

TWO DECADES OF POLISH MBA PROGRAMMES: ACHIEVING CRITICAL MASS OR SATURATION?¹

1. Introduction

Management education has experienced a real boom throughout the world in the latter half of the 20th century. Such programmes began in the United States and in Western Europe towards the end of the 19th century and have expanded ever since. In Europe, most of the knowledge imparted came initially from technical and commercial schools outside the confines of the national higher education systems (*écoles de commerce, Handelshochschulen*). Since the late 1950s the programmes became increasingly academic in nature and formed a growing part of university systems in the United States and, with some delay, also in European countries.

Polish management education began in the same period in which other European schools of commerce emerged². The cumulative effect of a weak presence in the in-

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² Nevertheless, for instance, the Warsaw School of Economics (founded in 1906) is invariably forgotten in the listings of ‘business schools’ of the late 19th through early 20th century. See e.g. L. Engwall, *The anatomy of management education*, “Scandinavian Journal of Management” 2007, No. 23, 4–35. This is another example of accepted neglect of the history of former ‘socialist’ countries and the lasting damage inflicted on western scholarship by the “Iron Curtain”.

terwar period³, the catastrophe of World War II, the destructions of Stalinism, and the “small stabilization” of the post-thaw “socialist steering and control” have made management into a schizophrenic practice and education. The “Political economy of socialism” supported by applied branch-level economics (*ekonomiki branżowe*), with minor, but significant, exceptions (foreign trade), was often seen as yielding no professional knowledge whatsoever. The “productivist” slant of the dominant ideology meant that engineers occupied the management posts. Historically, the sequence was roughly one of army political officers, outstanding and politically committed workers, party bureaucrats, party-nominated engineers, and politically non-committed professionals (*bezpartyjni fachowcy*). The majority of managerial cadres were trained in engineering, here conceived loosely, to point to the fact that management was strictly “sectoral”, i.e. agricultural enterprises were managed by graduates of agricultural “academies”, hospitals by medical doctors, universities by professors, etc. A particular bureaucratic perception of the, supposedly “planned”, division of labour was the underlying basis.

The only mobility of human ‘capital’ was political and concerned PZPR-nominated or supported cadres in the so-called “*karuzela stanowisk*”, or more generally and formally, *nomenklatura* (formal and informal social ‘capital’). Circulation of ‘connected’ persons in top management posts in and around the public sector has been a permanent feature of the past two decades of the market economy as well and is occasionally reported in the press⁴. 92% of those surveyed by Batory Foundation singled out nepotism and favouritism as the most frequent corrupt practice of high ranking officials and politicians. In the private sector, the mood is no better: “*Wiadomo, że w dzisiejszych czasach wszystko można załatwić jedynie po znajomości a już przede wszystkim pracę*” (it is well known that today everything can be “organized” only through networking with colleagues, jobs, in particular). Admittedly, this statement referring to non-managerial jobs is not an academic proposition and needs confirmation in scientific research. Anecdotal accounts of managerial careers are replete with stories of “old buddies”, “colleagues”, etc. The difference between networking and favouritism is tenuous. This social phenomenon is important, since en-

³ While the interwar period (1918–1939) has little relevance for contemporary practices, it has become customary in current political writing to trace “traditions” to the Second Republic (*Druka Rzeczpospolita*) as a rhetorical device.

⁴ Gadomski, *TKM wokoło Macieju*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 18 czerwca 2002 r. (after: *Karuzela stanowisk trwa*, http://www.bankier.pl/wiadomosci/print.html?article_id=363621), <http://www.batory.org.pl/korupcja/polska.htm>; <http://forum.iwom.pl/kariera/nepotyzm-w-firmach,317.html>; Czy to networking, czy już nepotyzm?, „Dziennik”, 10 03 2008 r., <http://www.dziennik.pl/drukowanie/72395>; Bankowa karuzela stanowisk się kręci, 13 07 2009 r., http://forsal.pl/artykuly/336323,bankowa_karuzela_stanowisk_sie_kreci.html; Karuzela z prezesami, 18 01 2010 r., <http://prnews.pl/michal-macierzynski/karuzela-z-prezesami-47816.html>. Nourished by press and blog reports, it is a topic awaiting thorough research by business historians. It is not a Polish phenomenon either, see: Musical chairs in big banks, one man’s giant leap. Lloyds, Britain’s biggest retail bank hires the boss of Santander, its best, “The Economist”, 18 November 2010.

tering the network of upwardly mobile alumni and benefitting from the reputation of a good business school is one of the most valued advantages of MBA as reported by studies all over the world. This is supposedly “good social capital” promoting highly qualified personnel and efficiency as against ‘mere’ favouritism (“bad social capital”)⁵.

Under “actually existing socialism”, there was no need for specialized management education. Only in late socialism, with the greater autonomy of State Owned Enterprises, did management become a valuable skill (within constraints imposed by the party control signaled above) that, coupled with networking, proved to be decisive in many privatizations (*uwłaszczenie nomenklatury*) allowing the Communist cadres to become capitalist owners. Private higher education, existing formally since 1990, catered for these emerging sectors and has experienced an unprecedented boom. In some periods more than half of all the students were students of business, management, and economics. A subsector of postgraduate management education (PME) emerged as well, allowing the under-trained and under-educated personnel to acquire the newly propagated business knowledge. The establishment of Polish higher management education was one of the most significant phenomena of the Polish transition. The HME has emerged out of the decade of the 1990s as a fully fledged, albeit relatively fragile, industrial entrepreneurial sector. In this, Polish private and public business education has endeavored in satisfying soaring demand and reflected the change in the structure of higher education in Europe and the world.

While many of the management prescriptions and economic theories were known and already taught to Polish students, one particular creed was unheard of. The story was called MBA, the Master of Business Administration (sometimes spitefully read – but *not* in Poland – as ‘Mediocre But Arrogant’ or, worse still, ‘Master of Bugger All’). The new product took the world by storm in the 1980s and 1990s and came to Poland as a fashionable, eminently saleable educational ‘hit’. A number of Polish higher education institutions (HEIs) originated through foreign programmes/grants and, since aid donors liked the visible results, it was not unusual for would-be business schools to begin larger scale operations with the MBA rather than other graduate or undergraduate studies. Some Polish business schools were, thus, built from above rather than from below. The MBA programme also became an instant hit with the academic teachers and school administration. One could have hypothesized that the old guard in Polish universities could be against the MBA because it is not academic or due to basic resistance to change. But this was definitely *not* the case. Fresh possibilities of selling newly acquired business knowledge bound with the reputation they heard about through the grapevine, coupled with ideological commitment to managerial capitalism, were the primary reasons for underpaid academic

⁵ “Nepotism in employment practices” was listed in the “data” appendix detailing the „dark-side” of academic life. K. Kloc., E. Chmielecka (eds.), *Dobre obyczaje w kształceniu akademickim*, FPAKE, Warszawa 2004. „Medice, cura te ipsum”.

employees to jump immediately on the bandwagon. The singularly positive attitudes of management academics and professionals have not necessarily been echoed by other social scientists⁶.

In sociological appraisal of social mobility, one finds the concept of “meritocracy”, as introduced by Michael Young⁷, useful for a preliminary discussion of social mobility in an advanced, democratic market economy. The inventor of the term used it in a satirical sense to describe the successful upwardly mobile persons, notably new managerial cadres, who achieved their higher social status supposedly only due to their individual talent (possibly also IQ) and effort, including higher (and higher) education. While the rest of the book was to disprove such a superficial “analysis” of a (fictitious) capitalist society, social scientists, especially in the US, were quick to adopt the term in a basically positive sense⁸. “For these intellectuals, the attraction of the idea of meritocracy was that it provided a basis for countering egalitarian arguments of a kind they regarded as unduly ‘socialistic’: that is, arguments in favour of a greater equality of outcomes as well as of opportunities. [Daniel] Bell and his associates maintained that if a high degree of equality of opportunity could be established, and especially of educational opportunity, and if social selection became based primarily on educational attainment, then a wide range of inequalities of outcome in incomes, wealth and status, etc. could be defended. These inequalities would reflect the differing levels of reward that individuals obtained — and indeed deserved or ‘merited’ — in return for their efforts in securing educational qualifications and applying these productively in their working lives”⁹. This was very much part of the once popular *modernization theory*: “increasing equality of educational opportunity and an increasingly the dominant role for education in social selection were not only desirable processes of change, but also ones actually present and reflecting, in fact, the functional imperatives of all modern societies. The technologi-

⁶ See e.g. Z. Drozdowicz, *Amerikanizacja szkolnictwa wyższego?* (Americanization of higher education?), a paper presented at conference “Dokąd zmierza Europa” (Where is Europe heading), Poznań, 8.11.2006.

⁷ Also Z. Melosik, *Uniwersytet i społeczeństwo. Dyskursy Wolności, Wiedzy i Władzy* (University and society. Discourses of freedom, knowledge and power), Poznań 2002. The latter shows clear affinity to our three-pronged institutional logic of market, knowledge and power. See A. Sulejewicz, *MBA strategy and business school mission*, [in:] J. Dietl, Z. Sapijaszka (eds.), *Master of Business Administration Programs. Polish and Foreign Experience and Plans for Future Development*, Fundacja Ekonomiczna Przedsiębiorczości, Łódź, 1996, pp. 29–48.

⁸ M. Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy, 1870–2033: An Essay on Education and Equality*, Harmondsworth, Penguin 1958. See also M. Young, *Down with meritocracy*, “The Guardian”, 29 June 2001.

⁹ E. Bukodi, J.H. Goldthorpe, *Market versus Meritocracy: Hungary as a Critical Case*, “European Sociological Review” 2010, Vol. 26, No. 6, pp. 655–674. Not all, however, see for instance S.J. McNamee, R.K. Miller Jr., *The Meritocracy Myth*, 2nd ed., Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham 2009.

⁹ E. Bukodi, J.H. Goldthorpe, op.cit., p. 655–656. References are to D. Bell, *On meritocracy and equality*, “The Public Interest” 1972, Vol. 29, pp. 29–68 and D. Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, Basic Books, New York 1973. See also: H. Domański, *Zmiany stratyfikacji społecznej w Polsce*, Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, Warszawa 2008; H. Domański, *Spółeczeństwa europejskie*, Wydawnictwo SCHOLAR, Warszawa 2009.

cal and economic dynamism of such societies made it essential that all available human resources should be exploited as fully as possible, and progressive educational expansion and reform were essential to meet this requirement. In turn, employing organizations were compelled, in the interests of their own efficiency, to give prime importance to educated and qualified talent in their recruitment and promotion policies¹⁰. ‘The postindustrial society is, in its logic, a meritocracy’—and the logic was one exerted in capitalist and socialist societies alike¹¹.

A contrasting view of meritocracy was proposed by Friedrich August von Hayek¹². According to this Austrian economist and philosopher, any kind of meritocracy is basically incompatible with the principles that underlie the operation of a free-market economy and a liberal society. In particular, talent (also perhaps, ‘human capital’, ‘intellectual capital’) is often formed by socially privileged backgrounds and it is likely that some types of ability (skills, attitudes, ...) may be the distinctive product of such backgrounds. Thus, in a liberal society, the idea of equality of educational opportunity is inevitably problematic. Some association between children’s class backgrounds and their educational attainment is always likely to prevail. Von Hayek emphasizes that “in a market economy, the rewards that individuals receive do not depend on their merits, as they or others may see them, but only on the value of what each individual has to offer on the market.” Bukodi and Goldthorpe note that “since in modern societies, the majority of the economically active population do not work on their own account, but are employees, [their] employers do in fact continually make what could be regarded as judgments of merit, externally to the market, through their decisions about whom to recruit, retain, promote, discharge, etc.”¹³ But, arguing for Hayek, “so long as a multiplicity of organizations compete with each other’ in this respect—i.e. apply differing criteria of selection—‘this is not merely compatible with freedom but extends the range of choice open to the individual’¹⁴.

A number of contemporary sociologists would regard the former “actually existing socialist” Eastern European societies as representing the most fully developed form of meritocracy of an education-based kind that has so far been realised — and even with due allowance being made for privileges that were enjoyed by the families of the *nomenklatura* and other ‘non-meritocratic’ features. It would, therefore, be interesting to initiate a comparative study of the impact that higher education achievements exert on the new social stratification in Poland emerging with massive

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 656.

¹¹ D. Bell, op.cit., pp. 99–119.

¹² F.A. von Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, Routledge, London 1960, chapters 5, 6 and 24.

¹³ E. Bukodi, J.H. Goldthorpe, op.cit., p. 656.

¹⁴ F.A. von Hayek, op.cit., p. 99.

privatization, marketization and liberalization¹⁵. Thus, two ideologically contradictory claims can be made: (a) recruitment for, particularly top, managerial positions was liberated from communist party control and privileges and can, therefore, be seen as basically “meritocratic” or (b) recruitment and human resource policy is basically social class-based¹⁶ and the “merits” are an epiphenomenon of growing income and wealth inequality solidifying into increasingly rigid segregation (*dziedziczenie ubóstwa – dziedziczenie bogactwa*).

These social problems of higher management education that have been hinted at provide the general demand background to the main topic of our paper, that is, the supply of MBA in Poland during the two decades of “social and economic transformation” or economic transition to “democratic capitalism”. Poland witnessed with some delay what had been observed in more developed capitalist economies with more marketized higher education: “Today, higher educational credentials are required for professional, technical, and managerial occupations and for most other non-clerical white-collar jobs in large private and public sector work organizations. These jobs represent a very large proportion of the most prestigious and best paying jobs available. Even in the less credentialized sphere of business management, credentialism has grown rapidly. Almost no one is promoted up the ranks into top management today without a college degree, and an MBA from a top-ranked business school has become an important ticket of admission to the executive suite”¹⁷. Another aspect well worth investigating is how the MBA degree fits the industrial relations in Poland, or indeed, the variety of capitalism that is being formed there as part and parcel of the “Great Transformation” of Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet block. The ostensible Americanization of Polish higher education alluded to above seems to provide a concrete example of the Anglo-saxon variety of capitalism emerging in Poland. “In the liberal market environments of the UK and USA, the combination of deregulated labor and capital markets, along with liberal arts and MBA granting educational institutions, creates both a demand for and supply of generalist managers at all levels. While generalist MBA type managerial education in the USA and UK has often been criticized as superficial, it arguably fits the type of labor and capital markets that firms in these countries operate in, and furnishes firms with a coherent managerial world view to accomplish the needed ‘organizational integration’¹⁸.

¹⁵ See: M.A. Zaidi, A. Sulejewicz, *Beyond MBA: Management Education in Transition Economies*, Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH, Warszawa 2010.

¹⁶ Classes *in statu nascendi* coupled with and strengthened by other stratification processes such as networking, club formation, elite recruitment, political clientelism, corruption, etc. E.O. Wright, *Social Class*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, ed. by George Ritzer, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks 2005.

¹⁷ S.J. McNamee, R.K. Miller Jr., *op.cit.*, p. 112.

¹⁸ P. Hall, D. Soskice, *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001, p. 367.

Researchers on the MBA in Poland have repeatedly claimed not only individual benefits (as a “passport to career” advertised on numerous websites), but also social benefits (enhanced competitive position of firms recruiting MBAs, effectiveness in business management, efficiency in allocating managerial talent and, ultimately, economic growth). Thus, in other words, one overarching question is, to what extent the modernisation of Poland is assisted by the rapid growth of an educational qualification considered by many as a passport to the managerial elite.

2. General features of the MBA programmes in Poland

Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, the number of MBA programmes in the world exceeds 1,500¹⁹; these are being offered in some 5,000 versions; about 350,000 students are enrolled into such courses out of which some 150,000 graduate annually (2006). The dynamic of the industry is pro-cyclical and a very crude assessment of the global market would give an annual business figure of approximately USD \$5 billion. At the turn of the 21st century, the supply of MBA rose dramatically in the “emerging” markets as well as in those economies that, owing to a different industrial culture, and variety of capitalism, have until then practiced their own traditions of management education (including Germany, Japan, and China). We see the emergence of a sector of internationalized postgraduate management education (IPME).

Somewhat paradoxically, the estimates of the quantity of programs proposed in Poland have not been more precise than those pertaining to the world as a whole. Various lists and compendia signaled the number between 40 and 106. The press-practiced rankings have usually included between 30 and 40. The rating compiled by *SEM FORUM* and published in *Rzeczpospolita* daily in 2006 included, according to the declaration, 39 programmes from the list of 47. The report by Błoński (2009) claiming to account for “almost all programmes” lists 47. The most recent number (2010) offered by specialised website *mbaportal.pl* is 50 with two programmes entering and two leaving the market during the past year²⁰. Since the number of schools (and other organizations) offering the programme is around 30, quantitatively, Poland is on par with Italy and Spain²¹. Figure 1 illustrates the cumulation of MBA pro-

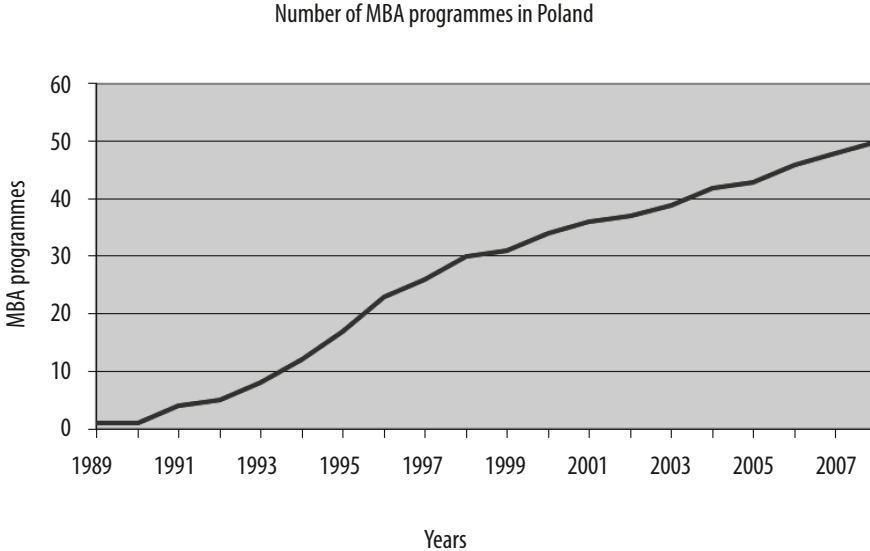
¹⁹ See: <http://www.mba-info-de/mbastud/markt>.

²⁰ *Moja Kariera*, „Rzeczpospolita”, 25.11.2006, www.rzeczpospolita.pl; www.semforum.org.pl/Semforum/rating_mba.html. See http://ceo.cxo.pl/artykuly/347367_4/Studia.MBA.w.Polsce.html and http://www.mbaportal.pl/artykuly/Rynek_studiow_MBA_2010_25.html.

²¹ Indeed, a ratio of MBA programs per million inhabitants, sometimes calculated, is even slightly higher in Poland than in those two countries. As we know, quantity in education is a somewhat dubious value.

grammes in Poland based on the year of programme initiation and declared number of editions. The figure likely over-emphasizes the cumulative growth and shows stabilisation at 50.

Figure 1. The number of MBA programmes in Poland (1989–2008)



Source: *Programy MBA. Informator*, SEM Forum, Warszawa 2008; *Informator o studiach podyplomowych i MBA 2010/2011*, praca zbiorowa, Informator Wydawnictwa TELBIT 2010, http://www.mbaportal.pl/artykuly/Rynek_studiow_MBA_2010_25.html. The assistance of Wojciech Sulejewicz is gratefully acknowledged.

Thus, *prima facie*, the sector of internationalized postgraduate management education enters, relatively quickly one would say, the period of maturity. The quantity of Polish programs has stabilized: the annual number of entering and exiting units is very close. However, a third of the programs appearing on web pages and leaflets at the turn of the century never took off, most likely because of lack of solvable demand (given the resources advertised and programmatic content). In addition, a special sub-segment of “MBA-type postgraduate studies” (*studia typu MBA*) emerged, using the acronym for essentially any type of studies dictated by the human resources these schools could command at the time. Given vertical differentiation, this cannot really be called quality debasement. Essentially, this is *not* a sub-segment of the MBA as such (IPME) but more likely a watered down version of post graduate management courses “for the poor”, i.e. an example of opportunistic behaviour of PME suppliers.

As we have mentioned above, the common perception of the Polish higher education landscape, which is influenced by skillful marketing of the schools themselves, is

that the place and role of the MBA programmes is important due to their anticipated contribution in accelerating the transition processes to a free-market economy. The building of a western style MBA programmes in a transition country can serve as a “real European/world laboratory”. The primary aim is taken to be the institutionalisation of free-market theories and developed market practices as well as participation in a transnational business culture – both by MBA graduates, professionally trained managers and MBA teaching/academic staff – i.e. to meet the challenge of economic transformation. In other words, when speaking about the MBA product, marked by “three magic letters” as *the* brand of the degree, special emphasis should be given to its key – business and public – purpose: preparation for leadership and transformational role in business²².

According to A. Sulejewicz, any forward-thinking discussion on problems of the MBA industry transfer to the transition economy has to consider three main perspectives of analysis: the market value of the MBA degree, the economic content of the MBA service, and social meaning of the MBA²³. There is no doubt that in all of the above-mentioned dimensions of the MBA, the success inevitably depends upon the solution of strategic issues related to the content and form of the MBA service in the transitional economy as well as on an „operational” management of MBA programmes and their commonly desired characteristics, like diversity, boldness, independence, focus on continuous improvement, responsiveness to changing business and wider environment realities.

Since the beginning of the transition process, management education has become an ever-expanding segment of the purported “knowledge industry” in Poland. Foreign providers from Western Europe and North America have become active in the process of delivering cheaper versions of their home-based management training, especially MBA programmes throughout Poland (to be sure, as partners of the Polish schools). In accordance with a global and European trend, an increasingly diversified and fragmented MBA market has been emerging. The Polish MBA programmes like their Western counterparts have also been exposed to the slowly growing challenge of competition. Changes in the MBA market, as driven by competitive factors, have been particularly apparent in the case of the growth of private-run and transnational MBA programmes.

The MBA programmes are oriented mainly toward general management and their programmatic content cover Western European or American experience in the

²² L.A. Heslop, J. Nadeau, *What do They Want? Determining Benefits Sought by MBA Program Applicants as an Aid to Branding MBA Programs*, paper presented at ASAC 2006, Banff (Canada).

²³ A. Sulejewicz, *Master of Business Administration in Central and Eastern Europe: Issues and Prospects of Transfer*, [in:] *New Approaches to Economics and Business Studies in Central and Eastern Europe. Conference Papers*, conference organised by Centre for the Development of Economic Education – WSE, IMHE – OECD, Warsaw, 15–17 January 1995.

functional areas of business with some minor adaptation to Polish economic conditions²⁴. MBA is a “general purpose technology”²⁵. In other words, the intention of an MBA programme design is to develop skills and competences necessary to cope with problems typical for CEE economies undergoing transformation. However, the “general purpose” character is very likely to provide the excuse for the straightforward adoption of the “classical” format. MBA students in the Polish HEIs are exposed to Western management concepts and methods (i.e. being part of the transfer of managerial values and practices) and, at the same time, their business goals are influenced by, at least initially, radically different institutional, socioeconomic, and cultural environments. Differences in business goals among CEEC MBA students are usually thought to stem from legacies of central planning and historical experience of transition.

On the other hand, contemporary trends in management training call for programme orientation which promotes entrepreneurship and business skills in a Europe-wide and international context. This is one of the latest versions of the general purpose programming (one design fits all).

Because of the absence of governmental regulation of the Polish MBA market, the process of collegiate (professional) accreditation was initiated and conducted by a sectoral organisation, the Management Education Association *SEM FORUM* (an independent body, member of EQUAL since 1997). A rather demanding accreditation policy, i.e. largely imported principles and procedures, appears to have been the reason for a very small number of successful *FORUM* accreditations so far (at the moment of the survey only 5 programmes). Abstention and risk minimization from the individual school marketing perspective lead to an unintended consequence of tarnishing the home and international reputation of Polish MBA programmes in general: it can be put at risk when an increasing number of programmes does not meet the conditions of (voluntary) accreditation run by *SEM FORUM*.

In the Polish HE system, the MBA degree has not yet been formally recognised (“not regulated qualification”) in the 1990 and the 2005 Act on Higher Education. So the designations of the degrees issued for these study programmes by HEIs are not identical to the “real” MBA as indicated by the transnational brand name. Generally, graduates from the Polish MBA programmes receive a certificate of completion of post-experience higher education (PEHE) non-degree studies at the relevant

²⁴ The absence of „local” case studies has been an „Achilles heel” in most programmes. Almost all education is based on American cases. See M.A. Zaidi, A. Sulejewicz, op.cit., chapter 3 New rules of the game: Local institutional environment of management education in Poland, pp. 113–168.

²⁵ T.F. Bresnahan, M. Trajtenberg, *General Purpose Technologies: Engines of Growth?*, “Journal of Econometrics” 1995, No. 65, pp. 83–108; R.G. Lipsey, K.I. Carlaw, C.T. Bekar, *Economic Transformations: General Purpose Technologies And Long Term Economic Growth*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005. For analogies as applied to „soft” educational technologies see: R.E. Quandt, *The Changing Landscape in Eastern Europe: A Personal Perspective on Philanthropy and Technology Transfer*, Oxford University Press, New York 2002.

HEI. Regarding collaboration with foreign providers (an almost mandatory mode of operation), the most frequent practice consists of awarding the foreign partner's MBA degree or certificate.

Taking into account the experience of highly developed Anglo-Saxon markets, however, the Polish MBA market is still "underdeveloped" in terms of the education quality and the relevance of the MBA degree itself. The introduction of a more complete regulatory framework works to help reduce significant organisational and programmatic differences across individual MBA programmes.

3. Objectives, approach and methodology of the empirical study

This paper covers a somewhat broader range of issues examined in the research project on the Polish MBA market that was completed in 2005. The research project entitled "MBA and Beyond. Change in Management Education in Poland" was launched in 2003 as "collaborative arrangement" by the Carlson School of Management and the University of Minnesota, in cooperation with the Warsaw School of Economics (Centre for Development of Economic Education). Financial support for the project was provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (New York). The major aim of the study was to discover how the "entire" institution of MBA is being transferred into the Polish setting and how it functions.

The survey (among MBA directors) has been conducted in 2004, covering 37 Polish MBA programmes from the total 63 existing ones (a response rate exceeding 50% of the total population). In the research project, all existing programmes were included, except those suspended (10) due to difficulties with recruitment, and 2, then newly, implemented programmes (still at an initial phase).

As stated earlier, in 2004, there were 63 MBA listed programmes in Poland of which 29 were programmes run by public establishments and 34 ones provided by private HEIs or training firms (foundations). It is worth emphasizing that, in the same year, the MBA market in Russia – Poland's huge neighbor – covered 75 schools offering this title, so the magnitude of the two emerging MBA markets is comparable²⁶. Such a large number of MBA programmes, as compared to MBAs supplied in neighbouring CEE countries, is commonly deemed (by industry participants) as

²⁶ L. Kartashova, *The MBA in Russia: Big Changes Ahead*, "Business Leadership Review I:III", October 2004, www.mbaworld.com/blr, *Путеводитель по MBA в России и за рубежом*, Под ред. Гозман О., Рубальской А., <http://www.begin.ru> 2009–2010 (and previous editions). The editors declared printing 5000 copies of the 2002 edition (published since 2001). An international website find-mba lists 39 programmes in France and 92 in Germany in 2010, see: <http://www.find-mba.com/france> and <http://www.find-mba.com/germany>.

an unquestionable success of Polish business training providers, both state-run and private ones.

The survey points to the need for a more systematic collection and analysis of data on the Polish MBA programmes, which would be essential in providing both candidates and HEIs offering business programmes with solid and reliable information on different aspects of the MBA programmes across the Polish management HE (educational choice and educational market analysis). Any database on MBA programmes is also a useful source of information to future employers when hiring MBA graduates, especially data on MBA quality and impact on graduate career. This is acknowledged by industry players, both sectoral participants (usually various websites) and individual schools performing tasks with good public characteristics²⁷.

It should be stressed that, for a long time, there were, neither, official MBA handbooks or directories in Poland, nor internet repositories of quantitative/qualitative data desired. *The Catalogue of Business Schools in Poland* that was published in the nineties by the Task Force for Training and Human Resources, Co-operation Fund [BKKK], has not been updated on a regular basis in recent years (latest edition dates from 2001). An early BKKK publication devoted exclusively to Polish MBA covered only selected programmes²⁸. *Directory of Leading Business Schools in Central and Eastern Europe* published by CEEMAN – Central and East European Management Development Association is “fragmented” and incomplete (the latest issue refers to 2004, with a coverage including only well known schools presumably enjoying a good reputation)²⁹.

These efforts notwithstanding, there is lack of accurate statistics on the Polish MBA market both on a programme and student stock and flow data. In order to expand the knowledge base on the MBA market (programmes) beyond the framework of information that one can find in a typical guide, the project aimed to provide some additional meaningful information i.e. indicator-type data including quantitative as well as (objective and subjective) qualitative data (e.g. opinions on expected salary increase). Thus a more comprehensive picture of the Polish MBA institutional capabilities was aimed at. The current report is primarily focused on the supply side of business education while neglecting an assessment of the business and management training needs of potential MBA students (mainly managers) and corporate customers. The methodology of our presentation envisages a cross-institution comparison as far as institutional characteristics analysis is concerned, and trend (time-series)

²⁷ Such as *Studia MBA w Polsce*, report by M. Błoński, director of the MBA Programme for the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and Łazarski Business School. Warsaw, 26 June 2009.

²⁸ A. Sulejewicz (ed.), *Master of Business Administration, czyli jak kształcić menedżerów* (Master of Business Administration or how to educate a manager), BKKK, Warszawa 1994.

²⁹ In early February 2011, upon inspection of the CEEMAN online Directory of Schools and Programs, the website returns the message of “currently under development”, <http://www.ceeman.org/pages/en/directory-of-schools-and-programs.html>.

data as far as the MBA programmes supply/output and educational demand analysis is concerned.

The paper can be viewed as an overview on the current state of MBA-level education in Poland as well as of major developments in the Polish MBA market over the past two decades. The following briefly summarizes what one would expect as regards selected institutional characteristics of the MBA programmes: ownership status, type of programme, mode of programme delivery, forms of business partnership, foreign academic partners as degree signers, internationalisation of programme provision, accreditation of an MBA degree held by a foreign partner, the number of foreign partners in MBA rankings, the number of Polish and foreign faculties, programme advertising and promotion. Other features of the supply of Polish MBA programmes in the mid-2000s are presented in detail, as the survey data equivalent items, in the final report (in Polish). This residual list covers the following items: requirements for MBA study, recruitment procedures, student profile data (number of candidates, annual student intake, gender split, average student age, average graduation age, number of graduates), program duration, number of contact hours, Polish academic partners, accreditation of an MBA degree held by domestic partners, evaluation of the reliability of domestic MBA rankings, the number of Polish faculties, financial data (tuition fee, advertising budget), the impact upon graduate salary (all the information provided by the MBA directors surveyed).

The paper closes by highlighting a number of observations based mostly on description rather than critical reflection of the Polish MBA market functioning and its implications for both the business education providers and the stakeholders – organizations seeking fully-fledged business education programmes for their (hopefully) high flying medium and top managers involved in strategic and operational activities, and candidates interested in extrinsic and intrinsic benefits from the MBA graduation.

4. Conceptual background: guidelines for the nomenclature and “essence” of Master’s business/management degrees in Europe

In Box 1 we summarize the basic features of the business education in North America and in (Western) Europe before the beginning of the Bologna process. For convenience we adopt Byrkjeflot’s scheme, dividing the characteristics into structural and content elements in order to highlight the particular key issues of the two business education models in question.

The Bologna process has had a profound impact upon Polish education³⁰. In Box 2, we sketch out what roughly can be seen as the new structure and content as signaled in Box 1. Generally, these specifications are regarded as of particular importance for the possibility to develop a more distinctive profile of the MBA (after the start of the Bologna modernization agenda).

The important area of CDEE/WSE enquiry was the convergence – diversity spectrum with respect to identity of the European MBA against its foreign main competitor – the American MBA. As shown in Boxes 3 and 4, there are two sets of inter-related and contradictory factors, in peculiar balance, at work (under two headings: isomorphism and diversity) which, in turn, through both synergy and tensions are shaping the European MBA model.

In the present section, where possible, comparisons are also made on the basis of the available quantitative data on MBA programmes' and MBAs, i.e. the supply of graduates. We hope that the survey enables one to gain insight into an important topic for the researchers of management education and MBA educators: the supply of MBA programmes by regions:

Box 1. Structure and content incompatibility of American and European business education (before the Bologna Declaration)

Structure	Content
Anglo-Saxon Model	
Three levels of education: BA + MBA + PhD	Business Administration
Major qualification: Master of Business Administration (MBA)	Selection to management is based on qualifications and proven abilities
Post-experience degree, not required to specialize in business as undergraduate	MBA degrees and systematic training in management is seen as a good background for top management roles
Business schools in universities	Emphasis on administration and leadership, ability to get along with and manage other managers and workers
Executive education programs as cooperation between HEIs and firms	Management is a profession

³⁰ See e.g. *Polskie uczelnie wobec wyzwań procesu bolońskiego*, J. M. Pawlikowski (red.), Zespół Promotorów Bolońskich, Politechnika Wrocławska, Wrocław 2006; *Założenia do nowelizacji ustawy – Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym oraz ustawy o stopniach naukowych i tytule naukowym oraz o stopniach i tytule w zakresie sztuki*, MNiSzW, Warszawa 2009.

Structure	Content
Continental European Model	
Major degree: 4-5 years pre-experience specialized (e.g. Diplomkaufmann, Sivilokønom, Carrera, Laurea, Diplome, Magister)	Business economics Management is an art Leadership knowledge can not be codified, has to be cultivated in practice
Independent business schools or in university departments of economics and social science	Emphasis on administration in education
Post-experience management training centers	Expert knowledge in specific functions serve as the basis for management
Distant relationship between HEIs, firms and executive education programs	Specialized, abstract economic knowledge may be a good qualification for the top management of a firm in the same way as engineering or law

Source: H. Byrkjeflot, To MBA or not to MBA? A Dilemma in European Higher Education. Scancor workshop: Transnational Regulation and the Transformation of States, Stanford, 22–23 June 2001, p. 27.

Box 2. Designation and segmentation of Master's degrees in Europe by programme type: possibility to develop a more distinctive profile of the MBA (after Bologna)

Definition of the Master's level in Europe (by EQUAL)	
A level achieved after 4 or 5 years of higher education. It is usually preceded by a first university qualification, which can be considered a Bachelor's level, although sometimes this level is only marked by an intermediate stage in a long 5-year continuous programme, sometimes after 2 years, more often after 3 years.	
Programme (degree) type	Definition (typical characteristics)
Type A: Generalist Master's (pre-experience) Suggested title in English: Master of Science in Management (MSc Management)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Generalist – After 3 years of HE – Younger students graduating at 23-25 – Pre-experience – Career preparation – Duration 1 to 3 years
Type B: Specialised Master's (pre-experience) Suggested titles in English: Specialised Master's in... (e.g. MSc in Finance, MS in Finance, Master's in Finance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Specialised – In-depth study of one area – Pre-experience – May require relevant previous qualification – Career preparation – Two sub-types: research orientation or professional orientation – Duration is usually 1 year

Definition of the Master's level in Europe (by EQUAL)

Type C: MBA
(post-experience)

Suggested title in English:
Master of Business Administration (MBA)

- Generalist
- Professionally oriented
- Significant work experience required
- Career change/acceleration
- Typical age range: 26-35
- Duration is between 1 and 2 years

European MBA Guidelines (by EQUAL)

The MBA is a postgraduate degree at the Master's level and must correspond to minimum intellectual and academic standards for such degrees. Admissions to an MBA programme will normally require a first degree or equivalent. This requirement can only be lowered exceptionally in the case of candidates with substantial and proven professional experience.

The MBA is a post-experience degree seen as a career accelerator or a means to make a career shift after a minimum of 2 or 3 years' professional experience. Programmes designed to help young graduates prepare for their entry into professional life should normally carry an alternative title.

Source: Elaborated on the basis of EQUAL Position Paper on the Designation of Master's Degree Titles in Management Education in Europe, EQUAL 2004; European MBA Guidelines, EQUAL 2004.

Europe versus its greatest competitor, the USA. Interestingly enough, we can observe (in tables

1, 2, and 3) quite large differences by region of the proportion of programmes and graduates (in absolute and relative figures) broken down by competing regions: USA, UK (the world leaders), the rest of Europe. According to *the data*, we have seen a clear increase in the number of MBA programmes and graduates. Moreover, the "rest of the Europe" and the "rest of the world" (compared to market leaders – the Anglo-saxon countries), as "emerging markets", have *stronger growth dynamics, at least over the analysed period. It is also interesting to look at this trend in relation to Poland's achievements. It looks quite solid as compared to the established, first-tier competitors.*

Box 3. Factors fostering MBA programmes convergence (isomorphism)

MBA programmes are becoming a world industry and „world format” in business education nowadays (e.g. international trade in educational services)

MBA as a global degree is one among the fastest growing post-experience qualifications in the world (mass education)

Traditional domination the global MBA market by American MBAs both in terms of quantity and quality

Transnational (global, regional, e. g. European) MBA governance structure is gradually evolving at the expense of traditional nation-states structure

There are a whole range of non-governmental participants (stakeholders) emerging: professional associations, accreditation agencies, international consultancies, web-based information services, media, media firms, (international) corporations

Increasing business influence over HEIs accompanying trends toward state diminishing

The process of convergence among European economies as well as qualification structures and selection practices in top management jobs

Increasing rivalry between European and American programmes

Effective collaboration between European and American MBAs as a key to meaningful improvements in MBA content and format across different regions

Emergence of regulatory framework (accreditation, rankings, and guidelines)

Smooth adaptation of an MBA degree to European management cultures, labour markets and education systems

Increasingly substantial role of MBAs in the system for elite recruitment in Europe

Importing an MBA degree by international business schools in Europe (pioneers: INSEAD, IMD, LBS), and contemporary establishments that may be labeled as European (MBA) hybrids

Existence of high-quality MBAs in leading European b-schools, creating the possibility for benchmarking for other (second-rate) schools

Linking b-schools and MBA programmes with transnational corporations

A large degree of freedom from external regulation

The Bologna Process striving to introduce new two-tier degree structure as a way to enhance internationalisation in higher education and incorporate MBAs in the EHEA

Note: Factors mentioned – not in any particular priority order (also in box 4).

Source: Authors. Isomorphism is amply discussed in M.A. Zaidi., A. Sulejewicz, op.cit., especially chapter 1 (pp. 27–62), 5 (pp. 231–321) and 7 (pp. 389–404).

Box 4. Factors fostering MBA programmes identity (diversity)

Much higher degree of external regulation (state/other regulatory bodies) in Europe

Efforts to create a European standard (specialized master's degree) in business education (e.g. CEMS Master) as an example of a strategy of Europeanisation

Degree competition among two different business education standards: a pre-experience European master degree, and a post-experience MBA degree

Distinctness exercising by American and European programmes: e.g. European educational traditions and corporate recruitment practices are not compatible with the development of graduate post-experience courses like the MBA

Diverse principles of the selection and circulation of elites in Europe and USA, e.g. strong position of engineers and lawyers in top management in Europe

Different MBAs' business environment especially in CEECs (transitional economies)

Existence of „European MBAs” (focus on European management cultures) perceived as one of specialized MBA programme orientation

HEIs providing traditional programmes are being linked up in transnational networks to protect specialized master's degrees and develop a European alternative in relation to MBA programmes

Rich diversity of curricula and internationalisation of the flavour of European MBAs (high proportion of foreign students, i.e. their multicultural and international experience)

More flexible (shorter) programme structure, programmes closer to the businesses needs, and pedagogical innovations in European MBAs

Important advantages of American MBAs – quality, prestige, and focus on research

MBA being the label that refers to very different kinds of practices (educational arrangements), i.e. „translation” – not „imitation” – of MBA ideas and concepts that take a very different shape in Europe

Development of international b-school and MBA model as opposite to classic American MBA model

The limited impact of MBAs in top management in Europe as compared with American realities (number of chief executives having an MBA degree)

Difficulties to integrate MBA into existing national HE structures and national qualification frameworks, i.e. legitimacy problems facing European MBA programmes, especially in CEECs

MBA being costly and insecure investment for a considerable number of potential European students who seek a government or private sponsor for financial assistance

Source: Authors.

Table 1. Number of MBA Programmes in 2000 and increase from 1998 by regions

Region	February 2000		September 1998		Increase (per cent)
	number	per cent	number	per cent	
UK	320	15	240	15	25
Rest of Europe	345	16	208	13	66
USA	1000	45	880	55	14
Rest of world	535	24	272	17	97
Total	2200	100	1600	100	37

Source: H. Byrkjeflot, To MBA or not to MBA?..., op.cit., p. 6.

Table 2. Estimated number of MBA programmes and annual number of MBA graduates relative to population (2000) by regions

Region	MBA programmes per million population (estimate)	Annual number of MBA graduates per million population (estimate)
United Kingdom	5,5	167
United States of America	3,7	369
Rest of Europe	1,0	28

Source: H. Byrkjeflot, To MBA or not to MBA?..., op.cit., p. 7.

Table 3. The Polish MBA programmes market in figures (number of programmes 1997-2004)

1997	2000	Increase from 1997 (per cent)	2004	MBA programmes per million population 2004 (est.)
27	30	11	63	1,6

Source: The CDEE/WSE MBA survey 2004; Business Schools Directory. BKKK, Cooperation Fund 1998, 2001.

5. The selected results of the empirical study

The selected outcomes of the empirical study should be seen in the wider context of suggested in the introduction of the paper. *One should remind that the focus of the paper is primarily on the supply aspect of the institutionalisation of the MBA subsector of higher management education in the Polish setting.* Specifically, this section of the paper addresses the following topics: The Polish MBA programme offerings and institutional arrangements, the Polish MBA quality monitoring, the

Polish MBA internationalisation, the Polish MBA marketing and branding the MBA products (advertising and promotion). For the sake of simplicity, we leave out specific breakdowns (like MBA programme ownership status, type of programme etc.) in the empirical analyses. Some key findings highlighted below will be repeated in the summary of the paper in order to *widen the context* for the discussion of the Polish MBA provision and its implications for higher education policy and practices.

Thanks to the high rate of return of the questionnaires, findings drawn from an analysis of the MBA directors' survey can be generalised to the entire population of the Polish MBA programmes. Finally, bearing in mind the limitations of the present study (e.g. the omission of analysis of an educational and labour market outcomes), a more systematic research approach is needed and efforts that help move beyond the exploratory nature of the survey.

The data that have been collected from MBA programme directors concerning programme portfolios and institutional arrangements indicate significant diversification and fragmentation of the Polish MBA programme offerings with respect to kind of ownership (governance), programme orientation, customer orientation, formal networking with business entities (Table 4). The only two exceptions are: type of educational institution and mode of provision. One can observe the dominance of the part-time MBA programmes as opposed to full-time ones. Similarly, HEIs are the prevalent type of education institution, at the expense of foundations as educational providers.

When considering the issue of forms of the MBA programmes' cooperation with business partners, particular attention should be given to the lack of foreign partners. Over half of the MBA programmes have not participated in cooperation with business partners on a regular basis (response category: "lack of business partner"). Table 5 details the variety of forms that cooperation with business partners takes, with evidence about predominant forms of partnership such as joint running projects and diploma thesis, and, to a lesser extent sponsoring, running business advisory boards, internships, providing case materials and businesses' involvement in teaching.

Box 5 presents the procedure established for the purpose of MBA rating (2006) by *SEM FORUM* – the only sectoral organization – an association of private business schools in Poland, founded in 1993. It has aspired, with partial success, to become one of the authoritative voices of higher business and management education in Poland. It has nevertheless generated a number of documents and tried to enforce rules and organizational arrangements (criteria, procedures and processes) applied for the purpose of quality evaluation and the rating of MBA programmes. Overall, the *SEM FORUM* rating scores in 2006 and 2010 ranged from promising rating class (bottom) to outstanding rating class (ultimate), with the dominant class labeled professional/professional plus. Although no significant changes have been noticed, the recent rating scores in 2010 show that there were fewer MBA programmes that were awarded the highest score (Table 6). *This was due to the fact that the MBA programmes were*

assessed against more stringent criteria and could be slotted into more rating classes. But our data are not unequivocal: it is also likely that MBA programmes' efforts to maintain and enhance education quality have not been fully successful.

The next section of the survey is devoted entirely to the issue of MBA internationalization: it covers, in detail, the following items: the Polish MBA education partnership with foreign business schools and HEIs; the presence of Polish MBA programmes' foreign partners in international press rankings, and the existence of the Polish MBA programmes with foreign faculty members (see Table 7 and Figures 2 to 4).

As anticipated, the survey shows that a small minority of the MBA programmes were less likely to have any form of cooperation with foreign partners, namely, business schools and/or other HEIs. Significantly, the majority of foreign partners were representatives of the public sector of higher education (Table 7).

As can be seen from Figure 2, there are differences regarding the results of the participation of the Polish MBA programmes' foreign partners in international press rankings, and the prestige of the ranking. It is also interesting to note the presence in international press rankings (in descending order) as follows: *Financial Times*, *Business Week*, other rankings (less well-known), *Forbes*, *Wall Street Journal* and *US News & World Report*. The only 5 programmes covered in the survey reported lack of foreign partners and, thereby, lack of evidence of the international press rankings' standing.

Figure 3 shows the incidence of accreditation as possessed by foreign education partners, which can be deemed as a critical attribute of the Polish MBA programmes' performance and their country-wide and international rating. Additionally, foreign education partners with accreditation signal the quality of the Polish MBA by drawing on the 'real' MBA brand, reputation and durability³¹. Whilst most of the respondents pointed to the incidence of foreign partners with reputable accreditations (AACSB, EQUIS, AMBA, of which even 5 partners with famous "triple-crown" accreditation), there are indications of a less favourable appreciation of "international affiliation" for many MBA programmes. Three of the circumstances *we have in mind* include: lack of foreign partners, partners without accreditation and little-known accreditation agencies.

In the CDEE/WSE study, we also looked at the participation of foreign faculties in the delivery of Polish MBA programmes (Figure 4). We might expect that the

³¹ Signalling as a strategic device is important in educational markets. For a brief discussion of the economic signalling model in the context of the Polish higher management education see: A. Sulejewicz, *Dostosowanie studiów ekonomicznych do potrzeb współczesnej gospodarki (uwagi moderatora)* [Adjustment of economic studies to the needs of contemporary economy: moderator's comments], [in:] *Oczekiwania biznesu wobec wyższych studiów menedżerskich*, J. Dietl, Z. Sapijaszka (eds.), Fundacja Ekonomiczna Przedsiębiorczości, Łódź 2003.

presence of the foreign lecturers would vary among the programmes surveyed. The majority of the programmes (around two-thirds) have employed “foreign outsiders” as faculty members. The most frequent incidence (intervals) of foreign faculty members fell into numerical brackets: 1–5 and 6–10 persons.

The following figures below (Figures 5 and 6) illustrate significant and almost universal initiatives from the surveyed MBA programmes in the realm of programme promotion and advertising. The main kinds of promotion of Polish MBA programmes were identified according to the information provided by the MBA directors (Figure 5): “composite” category labeled “other forms of promotion” (including such items as Polish/English language publications, organisation of national/international conferences), attendance at Polish educational fairs, attendance at virtual fairs, presence at the TOP MBA circuit. Figure 6 makes clear that the *most common form of advertising* in the Polish MBA market is still “classic” advertising, primarily in the form of Polish-language print advertising complemented by Polish language web-based advertising. However, the existence of a special advertising budget was confirmed only by a minority of the MBA programmes surveyed.

5.1. The Polish MBA programme portfolio and institutional setup

Table 4. The Polish MBA programmes' format by particular dimensions; 2004 (N=36)

Programme portfolio dimensions		Number of programmes	Per cent
Kind of ownership (governance)	Public	18	50.0
	Private	18	50.0
Type of educational institution	HEI	33	91.7
	Foundation	3	8.3
Programme orientation	General MBA	21	58.3
	Specialized MBA	15	41.7
Customer orientation	Standard MBA	11	30.6
	Executive MBA	25	69.4
Mode of provision (attendance pattern)	Full-time	4	11.1
	Part-time	32	88.9
Partnership with business ^a	Yes	15	41.7
	No	21	58.3

Note: ^a – the lack of the “typical” corporate MBA (company specific) programmes.

Source: CDEE/WSE Survey 2004.

Table 5. Forms of the MBA programmes' cooperation with business partners (N=36)

Forms of partnership	Number of programmes	Per cent
Sponsoring	7	19.4
Business advisory board	7	19.4
Stipends	2	5.6
Internships	6	16.7
Cases materials	5	13.9
Projects, diploma thesis	11	30.6
Involvement in teaching	5	13.9
Not applicable – lack of business partner	21	58.3
Total	36	100.0

Note: Multiple indications.

Source: CDEE/WSE Survey 2004.

5.2. The monitoring of MBA quality in Poland

Box 5. The procedure established for the purpose of MBA rating 2006 by SEM FORUM

Set of evaluation criteria (broad and detailed)		
Institutionalization	Institutional maturity (i.e. accreditations, rankings) degree of internationalization	
Admission	Admission requirements Admission practices	
Teaching and learning	Education programme Education process	
Career	Business links Building of community	
Stakeholders concerned	Rating objectives	Evaluators / tools
Candidates and their families	Programme quality Pedagogical quality Programme effectiveness	MBA graduates/ graduate survey
MBA providers	Economic and managerial criteria	Programme directors/ director survey
Firms – MBA recruiters	Skill and competence profile of graduate	Employer representatives & press sounding

Source: Information (press release) provided on Polish MBA Programme Rating (2006) by SEM FORUM (Association for Management Education FORUM).

Table 6. The Polish MBA Rating 2006 (N=39) and 2010 (N=38)

Rating classes	Number of evaluated programmes 2006	Per cent	Number of evaluated programmes 2010	Per cent
Outstanding	12	30.8	8	21.0
Professional plus	not applicable (N/A)	n.a.	9	23.7
Professional	16	41.0	7	18.4
Standard	7	17.9	not applicable (N/A)	n.a.
Aspiring	not applicable (N/A)	n.a.	8	21.0
Promising	4	10.3	6	15.8
Total	39	100.0	38	100.0

Note: Only 39 MBA (83%) programmes of the 47 functioning (up and running) ones (2006) participated and were listed in SEM FORUM Rating of Polish MBA programmes.

Source: Information (press release) provided on the Polish MBA Programme Rating (2006) by SEM FORUM (Association for Management Education FORUM). For 2010 see: http://www.mbaportal.pl/artykuly/ratingMBA_2010_III_edycja_badania_30.html.

5.3. The internationalization of Polish MBA programmes

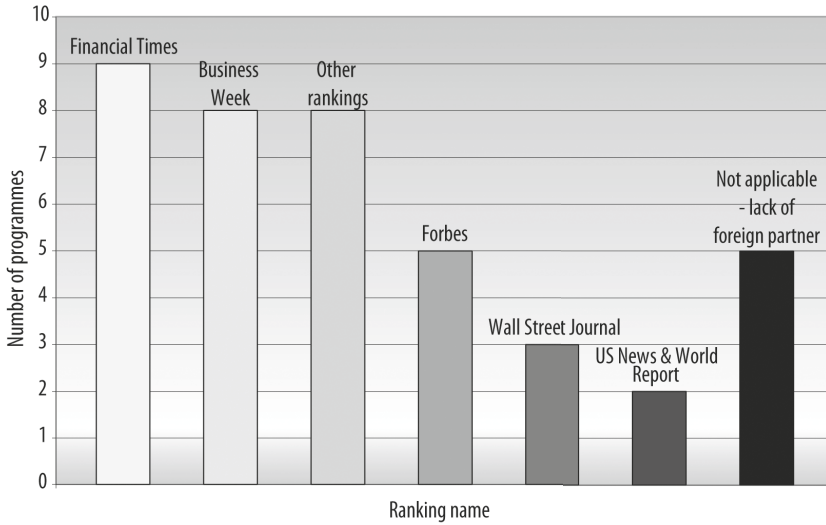
Table 7. Polish MBAs education partnership with foreign business schools and HEIs (N=36)

Presence of foreign partner	Number of programmes	Per cent
Single partner	23	63.9
Two or more partners	8	22.2
Lack of foreign partner	5	13.9
Total	36	100.0
Number of foreign partners		
Public	32	66.7
Private	16	33.3
Total	48 ^a	100.0

Note: ^a – total sum of foreign partners – business schools and HEIs amounts to 48 because of multiplicity of the education partners in case of 8 MBA programmes surveyed.

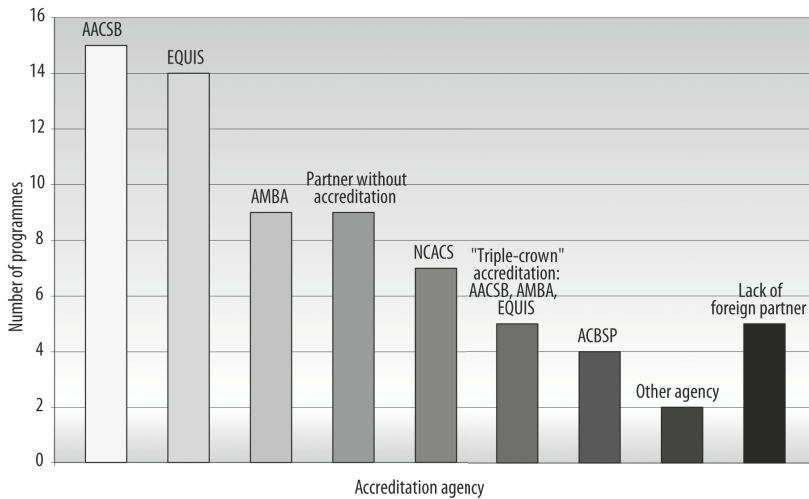
Source: CDEE/WSE Survey 2004.

Figure 2. Presence of the Polish MBAs' foreign partners in international press rankings (N=36)



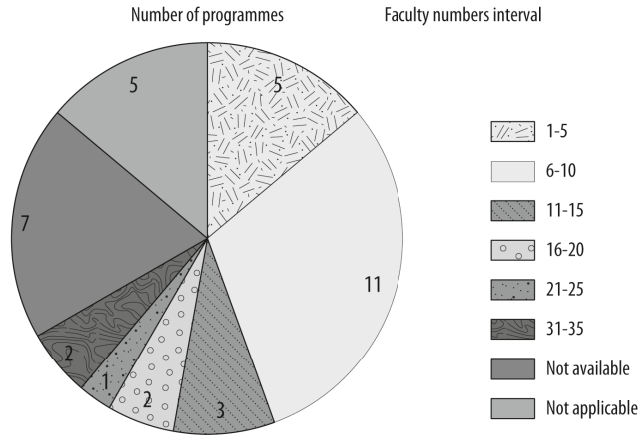
Source: CDEE/WSE Survey 2004.

Figure 3. Proportion of foreign education partners with accreditation as a mark of the Polish MBA quality and the MBA brand and reputation (N=36)



Source: CDEE/WSE Survey 2004.

Figure 4. Number of the Polish MBA programmes with foreign faculty members (N=31)



Source: CDEE/WSE Survey 2004.

5.4. The Marketing and branding the Polish MBA products

Figure 5. Promotion of the Polish MBA programmes in 2003 (N=37)

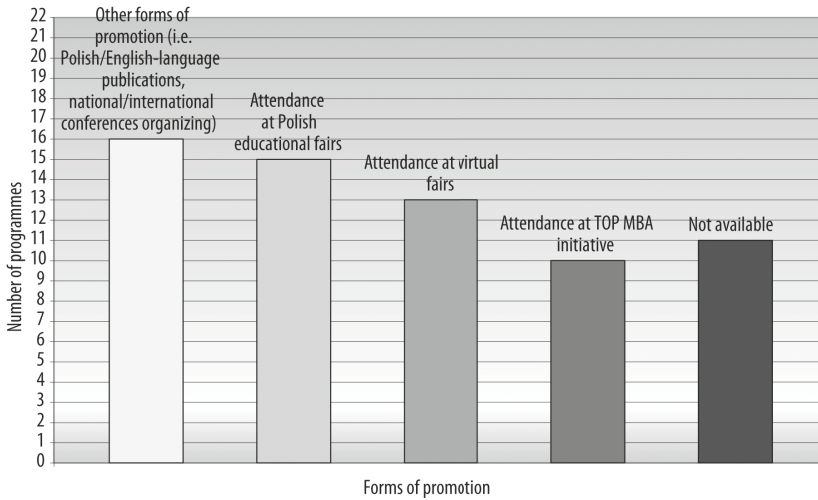
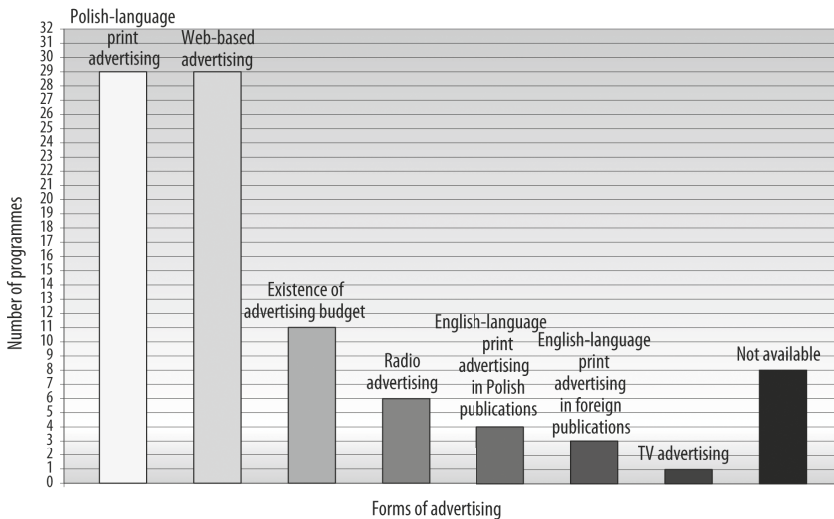


Figure 6. Advertising of the Polish MBA programmes in 2003 (N=37)



Source: CDEE/WSE Survey 2004.

6. Concluding remarks

As the MBA is a seemingly profitable and newly established business segment, it is not surprising that accurate private and public statistics concerning the number of candidates, students and graduates are lacking. In addition, MBAs are classified as post-experience higher education non-degree courses aggregate in the subject study category: business and management, not as masters' degree courses. That is why, in the CDEE/WSE survey, the basic category of analysis was the number of programmes (in addition, some of the programmes surveyed did not provide full information on candidate, student or graduate numbers).

The evidence from the Polish MBA market examined by CDEE/WSE survey suggests that there is a growing importance of this type of business/management education for current middle and senior professional managers, and potential candidates for CEOs. Some findings and observations deserve particular emphasis, when highlighting the existing strengths and weaknesses of Polish MBA programmes.

The rapid expansion of MBA programmes in Poland has not been accompanied by a state regulatory framework or by an external system of quality assurance and evaluation in the period covered by the CDEE/WSE survey (1989–2004). As regards a collegiate (inter-institutional, sectoral) accreditation system in Poland, the first and only initiative in question refers to the accreditation system established in 1994 by

*SEM FORUM*³². Regarding efforts to introduce a system of periodic ranking or rating of MBAs, additional to popular press classifications, it should be pointed out that functioning of the first MBA rating in Poland started recently – in 2006 (an initiative also undertaken by *SEM FORUM*).

In so far as there is no precise or clear “content” definition of what an MBA is, only a legal one, entry barriers are low and emergence of imitations (bogus practices) in HEIs operating on the MBA market without a “solid” foreign educational partner is an easy possibility. Reportedly, it concerns a minority of Polish MBAs. Furthermore, there is no collegiate body or other institution that would play the role of clearing house for schools intending to deliver MBA courses. The Polish State is reluctant to intervene and the recent Polish Act on Higher Education (2005) did not resolve the dilemma concerning the legal status of the MBA degree and its position in higher education management.

In a manner similar to other emerging MBA markets in the CEECs, the features of the Polish MBA market can be outlined as follows: a good deal of instability, diversification, opportunistic behaviour, and seeming contradictions. For instance, MBA courses enjoying a high reputation are run by well-known and highly regarded old public universities and very few of the oldest private business schools while “lemons” are usually offered by newly-emerged private HEIs. In case of the latter, the ratio of applicants to seats is very low or there is no sufficient demand at all in the “official” segment (years of reference 2004–2006)³³.

The origins of the MBA in Poland can be traced back to the beginning of the economic and political transformation of 1988–1989. The survey has allowed the identification of significant changes in the pace of the MBA expansion during the last two decades. The first dynamic wave of expansion belonged to the first half of the 1990s. Then, there has particularly been a second wave of the MBA market expansion since the beginning of the century until the global financial crisis of 2007–2009. Of the 63 programmes found in 2004, more than 50% have been established during 2001–2004. Taking into account the circumstances mentioned above, one can formulate conclusions about the ease of entry to and withdrawal from educational market in Poland.

Despite the general positive development trends in the Polish MBA market, detailed concluding remarks and observations point to many criticisms on MBAs that have found empirical confirmation in the survey. One should note that the Polish higher education realities affecting the Polish MBA identity and legitimacy differ

³² Fundacja Promocji i Akredytacji Kierunków Ekonomicznych (FPAKE) abandoned the idea of accrediting MBA programmes after some internal discussions in the early 2000s.

³³ Yet, the year-long (160 contact hours), week-end, Polish-language, post-graduate management studies „based on the structure of the MBA” offered by the WSE in Katowice (Upper Silesia) are now into its 23rd edition and show no sign of slackening demand despite a price of 7700 PLN (in 2010, two average monthly wages), http://szkolenia.gig.katowice.pl/pl/a605/Menedzerskie_oparte_na_strukturze_MBA.html.

from the analytical framework as proposed by the Bologna Process promoters and sectoral organizations like EQUAL.

Analysis of organizational aspects of the programmes (class contact and duration) points to considerable diversity of delivery modes. On the up side, this is symptomatic of flexibility in the MBA supply³⁴. Differences among programmes in terms of number of contact hours were smaller than differences in programme duration. Programmes belonging to the interval of 400–800 hours showed themselves as the most frequent ones. Predominantly, the programme duration ranged from 18 to 24 months (two thirds of the population studied).

The modes and ways of marketing and branding MBA programmes are similar to marketing undertaking by HEIs in other countries. However, there is a specific shortcoming, namely, the low popularity of English-language print advertising in foreign and Polish publications. Moreover, the existence of the MBA advertising budget was a rare phenomenon³⁵.

The survey data show that selection and admittance of MBA students is based on the standard international requirements and recruitment schemes practiced widely across foreign MBA programmes (e.g. years of experience). However, there are two exceptions: replacement of GMAT test by domestic GMAT-type tests (if at all), and the dominance of the domestic English language proficiency examination over the well known TOEFL test.

The popularity and (perhaps) value of the credential is reflected in the dynamics of applications for MBA programmes. In recent years, the number of applications has been slightly decreasing as compared to the pioneer period of expansion (the first half of the 1990s). On the other hand, the proportion of programmes with high numbers of graduates slightly increased. Most of the programmes surveyed had the annual graduate numbers amounting to 21–30 and 31–40 graduates. To complement the Polish questionnaire data, we have looked into the interpretation of the international financial crisis of 2007–2009 which, on the whole, has been mixed. It has provoked some content adjustment but, overall, did not provoke a fall in the in the total global intakes. Counter-cyclical demand (insurance against hard times still to come) is part of the educational business in general. However, country differences are likely to be pronounced³⁶.

³⁴ http://praca.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/21376,na_studiach_mba_przybywa_programow_specjalistycznych.html, [05.07.2008].

³⁵ Personal conversations and anecdotal evidence point, however, to a practice of under-reporting. The national MBA market is quite small and competitive intelligence is a non-negligible threat.

³⁶ MBA applications: Weathering the Storm, *The Independent*, 18 October 2007, <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/postgraduate/mbas-guide/mba-applications-weathering-the-storm-397111.html>; MBA in the *Period of Financial Crisis*, "The Moscow Times", 26 November 2008, http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/business_for_business/article/mba-in-the-period-of-financial-crisis/372664.html; *How are Business Schools Coping with the Global Financial Crisis?*, "The Independent", 9 April 2009, <http://www>.

The lack of female applicants is a serious challenge for MBA programmes in some countries (high gender imbalance)³⁷. This is also the case in Poland's MBAs, where the proportion of women students has not been significant in the case of majority of the programmes. Yet, compared to beginning of the 1990s, the female share remarkably increased in the 2000s.

The balance between public and private HEIs providing MBA programmes was a specific feature of Poland's MBA market in 2004. Furthermore, the dynamic growth of part-time programmes leading to the dominance of this sub-type of MBA in the education market in 2004. According to the data collected, the general MBA programmes outnumbered, slightly, the other, i.e. specialist MBA programmes. With regard to customer orientation, there was a clear trend towards the supremacy of executive MBA programmes. In 2004, the EMBA number more than doubled the number of standard MBA programmes. Distance learning as a mode of MBA provision cannot be reported on, neither can corporate (tailored) MBAs (the former because of likely absence, the latter because of trade secrecy).

In opposition to the best Western MBA programmes, the Polish ones are less closely linked to business. Links with the business environment are not a prevailing practice in the programmes surveyed. Particularly, a relatively low proportion of programmes enables their students to obtain financial support (stipends) from companies.

Internationalization of MBAs is growing in importance, also in Poland's business education market. Generally, issues of international orientation were addressed successfully, both in programme contents as well as in educational process. The HEIs have made significant efforts to internationalise their MBA programmes on a relatively large scale by employing foreign faculty members, introducing a foreign language of instruction or offering bilingual contents of instruction, and, to some extent, by attracting overseas students.

Only a minority of the Polish MBA programmes was directly involved in monitoring quality by means of domestic accreditation and rankings. Looking in the Polish MBA market, one can note that, for a long time, no Polish b-school or programme was listed in the international rankings and ratings of top European schools. The first Polish rated HEI (the WSE running 2 EMBAAs) appeared in "The Financial Times" not long ago – in 2006. The foreign partners' international accreditations give credibility to the Polish programmes and an assurance of the MBA degrees' value and relevance. The Leon Kozminski Academy has successfully played the ranking and

independent.co.uk/student/postgraduate/mbas-guide/how-are-business-schools-coping-with-the-global-financial-crisis-1665881.html; M. Błoński, op.cit.

³⁷ This is Common Experience. See: UK Business Schools Still Struggle to Name Any High-flying Female MBAs, *The Independent*, 9 April 2009, <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/postgraduate/mbas-guide/uk-business-schools-still-struggle-to-name-any-highflying-female-mbas-1665884.html>.

accreditation game in the latter half of the first decade of the 21st century and duly advertised their achievements³⁸. The data shows that only one in three programmes had a foreign partner who had not gained accreditation.

Considering the cost factor, one must remember that the tuition fees for most European MBAs range from 10 to 40 thousand Euros. The tuition fees required by Polish programmes tend clearly to be lower than average MBA fees in Europe³⁹. It is also to be noted that a diverse price offers on the MBA market, ranging from 1300 to 13500 Euros, go with the approximate steady number of programmes in particular cost brackets (the most expensive programmes were the exception).

There are indications that the development of the Polish MBA market may be called a success story. Nevertheless, quite a lot of the MBA programmes face generally numerous weaknesses, constraints and challenges, namely: an insufficient level of quality of education (educational achievements), low pedagogical commitment to the philosophy of continuous improvement, modest, to put it mildly, development of original knowledge in management as an academic discipline, and, last but not least, a poor reputation. It is important to consider also the tenuous relevance of MBA programmes in several important aspects: (i) “flexible” criteria in the recruitment of top managerial talent (see the discussion on “meritocracy” above), (ii) limited capability of the MBA providers to blend “classic” MBA content matter with original research results on domestic markets and management practices, (iii) low effectiveness of the programmes with respect to important strategic educational aims: adaptation of international management models and practices to the Polish business environment and the domestic realities of corporate decision making, (iv) an unsatisfactory level of programme usefulness with respect to graduate preparation for the business world (theory and application of business with a focus on practical solutions for business problems).

Having in mind the issue of matching supply of MBA programmes to educational demand, one can conclude that MBA market saturation is a safer hypothesis than existence of the critical mass of the MBA programmes in Poland. Speaking of a critical mass in case of business education programmes, one may conceive an MBA's effectiveness and efficiency covering, a product of high quality accepted by employers, and graduate satisfaction according to two criteria: extrinsic benefits from employment (the advantages in terms of salary and status) and intrinsic benefits, i.e. career factors (i.e. job satisfaction, fulfillment, development of self-confidence, strengthening

³⁸ <http://www.kozminski.edu.pl/index.php/pl/aktualnosci/art284.html>.

³⁹ This does not mean that the rate of return on investment in Polish MBA is higher. “There is no race for an MBA degree, because, in Poland, these studies do not lead to later profits” [Wyścigu po dyplomy MBA nie ma, bo u nas studia te nie przekładają się na późniejsze profity], S. Augustynowicz, *Studia MBA z zarządzania ochroną zdrowia – pęd ku tej wiedzy już minął?*, http://www.mbaportal.pl/artykuly/Studia_MBA_z_zarządzania_ochrona_zdrowia_-_ped_ku_tej_wiedzy_minal.html, [08.07.2009]. Generally, financial data are scarcely available and no „sectoral” calculation is (as yet) credible.

of beliefs, etc.). Which of these pictures is the more adequate description? In our opinion, the Polish MBA market has reached a saturation point (already at the time of inquiry), i.e. the rapid growth of the MBA programmes has led to meeting the educational demand measured by number of candidates.

As the “Which MBA? 2001” survey illustrated, a school’s reputation is the dominating criterion for students when choosing a business school, followed, in order of importance, by location, programme content, the quality of the teaching faculty, tuition and living costs, position in published rankings, friends’ recommendation and the starting salary of graduates.

The process of self-renewal in a considerable number of the MBA programmes is needed when considering the fact that 10 Polish MBAs in 2004 and 8 in 2006 being on offer were not “up and running” MBA programmes. In fact, those programmes may be marked as programmes with an uncertain future, and cannot be considered either by candidates and their employers as credible and capable of delivering high quality business education.

In other words, the development of the MBA industry in Poland, after two decades of evolution, has not yet reached the state of maturity as measured by presence of the MBA critical mass, i.e. their real value and its manifestation – reputation, relevance from a perspective of the business world, and impact on the HEI graduate labour market and CEOs selection and hiring practices. In summary, it seems that it is too early to recognize the whole of the MBA programmes and their graduates as a leading force in the Poland’s business community, advertisements of the business schools notwithstanding. From the public interest perspective, risks resulting from the lack of MBA critical mass exceed risks stemming from market saturation as measured by a low student application rate.

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Abstract

The paper discusses the supply side of the Master of Business Administration, i.e. of the international postgraduate management education (IPME) sector in Poland. The historical period covered spans the two decades of market transition (1989–2009). Empirical research, that is questionnaires administered to a representative sample of directors of Polish MBA programmes in 2004, provides additional insight into the analysis of the evolution of IPME. First, we introduce the demand side: the IPME sector with its transnational credentials appears as an important determinant of the new social stratification: it provides a “meritocratic” solution to recruitment into new managerial elite. We then trace the development of MBA in Poland primarily in terms of key variables: number of programmes, diversification in types of programmes and modes of delivery, *quality control (accreditations and rankings), internationalisation, and programmes’ promotion and advertising*. We summarize by discussing the importance of the MBA in Polish management education indicating that market saturation is the more likely hypothesis explaining the slower dynamics in the 21st century.

KEY WORDS: MANAGEMENT EDUCATION, MBA PROGRAMMES, MBA MARKET TRENDS, MERITOCRACY