

FOREIGN STUDENTS AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR POLISH UNIVERSITIES

Aleksander Ostenda, Tetyana Nestorenko

Annotation

In recent years the problem of a constant decrease in the number of university students in Poland has become very prevalent, due to an ever-growing demographic decline.

Universities, having to cope with a deficit of students have started to notice potential student candidates, abroad. Thanks to numerous marketing activities, the number of foreigners studying in Poland has grown each year, It is mostly private schools, which often balance on the break-even point, which supplement their enrollment with students from abroad.

Keywords: Universities, foreign students, demographic decline.

Introduction

Since 1990 Polish higher education has gone through a period of constant and dynamic development, which was caused by an increase in educational aspirations as well as a demographic boom which lasted nearly fifteen years.

Based on a report from the Socrates Intellectual Capital Development Institute entitled “Demographic tsunami” it appears that the number of Polish students in the year 2020 will drop in comparison to the record-breaking year of 2005, from 1.95 million to approx. 1.2 million, meaning to the level of students studying at universities in 2009 [1]. These predictions also show that the decreasing number of students will first and foremost affect private schools. That is why, a wide-scale promotion of Polish universities abroad, has already begun, since foreign students have become a chance for survival for many institutions of higher education.

Methodology

The article is an analysis of the title topic, conducted based on the publications of the Ministry of Higher Education, Central Statistical Office of Poland (CSO) data, press and Internet materials, as well as documents from the Katowice School of Technology.

1. Information regarding those studying at Polish universities

In the recently concluded academic year 2015/2016 in Poland, 1 million 405 thousand students were enrolled at 132 public universities and 302 private ones. This is 64 thousand less than in the previous year [2]. However, the number of foreigners studying in Poland is increasing.

Currently there are 57 thousand foreigners from 158 countries studying in Poland, this being 11 thousand more than in the previous year (an increase of 23%). Foreign students presently constitute 4% of the overall student population in our country (seven years ago it was only 0.6%, while last year 3.2%).

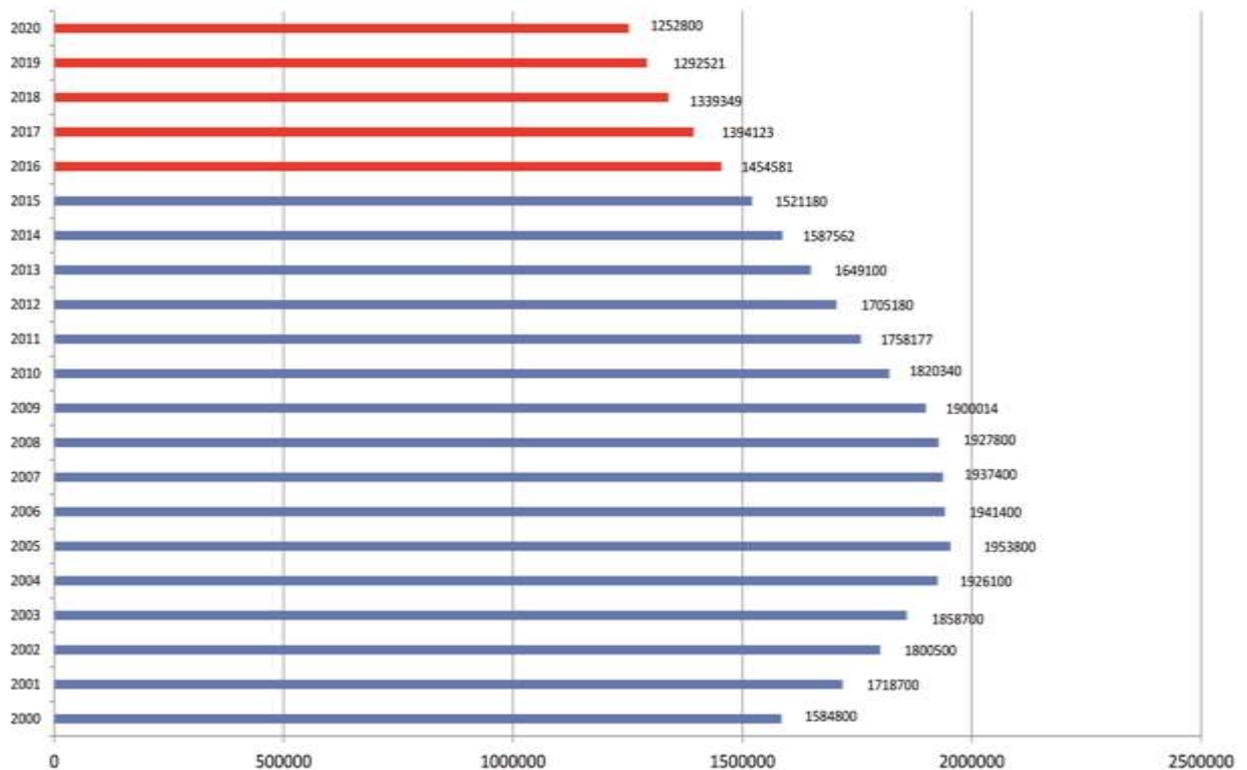
The growth of the internationalization index is a result of not only an increase in the number of foreigners but also a decrease in the overall student population in Poland. In the 2014/2015 academic year the number of students enrolled at Polish universities was smaller by 80,491 than in the previous year and by more than 265,000 as compared to three years ago.

The increase in the number of foreign students in Poland is mainly caused by an unprecedented influx of students from the Ukraine. In the previous academic year there were 23,329 such students – meaning 8206 more than the year before. They make-up more than 50% of the total number of foreign students (the year before this figure was 8% lower). The rapid growth of this figure is caused by a consistent, ten-year strategic marketing and promotional presence of Polish institutions of higher education on the Ukrainian market, the drive to gain a diploma from a country which is a member of the European Union, as well as the current difficult political situation in the Ukraine.

According to CSO data, the second largest group of foreign students in Poland is made up of Byelorussians (over 4.6 thousand), followed by Norwegians (1581), Spaniards (1407), and Swedes (1291). In the 2014/15 academic year more than 83% of the total foreign student population came to Poland from Europe. Students from Western European countries decide to study in Poland mainly due to attractive tuition costs at Polish universities and a relatively low cost of living.

Apart from that there are a little less than 7 thousand Asians studying in our country, slightly more than 1200 students from North and Central America, a little less than 1200 from Africa; there are also small groups of students from South America and Oceania [3].

Prognosis on the number of students in Poland between 2011-2020



Source: prepared by the Socrates Institute based on CSO data

2. University development patterns: threats and opportunities

Based on sociological research conducted by the author among students and staff members of the promotional and development departments of selected institutions of higher education in the Silesian Voivodship, an attempt was made to diagnose the factors which could influence an increase of the interest in the educational offer of these units. It was concluded that recruitment is based on a number of aspects such as: unique fields of study offered by the school, cooperation with external companies which prepare the students for a profession compatible with the field of study and which provide real perspectives for employment of graduates, highly qualified scientific personnel, or a modern didactic base.

The closing of private schools which do not fulfil the above-mentioned criteria and the desire to remain on the educational market, forces the university authorities of still active universities to look for additional solutions which would ensure student enrollment on an appropriate level, enabling self-financing of privately-funded non-public schools.

One of the solutions is a process of internationalization which is based on adapting the curriculum to a foreign language and the creation of a widely-understood infrastructure for foreign students.

A threat of foreign student influx is the creation of a Ukrainian monoculture at some Polish universities, which can cause conflicts in the future.

The author of the report "Foreign students in Poland 2014" Bianka Siwińska Ph.D., echoes these sentiments: -Due to a constant, dynamic increase in the number of Ukrainians, it is more and more common to talk about the "Ukrainization" of Polish universities. In this context, there were some xenophobic incidents at few academic centers in Poland. Both the academic community and the public opinion, local authorities as well as the people responsible for the public policy of the state in the field of higher education should, with special attention follow these moods and propose solutions supporting the proper integration of students from the Ukraine into the life of the university as well as the local community [4].

3. Foreign students in Katowice

In the context of analyzing the subject, the cooperation of city halls with universities is especially important. Most of those who come to study from abroad choose Warsaw or Cracow as their place of education. This is a direct result of little or no familiarity with other academic centers in Poland.

A well-managed cooperation, especially marketing activities, between cities and universities is bound to bring profits for both sides, the ever-depopulating cities have an opportunity to gain new inhabitants, while universities struggling with the demographic decline, and have the chance to attract a greater amount of students.

The author shall, based on a few institutions of higher education in Katowice, present which universities are chosen by students in cities that are not as well known outside of Poland as the aforementioned Warsaw and Cracow.

Katowice, with a population of approximately 300 thousand people, is one of the largest scientific centers in Poland. The city boasts 20 institutions of higher education (8 public and 12 private), in which over 63 thousand students are enrolled.

The Promotions Department of the Katowice City Hall has undertaken certain actions advertising the city as an academic center, for now basing their campaign on public schools. Representatives of the Katowice School of Technology have suggested to include non-public schools in such a city campaign, adding that the school running a marketing campaign abroad would also be promoting the city itself.

The most often chosen school by foreigners in Katowice is the University of Silesia. Foreign students (388) come from the Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, the Czech Republic, Russia, and Kazakhstan. They choose Polish philology, foreign philology, IT studies, pedagogy, political science, sociology, management, or the recently launched international Polish studies. In the framework of the Erasmus+ program – student exchange- University of Silesia admits approximately 100 students from Turkey or Spain. The most important institution in the US which takes care of foreign students is the School of Polish Language and Culture. It has already hosted several thousand students from all over the world.

The Medical University of Silesia (348 students) – students enrolled at the School of Medicine include citizens of the USA, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Norway, Sweden, and Germany. Ukrainians and Czechs select fields of study such as: nursing, physiotherapy and dietetics.

The University of Economics – among foreign students (95 people) Ukrainians constitute the largest group – over 47, others include Byelorussians, Georgians and Kazakhs. Foreign exchange students are mostly from Spain and Turkey. Ukrainian students most often choose International Economic Relations as their preferred field of study. However, also popular among foreigners are Finance and Insurance, Economics, Management and IT [5].

As an example of a non-public school we can use the aforementioned Katowice School of Technology, an artistic and technical school which educates bachelors, engineers and masters from the Ukraine, Belarus, Germany, Turkey, and Syria in the following fields of study: Architecture, Interior Architecture, Construction, Spatial Planning, Mechatronics, Design, and Graphics

An integral part of the school is made up of the Silesia Science and Technology Park. The aim of this project is to transfer technology and innovativeness among entrepreneurs in the Silesian Voivodship region, by strengthening the potential of the scientific unit – KST – providing services in the scope of innovation and technology transfer [5].

Conclusion

An influx of foreign students, especially from the Ukraine, has to some degree solved the deficit in student enrollment in private institutions of higher education. Unfortunately, this is not the case everywhere. Most of the foreigners who decide to study in Poland begin their education in the two best-known academic centers in Poland, namely Warsaw and Cracow. A lack of knowledge among students regarding other Polish cities is a direct result of insufficient external promotion of these cities.

It would seem that close cooperation between universities and city hall units responsible for promotion of cities abroad, can bring mutual benefits, for the school a possibility to remain on the market, while for the ever-depopulating cities an opportunity for new inhabitants.

It is important to remember that foreign students can only to some degree, limit the enrollment deficit at Polish universities. Other solutions are also necessary in order to convince young people to choose a certain school in a specific city. Implementing priorities resulting from the city strategy where a given university is active into the curriculum ensures education which is more suitable for current needs. Thanks to this, the educational system keeps up with the changes, meaning it provides a solution to future problems and not only interim ones.

Such a model of education makes it easier for the graduates to find a job in the city where they have undergone the educational process on the higher level, which in turn increases the potential of a given city.

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Information about authors:

Aleksander Ostenda – Ph.D., Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Applied Arts, Katowice School of Technology, Katowice, Poland. E-mail: aleksander.ostenda@wst.com.pl

Tetyana Nestorenko – Ph.D., Associate Professor, Berdyansk State Pedagogical University, Berdyansk, Ukraine. E-mail: tetyana.nestorenko@gmail.com