

Visual arts students' perceptions of the study-to-work transition: challenges and potential solutions

Ioana BOLDIȘ¹, Alexandra POP²

Abstract: *Due to the highly technological and competitive labor market requirements, youth need the skills to correlate subjective experience with exploring and processing multiple facets of the same reality³.*

Preparing students for the study-to-work transition aims to facilitate the transferability and adaptability of the academic skills and knowledge to the professional field.

In this paper, we investigated the visual arts students' perception regarding the transition from higher education to labor market. The participants answered to a series of questions. The main data collection instrument was an online survey.

In addition to the data regarding youth perception of the education-to-work transition, the study also includes a set of recommendations for optimizing programs, intended to facilitate the professional insertion of university graduates.

Key-words: *students; study-to-work transition; visual arts; work readiness*

“Paid internships can help with both a decent income and experience. Outside the organization, I would promote corporate social responsibility strategies and create capacity-building and skills development courses and workshops for young people.” (Karuna, 23, India)⁴

1. Introduction

The youth transition to independent adulthood, arouses a high interest in the last 30 years literature, mainly because it is a process in continuous changing. The study-to-work transition is a major part of this process and brings a lot of challenges for all the participants involved in it (youth, parents, universities, employers and any other stakeholders).

Work represents a central life interest for transitioning youth, being in a strong relationship with educational commitments. Education mediates choosing or accomplishing the career opportunities, while there is a strong link between the individual work purposes and actions, on one side, and the academic accomplishments and vocational identity status, on the other side⁵.

Youth tend to spend more time in education, to enter the labor market later than previous generations⁶, due to factors such as the growing access to education, the high requirements of

¹ Department for Teacher Training, University of Art and Design, Cluj-Napoca, ioana.boldis@uad.ro

² Department of Marketing, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

³ V. J. Shute & B. J. Becker. 2010. *Innovative assessment for the 21st century*. New York, NY: Springer-Verlag.

⁴ United Nations (2013). *World Youth Report: Youth Employment - Youth Perspectives on the Pursuit of Decent Work in Changing Times*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. New York.

⁵ H.W. Marsh. 1993. Academic self-concept: Theory, measurement, and research. In J. Suls (Ed.), *Psychological perspectives on the self*. Volume 4. (pp. 59-98). Lawrence Erlbaum: Hillsdale, NJ. C.A. Was, I. Al-Harthy, M. Stack-Oden, R.M. Isaacson. 2009. Academic identity status and the relationship to achievement goal orientation. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology*, 7(2), 627-652.

⁶ M.C. Buchmann & I. Kriesi. 2011. Transition to Adulthood in Europe. *Annual Review of Sociology* 37:1, 481-503

the job market (that involve higher education) and even to the low job offer for youth. The youth work readiness represents a complex topic because there are many perspectives and actors that bring their contribution to a successful transition to work, after graduating. Also, assessing work readiness is quite complicated. There are many factors that interfere with it: the youth perception of their skills and knowledge regarding the occupational field (that impacts their work-related decisions and behaviours), the university trying to prepare them for the after graduating life course and there are the employers with a wide range of asymmetrical requirements.

Youth need to face a knowledge economy and a fast changing job market. Universities have to find a balance between preparing a higher educated society and preparing next employees (the first aims having graduates as many as possible, the second implies a smaller number of graduates, highly trained for particular jobs). Labor market also provides different requirements (there isn't a consensus on labor market regarding what a successful young employee should be like), making the universities initiatives even more challenging in attempting to address the societal needs under increasingly globalised conditions⁷.

Due to the rapidly changing jobs, some employers require a more likely general academic preparation of graduating youth, such as being able to make strong commitments for a job and to learn and develop their role in the organization. Still, others (mainly in the business and industry field) ask universities to provide better prepared youth, with a long list of work-ready tools (work-related knowledge and skills)⁸.

The occupational field dynamics and the lack of prediction regarding the evolution of different professional requirements bring more questions in the preparation process. Though, even in this complex discussion, there are some trends than can be identified, such as the evolution from adaptability requirements to the transformative skills needed in many jobs, nowadays⁹.

Furthermore, the professional requirements tend to gain more complexity and many developing jobs need university graduates, even if in the past the higher education wasn't a precondition for entering them. Many professional fields no longer promote a job-for-life paradigm, but a dynamic labor market navigation. Even in areas where there is more stability, the employees are expected to commit to a lifelong-learning process connected to education, training and a continuous professional (and personal) development¹⁰.

⁷ P.G. Altbach, P.J. Gumport & R.O. Berdahl (Eds.). 2011. *American higher education in the twenty-first century: Social, political, and economic challenges*. Baltimore, MD: JHU Press. L. Harvey and contributors. 2003. *Transitions from higher education to work*. York, Enhancing Student Employability Skills Co-ordination Team (ESECT) employability briefing paper. <https://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/esecttools/esectpubs/harveytransitions.pdf>. A.O. Karpov. 2016. Socialization for the Knowledge Society. *International Journal of Environmental and Science Education*, 11(10), 3487-3496. G. Rayner, & T. Papakonstantinou. 2015. Student perceptions of their workplace preparedness: Making work-integrated learning more effective. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 16(1), 13-24.

⁸ L. Harvey and contributors (2003). *Transitions from higher education to work*. York, Enhancing Student Employability Skills Co-ordination Team (ESECT) employability briefing paper. <https://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/esecttools/esectpubs/harveytransitions.pdf>. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2004. *Career guidance and public policy: Bridging the gap*. Paris, France. Accessed from <http://www.oecd.org/education/innovation-education/34050171.pdf>; D. Peach, & N. Gamble. 2011. Scoping work-integrated learning purposes, practices and issues. In S. Billet & A. Henderson (Eds.). *Developing learning professionals*, (Vol.7, pp. 169-186). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer. In G. Rayner, & T. Papakonstantinou. 2015. Student perceptions of their workplace preparedness: Making work-integrated learning more effective. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 16(1), p. 13

⁹ Harvey and collab., *op. cit.*; Karpov, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ Harvey and collab., *op. cit.*

The post-graduating transition to work and the development of a professional career is no longer a linear process, it is rather a fast development of high flexibility and "openness to change" skills, adults being exposed to multiple job roles and job-to-education (and vice versa) transitions during their life time. Sometimes, after a few years in an occupational field, people choose to re-enter education, in order to advance to a higher organizational position or to find a better paid job or one that brings more professional satisfaction. Due to all this fast happening novelty and changing dynamics, youth have to manage their way through all the challenges and built a professional career, once they exit education or even while still enrolled in it.

A smooth entry into the labor market seems to be facilitated by economic prosperity, a functional relationship between education and work (e.g. vocational training) and efficacious labour regulations¹¹.

Though, entering work and developing a career is not related only to contextual job market factors but also to individual features such as youth perception regarding these aspects. For example higher educated youth tend to assess their employability opportunities in a more positive manner than their lower educated counterparts and this favorable view impacts the initiatives or actions they pursue in the work field¹².

In this paper we are particularly interested in higher education students who are soon to be transitioning to labor market. We aimed to investigate their aspirational goals, the barriers and the facilitating factors that could impact the arts students' transition from education to work.

Our main interest in this topic is related to the challenges of youth employment in Europe (in general) and in Romania, in particular. Begu and Vasilescu show that "in 2015, in the European Union, nearly 6 million people under 25 years did not have jobs and about 7.5 million people were neither in employment, education nor training programs. The rate of youth unemployment in the EU is over 20%, almost 3 times higher than for those over 25 years. In some countries, more than half of young people who want to work can not find a job."¹³

In Romania, Neagu and Petrescu show that according to World Bank, in 2012, one third of the youth between 18-26 years age were affected by poverty, while National Strategy for

¹¹ R. Breen. 2005. Explaining Cross-National Variation in Youth Unemployment. Market and Institutional Factors. *European Sociological Review*; Volume 21, Issue, pp 125-134. C. Mocanu, A.M. Zamfir, E.O. Lungu, E. Militaru. 2012. *School-to-Work Transition of Higher Education Graduates in Four Eastern European Countries*; Maastricht School of Management, Working Paper No. 2012/15. D. Raffe. 2011. Cross-national Differences in Education-work Transitions; pp. 312-328 In London, M. (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Lifelong Learning*. New York: Oxford University Press. P. Ryan. 2001. The School-to-Work Transition: A Cross-National Perspective. *Journal of Economic Literature*; Vol. 39(1), pp 34-92. M.H.J. Wolbers. 2007. Patterns of Labour Market Entry: A Comparative Perspective on School-to-Work Transitions in 11 European Countries. *Acta Sociologica*; Vol. 50(3), pp. 189-210. In L.S. Begu, & M.D. Vasilescu. 2017. School-to-Work Transition: European Youth's Perception of Labour Market Opportunities. *Economic Computation and Economic Cybernetics Studies and Research*, Issue 1/2017, Vol. 51, p. 6

¹² E. Berntson, M. Sverke, & S. Marklund. 2006. Predicting Perceived Employability: Human Capital or Labour Market Opportunities? *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, Vol. 27 (2), pp. 223-244. L.S. Begu, & M.D. Vasilescu. 2017. School-to-Work Transition: European Youth's Perception of Labour Market Opportunities. *Economic Computation and Economic Cybernetics Studies and Research*, Issue 1/2017, Vol. 51. R.W. Lent, D.D. Brown, R. Talleyrand, E.B. McPartland, T. Davis, S.B. Chopra, et al. 2002. Career Choice Barriers, Supports and Coping Strategies: College Students' Experiences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*; Volume 60, Issue 1, pp. 61-72

¹³ Begu & Vasilescu, *op. cit.*, p. 5

Youth 2014-2020 brings data suggesting that about 28% of youth are in relative poverty, and about 40% face a poverty or exclusion risk¹⁴.

In this context, as higher educated youth perspective can enhance or limit their opportunities of employment, there is a significant need for research in this regard¹⁵. The literature regarding this youth niche (arts students) is rather under-represented on the study-to-work transition, the reason why we believe this study might provide important data both for art universities and for potential employers.

Terms definitions

Study-to-work transition. "There is no precise definition of school-to-work transition in terms of its duration, start and end-points. The European Centre for Development of Vocational Training defines school-to-work transition as the process of moving from education or training to employment."¹⁶ Successful school-to-work transition is described by a recent study as "a process in which youth acquire the skills to make decisions in their job search that maximize their options and enables them to start an employment trajectory that improves their livelihood"¹⁷.

Visual arts students. By visual arts students we mean students enrolled in arts universities, studying fine arts (e.g. painting, sculpture, graphic arts, photography, video, digital image processing, conservation-restoration), decorative arts and design (e.g. ceramics, glass, metal, textile design, fashion design, design) or connected (e.g. art education, art history and theory).

As all the participants to the study are enrolled in visual arts faculties, "visual arts" sometimes mentioned only as "arts" are used interchangeably throughout the paper to maintain the reading flow.

Work-readiness. Work-readiness is focused on the mastery of relevant skills and knowledge, such as career self-management or a student's understanding of and connection with their intended profession¹⁸.

¹⁴ G. Neagu & C. Petrescu. 2017. *Methodology for working with young people in rural areas and within the child protection system*. <http://iccv.ro/sites/default/files/Methodology.pdf>. National Strategy for Youth/Strategia pentru Tineret 2014-2020. <http://mts.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Strategia-tineret-final.pdf>. D. Sandu, C.A. Stoica, R. Umbreș. 2014. *Tineri în România, griji, aspirații, atitudini, stil de viață*. Centrul de Sociologie Urbană și Regională http://www.fes.ro/media/2014_news/Raport-FES-Tineri_in_Romania.pdf. World Bank (2015) In G. Neagu & C. Petrescu. 2017. *Methodology for working with young people in rural areas and within the child protection system*. <http://iccv.ro/sites/default/files/Methodology.pdf>

¹⁵ W.E. Donald, M.J. Ashleigh, Y. Baruch. 2018. Students' perceptions of education and employability: Facilitating career transition from higher education into the labor market. *Career Development International*, 23 (5), 513-540. (doi:10.1108/CDI-09-2017-0171). W.E. Donald, Y. Baruch and M.J. Ashleigh. 2017. The undergraduate self-perception of employability: human capital, careers advice, and career ownership, *Studies in Higher Education*, doi: 10.1080.03075079.2017.1387107. A. Tymon. 2013. The student perspective on employability, *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 38 No. 6, pp. 841-856.

¹⁶ European Centre for Development of Vocational Training. 2019. Skills Panorama Glossary. <https://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en/glossary/s>. M. Wilson, Z. Khan, P. Cheriyan, D.S. of Laterite. 2019. Preparing Youth for the Future of Work, Mastercard Foundation. <https://mastercardfdn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SEA-School-to-Work-Transition-Final-1.pdf>. In A. Alam, M.E. de Diego. 2019. Unpacking school-to-work transition: Data and evidence synthesis, UNICEF: New York, p. 6

¹⁷ European Centre for Development of Vocational Training, op. cit.; Wilson et al., op. cit. In A. Alam, M.E. de Diego. 2019. Unpacking school-to-work transition: Data and evidence synthesis, UNICEF: New York, p. 6

¹⁸ R. Bridgstock. 2009. The graduate attributes we've overlooked. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 28(1), 31-44. D. Jackson. 2016a. Re-conceptualising graduate employability. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 35(5), 925-939. In D. Jackson. 2019. Student perceptions of the development of work readiness in Australian undergraduate programs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 60(2), 219-239. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2019.0020>

2. Methodology

This research aims to deepen understanding of the students' preparing process for the labor market - what criteria and strategies are applied, how the education-to-work system is functioning, and especially what is the youth perception of this process. The literature shows that there is needed an efficient working model for youth (formally recognised and regulated), adapted to the needs of this category of youth in their transition to work. The programs and strategies in this field are still in a developing stage. The effectiveness and long-term outcomes of the strategies that prepare young graduates for work in Romania are not operationalized, quantified and included in a unifying national or regional model¹⁹.

In this context, it is imperative to understand how things actually work, what are the strengths and the vulnerabilities of the strategies that are applied. Otherwise, we risk proposing different intervention strategies and continuously find ourselves in the same point of trial and error, making it difficult to develop long-term sustainable programs²⁰.

The choice of collecting mainly qualitative data was guided by the arguments proposed by Tuononen et al.: "Studies concerning the transition from university to working life taking the graduates' perspectives into account have mainly explored perceptions of competences and employability using quantitative surveys²¹. We argue that to be able to examine graduates' ability to reflect on their competences, we should explore how they are able to identify these competences themselves. Thus, there is a need for qualitative research on graduates' self-evaluations of their knowledge and skills."²²

The main research questions (RQ) we aimed to answer in this paper are:

- What are the arts students professional aspirations after graduation?
- What are the (perceived) barriers and facilitating factors that may influence the achievement of their professional goals and an efficient study-to-work transition?
- What are the youth perception on the preparation services, in order to facilitate the socio-professional insertion after exiting university?

The data collection method used was an online survey (with 64 items). Data were collected using multiple questions about the study-to-work transition (facilitators, barriers and solutions), about self perception regarding work-related goals, skills, experience and the preparation for this transitioning process. Some items were open questions, some were yes/no questions and some provided the possibility of choice on a scale from 1 to 5.

The survey was adapted based on the items included in various tools that investigated the education-to-work transition, mainly the higher educated transitioning youth issues²³.

¹⁹ I. Boldiș. 2020. *Tranziția tinerilor din sistemul de protecție la viața independentă*. Presa Universitară Clujeană, p. 9

²⁰ Boldiș, *op. cit.*, p. 9

²¹ E. Braun, H. Sheikh & B. Hannover. 2011. Self-rated competences and future vocational success: a longitudinal study. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 36 no. 4, pp. 417-427. G. Crebert, M. Bates, B. Bell, C-J. Patrick & V. Granolini. 2004. Developing generic skills at university, during work placement and in employment: graduates' perceptions. *Higher Education Research & Development*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 147-165. In T. Tuononen, A. Parpala & S. Lindblom-Ylänne. 2016. Transition from university to working life - An exploration of graduates perceptions of their academic competences. In E. Kyndt, V. Donche, K. Trigwell & S. Lindblom-Ylänne (Eds), *Higher education transitions - theory and research*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, p. 4

²² Tuononen, Parpala & Lindblom-Ylänne, *op. cit.*, p. 4

²³ e.g. Begu & Vasilescu, *op. cit.*; Boldiș, *op. cit.*; Donald et al., 2018, *op. cit.*; D. Gardiner & M. Goedhuys. 2020. *Youth Aspirations and the Future of Work: A Review of the Literature and Evidence*, ILO Working Paper 8 (Geneva, ILO); T.H. Jung et al. 2004. *Effective Measures for School-to-work Transition in the Vocational Education System*. Lessons from Australia and Korea, NCVET, Adelaide; Rayner & Papakonstantinou, *op. cit.*;

The quantitative and qualitative data presented and analysed in the research were collected in the 2021 spring and their processing was carried out using two analytical tools: IBM SPSS Statistics 20 - for quantitative data; Atlas.ti - for qualitative data.

Participants

The participants in this study were students from visual arts faculties, in the final faculty semester, a total number of 77 students.

All the participants were enrolled in faculties with an arts profile, such as fine arts (e.g. painting, sculpture, graphic arts, photography, video, digital image processing, conservation-restoration), decorative arts and design (e.g. ceramics, glass, metal, textile design, fashion design, design) or connected (e.g. art education, art history and theory).

Aged varied from 20 to 31 years old, ($M=21,59$; $SD=1.591$), 57 participants were women (74%) and 20 men (26%). Most of the participants (59 respondents, 76.6%) came from urban areas, while 18 respondents (23.4%) came from rural areas.

The participation to the survey was voluntarily, the participants had to express their written agreement for this participation and they were ensured regarding the confidentiality and the ethical use of collected data.

3. Results and discussion

We asked the students about their work experience, in order to identify their relationship with the work field so far. Youth can benefit from establishing a first contact with work before graduating, because the experience they gain in work might be useful in formulating realistic expectations about employability or job market requirements. About half of the respondents (51.9%) mentioned work experience so far. They reported work experience between one month to 96 months ($M= 5.5$ months, $SD=15.942$).

Looking at the data, there is a similar trend in working experience both for rural or urban youth. About one third of both categories of participants reported work experience in a field corresponding to their studies, about 20% pursued work activities in another field, not related to their education. Over 40% of both groups mentioned no work experience (Fig. 1). They preferred to focus exclusively on studying, postponing the work commitments for the time they will graduate.

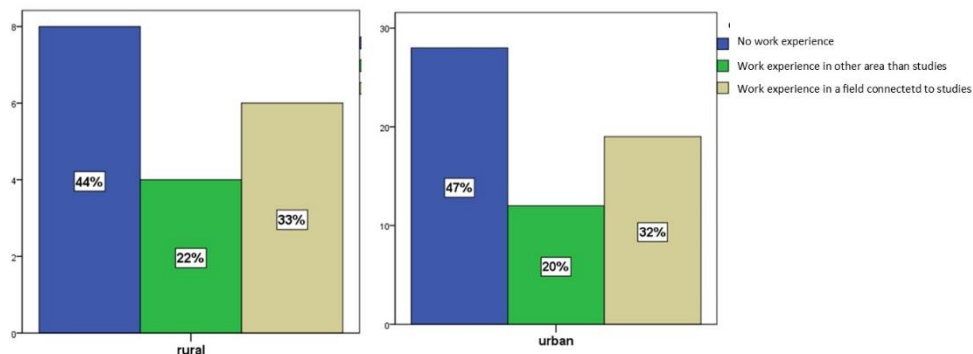


Fig. 1. Work experience reported by students from rural and urban areas (77 respondents)

Some studies²⁴ suggest that work experience in a field connected with the studies might rise the youth employability after graduating. First, because they have the chance to develop their work skills mainly for the field they prepare to enter after exiting faculty and second, because there are organizations that prefer to recruit their future employers during faculty, to train them during internship programs and to hire them as soon as they graduate. Even if the work experience is not in the specific job youth prepare for, it still represents a strong point, because it helps them develop an appropriate work mindset. Moreover, they have the chance to develop skills such as team work, respecting a job schedule, understanding responsibilities and how job relationships work etc., skills that would be beneficial in the labor market, no matter the professional career they pursue in the future.

Exploring the work activities and testing some vocational roles play an important part in the development of youth vocational identity, increasing their work readiness in the highly technologized economies and societies²⁵.

Yet, a significant part of the students prefer to focus exclusively on their academic activities, this aspect being mentioned by other studies regarding students' work interests²⁶.

Regarding aspirational goals of the respondents (related to RQ 1), most of them (69, about 90%) intend to find a job connected to their studies, where they can apply their artistic skills and knowledge and/or to pursue further education (a master program, another art faculty etc.) Some of the participants in the study (8 respondents, about 10%), mentioned they would choose an available job in the first place, while continuing their studies or developing an entrepreneurial business.

The youth in the present study intend to work in all the labor market areas (Fig. 2): entrepreneurship/own business, public organizations, private companies and others (e.g. NGO-s).

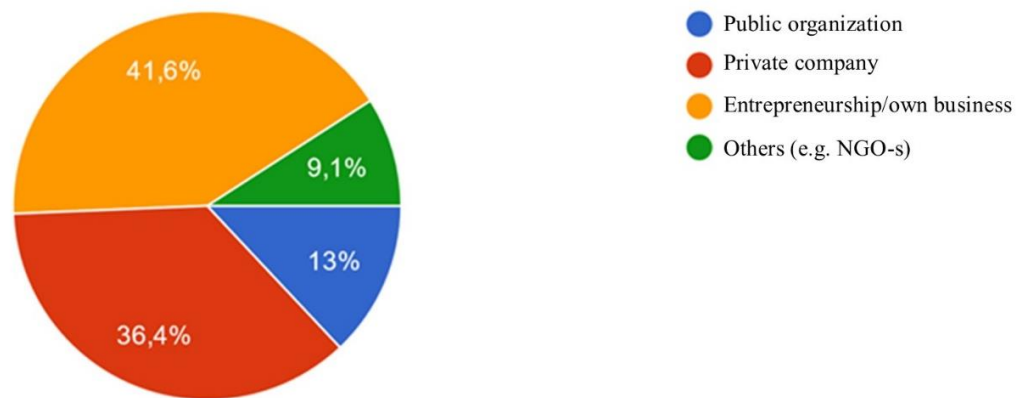


Fig. 2. Labor field categories aimed by the arts students in our survey (77 respondents)

²⁴ Harvey et collab., *op. cit.*

N. Bennett, E. Dunne & C. Carré. 2000. *Skills Development in Higher Education and Employment*. Buckingham, Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press. <http://www.ics.ltsn.ac.uk/books/reviewed/031.htm>

²⁵ E.H. Erikson. 1968. *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York, NY: Norton. J.T. Mortimer, H. Carolyn & S. Jeremy. 2002. The Quality of Work and Youth Mental Health. *Work and Occupations*. 29(2):166-197. J. Youniss, J.A. McLellan, Y. Su, M. Yates. 1999. The role of community service in identity development: Normative, unconventional, and deviant orientations. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 14(2), 248-261. In M.J. Zimmer-Gembeck, J.T. Mortimer. 2006. Adolescent work, vocational development, and education. *Review of educational research* 76 (4), p. 549

²⁶ S. Brint & A.M. Cantwell. 2010. Undergraduate time use and academic outcomes: Results from the University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey 2006. *Teachers College Record*, 112(9), 2441-2470

The reasons for choosing a public or a private organization are very similar: "to gain experience", "stability and a certain income", "insufficient knowledge or experience to start a business right after graduation", "lower risk level". Some would choose private companies that are perceived as "having a meritocratic approach" and "promoting more chances for team work and personal development"; others would choose public organizations for "having more advantages than the private ones" (e.g. more annual leave days, more career opportunity advancement).

Entrepreneurship is perceived as offering many advantages, such as flexibility, independence, freedom of expression and choice, leadership, more control on the results and the applied vision statement etc.

Regarding the European trend in arts workforce, data show a slightly positive perspective. Menger described artists as "an occupational group, on average younger than the general work force, better educated, tending to be more concentrated in a few metropolitan areas and showing higher rates of self-employment"²⁷.

As to employment rates of recent graduates, data suggest that the labor market records an increasingly ratio of absorption for higher education graduates (in general) and that work in artistic areas is favorable for self-employment. Eurostat statistics regarding employment rates of tertiary education graduates (ISCED levels 5–8) show a slowly increasing percent of employment for high education graduates, e.g. 79.5% in 2014 and 85% in 2019²⁸. Dent et al. in a report about creative workforce in Europe shows a positive pattern regarding the self-employment rates in arts, design and heritage area²⁹.

Albeit the European labor field recent trends seems to be slightly positive regarding the higher education youth absorption, the arts graduating students appreciation on the matter might be that the national context does not keep the pace with this trend. The national labor market is perceived as not providing a sufficiently wide range of long-term jobs and qualifications, according to the participants' study specialties. This is perhaps one additional main reason why arts youth are so oriented towards developing an own business/entrepreneurship.

The main concerns regarding entering a job after graduation³⁰ (related to RQ 2, assessed using adapted items after Begu & Vasilescu, 2017) seem to be: the lack of skills and knowledge related to the aimed work field (39%), not finding a stable job after graduating (31.2%), the level of salary (9.1%) and the fact they will have to move in order to find a job (5.2%). The other concerns mentioned by students are: lack of work practice during faculty, the low job offer for specific professions, the fact the youth don't have enough knowledge regarding the right job application (according to their skills), the fact the during studies only some professional activities are favored and others pass unmentioned, the need to develop high digital skills in the pandemic context and not only.

The modeled study³¹ brings similar data about study-to-work transitioning youth "30.8% said that they are concerned about not finding a stable job or a long term contract, 16.3% are worried about the level of salary, 16.3% believe they will have to move in order to find a job, and 13.7% of the respondents fear that the skills and knowledge acquired during school will not be sufficient or will not match those required on the labor market". Nonetheless, the participants in our study seem less

²⁷ P.-M. Menger. 1999. Artistic labor markets and careers. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, p. 545.

²⁸ Eurostat. 2019. *Employment rates of recent graduates* https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Employment_rates_of_recent_graduates&oldid=482075#Employment_rates_of_recent_graduates.

²⁹ T. Dent, et al. 2020. *Creative and Cultural Workforce in Europe Statistics Report*. DISCE Publications. <https://disce.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/DISCE-Report-D3.2.b.pdf>, p. 45

³⁰ Begu & Vasilescu, *op. cit.*

³¹ Begu & Vasilescu, *op. cit.*, p. 9

concerned about salary (than the youth in general population) and more concerned about their work-related knowledge and skills, while the concerns about the stability and long term job offer on the market seem to be present in the same proportion.

Similar data are presented by United Nations World Youth Report³², young people being concerned about job instability, inadequate salaries, lack of opportunities for gaining work experience or for career advancement. Other youth data underlined even more challenges for young people transitioning to work, such as poor working conditions; poor quality education, lack of skills, and skills ill-adapted to labor market needs; gender and other inequalities; the risks and benefits associated with labor migration and the need for governmental support in improving the situation of youth employment³³.

The youth concerns are certainly influenced by the socio-economical context they are immersed in, whereas the work offer for highly educated professionals tends to be less represented on labor market. For example, a study from 2014 suggested that in some parts of the country (e.g. Transylvania) there is a disproportioned higher percent of youth working in job categories that don't require higher education (over 60 percent) than in professional fields that do (16.7%). One explanation of the authors might be that that highly industrialized context provides a lower offer for "highly qualified experts"³⁴. Nevertheless, this percentage is dynamic, because as youth age, some of them re-enter the education field, in order to achieve a higher education or to gain different work specializations, and this factor significantly change their work evolution in the job market³⁵.

In this study we also investigated transitioning students' perceptions regarding the aspects that may influence the achievement of their professional goals. The main factors that respondents consider might help them achieve their professional goals (related to RQ 2) tend to have an intrinsic valence, such as work/personal effort and personal factors (e.g. ambition, self-discipline, self-confidence, perseverance). Arts youth also reported external factors such as opportunities during faculty for internship and professional practice or relationships with different professionals (specialists/mentors, vocational counsellors, other artists) in guidance, mentoring or peer learning activities; further education (master programs, workshops, courses); financial resources and stability; better knowledge regarding the labor market and luck.

We explored this topic because students' beliefs seem to impact their goal achievements. Their beliefs about ability, effort or goal setting could tailor their actions for achieving the goals they aspire to³⁶. Also, goal commitment, defined as the "intention to extend effort toward goal attainment"³⁷ seems to play a significant role in goal achievement.

³² United Nations World Youth Report 2012. Youth Employment: Youth Perspectives on the Pursuit of Decent Work in Changing Times http://unworldyouthreport.org/media/pdfs/WYR2012_SummaryReport_EN.pdf. In M. Roth, T.P. Hărăguș, M.B. Iovu, C. Faludi, A.E. Bernáth-Vincze, Á. Dávid-Kacsó, F. Pop, S.L. Raiu. 2016. *Rezultatele adolescenței. O viziune longitudinală*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Cluj, p. 88

³³ United Nations, *op. cit.*, p. 33

³⁴ Sandu et al., *op. cit.*, p. 81

³⁵ Sandu et al., 2014, *op. cit.* In I. Boldiș. 2020. *Tranziția tinerilor din sistemul de protecție la viața independentă*. Presa Universitară Clujeană, p. 122.

³⁶ A. J. Elliot & H. A. McGregor. 2002. Achievement Goals as Predictors of Achievement-Relevant Processes Prior to Task Engagement, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94(2), 381-395. D.L. McCollum. 2005. Relating students' social and achievement goals. *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, 9.1 (Spring 2005): 297(5). B. Weiner. 1985. An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion, *Psychological Review*, 92(4), 548-573. In N. Derrer-Rendall, C. Wesson, L. Anderson & E. Bould .2009. Students' goal achievement: Exploring individual and situational factors. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology*, 7(3), 1031-1051.

³⁷ H. J. Klein, M. J. Wesson, J.R. Hollenbeck, P.M. Wright & R.P. DeShon. 2001. The assessment of goal commitment: A measurement model meta-analysis. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 85(1), 32-55. In N. Derrer-Rendall, C. Wesson, L. Anderson & E. Bould .2009. Students' goal achievement:

The participants in our survey seem to put emphasis on goal commitment and on personal factors in achieving their professional goals, but also consider they need more instrumental support, such as opportunities for practice and internship during their studies. Developing collaboration and receiving guidance from specialists who work in practice (e.g. mentoring) or establishing professional relationships and networking with other artists or arts students (e.g. peer learning) are perceived as having a positive impact on their career goals realization.

Regarding the perceived work readiness, the respondents scored this variable rather in an average range, as seen below (Fig. 3).

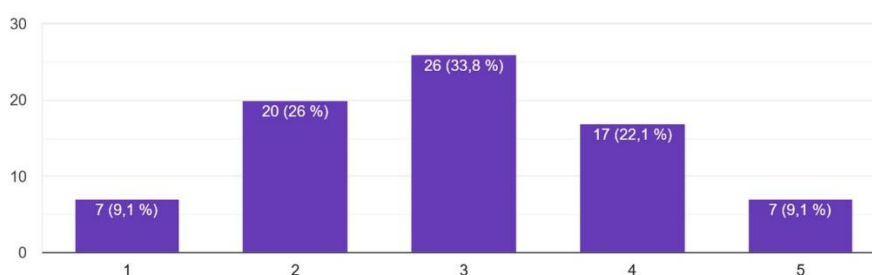


Fig. 3. Perceived work readiness for arts students in final year of faculty: 1- Poor, 2 – Fair, 3 – Average. 4 – Good, 5 – Excellent

Analyzing qualitative data, they feel well prepared regarding their knowledge and skills related to their specialties (as a result of the pursued high education), and less prepared for labor market requirements and dynamic (different requirements among employers, the claimed work experience in many jobs, the pressure and demand for highly trained employees etc.)

Regarding the gap between the academical theoretical preparation and job requirements, other authors³⁸ suggest a perceived excess of theoretical learning relative to graduate job requirements.

However, according to the same study, graduates in Fine Arts report that "their theoretical learning was on a very similar level to their job requirements and that it was highly useful".³⁹ Some studies mention that gender or background might bias job opportunities or outcomes in some regards⁴⁰. We investigated if demographic characteristics such as age, gender, background (rural/urban) or work experience impact the perception of the work readiness. None of the analyses provided statistically significant relationships (age - work readiness, $F=0.568$, $sig.=0.687$; gender - work readiness, $X^2= 6.709$, $p=0.152$; background - work readiness, $X^2=2.562$; $p=0.634$; work experience - work readiness, $F=0.592$, $sig.=0.669$). One explanation might be the small sample size

Exploring individual and situational factors. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology*, 7(3), p. 1035.

³⁸ E. Corominas, C. Saurina, E. Villar. 2010. The Match between university education and graduate labour market outcomes (Education-Job match). An analysis of three graduate cohorts in Catalonia, *Studies on Higher Education and Graduate Employment*, Girona University, pp. 67-68.

³⁹ Corominas et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

⁴⁰ e.g. D. Gardiner & M. Goedhuys. 2020. *Youth Aspirations and the Future of Work: A Review of the Literature and Evidence*, ILO Working Paper 8 (Geneva, ILO); W.E. Donald, M.J. Ashleigh, Y. Baruch. 2018. Students' perceptions of education and employability: Facilitating career transition from higher education into the labor market. *Career Development International*, 23 (5), 513-540. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2004. *Career guidance and public policy: Bridging the gap*. Paris, France. Accessed from <http://www.oecd.org/education/innovation-education/34050171.pdf>. T. Spielhofer, S. Golden & K. Evans. 2011. *Young People's Aspirations in Rural Areas*, Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research.

in our study or the fact that other subjective factors (e.g. preparation, effort) or objective factors (e.g. job market offer and dynamics) produce a greater effect in this regard.

Furthermore, we pursued the transitioning arts youth perception on their work-related skills. As the participants come from different visual arts study specialties, we investigated some general sets of skills⁴¹:

- career planning and workplace readiness skills (CP), e.g. developing a career plan, knowing and understanding transferable skills; selecting a career major; identifying job opportunities in labor market; preparing a resume and completing a job applications; sustaining a job interview;
- information technology skills (IT): use of technology to communicate, obtain, organize or analyze information: text, image processing, design, graphics etc.; use technology to present designs and results of own investigations; knowing software and their products; using virtual libraries; use technology and other tools to solve problems etc.
- critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills (TS): e.g. define problem/clarify decisions; formulate questions and hypotheses regarding a study topic and analyzing data; identify patterns; identify/evaluate alternative decisions; apply problem-solving skills to design projects;
- self-management skills (SM), such as set short and long term goals, team work, public speaking; evaluate own actions and accomplishments, provide constructive feedback, time management;
- safety skills (SS), e.g. injury prevention, protect and preserve personal safety; safe use of equipment or tools; knowing the rules of online and offline safety; knowing basic first aid intervention methods.

Participants were asked to score from 1 to 5 (1- Poor, 2 – Fair, 3 – Average, 4 – Good, 5 – Excellent) a set of indicators for every work-readiness skill category.

Work-Related Skills	Mean scores	SD	Weighted averages
Information technology skills	304.33	13.89	3.95
Critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills	284.43	9.07	3.69
Safety skills	283.30	43.91	3.68
Self-management skills	279.67	34.01	3.63
Career planning and workplace readiness skills	242.17	17.50	3.15

Table 1. *Perceived work-related skills (mean scores and weighted averages)*

The indicators (abilities) that recorded the highest scores were: use of technology to communicate, obtain, organize or analyze information: text, image processing, design, graphics etc. (IT); injury prevention, protect and preserve personal safety (SS); safe use of equipment or

⁴¹ adapted by the arts and workplace readiness standards and indicators, Whitman et al., *op. cit.*

tools (SS); evaluate own actions and accomplishments (SM); provide constructive feedback (SM); use technology and other tools to solve problems (IT); set short and long term goals (SM); use technology to present designs and results of own investigations (IT).

We chose these skills categories, according to what studies suggest is required on the present and future labor market, such as “communication skills, team working, problem solving, analytic, critical and reflective ability, willingness to learn and continue learning, flexibility and adaptability etc. In short, attributes that help organizations deal with change”⁴².

Although the five sets of abilities in our study seem to be perceived rather positively and scored in an average-good rank, career planning and workplace readiness skills seem to record a slight lower score than the other four (Fig. 4).

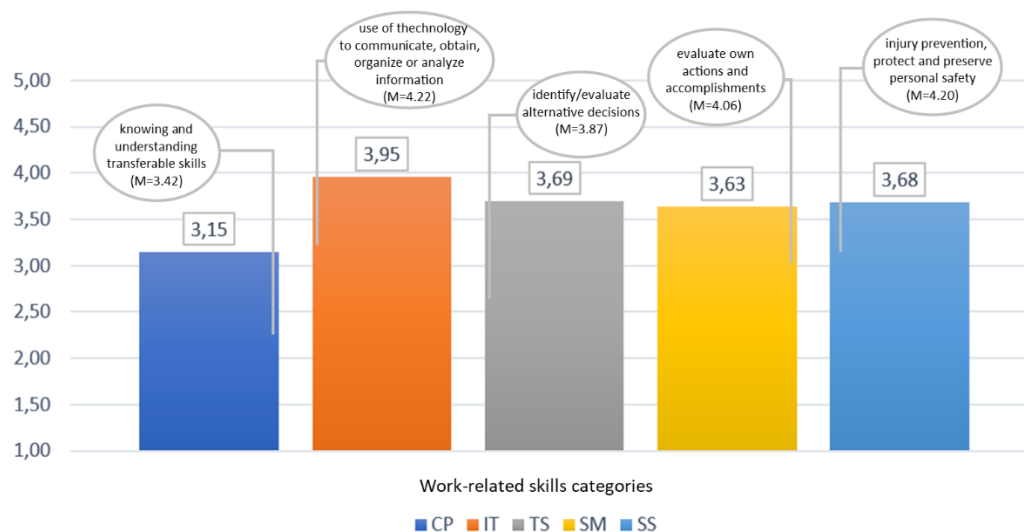


Fig. 4. Work-related abilities, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1- Poor, 2 - Fair, 3 - Average, 4 - Good, 5 - Excellent), with the most representative ability in every set.

CP- career planning and workplace readiness skills, IT- information technology skills, TS- critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills, SM- self-management skills, SS- applying safety principles skills

So, the work preparation programs for arts students may primary focus on developing this kind of skills in order to enhance students' self-efficacy beliefs regarding their employability and their chances to fulfill their potential by entering in a suited job. On the other hand, this line of intervention for study-to-work transition should also include raising awareness in regard to the workforce realities, in order to minimize the gap between youth aspirations and labor market realities. For successful outcomes on labor market, youth should be prepared both to acknowledge their work-related skills level and also the labor market offering and challenges.

Regarding the study-to-work transition preparation process (related to RQ 3), respondents mentioned the factors they consider would sustain a smooth and coherent entrance to labor market, in their case:

- personal commitment and effort. The most significant source of preparation (28 answers) seems to be an individual endeavor consisted of hard work committed to achieving professional goals.
- studies (rated in 21 answers). Students mentioned that the higher education offered them

⁴² Harvey et collab., *op. cit.*, p. 10

the knowledge they need in order to start working in the professional field they aim after graduation.

- internship, programs for students and voluntary or paid art activities, developed during faculty were also considered as being helpful by offering the practical preparation (19 answers),
- modeling other artists professional path (4 answers). Respondents mentioned this as a professional source of guidance and inspiration, useful in building an own career development.

In regard to what initiatives and strategies should be applied to ease the study-to-work transition for higher educated youth, some potential could be identified. These solutions involve a participatory approach between multiple socio-economic and educational representatives, such as the labor market (e.g. employers, workforce agencies, professionals), the universities and the state (laws, policies and regulations - youth programs and supportive regulations aiming to facilitate their labor entrance):

- a more flexible, more open and offering labor market. More support for study-to-work transitioning youth, employers requirements more fit for the graduates profile and more encouraging for hiring youth. Their requirements for long-term work experience, for highly qualified professionals lower the chances for young graduates to enter the labor market soon after graduation or even in the months or years leading up to that.
- more opportunities for "qualification", for preparedness according to the potential employers' demands. In this regard, youth might benefit from free workshops for students regarding entrepreneurship or with practitioners from different professions that arts students or graduates aim to achieve (people who already have an arts career and could teach them some important issues about finding and maintaining an artistic job, about developing and pursuing an artistic career). Opportunities for internship, mentoring, paid practice in different organizations that usually hire or work with arts graduates.
- more support for identifying job opportunities on the market, vocational counseling and also guidance from arts representatives with a higher level of expertise.
- more supportive law regulations for entering a first job after graduation;
- more projects or practical academic activities that model real workplace activities. For example, preparing a portfolio with different work-specific projects, as if they were employed in a real organization.

Similar to Jackson's study regarding student perceptions of the development of work readiness⁴³, participants in our survey appear to be reasonably confident in their knowledge and artistic skills yet they tend to be less positive in perceived preparedness for entering the labor market. As Jackson says, "this may reflect the broader elements of employability beyond skills"⁴⁴. Even if transitioning students feel fit for workforce in some regards, the potential employers offering, asymmetrical requirements and demands for work experience and highly trained employees raise concerns, fostering a reserved attitude in respect to their employability.

The students in the study mentioned above, reported similar strategies for facilitating study-to-work transition, such as linking theoretical content to the workplace for greater insight into real-life practice or paying more attention to career development learning during studies, including access to industry professionals⁴⁵.

Similar solutions are proposed by a cross-cultural study, regarding effective measures for school-to-work transition, claiming that "if students are to prepare for a successful transition from school to work, they need to be able to spend adequate amounts of time in industry

⁴³ Jackson, 2019, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ Jackson, 2019, *op. cit.*, p. 19

⁴⁵ Jackson, 2019, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20

acquiring appropriate industry-specific skills and experience”⁴⁶. The mentioned study highlights similar facilitating factors such as providing needs-sensitive educational programs, a strong career counselling program for graduating students, collaboration between different organizations, institutions and stakeholders on the work market in order to facilitate youth study-to-work transition⁴⁷.

4. Conclusions

This study underlines some emergent themes regarding arts students transition from study to work.

- Work experience. One third of the students reported work experience in a labor field representative for their studies. Raising the youth opportunities for gaining work experience already during their studies (even part-time or during vacations), could enhance their readiness for entering a more stable job after graduating. Developing specific work skills, being in contact with labor market realities, might support them to calibrate their work aspirations, expectations and behaviors according to a better knowledge regarding practical aspects of their profession.

- Self-employment. Although, the participants in our study mentioned aspirational goals connected to all the labor field areas (e.g. entrepreneurship, public and private organizations, NGO-s), about 40 percent of respondents aim to develop their own business. This might be both for the reason of flexibility, control, creativity expression or for the reason of insufficient or incongruent opportunities on labor market, according to their knowledge and skills. Facilitating free workshops or mentoring programs for visual arts youth, might be a factor of success for their study-to-work transition.

- Concerns. One of the arts youth concern regarding the consecutive steps of graduating, is the gap between studies and work. They consider that despite possessing knowledge and skills in their study specialty when graduating, the potential employers expect different things when hiring youth (work experience, high level of practical training etc.) or the job offer for specific professions is rather low. A rapprochement between arts faculties and specific organizations where the arts graduates work (public or private) might offer a good opportunity for testing their concerns and for developing effective strategies for approaching labor market barriers and challenges. Successful cases of visual arts practitioners might serve as models and a valuable resource for good practices (including those related to employability).

- Study-to-work preparedness. The visual arts students in our survey consider a good preparedness for work should be, first of all, a personal commitment and effort endeavor. Overall, they report owing the necessary abilities for work (investigated in our study), the need for optimization being represented by the career planning and workplace readiness skills. In this regard, peer learning opportunities (in learning and sharing experience groups with other artists), mentoring programs with people from practice, with a higher level of work expertise should offer the chance to develop or optimize this category of work-related skills, according to their opinion.

- Study-to-work transition. In order to achieve or pursue a smooth transition from higher education to labor field, according to the investigated arts students, the solutions are rather systemic and should come from multiple sources: personal factors (e.g. commitment, hard work), university (specific skills and knowledge), potential employers (suitable requirements for recent graduates), state (policies for youth targeted for a higher absorption on labor market) etc.

⁴⁶ Jung et al., *op. cit.*, p. 86

⁴⁷ Jung et al., *op. cit.*

Based on data presented in this paper, effective strategies addressing these issues, should facilitate a partnership between the involved actors and stakeholders, in order to raise visual arts graduating students access to different opportunities such as courses, workshops, mentoring programs, work-related activities and vocational training. For example, partnerships between educational institutions and visual artists hiring companies, doubled by effective programs (e.g. job shadowing, internship⁴⁸) might facilitate a better workforce insertion.

DeMand et al. (2021) show that socio-economic agents, organizations, stakeholders involved in youth preparation for entering the labor market often develop independent work. Every mentioned entity has its own policy, resources and project management and sometimes they are not even aware of or interested in what the other organizations' work really is. Yet, a collaborative approach has benefits not only for youth but also for the agencies or organizations involved. They can share goals, vision, values and be more "productive and effective by centering the needs of their clients"⁴⁹.

Nevertheless, a different approach, aiming to align education, employment and support services for facilitating youth transition to working world can really make a difference, increasing the equitable employment opportunities. According to the same authors, a key component of the effort to create a common mission seems to be the shared meetings and trainings, while services such as experiential learning and mentoring can align youth preparation to labor market needs⁵⁰.

This study brings data regarding visual arts graduating students, but it could be seen in a broader agenda of high education youth challenges and opportunities when transitioning from study to work.

Despite the limitations (e.g. small sample of respondents), the presented data allow the understanding of youth perception and struggles regarding the pursued professional career, and also their opinion regarding what services might work best for them. Both the quantitative and qualitative data allow the practical identification of the strengths of arts youth study-to-work transition as well as the aspects that require optimization.

One main contribution of this paper is encouraging the participation of young people and making visible their perceptions of the transition from higher education to work. In order to bring on the market better study-to-work programs and policies for youth, we need to provide a pertinent output for the programs developers and policy makers⁵¹.

The students' voice has a meaningful role in the debate of career transition by encouraging the youth proactive career behaviors while raising the employers awareness about their needs (and offer) and the visibility of labor market sections for which graduates are qualified⁵².

⁴⁸ L. Steinberg. 1997. From school to work: Making the transition. *Current*. 394:4. In M.J. Zimmer-Gembeck, J.T. Mortimer. 2006. Adolescent work, vocational development, and education. *Review of educational research* 76 (4), 552.

⁴⁹ A. DeMand, Z. Redd, H. Lantos & K.A. Moore. 2021. *Building Partnerships to Improve Employment Training Programs for Young Adults in Cleveland/Cuyahoga County*. p. 5.
<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/building-partnerships-improve-employment-training-programs-young-adults-cleveland-cuyahoga-county>

⁵⁰ DeMand et al., *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁵¹ Gardiner & Goedhuys, *op. cit.*

⁵² Donald et al., 2018, *op. cit.*; B. Okay-Somerville & D. Scholarios. 2014. Coping with career boundaries and boundary-crossing in the graduate labour market. *Career Development International*, Vol. 19 No. 6, pp. 1-27. In W.E. Donald, M.J. Ashleigh, Y. Baruch. 2018. Students' perceptions of education and employability: Facilitating career transition from higher education into the labor market. *Career Development International*, 23 (5), p. 514.

Without an approach where young people are seen as active partners in the process of entering work after graduating, and where they are heard and seen as active agents in sustainable development and economic growth⁵³, "employment policies aiming to match skills with labor market opportunities may continue to fail young people"⁵⁴.

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⁵³ Begu & Vasilescu, *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ Gardiner & Goedhuys, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

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