

## **Evaluation of the design impact on the performance of polish furniture enterprises**

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**Abstract:** *Evaluation of the design impact on the performance of polish furniture enterprises.* The aim of the study was to describe the main benefits associated with investing in design. The results of survey conducted among 75 furniture manufacturing companies were presented. The obtained data was elaborated taking into account the size of the given company. Moreover much attention was paid to the evaluation of design impact on business performance of analyzed enterprises.

*Keywords:* design, furniture manufacturing, benefits of investing in design

### INTRODUCTION

Design plays in increasingly important role in activities of enterprises operating in the economies of highly developed countries. Design was demonstrated to be particularly important in the case of enterprises manufacturing consumer goods, among others, furniture, i.e. companies oriented towards constant improvement of the design value of the offered articles (Edman 2004, Report DTI 2005, Tether 2005). Therefore, the opinion that investment in design can have a positive impact on the operation and development of enterprises is becoming increasingly widespread.

The aim of this article was to analyze advantages resulting from investment in design and to assess its impact on the activities of selected Polish enterprises involved in furniture production. Special attention was focused on possibilities of development and improvement of the situation of a given company on the market thanks to the application of design.

The performed investigations comprised economical subjects located in Poland specializing in furniture production. The enterprises studied were selected on the basis of the quota sampling method, taking into account the level of employment and geographic localisation so that the firms well represented the structure of furniture industry in Poland. The performed analyses included data from 75 enterprises.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first step in the analysis of the design impact on the furniture designing process and production involved determination of the significance of design as a factor affecting the development of enterprises functioning in the furniture sector. Up to 92% of the examined companies were of the opinion that design exerts influence on the operational development of enterprises manufacturing furniture (the answers “rather yes” and “definitely yes”(Fig. 1).

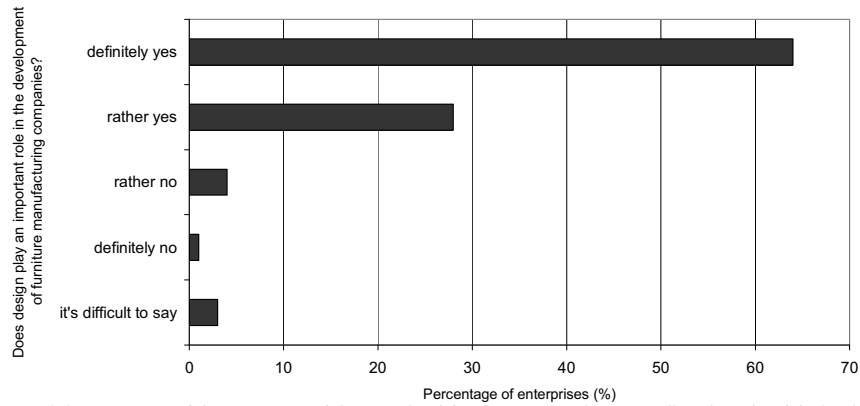


Fig. 1. Opinion structure of the managers of the examined furniture enterprises regarding the role of design in the development of furniture manufacturing companies

Source: Own elaboration based on the performed empirical research

Using the method of statistical grouping, detailed analyses of correlations between the size of an enterprise and assessment of design as a factor determining the development of companies in the furniture sector were performed. It was found that only micro- and small-sized enterprises expressed doubts as to the importance of the role of design actions in the process of furniture production (Fig. 2). However, it should be emphasized that it was a very small group of enterprises. Great majority of even very small companies considered design an important tool preconditioning the development of furniture industry. High role of designing in the analyzed sector of economy was also confirmed by the fact that 100% of both large and medium-sized enterprises (total of replies: “rather yes” and ”definitely yes”) considered design as a factor affecting development of the branch. Producers who took part in the survey expressed the opinion that design makes it possible for the company to build an image that is both strong and recognizable on the marketplace which, in turn, is associated with its prestige. Numerous respondents emphasized the fact that thanks to design, the company is capable of manufacturing better products. At the same time, higher added value of the offered articles increases considerably possibilities of their sale.

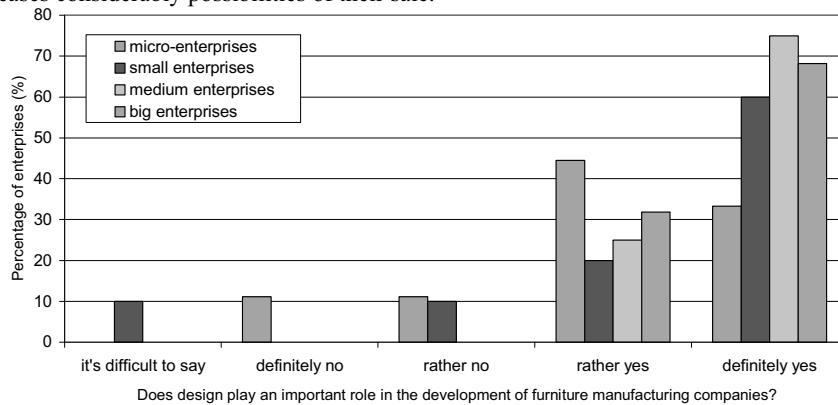


Fig. 2. Opinion structure of the managers of the examined furniture enterprises regarding the role of design in the development of furniture manufacturing companies depending on the size of the enterprise

Source: Own elaboration based on the performed empirical research

According to the questioned entrepreneurs, furniture must be liked or rather it should captivate and enrapture potential users. In the first phase of the purchasing process, customers pay attention, primarily, to visual aspects of a piece of furniture. Nevertheless, manufacturers strongly emphasized that in good furniture design, it is not only the external form that counts but other additional factors that customers discover in the course of furniture utilization are equally important. Good design allows integration, in a single article, of both aesthetic external form as well as material and construction novelties resulting in a product characterized by unique added value. In addition, design is also important for the development of furniture sector because in a well-designed article considerable attention is also paid to ergonomics. In the opinion of the examined entrepreneurs, changes taking place on the marketplace in this area, i.e. offering of products intended for consumers who are increasingly aware of the influence of utilized furniture on human health, can contribute to the improvement of living standards of consumers. Additionally, it was also stressed that novelties introduced into new articles, continuous development and monitoring of changes taking place on the market, are all significant. It was emphasized that in West European countries, on average, companies develop new collections every two years. The surveyed manufactures stressed that more and more frequently, Polish consumers know world design trends and look for furniture which follows these trends. Consequently, attention to high design quality of offered articles results in a steady development of enterprises and, as confirmed by the performed investigations, the above tendency is quite visible in the case of the furniture sector.

Within the framework of the performed experiments, opinions of entrepreneurs regarding the impact of design on the development of their companies were also analyzed. It turned out that more than 80% of respondents indicated that they expected that investment in design would improve the situation of their enterprises on the market (Fig. 3) and only 9% of producers presented a different opinion. However, it should be added that this group included subcontractors manufacturing furniture according to models commissioned by ordering enterprises. It can be assumed that these factories could not ‘consume’ advantages resulting from the introduction of new design at the same level as companies designing and marketing their own articles.

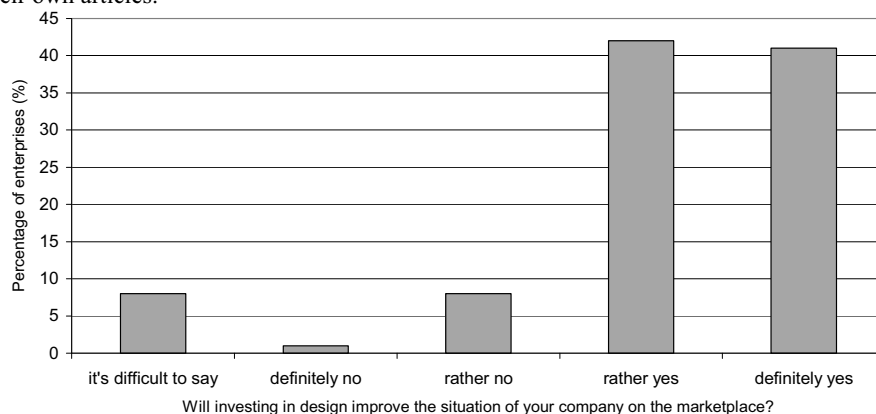


Fig. 3. Structure of the opinion of the surveyed furniture manufacturers regarding the impact of design on the improvement in the situation of their enterprises on the marketplace depending on the size of company  
Source: Own elaboration based on the performed empirical research

The performed analysis of the assessment of the design influence on the improvement of a given company’s situation on the market depending on its size revealed that none of the examined micro-enterprises was convinced as to the rightness of the discussed dependence.

Nevertheless, up to 67% of them presumed that investment in design may exert a positive influence on their activities (Fig. 4). The expressed reservations may have resulted from poorly developed tools and procedures facilitating the use of designing in Poland for small economical subjects. It is, therefore, difficult for these enterprises to get involved in designing activities and achieve profits. There are special governmental programs in many countries in the world the aim of which is to support design development and encourage micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises to introduce designing programs (Salimäki in. 2004, Design Denmark 2007, Report Creating a competitive edge through design. Better by Design 2008).

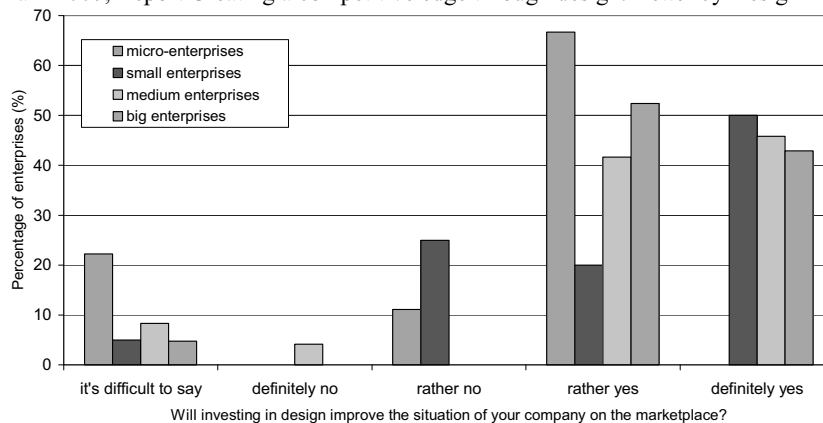


Fig. 4. Structure of the opinion of the surveyed furniture manufacturers regarding the impact of design on the improvement in the situation of their enterprises on the marketplace depending on the size of company  
Source: Own elaboration based on the performed empirical research

When assessing the impact of design on the improvement of a given enterprise situation on the market, it was strongly emphasized that high design level was usually associated in the minds of consumers with the company's reliability and stability. There seems to be no doubt that there is a direct relationship between the offering of nicely-designed articles and positive perception of an enterprise. Furniture manufacturers associated a positive impact of investment in design with the possibility of development of better products which such investment created and which were easier to promote and sell. In addition, the designed new models caused that such enterprises were more noticeable on the marketplace and were able to distinguish themselves among competing companies. It was further observed that a new design and product gave companies potential chances of expanding already captured markets and, consequently, of development. It was emphasized that, in modern-day economy, design is no longer an optional tool but is becoming more and more a necessity without which, an enterprise will be pushed out of the marketplace.

The performed investigations revealed that the range of benefits resulting from the design application by furniture enterprises is wide (Fig. 5). The largest group of companies (nearly 80%) indicated that design contributed to improvement of competitiveness, increase of sales (67%) and increase of profits (54%). Moreover, furniture manufacturers emphasized the possibility (thanks to application of design) of the company image improvement (49%), products distinguishing (47%) as well as expansion into new markets (42%). For the surveyed entrepreneurs, the existence of tangible advantages resulting from investments in design was a very serious issue, especially when they were undertaking strategic decisions associated with the expansion of activities of a given unit.

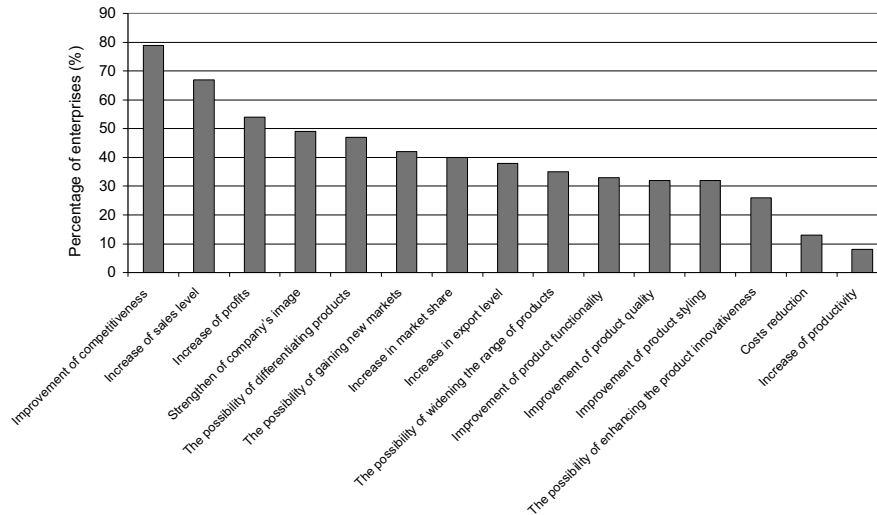


Fig. 5. Benefits resulting from the application of design in the examined furniture enterprises  
 Source: Own elaboration based on the performed empirical research

#### SUMMARY

Recapitulating, it should be emphasized that majority (92%) of managers in the examined enterprises was convinced that the application of design exerted a positive influence on the development of furniture manufacturing companies. During the analyzed period of time, advantages associated with investment in design were noticeable more clearly in large and medium-sized enterprises. The recorded smaller proportions of micro- and small-sized companies convinced about the impact of design on the improvement of their situation on the market resulted, first and foremost, from small possibilities of investment into design activities but also from insufficiently developed programs of design support or their small popularity among furniture manufacturers. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that even micro- and small-sized enterprises understand the necessity of investment in the development of new products and express opinion that these types of activities may contribute to the expansion of their activities. This fact was also confirmed by the analysis of advantages resulting from the application of design which showed that in this field the examined Polish furniture companies clearly recorded advantages associated with the improvement of competitiveness not only of individual products but also of the entire company. Production of well-designed articles increased, among others, possibilities of their sales making it possible for these enterprises to achieve higher profits from their activities.

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**Streszczenie:** *Ocena wpływu designu na działalność polskich przedsiębiorstw meblarskich.*  
Celem artykułu jest analiza korzyści wynikających z inwestowania we wzornictwo oraz ocena jego wpływu na działalność wybranych polskich przedsiębiorstw zajmujących się produkcją mebli. Przedstawiono wyniki badań przeprowadzonych wśród 75 przedsiębiorstw meblarskich zlokalizowanych na terenie Polski. Szczególna uwaga została zwrócona przede wszystkim na możliwość rozwoju i poprawy sytuacji przedsiębiorstwa na rynku dzięki stosowaniu wzornictwa.

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