

# LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: PRACTICAL WORKSHOPS CONNECTING LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ORGANISATIONS, WITH REFERENCE TO THE EXAMPLE OF THE OTWOCK DISTRICT

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## ABSTRACT

In the world of the globalised economy, local socio-economic structures are gaining importance again. The economies of European countries, including Poland, are mostly based on SMEs, which constitute the majority of all enterprises, employing more than half of the employees in the national economy. In this context, local initiatives that bring together entrepreneurs operating in the area, local government bodies and scientific centres, should be considered, which, by working together, influence local development. The aim of the article is to show the importance of the SME sector against the background of trends in global entrepreneurship. The authors ask whether local government can stimulate local entrepreneurship in the SME sector, and consider the effectiveness of Local Economic Development workshops, referring to the example of the Otwock district. Workshops in Local Economic Development based on the model of the American workshops have developed practical results in the form of ready-to-implement projects. Moreover, they have revived the network of local contacts that is vital for regional entrepreneurship.

KEY WORDS: *local development, regional development, entrepreneurship, SME.*

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## Introduction

In the era of globalisation and computerisation, local communities are becoming increasingly important. The globalisation processes initiated in the 1940s created the basis for the rapid development of large international corporations (Bezrukova, 2003, 217–234). As a result, there was a significant monopolisation of the market, starting with the fuel and petroleum sector, e.g. the Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Czachorowski, 2023, 1–16), to the production of everyday products, e.g. McDonald's (Loughran, 2023, 1–9) or entertainment and media, e.g. the Disney Corporation (Lloyd, 2023, 315–327). The largest number of headquarters of multinational corporations is in the United States (almost 30%).

As a consequence of the progressive development of the monopolisation of the market by large international corporations, the marginalisation and liquidation of small and medium-size enterprises operating on the local market takes place. An analysis of data from the statistical yearbooks of the Central Statistical Office for the years 2010 to 2015 shows that in Poland almost 60% of the food industry is dominated by

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global companies. Currently, in 2023, the level of globalisation of this sector reaches almost 80% (Baran, 2017, 75–85).

Local economic movements and the organisation of entrepreneurship at a regional level have been noticed in the global economy since the end of the 19th century as pragmatic reactions to structural changes. Drawing on the considerable autonomy of local government and business networks, a wide range of promotion and development policies was created, despite the poor legal basis (Ward, 1990, 100–108). However, it is in the last 20 to 30 years that the incidence of local economic initiatives has become greater. This applies not only to the activities of local governments, but also to central governments' efforts to catalyse development at a local level, and to the efforts of various community development organisations to improve economic and social conditions in specific neighbourhoods (Rich, 1992, 150–172; Wilson, 1996, 617–630). The activities of various community economic development initiatives exist in parallel with more formalised local government and private sector initiatives (Haughton, 1998, 872–877; Reed, 1999, 660–674).

The aim of this study is to search for an answer to the question about the future of small and medium-size enterprises in the context of the rapidly progressing global monopolisation of the market. It is also important to answer the next question, namely, what impact does the process of the computerisation of society have on the development of small and medium-size enterprises? The European Union, as well as individual member states, implements many legal, institutional and political instruments aimed at supporting and protecting the local entrepreneurship market. One such instrument is local economic development. Therefore, this study is an analysis of the implementation of this programme in the Otwock district, located on the outskirts of Warsaw.

The authors analysed literature in the field of SMEs, as well as legal acts regulating entrepreneurship. European and Polish statistical data are used in the article.

## 1. The structure of global entrepreneurship

The dominance of large international corporations on global markets has many reasons that are not the subject of this study. One of the characteristics of globalisation in the field of business entities, especially large international corporations, is the tendency to deepen the interdependence between the markets of different countries, and thus to gradually make local entrepreneurs dependent on global corporate policy. Such activities are possible due to the removal of political, legal, economic and social barriers (Dudzińska, 2015, 159–174).

The most important political barriers that limited the development of the global economy in the mid-20th century included the lack of openness to foreign investment. Thanks to various types of international agreements and the liberalisation of the openness of political authorities to the introduction of foreign investment in their country, a large invasion of corporations was noticed at the end of the 20th century. Another obstacle to the expansion of large corporations was legal obstacles such as tariffs or high taxes on foreign goods and services. An example of the elimination of these restrictions is the European Union, where customs duties have been abolished (the customs union) for products manufactured within the member states (free trade zone). In addition, the introduction of the freedom of movement of people, the movement of goods, freedom of entrepreneurship, and freedom of movement of capital, played an important role in the development of the field for corporations (Szewczyk, 2016, 75–87).

An important element conducive to the expansion of international corporations was the removal of social barriers. Even in the second half of the 20th century, social prejudices against what is foreign, including current capital, products and services, became visible in many countries. Quite quickly, however, European societies, including Polish society, opened up to multiculturalism, and thus to the diversification of goods and services. The concept of understanding patriotism, both local and national, also changed (Postuła, 2017, 241–252).

However, it seems necessary to indicate two main factors in this state of affairs. The first is undoubtedly the dynamic and well-organised organisational structure of corporations; and the second factor in development is the issue of finance at their disposal. When it comes to the structure of large corporations, flexibility is very important. These corporations, depending on the local conditions, cooperate with local groups of entrepreneurs, establish foreign branches, buy up local enterprises, and make mergers or takeovers. In addition,

they move production to other countries where costs relating to employment are lower, or it is cheaper to use local intellectual resources, known as *offshoring* (Khraishi, 2023, 405–422).

This organisational structure and functioning of corporations makes them able to create a policy for their development quickly and effectively, including expansion into new markets. Hence, international corporations are gradually absorbing medium-size and small enterprises. This process is undoubtedly the result of their organisational potential. Hence, E. Sobczak rightly claims that a negative effect of globalisation is the progressive marginalisation of individual economies and enterprises, especially those of a local nature (Sobczak, 2004, 60–67).

It is also worth noting that international corporations often have financial resources that exceed the budgets of medium-size countries. Hence, they are often beyond the control of states. They can easily use cheaper labour in one part of the world to sell the same products more expensively in more affluent countries, increasing their profits.

These two factors, i.e. the organisational structure and significant resources, make international corporations grow very quickly by opening branches in other cities and countries, introducing their products and services to the local market (horizontal expansion). Another way for corporations to conquer local markets is by gaining control over supply chains, e.g. by purchasing metal mines or oilfields in economically undeveloped countries, especially in Africa and some parts of Asia, for little money (vertical expansion). After all, large corporations diversify their activities by taking over enterprises from other industries, expanding the range of products supplied to the market or expanding the range of services (Geise, 2022, 118–131). New technologies allow large and wealthy corporations to expand into new areas of business that are hitherto unknown or hardly exploited, such as, for example, a dump. In this regard, small and medium-size enterprises do not have much prospect of fair and honest competition with corporations. However, it must not be forgotten that the activities of large international corporations are burdened with numerous risks (Masiukiewicz, 2014, 57–69).

The development of global corporations is also supported by ICT technologies. Their use allows not only for the faster and cheaper production of new products and services, but above all for the faster acquisition of markets. The process of computerisation has created an information society that communicates mainly through social media (Lukash, 2015, 383–395). However, the main beneficiaries of these social media are large corporations that can afford to run large advertising campaigns in this new communication space.

The picture of the functioning of global corporations in the information society outlined above does not mean that medium-size and small enterprises are in a losing position. It should be noted that great changes are taking place in this area as well. Local enterprises use IT tools in supporting management processes and identifying barriers to their development more and more often. Studies on the development and functioning of small and medium-size enterprises indicate that they use more and more new tools for the efficient and effective management of the enterprise. Local enterprises increasingly reach for information resources and process them for their own needs (Barbachowska, 2019, 65–89).

## 2. Actions taken in Poland and the EU to support local entrepreneurship

The actions taken by Poland and the EU for the benefit of small and medium-size enterprises are extremely important and necessary. Despite the expansion of large international corporations, the share of small and medium-size enterprises together with micro-enterprises in the formation of the GDP of Poland and the EU is still significant; moreover, it is larger than that of international corporations. According to a report from 2022 by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development, the number of micro-enterprises in Poland is 94.9% of all enterprises in Poland. Small enterprises in Poland are 4.2%, and medium-size enterprises are 0.7%. Large enterprises are only 0.2% (PARP, 2022). Polish enterprises, regardless of size, are active not only in the country, but also abroad, e.g. in Africa (Gudowski, Piasecki, 2016, 291–304).

This structure of entrepreneurship in Poland does not differ much from the structure of entrepreneurship in the European Union. Thus, micro and small enterprises account for 98.9% of all enterprises in the union, 0.9% are medium-size enterprises (EUROSTAT, 2022), while large enterprises account for 0.2%, which is the same as in Poland (Gudowski, Piasecki, op. cit.).

In the context of the above data, a few words should be said about the policy of the European Union and Poland towards the sector of small and medium-size enterprises. Despite the fact that SMEs operate mainly in a given country, they are covered by statutory measures and EU support programmes. Thus, relevant legal regulations are found in the TFEU in the field of taxation (Articles 110–113), competition (Articles 101–109, TFEU), and company law (establishment law, Articles 49–54, TFEU). The definition of an SME adopted by the Commission is in Recommendation 2003/361/EC.

Already in June 2008, the EC presented a comprehensive and wide-ranging initiative on SMEs in the form of a Communication on the Small Business Act. The aim of this document was to create a new policy framework combining existing instruments and based on the European Charter for Small Enterprises, and a modern policy for growth and employment in the SME sector. Instead of proposing a full community approach, a political partnership approach with member states was adopted (European Parliament, Small and Medium-Size Enterprises). In order to support SMEs, the European Union introduced intelligent regulations and access to financial resources, and guaranteed a competitiveness policy. On 11 December 2013, Regulation (EU) No 1287/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a programme for the competitiveness of enterprises and small and medium-size enterprises (COSME) for the period 2014 to 2020 was adopted. In the current funding period (2021 to 2027), the European Union is pursuing an SME strategy in several directions, including:

- the EISMEA (European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency), responsible for the development and implementation of the European Innovation Council, manages other EU programmes, in the areas of SME support, innovation ecosystems, the single market, consumer policy and interregional investment in innovation, and runs the Enterprise Europe Network, providing information support for enterprises;
- the Late Payment Directive to prevent payment backlogs;
- an examination of the impact of new legal regulations on the SME sector using the SME Test;
- support for digital transformation with the help of Digital Innovation Hubs (DIH) (European Commission, SME Strategy).

In Poland, the strategic document regulating the policy towards SMEs is the Strategy for Responsible Development until 2020 (and further until 2030) adopted in 2017 (Resolution No 8 of the Council of Ministers of 14 February 2017). The aim of the strategy in terms of supporting the SME sector is: structural changes in the sector, new forms of activity and cooperation, and modern support instruments. As part of the strategy, a number of legislative changes were introduced, including: the act of 16 December 2016 amending certain acts in order to improve the legal environment for entrepreneurs, the act of 9 November 2017 amending certain acts in order to improve the legal environment for innovative activity, the act of 6 March 2018, the Entrepreneurs' Law, the Act of 6 March 2018 on the Ombudsman for Small and Medium-Size Entrepreneurs, and the Act of 6 March 2018 on the Central Register and Information on Economic Activity and Information Point for Entrepreneurs.

The purpose of the changes was to facilitate the setting up and running of a business, registration, easier and better access to financing, focusing public support on companies wishing to develop, using the potential and professional qualifications of Polish employees, supported by the appropriate ICT, technical and organisational solutions (Resolution No 8 of the Council of Ministers of 14 February 2017, *op. cit.*).

### 3. The implementation of the Local Economic Development programme in the Otwock district

As the strategy indicates, 'Polish entrepreneurs are still characterised by a low willingness to cooperate with other entities within a given sector or other local entities' (*ibid.*). The literature also indicates other barriers to local development, including:

- the economic condition of the country, unemployment and the impoverishment of the society related to it, as well as the lack of resources to overcome it;
- financial and fiscal policy, the lack of a clear structure and high instability. At the same time, various local government units with a strong competitive position are considered as development barriers;

- the surroundings of local units: centralisation existing in visible areas, faulty government administration, political clashes within power, insufficient flow of information, poorly defined competences and tasks of the territorial system, unfavourable and unbalanced policy towards local government (Orłowska, 2018, 44–56).

In response to these and many other barriers and challenges, the Local Economic Development programme was created. The methodology was developed by the Office of International Labor of the US Department of Labor in cooperation with the US Small Business Administration (Hansen, 2003; Cole, 1990). The aim of the measure is to help local communities in the systematic activation (stimulation) of local economic recovery and the creation of new jobs in areas affected by unemployment (Instytut Współpracy i Partnerstwa Lokalnego, 2004, 5). This approach offers very specific action: leaders of local authorities from business circles, bankers, entrepreneurs, trade unions, environmental organisations, local government institutions, chambers of commerce, universities, research and scientific institutes, development agencies, local activists and cultural animators are invited to take part in a series of four or five workshops. Each of the workshops has a strictly defined course and sets of activities, aimed at supporting the participants first in a thorough analysis of opportunities and needs, and then in the search for joint opportunities for action. During the workshop, the economic situation of the local community is assessed, economic recovery plans are prepared, and then specific economic projects are selected and implemented by the participants.

Table 1. Methodology of Local Economic Development

Workshop A. Analysis of economic components in the local community	Workshop B. Analysis of the four principles of economic development in the local community	Workshop C. Creating proposals for economic projects that stimulate economic development in the local community	Workshop D. Evaluation and selection of proposed economic projects to be implemented in the local community
Helps workshop participants analyse the components: access to capital, economic environment, infrastructure, human resources and quality of life in the local environment that affect conditions conducting business activity in their area.	Helps workshop participants understand and apply four proven principles of local economic recovery that contribute to economic recovery in their area: 1. Capturing local income (reducing the outflow of money spent elsewhere), sealing cash outflow leaks. 2. Support for existing enterprises and local business. 3. Encouraging the creation of new enterprises. 4. Searching for and attracting (from outside) the necessary new businesses to the community.	Participants summarise the economic conditions in the community and develop a vision for the community. The workshop helps them develop concrete project proposals for the local economic recovery of this environment, helping to realise the vision.	The workshop helps participants select the most important projects in local economic development which local society can implement in its area. In the determination of the pitfalls and threats, the assignment of tasks in project implementation, deadlines, and the beneficiaries, assessing the risks and benefits of project implementation are the most important stages of this workshop. During the workshops, participants create new proposals and ideas for economic projects. They draw up action plans for a wide range of projects that will initiate local economic development.

Source: the authors' own elaboration on the basis of 23. Instytut Współpracy i Partnerstwa Lokalnego, Podręcznik uczestnika warsztatów Lokalnego Ożywienia Gospodarczego, Katowice, 2004.



Local Economic Revival workshops were conducted in the Otwock district in 2016. The main organiser was the Otwock district office (a unit of local government). The coordinator of the activities is the district Labour Office appointed by the district office, as its competence includes, among others: developing research, analyses and reports, including monitoring deficit and surplus professions, and making assessments regarding the labour market for the needs of the local labour market council and employment authorities; developing and implementing a programme for promoting employment and activating the local labour market, which is part of the local strategy for solving social problems; acquiring and managing financial resources for the implementation of tasks in the field of activation of the local labour market, including providing information on the possibilities and range of assistance specified in the Act on Employment Promotion and Labour Market Institutions; providing assistance to the unemployed, job seekers and employers in finding employees, through job placements and career counselling. The methodological concept was presented by a representative of a scientific unit (the Scientific and Research Centre for Fire Protection in Józefów).

Based on empirical experience and the results of research on the socio-economic conditions in the district (Barbachowska, 2013) (understood in accordance with the definition contained in the Act of 5 June 1998 on local government, as a local government community, i.e. residents of the district and the appropriate territory), members of the workshops, i.e. representatives of public administration, scientific and research units, entrepreneurs operating or with their registered office in the district, cooperated to develop a number of economic projects that could be implemented using local resources. The added value was the mapping of 'windows of opportunity', i.e. opportunities, to be used. The implementation of the Local Economic Revival contributed to the modernisation of the railway station in Celestynów, which was a response to real needs reported by the socio-economic environment. The workshops contributed to the creation of the New Economy Club of the Otwock district. Institutions and enterprises operating in the club have been organising the Economic Forum of the Otwock district since 2013, and participated in Local Economic Development workshops.

## Conclusion

Local Economic Development workshops offer real benefits for the local community. They develop economic and social projects with the support of local people. In addition, they integrate the local community, entrepreneurs, research centres and administration providing services to the local government community, and strengthen the economic environment.

The activities organised by or for a small local enterprise are not only positively perceived by the community, but are also beneficial to the local labour market. They integrate entrepreneurs and the administration, giving an impulse to establish cooperation and implement new economic projects. In Poland, as in most European countries, the economy is based on the SME sector, building a strong middle class. Supporting this group through activities initiated by local government and research centres, and based on new financial mechanisms, develops a strong economy resistant to shocks and crises.

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## VIETINIS EKONOMIKOS VYSTYMAS – VIETOS VALDŽIOS IR ORGANIZACIJŲ BENDRŲ VEIKLŲ APTARIMAS OTVOCKO RAJONO PAVYZDŽIU

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Straipsnyje smulkusis ir vidutinis verslo sektoriai pristatomi viso pasaulinio verslumo kontekste, pagrindžiant, kad būtent smulkusis ir vidutinis verslas (SVV) yra pasaulio ekonomikos, taigi ir daugelio Europos šalių pagrindas. Nepaisant mažesnio turimo kapitalo ir žmogiškųjų išteklių, SVV konkuruoja su tarptautinėmis korporacijomis, kur dirba nemaža dalis šalių dirbančiųjų (Lenkijoje – daugiau kaip 60 proc.). Tai ypač svarbu vietos ir regionų lygmenimis, ypač mažesniuose miestuose. Straipsnyje analizuotas Otvocko (lenk. *Otwock*) rajonas, pateikiamas kaip prieš tai išdėstytų teiginių pavyzdys. Viešojo administravimo institucijos – vietos valdžia – turėtų remti smulkųjį verslą, kuris teikia darbo vietų gyventojams ir plėtoja regioną. Otvosko mieste sėkmingai vykdyta vietos ekonominė plėtra, tai ne tik integravo verslininkus, bet ir paskatino įgyvendinti ekonominius bei socialinius projektus. Mažų vietos įmonių vykdomos veiklos ne tik gerai vertinamos bendruomenės, bet naudingos ir vietos darbo rinkai. Jos įtraukia verslininkus ir administraciją, skatindamos bendradarbiauti ir įgyvendinti naujus ekonominius projektus. Lenkijoje, kaip daugelyje Europos šalių, ekonomika remiasi SVV sektoriumi, formuoja stiprią vidutinę klasę. Šią grupę remiant vietos valdžios ir tyrimų centrų inicijuota bei naujais finansiniais mechanizmais grįsta veikla plėtojama stipri, sukrėtimams ir krizėms atspari ekonomika.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: *vietiniai regionai, regionų vystymas, verslumas.*

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