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Students' professional capital during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reports from nationwide research**

Summary

The aim of the article is to present the activities undertaken by students of Polish universities to support their professional capital during the COVID-19 pandemic. It presents the results of nationwide empirical research conducted with the participation of 1,259 male and female students. The research material was collected using an online survey (CAWI – Computer Assisted Web Interview) and subjected to statistical analysis (Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, V-Cramer coefficient and chi-square test were used for this purpose). The survey questionnaire used a tool designed for the study, inspired by the concept of professional capital by Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan (2012), in which respondents indicated what actions they took to support career capital during the pandemic. The results obtained indicate that the professional capital of students at that time was at an average level [average of the results obtained: human capital – 2.76 (scale 0–5), decisional capital – 2.45 (scale 0–5), social capital – 1.28 (scale 0–4)], and is manifested to a greater extent by older students studying at non-public universities, achieving high didactic results during studies (average grades obtained above 4.5) and people who were not forced to moving back in with their parents. The data enrich knowledge about how students function during the pandemic and may be useful for career advisors.

Keywords: students, COVID-19 pandemic, activities undertaken to support professional capital, professional career

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Introduction

The pandemic of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the COVID-19 disease it causes introduced changes in almost all spheres of human functioning. Its scope also did not omit the plane of his participation in the labour market. This article is devoted to the analysis of the professional situation of students at that time based on the available source materials, which are domestic and foreign reports and scientific texts, and it presents a fragment of the results of own research conducted as part of the project: "Students during the COVID-19 pandemic".

Various research reports from the period of the pandemic report that the modifications caused as a result of it in the field of youth activity related to professional career are rather not optimistic. It experienced mass job losses, a decrease in the number of working hours possible, as a consequence of an increase in the unemployment rate (the highest among the entire population) and the number of representatives of the NEET group, unemployed and professionally inactive (Belghith, Ferry, Patros, & Tenret, 2020; EuroPAP News, 2021a; EuroPAP News, 2021b; GUS, 2021; Scarlet, 2021). Analyses of the ADP Research Institute (Richardson & Klein, 2021) report that the professional effects of the pandemic will be most felt by young people among other age groups, which is confirmed in research reports that indicate their deteriorating professional and financial situation (Grodzicki et al., 2020; Myszka-Strychalska, Marciniak, Karmolińska-Jagodzik, Kanclerz, & Peret-Drążewska, 2022; NZS, 2020).

Working conditions during the pandemic were also not the easiest. Remote work, experienced by most employees, contributed to the threat to the continuity of employment and minimised opportunities for professional development, which was felt most strongly by people under 30 (Ferroni, 2020). In addition, almost every third professionally active person (28.0%) changed their current role in the company, and a significant group of professionally active youth was forced to take on new duties without proper preparation (Richardson & Klein, 2021). The future of a professional career and the feeling of being threatened with job security is becoming one of the greatest worries of young people (Ferroni, 2020). Even before the pandemic, they mainly worked on the basis of the so-called "junk" employment contracts (Kurzawa, 2018; Saczyńska-Sokół & Łojko, 2016), which the employer can easily terminate at any time. Most young people negatively perceive their situation on the labour market and feel discriminated against due to their age and lack of professional experience (Gumułka, 2020).

The pandemic has left its mark on the sense of self-confidence, commitment to the duties related to studying and non-academic matters in students and has resulted in a decrease in the development of such skills as: preparation for future

professional work, teamwork and expanding the comfort zone (WeWork, 2021). In addition, there is a decrease in students' activity in the social, sports, scientific and artistic fields caused by the pandemic (Aktywny Student, 2021/2022) and they share the belief that it is difficult to find a job after graduation and achieve their goals (Długosz, 2020).

There are also positive modifications introduced by the pandemic in the approach of young people to a professional career, as some of them used this time for self-development by participating in training and improvement courses, they also engaged in volunteer and social projects and changed their approach to previous plans professional to more flexible (e.g. they began to prefer remote work to office work) (PwC.pl, 2021).

Professional capital – basic assumptions of the concept

The concept of professional capital by Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan (2012) was developed with the teaching profession in mind, but it can be successfully applied to any person striving to achieve mastery in a given profession. In its assumption, professional capital is a resultant of human capital, social capital and decisional capital. All the indicated types of capital in this approach are perceived as individual resources based on the self-educational and proactive abilities of the entity, and having them is supposed to increase its chances of achieving professional success. It is worth emphasising, however, that despite the individual shading of professional capital, effective results of its development should be expected when it is shaped in the space of social learning and a sense of mutual responsibility of all entities involved in the process of its crystallisation (Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo, & Hargreaves, 2015).

Human capital is perceived as an individual human resource. It is associated with his cognitive skills, and therefore with the creation and modification of knowledge that is relevant at a given time, in accordance with the "here and now" domain, and allows you to co-create and learn (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). As a consequence, the information obtained is to contribute to changes in various aspects of the functioning of the individual (e.g. attitude, value system, behaviour) and result in specific benefits in the future. Its relationship with proactivity can be discerned, because it is composed of the ability to recognise development prospects and "reflective involvement in solving current problems" (Bańka, 2015, p. 98).

Social capital concerns interpersonal competences, such as establishing and maintaining relationships, team cooperation, networking, which are not insignificant for achieving and maintaining a specific professional position, or presenting

one's resources. It is crystallised not only on the basis of individual efforts undertaken for social development, but above all in the process of learning from other people (in the broadly understood social environment), which is why, according to the creators of the concept of professional capital, it can be analysed as the potential of the group (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

In turn, the decisional capital is responsible for making decisions by the entity on its own, based on previously made independent and critical judgments. It can be perceived as a complementary property, and at the same time an effect of the other two types of capital, because on the basis of acquired knowledge and built social position, an individual makes choices leading to the implementation of the adopted intentions. Therefore, it is characterised not only by the cognitive dimension, but also by the behavioural one. Decisional capital is based on judgment and expert knowledge that is gained over time and professional experience. It is they that allow the subject to participate in complex high-level decisional processes concerning not only himself, but also the professional group he represents, aimed at increasing the efficiency of its functioning (Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo, & Hargreaves, 2015).

One of the constructive features of professional capital is continuous human development related to the implementation of the principle of permanent learning (Rosalska, 2013). It determines the effectiveness of her efforts to shape her professional path and reflects the degree of resourcefulness and adaptation to the dynamic conditions of the present day.

Professional capital of students during the COVID-19 pandemic

The period of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related forced social isolation contributed to the intensification of people's activity in the virtual space, where they could develop on various levels. However, many data indicate that it did not create favourable conditions for professional capital, including the human capital of students. She experienced remote education, which resulted in a decrease in her satisfaction with her studies, and even burnout and exhaustion related to learning (Długosz, 2020). The main reasons for this situation can be seen in communication and technical difficulties (NZS, 2020), transformation of direct relationships with peers and teachers into indirect ones, and the need to independently analyse most of the material covered by the study program (WeWork, 2021). The remote mode of education is perceived by students (40.0%) as less effective and made them spend less time on learning (Flow Centrum Badawcze, 2020), but they have noticed the development of digital skills in themselves (Mindshare, 2020). Professionally active young people working remotely experienced a sense of loneliness, lack of purpose and observed a deterioration in their well-being (Achor et al., 2018).

The transformations taking place in the everyday functioning of students caused by the pandemic were also significant for its social capital. Although they limited direct contact with other people from their environment to a lesser extent than older age groups, some of them often did not meet their friends at all (Drozdowski et al., 2020a). In addition, they noticed the inability to meet their needs related to interpersonal relationships (Drozdowski et al., 2020b), and the lack of meetings with other people was one of the most burdensome factors during the period of forced social isolation (Grzelak et al., 2020a; Grzelak et al., 2020b). Also in the professional environment, there is a noticeable deterioration in relations between employees in companies and with clients, as well as difficulties in internal and external cooperation and networking (Antal & Eventory, 2021). On the other hand, the lack of direct social contacts during remote work/learning was considered by students and professionally active people as one of their greatest challenges (Dolot, 2020; Ert-Eberdt, 2020; Kasprzak & Ziółkowska, 2021; Mierzejewska & Chomicki, 2020). Despite the efforts of some employers aimed at building interpersonal bonds, such as virtual lunches or coffee breaks (Maurer, 2020), in some employees they resulted in an increased sense of longing for other people (Fetters, 2020). As a result of the pandemic, employees note weakening of private relations in the team, less frequent contact with colleagues and a decrease in trust in the organisation, but they also observe its positive consequences, such as obtaining support (also mental) from other employees and greater solidarity with them (Pracuj.pl, 2022).

Similar observations related to professional development during the pandemic can be made in the area of decisional capital. It left its mark on the decision-making process of students, as some students changed their career plans (also relating to the studied discipline) (Belghith, Ferry, Patros, & Tenret, 2020; Schwartz & Cymrot, 2020). In addition, in many cases they were forced to decide to postpone the deadline or were not able to pursue apprenticeships (Grodzicki et al., 2020). It is also worth emphasising that making choices during the lockdown period, which involved limiting freedom in the daily functioning of the individual, was disturbed by a decrease in young people's sense of loss of control and agency (Długosz, 2020; Hamer & Baran, 2021; Góra et al., 2020) and a decrease in trust in others (More in Common, 2021).

Methodology

The basic assumption of the research model constructed for the project *Students during the COVID-19 pandemic* results from the fact that the spheres of student activity in areas such as professional career, family and peer relationships, spirituality and civic engagement are likely to change due to factors related to with the

threat of life, the need to transform her daily functioning due to the lockdown and variables related to personality traits. This article presents the collected empirical material regarding activities supporting the professional capital of people participating in the study, attempting to answer the question: "What are the actions taken by university students to support their professional capital during the pandemic and what variables differentiate it?".

The study used the diagnostic survey method to collect statistical data and facts about the described phenomenon, which is the change in the existence of students in the above-mentioned areas, which have a significant impact on their behaviour, decisions and participation in everyday reality, which in turn made it possible to determine the , intensity and scope of these modifications. The study was quantitative, which made it possible to relatively accurately determine the scale and size of the changes taking place during the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic by subjecting them to statistical processing.

The CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) online survey was used in the survey. Due to the specificity of the situation, this was the only possible way to conduct research. The authors of the project are aware of the limitations resulting from both the method of distribution of the survey and narrowing down the group of respondents to people who are much more willing to carry out this type of research. The result of such an organisation of conducted explorations is the lack of representativeness of the results obtained. The conducted analyses are of an exploratory nature. The ZOHO portal was used for their implementation, taking into account, among others, data protection and anonymity of people completing the questionnaire. The online survey included 37 closed and semi-open questions with the opportunity to justify your answer. Purposeful sampling was used in the study. The criterion for selecting the respondents was their student status. Therefore, the term "students" means people studying full-time or part-time at a university, i.e. both young people and adults. The research tool was disseminated through Student Service Offices at selected universities that agreed to participate in the study.

The undertaken explorations were carried out during social isolation caused by the COVID-19 virus pandemic. In May 2020, the dissemination of the survey among respondents began. The last data was received in July 2020 – due to the holidays, it was not possible to distribute the data and subsequent student responses were recorded in the period from October 2020 to January 2021. It can therefore be concluded that the respondents completed the questionnaire in the period of the greatest fear and crisis, living in great uncertainty and the need to adapt to a number of restrictions and changes in everyday life.

The dependent and independent variables reviewed in the research exploration process are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Dependent and independent variables analysed during the research

Tool	Source	Variables/Indicators	Justification for selection
TIPI-P Test	Sorokowska, Słowińska, Zbieg, Sorokowski (2014), Łaguna, Bąk, Purc, Mielniczuk, Oleś (2014)	Five dimensions of personality described in the Big Five model: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience.	Most personality tests and tools are relatively lengthy and time consuming. However, research shows a tendency to use shorter versions (Credé et al., 2012; Gosling et al., 2003). This results, among others, from due to the need to shorten the time of the examination, which is especially important in research conducted via the Internet.
Author's survey	Author's survey	Dependent variables presented in the article: activities supporting professional capital undertaken by the surveyed students during the COVID-19 pandemic, subjective assessment of the level of involvement in particular spheres of life.[1]	Measurement, determination of the type of change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Variables will be used in the process of exploring selected problem areas and demonstrating the relationship with independent variables.
Socio-demographic variables	Identity questions used in the area of public health and specific in connection with COVID-19	Independent variables: age, gender, discipline of the knowledge studied, type of university, mode of study, year of study, didactic results obtained during studies, place of origin, place of residence before the pandemic, the need to move back to live with parents, professional situation, financial situation.	Characteristics of the study group. Variables will be used as criteria for intergroup comparisons in the population.

Source: Author's research.

[1] The respondents answered the question: "To what extent do you perceive yourself as a person involved (e.g. devoting time, putting effort) in the spheres of life listed below?" and defined their involvement in areas such as: friends/friends, relations with parents, partner/marital relations, professional career, inner/spiritual life, social/civic activity on a 5-point scale, where 1 means I am definitely not involved, and 5 – definitely involved. The categorisation of individual levels of involvement of respondents in the life sphere was derived from the distribution of data by dividing them into three groups with the aim of maintaining a proportional distribution by quartiles (25% – low level of involvement, 50% – average level of involvement and 25% – high level of involvement).

Questions concerning activities undertaken by students to develop their own professional capital were inspired by the concept of professional capital described above by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012). Respondents answered the question "What actions do you take to support professional capital during the COVID-19 pandemic?" by selecting 'yes' or 'no' for each of the 14 statements provided (Table 2). In the case of statements marked with numbers from 1 to 12, they received 1 point for each affirmative answer, and in relation to statements 13–14 – for a negative one (phrases with diagnostically inverse). It was found that the higher the score the respondent obtains, the higher the level of professional capital he/she displays.

Specific statistical procedures were selected and applied to identify and capture relationships between variables. The threshold level of statistical significance was $p \leq 0.05$, which is commonly accepted in social sciences. The Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (S) was used to analyse the relationships between the variables, and the V-Cramer coefficient for multi-valued nominal variables. In turn, the chi-square test (χ^2) was used to verify the differences in the values of the analysed measurement scales.

Characteristics of the research group

The study involved 1,259 people aged 21 to 49. Students under 21 years of age constituted 15.1% ($N = 189$) of the respondents, every fourth respondent was 22 years old (26.5%/$N = 332$), every fifth respondent was 23 (21.8%/$N = 274$), 24-year-olds constituted 13.8% ($N = 173$) of the research group, 25-year-olds: 9.4% ($N = 118$), and people over 25 years of age: 13.5% ($N = 169$). The respondents were men (7.2%/$N = 90$) and women (92.8%/$N = 1163$) studying full-time (69.2%/$N = 869$) and part-time (30.8%/$N = 389$) throughout Poland, with the vast majority (91.6%/$N = 1151$) being students of public schools, the rest being students of non-public schools (8.4%/$N = 105$). They were mainly students of humanities (39.2%/$N = 492$) and social sciences (53.5%/$N = 672$), other fields of study were represented by young people studying exact and natural sciences (2.5%/$N = 31$), medical (2.2%/$N = 27$), engineering and technical (1.4%/$N = 18$) and related to the arts (1.2%/$N = 15$). In terms of didactic results obtained at university, the group of people with an average grade in the range of 4.0–4.49, constituting 56.8% of respondents ($N = 705$), dominated. Every fourth of them had an average grade above 4.5 (25.2%/$N = 313$), and 18.0% ($N = 223$) below 3.99.

Almost half of the respondents (42%/$N = 528$) come from rural areas, every third respondent (29.5%/$N = 371$) indicated a small town with up to 50,000 inhabitants as their place of origin, a medium-sized city (from 50 to 200,000 inhabitants) – 14.7% ($N = 185$) of the respondents, and the remaining people (13.8%/$N = 174$) –

large voivodship cities (over 200,000 inhabitants). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost half of the students (46.1%/*N* = 569) declared returning to their family home during the lockdown.

The vast majority of respondents (69.4%/*N* = 862) are professionally active, as evidenced by the fact that almost every third respondent (27.5%/*N* = 341) works on the basis of a full-time employment contract, every fifth (21.1%/*N* = 262) – on a mandate contract, and every tenth – seasonally (9.7%/*N* = 121) or casually (11.1%/*N* = 138). The percentage of 30.6% of university students declared that they did not take up professional work.

Almost half of the respondents define their financial situation as good (48.0%/*N* = 598), which means that they have no problems with meeting their basic financial needs, but they cannot afford to make savings. Every third respondent indicates that they are in a very good economic condition (38.6%/*N* = 481), and every tenth (11.4%/*N* = 142) representative of students is in a difficult financial situation, and therefore does not have funds to pay basic expenses. The smallest percentage of respondents, 2.1% (*N* = 26), is dependent on their parents.

Results

It turns out that the surveyed students in the initial period of the COVID-19 pandemic invested their efforts related to the development of their professional careers in achieving the best possible results at university (82.7%/*N* = 860), exploring the knowledge of the discipline with which they associate professional future (72.7%/*N* = 756), belonging to industry groups on social networking sites (57.7%/*N* = 600), realising one's previous career plans (55.1%/*N* = 573) and gaining skills through the use of additional forms of online education (54.1%/*N* = 563). A smaller percentage of respondents cared about building relationships in their future professional environment (50.3%/*N* = 522), following information about the current situation on the labour market (46.8%/*N* = 488), took up a job that could be carried out during the pandemic (35.6%/*N* = 367) or completed on-line internships (20.7%/*N* = 215). The surveyed students paid the least attention to activities in industry associations (12.1%/*N* = 125), speaking on professional forums (8.6%/*N* = 89), or online professional activity (5.8%/*N* = 60). Every fourth young person was in favour of taking no action to develop their professional career (25.0%/*N* = 258), and every fifth suspended their professional activity during the pandemic (23.8%/*N* = 246).

These properties were used to specify the individual dimensions of the professional capital of the surveyed students. Statements 1–5 in the table above were used to identify human capital. The arithmetic mean of affirmative answers given

Table 2. Distribution of responses of the surveyed academic youth to the question: "What actions do you take to support professional capital during the COVID-19 pandemic?"

No.	Types of activities supporting professional capital	Answer	Number of answers (*N*)[2]	Percentage of answers (%)
1	I gain skills using additional forms of online education (courses, webinars, training)	Yes	563	54.1%
		No	478	45.9%
2	I do online internships	Yes	215	20.7%
		No	823	79.3%
3	I try to achieve the best results in my studies	Yes	860	82.7%
		No	180	17.3%
4	I develop my knowledge of the discipline with which I associate my professional future (I read books, watch thematic programs, look for information on the Internet)	Yes	756	72.7%
		No	284	27.3%
5	I follow information on the situation on the labour market	Yes	488	46.8%
		No	554	53.2%
6	I establish and maintain relationships with people who can help me develop my professional career	Yes	522	50.3%
		No	515	49.7%
7	I belong to thematic groups on social networks that may be important for my professional future	Yes	600	57.7%
		No	439	42.3%
8	I am active in organisations and/or scientific or industry associations	Yes	125	12.1%
		No	912	87.9%
9	I speak on industry internet forums/blogs	Yes	89	8.6%
		No	949	91.4%
10	I consistently implement my earlier career plans	Yes	573	55.1%
		No	467	44.9%
11	I took a job that I can do during the SARS CoV-02 pandemic	Yes	367	35.6%
		No	664	64.4%

[2] The sum of the answers is not always 1,259 due to the fact that some respondents gave up the possibility of indicating their attitude to a specific type of activity for the development of a professional career.

No.	Types of activities supporting professional capital	Answer	Number of answers (*N*)[3]	Percentage of answers (%)
12	I initiate my professional activity on-line: e.g. I create e-learning courses, webinars, I run a blog	Yes	60	5.8%
		No	975	94.2%
13	I do not take any action to develop my professional career	Yes	258	25.0%
		No	773	75.0%
14	the situation of the SARS CoV-02 pandemic forced me to suspend my professional activity	Yes	246	23.8%
		No	786	76.2%

Source: Author's research.

by the respondents is 2.76 points out of 5 possible to obtain. Most people chose the 'yes' option in the case of three variants of statements (33.3%/$N = 348$), every fifth respondent declared taking two (22.8%/$N = 238$) or four (22.7%/$N = 237$) activities for the development of one's own career, and every tenth (11.4%/$N = 119$) – one of them, and much less often the respondents answered negatively (4.2%/$N = 44$) or positively (5.6% /$N = 59$) for all proposed activities.

The greatest awareness in the area of human capital is manifested by older students over 23 years of age ($\chi^2 = 57.784$; $df = 25$; $p \leq 0.001$) and those achieving high academic results (i.e. students who obtained an average grade above 4.5) ($\chi^2 = 19.665$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.033$). This regularity was also confirmed by the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, which showed that the older the people participating in the study (S; $\rho = 0.130$; $p \leq 0.001$) or achieve higher didactic results at university (S; $\rho = 0.136$; $p \leq 0.001$), the higher the level of human capital they display.

There is a relationship between human capital and the subjective assessment of the level of involvement in various areas of activity by young people. It becomes a defining feature of the surveyed students who show relatively high involvement in friendships ($\chi^2 = 27.897$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.002$), partnerships ($\chi^2 = 27.530$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.002$), professional career ($\chi^2 = 105.725$; $df = 10$; $p \leq 0.001$), spiritual life ($\chi^2 = 38.220$; $df = 10$; $p \leq 0.001$) and civic activity ($\chi^2 = 81.348$; $df = 10$; $p \leq 0.001$). The subjective assessment of the degree of involvement in the above-mentioned spheres of youth functioning is not indifferent to the quality of human capital. It turns out that an increase in one of the factors contributes to an increase in the other in terms of friendships (S; $\rho = 0.116$; $p \leq 0.001$), partnerships (S; $\rho = 0.094$;

[3] The sum of the answers is not always 1,259 due to the fact that some respondents gave up the possibility of indicating their attitude to a specific type of activity for the development of a professional career.

$p = 0.003$), professional career (S ; $\rho = 0.294$; $p \leq 0.001$), spiritual life (S; $\rho = 0.169$; $p \leq 0.001$), and civic activity (S; $\rho = 0.235$; $p \leq 0.001$).

The personality traits presented by the surveyed students are also significant for the quality of human capital. It can be seen that it is a property characteristic of people with a high level of: extraversion ($\chi^2 = 26.286$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.003$), conscientiousness ($\chi^2 = 79.241$; $df = 10$; $p \leq 0.001$) and openness to experience ($\chi^2 = 35.767$; $df = 10$; $p \leq 0.001$). It is worth noting that Spearman's rank correlation coefficient showed that the higher the level of extraversion (S; $\rho = 0.114$; $p \leq 0.001$), conscientiousness (S; $\rho = 0.235$; $p \leq 0.001$) and openness to experience (S; $\rho = 0.137$; $p \leq 0.001$), the higher the level of human capital it presents.

The social capital of the respondents was identified using statements 6–9 (Table 2). The arithmetic mean of affirmative answers given by the surveyed students is 1.28 points out of 4 possible to obtain. Only 3.1% ($N = 32$) of the surveyed students indicated undertaking all of the listed activities in the area of social capital, every fourth of them (25.8%/$N = 270$) does not display any of them. The highest percentage of 34.3% ($N = 358$) gave an affirmative answer for one activity, a slightly lower percentage of 29.2% ($N = 305$) – two, and 7.7% ($N = 80$) of respondents for three.

The highest level of social capital is found in men ($\chi^2 = 37.951$; $df = 4$; $p \leq 0.001$), people over 25 ($\chi^2 = 47.374$; $df = 20$; p = 0.001), students of non-public universities ($\chi^2 = 18.610$; $df = 4$; $p = 0.001$), who were not forced to move back in with their parents ($\chi^2 = 14.342$; $df = 4$; $p = 0.006$) and working on the basis of an employment contract ($\chi^2 = 47.564$; $df = 16$; $p \leq 0.001$). It is worth mentioning that Spearman's rank correlation coefficient showed that the older people participating in the study are (S; $\rho = 0.090$; $p = 0.004$), the higher their level of social capital.

There is a statistically significant relationship between social capital and the degree of involvement in various spheres of activity by young people. It is the domain of students with relatively high commitment to professional career ($\chi^2 = 93.207$; $df = 8$; $p \leq 0.001$), spiritual life ($\chi^2 = 35.978$; $df = 8$; $p \leq 0.001$), civic activity ($\chi^2 = 50.206$; $df = 8$; $p \leq 0.001$), friendships ($\chi^2 = 19.107$; $df = 8$; $p = 0.014$) and partnerships ($\chi^2 = 18.837$; $df = 8$; $p = 0.016$). Moreover, there was a direct proportional relationship between the above-mentioned areas and social capital. This means that it increases with the level of involvement in each of them, i.e. professional career (S; $\rho = 0.286$; $p \leq 0.001$), spiritual life (S; $\rho = 0.157$; $p \leq 0.001$), citizenship (S; $\rho = 0.204$; $p \leq 0.001$), friendships (S; $\rho = 0.069$; $p = 0.026$) and partnerships (S; $\rho = 0.090$; $p = 0.004$).

The highest awareness in the area of social capital is demonstrated by the surveyed students with a high level of extroversion ($\chi^2 = 24.002$; $df = 8$; $p = 0.002$), conscientiousness ($\chi^2 = 22.639$; $df = 8$; $p = 0.004$) and openness to experience ($\chi^2 = 38.473$; $df = 8$; $p \leq 0.001$). A statistically significant relationship between these

variables was demonstrated by Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, which proves the influence of the increase in the level of one of them on the other [extraversion (S; $\rho = 0.144$; $p \leq 0.001$); conscientiousness (S; $\rho = 0.137$; $p \leq 0.001$); openness to experience (S; $\rho = 0.078$; $p = 0.012$)].

The decisional capital of the surveyed students was further defined by formulas 10–14 (Table 2). The arithmetic mean of the recorded answers given by the respondents is 2.45 points out of 5 possible to obtain. Most of the surveyed students opted for three actions (31.4%/$N = 328$) undertaken for their professional career in this area, and a slightly smaller percentage of 25.5% ($N = 266$) – for two. Those who indicated positively for four statements were 18.8% ($N = 196$), for one – 15.7% ($N = 164$), for none – 6.9% ($N = 72$), and for five – 1.8 % ($N = 19$).

The highest awareness in the area of decisional capital is defined by respondents over 25 years of age ($\chi^2 = 56.780$; $df = 25$; $p \leq 0.001$), studying at non-public universities ($\chi^2 = 18.818$; $df = 5$; $p = 0.037$), achieving high teaching results at university (average grade over 4.5) ($\chi^2 = 20.468$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.025$), who received distinctions during academic studies ($\chi^2 = 37.836$; $df = 5$; $p \leq 0.001$), who studied part-time ($\chi^2 = 59.728$; $df = 5$; $p \leq 0.001$) and at non-public universities ($\chi^2 = 11.818$; $df = 5$; $p = 0.037$). Spearman's rank correlation coefficient proved that the older the persons participating in the study are (S; $\rho = 0.172$; $p \leq 0.001$) or achieve higher academic results (S; $\rho = 0.091$; $p = 0.004$), the higher their decisional capital. The answers of the surveyed students were also differentiated by variables relating to the housing situation. It turns out that the decisional capital is distinguished by the surveyed students living in their own apartment before the pandemic ($\chi^2 = 25.918$; $df = 15$; $p = 0.039$) and not forced to move back to their parents due to the pandemic ($\chi^2 = 28.127$; $df = 5$; $p \leq 0.001$). Not without significance for the quality of decisional capital are aspects related to the professional career of students, because it specifies the surveyed people working on the basis of an employment contract ($\chi^2 = 173.275$; $df = 20$; $p \leq 0.001$), experiencing a modification of their professional situation during the pandemic ($\chi^2 = 20.158$; $df = 5$; $p \leq 0.001$), including in particular improving it or changing the form of work ($\chi^2 = 73.611$; $df = 15$; $p \leq 0.001$). Similar relationships can be found in the case of decisional capital and the economic situation of the respondents. Statistical analyses have shown that it is a feature of respondents who are in a very good financial situation ($\chi^2 = 52.941$; $df = 10$; $p \leq 0.001$), do not experience a change in their material situation ($\chi^2 = 29.616$, $df = 5$; $p \leq 0.001$) or experience an improvement in their financial situation ($\chi^2 = 70.607$; $df = 20$; $p \leq 0.001$). In addition, the highest level was manifested by people who observed COVID-19 cases in their immediate environment ($\chi^2 = 13.351$; $df = 5$; $p = 0.020$) and who shared the belief that their lives would not change due to the pandemic ($\chi^2 = 18.411$; $df = 5$; $p = 0.002$).

There is a noticeable relationship between the decisional capital and the subjective assessment of the level of involvement in various areas of activity by students. It characterises the surveyed people with relatively high involvement in their professional career ($\chi^2 = 128.349$; $df = 10$; $p \leq 0.001$), friendships ($\chi^2 = 27.730$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.002$) and partnerships ($\chi^2 = 19.008$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.040$), spiritual life ($\chi^2 = 26.338$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.003$), civic activity ($\chi^2 = 24.274$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.007$). It is not overlooked that the increase in the level of involvement in each of the indicated spheres allows for an increase in the level of decisional capital [professional career (S; $\rho = 0.337$; $p \leq 0.001$); friendships (S; $\rho = 0.124$; $p \leq 0.001$) and partnerships (S; $\rho = 0.093$; $p = 0.003$); spiritual life (S; $\rho = 0.104$; $p \leq 0.001$); active citizenship (S; $\rho = 0.118$; $p \leq 0.001$)].

In addition, significant decisional capital becomes the domain of the surveyed people with a high level of: extraversion ($\chi^2 = 39.695$; $df = 10$; $p \leq 0.001$), agreeableness ($\chi^2 = 22.365$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.013$), conscientiousness ($\chi^2 = 47.878$; $df = 10$; $p \leq 0.001$), stability ($\chi^2 = 83.037$; $df = 10$; $p \leq 0.001$) and openness to experience ($\chi^2 = 21.446$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.018$). Spearman's rank correlation coefficient allowed to note that the surveyed students showed a higher level of extraversion (S; $\rho = 0.183$; $p \leq 0.001$), agreeableness (S; $\rho = 0.107$; $p \leq 0.001$), conscientiousness (S; $\rho = 0.197$; $p \leq 0.001$) or stability (S; $\rho = 0.264$; $p \leq 0.001$), the higher the level of decisional capital.

The quality of individual career capitals manifested by the surveyed students is not without significance, because Spearman's rank correlation coefficient showed that the increase in the level of human capital contributes to the increase in the levels of social capital (S; $\rho = 0.394$; $p \leq 0.001$) and decisional capital (S; $\rho = 0.303$, $p \leq 0.001$).

Discussion and summary

The aim of the article was to present activities supporting professional capital undertaken by the surveyed university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The general values of the analysed categories, estimated on the basis of the arithmetic mean of points assigned for the respondents' answers, show that it was at an average level in each of the three areas, with the highest degree of the surveyed students having developed human capital, then decisional and social capital, respectively. These data show the diverse approach of young people to professional development, some of whom found opportunities for their professional capital in the virtual space and beyond during the pandemic, and some of them did not cope with it.

Statistically significant connections between individual types of professional capital and the subjective assessment of students' involvement in various areas of activity, such as professional career, spiritual life, civic activity and partnership

and family relationships, may indicate its importance for many spheres of human functioning.

Assuming that the knowledge and skills of an individual develop with age, it is not surprising that it is the older students who are distinguished by a high level of professional capital. Cognitively interesting are the data indicating that it is possessed by people who did not live with their parents again during the pandemic, students from private universities and achieving high didactic results in their studies. Treating the average grade as a criterion verifying the level of knowledge, it can be assumed that the structure of knowledge affects the self-awareness of an individual understood as "awareness of something" or "the ability of a person to know and evaluate himself and the environment" (Świadomość, n.d.). The issue requiring further analysis is to consider the thesis whether private universities, basing their image on competitiveness related also to caring for the quality of education, encourage young people to take action to develop their careers to a greater extent than public universities or create more favourable conditions for this (Marzec, 2019).

It is also worth looking at students who were forced to return home as a result of the pandemic. The phenomena of nesting (Piszczatowska-Oleksiewicz, 2014), emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2007) and deferred adulthood (Brzezińska, Kaczan, Piotrowski, & Rękosiewicz, 2011) signal the blurring of boundaries in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, young people, which results in experimenting in various spheres of life and prolonging the moratorium period (Liberska, 2007; Merino & Garcia, 2006). Low activity in building social ties in the professional field and in making decisions related to their careers, which it caused in their lives, may therefore intensify and additionally prolong the process of postponing the moment of moving out of the family of origin, which in its long-term consequences may be dysfunctional for it .

The authors of the model of personality traits called the Big Five indicate that a specific type of personality represented by an individual emphasises their individual features responsible for their characteristic ways of feeling, thinking, behaving and reacting in various situations (McCrae & Costa, 2003; 1997). In addition, it conditions beliefs about oneself, including in the area of self-efficacy and goal setting (McCrae & Costa, 1996). The relationships between openness to experience, extroversion, conscientiousness and professional capital, as well as agreeableness and stability in the case of decisional capital, revealed in the research results, emphasise which features of an individual have a positive impact on his development.

It should be borne in mind that it is difficult for students to clearly define the activities undertaken to support professional capital due to the general

developmental nature of their numerous activities and the problem of separating time devoted to professional development from activities related to everyday life (Baron-Polańczyk & Perzycka, 2021). Professional work for the vast majority of them (80.13%) is of significant value and it is important for them that it gives them a sense of satisfaction, security and development (Sarzyńska-Mazurek, 2021). There is therefore a high probability that they will take action to develop their professional capital in the (post)pandemic reality in order to achieve their goals, although achieving a stable position on the labour market will certainly be difficult due to the unstable situation in which they find themselves. due to the pandemic.

It turns out that in a situation of insecurity and difficult emotions caused by the pandemic, the motivating factor for achieving favourable professional results is the possibility of career development (Huo, 2021). However, the important role of educational institutions supporting young people in the process of professional orientation should not be underestimated. International research involving a significant group of young people (40,000 people from 150 different countries) indicates, however, that the education system does not sufficiently prepare them to decide about their professional career (Georgievska & Uragichi, 2020). This regularity may additionally increase their sense of uncertainty and fears related to entering the labour market and encourages them to reflect on possible actions in the area of prevention and career counselling that strengthen their professional capital. In the context of research data proving that people starting their professional activity during the crisis and recession that we are currently observing, in the future they will have difficulties in looking for employment and taking care of its favourable conditions (more often they decide to work on the basis of junk contracts, less often they seek wage increase) and divorce more often than other groups, and even live shorter lives (Szeligowski, 2020) – they are among the most important problems to be solved determining the future of the psychophysical and professional condition of young people.

These research results complement the knowledge about the functioning of students during the pandemic and the actions they take to support their professional capital during this time. They may be useful in creating preventive programs in the area of career counselling for young people in the (post)pandemic reality. They show what activities should be encouraged to strengthen their professional capital and draw attention to people who need special support in this area. The presented research results refer to students' activity during the pandemic, so it is worth treating them as an inspiration to recognise their activities related to the development of professional capital after the pandemic and analyse the changes it caused.

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