

## INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS RESEARCH IN POLAND: CRITICAL REVIEW OF SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

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**ABSTRACT.** The principal aim of this review article is to provide an account on the structure, topical and methodical diversity of international business research in Poland in the period 1990-2014. To fulfil this objective, a structured literature review combining qualitative and quantitative elements was carried out. Specifically, qualitative content analysis enabled identifying specific research questions within pre-defined research areas of international business. The review allows assessing the relative importance of specific research streams within international business research in Poland, also highlighting their evolution. It turns out that macro- and micro-level internationalisation, followed by international firm competitiveness and international entrepreneurship have consistently dominated among research areas, while their relative share has changed during the analysed period. Quantitative methods, with a clear focus on descriptive statistics, have prevailed in extant research. Apart from a suggested enhanced focus of performance and competitiveness implications of international business activities, interrelationships between macro-, meso- and micro-level variables should be explored to a larger extent. It is arguably the first comprehensive, structured review of Polish contributions to international business scholarship, showing its current state and underrepresented topics in current research.

**Keywords:** International Business, Literature Review, Poland

**JEL classification:** F14, F20, F21, F23, M16

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## 1. Introduction

The fundamental political and economic shift in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in 1989 opened both the economies and firms of the region to the global economy. Simultaneously, the discipline of international business and economics started an entirely new chapter after decades of development under the previous socio-economic and political system. Many scholars from the region, both originating from economics and management, took the opportunity to follow the rapid globalisation on the macro- and micro-economic level, by providing conceptual and empirical contributions.

Focusing on Poland as the largest CEE economy, the country has aimed at integrating itself into the world economy by increasing its share of world trade and foreign direct investment (Gorynia et al. 2006). This progressing internationalisation has frequently been regarded as one of the main tenets of the transformation of a formerly closed system towards a market-based economy. The new economic policy assumed that the country's reforms and international growth required liberalized prices and market regimes, privatisation of most state-owned enterprises, redirection of its trade from the former Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) trading bloc towards the EU, and opening of a bulk of its industries to foreign investment (Gorynia et al. 2003). Moreover, the increasing opening of the foreign economic policy, like in other post-communist countries of the CEE region, involved the introduction of convertibility of the national currency, more liberal customs tariffs, removal of non-tariff barriers to trade, de-monopolization of foreign trade, as well as the introduction of the principle of economic freedom for international business transactions (Gorynia 2002). These changes were further complemented by Poland's accession to international organisations such as the OECD (1996) and especially the European Union (2004).

Overall, the openness of Poland to international business can be synthetically measured by its share of global exports and foreign direct investment (FDI) stocks. In fact, between 1990 and 2010 Poland progressed from the rank of 38th exporter in value terms to the 27th position, while its accumulated value share in the world outward FDI stocks rose from 0,005% to 0,181% (Gorynia 2012). At the same time, the current economic positioning of Poland, like in the case of some

other CEE countries, remains ambiguous. Some international institutions consider the country still as an emerging market (see e.g. MSCI 2013), while others already classify it as an advanced economy (see e.g. UNCTAD 2013). Following Uhlenbruck and De Castro's (2000) claim that economies under transition provide fascinating grounds for refining existing management theories, international business scholarship in the CEE region could potentially contribute to the development of the discipline and its particular topical areas. Thus, the main objective of the present paper is to provide an account on the development of international business research in Poland in 1990-2014. In order to fulfil this aim, the results of a structured review of empirical research from the discipline of international business in Poland are to be presented. The article is organised as follows. First, the research methods used to review the literature are explained. Second, the findings of the review are presented in both quantitative and qualitative terms, including an overview of the content structure of international business scholarship in Poland and its evolution, the identification of key research areas and the addressed research questions, as well as the identification of key research methods and publication outlets. In the final section, indications for further development of the discipline are formulated.

## **2. Materials and methods**

### ***2.1 Assumptions and sample***

For the purpose of the delimitation of the review scope, it is assumed that international business concerns "all commercial transactions - private or governmental - between two or more countries" (Daniels & Radebaugh 2001, p. 3-4). However, as Gorynia (2012) argues, international economic activity can be analysed from the perspective of both economics and management, whereby economic explanations are mostly preoccupied with macro-level research questions, while micro-level analyses have predominantly belonged to management science. Thus, in line with the concept of Macharzina (2009, p. 41), the discipline under study is defined broadly as all organisational decision and design problems connected with cross-border operations of an internationally dispersed network of entities.

In order to precise the scope of "international business scholarship in Poland", delimitation occurred along two dimensions: (1) research contributions refer to Polish firms abroad or foreign firms in Poland; (2) author affiliation is with a Polish institution.

While this assumption certainly constitutes a simplification, it clearly confines the scope of the analysed discipline in terms of both empirical objects and authorship, therefore not only providing focused insights on Polish research context, but also on the scope and level of advancement of related studies in Poland. In accordance with the above definition of the discipline, studies related to Polish economy, meso-systems (such as regions or sectors of economy) and firms were taken into account. In order to collect data, keyword search was ran in major journal databases (EBSCO, ScienceDirect, Emerald, Proquest), as well as a Polish database of printed journals (BazEkon). Furthermore, desk research for non-indexed sources, including books, monographs, conference proceedings, etc. aimed at complementing journal articles. Research used dedicated keywords relative to one of the pre-defined categories shown in Figure 1. In consequence, as sample of 215 contributions was attained for the purpose of the present review.



**Figure 1. Research categories in international business**

Source: authors' work

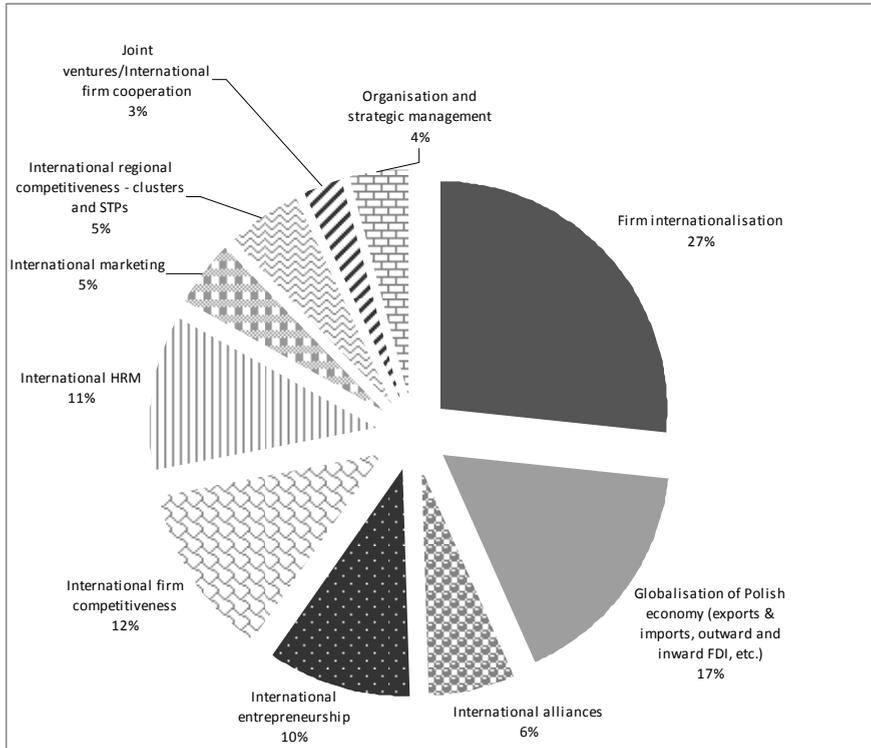
## ***2.2. Review methodology***

Previous research in international business and management has recurred to different review methods, allowing to take a critical perspective on what has been achieved so far and to identify further areas for theoretical development. Given the topical diversity of the reviewed body of empirical research, an initial qualitative analysis (Seuring & Gold 2012) of the gathered papers from the pre-defined research categories (Figure 1) was conducted, which involved the coding of specific research problems, methods and key findings. In order to ensure coding consistency within research areas, responsibility for a given research area was assigned to one researcher at a time. Moreover, a quantitative analysis (Schuh & Rossmann 2009) was performed to reflect the relevance of each area, specific research problems, as well as their evolution. The combination of both qualitative, content-related analysis with the quantitative assessment of the structure of extant research contents and methods was meant to enable the formulation of several conclusions and directions for further research, presented at the end of the paper.

## **3. Findings of the literature review**

### ***3.1. Structure of research areas***

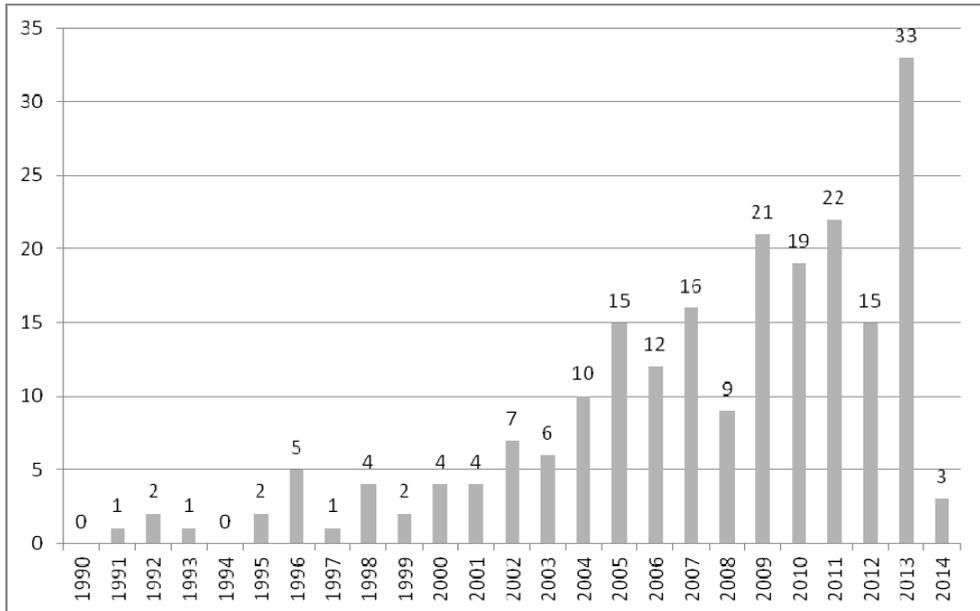
Taking into account all research areas in the sample of 215 results, it can be stated that the largest number of publications of Polish authors in years 1990-2014 (27%) is focused on the area of firm internationalisation (Figure 2). The globalisation of the Polish economy (which addresses similar questions to the firm internationalisation, yet on the macroeconomic level) accounts for 17%, while international firm competitiveness for 12%, international human resource management (HRM) for 11% and International Entrepreneurship for 10% of all research areas taken into consideration. This reflects the current position of the Polish economy after the end of the transition process. The increasing internationalisation of both the economy and firms raises relevant research issues related not only to the basic forms of cross-border operations, but to a rising extent also related to the management of cross-border operations, which bears numerous repercussions for distinct functional areas of firm management, as well as inter-firm relationships in an international context.



**Figure 2. Relative relevance of research areas**

Source: authors' calculations

Taking the number of publications in years 1990-2014 into consideration (see Figure 3), it can be observed that the largest number of articles was published in 2013 (33 articles). Analysing the entire period, a positive growing trend in the publication output within international business research in Poland (and on Poland) can be observed, which is another fact clearly correlated with the progressing internationalisation of the empirical objects under study. Particularly since 2004, scholars published more articles annually in different publication outlets. This may be the result of an intensified involvement of firms (both domestic and foreign) in international business, especially after the accession and subsequent integration of Poland in the European Union. Another explanatory factor arguably pertains to a facilitated access of researchers to different databases, which gradually became more widespread among Polish research institutions.

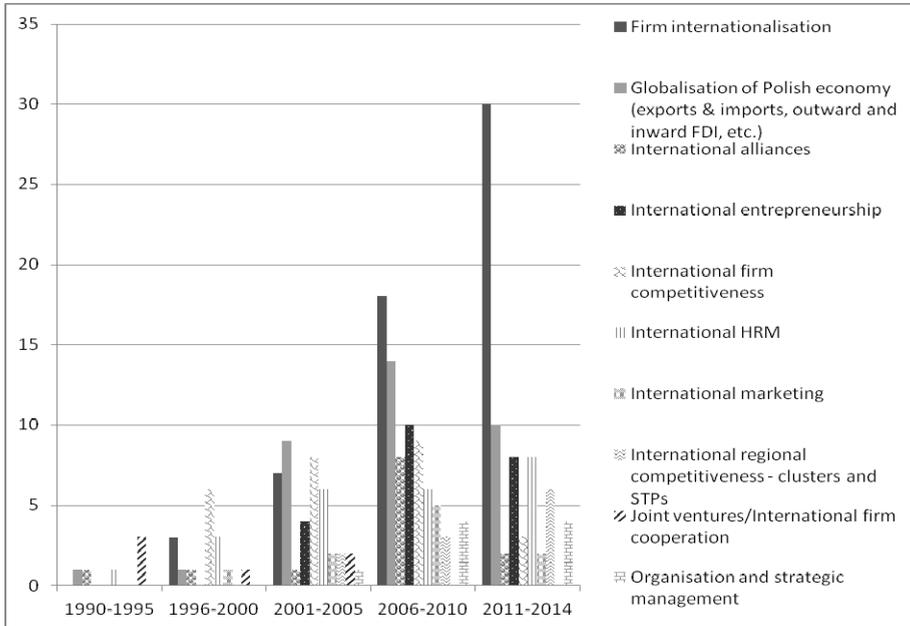


**Figure 3. Evolution of the number of publications**

Source: authors' calculations

Analysing the evolution of the research area structure (Figure 4) in different periods: 1990-1995, 1996-2000, 2001-2005, 2006-2010, 2011-2014 the authors predominantly focused on firm internationalisation, globalisation of the Polish economy, as well as on international entrepreneurship, particularly in the periods of 2001-2005, 2006-2010 and 2011-2014. In the years 1990-1995, shortly after the initiation of the transition process, there were merely 6 articles published in the areas of international alliances, globalisation of the Polish economy, international HRM, joint-ventures or other forms of international firm cooperation. While it should be taken also into account that it is difficult to gather data on the results of publications in the said period, since many of the can be accessed in paper form, it can be argued that this tendency reflects the aforementioned trend concerning the objects under study. More specifically, an interesting change in the structure of research areas can be observed, namely the increasing attention of scholars paid to outward or active internationalisation of the economy and firms, as opposed to passive internationalisation. This again reflects the progress of the empirical objects, which is followed by scholarship. Inter-firm cooperation

was covered in the 1990s, yet it gradually lost on relevance in favour of the issues related to international firm competitiveness and management-related problems from such functional areas as marketing or human resource management.



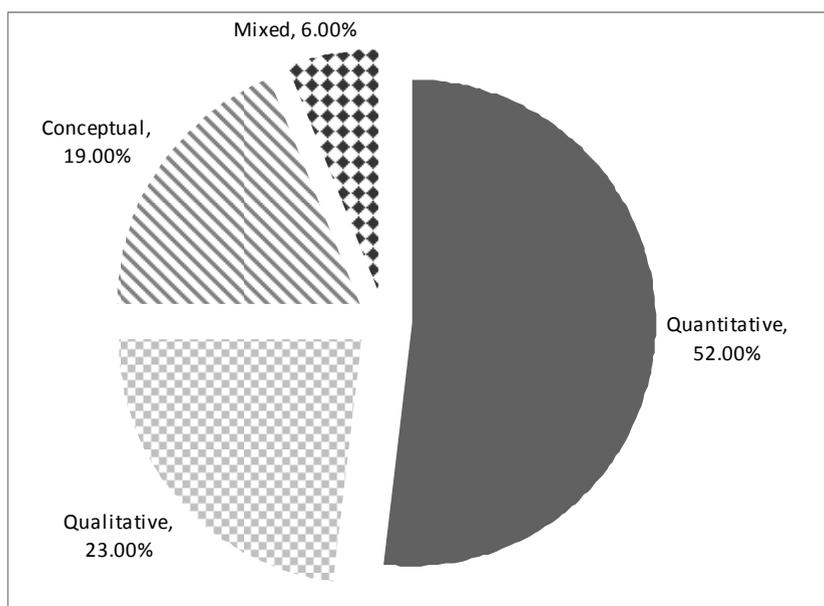
**Figure 4. Structural evolution of research areas**

Source: authors' calculations

### ***3.2. Research methods and publication outlets***

While analysing research methods used by Polish authors in the period of 1990-2014 we can observe that in more than 50% of all articles (52%) quantitative methods were used, with the predominance of descriptive statistics, such as means and frequencies. Meanwhile, primary data were gathered predominantly by the use of surveys. The use of more advanced econometric methods, such as regression analyses (15 articles), cluster analyses (2 articles), or other modelling techniques (2 articles), still remains strikingly limited. In this case, mostly secondary data were analysed. Qualitative methods were used in only 23% of contributions, with a visible predominance of descriptive case studies, based on both primary and secondary data,

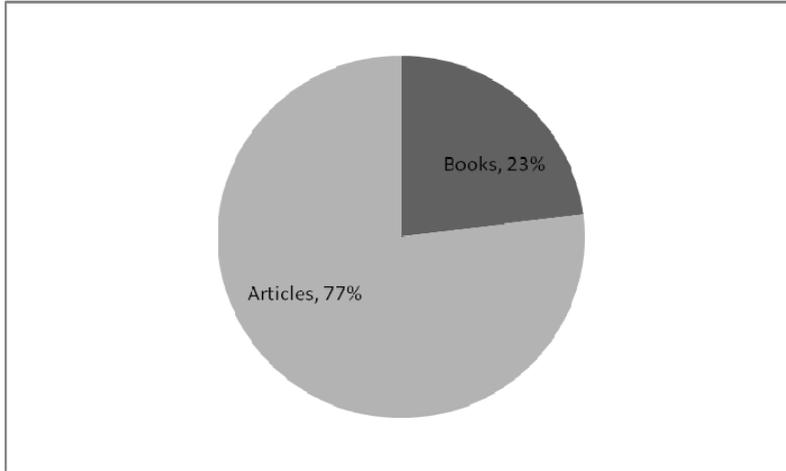
and hardly any attempts at theory building by using grounded theory or qualitative content analysis. Regarding the share of theoretical, review or purely conceptual contributions, these could be found in 19% of articles or books. Mixed-method designs (i.e. combining qualitative and quantitative methods) were used in only 6% of articles (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5. Research methods**

Source: authors' calculations

Taking into consideration the publication outlets (Figure 6), the results of the present review indicate that 77% of the publications were scientific articles, while 23% books and book chapters or conference proceedings. The most crucial journal used by Polish authors was *Gospodarka Narodowa* – with a total count of 19 articles in the sample of 215 results in the entire period of 1990-2014. The second most important journal used by authors was *Journal of Economics and Management* with 18 articles published in selected period (see Table 1). The weight of particular outlets in the sample can nevertheless be affected by the presence of special issues related to international business (as was the case of the *Journal of Economics and Management*), thus skewing the actual distribution of publications.



**Figure 6. Publication Outlets Books vs. Journals**

Source: authors' calculations

**Table 1 - Most important journals used by Polish authors concerning IB research in years 1990-2014**

Name of the journal	No. of articles
Gospodarka Narodowa	19
Journal of Economics and Management	18
Poznań University of Economics Review	6
Ekonomista	6
Eastern European Economics	5

Source: authors' calculations

### ***3.3. Research topics addressed***

Within the conducted qualitative analysis of scientific articles and books, the authors identified and coded detailed research topics within each broader research area, in accordance with the content of contributions. In each research area, research topics can be distinguished that are underrepresented and those which are very widespread amongst Polish scholars. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2 below. Due to volume constraints, the ensuing discussion does not include all reviewed contributions. The quoted publications merely serve as an exemplification of the observed trends.

**Table 2 - Overview of specific research topics within key research area**

<b>Research area</b>	<b>Research topic</b>	<b># of articles</b>
<b>Joint Ventures / International firm organisation</b>	Joint Ventures motives	6
	Inter-organisational relationships	4
<b>International alliances</b>	Alliance portfolio/Alliance network	2
	Comparative analysis	2
	Technological creation	2
	Supply chain management	2
	Clusters	1
	Technology and knowledge transfer	4
<b>International regional competitiveness, clusters and STPs</b>	Institutional environment	4
	R&D market	1
	Cluster cooperation	1
	Tenants analysis	1
	Career management	7
<b>International HRM</b>	Trends in HRM	5
	HRM Overview	4
	Culture	2
	Work performance	2
	Innovation in HRM	1
	Downsizing	1
	Women perspective	1
	Leadership	1
	Leadership	1
<b>Research area</b>	<b>Research topic</b>	<b># of articles</b>
<b>Firm internationalisation</b>	Internationalisation paths	14
	FDI motives	14
	FDI location	12
	Entry modes	11
	Internationalisation performance	11
	Firm competitiveness	9
	Internationalisation degree	8
	FDI barriers	6
	Resource determinants	5
<b>International firm competitiveness</b>	Internationalisation degree	8
	Competitive potential	8
	Competitive strategy	6
	Competitive position	6
	Resources	5
	Gap to foreign firms	4
	EU accession	4
	Effect of foreign entry	4
	Economic policy	3
<b>International entrepreneurship</b>	Internationalisation paths	13
	Internationalisation degree	7
	Born global	6
	Entry modes	6

Research area	Research topic	# of articles
	Internationalisation motives	5
	Resource determinants	4
	Competitive potential	4
	Competitive strategy	3
	Performance	2
<b>Globalisation of the economy</b>	FDI location structure	10
	FDI structure by sectors	9
	Export/import development	8
	OFDI/ IFDI ratio development	7
	Export/FDI support measures	6
	FDI externalities	5
	Economic policy	4
	Host-country determinants	4
	Psychic distance	1

Source: own work.

Within the research area related to joint ventures and international firm organisation, there were only 6 articles and all concerned joint ventures motives (Andruszkiewicz & Gronski & van de Ven 2001; Gołębiowska-Tataj & Klonowski 2009; Kostecki, Nowakowski, & Walkowicz 1996; Łuczak 2001; Miciński 1992; Uchman 1991). The second research area was international alliances with 13 articles. The most essential research topic related to inter-organisational relationships (4 articles). Authors focused mainly on the relationship between firms, as well as between firms and other organizations (Guzek 1992), taking into account different aspects: cultural context (Golonka 2013), as well as risk management (Szczepański & Światowiec-Szczepańska 2012), or sources of competitive advantage (Rudawska 2010). The clearly underrepresented topics included notably clusters (Godlewska & Weiss 2007), supply chain management (Kisperska-Moron & Świerczek 2006; De Haan, Kisperska-Moron & Płaczek 2007), comparative studies (Kirby et al. 1996; Lascu et al. 2006), strategic alliances in distribution channels (Mehta et al. 2006), technological cooperation (Arogyaswamy & Kozioł 2005; Puślecki 2009) and alliance portfolio/network management (Puślecki 2009). Thus, there is an urgent need for papers related to technological cooperation, such as strategic technology alliances (STA), different modes of alliances used by Polish firms, alliance portfolios in different sectors, as well as papers focused on alliance management (Puślecki 2010, 2009).

As far as the international regional competitiveness area is concerned, clusters and science and technology parks (STP) research

area most articles were theoretical or conceptual. Researchers focused mainly on the institutional environment (e.g. Dziura 2013; Krzak 2011; Marciniak & Guliński 2002; Piątyśzek-Pych 2013), which enables technology and knowledge transfer (e.g. Capello, Olechnicka & Gorzelak 2013; Guliński, Marciniak & Wolniewicz 2002; Jankowska & Pietrzykowski 2013). In this respect, an apparent gap related to cluster cooperation and STP's tenant analysis. In the aforementioned databases, the authors identified merely one article that comprehensively described the structure of tenants of technology parks in Poland and in the world (Marciniak 2007). Research conducted by B. Marciniak requires further development, for since 2007 numerous new institutions of this type there were established. The authors also recognise the need to provide studies concerning STP performance measurement, since both public and private-owned STPs gained on importance in Poland after 2004. The monitoring of performance of technology parks is not simple due to the variety of the legal forms and financing schemes the parks feature. It is normal for a park that is public-funded that generating profit is not its principal aim. However, for private parks to achieve their statutory objectives, including enhancing entrepreneurship and knowledge transfer, it is a prerequisite to generate profit. A good benchmark in this respect are the articles of foreign authors, like Fukugawa (2006), Colombo & Delmastro (2002), Wallsten (2004), Lindelöf & Löfsten (2002).

Researchers belonging to International HRM focused predominantly on career management and new trends in HRM. Many articles in this area were conceived with the use of qualitative studies based on case studies. There appears to be a deficit of scientific papers concerning leadership or women perspective in HRM. On the contrary, the study shows that the most popular research area in Poland is firm internationalisation. In this field quantitative research prevails, in relation to internationalisation paths, FDI motives (e.g. Gorynia, Nowak & Wolniak 2007; Karpińska-Mizelińska & Smuga 2007), FDI locations (Gorynia et al. 2013), entry modes (e.g. Gołębiowski & Witek-Hajduk 2007; Klimek 2011), FDI effectiveness evaluation (e.g. Jaworek & Szóstek 2008) or internationalisation performance (e.g. Doryń 2011). There are relatively few articles regarding FDI barriers and resource determinants (Jaworek 2008). It appears that with several exceptions (e.g. Gorynia et al. 2014; Szałucka 2008; Szałucka & Szóstek 2013), the link between

internationalisation and the performance in foreign markets, as well as MNE performance, has not been strongly accentuated in extant research. Moreover, with several exceptions there have been few attempts at using more advanced qualitative methods to formulate hypotheses for future research. On the other hand, hypotheses have been tested by recurring to descriptive statistics rather than statistical modelling.

Researchers active in the field of international firm competitiveness mainly devoted attention to the variable of internationalisation degree, internationalisation paths and different dimensions of firm competitiveness, by using predominantly descriptive statistics (e.g. Gorynia & Jankowska 2013). It is surprising that while political factors have been studied frequently in the context of Poland's transformation, there is an apparent lack of articles exploring how economic policy shapes firm competitiveness. The penultimate research area is international entrepreneurship, focused on the internationalisation of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), in which common topics are again internationalisation paths, entry modes and internationalisation degree (see. e.g. Wach 2012). One can also note a recent surge of studies devoted to born globals (e.g. Jarosiński 2013), however these still remain at a relatively early, descriptive stage. Therefore, further theorising on the distinctiveness of Polish born globals as compared to more mature contexts is required. Similar to the overall research stream on internationalisation, the most underrepresented topics also feature firm performance the relationship between international entrepreneurship and firm competitiveness. Last but not least, the more macro-oriented research stream on the globalisation of Polish economy focused *inter alia* on FDI location (e.g. Obłój & Wąsowska 2012), FDI sectoral structure and outward to inward FDI ratio development as a sign of economic development (e.g. Gorynia, Nowak & Wolniak 2008). However, there is an apparent deficit of studies related to the influence of economic policy on the internationalisation of the economy, including specific analyses of the system of support measure target at exports and FDI.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The present structured literature review is one of the rare comprehensive attempts at analysing the current scope and coverage of

specific research areas in Polish international business scholarship. The major contribution of the paper lies in adopting a systematic approach to reviewing extant studies, which allows demonstrating the relevance of particular research streams, the dominance of specific research questions and, more importantly, the relative paucity of empirical evidence in other aspects which thus constitute promising paths for further theoretical development and empirical efforts.

Obviously, this paper is burdened with a number of limitations. The sample size still requires further enhancement in order to be more representative and avoid the bias in the structure of publication outlets. Moreover, the coding of specific categories within the said research areas, while based on uniform rules among authors, is still exposed to the problem of subjectivism, which can potentially make the allocation of a specific code arbitrary, despite the best efforts of researchers. Also, going into breadth obviously sacrifices depth, which one could criticise in the present review.

However, this first attempt at diagnosing the state of international business research in Poland already does include specific indications as to the areas for future research, as discussed above. Following further progress of Poland's involvement in the international economy, research should move - both on the level of content and research methods - from a rather exploratory to a more normative and theory-enhancing state. The still emerging character of certain phenomena, such as technology parks and clusters, or the international expansion of different types of firms on the other hand, constitute fertile grounds for theoretical development. This, however, requires going beyond the mere motives and forms of different kinds of international operations and focusing more on management and organisational phenomena, which are still visibly underrepresented. Furthermore, the interrelationships between macro-, meso- and micro-level variables, such as the influence of economic policy on a national or industry level on firm strategies, constitutes an interesting direction for further studies.

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