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Szkoły wyższe
w świetle zmian
w zachowaniach nabywców

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Higher Education Institutions vis-à-vis Changes in Consumer Behavior

edited by
Maciej Kolasiński, Grażyna Nowaczyk

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redakcja naukowa
Maciej Kolasiński, Grażyna Nowaczyk

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The imperative to investigate changes in buyer behavior in the educational market is inscribed in marketing professionals' intrinsic focus on consumers' needs and expectations. Even if a lot of higher education institutions lack consistency in their approaches, it is broadly true that students are increasingly often seen as customers, and potential students are treated as the target market that has to be addressed with relevant marketing instruments. In this context, it is not surprising that an ongoing debate concentrates on retaining the quality of instruction and the sustainability of academic standards. At the same time, more and more universities embrace relationship marketing, whereby a student is perceived as a stakeholder – a partner in the higher education process. The higher education market has recently been reshaping in the wake of a prolonged demographic slump, internationalization of study programs, educational technology advances, and an accelerated evolution of young people's lifestyles and expectations – considerations that once again bring up the question of how to accommodate generational shifts and cater to both existing and potential students while still fostering academic values. This also entails the need to view higher education institutions as market players rather than merely in terms of public trust. In an effort to adapt to the new market conditions, many universities look to marketing management concepts to help them enhance performance by integrating the social and managerial aspects of organizational processes. In the face of multiple challenges that have arisen over the past decade, universities have had to review their market strategies and modify their marketing orientations, drawing on insights into the drivers of change in higher education marketing. A thorough understanding of consumer behavior is key to being able to respond to these challenges.

Changes in buyer behavior are manifold and may affect universities in a number of ways. What may be crucial to a higher education institution and its attempts at building relationships with its students is, in the first place, demand for higher education as such, or for degrees and programs offered by a specific institution. This is certainly a major challenge, given two disconcerting statistics: the number of students in higher education that has been declining since 2006, and the percentage of degree holders that has been shrinking since 2011. Secondly, an institutions' ability to acquire new students is conditional on where and how candidates look for information on course offerings, and on their expectations toward such information. When making a decision to seek a higher education degree, prospective students do search for information and tips that could assist them in their choice of program and institution. Their habits in that respect, however, have just undergone a number of pivotal changes relating to, for example, the use of new and emerging communication technologies, and to the degree of emphasis placed on specific communication media, ease of access to information, and chances to validate that information by confronting testimonials from existing students and alumni; last but not least, there have been some major changes in their expectations toward the scope of information provided and the time that it takes to retrieve it. What might also come into play is their attitude toward promotional communications and their requirements with regard to their contents. Further, one should look at factors commanding the choice of higher education institution. Degree seekers may be driven by a university's reputation, its range of degree programs, geographic proximity, graduate employability, self-development opportunities, pricing, as well as by other factors, such as admission criteria, academic requirements, or even acquaintance with other prospective students. What matters for existing students, on the other hand, may be such components of the education process as program content, instruction methodology, faculty, state-of-the-art technology, international mobility opportunities, practical merit of the program, or tools used to evaluate learning outcomes. At the same time, many of them may be concerned with possibilities to pursue their passions, interact with interesting people, or find employment upon graduation. An institution that is well aware of its existing and potential students' expectations in these areas, will be able to tailor its processes accordingly and hence build better relationships with its students and, consequently, its alumni. These are just some of a multitude of buyer behavior issues relevant to higher education institutions that strive to meet the underlying challenges.

The WSB University journal volume entitled *Higher Education Institutions vis-à-vis Changes in Consumer Behavior* represents an attempt to depict those changes in the behavior of higher education students and applicants that significantly affect policies implemented by institutions of higher learning. The publication aims to identify the type and extent of changes, and to assess their impact on what and how universities can hope to achieve. In structuring the volume, general issues, revolving around changes in the environment of higher education, were placed first, with a subsequent transition to describing the characteristics of higher education consumers and an ensuing treatment of marketing communications. As a result, the first part discusses the problems of Poland's higher education market, with a focus on the functions of a higher education institution – formerly as well as in the 21st century – and its market positioning. Part II, devoted to the higher education market customer, addresses such issues as motivations for the choice of a higher education institution, students' self-development needs, social factors influencing buyer behavior, and the determinants of university reputation. Part III is centered on the latest tools used in communicating with consumers, including primarily potential higher education students, and the role of effective marketing communication in attracting new enrolments. The fourth, and last, part comprises chapters dedicated to higher education students' and graduates' competencies and their employability in a transforming labor market.

The editors wish to thank the Authors and Reviewers, and to express gratitude toward their Colleagues from the WSB University in Poznań, as well as to all the others who contributed to the making of this Journal volume.

Grażyna Nowaczyk
Maciej Kolasiński

Changes in the Environment of Higher Education

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Poland's Education System at a Time of Demographic and Economic Crisis

Abstract. *Since there are close links between market economy and the education system, economic crises will have a visible effect on educational institutions at all levels. The late 2000s were marked by a coincidence of financial, demographic and immigration crises. The 2007-2009 global financial crunch, coupled with Poland's demographic crisis that dates back to 2007 and was exacerbated by mass emigration of young Poles, and the European refugee crisis that began in 2015 with increasing numbers of people flocking from African and Asian countries have had, and will continue to have, an substantial impact on the education system of Poland. The article highlights some of the crisis symptoms and their implications for Poland's education sector. As a result of the ongoing population decrease, we have seen schools being closed down, curricula being revised, and a wave of consolidations sweeping the higher education sector. The financial crisis has demonstrated that there is a need to reengineer higher education curricula in an attempt to attract more students and to focus educational effort on students who already have certain requisite skills. One benefit of the new approach would be raising the professional integrity of managers and thus minimizing fraudulent practices such as those pursued by the proud and self-serving executives of Enron and WorldCom. By contrast, the 2015 European migrant crisis has become a stimulus for developing a reasonable migration policy in lieu of fear-driven solidarity. It is clear that the education system should play a central role in making this policy a reality.*

Keywords: *education system, financial crisis, demographic crisis, immigration*

Introduction

Poland's education system is to a large extent market-driven and commodified, as a result of an explicit market orientation of most Polish educational institutions. What local and central decision makers are determined to do is train workforce that will be readily employable and will ensure that there is always a good supply of eligible candidates available to managers in the market. This instrumental approach to education compromises learning outcomes and turns knowledge into a commodity which the graduate is a "vehicle" [Cellary 2007]. Nonaka and Takeuchi define knowledge in economics terms as information and an asset, that is, an economic good that can be owned by an individual and hence marketed [Nonaka, Takeuchi 2000].

When it is all too common to look at knowledge and knowledge acquisition merely as tools that can be used to better one's position in the job market, the autotelic approach to education cannot stand ground. What this flawed perspective on education results in is graduates' tendency to develop a strong sense of entitlement and channel their frustration into various forms of protest, such as the "Indignados Movement"[1] or the ongoing expansion of the so called precariat [Standing 2014]. As a social phenomenon, precariat is relatively new to Poland and has not yet been investigated thoroughly[2]. The emergent stratification of society calls for a change of approach to the educational system. Increasingly more degree holders experience difficulties finding jobs commensurate with their qualifications, thus facing social exclusion. After all, the precariat clearly represents an outcome of the social exclusion of many university graduates. These widening disparities are likely to increase social inequalities, and no educational system should contribute to making this happen. Indeed, the awareness of this social fact ought to stir an insightful debate over the objectives that the current educational system supports.

The first decade of the 21st century culminated in a coincidence of financial (2007-2009), social (2007 – mass emigration of young Poles, 2015 – a wave of refugees from Africa and Western Asia) and demographic (a demographic low) crises that spurred changes in the education sector. The changes were felt throughout Europe and might soon affect Poland. What can be observed even now is the proliferation of schools teaching in the Arab language in Germany and the emergent demographic structure of many Swedish schools where aliens make up a majority of students. Poland could experience similar phenomena if it gullibly accepted the

[1] www.oburzeni.org.pl/news.php [accessed 15.11.2016].

[2] Besides the study by G. Standing that came out in Polish in 2014, other relevant Polish-language publications include the following: Sowa 2010; Śmiałek 2010; Urbański 2014; there are also a number of non-Polish-language publications, e.g.: Bourdieu 1963; Lindenboim, Perez 2004: 21-31; Lewchuk, Clarke, de Wolff 2008: 387-406; Korpi et al. 2003: 17-30.

proposed immigrant quotas to share the excess of west-bound refugees among the European states. In this context, the worsening standard of education is manifest in the trend to put stress on effective test-taking strategies rather than on developing abilities and attitudes. Meanwhile, the learning outcomes that should be accomplished as a result of an education process are defined in terms of specific knowledge, skills, and social competences. Increased emphasis on social competences, rather than on knowledge as such, is part of the Bologna Process initiated in 1999 and pioneering a fundamentally new outlook on the objectives of the teaching process [Joint declaration 2006].

These crisis situations notwithstanding, the recent changes have not had the expected effects on the quality of instruction. As subsidies were tied to the number of students, governing bodies of educational institutions were forced to start thinking commercially. The sustainability of an institution, and the number of jobs it can create, was hence linked to its earnings – from educational services or from research as much as from business activity. A gradual departure from that market-driven logic is what now stands for change.[3]

With the notorious underfunding in the education sector and in the face a demographic low accompanied by a west-bound surge of economic emigration (nearly 2.4m in 2016), it will be a major challenge for Polish government's social policy to get the society to acquiesce in the admission of new immigrants – which is solicited by wealthier EU states (e.g. Germany) from those less affluent ones (the Visegrad Group, or V4, countries). Considerations such as the need to preserve local identity and tradition will be no less important now that Poland's educational system has become part of what is referred to as the European Education Area and regarded as a key ingredient that comes into the making of a common Europe [Surina (ed.) 2012: 21].

1. The financial crunch

The worst financial crunch since the Great Depression of the 1930s began in August 2007 and lasted, formally speaking, until 2009. The United States of America and Western European countries suffered the most. Its origins can be traced

[3] The establishment of a national agency for academic cooperation, the designation of research universities, increased support for Universities of the Third Age, and the setting up of "science buses" to visit Polish schools – are some of the harbingers of a revolution in science and higher education announced by the Minister of Science and Higher Education Jarosław Gowin in a recent PAP interview: http://wpolityce.pl/spoleczenstwo/307753-gowin-zapowiada-kolejne-zmiany-w-szkolnictwie-wyzszym-trzeba-dofinansowac-nauke-i-zreformowac-uczelnie [accessed 15.11.2016].

back to the collapse of the post-war world order geared to ensure steady economic growth and the well-being of societies. It was just as a shift began away from the egalitarianism of the first three post-war decades that the world was set on a path toward the present difficulties. Many of those most knowledgeable about the U.S. economy discerned the social inequalities and the lack of prospects for upward social mobility experienced by an increasing fraction of American citizens. This compelled politicians to seek solutions to address the ambitions and aspirations of the excluded ones who looked up to the more and more affluent elites in defining their needs. The solution that presented itself was in line with the prevalent doctrines of Reaganomics and Thatcherism and led to the "credit bubble" in the real estate market whose spectacular bursting triggered the 2007 crisis [Wójcik 2015: 78-87]. The dramatic bankruptcy of two global players, Enron and WorldCom, provided a striking example revealing, for everyone to see and for some to experience hands-on, the dreadful consequences of fictitious financial statements, being just one of many failures of the existing system. Enron's accounting fraud was inscribed in an endless list of phony financial reports produced "as the management of so many companies, blinded by the lure of stock-option riches, recklessly pushed and pressurized everyone in the system to go along with the fabricated financial statements" [Jackson 2009: 6]. Evidence of how common financial statement manipulations are can be found in the 2002 SOX Report, unveiling multiple forgeries that were committed over a period of five years, July 31, 1997 through June 30, 2002. The report concludes that "[o]ver the Study period, the Commission filed 515 enforcement actions for financial reporting and disclosure violations arising out of 227 Division of Enforcement investigations" [SOX Report 2002].

The repercussions of the crisis persist even today and it remains hard to predict when the global economy effectively recovers and its normal operation is restored. The aftermath of the post-crisis situation severely affected not only the U.S. economy but many other economies, too. A number of large banks and financial institutions went bankrupt, while independent investment banking, a sector with a several decades-long history, ceased to exist. The stock markets in the U.S., in the U.K., across the Euro area and Asia, plunged. Dealings in mortgage-backed securities came to a halt. Investment and pension funds suffered a sharp slide in their returns. World trade plummeted, alike investments and consumption. The adverse developments in world economy had an obvious effect on every household and business through declining production, rising unemployment rates, decreasing incomes, and constraints on the availability of borrowing, notably of mortgage loans [Adamczyk 2012: 13-29].

2. Market economy vs. the education system

Following the banking crisis of the 2000s, the condition of market-based economies has impinged strongly on the educational system. This is just as true about countries that were less afflicted. During the 2007-2009 financial crunch Poland was officially proclaimed a "green island" that proved immune to the crisis except for an economic slowdown that became an important incentive for educational system reforms. In effect, an educational system designed to merely train for a profession becomes an outdated and vain idea. Managers of education institutions find it difficult to meet the requirement to apply market rules in controlling their schools' finances. Governmental decision makers seem to believe that every headmaster should be able to demonstrate enough business acumen to make the school profitable and that the head of every university should be able to derive income from its research findings. At the same time, any earnings that a school or university happens to generate are transferred to their governing bodies rather used directly toward satisfying its own needs. Interestingly enough, an upgrade of qualifications and competences does not immediately benefit a university graduate by translating into a higher salary. In fact, in Poland as well as in the U.S., degree holders get paid relatively less and less. Although nominal wages are rising, their purchasing power is diminishing [Phelps 2007: 28-29]. An education process focused primarily on the acquisition of qualifications for an attractive, well-paid profession may lead to what U. Beck described in his book *Risk Society, Towards a New Modernity* (*Risikogesellschaft – Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*): based on the example of Germany, he commented that, despite market-oriented learning outcomes, the popular rush for higher education diplomas created a "cleavage between generations." The consequences are visible in relations between genders, in parental behaviors, and in political culture (new social movements). As a result, we have been witnessing the phasing-out of class culture and of privileges based on social background. Since compulsory schooling was extended, traditional mindsets and lifestyles have been relativized and jettisoned as an outcome of the adoption of uniform teaching and learning environments, methodologies and contents alongside linguistic forms used [Beck 2002: 112-123]. The so called educational revolution favored schools that made one eligible for further education. Similar effects were observable in the expansion of higher education that, in many cases, brought about a common mismatch between education and employment.[4] This means that the intrinsic goal of instruction, which is to

[4] In 2009, there were 461 higher education institutions in Poland (including institutions run under the auspices of the ministers of national defense, internal affairs and public administration), of which 131 were government owned and controlled and had a total student population of 1,266,900

steer individuals toward learning a profession, is frustrated or ruined by external interference from the job market [Beck 2002: 221]. For fear of unemployment, a lot of young people choose not to graduate in time or to continue education. Nonetheless, the unemployment rate among the highly educated population is growing in Poland as well as across Europe. In 2013, one out of ten university degree holders aged 25-29 was out of work (10.5%). While this is still below the EU average of 10.7% and much less than the Euro area average of 13.2%, the implications might be unpredictable.[5] The belief that higher education is an effective protection against unemployment has waned. Instead, there is an increasing awareness that too many young people choose to train for professions that are not in demand in the labor market, thus inflating the "disparity between education and employment", since Polish schools equip them with specific knowledge but do not teach groupwork, loyalty toward the employer, assertiveness, patience or diligence – qualities that are valued by employers. Most such deficiencies are developed in post-primary education, in schools that are focused solely on high test scores. Long-term and structural unemployment causes discrepancies within the process of vocational training and undermines confidence in the "incumbent" education system. It can be presumed that the lowest levels of the educational ladder will continue to produce an increasing number of permanently unemployable individuals [cf. Beck 2002: 223]. Hence, it seems more relevant than ever to look for the meaning and purpose of education in education itself. It is the autotelic approach that offers a real alternative to the prevalent job training approach.

3. The demographic crisis

It should be underscored, however, that the key challenge to be faced by the Polish education sector is of demographic nature. The declining birth rate in the last two decades has had a tremendous impact on the number of students in education. The 2015 GUS (Central Statistical Office) statistics show that 2014 was the third consecutive year that the population of Poland shrank; this time

(66.7% of all students in higher education countrywide), with a new enrolment of 324,000 this year: [GUS 2010].

[5] In 2013, Greece had the highest employment rate in Europe, approximating 43% among the young and educated, compared with nearly 27% in Spain and 20% in Portugal. For many years, the lowest unemployment in this population group has been observed in such countries as Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands – 3.2%, or the United Kingdom – 3.7% in 2013 [Drozdowicz-Beć 2014: 3].

by an estimated 54,000 that was the largest population decrease in history (37,000 people less, with the rate of decrease at -0.1%) [GUS 2015a: 2].

The *Raport o stanie edukacji 2013* [*2013 Education Report*] [IBE 2014] indicates an increase in schooling, albeit accompanied by a high unemployment rate among university graduates and the highest rate of emigration since the 2007 record when 2.27 million people left Poland.[6] There were fewer admissions into higher education, primarily at private higher education institutions and in part-time programs, consistent with the demographic trend. At the end of 2014 Poland had a population of some 38.5m, which stands for a 17,000 decrease relative to the previous year. 2014 was also the third consecutive year the population shrank after years of growth (2008-2011).

What can be observed at nearly all stages of education is the expansion of private, non-state institutions. They already represent a majority of post-secondary schools (more than 63% of all institutions and almost a half of the student population in the segment in 2012) [IBE 2014: 47-48]. In the higher education sector, out of 338 institutions that were in operation in 2011, 27 have gone out of business while 22 are currently in liquidation, and the process is gaining momentum. Polska Konfederacja Pracodawców Prywatnych Lewiatan (Polish Confederation of Private Employers Lewiatan) estimates that in 2025 there will be only 50 left.[7] In an effort to broaden their course offerings, enhance the quality of instruction and bring down the costs of their operations, more and more institutions of higher learning decide to merge. As a result, they are able to target a wider population and offer a more pleasurable study experience. Examples of consolidations in the region of Dolny Śląsk (Lower Silesia) include Wyższa Szkoła Bankowa we Wrocławiu (WSB University Wrocław) and Dolnośląska Szkoła Wyższa (University of Lower Silesia) whose size enables them to compete with public universities. The consolidation process is now undoing what has been seen as fracturing in the higher education sector and shown e.g. in the Ernst&Young and Instytut Badań nad Gospodarką Rynkową report developed for Poland's Ministry of Science and Higher Education [Ernst&Young and Instytut Badań nad Gospodarką Rynkową 2009; 2010] or in the 2013 OECD study *Education at a Glance 2013* covering the 34 member states and delineating global trends in education [Education at a Glance 2013]. Consolidation processes are commonplace in other countries, too. University mergers occur worldwide – e.g. in Germany, France, and the Scandinavian countries. Not so long ago, two Finnish

[6] At the end of 2013 GUS estimated that around 2.196m Polish citizens were temporary residents of other countries. The figure is indicative of a 3.1% increase (by 66,000) compared to 2012 (around 2.13m) [GUS 2014].

[7] http://natablicy.pl/w-2015-roku-bedzie-mniej-uczelni-niepublicznych-w-polsce,artykul.html?material_id=50a0bcf616f1dab55b000000 [accessed 30.08.2015].

universities with campuses situated 50 kilometers away from each other merged to form the University of Eastern Finland.[8] Furthermore, the two institutions were awarded generous government subsidies. Likewise, Denmark just recently set up a powerful university in Aarhus by combining several higher education institutions and research institutes.[9] Such moves are naturally underpinned by the Scandinavian approach to education.

Finland, that has just risen to be the leader in education, was until recently under strong Swedish and Russian influence. Inscriptions in the Swedish language are still to be seen in public spaces (streets, the media) as relics of that past [Johnsson 2013: 443]. For years, Finnish learners have topped international rankings, including the reputable PISA survey, even as the gap between the best and the poorest has been closing due to effective support addressed by schools to less able pupils. In addition, each school tries to assist its learners and their families by offering the services of a social worker. Family support takes the form of free meals served in-school for all students. Of course, such policies will incur substantial expenses and involve a firm commitment to teacher development. Even more rigid requirements have to be met by pre-school teachers. Classes are only cancelled in exceptional cases, as schools arrange substitutions, and strikes are very rare at Finnish educational institutions. Headmasters have a large degree of autonomy including the powers to dismiss a teacher who falls short of their expectations. At the same time, the Finnish educational systems is much cheaper to run than e.g. the Polish one, where schools are overburdened with reporting and paperwork that engages some staff in generating information on their educational activities while hundreds of others are busy processing the data. Bureaucracy is ubiquitous – focused on interpreting defective laws, inflexible and unfriendly toward the workforce, oblivious of the actual subject of the educational process, and concerned with whatever happens inside their offices rather than with the outside world. In Finland, on the other hand, schools thrive on trust: the government trusts teachers to do a good job and therefore does not need to "invest" in control systems to keep tabs on schools and teachers. Once the educational system is ridden of the control function, the resulting optimization stands for reduced operating costs at educational institutions. This approach to school organization is in tune with a national culture that looks to the future. It should be stressed that Finland does not employ any standardized tests to assess learners' progress and schools are free to be guided by their own discretion in designing curricula [Fazlagić 2015]. High priority is given by the Fins, the Swedes and the Danes to adult education that provides opportunities for skill upgrading, obtaining additional qualifications, reducing social inequalities,

[8] www.uef.fi/en/uef [accessed 10.09.2015].
[9] www.au.dk/en/ [accessed 10.09.2015].

and participation in special interest groups, discussion groups, training courses (not necessarily related to professional development), as well as in lectures and seminars held by institutions of higher learning and vocational schools. In Finland, adult education is, on the one hand, part of the formal education system and, on the other, flourishes outside of it, too. Judging by the number of attendees, course loads, and considerable public funding, adult education is in high demand and fits perfectly into the idea of lifelong learning that is a central ingredient of public policy pursued by an efficient government [Gmerek 2013: 400-401].

4. Regression in teacher employment

The dwindling enrolment figures call for organizational changes in the education system to adjust the number of teachers, institutions and facilities to the evolving needs. Statistics show that between 2006 and 2014 the number of classes fell by more than 17% in post-primary (*gymnasium*) schools, by 12% in secondary schools, and by 7% at the primary school level. The average class size decreased, too, with more and more schools being transformed into so called school complexes [IBE 2014: 45-46]. At the same time, enrolment in higher education slumped even more dramatically – by almost a quarter [GUS 2015c: 26].

The adverse demographics have had an obvious impact on employment among school teachers. In 2007-2012, the decline in the population of children and adolescents led to a 3% decrease in the number of school teachers. The most significant decreases were observed in general education *lyceums* (secondary education), elementary vocational schools, and in *gymnasium* schools (post-primary education). At the same time, the number of pre-school teachers went up by 32%. The demographic trend has also affected teacher workloads. Over recent years, there have been hardly any fluctuations in the proportion between full-time and part-time teachers, with part-time employees representing some 26% of total employment. The percentage is much lower in pre-school education (about 15%). However, in recent years the dynamics of changes in these two groups were very different: while there was a rapid 5.5% drop in the number of full-time teachers in schools for children and adolescents, institutions of pre-school education hired more full-time (a 38% increase) than part-time teachers (a nearly 26% rise) [IBE 2014: 60]. In addition, 2014 was marked by a slight decline in the number of teachers in the higher education sector (by 2% relative to the previous year) [GUS 2015c: 43].

5. Polish mass emigration of 2007

A country's total population is influenced by natural increase and international migration. The 2014 decrease of Poland's population was mainly due to negative net cross-border migration that was accompanied by a negative, albeit slightly, rate of natural increase. Net permanent international migration has in fact been negative throughout Poland's post-war history. In 2014, it equaled 15,800 [GUS 2015b: 133-134]. Another disconcerting fact is that more and more Poles undergo naturalization in the United Kingdom and, ultimately, acquire British citizenship.[10]

Mass emigration had a negative impact on enrolment in Polish higher education institutions. Coupled with a demographic low, it resulted in what enrolment figures are at the moment. To make things worse, forecasts indicate that they will continue to deteriorate to reach 1.2m by 2020. The consequences will be felt, in the first place, by privately-run higher education institutions, many of which are likely to have problems enrolling enough students, particularly into part-time programs that their survival effectively depends on. This condition is further aggravated by increasing poverty, as tuition fees are charged for all part-time programs even in public universities. Insofar as there were 3.37m people aged 19-24 in 2010, it is estimated that there will be only 2.23m in 2020 [Czeladko 2011]. The Demograficzne tsunami report contends that the first wave of the demographic low will initially strike peripheral private institutions based away from strong academic centers, to then affect other schools. At any rate, it will have the worst impact on private higher education institutions, already experiencing a decline in enrolment (in 2014, enrolment in private institutions accounted for some 24% of the total enrolment in higher education) [cf. Antonowicz, Gorlewski 2011; GUS 2015c: 30].

6. The 2015 migrant crisis

In the summer months of 2015 Europe faced a multitude of illegal immigrants, chiefly from Africa and Western Asia (e.g. Syria, Iraq), that caused a humanitarian crisis comparable to that associated with the record numbers of incoming

[10] In 2013, 6,000 Poles became British citizens, twice as many as in 2012, and three times as many as two years earlier. The Home Office reports that there are currently 600,000 pending applications for citizenship, 10 times as many as 10 years ago: http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114871,16060573,Coraz_wiecej_Polakow_na_Wyspach_przyjmuje_brytyjskie.html [accessed 10.09.2015].

refugees following the outbreak of the 1992-1995 Bosnian war.[11] This several thousand hundred strong crowd of refugees seeking a better life in Europe is bringing change to the continent.

In the absence of a consistent EU immigration policy, the migrant wave alters the way the Schengen Agreement works, as border controls are restored between certain Schengen Area member states. One of the cornerstones of the European Union is thus shaking. The migration crisis has also sharpened the divisions between the Schengen member states and their non-Schengen neighbors. The growing tensions are best illustrated by the stance that the authorities of Britain, a country remaining outside the Schengen Area, took toward the attempts to cross the English Channel made by refugees from the French port of Calais.

Further, the construction of a barrier fence on the Hungarian-Serbian border was a move toward border militarization. These are some of the facts that are plain to see, however, it is much more difficult to determine the real reasons why these massive migrations take place.

The fact alone that the immigrant movement is headed for wealthier EU countries indicates that it would be of economic or religious rather than political nature. French sociologist Mohand Khellil was one of those who strove to uncover the religious motivation behind the Europe-bound movement of Muslim populations [Khellil 1991]. Nearly two decades ago, he envisaged many problems and dangers inherent in the European integration of North-African refugees stemming from their firm rootedness in their religion and culture founded on values derived from the Quran. Islamic law is totalitarian in nature, embracing all aspects of the believer's life. Every human act and behavior is enumerated, classified and evaluated by the law. It is through the Sharia law that Islam has become a creed as well as a distinct, closed culture and has formed a specific educational system that is impervious to external influence and focused on developing a strong sense of religious identity.

The implications of a massive refugee inflow were also depicted in literary form by J. Raspail in a novel published more than thirty years ago [Raspail 2015]. The writer draws the reader's attention to the threats to European identity arising from infiltration by great numbers of immigrants who are strongly committed to the religious and political directives of their religious leaders. Symbolic rather than utopian in its design, the novel reveals the interesting mechanism whereby immigrants assimilate into a new society: "boat people, the growth of radical attitudes in the Muslim community [...], the increasing psychological pressure from sundry 'human rights defenders', the deepening

[11] Overall, 866,000 asylum requests were filed in 44 developed countries, which represents a 45% growth relative to 2013. The number of applications nearly equated the peak level of 9000,000 coinciding with the beginning of the Bosnian war in 1992 [Uchodźcy w Europie 2015].

crisis of Christian doctrine over the ways the Gospel is preached by the clergy, the false 'angelicity' of human conscience, the refusal to confront the truth..." [Raspail 2015: 11].

While migrations have been taking place for centuries, the recent massive inflow of populations that are culturally and religiously alien to the Latin value system founded on natural law, is put new demands on school curricula even in Poland. The educational system may soon be seriously challenged as Pew Research studies show that the Muslim minority across Europe totaled 6% of the population in 2010 and is likely to climb to 8% by 2030. Most Muslims are settled in areas where they have dwelled for many generations, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Bulgaria, and Russia. At the moment, as the waves of immigrants from Syria and Iraq surge into Europe, movements have also intensified from areas of traditional Muslim settlement, e.g. from Albania and Bosnia.

In Western Europe, the largest Muslim population of nearly 5 million inhabits France, amounting to 7.5% of the country's total population. 4 million Muslims live in Germany. Relatively numerous Muslim minorities are also found in Belgium (6%), Austria and Switzerland (5.7% each). By contrast, the number of followers of Islam living in Poland is estimated between 15,000 and 25,000, which represents less than 0.1% of the country's population [Wojtalik 2015].

Overall, the Muslim population in Europe approximates 44m, making up 6% of the continent's total population, and is predicted to grow over the next two decades. While in 2010 there were 1.6bn Muslims worldwide, the number is expected to rise by around 35% to reach 2.2bn by 2030. It is estimated that in 15 years there will be 58.2m Muslims in Europe alone – a 32% increase that nearly parallels the global growth rate.[12] What therefore seems inevitable is a clash of civilizations and the subsequent emergence of a new world order. S.P. Huntington argues that culture plays an important role in the process, since "culture and cultural identities, which at the broadest level are civilization identities, are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold War world" [Huntington 1996: 20]. Hence, culture will also be largely germane to the education process.

7. Culture vs. education

To some extent, education can be viewed as a reflection of the culture prevalent in a given era, therefore the search for a model that would be adequate to a specific type of culture is among the hottest issues to be addressed by those

[12] www.euractiv.pl/politykawewnetrzna/artykul/muzumanie-w-europie-006454 [accessed 30.08.2015].

undertaking to modernize education systems. It is particularly relevant at a time a culture is threatened by refugees born in another region of the world, brought up in another civilization and a very different culture. Multiculturalism has not delivered in Europe since, according to its criticisms summarized by Kenan Malik in a *Foreign Affairs* article: "Europe has allowed excessive immigration without demanding enough integration – a mismatch that has eroded social cohesion, undermined national identities, and degraded public trust" [Malik 2015]. On the other hand, minority groups arriving in European countries may not be refused protection for their rights. For example, Germany's North Rhine-Westphalia state government decided that a 320,000-strong population of children following Islam was big enough to offer them a dedicated school subject. Consequently, as many as 44 primary schools across the region will complement their curricula with the course called "Introduction to Muslim Faith" [Wąsowski 2015].

Right at the heart of the relationships between culture and education is the university, being in itself an important culture-building institution. In Poland, this role of university was vital during the years of totalitarian rule. Today many universities have come to resemble business enterprises (entrepreneurial university, industrial university). The traditional academic values have been replaced by the rules of the market. Education and research work much like "production lines" and research findings are traded like any other commodity, while conducting research is seen as providing a service. Alike educational services, where "raw material, i.e. students, are molded (or, rather, transformed) into final products (capable of performing predefined professional roles). They are formed very much the same way a steel nail would, while technical specifications for their production (termed as competences) are provided by government administration and employers" [Czerepaniak-Walczak 2013: 11]. The quality stamp for this specific product is an academic degree that thus turns to a consumer good. This implies growing conformism, or even (mostly political) servilism, on the part of the university, which is in striking contrast to the university's traditional role. Reforms attempted by governments around the world are made in line with the principle "change everything so that everything can stay the same, where the secret [...] is not to blow the trumpet too loudly and to stick to a strategy of window-dressing" [Wallerstein 2008: 82]. The present-day model of education is characterized by a "deficit of culture in education" and encumbered by a "technocratic overload" [Rudenko 2012: 51]. Since the end of the 20th century, the keynote has been given in all aspects of life by technology (and technocratic) factors and elements, while spiritual factors and elements have retired to the backstage. "Technocratism" has also found its way into education.

Conclusion

To sum things up, in today' Poland the education system has long lost the power to determine social status. The degree alone will no longer do to launch a career or guarantee a professional status along with a matching income and prestige. This, however, does not imply that education does not matter at all. Unless you have a relevant qualification or university diploma to acknowledge the completion of a higher education program and the award of a specific professional degree, your chances to make a successful career are virtually nil. It is an increasingly common belief that degrees and credentials are less and less sufficient but more and more indispensable if you want to climb to one of the positions that are becoming so scarce [Beck 2002: 227].

The paper attempts to demonstrate the impact of demographic and economic factors on Poland's educational system by looking at some relevant aspects, such as the recent financial, demographic and migrant crises. In this context, the links between market economy and education as well as between culture and education are outlined. As a result of tensions between the rules of the market and the objectives of an educational system we have seen regression in teacher employment. Interesting alternatives that seem to be able to reverse the current trends in the teaching job market can be seen in the educational models developed by Finland or Denmark that have departed from an alienational, elite-centered and grossly ineffective approach to arrive at one that proves effective and inclusive [Jurczyk 2016].

The 1999 Bologna Accords and the Lisbon Agenda of 2000 aimed to make European higher education more competitive over just a decade despite the diversity of cultures, languages and national education systems involved, and despite wide academic autonomy as well, by establishing Europe-wide collaboration and coordinated higher education policies. These objectives have not been attained. Although the UE supports the mobility of students and teachers, fosters links between schools and between their governing bodies, and sponsors the development of European curricula, it has not yet succeeded in making the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area truly competitive vis-à-vis American higher education and science [Kosieniec 2016]. Therefore it seems advisable to consolidate Polish higher education institutions that have the potential to play a key role in the European Higher Education Area.

A discussion of the Finnish education paradigm indicates an imperative to apply a different philosophy to the design of school curricula, giving more prominence to local requirements and based on mutual trust. In Finland, the gaps between core curricula at subsequent levels of education are much narrower than e.g. in Poland, which makes transition to a higher level less stressful. This facilitates knowledge acquisition as well as the development of skills and social competences that are key to the elimination of fraudulent business practices, such as those pursued e.g. by the executives of Enron or WorldCom and underlying the global economic crisis of the 2000s. As soon as unnecessary barriers are removed, school teaching can become a pleasurable experience, with good rapport and friendly relations arising between teachers and students, and with valuable skills brought forward into adulthood that accelerate the buildup of social capital and hence benefit the society at large. The Fins chose to concentrate on promoting teamwork, peer relations, and equal opportunities, and that way have made a success that is approved of by the society. Their refusal to follow the trend toward the commodification of human life meant moving away from standardized exams, from the development of test-taking skills, and from the common practice of private coaching. Despite this divergence from the mainstream education paradigm, Finnish students garner top scores on the PISA tests [Odrowąż-Coates 2014: 324-325].

In a relevant insight contributed by P. Sahlberg, quality education and social inclusion are pinpointed as preconditions for the inception of a new economy based on knowledge and inclusive information society – values that were instrumental in developing a response to the financial crises of the 1990s and the 2000s and whose effects are likely to continue into the 21st century [Odrowąż-Coates 2014: 325]. What makes this concept difficult to implement in Polish educational settings is, in the opinion of many scholars, "the disintegration of Polish society, impoverishment, inequalities, and the shortage of funding for effective assimilation and rehabilitation" [cf. Kłusak 2001; Rejzner 2010; Galor et al. 2012].

Mass migrations call for Europe to place more emphasis on building European and national identities and thus resisting the influence of Muslim culture – one that is inclined to challenge whatever is alien to it in terms of religion and culture. In that sense, education systems and curricula should be closely aligned with a given country's culture and tradition. It should be also accentuated that the European treaties are predicated on a resolve to respect national identities of all countries and regions.

The paper also highlights the need to move away from the solicitation of solidarity in fear of immigrants toward the development of an immigration policy that respects national sovereignty and identity and allows for the educational system to play a central role in strengthening the European identity – one originating in Mediterranean civilization and based on natural law rather than sharia.

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Polski system edukacji w dobie kryzysu demograficzno-ekonomicznego

Streszczenie. *Gospodarka rynkowa jest silne skorelowana z systemem edukacji, dlatego każdy kryzys ma wpływ na funkcjonowanie placówek edukacyjnych na wszystkich szczeblach. Kryzys finansowy z lat 2007-2009 dotknął sfery życia publicznego w segmencie finansowym, demograficznym, imigracyjnym i edukacyjnym. Kryzys demograficzny, objawiający się niżem demograficznym i masową emigracją Polaków w 2007 r. oraz imigracją ludności z krajów afrykańskich i azjatyckich od 2015 r., miał wpływ na polski systemu edukacji (nastąpił spadek liczby studentów, likwidacja i konsolidacja szkół wyższych). Głównym celem artykułu jest ukazanie polskiego systemu edukacji przez pryzmat zmian demograficzno-ekonomicznych. Rozważania mogą stanowić przyczynek do szerszego dyskursu na ten temat. Celem szczegółowym jest wskazanie na konieczność zmian, zwłaszcza w obszarze szkolnictwa wyższego w Polsce, m.in. na potrzebę konsolidacji uczelni. Kolejnym celem szczegółowym jest ukazanie potrzeby zmiany podstaw programowych w celu pozyskiwania przez uczniów i studentów umiejętności kluczowych, pozwalających uniknąć błędów kadry zarządzającej Enronu i WorldComu, które m.in. doprowadziły do globalnego kryzysu. Wskazana została także potrzeba przejścia od wymuszanej solidarności strachu do budowania polityki imigracyjnej, zachowującej suwerenność i tożsamość narodową, w której system edukacji powinien odgrywać istotną rolę.*

Słowa kluczowe: *system edukacji, kryzys finansowy, kryzys demograficzny, imigracja*

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The Functions of University in a Knowledge-Based Economy and Their Implications for Students

Abstract. *Over the recent years, higher education has experienced a number of changes stemming from the pursuit of neoliberal ideology and the implementation of the Bologna Process. Emphasis placed throughout the European Higher Education Area on the employability of university graduates and their preparation for job market entry upon completion of a first-cycle program, alongside competition among higher education institutions and their embracement of entrepreneurship, are just a few of the changes that were triggered decades ago and are here to stay. It is therefore becoming increasingly important to address such questions as: how these changes have affected the functions of university, what factors determine the trends of change in Polish higher educations institutions, and what implications the transformations of universities and their functions have had for students.*

Keywords: *functions of university, Europe of Knowledge, knowledge-based economy, higher education stakeholders*

Introduction

Over the first two decades of the 21st century higher education has been exposed to a number of factors triggering changes to the functions performed by universities. The prevalence of neoliberal ideology, the advancing globalization and multiculturalism, the inception of the European Higher Education Area coupled with reforms to the higher education sector entailed by the Bologna Process, and the embracement of academic enterprise are [Wiśniewska 2014: 33-49] just some of the factors behind the changes taking place in the European and national frameworks of higher education as well as at the heart of universities.

Economic neoliberalism has made university education more practical and hands-on, concentrated on training for specific professions rather than on students' comprehensive academic development. The way that the Bologna Process has contributed to the evolution of higher learning across Europe is by accelerating university graduates' entry into the job market and expanding opportunities to continue education or to seek employment in countries signatory to the Bologna Accords – hence spurring the growth of multiculturalism all over Europe and beyond.

Given the above, it seems vital to know the direction that the functions of university are evolving toward, to determine the key drivers of changes to the way universities perform their functions, and to see what implications these changes have for students. The paper thus endeavors to identify the reasons for, and the trends of, changes in the functions of university, and to outline the consequences that the changes might bring to university students.

1. Changes in the functions of university

The science and research function has been intrinsic to universities since the Middle Ages. "Considering their staffing (primarily clergy) and the language of instruction (Latin), in the 12-14th century Europe they performed the role of centers of international life. As educational institutions, they had developed their unique instruction and research methodology known as the scholastic method" [Żechowska 1999: 46]. B. Żechowska notes that the belief in the university's leading role in research long persisted in Poland as well as across Europe. It was not undercut until the beginning of the 20th century when "increasing evidence indicated that the research and the educational (i.e. didactic-pedagogical) functions of university should be regarded as equally important" [Żechowska 1999: 48]. T. Lewowicki focuses on the elite-formation functions of higher education institutions, including traditional universities in the first place which he sees as bearing responsibility for "retaining continuity in culture and science, handing down the societal systems of values and behaviors, fostering the intellectual abilities of students, training the privileged classes, i.e. the elite, for their leadership role in economy and in public institutions, and educating experts to back up those in control of the state" [Lewowicki 2012: 14].

As a result of the common adoption of Humboldt's concept, universities have always combined the research and the educational function. The educational function is closely associated with knowledge creation based on research conducted in collaboration with students. T. Lewowicki contends that "institutions of higher education – since they attract top-notch knowledge workers – ought to make a significant contribution to scientific advances, and it should be through the creation of scientific knowledge" [Lewowicki 1995: 20]. This function has always been seen as intrinsic to universities. "Among the functions carried out by contemporary universities priority should be given to the pursuit of science and research [...] Universities – being populated by scholars specialized in a large variety of disciplines – are uniquely competent to engage in defining paths for future research and in proliferating new disciplines of science at intersections of existing knowledge domains" [Kruszewski 2000: 25-26]. At the same time, however, the author insists that "higher education institutions ought to, in the first place, perform basic research in disciplines where there are strong research teams" [Kruszewski 2000: 26]. At the moment, the research function has gained a commercial aspect visible in an emphasis on translating research outcomes into patents, applications and innovative technologies that feed into the economy. This is because, under the Lisbon Strategy, scientific research is supposed to not only lead to knowledge creation but also play an instrumental role in building an innovative, competitive and knowledge-based economy by partnering with business and industry.

The traditional educational function of university, closely linked with the research function under the Humboldtian model of higher education, "comprises the formation and education of elite groups – of those who are destined to take over leadership positions in government, economy, and culture" [Kruszewski 2000: 27]. Vested with this function, "university tends to be perceived in its environment as a center of learning that trains highly qualified workforce for the society, economy, and state" [Kobylarek 2005: 33]. The pedagogical-formative function of universities originates in the concept promulgated by the English theologian J.H. Newman but it has not effectively taken root.

Although this is not a complete list of functions performed by universities, A. Kobylarek argues that "all the other functions are intimately linked with these two or are derived from them and could be seen as their extensions." K. Kruszewski maintains that "the most popular attempt to delineate the functions of Poland's higher education sector ends up in isolating these three: instruction, formation, and research" [Kruszewski 2000: 20].

The rapid pace of changes in the surrounding social reality has been fueling an expansion in the functions of university, both internal and external [Jaskot 2002: 4-24]. At the moment, the functions performed by universities are as shown in Fig. 1.

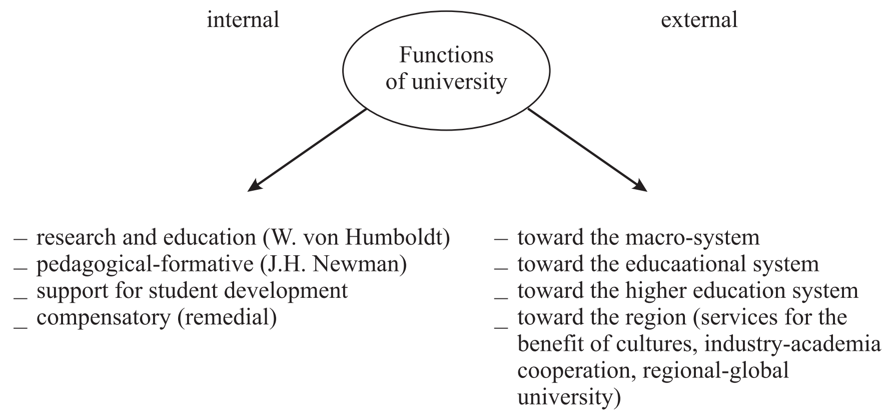

Figure 1. Functions of university

Source: own based on the classification proposed by Jaskot 2002: 4-24.

Concerning the distinction into university's internal and external functions, it should be noted that, arguably, the former are very slow to take effect, being aligned with changes in educational philosophy, whereas the latter are determined by the environment and reflect the need to adjust to changing requirements. The traditionally entrenched functions of universities continue to heat the debate among scholars on whether a higher education institution can and should be run the same way as a business organization would, i.e. whether it should aim at generating profits and financial autonomy, hence raise funds by charging fees for its services when e.g. sharing its expertise and research findings. At the same time, the worsening demographics and the job market dynamics, in conjunction with neoliberal ideology and EU policies, have been pressuring universities to give prominence to employability and concentrate on vocational training at the undergraduate level. Academic education has been, under directives issued by Education Ministers in the European Higher Education Area, shifted to second- (Master's) and third-cycle (Doctoral) programs.

In the 1990s, several seminal publications offered outlooks on the different levels of European education in the 21st century. J. Półturzycki names three such publications: *Learning: the Treasure Within*, also known as the Delors Report; the European Commission's 1995 *White Paper on Education and Training*; and the 1996 OECD report *Knowledge-based Economy* [Półturzycki 1999: 16]. The first of the documents highlights the fact that "education is becoming multi-dimensional (with the four pillars indicated by the European Commission), encompassing these four broad strands: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and to live with others, and learning to be. All of these strands are important and necessary, they make up a whole" [Półturzycki 1999: 18]. Attention is also brought to the importance of lifelong learning. *The White Paper on Education and Training* envisages that "the primary goal of education will be to consistently, albeit quickly, build up the learning society" [Półturzycki 1999: 23]. Changes in educational systems and approaches will be due to three major factors: the emergence of the information society, the economic globalization process, and the advances in science and technology [Półturzycki 1999: 23].

Closer linkage between industry and academia, attuned with robust growth of occupational training, is also highlighted by R. Pachociński: "University authorities are no longer alone in heading their institutions, as an increasingly pivotal role is played by governments, businesses, and trade unions. An important trend initiated in the 1990s was for higher education programs to become less academic and more occupational in nature [...] a university curriculum is supposed to train students for increasingly complex jobs. [...] Both students and employers demand that study programs be tailored to specific workplace requirements. The proliferation of professionally-oriented higher education programs has gone hand in hand with another global trend in higher education – that for tighter coupling between higher education and industry. More and more industrial actors want to see job-specific skills taught at universities. [...] The relationships between industry and higher education are becoming central to the higher education sector and are perceived amongst major challenges it has to face" [Pachociński 2004: 13-14].

As far as internal functions are concerned, the socialization function is one that deserves a more extensive treatment. In D. Hejwosz's phrasing, there are four levels at which this function is fulfilled:

– democratization – "In this context, university is where *citizens* are *forged* who will advocate democratic values, who will be tolerant, open to change, free from prejudice and resistant to stereotypes that could undermine the existing social order" [Hejwosz 2010: 80],

– preparation for a professional career or social mission – "universities not only prepare individuals to cope in the labor market but also inculcate basic moral and ethical values." [Hejwosz 2010: 80],

– building a society's elite – "educates future members of social elite to lead institutions and public opinion, at the same time providing them with requisite skills to adopt the lifestyle of high society" [Hejwosz 2010: 80],

– formation of scholarly men – "university is were researchers – *men of science* – are *forged* to ensure the continuity of our civilization's culture", which implies equipping prospective truth seekers with the methodological tools they need [Hejwosz 2010: 80].

Nevertheless, in an environment molded by neoliberal thinking and hence characterized by a growing emphasis on preparation for job market entry, the pedagogical-formative and the socialization functions of universities seem to be on the decline.

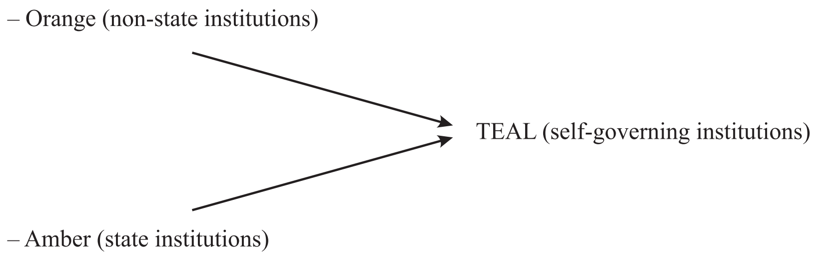

Figure 2. Organizational changes in contemporary higher education institutions

Source: own based on Laloux 2015: 50-51.

F. Laloux perceives contemporary universities as organizations and looks at their functions from the perspective of organizational management. Having investigated the trend of changes in various organizations, he proposed a model that all kinds of modern organizations are, or should be, moving toward. Acknowledging significant differences between state and non-state institutions of higher education, he places state institutions among what he terms as Amber Organizations, while non-state institutions are classified as Orange Organizations. The distinction between Amber and Orange notwithstanding, it is Teal Organizations that Laloux sees as living organisms embodying A. Maslow's needs hierarchy theory – founded on self-management and striving for self-development of individuals supported by coaches [Laloux 2015: 51, 71-174]. Thus the ongoing changes in education, as well as in other sectors, appear to have a similar trajectory, which is illustrated in Fig. 2.

In discussing the current trends in higher education and the functions performed by higher education institutions, it should be pointed out that, over the centuries past, we have seen multiple changes in both the internal and the external functions of university. Although, in K. Jaskot's view, changes in the internal functions take more time to happen and are geared to contribute to students' personal development, the two recent decades have been marked by significant changes in the external functions as well.

2. The rationale for changes in the functions of university

In a knowledge-based economy, training an individual for a professional career involves education for entrepreneurship, the use of modern technology (the Lisbon Agenda, Knowledge-based Economy, R&D), and the development

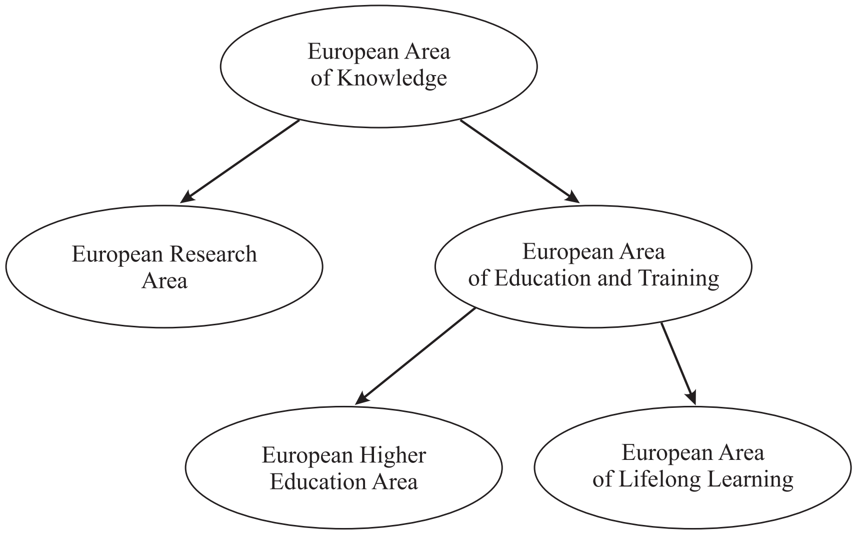

Figure 3. Policy objectives under the Lisbon Strategy

Source: Mazińska 2004: 12.

of skills sought by employers in the EU job market. At the same time, A. Stecyk highlights the role of knowledge in the information society: "The 21st century is the age of information that has been recognized as a key factor of social and economic growth and that, alongside classical factors of production such as land, capital and labor, has become the driver of civilization advances" [Stecyk 2013: 15] Both knowledge and information therefore emerge as essential to building Europe's competitive edge. "EU membership calls for a broader and more active participation of Poland's education sector in common European policy initiatives for transforming the existing education and training systems toward a common European area of knowledge [...]" [Mazińska 2004: 12] that will be made up of four components (Fig. 3).

In the wake of the Lisbon Agenda was developed – and adopted on June 14, 2002 – a joint work program on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe, detailing the activities focused on accomplishing the following general and specific strategic goals:

"Strategic objective 1: **Improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the EU** in order to cater to the needs of the knowledge society and accommodate the evolving content and methods of teaching and learning:

Objective 1.1 – Improving education and training for teachers and trainers

Objective 1.2 – Developing skills for the knowledge society
Objective 1.3 – Ensuring access to ICT for everyone
Objective 1.4 – Increasing recruitment to scientific and technical studies
Objective 1.5 – Making the best use of resources

Strategic objective 2: **Facilitating the access of all to education and training systems** in line with the idea of lifelong learning and in an effort to boost the chances of finding permanent employment, to increase professional development opportunities, and to promote active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion:

Objective 2.1 – Open learning environment
Objective 2.2 – Making learning more attractive
Objective 2.3 – Supporting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion

Strategic objective 3: **Opening up education and training systems to the wider world** in light of the necessity to better adapt education to the requirements of today's workplace and the needs of society at large as well as to meet the challenges of globalization:

Objective 3.1 – Strengthening the links with working life and research, and society at large
Objective 3.2 – Developing the spirit of enterprise
Objective 3.3 – Improving foreign language learning
Objective 3.4 – Increasing mobility and exchange
Objective 3.5 – Strengthening European co-operation" [Bednarczyk, Gawlik, Kupidura 2005: 60].

Neoliberal ideology compels higher education institutions to equip their students with prerequisites for specific jobs, to adjust to employers' expectations, and to develop their students' confidence in their utility as workforce based on their expertise, skills and, last but not least, social competences – formerly known as soft skills and defined as "skills, abilities, personality traits, attitudes and behaviors rather than formal or technical proficiency" [Woźniak 2009: 45]. An inability to upgrade one's competences through lifelong learning either gives the employer grounds for dismissal or (at best) may lead to an employee's resignation. From a neoliberal perspective, it is highly desirable that employees be able to realize their uselessness for the company and hand in their notice of their own accord.

Another determinant of change in higher education institutions is the accelerating progress in ICTs and other modern technologies. Today university students, being university's major stakeholders, are people who live and work tied to their laptops, tablets, e-books, smartphones, etc., and stay connected all the time. Clearly, the instructional process must take account of the needs and expectations of educational service customers of all ages and nationalities (programs such as Erasmus plus, Mundus, Tempus, etc.). University facilities need to change, too.

There are more and more classrooms furnished with multimedia and interactive whiteboards that not only make the study experience more attractive but also have a positive effect on integration among student groups and on interaction between the teacher and the students.

An even more important driver of change in universities is the postmodern era characterized by variability, fluctuation and volatility. “we are all transiting into a world that is, in a sense, *prefabricated*; a world where some things are essential while other things are less so or do not matter at all; a world where the existing measures for value and urgency make some things stand out and come into our view while other things are moved out of sight and out of mind; more than anything else, however, it is a world where a vast multitude of facts and objects are obvious enough to wholly escape our attention – we do not even need to call these facts or objects by the name to make sure that they are present and that they continue, as they have done ever before, to bestow upon this world this type of firmness and solidity that we have learned to call reality” [Bauman 2000: 19]. In a world where change is the only thing that can be considered permanent, university degree holders should be aware of the impermanence of their knowledge as well as of all sorts of skills and competences. Employees, on the other hand, should be committed to different forms of lifelong learning. They must be also ready to retrain or relocate if necessary, and perceive any out-of-work periods not as unemployment but as being “between jobs” – looking for another job or occupation or contemplating a business start-up. It is increasingly common among young people to choose to take a gap year, i.e. discontinue education or professional activity in order to take a break and think things over, and then restart with a new outlook on their careers or educational paths, possibly modifying their original choices [Sobczak 2014: 30].

3. Student-centered implications of changes in the functions of university

Changes in the functions of university have a substantial impact on the benefits delivered to students as well as on the difficulties encountered by learners. Concerning the internal functions, the benefits for educational services customers include the following:

– training for professions that are in demand in the job market and the economy – implementations in industry and the latest technologies,

– acquisition of hands-on and research skills,

– developing entrepreneurial attitudes and competencies,

– making up for educational deficiencies (in knowledge, skills and social competences) carried over from earlier stages of schooling.

The first-cycle (Bachelor's) degree is supposed to enable an individual to enter the job market and seek employment (or choose to be self-employed). Hence education for entrepreneurship becomes a must, and students need to be provided with both hard (technical, job- or area-specific) skills and soft skills, the latter being perceived as increasingly important by employers themselves. The 2011 amendment to the Law on Higher Education[1] imposed an obligation on higher educations institutions to include a work placement as part of every curriculum that is designated as practical-profile. At the same time, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education launched the *Study Hands-on*[2] program that mandates higher education institutions to team up with employers in creating opportunities for students to acquire hands-on skills and experience, alongside social competencies that are relevant to specific jobs, as part of their university education in all practical-profile programs. Research competencies, on the other hand, associated with second-cycle (Master's) degree programs and the Humboldtian model of university, allow graduates to seek employment in institutions of higher learning, research institutes, industry, and in the ever growing technology sector. It should be noted at the same time that the number of second-cycle degree holders continues to increase. An example of successful industry-academia cooperation in curriculum design can be found in the experiences of the University of Wroclaw [Uniwersytet Wrocławski) that has been pursuing, since 2014, a joint project aiming at "institutional alignment of the University's curriculum to the needs and expectations of the job market and the establishment of lasting links with employers" [Strategic Project Charter 2014].

Entrepreneurial competences, associated with the development of key competencies at each stage of education (competencies critical to lifelong learning), are particularly relevant in the higher education context. Job market entry involves the knowledge and understanding of business as much as an entrepreneurial attitude. In university settings, emphasis placed by an enterprise-oriented institution of higher education on developing entrepreneurial competences may be beneficial to employers as well as to alumni.

With the long-predicted demographic low [Kwiek 2016: 110] just round the bend, the compensatory function of university can be expected to expand gradually. As candidates increasingly differ in that they come from largely different

[1] Ustawa z dnia 18 marca 2011 r. o zmianie ustawy – Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym, ustawy o stopniach naukowych i tytule naukowym oraz o stopniach i tytule w zakresie sztuki, Dz.U. nr 84, poz. 455 [Amendment Act of March 18, 2011 to the Law on Higher Education, and to Act on the Academic Title and Academic Degrees. Journal of Laws 2011 No. 84, item 455].

[2] www.nauka.gov.pl/praktyki/ [accessed 27.08.2015].

learning environments, bringing with them not only very different learning habits but also very different levels of knowledge, skills and competencies, teachers will face more challenges in assessing their progress and will need to put more effort in fostering their further development and compensating for deficiencies that hamper the pursuit of course learning outcomes.

It should be pointed out that the educational function and the developmental support function can be deployed by furthering the activity of student societies, academic career centers and business incubators, as well as through the availability of a rich variety of elective courses at the university department level. These enable students to develop just the competencies that they truly wish to work on.

As far as the external functions are concerned, the following student benefits for students will play an increasingly important role:

– expanding employment opportunities for graduates seeking jobs in the region or in the European Higher Education Area,

– more focus on developing language skills and soft skills.

Higher education institutions and employers will thus work closely together in designing practical-profile curricula focused on developing specific professional skills and qualifications and aiming to form a graduate who will be capable of making the most of the opportunity to find employment as a result of a work placement. The question that remains unanswered is that of developing such skills as critical thinking, making inferences or formulating independent opinions – precisely those competences on which universities have anchored their reputation and that have traditionally been inscribed in their mission. We should therefore address the doubts raised by some about whether employability can really be seen as the blueprint for the design of first-cycle degree programs while all the other competences will only be taught in second-cycle programs. "There is one more good reason to fear the perils inherent in the belief that that education, particularly in academic settings, should be adapted to the requirements of the job market. The word *adapt* itself denotes a departure from the conception of university as the cornerstone of critical thinking. If we, instead, start thinking in terms of adaptation, university is represented as an institution that merely produces (insufficiently qualified or unqualified) workforce – the kind of individuals who are referred to by some as cognitarians – and appears to be not much more than an in-house training center offering education in narrow areas of specialization wanted by employers; who are all the same unsatisfied with the qualifications of applicants" [Czerepniak-Walczak 2013: 38]. With tough competition in the labor market, employers themselves begin to realize – which is reflected in studies conducted under the *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe* project [Fundacja Rozwoju Systemu Edukacji 2008] – that more value should be placed on the so called universal skills that enable employees to quickly retrain for other jobs. Hence, it makes just as much sense now as ever before to ask whether higher education institutions ought to merely train professionals employable in the EU job market or, rather, strive to shape reflective, critical and independent thinkers spawning new insights into their fields of expertise.

Beyond any doubt, Poland's EU accession and its involvement in the implementation of the Bologna Process has led to a stronger emphasis on developing the language skills of higher education students. Ample opportunities to go through part of the education process outside the home country account for increased exposure to other cultures, customs and traditions that makes it a lot easier to appreciate "otherness" and quickly build up relevant social competencies [Wiśniewska 2013: 163-171]. Studying with and among people of other nationalities allows students to develop an ability to work in a multi-cultural team and overcome stereotypes resulting in prejudice toward "the Other". For a higher education institution, on the other hand, this stands for access to generous funding for their English Divisions, student or alumni mobility programs, and staff exchange schemes.

By way of summary, it should be accentuated that higher education institutions operating in the European Higher Education Area do attempt to pursue visions and missions involving a variety of external and internal functions that obviously benefit their students and other stakeholders. It is not so clear, however, how to address some of the difficulties that have been identified among the implications arising from EU membership for higher education degree holders.

Changes in the functions of university occurring in the contemporary education context are attributable to the impact of diverse factors. One of these is definitely the transition from the Humboldtian toward the entrepreneurial model of university. Those graduating from the latter are expected to be, in the first place, effective and independent learners. Further, research skills have been deemphasized in favor of technical and social competences relevant to specific professions. Is this trend going to continue under the amended Law on Higher Education? This is soon to be ascertained.

As a result of the higher education reforms implementing the Lisbon Strategy and the Bologna Process, a university graduate has become eligible for continued education throughout Europe and can move freely between countries owing to the adoption of the European Credit Transfer System as a common standard for comparing and recognizing their previous study attainment and performance. It comes as no surprise then that more and more students declare an intent to seek employment outside their home country. At the same time, we have seen a marked increase in the number of students taking out higher education programs in Poland. In contemplating follow-up changes in legislation, priority should be given to enhancing employability and creating job openings for prospective university alumni. The success stories of industry-academia cooperation in curriculum design have definitely increased opportunities, yet the questions arises whether this actually should be the primary mechanism in place to facilitate university graduates' access to the rapidly evolving job market. The unfavorable demographic forecasts for Poland [Kwiek 2016: 110] might in fact force universities to focus on their science and research rather than educational and pedagogical-formative functions, thus reverting to the traditional W. Humboldt idea of university.

The supremacy of the educational and pedagogical-formative functions has effectively led higher education institutions to center the education process on student and employer expectations vis-à-vis learning outcomes, i.e. their knowledge, skills, and social competences. The entrepreneurial model sensitizes universities to the needs of their internal and external stakeholders, compelling them to respond to market requirements both in terms of teaching and research priorities. In effect, universities tend to abandon their pedagogical-formative function, instead concentrating on other internal functions. However, to be able to develop and fully realize their potentials, students need to be competent socially as much as professionally. Being deficient in social skills, many graduates feel inadequate in the labor market, seeing an increasing number of employers look for interpersonal skills in job applicants. Hence, there is still a lot to be done regarding the way this function is performed by higher education establishments.

Conclusion

The dynamic changes in the socio-economic environment associated with the 21st century civilization advances and the accelerating globalization have caused all higher education institutions – whether a full-fledged or a vocational university, public or private – to evolve toward the ideal of entrepreneurial university. Efforts directed at building the Europe of Knowledge and the knowledge-based economy involve human and intellectual capital to create the most competitive European Higher Education Area where cooperation between academic institutions and industrial enterprises or the SME sector would come as a matter of course.

Poland's EU accession and the ensuing embracement of the Bologna Process have resulted in the harmonization of educational structures and enhanced development opportunities for university stakeholders: students, graduates, research staff, and administrative staff. Importantly enough, the tuning took place simultaneously at the higher education level and at other levels of formal education. Increased autonomy of faculties and departments, on the other hand, has made it easier for universities to raise funds through cooperation with different industries and sectors of the economy. What seems to be crucial in the context of this discussion is, however, that most benefits are reaped by higher education students and alumni.

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Funkcje szkoły wyższej w gospodarce opartej na wiedzy i ich konsekwencje dla studiujących

Streszczenie. *Edukacja na uczelniach pod wpływem działania ideologii neoliberalnej oraz realizacji Procesu Bolońskiego podlega nieustannym zmianom. Nacisk na zatrudnialność absolwentów w Europejskim Obszarze Szkolnictwa Wyższego, przygotowanie do wejścia na rynek pracy już po ukończeniu studiów pierwszego stopnia, konkurencyjność uczelni i ich przedsiębiorczość to tylko niektóre z przemian edukacji w szkolnictwie wyższym w Polsce towarzyszące nam od dziesięcioleci. Dlatego też coraz bardziej istotne wydają się odpowiedzi na pytania: jak zmieniają się funkcje szkoły wyższej? Jakie czynniki determinują zmiany w uczelniach w Polsce? Jakie konsekwencje dla studentów wynikają ze zmieniających się funkcji szkoły wyższej?*

Słowa kluczowe: *funkcje szkoły wyższej, Europa wiedzy, gospodarka oparta na wiedzy, interesariusze uczelni*

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Positioning as a Strategy-Making Tool in Higher Education

Abstract. *Positioning may be considered as a complementary marketing tool that can assist managers in formulating growth strategies. The paper consists of several sections, dealing with: current diagnosis (meta-analysis) – broken down into competitive (direct), regional (intermediate) and localization (mixed) positioning – and prospective diagnosis including SWOT analysis, the BCG matrix, Porter's 5 Forces analysis, Pareto analysis, the Product Life Cycle analysis, and the Ansoff Matrix. The paper also outlines the application of positioning to the strategy making process in a higher education institution.*

Keywords: *positioning, development strategy, diagnosis, conceptualization*

Introduction

The use of information technology to accelerate the transformation of data into information reduces risk involved in decisions made by managers. The quality of information available to managers bears on a company's success as indicated by its earnings. "Any organization in which marketing is either absent or incidental is not a business and should never be run as if it were one" [Drucker 1954: 28]. Positioning [Kisielinicki, Turyna 2012: 27] consists in identifying the initial position, determining the target position, analyzing the opportunities and threats, and ranking the businesses operating in a given sector or industry or in its environment. Analyzing one's position in a market entails determining the ways this position can be maintained over long term [Kącik 2011: 23].

This paper aims to describe several distinct forms of positioning used in marketing. Practical examples of its application are set in the context of developing strategic concepts by higher education institutions. The ideas presented in the paper can be employed in the teaching process as cases studies to support hypothesizing, formulating research problems and attempting strategic conceptualizations.

This discussion of positioning does not in any way pertain to the process whereby internet search engines position specific websites and, on entering certain codes and keywords, make it possible to find a business on the internet [Kobis 2008: 15].

1. What is positioning

Positioning brings the scientific method into building credible strategic concepts by deploying analytics to identify the position of a business within a sector or industry or in its environment [Krzyżanowski 1999: 159]. The analysis results in placing the object being investigated across a variety of rankings. It can be assumed that the position thus determined represents a certain indefinite value arising from the relationships between the business and its stakeholders. It is not a real entity but a conceptual category or an abstract that, albeit nonexistent, can be regarded as a thing. Positioning is about visualizing the effects of processes taking place in an organization. It traces the outcomes of actions geared to attaining desired targets and deriving tangible benefits from prior investments. All the time, from the moment the decision is made to start up a business, throughout the period services are delivered or goods manufactured, until the business is wound up, processes are underway that are reflected in its position vis-à-vis competitors. As the position changes over the years, it can be repeatedly examined, and the findings can be related to developments in the environment impacting on the financial condition of the business and used to leverage the knowledge, intuition and experience of decision makers.

The concept of business positioning is underpinned by philosophical ideas and could be construed in different terms, viz.:

– in ontological terms [Honderich (ed.), 1999: Vol. 2, 655], i.e. by addressing such issues as: what does exist and what does not, what is it that exists, and how does it exist what exists? As far as positioning is concerned, the questions to be answered are as follows: what does it communicate toward the environment, what role does it play in building a brand or reputation, how can it be used to measure performance, and what effect does the position of a higher education institution have on raising specific forms of capital?

– in epistemological terms [Honderich (ed.), 1999: Vol. 1, 193], i.e. by looking at those properties that are relevant to the research being carried out. When it comes to positioning, questions will elicit feedback on how the position of a business affects its stakeholders' behaviors, how the position alters the way the stakeholders perceive the business in its environment, and how changes in the position influence the structure of its relationships.

– in axiological terms [Encyklopedia popularna 1998], where cognition is made possible owing to the use of subjective perceptions and a priori categories available in the human mind. It can be therefore considered sound to investigate phenomena in the surrounding reality and to analyze and synthesize the findings in an effort to obtain a prospective diagnosis that would point to alternative problem solutions or options for enhancing effectiveness.

Positioning can be seen as a philosophy of sorts, committed to analyzing marketing relations1 from various perspectives. What informs the adoption of the most adequate positioning method is "the choice of the best source of information based on clear-cut selection criteria" [Georg, Kalińska-Kula 2014: 39].

2. Current diagnosis[2] (meta-analysis)

Current diagnosis is most often based on data sourced from balance sheets and other financial reports, official statistics, professional journals, government institutions, and constitutes a critical step in the process of segmentation [Mc Donald, Dunbar 2003: 60]. It is mostly composed of reports, maps, charts, graphs, tables, figures, and studies describing an institution's key areas of operation. There are three dimensions to positioning. The first one is called direct positioning and is centered on identifying the position of a business relative to its competitors. The second is referred to as indirect or intermediate and is focused on positioning a region's technical and social infrastructure. The third is termed as localization positioning, since it pulls together information for an overview of phenomena observable in a certain area. It should be noted that it is the business being examined that decides the location – whether it intends to operate within just a poviat [district], throughout a voivodeship [province], or countrywide. When used in

[1] The term "marketing relations" denotes those relations between the business and its stakeholders that arise as a result of sale or purchase transactions.

[2] Due to space limitations, this paper barely touches upon how positioning can be used by higher education institutions in defining a segmentation strategy.

conjunction, these three types of positioning provide insights that can largely help make the right decisions.

Throughout the following sections of the paper, indicators applicable to higher education institutions are employed to demonstrate different approaches to positioning and to hypothesizing on research problems identified. Further, data contained in the tables should be treated as illustrative with regard to the issues being discussed.

Direct positioning involves placing a given characteristic of higher education institution (Q) in its competitive environment through the use of dedicated measures and indicators represented on predefined scales. These can be, for example, bar graphs where a number of institutions are arranged by a single criterion, in ascending or descending order. The resultant ranking list shows the position of institution (Q) relative to other higher education institutions. Overall, an institution's position in the higher education sector will be the outcome of processes described by measures or indices reflecting its structure, the satisfaction of its customers, and its students' learning outcomes. For example, the following indicators could be utilized to roughly estimate the position of an institution in the higher education market:

– the number of Ph.D. degree holders per 100 students,
– the number of Associate Professors per 100 students,
– the number of administrative staff per 1000 students,
– the number of students per 1 square meter of usable floor area,
– the number of volumes available in the library per 1000 students,
– the number of successful Bachelor's thesis defenses per 1000 students,
– the number of successful Master's thesis defenses per 1000 students,
– the number of lecture hours in a year per one student,
– the number of class hours in a year per one student.

Any one of the indicators from the above list can be utilized to assess the current positions of higher education institutions in a given area. This type of positioning is of static nature, since it merely captures the situation that is found at a certain moment.

A higher education institution can also be positioned simultaneously by two criteria. Once each is placed on either axis of a coordinate system, they will mark an arbitrary point showing where institution (Q) is positioned. This point is indicative not so much of relationships between the indicators as of distances between institutions in different configurations. The term "competition" is understood to mean "a situation where participants are pursuing similar goals and, due to rivalry among them, are at the same time making efforts to prevent the rivals from achieving their goals" [Falencikowski 2013: 66].

Indirect positioning is associated with correspondence between higher education curricula and job market requirements. To be able to assess it, one needs to, in the first place, examine the tangible and intangible resources available in the relevant region. Unless such an assessment is made, higher education institutions will not be able to train professionals that are demanded by local businesses. The position of a higher education institution should thus parallel the position of the region where it operates. If a synergistic effect is achieved by combining the position of institution (Q) with that of the region, it can be expected that the overall benefits will be maximized. An example of how positioning can be applied to the resources of a region is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Fields of study vis-à-vis a region's competitive position

Region's place in ranking	Proposed study programs
– Very large percentage of the working population employed in agriculture	– Agricultural Management – Food Processing Industry Management – Organic Food Engineering – Greenhouse Engineering
– Large proportion of forested areas – High quality of waters – Very low population density	– Forestry – Tourism Management and Organization
– Low level of expenditure on environmental protection, as in Polish zloty per capita – Marginal waste disposal by landfilling, in % of total waste produced – Very poor sewage network coverage, as in kilometers per 100 square kilometers	– Project Management – Sustainable Development
– High rate of unemployment	– Set up departments educating for micro-business and enterprise
– High business failure rate	– Offer programs to support the development of new uses of the marketing mix to influence customers

Source: own.

Indirect positioning yields recommendations for attuning the development of higher education institutions with the region's inherent potential. It indicates where information is available on how educational processes cater to the needs of the local community. Table 1 samples the use of positioning in shaping the educational offerings in an area corresponding to a single unit of a country's administrative division.

Localization positioning involves the use of the localization coefficient (W_{lok}) that reflects "a comparison between two percentage values unique to a group of regions; importantly enough, such comparisons can be drawn between any two significant percentages. The researcher can therefore choose to investigate any variable that he or she deems relevant to the issue and to the region being examined [Isard et al. 1965: 17]. The coefficient represents a measure of regional concentration in a given industry relative to a countrywide variable, such as e.g. population, area, employment rate in an industry, or income [Isard et al. 1965: 123]. (W_{lok}) denotes the value that a specific characteristic takes for a given higher education institution in relation to the value it takes throughout a given area. If the coefficient takes the value of "1", it means that the institution exhibits a given characteristic to just the same extent as its environment does; for boosters[3], values above "1" are considered desirable, while values below "1" are unsatisfactory. A number of individual localization coefficients can be aggregated into a synthetic localization coefficient. This process is broken down into the following steps:

Step I. Developing a structure of analytical localization coefficients (cf. Table 2).

Table 2. Sample formulas for localization coefficients

Analytical localization coefficient	Formula
A.loc.coeff.1	Number of students in university schools of business in poviat "X"
A.loc.coeff.2	Number of Ph.D. degree holders in university schools of business in poviat "X"
A.loc.coeff.3	Number of Associate Professors in university schools of business in poviat "X"
A.loc.coeff.4	Number of all employees in university schools of business in poviat "X"

Source: own.

Step II. Designing the structure of the synthetic localization coefficient (the arithmetic mean is used in the example), as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Sample formula for the calculation of a synthetic localization coefficient

Synthetic localization coefficient	Formula for the calculation of the synthetic localization coefficient
S.loc.coeff	$\frac{(\text{A.lok.coeff.1}) + (\text{A.loc.coeff.2}) + (\text{A.loc.coeff.3}) + (\text{A.loc.coeff.4})}{4}$

Source: own.

[3] With inhibitor variables, it is the reverse.

Step III. Positioning of the synthetic localization coefficient for specific poviats [districts] in voivodeship [province] "X" (column 6), as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Selected localization coefficients for higher education institutions based in specific poviats across voivodeship "X"

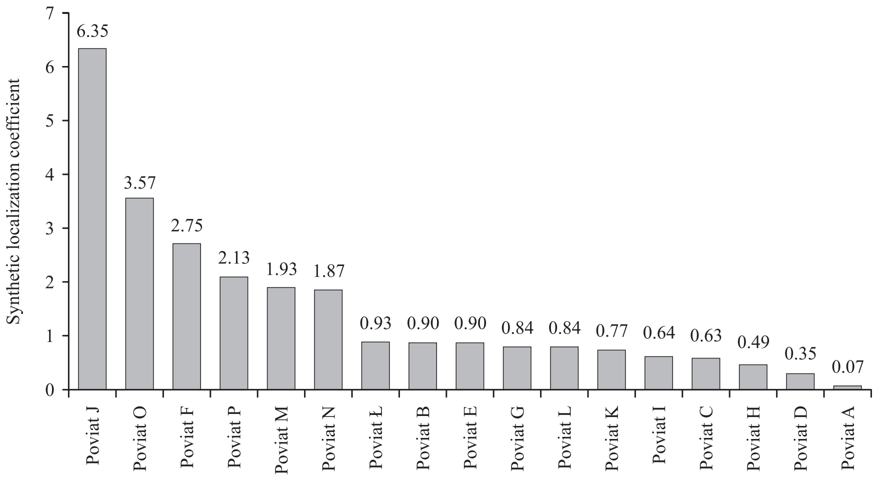
Specification	A.loc.coeff.1	A.loc.coeff.2	A.loc.coeff.3	A.loc.coeff.4	Synthetic localization coefficient
1	2	3	4	5	6
Poviat A	0.05	0.11	0.07	0.04	0.07
Poviat B	0.96	1.14	1.02	0.50	0.90
Poviat C	1.13	0.57	0.24	0.57	0.63
Poviat D	0.38	0.43	0.42	0.16	0.35
Poviat E	1.39	0.76	0.59	0.87	0.90
Poviat F	5.24	1.86	1.69	2.20	2.75
Poviat G	1.42	0.41	0.67	0.85	0.84
Poviat H	0.58	0.53	0.53	0.33	0.49
Poviat I	0.91	0.55	0.48	0.64	0.64
Poviat J	7.12	6.90	5.74	5.64	6.35
Poviat K	1.17	0.45	0.66	0.80	0.77
Poviat L	1.45	0.21	0.55	1.16	0.84
Poviat Ł	1.40	1.03	0.52	0.78	0.93
Poviat M	2.71	1.85	1.24	1.91	1.93
Poviat N	2.83	1.10	1.64	1.91	1.87
Poviat O	6.12	2.46	2.26	3.45	3.57
Poviat P	3.33	1.60	1.47	2.11	2.13

Source: own.

Step IV. The arrangement of the synthetic localization coefficients reflects the characteristics of educational institutions in specific poviats across voivodeship "X" in the context of the region's development, as depicted in Chart 1.

Values found in columns 2, 3, 4, and 5 of Table 4 can be arranged likewise, thus producing a synthetic localization coefficient for a given category (localization positioning is primarily focused on comparing two percentage values relating to this same indicator; however, running a comprehensive analysis in

Chart 1. Ranking of localization coefficients for voivodeship “X”



Source: own.

line with the quoted definition entails comparisons between several different percentages).

3. Conceptualization of the positioning process

All the three types of positioning are based on quantitative data and result in rankings, making it possible to draw lots of comparisons. If a maximum value, minimum value, arithmetic mean, median, mode, norm, or a theoretical model, is adopted as the reference point and assigned the value of 100%, any relevant indicator of one’s choice can be represented in relation to it, and a percentage distance can be established. The deviations identified can be further investigated in the context of prior decisions, since whatever disproportions are found, regardless of whether they are represented as absolute values or percentages, they are indicative of the quality of the relationships between the institution and its stakeholders. A conceptualization of the positioning process will address the steps that need to be taken in order to reach the desired target, or at least a satisfactory outcome. It is aimed at enhancing the accuracy of findings, so they can be, once properly arranged, used in developing strategic concepts. In the example provided, the positions that the institutions occupy in different rankings are the starting point for diagnosing the causes of both successes and failures. An insight into the region’s position informs the development of new study programs and facilitates cooperation with local businesses. The calculation of localization coefficients helps research the local market by applying several criteria. It is therefore easy to see that one of the most greatest benefits of marketing research is that it can facilitate the definition of the problem to be solved [Churchill 2002: 99]. As a result of conceptualization, a sequence of comparisons can be made and questions can be articulated to identify research problems:

– Which decisions have led the institution “X” to come first / last in the rankings?

– What is it that makes enrolment grow so rapidly / slowly?

– What are students’ motivations for taking out specific higher education programs?

– How to best exploit the region’s resources to improve the institution’s competitive position?

– What study programs can be offered in a given region?

– What measures were taken to gain a competitive advantage in the sector or in the environment?

– What changes should be made to the curricula in order to reduce the unemployment rate among higher education graduates?

– Should the same criteria continue to be applied in designing educational processes, or should new models and patterns be sought?

– How to adjust the curricula to the requirements of local economy?

Addressing the questions involves hypothesizing to delineate the search and provide a theoretical background for subsequent explanations [Pranulis 2007: 65].

Looking at an institution’s place in the rankings and the surrounding economic, social and political situation, we can hypothesize that there is no relationship between the course offerings and the demand for trained professionals:

The region’s economy is stagnant, hence the local businesses are uninterested in furthering links with higher education institutions and their alumni.

Under different assumptions, though, we can form an alternative hypothesis that sends us to what the researcher truly intends to inquire about, that is, any interdependencies that could be exploited toward improving the institution’s position:

The region’s economy is stagnant, hence the local businesses are interested in furthering links with higher education institutions and their alumni.

The hypotheses will be tested through specially designed qualitative analyses of sociological, phenomenological, hermeneutical and psychological character.

In summary, current diagnosis is preoccupied with determining the position of an object in its competitive environment and hypothesizing about it. Hypotheses can be based on distances between the actual and the reference values of relevant indicators. They are then tested through a variety of analyses in order to discover the causes of existing problems. In attempting to discover these, one acquires knowledge that can help avoid making similar errors in the future. Information obtained through current diagnosis can be interpreted as symptoms of both favorable and adverse developments that have led the higher education institution to find itself in its current situation.

4. Prospective diagnosis

Prospective diagnosis is a study that seeks to “indicate major issues concerning growth prospects as well as opportunities and threats to continued prosperity” [Zarząd Województwa Kujawsko-Pomorskiego 1999: 6]. It should be objective in that it puts forth viable development concepts on which an institution’s strategy could be built. “Prospective diagnosis highlights those factors and processes that are at work now but will affect future outcomes. In assessing the current state, one can take a selective, a qualitative or a dynamic approach. The selective approach differentiates between issues considered pivotal to future growth and applies a different treatment to each. The qualitative approach expresses relativism toward facts and processes in terms of their social impact and the attitudes in the society stemming from the extent to which the population’s needs, expectation and aspirations are met. The dynamic approach takes account of the pace of changes and the volatility of the interrelationships found in the current state” [Wysocka, Koziński 2000: 53]. Prospective diagnosis is used in devising plans on how to improve the current position. When contemplating and selecting the best options among possible courses of action, judgments are made primarily on economic grounds. Prospective diagnosis is focused on accomplishing the targets or outcomes that have been envisioned and programmed. These targets or outcomes emerge from analyses performed in determining strategic positions:

– SWOT analysis affords clues on how to make the most of one’s strengths and take best advantage of the opportunities arising;

– the BCG matrix shows how to continue making profits on the manufacture of goods or the provision of services for a maximum length of time;

– Porter’s 5 Forces analysis gives recommendations on how to manage relationships with customers and suppliers in the context of competitors’ behaviors related to new products and substitute goods;

– Pareto analysis singles out the profitable customers;

– the Ansoff Matrix helps select the right market and the right product to conquer the market;

– the Product Life Cycle analysis supports the generation of development concepts.

Performing a prospective diagnosis involves the operationalization of targets. This research approach strives to lay down definitions and time frames for projects to be implemented. In the process, abstract notions concerning the object are translated into concrete indicators and variables. They are thus made empirically meaningful and hence verifiable via real processes where they can be measured and observed.

Prospective diagnosis can be designated as a process supporting the functions of planning, organization and control. Its outcomes are instrumental to resolving those issues in an entity's operations that are central to its sustainability and growth.

Conclusion

A business entity's position in its competitive environment "will determine the group that its services fall into. Product or service customization means, on the one hand, that customers' needs are better satisfied but, on the other, that the costs and the prices are higher and thus might not be affordable" [Boguszewicz--Kreft 2009: 26]. Positioning will set strategic goals associated with establishing, maintaining and severing relationships with stakeholders. For a higher education institution, these include former and existing students, business organizations, government administration and, last but not least, local communities that expect it to fulfill its mission of training professionals for specific industries. When tailored to labor market requirements, educational processes can effectively prevent unemployment among higher educations graduates and support the region's sustainable development. University authorities will find easier to design relevant study programs once they have accurately identified their institution's market position as well as the characteristics of the region in which they operate.

It could be therefore summarized that the three types of positioning described in the paper, along with the methodology for current or prospective diagnosis, represent an attempt at inscribing these into the paradigm of marketing activities.

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Pozycjonowanie marketingowe instrumentem tworzenia strategii szkół wyższych

Streszczenie. *Pozycjonowanie można uważać za dodatkowy instrument marketingowy, który umożliwia tworzenie strategii rozwoju. Artykuł został podzielony na części: diagnoza stanu (metaanaliza), składająca się z pozycjonowania konkurencyjnego (bezpośredniego), regionalnego (pośredniego) i lokalizacyjnego (mieszanego), oraz diagnoza prospektywna, w której wyróżniono analizę SWOT, BCG, 5 sił Portera, Pareto, cyklu życia produktu i Ansoffa. Został przedstawiony także sposób zastosowania pozycjonowania w procesie budowy strategii rozwoju szkoły wyższej.*

Słowa kluczowe: *pozycjonowanie, strategia rozwoju, diagnoza, konceptualizacja*

Consumers in the Higher Education Market

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Students' Self-Development Needs and Higher Institutions' Ability to Satisfy Them

Abstract. *For young people, the years spent at university are a time of rapid growth, in terms of their professional career as well as, or in the first place, in terms of planning and pursuing their personal development. Students' self-development activities reflect, on the one hand, their interests and, on the other, their preferred lifestyles. Based on the findings of a survey of self-development activities pursued by students of three Wrocław-based universities, the paper outlines the principal areas of their personal development needs. Further, it identifies the categories of needs that are satisfied through formal education, and those that are realized outside of formal education. What can be observed in this context is that higher education institutions are just one of the environments where self-development is sought, and not necessarily the most important one. However, a better awareness of their students' needs could enable universities to create more favorable conditions and, as a result, become a more attractive environment for their students.*

Keywords: *self-development, student, self-development activity, higher education institution*

Introduction

In Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, self-development (or personal development) is placed among higher-level needs, while basic, physiological needs are found at the bottom. The top-level needs are associated with self-actualization, including e.g. the pursuit of self-development and self-fulfillment, the quest for the meaning of life or the desire to make one's life meaningful. Self-actualization is what Maslow saw as the highest and most important motivation for growth and at the same time a regulatory mechanism for the human psyche. As a later extension to his theory, he added cognitive (knowledge and understanding) and aesthetic needs that are supposed to broadly support personal growth as well as the satisfaction of other types of needs [Maslow 1954]. Step by step, Maslow moved away from the rigid hierarchy of needs toward a qualitative distinction into just two groups, or classes, of needs. One of those encompasses basic needs relating to natural deficiencies arising as a result of human evolution and activity (physiological needs, safety, security, etc.), while the other comprises needs directed toward growth and "being" (love and belonging, esteem, self-actualization, alongside cognitive and aesthetic needs). Albeit interlinked with "being" needs, basic needs are not a precondition for personal growth, yet their satisfaction triggers the emergence of higher-level needs (i.e. those that motivate humans to seek growth and self-fulfillment). Maslow believed that both groups of needs stemmed from the very human nature [Zbróg 2011: 24]. So understood, self-actualization is a natural process expressing a tendency that is inherent in every human. Insofar as the notion of self-actualization is germane to the humanist concept of the human being, the need for self-development[1] is widely recognized by different schools of psychology [cf. Pietrasiński 1992; Dudzikowa 1993; Matwijów 1994; Jankowski 1999; Pawlak 2009], since the more or less conscious strife to steer one's development is a key mechanism governing the growth and development of individuals.

Under a definition provided by Zbigniew Pietrasiński, self-development denotes a process whereby individuals control their personal growth trajectories, even if the degree of control may vary. This same author uses the alternative terms of self-creation and co-formation, thus emphasizing the incompleteness or fragmentariness of control that humans typically exercise over their personal growth. The process includes intentional, premeditated behaviors focused on self-development alongside spontaneous activities addressing other goals and areas but having developmental side-effects. Pietrasiński links self-creation with self-consciousness, self-reflection, and an ability to set and attain objectives in order to build one's life story around them [Pietrasiński 1992: 79-82; 1997: 385-395]. The varying degree of intentionality in self-formative behaviors is also highlighted by J. Pawlak who points out that such behaviors may have direct

[1] A variety of terms are used in relevant literature to refer to the personal development process, such as e.g. self-development, self-fulfillment, self-realization, self-creation, self-education, self-learning. Given the existing terminological diversity and the space limitations imposed on this paper, the author chooses to adhere to the term "self-development" in most cases, for it is not only the broadest one, embracing the totality of processes whereby individuals develop and realize their potentials, but also one unrelated to any specific concept of the human being. The other terms, however, will be occasionally used as alternatives throughout the paper.

or indirect impact. At the same time, the process is long-term, spanning a lifetime and traversing a number of growth areas [Pawlak 2009: 14]. Personal growth may therefore involve the development of personality traits, the acquisition of new competencies, an attitude change, or the procurement of resources enabling individuals to exploit new opportunities and potentials toward meeting their growth needs, in line with predefined future goals.

It has to be observed that the life-long process of human growth reaches peak intensity in the period of adolescence. It is as humans approach maturity that their cognitive processes flourish, allowing young people to fully develop an ability to set objectives and plan for the future, initially just short-term but, over time, also medium- to long-term [Schaffer 2007: 182-214]. The process is spurred by the expectations of society concerning the choice of educational path and professional career, which translates into developmental objectives to be met [Przetacznik--Gierowska, Tyszkowa (eds.) 2000: Vol. 1, 69-70]. Likewise, commitment to self-development can be driven by social and cultural factors. As educational paths become longer and the number of degree seekers increases, more and more youth take control of their own development. The trend is best visible in individuals transiting from adolescence to early adulthood, who are at the same time prospective or actual higher education students. At that stage in life, accelerating cognitive advances will already have taken most individuals to a point where they are capable of making decisions for themselves, predicting and planning future developments, designing their actions in compliance with their value systems, and evaluating their own behaviors. Longer time spent in education bears primarily on professional development, but also, albeit secondarily, on personal and social development. University study alone presents an opportunity to test one's life choices. Simultaneously, many of the educational and non-educational objectives that are intrinsic to university settings will face young individuals with choices and decisions about their leisure activities, interests and passions, friendships, lifestyle, as well as dreams and ambitions to pursue. The university time is therefore just as conducive to young people's professional development as to defining and developing their unique self-identities and shaping their personal futures.

The personal development process becomes pivotal in the context of demands that post-modernity puts on young people. In post-modern reality, characterized by volatility, multi-contextuality and ambiguity, inevitable social and cultural changes force individuals and societies to constantly evolve and recreate themselves. In this context, what young people are most importantly expected to do is continually reshape and adapt themselves [cf. Beck, Giddens, Lash 1994]. Contemporary humans are compelled to evolve and transform and to create biographical narratives of their own. Anthony Giddens observes that it is by shaping ourselves and planning our personal growth that we can really control our lives, which he sees as a salient characteristic of the late modern age [Giddens 1991].

It is a world where the urge to develop one's self has new implications and is of great consequence. In other words, the evolution of post-modern society seems to have become a major driver of individual growth.

Arguably, when considering the social and cultural pressures of post-modern society and their implications for the personal development of young individuals, attention should be centered on the university years and the growth factors that are at work there. The following section of the paper employs the findings of a survey to describe the self-development needs of students of three Wrocław-based universities. Subsequently, an attempt is made to delineate the potential and resources that higher education institutions can deploy to meet the needs of their students.

Personal development needs of students of Wrocław-based universities

The following discussion of the self-development needs stated by students pursuing different programs at three different Wrocław-based universities draws on portions of an analysis conducted on the findings of research focusing on the students' understanding of self-development. The study had a diagnostic and interpretational intent. It aimed to find out what activities the survey respondents assigned to specific self-development areas (whose distinction was on theoretical grounds), and then to identify and describe the categories of self-development activities that were prevalent in the respondent group. The specific survey objectives included: (1) describing the prevalent categories of activities in each of the self-development areas (defined in theoretical terms); (2) identifying differences between descriptions of activities across the predefined self-development areas provided by students of specific universities and programs; (3) isolating the areas of self-development activities relevant to the students surveyed and delimiting the emergent activity categories. The paper delivers the outcomes of an analysis concentrating solely on the third of the objectives, that is, identifying the areas of self-development activities relevant to the students surveyed, yet making no reference to the theoretical descriptions of the areas and disregarding differences between students in different programs. The analysis presented in this paper fuelled an attempt to outline the factors affecting the ability of higher education institutions to meet the personal development needs voiced in the survey.

The selection of survey sample was not on a random basis but followed predefined criteria. The point was to sort out groups of roughly equal size consisting of students in their early adulthood who made a conscious choice to continue education in their preferred field of study, who were integrated into their student communities, and who represented diverse study profiles. For these reasons, the researchers picked first-year students in second-cycle (Master's) programs from three of Wrocław's universities, representing three different program profiles: social (the University of Wrocław, program in Pedagogy); medical (the Medical University, program in Nursing and Physiotherapy); technical (the Wrocław University of Science and Technology, program in Telecommunications and Biotechnology). The survey involved a total of 195 students: 67 from the University of Wrocław (Uniwersytet Wrocławski – UWr), 64 from the Medical University (Uniwersytet Medyczny – UM), and 64 from the Wrocław University of Science and Technology (Politechnika Wrocławska – PWr). A vast majority of the respondent group were women – 168 over 27 men. The research tool was built around a theoretical distinction of seven self-development areas concerned with, respectively: physical appearance, physical fitness, health, intellectual abilities, personality features, wellbeing, and future outlook. The respondents were asked to describe five activities that they engaged in and that they thought the most important in each of the areas. It was assumed that the activities that were most commonly indicated by the students themselves were within the boundaries of their consciousness. This is because that which is verbalized is part of the conscious self and can be more or less consciously controlled and modified, which is indicative of self-development taking place [Pawlak 2009: 78-79]. The survey responses – the collection of activities specified by the students[2] – were examined in both qualitative and quantitative terms.[3] The qualitative analysis made it possible to isolate and describe categories of activities belonging into each of the predefined self-development areas. The quantitative analysis was, on the other hand, performed to capture trends emerging from the number of responses in each area and to subsequently describe the trends in qualitative terms. To that end, content analysis was applied. The survey responses (indicating particular self-development activities) were subject to substantive coding [Rubacha 2008: 264-265] that identified the dominant analytical categories in each of the areas. In the next step, theoretical coding led to describing the prevalent self-development activities across the areas predefined theoretically.

To begin with, attention should be given to the aggregate number of responses in specific self-development areas, as it is indicative of the their clarity and relevance to the respondents. Most student responses pointed to the area of physical appearance (828 responses). Further on the ranking was as follows: wellbeing (790), future outlook (710), health (697), intellectual abilities (672), physical fitness (641), personality features (547). The differentials show that the top categories, in terms of clarity and relevance, are concerned with physical appearance,

[2] For simplicity's sake, "self-development activities stated by the students" are oft referred to as "responses".

[3] D. Silverman contends that computational techniques can be a means of exploring data in qualitative research [cf. Silverman 2012: 62].

Table 1.The aggregate number of student responses
in each category of self-development activities

Categories	Physical activity	Informal education	Diet	Interpersonal relations	Body care and wellness	Formal education	Psychological and social health	Hobbies	Preventive healthcare	Professional training	Engagement in culture	Personal competencies	Risky behaviors	Social activism	Future planning	No response
Number of responses	1076	847	606	415	395	257	227	193	191	173	124	118	111	68	44	40

Source: own.

while those relating to personality features are the least relevant. A tentative interpretation of these findings could be based on the observation that it is much easier to look after one's appearance than to shape one's personality, as the latter entails a substantially higher degree of self-awareness. Further, for young people and adolescents physical appearance becomes an important and easily available instrument for building one's self-identity and self-presentation. The number of activities declared in specific self-development areas is alone not very informative unless it is refined by providing a qualitative description of the emergent categories.

A glimpse over all the categories of self-development activities stated by the students across specific areas (Table 1) reveals that most responses are clustered in categories associated with physique. This is especially true about physical activity, diet, body care and wellness. These three categories were top scorers, with concentrations visible in such areas as: appearance, fitness, health, and wellbeing. Secondly, attention can be drawn to categories related to learning and personal competencies. Most responses indicated informal education, the second largest number of responses was in the category of formal education, and the other high-rated categories were: hobbies, professional training, and engagement in culture. These categories were the most frequently found in areas pertaining to intellectual abilities, personality features, future outlook, and wellbeing. Nevertheless, the meaning attributed to the these categories would obviously vary. The third dimension of self-development activities emerging from the survey responses is socialization. This will chiefly correspond to interpersonal relations and social activism, and – to some extent – engagement in culture. These are the categories that were indicated the most often in the area concerned with wellbeing, and further – with personality features, and future outlook. A glance at the number of responses in specific categories (see Table 1) will do to perceive an overlap between the three dimensions of the students' self-development that could be labeled as follows: physique, personality (primarily learning), and socialization. Therefore it makes sense to take a closer look at each of these areas.

Students' self-development activities classified in the dimension of **physique** were investigated first.[4] Across this dimension, the students found the following categories the most relevant: physical activity (1076 responses), diet (606), body care and wellness (395), psychological and social health (227), and preventive healthcare (191). The students associated these categories primarily with physical appearance and fitness, and secondarily – with health and wellbeing. If we examine these categories in terms of content, it is clear that the dimension of physique is dominated by: behaviors related to specific types of physical activity (descriptions of specific exercises or activities), general references to healthy diet or examples of (less frequently) specific dietary behaviors, body care and wellness (with an emphasis on physical appearance and beauty), and preventive healthcare (periodic medical tests and checkups). At the same time, it seems from the descriptions that health is perceived by the students somatically rather than otherwise. Interestingly enough, the category of physical activity tops the ranking, being much ahead of the other categories in respect of the number responses. It could be supposed that for young people the cult of the body stands not so much for fitness, which is less important, as for bodily beauty and an instrument of image building. Concern with body and appearance develops in childhood and peaks in youth, when corporeality and sexuality are commonly used to express "self" [Błajet 2006: 57-59]. During the years in higher education, that coincide with the transition from adolescence to early adulthood, the desire to enhance one's sex appeal is an important motivation for self-development, since physical attractiveness is a major driver of identity-building and is felt to underpin the ability to develop close interpersonal relations. In 20-year-olds, physical fitness is usually good enough anyway and does not need continuous improvement, which could explain why physical activity is valued more where it is applied to improve appearance than where it promotes fitness. On the other hand, it would be interesting to know to what extent the categories of self-development activities are gender-dependent. The respondent group was by and large feminine, and the questionnaire did not include questions that would make it possible to investigate gender preferences. Today a person's concern with physical appearance and fitness is usually coupled with high priority given to health and healthy lifestyle, of which an adequate level

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[4] An in-depth analysis and discussion of these areas can be found in: Sladek 2014a.

of physical activity or a healthy diet are indispensable ingredients [Shilling 2010: 16-23]. Hence the presence of a significant number of categories related to health alongside those to do with physical appearance and fitness.

It could be concluded that the students ascribed different utility to their self-development needs concerning physical activity. To a large extent, they linked these to their image-building, that is, saw them as relevant to defining their self-identity. This obviously relates to their ability to develop relationships with others, as attractive physical appearance is among key factors that uniquely position youth for establishing relationships with peers. Notably, many categories associated with physique bear just as well on their sense of wellbeing, while at the same time they do not need to be consistent with commitment to health-related activities. For example, a lot of students stress the need to maintain a healthy diet while admitting to eating less healthy foods (junk food or candy) just to feel good. This implies that physique-oriented self-development activities play diverse, or even discrepant, roles for different students, some of whom are aware of this fact and some are not. Such discrepancies are likely to become barriers to self-development. Conversely, the more conscious the self-development choices are, the more coherent the process and the greater its alignment with the target value system.

The second dimension of self-development to be examined relates to **personality, and** more specifically to **learning**. It includes such categories as: informal education (847 responses), formal education (257), psychological and social health (227), hobbies (193), professional training (173), engagement in culture (124), personal competencies (118), and future planning (44). All of the above categories are concerned with either the development of intellectual abilities or control over one's future outlook,[5] and secondarily with personality features. On the other hand, these areas of development clearly overlap. A closer look at the categories seems therefore necessary to discover the needs and preferences behind them. As far informal education is concerned, the intellectual abilities area (481 responses) prevailed over the future outlook area (212). It should be noted, however, that the category of informal education comprises a rich variety of activities indicated by the students: foreign language learning, (extra-curricular) training courses and workshops, readings (in scientific literature as well as in belles-lettres), or cognitive skills training (jigsaw or crosswords puzzles, riddles and brain teasers, logic games, memory or perception training exercises), etc. This diversity is equally evident in both the self-development areas. Among activities grouped under informal education and impacting on personal futures, the students emphasized foreign language learning, training courses and workshops. It is easy to see that these activities lead to the acquisition of qualifications and

[5] An in-depth treatment of the future outlook/planning area can be found in: Sladek 2014b.

competencies that are demanded in the job market. As regards the development of intellectual abilities, most respondents engaged in reading and practiced cognitive training. These categories seem to be centered primarily on personal learning and fulfillment of personal educational needs. It comes as no surprise then that formal education is associated with higher education programs and curricular activities. Besides these two strands, there were occasional mentions of double majors or aspirations for doctoral study, or a scholarly career (membership in scientific societies and attendance at scientific conferences). Importantly, activities concerning formal education were prevalent in the future outlook area (151 responses), not in the area of intellectual development (93). It could be concluded therefore that the students surveyed perceive their degrees in terms of investment in their future rather than of intellectual development. What they regard as even more relevant to their future prospects is the additional qualifications and competencies that they can earn through informal education. This suggests that different meaning and functions are attached to formal and informal education depending on the developmental context. On the one hand, marketable qualifications and competencies are sought, in the first place, outside formal education. This goal is covered by the category of activities relating to professional training. On the other hand, the other self-development objective is of more personal nature, being concentrated on achieving intellectual progression through reading and brain training (e.g. logic games or memory training). While learning certainly is a vital need under both the objectives (formal and informal education), there is a considerable diversity of perceptions and approaches to learning, depending on whether the goal is defined as personal or professional development. After all, both will meet needs that are considered relevant in the growth phase.

Apart from informal and formal education and professional training, a number of respondents stated commitment to developing their personal competencies. Underscored in this category were such considerations as: developing self-awareness, strengthening motivations, and self-regulation. Most responses in the category of hobby-related activities were generic, indicating just the pursuit of a hobby, with few specific references to the type of hobby: listening to music, travel or arts (plastic arts, music or handicraft). Activities focused on psychological and social health turned out to be mostly religious practices and meditations alongside entertainment, leisure and recreational activities. Interestingly, many respondents worded their responses using expressions like "finding time for…", e.g. sleep, recreation, relaxation, enjoyment, etc. This implies that the categories are important to the students but somewhat scarce, hence desired. The categories related to engagement in culture were flooded by general statements of intention, with only some respondents citing film (the cinema) or music (including concerts and the opera). The dimension of personality (and learning) also showed that the students appreciated the role of interpersonal relations and social activism.

However, these categories actually send us to the third dimension of self-development, even if they are closely interlinked with the former two.

This third dimension of self-development is **socialization**. The key categories in this dimension are associated with interpersonal relations (415), social activism (68), and engagement in culture (124). This dimension can be said, in a sense, to bracket the former two. Interpersonal relations were considered the most relevant in terms of wellbeing and shaping one's personality features. The students appear to believe that interpersonal relations – especially opportunities to meet and talk with friends and relatives – have a strong effect on their sense of wellbeing. They also recognize how their personality can benefit from meeting people, talking to people, discussing and exchanging views with people, sharing experiences with people, and notably from interactions with representatives of different cultures. Social activism was associated, in the first place, with voluntary work. The number of responses bringing up initiatives addressed to the academic community (e.g. membership in the student union) was marginal. Socialization was also seen as an important aspect of engagement in culture. Cultural activity not only fosters personal development but also, more often than not, involves voluntary work for this or other community – hence it does have an obvious socialization dimension.

Summing up, the three dimensions of students' self-development – physique, personality (learning), and socialization – do not make up a hierarchical structure, but they should be seen as on a par and overlapping. At the same time, all of these dimensions have relevance to the priorities of young people's development at this stage in life, e.g. to their needs in respect of building their self-identities, preparation for their prospective social and professional roles, and the development of social relationships, including those of intimate character. The conclusion that readily presents itself on examining the students' self-development is that there is close linkage between the drivers of personal development and the fulfillment of social expectations concerning many interconnected developmental priorities.

Conclusions – higher education institutions' ability to meet personal development needs

Under the approach taken toward the understanding and interpretation of the respondents' self-development, several groups of needs can be distinguished. They can be organized into three emergent dimensions:

– needs concerning physique,

– needs concerning personality and learning, and
– needs concerning socialization.

These needs can be met via a number of environments of which the students are part. This paper focuses on just one of such environments, looking at how the students' self-development needs are satisfied by institutions of higher learning. The discussion will be organized along the distinction into the three groups of self-development needs.

Among **physique-related self-development needs**, most respondents indicated: physical activity, diet, body care and wellness, psychological and social health, and preventive healthcare. Higher education institutions have a considerable potential to meet these needs. Increasing students' physical activity has been on the higher education agenda for a long time and has led e.g. to an obligation imposed on higher education institutions to organize compulsory physical education classes. However, institutions of higher learning largely differ in what they offer their students by way of physical activity or physical education, whereas the variety of forms of physical activity and their alignment with students' preferences may matter. Besides, while the compulsory workload may be sufficient for some students, it will be unsatisfactory for others. It makes sense therefore to provide additional options – to either extend the workload or to take out other forms of activity. Many of the students surveyed stated interest in team activities, which could stem from the very nature of their needs at this stage in life. Consequently, it appears that higher education institutions should ensure that team activity options are available to their students. Higher education institutions could gain a competitive advantage by merely adjusting their offering of physical activities to their students' preferences. Although the individual choice of physical activity is ultimately determined by personal preference, it is influenced by social patterns and settings, particularly by the peer group and the prevalent trend or fashion. An institution that tries to learn about its students' needs and periodically tailors the forms of physical activity to the findings could reap benefits in terms of student enrolment and retention, as both existing and prospective students could perceive its attitude toward their self-development needs as an important factor in selecting the institution.

Diet was the second among the students' needs relating to physique. The survey respondents commonly articulated the need to maintain a healthy diet. Emphasis placed on this need may be to an extent attributable to the popularity of healthy lifestyles – a trend boosted by the media buzz and propagated through peer groups. In the context of conditions provided by higher education institutions, an important issue is therefore the availability of on-campus food services, such as canteens and cafeterias, and the kinds of meals that these places offer. A diversified range of meals, including healthy food dishes, not only supports the satisfaction of students' needs but might also prove conducive to the development of healthy eating habits. Conversely, the presence of fast food bars accounts for the development and reinforcement of bad eating habits. What can be also relevant to the satisfaction of students' self-development needs in respect of healthy diet is class scheduling that may permit students, or not, to eat meals on the campus throughout the day. The perfect class schedule would allow students to have regular meals daily, including breaks that are long enough and always scheduled at the same time of the day. There do exist institutions where classes are scheduled on a permanent basis, provide for regular breaks and include an extended lunch break. Coupled with the presence of a canteen/cafeteria on the campus, this solution accounts for students' ability to fully satisfy their needs concerning proper nutrition and health. Regretfully, there are also many institutions where class schedules do not provide for regular breaks.

Health also stands for needs relating to preventive healthcare and psychological and social health. Most higher education institutions provide access to healthcare, so their students can consult physicians and have basic tests done as required. This is, however, not so obvious with psychological assistance that is not available at all institutions. Although demand for such assistance was not openly voiced in the survey, it is inferable from responses signaling psychological and social health needs, where most students stated a need for recreation, entertainment and relaxation, various forms of meditation and religious practices, at the same time strongly accentuating shortage of time to look after all these needs, resulting in a feeling of being under the pressure of time and under stress. In the context of conditions created by higher education institutions, the issue will again boil down to class scheduling. If daily and weekly class schedules were more favorable, the students would be able to allot time to recreation and relaxation as well as to regular meals – which has been pointed out already. Another option is to allow students to create their class schedules on their own, making them thus share responsibility for the organization of their study time and leisure time and for adjusting it to their needs and preferences. This obviously gives students greater latitude and control over their personal development, which is a factor strengthening their commitment and motivation for self-development. Another measure that a higher education institution could consider in catering to students' self-development needs is to expand the menu of optional activities available to their students by including e.g. various types of meditation classes, opportunities for exposure to other cultures and religions, as well as leisure time and recreational activities. The latter should involve physical activities, too, as these are seen by the students surveyed as supporting the development of their physique and at the same time having a positive effect on their wellbeing.

Self-development needs relating to psychological and physical health direct attention toward **needs concerning personality development** (including learning). Most respondents indicated informal and formal education, professional training, personal competencies, hobbies, and engagement in culture. Many self-development needs falling into these categories can be pursued in higher education establishments. First of all, it should be underscored that the students placed a good deal of emphasis needs relating to informal and formal education. Although higher education institutions themselves are part of formal education, the students too recognized the role of learning outside the campus. This does not mean, of course, that higher education institutions can do nothing to meet a greater proportion of their students' needs. The need that the respondents attached most importance to was for attending e.g. language courses, training courses and workshops leading to the award of qualifications or certificates that are sought after in the job market and are considered prerequisites or assets for a specific career. At the same time, however, many of the students were eager to develop such personal competencies as self-knowledge, self-awareness, or skills related to self-regulation (e.g. understanding emotions, self-control or conscientiousness), strengthening motivations, and improving social competencies (e.g. communication skills, negotiation skills, leadership skills, conflict management skills). All these self-development needs associated with the acquisition or upgrade of qualifications and competencies are fuelled by the students' awareness of labor market requirements. The respondents are aware of what employers expect of them and take account of these expectations in programming their development paths. What employers expect from university graduates these days is not just domain knowledge and professional qualifications but, in the first place, personal and social competencies that make them good team-workers and fast learners who can retrain instantly and easily adapt to change [Bilans Kapitału Ludzkiego 2013: 27; Budnikowski et al. 2012]. This awareness on the part of the students heightens expectations toward higher educations institutions regarding possibilities to satisfy these needs. Obviously, co-curricular activities may be optional (elective). What really matters is that there are enough options to choose from to suit everyone's preferences. It is too often the case that students are required to perform a specified amount of optional workload while the choice is limited and reflects the institution's potential rather than the students' needs.

Further, the survey of students' self-development needs showed that many of them chose to boost their development and learning through reading. Besides compulsory reading assigned by teachers they read popular science books and belles-lettres. Their interests were varied. Some responses implied that they had taken interest in literature and learning as a result of attending courses where non-essential or supplementary reading was encouraged. Notably, it seems that the students greatly appreciated this from of stimulating their hunger for knowledge. What should also be highlighted in this context is the students' self-development needs relating to cognitive skills and abilities (memory, attention, perception, thinking, etc.). Higher education institutions are in a position to meet these needs through the application of interactive instruction methods, including but not limited to problem-solving and educational games. Inspiration for research work can be further strengthened via scientific societies and conferences. These can help develop research just as well as social competencies through collaboration in research teams that requires communication, problem-solving and negotiation skills. In addition, the students' talents for teamwork or leadership can be ascertained.

Another important factor for students' personal development is their passions and hobbies. Clearly, not all passions can be practiced at a higher education institution. What really counts is therefore that the institution provides opportunities for practicing and sharing as many passions as possible. Some personal interests can easily be pursued through optional class offerings. Alternatively, the school can encourage and support the activities of interest groups and student societies where individuals concerned could get together to share experiences and fascinations and to learn from each other. All that the university needs to do to make it happen is provide suitable facilities (premises) or publicize the possibility, while organizational matters are left to students' discretion. There are multiple advantages to this approach. First, it allows students to freely develop their passions. Second, it builds up their independence, organizational talents, motivation, and a sense of responsibility for their own development and the development of others. Third, it helps establish and cement relationships between group members, at the same time enhancing their social competencies. Fourth, membership in interest groups and societies makes students develop a sense of loyalty and belonging toward the university as a place where they can engage in what they are most keen on doing personally as well as professionally.

Self-governing on-campus interest groups bring the discussion to the third strand, or dimension, of students' **self-development needs concerning socialization**. In this strand, most students cited the need to establish and maintain interpersonal relations, engage in culture, and get involved in social activism. Where higher education institutions come in is appropriate space organization and facilities that encourage grouping and spending free time together between and after class. Secondly, as has already been pointed out above, a higher education institution can encourage and support students in getting organized – forming groups and associations around their passions and hobbies. Further, it can sponsor and (help) organize cultural and social events of all sorts that, on the one hand, create a natural setting for meeting new people and networking and, on the other, address the need for cultural participation. A vital area of social needs is exposure to other cultures and developing an openness toward the other. These goals can be accomplished through international mobilities and exchanges, e.g. under the European Erasmus program. Multicultural issues can be also seamlessly integrated within the framework of cultural events. What many higher education institutions still do not fully recognize is the potential of non-governmental organizations in youth education and promoting social activism [Jagiełło-Rusinowski 2011: 9-15]. Admittedly, voluntary work can largely contribute to the development of social competencies. It seems therefore plausible that higher education institutions encourage voluntarism through partnerships with non-governmental organizations and motivate students to engage in the work of student organizations and community services. Involvement in such activities not only enhances their social competencies but also compels them to take responsibility for their academic community and inculcates a sense of loyalty and attachment toward the institution.

Looking at the self-development needs articulated by the students surveyed, it is easy to observe that the three dimensions either overlap or complement one another. Higher education institutions can try and fulfill these needs in a number of ways, depending on their infrastructure and financial resourcefulness. It should be emphasized that students may very well be appreciative of the fact alone that their needs have been noticed. However, it will probably not suffice to analyze these. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that giving students a welcoming space in which to pursue their needs might be more relevant than the best of facilities. This is because personal development is mostly driven by the desire to realize one's growth potential and to follow an envisioned trajectory. Create the right conditions and incentives for students' initiative and self-organization in developing their competencies and practicing their passions is the best that a higher education institution can do to facilitate their self-development.

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Potrzeby samorozwojowe studentów a możliwości ich zaspokajania przez szkoły wyższe

Streszczenie. *Okres studiów to czas intensywnego rozwoju młodzieży nie tylko w zakresie przygotowania zawodowego, ale przede wszystkim realizacji potrzeb samorozwojowych oraz tworzenia wizji i planów własnego rozwoju. Działania samorozwojowe studentów wskazują z jednej strony na ich zainteresowania, a z drugiej na pewne wzorce stylu życia młodzieży. Na podstawie analizy działań samorozwojowych studentów trzech wrocławskich uczelni w artykule zostały przedstawione dominujące obszary ich potrzeb samorozwojowych oraz wyłonione te kategorie potrzeb, które studenci zaspokajają w ramach edukacji formalnej i poza nią. Szkoły wyższe stanowią jedno ze środowisk rozwojowych tego okresu, ale niekoniecznie najważniejsze. Znajomość potrzeb samorozwojowych studentów może jednak być dla uczelni podstawą do tworzenia warunków bardziej sprzyjających ich rozwojowi, przez co może ona stać się dla studentów środowiskiem bardziej atrakcyjnym.*

Słowa kluczowe: *samorozwój, studenci, zadania rozwojowe, szkoły wyższe*

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Prospective Students as University Stakeholders – the Relational Aspect

Abstract. *The paper aims to depict the needs and expectations of higher education students considered as a group of external stakeholders in a higher education institution, with special emphasis on communications targeted at this group. Learning about these needs enables a university to establish relationships with this stakeholder group, while requirements identification through research is an essential element of stakeholder relationship management. The author brings up such issues as e.g. the time frame for the decision making process involving university and course selection, prospective higher education students' expectations toward the form and content of communications addressed to them and toward the media used, the factors affecting the choice of university, and the specific benefits derived from research focused on this key stakeholder group. The paper is based on an analysis of secondary sources and the findings of the author's original research.*

Keywords: *stakeholder concept, university stakeholders, prospective students, prospective student expectations*

Introduction

The turbulent environment surrounding today's higher education institutions compels them to try and create lasting and positive relationships with respective stakeholder groups in an effort to reduce the risk of operations in the higher education market. Some of these efforts are centered on secondary school leavers, who are seen as prospective higher education students. As a matter of fact, this group is not counted among university stakeholders by all scholars and higher education institutions. There are, however, a number of institutions that regularly schedule promotional events addressed to this stakeholder group, such as open days, open lectures, contests, and roadshows (presentations) in secondary schools. Potential candidates are not normally surveyed by higher education institutions regarding the decision making process involving the choice of university, nor are they examined for their needs and expectations toward the university. Surveys, if any, are only limited to enrolled candidates who are, as part of the admission procedure, asked to state the information sources used in contemplating their choice of university (department) alongside the main reasons for the choice. Universities' failure to embrace prospective candidates – secondary school leavers – has an adverse effect on the outcomes of initiatives targeted at this stakeholder group, making it difficult to customize communications (both media and content) to prospective students' actual expectations and undermining universities' ability to exploit market opportunities and gain a competitive edge.

1. The origin and evolution of the stakeholder concept

The rapidly increasing interest in stakeholder relationship management stems from the volatility and unpredictability of a contemporary organization's environment and the belief that it is requisite for the attainment of organizational goals. It was not until the 18th century, however, that the role of stakeholders was fully recognized and the modern stakeholder concept emerged. In 1759 [Smith 1987: 57-148], Adam Smith touched upon some ethical issues that had broad implications for stakeholder theory [Brown, Forster 2013: 301]. A pivotal point in the theory's evolution was the novel approach proposed by Stanford Research Institute (SRI) in 1963, under which stakeholders were seen as "those groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist" [Freeman 1984: 31]. Significant contributions to the development of the concept were also made by the business community, notably by such companies as: Johnson &Jonson, General Electric Company or Sears, Roebuck & Company. Their practical observations of stakeholder relationships in market settings bore on the concept's subsequent evolution [Preston, Sapienza 1990: 362]. Present-day approaches, both to defining and to listing stakeholders, are much broader than those originally proposed by early scholars or companies. The most commonly cited definition of stakeholder was coined in 1984 by R.E. Freeman, who is regarded as the originator of the concept and who designated a stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" [Freeman 1984: 25].

Nowadays the list of an organization's stakeholders can include its owners, employees, customers, consumers, suppliers, local communities, investors, banks and financial institutions, the media, the government, non-governmental organizations, competitors, labor unions, public administration, and the general public (public opinion) [cf. Rudnicka 2012: 98]. The actual number of stakeholders and their relevance to a specific organization will depend e.g. on the type of business and its internal structure, on the complexity, stability, predictability and competitiveness of its environment, and on the relationships that the organization has with that environment.

Subject literature offers a variety of classifications that are supposed to facilitate stakeholder relationship management. The most popular distinction is that into internal and external stakeholders. Other stakeholder distinctions that are often made are e.g. into primary and secondary; positive and negative; consubstantial, contractual and contextual; economic and social; strategic and moral stakeholders [Rudnicka 2012: 93-96]. As the initial steps in the stakeholder relationship management process, all of an organization's stakeholders should be identified, diagnosed, and categorized. Further steps are as follows [Savage et al. 1991 cited in: Bukowska 2008: 90]:

- formulating relevant strategies to improve or modify the existing relationships and to benefit the overall situation of the organization,
- effective implementation of these strategies.

Effective stakeholder relationship management, i.e. such that meets stakeholder needs and expectations while at the same time generating satisfaction and hence building loyalty toward the organization, represents a key component of the strategic approach to management and impacts the organization's ability to attain its economic as well as social goals.

2. University stakeholders – their types, characteristics, and roles

As has been pointed out already, it is very common to discriminate between internal and external stakeholders. For a higher education institution, internal stakeholders will include:

- students (in all types of programs and modes of study),
- employees – teaching (faculty) and non-teaching staff,
- university authorities and their support units,
- the senate,
- the executive council.

While external stakeholders will include:

- prospective and existing (enrolled) candidates,

– parents of students and candidates,
– alumni,
– the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego),
– the National Accreditation Board (Polska Komisja Akredytacyjna),
– other higher education institutions,
– the business community,
– labor market institutions,
– local government bodies,
– the media,
– the local community,
– scientific and trade associations.

Under another distinction, an organization should differentiate between three major groups based on whether they form part of the internal, the external direct, or the external indirect environment, with the external direct environment usually being the most numerous faction. The first group comprises teaching, research and administrative staff. The second encompasses students in all types of programs and modes of study, prospective students and candidates, alumni, members of the business community, cooperating research institutes, local media, financial institutions, etc. What all these entities have in common is the fact that they use or intend to use the university's services and are willing to form cooperative links in the hope of obtaining economic, social, reputational or altruistic benefits. Finally, the external indirect environment is composed of actors on whom the links with direct stakeholders may be contingent. This group includes e.g. the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, local governments, national media, government administration agencies, etc. [Waśkowski 2015: 37-38].

The type and number of stakeholders that, under the most common distinction (that into internal and external stakeholders), belong in respective groups varies between theoretical and practical interpretations, depending on the approach taken by particular researchers or university authorities. For example, students and alumni can be treated as either internal or external stakeholders in a higher education institution [cf. Waśkowski 2015: 37-38; Raport samooceny; Cranfield University].

The more detailed the list of stakeholders, and the more meticulous the analysis of each group's role, needs and expectations, the more effectively stakeholder relationships can be managed (for example, the U.S.-based University of Saint Mary is in the habit of performing in-depth studies of both short- and long-term needs and expectations of its stakeholders, isolating narrow categories within a single student cohort, e.g. among "traditional" students, adult students, and online students).[1]

[1] www.stmary.edu/AQIP/III-Students-Stakeholders-Needs.aspx [accessed 20.08.2015].

Looking from the perspective of a higher education institution, stakeholders within each major group will have diverse roles. For example, external stakeholders such as the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the National Accreditation Board, employers and labor market institutions will be able to influence the quality of instruction, curricula and program offerings, because they have a say in determining the expectations and requirements toward the knowledge, skills and competencies of students and graduates. The recent years have been marked by an increasing role of internal stakeholders – students and staff – which is reflected in the number of publications on their needs, satisfaction, loyalty, motivations, and behaviors. From a marketing standpoint, emphasis should be placed on students. The high priority given to students these days is justified by the critical impact that they have on a university's major asset – its image and reputation – and hence on candidates' decisions regarding the choice of university. It is easier than ever to exert such influence now that one can instantly give testimonials and share opinions through social networking sites and blogs. Both existing and prospective students, the latter group currently shrinking due to demographic factors, seem to be posing a key challenge for higher education institutions today. The ability to form positive relationships with these groups should therefore be seen by higher education institutions as a primary objective of their marketing activity.

3. The needs and expectations of higher education candidates toward university course offerings and communications as input for stakeholder relationship management at higher education institutions – research findings and anticipated benefits

It has already been said, based on information sourced from topical literature and websites (of those institutions that do recognize, and account for, the role of their stakeholders), that prospective higher education candidates are not often given due attention and subject to opinion polls. However, there are institutions, notably in western countries, that put a lot of effort in analyzing respective groups of stakeholders, including prospective students, and looking at their short-term (diversified course offerings, availability of scholarships and financial assistance) as well as long-term needs and expectations toward an institution of higher learning (affordable fees, sense of belongingness, quality of instruction, security).[2] In Poland, systematic and sophisticated surveys are carried out by e.g. the University of Warsaw (Uniwersytet Warszawski). The research is primarily focused on the

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[2] www.stmary.edu/AQIP/III-Students-Stakeholders-Needs.aspx [accessed 20.08.2015].

critical factors determining candidates' choice of university and field of study (program), since these are presumed to reflect their needs and expectations toward institutions of higher education. The findings show that individuals choose to study at the University of Warsaw mostly rely on two factors: a conviction that the University offers high-quality education and its degrees are highly recognizable by employers, increasing their chances to find and retain a rewarding job in the future. A relatively large number of responses indicated the possibility to combine work and study (among full-time students, too), and tuition fees. It should be added that, except for surveys conducted by specific higher education institutions, there are no broad, nationwide studies focusing on the needs and expectations of higher education candidates [Wroczyńska 2013: 249-272].

Research performed by H. Hall and K. Peszko[3] demonstrated that prospective students, while still at secondary schools, had lots of questions that they would like answered directly by representatives of higher education institutions. What they would expect to hear about was e.g. the details of programs and major available from specific institutions, the likely effects that the degree would have on their professional careers, financial assistance offered, opportunities for and terms of international mobilities, admission requirements including advice on relevant secondary school subjects, and academic staff. The respondents admitted to having tried to find all this information (some of them unsuccessfully) in official websites and social networking sites. Many of them argued that promotional content, whether text (e.g. slogans) or graphics, should be co-authored by young people in order to make it sound and look more authentic, avoiding the maladjustment and ridiculous flavor of the "other generation" language – something that they encountered in marketing campaigns run by a number of higher education institutions. What they saw as the most effective communication tool was personal contact with university representatives (current students were most welcome in that role) during in-school roadshows where candidates could not only watch a presentation of what the university has to offer but also ask questions about any aspect of study at the institution (interestingly, candidates for second-cycle programs also perceived meetings with university staff and students as more relevant to their choice of field and major). The interviewees believed that visits from university representatives should be more frequent and paid earlier than it was the case with them. They suggested that the first visit be during their second year at secondary school at the latest, since this would help them timely concentrate on the key subjects given their intended field of study.

[3] The survey sample was composed of first-year students in first-cycle (Bachelor's) programs, third-year students in first-cycle programs, and first-year students in second-cycle (Master's) programs at two higher education institutions – the University of Szczecin (Uniwersytet Szczeciński) and the Rzeszow University of Technology (Politechnika Rzeszowska) – using the FGI method, with the respondents broken down into 8 mini-groups. See: [Hall, Peszko 2015: 50-67].

Interesting feedback was provided concerning education fairs and open day events held by higher education institutions. In the respondents' opinion, participation in such events brings an institution closer to candidates, who are then more likely to choose a "familiar" institution rather than one that is, in that sense, completely strange to them. In that they also highlighted the importance of personal contact that is made with university representatives during such events and their perception of the atmosphere at the institution. Different forms of personal interaction with a particular university's academic community were very often pointed out in the interviews, and the argument was that such interaction is very effective in introducing prospective candidates to the new environment because it would reduce the estrangement and stress associated with the selection of university and the commencement of study. Furthermore, it helps create an emotional attachment and develop a positive relationship.

The research also delivered a lot of useful comments (including many criticisms), suggestions and recommendations on the forms of marketing communication used by higher education institutions as well as on other kinds of incentives employed to attract candidates.[4]

The survey findings described above inspired the author to conduct a pilot research project in a different group of respondents – among potential candidates – and using a different method – an online questionnaire focused on the selection of higher education institution. The questionnaire was given to secondary school leavers from the city of Rzeszów who had already decided to continue to higher education. The survey aimed, in the first place, to capture the moment that the candidates started thinking of which university to choose, to identify the key drivers behind their choices and the sources of information on higher education institutions that they considered the most useful, and to learn about the institutions and programs that they were contemplating as well as about the problems that they encountered in their decision making process. The survey was performed in July and August 2015. Although the sample was relatively small (54 respondents), and the survey was designed merely as a pilot project, the findings encourage a more extensive follow-up study and imply that it is advisable for higher education institutions to target communications at the group examined.

The pilot project showed that nearly a half of the respondents did not begin thinking of which university to choose until the final year in secondary school (and a half of those not until the second term), while the second largest faction started contemplating their choices as early as in post-primary school (*gymnasium*), in the first or second year of secondary school, or as late as after the maturity exam (the Polish secondary school leaving examination). Every fourth of

[4] A broader treatment is provided in: Hall, Peszko 2015.

the respondents had not yet made any choice (still considering a number of institutions and fields of study), slightly more than a quarter of the group were still to choose from a limited set of alternatives, and the remainder were absolutely clear about what and where they were going to study. Regarding the preferred sources of information, most respondents relied on informal ones, such as other students or graduates, and the second most used source was university websites. Much less frequently used and much less valued were such information sources as printed matter (brochures), rankings, educational fairs, and open day events. The crucial factors influencing the ultimate choice included: career prospects, the university's reputation and prestige, quality of instruction, availability of the preferred study program (or major), and the university's location, where the location was perceived either in terms of attractiveness (a good city to live in) or convenience (the distance from home and, consequently, the cost of commuting).

Other findings, e.g. the higher education institutions and study programs contemplated by Rzeszów's secondary school leavers, will not be discussed in this paper, as they are of "local" relevance only.

By way of summary, it should be highlighted that, even if the largest respondent group did not start thinking of which university to choose until when in the final year of secondary school, roadshow visits from university delegates, current students most welcome, should be addressed to first- or second-year secondary school students. If the timing of visits is adjusted in this manner, potential candidates are likely to initiate the decision making process earlier, while presentations of specific study programs could help raise awareness and influence preferences, particularly among those who are yet to make decisions.

What was not surprising in the findings is the list of information sources that the respondents considered the most useful. The way the sources were prioritized by the candidates underscores an imperative for higher education institutions to concentrate on generating student satisfaction with study experience and hence students' loyalty in giving positive testimonials to potential candidates, a factor that often proves decisive for their choice of university. The survey responses were also indicative of what kind and scope of information should be found on university websites.

Many higher education institutions, in a less or more formal manner, look into their students' motivations for choosing the particular institution and the information sources that they used when making the decision. Surveys are usually conducted among candidates during the enrolment procedure or amongst first-year students. Most findings are for internal use only, rather few are publicized. Published research indicates that most decisions are dependent on firm preference for a specific field of study, whereas choices between universities running similar programs are based on two core criteria – cost and reputation [Mikosik 2014: 10-11]. The findings of the author's own research are not consistent with these conclusions, implying a need for higher education institutions to carry out regular surveys focusing on their specific areas of interest and to conduct these at the right time and in the right type of secondary school. The benefit is that in this way a university gains an invaluable insight into potential candidates' interests, their motivation for choosing a particular institution, and their preferred form and content of marketing communications, which makes it possible to center in-school presentations on the most relevant programs and majors, deploy reasonable supporting argumentation (relating e.g. to what employers seek in applicants), and tailor the communication tools, media and content to the audience's expectations. An additional value that universities can achieve through such surveys is making first contact with prospective candidates, thus building up the image of an institution that "cares" – something that is highly appreciated by secondary school leavers.

It should be added that the focus group interview method, applied to the first research presented in this paper, seems particularly adequate in surveying higher education students and candidates, as it allows mutual stimulation and interaction among group members, producing a lot of additional (not included in the interview scenario), unsolicited but very useful feedback, e.g. spontaneous evaluation and comparisons between a given institution and its competitors. A questionnaire, even one including open-ended questions, does not return such answers, since the respondents cannot be prompted by a moderator or other group members to provide exhaustive replies and support these with relevant arguments. Where they do provide answers to open-ended questions, the responses are brief and catchphrase-type. It appears, too, that they tend to forgo reading the instructions or overlook some replies in broadly-scaled close-ended questions.

Conclusion

The recent commitment of higher education institutions to forming and maintaining long-lasting links with all of their stakeholder groups has arisen in reaction to changes in the environment pushing them to transform and keep looking for ways to face emergent challenges and strive for a competitive edge. One of the crucial ingredients of the stakeholder relationship management process is identifying stakeholders' needs and expectations. The paper demonstrates that a consistent effort to learn about prospective higher education candidates, representing an external stakeholder group, can contribute a hoard of exceptionally useful information implying measurable and non-measurable benefits for each higher education institution. The research discussed in the paper also showcases how a well-designed and targeted survey can enable a university to determine the optimal timing to start its enrolment campaign in secondary schools, customize the information to be conveyed to candidates, and select the most suitable forms, media and tools of communication.

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Potencjalni kandydaci na studia jako interesariusze uczelni – aspekt relacyjny

Streszczenie. *Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie potrzeb i oczekiwań kandydatów na studia, jako jednej z grup zewnętrznych interesariuszy szkoły wyższej, względem uczelni, a szczególnie jej komunikacyjnych działań skierowanych do tej grupy. Wiedza na temat tych potrzeb i oczekiwań stanowi podstawę kreowania relacji uczelni z analizowaną grupą, a ich rozpoznawanie poprzez realizację badań jest jednym z niezbędnych elementów procesu zarządzania relacjami z nią. W artykule zwrócono uwagę m.in. na czasowy zakres procesu decyzyjnego kandydatów na studia,* *ich oczekiwania względem wykorzystywanych przez uczelnie instrumentów, środków i treści kierowanych do nich przekazów, czynniki decydujące o wyborze danej uczelni, jak również korzyści wynikające z realizacji badań w ramach analizowanej grupy. Artykuł opiera się na analizie źródeł wtórnych oraz wynikach pierwotnych badań autorki.*

Słowa kluczowe: *koncepcja interesariuszy, interesariusze uczelni, potencjalni kandydaci na studia, oczekiwania potencjalnych kandydatów na studia*

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The Social Factors of Consumer Behavior in the Higher Education Market

Abstract. *What becomes relevant in the context of increasing market-orientedness among higher education institutions is the analysis of factors affecting consumer behaviors characteristic of prospective students. The paper is focused on the social determinants of students' educational choices. These could include e.g. the influence of family or reference groups exerted through opinions or imitation. Another important motivation is the aspiration to build one's social status on the prestige attributed to a particular higher education institution or to a specific profession.*

Keywords: *consumer behavior factors, family influence, reference groups*

Introduction

The political overturn of 1989 triggered rapid growth in Poland's higher education market. In the face of a sky-rocketing unemployment rate, higher education started to be perceived in terms of opportunity for a better job and a better pay. A number of higher education institutions were established, mostly private ones [Drapińska 2011: 59-62]. Today, however, it could well be argued that the market – due to a demographic low, problems in the job market, and increasing economic migration – is undergoing a crisis. As institutions have to compete for students, they are forced to abandon their traditional roles in favor of market-orientation.

The present-day university has to understand motivations behind consumer choices as well as the needs of higher education candidates. Therefore, it becomes vital for universities to learn about consumer behaviors and use these insights to attract students and tailor course offerings to their needs.

This paper offers a discussion of the social factors affecting consumer behaviors in the higher education market. It seeks to categorize these factors drawing on consumer behavior theory while at the same time accounting for the unique features of the education service being examined.

1. Higher education services and its features

In this paper, service denotes "an activity which has some element of intangibility associated with it, which involves some interaction with customers or with property in their possession, and does not result in the transfer of ownership" [Payne 1993: 6]. This definition highlights two essential features that differentiate a service from a material product. First, it has an intangible component associated with personal interaction between the service provider and the customer. The teaching process in higher education involves personal contact with teachers and other university staff. This feature, that providing a service involves the presence of the service providers, is inseparable from the service itself. The other key feature is that no ownership title to the service is transferred as a result of service provision, although it is possible to transfer the right of ownership to tangible evidence of service performance. Thus on purchasing an education service a student does not automatically become the owner of the service. Instead, the education that he has earned becomes tangible evidence of service performance in the form of a degree award certificate. Other features of services include heterogeneity, or variability, of perception, which means that the use of a particular service will generate different levels of satisfaction in different customers. Perishability of services, on the other hand, implies that they cannot stored in inventory for future use. In other words, absence in class cannot be really compensated or made up for [Douglas, Douglas, Barnes 2006: 252].

An educational service is unique in that management and coordination of the teaching and learning process plays a greater role than knowledge transfer itself. Apart from knowledge and skills development, an important ingredient of the service is the pedagogical-formative function that shapes an individual's personality traits. An educational service has a substantial effect both on students' personal lives and on their professional careers. As such, it can be seen as a life choice. It is difficult for a student to evaluate the service quality prior to its performance, or even during the process. The level of satisfaction cannot be actually assessed until job market entry is made. The decision therefore carries a high level of risk. Another characteristic of an educational service is that its performance spans a long time, making it likely for student expectations toward the service to change before its completion [Drapińska 2011: 25]. Further, a higher education institutions provides a service that involves a number of stakeholders including students themselves, their parents and relatives, and their prospective employers [Henning-Thurau, Langer, Hansen 2001: Vol. 3, 332].

It should be also borne in mind that the higher education market is characterized by certain limitations on the freedom of choice. On the demand side, a free market should ensure the freedom of choice, easy access, reliable information, and direct, cost-covering prices. Access to higher education services is constrained by the fact that university campuses are only found at a limited number of locations. As a result, students' decision space is confined by convenient distance and the cost of living. The freedom of choice is therefore to a large extent conditional on a specific institution's course offerings and influenced by social factors, such as aspirations for prestige. The reliability of information is specifically compromised in this market by interpretative problems and information asymmetry. Last but not least, a free market should support direct and cost-covering prices. In most countries, certain education services are free of charge. Even in the case of paid education, however, the price does cover all the costs incurred, notably it does not cover the cost of living. The higher education market hence does not meet the characteristics of a free market, by this token adding complexity to students' choices [Drapińska 2011: 52-54].

2. Models of the decision process in the higher education market

The decision making process whereby a student chooses a field of study and a higher education institution consists of three stages: the predisposition stage; the search stage – seeking information; and the choice stage – making the decision on applying for admission to a specific institution.

The predisposition stage delimits the scope of a candidate's search and delineates the decision space. Preferences for a specific field/program of study are determined, and the range of institutional options is defined that are considered plausible in terms of distance from home and in terms of cost. Then the prospective student starts searching for relevant information, including the opinions and behaviors of influencers from a social group that is seen as the most credible. Advice provided by teachers and guidance counselors is taken into account, alongside information from official publications such as institutional communications, brochures and leaflets, open day events, etc. At stage three, the student decides to apply. The choice made at this stage is presumed to be rational, although its rationality is clearly bounded by social and cultural factors [MacAllum et al. 2007: 11].

Literature offers two basic models of the decision making process in the higher education services market: the economic model and the status attainment model. The former assumes that students are rational in making their decisions and therefore will choose the institution that offers best value. Consumers hence strive to maximize utility and minimize risk. The decision process begins on realizing the need. Then information is gathered. Next, the prospective student assesses the options on different criteria and makes the decision. The model has a number of limitations associated with doubts raised as to consumers' rationality and strengthened by the distinctive characteristics of both the educational market (constraints on the freedom of choice, information asymmetry, peculiar price-cost relationships) and the decision problem itself (high risk, volatility of expectations, difficulty in specifying the requirements).

Given these downsides, the status attainment model seems to deserve special attention. It is founded on social theory and emphasizes social ties, family bonds, societal relationships, and individual predispositions, at the same time refuting the assumption on the rationality of choice. Instead, consumers' decisions are believed to be based solely on available information that is often uncertain and comes from informal sources [Drapińska 2011: 70-71]. Under this model, it is external factors, such as educational achievements, social background or the parents' financial and social status, that are key to the decision making process.

3. Social factors affecting consumer behavior in the higher education market

Consumer behavior theory discriminates between publicly and privately consumed goods. The impact of the social environment on the first class of goods will be much more significant [Burgiel 2014: 59]. A higher education service definitely falls into the group of publicly consumed goods. It could be therefore expected that social influence will be strong, and even more so as their consumption is socially visible. The impact of the social environment is also dependent on whether a good is regarded as a luxury or a necessity good. With the former, the impact is usually stronger than with the latter. Therefore, the question needs to be raised about how higher education services should be in fact classified. Given their increasing affordability, improved access, and the growing numbers of degree seekers, it could be concluded that higher education is no longer a luxury good. This would imply that social influence is decreasing. On the other hand, A. Burgiel contends that publicly consumed necessity goods are influenced by the social environment more strongly than privately consumed luxury goods are [Burgiel 2014: 60].

In this paper, social factors affecting the decision being investigated have been divided into four groups, as shown in Fig. 1.

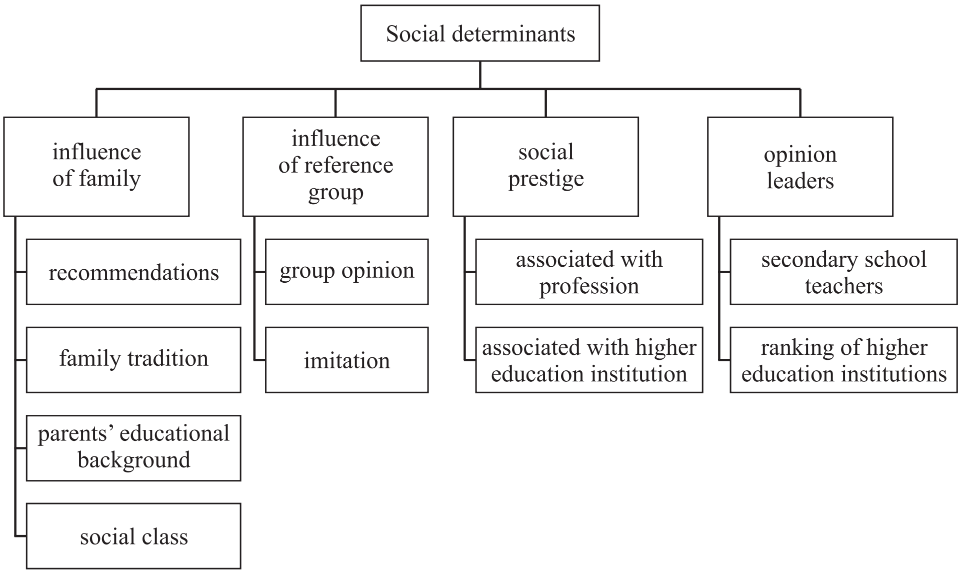

Figure 1. Classification of social factors affecting consumer behaviors in the higher education market

Source: own.

Impacts from the social environment can be broken down into normative and informative influence. Normative influence occurs when an individual imitates a person from his or her surrounding. Informative influence occurs when members of a social group convey information, such as recommendations or testimonials, to consumers, thus guiding their choices. Information from other consumers appears to be more credible because it is based on hands-on experience [Burgiel 2014: 47]. Two types of influence can be thus distinguished: through recommendations and advice, and through imitation.

3.1. The influence of family on the choice of a higher education service

Family is a primary social group governing consumer behavior. Each family member performs a different role in the decision making process. The roles include those of: initiator, influencer, decider, buyer, and user. The roles of the initiator and decider may be played either by the individual contemplating the choice of a higher education program or by his or her parents. Everyone in the family concerned with the choice usually adopts the role of the influencer, trying to have a say about the characteristics of the product or service that is to be purchased (in this case, a higher education program and institution). The person enrolling in a higher education institution is, in turn, designated as both the buyer and user. Parents applying to a higher education institution on their offspring's behalf embody a special case as they can be seen as the buyer within the process. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the student is still to be defined as the user.

In a survey conducted by the Regional Employment Office (Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy) in Lublin only 7% of the respondents admitted to having been influenced by the pressures from their family and their environment. 9.5% of the respondents regarded the opinion of their parents and guardians as an important factor influencing their decisions [Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Lublinie 2009: 31].[1] It should be noted that, according to the survey, parents' or guardians' opinion was more often followed by girls (10.3%) than boys (7.7%). Further, that opinion mattered more with first-cycle program (Bachelor's) choices [Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Lublinie 2009: 32], which might be attributable to the deciders' lack of previous experience, poor knowledge of the educational market, and greater dependence on the parents.

In a survey run by the Jagiellonian University (Uniwersytet Jagielloński) and focused on the preferences of lyceum school students [Uniwersytet Jagielloński 2011: 5][2] the respondents rated the relevance of specific factors to the choice of higher education institution in a 5-point scale. The top-rated factors were (alike in most similar surveys) personal interests and employment prospects. The average rating for counsel from family members was 2.24, and for parents' ambitions – 1.76.

Family tradition is what makes the influence of family on the choice of higher education program and institution particularly strong in the medical and law

[1] The survey was performed in 2008 in higher education institutions based in Lubelskie voivodeship (region) and involved a 600-strong non-random student sample selected on a discretionary basis using a non-probabilistic method.

[2] The survey was carried out in 2011 by the Jagiellonian University research staff and involved 484 students from five Kraków-based lyceums (secondary schools).

professions [Peszko 2015: 192]. Where the parents practice a specific profession, the young individual is already familiar with the job and, ostensibly, has a better access to employment. Only 5% of the respondents in an IBC Group survey conducted among university students[3] indicated family traditions as a factor influencing their choice of field of study [Badanie ewaluacyjne 2015]. Likewise, the Regional Employment Office in Lublin survey showed that no more 8% of the respondents were guided by family traditions in choosing a profession [Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Lublinie 2009: 4]. The Jagiellonian University research findings ranked family traditions among factors least affecting the choice of higher education path [Uniwersytet Jagielloński 2011: 5].

It has already been mentioned that parents' opinion is most influential among prospective students in medical programs. In a survey carried out among students of the Medical University of Bialystok (Uniwersytet Medyczny w Białymstoku) [Kropiwnicka et al. 2011: 72][4] links with the medical profession were reported by around 53.8% of the students in the Medicine and the Nursing programs. In the Medicine program, 21.9% of the links were through the parents, 8.1% through siblings, 31.9% through other relatives, and 10.6% – through friends and acquaintances.

What prospective students find important alongside the profession that runs in the family is family members' professional connections. Most respondents in nearly all research reports on factors determining the choice of higher education program or institution are concerned with their employability. If this is the case, family members who have the right connections can be valuable assets increasing the chances of a successful job search. However, this factor is usually omitted in surveys. One of the research reports that did capture its significance is that by the Regional Employment Office in Lublin, indicating that the factor influenced choices made by 23% of the respondents [Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Lublinie 2009: 24].

Another way, besides recommendations and imitation, that parents can influence their children's choice of higher education program and institution is the fact alone that they do hold a degree. This factor counts at the initial phase of the decision making process, as an individual is making a choice concerning one's life trajectory, contemplating university education versus job market entry. A CBOS research shows that high educational aspirations are characteristic of young individuals whose parents hold a university degree (88% of secondary

[3] The survey was conducted at the end of 2008 and at the beginning of 2009 by the IBC Group using the CAWI method and involved 600 students in mathematics, technology and natural sciences programs.

[4] The research was carried out in the area of Białystok among 320 students of the Medical University of Bialystok (Uniwersytet Medyczny w Białymstoku) using the diagnostic survey method.

school students whose mother holds a degree and 91% of those whose father does). A half of the youth whose parents only have primary or post-primary vocational education do not aspire for higher education [CBOS 2009]. Similar conclusions can be derived from the research done by M. Herbst and A. Sobotka,[5] where 70% of those whose mother or father held a university degree pursued higher education while no more than 40% of the respondents whose mother did not take the secondary school leaving examination (*matura*) enrolled in a higher education institution [Herbst, Sobotka 2014]. Similar correlations are revealed by the findings of a GUS research.[6] The level of education accomplished by the father most often resulted in a similar or higher level of education attained by the children (40% of those whose father had no education whatsoever did not go any further than post-primary vocational education). A similar effect was observed with the mother's education [GUS 2013: 29].

Family, being the primary social group, is part of a certain social class, where social class is defined as a "relatively permanent and homogeneous (monogamous) stratum in the society that stands out in terms of wealth as well as in terms of ability to attain socially valued goods" [GUS 2013: 39]. It is also characterized by a distinct ideology of values, lifestyle and living standard.

Overall, society can be stratified into upper, middle and lower classes, each with a distinct style of consumption. Upper class individuals will usually value quality and prestige, while price will be less relevant for them. Such individuals will tend to use the services of private institutions, as long as these services are higher quality and the institution is well reputed. Because upper class people seek esteem and prestige associated with study at a particular higher education institution, they will place more emphasis on brand recognition. Further, their approach will be more individualistic. They will be hence more willing to choose less popular study programs, ignoring general trends and fashions in that respect. Middle class people are characterized by a greater inclination for conformist behaviors. Middle class individuals will be therefore more susceptible to fads, often choosing fashionable programs and institutions. They will also be more concerned with the relations between quality, functionality and price. Therefore, they will more often look to state-owned institutions and place much stress on academic excellence. Individuals belonging to lower social classes will generally purchase fewer products relating to recreation and culture, and will travel less [Jachnis 2007: 325-327]. As far as higher education is concerned, they will be rather interested in training for a specific career. It should be added, however, that modern societies

[5] The research was done in 2013 in the area of Poland, using the CAPI method and involving a sample of 500 individuals aged 25-30.

[6] The survey was run in 2010-2011 by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (Główny Urząd Statystyczny), using a face-to-face interview and involving a sample of 3858 households.

are characterized by unprecedented social mobility. This means that class membership is not attributed to an individual for a lifetime but can be altered through movement between social strata as a result of income increase or change of residence.

L. Rudnicki insists that, in all societies, pressure on consumption is generated by the wealthiest. Less well-to-do individuals aspire to achieving the living and consumption standards of those more affluent. This is manifest in conspicuous consumption where some consumers manage their spending on publicly consumed goods in such a way as to demonstrate a consumption pattern similar to that of the more affluent ones [Rudnicki 2012: 117]. It is for this reason that people seeking social acceptance are likely to choose a private university, provided that it is in high esteem and popular with upper social classes.

3.2. The influence of reference groups

Another determinant of consumer behavior in the higher education market is reference groups. A reference group is to be construed as "any individual or collection of people whom the individual uses as a source of attitudes, beliefs, values or behavior" [Foxall, Goldsmith, Brown 1998: 214]. Reference groups will influence consumer behavior by encouraging such behaviors that will be approved by the group, thus leading to a high degree of groupthink.

Literature identifies several types of reference groups. The three major types are comparative, status, and normative reference groups. A comparative group serves a sort of benchmark, allowing individuals to evaluate their behaviors against those of the group. Its influence on consumer behavior is hence based on imitation. A status group is a collection of people whose acceptance an individual seeks and is ready to act on their advice and opinion. Approval is also often manufactured through conformist behaviors. A normative group is one that performs an advisory role and is used by an individual as a source of knowledge on values and norms that should be adhered to [Światowy 2006: 110-111].

A reference group can influence consumer behavior on several levels. First, it provides testimonials that inform purchase decisions. This is how, in the first place, a normative group functions. Admittedly, an advisory role is also performed by status groups. Consumers often purchase products or services because there is positive feedback on their features from the environment. The less information is available to an individual, the greater the role of the reference group. Consumers will obviously want to minimize their subjective perception of risk and uncertainty by confronting the opinion of their social environment. It could be therefore expected that the influence of the social environment will be substantial in the higher education market where consumers are exposed to information asymmetry and have to make high-risk decisions. However, this hypothesis is not supported by survey findings.

Imitation is another form that the influence of reference groups on buying behaviors can take, clearly distinct from providing opinion. The term refers to copying the behavior of others and conforming to patterns prevalent in a group. It should be noted, however, that individuals will not conform to a group beyond a certain point. Total conformity is actually rare in social settings. Imitation is gradable – from merely being inspired by other people's ideas, to imitating behaviors, to buying similar products and copying others' decisions as closely as possible [Burgiel 2014: 122-125]. The ultimate form of imitation is known as the bandwagon effect (or lemming-like rush, or herd instinct) that signifies the practice of copying other people's behaviors in an automatic, unthinking manner [Burgiel 2014: 127].

With higher education decisions, this stands for choosing a university or a study program just because older friends are already enrolled in it or because a number of peers have chosen to apply to it.

A research carried out by M. Pawlak and K. Grzesiuk[7] shows that youth do not make much of their friends' and acquaintances' opinions. The factor was ranked among the least relevant to the choices made [Pawlak, Grzesiuk 2014: 103]. Similarly, the survey conducted by the Jagiellonian University staff revealed that friends' and acquaintances' opinions did not matter a lot (2.28 points on average in a 5-point scale) [Uniwersytet Jagielloński 2011: 5]. Friends' recommendations were rated relatively high in a study carried out by A. Wroczyńska, where 21% of the respondents took them into consideration [Wroczyńska 2013: 255]. In Lublin's Regional Employment Office report, 11.17% of the persons surveyed prized the opinions of friends who also chose to continue to higher education. More importance was attached to opinions given by those who recommended a study program or an institution that is known to them from their own experience (14.17%). Research findings thus indicate that young people more often rely on opinions voiced by those who are already studying at a particular institution than to opinions stated by all other friends [Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Lublinie 2009: 31]. This observation is consistent with the findings of D. Vrontis, A. Thrassou, Y. Melanthiou who concluded that, in the world of today, peer beliefs are becoming increasingly influential among students while the influence of family, religion and national culture is declining [Vrontis, Thrassou, Melanthiou 2007: 979-989].

[7] A questionnaire survey given in 2013 to 1024 senior-year secondary school students from Lubelskie voivodeship (region).

Overall, both the influence of family and of reference groups is by ranked by students and candidates as not very significant. This makes one think whether their responses might be questionable. Trying to explain the rather small percentage of responses indicating young people's susceptibility to the opinion of others, M. Pawlak and K. Grzesiuk point out the fact that "young people entering into adulthood find it important to assert their independence and self-reliance. That is why they may be largely understating the extent to which their decisions are influenced by others" [Pawlak, Grzesiuk 2014: 103].

3.3. Social prestige and opinion leaders

Another factor affecting consumer behaviors in a market is social prestige, a property that is indicative of a person's authority and esteem. Prestige stems primarily from education, as well as from wealth, power, knowledge, qualifications, and from certain personality traits [Światowy 2006: 112]. An individual can seek social prestige in a number of different ways. One of the ways is to demonstrate a certain level of consumption.

In making their decisions about continuing to higher education, prospective students may be lured by two kinds of social prestige: that associated with a university, and that associated with a specific field of study. Institutional prestige is what causes students in a lot of countries to choose an institution prior to the choice of study program. It will be understandable once we realize that graduation from a reputable higher education institution ensures a privileged position in the job market. For an employer, institutional esteem stands for quality assurance on human capital [Drapińska 2011: 76].

Research findings point to an institution's prestige as a major factor affecting consumer decisions. Among factors of social nature, it is rated the highest by students in most surveys. In the IBC Group study, 58% of the respondents acknowledged that their choice had been influenced by a university's prestige. A similar survey by A. Drapińska[8] showed that almost a half of the respondent group (49.81%) made their choice of university based on its prestige. The Regional Employment Office in Lublin study reported a considerably lower percentage, with only 26.83% of the students surveyed indicating the institution's prestige and reputation as an important factor for their choice [Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Lublinie 2009: 31]. Interestingly enough, not all surveys represent university prestige as highly relevant to choices made by prospective students. For example,

[8] The survey was conducted in the area of the Tricity of Poland (composed of the adjoining cities of Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Sopot), involved 518 first-year students and 520 final-year students and used the diagnostic questionnaire method.

in M. Pawlak and K. Grzesiuk's research prestige and international acclaim were one of the factors considered the least relevant to the choice of higher education institution, with an average rate of 3.96 in a 6-point scale and ranking 22nd among all factors encompassed by the survey [Pawlak, Grzesiuk 2014: 101].

Professional stature is instrumental to achieving high income as well as social prestige. The professions that the society holds in highest esteem include medical doctors, judges, and university professors [Bylok 2005: 138-139]. Professional status is therefore a factor that is taken into account by many prospective students in planning their careers. In Lublin's Regional Employment Office survey, 45% of the respondents stated that professional prestige was relevant to them [Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Lublinie 2009: 4]. Similar research performed by the Jagiellonian University indicated that prestige associated with a specific profession is a rather significant factor, as the students rated it at 3.60 on average in a 5-point scale. Overall, it should be concluded that social prestige ranks rather high relative to other social factors affecting consumer behaviors in the higher education market.

The society will always look up to some individuals as opinion leaders. The terms refers to "people who, consciously or not, influence other people's behaviors by virtue of their rank, status, prestige, authority, etc., and whose conduct happens to be imitated by others" [Rudnicki 2012: 120]. This type of influence is passive in nature – there is usually no personal interaction between opinion leaders and recipients of their opinions. Advice is treated as an expert opinion. In the higher education market, it is principally secondary school teachers or publishers of university rankings that may be seen as opinion leaders. However, research findings demonstrate that opinions provided by secondary school teachers do not affect students' decisions as strongly as could be expected. A likely reason is that they are not perceived as very reliable. In the survey of Krakow's lyceum schools students the factor was rated at 2.21 in a 5-point scale. It may well be added, nevertheless, that teacher opinions were still more relevant to prospective students' choices than suggestions offered by friends and relatives. A. Drapińska research produced similar results, with the role of secondary school teachers recognized by 6.18% of the respondents only. On the other hand, it should be noted that nearly 20% admitted to having consulted their teachers about tertiary education programs [Drapińska 2011: 76].

Indubitably, university rankings merit an important place in the decision making process being investigated, since they represent a source of easily available and digestible information on the quality of services provided by an institution and are indicative of its social prestige. It should be all the same underscored that rankings are difficult to pinpoint in terms of their (social, marketing, economic, etc.) intent and character. University rankings are published by newspapers and magazines (*Perspektywy*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*) and channeled through television, hence reaching a very broad audience. Although their methodology raises a number of controversies, an average citizen does not reflect upon the criteria used to rank the institutions, taking the information at face value. These doubts notwithstanding, rankings do influence higher education candidates' decisions and build the image of specific institutions in the eyes of their parents, friends and teachers. They can be also used by employers as a source of information on the quality of instruction delivered by a given institution [Szczepańska-Woszczyna 2012: 228-229].

In a research report by W. Urbaniak[9] a university's prestige, as indicated by its performance in rankings, turned out to be among the top three factors affecting the choice of institution by the respondent group [Urbanik 2010]. The survey carried out among Krakow's lyceum school students [Uniwersytet Jagielloński 2011: 5] placed rankings among factors of moderate relevance with a rate of 3.62 in a 5-point scale, slightly below university prestige. In the Pawlak and Grzesiuk study, an institution's performance in rankings was rated at 3.87 in a 6-point scale, which made it one of the least important factors of all [Pawlak, Grzesiuk 2014: 101]. The findings thus suggest that rankings of higher education institutions are treated as more relevant by individuals who are already enrolled in, or applying to, a higher education institution, whereas they are not considered so by secondary school students.

Conclusion

The findings of research presented in the paper show that social factors are not among the key determinants of decision making processes in the higher education market. University students and secondary school leavers are reluctant to admit to the influence of friends or family on their choices, probably trying to assert their independence instead. What students most often point to as the decisive factor in choosing a specific higher education institution is their interests and employment prospects. If that is the case, an inquiry into how the job market prospects of a particular university's graduate are assessed is fundamental to investigating the social underpinnings of decision making processes in a given market. This seems to be an extremely important strand of research that could follow up and complement the discussion initiated in this paper. If the primary role of public opinion and university prestige in prognosticating job market prospects could be substantiated, then these factors would appear more relevant to building an institution's competitive position than opinions provided by family and friends

[9] The survey was conducted in 2010 using the structured interview method and involved 949 senior-year secondary school students from Zachodniopomorskie voivodeship (region).

that, according to known research, are not crucial influencers on young people's choices. Social prestige associated with a specific institution of higher learning or with a particular profession is slightly more relevant.

In the light of published research findings, the impact of social factors on consumer behaviors in the higher education market should be estimated as fairly modest. It would be therefore interesting to gain a scientific insight into indirect influences that have not yet been subject to empirical research.

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Społeczne uwarunkowania zachowań konsumentów na rynku szkolnictwa wyższego

Streszczenie. *W kontekście rynkowej orientacji uniwersytetu istotna staje się analiza uwarunkowań zachowań konsumenckich przyszłych studentów. Przedmiotem zainteresowania artykułu są determinanty społeczne zachowań studentów w sferze edukacji. Można do nich zaliczyć wpływ rodziny oraz grupy odniesienia, który może przybierać formę wyrażania opinii oraz naśladownictwa. Poza tym istotną funkcję pełni chęć uzyskania prestiżu społecznego, związanego z uczelnią oraz z zawodem.*

Słowa kluczowe: *uwarunkowania zachowań nabywców, wpływ rodziny, grupy odniesienia*

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Factors Affecting the Image of University in the Eyes of Students-Clients

Abstract. *The paper is based on an original research endeavor carried out in 2014 and looking into the evolution of Polish higher education institutions as they strive to adapt to market economy. It specifically addresses the issue of university branding and the determinants of university image in the eyes of students. The discussion of factors relevant to the process of university image building is framed around rankings based on empirical data. These data may be an important source of information for competing universities.*

Keywords: *student-client, image, branding, determinants of university image*

Introduction

Polish higher education institutions operate on an imperfect market characterized by high barriers to entry, poor transparency, and a large diversity of products available [Jabłońska 1999: 98]. Further, it is a dual market, actually composed of two interdependent sub-markets: that of public higher education (also referred to as non-paid higher education) and that of commercial higher education (also known as paid higher education). Interestingly, this division does not coincide with the ownership structure in the higher education sector, viz. with the distinction into public (state) and private (non-state) institutions.

It is because both types of institutions are present, albeit to a different extent, in both the sub-markets.

From a marketing viewpoint, the higher education market is in its mature phase. Higher education institutions respond to opportunities and threats from their environment, which is reflected in changes to their *modus operandi*, supported by strategies developed around educational, scientific and financial objectives. Activities undertaken by higher education institutions are validated by the market (students, alumni, research and teaching staff, labor marker actors, competitors, etc.). What becomes more and more important is therefore a proactive approach toward image/reputation and brand management that makes it possible for a university to overcome amorphousness, differentiate itself, and compete in the increasingly challenging higher education market.

This paper aims primarily to demonstrate how relevant it is today for a university to build a reputation and to exemplify such differentiators of institutional identity that would appeal to university stakeholders, i.e. students. An overview of definitions of image and brand will provide a context for a presentation of survey findings and the ensuing discussion of the key characteristics of students as higher education clients.

1. Student as an actor in the higher education market

As a result of the revolutionary changes that took place in the higher education sector in the early 1990s, a distinct higher education market emerged, and students began to be perceived as customers. In the wake of the economic transformation, the student became a conscious and active market player making thoughtful and rational decisions. However, the embracement of marketing principles by universities had its far-reaching implications, raising fears about the changes that might follow. The list of likely dangers to academic values and traditions included the so called McDonaldization, downgrading universities to the role of an educational service provider and reducing higher education to a fast consumer good where the student-consumer obtains a degree against a payment [Mok 1999: 117-127].

The multiple controversies over perceiving students in terms of a marketing consumer have fueled a debate. Apparently, a particularly cogent commentary was contributed by Michael J. Armstrong, who proposed to differentiate between “clients” and “customers” and argued that higher education students should be treated as clients rather customers [Armstrong 2003: 372]. The term “client” denotes an individual or business that needs professional assistance in the service delivery process. This definition clearly relates to professional services, whose clients lack expert knowledge and therefore have to rely, to a large extent, on the expertise of professionals. The latter have a substantial influence on the needs and expectations of clients toward services offered. It seems to come as a matter of course then that preferences, tastes and resulting educational needs should only be satisfied as long as they are not in conflict with the mission of higher education institutions. A similar outlook is advocated by Mete Sirvanci, who warns against designating a student as a customer (buyer), and Randal S. Franz, who underscores the role of education that should not be seen as something tantamount to packaging and delivering knowledge to a passive student. Instead, Franz describes a higher education student as an actor, or active participant, being an integral part of the educational process [Sirvanci 1996: 99-100; Franz 1998: 63].

Fundamental differences between defining a student as a client and as a buyer are pointed out in literature [Sirvanci 1996: 99-100]. These include:

– **freedom of choice** – there are no restrictions whatsoever on access to goods and services. This is the case when businesses do not discriminate between their clients and place no constraints on their ability to purchase goods and services. This does not apply, however, to higher education institutions as they are not accessible to all potential students. To be admitted, a candidate must have a specified grade-point average as well as certain other prerequisites. Only candidates that meet these requirements are thus considered eligible for higher education services.

– **responsibility for paying the price** – customers pay for products and services, which implies that the spending is funded by themselves. It does not have to be the case with higher education, however, since it is possible to use financial assistance (scholarships, student loans) or parents' money to cover tuition expenses. In addition, free educational services, e.g. government- or EU-funded, are available.

– **requirements to prove merit and eligibility** – in the world of business, it is unthinkable to have customers take tests or examinations to prove their merit and eligibility to purchase a product. Yet, students are assessed all the time in order to verify their learning. To complete a term and be promoted to the next, a student needs to be credited by dean based on a number of partial assessments, otherwise the credit is conditional or refused to the effect that the student has to repeat a term.

An active stance taken by many students today may stem from their demographic and socio-economic background as well as from the factors driving their decisions to choose a particular higher education institution. Grażyna Światowy contends that higher education students can be divided into several groups with distinct characteristics related to their commitment to the education process and to self-development. Under that distinction, the student community comprises the following types: prudent conqueror, defiant individualist, submissive conformist, last chance strategist, and learning-resistant student [Światowy 2004: 140-143].

At the same time, Philip Kotler and Karen Fox distinguish five groups of higher education students: social improvement learners, learning/career learners, leisure/status learners, submissive learners, and ambivalent learners [Kotler, Fox 1995: 219 cited in Hall 2007: 110].

Each of those groups has distinct expectations toward an education product, hence seeking a different higher education institution emphasizing different identity features and touting different values – from functionality, to experiential and symbolic values, to affordability. Consequently, university image management is a challenge that involves a multitude of studies and analyses. Active and conscious market participants, such as higher education students, have some clearly defined requirements and do not find it difficult to rank factors influencing their positive perception of a higher education institution.

2. University brand and image

A higher education institution can be said to be characterized by prestige, good reputation, high esteem, or renown (e.g. Yale University, Cambridge University, Jagiellonian University). As access to higher education became common and the unique higher education market emerged, a number of new terms came into usage including university brand or image.

There are important correlations between university brand, image and mission. Mission, being a verbal expression of university identity, should, alike brand, promulgate coherent values producing a certain image in stakeholders' minds (cf. Fig. 1) [Iwankiewicz-Rak, Shulgina 2013: 39].

By definition, a university's mission points to is indicative of the object of its activities, its goals, and the ways these goals are to be achieved. Understandably, a mission statement is not static, but it should be validated, refined and updated to account for changes taking place inside and outside the institution" [Iwankiewicz-Rak, Shulgina 2013: 33]. Mission statements will reflect, and comply with, the regulatory framework outlining its powers and responsibilities and laying down its operating rules. The mission should be communicated to internal as well as external stakeholders in order to broadcast the values that the university intends to foster, as these values will influence its perception and hence contribute to building a specific image of the institution.

A university's mission is directly related to its brand, particularly to its verbal (name) and non-verbal portion (logo/emblem). The logo, being an element of corporate visual identity, represents an institution's differentiator (anchor of identity) [Altkorn 2004: 43], evoking the identity features and values that are set forth in the mission statement. In literature, **brand** is defined very broadly. Jerzy Altkorn,

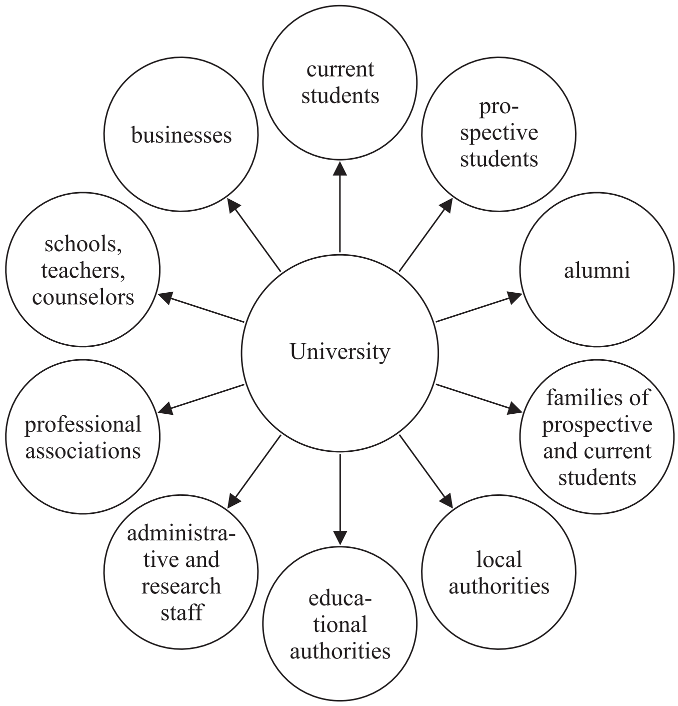


Figure 1. University stakeholders

Source: Payne 1997: 201.

for example, describes it as "a name, idea, symbol, inscription, pattern, or a combination of these, a color composition, tune, or a blend of all these components, used to differentiate a given product from those of competitors" [Altkorn 2001: 151]. Maciej Dębski has it that "brand is a complex combination of symbols, while the most lasting of all brand differentiators are value, culture, and personality" [Dębski 2009: 13].

The identity of a higher education institution, through its component brand differentiators, is supposed to create a specific picture, or image, of the institution. The resulting **image** is "a model, epitome, impression, picture" [Słownik współczesnego języka polskiego 1996, cf. Altkorn 2004: 14] crafted in the minds of all individuals and organizations that are directly or indirectly related to the institution. However, university identity can never be truly reflected in its image. Image can be said to represent a "holistic, subjective notion that an individual (e.g. student) has about an object. It arises as a result of deliberate communication measures centered on the object, conveying its true characteristics as well as elements of the desired picture" [Dąbrowski 2013: 10]. It is an undisputed fact that university image is an aggregate product of stakeholders' own experiences, popular beliefs, value systems, and even individual expectations. Image may vary and evolve with the kind and amount of information that the recipient has at a particular moment, hence so much weight attached to the communication policy pursued by an institution, and the communication tools and media that it employs [Białoskurski 2014: 32; Dudek-Mańkowska, Balkiewicz-Żerek 2015: 14, 22]. Although most higher education institutions still tend to rely on traditional media (e.g. the radio), increasingly higher priority is given to social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, etc.[1]

What is therefore at the heart of the **branding** process (forming a brand image) is accentuating the right values. The question arises: what values should be promoted by those who seek to differentiate themselves in the market while at the same time creating a positive institutional image? The question was answered e.g. by a survey involving students of Polish higher education institutions.

3. Determinants of university image in the light of the author's original research

Publications dedicated to higher education sector marketing and reflecting on university image or brand started coming out as the number of higher education institutions grew and a distinct higher education market emerged. Mass consumption of higher education products forced higher education institutions to adopt management styles prevalent in business. University image and brand management became important on the recent decline in the university-aged population accompanied by an undiminishing number of higher education institutions. It is presumed that higher education institutions will therefore intensify competitive behaviors and resort to a variety methods to mobilize social trust, engaging e.g. in branding. The increasing relevance of image and brand management has stimulated research on the adjustment of Polish higher education institutions to the realities of market economy. Some of the surveys included questions inquiring into university image.

[1] Originally, the underlying idea behind social media was to facilitate and support the development of social links. Over time, they have also become a communication platform for lots of organizations and their stakeholders. The most popular social networking site is Facebook. In 2015, it boasted 1.5 billion users, while the other top site YouTube had slightly over 1 million users. Social media have been growing rapidly as a result of social and cultural transformations and advances in information technology, especially that a fanpage or channel has a global outreach and costs relatively little to run. For a broader discussion, see: Bartosik-Purgat 2016; Tarka 2013.

In an image building process, a vital role is played by endogenic factors associated with the higher education institution itself, such as message content, including the institutional values and strengths that are highlighted, and the supporting visual identity system. What matters just as well is the selection of communication tools and media. Besides factors associated with the higher education institution whose picture is to be molded, branding importantly involves endogenic factors relating to message recipients (university stakeholders). The research whose outcomes are discussed in the paper was focused on factors linked to the activities of a university as an organization that were assessed by two groups of respondents – university research and teaching staff, and university students – through the lens of their own value systems and experiences.

The survey was performed between April and July 2014 and was designed to supply empirical data for use in a doctoral dissertation on the market orientedness of Polish higher education institutions. The questionnaire-based method of data acquisition was chosen for the survey. Recognizing the fact that the Web had become a major medium of communication, an online approach was adopted. Among the many advantages to conducting a direct survey online, the most appreciated ones are interactivity and global reach. Additional benefits are that the survey can be carried out at a lower cost, compared to traditional techniques, and completed in a relatively short time. Moreover, modern technologies make it possible to automate the recording and storage of data. Invitations to participate in the survey were e-mailed to rectors of Polish higher education institutions, along with a link to the e-questionnaire and a request to further circulate them among students and staff. More requests were distributed through social media. Since a suitable data base was not available, it was not possible to use random sampling, therefore non-probability sampling was used. Compared to random sampling, this method has several unquestionable strengths including, in the first place, a much lower cost to do research, feasibility to reach a clearly defined portion of the population even in the absence of a sampling frame – which was actually the case with the reported survey – and to conduct research on the target segment. Nevertheless, non-probability sampling has its weaknesses, too. Most importantly, the extent to which the findings are representative is difficult to determine and demonstrably inferior to those obtained from random samples. In total, the online questionnaire was completed by 938 respondents (including 301 students).

In the survey on the market orientation of higher education institutions, the respondents were asked to indicate and evaluate factors that, in their opinion, can influence university image. The respondents plotted their views on a matrix comprising a list of hypothetical factors that may be relevant to the branding process. The matrix was built around the proposition that higher education institutions are organizations operating in the higher education market and making use of marketing principles. Given the complexity of professional services marketing, it was assumed that factors determining university image would represent seven categories – an extended set based on the marketing mix concept. The categories were as follows: product, price, promotion, distribution, people, process, and physical environment [Boguszewicz-Kreft 2006: 25]. Since the list of factors included in the survey was not of a closed-end type, the respondents were allowed to add items and then provide their evaluations. However, this option was not exercised at all.

The factors were arranged alphabetically so that their order could not be interpreted as suggestive of their significance. The responses were used to rank the factors (Chart 1). The survey respondents were therefore requested to rate the listed items in a 5-point scale where the rate 5 stood for "most significant" and 1 for "least significant." In effect, a body of source data was collected that made it possible to build a ranking of the most relevant factors affecting the image of a higher education institution in the eyes of its stakeholders. The overall ranking was compiled using the grade-point scoring method. The procedure involved the following steps:

1) adding up responses pointing to a factor as relevant to university image building, and computing percentages for each such factor (only "highly significant" and "significant" evaluations were included in ranking these),

2) calculating a sum-total of the products of multiplying the percentages in each evaluation category (based on the list of factors) by their weights (a weight of 1.5 was adopted for evaluations in the category "highly significant" and a weight of 1 for the category "significant"), using the following formula:

$$x_{bw} \times 1.5 + x_{w} \times 1 = \text{ranking total},$$

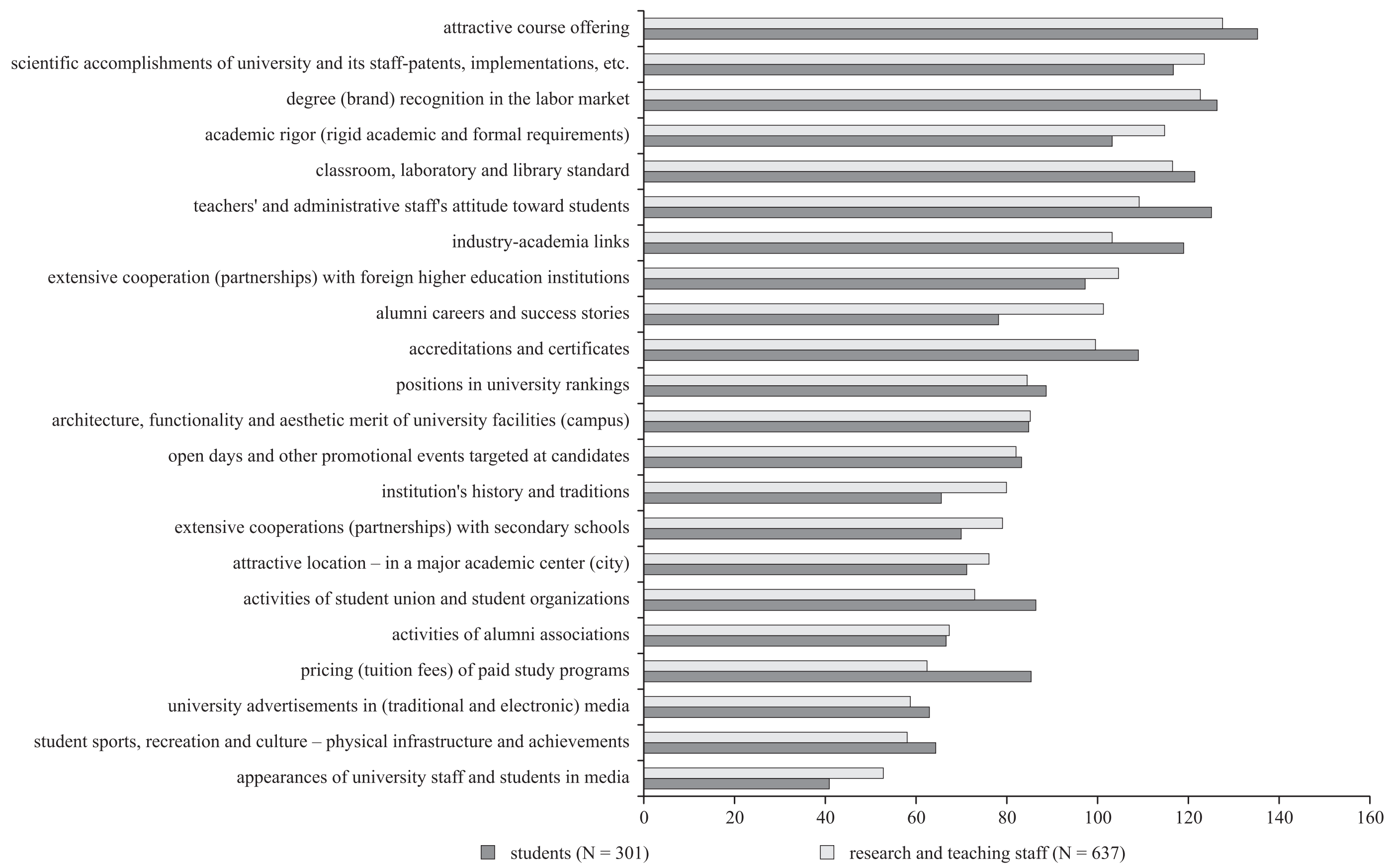
x_{bw} – value reflecting the percentage of responses in the category "highly significant",
x_{w} – value representing the percentage of responses in the category "significant",

3) making a ranking by arranging the corresponding elements by the value of a specific variable – the ranking total (the research and teaching staff ranking was assume adopt held up as the primary or master list, while the student ranking – as the secondary or reference list),

4) computing the differential between the ranking totals for specific factors affecting university image among research and teaching staff (p) and among students (s), to help analyze the final ranking.

Given the fact that students were treated in the survey as participants of a market where a professional service is offered and clients rely on the expertise of professionals (i.e. lecturers), the survey involved students alongside research and teaching staff. Hence, the way that the findings are delivered in the following section of the paper will be by juxtaposing the opinions of staff against those of the student community.

Chart 1. Ranking of factors affecting university image based on respondent opinions



Source: own based on an original questionnaire survey.

The respondents were unanimous in picking the factors that were the most and the least relevant to university image building, with attractive course offerings topping the list and staff and student appearances in the media lagging behind all other factors. They were also agreed about the relevance of such factors as classroom, laboratory and library standard (fourth place), attractive geographical location (sixteenth place), and activity of alumni organziations (eighteenth place). Both the respondent groups attached marginal importance to such factors as student sports, recreation and culture, or university advertisements in the media.

In the staff ranking, six of the factors that were considered the most relevant were related to course offerings, in the broadest sense, and to student facilities. Other top-ranked factors were centered on cooperation with stakeholders and partners. Lower rated factors included those strongly associated with university image, whether founded on institutional experience and tradition or on certificates, accreditations or positions in university rankings. Factors indicative of physical infrastructure and university campus were also placed in this category. The next two factors were focused on campus community – the seventeenth and the eighteenth place were taken by activities pursued by student and alumni orgnizations. At the bottom of the raking list are found factors corresponding to marketing mix components, including price, advertising, marketing communications, and complementary or non-curricular add-ons (sports, recreation, etc.).

Many student responses and evaluations diverge from those provided by university staff. The differences may be classified as slight (+/– 1 or 2 positions), significant (+/– 3 or 4 positions), or large (+/– 5 or more positions). Slight differences are found in the case of such factors as: degree recognition (placed lower in the staff survey); open days and other promotional events (rated lower in the student survey); university adevertisements in the media (positioned lower in the student survey); student sports, recreation and culture (a lower position in the staff survey); cooperation with foreign higher education institutions (a lower place in the student survey); campus (a lower position in the student survey); positions in university rankings (a lower rating in the staff survey); and cooperation with secondary schools (rated lower in the student ranking). Two of these factors were perceived by students as more relevant than by university staff (degree recognition and student life). A higher place given by students to brand perception indicates that they gauge the relevance of factors influencing university image from the perspective of alumni careers and their employability. This respondent group also places a greater value on such factors as student sports, recreation and culture, even though in the overall ranking the relevance of this factor appears negligible. This is due to the fact that activities other than study do matter if they can have an effect on a student's personal development (e.g. sports, including the activity of AZS [Academic Sports Association]). The factors whose evaluations differed more markedly between the respondent groups were as follows: academic rigor (rated lower in the student survey); teachers' and administrative staff's attitude toward students (positioned lower in the staff ranking); industry-academia links (a lower place in the staff survey); accreditations and certificates (a lower position in the staff survey); scientific accomplishments of university and its staff (placed lower in the student ranking). While rigor tends to be perceived by faculty as a fundamental ingredient of the instruction process, students will rather appreciate student-friendly attitudes, even such attitudes are often seen as an antonym of order and compliance with requirements imposed by teachers. Conversely, university staff are likely to regard academic rigor as a key prerequisite of quality instruction. Clearly, the two respondent groups have divergent views of what studying is about. Where research and teaching staff will mostly cherish the "old-school" approach to the instruction process, students believe in progressive values, which means that they put most emphasis on minimizng the time and effort that that it takes to earn a degree. For most students, the choice of university is driven by the expected market value of their education. Therefore, they discern that the choice of a university maintaining strong links with business enables its students to attend workshops, take part in study visits, and acquire hands-on experience, thus increasing their employability on graduation. It should be stressed as well that university staff find it very important that their institution has notable attainments in science. Excellence in research not only defines showcases demonstrates staff accomplishments but it also defines demonstrates determines the research performance and economic potential of the institution (implementations, patents). Students considered this factor slightly less relevant and gave it sixth place. The following factors were characterized by most salient differences in evaluations by students and staff: institution's history and traditions (ranked lower by students); alumni success stories (rated lower by students); activities of student unions and student organizations (a lower rank in the staff survey); and tuition fees (a lower position in the staff survey). Some of the differences were very pronounced. While institutional history and traditions were ranked fourteenth in the staff survey, students placed it near the end of the second ten of the ranking. Similarly, alumni success sories were rated by university staff as much more relevant to university image. An inverse relationship could be observed in the case of student unions and organizations (a six-place gap) and for tuitions fees (a seven-place disparity).

Contrary to what could be expected, advertising and media appearances of staff and students did not take a prominent place among factors affecting university image in the rankings compiled for the two respondent groups. Alumni associations were another factor that was rated low by the students and staff surveyed. Instead, the respondents seemed more focused on factors connected with the educational product, recognizing the relevance of attractive course offerings and curriculum design or the market value of the degree. It could therefore stated that it is to a limited extent only that the opinions revealed by the survey reflect the composion of a typical set of marketing instruments. The sole factor of this sort that was positioned high in the ranking was attractive course offerings that could be regarded in terms of products marketed by higher education institutions. Much emphasis was also placed on linkage between the value of the degree and the employability rate. Other marketing instruments were underrated by the respondents vis-à-vis their preception from a marketing perspective.

What has to be highlighted in summarizing the findings of the survey aimed at identifying the relative relevance of factors affecting university image is that an active approach to university image building and institutional brand management is critical. The discussion of the rankings of factors influencing university image demonstrates that precedence is given to factors relating to course offferings, the market value of the degree, and the insitutional research and economic potential. This leads to the conclusion that higher education institutions, while seeking to exploit the business opportunities inherent in their market presence, downplay other marketing instruments, notably communications and public relations.

Conclusion

The higher education market is no longer a national playground but has grown European or even global and is now governed by the same rules that apply to business entities. Quantitative and qualitative changes to the demand side of the market made in the past 26 years have resulted in tougher competition among higher education institutions whose behaviors, instead of being driven by sector convergence, have turned competitive. The initial explosive growth in the number of degree seekers has gradually abated, mainly due to two concurrent processes: the declining number of potential higher education students in the senior population, most of which have already upgraded their education in the post-transition period, coupled with the demographic low that will continue to threaten the prosperity of increasingly more higher education institutions in the years to come.

Having faced a variety of constraints on their growth, including toughening competition, higher education institutions started engaging broadly in marketing activities, taking special interest in branding and image management. What this entails is the need to identify factors to be made into the anchors of university identity and to convey values desired by the university as well as by its stakeholders. Among university stakeholders, a foremost group is students, who are to be seen by higher education institutions as clients making purchase decisions relating to an educational product. Admittedly, students are a distinctive type of client who relies heavily on the authority of professionals (academics) in making their choice of university and assessing an educational product, hence student opinions are depicted in the context of views articulated by faculty.

The paper discusses the findings of a survey showing that the two respondent groups rank relevant factors differently. What university staff rate the highest are factors associated with an institution's educational services, i.e. its course offerings, and terms of service. They also value collaboration with other organizations, including industry-academia ties. Among factors that they find less important there are university history, tradition, and experience. Students, on the other hand, give precedence to attractive educational products, university brand and reputation, and the labor market's perception of the degrees awarded by a specific institution.

Today the branding process, involving management of university image and reputation, increasingly often forms an integral part of marketing strategies pursued by higher education institutions. Institutions of higher learning strive to create a brand that is widely recognized in the market, not only by students but by other stakeholder groups as well, primarily by employers. Importantly enough, universities need to be responsive to constantly changing external conditions, hence the survey reported in the paper provides just a starting point for further exploration of this research area.

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Czynniki kształtujące wizerunek szkół wyższych w oczach klienta

Streszczenie. *Artykuł dotyczy problemów brandingu, a szczególnie czynników determinujących wizerunek uczelni w opinii studentów-klientów. Zaprezentowano w nim rankingi czynników kształtujących obraz uczelni, przygotowane na podstawie materiału empirycznego zebranego w trakcie badań nad przystosowaniem polskich uczelni do funkcjonowania w gospodarce rynkowej, zrealizowanych w 2014 r. Zgromadzone dane mogą stanowić źródło informacji dla uczelni, które podejmują działania zmierzające do budowania marki i pozytywnego image'u w oczach swoich interesariuszy.*

Słowa kluczowe: *student-klient, wizerunek, marka, czynniki kształtujące image uczelni*

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Determining Preference Parameters as Exemplifield by the Choice of University

Abstract. *In conducting research on decision making or consumer behavior, one encounters a number of methodology issues related to respondent sampling, data collection, data analysis tools, and inference techniques used to arrive at final conclusions. Difficulties in identifying the factors determining the choice of university are attributable to their diversity, hence generalizations entail the use of appropriate statistical tools that do not always ensure objective results. The paper offers a review of selected methods used in decision-making process research and associated methodological problems.*

Keywords: *consumer preferences, decision-making, education, choice of university, AHP*

Introduction

Given the rapidly changing needs and requirements of buyers, customer relationships should play an important part in business management. An excess supply and a wide range of available goods stand for an increasingly wider access to increasingly affordable goods. Advances in technology have led to the emergence of new distribution channels that facilitate goods purchases [Changsu et al. 2012: 385]. It is for these and other reasons that being aware of the factors influencing consumer decisions can play a key role in managing a business organization.

The awareness of how valuable the knowledge on motivations for decisions is, and how complex it can be, translates into increased interest in the findings of economics, psychology and neurobiology research [Glimcher, Fehr (eds.) 2013: 26]. Attempts are also made to employ naturalistic frameworks instead of formalized consumer behavior models in investigating strategies by observing behavior under extreme conditions, such as shortage of time or unclear preferences [Klein 2008: 456-457].

The choice of method for determining preference parameters in studying the processes and factors affecting decisions clearly bears on research outcomes. What the researcher therefore has to do at the initial stage of research process planning is account for the interdisciplinary nature of the problem and get a very good idea of what is to be learned about, what is to be achieved, and what relationships are to be found. In selecting tools and methods for data collection, sampling, data analysis, making inferences and drawing conclusions – each of the choices has an effect on the scientific merit and applicability of research outcomes [Adamkiewicz-Drwiłło 2008: 40]. Given the complexity of both the research object and subject, and the turbulent characteristics of today's marketspace where research is conducted, the selection of research methodology is the greatest challenge of all [Zhang, Wu, Olson 2005: 991-992]. Since consumer decisions concerning the same product may be influenced by different factors, consumer behavior models should be used with caution and adjusted for each type of product [Assel 1986: 26]. The paper aims, in the first place, to overview a range of tools for determining preference parameters and to provide an example of how the tools can be applied to establish the global parameter for differently-sized populations.

1. Methods for determining preference parameters

Studying consumer preferences involves determining variables affecting decisions made in the market. Variables defining motivations for consumer behaviors may be measurable or not, and yet, importantly enough, consumers find it much easier to describe their preferences in non-measurable terms. Hence, data collection methods are used that make it possible to assign numerical values to qualitative items. Applying an ordinal scale allows ranking the factors being examined according to their significance, thus even non-measurable characteristics (variables) can be described in numerical terms and then subjected to statistical processing [Szymańska 2007: 96].

Considering the type of choice preference data being collected and the expectations toward research findings, it is crucial to choose appropriate data processing methods. Depending on what measurement is used for preferences, one of the following methods can be selected [Szymańska 2013: 241-242]:

– composition methods of preference estimation that involve comparing and evaluating products or comparing and evaluating certain product features while at the same time assessing preferences for specific product criteria. Total utility is computed as the sum-total of weights reflecting the relative priority of specific criteria and sub-criteria adopted for a given product;

– decomposition methods of preference estimation that involve comparing consumer preferences between objects being investigated. As a next step, the preferences are decomposed into preferences for individual product criteria;

– composition-decomposition methods for estimating preferences – tools that incorporate elements of preference measurement combining composition and decomposition methods.

The choice of method is primarily aligned with the type of data acquired through a specific survey. Further in the paper, an example will be given of how a decomposition method can be used to determine preference parameters, alongside an example of a method for determining global preference parameters.

2. The AHP method in determining preference parameters

Making a decision involves choosing between at last two alternatives. Each alternative may have properties or characteristics that bear on the decision maker's preference for a given option. Difficulties arise in decision making processes where weights need to be determined to prioritize choice criteria. It is often the case that it is impossible or very difficult to determine the precise weights of preferences. Decision makers find it much easier to evaluate a specific criterion in terms of "better", "worse", or "just as important". A technique that comes in handy in analyzing such data is the AHP (Analytic Hierarchy Process) method. It was developed by Thomas L. Saaty as a tool that can support making multicriteria decisions [Saaty 1986: 841-842]. The procedure is best summarized when broken down into five transparent steps:

1. **Define the problem** – a stage where the object of analysis is established. This could be, for example, a question such as: Which university should I choose to study Management?

2. **Define the choice alternatives and criteria as well as sub-criteria** – a stage where alternative choices are specified (e.g. University A, University B), and then it is decided what criteria will be relevant for the choice (e.g. location, tuition fees) and what sub-criteria will be used to make the choice (e.g. location: city center or suburban area).

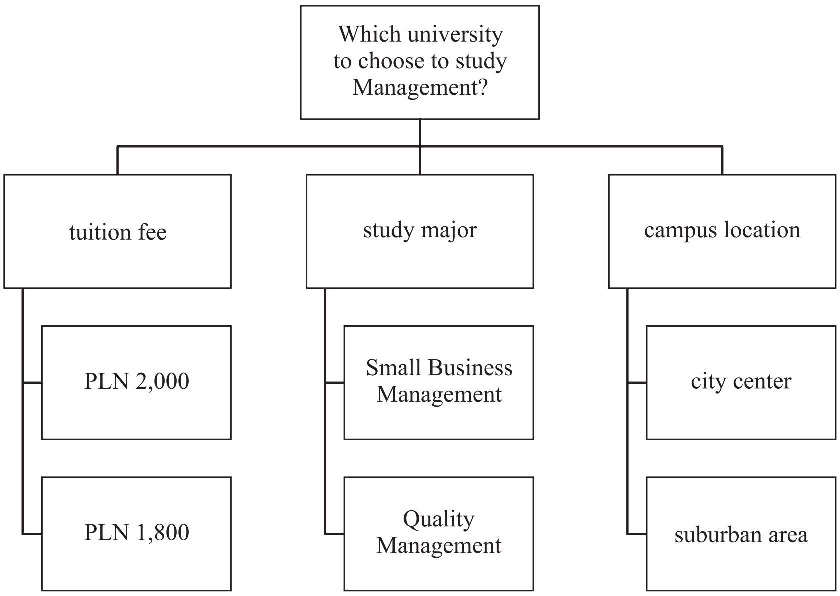

Figure 1. A set of criteria and sub-criteria in making the choice of Management program*

* The criteria and sub-criteria for the choice of university are hypothetical and are produced for the sole purpose of illustrating the application of the AHP method.

Source: own.

3. **Use a scale to prioritize the criteria against one another** (a scale can range from e.g. 9 to 1/9) – a stage that involves prioritizing the predefined criteria (e.g. study major is compared against tuition fee to establish that tuition fee is three times as significant as location).

tuition fee – study major								
9	7	5	3	1	1/3	1/5	1/7	1/9
study major – university location								
9	7	5	3	1	1/3	1/5	1/7	1/9
tuition fee – university location								
9	7	5	3	1	1/3	1/5	1/7	1/9

Figure 2. Prioritizing preferences for two selected criteria*

* The preferences are hypothetical values and are produced for the sole purpose of illustrating the application of the AHP method.

Source: own.

Preference scales shown in Figure 2 indicate that tuition fee is three times as significant as study major. If a decision maker wished to decide that study major is three times as significant for him/her as tuition fee, the value would be set to 1/3. A value of 1 means that the criteria are equally relevant.

4. **Plot the outcomes onto a matrix** – this stage involves plotting the preference parameters (values), established by prioritizing pairs of criteria, onto a matrix.

	Tuition fee	Study major	University location
Tuition fee	1	3	1
Study major	1/3	1	5
University location	1	1/5	1

Figure 3. A preferences matrix for the selected criteria

Source: own.

Matrices for the sub-criteria ascribed to specific criteria are built in a similar way.

5. **Calculate weights for individual criteria** – a stage where weights have to be calculated using two formulas.

Formula 1. A matrix of preferences for the selected criteria.

$$\begin{array}{c} N = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & a_{12} & a_{13} \\ a_{12}^{-1} & 1 & a_{23} \\ a_{13}^{-1} & a_{23}^{-1} & 1 \end{bmatrix} \\ \quad\; S_{c1} \quad S_{c2} \quad S_{c3} \end{array}$$

a_{nm} – preference-scale value for the *n*-th criterion vis-à-vis the *m*-th criterion,
S_{cn} – sum-total of the preference values.

The value of preference assigned to each criterion on prioritizing it against another is recorded in a matrix, as shown in Figure 3. Next, the columns are added up to produce the values of S_{cn} that will be then used to calculate weights from the equation given in Formula 2.

Formula 2. A matrix of preferences divided by the criteria sum-total.

$$N = \begin{bmatrix} \frac{1}{S_{c1}} & \frac{a_{12}}{S_{c2}} & \frac{a_{13}}{S_{c3}} \\ \frac{a_{12}^{-1}}{S_{c1}} & \frac{1}{S_{c2}} & \frac{a_{23}}{S_{c3}} \\ \frac{a_{13}^{-1}}{S_{c1}} & \frac{a_{23}^{-1}}{S_{c2}} & \frac{1}{S_{c3}} \end{bmatrix} \qquad X = \begin{bmatrix} \frac{\sum line1}{n} \\ \frac{\sum line2}{n} \\ \frac{\sum line3}{n} \end{bmatrix}$$

From the equation shown in Formula 2, the values of preferences assigned when prioritizing pairs of criteria are to be divided by the sum-total of preferences S_{cn}, for each line respectively. Accordingly, the value of X_1 represents the sum--total of the first line $X_1 = \frac{1}{S_{c1}} + \frac{a_{12}}{S_{c2}} + \frac{a_{13}}{S_{c3}}$ and stands for the weight of preference for tuition fee.

Figure 4 shows the weights given by decision makers to each of the criteria and sub-criteria. Thus, in making a decision to study Management at a particular higher education institution, cost of tuition will have a weight of 0.43, majors

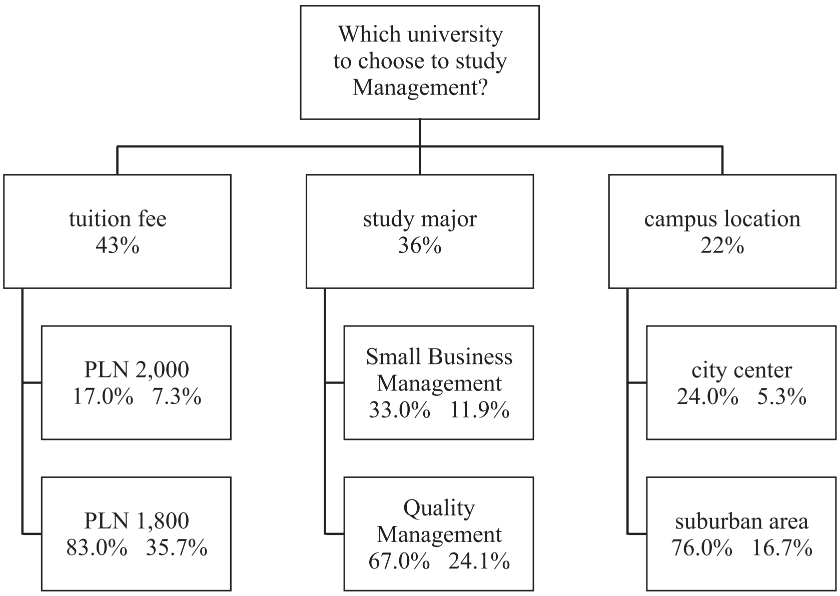

Figure 4. Weight assignment to the criteria and sub-criteria

Source: own.

available – 0.36, and campus location – 0.22.[1] The weights of preferences for all sub-criteria are known from the process of their prioritizing. For the cost of tuition, the weight of a fee at PLN 2,000 is, relative to other fees, 0.17. However, prior to any comparisons between sub-criteria, their weights need to be recalculated to account for the weight of the overarching criterion. Therefore, a tuition fee at PLN 2,000 will have a global weight of 0.073.

6. **Examine alternative choices** – the final stage of an AHP analysis where the values of weights for specific criteria and sub-criteria are added up to learn what decision would be optimal given the existing alternatives.

The decision maker is to choose among three institutions of higher learning. Each of them offers a program in Management but has some distinctive features:

– Institution A – tuition fee at PLN 2,000; major: Quality Management; location: suburban area;

– Institution B – tuition fee at PLN 2,000; major: Small Business Management; location: city center;

– Institution C – tuition fee at PLN 1,800; major: Small Business Management; location: city center.

Each of the institutions is described by criteria and sub-criteria that the decision maker is able to assess and hierarchize. Subsequent calculations yield their respective weights, making it possible to analyze the decision by adding up the global weights shown in Figure 4.

Institution A = 0.073 + 0.241 + 0.167 = 0.481
Institution B = 0.073 + 0.119 + 0.053 = 0.245
Institution C = 0.357 + 0.119 + 0.053 = **0.529**

The highest score is garnered by Institution C, therefore this is the one that the decision maker should enroll in. Through studying the preferences for specific criteria and sub-criteria, candidates gain an insight that can help them make optimal decisions and is particularly valuable in situations where multiple factors come into play. Higher education institutions, on the other hand, can benefit from exploiting the knowledge of preferences to tailor their services to market requirements and to strengthen those areas of their operations that are vitally relevant to candidates' choices.

[1] The reason why the weights do not add up to 1 is that they have been rounded to two decimal places.

3. The issue of marginalized groups in studying choice preferences

Every population can be broken down into sub-populations that will significantly differ it terms of e.g. number and preferences. This is conspicuous in medical science, where it is almost impossible to sample a homogenous respondent group. Hence, inferences and generalizations may be questionable since experimental treatments may have a positive effect on a very limited portion of the survey sample [Lau, Ioannidis, Schmid 1998: 123].

A heterogeneous population is one that consists of many distinct individuals who can be grouped consistently, based on some criteria, to form sub-populations. Establishing global preferences may raise problems where large size discrepancies are found between sub-populations. A tool that is commonly used to address such cases is the arithmetic mean, allowing researchers to generalize many of their findings. Calculating the arithmetic mean seems to be a relatively simple and particularly effective solution in cases where the sub-populations do not differ much in terms of size. Where the differences are larger, the use of arithmetic mean causes overrepresentation of smaller sub-populations whereas bigger sub-populations will have a lesser effect on the global result. The global result may be arrived at by using a weighted arithmetic mean where each sub-population is assigned a weight in proportion to its size relative to the total population being studied. This way, each sub-population's preferences bear proportionately on the global result. This appears to be a viable solution, even though in situations where one of two sub-populations is a lot more numerous than the other, the preferences of the smaller one will be marginalized and may have hardly any effect on the global result.

In the academic year 2010-11, a survey was run in the area of Dolnośląskie (Lower Silesia) region targeting factors for the choice of a university of economics.[2] A special definition of a university of economics was coined for the survey to help accurately delimit the research sample.[3] Based on data sourced from higher education institutions themselves, the population was known to comprise 12,904 first-year students.[4] The respondents to be surveyed for preferences

[2] The survey was conducted for use in the Ph.D. dissertation by mgr Wojciech Maciejewski on "Factors for the choice of a university of economics based on the example of Dolnośląskie (Lower Silesia)" [Maciejewski 2013].

[3] A university of economics was defined as any institution of higher learning based in Dolnośląskie region that offers a minimum of two study programs falling within the science of economics.

[4] The survey involved full-time and part-time students of public and private higher education institutions in first- and second-cycle programs.

Table 1. Percentage of full-time students in respective sub-populations of students of universities of economics, divided by type of university and study program

First-cycle program in a public institution	First-cycle program in a private institution	Second-cycle program in a public institution	Second-cycle program in a private institution
47.8%	26.6%	19.9%	5.9%

Source: Maciejewski 2013.

Table 2. Preferences determining the choice of university of economics among full-time students (%)*

	Greater prestige over a public/private institution	Program not available at other public/private institutions	Ssuperior quality of instruction over public/private institutions	Admissions process	Quality of administrative services	Other
Students in full-time first--cycle programs at public universities of economics	17.8	2.2	23.7	0.0	1.7	2.8
Students in full-time second-cycle programs at public universities of economics	40.7	0.8	26.5	1.7	0.0	3.1
Students in full-time first--cycle programs at private universities of economics	20.5	29.2	10.3	23.2	7.3	9.5
Students in full-time second-cycle programs at private universities of economics	0.0	15.4	14.1	50.0	17.9	2.6

* The respondents were allowed to select more than a single factor. Where two factors were selected, each of the factors was given a weight of 0.5; where three were selected, each was given a weight of 0.333; further weights were assigned accordingly, i.e. depending on the number of replies marked.

Source: Maciejewski 2013.

determining the choice of a university of economics were quota-sampled. First-year students in economics programs were split into sub-populations along the distinction between students of public (state-owned) and private institutions, students in first- (Bachelor's) and second-cycle (Master's) programs, and into full-

-time and part-time students. The division produced eight diversely sized sub-populations. The global result for preferences concerning the choice of a university of economics was computed separately for full-time and part-time students. The paper presents selected findings for full-time students in economics programs.

Table 1 provides a percentage breakdown showing the proportion of full-time students of economics (enrolled in different institutions and in first- or second-cycle programs) in the total population of full-time first-year students in economics programs. The largest sub-population is definitely that of students in first-cycle programs at public universities of economics. The smallest proportion of the population being surveyed is represented by second-cycle students at private universities of economics. The research aimed to ascertain the global preferences, yet there were fears that the preferences of a small-sized population would be marginalized.

Table 2 shows preferences for the choice of a university of economics. Since they vary across sub-populations, the global result had to be determined using a weighted arithmetic mean with weights expressed as roots. This method made it possible to proportionally render the general tide of responses from specific sub-populations in the global indicator, avoiding the excess influence of larger-sized sub-populations that would be effected by a weighted arithmetic mean, or the overrepresentation of smaller populations that would be visible if the arithmetic mean were used.

The arithmetic mean with weights expressed as roots can be calculated as follows from Formula 3.

Formula 3. Weighted arithmetic mean with weights expressed as roots.

$$a_g = \frac{a_1\sqrt{p_1} + a_2\sqrt{p_2} + \ldots + a_N\sqrt{p_N}}{\sqrt{p_1} + \sqrt{p_2} + \ldots + \sqrt{p_N}}$$

a – numerical size of population in a given group,
p – share of a given group in total population,
a_g – weighted arithmetic mean with weights expressed as roots.

Using the arithmetic mean with weights expressed as root numbers to calculate global preferences for the choice of a university of economics among first-year students in full-time programs allows scientific inference while adequately accounting for the preferences of small-sized sub-populations.

Table 3 shows the result for global preferences produced by, respectively, the arithmetic mean ($\bar{a}$), the weighted arithmetic mean (a_w), and the weighted arithmetic mean with weights expressed as roots (a_g).

Table 3. Global preferences for the choice of a university of economics computed for first-year students in full-time programs (%)

	Greater prestige over a public/private institution	Program not available at other public/private institutions	Ssuperior quality of instruction over public/ private institutions	Admissions process	Quality of administrative services	Other
$\bar{a}$	19.74	11.92	18.67	18.72	6.74	4.49
a_w	23.36	7.97	21.26	7.97	3.32	4.20
a_g	22.38	9.87	20.11	12.30	4.63	4.43

Source: Maciejewski 2013.

The educational services market is broken down into the public and private sectors, differentiated primarily by the absence of tuition fees for full-time programs provided by public institutions. The considerably greater number of students in full-time programs at public higher education institutions meant that this sub-population had a substantial impact on the global result. However, the authors' principal intention was to capture global preferences for the choice of a university of economics while not downplaying underrating the private educational services sector, one that had been experiencing dynamic growth and strengthening its position in the higher education market as a whole.

The use of weights expressed as roots was proposed by W. Słomczyński and K. Życzkowski as a means to allocate vote power/weight to the European Union member states. The method, referred to as the Jagiellonian compromise, represents an alternative to the system laid down in the Treaty of Nice and adopted in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. An approach based on weights expressed as roots has multiple advantages over the existing system, being simple, objective, representative, transparent, easily expandable, moderately effective, and not too conservative [Słomczyński, Życzkowski 2015: 18]. Importantly, it inflates the vote power of smaller member states, reducing the domination of large member states, such as Germany, France, or the United Kingdom.

Conclusion

The availability of tools that come in handy in determining preference parameters enables scholars to deliver more and more accurate findings in this research area. At the same time, the quick pace of changes in the market, alongside the increasingly personalized and individualistic preferences of decision makers are forcing researchers to enhance the existing instruments and look for innovative tools. The applicability of a specific research methodology may prove very narrow, and the data may be become obsolete almost from day to day due to unexpected developments in the market. Choosing a predefined set of variables reflecting consumer preferences may further compromise the relevance of the findings and make it difficult for the researcher to use them in formulating broad diagnostic statements.

An insight into consumer behaviors and consumer preferences regarding products available in market, as well as into their future expectations, is of great value to any business, hence the reliability and applicational merit of research outcomes does matter. Even the most sophisticated new tools will not be able to ensure that research findings are error-free. This realization, nevertheless, should not discourage further efforts at refining the research tools with a view to developing better and better solutions.

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Wyznaczanie parametrów preferencji przy podejmowaniu decyzji na przykładzie wyboru uczelni

Streszczenie. *Badania z zakresu podejmowania decyzji związane są z wieloma problemami metodycznymi. Składają się na to działania polegające na właściwym doborze próby badawczej, poprawnego zgromadzenia danych, doboru narzędzi analizy danych oraz końcowego wnioskowania. Trudności w poszukiwaniu czynników decydujących o wyborze uczelni wynikają z ich zróżnicowania, a ich uogólnienie wymaga zastosowania odpowiednich narzędzi statystycznych, które nie zawsze gwarantują uzyskanie obiektywnych wyników. Artykuł stanowi przegląd metod wykorzystywanych w badaniach procesów decyzyjnych oraz problemy metodyczne związane z tym zagadnieniem.*

Słowa kluczowe: *parametry preferencji, podejmowanie decyzji, edukacja, wybór uczelni, AHP*

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Alumni Relationship Management by a University of Tourism in the Context of a Practically-profiled Curriculum

Abstract. *In today's Poland, the higher education market compels university administrators to come up with new and innovative ways to govern their institutions. To be able to cope with this challenge, they need to know as much as possible about their universities' stakeholders and have a perfect understanding of stakeholder relationship management. The paper discusses university stakeholder relationships in terms stakeholder groups and stakeholder management tools, with a special focus on alumni as the group that increasingly centers the attention of universities implementing practically-profiled curricula. The paper seeks to identify relationships that a university has with its stakeholders and to apply relevant relationship management approaches to specific stakeholder groups. In doing so, it looks at how higher education institutions currently manage their alumni relationships and attempts to suggest improvements in that respect. To address the research problem of whether, and to what extent, an institution's concentration on the delivery of tourism programs affects its alumni relationships, the author makes extensive use of analysis, synthesis, and primary research.*

Keywords: *alumni, university stakeholders, relationship management, practically-profiled curriculum*

Introduction

For more than a few years now, Poland's higher education sector has been immersed in a complex and dynamic environment, among a dazzling blend of trends, developments, frameworks and marketplaces that make up the context for its operations [Dawidziuk 2011: 34]. The continually evolving legal, social and economic environment poses new challenges for more than 450 higher education institutions, both public and private, that are present in Poland's market. K. Mazurek-Łopacińska and M. Sobocińska name the following major challenges facing these institutions [Mazurek-Łopacińska, Sobocińska 2011: 10]:

– challenges relating to university governance,

– challenges relating to internal policy toward the performance of research and educational functions,

– challenges relating to toughening competition in the market,

– challenges relating to funding schemes available to higher education institutions,

– challenges relating to unfavorable demographic trends that might affect institutions of higher learning.

Those investigating the higher education services market contend that, in the context of these multiple challenges, higher education institutions must strive to foster positive, trust-based and lasting links with different groups found in their environment [Mazurek-Łopacińska, Sobocińska 2011: 10-11]. It should be therefore emphasized that stakeholder relationship management is becoming a vital issue for institutions of higher learning, given the increasingly common economic-managerial approach to the operations and development of higher education institutions in Poland.

The research objective of this paper is to identify university stakeholder relationships and the stakeholder group breakdown alongside the methodological toolkit for effective management of these relationships, and to evaluate the approaches that higher education institutions currently take toward developing alumni relationships, suggesting improvements to the way that specific tools are applied. The research problem was put forth as the question whether, and to what extent, an institution's concentration on the delivery of tourism programs affects its relationships with alumni. To address the question, the author made use of analysis, synthesis, and primary research. In the empirical portion of the research, questionnaire and interview techniques were used to address the research problem. The questionnaire survey employed two electronic online questionnaires: one targeted at alumni, and the other – at university staff. The online questionnaires were designed using the docs.google tool supplied by Google. Experts were interviewed using a direct interview technique based on a standardized questionnaire. The survey was conducted between September and November 2013, and the survey sample consisted of three cohorts: alumni – 361 graduates from second- or long-cycle programs who earned the Master's degree from a Polish higher education institution; higher education institutions – 71 public and private institutions based in Poland; and experts – 15 knowledgeable individuals elected from amongst those with profound insights into, and hands-on experience of, the functioning of higher education institutions in Poland. The survey was focused on alumni relationship management practices pursued by institutions of higher learning.

1. University stakeholder relationship management – actors and tools involved

In English-language literature, the practice of shaping university relationships with its environment is referred to as a strategy for managing the interactions between a higher education institution and its stakeholders in an organized fashion that involves analyzing, planning and designing [Pausits 2013: 90]. In Polish-language literature on the subject, A. Drapińska defines relationships management as a continuous and long-term process whereby a higher education institution builds relationships with its partners in the environment (students, businesses, public authorities, sponsors, etc.) through joint value creation in a way that ensures that all parties to the process achieve their objectives [Drapińska 2011: 149].

In the higher education services market, the notion of relationship may stand for links between a higher education institution and its stakeholders that are supposed to bring benefits to both parties through interactive, individualized and value-oriented process that unfolds in the long-term. To be able to flourish, a university's relationships with actors in its environment need to be competently managed. Namely, institutions have to plan, organize, motivate, and monitor the relationship management process. The planning stage relates to deciding which stakeholder groups are strategically relevant. It is important to set goals for establishing ties with actors in the environment and determine performance measures for their assessment. At the organization stage, a university needs to choose what sort and forms of relationships are to be created and maintained. The management function, involving staff motivation and leadership, is about identifying factors that can stimulate personnel for delivering better performance and putting a system in place that takes care of providing the right incentives and stimuli. A university's ability to attain its objectives in terms of stakeholder relationship management hinges on the skills and commitment of responsible staff. The control process, in turn, involves ongoing monitoring and review of stakeholder relationships. Monitoring and observation of the behavior of actors in the university's environment is clearly what makes it possible to identify and understand stakeholders' needs and expectations. Importantly, it is at the control stage that the outcomes should be analyzed and benchmarked against the objectives envisioned at the planning stage.

Table 1. Overview of actors in a higher education institution's environment – institutional stakeholders

Institutional stakeholder	Type of relationship	Stakeholder expectations	Sample relationship management measures and tools
Ministry of Science and Higher Education	formal (governed by administrative law)	– compliance with applicable laws – contribution to national growth through human capital development (via education), laying foundations for growth (via research), popularization and dissemination of knowledge	– attainment of strategic goals – reasonable deployment of financial, human and material resources
National Accreditation Board	formal (governed by administrative law)	– improving the quality of instruction – aiming at educational standards observed in the European Education Area and in the global higher education context	– active role of an institutional body for quality of instruction – use of benchmarking in university governance – student and alumni surveys – class observation
Providers of public co-funding (NCN, NCBiR)	formal (governed by administrative law)	– efficient use of funding allocated for research activity – pursuit of the objectives of government policy on research, technology and innovation – creating a platform for effective dialog between research and business communities	– supporting and motivating faculty to apply for funding – publishing calls for domestic and international research project proposals addressed to teams and individuals
Other government institutions (Tax Office, Social Insurance Institution, Police)	formal (governed by administrative law)	– disclosure of relevant information and optimizing information flows	– upgrading the skills of administrative staff – training courses and sessions
Local governments (and local government organizations)	organizational (collaborative partnership)	– cooperation and partnership for regional development – educating workforce for the local and regional labor market – embracement of corporate social responsibility	– joint undertakings promoting the regional education sector – engaging academic staff in joint projects – providing expert opinions and sectoral studies – involving local government officials in lecturing to provide exposure to first-hand experience as part of the curriculum

Media: internet, TV, radio, press	organizational (collaboration involving supply of reliable and marketable information)	– maintaining a professional mindset and attitude in interacting with media	– an online pressroom for contact with media – producing press releases for use by mass media – university image and reputation management
Secondary schools	market-driven	– assisting young people in making the choice of study program by showcasing their range of higher education products	– workshops and training courses run by university student societies and academic associations for the benefit of secondary school students – lectures, workshops and debates led by faculty in secondary schools – organization of events such as open days and campus tours featuring lectures, workshops, and quizzes – joint organization of science contests to promote higher learning – launching postgraduate courses designed for teachers
Employers	organizational (collaborative partnership)	– delivery of research and development services – commercialization of research results – increasing availability of qualified workforce – embodying employer opinions and recommendations in curriculum and instructional design	– collaboration in increasing graduate employability – addition of an advisory body consisting of practitioners and influential politicians to university organizational structures – offering internships and work placements – including business practitioners as faculty members – classes led by employers – creating incentives for faculty to undergo in-service training in businesses – organization of scientific conferences to bring together academics and practitioners – provision of training and personal development services to local workforce – supporting academic enterprise – co-hosting job fairs – setting up career services
Businesses (banks, service providers)	market-driven	– making timely payments – growth financing – service delivery	– effective university finance management – policy on loan financing for development and innovation – infrastructural development

Table 1 – cont.

Institutional stakeholder	Type of relationship	Stakeholder expectations	Sample relationship management measures and tools
Professional associations	organizational (collaborative partnership)	– proposing, conducting and supporting initiatives at industry level	– conference organization – on-campus promotional events
Partner universities (domestic and international)	organizational (collaborative partnership)	– involvement in joint educational and research projects – joint promotion and organization of conferences and seminars – forming associations to safeguard common interests – exchanging information on organizational and functional know-how and on current developments at institutional level	– bilateral agreements under the Erasmus program for student mobilities (the most common form of student involvement in the Erasmus program are exchanges between participating countries. Students may apply for two types of mobilities: one allowing them to complete a part of their study at a foreign partner institution of higher learning, and the other – to serve a work placement at an organization based in a foreign participating country – bilateral agreements under the Erasmus program for administrative and teaching staff mobilities – agreements on student mobility, such as e.g. MOST (MOST is a student exchange program drawing on the principles developed under the Socrates Program) – allowing access to academic degree award procedures – attendance at conferences, seminars, etc. – facilitating informal networking among staff, holding staff get-togethers
Competitor universities (domestic and international)	market-driven	– gaining a competitive edge in the market	– use of marketing-mix instruments (educational products, price, service distribution, promotion, faculty) – research grants – acquisition of EU funding – employing high-potential research staff – providing professional development opportunities for staff

Source: own.

Table 2. Overview of actors in a higher education institution's environment – social stakeholders

Social stakeholder	Type of relationship	Stakeholder expectations	Sample relationship management measures and tools
Higher education candidates and their families (including secondary school leavers)	market-driven	– supplying information on educational services offered	– involving secondary school leavers in special on-campus programs – launching free-of-charge preparation courses for the maturity (secondary school-leaving) exam – communicating with young people through education fairs – generating leads to feed e-mailing databases – soliciting participation in contests run through social networking sites – including a dedicated candidate tab (section) in the university website
Higher education students and their families	social as well as market-driven	– marketing attractive educational products – starting and completing a higher education program – learning and qualifications earned for good job prospects – fostering personal development	– induction events (tutorials) to integrate freshman students into university life – approaching students as partners – flexible class scheduling allowing students to tailor schedules to their preferences – state-of-the-art equipment and facilities – conducting marketing surveys to inquire into students' needs and expectations – effective student information systems – providing opportunities to pursue passions and interests – recognizing and backing up student initiatives – holding attractive student-centered events – training university staff in the delivery of professional student services – introducing innovations to streamline paperwork and formal procedures – engaging industry experts in teaching
Alumni and their families	social	– collaboration between higher education institutions and employers – supporting alumni in the job market – building a strong reputation of degrees awarded by the higher education institution	– forming alumni associations and clubs – setting up alumni programs – holding meetings to enable professional networking – building up the university graduate's reputation among employers – using PR instruments to promote graduates in the job market
Faculty, research staff and administrative staff	social	– commensurate salary – employer's prestige – quality of working conditions – professional development	– allotting funds to conferences and publications – training staff to upgrade their professional skills

Source: own.

An overview of university relationship management actors and tools is provided in two descriptive tables. Table 1 shows the institutional stakeholder group, while Table 2 describes the social stakeholder group. The type of relationships existing between a higher education institution and each of its stakeholders is indicated, the expectations of each stakeholder group are outlined, and examples of relationship management measures and tools are given.

A review of the actor groups in a university's environment demonstrates that there are a variety of relationships binding higher education institutions to specific stakeholder groups. Among institutional stakeholders, formal (i.e. governed by administrative law), organizational (collaborative partnership or cooperation involving the supply of reliable and marketable information) and market-driven relationships are prevalent (cf. Table 1).

Key insights afforded by an analysis of social stakeholders are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 demonstrates that social stakeholders are tied to the university chiefly by social bonds and less so through interaction in the market.

Each of the stakeholder groups regards and evaluates a higher education institution through the lens of their specific expectations, and their judgments of the institution's role in their individual settings are dependent on the extent to which their expectations are met. Hence, higher education institutions undertake a number of efforts and employ a variety of instruments to satisfy the needs of their stakeholders.

It is envisaged that collaboration with the stakeholder groups listed above will be particularly relevant to higher education institutions that have chosen to run practically-profiled programs,[1] a condition that is strongly attributable to the unique demands that the tourism market demonstrably puts on the competences of university graduates – the future workforce in the tourism industry.[2]

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[1] Act of July 27, 2005 Law on Higher Education, Art. 2, p. 3. Under the Law, a practically-profiled study program is one comprising modules geared to training students in practical skills and social competences, satisfying the requirement that practically-focused courses developing these skills and competences, including skill development workshops, represent a majority of the program content, as indicated by ECTS points, and are led by persons having work experience earned outside higher education.

[2] An extensive treatment is given to the education and training of workforce for the tourism industry in such publications as: Panasiuk (ed.) 2008; Fedyk, Paliga 2012: 141-154; Pstrocka-Rak 2012: 213-226.

2. Alumni and their role in the stakeholder structure in light of research

Studies focusing on university stakeholders lead to the observation that, besides actors traditionally entrenched in the higher education environment, new important players are coming into view, such as employers and graduates, and that the management of alumni relationships have become particularly relevant in the face of two concurrent and interlinked trends affecting the higher education sector in Poland: first, the demographic low that, notably after 2015, diminished the population of higher education candidates [GUS 2010: 170], and second, the embracement of the idea of lifelong learning by society, which is where institutions of higher learning certainly have a role to play.

However, strategies of Polish higher education institutions do not pay much attention to either the forms of interaction or to building long-term relationships with alumni, even though the experiences of many reputable U.S. and European universities prove that these relationships definitely bear on the institution's image and position in the educational market as well as in the job market [Mael, Ashforth 1992: 103-123]. A broad review of Polish university websites indicates that there are but a few higher education institutions that have really intensified measures targeted at alumni and opened up to communicating with them.[3]

Empirical studies conducted in 2013 and involving three groups of respondents – higher education graduates ($n = 361$), higher education institutions ($n = 79$), and higher education experts ($n = 15$) – revealed that all of them considered it important for a university to sustain links with alumni.[4] Nevertheless, what Polish

[3] Higher education institutions that have put alumni relationship programs in place include e.g. the Kozminski University (Akademia Leona Koźmińskiego) with an operational Alumni Relationship Office since March 2009; the Nicolaus Copernicus University (NCU) in Toruń (Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu) whose Centre for Promotion and Information initiated to uphold the NCU's relationships and collaboration with alumni in February 2001. The NCU Alumni Programme was launched to form and maintain bonds between the NCU and its alumni. The Program functions outside the existing Alumni Association and is part of the University's forward-looking strategy; the Warsaw School of Economics (Szkoła Główna Handlowa w Warszawie – SGH), where an Alumni Office was established in May 2010 as a response to an increasingly visible need for furthering links between the SGH and its alumni and to meet the growing demand from alumni themselves for cooperation with their Alma Mater in different areas and at different levels; the Lazarski University (Uczelnia Łazarskiego w Warszawie) that started its Alumni Club in 2010. The Club aims to create a network for the sharing and exchange of information, resources, support and opportunities among professionally active alumni, and to strengthen ties between the University and its alumni, forming a sort of advocacy group.

[4] The full characteristics of the survey sample, as well as the detailed findings, are given in the doctoral thesis by A. Krajewska-Smardz entitled "University alumni relationship management" and developed under the supervision of Prof. M. Pluta-Olearnik at the Faculty of Economic Sciences of the Wrocław University of Economics.

universities do in that respect was not found satisfactory by the alumni surveyed. More than a half of the alumni respondents appreciated the fact that, during their time at university, their institutions were open to student initiatives. Students were primarily encouraged to engage in the activities of academic societies and student unions. In addition, higher education institutions would muster the aid of students in organizing a variety of on-campus events (e.g. conferences, inauguration and graduation ceremonies). However, that did not translate to closer links after graduation. 77% of the alumni surveyed admitted to no contact whatsoever with their former universities, while 23% of the respondents said that the relationships were limited to periodic mailing – delivering up-to-date course offerings and invitations to take part in alumni career surveys or join the alumni association.

At the same time, 92% of the university staff insist that their institution does track alumni career paths. Although the percentage is fairly high, it should be realized that it covers both institutions that run solid, regular surveys and those that make sporadic research efforts. Higher education experts, on the other hand, believe that probing alumni regularly for information on their career paths will have a tangible effect on the development trajectories of Polish higher education institutions. Therefore, they suggest that universities need to attempt a more proactive attitude toward alumni relationships, perceiving their impact on the perception of quality of instruction at a given institution and taking notice of their significance in the context of the constantly evolving labor market determinants and employer expectations that higher education institutions have to raise to.

In assessing the alumni relationship management methods that higher education institutions have hitherto used, one is bound to say that most of them are not interested in alumni beyond their career tracking. Only 19% of the institutions surveyed have implemented special alumni-centered programs. Yet alumni visibly expect much more. The survey findings demonstrate that they would be more than willing to engage in closer relationships if only their universities created the right opportunities for them, such as personal and professional development projects, an option to consult their tutors about job-related concerns, discounts on postgraduate courses, or support in job seeking.

Furthermore, the findings are indicative of a very good perception that the alumni have of their universities. Most of them made no explicitly negative comments and saw their institutions as large, prestigious, employing accomplished scholars, and friendly toward students. The brand attributes that they valued the most were quality of instruction, faculty, and curricula.

A vast majority (77%) of the alumni respondents have a sense of identification with their university, enjoying the prestige that its degree gives them in their place of work and living. They also appreciate the professional training that they have received and the good job prospects in the labor market upon graduation. However, one in four alumni does not feel part of their university and does not hold it in high esteem, thinking low of the quality of teaching that it provides, being disappointed with the little effort that it takes to earn a degree and frustrated at their stuck careers or the fact that the university did not give them the kind of education that would make a difference in the job market. The survey showed that the alumni make contact with their universities incidentally and by chance (30% of the responses). At the same time, though, one out of four alumni visits the university website. This is an important clue for higher education institutions that intend to adopt an alumni relationship management concept and embark on building links with the alumni who graduated some time ago.[5] Admittedly, the official website appears instrumental in communicating with alumni.

For a higher education institution to be able to sustain lasting relationships with its alumni, it is necessary to keep communicating with them. The survey respondents expect to be contacted by their university at least twice a year. In their opinion, the most effective media that a higher education institution can use to communicate with alumni and build up relationships with them include e-mail and social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), whilst the least effective are newsletters and alumni news periodicals.

The alumni relationship management tools that the respondents saw as most effective would be as follows: promoting graduates in the job market, offering discounts on postgraduate courses or assistance in job search, launching a dedicated alumni website, holding free thematic lectures and workshops. What they regarded as least effective was e.g. sending holiday greeting cards and invitations for academic ceremonies and events.

By way of summary to this discussion of the relationships between higher education institutions and their alumni, it should be underscored that alumni relationship management can only be expected to bring measurable benefits in the long term. Based on feedback from alumni, statements by university officials and the opinions of higher education experts, further changes are to be anticipated in the ways that higher education institutions interact with their alumni as they evolve toward the application of professional techniques to building, maintaining and developing alumni relationships as well as to monitoring their effects. What can be seen at the moment as the key barriers to fully embracing the idea of alumni relationship management is underfunding and the reluctance of executives to engage in initiatives that are not likely to produce immediate benefits.

[5] The pertinent university alumni relationship management model was published in the author's Ph.D. thesis.

Benefits from alumni relationships vs. practically-profiled curricula at institutions running higher education programs targeted at the tourism industry

At the moment of this writing, there are 78 higher education institutions in Poland offering tourism and recreation programs [Wiadomości Turystyczne; Ministerstwo Sportu i Turystyki 2010: 320]. It is for these institutions, emphasizing the practical aspect of education and running practically-profiled curricula, that alumni relationship management becomes particularly relevant. A practical-profile curriculum stands for combining theoretical grounding given by the university with professional training delivered in business settings, where the work placement provider acts as an equal partner in the education process. Students therefore receive instruction both on university premises and on-the-job, pursuing a program agreed by the educational partners and hence meeting employers' real needs [Uniwersytet Opolski]. Work placement follows a detailed schedule and lasts throughout the duration of the university course. The practical study profile promulgated by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education turns out to be largely similar to what has been done for years in Germany by *Berufsakademie* found in federal states, where academic teaching at *Studienakademie* is blended with practical training in a real workplace to make up a dual study system.[6] In such systems, work placement is part of the formal education structures. German experiences prove that combining higher education with internships and on-the-job training is a very effective means to prevent graduate unemployment.

The report *Losy absolwentów szkół i uczelni kształcących kadry dla branży turystycznej* (*The Career Paths of Tourism School and University Graduates*) compiled for the Ministry of Sports and Tourism recommends that higher education institutions training tourism professionals should attempt at defining a practical teaching model that would at once become an ongoing process of adjustment to the changing expectations of the labor market [Ministerstwo Sportu i Turystyki 2010: 323]. Before final systemic solutions are in place, however, it is advised that alumni be treated by higher educations institutions as sources of up-to-date information on the job market and be involved in monitoring study programs based on employer expectations [Krajewska-Smardz 2014: 266-272]. Even though it seems that alumni could play a much greater role in the development of higher education institutions than by merely sharing their understanding of the changes occurring in the labor market.

[6] Eurydice (Network on education systems and policies in Europe), www.eurydice.org.pl/sites/eurydice.org.pl/files/niemcy.pdf [accessed 7.02.2013].

Table 3. Benefits derived from alumni relationships by higher education institutions specialized in tourism programs

Type (Area) of benefit	Examples of benefits
Informational	– acquisition of tourism labor market information – assistance rendered by tourism graduates by offering student internships and work placements in their organizations – sharing experiences to help more closely adapt educational programs to the requirements of the tourism labor market – ensuring exposure of faculty to business practice, enabling primary research, and holding student workshops led by practitioners
Marketing	– building a favorable image of the institution in the local community where the competences of its alumni will showcase, and attest to, the quality of its educational services – alumni as ambassadors of their alma mater – alumni's success stories attract good candidates and thus boost enrolment
Economic	– sponsorship – referrals and recommendations of higher education courses given to employees and associates – expansion of the range of postgraduate courses and training courses

Source: own.

Topical literature enumerates a variety of benefits that a higher education institution can derive from alumni relationship management. Arguably, the following are mentioned the most often:[7]

1. influence on university image and reputation,
2. competences and success stories of graduates as evidence of the superior quality of a university's educational services,
3. information on alumni career paths,
4. activities of alumni associations as supporting organizations for their higher education institutions,
5. forming partnership links, the so called partner networks (converting alumni into university sponsors, cherishing and nurturing intergenerational ties,

[7] The benefits that a higher education institution can garner from maintaining relationships with its alumni are mentioned in: Nowaczyk, Sobolewski (eds.) 2011: (the topic is addressed by e.g.: L. Lauer – p. 20-21, M. Pluta-Olearnik – p. 32, A. Oczachowska, D. Oczachowski – p. 171); Nowaczyk, Lisiecki (eds.) 2006: (cf. e.g.: B. Iwankiewicz-Rak, S. Wrona – p. 181, 188, J. Radkowska, J. Stefaniak – p. 201, K. Pawłowski – p. 279, 282, H. Mruk – pp. 391-397); Nowaczyk, Kolasiński (eds.) 2004: (cf. e.g.: B. Iwankiewicz-Rak – p. 58-59, J. Jerschina – p. 74, P. Ratajczyk, B. Sojkin – p. 164, K. Szczepańska-Woszczyna – pp. 182-189, M. Szabłowski – p. 203, A. Ostaszewska – p. 212); Pluta-Olearnik (ed.) 2009: 15, 25; Drapińska 2011: 279-280; Hall 2011: 51-60; Mazurek-Łopacińska, Sobocińska 2011: 11; Marszałek 2010: 188.

admitting students for work placements in businesses where alumni are employed).

Higher education experts partaking in the empirical study pointed to the following three key objectives to be achieved by building alumni relations [Krajewska-Smardz, Ph.D thesis]:

1. exploiting alumni's professional expertise in the design and development of practically-profiled curricula,
2. building up the image of an organization that supports its alumni's continued professional development,
3. strengthening university brand and reputation.

The author's empirical research demonstrates, too, that measurable benefits derived from alumni relationships by higher education institutions fall within three areas: informational (acquisition of labor market information), marketing (a distinctive feature to differentiate an instittuion from its competitors), and economic (expected enrolment, sponsorship).

An overview of the benefits that higher education institutions specialized in tourism programs garner from alumni relationships are presented in Table 3.

It should be emphasized that the alumni declared the following possible areas of cooperation with their universities: providing student internships and work placements; sharing professional expertise through guest workshops; promoting graduates in the workplace; getting engaged in the organization of large events (e.g. congresses); endowing scholarships for best performing students; sponsoring scientific events, e.g. conferences.

Alumni loyalty may result in recommendations and referrals given to degree-seeking friends and relatives or in willingness to extend financial support to the university. Nearly 28% of the alumni respondents believe that financial support offered by graduates e.g. through donations to a university foundation is important. At the same time, however, almost 37% of the respondents stated no opinion, which seems to indicate that universities do not make determined, institutionalized efforts to galvanize alumni into donating funds to support the growth of their alma mater. The average amount that the alumni would donate annually appears fairly small, falling short of PLN 100,00.

Conclusions

In order to build a strong position in the higher education services market, institutions providing tourism programs should revamp their strategies toward forming multi-tier relationships with their alumni as an important group of stakeholders. This is because alumni – their position in the labor market and the extent to which they identify themselves with their universities – play an increasingly significant role amongst factors influencing the brand and reputation of a Polish university.

The possibility to apply the knowledge and professional expertise of alumni to the design and delivery of study programs aligned with job market requirements seems to be an opportunity that is not yet being fully exploited by higher education institutions running practically-profiled curricula.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the discussion unfolded in the paper:

1. Today, Poland's higher education market compels university management to take an innovative approach toward leadership of their institutions, to try and understand the changing needs of stakeholders and to more effectively utilize the unique potential of which alumni are part.

2. A higher education institution's interactions with its alumni are becoming increasingly important, and effective alumni relationship management can not only strengthen university brand and reputation, portraying it as an organization that supports alumni career development, but it can also be instrumental in the design and delivery of practically-profiled study programs and become a valuable source of labor market information.

3. The rationale for nurturing a relationship is that it can create value that both the parties will be able to benefit from. Building a relationship incurs financial costs and expenditure of time, while measurable returns from alumni relationship management are slow to arrive and cannot be expected but in the long run. Based on feedback from alumni, statements by university officials and the opinions of higher education experts, further changes are to be anticipated in the ways that higher education institutions interact with their alumni as they evolve toward the application of professional techniques to building, maintaining and expanding alumni relationships as well as to monitoring their outcomes.

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Zarządzanie relacjami uczelni o profilu turystycznym z absolwentami w kontekście prowadzenia praktycznego profilu kształcenia

Streszczenie. *Współczesny rynek edukacji na poziomie wyższym w Polsce wymaga od kadry kierującej uczelnią innowacyjnego podejścia do zarządzania podmiotem, jakim jest szkoła wyższa. Aby sprostać licznym wyzwaniom, ważna staje się doskonała znajomość interesariuszy uczelni oraz umiejętność zarządzania relacjami z nimi. W artykule przedstawiono zarządzanie relacjami* *z interesariuszami uczelni w układzie podmiotowym i narzędziowym, a następnie na tym tle odniesiono się do absolwentów, których znaczenie dla uczelni rośnie, zwłaszcza w aspekcie przyjętego przez nie praktycznego profilu kształcenia. Celem artykułu jest zidentyfikowanie relacji uczelni z interesariuszami oraz opracowanie układu podmiotowego i narzędziowego zarządzania tymi relacjami, a także dokonanie oceny dotychczasowych metod kształtowania relacji szkoły wyższej z absolwentami i wskazanie kierunku, w jakim powinny nastąpić zmiany w ich wykorzystaniu. W artykule wykorzystano metodę analizy i metodę syntezy oraz metodę badań bezpośrednich.*

Słowa kluczowe: *absolwenci, interesariusze uczelni, zarządzanie relacjami*

Marketing Communications of Higher Education Institutions

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An Evaluation of Tools Used in Marketing Communication with Higher Education Candidates. Findings of the 2011-2014 Gdynia Maritime University Survey

Abstract. *Effective marketing communication is a crucial element of marketing efforts made by modern universities as they are facing changes to the higher education market. Emerging marketing innovations provide new opportunities to communicate with candidates. However, there remain the questions of how much use should be made of traditional forms of marketing communication and the role of a satisfied customer in motivating decisions to choose a particular university. A survey conducted by the Office of Promotions of the Gdynia Maritime University between 2011 and 2014 among higher education applicants shows that, despite the ongoing proliferation of marketing communication tools and the use of a variety of available information sources, candidates continue to recognize "word of mouth" as a relevant factor when making their choice of higher education institution. For applicants, trust built on consistent marketing messages is key to making a decision on selecting a specific institution.*

Keywords: *marketing communication, integrity, entrepreneurial university*

Introduction

What increasingly more higher education institutions perceive today is the need to manage their marketing activities in the same way as market-oriented organizations will. To perform its role well, marketing – as an essential element of competitive behavior, particularly in the higher education services market –

has to keep pace and be properly aligned with changes in the rapidly evolving environment and in customers' expectations. A. Drapińska observes that "to be able to reconcile the academic ethos with the mechanisms that are at work in an efficient business organization […] a university needs to have a vision of the organization put forth by its leadership and to get everyone on the staff involved in making the vision come true" [Drapińska 2012: 41]. Hence, putting such mechanism in place requires all, faculty as well as administrative support personnel, to engage in, and contribute to, shaping the right organizational culture and institutional reputation. M. Geryk emphasizes that "a higher education institution that has not created a recognizable and positive image basically vanishes from society's perception." He also highlights the fact that "society regards higher education institutions as institutions of public trust" [Geryk 2010: 55]. True and accurate marketing communications are instrumental to building such trust. Therefore, the overarching principle that a university must abide by in communicating with its market environment is that of providing coherent and truthful information.

This observation was also reflected in the findings of the opinion poll run repeatedly and consistently in 2011-2014 by the Gdynia Maritime University (Akademia Morska w Gdyni – AMG), involving all of the 17 555 applicants who signed up using the university's online enrolment service. Consequently, the survey can be recognized as exhaustive in terms of scope and reach. It was aimed at assessing the effects of marketing activities undertaken by the university on the respondents' choice of higher education institution and study program. What the survey focused upon were the sources of marketing communications that the applicants experienced the most, the marketing tools that the respondents think should be given preference by higher education institutions in communicating with potential candidates, as well as the respondents' motivations for the choice of AMG and the choice of a specific higher education program. The survey was conducted via the online enrolment system using a questionnaire form. The subsequent analysis of the findings demonstrated that most higher education candidates give a high priority to the coherence of information brought to them by an institution's marketing efforts. As a result, many of them seek confirmation or endorsement from current students or graduates of a specific institution. This means that they are highly responsive to the so called "word-of-mouth marketing" and tend to build their trust and make their choices based on information acquired through this channel.

This paper draws on 2011-2004 data provided in the reports on "The Implementation of Innovative, and the Improvement of Existing, Marketing Activities Focused on Promoting the AMG" that have been subjected to further in-depth analysis.

1. Marketing communication instruments (to be) employed by present-day higher education institutions

Marketing communications employed by higher education institutions have recently undergone an accelerated evolution that can be attributed to the availability of innovative marketing tools and widespread Internet connectivity on the one hand, and to changes in the role of the university itself on the other. T. Wawak observes that “educational services and research services provided by higher education institutions have become, in their subjection to the rules of the market, products similar to e.g. banking or insurance services” [Wawak 2012: 244]. In an unquestionably competitive academic education services market, it seems that higher education institutions have no choice but to play by the rules governing the market. M. Geryk points out that “your ability to stay on top of the changes, to instantly embrace and make the most of innovations, may well be what your future market position is critically contingent upon” [Geryk 2011: 70]. The rich variety of easy-to-use and easy-to-access marketing communication instruments that higher education institutions can and ought to utilize makes it possible to reach each and every target group while personalizing messages conveyed to individual recipients. Examples of marketing communication instruments available to higher education institutions are given in Table 1.

The fact that higher education institutions do make marketing efforts, deriving inspirations from the business domain, is indicative of their increasing openness and their gradual embracement of the idea of the entrepreneurial university. A. Drapińska describes the entrepreneurial university as exhibiting the following features:

– “a public role,

– close links with economy (e.g. emphasis placed on alumni careers, their employability, and the industrial applicability of research outcomes),

– a market-oriented approach to instruction and research (attention to customers and their needs, flexibility and responsiveness to the changing expectations of the market, reliance on flexible structures and efficient organization, market competiveness based on the identification and understanding of customers’ needs, a determination to seek and implement solutions generating satisfaction and benefits on the part of buyers as well as on the part of the university itself and other stakeholders)” [Drapińska 2012: 37].

This outlook on institutions of higher learning clearly draws on the market-based mechanisms governing the operations of business organizations. It is essential not only to be present in the media wherever potential buyers of higher education services can be found but also to provide a service that will be appreciated by direct as well as indirect stakeholders (institutions, organizations and pri-

Table 1. Types and instruments of marketing communication dedicated to higher education institutions – examples

Type of marketing activity	Marketing communication tools	Examples / Description
PUBLIC RELATIONS (PR) – scheduled communications directed toward the inside of an organization as well as toward its environment	corporate identity	measures targeted at creating the right attitudes amongst staff as indicated by the organizational mission and vision (corporate culture) and at strengthening their identification with the organization – building a coherent image of the organization (the CI manual)
	media relations	managing the company's presence in the media, influencing the way that relevant information is presented in the media
	article marketing	developing and circulating press articles, interviews, and press statements
	lobbying (influence marketing)	measures geared to obtaining the support of authorities, media, and other individuals and organizations that are critical to the higher education institution
	celebrity marketing	using a person of repute, e.g. an alumnus, to promote the image of a higher education institution
	word-of-mouth marketing	word of mouth that spreads through satisfied clients who share their opinions with others and recommend the services that they are content with
	social responsibility marketing	campaigns that aim to showcase an organization's social responsibility
INTERNET MARKETING – any Web-based marketing activities or activities conducted via the Web	advertising graphics: static or moving pictures, films	banners, skyscrapers, boxes, buttons, floating ads (top layer), etc.
	search engine optimization (SEO)	activities aimed at increasing the visibility of a Website by raising its rank on search results pages
	search engine marketing	inserting ads in Web search engines, e.g. through sponsored links or SEO
	e-mail marketing	sending out electronic communications such as newsletters and promotional or informational e-mails
	social media marketing	using social networking sites to communicate with customers

	crowdsourcing marketing	engaging Web communities in generating ideas for novel marketing solutions
	referral marketing	inducing clients to recommend a company to other potential customers
MOBILE MARKETING – marketing activities involving the use of mobile devices (smartphones, tablets, laptop computers, etc.)	QR codes	redirecting to a Website via codes placed on billboards, posters, flyers, etc.
	location based marketing	use of positioning and tracking tools for marketing purposes
	display advertising	special forms dedicated to mobile devices
	SMS / MMS messages	sending out advertising and informational content e.g. in text messages
OUTBOUND MARKETING (push marketing) – activities initiated by a higher education institution, targeted at individuals who may not expect to be contacted	direct marketing	posting dedicated messages to specific individuals, e.g. alumni
	traditional mail	deploying unaddressed or personalized admail campaigns, e.g. feedback on alumni delivered to secondary schools
INBOUND MARKETING (pull marketing) – activities geared to increasing the probability that an institution's offer reaches potential customers and then encouraging them to make contact	content marketing	trade journal papers/articles, reports, market research findings, case studies, success stories, etc.
	permission marketing	delivering marketing content on the recipient's permission to communicate opportunities and solicit interest in services being offered
EVENT MARKETING – organization of, or involvement in, all sorts of events	conferences and seminars	lectures, presentations, discussion panels, poster sessions
	trade show marketing	showcasing one's products and services at trade fairs
	festivals, concerts, outdoor events such as picnics	science festivals, student culture days
	"loyalty" trips	trips organized by higher education institutions, such as a boat cruise (e.g. cruise on the *Dar Młodzieży*)
	sponsoring	sponsorship of events organized by third parties, such as e.g. science contests or quizzes

Table 1 – cont.

Type of marketing activity	Marketing communication tools	Examples / Description
ATL (above the line) – advertisements broadcast through the mass media	press advertising	inclusion in trade catalogs or publication of printed matter
	television advertising	interviews, event coverage, advertising spots
	radio advertising	sponsorships, advertising spots, interviews
	out of home marketing	outdoor advertisements on e.g. bulletin boards, billboards, citylights, etc.
	product placement	placing product information in radio or television programs so that it appeals to the audience's unconscious mind
BRAND MARKETING – initiatives aimed e.g. at increasing brand recognition	test-driven marketing	running regular tests to assess the effects of new forms of marketing
	rebranding	change of logo, product visualizations, and market positioning
	promotion marketing	temporary price promotions, e.g. a reduction or waiver of the enrolment fee
	quizzes and contests	enhancing interactivity through fun
	loyalty marketing	launching programs targeted at maintaining positive relationships with existing customers and acquiring new customers, e.g. a second major or degree program offered at a promotional price
	certification	involvement in independent contests and rankings
	customer experience management (CEM)	managing customer experience

Source: own based on *Działania marketingowe* [no date].

vately-held businesses where prospective alumni will find employment, alongside universities themselves as potential employers for young scholars).

The entrepreneurial university can be also seen, in M. Pluta-Olearnik's formulation, as one whose "objectives and values, as well as its actions and its evolution, embody all of these four attributes:

- economic orientedness
- market orientedness
- innovation orientedness
- managerial orientedness" [Pluta-Olearnik 2009: 23-37].

The author clarifies that each of these attributes can be embraced by an institution to a varying extent and with a different degree of commitment, and that economic performance should be regarded as the key objective for any "entrepreneurial" institution of higher learning. She also argues that the entrepreneurial university should pursue a strategy founded on innovation and continued, sustainable growth. Where market mechanisms have to be taken into account, she contends, is in making everyday decisions affecting its development trajectory. Further, the entrepreneurial university should have a state-of-the-art management system in place to ensure that its intellectual potential, as well as its other resources, are exploited effectively.

The changing role of the university, evolving from its traditional commitment to an educational and research mission toward an institution governed by the rules of the market and marketing concepts, entails redefining its image to build a new reputation as an entrepreneurial entity. This, however, does not really imply abandoning the historical heritage and departure from the academic ethos but, rather, adaptation to the challenges of the present and the future.

2. Coherence as a signpost for building the brand image of a modern higher education institution

The university brand can be perceived, under K. Pawłowski's definition, as "a sum-total of notions, emotions, facts, and experiences that a university generates in public awareness. To put it shortly, and to send an extremely important message to university leadership, a **brand is the sum-total of promises and trust**" [Pawłowski 2015]. Bringing together promises and trust is crucial, since it is on promises delivered that stakeholders build their trust toward an institution. Hence, coherence is what appears to be an essential element of all marketing activities. Under the definition [Słownik języka polskiego: no date], coherence stands for a seamless combination of things into an integral, cohesive and consistent whole.

When applied to university brand building, it points to two interdependent areas where it should be found: in external and internal policy.

Internal policy refers to a university as a complex organization composed of a number of units: faculties, departments, institutes, etc., and to relationships amongst these. A. Kulig and P. Lisiecki caution that "importantly, this kind of organization should not be a conglomerate of standalone departments […] because efficiency is only possible where the component units fully collaborate" [Kulig, Lisiecki 2011: 275]. The awareness that a university image is created by joint effort is part of corporate culture – manifest in the behaviors of both faculty and administrative personnel. It should be borne in mind, too, that an image has tangible as well as intangible ingredients. Tangible ones include e.g. the campus and the study facilities. The intangible ones comprise e.g. quality of instruction or faculty's rapport with students. Nevertheless, it is functional qualities, associated with intangible factors, that ultimately bear the most on the satisfaction of purchasers of educational services, therefore having a critical impact on successful image building.

The external policy area, where coherence is no less important, refers to impressions that a higher education institution creates in the society at large. E. Stachura asserts that "image is a recipient's own individual notion that has emerged through confrontation with information on the institution that has been acquired deliberately or per chance" [Stachura 2006: 362] This information may be either explicit marketing content or a body of experiences shared by existing and prospective customers who are in a position to assess the quality of a specific educational service. Information conveyed to stakeholders must not be, in J.W. Wiktor's opinion [Wiktor 2013: 81], self-contradictory or conflicting, and it must not raise doubts as to its reliability and integrity. This discussion will therefore be perhaps best summarized by D. Penar and K. Szczepańska-Woszczyna's statement [Penar, Szczepańska-Woszczyna 2011: 261] that "coherent and consistent marketing communication is precisely the instrument that creates a desirable image."

Key to coherent communications is the development and establishment of visual identity guidelines (the so called Visual Identity Manual – VIM) to be consistently followed by the academic community. More and more higher education institutions appreciate the positive effects of coherent, integrated marketing communications on brand recognition. As far as the marketing communication categories and tools listed in this paper are concerned, VIM should be adhered to in fostering personal relationships between representatives of the academic and business community as well as in making official appearances at scientific conferences and similar events. Not only can VIM help broadcast consistent identity in diverse areas of marketing activity but it, in the first place, accounts for an institutional ability to build a desirable image among its stakeholders.

VIM may consist of such items as: the institutional logo alongside the logos of lower-level organizational units, student organizations, academic associations and scientific societies, etc.; document templates for use both with e-mail and traditional paper-based mail; folder, flyer, poster designs; e-mail headers/footers; and a host of other visual models and patterns. Sample VIMs available from the Web,[1] developed to align a higher education institution's visual identity to a common pattern, reveal an understanding and approval of the modern-day approach to marketing communication and image building.

3. Discussion of the research findings

The opinion poll was conducted in 2011-2014 by the Gdynia Maritime University's Office of Promotions (Akademia Morska w Gdyni – AMG).[2] The 17 555-strong respondent group included secondary school leavers as well as holders of maturity exam certificates from prior years intending to apply for admission to the AMG. The survey aimed at validating the effects of marketing efforts undertaken by the institution and their impact on candidates' choices of higher education programs. For use in this paper, an in-depth analysis was performed focusing on some of the most relevant aspects, viz.: what sources of marketing communications are most used by the candidates, or where they seek information; what marketing instruments they think should be used by higher education institutions to communicate with potential applicants; and what factors drove their decision to choose a particular program and what it was that made them ultimately choose the AMG?

Survey data were gathered electronically via an online questionnaire form that was available to respondents during enrolment campaigns in subsequent years. The findings analysis was based on structural aspects and led to the conclusions that are delivered and discussed further in the paper.

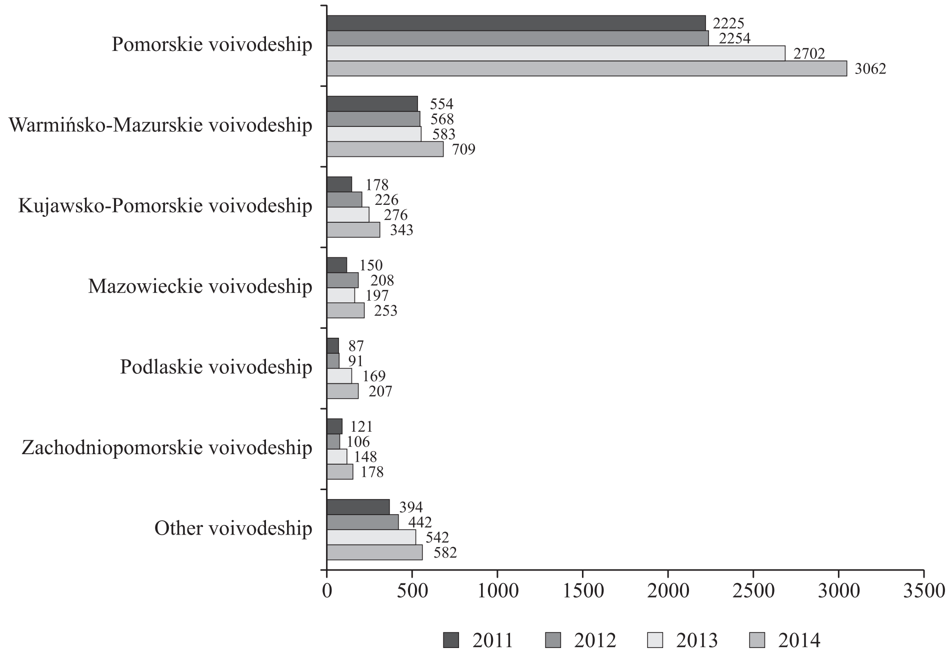
The respondent group was composed of secondary school graduates from different voivodeships (regions) of Poland (Chart 1 depicts the geographical distribution of the population examined in 2011-2014).

As can be seen, most respondents came from Pomorskie voivodeship, representing 58% of the total number of 17 555 respondents. This trend either continued

[1] Cf. e.g. Księga identyfikacji wizualnej UG [no date]; Księga identyfikacji wizualnej AGH [2007]; Księga znaku Stowarzyszenia Absolwentów WSB we Wrocawiu [2011]; Księga identyfikacji wizualnej AMG [no date].

[2] This paper cites some of the reports on "The Implementation of Innovative, and the Improvement of Existing, Marketing Activities Focused on Promoting the AMG" – a research project conducted in 2011-2014, whose findings were subjected to an in-depth re-analysis.

Chart 1. Regional breakdown of applicants for admission to the AMG in 2011-2014

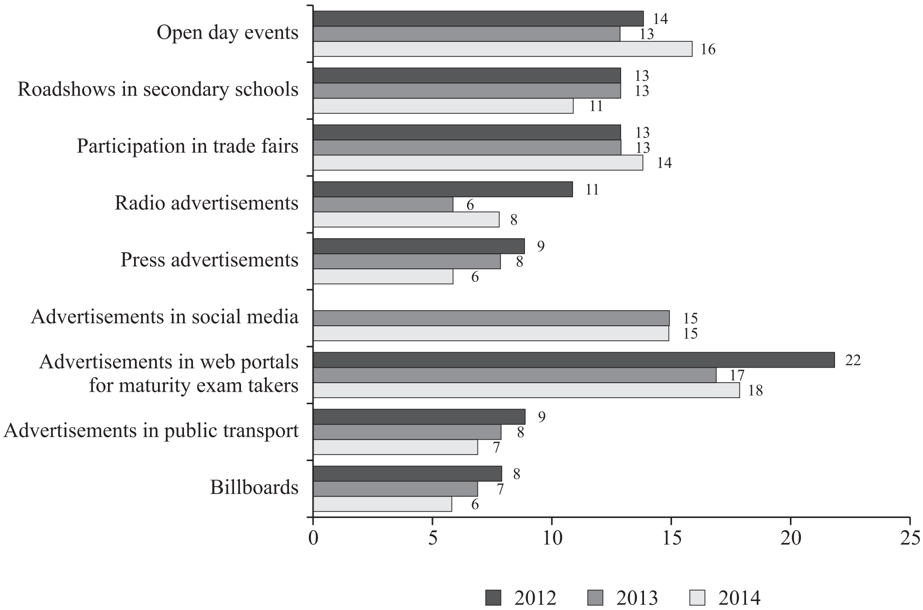


Source: own based on reports from the marketing research on "The Implementation of Innovative, and the Improvement of Existing, Marketing Activities Focused on Promoting the AMG" conducted in 2011-2014 by the Gdynia Maritime University's Office of Promotions, www.am.gdynia.pl/badania-ankietowe-kandydatow-na-studia-w-amg [accessed 12.08.2015].

or grew considerably over the four years under examination. The geographical proximity of the institution stood for their more frequent exposure to close contact with the AMG student community, allowing them to confront their observations and expectations with those of prospective fellow-students. This is indicative of Gdynia Maritime University's brand recognition throughout the region and across the adjacent voivodeships as well as of stable interest in its academic program offerings.

While registering through the online enrollment system, the applicants had an option to voice their opinion on the marketing campaign being run by the Gdynia Maritime University and to indicate the channels of marketing communication that they think the University should use most heavily. The responses recommended both such forms of communication that involve direct face-to-face contact with University representatives (selected by 40% of the respondents) and indirect Web-based methods (suggested by 60% of the respondents). Chart 2 illustrates the detailed results for 2012-2014.

Chart 2. Advertising media that should be preferred by higher education institutions (%)

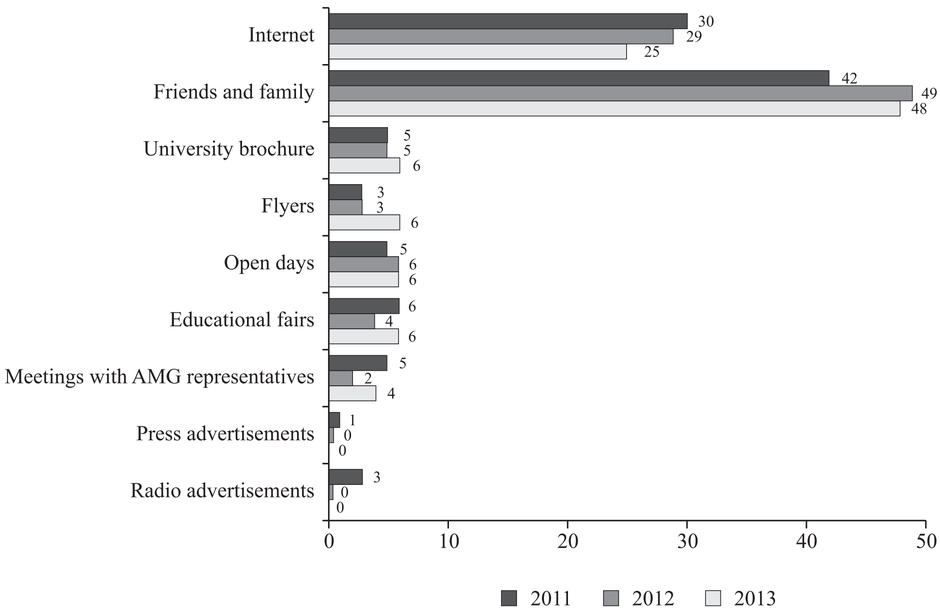


Source: own based on reports from the marketing research on "The Implementation of Innovative, and the Improvement of Existing, Marketing Activities Focused on Promoting the AMG" conducted in 2011-2014 by the Gdynia Maritime University's Office of Promotions, www.am.gdynia.pl/badania-ankietowe-kandydatow-na-studia-w-amg [accessed 12.08.2015].

Speaking of marketing communication channels, most respondents recommended that institutions of higher learning make more use of the Web, clearly placing stress on ease of access to information and its availability via mobile devices. It should be noted, however, that no matter how much they advocate easy online access to information, higher education candidates still do welcome an opportunity to obtain or confirm information through face-to-face interaction with university staff and representatives. Therefore, complementing the infallible traditional forms of personal interaction with the latest marketing communication technology seems to be a viable approach that increases the odds of information on educational products reaching the target audience. These considerations have encouraged the Gdynia Maritime University to establish a presence in such social networking sites as: www.instagram.com, www.fourquare.com, www.youtube.com, www.twitter.com, www.facebook.com, as well as on Web portals dedicated to maturity exam takers.

The findings also suggest that a coherent message conveyed through marketing communications is what most candidates find critically important. This is

Chart 3. Major sources of information on the AMG used by applicants (%)

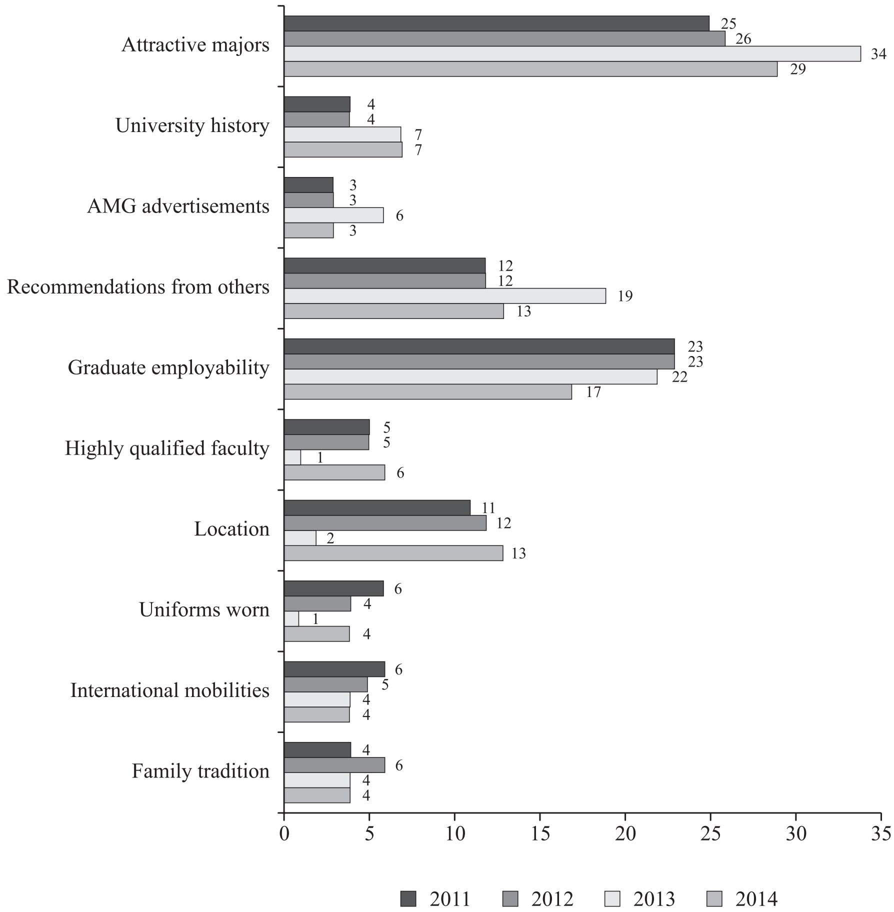


Source: own based on reports from the marketing research on "The Implementation of Innovative, and the Improvement of Existing, Marketing Activities Focused on Promoting the AMG" conducted in 2011-2014 by the Gdynia Maritime University's Office of Promotions, www.am.gdynia.pl/badania-ankietowe-kandydatow-na-studia-w-amg [accessed 12.08.2015].

clear from the fact that they try to validate the integrity of marketing information by consulting friends and relatives (former or current students of a specific institution). Hence, they can be said to be guided by word-of-mouth marketing in building their trust toward an institution and in making their choices. Chart 3 shows the distribution of responses indicating the information sources utilized by the applicants.

In 2013, an unsurpassed 73% of the respondents mentioned the Web or their friends as the primary sources of information on the AMG, which roughly parallels the outcomes from the preceding years: 78% in 2012, and 72% of the respondents in 2011, respectively, named the same primary information sources. Attention should be drawn to the fact that the opinion of friends and relatives was sought by nearly 50% of the respondents. Their prevalence over all other sources is indicative of their high priority. Other information sources proved rather insignificant. It seems therefore that, despite all the innovative forms of communication deployed by the marketing industry, we should not downplay the role of candidates' families and friends being, after all, long-time customers and hence perceived as au-

Chart 4. Factors driving the choice of AMG higher education programs (%)



Source: own based on reports from the marketing research on "The Implementation of Innovative, and the Improvement of Existing, Marketing Activities Focused on Promoting the AMG" conducted in 2011-2014 by the Gdynia Maritime University's Office of Promotions, www.am.gdynia.pl/badania-ankietowe-kandydatow-na-studia-w-amg [accessed 12.08.2015].

thoritative information sources. These are apparently the people who play a vital part not only by imparting information or by helping assess the coherence of an institution's marketing communications but also in the final of decision making process. What is unveiled here once again is that, like in other services markets, word of mouth spread by satisfied customers can give a powerful boost to effective marketing campaigns. For higher education institutions, this signifies an imperative to put emphasis on the quality of instruction in its broadest sense spanning both its technical and functional (e.g. organizational culture or management style) excellence. At the same time, it is a helpful tip for universities on how to further improve their marketing communications, suggesting a move toward the incorporation of the latest technologies used by potential applicants. The latter is exactly what the Gdynia Maritime University did by, for example, making its Website friendly to mobile devices. Besides, the AMG is present in social networking sites and has a consistent policy in place to make sure its educational products are continually upgraded and adjusted to the requirements of today's job market.

The poll demonstrated, too, that the applicants were not oblivious of labor market requirements and prospective employers' expectations. In choosing a higher education program, they were focused on those factors that maximize their chances of finding employment on graduation.

Almost 25% of the applicants in each year were confident about their employability as holders of degrees from the Gdynia Maritime University. At the same time, they quoted attractive majors as a factor driving their choice of university. Data obtained from other sources[3] provide evidence that candidates do look at the curriculum for a given major before making their choices. This leads us to assume that they do their best to make an informed choice of a study path that gives them a head start into a professional career. Notably, it is visible from the responses once again that referrals from people recommending the Gdynia Maritime University as a reputable institution play a central role.

Conclusion

The unique status of the Gdynia Maritime University as one of just two maritime institutions of higher learning in Poland is the key reason why most people using its academic education services aim at careers relating to what is called "marine economy." However, the continued presence of a "land" department within its organizational structure makes it necessary for the AMG to diversify its marketing campaigns by tailoring content to the different target groups. The effects of its marketing activities hinge critically on their consistent alignment with the product portfolio and the quality of services. Although catchy marketing promises and slogans can attract the attention of a potential candidate, it must be realized that marketing communications that fail the coherence test might have highly adverse consequences for the institution. It is therefore advisable to ensure that marketing activities broadcast a consistent message and are supported by the

[3] Unique pageviews for the site www.wpit.am.gdynia.pl, www.google.pl/intl/pl/analytics/ [accessed 12.08.2015].

latest technologies, and that they are coupled with a coherent faculty development policy to back up the teaching process. The rapid changes in the higher education market and the increasing competition among entrepreneurial universities make it essential to regularly evaluate the marketing communication tools used and to develop a concern for building a recognizable university brand among the society at large.

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Ocena narzędzi komunikacji marketingowej z kandydatami na studia. Wyniki badań Akademii Morskiej w Gdyni za lata 2011-2014

Streszczenie. *Skuteczna komunikacja marketingowa stanowi niezbędny element działań marketingowych współczesnego uniwersytetu, który stoi w obliczu zmian zachodzących na rynku szkolnictwa wyższego. Pojawiające się innowacje marketingowe stwarzają nowe możliwości komunikowania się z kandydatami na studia. Otwarte pozostaje jednak pytanie o znaczenie tradycyjnych form komunikacji marketingowej i rolę zadowolonego z jakości usługi klienta w podejmowaniu decyzji o wyborze danej uczelni. Z badań prowadzonych przez Biuro Promocji Akademii Morskiej w Gdyni w latach 2011-2014 wśród kandydatów na studia wynika, że mimo rozwoju narzędzi komunikacji marketingowej i korzystania z różnych źródeł informacji, nadal uznają oni „marketing szeptany" za czynnik istotny przy wyborze studiów. Kluczowe dla kandydatów w podejmowaniu decyzji o wyborze studiów jest budowanie zaufania opartego na spójności przekazu marketingowego.*

Słowa kluczowe: *komunikacja marketingowa, integralność, przedsiębiorczy uniwersytet*

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Mobile Applications in Relations-Building by University

Abstract. *The high penetration of smartphones among higher education students begs the question of whether it would be possible to exploit mobile communication, and mobile applications in particular, in building relationships between students and their university. The paper describes the key differentiators of mobile communication, to subsequently examine the unique characteristics of mobile applications and thus provide a setting in which to discuss the findings of a representative survey involving the population of Poland's higher education students and aiming to find out about their awareness and usage of their university's mobile applications (vis-à-vis other popular categories of applications).*

Keywords: *mobile communication, mobile application, relationship, university*

Introduction

Persons born between 1980 and 1996 are referred to as Generation Y or Millennials. They represent almost a quarter of the total population of Poland[1] and make up a majority of the student community in higher education today. Generation Y is also often termed as "digital natives", even though it is just the youngest

[1] Author's own estimate based [GUS 2013: table 15].

cohort that has been growing up with electronic gadgets literally glued to their hands. While mobile devices and laptops have become what enables Generation Y to establish and maintain social relations, it is emblematic that for 92% of Polish Millennials friends and colleagues are the most important things in life, taking precedence over health, fame, and wealth [Odyseja 2014]. Does that imply, then, that mobile communication, and specifically mobile applications, offers potential that can be exploited by higher education institutions to build relationships with their students?

1. App generation students

Of all electronic gadgets that are around, it is chiefly the high penetration of smartphones that distinguishes Millennials from prior generations. At the end of 2014, nearly 4 out of 5 Polish Millennials surveyed by TNS owned a smartphone; for comparison's sake, at the same time smartphone owners constituted slightly more than 2/3 of those in the 30-42 age bracket, a half of the population aged between 43 and 54, and less than a quarter of people above 55 years of age [Olękiewicz 2014]. The outstanding role that smartphones have come to play for young people nowadays has been cogently commented by Tomasz Szlendak [2014]: "For 30-year-olds, walking out of home without their smartphone feels like leaving an arm behind. For 20-year-olds, it is like leaving their heads behind, and for secondary school students it is like leaving themselves behind". Howard Gardner, professor of cognition and education at Harvard Graduate School of Education [Gardner, Davis 2013], designates this demographic cohort as the app generation.[2] Mobile applications run smoothly on smartphones, processing user requests "on demand" and "just in time", hence ensuring that the required information is retrieved easily and instantly. What Millennials appreciate the most in mobile applications is that they allow them to accomplish an objective in an efficient and problem-free fashion. It could be said that, these days, young-aged smartphone owners perceive the world around them as nothing but a collection of applications, and believe that everything that is important in life should be operable through an app. Notably, in Poland there are 4 times as many app users in the youngest population group (aged 16-21) as among 40-year-olds, and 5 times as many as among people being in their 50s [Jestem.mobi 2014].

[2] App is a colloquial abbreviation for application.

2. What mobile communication is about

Mobile applications are – alongside text and multimedia messages, QR codes, mobile websites, mobile browser in-app advertising, mobile advertising, and GPS--based communication systems – a cornerstone of **mobile communication**, that is communication taking place via smartphones and tablets. Pricewaterhouse-Coopers consultants [PricewaterhouseCoopers 2014] try to capture its uniqueness through their EI2 formula: Engagement, Identity, Insight. Compared to earlier technologies, mobile communication affords unprecedented possibilities to **engage** consumers, allowing businesses to deliver them valuable, compelling offers (mobile coupons) and to support them in the purchasing process. At the same time, the offers can be customized to consumers' preferences and their situational context (e.g. visiting a shopping mall, checking in at a hotel or for a flight). Insights derived from the observation of other buyers' behaviors empower online sellers to recommend products and services that are popular with other smartphone users. If these **recommendations** are delivered at key stages of the decision process, they can translate into the choice of a specific brand, thus building up a buyer's relationship with it. If, on the other hand, smartphone users are to hand over their personal details, and hence their **identity**, to marketers, they must be assured that their privacy will not be breached, which implies control over what information is disclosed by a customer and where and how (what for) it is further circulated.

Mobile applications are typically supposed to perform one of the following three broadly defined functions [Nicol 2013]:

1. to differentiate a brand and improve its perception,
2. to enhance customer service as well as customer satisfaction, involvement, and loyalty,
3. to boost sales through:
   – personalized promotional incentives (e.g. mobile coupons),
   – targeting richer and more costly versions of a model or higher-end product lines owing to a better understanding of consumers and their needs.

3. Mobile applications – their unique characteristics and the problems that they pose

A mobile application is a special program running on a smartphone that occasionally requires direct Web access to be able to function (except certain applications, such as e.g. games). As a result, the smartphone can be used to do new things, and the customer experience is heightened [Klein 2013]. Drawing a comparison between mobile apps and mobile ads, Sunil Gupta [Gupta 2013: 71-75] observes that the latter are usually characterized by not very intelligible graphical content and limited information capacity, never mind the fact that 4 in 5 users dislike them. In his view, what makes applications superior is that they are much less intrusive (this is why they are not perceived as adverts) and have a lot wider functionality. The potential inherent in mobile applications seems to be have been noticed by managers. A global research conducted in the spring of 2015 demonstrated that nearly a half of the businesses surveyed had a mobile application (14 percentage points up from the previous year) [Econsultancy 2015].

The reason why mobile applications are exceptionally important is that they account for 6/7 [3] (there are also statistics showing that it is actually 8/9 [Nielsen 2014]) of smartphone usage (excluding phone calls and texting). These statistics are reflected in Spicy Mobile research performed using a dedicated piece of software called Mobience, installed on 1033 smartphones owned by Polish users to monitor their activity over a week in February 2015. The findings showed that mobile apps took up roughly **3/4 of the time that the smartphones were used**, while mobile Web browsers consumed around 1/10, and the remaining time was devoted to making phone calls and texting [Kłosowski 2015].

It is paradoxical that, while mobile applications are – from a user perspective – what smartphones are predominantly used for, there exists a barrier of indifference that effectively prevents apps from making their way to a smartphone screen (i.e. from being downloaded and installed). Although many adult users run, on average, 23-24 applications each month, the 5 top apps (in the USA, these are: Facebook, Gmail, Instagram, Weather, and YouTube; in the UK: Facebook, WhatsApp, Gmail, eBay, and Twitter) account for 5/6 of usage time [Husson, Ask 2014]. Polish smartphone users do not run so many apps – 2013 Google analytics [Google 2013a, Google 2013b, Google 2013c] show that, in the month preceding the survey, an average Pole would run 8 applications, a Czech – 10, and a German – 11. Millward Brown estimates [Millward Brown 2013] that 1 in 8 Polish smartphone owners never downloads any extra apps, using only those that are already pre-installed on their devices; in the US, the corresponding statistic is 7% [eMarketer 2015: 11]. As a result, download statistics for an average application are unimpressive. According to Deloitte, in 2011 4 out of 5 UK-branded mobile applications were downloaded no more than 1000 times [Deloitte 2013]. In Poland, there were only 6 applications that garnered more than a million downloads (Allegro, GG, TVN, Yanosik, Program telewizyjny WP, JakDojade); a typical app achieves above ten thousand downloads on average in the first two or three

[3] According to Flurry Analytics, cited from: IAB Polska 2015: 8.

months following its launch, with only few going beyond 20,000 – a ceiling considered a hallmark of success [Mikowska 2014].

It should be strongly emphasized that users' reluctance to download mobile applications **is not** attributable to a price barrier. A vast majority of applications (90%, allegedly) are available for free (payments are usually charged for full versions of games and utility apps solely). In the US, commercial apps are downloaded by slightly more than a third of smartphone users [eMarketer 2015: 11]; at the same time, in Poland there are 3 times as many users installing free applications only as those who run both free and paid apps [MEC Mobile Report 2014]. An IAB Polska research indicates that 71% of Polish smartphone owners download none but free applications [IAB Polska 2015: 21].

The reason why mobile applications fail to attract new users should rather be sought in their **inferior quality** and **unsatisfactory usefulness**, and in **poor brand visibility** with users. TechCrunch studies demonstrate that in 2013 the average star rating awarded to applications available from Apple and Google stores ranged between 2.2 and 2.9 stars in a 5-grade scale. Most negative comments relate to the lack of required functionalities (above a quarter of all comments), frequent lockups or malfunctions (more than a fifth), and poor design (every sixth comment) [Usablenet 2013]. Netbiscuits research conducted in 10 countries worldwide show that the primary reason for not downloading mobile applications is that users are unfamiliar with the brand and, consequently, disbelieve that the application could be useful [Netbiscuits 2013a].

Unfortunately, it is not all about overcoming the fear of downloading an application by an unknown brand. Localytics argues that every fourth application that has been downloaded never gets to be run [Netbiscuits 2013b]. This is consistent with the finding of Vibes studies indicating that only 4% of smartphone users, according to what they say themselves, actually uses all of the applications they have downloaded, and no more than one eighth of them utilizes most of the downloads [Vibes 2013]. Other sources claim that every fifth app is run only once, and 3 out of 5 apps get to be used no more than 10 times [Silverpop 2014]. This brings us to the question of what requirements must be met by a mobile application to make a success.

4. Mobile application functionalities

A mobile application should reward users in at least one of the following ways [Gupta 2013; Martin 2011]:

1) **by facilitating their life** – an app must be useful, it should come in handy in this or other domain by solving a user's (even if minor) problem. For

example, Clorox brand managers have observed that many consumers typing in their Web queries look for tips on how to remove persistent stains. This gave them the idea to develop (and implement for iPhones and, subsequently, for Android phones) an application called myStain and to advertise it through magazines and mobile ads. Besides suggestions on how to eliminate most typical stains, the app permits users to ask Dr. Laundry for more specific, personalized advice. The annual cost to maintain the application is estimated by the company at $50,000, while the cost to develop it was below the price of broadcasting a single commercial through a nationwide US television station. The app has so far been downloaded by more than 200,000 users, with much vehement in social media, as 1 in 2 users would share their experiences with their friends. Further, consumers' questions concerning atypical stains have inspired the company's R&D department to work on new stain remover formulas [Schadler, Bernoff, Ask 2014].

2) **by creating unique value** – apps should be able to provide users with something that they cannot get from traditional computers; at the same time, they must be an extension of the brand and its key promise. A New York Times mobile app adjusts its language and topicality to the time of the day: in the morning, it brings out the hottest news, such as morning news brief, weather forecast or (as long as the smartphone user is staying in New York City) notifications of subway delays. At lunchtime, news items become more analytical in character, and the bottom section of the website includes "lightweight" information of minor importance. Every day, smartphone owners are supplied with 50-80 selected articles from the print version of the newspaper, alongside tidbits and highlights from other press titles. In its first week in the market this paid app (a monthly subscription can be purchased at $7.99) took first place in a ranking of most downloaded news applications [Assir 2014].

3) **by providing entertainment opportunities** – one of the major reasons for using a smartphone is to kill the time – more than 50% of smartphone users (3 in 5 in the 18-30 age bracket) admit to playing on their smartphones at an idle time, when not performing any specific tasks, rather than merely sitting and thinking [*One in six smartphone owners*... 2013]. Alike, joint research carried out by Mobile Posse and Phoenix Marketing evidenced that smartphones are twice as often used to kill the time as to perform a specific task. This is particularly true of mobile applications – among users with at least 30 extra apps onboard such behaviors were observed twice more often than among smartphone users with no more than 5 extra apps [Mobile Posse i Phoenix Marketing 2013]. An explanation comes from the findings of a 2013 US research project: half of smartphone users play games to reduce stress, for 1 out of 3 playing is a favorite pastime when traveling, and 1 in 5 prefers playing to watching TV [*Smartphone Users*... 2014]. Accenture argues that entertainment apps (games) are run by

around 50% of Polish smartphone users [Accenture 2014]. This kind of application is perfectly exemplified by *Twist*, *Lick*, *Dunk*, launched in November 2012 by Mondelez, owner of the Oreo cookie brand, based on activities that were encouraged by a cookie commercial. The game climbed to no. 1 position in 15 countries around the world [Sacks 2014]. This clearly shows how apps allowing people to get away from their daily routines help build positive feelings about a brand.

4) **by offering bonuses** – applications should provide tangible benefits, such as mobile coupons or promotional offers (which e.g. the SuperPharm app does), or otherwise help consumers make savings. This is illustrated by a Starbucks app that currently has 10 million users, 3/4 of whom are based in the US. The app makes it possible to pay for treats purchased at the chain's coffee shops while at the same time serving as a loyalty card and enabling users to reload their gift cards. Nearly a half of app users have the gold status, which means that they have made at least 30 purchases at Starbucks shops, entitling them to a free drink or other menu item every twelfth buy and giving them access to special offers. There are estimates that the app generated 10% of Starbucks revenues in the US market in the spring of 2013, and 1/6 of total sales in the following year [Johnson 2014; Econsultancy 2015].

5) **by producing social benefits** – apps are supposed to enhance relationships between friends, which may involve broadcasting one's location in downtown areas (to facilitate making appointments, as is the case with e.g. Foursquare or Facebook) or supporting the process of social gifting.

A somewhat different view is held by Dirk Nicol [Nicol 2013], who recommends focusing mobile app design around three major factors, viz. context, content, and involvement. What he sees as critical is application usage **context**. This is because once it is established when and in what circumstances a specific app is to be used, its functionality can be tailored accordingly. An example of an app driven by usage context is the United Airlines app, whose design was informed by ethnographic research data. Namely, it was noticed that flight delays generate most stress for passengers who have a layover at a large airport and nervously struggle to find the nearest flight to their destination. It was therefore assumed that there was room for an app that could assist in rebooking tickets for the nearest connection. Consequently, and importantly, the app features a large touch button that can be operated with a thumb (as the other hand is usually needed to drag a heavy suitcase). In the first two years after its premiere, the application was downloaded by over 6 million people, and on domestic flights it is now used by every fifth passenger in lieu of boarding pass [Schadler, Bernoff, Ask 2014].

Content refers to what a mobile application specifically does and what other devices (car navigation systems, cameras, MP3 players, torches, TV remote control units, musical instruments, etc.) it can substitute for. For example, mobile apps have become central elements of the 1 million dollar worth program MyMagic+ that is being introduced by Disneyland theme parks. The MyDisney Experience app allows users, for example, to book a table at a Disneyland Park restaurant of one's choice and order a meal while the other family members are still enjoying the Park's other attractions. What is more, as soon as the guests take their seats at the table (it is obviously smart, too), their presence is immediately made known to the kitchen area. Besides, the mobile app can help users find their favorite Disney characters across the Park [At Disney World 2014].

Involvement relates to the fact that the touch-screen interface, intuitive design, and ease of use, afford an opportunity to establish a profound, almost intimate relationships with consumers, going far beyond what is attainable for a personal computer. Such an app transcends the objective of facilitating the user's life, providing an insight into the smartphone user's likes and dislikes. Some mobile apps are purely relational by their very design, since they are geared to establishing and maintaining links with customers by e.g. inducing them to sign up for a loyalty program. A Maritz Loyalty study indicates that 10 out of 11 loyalty program participants are ready to download an associated mobile application [Patel, Schneider, Surana 2013]. A typical loyalty program app is Shell Motorist that enables a user to log on to a Shell ClubSmart account and check the number of points or view past transactions, as well as browse through obtainable rewards. Besides, a user can receive notifications of special offers and current promotions or learn more about any product available from Shell shops. Last but not least, the app helps you locate the nearest Shell station.

5. Higher education institutions and their mobile apps

Given the intrinsic characteristics of mobile applications and, even more so, the way that they are used by higher education institutions, the central question is whether one should build a universal app that tries to suit everyone or, rather, develop dedicated apps for applicants, students, alumni, etc. For one cannot be oblivious of the fact that each of these user groups will expect different functionalities from the app.

The first approach is exemplified by the iKozminski app catering to candidates as well as to students and alumni, authored by the Warsaw-based Kozminski University (Polish: Akademia Leona Koźmińskiego). It is demonstrably the most professionally designed of all mobile applications launched by Poland's institutions of higher learning. It has a very rich functionality (news, admissions, course descriptions, Virtual University, About the University, faculty, contact, map, alumni, sports, Facebook, settings, e-mail, calendar, notifications, job openings, and a blog) and a very clear, graphically presentable interface. It has hitherto been downloaded by more than 5000 users and has earned an excellent rating of 4.4 in Google Play based on 111 user evaluations (as on August 5, 2015).

Another example is the myUE app developed by the Katowice University of Economics (Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Katowicach). Its designers themselves admit to having been "motivated in creating the app by the intention to help maintain lasting links between the University and its students, candidates, staff, and alumni."[4] Using the app, faculty as well as students or prospective applicants can keep track of everything that is going on at the University. The question remains, however, whether their smartphone screen is exactly where they want to look up this information. Prospective students will be disappointed finding no information about available majors and admission procedures or requirements; students would probably appreciate being able to access personalized class schedules or getting guidance in navigating around the campus, but there is no such thing. The number of downloads (between 1000 and 5000 from Google Play Store as on August 5, 2015) and its average rating (3.3 based on 29 user feedbacks) can tell us something about how difficult it is to make everyone happy with a single app.

A fairly universal app called UJK Mobile is also offered by the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce (Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach). It provides a lot of practical information on study in the town of Kielce, yet is not overall very useful for current students (never mind alumni). As on August 5, 2015 it has been downloaded by between 100 and 500 users.

An application suited to prospective students' needs – containing a set of tables compiled for those taking the maturity exam in the sciences – has been launched by the SGGW. Truly useful as the tables are, doubts could raised about what they have to do with that particular institution. A typical app designed with prospective students in mind is the one offered by Collegium da Vinci (formerly Wyższa Szkoła Nauk Humanistycznych i Dziennikarstwa): besides a complete course catalog and basic information about the institution, it includes a sort of game. With 100-500 downloads from Google Play Store (as on August 5, 2015), it cannot be seen as a major success. A much more popular app (5000-10000 downloads), designated as Your Development Path (Twój Kierunek Rozwoju) and allowing users to self-test their vocational aptitude, has been put out by the WSB Universities (Wyższe Szkoły Bankowe). Most criticism relates to the fact that the app cannot be run unless the prospective student signs in, and the process raises users' fears, involving disclosure of too much personal information

[4] http://www.ue.katowice.pl/uczelnia/aplikacja-mobilna-myue.html [accessed 5.08.2015].

(including residence address). Another typical app oriented on the prospective student is WZR UG offered by the Faculty of Management of the University of Gdansk (Wydział Zarządzania Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego). Users can select a study program, convert maturity scores, and look up the location of specific buildings around the campus, at the same time providing a lot of details about their surroundings. The application has been downloaded by 100-500 people (as on August 5, 2015). PWSZ Leszno (Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa w Lesznie), on the other hand, has published an application (100-500 downloads) that merely represents an extended, mobile version of the school's flyer.

Typical student-centered applications, providing such functionalities as class scheduler or grade viewer include: mUczelnia (by the University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszow – Wyższa Szkoła Informatyki i Zarządzania w Rzeszowie) with above 500 downloads; MobilnaWSZiA (by the University of Management and Administration in Zamosc – Wyższa Szkoła Zarządzania i Administracji w Zamościu) with 10-50 downloads; Mobilna WSE (by the Tischner European University – Wyższa Szkoła Europejska im. ks. Józefa Tischnera w Krakowie) with 10-50 downloads; WSZiB Kraków (by the Kraków-based School of Banking and Management – Wyższa Szkoła Zarządzania i Bankowości w Krakowie) with 100-500 downloads; Górnośląska WSP (by the Cardinal August Hlond University of Education in Myslowice Górnośląska – Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna im. Kardynała Augusta Hlonda w Mysłowicach, currently a division of the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Cracow – Akademia Ignatianum w Krakowie) with 100-500 downloads, combining the utility of a student-centered app with that of an applicant-centered one; iUKSW (by the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw – Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego w Warszawie) – 100-500 downloads. The University of Warsaw (Uniwersytet Warszawski) app is distinctive in that it has an important, albeit limited, functionality allowing users to find the university buildings scattered throughout the city. Its popularity with users is nevertheless negligible (10-50 downloads), even though the app has been available for several months already. The University of Lodz (Uniwersytet Łódzki) trod the same path in restricting the capabilities of its infoRektorat app to searching for university staff by the position held. Again, it has not attracted a lot of interest (100-500 downloads), although it has been around for more than three years now. On the other hand, the University's Faculty of Management has an app if its own (WZmobi) that enables the user to stay on top of current developments and upcoming events or find the contact information of academic as well administrative staff; notably, it also makes it possible to view class schedules by field of study and major (500-1000 downloads).

In a world where several dozen of mobile apps dedicated to university alumni and college graduates (e.g. MIT, University of Cincinnati, City University of Hong Kong, New York University Stern School of Business, Wesleyan University, Northeastern University, IESE Business School, Georgia State University or, last but not least, Yale) are available from Google Play Store, Polish higher education institutions offer literally none.

It is therefore clear that Polish institutions of higher education are still learning how to employ the new instrument – mobile apps. Some of them entrust their design and development to eager students, some completely forget to advertise the apps in their websites (for example, the Cracow University of Economics – Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Krakowie), many do not seem to reflect upon who and why would want to run an app on their smartphones (i.e. typically while on the move and for a short time). Whereas the key question that they should ask themselves is: what if their students are not at all interested in such applications?

6. Findings of research on mobile applications

The forgoing discussion implies the need to validate the following points: (1) whether students have an interest in mobile applications – as indicated by their reported usage of mobile apps; (2) to what extent students are aware of the availability of a mobile app from their higher education institution and what usage frequency they report (compared to their familiarity with, and usage of, their university website). Based on the statistics cited earlier in this paper, one could predict that a large majority of students will be enthusiastic users of mobile applications, particularly of social networking and entertainment apps. It could be also expected that, once they have downloaded and set up an app on their smartphone, they will make frequent use of it. It has already been pointed out that for the present generation, referred to as the “app generation”, mobile applications are a natural choice when looking for fun, retrieving information, or building relationships with their peers.

Regarding the reported awareness and practical usage of mobile applications offered by institutions of higher learning, it could be hypothesized that a large faction of students will not even know that such apps exist, but that those who do know, will probably use them, albeit not very often. It could be also anticipated that university websites are more popular with students than mobile apps.

To validate the propositions put forth in this paper, a quantitative survey was performed among higher education students. The respondents were selected by non-probability sampling from amongst smartphone owners aged 18-34 and pursuing a higher education program at a Polish academic institution. The interviews were conducted via the Ariadna platform using the CAWI method between July 17 and July 22, 2015. The sample comprised 503 respondents.

Table 1. What applications have you ever run on your smartphone?

Mode of study	Social media						Maps & navigation		Transactional			News			Fun		Utility
	Facebook	Skype	Google+	Instagram	Snapchat	Hangout	Google Maps	Satnav	Allegro [online auction site]	Bank app	Comparison shopping	Weather	Onet	WP	YouTube	Games	“Cloud”
full-time	94.4	38.7	32.5	31.7	28.0	10,8	65.6	47.8	56.5	40.3	12.9	46.0	22.8	16.1	86.6	48.9	22.0
part-time	85.5	37.4	38.9	30.5	17.6	10,7	66.4	51.1	60.3	40.5	15.3	50.4	17.6	26.0	80.2	48.9	21.4

Source: own.

The research positively confirmed that mobile applications are massively used (cf. Table 1), with social media and fun apps in the lead. The most commonly used apps include Facebook and a variety of games, with 4 in 5 respondents admitting to running these regularly.

On a closer look at the statistics shown in Table 1, it seems that the following observations should be made:

– an enormous edge (twofold at the very least) that Facebook has over other social media applications; notably, the use of such apps as Snapchat or Instagram, whose penetration among American teenagers has been rising steadily over the last few years, are relatively rare among Polish students (run by 1 out of 3 respondents only);

– a high penetration by the YouTube app providing access to video content;

– penetration by games consistent with other research findings published in Poland;

– considerable interest in Google Maps and navigation apps[5] or in weather apps that forecast, or report on, weather conditions;[6]

[5] Among these apps, most users mentioned the free GoogleMaps app (2/5 of those using their smartphones for navigation). If the analysis is narrowed down to typical navigation apps, the champion is Here (free), used by nearly 1/6 of those running satnav apps on their smartphones, and AutoMapa (commercial), used by every eleventh smartphone owner using navigation apps.

[6] The most commonly used apps are accuweather (indicated by more than a quarter of those using weather apps) and Pogoda (nearly 1/6).

– a relatively low penetration by news apps (ranging between every sixth and every fourth student surveyed, depending on the application and the mode of study);

– a low penetration by apps giving access to files stored in a cloud.[7]

It comes as no surprise that young smartphone users aim, at least to a certain extent, to keep their phone screens tidy – they tend to remove apps that they have not used for a long time; and conversely, an app that is installed will be used rather often. Frequent usage is particularly true of social networking apps. Data compiled in Table 2 reveal that these apps, (Facebook alongside less popular apps such as Instagram or Snapchat) are run several times a day by 2 in 5 users (3 in 5 for Facebook)! Only 1 out of 4 respondents (every twelfth in the case of Facebook) using these applications runs them less often than once a week. Just for the sake of accuracy, it should be pointed out that the usage statistics for other social networking apps (outside the "big three") are slightly worse (this goes, above all, for the Skype mobile app).

Interestingly enough, the same pattern is visible in the case of news applications (WP, Onet or weather apps) – many more users run them at least once a day, while a much smaller percentage do so less often than once a week.

This is even truer of mobile games – every fifth smartphone gamer runs a game less often than once a week, yet 2 out of 5 play them once a day at a minimum.

For obvious reasons, Google Maps or navigation apps are much less frequently run on smartphones.

It was highly predictable that higher education students, alike other representatives of the "app generation", are aware of mobile applications and use them very often, with social networking apps, mobile games, and (less often) news apps topping the list. They will also download apps that support online shopping or bank transactions,[8] as well as maps and navigation apps facilitating travel – yet these are (understandably) used relatively less often.

As anticipated, many of the students surveyed (every third) have no idea whether their university has a mobile application (cf. Table 3). This ignorance is more common – by 1/3 – among female than among male students (perhaps young males found it more difficult to admit this), and slightly more common among younger students than among older-aged students. The high percentage of students who are ignorant of the availability of a mobile app from their institution may be attributable to:

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[7] Those few who did make use of cloud storage named the following: Dropbox (2/5 of those uploading files to clouds), Google Disk (above 1/3), and OneDrive (more than a quarter of all cloud users).

[8] The most popular bank app was the one provided by mBank (above a quarter of responses). Other common apps include those by ING, PKO BP, and BZ WBK (11-13% each).

Table 2. Usage frequency of selected mobile applications by higher education students (ranked by how often used)

Mobile applications	Several times a day	Once a day	2-3 times a week	Once a week	2-3 times a month	Once a month	Less often than once a month
Facebook	62.6	12.7	11.0	5.4	2.4	1.9	3.9
Instagram	44.9	15.8	13.9	7.0	5.1	2.5	10.8
Snapchat	40.9	17.3	11.0	7.9	4.7	2.4	15.7
Games	29.3	14.6	24.8	9.8	11.0	2.4	8.1
Weather apps	28.3	34.6	20.7	5.5	5.9	1.3	3.8
Hangout	25.9	3.7	9.3	7.4	9.3	5.6	38.9
WP	24.5	22.3	24.5	12.8	4.3	5.3	6.4
YouTube	18.5	16.2	25.3	16.4	11.9	4.9	6.8
Onet	15.7	28.7	19.4	12.0	8.3	4.6	11.1
Cloud storage	10.9	13.6	28.2	13.6	13.6	8.2	11.8
Google+	9.9	16.3	17.4	20.9	9.3	8.7	17.4
Ceneo	7.4	1.5	13.2	26.5	26.5	11.8	13.2
Allegro	6.6	6.9	21.5	15.2	27.0	10.0	12.8
Skype	5.7	5.7	17.1	13.0	22.3	14.5	21.8
Bank apps	4.9	15.3	33.0	21.2	15.8	3.9	5.9
Google Maps	3.0	2.7	26.9	23.9	21.5	6.6	15.4
Navigation apps	2.4	2.4	14.3	18.8	27.3	11.0	23.7

Respondents: higher education students owning a smartphone and reporting at least a one-time use of an app belonging in a given category.

Source: own.

1. overall little interest in mobile applications among students – however, the statistics presented above prove that this is not the case;
2. poor support rendered by higher education institutions to their apps (no publicity, no incentives to download them). It turns out, for example, that few universities publicize information on their mobile apps in their websites' main pages. Worse than that, there are institutions (e.g. the Cracow University of Economics) whose websites will not return any information on the availability of a mobile app even through the search page;

3. a literal interpretation of the question's wording ("[…] have its own mobile app") – where the app was developed and launched by a third party (a student, a scientific society/science club, etc.), the respondents might have been misled to answer "no" or "don't know". Most likely, however, this was not the main factor behind the large percentage of "don't know" responses;

4. a lack of interest in the academic aspect of university study, which could bring about indifference toward an app providing relevant tips and information. While this might certainly be true about some, it seems that it should not be assumed that so many university students (every third) would be completely unconcerned with activities that, after all, take up a significant amount of their time.

Table 3. Does your institution have its own mobile app (e.g. for smartphones)?

		Yes	No	Don't know
Total		12.9	51.3	35.8
Sex	female	11.6	47.1	41.3
	male	14.5	56.4	29.1
Age	18-24 years	12.2	51.1	36.7
	25-34 years	18.9	52.8	28.3
Mode of study	full-time	13.4	51.1	35.5
	part-time	11.5	51.9	36.6

Source: own.

More than a half of the respondents stated that their university did not have its own mobile app. Obviously, some of them might be simply mistaken about it (thinking that there is no such app – for reasons 2, 3 and 4 indicated above – although it actually exists), yet this clearly demonstrates **that mobile applications are rare among Polish higher education institutions and that most students may have never heard of them**. Barely 1 out of 8 respondents in the survey – slightly more among men, particularly older-aged and studying full-time – reports being in the know about the existence of their university's mobile application.

It was easy to predict that many more students will be aware of their institution's dedicated mobile website than of mobile apps. Every third respondent – again, more among those older-aged and studying full-time – knows about the university's mobile website (cf. Table 4). This means that the awareness of mobile websites is two and a half times more common than the awareness of mobile apps!

Table 4. Does your institution have a website dedicated to mobile devices, e.g. smartphones?

		Yes	No	Don't know
Total		33.4	27.8	38.8
Sex	female	33.7	26.8	39.5
	male	33.0	29.1	37.9
Age	18-24 years	33.1	27.6	39.3
	25-34 years	35.8	30.2	34.0
Mode of study	full-time	34.1	27.2	38.7
	part-time	31.3	29.8	38.9

Source: own.

Interestingly enough, a similar (or even slightly higher) percentage of the respondents admit to being ignorant of whether their university has a mobile-optimized website or not. What makes it so surprising is that fact that, while a mobile app needs to be actively searched for (one has to look it up at the Google Play Store, the Apple Store, or check the university's website), finding out whether a website can be viewed on a smartphone is extremely easy – all you need to do is type in the familiar address in the browser window. The nearly 40% of students who cannot tell whether their university has a mobile website either did not understand the question (what is a "a website dedicated to mobile devices"?), or are entrenched in the conviction that websites are most comfortably accessed from laptops and PCs rather than from smartphones, or are not very interested in what their university might want to communicate to them through its website. Intuitively, the second option (computers are best for exploring websites) appears to be the most likely explanation.

Students are much more familiar with their universities' mobile websites than with their mobile apps. It makes sense therefore to look at how often mobile apps are used by those who are aware of them. It turns out that (cf. Table 5) almost 3 out of 4 "aware" respondents use their university's mobile app, and 1 in 5 does it really often – at least once a day. This stands for a significantly higher usage frequency than the average for such applications as Ceneo, Allegro, Skype, Google Maps or navigation apps! It should also be noted that, overall, nearly 2 out of 3 students stating an awareness of their university's mobile application use it at least once a month. Apparently, universities' mobile apps have fewer occasional (i.e. running them less often than once a month) users than such applications as Hangout, Skype, Google+, or satnav apps! This seems more than enough to substantiate the belief in the (potentially) high relevance of mobile apps.

Table 5. How often do you personally use your university's mobile app?

		Several times a day	Once a day	2-3 times a week	Once a week	2-3 times a month	Once a month	Less often than once a month	Not at all
Total		4.6	15.4	10.8	4.6	21.5	6.2	10.8	26.2
Sex	female	6.3	18.8	9.4	6.3	25.0	9.4	12.5	12.5
	male	3.0	12.1	12.1	3.0	18.2	3.0	9.1	39.4
Age	18-24 years	3.6	16.4	10.9	3.6	18.2	7.3	12.7	27.3
	25-34 years	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	40.0	0.0	0.0	20.0
Mode of study	full--time	4.0	18.0	12.0	4.0	22.0	4.0	12.0	24.0
	part--time	6.7	6.7	6.7	6.7	20.0	13.3	6.7	33.3

Respondents: higher education students owning a smartphone and stating an awareness of their university's mobile app.

Source: own.

It should be observed that frequent usage (at least once a day) of a university app is much more common – by 2/3 – among women than among men. Understandably, a similar pattern is found between full-time and part-time students (classes held daily stimulate e.g. frequent use of the app to check class schedules). On the other hand, there are three times as many male as female non-users (among those who are aware of the app); over 1/3 more non-users in the lower than in the upper age bracket; and above 1/3 more non-users, too, among part-time than among full-time students.

Vis-à-vis the corresponding statistics for mobile apps, the percentage of respondents who are aware of mobile websites and actually use them is **a little lower** (cf. Table 6). Interestingly, there are more frequent users (those reporting usage at least once a day) among women than among men, unlike for mobile apps; there are 2/3 fewer frequent users among younger-aged than among older-aged students, and two and a half times fewer among part-time students than among full-time students. On the other hand, there is just a negligible percentage (1 out of 14) amongst those being aware of a mobile website who do not visit it at all – more than three a half times fewer than for mobile apps. This may result from some students' reluctance to "overload" their smartphone screen (some regarding

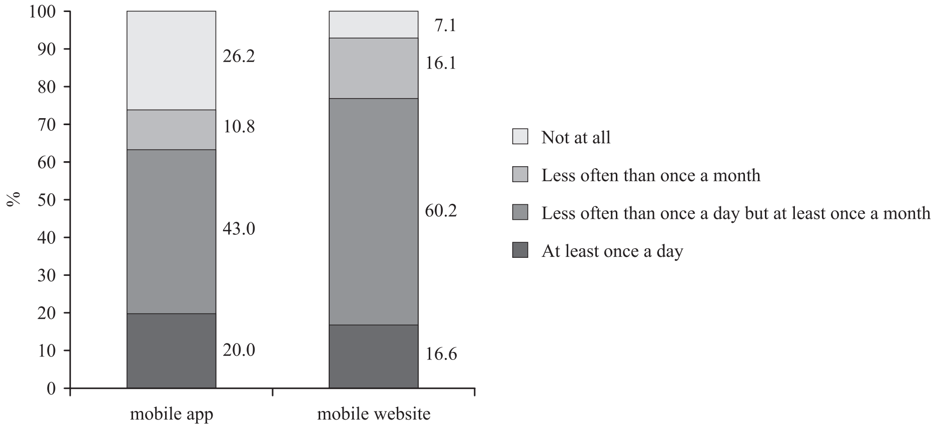
Table 6. How often do you personally use your smartphone to visit your university's website?

		Several times a day	Once a day	2-3 times a week	Once a week	2-3 times a month	Once a month	Less often than once a month	Not at all
Total		10.1	6.5	19.0	11.9	17.9	11.3	16.1	7.1
Sex	female	9.7	5.4	18.3	11.8	17.2	11.8	19.4	6.5
	male	10.7	8.0	20.0	12.0	18.7	10.7	12.0	8.0
Age	18-24 years	9.4	6.0	19.5	11.4	17.4	12.1	16.1	8.1
	25-34 years	15.8	10.5	15.8	15.8	21.1	5.3	15.8	0.0
Mode of study	full--time	11.8	7.9	18.1	11.8	16.5	10.2	18.1	5.5
	part--time	4.9	2.4	22.0	12.2	22.0	14.6	9.8	12.2

Respondents: higher education students owning a smartphone and stating an awareness of their university's mobile-optimized website.

Source: own.

Chart 1. Mobile app vs. mobile website usage (among those who are aware of each)



Source: based on Table 5 and Table 6.

it as little short of a body part) with unwanted applications – once an app gets to the screen, however, it is used heavily; if it is unlikely to be used, it simply never gets installed.

A comparison between usage frequency for university apps and for websites (cf. Chart 1) indicates that, while it is more difficult to induce a student to download an application than to type a familiar URL in the mobile browser window, users are more likely to frequently run apps that they have already downloaded than to pay repeated visits to a known website. Frequent usage (at least once a day) is reported 50% more often for mobile apps than for mobile websites; sporadic usage (less often than once a month) is reported for mobile apps by 1/6 fewer students than for websites.

Conclusion

Both the publicly available statistics and the research specifically performed to validate the propositions set forth in this paper clearly indicate that mobile applications afford real opportunities to strengthen a student's relationships with the university. First of all, smartphones are held in almost every student's hand. Secondly, most students see mobile apps as a natural ingredient of what their smartphone can do for them. Research findings provide evidence that 3 in 4 among those who are aware of the availability of their university's mobile app will install it on their smartphones and, consequently, run it often enough. As along, of course, as the app actually offers any of the functionalities that students or prospective students expect (this implies, for example, that it is not merely a mobile version of a brochure addressed to prospective students). Importantly, higher education institutions should make efforts to actively promote their mobile apps (which is what, for example, the Kozminski University does), and then consistently track download and usage statistics.

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Aplikacje mobilne w budowaniu relacji ze szkołą wyższą

Streszczenie. *Wysoka penetracja smartfonów wśród osób aktualnie studiujących każe zadać sobie pytanie o możliwość wykorzystania komunikacji mobilnej, a w szczególności aplikacji mobilnych w budowaniu relacji studentów z ich uczelnią. W artykule opisano kluczowe wyróżniki komunikacji mobilnej, by następnie na tym tle dokonać analizy specyfiki aplikacji mobilnych. Następnie przeanalizowano wyniki badań populacji osób studiujących w Polsce, poświęconych znajomości i korzystaniu przez nich z aplikacji mobilnej ich uczelni (na tle innych, popularnych kategorii aplikacji).*

Słowa kluczowe: *komunikacja mobilna, aplikacje mobilne, relacje, szkoła wyższa*

Competencies of Higher Education Students and Alumni

Zeszyty Naukowe
Wyższej Szkoły Bankowej w Poznaniu
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The Position of Higher Education Graduates in the Labor Market vs. Demand in the National Economy – the Present and the Future

Abstract. *The paper addresses a problem that visibly afflicts a lot of young graduates from Polish universities. A situation where a growing number of higher education degree holders are unable to find employment has adverse consequences for the graduates themselves as well as for the national economy. The reasons can be sought in such conditions as the increasing number of university graduates, the gaping mismatch between their education and the demand in the local labor market, and their lack of credentials required by employers. Among these factors, special attention should be given to the needs of local economies, as these effectively determine what personal qualities, skills, qualifications and education are expected of employees and what job openings are available in specific regions.*

Keywords: *university graduate, labor market, education, employment*

Introduction

Each year, a host of young people complete higher education programs, hence transiting from the stage of education to that of employment. On entering the job market, many graduates encounter problems finding employment. As a result, some of them start into their adult life by registering with employment offices as unemployed job seekers [Buchner-Jeziorska 2011: 18]. The position of higher education graduates in the labor market is regularly examined by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (Główny Urząd Statystyczny – GUS).

The first challenge in exploring the issue is the lack of a clear and unambiguous definition of a higher education graduate, as it is not found in Polish legislation. Although most authors adopt the definition proposed by GUS ("a higher education graduate is an individual who earned a higher education course completion certificate and, having defended a thesis, was awarded a professional degree – a Master's degree on completion of a long-cycle or second-cycle program, or a Bachelor's degree (or its equivalent) on completion of a first-cycle or vocational program" [GUS 1993]), it cannot be considered fully adequate, since a Master's degree program may not be concluded with the award of a Master's degree. Some of such programs may lead to equivalent degrees, e.g. physician or dental surgeon. With these considerations in mind, this paper assumes that a higher education graduate is an individual who had not been employed for a period of at least twelve months since the completion of a higher education program and remained out of work at the time this study was conducted.

The economic transformation process has been associated with an increasing correlation between education and position in the labor market. In effect, the society has formed a firm belief that a higher education degree and a university course completion diploma stand for immediate employability in jobs that will match each graduate's expectations and preferences [Piróg 2013: 305].

Nonetheless, Poland has been experiencing a consistent growth in the percentage of unemployed university graduates. Upon a successful attempt at the maturity examination (secondary school leaving exam), most young people struggle to make the decision of a lifetime to either choose a career path right away or to take a progressive step in their intellectual development. Potential higher education students, confident in that a university degree will help them climb to a dream job in the future, are much more likely to choose to continue into tertiary education [Grabarczyk 2008: 135].

Increasing tertiary education attainment is coupled with declining demand for university education in the marketplace, which translates into a soaring unemployment rate among university graduates. In 2014, Polish higher education institutions put out 424,000 graduates, including 190,000 graduates from Master's degree programs. At the same time, there were 225,000 unemployed university degree holders.

The popular availability of higher education has effectively worsened the job market position of recent university graduates, contributing to the emergence of their structural incompatibility with job market demand. Institutional course offerings are rather sluggish in responding to the changes in the labor market. The mismatch results in a number of tertiary education students pursuing degrees that are not in demand [Dworak 2011: 107-110].

The paper aims to explore the extent to which higher education degree holders match the changing needs of requirements of the labor market, and to assess their employability in the years to come. In this context, the paper presents the dynamics of changes in the number of higher education graduates and their breakdown by program/degree between 2002 and 2013, and discusses the outcomes of these changes for graduate employability, focusing on efforts at optimizing graduates' job search capability. What such efforts are based on is, for the most part, modifications to the objectives and methodology of academic instruction and the pursuit of the concept of creative, entrepreneurial university.

1. Higher education vs. labor market

Both in the science of economics and in business practice, intellectual capital is seen as a growth stimulator for specific countries and regions as well as a determinant of the economic growth rate, especially in knowledge-based economies. The completion of a higher education program is very often considered a prerequisite for a successful professional career or, at the very least, an assurance of finding any job whatsoever. Further, tertiary education, attested by a degree award certificate, informs the staff recruitment and selection process, being a token of an individual's potential and likely competencies [Kryńska 2011: 87-101].

The rapid growth in the number of degree seekers has also been driven by a variety of economic, social or psychological factors increasing a person's chances of finding employment, accumulating financial savings, and improving the living standard (cf. Fig. 1) [Piróg 2013: 303].

In the society of today, it comes as a matter of fact that the level of education critically influences individuals' ability to find an attractive job, and even more on their position in the society, i.e. their social status.

What is very often brought up in the context of tertiary education in Poland is the emphasis that it places on theory at the expense of practical skills, resulting in deficiencies in training for specific jobs. On the one hand, it seems to have been forgotten that a university's mission with regard to job training largely differs from that of basic vocational schools. On the other, most employers expect their prospective employees to have some desirable personality traits (loyalty, honesty, diligence, etc.), speak foreign languages, and be able to operate a computer or work with specific software. This shows that employers are aware of the fact that a brief on-the-job training is in most cases all that it takes to prepare a new hire for a job. Yet, institutions of higher learning effectively fail to offer study programs that fit into job market trends and satisfy actual demand for workforce in a country's or region's economy [Sedlak & Sedlak 2013]. Even if higher

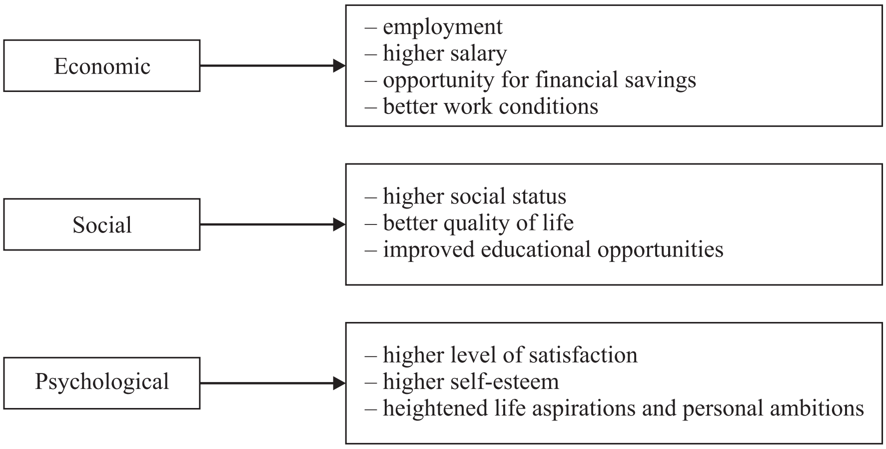


Figure 1. The potential benefits of higher education

Source: own based on Buchner-Jeziorska 2011: 17-31; Zarycki 2009: 12-25.

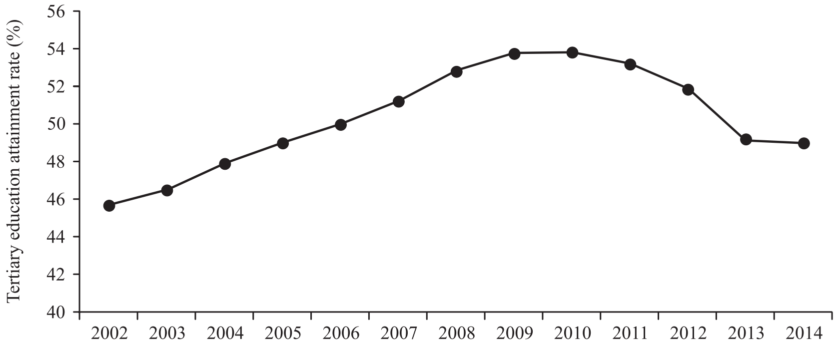
education institutions did their best to cater to labor market requirements, in terms of quantity as well as quality, they would not be able to anticipate demand in the market in the years to come. It can only be hoped that higher education graduates' increasing mobility and flexibility will eventually help overcome these constraints [Dworak 2011: 107-110].

Between 2002 and 2014, Poland experienced a dynamic growth in the number of higher education students and, consequently, university alumni. The increasing number of tertiary education students and alumni resulted, to a large extent, from the proliferation of non-state higher education institutions taking place under the new Law on Higher Education. The Law accounts for the growth in the overall student population, having spurred the expansion of non-public institutions accommodating individuals who have not been admitted to state-run universities.

The increase in the number of higher education students and graduates in 2002-2014 was reflected in the rising proportion of degree holders to Poland's population (cf. Chart 1).

The 2002-2010 period was marked by an increasing trend in the percentage of degree holders, driven primarily by the proliferation of private higher education institutions that, year by year, enrolled an increasing number of students. It was not until 2010 that the university graduates to population ratio started to decrease, culminating in a 5% drop in 2014. This trajectory can be explained by a number of factors, including the increasing awareness that tertiary education alone cannot secure employability, the underfunding of students by higher education institu-

Chart 1. Tertiary education attainment (university graduates to population) ratio in 2002-2014



Source: own based on the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS) data.

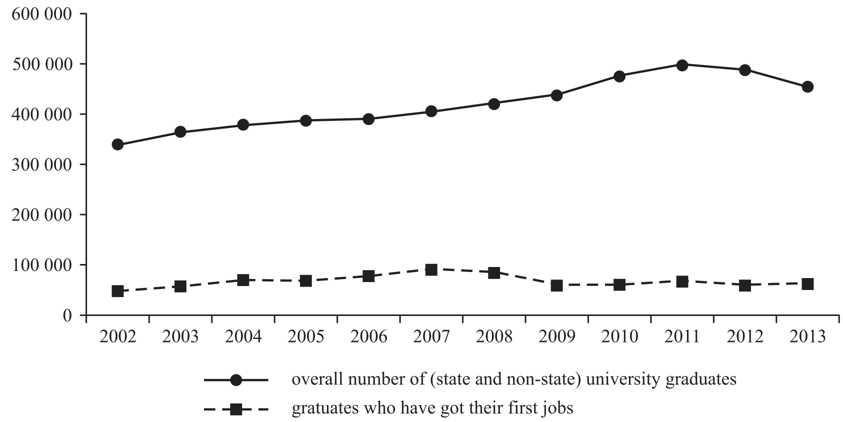
tions (in qualitative as well as in quantitative terms), or a lack of motivation for continuing education. Looking at young people's position in the job market today, it could be concluded that, for many of them, the pursuit of higher education is nothing but a way to put off the frustrations of a job search.

Some youth have become, over the years, more and more aware of how much a higher education degree can really do for them in terms of advancing their professional careers, hence an increasing proportion of secondary school leavers will choose to get a job and gain practical experience rather than study for a degree, realizing that the theoretical underpinning provided by universities may be these days of lesser value.

Students' enthusiasm and aspirations were soon confronted with the realities of the labor market. In 2014, the unemployment rate among higher education graduates was twice as high as at the beginning of 2002. Over just a decade, there were 76,000 more university alumni who had not been able to find employment within 12 months since graduation. Moreover, a large proportion of those who had got a first job found themselves engaged in a kind of work that was totally unrelated to their education. This was certainly one of the factors behind the low percentage of alumni getting jobs (cf. Chart 2).

The 2002-2007 period was characterized by the lowest disproportion between the total number of higher education graduates and the number of graduates in employment. In the subsequent years, however, the disparity widened considerably, being indicative of a declining percentage of university degree holders finding jobs on graduation. To a large extent, the increasing number of unemployed degree holders stemmed from a continued rise in the overall number of university graduates, as more than 5 million Poles completed degree programs at higher education institutions between 2000 and 2014.

Chart 2. The number of university graduates getting a first job
relative to the total number of higher education degree holders, year by year



Source: own based on the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS) data.

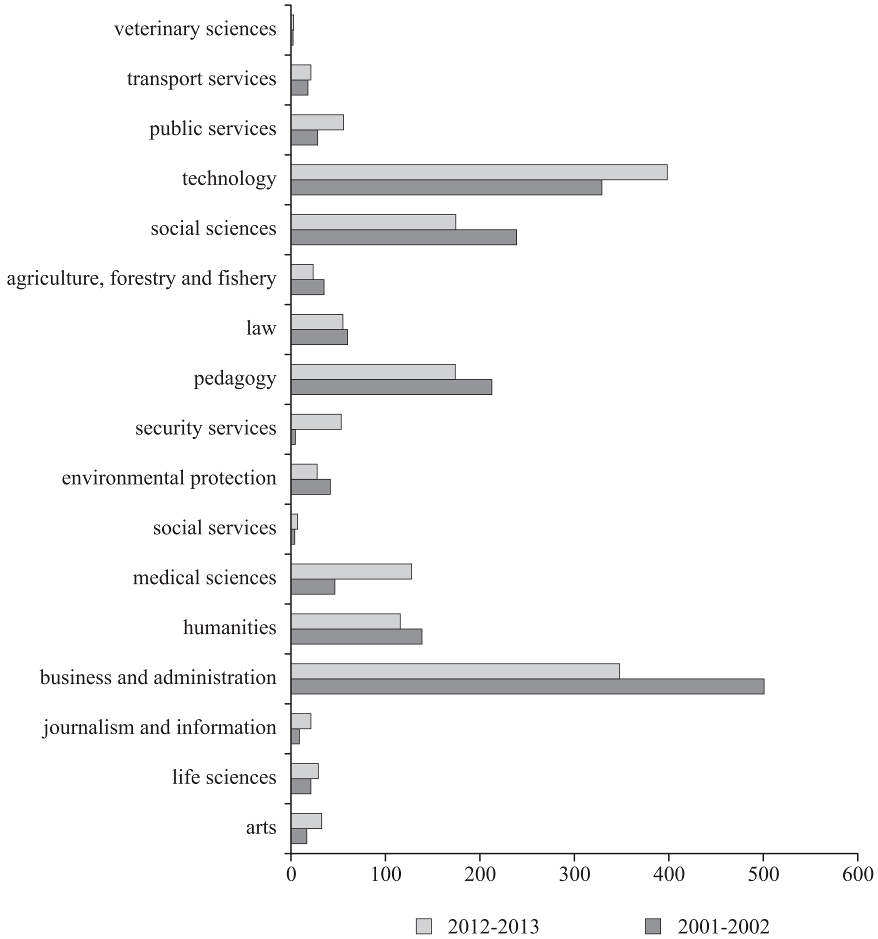
Although the number of unemployed university graduates went up year by year, the effective employment rate remained relatively steady for a decade – a condition that in itself could be interpreted as evidence of some success in satisfying job market demand [Jabłoński 2015: 175].

Higher education institutions' course offerings are diverse, including a very broad range of degree programs and majors. This means that the job market is fed with workforce equipped with a large variety of skills, qualifications, and competencies. For a decade or so, students' top choices were degree programs falling within such fields as business and administration, technology, social sciences, and pedagogy (cf. Chart 3).

At the same time, business and administration is the field that suffered greatest losses in enrolment figures, while increases were observed in such areas as technology, medical sciences, or security services. On the other hand, programs in pedagogy, public services, and business and administration continued to attract the most students, which entails tough competition for jobs in the labor market. This seems to be the key factor that led to a decline in enrolment in these programs at the beginning of the 21st century, paralleled by growing interest in technology and medical programs – those that happen to be in greatest demand in the economy.

The growing numbers of higher education students and graduates were accompanied by increases in the unemployment rate among degree holders. For comparison's sake, while only 4.4% of university graduates officially reported to be out of work in 2003, just a decade later unemployed individuals represented

Chart 3. Enrolment in specific types (groupings) of higher education programs, year by year



Source: own based on the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS) data.

more than 12% of the degree holder population. It is extremely difficult to establish which factor prevailed in having driven this upward trend: the explosive expansion of the higher education sector, or the non-adjustment of its services to the dynamically evolving needs of the labor market.

What can be observed at the moment is a discrepancy in attitude between the job market and the higher education sector. On the one hand, education is perceived as an important driver of economic growth, hence prospective labor force is encouraged to upgrade it, while on the other, university graduates' employment and career prospects are almost impossible to predict or prognosticate. Year after year, the job market suffers from a shortage of workforce with basic vocational training and, simultaneously, faces an excess supply of university degree holders. The oversupply of tertiary education graduates enables employers to pick and choose among candidates with the best qualifications and escalate pressure on their mobility and availability [Rogowski 2015: 186]. Given large differentials in quality of instruction between higher education institutions, employers can even afford to screen applicants in terms of superior and inferior qualifications, and hire persons with university degrees for ordinary jobs that do not in fact involve any sophisticated skills.

2. The demand for higher education graduates in Poland's economy

Poland's labor market is today flawed with an incompatibility between the knowledge, skills and competences that higher education students are taught and the skills and qualifications that are demanded by the economy. Obviously enough, the maladjustment has a number of adverse effects, including primarily scarce employment opportunities for many university graduates, which is a circumstance that might, understandably, cause frustration among surplus workforce as well as bring down their earnings and generate social pathologies.

In the first decade of the 21st century, Poland saw its tertiary education attainment rate sky-rocketing to levels unsurpassed throughout Europe. As a result, the demand for higher education further grew, fuelled by the rising percentage of university degree holders in the population in employment (cf. Table 1).

Between 2003 and 2013, the proportion of university graduates in the country's workforce nearly doubled (up from 15.83% in 2003 to 29.55% in 2013). At the same time, the participation of those less educated was on the decrease, except for individuals with general upper secondary education whose share in labor force increased, albeit slightly, to 9.14% in 2014.

There is a snowballing consensus that young Poles holding university diplomas are left to themselves, and even the statutory obligation to monitor alumni careers, imposed on higher education institutions as from the academic year 2011-2012, has not made much difference in this respect.

Furthermore, university graduate employment data clearly suggest that, over the decade being examined, there was a major change in the economy sectors that accommodated higher education graduates for their first-time employment (cf. Table 2).

Table 1. Poland's labor force structure by level of education in 2003-2013 (%)

Education level	% of population in employment			
	2003	2007	2011	2013
Tertiary	15.83	21.54	26.81	29.55
Upper secondary vocational and post-secondary non-tertiary	28.75	28.99	27.73	27.22
Upper secondary general	7.84	8.57	8.96	9.14
Elementary vocational	34.30	30.73	28.45	26.98
Lower secondary, primary or lower	13.28	10.17	8.05	7.10

Source: own based on the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS) data.

Table 2. University graduates' first-time employment by economy sector (%)

Economy sectors providing first-time employment to university graduates	2003	2008	2013
Agriculture, hunting, forestry, fishery	0.80	0.72	0.98
Mining	0.41	0.31	0.53
Manufacturing and processing	17.87	14.66	13.59
Electricity, gas and water production and supply	1.20	1.26	2.00
Construction	3.82	3.43	2.82
Commerce and repairs	13.0	12.41	12.9
Hotels and restaurants	1.14	1.06	1.08
Transport and warehousing	3.54	3.26	9.35
Information and communication	–	–	6.82
Financial intermediary services	7.48	8.71	6.49
Property market and B2B services	12.91	18.32	0.70
Professional services, science and technology	–	–	10.76
Public administration and national defense, mandatory social and health insurance	12.22	12.60	16.70
Education	13.93	10.82	14.48
Healthcare and social aid	9.18	9.73	13.01
Municipal services, social and personal services, other similar activities	2.47	2.71	3.63

Source: own based on GUS 2003: 132-133; GUS 2008: 136-138; GUS 2014: 99-101.

Table 3. Poland's population in employment by section of the PKD classification in 2000-2013 (in 1000s of employees)

Economy sector	2000	2005	2010	2013
Aggregate	15485.7	12890.7	14106.9	14244.3
Agriculture, hunting, forestry, fishing	4207.1	2134.1	2376.1	2379.0
Mining and extractive industry	357.1	186.4	172.9	168.6
Manufacturing and processing	3102.5	2400.2	2436.4	2421.1
Electricity generation and supply	269.2	150.5	159.1	137.3
Construction	827.4	661.5	865.2	810.5
Commerce and repairs	1903.1	2068.5	2189.0	2121.9
Transport and warehousing	–	633.1	701.4	730.0
Hospitality and food services	185.9	219.4	237.4	244.7
Information and communication	**–**	**183.2**	**237.7**	**270.8**
Financial and insurance services	**268.2**	**296.6**	**337.9**	**352.2**
Property market services	554.3	174.2	196.1	199.2
Professional services, science and technology	**–**	**408.2**	**481.3**	**553.3**
Administration and support services	–	327.2	411.7	443.2
Public administration and national defense	737.9	871.4	970.1	963.0
Education	896.4	1043.0	1079.8	1100.3
Healthcare and social aid	1003.4	689.0	764.4	804.7
Culture, leisure and recreation	–	130.9	148.4	140.0
Other services	**–**	**192.8**	**200.7**	**259.3**

Source: own based on the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS) data.

The relevant GUS data and studies show that most higher education graduates get their first jobs in process manufacturing, public administration and national defense, mandatory social and health insurance, and in education. The following are the sectors that reaped the most conspicuous growth in 2013:

– transport and warehousing;
– professional services, science and technology;
– information and communication services.

Looking at the developments in the country's economy in 2003-2013, it is easy to see that services significantly increased their share in total employment (cf. Table 3).

The most spectacular changes in employment structure occurred in information and communication services; professional, science and technology services; transport and warehousing; administration and support services, i.e. in sections that are often collectively referred to as business services. These primarily

Table 4. Movements in workforce demand and supply in 2014

Voivodeship (province)	Special-ist	Office worker	Service sector job	Skilled worker	Operator	Un-skilled worker
Dolnośląskie	–15.6	2.5	17.7	–3.5	–9.4	13.1
Kujawsko-pomorskie	–18.8	–0.5	8.4	–5.9	–1.2	23.6
Lubelskie	–12.1	6.4	7.5	–3.4	–2.0	12.6
Lubuskie	–2.9	–2.8	1.4	–3.6	–11.0	14.9
Łódzkie	–2.3	5.8	–1.4	–16.2	–3.0	16.4
Małopolskie	–14.0	2.4	0.7	–3.9	0.1	13.4
Mazowieckie	–14.8	3.3	2.3	–3.8	–2.1	14.4
Opolskie	–6.7	2.8	9.7	6.3	–5.6	4.9
Podkarpackie	–3.2	3.7	13.4	–21.2	–10.9	18.3
Podlaskie	–6.8	6.4	9.1	–5.3	–1.2	–5.8
Pomorskie	–15.6	5.2	14.5	7.1	–8.0	12.0
Śląskie	–8.9	9.2	2.1	–15.2	–2.2	19.1
Świętokrzyskie	–2.5	10.3	12.0	–36.6	0.2	18.6
Warmińsko-mazurskie	–10.9	5.6	6.2	–12.3	–4.9	18.3
Wielkopolskie	–9.2	1.4	0.2	5.0	–4.6	10.4
Zachodniopomorskie	–7.6	1.1	–4.6	1.8	–2.5	14.8
Total	–9.9	3.9	5.8	–6.6	–4.4	14.0

Source: Kocór 2015.

comprise tax and investment advisory services; law services; services related to computer technologies, software development and information processing; marketing research; consulting; and public relations. What makes these services grow in prominence is, in the first place, their ongoing penetration into most domains of the economy. It is plain to see that knowledge-based services involving advanced technology constitute the fastest growing segment of economy in the second decade of the 21st century.

In 2014, there was a fundamental shift in the economy's demand for specific types of labor force. The shift was chiefly associated with the country's socio-economic progress, manifest in flourishing innovation and an increasing edge of services over manufacturing industries. Accordingly, movements in workforce demand and supply (cf. Table 4) in selected segments of Poland's job market visibly favor highly qualified staff (specialists, engineers).

A surplus of potential employees was in 2014 reported for occupations where advanced skills were not required, such as unskilled workers, sales personnel, service staff, or office clerks. There was, on the other hand, a deficit of specialists and skilled laborers.

By way of summary to this discussion of demand in national economy, it could be stated that employment has been consistently going up in the services sector, particularly in professions where advanced skills are required, such as freight forwarders, architects, website designers, sales and marketing professionals, physicians and nurses, computer graphic designers, software and multimedia engineers, and information and communication technology specialists. This results from the fact that ICTs (including software development and informatics expertise in the broad sense), alongside transport and warehouse management, are the fastest growing segments of the labor market.

Undersupply, on the other hand, affects the following sectors of the Polish job market: construction (civil engineering), healthcare, and specialized services, e.g. acquisition of EU funding, consulting, adult education.

3. Labor market trends in the years to come

Much of the ongoing debate on university graduates' position in the job market converges on the conclusion that higher education, relevant as it still is to an individual's professional success and career prospects, brings fewer and fewer benefits to fewer and fewer graduates. Among a variety of factors that seem to have been at play in downgrading the value of university degrees, the predominant one is the rapidly growing population of university students and, consequently, the increasing surplus of prospective workforce. To make things worse, new hirings have slackened in those economy sectors that traditionally absorb most university graduates, such as administration, education, or commerce.

It appears to make sense, therefore, for students to be guided primarily by the chances of finding employment in a specific profession, as long as that choice is not very remote from their most desired options. This implies that any obtainable information about the economy's future demand for labor force or about the skills and competencies that employers might expect will come in handy.

Studies conducted by public institutions forecast, in the near future, the emergence of new, highly specialized jobs involving advanced skills in such areas as administration, marketing, sales, logistics, or IT. Demand is therefore likely to arise in the job market for all sorts of technicians, sales specialists (e-marketing), and executive staff to manage large corporations. It is anticipated that the most wanted graduates will be from the following backgrounds: architecture, construction, energetics, electronics and telecommunications, engineering, logistics, production management and technology, medical sciences with nursing and physiotherapy, and information technology [Górniak (ed.) 2012].

In the next several years, the labor market will definitely favor qualifications in certain technical areas. A Europe 2020 strategy report lists industries that will create the most new vacancies [Ratajczak et al. 2012: 55-58]:

– support services for agriculture, mining and extractive industries;
– food and chemical processing;
– manufacture of rubber, plastic and metal products;
– manufacture of electrical appliances;
– machinery and equipment repair, fitting and maintenance;
– e-commerce and e-marketing;
– construction (civil engineering);
– transport and warehousing;
– professional services, science and technology;
– healthcare;
– creative work related to culture, leisure and recreation.

Yet, it turns out that forecasting labor market demand for specific occupations alone will not suffice, as many job applicants simply do not meet employers' requirements regarding work experience, requisite practical skills, relevant qualifications, salary expectations, soft and transversal skills, knowledge of the market, business acumen, etc.

Competencies that will be most sought be employers in the years to come are intrinsically linked to changes taking place in the economy. As a lot of businesses endeavor to establish a presence in foreign markets, they will put a high value on employees with an international outlook, who are capable of working in multicultural teams and instantly adapting to a religiously diverse environment. Further, there will certainly be a strong emphasis on innovation and enterprise, since these factors are believed to have a critical impact on a company's ability to develop a competitive advantage in domestic and international markets. Cognitive competencies, too, are highly desirable, because knowledge-based economies thrive on lifelong learning and continuous skill development.

Conclusion

The analysis has revealed a gap between economy's demand for specific labor force and the skills and competencies taught at universities. This is clearly due to a mismatch between the levels and fields of study pursued by youth and the actual needs of the job market. As a result, too many students choose higher education programs in humanities, while at the same time employers report a deficit of technicians and high-grade specialists. This trend can be explained by the fact that higher education institutions maintain higher limits on admissions into humanities and social sciences programs, and that these programs have a much higher graduation rate than programs in technical fields that are mostly tougher to complete.

A university graduate's job market position and career prospects are also contingent on the level and quality of the degree, the latter being linked to the academic reputation of the awarding institution, i.e. the perception of its quality of instruction. Research findings suggest that holders of Master's degrees have better employment prospects and find it easier to get a job than holders of Bachelor's degrees.

Best employment opportunities await professionals with degrees in technical and medical sciences, i.e. those highly specialized in their specific areas. This can be attributed to the robust growth in such industries as information and communications, or transport and warehousing. Conversely, the position of graduates from degree programs that were hitherto most populated, such as business, administration, and pedagogy (primary school and early childhood teachers), is bound to decline every year, as these are likely to retain leadership in admissions in the years to come.

Nevertheless, it should be underscored that tertiary education attainment continues to represent a valuable asset and a vital part of intellectual capital, bearing positively on job seekers' employability and giving them an edge over those with lower-level education. While the oversupply of university graduates forces them to compete for jobs, a higher education degree still demonstrably stands for a better position in the labor market.

Notably, more and more higher education institutions are undertaking to re-design their curricula and modify their course offerings in an effort to better prepare graduates for labor market entry and to bridge the gap between their competencies and employer expectations or job market demand.

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Sytuacja absolwentów studiów wyższych na rynku pracy a zapotrzebowanie gospodarki – sytuacja obecna i przyszła

Streszczenie. *W artykule podjęto problem, z którym boryka się wielu młodych absolwentów polskich uczelni. Z niemożnością znalezienia zatrudnienia boryka się coraz większa grupa osób posiadających dyplom ukończenia szkoły wyższej. Negatywne skutki tej sytuacji są coraz bardziej odczuwalne i dotkliwe, nie tylko dla samych absolwentów, ale również dla gospodarki. Przyczyn takiej sytuacji upatruje się w wielu czynnikach i uwarunkowaniach, takich jak: wzrastająca liczba absolwentów uczelni, niedopasowanie posiadanego wykształcenia do zapotrzebowań lokalnego rynku pracy, brak kompetencji wymaganych przez pracodawców. Na szczególną uwagę zasługuje czynnik aktualnego zapotrzebowania gospodarki, który określa cechy, umiejętności, niezbędne kwalifikacje i wykształcenie pracowników na danych stanowiskach pracy w regionach.*

Słowa kluczowe: *absolwent studiów wyższych, rynek pracy, wykształcenie, zatrudnienie*

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The Benefits of Recognizing Prior Informal and Non-formal Learning

Abstract. *Learning and education are widely discussed topics, naturally focusing the attention of business, academia, and potential higher education students. Recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning is a concept that was introduced into higher education in 2015. Although it has to be embraced by the academic community and institutions in the first place, involving an awareness as well as practical implementation of enabling mechanisms, is it is arguably the most relevant to potential students. It is realized today that recognition of prior learning may bring most benefits to those professionally active, creating new educational opportunities that they could use to increase their chances of remaining in employment. A market research project has helped assess the likely benefits for all stakeholders in the validation and recognition process – universities, employers, and potential students.*

Keywords: *education, recognition of prior learning, non-formal learning, informal education*

Introduction

Learning and education are pivotal enough to have become widely discussed topics, focusing the attention of business, academia, and – potential and existing – higher education students. The ongoing transition from production- to knowledge-based economy, with the central place given to information and knowledge derived from multiple, formal and informal, sources, has a major impact on the economic growth of countries and the increasing wealth of societies. At the same time, learning – incidental, informal and non-formal – is becoming, alongside formal instruction, a key ingredient of the education process.

Formal education is delivered in accredited institutions where the curricula and certification policies are aligned to national and international regulations and standards. **Informal education** is traditionally identified with such forms of learning that are voluntary and that are practiced outside the formal education system. Informal learning occurs in environments that are not organized and structured in terms of objectives, outcomes and duration. It arises, for example, in performing professional duties (work experience) or daily activities related to family or leisure. **Non-formal education** is, in contrast, an organized process composed of scheduled activities, where the objectives and time frame are known in advance. It comprises, in particular, in-company training, foreign language learning, or distance learning programs involving the use of open educational resources. Non-formal learning hence primarily takes place at training seminars, distance learning courses, foreign language courses, and through other similar programs and initiatives geared to imparting or updating knowledge, skills, and experience.

Although knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning are not certified or attested by the award of a diploma, degree or another formal qualification, these forms of learning can be seen as a means of reducing inequalities in access to education as well as an underpinning for further formal education.

The pursuit of new learning outcomes is inscribed in society's economic growth, just like lifelong learning spans all stages of an individual's schooling as well as personal and professional life.

The current efforts on embedding mechanisms for recognition of prior learning into European education systems are originally based on the Council (of the European Union) Recommendation of 20 December 2012 (2012/C, 398/01) that mandated all EU member states to put in place fully functional systems for validating non-formal and informal learning by 2015. In Poland, the pathway for validation of prior non-formal and informal learning was opened by the July 11, 2014 amendment to the Law on Higher Education. However, the amendment does not go beyond laying down a framework for valorization of prior learning, leaving the ins and outs to the discretion of higher education institutions (cf. Drewniak, Voss 2015; Prewysz-Kwinto, Voss 2014; Prewysz-Kwinto, Voss, Walczak 2013).

The paper aims to outline the likely benefits that the implementation of a Europe-wide system for validating prior non-formal and informal learning can bring. To obtain insights into this issue, a number of interviews were conducted with scholars, university authorities, employers, representatives of the public administration sector with responsibility for education and employment, and, last but not least, with existing and potential higher education students.

1. Basic issues in the process of validating prior learning

The Final Declaration of the 5th Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Youth (Bucharest, April 27-29, 1998) encouraged European states to promote equality of opportunities by recognizing the training, skills and abilities acquired through non-formal education and by finding ways of endorsing the experience and qualifications acquired non-formally [Council of Europe 2000]. Acting on this policy statement, the European Steering Committee for Youth (*Comité Directeur Européen pour la Cooperation Intergouvernementale dans la domaine de la Jeunesse* – CDEJ) set up the Working Group on Non-Formal Education to define a conceptual framework and identify the key aspects of non-formal learning at European level. In October 1999, the Joint Council on Youth (CDEJ and the Advisory Council on Youth) of the Council of Europe's youth sector held a symposium dedicated to discussing these issues. The symposium proposed that non-formal education and human rights education be regarded as priority areas for action in the youth sector across the EU. Its outcomes were summarized at the Thessaloniki Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Youth on November 7-9, 2002 [Doświadczać uczenia 2004].

These conclusions and recommendations were followed up by the inception of such Europe-wide programs as Youth, Socrates or Leonardo that were, in conjunction, intended as a support vehicle targeted at both formal education and non-formal learning.[1] The Youth program was specifically focused on non-formal learning, offering instruments that strove to engage young people in gaining new skills and abilities outside of formal education. At the same time, it facilitated social cohesion and cultural integration and, by adding a European flavor to local projects, helped galvanize youth into action at local level and play an active role in shaping Europe's future.

Observers following the keynote documents and watching the tide of debate at European level would have noticed a growing consensus among EU institutions that non-formal learning is highly relevant to education in knowledge-based societies.[2] It is now widely acknowledged that non-formal learning practices should be seen as an intrinsic component of education. Hence, non-formal learning emerges as a de facto partner for the formal education system.

A challenge that must be addressed is how to bring certification into non-formal learning (since it implies a degree of formalization). There seem to be good

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[1] Cf. www.mlodziez.org.pl/sites/mlodziez.org.pl/files/publication/2172/przewodnik_po_programie_2013_vf.pdf [accessed 13.10.2016].

[2] Council of Europe 1999: "recognises that formal educational systems alone cannot respond to the challenges of modern society and therefore welcomes its reinforcement by non-formal educational practices." Cf. also: Doświadczać uczenia 2004: 31.

reasons to try and protect non-formal learning from excessive formalization. At the same time, there has to be a way to validate non-formal qualifications, and it does not seem possible to avoid e.g. testing to determine the extent to which non-formal competencies meet the standards applicable to formal education, such as the criteria set forth in syllabi, learning outcomes, course descriptions, etc. Documents that could be used in validating non-formal skills and qualifications include e.g. portfolios, vouchers, alternative diplomas and attestations of skill or ability, employer-provided credentials (descriptions of responsibilities performed and projects completed), testimonials and reports from non-governmental organizations, etc.

The fact that higher education institutions would be involved in valorizing non-formal learning barely undermines or alters the formal education system. Nevertheless, it seems that some of the recent developments (a high dropout rate that incurs excess costs, tough competition in the market, a demographic low, uncertainty about the value of university degrees) will effectively stimulate traditional educational institutions to implement procedures for recognition of prior non-formal learning.

As a matter of fact, lifelong learning spans nearly all of an individual's lifetime, from pre-school education to retirement. Given the nature of the lifelong process of informal and non-formal skill development, it is difficult to prescribe the quality and level of education that falls within the same field but was attained in diverse ways. Importantly, the framework and mechanisms for validating skills and competencies should be built around equality of opportunities and quality standards.

Admittedly, the quality of non-formal and informal learning may largely vary. Higher education institutions should realize that certificates attesting to their students' competencies may not easily fit into their pre-defined learning outcomes. Pressures on product quality, efficient customer service, more effective sales, etc. have recently inflated the need for continuous skill development and documenting achievements with relevant certificates. This is precisely the kind of documents that may be filed by students for consideration in the validation process [Voss et al. 2015: 20-22].

New skills are in demand in all areas of professional activity, hence difficulties in defining what on-the-job training, or learning through work experience, actually is. Further, workplace is not where one can obtain a valid certificate of competency; what occurs is such settings is, rather, informal or implicit learning. Once put in place, a validation mechanism would definitely work better if employers could certify skills acquired in the workplace. Therefore, in countries with full-fledged recognition systems, the business and the academic community work together to define learning outcomes that could be consistently applied within validation procedures. What is at stake, too, is developing a common methodology for assessing skills and qualifications. In the end, it will be a win-win for all parties involved in the process. Employees will require less time to update or upgrade their education and will be sure to develop exactly the skills that their employers want. Higher education institutions will be able to publish brochures for prospective students applying for recognition of their prior learning, including complete and accurate information about what kinds of non-formal learning can be recognized and how they have to be documented. A functional validation system makes it possible to design individual study paths, as long as potential students are clear about how university describes knowledge, skills, and social competencies for specific fields/programs of study, and how learning outcomes are assessed in each of these areas.

2. Admission and completion requirements for higher education courses – knowledge and skill descriptors

What potential students find important is that learning be accessible to everyone, recognizable, and comparable. In line with a European Commission proposal, key areas of skill and knowledge can be identified alongside learning outcomes that students are expected to achieve. It could be therefore assumed that a potential student who applies for recognition of prior non-formal or informal learning should meet the following knowledge and skill descriptors [European Commission 2005]:

1. **knowledge**: the graduate has a firm grasp of detailed theoretical and practical knowledge of a field. Some knowledge is at the forefront of the field and will involve a critical understanding of theories and principles;

2. **skills**: the graduate demonstrates mastery of methods and tools in a complex and specialized field and demonstrates innovation in terms of methods used; can devise and sustain arguments to solve problems;

3. **competence**:

– autonomy and responsibility – the graduate demonstrates administrative design, resource and team management responsibilities in work and study contexts that are unpredictable and require that complex problems are solved where there are many interacting factors;

– learning competence – the graduate can regularly review and evaluate own learning and identify learning needs;

– communication and social competence – the graduate can communicate ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences using a range of techniques involving qualitative and quantitative information; express a comprehensive internalized personal worldview manifesting solidarity with others;

– professional and vocational competence – the graduate can gather and interpret relevant data in a field to solve problems; demonstrate experience of operational interaction within a complex environment; make judgments based on social and ethical issues that arise in work or study.

Another frame of reference is provided by the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, which is an overarching framework for national higher education systems, delineating generic learning outcomes for first-, second-, and third-cycle qualifications. Under the framework, the first cycle qualification (in Poland, corresponding to the degree of licencjat or inżynier and typically including 180-240 ECTS credits) is awarded to students who [Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks 2005: 32]:

1. have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study;

2. can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach (in the broadest sense, encompassing whatever may be relevant in the context of employability or practicing an occupation, and assuming that some of the domain knowledge will be on an advanced level) to their work or vocation, and have competences (in the broadest sense where skills and abilities are taken to be gradable) typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study;

3. have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgments that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues;

4. can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;

5. have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.

These are then the criteria to be fulfilled by anyone requesting credit for a course in recognition of prior learning, to the effect that recognition will signify that the individual has exactly the kind and extent of knowledge and skill that are expected of higher education graduates in a specific field of study.

3. Recognition of prior learning in Poland

Under an innovative project designated as "PI – A New Model of Instruction – Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning in Higher Education Programs in Management" (Polish: PI – *Nowy model kształcenia – uznawanie efektów* *kształcenia pozaformalnego i nieformalnego w kształceniu na poziomie wyższym na kierunku Zarządzanie*) was undertaken an empirical research endeavor aiming to identify the needs and feasibility of implementing a mechanism for validation of prior learning in Poland's higher education system.

3.1. Research methodology

The resulting conception of the implementation process for a system of validation of prior learning was based on the findings of a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire design was informed by an analysis of documents concerning validation solutions adopted in other European countries, e.g. in the United Kingdom or Finland. Participation in the survey was solicited from 1000 third-year students pursuing part-time Management programs in state and non-state institutions of higher education across Poland. The survey was carried out in December 2012 using the PAPI method.[3] The questionnaire was broken down into two sections:

– the first section was made up of 10 questions and explored the students' views on the idea of the higher education sector embracing validation of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal learning;

– the second section was focused on the respondents' basic demographics, asking for information on their sex, age, work experience, and current employment status.

The questionnaire included both close- and open-ended questions. Some of them were to be answered with just a "yes" or "no". In many cases, however, the respondent was asked to choose one or more items from a set of options. Wherever possible and reasonable, the respondents were allowed latitude to voice their views on a matter. The findings were processed using statistical methods, primarily structural indicators.

3.2. Survey findings

The survey questionnaire was given to 1000 students. A vast majority of the respondent group were aged 21-30 (83.2%) and studied at non-state higher education institutions (76.2%). Further, a prevalent faction were those professionally active (69.5%) with 2-5 years in employment (51.9%). There were no significant

[3] The PAPI (Paper and Pencil Interview) method is a direct data collection technique through a face-to-face interview with a respondent involving the use of a paper-based questionnaire.

Table 1. Characteristics of the respondent group

Property		N	%
Sex	female	545	54.50
	male	448	44.80
	unspecified	7	0.70
Institution	state	224	22.40
	non-state	762	76.20
	unspecified	14	1.40
Age	below 20 years of age	13	1.30
	between 21 and 30 years of age	832	83.20
	between 31 and 40 years of age	125	12.50
	above 40 lat years of age	22	2.20
	unspecified	8	0.80
Current employment status	in employment	695	69.50
	unemployed	295	29.50
	unspecified	10	1.00
Years in employment	up to 1 year	108	10.80
	1-5 years	519	51.90
	6-10 years	205	20.50
	11-15 years	41	4.10
	16-20 years	17	1.70
	more than 20 years	12	1.20
	have not had a job yet	79	7.90
	unspecified	19	1.90

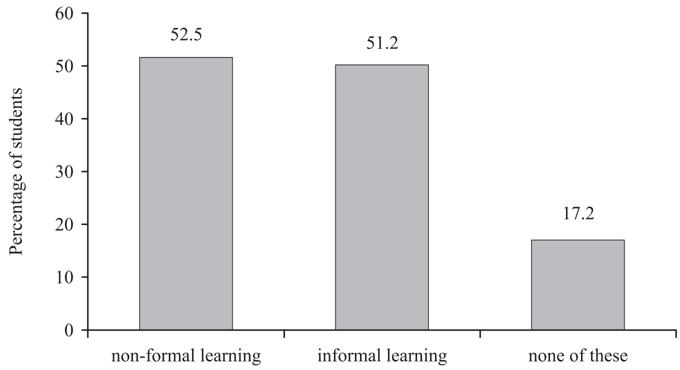
Source: own.

disproportions in the group's gender structure; women slightly prevailed with 54.5%, while men represented 45.5%. The respondents' detailed demographic information can be found in Table 1.

It should be pointed out that knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning were reported by more than 50% of the respondents. A modest 17% of the respondents stated no such prior qualifications (Chart 1).

A closer look at the responses reveals that the percentage of individuals declaring competencies acquired through non-formal or informal learning increases with the respondents' age. For non-formal learning, only 15.4% of the youngest respondents (up to 20 years of age) claimed such competencies, while in the 31-40

Chart 1. The proportion of respondents holding qualifications acquired through non-formal and informal learning (%)



Source: own.

and above-40 age brackets the proportion soared to 64.5% and 72.7%, respectively. For informal learning, those reporting such qualifications constituted 38.5% of the sample among below-20-year-olds, and nearly 60% in the 31-40 and above-40 age groups. Likewise, the percentage of respondents with non-formal competencies grew with years in employment, approximating 91% among those who have been working for more than 20 years. However, this trend did not hold for informal learning. Similarly, there were no significant differences in that respect between the sexes, with 50% of both male and female respondents indicating non-formal or informal skills. It should be added, though, that there were slightly more women with non-formal competencies (53.9% relative to 50.6%), and more men stating informal competencies (54.6% relative to 48.7%). Current employment status, too, had a marked effect on non-formal learning statistics, with those in employment (61%) stating such learning much more often than those out of work (32.5%). A similar disparity was not, however, observed for skills acquired through informal learning – they were reported by 51.4% of those currently employed and 51.9% `of those unemployed.

The respondents having work experience were asked to determine whether there was or is linkage between their job responsibilities and their university education. An affirmative answer was given by 63.9% of the respondents, indicating that they may already have some knowledge and skills consistent with the content of relevant university courses. At the same time, 67% of females and 61.5% of males answered "yes", and so did 59.4% of state university students and 65.1% of non-state university students. Moreover, the percentage of positive answers increased with age – equaling 46.2% among persons aged below 20, 61.3% in the 21-30 age bracket, 79.2% in the 31-40 age group, and approximating 86.4%

Table 2. Consistency between university course content and the skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning

Reply	Percentage
True for a few courses	63.20
True for a lot of courses	23.40
Not true	13.00
Can't tell	0.40

Source: own.

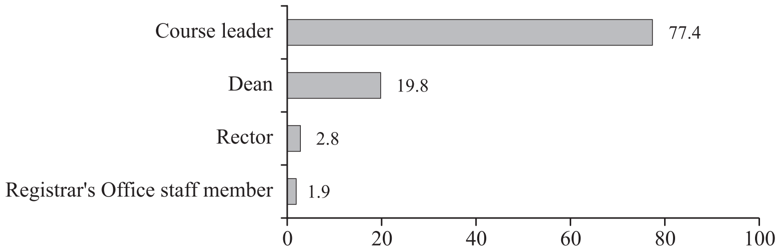
among those above 40 years of age. Also, more respondents currently in employment answered in the affirmative – 70.2% compared to 49.5% among unemployed individuals.

The respondents were also asked to assess consistency between university course content and their skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning The findings are shown in Table 2.

Nearly two out of three respondents believed that their prior skills and knowledge acquired outside formal education were consistent with some of the university courses, while almost a quarter of them decided that the statement was true for most courses. A more in-depth analysis ascertained that the percentage of responses indicating the former answer was similar for all respondent sub-groups, i.e. regardless of their demographic characteristics. Likewise, the percentage of those choosing the latter response, stating that their prior skills and knowledge were consistent with a number of university courses, ranged between 20% and 25% for all sub-groups. The only figures that stood out, whether notably or slightly, were in the 31-40 age group (29.5%) and among those with more than 21 years in employment (41.7%).

The respondents were also asked if they had ever tried, throughout their years at university, to request credit for a course based on their prior non-formal or informal learning. Only an unimpressive 13.9% concurred. The percentage of affirmative answers increased with respondent age, however: insofar as no such attempts had been made in the below-20 age group, those aged 21-30 had tried in 13.0% of cases, and those from the older age brackets returned even higher rates of positive answers – 16.4% among those aged 31-40, and 21.1% among those above 40. Further, positive responses were more often provided by students with more years in employment. In addition, it should be noted that credits were awarded for relevant courses in three out of four cases, and that positive outcomes were more often the experience of non-state university students (78.7%) than of state university students (59.1%). Notably, the percentage of respondents reporting credits for non-formal learning grew with age. In the oldest age group

Chart 2. Actors who have been approached about the award of course credits based on competencies acquired through prior non-formal and informal learning



Source: own.

(above 40) all requests for course credit based on prior learning, whether non-formal or informal, were granted.

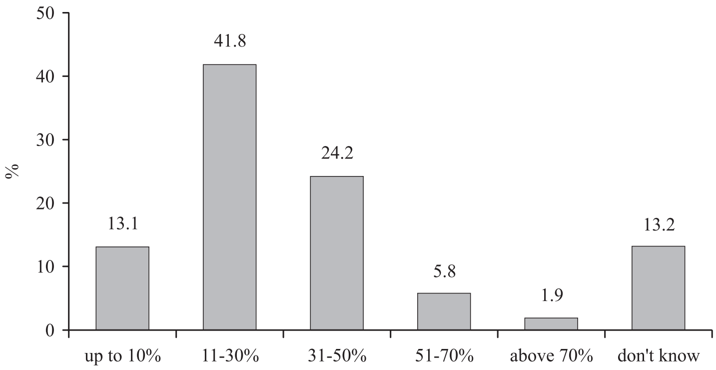
Those who had tried to obtain credit for a course were also asked to state whom they contacted about it. The findings are shown in Chart 2.

More than three quarters of the respondent group contacted their course leader about credit for prior learning, while one in five referred their case to a dean. It should be added that the percentage of those contacting their course leaders was higher among state university students (90.0%) than among non-state university students (73.8%). Conversely, those applying to a dean were more numerous among non-state university (22.6%) than among state university students (10%). Further, the percentage of those contacting their course leaders grew with age, reaching 71.6% among those aged 21-30, 94,7% in the 31-40 age group, and 100% among those above 40 years of age. Rector or Registrar's Office were approached by noone but the youngest respondents below 30 years of age.

The respondents were asked, too, about how many of their university courses can be credited in recognition of qualifications acquired through prior non-formal and informal learning. The findings are given in Chart 3.

42% – the largest faction of the students surveyed – feel that prior learning should be recognized for a maximum of 11-30% of courses/modules in a higher education program. Elaborating on the findings, it can be noted that the respondents' gender or employment status did not have a significant effect on the responses. Remarkable differences were found, however, between students from state and non-state institutions. Non-state university students proved to be less liberal, with 13.8% of them choosing the first (up to 10% of courses/modules) and 45.6% choosing the second option (11-30% of courses/modules), than their peers from state universities – 9.4% and 30.6%, respectively. The third (31-50% of courses/modules), the fourth (51-70% of courses/modules), and the fifth (more than 70% of courses/modules) option were chosen more frequently by state than

Chart 3. The percentage of university courses/modules that may be credited in recognition of qualifications acquired through prior non-formal and informal learning



Source: own.

by non-state university students, with 25.6%, 11.7% and 4.4% responses, respectively, among the former, and 23.7%, 3.9% and 1.1% responses, respectively, among the latter student group.

It should be also observed that support for the first option (up to 10%) increased with the respondents' age, and decreased for the second option (11-30%). There was no such correlation, however, for any of the other options. One might also want to take a note of the fact that the first option was favored, relative to the second option, by individuals with many years (more than 16) in employment.

There may be challenges in documenting knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning so that they can be recognized toward university course credits. For that reason, the respondents were asked to determine which of the documents listed were relevant enough to award course credits against them, which were not so relevant, and which were not relevant at all and should not be approved as a basis for recognition of prior learning. The findings are shown in Table 3.

The respondents clearly deemed that the recognition of prior learning is best based on training courses and seminars or professional certificates and accreditations. This option was indicated by more than three quarters of the respondent group. Two out of three respondents agreed that recognition of prior learning could be based on: work experience, responsibilities attached to a job, offices or honors held, and running a business of one's own. Engagement in voluntary work and running a farm were considered less relevant. An in-depth analysis of the responses did not reveal any correlation to the respondents' gender, current employment status, or work experience. However, the following options declined in relevance with the respondents' age:

Table 3. Forms of prior learning that could or should not be recognized (%)

Item	Definitely relevant	Possibly relevant	Irrelevant
Training courses and seminars	80.4	15.3	3.1
Professional certificates and accreditations	78.6	17.2	3.3
Work experience – proven track record in a position	67.8	27.6	3.9
Responsibilities attached to a job	65.4	29.5	3.6
Offices or honors held (public activity incl. NGOs)	65.4	28.0	5.3
Running a business of one's own	65.2	27.6	6.3
Special awards, honors and distinctions	63.6	28.7	6.3
Personal references/credentials	61.2	30.3	6.8
Voluntary work	46.1	45.0	7.4
Running a farm	45.3	43.8	9.8

Note: Respondents who gave no reply have been omitted from the statistics.

Source: own.

– training courses and seminars were perceived as relevant by 83.3% of the respondents aged below 20, 81.5% of those aged 21-30, 79.5% of those aged 31-40, and 63.1% of those aged above 41;

– offices or honors held (incl. civil society organizations) were considered relevant by: 83.3% of the respondents aged below 20, 66.7% of those aged 21-30, 59.0% of those aged 31-40, and 47.4% of those aged above 41;

– special awards, honors and distinctions were deemed relevant by: 66.6% of the respondents aged below 20, 66.3% of those aged 21-30, 54.1% of those aged 31-40, 31.6% of those aged above 41;

– personal references/credentials were seen as relevant by: 66.7% of the respondents aged below 20, 62.9% of those aged 21-30, 55.7% of those aged 31-40, and 36.9% of those aged above 41;

– community volunteerism was considered relevant by: 83.3% of the respondents aged below 20, 48.3% of those aged 21-30, 36.0% of those aged 31-40, and 20.1% of those aged above 41.

Overall, the older the respondents, the more options were indicated as irrelevant and not to be accepted as grounds for recognition of prior learning:

– training courses and seminars were irrelevant in the opinion of 0% of the respondents aged below 20, 3.0% of those aged 21-30, 3.3% of those aged 31-40, and 5.3% of those aged above 41;

– years in employment were considered irrelevant by 0% of the respondents aged below 20, 3.6% of those aged 21-30, 4.9% of those aged 31-40, and 10.5% of those aged above 41;

– powers and responsibilities attached to a job were deemed irrelevant by 0% of the respondents aged below 20, 3.4% of those aged 21-30, 4.1% of those aged 31-40, and 10.5% of those aged above 41;

– personal references/credentials were regarded as irrelevant by 0% of the respondents aged below 20, 6.4% of those aged 21-30, 8.2% of those aged 31-40, and 10.5% of those aged above 41;

– volunteerism was considered irrelevant by 0% of the respondents aged below 20, 6.8% of those aged 21-30, 8.2% of those aged 31-40, and 15.8% of those aged above 41.

These findings suggest that older individuals tend to be more cautious and skeptical toward documents that could be approved for recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning by higher education institutions.

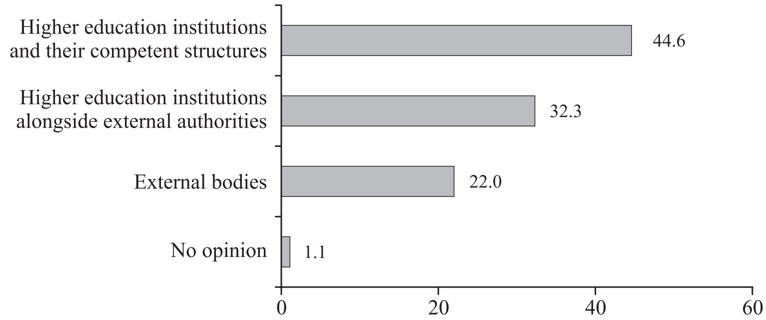
It should be born in mind that, in real settings, there will be a number of cases where a student does have relevant skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning but cannot produce a certificate that attests to these (e.g. the command of a foreign language). Therefore, the respondents were requested to decide whether such students should be given credit for the relevant course based on a preliminary test or exam and then exempt from class attendance. Almost a half of the respondents (47.8%) concurred. 37.4% of the students surveyed decided to the contrary, while 16.3% refrained from giving an opinion. It should be added that there were more state university students (61.2%) than non-state university students (44.2%) who agreed with the proposition. Further, individuals currently in employment were more agreeable to this option (56.8% responding in the positive, and 30.1% responding in the negative) than were those out of work (only 27.1% of positive responses, and 55.8% of negative responses).

The final questions concerned the legal and organizational framework for the validation process. Students were thus asked if relevant legislation should be adopted at the national level.

More than a half of the respondents (53.1%) were in accord with the statement that regulations on recognition of prior learning should be enacted at the country level, while 23.6% of the students surveyed disagreed. 23.3% of the respondents refused to provide an opinion. The responses were broadly consistent in all subgroups, except in those distinguished by current employment status where the percentage of positive responses was higher among those in employment (59.9%) than among those remaining out of work (38.0%). Negative responses were less common among those in employment (18.1%) than among those unemployed (36.6%).

Further, the respondents were asked who should have the decision making power in recognizing prior non-formal and informal learning: higher education

Chart 4. Where decisions should be made on recognition of prior learning (%)



Source: own.

institutions themselves or, rather, independent external bodies (e.g. NGOs), or both. The findings are plotted in Chart 4.

Nearly a half of the individuals surveyed (44.6%) believed that decisions on recognition of prior learning should be made by higher education institutions or their competent structures. 32.3% of the respondents would split responsibility for these decisions between higher education institutions and external bodies, and 22.0% of them would prefer an external body to administer the process. Overall, a majority of the respondent group held the view that higher education institutions should be in control of the recognition mechanism. On a more in-depth examination, differences in opinion can be discovered between students of state and non-state universities. Whereas more students of state universities pointed to "higher education institutions alongside external authorities" (48.7%) than to "higher education institutions" alone (32.6%) or "external bodies" alone (18.8%), individuals from non-state institutions would be more willing to entrust the decisions to "higher education institutions" (48.6%) than to either "higher education institutions alongside external authorities" (27.4%) or "external bodies" (23.2%). Further, preference for the first response turns out to grow with respondent age, with a score of 30.8% in the below-20 age group and 54.5% among those in the above-41 age bracket.

Respondents who would empower higher education institutions to make recognition decisions were subsequently asked who precisely should make these decisions. The findings are shown in Table 4.

Most respondents thought that the decision making power concerning recognition of prior learning should be delegated to course leaders or competent deans (37.4% of responses on each of these options). Significantly fewer students in the survey would locate the powers at the institutional level, assigning them to dedicated bodies (committees) or rectors. A more in-depth analysis shows that

Table 4. Institutional responsibility for recognition of prior learning (%)

Response indicated	Percentage
Academic teacher (course leader)	37.40
Dean	37.40
Institutional committee for recognition of prior learning	15.70
Rector	7.80
No reply	1.60

Source: own.

more non-state university students would rather see the decisions made by course leader (38.4%) or dean (40.3%) than state university students – 34.2% and 21.9%, respectively. With the other options, the trend of opinion reversed: committees or rectors were more often preferred by students of state institutions (31.5% and 9.6%, respectively) than by students of non-state institutions (12.4% and 7.6%). The percentage of responses indicating academic teachers as those responsible for recognition of prior learning increased with the respondents' age, from 25% among below-20-year-olds to 50% among students above 40 years of age. A reverse trend unfolded in responses indicating deans – it was at 50% among the youngest respondents and at 8.3% only among the oldest age group.

In summary, the following conclusions can be drawn from the questionnaire survey involving third-year students in part-time programs in Management and focusing on the recognizability of skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning:

1. The students surveyed admit to having skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal (52%) and informal (51%) learning. Only 17% of the respondent group do not have any such competences. As many as 85% of the respondents reckon that university course content is consistent with their non-formal or informal learning.

2. The credentials that are considered the most relevant in the context of validation of prior learning are training courses/seminars and professional certificates/accreditations. The least relevant qualifications are, in the respondents' view, experiences such as running a farm or voluntary activity. Further, nearly a half (48%) of the respondent group felt that students unable to produce a valid certificate attesting to prior non-formal or informal learning should be allowed to take a final exam while being exempt from class attendance.

3. Prior learning should be recognized toward credit for some, but not all, of the courses/modules in a higher education program. The largest percentage of the students surveyed estimated that recognition of prior learning would be fine within the range of 11 to 30% of courses/modules, while 24% of them would

permit credits to be awarded for 31-50% of courses/modules based on non-formal and informal competencies. Non-state university students were less liberal in this respect – more of them would restrict the recognition mechanism to a maximum of 30% of courses/modules. State university students are more often agreeable to allowing more than 30%.

4. The rules and regulations governing validation of prior learning should be enacted at the national level. 53% of the respondents corroborate to this statement.

5. Relevant decisions, i.e. concerning recognition of prior learning outcomes, should rather be made by higher education institutions, and more specifically – by course leaders or deans. More students from non-state universities indicate teachers or deans, while state university students are more likely to favor institution-wide committees or rectors.

Conclusions

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has come to focus the attention of European and national institutions. Socio-economic transformations have put knowledge and information at the frontier of knowledge-based society, bringing together the worlds of practice and education and making competencies acquired non-formally and informally a cornerstone ingredient of lifelong learning.

The benefits associated with recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning include, in the first place, incentives for potential students to sign up for higher education programs on the one hand, and strengthening the drivers of business-academia cooperation on the other.

Most emphasis is placed in this context on: increased employee availability owing to less time spent studying, time savings due to exemption from attending all courses/modules, a substantial improvement in the labor market position attributable to a tertiary education degree, no need to reiterate what has already been learned (at the expense of concentrating on other aspects), a single institution-wide recognition procedure put in place, a synergic blend of the outcomes of formal and informal education, and a promotional effect on enrolment into a specific institution.

It is therefore easy to see that it is a win-win for all parties to the education process.

Table 5 illustrates how recognition of prior learning affects each of the stakeholders in the process. Clearly, benefits derived by potential higher education students will be commensurate with gains for institutions of higher learning and

Table 5. Benefits of recognizing prior learning outcomes

	Beneficiaries		
	potential higher education students	higher education institutions	employers
Benefits	– incentive for adults to study for a degree – less demand on students' time – opportunity to upgrade education to a higher (tertiary) level – new career prospects – no need to reiterate what has already been learned	– single institution-wide recognition procedure in place – synergic blend of the outcomes of formal and informal education – promotional effect to boost enrolment – cohorts and groups more homogenous in terms of previous learning – possibility to implement lifelong learning systems – fostering business-academia links and collaboration	– increased employee availability owing to fewer study-related time constraints – creating an efficient staff development mechanism enabling employees to acquire requisite abilities and acquire additional qualifications – influencing staff morale through learning opportunities

Source: own.

employers. Therefore, although it will take time and effort to put all elements of the recognition mechanism to work in concert, it will, once in place, reshape the realities of the formal education system in a manner that will be welcomed by potential higher education students.

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Korzyści wynikające z wdrożenia procesu uznawania efektów kształcenia pozaformalnego i nieformalnego

Streszczenie. *Koncepcje uczenia się i edukacji stanowią przedmiot szerszej dyskusji i rozważań zarówno w środowisku akademickim, jak i wśród pracodawców i kandydatów na studia. Proces uznawania efektów kształcenia pozaformalnego i nieformalnego w szkolnictwie wyższym został wprowadzony w Wyższej Szkole Bankowej w Gdańsku w 2015 r. i chociaż związany jest z odpowiednim przygotowaniem i zapoznaniem z nim środowiska akademickiego, to przede wszystkim dotyczy kandydatów na studia. Dla grupy społecznej aktywnej zawodowo stwarza on nowe możliwości edukacji i zwiększa szanse utrzymania się na rynku pracy. Badania rynku pozwoliły na ocenę korzyści wynikających z wdrożenia procesu, zarówno dla kandydatów na studia oraz uczelni, jak i dla pracodawców.*

Słowa kluczowe: *edukacja, uznawalność efektów kształcenia, kształcenie pozaformalne i nieformalne*

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  Ustawa z dnia 19 listopada 1999 r. Prawo działalności gospodarczej, Dz.U. nr 101, poz. 1178 z późn. zm.

  Dyrektywa Rady 2004/67/WE z dnia 26 kwietnia 2004 r. dotycząca środków zapewniających bezpieczeństwo dostaw gazu ziemnego, Dz. Urz. UE L 127 z 29.04.2004.
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