

## THE ASSESSMENT OF THE INTER-ORGANISATIONAL COOPERATION EFFECTIVENESS BASED ON THE CREATIVE SECTOR IN POLAND – EMPIRICAL RESEARCH RESULTS

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**Purpose:** The aim of this article is to illustrate the assessment procedure concerning the effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation in terms of practice represented by the creative sector companies under consideration.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The accomplishment of the research objective was based on the hypothesis that the effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies in the creative sector constitutes an important determinant of strengthening the competitive advantage thereof. In order to assess the effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation, a categorisation method has been used, which belongs to the mathematical methods of multi-criteria benchmarking.

**Findings:** The effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies in the creative sector is an important determinant of improving their competitive advantage.

**Originality/value:** The paper describes the effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies in the creative sector. We identify increasing and lowering factors of the effectiveness, describe the benefits model of the inter-organisational cooperation and present the matrix of relations between the level of cooperation effectiveness and the level of competitive advantage. The article can be used by managers of the creative sector.

**Keywords:** inter-organisational cooperation, effectiveness, creative sektor.

**Category of the paper:** research paper.

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to illustrate the assessment procedure concerning the effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation in terms of practice represented by the creative sector companies under consideration. The creative sector centres not only on narrowly defined activities in the fields of arts, music and crafts but include areas of economic life as well that

have been influenced by modern technologies enabling production, processing and distribution of cultural products. On the other hand, however, the notion of the inter-organisational cooperation is understood as the existence of relatively permanent, non-incident economic links between companies, and the well-defined - and beneficial to all the parties concerned – relationship between two or more organisations aimed at achieving common goals.

The accomplishment of the research objective was based on the hypothesis that the effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies in the creative sector constitutes an important determinant of strengthening the competitive advantage thereof. An underlying foundation for the indicated hypothesis includes the results of the hitherto conducted research on the inter-organisational cooperation. On the one hand, the research results reveal the significance of the aforementioned area within the specificity of business operations of the creative sector companies. The partnership provides the opportunity to acquire necessary resources, increase production efficiency and sales volume. Moreover, the indicated companies acquire new competencies and, through building and increasing their capabilities, they are able to more effectively implement the strategy they have adopted. On the other hand, however, the research reveals numerous barriers to the effective inter-organisational cooperation: partners' incompetence, going concern failing, no rules of communication or bad communication, cultural mismatch, the lack of strategic or financial benefits.

In order to assess the effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies in the creative sector, a categorisation method has been used, which belongs to the mathematical methods of multi-criteria benchmarking (Łuniewska, Tarczyński, 2006). The categorisation method takes the form of diagnostic tests, the result of which is a qualitative assessment of the examined phenomenon analysed through the prism of the index value of effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between the creative sector companies.

This research was regionalised. It covered 43 companies located in south-eastern Poland, operating in the creative sector. An interview questionnaire and a survey addressed to the top managers of the surveyed companies were used for collecting data.

## **2. Effective Cooperation Pre-conditions**

Business-to-business cooperation based on networks of interconnections is an integral part of the modern entrepreneurship. On the one hand, it expresses a response to the dynamics of changes in the environment and on the other hand, it constitutes a company's strategic resource. Effective cooperation facilitates the implementation of the strategy that has been adopted, the development of a company, and provides for the achievement of a competitive advantage in the market. The lack of cooperation may cause many companies to merely lose the market. Additionally, it should also be emphasised that apart from benefits, it may bring adverse effects

as well. Whether a given company will take up the cooperation and what effects it will bring depends to a large extent on the rules adopted throughout the entire process.

A number of researchers concentrate their studies on the issues of alliance, partnership, cooperation, and very often treat the indicated conceptual frameworks as synonyms, while the peak of research and development falls at the turn of the 20th and 21st century (Cygler, 2013). W. Czakon notes that the topic of cooperation is related to other fields such as sociology or economics (Czakon, 2010a), but over the years we have seen massive changes in its definition. From its initial bilateral form, it has evolved into multilateral cooperation and networking, with the extension of cooperation within the framework of cooptation. Consequently, it has brought about a diversity of interpretations, resulting from the adopted criteria of description, form, scientific discipline, or context. The heterogeneity makes us understand it in different ways. For the purposes of this paper, however, we will define cooperation as *multi-level interplay within the framework of cooperation with partners outside the organisation, providing for the achievement of specific benefits not otherwise achievable, being dynamic, complex structures reaching different degrees of effectiveness and sustainability*.

We can therefore assume that the aim of cooperation with other market participants is to achieve measurable benefits. The researchers such as A. Adamik (2015), J. Child et al. (2005), W. Czakon (2012), W. Dyduch, M. Bartnicki (2016), Y.L. Doz, G. Hamel (2006), P. Klimas (2014), Krzakiewicz K. (2013), Michna et al. (2020), E. Stańczyk-Hugiet (2012), R. Tyszkiewicz (2017), A. Zakrzewska-Bielawska (2015) have pointed out a number of benefits derived from cooperation. The effective cooperation may be reached in two ways. By maximising factors, conditions, parameters facilitating the cooperation efficiency and through minimising the potential risks (or mitigating them) leading to the discontinuation of cooperation or a partial achievement of objectives. Moreover, the effectiveness of cooperation depends on the inter-organisational proximity, which is a set of some similar features, attributes of the organisation (Klimas, 2013; Czakon 2010b; Knoblen, Oerlemans, 2006).

A critical analysis of the related literature displaying various factors determining the cooperation efficiency has made it possible to specify the framework pre-conditions for its effectiveness. We have grouped the aforementioned factors into homogeneous areas (ranges) and described them in a synthetic analysis presented below.

### **1. The Planning Scope**

One of the most important attributes of each company is a defined level of cooperation capability, due to which reaching the pursued goals, the achievement of which on their own would be significantly impeded or even impossible, is more effective. Therefore, on the one hand, the effective cooperation facilitates the development of a company and, on the other hand, provides for improvement of its competitive advantage. There is no doubt that one can talk about effective cooperation only if it puts forward jointly assumed and uncontested objectives and is planned in an appropriate manner, taking into account a comprehensive approach.

The measure of effectiveness is the degree at which the targets resulting from the cooperation are reached<sup>1</sup>.

## **2. The Extent of Cost-effectiveness**

Cooperation is effective when it leads to the achievement of measurable benefits. It means that the benefit-cost ratio is higher than one and the action itself contributes to the achievement of the pursued goal. In the case of a partnership, it denotes such an activity which is the most effective of all possible actions in terms of the intended purpose, conditions, constraints, and contributes to reducing costs or exploiting the synergy effect. To a large extent, an appropriate distribution of profits and costs increases the effectiveness of the cooperation implemented.

## **3. The Scope of Organisation**

Another important factor influencing the effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation is the adoption of an appropriate structural scheme adjusted to the strategy as well as to the principles of cooperation, the partners' potential or the complexity of cooperation. The effectiveness will grow if the adopted arrangement determines the extent of objectives, tasks and responsibilities of respective organisational units, the way in which the lines of subordination will run, coordination mechanisms, communication channels between elements of the organisational structure or the exploitation of modern types of structural schemes: team-based scheme, network-based scheme, virtual one, the scheme facilitating flexibility of activities. It should also be noted that the partners' independence and the way of task supervision constitute an important factor affecting effectiveness.

## **4. The Scope of Knowledge**

More and more often the scope of undertaken cooperation is tied to the acquisition, transfer or generation of specific knowledge. The faster it is created, easier to use and absorb, the more it will contribute to increasing the competence of both individual employees and the entire organisation in terms of processes and product. The importance of protecting both silent and formal knowledge in the whole cooperation process should also be underlined, as it is one of the main factors of competition. Moreover, cooperation denotes collaboration of all participants. We can therefore assume the hypothesis that the higher the awareness and understanding of the need for cooperation at each management level, the more effective it is.

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<sup>1</sup> In view of the aim of the study as well as the limited publication capacity of those interested in this topic, we refer to the literature focusing on the difficult problem of measuring the effectiveness of cooperation. Most researchers measure the effectiveness of cooperation using descriptive characteristics, like for example Heimbürger M., Dietrich P. or Schnobrich-Davis J., and Terrill W.

We can also point to studies using methods of analysing the effectiveness of inter-organisational cooperation based on qualitative assessment. We can name researchers such as: A.M. Thomson, J.C. Perry and T.K. Miller or T.M. Simatupang and R. Sridharam. Respectively: M. Heimbürger, P. Dietrich: Identifying the Basis of Collaboration Performance in Facility Service Business. *Facilities*, 2012, Vol. 30/11; J. Schnobrich-Davis, W. Terrill: Interagency Collaboration: An Administrative and Operational Assessment of the Metro-LEC Approach. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, 2010, Vol. 33/3, pp. 506-530; A.M. Thomson, J.L. Perry, T.K. Miller: Conceptualizing and Measuring Collaboration. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 2009, Vol. 19/1, pp. 23-56; T.M. Simatupang, R. Sridharan: The Collaboration Index: A Measure for Supply Chain Collaboration. *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management*, 2005, Vol. 35/1, pp. 44-62.

### **5. The Scope of Communication**

The effective cooperation is also dependent on the quality of information and its effective flow, called the communication process. In the case of complex cooperation networks, the process of proper communication plays a special and sometimes even the most significant and crucial role. Information appears as one of the three essential elements of exchange between relatively isolated systems and the environment. The aforementioned exchange is characterised by a network of information transmission connections in terms of the system – environment and particular attention ought to be paid to a proper organisation of the entire process as well as the exchange of information on an on-going basis, maintaining the continuity, timeliness and effectiveness of procedures.

### **6. Cultural Conditionalities**

The effectiveness of cooperation is also reflected in the degree of compatibility in terms of common values, norms, habits and patterns of behaviour. Properly shaped culture should facilitate the integration of partners as well as adaptation to dynamically changing environmental conditionalities. Moreover, it is a carrier of content affecting the effectiveness of cooperation. One of the key elements of successful partnership is common trust between partners, which reduces uncertainty by higher predictability of partner's behavior (Sako, 1998). Trust-building competence is a significant part of relational competence of an organization, which we define as a bundle of attitudes, organizational routines and capabilities necessary to: establish partnership and prepare the frame for it; lead common activities and control their effects; manage knowledge creation and exchange between partners, communicate effectively, solve problems and integrate partnering firms on interorganizational, interpersonal and inter-team level (Chrupała-Pniak et al., 2017; Sulimowska-Formowicz, 2015).

In conclusion, it is plausible to state that the above considerations have provided the opportunity to distinguish a number of important factors and conditionalities affecting the effectiveness of cooperation, becoming a source of competitive advantage. Apart from the above mentioned issues, effective cooperation is the one that makes it feasible to build lasting relations that produce measurable results not only in financial terms. Furthermore, it is also such cooperation that benefits from isomorphism, constitutes a company's resource, influences its development and enhances the efficiency of performance. Moreover, the more it is based on mutual respect, trust and when it takes into account common standards and principles and is widely accepted, the more effective it is.

## **3. Effective Cooperation Benefits**

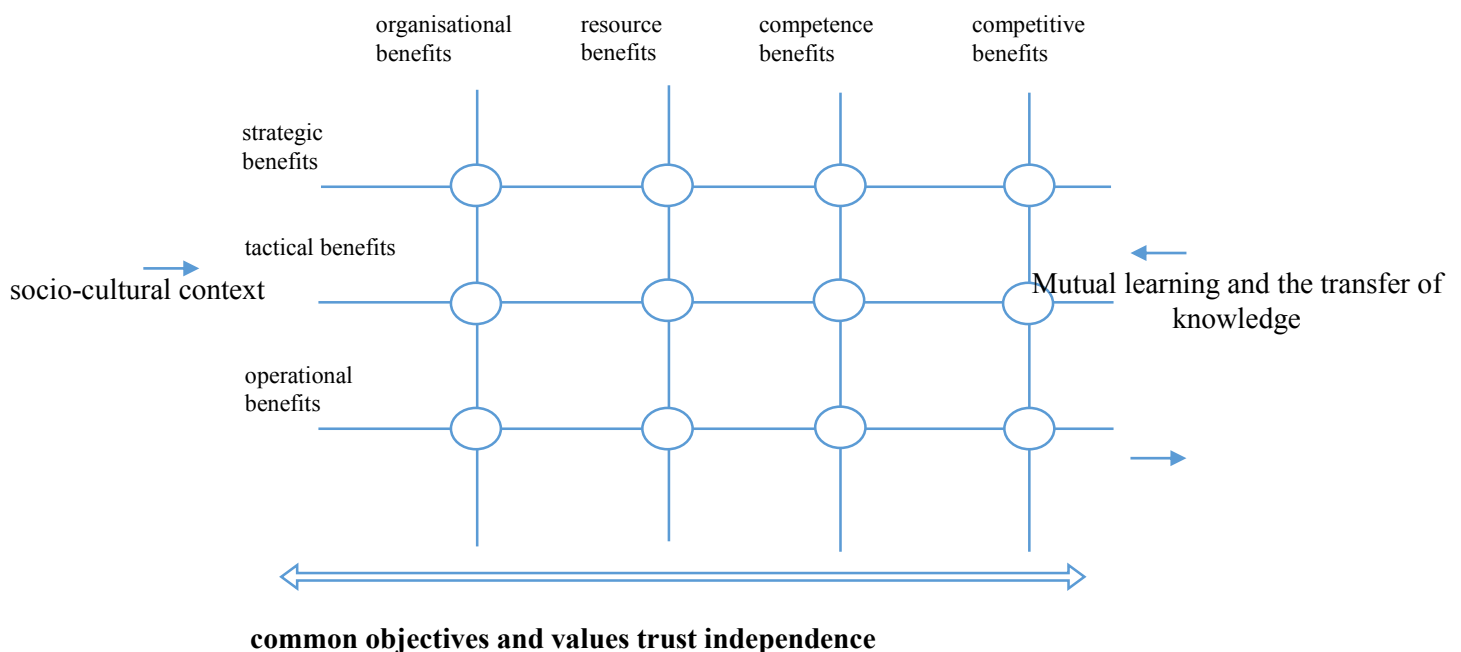
Due to the complexity and heterogeneity of the concept of the inter-organisational cooperation, we may conclude that the indicated effectiveness may come forward with synergistic benefits in various areas of a company's performance. The researchers have developed

a proprietary benefit model of the inter-organisational cooperation (Figure 1), in which two main planes are distinguished within the framework of which cooperation benefits are identified:

1. strategic, tactical, and operational benefits,
2. regarding: resource, competence, organisation, and competition.

Commonly accepted, non-contradictory goals, values and trust between partners constitute the key and the most important cooperation outcome. The three elements make up the core of the inter-organisational cooperation. The main prerequisite of cooperation is to achieve the pursued goals which initiate the whole process and are aggregated and implemented by the partners during the cooperation. They should be a resultant of an objective or a group of objectives stemming from the adopted vision and mission/strategy of cooperating companies. Moreover, the cooperation should be based on common values, independence and mutual trust, aiming at creating sustainable cooperation resulting from the partners' key resources and competencies. It should also be noted that the achieved effects of cooperation depend to a large extent on partners' experience and socio-cultural context.

As cooperation is a complex and multifaceted issue, it is believed to deliver synergistic benefits at diverse levels. The decision has been made to distinguish two levels of benefits. One level arises from strategic, tactical and operational benefits. The second one is related to benefits regarding resource, competence, organisation and competition. The achieved resource benefits are part of tangible and intangible resources, based on complementarity or the scarcity effect.



**Figure 1.** The benefit model of the inter-organisational cooperation. Source: own elaboration.

Given the importance of knowledge, skills and experience, competence benefits have been deliberately highlighted. They include issues of mutual learning within the partnership, continuous expansion of knowledge, product and process innovation, as well as the ability to adapt quickly to changes in the environment and to influence the shape of the relationship between the organisation and the environment. The area of competence benefits should include, in particular: the ability to use one's skills in specific areas of activity, integration and coordination, and the proper application of managerial knowledge in terms of cooperation, collaboration, attitudes and values. The skills of continuous improvement, openness and constant readiness to change as well as overcoming common stereotypes are also important.

Organisational benefits represent another group of effects achieved through the inter-organisational cooperation. They include the improvement of implemented processes and structural arrangements by means of increasing the level of its adaptability and flexibility. The effects will also facilitate the improvement of the company's performance and efficiency thanks to cooperation.

The last but not the least group consists of the benefits resulting from the strengthened competitive advantage. They contribute to a better use of opportunities and increasing opportunities as well as expanding the scale of business operations onto new markets. On the one hand, the aforementioned activities increase a company's equity, and on the other hand, they strengthen its competitive advantage in the market.

It should also be noted that, in addition to the above mentioned benefits, cooperation may also have an adverse impact arising from factors that reduce the effectiveness of cooperation and thus may diminish competitiveness in the market. The issue represents a relatively new research area. The subject matter and numerous studies focus on advantages and benefits rather than on negative consequences. The indicated issues are tackled in the studies of the following researchers: W. Czakon (2007), P. Klimas (2014), J. Niemczyk (2008), E. Stańczyk-Hugiet, M. Strychalski (2013). The reasons for ineffectiveness depend on a number of individual conditionalities that characterise a given cooperation. They may abundantly include a correlation of irregularities. Table 1 below presents the selected factors that affect the cooperation efficiency.

The above mentioned set of adverse effects is diverse and does not exhaust all the irregularities. However, their occurrence affects the effectiveness of cooperation and there is no doubt that if they occur, they should be actively counteracted. In a situation where the efforts made do not bring the desired results, the cooperation should be discontinued in a controlled manner.

**Table 1.***Factors lowering the effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Cause</b>	<b>Negative Effect</b>
Strategy	incorrectly defined scope of plans and objectives, aggregated and implemented at lower management levels	- discrepancy between aims - duplication of objectives - no clear rules of cooperation - no strategic benefits
Structure	incorrectly defined goals, tasks, responsibilities of organisational units and the way the lines of subordination will run	- improper assignment of objectives, tasks and responsibilities - workload, conflicts - increased organisational complexity - loss of independence
Competencies	partner's incompetence	- financial losses - conflicts - image loss
Knowledge	improper knowledge transfer	- knowledge loss - unidirectional knowledge transfer - lack or incorrect absorption of knowledge - no technological benefits
Management Style	inappropriate distribution of discretionary powers and diffusion of knowledge	- inappropriate position and status of participants (power imbalance) - loss of independence - weakening of the negotiating position - inter-organisational conflicts
Processes	incorrectly defined ways of organising cooperation	- improper process of communication - formal as well as informal links and high strength and frequency of links with a high degree of trust
Culture	cultural mismatch	- distrust - loss of identity - cultural mismatch - conflicts
Financial	incorrect structure of cost and profit appropriation	- financial losses
Legal		- financial losses

Source: own elaboration.

#### **4. Assessment Methodology**

The degree of effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies in the creative sector has been assessed by means of a categorisation method. In particular, the categorisation procedure consists of determining the structure of the assessment criteria in respect of the examined phenomenon, qualification of the assessment criteria, carrying out



a follow-up evaluation, developing the qualification regulations. The subsequent stages of the categorisation procedure are briefly discussed below.

### **Determining the Assessment Criteria**

In order to assess the degree of effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies in the creative sector, 15 criteria have been adopted and included in three generic groups, examining the level of implementation of the distinguished aspects of the inter-organisational cooperation:

- 1) essence and scope of the inter-organisational cooperation ( $A_1$ ):
  - number of partners with which the company cooperates ( $K_1$ ),
  - partner selection criteria for the inter-organisational cooperation ( $K_2$ ),
  - reasons for establishing the inter-organisational cooperation ( $K_3$ ),
  - reasons for not undertaking the inter-organisational cooperation ( $K_4$ ),
  - extent of the inter-organisational cooperation ( $K_5$ ),
  - business areas of the company covered by the inter-organisational cooperation ( $K_6$ ),
  - factors destabilising the inter-organisational cooperation ( $K_7$ ),
- 2) the involvement of the company's managers and employees in shaping the inter-organisational cooperation ( $A_2$ ):
  - the degree to which the managers of the company understand the need for the inter-organisational cooperation ( $K_8$ ),
  - the degree to which the employees of the company understand the need for the inter-organisational cooperation ( $K_9$ ),
  - organisation of the principles underlying the inter-organisational cooperation in the company ( $K_{10}$ ),
- 3) effects of the inter-organisational cooperation ( $A_3$ ):
  - impact of the inter-organisational cooperation on the implementation of the company's objectives ( $K_{11}$ ),
  - impact of the inter-organisational cooperation on the objective implementation by partners ( $K_{12}$ ),
  - impact of the inter-organisational cooperation on the development of a company ( $K_{13}$ ),
  - extent to which the inter-organisational cooperation is the company's resource ( $K_{14}$ ),
  - effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation ( $K_{15}$ ).

The values of respective criteria have been determined by assigning to them an appropriately selected range of questions taken from the survey questionnaire. An example of the characteristics of one of the adopted criteria together with the interpretation is presented in Table 2.

## Assessment Criteria Qualification

Once the criteria for assessing the degree of effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies in the creative sector have been defined, the following steps may be taken to qualify them: 1) developing the assessment benchmark, 2) setting selection preferences, 3) determining the weight of the assessment criteria. Each of the subsequent steps will be briefly described below.

**Table 2.**

*Sample characteristics of the criterion (K<sub>7</sub>)*

<b>K<sub>7</sub> – factors destabilising the inter-organisational cooperation</b>
<p>The criterion is a destimulant, i.e. the more factors destabilise the inter-organisational cooperation, the lower the aforementioned criterion scores.</p> <p>For the purposes of the conducted research, the following barriers disrupting and restricting the cooperation have been distinguished:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the fear of the loss of knowledge,</li> <li>- the fear of the loss of independence,</li> <li>- the lack of clear and mandatory rules of cooperation,</li> <li>- going concern failing,</li> <li>- cultural mismatch,</li> <li>- personal mismatch,</li> <li>- difficulties in determining the rules for profit appropriation,</li> <li>- the resistance of employees to change,</li> <li>- too high costs of cooperation,</li> <li>- the incompetence of a partner,</li> <li>- mismatch of goals,</li> <li>- work overload,</li> <li>- the fear of dismissal of specialists,</li> <li>- no financial benefits,</li> <li>- no strategic benefits,</li> <li>- no technological benefits,</li> <li>- too much dependence on partners,</li> <li>- the lack of trust between the parties,</li> <li>- high organisational complexity,</li> <li>- no time for cooperation.</li> </ul> <p>Comment: The benchmark value is equivalent to the absence of barriers that limit or interfere with the inter-organisational cooperation. The more barriers, the narrower the scope of the inter-organisational cooperation is.</p>

Source: own elaboration.

### **1. Developing the benchmark value for effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies in the creative sector**

The assessment benchmark is a set of criteria incorporated into the assessment system. It may be either normative or postulative. The normative benchmarks are considered to be extreme volumes. Exceeding or failing to achieve them accounts for a drawback of the system being tested. On the other hand, there are two kinds of postulative benchmarks:

- stimulants, i.e. features for which an upward trend is desired,
- destimulants, i.e. features for which a downward trend is desired.

From the point of view of the aforementioned aspects of the inter-organisational cooperation, the benchmark values have been described by means of qualitative features for each of the proposed assessment criteria. An example of the benchmark value for one of the adopted assessment criteria has been presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.**

*An example of the benchmark value for the assessment criterion*

<b>K7– factors destabilising the inter-organisational cooperation</b>
<p>The assessment criterion takes the highest value when at an enterprise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no fear of loss of knowledge is observed,</li> <li>- there is no fear of loss of independence,</li> <li>- clear mandatory rules of cooperation are established,</li> <li>- continuity of cooperation between partners is maintained,</li> <li>- there is a cultural match,</li> <li>- there is a personal match,</li> <li>- the rules for profit appropriation are established,</li> <li>- there is no resistance of employees to change,</li> <li>- the costs of cooperation are not felt to be high,</li> <li>- the partner is competent,</li> <li>- partners' objectives are matched,</li> <li>- there is no work overload,</li> <li>- there is no fear of dismissal of specialists,</li> <li>- inter-organisational cooperation brings financial benefits,</li> <li>- inter-organisational cooperation brings strategic benefits,</li> <li>- inter-organisational cooperation brings technological benefits,</li> <li>- there is not too much dependence on partners,</li> <li>- there is no lack of trust between the parties,</li> <li>- the organisational complexity is not high,</li> <li>- there is no lack of time for cooperation.</li> </ul>

Source: own elaboration.

## **2. Setting selection preferences**

Preferences serve the grounds for determining the validity of the assessment criteria, prioritising thereof by means of scoring. Preferences are selected according to the extent and substantive significance of the conducted research. Those may be purposeful, e.g. economic, organisational, technical, social as well as situations or circumstances according to which the weight of assessment criteria is determined.

The preferred level of a company's competitive advantage has been assumed to fit the distinguished assessment criteria for the degree of effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies in the creative sector. The sustainable and undisturbed inter-organisational cooperation has been found to stimulate a company's development, which may be indirectly verified through the financial and market performance thereof.

## **3. Determining the weight of the assessment criteria**

Once the preferences have been selected, the weight of the assessment criteria should be determined. The weight expresses the significance of a given criterion. Preferences serve as a yardstick against which justification is given as to why a particular weight is attributed to a given criterion. The weight has been determined by the researchers of the Cracow University

of Economics for the purpose of this research. The weights have been assigned to respective assessment criteria on the basis of a three-point scale:

- 3 points: absolutely necessary criteria (dominant),
- 2 points: required criteria (essential),
- 1 point: useful criteria (good).

Table 4 correlates the weights determined by the experts for respective assessment criteria for the degree of effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies in the creative sector.

**Table 4.**  
*Correlation of weights for the assessment criteria*

No.	Criterion	Weight
K <sub>1</sub>	the number of partners with whom a company cooperates	1
K <sub>2</sub>	partner selection criteria for inter-organisational cooperation	2
K <sub>3</sub>	reasons for establishing inter-organisational cooperation	1
K <sub>4</sub>	reasons for not undertaking inter-organisational cooperation	1
K <sub>5</sub>	extent of inter-organisational cooperation	3
K <sub>6</sub>	a company's business areas covered by inter-organisational cooperation	2
K <sub>7</sub>	factors destabilising inter-organisational cooperation	3
K <sub>8</sub>	the degree to which the managers of a company understand the need for inter-organisational cooperation	2
K <sub>9</sub>	the degree to which the employees of a company understand the need for inter-organisational cooperation	2
K <sub>10</sub>	organisation of the principles of inter-organisational cooperation in a company	2
K <sub>11</sub>	the impact of inter-organisational cooperation on achievement of a company's objectives	3
K <sub>12</sub>	the impact of inter-organisational cooperation on the objective deliverable by partners	2
K <sub>13</sub>	the impact of inter-organisational cooperation on the development of a company	3
K <sub>14</sub>	the extent to which inter-organisational cooperation is a company's resource	3
K <sub>15</sub>	the level of effectiveness of inter-organisational cooperation	3

Source: own elaboration.

### Carrying out a follow-up assessment

A follow-up assessment is a tool to standardise assessment criteria, which makes aggregate assessment possible. The primary aim of the standardisation of assessment criteria is, on the one hand, to deprive the distinguished diagnostic variables of their natural size that is measured to value them and, on the other hand, to unify the order of magnitude in order to make the ultimate diagnostic variables comparable (Pawelek, 2005, p. 47). The follow-up assessment should indicate whether a given object satisfies the pre-set requirements. The interpretation of

resulting figures and related trends is essential for the accurate follow-up assessment, especially when a multi-criteria model is applied, and respective criteria represents nominants ( $K_1, K_2, K_5, K_6, K_{10}$ ), stimulants ( $K_3, K_8, K_9, K_{11}, K_{12}, K_{13}, K_{14}, K_{15}$ ) and destimulant ( $K_4, K_7$ ). The follow-up assessment may be expressed in terms of indicators (it expresses the relationship between the actual figures and the benchmark value) or in terms of scores (it is a reference of the factual state to the relevant degree of assessment on the point scale) (Stabryła, 2005). The follow-up assessment based on indicators represents the ratio scale and the numerical scores corresponds to an interval scale. The scheme of positive, standardised six-point follow-up assessment was employed in this study (Table 5):

- 0 – unsatisfactory condition,
- 1 – allowable condition,
- 2 – satisfactory condition,
- 3 – moderate condition,
- 4 – good condition,
- 5 – high utility condition,
- 6 – outstanding condition.

**Table 5.**

*Scalars for the follow-up score-based assessment in relation to the effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies in the creative sector*

Assessment criteria	Score						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
$K_1$	0	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-20	21-40	above 40
$K_2$	0		1	2	3	4	5
$K_3$	0	1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10
$K_4$	7 - 6	5	4	3	2	1	0
$K_5$	0			1	2	3	4
$K_6$	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7	8	9
$K_7$	21-20	19-16	15-12	11-8	7-4	3-1	0
$K_8$	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
$K_9$	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
$K_{10}$	0				one organisation	several organisations	all organisations jointly
$K_{11}$	0		small	medium	large	very large	full
$K_{12}$	0		small	medium	large	very large	full
$K_{13}$	0		small	medium	large	very large	full

Cont. table 5.

K <sub>14</sub>	0		low importance resource	medium importance resource	high importance resource	resource of a very high importance	key resource
K <sub>15</sub>	0		small	medium	large	very large	full

Source: own elaboration.

Given Table 5, the index value of the effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies from the creative sector ( $S_i$ ) has been determined for each company surveyed according to the formula:

$$S_i = \sum_{j=1}^n w_j * o_{ij} \quad (1)$$

where:

$w_j$  – the  $j$  weight of the assessment criterion,

$o_{ij}$  – the follow-up score-based assessment related to  $i$ -of that company,

$i = 1, \dots, m$  – companies,

$j = 1, \dots, n$  – assessment criteria.

### Drawing up qualification regulations

The qualification regulations account for a formalised set of rules and pre-conditions for determining the category of a company in view of the achieved value of the index of effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies in the creative sector ( $S_i$ ). The qualification regulations serve the purpose of qualitative assessment of the system under consideration, which means translating the value of the  $S_i$  index into a specific category. The qualification regulations include provisions concerning: arranging for the valuation scale, setting hierarchical ranges on the valuation scale and marking the category of companies.

The maximum score-weighted value of the  $S_i$  index amounts to 198 in the presented method. The indicated value would be achieved by a company if it were given a score of 6 for each of the 15 assessment criteria that have been distinguished, multiplied by the weight criterion adopted for each of them.

Hierarchical ranges are the limit values of qualification degrees set for the index. Those ranges correspond to specific categories: A, B, C, D, which express the gradation of the  $S_i$  significance index. The applied  $S_i$  index hierarchy is represented by the ranges given in Table 6.

**Table 6.***The adopted hierarchical ranges of the  $S_i$  index*

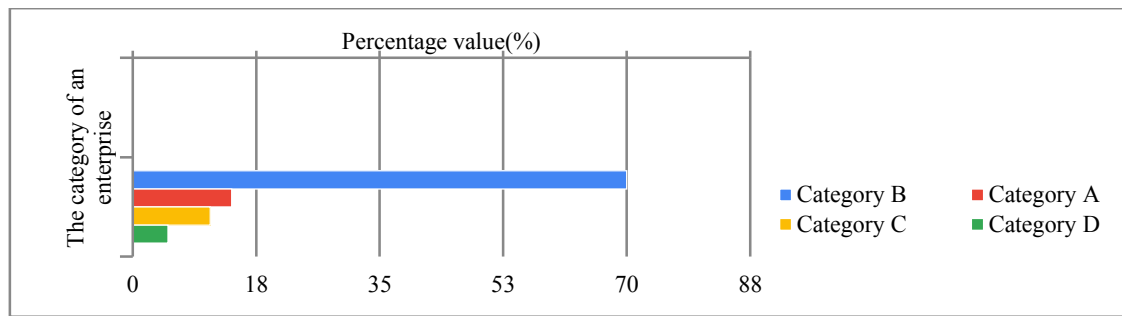
Category	Points	Characteristics
A	198-159	a company with a high effectiveness level of inter-organisational cooperation – the $S_i$ index above 80%
B	158-119	a company with an average, good level of effectiveness of inter-organisational cooperation – the $S_i$ index ranging from 60 to 79%
C	79-118	a company with a low, sufficient level of effectiveness of inter-organisational cooperation – for the $S_i$ index ranging from 40 to 59%
D	0-78	a company with a very low, insufficient level of effectiveness of inter-organisational cooperation – for the $S_i$ index lower than 39% of its maximum value

Source: own elaboration.

The stage of marking the category of a company closes the categorisation process. Within the framework thereof, the  $S_i$  index is calculated for each  $i$ - of that company and a specific category is assigned to it.

## 5. Research Results

This paper shows the results of a study on the analysis of the inter-organisational cooperation in the creative sector, carried out between January 2019 and February 2020. The study was conducted by means of the Delphic method and two research methods, a partially standardised interview and a survey. The results of numerous interviews using open and closed questions had been employed to develop a survey questionnaire which included 26 open and closed single and multiple-choice questions. The research involved 43 companies of varied size, ownership, extent of operation, sectors of the creative industry, based in the south-eastern Poland in the Małopolskie, Podkarpackie and Śląskie Voivodeships, located mainly in large cities of over 500 thousand inhabitants. The companies were selected deliberately and included companies operating in the creative industry. The survey was addressed to the managers, mainly self-employed, top managers, and chief executive officers. As a result of the calculations carried out with the use of  $S$  index, the surveyed companies were classified into three subsequent categories indicating the gradation of the significance index (Figure 2).



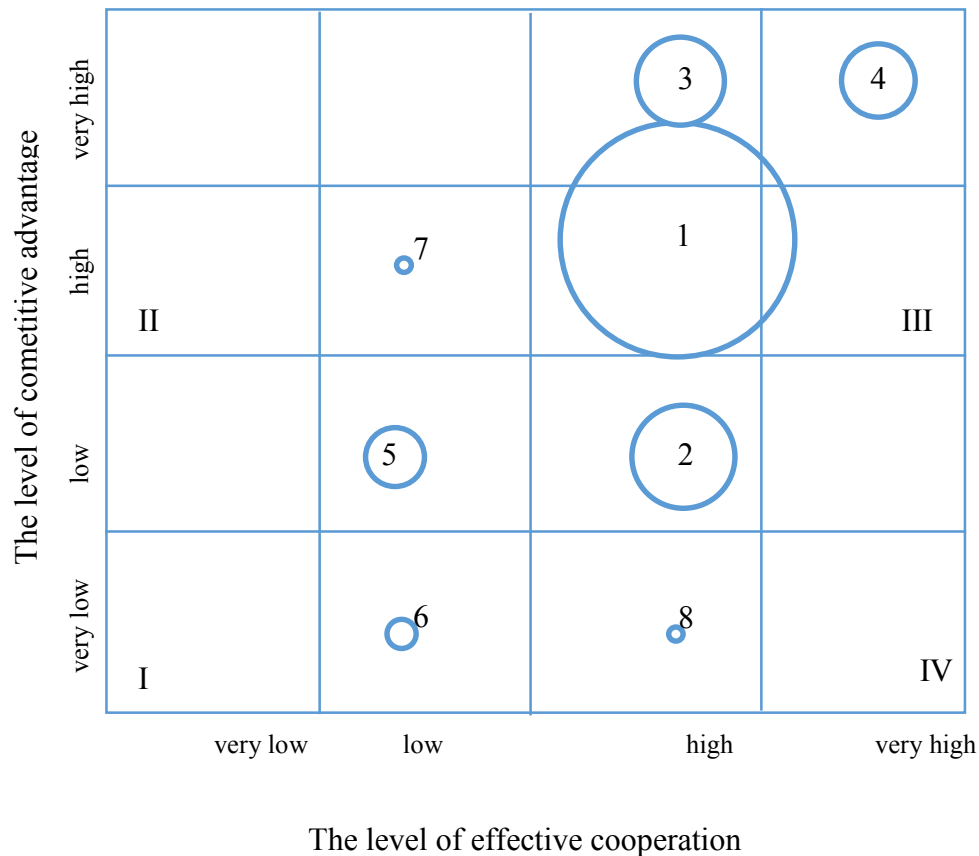
**Figure 2.** The benefit model of the inter-organisational cooperation. Source: own study based on the results of the conducted research.

The analysis of the obtained results shows that the highest value of the  $S_i$  index reached the score of 163 points, and the lowest one was the score of 62 points. The vast majority of companies (70%) were classified into category B, due to the value of the  $S_i$  index, characterised by an average or good level of effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation. Within the framework of categories A and C, 14% and 11% of the surveyed companies were classified respectively. It should be noted, however, that the highest value of the  $S_i$  index (amounting to 163 points), only slightly exceeds the assumed threshold value for this range. It shows that none of the surveyed companies displays the inter-organisational cooperation which would be organised and implemented according to the benchmark, and which would guarantee a very high competitive advantage. However, it is satisfactory that only 5% of the surveyed companies, due to the  $S_i$  index in the group of the surveyed companies, received category D, indicating insufficient or very low level of effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation.

In order to deepen the conducted analyses, the decision was made to develop a matrix describing, comparing and then evaluating the surveyed companies taking into account two variables: the level of competitive advantage and the level of cooperation effectiveness (Figure 3). The developed tool is based on the assumption that higher effectiveness of cooperation should result in a higher level of competitive advantage.

As a result of the conducted analysis, we have obtained eight groups of companies, the varied levels of effectiveness of cooperation of which translate into the varied levels of their competitiveness. The size of circles shows the percentage share of companies with the same coordinates in the total number of the companies under consideration. As we can see, the largest group 1, that includes 37% of the surveyed companies, is found in the quarter on the matrix with over 60% of all surveyed companies. It shows that the implemented cooperation is at a good level of effectiveness, which is also confirmed by the results obtained in terms of  $S_i$  index hierarchy. It is also worth noting that almost all companies in category A are found in group 4.





**Figure 3.** The matrix of relations between the level of cooperation effectiveness and the level of competitive advantage. Source: own study based on the results of the conducted research.

While conducting a further assessment analysis as regards the degree of effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies in the creative sector, taking into account the criteria described above, it seems cognitively interesting to point out the differences between companies in categories A and D. The indicated differences relate in particular to the third criterion associated with the effects of the inter-organisational cooperation (A3) and the criterion of the essence and extent of cooperation (A1).

The A category companies are characterised by a much broader extent of cooperation than those in category D. When selecting partners, the category A companies take into account such aspects as the knowledge or technology used by the potential partner, experience, reputation or financial criteria. However, for category D companies, the most important are financial issues, proximity (distance) and knowledge possessed by the partner.

Moreover, the subject matter of the inter-organisational cooperation is much more diverse in the case of the category A companies and is related to obtaining the necessary resources, complementary competencies as well as increasing production capacity and sales volume. The partnership in those companies includes, among others, the provision of information, a semi-finished product or a sub-assembly necessary to produce a final product, assistance in the implementation of processes in the company. In the case of companies connected with IT industry, computer games or film production, the subject matter of the cooperation includes providing technology or a semi-finished product essential for the production process.

Moreover, the cooperation implemented in the aforementioned companies is more open and active and is characterised by higher consciousness. Additionally, it includes many partners in the field of production, accounting, financial, marketing, human resources, logistics, IT and EU funding functions. The minimum number of partners indicated by those companies is seven, although a significant part of companies indicate more than 40 partners.

The companies included in category D, in turn, focus primarily on cooperation in the field of information transmission, assistance in the implemented processes (accounting, financial, marketing and logistics) and a semi-finished product delivery. The number of partners in most cases include only a few (three partners in most of the cases).

The conducted research has also shown that the managers and employees in the category A companies more knowingly participate in shaping the inter-organisational cooperation than in the category D companies. The degree to which managers and employees understand the need for cooperation is full or very high. Moreover, the effectiveness of cooperation is assessed to be higher among organisations in category A, that constitute a significant source of value for all of the cooperation participants, contributing significantly to achieving a competitive advantage in the market.

However, the effectiveness of the partnership, as indicated by the study, is reduced by factors such: as cooperation discontinuity, mismatch and incompetence of partners, cultural differences, the lack of jointly defined and respected rules of cooperation, which may contribute to the loss of independence or knowledge, the lack of support from managers and improperly defined processes.

Despite the fact that none of the surveyed companies accomplishes full effectiveness in the field of the realised cooperation, they consciously establish relations with partners, expecting concrete, measurable effects, and in most cases it is achieved.

It is also worth noting that all companies under consideration are involved in cooperation. There are only a few examples of companies which do not undertake cooperation. It results from the lack of need or an appropriate, competent partner.

In view of the above-mentioned factors, it may be concluded that the more effective inter-organisational cooperation is, the more determined it is to improve the competitive advantage of companies in the creative sector. It contributes to the growth of strategic and operational benefits, it facilitates the implemented processes and provides a possibility to acquire and complement competences as well as necessary resources. Moreover, it increases production and sales potential in new markets.

## 6. Summary

The results of the research efforts make it possible to confirm the assumed hypothesis that the effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation between companies in the creative sector is an important determinant of improving their competitive advantage. The inter-organisational cooperation implemented in 70% of the surveyed companies is at an average or good level of the inter-organisational cooperation effectiveness (the B category companies). Only 5% of the surveyed companies display a very low or insufficient level of the inter-organisational cooperation effectiveness. Moreover, the comparative analysis of the obtained results for organisations qualified to be A and D categories has allowed to indicate the factors increasing the effectiveness of the inter-organisational cooperation. The partnership is more effective when:

- the extent of cooperation is clearly defined and also includes regulations governing the protection of information, knowledge, technology, profit and cost sharing, and the rules established are strictly obeyed by all participants;
- the partners' independence is preserved;
- managers' support and understanding of the need for cooperation is bigger and they prove commitment;
- employees' and partners' consciousness and common understanding of the need for cooperation is increased;
- it contributes more to the objectives of all cooperation partners;
- it contributes more to the development of the company and constitutes its resources as well as allows to derive strategic, financial and technological benefits;
- it takes into account the higher degree of diversity of partners, but the higher the diversity, the more carefully they should be selected;
- the cultural, personal, organisational, cooperation objectives and competence are matched better and the level of trust between partners is higher.

We can conclude that the cooperation in the sector under consideration, taking into account the above mentioned factors, may become a significant source of equity for all participants, especially if it is perceived as an opportunity rather than a business risk.

The above considerations do not fully exhaust the problem that has been addressed, and indicate further research areas of interest in both cognitive and normative terms. The determination of correlations in terms of partner selection criteria or the assessment of effectiveness of the implemented inter-organisational cooperation and in-depth analysis in the field of competitiveness may still be an outstanding issue.

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