

UDC 334.012.64:339.137.2:355.01:338.43

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<https://doi.org/10.25313/3083-7782-2026-5-57>

MANAGING SMALL BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS UNDER MARTIAL LAW: AN ECOSYSTEM APPROACH IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRARIAN BUSINESS ECOSYSTEMS

Summary. Introduction. Under martial law, the competitiveness of small businesses takes on a new meaning, as enterprises' ability to maintain market positions depends not only on price advantages but also on resilience, adaptability, access to resources, and integration into broader business ecosystems. This issue is particularly relevant for the agricultural sector, where the performance of small enterprises is closely linked to logistics, financing, human resources, digital solutions, local communities, and institutional support.

Purpose. The purpose of the study is to substantiate an ecosystem-based approach to managing the competitiveness of small businesses under martial law and to determine its significance for ensuring the sustainable development of agrarian business ecosystems.

Materials and methods. The study was conducted using systemic, structural-functional, and comparative analysis, as well as methods of generalization, abstraction, and synthesis of scientific approaches to competitiveness, enterprise resilience, dynamic capabilities, and business ecosystems. The study's information base includes contemporary academic literature, official analytical materials, regulatory acts, and business survey results that reflect the conditions of small business operations during martial law.

Results. The article determines that the competitiveness of small businesses under martial law is a multidimensional characteristic that combines the ability of an enterprise to maintain operational continuity, adapt its business model, preserve access to resources, and form the potential for further development. It is substantiated that, in a wartime economy, the competitive position of small enterprises is influenced not only by productivity, innovation, and pricing policy, but also by the continuity of logistics and energy supply, access to finance, labor availability, digital maturity, the quality of the institutional environment, and the level of involvement in value-creating networks.

Particular attention is paid to agrarian business ecosystems, within which small enterprises interact with producers, processors, logistics operators, financial institutions, advisory services, digital platforms, and local communities. The article proposes a conceptual model for assessing the competitiveness of small businesses, which includes the following components: resilience, digitalization, financial capacity, human capital, logistics and energy continuity, institutional quality, and ecosystem embeddedness. This approach allows a small enterprise to be considered not as an isolated entity but as an element of an interdependent system capable of generating economic, social, and environmental value.

Further research in this area. Further development of the ecosystem-based approach to managing small business competitiveness should focus on improving the methodology of integral assessment, clarifying the weighting coefficients of individual components,



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and adapting the model to different types of agrarian business ecosystems. The practical value of the study lies in identifying management priorities for small enterprises and support priorities for the state, local communities, and development partners, particularly in relation to affordable finance, digital transformation, human capital retention, cooperation within value chains, and strengthening the resilience of agrarian business during wartime and post-war recovery.

Key words: small business competitiveness, martial law, enterprise resilience, agrarian business ecosystems, ecosystem approach, digitalization, access to finance, value chains.

Statement of the problem. The full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine and the introduction of the legal regime of martial law have significantly changed the conditions for the functioning of the national economy. The business environment is characterized by high uncertainty, increased operational risks, disruptions to logistical connections, rising energy prices, labor shortages, and the destruction of production and transport infrastructure. These challenges are especially noticeable in the agricultural sector, which remains a key element of the state's economic stability, ensuring food security and supporting export potential.

In a war economy, the competitiveness of agricultural enterprises takes on a new meaning. It can no longer be considered only through indicators of price, product quality, production volumes, or profitability. The ability of an enterprise to maintain continuity of operational activities, quickly adapt the business model, retain human resources, reorient supply and sales channels, attract financial resources, and integrate into cooperation networks becomes increasingly important. In this context, the study of small agricultural businesses, in particular family farms and small agricultural producers, which, in wartime, perform not only an economic but also an important social function, becomes particularly relevant.

Small agricultural enterprises are important participants in local food systems. They contribute to the provision of food to territorial communities, support employment in rural areas, ensure the flexibility of production, and enable a quicker response to changing market and security conditions. At the same time, small businesses are more vulnerable to limited access to financing, shortages of equipment, a lack of qualified workers, logistical difficulties, and instability in the institutional environment. This necessitates the search for new approaches to managing their competitiveness.

Traditional models of anti-crisis management, focused mainly on an individual enterprise's internal resources, do not fully meet the conditions of prolonged military uncertainty. In such circumstances, it is advisable to consider the competitiveness of small agrarian businesses not in isolation, but within the broader agrarian business ecosystem, which includes producers, suppliers, processors, logistics operators, financial institutions, digital platforms, government bodies, local communities, and consumers. It is the level of interaction among these participants that determines the ability of small businesses not only to maintain viability in crisis conditions, but also to lay the groundwork for recovery and further development.

Therefore, the study's relevance stems from the need to scientifically substantiate the ecosystem approach to enhancing the competitiveness of small agricultural businesses under martial law. This approach allows combining anti-crisis management, digital transformation, financial stability, personnel adaptation, cooperation, and principles of sustainable development into a single system of management decisions aimed at increasing the sustainability of agricultural business ecosystems.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The issue of adaptation of small businesses and agribusinesses to crisis phenomena, particularly in war conditions, has been widely covered in the economic literature. Domestic scientists have made a significant contribution to the study of these issues. In particular, K. Bogomolova [17] studies the transformation of business processes and digitalization under the influence of global shocks. O. Skydan [19] covers logistical gaps, enterprise sustainability, and the introduction of green energy. The issues of diversification of rural entrepreneurship are considered by I. Tomashuk and I. Tomashuk [15]. The specifics of managing the competitiveness of small-scale family farms are revealed by L. Hnatyshyn and R. Velyky [3], and the environmental consequences and soil degradation are analyzed by S. Balyuk and A. Kucher [2]. A separate vector is the macroeconomic assessment of the environment, as reflected in international indices such as B-READY [13; 18] and CPI [6]. At the same time, U. Rosola and A. Rosola [11] highlight the issue of institutional interaction in the agricultural sector, thoroughly investigating the need to develop business ecosystems to integrate innovations and ensure food security.

However, despite the broad scientific base, the nature and scale of current military threats force the formation of new methodological concepts. The issue of combining the competitiveness of small businesses, military resilience, and ecosystem interaction in the agricultural sector remains insufficiently explored.

The purpose of the article is to substantiate the ecosystem approach to enhancing the competitiveness of small businesses during martial law and to identify management factors that determine their growth in the context of sustainable development of agrarian business ecosystems. To achieve this goal, the following tasks have been set: clarify the content of the concept of competitiveness of small businesses in the war economy;

systematize the external and internal factors in its formation; develop a conceptual model of integrated assessment; determine the specifics of the agrarian dimension of competitiveness.

Materials and methods. The methodological basis of the study is a systemic approach, structural and functional analysis, comparative analysis, PEST and SWOT analyses, as well as a method for generalizing scientific sources and analytical materials on the development of small businesses under martial law.

Presentation of the main material of the research. In wartime conditions, the competitiveness of small businesses should be interpreted as the ability of an enterprise not only to create consumer value and maintain profitability, but also to ensure the continuity of production and sales processes, adapt the organizational structure, maintain the core personnel, quickly change supply and sales channels, and integrate into support and cooperation networks [2; 10–16].

A study by the American Chamber of Commerce and Citi Ukraine shows that 81% of companies are experiencing the impact of mobilization on their performance, and among the main barriers in 2024, businesses name employee reservations, personnel safety, employee psychological state, power outages, and infrastructure strikes [5]. In the first quarter of 2026, the NBU also recorded that military operations, a shortage of skilled workers, and high energy prices remain key factors limiting production expansion [6]. This allows us to single out the first block of competitiveness factors — resource and security, which includes labor, energy, physical infrastructure, and operational security.

The second block of factors is financial and institutional. CES emphasizes that for Ukrainian businesses, war risks, insurance coverage, regulatory imperfections, a high level of problem loans, strict bank financing conditions, and poor awareness of support programs significantly reduce the ability of small agricultural enterprises to attract resources for development [2]. The NBU notes that companies continue to name high rates and the availability of alternative sources of financing as the main obstacles to new loans [12]. Therefore, access to financing in a war economy is not just a growth tool, but a critical marker of competitive viability.

The third block is digitally adaptive. As of April 2026, the NBU recorded a positive business activity index for the real sector at 51.7, despite pressure from fuel prices, rising business costs, the destruction of logistics and production capacities, and the shortage of personnel [8]. In the international literature, digitalization is increasingly seen as the mechanism through which dynamic capabilities are transformed into a competitive advantage of small agricultural enterprises [14]. For small businesses, this means that digital sales channels, electronic document management, remote communications, CRM/ERP solutions, cloud analytics, and digital platforms are no longer a “modernization option” but are becoming the infrastructure of competitiveness.

The fourth block is the ecosystem. The participation of an enterprise in an ecosystem gives it access to the effect of scale without formal consolidation: to partner networks, joint logistics, financial instruments, knowledge, sales platforms, advisory services, clusters, and public initiatives [15; 16]. In wartime conditions, the importance of this block increases sharply, since an individual small firm is often unable to independently compensate for the loss of the market, infrastructure, or personnel. Therefore, it is advisable to consider competitiveness in small businesses as network capacity, that is, the ability to maintain and increase value through cooperation and coordination with other elements of the business ecosystem.

The generalization of the above factors gives grounds to assert that in conditions of martial law, the competitiveness of small businesses takes on a complex character. It is determined not only by the ability of the enterprise to produce competitive products or maintain profitability, but also by its ability to ensure operational continuity, adapt to security and market changes, attract financial resources, preserve human capital, use digital tools, and participate in cooperation networks.

Therefore, it is advisable to consider the competitiveness of small businesses in a war economy as an integral characteristic that combines resource sustainability, digital maturity, financial capacity, human resources potential, logistical and energy continuity, the quality of the institutional environment, and the level of ecosystem inclusion. This approach creates a methodological basis for building a model of integrated assessment of competitiveness. We propose to determine the integral level of competitiveness of small businesses in martial law according to the formula:

$$Cw = w_1S + w_2D + w_3F + w_4H + w_5L + w_6I + w_7E$$

where: S — level of sustainability;
 D — digitalization;
 F — financial capacity;
 H — human capital;
 L — logistics and energy continuity;
 I — quality of the institutional environment;
 E — ecosystem inclusion.

The proposed integrated model has not only computational, but also analytical and visualization value. Since each component reflects a separate direction in the formation of small business competitiveness, it is advisable to present the assessment results in a radar diagram (Fig. 1).

This format allows you to clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses of the enterprise or agricultural business ecosystem, as well as establish areas that require priority management influence.

For practical application of the proposed model, it is advisable to use a graphic visualization of the enterprise's competitiveness profile according to key indicators, which is shown in Fig. 1. To construct a diagram, the indicators can be normalized on a scale from 0 to 100 points, where 0 means a critically low level of development of the component, and 100 means the highest possible level.

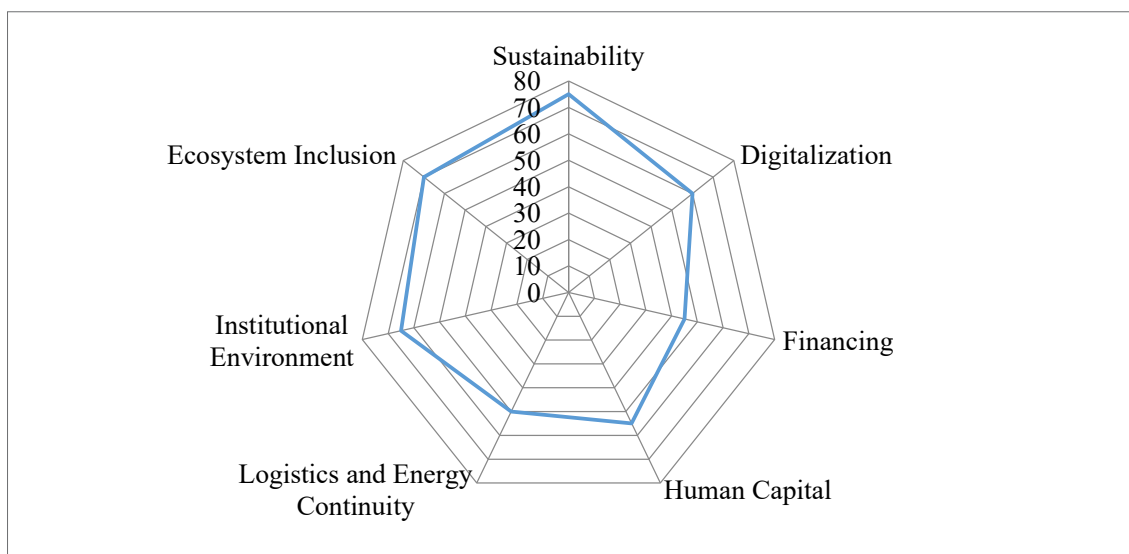


Fig. 1. Integral profile of small business competitiveness under martial law
 Source: compiled by the author

The resulting profile shows that the relative strengths of small businesses are resilience and ecosystem inclusion, while the most problematic components remain financing, logistics, energy continuity, and human capital. This confirms the need to strengthen access to financial resources, develop cooperation mechanisms, support personnel, and ensure the stability of operational processes within the agrarian business ecosystem.

The modern paradigm of economic science is gradually moving away from the neoclassical view of the enterprise as an isolated production unit operating in a vacuum of market prices, moving towards an expanded concept of business ecosystems [11].

The agribusiness ecosystem is a complex, hyperdynamic, spatially distributed, and interdependent network of economic agents, including farmers, seed and plant protection product suppliers, processing enterprises, logistics operators, financial institutions, government regulators, research institutions, and end consumers. All these entities are in constant co-evolution, jointly creating consumer value. The interactions among key participants in the agribusiness ecosystem of small businesses are summarized in Fig. 2.

Managing the sustainable development of such a multidimensional ecosystem requires an integrated approach. This approach requires a balanced consideration of the economic, social, and environmental vectors of development, as well as the purposeful development of the system's capacity to absorb external destructive shocks. In this context, the ability of rural areas to absorb risks is strictly determined by the structure of local agrarian ecosystems and the degree of their diversification.

Based on research [7; 9; 11], it is proven that small farms constitute the organizational basis of global agriculture. Their strategic value lies not in the volume of gross harvest but in ensuring the diversity of agricultural products, flexible use of local resources, and environmental protection. Small farms, as a rule, operate on much smaller areas with many plot boundaries, creating a favorable environment for biodiversity and a much more heterogeneous landscape.

In the conditions of a full-scale war, this ecological heterogeneity unexpectedly acquired the significance of spatial security: dispersed, decentralized small businesses are much less vulnerable to enemy missile attacks than giant infrastructure facilities (elevators, oil depots) of agricultural holdings. Accordingly, the preservation and stimulation of the development of small businesses move from the realm of social policy to the plane of ensuring national food security and the state's defense capability.

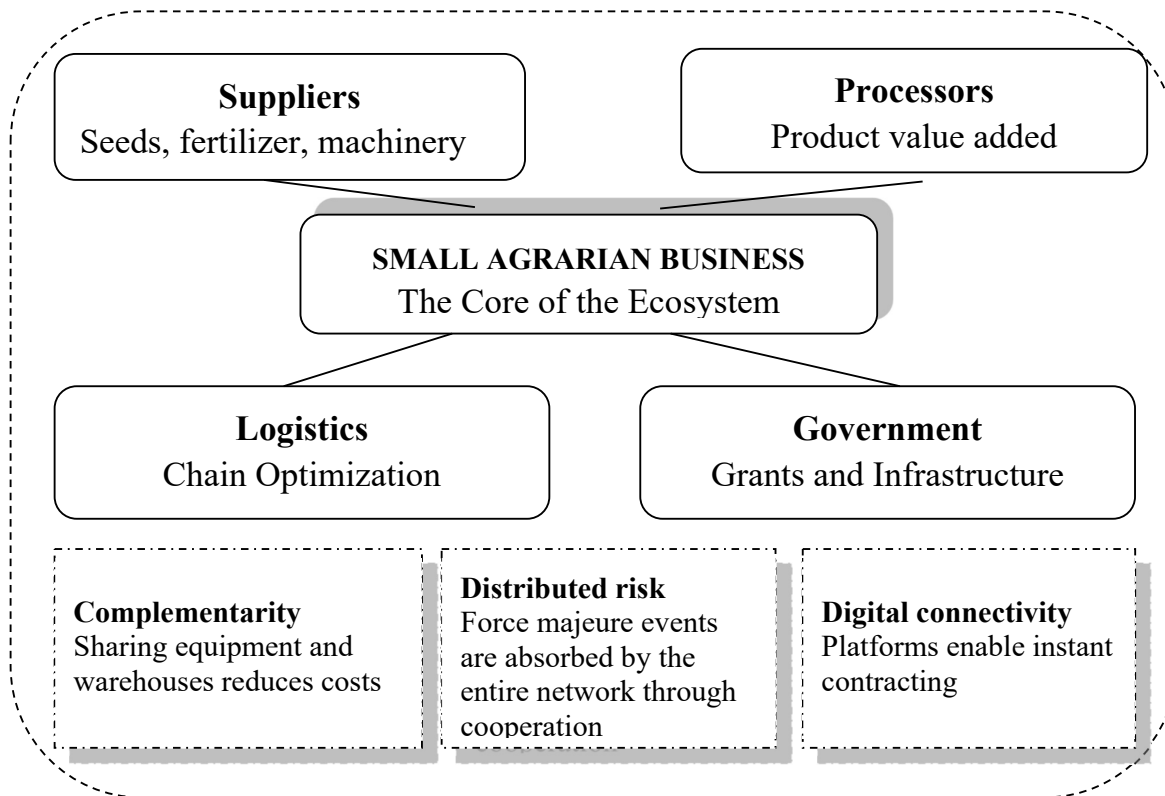


Fig. 2. Structure of the agrarian business ecosystem of small businesses

Source: compiled by the author

To determine the external factors affecting the operation of a small agricultural business, it is advisable to use a PEST analysis [4]. Conducting a detailed PEST analysis allows you to systematize the exogenous factors listed below.

Political. Permanent instability of tax and mobilization legislation; limitation of agricultural exports through the introduction of tariff and non-tariff restrictions by both the aggressor country and partner countries, namely the problem of grain exports through Eastern Europe, the need to operate anti-crisis headquarters, and adapt to curfew conditions. Farmers are constantly faced with issues of state regulation, for example, unforeseen cancellations or postponements of benefits, as well as increased control over organic products in accordance with new European integration bills.

Economic. Rapid, uncontrolled increase in the price of critical raw materials, fuels and lubricants, seed stock, and mineral fertilizers. Inflationary pressures, a catastrophic deficit of working capital among farmers, and a general decline in the purchasing power of the domestic population, which is especially hitting producers of craft products with high added value.

Social. The war caused the deepest demographic crisis: there is a steady trend towards a reduction in the rural population, mass labor, and forced migration of millions of Ukrainians abroad. In addition, mobilization created an unprecedented personnel shortage: the outflow of qualified machine operators, tractor drivers, and agronomists to the front left farms, leaving them without critical human capital. A significant part of rural youth lost motivation to work on the land due to high risks.

Technological. Loss of access to modern agricultural machinery due to the destruction of leasing mechanisms and the destruction of the machines themselves. Complications or complete impossibility of using precision farming technologies, in particular, the ban on the use of agricultural drones in frontline areas. The response to these challenges is the forced digitalization of business process management and the transition to remote monitoring formats.

The results of the PEST analysis indicate that small agricultural enterprises operate in a complex and unstable external environment, shaped by political uncertainty, economic pressures, social upheavals, and technological constraints. However, the definition of these macro-environmental factors does not fully explain how individual enterprises respond to such challenges at the strategic level. Therefore, it is necessary to supplement the PEST analysis with a SWOT analysis, which allows assessing not only external threats and opportunities, but also internal strengths and weaknesses of small agricultural enterprises [15].

SWOT analysis of small agricultural entrepreneurship in war conditions reveals a specific management paradox [15]. On the one hand, weaknesses and threats, war leads to a direct, physical reduction of the production base. Physical security risks, such as the enterprise's geographic location relative to the borders with the aggressor country and the front line, have become the most significant factor to be considered in strategic management. On the other hand, strengths and opportunities, it is a small business that demonstrates phenomenal flexibility, which corporations lack. It has high potential for rapid restoration of food security at the local level, provision of employment for internally displaced persons, and rapid diversification of cropland structures (Tabl. 1).

Table 1

SWOT analysis matrix of small agricultural businesses under martial law

Strengths	Weaknesses
High structural flexibility and speed of management decision-making. Ability to quickly adapt the range to local needs. Less vulnerability to targeted missile attacks (decentralization). Ability to quickly involve family members in labor.	Lack of economies of scale and high unit costs. Critical dependence on limited own financial resources. Inability to form large batches of goods for export. Direct physical reduction in production volumes due to destruction.
Opportunities	Threats
Attracting grant funding and international aid funds. Deep diversification (processing, ecotourism, niche crops). Development of short supply chains (from producer to consumer). Involving internally displaced persons as a new labor resource.	Continued instability of the macro environment and the threat of occupation. Deepening demographic crisis and outflow of qualified personnel. Price shocks in the fertilizer, fuel and logistics markets. Increasing regulatory pressure and unfair competition.

Source: based on [9; 15]

Based on the identified factors, PEST analysis, and SWOT analysis, the following directions for increasing the competitiveness of small businesses under martial law can be identified:

1. Deep production and service diversification. Abandoning monoculture and transitioning to the “production + processing + services” model. This allows you to diversify risk and reduce dependence on global price shocks, such as the projected growth of the sunflower market or fluctuations in grain prices.

2. Optimization of the management model and total digitalization. The experience of overcoming the COVID-19 crisis and the first years of the war has proven the critical need to move as many business processes online as possible, implement modern IT financial accounting systems, ensure the effective operation of crisis headquarters, and provide systematic support to personnel.

3. Cooperation and building short supply chains. Since small farmers cannot, in practice, achieve economies of scale individually, their horizontal integration into production and marketing cooperatives enables the formation of sufficient commodity lots. The marketing strategy should focus on local supply to communities, bypassing intermediaries.

4. Focus on preserving and developing human capital. In the conditions of the most acute demographic crisis, people become the main capital of the enterprise. Businesses are forced to develop mechanisms for psychological support for employees, offer flexible schedules, and socialize their activities as much as possible, for example, by helping medical institutions or employing internally displaced persons.

Such comprehensive actions, supported by the projected recovery of nationwide production, in particular, expectations for a grain harvest in Ukraine of about 60.4 million tons in 2026 [1], will create a solid foundation for the industry's survival.

Conclusions of this research and prospects for further research in this area. The complexity, multidimensionality, and existential nature of the challenges faced by Ukraine's small agrarian businesses under the legal regime of martial law require an immediate transition from reactive “day-to-day” survival models to proactive management of sustainable development within the framework of agrarian business ecosystems. The conducted detailed study allows us to formulate several conceptual conclusions.

First, armed aggression fundamentally transformed the operating environment for entrepreneurship, bringing to the fore previously unforeseen physical security risks, including proximity to the front line, mining, the total destruction of logistical infrastructure, and a critical shortage of labor resources due to mobilization and migration. In these extreme conditions, it has been proven that small and micro-enterprises are much more flexible and adaptive compared to rigid agro-holdings. They act as shock absorbers in the business ecosystem, maintaining economic activity in villages and guaranteeing local food self-sufficiency of communities.

Secondly, it is substantiated that classical economic tools of competitiveness management, based on the maximization of production volumes and returns to scale, are methodologically irrelevant for small-scale family farms. Their development strategy should be based on the dualistic goal of ensuring family well-being and commercial profit, and focus on deep diversification, from growing basic crops to craft processing and ecotourism, cooperation, and shortening food chains through direct access to the consumer.

Third, post-war reconstruction and organic integration of Ukrainian small businesses into the European economic space will be impossible without compliance with new, much stricter global institutional standards. The World Bank's transition from the one-dimensional Doing Business index to the comprehensive Business Ready (B-READY) paradigm [13; 18], as well as the need to improve positions in the global Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) [6], dictates the imperative need to form a transparent, digitalized, and environmentally responsible business environment. Ensuring energy autonomy of enterprises through the development of small-scale green generation and climate-adaptive production for degraded soils is becoming not just a social trend, but a basic condition for survival and the foundation of competitiveness.

Further development of scientific research on this topic should primarily focus on developing specialized software and mathematical tools based on artificial intelligence and predictive analytics technologies to accurately assess the financial sustainability of small business ecosystems in conditions of information deficit. In addition, there is an urgent need to create innovative methods for precise economic assessment of environmental damage caused to land resources by war and the formation of transparent financial mechanisms, in particular, with the involvement of B-READY tools and international grant platforms for large-scale land reclamation, humanitarian demining, and comprehensive "green" restoration of the agricultural sector of Ukraine.

ДОДАТКОВА ІНФОРМАЦІЯ

ФІНАНСУВАННЯ: Автори не отримували фінансування для цього дослідження.

ЗАЯВА ПРО ДОСТУПНІСТЬ ДАНИХ: Не застосовується.

КОНФЛІКТ ІНТЕРЕСІВ: Автори заявляють про відсутність конфлікту інтересів.

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Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 22.04.2026

Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 20.05.2026

Дата публікації: 28.05.2026

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УПРАВЛІННЯ КОНКУРЕНТОСПРОМОЖНІСТЮ МАЛОГО БІЗНЕСУ В УМОВАХ ВОЄННОГО СТАНУ: ЕКОСИСТЕМНИЙ ПІДХІД У КОНТЕКСТІ СТІЙКОГО РОЗВИТКУ АГРАРНИХ БІЗНЕС-ЕКОСИСТЕМ

Анотація. Вступ. В умовах воєнного стану конкурентоспроможність малого бізнесу набуває нового змісту, оскільки здатність підприємств зберігати ринкові позиції залежить не лише від цінних переваг, а й від стійкості, адаптивності, доступу до ресурсів та включеності у ширші бізнес-екосистеми. Особливої актуальності ця проблема набуває для аграрного сектору, де діяльність малих підприємств безпосередньо пов'язана з логістикою, фінансуванням, кадровим забезпеченням, цифровими рішеннями, місцевими громадами та інституційною підтримкою.

Мета. Метою дослідження є обґрунтування екосистемного підходу до управління конкурентоспроможністю малого бізнесу в умовах воєнного стану та визначення його значення для забезпечення стійкого розвитку аграрних бізнес-екосистем.

Матеріали і методи. Дослідження проведено із застосуванням системного, структурно-функціонального та порівняльного аналізу, методів узагальнення, абстрагування й синтезу наукових підходів до вивчення конкурентоспроможності, стійкості підприємств, динамічних здатностей і бізнес-екосистем. Інформаційною основою дослідження стали сучасні наукові праці, офіційні аналітичні матеріали, нормативно-правові акти та результати бізнес-опитувань, що відображають умови функціонування малого бізнесу під час воєнного стану.

Результати. У статті визначено, що конкурентоспроможність малого бізнесу в умовах воєнного стану є багатомірною характеристикою, яка поєднує здатність підприємства підтримувати операційну безперервність, адаптувати бізнес-модель, зберігати доступ до ресурсів і формувати потенціал для подальшого розвитку. Обґрунтовано, що у воєнній економіці на конкурентні позиції малих підприємств впливають не лише продуктивність, інноваційність і цінова політика, а й безперервність логістики та енергопостачання, доступ до фінансування, наявність трудових ресурсів, цифрова зрілість, якість інституційного середовища та рівень включеності у мережі створення доданої вартості.

Особливу увагу приділено аграрним бізнес-екосистемам, у межах яких малі підприємства взаємодіють із виробниками, переробниками, логістичними операторами, фінансовими інституціями, дорадчими службами, цифровими платформами та місцевими громадами. Запропоновано концептуальну модель оцінювання конкурентоспроможності малого бізнесу, що охоплює такі складові: стійкість, цифровізація, фінансова спроможність, людський капітал, логістично-енергетична безперервність, інституційна якість та екосистемна включеність. Такий підхід дає змогу розглядати мале підприємство не ізольовано, а як елемент взаємозалежної системи, здатної генерувати економічну, соціальну та екологічну цінність.

Перспективи. Подальший розвиток екосистемного підходу до управління конкурентоспроможністю малого бізнесу доцільно спрямувати на поглиблення методики інтегрального оцінювання, уточнення вагових коефіцієнтів окремих складових і адаптацію моделі до різних типів аграрних бізнес-екосистем. Практичне значення дослідження полягає у визначенні управлінських пріоритетів для малих підприємств і напрямів підтримки з боку держави, громад та партнерів розвитку, зокрема щодо доступного фінансування, цифрової трансформації, збереження людського капіталу, розвитку кооперації у ланцюгах доданої вартості та підвищення стійкості аграрного бізнесу в умовах війни й повоєнного відновлення.

Ключові слова: конкурентоспроможність малого бізнесу, воєнний стан, стійкість підприємства, аграрні бізнес-екосистеми, екосистемний підхід, цифровізація, доступ до фінансування, ланцюги доданої вартості.