The Student's Socio-Professional Universe and the Profile of the Opinion Leaders

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Abstract: *The aim of the present paper is identifying the mechanisms through which students form their interpersonal and professional universe in the academic medium, as well as the profile of the opinion leaders they follow and aspire to. For the empirical part, there were three focus-groups and 24 interviews designed, with students from all years of study. The focus groups were made with students from the College of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences (Babeș-Bolyai University) and the interviews were carried with students from the College of Automatics and Computers (Technical University). There was also a pilot-experiment with the students from the College of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, designed to generate new data with which to associate the information obtained in the focus-groups.*

Keywords: *student life, professional relationships, personal relationships, opinion leader, networks, academic universe, socio-humanities, informatics*

The first anchor

Student life is flourishing all over the big cities, benchmarks of important academic centers. Still, little is known about its complex aspects and what are the steps and processes students go through at an individual level, from the beginning, to the end of their academic life. Some choose to deepen their studies and follow masters programs or earn PhD titles, but by the time they enter the work

field, much of what they experienced as students gets erased by the passage of time.

In the Western countries there are many initiatives and efforts to support young students as they experience college life with all its challenges. They form associations with which they "map" the networks students form from the first year, to the final semester. Unfortunately, in the case of Romanian colleges, the situation is far from the desired outcomes. Improvements can be seen in the new student associations which are being formed each year. And you can see attempts of bringing college life as close as possible to Western standards, in terms of students' interactions. But, a clear anatomy of this network is yet to be formed.

Also, another sensitive issue is the presence of *opinion leaders* during college years. These are the ones who represent important sources of information when it comes to students' career choices and decisions, thus, identifying them is an important aspect of the present research.

After thoroughly analyzing the subject and the situation, the following research questions could sketch the foundation of the present research:
- Which are the mechanisms through which students form their professional and interpersonal universe during the college years?
- Who are the opinion leaders (including those from their generation) and what is their profile, according to them?
- Which are the main differences between the students from Socio-Humanities and those from Automatics and Computers?

Each research question has been addressed independently during the focus-groups and the interviews and will be treated separately in the analysis section.

Searching for college frames and patterns

Starting from a general perspective, the college staff is always interested in the ways students learn, develop and grow. A step the Western universities took consisted of developing student affairs, programs and services, through which a tutor (or a student affairs professional) would supervise a student and help him develop as harmoniously as possible (Martin & McGee 2014). They suggest that the intellectual growth should be of primary importance, but the final objective should be the holistic development of the student.

For the two authors, this notion divides itself into the following concepts: critical thinking, intellectual flexibility, reflexive judgment, complex meaning making, reasoning, comprehension and independent judgment. These were of high importance in their study, because following an analysis they did with the help of the Wabash National Study database, it seemed that a student affairs professional helped a great deal on all of the aforementioned concepts, except for *critical thinking*. It appeared that when it came to this, the support they offered caused

"laziness" among the college students they supervised and they refused to seek for opportunities as they did when being on their own (Martin & McGee 2014). Nevertheless, this effect disappeared when these students were introduced to volunteering and leadership programming. These led to an association with positive growth.

Taking further the students' performance, another concept is brought into focus: *excellence*. According to another study which sheds a light on how college life unfolds for the youth, *excellence* is: "doing better than others or producing a higher quality outcome than those in the same field" (Knight 2014). In order to have a perspective on excellence, higher education systems must have three goals: *education*, *research*, and *public/ community service* (with an accent on community service) (Astin and Antonio, 2002 in Knight 2014). In this respect, the Western trend concentrates on conceiving better preparation programs, in order to better meet the expectations of student affairs leaders. This implies: ensuring new professionals attained skills of staff supervision, budgeting, strategic planning and computer usage (Knight 2014).

Another issue which is raised is how to professionally develop the students. The fast-paced market puts the academic universe in trouble when it comes to constantly changing standards. As Knight envisions it, *professional development* implies being employed and working day-to-day in a field, in order to gain the necessary amount of experience.

When we bring into discussion a subject such as "professional development", we must also bear in mind notions like: *work personality*, *work engagement* and *academic effort* (Strauser, O'Sullivan & Wong 2012). Strauser *et al*. define "work engagement" as a fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work, doubled by dedication and absorption. Their study focused on 65 students (56.9% female and 43.1% male). As a measurement instrument, they used *The Developmental Work Personality Scale*, with 26 items addressing behaviors, role models and tasks which individuals encounter during middle childhood.

Based on their results, the students who had a relatively high academic effort score were also very likely to have a high *Work Task* score and a high academic engagement score. Also, female students scored higher than male students on both constructs (Work Task and academic engagement). It seemed that the gender is a predictor of academic effort.

Besides the professional and academic success, there is also the *socialization* aspect which should be taken into consideration. This is considered to be the process by which the students acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions that make them more or less effective members of the society (Weidman, DeAngelo & Bethea 2014). Also, during college, they remain in periodic contact with others and are influenced by their dear ones.

Weidman (1989) realized almost three decades ago a more detailed profile of the students, updating his findings in 2014. He presents the following:

- A student enters college with certain values, aspirations and personal goals
- He/ She is exposed to various socializing influences, including normative pressures via social relationships with college faculty and peers
- A student changes or maintains the values, aspirations and personal goals that were held at college entrance

Weidman and his group presented in the 2014 study findings from 6 empirical studies they made from 2003 and 2013. Unlike Martin and McGee's conclusions, they believe that early interaction with the faculty can only benefit the students and that it is essential to the formation of mentoring relationships. They further underline the importance of the campus as a set of normative contexts in which the socialization processes influence significant outcomes.

Taking a giant leap from the Western culture, there are also studies which come from the Slavonic countries. One such research is from Slovakia. A study made on 407 students tried to determine the level of use of social networks and spotted gender differences in internet usage (Potkány & Hajduková 2015). They identified two trends among college students. One illustrates the use of social media as a means of socializing and improving the human personality and the other one presents social media as a mechanism of finding jobs. Here, there can be traced clear gender differences, because they discovered that women use social networks to find jobs much more often than men do (Potkány & Hajduková 2015).

There is also the issue of student appeal in terms of research. A Russian case study made on 182 students from Computer mathematics and Cybernetics, followed by another one on 231 students from Sociology, revealed (or better say confirmed) the fact that students are not drawn to research because of the lack of financing (Sudas & Iurasova 2006). Moreover, in terms of academic approach, science no longer possesses the internal and ethical resources to motivate students on its own.

Finally, the last issue which should be addressed is that of the preparation of students for the after-college life. The expectations nowadays are for universities and colleges to prepare students for their working future and act *in loco parentis* (Smith 2012). This comes from the days when only wealthy families could afford to send their children to college and the emphasis fell on preparing leaders.

The crisis in Western universities comes from the harsh economic conditions college graduates face and a "plethora of new career choices", packed up with a divided political landscape (Smith, 2012). Employers in the West perceive students as being prepared for their first job, but not for higher positions which require critical thinking and the ability to direct themselves and manage uncertainty (Peter D. Hart Research Associates 2008 in Smith 2012).

The sole solution provided by Smith's study for the current crisis is increasing awareness of the common challenges the students might encounter and educate them about the employers' goals.

As it can well be seen from the analysis, the perspectives for college graduates are not bright. There are several challenges that await students and the struggle is getting bigger each year, as the market requests rise as well. Good networks can definitely represent the best support for students' future development. In this respect, the empirical part of the study concentrates on the type of connections Romanian students make, the groups they adhere to and expanding the focus on their preferences and individuals they consider to be *opinion leaders*.

Methodological framework

In order to obtain as much information as possible and answer the research question, there were three focus-groups organized at the College of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences and 24 interviews at the College of Automatics and Computers, where are four years of study. The focus-groups had each six participants and, for the interviews, there were six students from each year. The topics covered by the two research methods include: which are the dominant features they search in people they connect with, the type of groups they prefer, free time and extracurricular activities, how they search for job opportunities and how they connect with professionals from their field of interest, who represents a professional model and what is an opinion leader for them- the main traits and a portrait from their generation.

There was also conducted a pilot experiment with 7 students from the focus-groups from the College of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences. The experiment aimed at identifying tendencies towards individualism and trend-setting. One of the objectives was also seeking for potential opinion leaders in the particpants' generation. Because there are certain preferences or choices which cannot be detected just through discussion, there was a replication of an instrument. It is a test made up of 12 groups of geometrical figures, created after the model developed by Heejung Kim and Hazel Rose Markus, at the Stanford University (1999). Unfortunately, due to the fact the authors published only four of those geometrical figures, the replicated instrument contains new figures which were designed based on the indications the authors offered in the original study. The participants were asked to rate each figure with a number from 1 to 9 (1- for the most likes and 9- for the least liked) and explain the reason for choosing the first and the last geometrical figures. The second instrument in the experiment consisted of several notions extracted from Oyserman's *Individualism and Collectivism Domains Assessed in Individualism-Collectivism Scales* which the subjects had to rearrange, descending from the most important to the less important. These two

instruments were used with the purpose of noticing whether students have collectivistic tendencies or they develop more individualistic tendencies, with a keen orientation towards group differentiation and leadership. This could provide key information about the identification of possible opinion leaders.

The focus-groups

The first topic covered in the research covered the traits the students from the College of Political, Administrative and Communication sciences search for in their new connections. The 3rd year representatives quickly named the features they would like to find in others. The boys mentioned traits such as: *"empathy"*, *"sympathy"*, *"sincerity"*, *"opennes in communication"*, *"punctuality"* and *"humor"*. Their feminine counterparts spoke about things like: *"being funny"*, *"kindness"*, *"intelligence"*, *"hugs"*, *"sincerity"*, *"being open-minded"*. In the 2nd year, the pattern followed the same lines, with the male part talking about *"credibility"*, *"sincerity"*, *"strong general culture"* and *"integrity"*. The girls brought forward features like: *"humor"*, *"empathy"*, *"energy"*, *"a good, clean outfit"*. Finally, the 1st year male students underlined *"emotional independence"*, *"sincerity"*, *"empathy"*, *"charisma"* and the female students talk about *"intelligence"*, *"humour*, *"empathy"* and *"wisdom"*. In order to spot analogies and differencies, we'll analyse the students' answers in parallel.

Table 1. Answers from the first topic (FSPAC students)

	Male participants	Female participants
3rd year	**empathy**, sympathy, *sincerity*, oppennes in communication, punctuality, humor	*being funny*, kindness, intelligence, hugs, sincerity, open-minded
2nd year	credibility, *sincerity*, strong general culture, integrity	*humor*, **empathy**, energy, a good, clean outfit
1st year	emotional independence, *sincerity*, **empathy**, charisma	intelligence, *humor*, wisdom, **empathy**

The first aspect worth taking into consideration are recurrent features in each year, based on the gender. In the boys case, there is a need for *"sincerity"*, while the girls need *"humor"*; the ability of the interlocutor to make them laugh is crucial. And, when looking at both sides, the trait which emerged on top is *"empathy"*. Being on the same level of emotional understanding with the other is extremely valuable in the search of new connections.

The second raised issue was the type of groups they prefer and what is their specific. The 3rd year male students mentioned the following: *"the Alpine club"*, *"sports clubs- football, basketball, handball"*, *"Medieval re-enactment"*, *"I'm more of the anti-social type"*, *"research groups"*. The girls talked about groups such as *"the Scouts"*, *"college and research groups"* and *"random groups of people, with various in-*

terests". The 2nd year also presented the online facet of their social life. The boys discussed their preferences and talked about: *"informal groups of friends", "facebook groups", "groups which promote discipline and sincerity"*, while the girls mentioned: *"I can't say I have a certain type of group. I like those which promote different hobbies that complete each other"; "I search for groups which promote unity, fraternity and coopera-tion", "facebook groups, with or without college connection (hobbies)"*. The boys from the 1st year prefer: *"facebook groups", "groups with the same interests as mine (hobbies)"* and the girls: *"informal groups, with sense of humor, but with professional ambitions, as well"*.

Students from all years of study mentioned the use of social media- facebook, in this case- not only for their hobbies and leisure activities, but for college and professional aspects, as well. Also, for those from the 1st and 2nd year, this type of groups is extremely frequent, it is an important social gathering, just like the groups in the physical world.

The third year mentioned sports and research, whereas their younger counter-parts accentuated the importance of groups which promote certain strong moral traits: *"unity", "cooperation", "discipline", "ambition"*. Furthermore, the male re-spondents also talked about the *"discipline and sincerity"* component , while the girls want *"informal groups, with a sense of humor"*, this information being in accord-ance with the traits mentioned on the first topic.

Extracurricular activities are of major importance when trying to put together the profile of a student. From the final year, the following answers arose among male students: *"For me and my friends, the spare time activities will be the same, because we play PC games. And go to the gym. Or, we cook."*. Others named specific activity clubs: *" the Photoshop club", "Applied research club", "NGO internships", "volunteer-ing"; or personal work: "I work on a personal project, 2 to 3 days a week"*. The girls' activities were varied, as well: *"playing the guitar", "going in the pubs", "taking hikes in the mountains", "volunteering", "Scouts trainings", "two internships", "road trips", "reading", "theatre", "board games nights"*.

The 2nd year boys made no exception in terms of broad activities: *"going to the gym", "activity in an NGO"; "I divide my time into two categories: one with people who develop certain skills: meditation, dance and the other one with leisure activities"; "Read-ing, documentaries, movies. I learn something new every day."* The girls added to all these: *"symphonic concerts", "tango- a shortcut to happiness", "I enjoy going to theatre and listening to classical music"; "right now I work and this limits my time a lot. But in the weekends, I enjoy going to events and classes with my friends"*.

The 1st year students are quite active, as well. The boys talked about: *"attend-ing events in Cluj-Napoca"; "volunteering for causes I care about"; "sports"; "developing skills (like graphic design or public speaking)"*, while their female counterparts mentioned: *" going to the theatre", "reading", or "attending concerts"*.

One important aspect which can be noticed is all students declared preoccupation for volunteering and NGO activities. Furthermore, regardless of their gender or year, it seems they are in search of a balance between activities which sharpen their professional skills- such as *"research"*, *"graphic design"* or *"public speaking classes"*- and leisure activities, which include sports and cultural events.

Shifting towards their professional perspectives, the participants were asked how they search for information regarding future jobs and how do they connect with specialists from their desired work field. The male students from the 3rd year said: *"in the case of governmental institutions, I choose to go there for practice and, for private institutions, I talk to people I know and ask for feedback"*; *"I look on Facebook"*; *"through e-mail"*; *"I prefer a face-to-face approach"*; *"I look up on LinkedIn"*. The female students continued on the same note: *"I search on Facebook"*; *"I contact people on the phone"*; *"I meet professionals at conferences"*; *"I search articles and reports from the European Union and contact different actors who are directly implicated in this"*.

The 2nd year male participants presented the following options: *"I look on job search platforms: e-jobs, bestjobs"*; *"I improved my LinkedIn account and look there"*, *"I ask friends"*, while the girls said: *"I search for opinions regarding different jobs and act"*; *"I read in books and from people who are involved in the field I'm interested in. I want to go to the "Diplomat school" one day, so I try to establish connections with as many people as I can"*. In the case of the 1st year, the boys stated: *"I don't search for a job, at the moment. I try to create and learn"*, *"I search on Facebook and ask for feedback from people I know"* and *"with the help of the Internet and the library"*. The girls stated: *"I look up for opportunities on Facebook"*, *"If a job interest me, I send an e-mail and ask for more details"*, *"I ask people I know for recommendations"*.

As expected, students from the 1st year don't fervently search for a job, mainly because they find themselves in the beginning of their college life. In the case of their more experienced colleagues, however, there are several channels they choose when searching for opportunities. The online instruments prevail (*Facebook, e-mail, job platforms*), but they also ask for feedback before jumping with their head forward. They need guarantees that their choice is a good one and it is not time consumed in vain. They value it in their activities, no matter what their nature.

The issue of *opinion leaders* arose. The final year male students considered the following to be the best opinion leaders: *"managers"*, *"freelancers"*, *"designers"* (international level), *"the professors"* and the girls mentioned: *"copywriters"*, *"marketers"*, *"some of the professors and a part of the NGO members I met"*. The 2nd year male participants pointed out traits, rather than specific jobs: *"to be fair"*, *"credible"*, *"to give me a sense of security"*, with an exception- *"friends whose professional lives are common with mine"*. The girls also presented people with certain professions: *"doctors"*, *"professors"*, *"leaders"*, *"people hired in the field I'm interested in.*

The 1st year students followed the same wave, the boys saying an opinion leader should be a person who is *"credible"* and *"well-perceived"* and, as far as the girls are concerned, he or she should be *"well-informed"* and *"have experience in what he does"*.

Table 2. Answers regarding the traits and professions of an opinion leader (FSPAC students)

	Male participants	**Female participants**
3rd year (professions)	*managers, freelancers, designers (international), professors*	*Copywriters, marketers, some of the professors, NGO colleagues*
2nd year (boys – traits girls – professions)	*Fairness, credibility, security, friends with common professional lives*	*Doctors, professors, leaders, people working in the same field as me*
1st year (traits)	*credibility, good reputation*	*well-informed, experience*

But, when they were all asked what is that recommends them as leaders, all of them almost unanimously invoked the *"experience"* as the main factor which enhances their trust.

The final point on the agenda was discovering what does the profile of an opinion leader look, what are his traits and what is his profile in these students' generation. The third year came with the following insight: *"an opinion leader is anyone who is capable of influencing my perspective on a certain thing or subject"; "an opinion leader can be anyone around me who can offer me a new perspective on something"; "someone coherent and credible- with expertise"*. The girls stated: *"Unfortunately, the opinion leaders in our generation don't have the best human quality, but they influence thousands of youngsters"; "Someone anchored in reality, who is up-to-date with all the local and international news"; "A person with great oratorical traits, charisma and self-control"*.

The 2nd year students picked up the idea and took it further- the boys said: *"Someone with integrity and centered on details"*; nevertheless, one of them continued: *"I don't have an opinion leader. I haven't found anybody from my generation who could represent me. Still, I follow the advice of my mentor."* The girls concluded: *"It has to be someone who inspires, who sets the trajectory for others, someone who is a leader."; "There are certain public figures who have great creative skills and are a good influence"*.

Boys from the 1st year were rather reluctant and referred to this concept in terms of stereotypes: *"The stereotype in our generation puts together young people with a will of making a change, realist, ambitious, courageous and altruistic."* The girls counterbalanced and said: *"A person who takes into consideration everybody's opinions. He/ She has to be someone creative, brave and should show interest for a wide set of subjects"*.

The participants stated that an opinion leader is validated by traits such as *charisma, persuasive arguments, integrity* and *credibility*. Also, they suggested that, for them, the opinion leader can be anyone, from a public person to a colleague, as

long as he/she has the capacity of persuading others. But, there is also a wave of disappointment which can be traced. Some of them admit that "inappropriate" people become opinion leaders and mislead young people like them. Also, some of them are unhappy with the fact that among their colleagues there aren't representatives which fit this profile. The answers provided by the Computer Sciences and Automatics students will reveal whether this situation is synonymous with others.

The interviews

The same topics were analyzed with students from the Faculty of Automatics and Computers, from the Technical University. In terms of traits they search in people they connect with, the male students from the 4th year mentioned: *"intelligence", "openness", "tolerance"*, while their female counterparts search for: *"humor", "sincerity" and "common interests"*. The boys from the 3rd year talked about *"determination", "trust", "sincerity"* and the girls pointed out *"moral values, a strong character", "kindness"* and *"humor"*. In the 2nd year, both genders talked about *"fair judgment", "ambition", "openness" (boys' case)* and *"humor" (girls' case)* and, in terms of preferences of the 1st year, the boys mentioned *"sincerity", "honesty"* and *"loyalty"* and the girls *"kindness"* and *"intelligence"*.

Table 3. Answers from the first topic covered with the UT students

	Male participants	Female participants
4th year	*intelligence, openness, tolerance*	*humor, sincerity, common interests*
3rd year	*determination, trust, sincerity*	*moral values, strong character, kindness, humor*
2nd year	*fair judgement, ambition, openness*	*fair judgement, ambition, humor*
1st year	*sincerity, honesty, loyalty*	*kindness, intelligence*

Strong moral traits are once again the main focus of forming new relationships. The boys are in search of *"openness", "honesty"* and *"sincerity"*, while the girls look at the *"sense of humor"* and *"kindness"*.

When asked about groups they prefer, the situation was quite startling in the case of the final year. Except for one girl who mentioned she chooses groups for relaxing activities, related to her social life, the others mentioned not wanting to take part in any type of groups. The 3rd year students have a wider palette of activities, which include- for boys: *"sports", "computer groups (related to college)", "personal development"* and for girls *"dancing", "volunteering", "leisure groups"* and one also mentioned *"church activities"*. Nevertheless, the number of group options decreased when reaching the 2nd year. They generally stated they prefer groups specially destined for relaxing leisure activities or volunteering for various social causes and, most importantly, groups which promote *"mutual respect"* and, more particular, *"sincerity"* for the boys and *"loyalty"* in the girls' case.

In the 1st year's case, the options became varied again. The male participants talked about the following: *"UT students group (college related)"*, *"programming"*, *"volunteering"* and their female counterparts added: *"research clubs"*, *"social cases volunteering"*, *"leisure activities groups"* and one of them admitted being shy and introverted and doesn't prefer any type of groups.

Based on their answers, the discussions went deeper and the participants were asked what type of extracurricular activities they have. The answers and reactions were quite unexpected. They stated not having time for extracurricular activities, except for sports and activities related to college, in some cases, due to their working schedule. This could be seen in all years of study.

In terms of professional perspectives and searching for jobs, the situation is quite clear for the Automatics and Computers students. Starting from the 1st to the final year, they are all in search of jobs and they start searching for them from an early college period. In terms of the means they do it, male students from the 3rd and 2nd year offered the following insight*: "I go to IT conferences"*, *"We have special events, designed for IT specialists"*; the female participants followed the same pattern: *"I like to go to multiple workshops and approach the employers directly"*; *"I go to conferences"*, *"If I find out about a job from any source (Internet or fiends), I contact the employer and ask for information".* The 1st year, however, makes use more of the online medium: *"I look up directly on Google"*, *"I search online to see the latest jobs"*. This comes, probably, from the fact they didn't get to participate and get accustomed to IT events, like their bigger counterparts.

With the 4th year students, this subject was quickly analyzed, for a quite simple reason: they were all working by the end of their college period.

After going through their personal and professional aspects of their life, they were also asked what is an *opinion* leader for them and how they envision him/her. Regardless of their year, the main recurrent idea is the *"capacity of influencing their opinion on a certain issue"*. Those in the 3rd and 4th years mentioned specific groups, like *"family members"*, *"professors who inspire"* or *"people with expertise in their field"*. These options came from all the students, regardless of their gender. In the 1st and 2nd year a full portrait of an opinion leader hasn't yet been formed, but it encompasses the following traits- for the boys: *"persuasiveness"*, *"self trust"*, *"charisma"* and in the girls' case: *"sociability"*, *"strong sense of responsibility"*, *"humor"*; *"They should inspire others for a given amount of time"*. Most of them also admitted not considering any of their generation colleagues as being an opinion leader for them.

In the following section, there will be a comparative analysis on each topic, in order to trace the main common aspects and differences and also point out the major findings which come with answers for the research questions.

The experiment

As aforementioned, the experiment consisted of two instruments, which were meant to test the individualistic/ collectivistic tendencies of the participants. These are a strong indicator whether the individuals tested show an inclination towards developing their own divergent beliefs and setting ground for opinion leadership or they prefer fitting in the group's structure and follow others' interests.

The test was designed after the model developed by Heejung Kim and Hazel Rose Markus. The participants received a sheet with various geometric figures that they had to arrange, according to preference. The following figures represent sample of the used instrument. The whole set of figures can be found in the Appendix section.

**Figure 1**. Sample from the experiment   **Figure 2**. Sample from the experiment

After analyzing the results provided, based on their ratings, the majority preferred the geometrical shapes which were identical with others. Most of them chose the shapes with the same contour and color, suggesting a clear preference for the collectivistic norm. The answers provided for their reason of choice included: *"uniformity", "stability", "homogeneity", "stability", "uniqueness", "it's in the center"; "it holds the group together"; "I don't like the fact that it's different from the others"*.

Nevertheless, one of the participants differentiated himself from the rest and marked with „1" the most atypical figures. The reasons invoked were: *"it's different"; "opposed symmetry"; "small things matter"; "it's out of the ordinary pattern"; "totally opposed by shape, but they can influence each other"; "1 is a leader with experience"*. He was the only one drawn to the different shapes and to breaking the pattern.

he first segment of the experiment allowed a very clear sneak peek into the way the respondents perceive clusters and elements which are similar or divergent to others. This suggest the fact that a collectivistic perspective is somewhat still deep implanted into their minds and it reflects a "uniformity" of initiatives, a word one of the participants actually used. This isn't very encouraging in terms of potential of opinion leaders but, should this become a recognizable pattern, further experiments on the students from the Faculty of Automatics and Computers would provide a very good insight.

The second part of the experiment covered the arrangement of notions extracted from Oyserman's scale. (The full list can be consulted in the Appendix section). The selection was also meant to rank aspects which were previously discussed in the focus-groups, descending from the most important to the less important.
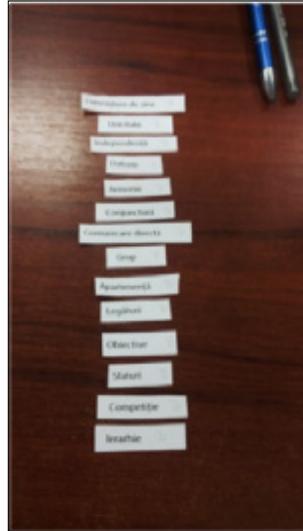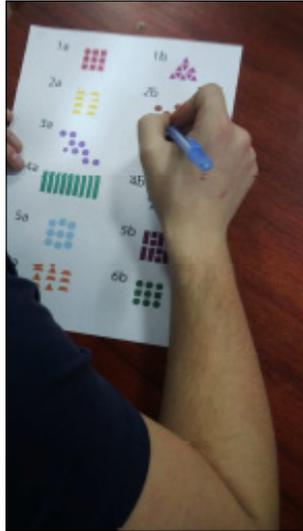
Photos 1 and 2. Participants filling in the test during the experiment

Surprisingly, the second phase of the experiment showed a mixture of individualistic and collectivistic preferences. The notions they had to choose from were: "independence", "connections"; "advice"; "objectives"; "harmony"; "competition"; "hierarchy"; "group"; "uniqueness"; "conjuncture"; self-knowledge"; "duty"; direct communication" and "membership". The participants had to arrange a series of words which encompassed individualistic or collectivistic characteristics. All of them rated high both types of features and the participant who chose the asymmetric figures in the first exercise, chose among the first traits collectivistic traits, such as: "duty"; "group" or "harmony".

The interesting finding is that although the individuals chose a certain trait as being the most important for them, on the final scale, 5 out 7 participants rated that specific statement with far less than expected. Instead of rating them with 4 or 5, they rated them with 2 or 3. Plus, the participants tended to choose notions which defined them as individuals, such as "uniqueness" or "self-knowledge", but they also ranked high terms which expressly linked them to groups: "harmony" or "duty".

Findings. Discussions. Answers.

The first research question aimed at discovering which are the mechanisms through which students form their interpersonal and professional universe. This was analyzed in terms of group preference and traits they base their search on. After going through the respondents' answers, besides identifying the *opinion leader typologies* and the groups students prefer, we can trace differences based on gender. First of all, we can see that when it comes to traits they would like to find in

others, male students prefer "empathy", "sympathy", "openness" and "receptivity", whereas women would much rather like to find "kindness", "humor", "sincerity" and even "hugs". They are much more centered on the "emotional" aspect of relationships. Although things like "sincerity" and "credibility" could have been found at the second year of study, they also added "charisma", "wisdom", "emotional independence" and went up to the "outfit" of the person. Also, in terms of comparing the two academic environments, although the specializations are at opposite ends of the spectrum, the traits they search for in new acquaintances are overlapping in most cases. The emotional intelligence is the mechanism through which they test new acquaintances. There were two traits which emerged and were recurrent in their answers: "sincerity", "openness" and "humor", surpassing options such as "ambition" or "seriousness in work". This suggests that, although in an academic environment, the students still search for connections which can fulfill them on a more personal level.

When it comes to groups they are part of and the activities they like to have, FSPAC students are more focused on the practical side, doubled by solidarity and trust, whereas Computer Sciences students mostly prefer leisure groups, volunteering and some college related groups. Also, besides the extracurricular groups with a clear and specific activity, such as Photoshop, the Alpine club, programming or dance clubs, students from both colleges show a clear preference towards activities and groups which include their friends. Plus, there is a clear inclination for activities which not only serve the community, but help them build themselves and perfect their skills. But, there were visible differences between final year students at FSPAC and Computer Sciences, because the latter prefer not getting involved in any type of club, while the first category multiplies its groups, by the time they finish college. Also, all years of study from Computer Sciences mentioned they do not invest in extracurricular activities, because their time doesn't allow them to do so. They work the whole week, so the spare time they got left, they invest it in leisure activities or in causes they enjoy.

As far as the job search goes, FSPAC students do not just look up the Internet and see what they find. Most of them, regardless of their year, talk with people they know or search people who work in the field and ask for opinions. They want feedback and reassurance that the job they want is fair. Added to their extracurricular activities, they are not willing to waste time with things which do not add value to their experiences.

For Computer Sciences students, things are quite different in this respect. In the case of all the years, the most frequent method is searching jobs on Google. They also mentioned social media tools, like Facebook, where there are groups specialized on their profile, conferences, job fairs and workshops. In terms of contacting employers from IT, they contact them personally, send CVs and call, or approach them at conferences or at presentations at their college.

Regarding the opinion leaders, the final year students have been more inclined to name people with specific social status such as "managers, freelancers, marketers, professors etc" and the second year students rather inclined towards people with traits like "credibility" and "expertise". Both years show a clear tendency towards the "self-made man" concept, whether they made references to certain positions and professions or human qualities. Also, they mentioned the fact that anyone with a good expertise, charisma and pertinent ideas can be an opinion leader, not only public figures from their activity domain.

The Computer Sciences students stressed the importance of *character*, understood a sum of moral traits and setting an example for others. Also, many said they don't consider any of their colleagues as being opinion leaders. This can be correlated with what many of them suggested, the fact that a true opinion leader should be altruistic and generous, things which are rarely encountered. Most tend to be centered towards their own personal interest.

The experiment also pointed towards a uniformity in choices and opinions, with only one participants choosing the different pattern of shapes and actually suggesting this was based on their uniqueness and the fact they represent a "leader's perspective".

In conclusion, besides the need of strong interpersonal networks which can offer them good moral support, Romanian students also want to be empowered to develop themselves on a personal and professional level and search for models in people who are much more similar to them then well-known leaders who used to inspire the past generations for so many years.

Limitations and future research perspectives

The present findings cannot be subjected to generalization. In order to further research whether these answers will turn into patterns, the instruments will have to be applied to upcoming generations and compare the future results. The research can deepen the subjects through a new series of experiments which would also include the Technical University students. Also, in the future analysis, the sample of participants could be larger and, maybe, include several other specializations not only at a national level, but an international one, as well.

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Appendix

The focus-group guide

1. Which are the dominant features you look for in those with whom you form new relationships?
2. What kind of groups attract you and which are those you enrolled in? What's the specific of those groups?
3. What kind of activities do you have in your spare time? With whom do you prefer doing them?
   - Do you have extracurricular activities? With what frequency do you attend them?
4. How do you search for information regarding the work field you want to activate in?
   - How do you form connections with professionals from your work field?
5. How do you seek for work opportunities and whom do you contact?
6. Who represents a model for you regarding professional information?
7. Why are their opinions more valuable than others'? What causes this?
8. What does *opinion leader* mean to you?
   - What traits should he/ she have?
   - How does an *opinion leader* from your generation look like?

The interview guide

Introduction: These questions are part of a research made on students from the Technical University and Babeș-Bolyai University and the aim is identifying certain common traits in terms of student life. There are no right or wrong answers , all the gathered data is confidential and will be used only for scientific purposes.

College:
Specialization:
Year:
Gender: M/F

1. Which are the dominant features you look for in the people you connect with?
2. Which kind of groups attract you and in which did you enroll? What kind of profile do these groups have?
3. What kind of activities do you have in your spare time? With whom do you prefer doing them?
   - Do you have extracurricular activities? With what frequency do you practice them?
4. How do you look up information about the working field that interests you?
   - How do you establish connections with the professionals from your field?
5. How do you search for job opportunities and whom do you contact?

6. Who are the people who represent models for you, in terms of professional activity?
7. Why are their opinions more valuable than others'? What causes this?
8. What does *opinion leader* mean to you?
   - What traits should he/she have?
   - How does an opinion leader from your generation look?

The Experiment

The geometric figures developed after Heejung Kim and Hazel Rose Markus's instrument
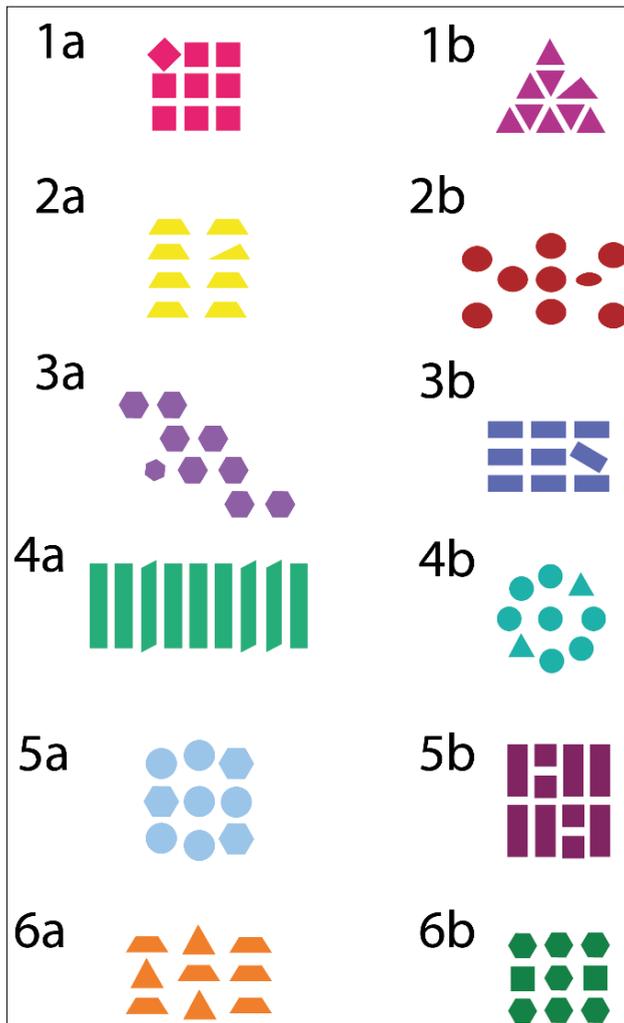
The notions extracted from Oyserman's *Individualism and Collectivism Domains Assessed in Individualism-Collectivism*

- Independence
- Connections
- Advice
- Objectives
- Harmony

- Competition
- Hierarchy
- Group
- Uniqueness
- Conjuncture

- Self-knowledge
- Duty
- Direct communication
- Belongingness
- Membership