

The importance of furniture clusters in Poland

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Abstract: *The importance of furniture clusters in Poland.* The furniture industry in Poland is one of the most important sectors of the economy, showing strong growth in both product sales, employment policy and the sales revenue. The furniture industry is characterized by a large dispersion and diversity in terms of size of companies, the vast majority of which belongs to the SME sector. That's why more and more of them join furniture clusters, which are designed to facilitate the existence of the market.

Keywords: furniture sector, cluster initiative, furniture cluster.

INTRODUCTION

The economic crisis, which has been affecting the Polish economy for two years, has an impact on all of its branches, sectors and industries. A few years ago, the furniture industries in Poland was cited as the fastest-growing. Unfortunately, the past year has forced the furniture industry companies to seek solutions that will help them to maintain their market position. Examples of initiatives allowing to remain on the market is an association of enterprises in clusters that support the operations of concentrated enterprises, as well as allow to undertake joint initiatives.

CLUSTER INITIATIVES

The concept of economic cluster was first used by A. Marshall in the 20s of the last century. He drew attention to the location of externalities, including in particular the so-called "Spill" (diffusion) of knowledge, advantage created by the local labor market, focusing people with the right skills and also ascending and descending networks of connections within large regional markets. This concentration in particular industries caused an increase in the attractiveness of the sector and improved the competitiveness [Fujita, 2001].

One of today's researchers of clusters was M. Porter, who defined a cluster as "geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, businesses operating in related industries and associated institutions (for instance universities, standards bodies and industry associations) in specific areas, competing with each other, but also cooperating" [Porter, 2001]. The definition of economic cluster has also been formulated in the regulation of Ministry of Economy (2 December 2006) on the granting by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development financial aid not related to operational programs, in which "the cluster means the spatial and sectorial concentration of operators acting for economic development or innovation, and at least ten companies, engaged in business activities in one or several neighbouring regions, competing and cooperating in the same or related industries and associated extensive network of formal and informal nature, at least half of the entities within the cluster are entrepreneurs "[Dz.U.06.226.1651].

The determinants of deciding whether action can be implemented in a cluster initiative is primarily a strong degree of concentration of economic operators of the sector or industry in a given geographical area (region or province). To cluster might exist should be completed several important factors such as:

- Spatial concentration,
- Geographical proximity,
- System, network of socially embedded nature of the relationship,
- Competition or simultaneous competition and cooperation entities,
- Long tradition of the activity at a given location (local or regional traditions basin),
- Attractive market specialized work force,
- Effective diffusion of tacit knowledge, whose acquisition requires going into direct relationships,

- Significant social capital resources (including relational capital) resulting inter alia in mutual trust, regional patriotism, perceiving common objectives and translate into effective cooperation in the triple helix system – for instance between business, environmental science and public authorities [Maskell, 2001].

Research on the cluster, which was conducted in Europe by the Community Innovation Survey, showed positive interactions not only between companies grouped in clusters, but also their impact on the whole region, in an area that work. The regional aspect of the clusters is associated with the formation of the territorial community, increase of public confidence in companies operating in them and with growth of the level of innovation in enterprises. Another important aspect of clusters is the ability to transfer knowledge between businesses, both technical and organizational. In exchange of experience and knowledge very important are informal relationships, that in clusters are created in a way faster and easier than between companies in no relation to each other.

In the case of a cluster operating in high-technology sectors, it is very important to include in the structure of the major research centre or university profile coinciding with the scope of the operation of the cluster. In this case, the real potential for scientific academic centre determines the international competitiveness of the cluster. The location near a strong research unit is important in view of the fact that the process of transfer of knowledge from science to the economy is much more spatially limited than the spread of knowledge between operators of the industry [Adams 2005].

ROLE OF FURNITURE CLUSTERS IN POLAND

In Poland, the more often you will find the actions taken by the company, aiming to create a concept of clusters or cluster-like.

The furniture industry in Poland is characterized by a great diversity in terms of the operators concerned. You can highlight both micro businesses (about 22,000) and operating on a nationwide or global scale.

Number and size of the furniture sector in Poland is shown in Table 1.

Table.1. The occurrence of the furniture companies in Poland in terms of their size

Province	Company size			
	Micro	Small	Medium	Large
Zachodniopomorskie	601-1200	51-90	0-9	1-3
Pomorskie	1201-1800	91-130	31-90	4-7
Warmińsko– Mazurskie	601-1200	91-130	31-90	16-30
Podlaskie	601-1200	0-50	10-19	1-3
Lubuskie	0-600	0-50	10-19	4-7
Wielkopolskie	2401-3100	251-350	91-120	16-30
Kujawsko- Pomorskie	601-1200	91-130	31-90	4-7
Mazowieckie	2401-3100	131-250	20-30	1-3
Dolnośląskie	1201-1800	91-130	20-30	8-15
Łódzkie	1201-1800	131-250	10-19	4-7
Lubelskie	601-1200	0-50	0-9	8-15
Opolskie	601-1200	51-90	10-19	1-3
Śląskie	1801-2400	91-130	10-19	4-7

Świętokrzyskie	0-600	0-50	0-9	0
Małopolskie	2401-3100	131-250	20-30	1-3
Podkarpackie	1201-1800	51-90	0-9	4-7

Source: REGON, 2012

Clusters of furniture, it is not only close cooperation between the companies grouped in it, but also the involvement of a number of institutions and individuals that may have a significant impact on the improvement of cluster initiatives. We can distinguish several major groups included in the cluster:

- companies – mainly from one industry or closely linked to it. The clusters can be seen outside furniture manufacturers, companies producing hardware, which are an integral part of the furniture;
- Environmental Research – increasingly clusters establish cooperation with research institutes and universities, in order to carry out surveys, analyses. It also has a second dimension to the image of the cluster namely increasing confidence in the company;
- Financial institutions – cluster may include insurance companies or investment funds that improves security of cluster activities;
- General business environment - associations, lobbying and regional policy strongly influences the formation of the clusters, supporting them and helping to set up;
- The government - if the cluster initiative will not end in a fiasco that it will create a comprehensive database of resources, both human and technological, and thus contribute to the development of the region.

Specific support and involvement in clusters of all these groups, influences positively economic and technological efficiency, and increases the competitiveness of companies in the cluster.

CONCLUSIONS

In Poland, the furniture companies are increasingly trying to establish clusters so they have a better chance to compete in the European market. Please note that clusters will naturally bring economies of scale due to innovation, improving the quality of goods and services but also to the development of human and intellectual capital within the cluster. Clusters are also common policy information, marketing, promotional and economic support but to help weaker firms.

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Streszczenie: *Znaczenie klastrów meblowych w Polsce.* Branża meblarska w Polsce to jedna z ważniejszych gałęzi gospodarki, wykazująca dużą dynamikę zmian zarówno w sprzedaży produktów, polityce zatrudnienia czy przychodach ze sprzedaży. Branżę meblarską charakteryzuje duże rozproszenie oraz zróżnicowanie pod względem wielkości przedsiębiorstw, która znaczna większość należy do sektora MŚP. Dlatego coraz częściej można zauważyć ich zrzeszanie się w klastrach meblowych, które mają za zadanie ułatwić istnienie na rynku.

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