СТОПАНСКА АКАДЕМИЯ „Д. А. ЦЕНОВ“ – СВИЩОВ

СЪЮЗ НА УЧЕНИТЕ В БЪЛГАРИЯ – КЛОН СВИЩОВ

Международна научна конференция

ПРОБЛЕМИ И ПРЕДИЗВИКАТЕЛСТВА ПРЕД ИКОНОМИЧЕСКИТЕ НАУКА И ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ ПРЕЗ XXI ВЕК

Свищов, 22 ноември 2024 г.

Сборник с доклади

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HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE AGE OF DIGITALIZATION
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GENERATION Z IN POLAND AND BULGARIA: CORE VALUES AND LIFE PRIORITIES

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Abstract: *This article examines the values and life priorities of Generation Z in Poland and Bulgaria, highlighting differences arising from the socio-economic and cultural conditions of each country. The aim of the paper is to compare the expectations and approaches of young Poles and Bulgarians toward work, education, and self-realization. Findings indicate that Polish youth place greater emphasis on personal development, pursuing passions, and achieving dreams, while young Bulgarians focus more on job stability and career advancement. These differences reflect local market conditions and cultural traditions.*

Key words*: Generation Z, life priorities, professional values, professional stability, self-fulfilment.*
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1. Introduction

Each generation, both those that are just starting their adventure with the job market and those that are already actively involved in it, is characterized by specific values and life priorities that shape their approach to self-fulfilment, professional choices and social involvement. These values reflect changing socio-economic, environmental, political and legal, and even cultural conditions that are the result of global transformation processes. However, it should be noted that some principles have a universal, timeless character, valued in practice by all generations. On the other hand, specific, unique values appear, valued by a specific age group, resulting from experiences shaped by the historical period in which they grew up.

Of all the generations that constitute the labour pool, Generation Z is particularly interesting, as it is currently entering adulthood. It should be noted that its expectations and values differ significantly from previous generations, mainly due to growing up in a digital reality and experiences related to the dynamic development of technology, virtual communication and artificial intelligence. This generation, often referred to as "digital" or "instant online generation", has developed a unique approach to work, life and interpersonal

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relationships, which largely depends on access to social media and the reality created by the Internet.

However, despite common features resulting from growing up in a global, digital environment, Generation Z is diverse in terms of country of residence. Socioeconomic conditions, political situation and local cultural events influence the values and attitudes of young people, shaping their approach to life and career. In Poland and Bulgaria, these differences are particularly visible due to the different historical paths and socio-economic transformations that have taken place in both countries in recent decades. Although both countries were subject to similar transformation processes after the fall of the Eastern Bloc, local conditions and the pace of change varied, influencing the everyday experiences and priorities of the young generation.

Based on the above assumption, the aim of the study was to identify and compare the values and life priorities of Generation Z in Poland and Bulgaria. This comparison should help to better understand how local social, economic and cultural conditions affect their expectations and approach to work, education and self-fulfilment. This type of analysis allows to present both common generational features resulting from global technological influences, as well as differences shaped by country-specific conditions.

2. Generation Z – a theoretical approach

Generation Z, i.e. people born between the years 1995 and 2012, stands out from previous generations with a unique set of values and life priorities that result from the unique socio-technological context of their upbringing (Messyasz, 2021). The generation in question has largely developed in a digital reality, where technologies have become an inseparable element of everyday life (Kulka, Nowacka, 2019). Growing up in the age of smartphones, artificial intelligence and social media has had a significant impact on their attitudes and expectations, both in their personal and professional lives (Lanier, 2017).

The key values of Generation Z are dominated by autonomy and personal freedom, as well as the pursuit of work-life balance. For this group, work is a way to pursue passions and personal goals (Roach, Goodwin, Nelson, 2019). Representatives of Generation Z emphasize that their lives cannot be limited to work, they want to maintain space for developing their interests and building family relationships (Chomątowska, Janiak-Rejno, Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, 2021).

Generation Z, thanks to their experiences with social media, is also distinguished by openness and freedom in expressing opinions (Dolot, 2018). They definitely prefer work environments based on transparency and justice, where hierarchy is not a barrier to communication (Racolta-Paina, Irini, 2021). For Generation Z, these values are the foundation of their sense of self-worth and translate into high assertiveness and the expectation of individual treatment in the workplace (Workforce Institute, 2019).

In the context of environmental and pro-social values, Generation Z demonstrates high ecological awareness. They often seek employment in organizations that support sustainable development. For many representatives of this generation, the environmental ethics and acceptance of cultural, racial, and gender diversity are key in the process of choosing an employer (Kapil, Roy, 2014). This attitude is not only based on moral beliefs, but also on the desire to work in organizations with an open and friendly ambience (Bharat & Rajendra, 2018).

Despite their digital proficiency, Generation Z also values authentic interpersonal interactions, although they often have difficulty creating deep interpersonal relationships. Despite being constantly "online," their need for face-to-face contact and emotional support suggests that interpersonal connections remain an important part of their professional lives (Csiszárik-Kocsír, Garia-Fodor, 2018).

In summary, Generation Z is a group that clearly differs from previous generations. They are characterized by openness to change, high adaptability to new technologies, the need for self-fulfilment and clear boundaries between work and private life.

3. Methodology, sample and results

The empirical study on the values and life priorities of Generation Z was conducted at the turn of the years 2023/2024. It was based on a survey consisting of two parts. The first one is a personal profile, the second one contains fundamental issues concerning aspects such as priorities in life, factors shaping the approach to work, expectations, values, etc. The study involved representatives of Generation Z, with 120 respondents in Bulgaria and 573 respondents in Poland. It should be noted that the respondents represented a varied level of professional experience, with the dominant group being people with little work experience. This group was dominated by people employed under flexible forms of work, such as contracts for services, seasonal work or jobs performed without formal contracts. The remaining respondents, slightly smaller in number, declared greater professional experience or no previous professional activity.

Most of the respondents gained the experience while working for several different employers, some of them had changed jobs many times. Among the respondents, one can also see diverse attitudes towards employment, where a significant group declared that their competences were in line with the requirements of their current position, often in line with their education. One of the key research issues was also plans regarding career path. Most of the respondents had specific career plans, which they consistently pursued. It is also worth paying attention to the group that was unable to clearly define their career plans, which suggests the need for further support and advice in this area. The detailed characteristics of the research samples are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.Characteristics of the study sample

No.	Characteristic	Bulgaria N-120		Poland N-576	
		No. of indications	Share (in %)	No. of indications	Share (in %)
Defined career plans					
1.	Definitely yes	52	43,3	64	11,1
2.	Rather yes	43	35,8	258	44,8
3.	I don't know	10	8,3	76	13,2
4.	Rather no	10	8,3	137	23,8
5.	Definitely no	5	4,2	41	7,1
Work experience[1]					
1.	none	6	5	88	15,3
2.	1-2 years	49	40,8	312	54,2
3.	3-5 years	39	32,5	138	22,6
4.	6-10 years	14	11,7	28	4,9
5.	over 10 years	12	10	10	1,7
Job change[1]					
1.	none	37	30,8	157	27,3
2.	1-2	43	35,8	249	43,2
3.	3-5	19	15,8	150	26,0
4.	6-10	8	6,7	17	3,0
5.	over 10 times	13	10,8	3	0,5
Competences					
1.	Consistent with the work performed	69	57,5	286	49,7
2.	Inconsistent with the work performed	17	14,2	122	21,2
3.	Difficult to determine	34	28,3	168	29,1
Subjective attitude to work					
1.	Simulating and pretending work	4	3,3	4	0,7
2.	Only performing assigned duties (with the least possible involvement)	18	15	38	6,6
3.	Doing job without commitment (I work as much as I have to)	20	16,7	155	27,0
4.	I am committed - I go beyond assigned duties	34	28,3	237	41,1
5.	I show initiative, I look for new ideas, ways, opportunities for development	44	36,7	142	24,6

[1] *included seasonal work, contract work, holiday work, etc.*

Source: own study.

Based on the analysis of the data included in the table, it is possible to identify the most important differences and similarities between Generation Z representatives in Poland and Bulgaria in terms of career plans, professional

experience, frequency of job changes, compatibility of competences with performed tasks and subjective attitude to work.

The research indicates significant differences in the career plans of respondents from Bulgaria and Poland. In Bulgaria, a larger part of the respondents have specific career goals, while in Poland the openness to professional changes dominates, with less clear plans. These differences may result from different labour markets and cultural conditions. In Bulgaria, with a strong tradition of professional stability, the labour market favours a long-term planning. In Poland, on the other hand, due to the dynamic economic changes, flexibility is preferred which results in less specific career plans.

The analysis of professional experience indicates that in Poland, a group of employees with shorter experience (1-2 years) dominates, while in Bulgaria there is a higher number of people with longer experience. This may be due to the greater popularity of flexible forms of employment and professional mobility in Poland, while in Bulgaria the traditional approach to professional stability prevails, which favours longer relationships with the employer.

In terms of the frequency of job changes, both countries are characterized by moderate turnover, although in Bulgaria changes of more than ten times are more common, which may be the effect of local labour market constraints. In Poland, on the other hand, frequent changes of positions may result from the search for better financial conditions and professional development, which responds to the increasing flexibility and variability of the labour market.

The compatibility of competences with the work performed is higher in Bulgaria than in Poland, where a higher percentage of respondents indicate a lack of such compatibility. This may be the result of the rapid development of the Polish economy and the growing demand for specialists, which does not always allow for an exact match of qualifications to the duties performed.

Differences also occur in the subjective approach to work. In Bulgaria, the group of people who present initiative and seek new solutions predominates, which may result from the need to develop competences independently in limited professional conditions. In Poland, on the other hand, where the structure of work is more formalized, a higher percentage of employees perform their duties without additional involvement, which may be the result of precisely defined scopes of duties and a smaller need to go beyond the established framework.

The main issue that this study attempted to present is the identification of priorities and values that characterize representatives of Generation Z in Poland and Bulgaria. Respondents from the set of 12 priorities had the opportunity to indicate three that, in their opinion, best characterized their approach to life. The distribution of responses is presented in Chart 1.

The analysis of the graph allows us to conclude that there are both similarities and differences between Generation Z representatives. Particular similarities can be observed on three levels: family, health and self-development.

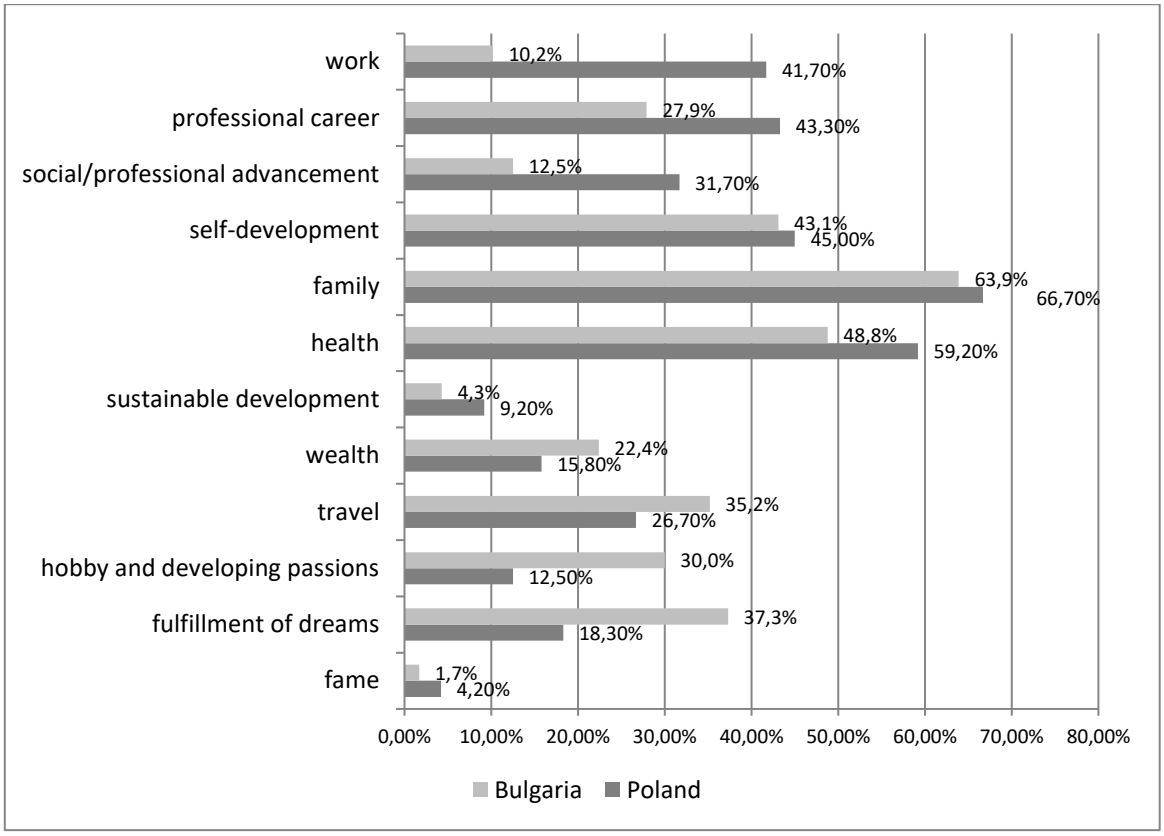


Chart 1. Priorities in the lives of Polish and Bulgarian representatives of Generation Z

Source: own study

The high position of family in the hierarchy of Generation Z values in Poland and Bulgaria results from cultural traditions and the expectations of young people regarding emotional and material support. Despite the influence of globalization, the family remains the foundation of social stability and belonging. In the face of economic uncertainty, young people rely on financial support from their families, which often includes living with their parents or helping with education. Family also supports personal and professional development, acting as a mentor and helping to cope with professional challenges in the face of dynamic changes in the labour market.

The second priority shared by both nations is health, which can be explained by the growing global health awareness resulting from, among other things, access to medical information and the social role of a healthy lifestyle.

The last priority with high agreement is self-development, which means that both Poles and Bulgarians place a strong emphasis on personal and intellectual development. It results from the need to adapt to the dynamically changing labour market and the challenges of the modern world. In addition, self-development becomes for them not only a tool for improving qualifications but also a way to build a self-confidence and independence.

On the other hand, the interesting differences can be noticed between the priorities of Polish and Bulgarian representatives of Generation Z. They are

particularly visible in the categories concerning the approach to work, socio-professional advancement and hobbies and development of passions. The essence of these priorities for representatives of the analyzed countries is related to the different socio-economic situation and cultural differences that shape their aspirations and perception of life success.

Work is a priority for 41.7% of young Bulgarians, compared to 10.2% in Poland. Bulgarians more often treat work as the foundation of financial security, which may result from lower economic stability and more difficult employment conditions. A less predictable labour market and limited development opportunities in Bulgaria strengthen the importance of work as a source of stability. In Poland, on the other hand, higher economic stability and lower unemployment make young people treat work less of a priority, perceiving it as one of the elements of life, not the main determinant of identity.

The pursuit of professional and social advancement is a priority for 31.7% of young Bulgarians, while in Poland it is important for only 12.5%. The stronger commitment to advancement in Bulgaria may result from a greater need to improve the quality of life and gain prestige as a source of stability. Bulgarians may see advancement as the main path to improving the social status, while in Poland, thanks to wider educational and professional opportunities, the hierarchical advancement is less important.

Poles, on the other hand, place greater importance on hobbies and the development of personal passions. The higher level of interest in developing interests in Poland may be the result of the better financial situation of young people, which allows them to invest in personal development and the realization of their interests. Supported by greater economic opportunities, Poland seems to favour work-life balance, which encourages the pursuit of passions as an important aspect of self-fulfilment. In Bulgaria, where the labour market creates greater uncertainty, young people may focus more on meeting basic needs and professional stability, while the development of passions and hobbies remains in the marginal sphere.

In summary, these differences reflect the complex influences of socio-economic and cultural situations that shape the preferences and priorities of young Poles and Bulgarians. In Poland, greater economic stability favours the formation of values related to self-fulfilment, while in Bulgaria, professional and economic realities force a focus on practical aspects, such as work and career advancement.

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the values and life priorities of Generation Z in Poland and Bulgaria reveals that their attitudes are shaped by both the global technological factors and the local socio-economic conditions. Polish representatives of Generation Z place greater emphasis on self-development, pursuing passions, and work-life balance, which may result from higher economic stability and wider opportunities for self-fulfilment. In turn, young Bulgarians focus on professional

stability and advancement, which reflects their greater need for financial security in a less predictable labour market. However, both countries share a high value placed on family and health, which emphasizes the common need for emotional and material support. The study did not provide answers to all questions about the behaviours, priorities, and values of Generation Z. Further research is required on aspects such as professional attitudes, the role of social media in shaping the behaviours of the generation, or a broader comparison of Generation Z values in Central and Eastern European countries.

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