

Assessment Of The Competitiveness Of Public Enterprises In Poland As Perceived By Generation Z Students*

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to identify the competitiveness of public enterprises as perceived by Generation Z students. This aim was achieved through a study carried out at the Wrocław University of Economics and Business, with the use of the following research methods: a questionnaire interview, a survey questionnaire, a semi-structured interview. Moreover, the formal-dogmatic method was applied, which made it possible to examine the provisions of generally applicable law in force in Poland, including public economic law. At present, no studies are being conducted on the competitiveness of public enterprises as perceived by Generation Z students. In the authors' view, this constitutes a significant gap in the scholarly literature (both in legal studies and in economics).

The key finding stems from the formulation of new hypotheses which will be verified at the next stage of the undertaken research: (1) awareness of the activities of public enterprises will influence students' assessment, (2) students' knowledge of EU regulations will influence their perception of public enterprises. The authors conclude that members of Generation Z perceive public enterprises as moderately competitive, yet inflexible and encumbered by bureaucracy. They point to the low qualifications and motivation of employees, as well as the limited ability of these entities to adapt to market conditions. Importantly, representatives of Generation Z identify opportunities to enhance efficiency and competitiveness through organizational and cultural changes within the enterprises in question.

Keywords: Generation Z, public enterprises, competitiveness

Introduction

Public entrepreneurs constitute a special group of entities conducting business activity in Poland. Their position on the market is very important, and the functioning of the state would not be possible without them. Firstly, it should be noted that, pursuant to Article 3 of the Act of March 6, 2018 – Entrepreneurs Law, economic activity is defined as organized profit-making activity carried out on one's own behalf and on a continuous basis. It can be noted that this definition is universal in all cases where separate regulations use this term and at the same time do not contain their own (separate) definition. It can also be stated that the Polish legislator introduced a legal definition of a public entrepreneur into the legal system with the Act of September 22, 2006 on the transparency of financial relations between public authorities and public entrepreneurs and on the financial transparency of certain entrepreneurs. According to this Act, a public entrepreneur should be understood as any entity conducting economic activity, regardless of its mode of operation and organizational and legal form, in particular a commercial company, cooperative, state-owned enterprises, mutual insurance companies, and state-owned banks whose activities are significantly influenced by public authorities, regardless of the influence exerted on them by other entities. This definition contains a direct reference to the interpretation of the concept that results from the acquis communautaire [Gola 2021, p. 159].

In the case of public entrepreneurs, many classifications can be made. However, it should be emphasized that both state and local government entrepreneurs play an important role in the social market economy [Szafranski 2008, p. 90]. Their

position on the market is significant, and the functioning of the state without them is not possible. For example, State Treasury companies have the status of corporate legal entities, in which the entities forming the legal entity provide it with assets and want to influence its operations by appropriately shaping the competences of its bodies. They also set the objectives and directions of their activities and decide on their reorganization and possible dissolution. State Treasury companies are an example of public entrepreneurs. The very concept of "State Treasury" refers to the private law personality of the state related to the performance of its tasks in the area of civil law relations. The State Treasury is therefore synonymous with the state, insofar as it appears in civil law transactions [Frąckowiak 2012, p. 1173]. It should also be noted that the State Treasury uses the form of single-member State Treasury companies in the belief that this form is better than other forms, such as, for example, a state-owned enterprise or another state organizational unit. This is because it ensures control over the management of the company without the need to share competences with the employee self-government [Grabowski 2018, p. 17].

The Polish legal system also includes a special type of State Treasury company. The legislator defines them as companies that are of significant importance to the national economy. It indicates that they conduct economic activity, the subject of which includes: the production or transmission of electricity; storage and warehousing of motor gasoline, diesel oil, and natural gas; telecommunications activities; land, water (including maritime), or air transport activities; postal activities covered by the obligation to provide universal services. The Regulation of the Prime Minister of January 13, 2017, on determining the list of companies of significant importance to the national economy (item 95) includes a list of 30 companies [Gola 2021, p. 161].

As mentioned above, local government entrepreneurs are also distinguished among public entrepreneurs. They conduct business activities in the public utility sector and outside it. Representatives of public economic law doctrine indicate that, in subjective terms, municipal economy includes: the activities of local government units; separate natural persons, legal persons and organizational units without legal personality, to which a given local government unit has entrusted, by way of an agreement, the performance of tasks in the field of municipal economy (Article 3 of the Municipal Economy Act); legal entities separate in the legal sense from a given local government unit, which were established by these local government units, or entities which these local government units have joined [Szydło 2008, p. 28]. Tasks of a public utility nature constitute a certain qualified element of the own tasks of local government units and fall within the scope of "municipal services" [Szydło 2008, p. 28].

It is worth emphasizing that the effective functioning of public enterprises on the market may contribute to the proper performance of public tasks entrusted to these enterprises. On the other hand, however, economy perceived as maximizing savings may conflict with the requirement to properly provide certain public services, e.g., in a situation where there is relatively low demand for these services in a given area. In such a situation, priority should be given to the duty to perform public tasks (provision of public services), although from the perspective of the narrowly defined criterion of economy, such action may be assessed as insufficiently economical or insufficiently efficient [Gola 2021, p. 256].

It should also be remembered that ownership supervision over public enterprises should be equated with the influence of state or local government bodies on the functioning and directions of enterprises in which the state or local government hold shares. Essentially, this refers to measures resulting from the share rights of public entities in such companies, i.e., measures analogous to those available to private shareholders or stockholders of commercial companies. However, the influence of the state or local government on companies in which they hold shares also takes place through the creation of the legal and economic conditions in which these companies operate.

Students from Generation Z (2002-2006)

Hence, Generation "Z" is those born after 1997, a majority of whom are university students who grew up in the world of the Internet and who are online all the time. On the one hand, this generation is technologically advanced and engaged and lost in the real world, displaying interpersonal problems, and on the other hand, it is committed to various online charity projects and social actions. Generation "Z" grew up in the period 2000-2010, that is the time of technological and software innovations [Pawłowska M. *Generacja Z....*]. They are characterized by their proficiency in using social media and their quick assimilation of new digital tools. They often seek a balance between learning, work, and private life, focusing on flexibility and personal development. Authenticity, diversity, and a sense of purpose in their activities are important to them. In education, they value a practical approach, interactivity, and the opportunity to shape their own learning path. At the same time, they can be impatient, sensitive to stress, and demanding of institutions, from which they expect understanding and an individual approach.

Results of the conducted research

The research was carried out between September and October 2025 at Wrocław University of Economics and Business with

the use of the following research methods: a questionnaire interview, a survey questionnaire, a semi-structured interview. There were 112 students participating in it. The examined persons studied Management and a second faculty: Accounting and Taxes. Questionnaires were received from students pursuing their Bachelor's and Master's programs. The questionnaire consisted of four questions. This is the first stage of research on the perception of public enterprises by young people who will soon begin working in the labor market as managers, accountants, and directors.

Questions – answers (number of responses in parentheses).

- **How do you assess the competitiveness of public enterprises in comparison with private companies in Poland?**

Very low (31) Low (13) Average (50) High (16) Very high (2)

- **In your opinion, which factors have the greatest impact on the lower competitiveness of public enterprises?**

Management efficiency (20) Innovation (15) Government policy (16) Employee qualifications (60) Image and public trust (1)

- **Do you think that public enterprises should operate more on the basis of market mechanisms (e.g., competition, marketing, price flexibility)?**

Definitely yes (2) Rather yes (76) Hard to say (20) Rather no (4) Definitely no (10)

- **What measures do you think would most increase the competitiveness of public enterprises?**

Introduction of modern technologies Simplification of procedures and bureaucracy (77) Better employee motivation (30) Greater decision-making autonomy (5) Partnerships with the private sector

Analysis of the results of individual questions:

Assessment of the competitiveness of public enterprises

Most students (44.6%) considered the competitiveness of public enterprises to be *average*, while 39.3% rated it as *low or very low*. Only 16% of respondents considered it to be *high or very high*. This means that moderately skeptical opinions about the ability of public enterprises to compete effectively with the private sector prevail.

Factors affecting competitiveness

As many as 53.6% of respondents pointed to employee qualifications as a key factor determining the low competitiveness of public enterprises. Fewer people mentioned management efficiency (17.9%) and state policy (14.3%). The result suggests that students perceive the human factor—competence and motivation—as the main barrier to the development of this sector.

Market mechanisms in the functioning of public enterprises

The vast majority (69%) of respondents believe that public enterprises should rely more on market mechanisms. Only 12.5% expressed opposition, and 18% had no opinion. This demonstrates the young generation's strong focus on efficiency, flexibility, and competition as desirable values in the public sector as well.

Measures to increase competitiveness

The most votes (68.8%) were cast for simplifying procedures and bureaucracy, which shows that young people perceive excessive formalization as the main obstacle to the efficient operation of these institutions. Another important area for change is improving employee motivation (26.8%), while factors such as decision-making autonomy and partnerships with the private sector were rated as marginal.

Conclusions

The survey shows that Generation Z students perceive public enterprises as moderately competitive but inflexible and burdened by bureaucracy. They see the main problems in low employee qualifications and motivation, as well as in limited ability to adapt to market realities. At the same time, they demonstrate a pro-innovation and market-oriented attitude, pointing to the need to simplify procedures, modernize, and implement new technologies. Overall, the younger generation has a critical but constructive approach to the public sector—it recognizes its weaknesses but also sees opportunities

to improve efficiency and competitiveness through organizational and cultural changes.

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