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## UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND LEVELS OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE IN TOURISM AND RECREATION STUDENTS

**Abstract:** Social competences are one of the most important areas of an individual's functioning in the surrounding environment. They are so important that, apart from knowledge and skills, they have become one of higher education's outcomes. The level of social competence depends not only on the internal qualities of an individual but also on environmental factors. This article aims to present the findings of research concerning the level of social competences attained by students of tourism and recreation throughout their higher education and comprises quantitative and qualitative research methods. The results indicate that students show only average levels of social competence even though their academic teachers declare that education outcomes have been accomplished in this field.

**Keywords:** social competences, higher education, students of tourism and recreation.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Social competences are an essential element (ability) that makes it possible for an individual to function effectively in society (Argyle, 1998; Goleman, 1997). However, it is quite difficult to define social competences, and this has caused much controversy among psychologists from various fields who disagree on its definition, such as the one stated above. In the literature, the term is frequently used interchangeably with social, interpersonal, interactive, or communication skills (Jakubowska, 1996). According to Argyle (1999), social competence is an ability, the mastery of social skills, which make it possible to generate the desired effect in social relationships. The author also points to two categories of social skills: common social skills that every person needs, and professional social skills that are necessary for many occupations. Jakubowska (1996) assumes that social competences comprise such elements of a relationship as mental dispositions and the ability to receive and send messages that are congruent with a situational pattern or an individual's set goal. This is, therefore, the communicative dimension to social competence. The interpersonal approach has been conceptualized by Spitzberg and Cupach (2002) who proposed static and dynamic understandings of social competence. The former assumes that interpersonal skills are

behaviours that aim at establishing, maintaining and ending human relationships, while the latter describes them as intentional behaviours, adapted to the situation, learned, and controlled by the individual.

Greenspan (1981) defines social competence as a disposition that determines success in interpersonal relationships, and that it depends on intellectual abilities and personality traits. Matczak (2001), on the other hand, extends the concept and adds the interaction of personality and intellectual factors with the environment in which a person functions where a significant role is played by so-called social training, i.e. the actions taken by an individual during the course of their lives. It is, therefore, an interactive model.

### 2. SOCIAL COMPETENCES AS A PART OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Social competences do not only play a key role in the modern world, but they also constitute one of the three main elements of higher education outcomes under the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the

European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (*Europejskie Ramy Kwalifikacji...*, 2008; see also: Bereźnicki, 2011; Nowakowska, Pietkiewicz, 2016)<sup>1</sup>.

Learning outcomes express what an individual knows, understands, and is able to do at the end of a learning process, and are characterized by three categories – knowledge, skills and competences (*Europejskie Ramy Kwalifikacji...*, 2009). In Poland, these categories have been defined by the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) (Chłoń-Domińczak, Sławiński, Kraśniewski, 2015; Rydzewska-Włodarczyk, 2017; Sławiński, 2017).

Learning outcomes offer a means by which attention can be focused on the actual achievements of students, and this represents a more realistic and genuine measure of the value of education than measures of teaching input (Maher, 2004). Learning outcomes are strongly integrated into the study programme, and as Kraśniewski (2009) points out, because of their meaning for the educational process, outcomes should be measurable and measured by the educational institution. Therefore, the student's qualifications are confirmed by an appropriate diploma.

This research aimed to determine the levels of social competence among students of tourism and recreation at the University of Physical Education in Kraków (AWF), and its characteristics have been included in a document entitled *Description of learning outcomes (Opis kierunkowych efektów kształcenia dla studiów I stopnia...*, 2020; *Opis kierunkowych efektów kształcenia dla studiów II stopnia...*, 2020).

The description of learning outcomes for first degree studies states that students who, within the adopted educational framework, attend lectures and participate on exercises, camps and internships should attain social competences that include the skills to:

- complement and improve qualifications through the autonomous acquisition of knowledge and skills in the selected professional specialty;
- realistically assess their abilities and competences, in particular, perform reliably and safely tasks in the field of tourism and recreation;
- be guided by the principles of professional ethics;
- demonstrate care for the safety of those participating in recreational activities and tourist events;
- work in a team;
- communicate effectively with people, including under stress, provide them with information related to a programme of activities and ensure safety, as well as correctly interpret the expectations of participants in the activities;
- make participants with different educational backgrounds, interested in tourist events and recreational activities using appropriate knowledge, and methodology;

– express opinions on professional matters related to tourism and recreation (*Opis kierunkowych efektów kształcenia dla studiów I stopnia...*, 2020).

Whereas, the learning outcomes for second-degree students should include:

- autonomously complement their knowledge, realistically assess competences, be aware of their limitations, but also those that result from the need to protect the interests of others;
- perceive and formulate ethical problems related to their work;
- demonstrate leadership towards a team as well as towards participants in tourist and leisure activities;
- assess the conditions of task realization and define priorities for the activities aimed at their achievement;
- take responsibility for a team carrying out a task;
- manage tasks in a way that ensures the safety of co-workers and participants of tourist events and recreational activities;
- formulate independent opinions on selected aspects of professional activity in the field of tourism and recreation, based on factual arguments;
- be enterprising (*Opis kierunkowych efektów kształcenia dla studiów II stopnia...*, 2020).

Such a definition of academic learning outcomes in the context of social competences clearly indicates how broad, but also how incoherent and intuitive at times, is the understanding of this category in higher education.

There are discrepancies between the description of social competences realized within the tourism and recreation course at the University of Physical Education in Kraków (AWF) and the definitions proposed by Argyle (1999), Jakubowska (1996) and Greenspan (1981), which require further unification and a clear and unambiguous definition.

Social competences stated in the Polish Qualifications Framework (Chłoń-Domińczak, Sławiński, Kraśniewski, Chmielecka, 2017) refer to a wide range of pro-social or even ethical behaviours. In the tourism and recreation courses at the University of Physical Education in Kraków (AWF), social competences refer to practical dimensions and focus on a graduate's functioning in the industry related to their field of study (*Opis kierunkowych efektów kształcenia dla studiów I stopnia...*, 2020; *Opis kierunkowych efektów kształcenia dla studiów II stopnia...*, 2020) which involves a wide range of situations requiring interpersonal and relational skills.

In the current study, the biggest challenge, however, was to define the social competences shaped in a group of students. Should we assume their purposefulness (Argyle, 1998), i.e. social effectiveness, or the interpersonal approach (Spitzberg, Cupach, 2002), i.e. the ability to create healthy and effective social relationships. Indeed, a precise definition of social competences within the learning outcomes framework would facilitate

a better design of the pedagogical means and methods needed to acquire them.

Given such a broad and fuzzy conceptualization of social competences, the analysis of this phenomenon in the context of academic education implies the inclusion of the concept that is a) most universal, and b) covers the broadest range of social situations. Their understanding, following Greenspan (1981), as an individual variable of personality that determines interpersonal success, based on the interaction of temperamental, social, and intellectual factors, best meets these needs. Additional experiential value is provided by the development of the model developed by Matczak (2001) which proposes an interactive approach extending it to the interaction with the environment. In her concept, the author defines social competences as complex skills that enable individuals to regulate emotions and cope with various social situations effectively. Thus, it has been chosen for the present study where social competences are acquired based on individual predispositions and social training. According to this model, academic influence as broadly understood, is structured and purposeful, and is considered one of the elements of social training. It is worth noting that its intensity is determined by individual characteristics (personality and temperament), and its effectiveness is moderated by the level of intellectual development. These factors work in interaction with each other, and the individual is formed by education and socialisation, while at the same time manifesting his or her activity in shaping personality and identity.

### 3. UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AS A FORM OF SOCIAL TRAINING

Insight into the role of academic education as social training is the key to understanding the diversity of social competences in a group of tourism and recreation students. In the interactive concept of shaping social competences, academic education is conceived as an element of training which, together with student temperamental and personality traits, determines the effectiveness of these activities. Thus, the analysis of the interaction of social competences and academic influences in a tourism and recreation course requires the inclusion of, at least to some extent, situational and personal perspectives while taking into account developmental dynamics.

Accordingly, social competences can be shaped during so-called training which, at the academic level, relates to the implementation of the educational programme. Interaction with academic teachers and the teaching methods used during lectures, exercises,

laboratories, camps and fieldwork, as well as interaction with potential or current employers during internships, and also participation in the Erasmus programme, are key factors. As Nowak-Dziemianowicz (2012) puts it, education is the type of social training that must meet local, national, and global needs.

Nevertheless, it is surprising that the assessment of learning outcomes in the context of the continuously growing role of social competences, is performed without any external criteria, at a subjective and arbitrary level. There is only limited feedback in the form of student self-assessment and lecturer assessment. This is perhaps due to the fact that the formation of study programmes based on the European and Polish Qualification Framework gives universities far-reaching autonomy to determine faculties, study plans, and educational outcomes (Chmielecka, 2010; Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2012). As a result, there is no objective system that would provide their adequate evaluation at the academic level and at the later stage of a graduate's life. What is more, there is a surprisingly limited number of publications on such an important issue (Pacana, Woźny, Sobczyńska, 2016; Piróg, 2016; Rocki, 2018; Smółka, 2008), and in the case of the tourism and recreation area, they require updating (Rozycki, 1998).

One of the key factors that determine the effectiveness of training is knowledge about the initial level and quality of competences already acquired as well as accurate and reliable feedback on performance. While we possess some knowledge of the social competences of employees in the tourism sector (Alejziak, 2014; Burzyński, 2019), the initial level of these competences in students admitted to the university is unknown. Academic education should aim to prepare students for the labour market, i.e. to meet the needs and expectations of employers, and while we know what knowledge and skills the student has after secondary education, the levels of social competence can only be based on assumptions.

### 4. PURPOSE AND METHOD

The research aimed to determine the levels of social competence of students of the tourism and recreation faculty and their interaction with educational experiences at an academic level. It was assumed that the level should increase throughout the academic course, in particular through participation on professional practice and the Erasmus international exchange programme in a culturally diverse environment. The study sought to answer to what extent higher education differentiates the levels of social competence of tourism and recreation students between undergraduate and

graduate studies. To further clarify the problem, some detailed research questions were posed:

1. What are the levels of social competence of those studying tourism and recreation?
2. Does the experience of academic education differentiate students of tourism and recreation in terms of social competences?
3. What is the relationship between participation on the exchange programmes for international student education, such as the Erasmus programme and others, and the levels of social competence?
4. What is the relationship between the internships of tourism and recreation students and their levels of social competence?

In order to determine the levels of social competence, Matczak's (2001) Social Competence Questionnaire (SCQ) was used to determine the levels and scope of students' social competence in three areas:

- effectiveness of behaviour in social exposure situations (S.E.),
- effectiveness of behaviour in situations requiring assertiveness (A),
- effectiveness of behaviour in intimate situations (I).

The SCQ is a standardised psychological tool<sup>2</sup> that is used to analyse the selected social competences. 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).

The author's own questionnaire for the Self-Assessment of Student's Professional Achievement, to determine the following elements of education: type of secondary school completed and class profile, year of study, grades obtained, participation in internships (their length and the grade received), participation on international educational exchange programmes such as Erasmus and others, involvement in a second field of study. The questionnaire included categorised questions on a 5-point Likert scale and open-ended questions about students' professional development perceptions<sup>3</sup>.

In order to determine the levels of social competence in the group of tourism and recreation students, the results of the research were subjected to statistical analysis and the Statistica 10 program (StatSoft Polska) was applied to carry it out. Intergroup differences were examined using a Student's t-test for independent variables, Mann-Whitney U test (when the numbers were too small, or the distribution of results was not close to a standard), single-factor analysis of ANOVA variance (when comparing more than two groups) and two-factor analysis of MANOVA variance to examine group × gender interaction. For correlational analysis, Pearson's r and Spearman rho tests were used. A test probability at the level  $p < 0.05$  was assumed to be significant, and a test probability at the level  $p < 0.01$  and  $p < 0.001$  was considered to be highly significant.

Preliminary analysis of the findings of the Social Competence Questionnaire consisted in calculating the results obtained from the SCQ scales: Intimate Contacts Scale (I), Social Exposure Scale (E.S.), Assertiveness Scale (A) and calculation of the total raw result (Total R.R.).

The selection of the research group was purposeful, based on the selected, full-time field of study. Thus, the participants were full-time students of tourism and recreation at the University of Physical Education in Kraków (AWF). The research was conducted in 2019, face to face during classes, using the traditional paper version of research tools. The researcher aimed to attract as many respondents as possible. In total, 660 students were enrolled in the course that year but participation in the research was voluntary. After presenting the purpose of the study and its rationale, the questionnaire "Self-assessment of Student's Professional Achievements" was filled in by 511 students, and the Social Competence Questionnaire by 442.

The respondents were therefore divided into three groups: 1<sup>st</sup> year (1 BA), 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students of undergraduate studies (2-3 BA), and the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year of supplementary MA studies (MA). This division facilitates greater transparency in the presentation of results. However, the analysis conducted for each group did not show the intended effect as differences between the groups were not significant.

## 5. RESULTS

### 5.1. THE SAMPLE

The majority of participants were female (73%), and only one in three respondents was male (27%). The pattern was repeated in all three groups (1 BA: 69.6%; 30.4%; 2-3 BA: 77.0%; 23%; MA: 71.2%; 28.8%) – Figure 1.

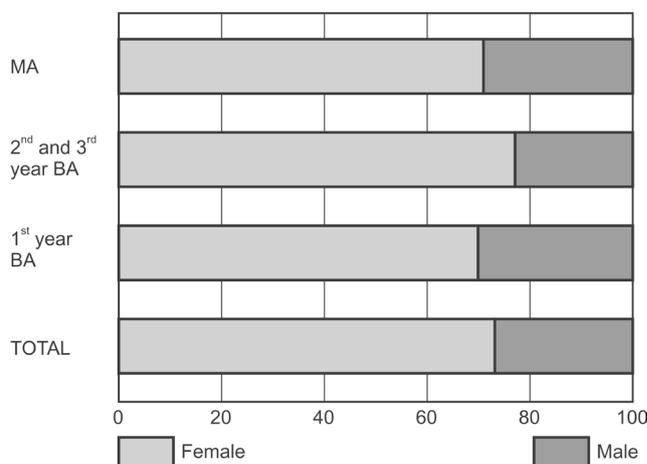


Figure 1. Gender of participants  
Source: author

Most of the respondents graduated from a *liceum* (74.21%), but a quarter of students had completed a technical secondary school (25.79%). A similar pattern was observed at 1 BA (70.06%; 29.94%), 2-3 BA (74.88%; 25.12%), and MA (78.26%; 21.74%) levels Figure 2.

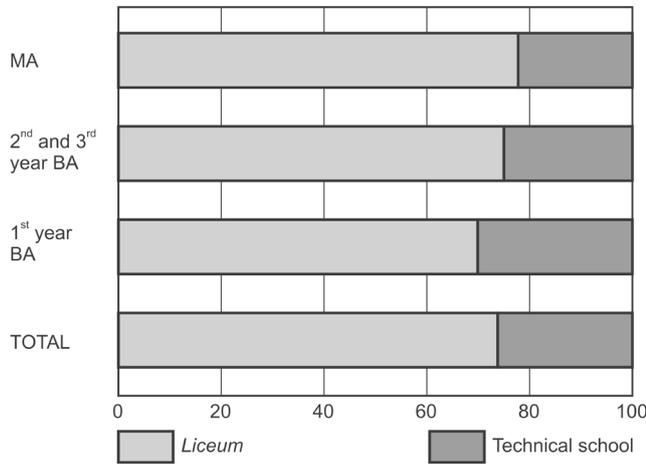


Figure 2. Type of secondary school completed  
Source: author

As far as learning achievements (Figure 3), most of the students had received ‘good’ (60.2%), ‘sufficient’ (26.2%), or ‘very good’ grades (13.6%). A similar pattern was repeated in all three groups: 1 BA (62.7%; 22.3%; 15.1%), 2-3 BA (58.9%; 29.7%, 11.4%) and MA (59.0%; 25.9%; 15.1%). Therefore, the students of tourism and recreation, in general, can be classified as achievers. It is worth highlighting that more than every tenth surveyed student (15.46%) was also enrolled on a second course (thus, only 84.54% studied only tourism and recreation at AWF). The group who attended another course, consisted of MA students (28.1%), almost every third one. On the other hand, on BA studies, it concerned about every tenth respondent (1 BA: 9.5%; 2-3 BA: 11.8%) – Figure 4.

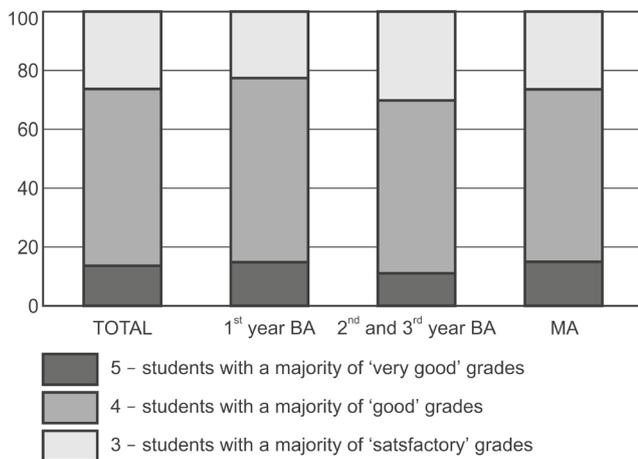


Figure 3. Grades obtained according to respondents  
Source: author

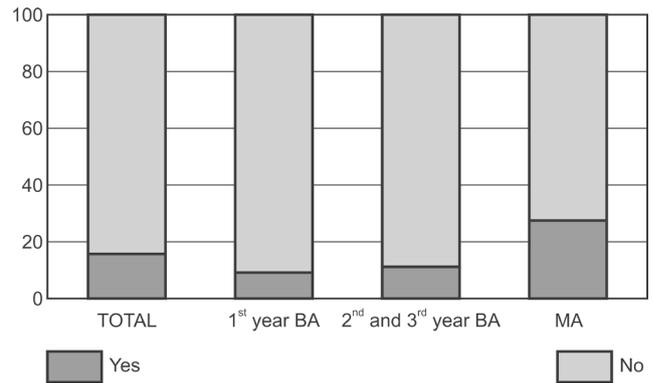


Figure 4. Participation in the second course  
Source: author

### 5.2. THE LEVELS OF COMPETENCE AMONG STUDENTS OF TOURISM AND RECREATION

A MANOVA analysis was used to determine the differences in the levels of social competence between the examined groups, i.e. BA and MA students (with simultaneous consideration of their gender). The results indicating statistically significant differences between the examined groups on an ICS scale (competences determine the effectiveness of behaviour in intimate situations) ( $F(2, 442) = 3.129; \eta^2_p = 0.014; p = 0.045$ ). Post hoc analysis showed that 2-3 BA students have a statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher level of these competences as compared to 1-2 MA, the value of the sub-segmentary eta square ( $\eta^2_p > 0.014$ ) indicates a strong effect (Miles, Shevlin 2001; Cohen 1988; Cohen, Cohen, West, Aiken 2003). No statistically significant differences were found between students of particular years of study, as regards gender, and interaction: group  $\times$  gender ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Descriptive statistics from the SCQ questionnaire are presented on Table 1. The results of statistical analysis presented in the next part of the study refer to these values (averages and standard deviations) in order to indicate intergroup differences.

Additionally, the results were converted into standard (sten) results for the student population. At all scales, the mean sten scores were between 5-6. This confirms that the students of tourism and recreation show an average level of social competence which is in line with another group of students in Matczak (2001).

Interestingly, a similar result, i.e. an average level of social competence, had been obtained in a study conducted by Wierzejska (2016), who used the same research tool among graduates of humanities (journalism and social communication, sociology, psychology, and pedagogy), and science (chemistry, biology and biotechnology, geography) at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the SCQ in the studied groups

| Scale<br>SCQ    |    | BA studies           |             |              |  |             |              | MA studies                               |             |              | Total        |              |              |
|-----------------|----|----------------------|-------------|--------------|--|-------------|--------------|--|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|                 |    | 1 <sup>st</sup> year |             |              | 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> year |             |              | 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> year |             |              |              |              |              |
|                 |    | F<br>(N=82)          | M<br>(N=33) | T<br>(N=115) | F<br>(N=149)                             | M<br>(N=45) | T<br>(N=194) | F<br>(N=96)                              | M<br>(N=37) | T<br>(N=133) | F<br>(N=327) | M<br>(N=115) | T<br>(N=442) |
| ICS             | M  | 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          |
| SES             | M  | 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              | M  | 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          |
| Result<br>Total | M  | 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         |

Key: F – females; M – males; T – total; I – competences determining the effectiveness of behaviour in intimate situations; E.S. – competences determining the effectiveness of behaviour in social exposure situations; A – competences determining the effectiveness of behaviour in situations requiring assertiveness.

Source: author.

### 5.3. INTERNSHIPS

Internships are integral element of university education and the educational programme in the field of tourism and recreation and students are placed in companies that provide tourist or recreational services. The aims of the internship are to acquire further practical skills, develop key graduate attributes and skills, gain working experience, and accept responsibility for tasks, develop attitudes and standards appropriate to career objectives (Busby, 2003), but also provide important opportunities for training that can affect students' expectations and perceptions of career choices in the tourism industry (Kim, Park, 2013). What is more, the internship helps students to confront theory with practice (Busby, 2003) and prepare the student to enter the labour market.

The most frequently mentioned social competences in this category are teamwork skills, communication skills, and ethics (e.g., awareness and taking responsibility for one's actions), which are the elements of learning outcomes (Klimkiewicz, 2015; Maertz, Stoeberl, Marks, 2014; Narayanan, Olk, Fukami, 2010; Templeton, Updyke, Bennett, 2012; Ward, Yates, 2013).

Therefore, this study also sought to determine whether the internships related to the respondents' level of social competence. The length of the internships accomplished by the participants depended on the year of study, and type of secondary school, i.e. *liceum* or technical school<sup>4</sup>. The results have shown that the majority of students (41.9%) completed internships that lasted one month, and the sample consisted of 3<sup>rd</sup> year BA who had completed a *liceum*. Other respondents took part in slightly longer internships. One out of five students participated in a two-month internship (19.0%), a three-month internship (10.0%), a four-month

internship (3.1%), and a five-month internship (2.5%). The most extended internship, i.e., the five-month one, was carried out by second-year MA students who had graduated from a technical school of hotel, catering and tourism. However, 23.5% of the respondents did not complete any internship at the time of the research.

The vast majority of respondents (87.8%) received a 'very good' grade (A) from the internship, others (11.0%) received a 'good' grade (B), and a small group (1.2%) received a 'sufficient' grade (C).

The analysis using Pearson's *r* test did not find any statistically significant correlation between the internship completed by students at secondary school (technical school), at the university or on any of the Social Competence Questionnaire scale.

### 5.4. INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGES AND SOCIAL COMPETENCES

Another dimension of academic experience is participation on an international exchange programme such as Erasmus or other. A multicultural environment might significantly influence the differentiation of social competences among the students who have participated. The Erasmus programme, as confirmed by many studies, facilitates the acquisition of knowledge, provides opportunities for gaining international experience and professional qualifications, supports versatile personal and social development (Alejziak, 2018a; 2018b; Cvikl, Artic, 2013; Dhiman, 2012; Dolga, Filipescu, Popescu-Mitroi, Mazilescu, 2015; Krawczyk-Bryłka, 2014; Milne, Cowie, 2013).

The research shows that more than one out of ten students (12.4%) participated in an exchange. Thus, 87.6% did not take advantage of this opportunity. The

following criteria were taken into account: the stay in general, the duration, the aims (educational, educational plus internship, internship). The results showed that, on average, the stay lasted from one-ten months at secondary and university levels. However, an educational exchange for university students usually took one or two semesters, and internships and practice varied in length and depended on the needs of employers abroad.

The 1<sup>st</sup> year students declared they usually had spent one to three months abroad while at secondary school. The longest time (5-10 months) was found in the group of MA students. The aims of the stays were diverse. The highest number of outgoing students had participated in educational stays abroad (65.8%), every fourth student (23.7%) went on an internship, and every tenth (10.5%) combined education with an internship. As far as the groups of undergraduate and graduate students are concerned, the distribution of percentages showed similar pattern (1 BA: 61.8%; 20.6%; 17.6%; 2-3 BA: 69.6%; 26.1%; 4.3%; MA: 68.4%; 26.3%, 5.3%).

No statistically significant differences were found between the levels of social competence on any dimension between students who participated in exchange programmes and those who did not ( $p > 0.05$ ). Moreover, the length of stay did not indicate any significant correlation with the results of the SCQ ( $p > 0.05$ ). The aim of travel (educational, educational plus internship, internship) did not differentiate the respondents in terms of their social competences.

## 6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The level of social competence determines the quality of relations with other people as well as interpersonal effectiveness and attractiveness. People who possess a high level of social competence have the ability to cooperate, are able to work in a team, solve conflicts and work more effectively (Bandach, 2013; Smółka, 2008). Social competences are, in particular, useful in tourism and recreation services where work is based on the so-called soft skills (Yururur, Koc, Taskin, Boz, 2018) – the role of which is expected to grow (Czarnik et al., 2019). Soft skills are perceived as critical skills for employment in general, but they also enhance the employability of graduates within the tourism and hospitality industry. Employers seek to take on comprehensively educated employees that are not only knowledgeable but also competent in both technical and interpersonal skills (Chan, 2011).

The present research assumed that academic activity, the educational programme, and the learning outcomes in the area of social competences constitute an effective form of social training for students of tourism and recreation. It was also asserted that quantitative

and qualitative changes to social competences take place in the course of Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes. Therefore, older students are expected to score more highly on the Social Competence Questionnaire scales than their younger counterparts. This study has not confirmed that notion. Nonetheless, social training is just one of the dimensions that determine the acquisition and effectiveness of social competences. The other two comprise the temperamental and intellectual traits of an individual. According to Matczak (2001), the interplay of all three factors constitutes a category that a curriculum and its effectiveness aspire to. Consequently, without knowledge about students' temperamental traits, or level of intelligence (in particular social intelligence), only a specific part of the resulting variability in the social competence category can be explained reliably.

Surprisingly, the students with shorter academic experience scored higher in social competences only on the I scale (competences determining the effectiveness of behaviour in intimate situations). However, it should be noted that the present study had a cross-sectional design, and in this particular education context, the students did not constitute a homogeneous group. Additionally, the verification that learning outcomes, in particular, social competences have been attained in an academic context, is declarative and based on the subjective evaluation of an academic teacher, rather than an external criterion.

It was asserted that students' participation on international exchange programmes (educational and internships) is associated with a higher level of social competence. Interestingly, the findings did not confirm this notion for any of the considered criteria, such as the type of stay (to study, work, or study and work), nor the length of the programme (from 1 to 10 months). Thus, participation on international exchange programmes was unrelated to the development of social competences among students.

Other benefits of foreign exchange programmes have been identified in Alejziak's research (2018a) such as improvement in foreign languages, acquiring and broadening general knowledge, learning the culture of the visited country, knowing other educational methods, improving the ability to cope with difficult life situations, and becoming more responsible. The experience of learning and working abroad has been found to predict an increase in cultural sensitivity (Yurur, Koc, Taskin, Boz, 2018). Additionally, Jacob, Kühhirt, Rodrigues (2019) pointed to the superiority of academic education in Western Europe in the opinion of young people. Other research revealed that students who go abroad do not consciously consider their personal development goals (Petzold, Moog, 2018), and sometimes treat the exchange programme as a great adventure and entertainment (Alejziak, 2019). It should also be noted

that these participants had not filled out a standardized psychological tool examining social competences, but a survey concerning their opinions.

Professional practice is an integral part of academic training, and it reflects the working environment of a selected profession. Therefore, it was assumed that the length of internship and the grade obtained by students would mediate their level of social competence. However, the majority of the students received 'very good' grades from internships, and the groups were hard to differentiate. Also, the acquisition of social competences is considered a process, and thus the duration time of internships that are 1 to 5-months long is undoubtedly too short to notice any effects. Nevertheless, the internships constitute an important stage in the life of a young person (although very short), and affect their development.

The findings of the present research seem quite surprising in light of the existing data and interestingly, no differences across the three groups of students were found. Having assumed that social competences are shaped in the course of academic education, it could be expected that these skills would develop along with the academic seniority of the students. The average score obtained by the participants in terms of social competences might result from a shared conviction that the role of a university is to educate. What is more, many academic teachers believe that their role is to 'teach'. Wasielewski (2014) points out that, even though academics declare and assume the importance of academic teaching, it is clear that they focus more on academic work which determines their development and professional advancement.

On the other hand, Brzezińska and colleagues (2011) noticed that the contemporary young exhibit features of 'deferred adulthood', which leads to entering adulthood later in life. Thus, the period of study is considered as additional time to shape their identity and personality (Brzezińska, Kaczan, Piotrowski, Rękosiewicz, 2011).

The present research had a cross-sectional design. For this reason, results that indicate a lack of differences between groups in subsequent years, and the levels of social competence attained assumed by academic teachers, should be interpreted very carefully. The two-stage system of education and recruitment at universities results in the fact that the students in the third group (MA) are potentially graduates of other universities, and sometimes even other faculties. Thus, the finding confirms the initial assumption concerning the need for evaluation of these competences. Also, the forms for the assessment of social competences should have methodological validity and reliability while assuming student privacy. The criteria for self-evaluation and the arbitrary assessment by lecturers are too subjective to flexibly modify the objectives related to the development of social competences in the student population.

Another discussion area is the nature of the goals. Social competences are personality traits, and their development requires targeted actions that are developing or corrective, but sometimes only intensive, workshop-like interventions can produce desired results (Muralidhar et al., 2016). The goal should be autonomy for the students themselves who must demonstrate not only motivation but also readiness for change.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Instead of the term 'learning outcomes,' the term 'teaching outcomes' is also used, which are often treated as synonyms. The prime goal of the modern educational process is to make – the student 'learn', as opposed to 'be taught,' as a result of appropriate teaching methods. In this sense, the term 'learning outcomes' is more relevant to contemporary educational requirements than the more commonly used and accepted name 'teaching outcomes' (Chmielecka, 2010; Poczmańska, Stęchły, 2018). Sławiński (2016) explains, however, that in the Act (2005) – Law on Higher Education, there is a distinction between teaching outcomes that are attained in the teaching process within the study system and learning outcomes that are achieved in the learning process outside the study system. This distinction does not exist outside higher education (*Ustawa*, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Research and psychological consultations in the interpretation of the results: Katarzyna Supernat, M.Sc. Katarzyna Supernat, assistant at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Psychology AWF Kraków.

<sup>3</sup> The Questionnaire for the Self-Assessment of Students' Professional Achievements aimed to determine students' the professional development at various stages of education, including: professional plans, motives for studying tourism and recreation, foreign languages, educational, professional, sporting achievements, professional interests, professional courses and trainings, obtained qualifications confirmed by diplomas or certificates, level and scope of professional experience, i.e. seniority, positions held in the tourism industry sector and other sectors of economy, etc.

<sup>4</sup> In accordance with Annex No. 8 to the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 7 February 2012 on framework teaching plans in public schools (*Załącznik*, 2012), apprenticeships in a technical school shall be implemented in the dimension specified in the curriculum basis for education in professions, in the class determined by the headmaster of the technical school. The dimension of hours of apprenticeship for individual professions is specified in the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 7 February 2012 on the core curriculum of education in professions (*Rozporządzenie*, 2012). The student shall be directed to complete a professional practice in the dimension specified in the said Regulation. The provisions of the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 15 December 2010 on practical vocational training (*Rozporządzenie*, 2010) also apply to vocational training. In accordance with the provision of § 4(3) of the aforementioned regulation, apprenticeships are organised for students in order to apply and deepen the acquired knowledge and professional skills under real working conditions. However, in accordance with the provision of § 4.6 of the said regulation, the scope of knowledge and skills acquired by students during practical classes and apprenticeships, as well as the hours of such classes and apprenticeships shall be determined

by the curriculum for a given profession approved for use in a given school by the headmaster (*Praktyka zawodowa*, 2020). On the Tourism and Recreation course at the Academy of Physical Education in Kraków, the number of work placement hours is stated in the syllabuses that are followed by students who started university studies in 2013-2018 (see: *Plany studiów AWF Kraków*, 2013-2018). At the bachelor's and master's degree courses, the student completed 160 hours of practical training each, which was due to the general academic profile of both the bachelor's and master's courses (*Plany studiów AWF Kraków*, 2013-2018). It is worth explaining that since 2018, undergraduate Tourism and Recreation studies at AWF in Kraków have been of a practical nature. Therefore, students who began in that particular year were obliged to complete their 720 hours during their sixth term. This is a substantial change as regards professional skills compared to the general academic profile that was examined and presented in this article.

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