Vision of Personal Future as a Tool for Supporting Adolescents' Transition to Adulthood

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This article reports on the Vision of personal future scale (vpf), an instrument aimed to assess cognitive clearness, conviction in realization, and the self-directedness of adolescents' envisioning of their personal future. The 13-item scale was applied on 1,969 Serbian adolescents with the aim of exploring general aspects of their anticipations of their personal future. Results show that adolescents highlight the motivational and guiding potential of their own vision of the future. Two factor structures were extracted (named motivational optimistic and cognitive fearful), but each factor was emphasized differently by adolescents. The usefulness of the scale was discussed in the context of youth work and the creation of specific programs aimed to support youth development.

Introduction

Adolescence is considered to be a core period of life for the construction of a meaningful comprehensive picture of one's own future, thus outlining an important motivational framework and trajectory of the desired and/or expected development toward adulthood (Arnet 2000; Lloyd 2005). Researchers and practitioners addressing the issue of transition to adulthood have recognized the vital importance of providing effective support services that will support adolescents to prepare for emerging transition via envisioning and designing their lives toward positive futures (Guichard 2005; Lerner et al. 2005; Schmid, Phelps, and Lerner 2011). The benefits of such preparation are particularly apparent

for current generations of young people, whose transition to adulthood is marked with challenges greater than ever before (Crocetti et al. 2012). Induced by the transforming impacts of globalisation on all spheres of public and private life, new ways of coming of age (Arnett 2002) are characterized with abundant developmental tasks, to be performed in the context of the uncertainties of constantly changing living in 'liquid modernity' (Bauman 2006). Such a context is marked with lack of a demographic normative (different lifestyle options encompassing time/choice of: finishing education, autonomous living, job/career type, romantic/marital arrangement, becoming a parent) that challenges previous patterns of being and becoming and opens up the important issue of 'navigating' one's own development (Sica et al. 2016).

In order to establish a certain level of certitude and predictability and to maximize the personal benefits of development through this life stage (from 18 to 29 years), a young person needs to have a new approach and new tools. One such tool is related to the management of one's own development in terms of mastery and control over performance of age-appropriate developmental tasks and achieving a state of general well being. One of the first steps in the navigation of own development is the creation of a vision of one's personal future i.e. a cognitive framework that sets up important goals and anticipates and motivates necessary action. Stressing the importance of a self-management approach to one's individual life course and proposing the construct 'vision of personal future,' we seek to extend our understanding of young people's future-oriented phenomena in the context of building their strengths and thriving to fulfil their goals.

Similar to some other post-socialist societies, Serbia does not offer sufficient support for the positive development of new generations of young people (aged 16–29) which account for 18.35% of the total population (*Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia* 2017). The majority of them (83.5%) attend/participate in secondary education and near half (46%) is enrolled in tertiary education (*Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia* 2014). In that regard, the domain of education should be suitable for developing youth support programs, although educational institutions have not recognized the issue of thinking about the future and shaping future goals as important research and practice-oriented themes. Recent sociological studies provide insight into elements of the disadvantages of social position and the role of youth in Serbian society. The results of these studies indicate that transition to adulthood for current genera-

tions of youth in Serbia takes places in the context of a substandard and unstable economy (around 50% of youth is unemployed, Mojić 2014), a blurred value framework (declining traditional and authoritative values; liberal values still not accepted, Mojić 2014) and contradictions in the social articulation of life that derive from value normative dissonance (the difference between value systems and norms and how things function in reality, Mrđa 2011). In that regard, declarative rhetoric in public discourse about the key role of young people in the development of society is in contradiction with the lack of efforts by power holders to establish realistic foundations and mechanisms for young people to truly become agents in decision-making society-development processes. Moreover, besides the fact that for youth all choices are seriously brought into question by the real social situation and social circumstances in which they live, young people are also exposed to stereotypes and misunderstandings about their role and what's expected of them (Mrđa 2011, 120). In addition, they are also immersed in living contexts characterized by a low quality of sociocultural capital (quasi-institutional changes; poor level of collective benefits that derive from cooperation between individuals and groups) which undermine the development of trust and reciprocity between groups and individuals. Having all this in mind, it is not surprising that the terms used to describe young generations in the last ten years are most often: apathy, un-initiative, and inertia (Cvejić 2006; Mrđa 2011). In addition, emigration aspirations are widespread – near half of the youth population wants to emigrate, although a smaller proportion actually does so (Tomanović and Stanojević 2015). Such a situation accentuates the importance of youth programs that aim to strengthen young people's efforts to find the best possible way to manage their own development toward positive and life satisfying outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

This study follows a Positive Youth Development (PYD) paradigm created at the end of the old and the beginning of the new millennium as a new approach to the study, developmental support, and enhancement of young people's potentials, as well as a new approach to looking at what is normative for adolescents' development (Benson 2003; Bowers et al. 2010; Catalano et al. 2004; Larson 2000; Li, Lerner, and Lerner 2010; Youngblade et al. 2007). In that regard, the term PYD refers to a number of interrelated fields of considerations: theoretical considerations about processes of development and growth of young people; philosophy of ap-

proach to youth programming; program/organization-based practices of fostering the positive development of youth; and the design of public policies relating to youth development (Hamilton, Hamilton, and Pittman 2004). Thus PYD is characterized by a number of constructs and a comprehensive, widely-inclusive approach regarding the creation of positive youth development programs as well as different instruments created to examine many different youth development constructs (Catelano, Gavin, and Markham 2010).

The PYD paradigm advocates new approaches to development based on values and principals considered to be important for living in the 21st century. The domain of education is seen the first and most important area for the affirmation of new values and norms. In the PYD theoretical framework, equal significance is attached to the strength of the individual and the supportive conditions of the environments in which the development takes place. The central point of the approach is the emphasis on young people's strengths and on promoting the development of functionally valuable behaviours, elaborated as the development of key cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and social competencies, as well as the fostering of young people's self-determination and belief in the future.

It is important to emphasize that in the PYD approach defining the constructs also means defining objectives of the approach, as well as generating criteria for program outcomes. In accordance with the topic of our paper, we briefly present only two PYD constructs: 'beliefs in the future' and 'self-regulation.' The term 'beliefs in the future' refers to 'an internalisation of hope and optimism about future outcomes' (Sun and Shek 2012, 1), but also includes goal-directed thought (long-range goal setting related to valued and attainable goals) and orientation towards goal-directed activities (Catalano et al. 1998). Positive future expectations are regarded as important personal strengths of individuals, a sort of tool that can provide an individual with better outcomes in dealing with major developmental issues (Stoddard and Pierce 2015). Within PYD paradigm, beliefs (i.e. hopeful expectations for the future) are considered to be theoretically related to the 'self-regulation' construct (Schmidt, Phelps, and Lerner 2011). Developing 'belief in the future' implies envisioning future goals and events, thus creating the ground for regulation of personal behaviour and emotions in order to bring about the imagined future (Taylor 2011).

Integrating the stances of different authors on self-determination, Catalano et al. (1998) defined self-determination as the ability to think

for oneself, to take action consistent with that thought, and to chart one's own course. This construct elucidates the process through which the strengths of youth (intentional self-regulating skills; developing ability to live and grow by self-determined internal standards and values) could be developed through youth development programs (Catalano et al. 1998; Mueller et al. 2011). Schmid, Phelps and Lerner (2011, 1127) explored relations among adolescents' hopeful future expectations and intentional self-regulation over time and found that earlier hopeful expectations for the future may be influential for later intentional self-regulation abilities, and that both constructs were strong predictors of PYD in middle adolescence. Mueller et al. (2011) examined the relationship between adolescents' self-regulation skills (selection, optimization, and compensation) and the adolescents' participation in youth development (YD) programs through Grades 8 and 9 in predicting Grade 10 PYD contribution. Results indicated that while self-regulation skills alone predicted PYD, self-regulation and YD program participation both predicted contribution to PYD. Taylor (2011) reports on a program of research on mental simulation as a potentially valuable tool for exercising anticipation of the future and managing the reaching of future goals and events.

One of the starting points for developing self-regulating skills in the service of positive development is the creation of a cognitive framework to articulate an individual's important goals, expected to be realized in the future.

Vision of Personal Future

Although the issue of ways in which young people think about and prepare for their desired and expected future has been analyzed using several conceptual frameworks by various authors (Johnson, Blum, and Cheng 2014; Lens et al. 2012; Markus and Nurius 1986; Nuttin and Lens 2014; Seginer 2009), this study refers to young people's future orientation by drawing upon the PYD framework and introducing the psychological construct 'vision of personal future' as a one that in specific form integrates aspects of 'beliefs in the future' and 'self-regulation.' The construct originates from the field of leadership and organization development (Strange and Mumford 2002; Mhatre and Riggio 2014) but recently appeared as relevant for understanding the processes of individual development, as well (Scott, Lonergan, and Munford 2005; Blue-Banning, Turnbull, and Pereira 2002; Polovina, Ćirović, and Jošić 2013).

Analyzing different definitions of the term 'vision,' Strange and Mum-

ford (2002, 344) stressed that all definitions 'imply that vision may be conceived of a set of beliefs about how people should act, and interact, to attain some idealized future state.' According to them *vision of the future* is a distinct image of an individual (or organizational) future, a framework involving a set of idealized future goals as well as directions for and coordination of activities relevant to future goal attainment (Strange and Mumford 2005, 122). *Vision of the future* implies the involvement of a cognitive aspect (consciously represented and self-reported images regarding the future, judgment of internal versus external causality) and motivational-affective aspect (goals that are of emotional importance to the person, beliefs about realization of vision). This is in line with Strange and Mumford's stance (2002, 344–5) that vision does not, by itself, ensure desirable outcomes, but that articulation of a vision (vision contents/goals) directs and motivates behaviour (specifies direction and purpose), while the common framework enables organization of action around future goals. The features offered by Strange and Mumford provide the basis for making a distinction between a common framework of vision (general beliefs related to future and future actions) and vision contents (goals in different life domains).

Partly similar to well-established psychological constructs (detailed in Gril et al. 2018) relating to issue of images that adolescents develop about the future, *future time perspective,* (Nuttin and Lens 2014), *future orientation* (Seginer 2009), *possible self* (Marcus and Nurius 1986), the construct 'vision of personal future,' in our view, has some specific features that are relevant for our approach to the issue under consideration. In that regard, we define 'vision of personal future' as a self-relevant cognitive framework related to imagined/anticipated future goals and their attainment. Envisioning the personal future implies potential behavioural control and self-direction of individual development. Such a cognitive representation of the future may be more or less cognitively clear and more or less stable, as well as being pervaded with a sense of certainty or uncertainty regarding its fulfilment. We argue for the separation of general aspects of such a self-relevant framework and the domain-specific thematic aspects of the visions of personal future.

Measuring Adolescents' Subjective Images of Future

For more than last 50 years, as pointed out by Seginer (2003, 4), the majority of future-oriented research has focused on thematic (content) aspects of subjective images of personal future, based on data collected

by means of qualitative i.e. open-ended methods (Nurmi, Poole, and Kalakoski 1994; Nurmi, Poole, and Seginer 1995; Unemori, Omoregie, and Markus 2004; Türken et al. 2016; Heggli, Haukanes, and Tjomsland 2013). However, with the proliferation of the PYD approach, numerous quantitative self-report based instruments entered the field, indicating its usefulness for supporting the development of functionally-valuable youth behaviours. A comprehensive review of these instruments (including overlaps but also nuances of conceptual differences) goes beyond the scope of this paper. With regard to the topic and goal of our work, we will outline three scales (their format and conceptual background) that, on different grounds, have points of contact with our Vision of Personal Future Scale (VPF). This are: *Personal Growth Initiative Scale* (PGI, Robitschek 1998; Robitschek, Ashton, and Spering 2012), *Time Perspective Inventory* (ZTPI, Zimbardo and Boyd 1999) and *Visions About Future Scale* (VAF, Ginevra et al. 2017).

Personal Growth Initiative Scale. (PGIS) was initially developed in the context of a wilderness program for people who were in life transition and it addressed specific objectives: personal growth related to life goals, purpose and balance (Robitschek 1998). The initial pool of items was developed by brainstorming and included clarifying understanding of the issue of the developmental stage and transition i.e. process of change, vision of the future, and setting of goals. The process of validation of an initially 9-item Likert-type scale indicated that the scale was particularly relevant for exploring undergraduates and college students' engagement in processes of growth across several potential personal growth domains (Robitschek 1999; Robitschek and Cook 1999). Ten years later, the scale was redesigned (PGI-II, Robitschek et al., 2012) in terms of its content (derived from theory, addressing only the issue of intentional personal growth) and number (16-item Likert-type scale). The PGI-II scale is in use as a multidimensional instrument that captures 4 subscales (Readiness for Change, Planfulness, Using Resources, and Intentional Behaviour). It is indicated that the scale has the potential to cultivate active, intentional engagement in the process of personal growth through support based programs, such as those related to the exploration of issues of career, vocational identity, and coping styles (Robitschek and Cook 1999). Comparing the items of PGI and PGI-II scales and items of our VPF scale, we found no similarities.

Zimbardo Time perspective Inventory is a theoretically-based instrument focused on fundamental dimension in the perception of time, im-

plying cognitive processes parcelling out human experience into past, present, and future temporal frames (Zimbardo and Boyd 1999, 1271). Achieving a balanced time perspective is considered to be one key to learning how to live a fulfilling life (Boniwell and Zimbardo 2004, 165) confirmed results of different studies. The inventory is offered both in extensive (56 items including 5 dimensions related to Future, Present and Past time perspective) and short forms (13 items relating to Future time; 9 items related to Present time). Here we highlight the shorter Future time perspective scale, a zone in which our plans, commitments, and anticipated experiences are situated, as well as our expectations for personal well being. This is particularly important when young people are the focus of consideration (Zimbardo and Boyd 1999). Comparing the items of Future time perspective and items of our vpf scale we found that only one item is similarly worded and with similar meaning (zftp – 'Thinking about the future is pleasant to me'; vpf 'I enjoy thinking about the future').

Visions About Future Scale (Sgaramella et al. 2017) is a recently-constructed scale, aimed to inclusively assess optimism, pessimism, and hope in adolescents. The three constructs are positioned as potentially important components of positive views about the future, particularly relating to adolescents' involvement in career planning. Items were developed from relevant theoretical conceptualisations and research. Psychometric evaluation crystallized 19 items with a five-point scale response format. Comparing the items of vbs and items of our vpf scale we found that only two items are similarly worded and with similar meaning (vbs – 'Even if I encounter difficulties in the future I will continue being optimist,' 'It is useless to hope for the future: I will not be able to do what I have in mind'; vpf 'I am determined to realize my ideas about the future despite the obstacles I might encounter'; 'Probably my ideas about the future will not come true').

Overview of the Study

In this paper, we present part of data collected in a broader survey designed to contribute to better understanding of challenges young people face in their transition to adulthood and to instigate the design of positive youth development programs for supporting positive transition. The survey was inspired by insights gained in preliminary qualitative research (Polovina, Ćirović, and Jošić 2013) but based on a quantitative methodology. The central part of the survey comprised a comprehensive question-

naire containing five sections : general aspects relating to adolescents' envisioning of their personal future, and four domain-specific aspects (education and career; finance and housing; romantic relations/marriage and parenthood; and place of residence).

The present study addressed general aspects of adolescents' envisioning of their personal future. Our research question relates to the development and evaluation of some psychometric properties of Vision of Personal Future Scale (VPF): a self-report instrument developed to access characteristics of adolescents' general cognitive representation of envisioned future. The purpose of the evaluation was to shed light on the general characteristics of youth vision for their personal future and to consider the usefulness of this instrument in the field of youth work. Two steps in the development of the scale are presented: a pilot study and the main study, conducted on a representative sample of adolescents in Serbia.

Method

SCALE DEVELOPMENT

The Vision of Personal Future (further on VPF) was initially developed to assess the characteristics of young Serbs' developmental strivings and opportunities in their future life. Items for the scale originated from analysis of a previous qualitative study and pilot study. These studies revealed the same specific components in cognitive and motivational segments of young people's vision of their personal future. Both studies helped researchers to construct items for the final version of the VPF scale

Based on analysis of qualitative materials (a short essay form of vision of personal future, see. Polovina, Ćirović, and Jošić 2013) we realized that adolescents differ in terms of articulation of their visions of personal future and in their determination to accomplish them, but also regarding the topics to which they are focused. Those findings led us to construct a 5-item Likert-type scale. Reliability analyses of this scale, measured by Cronbah alpha coefficient, was $\alpha = 0.71$. The principal component analyses extracted one factor out of these items. This one factor explains the total of 46 % of variance.

Further work on the VPF scale led us to construct a 13-item Likert-type scale which was developed to assess a time-limited general framework concerning the future. Following Strange and Mumford's (2002) abovementioned stance relating to a distinction between a common/general

frame of vision, and vision contents, we created vpf as a basic common frame screening tool which could be upgraded (more about the upgraded version in Gril et al. 2018) in order to address different contents, e.g. contents relating to different aspects of the educational, career and work-related interests and aspirations of young people. This two-step (general framework, concrete themes) approach offers different possibilities to professionals, since it is constructed to be used by them in the context of creating youth development programs.

In line with previous academic considerations (Nuttin and Lens 2014; Seginer 2009; Transdorf 1983) the scale was created to focus on the two important general components of future-oriented thinking: cognitive aspect (includes 6 items relating to clarity of vision; stability of vision; judgment of internal versus external causality) and the motivational-affective aspect (includes 7 items related to decisiveness in fulfilling a vision; hopes/optimism and fears about fulfilling the vision). The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was $\alpha = 0.78$. The items are presented in table 1.

PARTICIPANTS

In the pilot study, during the scale development, the sample consisted of 245 students from 5 high schools from different parts of Serbia (64% girls and 36% boys, mean age 18).

The main study was conducted at the beginning of the 2015/2016 school year and included stratified random samples of Serbian high school students studying in the last grade of three types of educational institutions: gymnasiums, professional, and vocational schools. The sample consisted of 1,969 participants from 94 schools. Serbia was divided into three geographical regions. Schools were drawn from each region from urban and rural areas by a stratified, random procedure. The sample consisted of 52% girls and 48% boys, with the mean age of 17.84 years. Out of the total number of adolescents, 21% were enrolled in gymnasiums, 68% were studying in professional schools, and 11% were students in vocational schools.

PROCEDURE

The pilot study was conducted in April 2015 and the main study in November 2015. All students were instructed to thing about their own life in the next 10–15 years and to imagine themselves as 27–32 years old person. The adolescents answered the questionnaire on visions of the future collectively in one school class. Adolescents were asked how much

they agree with the statement they read with the help of a five degree scale where 1 means 'do not agree at all' and 5 means 'totally agree.'

Results

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTIC

In table 1, we show descriptive data of the items in order to present the adolescents' answers. We have summarized data on the scale and shown polarized answers both with the data on average scores and standard deviations. From that table, we can see that adolescents highly agreed with items that emphasize the three aspects of vision of personal future – motivation, persistence, and guidance (items 3, 7, and 9). On the other hand, our participants disagreed with the items related to instability, fearfulness, and avoidance concerning the vision of personal future (items 4, 11, and 13).

FACTOR ANALYSIS

The analysis of the main components with Promax rotation with Kaiser normalization confirmed that 13 items could be grouped into 2 factors which explains the total of 38% of variance (see table 2). From table 3, which shows the saturation factors, we can see that the first factor (named *motivational-optimistic*) groups items related to motivation and positive feelings, and expectations (clarity of vision, acting in accordance with the vision, decisiveness and persistence in fulfilling the vision, positive feelings and optimism). The second factor (named *cognitive fearful*) groups items related to cognitive processes and unpleasant emotions (fearful uncertainty, instability, focus on external causality, recognition of guiding aspect of the vision). The obtained factors were named on the base of items content and in line with previous academic considerations (especially Nuttin and Lens 2014; Seginer 2009; Transdorf 1983) that pointed out the cognitive and motivational-affective components of future thinking. This view is corroborated with comprehensive analysis of Andre et al. (2018, 6) regarding a different future time construct' structure that 'may include: (a) cognition, (b) the combination of cognition and behavioural intention, (c) the combination of cognition and affect, and (d) a mixture of cognition, behavioural intention, and affect.'

RELATIONS WITH SCHOOL TYPE AND GENDER

We calculated mean scores for two factors of VPF scale on the basis of the extracted factors. On those two factors we checked their relations to gender and school type. Adolescents showed significant gender differences in

TABLE 1   The Percentage of Answers on the Items in Relation to the Future
and Descriptive Parameters Mean and Standard Deviation

Items	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	M	SD
1 I have a clear picture about my future	4.0	4.7	18.5	41.5	31.2	3.91	1.02
2 Thinking about how my life will look in the future will fill me with anxiety and uncertainty	8.5	11.8	26.4	30.9	22.5	3.47	1.21
3 Decisions I make today are influenced by my wishes and intentions concerning my future	3.2	4.7	17.3	35.6	39.2	4.03	1.02
4 I often change my ideas about the future	25.1	21.9	19.6	18.8	14.6	2.76	1.39
5 I am convinced that I will realize my ideas about the future.	3.0	4.2	25.6	24.7	17.2	3.87	0.98
6 In spite of my wishes and dreams, fulfilment of my ideas about the future will mostly depend on external circumstances and luck.	12.0	16.8	29.7	24.3	17.2	3.18	1.24
7 I am determined to realize my ideas about the future despite the obstacles I might encounter	1.4	3.5	14.8	34.4	45.9	4.20	0.91
8 I enjoy thinking about the future.	6.5	9.3	25.9	24.3	34.0	3.70	1.21
9 It is important to have an idea of the future, in spite of the fact that it may not be realized.	4.1	4.9	15.4	27.7	47.8	4.10	1.09
10 I think that I have bright future.	3.3	4.8	33.9	33.0	25.0	3.72	0.99
11 Probably my ideas about the future will not come true.	36.7	25.7	26.7	7.0	4.0	2.16	1.15
12 The one who doesn't have a clear picture about the future neither has a guiding idea	7.2	7.7	18.0	24.3	42.8	3.88	1.25
13 I rarely think about how my life will look.	42.6	22.7	16.0	10.1	8.6	2.19	1.31

NOTES   Column headings are as follows: (1) do not agree at all, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, (5) totally agree.

terms of their agreement with the *motivational optimistic* ($F_{1,1965} = 5.602$, $p = 0.018$) and *cognitive fearful factor* ($F_{1,1965} = 15.941, p = 0.000$). Our data indicated that, concerning both factors, girls on average expressed cognitive and motivational-affective aspects on VPF scale more strongly. This implies that envisioning the future is a concept closer to girls who show-

TABLE 2   Initial Eigenvalues and Percentages of Explained Variance in the Factor
Analysis of the VPF Scale

Factor	Eigenvalues	Percentage of variance	Cumulative percentage
1	3.32	25.5	25.5
2	1.66	12.8	38.4

TABLE 3   Pattern Matrix of Factors VPF Scale after Promax Rotation

Items	(1)	(2)
1 I have a clear picture about my future.	0.682	
2 Thinking about how my life will look in the future will fill me with anxiety and uncertainty.		0.603
3 Decisions I make today are influenced by my wishes and intentions concerning my future.	0.567	
4 I often change my ideas about the future	−0.348	0.488
5 I am convinced that I will realize my ideas about the future.	0.664	
6 In spite of my wishes and dreams, fulfilment of my ideas about the future will mostly depend on external circumstances and luck.		0.622
7 I am determined to realize my ideas about the future despite the obstacles I might encounter	0.682	
8 I enjoy thinking about the future.	0.564	
9 It is important to have an idea of the future, in spite of the fact that it may not be realized.	0.401	0.544
10 I think that I have bright future.	0.658	
11 Probably my ideas about the future will not come true.	−0.551	0.376
12 The one who doesn't have a clear picture about the future neither has a guiding idea.	0.358	0.409
13 I rarely think about how my life will look like.	−0.377	

NOTES   Column headings are as follows: (1) factor 1: motivational/optimistic, (2) factor 2 – cognitive fearful. Saturations lower than 0.3 were omitted from the table.

cased a clear attitude as opposed to boys who gravitated toward more neutral answers. This is in line with already existing findings (Greene and DeBacker 2004; Seginer and Mahajna 2004).

Regarding the relation between school type and extracted factors, adolescents differ in *cognitive fearful factor* ($F_{1,1965} = 4.883$, $p = 0.027$) but not in the *motivational optimistic factor* ($F_{1,1965} = 0.102$, $p = 0.749$). Specifically, this means that adolescents from all types of schools (gymnasium and professional and vocational school) agreed less with the cognitive

fearful aspect of their future, although adolescents from professional and vocational schools had higher scores for this factor. Students from these schools are more concerned about the future and are more anxious about the realization of their future, which is to be expected if we take into account the short time distance to possible employment and taking up the role of an adult in other domains of life.

Final Discussion

This contribution was designed to shed new light on young people's future-oriented thinking by introducing the construct 'vision of personal future' and stressing its developmental relevance in the process of transition to adulthood. By using the construct 'visions of the future' and creation of the VPF scale we wanted to emphasize the importance of envisioning the future in a cognitive form that include the construction of a general personal framework (basic direction and 'tone' of development), implying the need for self-managing ones own life-course and openness for further thematic elaborations regarding future goals in different life domains. Besides its conceptual and methodological contribution (construct vision of personal future and VPF scale development), our paper provide empirically based grounds for the creation of programs for supporting and empowering young people in the challenging time for transition to adulthood.

As we can see from the presented data (table 1), a high percentage of affirmative answers was obtained on the item relating to importance, emotional significance and motivational potentials of vision of personal future. In that regard, participants in our research confirmed that envisioning one's own future in a way that affirms motivation, persistence and guidance can be a useful 'tool' for a young person's development, but not in a way that is shadowed by instability, fearfulness and avoidance. This finding is in line with Positive youth development conceptualisations and suggested practices of supporting optimization of adolescents' development grounded on enhancing their strengths (Lens et al. 2012; Linley and Joseph 2004). Similar to already existing conceptualisations and research findings (Nuttin and Lens 2014; Transdorf 1983), the results of our study pointed out that adolescents' visions of personal future contained different and somewhat opposing aspects (represented in extracted factors labelled *motivational-optimistic and cognitive fearful*). When we think about these opposing aspects on the group level, our data indicates that envisioning the future is a concept closer to girls than

to boys. Namely, girls expressed cognitive and motivational-affective aspects more strongly on the VPF scale, i.e. envisioning the future is a concept closer to girls, who showcased a clear attitude as opposed to boys who gravitated towards more neutral answers. The findings are consistent with the results of previous studies showing that girls thought more about the future than boys (Gjesme 1979), and that female students had fewer negative thoughts about the future than male students (Mello and Worrell 2006). Also, we found opposing aspects of adolescents' visions of personal future relating to the type of school adolescents attend. Expectedly, students from professional and vocational schools are more concerned about the future and are more anxious about the realization of their future (they had higher scores regarding the cognitive fearful aspect of their future) which can be related to the proximity of possible employment and taking up the role of an adult in other domains of life. Both types of difference (gender, school type) call for specific approaches and programs within youth work. On the other hand, considering the issue of opposing aspects of vision of personal future on individual level of functioning (present in general or in relation to some domain-specific goals), the need for youth work and support to their developmental dilemmas have become more obvious.

Given the challenging social and economic contexts in Serbia, reflected in findings of sociological studies pointing to youth social apathy (loss of thrust and reciprocity) and widespread emigration aspirations (Cvejić 2006; Tomanović and Stojanović 2015), our findings based on psycho-developmental approach indicated that participants in our research have the potential to develop positive and personally motivating perspectives of the future. It is this discrepancy that additionally emphasizes importance of creating youth policy which would give greater impetus to youth work within the educational system, which brings together the largest number of young people. The young are ready for it. The question is, whether society is ready for such an endeavour?

The programs that facilitate preparation of adolescents for optimal 'capitalization' of their potentials and strengths during their transition to adulthood present a challenging task. As already indicated, support programs have to consider different ways of thinking about the future for young males and females, especially those finishing gymnasium, professional, or vocational schools. Furthermore, we want to stress the potential usefulness of our scale and approach for the creation of thematically complementary but different programs for supporting young people in their

articulation and elaboration of domain-specific goals, plans, and direction of future actions.

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