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**CAREER CONSTRUCTION AND WORK INCLUSION OF  
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: GOAL SETTING**

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**Abstract**

Today, the quality of human capital and active involvement of the disadvantaged people into socioeconomic and political life are the main challenges for the Russian Federation as it is going through another round of modernization. Despite the government allowances, the disadvantaged groups have no motivation to improve their human capital assets and to construct own career. In the paper, we propose the project that aims at impacting the wellbeing of the disadvantaged social groups. We will study the traditional and emerging structural forms of inequality in the context of complicated social reality and an increased rate of social changes, to identify the factors that improve or affect career construction and quality of life of every disadvantaged social group. Referring to career theoretical models and variables, a set of qualitative and quantitative measures will be used to assess strengths and weaknesses of involved people and to better understand relations among variables. These research results allow us to develop and implement career intervention programs aimed at improving people resources and facilitating career and life constructions, as well as social and work participation. These interventions will be devoted both to people with disabilities and their significant others.

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**Keywords:** Social inequality; psychological support; career construction; disadvantaged groups; work inclusion; life design.

## 1. Introduction

We live in the era of deepening inequality. This happens at country levels during the formation of the global society. In this society, gap between the poorest and the richest countries is increasing. As it was noted at the Davos economic forum in 2014, this is happening within societies and it is one of the main reasons for the slowdown in the economic growth. This problem is particularly acute for the Russian Federation, where the Gini index of income inequality corresponds to countries with high levels of social



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polarization. It is not surprising that the last World Congress of Sociology and Future All-Russian Sociological Congress (October, 2016) were devoted to the theme of inequality. The causes of increasing inequality are associated with the growing complexity of modern society. Modern complex society is a cause and effect of the growing speed of social changes. The increasing complexity leads to increasing risks. The growth of inequalities contribute to the disparities of the consumption economy, oligarchic allocation of wealth in the world and national scales, the fact that the economic crises began to occur more frequently, and their duration decreased. Crises most painfully affect the vulnerable groups of the population having low income and not having cash savings. First and foremost, risks affect socially vulnerable groups: young adults, older persons, undereducated people, low-income individuals, and people with disabilities. People with disabilities are special social groups as their physical state not only restricts the career choice, but also makes education inaccessible. Any deterioration in the economic situation throws them into poverty and even absolute poverty. Low individual human capital does not allow the representatives of these groups to overcome the crisis independently. Therefore, the society, claiming the construction of the socially oriented state, is not entitled to leave those communities without support in various institutional forms. On the other hand, the changes in professional life and the newly emerging technologies actualize the development of integrated system of career counseling for socially vulnerable groups. This means the development of individual educational and career trajectories, based on the personal features and their necessary improvement, initial career position, and possible environmental changes (social and economic, political and legislative changes, etc.).

To help the disadvantaged people to be more confident and successful and to facilitate psychological support and career consulting, we decided to design a new project described hereinafter. Even a limited contribution in this area would be a tremendous benefit for society.

## **2. Main objectives**

The project aims at building a support network that helps and empowers the disadvantaged groups in increasing their human capital assets and career construction in the context of the inequality growth. This goal comes with intermediate sub-objectives. The first step is to analyze and evaluate the institutional environment, to find out its variables, supports and barriers that influence career achievements of the disadvantaged groups. This implies the development of a set of quantitative and qualitative measures with verified and adequate psychometric requisites. The second step is to develop and implement career intervention programs to prevent the disadvantaged groups from psychological discomfort during the education and employment process. Referring to the context, the project aims to have an impact on significant others that live near people with disabilities and vulnerabilities. Specific activities will be also developed for significant others to change their attitude towards inclusion and to help them to interact socially with people with disabilities and vulnerabilities. The third sub-objective is to disseminate the successful results of providing the disadvantaged groups with career education and career counseling.

In the project we intend to:

- analyze and minimize the identified risks for the disadvantaged social groups in the context of new socioeconomic environment;

- determine the routes of individual behaviour strategies used by the disadvantaged social groups for human capital formation;
- analyze the law knowledge rate of the disadvantaged social groups regarding the institutional forms of support;
- analyze significant others' attitudes toward disability (someone who have great influence on behavior and self-esteem of people with disabilities and vulnerabilities);
- develop a set of qualitative and quantitative measures of assessment to be used both with people with disabilities and vulnerabilities and with their significant others and to verify the efficacy of the intervention;
- develop intervention programs and verify their efficacy to promote social and work inclusion and increase the inclusiveness of the contexts;
- design a website with a feedback control which is used to obtain comprehensive information concerning education and social services;
- enter into cooperation with personnel offices and develop a 'guaranteed interview' scheme for people with disabilities;
- instruct personnel officers and university teachers how to work with the disabled people;
- review and monitor the experiences and views of all applicants and employees.

### **3. Research methods**

The initial longitudinal studies are performed using mutually complementary methods and approaches to collect and interpret the findings. There are many theories that explain the conceptual framework of social reality. To determine how an agent might benefit from membership in social groups, we will use the concepts, predictive capabilities, and the theoretical formulations on social capital of Bourdieu (1986). The key concepts of the theory (cultural and social instruments of reproduction, recognition, social gain of education, and reproduction strategy) correlate to the project objectives.

To distinguish the career potentials of the disadvantaged people, we take the theory of human capital which focuses on the mechanisms of human capital investment. The theory explains in what way differences in earnings depend on workers' skills and the amount of investment in human capital.

The concept of a «risk society» (Beck, 1992) points out that the dynamics of modern society and changing nature of society's relations manufacture new social risks. These risks are not exceptions in social life; they may be socially constructed and reproduced after making a certain decision. The «risk society» conception will be used to develop individual career trajectories for the disadvantaged people, to control, and minimize these risks.

To study the structure of social network connections of the disadvantaged groups, we will use mathematical theory of graphs. It enables us to model the interactions among the disadvantaged people and social institution of career consulting, to estimate efficiency of these institutions, and to formulate recommendations concerning their efficiency improvement.

A simulation program, which is based on the received data and the selected factors, will be used to walk through scenarios of career development of the disadvantaged people. For this, we will use mathematical statistics, time-series analysis, and the neural network method.

The received data will be processed with the mathematical techniques of data analysis. Examples of these techniques are a multi-dimensional factorial analysis, a multivariate regression (linear or nonlinear), and the method of principal components. These techniques help to evaluate the impact of the identified factors on individual's career development. Also the structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis will be used to verify the hypothesized associations among variables. A statistical approach based on the subsupmption algorithm of Computer-Assisted Teaching (such as a decision function method and neural networks) will be used to process heterogeneous sociological data (ratings, quantitative, or ordered data). The structural functionalism is to be used to analyze the parameters of social inequality in the context of complicated social reality and an increasing rate of social changes. A structural functionalism approach assists in defining the criteria of social inequality based on the questionnaire methods which were verified and validated for estimating inequality. Qualitative analysis will be conducted referring to grounded theory (Strauss, & Corbin, 1990) with consensual qualitative research methods (Hill et al., 2005) that aim to develop an understanding of the participants' conceptions and meanings.

Specifically, we take the intervention model for life designing based on the theories of self-constructing (Guichard, 2005) and career construction (Savickas, 2009). This model underlines the significance of human flexibility, career adaptability, and life-long learning. It will be used to predict disadvantaged people's adjustment to work environments assuming the rapid changes of social environment. To assist individuals in designing their career and life paths, we will use questionnaires (especially focusing on offline social interactions), surveys, simulation exercise method, sensitivity training or T-groups method, and case study method.

#### **4. Description of the proposed research**

A just society calls on the institutional environment and social institutions to provide equal rights and freedoms to all citizens. The institutional environment determines the vector and the scope of social progress. The structural elements of institutional environment shape the cultural foundations and rules of production, exchange, and distribution and determine patterns of social behaviour. Modern social systems are naturally evolving institutional environment where the most significant factor is human capital (individual, corporate, or national) with its educational, professional, and management skills. As a result, the most successfully developing social models enable personality to develop all-round. They also provide equal rights and equal access to developing human capital for all citizens.

The economic slowdown, the predominance of economic structure of agrarian and industrial societies, soaring corruption, the inefficiency of the institutional power, social polarization and atomization of social environment, citizens' orientation towards material consumption, the constant narrowing of social interests, cultural liberalism, and other aberrations of individual and collective consciousness lead to serious social implications and reinforce social inequality. In such circumstances, the most vulnerable social groups are the disabled, low-income people, and people with disabilities. Many of them hold university degree but cannot gain a decent employment. The disadvantaged people are less socially and psychologically protected to cope with the pressure of social problems.

In most modern societies, characterized by globalization, unstable labor markets, and growing inequality, the number of vulnerable groups is constantly increasing (Guichard, 2013). Psychologists underline a shift that has occurred from sociological marginalization to social psychology marginalization

(Young, 2000; Mullaly, 2007). Today, labor markets do not enable everyone to have a job. It causes social exclusion where the disadvantaged social groups (people with disabilities, elderly individuals, the unemployed) experience marginalization due to difficulties in accessing education, health care, and work. There is a variety of barriers that make it hard for people in general and the disadvantaged social groups in particular to develop their own career and life path (Maynard, & Ferdman, 2015). So, the first part of the project starts with an analysis of the factors that impact career construction and quality of life in order to identify the barriers and supports for populations with significant career and life design needs: young people, elderly workers, low-skilled workers, people with disabilities, etc. The project intends to shed light on the problem of career construction and work inclusion of the disadvantaged social groups in the context of social inequality. Recent researches have highlighted this problem and its impact in most European societies (Mullaly, 2007; Guichard, 2013; Nota, et al., 2014).

Another important aspect, which so far has not been explored in a large extent, is what factors contribute to the increased social and work participation of the disadvantaged social groups. In community psychology, disadvantaged people have low motivation and self-confidence, limited opportunities to make social contributions, low self-efficacy, and low self-esteem (Burton, & Kagan, 2003). Usually, they are stigmatized, which lead to social conflicts and difficulties in participating in community life, resulting in further isolation (Maynard, & Ferdman, 2015). Therefore, the project is of particular importance for the understanding of how to assist and empower these at-risk populations in forming and enlarging their human capital assets.

In recent years, interest has grown in the significance of individual differences in career decision-making (Gati et al., 2010; Savickas, 2005). The second part of the project focuses on the approaches to assist disadvantaged individuals' career development. Preventive, proactive approaches are supposed to be more effective and less expensive than interventions undertaken after problems have appeared (Blustein, 2011; Kenny, et al., 2009). In the project we will refer to a life design approach (Savickas, et al., 2009; Nota, & Rossier, 2015) developed by a group of international scholars to meet career and life challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Life Design approach tries to implement the theories of self-constructing (Guichard, 2005) and career construction (Savickas, & Porfeli, 2012) that describe vocational behavior and its development. Thus, the framework is structured to be life-long (career construction should help people determine for themselves which skills and knowledge they value in their life-long development), holistic (people involved in designing their lives should be encouraged to consider simultaneously all salient life-roles), contextual (the person should be encouraged to explore the life theatre in which the different roles may be performed and use the results of this exploration in the self-construction process), and preventive (vocational guidance can no longer confine itself to intervening during transition times and making predictions or proposing suggestions on the basis of present stock taking).

It is not sufficient to insert people with disabilities in a class or in a job to succeed in inclusion. It is necessary to work with people in the context to increase their positive attitude toward the disabled and develop their skill to interact with them adequately (Santilli, et al., 2014).

Socioeconomic and political transformations of Russian society aggravated the employment discrimination of the disadvantaged people. Moreover, the implicit forms of employment discrimination (such as industry-based career isolation in low-paid and low-prestige jobs, non-formal barriers to a career

growth) were supplemented by explicit segregation in dismissal and employment. To eliminate employment discrimination we need to clarify its social causes, to assist the disadvantaged people in career adaptability and career construction, and to develop a social safety net of «support employment». In addition, we should consider a career not only as a certain professional status, but also as a dynamic category which provides an opportunity for personal development.

Recent researches indicate the main parameters of career construction (Greenhaus, 2003) and seven factors of career achievements that are career strategy, interpersonal relations, family relations, human capital investments, motivation factors, organization capabilities, and personal characteristics. (Savickas et al., 2009) identified five presuppositions of life-design counseling: contextual possibilities, dynamic processes, non-linear progression, multiple realities, and personal patterns.

Career development is influenced by situational, institutionalized and individual factors. (Arnold et al, 2003) states that unequal initial conditions usually affect individual's career achievement but they might not affect his/her personal appraisal of career achievement. So, career adaptability leads to successful career construction, self-sufficiency, and psychological well-being of the vulnerable groups.

The project has two strategic vectors of development. The first is sociological one aimed at studying Russian institutional environment and its development in the context of inequality growth and complicated social relations. The project will emphasize traditional and emerging structural forms of inequality within the trends of world economic and political development. It also reveals risks for the disadvantaged people in social and economic upheaval. To achieve the project objectives we need to identify the factors that directly affect socio-economic status of vulnerable people: the disabled, pensioners, low-income families, etc. We intend to use questionnaire methods to evaluate the awareness of vulnerable social groups on available institutional support, social programs, and benefits.

In Russia, structural inequalities and its consequences are studied in theoretical and applied sociological research. Institute of sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences pays special attention to this theme. In 2013, they prepared an analytical report "Poverty and Inequality in Contemporary Russia: 10 years later". The report analyzed the socio-demographic factors of vulnerability and the opinion of the poor people about inequality and justice in Russia. Meshcheryakova (2014) examined how inequality cause the anomy and erosion of values and traditions; and how it leads to the loss of social capital and prevents the modernization of society.

The era of global transformations adds new forms of inequalities to the traditional ones such as income inequality, power inequality, educational inequality, and inequality of vocational status. Kuzmina, (2013) points out that the forms of social inequality are becoming more diverse and ambiguous; and it has become more difficult to recognize and diagnose them. These new forms of inequality are information inequality, occupational inequality, deprivation, and unequal access to mobility and security.

Our approach will focus on specific risks for each social vulnerable group. This is where most of the novelty and scope of the project lies. We intend to develop an individual approach to human capital formation and routing of individual career strategies. We will examine institutional support options for each vulnerable group, the legal regulation of their status, and socio-psychological characteristics and behavioral patterns of people with disabilities and vulnerabilities.

The psychological vector refers to choosing and validation of approaches and methods to provide the disadvantaged people with individual psychological and vocational assistance.

## 5. Conclusion

In general terms, the project aims at impacting the wellbeing of the disadvantaged social groups. Providing the disadvantaged social groups with professional career consulting can reduce employment discrimination and unemployment. Employment is one of the most important economic parameters of state development, as it ensures a decent standard of living. To increase the coefficient of occupation means to reduce government's social commitment and invest state budget into institutional development.

The legal impact of the project is that it revises the Russian legislation in the sphere of social security of social vulnerable groups. Project findings enable to correct legal acts regarding social and psychological support and career consulting of the disadvantaged social groups.

To assist the disadvantaged social groups in career construction and employment can bring many social impacts: improve welfare of the community and living standards; performance improvement; improve health and life expectancy; reduce social tension; and guarantee social stability and institutional support.

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