A summary of a doctoral thesis
written under a scientific guidance of
dr hab. prof. UE Ewa Zeman-Miszewska
„Building a competitive position of non-public private schools”
mgr Marcin Marzec

A market can be described as an overall amount of the buy and sell transactions (the parties involved as well) and the conditions in which they take place. Concept of the market understood in such a way involves: the parties of the market, market processes of supply and demand and conditions of the processes (price, delivery and payment, place of the transaction, etc.).

The market of the higher educational services consists of public and non-public schools. The market involves buy and sell relations of the educational services taking place among the higher schools that represent the supply and the customers representing the demand. The market of the higher educational services is not classic. The higher educational services are in their major part public goods offered for free or partly for payment as part of the classical functions of the state. It is mostly controlled by the state. Non-public higher schools form a complimentary segment that fulfills a basic offer provided by the public schools. Higher schools get into miscellaneous relations with market operators of both a market (expertise, projects, research, etc.) as well as non-market character: Ministry of Science and Higher Education, economic entities, local governments, state administration, media and other higher schools.

The systematic transformation in the Polish economy, that started at the beginning of the 1990s led to some fundamental changes on the market of the educational services provided by the higher schools. The changes were considered both as far as the supply and demand were concerned. The official beginning of the changes on the market of the educational services was marked by the Law on Higher Education of 12 September 1990, which created a legal basis of establishing and functioning of the non-public higher schools. It followed the development of the higher education sector. At the very moment the state didn’t get the exclusive of creating and running the higher schools and there emerged non-public schools as well¹. The main goal of the higher school was the didactic-scientific activity. It

demanded from the newly founded entities to get on the market and to continue to exist. The higher schools that wanted not only to survive but also to develop had to take care of the proper relations with their interested parties, so the customers and other entities of closer and further environment.

At the time there was a vast demand on the higher education services. It was due to the raise of demand on different specialists. The development of new technologies, the market economy and the new entities operating according to the market mechanisms demanded new, professional knowledge of the employees. The employees were interested in acquiring new qualifications and the employers in hiring mobile, adjusted to the market employees. Thus the raise in the number of students and higher schools.

During the first period, the marketing of the higher education, high demand dynamics and uncontrolled raise of supply created altogether a blurred market. The perspectives and the direction of the changes of the educational services were also not transparent enough. It favoured the existence of not only high quality higher schools but also those of questionable standards. Together with the raise of the expectations of the employers concerning the knowledge, qualifications and vocational training of the employees also raised their expectations, as far as the level of the educational services were concerned. It was supported by the control and accreditation procedures. The demographic decline led to a remarkable selection of the higher schools and the increase of the competition. The schools started to compete for the candidates, external funds for the statutory objectives and research and for the scientific-didactic staff and in addition for the possibility of the international cooperation.

The conditions created a situation in which the higher schools should take an interest in gaining a long-term comparative advantage on the market. The advantage was set aside only for those schools that were able to enhance their scientific-didactic potential and offer a high quality educational and scientific-expert services and were able to use their resources on a high level. A crucial element of the advantage was the ability to communicate and to establish partnership with the interested parties in a way that brought the benefits for all the parties of the relation. The creation of the comparative advantage required the use of above mentioned resources that were to guarantee an adequate level of the educational service quality, but also the use of symbolic and emotional elements like: associations with the higher

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school, opinions about it, associated attitudes and values. It implied creating by the higher schools the brand based on the positive feelings, emotions and facts. The higher schools were to shape their positive image⁴.

The active market behavior of the non-public higher schools were more and more important due to the fact of the process of commercialization of the educational services, growing competition, and most of all the gradual decrease of the potential students. The problems of functioning of the non-public higher schools on the market were not described in the context of assessment of their ability to adjust to the changing market conditions. It seems that thirty years of their functioning is enough to assess their way of functioning.

Main objectives of the presented doctoral thesis were:

1. The identification of the factors influencing the interest of the potential students in studying at the non-public higher schools.
2. The identification of the instruments used by the non-public higher schools in the process of creating their comparative position.
3. The assessment of the accuracy of the conducted activities of the non-public higher schools involving the creation of the comparative position.

The instrumental objective was to assess the adjustment activities of the non-public higher schools in the process of creating the comparative position.

An attempt was made to verify the following hypothesis:

1. The main instruments used by the non-public higher schools in the process of creating their comparative position on the market are: brand and quality of the educational services. The importance of using the price strategies is decreasing.
2. The non-public higher schools organize promotional actions as far as their educational offer is concerned. The communication does not reach many of the potential students.
3. The key factor of choosing the education in the non-public higher schools by the potential students is mostly the failure in getting into the public schools. Further the factors of choosing the education in the non-public higher schools are: the course of study, quality and the convenient localization.

The theoretic part of the thesis was based on the studies of Polish and foreign literature. The statistic data from the Central Statistical Office, legal acts and information that could be find on the websites were also used. The main goal of the secondary research was to

organize the information regarding the creation of the comparative position by the non-public higher schools.

The empirical part of the thesis consisted of exploration research. The subjects of the research were the non-public higher schools (the interviewees were the chancellors, deans, administrative workers, etc.) and also potential students – high-school students and public and non-public schools students.

The objective scope of the research concerned the ways and instruments used by the non-public higher schools in the process of creating their comparative position. The geographical scope encompassed the territory of Poland. The direct research was conducted between February and October 2015. From 290 non-public higher schools that were asked to take part in the research 62 were interested. In the research there also took part high-school graduates (200), students of the non-public higher schools (200), as well as the students from the public higher schools (200). To conduct the research a questionnaire was prepared. The objective of the research was to recognize the ways and instruments used by the non-public higher schools in the process of creating their comparative position. The results also enabled the diagnosis and assessment of the abilities of the adjustment activities of the non-public higher schools to the situation on the educational services market. To obtain the information a postal-mail survey was used among the representatives of the non-public higher schools and direct survey among other interviewees.

Increasing awareness of the value of education, the growth of demand for educated workers and the intensification of the competition on the labor market, caused a dynamic development of the higher education schools, which started operating as market entities. A low price of the educational offer, though considered vital for the customers, did not guarantee the growth of demand for particular courses/majors of the studies. It became apparent that this growth was subjected to a combination of many factors e.g.: the price of the offer, the promotion of the services, localization of the school, the quality of the provided services, the reputation of the school, the profile of the studies, the character of the school, the academic position of the scientific and senior staff, the attitude of the interested parties towards the higher school, the conditions of studying, etc. The difficulties in recruiting future students mostly resulted from the maladjustment of the educational offer to the needs of the labor market. At the same time, it could be observed that the result of the creation and dynamic development of the number of entities providing educational services was the lack of transparency of the market during the first few years of systemic changes.
The process of Poland's integration with the European Union structures made the emerging Polish market of the educational services included in the European higher education market. This led to an intensification of competition between both the national as well as the foreign universities. The higher schools, especially the non-public ones, faced the necessity of adopting a strategy ensuring their high competitive position.

Observation of the market of educational services of the higher schools in this period allowed to diagnose its following features: deep information asymmetry between the market participants and an unequal treatment by the state of the entities within the management of the public good, which is education. For the non-public schools, the main source of funding was the payment of recipients of these services, whereas in the public school sector these were the state funds. The consequence of this fact was their concentration on the low-capital and cost-intensive educational services, as well as the dominance of price competition within the competitive strategies of the non-public higher schools.

The paper attempts to assess the ability of the higher schools to adapt to the changing conditions in the non-public schools segment. To this end, the opinions about the importance of various factors when choosing a place to study of potential students (high schools graduates) and students currently studying at public and non-public higher education schools were compared, as well as the opinions of the representatives of the higher schools.

The most important conclusions from the research are as follows:

- the main instruments used by the non-public higher schools in the process of creating their comparative position on the market are: the brand and the quality of the educational services. The importance of using the price strategies is decreasing;

- the non-public higher schools organize promotional actions as far as their educational offer is concerned. The communication does not reach many of the potential students;

- the key factor of choosing the education in the non-public higher schools by the potential students is mostly the failure in getting into the public schools. Further the factors of choosing the education in the non-public higher schools are: the course of study, quality and the convenient localization.

The ways of building the market position used so far are insufficient in relation to such barriers of their operation as: demographic decline, financial difficulties resulting from under-financing from the state budget, stereotypical perception of the non-public higher schools as inferior to the public ones and the lack of support in equalizing the conditions of public and non-public higher education. The solution that could ease the severity of these barriers is the consolidation of the non-public higher schools. Consolidation measures enable
the reduction of part of the operating costs and the establishment of facilities with a strong scientific, research and didactic base. Another activity that could improve the situation of non-public schools is among others the acquisition of the foreign students, especially from Ukraine, Belarus and China.

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