

Investigating young people's job choice and related life- defining decisions: A trade- off approach using Conjoint Analysis

The topic under investigation of this analysis are the job preferences of young residents of the region of South Tyrol aged between 15 and 29 years. More specifically, the research question is, what these young people's life expectations are, with a specific focus on their future or ideal workplace. I thus want to investigate which role the own job plays in young people's life plan and if personal preferences about housing, mobility and social surroundings impact respondents career preferences.

As far as the methodology is concerned, an Adaptive Choice Based Conjoint Analysis (ACBC) is used to investigate the respondents job preferences. Originating from market research areas, I adapted this research method to our case to predict how young people make the complex decision of choosing and evaluating potential work offers and places. ACBC uses repeated answers to investigate how important each attribute is in driving each respondent's decisions and which levels within each attribute are preferred (and by how much). Additionally, this method helps me investigate if respondents display non-compensatory behaviours.

Using the micro level data obtained with the ACBC analysis, I hope to gain a more specific insight into the factors which drive individuals' job and career choices, as they help obtaining a personal and differentiated preference scheme. A series of questions related to the topics of mobility, housing and the social and familiar surroundings is then supposed to help me evaluate and describe potential clusters of young people and their respective preferences. In addition to regression and cluster analysis, I hope to obtain other interesting micro level data to include in the publication.

In an earlier questionnaire, the set of attributes for the ACBC exercise were carefully selected with the help of a MaxDiff exercise, completed by 130 respondents of the same age group, to guarantee the relevance of the asked items.

Overall, more than 2.000 respondents of the relevant age group completed the survey using CAWI technique. The sample is quite representative, with a small overrepresentation of younger respondents. The questionnaires were collected from February to June 2023 and spread throughout the whole target group with the help of regional youth and labour organizations and associations.

Using Hierarchical Bayes regression techniques, so called individual importance and utility scores were obtained for each respondent. Importance scores are expressed in percentage points and describe the relative importance of each attribute of the questionnaire. Utilities are zero- centred scores, which express the relative utility of each level of each attribute and can thus be used to compare the relative utility each respondent puts on different levels of the same attribute.

Looking at the overall importance scores, the first result reads as follows. Work climate among colleagues and salary each hold a share of 20% of the overall importance, followed by the relationship to one's employer (14%). Other relevant aspects that contribute more than 10% to the overall importance are the job contract and career opportunities. Somewhat less important, on the other hand, are the opportunities for further training, the working hours schedule and the room for decision-making and responsibility.

However, not all young people are the same, as the survey demonstrates. A good work climate among colleagues and a good relationship to one's employer are more important for women, while men rather prioritise a higher salary. Conversely, young people who are already employed want a permanent contract more often than pupils and students. Seasonal employment contracts, on the other hand, are least popular among men. Finally, young residents who are already working, put more importance on career prospects and a permanent employment contract.

Surprisingly however, the differences in general according to these socio-demographic factors are not as big as expected. Rather, some clusters emerge, i.e., groups of young people who have very homogeneous preferences, but do not necessarily belong to only one language group, geographical area or gender. At the moment I am thus working on a cluster analysis, which will be one big result of this study.

Another interesting finding from the adaptive- styled survey is that for a considerable number of the young people surveyed, certain workplace characteristics are totally unacceptable. For example, 30% of the respondents would not accept or also leave a workplace with a negative work climate among colleagues. Additionally, 20% of the young people would not accept a job with a salary of less than 1,400 euros net per month. This figure is rather alarming, considering that about 25% of private employees in the region of South Tyrol earn less than 1,400 euros. A young South Tyrolean would therefore not even consider a large part of the available jobs. Finally, for 15% of respondents, a bad relationship to their employer would be enough to refuse or leave the workplace.

Further results confirm one of our hypotheses, namely that competition for human resources is no longer just a local phenomenon. More than half of the young residents declare they would definitely or rather surely be willing to leave South Tyrol for professional reasons. The group most willing to move abroad for professional reasons includes young people of Italian mother tongue and those living in urban communities. The main reasons cited by these young people are the possibility of finding more interesting job opportunities, having better career prospects and earning a higher salary outside South Tyrol. Amongst these, more younger respondents (aged between 15 and 19) cite as main reason the career opportunities, while their older counterparts (aged between 25 and 29) put more relevance on the monetary aspect.

Another question related to the most desirable place to live in the future. One third each of respondents declare that their future ideal place to live would either be a small village or a village near to a bigger city. However, in this case the differences among the language groups are significant: 43% of respondents with Italian mother tongue would prefer living in a metropolis, while only 8% of respondents with German mother tongue would do so. Conversely, 47% of respondents with Ladin mother tongue would prefer a small village, compared to only 8% of their Italian counterparts.

The additional questions regarding mobility, housing and the social and familiar surroundings reveal that three items were most important for respondents when asked about their future, namely, to have enough time for friends and family (71%), to be able to own an apartment or house (69%) and to have solid medical care in the surroundings (64%). However, also in this case there are some differences for example according to some sociodemographic factors. For women, aspects related to acceptance in the neighbourhood are more important. Respondents aged between 25 and 29 years and those with Italian mother tongue conversely prioritise aspects related to their workplace, such as its quick reachability. Finally, young people living in cities put less importance on the topics of civic engagement and on being surrounded by family and friends. These results will then be taken into consideration when doing the cluster analysis interpretation.

Eventually, the analysis shows that salary and the work climate among colleagues play a crucial role and often represent a real barrier that cannot be compensated by other benefits offered by the company, such as training opportunities. In the other aspects studied, companies have more room for negotiation: for example, seasonal employment may be more acceptable if it is combined with a reasonable salary or a pleasant working atmosphere. However, the results also show that young people cannot be lumped together, as there are differences according to gender, mother tongue and place of residence and other factors that are still to be analysed.

With this analysis I want to inform employers, policy makers and other stakeholders about what changes in attitudes and preferences they are to expect in the future labour market. Finally, a qualitative section with

stakeholder interviews will be added, in order to compare professional's and young people's opinions and beliefs about a selection of jobs, always based on the grid of attributes used in the ACBC analysis.

Some in-depth results and conclusions will be ready to be presented during the conference.