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*“GRaduates Advancement and Development of University
capacities in Albania”*

GRADUA

REPORT

**The best practices for internship promotion in Albania for
the academic year 2020-2021**

Tirana, 2021

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Introduction

Ever since Albania embarked on the path of democracy, the labor market has gained its true meaning and has put the phenomenon of unemployment at the forefront of Albanian society. To combat this phenomenon, each government undertakes passive policy programs and develops active labor market policy programs. General national employment strategies need to take into account the changing reality so, over the years there have been times when a strategy did not reflect the programs, ways, steps for employment of young people, does not have a national youth employment policy, which may be another cause for the phenomenon of young people leaving Albania.

Finding a job can be a challenge, especially if you don't have experience. Unfortunately, you need to obtain a job before you can gain experience. Internships are a great way for university students, recent graduates or anyone considering a career change to obtain valuable work experience.

The work experience is invaluable and cannot be obtained in a classroom setting, making this one of the most important **benefits of internships**. Interns have the opportunity to apply acquired knowledge to real work experiences in their chosen field. In addition to learning the specialized skills of a particular field, transferable skills such as communication, teamwork, and computer proficiency are also obtained in an internship, fully preparing interns to enter the workforce upon graduation.

Exploring is an important part of the college experience, and **internships are a great way for students** to acquaint themselves with the field they are interested in. Some students begin university studies with a major or career path in mind, and end up changing their minds later on. By graduation, students who interned are more likely to feel **confident they chose the right degree**.

You can learn a lot about your **strengths** and **weaknesses** during an internship. Internships allow for **feedback from supervisors** and others who are established in the field, and offer a unique learning opportunity that you may not have again as a working adult. Embrace the mistakes you make as an intern and the many things that you don't know. Ask questions, observe, and take risks to get the most out of your internship training experience.

In the working world, it's all about who you know. As an intern, you will be surrounded by professionals in the industry. Internships are more than just about earning credit, getting a grade, or making money; internships provide an opportunity to learn from the people around, ask questions, and impress. The professionals encountered during an internship can be **the future colleagues** or **the connection to your first job**.

Many companies use internships as a way to enhance their recruitment efforts. In some cases, a company may decide to hire an intern at the end of the assignment. Even if a job offer doesn't happen right away, an intern who makes a favorable impression could receive an offer down the line when an opening occurs. It's a way for companies to test out an employee before committing to hiring them.

To this, GRADUA project has a specific focus on this regard. One of the work packages of the GRADUA project, consists on “*Creating sustainable University-Enterprise cooperation through capacity building dynamics*”. The WP is aimed to strengthen relations/cooperation with private enterprises and organize traineeships/internships in a more structured way, with more support, coaching and monitoring from the universities staff.

To have a good internship, three components should collaborate with each other all the time: the universities, enterprises, and students.

This report was prepared in the context of the GRADUA Project (2017-2021). GRADUA Project aims to support the advancement of graduates and development of HEI’s capacities in Albania through building a graduates’ data platform for matching the educational supply and the demand for qualified labor, enhancing university-enterprise cooperation and building related institutional capacities in partner HEIs. One of the activities foreseen in this project, was to carry out a survey with the students regarding internships and employability, taking into considerations various challenges students encounter on their way to the first job.

Methodology

In order to examine the issues foreseen on this report, a structured questionnaire was prepared. In order to assess the clarity of the questions and to check for biased or confusing questions, this questionnaire was subjected to a pre-test with academics and with five students, who were part of the target group. The final questionnaire was comprised of four sections: general information about the students, information how to find an internship, the performance of the internship, evaluation of the internship, self-assessment about the internship and professional future.

The questionnaire was administered to the students of five universities Agricultural University, University of Tirana, Polytechnic University of Tirana, Albanian University, Polis University, Catholic University Lady of Good Counsel and European University of Tirana, partners in GRADUA project, who have/or do not have an internship program in their program studies. Thus, the preliminary condition to select the target group was the internship program. Finally, a number of 669 students of Bachelor programs and Master programs, were targeted.

The technique used to gather the data was online through a Google- form, because the academic year 2020-2021 has been performed online for all the universities in Albania. The lack of face-to-face contact may have led to the small number of questionnaires obtained compared with the one organized in 2018.

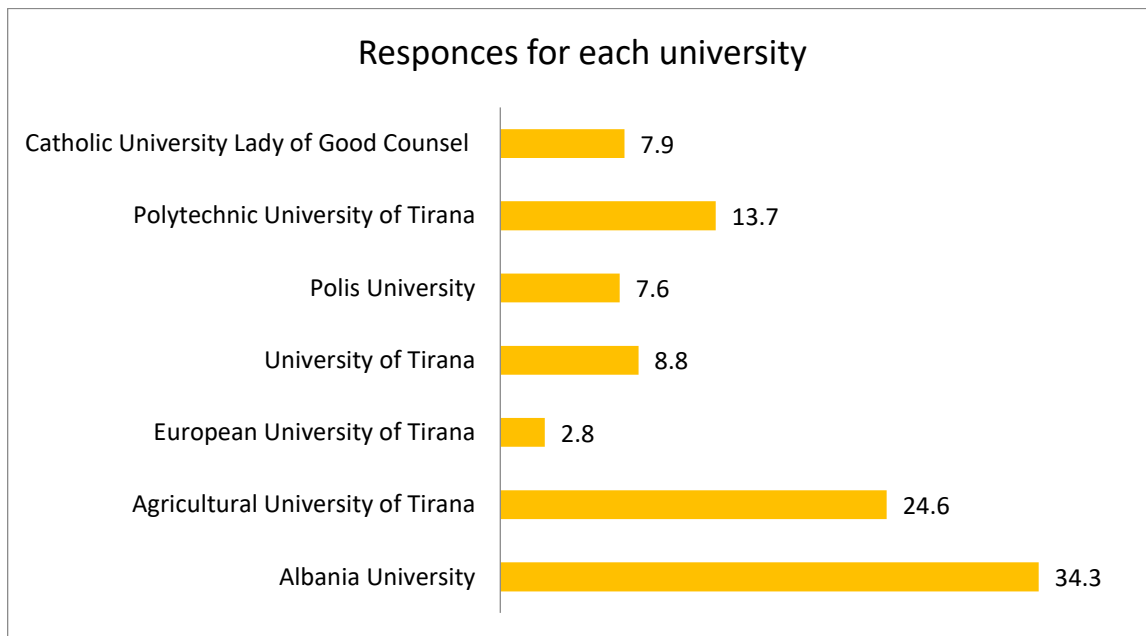
The matched data we will analyse was subject to a data cleaning process. The questionnaire contains some open questions and in those cases the students have given their answers using different descriptions, which in consequence have made the analysis very difficult. For this reason we have not given a report from which faculty students are and what program study they follow. These information correspond to the questions 2 and 3 in the questionnaire. Also an open question is question 25, where is asked information about the subjects that have resulted more efficient during the internship. The information provided from the responses are not informative and do not reach the aim we had when the questionnaire was designed. The

last open questions are 27 and 28, for which we have not made any statistical evaluation, but we have analysed them carefully and given a qualitative description of the student opinions. In order to obtain more accurate information, the data underwent the cleaning process.

General information

1. In which university do you study?

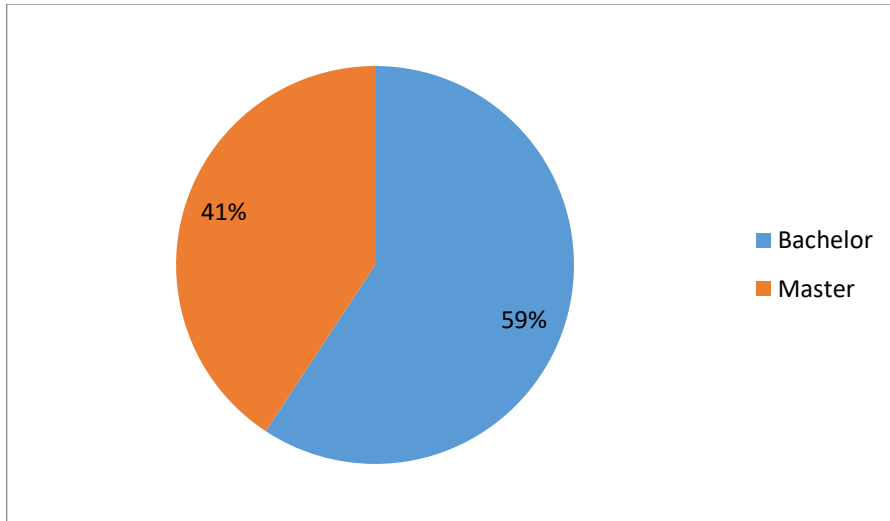
The questionnaire is filled from 669 students and in the following graph are given the percentage representative for each university. The largest percentage belong to Albanian University with 34% and Agricultural University with a representative of 25%. The smallest percentage is represented by European University of Tirana with only 3%, and we have not included the Metropolitan University which is represented in the database with only one questionnaire.



The responses of questions 2 and 3 are not presented because those have been open questions for the faculty where the student is enrolled and the program study he/she follows. Both these responses are written in most different ways and are very difficult to be processed.

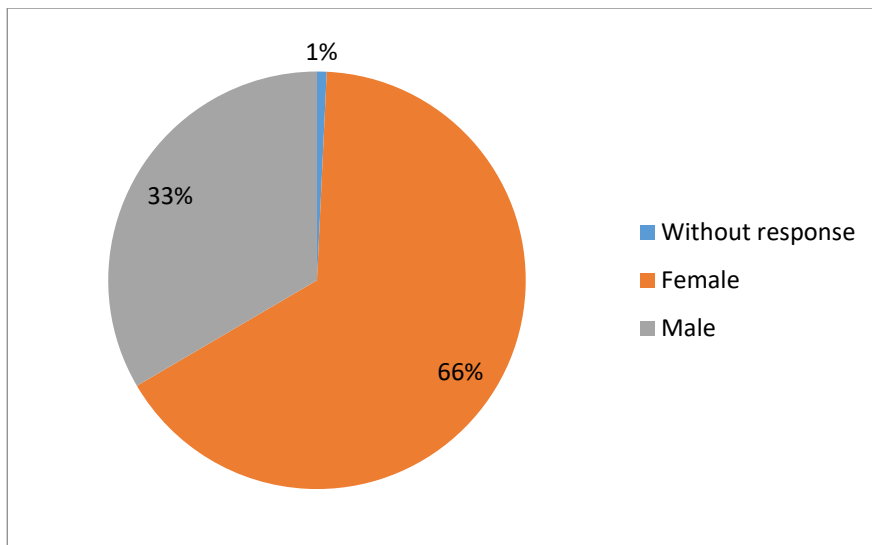
4. The cycle of the study

This questionnaire is filled by 59% bachelor students and 41% master students. The largest percentage of the bachelor is justified, by the fact that there are more students following the bachelor programs and less students in the master programs.



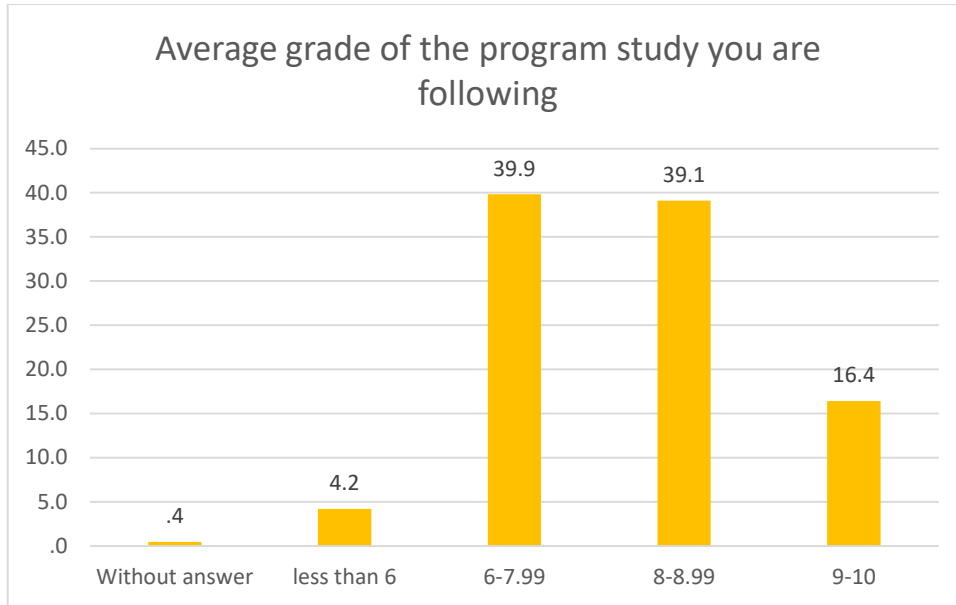
5. Gender statistics.

From the gender statistics of the questionnaire results that female students 66% of the entire sample have shown interest in answering it.



6. Grades statistics

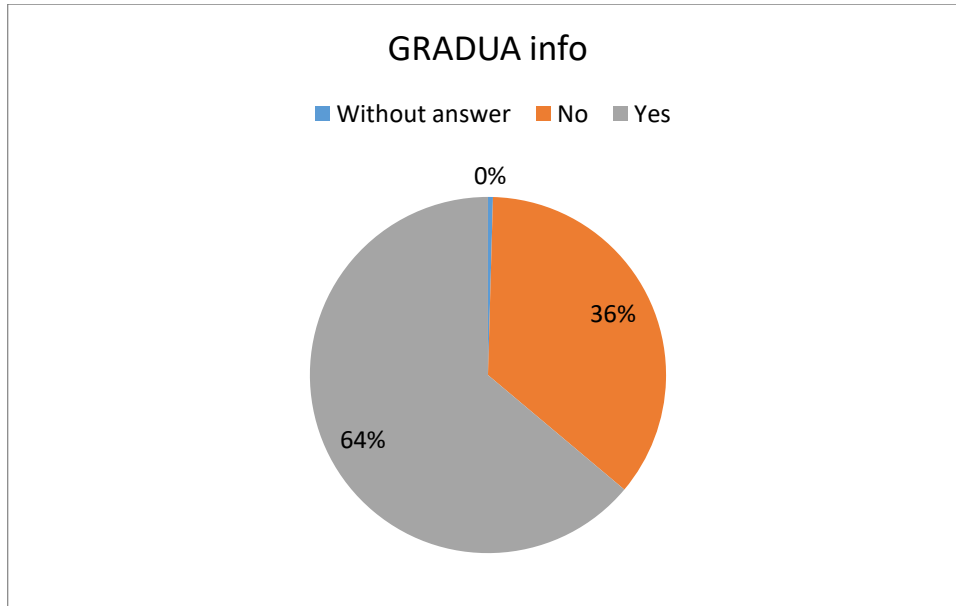
As regard to the grades statistics, we have approximately a normal distributed target group with respect to their grades, which gives us the right to say that this is a representative sample. 40% of the students are in the range of grades 6-7.99, 39% are in the range of grades 8-8.99 and 16% are in the range of grades 9-10.



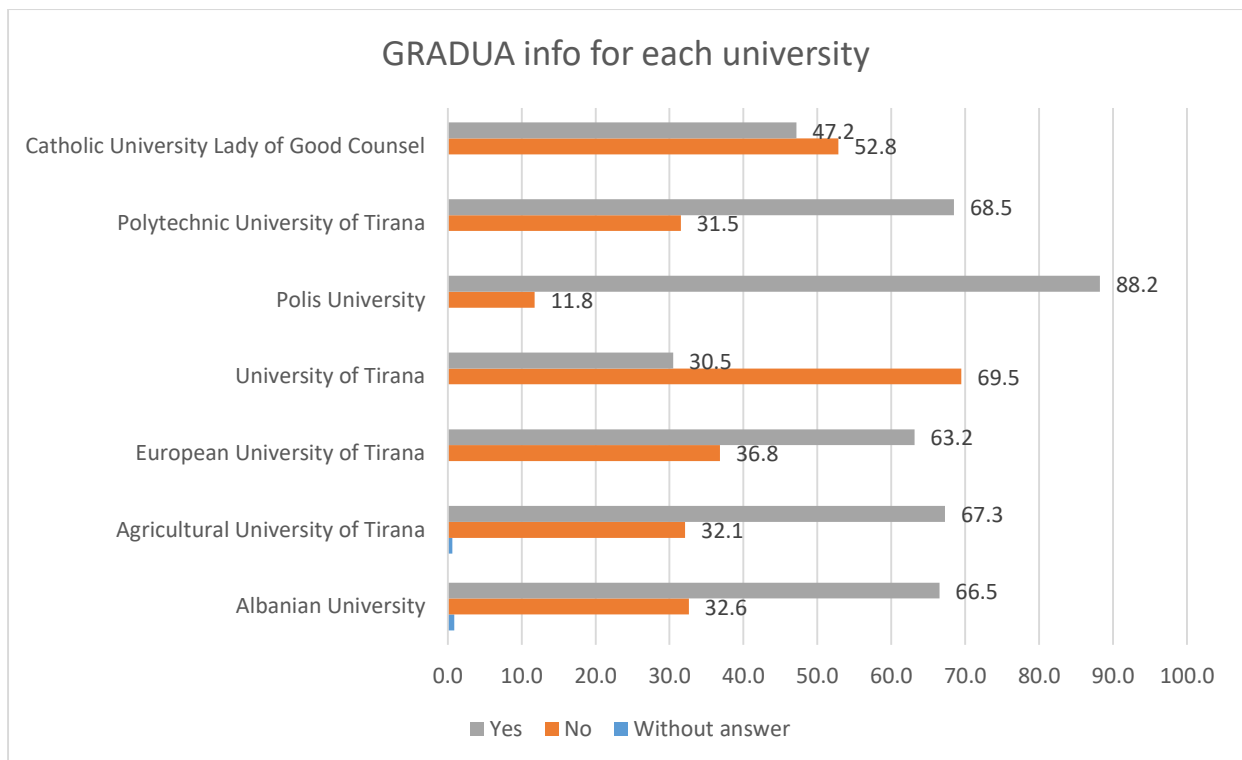
Information on how to find an internship

7. Have you been informed about GRADUA platform as an alternative for your future employment or in performing an internship?

From the entire students that had answered the questionnaire 64% of them are informed about GRADUA platform and 36% do not have any information about it.



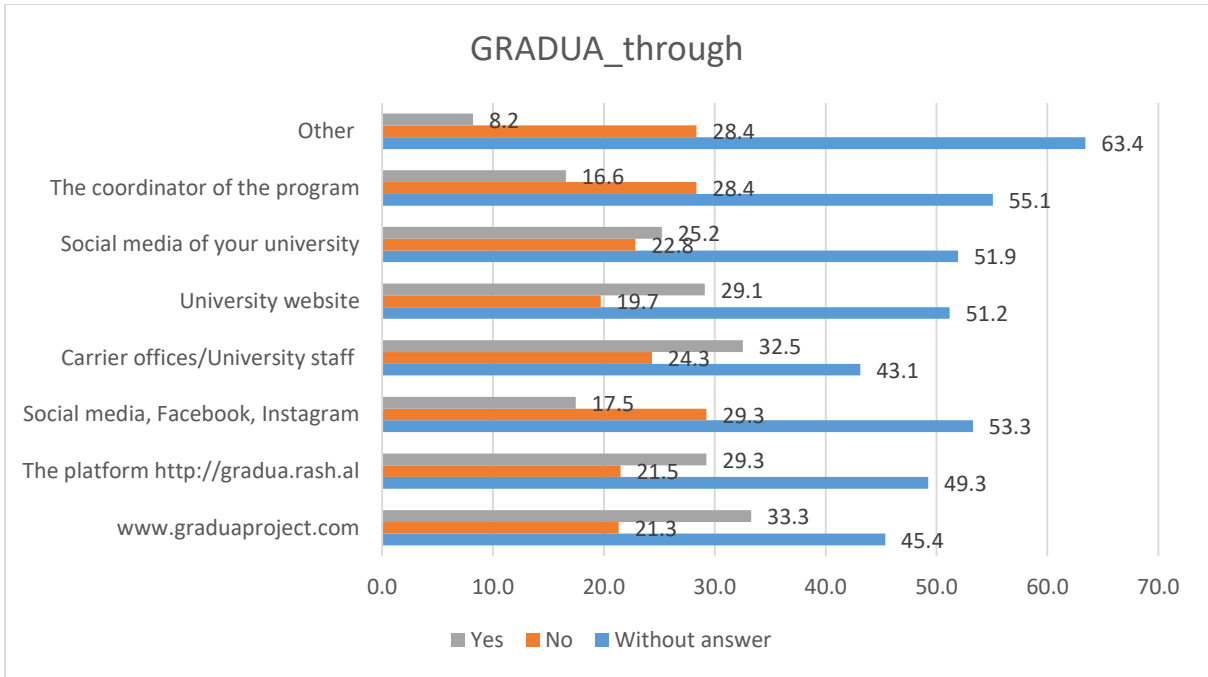
In order to have a better understanding how the dissemination process has proceeded in each university, one can refer to the following graph. Polis University is the leading one in this process with 88% who have responded “Yes”, followed by Polytechnic University and Agricultural University.



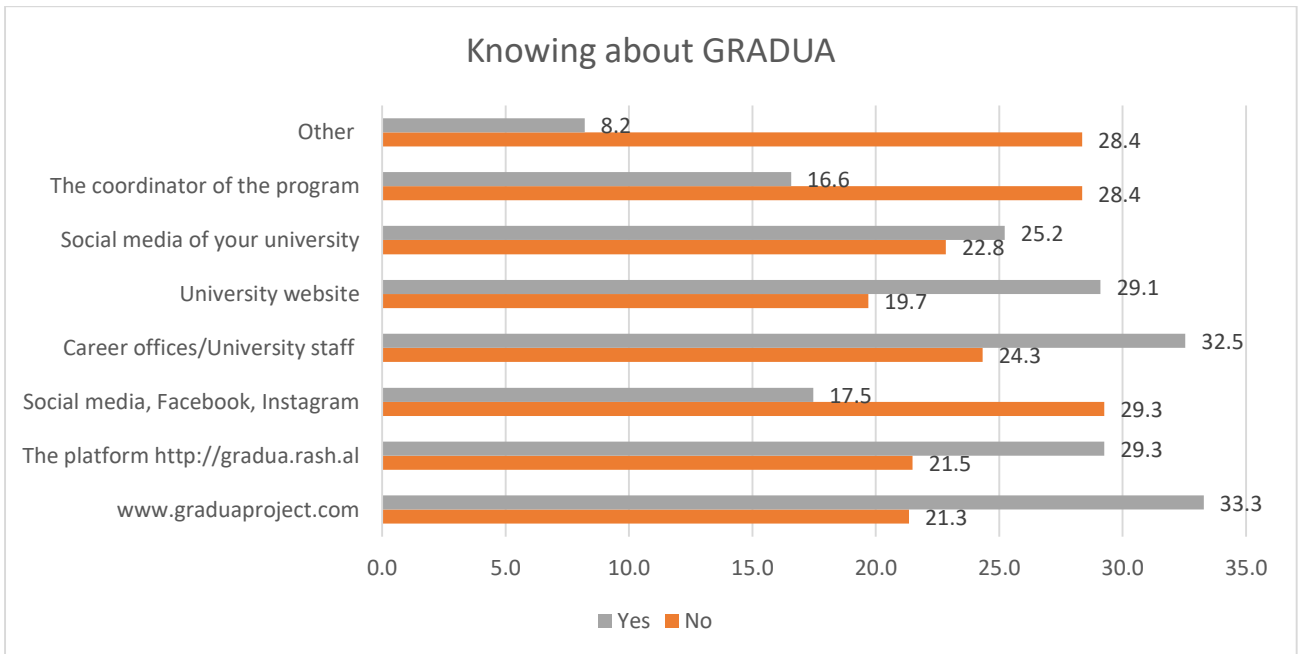
8. If you are informed about GRADUA, which of the sources have you visited for a detailed information?

- www.graduaproject.com
- The platform <http://gradua.rash.al>
- Social media, Facebook, Instagram, www.facebook.com/graduaproject
- Career offices/University staff
- University website
- Social media of your university
- The coordinator of the program study you follow
- Other sources

From the statistics for this question we have a large percentage with Missing values and for this reason in order to come into a conclusion which is the most efficient way to advertise and disseminate GRADUA platform, we refer to the next graph.



If we leave apart the percentage “Without answer” the situation is projected in the following form presented in the graph below. The website of GRADUA project has resulted to be the most reported source with 33%, followed by Career offices/University staff with 32.5% and University website by 29%.

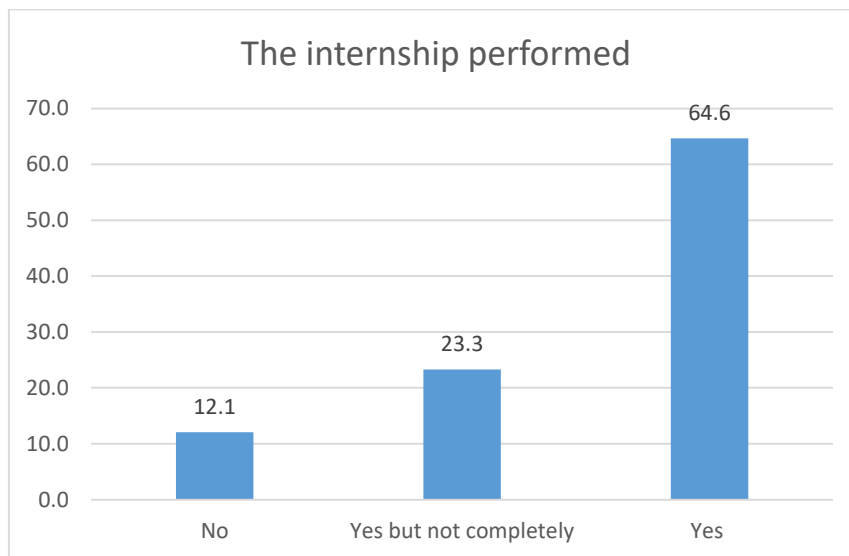


The performance of the internship

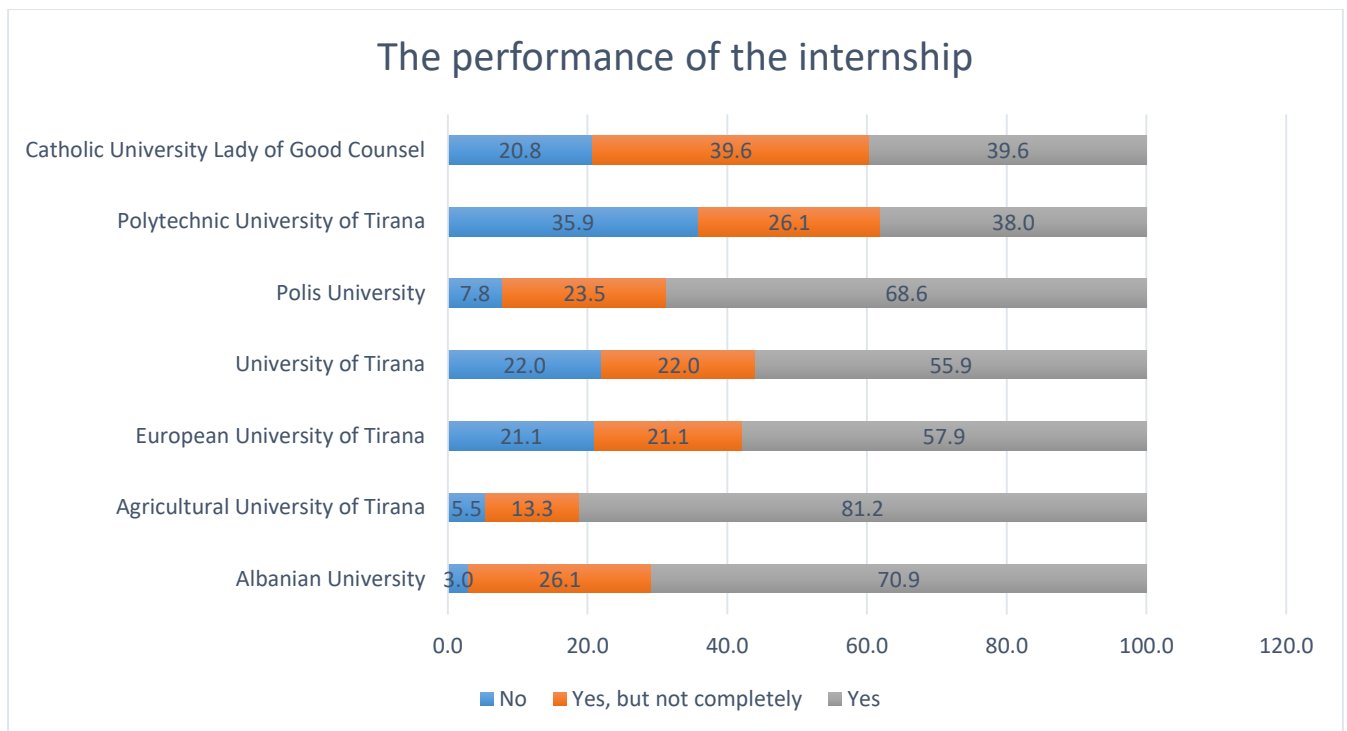
9. Did you have the possibility to perform the internship during this academic year?

This question is very important for the academic year 2020-2021 where quite all the activities are organized online and the internship in some universities as for example the ones that have program studies that prepare Teachers for Secondary and Higher schools have postponed the internship or organized it online, because the schools have been opened in restricted number of pupils.

From the graph we see that 65% of the sample have performed the internship, 23% “Yes, but not completely” and only 12% of them have not made the internship.



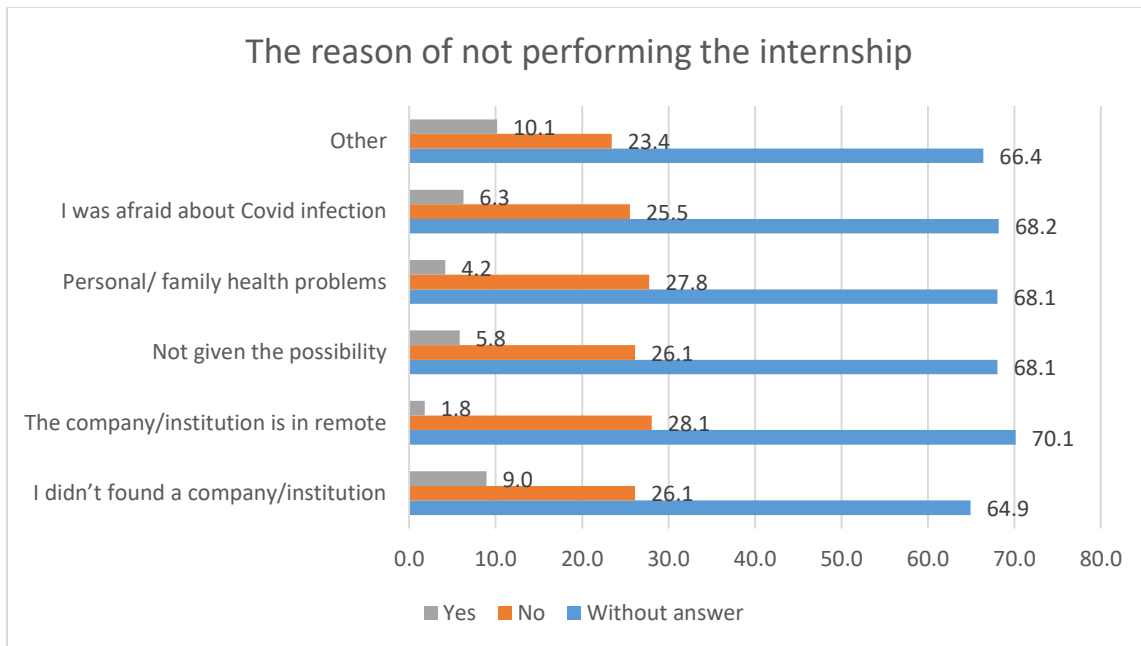
In the graph below is given the performance of the internship in a comparison scheme for all the university partners in the project and we can notice that Agricultural University and Albanian University have performed the internship respectively with values 81% and 71%, followed by Polis University with 69% of the target group that have responded “Yes”. Polytechnic University has the largest percentage of the students that have not performed the internship with a value about 36%.



10. If you did not perform the internship during this academic year, which are the reasons that have influenced it?

- I didn't find a company/institution where I could make the internship.
- The company/institution asked me to work online, but I didn't have the possibility.
- In my home town there wasn't a possibility to perform the internship.
- Personal/ family health problems.
- I was afraid about Covid-19 infection.
- Other.

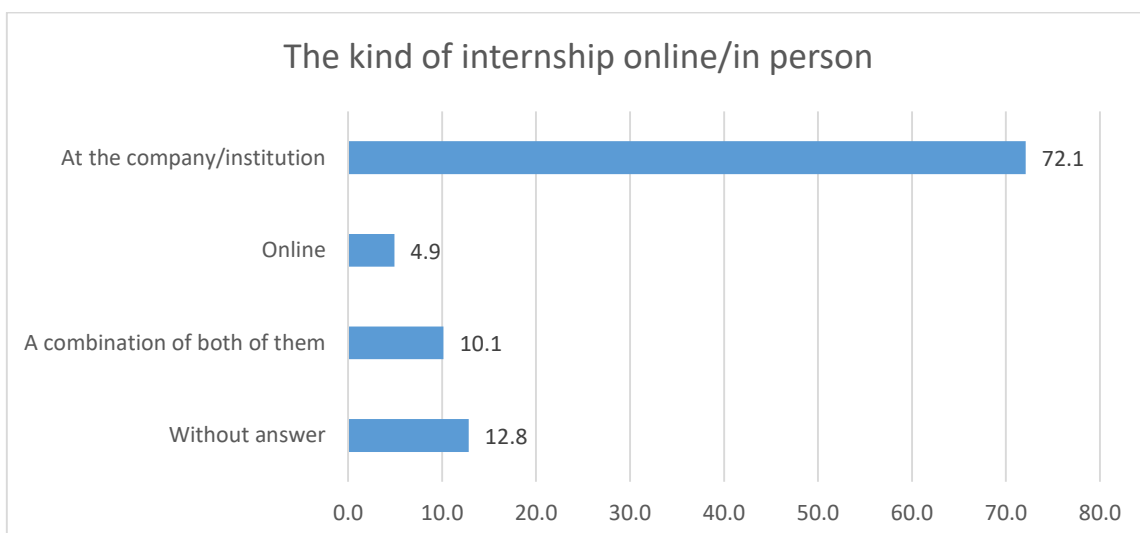
This question is used to obtain the information of not realizing the internship during the academic year 2020-2021, where all the activities have been organized under very restricted conditions because of the pandemic situation. This question has a large percentage of responses “*Not an answer*” and the reasons listed didn't have a significant response, because quite all the “*Yes*” responses for all the reasons range from 2% -10%.



11. How is the internship performed considering that the academic year 2020-2021 has been organized online for all public and non-public universities in Albania?

From 88% of the students that have responded “Yes” to the question 9 “If they performed the internship” in this question is taken the information about the way how they have performed it, online, in person or a combination of both forms.

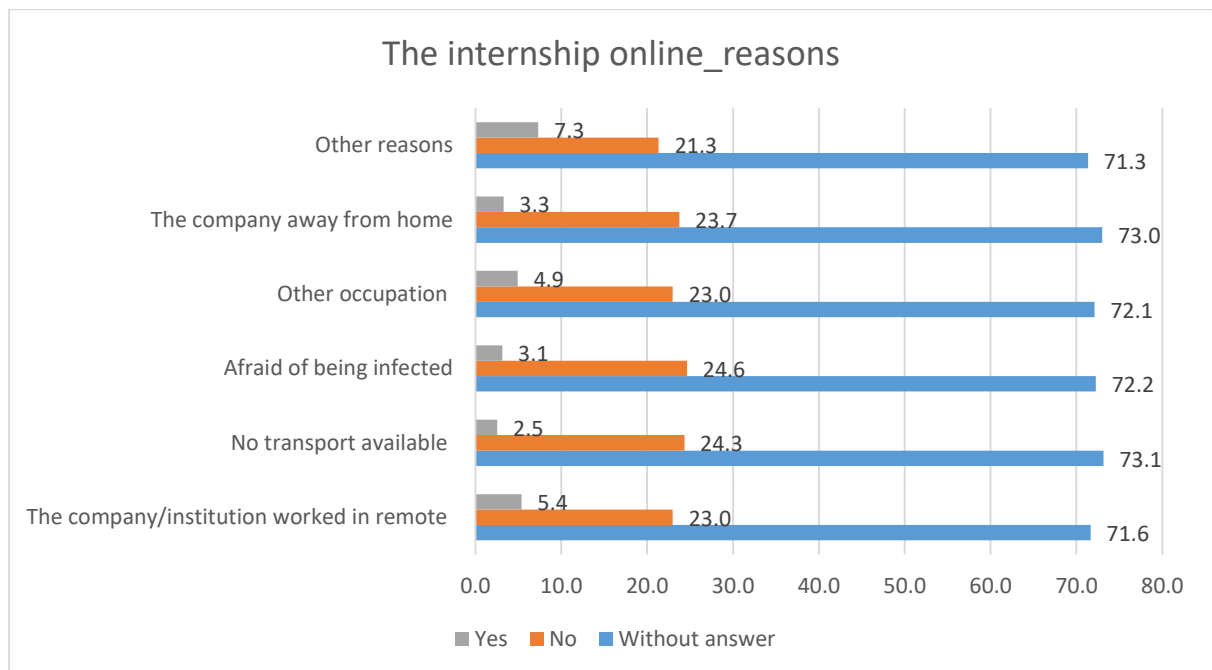
72% of the students have performed the internship at the company/ institution in person, 5% have performed it online and 10% have done it in a combination of both of them (online and at the company/institution).



12. If you performed the internship online, which of the following reasons influenced your decision?

- The company/institution worked in remote way online from home for all the employees.
- There was no transport available to go at the company/institution in-person.
- I decided to work online because I was afraid of being infected.
- Other occupation constricted me to make the internship online.
- The company was not in my home town.
- Other reasons.

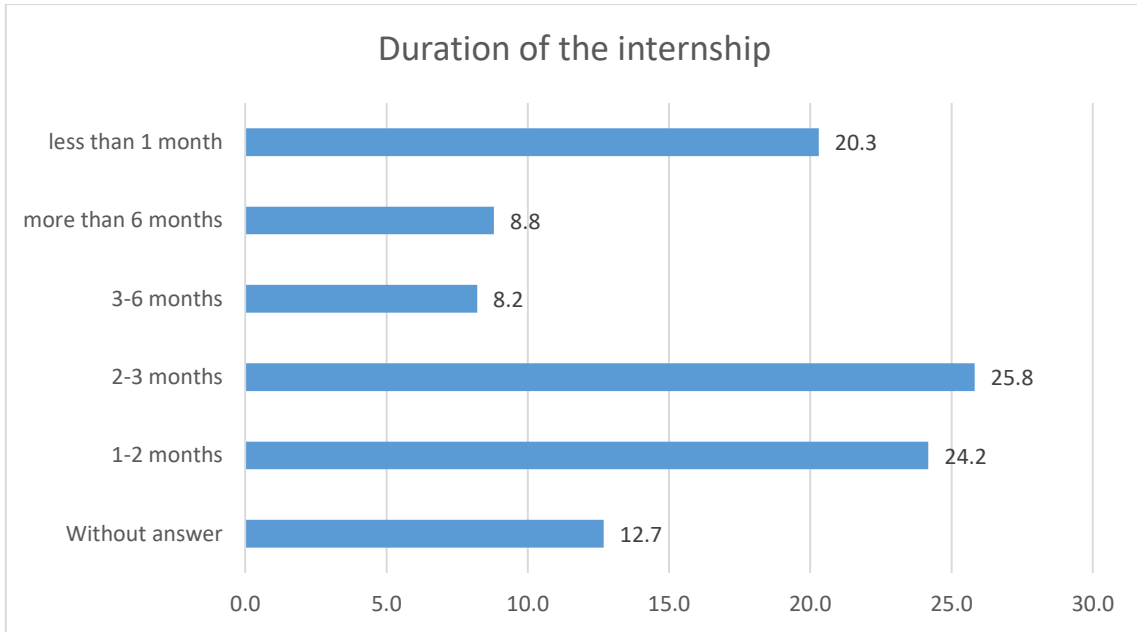
The aim of this question is to find the most relevant reason that has influenced on the performance of the internship online. Here we are in the same situation as in question 10, where the answers of the students have not converged to a precise reason, leaving a large percentage with “Without answer”. The largest percentage is 5.4% of the reason that the company/institution where they have been affiliated has been working in remote way and 7.3% of them has chosen the case “Other reasons”.



13. If you performed the internship, how long did it last?

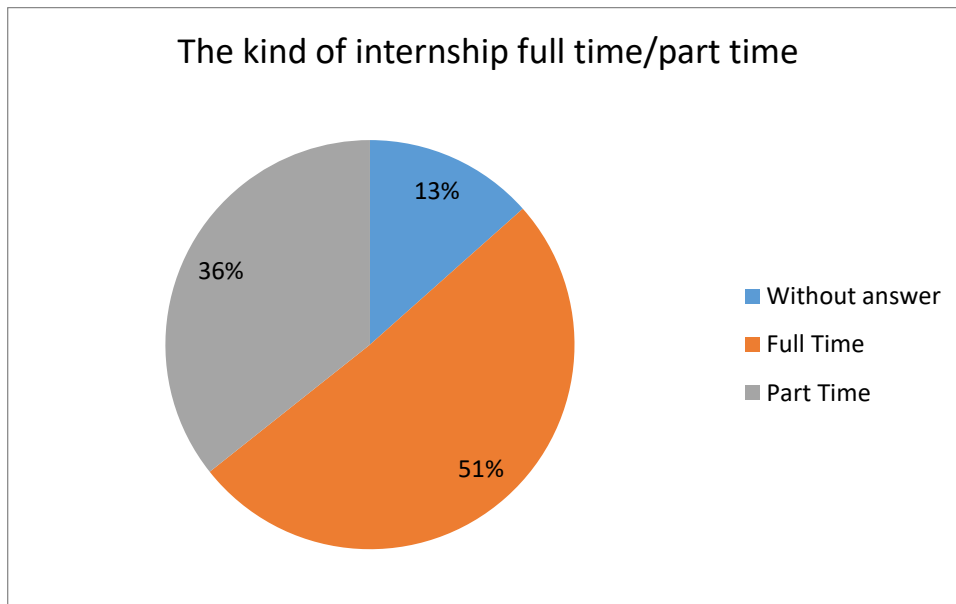
In this question the students have answered for the time duration that they have performed the internship and 26% of them have done the internship for 2-3 months, 24% have performed the internship in one month and 20% have performed an internship of less than one month.

A considerable percentage of the students 9% have performed the internship in more than 6 months and 8% have done an internship from 3 till 6 months. If we summarise the range of the duration more than 3 months we have about 17% of the students that have performed in internships in more than a semester.



14. If you performed the internship, in which form you followed it full time or part time?

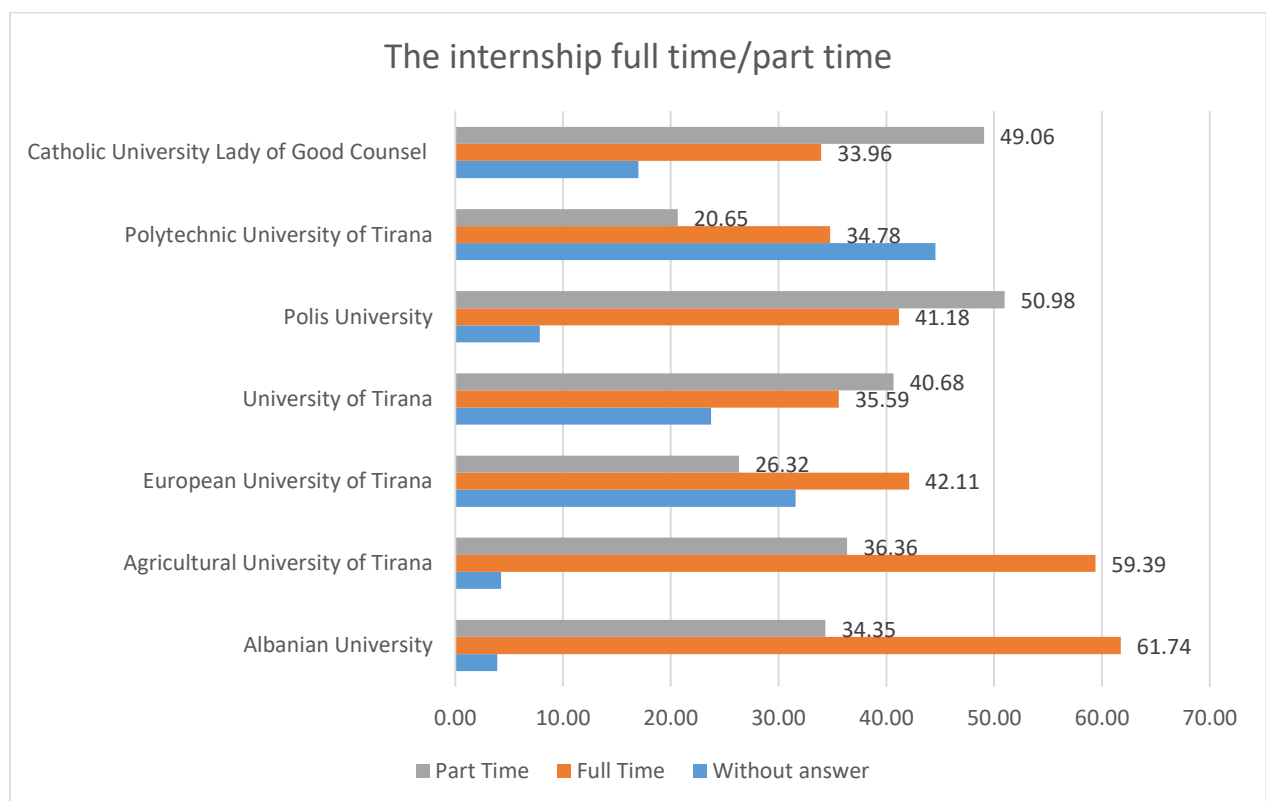
In this question is gathered information about the kind of internship full time or part time and 51% have performed it full time. We do not have information if the internship is part of the university curricula, and in this case the engagement full time is justified by the University for a certain period of time, or it is like a probationary period before the employment. 36% of the students have performed the internship part-time using the free time left from the university schedule.



In order to see the dynamics of this question for each university we have plotted the graph given below, and we see that the situation varies in each university, because each one has its own specifics. In general we can divide the universities in two groups:

- (i) The universities where the majority of the students have performed the internship part-time are Catholic University Lady of Good Counsel, Polis University and University of Tirana.
- (ii) The universities where the majority of the students have performed the internship full-time are Polytechnic University of Tirana, European University of Tirana, Agricultural University of Tirana and Albanian University.

The students of the Catholic University Lady of Good Counsel have a division of 49% part-time and 34% full time. The students of Polytechnic University of Tirana 21% have performed the internship part-time and 35% full-time. The students of Polis University have the largest percentage of all the university with 51% of the students that have performed the internship part-time and 41% full-time. The students of University of Tirana are quite divided in half about the form of the internship with 41% part-time and 36% full-time. The students of European University of Tirana are divided in 26% part-time and 42% full-time. The students of Agricultural University of Tirana are listed the second for the percentage 59% that have performed the internship full-time and 36% have performed it part-time. The students of Albanian University are the first for performing the internship full-time 62% of them and only 34% have done it part-time.



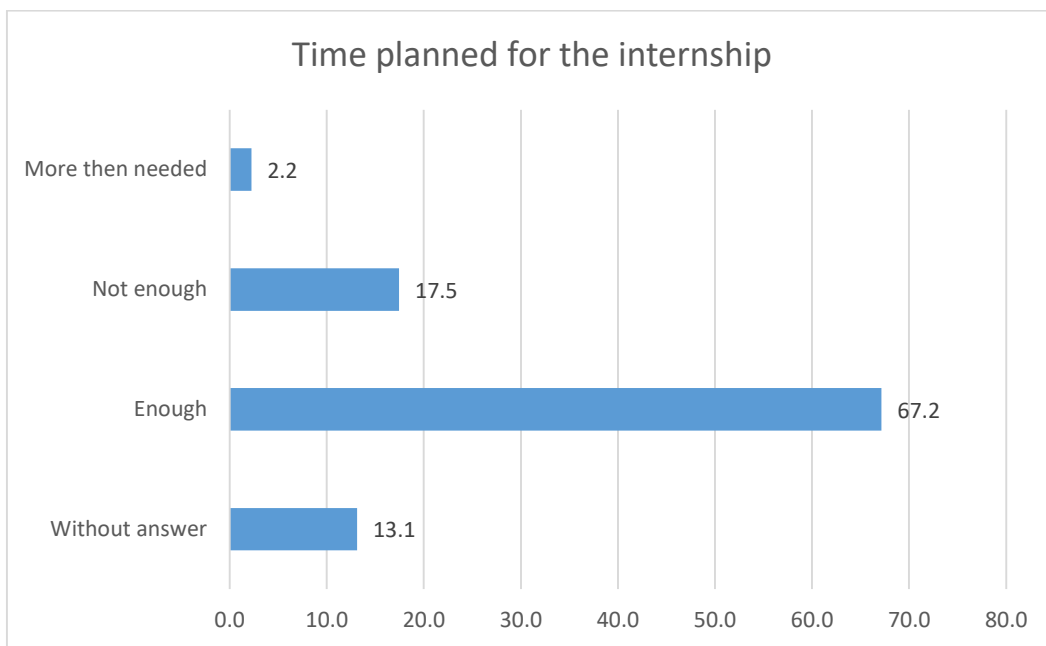
Evaluation of the internship

15. The time planned for the internship was enough, not enough or more than needed?

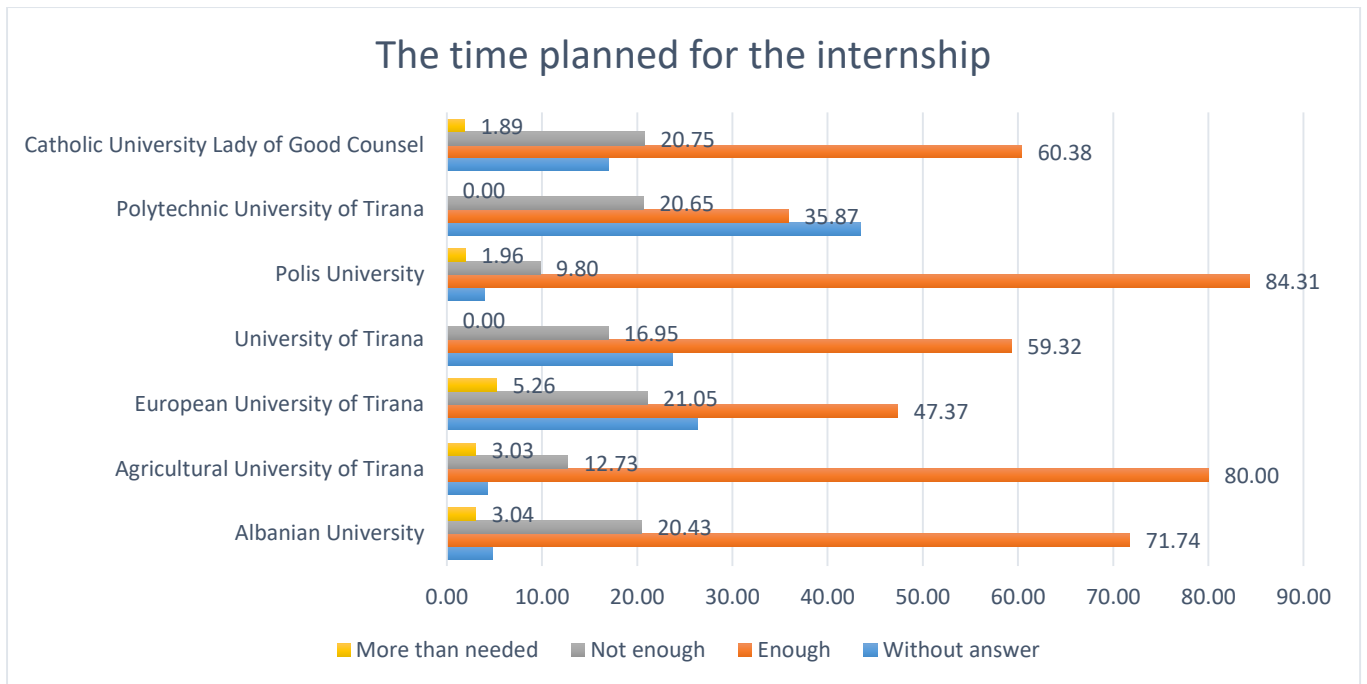
In some program studies the time planned for the internship is defined in the curricula of the program they follow and is transferred into credits with respect of the time they spend in the

company/institution, but in other cases the internship is performed according to an agreement that the university or faculty has with companies/institutions. In the first case the time is determined by the departments that offer that program study and it is interesting to have a feedback from the students if the time has been appropriate or not, by their point of view. In the cases when the internship comes through an agreement, the time is mainly determined by the company/institution and also in this case it is needed to have the opinion of the students in order to be aware when the agreements are drafted and signed by the actors.

The responses of the students 67% have concluded that the time planned for the internship is enough and 18% say that the time determined is not enough.



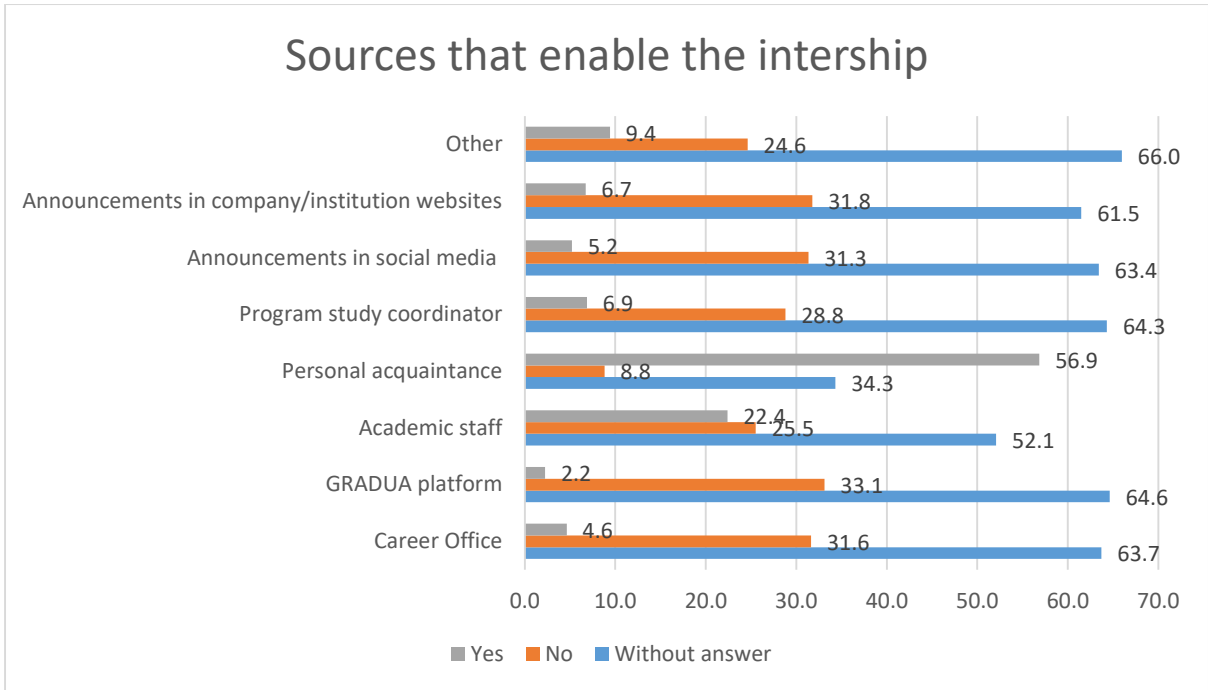
In order to have a more detailed view how each target group that has represented its university we show the following graph, where for all the universities the higher percentage goes for the fact that time available of the internship is enough.



16. The finding of the company/institution for the internship was offered by:

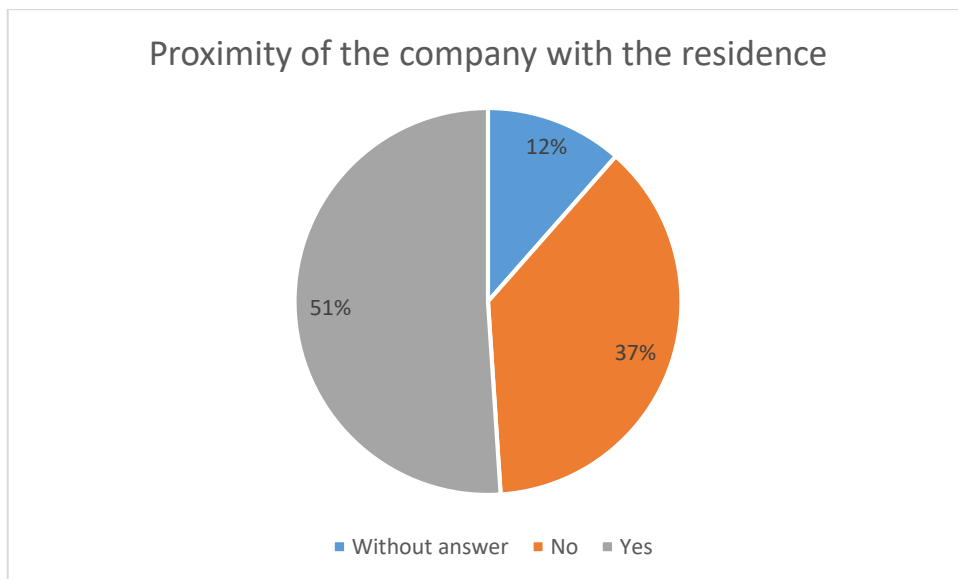
- Career office
- GRADUA platform
- Academic staff
- Personal acquaintance
- Program study coordinator
- Announcements in social media
- Announcements in company/institution websites
- Other

This question is determined to find the most relevant sources that students use to find the internship. We notice that a large percentage of the students have left the question without an answer, but it is clearly seen that Personal acquaintances with 57% remain the most important source for finding the internship, with the results to all the reports of the universities on GRADUA questionnaire 2019 and Internship Practices Report 2018. The second most relevant source is Academic staff with 22.4% and remains a challenge to engage the Career office and GRADUA platform in organizing and managing the internship for the students. All the other sources vary quite in the same percentage.



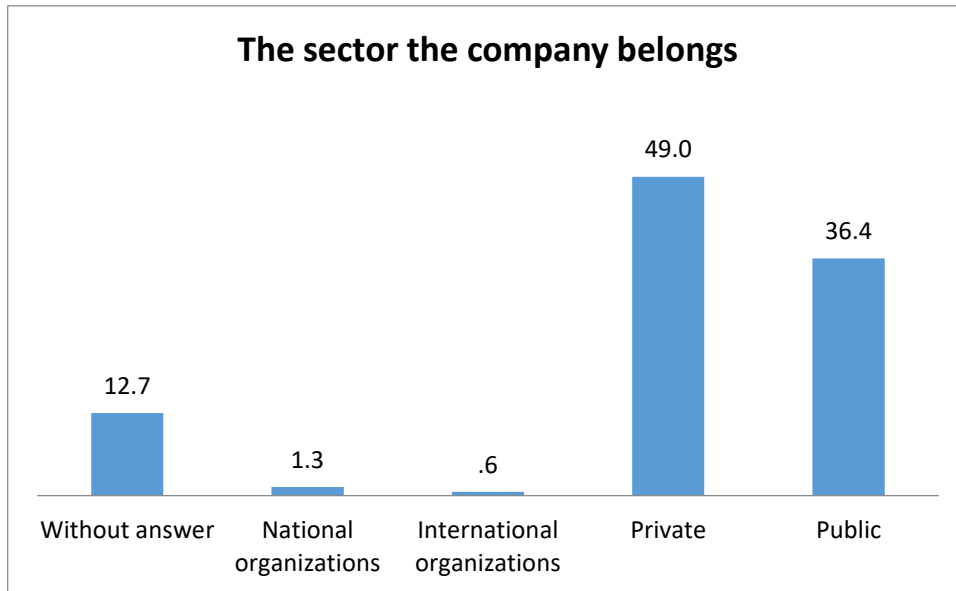
17. The company/institution that you had applied to was near your home?

The aim of this question is to capture the information that the company/institution was near the home where the student was resident. Also for the reason of pandemics the students mostly have lived at their home with the parents and not in the cities where their university is situated and this has led to the large response 51% that the company/institution has been near their residence.



18. The institution where you perform the internship was part of the sector:

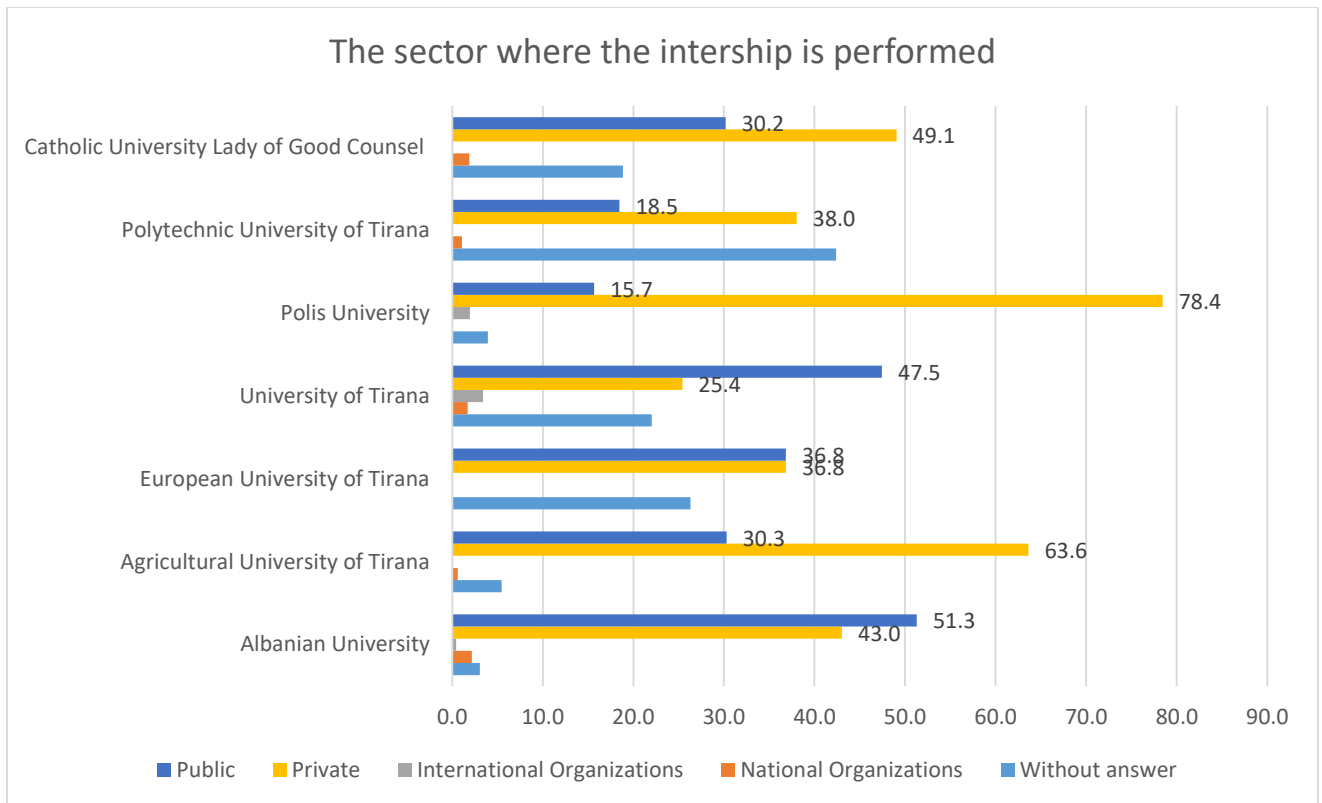
This question is very important and also is a question that we encounter also in GRADUA questionnaire and the responses indicate that the private sector with 49% dominates the labor market. The public sector is represented with 36.4% and National and International organizations with quite insignificant percentages.



In order to have a more detailed picture how the sectors vary for the students of all the universities we give the following graph and we may classify the universities in two groups:

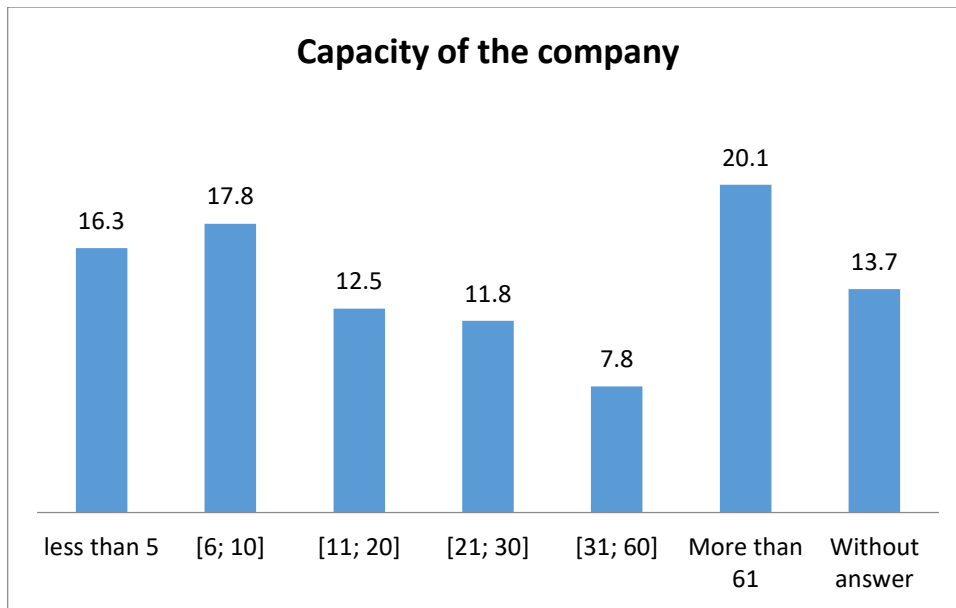
- (i) The universities where the most encountered internships are offered by the private sector. In this group are Catholic University Lady of Good Counsel 49%, Polytechnic University of Tirana 38%, Polis University 78%, and Agricultural University of Tirana 64%.
- (ii) The universities where the most encountered internships are offered by the public sector. In this group belong University of Tirana and Albanian University.

European University of Tirana does not belong to either of these groups because both sectors are represented in equal percentage.



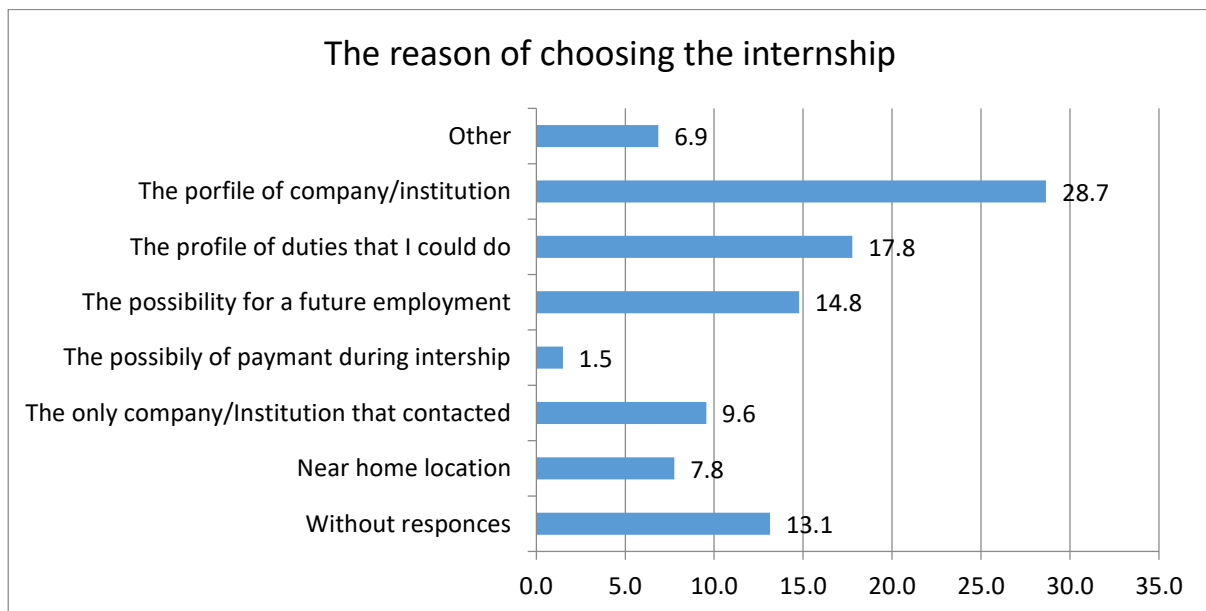
19. How many employees had the company/institution where you performed the internship?

In this question is taken the information about the capacity of the company and the highest percentage 20% goes for the larger companies with more than 61 employers, but a high percentage is encountered even in the small companies, 16% for companies with less than 5 employers and 18% for companies with 6-10 employers.



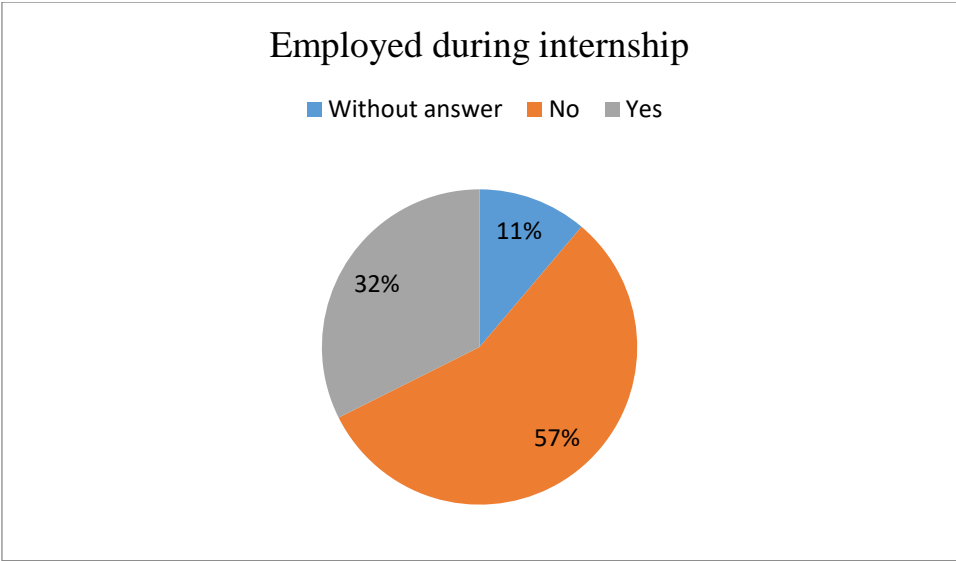
20. The main reason that affected the choice of the company/ institution for the internship.

This question is made to identify the reason that affects more in the process of decision making where the student has the opportunity to choose. The most relevant resulted to be the profile of the company/institution with 28%, followed by the profile of the work with 18%, the possibility for the future employment with 15% and with the lower percentage is the possibility of payment with 2%. As a conclusion the reputation of the company/institution is more relevant than every other possibility that students evaluate.



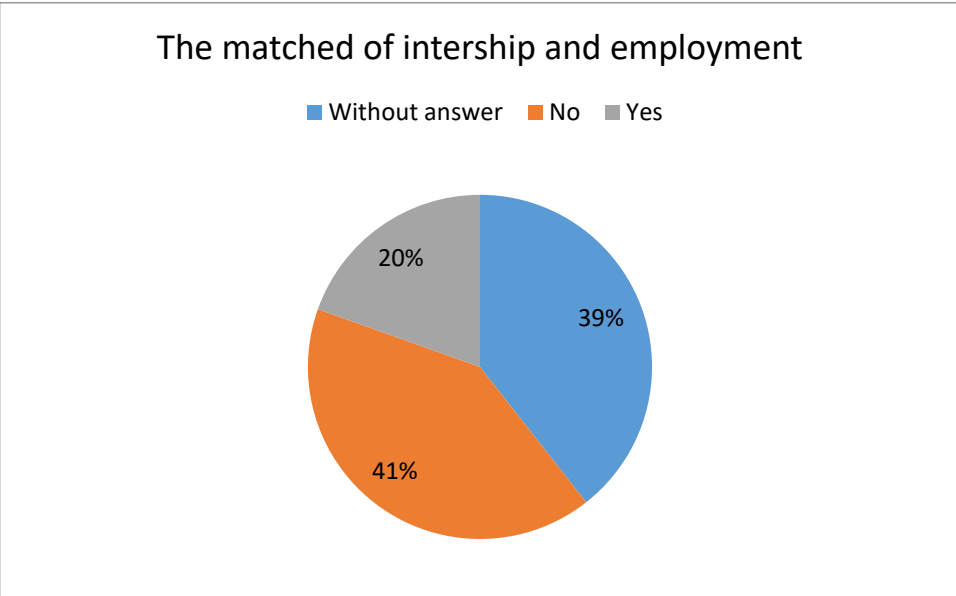
21. Have you been employed during the internship?

When the students are asked if they have been employed during the internship, 57% of them have responded “No” and 32% have responded “Yes”.



22. If you have been employed during the internship, have you performed it at the same company/institution?

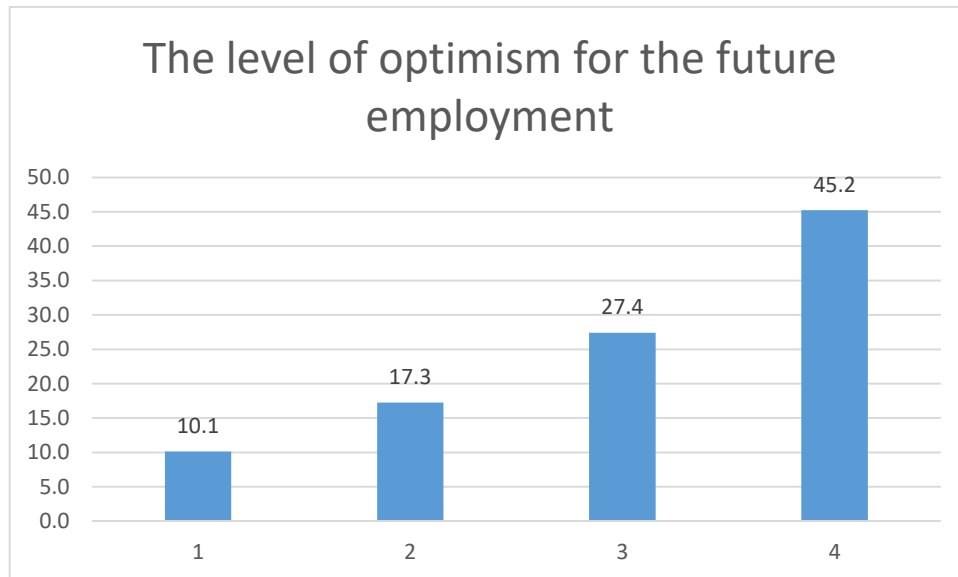
From the students that have been employed during the internship 32%, only 20% of them have performed the internship at the same company/institution. 41% of them have done the internship in a different company/institution than the one they are already employed.



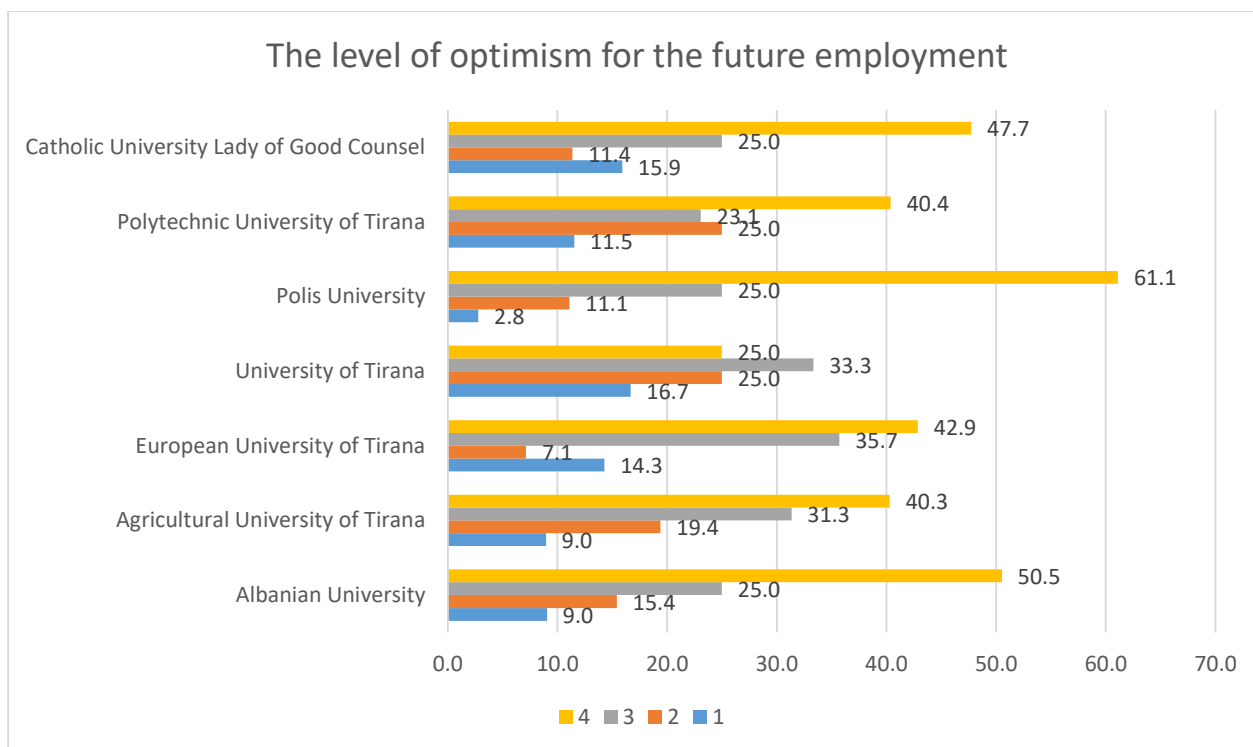
Self-assessment about the internship and the professional future

23. If you have not been employed before the internship, how optimistic are you now for your future employment?

With a total of 25% of missing values we have obtained this classification of the level of the optimism that the students have for their future employment. Approximately half of them 45.2% have evaluated with the highest score for their expectations for the employment.



In the following graph is given the evaluation from the students of each partner university. The highest score goes for Polis University 61%, followed by Albanian University with about 51%.

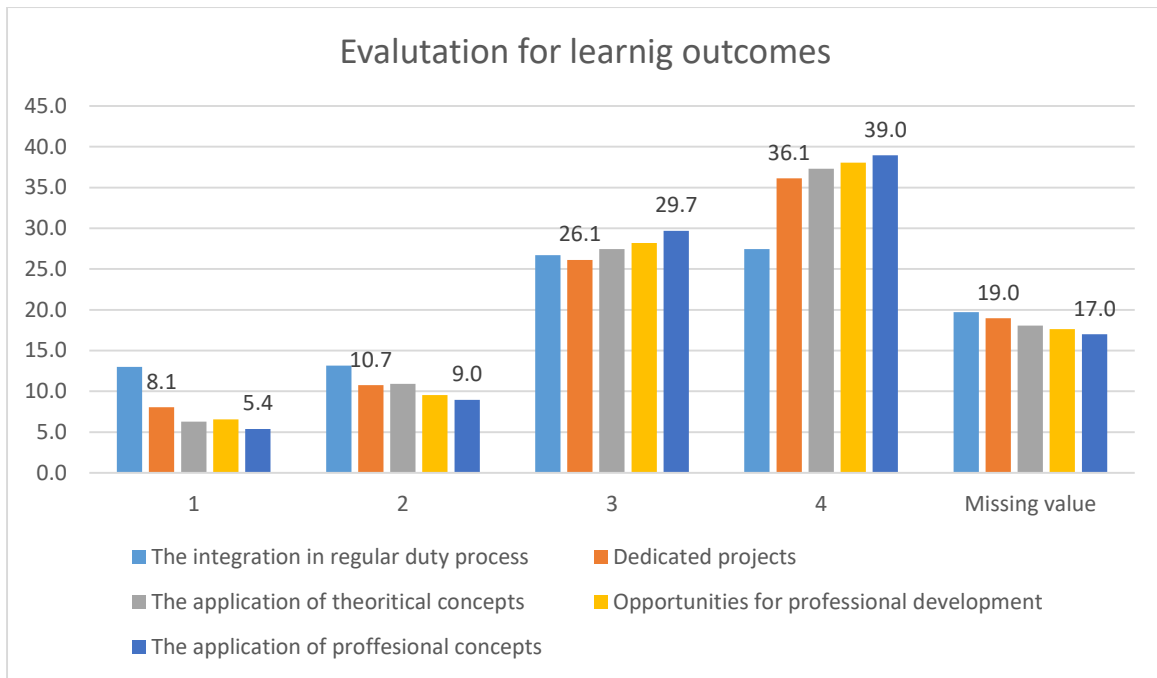


24. Give your evaluation about the level of agreement for the following information:

- During the internship I got integrated with the regular process of the work.
- They gave me personal projects to work for.
- There were given many opportunities for my professional development.
- I had the opportunities to apply my theoretical knowledge provided during the university studies.
- I had the opportunity to apply my professional knowledge provided during my university studies.

This question is formulated in order to give students the opportunity to evaluate his/her agreement for the integration in regular duty processes, the application of theoretical concepts, the application of professional concepts, if they are given dedicated projects and if this internship gives them the opportunity for professional development.

In the graph given below each colour bar represents one attribute and scored in increasing level from 1 to 4. If we focus on the level 3 and 4 we notice that the most rated outcomes are the application of professional concepts and the opportunity for professional development.

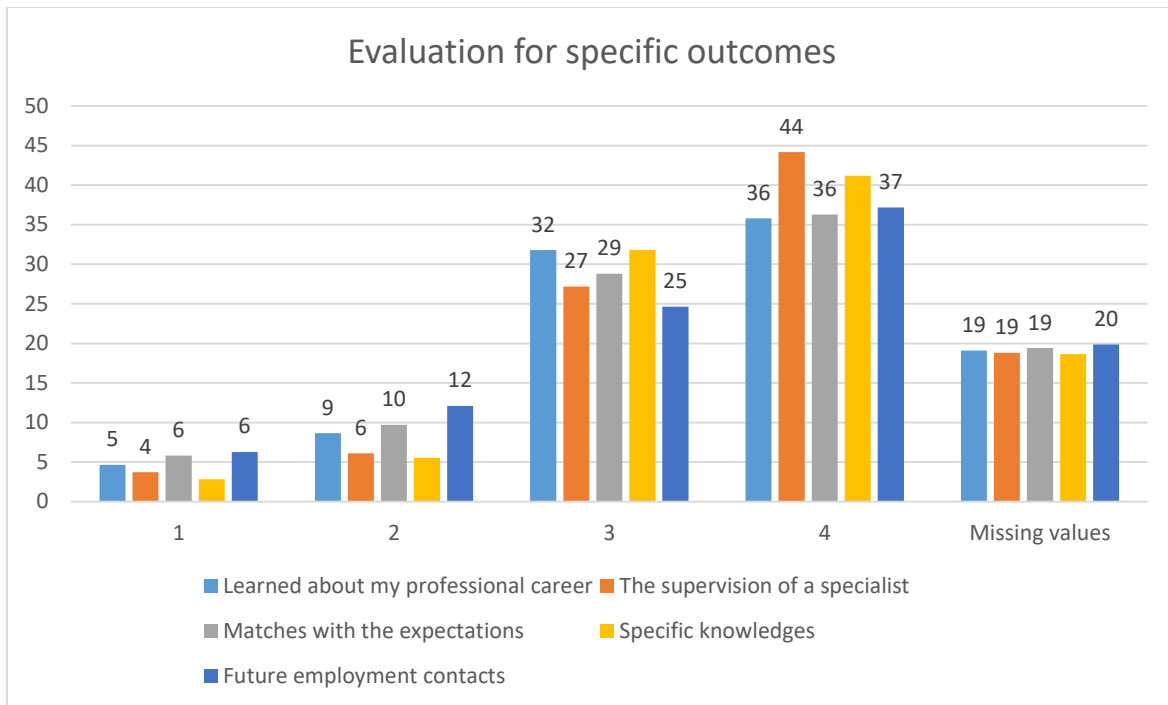


26. Give your evaluation about the level of the agreement according to the following information:

- I learned about my professional career.
- I worked under the supervision of a specialist of my professional field.
- The company/institution matches with the expectations.
- I earned specific knowledge.
- I created contact that will help me in the future employment.

In the consequence of question 25, again in this question is asked the evaluation of some other outcomes that are more related to the working environment.

In the graph given below is used the same representation where each outcome is represented by a different colour and the level is represented in increasing order from 1 to 4. The most rated outcome is the supervision of a specialist during the internship with 44%, followed by obtaining specific knowledge with 37% and with the same percentage are represented the learning about the professional career 36% and what they experienced matches with the expectations with 36%.



27. What are the strong points for you as an intern?

This is an open question in the questionnaire and below are listed the most frequent qualities that the students have expressed.

The willingness to learn fast, the readiness to make things, the will and desire, persistence, prudence, commitment to the job, correctness, good communication, new and innovative ideas, professional knowledge, leaning fast, knowing some software programs, punctuality and precision, creativity, the knowledge gained at the university.

28. What are the weak points for you as an intern?

Also this is an open question in the questionnaire and below are listed the most frequent qualities that the students have filled in the questionnaire.

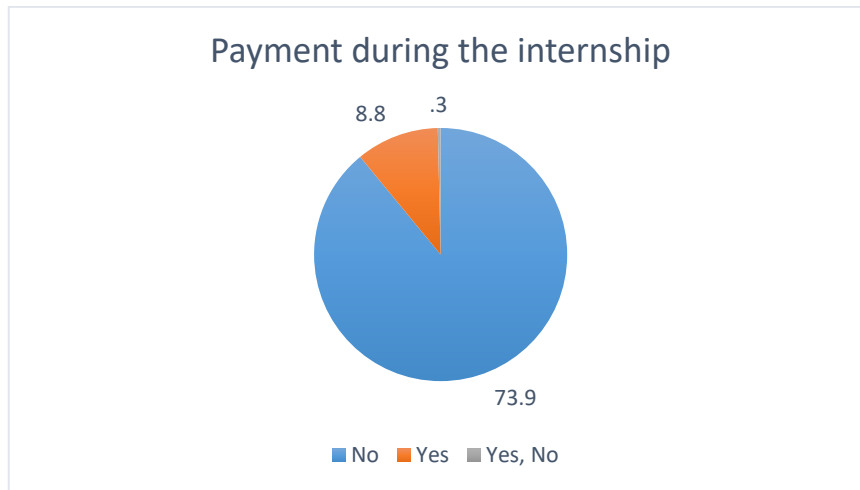
The lack of experience, insufficient practice, not having a driving licence, the large amount of information at the same time, staying inactive in the first days of the internship, the fear of making a mistake.

29. Have you been paid by the company/institution during the internship?

There are two main types of internships: ones that are paid and ones that are not. Most internships are unpaid. This is because the student is not there to earn money, but rather to earn valuable knowledge and experience. If an internship is unpaid, it is usually subject to stringent labor guidelines. In addition, some states have their own regulations regarding unpaid interns. For example, unpaid interns in most western countries must receive college credit for their work in lieu of pay. Some of the program studies in Albanian universities have included the

internship as part of the program study, more frequently in master programs and less in bachelor program studies.

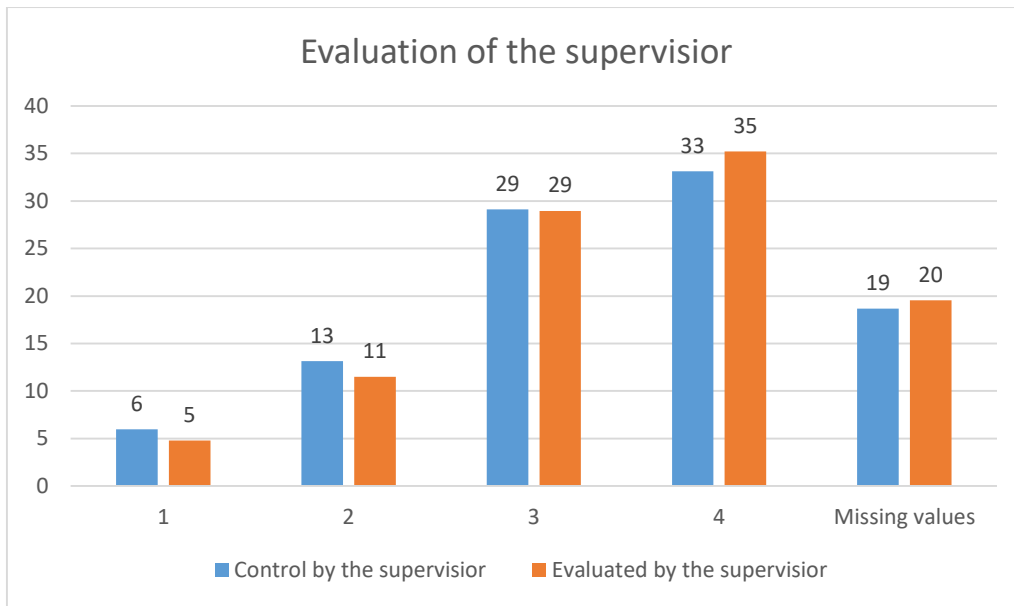
From the database of all the target students from all the universities 74% of them are not paid during the internship. This result matches with the results obtained in the first questionnaire made in 2018.



30. Give the level of your evaluation about the following information:

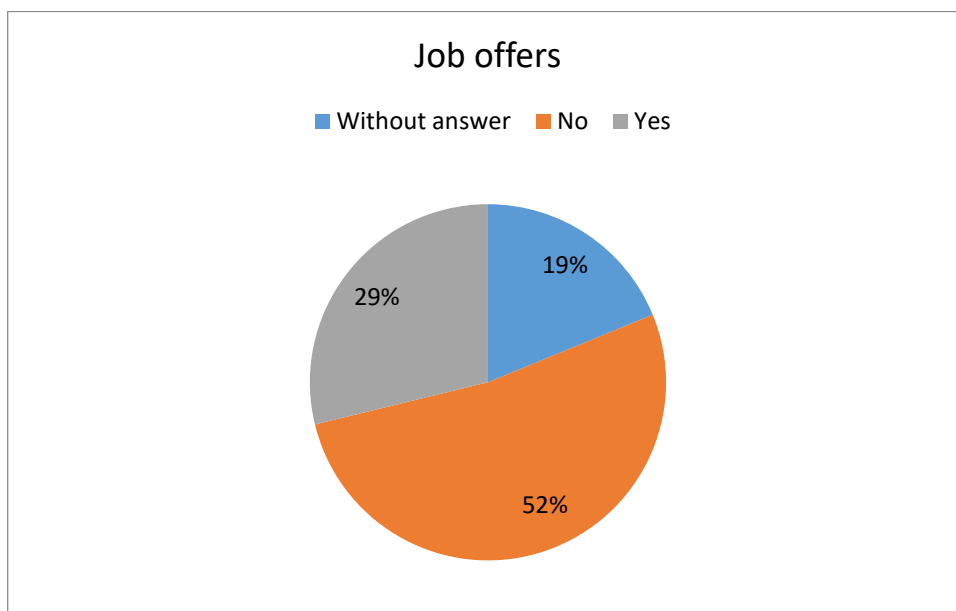
- The supervision in the company/ institution where I performed the internship checked my progress and development regularly.
- The supervisor in the company/institution evaluated my progress.

In this question the student is asked to give an evaluation for his/her supervisor at the company/institution where he/she performed the internship. With the blue bar is represented the control by the supervisor and with orange bar is represented the control or evaluation done to the intern from the supervisor during his/her internship. The percentage is quite the same for both evaluations and the highest percentages are for level 3 and level 4, which expresses in general a satisfaction of the intern.



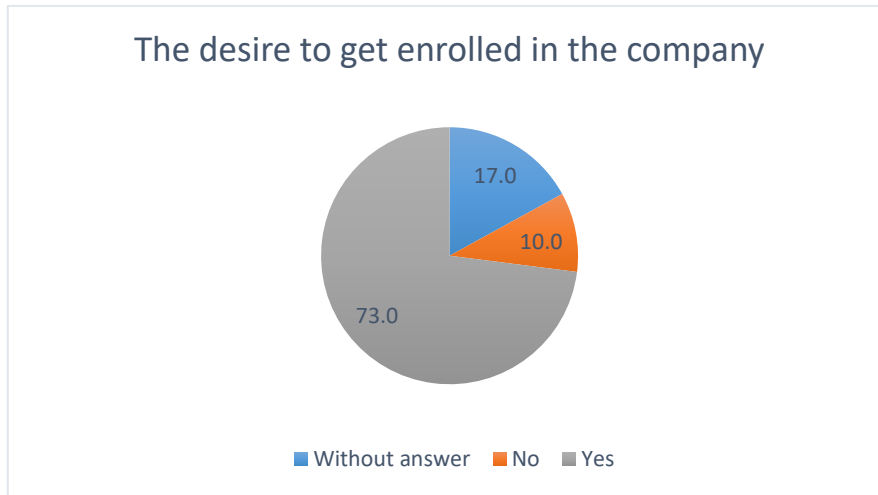
31. Have you received job offers from the company/institution where you performed the internship?

One gold opportunity for the intern student is that he/she could receive a job offer from the company/institution he/she is affiliated, but unfortunately 52% of the interns have answered “No” to this question. The bright side of the medal is that 29% of them have received a job offer from the company/institution where they have performed the internship.



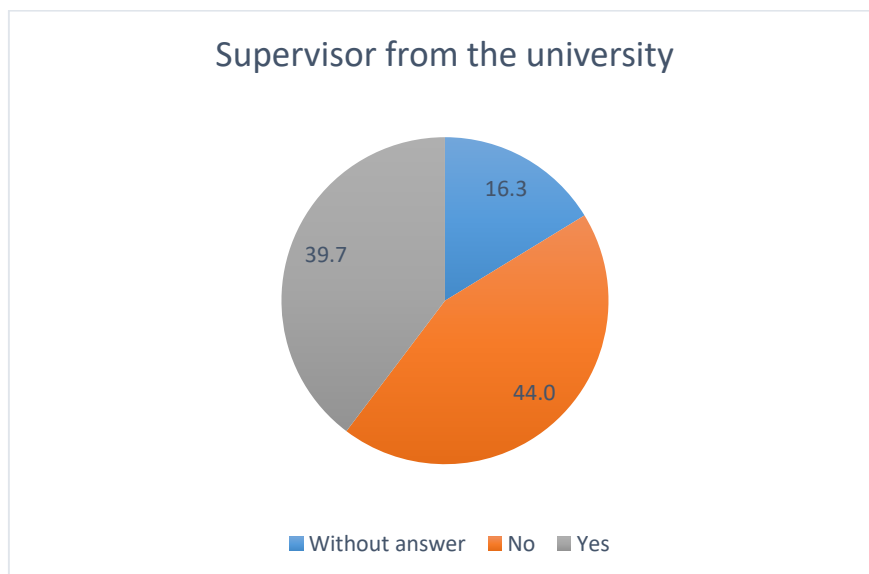
32. Would you like to work in the same profile at the company/institution where you performed the internship?

When the students are asked if they desire to work at the same company/institution, 73% of them have answered “Yes” and only 10% have said “No”. This question on the other side demonstrates that the choice of the company/institution has been the right one and has reached the expectations of the intern student.



33. Did you have a supervisor from the university?

In the cases when the internship is planned in the curricula of the program the students follow, they have a supervisor from the university that accompany them during the internship. When the internship is performed during the free time the student has, or through a bilateral agreement, it means that he/she will not have a supervisor from the university. This is justified from the results that 44% have answered “No” and 40% have answered “Yes”.



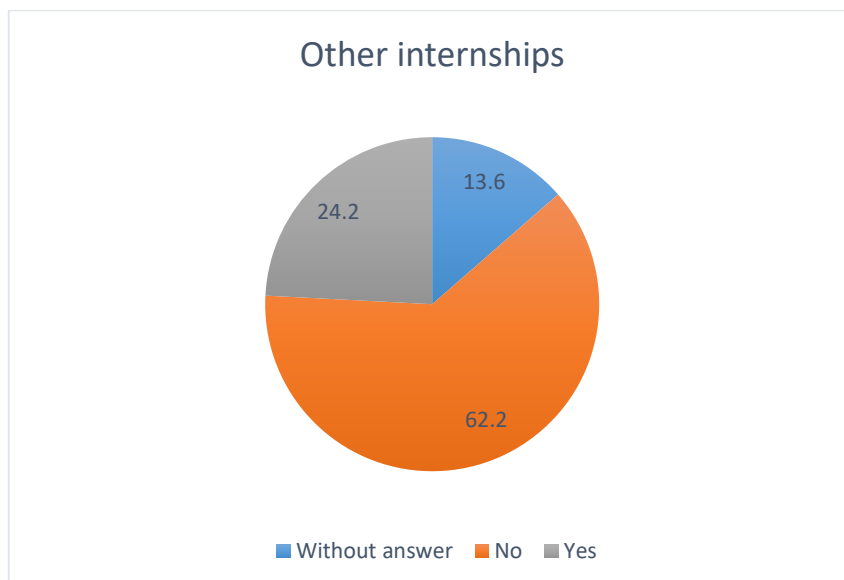
34. The satisfaction about the internship you performed. (1- totally unsatisfied, 10-totally satisfied).

In the graph below is given the satisfaction of the student during the internship he/she has performed. What we notice is that 39% of the students are very satisfied about the internship.



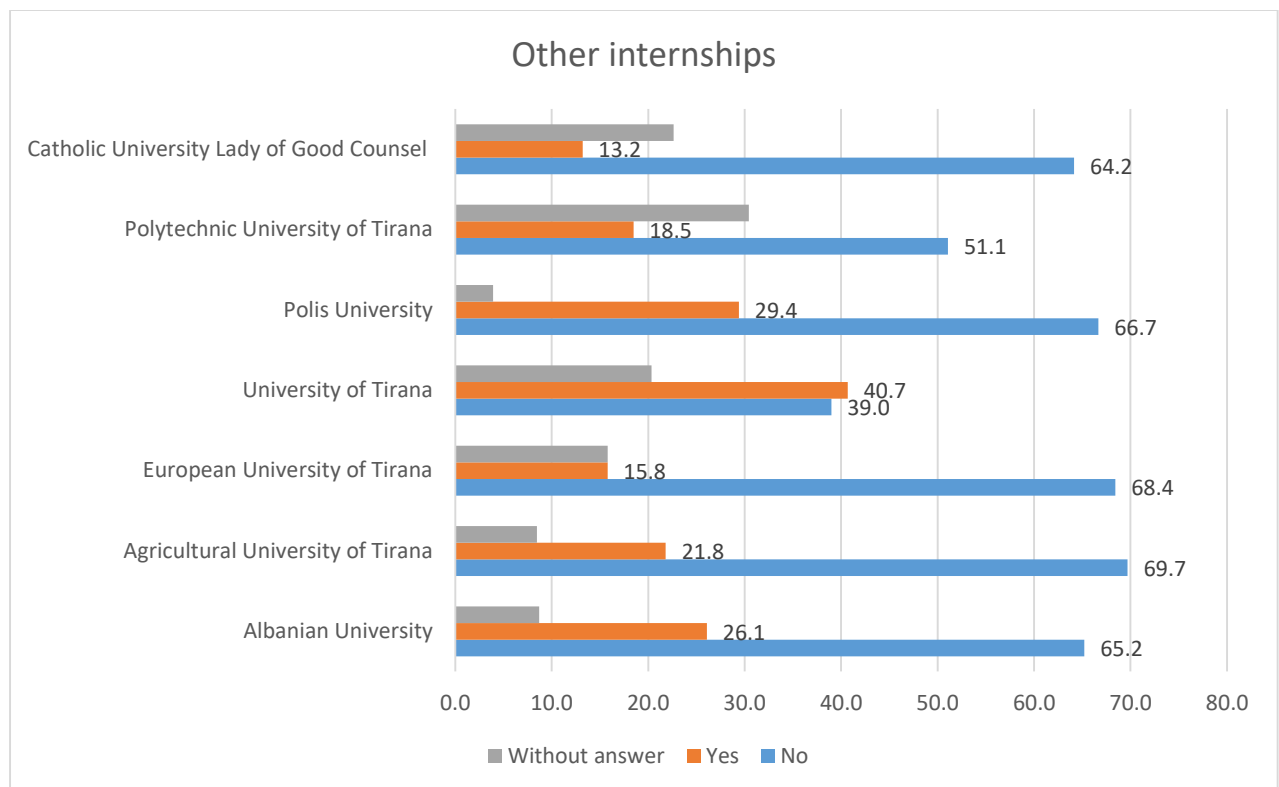
35. Have you performed other internships during your studies?

The students can perform more than one internship during their studies, and this is sometimes urged by the need to get employed or by the need to advance in the professional skills. When the students are asked if they have performed other internships 62% of them has answered “No” and 24% of them have answered “Yes”.



In order to have a more complete view how the situation is in each target university we have presented the following graph where we see that in all the universities there is a clear situation

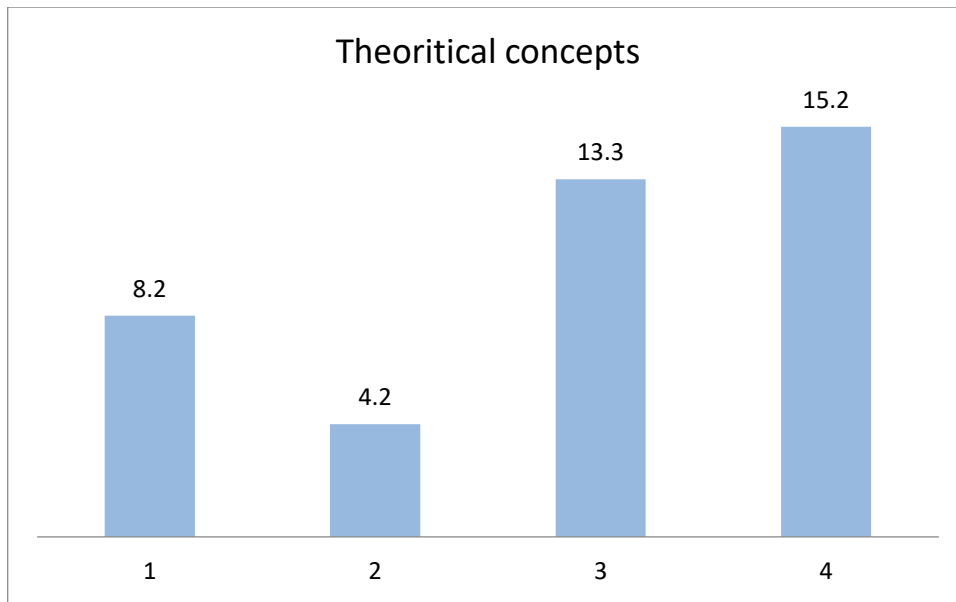
that they have performed only one internship except for the students of University of Tirana where 41% have answered that they have performed other internships.



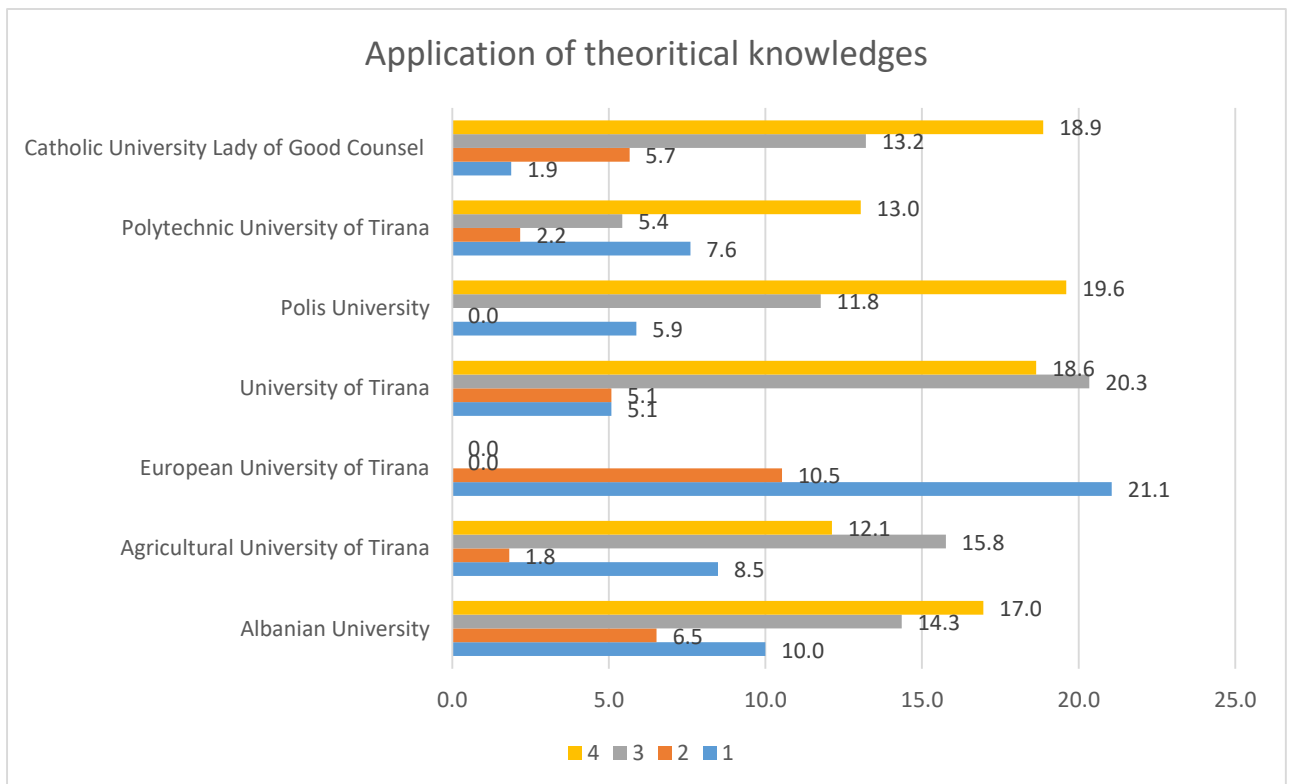
36. If you have performed other internships, give your evaluation about the level of agreement that these short internships have helped you to understand my theoretical knowledge.

The majority of internships are work experience internships. This means that they are essentially on-the-job training in a field that the student or young worker is interested in. However, there are also research internships, which are more common in scientific fields. With a research internship, a student will examine a particular topic on behalf of a business before producing a written study or presentation.

The responses taken from this question vindicate this fact that mostly the students perform the internship as a work experience internship and their theoretical knowledge does not find application, at least up to this stage. Only 15% of them rate this outcome with the highest score. 59% of the answers are “Without response”.

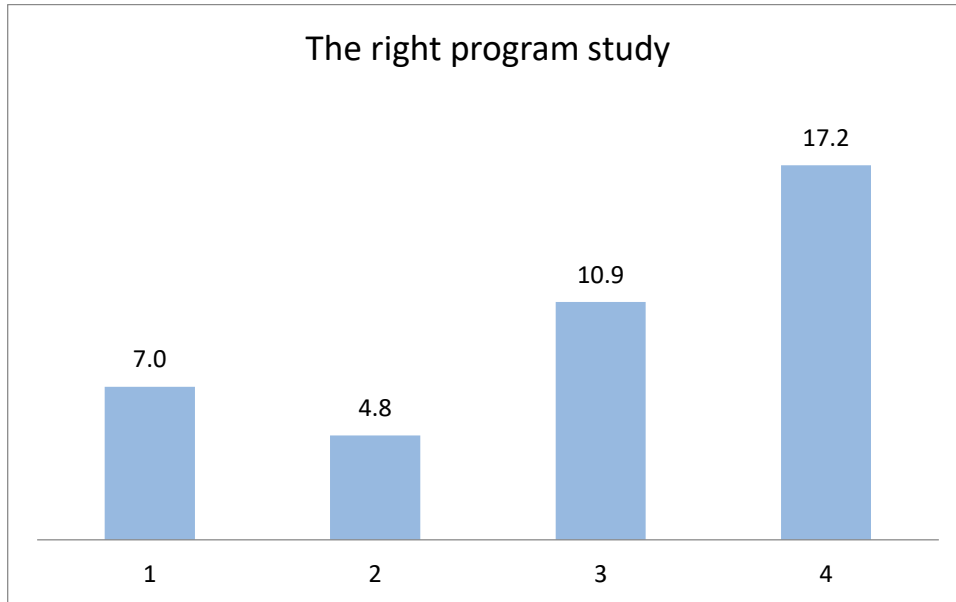


To see how the students of each university have answered to this question the following graph is presented. In all the universities is clear and highly scored the application of theoretical concepts and knowledge in other internships, except for the students of European University of Tirana.

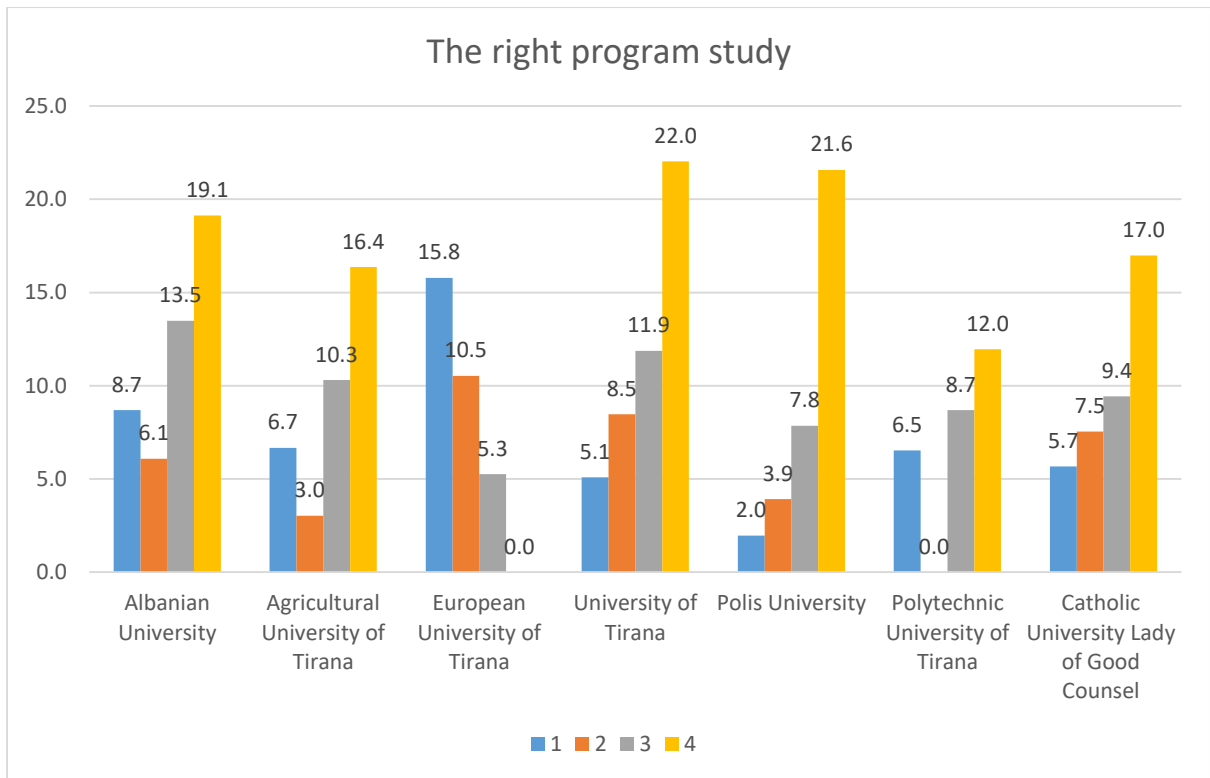


36. The short-term internships have helped me to understand that the program study I am following is the right one.

This is a very important question and shows the satisfaction of the student for its own program study seen by the perspective of the capability of the things and duties he/she is able to do. 17% of the students of all the universities give the highest evaluation for their program studies.



In order to see how this evaluation is for each university is given the graph below where the highest satisfaction is from the students of University of Tirana and Polis University. In general, the students demonstrate that they are following the right program study for all the universities except for the ones of European University of Tirana.



Conclusions and recommendations

The professional practice or internship is a way to study the student's experiences, to improve how they should work. This will help them understand what they are doing and why they are doing it. Involvement in a continuous reflective practice would help to improve the quality of the work and fill the gap between theory and practice. In summary, the conclusions obtained from this study conclude in these recommendations and conclusions for the two target groups:

Higher education institutions and in particular faculties and departments, which are responsible for the development and the improvement of bachelor and master curricula, should include in their programs Internship and should provide these internships through bilateral institutional agreement setting out the terms, obligations, and objectives of both parties, so that the internship does not become just a formalisation documentation, but on contrary it should serve as a starting point for further employment. The report prepared in 2018 shows that 51% of students enable internship through their personal acquaintances, but in this report this value is 57%, which leads to an urgent interference to make the Career offices more efficient. All the partner universities must advertise GRADUA platform as a source to find the right internship.

The universities must assign a supervisor from faculty in order to follow and facilitate the process. From the questionnaire only 44% of the students have declared that they have had a supervisor from the faculty. All the students have declared that they are following the right program study and most of the internships are performed in the private sector.

The student must demonstrate that he/she is committed to the duties that are assigned to him/her. They have listed as strong point the will and persistence to develop in the practical skills and must show this through actions during the internship. The student must show perseverance in duties and project addressed to him/her. The student must be aware that the most important knowledge, habits, skills and abilities acquired during the implementation program study they are following are obtained outside the auditorium. The internship must be considered as an opportunity to test the knowledge, 'to make mistakes' in a supportive environment, to learn and to be tested for what is trained and over all to find its own orientation in a variety of career opportunities. Students need to understand what it means to be a professional, which includes demonstrating professional behaviour as well as absorbing the role they play in a welcoming environment.

The majority of internships are work experience internships. This means that they are essentially on-the-job training in a field that the student or young worker is interested in. The purpose of education through practice is to combine the theoretical and conceptual contribution outside the classrooms, so that the students must gain a consistent and high quality experience by the time they are still students.