

THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT OF FAMILY ENTERPRISES IN SLOVAKIA - PERCEPTION OF EXTERNAL BARRIERS

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Abstract: The primary objective of the paper is to examine the perception of external barriers in the conditions of family business in Slovakia, also in the classification according to selected distinctive features. Mathematical and statistical methods of descriptive and inductive statistics were used in data processing. To investigate the perception of external barriers, we developed a scaling instrument, the reliability of which was verified by Cronbach's alpha. In this paper, we present two research questions and three hypotheses, which we verify using a one-way ANOVA test. The results suggest that family businesses in Slovakia do not perceive the existence of external barriers at a high level. It can be concluded that the nature of family businesses according to the selected criteria does not have a significant impact on the perception of the existence of selected external barriers in the business environment. Barriers are perceived by family businesses in the same way regardless of the criteria according to which they have been categorised.

Key words: family entrepreneurship, business environment, external barriers to entrepreneurship, competitiveness, Slovakia

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Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play an important role in the Slovak economy (Kliestik et al., 2020). According to Haviernikova et al. (2019) brings a number of positives to the economic and social environment. Gavurová et al. (2020) for example, it states, that they generate a high share of Slovakia's gross domestic product (GDP) and contribute significantly to total employment. They are engaged in activities that are less interesting for large companies and thus fill gaps in the market (Vokoun, 2018). They become important partners of large companies, which are beginning to transfer more and more of their activities to other business entities (Slaba, 2016). According to Vrbka (2020), it is more advantageous for them to

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simplify their organization and rather to rent some services and buy some components for their products from smaller companies. Small and medium-sized enterprises thus create an important subcontractor network for large companies (Cepel et al., 2020). Belas et al. (2020a) states that small and medium-sized enterprises are stabilizing elements of economic society. They are better able to respond to changes in demand. They provide a substantial number of job opportunities (Belas et al., 2020b, 2020c; Mura, 2020; Stacho et al., 2021; Yousuf et al., 2021). According to Rowland and Suler (2019) they can better communicate with their customers and adapt to their current needs. They do not have such a complex organizational structure, so they are much more flexible (Kasych and Vochozka, 2017).

All the above-mentioned positive aspects of small and medium-sized enterprises are constantly pointed out by the professional public (Psarska et al., 2019). In this context, the obstacles that these companies have to face are surfacing. Compared to large corporations, they have to deal with several disadvantages, such as lack of capital or lower competitiveness (Horak, 2020). Due to these obstacles, their positive role in international and regional economies is again emphasized in order to motivate governments to create sufficient tools to support them. Awareness is very broad in this respect and attention is paid to small and medium-sized enterprises even at the lowest levels of state entities (Kasych et al., 2020, Kepler, 2021; Ingaldi and Ulewicz 2020).

Vochozka and Psarska (2016) say, that a relatively significant part (around 80 %) of SMEs is made up of family businesses. Family businesses bring positive economic effects to the entire Slovak economy and are also key actors in the business environment. Kasych and Vochozka (2018) adds, that the dynamic growth of family businesses requires the creation of appropriate conditions for entrepreneurship and targeted support from the state. However, some evidence points to the existence of external barriers in the business environment in Slovakia (SBA, 2020; Habánik et al., 2016; Soltes and Gavurova, 2014). In fact, the business environment and public support are the keys to developing and increasing the competitiveness of family businesses (Petrach and Vochozka, 2016). The main objective of the present paper is to investigate the perception of the existence of external barriers by family businesses based on a primary survey of the Slovak family businesses. The sub-objective is to identify significant differences between the perception of barriers by individual legal forms of enterprises, size categories and generations in the management of family businesses.

Literature Review

Business entities are an integral part of any economy (Bacik et al., 2019; Draskovic et al., 2017; Ivanová, 2017) and family businesses form an important part of them (Petrú and Havlíček, 2016). At the same time, the global importance of family businesses is unquestionable (Arregle et al., 2017; Daspit et al., 2017; Hussain et al., 2021a, Hussain et al., 2021b). The family business is also a subject of interest to

researchers in sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, law, management and other scientific disciplines (Podhorska et al., 2020) Ferramosca and Ghio (2018) confirm that a full understanding of family business requires a combination of multifaceted knowledge related to economic, business, financial, organizational, psychological, entrepreneurial, managerial and strategic areas (Domanižova et al., 2020). There are also specific interesting topics, such as the perspective of strategic management (Daspit et al., 2017), the impact of strategic activities and market orientation on family business performance (Dvorský et al., 2020; Vlachy, 2019), investments of family businesses abroad through subsidiaries (Vokoun, 2017) or strategic cooperation with business partners in line with cultural and institutional distance (Del Bosco and Bettinelli, 2020; Draskovic et al., 2019; Draskovic et al., 2020), the phenomenon of socio-emotional wealth (Hernandez-Perlines et al., 2019), the family (human) capital that characterizes these enterprises and influences their operation and resilience (Mzid et al., 2019). However, it is still an emerging discipline that brings new trends (Benavides-Velasco et al., 2013) and new challenges (Carr et al., 2016). In fact, family businesses are key actors in the business environment (Duh et al., 2009; Mera and Bermeo, 2017). It is also true that a quality entrepreneurship environment greatly affects the performance of the business sector and is a basic prerequisite for business development (Belas et al. 2018; Commander and Svejnar, 2011). It reflects the current state of the country's economy and, simultaneously, its multiplier effects accelerate the economic growth of countries (Bilan et al. 2017; Korcsmáros et al., 2017). Hamilton and Webster (2018) identify business environment factors classified into the following categories: political, economic and financial, socio-cultural, technological, legal and environmental, stating that they are interdependent. Khazaei and Azizi (2020) state that business entities need a business environment for their growth in which there are simple conditions for doing business, paying taxes, obtaining credit, registering assets, enforcing contracts and debts, and trading across borders. The activities of business entities are affected by external barriers of the business environment, but business entities cannot influence the existence of these barriers. The most frequent external barriers in the business environment include bureaucracy and corruption, high tax and levy burdens, incomprehensible and ever-changing legislation for entrepreneurs, low law enforceability, lack of capital and insufficient support for entrepreneurs (Olah et al. 2021; Amoah et al., 2021; Bažó et al., 2019). According to Worthington and Britton (2006), governments and government institutions have an important role to play in improving the quality and competitiveness of a country's business environment. Also, Khazaei (2020) and Čabinová et al. (2021) revealed a positive relationship between the competitiveness of the business environment and the financial performance of enterprises. According to Písař and Kupec (2019), Michálková et al. (2020), a favourable business environment enables the implementation of innovations, which are the driving force of every business and create a competitive advantage in business (Kubičková and Benešová, 2020; Ślusarczyk et al., 2020). The innovation potential leading to the competitiveness of

SMEs is accelerated, for example, by the use of social networks (Písař and Tomášková, 2020; Vaníčková and Szczepańska-Woszczyna, 2020).

Methodology

The main objective is to investigate the perception of external barriers in the conditions of the family business in Slovakia and to identify possible distinctive features of enterprises on the perception of the existence of external barriers. Based on this objective, the following research questions (RQ) and hypotheses (H) are formulated:

-RQ1: What is the perception of external barriers of the studied family businesses?

-RQ2: How do the selected distinctive features of the enterprises influence their perception of external barriers?

-H1: There is a relationship between the perception of external barriers by family businesses and their legal form.

-H2: There is a relationship between the perception of external barriers by family businesses and their nature concerning the size category of the business.

-H3: There is a relationship between the perception of external barriers by family businesses and the generation that runs the business.

The fulfilment of the objective is achieved through scientific methods of primary data analysis followed by synthesis into relevant findings. The method of comparison was used to evaluate the common features in the perception of external barriers for family businesses. By systematizing the data, a database was created to prove common and different features in the perception of external barriers by family businesses and also to document the identified weaknesses. Cronbach's alpha (due to the scalar nature of the research tool) was used to examine the internal consistency of the new instrument, while a one-way ANOVA test was applied to test the hypotheses.

Research Sample

The paper is supported by primary research of a quantitative nature using a questionnaire as a tool. The primary survey was conducted in the first half of 2020 through online enquiry. During the implementation of the survey in contacting the respondents, we proceeded to multiple direct outreaches in the form of targeted online inquiries through e-mail communication, as well as face-to-face interviews. The object of investigation was family businesses. A total of 480 respondents who were known to us to be family businesses were contacted. A total of 119 questionnaires were completed, representing a response rate of almost 25%. At the same time, because 3 respondents indicated 'no' in the initial question (whether they were running a family business), we excluded them from the whole survey. Based on the selection, it can be stated that 116 companies (24%), which can be classified as family-owned, took part in the survey. The distinctive features of the enterprises in the context of the studied parameters are recorded in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Distinctive feature (variable)	Value	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency (%)
The legal form of business entity	plc	5	4
	ltd.	91	78
	general partnership	1	1
	sole proprietorship	13	11
	European company	1	1
	holding	5	4
Business size category	microbusiness	58	50
	small business	27	23
	medium-sized business	25	22
	large business	6	5
Generations	first	32	28
	second	78	67
	third	6	5
Total		116	100

Note: Business size category – microbusiness 0-9, small business 10-49, medium-sized business 50-249, and large business over 250 employees

Scale of External Barriers to the Business Environment

To quantify the perception of external barriers, an instrument was developed to measure the perception of external barriers by family businesses. It contains 10 barriers, with businesses reporting their perception (existence) of each barrier. The constructed instrument consists of dichotomous scales. The businesses therefore express the existence or non-existence of a chosen barrier. The research tool as well as the basic statistical parameters of each barrier (mean, standard deviation (St. dev.) and Cronbach's alpha) are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Basic statistical parameters of the research tool

External barriers*	Mean	St. dev.	Cronbach's alpha**
1. Low state funding	0.47	0.50	0.727
2. Insufficient government incentives	0.24	0.43	0.723
3. Difficulties in obtaining external financial resources for implementation	0.13	0.34	0.749
4. Problems with obtaining euro fund or grant financial resources	0.28	0.45	0.720
5. Changes in the European Union and Slovak regulations and standards	0.26	0.44	0.727
6. Legal aspects, frequent changes in legislation and high administrative burden	0.46	0.50	0.718
7. High tax-levy burden	0.57	0.50	0.721

8. Low law enforceability	0.46	0.50	0.709
9. Corruption	0.41	0.49	0.719
10. Information and institutional barriers	0.13	0.34	0.735

Note: * dichotomous scale used: perception of the barrier existence = 1, not perceiving the barrier existence = 0; ** The overall Cronbach's alpha for the research tool is 0.746

As this is a new research tool, it was necessary to verify its reliability. Cronbach's alpha was used to investigate internal consistency. The overall Cronbach's alpha is 0.746, which can be interpreted as an acceptable reliability value. In terms of the individual statements (Table 2), it can be concluded that by eliminating barrier no.3 (Difficulties in obtaining external financial resources for implementation), a higher level of reliability could be obtained. On the other hand, it should be noted that this increase is very low and the removal of this barrier would not have a significant effect on increasing the reliability of the research tool developed. In terms of standard deviation, it can be stated that enterprises responded most consistently at barriers 3 and 10. These barriers also had the lowest mean value. The instrument is generally considered acceptable.

Results and Discussion

This section focuses on answering the research questions and verifying the hypotheses to fulfil the main objectives of the paper.

RQ1: What are the perceptions of external barriers of the family businesses under study?

To quantify the perception of external barriers, we created a scaling tool that included 10 external barriers. The interval of the resulting measured values can range from 0 to 10 points. A score of 0 represents a situation where the family business did not perceive any of the barriers under study. A score of 10 represents a situation where the business perceived all the barriers mentioned. In general, it can be stated that the closer the value is to 10, the more barrier of the business environment in Slovakia is perceived from the point of view of the surveyed family businesses.

The mean value is 3.40 points with a standard error of the mean of 0.23. The standard deviation is 2.50 points. The modus and median are 5 and 3 points respectively. The minimum value represented 0 points and the maximum value represented 9. It can be concluded that the business environment in Slovakia is perceived by family entrepreneurs as less barrier. As can be seen from the nature of the variables, the values can range from 0 to 1. The individual mean values of all the examined barriers are presented in the following Figure 1.

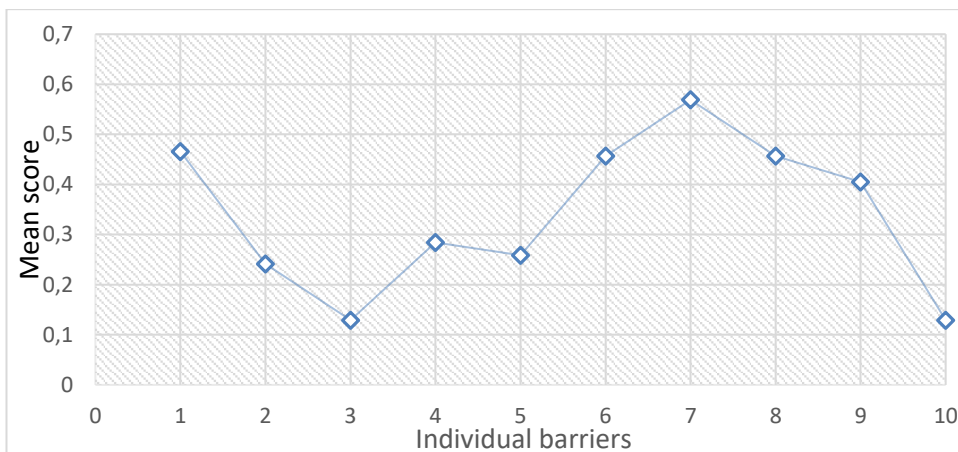


Figure 1: Average values of individual barriers

Note: 1. Low state funding; 2. Insufficient government incentives; 3. Difficulties in obtaining external financial resources for implementation – bank loans; 4. Problems with obtaining euro fund or grant financial resources; 5. Changes in the European Union and Slovak regulations and standards; 6. Legal aspects, frequent changes in legislation and high administrative burden; 7. High tax-levy burden; 8. Low law enforceability; 9. Corruption; 10. Information and institutional barriers.

Figure 1 shows the measured mean values of the perceived existence of each barrier. Except for one barrier (7 High tax-levy burden), all of them are at a below-average level of perceived existence. It can be concluded that barrier 7 can be considered as the biggest barrier. The results of the respondents' views on the existence of the barrier in question correspond with the results presented in the analysis carried out by the Association of Industrial Unions (APV, 2019), which states that the tax-levy burden (mainly labour and income) has limited the competitiveness of enterprises in recent years. Also, Slovakia has long had the highest tax burden on employers from Eastern Europe. According to the Paying Taxes study (PWC, 2020), Slovakia has a tax-levy burden on entrepreneurs of up to 49.7%, which ranks it 6th among the countries of the European Union (EU) with the highest-burden on entrepreneurs (the EU average is 38.2%). The tax-levy burden has also been criticised for a long time in all reports on the state of SMEs, which are prepared annually by the Slovak Business Agency (SBA, 2018a; 2019). Based on this, it is possible to conclude that not only family businesses, but all business entities perceive the tax-levy burden as the most significant barrier in the Slovak business environment. Thus, it is necessary to work towards reducing the tax-levy burden on business entities and thus enable them to accelerate their growth and competitiveness. The low law enforceability and the existence of corruption as external barriers, which were often perceived by the surveyed businesses, create a long-term discriminatory effect for all business entities in Slovakia, including family businesses. At the same time, they may have a negative impact on the interest of foreign investors to enter the Slovak market. As Moresová

and Sedliačiková (2018) point out, a high degree of corruption is closely related to low law enforceability. Respondents' views also correspond with Slovakia's ranking in the Corruption Perceptions Index compiled by Transparency International (2020). According to this index, Slovakia ranks 60th out of 179 countries assessed and has long been perceived as a country with a high existence of corruption.

Low state funding was also a very frequently mentioned barrier. Its occurrence may also be based on the lack of a definition of the family business and the resulting minimal funding by the government and its institutions for these entities. Due to the lack of a definition, it is not possible to measure the contribution of these entities to the Slovak economy, and therefore it is also not possible to provide them with targeted funding. Legal aspects, frequent changes in legislation and high administrative burden are also perceived by respondents as long-term obstacle to their functioning. This finding corresponds with the results of analyses carried out by various institutions dealing with the assessment of the business environment in Slovakia. In this context, the SBA study (2019) showed that one of the most frequent obstacles to entrepreneurship is the administrative burden, in particular the monthly completion of reports for insurance companies related to the implementation of levy obligations. Within the EU countries, Slovakia is also perceived as a country with a high existence of gold-plating. A very important step in favour of the Slovak entrepreneurs, including family businesses, is the adoption of laws and measures always by a certain date and also eGovernment.

RQ2: How do the selected distinctive features of the enterprises influence their perception of external barriers?

For better illustration, the mean values of the individual variables under study are presented in the following Table 3.

Table 3. Perception of external barriers by family businesses

Distinctive feature (variable)	Value	Mean score
The legal form of business entity	plc	2.40
	Ltd.	3.53
	general partnership	4.00
	Sole proprietorship	2.85
	European company	2.00
	holding	3.60
Business size category	microbusiness	3.10
	small business	3.56
	medium-sized business	3.96
	large business	3.17
Generations	first	3.19
	second	3.59
	third	2.00

The results presented in Table 3 show that the perception of external barriers by family businesses is very similar and ranges from 2 to 4 points, which represents a below-average level of the research tool. To investigate the significance more intensively, we developed the above-mentioned hypotheses H1, H2, H3, the verification of which was performed on the basis of a one-way ANOVA test. The key results of this test are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Selected results of one-way ANOVA test

Hypothesis	F-value	F-crit	F value - Fcrit	α	p-value	α p-value
H1	0.405336	2.296868	F < Fcrit	0.05	0.8442	$\alpha < p$ -value
H2	0.738314	2.685643	F < Fcrit	0.05	0.5313	$\alpha < p$ -value
H3	1.289166	3.076574	F < Fcrit	0.05	0.2795	$\alpha < p$ -value

Based on the results presented in Table 4, all the stated hypotheses can be rejected. Concerning the results presented in Table 3 and Table 4, it can be concluded that there is no significant relationship between the legal forms of the family business, size or generation in the management of the family business and the perception of external barriers by the subject businesses categorised in subcategories according to these criteria. These results are confirmed by the findings of several surveys specifically focused on the barriers to the functioning of the family business in Slovakia, e.g., SBA (2018a; 2018b; 2019), Moresová and Sedliačiková (2018), Strážovská et al. (2008). Their evidence suggests that the main causes of stagnation of businesses, including family ones, in Slovakia, include high tax and levy burdens, corruption, clientelism, incomprehensible legislation, frequent changes in legislation and high administrative burdens, insufficient support for start-ups as well as lack of capital. It can be concluded that the impact of external barriers as such affects all businesses and is therefore universal in nature.

Summary

Since the competitiveness of family businesses is fundamentally influenced by external factors of the business environment, the aim of the article was to examine the perception of the existence of barriers in the business environment by family businesses. Based on this research, it is clear that the business environment shows similar features in most of the observed parameters for all groups of family businesses. Family businesses perceived barriers in the same way regardless of the criteria according to which they were categorised, and the following conclusions can be drawn. There is no relationship between the perception of external barriers by family businesses and their legal form, size structure, or the generation that manages the family business. The absence of relationships led to the rejection of all three established hypotheses. In this context, it can be concluded that the impact of external barriers as such affects all businesses and is therefore universal in nature.

At the same time, this finding supports the claim that family businesses are an important part of the entrepreneurial entities and perceive barriers in the business environment in the same way as other business entities, independently of the fact that they are family-owned. The most frequently mentioned barriers (high tax and levy burdens, complicated law enforceability and dysfunctional courts, excessive administrative burden or complicated and rapidly changing legislation, unavailability of external financial resources) are among the long-standing external barriers to the growth of the enterprises in question, as well as non-family businesses. The removal of these barriers and the creation of a quality business environment are important determinants of ensuring prosperity and increasing the competitiveness not only of family businesses, but of all business entities in Slovakia. Several limitations and restrictions can be found in this research, which should be taken into account in future research. It is important to note that the sample size is acceptable, but not representative. At the same time, the research was carried out in only one country, and in any international comparison, the specification of the individual external barriers in countries should also be taken into account. In terms of the reliability of the research tool, Cronbach's alpha was used, which also has some limitations. Therefore, it is possible to discuss the estimated reliability, and it is appropriate to perform further measurements with the research tool to confirm it.

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OTOCZENIE BIZNESOWE PRZEDSIĘBIORSTW RODZINNYCH NA SŁOWACJI - POSTRZEGANIE BARIER ZEWNĘTRZNYCH

Streszczenie: Podstawowym celem artykułu jest zbadanie postrzegania barier zewnętrznych w warunkach firm rodzinnych na Słowacji, także w klasyfikacji według wybranych cech wyróżniających. W przetwarzaniu danych wykorzystano matematyczne i statystyczne metody statystyki opisowej i indukcyjnej. W celu zbadania percepcji barier zewnętrznych opracowaliśmy narzędzie skalujące, którego wiarygodność zweryfikowano metodą alfa Cronbacha. W artykule przedstawiamy dwa pytania badawcze i trzy hipotezy, które weryfikujemy za pomocą jednokierunkowego testu ANOVA. Wyniki sugerują, że firmy rodzinne na Słowacji nie dostrzegają istnienia barier zewnętrznych na wysokim poziomie. Można stwierdzić, że charakter firm rodzinnych według wybranych kryteriów nie ma istotnego wpływu na postrzeganie istnienia wybranych barier zewnętrznych w otoczeniu biznesowym. Bariery są jednakowo postrzegane przez firmy rodzinne, niezależnie od kryteriów, według których zostały skategoryzowane.

Słowa kluczowe: przedsiębiorczość rodzinna, otoczenie biznesowe, zewnętrzne bariery przedsiębiorczości, konkurencyjność, Słowacja

斯洛伐克家族企业的商业环境——外部障碍的认知

摘要：本文的主要目的是检查斯洛伐克家族企业条件中外部障碍的感知，以及根据选定的显著特征进行分类的情况。在数据处理中使用了描述性和归纳性统计的数学和统计方法。为了调查对外部障碍的感知，我们开发了一种标度工具，其可靠性已通过 Cronbach's alpha 验证。在本文中，我们提出了两个研究问题和三个假设，我们使用单向方差分析验证了这些假设。结果表明，斯洛伐克的家族企业并未在高水平上感知外部障碍的存在。可以得出结论，根据所选标准，家族企业的性质对商业环境中所选外部障碍存在的感知没有显著影响。无论根据何种标准对障碍进行分类，家族企业都会以同样的方式看待障碍。

关键词：家族创业, 商业环境, 创业的外部障碍, 竞争力, 斯洛伐克