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Work experience of tourism and recreation students and the level of social competence. Selected issues

Abstract. The aim of this article is to present results of a study concerning the level of social competences displayed by students of tourism and recreation and how it relates to their work experience. The author hypothesized that the fact of being employed could help to differentiate between different levels of social competences in the student population. Factors such as the length of work experience, positions held, work abroad, internships, and voluntary work were analysed. The study was based on quantitative and qualitative data collected using such tools such as the Social Competence Questionnaire and the Questionnaire for Self-Assessment of Student's Professional Achievements in order to identify forms of professional activity among the respondents. Full-time students of tourism and recreation were found to have an average level of social competences, and their work experience, considered as a form of social training, did not differentiate between different levels of social competence. No statistically significant correlations were found between the level of social competence and internships at secondary schools, internships at university, work experience in general and in tourism and recreation in particular, and voluntary work. Also, positions held did not differentiate the level of social competence. It could therefore be concluded that the respondents' work experience was too short to have a measurable effect on the level of their social competences, which take much more time to develop and depend on personal and environmental factors.

Keywords: social competences, professional activity, students of tourism and recreation

JEL Codes: L83, O15

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1. Introduction

Next to knowledge and skills, social competences play an increasingly important role in the current labour market and the tourism sector. Not only do they facilitate effective interaction with the social environment but they also determine how well employees adapt to new and changing conditions, how quickly they react in difficult situations, and how resistant they are to stress.

A high level of social competences is one of the most important criteria that tourism companies consider when hiring employees, who are expected to have frequent, direct interactions with people (Giddens, 2004), and their actions significantly affect the usability of the final intangible product (Berry & Lampo, 2004; Goldstein, 2003). In a knowledge-based economy, human capital, i.e. people's knowledge, skills, and social competences, constitutes the basis for values that are important from the perspective of customer needs (Bednarska & Olszewski, 2015: 367). The ability to establish, maintain and end human relations, as well as behaviours that are adjusted to specific situations, learned, and controlled by the individual, are essential for direct interactions with people (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002). Social competences involve the ability to form emotional bonds with other people, to build, develop and maintain relationships, as well as to elicit social support. They largely determine the quality of delivered services, which is confirmed by labour market forecasts predicting their growing role (Deming, 2017). A high level of social competences displayed by employees, who constitute the intellectual capital of an organization, is one of the key factors that affects its competitiveness, especially if the company provides tourism and recreation services (Sharpley & Poster, 2003).

Social competences are defined as the ability to cope with social situations and are essential for direct, open, and friendly relations with customers and other people from the company's internal and external environment. They are also considered to be a good predictor of professional and life success. Social competences are an essential for a person's effective functioning in society and in social adaptation (Argyle, 1998; Bobrowska-Jabłońska, 2003; Borkowski, 2003; Goleman, 1997).

Employers often negatively assess the professional preparation of university graduates in terms of their social competences. In particular, critical remarks are directed to some fields of education (Wierzejska, 2016), including tourism and recreation (Alejziak, 2014; Burzyński, 2018, pp. 43-154). The problem persists, even though the development of social competences is an inherent part of academic education (Bereźnicki, 2011; Nowakowska & Pietkiewicz, 2016, p. 56; Recommendation of the European Parliament..., 2008). According to the Bologna System, universities should not only prepare students to perform work

but, above all, to be able to perform professional tasks in specific social conditions (Ciechanowska, 2014, p. 56; Sławiński, Chłoń-Domińczak, & Kraśniewski 2015, p. 36). Therefore, social competences (in addition to knowledge and skills) should be acquired during formal, as well as non-formal and informal education.

However, it should be noted that it is very difficult to acquire social competences as they are often associated with social sensitivity, openness to others, negotiation skills, empathy, assertiveness, and communication skills. The level of social competence is not only related to individual circumstances (Nęcka, 2003; Schneider, Ackerman, & Kanfer, 1996) but is also influenced by environmental settings, where social training plays a key role (Argyle, 1999; Matczak, 2001). Consequently, social training can take place both during formal academic education and in the course of the individual's own activity (Bee, 2004; Hall, Lindzey, & Campbell, 2004; Nowacki, 2004, p. 217; Przetacznik-Gierowska, 2000, p. 62), e.g. by taking up employment.

The notion of social competences is rather ambiguous, as indicated by the many complementary definitions, classifications, and typologies. Most often, the definitions involve interpersonal interactions, in particular, the ability to empathize, cooperate, convince, or resolve conflicts (Jagodziński, 2013). There are a few related concepts, such as social skills (Sęk, 2000, pp. 105-117), social intelligence (Strelau, 2002), ability to make an impression (Goffman, 1981), emotional intelligence (Cherniss, 2000; Hochschild, 2009; Illouz, 2010; Turner, 2008), or interpersonal skills (Ciupińska, 2005; Dickson & Hargie, 2004; Makięła, 2006).

Since there is such a wide range of social competences, the present study is based on the most universal concept involving the broadest scope of social situations, as defined by Matczak (2001), who describes social competences as complex skills that enable individuals to effectively regulate emotions and cope with various social situations. This definition is rather general and comprises competences regulating the effectiveness of behaviour in situations involving:

- intimate contacts;¹
- social situations;²
- assertiveness.

Despite its generality, this concept provides a reliable picture of social behaviour in the student population.

Therefore, the study aimed to determine the level of social competences displayed by students of tourism and recreation and its relationship with their professional experience. It was hypothesised that social training in the context of

¹ Close interpersonal relationships involving a high degree of self-disclosure on the part interaction partners, in face-to face or indirect situations.

² Situations in which a person is likely to be observed or assessed by others; the Polish term used by Matczak (2001) is "ekspozycja społeczna" (social exposure).

professional work might differentiate between different levels of social competences of BA and MA students of tourism and recreation.

To understand the variation in the level of social competences of responding students, one has to, on the one hand, to recognize the role of higher education, which is supposed to prepare students for employment in the tourism and recreation industry and, on the other hand, the role of work experience, which students often start to accumulate already during the course of their studies.

It is worth noting that the nature of work experience acquired by full-time university students differs from that gained by young working adults who do not study. To obtain an insight into the issue of work experience and its impact on the level of social competences, quantitative and qualitative data were collected about:

- work experience and type of positions in tourism and recreation as well as other industries;
- completed internships;
- voluntary work;
- foreign vs. domestic employment.

The main research question was formulated as follows: What is the relationship between professional activity of students of tourism and recreation and their level of social competences?

To further clarify the problem, three detailed research questions were put forward:

1. To what extent does the experience of higher education differentiate between students of tourism and recreation in terms of their level of social competences?
2. To what extent does work experience differentiate between students of tourism and recreation in terms of their level of social competences?
3. To what extent does the type of positions held so far affect the level of social competences of tourism and recreation students?

2. Method

In order to meet the research aims the following qualitative and quantitative tools were applied:

1. **The author's Questionnaire for Self-Assessment of the Student's Professional Achievements (QSASPA)** to determine the level and scope of students' professional experience, i.e., work experience, positions held in tourism

and other industries, internship length, foreign vs. domestic employment, volunteer work.³

2. Matczak's Social Competences Questionnaire (SCQ) (Matczak, 2000) to determine the level and scope of students' social competences in three areas:

- effectiveness of behaviour in social situations;
- effectiveness of behaviour in situations requiring assertiveness;
- effectiveness of behaviour in intimate situations.

The SCQ is a standardised psychological tool used for analysing selected aspects of social competence. It has been tested for validity and reliability. The SCQ contains self-description questions about social activities (60 items) and other, non-social activities (30 items).⁴

The statistical analysis was carried out using Statistica 10 statistical software from Statsoft Polska. Intergroup differences were examined using Student's t test for independent variables, Mann-Whitney's U test (when sample sizes were too small or when the data were not normally distributed), ANOVA single-factor analysis of variance (to compare more than two groups) and MANOVA two-factor analysis of variance to examine the group \times sex interaction. Correlation was analysed using Pearson's r and Spearman's rho tests. The test results at the level $p < 0.05$ were assumed to be significant and those at the level $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.001$ were assumed to be highly significant.

The study was conducted in 2019. The questionnaires were distributed among full-time students of tourism and recreation from the University of Physical Education in Krakow. Participation in the study was voluntary. Of the 660 students enrolled in this area of study, 442 completed the SCQ and 551 – the QSASPA, thus the sample can be regarded as representative of the population of students at this faculty.

³ These areas are of interest from the point of view of the analyses presented in this article; however, the QSASPA takes into account a much wider area of students' professional development including formal education (type of secondary school completed, class profile, professional plans, motives for undertaking higher education in the field of tourism and recreation, knowledge of foreign languages, educational, professional, sporting achievements, professional interests and the area of non-formal education (qualifications acquired outside the formal education system implemented in the form of courses and training and acquired entitlements confirmed by a diploma or certificate). The above questionnaire included 5-point Likert scale questions and a whole range of open-ended questions concerning young people's views on their own professional development.

⁴ To facilitate the interpretation of the results the author consulted with Katarzyna Supernat, M.Sc. Katarzyna Supernat, assistant at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Psychology, University of Physical Education in Krakow (Poland).

3. Results

The field of tourism and recreation is dominated by women, who account for 73% of all students. The majority of students completed comprehensive secondary schools (74.21%), while the remaining quarter were graduates of technical secondary schools (25.79%). More than half of all respondents (55.6%) described their income level as average, over a quarter (27.4%) – as low, and 17.0% – as high.

3.1. Students' level of social competences

As far as social competences are concerned, preliminary analysis of the Social Competence Questionnaire (SCQ) consisted in calculating the results obtained for the following scales: Intimate Contacts Scale (ICS), Social Situations Scale (SSS), Assertiveness Scale (AS), and the total raw score (Total RS). The results were normalized into sten scores, with a mean of 5.5 and a standard deviation of 2 for the student population. The average sten values for all scales were between 5-6 sten, indicating an average level of competence in the student population, which is in line with the reference group of Matczak's study (2001) – see Table 1.

A two-factor analysis of variance was used to determine differences in the level of social competences between the groups, i.e., bachelor's and master's students, broken down by sex. Interestingly, the results of the analyses of all variables did not show statistically significant differences between the groups, i.e., between students of particular years of study, sex and the interaction of group \times sex ($p > .05$) (Cohen, 1988; Miles & Shevlin, 2001; Cohen et al., 2003).

3.2. Work experience and social competences

Professional experience is one of the factors determining graduates' entry into the labour market and shaping their social competences, which are particularly important in the tourism and recreation industry (Alejziak, 2014). A high level of social competences is not only a desirable quality in the labour market (Agran et al., 2016), but contributes to a better quality of work (Hochwarter et al., 2006) and is associated with higher wages (Ferris, Witt, & Hochwarter, 2001). It is also worth noting that the tourism and recreation industry involves a wide range of activities (hospitality, catering, tourist services, etc.), which are related to many functions and positions.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the results of the SCQ questionnaire in the studied groups

Scale SCQ	Statistical measures	BA 1			BA 2-3			MA			Total		
		females (N = 82)	males (N = 33)	total (N = 115)	females (N = 149)	males (N = 45)	total (N = 194)	females (N = 96)	males (N = 37)	total (N = 133)	females (N = 327)	males (N = 115)	total (N = 442)
ICS	Mean	46.8	45.0	46.3	46.7	47.6	46.9	45.7	44.7	45.4	46.4	45.9	46.3
	SD	6.1	7.0	6.4	6.4	5.3	6.1	5.2	5.8	5.4	6.0	6.1	6.0
SSS	Mean	54.1	53.0	53.8	52.6	50.1	52.0	52.1	52.1	52.1	52.8	51.6	52.5
	SD	9.6	10.0	9.7	9.3	10.3	9.6	7.5	7.3	7.4	8.9	9.4	9.0
AS	Mean	49.1	49.4	49.2	47.8	47.2	47.7	47.0	47.6	47.2	47.9	48.0	47.9
	SD	8.3	9.3	8.6	8.6	7.7	8.4	7.2	7.1	7.1	8.1	8.0	8.1
Total RS	Mean	181.8	178.3	180.8	179.2	176.4	178.5	176.4	176.0	176.3	179.0	176.8	178.4
	SD	24.1	27.6	25.1	23.9	23.3	23.7	19.3	20.4	19.5	22.7	23.6	22.9

Explanation of abbreviations:

BA 1 – students of the 1st year of BA studies

BA 2-3 – students of the 2nd and 3rd year of BA studies combined

MA – students of the 1st and 2nd year of MA studies combined

SCQ – social competence questionnaire

ICS – competences determining the effectiveness of behaviour in intimate situations

SSS – competences determining the effectiveness of behaviour in social situations

AS – competences determining the effectiveness of behaviour in situations requiring assertiveness

RS – raw score

M – mean

SD – standard deviation

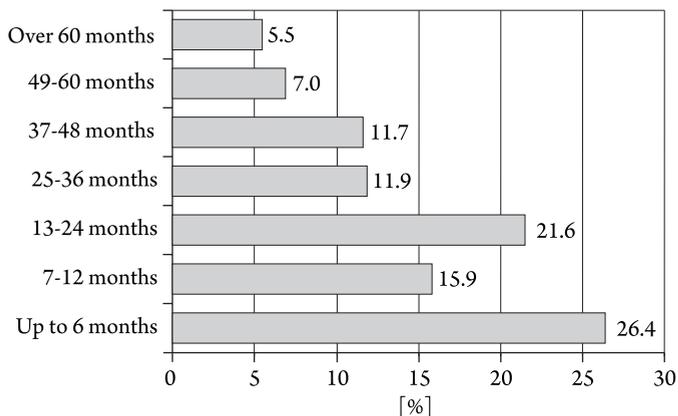
Source: own study.

The prospect of **working abroad** is naturally attractive to people working in the tourism industry. However, it involves the challenge of having to adapt to cultural differences while fulfilling professional duties. Mobility and talent management are considered to be the future direction (Churchward & Riley, 2002; Tolkach & Tung, 2019). For this reason, employers, who have great expectations regarding social competences, also value **professional experience gained abroad** more highly than participation in study abroad programmes (Kay & DeVau, 2003; Van Mol, 2017). Therefore, professional experience is one of the most relevant factors that shapes social competences and is highly evaluated by employers.

The task of determining the respondents' scope of professional experience posed a challenge and was based on insights derived from the analysis of the professional development path. The respondents were asked to describe their professional experience to date, as if they were writing their CVs. The analysis of responses was complicated by the variety of answers provided by the respondents. It also required a careful categorisation of written statements into logical, homogeneous groups. The aim was to determine the length of work experience of the students in various industries (up to 6 months; 7-12 months; 13-24 months; 25-36 months 37-48 months 49-60 months; over 60 months), including tourism and recreation (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) and their positions.

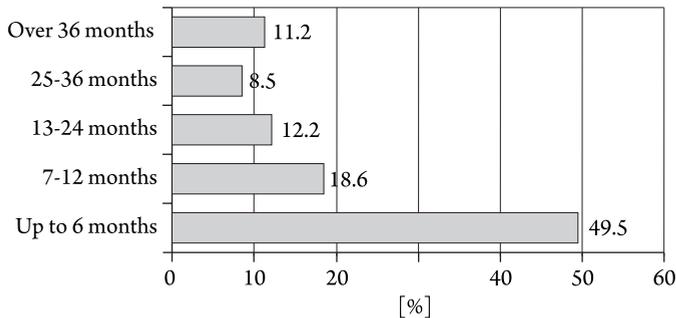
It was assumed that work experience and job position, particularly in situations where direct contact with people is required, are related to varying levels of social competence.

Fig. 1. Respondents' work experience in general



Source: own study.

Fig. 2. Respondents' work experience in tourism and recreation



Source: own study.

It was found that one in four students (26.4%) worked for less than six months and one in five (21.6%) for 13-24 months. The results for other lengths of work experience are as follows: 15.9% for 7-12 months, 11.9% for 25-36 months and 11.7% for 37-48 months. Comparatively few respondents had more than three years of work experience: 7% worked for 49-60 months, and 5.5% for over 60 months. As can be expected, work experience of the respondents increased with age: in the first year of BA studies, most respondents (48.8%) had less than half a year of work experience, while those in MA programmes (40.4%) had already worked for over three years.

Students who choose to study tourism and recreation are also likely to have careers in tourism services. However, work in such areas, as well as in other industries, requires specialist competencies, including social competences. Therefore, the respondents were asked about their work experience in general and in the area of tourism and recreation. It was found that some respondents had already worked in the area of tourism and recreation. However, compared to the total number of all students with a history of previous employment, they were significantly less numerous (188 vs. 402). Also, their work experience was much shorter compared to the majority of respondents: almost half of them (49.5%) had worked in the industry for less than six months, while another 18.6% – for 7-12 months. Thus, only approximately one in ten students had a relatively long job experience in their field of study.

Regardless of the year of study, approximately half of all students (62.2% of 1 BA; 50.6% of 2-3 BA; 41.7% of MA) had worked in tourism for less than half a year, and approximately one in ten students – for three years (8.1% of 1 BA, 10.1% of 2-3 BA, and 13.9% of MA).

Another aspects analysed in the study was the relationship between social competences and professional experience gained from internships attended during the period of study, where students could “gain first-hand professional experience” (Beggs, Ross, & Goodwin, 2008). Internships are a key component of higher education (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006).

The majority of respondents (41.9%) took part in a one-month internship, nearly one in five (19.0%) – in a two-month internship; longer internship periods were much less common: 10.0% – 3 months, 3.1% – 4 months, 2.5% – 5 months respectively. The period of internship can last from one month in the case of 3rd-year students, who graduated from a comprehensive secondary school, up to five months in the case of 2nd-year MA students who graduated from technical secondary schools.

The correlation analysis between the length of internship in secondary school, during the studies and the length of work experience in general, or the length of work experience in tourism and recreation, and any of the three competence scales of the SCQ, did not reveal any statistically significant differences. The result may be somewhat surprising; however, the length of internships (from one to five months) and the length of work experience in tourism and recreation (mostly up to six months) and other industries (slightly longer) seem to be too short to differentiate between different levels of social competences.

3.3. Volunteering

Volunteering is an interesting form of gaining professional experience.⁵ Depending on its duration, it can be a one-off, systematic, or long-term activity. It can also involve different domains and forms of activity, such as sport, hospice care, work, senior citizens, Internet, international settings (workcamps, European volunteering under the Erasmus+ programme, missionary trips). Specific tasks can vary greatly, and individuals interested in this form of activity make their choices based on their skills, interests, and personal aptitudes.

Volunteering is an excellent opportunity to acquire practical skills and develop social competences that can be useful in future professional careers (Jeżowski, 2018, p. 5 and 11; Kulig-Moskwa, 2013; Veleva et al., 2012). The most frequently mentioned ones include teamwork, communication skills, self-confidence, the ability to listen, responsibility, understanding of social and cultural relations,

⁵ According to the Act on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteering (Ustawa z dnia 24 kwietnia 2003 r. o działalności pożytku publicznego i o wolontariacie, Dz. U. Nr 96, poz. 873), a person is regarded as a volunteer if they voluntarily, consciously, and without remuneration, engage in work for the benefit of persons, non-governmental organisations and institutions operating in various social areas. The act also specifies a list of tasks classified as voluntary activity.

problem-solving skills (*Youth Volunteering...*, 2008). In the survey, one in 3 students of tourism and recreation (30.10% of 1 BA; 41.10% of 2-3 BA; 28.80% of MA) reported having participated in volunteering activities. Provided below are some of the responses given in the questionnaire:

“I have worked for a short time with Caritas helping the homeless,” “I was actively involved in volunteering in high school, the work consisted in helping to organize fairs for the poor,” “for three consecutive years in the technical school I took part in 1 or 2 days of volunteering work that involved helping at slow food fairs in Cracow,” “I worked in an association *Open Cages* to improve the conditions of breeding animals,” “I was a volunteer during World Youth Days,” “I took part in the volunteer work that organized trips to senior citizens’ homes where we could talk and listen to them. Moreover, I also helped at festivals for people with disabilities,” “I worked as an assistant at the “Mobile Tourist Information Point” in Olkusz and helped with the organization and implementation of the “Night of Museums” in the local cultural centre,” “I worked as a volunteer at a children’s home where I helped children with their school work,” “I was a volunteer at a social welfare home,” “I was a volunteer at a single mother’s house, where I took care of the children, organized animations and games, gave support to the children,” “I worked as a volunteer during the food collection, during the Noble Parcel Action,” I was a volunteer during the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity.”

As in the case of work experience and internships, volunteering did not differentiate between students in terms of social competences ($p > 0.05$), although it is commonly believed that people who perform volunteering work have a high level of social competences.

It can be argued that the lack of correlations may be due to the nature of the work performed, which may not have involved intensive relationships with other people (e.g. participation in slow food fairs, assistance at a tourist information point, etc.). In addition, the above experience was too short, and the assistance provided was rather short-term (action), and therefore was not associated with differential levels of social competences.

3.4. Professional experience in selected positions and social competences

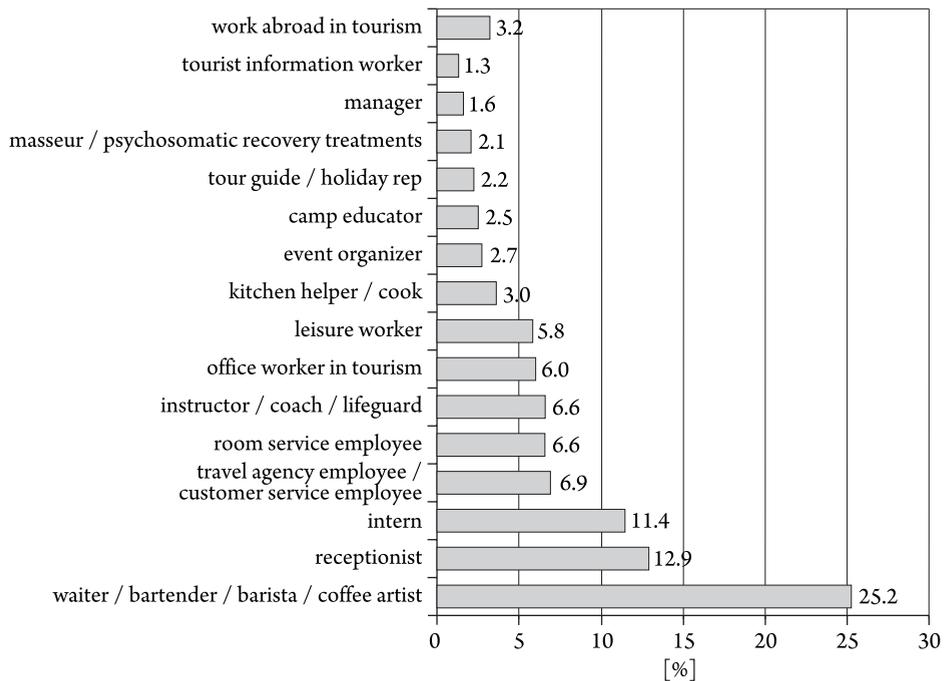
Apart from professional experience, the students of tourism and recreation were also asked about jobs held to date. It was hypothesised that work performed by the respondents, in particular work involving direct interactions with consumers, might be associated with differential social competences. The list of jobs performed by students and their work experience was created based on the analysis of their professional development path and responses to open-ended questions. Jobs were divided into two basic groups:

- jobs performed in tourism services and recreation industry;
- jobs performed outside the tourism services industry.

The analysis of jobs performed **in the tourism services and recreation industry** (Fig. 3) yields an interesting observation. Although only half of all students with a history of past employment had worked in such jobs, the number of different jobs listed in this group was twice as big ($N = 634$ vs. $N = 319$) and included the following: a waiter / bartender, a barista / coffee artist (25.2%), and a receptionist (12.9%). Fewer respondents reported working in customer services or as salespersons (6.9%), as room service employees (6.6%), as instructors/coaches / lifeguards (6.6%), as office workers (6.0%). 11.4% of respondents had gained work experience during an internship.

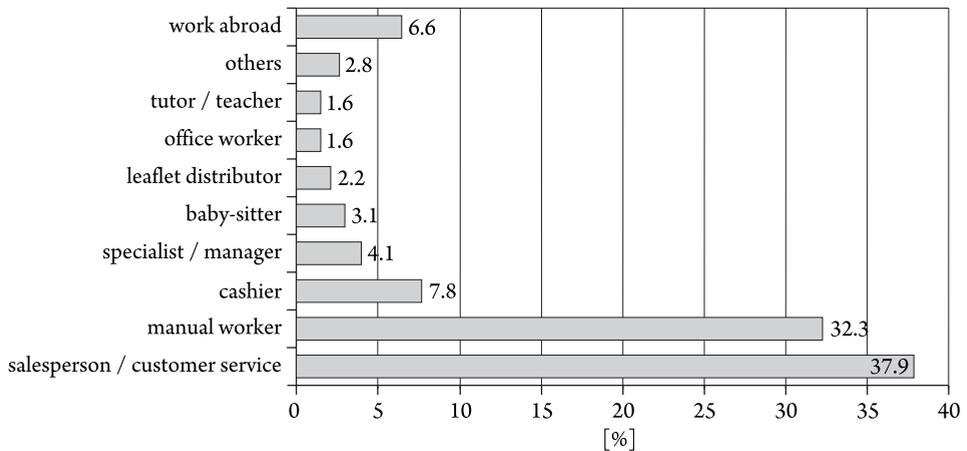
The analysis of the structure of professions indicates that most of them are operational positions that do not require high or specialized qualifications. It is particularly visible for gastronomy, where a quarter of all students had worked, and for room service and kitchen helpers. The characteristic feature of most of the jobs undertaken by the students, besides physical effort, is a direct contact with the customer (a waiter, a receptionist, sales/customer service, a leisure time animator, a camp educator, a tour guide/a resident). Performing such jobs often becomes a life lesson for a young person because working with a client is quite de-

Fig. 3. Jobs in the tourism and leisure industry, performed by respondents



Source: own study.

Fig. 4. Jobs outside the tourism and leisure industry



Source: own study.

manding, and it teaches the young person patience, respect, and humility, which in the social context is an essential factor of personality development.

When it comes to jobs **outside the tourism industry** ($N = 319$), (Fig. 4), the biggest number of respondents worked as salespeople, in customer service departments (37.9%) or as manual workers (32.3%). 7.8% worked as cashiers (7.8%). Some also took up work abroad (6.6%), and the vast majority of them had worked as manual workers (at construction sites, in warehouses, picking vegetables, fruits, and flowers). If we count those who worked abroad in the tourism industry (3.2%) (mainly washing dishes in restaurants, as waiters, bartenders, leisure time animators), it turns out that nearly one in ten students had foreign work experience. Jobs outside the tourism industry were also considered because young people who leave their everyday environment enter into numerous social and intercultural interactions, which can differentiate their level of social competence.

In summary, work experience has a considerable influence on students' professional development and their future career, as pointed out by a number of authors:

- J.L. Holland believes that an individual, while comparing their own “self” with the specific requirements of various professions, accepts and rejects various options to make a final choice (Bańka, 1995, p. 139; Holland, 1958; Paszkowska-Rogacz, 2003, p. 38),

- E. Ginzberg finds that young people who enter the period of realism (stage III) and are at the stage of searching, can modify their interests and their

search for a place in the labour market consists in narrowing professional goals and excluding certain professions (Ginzberg, 1984; Muszyński, 2010, p. 91; Pi-sula, 2009, pp. 104-105;),

– D. E. Super argues that adolescents, who enter the second stage of exploration (15-24 years old), are engaged in self-discovery, and to this end, they take up various professional roles to try them out and to finally find their own professional path (Gurba, 2001; Hornowska & Paluchowski, 1993; Łyszkowska, 2010, p. 215; Super, 1984).

Thus, the experience of doing various jobs in tourism and recreation or other industries is an element of shaping one's self-image, finding one's place in the labour market, and an important developmental factor in the social sphere, as presented below.

Based on the results of the SCQ and the length of work experience in the tourism/recreational industry, it can be concluded that the ES score of respondents who had worked as **kitchen assistants / cooks** (19)⁶ were significantly higher ($t(445) = -2.173$; $p = 0.030$) ($M = 57.2$, $SD = 8.0$) than those of students who had not worked in such positions ($M = 52.3$, $SD = 9.0$). The analysis of their career paths revealed that they had had other jobs, such as: receptionist (6), waiter/bartender (10), cleaner/room service employee (5), salesman/customer service employee (5), and manual worker (4).

It was also found that students who had worked as **salesmen in tourism/customer service** (44) had a significantly different level of social competence compared to other respondents. Interestingly, they scored lower on all scales of the SCQ (ICS: $M = 44.1$; $SD = 6.3$; SSS: $M = 49.9$; $SD = 8.5$; AS: $M = 45.1$; $SD = 7.6$; Total score: $M = 168.6$; $SD = 20.5$) than respondents without such experience (ICS: $M = 46.5$; $SD = 5.9$; SSS: $M = 52.7$; $SD = 9.0$; AS: $M = 48.2$; $SD = 8.1$; Total result: $M = 179.2$; $SD = 23.0$). ICS: $t(445) = 2.436$; $p = 0.015$, SSS – differences not entirely significant: $t(445) = 1.947$; $p = 0.052$, AS: $t(445) = 2.321$; $p = 0.021$, Total score: $t(445) = 2.845$; $p = 0.005$. As in the case of kitchen assistants/cooks, respondents who had worked as salespeople in tourism/customer service had also worked in other jobs: a waiter/bartender (8), a cashier (3), and a receptionist (3).

Another job that differentiated the students in terms of social competences was that of a **tour guide / holiday rep** (14). Respondents with this kind of work experience scored significantly lower on the effectiveness of behaviour in intimate situations (ICS: $M = 41.4$; $SD = 5.2$ vs $M = 46.4$; $SD = 6.0$) ($t(445) = 3.003$; $p = 0.003$). Also, the overall social competence score (total score) for this group of students tended to be lower ($M = 167.8$; $SD = 17.8$) than that for other respondents ($M = 178.6$; $SD = 23.0$) ($t(445) = 1.679$; $p = 0.094$), although the result was entirely significant. However, these students had also worked as waiters/

⁶ The number of people who have worked in a given position is provided in brackets.

bartenders (4), recreation instructors (3), leisure workers/camp educators (4), sales persons/customer service (3), manual workers (3).

Differences in the level of social competence were also found in the group of students who had worked as **event organisers** (18) (ICS: $M = 50.7$; $SD = 5.1$; SSS: $M = 56.5$; $SD = 9.4$; AS: $M = 51.9$; $SD = 8.8$; Total result: $M = 193.2$; $SD = 23.0$) and other respondents (ICS: $M = 46.1$; $SD = 6.0$; SSS: $M = 52.3$; $SD = 9.0$; AS: $M = 47.7$; $SD = 8.0$; Total result: $M = 177.7$; $SD = 22.8$). These students had higher scores on social competence (ICS: $t(445) = -3.153$; $p = 0.002$, SES – differences not entirely significant: $t(445) = -1.903$; $p = 0.058$, AS: $t(445) = -2.080$; $p = 0.038$, Total result: $t(445) = -2.750$; $p = 0.006$). The analysis of their career path also reveals they had also worked as sales persons /customer service (11), waiters /bartenders (3), security officers at mass events (1), a manual worker (1), a baby sitter caretaker (1), and an elderly caretaker (1).

No significant differences ($p > 0.05$) in the level of social competence were observed for the following jobs:

- students who had worked as **receptionists** (82) tended ($t(445) = 1.722$; $p = 0.086$) to have lower but no significant differences in competencies regarding the effectiveness of behaviour in social situations (SSS) ($M = 50.8$, $SD = 8.6$) compared to other jobs ($M = 52.8$, $SD = 9.1$). In addition, they tended to ($t(445) = 1.829$; $p = 0.068$) to have higher but no significant differences in competencies in the effectiveness of behaviour in assertive situations (AS) ($M = 48.2$, $SD = 8.1$) compared to other respondents ($M = 46.3$, $SD = 7.7$). It should be noted, however, that students with previous work experience as receptionists had also worked as waiters (33), kitchen assistants (5), salespersons/ customer service in a travel agency (21), maids (19), physical workers (15), leisure workers (4), recreation instructors (7), and office workers (8).

- students who had worked as **managers** in tourism (11), tended to have lower but no significant differences in competencies in the effectiveness of behaviour in situations requiring assertiveness (AS) ($M = 42.9$, $SD = 6.3$) in comparison with other respondents ($M = 48.0$, $SD = 8.1$), $Z(445) = -1.936$; $p = 0.053$. Respondents who had been employed as receptionists had also worked as waiters/bartenders (3), recreation instructors (3), manual workers (2), and receptionists (2).

No statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$) were found for the following occupations: leisure time worker, camp educator, waiter/bartender/barista/coffee artist, room/cleaning service, office worker in tourism, tourist information worker, instructor/coach/rescuer, massage therapist/operator. Also, the fact of working abroad did not differentiate between respondents in terms of their social competences.

The analysis of non-tourism jobs performed by the students indicated that those who had worked as blue-collar workers had significantly higher scores relating to effectiveness of behaviour in intimate situations (ICS: $M = 47.7$, $SD = 5.8$ vs.

$M = 45.9$, $SD = 6.0$; $t(445) = -2.546$; $p = 0.011$), effectiveness of behaviour in social situations (SSS) ($M = 54.4$, $SD = 8.8$ vs. $M = 52.0$, $SD = 9.0$; $t(445) = -2.316$; $p = 0.021$) and on the overall level of social competence (Total score) ($M = 183.4$, $SD = 21.9$ vs. $M = 176.9$, $SD = 23.1$; $t(445) = -2.422$; $p = 0.016$). It was also found that these respondents had additional experience having worked as receptionists (27), waiters/bartenders (21), leisure time animators (6), recreation instructors (6), maids (6), camp educators (5), tour guides, holiday reps (5), sales persons/customer service (5), kitchen helpers/cooks (5).

As for other jobs outside the tourism industry (a child caretaker, a salesperson/customer service, a cashier/tax cashier service, an office worker, and others), no significant differences in the level of social competence were found ($p > 0.05$).

4. Conclusions

Work in the tourism and recreation industry involves frequent interactions with people, in which employees have to establish and maintain relationships, and therefore, need to display a high level of social competence. Previous research has revealed changes that have been occurring in the way entrepreneurs run their businesses regarding human and career management, and social competences are particularly important for professional success (Cherniss, 2000; Dickson & Hargie, 2004; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002). In addition, social competences affect performance and help employees achieve results that are above the average (Cherniss, 2000). However, in order to 'become competent' in a particular skill, a person has to understand it cognitively, master it behaviourally, receive feedback, use it frequently until it becomes an entirely natural activity and is integrated into their behaviour (Dickson & Hargie, 2004; Znajmiecka-Sikora & Kędzierska, 2011, p. 28). A low level of social competences limits one's effectiveness in the labour market but can be developed through purposeful actions (Cherniss, 2000; Muralidhar et al., 2016; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002).

The study described in the article was based on the assumption that higher education should prepare students for entering the labour market and should be a form of social training. It was also hypothesized that students' social competences develop as their studies progress, which means that at the end of the studies, graduates should have achieved a high level of these skills. The study findings did not confirm this hypothesis: students of tourism and recreation who responded to the survey obtained average scores on all SCQ scales. However, they did not score extremely low, either, which is a positive result for those working in the tourism and recreation industry.

Interestingly, a similar result was also obtained by Wierzejska (2016), who surveyed students of social disciplines (psychology, journalism) and technical studies at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. She found that university education provided, at most, an average level of social skills, including abilities of establishing close interpersonal relationships, handling social situations or pursuing their own goals by exerting or resisting influence.

The average results regarding social competences obtained in the study may result from the fact that some of the educational outcomes in the area of social competences are typically psychological (personality), and can be measured by means of the SCQ, while others are more pro-social and ethical, and are related to the performance of professional tasks in an industry related to the field of study.

It is worth noting that students are still in the initial phase of their careers (Suchar, 2003, p. 17). Moreover, it has long been known that students do not necessarily develop the highest level of social traits (Riggio, Watring, & Throckmorton, 1993). It is not only valid for Polish students but also, for example, Turkish students, who exhibited a moderate level of social anxiety (Koc, 2019) and a low level of cultural sensitivity (Yurur et al., 2018).

What is more, professional work and experience acquired during the studies provide opportunities for social training, during which they can develop specific professional and social skills. The author hypothesized that the length of work experience, jobs held, internships, and volunteering might have a differential influence on students' level of social competences. This hypothesis was not confirmed. These factors were not found to differentiate between levels of social competences in the group of tourism and recreation students. Surprisingly, in the analysis of the relation between the level of social competences and the type of jobs performed, it turned out that students who had worked as blue-collar workers had higher scores on the ICS (competences determining the effectiveness of behaviour in intimate situations) and SES (competences determining the effectiveness of behaviour in social exposure situations), and in total than those who had not worked in such jobs.

Also, students take up different jobs while looking for their dream job that fits in with their interests and skills. As a result, correlation discrepancies occurred. Most respondents had worked in catering, hotels, travel agencies, in the recreation industry, and had done various jobs outside tourism and recreation. It should also be underlined that the sample consisted of full-time students. Therefore, it is difficult to compare their work experience to full-time employees who have done a given job for several years.

In summary, it can be concluded that the development of social competences is a long-term process that depends on personality and environmental factors.

For this reason, educational and professional experiences are merely stages of social training that enable students to keep developing their social skills, largely depending on their motivation and willingness to change their personality.

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Aktywność zawodowa studentów turystyki i rekreacji a poziom kompetencji społecznych. Wybrane zagadnienia

Streszczenie. Celem artykułu jest prezentacja badań diagnozujących poziom kompetencji społecznych młodzieży akademickiej studiującej na kierunku „turystyka i rekreacja” oraz ich interakcji z doświadczeniem o charakterze zawodowym. Założono bowiem, iż podjęcie pracy zawodowej, gdzie uwzględniono takie czynniki, jak: długość stażu pracy, pełnione stanowiska, praca w kraju lub za granicą, praktyki zawodowe, praca w wolontariacie, może różnicować poziom kompetencji społecznych studentów. W tym celu zastosowano ilościowe i jakościowe metody badań, na podstawie których ustalono, że studenci turystyki i rekreacji prezentują przeciętny poziom kompetencji społecznych. Nie wykazano także istotnych statystycznie zależności między poziomem kompetencji społecznych a stażem praktyk w szkole średniej, stażem praktyk na studiach, stażem pracy w ogóle, stażem pracy w turystyce i rekreacji oraz pracą wolontariacie. Z przeprowadzonych badań można wyciągnąć wniosek, że staż pracy badanych studentów jest jeszcze zbyt krótki, aby różnicował on kompetencje społeczne.

Słowa kluczowe: kompetencje społeczne, aktywność zawodowa, studenci turystyki i rekreacji



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Suggested citation: Alejziak, B. (2020). Work experience of tourism and recreation students and the level of social competence. Selected issues. *Studia Periegetica*, 3(31), 9-30. <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0014.4312>