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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS BETWEEN TWO LABOUR MARKETS: PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY, WORK CONDITIONS AND CAREER PLANNING

Abstract

Market-orientation of universities and implementation of the concept of work-integrated learning have led to increased participation of the meso-level economic actors in the functioning of higher education. Companies, small and mid-size enterprises become partners of scientific-research organisations, primarily in implementing work practice for students, and also in securing specific additional jobs and long-term professional engagements after the studies. For international students, such circumstances in a great number of cases lead to contacts with actors coming from more than one labour market. Such a situation may result in acquiring specific dual work experience for these students, and accordingly, spark comparison and consideration of the conditions for and position of their own profession in different work environments. The topic of this paper are these very work experiences by international students abroad and effects of such experiences on their professional identity, perception of work conditions and planning of their career after finishing their studies. The presented findings have been based on the integrated quantitative and qualitative results acquired by means of focus group interviews, surveys and in-depth qualitative interviews with foreign students in Serbia, Serbian students studying abroad and student returnees from both these categories.

Keywords: professional identity, international students, labour market, work conditions, career planning

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Development of the theory on migrant industry (Castles & Miller, 2003; Hernández-León, 2013; Cranston & Spaan, 2017) and its application in explaining the mobility of international students (Li, 2019; Liu-Farrer & Tran, 2019; Brotherhood, 2020) contributed to the attention being increasingly dedicated in literature to various, previously neglected actors that mediate between the country of destination and the migrants themselves. It is a “string of intermediate institutions” (Salt & Stain, 1997) that enable and support the process of (academic) migrations, such as state institutions and agencies, non-governmental sector, associations, enterprises, unions, etc. (Salt, 2011). From the meso level, the aforementioned actors

directly or indirectly influence (re)shaping of the process, character and effects of international migrations and, together with national and transnational macro structural actors and micro-actors such as migrants' networks and social capital, they need to be considered in order to comprehensively explain the phenomenon.

If one bears in mind the fact that economic reasons are among the most important when it comes to migration decisions (OECD, 2023), economic actors from the meso level of destination country are pretty important in the context of migrant industry. Accordingly, within the migrant education industry, the actors who provide opportunities for realisation of work practice of students, additional jobs, temporary employment, or long-term professional engagement, play an important role in shaping international student migrations. These include scientific-research organisations, state institutions, companies, small and mid-size enterprises and other labour organisations that provide the framework for functioning of the work integrated learning model (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden, 2010). Such orientation of universities have gained momentum in recent decades, on the wave of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

According to certain sources (Baas, 2019), it is this very migrant education industry that serves as an intermediary in the concept known as two-step migration which often characterises international student migrations. In this context, academic migrations represent "the first step" in which the students may perform allocation of the resources necessary for "the second step", i.e. further migration towards the final destination. Practice, additional jobs, or long-term employment in a foreign country (as a part of the studies, or on the side) may offer international students knowledge on different modes of labour, work with different instruments and tools, as well as working skills in different (inter)cultural work environments (see, e.g. Di Pietro, 2022; Benati, Lindsay, O'Toole, Fischer, 2023). In addition to this human capital, professional experience abroad offers different forms of cultural capital, such as adopting a different professional culture, work standards, etc. (see e.g. Lee, 2019; Bótas & Huisman, 2013).

The literature which deals with experiences of international students has been growing in the last dozen of years. Research projects have been realised with employers, i.e. their attitude towards international students has been analysed (Hawthorne & To, 2014), as well as their valuing of the experience of practice or education abroad (Van Mol, 2016). To a certain extent, the experience of work practice of students during their studies abroad has also been analysed (Ruhanen, Robinson & Breakey, 2013; Khalil, 2015), as well as their position on the labour market (Nyland, Forbes-Mewett, Marginson, Ramia, Sawir & Smith, 2009).¹

¹ According to some sources (Nyland et al., 2009), along with members of marginalized social groups, international students belong to the vulnerable category of work force, which accepts unfavourable employment conditions, yet which is often neglected in discussing this problem.

What researchers have dedicated the most of their attention to, however, are the effects of international student migrations for the working and professional life of such students (Kratz & Netz, 2016), inequalities in career opportunities after they finish their studies (Moskal, 2016), their experiences on the labour market and problems with employment (Hawthorne, 2010; Gribble, Rahimi & Blackmore, 2017), the impact of experience on foreign labour market on one's decision to return to the country of origin (Bijwaard & Wang, 2016), as well as the experience of working after the studies abroad by the students who returned in their country of origin (Tran et al., 2020).

This paper's topic deals exactly with the work experiences of international students during their studies abroad. The main research question which serves as the point of departure is: In what way does facing two distinct labour markets shape the attitudes of international students towards their own profession, i.e. their own professional identity? Furthermore, the following additional research questions are also asked – In what way do students think about their profession, how do they compare labour conditions in the two countries, and what are their career plans after the migration?

Responses to the aforementioned research questions are in this paper obtained based on the data collected with a mixed methods approach, which has already been explained in detail in the first chapter of this study, which deals with the research methodology. Without delving deeper into details of the methodological approach, we here only need to note that the analysis has integrated the data acquired by all three data collection methods used – focus groups, poll questionnaire and in-depth qualitative interviews with all the investigated categories of students.

RESULTS

The main results of this research deal with different aspects of international students' subjective experience pertaining to the profession for which they are currently educating themselves, i.e., in the case of returnees, the profession for which they educated themselves or they are currently practicing. Thoughts on one's own profession were initially investigated through focus group interviews with international students, on which occasion it was found that the effects of this type of migration occurred among the respondents in three groups of topics: (1) perception of valuing of the profession for which students were educating themselves in certain society, as well as (re)shaping of professional identity, closely related to the aforementioned valuing; (2) perception of the working conditions for performing certain profession and its position in a wider system; as well as

(3) recognition of the importance of academic mobility for the performance of professional activity and its impact on the planning and possibilities for future work experience. All the topics that have been identified in the students' narratives have a certain dual character, i.e. they were considered through comparisons between two social contexts, or two labour markets – that of the country of origin and that of the country of studying.

Before considering the aforementioned topics, the working experience of the international students needs to be highlighted. Based on the quantitative part of the research, it may be concluded that, out of the total number of the respondents, more than a half (58.91%) had some kind of working experience during their studies abroad. Most of them were formally employed (26.34%), a somewhat smaller number were engaged in paid or unpaid practice (18.30%), while the smallest portion of them volunteered (14.27%). Employment, paid or unpaid practice, or volunteering abroad were most frequently experienced by the respondents from the group of returnees, followed by Serbian students studying abroad, while the least likely to be engaged in such practices were foreign students studying in Serbia. Also, male students were somewhat more likely to have had this type of work experience, than female students.

Professional Identities

A significant number of classical research pieces on organisational behaviour highlight the link between professional identity and valuing of a profession in certain social environment (e.g. Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ibarra, 1999; Stryker & Burke, 2000). For this reason, before analysing professional identity, it is important to point to the perception of valuing the profession by international students in two social contexts – country of origin and country of studying.

The results on the Likert scale which measured valuing of the profession in different social contexts, indicated that more than a half of the participating international students believed that their profession was valued more abroad (58.59%) than in their country of origin. Observed from the perspective of the total number of male and female respondents separately, the share of male respondents that support this opinion is somewhat higher (62.61%) than that of the female respondents (53.97%). When we talk about the differences identified depending of different groups of international students, the most adamant in professing this attitude are student returnees (61.53%), which is particularly indicative as they had finished their studies abroad and then once again faced (the lack of) valuing of their profession in their country of origin after their return. After this group, the opinion is the strongest among the Serbian students studying abroad

(58.67%), followed by foreign students studying in Serbia (55.56%). These results may be explained by the very socio-economic circumstances and the character of international migration. Students from Serbia studying abroad educate themselves in western countries that are at a highest level of economic development and, accordingly, the professions that they educate themselves for are predominantly more valued in these societies than they are in Serbia. On the other hand, as foreign students perceive Serbia as foreign country and Serbian standard is lower than that of some other destinations that they perceived as desirable, they perceive their professions to be somewhat less valued abroad, though still quite a bit more valued than in their countries of origin. In addition to economic standard, here we should also take into account the trend that Serbian students abroad mainly consider staying in the country in which they study (or a similar country), while foreign students in Serbia perceive their stay as temporary – they are either oriented on returning to their country of origin, or they perceive Serbia as a country of transit, i.e. “the first step” in migrating to their desired destination.

When it comes to the professional identity of international students, it was measured primarily via the groups of statements in the Likert scale that referred to one’s individual attitude to the profession, as well as the attitude of relevant others towards the profession of the respondent. Here, the statement that had the highest average was: “I like to talk about my (future) profession” ($M=3.62$). It was immediately followed by the following statements: “I cannot imagine having another profession in my life” ($M=3.15$) and “I am upset when someone talks unfavourably about my (future) profession” ($M=3.01$). Except from the results for the first statement that incline towards the affirmative attitude, the results of the second two statements show that there are no entirely clear attitudes among international students that concern professional identity. This may be explained by the fact that in the majority of the cases (except for the returnees) these were students whose professional education was still ongoing, so they possibly did not have their professional identity entirely developed. These findings are in line with some of the classical theoretical explanations that claim that it is necessary for an individual to complete his/her education and to internalise the values and norms in order to be able to define or identify him/herself with certain profession (Barker Caza & Creary, 2016).

Poor identification with the profession is also clear when it comes to the data that indicate a relatively small number of the participating international students (29.01%) believing that they would remain in their own profession even in the case of being offered a better position in some other field, as well as a large number of the students stating that family was more important to them than their professional career (61.6%). In addition to the fact that international students, due to the education process which is still underway, mostly do not have

developed values and norms still that lead to identification with the profession, one should take into account the change that happens to professions and professional identity in the postmodern society.² Namely, individuals are less and less tied to certain organisations and professions, due to short-term labour contracts, projects and additional jobs (Sennett, 1998). In such a system, careers are increasingly perceived as series of different professional experiences and roles, susceptible to frequent changes during one's lifetime (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).

Position of the Profession and Work Conditions

Position of a profession in a society is usually perceived through the amount of respect, power and wealth that may be accumulated by the individuals belonging to the same professional group (see e.g. Treiman, 1977). The aforementioned valuing of a profession by a concrete society has impact on its position in said society and therefore different societies may position the same profession in entirely different ways. Even the same society may value a profession entirely differently in different historical eras. Therefore the social context is highly important for the position of a profession, which was also clearly confirmed by the research with international students.

International students assess the position of their own profession mainly by comparing the conditions for engaging in the profession in their country of origin and the country of studying. Thus, for example, a foreign student in Serbia notes the circumstances in which she performs her scientific-research work as a part of the doctoral studies, and compares them with what she believes would be the conditions in her country of origin:

"I think if I would have studied in Iran, I think I would maybe have a higher position than I am having now here. I'm just one student here, but for a PhD candidate I should be more than this ... I don't have any career. I don't have any academic engagement and job. Like I don't have any chair. I don't have any table. I don't have any office, nothing. I have nothing. I'm just one student among other students like bachelor students. If I would be in my country, I would have my own office and at this level I could already be a professor." (F, 31, Serbia)

² The loss of importance of profession in the contemporary society has been discussed by different social science theoreticians. For example, in his papers on liquid modernity, Bauman claims that identity, including the professional, is increasingly unstable, i.e. that traditional roles lose their importance more and more (Bauman, 2000). Additionally, Bourdieu states that professional limits become more and more flexible and are susceptible to changes, depending on a wider social context (Bourdieu, 1984).

From the quoted part of the interview, it can clearly be discerned that the student makes conclusions about her professional position based on the attitude of the institution and relevant individuals towards her work and working needs. Similarly, a student from Serbia, makes conclusions about the position of the entire profession based on the state of equipment of the institution in which she is currently studying abroad: *"I would return there, because journalism is the profession which is specific that way, I think I would fit in better there... They perceive the profession of journalist differently."* (F, 21, Belgium) A wider perception of the relationship of a society towards the profession, and accordingly its position as well, is identified by students in the impressions on the values that are narrowly linked with the profession in a concrete society. An example is an explanation by a foreign student in Serbia about the reasons that engineering is insufficiently developed or valued in Serbian society: *"I'm from electronics and I would be very much interested in technology, but here ... if they have old technology, they are okay to use with that. I mean their attitude towards the modernization... I do not see they have that interest. The interest towards the modernization or adaptation."* (F, 29, Serbia) Together with the impression of what is valued in the host country, students sometimes assess what is valued in their country of origin, and frequently these are entirely different aspects that are emphasised. This is noticeable with a student from Serbia who went to study painting abroad: *"Art is a glorified craft. They value it there. Whether someone knows how to do it... While here [they value the following] – Right, you studied in Firenze!"* (M, 32, Italy)

Conditions of work have been considered in the research as yet another indicator of the profession's position in the country of origin and country of studying of international students. Different research projects have suggested that better work conditions including better payment equipment, promotion opportunities, protection at work, different benefits, etc., while also implying better status of a profession in certain society.³ Vice versa is also true – poorer work conditions usually indicate a lower status of the profession. Table 1 presents the results which evidence the way that students perceive work conditions, i.e. whether they believe that certain elements thereof are better in their country of origin (1) or abroad (5).

³ A classical piece of research in the field of sociology of work and profession was the one by Everett Hughes (Hughes, 1958) which dealt with the very problem of how the social status and work conditions may influence the reputation and valuing of a profession in a society. In addition to this classical effort, sociology has an entire field of research that deals with the link between the work condition and position of the profession in a society (see e.g. Goldthorpe & Hope, 1974; Abbott, 1988).

Table 1. Mean values of subjective assessment of working conditions in home country and abroad

Work conditions	Total	Gender		Group		
		M	F	1	2	3
Equipment	3.66	3.83	3.55	4.13	4.15	3.03
Earnings	3.75	3.98	3.53	4.41	4.29	2.91
Promotion	3.72	3.89	3.54	4.09	3.86	3.37
Flexibility	3.52	3.59	3.45	3.81	3.44	3.37
Annual leave	3.28	3.37	3.15	3.49	3.30	3.18
Free days	3.15	3.23	3.03	3.31	3.04	3.11
Awards and bonuses	3.71	3.81	3.57	4.05	4.11	3.18
Protection at work	3.68	3.80	3.56	4.08	3.96	3.20
Teamwork	2.98	3.06	2.92	3.11	2.90	2.97

Note: The lowest value on the scale referred to better conditions in one's homeland, while the highest referred to better conditions abroad; Group 1 in the table are Serbian students abroad, Group 2 are returnees while Group 3 are foreign students in Serbia.

Due to the scope of the qualitative data, it is not possible to illustrate every obtained piece of quantitative data in the table. However, three categories of work conditions are particularly emphasised in the following analysis – earnings as the highest score in the table, teamwork as the lowest, and work equipment as something that students talked about particularly extensively during the interviews. In addition to these three categories, in the follow-up interviews another category that had not been incorporated in the scale was singled out – that of work practice, i.e. its quality and contents.

It has already been mentioned that the highest total value of the arithmetic mean on the scale that investigated the work conditions in one's homeland and abroad referred to the height of earnings. International students believe that earnings are better abroad than in their countries of origin and this very circumstance is often linked in interviews with consideration of some further, (re)emigration in the future. This is characteristic for the Serbian students studying abroad, as well as for the foreign students in Serbia, it is just that the latter state that earnings are better in other foreign countries, especially the western ones.

"Truth be told, I always wanted to study abroad and stay there, because the salary they get for the identical job, if I working here as an intern earn more than a software engineer in Serbia as a senior, then it didn't make sense staying in Serbia. I can work here for ten years, get retired at 30 and never ever work again." (F, 22, USA)

"So the first thing definitely, obviously, the wages in Serbia are quite different, are low compared to England. For example, some jobs in England, they pay some low-level, low-skilled jobs, they pay more than, like, you know, as a doctor, starting doctor salary. So one of those, but obviously it's not easy to sort that out." (M, 27, Serbia)

The lowest average score at the scale refers to teamwork, meaning that students on average believe that team oriented work environment is somewhat more present in their countries of origin. These findings may be a result of a higher degree of social and cultural closeness that students feel with their colleagues in the country of origin, i.e. easier communication based on common cultural norms.⁴ In the interviews with Serbian student returnees, the cultural framework of professional communication abroad and its comparison with the communication in the country of origin are particularly pronounced:

"In the academic context, I needed time to learn this particular code that they had. When someone says something to you, what does that actually mean... Everything's pretty much enveloped in this context of courtesy, when you really need to learn to read the final message." (F, 32, United Kingdom)

"Everyone works for themselves and you can't blame no one because you work for your own sake only. Strictly business. People are much closer in our country, they see themselves close..." (F, 29, Austria)

International students from Serbia who are currently in study exchange programmes, as well as those who returned to Serbia after their studies, also put particular emphasis on better work equipment abroad. Their impression is that work environments in Serbia frequently either do not possess the equipment necessary for the performance of work, or this equipment is obsolete and cannot secure performance of the work in a modern way. Such situation in the workplace necessarily influences the quality of work and slows down performances, or causes additional difficulties. Good examples of this are provided by Serbian students of communicology and chemistry: *"There we had lots of equipment for media things, unlike here, a studio, teleprompter, and all the rest..." (F, 21, Belgium); "There I was able to wash my dishes in a dishwasher, while here I need to wash everything by hand and then I repeat for a million times if I were there now, I would wash it in 15 minutes, while here I need to wash for two hours." (F, 29, Austria)*

⁴ Knowledge of the social environment's language was also singled out as an important factor. Even those students who stated that their English was very good, had the impression that they were unable to express their personality fully abroad, in a way they could on the "home ground".

In addition to work equipment, the category that was particularly highlighted in the interviews was that of work practice, especially with Serbian students abroad and those who returned to Serbia having finished their studies. Students testify that practice is very much present as a part of study programmes abroad. Furthermore – the practice provided within study programmes is indeed professional practice in the study field. One psychology student testifies that at a foreign faculty where she studied there is a private clinic and that clients admitted there are forwarded to students as a part of the practice: *“The entire part is much better organised, much more opportunities for learning and acquiring knowledge and skills are within the faculty.”* (F, 27, Cyprus) Practical knowledge and skills in foreign faculties are not narrowly linked to private practice only, but are rather integrated in learning about modern tools and programs necessary in performing professional tasks. This is confirmed by a sociology student who is currently in a student exchange programme: – *“This stream is oriented to statistics and learning the programs that would later on become your advantage on the labour market. I mean Python, R, etc. and I liked this very much... you can learn something practical here and then you go the labour market and say, here’s what I know, you need me.”* (M, 34, Germany)

Career Planning

Being in an international exchange programme doubtlessly leads to certain changes in the lives and future planning of students, which has been evidenced by a great number of research pieces (Potts, 2015; Waibel et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2019). That topic is treated separately in the final paper in this collection. Here, the focus is put on the changes that concern one’s career, i.e. perception of career opportunities and planning after finishing one’s studies abroad.

When it comes to the responses to the general question of what to the greatest degree changed for the students from the time when they went abroad to the moment of this research, right after the perspective on the way of life that they wished to be leading (M=2.34) comes this very attitude towards the career they wished to pursue (M=2.48).⁵ This change is somewhat more pronouncedly recognised among the male respondents (M=2.38) as opposed to female ones (M=2.67). When we talk about different groups, the change has been recognised the most among the returnees (M=2.23), then among Serbian students abroad (M=2.48) and finally, among the foreign students in Serbia (M=2.63).

⁵ Mark 1 in the scale referred to the response “It changed me completely”, while mark 5 meant “It did not change me at all”.

International experience has brought certain benefits to the students, especially in terms of acquiring intercultural competences that may be used as their advantage in their future careers in any labour market. A direct advantage in the process of employment was acquired by a student who stated that due to her academic migration she got the opportunity to work in Serbia: *"I think that the studying abroad was crucial in getting the job... Not only that the PhD was a condition for me to get this job, but my employment then also depended on, as far as I remember, the call for employment of a thousand of young PhD students, returnees from abroad, in Serbian institutions, so my studying abroad was absolutely among the conditions for me to get this job."* (F, 35, United Kingdom) Other student returnees testify that experiences in intercultural working environment have helped them in performing their jobs easier after they completed their studies: *"The studies have already helped me, as I work in an international environment."* (M, 31, Czech Republic); *"I have concrete things that I learned during this stay, I know my skills, I know what to do with them and if I don't find a job, I know where I'll go."* (M, 30, Germany)

In addition to intercultural competences, students got to improve their English due to international student migration, i.e. the language which is particularly significant for working in different markets: – *"I learned a lot, I experienced a lot for sure. Even the language skills are great. Maybe I could not catch it in my country if I studied in my native language."* (M, 31, Serbia) Social capital, networks and contacts are also listed as significant for post-university careers. Some of the student returnees have found their jobs after the studies due to the very connections that they made during their stay abroad, while some of them even established business contacts with individuals from their earlier foreign environment: *"In any way, the fact that I was abroad means to me, because today I cooperate with these people."* (F, 32, Italy)

For the students, thinking about their future careers largely involved also thinking about the return, stay or further migration. It has already been mentioned in the study that more than one third of the students quote as their main motive for the return to the country of origin a secured and well-paid job in their profession, while the remaining respondents mentioned family reasons, state support and favourable conditions for starting one's own independent business, i.e. entrepreneurship, change of government in their homeland, cheap housing loans, better living standard, wish to return to their native country, existence of romantic partner relationships, etc.

International students on average express their wish, upon their potential return, to help their homeland with the knowledge and skills they acquired during their stay in another country (M=3.81). This wish is much stronger among women (M=4.15), than among men (3.67), and it is also more prominent among the foreign students in Serbia (M=4.01) and student returnees (M=3.91), while it is

significantly lower (yet still has a positive tendency) among the Serbian students abroad ($M=3.48$). Also, international students believe on average that everyone who returns to their own country needs to contribute to the development of his/her homeland with his/her work ($M=3.99$). Similar to the previous question, this position is stronger among the women ($M=4.20$) than men ($M=3.89$), however, there is a certain difference when it comes different groups – such opinion is the stronger among the foreign students in Serbia ($M=4.19$), then among the returnees ($M=4.04$), while it is the weakest when it comes to Serbian students abroad ($M=3.77$).

However, regardless of the wish to help their country after the return, a certain number of international students believe that they would face, or they have indeed faced in the case of the returnees, certain limitations at the domestic labour market. Asked whether they expected the same treatment on the labour market as other workers after their return to their country of origin, Serbian students abroad are particularly hesitant to agree ($M=2.93$). Such a result may be additionally supported by excerpts from the interviews, while a good example is a student who testified on the lack of harmonisation between international study programmes and the demands of domestic employers: *"The fact is that I know they wouldn't gladly let me work here in my profession, because I have missed many of these courses that they have in our study programmes."* (F, 33, Austria) Unlike Serbian students studying abroad, the returnees have somewhat more positive attitude concerning the equality with other workers on the labour market ($M=3.25$), while the opinion on the subject is the most positive in the group of foreign students in Serbia ($M=3.48$). When it comes to the respondents' gender, no major differences in answers have been identified.

International students on average believe that there are better opportunities for finding a job abroad ($M=3.82$). This attitude has been somewhat stronger among the male ($M=3.89$), than among female respondents ($M=3.76$). In terms of different groups, such attitude is the strongest among the returnees ($M=4.15$), followed by Serbian students abroad ($M=4.01$), while the agreement with the statement is the weakest, though still positive, among the foreign students in Serbia ($M=3.42$). An example of an exchange student clearly points to the problem of personal employability in Serbia after the studies: *"I love coming to Serbia. The thing is I don't know what I would do here. I don't know who would employ me here, since I work on something for which there's no context in Serbia."* (F, 32, Germany) In addition to the problems that concern inexistence of concrete profiles of certain profession in their homeland, the students also quote problems with employment that are connected to the loss of contacts and links within the professional community which can often be rather closed: *"It's hard anyway because this, even as a professional, this feels like urbanism and architecture are a bit more elitistic, so there's not like a lot of openings going on all the time."* (F, 32, Serbia)

Serbian students abroad and returnees to Serbia do not express a clear attitude pertaining to the statement that experts who studied abroad are not respected in their homeland after their return, however foreign students in Serbia on average do not agree with this statement ($M=2.39$). Such a result may be interpreted in terms of characteristics of the very group of foreign students studying in Serbia – i.e. the fact that these are mainly students from the Third World countries, who come to Serbia due to intergovernmental agreements, meaning that a degree obtained in a Serbian university is pretty much esteemed in their country of origin. In all three groups, the position that experts are not sufficiently valued in their homelands is on average more disapproved by women ($M=2.69$), while men are undecided ($M=2.98$).

CONCLUSION

Based on the presented research data, it can be concluded that the three main problems analysed in this paper – professional identity, work conditions and career planning – are always considered by international students in the context of at least two labour markets. With the students from Serbia abroad, as well as with the returnees, the aforementioned consideration has a dual character and assumes the state of origin and the state of studying. When it comes to the foreign students in Serbia, it assumes a multi-focal character, as in addition to the country of origin and country of studying, when considering their profession, this category also takes into account the situation in the labour market in a third country, i.e. the country that the student wishes to emigrate to after finishing the studies.

Generally, the data show that professional identity is not fully formed in international students whose schooling is underway. This category of students did not show clear attitudes in the research pertaining to their professional identity, which may indicate that the process of adopting professional norms was not finished and that this type of identity was still emerging. Additionally, current situation on the labour market characterised by uncertainty and frequent changes of jobs, limited duration employments and short-term projects, contributes to the general “crisis of professions” (Leicht & Fennell, 2023) which is evident in the data from each group of the respondents.

As far as work conditions are concerned, the qualitative part of the analysis has shown that the most important problems from this category that international students are likely to discuss include amount of earnings, interpersonal relations at work, and the contents and quality of the work practice abroad. The quantitative results have shown that students believe that salaries are higher abroad, while the teamwork in the context of interpersonal relations at work and

the quality of these relations are to a degree better in their country of origin. Furthermore, the overall analysis has shown that consideration of the conditions at work almost always also leads to considering further (re)emigration and planning their lives in certain society.

Finally, for international students, career planning is inseparable from the previous two topics and it mostly deals with the potentials of certain professions, i.e. employability in a concrete society, problems concerning certain professional profiles' overlapping with the needs of the labour market and assessment of the respect for international experience in the country of origin. For many international students, academic migration plays the role of the "first" step in the process of "two-step migration", and this has been especially prominently evidenced by the data concerning the foreign students in Serbia.

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