

A geography graduate's transition into the labour market in Poland: a quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the process

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Abstract. Transition, i.e. the education-to-work shift, is considered one of the most important processes in human life. The characteristics of transition hinge on, first of all, the labour market situation, the economic climate in the region, the educational services market and the aspirations of society. Virtually unlimited access to education at an academic level and the growing appetite of young people for degrees have resulted in a rapid increase in the number of university graduates. Consequently, there has been a high supply of employees with university degrees. However, the speed and type of transition among recent graduates is one of the least investigated processes on the labour market in Poland.

The article presents the results of a survey on how Polish geographers enter the job market. The study compares geographers' professional qualifications, aspirations and plans about their future job at the time of graduation with the actual fulfilment of those plans six months later. Quantitative analysis of the process shows that half the graduates have succeeded in finding employment. Qualitative analysis of the type of jobs shows that the university-to-work transition was unsatisfactory in many respects. For example, the new position was unlikely to require the graduates to use the competences acquired during the course of study, the job offered limited career development opportunities and had a low remuneration. All the above raise concerns regarding the limited opportunity for successful transition and the respondents' low satisfaction level.

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1. Introduction

The process of university graduates' entry into the job market is complex with a multitude of factors at play. The characteristics of transition hinge on, first of all, the labour market situation, the economic climate in the region, the educational services market and the aspirations of society. The employment structure of the labour market is currently changing and the demands of employers are increasing. Work modes evolve which results in new forms of employment. Virtually unlimited access to education at an academic level and the growing appetite of young people for degrees have resulted in a rapid increase in the number of university graduates. Consequently, there has been a high supply of employees with university degrees. The above mentioned factors have an impact on the speed and type of transition; the outcome of university-to-work transition is burdened with the risk of failure (Kryńska, 2002, 2011).

University graduates are a unique group of job seekers. This is because their educational capital required the greatest investment - either private (in the case of paid education) or public (in the case of free education). This education capital that has been acquired with great effort should ensure a smooth and satisfactory transition. However, the process encounters increasing difficulties. This is evident in the lower number of graduates who hold positions where their competences acquired at university as well as their university degree in general are irrelevant and in the lower number of university graduates who find jobs at all (e.g.: Allen and Van der Velden, 2007; Teichler, 2011).

Therefore, it is important to learn more about the mechanisms governing the transition of geographers from academic education to professional career and monitor the jobs and positions held by recent gradu-

ates. However, research into geographers' transition into the job market has been rare and the topic of jobs held by newly graduated geographers is one of the most under - researched areas, especially after the transformation process. In the 21st century, no studies that would track the career paths of geography graduates in Poland have been conducted while the status of graduates on the job market has substantially deteriorated (Piróg, 2010). The 2012 unemployment figures in Poland signify that the average unemployment rate among people with a degree is only 1.1% lower than the overall average. Increasing difficulties are observed in the smooth transition of recent graduates to the labour market. This is corroborated by the increase in the number of unemployed graduates from 17.1% in Q4 of 2007 to 22.5% in Q3 of 2011, i.e. unemployment figures among graduates were up by 5.4%. Another worrying phenomenon is hidden unemployment, which manifests itself in taking up employment below one's qualifications (Kiersztyn, 2011, 2012; Piróg, 2013). Since in Poland there are no unemployment statistics that can be linked with the specific degree obtained, on the basis of this general growing tendency of unemployment among all graduates we can assume that a smooth transition to the job market poses an ever increasing challenge for geographers. Additionally, this fact can be corroborated via informal channels such as Internet forums for geographers, opinions expressed in the media or feedback collected during geography graduates' reunions, etc. At the same time, young people are less interested in taking up geography as a discipline of study, which in turn lowers the status of geography as a school subject and creates an unfavourable social perception of this discipline as an unattractive choice – career prospect wise. A demographic surge has provided the faculties with a plethora of candidates interested in pursuing any degree, including geography.

2. Methodology

The above circumstances trigger a series of questions about the actual situation of geographers on the labour market and the extent to which their aspirations and expectations have been met.

Successful transition may be interpreted in a number of ways. Current transition analysis procedures require the following to be established: (a) the extent to which graduates use the intellectual capital acquired during the course of their studies. This is established mainly by finding links between the job and the education level, as well as the specific degree and by investigating the work destinations of graduates; (b) the type of employment contract – an indicator of how stable and secure the job is; (c) remuneration – complements the picture drawn already by the information about employment contract type and helps to estimate the likelihood of actual transition to the world of adult financial independence; (d) career development prospects – defined not only by the position held, but also by promotion opportunities; (e) subjective satisfaction level with the job – may be in line with objective indicators, but may also be divergent (Müller, Gangl, 2003; Raffe, 2008; Gajderowicz et. al., 2012).

Furthermore, in order to analyse transition, it appears reasonable to juxtapose the aspirations and plans (financial, professional) regarding a future job at the time of graduation with their fulfilment (Jakimiuk, 2012).

The literature review shows that so far no academic papers have been published in Poland that empirically discuss the qualitative aspect of transition. Recent academic papers on the first job after university, conducted among students and graduates of selected universities, focus on mobility readiness during job seeking and professional and financial expectations (Poteralski, 2008; Jończy, Rokita-Poskart, 2011; Jakubiak, 2012; Szwarc, 2012). The qualitative aspect is important in evaluating the type of university-to-work transition experienced by new graduates.

Therefore, the objective of the article is to juxtapose formal qualifications, aspirations and plans of geographers regarding the scope of their future work at the time of graduation with their real situation approximately six months later.

A nationwide survey was conducted to achieve this purpose. It consisted of two stages: stage one took place between May and June 2011 and stage two encompassed January and February 2012. The first stage of the study was addressed to students graduating from full time geography degree programmes in the academic year 2010/2011 in all fourteen higher education institutions which offer geography degrees in Poland. These are as follows: the Pomeranian University in Słupsk, - Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, the University of Lodz, the University of Warsaw, the University of Wrocław, the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, the University of Gdańsk, the Pedagogical University of Krakow, the University of Silesia, Szczecin University and Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz (see Fig. 1).

Official letters were sent to all geography faculty heads asking for consent to carry out a survey among students of geography degree programmes at a time as close to their graduation date as possible, e.g. the last class or the dates of their BA and MA *viva voce* examinations. The objective of this stage of the research was, among others, to learn about graduates' dispersal among given specialisations, i.e. their formal qualifications to work in specific occupations, their plans in terms of entering the job market including desirable workplaces and occupations.

Twelve out of fourteen higher education institutions gave their consent to participate in the study (two universities, i.e. Szczecin University and Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, did not consent to participate in the study). In stage one, with the help of the heads and academic staff of the faculties, face-to-face meetings were held with students of each higher education institution. During those especially organised meetings and weekly classes in small groups, the students were told about the objectives of the study and asked to participate in the survey. The survey was confidential but not anonymous as the respondents were asked to supply their email addresses or telephone numbers in the questionnaire. 1347 surveys were collected in this way, . out of which 1120 met the reliability criterion and were taken into account during further analyses. This accounts for approximately 78% of all gradu-

ates from full time geography degree programmes in the academic year 2010/2011. Majority of the participants were women. The respondents represented all student types, i.e. undergraduates (bachelor's de-

gree), postgraduates (two year master's degree) and students of the long-cycle five-year master's programmes which were still running at that time in some universities.

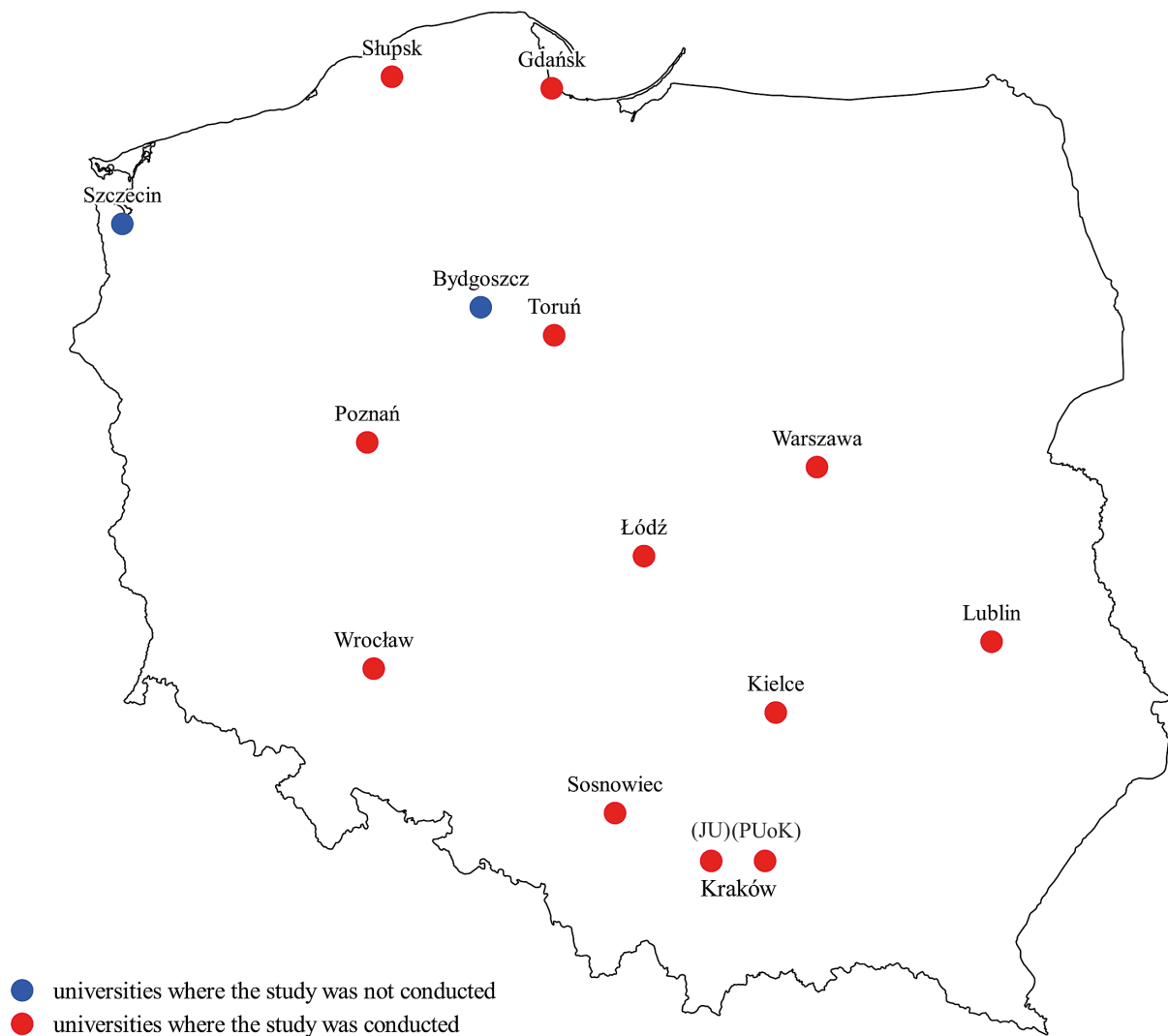


Fig. 1. Higher education institutions selected for the study

Source: Own study

The second stage of the study was conducted approximately six months after graduation. An online survey was sent to all respondents who were most determined to find- a job, i.e. in stage one they had declared plans to seek employment immediately after graduation. This stage did not cover respondents who in the first stage declared that they planned to continue studying, wanted to combine further academic education with job seeking efforts or had

other plans not related to seeking employment. It was carried out approximately six months after official cessation of education as six months is the usual period necessary to investigate the speed and type of transition from university training to a professional career (Müller, Gangl, 2003). 597 respondents declared in stage one that they were planning to look for a job after graduation and all of them received an electronic invitation to participate in the

second stage of the project. The invitation included a personalised link with an individual password to log into the database. The objectives of this stage focused on collecting the data necessary to compare plans and aspirations of respondents regarding their workplaces and working terms and conditions at the time of graduation and reality.

The collected statistical data from two databases (from stage one and two) was used to generate a single output database. The output database contained associated information from both databases and the email address provided the basis for one-to-one associations. The email addresses were unique keys, explicitly identifying each respondent at the moment of graduation and approximately six months later. The interconnected databases underwent formal and technical control measures in order to reveal any possible mistakes or discrepancies. From a formal point of view, the completeness of the set was checked. From a technical point of view, logical and arithmetical control checks were performed.

As a result, a set with complete data from 375 graduates was extracted, amounting to a responsiveness rate of 68.2%. This personalised collective group of graduates was the study group which was subjected to further in-depth statistical quantitative and qualitative analysis. The group consisted of representatives of all degree types in nearly equal measure, i.e. graduates of undergraduate bachelor's programmes accounted for 32.5%, postgraduates accounted for 32.0% and graduates of long-cycle five-year master's programmes accounted for 35.5%. As far as gender is concerned goes, 65.3% of the respondents were women. Overall, the respondents were of similar age as nearly 98% were in the 22-24 age bracket. The majority of graduates came from towns or villages: one out of three respondents came from the countryside (37%) and one in four (25%) from towns with up to 50 thousand inhabitants. The remaining respondents came from medium- and large-size cities (over 200 thousand inhabitants) (see Fig. 2).

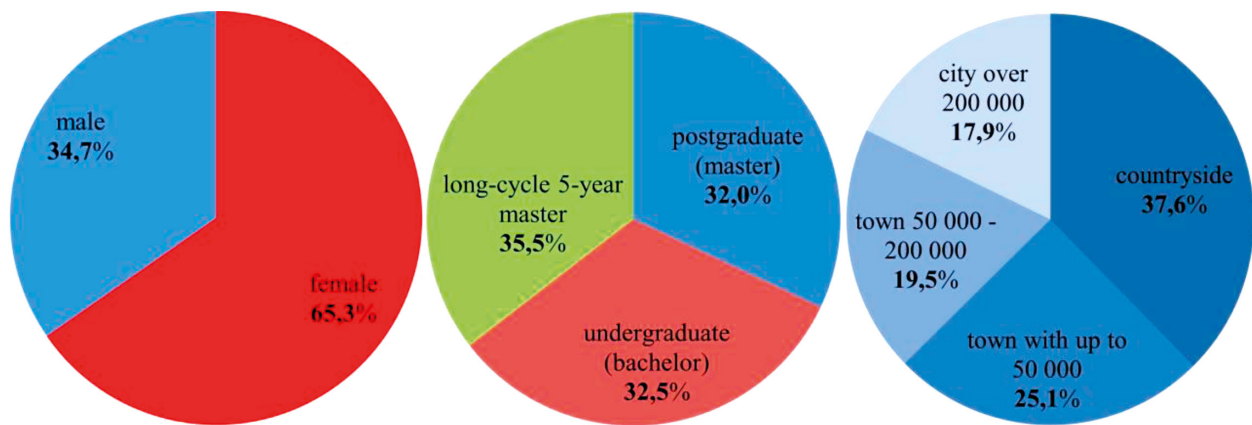


Fig. 2. Characteristics of the respondents

Source: Own study

3. Results

3.1. Professional aspirations of students graduating with a geography degree versus the reality

As seen in the research results, an overwhelming majority of all geographers at the stage of graduation wanted to find employment in jobs closely related both to the degree and the specialisation they

had chosen during the course of study. The largest group wanted to work in the public sector, in particular in non-material and social services, i.e. in civil service and local authorities as specialists in analysis and monitoring changes in the environment, administering environmental resources, in spatial development offices as urban and spatial planners and, thirdly, in the educational sector as geography and science/history/biology teachers at primary, secondary and upper secondary levels.

Graduates' fourth most popular workplace choices were land surveyor and cartography experts where both GIS remote specialists and cartographers were hoping to find a job. As many as 10% of geography graduates declared plans to become self-employed. A similar number of young geographers were keenly interested in workplaces related to dealing with tourist traffic, in particular as tour leaders and tour guides and specialists in organising and managing

leisure activities. A small proportion of respondents (2.5%) dreamt of a career in academia. Nearly one fifth of the surveyed graduates selected the response "other". Among the overall population, 4.2% of people were so determined to find any source of income immediately after graduation that they admitted a willingness to accept any job offer, including that of manual labour which is considerably below their qualifications and level of education (see Fig. 3).

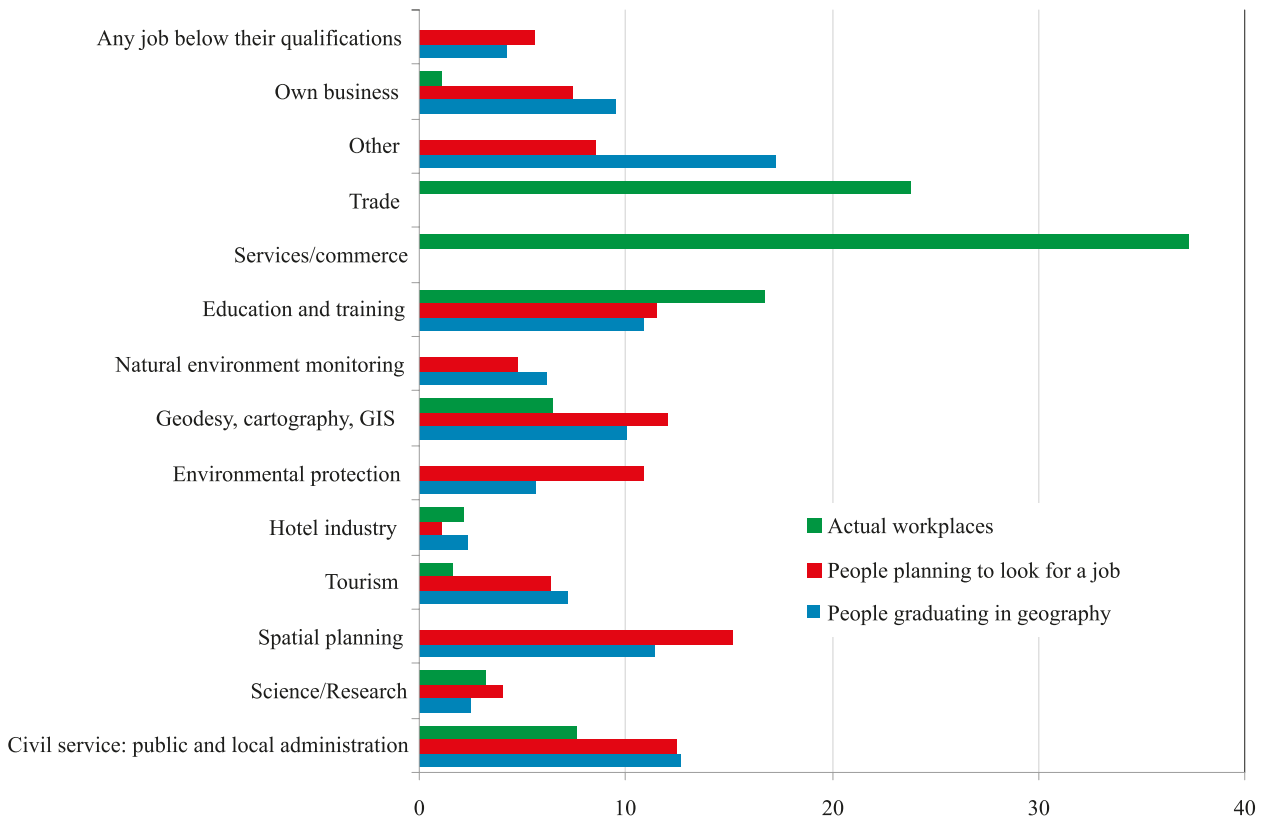


Fig. 3. Expected and actual workplaces

Source: Own study

The high proportion of graduates willing to work in public administration stems most of all from the respondents' desire to obtain a stable job with the perspective of long-term employment. Employment in the public sector, even though not very well paid, gives a sense of relative security which becomes a more valuable trait than the level of salary in times of crisis on the labour market. Furthermore, it almost certainly guarantees a safe return to work for women after maternity leaves, which is not that secure in the private sector. A lively interest in the teaching profession is to a great extent due to the fact that geographers have traditional-

ly worked as teachers. Finally, GIS-related jobs and those based on qualifications necessary in tourism were also popular mainly because people with these qualifications are doing quite well as these are sectors which have enjoyed dynamic growth in Poland (Piróg, 2014).

The research showed that graduates' aspirations were location specific. For instance, geography graduates from southern Poland were most willing to work in environmental resources management – nearly one in four respondents from Sosnowiec and 19.0% of graduates from Jagiellonian University chose this answer. Graduates of the Pedagogical

University in Kraków were most willing to work in education (23.4%) – clearly related to the university profile but it is also possible to choose a non-teaching major at the Institute of Geography. Graduates of -Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń were second on the list of graduates wanting to become teachers with 18.9%.

Respondents from Wrocław and Toruń were most willing to pursue a career in academic research after graduation with 13% and 11.9%, respectively. Spatial planning was most popular among graduates of Nicolaus Copernicus University (16.5%) and Jagiellonian University (16.1%), while tour guide and tourism industry careers were deemed most attractive by graduates of the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce (15.1%) and the Pomeranian University in Słupsk (12.2%).

Work in environmental protection was most often selected by graduates of the University of Gdańsk (13.4%) and the Pedagogical University in Krakow (10.8%). Lublin (20.0%), Poznań (19.0%) and Warsaw (17.5%) graduates were most interested in working in the geodesy and cartography industry, while environmental monitoring was selected most often by students from Poznań (14.3%) and Gdańsk (11.0%). Graduates of all universities with the exception of Sosnowiec were ready to take up any job – even that below their qualifications. This option was selected most often by students from Słupsk (10.7%) and Poznań (9.5%). Students from Słupsk, Lublin and Łódź were most proactive because as many as 14.5%, 12.2% and 11.5% respectively declared they wanted to set up their own businesses (see Fig. 4).

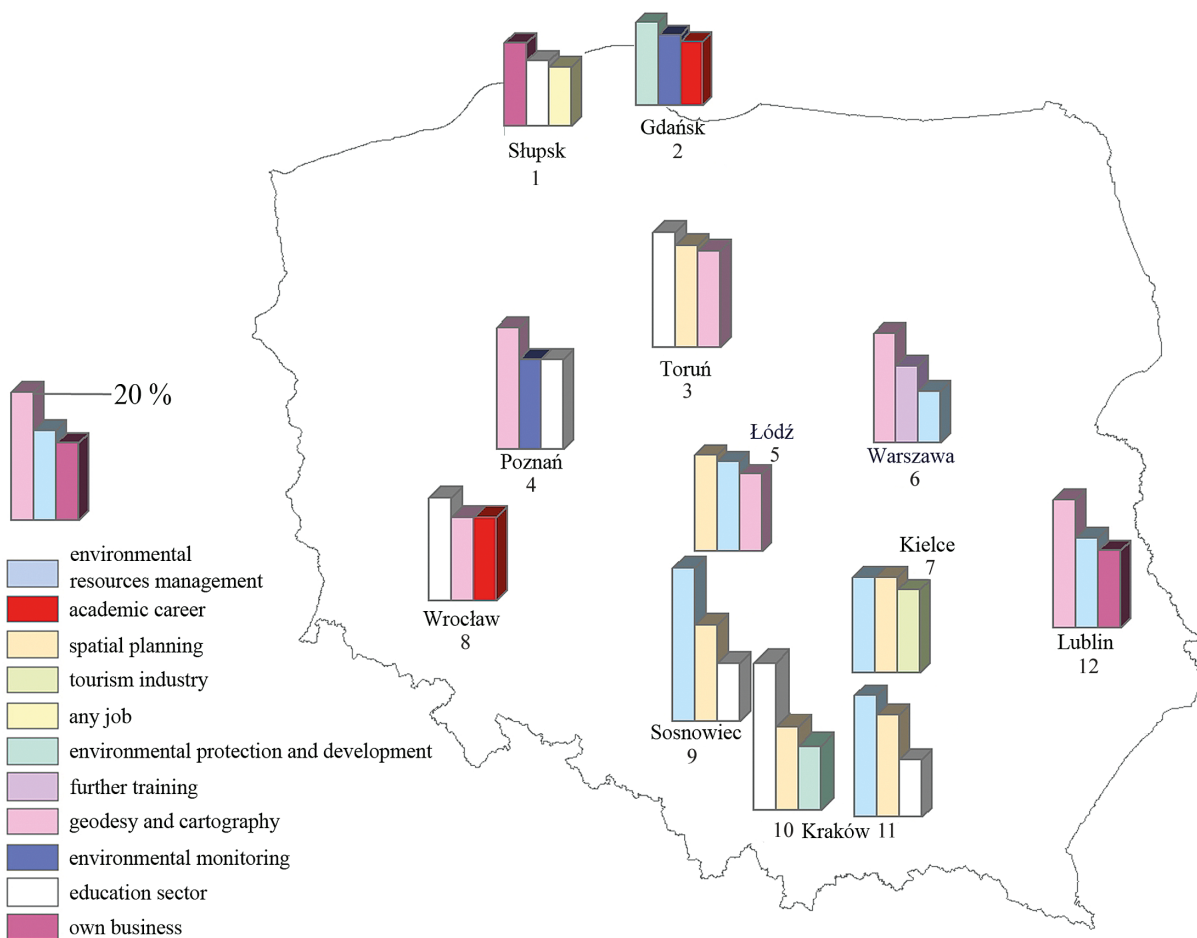


Fig. 4. Most desirable workplaces of geography graduates per university

Explanation: 1 – Pomeranian University in Słupsk; 2 – University of Gdańsk; 3 – Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń; 4 – Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań; 5 – University of Lodz; 6 – University of Warsaw; 7 – Jan Kochanowski University in Poznań; 8 – University of Wrocław; 9 – University of Silesia; 10 – Jagiellonian University; 11 – Pedagogical University of Krakow; 12 – Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin

Source: Own study

Unfortunately, the expectations of geographers captured in the first stage of the research project were only partially fulfilled. Only about half of the graduates (48.8%) were working, 0.5% were entrepreneurs, while job seekers accounted for 50.7%. Over half of the working graduates performed jobs that were neither related to their discipline of study nor required higher education qualifications.

Graduates working in jobs not related to their degree and oftentimes below their level of education held positions in material services for consumers (trade, transport, catering); less frequently in services for manufacturers and business (warehouse management, real estate).

People who held jobs related to their degree worked mainly in education and public administration, non-material service industry and social services. This group included teachers (16.7%), people dealing with organisation and environmental management in local authorities (7.6%), land surveyors and cartographers (6.5%), employees of the tourism industry, e.g. travel agencies, hotels (3.8%) and staff in academic centres, mainly university-based ones (3.2%). None of the respondents seemed to work in spatial planning or environmental protection. Geographers who worked in the civil service held positions in municipality offices, city and town councils, the Central Statistical Office and regional employment agencies. Graduates working in the tourism industry worked in travel agencies as office staff and tour leaders travelling abroad with tour groups, as well as hotel staff working at reception or performing other administrative work. Those geographers

who used their competences in cartography and GIS methods found employment mainly in private companies providing services in this field. Only two people managed to fulfil their plans to set up their own businesses in such a short timeframe. These were two female respondents with master's degrees. One of them graduated with a specialisation in social and economic geography and the other one majored as a teacher of geography and science. Both women were sole traders in the service industry. The first one launched an online clothes outlet, while the other one used her second degree obtained during geography studies, i.e. landscaping, and set up a landscaping business as a subcontractor of a large company providing such services. It is interesting to note that nearly two years after setting up their businesses (June 2013) the clothes outlet was still in operation while the other respondent closed the company after just over a year due to lack of profit (Piróg, 2014).

3.2. Expected and acquired employment terms

The geographers' first jobs included mainly low level assistant positions including office staff and other entry-level positions (59.0%), as well as the so-called "other" category (19.7%). Only approximately one fifth of the geographers worked as specialists or held independent positions and several of the respondents held medium level managerial positions (see Table 1).

Table 1. Position in the first job

Position	%
Assistant (office staff and other entry-level positions)	59.0
Specialist, other independent position	18.6
Medium level managerial position	2.7
Other	19.7
Total	100.0

Source: Own study

An analysis of employment contracts signed by working geographers shows that one in three geographers had a so-called contract of mandate and one in four had a fixed-term employment contract

which seems to ensure a relatively stable workplace and entails a high probability of contract extension should the employer be happy with the quality of the graduate's work. Some of the re-

spondents worked on temporary contracts where they filled in for permanent staff on leave and sev-

eral people decided to work on a voluntary basis (see Table 2).

Table 2. Contract type in the first job

Contract type	%
Contract of employment – trial period	12.0
Contract of employment – temporary (substitution)	7.7
Contract of employment - permanent	13.7
Contract of mandate	30.6
Contract of specific work	3.8
No contract	3.3
Voluntary work	1.6
Other	2.7
Fixed term contract of employment	24.6
Total	100.0

Source: Own study

The employment terms described by the current project seem to correspond to the situation of university graduates in other countries. For instance, in Norway it has been established that between 1985-1999 over half of university graduates took up more flexible jobs, i.e. part time or casual work. The proportion increased the lower the link between the job and the discipline of study (Try, 2005). A difficult situation on the labour market in times of an economic downturn in the 21st century seems to put even more pressure on graduates to accept non-standard forms of employment.

The scarcity of graduates setting up their own business in Poland stems from a number of reasons. One of them is likely to be the short timeframe for fulfilment of one's plans as the second stage of the study took place only six months after their *viva voce* examination. On the other hand, however, surveys of university graduates in other countries show that in general self-employment among this group is low and amounts to 2.1% directly after graduation and increases nominally by only 1.1% in the following four years after graduation to reach 3.2%. At the same time, self-employment figures among graduates of higher education institutions observed a sharp increase as the rate of entrepreneurs among this group was as low as 0.3% in the 1980s (Greene, Saridakis, 2008). The above low self-employment figures can be partially due to

the short period between the two project stages but what seems to be the major contributing factor is the severe economic downturn. The poor economic situation coupled with complex regulations and a lot of red tape requirements for setting up a business in Poland, as well as the costs involved in running one's own company (some of the highest in Europe) (Czarnik, Turek, 2012) are also to blame for the shortage of entrepreneurs among recent geography graduates.

The respondents, when completing their studies, had rational, thought-out and not exaggerated financial expectations with respect to the remuneration in their first job (all amounts are net, unless stated otherwise). On average, they wanted to earn PLN 1,929 and over half of these wanted to earn between PLN 1,501 and 2,000. One in four students were willing to accept remuneration between PLN 1,001-1,500 and one in six expected to be paid between PLN 2,501-3,000. Relatively high and least realistic were the financial expectations of a small group of 1.3% respondents who wanted to earn more than PLN 4,000. Financial expectations were also location specific. The following graduates had the highest financial expectations: the University of Warsaw (average of PLN 2,145), the University of Gdańsk (PLN 2,128) and Jagiellonian University (PLN 2,031). The most modest financial expectations were held by the students from

the University of Silesia (PLN 1,675), the Pedagogical University in Kraków (PLN 1,732) and Adam

Mickiewicz University in Poznań (PLN 1,750) (see Fig. 5).

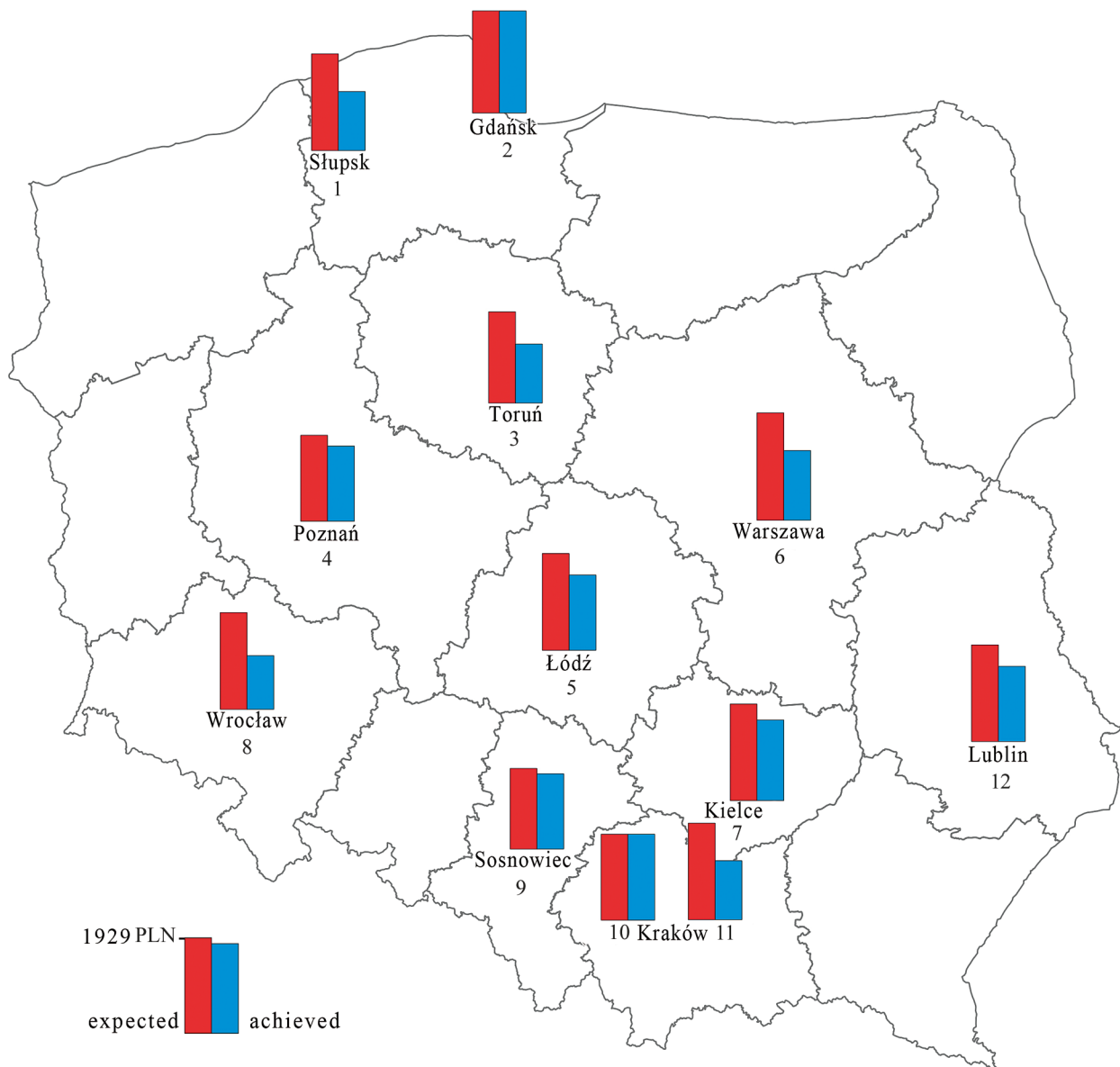


Fig. 5. Expected and achieved remuneration (net)

Explanation: 1 – Pomeranian University in Słupsk; 2 – University of Gdańsk; 3 – Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń; 4 – Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań; 5 – University of Lodz; 6 – University of Warsaw; 7 – Jan Kochanowski University in Poznań; 8 – University of Wrocław; 9 – University of Silesia; 10 – Jagiellonian University; 11 – Pedagogical University of Krakow; 12 – Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin

Source: Own study

The financial expectations of students from the University of Gdańsk, the Pedagogical University in Kraków and the University of Silesia were closest to their actual salary, but the majority (80.3%) of working graduates earned less than expected in their first job.

3.3. Planned and acquired criteria of workplace selection

At the time of graduation, the dominant criteria of employer selection by graduates included both in-

strumental and intrinsic aspects. The number one factor was remuneration, which belongs to the instrumental criteria category. Non-material factors came second, including career development prospects and professional satisfaction with the scope of duties involved.

As the job search continued, the criteria also evolved and the respondents paid attention to the declared requirements to a different extent. In reality, the attitude of “willing to take up any job” was most often applied during their job search. Among graduates who were willing to take up any job at the time of graduation, over one fourth chose this answer once again during the follow-up study, indicating that it was indeed the primary factor which determined their decision. Consequently, a criterion that was relatively rarely taken into account by the

students at graduation, turned out to be the dominant one during real job seeking efforts.

A considerable number of graduates applied the criterion “suitable workplace location” (20.5% chose it in the follow-up study) during job seeking. Remuneration, which was the dominant criterion declared at graduation, did not, in fact, determine the decision all that often (14.4%). Similar results were recorded for the criteria that the job should match respondents’ skills and offer career development opportunities (10.7% and 10.2% respectively).

The lowest number of people used the criterion “promotion prospects” (2.9% in the follow-up study), a criterion that was often selected in the first stage of the study, along with “employer’s reputation” (3.3%) (see Fig. 6).

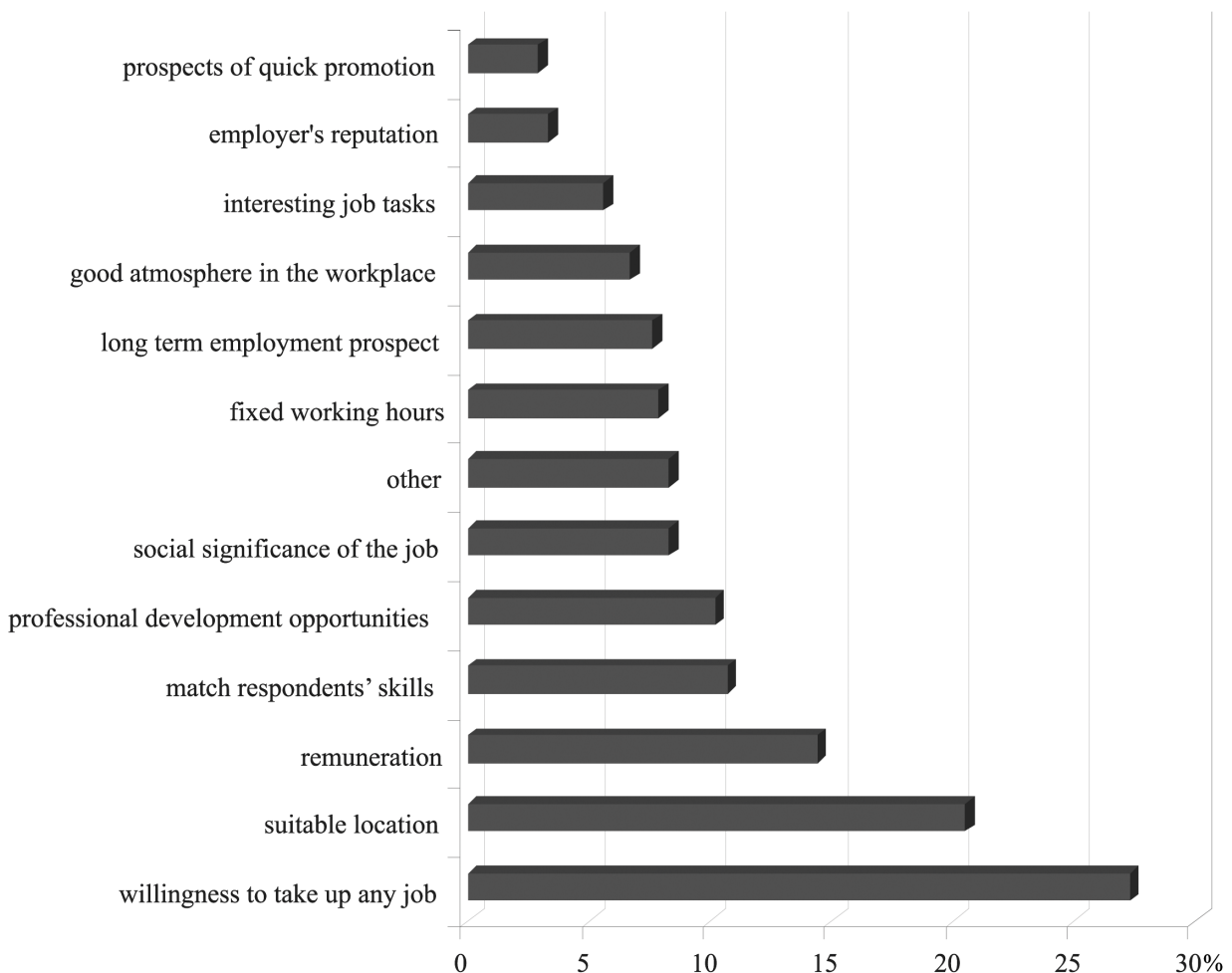


Fig. 6. Employer selection criteria in the follow-up study

Source: Own study

3.4. Expected and real recruitment criteria; job satisfaction level

At the time of graduation, the students were convinced that employers primarily pay attention to candidates' previous professional experience. Next, in the opinion of the respondents, were language skills, personal characteristics, i.e. soft skills, and the recommendations of other people, the so-called "contacts". As far as fifth down the list was the subject studied, followed by a higher education diploma. Other aspects are, in the opinion of the respondents, negligible in the recruitment process. For example, the grade on the degree diploma was selected as one of the least important factors.

In general, geographers predicted that in the real recruitment process, the employer pays most attention to the candidate's personal characteristics, followed by recommendations, previous professional experience and the subject studied at university. The predictions of graduates who selected the following answers turned out to be most valid in real recruitment criteria: personal characteristics (28.5% of answers in the follow-up study), IT skills (15.2%), subject studied (14.2%) and recommendations (13.9%). No respondent who thought the

grade on their diploma and the prestige of the university mattered during recruitment was actually recruited according to those criteria (0% answers in the follow-up study). Few people, who initially thought that experience from abroad would be important for the employer, were in reality assessed according to this criterion (4.5% of answers in the follow-up study). Similarly low results were recorded by students who regarded a university diploma as a key recruitment criteria – only 9.6% declared in the follow-up study that their diploma mattered in the real job search.

Out of those who, at the time of graduation, thought that previous professional experience determines the outcome of recruitment, only 13.4% agreed with this evaluation in the follow-up study and confirmed that their experience was the key for successful job acquisition. The majority of graduates stated that they received the job mainly thanks to their personal characteristics (28.6%) and personal contacts (13.4%). Respondents who valued language skills high on their priorities list also only partially confirmed that these skills were crucial for finding a job (10.3%), but they also noted that other criteria such as personal characteristics and recommendations were considered during their recruitment (see Fig. 7).

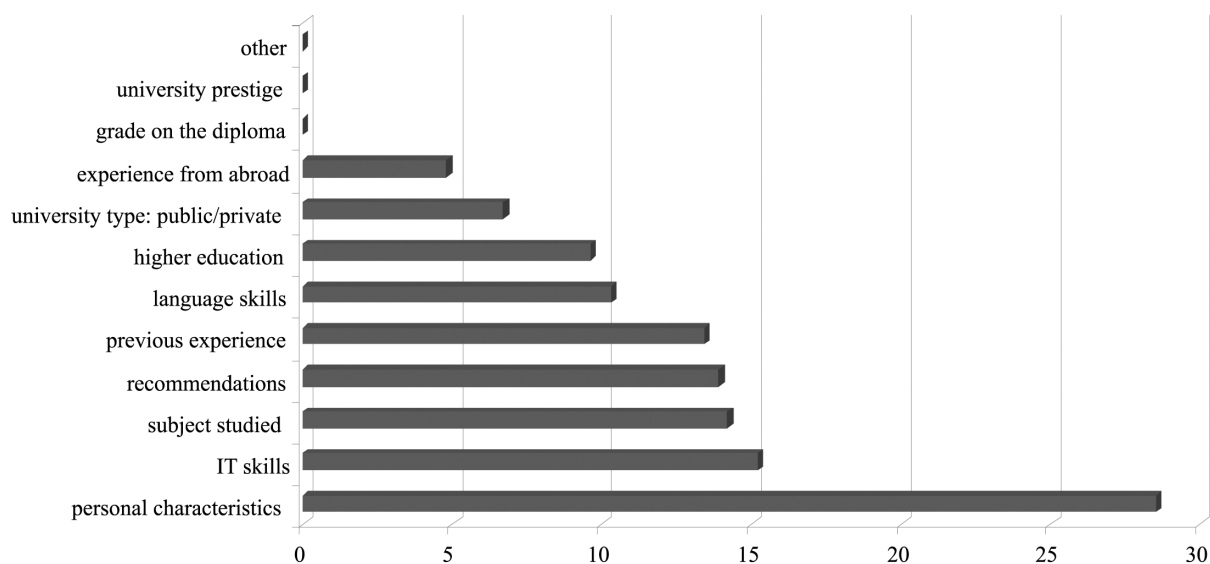


Fig. 7. Recruitment criteria in the follow-up study

Source: Own study

Over half of working geographers stated that their current job is definitely or somewhat below their expectations (53% in total). One in three respondents was relatively satisfied with their job (34.4%) and one in eight was fully satisfied with their professional career (12.6%). The majority of respondents worked in sectors they neither dreamt of working in nor planned to work in at the time of graduation.

4. Conclusion: evaluation of transition quality

Upon examining the transition process of geography graduates, one observes that it was successful for over half of them. Available research results allow us to compare this data only with the performance of graduates at given universities, but not to geography graduates specifically. Studies which trace graduates' career paths at chosen universities prove that the majority of people who found work after university (over 85%) graduated from renowned universities of science, technology and economy. Furthermore, at least 77% of respondents in this group declared that they worked in a position related to their degree (Bielecki, 2008; Wyniki, 2012). A slightly lower employment rate was found among non-technical university graduates. For instance, 77% of graduates from Jagiellonian University in Krakow found a job. However, the results varied enormously depending on the discipline of study and as many as 90% of graduates from English studies faculties had a job compared to only 50% of history graduates, a discipline with an similar education concept to geography (Ćwiakalska et. al., 2011). It seemed that it was the graduates of the humanities and pedagogy who found it most difficult to find a job. This may be illustrated by the fact that less than half (45%) of the graduates of the Pedagogical University in Krakow, the best teacher training institution in Poland, were employed a year after graduation. Moreover, within the group of working graduates, only 44% declared they were working in a job related to their degree (Losy, 2012). If we evaluate the situation of geography graduates on the labour market, with the employment rate of 50.3%, they hold one of the last places in the ranking.

A qualitative analysis of jobs obtained by geographers shows that they found a number of aspects unsatisfactory.

Firstly, there was a very low likelihood that their competences (especially geography-related ones) acquired during the course of study would be utilised in their job. There was a generally low correspondence between their professional destinations and both their formal qualifications and career plans and aspirations at the time of graduation. One is six geographers performed tasks which were strictly related to their level and field of education in their first job after university. A similarly modest number of students fulfilled their dreams and ended up holding the specific positions in professions they wanted. The majority of graduates were employed in the non-material consumer services sector where higher education was generally not required. It is a very poor result when we compare it to both the overall graduate population of 1999-2008, where only 54.0% found jobs which required higher education (Jeruszka, 2011: 2), and to the results of other graduates who found jobs related to their field of study (the proportion was 40% or more in each university).

Secondly, when we analyse the criteria used by the graduates to select their future employer, it seems that the majority of the respondents did not have a real choice and took up the job because there was no real alternative. This limited or non-existent choice made it virtually impossible for graduates to select between vacancies, workplaces and positions. This corroborates the fact that the labour market currently belongs to employers. At a time of oversupply of university graduates, employers can afford to pose unrealistic demands or offer unsatisfactory terms of employment to graduates (Korpysa, 2003).

Thirdly, the type of employment contracts signed by geographers in their first post-graduation jobs were not much different from the contracts offered to other employees hired at the time of downturn on the labour market. These were mainly benefit-free, non-standard forms of employment which were less and less related to the graduate's field of study (Try, 2005).

Additionally, career development prospects were also limited and many respondents stated that their current job was only a temporary solution, a sort of

“emergency”. It is difficult to predict whether geographers will look for more challenging positions or stay in current, relatively unsatisfactory employment where they work hard hoping for a promotion. Another option is that, given the lack of intellectual and financial incentive, they will stay with the employer and await better times on the labour market and the length of employment will only be determined by external conditions on the market.

Finally, the level of remuneration raises concerns about the possibilities of a real transition to the adult world – one which is directly related to financial independence. The average net salary of geography graduates is higher than the minimum wage (at the time when the study was conducted, i.e. in 2012, the minimum wage amounted to PLN 1,500 gross) (Rozporządzenie, 2011), but considerably lower than the national average (in the first quarter of 2012, average net salary amounted to approximately PLN 2,600) (GUS, 2012).

The above listed characteristics and terms of employment juxtaposed with the graduates’ plans and aspirations result in the low satisfaction level of the researched subpopulation.

A foreign literature review leads the author to conclude that similar problems with obtaining work in general, and in particular work corresponding to the graduates’ level of education and discipline studied, are experienced by British geography graduates (Gedye, Chalkley, 2006). The present article is a modest attempt to fill part of the large research gap in examining the transition of new geography graduates into the job market in the 21st century. Overlooking this process as a research topic is at best nothing but avoidance of accountability or at worst a negation of the whole idea of geographic research (Rooney et al., 2006).

Referring back to the article’s title, it is telling and hugely disappointing that over half of geography graduates in Poland remain unemployed six months after graduation. Furthermore, the great majority of working graduates do not feel they have fulfilled their professional expectations and only one in six working graduates states that their first job after university fully or even partially fulfilled their plans and aspirations. It is a sad conclusion to draw and one which should raise an important premise for further discussion on the concept of geography education at tertiary level in Poland.

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