

Working conditions in the woodworking industry in the era of globalization on the basis the Opole Region

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Abstract: Providing proper working conditions at work shall be fundamental issues for each enterprise that wishes to be successful both on domestic and international market. That particular question should be implemented into management strategy and be one of the priority goals of the company. It is also essentially important in the aspect of globalization of world leading economies, whose main goal is to neutralize diversified barriers. The aim of the article is to present working conditions in woodworking industry in the era of globalization.

Keywords: working conditions, globalization, woodworking industry

INTRODUCTION

The process of globalization can be simply described as tightening international correlation among companies, which in effect leads to generating stronger mutual dependencies. Moreover, it is assumed that thanks to that process the scope of big concerns activity is wider. According to that, the dynamic changes occurring in the world will be the outcome of the organizational, technological, social and economic progress, which indicates that globalization process has a significant effect on creating the image of each company that wishes to exist on international market, become competitive and influence the sustainable socio economic growth. Nowadays, Polish companies more often realize that their economic activity shall be based, not only on strong and transparent relations with their workers, suppliers or investors, but also strong bonds with customers, local community and government administration. It is especially important in certain branches of economy where performing on the market is difficult. One of such branch of economy is the woodworking industry, which is mostly characterized by improper realization of European standards (especially in the field of providing working conditions and environment protection policy) not to mention activities foreseen or desired by the local community.

Solving existing global problems, including those occurring in the field of improper working conditions, needs involvement of all parties – subjects (e.g. national companies, international concerns, national economies and international integration groups and economic organizations) which influence common activities in economic and social aspect. Improvement of working conditions shall be the fundamental aim of every company that wishes to function according to European standards, to be reckoned positively, and in consequence achieve good position on the market. Undertaking actions in that particular field is not complicated, although achieving the goal is not easy since the issue of working conditions is not one of priory goals of the company.

The article characterizes the quality of working conditions and present their current level in companies located in Opole Region on the basis of woodworking industry.

THE MEANING OF GLOBALIZATION

Globalization is a specific form of integration of world economy¹, its main aim is to eliminate diversified social, economic and political barriers among particular societies and economies as well as create global socio-economic system. Additionally, the important aim of globalization is creation of concurrent organizational, legal and institutional solutions. One of them is to determine common norms and rules in the field of working conditions e.g. management norms of occupational safety and health. Globalization of the market is most of all standardization of products and services at the international level, which main aims is increase of effectiveness. Moreover the process of globalization allows and at the same time opens the perspectives for international flow of means of production, flow of capital, products, services and people in the higher dimension than currently, which in consequences will be crucial economic development of societies taking part in the process of globalization. Therefore, it can be stated that globalization is the characteristic feature of each country belonging to European Union and majority of world economies.

According to researchers, the process of globalization has equally positive and negative aspects. Among negative features, we can distinguish process of dissolution of national states, increase of unemployment, migrations, disappearing of tradition and local customs. Whereas the positive aspects are the following: implementation and living according to commonly defined standards such as providing decent working conditions and innovation activities, as well as application of new technologies safe for environment and human.

LEVEL OF WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE WOODWORKING FACTORIES IN OPOLE REGION

Woodworking industry, apart from its untypical specification caused by various factors, both internal and external (localization, working conditions, obsolete machines and lack of foreign investments), still plays an important role in national economy. Its specific role derives from the fact that, it functions mainly thanks to natural, and renewal national base of timber (according to Central Statistical Office in Poland, state for the end of 2008, the area of woods was 9066 thousand hectares, it corresponds to forestation 29, which enables to acquire approximately 25-26 millions m³ of timber per year, while sustaining other woods functions not connected with the production). Owing to that, the woodworking industry does not require high demand for energy necessary to process timber. At the same time, this branch of industry has an opportunity for recycling and utilization of timber waste. These elements mainly determine the ecological character of woodworking industry, which in wider dimension has a significant meaning in the aspect of sustainable development.

The woodworking industry, especially furniture trade and timber processing companies for many years have been indicating relatively high dynamics of employment and sales production. In Opole Region the situation looks similarly, according to latest data in 2010 the indicators of mean employment as well as sales production radically surpass the average in the industry (table 1, table 2).

Table 1. Dynamics of production sale in the various branches of woodworking industry in Opole Silesia in the years 2009-2010

Specification	Industry	Woodworking industry	last year=100%
			Furniture production
2009	79,0	81,5	84,5

¹ W.Siwiński, Globalizacja gospodarki (w:) Wiek wielkich przemian, pod red. M. Dobroczyńskiego, A. Jasińskiej, Toruń 2001.

2010	86,8	114,9	107,0
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Source: self-study based on Central Statistical Office data

Table 2. Dynamics of average employment in selected branches of woodworking industry in Opole Silesia in the years 2009-2010

Specification	Industry	Woodworking industry	Furniture production
2009	95,7	99,7	92,0
2010	97,9	109,5	100,4

Source: self-study based on Central Statistical Office data

Unfortunately, although its significant role, woodworking industry still has financial problems, and is not able to self-finance its investments and modernization. Moreover, this branch can be characterized by relatively small interest of the foreign capital. Apart from financial problems in woodworking industry, organizational and technical problems have also appeared. They derive from number of health threats of workers and improper organization of work (it has significant meaning since most of the employed people works with hazardous machines) from both the employer side and employee. Until recently, it happened that working has been carried out using obsolete machine park, due to the lack of financial means, which mostly do not fulfill required safety norms. Moreover, workers not always pay enough attention to specialist trainings from the field of occupational safety. When Poland joined the European Union, the Union has imposed certain occupational norms and standards and the above-mentioned situation has improved. Unfortunately, these changes are mostly hindered by improper workers activities (according to survey concerning the quality of working conditions carried out in 2004 and 2009 among workers of the woodworking industry it was noted only 11% of growth in systematic usage of individual protection means – nowadays it is noted around 60%). These elements significantly influence the level of working conditions quality.

In Poland, like in other European countries, workers of timber processing and cabinet-makers are mentioned among 10 professions with high level of accident rate. The highest accident rate is noted while servicing circular sawing machines, shaping machines and milling machines. Main injuries caused during these accidents are hand injury, palm injury and injuries of abdominal cavity.

Table 3. Employment in hazardous conditions in the woodworking industry in Opole Province in the years 2001-2008

Specification	Total	Factors connected with the work environment	Factors connected with work arduousness	Mechanical factors
2001	1893	1194	139	580
2002	1515	918	47	550
2003	1759	975	53	731
2004	1751	990	80	681
2005	1810	1010	90	610
2006	1680	890	78	712
2007	1710	910	97	703
2008	1620	850	80	590

Source: self-study based on Z-10 reports for the years 2002-2009, Opole Statistical Office

Table 4. Employment in hazardous conditions in the woodworking industry in Opole Province in the years 2001-2008 (for 1000 employed)

Specification	Total	Factors connected with the work environment	Factors connected with work arduousness	Mechanical factors
2001	795	496	55	244
2002	706	408	16	283
2003	735	419	16	299
2004	740	420	25	295
2005	710	415	20	285
2006	695	395	14	286
2007	705	420	25	260
2008	700	405	21	274

Source: self-study based on Z-10 reports for the years 1993-2005, Opole Statistical Office

Table 3 and 4 contain data of workers employed in hazardous conditions in total and in specific groups. It can be derived from the analyzed material that the degree of workers' life threat resulting from interaction of noxious factors in the woodworking industry, has not been significantly changed and even now is maintaining on the high level (on the average 70-85% of workers have been employed in the norms not following the occupational and safety standards). The highest level of hazard derives from the hazardous factors in the work environment (for 1000 employed workers almost every other worker is under the influence of these factors). High level of health and life threats in the woodworking industry is also generated by the mechanical factors. It is an effect of using obsolete and exploited machines and tools. Due to high prices of modern facilities and machines, the entrepreneurs make use of their obsolete facilities, which is inappropriate and dangerous for workers and production process. However, the level of life threats caused by factors connected with work arduousness is far lower.

Table 5. The structure of workers exposed to occupational hazard occurring in selected companies from woodworking industry in Opole Province in the years 2001-2008

Number	Selected hazardous factors	Proportional participation of workers expose to a selected factor
1.	Noise	70,0%
2.	Wood dust	39,9%
3.	extremely low or extremely high temperature	25,9%
4.	Muscle overloading	14,4%
5.	Selected chemical substances	8,3%
6.	Mechanical vibrations	7,0%
7.	Forced body position	6,6%

Source: Self-study based on data acquired in occupational safety department of selected companies form the woodworking industry in Opole Province

The detailed analysis of data from all companies in Opole Silesia has allowed establishing the most important, from the statistical point of view, hazardous factors (table 5). On the basis of acquired data it can be assumed that the most important hazard in the woodworking industry in Opole Silesia, is the noise, which recursively exceed the permissible norms.

Moreover, the second hazard is the wood dust. However, in this case exceeding permissible norms is usually minimal. Additionally it causes great hazard to worker's health (especially hard wood – oak, beech, which has carcinogenic cells). In the surveyed companies, there has been noted also high level of exposure to extremely high or extremely low temperatures. It derives from the specific of this industry, where most of the works is being performed on the outside or in the free-opened room regardless of the season of the year (it concerns mostly the sawmill industry).

In surveyed companies, the number of work accidents has dropped twice in the given period (from 25 in 2001 up to 10 in 2009). However, it does not derive from improvement of working conditions, as it may be seemed, but mostly from the lower number of workers (in the given period that number fell more than 50%, from 653 to 320). Unfortunately, despite the fact that overall number of accidents has fallen, the woodworking industry is characterized by high gravity index (i.e. number of days for one accident) which during the analyzed time has risen more than ½ (from 45 to 85). Alarming phenomenon is also increased number of serious accidents (2001 – 1 accident, 2009- 4 accidents). In case of frequency index, the significant downfall has been observed (38 accidents in 2001, only 27 in 2009). It can be perceived as a positive change. However, the most frequent reason for work accidents is the human factor (more than 50% of all accidents – table6, of which predominant part is caused by inappropriate behavior and activity of workers, e.g. not employing protection facilities). Moreover, a significant number of all accidents are caused by inappropriate organizational and technical factors, which is a reflection of using obsolete machines. Additionally, disadvantageous reflection of work accidents is high level of sick leaves especially those longer ones (more than 29 days), it results in high economic and social costs, borne by particular companies and state.

Table 6. Reasons of work accidents in selected woodworking companies in Opole Silesia in the years 2001-2008

Specification	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Technical factor	14,3%	15,7%	19,9%	21,7%	22,5%	19,2%	18,8%	18,1%
Organizational factor	33,3%	26,6%	23,9%	22,5%	25,9%	25,3%	21,3%	23,2%
Human factor	52,4%	57,7%	56,2%	56,3%	51,6%	55,5%	59,9	58,7%

Source: Self-study based on data acquired in occupational safety department of selected companies from the woodworking industry in the Opole Province

CONCLUSION

Providing decent working conditions level shall be an integral part of company's policy that wishes to function according to established norms and standards in that field. It is important issue owing to which workers are feeling more secure and can better integrate with company policy and engaged into work, this in result influence their work efficacy. In consequence, companies are positively recognized by the surroundings and have greater chances to achieve success both on national and international markets. Therefore the issue of providing decent working conditions should be implemented into management strategy and be one of the priority goals of the company. It is essentially important in the aspect of globalization of world leading economies, whose main goal is to neutralize diversified barriers.

Unfortunately, in the analyzed sector of industry, in spite of significant technical and organizational progress in the investigated period of time, the level of working conditions is still very low, which in consequence negatively influence functioning of the company and disables the company to enter new markets. This situation is a consequence of difficult

financial condition of woodworking industry, poor work organization and lack of workers and employers involvement.

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Streszczenie: Zapewnienie odpowiedniego poziomu warunków pracy powinno być priorytetem dla każdego przedsiębiorstwa, które chce odnosić sukcesy zarówno na rynku krajowym, jak i zagranicznym. Kwestię tą należy wkomponować w strategię zarządzania i traktować na równi z pozostałymi priorytetowymi celami firmy. Jest to szczególnie ważne w aspekcie globalizacji światowych gospodarek, której celem jest znoszenie niejednorodnych barier w różnych dziedzinach. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie poziomu warunków pracy w zakładach przerobu drewna w dobie globalizacji.

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