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PROFILES OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS OF TOURISM AND RECREATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ŁÓDŹ FACULTY OF GEOGRAPHICAL SCIENCES IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2010/11

Education for the tourism industry has been associated with the University of Łódź since 1977 (LISZEWSKI 2008) when the *Podyplomowe Studium Turystyki* (Post-graduate Course in Tourism) was founded at the Institute of Geography. This course operated until 1992, and in 1999, after a break of a few years, they were re-launched. In addition three other courses have been run: a geography of tourism specialization as part of a degree in geography (after the second year, 1982-1998), *Geografia Turyzmu i Hotelarstwa* (Geography of Tourism and the Hospitality Industry – 1994-2008), and *Turystyka i Rekreacja* (Tourism and Recreation – since 2004). The current course is divided into two separate stages: a three-year *licencjat* (bachelor equivalent) and a two-year *magister* (masters). Courses are run both as full-time and weekend part-time.

From 1994-9 there was a two-part examination during the recruitment process for the Geography of Tourism and the Hospitality Industry, consisting of written and oral stages (LAWIN & SZKUP 2000). On the written part there was a questionnaire on students' interests, reasons for choosing the course, plans for the future and knowledge of Poland and Europe (JAKÓBCZYK-GRYSZKIEWICZ & WŁODARCZYK 1995). This questionnaire was then a basis for the oral exam. From the data collected from the candidates, profiles were prepared and published in the *Turyzm* journal (JAKÓBCZYK-GRYSZKIEWICZ & WŁODARCZYK 1995, JAŻDŹEWSKA & WOLANIUK 1996, STASIAK & WŁODARCZYK 1997, RZEŃCA & SZKUP 1998, LAWIN & SZKUP 2000).

In the following years such research was abandoned. This situation should perhaps be reversed because knowing students' expectations may (at least to some extent) contribute to a better adjustment of the curriculum to their needs. For this reason it was

decided to undertake similar research, this time among students of Tourism and Recreation.

Because candidates no longer take an entrance exam (recruitment is by computer and based on the results of final school exams), a questionnaire was prepared for first-year students. Research was conducted during classes on November 24th 2010 (full-time course) and 25th-26th November 2010 (weekend part time course). The questionnaire used consisted of seven questions (both open and closed) and seven further giving background personal details.

The main objective was to find answers to the following questions: where did students find out about the course and why had they started it, and what were their expectations and future plans. In addition, students were asked about their certificates in the field of tourism, membership of tourism organizations and whether Tourism and Recreation was their first degree course. The goal was to question all students, but after conducting the survey and checking the data, it proved impossible to achieve.

A total of 85 students filled in the questionnaire correctly: 47 from the full-time course and 38 from the weekend part-time course. There were more male than female (47 out of 85 respondents). It should be noted, however, that among full-time students female respondents dominated (seven more). The overall higher number of male respondents is due to their domination among part-time students (17 more).

As to age structure, a strong predominance of those aged 19-20 can be seen (74.1% of respondents) (Fig. 1).

Overall, for the vast majority of respondents (75.3%), Tourism and Recreation is their first degree course. This was particularly evident among female respondents – 36 from 38 gave this answer, while

among male the proportion who had already studied another course was higher – 28 from 47.

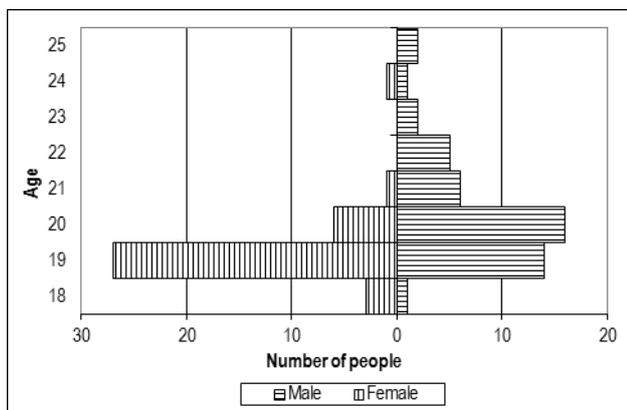


Fig. 1. Gender and age structure of respondents
Source: author's research

The majority had attended a *liceum* (secondary/high school) but significantly less a *technikum* (technical secondary school) (Table 1). Among the 14 from a *technikum*: eight were from a hotel administration profile, two from catering and one from information management. Two chose 'others' as they were from schools abroad (in Belarus and in Kazakhstan). Those from a *technikum* studied mostly on weekend part-time courses – 71.4%.

Table 1. Schools attended

Type of school attended (n = 85) in percentage	
Liceum (secondary/ high school)	76.5
Liceum profilowane (vocationally specialised secondary school)	4.7
Technikum (technical secondary school)	16.5
Others	2.4

Source: author's research.

The respondents were asked about their home town (Fig. 2). Out of 85, three came from abroad: Angola, Kazakhstan and Belarus. As for Poland, the majority of students (88.1%) came from *Województwo łódzkie* while all but two of the remaining came from neighbouring *województwos*. Of the others from further afield – one was from the southern part of *Województwo śląskie* (Silesian) and one from *Województwo warmińsko-mazurskie*. This situation shows the wide regional range of the Tourism and Recreation course at the University of Łódź with those from the city representing only slightly above one third of respondents (35.7%), and with more than half coming from other places in *Województwo łódzkie*.

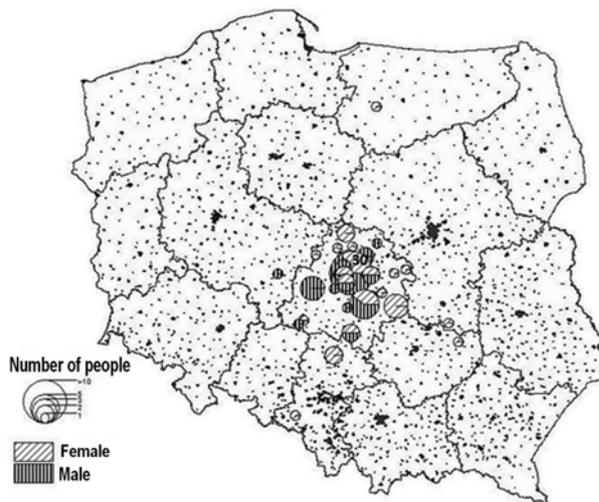


Fig. 2. Students' home towns
Source: author's research

The respondents were also asked to state their current place of residence (Fig. 3). All respondents live in *Województwo łódzkie* – the vast majority in Łódź itself (67.1%). Taking the type of course into account, more full-time students live in Łódź. This situation is probably caused by the practical reason that daily commuting from other locations is expensive and often simply impossible. Other full-time students live in places located close to Łódź (Zgierz, Konstantynów Łódzki, Aleksandrów Łódzki) or towns with convenient communication (Koluszki). As all classes are held during weekends, part-time students are able to commute from places further from the city.

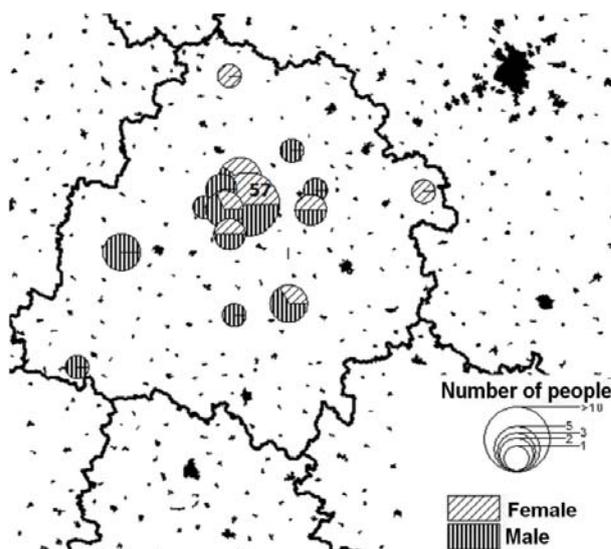


Fig. 3. Respondents' current places of residence in *Województwo łódzkie*
Source: author's research

The most common sources of information about the Tourism and Recreation course at the University of Łódź were the official web page of the *Instytut Geografii Miast i Turyzmu* (Institute of Urban Geography and Tourism), and also information collected from friends or family. Those sources covered 74.1% of the total (Fig. 4). From the perspective of the course designers this should be considered successful. ‘Word of mouth’ information demonstrates the positive image of the Tourism and Recreation course among those interested in higher education, while the importance of the official web page shows that it is well-constructed, well-run and that it should be further developed. The large role of the web page suggests that candidates are aware of the existence of the Tourism and Recreation course and that they are seeking information about where they can begin such a course.

Educational fairs were a third, but considerably less important, source mentioned by 10% of respondents. It should be noticed that fairs were far more important among full-time students (15%) than among part-time (5.3%, Fig. 4). Respondents were asked about specific fairs and mentioned *Łódzkie Targi Edukacyjne* and *Salon Maturzystów*. Other sources of information were less common (up to 7% of responses) including web pages (other than the official page of the Institute of Urban Geography and Tourism) such as the official page of the University of Łódź, *kie-runkistudiow.pl* and *perspektywy.pl*.

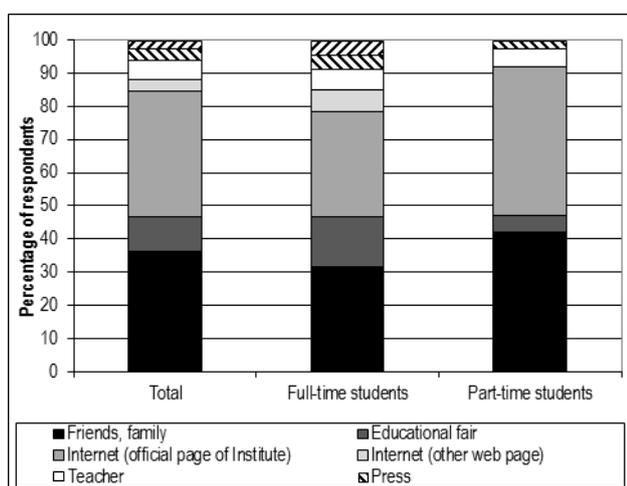


Fig. 4. Sources of knowledge about the Tourism and Recreation course at the University of Łódź
Source: author's research

Another issue considered were the reasons for choosing this course at the University of Łódź (Fig. 5). Respondents gave a total of 250 responses, giving ranks from 1 (the most important) to 3 (the least

important). All students named at least two reasons and 80 mentioned three. The most common were ‘own interest’ (76 responses) and ‘willingness to travel and learn about the world’ (73).

A common (but less often specific) reason was willingness to pursue a career opportunity in tourism following the course (51 responses). It should be mentioned that this reason was generally given in second or third place. Among full-time students only 6.4% considered it as the most important, among part-time students – 10.5%. The fourth reason for choosing Tourism and Recreation as a course (but only with 22 responses) was a willingness to study foreign languages. In fifth place (19) were suggestions from friends and family.

Further reasons were given only by a very small number of students and those who chose the answer ‘other’ declared that: ‘the course seemed to be interesting’, ‘it is a continuation of *technikum* studies’ or ‘the course will help in my current career’.

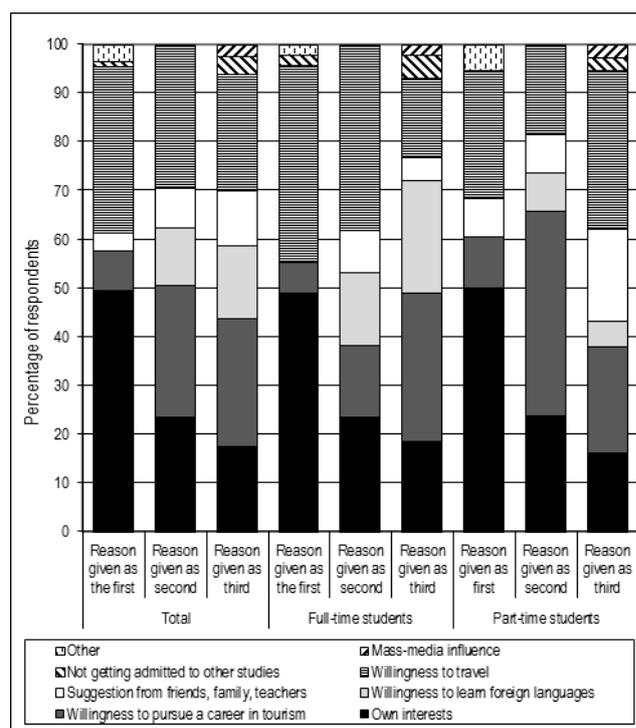


Fig. 5. Reasons for choosing Tourism and Recreation at the University of Łódź
Source: author's research

The reasons for choosing Tourism and Recreation as a course were to a large extent consistent with the reasons given by candidates for the Geography of Tourism and the Hospitality Industry in 1994-1999 (JAKÓBCZYK-GRYSZKIEWICZ & WŁODARCZYK 1995, JAŻDŹEWSKA & WOLANIUK 1996, STASIAK & WŁODARCZYK 1997, RZEŃCA & SZKUP 1998, LAWIN & SZKUP 2000).

In this period the primary motivation was 'learning about the subject' which in 1994-6 given by between 20% and 40% of respondents. An important reason was also 'own interest in geography and tourism' mentioned by 25.9% (1994) and 50% in 1996, while between 1997-1999 this was the most common reason. Aspiring students also mentioned 'willingness to travel and learn about the world', a factor for 33% of candidates (1996) to more than 70% (1998-1999). Among other reasons 'willingness to pursue a career in tourism', 'an interesting programme of study', 'fulfilling dreams' and 'willingness to learn foreign languages' were mentioned.

The next question referred to expectations from the course (Fig. 6). Respondents were asked to select to what extent they expect to fulfil each of five given elements (on a scale from 'very high expectation' to 'no expectation').

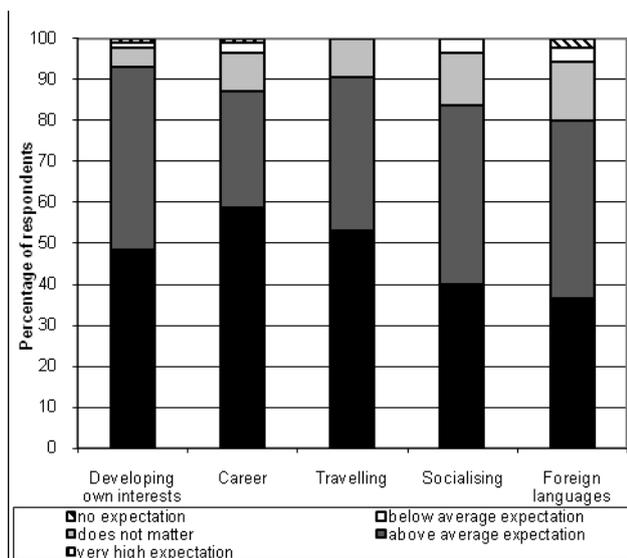


Fig. 6. Students' expectations from the course
Source: author's research

Students expect to develop their own interests: 92.9% had an 'above average expectation' or a 'very high expectation'. An equally common level was travel expected by 90.6% of students. These two answers are complementary because for many people travelling is a hobby. Nearly 90% (87.1%) expected to find a job after the course. It should be noted though that this expectation was the most frequent chosen in the 'very high expectation' category (58.8%) meaning that although a career was not the main reason for choosing a course, it was an important expectation. The least important was to learn foreign languages, but it still had a high rate of responses (80%) in the top two categories (for 14.1% however this element 'did not matter').

Respondents were also asked about certificates already held in the field of tourism and about their membership in tourism organizations. In both cases negative answers dominated. Only 15.3% students had any certificate and just 4.7% were members of tourism organizations. Among those having a certificate five were as a 'professional hotel worker' *technik hotelarza* (after finishing a *technikum*), four were entitled to look after children on summer camps (*opiekun kolonijnego*), and two lifeguards (*ratownik WOPR*). There were also single examples of a certified mountaineer in the Tatras (*uprawnienia taternickie*), a qualified sailor of yachts (*patent zeglarski zeglarza jachtowego*) and a qualified holiday organiser (*certyfikat animatora turystyki*). It should be noted that fewer declared being certified 'professional hotel workers' than had actually graduated from *technikum* in this field which may be because students do not consider it a tourism certificate. As for tourism organizations, two were members of *Polski Towarzystwa Turystyczno-Krajoznawczego* (Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society) and one each of the Polish branch of Hostelling International and *Polski Związkku Alpinizmu* (Polish Mountaineering Society).

This situation is worrying in the context of reasons for choosing a course as the most important factor was 'own interests'. So why are those interests not followed up by practical action? Although it can be expected that some respondents will try to gain certificates in the later years of course, the low rate of membership in tourism organizations is very surprising. It should be noted that this situation to some extent continues a negative trend visible among candidates for Geography of Tourism and the Hospitality Industry in 1994-9 (LAWIN & SZKUP 2000). During this period membership of such organizations dropped significantly from 33% in 1994 through 25% in 1996 to 9.1% in 1999. It could be said that students' own interests are 'theoretical' rather than practical.

In the following question, students were asked to state their future plans (both personal and professional). Respondents usually mentioned several and in total 85 career-related plans were presented (some students have no plans, some have more than one), with 82.4% connected with tourism. The biggest group was 'Career in tourism' (unspecified) – almost a third, followed by just less than a fifth who declared that they simply want to have a professional job, not necessarily in tourism (Fig. 7).

As for personal plans, the most common answer was 'Travelling' – 19 times, while 12 just want to graduate, 8 – to start a family, 5 – to meet new people and learn about other cultures, 4 – to learn foreign languages. Other plans were mentioned by just one or two respondents, and among the most original were

being a missionary and helping people in need, gaining a *concierge* certificate, and becoming a certified guide in the Tatra Mountains.

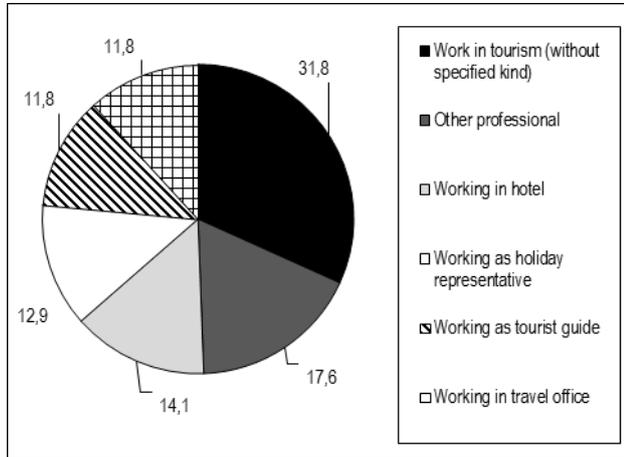


Fig. 7. Professional plans of respondents
Source: author's research

Table 2. Future plans declared by candidates for Geography of Tourism and the Hospitality Industry (1994-6), and by first-year students of Tourism and Recreation in 2010

Plans	Year			
	1994	1995	1996	2010 (n=104)
	%			
Travelling	23.1	-	27.0	18.3
Working as a tourist guide	23.8	23	47.7	9.6
Working in travel office/ hotel	36.2	50	26.7	21.1
Working in tourism industry (unspecified)	-	-	11.1	26.0
Working as a holiday representative	-	-	-	10.6
Other professional plans	6.8	-	-	14.4

Sources: JAKÓBCZYK-GRYSZKIEWICZ & WŁODARCZYK 1995, JAŹDŹEWSKA & WOLANIUK 1996, RZEŃCA & SZKUP 1998, STASIAK & WŁODARCZYK 1997, LAWIN & SZKUP 2000 and author's research.

The future plans of respondents were compared to those declared by candidates for Geography of Tourism and the Hospitality Industry in 1994-1996 (JAKÓBCZYK-GRYSZKIEWICZ & WŁODARCZYK 1995, JAŹDŹEWSKA & WOLANIUK 1996, STASIAK & WŁODARCZYK 1997, RZEŃCA & SZKUP 1998, LAWIN & SZKUP 2000,

Table 2). In this period – similar to this research – the majority wanted to pursue a career in tourism (in the broad sense). In 1994-6 the most popular was 'job in travel office or hotel' (from 26.7% to 50%) and 'working as a tourist guide' (from 23% to 47.7%). From 1997-1999 these tendencies stayed the same with the majority of candidates wanting to work in a travel office, hotel or as tourist guide.

Having taken into consideration the aims of the research it can be stated that:

1. The most common sources of information about the Tourism and Recreation course at the University of Łódź were the official web page of the Institute of Urban Geography and Tourism (37.6% responses) and information collected from friends of family (36.5%).

2. The most important reasons for choosing this course were students' own interest (30.4%) and willingness to travel (29.2%). Slightly less significant (20.4%) was the possibility of pursuing a career in tourism.

3. In the future most are willing to work in the field of tourism (82.4% of professional plans). The most frequent personal plan is to travel around the world.

It may seem worrying that most students do not have a tourism certificate and do not belong to any tourism organizations. This means that their personal interests are not being followed by practical action.

Undertaking this kind of research among first-year students may provide better understanding of their needs and expectations and furthermore allow adjustment of the curriculum to those needs (of course as long as appropriate standards are maintained). It is especially important in the context of the recruitment process. Current recruitment, by an electronic computer system based on points from final school exams as the only criterion, does not allow advance knowledge of those who are going to begin the course at the University of Łódź. This is why research such as this should be developed and conducted on regular basis, preferably annually.

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