

SCIENTIFIC NOTE

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Marta Maro-Kulczycka

University of Łódź
Institute of Urban Geography and Tourism
m.marokulczycka@wp.pl

PROFILES OF FIRST YEAR TOURISM AND RECREATION STUDENTS: UNIVERSITY OF ŁÓDŹ FACULTY OF GEOGRAPHICAL SCIENCES (ACADEMIC YEAR 2011/12)

Education for the tourism industry has been associated with the University of Łódź since 1977 (their evolution has been fully presented by LISZEWSKI 2006, 2008). The current course – *Turystryka i Rekreacja* (Tourism and Recreation) is divided into two separated stages: a three-year *licencjat* (bachelor equivalent) and a two-year *magister* (master's equivalent). Courses are conducted both as full-time and weekend part-time.

In 1995-2000 in the journal *Turyzm* there was a cycle of publications on the profiles of candidates for degrees in the Geography of Tourism and the Hospitality Industry, based on data collected during the recruitment process (JAKÓBCZYK-GRYSZKIEWICZ & WŁODARCZYK 1995, JAŹDZEWSKA & WOLANIUK 1996, STASIAK & WŁODARCZYK 1997, RZEŃCA & SZKUP 1998, LAWIN & SZKUP 2000). In the following years such research was abandoned. This situation was recognized as inappropriate because knowing students' needs may to some extent contribute to a better adjustment of the curriculum to their expectations. For this reason in the academic year 2010/11 similar research was conducted among first year 'Tourism and Recreation' students (MARO-KULCZYCKA 2010). Directly asking candidates questions has become impossible, as they no longer take an entrance exam (recruitment is based on the results of final exams at the end of school and over the internet). In the academic year 2011/12 this research was undertaken for a second time.

The main objective was to find answers to the following questions: where did students find out about the course; why did they choose it; and what were their expectations and future plans? In addition, they were asked about certificates in the field of tourism, membership of tourism organizations, tourism

trips in 2011 and whether 'Tourism and Recreation' was their only degree course.

Research was conducted during classes on November 6th and 20th 2011 (weekend part-time course) and November 10th and 17th (full-time course). The questionnaire consisted of nine questions (both open and closed) and a further nine on background personal details. The goal was to question all students but after conducting the survey and checking the data it proved impossible to achieve.

A total of 96 students filled in the questionnaire correctly – 63 from the full-time course and 33 from the weekend part-time course. There were slightly more female than male (52 out of 96 respondents). As to age structure, a strong predominance of respondents aged 19-20 can be noticed (84.7% of students, fig. 1).

Overall, for the vast majority of respondents 'Tourism and Recreation' is their only degree course – only four had another.

The majority of respondents had attended a *liceum* (secondary/high school), and significantly less – a *technikum* (technical secondary school, table 1).

Table 1. Schools attended

Type of school attended (n=96) as a percentage	
<i>Liceum</i> (secondary/high school)	68.8
<i>Liceum profilowane</i> (vocationally specialised secondary school)	6.3
<i>Technikum</i> (technical secondary school)	18.8
Others	6.3

Source: author's research.

Among the 18 from a *technikum*: seven were from a hotel administration profile, three from economics and catering profiles, one each from logistics, ICT, horse breeding, sanitary installation, and landscape architecture. Six from schools abroad (in Belarus and in Kazakhstan) and from a music school chose 'others'.

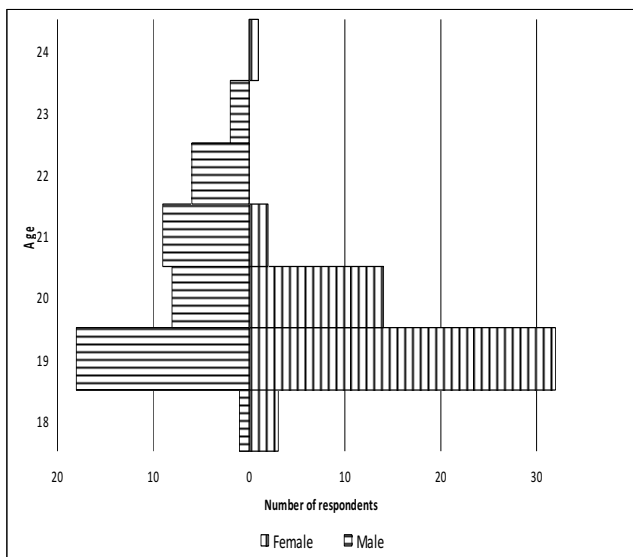


Fig. 1. Gender and age structure of respondents
Source: author's research

Respondents were also asked about their final school exams. In addition to the obligatory Polish, a foreign language and mathematics, 81 students had taken geography (61 at extended level), 13 social studies (8 at extended level), eight history and three biology.

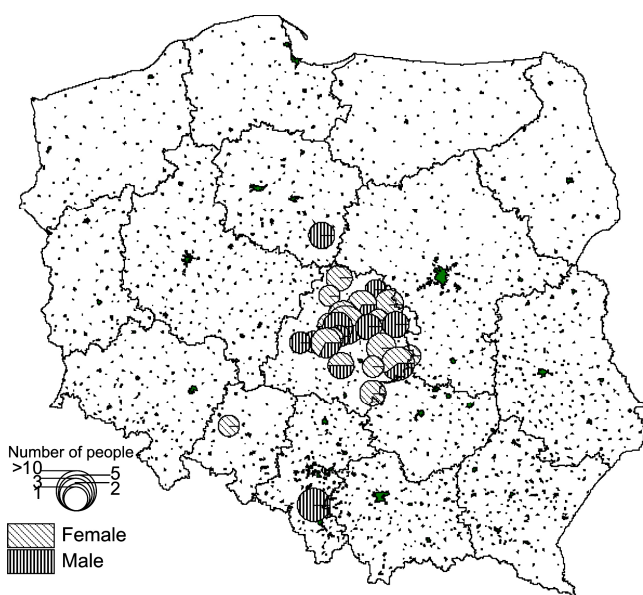


Fig. 2. Students' home towns
Source: author's research

The respondents were asked about their home town (fig. 2). Out of 96, six came from abroad: Belarus (4), Kazakhstan and Ukraine. As for Poland, the vast majority of students (91.7%) came from Łódź Voivodeship. Only four came from others - Silesian (2), Opolskie and Kujawsko-Pomorskie. This situation shows the regional focus of the 'Tourism and Recreation' course at the University of Łódź, confirmed as more than a half of the students from Łódź Voivodeship live outside of the city. This structure is similar to that from the previous academic year when 88.1% of respondents came from Łódź Voivodeship (MAROKULCZYCKA 2010).

The respondents were also asked to state their current place of residence (fig. 3). All students live in Łódź Voivodeship - the vast majority (70.8%) in Łódź itself. Taking the type of course into account, more full-time students live in Łódź. This situation is probably due to practical reasons as daily commuting from other towns is expensive, time consuming or often simply impossible. Full-time students that do not live in Łódź live in places close to the city (Zgierz, Konstantynów Łódzki) or in towns with convenient communications (Koluszki). Almost 3/4 of respondents live with their families (parents or grandparents) while 15.6% rent flat with friends. Slightly more than 10% live in a student hostel.

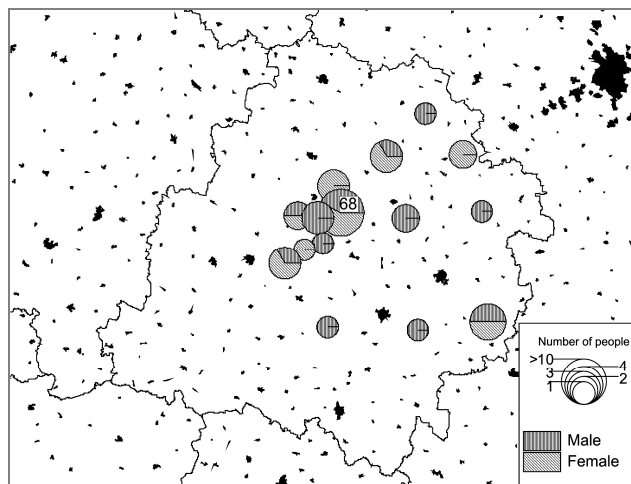


Fig. 3. Respondents' current places of residence in Łódź Voivodeship
Source: author's research

The most common sources of information about the 'Tourism and Recreation' course were those collected from friends or family and also from the official webpage of the *Instytut Geografii Miast i Turyzmu* (Institute of Urban Geography and Tourism). These sources covered 80% of the total (fig. 4). From the perspective of course designers this should be considered successful, as 'word-of-mouth' information demonstrates the positive image of the 'Tourism and

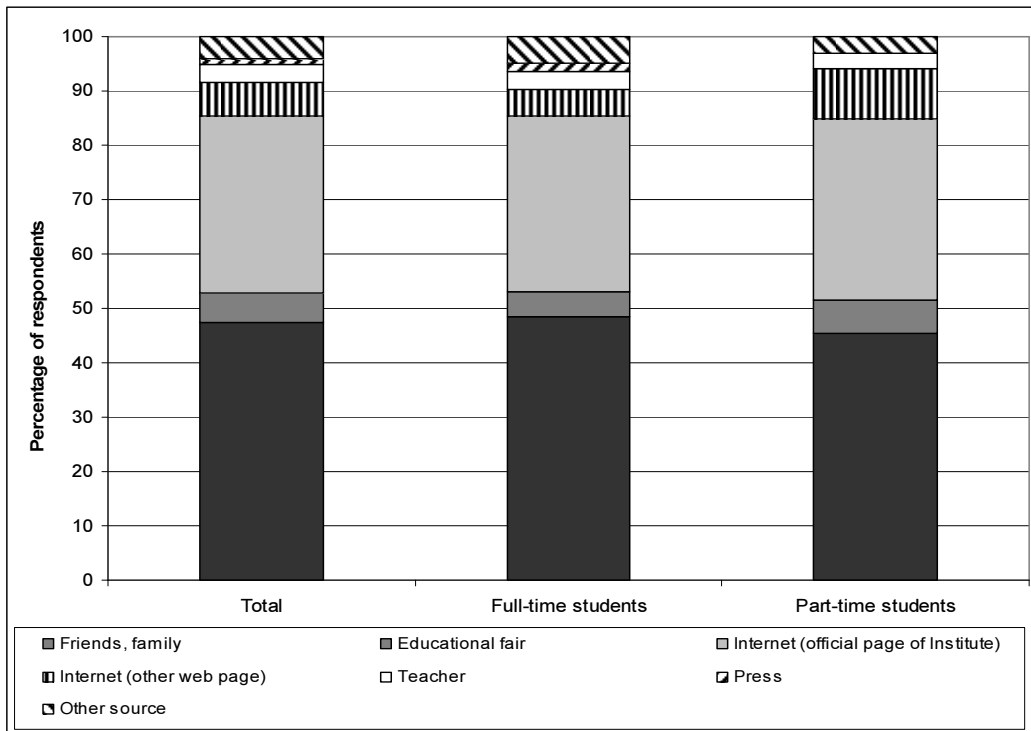


Fig. 4. Sources of knowledge about the 'Tourism and Recreation' course at the University of Łódź
S o u r c e: author's research

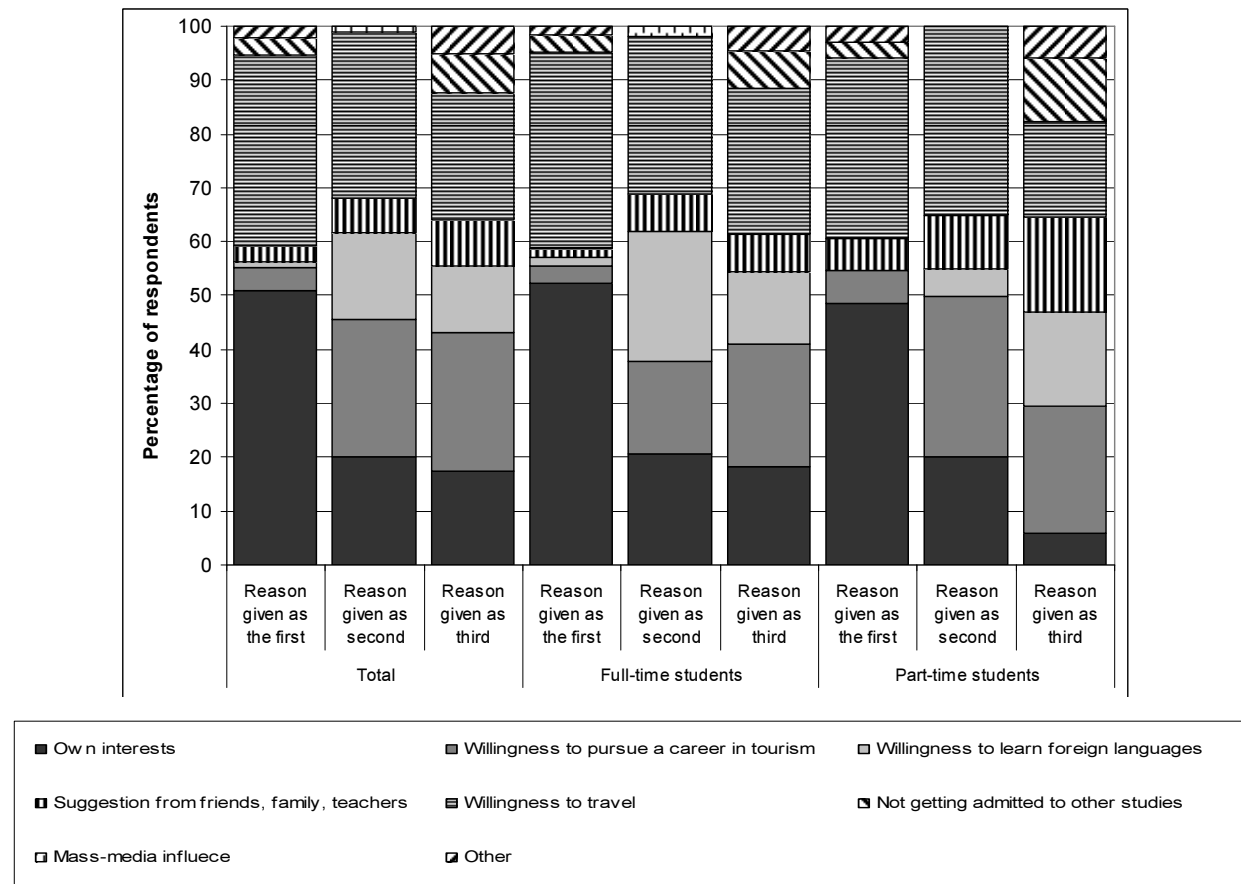


Fig. 5. Reasons for choosing 'Tourism and Recreation' at the University of Łódź (In each case in the graph 'as first etc reason')
S o u r c e: author's research

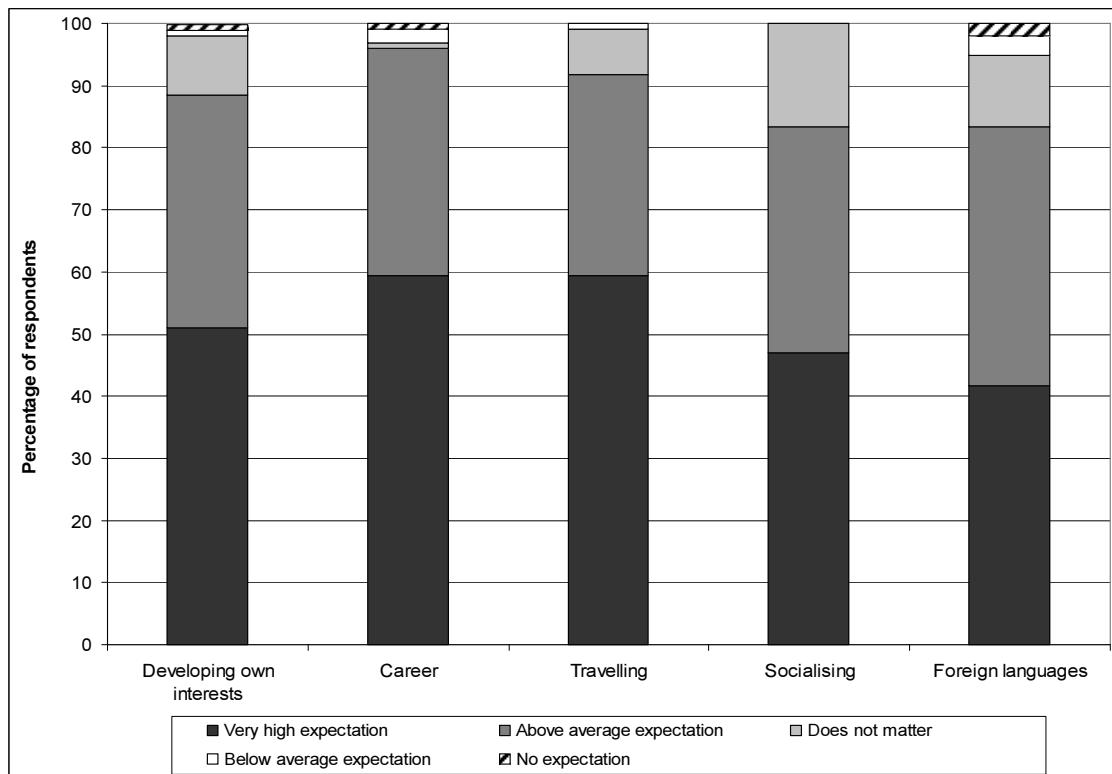


Fig. 6. Students' expectations from the course
S o u r c e: author's research

Recreation' course among those interested in higher education. The importance of the official webpage shows that it is well-constructed and well-run. The popularity of the webpage has been taken into account by the course designers and in December 2011 a new, more interactive version was launched.

Other webpages (e.g. the official page on the University of Łódź) were a third, but considerably less important, source, mentioned by 6.3% of respondents (9.1% among weekend part-time students).

Another issue considered was the reason for choosing this course (fig. 5). Respondents gave a total of 271 responses, giving ranks from 1 (the most important) to 3 (the least important). At least two reasons were named by 94 students and three by 81. The most common were 'own interests' (82 responses, 49 with rank '1') and 'willingness to travel and learn about the world' (73, 34 with rank '1'). The third reason (but less often declared – 49) was 'willingness to pursue a career in tourism'. It should be mentioned that this reason was generally given in second or third place; it was considered more important by weekend part-time students than for full-time students. Other reasons were 'a willingness to study foreign languages' (26) and 'suggestions from friends or family' (16). Further reasons were given only by a very small number of students.

The reasons for choosing 'Tourism and Recreation' as a course were to a large extent consistent with the reasons given by candidates for the Geography of Tourism and the Hospitality Industry in 1994-1999 and by students of 'Tourism and Recreation' in the academic year 2010/11 (JAKÓBCZYK-GRYSZKIEWICZ & WŁODARCZYK 1995, JAŹDZEWSKA & WOLANIUK 1996, STASIAK & WŁODARCZYK 1997, RZEŃCA & SZKUP 1998, LAWIN & SZKUP 2000, MARO-KULCZYCKA 2010).

In 1994-9 the primary motivation was 'learning about the subject' which was given by between 20% and 40% of candidates. An important reason was also 'own interest in tourism and geography' mentioned by 25.9% (1994) and 50% in 1996. Aspiring students also mentioned 'willingness to travel and learn about the world', a factor for 33% of candidates (1996) to more than 70% (1998-9). In the academic year 2010/11 the most important reasons were 'own interests' (76 answers) and 'willingness to travel and learn about the world' (73 answers).

The next question referred to expectations from the course (fig. 6). Respondents were asked to select to what extent they expect to fulfil each of five given elements (on a scale from 'very high expectation' to 'no expectation').

Students expect to find a job after the course: 95.8% had an 'above average expectation' or a 'very high

expectation'. Almost equally popular expectations were travelling (91.7% respondents had had an 'above average expectation' or a 'very high expectation') and developing own interests (88.5%). Less important were socializing and learning foreign languages, but they still had a high rate of responses (83.3% each) in the top two categories.

Respondents were also asked about certificates held in the field of tourism and about their membership of tourism organizations. In both cases negative answers dominated. Only 14.6% of students had any certificate and just 6.3% were members of tourism organizations. Among certificates the most popular were those connected with sailing and swimming – five students were qualified 'yacht sailors' (*patent żeglarski*) and four were lifeguards (*ratownik WOPR*). Four respondents were entitled to look after children on summer camps (*opiekun kolonijny*), two were qualified holiday organizers (*animator czasu wolnego*) and two had completed a climbing course. As for tourism organizations, five respondents were members of *Polskie Towarzystwo Turystyczno-Krajozawcze* (Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society) and one *Polskie Towarzystwo Schronisk Młodzieżowych* (the Polish branch of Hostelling International). As in the previous academic year, this situation seems to be worrying in the context of reasons for choosing a course. If 'own interests' were the most important factor, why are they not followed up by practical action? It should be noted that this situation recalls a negative trend visible among candidates for the Geography of Tourism and the Hospitality Industry degree in 1994-9 (LAWIN & SZKUP 2000). During this period membership of such organizations dropped significantly from 33% in 1994 through 25% in 1996 to 9.1% in 1999.

In the following question, respondents were asked about their future plans (both personal and professional). Students usually mentioned several and in total 99 career-related plans were presented (some students had no plans, some had more than one), with 67.7% connected with tourism (fig. 7). The biggest group was 'Career in tourism' (unspecified) - approximately one fifth. A further group of respondents (one third) simply want to have a professional job, not necessarily in tourism.

As for personal plans, the most common were graduating (18 times) and travelling (15 times). Moreover, nine want to live abroad, four to learn foreign languages, to meet new people or simply to be happy. Other plans were mentioned by just one or two students, and among the most original were becoming a dance instructor, film editor, a landlord, a stunt performer and a horse riding instructor.

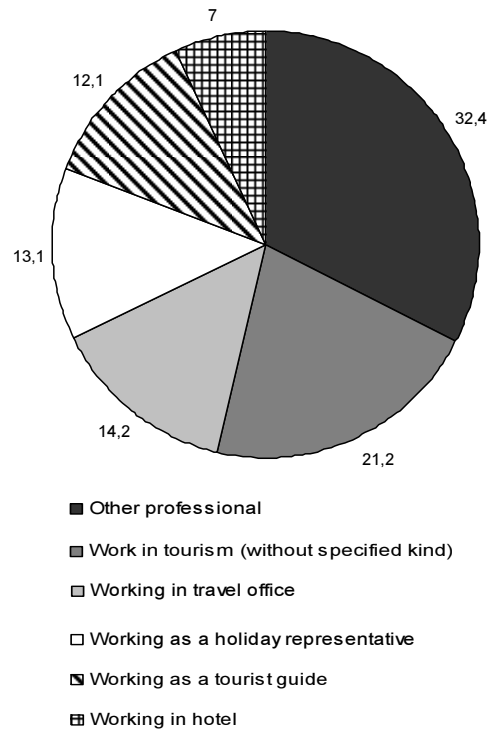


Fig. 7. Professional plans of respondents
Source: author's research

Future plans are to a large extent similar to those declared by candidates for Geography of Tourism and the Hospitality Industry in 1994-6 and 'Tourism and Recreation' in the academic year 2011/11 (table 2). Compared to previous years there were fewer plans connected with tourism.

Table 2. Future plans declared by candidates for Geography of Tourism and the Hospitality Industry (1994-6) and by first-year students of 'Tourism and Recreation' in 2010 and 2011

Plans	Year				
	1994	1995	1996	2010 (n=104)	2011 (n=114)
	%				
Travelling	23.1	-	27	18.3	13.2
Working as a tourist guide ^a	23.8	23	47.7	9.6	10.5
Working in travel office/hotel	36.2	50	26.7	21.1	18.4
Working in tourism industry (unspecified)	-	-	11.1	26.0	18.4
Working as a holiday representative	-	-	-	10.6	11.4
Other professional plans	6.8	-	-	14.4	28.1

Source: JAKÓBCZYK-GRYSZKIEWICZ & WŁODACZYK (1995), JAŹDŹEWSKA & WOLANIUK (1996), RZEŃCA & SZKUP (1998), STASIAK & WŁODARZYK (1997), LAWIN & SZKUP 2000, MARO-KULCZYCKA (2010) and author's research.

Compared to previous research, the current questionnaire was extended with a question about students' tourism travel in 2011. In this year $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents had participated in such activity. Among 71 travellers, the most popular country was Poland – 52 people – with the most popular places being Zakopane (14) and Mielno (8). As for foreign destinations, five travelled to Spain, four each to the Czech Republic and France, and three to each of Bulgaria, Italy, Germany, Turkey, Egypt and England (table 3).

Table 3. Students' travel destinations in 2011

Country	Number	Country	Number
Poland	52	Croatia	2
Spain	5	Hungary	2
Czech Republic	4	Slovakia	2
France	4	Tunisia	1
Bulgaria	3	Albania	1
Italy	3	Russia	1
Germany	3	Ukraine	1
Turkey	3	Denmark	1
Egypt	3	Lithuania	1
'England'	3	Montenegro	1
Netherlands	2	Sweden	1
Austria	2	USA	1
Greece	2	Slovenia	1

Source: author's research.

Having taken into consideration the aims of the research it can be stated that:

1. The most common sources of information about the 'Tourism and Recreation' Course at the University of Łódź were from friends or family (47.4% responses) and the official webpage of the Institute of Urban Geography and Tourism (32.6%).
2. The most important reasons for choosing this course were the students' own interests (30.2%) and willingness to travel and learn about the world (30.3%). Slightly less significant was the opportunity to pursue a career in tourism (18.1%).
3. Students expect from the course an opportunity to find a job (95.8% had an 'above average expectation' or a 'very high expectation') and the chance to travel (91.7% an 'above average expectation' or a 'very high expectation'). Developing their own interests was also a significant expectation.

4. In the future 67.7% would be willing to work in the field of tourism. The most popular personal plans are to graduate and to travel around the world.

It may seem worrying that most students do not have any tourism certificates and do not belong to tourism organizations. This means that their declared personal interests are not being followed by practical action. However, their interest may also be developed during tourism travel, in which 76% of respondents participated in 2011. Those were mainly domestic trips.

The profile of first-year students of 'Tourism and Recreation' at the University of Łódź has been prepared for a second time but does not allow conclusions to be drawn about existing or non-existing long-term trends. It should be noted, however, that conducting this type of research may provide a better understanding of students' needs and expectations. It is especially important in the context of the recruitment process. Current electronic recruitment, based on points from final school exams, does not allow advance knowledge of those who are going to begin the course at the University of Łódź.

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