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**GRADUATES OF GEOGRAPHICAL STUDIES
ON THE LABOUR MARKET IN THE PROCESS
OF TRANSFORMATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION***

Abstract: Unemployment, which also hits people with higher education, is one of the major socio-economic problems in Poland. This unfavourable situation is caused by the wrong conception of higher education which doesn't prepare graduates for employers' requirements. Curriculum strategies that have been followed contributed to the situation where many faculties at universities are perceived as the admission pass to professions poorly paid or even as those ones that don't give the opportunity of finding any job in the future.

The author of this paper presents results of research performed among graduates of geographical studies in the system of two-stage studies (Bachelor's three-year studies and Master's two-year studies) and Master's five year-studies at Pedagogical University of Cracow.

The main aims of this research were as follows:

- Getting to know how graduates assess the competences acquired during their studies. These competences are regarded as the key ones in tuning research on a European scale;
- Getting to know geographical studies graduates' plans, expectations and attitudes towards challenges of labour market.

The results obtained proved that geography graduates, especially those with Bachelor's degree assessed most of the key competences as good and very good. Criteria which are taken into account while choosing a job are not dependent on money. The dominant criteria are the ability to join work with passions and the prospects for professional development. Respondents declared the intention to look for a job in the education sector and the civil service by means of the direct contact with an employer.

* research financed from education budget for years 2010–2012 as the research project No. N N114 076739

Key words: competences, geographical studies, graduate, labour market

INTRODUCTION

Transformation of political system in Poland has had, besides clear advantages, also some negative consequences. One of them has been the unemployment which has affected also people with higher education. From the mid-90ties of the twentieth century the basic problem of academic education has been the increasing number of students and thus graduates who haven't been absorbed by the labour market. In the first quarter of the year 2010 the highest unemployment, it is 29.7%, was among people aged between 25 and 34. 9.1% of those people were those who had higher education, which is a highly undesirable fact (www.startwkariere.pl). Young, unemployed graduates can't verify their professional skills acquired during studies and may feel frustrated with the fact the academic education didn't guarantee the possibility of starting their adult life. (Kopertyńska 2009). This problem concerns also students of geography. Experiences of countries in the Western Europe prove that in the next dozen or so years it is important to create such a vision of higher education which would develop graduates' competences matching closely employers' requirements. For this reason, it is important to perform both research concerning the self-assessment of competences acquired by students during their studies, regarded as the key research in tuning research in European scale, and to get to know plans, expectations and attitudes of graduates towards labour market. (Donert 2007; *Gedye and others* 2004; *Key competences...* 2005).

SELF-ASSESSMENT OF COMPETENCES REGARDED AS THE KEY ONES IN TUNING RESEARCH ON A EUROPEAN SCALE

The author of this paper performed research in the year 2010 among 256 graduates in geographical studies of Pedagogical University of Cracow.

The research method was a diagnostic survey and 91 graduates of the first stage studies (Bachelor's degree three-year studies), 25 graduates of the second stage studies (Master's degree two-year studies) and 137 (that is 53 % of all respondents) graduates of Master's degree five-year studies participated in the research. Both full-time studies graduates (162 people; 63.3 %) and part-time studies graduates (94 people; 36.7 %) took part in the survey.

Graduates in geography with specialization in enterprise and spatial development (125 people; 48.8%), geography with tourism (50 people; 19.5 %) and geography with nature (49 people; 19.1 %) constituted the largest group of respondents. Students who chose teacher training studies dominated in this group (179 people; 69,9 %).

Graduates were asked to perform self-assessment of the acquisition of 30 skills and attitudes during their studies (see picture 1) on a scale from 1 to 6 (1 was the unsatisfactory mark and 6 was the outstanding mark). In order to evaluate the chances of graduates of geographical studies on European labour market the set of tested skills referred to the same kind of skills tested in the research in the year 2002 in Europe. This was so called tuning research concerning skills which graduates should have in the field of geography, geology and environmental protection while applying for a job. This research was performed in twelve countries (Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain and the UK).

On the basis of the performed research the key set of competences which is valued by European employers most was worked out. These competences are in turn: ability to make analysis and synthesis, ability to apply the acquired knowledge in practice, ability to work in a team, creativity, ability to search for information, ability to gather and process information from different sources, ability to solve geographical problems, research skills, time management skills, ability to use information technology, ability to present themselves and skills in proper oral and written communication (Donert 2007).

So far results of such research concerning graduates of geographical studies haven't been published in Polish specialist literature on a national scale. Only some results concerning Małopolskie District research have been published.

This pilot research on expectations of Małopolskie District employers showed that the most important formal competence is ability to apply theoretical knowledge in practice, then ability to use information technology and ability to search for information from different sources. (Piróg, Piróg 2007)

Let us compare graduates' self-assessment with employers' expectations.

On the whole, respondents chose five most developed skills and attitudes during studies. These were self-reliance, ability to work in a team, ability to perceive the relation nature-human beings and responsibility. Skills which were rated as the worst by respondents were the readiness for work in an international team, foreign languages skills and ability to use information technology.

Graduates of Master's degree five-year studies and graduates of the first stage studies (Bachelor's three-year studies) and the second stage studies (Master's two-year studies) assessed their skills a bit differently. Graduates of Master's degree five-year studies were much more careful while assessing their competences, which can mean both that they are more objective and realistic in their judgment but also that five-year studies are less efficient in developing skills. It can be clearly seen that graduates of the first stage studies (Bachelor's three-year studies) and the second stage studies (Master's two-year studies) assessed their skills slightly better. Clear disproportions can be seen in the ability to use Polish language in speaking and writing, applying knowledge in

practice, skills in negotiation and communication, ability to present themselves and critical assessment of themselves and other people.

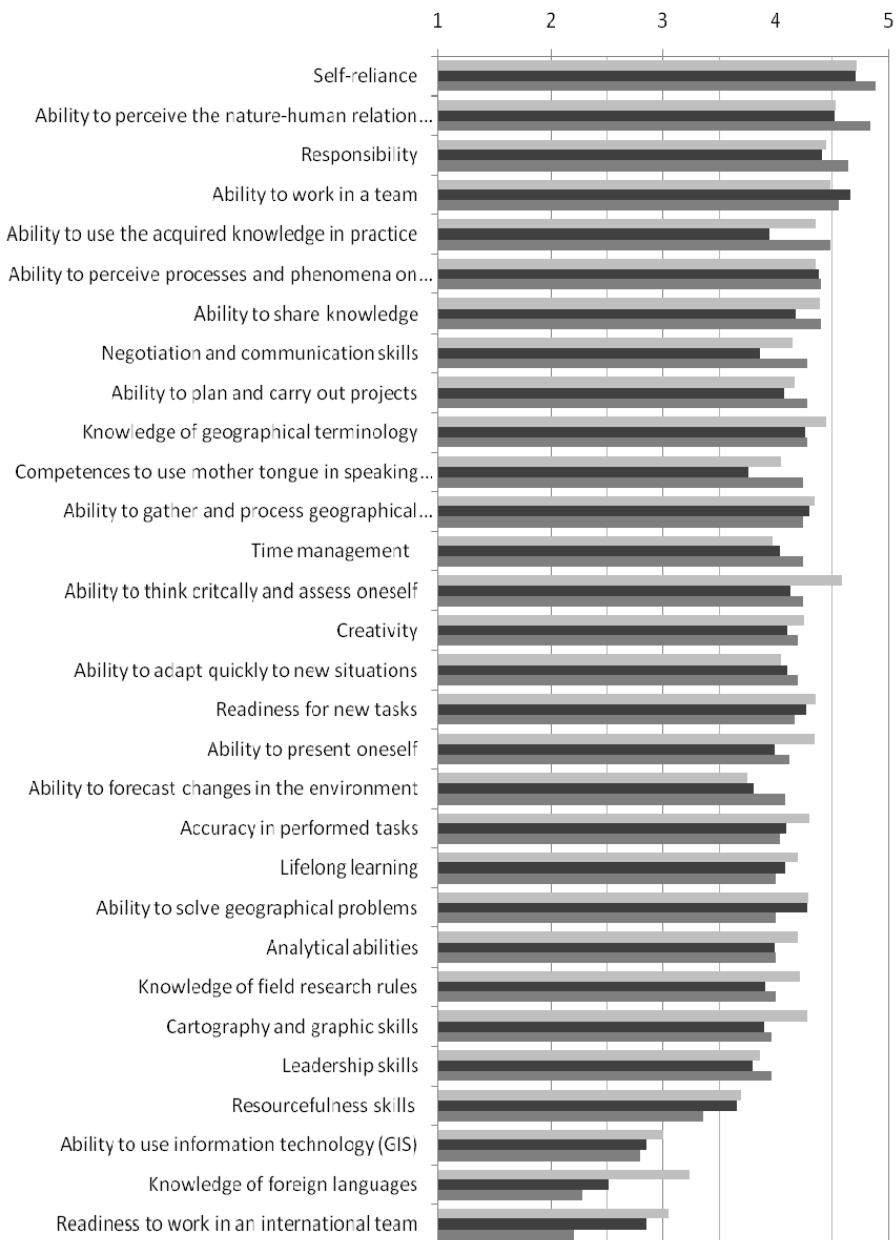
Interestingly, graduates of the first stage studies (Bachelor's three-year studies) so graduates who studied for the shortest amount of time assessed a set of skills as developed best. Those skills are foreign languages skills, readiness to work in an international team, cartography and graphic skills. Better assessment of foreign language skills can be the result of more effective foreign languages courses during studies or individual efforts in this matter. Consequently, better foreign languages skills may influence the declarations of being ready to work in an international team. Moreover, the number of students who participated in Comenius programme rose.

Graduates of the second stage studies (Master's two-year studies) assessed better than other respondents the following skills: responsibility, self-reliance, ability to apply theory in practice and ability to perceive the relation nature-human beings.

Graduates of geographical studies, especially graduates of the first stage studies (Bachelor's three-year studies) assessed as good or very good most skills considered in tuning research as the key competences. The highest score was given by all respondents to ability to work in a team and ability to apply theory in practice and creativity. The lowest score was achieved by ability to use information technology and efficient use of mother tongue. Ability to work in a team was developed best by graduates of Master's degree five-year studies, which is probably the result of the longest period of studying with the same people and thus frequent cooperation with the same people. Application of theory in practice was best assessed by graduates of the second stage studies (Master's two-year studies) and then, in turn, graduates of Master's degree five-year studies and graduates of the first stage studies (Bachelor's three-year studies). The most creative are graduates of the first stage studies (Bachelor's three-year studies), and then graduates of the second stage studies (Master's two-year studies). The least creative are graduates of Master's degree five-year studies. These declarations may prove that curriculum programme of two-stage studies develops better creativity among students than the traditional curriculum programme.

Ability to use information technology was best assessed by graduates of the first stage studies (Bachelor's three-year studies) and then, in turn, graduates of Master's degree five-year studies and graduates of the second stage studies (Master's two-year studies), which should be the subject for consideration for university teaching staff.

Longer period of studying seems to develop such a valuable ability as time management. This skill was highly assessed by graduates of the second stage studies (Master's two-year studies) and graduates of Master's degree five-year studies rather than graduates of the first stage studies (Bachelor's three-year studies) (fig.1).



dark grey – graduates of Master’s degree five-year studies
 light grey – graduates of the first stage studies (Bachelor’s three-year studies)
 grey – graduates of the second stage studies (Master’s two-year studies)

Fig. 1. Graduates’ self-assessment of the degree of the acquisition of selected skills and attitudes during Master’s five-year studies and two-stage studies (Bachelor’s three-year studies and Mater’s two-year studies); source: author’s own research on the basis of questionnaire survey

**PLANS, EXPECTATIONS AND ATTITUDES OF GRADUATES
OF GEOGRAPHICAL STUDIES AGAINST CHALLENGES
OF THE LABOUR MARKET**

The aim of this research was also to record plans and expectations of newly-graduated students of geographical studies towards the labour market.

This paper examines the following points:

- assessment of chances on the labour market and respondents' own activities towards improvement of their qualifications while studying;
- criteria regarded by respondents as the most important ones while choosing a job;
- criteria which are taken into account by employers during the period of recruitment in the opinion of graduates;
- declared ways of searching for a job.

In the survey respondents were also asked to give the reasons why they had chosen geographical studies in order to record respondents' aspirations and assess whether they had planned their future on the labour market. Respondents gave various reasons why they had chosen geographical studies. Reasons connected with future career plans had influenced respondents' choices but they were not dominant.

Graduates were to indicate three reasons why they had chosen geographical studies, at the same time determining their importance. The biggest amount of people – almost 38.3 % pointed out to their geographical interests. Then, in turn, 16.8 % declared the willingness to work as a teacher and only 8.2 % pointed out that they wanted to get qualifications which would enable them later to find a job. Thus it can be observed that the respondents had chosen their faculties according to their interests and their choice was influenced by emotions rather than pragmatic calculations.

Respondents' attitude towards the labour market can be seen in criteria they are going to take into account while choosing the place of work, the type of an institution or a company where they would like to work. Graduates were to point out to three criteria, marking them on the scale of 1 to 3 points (1 point given to the most important criterion). Analysis of the answers to this question proved that respondents pointed out to aspects not dependent on money, such as possibility to join work with passions. Here, respondents marked 'tasks at my work that are interesting for me' (47 people; 18.4%). The next two criteria marked were: professional development opportunities and a job that corresponds with a graduate's skills (each criterion was marked by 42 people; 16.4%). Such indications may prove that respondents have realistic attitude towards their skills, willingness to do their job with passion and mature

attitude towards work which should give satisfaction, professional development and gradually bring higher salaries. Salary as the criterion was in the fourth place (39 people; 15.2%). Considerable number of respondents pointed out to good atmosphere at work (28 people; 10.9%) and prospects for long-term employment (18 people; 7.0%).

Second place in the hierarchy of criteria for choosing a job take aspects connected with fulfilling ones ambitions, it is the possibility to be promoted (50 people; 19.5%). Salary appears more often as the criterion (36 people; 14.1%) and then the prospects for long-term employment (31 people; 12.1%).

Third place was given to material matters (46 people; 18%) but good atmosphere at work (36 people 14.1%), prospects for being promoted and convenient location of the place of work (each was marked by 35 people; 13.7%) were important as well (table 1).

Respondents, first of all, would like to work in education sector (69 people; 27%), which seems to be the natural consequence of choosing studies at pedagogical university, training mainly teachers. In the system of five-year Master's studies all students participated in teacher training. In the system of two-stage studies students had the choice between teacher training course or other specializations. Pleasing seems to be the fact that after studies and teacher training at various types of schools, still such a big number of graduates of Pedagogical University of Cracow is willing to work as teachers of geography, science or the fundamentals of enterprise.

Administration institutions were chosen as the second most desirable place of work (34 people; 13.3%) and spatial development companies occupied the third place (29 people; 11.3%).

Among the respondents, a group of 24 people (9.4%) declared the willingness to continue studies. They are not going to look for work right now but are planning to acquire more skills and diplomas. Considerable percentage of respondents (8.6%; 22 people) are planning to set up their own business. Attitude of these respondents is probably partly influenced by the fact that they studied specialization 'geography with enterprise' and they prove that graduates of geographical studies are courageous and creative. Similarly numerous group of people (20 people; 7.8%) would like to work in travel agencies. A small group, it is 10 people, is satisfied with their job, which they have been doing during their studies and they are planning to continue this work. Another group of 10 people would like to work for geodetic surveying and cartography companies. Individual cases would prefer to work in national or landscape parks, hotels, meteorological stations. 5 people don't mind doing any job. (Fig. 2).

Recorded attitudes of graduates are typical for so called generation Y, who value the work-life balance more than their predecessors. Career is regarded as

one of the components but not the priority in life and slightly lower earnings are accepted in return for the time for one's own passions and private life. (Majewska, Pieńczykowska 2010).

Interestingly, graduates in geographical studies at Pedagogical University of Cracow are not the only ones in their declarations. Wójcik writes in his paper (2010) that more than a third of graduates of universities in Poland would like to work in the civil service. Second place is occupied by financial sector (18%), third is taken by marketing sector (17%). The smallest number of people chose telecommunication sector (only 3%), which seems to be quite surprising when taking into consideration the opportunities which companies from that sector give to their employees.

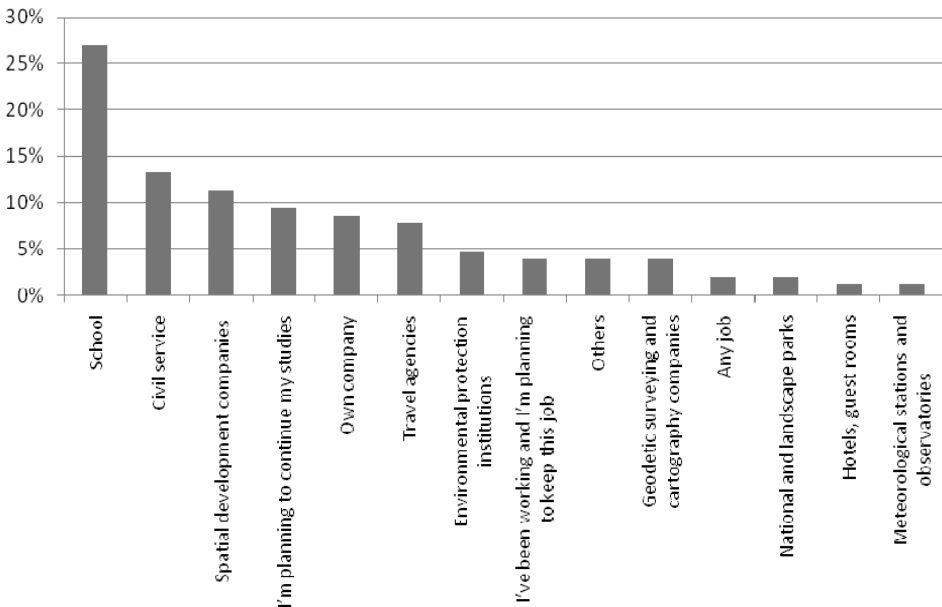


Fig. 2. Types of institutions and companies preferred by graduates in geographical studies at Pedagogical University of Cracow as their future place of employment

Source: author's own research on the basis of questionnaire survey

In the survey respondents were asked to indicate criteria which, in their opinion, are taken into account by employers in the first place. By far the biggest group of respondents chose previous work experience in the first place (117 people, 45.7%). Much smaller group of respondents (39 people; 15.2%) underlined the importance of a third party's recommendation. In the third position (30 people; 11.7%), there was the answer that a university degree is important

for an employer. Applicants' character features (28 people; 10.9%) and the faculty of studies (21 people; 8.2%) were also indicated as important.

As the second in the hierarchy, respondents also marked earlier experience of applicants (64 people; 25.4%) and knowledge of foreign languages (52 people; 20.3%). The third place was taken by applicants' character features (70 people; 27.3%), foreign languages skills (42 people; 16.4% indications) and recommendation from other people (32 people 12.5%).

In respondents' opinion the least important criteria of choosing an employee are: the mark on a diploma, type of studies, prestige of university one graduated from and IT skills (Table 1).

Table 1. Criteria for choosing a job, the way of searching for a job and employers' criteria for choosing an employee marked in the survey by graduates of geographical studies; Source: author's own research on the basis of questionnaire survey

QUESTION	ANSWER	1 criterion indicated (No. of graduates)	1 criterion indicated (%)	2 criteria indicated (No. of graduates)	2 criteria indicated (%)	3 criteria indicated (No. of graduates)	3 criteria indicated %
Please indicate maximum 3 criteria which you will take into consideration while choosing a job	Willingness to start any job	12	4,7	8	3,1	7	2,7
	Good atmosphere at work	28	10,9	29	11,3	36	14,1
	Convenient location	11	4,3	27	10,5	35	13,7
	Tasks at my work that are interesting for me	47	18,4	23	9,0	12	4,7
	Prospects for promotion	7	2,7	13	5,1	10	3,9
	Professional development opportunities	42	16,4	50	19,5	35	13,7
	Regular working hours	2	0,8	14	5,5	11	4,3
	Prospects for long time contract	18	7,0	31	12,1	24	9,4
	Job that corresponds with my skills	42	16,4	17	6,6	21	8,2
	Reputation of a company	3	1,2	5	2,0	7	2,7
	Social usefulness of a job	4	1,6	3	1,2	11	4,3
	Salary	39	15,2	36	14,1	46	18,0
Others	1	0,4	0	0	1	0,4	

QUESTION	ANSWER	1 criterion indicated (No. of graduates)	1 criterion indicated (%)	2 criteria indicated (No. of graduates)	2 criteria indicated (%)	3 criteria indicated (No. of graduates)	3 criteria indicated %
Please indicate maximum 3 criteria which an employer takes into consideration while choosing an employee	Character features of an applicant	28	10,9	18	7,0	70	27,3
	Experience acquired abroad (work, education)	6	2,3	14	5,5	9	3,5
	Private or state university	2	0,8	2	0,8	9	3,5
	Studies faculty	21	8,2	24	9,4	25	9,8
	Mark on a diploma	3	1,2	6	2,3	3	1,2
	Degree diploma	30	11,7	31	12,1	19	7,4
	Prestige of university one graduated from	3	1,2	8	3,1	11	4,3
	Other people's recommendation	39	15,2	27	10,5	32	12,5
	IT skills	1	0,4	6	2,3	6	2,3
	Earlier job experience	117	45,7	65	25,4	30	11,7
	Foreign languages skills	5	2,0	52	20,3	42	16,4
	Others	1	0,4	3	1,2	0	0,0
Please indicate three ways of looking for a job after you have finished your studies	Direct contact with an employer	129	50,4	25	9,8	38	14,8
	Careers Advice Centre at university	1	0,4	7	2,7	4	1,6
	Professional contacts/friends' contacts	23	9,0	49	19,1	35	13,7
	Advertisement in the Internet	47	18,4	60	23,4	33	12,9
	Advertisement in a newspaper	9	3,5	29	11,3	28	10,9
	Private recruitment company	3	1,2	3	1,2	3	1,2
	Public job centre	13	5,1	21	8,2	28	10,9
	Family/friends	15	5,9	35	13,7	41	16,0
	I will advertise in a newspaper on the Internet	2	0,8	2	0,8	10	3,9
	Meetings with employers organized by university	0	0,0	1	0,4	1	0,4
	Job fairs	1	0,4	11	4,3	22	8,6
	N/A, I'm planning to be self-employed	13	5,1	13	5,1	13	5,1
	Others	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0

Graduates of geographical studies declared that, first of all, they would search for a job by means of the direct contact with an employer (as many as 129 people, it is 50.4% chose this way in the first place; 38 people, it is 14.8% chose this way in the third place). The second important means of searching for a job was the Internet. 18,4% of respondents chose this way in the first place and 23,4% chose this way in the second place. The third important means of searching for a job were professional contacts (9% of respondents chose this way in the first place, 19.1% chose it in the second place and 13.7% chose it in the third place) and family and friends' contacts (13.7% chose it in the second place and 16% chose it in the third place). Respondents occasionally declared plans to get help at career advice centres at universities, job fairs or place an advertisement in a newspaper or in the Internet.

CONCLUSION

Author's research proves that graduates in geographical studies at Pedagogical University of Cracow assess highly the level of their skills developed during studies. The highest marks were given to themselves by graduates of the first stage studies (Bachelor's three-year studies) and then, in turn, graduates of the second stage studies (Master's two-year studies) and graduates of Master's degree five-year studies. Thus we can risk to advance a thesis that two-stage studies prepare students better for the requirements of the labour market than Master's degree five-year studies.

Respondents declare their intention to look for a job in the education sector and the civil service by means of the direct contact with an employer. These declarations don't differ considerably from graduates of Master's degree five-year studies, two-stage studies, full-time or part-time studies.

The presented results of research in the aspect of developed competences are only respondents' self-assessment and declarations of their attitudes towards the labour market. The real level of developed competences against the current needs of employers and further experiences of graduates on the labour market will show the effectiveness of two-stage system and five-year system of education in graduates' preparation for existence on the labour market.

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