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**VALUES AND PROFESSIONAL ASPIRATIONS –
A CONDITION FOR SOCIAL MATURITY
IN THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD**

511.03 – SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

ABSTRACT

of the doctoral thesis in psychology

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I. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

Rationale and Scholarly Significance of the Research. The social maturity of young people in the process of transitioning to adulthood constitutes a field of significant scholarly inquiry, distinguished by its theoretical and empirical relevance and by its direct implications for educational and social policy frameworks. Situated within the broader context of the passage from formal education to labor market integration, and against the backdrop of an increasingly volatile socio-economic environment, this study seeks to elucidate the ways in which values and professional aspirations inform processes of social maturation. Furthermore, it aims to delineate the key factors that underpin the acquisition and consolidation of competencies deemed essential for effective participation in contemporary society.

Although the National Strategy “*Moldova 2030*”¹ seeks to enhance quality of life and harness the potential of every individual, empirical evidence indicates that a segment of young people remains insufficiently prepared to assume social roles, due to shortcomings in early formation and delays in professional integration. The level of social maturity among high school graduates falls short of the current demands of the labor market, revealing a persistent gap between the competencies acquired and those required for active social participation². Data from the National Bureau of Statistics³ further emphasize the intensification of the NEET phenomenon. In 2023, approximately 27.6% of young people aged 15 to 34 were neither in education, employment, nor training, with women accounting for the majority (around 63%). The primary causes identified—most notably family and childcare responsibilities (42.9%)—reflect a significant social vulnerability and a low level of active participation in socio-economic life. At the international level, empirical studies (Quintano *et al.*) corroborate the upward trend of the NEET phenomenon and underscore its association with heightened risks of long-term unemployment and social exclusion⁴.

In this context, professional values and aspirations play a central role in shaping the social maturity required for adapting to societal demands and assuming independent roles. Social maturity entails, fundamentally, the alignment of personal and interpersonal attitudes—articulated through values and aspirations—with the structures and dynamics of a complex society. Consequently, educational policies and interventions must address these dimensions in a systematic manner in order to support the effective transition of young people into adulthood.

Extent of Research on the Topic. The phenomenon of social maturity and the transition to adulthood has been extensively documented in the scholarly literature at both international and national levels, including within the context of the Republic of Moldova. A comprehensive review of the literature reveals sustained academic engagement with these themes, underscoring the multidimensionality and complexity of the processes under investigation.

In the Western academic sphere, J. J. Arnett’s pioneering research established the theoretical foundations of the concept of *emerging adulthood*, conceptualizing the transition to adulthood as a distinct developmental stage characterized by exploration, instability, and identity formation. Similarly, H. Blatterer and P. Bourdieu examined, from a sociological perspective, the ways in which social structures and cultural capital condition young people’s integration into society. Complementary to these approaches, the classical contributions of E. Fromm, E. Erikson, C. Rogers, A. Maslow, A. Adler, G. Allport, and H. Sullivan have consolidated the theoretical corpus on personality development, psychosocial maturity, and self-actualization.

¹ GUVERNUL REPUBLICII MOLDOVA. Strategia Națională de Dezvoltare „Moldova Europeană 2030”. Disponibil: <https://gov.md/ro/moldova2030>

² CRÎSMARU, M., GAGAUZ, O., BUCIUCEANU-VRABIE, M., *Incluziunea tinerilor aflați în afara sistemului de educație, formare și ocupație profesională (tineri NEET), studiu sociologic*. Chișinău: 2018, 102 p. ISBN 978-9975-89-085-4;

³ STATISTICA MOLDOVEI. *Tinerii NEET în Republica Moldova în trimestrul I 2023*. Disponibil: https://statistica.gov.md/index.php/ro/tinerii-neet-in-republica-moldova-in-trimestrul-i-2023-9430_60458.html

⁴ QUINTANO, C., MAZZOCCHI, P., ROCCA, A. *The determinants of Italian NEETs and the effects of the economic crisis*. In: *Genus*, 2018, 74(1), 5. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41118-018-0031-0>.

In the domain of value theory and motivational research, M. Rokeach and Shalom H. Schwartz elaborated foundational models for the operationalization of human values, while subsequent studies by E. Deci and R. Ryan, together with R. Kasser, Y. Kim, H. Lee, and G. Powell, deepened the understanding of the relationship between professional aspirations, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and social maturity. Similarly, J. Rojewski, W. Sewell, E. Hoppe, L. Gottfredson, J. Ashby, I. Schoon, A. Cabrera, La Nasa, W. Mau, and L. Bikos investigated the determinants shaping the development of professional aspirations, whereas L. M. Padilla-Walker, C. M. Barry, J. S. Carroll, S. D. Madsen, and L. J. Nelson elucidated the interrelation between identity formation, individual aspirations, and the transition to maturity.

In the Russian academic space, research has emphasized the dialectical relationship between the individual and the social context, offering a systemic approach to the study of maturity. B. G. Ananyev, L. I. Bozhovich, L. N. Kogan, I. S. Kon, G. M. Andreeva, L. I. Antsyferova, and E. G. Kameneva explored various dimensions of social development, adaptation, and integration into adult roles. Further studies by A. A. Rean, S. L. Bratsenko, M. R. Mironova, V. N. Myasishchev, R. V. Ovcharova, A. A. Derkach, A. A. Bodalev, and E. F. Zeer addressed psychosocial indicators of maturity, interpersonal relationships, and the development of social competences. Notably, A. N. Leontiev and D. A. Leontiev made seminal contributions through their theories on activity and the meaning of life, which have direct implications for understanding social maturity. Moreover, V. Sopov and L. Karpushina's development of the Morphological Test of Life Values remains a cornerstone instrument for the study of axiological orientations.

In Romania, research has focused on the educational and cultural dimensions of social maturity. Scholars such as M. Moraru, V. Pavelcu, C. Cucos, and P. Ilut have emphasized the formative role of values, cultural traditions, and educational processes in shaping identity and facilitating the integration of youth into social and professional life. Their contributions highlight the Romanian specificity, wherein education and culture serve as fundamental pillars in personality development and the formulation of value-based and professional decisions.

Within the Republic of Moldova, specialized research has predominantly examined the socioeconomic dimensions of the transition to maturity. Scholars such as M. Bulgaru, A. Oceretnii, L. Malcoci, T. Spataru, V. Mocanu, D. Cheianu-Andrei, O. Gagauz, M. Buciuceanu-Vrabie, and L. Pantea have analyzed the impact of migration, labor market dynamics, and the transition from education to employment, as well as broader social transformations affecting the maturation process. Complementary studies by N. Silistraru have underscored the formative function of education and moral values in personality development. The works of S. Rusnac, O. Paladi, D. Antoci, T. Spătaru, and E. Puzur have focused on psychosocial indicators of maturity, adapting international assessment instruments to the Moldovan socio-cultural context. In addition, authors such as I. Caunenco, M. Bulicanu, T. Cozma, and M. Sleahitchi have explored in depth the interplay between values and professional aspirations, illuminating how these constructs are reflected in the attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making processes of contemporary youth.

Despite these contributions, the phenomenon of social maturity remains insufficiently explored, particularly in terms of how personal values and professional aspirations collectively shape the development of social and professional competencies. This gap underscores the need for further research to deepen theoretical understanding and inform practical interventions in educational and social policy. Accordingly, the present study aims to investigate social maturity during the critical transition from formal education to professional life, focusing on the mechanisms through which values and professional aspirations influence the formation of young people's social and professional identity.

To address this issue, the research seeks to answer several key questions: To what extent do personal values and professional aspirations influence the social maturity of young people in the Republic of Moldova? Which psychological factors may hinder or facilitate the transition from formal education to professional life? How can educational and vocational training programs be adapted to foster the development of optimal social maturity?

Accordingly, **the central research problem** concerns the need for a comprehensive theoretical and empirical understanding of the relationship between personal values and professional aspirations and their influence on the social maturity of young people in the Republic of Moldova, particularly in the context of the transition to adulthood and professional integration. Such understanding is essential for informing educational, psychosocial, and policy interventions that effectively facilitate successful adaptation and integration into contemporary society.

The aim of the study is to investigate the social maturity of young people transitioning to adulthood by analyzing the interrelationship between life values and professional aspirations within the dynamics of the social maturation process, with the ultimate goal of developing educational and social intervention strategies that promote effective adaptation and integration into adult roles.

Research Objectives. The objectives of the study were formulated in accordance with its overarching aim: 1) to conduct a theoretical analysis of social maturity during the transition to adulthood, emphasizing the determinant role of values and professional aspirations; 2) to examine the content and characteristics of existential orientations, value systems, professional aspirations, stages of professional identity formation, and levels of psychological and social maturity, in relation to sociodemographic variables (gender, educational level, and age 18–22); 3) to develop and empirically test, at a correlational level across the entire sample, an integrative model of social maturity articulating existential orientations, value and career aspirations, psychological maturity, professional identity, and social maturity; 4) to design, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of a psychosocial intervention program aimed at fostering value development and consolidating professional identity among young people transitioning to adulthood, with the objective of enhancing social maturity through clarification of values, aspirations, and career orientations; 5) to formulate evidence-based recommendations for improving educational and career counseling programs, thereby facilitating an effective transition to adulthood through the development of social maturity, clarification of professional identity, and support for vocational decision-making.

General Research Hypothesis. It is hypothesized that the values and professional aspirations of young people, in interaction with age, gender, and educational level, correlates significantly social and psychological maturity as well as the clarity of professional identity. Furthermore, psychosocial interventions focused on value development and the consolidation of professional identity are expected to support the transition to adulthood and facilitate the attainment of social maturity.

Synthesis of the Research Methodology and Justification of Selected Methods. The research methodology was designed to ensure a comprehensive and systematic approach, integrating both theoretical and empirical dimensions in order to investigate social maturity among young people transitioning to adulthood. The general methodology aims to facilitate an in-depth exploration of social maturity, while the specific methodology focuses on the relationships between values, professional aspirations, and social maturity in youth.

From a theoretical perspective, the study involved a thorough analysis and synthesis of the specialized literature on social maturity, as well as on values and professional aspirations as its determining factors. Various theoretical approaches and conceptual models of social maturity during the transition to adulthood were examined, with particular emphasis on defining the role of values and professional aspirations in the development of social maturity. A hypothetico-deductive approach was employed to formulate hypotheses and interpret the results in light of the literature, thereby providing a robust scientific foundation for the study.

Empirically, the study was organized in multiple stages and employed validated assessment instruments, allowing for a detailed examination of the variables of interest. ***The Life Significance Orientation Test***, developed by Leontiev D.A., was used to evaluate participants' value systems and existential orientations, providing insights into the primary motivational directions during the transition period. ***The Morphological Test of Life Values***, created by Sopov V.F. and Karpushina L.V., was applied to identify value structures and individual priorities in the context of social maturity development. ***The method for diagnosing stages of professional identity***, proposed by Azbel A.A. and Gretsov A.G., was utilized to assess the level of professional identity formation and determine its influence on social maturity. The analysis of psychological and social maturity was conducted

using the following methods: *the Psychological Maturity Diagnostic Method*, developed by Ruzhenkov V.A. and his team, which allowed for the evaluation of young people's psychological development and its relationship with social maturity; and *the Social Maturity Assessment Scale* for graduates, elaborated by Kozhevnikova T.N., Shtumbris N.A., and Sundukova T.A., employed to measure the level of social integration and adaptation to adult roles.

Statistical Methods Employed. In the analysis of empirical data, a range of statistical methods was applied to test the hypotheses and validate the conclusions. The Student's *t*-test was employed to compare group means, thereby identifying statistically significant differences between characteristics. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), with Bonferroni correction, was used to adjust the significance threshold when comparing multiple groups simultaneously, thus reducing the risk of Type I errors and ensuring rigorous statistical interpretation. Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied to assess the relationships among the variables under study, with particular emphasis on the associations between values, professional aspirations, and social maturity. Non-parametric statistical tests, including the Mann–Whitney U test and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, were employed in the control experiment: the Mann–Whitney U test to compare two independent groups, and the Wilcoxon test to evaluate differences between paired measurements.

This integrated methodological approach, which combines theoretical analysis with empirical investigation, ensures a comprehensive assessment of social maturity and its determining factors, thereby facilitating the formulation of robust, evidence-based conclusions and recommendations.

Institutions and Experimental Subjects. The research objectives were pursued through a confirmatory experiment involving a sample of 437 participants, aged between 18 and 22 years, comprising young men and women at various stages of study in high schools (158 pupils), colleges (130 pupils), and universities (149 students). Data collection was carried out using the traditional “paper-and-pencil” method over the period 2020–2024. Participants completed the instruments individually, with the possibility of receiving assistance in cases of comprehension difficulties.

Within the formative research phase, the sample was divided into two groups: the Experimental Group (EG) and the Control Group (CG), each consisting of 15 senior students from colleges and high schools who had also participated in the confirmatory phase. The Experimental Group underwent the *Psychosocial Program for Value Development and Professional Identity Consolidation*, while the Control Group did not receive the intervention, thereby enabling the comparative evaluation of the program's effects on social maturity.

To validate the research methods employed, the experiment also included an additional group of 40 young participants, aged between 18 and 20 years, who were enrolled as students in a higher education institution.

II. CONTENT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

Chapter 1, entitled Theoretical Foundations of Social Maturity and the Criteria for Its Identification during the Transition to Adulthood, provides an integrated analysis of the concept of social maturity within the broader framework of the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Subchapter 1.1. The Transition to Adulthood: From Classical Periodizations to the Paradigm of Emerging Adulthood synthesizes the principal theoretical directions concerning the transition to adulthood, analyzed through psychological, social, and axiological lenses. The transition is conceptualized not as a mere chronological stage but as a complex process of identity reconstruction, assumption of social roles, and integration of personal values into a coherent life project.

The specialized literature delineates two major interpretative axes: classical models of periodization, which establish conceptual reference points for developmental stages, and contemporary paradigms, which define maturation as a desynchronized, reflective, and context-dependent process. Within the classical tradition, authors such as Erikson (E. H.)⁵, Havighurst (R. J.),

⁵ ERIKSON, E.H. *Childhood and Society*. London: Imago, 1951. 397 p., pp. 129-130. ISBN 978-0393-347-38-8

Hall (G. S.), and Rousseau (J.-J.)⁶ conceptualized maturation as the fulfillment of normative developmental tasks—including career choice, formation of intimate relationships, and assumption of social responsibility. Subsequently, Levinson (D. J.)⁷ and Allport (G. W.)⁸ expanded this framework to encompass the moral and value dimensions of maturation, while Russian and Romanian scholars, including Ananiev (B. G.)⁹, Șchiopu (C.), Verza (E.)¹⁰, and Albu (E.)¹¹, underscored its gradual and multidimensional nature.

Contemporary approaches, represented by Beck (U.)¹², Arnett (J. J.)¹³, Côté (J.)¹⁴, and Blatterer (H.)¹⁵, advance a more flexible and individualized interpretation of maturation, wherein reflective identity formation and the notion of emerging adulthood describe a trajectory shaped by structural factors such as social capital, family support, educational background, and economic conditions. In parallel, the systemic model proposed by Rasaili (T.) and Titus (C.)¹⁶ offers an integrative perspective in which maturity arises from the interaction among psychological, social, educational, and institutional dimensions.

Thus, the transition to adulthood emerges as a gradual, dynamic, and multidimensional process, shaped by both internal resources—identity, values, and self-regulation—and external factors—social support, educational opportunities, and socio-economic constraints. Social maturity, therefore, cannot be reduced to chronological thresholds; rather, it constitutes a contextualized and flexible construct, the degree of which depends on the alignment between internalized values and professional aspirations.

Subchapter 1.2. Maturity – An Essential Dimension in Human Development presents maturity as a central dimension of personal development, extending beyond the mere passage of chronological age. Erikson E.H.¹⁷, Levinson D.J.¹⁸, Arnett J.J.¹⁹, and Côté J.E.²⁰ emphasize that maturation involves the assumption of responsibility, autonomy, inner balance, and social integration, rather than the mere fulfillment of prescribed roles.

A distinction is drawn between *maturation* (a continuous process of psychological and social transformation) and *maturity* (the relatively stable outcome of this process, characterized by autonomy, responsibility, and identity coherence)²¹. In the Russian scholarly tradition, the opposition between *созревание* (maturation) and *зрелость* (maturity) underscores this process–outcome

⁶ Apud CREȚU, T. *Psihologia vârștelor*. Universitatea din București: Editura Credis. 2011. 380 p. ISBN 978-973-46-6008-7.

⁷ LEVINSON, D. J. *A Conception of Adult Development*. In: *American Psychologist*, 1986, 41(1), pp.3-13. ISSN 0003-066X, eISSN 1935-990X.

⁸ ALLPORT, G. W. *Structura și dezvoltarea personalității*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1981. 578 p. (Fără ISBN) RAJ, M. *Encyclopedia Dictionary of Psychology and Education*. New Delhi: Anmol Publications. 1996. 1840 p. ISBN-13: 978-935-41-0582-1

⁹ АНАНЬЕВ, Б. Г. *Человек как предмет познания*. СПб.: Питер, 2016. 288 p. ISBN 5-272-00315-2

¹⁰ ȘCHIOPU, U., VERZA, E. *Psihologia varștelor: Ciclurile vieții*. București: EDP, 1997, p. 206. ISBN 973-30-5798-3.

¹¹ ALBU, E. *Psihologia vârștelor*. Târgu-Mureș: Universitatea „Petru Maior”, 2007, p. 30-31. (Fără ISBN)

¹² BECK, U. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage. 1992. 272 p. ISBN 978-020-3107-92-8

¹³ ARNETT, J. J. *Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties*. In: *American Psychologist*, 2000, v. 55(5), pp. 469-480.

¹⁴ CÔTÉ, J. *Arrested adulthood: the changing nature of maturity and identity*. New York: New York University Press, 2000. 224 p. ISBN 978-0814-737-79-8.

¹⁵ BLATTERER, H. *Generations, Modernity and the Problem of Contemporary Adulthood*. In: *Contemporary Adulthood: Calendars, Cartographies and Constructions*, J. Burnett (Ed.), UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 10–23. E-book ISBN 978-023-0290-29-7.

¹⁶ RASAILI, T. R., TITUS, C. M. *Reunification – 'a reality or an impossible dream? The perspectives of Swedish child care and foster family social workers*. 2007. Disponibil: <https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/4609/1/Complete%20final%20thesis%202.pdf>

¹⁷ ERIKSON, E.H., *op. cit.*

¹⁸ LEVINSON, D. J., *op. cit.*

¹⁹ ARNETT, J. J., *op. cit.*

²⁰ CÔTÉ, J., *op. cit.*

²¹ FRANK, L. K. *The Concept of Maturity*. În: *Child Development*, 1950, vol. 21, nr. 1, p. 21–24. ISSN 0009-3920. Disponibil: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1125914>

perspective²². Theoretical perspectives vary considerably: Freud S. conceived maturity in terms of social responsibility and care for others; Piaget, J. emphasized the development of abstract thinking; Erikson E.H. formulated a psychosocial model in which maturity is achieved through balancing integrity, intimacy, and autonomy²³; while Rogers C., from a humanistic standpoint, highlighted authenticity and congruence²⁴. Rean, A.A. and Kolominsky, Ya.L. propose four operational criteria of maturity: responsibility, self-development, tolerance, and positive thinking²⁵. At the societal level, maturity reflects the interplay between individualization (autonomy, self-sufficiency) and socialization (the assimilation of norms and values). Allport G.W.²⁶, together with Russian scholars such as Andreeva G.M.²⁷ and Kon I.S.²⁸, conceptualize social maturity as a multidimensional construct encompassing social identity, professional roles, community engagement, and the internalization of moral values.

In synthesis, maturity is best understood as a dynamic and multidimensional process situated at the intersection of internal resources (identity, values, self-regulation) and environmental demands (social support, opportunities, constraints), and expressed through autonomy, responsibility, value integration, and active social participation.

Subchapter 1.3. The Structure of Social Maturity: Defining Criteria and Domains of Manifestation. Social maturity may be conceptualized as a conscious, responsible, and adaptive positioning of the individual in relation to the social environment. Four principal domains of manifestation can be distinguished: (a) *the relationship with the self* — responsibility, autonomy, congruence, and self-actualization (Rogers, C.²⁹; Maslow, A.H.³⁰; Allport, G.W.³¹; Erikson, E.H.³², among others); (b) *the relationship with others* — authentic interpersonal ties grounded in trust, respect, and empathy (Fromm, E.³³; Rogers C.³⁴; Myasishchev, V.N.³⁵, and others); (c) *the relationship with society* — the internalization of values and norms, the consolidation of social identity, and the development of moral reasoning (Erikson, E.H.³⁶; Kohlberg, L.³⁷, and others); (d) *the relationship with the profession* — the formation and strengthening of professional identity, with personal values aligned to the demands of work (Zeer, E.F.³⁸; Côté, J.E.³⁹, and others).

Professional orientation, social engagement, personal self-regulation, value orientations, social roles, and the assumption of responsibility for actions and commitments emerge as defining

²² ЗЕЕР, Э. Ф., СЫМАНЮК, Э. Э. *Психология профессиональных деструкций: учебное пособие для вузов*. Москва: Академический Проект, 2020. 240 p. ISBN 978-5-8291-2723-7

²³ Apud PAPALIA, D.E., WENDKOS OLDS, S. *Dezvoltare umană*. București: Ed. Trei, 2016. 832 p. ISBN 978-9737-074-14-0.

²⁴ РОДЖЕРС, К. *Взгляд на психотерапию. Становление человека*. Москва: Прогресс-Универс, 1994. 480 с.

²⁵ РЕАН, А. А., КОЛОМИНСКИЙ, Я. Л. *Социальная педагогическая психология*. СПб.: Питер, 2000. 416 с. ISBN 5-88782-424-7

²⁶ ALLPORT, G. W. *Structura și dezvoltarea personalității*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1981. 578 p. (Fără ISBN) RAJ, M. *Encyclopedia Dictionary of Psychology and Education*. New Delhi: Anmol Publications. 1996. 1840 p. ISBN-13: 978-935-41-0582-1

²⁷ АНДРЕЕВА, Г. М. *Социальная психология: Учебник высших учебных заведений*. Москва: Аспект пресс. 2014. 363 p. ISBN: 978-5-7567-0827-1.

²⁸ КОН, И. С. *Психология ранней юности*. Москва: Просвещение. 1989. 256 p. (Fără ISBN).

²⁹ РОДЖЕРС, К., *op. cit.*

³⁰ MASLOW, A. H. *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper & Row, 1954. 411 p. (Fără ISBN).

³¹ ALLPORT, G. W., *op. cit.*

³² ERIKSON, E.H., *op. cit.*

³³ FROMM, E. *The Art of Loving*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006. 180 p. ISBN: -0061-97835-1297

³⁴ РОДЖЕРС, К., *op. cit.*

³⁵ МЯСИЩЕВ, В. Н. *Основные проблемы и современное состояние психологии отношений*. В: Психологическая наука в СССР. М.: Изд-во АПН РСФСР, 1960, Т. II, с. 110-125.

³⁶ ERIKSON, E.H., *op. cit.*

³⁷ KOHLBERG, L. *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981. 441 p. ISBN: 978-0060-6476-05

³⁸ ЗЕЕР, Э.Ф. Психологические особенности прогнозирования профессионального будущего молодежи. В: *Актуальные проблемы психологического знания*, 2015, 3(36), с. 16-26. ISSN: 2073-8544

³⁹ CÔTÉ, J., *op. cit.*

criteria of social maturity. These dimensions capture both *internal stability* (identity, autonomy, self-regulation) and *flexible adaptation* to environmental challenges (civic participation, role fulfillment, and ethical responsibility).

Social maturity develops gradually through the interplay of individual characteristics, family influences, and educational and socio-cultural contexts. Personal values and professional aspirations mediate the crystallization of professional identity and the consolidation of social maturity.

In this framework, maturity designates the attainment of a higher level of physical, psychological, and social development. Psychological maturity entails the stabilization of identity, decision-making autonomy, emotional self-regulation, and congruence between values and behaviors; social maturity, in turn, is expressed through an independent and responsible stance within society, achieved via the internalization of values, the assumption of roles, and active engagement in community life.

The model (Fig. 1) synthesizes the determining factors—individual characteristics, familial influences, educational context, and socio-cultural environment—which, mediated by personal values and professional aspirations, contribute to the formation of professional identity and, consequently, to the development of social maturity in young individuals.

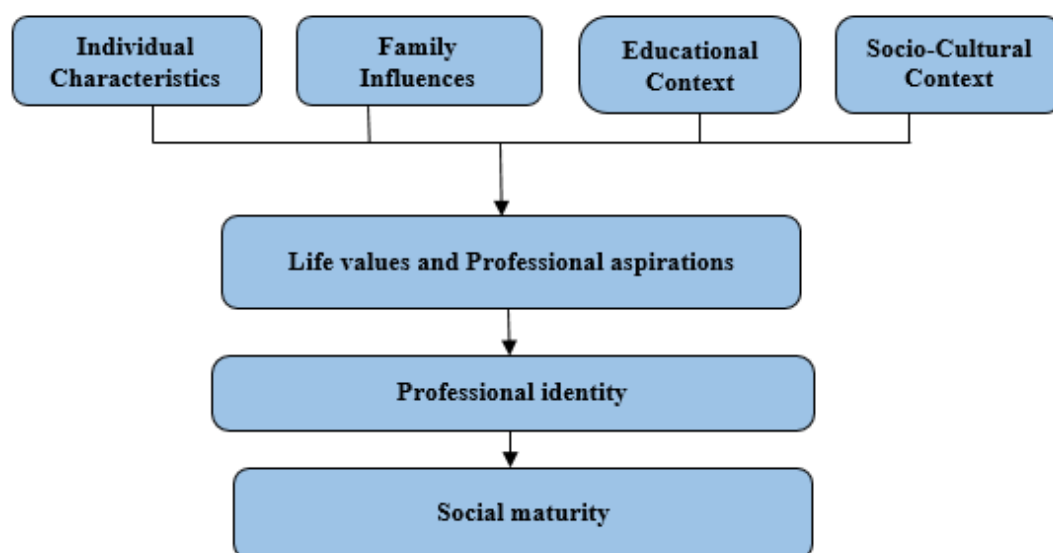


Fig. 1. Conceptual Model of Social Maturity (Own Contribution).

Subchapter 1.4. Professional Values and Aspirations – Determinants of Social Maturity. In emerging adulthood (Arnett, J. J.⁴⁰), professional values and aspirations operate interdependently: congruence between career choices and one's value system supports socio-economic status, lifestyle, and subjective well-being.

From an axiological perspective, values are enduring beliefs that guide both goals and means (Rokeach, M.⁴¹: terminal vs. instrumental values) and are organized within a motivational circumplex (Schwartz, S. H.⁴²) along the axes of openness–conservatism and self-enhancement–self-transcendence. Value–career congruence is associated with higher satisfaction and performance.

Professional aspirations are anchored on two levels: (a) external—profession, prestige, and rewards, explained through circumscription and compromise (Gottfredson, L. S.⁴³); and (b) internal—

⁴⁰ ARNETT, J. J., *op. cit.*

⁴¹ ROKEACH, M. *Understanding Human Value. Individual and societal*. New York: The Free Press, 1979. 288 p. ISBN: 08-2676-0029-978

⁴² SCHWARTZ, S. H. Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. In: M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology*. Cambridge: Academic Press, 1992, vol. 25, pp. 1–65. ISBN: 978-0-12-015225-4

⁴³ GOTTFREDSON, L.S. Gottfredson's theory of circumscription, compromise and self-creation. In: D. Brown & Associates (Eds.), *Career choice and development*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass. 2002, pp. 85-148. ISBN-13: 978-078795741

intrinsic motivation, interests, and relatively stable “anchors.”⁴⁴ The level of self-efficacy modulates goal-setting and perseverance. Within the framework of career development, professional maturation (Super, D. E.⁴⁵) entails increasing alignment between aspirations and identity.

According to Self-Determination Theory⁴⁶, intrinsic aspirations (self-development, affiliation) correlate positively with vitality and satisfaction, whereas emphasis on extrinsic goals (financial gain, status) is associated with diminished well-being⁴⁷, with variations contingent on socio-cultural context.

The congruence between values and professional aspirations serves as a key indicator of social maturity, reflecting the equilibrium between internal motivation and adaptation to external social expectations. During the transition to adulthood, values and professional aspirations become defining dimensions of identity formation, facilitating social integration and professional adjustment.

Based on Leontiev’s^{48,49} existential model, professional aspirations may be conceptualized as manifestations of internalized values and projections of the ideal self. Consequently, their systematic assessment enables the evaluation of value-aspirational maturity, which constitutes a foundational component of social maturity.

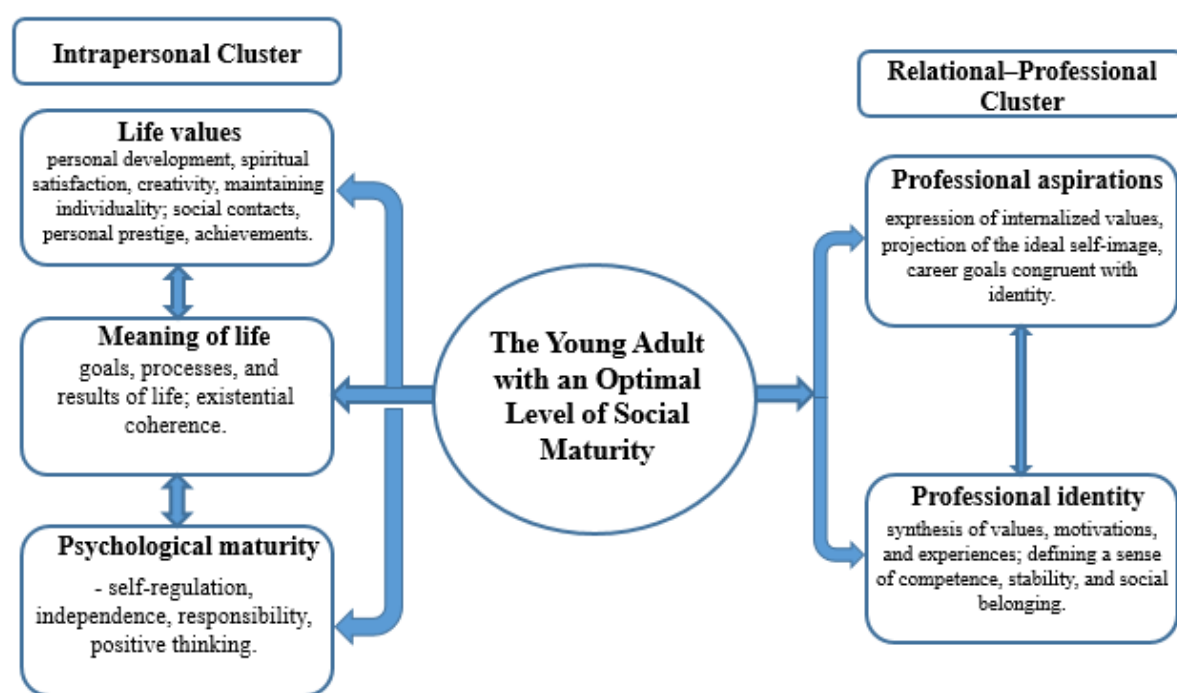


Fig. 2 The socio-psychological profile of the young person characterized by social maturity (own contribution)

The integrative model (Fig. 2) conceptualizes social maturity as the emergent outcome of the convergence of three functional clusters: (1) self-regulation and personal autonomy, encompassing responsibility, independence, and an internal locus of control; (2) axiological orientation and existential direction, encompassing values, aspirations, life purpose, and self-development; and (3)

⁴⁴ Apud ANGHEL, O. Professional aspirations among students with technical talent. In: *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2015, v. 191, pp.1881-1885. ISSN 1877-0428.

⁴⁵ RYAN, R. M., DECI, E. L. Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. In: *American Psychologist*, 2000, nr. 55, pp. 68-78. e-ISSN 0003-066X.

⁴⁶ SUPER, D. E. A life-span, life-space approach to career development. In: *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 1980, 16 (3), pp. 282-296. ISSN 0001-879

⁴⁷ KASSER, R., RYAN, R. M. Further examining the American dream: Differential correlates of intrinsic and extrinsic goals. In: *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 1996, 22(3), pp. 280-287. eISSN: 15527433; ISSN: 01461672.

⁴⁸ ЛЕОНТЬЕВ, Д. А. *Тест смысловых ориентаций (СЖО)*. Москва: Смысл, 2000. 18 с. ISBN: 5-89357-088-X.

⁴⁹ ЛЕОНТЬЕВ, Д. А. *Психология смысла: природа, строение и динамика смысловой реальности*. М.: Смысл, 2003. 487 с. ISBN: 5-89357-082-0.

psychological functioning and relational adaptation, encompassing psychological maturity and positive thinking.

Accordingly, social maturity can be operationalized as the stage at which internalized values, professional aspirations, and self-regulatory mechanisms coalesce into autonomous, responsible, and reflective functioning, manifested through congruent decision-making, persistence in achieving goals, and ethical contributions to community life. Effective interventions seek to dynamically align values with aspirations while balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational forces.

Subchapter 1.5. Risk Factors and Challenges to Social Maturity during the Transition of Youth to Adulthood. The transition to adulthood entails a reconfiguration of roles and responsibilities, often characterized by ambiguous status—partially assumed responsibilities and incomplete adult belonging^{50 51 52}. Indicators of maturity shift from external markers, such as social status and family position, to internal benchmarks, including autonomous decision-making, accountability, and financial independence.

The challenges of this period emerge from the tension between personal aspirations and societal expectations, compounded by the pressures of rapid socio-cultural change. Demographic and social studies conducted in the Republic of Moldova identify specific risks, including rural poverty and social exclusion, the education–labor market gap, youth migration and consequent human capital loss, labor market rigidity and the expansion of the informal sector, barriers confronting young women, and persistent educational inequalities^{53 54 55}.

The NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) risk is exacerbated by poor mental health, low self-esteem and self-confidence, insufficient autonomy, and engagement in risk behaviors⁵⁶. Within the transactional model of stress, differences in adaptation are explained by the quality of coping strategies—social support and positive reappraisal versus avoidance⁵⁷. Deficient emotional regulation amplifies anxiety and depression, undermining social integration⁵⁸, while sustained stress diminishes life satisfaction and promotes behavioral withdrawal⁵⁹.

Consequently, the social maturity of youth in transition is influenced by a complex interplay of socioeconomic factors (poverty, migration, informal labor markets, educational inequalities) and psychological factors (mental health, self-efficacy, emotional regulation, coping skills). An integrative approach is therefore indispensable: early interventions targeting mental health and adaptive skills, policies aimed at reducing inequalities, alignment of educational curricula with labor

⁵⁰ MACEK, P., BEJČEK, J., VANÍČKOVÁ, J. Contemporary Czech Emerging Adults, Generation Growing Up. In: *The Period of Social Changes, Journal of Adolescent Research*, 2007, nr. 22 (5), pp. 444- 475. ISSN 0743-5584

⁵¹ SIRSCH, U., DREHER, E., MAYR, E., WILLINGER U. What Does It Take to Be an Adult in Austria? Adulthood in Austrian Adolescent, Emerging Adults and Adults. In: *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 2007, nr. 24 (3), pp. 275-292. ISSN: 0743-5584; eISSN: 1552-6895

⁵² ARNETT, J. J., *op. cit.*

⁵³ BULGARU, M., OCERETNÎI, A. Tineretul studios: dimensiuni ale identității sociale. Chișinău: CEP USM, 2012, 212 p. ISBN 978-9975-71-068-8.

⁵⁴ MALCOCI, L., MOCANU, V. Structura socială a populației în funcție de statutul ocupațional. In: *Coeziunea socială în Republica Moldova: dimensiuni și manifestări în condiții de urgență*, 25 octombrie 2020, Chișinău. Chișinău: F.E.-P. "Tipografia Centrală", 2021, pp. 107-116. ISBN 978-9975-157-01-8.

⁵⁵ GAGAUZ, O., CRISMARU, M. Factorii de risc pentru plasarea tinerilor în categoria neet: cazul Republicii Moldova. In: *Calitatea Vieții*, 2024, vol. 35, pp. 1-19. ISSN: 1844-5292

⁵⁶ RAHMANI, H., GROOT, W. *Risk Factors of Being a Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET): A Scoping Review*. In: *International Journal of Educational Research*, 2023 (120). e-ISSN 1873-538X. Disponibil: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0883035523000629>

⁵⁷ LAZARUS, R. S., FOLKMAN, S. *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1984. 460 p. ISBN 08261-4191-9.

⁵⁸ GROSS, J. J. Emotion regulation: Affective, cognitive, and social consequences. In: *Psychophysiology*, 2002, 39(3), pp.281-291. ISSN 1469-8986

⁵⁹ MILAS G., KLARIĆ I. M., MALNAR A., SAFTIĆ V., ŠUPE-DOMIĆ D., SLAVICH G. M. The impact of stress and coping strategies on life satisfaction in a national sample of adolescents: A structural equation modelling approach. In: *Stress Health*, 2021, nr.37(5), pp.1026–1034. ISSN 1532-3005, e-ISSN 1532-2998.

market demands, and targeted support for young women. This analysis underpins the research problem addressed in the main body of the dissertation.

Chapter 2, The role of life values and professional aspirations in shaping social maturity among young people in transition to adulthood: An Empirical Investigation. This chapter empirically examines the manner in which professional values and aspirations shape social maturity during the transition to adulthood.

Subchapter 2.1. Research Design and Methodology. The study adopts an integrated approach to youth in the Republic of Moldova, correlating social maturity with existential orientations, personal values, professional aspirations, and vocational identity. Analyses are comparative—considering gender, educational level, and age—and modeled through mediation mechanisms, including professional identity and psychological maturity.

Objectives of the Empirical Investigation: 1) To describe professional values and aspirations during the transition to adulthood; 2) To estimate their influence on psychological and social maturity, with comparative analyses by gender and educational level; 3) To examine the relationship between stages of professional identity and social maturity; 4) To delineate the psychosocial profile of youth exhibiting cohesive socio-professional integration.

General Hypothesis. It is posited that the life values and professional aspirations (conceptualized through existential and life orientations) of young people, in relation to age, gender, and educational level, correlate significantly with the level of social and psychological maturity, **as well as with the degree of professional identity formation.**

Working Hypotheses

H1. Significant gender differences are expected: young women are hypothesized to score higher than young men on existential orientations, value preferences, stages of professional identity, as well as on psychological and social maturity.

H2. Educational level is anticipated to produce significant differences: university students are expected to outperform high school or college students in existential orientations, perceived control over life, self-development, professional engagement, stages of professional identity, and psychological and social maturity.

H3. Age is hypothesized to exert a significant developmental effect: as youth advance in age, they are increasingly likely to attain the stage of achieved professional identity, with decreasing prevalence of undefined or imposed stages (the moratorium being transitory), while simultaneously exhibiting higher levels of psychological and social maturity.

H4. The relationship between youth's existential orientations, personal values, and professional aspirations, and their social maturity, is posited to be mediated by professional identity and psychological maturity.

The empirical investigation is structured around two conceptual-operational models. Figure 3 illustrates the key axes: *life values* (Morphological Test of Values – Sopov & Karpushina: personal development, spiritual fulfillment, creativity, active social contacts, prestige, material well-being, achievements, maintenance of individuality) and *existential orientations* (Life Meaning Orientation Test – Leontiev: goals, processes, outcomes, LC-Self, LC-Life), considered under the influence of psychosocial factors (gender, age, educational level), with expected effects on professional aspirations.

Figure 4 organizes three dimensions: *professional identity* (Azbel; Gretsov – stages: undefined, imposed, moratorium, achieved), *psychological maturity* (Ruzhenkov; Ruzhenkova; Lukyantseva – tolerance, self-actualization, positive thinking, independence), and *social maturity* (Kozhevnikova; Stumbris; Sundukova – educational and professional values/aspirations, life perspective, decisional independence), with a focus on intergroup comparisons and correlations among indicators.

Collectively, Figures 3 and 4 delineate the explanatory trajectory from value profiles and existential orientations to aspirations, subsequently to professional identity and psychological maturity, and ultimately to social maturity.

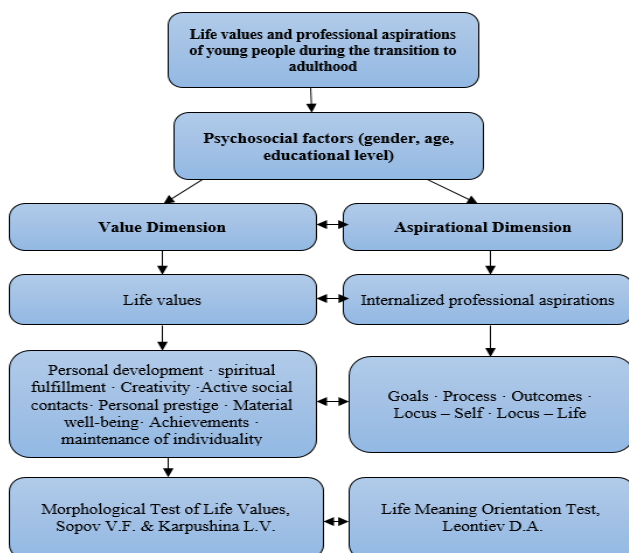


Figure 3. Research Model of Professional Values and Aspirations (own contribution)

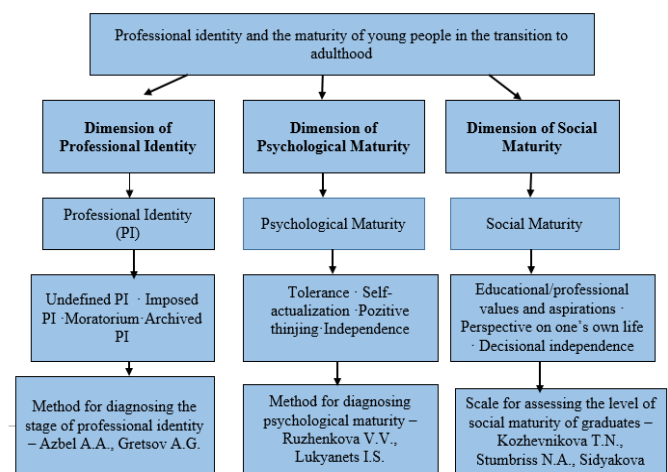


Figure 4. Research Model of Youth Maturity in Transition (own contribution)

The research was conducted in three phases (2020–2024). *Phase 1* (methodological) established the study's purpose, objectives, hypotheses, and variables (predictors: values, orientations, aspirations; criterion: social maturity; mediators: professional identity, psychological maturity; moderators: gender, age, educational level), defined the sample, selected the instruments, and piloted the procedures. *Phase 2* (empirical investigation) involved administering psychometric tests, evaluating the variables, and interpreting the results in relation to the hypotheses, while simultaneously delineating the profile of youth exhibiting high social maturity. *Phase 3* (intervention and monitoring) entailed designing and implementing a psychosocial program (clarification of values, formulation of realistic aspirations, training in autonomous decision-making and social roles), with test–retest evaluation and analysis of effects between experimental and control groups.

The research methods employed validated psychometric instruments: (1) Life Meaning Orientation Test (Leontiev); (2) Morphological Test of Values (Sopov & Karpushina); (3) Professional Identity Stage Diagnosis (Azbel & Gretsov); (4) Psychological Maturity Assessment (Ruzhenkov; Ruzhenkova; Lukyantseva); (5) Graduate Social Maturity Scale (Kozhevnikova; Stumbris; Sundukova). Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics (means, percentages), independent-samples t-tests, multiple comparisons (Bonferroni), Pearson correlations, and nonparametric tests (Mann–Whitney U and Wilcoxon) for evaluating the intervention.

The sample (Phase 2) comprised $N = 437$ students and pupils (ages 18–22), with distributions across gender, age, family structure, and socio-economic status, as well as by institution type (high schools, colleges/centers of excellence, universities).

The research adhered to ethical principles—respect for persons, beneficence/non-maleficence, and justice—and to data protection standards, including informed consent, voluntariness, confidentiality and anonymization, secure data storage, the right to withdraw, and debriefing. The protocol was approved at the level of the doctoral school and implemented uniformly.

Subchapter 2.2. Procedure for Adaptation and Testing of Assessment Instruments. This procedure aimed to ensure the linguistic and cultural adaptation of the instruments in accordance with the recommendations of the MAPI Research Trust⁶⁰, guaranteeing conceptual equivalence with the original versions and intelligibility within the context of the Republic of Moldova. The procedure comprised: (1) forward translation from the source language (Russian) into Romanian by certified translators; (2) independent back-translation, without access to the original, to verify concordance;

⁶⁰ *Linguistic Validation Guidance of a Clinical Outcome Assessment (COA)*. Published by Mapi Research Trust 2018, Mapi Language Group; 2018. Disponibil: <https://www.mapi-trust.org/services/translation-linguistic-validation>.

(3) expert review by psychologists, with terminological and cultural adjustments; and (4) piloting with 15 participants (6 males, 9 female) through cognitive interviews.

Consequently, the combination of translation, expert review, and piloting ensured both linguistic and cultural equivalence. Cronbach's α coefficients and Pearson correlations confirmed the reliability and convergent validity of the instruments. The adapted test battery provides a robust methodological foundation for the subsequent collection and analysis of data in research on the social maturity of youth in the Republic of Moldova.

Subchapter 2.3. Presentation and Interpretation of the Empirical Findings. This subchapter is organized into two sections. **Section 2.3.1** elucidates differences among socio-demographic groups (gender, age, educational level) in life values, professional aspirations, professional identity, psychological maturity, and social maturity, based on t-tests/ANOVA and Bonferroni comparisons, with accompanying figures and tables. This section tests hypotheses *H1–H3*, concerning the effects of gender, educational level, and age on values, existential orientations (life meaning), professional identity, psychological maturity, and social maturity. **Section 2.3.2** examines the mediation of the relationship between existential orientations, values, and professional aspirations and social maturity through professional identity and psychological maturity.

Study Results. The first two hypotheses (*H1, H2*) regarding intergroup differences on the same set of target variables—existential orientations, value preferences, stages of professional identity, psychological maturity, and social maturity—were tested. *H1 posits that young women score higher than young men on these dimensions. H2 predicts that university students score higher than high school/college students on the same variables.*

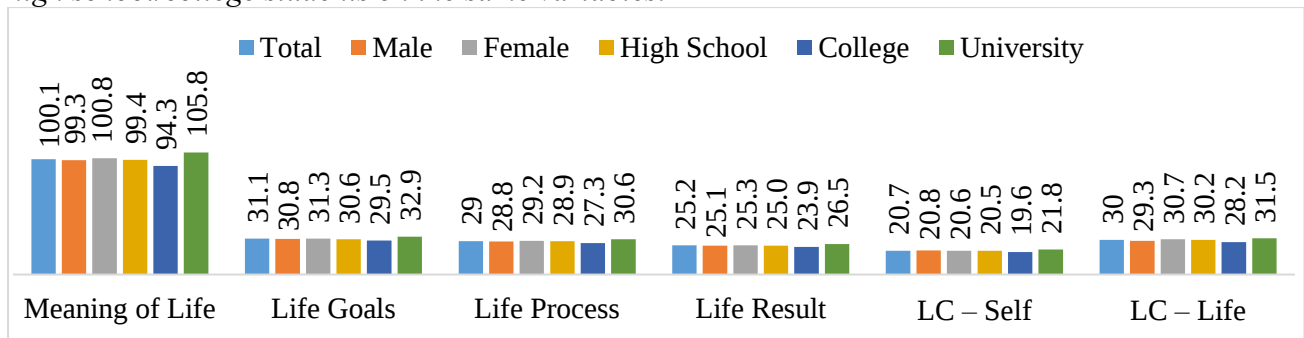


Figure 5. Mean Scores on Professional Aspirations (conceptualized through existential orientations) – Overall, by Gender, and by Educational Level

The analyses reveal a differentiated profile across components. For *Life Meaning*, mean scores by gender are very similar on *Goals*, *Life Process*, *Life Outcomes*, and *Locus of Control – Self* (Fig. 5), with differences not reaching statistical significance. The only significant gender difference emerges for *Locus of Control – Life* ($M_{\text{male}} = 29.3$ vs. $M_{\text{female}} = 30.7$; $p = 0.026$), suggesting that young women perceive greater controllability over contextual life circumstances.

With respect to *educational level*, the overall *Life Meaning* score is higher among university students ($M = 105.8$) than among high school students ($M = 99.4$; $p = 0.013$) and college students ($M = 94.3$; $p < 0.001$). On the *Goals* dimension, university students ($M = 32.9$) significantly exceed both high school students ($p = 0.020$) and college students ($p < 0.001$). For the *Life Process* dimension, the difference is pronounced between university students ($M = 30.6$) and college students ($M = 27.3$; $p = 0.001$), but not significant compared to high school students ($M = 28.9$) (Fig. 5).

The analysis indicates that young women score significantly higher than young men on *self-development* (6.0 vs. 5.3 ; $p = 0.001$), *spiritual fulfillment* (5.9 vs. 5.2 ; $p = 0.001$), *achievements* (6.3 vs. 5.6 ; $p = 0.001$), *material status* (5.9 vs. 5.1 ; $p < 0.001$), and *maintenance of individuality* (6.8 vs. 5.6 ; $p < 0.001$) — see Fig. 6, gender panel. Differences are not significant for *creativity*, *social contacts*, and *personal prestige* ($p > 0.10$).

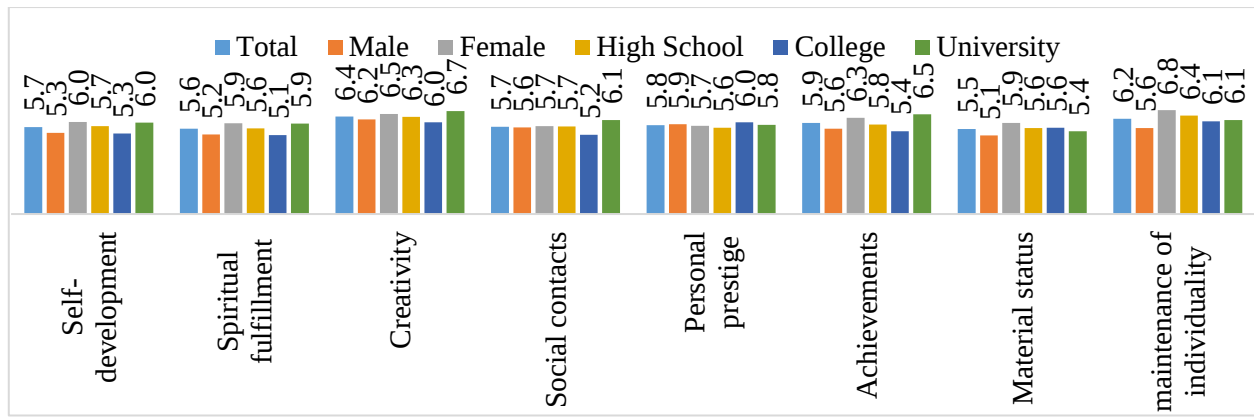


Figure 6. Mean Scores on Life Values – Overall, by Gender, and by Educational Level⁶¹

University students demonstrate greater orientation toward intrinsic values (creativity, achievements, spirituality), surpassing college students and, in some cases, high school students. For instance, on the *Achievements* dimension, differences are significant compared with both high school ($p = 0.035$) and college ($p < 0.001$) students. Regarding life priorities, university students score higher on *career* ($M = 5.8$) and *preferences/activities* ($M = 6.4$), with significant differences ($p < 0.05$), whereas high school students score slightly higher on *family* ($M = 6.2$) and *social engagement* ($M = 5.7$), though these differences are not statistically robust — see Fig. 6, educational level panel.

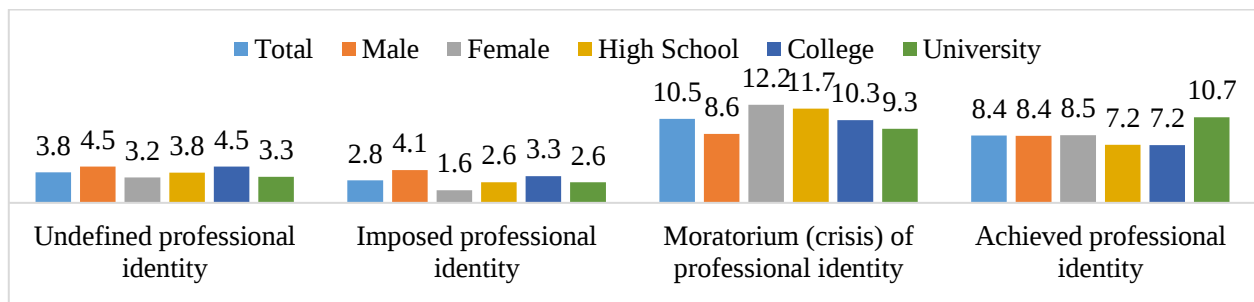


Figure 7. Mean Scores on Professional Identity – Overall, by Gender, and by Educational Level

With respect to gender, young women are more frequently in the *moratorium* stage (12.2 vs. 8.6; $p < 0.001$), indicating active exploration of professional options, whereas young men score higher on *undefined identity* (4.5 vs. 3.2; $p < 0.001$) and *imposed identity* (4.1 vs. 1.6; $p < 0.001$). *Achieved identity* is comparable across genders (8.5 vs. 8.4; n.s.) — see Fig. 7, gender panel.

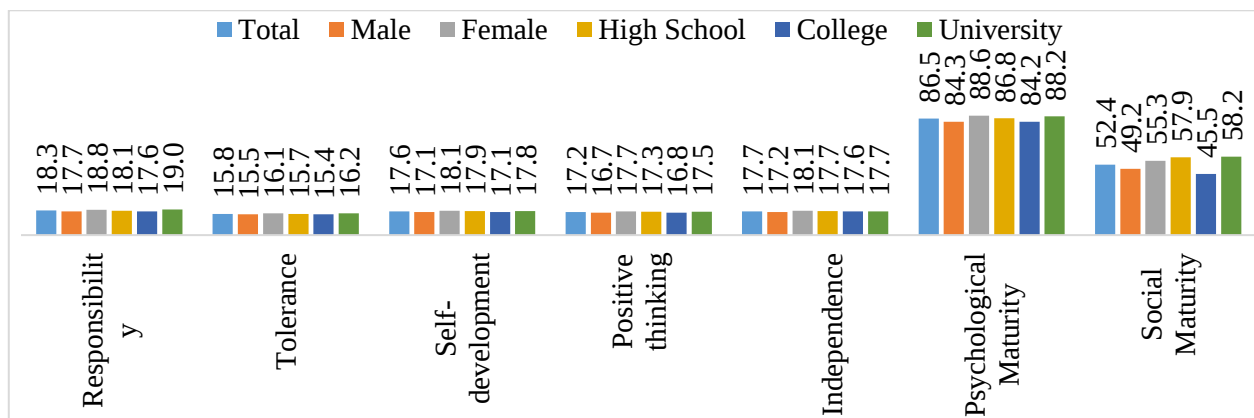


Figure 8. Mean Scores on Psychological and Social Maturity – Overall, by Gender, and by Educational Level

⁶¹ The values in the figure represent the STEN means (1–10) for each scale.

Across educational levels, the stage structure suggests gradual maturation: in high school, the *moratorium* predominates ($M = 12.1$); in college, the incidence of *undefined identity* increases ($M = 4.5$); and at university, *achieved identity* is consolidated ($M = 10.7$), occurring more frequently than in the other groups — see Fig. 7, educational level panel.

Results regarding *psychological maturity* highlight that young women achieve higher scores than young men on *responsibility* (18.8 vs. 17.7; $p = 0.001$), *tolerance* (16.1 vs. 15.5; $p = 0.007$), *self-development* (18.1 vs. 17.1; $p = 0.003$), *positive thinking* (17.7 vs. 16.7; $p = 0.009$), and *independence* (18.1 vs. 17.2; $p = 0.006$). On the global score, the difference is pronounced: 88.6 for young women vs. 84.3 for young men ($p < 0.001$) — see Fig. 8, gender panel.

Across educational levels, significant differences are particularly observed between college and university students, with higher scores in responsibility and tolerance among university students, contributing to a superior overall score. No systematic differences are noted between high school and university students in self-development, independence, or positive thinking — see Fig. 8, educational level panel.

Although the mean *social maturity* score is higher for young women (55.3 vs. 49.2), the difference is not statistically significant ($p = 0.384$). By educational level, mean scores are distributed nonlinearly: high school $M = 57.9$, college $M = 45.5$, university $M = 58.2$; Bonferroni tests indicate significant differences between high school and college ($p < 0.001$) and between university and college ($p < 0.001$), while high school versus university shows no difference ($p = 1.000$) — see Fig. 8.

Hypothesis H1 is strongly supported for psychological maturity and is well corroborated by the value profile and life priorities (see Figs. 6 and 8). Confirmation is selective for life meaning (difference observed only for LC – Life, see Fig. 5) and for professional identity (differences are noted in the developmental trajectory—moratorium/diffuse/imposed—but not in the final achieved identity; see Fig. 7). *H1* is not confirmed for overall social maturity (see Fig. 8). Overall, gender exerts a stronger influence on internal components of maturation (axiological and psychological) and on the process of vocational clarification, whereas globally measured social integration appears to be determined by other predictors.

Hypothesis H2 is partially confirmed. University-level education provides clear advantages over college across all analyzed dimensions (life meaning, values, professional identity, psychological maturity, and social maturity; see Figs. 5–8). Compared with high school, differences are selective: students stand out in life meaning and professional identity (Figs. 5 and 7), whereas in social maturity, high school students remain at a level comparable to university students (Fig. 8). These results suggest that the college stage represents a period of vulnerability—associated with vocational uncertainty and a temporary decline in social integration—while university provides a framework for consolidating personal and social maturation.

H3. Age exerts a significant effect on development: as youth advance in age, they are increasingly likely to attain the stage of achieved professional identity, with a decreasing probability of undefined and imposed stages (the moratorium remaining transitory), while simultaneously exhibiting higher levels of psychological and social maturity.

The evolution of the four stages of professional identity demonstrates a predictable trajectory from exploration toward commitment. The *moratorium* stage decreases significantly between ages 18 and 20 ($p < 0.001$), whereas *achieved identity* increases markedly over the same interval ($p < 0.001$). After age 20, these values tend to stabilize, suggesting the consolidation of vocational choices. In contrast, the *undefined* and *imposed* stages remain relatively constant, with no significant differences observed ($p > 0.18$).

Results for psychological and social maturity reflect the same trend. Between **ages 18 and 20**, there is a significant increase (*psychological maturity*: $p = 0.030$; *social maturity*: $p = 0.001$), followed by stabilization at ages 21–22. This pattern indicates that the 18–20 age range represents a critical transition period for the assumption of responsibilities and active integration into social roles, after which self-regulation and adaptive strategies remain relatively stable.

Thus, the data support both the *identity-related* and *maturational* components of hypothesis H3. Age 20 emerges as a sensitive threshold, marking the reduction of exploratory crises, the consolidation of identity commitment, and the attainment of higher levels of psychological and social maturity. The practical implications suggest focusing career guidance and counseling interventions within the 18–19 age range, when openness to exploration is maximal and educational support can have a decisive impact.

Regarding working hypothesis H4, it is posited that *professional identity* and *psychological maturity* do not merely represent individual traits but function as mediating variables in the relationship between youth's existential orientations, personal and professional values and aspirations, and social maturity. Youth who have established a clear professional identity and exhibit high psychological maturity are better able to translate their values and aspirations into socially mature behaviors, thereby facilitating more effective integration into adult roles. Accordingly, statistical analyses aimed at testing hypothesis H4 allowed for the delineation of five principal axes for interpreting the results.

The first research axis focuses on the correlational analysis between existential orientations (life meaning) and social maturity. The results reveal positive and statistically significant correlations between *responsibility* and the dimensions of life meaning: *sense* ($r = 0.353$, $p < 0.001$), *goals* ($r = 0.308$, $p < 0.001$), *process* ($r = 0.241$, $p < 0.001$), *outcome* ($r = 0.238$, $p < 0.001$), *LC-Self* ($r = 0.388$, $p < 0.001$), and *LC-Life* ($r = 0.283$, $p < 0.001$). *Self-development* exhibits the highest correlations with existential orientations (r ranging from 0.338 to 0.444, $p < 0.001$), as does *positive thinking* (r ranging from 0.356 to 0.478, $p < 0.001$). *Independence* shows more moderate associations (r ranging from 0.156 to 0.241, $p < 0.001$), whereas *tolerance* does not demonstrate significant links ($p > 0.05$). Overall, *psychological maturity* consistently correlates with the dimensions of life meaning (r ranging from 0.370 to 0.473, $p < 0.001$), and *social maturity* shows similar associations with these dimensions. Collectively, the correlational model indicates that psychological and social maturity are closely related to the manner in which youth confer meaning on their own existence—particularly through clarity of goals, perception of internal control, and orientation toward self-development.

This finding underscores the importance of a coherent existential framework for the development of overall maturity and the consolidation of professional identity.

The second axis of research investigates the relationships between life values and the dimensions of psychological and social maturity. The correlational analysis delineates a coherent profile of factors that support the formation of maturity. The results indicate that young people who prioritize personal development, spirituality, creativity, and achievement tend to exhibit higher levels of responsibility, positive thinking, independence, and psychosocial balance.

Responsibility correlates positively with the values of *personal development* ($r = 0.280$, $p < 0.01$), *spiritual satisfaction* ($r = 0.319$, $p < 0.01$), and *achievement* ($r = 0.362$, $p < 0.01$), reflecting an orientation toward self-improvement and social recognition. *Self-development* shows the strongest associations (r between 0.242 and 0.431) with intrinsic values, indicating a harmonious integration between personal growth and social relations. *Positive thinking* and *independence* also correlate significantly with spiritual, creative, and self-affirmation values (r between 0.175 and 0.261), confirming the role of optimism and autonomy in self-realization.

At a general level, both *psychological* and *social maturity* correlate consistently with values of development, fulfillment, and individuality (r between 0.261 and 0.480). These findings delineate two major axiological orientations: **intrinsic values**—development, meaning, creativity—which exert a stronger influence on maturity, and **extrinsic values**—success, prestige, status—which play a complementary role. Overall, life values emerge as **predictors of psychosocial maturity**, mediating self-regulation, responsibility, and a constructive orientation toward the future.

The third axis of analysis examines the correlational relationships between the dimensions of *professional identity* and *existential orientations*, conceptualized in this study as expressions of *professional aspirations*. The results reveal a systematic association between the structure of

professional identity and the ways in which young people attribute meaning to life, formulate goals, and perceive control over their own trajectory—the aspirational core guiding career decisions.

An *undefined professional identity* correlates negatively with all aspirational dimensions (r between -0.296 and -0.373 , $p < 0.01$), reflecting diffuse aspirations, lack of direction, and low internal control. The *imposed identity* also presents negative correlations (r between -0.100 and -0.247), suggesting externally driven decisions and extrinsic motivation. By contrast, the *identity moratorium* displays no significant associations—characteristic of an exploratory phase that remains axiologically unstable.

A *formed professional identity* correlates positively and significantly with all aspirational dimensions (r between 0.334 and 0.471 , $p < 0.01$), indicating a well-defined sense of purpose, teleological coherence, and strong internal control. The progression from *undefined* or *imposed identity* toward a *formed identity* illustrates the transition from externally determined aspirations to autonomous, coherent ones. This model confirms that the maturation of professional identity is closely linked to the organization of the aspirational system, where meaning, goal orientation, and an internal locus of control constitute the foundation of mature professional and social integration.

The fourth axis of research explores the relationships between the dimensions of *professional identity* and *life values*. The results demonstrate that the structure of professional identity is strongly associated with the *consistency* and *degree of internalization* of the value system. An *undefined identity* correlates negatively with most values (r between -0.113 and -0.338), reflecting a weakly consolidated axiological system, lack of prioritization, and low coherence between values and behaviors. The *imposed identity* shows similar negative associations, indicating conformity and an extrinsic orientation. Conversely, the *identity moratorium* correlates positively with values such as *spiritual satisfaction*, *achievement*, and *individuality*, suggesting a constructive phase of exploration and axiological reorganization. A *formed identity* correlates positively with *self-development*, *creativity*, *spiritual satisfaction*, and *achievement*, outlining a mature profile oriented toward self-actualization and internal coherence.

The analysis of relationships between professional identity and life domains confirms this developmental evolution—from *disengagement* and *dependency* (undefined/imposed identity) to active engagement in education, work, and social life (formed identity). The *moratorium* thus emerges as a functional stage of exploration and value redefinition, preparing the integration of a coherent and autonomous professional identity.

The fifth axis of research examines the associations between the dimensions of *professional identity* and the components of *psychological* and *social maturity*, illustrating how the formation of vocational identity influences responsibility, self-development, positive thinking, independence, and social integration. The findings reveal a clear developmental gradient linking stages of identity formation to the level of psychosocial maturity.

Undefined or *imposed identities* correlate negatively with all maturity indicators (r between -0.24 and -0.41), reflecting lack of internal coherence, dependency on external validation, and low motivation for personal and social growth. By contrast, the *identity moratorium* exhibits moderate positive correlations (r between 0.13 and 0.23) with maturity components, confirming its function as a transitional stage of exploration and value redefinition that fosters responsibility and autonomy. A *formed professional identity* shows significant positive correlations (r between 0.25 and 0.41) with all maturity dimensions, outlining a balanced profile characterized by identity clarity, optimism, responsibility, and self-regulation.

Overall, the evolution from *undefined* or *imposed identity* toward a *formed identity* reflects the transition from psychosocial vulnerability to autonomous, mature integration. The *moratorium* stage is reaffirmed as a functional and necessary phase in identity development. The results underscore the importance of vocational counseling programs that emphasize value clarification, self-exploration, and decision-making competence among young people.

Verification of Hypothesis H4. Hypothesis H4 posited the existence of significant relationships among *existential orientations* (professional aspirations), *life values*, *professional identity*, *psychological maturity*, and *social maturity*, thereby emphasizing the interdependence of

motivational, axiological, and social dimensions of development. The tested model incorporated *existential orientations* and *life values* as predictors, *psychological maturity* and *professional identity* as mediators, and *social maturity* as the outcome variable.

The correlational analyses confirmed the hypothesis, revealing that *professional aspirations* and *life values* correlate positively with *social maturity*, while *psychological maturity* and a *formed professional identity* strengthen this relationship as mediating factors. Existential orientations centered on *meaning* and *life goals* are associated with enhanced internal control and a mature identity, whereas values related to *self-development*, *achievement*, and *spirituality* foster responsibility and social integration.

The results demonstrate that social maturity emerges from the dynamic interaction between internalized values, goal clarity, and identity coherence. Young people possessing a well-defined sense of purpose and a consolidated professional identity display greater autonomy, responsibility, and social engagement, validating the proposed model regarding the mediating role of psychological maturity and professional identity.

Socio-psychological profile of socially mature youth. Socially mature young individuals are characterized by responsibility, self-development, positive thinking, and independence—traits reflecting the integration of personal values with societal expectations. They exhibit identity clarity, emotional balance, and a strong internal locus of control. A clear sense of meaning and well-defined life goals ensure motivational coherence, while values centered on *self-development*, *creativity*, and *positive social relations* underpin prosocial engagement.

Ultimately, social maturity is expressed through the ability to translate values and professional aspirations into responsible and coherent action, enabling active and balanced participation in both professional and community life. It represents a synthesis of the value-based, motivational, and identity dimensions of personality.

Chapter 3, The Impact of the Psychosocial Program for Value Development and Professional Identity Consolidation on Youth in Transition to Adulthood. This chapter addresses the design, implementation, and impact evaluation of the *Psychosocial Program for Value Development and Professional Identity Consolidation* targeting young people undergoing the transition to adulthood.

Subchapter 3.1. Methodological Foundations of the Formative Experiment presents the methodological underpinnings of the formative experiment through which the program was designed, implemented, and assessed. The program was developed for youth aged 18–20, situated at the threshold of adult life.

The stated objective was the design, application, and validation of an intervention program aimed at strengthening core values, clarifying aspirations, and consolidating professional identity, with expected effects on both psychological and social maturity. The working hypothesis posited that participation in the program would generate a positive dynamic in the awareness of personal values, in the shaping of professional trajectories, and in the enhancement of maturity indicators.

To achieve this goal, staged objectives were established: (a) identification of resources and challenges (pilot phase), (b) elaboration and refinement of the program, (c) its implementation with an experimental group (EG) alongside a control group (CG), (d) immediate and six-month follow-up evaluations, and (e) formulation of recommendations.

The research design employed two comparable groups (EG = 15; CG = 15), consisting of 12th-grade high school students and college undergraduates aged 18–20. Participants were selected based on inclusion criteria (age, educational status, full availability, informed consent) and exclusion criteria (major learning or participation difficulties; absence of consent). The groups were socio-demographically homogeneous (gender, age, family type, economic level), thereby ensuring a rigorous assessment of the intervention's impact.

Subchapter 3.2. Methodology and Design of the Psychosocial Program for Value Development and Professional Identity Consolidation. This subchapter outlines the methodology and design of the *Psychosocial Program for Value Development and Professional Identity Consolidation*, highlighting the stages of its conception, implementation, and evaluation.

The program unfolded in four stages: (1) piloting (09–12.2022): conducted across 10 sessions at FIUM, aimed at mapping participants' needs and generating feedback for subsequent adjustments. (2) design (01–02.2023): integration of pilot results into a finalized structure of themes and objectives. (3) implementation (03–07.2023): delivery of 12 weekly sessions with the experimental group (EG), spanning the process from orientation and informed consent to thematic activities and evaluation. (4) evaluation (08.2023–02.2024): included both an immediate post-test and a six-month follow-up to assess the sustainability of program effects.

The content was structured around three complementary axes: (I) Self-knowledge and Values (value hierarchy, value–choice relationship, clarification of short- and long-term goals, self-assessment); (II) Socio-emotional Development (cohesion, communication, empathy, management of emotions and stress, emotional intelligence); (III) Professional Orientation and Planning (inventory of aptitudes and interests, motivation, informed decision-making, realistic career planning – profession psychogram).

The intervention employed experiential and reflective techniques—dyad and small-group work, projective methods, guided imagery, self-reflection, role-playing and simulations, case studies, and situation modeling—tailored to participants' dynamics and learning styles. The program also integrated mid-term evaluation and a post-program guide to support sustained progress.

From an organizational standpoint, the program comprised 14 sessions (one baseline assessment, one introductory session, ten core sessions, one mid-term evaluation, and one follow-up), each lasting 90–120 minutes, conducted weekly from March to July 2023, with the follow-up session in February 2024.

Program effectiveness was assessed using a battery of validated instruments: scales for meaning of life (goals, process, results, LC–Self, LC–Life); for values (morphological test); for professional identity (statuses: undefined, imposed, moratorium, achieved); for psychological maturity (responsibility, tolerance, self-development, positive thinking, independence; global index); and for social maturity (adaptation, role performance, integration). Statistical analyses employed the Mann–Whitney U test (for baseline EG–CG homogeneity) and the Wilcoxon test (for intra-group changes across test–retest/follow-up).

The comparative analyses confirmed initial homogeneity between groups for most variables (non-significant differences), with two exceptions: a significantly higher tendency toward “imposed professional identity” in the control group, and a slight, non-significant tendency toward higher positive thinking. This configuration substantiates the attribution of subsequent changes to the intervention.

Taken together, Subchapter 3.2 demonstrates that the program was theoretically grounded, methodologically rigorous, and ethically implemented, thereby providing a robust framework for testing its effects on professional identity as well as on psychological and social maturity among youth in transition to adulthood.

Subchapter 3.3. The Effectiveness of the Psychosocial Program for Professional Identity Development: Results of the Controlled Experiment. This subchapter presents the outcomes of the controlled experiment designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Psychosocial Program for Value Development and Professional Identity Consolidation. The progression of the experimental group (EG, program participants) was compared to that of the control group (CG, no intervention), using the same instruments as in the baseline assessment. Statistical analyses included the Wilcoxon test (intra-group comparisons) and the Mann–Whitney U test (inter-group comparisons).

Experimental Group (test–retest). Existential orientations increased significantly across all dimensions (meaning, goals, process, results, LC–Self, LC–Life), thereby confirming a robust program effect on participants' clarity and perceived control over life. The program demonstrated substantial efficacy in the experimental group, with Wilcoxon and Mann–Whitney U tests revealing statistically significant improvements in several domains:

- *Meaning of life and existential orientations:* EG scores rose markedly (e.g., from 92.4 to 118.5 for meaning of life, $p = 0.001$), indicating a clearer and more positive perception of existence.

- *Life values*: Notable improvements were observed in self-development ($p = 0.002$), spiritual fulfillment ($p = 0.007$), and maintenance of individuality ($p = 0.001$). Other values (e.g., creativity, social contacts) did not reach statistical significance.
- *Life domains*: EG reported significant gains in academic engagement ($5.1 \rightarrow 7.1$; $p = 0.004$), professional life ($p = 0.006$), family ($p = 0.007$), social involvement ($p = 0.001$), and physical activity ($p = 0.035$).
- *Professional identity*: The “achieved identity” status increased substantially ($8.0 \rightarrow 15.9$; $p = 0.001$), while the imposed identity also rose significantly ($p = 0.026$). Undefined identity and moratorium scores declined slightly, though without statistical significance.
- *Psychological and social maturity*: Significant growth was recorded (psychological maturity: $115.3 \rightarrow 122.8$, $p = 0.036$; social maturity: $50.7 \rightarrow 60.9$, $p = 0.003$). Nevertheless, some components—such as positive thinking and responsibility—did not exhibit significant changes.

The comparative analysis of the test–retest results highlights that the significant improvements observed in the experimental group (EG) stem from the awareness, clarification, and internal restructuring processes stimulated by the *Psychosocial Program for Value Development and Professional Identity Consolidation*. The significant increase in professional aspirations (meaning, goals, process, result, LC–Self, and LC–Life) reflects that participants developed a clearer vision of their own existence, achieved greater coherence in goal structuring, and strengthened their sense of internal control. These transformations indicate a shift from a diffuse perception of life meaning to a cognitive–affective clarification of personal and professional development directions, supported by guided reflection and self-exploration activities within the program.

In the control group (CG), moderate changes were observed, attributed to other educational and social factors: increases in perceived meaning of life ($92.5 \rightarrow 100.8$; $p = 0.018$), self-development ($p = 0.005$), personal prestige ($p = 0.041$), material status ($p = 0.010$), and maintenance of individuality ($p = 0.024$). However, professional identity remained practically unchanged, and psychological and social maturity remained stable, except for a slight improvement in independence.

Therefore, the program is effective in enhancing clarity of professional aspirations (meaning, process, perceived control), strengthening key values (self-development, spirituality, individuality), structuring the achieved professional identity, and improving social maturity. The more “inertial” dimensions (some values and specific components of psychological maturity) require targeted modules and/or extended duration. The results remained consistent in the six-month follow-up assessment.

III. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In alignment with the topic, central hypothesis, purpose, and research objectives of this doctoral thesis, a set of conclusions has been formulated to synthesize the principal scientific findings.

1. The theoretical analysis highlights the processual and multidimensional nature of social maturity during the transition to adulthood, encompassing the assumption of responsibilities, integration of personal and professional values, adaptation to diverse social roles, and consolidation of a stable identity⁶². Key criteria identified in the literature—professional orientation, social involvement, personal self-regulation, value system, and awareness of social roles—served as the foundation for operationalizing social maturity in this study⁶³.

Professional values and aspirations emerge as determining factors, structuring motivation, guiding decision-making, and supporting the development of professional identity, thereby facilitating social integration and autonomy. Social maturity can thus be conceptualized as a balance among responsibility, adaptability, and self-actualization, expressed through a coherent value system

⁶² POPOVICI, A. Formarea valorică - condiție a maturității sociale în tranziția la vârsta adultă. In: *Asistența psihologică la etapa contemporană: realități și perspective*, Ed. 1, 21 octombrie 2022, Bălți. Bălți: CEP UPS „I.Creangă”, 2022, pp. 71-74. ISBN: 978-9975-50-295-5

⁶³ POPOVICI, A. Analiză factorială: maturitatea psihologică și socială a personalității. In: *Revista de Știință, Inovare, Cultură și Artă „Akademos”*, 2024, nr. 2(73), pp. 152-158. ISSN 1857-0461.

and realistic professional projects⁶⁴. These conclusions inform educational and social recommendations aimed at clarifying values, fostering professional identity, and developing self-regulation skills—essential components for an ethical and sustainable professional trajectory.

2. The analysis revealed consistent influences of gender and educational level on meaning in life, value priorities, and professional identity formation. Young women tend to emphasize intrinsic dimensions—self-development, spiritual fulfillment, social relationships—associated with greater autonomy and active career exploration; they more frequently achieve a clearly defined professional identity after the moratorium stage. Young men, in contrast, prioritize extrinsic dimensions—professional success, prestige, and material outcomes—with professional identity often shaped externally (foreclosed) or remaining undefined⁶⁵.

Educational level further differentiates these trends. University students demonstrate stronger intrinsic value orientation and a more consolidated professional identity, characterized by a coherent life vision and enhanced personal direction, compared to college and high school students. College students focus on social relationships and material stability but exhibit a more fluctuating professional identity; high school students largely remain in the exploration stage, with unresolved professional directions and unstable identity^{66,67}.

Age-related analyses (18–22 years) indicate progressive consolidation: the prevalence of achieved professional identity rises with age, while undefined and foreclosed statuses decline, with moratorium retaining its transitional role. Correspondingly, higher levels of psychological and social maturity are observed in the older age ranges.

3. The study proposed an integrative model demonstrating the interdependence of psychological and social maturity, grounded in existential orientations and professional values. Life meaning and goals, along with the valuation of self-development, creativity, spiritual fulfillment, personal achievement, and identity preservation, foster key psychological traits—responsibility, self-regulation, positive thinking, and independence. These traits, in combination with professional identity, translate into socially adaptive behaviors, including role assumption, community engagement, and effective integration in educational and professional contexts⁶⁸.

The findings support a coherent explanatory chain: existential orientations and the axiological core are associated with (i) strengthened psychological maturity and (ii) progression from diffuse or foreclosed identities to an achieved professional identity. Identity stages exhibit distinct profiles: undefined and foreclosed statuses correspond to lower responsibility, self-regulation, and social integration; moratorium represents constructive exploration; achieved identity reflects internalized values, clear objectives, and mature social functioning. Social maturity thus emerges from value internalization and identity consolidation, mediated by intrinsic psychological resources^{69,70}.

⁶⁴ POPOVICI, A. Maturitatea socială – perspectiva psihologică. In: *The contemporary issues of the socio-humanistic sciences*, Ed. 11, 3-4 decembrie 2020, Chișinău. Chișinău: "Print-Caro" SRL, 2021, pp. 161-165. ISBN 978-9975-3471-4-3.

⁶⁵ POPOVICI, A. Studiul problemei sensului vieții la tinerii și tinerele ce se află în perioada de tranziție de la studii spre muncă, În: *Volum lucrări Simpozion Național cu participare Internațională Kreatikon: Creativitate-formare-performanță: „Creativitate și inovare-premise ale excelenței în educație”*. Ed. XIX. Iași, 2024, pp.112-120. ISSN 2068-1372

⁶⁶ POPOVICI, A. Sensul și valorile vieții în etapa de tranziție a tinerilor de la studii la muncă. In: *EcoSoEn*, 2023, nr. 2, pp. 65-72. ISSN 2587-344X.

⁶⁷ RUSNAC, S., POPOVICI, A. Maturitatea socială și valorile personale: factori cheie în dezvoltarea identității profesionale a tinerilor, In: *Revista de pedagogie*, 2024 (1), LXXII, 2024 (1), pp. 125-152. ISSN: 0034-8678; eISSN: 2559-639X. Disponibil: <https://revped.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/RevPed-1.2024-6.pdf> etc.

⁶⁸ POPOVICI, A. Analiză factorială: maturitatea psihologică și socială a personalității. In: *Revista de Știință, Inovare, Cultură și Artă „Akademos”*, 2024, nr. 2(73), pp. 152-158. ISSN 1857-0461.

⁶⁹ POPOVICI, A. Autodeterminarea profesională – componentă de bază a maturității sociale la vârsta adolescenței. In: *The contemporary issues of the socio-humanistic sciences*, Ed. 13, 1-2 decembrie 2022, Chișinău. Chișinău, 2023: "Print-Caro" SRL, 2023, Ediția 13, pp. 93-99. ISBN 978-9975-165-61-7.

⁷⁰ POPOVICI, A. Interrelația maturității sociale și identității profesionale la adolescenți în perioada crizei identității profesionale. In: *Psihologie, revista științifico-practică*, 2024, nr. 1(44), pp. 12-25. ISSN 1857-2502.

The socio-psychological profile portrays youth as responsible, self-development-oriented, positive thinkers, and capable of aligning personal values with educational and professional choices while maintaining authentic social relationships. Applied interventions should focus on clarifying values and life meaning, goal-setting, cultivating self-regulation and responsibility, and fostering identity work, providing a comprehensive framework for successful transition to adulthood.

4. The implementation of the *Psychosocial Program for Value Development and Consolidation of Professional Identity* produced positive effects in clarifying vocational directions and strengthening professional identity, thereby facilitating social and professional maturation through counseling, self-reflection, and strategic career planning. The experimental group demonstrated enhanced life control and clarified professional aspirations, with follow-up assessments confirming skill retention. Areas characterized by identity crisis and professional uncertainty were less responsive, highlighting the need for individualized approaches and extended program duration. The hypothesis that structured interventions support social maturation and effective adult transition is confirmed, emphasizing the value of prolonged and personalized programs.

5. These findings provide innovative recommendations for educational and social interventions supporting young people in their professional and social transition, offering both scientific insight and practical utility.

The overarching hypothesis of the research is confirmed: existential orientations (meaning of life, goals, perspectives on life processes and outcomes, as well as internal locus of control), together with professional values and aspirations, are significantly associated with the levels of social and psychological maturity and with the clarity of professional identity among youth transitioning to adulthood.

Differential analyses demonstrated that gender, educational level, and age modulate these relationships (H1–H3), with university students and older youth overall exhibiting more consolidated profiles of maturity and identity. Moreover, correlational results support a mediating mechanism (H4) whereby existential orientations and values/aspirations influence social maturity through the enhancement of psychological maturity and professional identity. Finally, psychosocial interventions focused on value development and the clarification of professional identity proved effective, facilitating goal-setting, increasing perceived personal control, and promoting a more coherent transition to adulthood, accompanied by superior social adaptation.

The results obtained, which contribute to addressing a significant scientific problem, consist of the conceptualization and theoretical grounding of an integrative model of social maturity during the transition to adulthood. Within this model, existential orientations, professional values, and aspirations function as predictors, while professional identity and psychological maturity act as mediators of social integration. Through empirical demonstration, the value–aspiration transmission mechanism toward social maturity has been clarified, the evaluative indicators have been specified, and the influence of age and educational level on the formation of professional identity and psychosocial maturity has been highlighted.

From an applied perspective, a psychosocial program for value development and professional identity consolidation was designed, implemented, and validated. This program optimized the clarification of career directions and enhanced psychological and social maturity, with effects maintained at follow-up. Collectively, these contributions provide a coherent theoretical and practical framework, guiding curriculum design, youth policies, and counseling interventions, thereby supporting the effective transition of young people into adult roles.

The novelty and scientific originality of the results obtained lie in the development of an integrated approach to professional values and aspirations as determinants of social maturity during young people's transition to adulthood. The study proposes an innovative perspective, exploring the interdependence between psychological and social maturity, and emphasizes the essential role of existential orientations, personal values, and professional aspirations in this process. This approach has not previously been investigated in such detail and represents one of the few studies that simultaneously examines the impact of these two dimensions on youth social maturity.

The research delineated an integrative model of social maturity, highlighting the central component of professional identity alongside educational and social values and aspirations, thereby enabling a complex and in-depth analysis of the social development process. This model was tested and validated through an experimentally implemented career guidance program, which demonstrated the positive impact of counseling and self-reflection on consolidating professional identity and enhancing social maturity.

The mixed-methods methodology employed, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, allowed for capturing the nuanced experiences of young people and revealed gender-, educational level-, and age-related differences in the formation of professional identity and social maturity. The originality of the research resides in the detailed comparative analysis of these variables, offering novel insights into how values and aspirations influence the transition to adulthood.

The findings contribute to the development of innovative recommendations for improving educational and social interventions aimed at supporting young people in their professional and social transition, thereby adding value from both a scientific and practical perspective.

The theoretical significance of the research extends knowledge regarding social maturity and the role of professional values and aspirations in the transition of youth to adulthood, defining social maturity as a multidimensional process encompassing responsibility, self-regulation, the integration of personal values, and adaptation to diverse social roles. By incorporating professional values and aspirations, the study highlights the interdependence between psychological and social maturity and establishes an integrative theoretical model that links psychological components (self-regulation, independence, self-actualization) with social dimensions (values, aspirations, and socio-professional adaptation). This model provides an innovative interpretative framework and directions for future research. Simultaneously, the analysis of gender-, educational level-, and age-related differences clarifies the factors influencing youth development, thereby consolidating the theoretical foundations of developmental and educational psychology and suggesting effective educational and social strategies to support young people in their maturation process.

The practical value of the research lies in the potential application of the obtained results for the development and optimization of educational and social interventions aimed at supporting youth during the transition to adulthood and from formal education to professional life. The study demonstrated that career guidance programs centered on the values and aspirations of young people play a crucial role in clarifying professional directions and consolidating social maturity and professional identity.

An important aspect of the applied value is the translation and validation of the research instruments employed in the observational experiment. This process ensured the cultural adaptation of the tools for assessing values and social maturity to the specific context of the Republic of Moldova, making them applicable over the long term for evaluating the effectiveness of educational and vocational guidance programs. These instruments can be utilized by psychologists, career counselors, and educators to design personalized programs tailored to the individual needs of young people.

Beyond methodological validation, the research contributed to the development and testing of a career guidance program centered on values and aspirations, which proved effective in supporting young people during the transition to adulthood. This program can be implemented in schools, high schools, colleges, and universities, providing a structured framework for youth counseling, assisting participants in clarifying their aspirations and strategically planning their professional trajectories.

Furthermore, the research offers a solid foundation for the development of more effective educational and social policies, positioning social maturity as a central objective in youth development. Educational institutions can leverage the recommendations to optimize career guidance methodologies and equip counseling centers with modern assessment technologies, including digital testing and self-evaluation platforms.

In conclusion, the applied value of the research is reflected in the direct utilization of the findings to enhance educational and counseling practices, in the creation of personalized support

programs, and in the establishment of a modern, inclusive educational framework tailored to the individual needs of young people and the dynamic demands of the labor market.

Approval and Implementation of Scientific Results. The approval and implementation of the research findings were accomplished through a series of presentations at national and international scientific events, as well as through the publication of contributions in specialized journals. Specifically, the research results were presented at three editions of the International Scientific Conference “*Contemporary Concerns in the Social-Human Sciences*” (2019, 2020, and 2022), organized by the Free International University of Moldova (FIUM).

Additionally, the findings were presented at major international scientific conferences, such as the International Scientific Conference “*Psychological Assistance in the Contemporary Era: Realities and Perspectives*,” 1st edition, October 21, 2022, Bălți, USARB; and the National Symposium with International Participation *Kreatikon: Creativity-Formation-Performance: “Creativity and Innovation—Premises for Excellence in Education,”* XIX edition, March 28–30, 2024, Iași, *Petre Andrei University*. Four of the presented contributions were subsequently published in the volumes of the aforementioned conferences.

Furthermore, four articles were published in specialized scientific journals, including: *Akademios: Journal of Science, Innovation, Culture, and Art* (DOAJ, Index Copernicus, ROAD, ERIH Plus, Google Scholar); *Psihologie: Scientific-Practical Journal* (DOAJ, Index Copernicus, CEEOL, ERIH Plus); *Journal of Pedagogy* (ERIH Plus, Crossref, ULRICHWEB, HEDBIB, DOAJ, De Gruyter, EBSCO, ROAD, CEEOL); and *EcoSoEn* (DOAJ, Index Copernicus, CEEOL).

The research findings were also incorporated into academic instruction through teaching within the module “*Developmental Psychology: Adulthood and Senescence*” of the course “*Youth: General Characterization and Substages*” at the undergraduate level. These academic presentations, publications, and integration into teaching attest to the validation and practical applicability of the research results across diverse educational and scientific contexts.

Based on the findings of the doctoral research, a series of practical recommendations are proposed to support the development of social and professional maturity among young people during their transition to adulthood.

Recommendations for Field Specialists

1. Implement the *Psychosocial Program for Value Development and Professional Identity Consolidation* in schools, high schools, colleges, and universities. This program should provide young people with a structured counseling framework to clarify aspirations, plan professional trajectories, and develop social and professional responsibility.

2. Enhance counseling and career guidance methodologies by incorporating: modules focused on identifying and prioritizing personal values; emphasis on strengthening professional identity, particularly between the ages of 18 and 20; promotion of intrinsic values—self-development, creativity, and spiritual fulfillment—which correlate positively with psychological and social maturity; development of emotional self-regulation and positive thinking skills; adaptation of educational content to gender-specific characteristics; personalized or extended programs tailored to the individual needs of young people.

3. Introduce early interventions for social maturity development, integrating activities into high school and college psychosocial programs that focus on decision-making, social skills formation, and civic responsibility.

Recommendations for Governmental Bodies Responsible for Educational Policy

1. Prioritize social maturity development as a central objective in youth education and social policies. Use the findings of this research to strengthen youth-centered frameworks that foster social and professional maturity in the context of socioeconomic change and contemporary labor market dynamics.

2. Expand access to career guidance programs focused on developing social maturity, providing effective support for young people during the transition to adulthood and labor market integration.

3. Integrate social maturity modules into curricula at lower- and upper-secondary education levels to systematically support students' psychosocial and professional development.

4. Utilize tools from the *Psychosocial Program for Value Development and Professional Identity Consolidation* to enhance monitoring and evaluation mechanisms of educational and vocational counseling programs, ensuring evidence-based improvements.

Limitations of the Research. While this study provides valuable insights into social maturity and the professional values and aspirations of young people, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small and focused exclusively on a specific group of youth from the Republic of Moldova, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other socio-cultural or geographic contexts. Consequently, certain aspects relevant to youth in different regions may not be fully captured.

Another limitation concerns the duration and context of the intervention program. The psychosocial program for value development and professional identity consolidation was implemented over a relatively brief period, which may constrain the stability and long-term durability of its effects. In addition, the program was conducted under controlled conditions, which may not fully reflect the complex challenges and variables that young people encounter during the transition to adulthood.

Furthermore, some demographic variables—such as economic status, family composition, and residential environment—were only partially considered in the analyses. These factors may exert a significant influence on social maturation and professional identity formation, and their more comprehensive inclusion could enhance the understanding of these processes.

Finally, the validation and translation of the research instruments were conducted specifically for the Moldovan context, which may limit their applicability in other cultural or linguistic settings without further adaptation. Future studies are therefore needed to validate these instruments across diverse socio-cultural environments.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a solid foundation for future research, offering opportunities to expand and deepen the investigation of social maturity and professional development in youth.

Future Research Directions. To extend and deepen the understanding of the development of social and professional maturity among young people, the following research directions are proposed:

1. Expanding the sample to include groups of young people from diverse socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural backgrounds. This would allow for a broader exploration of variability in the development of social and professional maturity. In particular, it would be valuable to include young people from rural areas, who face challenges distinct from those in urban environments, as well as international students studying in the Republic of Moldova. Studying these groups would contribute to a better understanding of contextual influences on the formation of professional identity and values.

2. Conducting longitudinal studies to monitor the evolution of young people's social and professional maturity over a longer period. Such studies could provide a detailed perspective on how social maturity develops over time, highlighting the key moments of the transition to adulthood and the factors influencing its success. Tracking young people from high school through their entry into the labor market would allow for the identification of critical stages and effective strategies for supporting their transition.

3. Using complementary methods, such as case studies, to explore in depth the psychological and social factors that influence success or difficulties during the transition period. Case studies would enable a detailed analysis of individual trajectories, providing valuable insights into the motivations, values, and personal challenges young people face in forming their professional and social identity. These methods could complement quantitative data and offer a holistic perspective on the maturation process.

4. Exploring the influence of digital technologies on the development of social maturity and professional identity. Future studies could investigate how the use of social networks, online

educational platforms, and other technologies affects identity formation, social interactions, and career management among young people.

A practical research direction would be the testing of adapted educational and social interventions, personalized according to the individual needs of young people. Through the implementation of personalized career guidance and counseling programs, the long-term effects of these interventions on the development of social and professional maturity could be evaluated.

By pursuing these research directions, it will be possible to broaden the understanding of the factors influencing young people's social and professional maturity, contributing to the development of more effective educational and social strategies.

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V. LIST OF THE AUTHOR'S PUBLICATIONS ON THE THESIS TOPIC

2. Articles in scientific journals:

2.2. in journals indexed in other databases accepted by ANACEC (with the indication of the database)

1. RUSNAC, S., POPOVICI, A. Maturitatea socială și valorile personale: factori cheie în dezvoltarea identității profesionale a tinerilor, In: *Revista de pedagogie*, 2024 (1), LXXII, 2024 (1), pp. 125-152. ISSN: 0034-8678; eISSN: 2559-639X. Disponibil: <https://revped.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/RevPed-1.2024-6.pdf>

2.3. in journals from the National Register of Specialized Journals (with the indication of the category)

1. RUSNAC, S., POPOVICI, A. Formarea identității profesionale în perioada de tranziție la vârsta adultă. În: *Revista de Teorie și Practică Educațională DIDACTICA PRO...*, Nr. 6 (148), 2024, nr. pp.2-6. ISSN 1810-6455. Indexată în baze de date: COPERNICUS. Disponibil: https://ibn.idsi.md/ro/vizualizare_articol/218587
2. POPOVICI, A. Analiză factorială: maturitatea psihologică și socială a personalității. In: *Revista de Știință, Inovare, Cultură și Artă „Akademos”*, 2024, nr. 2(73), pp. 152-158. ISSN 1857-0461. Disponibil: https://ibn.idsi.md/ro/vizualizare_articol/209290
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4. POPOVICI, A. Sensul și valorile vieții în etapa de tranziție a tinerilor de la studii la muncă. In: *EcoSoEn*, 2023, nr. 2, pp. 65-72. ISSN 2587-344X. Disponibil: https://ibn.idsi.md/ro/vizualizare_articol/184330

3. Articles in conference proceedings and other scientific events

3.3. in the proceedings of scientific events included in other databases accepted by ANACEC

1. POPOVICI, A. Studiul problemei sensului vieții la tinerii și tinerele ce se află în perioada de tranziție de la studii spre muncă, În: *Volum lucrări Simpozion Național cu participare Internațională Kreatikon: Creativitate-formare-performanță: „Creativitate și inovare-premise ale excelenței în educație”*. Ed. XIX. Iași, 2024, pp.112-120. ISSN 2068-1372. Disponibil: https://ibn.idsi.md/ro/vizualizare_articol/217714

3.3. in the proceedings of scientific events included in the Register of materials published based on scientific events organized in the Republic of Moldova

1. POPOVICI, A. Autodeterminarea profesională – componentă de bază a maturității sociale la vârsta adolescenței. In: *The contemporary issues of the socio-humanistic sciences*, Ed. 13, 1-2 decembrie 2022,

- Chișinău. Chișinău, 2023: "Print-Caro" SRL, 2023, Ediția 13, pp. 93-99. ISBN 978-9975-165-61-7. Disponibil: https://ibn.idsi.md/ro/vizualizare_articol/176409
2. POPOVICI, A. Formarea valorică - condiție a maturității sociale în tranziția la vârsta adultă. In: *Asistența psihologică la etapa contemporană: realități și perspective*, Ed. 1, 21 octombrie 2022, Bălți. Bălți: CEP UPS „I.Creangă”, 2022, pp. 71-74. ISBN: 978-9975-50-295-5. Disponibil: https://ibn.idsi.md/ro/vizualizare_articol/170024
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ANNOTATION

Popovici, Adriana. *Values and Professional Aspirations - a condition for social maturity in the transition to adulthood*. Doctoral Thesis in Psychology, Chişinău, 2025

Structure of the Thesis: Table of contents, introduction, three chapters, general conclusions and recommendations, bibliography comprising 200 titles, six appendices, 155 pages of main text, 33 figures, and 11 tables. The findings have been published in nine scientific works.

Keywords: professional aspirations, psychological maturity, social maturity, professional identity, youth, life meaning, life values.

Purpose of the Research: To investigate social maturity among young people in transition to adulthood by analyzing the relationship between life values and professional aspirations within the dynamics of the social maturation process, with the aim of developing educational and social interventions that facilitate adaptation and effective integration into adult roles.

Objectives of the Research: (1) Conduct a theoretical analysis of social maturity during the transition to adulthood, emphasizing the role of life values and professional aspirations as determining factors; (2) Empirically describe and investigate values, professional aspirations, existential orientations, professional identity, and levels of psychological and social maturity, according to sociodemographic variables (gender, age, educational level); (3) Develop and validate an integrative model of social maturity that captures the relationships among professional values/aspirations, psychological maturity, professional identity, and social maturity; (4) Design, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of a psychosocial program focused on clarifying values and consolidating professional identity among young people in transition to adulthood; (5) Formulate applied recommendations for improving educational and career guidance practices, with the aim of facilitating the social and professional integration of young people.

Scientific Novelty and Originality: The research proposes an integrative approach to understanding the relationship between life values, professional aspirations, and social maturity during the transition to adulthood. By developing and empirically validating a comprehensive model of social maturity, it was demonstrated that life values and professional aspirations function as predictors, while professional identity and psychological maturity act as mediators of the social maturation process. The originality of the study lies in integrating the value-aspirational dimension into the conceptual explanation of social maturity, offering a novel perspective on how young people articulate their values, aspirations, and professional identity during personal and social development. The research employs a mixed-methods design, allowing the identification of gender, age, and educational level differences and highlighting how these factors influence the formation of professional identity and social maturity. At the applied level, the study led to the development and validation of the Psychosocial Program for Value Development and Consolidation of Professional Identity, which proved effective in clarifying values, fostering professional identity, and enhancing psychosocial maturity. Through its theoretical, empirical, and applied contributions, the research provides a coherent scientific framework for the study of social maturity and opens innovative directions in developmental psychology and vocational counseling.

Results and Contribution to Solving a Significant Scientific Problem: The results consist in the conceptualization and empirical validation of an integrative model of social maturity during the transition to adulthood. In this model, professional aspirations and life values act as predictors, while professional identity and psychological maturity function as mediators of social maturity. The empirical validation clarified the value-aspirational mechanisms underlying the formation of social maturity, highlighting the complex interaction between motivational, axiological, and identity factors, and demonstrating the influence of demographic variables—age and educational level—on psychosocial development dynamics.

At the applied level, the Psychosocial Program for Value Development and Consolidation of Professional Identity was designed and implemented for young people in transition to adulthood. This program supports the clarification of values and career directions, the development of professional identity, and the enhancement of psychological and social maturity, offering a validated framework for formative intervention. Collectively, these contributions provide a coherent theoretical and praxiological foundation that can guide curriculum design, educational and youth policies, and psychological counseling programs, promoting a balanced and effective transition to adult roles.

Theoretical Significance: The study expands knowledge on social maturity and emphasizes the role of life values and professional aspirations in the transition to adulthood. Social maturity is defined as a multidimensional process involving responsibility, self-regulation, internalization of values, and adaptation to diverse social roles. By integrating life values and professional aspirations, the research demonstrates the interdependence between psychological and social maturity, proposing an integrative theoretical model linking psychological dimensions (self-regulation, independence, self-actualization) with social dimensions (values, aspirations, professional identity). This model provides an innovative perspective on the maturation process and suggests directions for future research. Analysis of gender, educational level, and age differences clarifies factors influencing youth maturation, strengthening the theoretical foundation of developmental and educational psychology, and suggesting effective educational and psychosocial strategies to support this process.

Applied Value: The applied significance lies in the use of the results to optimize educational and social interventions that support young people in their transition to adulthood and professional integration. Three instruments assessing professional identity, psychological maturity, and social maturity were translated, culturally adapted, and validated, providing a sustainable methodological basis for counseling and vocational assessment. The research led to the development and testing of the Psychosocial Program for Value Development and Consolidation of Professional Identity, proven effective in clarifying personal values and career planning. The results provide a solid foundation for modern educational policies and the modernization of vocational counseling in schools and universities.

Approval and Implementation of Scientific Results: The scientific results were presented and published at national and international conferences and in recognized academic journals. The findings were disseminated through conferences organized by the Free International University of Moldova (FIUM), the International Scientific Conference “Psychological Assistance in the Contemporary Era,” and the National Symposium Kreatikon, being published in their respective proceedings. Four articles were published in reputable journals, including *Akados*, *Psihologie*, *Revista de Pedagogie*, and *EcoSoEn*, attesting to international recognition of the research’s value. Integration of the findings into the “Developmental Psychology” course at ULIM confirms their applicability in educational contexts, contributing to the preparation and training of future specialists. Thus, the research demonstrates relevance both academically and educationally.

ADNOTARE

Popovici Adriana. Valorile și aspirațiile profesionale – condiție a maturității sociale în procesul de tranziție la vârsta adultă.

Teză de doctor în psihologie, Chișinău, 2025

Structura tezei: cuprins, introducere, trei capitole, concluzii generale și recomandări, bibliografie compusă din 200 de titluri, 6 anexe, 156 de pagini de text de bază, 33 de figuri, 11 tabele. Rezultatele obținute sunt publicate în 9 lucrări științifice.

Cuvinte-cheie: aspirații profesionale, maturitate psihologică, maturitate socială, identitate profesională, tineri, sensul vieții, valori de viață.

Scopul cercetării: investigarea maturității sociale la tinerii aflați în tranziție la vârsta adultă, prin analiza relației dintre valorile de viață și aspirațiile profesionale în dinamica procesului de maturizare socială, în vederea elaborării unor intervenții educaționale și sociale care să favorizeze adaptarea și integrarea eficientă în rolurile adulte.

Obiectivele lucrării: (1) Analiză teoretică a maturității sociale în procesul tranziției la vârsta adultă, cu evidențierea rolului valorilor și aspirațiilor profesionale ca factori determinanți; (2) Descrierea și investigarea empirică a valorilor, aspirațiilor profesionale, orientărilor existențiale, identității profesionale și nivelului maturității psihologice și sociale, în funcție de variabilele sociodemografice (gen, vârstă, nivel educațional); (3) Elaborarea și validarea unui model integrativ al maturității sociale, care să surprindă relațiile dintre valorile/aspirațiile profesionale, maturitatea psihologică, identitatea profesională și maturitatea socială; (4) Elaborarea, implementarea și evaluarea eficienței unui program psihosocial axat pe clarificarea valorilor și consolidarea identității profesionale a tinerilor aflați în tranziție la vârsta adultă; (5) Formularea recomandărilor aplicative pentru îmbunătățirea practicilor educaționale și de orientare profesională, cu scopul de a facilita integrarea socială și profesională a tinerilor.

Noutatea și originalitatea științifică a rezultatelor obținute. Cercetarea propune o abordare integrativă asupra relației dintre valorile de viață, aspirațiile profesionale și maturitatea socială în perioada de tranziție la vârsta adultă. Prin elaborarea și validarea empirică a unui model complex al maturității sociale, s-a demonstrat că valorile de viață și aspirațiile profesionale acționează ca predictori, iar identitatea profesională și maturitatea psihologică – ca mediatori ai procesului de maturizare socială. Originalitatea cercetării constă în integrarea dimensiunii valoric-aspiraționale în explicația maturității sociale, oferind o perspectivă nouă asupra modului în care tinerii își articulează valorile, aspirațiile și identitatea profesională în procesul de formare personală și socială. Lucrarea se remarcă printr-o metodologie mixtă, care a permis surprinderea diferențelor de gen, vârstă și nivel educațional, evidențiind modul în care acești factori influențează constituirea identității profesionale și a maturității sociale. În plan aplicativ, a fost elaborat și validat Programul psihosocial de dezvoltare valorică și consolidare a identității profesionale, demonstrând eficiența intervențiilor educaționale în clarificarea valorilor, formarea identității profesionale și dezvoltarea maturității psihosociale. Prin ansamblul contribuțiilor teoretice, empirice și aplicative, cercetarea oferă un cadru științific coerent pentru studiul maturității sociale și deschide direcții inovatoare în psihologia dezvoltării și consilierea vocațională.

Rezultatele obținute care contribuie la soluționarea unei probleme științifice importante constau în conceptualizarea și validarea empirică a unui model integrativ al maturității sociale în etapa tranziției la vârsta adultă, model în care aspirațiile profesionale și valorile de viață acționează ca predictori, iar identitatea profesională și maturitatea psihologică funcționează ca mediatori ai maturității sociale. Demonstrația empirică a modelului a permis clarificarea mecanismului valoric-aspirațional care susține formarea maturității sociale, evidențiind interacțiunea complexă dintre factorii motivaționali, axiologici și identitari și relevând totodată rolul variabilelor demografice – vârstă, nivelul educațional – în dinamica maturizării psihosociale. În plan aplicativ, a fost elaborat și implementat Programul psihosocial de dezvoltare valorică și consolidare a identității profesionale, destinat tinerilor aflați în tranziția la vârsta adultă. Acesta sprijină clarificarea valorilor și direcțiilor de carieră, dezvoltarea identității profesionale și creșterea nivelului de maturitate psihologică și socială, oferind un instrument validat de intervenție formativă. Ansamblul acestor contribuții oferă un cadru teoretic și praxiologic coerent, care poate ghida proiectarea curriculară, politicile educaționale și de tineret, precum și programele de consiliere psihologică, sprijinind tranziția eficientă și echilibrată a tinerilor către rolurile adulte.

Semnificația teoretică a cercetării. Cercetarea extinde cunoștințele despre maturitatea socială și evidențiază rolul valorilor de viață și al aspirațiilor profesionale în tranziția tinerilor la vârsta adultă. Maturitatea socială este definită ca un proces multidimensional, care implică responsabilitate, autoreglare, internalizarea valorilor și adaptarea la roluri sociale variate. Prin includerea valorilor de viață și a aspirațiilor profesionale, studiul evidențiază interdependența dintre maturitatea psihologică și cea socială, oferind un model teoretic integrativ care corelează dimensiunile psihologice (autoreglare, independență, autoactualizare) cu cele sociale (valori, aspirații, identitate profesională). Acest model oferă o viziune inovatoare asupra procesului de maturizare și direcții pentru cercetări viitoare. Analiza diferențelor de gen, nivel educațional și vârstă clarifică factorii care influențează maturizarea tinerilor, consolidând fundamentul teoretic al psihologiei dezvoltării și educației și sugerând strategii educaționale și psihosociale eficiente pentru susținerea acestui proces.

Valoarea aplicativă a cercetării constă în utilizarea rezultatelor pentru optimizarea intervențiilor educaționale și sociale care sprijină tinerii în tranziția la vârsta adultă și integrarea profesională. Au fost traduse, adaptate și validate trei instrumente privind identitatea profesională, maturitatea psihologică și cea socială, oferind o bază metodologică durabilă pentru consiliere și evaluare vocațională. Cercetarea a condus la elaborarea și testarea Programului psihosocial de dezvoltare valorică și consolidare a identității profesionale, eficient în clarificarea valorilor și planificarea carierei. Rezultatele fundamentează politici educaționale moderne și modernizarea consilierii vocaționale în școli și universități.

Aprobarea și implementarea rezultatelor științifice. Rezultatele științifice au fost prezentate și publicate în cadrul unor conferințe științifice naționale și internaționale, precum și în reviste de specialitate recunoscute. Rezultatele cercetării au fost diseminate în cadrul conferințelor organizate de Universitatea Liberă Internațională din Moldova (ULIM), Conferinței Științifice Internaționale „Asistența psihologică la etapa contemporană” și Simpozionului Național Kreatikon, fiind publicate în volumele acestor conferințe. De asemenea, patru articole au fost publicate în reviste științifice de renume, cum ar fi „Akademos”, „Psihologie”, „Revista de pedagogie” și „EcoSoEn”, fapt ce atestă recunoașterea internațională a valorii rezultatelor. Includerea rezultatelor cercetării în activitățile didactice la modulul „Psihologia dezvoltării” (ULIM) confirmă aplicabilitatea rezultatelor în contextul educațional, contribuind la pregătirea și formarea viitoarelor generații de specialiști. Astfel, cercetarea își dovedește relevanța atât în plan academic, cât și în sfera educațională.

POPOVICI ADRIANA

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MATURITY IN THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD**

SPECIALTY: 511.03 – SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

ABSTRACT

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