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Evolution of organisational culture of polish companies in the context of their competitiveness - results of empirical research

Studia i Prace Wydziału Nauk Ekonomicznych i Zarządzania 4, 119-134

2008

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

**STUDIA I PRACE WYDZIAŁU NAUK EKONOMICZNYCH
I ZARZĄDZANIA NR 4**

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**EVOLUTION OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE
OF POLISH COMPANIES IN THE CONTEXT
OF THEIR COMPETITIVENESS
– RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

Introduction

Competitiveness of enterprises is the main determinant of the competitiveness of the whole economy of a country. Under the conditions of dynamic integration and globalisation processes, which require meeting higher standards of competition, the efforts to improve competitiveness in a company should become a priority for decision makers at both macro (central government and local governments) and micro (shareholders, managers, personnel) levels.

Competitiveness is determined by a number of factors, including: highly qualified personnel and access to capital, information and high technologies. Nevertheless, it is the way people cooperate to use those resources, as well as their values, beliefs and attitudes that are the main determinants of an enterprise's competitiveness. It makes up the organisational culture.

Various authors exploring this issue, e.g. M.E. Porter, D. Landes, M. Grondona¹, claim it is indisputable that organisational culture affects economic growth and competitiveness, yet it is difficult to estimate that impact against other factors and attempt to isolate its individual effects. It results

¹ They presented their theses at the “Cultural Values and Human Progress. A Symposium” in April 23–25, 1999, in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cambridge.

mainly from the fact that cultural issues are hardly quantifiable or even identifiable, as they are a part of a wide psychological, political and geographical framework (Harrison..., 2003, p. 28,59). The environment in which Polish enterprises have been operating till now significantly determines their organisational culture.

The aim of the paper is to characterise the organisational culture in Polish enterprises and present its evolution since the transition as related to the competitiveness of companies.

The major research method is a deductive analysis of “management through organisational culture” concepts presented widely in the domestic and foreign literature on the subject. The results of research carried out by the author herself as well as results obtained by other authors will be a reference for verification of the hypotheses and basis for conclusions.

Competitiveness of Polish economy and Polish enterprises

Competitiveness is the ability of a country or enterprise to create more wealth than their competitors in the global market. Competitive ability of a country is the effect of transformation of its existing (natural) or manufactured resources (infrastructure, human capital) by means of processes, e.g. production, into economic performance which is then verified by competition in the international markets (The Word..., 1994, p. 18).

Competitiveness of the economy can be estimated with various measures, GDP per capita being one of the basic indicators, according to the theory of competitiveness. Other measures include: export of high-technology industries, number of triadic patent families, share of R&D in GDP, labour market structure, structure of business entities operating in the market, GDP per man-hour, etc. (cf.: Krystowski, 2003). Selected indicators of competitiveness of the Polish economy are presented in Fig. 1 and Table 1.

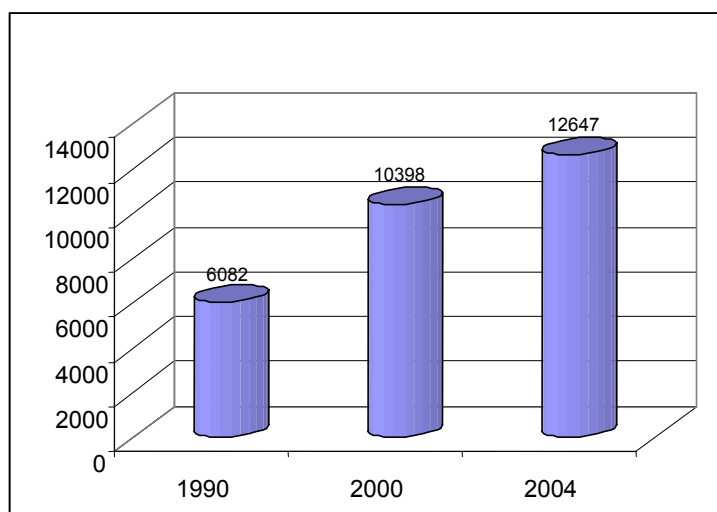


Fig. 1. GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Standards (USD)

Source: own study based on: OECD Statistics Browser.

Table 1

Selected indicators of competitiveness of the economy

Selected indicators of competitiveness	1990	2000	2004
Unemployment rate (%)	14.0	16.4	18.8
GDP per man-hour (annual growth in %)		4.02	4.04
Export shares of high-technology industries in OECD countries as a percentage of total manufacturing exports of goods (%)	6.1	10.3	11.8
Number of triadic patent families	5	10	10
R&D/GDP (%)	0.9	0.66	0.56

Source: own study based on: OECD Statistics Browser.

The data presented above shows that the indicators describing competitiveness of our economy – e.g. GDP per capita or export of high-technology industries – have improved over the last decades. There are areas, however, which still require stimulation activities. Generally, competitiveness of The

Polish economy is low, as compared, for instance, to such countries as the Czech Republic or Hungary, or the EU-15 member countries (See: Fig. 2 and Table 2).

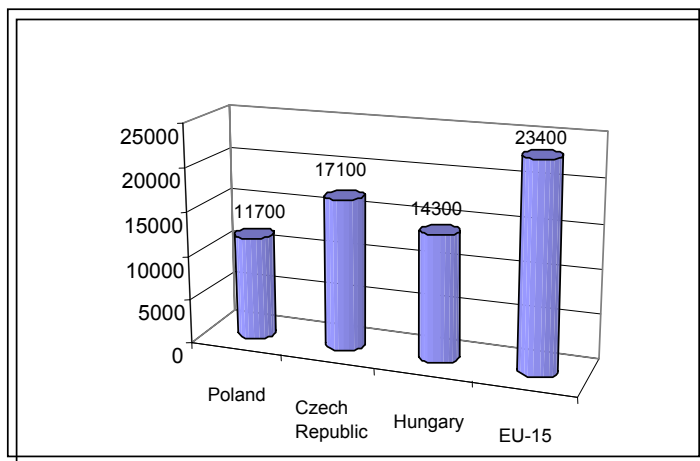


Fig. 2. GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Standards (USD) [2005]

Source: own study based on: (Żyndul, Pyliński, 2004), (Lisman, 2006), OECD Statistics Browser.

Table 2

Competitiveness of Polish economy as compared to other EU member countries

Selected competitiveness indicators	Poland	Czech Republic	Hungary	EU 15
Unemployment rate (%) [2004]	18.8	8.3	6	8.1
GDP per man-hour (annual growth in %) [2004]	4.04	8.32	3.13	1.49
Export shares of high-technology industries in OECD countries as a percentage of total manufacturing exports of goods (%) [2003]	6.55	14.73	32.14	22.13
Patent applications to the European Patent Office per million inhabitants [2002]	2.7	10.9	18.3	133.6
R&D/GDP (%) [2004]	0.58	1.27	0.98	2

Source: own study based on: (Żyndul, Pyliński, 2004), (Lisman, 2006), OECD Statistics Browser.

The system reforms of the 1990s found the Polish economy to be uncompetitive and having a poor position in the international division of labour. Polish economy entered the “transition path” with a poor balance – negative dynamics of capital expenditure, obsolete fixed assets, and unfavourable structure of tangible capital expenditure. In spite of that, entrepreneurship skills of the society, intensification of privatisation and restructuring as well as FDI inflow to Poland have contributed to a dynamic economic growth in the early years of the decade. The following years, despite improving macroeconomic indicators (inflation rate, tax rates, etc.), witnessed a slower economic growth and dynamics of investment. It was related mainly to the lack of growth opportunities for enterprises and their relative inefficiency of operations, proving the thesis that macroeconomic policy instruments alone provide no guarantee of a long-term economic growth. To improve competitiveness of an economy, it is essential to improve the competitiveness of individual enterprises operating in the market.

Contemporary performance of Polish enterprises encourages the conclusion that it is essential to improve their efficiency, and hence, their competitiveness. The latter is the basic objective which determines the enterprise’s development strategy, and requires special concern of the management, regardless of the industry the company operates in.

In today’s economy, the synthetic measure of competitiveness in enterprises is their innovativeness, understood as the ability to generate and introduce global new technological, organisational and social solutions to the market (System..., 2003, p. 12). In this situation, in order to improve the position of The Polish economy in the world, especially in the integrated Europe, it should be of primary concern to raise and keep a high standard of innovation processes, whereas Polish innovation potential, as related to the European average, is still low. Year by year, the share of R&D expenditure in GDP has been decreasing. The financing of research from the state budget falls still faster. Research and development is mostly (in 65%) financed with the public resources (whereas in Germany, for instance, 60–70% comes from private capital) and focuses mainly on general issues (theoretical studies, not aimed at specific practical applications) (Lisman, 2006).

The reasons for innovativeness of the Polish economy can be traced, among others, to the fact that the biggest enterprises, which in the Western countries account for the majority of the R&D expenditure, are usually owned

by foreign investors who rarely – if ever – cooperate with Polish research institutions. Polish small and medium-sized enterprises are also less innovative than their former EU-15 peers, which is related mainly to their economic weakness and difficult access to financing (Szultka..., 2004). The lack of innovation-supporting cultural patterns – such as initiative, concern about career development, self-reliance, responsibility, involvement – is another important issue here. An essential solution to this problem is conscious shaping of or change in the organisational culture aimed at dissemination of such attitudes and behaviours.

Innovativeness is to a large extent dependant on the management's awareness of the need to introduce new solutions. That awareness itself is one of the basic elements of the innovation potential of an enterprise. Management should encourage innovative activities among its personnel at each level of HR management, including the phase of selection (pressure on creativity, initiative, activeness of the candidates), and motivation (incentives for innovation-supporting behaviours), development (concern about development of creative abilities) or assessment (assessment criteria accounting for desired attitudes and behaviours). In the Polish enterprises, since the transition, conscious development of the organisational culture supporting innovativeness has been proceeding with different intensity.

Overview of research into organisational culture of Polish enterprises

In the world, organisational culture has been widely discussed and analysed for many years. The 1940s and 1950s witnessed a strong focus on the culture, especially in social sciences. After a short fall in interest in this matter, in the 1990s the research into culture became popular again. As a result, attempts were made to consider the civilisation and human progress with a new paradigm oriented at culture (Harrison..., 2003, p. 24–25).

In Poland the significance of organisational culture was noticed in the late 1980s. M. Bratnicki, R. Kryś and J. Stachowicz (Bratnicki..., 1986), and Cz. Sikorski (Sikorski, 1992) were the first to handle this issue.

Since the 1990s, especially at the moment, many more studies and research projects focused on this issue have appeared: Kostera M. (1996), Zbiegień-

-Maciąg L. (1999), Wiernek B. (2000), Sułkowski Ł. (2002), or Czerska M. (2003) to name a few.

Table 3 presents the overview of the most important research projects exploring organisation culture of Polish enterprises.

Table 3

Research projects exploring organisational culture in Polish companies

No.	Author	Year	Aim of the research
1	2	3	4
1	M. Bratnicki, R. Kryś, J. Stachowicz	1985–1986	Identification of three cultural characteristics of the organisation: system of value, organisational climate, system of beliefs among top management
2	Cz. Sikorski	1991	Identification of the management's acceptance of cultural patterns of central planning or market, and evaluation of the cultural distance which needs to be covered while transforming the central planning economy into a market economy.
3	A. Sitko-Lutek	1996	Diagnosis of learning styles among management and organisational culture allowing identification of the cultural gap that affects the efficiency and operations of the organisation, and indicating interrelations between learning styles and organisational culture.
4	A. Stachowicz-Stanusch	1997–1998	Diagnosis of organisational culture and marketing orientation of the enterprise.
5	J. Łucewicz	Late 1990s	Characteristics of an organisation in the context of its culture.
6	B. Mikula, W. Nasierowski	1990s	Identification of characteristic features of organisational culture in Polish enterprises.
7	S. Olko	1990s	Diagnosis of the organisational culture in the mining industry at the level of a mine, including: system of organisational values, attitudes and behaviours, needs and preferences at work, and analysis of changes in organisational culture.
8	A. Glińska-Neweś	2000	Identification of the activities undertaken by Polish enterprises to shape their organisational culture in the most desired direction from the viewpoint of their mission and strategy.
9	R. Kamiński	2000	Analysis of the effect of consistent organisational culture on the innovativeness of the enterprise.
10	B. Fryzeł	2001	Identification of the impact of organisational culture through quality-based management on the enterprise's competitiveness.
11	K. Gadomska	2001	Diagnosis of the organisational culture of domestic and foreign-owned enterprises, identification of differences in cultural patterns and analysis of their effect on the efficiency of management.

1	2	3	4
12	M. Czerska	2001–2003	Identification of the real and declared organisational culture in the context of its adjustment to the requirements of the strategy adopted.
13	R. Krupski, S. Pierzchawka	2003	Identification of the type of organisational culture preferred in SMEs operating in Poland and the impact of a manager on the shaping of organisational culture.
14	J. Mróz	2004	Identification of organisational culture in SMEs with an indication whether the management of SMEs perceive the relevance of organisational culture.

Source: own study based on reference numbers: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22.

The projects presented in Table 3 indicate that their authors, while exploring the organisational culture, understand culture as a variable that distinguishes an organisation, which – according to the Burrell-Morgan classification of sociological paradigms – matches the functional paradigm. This perspective entails an analysis of organisational culture in the context of its functions in and for the enterprise, impact on its efficiency and competitiveness and the role of management in the process of shaping the culture and its changes. (Smircich, 1980).

Characteristics of organisational culture of Polish enterprises²

An overview of results of the research projects carried out by the above-mentioned authors indicates that organisational culture of Polish enterprises can be classified in three groups – 1) those operating before the transition, 2) those operating just after the transition, 3) those which are operating at the moment.

The enterprises representing the first group were not independent organisations, they were a part of a bigger whole – a part of the system. The management – who neither owned their resources nor took any strategic decisions – was strongly dependent on the central authorities. The management in those enterprises was very susceptible to steering from outside and

² This part of the paper has been prepared basing on the results of research carried out by the authors listed in Table 3, the major source being the author's own research. The project "Diagnosis of organisational culture in enterprises" aimed at the identification of culture patterns involved questionnaire survey followed by a series of interviews with management staff in manufacturing enterprises operating in Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship. The research was carried out from May through November 2001, the sample comprised 150 entities.

experienced a strong emotional need to submit to the decisions made at the central level. It was reflected in their role, which involved mainly supervision over plan execution, keeping employees at a distance, unwillingness to delegate authority, poor motivation system, lack of team working, etc. The attitudes of management translated into the attitudes of employees – their passivity, pretending of activity, inefficiency. Moreover, social consent to demonstration of weakness, admittance of failures and complaints was also observed. Employees were mostly passive and demanding, and as a result they showed no respect to their customers or superiors (management had no standing among their subordinates) and did not identify themselves with the organisation. The employees valued the quality of interrelations at work and as a consequence informal contacts were of highest importance. Due to the fact that the basic cultural norm was to execute a plan, most of the tasks were focused on current problems, related mainly to the access to essential resources and the continuity of production. For this group of enterprises, it can be hardly said they developed or followed a strategy as such. Due to the lack of authority in this aspect, the management focused on central decision makers' needs rather than strategic management. The environment was perceived as stable and predictable, and the enterprises operated so as to keep the existing status quo, they were reluctant to change and risk. Organisational structures were lean, centralised, functionality was the main criterion for creation of organisational cells. The enterprises operating in the central planning system were rather uniform in terms of culture. Some researchers claim even that in this case it is hard to talk about organisational culture at all.

In the 1990s the enterprises, while planning their activities, accepted a short time horizon (up to 3 years). It should be noticed, however, that they were much more aware of the significance of strategic management. The strategies they developed were usually adaptive and focused on the search for survival opportunities. But with time those strategies became more active and diversified, yet the change was still approached with reluctance, conservatism and overcautiousness. Despite a declared willingness of changes, their implementation was sometimes deliberately delayed. Many enterprises did not appreciate the opportunities offered by the new system and they the changes. Organisational structures were still characterised by a high degree of centralisation, which was related to the concentration of significant authority to take decisions in the top management, which made the structures unable

to adapt quickly to the changing environment. Although the decisions were made at the top, the employees had more impact on their preparation. Lean, clearly hierarchical structures with long communication paths prevailed. The managers' attitudes lacked both partnership in the relationships with their subordinates and trust in their skills and qualifications; reluctance to delegate authority was still observed. Employees, on the other hand, still showed no real involvement at work or individualism, and remained passive. They did not identify themselves with the goals of the company. They placed particular emphasis on the quality of human relationships at work, which resulted in emotional relations between individuals and the organisation. The demanding attitude was still prevailed, especially in terms of a wide social security system.

At the moment the enterprises perceive their environment as turbulent and unpredictable, recognising at the same time the changes as both threats and opportunities. It is reflected in the above-average tolerance for uncertainty and risk in the life of an organisation. Organisations are more aware of the existence and relevance of many players in their environment. The role of co-operators, competitors, banks, financial institutions, trade unions, local communities, etc., which has been neglected so far, becomes more and more appreciated which translates into strategies. Cooperation and taking into account the interests of various groups are intrinsic elements of contemporary strategies. In many "young" enterprises the patterns of a dramatic growth based on the change are considered as valuable. The model growth of an enterprise is related to the opportunity of fast diversification of activities towards developing sectors. Reluctance to change is replaced by the awareness and understanding of its necessity, especially in the area of strategy, organisation, and technology. Certain areas, however, e.g. human resources management, still remain reluctant to change. More and more organisations choose flat, decentralised structures, although there is a significant number of enterprises whose structures are still centralised. While developing organisational cells, it is such criterions as the customer, region or process that tend to gain in relevance. The employees participate in decision-making, yet their role is usually to identify and analyse the problem and suggest a few solutions. The selection of the actual option still remains within the power of the management. The attitudes of the management which prevail at the moment include: an indifferent approach to employees or treating them like objects; autocratic management style; concentration on the quality of tasks performed by an employee rather than on their initiative.

It should not be overlooked, however, that the distance between the manager and the subordinate has become significantly shorter. Among the employees themselves, we can observe much more independence and responsibility for their tasks, efficiency and work environment, and – which is of extreme importance – more respect to the customer. Employees enjoy much more freedom in their activities, which encourages creativity, initiative, and offers a variety of development opportunities. Enterprises often participate in the costs related to raising qualifications of their personnel. There are, however, no clear career paths which would indicate development path for an individual. Despite a strong change in the attitudes, however, there is still a number of employees who are passive, show no initiative, and are reluctant to become involved in the organisation's activities, accomplishing only their appointed tasks.

Organisational culture of Polish enterprises and their competitiveness – conclusion

Analysis of organisational culture in Polish enterprises leads to a conclusion that its change is a long-lasting process. Negative cultural patterns have been so deeply ingrained in Polish enterprises, so widespread and clear, that nearly two decades were necessary to observe their slight change. Nevertheless, the dynamics of changes over the last years proves the thesis about significant relationship between this determinant and competitiveness of enterprises, and hence, the economy as a whole. A number of factors have contributed to the change in the organisational culture, including changes in the age structure of personnel (increasing number of young people who are not burdened with the habits characteristic of the central planning economy, have a different system of values, attitudes or aspirations) and the presence of numerous (young) start-ups, adapted to the present market situation, following market-oriented values and norms. Moreover, such phenomena as using of other businesses' (usually foreign) experience, management's higher awareness of the significance of organisational culture and its impact on the efficiency of business operations (better knowledge of management methods and techniques oriented at this aspect) and changes in the environment enforcing a shift in cultural patterns encourage shaping of a competitiveness-oriented organisational culture. As a result, we can more often observe such aspects of culture as: team working,

efficient communication system, flexibility in activities, adaptation to change, as well as anticipating future trends in the environment and organisational learning. Those changes have been heading in the direction desired for well-established businesses and organisations in developed countries. The intensity of those changes has recently overlapped with improved competitiveness of The Polish economy.

Although the above-mentioned phenomena should not be underestimated, while stressing their relevance it should be noticed that the level of organisational culture in Polish enterprises is still far from perfect. Many organisations still lack efficiency- and innovation-oriented cultural patterns. It is, therefore, necessary to undertake further activities to shape the attitudes and behaviours consistent with the goals of enterprises. It is essential to constantly raise the awareness of organisational culture among managers. What is desired now is openness to experiments and new experience, customer-orientation (meeting customer needs, convenient sale and after sale service, anticipating of the customer expectations), development of personnel (programming of career paths), readiness to implement the management tools which refer to relevant experience of well-established peers.

The process of developing organisational culture oriented at the growth of competitiveness should be also supported by:

- the enterprise's strategy, which arranges all the activities so that individual goals of employees fit into the company's objectives, with higher competitiveness being the priority;
- clear division of competence which on the one hand eliminates "no-man's land" and conflicts related to the overlapping of competence of individual departments, yet allows for sharing knowledge and experience on the other;
- an incentive system relating the salary to effects, allowing for the employees' initiative and involvement in searching for innovative solutions;
- an appropriate training system as an opportunity not only to improve the employee's skills but also to prove the company's orientation at development of both human resources and the organization as a whole;
- an appraisal system which allows for such criteria as: creativity, innovative activities, number of patent applications, number of new solutions introduced in the company, etc.

Efficient use of the company's intellectual capital and sharing of knowledge among employees indicate well-developed organisational culture. Careful gathering of new experience and benefiting from the previous one enables the company to call itself a learning organisation which has a chance to win the competition in the market.

The measure of a high-level organisational culture is therefore the organisation's ability to develop its own cultural patterns which in the most complete way reflect its long-term goals and naturally benefit from the characteristics of local community and its environment. Polish economy in this aspect can boast a significant area for exploration, which to a large extent determines a positive outlook for its development abilities.

Conclusion

Dynamic, diversified, complex and unpredictable character of the environment requires from organisations the ability to overview and transform their basic values and attitudes. The role of the managers is to develop tools to change organisational culture into one that would support it (Forsythe, 2005, p. 1289). There is no doubt that changes in organisational culture are not only forced by external factors but can and should be internally stimulated and oriented at desired values as well. An appropriate process encourages development and sustaining of efficiency- and innovation-supporting cultural patterns thus improving the competitiveness of companies and the economy as a whole.

The fact that the Polish economy has become more competitive over the last decades should be also associated with the development of efficiency-supporting management patterns. It seems also that it is that sphere where the potential for further growth and development opportunities should be sought. Polish economy is relatively rich in highly skilled human resources. The opportunities related to this advantage offered by the introduction of appropriate (development-supporting) cultural patterns, supported by such attitudes as involvement, ambition, creativity or orientation at success, create an opportunity to improve competitiveness.

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**EVOLUTION OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE OF POLISH COMPANIES
IN THE CONTEXT OF THEIR COMPETITIVENESS
– RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

Summary

The intensified integration of the world economy increases the significance of enterprises' ability to compete on the global scale. Competitiveness is determined by a number of factors, including: highly qualified personnel and access to capital, information and high technologies. Nevertheless, it is the way people cooperate to use those resources, their values, beliefs and attitudes that are the main determinants of an enterprise's competitiveness. It makes up the organisational culture. Various authors exploring this issue indicate that organisational culture affects economic growth and competitiveness although it is difficult to estimate that impact against other factors and attempt to isolate its individual effects. It results mainly from the fact that cultural issues are hardly quantifiable or even identifiable, as they are a part of a wide psychological, political and geographical framework.

In the world, the issues related to organisational culture have been widely discussed for many years. In Poland, their significance was noticed in the late 1980s. Ever since, the organisational culture of Polish enterprises has been evolving, increasing their competitiveness.

The paper characterises organisational culture in Polish enterprises basing on the results of research carried out by a number of authors and presents its evolution since the transition as related to the competitiveness of the companies.

The main research method is a deductive analysis of "management through organisational culture" concepts presented widely in the domestic and foreign literature on the subject. The results of research carried out by the author herself as well as results obtained by other authors will be a reference for verification of the hypotheses and basis for conclusions.