

The Business Environment in Bengbu and its Optimisation Strategies

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Abstract

Business environment is the external conditions for enterprises to invest, operate and develop, and has become a new carrier of urban comprehensive competitiveness. It need to create a good business environment to promote the high-quality development of Bengbu. This paper constructs the evaluation index system of urban business environment on the basis of the literature, and carries out the vertical analysis of the level of Bengbu's business environment, and the horizontal comparative analysis of the main indexes of Bengbu's business environment with that of other cities in Anhui Province through the statistical yearbook and survey data. The results show that the overall business environment in Bengbu is constantly improving, however, there are some problems in Bengbu in the market environment, the rule of law environment, and the governmental environment and so on, and put forward countermeasures and suggestions to improve the quality and efficiency of the business environment in Bengbu.

Keywords

Business Environment; Innovation Environment; Government Environment; Bengbu.

1. Introduction

The business environment is the most important environment for a market economy and the external condition for the investment, operation and development of market players. From the perspective of national and regional development, the business environment is the soil for regional and national economic development, and a good business environment plays an important role in activating the vitality of market players, improving regional innovation capacity, business operation and government image (Zeng Hui,2022). From the perspective of urban development, with the steady advancement of the overall strategy of national urban development and the active exploration of local urban governance innovation, cities have increasingly become an important carrier of national and regional competitiveness and an important field to promote national system reform and local governance capacity improvement, and the market business environment has become a new field and a new carrier of urban comprehensive competitiveness. The optimization of the business environment can promote the agglomeration of urban investment factors, attract new enterprises to enter the local market, and drive the improvement of the city's innovation level. Optimizing and improving the business environment to stimulate economic vitality is the only way to promote high-quality economic and social development. How to stimulate the vitality of market players and establish a sound business environment has become the key to the development of market economy.

According to the current Bengbu goal -- building "three places and one district two centre", and achieving the "five more", it is inseparable from the high-quality market participant, and needs to create a first-class business environment, in order to promote the high-quality development of Bengbu. The author searched a total of 1,884 journal articles on China Knowledge Network with the subject term "business environment in Bengbu ", However, there is only one paper has

related content, which the title is "Research on the Status Quo, Problems and Countermeasures of Foreign Direct Investment in Bengbu City". So it is necessary to further analyze the business environment in Bengbu.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Meaning of Business Environment

The concept of business environment entered the Chinese public's view thanks to the first "Business Environment Report" released by the World Bank in 2003, which defined it as the sum of the external environmental conditions faced by an enterprise from inception to closure (Chen Tianyi, Zhao Beibei, Hong Zhuorui, 2023). As a universal concept, the business environment has the connotation analysis from multiple perspectives. From the perspective of enterprises, the business environment is a set of conditions composed of various explicit and implicit costs that enterprises need to pay for following policies and regulations in business behaviors such as establishment, operation, transaction, performance of contracts, tax payment and closure, and is a key factor affecting the stable and sustainable development of enterprises' production and operation. From the nature of the business environment, it is divided into "soft environment" and "hard environment", the former is the institutional environment such as government affairs, finance, culture, innovation and rule of law (Shen Shuo et al., 2021), and the latter includes the physical environment such as natural environment and infrastructure (Lou Chengwu et al., 2018). Now scholars believe that new business forms, digital infrastructure, and digital governance generated by the digital economy should also be included in the definition of business environment (Pan Siwei et al., 2022; Zhao, Hongmei, Wang, Wenhua, 2022). China's business environment needs to be combined with the domestic situation to analyze its connotation. According to the Regulations on Optimizing the Business Environment, the business environment refers to the institutional and institutional factors and conditions involved in market economic activities of enterprises and other market entities; The regulations of The State Council define the business environment as "the institutional and institutional factors and conditions involved in the market economic activities of enterprises and other market entities". The research group of "China's Urban Business Environment Evaluation Research" believes that the business environment is an ecosystem, and as one of the main bodies of this ecosystem, enterprises will inevitably be restricted and affected by other entities in the system such as the government, financial institutions and public institutions. Political environment, economic environment, legal environment, innovation environment and other external environmental factors will have an impact on the business environment of enterprises. This paper studies Bengbu's urban business environment, mainly referring to the literature of urban business environment, and paying attention to the factors related to the operation of market entities such as enterprises in the business environment.

2.2. The Evaluation Index System of Urban Business Environment

Business environment evaluation indicators are not uniform, the World Bank's business environment report evaluation index system includes 11 regulatory areas, from the establishment of enterprises, the acquisition of business factors to the withdrawal of enterprises, which almost covers the whole life cycle of enterprises. The existing evaluation index system of China's business environment can be divided into three levels: province, city and enterprise, showing obvious level differences. Bengbu business environment belongs to the city business environment, combined with Li Zhijun (2021, 2023) and other research results on urban business environment and urban development requirements, the indicators for analyzing and evaluating the city's business environment can be analyzed in terms of the market environment, legal environment, the government environment, public and financial services, human resources and the innovation environment at the primary level and their

corresponding secondary indicators. These indicators include both hard and soft indicators, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Main evaluation indicators of urban business environment

Primary Indicator	Secondary Indicator
Market Environment	Economic Indicators, Imports and Exports, Business Institution
Legal Environment	Social Security, Judicial Services and Degree of Information Disclosure
Innovation Environment	Innovation Input, Innovation Output
Government Environment	Government Input, Political-commercial Relations
Public Service	Gas Supply, Water Supply, Electricity Supply, Medical Condition
Human Resources	Human Resource Reserve, Labor Cost
Financial Service	Employment Scale, Financing services, others

3. The Overall Situation of Business Environment in Bengbu

3.1. Vertical Analysis of Bengbu Business Environment Level

Bengbu business environment indicators include hard indicators and soft indicators, according to Bengbu Statistical Yearbook 2018-2022, Government Work Report 2018-2022, statistical data of functional departments and data from other public media, the collected indicators of business environment are shown in Table 2.

Soft indicators are used to measure the political-commercial relations in the government environment and the financing service in financial services, which are respectively the enterprises' satisfaction with the relationship between government and business and the enterprises' satisfaction with financing services. According to the results of the quarterly enterprise survey conducted by Bengbu Business Environment Office in 2022, the satisfaction of government services, government services and financing services for enterprises has reached more than 90%, which is a very satisfactory state.

The above data analysis results show that the overall business environment in Bengbu is constantly improving. In the past five years, Bengbu City government has paid more attention to the construction of public infrastructure, and the public service capacity of Bengbu city has steadily improved in terms of natural gas, water supply, power supply and the number of medical beds. In terms of innovation investment, Bengbu's scientific investment in the past five years, in addition to a slight decline in 2018, has increased significantly in 2019, 2020 and 2021 compared with 2017, and scientific expenditure has steadily strengthened in the past five years. From the perspective of the legal environment of Bengbu City, from 2017 to 2021, the number of law firms in Bengbu city has increased from 26 in 2017 to 45 in 2021, and the growth number has nearly doubled; the digital business environment is constantly strengthening. At present, the penetration rate of mobile phones in Bengbu has increased significantly, from more than 70% in 2017 to more than 97% in 2021, the number of people using computers per 100 will reach 72% in 2020, which is not bad overall. However, the number of employees in information transmission, software and information technology services, scientific research and technology services showed a downward trend, the number of digital industry talents in Bengbu exceeded 8,500 in 2017, which dropped to 6,200 in 2019, although the number of digital industry talents has increased in 2021, reaching 6,891 people, it has not reached the level of talent in 2017, and there is still room for improvement.

Table 2. Vertical level of Bengbu city business environment

Primary Indicator	Secondary Indicator	Tertiary Indicator	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Public Service	Gas Supply	Gas Supply Capacity (10,000 cubic meters)	29183	29948	33547	34621	44009
	Water Supply	Public Water Supply Capacity (10,000 cubic meters)	20871	22631	23142	24664	25246
	Electricity Supply	Industrial Power Supply Capacity (10,000 KWH)	784435	863161	892530	930229	1039411
	Medical Condition	Medical and Health Services (per 10,000 people)	52.59	54	58.4	77	78.18
Human Resource	Human Resource Reserver	Number of Students in Colleges and Universities	703703	60300	65651	69065	74895
		Number of Employees in non-private Units at the end of the year (10,000)	25.74	27.61	27.75	24.96	24.03
	Labor Cost	Average Wage Level (Yuan)	65150	64501	72340	77990	83153
Market Environment	Economic Indicators	Regional GDP per capita (Yuan)	51611	58125	61370	61255	60117
		Total investment in fixed assets (ten thousand yuan)	4285989	5766422	6532053	6293318	4302010
	Import and Export	Actual amount of foreign capital used in the year (US \$10,000)	160963	139845	140000	120498	124031.2
		Number of newly signed projects (contracts) in the year	54	15	6	13	25
	Business Institution	Number of industrial enterprises above designated size (number)	1115	1107	952	1061	858
Innovation Environment	Innovation Input	Scientific expenditure (ten thousand yuan)	126849	106434	166238	176122	174618
	Innovation Output	Number of invention patents granted (units)	7614	9406	7193	9340	6453
Financial Service	Employment Scale	Financial employees (10,000)	13349	11481	12103	9722	7921
Legal Environment	Social Security	Number of criminal cases (cases / 10,000 people)	35.16	31.65	31.46	47.57	33.79
	Judicial Service	Number of law firms (units)	26	37	41	45	45
Government Environment	Government Expenditures	Expenditure within the general budget of local governments (ten thousand yuan)	2977139	2957943	3375154	3259399	3288080
Digital Business Environment	Mobile Phone Penetration	Mobile phone penetration rate	70.12%	77.32%	86.46%	83.74%	97.08%
	Number of talents in digital industry	Number of relevant employees	8589	7467	6289	6235	6891

3.2. Horizontal Comparison of Main Indicators of Business Environment between Bengbu and Other Cities in Anhui Province

Table 3. The Comparative analysis of main indicators of business environment

Leading Indicator	Subordinate Indicators	city	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Innovation Input	Scientific Expenditure (ten thousand yuan)	Hefei City	0.23	8.64	7.84	9.27	9.97
		Huaibei City	0.13	0.10	0.05	0.14	0.46
		Bozhou City	0.42	0.49	0.35	0.31	0.30
		Suzhou City	0.31	0.43	0.21	0.34	0.38
		Bengbu City	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
		Fuyang City	0.42	0.47	0.43	0.41	0.43
		Huainan City	0.28	0.39	0.30	0.23	0.23
		Chuzhou City	0.83	1.03	0.84	0.86	0.88
		Lu'an City	0.73	1.01	0.69	0.47	0.28
		Ma On Shan	0.97	1.09	0.65	0.68	0.72
		Wuhu City	4.53	5.62	3.08	3.09	4.02
		Xuancheng City	0.88	1.31	0.94	0.82	0.80
		Tongling City	0.66	0.57	0.57	0.59	0.72
		Chizhou City	0.10	0.24	0.15	0.15	0.16
		Anqing City	0.76	0.99	0.68	0.66	0.75
			Huangshan City	0.43	0.55	0.37	0.37
Business Institution	Number of industrial enterprises above designated size (number)	Hefei City	2.02	2.02	2.15	2.03	2.77
		Huaibei City	0.66	0.62	0.62	0.60	0.74
		Bozhou City	0.79	0.74	0.69	0.58	0.76
		Suzhou City	1.14	1.04	1.04	0.95	1.26
		Bengbu City	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
		Fuyang City	1.56	1.69	1.76	1.55	1.83
		Huainan City	0.55	0.61	0.74	0.68	0.91
		Chuzhou City	1.38	1.44	1.80	1.76	2.48
		Lu'an City	0.82	0.83	0.98	0.97	1.37
		Ma On Shan	0.95	0.97	1.17	1.07	1.47
		Wuhu City	1.76	1.69	1.88	1.67	2.41
		Xuancheng City	1.29	1.26	1.47	1.48	2.16
		Tongling City	0.48	0.51	0.48	0.46	0.65
		Chizhou City	0.52	0.51	0.62	0.51	0.73
		Anqing City	1.54	1.58	1.69	1.55	1.99
			Huangshan City	0.47	0.47	0.57	0.51
Innovation Output	Number of invention patents granted (units)	Hefei City	9.80	8.64	8.38	9.10	8.34
		Huaibei City	0.44	0.39	0.45	0.65	0.70
		Bozhou City	0.60	0.61	0.67	0.99	0.62
		Suzhou City	0.40	0.46	0.49	0.91	0.72
		Bengbu City	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
		Fuyang City	1.09	1.49	1.44	1.58	1.18
		Huainan City	1.08	0.70	0.57	0.72	0.66
		Chuzhou City	1.43	1.43	0.57	1.92	1.92
		Lu'an City	1.21	1.20	0.92	1.20	1.03
		Ma On Shan	1.85	1.70	1.43	1.73	1.48
		Wuhu City	4.07	3.28	2.76	2.93	2.63
		Xuancheng City	0.90	0.99	0.83	1.18	1.07
		Tongling City	0.47	0.48	0.54	0.53	0.51
		Chizhou City	0.71	0.54	0.51	0.53	0.41
		Anqing City	1.14	1.00	0.88	1.21	1.15
			Huangshan City	0.38	0.33	0.33	0.34

Through searching Anhui Statistical Yearbook, Anhui city government work reports, the relevant business environment data of major cities in Anhui from 2017 to 2021 were found. In order to facilitate the comparison, the index data of Bengbu City is taken as the benchmark, that is, the index of Bengbu city is 100%, in the form of percentage system, and the percentage of other cities is Bengbu city. Due to the large number of business environment indicators, only some important indicators are compared and analyzed in the horizontal comparison, as shown in table 3.

In terms of industrial enterprises above designated size, Bengbu is in the lower middle level, Hefei, Wuhu, Chuzhou, Fuyang, Anqing, Xuancheng and so on are obviously more than Bengbu, in the future, Bengbu city needs to strengthen the construction of market environment, strive to return to the original position in the province and gradually catch up. In terms of innovation input and output, the change of innovation input and output in Bengbu city is relatively stable compared with other cities in the past five years, indicating that Bengbu city has maintained normal development level in the past five years, but the position was overtaken by individual cities. In terms of the absolute amount of innovation investment, Hefei is far ahead, followed by Wuhu and Bengbu. However, in 2021, Hefei's scientific expenditure is 9.97 times that of Bengbu, and Wuhu is more than 4 times that of Bengbu; in terms of the number of invention patents granted, Hefei, Wuhu, Chuzhou, Anqing, Ma 'anshan, Lu 'an, Fuyang, etc. have exceeded Bengbu in the past five years; however, from the perspective of longitudinal data analysis, the key indicators of Bengbu's business environment still have shortcomings compared with similar cities in Anhui, which need to be continuously improved.

4. The Problems in Bengbu's Business Environment

4.1. The Market-oriented Business Environment Needs to Be Improved, the Attractiveness of Investment Needs to Be Enhanced

Firstly, the number of industrial enterprises above the scale in Bengbu is likewise in a general state of decline over the five-year period, falling from 1,115 in 2017 to 858 in 2021. Compared with other cities in Anhui province, Bengbu is in the middle level in the province, Hefei, Wuhu, Chuzhou, Fuyang, Anqing, Xuancheng and so on are significantly more than Bengbu, Bengbu needs to strengthen the market environment in the future. Secondly, in terms of import and export, the scale of import and export of Bengbu after 2019 has decreased significantly, and the number of newly signed project contracts has also dropped significantly, which may be related to the epidemic and other objective reasons; thirdly, Bengbu's total fixed asset investment declines more significantly between 2020 and 2021. It shows that Bengbu's market environment investment attraction still has a large room to rise.

4.2. Deficiencies in the Legal Environment

From the perspective of the legal environment, the overall legal environment of Bengbu city has been improved, but the pace of construction has been slow, which can be reflected in the number of criminal cases of 10,000 people. The number of criminal cases for 10,000 people has increased rather than decreased in the past five years. In addition, a small number of market players have low compliance with laws and regulations, and there are pirated copies and malicious defaults in the market, which shows the objective fact that market players have weak awareness of the rule of law, which hinders the construction of a business environment governed by law. In terms of the number of law firms, the legal business environment of Bengbu City has improved in the past five years, but the growth rate of law firms is slow.

4.3. Inadequate Public Service Environment

From the comparative analysis of public service indicators, Bengbu is only weaker than Hefei and Wuhu in gas supply and water supply, and is at the forefront of Anhui; But in terms of

industrial power supply capacity, Bengbu city is obviously insufficient compared with some cities in the province, and there is a big gap between Bengbu City and Hefei, Wuhu and Chuzhou. In terms of the basic conditions of medical and health services, Hefei is the first echelon, while Bengbu, Wuhu, Anqing, Lu 'an, Chuzhou and Suzhou have relatively little difference in data, belonging to the second echelon. From the vertical point of view of public service, from 2017 to 2021, Bengbu City's public service capacity on the whole shows a rising state, but the growth rate is slow.

4.4. Digital Government Service Capabilities Need to Be Improved, and Digital Talents are Lacking

Through the analysis of business environment, Bengbu City still has relatively weak problems in digital government services, such as insufficient information infrastructure construction, non-sharing of departmental data, and decentralized service system; Bengbu also has deficiencies in the construction of digital infrastructure, such as differences in network coverage and data storage capacity between Bengbu and other cities, which limits the development of digital government services. It is difficult to share and integrate data and information among various government departments, which affects the synergy and efficiency of digital government services. Bengbu digital business environment construction also faces a key problem. The lack of digital professional support. Bengbu has a growing demand for professionals in artificial intelligence, big data, cloud computing and other fields, but there is a lack of high-quality digital talents in the market.

4.5. The Development of Urban Financial Service Environment is Weak, and the Level of Innovation and Development has Room to Rise

In terms of financial services, both the financial scale and the number of financial employees are significantly lower than some cities in the province, and show a downward trend from 2017 to 2021, and the financial scale and the number of employees continue to decline. This is unfavorable to the development of business operations in Bengbu, especially in financing services, it is difficult to bring effective help to enterprises, affecting the enterprise financing channels, financial services support for small and medium-sized enterprises in Bengbu also need to be further increased. From the perspective of innovation environment, Bengbu's innovation investment has increased, while from the comparative data, Hefei's scientific expenditure in 2021 is 9.97 times that of Bengbu, and Wuhu is more than 4 times that of Bengbu; the number of patents granted in Bengbu also fluctuated greatly, and dropped to 6,453 in 2021, significantly lower than the level of 7,614 granted in 2017. Looking at the province as a whole, Hefei, Wuhu, Chuzhou, Anqing, Maanshan, Lu'an and Fuyang have all granted more patents than Bengbu in the last five years.

5. Strategies and Suggestions

5.1. Strengthening the Government's Sense of Proactive Service to Further Bring Government and Enterprises Closer Together

Whether it is to attract enterprise investment or maintain and expand existing enterprise investment, it is necessary to strengthen the active service consciousness of personnel in government functional departments and deal with the political and business environment. The specific performance is as follows: it is necessary to establish enterprise-centered work orientation and service awareness, government functional departments change their roles, regard enterprises as customers, and always meet the needs of enterprises as the core goal of work. Proactively listening to and understanding the difficulties, opinions and problems of enterprises, and actively resolving and improving them; constantly innovating service methods. Through digital technology and information technology, government functional departments

provide a one-stop, integrated service platform to reduce the cost and time of doing business. The local government will continue to promote the deepening of the "release of administrative services" reform by doing practical work for enterprises. In addition, government functional departments need to do enterprise demand "a mouth" to receive and handle and make closed-loop management. Including to optimize the "Anhui Creating a Better Business Environment for Enterprises Service Platform" online, and set up special enterprise-related service windows relying on government service halls at all levels offline, so as to establish a closed-loop system of accepting enterprise requests online and offline, handing them over for processing, handling them within a time limit, providing timely feedback, and monitoring and evaluating them.

5.2. Increasing the Openness of the Market Environment and Optimizing the Allocation of Market Resources

Firstly, government functional departments in Bengbu should reduce the approval process and reduce business costs, which can start from simplifying the approval process, strengthening information disclosure, promoting information sharing and collaboration between government departments, land supply and increasing support for entrepreneurial enterprises. Secondly, it need to improve the modern property rights system and build a level field of fair competition. government functional departments need strengthen the protection of the whole chain of intellectual property rights, protect the property rights of enterprises and the rights and interests of entrepreneurs in accordance with the law, and crack down on maliciously damaging the image and brand reputation of enterprises. Thirdly, optimize methods, improve efficiency, and build a unified, open and orderly competitive market. Local government should continue to improve the negative list management system for market access. Fourthly, local government of Bengbu should uphold the decisive role of the market in resource allocation, and give play to the resilience and flexibility of market mechanisms.

5.3. Strengthening the Building of Legal Environment and Creating a Business Environment based on the Rule of Law

To create a business environment governed by law, it is necessary to strengthen the construction and improvement of relevant laws, and establish and improve the long-term mechanism of supervision. By establishing and improving the legal and regulatory system related to the business environment, local government needs to ensure that the laws are targeted, scientific and effective. By reasonably reducing the government's intervention in the market economy, unnecessary laws, regulations and administrative procedures to avoid the shackles of enterprises and the market. At the same time, local government needs to increase the autonomy and discretion of market entities to promote the vitality of enterprises and markets, and strengthen publicity and training of laws and regulations for market players, and establish standardized and transparent law enforcement procedures to enhance the credibility of law enforcement, strengthen the law enforcement capacity and supervision means of the regulatory departments, and improve the awareness of responsibility and enforcement efficiency of the regulatory departments.

5.4. Establishing of a Digital Government Platform and Developing of a Digital Business Environment

Firstly, it needs to promote the construction of information technology infrastructure. Increase the construction and optimization of digital infrastructure such as networks and data centers, improve the level of information infrastructure in Bengbu, and provide better support for digital government services. Secondly, data sharing and integration should be strengthened. It needs to establish a unified data standard and information sharing mechanism, break the data barriers between different departments, realize data interconnection, and improve the coordination and efficiency of digital government services. Thirdly, the construction of the

Bengbu digital government service platform should be strengthened. It can integrate the service systems of various departments, establish a unified digital government service platform, provide one-stop and convenient government services, and facilitate the use of the masses and enterprises. Fourthly, the training and introduction of talents should be strengthened. Strengthen the training of digital-related talents, cultivate professional digital technical talents and government service talents, and introduce excellent talents and teams to improve the digital government service capabilities.

5.5. Enhancing Financial Services and Promoting Innovative Development

On the one hand, it needs to increase support for small and medium-sized enterprises, reduce the burden of enterprises. Increase support for financing of small and micro enterprises, and establish financing institutions that serve the development of small and micro enterprises, and actively promote the construction of "Internet + tax", save labor costs and improve work efficiency. On the other hand, enterprises should be encouraged to innovate, continue to increase investment in innovation, take measures to encourage enterprises to strengthen research and development to improve the ability of independent innovation; it also should build a good service platform to promote the cooperation and exchange between the municipal government and enterprises.

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