

## ABSTRACT

The objective of this doctoral thesis was *to identify the areas and internal as well as external circumstances that influence the competitiveness of SMEs on the liquid fuels market in Poland*. Reaching that objective, allowed to formulate conclusions regarding the structure of the liquid fuels market in Poland, and particularly the unique conditions of functioning and obstacles the SMEs face during their course of operation.

The liquid fuels market is, and will be controlled by large-scale entities—the oil companies—which are its unquestionable leaders, whereas the SMEs ways of development and effective engaging in the competition with the big players are limited due to scarce funds and the obstacles SMEs have to overcome. Such relationship between the oil companies and other entities present on the liquid fuels market in Poland force the small- and medium-size enterprises to either follow indifferently the trends set by the leaders or join the development processes inspired by the oil companies. At the same time, it has been confirmed that the process and product technological innovations are the main drive of competitiveness.

The thesis presents an innovative system of preventing the liquid fuels from mixing during the loading and unloading procedures, implementation of which should benefit everyone in the supply chain, i.e. the fuel producers, the logistics operators, the wholesalers and carriers as well as the end customers—the petrol stations and individual buyers. The aforementioned profits concern, first of all, the issue of substantial increase of the ability to control, drive, and provide the quality in the process of fuel transport.

Achieving all said and possible benefits requires to undertake a series of actions in the area of monitoring the fuel market and eliminating the obstacles obstructing its proper functioning and preventing the enterprises, especially the small and medium ones, from development. Therefore, as the author concludes, further research should cover:

- 1) the means of disseminating and diffusing the innovative technical solutions;
- 2) the dynamics and the scope of development of SMEs operating on the liquid fuels market.

Moreover, the influence of legislative solutions and the State's activity, concerning respectively the provision of sufficient quality of fuels and the attempts to control the grey market, should be researched as well.

Using proper methods and research tools, the author to reached the objectives set in this thesis. The research process was divided into two stages, the first of which included interview surveys. The aim of performed surveys was to analyse the influence the external environment of the liquid fuels market in Poland on the SMEs competitiveness. The interview sessions were held amongst the selected companies actively operating on the liquid fuels market in Poland. For the purpose of this project, the author has conducted a research on the quantity and the quality of the fuel, and basing on the results, created a case study of the application of an innovative solution tailored for the Polish liquid fuel sector.

The subject literature as well as empirical studies show that the main research hypothesis—*that the competitiveness of SMEs operating on the liquid fuels market depends on the strategy adopted by their innovation-oriented competitors ready to follow the trends set by the leaders on the fuel market*—is highly probable.

The thesis is divided into the following parts: the introduction, four chapters, and the summary. In the first chapter, the author presents the theory of the competitiveness of the SME sector subjects, focusing on the subjects that operate on the liquid fuels market and the influence of innovation on their competitiveness, position and the ability to gain the competitive advantage. In the second chapter, the in-depth characteristics of the economic entities creating the liquid fuel market in Poland as well as the identification of the dependencies between them and the most important areas of influence are presented. In the third chapter, the author presents a case study of a self-designed innovative solution implemented in the LOTOS Group. In the fourth chapter, the author presents the research results and their analysis as well as the assessment of the influence they exert on the competitiveness and the innovation of SMEs operating on the liquid fuel market in Poland.