

BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL BUSINESS IN RURAL AREAS

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The study presenting and analysing the barriers and opportunities for small business development in rural areas of Poland and Lithuania. The scientific problem – how to develop small business in rural areas and what kind of support measures would benefit business developers. Symmetric research in the form of a survey was conducted among 50 researchers-economists from the University of Agriculture in Krakow and in Agricultural Academy of Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. The research is of a pilot nature and constitute grounds for continuing research into the research issues undertaken. The aim of the study was to identify, evaluate and compare barriers and opportunities for small business development in rural areas of Lithuania and Poland and to propose effective incentives for such kinds of businesses. The main barriers to the development of enterprises in Poland include high pension contributions and a complicated VAT paying system. In Lithuania it was indicated poor economic conditions in rural areas and related unemployment and poverty of some of their inhabitants. In Poland, huge opportunities for the development of entrepreneurship were perceived in the opening-up of eastern markets and support from the European Union's funds. In Lithuania – in professional consulting and the use of aid from the EU.

Key words: barriers and opportunities for entrepreneurship, Poland, Lithuania, small business, rural areas.

JEL Codes: O18, R00, R51.

1. Introduction

In the European Union, strictly rural areas cover the area of around 1928.7 km². i. e. around 42.3% of the geographical surface. These areas are inhabited, according to various statistics, from 82 to 97 million EU citizens (World Bank, Eurostat). This means that every fourth citizen of this economic and political area lives in rural areas characterised by dense or remote settlements. However, the proportions between rural and urban populations vary significantly from member state to member state. In the

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ranking of demographic urbanisation, Poland ranks 21st with 40% of rural population inhabiting approximately 90% of the country's total area. In this ranking, Lithuania came 25th with rural inhabitants accounting for around 47% of the total population and rural areas covering approximately 80% of the country's territory. Thus, Poland and Lithuania have quite similar shares of rural population in the whole population (Eurostat).

Rural areas in EU countries have for several decades been inhabited by population that has mainly non-agricultural sources of income, with the share of income from agriculture still falling, though at a slower pace now, „as a consequence, the farm owners seek to diversify their sources of income and run other strategies aiming at stabilizing their earnings” (Pastusiak, 2017). Moreover, such areas witness a continuous, and even progressive decline in the importance of agriculture in national economy. This indicates the significance of multifunctional development of rural areas, especially in the directions not related to the agribusiness sector (Zajac, 2014).

According to the authors (Ploeg, 2000): „The modernization paradigm that once dominated policy, practice and theory is being replaced by a new rural development paradigm.” In the literature, multifunctionality of rural areas, deagrarianisation and alternative incomes of rural population are widely described and analysed (Musiał, 2015). However, economic development of an area is possible only when it is inhabited by creative, entrepreneurial people (Schumpeter, 1960). Therefore, the development in rural areas should be driven by entrepreneurship, „agriculture as a highly specialized domain focused on efficiency and performance” (Lans, 2013), both agricultural one, understood as maintenance, modernisation and development of agricultural production, and non-agricultural one, characterised by diversity in terms of industries and scale, which is also evidenced by the experience of highly developed EU member states (Kłodziński, 2010; Hyski, 2018).

The aim of the research was to compare and evaluate barriers and opportunities with respect to the development of entrepreneurship in rural areas in Lithuania and Poland. The article was based on opinions of researchers – academics, who, through their work, impact attitudes of young people.

2. Materials and methodology

The research was conducted by the staff at the Department of Agricultural Economics and Organisation of the Institute of Economic and Social Sciences at University of Agriculture in Krakow and the Institute of Business and Rural Development of Agricultural Academy of Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. The empirical studies carried out by the authors were of a pilot nature, and their results will form the basis for further, more in-depth analyzes. The source material was obtained through research in the form of original, in-depth survey-interview using a questionnaire. The concept assumed that these interviews would be carried out on a small, non-random sample. The selection of units was deliberate.

The main criterion was conducting research on entrepreneurship in rural areas. Special attention was paid to the education criterion, so that the sample would include people with highest levels. Such a selection of the sample allowed for the acquisition of experts in the field studied.

It was conducted among 50 academics, 25 in Lithuania and 25 in Poland. According to the accepted criterion the objects of the research were academics who deal with the issues of economics and management in the broad sense in their professional work and, directly or indirectly, address entrepreneurship and problems of the development of rural areas in their research, analyses and assessments.

The respondents assessed selected formal, legal, economic and institutional aspects connected with starting a new business activity and carrying it on in market conditions. Moreover, they indicated the main factors that encourage inhabitants of rural areas to engage in self-employed activity, and also presented barriers that significantly hinder the development of non-agricultural entrepreneurship. The research also allowed opinions to be gathered on opportunities of the development of individual economic activity, which can be exploited for economic success and improvement of living conditions in rural areas.

For the purpose of delimitation, the definition of rural areas proposed by the European Union was used. According to this definition, these are areas with the population density not exceeding 300 person/km² and inhabited by less than 5,000 people (European Parliament 2016).

3. Diagnosis of barriers and opportunities to the development of entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship in economic sciences is treated as an important factor of economic development. However, the observation of the effects of entrepreneurship should refer not only to the analysis of its forms, but also to the conditions that determine this entrepreneurship. Therefore, it is legitimate to ask how domestic institutional capital shapes entrepreneurship and whether it has a stimulating or even opposite effect on it. The institutional environment, understood very broadly, creates a kind of impact of entrepreneurship on the economy and society, through the allocation of entrepreneurial resources. Institutions use the theoretical framework of the so-called new institutional economics, the foundations of which the authors based their research. Analyzing the way in which the institutional environment shapes and influences entrepreneurship. Opportunities for the development of entrepreneurship usually include a wide range of political, macro and microeconomic and behavioural factors, „there are number (...) indicators that can be used to assess rural development. Based on this, it is difficult to choose suitable of them describing development of rural areas” (Strakaa, 2016). Assessments and opinions on the state and development of entrepreneurship in a given country, region or industry, also depend on multiple aspects (Gancarczyk, 2008). Entrepreneurs actively involved in running companies,

representatives of administration or local authorities, employees in the institutional environment of small business and academics who conduct research and teach in the area of broadly understood economics, finances or management – all of them may have different views of a lot of issues.

50 academics participated in the research. They represented various levels of formal advancement of academic development. Participants with MSc and PhD accounted for 64% and 40% of the research sample in Poland and Lithuania respectively. The rest of the academics, i.e. 36% and 60% respectively, had post-doctoral titles or were associate professors (tab. 1).

Table 1. Identification of the respondents

Specification	Poland	Lithuania
Number	25	25
Age (years)	46	51
Share of males	52	44
Education (in %)		
MSc, PhD	64	40
Post-doctoral title, professor*	36	60

* In Lithuania, the post-doctoral title of “doktor habilitowany” is no longer conferred from 28 August 2009

The average age of the respondents was 46 for the Polish sample, and 51 for the Lithuanian one, with males accounting for 52% and 44% respectively. Thus, the research samples were not only identical in terms of the number, but also relatively similar in terms of the respondents’ characteristics, i.e. age, gender and education.

First, the respondents were asked to indicate opportunities for the development of entrepreneurship. Among the factors classified as macro-economic, the respondents in Poland most often indicated those related to the opening-up of the market „to the East” (56%). In Lithuania, opportunities connected with the support for the development of entrepreneurship from the EU funds were most often highlighted (44 %) (tab. 2).

The second and further, third and fourth, positions in terms of most often indicated responses in Poland were occupied by opportunities connected with globalisation (40%), European integration (32%) and support for business from EU funds (32%) respectively. It should be noted that opportunities connected with globalisation and European integration were much more often indicated by young academics (MSc, PhD) than those with a post-doctoral title or professors.

Among the respondents from Lithuania, integration with the EU (40%) and changes in the economic policy (40%) came second and third respectively, while opening-up of the markets „to the East” came fourth.

Table 2. Main opportunities for the development of companies in the macroeconomic area, according to the respondents' assessments

Specification	Poland			Lithuania		
	MSc. PhD	post-doctoral title, professor	Total	MSc. PhD	Professor	Total
Globalisation and opening up to the world	28	12	40	20	4	24
Integration with the EU	24	8	32	16	24	40
Opening-up of the markets to the east	32	24	56	8	28	36
Change of the country's economic policy	4	8	12	4	36	40
Support for business from EU funds	16	16	32	20	24	44
Lack of stability	4	0	4	4	0	4
Other (specify)	0	0	0	4	0	4
In total	108	68	176	76	116	192

Thus, there are significant differences between the assessments by Polish and Lithuanian respondents, with the assessments overlapping to much extent for opportunities connected with European integration and support for the development of businesses with EU funds (tab. 3).

Small businesses located in rural areas also see opportunities for maintaining stability of business, its development or improvement of its effectiveness or profitability in various microeconomic factors, or adjustments, „SMEs in rural areas appear to be able to optimize their competitive advantages and to overcome the local environmental constraints at the same time” (Abrahám, 2015). The respondents from Poland indicated consulting in successful application for EU aid (64%) as playing the most important role in this respect.

Second position was taken by chances provided to business by good tax consulting (52%). Investment and technological consulting was indicated by 24% and 20% respondents respectively. Every fifth respondent (20%) sees training courses designed for entrepreneurs as a significant chance for the development of small business in rural areas.

Table 3. Main macroeconomic opportunities for the development of businesses

Specification	Poland			Lithuania		
	MSc, PhD	Post-doctoral title, professor	Total	MSc, PhD	Professor	Total
Legal consulting	4	8	12	12	32	44
Tax consulting	32	20	52	16	8	24
Technological consulting	12	8	20	8	0	8
Investment consulting	20	4	24	20	36	56

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Specification	Poland			Lithuania		
	MSc, PhD	Post-doctoral title, professor	Total	MSc, PhD	Professor	Total
Consulting in the use of EU aid	36	28	64	4	12	16
Business training courses	16	4	20	12	24	36
Municipal business associations and clubs	0	0	0	4	0	4
In total	120	72	192	76	112	188

Lithuanian respondents assessed the chances for the development of businesses in a somewhat different way. Investment consulting was most often indicated as a chance for such development (56%), with older academics accounting for 36% of those indicating this chance. It was followed by improvement of legal consulting for small business (non-commercial consulting) (44%) and business training courses (36%). In contrast to the assessment of Polish respondents, tax consulting is not regarded in Lithuania as a big chance for improvement of the situation of small businesses. Its place has probably been taken by legal consulting (44%). A kind of summary of this group of research problems is respondents' opinions on the prospects of the development of entrepreneurship in rural areas in the next three years. They are a function of the macroeconomic and microeconomic policy of a country, including the very sensitive sphere of tax and non-tax levies, as well as the impact of local authorities on the running of local business.

Polish respondents showed more optimism in terms of the prospect of entrepreneurship development, with 52% of positive responses, while the share of Lithuanian positive responses was smaller by 8 pp. A similar proportion was observed in the assessments indicating stagnation in entrepreneurship development within the next three years: 44% of responses in Poland and 40% in Lithuania. The responses indicating reduction or/and shutdown of companies within the next three years were selected by 4% of the respondents from Poland and as many as 12% of those from Lithuania. Thus, the research and assessments show a better prospect of the development of small business in rural areas in Poland compared to Lithuania. However, the Polish rural areas, with their long history of entrepreneurship-based development, in the agricultural sphere connected with family farms and non-agricultural initiatives, differ from the Lithuanian ones. In Lithuania, entrepreneurship, responsibility for one's own economic situation, was interrupted by several decades of widespread collectivisation and almost exclusive work of inhabitants of rural areas as employed persons.

Next, the respondents indicated barriers to the development of entrepreneurship in both the countries. Presented with a range of possible responses contained in the surveys, including an open question, they were asked to choose maximally three responses (tab. 4).

The most responses concerning barriers to the development of entrepreneurship in Poland referred to „the country’s economic policy” that is not

business friendly, i.e. legislative solutions and the practice of their implementation arising from the national law.

This particular barrier was indicated by as many as 80% of the respondents, with young academics accounting for 48% and respondents with post-doctoral titles and professors accounting for 32%. That is why reforming politics is so important and „softer regulation and less pressure on enterprises, especially within the first years of existence, may be a good start for such a policy” (Janda, 2013).

These respondents were also critical about „the policy of regional authorities” in terms of supporting entrepreneurship or creating favourable conditions for its development – 32% of the responses in total, of which 24% were chosen by younger scientists and 8% by older ones. According to Harasym, Rodzinka, Skica (2017): „a large number of public officers (...) corresponds result in a lack of coordination in the support of entrepreneurship within the structures of the office and in effect lowers the effectiveness of support that is based on separate activities”.

Significant barriers to the development of entrepreneurship, as indicated by respondents in Poland, also included economic downturn – 24% of the respondents in total – and unemployment and poverty – also 24% in total. Given the states of European economies, i.e. the area of the EU, including Poland and Lithuania, which currently have a good or even very good economic situation; it is very hard to provide a definite interpretation of such an assessment. This response was chosen by 24% of the respondents in Poland and 44% in Lithuania (the highest share in the category of the responses), which can be cautiously interpreted as an indication of difficulties of small economic entities located in rural areas with adaptation to the market of production or services, resulting in little participation in the benefits that economic recovery or blooming economic cycle should bring to the development of businesses (Płonka, 2017).

Second place among the top barriers indicated by Lithuanian academics was taken by „the country’s economic policy” that is not favourable for entrepreneurs (36% of responses, only older academics) and „unemployment and poverty” (also 36%), which generates little or very limited market demand, and thus does not facilitate or even hinders the development of local entrepreneurship, e.g. in the sphere of trade or broadly understood services. The barriers to entrepreneurship resulting from the international (world) policy accounted for the smallest share of the respondents’ responses. This area includes both globalisation of markets and economic protectionism, and mutual relations, e.g. EU-USA. Only 8% of the respondents in Lithuania highlighted these issues, while the Polish respondents did not indicate such factors at all. Rural areas, especially those where the participation of the public, or cooperative, agricultural sector is significant or even dominant have been and often still are particularly prone to

various kinds of social pathologies. Such a situation does not facilitate, and even inhibits the development of small business, which was noted by 20% of the respondents in Lithuania and 8% in Poland.

Table 4. The main macroeconomic barriers to the development of entrepreneurship in rural areas as assessed by the respondents, in % entage*

Specification	Poland			Lithuania		
	MSc, PhD	Post-doctoral title, Professor	Total	MSc, PhD	Professor	Total
International (world) policy	0	0	0	4	4	8
Integration with the EU	12	0	12	4	8	12
Country's economic policy	48	32	80	0	36	36
Policy of regional authorities	24	8	32	12	20	32
Economic downturn (decline)	8	16	24	24	20	44
Unemployment and poverty	8	16	24	12	24	36
Social pathologies	8	0	8	12	16	28
Other	4	4	8	8	12	20
In total	112	76	188	76	140	216

*The respondents were allowed to choose maximally three responses, therefore the summary % entage exceeds 100%

Assessment of macroeconomic factors in the development of entrepreneurship in rural areas almost always includes assessment of the economic policy implemented through fiscal instruments. It is business taxation and compulsory payments, including mainly insurance contributions, that are regarded as the most important measures of the country's approach to entrepreneurs, especially those running small companies. A favourable tax system is also a way to reduce hidden economy, which in Poland, especially in the southern part, has a strong position and a long tradition.

Analysis of the assessment of small business taxation, in terms of the form of taxation and the amount of paid taxes, with five categories of assessments¹, shows that the response „average” clearly prevails here. This response dominated among the respondents from Poland (68%), and in Lithuania it accounted for 56%. While no extreme assessments, i.e. „very favourable” taxation conditions, were recorded in Poland, in Lithuania 4% of the respondents assessed them as very favourable. At the same time, the Lithuanian academics showed more polarised assessments, i.e. 20% assessed these conditions as favourable, and the same percentage – as unfavourable. In the case of Poland, the assessments were more sceptical (critical), with 24% assessing the conditions as unfavourable and 8% as favourable.

Taxes paid by small entrepreneurs usually have important fiscal functions for the economy, constituting central and local budget receipts. They also have a significant impact on the functioning of companies, their turnover and profits. The development and functioning of entrepreneurs in the sphere of legal trade is also greatly affected by pension and health insurance schemes. Pension contributions (and related payments), as well

¹ Assessments: very favourable, favourable, average, unfavourable, very unfavourable

as health insurance contributions, often constitute a significant burden for small entrepreneurs, and as a result are usually perceived by them as quasi tax burdens.

Of the taxes and compulsory payments imposed on small entrepreneurs in Poland and Lithuania, two types of tax accounted for the most negative responses among the responses.

In Poland, it was VAT, which due to the complication of the system and its frequent changes, has the strongest, negative impact according to 48% of the respondents on the development of small business. A significant problem, indicated by 32% of the respondents, is also posed by income tax, which is paid in various forms. In Lithuania, the assessments are reversed: 60% of the respondents indicated a negative impact of income tax, while VAT was indicated by 32%. It should be noted that in Poland it is young academics (MSc, PhD) that are more critical in this regard, while in Lithuania – professors (40% for income tax, 24% for VAT) (tab. 3). In Poland, the top instrument with the highest negative impact that financially affects enterprises is a compulsory pension contribution, which was indicated by 56% of the respondents.

This payment was indicated by 28% of the respondents from Lithuania and came third, i.e. following income tax, which was indicated by 60% of the respondents, and VAT, which was chosen by 32% health insurance contributions play a significant role in the Polish system of compulsory charges, which was highlighted by 24% of the respondents, while in Lithuania they were indicated by 4%.

Table 5. Distribution of assessments of the types of taxes and compulsory payments that have a negative impact on the development of small business (%)

Specification	Poland			Lithuania		
	MSc, PhD	Post-doc-toral title, Professor	Total	MSc, PhD	Profes-sor	Total
Income tax	28	4	32	20	40	60
VAT	32	16	48	8	24	32
Pension contribution	24	32	56	16	12	28
Health insurance	20	4	24	0	4	4
Local tax	8	8	16	0	8	8
Other	0	4	4	4	4	8
In total	112	68	180	48	92	140

Local authorities, though they play a large role in creating a good investment climate and favourable conditions for running a business, are also collectors of taxes, mainly local ones (Zuzek, 2015). Low rates of such taxes compared to neighbouring municipalities may have a stimulating impact, especially for the location of small business. However, in the Polish conditions, local tax is assessed as a relatively weak in-

strument for creating the local investment policy (Płonka, 2011). The research confirmed a limited negative impact of local tax, which was indicated by 16% of the respondents in Poland and 8% in Lithuania.

4. Conclusions

1. Knowledge of economic realities and conditions of entrepreneurship causes that scientific employees are a social group with a significant opinion-forming influence. Therefore, it is important to devote much attention to their assessment of barriers and opportunities for entrepreneurship development.

2. The survey conducted among academics – economists at agricultural universities in Krakow and Kaunas showed both chances and significant differences in barriers and threats with respect to running and developing small business.

3. The academics from Poland indicated „opening of the markets to the East” and globalisation and opening „to the world” as key (most important) chances for the development of entrepreneurship.

4. The respondents from Lithuania mainly highlighted the chances provided to small business by EU funds and those connected with European integration and change of the country’s policy.

5. In a microeconomic perspective chances provided by consulting in the use of EU aid were rated most highly in Poland, while investment and legal consulting – in Lithuania.

6. Among the most significant barriers indicated by the respondents from Poland were the country’s economic policy that is unfavourable for the development of small business, too high pension contributions paid by entrepreneurs and too complicated VAT paying procedures.

7. The respondents from Lithuania mainly highlighted unfavourable economic situation for small businesses located in rural areas and (similarly to Polish respondents) unfavourable economic policy and unemployment and poverty (as factors that weaken local markets). As far as unfavourable tax-related factors are concerned, critical assessments referred mostly to income tax imposed on small businesses.

5. Proposals

Knowledge is increasingly important in the management process in the modern economy. The investigated research and received conclusions allow the transition from theoretical analysis to implementation in practice. The information provided is importance to local government and state units but may also be helpful for entrepreneurs themselves or for people starting their own economic activity.

The authors are convinced that the key factor for the success and development of an organization is the ability to acquire and manage knowledge. Knowledge of economic realities and entrepreneurial conditions determines the proper functioning of the enterprise. Determination of specific directions of transformation of individual villages with an emphasis on non-agricultural entrepreneurship is an important element of multifunctional development of rural areas, therefore, learning the opinion of economists-

experts on opportunities and barriers to the development of non-agricultural economic activity in the discussed areas plays a key role.

The obtained results have high cognitive and application for business practice. Analysis of the results of research leads to a better understanding of entrepreneurship, which is important not only for entrepreneurs themselves, but also for self-government and government units who create tools to create favorable conditions for the development of existing and newly emerging business entities. On the basis of the conducted research, several key conclusions can be drawn regarding the scope of necessary actions aimed at improving the current state of rural enterprise in Poland as well as in Lithuania.

- It is necessary to increase efficiency and extend the offer of business environment institutions in the field of supporting rural entrepreneurship. Creation of an integrated system of institutional environment, whose main task will be creating favorable conditions for cooperation of enterprises and the effectiveness of operation of business environment institutions will make it possible to increase the competitiveness of rural entrepreneurs.

- It is necessary to simplify and harmonize regulations regarding economic activity in rural areas (in particular regarding the tax system), which will facilitate their unambiguous interpretation and their easy use in everyday operations of the company. Limiting barriers in the form of unfriendly regulations and legal regulations as well as bureaucratic difficulties allowed to reduce transaction costs related to running a business.

- Previous actions of the authorities at the central as well as local government level in initiating non-agricultural activities in rural areas brought disproportionate effects, which indicates the need to reorient state policy in stimulating the development of small and medium enterprises, allowing better use of existing, unused resources occurring in rural areas while at the same time increasing the level of socio-economic development of the village.

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SMULKAUS VERSLO PLĖTROS KLIŪTYS IR GALIMYBĖS KAIMO VIETOVĖSE

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Santrauka

Tyrime analizuojamos ir pristatomos smulkaus verslo plėtros kliūtis bei galimybės vystant verslą kaimo vietovėse Lenkijoje ir Lietuvoje. Mokslinė problema – kokios smulkaus verslo vystymo galimybės kaimo vietovėse ir kokios paramos priemonės būtų naudingos verslo vystytojams? Tyrimo metu atlikta 50-ies mokslininkų – ekonomistų, dirbančių Žemės ūkio universitete Krokuvoje ir Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto Žemės ūkio akademijoje Kaune apklausa. Tyrimo tikslas – įvertinti ir palyginti smulkaus verslo plėtros kaimo vietovėse Lietuvoje ir Lenkijoje kliūtis ir galimybės bei pasiūlyti veiksmingas skatinimo priemones verslo subjektams. Pagrindinės Lenkijos įmonių plėtros kliūtys – didelės įmokos į pensijų fondus bei sudėtinga PVM mokėjimo sistema. Lietuvoje – sudėtingos ekonominės sąlygos vystant verslą kaimo vietovėse ir su tuo susijęs nedarbas bei kai kurių jų gyventojų skurdas. Lenkijoje didelės galimybės verslui plėtoti numatomos Rytų šalių valstybių rinkuose ir paramoje iš Europos Sąjungos. Lietuvoje – vystant profesionalias konsultacijas įmonėms ir naudojant ES pagalbą.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Lenkija, Lietuva, kaimo vietovės, smulkusis verslas, verslo kliūtis ir galimybės.

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