which the Hungarian Defence Forces shall become a modern force with flexibly and efficiently applicable capabilities and a balanced structure.” (kormany.hu, p.2.)

„Beyond financial resources, the nature of the available human resources is of critical importance in respect of the operation of the Hungarian Defence Forces. The prepared, motivated and committed soldier performing a special public service is the Hungarian Defence Forces' greatest asset.

Complex military challenges of our time can only be tackled by an armed force whose personnel has received high-level education and training, has adequate physical and psychological endurance, is capable of high-level performance in an international environment, and is motivated and committed to executing its tasks. For that, secondary and tertiary education, courses, training and drills preparing for the successful implementation of tasks and fulfilling the requirements of our age and an adequate selection system for the selection of leaders are required. The transforming officers' training focusing on leadership capability and the aligned training of non-commissioned officers must establish the conditions for the convertibility between public service careers.” (kormany.hu, 8. o)

Decrees and laws are adjusted to the changes to which armed forces have to be rendered and educated, a young generation of military officers who are raised along different ethical standards.

## **Research objectives**

- My primary objective is to prove that the young candidates are motivated to make a career as army officers and they want to become a member of the military armed forces.
- In my research I look for those competencies that motivated students to become committed to a military career.
- My purpose is to explore any preliminary motivation to choose this career, how such a decision was made, how the decision was implemented and realised.
- I am looking for those interconnections, laws and determining motifs that connect the choice of career and the personal life of the student. I want to identify those cause and effect relationships that directed the young people's attention to being committed to an officer's career and I analyse those factors that affect their development and vocation.
- A further objective of the research is to identify, based on the students' opinion, those insufficiencies and weaknesses that assist the commanders to find out how the candidate officers see them, their activities, and how they see an officer's career. It also helps the university to recognise those segments, which are in need of changes, and receive proposals on how the military career may be made more attractive.

## **The structure of the dissertation, and the research methods used in the analysis of the subject**

The structure of the dissertation follows the set objectives, and is split up to three parts.

In the first part, in addition to the issues concerning the defence forces as identified in the introduction, I defined my goals and detailed the problem that urged me to write the dissertation.

In the second chapter of the research I deal with analysing the theoretical background of career motivation and in that context the theoretical background of military career motivation. I interpret the pedagogical and social approaches written about the factors determining the choice of career. I present the various motivation theories and fundamental concepts, than I apply these to the world of the professional and of labour, and define the career motivation.

The next part of the second chapter elaborates on the special educational methods necessary to be applied in the case of military students. Analysing the specific age features of young adults I assess whether students are still educable in the phase of young adulthood and explain what other tools the military education requires the schools or the organisations to use specifically to allow the candidate-officers to identify with the profession, reach success in their professional career and endeavour to progress towards self-realisation all the way through.

The military career is such an organisational system requiring a closed way of life and attitude different from civil life where it is of utmost importance for the individuals to have such personal traits that help them in developing their sense of belonging to the group and their system of relations. For this reason, in my opinion, it is important to explain in detail the characteristics of military community, to study the theoretical concept of personality and the group, in which the individual feels good and adapts to his fellows. The members of the group carry out their due tasks to the best of their knowledge in order to achieve their common objective and with a sense of belonging together. This community spirit will facilitate identification both with the community and with the defence forces and military spirit.

The love of the military career and the high-level acquisition of the profession, however, cannot happen through self-education. The assistance and educational activities of trainers, officers and superiors participating in military training are also necessary in raising the feeling

of attraction to the profession and developing expertise. Therefore, the roles and tasks of military leadership must be analysed, as well as the characteristics of the good commander and university teachers, whom the students may look up to and regard them as their role model. In order to understand how today's officer training came to being it is important to review the history of the education of military officers, which is contained by the last chapter.

The third chapter describes the empirical research. The sample was taken from the candidate officers of the Zrínyi Miklós National Defence University Students' Faculty. I distributed a total of 455 questionnaires in the 1-4th years, from which 334 were returned completed. The rate of response is 73.5%. The questionnaires were distributed midway the school year by when even the first year students had some experience about military education, while students in the fourth year already started to plan their future, assessed their possibilities in the labour market related to starting a military career. The starting point of the analysis was the questionnaire survey, which embraces the period of the family background, through the university years until the passing-out parade. It was voluntary for students to complete the questionnaire that contained 46 questions, both open and closed. For open questions the respondents could elaborate on their own ideas, while the closed questions asked them to mark intensity or rank.

The questionnaire survey and the success of achieving my objectives were supplemented by the interviews made with trainers and commanders.

One of the most authentic sources of my research was my conversations with the students during the years I spent at the university as well as the opinions voiced and information provided during the activities we performed together. During the informal time spent together I could build a relation with students to invite them to discuss things openly, honour me with answering the questions in the survey honestly, and this honesty could be felt in reading their responses.

## NEW SCIENTIFIC RESULTS

I explained my statements related to the hypotheses above. In the course of my research, however, a number of new scientific results were reached apart from the hypotheses.

Comparing it to the results of other previously conducted researches looking for motives of the military career (Szelei 1999, Kanyó Lászlóné 2004), it can be concluded that all in all the result of my research may be regarded positive.

1. I have come to the conclusion that the choice of a military career is not a secondary alternative, as those young individuals apply for officer training who feel a vocation for the military profession, are committed and would like to be army officers. The factor of the influence of the family is low in choosing a military career, and while the socialisation function of the family is apparent, parents have no direct influence on the choice of officer training.
2. During the university years, the students' motivation does not reduce, although there are such factors in the structure of education that the students do not like and at which points they require changes, and they wish to remain the members of the defence forces even after finishing their university years. The research suggested that students conform to a pattern, and almost all of the students have a role model at the university.
3. The research I conducted concluded that the following factors influence orientation towards the military career:
  - Family background (place of living, environment, relationship with parents)
  - Institutions of education
  - Previous school education and results
  - Preliminary information about the military profession
  - The possibility of meeting the admission requirements to the military profession
  - The quality of professional and practical training
  - Mentor system, mentoring activities
  - Prestige of the military profession
  - The example shown by teachers, superiors and officers and their relations with the students

- Relation with the members of the group, atmosphere of the university years
- Accommodation
- Identification

## **PROPOSALS**

Based on the conclusions drawn from the scientific results I formulate such proposals below that may help make the military career more attractive, strengthen the vocation of officer candidates for their profession and improve the quality of professional work.

- In my opinion it is necessary to measure input-output, and I propose to request students starting and graduating from the university to complete a questionnaire similar to the one I used in my research.
- It would be necessary to conduct a sociological survey of the students already graduated in cca. 5 years after they graduated from the university, and in later periods as defined (even in 10, 15 years), whether they remained in their profession, achieved their goals, and they could be asked to make proposals related to the university education.
- In my opinion continuous consultations would be necessary with the teachers/commanders about their opinion on the students (during the school year), as teachers at that point are still able to adjust their activities. The pertaining system should be worked out.
- Gathering the proposals of students, it is necessary to conduct a quality improvement satisfaction survey.
- It would be important to operate the Mentor System properly.
- It would be advisable to revive the military events, their appearance in mass communication, which would improve the prestige of the military. Making the defence forces more attractive for civil society even through the media appearance of the appropriate persons (making them celebrities).



- Within the secondary-school mandatory public work program the defence forces should also assign tasks to students, thus letting them have an insight into the military profession.
- The university should organise military clubs in elementary schools and secondary schools, where the university students in social programs transfer the knowledge and activities of the military profession in forms of games (model-building, firearm presentations, combat vehicles, field exercises. The task is to compile the subject matter of such clubs.

### **List of publications related to the field of research**

1. dr. Papula Lászlóné: What do you want to be when you grow up?
2. dr. Papula Lászlóné: The Roma in the educational institutions
3. dr. Papula Lászlóné: Learning and literacy in old age.
4. dr. Papula Lászlóné: Bringing up a soldier...
5. dr. Papula Lászlóné: Career choice factors
6. dr. Papula Lászlóné: The impact of the National Military on Military Organisation