

OUTLINE OF THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS RELATED TO THE EMPLOYMENT OF HUMANITIES GRADUATES IN THE LABOR MARKET IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Abstract:

The submitted article deals with the topic of possibilities and limits of employment of humanities graduates in the labor market in the Czech Republic. It is a very broad topic, which would greatly exceed the scope of a professional article and for this reason the authors of the article decided to simply outline the possibilities and limits. In the Czech Republic, the humanities have long enjoyed great popularity. However, in a rapidly changing world and with the rise of modern technologies and engineering, the employment of humanities graduates in the labor market seems uncertain at first sight. The authors of this article try to point out that even nowadays there is a great demand for humanities graduates. It is clear from research that the key role is played not only by the graduate's education and field of specialization, but above all by the individual's own abilities and personal prerequisites for a particular profession. The selection of an appropriate career guidance service, which is also discussed to a lesser extent in the present article, may also be an important aspect for a graduate when choosing a career.

Keywords: graduate, humanities, labor market, education, universities, career counseling.

Introduction

The humanities have long been one of the most popular fields of study for high school graduates in the Czech Republic. Interest in studying the humanities can generally be considered a very positive phenomenon. Thus, even in the current challenging times, when young people are exposed to various social pressures (among which we can include, for example, a strong emphasis on performance, overwhelmed by IT technologies, widespread consumerism, global political problems, ecological or ethical issues arising from demanding personal lives and other negative social phenomena) that have a great impact on the human psyche, the interest in the humanities among high school graduates represents a hope that the ideal of humanity can be maintained and expanded.

On the other hand, however, the question of the employability of humanities graduates on the labor market has remained open for a long time. The list of current higher education disciplines in the humanities is very large and varied. There are wide variations in the employability of humanities graduates in the labor market. The present text aims to briefly outline the possibilities and also the limits of whether it is promising for a high school graduate to study the humanities, specifically using the example of a degree programme in historical studies and related fields, and to point out the possible high level of risk involved in a narrow vocational focus in relation to the labor market. However, it should be stressed that it is very difficult to determine more precisely whether or not graduating in specific humanities disciplines is promising in that we lack more detailed data on the employability of graduates in the work environment for specific disciplines. However, in contrast to the past, a changing society also offers new opportunities for graduates in the context of general progress and new technologies.

Perspective and desirability of humanities

There has long been a great interest in the study of the humanities in the Czech Republic. The decisions of high school graduates to study the humanities are based on various motives. In a basic perspective, the final decision of graduates may be influenced by the difficulty (and sometimes even the fear of success) of pursuing technical and natural sciences. Another aspect is usually (the author of the article draws on his personal experience of several years as a secondary school teacher) a sincere interest in social events and a vision of the possibility of self-fulfillment in a particular humanities field. Last but not least, the possibility of

employment in the chosen field of study on the labor market is also an important aspect in the decision-making process. For instance, the data published by the University of Ostrava in 2019 in cooperation with the STEM/MARK agency are interesting. The STEM/MARK agency conducted a survey on the employment of graduates in the humanities and social sciences, working with data from three philosophy faculties - the University of Hradec Králové, the University of Ostrava and the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem. The research was carried out as part of the project „Joint approach of philosophical faculties in the field of increasing the quality and prestige of humanities and social sciences“. The sociological survey showed that school graduates are in demand on the labor market and, for example, in the education and service sectors, employers consider them irreplaceable. The sociological survey was conducted from 9 July to 7 August 2019 and involved more than 1,000 companies with five or more employees. The survey results yielded positive conclusions. A relatively high number of employers (71%) were satisfied with the qualifications that humanities and social science graduates come out of school with. It was also interesting to find that just under a third of companies made their selection decisions based on the prestige of the school.

According to the survey, large companies from the field of education and public administration are most interested in graduates of humanities and social sciences. However, there are differences in employment between regions. There is above-average interest in these graduates in Prague and the Ústí nad Labem region. In the Moravian-Silesian Region, the interest is mainly in graduates with language skills and the demand of companies is rather average. There is below-average demand for graduates in the humanities and social sciences in the Central Bohemia, Pilsen and Zlín regions.¹ This research is also reflected and expanded by the renowned magazine of Czech universities „Universitas“², which is a national web portal and electronic journal on science, education, research and higher education and it is a joint project of Czech public universities.³ This is only a representative example, but it is supported by real data and can be used as a probe within the research topic from a societal perspective.

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- 1 Ostravská univerzita (2019). *Unikátní průzkum potvrdil nezastupitelnou roli absolventů humanitních a společenskovedních oborů na trhu práce*. <https://www.osu.cz/24115/nezastupitelna-role-absolventu-humanitnich-a-spolecenskovednich-oboru-na-trhu-prace/>
 - 2 Keményová, Zuzana (2021). Absolventi humanitních oborů nekončí v Mekáči, upozorňuje platforma tří českých univerzit. *Universitas*. <https://www.universitas.cz/tema/6490-absolventi-humanitnich-oboru-nekonci-v-mekaci-upozorňuje-platforma-tri-ceskych-univerzit>
 - 3 There were 14 co-founding universities in 2017 and nine more from the Czech Republic joined the project by 2021.

The employer satisfaction result reflects only satisfaction with the qualifications of graduates in the survey. However, the starting position of graduates also needs to be monitored. On the one hand there is a certain amount of required knowledge, but on the other hand there is also the ability of young graduates to impress employers in the whole recruitment process. The basic problems that arise from the age of the graduates include a limited ability to present themselves, shyness and in some cases insincerity and insecurity, which is related to the fact that some lack the composure of their own thoughts, which in turn give rise to nervousness. In other cases, it may be excessive salary demands that are out of proportion to qualifications and experience, and exaggerated ambitions.⁴

Decision-making process

The choice between the humanities and the science is one of the key moments in a young person's life. The decision is not an easy one to take. The family, the school, the environment in which the student grows up and, last but not least, the personality and aptitudes of each person have a great influence on their final decision. At a young age, however, the choice is often very difficult. Career guidance can play a very crucial role in the final decision. Career guidance (in the context of the topic) is currently widespread, particularly in the context of educational guidance in primary and secondary schools, where guidance counselors are dedicated to this task. Career counseling is carried out by psychologists in educational and psychological counseling centers. The main form of counseling in this case is individual work with pupils who are seen as „generalists“ or those who are hesitant to make a decision. A psychological examination can also help in decision-making. In the Czech Republic, but also in the Slovak Republic for example, specialized activities are being developed within the Ministry of labor and Social Affairs in the field of career counseling, with an information and counseling center in each office. The aim of the specialized workplace is to enable clients, including primary and secondary school pupils, to use the maximum amount of information for their final decision. In addition, recruitment agencies are also available to all interested parties. In the Czech Republic, all career counseling activities (for primary and secondary school pupils) are legislatively anchored in particular by Decree 72/2005 Coll., paragraph 2, on the provision of counseling services in schools and (educational) counseling centers and by the Decision of the Council of the European Union of July 2005 on guidelines for the employment policies of the member states (2005/600/EC).⁵ In specific cases, for

4 Svobodová, Dagmar (2015). *Profesní poradenství*. Praha: Grada, p. 23.

5 Vendel, Štefan (2008). *Kariérní poradenství*. Praha: Grada, pp. 15-16.

example, for pupils with SEN (special educational needs) or PAS (autism spectrum disorder), the commonly available handbook „Inclusion and Career Guidance“, which is intended for teachers and teaching assistants, can be used, but in more complex cases it can also be used by counseling centers. The handbook provides guidance on how to proceed if a pupil has not chosen a suitable school or career. Directly for the school environment, professionals can use the findings from another of Vosmik's publications, „Group counseling Course in Schools“, which focuses on group counseling with the aim of familiarizing themselves with the individual modules (e.g. My Self-Acceptance, Activation and Motivation, Self in Relationships-Coping with Obstacles, Conflicts, etc., The World of Work, Choice, Job Search, etc.).

The choice of suitable jobs for graduates in the context of the use of career counseling nowadays also opens up new, until not so long ago, not quite traditional approaches. For example, Senichev's article, with reference to the work of Target Connect⁶ (providers of career services for university students) the possibility of using virtual reality in career services and counseling. This can include virtual internships, realistic simulations of specific workplaces/360 degree experiences, virtual career fairs or the provision of career consultations using virtual reality.⁷

Today, humanities graduates have significantly more opportunities than in the past to effectively enter the labor market. Interestingly, however, the number of graduates from higher education is generally declining. In 2022, 305 000 people were studying at universities in the Czech Republic. There has been a long-term increase in the representation of foreigners, who last year already accounted for 18% of all university students. While the number of students has been slightly increasing since 2019, the number of graduates continues to decrease. The number of first-time students enrolled in 2022 also declined. In recent years, the number of students majoring in science, ICT, education and health has been growing fastest. However, the interest in studying technical and social sciences is declining. Last year, for the first time, technical subjects recorded a slightly lower number of students than both education and health majors.⁸

6 Target, Connect (2019). *Five ways virtual reality can enhance a careers service's options*. <https://targetconnect.net/resources/five-ways-virtual-reality-can-enhance-careers-service%E2%80%99s-options>.

7 Senichev, Valery (2021). Možnosti využití virtuální reality ve vzdělávání a kariérovém poradenství. *Aplikovaná psychologie/Applied Psychology* 6(1), 698-699.

8 Český statistický úřad (2023). *Od roku 2012 klesá počet absolventů vysokých škol* <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/od-roku-2012-klesa-pocet-absolventu-vysokych-skol>

Overview of the employment of humanities graduates in selected examples in the Czech Republic

There is currently a large body of research that is primarily concerned with the employability of humanities graduates, and therefore only selected representative examples are included in the following paragraphs to provide at least a basic outline of the current state of play. As an example, we can cite one of the major surveys „Graduate 2018“⁹. The final report of the research conducted by the CSVS was published in 2019.¹⁰ Generally speaking, fresh graduate status is rarely a factor that significantly contributes to getting a qualified job. For almost all employers, the survey indicated that the real skills and abilities that enable a person to perform his or her job independently were essential. The survey also revealed that...

„Almost all PhD graduates and their employers are convinced that a relevant or at least related discipline is needed for the position. The situation is very similar among master's graduates, except that there are already units of percentages of those who in their opinion are working completely outside their major (around 9%). However, working outside their field or without the necessary specialization is already more common among bachelor's graduates and their employers - around 24% of bachelor's graduates and 9% of their employers would consider a completely different field to be the most suitable. Still, in about two-thirds of cases, they agree that the most suitable field for the position is exclusively the graduate's degree or at least a related field.“¹¹

The „Employment structure of the City of Prague“ for 2022 shows that Prague has a significantly higher share of workers in the M - Professional, scientific and

9 The Graduate 2018 research project was implemented by CSVŠ in cooperation with the Centre for Educational Policy of the Faculty of Education of Charles University and with the cooperation of participating universities in the Czech Republic. The investigation had two parts: a) description and analysis of the quality of the studies completed in relation to the transition and employment in the labour market and description of the career paths of university graduates; b) description and analysis of the quality of graduates' participation in the labour market and their short- and long-term employability with regard to the education received from the perspective of employers. The main target group was graduates of bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programmes of higher education institutions who obtained a university diploma in the period from 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2017, and at the same time did not pursue further studies at a higher education institution in 2018, nor were they studying at a higher education institution in any form of study at the time of the survey. The second target group included employers of university graduates from the first target group. Cf. <https://www.csvs.cz/ukoncene-projekty/absolvent-2018/>

10 CSVŠ = Centrum pro studium vysokého školství.

11 Zelenka, Martin et al. (2019). *Souhrnná zpráva o šetření Absolvent 2018*. Praha: CSVŠ, pp. 183-184.

technical activities (12.3%) and J - Information and communication activities (10.3%) sectors compared to the Czech Republic as a whole, where 5.1% of the economically active work in the M sector and 3.8% in the J sector. The C - Manufacturing industry is significantly less represented in the capital city (8.0% compared to 25.9% in the Czech Republic).

The problem of specialization

The previous paragraphs outline the fact that graduates of humanities disciplines currently have relatively good prospects for employment in the labor market, because employers often consider the graduate's real skills and abilities in practice to be decisive. However, specialized fields or fields where the number of jobs for a given specialization is limited can be a problem. As an example, consider the field of History and related fields of the historical sciences. In the case of bachelor's studies, we can often see on university websites formulations stating that a bachelor's graduate is ready to apply the knowledge and experience gained in practice in museum and gallery collections, archives, libraries, editorial offices, media or publishing houses, as a member of professional teams focused on culture and history in private and state institutions, etc. A certain problem arises, however, in the fact that nowadays high demands are placed on specialization and even subfields for which general standards of field knowledge used to be sufficient now require specialization. This is reflected in the range of university courses and specialized courses offered. In the case of doctoral graduates, the situation is even more complex in that they are usually highly specialized professionals who have a deep knowledge of the field but are often „overqualified“ for the Czech labor market and encounter a limited number of relevant job opportunities in their specialization. This is a long-term problem that needs to be addressed at a governmental level.

The University of Hradec Králové (UHK), for instance, offers an interesting alternative for Bachelor's studies from the point of view of the labor market, offering the opportunity to study „Digital Historical Science“. A suitable profile from secondary school studies is a graduate with an interest in ICT, history and the present, who is particularly familiar with Czech history and its records (buildings, objects, texts, pictorial sources, etc.). The Faculty of Arts at the UHK offers an interesting offer to applicants. Graduates will learn to search, classify and analyze a wide range of sources (written, visual and physical), which they will be able to make digitally accessible to the professional and general public.

Graduates can work in the state administration or local government (e.g.

monument protection), in all types of cultural and educational institutions, in state-funded organizations, but also in private companies operating e.g. in the field of monument restoration or tourism. The skills of working as an ICT coordinator, IT administrator and communicator between the institution and external IT specialists can be interesting for the labor market, and as the FF UHK literally states *„its target sector is also, in a broader sense, the cultural and creative industries (CCIs), which form one of the pillars of Industry 4.0.“*¹²

Conclusion

The presented article has outlined the topic of employment and limits of humanities graduates in the labor market. It can be concluded that, in general, graduates of humanities have good prerequisites for the application of their knowledge and skills in practice. Obviously, the employment of a particular graduate is also determined by the specific region, but if he or she has the needed knowledge, skills and personality, he or she should not have any significant difficulty finding a job. If he or she cannot find a job, or if the job is not suitable for him or her, he or she can use, for example, career guidance services. However, there are limits in specialized fields and areas, where it is necessary to consider in advance the degree of employability in the Czech Republic or to be prepared for the possibility of a job abroad. This implies that the main problem lies in the supply of specialized university studies on the one hand and the real demand on the labor market on the other. Achieving a balanced situation should therefore be one of the key points for possible adjustment of the implementation of the higher education framework.

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