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## **Students' Self-Development Needs and Higher Institutions' Ability to Satisfy Them**

***Abstract.** For young people, the years spent at university are a time of rapid growth, in terms of their professional career as well as, or in the first place, in terms of planning and pursuing their personal development. Students' self-development activities reflect, on the one hand, their interests and, on the other, their preferred lifestyles. Based on the findings of a survey of self-development activities pursued by students of three Wroclaw-based universities, the paper outlines the principal areas of their personal development needs. Further, it identifies the categories of needs that are satisfied through formal education, and those that are realized outside of formal education. What can be observed in this context is that higher education institutions are just one of the environments where self-development is sought, and not necessarily the most important one. However, a better awareness of their students' needs could enable universities to create more favorable conditions and, as a result, become a more attractive environment for their students.*

***Keywords:** self-development, student, self-development activity, higher education institution*

### **Introduction**

In Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, self-development (or personal development) is placed among higher-level needs, while basic, physiological needs are found at the bottom. The top-level needs are associated with self-actualization, including e.g. the pursuit of self-development and self-fulfillment, the quest for

the meaning of life or the desire to make one's life meaningful. Self-actualization is what Maslow saw as the highest and most important motivation for growth and at the same time a regulatory mechanism for the human psyche. As a later extension to his theory, he added cognitive (knowledge and understanding) and aesthetic needs that are supposed to broadly support personal growth as well as the satisfaction of other types of needs [Maslow 1954]. Step by step, Maslow moved away from the rigid hierarchy of needs toward a qualitative distinction into just two groups, or classes, of needs. One of those encompasses basic needs relating to natural deficiencies arising as a result of human evolution and activity (physiological needs, safety, security, etc.), while the other comprises needs directed toward growth and "being" (love and belonging, esteem, self-actualization, alongside cognitive and aesthetic needs). Albeit interlinked with "being" needs, basic needs are not a precondition for personal growth, yet their satisfaction triggers the emergence of higher-level needs (i.e. those that motivate humans to seek growth and self-fulfillment). Maslow believed that both groups of needs stemmed from the very human nature [Zbróg 2011: 24]. So understood, self-actualization is a natural process expressing a tendency that is inherent in every human. Insofar as the notion of self-actualization is germane to the humanist concept of the human being, the need for self-development<sup>1</sup> is widely recognized by different schools of psychology [cf. Pietrasiński 1992; Dudzikowa 1993; Matwijów 1994; Jankowski 1999; Pawlak 2009], since the more or less conscious strife to steer one's development is a key mechanism governing the growth and development of individuals.

Under a definition provided by Zbigniew Pietrasiński, self-development denotes a process whereby individuals control their personal growth trajectories, even if the degree of control may vary. This same author uses the alternative terms of self-creation and co-formation, thus emphasizing the incompleteness or fragmentariness of control that humans typically exercise over their personal growth. The process includes intentional, premeditated behaviors focused on self-development alongside spontaneous activities addressing other goals and areas but having developmental side-effects. Pietrasiński links self-creation with self-consciousness, self-reflection, and an ability to set and attain objectives in order to build one's life story around them [Pietrasiński 1992: 79-82; 1997: 385-395]. The varying degree of intentionality in self-formative behaviors is also highlighted by J. Pawlak who points out that such behaviors may have direct

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<sup>1</sup> A variety of terms are used in relevant literature to refer to the personal development process, such as e.g. self-development, self-fulfillment, self-realization, self-creation, self-education, self-learning. Given the existing terminological diversity and the space limitations imposed on this paper, the author chooses to adhere to the term "self-development" in most cases, for it is not only the broadest one, embracing the totality of processes whereby individuals develop and realize their potentials, but also one unrelated to any specific concept of the human being. The other terms, however, will be occasionally used as alternatives throughout the paper.

or indirect impact. At the same time, the process is long-term, spanning a lifetime and traversing a number of growth areas [Pawlak 2009: 14]. Personal growth may therefore involve the development of personality traits, the acquisition of new competencies, an attitude change, or the procurement of resources enabling individuals to exploit new opportunities and potentials toward meeting their growth needs, in line with predefined future goals.

It has to be observed that the life-long process of human growth reaches peak intensity in the period of adolescence. It is as humans approach maturity that their cognitive processes flourish, allowing young people to fully develop an ability to set objectives and plan for the future, initially just short-term but, over time, also medium- to long-term [Schaffer 2007: 182-214]. The process is spurred by the expectations of society concerning the choice of educational path and professional career, which translates into developmental objectives to be met [Przetacznik-Gierowska, Tyszkowa (eds.) 2000: Vol. 1, 69-70]. Likewise, commitment to self-development can be driven by social and cultural factors. As educational paths become longer and the number of degree seekers increases, more and more youth take control of their own development. The trend is best visible in individuals transiting from adolescence to early adulthood, who are at the same time prospective or actual higher education students. At that stage in life, accelerating cognitive advances will already have taken most individuals to a point where they are capable of making decisions for themselves, predicting and planning future developments, designing their actions in compliance with their value systems, and evaluating their own behaviors. Longer time spent in education bears primarily on professional development, but also, albeit secondarily, on personal and social development. University study alone presents an opportunity to test one's life choices. Simultaneously, many of the educational and non-educational objectives that are intrinsic to university settings will face young individuals with choices and decisions about their leisure activities, interests and passions, friendships, lifestyle, as well as dreams and ambitions to pursue. The university time is therefore just as conducive to young people's professional development as to defining and developing their unique self-identities and shaping their personal futures.

The personal development process becomes pivotal in the context of demands that post-modernity puts on young people. In post-modern reality, characterized by volatility, multi-contextuality and ambiguity, inevitable social and cultural changes force individuals and societies to constantly evolve and recreate themselves. In this context, what young people are most importantly expected to do is continually reshape and adapt themselves [cf. Beck, Giddens, Lash 1994]. Contemporary humans are compelled to evolve and transform and to create biographical narratives of their own. Anthony Giddens observes that it is by shaping ourselves and planning our personal growth that we can really control our lives, which he sees as a salient characteristic of the late modern age [Giddens 1991].

It is a world where the urge to develop one's self has new implications and is of great consequence. In other words, the evolution of post-modern society seems to have become a major driver of individual growth.

Arguably, when considering the social and cultural pressures of post-modern society and their implications for the personal development of young individuals, attention should be centered on the university years and the growth factors that are at work there. The following section of the paper employs the findings of a survey to describe the self-development needs of students of three Wrocław-based universities. Subsequently, an attempt is made to delineate the potential and resources that higher education institutions can deploy to meet the needs of their students.

### **Personal development needs of students of Wrocław-based universities**

The following discussion of the self-development needs stated by students pursuing different programs at three different Wrocław-based universities draws on portions of an analysis conducted on the findings of research focusing on the students' understanding of self-development. The study had a diagnostic and interpretational intent. It aimed to find out what activities the survey respondents assigned to specific self-development areas (whose distinction was on theoretical grounds), and then to identify and describe the categories of self-development activities that were prevalent in the respondent group. The specific survey objectives included: (1) describing the prevalent categories of activities in each of the self-development areas (defined in theoretical terms); (2) identifying differences between descriptions of activities across the predefined self-development areas provided by students of specific universities and programs; (3) isolating the areas of self-development activities relevant to the students surveyed and delimiting the emergent activity categories. The paper delivers the outcomes of an analysis concentrating solely on the third of the objectives, that is, identifying the areas of self-development activities relevant to the students surveyed, yet making no reference to the theoretical descriptions of the areas and disregarding differences between students in different programs. The analysis presented in this paper fuelled an attempt to outline the factors affecting the ability of higher education institutions to meet the personal development needs voiced in the survey.

The selection of survey sample was not on a random basis but followed predefined criteria. The point was to sort out groups of roughly equal size consisting of students in their early adulthood who made a conscious choice to continue education in their preferred field of study, who were integrated into their student communities, and who represented diverse study profiles. For these reasons, the

researchers picked first-year students in second-cycle (Master's) programs from three of Wrocław's universities, representing three different program profiles: social (the University of Wrocław, program in Pedagogy); medical (the Medical University, program in Nursing and Physiotherapy); technical (the Wrocław University of Science and Technology, program in Telecommunications and Biotechnology). The survey involved a total of 195 students: 67 from the University of Wrocław (Uniwersytet Wrocławski – UWr), 64 from the Medical University (Uniwersytet Medyczny – UM), and 64 from the Wrocław University of Science and Technology (Politechnika Wroclawska – PWr). A vast majority of the respondent group were women – 168 over 27 men. The research tool was built around a theoretical distinction of seven self-development areas concerned with, respectively: physical appearance, physical fitness, health, intellectual abilities, personality features, wellbeing, and future outlook. The respondents were asked to describe five activities that they engaged in and that they thought the most important in each of the areas. It was assumed that the activities that were most commonly indicated by the students themselves were within the boundaries of their consciousness. This is because that which is verbalized is part of the conscious self and can be more or less consciously controlled and modified, which is indicative of self-development taking place [Pawlak 2009: 78-79]. The survey responses – the collection of activities specified by the students<sup>2</sup> – were examined in both qualitative and quantitative terms.<sup>3</sup> The qualitative analysis made it possible to isolate and describe categories of activities belonging into each of the predefined self-development areas. The quantitative analysis was, on the other hand, performed to capture trends emerging from the number of responses in each area and to subsequently describe the trends in qualitative terms. To that end, content analysis was applied. The survey responses (indicating particular self-development activities) were subject to substantive coding [Rubacha 2008: 264-265] that identified the dominant analytical categories in each of the areas. In the next step, theoretical coding led to describing the prevalent self-development activities across the areas predefined theoretically.

To begin with, attention should be given to the aggregate number of responses in specific self-development areas, as it is indicative of their clarity and relevance to the respondents. Most student responses pointed to the area of physical appearance (828 responses). Further on the ranking was as follows: wellbeing (790), future outlook (710), health (697), intellectual abilities (672), physical fitness (641), personality features (547). The differentials show that the top categories, in terms of clarity and relevance, are concerned with physical appearance,

<sup>2</sup> For simplicity's sake, "self-development activities stated by the students" are oft referred to as "responses".

<sup>3</sup> D. Silverman contends that computational techniques can be a means of exploring data in qualitative research [cf. Silverman 2012: 62].

Table 1. The aggregate number of student responses in each category of self-development activities

Categories	Number of responses
Physical activity	1076
Informal education	847
Diet	606
Interpersonal relations	415
Body care and wellness	395
Formal education	257
Psychological and social health	227
Hobbies	193
Preventive healthcare	191
Professional training	173
Engagement in culture	124
Personal competencies	118
Risky behaviors	111
Social activism	68
Future planning	44
No response	40

Source: own.

while those relating to personality features are the least relevant. A tentative interpretation of these findings could be based on the observation that it is much easier to look after one's appearance than to shape one's personality, as the latter entails a substantially higher degree of self-awareness. Further, for young people and adolescents physical appearance becomes an important and easily available instrument for building one's self-identity and self-presentation. The number of activities declared in specific self-development areas is alone not very informative unless it is refined by providing a qualitative description of the emergent categories.

A glimpse over all the categories of self-development activities stated by the students across specific areas (Table 1) reveals that most responses are clustered in categories associated with physique. This is especially true about physical activity, diet, body care and wellness. These three categories were top scorers, with concentrations visible in such areas as: appearance, fitness, health, and wellbeing. Secondly, attention can be drawn to categories related to learning and personal competencies. Most responses indicated informal education, the second largest number of responses was in the category of formal education, and the other high-rated categories were: hobbies, professional training, and engagement in culture. These categories were the most frequently found in areas pertaining to intellectual abilities, personality features, future outlook, and wellbeing. Nevertheless, the meaning attributed to these categories would obviously vary. The third dimension of self-development activities emerging from the survey responses is socialization. This will chiefly correspond to interpersonal relations and social activism, and – to some extent – engagement in culture. These are the categories that were

indicated the most often in the area concerned with wellbeing, and further – with personality features, and future outlook. A glance at the number of responses in specific categories (see Table 1) will do to perceive an overlap between the three dimensions of the students' self-development that could be labeled as follows: physique, personality (primarily learning), and socialization. Therefore it makes sense to take a closer look at each of these areas.

Students' self-development activities classified in the dimension of **physique** were investigated first.<sup>4</sup> Across this dimension, the students found the following categories the most relevant: physical activity (1076 responses), diet (606), body care and wellness (395), psychological and social health (227), and preventive healthcare (191). The students associated these categories primarily with physical appearance and fitness, and secondarily – with health and wellbeing. If we examine these categories in terms of content, it is clear that the dimension of physique is dominated by: behaviors related to specific types of physical activity (descriptions of specific exercises or activities), general references to healthy diet or examples of (less frequently) specific dietary behaviors, body care and wellness (with an emphasis on physical appearance and beauty), and preventive healthcare (periodic medical tests and checkups). At the same time, it seems from the descriptions that health is perceived by the students somatically rather than otherwise. Interestingly enough, the category of physical activity tops the ranking, being much ahead of the other categories in respect of the number responses. It could be supposed that for young people the cult of the body stands not so much for fitness, which is less important, as for bodily beauty and an instrument of image building. Concern with body and appearance develops in childhood and peaks in youth, when corporeality and sexuality are commonly used to express "self" [Błajet 2006: 57-59]. During the years in higher education, that coincide with the transition from adolescence to early adulthood, the desire to enhance one's sex appeal is an important motivation for self-development, since physical attractiveness is a major driver of identity-building and is felt to underpin the ability to develop close interpersonal relations. In 20-year-olds, physical fitness is usually good enough anyway and does not need continuous improvement, which could explain why physical activity is valued more where it is applied to improve appearance than where it promotes fitness. On the other hand, it would be interesting to know to what extent the categories of self-development activities are gender-dependent. The respondent group was by and large feminine, and the questionnaire did not include questions that would make it possible to investigate gender preferences. Today a person's concern with physical appearance and fitness is usually coupled with high priority given to health and healthy lifestyle, of which an adequate level

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<sup>4</sup> An in-depth analysis and discussion of these areas can be found in: Sladek 2014a.



of physical activity or a healthy diet are indispensable ingredients [Shilling 2010: 16-23]. Hence the presence of a significant number of categories related to health alongside those to do with physical appearance and fitness.

It could be concluded that the students ascribed different utility to their self-development needs concerning physical activity. To a large extent, they linked these to their image-building, that is, saw them as relevant to defining their self-identity. This obviously relates to their ability to develop relationships with others, as attractive physical appearance is among key factors that uniquely position youth for establishing relationships with peers. Notably, many categories associated with physique bear just as well on their sense of wellbeing, while at the same time they do not need to be consistent with commitment to health-related activities. For example, a lot of students stress the need to maintain a healthy diet while admitting to eating less healthy foods (junk food or candy) just to feel good. This implies that physique-oriented self-development activities play diverse, or even discrepant, roles for different students, some of whom are aware of this fact and some are not. Such discrepancies are likely to become barriers to self-development. Conversely, the more conscious the self-development choices are, the more coherent the process and the greater its alignment with the target value system.

The second dimension of self-development to be examined relates to **personality, and** more specifically to **learning**. It includes such categories as: informal education (847 responses), formal education (257), psychological and social health (227), hobbies (193), professional training (173), engagement in culture (124), personal competencies (118), and future planning (44). All of the above categories are concerned with either the development of intellectual abilities or control over one's future outlook,<sup>5</sup> and secondarily with personality features. On the other hand, these areas of development clearly overlap. A closer look at the categories seems therefore necessary to discover the needs and preferences behind them. As far informal education is concerned, the intellectual abilities area (481 responses) prevailed over the future outlook area (212). It should be noted, however, that the category of informal education comprises a rich variety of activities indicated by the students: foreign language learning, (extra-curricular) training courses and workshops, readings (in scientific literature as well as in belles-lettres), or cognitive skills training (jigsaw or crosswords puzzles, riddles and brain teasers, logic games, memory or perception training exercises), etc. This diversity is equally evident in both the self-development areas. Among activities grouped under informal education and impacting on personal futures, the students emphasized foreign language learning, training courses and workshops. It is easy to see that these activities lead to the acquisition of qualifications and

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<sup>5</sup> An in-depth treatment of the future outlook/planning area can be found in: Sladek 2014b.

competencies that are demanded in the job market. As regards the development of intellectual abilities, most respondents engaged in reading and practiced cognitive training. These categories seem to be centered primarily on personal learning and fulfillment of personal educational needs. It comes as no surprise then that formal education is associated with higher education programs and curricular activities. Besides these two strands, there were occasional mentions of double majors or aspirations for doctoral study, or a scholarly career (membership in scientific societies and attendance at scientific conferences). Importantly, activities concerning formal education were prevalent in the future outlook area (151 responses), not in the area of intellectual development (93). It could be concluded therefore that the students surveyed perceive their degrees in terms of investment in their future rather than of intellectual development. What they regard as even more relevant to their future prospects is the additional qualifications and competencies that they can earn through informal education. This suggests that different meaning and functions are attached to formal and informal education depending on the developmental context. On the one hand, marketable qualifications and competencies are sought, in the first place, outside formal education. This goal is covered by the category of activities relating to professional training. On the other hand, the other self-development objective is of more personal nature, being concentrated on achieving intellectual progression through reading and brain training (e.g. logic games or memory training). While learning certainly is a vital need under both the objectives (formal and informal education), there is a considerable diversity of perceptions and approaches to learning, depending on whether the goal is defined as personal or professional development. After all, both will meet needs that are considered relevant in the growth phase.

Apart from informal and formal education and professional training, a number of respondents stated commitment to developing their personal competencies. Underscored in this category were such considerations as: developing self-awareness, strengthening motivations, and self-regulation. Most responses in the category of hobby-related activities were generic, indicating just the pursuit of a hobby, with few specific references to the type of hobby: listening to music, travel or arts (plastic arts, music or handicraft). Activities focused on psychological and social health turned out to be mostly religious practices and meditations alongside entertainment, leisure and recreational activities. Interestingly, many respondents worded their responses using expressions like "finding time for...", e.g. sleep, recreation, relaxation, enjoyment, etc. This implies that the categories are important to the students but somewhat scarce, hence desired. The categories related to engagement in culture were flooded by general statements of intention, with only some respondents citing film (the cinema) or music (including concerts and the opera). The dimension of personality (and learning) also showed that the students appreciated the role of interpersonal relations and social activism.

However, these categories actually send us to the third dimension of self-development, even if they are closely interlinked with the former two.

This third dimension of self-development is **socialization**. The key categories in this dimension are associated with interpersonal relations (415), social activism (68), and engagement in culture (124). This dimension can be said, in a sense, to bracket the former two. Interpersonal relations were considered the most relevant in terms of wellbeing and shaping one's personality features. The students appear to believe that interpersonal relations – especially opportunities to meet and talk with friends and relatives – have a strong effect on their sense of wellbeing. They also recognize how their personality can benefit from meeting people, talking to people, discussing and exchanging views with people, sharing experiences with people, and notably from interactions with representatives of different cultures. Social activism was associated, in the first place, with voluntary work. The number of responses bringing up initiatives addressed to the academic community (e.g. membership in the student union) was marginal. Socialization was also seen as an important aspect of engagement in culture. Cultural activity not only fosters personal development but also, more often than not, involves voluntary work for this or other community – hence it does have an obvious socialization dimension.

Summing up, the three dimensions of students' self-development – physique, personality (learning), and socialization – do not make up a hierarchical structure, but they should be seen as on a par and overlapping. At the same time, all of these dimensions have relevance to the priorities of young people's development at this stage in life, e.g. to their needs in respect of building their self-identities, preparation for their prospective social and professional roles, and the development of social relationships, including those of intimate character. The conclusion that readily presents itself on examining the students' self-development is that there is close linkage between the drivers of personal development and the fulfillment of social expectations concerning many interconnected developmental priorities.

### **Conclusions – higher education institutions' ability to meet personal development needs**

Under the approach taken toward the understanding and interpretation of the respondents' self-development, several groups of needs can be distinguished. They can be organized into three emergent dimensions:

- needs concerning physique,

- needs concerning personality and learning, and
- needs concerning socialization.

These needs can be met via a number of environments of which the students are part. This paper focuses on just one of such environments, looking at how the students' self-development needs are satisfied by institutions of higher learning. The discussion will be organized along the distinction into the three groups of self-development needs.

Among **physique-related self-development needs**, most respondents indicated: physical activity, diet, body care and wellness, psychological and social health, and preventive healthcare. Higher education institutions have a considerable potential to meet these needs. Increasing students' physical activity has been on the higher education agenda for a long time and has led e.g. to an obligation imposed on higher education institutions to organize compulsory physical education classes. However, institutions of higher learning largely differ in what they offer their students by way of physical activity or physical education, whereas the variety of forms of physical activity and their alignment with students' preferences may matter. Besides, while the compulsory workload may be sufficient for some students, it will be unsatisfactory for others. It makes sense therefore to provide additional options – to either extend the workload or to take out other forms of activity. Many of the students surveyed stated interest in team activities, which could stem from the very nature of their needs at this stage in life. Consequently, it appears that higher education institutions should ensure that team activity options are available to their students. Higher education institutions could gain a competitive advantage by merely adjusting their offering of physical activities to their students' preferences. Although the individual choice of physical activity is ultimately determined by personal preference, it is influenced by social patterns and settings, particularly by the peer group and the prevalent trend or fashion. An institution that tries to learn about its students' needs and periodically tailors the forms of physical activity to the findings could reap benefits in terms of student enrolment and retention, as both existing and prospective students could perceive its attitude toward their self-development needs as an important factor in selecting the institution.

Diet was the second among the students' needs relating to physique. The survey respondents commonly articulated the need to maintain a healthy diet. Emphasis placed on this need may be to an extent attributable to the popularity of healthy lifestyles – a trend boosted by the media buzz and propagated through peer groups. In the context of conditions provided by higher education institutions, an important issue is therefore the availability of on-campus food services, such as canteens and cafeterias, and the kinds of meals that these places offer. A diversified range of meals, including healthy food dishes, not only supports the satisfaction of students' needs but might also prove conducive to the development

of healthy eating habits. Conversely, the presence of fast food bars accounts for the development and reinforcement of bad eating habits. What can be also relevant to the satisfaction of students' self-development needs in respect of healthy diet is class scheduling that may permit students, or not, to eat meals on the campus throughout the day. The perfect class schedule would allow students to have regular meals daily, including breaks that are long enough and always scheduled at the same time of the day. There do exist institutions where classes are scheduled on a permanent basis, provide for regular breaks and include an extended lunch break. Coupled with the presence of a canteen/cafeteria on the campus, this solution accounts for students' ability to fully satisfy their needs concerning proper nutrition and health. Regretfully, there are also many institutions where class schedules do not provide for regular breaks.

Health also stands for needs relating to preventive healthcare and psychological and social health. Most higher education institutions provide access to healthcare, so their students can consult physicians and have basic tests done as required. This is, however, not so obvious with psychological assistance that is not available at all institutions. Although demand for such assistance was not openly voiced in the survey, it is inferable from responses signaling psychological and social health needs, where most students stated a need for recreation, entertainment and relaxation, various forms of meditation and religious practices, at the same time strongly accentuating shortage of time to look after all these needs, resulting in a feeling of being under the pressure of time and under stress. In the context of conditions created by higher education institutions, the issue will again boil down to class scheduling. If daily and weekly class schedules were more favorable, the students would be able to allot time to recreation and relaxation as well as to regular meals – which has been pointed out already. Another option is to allow students to create their class schedules on their own, making them thus share responsibility for the organization of their study time and leisure time and for adjusting it to their needs and preferences. This obviously gives students greater latitude and control over their personal development, which is a factor strengthening their commitment and motivation for self-development. Another measure that a higher education institution could consider in catering to students' self-development needs is to expand the menu of optional activities available to their students by including e.g. various types of meditation classes, opportunities for exposure to other cultures and religions, as well as leisure time and recreational activities. The latter should involve physical activities, too, as these are seen by the students surveyed as supporting the development of their physique and at the same time having a positive effect on their wellbeing.

Self-development needs relating to psychological and physical health direct attention toward **needs concerning personality development** (including learning). Most respondents indicated informal and formal education, professional

training, personal competencies, hobbies, and engagement in culture. Many self-development needs falling into these categories can be pursued in higher education establishments. First of all, it should be underscored that the students placed a good deal of emphasis needs relating to informal and formal education. Although higher education institutions themselves are part of formal education, the students too recognized the role of learning outside the campus. This does not mean, of course, that higher education institutions can do nothing to meet a greater proportion of their students' needs. The need that the respondents attached most importance to was for attending e.g. language courses, training courses and workshops leading to the award of qualifications or certificates that are sought after in the job market and are considered prerequisites or assets for a specific career. At the same time, however, many of the students were eager to develop such personal competencies as self-knowledge, self-awareness, or skills related to self-regulation (e.g. understanding emotions, self-control or conscientiousness), strengthening motivations, and improving social competencies (e.g. communication skills, negotiation skills, leadership skills, conflict management skills). All these self-development needs associated with the acquisition or upgrade of qualifications and competencies are fuelled by the students' awareness of labor market requirements. The respondents are aware of what employers expect of them and take account of these expectations in programming their development paths. What employers expect from university graduates these days is not just domain knowledge and professional qualifications but, in the first place, personal and social competencies that make them good team-workers and fast learners who can retrain instantly and easily adapt to change [Bilans Kapitału Ludzkiego 2013: 27; Budnikowski et al. 2012]. This awareness on the part of the students heightens expectations toward higher education institutions regarding possibilities to satisfy these needs. Obviously, co-curricular activities may be optional (elective). What really matters is that there are enough options to choose from to suit everyone's preferences. It is too often the case that students are required to perform a specified amount of optional workload while the choice is limited and reflects the institution's potential rather than the students' needs.

Further, the survey of students' self-development needs showed that many of them chose to boost their development and learning through reading. Besides compulsory reading assigned by teachers they read popular science books and belles-lettres. Their interests were varied. Some responses implied that they had taken interest in literature and learning as a result of attending courses where non-essential or supplementary reading was encouraged. Notably, it seems that the students greatly appreciated this from of stimulating their hunger for knowledge. What should also be highlighted in this context is the students' self-development needs relating to cognitive skills and abilities (memory, attention, perception, thinking, etc.). Higher education institutions are in a position to meet these needs

through the application of interactive instruction methods, including but not limited to problem-solving and educational games. Inspiration for research work can be further strengthened via scientific societies and conferences. These can help develop research just as well as social competencies through collaboration in research teams that requires communication, problem-solving and negotiation skills. In addition, the students' talents for teamwork or leadership can be ascertained.

Another important factor for students' personal development is their passions and hobbies. Clearly, not all passions can be practiced at a higher education institution. What really counts is therefore that the institution provides opportunities for practicing and sharing as many passions as possible. Some personal interests can easily be pursued through optional class offerings. Alternatively, the school can encourage and support the activities of interest groups and student societies where individuals concerned could get together to share experiences and fascinations and to learn from each other. All that the university needs to do to make it happen is provide suitable facilities (premises) or publicize the possibility, while organizational matters are left to students' discretion. There are multiple advantages to this approach. First, it allows students to freely develop their passions. Second, it builds up their independence, organizational talents, motivation, and a sense of responsibility for their own development and the development of others. Third, it helps establish and cement relationships between group members, at the same time enhancing their social competencies. Fourth, membership in interest groups and societies makes students develop a sense of loyalty and belonging toward the university as a place where they can engage in what they are most keen on doing personally as well as professionally.

Self-governing on-campus interest groups bring the discussion to the third strand, or dimension, of students' **self-development needs concerning socialization**. In this strand, most students cited the need to establish and maintain interpersonal relations, engage in culture, and get involved in social activism. Where higher education institutions come in is appropriate space organization and facilities that encourage grouping and spending free time together between and after class. Secondly, as has already been pointed out above, a higher education institution can encourage and support students in getting organized – forming groups and associations around their passions and hobbies. Further, it can sponsor and (help) organize cultural and social events of all sorts that, on the one hand, create a natural setting for meeting new people and networking and, on the other, address the need for cultural participation. A vital area of social needs is exposure to other cultures and developing an openness toward the other. These goals can be accomplished through international mobilities and exchanges, e.g. under the European Erasmus program. Multicultural issues can be also seamlessly integrated within the framework of cultural events. What many higher education institutions

still do not fully recognize is the potential of non-governmental organizations in youth education and promoting social activism [Jagiełło-Rusinowski 2011: 9-15]. Admittedly, voluntary work can largely contribute to the development of social competencies. It seems therefore plausible that higher education institutions encourage voluntarism through partnerships with non-governmental organizations and motivate students to engage in the work of student organizations and community services. Involvement in such activities not only enhances their social competencies but also compels them to take responsibility for their academic community and inculcates a sense of loyalty and attachment toward the institution.

Looking at the self-development needs articulated by the students surveyed, it is easy to observe that the three dimensions either overlap or complement one another. Higher education institutions can try and fulfill these needs in a number of ways, depending on their infrastructure and financial resourcefulness. It should be emphasized that students may very well be appreciative of the fact alone that their needs have been noticed. However, it will probably not suffice to analyze these. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that giving students a welcoming space in which to pursue their needs might be more relevant than the best of facilities. This is because personal development is mostly driven by the desire to realize one's growth potential and to follow an envisioned trajectory. Create the right conditions and incentives for students' initiative and self-organization in developing their competencies and practicing their passions is the best that a higher education institution can do to facilitate their self-development.

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### **Potrzeby samorozwojowe studentów a możliwości ich zaspokajania przez szkoły wyższe**

**Streszczenie.** *Okres studiów to czas intensywnego rozwoju młodzieży nie tylko w zakresie przygotowania zawodowego, ale przede wszystkim realizacji potrzeb samorozwojowych oraz tworzenia wizji i planów własnego rozwoju. Działania samorozwojowe studentów wskazują z jednej strony na ich zainteresowania, a z drugiej na pewne wzorce stylu życia młodzieży. Na podstawie analizy działań samorozwojowych studentów trzech wrocławskich uczelni w artykule zostały przedstawione dominujące obszary ich potrzeb samorozwojowych oraz wyłonione te kategorie potrzeb, które studenci zaspokajają w ramach edukacji formalnej i poza nią. Szkoły wyższe stanowią jedno ze środowisk rozwojowych tego okresu, ale niekoniecznie najważniejsze. Znajomość potrzeb samorozwojowych studentów może jednak być dla uczelni podstawą do tworzenia warunków bardziej sprzyjających ich rozwojowi, przez co może ona stać się dla studentów środowiskiem bardziej atrakcyjnym.*

**Słowa kluczowe:** *samorozwój, studenci, zadania rozwojowe, szkoły wyższe*