

Work-related perspectives of freshman students at university of debrecen hungary

Perspectivas relacionadas con el trabajo de los estudiantes de primer año en la
universidad de debrecen húngria

Peter Nagy^{1*} <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2669-0380>

nagy.peter@econ.unideb.hu

Leila Vezendi.² <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8366-1857>

vezendileila319@gmail.com

Boglarka Tóth¹ <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1324-418X>

toth.boglarka@econ.unideb.hu

Adrian Nagy¹ <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3813-9759>

nagy.adrian@econ.unideb.hu

¹Hungary, University of Debrecen Faculty of Economics and Business Institute of Applied Economics

²Hungary, University of Debrecen, Faculty of Engineering, Department of Engineering Management and Enterprise

*Autor para la correspondencia: nagy.peter@econ.unideb.hu

ABSTRACT

The article begins with an exploration of the existing literature on motivations related to employment. Additionally, the review sheds light on the diverse range of student services available at the University of Debrecen, offering support and resources to enhance the academic and professional journey of its students. It also delves into the unique experience of being a student in Debrecen, capturing the vibrant cultural and academic atmosphere of the city. Furthermore, the article presents the findings of a survey conducted among first-year students at the University of Debrecen, aiming to explore their career expectations and aspirations. The

survey results provide valuable insights into the perspectives of these incoming students regarding their future employment prospects and goals.

Keywords: University, Career, Youth, Employment

RESUMEN

El artículo comienza con una exploración de la literatura existente sobre las motivaciones relacionadas con el empleo. Además, la revisión arroja luz sobre la diversa gama de servicios estudiantiles disponibles en la Universidad de Debrecen, que ofrecen apoyo y recursos para mejorar la trayectoria académica y profesional de sus estudiantes. También profundiza en la experiencia única de ser estudiante en Debrecen, captando el vibrante ambiente cultural y académico de la ciudad. Además, el artículo presenta los resultados de una encuesta realizada entre los estudiantes de primer curso de la Universidad de Debrecen, con el objetivo de explorar sus expectativas y aspiraciones profesionales. Los resultados de la encuesta aportan información valiosa sobre las perspectivas de estos estudiantes de nuevo ingreso en relación con sus perspectivas y objetivos laborales futuros.

Palabras clave: Universidad, Carrera, Juventud, Empleo

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INTRODUCTION

The University of Debrecen is one of Hungary's leading (671-680 worldwide ranking) higher education institutions, offering students a wide range of opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills (*Topuniversities.com, 2023 ; Unideb.hu, 2023*). The student services of the University of Debrecen include a range of services that contribute to students' academic and personal development. There are various scientific workshops, research groups, sports and recreational opportunities (*DETEP, 2023*). The library and IT infrastructure is modern and well-equipped to facilitate learning and research. Student life in Debrecen is colourful and exciting. The city's vibrant cultural life, student clubs, events and festivals provide opportunities for recreation and socialising. Student organisations and volunteer programmes help students to get actively involved in community life and develop their leadership and organisational skills. The city of Debrecen also offers a wide range of job opportunities for young professionals

(*Gergely et al., 2023*) The city's economy is growing dynamically and there are a number of multinational companies offering internships and job opportunities for students and recent graduates of the University of Debrecen. In addition, the city's innovation and technology parks contribute to the growth of local job opportunities (*Polónyi, 2019*).

Student Services: The University of Debrecen provides a spectrum of student-centric facilities that foster academic and personal growth. Our state-of-the-art library and IT infrastructure greatly aid students' research and learning pursuits. Diverse scientific workshops and research groups offer students the chance to acquire practical experience and engage with the scientific community. Sports and leisure facilities, including sports centres and parks surrounding the campus, provide a platform for students to engage in physical activities and collaborative efforts (*hkszk.unideb.hu, 2023*).

Student Life: The vibrancy of the student life both in the city of Debrecen and the university campus is well highlighted by various student organisations, clubs, and events that enable students to socialise and unwind. Students are also enriched with the cultural events in the city, such as festivals and concerts, as well as the local museums and galleries, that enhance their overall experience. Community volunteering programmes provide students with the chance to create a positive impact on their local area whilst enhancing their leadership capabilities (*Marosán, 2019*).

Job opportunities in Debrecen: The economy in Debrecen is growing dynamically with multiple multinational companies located within the city that offer internships and job positions for university students and recent graduates for instance: BMW, National Instruments, British Telecom (*Pócsik, 2019*). The university's career centre assists students in identifying suitable job opportunities and establishing connections with local companies. The innovation and technology parks in the city provide young professionals with further employment prospects and networking possibilities (*Buczi, 2018*).

Challenges and Opportunities: While Debrecen's labour market is dynamic, it encounters obstacles like ensuring competitive salaries and long-term career possibilities. On the other hand, the city's expanding infrastructure and supportive university community positively affect young people's motivation to work and local employment prospects. In conclusion, Debrecen city provides a beneficial atmosphere for young individuals striving to work and advance their careers. Strategically coordinated efforts between the city and university, alongside the growth of regional industries, promote a dynamic labour market and bolster openings for ambitious

professionals. Future developments and continued collaboration can enhance this positive trajectory, leading to economic and social advancement in Debrecen (*Gergely et al., 2023*).

Literature review

In this review we examine 20 work-motivation related publications worldwide to understand this field, and make a comprehensive picture about what motivates people and university students to work.

University students can undertake part-time work alongside their university studies, and there are various ways to achieve this. One option is to engage in voluntary work placements, which enable students to accomplish specific goals. The likelihood of a surge in voluntary work in recent years remains low. Nonetheless, research conducted recently suggests that up to 40% of jobseekers will secure paid employment. Furthermore, there is a possibility that volunteering may assume pseudo-social characteristics for those who participate. Consequently, it is anticipated that children will be more inclined to volunteer for this type of work compared to other forms (*Fényes – Markos, 2018*). *Miguel et al. (2019)* delves into the intricate relationships between job satisfaction, motivation, and performance in the workplace. It underscores the importance of intrinsic motivation—stemming from personal satisfaction and interest in the job—as a significant driver for enhanced job performance. Moreover, the study demonstrates that employees who find personal meaning and value in their tasks are more likely to be dedicated, put in extra effort, and display a higher level of job satisfaction. This intrinsic motivation, according to the findings, has a more profound impact on job performance than extrinsic motivators like monetary rewards or promotions. For employers aiming to foster a motivated workforce, understanding these intrinsic factors is pivotal. *Szabó (2022)* research sheds light on the role of cultural differences in shaping employment motivations. The study was conducted across multiple countries, highlighting variances in motivational factors stemming from cultural norms, values, and beliefs. For instance, while some cultures prioritize financial incentives, others place more emphasis on work-life balance or familial obligations. The research suggests that organizations looking to motivate a diverse workforce must be attuned to these cultural nuances. Recognizing and respecting these differences can lead to more tailored and effective motivational strategies, ultimately benefiting both the employee and the

organization. *Kerékgyártó (2022)* notes that as the digital era reshapes industries, traditional motivators such as job security and monetary benefits are being complemented—and sometimes even overshadowed—by factors like opportunities for continuous learning, digital upskilling, and the chance to work on innovative projects. Employees are increasingly driven by the desire to remain relevant in a rapidly changing environment. Thus, organizations that can provide platforms for continuous digital learning and the promise of innovation are more likely to attract and retain a motivated workforce. The *Balogh-Bácsné (2020)* research emphasizes the role of employee autonomy and its influence on employment motivation. Drawing upon various case studies, it is demonstrated that granting employees a higher degree of autonomy in their roles fosters intrinsic motivation and a sense of ownership over their tasks. This autonomy, which includes the freedom to make decisions and take initiative, often results in increased job satisfaction, greater engagement, and improved performance outcomes. The study suggests that organizations should consider restructuring traditional hierarchical models in favor of more flexible, autonomous structures to harness the motivational benefits. *Bodrog (2023)* presents an in-depth exploration of the intersection between personal values, societal norms, and employment motivations. It underscores that while individual values play a significant role in shaping a person's motivation to work, societal norms and expectations often exert a more dominant influence. For instance, in societies where career success is highly revered, individuals might be more motivated to seek promotions or take on high-responsibility roles. Conversely, in societies that prioritize family or community welfare, individuals might be more motivated by jobs that offer flexibility or community engagement. Recognizing this interplay can help organizations tailor their motivational strategies to resonate with their employees' deeply held values and societal influences. *Aflit et al. (2022)* delves into the dynamics of workplace motivations in the context of modern organizational structures. The central theme revolves around the idea that as businesses transition towards more flexible and decentralized models, traditional motivational techniques need reevaluation. The study indicates that employees in such structures value transparency, opportunities for personal growth, and a sense of purpose over hierarchical promotions or rigid job roles. Employers aiming to tap into these motivations should focus on creating a culture of trust, fostering continuous learning environments, and aligning individual roles with the broader organizational mission. *Swaramarinda et al. (2022)* research offers insights into the role of employee well-being and its connection to employment motivation. It highlights that beyond traditional motivators like salary or job security, an individual's overall well-being—including mental,

emotional, and physical health—plays a pivotal role in their motivation levels. Employers that prioritize and invest in initiatives promoting well-being, such as mental health support or ergonomic workplaces, witness a surge in employee motivation, reduced absenteeism, and improved performance. The research underscores the importance of holistic employee care in fostering a motivated and productive workforce. *Ádámkó et al. (2022)* analyzes the relationship between workplace environments, particularly in the material science and engineering sectors, and employee motivation. The study finds that professionals in these sectors are deeply motivated by opportunities to work on cutting-edge technologies and innovations. Moreover, collaborative environments, where interdisciplinary teams come together to solve complex challenges, further enhance motivation. The research suggests that companies in these sectors can amplify employee motivation by fostering a culture of innovation, continuous learning, and collaboration. *Sziki et al. (2022)* revealed the profound impact of technological advancements on employee motivations. As the world becomes increasingly digitized, the study finds that employees are seeking roles that allow them to stay abreast of technological trends and upskill accordingly. Furthermore, opportunities to work with advanced technologies and innovative digital tools serve as strong motivators. The research implies that businesses that embrace and invest in the latest technologies not only remain competitive but also attract a workforce that is highly motivated, skilled, and forward-looking. *Foroudastan (2022)* emphasizes the importance of hands-on learning experiences, specifically within the context of the "Experimental Vehicles Program." The research demonstrates that students who actively engage in projects related to energy conversion and conservation show improved performance and understanding. Importantly, these hands-on experiences not only enhance academic outcomes but also bolster students' motivation and interest in pursuing careers in related fields. This connection between practical learning and employment motivation suggests that educational institutions and employers can potentially tap into this form of experiential learning to foster a more motivated and skilled workforce. *In Lily et al. (2022)* research in this publication search into the psychological aspects of motivation, especially within the context of employment. The study finds that employees' self-perception, self-efficacy, and their beliefs about their capabilities play a pivotal role in shaping their motivation levels. When employees perceive that they have the skills and capabilities to excel in their roles, their intrinsic motivation is heightened. This heightened motivation, in turn, translates to better job performance, engagement, and overall satisfaction. Employers aiming to enhance motivation should, therefore, focus on initiatives that boost employees' self-efficacy and confidence in their

abilities. *Duong et al. (2023)* presents research on the influence of workplace environment and organizational culture on employee motivation. It underscores that a positive, inclusive, and supportive work environment significantly boosts employees' motivation levels. The study also highlights the role of transparent communication, recognition, and opportunities for professional growth in fostering motivation. Employers who prioritize creating a conducive workplace environment and promote a culture of mutual respect and growth are more likely to have a motivated and committed workforce. *Szele-Nagy (2022)* research focuses on the role of leadership and its impact on employee motivation. The study underscores that empathetic, transparent, and transformational leadership styles significantly enhance employee motivation. Leaders who are approachable, understand their team members' aspirations and challenges, and provide clear direction foster an environment where employees feel valued and motivated. The findings suggest that training leaders to adopt these attributes can be a strategic move for organizations aiming to improve employee motivation and, consequently, performance. *Bartosh et al. (2020)* explores the dynamics of team collaboration and its influence on employee motivation. It suggests that employees working in cohesive teams, where there is mutual respect, open communication, and a shared vision, exhibit higher levels of motivation. Such collaborative environments foster a sense of belonging and purpose among employees, driving them to contribute more actively to the team's goals. The research indicates that businesses should prioritize building strong, synergistic teams to harness the benefits of enhanced motivation and improved organizational outcomes. *Resta (2021)* showed the intricacies of job roles and their alignment with personal passions and interests. The study emphasizes that when employees are in roles that resonate with their personal interests and passions, their motivation levels soar. Such alignment not only enhances job satisfaction but also results in improved performance and a deeper commitment to the organization. The findings suggest that employers can benefit from understanding their employees' passions and aligning job roles accordingly to foster a deeply motivated workforce. *Amjad et al. (2022)* investigates the multifaceted nature of employee motivations in contemporary workplaces. The research emphasizes the significance of understanding individual differences and the diverse factors that influence an employee's drive to work. It is highlighted that beyond financial incentives, factors such as workplace culture, opportunities for professional development, and the quality of leadership play crucial roles in shaping motivation. The findings suggest that a holistic approach, considering both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, is essential for organizations aiming to cultivate a motivated and productive workforce. *Kavithambika et al. (2022)* sheds light on the

relationship between job design and employee motivation. The study suggests that jobs designed with clarity, autonomy, and opportunities for skill variety tend to enhance motivation levels. Furthermore, when employees perceive their roles as meaningful and see a clear connection between their tasks and the broader organizational goals, their intrinsic motivation is amplified. The findings highlight the importance of thoughtful job design as a critical strategy for organizations aiming to optimize employee motivation. *Ragazou et al. (2022)* publication focuses on the nexus between sustainability practices in organizations and employee motivation. The research underscores that as societal awareness about sustainability grows, employees are increasingly motivated by organizations that prioritize sustainable practices. Such practices not only reflect corporate responsibility but also resonate with the personal values of many employees. The study suggests that organizations that embed sustainability in their operations and culture are likely to attract and retain a motivated workforce that values purpose-driven employment. *Research maded by Zhuang et al. (2022)* provides insights into the role of organizational culture and its profound impact on employee motivation. The study highlights that cultures emphasizing openness, collaboration, and mutual respect tend to foster higher motivation levels among employees. Furthermore, when employees perceive alignment between their personal values and the organization's cultural ethos, their intrinsic motivation and commitment to the organization are enhanced. The findings underscore the significance of cultivating a positive organizational culture as a strategy to bolster employee motivation.

RESULTS

The 2023 Freshman Survey was conducted in the form of an online questionnaire at the University of Debrecen. The total number of people who completed the questionnaire between 23 August 2023 and 10 September 2023 was 1658. The questionnaire is of course still open to all the participants of the freshers' camp to share their opinions. In total, around 2,400 newly recruited students and organisers participated in the two rounds of the 2023 Freshers' Camp, giving a 69% completion rate at this stage. The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions in total, which can be divided into five different categories: demographic data, expectations regarding the freshers' camp, questions about future job opportunities, expectations regarding job opportunities, factors influencing the choice of job.

The demographic data clearly shows that more female students completed the questionnaire, as 57.2% of the respondents were female and 43% were male.

They were then asked to indicate which faculty and course they would start their studies in. The aggregated data show that more than half of the respondents started their studies in the following faculties: 22.3% in the Faculty of Economics and Business, 11.9% in the Faculty of Humanities, 11.3% in the Faculty of Law, 10.1% in the Faculty of Science and Technology, 9.6% in the Faculty of Informatics and 8.8% in the Faculty of Engineering. After answering the study questions, the students who took part in the questionnaire said what city they were from and what they expected from the camp.

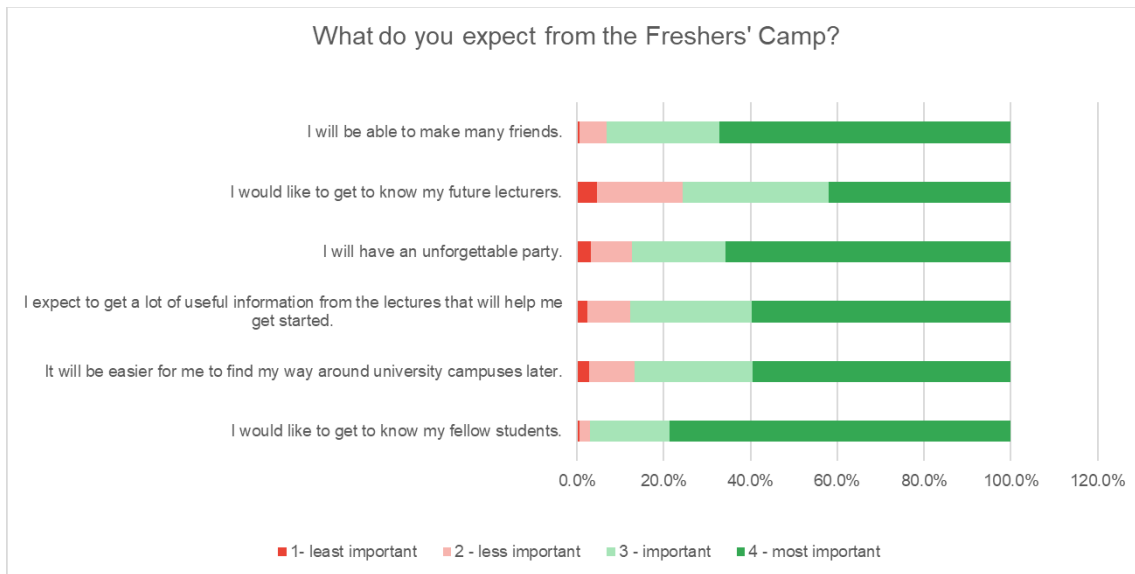


Figure 1: What do you expect from the Freshers' Camp?

Source: own database

A significant 45.9 percent of the respondents were from a city, 23.3 percent from a small village (population less than 5,000), 22.3 percent from a city with county status and 8.5 percent from a large village (population more than 5,000). Not surprisingly, 86.8 percent of freshmen were excited and enthusiastic about their freshman camp experience.

In the next part of the questionnaire, students were asked what they expect from the freshman camp. In this section, respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of one to four how important each statement was to them, with 1 being the least important and 4 being the most important. In total, six statements could be answered. The results are illustrated on the figure 1.

As can be seen from the above chart, all six statements are considered important and very important by respondents. From the responses, it can be inferred that newly admitted students attend freshmen camp with the aim of getting to know the community with which they will start

the new semester, to share experiences with their new classmates, to make friends and have fun, and to gain useful information before starting their university years.

The next question in the questionnaire was about previous and future employment. In response to the question "Have you worked before?" 69.5 percent answered yes and 30.5 percent answered no. For those who had worked in a job prior to their university years, the responses indicated that most had worked occasionally, in the summer. The responses also showed that many people helped in family businesses and took jobs to supplement their pocket money. Some had worked regularly part-time or at weekends even during their secondary school years.

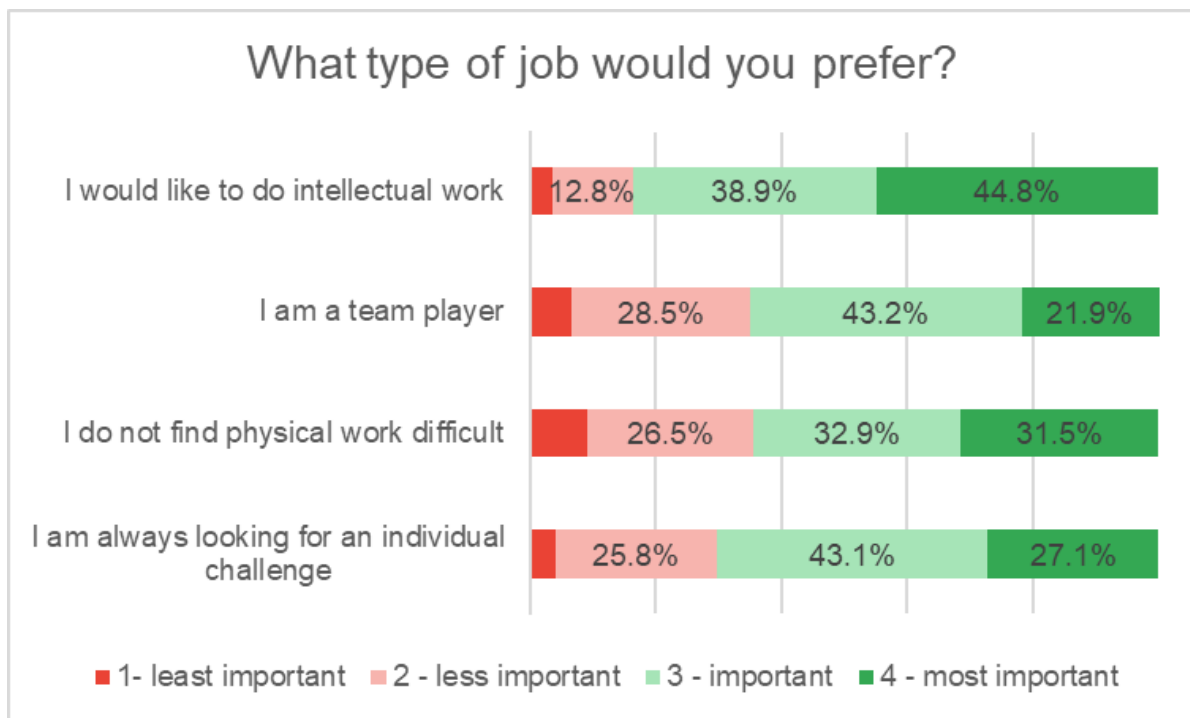


Figure 2: What type of job you prefer?

Source: own database

The question on the type of job, i.e. "What type of job would you most like to work in?" also had to be rated on the basis of how important they thought the aspects we were looking at were. These aspects and their responses are illustrated on figure 2. in the appendix section.

The results clearly show that the most preferred type of job is intellectual, and that respondents consider it important to be challenged at an individual level. In addition, to a lesser extent but also important for prospective university students is the possibility to work in a team and physical work is not considered demanding. In the future, it would be worthwhile to look at this part of the questionnaire specifically for each course of study, as it is possible that we could find differences.

As regards the starting salary, we received different answers from students. Among the 1 658 responses received, there were also text responses with low values (e.g. 2.7) that could not be taken into account. It is not clear from the question and the answers whether the respondents were counting gross or net. Nevertheless, most values ranged between HUF 270,000 and 400,000. According to the KSH (Hungarian Statistic Department) data for August 2023, the average net salary in Hungary was HUF 383 500, so it is not surprising that this was the value indicated by most respondents (*KSH, 2023*).

42.6 percent of respondents do not plan to work abroad after their studies, while 57.4 percent plan to do so. Of those who plan to work abroad, 14 percent plan to work for a few months, 47 percent for 2-3 years and 39 percent for a long period.

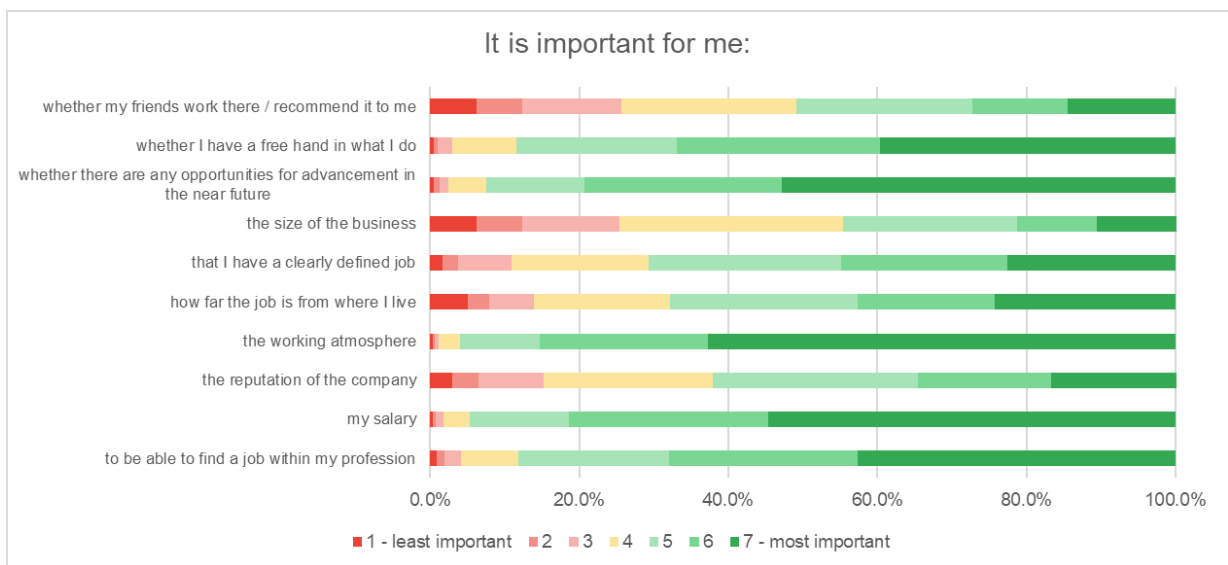


Figure 3: What is important to your job decision?

Source: own database

In the next section, we asked how important the aspects we listed are to the respondent in relation to their future job. They were also asked to rate the statements listed here on a scale, with 1 being the least important and 7 being the most important. The 10 statements and their results are shown on the figure 3.

As the chart above shows, the most important factors for respondents in relation to their job are the work environment, the salary and the career opportunities.

In the final part of the questionnaire, we sought to identify the identity of the people who influenced their choice of job. Those who completed the questionnaire cited their own feelings as the main reason for such a decision, followed by the opinions of those already working in

the job and, surprisingly, the opinion of their favourite instructor. The opinions of relatives and friends proved to be the least influential in this respect.

Finally, we measured the interests of the new students and asked them to list the three topics they were most interested in which is presented on figure 4.

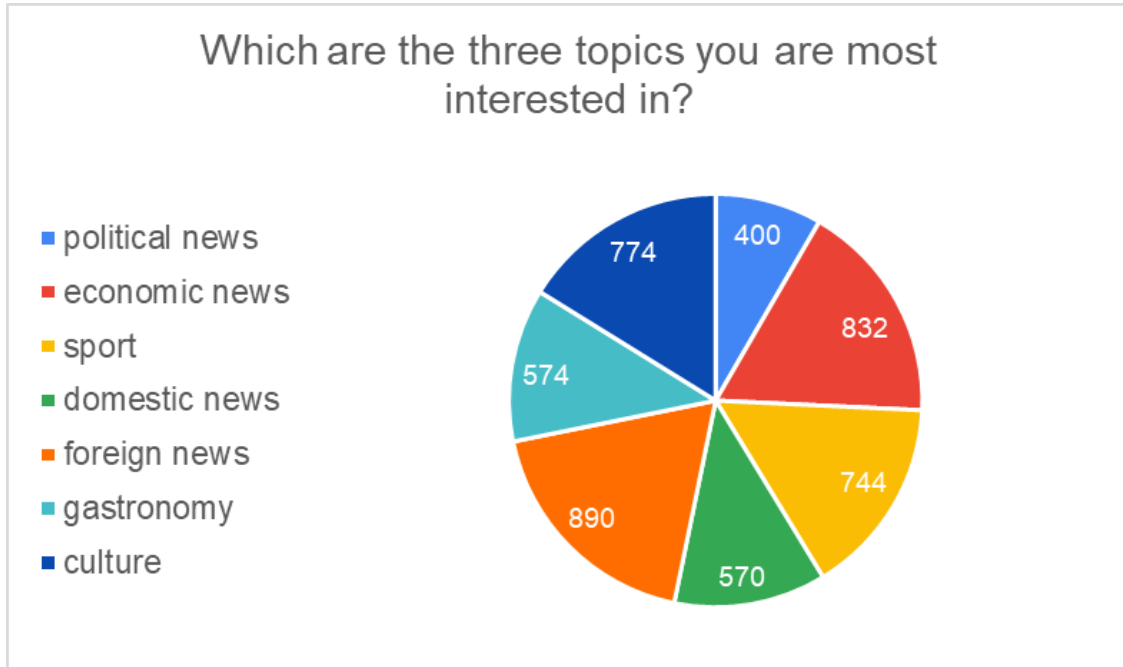


Figure 4: Which are the three topics you are most interested in?

Source: own database

The three most popular topics among respondents are foreign affairs, the economy and culture, which are mostly discussed on social media, online news portals and in conversations with friends.

CONCLUSION

The main goal for our research was to find out the job preferences of the freshmen students of the University of Debrecen. While Debrecen's labour market is dynamic, it encounters obstacles like ensuring competitive salaries and long-term career possibilities. This was our drive to do the research. We used an online survey that we shared around the Freshers Camp. With this way, we were able to reach 69% of the freshman participants of the camp, which meant 1658 answers. As the division of the sample, we had answers from all the 14 faculties, but most of the students were from the Faculty of Economics and Business (22,3%), the Faculty of Humanities (11,9%), and from the Faculty of Law (11,3%). We found out that the aim of

attending the camp for the students is getting to know the community with which they will start the new semester, to share experiences, to make friends and have fun, and to gain useful information before starting their university years. Not surprisingly, 86.8 percent of freshmen were excited and enthusiastic about their freshman camp experience. The answers showed that most freshmen (69,5%) have worked before, mostly part time jobs, so we can conclude that the youth coming to the University of Debrecen are receptive to work. They also tend to work abroad (57,4% would go abroad to work), probably that is why they are most interested in foreign news (53,7%), and at least for the average Hungarian salary, so they have a realistic concept of the salaries of the labor market. The most important factors for respondents in relation to their job are the work environment, the salary and the career opportunities. We consider that this is what local companies should be focusing on to improve. As the university and the city are connected to each other in the labor market, it is necessary to keep up with the future employees' perspectives so together they can create a positive effect on young people's motivation to work and local employment prospects; and a beneficial atmosphere for young individuals striving to work and advance their careers after university. Our future plans include researching the expectations divisions by faculties, research topics, a comparison between grades, and asking the students about their motives when they are seniors.

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Author Contributions:

Peter Nagy: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Research, Writing-original draft, Validation, visualization and approval of the final version.

Leila Vezendi: Methodology, Research, Writing-original draft, Software, visualization and approval of the final version.

Boglarka Toth: Research, Writing-original draft, writing-review and editing, visualization and approval of the final version.

Szilard Adrian Nagy: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Research, writing-review and editing, Supervision, visualization and approval of the final version.

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