



Ekonomická univerzita v Bratislave
Fakulta medzinárodných vzťahov
University of Economics in Bratislava
Faculty of International Relations



Zborník príspevkov
z 19. medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie

***Medzinárodné vzťahy 2018:
Aktuálne otázky svetovej
ekonomiky a politiky***



***International Relations 2018:
Current issues of world
economy and politics***

Conference proceedings
19th International Scientific Conference

Smolenice Castle
29th - 30th November 2018

Publishing Ekonóm
2018

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Vychádza jedenkrát za rok/ Is published annually.

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ISBN 978-80-225-4602-7
ISSN 2585-9412

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WHAT DO STUDENTS THINK OF THE EDUCATION CURRICULUM? CASE OF KATOWICE SCHOOL OF TECHNOLOGY

Aleksander Ostenda^a – Tetyana Nestorenko^b – Anatolii Zhyhir^c

^aFaculty of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Applied Arts, Katowice School of Technology,
43 Rolna Street, 40-555 Katowice, Poland, e-mail: aleksander.ostenda@wst.com.pl.

^bFaculty of the Humanities and Economics, Berdyansk State Pedagogical University,
4 Shmidt Street, Berdyansk, 71112 Ukraine, e-mail: tetyana.nestorenko@gmail.com.

^cFaculty of the Humanities and Economics, Berdyansk State Pedagogical University,
4 Shmidt Street, Berdyansk, 71112 Ukraine, e-mail: azhigir@gmail.com.

Reducing the shortage of highly skilled labour for the automotive industry, which is now observed in Poland, depends largely on the degree of satisfaction of students with the organization of their training at a university. What do students of a selected University think of the education curriculum and the organization of studies connected with the automotive industry? The article presents the results of evaluation of the education curriculum and the organization of studies at the field of study of Mechatronics with a specialization in Vehicle Mechatronics at the Katowice School of Technology. The evaluation was based on the survey studies among students of this major, who were graduates of this specialization in the 2017/2018 academic year.

Key words: automotive industry, electromobility, education, Katowice School of Technology, Poland

JEL: I23.

Introduction

The automotive industry is one of the most dynamically growing industries in Poland. As noted in Automotive Industry Report (2018/2019), after weak results in 2012, the following years brought a reflection. The production of the Polish automotive industry in 2017 increased, both due to new investments and due to the ongoing recovery in major export markets. The value of sold production of motor manufacturers in Poland equalled 148.4 billion PLN and increased by 7.0% in real terms.¹

The development of automotive industry is also confirmed by the growth of employment in this industry. Over 202,000 workers were employed in the production of motor vehicles in Poland in 2017 (7.4% of all employment in industry). In comparison with 2016, employment in the industry increased by 8.3%. In total, the automotive sector and related sectors of the economy create a total of nearly 1.1 million jobs.²

With the increase in employment, the average monthly salary in the automotive industry also increased, amounting to 5,002 PLN in 2017. This means an increase by 7.1% compared with the previous year. In 2016, it amounted to 4,669 PLN (over 600 PLN more than the average for the entire industrial processing sector and over 400 PLN more than the average remuneration in Poland at the end of 2016). According to the KPMG report, the average monthly salary in the automotive industry has been growing for several years.³

¹ Raport branży motoryzacyjnej 2018/2019, p.195. <http://www.pzpm.org.pl/Rynek-motoryzacyjny/Roczniki-i-raporty>.

² Branża motoryzacyjna rośnie w siłę. Na przeszkodzie w jej rozwoju może stać brak pracowników. <https://biznes.newseria.pl/news/branza-motoryzacyjne,p1178459578>.

³ Motoryzacja. KPMG. <https://home.kpmg/pl/pl/home/industries/motoryzacja.html>

In 2017, labour costs in automotive production remained relatively high: they constituted 110.4% of the total industry and 115.1% of the processing industry.⁴ However, despite a higher than average salary offered by automotive firms and their willingness to hire new workers, the automotive industry in Poland faces a shortage of skilled workers.

The report "MotoBarometer 2018" developed by Exact Systems shows that 63% of the automotive companies want to increase employment in the coming months (2017 – 44%, 2016 – 60%). However, recruitment of new employees is not easy because they are lacking in the labour market. In 2018, 63% of enterprises struggled with the lack of qualified personnel, which is more than in previous years (29% in 2017 and 31% in 2016).⁵ Personnel gaps are a serious barrier to the development of the automotive industry in Poland. 57% of the automotive companies employ employees from Ukraine due to the lack of Polish employees.⁶

Therefore, there is a shortage of qualified specialists who meet the requirements of the automotive industry on the Polish labour market. The desire and willingness of students to study on the courses related to the automotive industry depends largely on how students assess the effectiveness of the education curriculum and the organization of studies at a University.

The quality training is directly dependent on school quality. Often the school quality framework is considered in five categories: teachers and the teaching environment, school culture, resources, indicators of academic learning and character and wellbeing outcomes.^{7,8}

Some researchers consider the satisfaction of students with the education curriculum and the organization of studies as a necessary provision condition of quality training for automotive industry.⁹ Of course, student satisfaction with the curriculum is very important for its quality training as the future specialists. However, from our point of view, a more adequate assessment of the quality of the curriculum can be given on the basis of a study of the level of satisfaction of graduates.

1 Data and methodology

The purpose of the study was to determine the satisfaction of students with the education curriculum and the organization of studies connected with the automotive industry (based on the example of the Katowice School of Technology) as one of the factors for the further employment of graduates in the specialty and thus as one of the factors for the further development of Polish automobile industry.

The research was conducted based on analysis of professional literature, publications in the press and online sources as well as sociological research methods such as: survey, participant observation and an in-depth interview.

In order to evaluate the education curriculum as well as organization of studies in the field of study of Mechatronics with a specialization in Vehicle Mechatronics, the authors of the present report, conducted survey studies among students of this major. Survey was

⁴ Raport branży motoryzacyjnej 2018/2019, p.200. <http://www.pzpm.org.pl/Rynek-motoryzacyjny/Roczniki-i-raporty>.

⁵ MotoBarometr 2018. Nastroje w automotive Polska, Czechy, Niemcy, Rosja, Rumunia, Słowacja, Turcja, Węgry, Wielka Brytania. Raport EXACT SYSTEMS S.A. https://wnet.fm/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/MotoBarometr_Raport2018_final-small.pdf

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ GAGNON, D. – SCHNEIDER, J. (2016). Measuring school quality beyond test scores: Year 2 final report, p.3.

⁸ KELLY, M. – FEISTMAN, R. – SCHNEIDER, J. – NOONAN, J. (2018): Student Survey-based Measures of School Quality, p. 1.

⁹ MARSCHALL, C. (2014): Involving Students in Curriculum Evaluation.

conducted via Survey Monkey on September 2018. The data from survey was collected confidentially.

The survey included 17 multiple-choice questions (9 concerning the education curriculum, 7 organization of studies and 1 general concerning the field of study). We proposed 5 answer options. For each of the multiple-choice questions the respondent could provide one of the following answers: Neither Agree nor Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree. In addition 3 open-ended questions (additional remarks) were also asked. 13 students took part in the study (all were graduates of this specialization in the previous 2017/2018 academic year).

2 The study of Mechatronics with a specialization in Vehicle Mechatronics

Due to the expansion of the automotive industry, new specializations are being developed in many Polish institutions of higher education, which contribute to the development of this industry. An example of such a University is the Katowice School of Technology (KST),¹⁰ where within the framework of the field of study of Mechatronics, there is a specialization of Vehicle Mechatronics. Engineering first-cycle studies in Mechatronics at KST last 7 semesters with the student choosing a specialization after the third semester.

On top of that, every student after each year of studies is obliged to complete a professional internship, which should last at least 3 months. The principal goal of this internship is to become familiar with the industrial community, industrial organization of work, as well as practical methods of work used by engineers and technicians of various specializations, especially:

- Acquiring general technical and industrial experience as far as construction, building and exploitation of mechatronic devices,
- Verifying their skills in the fields of mechatronics, automation and robotics, acquired during the course of their studies, in practice,
- Becoming familiar with the whole process of work organization in an enterprise,
- Adapting to future independent work.¹¹

The results of the research conducted were illustrated with the use of figures 1-5.

¹⁰ The Katowice School of Technology was established on 1 October, 2003. It is the first non-public school in Upper Silesia which conducts technical and artistic studies at two faculties (Faculty of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Applied Arts as well as Faculty of Acting, Media and Directing), which educates engineers of Mechatronics and Spatial Development, engineers and Masters of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Masters of Graphics, Film, Television and Still Photography, bachelors and Masters of Interior Architecture and bachelors of Design and Nursing. Moreover the School is also preparing studies in the field of study of Medicine.

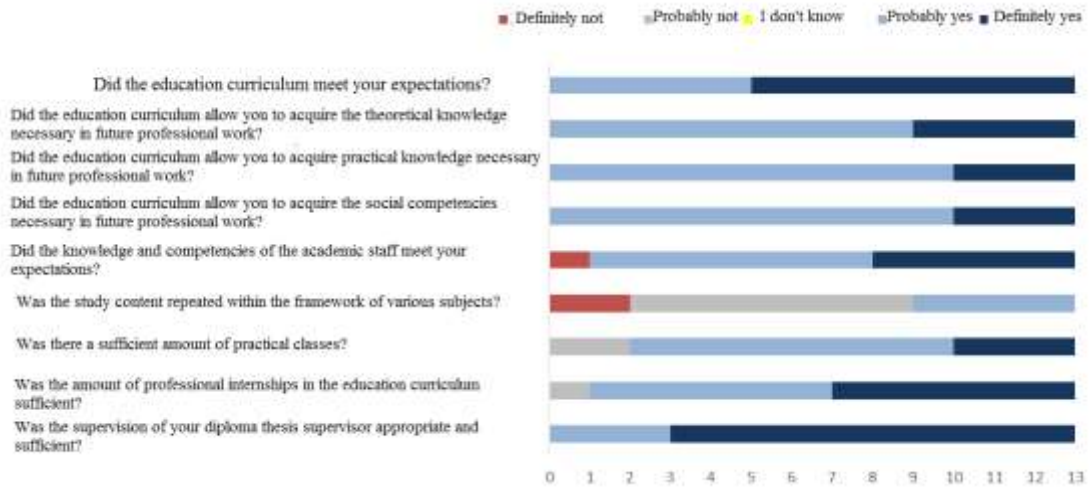
The school's trademark is a specially developed academic syllabus and highly qualified academic staff, which is made up of outstanding experts from the Silesian, Breslau and Cracow academic communities. The rich academic syllabus built on interdisciplinary knowledge prepares students for future work both practically and theoretically.

Taking into account the high requirements put in front of graduates by the contemporary job market, students during their studies have the possibility to become familiar with modern systems of supporting design and computer technologies.

The School possesses laboratory facilities which meet the highest standards as well as the Silesia Science and Technology Park, which is an integral part of KST.

¹¹ Archives of the Katowice School of Technology.

Figure 1: Evaluation of the education curriculum at the field of study of Mechatronics – specialization: Vehicle Mechatronics

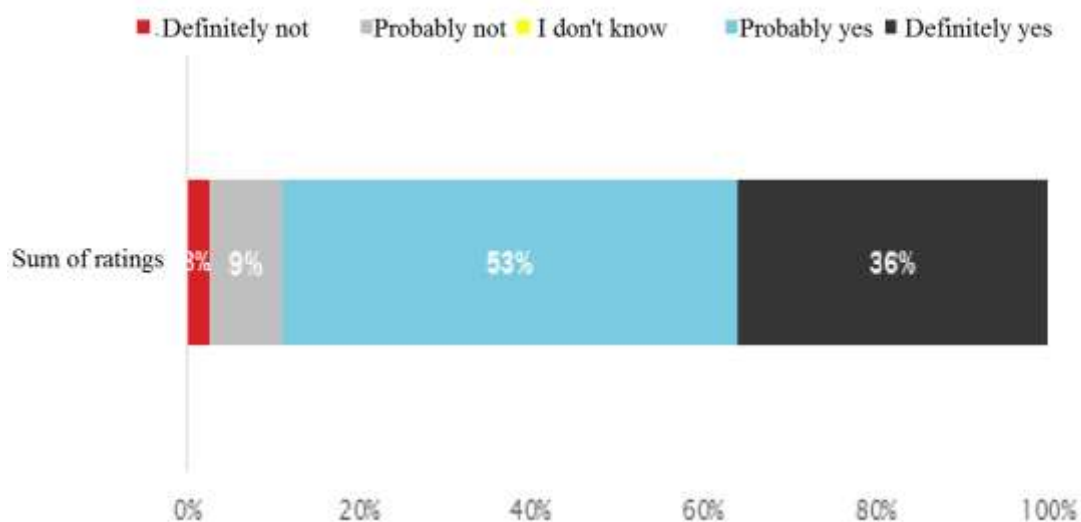


Source: designed by the authors on the basis of based on survey data

Figure 1 shows that in answering questions regarding the education curriculum the students were most pleased with the collaboration with diploma thesis advisors asked in question 9. *Was the supervision of your diploma thesis supervisor appropriate and sufficient?* (10 answers of “strongly agree” and 3 answers of “agree”) as well as the education curriculum which for the most part fulfilled the respondents’ expectations, question 1. *Did the education curriculum meet your expectations?* (8 responses of “strongly agree” and five responses of “agree”).

In the opinion of the students the education curriculum is appropriately constructed and does not repeat itself in the content of other subjects. The responses given to the question regarding the repetitiveness of content were mostly negative, 2 respondents answered “strongly disagree, while 7 of them “disagree”. The student responses to the remaining questions were also mostly positive which is shown on figure 2.

Figure 2: Total evaluation of the education curriculum at the field of study of Mechatronics – specialization: Vehicle Mechatronics

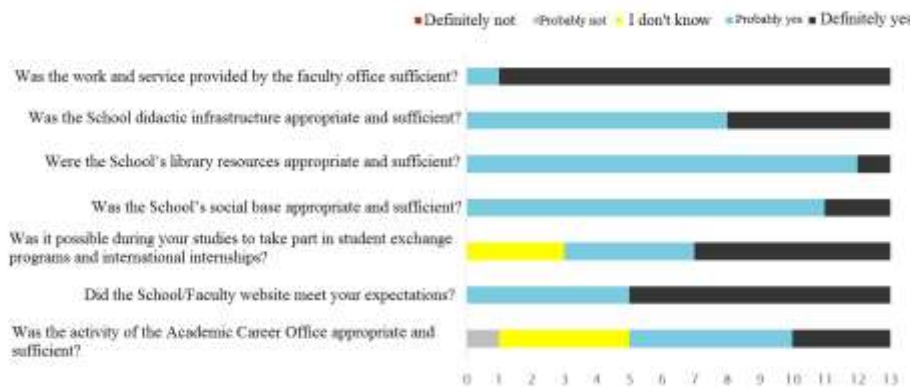


Source: designed by the authors on the basis of based on survey data

Taking into account the opinions of all students it was shown, that those taking part in the survey in responding to the questions with an “agree” or “strongly agree” are for the most part pleased with the education curriculum. Displeasure was expressed by just a single person. In answering questions about the organization of studies the respondents gave the highest marks to the functioning of the faculty office, question 1. *Was the work and service provided by the faculty office sufficient?* (12 answers of “strongly agree” and one answer of “agree”), as well as the website, which for the most part fulfilled the students’ expectations, question 6. *Did the School/Faculty website meet your expectations?* (8 answers of “strongly agree” and 5 answers of “agree”).

The activities of the Academic Career Office were given the lowest marks, question 7. *Was the activity of the Academic Career Office appropriate and sufficient?* (4 persons provided an answer of “neither agree nor disagree”, 1 answer was “disagree”, with 5 answers of “agree” and 3 of “strongly agree”). The remaining questions were for the most part answered in a positive manner, which is shown on figure 3.

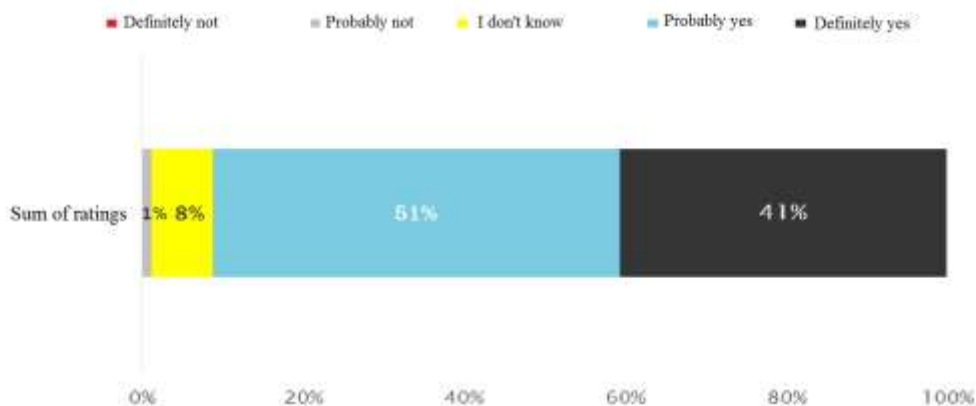
Figure 3: Evaluation of the organization of studies at the field of study of Mechatronics – specialization: Vehicle Mechatronics



Source: designed by the authors on the basis of based on survey data

Taking into account the opinion of student it was determined that the survey takers in answering „agree” (51% of the answers), or strongly agree” (41% of the answers) to the questions, are to a large extent pleased with the organization of studies. Only 1% of the answers received a negative response of “disagree” (figure 4).

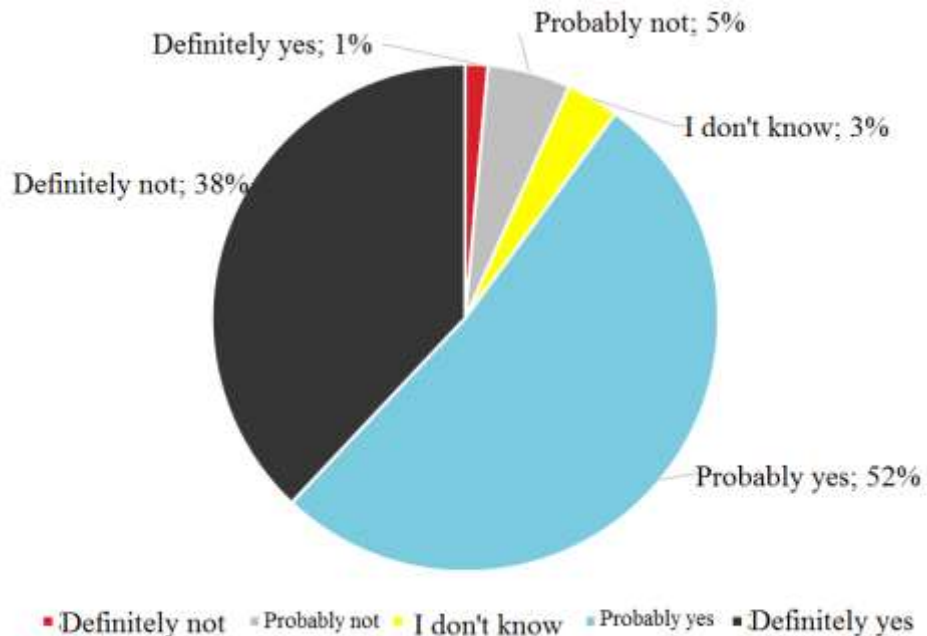
Figure 4: Total evaluation of the organization of studies at the field of study of Mechatronics – specialization: Vehicle Mechatronics



Source: designed by the authors on the basis of based on survey data

Figure 5 shows the general evaluation of the education curriculum as well as organization of studies. In all 90% of the answers provided by the respondents were positive (38% “strongly agree”, 52% “agree”) Negative answers of “disagree” and “strongly disagree” constituted only 5% and 1% of the responses respectively.

Figure 5: General evaluation of the education curriculum and the organization of studies at the field of study of Mechatronics – specialization: Vehicle Mechatronics



Source: designed by the authors on the basis of based on survey data

The data above shows a positive opinion of the education curriculum and organization of studies at the field of study of Mechatronics at the Katowice School of Technology.

In addition, a general question was asked in the survey: Do you believe that the completed field of study is prospective? The answers were spread in the following way: “strongly agree” – 7 respondents, “agree” – 2 respondents, “strongly disagree” – 3 respondents.

On top of that the survey takers had the possibility to answer 3 open-ended questions, however they provided a response to only question 1. *What education modules (subjects) are according to you the most important to the needs of your future professional work?*

The answers given most often were:

1. Manufacturing Engineering
2. Modeling of Quality Systems in UML
3. Basics of Theory of Control
4. Engineering Calculations

In the analysis of the student evaluation regarding the education curriculum organization of studies at the field of study of Mechatronics with a specialization in Vehicle Mechatronics certain shortcomings were detected, which should be eliminated as soon as possible. The most important of these is the reorganization of the activity of the Academic Career Office.

If possible, greater emphasis should also be placed on the most important education modules indicated by the students as far as the needs of the future profession, for example,

introducing the desired aspects of these modules into the works of the science student clubs or organizing professional internships with companies collaborating with the School.

Conclusion

Katowice School of Technology graduates who have received the diploma in Vehicle Mechatronics in the 2017/2018 academic year believe that the completed field of study is prospective for them. This gives grounds to assert that most graduates will work in their specialty and thereby contribute to reducing the shortage of qualified personnel for the automotive industry in Poland.

The general evaluation of the education curriculum and the organization of studies at the field of study of Mechatronics with a specialization in Vehicle Mechatronics at the Katowice School of Technology seems to be positive, however, taking care of the quality of education there must be continual attempts for its optimization.

With this goal in mind, cooperation of the automotive industry with institutions of higher education is necessary, as are ensuring students with internships in production plants and influence of employers on education curriculums in institutions of higher education.

Due to a varied and developed matrix of educational needs there is a need for collaboration among three sectors: industry, science and administration – especially in the field of educating vocational school and university teachers.

Polish education needs to increase the prestige of vocational education. This can be easily achieved by inviting students to Polish production plants and showing them what new industry is based on and what it is.

Staff shortage is an obstacle to further dynamic development of the automotive industry. Polish automotive firms and their various associations are ready to support the training of young professionals. For example, one of the goals of the Eastern Automotive Alliance, bringing together companies from the industry operating mainly in the Subcarpathian Region, is to support the education of young people in terms of the needs of the automotive sector.¹²

The authors believe, that such a consolidation of activities may bring benefits resulting in the elimination of barriers which exist today.

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¹² W branży motoryzacyjnej brakuje rąk do pracy. <https://wrc.net.pl/w-branzy-motoryzacyjnej-brakuje-rak-do-pracy>.

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Contacts:

prof. Aleksander Ostenda, PhD

Faculty of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Applied Arts
Katowice School of Technology 43 Rolna Street
40-555 Katowice, Poland
e-mail: aleksander.ostenda@wst.com.pl

doc. Tetyana Nestorenko, PhD.

Faculty of the Humanities and Economics
Berdyansk State Pedagogical University
4 Shmidt Street
71112 Berdyansk
Ukraine
e-mail: tetyana.nestorenko@gmail.com

prof. Anatolii Zhyhir, DSc

Faculty of the Humanities and Economics
Berdyansk State Pedagogical University
4 Shmidt Street
71112 Berdyansk
Ukraine
e-mail: azhigir@gmail.com

Názov/Title: **Medzinárodné vzťahy 2018: Aktuálne otázky svetovej ekonomiky a politiky**
Zborník príspevkov z 19. medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie konanej v Smoleniciach 29. – 30. novembra 2018

International Relations 2018: Current Issues of World Economy and Politics
Conference Proceedings 19th International Scientific Conference at Smolenice Castle 29th - 30th November 2018

Zostavovatelia/Editors: Ing. Adam Cibul'a, Ing. Natália Goda, Mgr. Martin Karas, Ing. Monika Kochajdová, Ing. Kristína Krupová, JUDr. Michal Klenka, Ing. Peter Valačai, Mgr. Eva Vlková, Ing. Andrej Zrak

Vydavateľ/Publisher: Vydavateľstvo Ekonóm, Dolnozemska cesta 1, 852 35 Bratislava 5

Vychádza/Published: jedenkrát za rok/Annually

Rok vydania/Year: 2018

Počet strán/Pages: 782

ISBN 978-80-225-4602-7
ISSN 2585-9412