PROFESSIONAL PROSPECTS FOR GRADUATES FROM HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION – COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE POLL RESEARCH RESULTS IN RZESZOW (POLAND) AND BIELEFELD (GERMANY)

Abstract. The developing economy of the enlarged European Union requires the college graduates to possess knowledge and skills that meet the standards of the XXI century. The transforming labour market establishes elevated requirements – theoretical knowledge obtained during studies must be accompanied by practical skills.

This article describes the issue of professional perspectives for higher education institution graduates in ‘old’ and ‘new’ European Union countries based on the example of Germany and Poland at the turn of the XX and XXI century. In the text, the results of poll research regarding the beginning of career, which were conducted between graduates in two partnership cities (Bielefeld, Rzeszów) were shown.

Key words: labour market, professional perspectives for higher education institution graduates, Poland, Germany, a poll research.

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union expansion of 1st of May 2004 has caused a whole range of positive as well as negative occurrences connected with the job markets in individual member countries. Among numerous consequences the post-access changes are significant, they concern the behaviour of young people at the beginning of their careers, work values presented by young people and opportunities and hazards they encounter. Furthermore, how young people from the ‘new’ member countries launch their careers becomes determined by the free choice of a work place within their country or outside their country.

The expanded European Union economy which is undergoing transformation requires that the young employees and particularly higher education graduates posses the knowledge and skills suitable for the 21st century and the changing job market challenges them with high expectations – the theoretical knowledge gained at universities must be backed by practical skills.

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[59]
This study discusses the problem of work prospects higher education graduates face in the domestic job market in the ‘old’ and ‘new’ European Union at the turn of the 20th and 21st century. Work expectations, first job possibilities, ideas and opportunities for a good career launch are presented as an example of graduates of higher education institutions in Rzeszów and Bielefeld, two Polish and German partner cities. Individual results of a research poll underwent analysis. The main aim of the research poll was to deepen the knowledge of behaviour of higher education graduates entering the job market in both researched regions, and especially presentation of opportunities and hazards young people encounter, also to establish what are the actual conditions of their professional life launch as well as to estimate the level of professional preparation for the job market required in both countries. The research took place in the academic year of 2008/2009 and included student communities in the aforementioned partner cities. The tested subjects were chosen randomly. The source for gathering the information was a poll questionnaire with the use of cafeteria-style questions: open, half open, closed, multiple choice. The survey questionnaire was divided into nine chapters and included 42 questions.

Considering the multiple methodological and interpretational queries present during research on the professional potential of higher education graduates, the research was not limited to a simple question about opportunities and hazards of the graduates’ career launch but the question mode was such as to let, at least partially, a verification of respondents’ declarations and relate them to the level of actual plans and professional possibilities of Polish and German graduates.

2. PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES FOR POLISH GRADUATES
OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS BASED
ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE CAPITAL OF PODKARPACIE

2.1. The unemployment problem among higher education institutions
graduates – general characteristics

As shown in the research\(^1\), the position of higher education graduates in the Polish job market is significantly better than that of people with a lower degree. Over recent years the unemployment rate has been lowest in that particular group (8.5% in the overall number of registered unemployed at the end of December 2008.) Most of the unemployed registering at work agencies are people with a relatively low education (of general vocational and secondary school,

\(^1\) U. Sztanderska, Efekty kształcenia a wymagania rynku pracy, Konferencja Efekty kształcenia – szanse i wyzwania dla szkolnictwa wyższego w Polsce, Warsaw 29 October 2008.
primary school and incomplete primary school education, respectively 28.6% and 30.4% of a total number of registered unemployed in the 4th quarter of 2008), (see table 1).

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Source: Own study based on Bezrobocie rejestrowane I-IV kwartał 2008 r., GUS, Warszawa 2009.

A 1.6% (see table 1) rise in the unemployment rate among the higher education graduates was observed at the end of 2008 – in comparison to an analogous period the previous year – hence a relative weakening of the position of higher education graduates becomes apparent, which is manifested as poorer prospects of finding work relative to individual education as well as achieving high remuneration. The causes of such a situation may lie in a slump in work demand among higher education graduates while the supply grows constantly, as a result the professional situation for higher education graduates becomes similar to that of people with secondary school education. Moreover, higher education is frequently structurally incompatible with work demand. Therefore it has been observed that the domestic economy does not make use of the highly educated work force because the needs of the economy manifested in the employers’ needs are different from the skills and knowledge universities’ graduates have², thus the graduates of Polish universities are often forced to seek work outside their country.

2.2. Individual results of research among higher education institution graduates in Poland based on the example of the capital of Podkarpacie

Further the study presents individual results of questionnaire research carried out among Rzeszów’s higher education institution students.

2.2.1. Evaluation of a degree of professional preparation for the needs of a domestic labour market

Over recent years higher education in Poland has developed rapidly. Demographic condition changes and the economic development of the country have made higher education widely accessible. At the beginning of the 90s the number of students in Poland was slightly over 400 thousand, whereas in 2007 it reached a level nearly 5 times higher\(^3\). Multiple researches analyse contemporary education with regards to its adjustment to the markets requirements\(^4\).

![Figure 1. The influence of labour market needs on the university course choice (Was the university course dominated by the labour market needs?)](image)

Source: own study based on questionnaire research Rzeszów 2008.

The attitude of young people is rather significant, when choosing a university major they consider the actual job market needs. Out of the tested graduates of Rzeszów’s universities as many as 67% indicated that the choice of a university major/specialty was actuated by the job market needs. Only 33% of the respondents claimed that their university major was not determined by the job market needs (see figure 1).

\(^3\) www.rynekpracy.pl

\(^4\) See Szkolnictwo wyższe a wyzwania rynku pracy, www.rynekpracy.pl
Despite a big increase in the number of higher education institution graduates many employers report a need for highly qualified employees. Polish job market shows a deficit of individual jobs and specialties, which results from the educational offer maladjusted to the constantly changing needs of the job market.

![Bar Chart]

Figure 2. A degree of professional preparation to the needs of a job market as perceived by higher education institution graduates (answer arrangement in %) *(Is your professional preparation appropriate for the needs of a German job market? ‘10’ – very well, ‘1’ – very badly.)*

Source: own study based on questionnaire research (2008)

The highest mark the graduates of Rzeszów higher education institutions awarded to the degree of professional preparation upon completion of a university ranged within 5–7 points (on a 1 to 10 scale.) The analysis of the data from figure 2 shows that most respondents (over 70%) evaluated their preparation for the job market needs in the range of 4–7 points. The most respondents, about 21%, chose 5 points to mark the degree of their professional preparation for the needs of the Polish job market. 20% awarded 6 points, 18% – 7 points, 17% – 4 points, 9% – 3 points, 6% each – 8 and 2 points and only 1% of the respondents claimed that they were very well prepared for the needs of the Polish job market. (see figure 2).
2.2.2. Individual conditions of the graduates’ career launch

Apart from adjusting the kind of education to suit the job market there are other numerous conditions for higher education institution graduates to launch a career.

The data compiled in figure 3 shows that the biggest decisive factor for finding employment by young graduates of higher education institutions in the capital of Podkarpacie is a command of foreign languages – as many as 79% of the tested subjects considered this factor as the most significant and strongly agreed with the above opinion, and 21% of the tested subjects rather agreed. None of the respondents rendered this factor insignificant. Only recently have Poles grown to learn at least one foreign language because they have become aware that without this skill any professional career is not possible.

Figure explanation:
1- Intelligence and creativity
2- Practice and work experience
3- Courage, independence, resourcefulness
4- Luck and fortune
5- Elocution, cleverness, communicativeness
6- Personal charm, good presence
7- Convenient situation in a local job market
8- Being a team player
9- Good professional preparation, diligence, responsibility, appropriate professional competence
10- Good command of foreign languages
11- Connections, relations, affinities

Figure 3. Factors determining whether a young person out of a university finds employment in Poland (What in your opinion is a decisive criteria for a young person out of a higher education institution to find employment?)

Source: own study based on questionnaire research (2008).
The ‘personal charm and good presence’ factor scored very well (73% of the respondents strongly agreed that it may be decisive in finding employment and 27% rather disagreed) so did the ‘courage, independence, resourcefulness’ factor (37% of the respondents strongly agreed that it may be decisive in finding employment and 63% rather agreed.)

The achieved results show that the highly decisive factor in finding employment by a young person after graduating from a higher education institution is practice and work experience. Most employers pay attention and often condition the employment on work experience. The sounder the practice and work experience the better chances for employment – as 92% of the respondents claimed and only 8% thought otherwise.

The subsequent factor chosen by the respondents was ‘eloquence, cleverness and communicativeness’ – 91% of the tested subjects rather and strongly agreed. Factors such as ‘good professional preparation, diligence, responsibility, appropriate professional competence’ were also ranked quite high (rather and strongly were the responses of 87% tested subjects), ‘convenient situation in a local job market’ (the proportion of those who agreed with the influence of this factor on a possibility of finding employment was 85%), ‘intelligence and creativity’ and ‘connections, relations, affinities’ (in both cases 84% of the respondents strongly and rather agreed that this factor may be decisive in finding employment, whereas only 16% did not agree.)

Yet, the tested subjects considered least important ‘luck and fortune’ (54% rendered it rather insignificant and strongly insignificant) and ‘being a team player’ (as many as 40% rendered this factor strongly insignificant and rather insignificant.) (see figure 3).

It needs to be emphasised that the ‘old’ features reflecting a normatively firm work respect, gain new features such as: professional auto-representation ability, adequate interview behaviour, networking, etc. The belief that an important factor in finding satisfactory employment is ‘connections, relations, affinities’ is still prevalent. Nevertheless it is not a sufficient professional career factor. The so called ‘connections’ are rather helpful in the recruitment process, while in a long professional perspective they are not a warranty of professional stability.

In the respondents’ closed answers about easy employment prospects in Poland the most commonly mentioned was a doctor (mainly anaesthetist), a nurse, a midwife or a construction engineer. IT engineer, insurance agent and architect were also popular. The respondents also paid a lot of attention to the command of foreign languages (currently without fluency in at least one foreign language one may not expect to get a good job while a general idea of globalisation requires such knowledge.)
Moreover, the tested subjects valued additional computer courses, foreign languages courses and specialist courses which may raise work qualifications in an individual field, just to mention the fact that the respondents demonstrated willingness to develop their bookkeeping or accountancy skills right after completion of higher education.

![Figure 4. Work search period after completion of university](image)

Source: own study based on questionnaire research (2008)

The next tested problem was the time period of work search after completion of higher education. The research results indicate that the longest work search period is about 7–9 months (26% respondents pointed to this time frame). According to 23% of respondents work search just after graduating from university takes only 2–3 months, 21% of respondents pointed to a period of 4–6 months, while 16% reckon that the work search period after higher education is 10–12 months. Only 6% of respondents decided that searching for work may take 1 month, whereas 8% believe it to be over one year.

It is apparent that there is a significant diversification among the tested subjects because a similar number of respondents: 24%, 22% and 26% indicate various periods of time needed to find employment. The most commonly indicated answers were the following time periods: 7–9 months, 2–3 months and 4–6 months (see figure 4).
3. PROFESSIONAL PROSPECTS FOR THE GRADUATES OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN GERMANY, BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF BIELEFELD

3.1. The unemployment problem among higher education institution graduates – general characteristics

In 2008 the average unemployment rate in Germany was 7.8% (Eastern Germany 13.1%, Western Germany 6.4%)\(^\text{5}\).

However, over recent years unemployment rates in relation to the education level were on a lower level among people with higher or higher vocational education (see figure 5.)

![Figure 5. Unemployment rate in Germany in accordance with professional qualifications in 1991–2005 (%)](source: based on the data at www.sozialpolitik-aktuell.de)

The graduates of German higher education institutions face a relatively low possibility of unemployment. The unemployment rate for the graduates of higher education institutions balanced for years on a low, lower than average level, for example in 2005 for the whole German Federal Republic it was 4.1% (an average unemployment rate for people in a productive age balanced on the level of

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\(^\text{5}\) Based on the Eurostat data.
about 11.8%\textsuperscript{6}. It is notable that during the first months after graduation from a higher education institution a specific phenomena occurs – unemployment related to work search\textsuperscript{7}.

The research results listed in the report *Der Absolventenjahrgang 2000/2001 fünf Jahre nach dem Hochschulabschluss*\textsuperscript{8}, indicate that over a half (57\%) of the graduates did not face unemployment, further 22\% estimated their unemployment period as 1–3 months and only 5\% of the tested graduates indicated an overall 12+ month unemployment period during a research period which lasted 60 months. Graduates from the unemployed group were without employment on average 5.7 months, still there are various unemployment period phases. Three quarters of the respondents were only episodically unemployed during the first five years after graduating from a higher education institution.

Thus due to a comparison of unemployment rates in the context of a variety of professional qualifications it is evident that the graduates of higher education institutions are in the best position. Moreover, apart from a lower risk of unemployment, higher education institution graduates get better remuneration conditions in Germany and in later professional life they have a better chance of employment congruent with their qualifications.

One should take note that with regards to jobs with a remarkable lack of candidates or the fields sought by students the circumstances of finding employment vary.

3.2. Individual research results from graduates of higher education institutions in Bielefeld – Rzeszów’s partner city

The further part of the study presents individual results of research carried out among graduates of higher education institutions in Rzeszów’s partner city, Bielefeld (Nordrhein Westfalen, Germany.)

3.2.1. Evaluation of the level of professional preparation for the needs of the domestic job market

One of the main aims of Bologna process is to prepare graduates for the needs of the job market. The reforms introduced in many European countries


\textsuperscript{8} Ch. Kerst, M. Schramm, op. cit., s. 47.
two-phase higher education is based on the assumptions of improvement of professional education quality and to provide students with new possibilities with which to launch a professional career and combine it with further education and private life. In a winter semester of 2008/2009, 75% of all university majors (9,200 of a total number of 12,300 majors) at German higher education institutions were swapped to the two-phase system, especially in higher education vocational schools 94% of all majors underwent the reform. The largest number of students studying in a two-phase system were those reading law, economy, social and mathematics-natural science studies⁹.

A positive answer to the question whether the choice of a major/specialty was determined by the needs of a job market, provided by the questioned graduates was given in 54% cases, negative in 46% cases (see figure 6.) 58% of ‘YES’ answers were provided by women and 42% by men.

![Pie chart showing 54% Yes and 46% No](image)

Figure 6. An influence of job market needs on the choice of university major/specialty (*Was the choice of your university major determined by the needs of the job market?*)

Source: own study based on questionnaire research Bielefeld 2008.

Yet, when asked a question about the level of professional preparation for the needs of the German job market on a scale of 1 (the lowest) to 10 (the highest) most of the answers given fluctuated around 7 and 8 (see figure 7).

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⁹ [http://www.bmbf.de/de/3336.php#stand_umsetzung](http://www.bmbf.de/de/3336.php#stand_umsetzung)
3.2.2. Individual conditions of graduates’ professional career launch

65% of the tested higher education institution graduates strongly agreed that the most decisive factor among the factors determining whether a young person who has finished higher education will find employment in Germany is work experience (32% rather agreed with this opinion, only 3% rather disagreed and none answered ‘strongly disagree’). 93% of respondents perceived (strongly or rather agree) eloquence, cleverness, communicativeness as a very important factor.

With the idea that intelligent and creative people as well as people with personal charm and good presence find it easier to get employment, strongly and rather agreed 89%. The successive factors chosen by the respondents were ‘good professional preparation, diligence, responsibility, appropriate professional competence’ (87%) and ‘being a team player’ (84%). The respondents believed that proportionally important in effective job search is ‘courage, independence and resourcefulness’ (81% strongly and rather agreed with it.)
Figure explanation:
1- Intelligence and creativity
2- Practice and work experience
3- Courage, independence, resourcefulness
4- Luck and fortune
5- Eloquence, cleverness, communicativeness
6- Personal charm, good presence
7- Convenient situation in a local job market
8- Being a team player
9- Good professional preparation, diligence, responsibility, appropriate professional competence
10- Good command of foreign languages
11- Connections, relations, affinities

Figure 8. Factors determining whether a young person out of university finds employment in Germany (What in your opinion is a decisive criteria for a young person out of higher education finding employment in Germany?)

Source: own study based on questionnaire research Bielefeld 2008.

The respondents considered luck and fortune the least decisive factor in finding employment after graduating from a higher education institution (52% rendered it rather insignificant and strongly insignificant), then connections, relations, affinities (29% rendered it rather unimportant and strongly insignificant) and a command of foreign languages (25% rendered it rather insignificant and strongly insignificant.) (see figure 8).
Information in figure 9 indicates the length of time the graduates need to find employment. A prevailing number of respondents (about 44%) needed 2–3 months after completion of higher education to find employment. According to 35% of respondents the work search period after higher education completion takes 4–6 months and only 1% of respondents stated that it would take over a year to find employment. (see figure 9).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Among the tested graduates of Rzeszów universities as many as 67% pointed out that the choice of a major/specialty was prompted by the needs of the job market, whereas in Bielefeld 54% of higher education institution graduates gave a positive answer to the same question.

The highest scores awarded by the graduates of Rzeszów higher education institutions with regards to the level of their professional preparation after finishing a university oscillated within the range of 5–7 points (on the scale of 1 to 10). However, most of their German counterparts answered within a range of 7 and 8 points, which means that in the opinion of the Bielefeld graduates they have better professional preparation for the job market than their Polish peers.

An analysis of factors decisive in finding employment among graduates of higher education institutions in Rzeszów showed that the most significant ones are:

1) Command of foreign languages (as many as 79% of respondents rendered this factor the most significant and strongly agreed with the above opinion, 21% of respondents rather agreed);
2) personal charm and good presence (73% of respondents strongly agree that it may be decisive in finding employment and 27% rather agree);

3) courage, independence, resourcefulness (37% of tested subjects strongly agree that it may be decisive in finding employment and 63% rather agree);

4) practice and work experience (51% of respondents strongly agree that it may be decisive in finding employment and 41% rather agree);

5) eloquence, cleverness and communicativeness (91% of respondents rather and strongly agree);

6) good professional preparation, diligence, responsibility, appropriate professional competence (87% of tested subjects chose rather and strongly);

7) convenient situation in the local job market (the proportion of the answers agreeing with the influence of this factor on finding employment was 85%);

8) intelligence and creativity as well as connections, relations, affinities (in both cases 84% of respondents strongly or rather agreed that this factor may be decisive in finding employment, whereas only 16% did not agree).

The respondents paid least attention to luck and fortune (54% rendered it rather insignificant and strongly insignificant) as well as being a team player (30% rendered this factor strongly insignificant and rather insignificant.)

Bielefeld higher education institution graduates evaluated the determinants slightly differently in finding a work place. The following factors came in first:

1) practice and work experience (as many as 65% of respondents rendered this factor the most significant and strongly agreed with the above opinion, 32% rather agreed with this statement);

2) eloquence, cleverness, communicativeness (93% of respondents strongly and rather agree that it may be inductive in finding employment);

3) intelligence and creativity as well as personal charm and good presence (strongly and rather was chosen by 89% of tested subjects);

4) good professional preparation, diligence, responsibility, appropriate professional competence (87%);

5) being a team player (84%);

6) courage, independence and resourcefulness (81%);

7) command of foreign languages (73%);

8) connections, relations, affinities (70%).

The least important factor to the respondents from Beilefeld were luck and fortune (52% rendered it rather and strongly insignificant), connections, relations, affinities (29% rendered it rather and strongly insignificant), command of foreign languages (25% rendered it rather and strongly insignificant) as well as convenient situation in the local job market (23% rendered it rather and strongly insignificant.)

On the basis of the above comparison one may state that – according to the graduates of higher education institutions both in Rzeszów and in Bielefeld – the
most significant factors determining employment are ‘practice and work experience’ (the most important factor for the respondents from Bielefeld), ‘eloquence, cleverness, communicativeness’, ‘personal charm and good presence’, ‘good professional preparation’, ‘intelligence and creativity’ and ‘courage, independence and resourcefulness.’ It is notable that – according to the graduates from Rzeszów – among the analysed factors the top choice was a command of foreign languages although their German peers did not consider it as such\(^\text{10}\). Both tested societies placed ‘luck and fortune’ in the group of least important factors. Moreover, the graduates from Rzeszów perceived the ability to be a team player less important than their German counterparts (70% rendered this factor significant, while 84% of their German peers considered it highly significant). For graduates from Rzeszów connections, relations, affinities are more important (14% more positive answers), while in Bielefeld a convenient situation in the local job market was given little importance (56% positive answers), in Poland this factor was considered important by 85% respondents. We may presume that the graduates of higher education institutions in Bielefeld are more mobile than their peers from Rzeszów.

The tested graduates differently evaluate their professional chances after completing their universities. Among the most indicated assets connected with higher education was a possibility of gaining work experience in one’s field, the prospect of entrepreneurship, higher remuneration prospects, vaster job range offers, broadening one’s mind, specialisation in an individual field, appropriate theoretical preparation for professional life, command of foreign languages (language of business), competitiveness. It is important to emphasise (also indicated by many respondents, especially from Bielefeld) that employers seek experienced employees more and more frequently.

REFERENCES


\(^\text{10}\) It needs to be stated that over 100 million people speak German while only over 40 million speak Polish 40 million.

Anna Barwińska-Małajowicz

**PERSPEKTYWY ZAWODOWE ABSOLWENTÓW SZKÓŁ WYŻSZYCH – ANALIZA PORÓWNANCZA WYNIKÓW BADAŃ ANKIETOWych PRZEPROWADZonyCH W RZESZOWIE (POLSKA) I BIELEFELD (NIEMCY)**

Podlegająca przeobrażeniom gospodarka poszerzonej Unii Europejskiej wymaga od absolwentów szkół wyższych wiedzy i umiejętności na miarę XXI w., a zmieniający się rynek pracy stawia przed nimi wysokie wymagania – wiedza teoretyczna zdobyta na studiach musi być poparta umiejętnościami praktycznymi.

Niniejszy artykuł porusza problematykę perspektyw zawodowych absolwentów szkół wyższych w "starych” i "nowych” krajach Unii Europejskiej na przykładzie Niemiec i Polski na przełomie XX i XXI w. W artykule przedstawione zostały wybrane wyniki badań ankietowych, które przeprowadzono wśród absolwentów szkół wyższych w dwóch miastach partnerskich (Bielefeld / Rzeszów), w zakresie uwarunkowań startu zawodowego absolwentów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rynek pracy, perspektywy zawodowe absolwentów szkół wyższych, Polska, Niemcy, badania ankietowe.