



## ENTREPRENEURSHIP OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES IN POLAND IN THE CONTEXT OF THE REGIONS AND INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY

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### Abstract

The main objective of this study was to identify the state of entrepreneurship of small and medium-sized enterprises in Poland in the context of individual regions and to try to identify the relationship between entrepreneurship and international activity, with particular focus on foreign direct investment. This goal was also chosen to inspire more researchers to fill the research gap in this respect. To achieve this goal, research was carried out, consisting of comparative analyses of existing official reports and documents regarding the state of entrepreneurship and internationalization, which would then show the activity of enterprises in relation to their revenues, investment expenditures and their internationalization. It should be mentioned that there are no compact, uniform studies regarding the relationship between entrepreneurship and internationalization of activities broken down into individual voivodships. It is definitely a research gap. For the purpose of this study, it was necessary to explain the fact that the author identified the international activity of enterprises with their internationalization and used this nomenclature interchangeably in this study. The author understands internationalization to be every activity of enterprise in relation to their various forms: from sporadic export and import contacts in an indirect way (i.e. through foreign intermediaries), to direct trade activities (direct export and import), cooperative contacts, strategic alliances and foreign direct investments (FDI). The study is not about showing what forms dominate in individual regions, but what the state of entrepreneurship is there, evaluated through the prism of such indicators as revenues per company from the SME sector in PLN million, investment outlays in PLN thousands and the so-called Synthetic indicator (WS). This action was performed to bring the following results: a comparison of the entrepreneurship of small and medium enterprises in Poland in relation to their regionalization and to draw attention to the relationship between the state of entrepreneurship and the state of internationalization.

## PRZEDSIĘBIORCZOŚĆ MAŁYCH I ŚREDNICH PRZEDSIĘBIORSTW W POLSCE W KONTEKŚCIE REGIONÓW I AKTYWNOŚCI MIĘDZYNARODOWEJ

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### Abstrakt

Zasadniczym celem opracowania jest zidentyfikowanie stanu przedsiębiorczości polskich firm z sektora małych i średnich w kontekście poszczególnych regionów oraz próba zidentyfikowania związku między przedsiębiorczością a aktywnością o charakterze międzynarodowym. Do zrealizowania celu przeprowadzono badania, polegające na analizach porównawczych istniejących oficjalnych raportów i dokumentów dotyczących stanu przedsiębiorczości i internacjonalizacji, co ma pozwolić na pokazanie aktywności przedsiębiorstw w związku z osiąganymi przez nie przychodami i nakładami na inwestycje oraz ich internacjonalizacji. Nadmienić należy, że nie ma zwartych, jednolitych opracowań dotyczących związku przedsiębiorczości z internacjonalizacją działalności w podziale na poszczególne województwa. Jest to z pewnością luka badawcza. Do zrealizowania celu autorka utożsamia międzynarodową aktywność przedsiębiorstw z ich internacjonalizacją i nazewnictwem tym w opracowaniu posługuje się zamiennie. Internacjonalizację zaś rozumie jako każdą aktywność przedsiębiorstw w związku z ich zróżnicowanymi formami: od sporadycznych kontaktów eksportowych i importowych pośrednich (czyli przez zagranicznych pośredników), po bezpośrednie działania handlowe (eksport i import pośredni), kontakty kooperacyjne, alianse strategiczne i bezpośrednie inwestycje zagraniczne (BIZ). W opracowaniu nie chodzi o wykazanie, jakie formy dominują w poszczególnych regionach, ale jaki jest stan przedsiębiorczości ocenianej przez pryzmat takich wskaźników, jak: przychody na firmę z sektora MSP w mln PLN, nakłady na inwestycje w tys. PLN oraz tzw. wskaźnik syntetyczny (WS). Takie działanie ma przynieść następujące rezultaty: porównanie przedsiębiorczości małych i średnich przedsiębiorstw w Polsce w związku z ich regionalizacją oraz zwrócenie uwagi na związek stanu przedsiębiorczości ze stanem internacjonalizacji.

## Introduction

In recent years, the role of entrepreneurship in companies and their international activity has been growing. The characteristics of owners and managers, such as enthusiasm, charisma, and risk-taking abilities are gaining in importance (Kaczmarek, 2013, p. 192). The pace of change is connected with the continuous expansion of competences, especially those related to entrepreneurship and the ability to take a responsible risk. Despite barely twenty years of the past related to the conditions of running a business in Poland, a marked increase in the international activity of Polish enterprises has been noted. Small and medium-sized enterprises, which form the backbone of the Polish economy, play an unwavering role in this activity. The sector of small and medium enterprises fulfills very

important functions that positively affect a serious chance to increase employment and international activity (internationalization) as well as the effective competition of the Polish economy on the European market and global markets (*Przedsiębiorczość: szansą na sukces...*, 2003, p. 235). At the same time, small and medium-sized enterprises face numerous barriers to their development, which in individual regions leads to restrictions on their functioning, and sometimes to collapse, which also affects the negative development of the entire economy. Internationalization is often a response to the lack of opportunities to develop in a given country's market or in a given region, and the multiplication of barriers is often an incentive to look for opportunities beyond the borders of one's own country. More and more enterprises are moving their business operations directly or indirectly out of their home country (Glinkowska & Kaczmarek, 2016a, p. 11-15). This article was inspired by self-conducted research performed in connection with the internationalization of Polish enterprises in 2013–2017. The results of the obtained research gave rise to scientific questions, whether the entrepreneurship of business owners and their managers influence the growth of international activity and whether there is an increase in the entrepreneurship of regions and an increase or decrease in the activity of enterprises from the SME sector on foreign markets.

The aim of the study was to identify the state of entrepreneurship of small and medium enterprises in individual voivodships in Poland and to connect it with their international activity in an attempt to draw conclusions about the relationship between regional entrepreneurship and international activity in individual regions. It seems to be worthwhile here to draw attention again to the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises for the Polish economy.

## **Description of the research methodology**

Seeking answers to these questions, the author decided to explore the reports related to entrepreneurship in individual regions of Poland and to the international activity of businesses. For the elaboration of the study, analysis of the existing official documentation was carried out, including PARP Reports: Desk research report – internationalization of enterprises, Report on the state of the small and medium enterprises sector in Poland, and Regional and international reports on the websites of the Central Statistical Office in Poland. The literature on the subject was also analyzed: retrospectively and currently. A critical comparative analysis was made. The results of the research obtained were also analyzed from entrepreneurs, representatives of the local government and the government in Ukraine in the Luhansk, Kiev and Kharkov regions, which was carried out personally in Ukraine in 2013–2017. Surveys and interviews were conducted there. The research concerned the internationalization of Polish and Ukrainian enterprises. Among the research problems

were those that concerned the characteristics of contemporary entrepreneurs and managers and their relationship with the development of enterprises, while seeking opportunities outside the market of their own country. Moreover, the reasons for internationalization and barriers in this process were also examined. The research is of a qualitative character.

## **The sector of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Polish economy and its significance**

The SME sector in Poland, as well as in all economically advanced countries, plays an important role in the economy. It is an important source of income for the state budget (and thus for the budget of individual regions), it also participates in the creation of gross domestic product (GDP), contributes to the creation of jobs and to creating social and functional changes in the region (voivodship, municipality, city). It also has a significant impact on the innovativeness of the economy (Targalski, 2003, p. 12). Small and medium enterprises are flexible in terms of structure and costs, which means they can compete with large enterprises in terms of speed of reaction to market volatility; owners' motivation to act; exploiting market opportunities by entrepreneurial managers; rationality of resource use, the rationality of information flow within the company; ease of entering into cooperative arrangements, as well as the use of privileged conditions to obtain funds from specially launched sources for the support of the development of regional and local economies (*Zarządzanie małym i średnim przedsiębiorstwem...*, 2002, p. 20, 21). B. Onak-Szczepanik is of the opinion that the region in which entities from the small and medium-sized sector prevail is more resistant to economic fluctuations and any "disturbances" (*Nierówności społeczne a wzrost gospodarczy...*, 2007, p. 613-626). In the activities of small and medium enterprises, the role of their international activity increases, especially in terms of forms such as exports and imports. The share of export activity compared to imports has been clearly growing for a number of years, however, it should be mentioned that import activity over export activity still prevails, which is due to the higher profitability of importing over exporting. However, for the first time in the history of the market economy, the statistics contained on the websites of the Central Statistical Office for 2013 noted an equally balanced level of value of both forms (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2018). Every form of international activity is important because it directly or indirectly influences the attraction of new technologies, new investments, ideas, revenues, innovative products and services, as well as improving their quality. Regardless of the applied form of regional and international activity, the entrepreneurship of business owners and managers appears to be the most important. It is thanks to entrepreneurship that it is possible to increase the activity of enterprises, which will translate into the development of individual regions and, consequently, the development of the economy in Poland.

## Entrepreneurship – essence

The Entrepreneurship Report, prepared by the European Commission, states that the “entrepreneur’s initiative is a key condition for the development (...), innovation and creation of new jobs” (*Raport o przedsiębiorczości*, 2004, p. 32). The concept of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneur was introduced to the literature around 1800 by the French economist J.B. Say who bluntly defined the entrepreneur as the one who “transfers economic resources from the area of lower to the area of higher productivity and higher yield” (Drucker, 1992, p. 30). One of the most accurate (in the author’s opinion) expressions for the analyzed terms: entrepreneur and entrepreneurship were proposed by R. Cantillon – the entrepreneur, according to him, is a person who looks for opportunities and uses them, and entrepreneurship is a relationship with uncertainty and risk (Gruszecki, 1994, p. 32, 33). Similarly, entrepreneurship is treated by R.W. Griffin, who stresses that it is a process of doing business and taking risks (Griffin, 2009, p. 730). Over the years, many definitions have emerged defining the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship. Most of them stress resourcefulness and charisma as characteristics of these concepts. According to the *New Dictionary of Polish Language (Nowy słownik języka polskiego)* entrepreneurship means ingenuity, initiative and resourcefulness (*Nowy słownik języka polskiego*, 2003, p. 769).

T. Listwan associates entrepreneurship with initiating projects, creative problem solving, taking advantage of opportunities, taking risks, and adapting to environmental conditions (*Kapitał ludzki a kształtowanie przedsiębiorczości*, 2004, p. 201). A.K. Kozminski, on the other hand, believes that entrepreneurship enables the full use of resources (especially intellectual), thanks to which the company can quickly and flexibly react to a change in the market situation, avoid defeat and blur the borders between the organization and its surroundings (Kozmiński, 2004, p. 155-156). Entrepreneurship is an indispensable element of the modern economy, allowing for the search for opportunities in the national and international environment. D.B. Audretsch and M. Keilbach (2004, p. 605-616) underline the importance of the flow of knowledge in entrepreneurial behaviors that may lead to the region’s development. The influence of entrepreneurship on regional development has also been confirmed by:

– P.D. Reynolds (1994, p. 429-442) who on the basis of research covering 382 regions of the USA for the period 1986-1988 stated that the growth of entrepreneurship is accompanied by a greater degree of regional development;

– P. Braunerhjelm and B. Borgman (2004, p. 929-947) based on data from 70 Swedish regions for the 1975-1999 research period;

– B. Ashcroft and J.H. Love (1996, p. 482-500) based on data on 64 regions of Great Britain in the eighties.

## **International activity – essence**

The international activity of enterprises is often described as internationalization, globalization or foreign expansion. It is a term often found in the contemporary literature on the subject of business operations. As a process, it is considered at many levels: the world, countries, regions or individual enterprises (Glinkowska & Kaczmarek, 2016b, p. 12). The simplest definitions treat it as any economic activity undertaken by an enterprise abroad (Rymarczyk, 2004, p. 19), the degree or level of involvement of the company/sector in international operations (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, p. 26; Przybylska, 2005, p. 73) or as a process involving the export and import of products/raw materials, and sometimes also as a transfer of all production to other countries (direct foreign investment (FDI) (Pietrasieński, 2005, p. 15). Nowadays, internationalization is an important way of development and growth for enterprises which increases their competitiveness (Glinkowska & Kaczmarek, 2016a, p. 13-20). It is a changeable and dynamic process, characterized by an upward trend and leading to the expansion of the company's operations in other countries (Welch & Luostarinen, 2013, p. 17). It is widely believed that the greater the company's involvement in international activity, the higher the stage of internationalization of activities (Przybylska, 2013, p. 17). Internationalization refers to the constantly developing network of economic connections, going beyond the borders of the region, and then the home country. International activity is the result of the activities of entrepreneurial business owners and their managers. Entrepreneurialism of business owners brings a lot of benefits thanks to the use of new technologies, new organizational and management methods, the use of differences between the price of raw materials at home and abroad, differences in labour costs in individual countries, etc. Foreign markets are a source of knowledge that allows for increased production efficiency, and economic relations with other countries give the opportunity to expand the network of contacts and strengthen the position of the company and the region. A multitude of definitions related to the international activity of enterprises requires the process to be perceived in a multifactorial and complex manner. It can be considered from the point of view of motives, barriers, forms, strategies and ways of internationalization, or we can – which is the essence of this study – compare and analyze the state of international activity of companies and the state of entrepreneurship of SMEs in selected regions.

## Entrepreneurship of companies in the SME sector in Poland by region

Quoted in the PARP Report (*Raport o stanie sektora...*, 2017, p. 45-49), the research results cover many aspects. In this study, the focus is solely on the issues of entrepreneurship in the SME sector and its relation to the international activity of this sector. Figure 1 contains the results of PARP research.

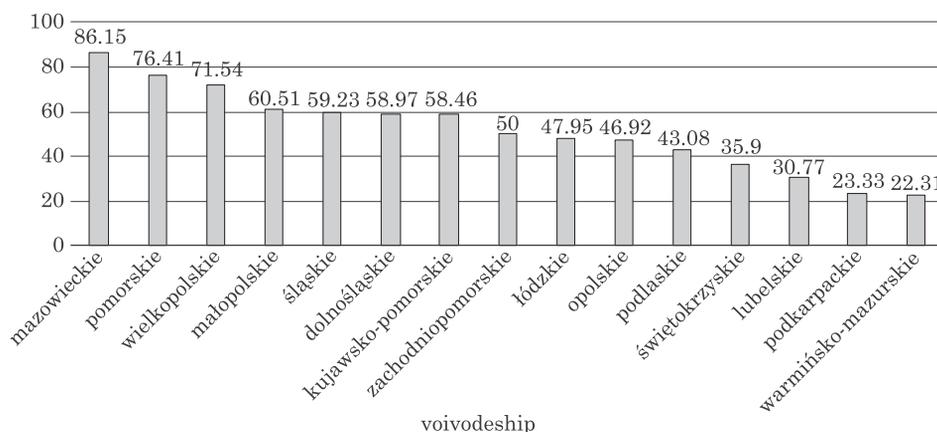


Fig. 1. Ranking of entrepreneurship by voivod – synthetic indicator

Source: study based on *Raport o stanie sektora...* (2017, p. 45-49).

Analyzing the results of the PARP report, it can be noticed that in 2015 (as in previous years), the leader in the entrepreneurial ranking was the Mazowieckie Voivodship, which took first place in several analyzed categories. The value of the synthetic entrepreneurship indicator, which consists of the medium income of enterprises and capital expenditures for the voivodship, amounted to 86.15 and was higher than the previous year (83.3). The next places were occupied by the following voivodships: Pomorskie (76.41, for five years unchanged) and Wielkopolskie (71.54). The worst performers were the following voivodships: Lubelskie (28.46), Podkarpackie (23.33) and Warmińsko-Mazurskie (22.31). An increase in the ranking in relation to 2014 was recorded by such voivodships as Małopolskie, Zachodniopomorskie, Łódzkie, Opolskie, Lubuskie and Lubelskie. The following voivodships fell: Dolnośląskie, Podlaskie and Podkarpackie. The remaining voivodships did not change their position in the ranking.

Also of interest is the situation related to the revenues of SMEs (in PLN million per active company) in regional terms. In 2015, the average revenue per active company amounted to PLN 1.19 million in total and, compared to 2014, it was higher by an average of 10,000. PLN (Fig. 2).

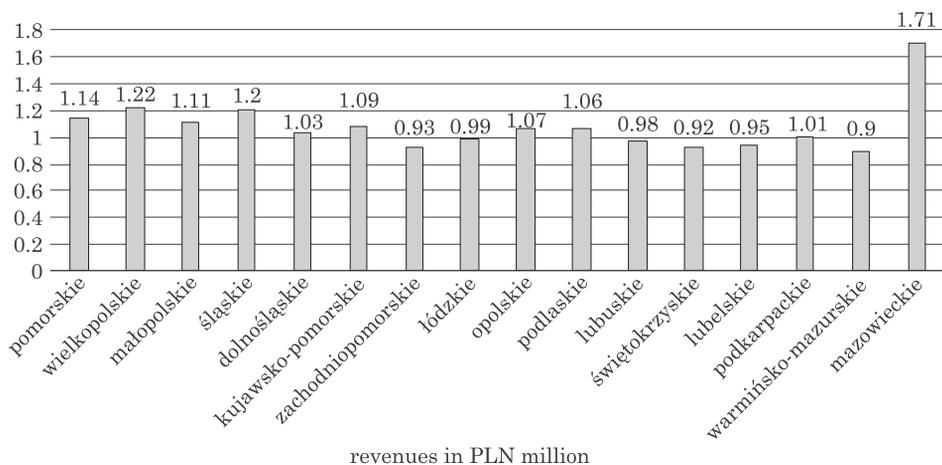


Fig. 2. Average income of active SMEs in 2015 by region

Source: study based on *Raport o stanie sektora...* (2017, p. 51, 52).

The analysis of Figure 2 shows that the highest average income of active SMEs was recorded in the following voivodships: Mazowieckie (PLN 1.71 million), Wielkopolskie (PLN 1.22 million) and Śląskie (PLN 1.20 million). Supplementary data included in the analyzed documentation, inform that in the Mazowieckie voivodship this result was worse compared to the revenues from the previous year by 37 thousand PLN. Decreases in revenues in 2015 were also recorded in the following voivodships: Lubelskie (decrease by PLN 41 thousand), Podkarpackie (decrease by PLN 33,000) and Wielkopolskie (decrease by PLN 7 thousand). In turn, the largest increase in revenues (compared to 2014) was recorded by enterprises in the following voivodships: Zachodniopomorskie (increase by 96 thousand PLN), Lubuskie (increase by 75 thousand PLN) and Dolnośląskie (increase by 53 thousand PLN).

The regions' entrepreneurship is also evidenced by the investments made by the companies. Trends can be observed where the increase in average income attributable to active SMEs is accompanied by an increase in investment outlays and a decline in revenues in many voivodships. This is accompanied by a decrease in investment outlays. In 2015, the average investment outlay attributable to active SMEs in 2015 amounted to PLN 47.04 thousand and increased on average by 7.75 thousand PLN in comparison with 2014. The highest average investment outlays were incurred by enterprises from the SME sector in the Mazowieckie voivodship (PLN 64.22 thousand). They were lower by over 6.5 thousand PLN as compared to 2014. High investment outlays were also recorded by SMEs in the following voivodships: Kujawsko-Pomorskie (PLN 51.22 thousand), Pomorskie (PLN 49.27 thousand), Opolskie (PLN 46.78 thousand), and Zachodnio-Pomorskie (PLN 46.22 thousand). The lowest investment outlays were made by enterprises

from the following voivodships: Lubuskie (36.92 thousand PLN), Świętokrzyskie (37.05 thousand PLN) and Dolnośląskie (37.44 thousand PLN). A decrease in outlays was recorded in 5 out of 16 voivodships, which in comparison to the situation in 2014 is a better result (9 out of 16). Revenues that were too low translated into a decrease in the level of investment. The largest increase in investment outlays compared to 2014 was recorded in the following voivodships: Lubuskie (by 8.6 thousand PLN), Kujawsko-Pomorskie (by 5.94 thousand PLN) and Małopolskie (by 5.41 thousand PLN).

In the analyzed PARP Report, separate data on R & D expenditures can also be found. In 2015, as compared to 2010, they increased more than threefold.

Individual voivodships have their specificity related to the scope and type of activity. Many factors contributed to this, including the demand of the regions for a given product/service, historic conditions of the region, access to resources and raw materials, proximity to the state border, etc. Due to this specificity, particular regions are perceived through the prisms of their most frequently produced or sold products / services, which are often export products as well. In the first half of 2017, the largest export partners were the following countries: Germany (27.2% of total exports), the Czech Republic (6.4%), the United Kingdom (6.4%), France (5.6%), Italy (5%), the Netherlands (4.4%), Russia (2.9%), Sweden (2.8%), the USA (2.7%) and Hungary (2.7%). Regarding imports, these were in turn: Germany (22.8%), China (11.7%), Russia (6.5%), Italy (5.2%), France (3.9%), the Netherlands (3.9%), the Czech Republic (3.7%), the USA (2.9%), Belgium (2.7%), and the United Kingdom (2.3%) (*Towary eksportowe polskich województw*, 2018). Entrepreneurship is also evidenced by the foreign activity of entrepreneurs in various forms, and especially by direct foreign investments.

### **Foreign direct investment of Polish entrepreneurs by industry and motive**

Every year, the value of foreign direct investments (FDI) of Polish enterprises increases. In 2014, 345 foreign units of Polish enterprises operating in Ukraine were recorded, at the same time in the same period, 311 Polish enterprises operated in Germany, and 212 in the Czech Republic (*Polskie inwestycje bezpośrednie...*, 2015). GUS public data show that the most enterprising in the field of international activity are the following voivodships: Mazowieckie, Śląskie and Wielkopolskie. Data obtained in the Kiev region indicate that in comparison to 2009, their value in USD million (about USD 60 million) doubled; however, it is still quite low in relation to the potential of this country and Polish entrepreneurs. FDI was located in such sectors of the Ukrainian economy as: industry – 31.5%, including the processing industry – 29.5%, financial sector – 29.6%, real estate trade and other services provided to entities conducting business

activity – 16.6%, as well as trade and repair services – 11% (Deržavna Služba Ukrainy, 2017). The main motivations for FDI in the respondents' opinion were: attractive production costs, cultural and geographical proximity, willingness to develop, technological advantage, and own entrepreneurship.

Research carried out by a team of researchers from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń confirms that the most important motives for internationalization for entrepreneurs is entrepreneurship associated with acquiring new markets, geographic proximity, willingness to develop and allocate capital (*Aktywność inwestycyjna...*, 2009, p. 9).

## Conclusions and recommendations

Observing trends in foreign trade against the background of the economic situation of individual regions, one can notice a clear progression in the internationalization of Polish enterprises, both in terms of the number of companies cooperating with foreign countries and the size of internationalization forms, such as exports and imports. After the difficult years of crisis from 2007 until 2013, in 2014 the mood improved, and has continued to this day. From 2013 to 2015, there was a significant increase in exports (by about 7.8%). However, in 2015 there was a slight decrease (down 6.4%), and in 2016 it increased 2.8%. This was due to the fact that in 2014-2015 exports to countries outside the European Union showed negative dynamics. Against this background, the dynamics of imports changed similarly (*Raport o stanie sektora...*, 2017, p. 38-49). Unfortunately, there are no collective studies on the analysis of individual regions in terms of various forms of internationalization and its relation to the entrepreneurship of individual regions. On the website of the Central Statistical Office, one can find a summary of the state of exports and imports in selected regions (e.g. Pomorze, Eastern Poland). Analyzing this data, it can be noticed that voivodships, whose revenues and expenditures on investments are the highest, also, in the most intense way, conduct export and import as forms of internationalization of their activities. Commodity and service exchange with foreign countries is an important element of the economic development of the country and regions. Data on the status of this exchange enable regional authorities to design enterprise support for internationalization. More data on the status of exports and imports can be found in the INTRASTAT and EXTRASTAT systems, which have been in existence since 2016, however, there are restrictions related to the identification of entities and regions. Direct allocation of revenues from the export and import of goods to individual voivodships was made in 2013 at around 85% of trade in goods. Among voivodships in the field of export and import, the Mazowieckie Voivodship is the leader.

The research carried out by the author of this study, based on the analysis of existing, legal documentation, interviews and surveys gave the conclusion that the entrepreneurship of the regions directly affects their internationalization activity; however, the state of entrepreneurship of individual voivodships is different. The basic indicators showing the state of entrepreneurship of regions is the share of revenues of enterprises from the SME sector. It is positively correlated with investment expenditures and directly proportional to the position in the voivodship ranking achieved by the given voivodship.

The author has only reached very general detailed data on the relationship between entrepreneurship of the regions and the state of internationalization. The reason for this is the existing data gap regarding the state of internationalization broken down into voivodships. There are only rudimentary data on the state of exports and imports, and only regarding selected regions. This is certainly an area that requires research and additions. The analysis of the data gives the conclusion that regions characterized by high entrepreneurship also have a high share in exports and imports. The voivodships: Mazowieckie, Śląskie and Wielkopolskie are characterized as having the highest entrepreneurship according to the synthetic index of entrepreneurship adopted in the study and the highest international activity. This may be the result of the positive perception of a given region by foreign entrepreneurs and a greater willingness to make contacts. The study can be an inspiration for further research and analysis. It can also be used to create regional programs and to dispose of funds in connection with the initiation of entrepreneurship and support for the international activity of small and medium enterprises in Poland.

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