

THE IMAGE OF A PUBLIC ORGANISATION AS AN ATTRACTIVE EMPLOYER – THE EXAMPLE OF THE POLISH ARMED FORCES

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Purpose: The main objective of the research conducted was to evaluate the image of the military as an employer in Poland.

Design/methodology/approach: The authors have identified shortcomings in the research results pertaining to the image of public organisations as employers. They have particularly noted the inadequacy of reports on the quality of the armed forces' image as an employer. In light of these observations, the authors have conducted a new research study to explore this issue in greater depth. With the use of the CATI and CAWI techniques, it was possible to identify the co-occurrence of psychological, economic and functional benefits resulting from possible entry into professional service, as well as to indicate the level of trust towards the military.

Findings: The survey revealed that the military enjoys a generally positive image in Poland and a positive image as an employer. This translates into considering the military as an attractive employer and a trustworthy institution. From a social perspective, the attractiveness of the military is fuelled primarily by the military's vital role in the state in terms of maintaining the security of citizens, the certainty of employment and the attractiveness of the pension system. The possibility of early retirement is especially appreciated by those who perceive the situation in the local labour market as difficult.

Research limitations/implications: The research was conducted among Poles, what means that only external image of the army as an employer was analysed. In the future studies it is worth to conduct research among employees, what gives an opportunity to compare those two perceptions (internal and external).

Practical implications: Revealing the results of the research connected with the image of a public employer – the image of the army, gives a possibility to plan and organize activities toward shaping the better image of the army, implement changes in the employer branding process, as well as understanding the opinion of the generations on the labor market.

Originality/value: The paper reveals the image of the army as an employer in the public opinion of Poles.

Keywords: Employer branding, public organisation, armed forces.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

The public sector is often known as bureaucratic, characterised by stalemate, red tape, and inertia (Osborne, Brown, 2011). This fact can negatively affect the perception of it in terms of being an attractive employer. Given that in many states, the public sector is a major employer in terms of its share of total employment (e.g. between 20% and 30% in the majority of EU states), the problem of the attractiveness of a public organisation's image in attracting talent is all the more pressing. It must therefore come as a surprise that there is a rather limited amount of literature in this field, not to mention the rare studies on a specific public employer such as the armed forces of individual countries. Consequently, in order to fill this gap, the main objective of the research presented in this article was to determine the image of the military as an employer in Poland. The research analysed both the attractiveness of the military and the general image of the institution. Additionally, answers were sought to the following questions: *What factors might determine the decision to join the military?* and *Is the military perceived as a trustworthy public institution?* Providing answers to the research questions so posed, including the achievement of the research objective, entailed conducting empirical research.

The study presented herein is structured as follows. The first part addresses the functioning of public organisations in the labour market. It presents the role and importance of a public organisation in its capacity as an employer. The second part deals specifically with the issue of the employer's image as an important prerequisite for attracting and retaining competent and talented employees. The next part of the article identifies the factors of the attractiveness of an organisation as an employer. The next part of the paper discusses the results of the empirical research. This part begins with a presentation of the research methodology and characterisation of the research sample. The article is based on the results of two survey rounds: the first survey was carried out in February and March 2022 (CATI, N = 537; The research was realised by a team composed of Marzena Piotrowska-Trybull, Ph.D., Prof. Stanisław Sirko, Ph.D., under the task included in the task and financing plan of scientific activity of the War Studies University for the year 2021, entitled "Efficiency of acquiring candidates for military service in the Polish Armed Forces in the light of contemporary management concepts and methods", task no. II.2.3.), and the other one in June 2022 (CAWI, N = 384; The research was carried out by Dorota Kurek, Ph.D., under the research task included in the task and financing plan of scientific activity of the War Studies University for the year 2021, entitled "Methods and techniques of shaping the image of employers", task no. II.2.1.). This section includes conclusions along with limitations and directions for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The public sector as an employer

The role of the public sector is not just about providing socially useful goods. “Public sector labour markets have attracted over the decades a great deal of attention from economists” (Gregory, Borland, 1999, p. 3574). Economists have emphasised the impact of public sector employment on the national (Assaad, 1997) and local levels (Faggio, Overman, 2014). The discussion concerning the volume of employment in the public sector revolves around a broader issue relating to the role of the state in shaping the socio-economic reality of individual economies. Proponents of the state's proactive role in the economy acknowledge the possibility of greater relative employment in the public sector and see nothing wrong with the state being a direct employer for many people (in administration, state-owned enterprises and other public sector units). In contrast, advocates of far-reaching economic liberalism and the minimal role played by the state in a country's socio-economic life will consider the high proportion of employment in the public sector to be dysfunctional. In general, in so-called market economies with the dominance of private ownership, it may be as low as a few per cent. The size of public sector employment varies significantly among different OECD countries; for example, Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden) report the highest levels of general government employment, reaching close to 30% of total employment. On the contrary, some developed Asian countries like Japan and South Korea report the lowest levels among OECD countries, with general government employment making up only 6% of total employment in Japan and 8% in Korea (OECD, 2021).

However, regardless of the size of the public sector in a country's overall economy (measured in various ways, e.g. the ratio of government expenditures to the total output of the economy or the number of public sector employees as a percentage of the total workforce), considering a public organisation as an employer also involves considering the qualitative characteristics of the people employed in the public sector. Indeed, public organisations compete in the market for the best possible employees. Many factors determine whether a person opts for public or private sector employment. Salary is one of the more frequently mentioned determinants, though it is not the only factor.

Clearly, the intense competition to secure a workforce between the public and the private sector is dependent on the level of unemployment prevailing in a particular area at a particular time. The lower the unemployment rate, the more intense this competition becomes. Undoubtedly, it is more difficult for the public sector to attract skilled and qualified employees in that situation (if only for the reason that in conditions of low unemployment, employees value employment stability less, knowing that they can find another job quite easily). Such conditions have been present in Poland in recent years. Among other European Union (EU) states, Poland has been characterised by a very low level of unemployment. According to

data published by the Statistical Office of the European Union, the unemployment rate in Poland in 2021 was 3.4% (comparable to Malta, only the Czech Republic reached a lower unemployment rate of 2.8%) (Eurostat, 2023). Similar figures were recorded in 2022, e.g. in November 2022, the unemployment rate in the euro area amounted to 6.5% and in the EU countries to 6%. The lowest levels of unemployment were in the Czech Republic (2.2%), and Germany (3.1%). It can therefore be observed that, despite the economic slowdown in Poland, unemployment remains at a very low level - especially considering Poland's more than 30-year history of a free market economy (which began with the changes in 1989). Thus, the intense rivalry to recruit employees that has occurred in recent years has come as a shock to a number of employers representing both the private sector (e.g. the need to raise salaries) and the public sector (e.g. no candidates for a given job position). This makes the ability to create an image of an attractive employer all the more important. When it comes to the Polish armed forces, this issue is all the more important, as the war in Ukraine (the country being Poland's direct neighbour) raises numerous fears and concerns about professional military service as a potentially dangerous career prospect. This factor also reinforces the need to professionally manage the image of the military as an attractive employer.

2.2. Employer image

A key non-material resource (Szczygielska, Kurek, 2021), having a significant impact on an organisation's ability to attract competent employees, reduce turnover rates and consequently increase retention rates is the organisation's attractiveness as an employer. Every organisation, regardless of whether it belongs to the private or public sector, pays attention to how it is perceived by its stakeholders, including efforts aimed at protecting its image. As far as the public sector is concerned, where the military belongs, the organisation strives to achieve success, viewed not so much in the category of the financial result it has achieved but in the context of assessing the usefulness of its activities for society (Piotrowska-Trybull, Jabłońska-Wołoszyn, 2020). As emphasised by Kotas (2014), the key to public organisations' success is to satisfy individual stakeholder groups, which depends, among other things, on the efficiency of the communication system, which, on the one hand, enables the collection of information on stakeholders' needs and expectations, as well as the evaluation of previous activities, and, on the other hand, serves to provide information on: changes introduced in response to customers' needs, procedures that guarantee the quality of the service, and the outcome of work. When addressing the concept of employer image, it is important to understand its nature, diversity and perspectives in order to correctly interpret the potential benefits of taking proactive measures and the consequences of failing to do so.

One category closely related to the issue of the image of public organisations is the public goods they provide. As regards the military – national defence is being provided on the basis of universal accessibility. Individual enjoyment of this good does not prevent other members of society from accessing it. As a matter of principle, the production and consumption of public

goods are regulated in such a way so as to ensure that regardless of their different purchasing power, individuals have access to them, as it is an expression of social inclusion and serves the interests of the public (Matysiak, Brol, 2010; Kożuch, 2004).

The image of public organisations is one of the ingredients used to gain public acceptance of their activities and a positive assessment of their usefulness. Creating a favourable image of an organisation such as the military in the public's consciousness results in increased trust towards this organisation and translates into longer-lasting relations with the community and, consequently, leads to the higher efficiency of security activities. That is why there is a need for systematic and long-term actions in the sphere of image building due to its "ephemeral" nature, as it is not given to an organisation once and for all but is constructed on an ongoing basis in relations with stakeholders. The key question is: In what direction and in what way should the image be changed so that it meets social expectations?

The term image is derived from the Latin word *imago* meaning reflection, likeness, or image. It is commonly defined as an opinion, a view, or an image that appears in people's minds about another person, organisation or thing. In turn, literature offers definitions derived from psychology, management theory and marketing. Boulding emphasises that image is the result of all of one's past experiences (1956), while Miller, Galanter and Pribram point out that it can be freely shaped by providing an individual with relevant, carefully selected information, which allows an image to be formed in accordance with expectations (1980). It is therefore considered that the image is both of a subjective and active nature, as it undergoes changes under the influence of a new pool of information, while the value of the incoming information depends on the credibility of the source, also assessed subjectively.

The multifaceted character of an image is evident in its varieties. The image of an organisation, perceived as an image existing in stakeholders' opinion, can be analysed in relation to the views of all stakeholders – the so-called actual image, and internal stakeholders (employees) – the so-called mirror image. The said image can also be classified using the criterion of the reality of the image, in which case the desired image (the way in which the organisation would like to be perceived) and the target image (representing a compromise between the desired image and the organisation's actual potential, limited by competition, the company's reputation, as well as financial and personal resources) can be indicated (Budzyński, 2002).

Bearing in mind the scope of ongoing research concerning image, increasing attention is being paid by researchers to the issue of employer branding (EB). Ambler and Barrow (1996) are credited with coining the term employer branding. They define EB as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company" (Ambler, Barrow, 1996, p. 187). Furthermore, the authors draw attention to the importance of communication and organisational culture throughout the process. Minchington's work shows a different approach to this definition since, according to the researcher, EB is the image of an organisation perceived as an amazing working

environment (2005). Barrow and Mosley, on the other hand, describe EB as an emotional relationship between employer and employee built on communicated information about the company's personality as an employer of choice and shaped through the use of tools and techniques to develop employee engagement and motivation (2005). Meanwhile, Burke emphasises that EB is simply the manner in which stakeholders evaluate the promise made by an employer (2007). The significance of a bilateral agreement between an organisation and employees is captured in Rosethorn's (2016) definition, demonstrating at the same time that it is the quality of this agreement that determines the willingness to work for the organisation. A different way of defining EB can be seen in the work of Sullivan (2004). Indeed, the author points out that it is a long-term strategy aimed at managing the awareness and perception of both employees and job applicants, aiming at retention, recruitment and productivity management. Its main objective is to portray the organisation as a good place to work. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), on the other hand, point out that EB is the process of building a unique corporate identity easily identifiable by the public.

In conclusion, EB is both a way in which an organisation is perceived by its stakeholders and the result and, at the same time, the objective of a long-term strategy of the organisation, which seeks to communicate its unique identity to the public, as well as to point out the promise that the organisation is able to fulfil when engaging with an employee. The overall activities undertaken as part of employer branding highlight the importance of the issue analysed mainly in terms of the perception of the organisation, i.e. how it is perceived on the market.

When exploring the issue of employer branding, researchers are increasingly considering the impact of these activities on recruitment effectiveness (Kumari, Dutta, Bhagat, 2020; Wilden, Gudergan, Lings, 2010), improvement of communication within the organisation (Ćorić et al., 2022), development of the GHRM concept (Muisyo et al., 2023), implementation and development of CSR concepts (Szegedi, Németh, Körtvési, 2023), employee commitment (Ashariana, 2022; Agarwal, Arya, Bhasin, 2021; Staniec, Kalińska-Kula, 2021; Hanin, 2013), employee performance (Ha, Luan, Khoa, 2021), the link between EB and the development of virtual reality (Najam et al., 2022), the importance of digital EB (Kurek, 2021) and employee retention (Thalgaspitiya, 2020; Bayarsaikhan, Sain-Od, 2017; Gilani and Cunningham, 2017). The analysis also addresses the impact of internal communication on creating internal EB (Vokić, Verčič, Ćorić, 2023), the use of gamification (Kaoud, ElBolok, 2023) and PR in shaping the image of the employer (Olariu, 2017) or managing the employer's reputation to enhance its attractiveness (Šontaitė-Petkevičienė, 2022).

The image of organisations operating within the business landscape, with a particular focus on the IT industry, has been widely explored (Suruchi et al., 2017; Kucherov, Zamulin, 2016). On the other hand, as regards public institutions, the research focuses, among others, on the image of universities (Ryńca, Miško, 2016; Dejnaka, 2012; Alves, Raposo, 2010; Palacio, Meneses, Perez, 2002), as well as public service/public administration institutions (Weske et al., 2019; Korac, Saliterer, Weigand, 2018; Kotas, 2014; Wæraas, Byrkjeflot, 2012).

Meanwhile, the issue of the military's image has been analysed by scholars from India (Kaur, Shah, 2019; Kaur, Pingle, 2018), the Philippines (Sabado, 2016), Belgium (Lievens, 2007; Lievens et al., 2005), Sweden (Jorlöv, Venngren, 2014), and Poland (Kurek, 2022; Klein, 2019), among others. The image of the military in the role of the employer can be analysed when considering two perspectives: internal and external. Central to both are the factors that make the military an attractive employer for both current employees (both civilian employees and professional soldiers) and potential candidates to serve and work in the military (Piotrowska-Trybull, 2018; Piotrowska-Trybull, Sirko, 2023).

2.3. Factors determining an organisation's attractiveness as an employer – distinctive features of the attractiveness of public organisations

The attractiveness of an organisation in its capacity as an employer can be conceptualised differently by employees, job applicants and the organisation itself. According to Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005), from an employee's perspective, attractiveness is the result of the benefits the employee attributes to the job. Conversely, from an organisational perspective, it is captured as the power an organisation has to motivate a candidate to consider a particular employer brand as an entity of value in the labour market (Bakanauskiene, Bendaravičienė, Barkauskė, 2017). In turn, if we turn our attention to job candidates, attractiveness can be defined by them as the degree of interest in a given organisation resulting from potential job benefits (Ray, 2006). Attractiveness can therefore be considered the strength of an organisation both in attracting job applicants and retaining employees. There is an increasing awareness of the importance of the process of building the so-called psychological contract between the organisation and employees. The change in mindset regarding the establishment of relationships with employees – moving away from the employment contract towards relationship building, including emotional attachment has a significant impact on organisational culture, productivity and engagement (Chhabra, Sharma, 2014). The two dimensions of attractiveness identified – intrinsic and extrinsic attractiveness – should be analysed in detail, as a general identification of employer attractiveness factors can distort the correct understanding of the values that stakeholders believe are of key importance for a given organisation.

There are a number of different classifications of attractiveness factors to be found in the literature:

- two types of benefits: instrumental and symbolic (Lievens, Highhouse, 2003), hard and soft (Baum, Kabst, 2013) and monetary and non-monetary (Ray, 2006);
- the three types of benefits referred to as functional, economic and psychological, originally identified by Ambler and Barrow (1996) and taken into account in research conducted by Berthon, Ewing, Hah (2005) and Reis, Braga, Trullen (2017), among others;

- five categories of factors determining the attractiveness of an organisation, including social, economic, developmental, application and attribute aspects (Jiang, Iles, 2011; Alniacik, Alniacik, 2012; Thiranagama, Dileesha, 2020).

Employer attractiveness is determined by a number of factors, and attractiveness alone does not necessarily mean that a stakeholder will decide to actively apply for a job with that organisation. An additional factor influencing the final decision is the reason for choosing a particular job or employer, sometimes at odds with the perceived level of attractiveness. One excellent example of such a situation is the way in which the attractiveness of public institutions as employers is assessed. In the public's opinion, these entities enjoy a high level of attractiveness, which is attributable to several factors. Each of these factors can be interpreted differently and thus given an individual value (factor weighting), which means that public institutions are regarded as stable employers, but, for instance, they are not able to compete in terms of remuneration with organisations from the business sector. When it comes to this type of institution, there is a clash between so-called theoretical values and ideological values (Van Der Wal, de Graaf, Lasthuizen, 2008), with the indicated values perfectly manifested in the Employee Value Proposition. Eisenberg et al. viewed that "first, a firm develops the value proposition that is to be embodied in the brand. Intended to be a true representation of what the firm offers to its employees, the value proposition provides the central message that is conveyed by the brand" (Chhabra, Sharma, 2014, p. 50).

The phenomenon of the dominance of ideological values over theoretical values in relation to work in public institutions has already been described by scholars and falls under the term PSM – Public Service Motivation. PSM is defined as "the belief, values and attitudes that go beyond self-interest and organisational interest, that concern the interest of a larger political entity and that motivate individuals to act accordingly whenever appropriate" (Vandenabeele, 2007, p. 547).

A sense of mission, and therefore an innate urge to serve society, can have a significant impact on the way an organisation is assessed as an employer. A special sense of mission, values and attitudes are evident in those who apply for jobs in the uniformed services, including the military.

In order to reflect the value of the image of a public institution, of which the military is an example, it is appropriate to quote Hope and Dubick, according to whom "(...) the difference between public service institutions and other organisations supplying any "good" to the market is the fact of their potential existence or non-existence on the market. While the absence from the market of the latter or their failure from the point of view of society as a whole is of little importance, the bankruptcy or even poor financial condition and especially the negative reputation of the activities of public utilities can have far-reaching consequences for society as a whole" (Kotas, 2014, p. 135). With regard to public institutions, the negative image of these entities as employers may be due to the different values held by potential candidates in relation to the values offered by the organisation, among other things. On top of that, the attractiveness

of the indicated entity is also conditioned by the market situation and the attractiveness of other organisations that compete for employees. In order to attract suitable candidates for service, the military competes for them with other employers, representing the public, private and social sectors. Accordingly, when compared to other employers, the attributes possessed by the military and their attractiveness in the assessment of candidates may be particularly important in the recruitment process, as well as in career development.

3. Description of the research and structure of the survey sample

Two rounds of empirical research were conducted to provide answers to the main research question and specific problems. The first round of research took place in February and March 2022. The research, with the use of the diagnostic survey method with the CATI technique and based on the original tool in task no. II.2.3. was conducted by the IPC Research Institute Sp. z o.o. The research involved people aged between 18 and 44 (those who are of working age and mobile, a category in public statistics). Drawing on data available from the Central Statistical Office (for 2019), it was determined that the population of Poland in the specified range reached 14,461,300 people. The size of the survey sample was determined accordingly. The study involved 537 respondents selected randomly and proportionally by gender and taking into account the provinces (voivodeships) where they live. After the completeness and correctness of the input were analysed, data from 530 respondents were accepted for further analysis (Table 1). Seven questionnaires were rejected due to errors that occurred during the entry of data into the database.

Table 1.

Distribution of survey respondents by province, 02.2022-03.2022

Voivodeship	%
Lower Silesia	7,36
Kuyavian-Pomeranian	6,04
Lublin	5,85
Lubusz	2,45
Lodzkie	6,04
Lesser Poland	9,25
Masovian	13,21
Opole	3,02
Subcarpathian	5,66
Podlaskie	3,21
Pomeranian	6,60
Silesia	10,57
Holy Cross	3,21
Warmian-Masurian	3,77
Greater Poland	9,25
West Pomeranian	4,53
Total	100,00

Source: own research results (research task no. II.2.3, N = 537).

The survey involved 273 men (51.51%) and 253 women (48.49%). Taking into account the economic activity of respondents – 13.2% were students or learners, 79.6% were working, and 7.2% were unemployed. In turn, regarding the education of respondents – 53.02% had secondary education, 26.79% had higher education, basic vocational education – 13.58%, post-secondary and post-secondary education – 5.47% and 1.13% had lower secondary education. Respondents lived in localities with varying population potential. Thus, rural areas were represented by 14.15%, towns with up to 20 thousand inhabitants – 5.85%, towns with more than 20 thousand to 50 thousand inhabitants – 16.6%, towns with more than 50 thousand to 100 thousand inhabitants – 30.19%, towns with more than 100 thousand to 200 thousand inhabitants – 19.62%, and 13.58% were from towns with more than 200 thousand inhabitants.

The second survey was carried out in June 2022 on a sample of 384 Polish residents. The survey was conducted using the CAWI technique. The structure of the survey sample was determined with three key criteria in mind: gender, generational affiliation and voivodeship. The study involved 178 women (46.4%) and 206 men (53.6%). Respondents aged between 18 and 60 for women and 65 for men participated in the research (table 2).

Table 2.

Research sample structure

Voivodeship	Generation Z		Generation Y		Generation X		Total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Lower Silesia	4	4	6	6	5	4	29
Kuyavian-Pomeranian	3	3	4	4	4	3	21
Lublin	3	3	4	4	4	3	21
Lubusz	1	1	2	2	2	2	10
Lodzkie	4	3	5	4	4	4	24
Lesser Poland	5	6	7	6	6	5	35
Masovian	8	7	11	10	9	8	53
Opole	2	1	2	2	2	1	10
Subcarpathian	4	3	4	4	4	3	22
Podlaskie	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
Pomeranian	4	3	5	4	4	3	23
Silesia	6	6	9	8	9	7	45
Holy Cross	2	1	3	2	2	2	12
Warmian-Masurian	3	2	3	2	3	2	15
Greater Poland	6	5	7	6	6	5	35
West Pomeranian	3	2	3	3	3	3	17
Total	112		146		126		384

Source: own research results (research task no. II.2.1, N = 384).

In order to fully characterise the survey sample, respondents were also asked about their level of education, expected salary and place of residence. The survey included 7.29% of respondents with education below secondary level, 48.44% with secondary education and 44.27% with university education. The group of respondents included 11.98% of persons expecting to be paid up to PLN 3000, 32.55% would like to be paid between PLN 3001 and 4000, 23.96% expected to be paid between PLN 4001 and 5000, 17.19% would like to be paid between PLN 5001 and 6000, while remuneration of over PLN 6000 was expected by 14.32%

of the surveyed Poles. Meanwhile, in terms of place of residence, 17.45% of respondents resided in rural areas and 18.75% in cities with more than half a million inhabitants. The remaining respondents were residents of cities with up to half a million inhabitants. The purposefulness of the selection of the survey sample resulted from the desire to reflect the structure of the general population in Poland in the structure of the respondents of working age.

As part of the conducted research, an analysis of the reliability and relevance of measurements was also undertaken. Cronbach's alpha was used to estimate the reliability of a set of items comprising a Likert scale. The analyses revealed that the level of reliability in surveys conducted on the sample of 384 people was Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.864$, while in the survey conducted on the sample of 537 people, Cronbach's α was $= 0.918$.

The change in Cronbach's α was checked if an item was deleted. The results revealed no significant change in the scale. In order to ensure the right level of validity of the research tool, the authors asked for the opinion of a group of competent people. The group consisted of university professors – experts who are involved in research on the issue under consideration.

4. Results

Being an employer of major importance on the market, employing not only soldiers but also a large number of civilian employees, the Polish Army undertakes a wide range of activities aimed at shaping its image. Numerous campaigns promoting military service, the implementation of solutions accelerating the process of recruitment to the army, the promotion of service in mass media, as well as an active online presence, especially through social networking profiles, all translate into the social perception of the army not only as an institution that guarantees security, but also an institution that provides jobs for more than 46,500 civilian employees and more than 110,000 soldiers.

When asked in the course of the survey about the overall image of the military, the respondents indicated that it was rather or definitely positive – 61.19%. 12.25% of respondents expressed the opposite opinion, while 26.56% found it difficult to indicate the quality of the military's image. When asked to assess the image of the military as an employer, the same respondents expressed a similar opinion, with almost two percentage points more respondents stating that it was difficult to say (Table 3).

Table 3.

Respondents' opinions on the general image of the military and the image of the military as an employer

Answers	Image of the military as an employer in Poland	General image of the military
Very positive	20,31%	21,09%
Rather positive	41,67%	40,1%
Difficult to say	28,65%	26,56%
Rather negative	7,29%	9,38%
Very negative	2,08%	2,87%

Source: own research results (research task no. II.2.1, N = 384).

Taking into account the prevalence of information about the military as a state institution, the percentage of respondents having difficulty giving definite answers may be due to the fact that the research was conducted more than four months after the war in Ukraine had begun. The outbreak of armed conflict in a neighbouring country may have significantly affected respondents' opinions on the quality of the military's image, especially as an employer. The stability guaranteed by the military, due to the specifics of its functioning, may partly cease being considered an advantage.

The respondents were also asked to indicate the level of attractiveness of the Polish Army as an employer. High and very high attractiveness levels were indicated by a total of 60.39% of respondents. A medium level of attractiveness was indicated by 30.47% of respondents, while opinions of low and definitely low attractiveness were expressed by 9.11% of respondents (Figure 1).

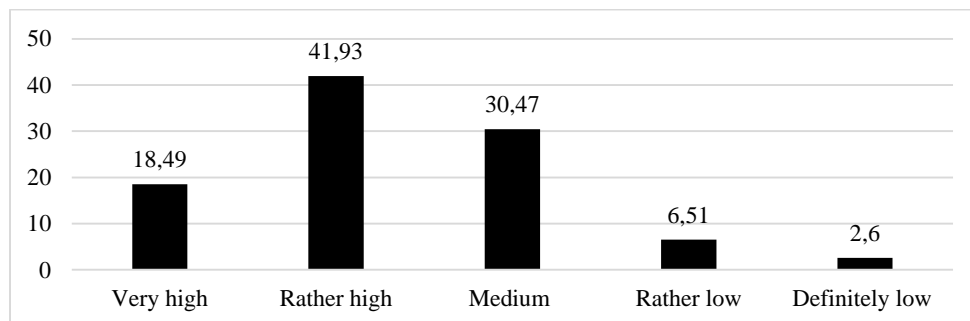


Figure 1. Attractiveness of the army as an employer – research findings.

Source: own research results (research task no. II.2.1, N = 384).

The analysis of the conducted research shows that the Polish Army enjoys a positive opinion as an employer. Almost every third respondent assesses the attractiveness of the army as average, while the indicated level results from a subjective assessment of factors shaping – increasing and decreasing – the level of attractiveness. The assessment of the level of attractiveness does not necessarily translate directly into the employees' decision to take up a job in the army, as some of the surveyed employees, when making their assessment, tend to compare the working conditions in the army with the conditions offered to them by their current employer. The result of such a comparison, especially with regard to the stability of employment, the openness of salaries, additional benefits and the social prestige of the profession, may determine the attractiveness of the military.

When studying the image of a public institution, it is reasonable to analyse not only the subjective feelings of the respondents concerning the quality of the image but also opinions relating to trust in a given institution because, as indicated in the paper, the level of trust is important in the perception and social assessment of a given entity. The research carried out shows that trust in the Polish Army was declared by a total of 71.18% of respondents (I trust the army: 36.46% and I rather trust: 36.72%). Lack of trust was indicated by 8.59% of the respondents, and 18.23% found it difficult to give a definite answer. When comparing the results of the research in terms of trust and the general image of the army, as well as the image of the army as an employer, it was revealed that more respondents (by almost 10%) declare trust in the indicated institution, in relation to those who consider the image of the army as positive – both overall and the image of the army as an employer. Therefore, it can be concluded that trust in a given institution does not necessarily correlate with a positive assessment of its image, both overall and of the organisation as an employer.

Trust in the military is conditioned by a number of factors, which include the military's actions and their effects, the legitimacy and predictability of these actions and communication with stakeholders. In terms of the implementation of statutory tasks, the apolitical nature of the military should be considered another important category, for it strengthens the conviction of the permanence of values and principles that serve society as a whole, affecting people's trust in this institution. When asked whether the apolitical nature of the military matters, 66.03% of respondents answered in the affirmative, while 33.96% gave a negative answer. Regarding the results presented above on trust in the military, it needs to be emphasised that the survey conducted in February and March 2022 also produced a very high proportion of respondents who affirmed trust in the military (83.7%), and the rest answered negatively. These findings corresponded with the CBOS [Public Opinion Research Center] results on citizens' trust in public institutions. Between 1995 and 2021, declarations of trust in the military were expressed each year by at least 74% of survey participants (Omyła-Rudzka, 2020). Trust in the military is based on the characteristics associated by respondents with military service. In the conducted surveys, the highest levels were attributed to, among others: readiness to sacrifice for the Homeland (83.4% of respondents), compliance of the military's actions with procedures (80% of respondents), assistance to the local community in emergency situations (79.43%), and physical fitness (75.28%). It can be assumed that the attributes associated with the military confirm its servant role towards society and allow for a certain degree of explanation for the trust in this institution.

As has been emphasised previously, developing the military's image in public opinion is determined by communicating it to its stakeholders. The military uses a variety of information sources for this very purpose. Accordingly, the respondents were asked about the sources of information about the military and military affairs that, in their opinion, are useful in this regard. Respondents considered information from friends (76.79%) who serve or work in the military and family members (75.65%) professionally related to the military to be useful and very useful

sources. In addition, respondents gave high ratings to information: obtained from military websites (66.6%), from participation in open days at the unit (62.63%), from the recruitment portal of the Polish army (59.42%), and from social media (58.1%). On the other hand, the lowest level of indications of useful and very useful sources concerned television programmes (38.1%), articles in the press (33.39%), advertising on radio and television (27.13%), and popular science books (26.9%).

Based on the results obtained, it can be assumed that face-to-face contacts still play a vital role in conveying information about the military, in particular about serving and working in this organisation. During face-to-face meetings, the opinions and behaviours of people associated with the military, to some extent, reflect the way they perceive the attractiveness of the military as an employer and may also influence their decisions about a career path. In addition, during open days at military units, meetings with soldiers make it possible for those interested to get a first-hand opinion and look at the organisation "from the inside", so to speak. At the same time, direct contacts are crucial in the context of building the image of the military as an organisation that can be trusted with responsibility for the security of the state and citizens.

In order to find out the respondents' opinions on the motivations, understood as internal states with an impetus to actions leading to the satisfaction of needs (Koziański, 2003), which may determine the decision to join the army, they were asked to evaluate a dozen or so categories. Some of the categories listed had attributes that made it possible to describe the military from the perspective of an attractive employer that offers certain benefits to its employees. Others corresponded to the impact of those associated with the military on the respondents and their clearly defined interests. Viewing the military through the prism of particular attributes may provide an incentive to serve and work in the military as it relates to the possible benefits to be gained from this employer. The categories that respondents evaluated can be divided into three groups following the division of benefits presented in the literature (Ambler, Barrow 1996), namely:

- functional – the military: cares for the professional development of soldiers, provides opportunities to prove oneself in situations under the pressure of time, develops teamwork skills, creates equal development opportunities for women and men, is helpful during crisis situations in local communities, is an important partner in NATO structures;
- economic – military: provides job security, offers high pay in comparison to other employers, provides an attractive pension scheme;
- psychological – the military: plays an important role in the state, ensuring the security of citizens, enjoys public trust and gives a sense of pride in belonging to the organisation.

As signalled above, the motivation for joining the service may come from interests in the military and military affairs and contacts with family members and friends who are or have been associated with this organisation. In the case of personal contacts and relationships

regarding the military, it can be assumed that respondents have a specific perception of the attributes of this organisation thanks to such contacts.

Among the factors that respondents believe may have the greatest impact on their decision to join the military (answers to a great and very great extent), we can point to the military fulfilling an important role in the state in the context of taking care of the security of citizens – 84.7% of respondents answered this way, and the military providing job security – 81.89%. A slightly lower percentage of indications related to the military offering an attractive pension scheme – 66.42%, the development of teamwork skills – 64.91% and a sense of pride in belonging to the organisation and being able to serve – 63.96%. Two motivations received the lowest percentage of indications to a high and very high degree, namely the Polish military being an important partner in NATO structures – 48.49% and the military creating equal development opportunities for men and women – 38.68% (Figure 2). The last two motivations also received the highest mid-point ratings, respectively: 39.81% and 39.43%.

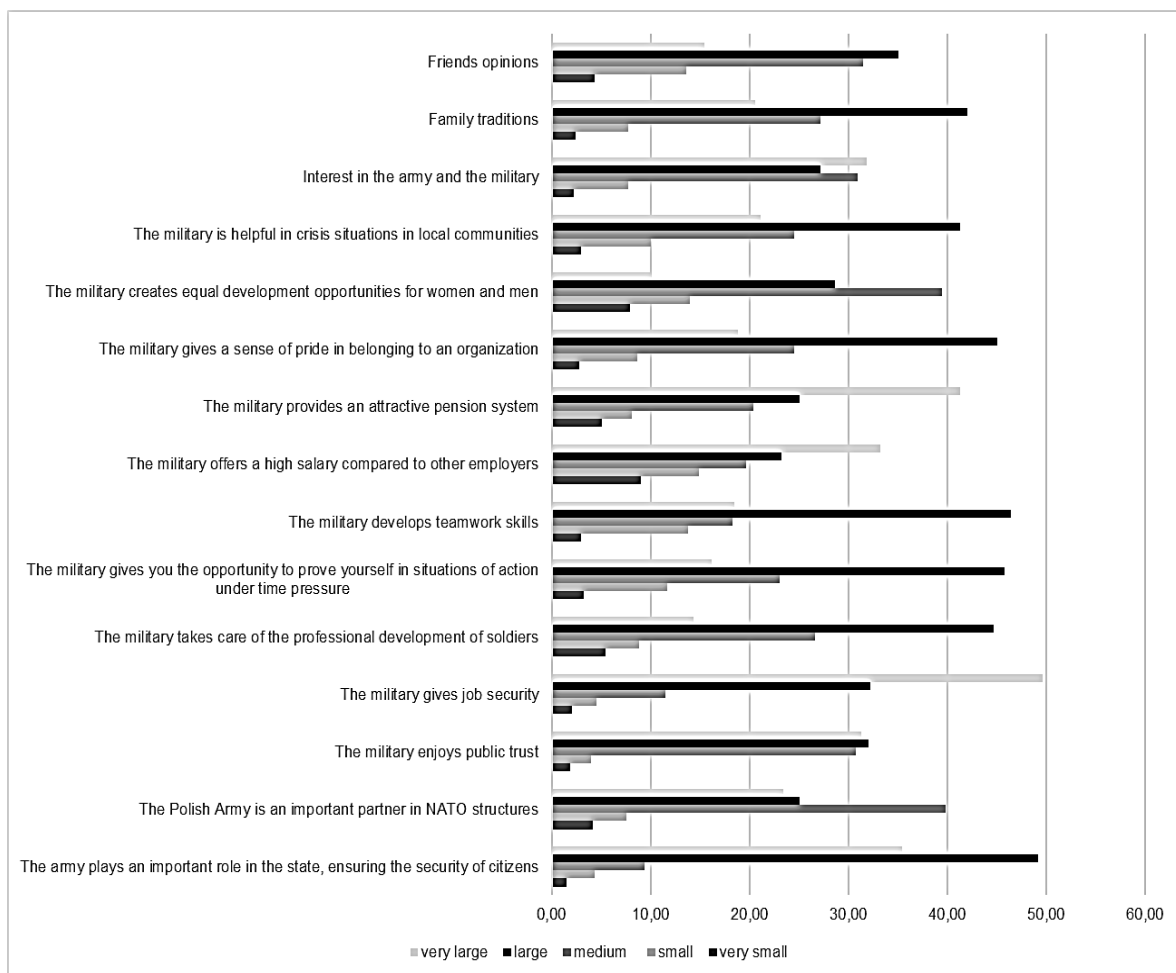


Figure 2. Degree of influence of individual motives behind the decision to join the army

Source: own research results (research task no. II.2.3, N = 537).

When analysing the distribution of opinions expressed by respondents regarding the motives for joining the service, the relatively high ratings of the individual categories are worth highlighting. At the same time, it is possible to identify two motives, which were accompanied

more often than others by opinions that they could influence the decision to join the army to a very small and small degree, namely: the army offers high remuneration in relation to other employers – 23.96% and the army creates equal development opportunities for men and women – 21.89%. Respondents' opinions on equal development opportunities for both sexes in the military may indicate certain doubts in this respect, conditioned both by stereotypical perceptions of the occupations and their division into masculine and feminine, as well as by media reports on irregularities in this respect.

The respondents' answers show the co-occurrence of benefits of a psychological, economic and functional nature resulting from possible entry into professional service. In the context of benefits associated with certainty of employment in the army, no significant link to the labour market situation in the respondents' place of residence was observed. In contrast, such a relationship was found in relation to the variable: attractive pension scheme. Respondents rating the labour market situation as average and good were also more likely to perceive the attractiveness of this system ($r = 0.25$).

5. Conclusions

Conducting research dedicated to the issue of the image and attractiveness of the military as an employer is an important activity, especially when considering the social importance of the indicated institution, the size of the workforce (soldiers and civilian employees of the military) and the importance of this employer in the local labour markets in particular. The survey led to the conclusion that the military enjoys both a positive overall image (61.19%) and a positive image as an employer (61.98%) and is considered an attractive employer (60.39%). A total of 71.18% of respondents declared trust in the Polish Army. Persons who serve or work in the army (76.79%), family members professionally connected with the army (75.65%) and websites dedicated to military matters (66.6%) were indicated as the main sources of information about the army. The information obtained from the said sources of information allowed a positive assessment of the military as an employer, as well as an indication of the main motives for choosing a military career (aspects related to functional, economic and psychological benefits). The opportunity to serve in an institution with an important social role, job security and an attractive pension scheme are the most frequently indicated motives for choosing a military career. The opportunity to develop teamwork skills and pride in fulfilling an important social role are also deemed significant.

Given the considerations as well as the results obtained concerning the image of an organisation such as the military, it can be concluded that it carries out activities that have a positive impact on its image. It is noteworthy that, in the opinion of the respondents, the military plays an important role in the state security system, its assistance to the community

in emergency situations is perceived to strengthen trust in this institution, and it has been emphasised that belonging to this organisation can be something to be proud of. In this respect, the military is successful in image-building efforts as its activities are assessed as being useful to society. Meanwhile, in the context of creating a positive image of the military, the material conditions (financial and non-financial) offered to candidates for service and their verification expressed in the assessments of those who function in military structures are complementary to the aforementioned activities. As the results of the survey have shown, the opinions of soldiers and military employees about this employer are important, determining the public's perception of it, as well as potentially influencing the influx of candidates for service. Not only are the opinions of those directly associated with the military considered to be a reliable source of information about the military as an employer, but they also have a significant impact on the overall assessment of the military's image and trust in this institution, which is connected to Poles' sense of security.

The research included an analysis of Polish society to examine the general public perception of the military, as well as an assessment of the military's external image and attractiveness as an employer. Internal image and attractiveness were not analysed, which limits the possibility of inference. The authors plan to conduct research on internal image and attractiveness in the future. The spatial scope of the research will also be extended to include other states in order to identify similarities and differences in this area. The authors also plan to carry out an analysis of the conditions for shaping the image of the military among the public and in the labour market.

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