A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIVIDUAL SOCIAL VALUES

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Abstract: *This research aimed to investigate the individual importance of certain social values in the context of the complex processes of Romania's integration in the European Union. Based on the questionnaire applied in three high schools in Arad, we observed how young people relate to social norms and values, as well as the concordance/discrepancy between desirable and real attitudes. The responses of given by the subjects enabled the creation of correlations and associations between different attitudes and behaviors, and also allowed us to draw conclusions to improve the educational efforts undertaken to this end.*

Keywords: *social values, attitudes, behaviors, opinions, education.*

1. The conceptual framework

The changes that have occurred in our country in the economic, political, social, educational and institutional fields necessarily imply studying how the democratic values promoted by society are perceived and implemented. In this context, a rich literature that addresses various topics has accumulated: the values and the structure of personality, the values/attitudes/behaviors distinction, the relationship between beliefs and interests, the role of values in the process of socialization and social integration, the valoric restructuring of social participation, multiculturalism and inter-culturalism in social relations, social values in the context of a dynamic competitive economy, personal values, prejudices and social models etc.

On the other hand, one have made distinctions between the values of economic, legal, political, ethical, aesthetic, historical and religious values, as well as redefining the value as a constituent element of the individual with an important social determinant expressed by rules, customs, ideologies and traditions (Voicu, 2011) or as an element assimilated by individual perceptions and the collective beliefs specific to each culture and internalized through socialization (Barus, Enriquez and Levy, 2002).

Based on these aspects, the present study attempts to capture the significance of individual social values by students from three high schools in Arad. The set of questions that were asked to young people in the sample were structured around the following major themes: the importance attributed to social values (social participation, human solidarity, responsibility, caring for others, tolerance and freedom of

expression), the place where they discussed these values, the importance of equal opportunities for promotion based on personal merit, equality before the law, ethnic or gender discrimination, the model of success in life, the factors which determine success in life and the perception of their opportunities for study or work in the European Union. In this set of questions were added views on different forms of tolerance and prejudice that manifest themselves in social and group relations.

2. Research hypotheses

Between the years 2005 – 2006, a research based on a CNCS grant[33] was developed, whose theme was youth civic culture and multiculturalism in the context of Romania's accession to the European Union. The question that was put was that of investigating the level of civic culture of young people during the process of accession to the EU. The interpretation of data gathered by the questionnaire applied in the first and second year of the survey revealed a certain discrepancy between the subjects' responses to certain items (cf. Şimandan and Balas-Timar, 2007). The subjects offered responses that they considered desirable, but the control questions revealed opinions and attitudes that they wanted to hide. It emerged that the social values indicated in the questionnaire were selected based on the respondent's intention to provide a positive self-image. The correlation of these items with those that aimed at tolerance and especially prejudices revealed a social reality according to which the young used in their daily lives a number of biases that they wanted to deny so as not to damage their positive self-image. Likewise, the problem of success in life, of the source of success in life and of international mobility emerged, as the youth, concentrating on each item, allowed researchers to identify the difference between the declarative and the behavior levels of the subjects.

Six years later we posed the question of selecting items from the original questionnaire, focusing this time on the levels of the citizenship, of emotional intelligence and social intelligence (cf. Goleman, 2006; 2007).

The hypothesis that we started from was that after the EU accession, young people aged 17-19 have mastered the essential concepts of citizenship. It was assumed that they relate differently to the social reality, so that the discrepancy between the declarations and the behavior was reduced significantly. As a result, they have internalized the democratic values and apply them both in social interactions and the formation of their own selves. We also took into account the increased interest in recent years to improve teacher training and civic education, tolerance and multiculturalism, which is reflected in the work of students and hence the formation of a young generation of EU citizens.

3. Methodology

In determining the method of research we have started from the assumption mentioned above, namely the correlation of the data obtained in this study with the

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[33] Research grant CNCS 238 A/ 2005-2006

findings of the study in 2005-2006. In that research the methods used were the standardized questionnaire and the focus group. By reducing the number of schools and subjects to ensure scientific rigor, we chose to apply the questionnaire.

In developing the initial questionnaire, we included questions of opinion and control questions (see Rotaru and Iluţ, 2006; McQuenn and Knussen, 2006), which investigated the issue mentioned before. The issues considered were democratic values, respect, tolerance and multiculturalism, as well as: free association on the Romanian society, the level of mass-media information, knowledge about the culture and personal data. For the present study we selected a set of questions on democratic values, respect, tolerance and multiculturalism (Appendix 1).

This version of the questionnaire was applied to a total of 121 subjects from three high schools in Arad. The high school students in the sample were selected from classes XI and XII as we considered young people aged between 17-19 years. We chose this age group because young people already have the school and life experience necessary to know these concepts.

Moreover, the studies which aim civics, social intelligence or emotional intelligence generally choose this age. It is also the period in which the individuals form their self-image and shape their identity, being able to analyze themselves and to relate to their peers in terms of social values.

The three schools were: The "Csiky Gergely" College, the Economic College and School of Food Industry. We have selected two high school units with technology profile given the fact that in the county of Arad 49.61 % of the high schools are technological high schools, 50.39 % are represented by classes with vocational profile.

The sex ratio was: 81 girls (67%) and 40 boys (33%). Depending on ethnicity, the situation is as follows: 88 Romanian students (73%) and 33 Hungarians (27%). Regarding their school profile, the distribution is as follows: technological profile 84 respondents (69%) and theoretical profile 37 (31%).

Table no. 1 – Personal data of the respondents

Q28. Sex	1.boys	2.girls	
	40	81	Total= 121
Q.29 Age	17 years: 34	18 years: 69	19 years: 18
Q32. High school profile	theoretical	technological	
	37	84	Total= 121
Q37.Nationality	1Romanian	2.Hungarian	
	88	33	Total= 121

4. Results and interpretation

4.1 *Ordering democratic values according to the importance given to them*
After analyzing the responses to this item, it was established that subjects view the hierarchy of democratic values as follows: 1. assuming responsibility; 2. freedom of expression; 3. human solidarity; 4. caring for others; 5. tolerance; 6. social

participation. What follows is an analysis based on the order in which they appear in the questionnaire applied.

As can be seen in Fig. no.1, 44% of the respondents placed social participation last in the hierarchy. In fact, the only situation in which the percentage is so high and allows an accurate identification in the hierarchy.

It would therefore seem that the really important values are solidarity and concern for others, but more at a declarative level, since participation itself is positioned last as a social value.
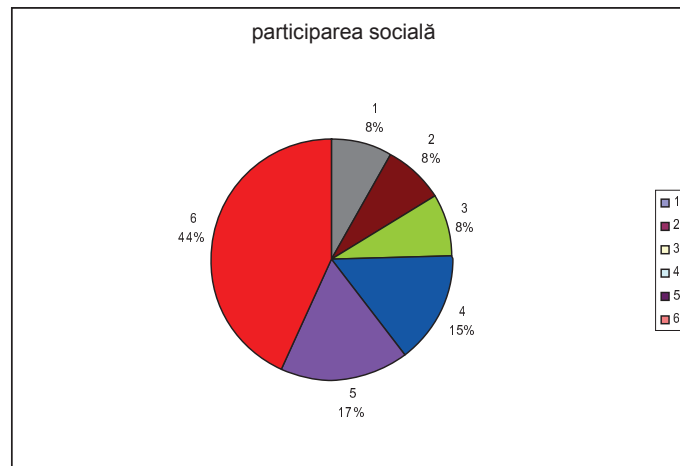

Fig. no.1

Human solidarity can be seen third in the hierarchy, although in Fig. no.2 it seems to be the fourth, because respondents ranged from placing it as the third or fourth value, unlike caring for others, where the oscillation is between the third and fifth position. But solidarity also means spirit of understanding, and in the case of the item of bias we noticed that young people take this into account and are influenced by them, a fact which raises questions regarding the placement of solidarity at the top of the hierarchy of values considered.
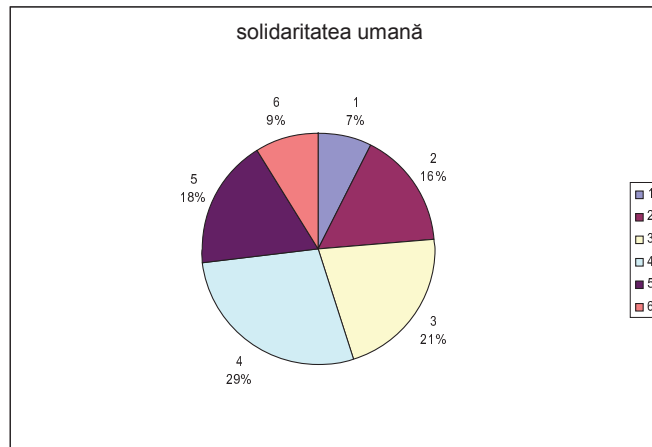
Fig. no.2

Accountability can be considered the first in the hierarchy of social values because more subjects oscillated in placing it on the first or second place, unlike freedom of expression, where the same oscillation is found in a smaller number of respondents (Fig. no.3). The proximity between accountability and freedom of expression suggests that the young oscillate between values that regard their own freedom and social involvement.
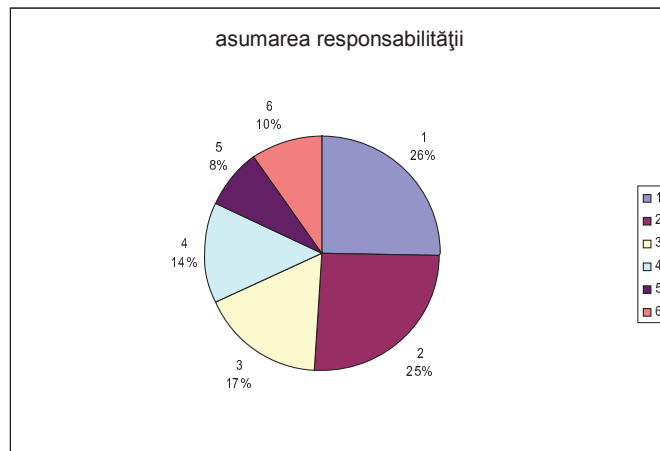

Fig. no.3

Caring for others comes as the fourth democratic value (Fig. no. 4), but the correlation of this response with the data items regarding tolerance and prejudice rather show the intention to provide a desirable and socially promoted response.
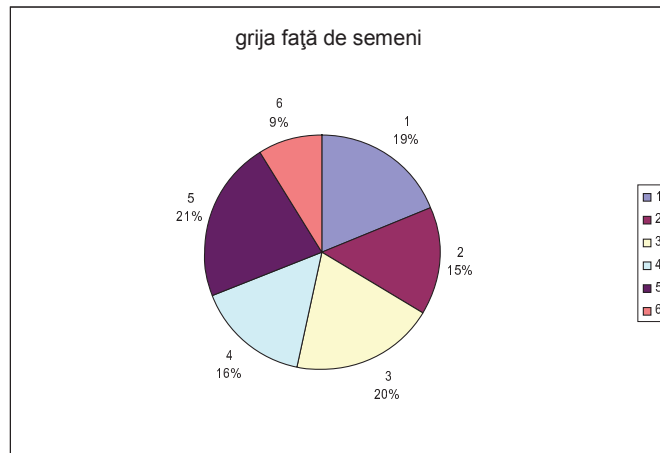
Fig. no. 4

Regarding the perception of investigated subjects, *tolerance* can be considered the fifth in the hierarchy of social values if we take into account the percentage of 20% (Fig. no.5).

Considering all the responses, it appears that this value poses questions for the youth, since it covers all the hierarchy with relatively close percentages.

So if one would raise the issue of tolerance within the group, their views would cover a wide range of responses, which suggests that this democratic value, paradoxically, can cause tension in the group.

Fig. no.5

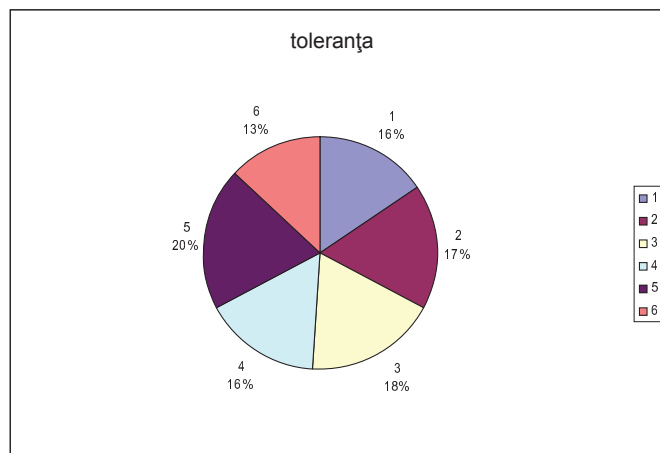According to the opinions of the participants, *freedom of expression* is considered an important democratic value for approximately half of the respondents (Fig. no.6). It can be questioned whether for the youth this value refers only to *their* freedom of speech or the freedom *of all*. The second part of the questionnaire, which poses the question of tolerance and prejudice, nuances this choice of the respondents.

From this point of view it is presumed that the commissioning of prejudice in social relations has a direct effect on the freedom of expression of others.
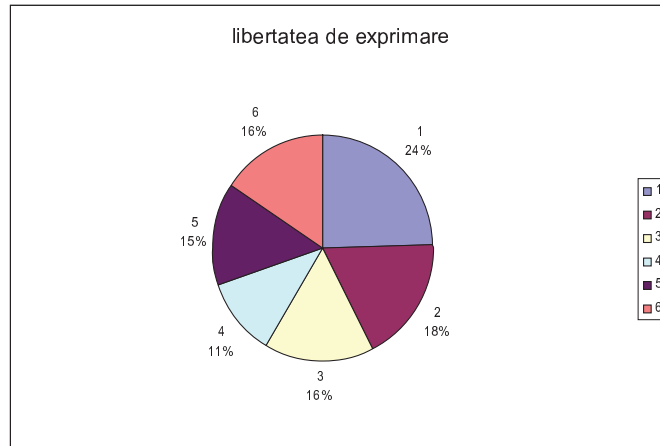
Fig. nr.6

Fig. no. 6

The hierarchy of democratic values has been established taking into account the responses of all subjects, but it is useful to compare them with the responses of the three high schools respondents.

As it is clear from Fig. no.7, the Economic College students placed social participation in the sixth place, while the students from the other two high schools reveal more varied responses.
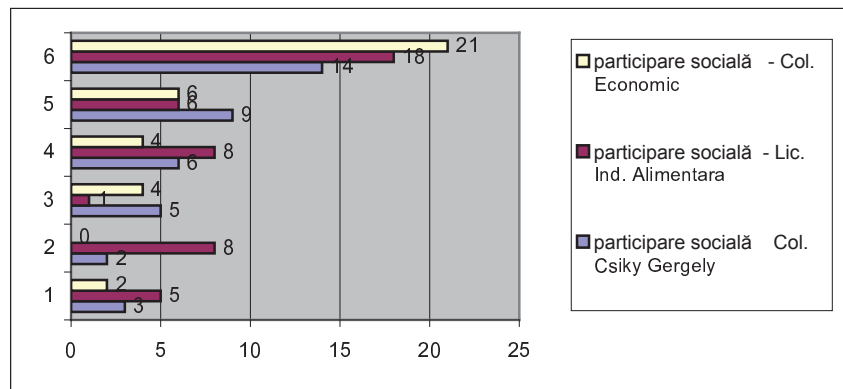
Fig. no.7

In the case of human solidarity the responses fall within the normal distribution at all three schools in the study, outlining the "Gauss bell", which indicates the third place of this value (Fig. no.8) based on the measurement of the central tendency.
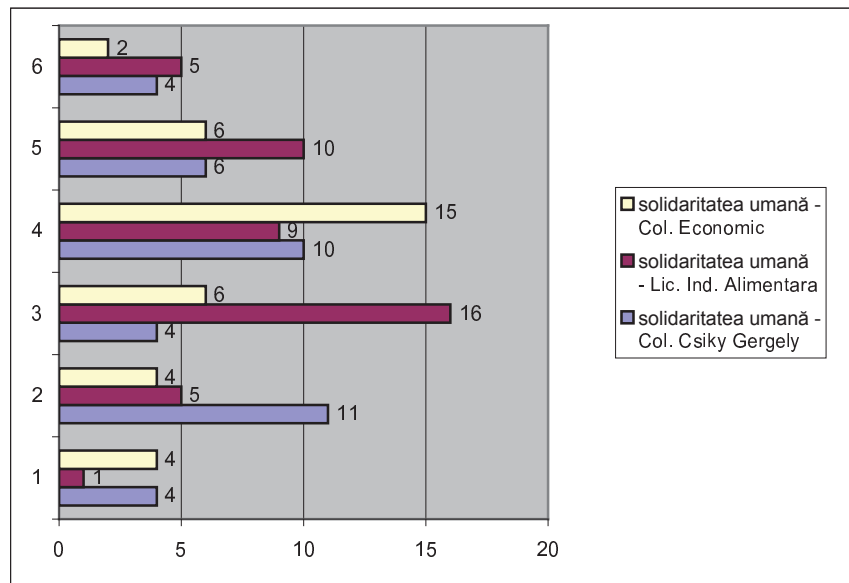
Fig. no.8

Regarding accountability, Fig. no. 9 shows its position among the top three democratic values. The mechanisms of social desirability function for all respondents, regardless of high school or profile.
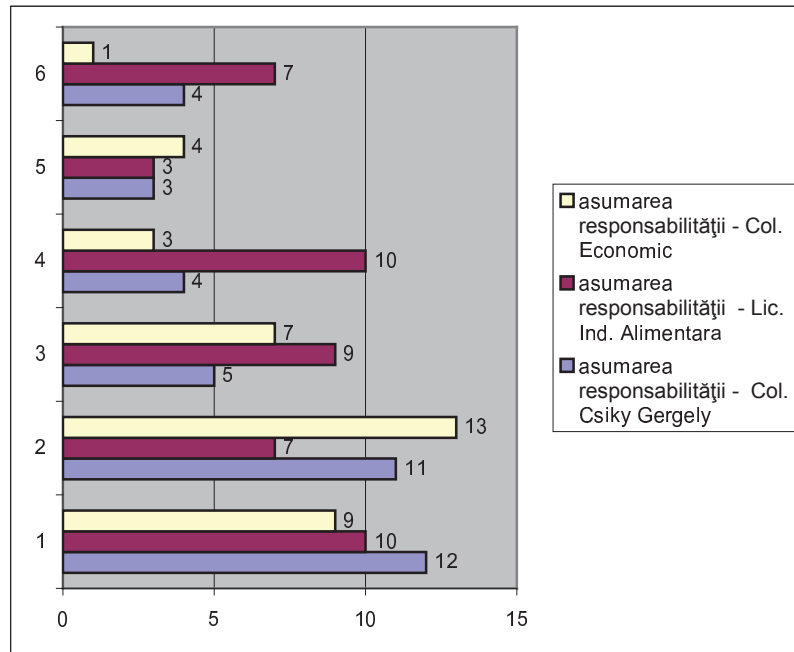
Fig. no.9

Caring for others comes as the first value in the hierarchy established at the level of each high school unit (Fig. no. 10), but considering all the answers, it comes to be placed in the position of the fourth democratic value. It is the only situation where there is a big difference between the answers given by respondents from each school.
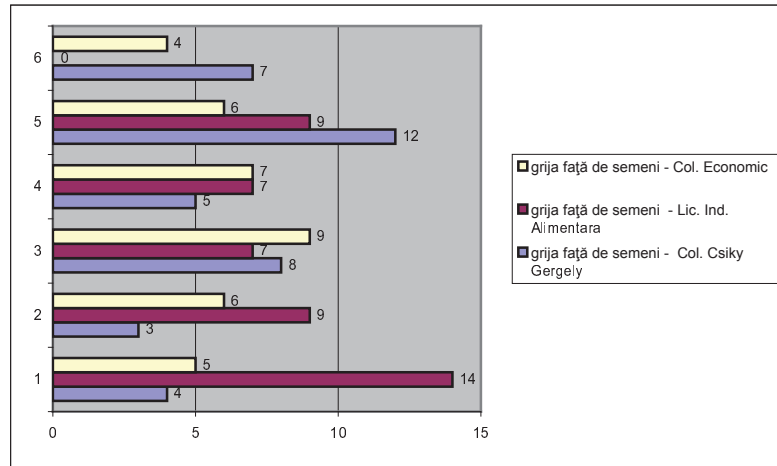
Fig. nr.10

By looking at Fig. no.11 one can notice the formation of the "plateau" (if we consider all responses), while the subjects from the Economic College tend to place this value on the fifth place (although the other positions meet an approximately equal number of answers).
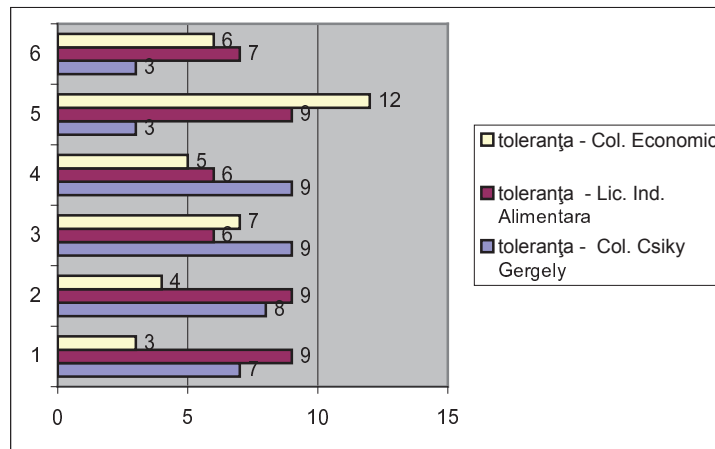
Fig. no.11

Freedom of speech is regarded by respondents as the second democratic value considering the central tendency. If we look, however, at the responses in each school it is observed that the subjects from the Economic College place it at the forefront of

hierarchy, whereas the Food Industry High School and The Csiky Gergely College subjects opt for all options in close percentages.
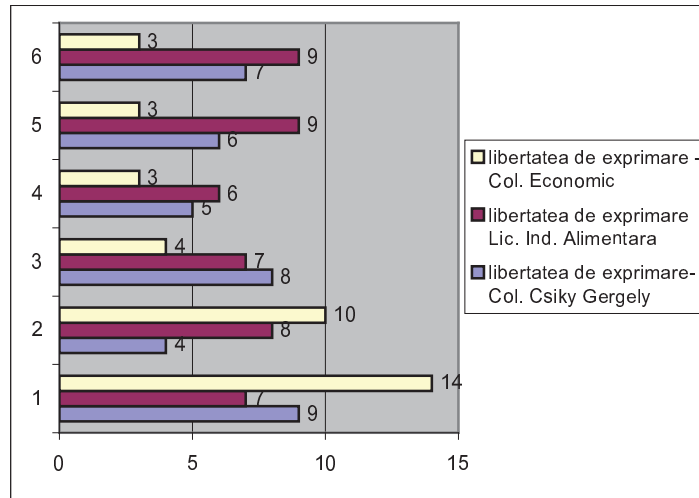
Fig. no.12

4.2. *The educational environment indicated by the subjects in relation to the social values*

After analyzing the responses, it was found that 64 % of the subjects discussed democratic values at school, 18% indicated the family as the main source of information, 10% selected their group of friends as having an essential role in relation to these value, while 8% indicated other sources. It is found that 36% of respondents chose the school as the main source of information and training, given the fact that ever since primary school, students study the elements of civic education. It is important that the family and the group of friends should contribute to the development of the individual, but then the question is what has been studied in the school discipline mentioned above. Thus, we can say that for 36% of the students' civics classes, counseling and orientation and others alike were ineffective. Even if it is not only up to the school to form an individual's personality, it must ensure objectivity on democratic values to counteract trends that may affect the functioning of social relations.

4.3. *The importance of social values*

By analyzing the responses of subjects to the "very important" question, it appears that the answer that ranks first is equality before the law with 23%, while the last social value is discrimination of sex by 14% (Fig. no.13). Most likely, the respondents were directed to those social values that affect them directly within their social reality and which are related to the elimination of inequalities in all aspects: equality before the law, equal educational opportunities, as well as an equal pay to equal work. This time, the answer is not only a social goal, but a set of values wanted by the respondents in relation to their integration into the labor market, in a society built on democratic and equitable principles.
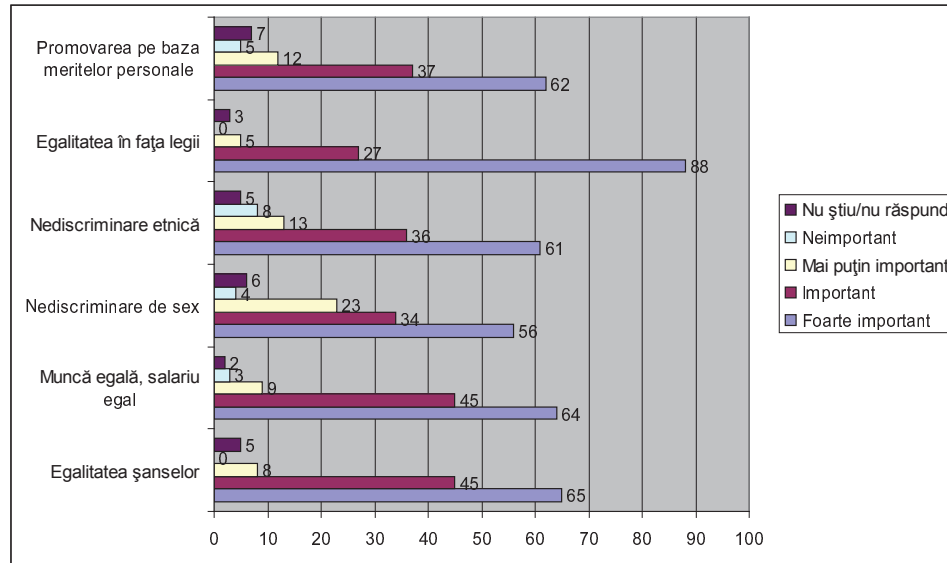
Fig. no.13

4.4. *The model of success in life*

On this item, 34% of respondents chose the option "I have no model", and 43% chose the option, "I do not know / I do not answer" and only 23% have taken a model of success in life. The model of success also falls within the category of desirable answers desirable: mother, father and family. In this item, the youth chose those answers that do not affect the image that others formed about them. On the item of the source of success in life, most respondents chose the option "the ability to 'handle'", which largely justifies that they have not indicated a role model to reflect this option of theirs.

4.5 *The importance of the types of success in life*

The hierarchy of the types of success in life, in the view of the respondents, is: 1. success in one's personal life; 2. professional success; 3. financial success (Fig. no.14). By relating this hierarchy with the respondents' option of "ability to 'manage'" as a source of success in life raises questions concerning the indication of success in one's personal life as being the most important to the individual. Respondents felt that this hierarchy would show their attachment to moral values and would suggest rejecting the concern of earning money by any means, strengthening the positive image of the company served.
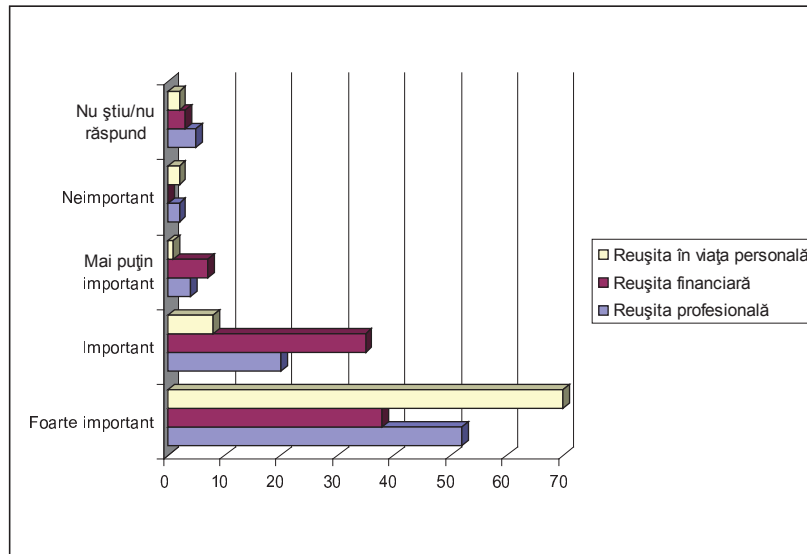
Fig. no.14

4.6 *Factors that ensure success in life*

Analyzing the responses of subjects to the "very important" issue of ranking the factors which ensure success in life, the situation is as follows: 38% chose one's own effort, 34% chose the ability to "manage", 17% indicated opportunities (chance, luck), 8% preferred their parents' social status and 3% have opted for the intervention of other people (Fig. no. 15).
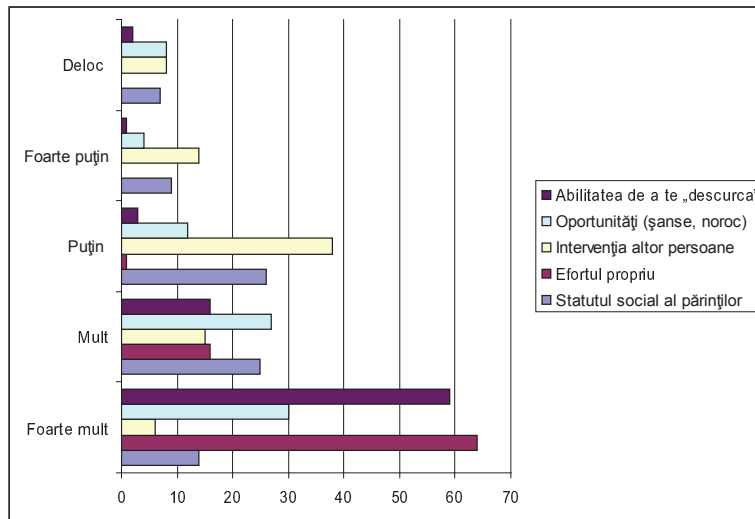
Fig. no.15

4.7 *Factors influencing the growth opportunities for study / work in the European Union*

In terms of increasing one's opportunities for study/work in the EU, young people especially indicated: accomplishment by one's own effort (31%); quality work (18%); respect for the given word (17%); teamwork – team spirit (14%) as shown in Fig. no.16. The factors which were considered the least important were: acceptance of job changes (2%); accepting a job in another city (1%), indicating that, in the respondents' opinion, what matters is the emphasis put on both personal qualities and good quality work. Instead they seek stability and are less willing to change jobs. This situation poses questions concerning their preparation for the European labor mobility.
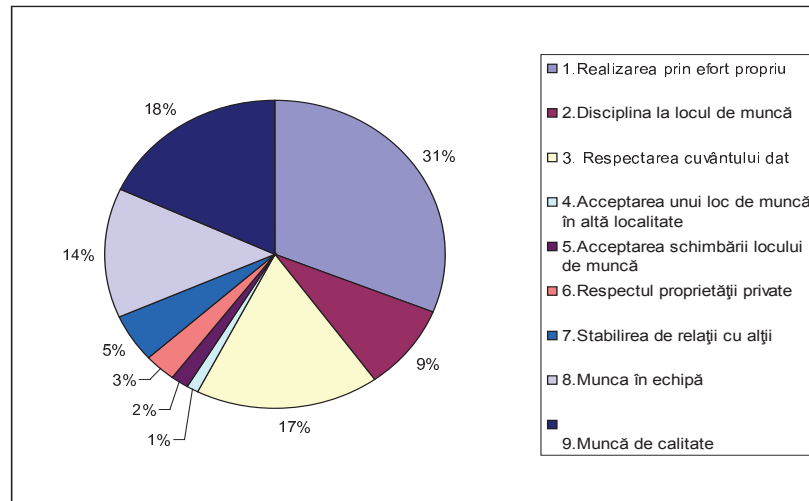
Fig. no.16

4.8 *The importance of different forms of tolerance*

From the analysis of the data gathered, we realize that the subjects' responses polarize upon the "very important" and "important" options: religious tolerance, ethnic tolerance, gender tolerance and racial tolerance, while the majority of respondents consider national tolerance and cultural tolerance as "important". In the case of political tolerance we notice the interesting "important" - "less important" opposition in equal percentages. Regarding tolerance of alternative sexual orientations, the subjects' responses were divided equally among the five options (very important, important, less important, unimportant and I do not know/ I do not answer), so that 15% of them opted for the option "I do not know/ I do not answer". This form of tolerance divides the group of respondents, indicating that they do not have or do not wish to take a clear position, which is a signal that tolerance is a delicate issue which is not fully resolved in the public perception of the individual.

4.9 *The importance of the types of biases in the social representations of individuals*

After analyzing the influence of prejudice on social representations, one can conclude that, on most forms of tolerance, the subjects indicated the answers that they thought were expected. For example, national tolerance is considered "important", while prejudices of nationality matter "much" and "very much". Therefore, those who considered a certain form of tolerance as "very important" should have indicated "not

at all" in the case of the influence of the prejudices, an issue which was not revealed by the subjects' responses. In this case we were able to once more distinguish between the declarative and practical-applicative levels, because, by focusing on prejudice, the participants to the research neglected the desirable response given previously.

Conclusions

The responses given to the questionnaire six years ago should indicate a change in the social behavior and in the representations of the youth after the EU accession. It was found that the same difference occurs, not at all insignificant, between socially acceptable answers to the questions and the answers that truly reflect their way of thinking and acting.

This raises a set of problems reported in the specialty literature (Iluţ, 2004; Gavriliuc, 2006; Neacşu, 2010; Hatos, 2011; Login, 2012) and which were identified in our research. It is mainly about:

•the need to pursue within the educational practice not only the acquisition of values and social norms but also how they are reflected in daily attitudes and behaviors;

•the consideration of the multiple influences of the socio-economic context, the family's financial status, age, interests and personal aspirations, the level of the "emotional competence" and "social intelligence" of the individual, as well as the ways in which society promotes certain values and social patterns;

•understanding the causes underlying the distinction between the values of superficial affirmation and the values of authentic affirmation, at the same time with the increase of the importance of educational activities conducted in schools with a focus on: clarifying values, the consequences of practicing certain values, the importance of the individual significance of social values, rational behavior in relation to others , acceptance of ethnic, opinion or cultural differences;

•understanding the fact that the values transmitted through social mechanisms refer to the means of action considered desirable, their role consisting in guiding human action in setting objectives and goals to be achieved, strategies, methods and ways of individual and collective action; hence, the acceptance of a gap between the interests, attitudes and individual behaviors in relation to the system of values and norms promoted by the society;

•developing systems for continuous training of teachers on the social significance of values and how they should be treated and promoted in daily behavior, the importance of understanding the individual and group specificities of the youth, identifying the normative significance of different social values, the relation between personal values, the system of preference and the hierarchies that are established between these values depending on contexts and individual social practices.

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APENDIX 1

THE YOUTH AND CIVICS - DEMOGRAPHIC VALUES

A1.Arrange the following democratic values according to how important they are to you: *(mark in the table the corresponding number from 1=the most important to 6, in descending order)*

Code	Answer option	Order
A1.1	Social participation	
A1.2	Human solidarity	
A1.3	Assuming responsibility	
A1.4	Care for others	
A1.5	Tolerance	
A1.6	Freedom of speech	

A2. Where have you discussed the democratic values enumerated above?
(only one answer, by circling the code)

      1. home   3.at the university   5.others

      2. at school   4.in my group of friends

A3. How important are the following social values to you? *(circle the code which corresponds to each option chosen)*

Code	Answer option	Very important	Important	Less important	Unimportant	I do not know/answer
A3.1	Equality of chances	1	2	3	4	9
A3.2	Equal work, equal pay	1	2	3	4	9
A3.3	Sexual un-discrimination	1	2	3	4	9
A3.4	Ethnical un-discrimination	1	2	3	4	9
A3.5	Equality before the law	1	2	3	4	9
A3.6	Promotion according to personal merits	1	2	3	4	9

A4. Which person is a model of success in life in your opinion? *(only one option)*

      1. I don't have a mode.   3. I don't know/answer

      2. His/her name is:............................

A5. Which is, according to you, the importance of these types of success?
(circle the code which corresponds to each option chosen)

Code	Answer option	Very important	Important	Less important	Unimportant	I do not know/answer
A5.1	Professional success	1	2	3	4	9
A5.2	Financial success	1	2	3	4	9
A5.3	Personal success	1	2	3	4	9

A6. Your success in life depends on: *(circle the code which corresponds to each option chosen)*

Code	Answer option	Very much	Much	A little	Very little	Not at all
A6.1	Your parents' social status	1	2	3	4	5
A6.2	Personal effort	1	2	3	4	5
A6.3	Other people's intervention	1	2	3	4	5
A6.4	Opportunities (chance, luck)	1	2	3	4	5
A6.5	The ability to „manage"	1	2	3	4	5

A7. The increase of your chances of studying/working in the European Union depends upon: *(pick three options from the list below by circling the code)*

1. Accomplishment through personal effort
2. Discipline at the work place
3. Respecting one's word
4. Accepting a workplace in another town

5. Accepting to change your workplace
6. Respecting personal privacy
7. Establishing relationships with others
8. Team work
9. Good quality work

A8. Which is, in your opinion, the importance of the following forms of tolerance? *(circle the corresponding code for each option chosen)*

Code	Answer option	Very important	Important	Less important	Unimportant	I do not know/answer
C1.1	National tolerance	1	2	3	4	9
C1.2	Ethnical tolerance	1	2	3	4	9
C1.3	Religious tolerance	1	2	3	4	9
C1.4	Cultural tolerance	1	2	3	4	9
C1.5	Political tolerance	1	2	3	4	9
C1.6	Gender tolerance	1	2	3	4	9
C1.7	Tolerance for alternative sexual orientations	1	2	3	4	9
C1.8	Racial tolerance	1	2	3	4	9

A9. How much do these types of prejudices matter to you? *(circle the corresponding code for each option chosen)*

Code	Answer option	Very much	Much	A little	Very little	Not at all
C2.1	Prejudices connected to nationality	1	2	3	4	5
C2.2	Prejudices against old people	1	2	3	4	5
C2.3	Gender prejudices	1	2	3	4	5
C2.4	Prejudices against alternative sexual orientations	1	2	3	4	5
C2.5	Racial prejudices	1	2	3	4	5

PERSONAL DATA

(the questionnaire is anonymous; the data will be used for scientific purposes; circle the answer option and fill in where data is required)

Q28. Sex:

1.masculine   2.feminine

Q.29 Age......... years

Q32. The profile of your high school

....

Q33. The specialty that you enrolled for in your high school
....

Q37.Nationality:

1. Romanian   3. German

2. Hungarian   4. others/which

Q39. Date of the interview........................... **Name of the respondent...........................**
Q40. Town...   **Phone..**
Q41. County...
Q50. Operator code....................................